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DEEP SEA DIVING:
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11 VIVACITY

Nitish returns as CM with new deputies

Tarkishore Prasad, Renu Devi to be Dy CMs; BJP's Nand Kishore Yadav picked as Speaker; 14-member council of ministers takes oath; BJP bags 7 berths, JD(U) 5, HAM, VIP 1 each

PNS/PTI ■ PATNA

Nitish Kumar was on Monday sworn in as the Chief Minister of Bihar for the seventh time in two decades, in the presence of top NDA leaders, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president Jagat Prakash Nadda.

Nitish, who heads the JD(U), was administered the oath of office at Raj Bhawan by Governor Phagu Chauhan, a day after he staked claim for the formation of a new Government in the State, armed with unanimous support of all legislators of the NDA despite his party's plummeted tally.

The 69-year-old, who has had a continuous run since November 2005, except for the period in 2014-15 when Jitan Ram Manjhi kept the chair warm for him, is on course to becoming the longest serving CM of the State, surpassing the record of Shrikrishna Singh who held the top post since before Independence till his death in 1961.

A 14-member council of ministers, headed by Nitish, was on Monday sworn in. Those who were administered oath of office included two Deputy Chief Minister designates Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi both from the BJP which bagged a lions share of seven berths.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda, Bihar Governor Phagu Chauhan, HAM(S) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Deputy Chief Ministers Renu Devi and Tarkishore Prasad pose for a group photograph after the oath-taking ceremony at Raj Bhawan in Patna on Monday PTI

Since the post of a Deputy CM is not a constitutional one, the two took oath as ministers and their posts would be notified by the Cabinet in due course. The two sat alongside Kumar on the podium which confirms their elevated position in the Cabinet.

Five ministers were from the JD(U), while one each was from smaller allies Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Vikashin Insaan Party (VIP). JD(U) Ministers included old hands like Bijendra Prasad Yadav, Ashok Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Chaudhary besides new faces Mewa Lal Chaudhary and Sheela Kumari Mandal.

Other than the two Deputy CM designates, those from the BJP included Mangal Pandey, who held the health portfolio in the previous Government

besides Amarendra Pratap Singh, Ramprit Paswan, Jibesh Kumar and Ram Surat Rai. HAM MLC Santosh Kumar Suman, whose father Jitan Ram Manjhi is a former Chief Minister and the national president of the party, also took oath besides Mukesh Sahni, the founder of VIP who formerly worked as a set designer in the film industry. A political greenhorn,

Sahni could not tame his exuberance and shared a screenshot of the communication he had received from Raj Bhawan on his Twitter handle much before the ceremony, attended among others by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda, commented.

Ramprit Paswan, who is the MLA from Rajnagar in Madhubani, and Jibesh Kumar

who represents Jale in Darbhanga, took oath in their native Maithili language.

Among the two Deputy CM designates, Prasad is a fourth term MLA who is getting inducted into the council of ministers for the first time.

Renu Devi, who is a former national vice president of the BJP and four-term MLA from Bettiah, has previously served as a member of the council of ministers headed by Nitish Kumar in 2010.

Senior BJP legislator Nand Kishore Yadav will be the new Speaker of the Bihar Assembly, sources said on Monday. Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, a close aide of the Chief Minister, was the Speaker of the previous Assembly. Chaudhary has taken oath as a minister.

Nand Kishore Yadav, a seven-term MLA from Patna Sahib, has been intimated about it by the party's leadership, they said.

He has served as a minister in all the previous NDA Governments in Bihar. He was the Minister for the Road Construction Department in the last government. The Speaker's post will go to the BJP as per the understanding reached within the alliance, the sources said.

The BJP has emerged as the largest party within the ruling coalition with 74 seats, while the JD(U) has a strength of 43.

Covid vaccine efficacy 94.5%, says Moderna

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moderna, the US-based biotech firm, on Monday said its vaccine shots provide strong protection with at least 94.5 per cent effectiveness against coronavirus.

Last week, Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech announced that their vaccine was 90 per cent effective.

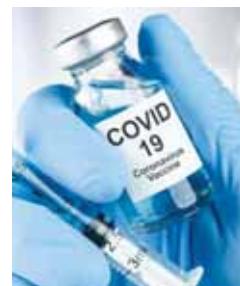
The Moderna announcement that its experimental vaccine against Covid-19 was 94.5 per cent effective was based on the early results from a clinical trial with more than 30,000 participants.

However, the study is continuing, and Moderna acknowledged the protection rate might change as more Covid-19 infections are detected and added to the calculations. Also, it's too soon to know how long protection lasts. Both cautions apply to Pfizer's vaccine as well.

Dr Stephen Hoge, Moderna's president, termed it "really important milestone" but said having similar results from two different companies is what's most reassuring.

"That should give us all hope that actually a vaccine is going to be able to stop this pandemic and hopefully get us back to our lives," Hoge told a news agency.

"It won't be Moderna alone



that solves this problem. It's going to require many vaccines to meet the global demand," he added.

"Since early January, we have chased this virus with the intent to protect as many people around the world as possible. All along, we have known that each day matters," said Stéphane Bancel, Moderna's chief executive officer.

"This positive interim analysis from our phase 3 study has given the first clinical validation that our vaccine can prevent Covid-19 disease, including severe disease," he said.

The US firm expects to have about 20 million doses, earmarked for the US, by the end of 2020 while Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech expect to have about 50 million doses globally by year's end.

Lowest daily count in 4 mnths raises hopes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With 30,548 new Covid-19 infections reported in the last 24 hours, India registered lowest increase in daily infections in last four months, a big relief to the authorities despite fear of a sharp surge in the cases post-Diwali.

The total number of cases stands at 88,45,127. With 435 new deaths reported in the last 24 hours, the toll has mounted to 1,30,070, the Union Health Ministry said on Monday.

"Daily new cases numbering 30,548 is a historic low that assumes significance given many countries in Europe and America are experiencing a continuous steep rise in daily new cases," said the Ministry.

The number of total active cases stands at 4,65,478 after a decrease of 13,738 while the total discharged cases stand at 82,49,579 with 43,851 new discharges in the last 24 hours.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a total of 12,56,98,525 samples have been tested for Covid-19 up to November 15, of these 8,61,706 samples were tested on Sunday.

The Recovery Rate has improved to 93.27 per cent on

| Covid-19 IN INDIA | |
|----------------------|--|
| TOTAL | |
| CASES: 88,68,445 | |
| DEATHS: 1,30,417 | |
| RECOVERED: 82,82,009 | |
| ACTIVE: 4,54,024 | |



Monday. Also, 78.59 per cent of the recovered cases reported in the last 24 hours are from ten States/UTs. Delhi saw the greatest number of recoveries as 7,606 confirmed cases recovered. Kerala registered 6,684 daily recoveries while West Bengal followed by reporting 4,480 new recoveries.

The Ministry said 76.63 per cent of the new cases have been reported from ten States/UTs. Kerala recorded 4,581 new cases. Delhi which

saw a surge in new cases over the last few days reported only 3,235 new cases yesterday, followed closely by West Bengal which reported 3,053 new cases. There has been a significant rise in the number of containment zones as authorities have created over 1,000 new such zones in the last 15 days, according to Delhi Government data.

Similarly, 78.85 per cent of the 435 new deaths are concentrated in ten States/UTs.

LIC's New Jeevan Anand

About a fifth, 21.84 per cent of new fatalities reported are from Delhi which reported 95 deaths, overtaking Maharashtra. Maharashtra reported 60 fatalities.

The other worst-hit States are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. At least, 14 States/UTs have death per million higher than national average of 94 while 13 States/UTs have a Case Fatality Rate higher than National Average.

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STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has sought "maximum possible help" from the Central Government to eradicate Naxalism from the Bastar region in the coming years.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Baghel has offered some suggestions, underlining that it was important to create employment opportunities in the area so that youths who are unemployed do not join any Maoist group.

With iron ore available in plenty in Bastar, 30 percent discount provided in iron ore for setting up steel plants in Bastar will generate hundreds of crores worth of investment, providing direct and indirect employment in the region, he said.

Difficult geographical terrain came in the way setting up grid power and thus the estab-

lishment of a large number of solar power plants would meet the energy needs of people and their economic development could be met strategically.

The Chief Minister mentioned that there is an urgent and indispensable need to provide generous grants to establish processing units and cold chains in the region to help the Collectors push up sales of small forest produce, forest medicines and horticultural crops. Likewise, the implementation of the proposed

Bodhghat multipurpose irrigation project on the banks of Indravati river will improve the irrigation and energy capacity of Bastar region. The seven districts of Bastar region are identified as aspiring districts.

It would be in the best interest that district Collectors are provided Rs 50 crore each year to develop the means of livelihood of the people, Baghel said.

"In the past years, the Government of India has generously provided assistance to the Naxalite affected states for

70% Delhiites didn't burn firecrackers on Diwali: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Monday said around 70 per cent people in Delhi did not burn firecrackers on Diwali after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government imposed a ban on the same and the results will be better next year.

"The Government had banned firecrackers in Delhi this year and nearly 70 per cent of the citizens did not burn any kind of firecrackers this year during Diwali. I am hopeful that in the next year we will be able to improve the campaign and bring down more pollution which is created through the firecrackers. The Delhi government is working relentlessly to find out a steady solution to combat pollution. A long-term solution to the problem of pollution "cannot be found in a day," he said.

The Delhi Government had on November 5 banned the sale and use of all kinds of fire-



crackers in the city till November 30.

The National Green Tribunal had also imposed a total ban on sale or use of all kinds of firecrackers in the National Capital Region from November 9 midnight to November 30 midnight, saying "celebration by crackers is for happiness and not to celebrate deaths and diseases".

Rai, who launched the Phase 2 of 'Red light on Gaadi Off' campaign along with Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday, said Pusa bio-decomposer has emerged as a long-term solution to the problem of stubble burning.

According to scientists at Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa, the solution can turn crop residue into manure in 15 to 20 days and therefore prevent stubble burning.

The Minister said the Delhi

Government will submit the Pusa bio-decomposer impact assessment report along with a petition to the Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Adjoining Areas on Monday, and urge it to issue directions to all state governments to implement it.

Sisodia stressed the need for steps to reduce "pollution at its source" to effectively address the issue of bad air quality.

"There are multiple sources that contribute to pollution. If it is due to vehicles, their number should be reduced or these should be turned off at red light... If it is stubble burning, a solution such as Pusa bio-decomposer is needed," he said.

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia with Environment Minister Gopal Rai and others holds placards during Red Light On, Gaadi Off campaign, started by the Delhi Government to tackle air pollution, in New Delhi on Monday.

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Reserve 50% general beds, 75% in ICU for Covid patients, G'gram hospitals told

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

In view of increasing number of Covid-19 cases in the district, the Gurugram administration on Monday asked all private and public hospitals to reserve 50 per cent of their total bed capacity in general category and 75 per cent beds in ICU/ventilator for Covid-19 patients.

The hospitals were also told to reserve ICU and ventilator facilities for Covid-19 patients in Gurugram.

Moreover, the data of available beds will have to be uploaded on the platform 'onemapggm.gmda.gov.in' of the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) by the hospitals.

The order was issued under the epidemic diseases Act-1897 and sub-section-2 of the Disaster Management Act-2005.

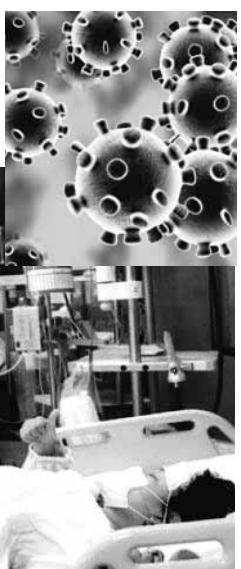
"We have asked all the hospitals to provide services



including human resources and logistics ie doctors, paramedical staff, medicine, ICU, ambulance etc. Apart from this information about the number of patients and available beds, etc., will be updated on a daily basis on the GMDA platform," the order said.

Apart from this, the Gurugram district on Monday recorded 546 fresh coronavirus cases. Three deaths were also reported from the city, taking the district's COVID toll to 244, officials said.

The Covid-19 tally in Gurugram has now risen to 39,933, according to the official daily health bulletin.



There are a total of 5,749 active cases.

A total of 33,940 have been cured and discharged, including 784 on Monday.

The health department said out of 244 deaths, 189 died due to co-morbidities and the remaining 55 without co-morbidities.

Flier coming from US with bullet held at IGI Airport

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has arrested an Indian passenger coming from the United States (US) at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport for allegedly carrying a bullet in his baggage.

According to a senior Central Industrial Security Force official, the man identified as V K Gupta was intercepted with a bullet of 9 mm calibre in his bag on Sunday at Terminal 3 of the IGI airport.

The man landed here from Newark and was bound for Raipur in Chhattisgarh. As he had no documents for carrying the live ammunition round and an empty cartridge, the man was handed over to Delhi Police for further probe by the Central Industrial Security Force personnel," said the senior CISF official.

Dozens hurt in clash over standing at local shop

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Four men, including a former sarpanch, were seriously injured and dozen others were hurt in a clash between two groups following a minor dispute over standing near a local shop at Bamdoli village in Gurugram late on Sunday night.

Four of the accused have been admitted to a private hospital. The victim, Joginder Yadav, a resident of Bamdoli village, was standing at a village shop and was smoking at around 11.30 pm when the accused Akash alias Ashu reached the spot and raised objection over his presence at the spot. This led to an alteration between them.

It is alleged that Akash called dozens of his group members including Sunny who joined him and they allegedly attacked Joginder Singh with sticks. Later Yadav also called up his men including his two maternal uncles Shamsher and

Snesh Kumar and a full-fledged fistfight broke out between the two groups.

Akash and his aides then allegedly took out their sticks and weapons and fired dozens of rounds on members of the other group.

Sources said that during the incident, a bullet hit a former sarpanch reportedly Shamsher in the stomach.

Apart from Shamsher, Snesh Kumar, Praveen and Manoj were critically injured. Several others also suffered injuries in the clash.

All of them were taken to a private hospital in Gurugram. Shamsher, who is stated to be critical, is in the ICU.

"The accused will be arrested as per law once they are discharged from the hospital.

The firearm of the culprit, which was allegedly used in the commission of the crime, has also been seized," said a police officer privy with the matter.

"Based on a complaint from Joginder, a case of vari-

ous sections of the IPC has been registered against Akash, Sunny, Akash's parents Azad and Kamlesh and others at Sector-10A police station. We are scanning CCTV footage of the vicinity. Investigations are under way to identify others involved in the incident," said Sanjay Yadav, SHO sector-10A police station.

A huge police force has been deployed inside the village as security purposes, he said.

It may be noted that Akash, the prime accused in this incident had eliminated a co-student inside his school premises with his father's licensed pistol in 2008 in Gurugram.

The school was located at Sector-4 in Gurugram. The incident hit the headlines across the country and serious concern was aroused about the safety of the children inside the school premises.

The accused was also involved in two murder cases registered against him in Delhi.

Anaj Mandi fire: 4th accused held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has nabbed the fourth accused nearly a year after a massive fire at a four-storey building in north Delhi's congested Anaj Mandi area, which had claimed 45 lives, who were mostly labourers.

Police had earlier arrested three accused — the building's owner Rehan, his manager Furkaan and another man named Mohammad Suhail — in connection with the case. The fourth accused has been identified as Mohammad Imraan, who is Rehan's brother and partly owns the building.

Imraan was absconding since the day of the incident

and was carrying a reward of Rs 50,000, police said.

On December 8 last year, a massive fire had ripped through a four-storey building housing illegal manufacturing units in north Delhi's congested Anaj Mandi area, killing 45 people including nine minors and injuring 21 others, including six minors.

Almost all the deceased were migrant labourers hailing from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who stayed as well as worked inside the building. After the incident, a case had been registered at Sadar Bazar police station which was later transferred to the Crime Branch.

According to B K Singh, the additional Commissioner

of Police, Crime Branch, on Saturday, police team received specific inputs that Imraan would be coming to Delhi to attend a family function.

Acting on the specific

inputs a trap was laid and

Imraan was apprehended near Rameshwari Nagar in Azadpur.

The building that had caught

fire comprised of two adjacent

properties, both of which are

interconnected. The property is

jointly owned by Imraan and

his brother Rehan and was pur-

chased in 2007. At that time,

the building was only two-

storey high but later, it was con-

verted into a five-storey build-

ing," said the additional CP.

"The rest of the property

had been rented out by him.

After the fire incident, he had

been hiding and living with his

relatives in Meerut, Agra, Raipur, Ajmer and Seelampur in Delhi. Imraan has been

taken into five days police

remand for further investiga-

tion," the additional CP added.

Two stab eatery owner to death after being asked not to eat, drink at his house

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 42-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by two men after he scolded them for eating and consuming alcohol.

"The quarrel escalated and

one of them took out a knife and

stabbed Rajesh in the chest before

fleeing from the spot. Rajesh was

rushed to Babu Jagiyan Ram

Memorial Hospital, where he died

during treatment," said the DCP.

"During enquiry it was

revealed that both the accused and

the victim had altercations on the

same issue quite a few times earli-

er as well. The victim had once

even warned the duo but they con-

tinued with their activities," said the DCP.

"Police had registered a case

under sections 302 (Murder) and

34 (Acts done by several persons in

furtherance of common intention)

of the Indian Penal Code and

arrested two men in connection

with the incident," said the DCP.

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Post Diwali, air quality 'satisfactory' in Raipur

STAFF REPORTER ■

RAIPUR

A day after Diwali, air quality in the Chhattisgarh capital Raipur remained in the satisfactory category on Sunday, the Chhattisgarh Environment Conservation Board said on Monday.

The air quality index (AQI) in Raipur was 73.70, it was 61.8 in Bilhail and 61.50 in Bilaspur, a press release said.

In Raipur, the Particulate Matter (PM 10) in air quality on Deepawali was down by 5.89 percent while Bilaspur recorded a 7.52 percent and Bilhail a 9.3 percent decrease in air quality as compared to last year, the release said.



In Raipur, the PM 10 in air quality at City Kotwali was 71 µg/m³ and 56.6 µg/m³ near AIIMS.

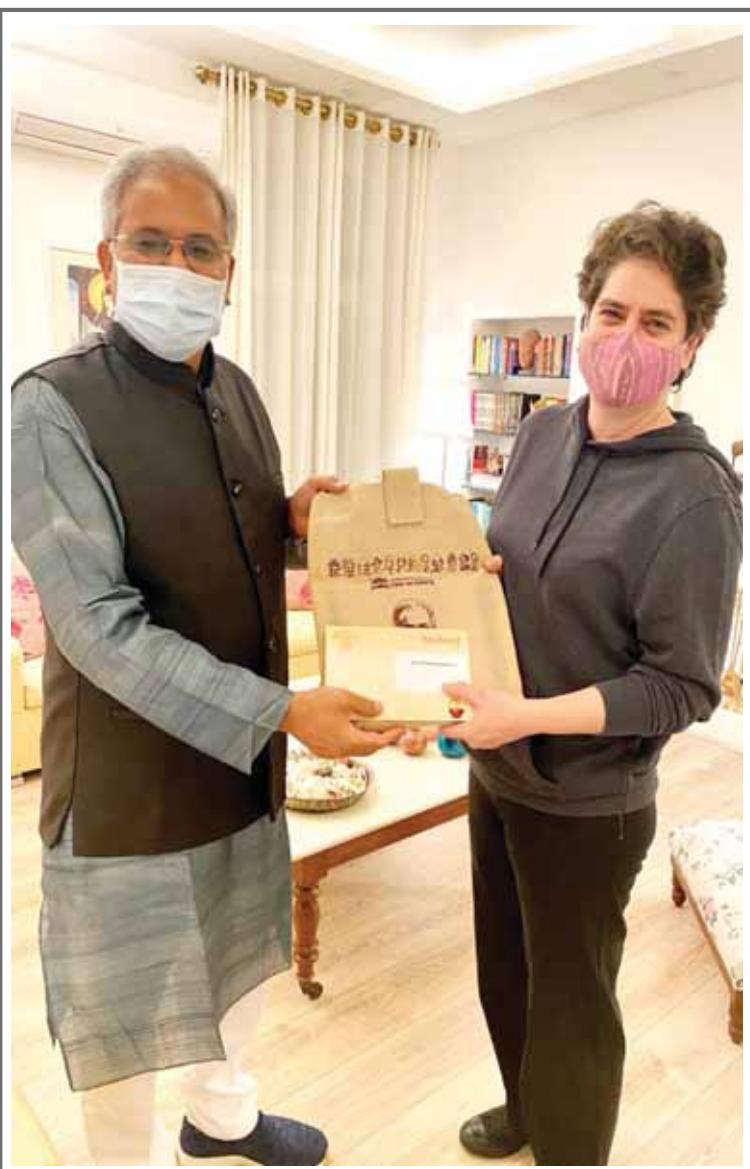
In Bilaspur, it was 55.0 µg/m³ at Vyapar building and

68 µg/m³ near Traffic Thana. In Bilhail-Durg, PM 10 in air quality was 55.4 µg/m³ at 5/32 Bunglow and 63.8 µg/m³ at Durg city Kotwali.

On Diwali, 3.62 percent

reduction in noise pollution was witnessed in Raipur. The average intensity of sound at Raipur was 65.53 decibels and it was 71.13 decibels in Bilhail.

In view of Covid-19, the Chhattisgarh government last week fixed two hours for bursting firecrackers on Diwali, Chhath, Guruparva, Christmas and New Year.



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel called on Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at her residence on Monday in New Delhi and extended Diwali greetings. *Pioneer Photo*

Vaccinating 130cr Indians with injectable Covaxin a challenge: Bharat Biotech

■ IANS

Even as India's first indigenous coronavirus vaccine Covaxin is entering its third phase of human trials, Bharat Biotech on Monday raised the logistical query on "how to vaccinate 1.3 billion (130 crore) people with two injectable doses. Terming the exercise a "challenge" it also said that work was on single-dose nasal drop vaccine.

Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) Chairman and Managing Director Krishna Ella said the company's Bio-Safety Level 3 (BSL-3) facility currently has limited capacity but hoped to reach one billion (100 crore) doses by next year.

"We have partnered with ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) for Covaxin and as we speak, we are entering phase III trials but I am not happy because it is a two-dose injectable

vaccine. If we have to vaccinate 1.3 billion population with two dose vaccine, we need 2.6 billion (260 crore) syringes and needles," he said.

Ella was addressing Deccan Dialogue organised by the Indian School of Business (ISB) and supported by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on 'Crisis and cooperation: Imperative in the times of pandemic'.

"We are working on another vaccine, a single dose nasal drop. We have experience of making Rotavirus and Polio nasal drop vaccines. We can scale up to 1 billion doses and my feeling is that by next year we will reach there," he said.

The Hyderabad-headquartered vaccine maker announced in September that it is collaborating with the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, Missouri to manufac-



ture a billion doses of a single-dose intranasal vaccine.

"The challenge is to vaccinate 1.3 billion population. Six billion (600 crore) people

in the developing world have to be vaccinated but the opportunity is if 20 per cent of them are vaccinated, I have done my job as a scientist. You

partly need vaccine because there will be herd immunity," he added.

Ella also pointed out that 40,000 unknown viruses are

existing, "10,000 viruses can hop from animal to animal and to human. What we are seeing today is only a sample. Because of its impact on economy it got more attention. We are yet to see lot many things."

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Hyderabad's Prof M. Vidyasagar, who is also the chairman of the 'COVID-19 Indian National Supermodel Committee', however, said for this pandemic 30 to 40 per cent people needed to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.

"The challenge is whether the cold weather especially in north India exacerbates this pandemic and whether we can predict this by observing the course of the pandemic," he said.

He noted that India had more success in controlling the pandemic unlike other countries like the US, the UK

and France who have death rate per million 7 to 8 times higher than that of India.

"These countries have gone back to second lockdown because they see so-called second wave. This raises the question could proper modeling have helped these countries to foresee that there will be second wave, whether it could have helped the countries to assess effectiveness of the first lockdown, would the second lockdown be more effective this time when it was apparently not successful the last time," said Prof Vidyasagar.

Arti Ahuja, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said India should be proud of what it has done to deal with the pandemic.

She said from just one public health institute conducting COVID-19 test, the country now has 2,000

laboratories. According to her, it was not just the government but the participation of all stakeholders, including the private sector which helped the country deal with the pandemic.

Rahul Chabra, Secretary, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, said the pandemic brought out new aspects of non-military threats to the security. Health security came up as major issue and multilateral cooperation now has to be part of strategic foreign policy engagement with all countries.

Vikram K. Doraiswamy, India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Prof Sarang Deo, Executive Director, Max Institute of Healthcare Management, ISB also addressed the session, which was moderated by Govindraj Ethiraj, Founder, IndiaSpend and BOOM.

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Two Nigerians held for duping Chhattisgarh woman of ₹7.53L

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Monday arrested two Nigerian nationals from New Delhi and brought them to Raipur on charges of cheating a woman from the state to the tune of ₹7.53 lakh after posing as doctors through a fake profile on a social media site.

Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Kumar Yadav told The Pioneer that the accused, identified as Iduchi (30) and Christopher (28), resided in Delhi.



cash.

The victim woman recently lodged a complaint with the Khamtarai police station in Raipur that in August 2019 she became friends with the accused on Facebook, Yadav said.

The victim woman asked for more money, the victim realized she has been cheated and she lodged a FIR against the accused, he said.

Based on a technical analysis of Facebook IDs, messages,

Media provides direction to democratic debate: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The media through gallant and impartial journalism provides new direction to the democratic discussion in the country, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Monday while greeting journalists on the occasion of the National Press Day.

Police broke the door open and the body was sent for post-mortem. "No suicide note was recovered," he added.

According to the judge's staff members, she had been apparently under depression following the death of her husband last year, the officer said.

She has two sons. While one of them lives in Delhi, another resides in Raipur. An investigation is on to ascertain the exact cause behind her extreme step, added the police officer.

Baghel said a free press is a specialty of a vibrant democ-

racy and also its foundation. The National Press Day recalls the freedom of press and its responsibility, states an official statement issued on the occasion.

Baghel said the Chhattisgarh government has been continuously working to provide better facilities to the journalists. The eligibility and provisions are being amended to ensure a wider range of journalists are included under the different schemes.

Even the block level journalists have been brought under purview of the accreditation process, he said. The honorarium of senior journalists (retired) has been doubled to ₹10,000 per month.

Jagdalpur prisoners make tribal handicrafts for Tribes India

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Continuing with its expansion spree, Tribes India added more new products on Monday, one of the highlights being the beautiful hand-crafted items made by the inmates of the Central Jail in Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh.

All the new products introduced in the past few weeks are available in 125 Tribes India outlets, Tribes India mobile vans and on online platforms such as the Tribes India E-marketplace (tribesindia.com) and e-tailers.

Speaking on the occasion virtually, Pravir Krishna, Managing Director, TRIFED, said: "Our association with the Central Jail in

Jagdalpur is another initiative to provide the tribals a bigger market for their handicrafts and produce and help them become self-reliant.

Sourced from different parts of the country, among the products launched on Monday include beautifully crafted statues and some Ketki baskets from the tribal inmates of Jagdalpur Jail.

These attractive statues of

Ganesha, Lakshmi and Durga will not only make for gift items but will help make the tribal jail inmates self-reliant.

There are lampshades with Saura paintings and dokra diyas from the tribes of Odisha. From the tribes of the South, a new organic range of beauty products such as beeswax lip balms in different flavours (mint, lemon, vanilla) have been introduced.



Govt mulling new code of conduct for TV: I&B Min



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar on Monday said that the Government is considering a new code of conduct for television and mulling strengthening the regulatory mechanisms for OTT platforms.

Speaking at a webinar organised by the Press Council of India (PCI) on the 'Role of media during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on media' on National Press Day, the minister touched upon the issue of absence of a regulatory body for TV channels and said a decision may be taken on bringing a code of conduct for them.

The Press Council of India is a self-regulatory body which has representations from vari-

ous media houses as well as parliament. There have been discussions on giving more power to the PCI, he said.

"But for TV channels there is no self-regulatory body like PCI. We are getting suggestions to make a code of conduct for all TV channels but we are yet to take a decision on it," the minister said, adding that the government doesn't want to interfere but press should present responsible journalism.

Javadekar further said just like TV, there is no regulatory body for over-the-top (OTT) platforms and the government is receiving suggestions on how to regulate its content.

OTT platforms such as Netflix, Hotstar, and others were recently brought under the ambit of the information and broadcasting ministry.

Neither there is any PCI nor any other body for OTT platforms which have very good content as well as very bad content. So, something needs to be done about it, he said.

Discussions are going on and we are getting suggestions

from a lot of people on what should be done to regulate the content on OTT platforms, he said.

He said a free press is the cornerstone of democracy and freedom comes with responsibility even as he asked news organisations to avoid sensationalism. "Freedom of press is the soul of democracy. Freedom of press is very important but any freedom comes with responsibility. So, there has to be a responsible freedom and no sensationalism by the press," the minister said in the video message.

The news should not be to deliberately defame anyone, he said adding the way freedom of press is being attacked these days is not good.

Talking about the alleged Television Rating Points (TRP) manipulation by some news channels, the minister said a committee formed by the ministry will soon submit its report on the issue. To check the TRP manipulation and address the issue, we have formed a committee which will give its report very soon, he said.

CBI takes over 3 land encroachment cases in J&K at HC behest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered three separate cases at the behest of Jammu and Kashmir High Court and taken over the investigation of these cases, earlier registered by Vigilance Organization, Jammu (now Anti-Corruption Bureau, Union Territory of J&K).

The first case has been registered against unknown officials of Revenue Department, Jammu on the allegations that the Revenue Department officials conferred undue benefits upon the illegal occupants of the state land by intentionally ignoring the laid down provisions of Roshni Act and rules, thereby conferring ownership rights of the state land wrongfully to selective underserving persons and hence inflicted huge monetary loss to the State exchequer.

The second case relates to similar misuse of authority in Samba district. The third case relates to a private person, resident of Gandhi Nagar, Jammu, unknown officials of Revenue Department, Jammu; unknown officials of Jammu Development Authority (JDA) and unknown others on the allegations that the Revenue officers of Jammu district had entered into a criminal conspiracy with the said private person and conferred ownership rights with regard to land measuring five Kanal and two Marlas in Khasra No. 781 situated at village Deeli Tehsil and District Jammu.

These cases are the outcome of the orders of Jammu and Kashmir High Court in PIL No. 19/2011. The cases were earlier registered by Vigilance Organization, Jammu (now Anti-Corruption Bureau, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir) vide FIR Numbers 23/2015, 5/2015 and 6/2014.

In the first case, it was further alleged that the purpose of Jammu and Kashmir State Lands (vesting of ownership rights to the Occupants) Act, 2001 which was generating revenue for undertaking developmental works in the state was defeated.

The second case relates to similar misuse of authority in Samba district.

The third case relates to a private person, resident of Gandhi Nagar, Jammu,

Baricitinib may reduce death risk among elderly Covid +ve patients

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug Baricitinib, used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, may reduce the risk of dying for elderly patients with Covid-19, and provide a new weapon in the arsenal against the novel coronavirus, according to a study published in the journal *Science Advances*.

The scientists came with the conclusion after 83 patients with a median age of 81 and all suffering from moderate to severe Covid-19 infection were given the drug.

This medication was ini-

tially identified by scientists at Imperial College London in the UK using artificial intelligence (AI) as a drug that could have anti-viral and anti-inflammatory effects.

In the study, the patients, who were in multiple hospitals across Italy and Spain, had a 71 per cent reduced risk of dying compared to patients who had not taken the drug.

The study found that 17 per cent of patients who were given the drug died or needed to go on a ventilator, compared to 35 per cent in the control group who were not given the medication.

The study suggests this drug can aid recovery of patients with moderate to severe Covid-19, and may provide a new weapon in the arsenal against the virus, the researchers said.

The team grew miniature human organs in the lab, called organoids, to investigate how exactly the drug may combat Covid-19.

The findings revealed that the drug may help work in two ways: reduce organ damage caused by inflammation, and blocking the virus entering human cells.

Chirp of cricket to be used to monitor their species diversity: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The chirp of the cricket may soon be used to monitor their species diversity. Dr. Ranjana Jaiswara, a Department of Science and Technology (DST) Inspire Faculty Fellow at the University is working to establish a field cricket acoustic-signal library which can be used as a non-invasive tool in species diversity estimation and monitoring.

"The library will be a digital ones and can be used through mobile phone application for automated species recognition and discovery as well as documentation of new species of crickets from India," she said.

Jaiswara explained that currently morphology-based traditional taxonomy has gone a long way to recognise and establish species diversity.

"But it is often not sufficient in delimiting cryptic species - a group of two or more morphologically indistinguishable species (hidden under one species) or individuals of the same species

expressing diverse morphological features (which are often classified into multiple species).

"Therefore, identification solely based on morphological features leads to underestimation or overestimation of species diversity," she added.

Dr. Jaiswara's research as a DST-INSPIRE Faculty addresses the problem of cryptic species by using advanced tools in an integrative frame in delineating species boundaries.

These tools include field crickets as the model organism. In her research published in *Journal of Zoological Systematics and Evolutionary Research*, she has shown that species-specific bioacoustics signals are a highly efficient and reliable tool in marking species boundaries and it can be used to get an accurate estimate of species richness and diversity estimate of any geographical area.

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Clarify your stand on Article 370, NC, PDP: Law Minister to Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Law Minister and Senior BJP leader Ravishankar Prasad on Monday asked the Congress to clarify whether it is standing with the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on the issue of restoration of the Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir.

Sonia and Rahul tell clearly and categorically, are you with the demand for the restoration of the Article 370," asked the law minister here at a press conference.

Politics around Article 370 is heating up with the union territory to undergo local bod-

ies elections .BJP has deputed Minister of State for Finance, Anurag Thakur to win it the forthcoming Jammu Kashmir local body polls. Polls will be held from November 22 to December 28.

Hitting out at the Congress, Prasad demanded to know as to why the opposition party is backing "Gupkar declaration" and the "anti-nationals" who are "seeking China's help and are disrespectful to the National flag". The Minister was referring to the recent comments of former Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah & Mehbooba Mufti.

Prasad said Article 370 denied women, children, backward classes and SCs their basic rights in the erst-

while state and the scrapping of which has now facilitated implementation of all "progressive central laws" in the J&K.

The BJP leader said prevention of corruption Act was not allowed to be implemented by the Article 370 with political leaders making merry with the state funds.

Women of the state marrying outside were denied property rights in the state which is now a Union territory, he said.

"Are Gupkar alliance parties and the Congress aiming to take the state backward and deny people of the J & K their legitimate rights?", asked Prasad.

Modi to attend virtual BRICS summit today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Tuesday attend the virtual summit of BRICS that will focus on cooperation in counter-terrorism, trade, health, energy and ways to offset the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Russian President Vladimir Putin are scheduled to attend the 12th summit of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping.

The BRICS summit is taking place at a time two of the bloc's members, India and China, are locked in a bitter

border standoff in eastern Ladakh for over six months.

Both Modi and Xi had come face-to-face virtually at the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on November 10.

"At the invitation of President Putin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be attending the 12th BRICS Summit hosted by Russia, under the theme "Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth" on November 17," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

The BRICS is known as an influential bloc that represents over 3.6 billion people, or half of the world's population. The

BRICS countries have a combined GDP of USD 16.6 trillion.

The MEA said the leaders would be discussing intra-BRICS cooperation and key issues in the global context, including the reform of the multilateral system, measures to mitigate the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, cooperation in counter-terrorism, trade, health, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

"India will be taking over the chair of the BRICS, which would be the third BRICS Presidency for India since its inception (after 2012 and 2016) and will host the 13th BRICS summit in 2021," the MEA said.

India's first indigenous coronavirus vaccine Covaxin enters third phase of human trials



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Even as India's first indigenous coronavirus vaccine, Covaxin, is entering its third

phase of human trials in 26,000 participants, Bharat Biotech on Monday wondered how the country's 1.3 billion (130 crore) people will be vaccinated with its two-dose injectable vaccine.

Ella asserted that the challenge is to vaccinate 1.3 billion population. Six billion (600 crore) people in the developing world have to be vaccinated but the opportunity is if 20 per cent of them are vaccinated, I have done my job as a scientist. You partly need vaccine because there will be herd immunity.

Ella also pointed out that 40,000 unknown viruses are existing. "10,000 viruses can hop from animal to animal and to human. What we are seeing today is only a sample. Because of its impact on economy it got more attention. We are yet to see lot many things."

He said that Bharat Biotech is the only vaccine company in the world which has BS3 production facility (Biosafety level 3).

Last month the vaccine maker said it had successfully completed interim analysis of Phase I and II trials of the vaccine and is initiating Phase-III trials in 26,000 participants.

The Hyderabad-based vaccine maker had on October 2 sought the Drug Controller General of India's (DCGI) permission to conduct phase 3 randomised double-blind placebo-controlled multicentre trial of its COVID-19 vaccine.

"We are working on another vaccine through nasal drops my feeling is by next year it will reach the population," Ella said.

Bharat Biotech in September had said it entered into a licensing agreement with Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis for a novel "chimpanzee adenovirus" (Chimpanzee adenovirus), single dose intranasal vaccine for Covid-19.

SC issues notice on plea against arrest of Kerala scribe on way to Hathras

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Uttar Pradesh Government on a plea challenging the arrest of Kerala-based journalist Siddique Kappan on his way to Hathras where a young Dalit woman had died after allegedly being gang-raped.

The top court, which has now posted the plea of Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) seeking bail for Kappan on December 20, asked the union as to why it did not approach the Allahabad High Court seeking the same relief.

"We are trying to discourage (Article) 32 petition (Writ petitions under Article 32 are directly filed before the top court). This is not a comment on the merits at all," said a bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian.

"Issue notice returnable on November 20. In the meantime, as prayed for, the petitioner (KUWJ) is allowed to serve the Standing Counsel for the respondents/State (Uttar Pradesh)," the bench said in its order.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the journalists' body, sought bail for the scribe saying

"there was nothing against the journalist in the FIR lodged at Mathura by Uttar Pradesh police. The FIR has been filed under various provisions of the IPC and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against four people having alleged links with the Popular Front of India, or PFI."

PFI had been accused in the past of funding protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act across the country earlier this year.

During the hearing, Sibal said, "The FIR does not name him (Kappan). No offences alleged. He has been in jail since October 5."

When the top court said that the journalists' body should not have directly come to the top court, Sibal responded by saying, "Your lordships have done this under Article 32 (petitions)." "We are quite aware about our powers under (Article) 32. We find there is a spate of Article 32

Muzaffarnagar, Masood Ahmed from Bahraich and Alam from Rampur.

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Dilip Ghosh vows Gujarat model, TMC criticises

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after calling Bengal a terrorist hub "worse than Kashmir" State BJP president on Monday vowed to turn the State into "Gujarat" drawing sharp counter attack from the Trinamool Congress which said that "BJP's dream will turn into its nightmare."

Exuding confidence that his party would come to power with two-third majority Ghosh said "after coming to power we will turn the wheels of development in Bengal making it another Gujarat," ruining the State had become a laggard in all respects with deteriorating law and order, education and economy.

"Today the situation is such that a State which was at the forefront of everything does not even produce IAS and IPS officers... but when the BJP will come to power we will introduce all-round development

of the State bring back its glorious past."

Ghosh's remark came a day after he condemned the Trinamool Congress Government for making Bengal into a "terror hub worse than Kashmir."

Saying that Bengal had become a hub of "terrorists and anti-social elements" Ghosh said how recently "six Al-Qaeda terrorists were arrested from Alipurduar (indicating that) a network has been formed in several places of the state. Even Bangladeshi leader Khaleda Zia has said the terrorists are being trained in India and sent to Bangladesh to create disturbance. This state has become a hub of terrorists, and anti-nationals. Such is the situation that Bengal is now worse than Kashmir with the people living in fear."

He alleged that even he had been in the hit list of the terrorists adding how he was

"attacked in Jaygaon in Alipurduar district where Rohingya Muslims are living" saying that the local political parties were providing shelter to the terrorists.

"It is very alarming that a few political parties are giving shelter to the terrorists and anti-social elements." Reacting to Ghosh's statement senior TMC leader and Minister Subroto Mukherjee said his dream would never come true. "Everyone has a right to dream but it is his duty to see that the dream does not turn into nightmare." Mukherjee said on Ghosh's winning Bengal Assembly elections in 2021.

His ministerial colleague Firhad Hakim said "there are people who are aspiring to convert Bengal into Gujarat but they have no idea of Bengali culture. Bengalis will never allow the State to become Gujarat as they don't want to be killed in encounters. People will reject BJP."

Govt allows ICRISAT to use drones for agricultural research

New Delhi: The Ministry of Civil Aviation has allowed Hyderabad-based International Crops Research Institute (ICRISAT) to use drones for agricultural research activities.

Granting the institute a "conditional" exemption from some of the rules applicable for deployment of drones, the Civil Aviation Ministry said the institute can gather data for agricultural research activities within the ICRISAT research field using remotely piloted aircraft systems or drones.

The exemption is valid for six months from the date of issuance of permission or until the full operationalisation of Digital Sky Platform (Phase-1), whichever is earlier, the release said, adding that the exemption will be valid only if all conditions and limitations are strictly adhered to.

"Drones are poised to play a big role in the agriculture sec-

tor in India especially in areas like precision agriculture, locust control and improvement in crop yield. The government is encouraging young entrepreneurs and researchers to look at ruggedized low-cost drone solutions for the over 6.6 lakh villages in India," the release quoted Amber Dubey, joint secretary in Civil Aviation Ministry, as saying.

Last month, the ministry has allowed NTPC to use drones to carry out research and inspection activities at its three power plants in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Granting the public sector unit (PSU) a "conditional exemption" from some of the drone rules, the ministry said NTPC can use drones at Vidyachal super thermal power station and Gadarwara super thermal power plant, both in Madhya Pradesh, and Sipat super thermal power project in Chhattisgarh. PNS

MAHA ACID-PETROL ATTACK DEATH

Court remands accused in 8 days police custody

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After having battled for more than 15-long hours, the victim girl Savitra D. Ankulkar died on Sunday morning at the Beed Civil Hospital, where she had been rushed to by the police on Saturday.

The motive behind the ghastly murder has not been established yet. The police have recorded the statement of the victim before her death.

The investigations have revealed that Avinash set out on a motorbike along with Savita from Pune to Shergaon late on Friday night, after promising her that he would take their native village of Shergaon village in Nanded district for Diwali. The two had stayed as live-partners in Pune before the accused offered to take her home for Diwali.

However, the accused stopped the vehicle at an isolated place near Yellambal Ghat near Beed town in Marathwada region in the small hours of Saturday.

petrol.

"First, the accused tried to strangle her. After she resisted the attempt, the accused threw acid from a bottle that he was carrying. She screamed for help. No help was forthcoming. The accused went further, removed petrol from his motorbike, doused her with it and set her on fire. Later, he pushed the burning victim girl into a ditch and fled the scene," Investigating Officer from Neknur Police Station Laxman Kende said.

According to the IO, a shepherd tending to his flock in the nearby field alerted the police at 2 pm on Saturday. "We reached the spot quickly and rushed the victim girl to the Beed Civil Hospital," Kende said.

The victim, who had sustained 50 per cent burns, succumbed to the wounds on Sunday morning.

Tamil Nadu's obsession with film politics continues

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu's search for a political savior is continuing and as on Monday it has not yielded any result. Other than MK Stalin, the DMK president, and incumbent Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy, there are no viable choices to lead the State at this juncture.

While Stalin became DMK chief only because of him being the son of Karunanidhi, the former Chief Minister who led the party for almost 50 years, Palaniswamy was elevated to the Chief Minister's post as a consensus candidate in the AIADMK in 2017. Since then the farmer from Edappadi village in Salem has established himself as the undisputed leader of the party.

Though there are no dearth of chief ministerial candidates in Tamil Nadu, the contenders themselves are not sure of their position. Vijayakanth, who had launched the DMDK in 2006 and introduced himself as Karuppu MGR (Black MGR), Tamil Nadu people are yet to accept him as a leader. The former film actor is not in the best of health and is unlikely to campaign as he is bedridden for the last one year due to many ailments.

The spiritual politics of Rajnikanth has not reached anywhere though the actor has been speaking about it since 2017. The last one heard of him was a statement in which the matinee idol said that due to medical grounds he may not be able to travel and meet the voters. "Our firm belief is that Rajnikanth would come with his political party. There is enough time for the assembly election and he is likely to make an announcement soon," said Tamilarvi Manian, a close associate of the actor.

When asked about the Covid-19 pandemic acting as the spoilsport, Manian said one need not physically travel all over Tamil Nadu for meeting voters. "The digital and visual media are there and we will make use of them." Said Manian.

Kamal Haasan, another super star, who had launched Makkal Needhi Meiam, a political outfit with Torch as its symbol came a damp squib in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Though he had declared himself as the chief minister candidate of his party, chances are that he may join the DMK front

and flash the Torch light for Stalin's route to the top post," said Sam Rajappa, veteran commentator.

Anbumani Ramadoss, son of PMK founder S Ramadoss was the chief ministerial candidate of the Vanniyar dominated outfit. Though the Vanniar constitute 25 per cent of the Tamil Nadu population, it would not be sufficient for the realization of Ramadoss' dreams. Many senior leaders like S Semmalai (AIADMK) and Durai Murugan (DMK) belong to the Vanniyar community. Wherever the community forms a major chunk of the voters, both the DMK and AIADMK field only Vanniyar candidates.

The latest to make his political dreams known is Joseph Vijay, popularly known as Thalapathi. Though he has

not openly announced his decision to launch a political career, his new venture "Master" is being la

belled as a political movie. The actor plays the role of a college teacher and is seen throwing away the black shirt which his fans interpret as a signal that he was discarding Dravidian politics. The teaser has reportedly earned 24 million likes, according to the producers of the movie. But Vijay, who is yet to make a public speech other than the one-liners scripted by story writers, has to prove to the voters that he is a leader material.

Besides these movie stars, Tamil Nadu politics is agog with names like O Panneerselvam and K A Sengottaiyan (both AIADMK)

as strong contenders for the top job.

390 more corona cases in J&K, 482 recoveries

Srinagar: Avalanche warnings were issued on Monday for four districts of Jammu & Kashmir following fresh rain and snowfall in the Union Territory.

A medium danger avalanche warning has been issued for Kupwara and Baramulla districts while a low danger warning has been issued for Bandipora and Ganderbal districts.

Officials said the warning shall remain in force during the next 48 hours.

"People are advised not to move out unnecessarily in higher reaches of these districts during the next 48 hours," an official of the provincial administration said.

The official said the danger of avalanches in higher reaches starts normally once the weather clears out.

After two days of rain and snowfall, weather in J&K has improved. Met officials said except for scattered rain/snow at isolated places, there would be no major change in general weather conditions during the next 7 days.

IANS

Avalanche warning issued for 4 J&K's dists

Khadi India's flagship CP outlet records sale of ₹1.02 crore on Gandhi Jayanti

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Overcoming the economic distress and the fear surrounding the Corona pandemic this festive season, the flagship Khadi India outlet here has crossed the single-day sales figure of Rs 1 crore four times since October 2 this year at Connaught Place in the national capital.

"In just 40 days since October 2 this year, Khadi's single-day sales figure has crossed the Rs 1 crore mark for 4 times at the flagship Khadi India outlet at Connaught Place in New Delhi," the MSME said. On November 13, the total sales at this outlet stood at Rs 1.11 crore, the highest single-day sale figure recorded this year.

Since business activities resumed after the lockdown, Khadi sales figure touched Rs 1.02 crore on Gandhi Jayanti (October 2) this year, followed by Rs 1.05 crore sales on October 24 and Rs 1.06 crore on November 7. In 2018 too single-day sales had crossed the Rs 1 crore mark on four occasions, with the highest single-day sale for the year touching Rs 1.25 crore on October 13. Khadi's highest ever single-day sale was recorded at Rs 1.27 crore on October 2, 2019.

KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena attributed the massive sale figures to the frequent appeals of the Prime Minister to promote "Swadeshi", particularly Khadi

KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena attributed the massive sale figures to the frequent appeals of the Prime Minister to promote "Swadeshi", particularly Khadi. "It is heartening to see a large number of Khadi lovers coming out to support artisans who form the backbone of the Khadi and Village Industries sectors. Despite the pandemic, Khadi artisans kept the production activities going in full vigor and the fellow countrymen have reciprocated with the same zeal," Saxena said, adding despite the economic slowdown, KVIC has managed to maintain the pace of Khadi's growth.

The lockdown had a severe bearing on the livelihood of Khadi artisans but the Prime Minister's appeal for "Atmanirbhar Bharat" and "Vocal for Local" infused a new life into the local manufacturing particularly the Khadi and Village Industries sectors.

REOPENING OF TEMPLES & PLACES OF WORSHIP IN MAHA NCP slams BJP's bid to claim credit, says it was PM who ordered temple closure

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

As the temples and other places of worship reopened in Maharashtra on Monday after a gap of seven months on Monday, the ruling Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) slammed the Opposition BJP for its efforts to claim credit for the development, by saying that it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had ordered the closure of temples during the lockdown.

As the BJP celebrated the reopening of temples as "Anandotsav" in different parts of the state and dubbed the development as a victory of devotees', Maharashtra NCP president and senior minister Jayant Patil slammed the principal Opposition party, by saying: "The BJP tries to politicise each and everything. The BJP can in no way hog credit for reopening of temples. If anything, the credit for the development goes to the chief minister and Maharashtra government".

"A few months ago, the BJP workers – unmindful of the continued Coronavirus crisis – went in front of temples and staged a protest by banging thalis. Had they given us suggestions on how to reduce the Coronavirus, I would have understood. But, their effort was to see that they could contribute to the increase in the number of infections. When

the BJP was in the Opposition, we quietly heard what Narendra Modi had to say then in this kind of situation. Our stand was then and now is that we do not want to indulge in politics on this kind of an issue. The Coronavirus crisis has affected the entire world. Here, the BJP indulges in politics on this issue," Patil said.

Earlier, in a statement issued here, State BJP president Chandrakant Patil said: "The MVA government's decision to reopen temples and other places of worship is a victory of the devotees' faith".

Debunking chief minister Uddhab Thackeray's statement that the reopening of religious places was not a government order, but was being done as the wish of the Almighty, Chandrakant Patil said, as he appealed to the devotees to follow Covid-19 protocols while visiting temples in future.

While making an announcement about the reopening of places of worship with a note of caution, Maharashtra chief minister Uddhab Thackeray had said on Saturday: "We should not forget that the demon Coronavirus is still in our midst. Even though that there has been some respite, we can ill-afford to be complacent.

Citizens need to follow discipline when the places of worship reopen."

Uddhab had said that though all places of religious worship remained during the pandemic months, God was taking care of all devotees in the form of doctors, nurses and other health staff.

The chief minister said that the people from religious faiths celebrated Ganesh Chaturthi, Navratri and Pandharpur wari (annual pilgrimage), Eid, Mount Mary etc by observing discipline, restraint and following Covid-19 protocol norms enforced by the state government.

"People will have to avoid crowding at the places of worship. The reopening of religious places is not a government order, but is being done as the wish of the Almighty. The devotees will have to leave their shoes outside, while the wearing of masks is mandatory... If we follow discipline, we will get God's blessings," the chief minister said.

Chilly winds, rain in south Karnataka dampen festive spirit

Bengaluru: With the north-east monsoon setting in Karnataka, chilly winds and rains turned this year's festive season wet in the state's southern region, including Bengaluru, said a weather official on Monday.

As part of the north-east monsoon, a trough developed in the south-east Bay of Bengal leading to a low-pressure depression and causing rains in the state's southern region, including Bengaluru," Bengaluru weather scientist C. N. Prabhu told IANS.

Within days after the extended south-west monsoon ended on October 28, the south-east monsoon activated during the first week of November resulting in widespread rainfall from Kolar to Chamarajanagar in the state's old Mysuru region. "A cloudy sky, strong surface winds and moderate rains are the forecast for this week in

Aligarh: ₹10 cr of fireworks burnt on Diwali

Aligarh: On Diwali, around Rs 10 crore fireworks smoke blew in the environment which includes the possibility of firecrackers worth 8 crore rupees in the city itself. The elders also set off fireworks with the children. People enjoyed the colorful fireworks. The noise of firecrackers kept echoing till late at night.

For more than two decades, exhibition ground has the city's only cracker market and this year 200 shops got licenses which are 50 less than last year, but from the city to the village, unlicensed shops also sold a lot of fireworks. According to the people, fireworks worth about Rs 10 crore have been sold from all these shops. The fireworks market in Atrauli, Hardaugarh were also buzzing. The city also witnessed a rush of buyers from wholesalers. On Diwali, a single person bought fireworks ranging from 5 to 15 thousand rupees.

Over 40 children burnt with firecrackers, one serious in Aligarh

PNS ■ ALIGARH

On the night of Diwali, over 40 children and young people have been burnt. A 9-year-old child from Basai village is seriously burnt and has severe injuries in his eye. Doctors are recommending the operation.

9-year-old Abhay, son of Pradeep Kumar, a resident of Basai village, burnt severely during fireworks on Diwali. The family rushed to Gandhi Eye Hospital with the child where doctors have recommended the operation. Additionally, Sandhya of Igla, Mohit of Atrauli, 9-year-old Lalit of Jirauli, 16-year-old Brij of Gabbhan, 13-year-old Vishal of Hathras, 18-year-old Shivam of New Avatar Nagar, the 15-year-old of Kuldeep Bihar, 8-year-old Gangadeep of Bhagwanagar, Kasganj. 10-year-old Mayank reached Gandhi Eye Hospital.

Noise and air pollution level crossed the standard level

Aligarh: Aligarh Fireworks' noise and smoke pollution had made the environment sick on Diwali. The district recorded 270.93 micrograms per cubic meter PM 10 and 69.9 micrograms per cubic meter PM 2.5, which is higher than the standard level. Similarly, a maximum of 85.2 dB noise pollution has been recorded.

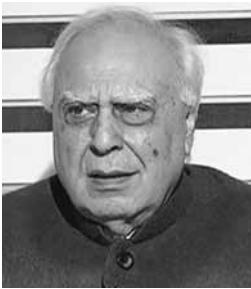
Before Diwali, with the rise in pollution levels in the cities including Delhi & NCR, people were hoping that this time the people will take control of the use of firecrackers in the district.



A pair of painted storks at the Alipore Zoo, in Kolkata on Monday

Congress a bleakhouse

Kapil Sibal pushes for CWC elections again, says party not people's choice anymore and needs actionable revival plan



The problem with the Congress is that anybody with a prescriptive formula to revive it is usually considered a rebel than a well-meaning loyalist or dismissed as a defector, usually to the other national party. It matters little that in the process of losing some of its best men and women, it is slowly losing its relevance as a national party, and now even as a regional party, trailing at third and fourth positions. In fact, if the status quo continues, then the BJP would be the only national party in the country and the Congress would be left with a rump of its own making. Yet the leadership is unmoved as it suffers debacle after debacle in each election with no attempt to even discuss the real state of affairs except finding a scapegoat or traitor to the cause. The last particularly applies to ambitious young leaders who want legacy over oblivion. And considering the way 23 of the party's senior loyalists were sidelined in August for writing a "dissent letter" and pleading for inner-party democracy, the party's first family, the Gandhis, have decided that their gatekeeping writ, that is no longer earned but rests solely on history, will not be challenged even if the party hurtles down the road to perdition. Still one of the letter writers, Kapil Sibal, has again renewed calls to rescue the moribund party after its dismal performance in the Bihar Assembly elections. The Congress managed to win only 19 of the 70 seats it contested and given its poor rate of conversion despite an anti-incumbency wave, prevented its alliance partner, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), from forming the Government. The RJD went on to become the single-largest party, winning 75 seats despite losing Nitish Kumar to the BJP, being certainly less-resourced than the national party and the belated takeoff by a hastily-schooled Tejashwi Yadav. RJD leaders are already complaining about the Congress being the weakest link, not even managing to swerve the upper castes or Dalits, the latter's traditional votebank, in its favour. They even blame its half-heartedness for the rout. And the Congress is predictably making excuses that the 70 seats were not exactly its strongholds instead of calling a spade a spade. Why didn't it go for fewer seats that it could manage? But Sibal has stuck his neck out and said that people everywhere, not just in Bihar, "obviously don't consider the Congress to be an effective alternative." He said that the party had even lost the opportunity to introspect as "the writing is on the wall" after it lost all the byelections in Gujarat and got less than two per cent of the votes in some seats in Uttar Pradesh. He tossed the chaos back to the leadership, saying it has the answers but was just not willing to listen. And he argued for basic reform — transforming the Congress Working Committee (CWC) from a nominated panel of entitled peers to an elected, representative one that would keep the grassroots worker invested in the party.

But the Gandhis, fearing their irrelevance, would rather revel in their fading aura than prop up organisational builders or give them a seat at the high table. Sibal is the only one of the original letter writers to have revived the fighting spirit ever since party president Sonia Gandhi neutralised them with sycophants. While this may have served the dynastic cause, what Sonia doesn't realise is that the Congress worker, in a politically empowered India, sees no potential in the leadership of her children but would certainly like to rebuild the party. The voter has already rejected the Gandhi scions, so no magic can be worked there through activism and *padyatras*. Through their letter, the leaders had only suggested ways and means of reviving the Congress, that too by staying within the provisions and democratic processes already laid down in the party's constitution. The Congress last held CWC elections in 1998 and understandably this is the reason for the turmoil and impatience as worthy leaders have no say whatsoever. They are cut off by a sedimentary layer of courtiers, who are interested in simply playing along as long as their posts are secure. There's no doubt that the central leadership has had little role to play in States where the party is in power or is an alliance partner. That success purely goes to the solidity of State leaders like Capt Amarinder Singh, who have been fairly autonomous in their ways and cannot be ignored. Those who left the party because they were stifled have proved their credentials, like Jyotiraditya Scindia did in the Madhya Pradesh bypolls, helping the BJP pick up more than a fair share of seats. If the Congress wants to stick around, this is its last chance to self-correct, rise above ego, value honest counsel and appear selfless in the interest of a larger political legacy. Unless its leadership just wants to exist on the political map, like most Independents do, without really caring for growing roots and branches. Already its prospective allies in the Bengal and Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, the Left and the DMK, are a worried lot about its vote-cutting rather than vote-harvesting capacity. Particularly in Bengal, it would end up being spoiler, assuming it does perform, or boost the BJP's polarisation agenda. And if Rahul Gandhi is again foisted as party president come January, then dynastic stubbornness would cost the party dear. For there's no guarantee that the rank and file would unanimously elect him as one.

Civil disobedience

Thanks to the weak application of rules, breaking the law is a way of life for most of us. So the cracker ban failed



On Sunday evening, after a day when the dirt and pollution from thousands of spent firecrackers filled the air in the National Capital Region (NCR), the gods smiled down and made it rain. It wasn't much but still enough to drive the dust away and make the air breathable again. There was a firecracker ban in place seeing how the air quality had been over the past month but many denizens ignored it. Some called them "suicide bombers" for adding to the pollution but many dubbed them as heroes for defying the ban and blowing crackers anyway. The latter group argued that firecrackers would not significantly add to pollution since farmers burning rice stubble on their fields were the primary culprits. Many of these people also attributed the rains to divine intervention.

Yes, burning firecrackers is a traditional way of celebrating Diwali but tradition should not become a victim to common sense. Firecrackers add noxious nitrogen oxides, sulphur and potassium into the atmosphere. A complete ban in Delhi and its surrounding areas, however, was not worth its weight on the paper it was signed on because it was going to be disobeyed any which way. Many took gleeful joy at their law-breaking. This should not come as any surprise to those in India, where thanks to the weak application of rules, civil disobedience is a way of life for most of us. You see it in the way we drive on our roads where rules are deemed optional and common sense vanishes in many. Helmet usage, something that enhances safety, is considered optional even though there are large fines. The lack of any fear of punishment and pliable fines for the privileged mean that inconveniences are marginal. What else can explain the continuing instances of extreme sexual violence even though in some cases the offender ought to be punishable by death? It may be for sociologists to come up with theories as to why this almost brazen attitude towards the law is so prevalent in India and other nations in the neighbourhood. Some might even attribute it to the movement for Independence, where casual law-breaking was almost encouraged and the volume of cases overwhelmed the authorities. It is not just about firecrackers here, it is about making citizens realise the importance of law and order. We cannot celebrate one instance of blaze law-breaking and decry the helplessness of authorities in another instance. In normal times, this would be impossible but we now have a leader who commands a mandate and respect among the population and the Bihar elections proved that. It is time that Narendra Modi stepped up to the plate and asked that his fellow Indians become better citizens. And initiated judicial and police reforms.

A biased viewpoint

Western notions of democracy, where the authors propound theories convenient to them, need to be challenged



A SURYA PRAKASH

A Swedish Institute, which claims to study democracies around the world, has downgraded India and put it far below several nations, many of whom lack the essentials of democracy like secularism, separation of state and religion and equality before law, all of which are firmly embedded in our Constitution.

The *Democracy Report 2020* has been released by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), a research institute based in the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. It claims that "it has a nuanced approach to measuring democracy – historical, multi-dimensional and disaggregated, employing state-of-the-art methodology." Each of these claims needs to be tested.

The report makes a startling claim that India "is on the verge of losing its status as a democracy due to the severely shrinking space for the media, civil society and the Opposition under Prime Minister Modi's government." On the other hand, the best democracies are supposedly Denmark, Estonia, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway. India is at a lowly number 90. This report must be denounced lock, stock and barrel for the following reasons.

Let us examine the claim that the media space is "severely shrinking" in India after Mr Modi became Prime Minister. You will find this laughable in the light of the reports of the Registrar-General of Newspapers in India and other agencies which track media growth. India has witnessed a media boom over the last decade and the figures for the last six years should make anyone's jaw drop. The circulation of daily newspapers in India in 2014 was 150 million copies. By the year 2018, it had jumped to 240 million copies. There are about 250 million households in the country and of them as many as 160 million households had television sets in 2014. By the year 2018, this figure was closer to 200 million.

But this growth story extends beyond mainstream media. There has been an exponential growth in the social media in recent years and this is reflected in the number of internet connections, which has spiralled from 150 million in the year 2014 to over 500 million five years hence.

Further, just take a look at the shrill debates that are on in Indian news television programmes every



evening and the talking heads representing different political and social voices trying to out-shout each other and you will realise that our democracy has become too argumentative, somewhere even bordering on chaos. So, where is this decline of democracy?

Finally, let us look at the social media. Not a week passes without the anti-Modi lobby running hashtags like "#NarendraModiWorstPrimeMinister" on Twitter regularly and thousands of followers of political parties opposed to him endorsing this line or adding their own abusive comments or cartoons. Therefore, the charge that freedom of expression is under severe threat in the country is ridiculous and smacks of uninformed opinion. Also, in view of all this evidence, anyone who says that "media space is shrinking" in India and that civil society and the "Opposition" are stifled, needs to get his head examined.

The second defect in the report is that it attributes whatever deficiencies it has found vis-a-vis freedom of expression to Modi. This is downright irresponsible for the reasons that have been cited above and also from a constitutional point of view. Obviously, the report is written by individuals who are totally oblivious of India's constitutional scheme. India is a federal republic in the sense that the legislative and executive powers are shared between the Union and the governments in the States and the Constitution itself spells out the subjects that are allotted to both. Further, neither Modi nor his party and the coalition to which it belongs govern all the 28 States and eight Union Territories in the country. About

half of these States are ruled by political parties and coalitions, which are opposed to his party. At last count, there were 42 political parties governing these States.

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THE CIRCULATION OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA IN 2014 WAS 150 MILLION COPIES. BY 2018, IT HAD JUMPED TO 240 MILLION COPIES. THERE ARE ABOUT 250 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS IN THE COUNTRY AND AS MANY AS 160 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS HAD TELEVISION SETS IN 2014. BY 2018, THIS FIGURE WAS CLOSER TO 200 MILLION. WOULD WE STILL SAY THE MEDIA SPACE HAS SHRUNK?

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the head of State "shall be a king or queen." More importantly, the Constitution says the king or queen cannot be prosecuted for his or her actions, which means equality before law (Article 14 in our Constitution) has no place in Sweden. Further, the Constitution says the king "shall always profess the pure evangelical faith." It also does not allow the prince or princess to marry at will. They need government permission to do so! Therefore, Sweden is not a republic, it is not a secular State as its head of State is wedded to a church. Equality before law is also absent because the king cannot be censured or accused.

Also, a significant responsibility given to the States by the Constitution is maintenance of "law and order," which means States are responsible for the administration of the criminal justice system. Therefore, when a State Government registers a case against a journalist for defamation etc, the Union has nothing to do with it. In recent times, there have been challenges to media freedom in some States, several of whom are run by trenchant critics of Modi.

Having examined the Constitutions of dozens of nations, this writer is of the view that a pristine democracy must contain the following eight fundamentals: An inviolable commitment to freedom of expression and freedom of conscience; an unambiguous commitment to secularism; separation of religion and state; republican form of government; constitutional right to equality before law; gender equality; right to life and personal liberty; and universal adult suffrage. All these eight essentials exist in the Indian Constitution.

Now let us look at the V-Dem report and the countries ahead of India. Denmark is the best democracy according to this report. But is it? Its Constitution says that the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is based on the Holy Bible, "shall be the established church of Denmark." Further, "the State has a duty to support the Church of Denmark financially and in other ways." Sweden is Number 3 but it is not a republic. Its Constitution says

other nations which have been put ahead of India include Papua New Guinea, a nation based on Christian principles, and Argentina, where the federal government supports the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion.

India is not only a secular, democratic nation but also the most vibrant and diverse in the world. It has the "secular" ideal embedded in the Preamble of its Constitution. It is home to all religions, its population is ethnically diverse and its people speak 122 languages and 170 dialects.

Therefore, those who seek to run down India are actually running down democracy itself. These Western notions of "democracy," where the authors propound theories convenient to them, need to be challenged. Indians need to stand up and say, "Don't lecture us – your theories have a strong stench of racism and Christian communalism."

(The writer is an author specialising in democracy studies. Views expressed are personal)

SOUNDBITE

We just approved new measures that should allow us to face this new wave of infections, which is severely affecting not only Italy but the whole of Europe.



Italian Prime Minister —Giuseppe Conte

Dream the impossible and speak it into existence. You have to work for it, you have to chase it and never give up, and never doubt yourself.

F1 driver —Lewis Hamilton

Whatever happens in the future, who knows, which administration will be, I guess time will tell.

US President —Donald Trump

I want to do deep sea diving and see the corals. I have been hearing that corals are going to die soon and they are already considered extinct in many terrains.

Actor —Abhishek Banerjee

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India must be wary of future intrusions



It is hoped that the agreement between India and China on the step-by-step process of disengagement of troops from all major friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) happens in a time-bound manner. And helps resolve the protracted border standoff between the armies of the two countries. This development comes two months after the Moscow meeting during which the External Affairs Ministers of both the nations finalised a five-point roadmap for establishing peace in eastern Ladakh.

Despite China's brazen incursions, it has blamed India for abetting hostilities and tried to justify its actions by invoking the unilaterally defined 1959 LAC. New Delhi's stand on the issue helped it receive support from the US and the international community. However, given the harsh winters and the ongoing pandemic, the two countries must enter into a comprehensive peace pact that applies to the entire LAC, including the disputed Delsang plains. Given that China may devise crooked ways to make India believe that it is de-escalating,

right-wing Hindutva zealots to reiterate their unflattering view of Rahul. Obama was ignorant of Indian politics to belittle a leader who stands for the nation's long-cherished values and fights for them. Hopefully, his memoir does not eulogise leaders in India who thrive on polarising society.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

anced. Now, digital content creators will have to tread a tight rope while bearing the backlash in mind they might face. Sadly, this is yet another attempt to control one's freedom of expression.

Rahul Chouhan
Ujjain

Ceasefire violations

Sir — India has objected to the ceasefire violations by Pakistan. The Charge d'Affaires of the High Commission of Pakistan was summoned by the Ministry of External Affairs and a strong protest was lodged over unprovoked ceasefire violations by Pakistani forces on multiple sectors along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir on November 13, resulting in the death of four innocent civilians and serious injuries to 19 others. Pakistan must respect the bilateral agreements between the two nations and not allow any territory under its control to be used for terrorism against India in any manner.

Amrit Singh Kushwaha
Satna

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN**Bengal set for a clash of Titans**

While a Modi versus Mamata battle may have worked well for the BJP at the Lok Sabha level, it may not be that easy at the State level



KALYANI SHANKAR

West Bengal is moving towards a personality clash between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the forthcoming Assembly elections. Both have evolved as cult figures over the years. With no tall State leaders in Bengal, the BJP is following its pet formula of a battle between a regional heavyweight and the BJP mascot Modi. It has tried this formula out in some States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra and Haryana, with mixed success. On the face of it, next year's Assembly polls to five States — West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry will be a litmus test for the BJP's expansion plans. But the saffron party's main focus is on West Bengal where the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) is well-entrenched since 2011, when Mamata ousted the CPI(M) which had ruled the State for three decades. Mamata will be seeking a third term in power now.

While a Modi versus Mamata battle may have worked well for the BJP at the Lok Sabha level, it may not be that easy at the State level. For instance, Mamata or "Didi" as she is fondly called, is not like other regional leaders. She is a firebrand leader and there is a method to her madness. She has reduced other Opposition parties like the CPI(M) and the Congress to "zero" in the past decade and is a fierce street fighter. Besides, for more than 45 years, the State has been anti-Centre, which might help Mamata.

On its part, the BJP is upbeat since its performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in Bengal was impressive. It won 18 of the 42 seats, just four less than the ruling TMC. Significantly, the BJP's vote share in the State increased to over 40 per cent in 2019 from a mere two per cent in the 2011 Assembly polls, emerging as the number two party in the State.

The Congress and the CPI(M) had fought the 2016 Assembly elections together, managing to win 76 of the 294 seats and accounting for almost 39 per cent of the vote share. They had, however, split ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. This time around, the CPI(M) central committee has given the go ahead for a poll tie-up with all secular parties, including the Congress.

The 2021 election, however, will be difficult for the ruling TMC. The BJP has the advantage of being an "untested challenger." As a strategy, the BJP is trying to mobilise the anti-incumbency factor against Didi and consolidating Hindu votes. Mamata's "Paribartan (change)" of 2011 is BJP's slogan today. It is focussing on issues like graft, commissions and the syndicate raj. The TMC's alleged corruption seems to be the main poll plank of the BJP. "Aamaar Poribaar, BJP Poribaar (My family, BJP family)" is the saffron party's current slogan. It aims to capture the youth through a social media campaign called "Reboot Kolkata" referring to the city's glorious past. The party is using its army of WhatsApp workers to consolidate the Hindu vote as there are two more major parties in the race as well — the Congress and the CPI(M). However, Mamata's biggest strength lies in her image as a developmental Chief Minister, which she had created post-Singur and Nandigram with schemes ranging from 'Kanyashree' or distribution of cycles to girls of underprivileged families, distribution of rice at a low price, development of roads and so on. During the lockdown, she launched the campaign "Banglar Gorbo Mamata (Bengal's pride Mamata)", which involves various meetings with voters, workers and prominent Bengali personalities. The development schemes and her populist image might stand her in good stead.

Mamata has a ready-made issue after Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) would be implemented in Bengal ahead of the Assembly polls. The TMC is planning multiple protests against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The TMC, Left and the Congress are also expected to come together and pass a resolution against the NRC in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Mamata's advantage is her formidable minority base that forms 28 per cent of the population. They matter in 70 to 80 seats. As the BJP plans to polarise the electorate on a communal basis, Mamata will have to guard against the splitting of the minority votes. The AIMIM (All-India Majlis-e-Sho'ra-e-Ul-Muslimeen), which won five seats in Bihar, is planning to contest in Bengal too, which could cut into the Muslim votes. It is too early to predict the West Bengal election scene as clarity will emerge nearer the polls but violence could be expected. An important issue would be how the public perceives the performance of the Mamata Government on containing the pandemic, as it is a burning issue.

The BJP has not won any State since the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. It lost Maharashtra even after emerging as the single-largest party because of the ego clash with its long-time partner, the Shiv Sena. In the end, the Sena, NCP and the Congress coalition formed the Government. A little ray of sunshine was the fall of the Congress Government in Madhya Pradesh as the BJP installed its Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan after pulling down the Kamal Nath Government. Therefore, winning big in Bihar elections was important for the party and winning Bengal will mean the BJP will continue its eastward expansion.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

analysis

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POINT COUNTER POINT

HE (JOE BIDEN) WON BECAUSE THE ELECTION WAS RIGGED. I CONCEDE NOTHING! WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO. THIS WAS A RIGGED ELECTION.

—US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP



IT WAS GOOD ACTUALLY TO SEE PRESIDENT TRUMP TWEET OUT THAT (BIDEN) WON. I THINK THAT'S THE START OF AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

— REPUBLICAN GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS ASA HUTCHINSON

Nix priority sector lending

The policy — a legacy of the socialist era — has led to blatant misuse and misappropriation of funds and is far from helping those for whom it is intended



UTTAM GUPTA

On September 4, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced changes in the norms for priority sector lending (PSL) with the stated objective of "enabling better credit penetration to credit-deficient areas, increase in lending to small and marginal farmers and boosting credit to renewable energy and health infrastructure." Under PSL, the RBI mandates a certain percentage of a bank's lendable resources to specified areas.

The policy — a legacy of the socialist era — has led to blatant misuse and misappropriation of funds and is far from helping the most vulnerable groups and sectors for whom it is intended. It needs to go as today the banking network is capable of meeting credit needs of all, provided the sector is left itself. However, faced with contraction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth by a whopping 23.9 per cent and credit growth at a low of 6.7 per cent during the first quarter (Q1) of the current financial year (FY), the RBI introduced changes in the norms for PSL. But what is the connection between PSL and growth?

For several decades, successive governments followed a policy of directing banking credit to specified sectors, which had remained neglected for long and needed the required push to catch up with the country's growing economy. The RBI mandates that a certain percentage of a bank's Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) or lendable resources be given for PSL. For commercial banks, including foreign banks, this is 40 per cent, while regional rural banks (RRBs) and small finance banks (SFBs) are required to allocate a whopping 75 per cent for PSL. Within the over 40 per cent limit, there are sub-limits; for instance, agriculture gets 18 per cent of the ANBC. Although the guidelines do not lay down any preferential rate of interest for PSLs per se, generally such loans are "cheaper" and "more accessible." The chargeable rate of interest is as per the RBI's directives and varies from sector to sector.

As per the RBI's directive, a short-term crop loan of up to ₹3,00,000 (for animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries farmers, this limit is ₹2,00,000) is available at a subsidised interest rate of seven per cent; an additional incentive of three per cent is provided for prompt payment. The effective interest cost works out to only four per cent. To make it happen, the Union Government offers to banks interest subvention of two per cent per annum and prompt repayment incentive (PRI) of three per cent. This comes at a huge cost to the exchequer (during 2019-20, the Government spent ₹18,000 crore). The banks, too, share a good portion of the cost as reimbursement given by the Centre does not fully cover the interest subsidy extended by them to farmers (on a total farm loan of about ₹13,00,000 crore given during 2019-20, interest subvention at the rate of two per cent alone works out to about ₹26,000 crore against a budgetary support of only ₹18,000 crore. If we include PRI, the shortfall would be even higher). It is, therefore, natural to ask whether farmers are actually deriving the intended benefit?

According to a study by the RBI's internal working group, in several States, the quantum of crop loan was found to be higher than the value of all agricultural inputs (in Andhra Pradesh, during 2015-2017, this was 7.5 times the value of agri-inputs). Considering that crop loans are taken mostly for buying agricultural inputs, when the value of the former exceeds the latter, it clearly points towards diver-

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PSL NEEDS TO GO. OUR BANKS SHOULD ENJOY THE FREEDOM TO LEND AND FOCUS MORE ON CONDUCTING DUE DILIGENCE, CREDIT APPRAISAL, HAND-HOLDING OF BORROWERS AND MONITORING FUND USE. FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE, THE GOVERNMENT MAY GIVE INTEREST SUBSIDY BUT THAT SHOULD BE DIRECTLY CREDITED TO THEIR BANK ACCOUNTS

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sion of funds to non-farm uses. Even out of credit that flows to agriculture, a disproportionately high share is cornered by large farmers *viz.* those with farms over 10 hectares. During 2016-17, large farmers, who account for 0.6 per cent of the total number, got away with 41 per cent of the agri-credit. Semi-medium and medium farmers, owning between two-10 hectares (they are 13.2 per cent of all farmers) get bulk of the balance 59 per cent agri-credit. Small and marginal farmers with holdings up to two hectares (they are 86.2 per cent) get very little; in fact, nearly 41 per cent of them don't even have access to banks.

Asset creation in agriculture holds the key to sustainable increase in the farmers' income. Yet, the share of investment credit in total farm credit is only 25 per cent (down from 50 per cent in 2000). A big chunk of this also goes to medium and large farmers. According to the committee on "Status of Farmers' Income: Strategies for Accelerated Growth," that was set up to identify ways to double farmers' income, small and marginal farmers finance 30.8 per cent and 52.1 per cent of their investment in assets through informal sources *viz.* moneylenders, traders and input dealers (albeit at high interest rate) and so on, as they don't have access to banks.

The irony is that large, medium and semi-medium farmers, having borrowed from banks at such low rates (four per cent), further lend this money to small and marginal farmers at a much higher rate, thereby making a huge profit. This is clearly a case of better off farmers and even non-farmers profiteering from the State largesse, riding piggyback on the most vulnerable for whom it is meant.

The misuse is rampant even in other areas of PSL, say the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector, which gets 7.5 per cent of bank

lending. Yet, our policy-makers continue with PSL and keep adding more and more sectors under its ambit and shuffling the limit under each. Thus, there are a host of other categories such as export, education, housing, health, social infrastructure, renewable energy and now, start-ups.

In September, the RBI increased the targets for small and marginal farmers from the existing eight per cent of the ANBC to 12 per cent, applicable from 2020-21 onward. It also increased credit limit for farmers producers organisations (FPOs) and farmers producers companies (FPCs) to ₹2 crore per borrowing entity. The moot point here is when already the subsidised credit is not reaching where it ought to be reaching, what is the use of pouring more in? From FY 2021-22, a higher weightage of 125 per cent would be assigned to incremental priority sector credit in the identified districts, where the per capita PSL is less than ₹6,000, and a lower weight of 90 per cent would be assigned for incremental priority sector credit in the identified districts, where the per capita PSL is more than ₹25,000. This is intended to help 184 districts with low per capita PSL credit flow. Will things improve merely by assigning higher weightage?

To give a boost to renewable energy, the RBI has increased the limits for priority sector lending. Thus, loans up to ₹30 crore per borrower for solar-based and biomass-based power generators, windmills, micro-hydel plants and so on will now be eligible for PSL (up from ₹15 crore). Likewise, the limit for loan for building healthcare facilities, including those under Ayushman Bharat in Tier-II to Tier-VI centres, has been increased from ₹5 crore per borrower to ₹10 crore. Start-ups, which conform to the definition laid down by the Ministry of Commerce and are engaged in activities other than agri-

culture and MSMEs, can avail loans up to ₹50 crore under the PSL. What is the sanctity of these limits? Is it the case that an entity which needs ₹31 crore for setting up a solar-based plant won't be eligible for PSL? Or, the application of a start-up needing a loan of ₹51 crore will be rejected. This is bizarre.

Putting in place such a system brings in a lot of discretion and gives the bank manager or officials a lot of room to manoeuvre. From the perspective of the borrower, every aspirant — irrespective of his/her scale of operation — will play with numbers to keep his/her borrowing proposal within the threshold. This is the surest invitation to nepotism and corruption.

To conclude, the extant highly convoluted system of "directed lending," specifying targets for sectors in a typical top-down approach that keeps bank officials busy with target fulfillment and compliances, is pregnant with blatant misuse and misappropriation of funds. It is unlikely to serve the desired objective of helping the most vulnerable groups for whom it is intended. At the same time, it imposes a huge collateral damage.

For instance, of the outstanding bank credit of about ₹100,00,000 crore, when 40 per cent or ₹40,00,000 crore is PSL given at a subsidised interest rate, banks are bound to charge more on the remaining 60 per cent to remain viable. This raises the cost of capital to all those enterprises.

PSL needs to go. Banks should enjoy the freedom to lend and focus more on conducting due diligence, credit appraisal, hand-holding of borrowers, and monitoring fund use. For the most vulnerable, the Government may give interest subsidy but that should be directly credited to their bank accounts.

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

Tollywood must blend business with craft

Bollywood in Mumbai would have been neither as rich nor gifted without the many bounties of Bengal, like the late Soumitra Chatterjee



PRAFULL GORADIA

Having seen a few of Soumitra Chatterjee-led films, I cannot forget him, or conceptually, Tollywood as a whole. The only film studio I have seen was at Tollygunge in the days when the actor had to wear a light blue *dhoti* so that it showed up as white on the screen. Bollywood in Mumbai would have been neither as rich nor gifted without the many bounties of Bengal, like the late Soumitra Chatterjee.

There was Anil Biswas, who discovered Talat Mahmood, the silken voice; even Talat was first discovered singing Bengali songs as Tapan Kumar

on All India Radio, Kolkata (called Calcutta in those days). There were the unforgettable Hemant Kumar, the versatile Manna Dey and many other artistes, musicians and directors. The wonderment that these men and women, born, bred and having turned artistes in Kolkata, came to what was then called Bombay (the Mumbai of today) to blossom. Arguably, the proudest name of Indian filmdom has been the late Satyajit Ray, India's only Oscar-winning film-maker. Yet, it is Bollywood that has flourished whereas Tollywood has merely survived. What makes this paradox viable?

Tollywood is art plus art, while Bollywood is craft plus business. In some ways, Tollywood reflects the essence of what has been the Bengali elite for the best part of two centuries. To begin with, it was presumed that theatre and cinema were for the classes, while for the masses, the answer was the *jatra* (a popular folk-theatre). A simple song from a popular movie called *Harano Sur* appealed

to most listeners. I tried it once with the servants, also of the neighbourhood, but their response was cool. The song was sung on screen by Suchitra Sen: "Aykhaar bolo, tumi je aamar."

For the Bengali ethos, the businessman was a "byabashadar" and the "banik" was an OBC, unlike northern and western India, where he is a twice born and permitted to wear the sacred thread. My belief is that Tollywood film-making has been influenced by this ethos.

Once, when the Rajya Sabha proceedings were awaited to begin, I got a chance to have a 15-minute chat with Mrinal Sen, who has been rated second only to the distinguished Satyajit Ray. Among the two or three questions I happened to pose, one was why Bengali film themes seldom cater to the masses, although they are often about poor people. His reply was that, "When we began, it was presumed that our market was not large enough like the Hindi cinema." When I pointed out that West Bengal plus



Bangladesh would be 20 crore people, he was slightly taken aback and merely said, "We must think about it." My impression is that many a film was a reflection of the director's choice without sufficient consideration for what the audience would love to watch. When the director and the audience happened to coalesce, the film would be a hit. The Bengali language is melody when spoken and

probably poetry when written. So far wonderful; but it has in the past discouraged even prime ministerial aspirants from learning Hindi with any degree of accuracy.

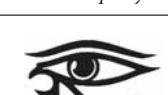
The late Jyoti Basu, Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Pranab Mukherjee could not speak Hindi spontaneously. Priya Ranjan Dasmuni was the first Bengali I heard speaking in Hindi. Any educated person among the elite spoke English. The second emotional preference was for French. Now, no doubt things are changing as we have heard Babul Supriyo, Minister Of State in the Narendra Modi Government, speaking fluent Hindi.

The West Bengal economy does need a boost and the film industry could well be the one to bring in employment. It does not require much investment by the State and Bengalis generally are naturally artistic, be it in acting, music and what not. The only real requirement is that of attitude and priority. Bengali filmmakers must take into account that all

films are not media of artistic expression. Most of them must have a large dose of popular entertainment, too. The market extends from West Bengal to Bangladesh and several districts of Assam. Suitable movies in Bengali could be dubbed in Hindi and other languages, which could extend the market considerably.

Remember, the film industry in India began with Kolkata at its centre, with New Theatres founded by Birendranath Sircar and the great Kundan Lal Saigal as its outstanding star. Incidentally, Saigal had come to Kolkata from Punjab. He picked up Bengali quite well and acted in seven Bengali films, produced by New Theatres. Rabindranath Tagore first heard Saigal before giving consent for the first time to a non-Bengali singing his songs. Saigal endeared himself to the whole of Bengal through his 30 Bengali songs.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. Views expressed are personal)

**SCIENCE LOSES TO PROFIT MARGINS**

The technology behind the COVID-19 vaccine was not of interest to big pharma until huge sums could be made from it. That is not a way to advance science. It has been stifled by the unwillingness of governments and companies to fund technology that doesn't lead to commercial advantage.

(The Guardian editorial)

Trump again refuses to concede

Washington: President Donald Trump on Monday again refused to acknowledge his defeat by Democrat challenger Joe Biden and insisted that he "won" the November 3 presidential election.

"I won the Election!"

Trump tweeted on Monday.

The tweet was flagged by the social networking site, which said, "Official sources called this election differently".

The tweet was not in the caps unlike earlier in the day wherein the same words were in caps.

"He won because the Election was Rigged," the Republican president wrote on Twitter, repeating unsubstantiated claims of election fraud.

Last week, the mainstream media declared Biden as the winner of the presidential election after the 77-year-old former vice president crossed the mandatory 270 electoral votes out of the 538-member Electoral College.

Trump, however, has refused to concede the election, asserting that he has won.

Trump, who has 232 electoral college votes, has challenged the election results in various states including Pennsylvania, Nevada, Michigan, Georgia and Arizona. He had demanded a



recount in Wisconsin.

He has launched a slew of lawsuits in key states, but has not provided any evidence to back his claims of fraud.

All his lawsuits have so far been unsuccessful.

As Trump, 74, has refused to concede the election, the transition team of Biden and vice-president-elect Kamala Harris says that the Trump administration is not cooperating with them in transition. **PTI**

Not just politicians, even voters are divided now: Obama



Washington: Former US president Barack Obama has said that not just politicians, even the voters are divided now as the priority is to "beat the other guy" rather than discussing issues, facts and policies, and the current media environment adds to that greatly.

Obama, in an interview to CBS News on Sunday, said that they have to work with the media and the tech companies to find ways to inform the public better about the issues and bolster the standards to ensure that they can separate truth from fiction.

"The media landscape has changed. And as a conse-

TRUMP'S NSA PROMISES 'VERY PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION' TO BIDEN

Dubai: President Donald Trump's national security adviser promised a "very professional transition" to the administration of President-elect Joe Biden in an interview broadcast Monday, even as Trump continues to falsely claim he won the November election. Speaking to the

Global Security Forum hosted in part by Qatar, Robert O'Brien several times mentioned the transition and referred to recent peace deals that Bahrain, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates struck with Israel as "a great legacy for the president to have as he leaves office." **AP**

demic-related aid from states run by Democratic governors.

Obama said: "It's not just the politicians now. The voters are divided. It has now become a contest where issues, facts, policies per se don't matter as much as identity and wanting to beat the other guy. You know, that's taken priority."

"I do think the current media environment adds to that greatly. This democracy doesn't work if we don't have an informed citizenry. This democracy doesn't work if we don't have responsible elected officials at other levels who are willing to call the president when he's not doing something right, call him on it."

Trump and Biden voters expressed strikingly different views on different issues. While Biden voters wanted the government to prioritise limiting the spread of the COVID-19, Trump supporters preferred an approach that focused on the economy.

Biden often appealed to a sense of national unity and the soul of America while Trump often described himself as a defender of his voters. He even threatened to withhold pan-

ning.

Trump and Biden voters

expressed strikingly different views on different issues. While

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GST TURNOVER DISPLAYED IN FORM 26AS

No extra compliance burden on taxpayers: DoR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The revenue department on Monday said data analytics has detected persons showing turnover of crores of rupees in GST but not paying a single rupee in income tax, and announced there would be no change in the reporting requirement with the display of GST turnover data in Form 26AS for honest taxpayers.

In a statement, the Department of Revenue (DoR) reiterated that there will be no extra compliance burden on the taxpayers for GST turnover displayed in the Form 26AS, which is an annual consolidated tax statement that can be accessed from the income-tax website by taxpayers using their Permanent Account Number (PAN).

"There would be no change in the reporting requirement with the display of information of GST turnover in Form 26AS because the honest taxpayers are already furnishing GST returns and Income Tax Return and reporting their turnover correctly," it added.

Beginning June 1, 2020, Form 26AS has been revamped to an "Annual Information Statement" which apart from the TDS/TCS details, shall now

contain comprehensive information relating specified financial transactions, payment of taxes, demand/refund and pending/completed proceedings undertaken by a taxpayer in a particular financial year that has to be mentioned in the income tax returns.

The DoR said that the notified Income Tax Return for the current AY 2020-21 already requires reporting of GST outward supplies in the Schedule GST.

Therefore, the information displayed in Form 26AS would provide ease of compliance to the taxpayers in filling Schedule GST.

"There would be no change in the reporting requirement with the display of information of GST turnover in Form 26AS because the honest taxpayers are already furnishing GST returns and Income Tax Return and reporting their turnover correctly," it added.

The earlier Form 26AS used to give information regarding tax deducted at source and tax collected at source relating to a PAN, besides certain additional information including details of other taxes paid, refunds and TDS defaults.

I-T profiling to help revenue dept nab fraudsters claiming fake GST credits

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government proposes to match GST data mentioned in Form 26AS with the turnover numbers provided while filing income tax returns. The move is aimed at identifying unscrupulous persons who try to avail or pass on input tax credit fraudulently by generating fake invoices. In such cases, the revenue department had found that checking income tax profiles of suspected entities gave the right results on the extent of tax evasion, both on direct and indirect taxes.

Sources said that there is no reconciliation of whether a suspected entity's income

tax payment is commensurate with the expected profit margin on turnover reported by him in the GST returns or additional compliance burden on taxpayers. Only suspected fake invoice generators are being identified for serious action under GST and other laws including suspension of their GST registration based on the fact that whether their income tax payment is commensurate with the expected profit margin on turnover reported by them in the GST returns. The revenue department explained that recently, it was noticed that many unscrupulous persons are trying to avail or pass on input tax credit fraudulently by generating fake invoices.

FinMin invites bids from actuarial firms for valuing LIC ahead of IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Monday invited bids from actuarial firms for arriving at the embedded value of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) ahead of its stake sale.

The government plans to sell minority stake in the insurance behemoth and list it on the bourses.

It has already appointed Deloitte and SBI Caps as pre-IPO transaction advisors. In the bid notice, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) said LIC needs to develop an Indian Embedded Value (IEV) reporting framework for necessary disclosures for the proposed Initial Public Offering (IPO).

Embedded value is a common valuation measure used to estimate the consolidated value of shareholders' interest in an insurance company.

BPCL privatisation gets multiple bids; Reliance skips, no supermajor in race

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday received 'multiple' bids for buying out its stake in India's second-biggest fuel retailer BPCL but billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries as well as supermajors Saudi Aramco, BP and Total did not make a bid.

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), which is handling the sale, tweeted that the transaction advisors for the sale of government's 52.98 per cent stake in Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) did not make a bid.

The last date for submission of bids is December 8.

The government has budgeted to collect Rs 2.10 lakh crore from stake sales this fiscal. This include Rs 1.20 lakh crore from CPSE disinvestment and Rs 90,000 crore from selling stake in financial institutions. So far this fiscal, the government has been able to mop up Rs 6,138 crore from CPSE disinvestment.

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also tweeted.

Neither of them however gave the number of bids received or the names of the bidders.

Separately, four industry officials said Reliance Industries, which was considered a potential bidder as BPCL would have added 22 per cent fuel market share to its fledgling retail business and made it the nation's number one oil refiner, did not put in an expression of interest (EoI) at the close of the deadline on Monday. Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco), which had been keen to enter the world's fastest-growing fuel market, too did not put in an EoI. UK's BP plc and Total of France - who have plans to foray into the Indian fuel market - had previously ruled themselves out of the BPCL race as they did not want to add oil refining assets when the world was moving away from liquid fuels.

A clutch of private equity

funds and/or pension funds are said to have put in an EoI.

Russian energy giant Rosneft-led Nayara Energy, which operates a 20 million tonnes oil refinery at Vadinar in Gujarat and also has 5,822 petrol pumps, was considered a potential bidder for BPCL but reports last month had indicated it was no longer keen.

Abu Dhabi National Oil Co (ADNOC), which has ambitions for Indian market, too

was considered a potential bidder but it wasn't immediately known if it put in an EoI.

Mining billionaire Anil Agarwal is considered another potential bidder given his interest in the oil and gas business with the USD 8.67 billion acquisition of Cairn India.

At Friday's closing price of Rs 412.70 on BSE, the government's 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL is worth Rs 47,430 crore. Also, the acquirer would have to make an open offer for buying another 26 per cent stake from the public, which would cost Rs 23,276 crore.

WPI inflation at 8-month high of 1.48% in Oct on costlier manufactured items

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi: The wholesale price-based inflation rose to an eight-month high of 1.48 per cent in October, as manufactured products turned costlier, with experts saying that the RBI will keep interest rates on hold in its policy review next month.

The WPI inflation was at 1.32 per cent in September and zero per cent in October last week showed. ICRA Principal Economist Aditi Nayar said core inflation spiked to 1.7 per cent in October 2020 from 1 per cent in Sept, and the core index has been hardened since when it was at 2.26 per cent.

While food article prices softened in October, manufactured items witnessed hardening of prices, according to the data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry. Food inflation in October stood at 6.37 per cent, as against 8.17 per cent in the previous month.

The rate of price rise in vegetables and potato remained high at 25.23 per cent and 107.70 per cent, respectively, during the month. Inflation in

CIL floats tenders for 35 mining projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) on Monday said it has issued tenders for all 35 mining projects identified for mechanised transportation of dry fuel and setting up coal handling plants and silos for rapid loading at an estimated cost of Rs 12,500 crore.

Under mechanised transportation, coal would be moved through piped conveyor or belt mode promoting cleaner environment. With reduced movement of coal-laden trucks on roads, it brings down dust pollution to the comfort of people residing in the proximity of the mines. "Coal India's pitch for efficient and environment friendly mechanised coal transportation in its first-mile connectivity, replacing the road movement, gained pace with the company successfully issuing tenders for all the 35 projects, of phase-1, by September 2020 as planned," the PSU said in a statement.

Power consumption grows 7.8% in first half of Nov

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption grew 7.8 per cent to 50.15 billion units (BU) in the first half of November this year, showing rise in economic activities, as per government data.

Power consumption in the country was recorded at 46.52 BU during November 1-15 last year, according to the power ministry data.

For a full month in November last year power consumption was 93.94 BU.

Thus, the extrapolation of half-month data clearly indicates that power consumption may witness year-on-year growth for the third month in a row, according to experts.

After a gap of six months, power consumption recorded a growth of 4.4 per cent in September this year at 112.24 BU compared to 107.51 BU in the same month last year.

Saudi Aramco to issue bonds as it seeks cash amid oil slump

AP ■ DUBAI

Saudi Arabia's oil giant Aramco announced Monday it will issue international bonds as it seeks a cash infusion to help pay for billions of dollars in dividends the company promised shareholders before the global coronavirus pandemic sent oil prices plummeting.

In a statement posted on the Saudi Tadawul stock exchange, the company said it plans to issue US dollar-denominated bonds but did not specify the size of the issuance.

The bonds, which range from three to 50 years, are targeted to institutional investors with a minimum subscription of USD 200,000. The amount issued and the returns are subject to market conditions, the company said.

Aramco floated a sliver of

Amazon India launches 'STEP' to accelerate growth of 7 lakh sellers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amazon India on Monday launched 'STEP', a performance-based benefits programme to help the seven lakh sellers on its platform accelerate their growth.

With the launch of STEP, Amazon is introducing its revised fee structure that was earlier deferred to after Diwali. STEP simplifies the seller experience by providing customised and actionable recommendations which help sellers improve key customer experience metrics and in turn their growth, a statement said.

By improving performance, sellers can unlock benefits across multiple levels like 'Basic', 'Standard', 'Advanced', 'Premium' and more.

These benefits include fee waivers, faster disbursement cycles, priority seller support and world-class free account

Diesel sales fall 5% in Nov

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's diesel sales fell 5 per cent in the first half of November when compared with the previous year, industry data showed on Monday, after rising for the first time in eight months in October.

Sale of diesel, the most used fuel in the country, was, however, 7 per cent higher month-on-month. Between November 1 and 15, diesel consumption was 2.86 million tonnes, down from 3.01 million tonnes in the same period a year back.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is for the information of all concerned that our project of "Modernization of existing institutional Building" at Plot No. 10196, Keshav Kunj, Jhandewalan, New Delhi has been accorded the Environmental Clearance from Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change vide their approval no. F.No. 21-30/2018-IA-II dated 30/05/2018 subject to the conditions enumerated herein and copies of the clearances letter are available with the MoEF&CC and may also be seen on the website of MoEF&CC at <http://www.envfor.nic.in>.

RAVINDER KUMAR GUPTA
AUTHORIZED SIGNATORY

SHREE KESHAV SMARAK SAMITI

10196, Keshav Kunj, Jhandewalan, New Delhi - 110055

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Dinesh S/o Harish R/o Pooja Colony, near Balraj School, P.S. Toronita City, Loni, Ghaziabad, UP, has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 33705/17 Dated 09/11/2020 u/s 379/411/34 IPC has been registered at P.S. Timarpur, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Dinesh cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Dinesh has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Dinesh of E-FIR No. 33705/17 Dated 09/11/2020 u/s 379/411/34 IPC has been registered at P.S. Timarpur, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 18.12.2020.

By order

Ms. Riya Guha, MM,
(Metropolitan Magistrate-02), Central
Room No. 26, Tis Hazari Court,
Delhi

DP/719/N/2020

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Raj Kapoor @ Rajesh S/o Suresh @ Munna Lal, R/o Village Lakhnai, PS-Narki, Distt-Farrukhabad (U.P.) has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence under FIR No. 284/19 u/s 381 IPC has been registered at P.S. Bawana, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Raj Kapoor @ Rajesh cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Raj Kapoor @ Rajesh has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Raj Kapoor @ Rajesh of FIR No. 284/19 u/s 381 IPC has been registered at P.S. Bawana, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 24.12.2020.

By order

Vaibhav Mehta, Metropolitan Magistrate-05 (North),
Court Room No. 114 (First Floor),
Rohini Court, Delhi

DP/591/ON/2020

NMDC celebrates foundation day



Hyderabad: NMDC celebrated its 63rd foundation day at its head office Hyderabad and at all locations of its major projects and units with great enthusiasm. NMDC, the largest iron ore producer in the country, was incorporated on this day in 1958 and has completed 62 years of excellence. Sumit Deb, CMD, NMDC inaugurated the programme in the presence of functional directors of NMDC PK Satpathy, Director - Production, Amitava Mukherjee, Director Finance, Alok Kumar Mehta, Director Commercial.

Congratulating the employees on this prestigious occasion Sumit Deb, CMD, NMDC said, "Everyone associated with NMDC should take pride in its achievements and also be aware of the increased responsibilities it

Equitas Small Finance Bank launches women savings account offering 7% interest

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equitas Small Finance Bank (ESFB) on Monday announced launch of 'Eva' savings account for women offering 7 per cent interest.

Eva, a unique savings account, tries to address the well-being of Indian women in every aspect such as health, wealth and prosperity, ESFB said in a release.

"Along with 7 per cent interest in savings account, it also offers free health check-up and unlimited tele-consultation with women doctors, gynaecologists and mental health experts," the bank said.

Govt's MSP paddy procurement rises 20.25% so far this kharif season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government's paddy procurement has increased by 20.25 per cent to 281.28 lakh tonnes so far in this kharif season, Punjab contributing the most, the Union Agriculture Ministry said on Monday.

Paddy procurement commenced in Punjab and Haryana from September 26 due to early arrival of the crop, while in other states from October 1.

More than 80 per cent of the country's paddy crop is grown in the kharif season. The government through Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies undertakes procurement of paddy at the minimum support price (MSP).

"Out of the total purchase of 281.28 lakh tonnes, Punjab alone has contributed 196.13 lakh tonnes which is 69.73 per cent of the total procurement," the ministry statement said.

Total procurement

by 20.25 per cent till November 15 of the ongoing kharif season from 233.89 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period, it said. The government has procured paddy at the MSP value of Rs 53,105.70 crore so far, benefitting 24.14 lakh farmers.

For the current year, the Centre has fixed the MSP of paddy (common grade) at Rs 1,868 per quintal, while that of A grade variety has been fixed at Rs 1,888 per quintal.

According to the ministry, MSP procurement of paddy in this kharif 20



pioneer

THE PIONEER 10
RAIPUR | TUESDAY | NOVEMBER 17, 2020

HEALTH

DOCYARD

DR ARCHANA DHAWAN BAJAJ

Gynecologist,
Obstetrician and IVF
Expert

NURTURE IVF CENTRE

Take extra care of newborns



With the winters settling in most parts of the country, the weather around us is soothing as it relaxes our mind and body. The cool morning breeze brings with it a new found freshness and energizes us in a way like no other. However, the pleasant winters are known to be one of the leading cause of pollution related deaths in adults and infants. Children are more prone to greater health problems due to their fetal development and in their earliest years and that's because children breathe faster than adults.

The initial lockdown period saw a steep decline in air pollution, however the levels are rising again and air quality has already dipped to very poor category in several cities. Our national capital is facing the brunt of poor air quality and the smoggy mornings and evenings that we are exposed to is a proof. People are facing the harmful effects of air pollution on a daily basis right from irritation in the eyes to breathing problems. According to a report — *State of Global Air 2020* — on air pollution exposures and their impacts on human health, pollution contributed to the deaths of more than 1, 16,000 Indian infants in their first month of life in 2019. Solid fuels such as charcoal, wood, and animal dung used for cooking have been related to more than half of these deaths. While the government claims a decline in the average pollution levels in India over the last three years, the decline has been marginal particularly in the Indo-Gangetic plains, which normally see extremely high particulate matter pollution exposure particularly during winter.

Early morning hours are the worst for babies as it has highest levels of air pollution. Therefore, limit their sunlight exposure to afternoon as it is a relatively safer period for them

nurable groups.

Protective measures

Parents need to be alert and take immediate measures to protect their children, especially babies from the harmful effects of air pollution. Here are some tips for parents:

Avoid toxic air exposure: It's most important to avoid exposure to outside environment and thankfully in our country, babies are not taken out in public before they are at least a month old.

Avoid early morning sunlight for babies: Early morning hours are the worst as it has highest levels of air pollution. Therefore, limit the exposure to afternoon as it is a relatively safer period for babies.

Make use of air purifier: It is a myth that air purifiers can reduce a child's immunity, however it tends to make the air dry, therefore one must also use a humidifier along with air purifier. Alternatively, make use of indoor plants or vertical gardens in the house.

Avoid exposure to dust and use organic repellents: Parents need to protect their babies from the harmful effects of dust and indoor pollution as well. Avoid cleaning or dusting the room in presence of the baby and as far as possible makes use of organic mosquito repellents instead of chemical sprays.

Breastfeeding: Breastfeeding gives a lot of immunity to your baby, therefore, feed your child frequently so that they have immunity and also keep them hydrated at all times.

WARM FOODS

BRUSSELS SPROUTS:

Brussels sprouts are low in calories but high in fiber, vitamins and minerals. They are especially rich in vitamin K, which is necessary for blood clotting and bone health.

They're also high in Vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps promote iron absorption and is involved in tissue repair and immune function. What's more, their high fiber content helps support regularity and gut health.

Brussels sprouts contain small amounts of vitamin B6, 28 per cent. They may also come with added health benefits, including the potential to reduce the risk of cancer, decrease inflammation and improve blood sugar control.

Dadi Ka Kehna

Bad breath can be extremely embarrassing for anyone and everyone. ROSHANI DEVI shares easy home remedies that can help you keep the smell away and feel all the more confident throughout the day



Bad breath is common, more so if one likes to eat onions and garlic. However, there can be many underlying issues, but the most common reason is poor oral hygiene. Here are a few tips that can help you fight it.

First and foremost, brush at least thrice a day or after eating. Use a good mouth wash. And replace your toothbrushes at regular intervals of



Second, pineapple is their to your rescue. Drink a glass of organic pineapple juice after every meal, or chew on a pineapple slice for

Say no to popping pills

Millennials worry that despite best of care, unknown nutritional deficiencies might plague their health. Hence, they take to popping pills. PULKIT SHARMA tells you that a balanced diet is all one needs

With a sharp increase in our life expectancies along with the growing burden of lifestyle and novel infectious diseases, most of us want to take no chances when it comes to our health. We try to follow special diets, exercise more, reduce our stress levels and aspire to keep agile and happy. Over the last few years, several vitamins and supplements have become an integral part of our diet. Many millennials worry that despite best of care, unknown nutritional deficiencies might plague their health.

Consequently, they are always on a lookout for a perfect health supplement—a pill that will magically fill in the various nutritional gaps in their diet and give them the best of health. With many multivitamins and health supplements easily available over the counter, an increasing number of people use them on a regular basis.

Fourth, brew two cups of tea before going to bed and refrigerate it overnight. Pour your cool tea into a water bottle and carry it with yourself all day. Slowly sip on it throughout the day.

longevity come with a pando-ras box of maladies. For starters, many such products may contain vibrant artificial colours, synthetic derivatives, hydrogenated oils, heavy metals, and titanium dioxide and with all these unhealthy additives, the tiny pills and fine powders do more harm than good. The bigger problem is that people often use these pills as a substitute for healthy behaviours such as a balanced diet, physical exercise, and relaxation. They erroneously start believing that they can binge on junk food routinely, sprawl around freely and do whatever they fancy, as if the health supplements will miraculously fix everything.

Of course, vitamins, minerals and health supplements do have a range of health benefits. Vitamin D boosts our immune system, strengthens our bones and teeth, and regulates our mood. But does this mean that we need to swallow several pills a day to get these essential micronutrients into

our system? We seem to have forgotten that a varied and a balanced diet can provide most of these micronutrients to us in their most natural and potent form. Nature has designed our systems to extract nutrition from food and not from tablets, gummies or powders manufactured in a laboratory. When we get these essential nutrients from the food, there is no significant risk of overdosage or toxicity.

If you are feeling rundown, try to fix your diet and lifestyle first. If that does not help, schedule a visit to a health practitioner who can diagnose your condition and assess whether you need any supplement or not. Even if you need one, the emphasis should still be on eating right and cultivating healthy habits so that your body recovers from the deficiency and you can go off the supplements quickly.

The writer is a clinical psychologist & the author of *When the Soul Heals*

NotSoAccurate

After Tesla CEO Elon Musk raised questions over the efficacy of the rapid tests to spot Covid-19, new research has claimed that the accuracy of a rapid finger-prick antibody test for Covid-19 infection may be considerably lower than previously suggested. The results suggest that if 10 people of people given the test had previously been infected, around one in five positive test results would be incorrect



A CUP FULL OF IMMUNITY



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

BALA SARADA lists teas that can boost immunity

Having a strong immune system is more important than ever. With the ongoing pandemic, while there is no proven cure as of now, enhancing the body's immunity plays a very crucial role in maintaining optimum health and keeping the disease at bay.

Here are five teas which can play a significant role in boosting and building your immunity the natural way.

Turmeric Tea

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

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

Lemon Tea

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

Pure Green Tea

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

Moringa Tea

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

Ashwagandha Tea

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

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

Avoid adding milk. You can add honey, stevia or any other sweetener.

The writer is Founder, Vahdam Teas



THE THIRD COMING

With COVID-19 taking four lives an hour in the Capital, the third wave has emerged as the most fatal one. Doctors SANDEEP NAYAR and ROMMEL TICKOO tell MUSBA HASHMI that chances of cases ebbing in Delhi in the next few days look bleak

It was only yesterday that Delhites woke up to a chilly and clear morning. All thanks to the rains and the cold breeze, that have swept away the smog at least for a day or two. But nonetheless, COVID-19 is here to haunt the Capital even more.

With an alarming rise in cases, there are speculations that if or not Delhi is witnessing the third wave of COVID-19. Unfortunately, according to many doctors and experts, the answer is yes.

"The third wave is going on in Delhi and I don't see a decline in cases any time soon. If at all, the numbers might increase owing to the pollution levels, arrival of winters and also the irresponsible behaviour of the people. In winters, people may suffer from respiratory tract infections," Dr Rommel Tickoo, Associate Director, Internal Medicine, Max Healthcare, tells you.

If a person is infected with COVID and is sneezing or coughing due to pollution, he has more chances of spreading the virus. Hence, the situation is more difficult than ever, Nayar says.

Nayar agrees with Tickoo and says that time and again COVID has proved all of us wrong and one can only hope for a decline in cases. "During summers, we anticipated a decrease in cases, then in the monsoon we thought it will happen, but it didn't. It is difficult to analyse the case pattern, hence all one can do is take precautions until a vaccine or a definitive treatment comes. Because for now, doctors are relying on a cocktail of medicines. And if the patient gets late for treatment, it becomes all the more difficult to treat because by that time the virus has already multiplied itself in the body and the medicines work at a lesser rate," he explains.

He adds that there is already a shortage of ventilators and ICU beds and that the situation can become worse as the doctors and hospital staff is already over-loaded with work.

Dr Sandeep Nayar, Senior Director and Head, Centre of Chest and Respiratory Disease, BLK Super Speciality Hospital, tells you that every year pollution rises during this period but this time because of COVID, it is a double whammy.

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breathlessness. It has become a challenge to identify whether it is because of pollution only or it is COVID-19 or any other viral infection for that matter. The challenge grows even more when a patient returns to us with similar complaints and doing a RT-PCR test again and again is not a feasible option. And if someone is already suffering from COVID, the pollution is going to worsen his condition because both of them affects the lungs," he tells you.

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final reports. In such cases we can't afford to waste any time, because if the virus starts affecting other organs, the situation can get out of control and it becomes hard to kill the virus. So it is a rule of thumb that the first week is important," he tells you.

Now that it has become a challenge to find beds for COVID patients in hospitals, it is advisable that patients with mild symptoms should home isolate themselves and continue to get treatment from their home.

"It is important to seek doctor's advice as soon as one tests positive. But in rare cases, when a patient is unable to contact a doctor, given the high caseload, one can always start the treatment. First and foremost, isolate yourself in case of mild fever, start paracetamol, if it does not work

take a higher combination of aceclofenac and combiflam. Take immunity boosters like zinc and vitamin C

— DR SANDEEP NAYAR

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further delay. Even when we come across such patients whom we doubt are COVID infected, like if someone's family has tested positive and they are also experiencing similar symptoms, we start the treatment without waiting for the

points. We seem to have forgotten that a varied and a balanced diet can provide most of these micronutrients to us in their most natural and potent form. Nature has designed our systems to extract nutrition from food and not from tablets, gummies or powders manufactured in a laboratory. When we get these essential nutrients from the food, there is no significant risk of over dosage or toxicity.

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If you are feeling rundown, try to

Trend Blazer

Taapsee gives *Rashmi Rocket* twist

Actor **TAAPSEE PANNU** has a great sense of humour. She gave a hilarious *Rashmi Rocket* twist to her life, noting how she runs from one location to another.

Taapsee posted a picture on Instagram. In the image, she is seen running hurriedly dressed in athleisure.

"Running from one location to another. Pune > Lonavala > Mumbai #RashmiRocket," she wrote alongside the image.

Directed by Akash

Khurana, Rashmi Rocket is about a runner from the Rann of Kutch who fights for her identity and becomes an athlete. Actor Priyanshu Painyuli will be seen playing the role of Taapsee's husband in the project.



'I want to do deep sea diving and see the corals before it's dead because I have been hearing that corals are going to die soon and they are already considered extinct in many terrains. So, that's something I really want to see. I want to see the beautiful deep water sea and the marine plants.'

—Abhishek Banerjee

Actor **ANIL KAPOOR** has started shooting for his forthcoming film,

Jug Jugg Jeeyo, directed by Raj Mehta.



The film is backed by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions. The filmmaker took to Twitter and shared the film's clapboard.

"Nothing matches the happiness, nervousness and excitement like the first day of shoot! #JugJuggJeeyo We are ready! #firstshot," Anil wrote.

The film also stars Neetu Kapoor, Varun Dhawan and Kiara Advani.

This year showed us what mattered: JL

Singer-actress **JENNIFER LOPEZ** says 2020, which saw the world fighting against COVID-19, turned out to be one that showed people what mattered the most to them.

Lopez was named The People's Icon Of 2020 at People's Choice Awards.

"Man, 2020 was no joke right? I mean before 2020, we were obsessing about winning this award or getting nominated for that award or we were caught up in who sold the most records or box office opening or crazy stuff like did we get the latest drop before anybody else. But not this year. This year was the great leveller. It showed us what mattered, what didn't," Lopez said during her acceptance speech.



A magician's travelogue

Travelling to the most vibrant corners of India, illusionist NEEL MADHAV unravels the cultural richness of India and explores magic in every element he stumbles upon in his new show, *You Got Magic*. By TEAM VIVA

One man, seven cities and an exhilarating journey to find magical elements across India. Neel Madhav, the illusionist, is back with a thousand new tricks up his sleeve in the new show — *You Got Magic With Neel Madhav*. This time, the series will witness Neel bring to life the cultural richness of the country and unravel folk secrets across places like Dehradun, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Ahmedabad, Agra, Deogarh and Chandigarh. Excerpts:

■ Can you tell us about the series — *You Got Magic With Neel Madhav*?

In the show, I travel to places in and around India to explore magic with locals and also, to feel the magic of each place. So, we are starting off with me going back to my roots, which is to Dehradun because I was in the boarding of Doon School there for almost six years. So I thought maybe lets give people a taste of the

kind of education I had. I have been going to a lot of schools lately for my book promotion and something I realised that was missing was a sense of pride towards their own country. So I thought it would be a great idea to start with the basics and then move forward to the kind of magic our country offers.

■ Tell us some of the best memories while travelling for this series?

One of the memories is from Dehradun itself. In my school, we had a thing called the Rose Gold, it's an auditorium which houses around 4,000 people and it was built by the students at the school. Any person who got a chance to perform at the auditorium was a huge deal. So, in the show, I got the entire school coming into the Rose Gold and

did a two-hour performance for them. It was very special for me. It was me reliving my old school life.

■ How do the locals respond to your magic tricks?

It's a give and take relationship. It's one-sided and it can never be. They make me experience their culture, food, music and more. In return, I perform my magic.

■ How does your interest in Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Criminal Psychology help you in your magic?

Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Criminal Psychology are not used to do tricks. They are used to understand people. And once you do that, then you know what kind of tricks to do with them. The amount of mental health cases in India are growing and it's very important to understand where they come from. At the end of the day, when to study humans, it's important to understand why they do the things they do and why they are like that. Before performing magic, I think it's important to understand what kind of feeling they want to generate. And that's where Neuro-

Linguistic

Programming helps me in doing the right kind of trick.

■ What's so special about the cities covered in this series and why did you pick them?

Dehradun is nostalgic. We had to go there. Then we went to Kerala because we had the boat race happening there, so we were intrigued to know how communities get together for this mega event. We went to the backwaters of Kerala as well and I got to experience the boat race firsthand. That was something magical about Kerala. After that we visited Ahmedabad, there we had the kite festival happening, an amalgamation of colours. It was truly aesthetic. Kite flying is an art form and it's about bringing humans together. We also went to Agra. It has a place called Sheroes, which is a restaurant run by acid attack survivors. How they pulled themselves out from misery and torture is as magical as anything can be. It highlighted the darkside of our culture and humanity. But those who were inflicted by the darkness came out stronger, that was inspirational. So, we encountered such amazing stories from different parts of our country. I think everyone needs to cherish and celebrate them.

■ How has the lockdown been for you? With restrictions on travel, what kept you busy?

Oh, it was amazing. I had no problems in lockdown whatsoever. I actually wrote my second book this lockdown. I think it was a tremendous few months. As much as the world was suffering, as much as I'd like to physically help them, but the least I could do is make people understand the workings of the mind through my book. This pandemic has pretty much increased the amount of mental health patients. So, it was quite productive. I got time to spend time with myself and respect my work.

■ What's the next adventure that's drawing your attention?

Undoubtedly, my book. The first draft has been completed. Now it's going for checking. There's still a little way to go. But before that happens, I am really excited about my show going live. It's a huge platform and a lot of Indians love to watch shows that educate them about various things of our country. So I am kind of humbled to be able to show my journey on television. My show comes from a very non-judgmental perspective. I am looking forward to people taking back some magic as the show rightly says, *You Got Magic*.

(The show premieres on November 19 at 10 pm on Sony BBC Earth.)



TALES OF COURAGE

The documentary, *India: The Forgotten Army*, discusses the crucial yet overlooked role played by the Indian soldiers during World War I



remain largely unknown once the war was over. They were neglected by the British, for whom they fought, and ignored by their own country, since they were fighting a colonial war. History had orphaned them. This film is a valuable contribution to the footnotes." He adds, "These men were undoubtedly heroes: pitchforked into battle in unfamiliar lands, in climatic conditions they were neither used to nor prepared for, fighting an enemy of whom they had no knowledge, risking their lives every day for little more than pride. Yet they were destined to

Digital (South Asia), Discovery said, "The brave feats by Indians during the First World War had so far gone unnoticed. We are humbled to be able to shine a light on their tales of courage and sacrifice with the release of India: The Forgotten Army on Discovery Plus. Our users have repeatedly expressed their interest in knowing more about the

storied past of our brave soldiers and this release reaffirms our commitment to listen to our users."

The show brings together military and history experts and takes the viewers to the battle sites with animations and footages.

(The series is streaming on Discovery Plus.)

A safe bet

Veteran producer ANAND PANDIT says that remakes of South-Indian films are here to stay



Recently, Akshay Kumar's *Laxmmi* released on an OTT platform. It is the much-awaited remake of Ragava Lawrence's 2011 film, *Kanchana*. Shahid Kapoor's next is the remake of Telugu hit *Jersey*. John Abraham is remaking Malayalam hit, *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* and Rajkumar Rao is going to star in the remake of Telugu film, *Hit*.

The veteran producer Anand Pandit says that the trend of remaking South-Indian films is not new. "It is much older than the films like *Simmba*, *Kabir Singh*, *Kick*, *Rowdy Rathore*, *Wanted*, *Bodyguard*, *R..Rajkumar*, *Bhool Bhulaiyaa*, *Garam Masala*, *Hera Pheri* and more," adds he.

All through the 40s and the 50s, regional studios like Gemini Pictures, AVM and Prasad Productions were remaking their films in Hindi.

Pandit observes, "South-Indian films were being adapted for the Hindi film audience as far back as the 50s. Films like *Azaad* that established Dilip Kumar Saab as a comic legend was made in 1955. It was a remake of a Tamil film *Malaikkaran*. In fact, Dilip Saab starred in many South-Indian

remakes like *Ram Our Shyam* and *Admi*."

In the 80s too, Pandit recalls that Jeetendra starred in many hit South-Indian remakes like *Himmatwala*, *Mawaali*, *Tohfa*, *Justice Chaudhury* and more.

"It is not tough to see why so many makers and actors are drawn to South-Indian hits. Well-told stories that have already struck a chord with the audience are a safe bet and that is why you see so many remakes of *Arjun Reddy*. It makes sense commercially to bet on a film that has done well," Pandit feels.

He says that the audience want stories that have a universal appeal and often, a South-Indian film offers something fresh. "I don't think, we would have had films like *Laxmmi*, *Ghajini* or *Sadma* amid us without their regional predecessors.

As a maker, I too look forward to collaborating with directors from other industries and produce a really enthralling, entertaining remake," he shares.

Pandit is currently giving final touches to his forthcoming films, *The Big Bull* starring Abhishek Bachchan and *Chehre* starring Amitabh Bachchan and Emraan Hashmi.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

David Warner and Steve Smith's presence does make Australia stronger but Cheteshwar Pujara has full faith in India's "remarkable" bowlers, who, he feels, possess the wherewithal to script a repeat of the historic 2018-19 Test series victory.

Pujara's 500 plus runs with three top-notch hundreds formed the cornerstone of a 2-1 series win back then, India's first in Australia in 71 years. However, Smith and Warner didn't play in that series due to their ball-tampering bans.

"(Australian batting line-up) will be a little stronger than what it was in 2018-19 but then victories don't come easy. If you want to win away from home, you need to work hard," India's dependable No.3 told PTI in an exclusive interview before he embarked on the tour of Australia.

Pujara believes that India's fast bowling troika of Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami can again work up some magic like in 2018-19, posing a lot of discomfort for the home batting line-up. The upcoming Tests are scheduled to start on December 17.

"No doubt Smith, Warner and Marnus Labuschagne are great players. But the good part about our current crop of bowlers is that most of them play in the same series and our bowling unit will also not be very different to what it was in 2018-19."

For India's fast bowlers, it's like a "been there, done that" situation.

"They know how to be successful in Australia as they have enjoyed success there in the past. They have their game-plans in place and if we can execute them well, they are capable of getting Smith, Warner and Labuschagne out quickly."

"If we can do what we have done in the past, I am sure we have every chance of winning the series again."

The opening Test in Adelaide is a Day-Night game and batting against the pink kookaburra during the twilight session will pose its own set of challenges, said the man who

SMITH, WARNER'S PRESENCE A CHALLENGE: PUJARA



Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara in a file picture

is nearing 6000 Test runs (5840 in 77 games) with 18 hundreds in his kitty.

"It will be a different challenge altogether playing with pink ball as pace and bounce also changes. We

will be playing with pink kookaburra in Australia (against Bangladesh, it was Pink SG Test). It will be slightly different."

He believes that overcoming the challenges of playing their first overseas Day/night Test will have to happen collectively.

"As a team and as individuals, one has to understand and accept and get used to it (pink ball and lights) as early as possible. There will be a bit of difference with pink ball.

"The twilight period is more challenging than other periods but as you play more and practice more, you get used to it. It does take a little while..."

An astute student of the game, Pujara is known to work on his with father Arvind Pujara, who is also his one and only coach.

Pujara's 500 plus runs with three top-notch hundreds formed the cornerstone of a 2-1 series win back then, India's first in Australia in 71 years. However, Smith and Warner didn't play in that series due to their ball-tampering bans

He has plans in place but won't like to divulge much.

"The technical aspect is something that I can't discuss. I prefer not talking about it. It's a strategic thing which can't be divulged."

"Even during the last tour, my preparation was good, I am confident that I am able to repeat the same

KL hones his pull shot with tennis ball training

PTI ■ SYDNEY

the stand-in white ball vice-captain with tennis balls aimed at his rib cage.

Rahul was trying to keep the pull shot down, an art his skipper Virat Kohli has mastered over the years, rolling his wrists.

With training modules undergoing a sea change, now the tennis rackets are used to add more pace to the light tennis balls.

Team's senior speedster Mohammed Shami posted a video on his personal twitter handle, where he was seen bowling with the pink kookaburra ball.

"There is no better feeling than to play for your country. A long wait to bowl in the #TeamIndia nets finally ended today! Looking forward to our Australian tour," Shami tweeted.

preparation before this series also. I always try and add a few more things in my game, which will help me get better," he said.

The 32-year-old is confident that history will repeat itself in Australia this time.

"You can't win matches on your own. Yes, you can perform exceptionally well but you need support from other players to win. Even the bowling unit was remarkable during the last series."

"In the end, you need 20 wickets to win a Test and wasn't just my performance, even other batters supported at some stage or the other. It was the team's success. When the Indian team succeeds, it is always a moment of pride," he rec-

Pujara has practised for a good two months at his academy in Rajkot under the watchful eyes of his father.

Does it bother that before leaving for Australia, he didn't get enough match practice?

"Look, this is a situation that has impacted millions of lives and people have lost lives. In normal circumstances, we would have played domestic cricket and gone to Australia but everyone needs to think about safety and security."

"As far as I am concerned, I am happy if I am able to practice, do my fitness, running sessions and move my body well, which I did," he concluded.

Cummins not sure about playing white ball series

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia pace spearhead Pat Cummins on Monday said he is yet to take a call on whether to play in the limited-overs series against India beginning November 27 even though he is feeling fresh after spending three months inside bio-secure bubbles.

Cummins, who returned last week from the UAE where he turned up for Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League, has been hopping between bio-secure bubbles since touching down in England in late August but he allayed fears of fatigue.

"(I) haven't made a final decision on that yet. (It's) unprecedented times with so many people spending a large portion of time in these bubbles so we're going to keep all the conversations open, chat about that a bit closer to when we all get together," Cummins said when asked about resting ahead of the Test summer.

"There's always cricket on, so we'll make sure we're all open about that, having those conversations," said the 27-year-old during a video conference as reported by 'cricketc.com.au'.

Cummins has been named in both the white and red-ball squads as vice-captain. The limited-overs series is to be held in Sydney and Canberra ahead of the four-match Test series, beginning in Adelaide on December 17.

Australia's Test players in the white-ball squad, including Steve Smith and David



Pat Cummins celebrates after taking wicket during IPL KKR/Twitter

and Manchester on Australia's white-ball tour of the UK before flying to the UAE for the IPL, where he was with his franchise Kolkata Knight Riders.

He is now in Sydney spending 14 days quarantining and will join the squad on November 27, the day of the opening one-dayer at the SCG.

Despite enduring bio-bubbles for three months now, Cummins said he felt it is a "pretty good place".

"One of the benefits of being in a bubble in the UAE was we didn't spend much time travelling. A normal IPL we're on a flight every second day, different city, so I think sometimes that can be as draining as the playing part.

"No doubt as well, the six or seven months we had at home (during the winter) put us in a pretty good place leading into the England tour and IPL."

"Coming in fresh to those tours it doesn't feel like the end of the summer, it feels like I'm ready to start the tour and in a pretty good place."

Cummins also said he won't be going out there to intimidate the Indians but if he manages to have the effect, it would be a bonus.

"If it happens I'll be happy. Hopefully the (pitch) conditions will be what we as Aussies are accustomed to," he said.

"Hopefully they've got a bit more bounce and pace than you would a place like India so that home advantage might come into it."

The right-armner was in bio-bubbles in Southampton

Warner, will get only a week to prepare for the opening Test, a day-nighter in Adelaide.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there's times throughout the summer where some players might just need a little rest knowing not only how busy this next couple of months is but also a tour of South Africa (February-March) and a few away tours next year," said Cummins, who has taken 143 wickets from 30 Tests.

"Hopefully they've got a bit more bounce and pace than you would a place like India so that home advantage might come into it."

for Italy midway through the first half after Andrea Belotti was brought down inside the area. Domenico Berardi added another goal late in the second half after collecting a pass from Lorenzo Insigne.

Italy leads Group 1 in League A with nine points. The Netherlands is next with eight points after beating Bosnia 3-1. Poland is still in contention with seven points, while Bosnia trails with two.

BELGIUM NEARS FINALS

Dries Mertens scored a superb free kick as Belgium ended England's hopes of reaching the finals.

Belgium took the lead 10 minutes in when Romelu Lukaku set up Youri Tielemans for a deflecting shot.

Mertens made it 2-0 in the 24th by expertly curling his kick

over the English wall - which mostly failed to jump - after Kevin De Bruyne was fouled.

Belgium leads Group 2 in League A with 12 points. Denmark



Paine wants Burns to open

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Promising Australia batsman Will Pucovski may have to wait for his much-anticipated Test debut with skipper Tim Paine showing keenness to persist with struggling Joe Burns when the high-stakes series against India begins next month.

Despite Pucovski scoring truckload of runs, including consecutive double centuries in the Marsh Sheffield Shield, Australia Test captain Paine hinted that Burns may continue his opening partnership with David Warner.

"Burns had a really good summer for us last year with David Warner, their partnership and relationship is a really important one for our team," Paine was quoted as saying by Australian Associated Press.

"They got us off to a number of good starts last year. Burns hasn't been in the form

that he would like or scored the runs he would like. But we know he does a good job.

"He averages close to 40 in Test cricket for Australia, which is a great effort opening the batting, and I expect him to start this summer," he added.

Many former players, including ex-captain Mark Taylor, Ian Chappell, Michael Clarke and Kim Hughes have called for Pucovski to debut at Adelaide Oval in light of his sparkling form and the struggles of Burns.

Chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns and coach Justin Langer have also indicated that Burns is unlikely to be left out of the Test team.

Burns averaged 11.4 with only one score above 20 but he was Australia's third highest run-scorer last summer (32.00).

The four-Test series will begin with day/night Test at Adelaide from December 17.

Nadal, Thiem start with win

AP ■ LONDON

Dominic Thiem made sure this year's ATP Finals didn't begin the same way last year's ended.

Thiem outlasted Stefanos Tsitsipas in a rematch of the 2019 final, beating the defending champion 7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-3 Sunday in the opening singles match of the tournament inside a largely empty O2 Arena.

In the late match, Rafael Nadal had a much easier time against newcomer Andrey Rublev, beating the Russian 6-3, 6-4 in just 1 hour, 17 minutes.

Nadal is looking to cap a season in which he earned his record-equalling 20th Grand Slam title and 1,000th match win on tour by capturing his first trophy at the ATP Finals. He has qualified for the season-ending event for a record 16 straight years but lost in the final twice and missed six editions because of injuries.

"It's important to start well, of course, for the confidence, because winning in straight sets helps," Nadal said.

"I played solid with my serve. I didn't suffer much, and that helps to play more relaxed on the returns."

Thiem, who won his first major at this year's U.S. Open, broke Tsitsipas for a 2-0 lead in the third set with a drop shot at the net and converted his second match point when Tsitsipas sent a forehand wide.

Tsitsipas beat Thiem in a third-set tiebreaker in last year's final to clinch the biggest title of his career. But he let the first-set tiebreaker slip away this time, after leading 4-1 and 5-3.

Facing set point, the Greek failed to put away a fairly simple overhead at the net before sending a lob long to hand Thiem the lead.

"That was the silliest thing that ever happened to me," Tsitsipas said about his overhead shot.

"I had ball over the net, and I decided to play forehand instead of a smash. I don't know what kind of decision that was."

Tsitsipas broke for a 2-1 lead in the second set with a forehand passing shot before leveling the match. He had a

chance to break back at 3-1 in the third but netted a backhand, letting out a scream of frustration after the miss. Thiem eventually held serve after a game that went to six deuces, and was never troubled the rest of the way.

"That was crazy, I was pretty tight I must say in that game," Thiem said about his hold for 4-1.

"I think that was the last key moment where the match went finally in my direction."

Nadal steered the evening match in his direction from the start, losing just five points on his serve in the first set. He broke for a 4-2 lead when Rublev sent a shot long, and the Russian then slammed his racket into the ground in frustration.

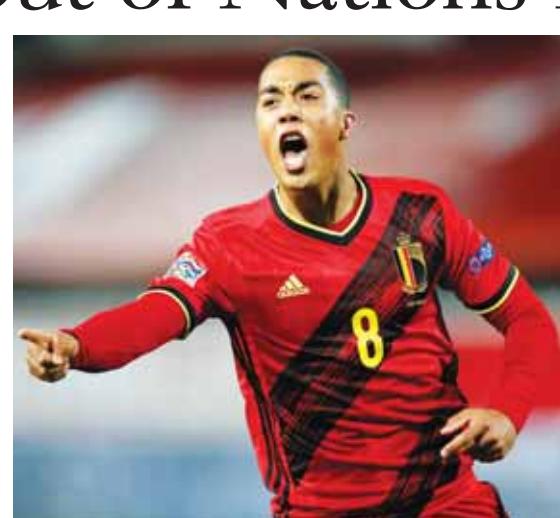
Rublev entered the tournament as one of the hottest players on tour, having won five titles this season, but looked unsettled against Nadal and continuously gesticated and shouted to himself between points.

This is the 12th and last year that the ATP Finals is played at the O2 Arena before moving to Turin, Italy, next year. Because of the coronavirus pandemic there are no fans inside the 20,000-capacity venue this time - meaning the normally raucous atmosphere has been replaced by an eerie silence interrupted only by muted applause from the players' boxes between points.

On Monday, Djokovic will face

debutant Diego Schwartzman before Daniil Medvedev takes on 2018 champion Alexander Zverev.

Three Lions out of Nations League



Belgium's Youri Tielemans celebrates after scoring his team's first goal AP

is next with 10 following a 2-1 win over Iceland. England has seven and Iceland none.

Belgium needs only a draw at home with Denmark on Wednesday to reach the finals.

DE BOER FINALLY WINS

Frank de Boer finally has his first win as Netherlands coach after Georginio Wijnaldum scored a swift goal to lead his team to a 3-1 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Wijnaldum, captain in the absence of his injured Liverpool teammate Virgil van Dijk, tapped in from close range in the sixth and 14th minutes to set up the win in the empty Johan Cruyff Arena.

Wijnaldum has now scored seven of his country's last 12 goals.

Memphis Depay got the Netherlands' third goal.

The victory eases pressure on De Boer, who became the first Netherlands coach not to register

a win in his first four matches in charge when his team drew 1-1 with Spain on Wednesday, following a defeat and two more draws since taking over from Ronald Koeman.

WINNING WALES

Wales is the only unbeaten team in League B following a 1-0 win over Ireland, courtesy of David Brooks' second-half header.

Now Wales needs only to avoid defeat at home against second-place Finland to earn promotion to the top tier.

"We didn't play that well today, but we came out fighting in the second half. It's another three points and that's what matters and it sets up well for Wednesday," said Wales captain Gareth Bale.