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VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 16, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



AMALA TO PLAY AN INVESTIGATING OFFICER

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MARUTI 800 LAUNCH 37 YRS AGO, USHERED IN A TRUE REVOLUTION

The Maruti 800 is an icon in every sense and holds a special place in India's automotive history. The model was a game-changer that brought the era of Japanese four-wheeled mobility to the masses in the country. On December 14, 2020, the Maruti 800 celebrates its 37th anniversary, and while it may not be on sale anymore, the car continues to be deeply a part of our collective conscience, not to forget it's still not too hard to spot one on the road. As we celebrate 37 years of the iconic 800, here are seven facts that you need to know about India's People's Car.



BORIS JOHNSON TO BE R-DAY CHIEF GUEST, UK SAYS 'GREAT HONOUR'

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has accepted India's "very generous" invite to be the Republic Day chief guest at next month's celebrations in Delhi. UK's Foreign Secretary said today, calling it "a great honour". This will be Boris Johnson's "first major bilateral visit" since he took charge last year, his office highlighted. "I am absolutely delighted to be visiting India next year at the start of an exciting year for Global Britain, and look forward to delivering the quantum leap in our bilateral relationship that Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi and I have pledged to achieve," the British PM said in a statement. He is only the second British leader since India's independence to attend the Republic Day parade in Delhi as guest of honour after John Major in 1993.



RAJAN LEADS EXPERT ANALYSIS OF DANGER OF GLOBAL INSOLVENCY

The world's policy makers must act urgently if they are to head off a looming solvency crisis that could cripple economies after the pandemic, according to a report led by two top former central bankers. Mario Draghi, previously president of the European Central Bank, and Raghuram Rajan, the ex-governor of the Reserve Bank of India, headed a Group of 30 study that looked at the response to the crisis. It says the massive flood of liquidity pumped into economies to keep companies afloat during shutdowns is unsustainable, and a "cliff edge" of insolvencies is coming as support programs lose funding and capital is eaten up by losses.



ULTRA VIOLET-EMITTING LED LIGHTS CAN KILL COVID, SAY SCIENTISTS

Ultraviolet LEDs can kill the novel coronavirus efficiently, quickly, and cheaply, according to a study which says the new innovation could be installed in air conditioning and water systems. The research, published in the Journal of Photochemistry and Photobiology B: Biology, assessed the disinfection efficiency of UV-LED irradiation at different wavelengths on a virus from the family of coronaviruses, which includes the COVID-19-causing SARS-CoV-2. "The entire world is currently looking for effective solutions to disinfect the coronavirus," said Hadas Mamane, co-author of the study. In order to disinfect a bus, train, sports hall, or plane by chemical spraying, the scientists said physical manpower is needed along with time for the chemicals to act on the surface.



'DPIIT making genuine effort to provide single window system'

8



Modi: Govt addressing farmers' concerns; Oppn misguiding them

5



Can caste cause Congress comeback, confer credibility?

2

AP Govt mulls buying stake of Ras-Al-Khaima in ANRAK

Government contemplates 'out of court settlement' as amicable end to International Arbitration

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government appears to be favouring an out of court settlement in the International Arbitration initiated by the Government of Ras-Al-Khaimah (RAK) against the Union of India, in relation to its investment in the ANRAK Aluminum refinery project in Vizag.

It's reliably learnt that the Jaganmohan Reddy government is looking into the option to buy out Ras-Al-Khaimah Investment Authority (RAKIA)'s equity stake in the alumina refinery as part of finding a solution to the issue



of International Arbitration raised by RAKIA, regarding cancellation of Bauxite Supply Agreement (BSA) between state-run M/s APMDCL and ANRAK Aluminium Limited. It's also learnt that the State Government is looking at working out the possibilities to operationalise ANRAK

Refinery Project by examining various options for facilitating the supply of bauxite ore to the refinery.

The government is also examining a proposal to refund the Rs 135 crore submitted by ANRAK to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change through APMDCL.

It's now understood that the State Government is looking at the possibility of buying equity stake held by ANRAK, seeking various options to supply bauxite ore and operationalise the alumina refinery which had been lying idle since its inception.

→ 2

Jagan asks Shah to hasten shifting of HC to Kurnool

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to set in motion the process of relocating the Andhra Pradesh High Court from Amaravati to Kurnool by issuing a notification.

The Chief Minister's request came at a time the Andhra Pradesh unit of the BJP is trying to corner the ruling YSRCP in the State and has categorically stated that it is against the three-capital proposal being pushed by the State Government.

During the meeting, Jagan informed Shah that his govern-



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy presents a memento to Union Home Minister Amit Shah during their meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday.

ment has decided to have three capitals for the State—the executive capital in Vizag, the legislative capital in Amaravati

and the judicial capital at Kurnool.

→ 2

Covid vaccine process won't allow local body polls in Feb: Govt to HC

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government on Tuesday told the Andhra Pradesh High Court that it would not be possible to hold the local body elections in February as all its staff would be engaged in the Covid vaccination process.

In an additional affidavit filed in the court of Justice DVSS Somayajulu, the Government, represented by advocate Suman, said that as per the guidelines issued by the Centre regarding the vaccination process, the State



Government has been directed to utilise the services of personnel from all its departments, including the Police.

The affidavit said that the Centre has instructed that the second dose of the vaccination

should be given four weeks after the first dose is administered, which basically meant that the employees would be deputed for the vaccination process for well over a month.

The affidavit also stated that the vaccination process should be carried out in the same way as the electoral process and that the vaccination process takes precedence over elections.

"Therefore, the State Government has decided not to hold Panchayat elections in February," the affidavit said.

→ 2

Chettinad raid yields Rs 700 cr tax evasion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department has detected tax evasion of more than Rs 700 crore after it recently raided multiple locations of Chennai-based Chettinad Group, the CBDT and official sources said on Tuesday.

"The highlight of the search includes seizure of unaccounted cash of Rs 23 crore from various locations," the CBDT said in a statement. "As of now, the department has succeeded in detecting evasion of income of over Rs 700 crore," it said.

→ 2

YSRCP lying through full page ads, says TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP on Tuesday blew holes in the YSRCP Government claims on crop insurance premium payments made through full page advertisements in some newspapers.

Accusing the YSRCP Government of lying to the farmers through the advertisements, TDP national spokesperson Kommareddy

Pattabhi said that while the Government claimed that it had paid Rs 1,252 crore under the YSR Free Crop Insurance scheme but, the district-wise reports make it clear that only Rs 918 crore was paid.

"There was a difference of over Rs 334 crore that reveals once again how the YSRCP openly cheats the people with its falsehoods," Pattabhi said.

→ 2

YSRCP man threatens suicide, targets Vamsi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

High drama prevailed for some time at Gannavaram of Krishna district on Tuesday after a lower-rung YSRCP leader threatened suicide after accusing his party seniors of doing injustice to Dalits.

Mogilicharla Jojibabu sprinkled petrol over his body and warned that he would set himself on fire, before his party activists intervened.

→ 2

Centre warns against laxity as number of cases, deaths dips

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

COVID-19 cases and deaths are declining in India which is very reassuring, the Centre said on Tuesday but cautioned against any laxity saying an overwhelming proportion of the country's population is still "very susceptible" to the virus and the situation may escalate unexpectedly.

While there is a continuous increasing trend in COVID-19 cases and deaths globally, particularly in America and Europe and the situation in the world is becoming worrisome, in contrast the scene in India

is satisfying as the cases and deaths are declining, Dr V K Paul, member (health) at NITI Aayog, told a press conference here.

"Mortality is declining and it is well below 400 per day. Cases have come down to almost 22,000. This is the kind of number we all experienced in July. So that is very reassuring. As a nation, we seem to be now doing very well.

"We are saving lives. But remember, this cannot be taken for granted. An overwhelming proportion of our population is still very very susceptible to the virus. And

the situation can escalate unexpectedly," Paul said while cautioning against any laxity.

He further said the reassuring thing is that people are saying the R0 has come below one which means the pandemic is shrinking.

→ 2

AP fixes Covid test price at Rs 499; 500 new cases Pg 2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Margashirsha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Dwititya: 04:53 pm

Nakshatram: Puna/Ashra: 08:04 pm

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

Rahukalam: 12:11 pm - 01:34 pm

Yamagandam: 08:05 am - 09:27 am

Variyam: 03:47 am - 05:19 am

Goorka: 10:49 am - 12:11 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritkalam: 03:33 pm - 05:03 pm

Abhijit Muhurtam: NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly sunny

Temp: 32/21

Humidity: 64%

Sunrise: 06:39am

Sunset: 05:44pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated December 15, 2020 5:00 PM

VANTAGE POINT

-NARSIM



Woman activist booked under UAPA for 'aiding Maoists'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Vizag rural police on Tuesday morning took into custody A Annapurna, a woman activist and lawyer, from her residence in Arilova in Visakhapatnam and booked her under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for 'aiding Maoists'.

The UAPA case was filed against her in the Munchingput police station in Visakhapatnam agency for allegedly aiding the outlawed Maoists.

Srinivasa Rao, her husband, said that the police reached his house in the early hours and took Annapurna away when she was giving milk to their children.

→ 2

Airlines warned of mishaps as planes, staff return to service

PNS ■ SYDNEY

Regulators, insurers and experts are warning airlines to take extra care when reactivating planes left in extended storage during the Covid-19 pandemic, citing potential pilot rustiness, maintenance errors and even insect nests blocking key sensors.

The unprecedented number of aircraft grounded as coronavirus lockdowns blocked air travel — at one point reaching two-thirds of the global fleet — has created a spike in the number of reported problems



as airlines return them to service.

The number of "unstable" or poorly handled approaches has risen sharply this year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Such mishaps can result in hard

landings, runway overshoots or even crashes.

Worried by IATA's data, insurers are questioning airlines about whether they are doing extra pilot training to focus on landings, said Gary Moran, head of Asia aviation at insurance broker Aon PLC.

"They want to know about the circumstances of the training," he said.

Approaches and landings place significant demands on crew for which training and regular experience are seen as vital.

→ 2

Men in Telugu states continue to treat sterilisation as taboo

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Men in both the Telugu states continue to shy away from taking part in 'family planning', as per the latest round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

According to the survey, the male and female sterilisation ratio is totally skewed in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Call it myths or misconceptions attached to the permanent contraceptive method of vasectomy, men continue to push women to undergo tubectomy. As per the latest data,



female sterilisation in Andhra Pradesh had gone up to 69.6 percent from 68.3 percent during the last round of such NFHS-4 undertaken in 2015-

16. Compared to female sterilisation, male sterilisation stood at a meagre 0.4 percent. Significantly, there was a drop

on the male sterilisation numbers as it was 0.6 percent in the last round of survey in 2015-16. Female sterilisation was also more in rural tracts at 70.2 percent

in comparison with 68.3 percent in urban areas. In comparison, slightly more urban men than their rural counterparts underwent a vasectomy in Andhra Pradesh. While 0.6 percent of the urban men underwent sterilisation in urban areas, it was only 0.4 percent in rural tracts.

In Telangana too, female sterilisation went up to 61.9 percent in 2019-20 when compared to 54.2 percent in 2015-16.

Interestingly, male sterilisation went up to 2 percent from 1.6 percent from the last survey. In Telangana too, more rural women (62.2 percent)

underwent tubectomy than their rural counterparts which was 61.3 percent. Interestingly, more rural men in Telangana (2.3 percent) underwent sterilisation than their peers in urban areas which stood at 1.4 percent.

While vasectomy is simpler and safer compared to tubectomy, men fearing loss of virility, shy away from the procedure. As per health experts, in non-scalpel vasectomy there are no stitches and also, the reversal of vasectomy is considered better and more effective than tubectomy.

→ 2

Can caste cause Congress comeback, confer credibility?

For decades, the 'caste card' has been playing a crucial role in elections to the extent of drawing votes and swaying public opinion.

PIN POINT

Every book, deployed every weapon in its arsenal, but has experienced only setbacks in the recent past.

While it's true that elections to the Telangana Assembly are on the distant horizon — due in 2023 — the political heat in the state is considerable and intensifying by the day. In this scenario, both the TRS and Congress, the latter more so, cannot afford to delay implementing their plans of action.

Those in power know that they cannot afford to alienate a caste that they have been at odds in the past and take great pains to ensure that relationships may be frayed, but never broken.

For a political party that is down in the dumps and relegated to the sidelines, drawing the caste card from the deck makes sense.

It makes more sense for a party like the Congress that has employed every trick in its

It's the Congress that has got its work cut out — the party leadership had high hopes of coming to power in TS being the party that granted India its newest State.

However, it was not to be — the people decided to reward their hero who strived hard to make their dream come true with his political moves despite having only two members in

Despite leader after leader deserting it, and electoral setbacks, the Congress bravely stood up and gathered momentum, so much so that it fancied its chances in the Dubbak by-election. However, the BJP upset the appellation of both the Congress and the TRS with its stunning victory in the Dubbak by-election.

Lok Sabha.

Upon coming to power, K Chandrasekhar Rao, the undisputed leader of the TRS, decided to dismantle Congress, perhaps fearing that it could pose a challenge to his party in the future, perhaps due to its historical background and base.

Despite leader after leader deserting it, and electoral setbacks, the Congress bravely stood up and gathered

momentum, so much so that it fancied its chances in the Dubbak by-election. However, the BJP upset the appellation of both the Congress and the TRS with its stunning victory in the Dubbak by-election and then put on a stunning performance in the GHMC elections.

This has forced the Congress to go back to the drawing board, take a close look at its strengths and weak-



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

nesses, particularly when it ruled the roost in undivided AP.

With the formation of Telangana State, the powerful Velama community emerged as the new ruling caste. This community, comprising just 1 percent of the state's population, mostly comprises land-

lords who have again got the opportunity to rule because of the emergence of KCR as the undisputed leader in TS.

The Congress undoubtedly needs all help it can get, more so from the powerful Reddy community that has been solely responsible for its uninterrupted rule that lasted for decades in undivided AP.

Almost 90 percent of the Congress Chief Ministers in undivided AP were Reddys; the community made such an impression in the minds of the Delhi leadership that it was unimaginable to think of AP without a Reddy ruling it.

In this backdrop, the Congress leadership is believed to have decided that the party's best shot at regaining power is through the Reddy community. The community too is aware that the Congress provides it the best shot at power in the near future.

The community realises that no Reddy would probably ever get the CM's post as long as the TRS rules because of embedded caste supremacy in the party.

At this juncture, the Congress is weighing options of giving the post of TPCC president to a Reddy. Incidentally, about a dozen aspirants have staked claims for the post and 90 percent of them are Reddys.

Traditionally, the Congress has had the backing of other communities, but its real strength lies in the Reddy community. It is now the responsibility of the Congress to ensure that the Reddy community continues its patronage of the party.

The community rules neighbouring AP, and its members in Telangana are believed to have received assurance from YS

Jaganmohan Reddy of his full support.

Now that the Congress is tottering, the TRS appears to be giving more political opportunities to Reddys. It's contemplating making Reddy the Mayor of Hyderabad.

The TRS is also aware that Jaganmohan Reddy enjoys some popularity in Telangana, and KCR will do his best to tap in on his relationship with the AP CM.

KCR is aware that the Reddy community stood as one in support of YS Rajasekhara Reddy when he needed it in the 1999 election, and this support led to the defeat of P Janardhan Reddy, the then CLP leader in AP Assembly, who was being seen as a 'headache' for YSR.

This is perhaps the reason behind the TRS chief's overtures to the Reddy community.

AP fixes Covid test price at Rs 499; 500 new cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Government has reduced the rates of Covid-19 tests in ICMR-approved private labs as the cost of reagents and testing kits decreased significantly.

State Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal issued an order fixing Rs 475 as the rate for each sample sent by the government for testing.

For individuals, the test price has been fixed at Rs 499, including the PPE kit.

The rates previously were Rs 800 and Rs 1,000 per sample test respectively.

Meanwhile, the State added 500 new cases to its Covid-19 tally on Tuesday that now rose



to 8,76,336. In the 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, 563 patients also recovered while

five more succumbed in the state. The latest health bulletin

said the number of active coronavirus cases fell to 4,660 after 8,64,612 recoveries and 7,064 deaths so far.

Chittoor, Krishna, Guntur and West Godavari districts reported new cases in excess of 50 each. Nine other districts added less than 50 fresh cases each in 24 hours.

Krishna district saw two fresh Covid-19 fatalities while Chittoor, Guntur and SPS Nellore reported one each.

After 1.09 crore total sample tests, the overall infection positivity rate stood at 8.01 per cent while the recovery rate was 98.66 per cent.

The case mortality rate remained stable at 0.81 per cent.

AP Govt mulls buying stake of Ras-Al-Khaima in ANRAK

Continued from Page 1

It may be recalled that AP government had constituted a high-level committee of senior officials to work out various possible alternatives to resolve the issue of International Arbitration raised by Ras-Al-Khaima Investment Authority (RAKIA) of Government of UAE, regarding cancellation of Bauxite Supply Agreement (BSA) between state-run M/s APMDC and ANRAK Aluminium Limited.

Setting up of the Committee assumed significance as it was constituted over three years after RAKIA raised the International Arbitration in 2016. Till then, the issue remained dormant.

Notably, Penna Group, promoted by Penna Pratap Reddy, one of the accused in YS Jaganmohan Reddy quid pro quo case filed by the CBI, holds

a majority stake in Anrak Aluminium Ltd.

Anrak Aluminium Ltd is a joint venture of RAKIA and Penna Group. Anrak had set up an alumina refinery plant with 1.5 million tonnes annual capacity at Makavarapalem in Visakhapatnam district basing on the assurance of bauxite ore supplies mined by APMDC from Vizag Agency tracts.

Anrak had invested close to Rs 5,600 crore in setting up the alumina plant in 2013.

While the agreement mandating supply of 224 million tonnes of bauxite per annum was signed during former Chief Minister Y Rajasekhara Reddy's rule, it was scrapped in April 2016 by the Chandrababu Naidu government.

Sources in the government pointed that RAKIA had put forth a proposal before the AP Government offering its stake.

RAKIA made a \$44.71 million arbitration claim, seeking to recover the cost of its investment in Anrak Aluminium Limited. While Penna Group holds the majority stake in ANRAK, RAKIA initially held 30 per cent shares, which later came down to 13 per cent.

Losses for ANRAK mounted as the alumina refinery could not be operated ever since it was established due to lack of supply of raw material-bauxite ore as assured by the AP government.

The project has also been labelled Non Performing Asset (NPA) as it failed to repay a loan of Rs 3,461 crore to a consortium led by State Bank of India (SBI). In order to remove the NPA tag by operationalising the refinery Plant ANRAK had also in the past wrote to Odisha seeking supply of the bauxite ore from the mines available in the eastern state.

YSRCP man threatens suicide, targets Vamsi

Continued from Page 1

According to YSRCP sources, the difference between Vallabhaneni Vamsi, who has rebelled against his party the TDP, and his follower Komma Koteswara Rao, forced Jojibabu to take the extreme step.

Jojibabu accused Vamsi and Koteswara Rao of doing grave injustice to Dalits in Gannavaram. "Tenders in favour of Dalits are being blocked by them. Dalits in the constancy are being blocked from bagging contracts," he alleged. He demanded that YSRCP supremo YS Jaganmohan Reddy take stern action on them.

Vamsi, who has been keeping away from his parent party the TDP, has been facing stiff resistance from YSRCP leaders and activists in Gannavaram constituency, right from the day he declared his support to the YSRCP.

Covid vaccine process won't allow local body polls...

Continued from Page 1

Responding, Aswin Kumar, counsel for the State Election Commission, told the court he needed time to file a counter as he had received the additional affidavit only on Monday night. The court adjourned the case to next Friday.

It may be recalled that the YSRCP Government had passed a resolution in the Assembly not to hold panchayat polls due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Following this, the SEC communicated its decision to the government to hold the panchayat election in February.

The Government is not keen on holding the election at least till March 2021.

Jagan asks Shah to hasten shifting of HC to Kurnool

Continued from Page 1

He pointed out that his government has also got the Act to facilitate three capitals approved by the State Legislature. Jagan also reminded the Union Home Minister that the BJP, in its poll manifesto, too had promised High Court in Kurnool.

Jagan's meeting with Amit Shah came in the backdrop of crucial political developments back home — the agitation launched by the Amaravati farmers has completed one year and the BJP state unit chief Somu Veeraj has announced that his party is in favour of Amaravati as the only capital of Andhra Pradesh, against the Chief Minister's plan to have three capitals.

Until now, the BJP has been maintaining that the Centre has no role in deciding the location of a state's capital.

Sources said that Jagan asked Amit Shah to impress upon the Jal Shakti and Union Finance ministries to fund the Polavaram project as per 2017-18 rates.

Among the other issues

Jagan's visit to Delhi assumes significance considering the fact that there has been no headway into his complaint against a sitting judge of the Supreme Court and a few judges of the AP High Court.

Jagan took up with Amit Shah was expediting the process of Centre approving Disha Bill passed by state Legislature and also the assent of the President to the land titling Bill.

He also asked Amit Shah to impress upon the Ministries concerned to release the state's share of GST pending with them.

Jagan briefed the Union Home Minister about the measures taken by the State Government to control Covid pandemic and also informed him that the state was ready to conduct the Covid vaccination drive as per the guidelines issued by the Centre. He also appealed to him to release funds for compensation to victims of Cyclone Nivar.

Jagan's visit to Delhi assumes significance considering the fact that there has been no headway into his complaint against a sitting judge of the Supreme Court and a few judges of the AP High Court. Jagan had written a letter to the Chief Justice of India levelling serious allegations against the aforementioned judges.

Andhra Pradesh is also witnessing political heat with heated exchanges between the ruling and opposition parties over Central funding for the prestigious Polavaram project.

The Chief Minister is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Union Ministers on Wednesday.

YSRCP lying through full page ads, says TDP

Continued from Page 1

He said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy himself claimed in the Assembly that 58.77 lakh farmers were covered under crop insurance scheme but this number was cut short to 49.8 lakh in the latest advertisements on free crop insurance.

"The Centre had clearly said in the Parliament that only 26 lakh farmers in AP were eligible for the insurance scheme. This is enough to say how Jagan and his Ministers are betraying farmers and other sections of the people in the State with their lies," Pattabhi said.

He criticised the YSRCP

government for settling less than 50 per cent of the claims of farmers for kharif-2019.

"As per Central Government data, claims for Rs 1,819 crore were received under the PM Fasal Bima Yojana. But now, the AP Government was prepared to pay just Rs 918 crore," he said. Pattabhi asserted that while

the YSRCP paid less than 50 per cent insurance claims, the previous TDP regime had an excellent track record of paying 100 per cent claims at the rate of Rs 1,874 crore out of Rs 1,879 crore for 2018-19, Rs 779 crore out of Rs 779 crore for 2017-18 and Rs 943 crore out of Rs 943 crore for 2016-17.

Airlines warned of mishaps as planes, staff return to service

Continued from Page 1

According to aircraft maker Airbus SE, the largest category of fatal accidents can be traced back to the approach to an airport, while the largest number of non-fatal accidents happen during landing.

In May, a Pakistan International Airlines jet crashed after an unbalanced approach, killing 97 people,

while 18 died in an Air India Express crash on landing in August, also after an unbalanced approach.

Training is not the only concern.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has reported an "alarming trend" in the number of reports of unreliable airspeed and altitude readings during the first flight after a plane leaves storage.

In some cases, take-offs had to be abandoned or the aircraft had to return to base.

In most cases, the problem was traced back to undetected insect nests inside the aircraft's pitot tubes, pressure-sensitive sensors that feed key data to an avionics computer.

In June, a Wizz Air Holdings PLC jet halted take-off after the captain found the airspeed was reading zero.

Woman activist booked under UAPA for...

Continued from Page 1

Sources in the police said after picking her up from her home, Annapuram was taken to Munchingput police station for questioning but refused to comment whether she was arrested or not.

She is the third person to be arrested by the police in the Piduguralla case. Anjaneyulu, Konda Reddy and Annapuram are members of the Pragatisheel Karmika Samakhya (PKS).

Centre warns against laxity as number...

Continued from Page 1

"So we should be happy about that but cautiously happy," he said.

Noting Delhi has made progress, he said, "We congratulate the government of Delhi as also all the other governments who have done so well in contributing towards such a significant control (in cases) in recent times."

Paul, however, expressed concern over the COVID-19 situation in some states like Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh and stated all efforts to control the spread are being made in collaboration with these governments.

Union Health Secretary

Rajesh Bhushan said that more than 15.55 crore tests have been conducted so far for detection of coronavirus infection in the country, and the cumulative positivity rate has come down to 6.37 while the average daily positivity rate during last week was 3.00 per cent.

India's Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is also among the lowest in the world. At present, India's CFR is 1.45 per cent, whereas globally it is 2.26 per cent, Bhushan said.

Speaking about the preparation for the COVID-19 vaccination drive, Bhushan said guidelines for estimation of electrical and non-electrical cold chain equipment and their

strengthening have been issued to states.

Guidelines for management of cold chain at last cold chain points and session sites have been issued.

At least 29,000 cold chain points, 240 walk-in coolers, 70 walk-in freezers, 45,000 ice-lined refrigerators, 41,000 deep freezers and 300 solar refrigerators will be used for the COVID-19 vaccination drive.

States have been asked to identify at least one adverse event following immunisation (AEFI) management centre in each block.

"Adverse events following immunisation is a critical aspect. Even during universal immunisation programmes,

which have been going on for decades, some adverse effects are seen in children and pregnant women after vaccination.

"So, we can't deny the possibility of an adverse event when the COVID-19 vaccination begins. The countries where inoculation has already started, especially in the UK, adverse events took place on the very first day. So, it is essential that states and union territories prepare for this too," Bhushan said.

Detailed instructions on infection prevention and control practices during vaccination and management of minor, severe, serious adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) have been issued to states.

Men in Telugu states continue to treat sterilisation as taboo

Continued from Page 1

"Driven by masculinity norms, men regard their use of contraceptives, particularly male sterilisation, as an 'invasive' procedure and an attack on their 'manhood' resulting in decreased sexual performance. Men also perceive that sterilisation can compromise their role as providers by hampering their bodies and, in turn, their economic productivity, and hence are uncomfortable to even talk about it," said a report prepared by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Men perceive that sterilisation can compromise their role as providers by hampering their bodies

under its two-year-long Couple Engage project in India regarding men's engagement in family planning.

"Use of condoms is also fraught with these misconceptions along with notions about reduced pleasure," the report added.

In Telangana, Information was gathered from 27,351 households, 27,518 women, and 3,863 men. In Andhra Pradesh information was gathered from 11,346 households, 10,975 women, and 1,558 men.

Interestingly, the Union Health Ministry had undertaken several initiatives across the country to increase male participation in Family Planning like the observation of 'Vasectomy Fortnight' in November every year in all states of India to raise awareness on male participation and promotion of male sterilisation.

CM launches free crop insurance

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday launched 'YSR Free Crop Insurance' scheme and directly credited Rs 1,252 crore into the bank accounts of 9.48 lakh farmers who have lost their crop during 2019.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that the government has taken up the responsibility of supporting the farmers in difficult times and thus brought in the free crop insurance scheme, without levying any burden of premium on farmers.

During the previous government, for availing crop insurance scheme, the farmer had to pay his share, while both State and Central governments had to pay an equal share of premium amount.

However, neither the State nor the Centre used to pursue the insurance claims due to which farmers either received the insurance amount after a very long time or ended up losing the insurance altogether, he said.

In order to address these issues, the government has started the 'YSR Crop Insurance Scheme' to benefit the farmers. Under the scheme, the government will pay the entire premium amount on behalf of farmers, besides processing the claims in fast-track mode.



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■ During three years from 2016 to 2019, the previous government had spent an average Rs 393 crore per annum towards crop insurance premium, while the farmers paid about Rs 290 crore per annum.

■ However, neither the State nor the Centre used to pursue the insurance claims due to which farmers either received the insurance amount after a very long time or ended up losing the insurance altogether, he said.

■ About 49.80 lakh farmers have been brought under the insurance cover by our government. The government is paying Rs 971 crore towards crop insurance premium for the year 2019-20. In contrast, only 20 lakh farmers enrolled for insurance cover during the TDP regime fearing heavy premium amount, the CM said.

entire premium amount on behalf of farmers, besides processing the claims in fast-track mode.

In the previous government, farmers were not interested in crop insurance scheme as they were expected to pay heavy premium amount from their pockets.

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Rs 393 crore per annum towards crop insurance premium, while the farmers paid about Rs 290 crore per annum.

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TDP regime fearing heavy premium amount, the CM said.

In 2016-17, only 17.79 lakh farmers had insurance cover, while in 2017-18 and 2018-19, 18.22 lakh farmers and 24.83 lakh farmers, respectively, were brought under insurance cover.

In our government, during 2019-20, about 49.80 lakh farmers were brought under insurance coverage, said the

Chief Minister adding that 45.96 lakh hectares of land was covered with insurance.

Referring to the damage caused due to Nivar Cyclone, the Chief Minister said that the crop loss enumeration had been completed and the details would be displayed at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) and village secretariats. The compensation would be paid by December 31, he assured.

Temple to follow strict norms for Deeksha withdrawal

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The administration of Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam has decided to strictly follow Covid-19 guidelines for the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment to be held next month. The temple trust board meeting was held on Tuesday and discussed various issues.

Temple Executive Officer MV Suresh Babu said holy bath at Durga Ghat and Giri Pradakshina would not be allowed for Bhavani's, who take Deeksha.

He further said Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment will not be allowed in the temple and made it clear the devotees have to relinquish the Deeksha at the same place where they took it (Maladharana). He said the devotees can visit the temple only for performing pujas and prayers.

Temple Trust Board chairman P Somi Naidu and other members discussed the income and expenditure and temple administrative activities. The EO said there will be restrictions on the number of devotees visiting the temple during the Deeksha relinquishment.

'Take inspiration from Sriramulu in fight for Amaravati'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday paid rich tributes to Amarajeivi Potti Sriramulu who sacrificed his life for the creation of separate Andhra state. He recalled how Potti Sriramulu fought courageously against injustice and disrespect meted out to the Telugu people prior to the formation of Andhra state.

Naidu called upon people to follow the footsteps of Potti Sriramulu and prepare to make any sacrifice in the agitation against Jagan Mohan Reddy's regime in the State.

While Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is responsible for unification of India, Potti Sriramulu laid down his life for uniting all the Telugu speaking people. Potti Sriramulu went on a fast for 58 days to ensure that a separate state was carved out from Tamil Nadu for Telugu speaking people keeping in

view their distinct culture, language and interests.

Addressing a meeting held on the occasion of death anniversary of Sri Sriramulu, the TDP chief asserted that the Amaravati Capital City project was taken up to connect the entire AP and create huge potential for future economic growth of all the 13 districts in the State.

Sriramulu was the source of inspiration behind visualising Amaravati as an effective income-generating growth engine for all the people of the State. However, Jagan Reddy was hell-bent on ruining the capital and the future of the people, as well.

Naidu said: "The people led peaceful lives without any threat to their security or property during TDP regime. Now the State is witnessing a tyrannical rule. AP has become a hub for gangsters, fraudsters, mobsters and criminals."



SHORT TAKES

Inter-state ganja smugglers held in Vizag, 60 kg ganja seized

VISAKHAPATNAM: Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) officials raided Sai Sampath Residency here in Allipuram and seized 60 kg of dry ganja from the possession of three persons. The arrested have been identified as Sufal Jha (21), Ansu Jha (19), both natives of West Bengal and a juvenile. The officials have launched a manhunt for two more persons, Pankaj Kumar and Rajendra in connection with the case. Sufal Jha, Ansu Jha and Pankaj Kumar and the juvenile visited Sileru of Vizag Agency and they purchased the weed from Rajendra at a low price. Pankaj Kumar asked Sufal Jha, Ansu Jha and the juvenile to travel West Bengal to sell the ganja at high prices. When the trio was making arrangements to travel to West Bengal by train, the SEB officials conducted a raid, seized the weed, and arrested the culprits. The SEB officials also seized the banned tobacco products worth over Rs1.15 lakh.

Sanchaita bans entry of people into Ayodhya ground, draws ire

VISAKHAPATNAM: MANSAS chairperson Sachaita Gajapathi Raju's decision to restrict the entry of public into Ayodhya ground other than the MR College students has drawn the ire of the local public. Regular joggers and youngsters playing on ground were unhappy after seeing the entry gate of the ground locked with a notice that only MR College students and staff are allowed. Many boys were seen playing on the road outside the stadium on Tuesday morning. The decision has outraged the walkers regular to the ground. Several political party leaders, including the SFI, are planning to stage protests soon. "It would not be a good idea for the management not to allow walking on the Ayodhya playground and that Mansas is not anyone's property," protested a morning walker. Earlier, there was stir over the privatisation of the educational institutions run by MANAS. The correspondent of MANSAS Educational Institutions, KV Lakshmi Prasad Raju, wrote to the principal of the college on October 6, directing to defer admissions. The letters mention that MANSAS has formally submitted a proposal to "close Intermediate programmes/courses" and to "withdraw aid to MR (A) college", as a part of an exercise in "restructuring and reorganising the academic programmes effective from 2020-21."

Jagan to start comprehensive land survey in Jaggaiahpet

VIJAYAWADA: Transport and Information Minister Perni Venkatramiah (Nani) on Tuesday said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will launch a comprehensive land survey programme at Thakkellapadu of Jaggaiahpet mandal in Krishna district on December 21. Minister Nani inspected the arrangements for Chief Minister's visit along with CM programme coordinator T Raghuram, Government Whip Samineni Udayabhana, District Collector A MD Imtiaz, Joint Collector Dr K Madhavi Latha and District SP Ravindranath Babu. Speaking to the media, Nani said that the state government will be conducting a comprehensive land survey to find a permanent solution to the land disputes being faced by the farmers. There are clashes between farmers regarding boundaries of their lands and wasting time and money due to court proceedings. We are going to start this survey process via satellite with state-of-the-art equipment for a permanent solution. The survey is aimed at eliminating disputes and giving the real owners ownership over their property, said the Minister. Andhra Pradesh government whip Udaya Bhanu said that the CM had decided to conduct a comprehensive land survey to give rights to every farmer.

International workshop on 'Scour and Erosion'

VISAKHAPATNAM: An International workshop on "Scour and Erosion" will be organised virtually on December 16 by the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering (ISSMGE), Indian Geotechnical Society (IGS) in association with Department of Civil Engineering, Andhra University College of Engineering. AU Vice-Chancellor Prof. P. V. G. D. Prasad Reddy will inaugurate the workshop. Prof. C.N.V. Satyanarayana Reddy, Department of Civil Engineering (AUCE) is the coordinator of the workshop. Prof. Reddy is the Indian Member on the ISSMGE Technical Committee - 213 on 'Scour and Erosion'. The workshop aims at creating awareness and exposing the civil engineering professionals to the causes for soil erosion / scour and impart knowledge on various mitigation methods. Prof. Shinji Sassa, Chairman, Technical Committee (TC)-213 of ISSMGE, Prof. E.C. Shin, Incheon National University, South Korea & Vice President (Asia), Prof. Jie Han of Kansas University (USA), Prof. M.R. Madhav, IIT Hyderabad, Dr. Paolo, Maccaferri Geosynthetics (Italy), Albert of Tencate Geosynthetics Asia, (Malaysia) and Prof. C.N.V. Satyanarayana Reddy of Andhra University will deliver the lectures related to the issues of coastal and river scour and erosion, surface/subsurface erosion of soils and deals with the remedial measures to be adopted to control scour and erosion. The suitability of various erosion and scour protection structures such as Groins, Geotubes, Gabion structures, etc. for beach erosion issues and Geobags, Gabion/ Geocell mattress systems will be discussed during the workshop. More than 500 participants (Academicians, Engineers and Researchers) from India and abroad (18 different countries) are participating in the event. The live stream of the event is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/vscbSSM2KL4>.

'Naidu fuelling protest to protect wealth'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a vitriolic attack on TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu for encouraging Amaravati agitations, Government Chief Whip G Srikanth Reddy said that the opposition leader is indeed taking up anti-Royalaseema, anti-North Andhra and anti-Amaravati development agitations. Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, he said that Chandrababu Naidu has been crying foul only to safeguard his ill-gotten properties through Amaravati farmer's protest.

He reiterated that YS Jagan

Mohan Reddy's government is farmer-friendly but never cheat them. Naidu, who announced to take part in padayatra for Amaravati protests, is actually protesting against the development of North Andhra, Rayalaseema and even Amaravati region also. He said that Naidu who hails from Rayalaseema has abandoned his nativity and is going against the development.

Srikanth Reddy said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday had directly credited Rs 1,252 crore in the accounts of farmers under crop insurance for 2019

and proved again that his government is farmer-friendly.

While the Government has mooted to distribute 54,000 house site pattas in Amaravati, Naidu has turned jealous and has instigated litigants to file a PIL in the High Court, further stating that the distribution leads to demographic imbalance in Amaravati region, he added.

The effort of the CM is to develop all three regions equally, to include all sections of people. It is Chandrababu Naidu who has ill-treated Dalits by burning their crops and attacking them, he said.

Siripuram fountain to sprinkle treated sewage water now

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Fountain at the Siripuram Circle, touted to be the Central location of Vizag city, will be an example for the judicious use of water. The reason being the fountain will be sprinkling treated sewage water instead of the supplied water.

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is now utilising the treated waste water for the fountain in a bid to save water, said GVMC commissioner, Srijana Gummalla.

The Vizag city does not have its own source of drinking water and if the city becomes the executive capital of the state, the demand for the potable water will increase manifold. Recycling of waste water for purposes, other than drinking, could save water.

GVMC has been augmenting the capacity of Sewage Treatment Plant in its jurisdiction. Currently, the STPs can recycle only 50 per cent of the waste water generated industrial units and households in Vizag city, before releasing the waster into the sea.

The treated sewage water will be supplied to the industries, especially RINL and HPCL, according to the plans of the municipal corporation.

Rapid expansion of the city is also increasing the sewage burden. According to the urban development department, the existing sewerage capacity of the Visakhapatnam circle is 76 MLD, while the sewage to be generated in the circle by 2031 is estimated to be at 509.88 MLD.

The existing - STPs at Appughar, Old City, Mudasarlova and the mini STPs - are treating about 57 MLD. If the 108 million litres per day (MLD) capacity STP at Narava is fully commissioned, it will take the total capacity of the STPs to 215 MLD.

There are 21 drains meeting the sea from the fishing harbour to Tenneti park. The effluents of the 13 drains are either partially treated or not treated at all. The GVMC has prepared a plan to divert the drains to the existing treatment plants with an estimated budget of Rs 8 to 10 crore.



Srikakulam SP Amit Bardar and Palakonda SDPO M Sravani distribute medicines to tribals during the medical camp organised at Labha village of Kothuru mandal in Srikakulam district on Tuesday.

Palakonda police conducts medical camp for tribals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Srikakulam police department on Tuesday organised a mega medical camp at Labha village of Kothuru mandal in Srikakulam district under the aegis of Palakonda SDPO M Sravani.

Superintendent of Police, Srikakulam, Amit Bardar has directed the officials to conduct mega medical camps in

their jurisdiction.

As part of the programme, treatment and medicines were provided to the tribals along with food and transport facility.

Around 1,500 tribals were given medical treatment in the medical camp organised by the police in co-ordination with Gems multi-speciality hospital and RMP doctors' association.

"We have selected the tribal school, Ashram school of Labha, for conducting the programme. Apart from basic treatment, Gems hospital has promised to provide high end treatment to tribal free-of-cost on behalf of Srikakulam police.

Srikakulam SP Amit Bardar, ITDA PO Sridhar and others attended the medical camp.

Burglars decamp with gold, silver in Akkayapalem

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Unidentified burglars broke into the house of a grocer in Akkayapalem in the heart of the Visakhapatnam city under Fourth Town police station limits and decamped with 60 tolas of gold and one kg of silver. The incident took place when the grocer Jalamuru Bangaraju and his wife were at the shop, located 20 metres from the house. His lone daughter was married and settled in Bengaluru.

According to police, the burglars broke into the house between 5 pm and 9 pm on Monday when Raju and his wife were busy in the shop.

One of the thieves took away the key of the house from the shop when the grocer's wife was busy. Her husband Raju went to market in the evening. When the woman went home at about 9 pm, she saw the house open and ransacked. She immediately called her husband over the phone.

He came rushing and found and immediately informed the police.

This is the biggest burglary in the city in recent times, the police sources said.

Krishna district gearing up for vaccination

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The district authorities are making all arrangements for Covid-19 vaccination for more than 40,000 health workers, frontline warriors, police, revenue, officials of other departments and people above 50 years of age.

As part of the state-wide preparedness programme for the vaccination, two-day training programme was conducted at the IMA Hall in Vijayawada for the medical and health department staff working in Vijayawada and Nuzid revenue divisions.

The second-day training session will be organised in Machilipatnam on Wednesday for the health department officials working in Machilipatnam and Gudivada



revenue divisions.

The hectic task of vaccination requires planning, preparedness, storage of vaccination and training the staff on procedures to be followed. Medical officers, computers operators, staff nurses, Asha workers and others will be given necessary training. Covid-19 guidelines will be followed during the process of vaccination.

Krishna district DM&HO Dr Suhasini said the vaccina-

tion will be given in three phases in the district. Health workers, doctors, hospital staff, frontline warriors, police, revenue and other department staff will get in two phases. In the third phase, people above 50 years of age and people below age of 50 years with comorbidity will be administered the vaccine, she said.

The vaccine will be stored at 145 places including the government hospitals, area hospitals, PHCs across the district.

Amaravati protesters want three capitals decision revoked

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The pro-Amaravati leaders and activists in large numbers joined Amaravati Praja Padayatra conducted in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Amaravati Praja Padayatra demanded that the YSRCP government should cancel three capitals decision and to continue Amaravati as only capital of the state.

TDP leader Devineni Umamaheswara Rao said that last year CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy announced decision on three capitals in the Assembly which got severe opposition from all sections of the society. He said that Amaravati movement has been continuing for the past one year and that indicates the support of people. He

stated that Amaravati agitations would continue till cancellation of three capitals decision. TDP MLA Gadde Rammoan said that Amaravati movement created a new history with the continuous protests for one year. He lamented that nearly 30,000 farmers had sacrificed their farmlands for world class capital Amaravati but CM Jagan scrapped the development of the state by announcing three capitals decision.

Andhra Pradesh Congress women leader Sunkara Padmasri stated that fearing the growing response to Amaravati movement, CM Jagan was trying to suppress agitation by creating difficulties to women who were participating in pro-Amaravati protests.

Woman among four family members booked in rape case

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

Four family members, a woman among them, have been booked after a rape case was filed by a 30-year-old woman who has also alleged that the main accused had recorded the act, police said Tuesday.

They said the complaint was filed by the victim against Mohd Zaki, his brothers Intazar and Rizwan, and the latter's wife.

Rizwan is a former village head.

Civil Lines Police Station SHO D K Tyagi said the four were booked on the direction of the Senior Superintendent of Police.

The victim has alleged in her complaint that she was raped by Mohd. Zaki four years ago when she had gone to his house for some works. She has also alleged that the accused recorded the act and threatened her to put the video online if she raised her voice.

She also said she approached Zaki's family, including his former village head-brother and his wife, with her grievances, but they allegedly supported the accused.

She has also alleged that Mohd Zaki raped her again on September 16 on some pretext, according to the complaint. Police said they are investigating the matter.

Centre interfering in WB jurisdiction: Mamata



Mamata Banerjee also dared the Union government to impose President's Rule in the state, lashing out at the BJP for trying to convert West Bengal into "riot-torn" Gujarat.

PTI ■ JALPAIGURI (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday accused the Centre of interfering in the state's jurisdiction by summoning IPS officers to serve under it.

Banerjee also dared the Union government to impose President's Rule in the state,

lashes out at the BJP for trying to convert West Bengal into "riot-torn" Gujarat.

She reiterated that BJP national president J P Nadda's convoy was not attacked and wondered why "convicted criminals" were accompanying him.

"If the BJP and the central government think they can scare us by bringing in central

forces and transferring state cadre officers, they are wrong. The Centre is summoning our officers... No one wanted to hurt him (Nadda) or his convoy," Banerjee said at a rally here. "Why were so many cars accompanying his convoy? Why were convicted criminals accompanying him? The goons who vandalised the bust of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar last year were also accompanying Nadda... People get infuriated when they see such goons roaming free... I dare the Centre to impose President's Rule in Bengal," she added.

Referring to a recent letter addressed to the prime minister by BJP MP Subramanian Swamy over changing the national anthem, the chief minister said the people of the state will give the party a befitting reply if it goes ahead with such a "misadventure".

"They want to change the history of our country, and now the national anthem," she said.

Banerjee also said refugee colonies have been recognised in West Bengal, and no one needs to fear the National Register of Citizens, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Population Register.

"BJP has created a new religion of riots and hatred among communities," she alleged.

Modi lays foundation stones for energy park, milk plant in Gujarat

PTI ■ DHORDO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday laid foundation stones of a desalination plant, a hybrid renewable energy park, and a fully automated milk processing and packing plant in his home state Gujarat.

Harnessing its vast coastline, Gujarat is taking a significant step towards transforming seawater to potable drinking water with the upcoming desalination plant at Mandvi in Kutch district, an official said.

This desalination plant, with 10 crore litre per day capacity (100 MLD), will strengthen water security in Gujarat by complementing Narmada Grid, Sauni network and treated waste water



infrastructure, he said.

It will be an important milestone for sustainable and affordable water resource harvesting in the country. Nearly 8 lakh people across the regions of Mundra, Lakhpat, Abdasa and Nakhtrana talukas will receive desalinated water from this plant,

which will also help in sharing the surplus to upstream districts of Bhachau, Rapar and Gandhidham.

It is one of the five upcoming desalination plants in Gujarat besides those at Dahej (100 MLD), Dwarka (70 MLD), Ghogha Bhavnagar (70 MLD) and Gir Somnath

(30 MLD).

The Hybrid Renewable Energy Park near Vighat village in the district will be the country's largest renewable energy generation park. It will lead to the generation of renewable energy to the tune of 30 GW.

Spread over 72,600 hectares of land, the park will have a dedicated hybrid park zone for wind and solar energy storage, as well as exclusive zone for wind park activities.

Modi also laid the foundation stone of a fully automated milk processing and packing plant at Sarhad Dairy at Anjar. The plant will cost Rs 121 crore and have the capacity to process two lakh litre milk per day, an official release said.

Drugs case: NCB summons Arjun Rampal on Wednesday

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Narcotics Control Bureau has summoned Bollywood actor Arjun Rampal here on Wednesday for questioning in a drugs case, an NCB official said on Tuesday.

Rampal has been asked to remain present before the NCB team, which is conducting a probe into the alleged Bollywood-drugs nexus following the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, the official said.

This is the second time that the NCB will question the model-turned-actor in the drugs case.

Earlier, he was questioned by the agency on November 13 for around seven hours.

Rampal was summoned on Wednesday after the NCB obtained some information during interrogation of some of the persons arrested in the drugs case, the official said. The NCB last month conducted searches at Rampal's



residence in Bandra area of Mumbai and seized electronic gadgets and some medicines banned under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

His partner Gabriella Demetriades was also questioned by the agency for two days last month in the case.

Gabriella's brother Agisilaos Demetriades was arrested by the NCB in the case in October and it was found that he was in touch with many Bollywood celebrities, the official said.

Rampal's friend Paul Bartel was also earlier arrested by the NCB in the drugs case.

Based on some WhatsApp chats involving drugs, the NCB launched a probe into the alleged drug use in Bollywood after the death of Rajput in June this year.

The central agency had earlier arrested Rajput's girlfriend, actress Rhea Chakraborty, her brother Showik, some employees of the late filmstar and a few others under sections of the NDPS Act.

Churu coldest in Rajasthan with minimum of 5.2 deg C

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Churu was the coldest place in Rajasthan with a minimum of 5.2 degrees Celsius followed by Pilani where the night temperature was 5.3 degrees Celsius, the meteorological department said on Tuesday.

Bikaner, Ganganagar, Phalodi, Sikar, Jaisalmer and Alwar recorded a minimum of 5.6, 6.4, 6.6, 7, 7.4 and 8 degrees Celsius respectively, according to the Met department here.

The night temperatures in Jaipur, Barmer, Ajmer and Jodhpur were 9.8, 10.9, 11.5 and 12.3 degrees Celsius respectively.

The department has predicted a fall in temperature across the state with a possibility of cold wave conditions at isolated pockets in Sikar and Jhunjhunu district during the next 24 hours.

No proposal from the BJP for cabinet expansion, says Nitish

PTI ■ PATNA

Expansion of the newly formed cabinet in Bihar will take place in due course in consultation with the BJP and the same was not on cards as of now, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said here on Tuesday.

Kumar made the statement in response to queries about the intense speculations about a tussle between his JD(U) and the BJP coming in the way of expansion of the cabinet which has 14 members, including himself, less than half of the sanctioned strength.

As per the rule, a maximum of 36 ministers, including the chief minister, can be appointed to the 243-member Bihar Assembly. "At present we are busy with moving forward on our blueprint for the next five years. A cabinet meeting is scheduled later in the day for the purpose."

"When the BJP proposes expansion of the cabinet, we will think over it. So far no pro-

Speculations were rife that the cabinet expansion was deferred as the JD(U) was insistent on having a number of berths equal to that of BJP which currently has 7 ministers

posal has been received", Kumar told reporters.

Speculations were rife that the cabinet expansion was deferred as the JD(U) was insistent on having a number of berths equal to that of the BJP which at present has seven ministers, as against only four from the chief ministers party.

Two of the BJP ministers Tar Kishor Prasad and Renu

Devi have been designated as Deputy CM.

One of the JD(U) ministers, Mewa Lal Chaudhary, had to resign within hours of taking charge as a massive controversy had erupted over his being named in a case relating to irregular appointments at an agriculture university of which he was then the V-C.

While the BJP is said to be of the view that it deserved a greater share of the pie on account of its superior tally in the assembly, the JD(U) holds that it suffered in the assembly elections because of Chirag Paswan's politics of brinkmanship whom the saffron party failed to rein in despite its clout.

In the assembly polls, the BJP returned with a tally of 74 while the JD(U) won only 43 seats. The JD(U) is also said to have underscored that it had contested as many seats as the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls last year, despite then having a strength in the assembly that was superior to the latter.

Security agencies fear 'crazy' yaba may find ground in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A sharp rise in the smuggling of yaba or 'crazy medicine' drug tablets -- almost double than the much-abused Phensedyl cough syrup -- along the country's eastern front with Bangladesh has alarmed security agencies prompting them to tweak their strategy for curbing the new menace, according to government reports and officials.

A dossier prepared by a central security organisation notes that while India at present is a "transit" territory for the circular-shaped and red-coloured drug, its "increased inflow clearly indicates that it is just a matter of time for such an addictive drug to gain a foothold in India".

It adds that Indian smugglers, involved in illegal Phensedyl transport, are "now shifting" to yaba due to high demand and profitability.

Court refuses to cancel NBWs against Shravan Gupta

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has refused to cancel the non-bailable warrants (NBWs) against Shravan Gupta, the former managing director of realty major Emaar MGF, in connection with the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper money laundering case, saying he was not cooperating in the investigation.

The court said Gupta's application seeking cancellation of the NBWs was "without any merit" and also noted that the warrant was issued against him on August 29 as he did not join the investigation despite receipt of summons and was trying to evade the probe on one ground or the other.

Enforcement Directorate had submitted that Gupta failed to join the investigation despite service of nine summons which led to issuance of NBWs against him and that he was not cooperating in the investigation.

Special Judge Arvind Kumar in December 5 order said "In the present matter applicant did not join investigation despite receipt of summons and is trying to evade the investigation on one ground or the other."

"Even during proceedings, the applicant did not express intention to appear before ED to join investigation."

Green buildings movement should become people's movement: Venkaiah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday appealed to finance commissions and local bodies to encourage green buildings through various measures including tax incentives.

He also wanted all states to create online portals to provide single-window clearance to green buildings. Virtually inaugurating the 12th GRIHA (Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment Summit) from Hyderabad, the vice president said India has the poten-

tial to lead the global green building movement and emphasised the need to promote green building concept by both the private sector and the government.

Recognising that there is a lack of awareness among people about the green building concept, he also called for the launch of a mass media campaign on the advantages of building green homes. "Green buildings movement should become people's movement," the vice president said, according to an official statement.

Quoting World Green Building Council data, Naidu said buildings and construction account for 39 per cent of energy-related CO2 emissions in the world and called for accelerating the process of total de-carbonisation of the built environment.

Noting that the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan' envisions making India self-reliant in all spheres, the vice president emphasised the need for sustainable development and wanted awareness to be increased among the people.

Boris to be Republic Day Chief Guest

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will visit India in January to be the chief guest at the Republic Day Parade, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced on Tuesday after holding talks with his Indian counterpart External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Addressing a joint press conference after the talks, Jaishankar said the two sides held four hours of discussion on a wide range of issues and focus has been on how to take the bilateral ties to a higher level.

"In recent years as you know, there have been very big changes in global politics and we both believe that our interests are better served by working together more effectively," he said and added that important issues, including the situation in Afghanistan as also developments in Gulf and evolution of the Indo-Pacific region were discussed.

Jaishankar said challenges posed by terrorism and radicalism which are shared concerns were also discussed during the talks.



"Prime Minister Boris Johnson has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join the UK-hosted G7 summit next year. The UK Prime Minister has also accepted the very generous invitation to attend India's Republic Day celebrations (as chief guest) in January which is a great honour," Raab said.

On his part, Jaishankar said Johnson accepting the invitation for the Republic Day was, in a way, symbolic of a new era in Indo-UK ties.

Raab's three-day visit to India from December 14-17 comes at a time the UK is holding complex negotiations with the European Union on reaching a post Brexit trade deal.

Coast Guard ship 'Sujit' commissioned in Goa

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Indian Coast Guard ship 'Sujit', the second in the series of 105 metres off-shore patrol vessels, was commissioned in Goa on Tuesday.

The vessel will enhance the Indian Coast Guard's operational capability to discharge multifarious maritime tasks, a spokesman of the Coast Guard said.

It was commissioned at the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) in Vasco town by Secretary (defence production) Raj Kumar in the presence of Indian Coast Guard Director General Krishnaswamy Natarajan and others.

The 105 metres OPV (off-shore patrol vessel) has been designed and built indigenously by the GSL, and is fitted with



advanced technology, navigation and communication equipment, sensors and machinery, the spokesman said.

The ship is also equipped

with an integrated bridge system, integrated platform management system, power management system and high power external fire-fighting.

It is designed to carry one

The ship, on joining the Coast Guard, will be based at Goa, he said.

"The ship will be deployed extensively for EEZ (exclusive economic zone) surveillance and other duties as enshrined in the Coast Guard charter," he said.

"Presently, the Indian Coast Guard has a fleet of 155 ships and 62 aircraft," he said, adding that 35 more ships are at various stages of construction at different Indian shipyards.

Besides, 16 advance light helicopters are under production at the HAL, Bengaluru, which will provide an added strength to the surveillance capabilities of the Indian Coast Guard to deal with the ever-dynamic maritime challenges, he added.

SHORT TAKES

Rajasthan: Aged couple die in blaze, labourer electrocuted



An elderly couple was burnt to death in a blaze while a labourer got electrocuted in another incident in Rajasthan's Bikaner division on Tuesday, police said. A fire broke out in the house of scrap dealer Anil Kumar (70) in which he and his wife Anita (66) were charred to death in Sriganganagar district. The incident occurred under Kotwali police station area of the district in the morning. Based on information from their neighbours, police and fire brigades were rushed to the spot and the flames doused, police said. In Gajner area of Bikaner, a truck came in touch a high-tension power line while unloading sand. A labourer, who was standing near the truck, got electrocuted in the incident, the police said, adding that the body was shifted to a mortuary for conducting a post-mortem.

Vice Admiral Srikant dies due to Covid related complications



Vice Admiral Srikant died on Tuesday morning at the base hospital here due to COVID-19-related complications, officials said. The vice admiral, the Navy's senior-most submariner, was due to retire on December 31. Expressing his condolences, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted, "Deeply pained at the untimely and sudden demise of Director General Seabird, Vice Admiral Srikant." The Ministry of Defence and the Indian Navy will always remember his stellar contributions and remarkable service to the nation, Singh said. "My deepest condolences to his bereaved family and friends. Om Shanti!" the minister stated. Srikant was admitted at the base hospital in Delhi after he contracted COVID-19, said a junior Navy officer who had worked under him. Subsequently, the vice admiral tested had negative for COVID-19 on Sunday morning, but developed breathing difficulties by evening, the officer said. "He was shifted to ICU and was subsequently put on a ventilator," the officer mentioned. Officials said the vice admiral, who was the Navy's senior-most submariner, died on Tuesday morning.

AGP founding member opposes CAA, resigns after being sidelined



Former minister and founding member of the Asom Gana Parishad Pabindra Deka resigned from the party on Tuesday, miffed over its leadership "sidelining him due to his strong opposition to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Deka is an MLA from Patancharkuchi constituency representing the AGP, an ally of the BJP-led government in Assam. "I have resigned from the primary membership of AGP today... When CAB was introduced the second time in Parliament last year, AGP was silent and its lone MP in Rajya Sabha Birendra Prasad Baishya voted in favour of it. "I was the only person against it in the party and publicly opposed it. For that, the party leadership punished and sidelined me," Deka told reporters here. He also asserted that regionalism is not safe in the hands of the AGP leadership, which also prompted him to exit from the party. Asked if he will join another party, Deka said, "I will participate in the 2021 assembly polls, but I have not decided which party will I join as yet."

Modi: Govt addressing farmers' concerns; Oppn misguiding them

PNS ■ DHRDO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government is addressing the concerns of farmers over the new agri laws and accused the opposition parties of misguiding them.

Modi was speaking after laying foundation stones of a desalination plant, a hybrid renewable energy park, and a fully automated milk processing and packing plant in his home state Gujarat.

"Farmers gathered near Delhi are being misled as part of a conspiracy.

Farmers are told that their land will be grabbed by others if new farm reforms get implemented. I want to ask you, did the dairy owner take your cattle because you are selling milk to him?" the prime minister said.



ister said.

"Opposition parties, when they were in power, were in favour of these farm sector reforms, but did not take any decision back then. Now when the country has decided to embrace these reforms, these

people are spreading falsehood and misleading farmers. I want to reiterate that my government is ready 24 hours to resolve all your doubts," Modi said.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and else-

Thousands of farmers have been protesting near various border points of Delhi including Singhu and Tikri for over a fortnight demanding the Centre repeal new farm laws

where have been protesting near various border points of Delhi including Singhu and Tikri for over a fortnight demanding the Centre repeal three new farm laws.

Opposition to three agri laws politically-motivated: Fadnavis

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday told the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly that three agri laws passed by the Centre were being opposed for political reasons and claimed that farm sector reforms had been initiated when the Congress-led UPA was in power.

Speaking in the Lower House, the Leader of Opposition also said that handling of cases against Republic TV's editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami and actress Kangana Ranaut "showed the state government's arrogance of power."

Fadnavis said the erstwhile UPA regime was of the view that there should be freedom



to farmers to sell their produce anywhere they want, a key feature of the recently-passed agri laws.

"In the year 2010, a committee comprising ministers from all states was set up regarding the implementation of agricultural reforms with a view that farmers should have a competitive and alternative marketing mechanism at their disposal, the former chief minister said.

He said a committee set up

for this purpose was headed by Harshvardhan Patil, who was a minister in then Congress-NCP government in Maharashtra.

"When these reforms are implemented now, why should there be opposition (to the three agricultural laws passed by the Centre). This (opposition to the laws) is politically motivated," he said.

Fadnavis said he (the BJP) did not subscribe to the views of Goswami and Ranaut.

"We believe in the rule of law. If anybody is doing anything wrong, action should be taken as per law. We do not subscribe to the views of Arnab Goswami and Kangana Ranaut," he said. Referring to the reopening of a 2018 abatement to suicide case against Goswami, Fadnavis said, "there are laws to punish Arnab Goswami if he has done anything wrong."

Temperature dips to sub-zero levels across Kashmir Valley

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Night temperatures in the Kashmir Valley dipped below the freezing point owing to a clear sky, with the famous skier of Gulmarg shivering at minus 10.2 degrees Celsius, Meteorological department officials said here on Tuesday.

All weather stations in the Valley recorded sub-zero night temperatures several degrees below the normal for this part of the season, the officials said.

They said the temperature in Gulmarg, the famous ski-resort in north Kashmir, settled at a low of minus 10.2 degrees Celsius, which is six degrees below the normal for this time of the season.

The resort was the coldest recorded place in the UT, the Met officials said.

MH allots Rs 1.77 crore for safety at CJJ's home

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has made a provision of Rs 1.77 crore towards additional safety measures at the Nagpur residence of Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde.

The provision has been made in the supplementary demands of the law and judiciary department tabled in the state Legislature on Monday.

No reason for the provision has been mentioned in the supplementary demands' document.

Nagpur is the hometown of CJI Bobde. In the demands of the state Public Works Department, Rs 5.75 crore has been earmarked for construction and related works at Raj Bhavan and another Rs 6.16 crore for construction and related works at residential premises of judges.

The state government has allocated Rs 2,211 crore to



provide relief to farmers hit by natural calamities and Rs 22 crore for COVID-19 vaccine air conditioning facilities as it tabled Rs 21,992.50 crore supplementary demands in the assembly on Monday.

Supplementary demands are additional grants required to meet the expenditure of the government.

The winter session of the Legislature, traditionally held in Nagpur - the second capital of the state - is being held in Mumbai in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cong pays tributes to Patel; Rahul says need to follow his principles

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday paid tributes to India's first deputy prime minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary, with Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra underlining the importance of remembering his principles at a time when farmers are protesting against the new agri laws.

Patel, a freedom fighter who also became India's first home minister, is credited with unifying hundreds of princely states into the Union of India following independence through a mix of persuasion, dialogue and even use of force when required.

"On his death anniversary, we pay solemn tribute to India's Sardar, the man behind a united India, Shri Vallabhbhai Patel," the Congress said on its official Twitter handle.



"As a brave freedom fighter & the nation's first Deputy PM, his innumerable contributions to nation-building inspire countless of Indians even today," the party said.

In a Facebook post in Hindi, Rahul Gandhi shared Patel's quote that "my only wish is that India should be a good producer and no one in this country should shed tears while being hungry". Tributes to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death

Couple die in blaze, labourer electrocuted

PNS ■ RAJASTHAN

An elderly couple was burnt to death in a blaze while a labourer got electrocuted in another incident in Rajasthan's Bikaner division on Tuesday, police said.

A fire broke out in the house of scrap dealer Anil (70) in which he and his wife Anita (66) were charred to death in Sriganganagar.

The incident occurred under Kotwali police station area of the district in the morning. Based on information from their neighbours, police and fire brigades were rushed to the spot and the flames doused, police said.

In Gajner area of Bikaner, a truck came in touch a high-tension power line while unloading sand.

A labourer, who was standing near the truck, got electrocuted in the incident, the police said, adding that the body was shifted to mortuary.

Transgenders did not get fair deal in Bihar: HC

PNS ■ PATNA

The ongoing process for recruitment of constables in Bihar fell 'short of constitutional mandate' since there was no provision for applicants falling under the transgender category, the HC has ruled.

The court made the observation in an order passed on Monday whereby it directed the state government to immediately look into the matter and take remedial measures and put on hold finalisation of candidates' list 'till further orders'.

The order was passed by a division bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice S Kumar which pointed

out that the advertisement inviting applications "falls short of the Constitutional mandate... it is not clear as to whether persons falling under the provisions of the Transgender Persons Act, 2019 can even apply for the post or not". The advertisement had put out eligibility criteria for only 'male' and 'female' candidates, with no mention of those belonging to the third gender. The court made the observation while hearing the petition of one Veera Yadav who had sought clarity on whether reservation was in place for transgender applicants on the lines of separate quotas for the physically disabled.

Prashant seeks hearing on his plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Activist-lawyer Prashant Bhushan on Tuesday moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction that his two pleas, in which he has sought review of the orders convicting and sentencing him for contempt of court for his tweets against the judiciary, be heard after adjudication of his separate petition raising the issue of right to appeal in such matter.

The application has been moved by Bhushan, a day before a three-judge bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar is scheduled to consider in-chamber on Wednesday his two petitions seeking review of the apex court's orders by which he

was convicted and sentenced in the contempt case.

The top court had on August 14 held Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his two contemptuous tweets against the judiciary, saying they cannot be said to be a fair criticism of the functioning of the judiciary made in the public interest.

Later, the apex court had on August 31 sentenced him to either pay nominal fine of Re 1 or face a three-month jail term and debarment from law practice for three years in the case.

Bhushan, who has already deposited Re 1 as fine with the apex court's registry on September 14, has filed two separate review petitions in the case.

Rath yatra with 'Ramayana' theme to mark two years of Chhattisgarh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Places associated with Lord Ram will be developed as 'Ram Van Gaman Path' in Chhattisgarh as part of an ambitious plan chalked out by Bhupesh Baghel-led state government to mark the completion of its two years, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The Ram Van Gaman Path is referred to the route taken by Lord Ram during his 14 years of exile.

"The Ram Van Gaman tourism circuit project was chalked out to highlight the mythological and historical background of Chhattisgarh and its close association with the life of Lord Ram," the statement issued by Chhattisgarh information cen-



tre here said. "It not only emphasizes the places associated with the exile period of Ram, but will additionally aid in the development of areas surrounding the sites," it said. The Ram Van Gaman circuit will be a tourist delight in each

step, the statement said. "Rath Yatra with 'Ramayana' theme to mark Bhupesh Baghel-led Chhattisgarh government's completion of two years. Places with Lord Ram's association in Chhattisgarh to be developed as Ram Van Gaman Path," the statement said.

Senior Congress leader Baghel was sworn-in as the chief minister of Chhattisgarh on December 17, 2018.

The devotees and tourists will be able to feel the presence of Lord Ram with every foot-step, during their journey of Ram Van Gaman Path. The total length of the subways, including the main route of the path, is approximately 2,260 km, it said.

"Chhattisgarh was the maternal home of Lord Ram and the birthplace of his mother, Mata Kaushalya. Lord Ram along with his wife Sita and younger brother Lakshman had started their exile in the Dandakaranya region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh," the statement said.

Mark Zuckerberg calls India 'a very special country'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Facebook co-founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Tuesday said India is a very special and important country with a remarkable entrepreneurship culture, as he sought to push deeper the just-launched payments services that allow users to make payments over WhatsApp.

Last month, Facebook-owned WhatsApp received approval from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) for rolling out its payments services in India. In 2018, WhatsApp started testing its UPI-based payments services in India -- a global first -- with about a million users. "We just launched WhatsApp payments in India last month -- now you can send money to your friends and family through WhatsApp, as easily as sending a message. That was possible because of the UPI system that has been built in India," Zuckerberg said during a fireside chat with Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani.



He said the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) makes it easy for anyone to instantly accept payments across different apps.

Referring to late Dhirubhai Ambani's vision of affordable connectivity in the country, Zuckerberg said, "... today Indians can communicate with one another for less than the cost of a postcard and that's what we've tried to do with messaging... and hopefully we can do that together with payments and make it so people

can use India's new UPI system, which I think is just great."

Following the NPCI approval, WhatsApp has started its payments service in the country in a "graded" manner, starting with a maximum registered user base of 20 million in UPI. WhatsApp -- which counts India as its biggest market with over 400 million users -- will compete with players like Paytm, Google Pay, Walmart-owned PhonePe and Amazon Pay in the country.

In April, Facebook announced an investment of USD 5.7 billion (Rs 43,574 crore) in Jio Platforms.

"I have no hesitation in going on record, that it is your investment that set the ball rolling. Not only for Jio, but for the Indian FDI which has been the largest-ever in its history," Mukesh Ambani said.

He added that the partnership between Jio and Facebook will "actually demonstrate that it is great for India, Indians, and small Indian businesses".

"And I believe Mark, that our actions will speak louder than our words in the coming months and years," Ambani said. Ambani stated that technology, with all the digitisation steps that India has taken, will democratise wealth and value creation for individuals and small businesses.

Noting that WhatsApp and Jio have hundreds of millions of subscribers in India, Ambani said Jio Mart retail service aspires to "serve tens of millions of small shopkeepers in India, who are the bedrock of employment".

"This means Jio brings digital connectivity, WhatsApp now with WhatsApp Pay brings digital interactivity, and the ability to move to close transactions and create value, and Jio Mart brings the unmatched online and offline retail opportunity, that gives our small shops which exist in villages and small towns in India, a chance to digitise and be at par with anybody else in the world," he added.

Zuckerberg said India has introduced a lot of innovation in areas like education and financial inclusion, and that decisions taken here, shape global discussion about how technology can drive more economic opportunity and better outcomes for people," he said.

Zuckerberg also said that a lot of Indian organisations are leading the way in using technology to build safer communities, and more inclusive financial systems. "Whether it's in social commerce or education or financial services, there is a lot of innovation that happens here. And we are proud to partner with some of the teams that are working on these important challenges... India is a very special and important country for us," he said.

Saying that millions of Indians use its products (Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp) every day to stay connected, Zuckerberg said millions of small businesses across the country are using WhatsApp Business and Messenger to reach customers manage orders and grow their businesses.

Death toll due to COVID-19 rises to 8,103 in Uttar Pradesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The death toll due to COVID-19 in Uttar Pradesh rose to 8,103 on Tuesday with 20 more fatalities, while 1,336 fresh cases pushed the tally to 5,68,064 in the state, an official said. "At present, there are 18,382 active cases and the total number of people discharged after treatment stands at 5,41,579," said Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad.

The recovery rate in the state has now increased to 95.38 per cent, Prasad said. With 20 new fatalities, the death toll has risen to 8,103 from 8,083 on Monday while the total number of cases rose to 5,68,064 from 5,66,728. On Monday, over 1.48 lakh samples were tested for detection of COVID-19, taking the total number of tests conducted so far in the state to over 2.16 crore, Prasad said. He said that the state has started training staff to be engaged in COVID-19 vaccination. "The state is prepared to carry out the vaccination as per the Centre's guideline. The maintenance of cold-chain and other works related to the vaccination are on," he said.



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Up for sale!

Will Air India finally find someone other than the Government of India to fund it?



Air India for years has been one of India's most glorious examples of a white elephant, not just because the airline operated Boeing-747 Jumbo Jets painted in white. Much like other Public Sector Enterprises, the airline became a way for politicians and bureaucrats to repay favours with inflated leases and purchases of aircraft and services. And ever since the days of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government, the airline has been on the shop window and up for sale. Crippled by its own debt, Air India has found it impossible to not only turn a profit but also be competitive on a number of counts against domestic rivals such as IndiGo; on international routes

Air India has been hollowed out by massive route rights allotted to Arabian airlines whose growth has been predicated on the Indian passenger. While Air India has played a major role in the repatriation of Indian citizens from foreign countries since the pandemic began (and many other evacuation exercises on occasions even earlier, especially when Sushma Swaraj was the Minister of External Affairs), the airline has made a pretty penny from it. And that will not substitute as a policy once the pandemic begins to wear off and air travel begins in earnest again. But the flag-carrier airline is not competitive domestically and while it might gain on international sectors with the rise of non-stop point-to-point travel, it faces risks from other Indian carriers such as IndiGo and Vistara. However, make no mistake, Air India is a powerful brand and one worth saving especially if the Government of India takes a major hit and absorbs much of the debt associated with the airline. After all, why would any sane person buy an asset where he is crippled by prior debt when it would be cheaper to create an all-new asset. If the undisclosed bidders for Air India give the Government a fair price for the airline and absorb some of the losses and most of the employees, it could well be a win-win for everyone. Sure, writing off thousands of crores of debt might be a hard pill to swallow but it is a lot better than continuing to absorb losses or shutting down the airline completely, losing an iconic Indian brand and thousands of jobs. There already have been in the past decade massive layoffs and many lives ruined largely owing to the failures of airlines like Kingfisher and Jet Airways, and tens of thousands of crores of public money has been lost in these private airlines as public sector banks have borne the brunt of bad loans to the aviation industry.

While the Government of India has not disclosed the identity of those who have expressed interest in bidding for the airline, it has been suspected that a group of employees of the airline along with a private equity firm Interups and Tata Sons are among the suitors. As the Maharaja goes under the hammer, sources in the Government have confirmed that it has received multiple expressions of interest. We still believe that selling Air India piecemeal might be a way for the Government to realise additional value from the airline but those in power believe that such a step will only delay and needlessly complicate the sale. We cannot underestimate the importance of the aviation industry for India and while the Railways have been the lifeblood of the Indian passenger transport system for decades, in a country the size of India, an affordable, reliable as well as a profitable aviation industry is vital not just for connecting people and enabling the economy but most importantly, it is one of strategic importance. A large civilian air fleet — much like a large civilian merchant fleet in centuries past — is a way to move military and other strategic assets quickly. Many have argued that this is why India should retain a public airline but many large nations, particularly the United States, do not have any airline controlled by the Government. In fact, a professionally run Air India which is profitable and not a taxpayer-subsidised operation that competes with true private airlines will lead to a level playing field and the overall growth of the Indian aviation sector. However, as the saying goes, there is often a slip between the cup and the lip and it remains to be seen whether the sale goes ahead.

AAP's ambition

Having established itself in Delhi creditably, the party is now planning to test the waters in UP Assembly elections



The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), after initial hiccups in its ambitions to spread its wings nationwide, learnt the hard way that it had to first establish its political life's longness with proof of its governance skills. This is why it abandoned its pan-India efforts, considering its limited appeal among the civil society, and concentrated on securing Delhi. And now that it is into its third term in the city-State, riding a massive verdict and having managed to stave off the BJP creditably, it is now considering spreading its footprint across the country. Of course, in this effort, it is following a ground-up policy, proving its credentials in local Government polls. Emboldened by the party's maiden win in the Goa *zila panchayat* elections, its convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said that the AAP will contest the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Assembly elections in 2022. The Goa win is significant for the simple reason that although the BJP dominated the results, the Opposition Congress performed poorly and the AAP seemed to be gaining at the latter's expense. Of course, the AAP is playing it big in UP by harping on its comparatively superior performance in citizen-friendly governance. In fact, Kejriwal almost launched a campaign yesterday, asking why people from UP would have to look at Delhi for health services and education in an obvious reference to his successful run with *mohalla* clinics, free electricity, water, education and healthcare facilities. It would enter the contest as an outlier, hoping to encash on the vacuum created by the Congress. But the question is whether it would be open to alliances to push up its tally and relevance. Already Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav has said that his party would form an alliance with smaller parties. His reason: his experience has not been good with the bigger parties. The AAP is now also eyeing Punjab, where it has significant presence with 19 MLAs. It has already won 62 of the 70 seats in Delhi with a vote share of nearly 54 per cent, a few of them on Punjabi-dominated seats. And now it has thrown its lot with the farmers' agitation, dominated as it is by agriculturists from Punjab, and even thrown barbs at Congress Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh for toning down his attack despite the initial fury. Of course, Singh has been at the forefront of the farmers' agitation, passing amendment Bills to the three Central Farm Acts in the Assembly, insisting on meeting the President and sending his legislators to Delhi to stage a dharna. He has been one of the leading Congress voices in articulating protests against the farm Acts.

However, the AAP hopes to make gains from the anti-incumbency factor against him and benefit from the erosion of the base of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). Though the latter has now walked out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over the farm laws, it has been too little a move to wrest control in the State. The AAP wants to use this disappointment with the SAD to its advantage. Kejriwal's party, however, still has to work on its base in Punjab. It has to rebuild connect with the Malwa region — the epicentre of agrarian distress — which it has lost since 2014. The AAP has to take care of factionalism in the State unit, which has not been quite at peace with the central leadership. If the party is serious about pushing itself to the forefront, it has to work on consolidating a political base that's different from the existing players who have been seen as championing the interests of the elite. This has alienated much of Punjab's masses from the political class and the AAP wants to spearhead that change. The farmers' protests are just the beginning. The question is can it wrest the alternative space?

Repeated failures

The ongoing India-China standoff yet again points to Intelligence lapses amid reports that the Chinese got winter warfare training from Canadian forces



ASHOK K MEHTA

Rebel News, a Canadian far right news network, has obtained 34 pages of documents called 'China Files' establishing that Canada has been training the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in cold-weather warfare at its military institution in Kingston, bases in Ontario and at the Canadian Forces College, Toronto. Further, it sent to China flag-rank Canadian officers to teach PLA officers tactics and techniques in high-altitude fighting. Nearly 200 Canadian soldiers participated in the October 2019 World Military Games at Wuhan and Canadian sailors and naval ships celebrated the PLA Navy's 70th Raising Day at Qindhao. Defence and security relations between the countries were particularly active during 2018-19 despite the Chinese taking two Canadian civilians hostage. It seems that the Canadian Government under Premier Justin Trudeau was keen to maintain warm relations and not to displease the Chinese overlooking objections raised by the Trump Administration over unintended consequences of transfer of knowledge and information to the Chinese though Canada's Five Eyes partners were not perturbed. The news network obtained redacted documents, some classified secret and for Canadian eyes only, 19 months after it sought them on a Freedom of Information request but as the documents were not properly redacted, they were legible. When there was resistance to implementing the exchange programmes — the Chief of Defence Staff put on hold one joint section-level exercise in winter warfare in Canada — orders were given that no training was to be suspended without consulting the Chief of Privy Council. These documents, made public last week, clearly tell India that the Chinese had been preparing for high-altitude warfare since 2018-19 — especially in the winter of 2019 — and have received training, expertise and equipment from Canadian Defence Forces during bilateral military exchanges in China and Canada. The Trudeau Government's record of sensitivity towards India's security concerns has at best been lax, given that its Defence Minister and Leader of the Opposition are both Khalistani sympathisers. These revelations fit in neatly with the US-China Economic,



Security Review Commission report of December 1 which describes the eight-month-long India-China standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as the most severe border crisis in decades and accuses China of planning the Galwan clash with the blessings of Defence Minister Gen Weng Fei. Two weeks before the clash, *Global Times* warned that India would suffer a devastating blow if it got involved in the US-China rivalry. The report notes that while the "Chinese Government might deem its Ladakh venture to acquire territory a success, it failed to disavow India from building infrastructure or aligning with the US, where results have been counterproductive". The Indian Government, though, has denied both loss of any territory or alignment with the US. Although no clinching evidence was presented in the report, tell-tale signs were there that China was working to a premeditated grand design of forcibly altering the LAC in Ladakh for which preparations had started in mid-2019, if not earlier, as the 'China Files' indicate. These predate the Mahabalipuram/Chennai summit and are akin to Prime Minister AB Vajpayee's historic Lahore visit coinciding with Gen Musharraf's planning of Kargil.

Lies and deceit are ingrained in the Chinese Communist Party and PLA's

psyche. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar has said that the Chinese have given India five differing explanations for deploying large forces along the LAC. In its latest response to Jaishankar speaking at a virtual session with Sydney-based Lowy Institute where he blamed China for the standoff and breakdown in relations, Beijing Foreign Office repeated its standard response: "The merits of the situation are very clear. India is totally responsible for the situation." The standoff has hit an impasse with no prospect of any thaw this winter; the Chinese and Indian tanks are just 20 metres apart near Kailash range. The Chinese cancelled the joint release of a stamp on the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations. The date for the ninth military dialogue has not been communicated by Beijing and while channels of communication remain in suspended animation, both sides are talking at each other.

Russia, which enjoys the best of relations with both India and China, has entered the fray not in helping to break the logjam but adding fuel to the fire by accusing the West of "anti-China games". Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov set the cat among the pigeons by saying that the western powers were promoting Indo-Pacific Strategy and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to engage India in anti-China games and also trying to under-

mine Russia's partnership with India. His remarks were directed at the US which has been threatening India with sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for the purchase of \$5.4 billion S400 air defence system from Russia. This is a direct challenge to India's strategic autonomy and one of the sticking points in the India-US Defence Partnership on which the Trump Administration remained discreetly silent.

Although India is still sitting on the fence in deference to China, it has indicated to Beijing both in words and deeds the options available to it for crossing the Rubicon. US Democratic lawmaker Mark Warner, speaking last week at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit, said: "India should join a 'Coalition of the Willing' with the US and other democracies to confront China's model of State-sponsored authoritarian capitalism." Just as Trudeau wants to be nice to China, India does not wish to offend Beijing as it cannot independently deter Chinese coercion on the Himalayan frontiers due to conspicuous power asymmetry.

Jaishankar's continuing reliance on diplomacy stems from ground reality and realpolitik. When asked by a journalist about India's reaction to Chinese intrusions being diplomatic rather than a pushback, he

rebutted that "there has been an enormous military response in our force deployment", deflecting the initial omissions of any counteractions following delayed detection of intrusions. The Government is making a virtue of necessity in its counter-deployment. In the same interview, he said the standoff could go the Sumdorong Chu way (1986) which took nine years to resolve. But then while the geopolitical context and limited scale of deployment were vastly different, India was tactically in a commanding position having surrounded the PLA intrusion at Wangdung which was beyond the Indian limit of patrolling. Still Wangdung was an Intelligence lapse!

The Intelligence and operational failures on the LAC this year are compounded by the *Rebel News* revelations of the Chinese getting winter warfare training from the Canadian armed forces in 2018-19. In a similar situation in 1984, India got a tip-off that Pakistan was buying snow clothing in Europe and pre-emptively occupied Siachen. The last GOC Ladakh Sub-Area, Maj Gen Yash Mor who was there at the time of intrusions, lamented this week about "our repeated failures to read Intelligence".

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff)

SOUNDBITE

Why is the Government running away from the Winter Session and hiding behind a pandemic? They are subverting democracy.

Former Union Minister — Manish Tewari



It is the clearest demonstration of the will of the American people. In this battle for the soul of America, democracy prevailed.

US President-elect — Joe Biden



Dhyan Chand is one of the greatest hockey players in the history of our national sport, and it is a matter of pride to direct his biopic. Hoping to announce the lead actor soon.

Film director — Abhishek Chaubey



I think it (getting hit and suffering concussions) is more to do with the fact that everybody has got their front-purse where technically they are moving forward.

Former India captain — Sunil Gavaskar



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There's a time to stop

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Now, hunger strike' (December 15). The protests against the agrarian laws represent a significant movement in mass political mobilisation in India. The Government, on the other hand, believes that the movement has been taken over by "political" elements.

While the movement's strengths are clear, the problem with it is not too much of politics but too little of it. Politics entails different elements and agitation is only one of them. Good politics also involves the ability to negotiate, reconcile the demands of a movement with the possibilities of what can be attained, recognition of the balance of power, and when to declare victory. This element of politics is missing in the movement. Once the protests escalated and the Government had no choice but to engage and offer concessions, good political leadership among the protesters would have meant leveraging the movement.

But no group wants to be seen as "compromising" for fear of being seen as "sold out" to the Government or corporates or has the courage to tell the farmers that the deal on offer is reasonable.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

Angry farmers deserve a sympathetic ear

This refers to the article 'A swift end to farmers' stir desirable' (December 15) by Kalyani Shankar. Walking down the memory lane on the food crisis in India post-Independence to its self-sufficiency after the Green Revolution, which was brought about during the leadership of former Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi, the writer has touched upon every significant development causing ups and downs in the country's agriculture sector all these decades while her solicitude over the ongoing standoff between the Union Government and 30-odd farmer unions following the promulgation of the new farm laws also stands justified.

This is really a matter of great public concern that many a round of talks between the farmer leaders and the Government and the siege around the national Capital's borders have remained inconclusive even as many national celebrities from various fields have decided to return their State honours in a show of solidarity with the agitating farmers.

Ironically, the Centre's claim that the new farm laws are meant for the amelioration of farmers and the latter negating it underscores a 'misunderstanding' between the



two that seems to have culminated in the ongoing stir. Hence, the writer's observation that the sooner a swift solution to the protests is found the better holds good and merits attention in the national and public interest. Farmers have always borne the brunt of natural calamities like floods, drought or marauding animals and they labour endlessly in inclement weather. It's really a pity that these *annadatas* themselves have to sit on roads to get their voices heard.

Azhar A Khan
Rampur

Le Carre: A master class

Sir — The great English novelist John Le Carre, whose real name was David Cornwell and who passed away recently aged 89, will probably be known as the greatest spy writer of any era, anywhere.

Before him, it was Ian Fleming and his flamboyant spy character James Bond, who ruled the roost. Le Carre was a wholly different story, no bang-bang stuff but provoking reflection. Le Carre's intricate plots came from the Cold War, in which for a time he was himself a participant as a junior British spy. Le Carre shunned literary awards and State honours.

When the Cold War ended, he wrote grippingly, fluently and with understated eloquence, following his deep on-location research about the drug trade, big pharma and torture in the wake of America's questionable interventions in Iraq and its 'war on terror'.

He was among the rare breed of writers whose characters teetered on the fine line between right-wrong and good-bad.

Shovanlal Chakraborty
Kolkata

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A wave in favour of choice

Abortion is currently an issue in many countries and in almost every one of them there's a majority in favour of it among the younger population



GWYNNE DYER

Get your rosaries off our ovaries," chanted the women marching in support of the referendum that made abortion legal in Ireland in 2018. Two years later the 2020 election broke the century-long stranglehold on power of the two Centre-Right parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. They got fewer than half the votes even together. Did the 2018 mass mobilisation against the anti-abortion law radicalise Irish politics and trigger that shift? Probably. Another country where the Catholic Church has traditionally dominated politics, Poland, is now seeing a mass mobilisation, too. Abortion on demand was legal in Poland under Communist rule but since democracy came in 1989, the Catholic Church has been steadily pushing back abortion rights.

Soon after the Law and Justice Party won the 2015 election, it tried to push a law through Parliament banning abortions in cases of foetal abnormality but the politicians retreated in the face of mass protests, particularly by women. So the Government tried a different approach. (Americans will recognise this strategy.) The Law and Justice Party packed the constitutional court with party loyalists and last October the court effectively banned almost all abortions. But the country exploded in protest. Suddenly a lot of Poles are openly angry at the Catholic Church, although it is as closely linked with Poland's identity and nationhood as it was with Ireland's.

The late Pope (and Saint) John Paul II is revered as the only Polish Pope and a great national hero, but a statue of him near Warsaw recently had its hands daubed with red paint. Only 35 per cent of Poles now have a positive view of the Catholic Church, and among the young it's down to nine per cent. Will this end up reshaping Polish politics? Probably yes. And in Argentina the Lower House of Congress has just passed a Government-backed Bill to legalise abortion, currently considered a crime in almost all circumstances. Even women who had spontaneous miscarriages have been accused of abortion and jailed for homicide.

But tens of thousands of women came out in Buenos Aires last Friday to greet the passage of the legalisation of abortion: A local news website called it a "tsunami of joy." They will be out again in strength later this month to ensure that the Senate passes the new law (which it probably will) — and that will unleash a wave of demands for similar reforms all over Latin America.

Most countries in Central and South America only allow abortion in cases of rape or risk to the mother's life, thanks to the traditional power of the Catholic Church. Until now, only Cuba and Uruguay have allowed abortion on demand. But for the majority of Latin countries where most people are no longer rural peasants, the writing is now on the wall.

Which brings us, naturally, to the US, where very few people think of themselves as peasants. The landscape is quite similar, with evangelical Christians even more militantly opposed to abortion than Catholics. Yet the abortion rate among Catholic women matches the national average and even among evangelical women it is about half that. Abortions in the US are now at the lowest rate since the key Supreme Court decision that legalised abortion, Roe vs Wade, back in 1973 but that's mainly due to better contraception. Nevertheless, almost a quarter of American women (23.7 per cent) will get an abortion at some point in their lives, most when they are in their 20s.

A great many of these women have abortions because of their life circumstances: Three-fifths of them already have at least one child, and half of them are living below the poverty line. All that would happen if abortion were made illegal is that the backstreet abortionists would reappear and lots of women would die or end up maimed in some way.

US President Donald Trump is gone now with the Electoral College putting Joe Biden firmly in the White House. Biden formally won 306 Electoral College votes as electors voted in State capitals around the US either virtually or in person, fulfilling a pro forma responsibility that wouldn't have received so much public attention but for Trump's refusal to acknowledge his defeat. Trump expectedly won 232. However, even though Trump is out, he has packed the US Supreme Court six-three with Conservatives who are thought to be "pro-life." If they decide to re-ban abortion, they will certainly unleash mass protests on a scale that the US has not seen before, just like in Ireland and Poland. The "pro-life" movement is noisy, but 80 per cent of Americans support abortion rights. A ban in the US might even trigger a women's general strike. The right is already radicalised in the US but the rest of the country is ripe for it, too.

Abortion is currently an issue in many countries and in almost every one of them, there's a majority in favour of it among the younger population. What message does this have for Right-wing governments that cling to power by waging "culture wars" to cobble together narrow majorities? Stay away from the abortion issue. It will explode in your faces.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work'.)

THE SO-CALLED FARMER AGITATION HARDLY REMAINS A FARMERS' AGITATION. IT HAS GOT INFILTRATED BY LEFTIST AND MAOIST ELEMENTS.

—UNION MINISTER PIYUSH GOYAL

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



FOR THE MODI GOVERNMENT, DISSENTING STUDENTS ARE ANTI-NATIONALS AND PROTESTING FARMERS ARE KHALISTANIS.

—CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

Miles travelled, yards to go

Goods and Services Tax rates can come down only when the rate of compliance improves for this grand tax reform



SUBHASH CHANDRA PANDEY

The Narendra Modi-led Union Government is cracking the whip on tax evaders in the country to ramp up Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections. Nationwide raids by the Directorate-General of GST Intelligence unearthed 4,586 fake entities registered under the GST regime. Countrywide 132 people were arrested in 1,430 cases related to illegally availing or passing on of bogus Input Tax Credit. Plus, more than six months' default in filing monthly tax returns led to the cancellation of GST registrations of 1,63,042 entities.

Tax evasion in the country is rampant and strong anti-evasion measures are needed as GST collections are way below expectation and potential. This is at a time when the economy of the nation, which was already in the red, has taken a crippling blow due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Government, which is trying to combat the pandemic, needs all the money that it can garner to keep the anti-COVID momentum going.

The Lok Sabha was informed in March that GST evasion of ₹70,207 crore had been detected between July 2017 and January this year, of which ₹34,591 crore had been recovered. The Directorate-General of Analytics and Risk Management has identified over 12,900 business entities suspected of availing Input Tax Credit since July 2017 through bogus invoices worth over ₹1,00,000 crore till March this year.

Collection from taxes subsumed in the GST was about six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016-17. In contrast, the GST collections to GDP ratio was 6.25 per cent in 2018-19 and six per cent in 2019-20. GST collections were about ₹7,40,650 crore in 2017-18, ₹11,77,370 crore in 2018-19 and ₹12,22,131 crore in 2019-20.

GST collections were about ₹32,000 crore and ₹62,000 crore during April and May. The next four months saw an average collection of ₹90,000 crore per month, which improved to ₹1,05,000 crore per month in the last two months, showing a robust recovery.

If the GDP at factor cost (proxy for the total base of indirect taxes) is assumed to be ₹160 lakh crore and 60 per cent of this GDP pays an average GST of 15 per cent, the GST revenue should be ₹1,20,000 crore per month. Obviously, at the moment, the GST revenue is below expectations and its potential.

The Centre and State Governments across the country are taking steps to overcome resistance to formalisation and digitalisation, rationalisation of GST rates and curbing tax evasion through claims of fake or excess Input Tax Credits, misinvoicing or undocumented sales. The GST system includes certain checks on tax evasion like mandatory audits, matching of returns, E-Way Bills, reverse charge mechanism and invoice matching. These are being gradually introduced. To check the practice of setting up shell firms for fraud, the Government has mandated Aadhaar authentication for GST registration. The GST law permits deemed registration 21 days after an application is filed. Authorities will now physically inspect and verify entities obtaining deemed GST registration without Aadhaar.

Ever since the Economic Administration Reforms Commission, chaired by LK Jha in 1984, highlighted how 80 per cent of Excise manpower then guarded gates of low revenue yielding factories, tax administration in India has been moving away from physical controls to self-assessment. However, the truth is that a trust-based tax assessment system is effective only when there is the deterrence of test checks and fear of penal action on detection of breach of faith in test checks.

Otherwise, the tax system will be no different than managing the collection boxes placed in religious places. Since tax inspectors no longer guard



“AFTER FULL AUTOMATION IS ADOPTED BY TAXPAYERS, EVEN 'ASSESSMENT' AS UNDERSTOOD IN THE MANUAL SYSTEM MAY NO LONGER BE NECESSARY. THE TAX RETURNS CAN BE GENERATED BY A SYSTEM THAT MATCHES INVOICES. TAX EVASION CAN BE DETECTED BY APPLYING ANALYTICAL TOOLS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO THE MASSIVE DATA THAT CRORES OF INVOICES GENERATE



gates of factories and godowns the E-Way Bills system was rolled out in April 2018 to track the movement of taxable goods. This also reduces Income Tax evasion by transporters as they need to get registered. Capturing the vehicle registration numbers into a trackable IT system, the E-Way Bills and the FASTag system help check other malpractices. For instance, in the Bihar fodder scam, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) detected that certain vehicles supposedly used for fodder transport were actually registered two-wheelers, proving fake procurement.

Officials have found lakhs of E-Way Bills being cancelled within a few hours, indicating undocumented delivery to intra-city or nearby destinations or multiple trips being made against a single E-Way Bill to transport excess undeclared goods. To curb misuse, E-Way Bills are now being integrated with the FASTag system being used for electronic collection of tolls on National Highways and the Vahan database, too.

There have been instances where unscrupulous dealers have used fake invoices for inputs not received to claim undue Input Tax Credit. Such invoices don't have any corresponding supply of goods/services or not to the full extent and do not involve actual payment of GST on them. This practice also leads to defrauding of banks by exaggerating turnovers and money laundering.

The July 2019 CAG report on GST, expressed concern over the continuing delay in the full invoice matching system which has made the system prone to Input Tax Credit frauds. The system was intended to be designed based on 100 per cent invoice-matching to ensure system-verified Input Tax Credit, correct settlement of the Integrated Goods and Services Tax and for minimising direct human interface with assessee. After full automation is adopted by taxpayers, even "assessment" as understood in the manual system may

no longer be necessary. The tax returns can be generated by a system that matches invoices.

Tax evasion can be detected by applying analytical tools and Artificial Intelligence to the massive data that crores of invoices generate. In fact, the GST system should reach the same maturity in terms of providing visibility of Input Tax Credit as is now available for verification and tracing of TDS/TCS credits by Income Tax assesses.

One common problem, especially for small businesses, is that the GST system is not designed to distinguish a sale on full upfront payment and a sale on credit and a sale on Equated Monthly Installments. Why force a seller to pay GST even before he gets paid for the supplies? Even allowing quarterly filing of GST returns with monthly payments does not address this problem.

Small businesses selling to big buyers, including governments and Public Sector Undertakings, routinely face payment delays though some progress has been made recently. It would be desirable if in a GST2.0 upgrade, a receipt-based GST system can be implemented where the GST would be payable to the Treasury only on receipt of full or pro rata payment for the supplied goods/services. One theoretical option to implement this, at least for small businesses, could be to allow them to opt for Cash Accounting rather than Accrual Accounting. However, that will create problems when they grow and have to leave the small business tag. A better option will be to introduce payment tracking, whose benefits will go beyond the GST sphere in checking defaults and delinquencies.

It is a creditable achievement that the number of registered businesses under taxes subsumed in the GST has increased from 72 lakh to 1.28 crore, despite significant de-registrations due to increased thresholds for registration and voluntary

deregistration by some Central Excise-exempt units located in the Himalayan/North Eastern States whose business became unviable under the destination-based GST. Some 82 lakh registered sellers filed detailed returns for November and over 20 lakh GST taxpayers opting for the Composition Scheme are exempt from filing detailed returns. As a taxpayer facilitation measure, almost 94 lakh small GST taxpayers are now allowed quarterly filing of return with monthly payment.

The GST rate rationalisation is also on course. Almost 99 per cent of all commodities are now taxed with GST at the rate of 18 per cent or lower. Consumers tend to compare GST rates with erstwhile Sales Tax/Value Added Tax (VAT) rate not realising the basic fact that the GST subsumes Central Excise which has been hidden in the price of products on which VAT was applied. When the invisible Central Excise and other taxes are subsumed in the visible GST, it is bound to be seen higher than VAT.

For instance, the pre-GST taxation of goods was a typical standard VAT at the rate of 14.5 per cent, Central Excise at the rate of 12.5 per cent and CST at the rate of four per cent. With the cascading effect of tax on tax, the total levy paid by the end consumer was over 30 per cent. Inclusion of petroleum products in GST, if necessary by adjusting non-GST taxes like Customs duty, allowing Input Tax Credit across full value addition chains, further lowering of rates with continuing strict action against tax frauds can make GST more acceptable and yield more revenues.

Digitalisation and formalisation of businesses poses some short-term costs and hassles, but it is inevitable and it alone holds the promise of giving long-awaited justice to the overtaxed. GST rates can come down when compliance improves for this grand tax reform.

(The writer is former Special Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry)

A just cause buried in the sand

Palestinians look up to Saudi Arabia as the only remaining ally in their dream of a homeland but the friend seems to be betraying them



PRANAY KUMAR SHOME

The last few months of the outgoing Trump Administration were very hectic, especially seen from the foreign policy perspective. In an otherwise turbulent and highly-fragile four years of the Trump presidency marked by foreign policy disasters, the last six months were landmark vis-à-vis Trump's West Asia policy. In early August, the Trump administration oversaw the signing of the Abraham accords which are a series of peace-normalisation agreements between Israel with three Arab States,

namely Bahrain, the UAE and Sudan.

However, one issue that remains unaddressed that can have ubiquitous ramifications for peace and stability in West Asia and the Middle East is the two-State solution. The normalisation agreements have covertly sidelined the issue of the Palestinians.

Transformation of West Asian politics: One thing that is very clear from the normalisation agreements between Israel and the Gulf Arab States is that the politics of West Asia has undergone drastic transformation. It will not be the same any more. Henry Kissinger in his famous book 'World Order' wrote that geopolitics and strategic considerations triumph religious issues.

These diplomatic agreements are symptomatic of a Zionist-Sunni alliance against Shia Iran. Iran finding itself isolated is desperately trying to find a way out of this stranglehold because Arab-Zionist bonhomie is clearly in the US' strategic interest.

To undermine the impact of the agreements, Iran stitched a \$400 billion strategic partnership with China in late September. Iran approved China's access to its defence and financial systems so much so that Iran is now a *de jure* part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) much to India's chagrin. The scales appear firmly tilted in Israel's favour however. With the change of regime in the US, it will be very interesting to see what happens with the new Biden Administration.

Should it choose to follow a more reconciliatory policy towards Iran and think about resurrecting the Iran nuclear accord, it would end up alienating Israel and the Sunni Gulf monarchies. If Biden follows a hard line towards Iran, the outcome will be a recalcitrant Iran pursuing a virile policy using its proxies to destabilise the entire Middle East and West Asia. In such a context the old fissures in West Asia will be aggravated.

No justice for Palestinians: The

result of these diplomatic agreements was the Palestinians being left high and dry. For decades they have been fighting for the two-State solution. First, Britain betrayed them through the Balfour Declaration of 1916, then the Sykes-Picot Agreement, followed by the formation of Israel in 1948 with utter disregard for the rights of the Palestinian people. These agreements have not only alienated the Palestinians who are almost facing an existential crisis but also point to a deeper schism within the Muslim world.

The Palestinian cause has been jettisoned by the Gulf monarchies who earlier were the most vocal endorsers of the two-State policy. In fact, the height of irony is the *volte-face* by the Gulf monarchies vis-à-vis the Israeli occupation of West Bank. Israel promised to postpone the building of new settlements as a part of the recognition agreement considerations but never said anything about bringing the construction work to a halt. The

international community gave a muted response to all this. However, despite the opprobrium from the UK and Germany, Israel continues to violate Palestinian rights. The United Nations is powerless to act as the West calls the shots at the world body. Perhaps it is pretty clear that Palestinians will face further rights violations in the coming years.

Saudi recognition of Israel a potential death knell?: The recent "esoteric" meeting between Israeli and Saudi officials and the subsequent allowance given to Israeli flights to use Saudi airspace, generated a new churn in West Asian geopolitics. However, when seen from the prism of the Palestinian cause, it potentially signals its death knell. The primary reason for this is the fact that Saudi Arabia is the core State in the Islamic world despite the emergence of fissures in Muslim unity, following the emergence of a parallel grouping led by Malaysia, Turkey and Pakistan.

The hush-hush Saudi recognition of Israel signals a paradigm policy shift, for it could lead to the creation of new history and may signal a dramatic change in the way the Jewish-Muslim relations evolve. What, however, needs to be remembered is that Palestinians look up to Saudi Arabia as the only remaining ally in their dream of a homeland and their ally seems to be slowly betraying them.

As of now, there appears little hope for the Palestinian cause. The only remedy for them is perhaps an urgent course correction by the international community. The new liberal US leadership under Joe Biden must pressure Israel into halting all settlement building works and ask the Jewish State to respect Palestinian rights. If that fails, the international community should think about imposing sanctions on Israel. One thing is very clear, Palestinians have to dig in and fight for their cause.

(The writer is a columnist)

FOREIGN EYE



THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Beijing believes that the grotesque human rights abuses of the Uighurs in Xinjiang have nothing to do with foreigners. But China's economic might has made its business everyone's business. Though Chinese officials show signs of unease at western pressure, economic means have their limits.

(The Guardian editorial)

I-T dept detects over Rs 700 crore tax evasion after raids on Chettinad Group

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department has detected tax evasion of more than Rs 700 crore after it recently raided multiple locations of Chennai-based Chettinad Group, the CBDT and official sources said on Tuesday.

"The highlight of the search includes seizure of unaccounted cash of Rs 23 crore from various locations," the CBDT said in a statement.

"As of now, the department has succeeded in detecting evasion of income of over Rs 700 crore," it said.

The statement claimed that tax sleuths also detected documents related to possession of "foreign assets to the extent of Rs 110 crore in the form of fixed deposits, which were not disclosed in the return (income tax return) and will attract action under the Black Money Act".

The taxman had raided 60 premises of the Tamil Nadu-based group in Chennai, Trichy (Tiruchirappalli), various locations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Mumbai on December 9.

While the CBDT said its action and further detections were made against a "leading



I-T raids on Maha builder nets Rs 160 cr black money

The Income Tax Department has detected over Rs 160 crore unaccounted income after it raided the premises of a builder group and some linked persons in Panvel city of Maharashtra, the CBDT said on Tuesday. The search and survey action was conducted on December 10 at 29 locations in Panvel (Raigad district) and neighbouring Vashi. "The search action on the leading builders group and entry operators resulted in unearthing of incriminating data pertaining to routing of unaccounted income earned by way of on-money from flat and land sale from real estate projects of the group, in the form of accommodation

(dubious) entries of non-genuine unsecured loans through certain shell (dummy) companies," the CBDT said. Unaccounted income of the group, detected so far, is about Rs 163 crore, including Rs 13.93 crore cash seized during the raids, it said. "Evidences related to out-of-books transactions by taking on-money on the sale of flats and land have been seized," the Central Board of Direct Taxes said. It added that the "accommodation entry of unsecured loans, including interest paid of Rs 58 crore in the books of accounts of the group, was detected during the course of search and survey action".

business group operating from Chennai, based on intelligence input about tax evasion", the official sources identified it as the about 100-years-old

Chettinad Group. The group is involved in business activities like cement manufacturing, logistics, construction, among others, the CBDT said.

"Inflation of expenditure to take out cash and also to reduce profits, receipts not accounted fully, bogus claim of depreciation amounting to Rs 435

crore were also identified.

"There are indications of capitation fee receipts for medical admissions to post-graduate programmes," the statement alleged.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes is the administrative authority for the I-T department. The statement added that "details of the actual financial transaction between the searched group and another group for the sale of three infrastructure facilities at various ports were found".

"Complex financial arrangements creating bogus liabilities from their own concerns were also seen to be made, ostensibly, to reduce the capital gains arising out of this transfer," it said.

It added that capital gains amounting to about Rs 280 crore have been arrived at.

"Similarly, huge capital introduction through a web of bogus intercorporate transactions within the group is also under the scanner," the statement said.

A large number of lockers belonging to the group have been identified, which will be operated in due course, even as the search is temporarily concluded and investigations are still in progress, it said.



Farmers' protest resulting in Rs 3,500 crore daily loss

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body Assocham on Tuesday urged the Centre and farmers' organisations to resolve the impasse over the new agri laws, saying that the protests are inflicting a heavy blow to the economies of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and J&K.

"A daily loss of Rs 3,000-3,500 crore is resulting in the economies of the region from the value chain and transport disruption because of the protests," according to a rough estimate by the chamber.

Assocham President Niranjan Hiranandani said, "The size of the combined economies of Punjab,

Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and J&K is about Rs 18 lakh crore. With the ongoing farmers' agitation and blockade of roads, toll plazas and railways, the economic activities have come to a halt."

On Monday, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had said the farmer agitation has led to supply chain disruptions, which will impact the economy in the coming days and may impinge upon the ongoing recovery from the economic contraction due to COVID-19.

Assocham's Hiranandani observed that industries such as textiles, auto components, bicycles, sports goods which

cater significantly to the export markets would not be able to fulfil their orders, ahead of Christmas, harming the industry's goodwill among the global buyers.

Recovering from the harsh COVID-19 blow, the Indian economy needs to double down on growth which is possible only with a conducive environment for industrial activities, investment including the Foreign Direct Investment, Assocham stated.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said in the last 20 days, trade and other activities of about Rs 5,000 crore have been affected in Delhi and its surrounding states.

Rupee settles 8 ps lower at 73.6 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated by 8 paise to settle at 73.63 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, tracking muted domestic equities.

At the interbank forex market, the domestic unit opened at 73.62 against the US dollar and witnessed an intra-day high of 73.59 and a low of 73.67.

The local unit finally closed at 73.63 against the American currency, registering a fall of 8 paise over its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee advanced by 9 paise to settle at 73.55 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent lower at 90.65.

'TANGEDCO demanding heavy discounts from IPPs'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Association of Power Producers (APP) has written to Union Power Minister R K Singh, alleging that Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Ltd (TANGEDCO) was demanding heavy discounts on pending dues from independent power producers (IPPs).

The APP in its letter to the minister also said that the state-run non-banking firms PFC and REC, which are implementing the centre's liquidity infusion scheme, should be directed to release funds for payment of bills of IPPs, central generating stations and renewable energy projects together.

Earlier in May, the government had announced Rs 90,000 crore liquidity infu-

The IPPs supplying power to Tamil Nadu have been asked to provide 50 per cent discount on LPS dues and 20 per cent discount on pending fixed charge amounts

sion scheme for discoms to pay off power generating firms (gencos) which was later increased to Rs 1.2 lakh crore.

In a letter shot off to the minister on Monday, the APP said, "Looking at the urgency, we request for early action..." and help in resolving this impasse.

"All the pending dues of central generating stations and

IPPs, whether conventional or RE (renewable energy) generators, should be submitting together for disbursement under the liquidity window," it has asked the power minister. Earlier last month, the APP had informed the minister regarding the centre's liquidity infusion scheme for DISCOMs, wherein, TANGEDCO was pressurising individual IPPs and trying to arm twist them into accepting huge discounts on the pending dues.

According to the letter, the IPPs supplying power to Tamil Nadu have been asked to provide 50 per cent discount on LPS (late payment surcharge) dues and 20 per cent discount on pending fixed charge amounts in order to get their dues under the liquidity infusion scheme.

SBI Card, BPCL launch credit card

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

SBI Card on Tuesday announced launch of 'BPCL SBI Card Octane' in association with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), offering maximum savings to consumers who spend a significant amount on fuel.

The credit card has been designed to offer maximum savings to the well-heeled consumer segment which spends a significant amount on fuel.

The BPCL SBI Card Octane brings 25X reward points on spends for BPCL fuel and MAK Lubricants, Bharat Gas (LPG) spends (website and app only) and BPCL's 'In & Out' convenience store spends, SBI Card said in a release.

The card offers 7.25 per cent value back (including 1 per cent surcharge waiver) on BPCL and lubricant spends at BPCL



fuel stations and 6.25 per cent value back on Bharat Gas spends, it added.

It also bundles in accelerated savings on other regular spend categories, including departmental store and grocery, dining and movies.

Card holders can avail the benefit from over 17,000 BPCL fuel stations across the country, and there will be no minimum transaction threshold for fuel spends, enabling customers to save with every transaction, the pure-play credit card company said.

MONEY MATTERS

19 industrial bodies protest rising prices of raw material

Nineteen industrial Associations under the banner of Federation of Coimbatore Industrial Association (FOCIA) staged a demonstration here on Tuesday, demanding that the Centre take steps to bring down the prices of raw

material, including steel, copper and aluminium, which have gone up for the last two months. Placing wet grinders, motors and pumps in front of them, they raised slogans in support of their demands, including forming a price monitoring committee and fixing a cap on raw material prices, which should be revised once a year, as in the agriculture sector.

Gold rises Rs 514, silver also gains Rs 1,046

Gold prices rose Rs 514 to Rs 48,847 per 10 gram in the national capital on Tuesday on a strong global trend and rupee depreciation, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at Rs 48,333 per 10 gram in the previous trade. Silver

prices also jumped Rs 1,046 to Rs 63,612 per kilogram from Rs 62,566 per kilogram in the previous trade. "Spot gold prices for 24 carat in Delhi rose by Rs 514, reflecting gains in global gold prices and rupee depreciation," HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said. The rupee depreciated by 8 paise to settle at 73.63 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday. In the international market, gold was trading higher at USD 1,845 per ounce, while silver was quoting flat at USD 23.16 per ounce. Navneet Damani, VP - Commodities Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said, "Gold is trading higher primarily as the dollar fell against its major crosses, and also as uncertainty related to stimulus package announcement from the US continues."

Narayana Health, MSMF launch Medtech Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Healthcare services provider Narayana Health in association with Mazumdar Shaw Medical Foundation on Tuesday launched Mazumdar Shaw Medical Foundation (MSMF) MedTech Innovation Centre - BIRAC BIONEST Narayana Health City in Bengaluru.

The centre will help medTech entrepreneurs who are looking to address affordability, access and innovation challenges in the healthcare ecosystem, Narayana Health and MSMF said in a joint statement.

"This is a culmination of one of our key objectives, which was to set up a medtech innovation hub within the hospital," Biocon Chairperson and MSMF Founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw said at a virtual press conference.

She noted that one of the key focus areas for Indian medtech has to be affordable innovation, because we need

The centre will help entrepreneurs to address affordability, access and innovation challenges in the healthcare ecosystem

to make sure that anything which comes out of these labs is accessible to anyone who needs it and affordability has to be at the heart of it.

"Affordable innovation is my driving mantra for whatever I do at Biocon and I am sure it can be the driving mantra for anything to do with innovation in India when it comes to life sciences," Mazumdar-Shaw said.

"We aim to fill the gap in healthcare innovation to have a single platform for entrepreneurs to co-create and identify clinical challenges in conjunction with doctors, scientists, and technology enthusiasts," she said.

Demand for chemicals, petrochemicals to grow 9 per cent per annum: Gowda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister D V Sadananda Gowda on Tuesday said the demand for chemicals and petrochemicals is expected to rise 9 per cent annually, and the size of the industry is likely to grow to USD 300 billion by 2025.

Addressing a conference organised by industry body Assocham, the minister said the Indian chemical industry, over the last one-and-a-half decade, has transformed from manufacturing principal chemicals in a highly regulated market to being a mature industry in a liberalised economy.

Majority of the chemicals produced in India comprise either upstream products or intermediates, which go into a variety of manufacturing applications including fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, textiles and plastics, agrochemicals, paints and dyes, he said, adding that end-use industries like automobiles, electronics, packaged food and textiles are driving Indian specialty chemicals industry.



"Strong domestic demand, coupled with huge investments by domestic and foreign players, is making the industry scale new heights," Gowda said.

The minister said rising disposable income, median age of population, urbanization and growing penetration, and demand from rural markets are the factors contributing to growth of chemical and petrochemical sector.

"As production and consumption shift towards Asian and Southeast Asian countries, the demand for chemicals and petro-

chemicals is expected to grow at 9 per cent per annum, much faster than the expected GDP growth rate, to reach USD 300 billion by 2025," Gowda said.

Gowda said the size of the industry was USD 163 billion in 2018, contributing 13.4 per cent of manufacturing GVA (gross value added) and 2.4 per cent of national GVA. The sector employs 2 million people.

He said Indian chemical and petrochemical industry plays an important role in all sectors of the economy.

Suspension of weekly TRP data hasn't impacted ad revenues

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Television news player ABP Network on Tuesday said rating body BARC's decision to suspend viewership data has not impacted its advertising revenues.

ABP Network Chief Executive Officer Avinash Pandey, which runs news channels across Hindi, Marathi and Bengali languages, said advertising agencies rely on inputs beyond the weekly data from the BARC for buying ad inventory.

A few weeks ago, the Mumbai Police had claimed to have unearthed a fake TRP (television rating points) scandal alleging that the BARC's measurement was being compromised to increase advertising revenues. It has arrested many people in the case, including Republic Media Network Chief Executive Vikas Khanchandani.

UK sees record number of job losses during 3-month period

PNS ■ LONDON

The number of people in the U.K. who lost their jobs hit a record high in the three months through October during the run-up to the planned ending of a government salary support scheme, official figures showed Tuesday.

The Office for National Statistics said redundancies reached 370,000 in the August to October period, a record for a three-month period.

At the end of October, the British government had been

planning to end the Job Retention Scheme, which saw it pay the majority of the salaries of people who had become idle due to the coronavirus pandemic but were kept on payroll by firms.

That program was eventually extended until the spring after the government announced a second national lockdown for England during November as infection numbers spiked. Those eligible for support will get 80 per cent of their salaries paid for by the government.

"The labour market continued to deteriorate as infec-



tions grew — and restrictions increased — in the run-up to the second lockdown," said Nye Cominetti, senior Economist at the Resolution Foundation think tank.

"Hospitality continues to be worst affected by Britain's jobs crisis."

The latest monthly numbers showed that there were 819,000 fewer employees on the payroll in November than in February, the month before the pandemic really took root in the U.K.

Around a third of those job losses are believed to have come from the hospital-

ity sector, such as in pubs and restaurants.

The government will hope that the renewed salary support will prevent firms from laying off more staff through the winter.

The experience of the furlough program since its introduction in March is that it has limited the rise in unemployment, certainly in comparison with other countries such as the United States.

The jobless rate has risen by around a percentage point over the past few months to 4.9 per cent in October.

HMSI starts utilising Hazira-Ghogha inland waterway in Gujarat

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) on Tuesday said it has become the first automobile company in the country to commence transportation of products through the newly inaugurated

Hazira-Ghogha Ro-Pax ferry service in collaboration with Indigo Seaways. The company dispatched its first two-wheeler consignment using the ferry service from Narsapura plant in Karnataka to Veraval (near Somnath) in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, HMSI said in a statement. Utilising this logistics way, the delivery time and distance from the company's new two-wheelers reaching the Saurashtra region from the Karnataka factory has significantly reduced, it added. Compared with the earlier full road route, the transit time has reduced by two days and distance by 465 kms respectively, the two-wheeler maker said. "At Honda we believe we have a responsibility to apply our innovations, technologies and initiatives to improve the lives of the people while minimising the environmental impacts of our products and business operations to ensure a sustainable future for society," HMSI Director Sales & Marketing Yadvinder Singh Gulera said.

Hyper-realistic art wows lovers

Bringing fascinating art to Hyderabad's viewing pleasure, Castle Art City organised an exhibition of Hyper-realistic Artist Sumanth Marda at Gallery 78 in Hitech city, Hyderabad. The week-long exhibition was inaugurated by Jayesh Ranjan IAS, Secretary, Information Technology (IT). Many literary figures, artists and art connoisseurs were spotted.

A resident of Hyderabad, Sumanth Marda is a fine artist who works with charcoal and acrylic mediums. The contemporary has a Bachelor of Fine Art in Animation degree from the Academy of Art University, San Francisco. After a 10-year long career in the animation industry, Sumanth is now focusing on creating monochromatic works in charcoal which exhibit the natural world in its reality.

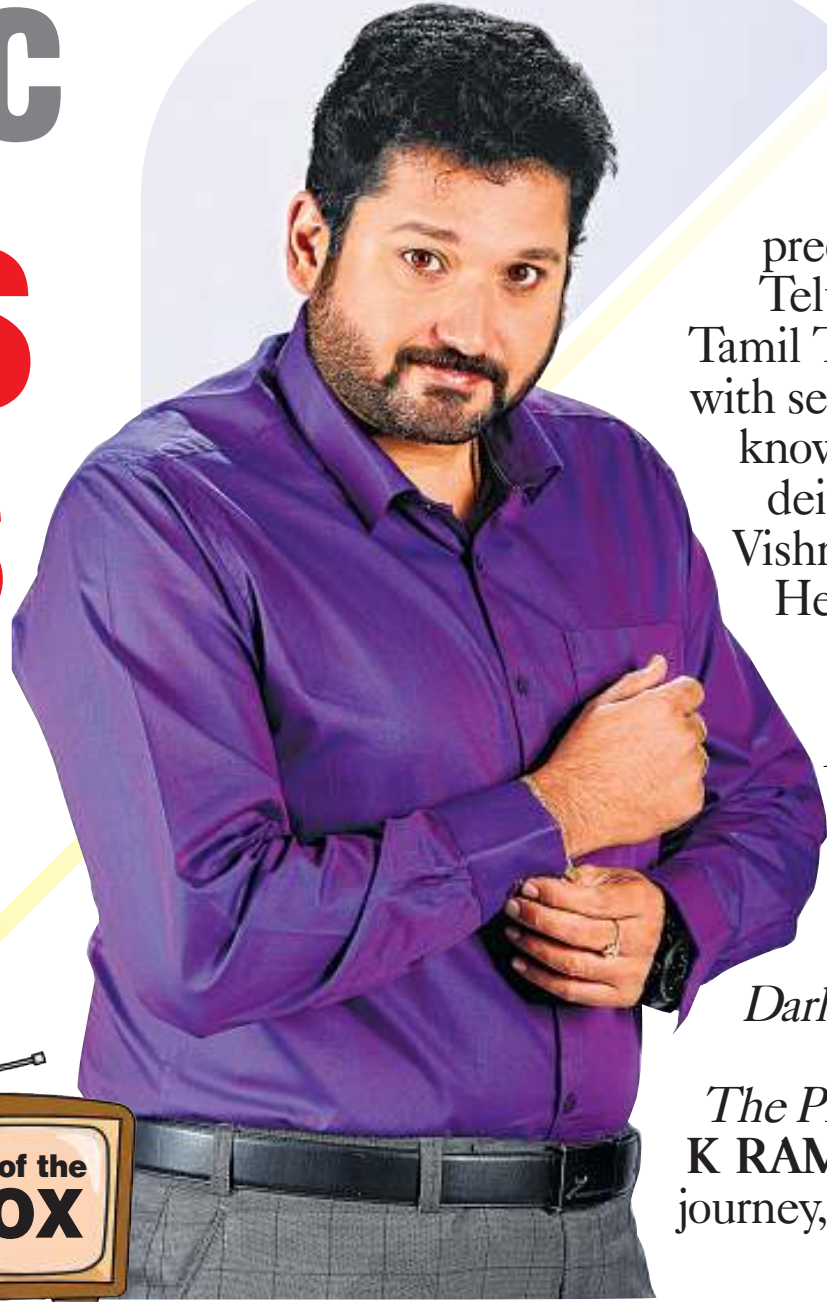
Speaking about his work, Sumanth said, "I draw inspiration from people. For instance, in one of my first large artworks, titled Innocence, at Edulabad, India, I wanted to capture pure untainted emotions. In my quest to capture humans who evoke an emotional interest in me, I traveled to Visakhapatnam, hired a car, and ventured deep into the jungles on the Andhra-Odisha border in search of tribals living in seclusion. I passed by several empty houses with a camera in hand until I came across a grandmother embracing her grandchild. For those few moments, we all shared the same feeling." "Khushi" — Happiness, happens to be the title of one of the artworks exhibited.

Castle Art City (CAC) is being developed to be an epicenter of art from all over the world. Founded by like-minded entrepreneurs who share a passion for art, CAC is being developed close to Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana. Speaking on the occasion, the promoter of CAC, Ramakanth Thumrugoti said, "As



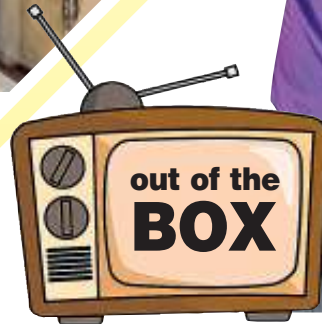
part of the art promotional programmes, CAC will be discovering new talents and presenting their works to a distinguished audience. One of the talents that was discovered this year is Sumanth Marda. A Hyderabad artist with hyperrealism as his speciality. A first-of-its-kind in South India, CAC is coming up within the premises of the magnificent theme resort, The Hidden Castle, just 100 km away from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. We also plan to host a large-scale annual art event featuring the crème de la crème of national and international galleries."

This is definitely something for art lovers in Hyderabad to look forward to, as Castle Art City is envisaged to comprise of a permanent art museum, art galleries, seminar halls, artists' residences, theatres and recreation centres.



Actor Sai Kiran Ram, who predominantly works in Telugu, Malayalam, and Tamil Television serials along with several Telugu films, is known for playing Hindu deities such as Krishna, Vishnu, and Venkateshwara. He made his debut with Television, and later appeared in the film *Nuvve Kavali*. This was followed by a string of successful films, including *Preminchu*, *Manasunte Chaalu*, *Darling Darling*, and *Satta*. He talks to

The Pioneer correspondent K RAMYA SREE about his journey, what's next and more



"Newness, a recipe for success"

Legacy of Hollywood hits gets OTT rebirth

There is a thread that ties Star Wars and Moana with Baahubali. Their universes are ever expanding, through spinoff series on the canvas of streaming platforms.

For many, the success of a film directly translates to a chance to cash on the success by spinning a new series and stories. It is a win-win for the audience as well, as the makers as well as people get to live with their favourite characters, and makers continue to reap on the benefits of the success and create a multiverse franchise.

Here is a look at some big-ticket spinoffs, which are either winning fans all over the globe or are in works.

The Batman

The show will be set in the world that Matt Reeves is creating for *The Batman* film. It will build upon the film's examination of the anatomy of corruption in Gotham City, and go on to launch a new Batman universe across multi-

ple platforms. It is being created for HBO Max.

Star Wars

The saga from a galaxy far, far away continues to live on through various films and spin off series. The list of *Star Wars* stories for Disney's streaming platform keeps on growing. It already includes *The Mandalorian*, and two other previously ordered series — one based on Cassian Andor prior to the events of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and another following the adventures of Obi-Wan Kenobi between *Revenge Of The Sith* and *A New Hope*.

Loki

The OTT series will bring back actor Tom Hiddleston as Loki, the trickster demigod and brother to Thor, for new adventures. It will stream on Disney+ Hotstar in 2021.



Ice Age

Titled *The Ice Age Adventures Of Buck Wild*, the spin-off will revolve around three characters: the prankster possum brothers Crash and Eddie, and the titular weasel, Buck. Simon Pegg will be returning to lend his voice to the role of Buck. It is slated to release in 2022.

Moana

Titled *Moana: The Series*, it takes on from the successful 2016 animated film, which narrates the adventures of a young island princess, who is chosen by the ocean to reunite a mystical relic to a goddess. Her journey starts when she sets sail in search of Maui, a legendary demigod with a hope to save her people. The spin-off series is being described as a "long-form musical comedy" and slated to release in 2023.

Up

The OTT spinoff will bring back one of most loved char-

acters in the film. The animated series is titled *Dug Days*, and it features breakout character Dug the dog who will discover the "dangers of suburbia like puppies, fireworks, and... SQUIRRELS!!". It will be released on Disney+ Hotstar in 2021.

Monsters At Work

The animated spinoff series inspired by the Hollywood hit *Monsters, Inc* will introduce new monsters. The series will follow a new cast of monsters, with special appearances by popular franchise characters Mike and Sulley (voiced by Billy Crystal and John

Goodman). It is being made for the streaming platform of Disney.

Boss Baby

Based on the film, the spin-off series, *The Boss Baby: Back In Business*, follows the Boss Baby as he continues to balance his work as a CEO of Baby Corp and home life schedule. It is available on Netflix.

Zootopia+

Slated to release in 2022, *Zootopia+* will feature different characters and locations from the film. The spinoff will feature some of the most pop-

ular characters in the 2016 film *Zootopia*, such as *Fru Fru*, *Tiger Dancers* and *Flash* the sloth.

Baymax!
The Big Hero sidekick and healthcare robot Baymax is getting his own OTT series. Set in San Fransokyo, the show will give Baymax new powers to help people. It will be released in 2021.

The Princess and The Frog
The spin-off is titled *Tiana*. The film, which was released in 2009, is about aspiring chef Tiana, who kisses a prince turned frog, and also turns into a frog. They then go on a journey to defeat a witch to get back to their human form. It is believed that the series will follow the titular character's marriage to the prince, her new royalty status, and running her restaurant. It is one of four animated spin-offs expected to launch on Disney+ in 2022.

Falcon And Winter Soldier
The web series will take the audience on new adventures featuring characters played by Anthony Mackie (Falcon) and Sebastian Stan (Winter Soldier) in the *Captain America* and *Avengers* movies. It will stream on Disney+ Hotstar.



Baahubali

The success of the magnum opus "Baahubali" film franchise gave way to the opportunity to explore the story through a spin-off series titled "Baahubali: Before The Beginning". It will explore life on the streets of the fictional city of Mahishmati. Slated to release on Netflix.



Cars

The world of "Cars" will expand with a new series. The untitled series will follow Lightning McQueen and Mater on a road trip across the country. It will feature old characters and introduce new characters as well. It is slated to release in 2022.



Swara Bhaskar: A great actor isn't necessarily a great human being

Swara Bhaskar points out that an actor who plays a heroic character, or is great with the craft and is talented, is not necessarily a great human being in real life, too.

Swara's *Tanu Weds Manu* co-star Kangana Ranaut has faced a lot of social media ire lately for her nasty statements while talking about colleagues. She is also involved in frequent spat with people, the latest being one with Punjabi actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh. A while back, Kangana snubbed Urmila Matondkar calling her a "soft porn star". She has also described Swara, as well as Taapsee Pannu as "B Grade actresses". Kangana has not spared a veteran like Jaya Bachchan, too.

Does Kangana contradict the statement, "a great artist is a great human being"?

"I think it has nothing to do with Kangana in specific. Yes, in past we had our share of arguments but I think we really need to rethink that statement that one has to be a great human being to be a great

artist. We often make this mistake that just because a person is playing a character on screen that is enduring and heroic and because they are great with their craft and are talented, they are the same in real life. No, that does not necessarily mean that they are great human beings in real life. That does not mean that all the heroic quality of an on-screen character is there in the actor, who is performing it," Swara told IANS.

"There is nothing further from the truth. Acting is a profession like any other. A doctor, an engineer, or a teacher could be great at their jobs, (but that) does not mean they are great human beings, too. I, for instance, was a fan of a particular author because of his writing. When I met him in person, I think he is one of the most obnoxious person I have come across. But he is a great writer. So, your craft is not who you are as an individual. Whether you are a dancer, singer, actor, writer, or photographer, you have to have talent, training and skill, and

you have to know your craft. That may not be the reflection of your personality," she added.

However, no one can deny that Bollywood stars are more influential than most people from other walks of life. Why are they not always responsible with their words?

"Because as an artiste, we have more flaws, more insecurity, more vulnerability and it is easy to lose ourselves in the wildness of our world. We all work hard but the insane popularity, money, and admiration across the globe of thousands can make us think that we are omnipotent," Swara reasoned.

"That is why, a celebrity, a filmstar, or a rockstar lives a life in which at times they feel that they are the best thing (that has) happened to the world, and that they are not accountable to anyone. It is often noticed that the character traits of an artiste are way different from the art they create," explained Swara who has recently appeared in the Netflix original web series *Bhaag Beanie Bhaag*.



Quintessa Swindell to play superhero Cyclone in *Black Adam*

Actor Quintessa Swindell has joined the cast of Hollywood superstar Dwayne Johnson's much-awaited anti-hero movie *Black Adam*. Swindell, known for starring in Netflix's *Trinkets* and HBO series *Euphoria*, will essay the role of DC hero Cyclone, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. The movie, which will feature Johnson as the titular antihero, is a spin-off of Warner Bros and New Line Cinema's *Shazam!*, which starred Zachary Levi.

It will also feature Noah Centineo as Atom Smasher and Aldis Hodge as Hawkman with Sarah Shahi appearing in a supporting part.

Jaume Collet-Serra, who has helmed Johnson and actor Emily Blunt's upcoming Disney movie *Jungle Cruise*, is on board as the director.

Rory Haines and Sohrab Noshirvani wrote the latest draft of the script, from a previous draft by Adam Szykiel.

Johnson is also producing with former wife Dany Garcia and Hiram Garcia through their Seven Bucks Productions, and Beau Flynn through FlynnPictureCo.

Chris Pine to star in Paramount's *Dungeons and Dragons* movie

Actor Chris Pine is in talks to play the lead role in Paramount Pictures' feature adaptation of popular fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*.

According to *Deadline*, *Game Night* filmmakers Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley are set to direct the film from a script they wrote based on a previous draft by Michael Gilio.

Paramount is co-producing and co-financing the movie with Hasbro and eOne. Jeremy Latcham is producing the

project for eOne, while Brian Goldner is on board as A producer for Hasbro. The makers are planning a May 2022 release for the film.

Dungeons and Dragons, known for its war games, treasure hunts, campaigns,

camaraderie and reversals of fortune, was previously adapted for the big screen in 2000 by New Line.

The film, which starred Justin Whalin, Marlon Wayans and Jeremy Irons, was a critical and

commercial debacle. Pine will be seen next alongside Gal Gadot in the DC superhero movie *Wonder Woman 1984*, reprising his role as Wonder Woman's love interest, Captain Steve Trevor.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution
 3 8 9 7 6 4 2 1 5
 4 2 1 5 9 8 3 6 7
 6 5 7 3 2 1 8 4 9
 2 1 5 4 3 6 9 7 8
 7 3 6 9 8 2 4 5 1
 8 9 4 1 5 7 6 2 3
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 5 4 2 8 1 3 7 9 6
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Rules
 • Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 • The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS
 1 Air-holes in your nose
 2 Become larger
 3 A spider's trap
 4 Speaks
 5 The body's pump
 6 Uncles' wives
 7 Took away illegally
 8 Hot coals left from a fire
 9 Meat from a cow
 10 Unexpectedly, without warning

DOWN
 1 A frightening dream
 2 Small seat without a back
 3 A feeling that makes you want to scratch

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

Initially, I wasn't okay with the kissing scenes of Dirty Hari: Simrat

NAGARAJ GOUD

After playing pucca Telugu ammai in her first two Telugu films—Prematho Mee Karthik and Parichayam, Simrat Kaur has treaded the experimental path with MS Raju's Dirty Hari. "My role Jasmine is a 360 degrees turn for me from what I've played so far. A Christian girl, she is bold, confident, mature, ambitious and feminine. While I'm a tomboy in real life, my real life personality does share some similarities with Jasmine. MS Raju sir made me work hard and if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have pulled it off," she says proudly.

As much as she loved the script, the Mumbai girl had to think twice to board the project because the "film had a few kissing scenes". "I found the script to western and it was a shock to see Raju sir pen such a story. But when he mentioned about the kissing scenes I wasn't okay regardless of the fact that I liked the script. He told me later, 'If you can't live the character, then you are not a good actor'. I later sought the opinion of my mother, who surprisingly told me that she was prepared for her daughter to do a brave role one or the other day after taking the film route. She asked me to look at the role. When I said it's good, she told me to justify it and not think what others will think of it."

The slender beauty admits that she was in two minds whether to continue her career in the industry after her first two projects. "After Parichayam I thought I will not do movies again

because they involve a lot of hard work. I'm an emotional person in real life and I took up my maiden film while I was still pursuing graduation. Movies are a gamble, so I was wary about a career. But my family supported me. They told me that since I've taken the route I should stick with it and that struggles are a part of every field. Around the same time, Raju sir came into my life as an angel with the script of Dirty Hari," she explains.

Heaping high praise on the producer-director, she says he made her comfortable on the sets. "For a particular scene which ran into two paragraphs, I broke down after giving 20 takes. Weeping, I told him, 'It's not happening. Sorry sir, I'm not a good actor and I can't do'. He asked the unit to leave the sets and made me listen to music. Later, he told me, 'Even big heroes give multiple takes at times and you are a newcomer, who is learning things. It is natural, so don't panic'. His words infused a lot of confidence," she concludes.



Amala to play an investigating officer



The Pioneer was the first to break the news (Oct 15) that U-Turn director Pawan Kumar has signed on Amala Paul for a thriller to be made for Telugu streamer aha. To this end, the latest we hear is that the project has been conceived as a web series. "It is a fantasy thriller consisting of eight episodes. Amala will be seen as an investigating officer who is assigned to solve a mysterious case. The project has been conceived on a rich scale and aha is extremely pumped up about it as the genre is something new for the Telugu audience," says a source close to the development.

The source further adds that aha is hoping to gain subscriptions from neighbouring south markets with the still-untitled project as Amala is a prominent name in Tamil and Malayalam, while Pawan is a Kannada filmmaker.

Guhan-Adith film titled WWW

The Pioneer was the first to inform you (Oct 12) that cinematographer-turned-director is teaming up with Adith Arun for a techno thriller. We've also later reported (Nov 7) that Shivani Rajasekar was cast opposite Adith as the leading lady. While Firewall was initially considered as the title, the makers on Tuesday announced

the title as WWW (Who.. Where.. Why). Producers Dr Ravi and P Raju Datla said that the shoot has been wrapped up and it is presently in post-production.

For the film, Guhan doubled up as the cameraman as well. Set in Hyderabad, it has been shot from a point of view perspective. The likes of Satyam Rajesh, Priyadarshi, Divya Darshini and Viva Harsha have playing supporting roles. Mirchi Kiran has penned the dialogues while Simon K King is composing music.



Alamelu Manga Venkata Ramana to roll in February

The filming of Teja's next, Alamelu Manga Venkata Ramana, with Gopichand will commence in February—exactly a year after the project was first announced earlier this year. "We are looking to start next February and wrap it up in 50 days. It's a Hyderabad-set family drama with a lot of humour. Gopi will be seen as a married man," Teja told us.

On the question of the film's leading lady, Teja said that they are in the final round of negotiations with an actress and an announcement is around the corner.

Known to work at a breakneck speed, Teja stated that he is looking at having three releases as a director next year. "I am also planning to direct a couple of new projects introducing close to 100 faces. The details will be revealed at an appropriate time," he pointed out.



Kajal joins Acharya shoot with husband in tow

With the latest schedule of megastar Chiranjeevi-starrer Acharya commencing in Hyderabad earlier this week, film's leading lady Kajal Aggarwal joined the sets on Tuesday. Although the film went to floors at the start of this year, the actress wasn't required for the first two months. And when she was, in March, the film had to be put on pause mode due to the lockdown induced by COVID-19.

With the shoot resuming last month, Kajal's joining was anticipated by her fans, as she entered a new phase of her life. Giving her company on her return to work in Telugu cinema was her husband Gautam Kitchlu. With the newlyweds on the sets for the first time, the megastar ensured that they exchanged garlands, cut a cake before he blessed them. Koratala Siva, co-producer Anvesh Reddy, production designer Suresh Selvarajan and cinematographer Thiru were seen at the

occasion extending their greetings to the new couple.

Right now, Koratala is filming a song on Chiru and Kajal at Kokapet, Hyderabad where a set has been erected. The new schedule will go on till the end of this month, while Ram Charan, who will be seen in a supporting role, joins the shoot next month. Koratala is planning to complete the filming by March-end. A socio-political entertainer, the film sees Chiru in the role of a maximalite-turned-social reformer.

