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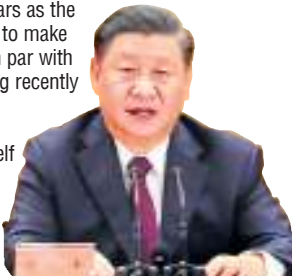
VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3

RAKUL DENIES DOING
FILM WITH MOHAN
BABU

Page 12

XI ORDERS MILITARY TO TRAIN
UNDER REAL COMBAT CONDITIONS

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday ordered the armed forces to strengthen training under real combat conditions and raise their capability of winning wars as the ruling Communist Party laid out plans to make the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on par with the US military by 2027. After stressing recently that the PLA must apply cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence if it wants to transform itself into a modern fighting force on a par with those of other leading powers, Xi said the military must focus on training to win wars.

MODI SUGGESTS STATE-SPECIFIC
EXPORT PLANS; REVIEWS PROJECTS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asked states to develop a state-specific export strategy and reviewed development projects worth Rs 1.41 lakh crore spread across 10 states and union territories. Reforms are beneficial only when one performs, and this is the way forward to transform the country, Modi said as he chaired the meeting of PRAGATI — an ICT-based multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation involving central and state governments. In the PRAGATI meeting, multiple projects, grievances and programmes were reviewed, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

WILL TAKE SECRETS TO MY GRAVE:
AHMED PATEL ON PENNING MEMOIR

Secrets will travel with me to my grave. That was Congress leader Ahmed Patel's matter-of-fact response a few months ago when asked if he would pen his memoirs to share his experiences as the party insider with a finger on its power buttons. Patel, who died on Wednesday at a Gurugram hospital where he was admitted with COVID-19, could have been the tell-all leader offering insights and information with his inside view of the workings of the Congress and the political world.

DIEGO MARADONA, ICON, FOOTBALL
LEGEND, DIES OF HEART ATTACK

One of the greatest players of all time, Diego Maradona has died at the age of 60. The former Argentina attacking midfielder and manager suffered a heart attack at his Buenos Aires home. He had successful surgery on a brain blood clot earlier in November and was to be treated for alcohol dependency. Maradona was captain when Argentina won the 1986 World Cup, scoring the famous 'Hand of God' goal against England in the quarter-finals. In a statement on social media, the Argentine Football Association expressed 'its deepest sorrow for the death of our legend', adding: 'You will always be in our hearts.'

'Jagananna Thodu' gives BJP,
TDP ammo to attack Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Jaganmohan Reddy government on Wednesday came under intense criticism from the opposition, especially from the BJP, for pushing a Union Government scheme as its own.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Wednesday launched Jagananna Thodu, that provides collateral-free credit to street vendors, stating that he had designed the scheme as he was moved by the plight of street vendors during his Padayatra.

Soon after the launch, both the BJP and TDP claimed that the State Government was shamelessly pushing the Central scheme as its own. Earlier too, the BJP had slammed Jagan, accusing him of using his own sticker on Central schemes and claiming credit.



BJP state president, Somu Veerraju had on many occasions in the recent past said that Jagan has been following his predecessor N Chandrababu Naidu in claiming Central schemes as the State Government schemes.

After drawing flak from the BJP, the YSRCP Government had added the PM KISAN name to the YSR Rythu

Bharosa scheme that was launched in October last year. At that time, the state unit of the BJP had demanded the State Government to include Prime Minister Narendra Modi's name to the much-hyped Rythu Bharosa scheme. "The Chief Minister renamed the Central Sector Scheme, fully-funded by the Union Ministry of Housing

CM launches Jagananna Thodu

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Wednesday launched the Jagananna Thodu scheme by deposited Rs 905 crore meant to provide succour to 9.05 lakh small traders by allowing them to take interest-free loans. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that from now on, small and petty vendors, artisans needn't approach private parties for loans and burden their lives by paying heavy interest, as they can take

loans from banks under Jagananna Thodu scheme for their working capital. The Chief Minister said that he had witnessed the plight of small vendors and artisans during his 3,648 km padayatra, where the vendors cater to the needs of the public irrespective of the adverse weather conditions, by selling vegetables, flowers in the streets and making their survival.

2

Govt to come out
with model
tenancy law soon

8

Goa approves
employment
scheme for young
engineers

5

People expect
discipline from
elected
representatives:
Kovind

4

SC stays HC gag order on
Amaravati land scam FIR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Andhra Pradesh High Court direction, restraining the media from publishing news regarding an FIR lodged on alleged irregularities in land transactions in Amaravati.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that the High Court shall not decide till the last week of January the pending matter which relates to the alleged illegal land transactions during shifting of the state capital to Amaravati.



The bench, also comprising Justices RS Reddy and MR Shah, refused to stay at this stage the other directions of the

High Court including the stay on probe into the FIR in the matter.

2

Coast Guard seizes 100 kg
heroin worth Rs 500 crore

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Indian Coast Guard has seized 100 kg of heroin from a Sri Lankan boat on the high seas south of Thoothukudi in a nine-day operation that started on November 17.

The market value of the contraband is estimated to be at least Rs 500 crore in the international market.

Officials involved with the seizure informed on Wednesday that six crew members have been apprehended. The arrested accused have identified themselves as

Sri Lankan nationals and are currently being interrogated. During their initial questioning, it has been revealed by the crew that the drugs were exchanged at high seas from Pakistani dhow coming from Karachi.

The drugs were meant to be sent to western countries and Australia.

The Coast Guard have apprehended 99 packets of heroin, 20 small boxes of synthetic drugs, five 9mm pistols and a Thuraya satellite phone set.

2

Nivar: Around 2,000 people in Chittoor evacuated

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Heavy rains induced by the severe 'Cyclone Nivar' battered Nellore with the maximum rainfall hovering around 13 cm on Wednesday. Strong gales were gusting through South Andhra Pradesh through the day.

The severe cyclone may cross the coast at midnight of November 25 and early morning of November 26 as a very severe cyclonic storm.



The wind gust is expected to touch around 70 kmph over the adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal and Rayalaseema region post landfall of the cyclone along Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts between Karaikal and Mamallapuram.

Gale wind speed reaching 65-75 kmph gusting to 85 kmph very likely over adjoining west central Bay of Bengal and along and off South Andhra Pradesh (Nellore and Chittoor districts).

As many as 1,200 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel have been deployed in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Andhra Pradesh. Seven teams are in Andhra Pradesh, 12 teams are in Tamil Nadu (six in Cuddalore district and two in Chennai) and three in Puducherry.

2

5-yr-old raped, battles for life in Kakinada

Victim found bleeding heavily from grievous injuries near her home

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In another heart-wrenching incident, a five-year-old girl was left battling for life after she was sexually assaulted by an unidentified person in Kakinada on Wednesday.

With internal and external wounds over the body of the victim and continual bleeding,

the doctors at Government General Hospital in Kakinada are trying their best to save her life.

The doctors on Wednesday performed surgery on the girl and they are said to be doing their level best to control bleeding and stop any infection.

2

BJP, JS for Amaravati
as AP capital: Pawan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Actor and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan said that it's the joint decision of both BJP and Jana Sena that Amaravati should be continued as the capital of Andhra Pradesh and will continue to fight till the last farmer gets justice. Pawan Kalyan and party Political Affairs Committee (PAC) Chairman Nadendla Manohar met BJP national president JP Nadda in Delhi on Wednesday evening. The meeting that lasted for

one hour discussed the situation prevailing in the State and present political scenario.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting Pawan Kalyan said "We attended the meeting on the invitation of Nadda and we have taken several issues to the notice of the BJP national president and also discussed the Polavaram project and the Amaravati movement. The BJP and Jana Sena alliance will fight till the last farmer gets justice. We have brought the high corruption taking place in the state to the notice of Nadda."

Andhra-Odisha border dispute escalates

Odisha villagers destroy coffee plantation in AP territory; inter-state survey today likely to ease tension on both sides

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha over the border limits along Vizag district has escalated.

Residents of Badlammida village under Dumuriguda mandal in Vizag alleged that the residents of Sambai Panchayat in Koraput district, Odisha destroyed around three acres of coffee plantations in their area on Monday. Hence, the villagers from the AP side blocked the border road.

Badlammida villagers further alleged that the coffee



farms were destroyed by people from Odisha's side after a

few administrative officials from the state intruded into the

bordering areas in Andhra Pradesh. A few local leaders of both the states visited the area following the incident.

As the border dispute adding fuel to the Odisha politics with the Opposition parties there raising issue, the matter may boil into major dispute.

Project Officer of ITDA-Paderu, Dr Venkateswar Salijamala said revenue officials from Andhra Pradesh visited the spot to sort out the dispute. Both the Revenue and Forest department from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha would conduct a joint survey on

Thursday to resolve the issue. A few weeks ago, some locals from villagers of Koraput district of Odisha bordering Andhra Pradesh, along with some officials and political leaders, walked into Kolaput Panchayat of Dumbriguda Mandal in Vizag Agency of Andhra Pradesh side, and allegedly forcibly encroached over 600 meters on the AP side by removing the signboards and stones demarcating the border and shifted them over 600 meters inside the AP side.

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Kartik & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi: Dwadashi: Full Night

Nakshatram: Revati: 09:20 pm

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

Rahukalam: 01:26 pm - 02:49 pm

Yamagandam: 06:31 am - 07:54 am

Varjyam: 07:50 am - 09:38 am

Gulika: 09:17 am - 10:40 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritkalam: 06:38 pm - 08:26 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:41 am - 12:25 pm

VIJAYAWADA

WEATHER

Forecast: Rain

Temp: 24/22

Humidity: 96%

Sunrise: 06:27am

Sunset: 05:39pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated November 25, 2020 5:00 PM

VIZAG-CHENNAI INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR

YSRCP MLA opposes chemical industries in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

After CPI(M), YSRCP-MLA from Paykaraopeta Golla Babu Rao has expressed concern over the establishing of chemical industries as part of the Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor development. His opposition to the proposal came during the public hearing organised by the AP Pollution Control Board in Nakkapalle in Visakhapatnam district on Wednesday.

The MLA categorically said he was in favour of the industries in the corridor but against chemical industries that will pollute the region.

Babu Rao also expressed displeasure over the difference in the payment of compensation to the farmers whose lands were acquired for the industrial corridor.



He said the previous TDP government compromised the interests of the farmers in 2016 during the acquisition of the lands.

As per the 2013 Land Acquisition Act, the compensation should be equally paid to private landowners, D patta holders and encroachers of

assigned lands.

"Rs 18 lakh was given to the private lands and Rs 12 lakh to owners of D Patta land. Not a rupee was paid to the farmers who were farming in assigned lands. As per the 2013 Act, each farmer was entitled to Rs 5,000 per each coconut tree but only Rs 1,000 was paid," the

MLA said.

"I asked the joint collector to rectify all these issues and do justice to the farmers," Babu Rao said and added that the farmers never opposed industrialisation in the region.

Former MLA and TDP State Mahila president Vangalapudi Anitha said she also opposed the setting up of the chemical industries in the corridor.

She said there was no clarity on the employment though the YSRCP government promised 75 per cent of the jobs to the local people. She insisted that skill development centres should be immediately set up in the Nakkapalle region.

She also strongly objected to conducting the public hearing during Covid-19 threat. Around 700 people attended the meeting, she said.

831 fresh Covid cases reported in AP

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Only 831 new Covid-19 cases were reported in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday, taking the gross to 8,64,674.

The number of active cases fell below the 13,000 mark to 12,673 after 1,176 patients got cured in 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday.

Six deaths were reported, the lowest daily count in about five months now.

The total recoveries increased to 8,45,039 and the toll to 6,962, according to the latest bulletin.

Only three districts reported between 100 and 150 fresh cases, four districts between 50 and 100 while six others added less than 50 cases each in 24 hours. Krishna district reported 145 fresh cases and two deaths in 24 hours.

The overall infection positivity rate declined to 8.83 per cent after 97.88 lakh samples were tested for coronavirus in the state.

Coast Guard seizes 100 kg heroin worth Rs 500 crore

Continued from Page 1

The drugs were found hidden in an empty fuel tank on board a Sri Lankan vessel.

According to the crew members, the boat is allegedly owned by Alensu Kuttige

Sinha Deeptha Sani Fernando from Negombo, a city on the west coast of Sri Lanka.

All six apprehended crew along with the boat have been brought to Tuticorin port for further interrogation.

SC stays HC gag order on Amaravati land scam FIR

Continued from Page 1

The apex court passed the order while hearing an appeal filed by Andhra Pradesh Government against the September 15 order of the State High Court.

The top court, which did not issue notice to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on the appeal, sought responses from others including the AP DGP and former advocate-general Dammalapati Srinivas on whose plea the High Court had passed the order.

The bench posted the matter for hearing in January.

The Jaganmohan Reddy government had on February 21 constituted the 10-member SIT, headed by a Deputy Inspector General of Police-rank IPS officer, to conduct a comprehensive investigation into various alleged irregularities, particularly the land deals in the Amaravati Capital Region, during the previous Chandrababu Naidu regime.

The report of a Cabinet Subcommittee on the "procedural, legal and financial irregularities and fraudulent transactions concerned with various projects, including the issues related to land in the CRDA

region will form the basis for the SIT probe, the government had said.

During the hearing conducted through video-conferencing, senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for Andhra Pradesh Government, argued the High Court could not have said that no investigation should take place in the case.

He said the High Court should not have given directions that no coercive action be taken and no gag order could have been passed.

"What is so special about this petition? The essence of this case is malafide but where it is reflected in the petition," the senior advocate said.

Dhavan argued that the writ petition before the High Court is political and against the Chief Minister and is based on reliable sources.

"There is evidence in the complaint and it runs into pages and pages. Now why will farmers purchase land in June and July and sell it in January. Now I ask myself whether this kind of complaint should be probed or not. There were a series of transactions and whether it should not be probed," he said.

Taking note of his submissions, the bench observed: "We are of the view that the issue requires consideration and therefore we will issue notice."

Centre asks states to reopen medical colleges from Dec 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry Wednesday asked state governments to initiate steps for reopening of medical colleges from December 1 or before it, but with strict adherence to all COVID-19 related guidelines.

Educational institutions in the country have been closed since March in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter to the chief secretaries and the administrators of all states and Union Territories, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan also suggested making non-COVID beds available in sufficient numbers in affiliated medical college-hospitals to facilitate undergraduate training.

The Health Ministry has obtained concurrence from the Ministry of Home Affairs for re-opening of medical colleges, the letter mentioned.

Accordingly, the states and UTs may take necessary steps to open the medical colleges on or before December 1, 2020, the health secretary said in his letter dated November 25.

Needless to say, all SOPs/guidelines with respect to social distancing and prevention of spread of epidemic issued by Central/states and UT governments will be followed scrupulously by all the colleges,

he said.

The Centre's directive comes in the wake of the National Medical Commission recommending reopening of medical colleges from December 1 or before it for the MBBS students already pursuing their courses.

The NMC, which has received representations from students and medical colleges, noted that the current batch of interns (2020) have not completed their required clinical training and unless they do it, they would not be eligible for appearing for the PG-NEET exam.

It also noted that the PG-NEET exam for the academic year 2021-22 has been delayed as the eligible candidates will be completing their training late.

Their training is required to be completed at the earliest so

that the PG - NEET exam for the academic year 2021-22 can be held accordingly, it said. "Delay in resuming

the training would have a cascading effect on training of next PG and super-speciality courses in the coming years," the NMC noted.

"The delayed new academic session for 2020-21 should commence from February 1, 2021. The new PG session for the academic year 2020-21 should begin from at least July 1, 2021 and therefore the PG-NEET exam for AY 2020-21 would need to be scheduled around March-April 2021," the NMC said in a communique to the Health Ministry on November 12.

With opening of medical colleges and to facilitate UG training, all medical colleges affiliated hospitals would need to have sufficient number of beds for non-COVID patients and hence facilities for both outpatient and inpatient management for non-COVID patients must be re-started, if not already done, the NMC stated.

Further, it noted that the students today (and would-be doctors tomorrow) should also be familiar with the inherent threats and opportunities in healthcare systems which they would eventually handle themselves.

It should not become a missed opportunity for medical students to learn the skills of epidemic management as public health professional, the NMC said.



Poor should get access to super speciality medicare: Guv

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Wednesday inaugurated the super specialty facilities and state-of-the-equipment at Sri Balaji Medical College, Hospital and Research Institute in Tirupati from Raj Bhavan through video conference.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said with the launch of Super Specialty services and latest medical equipment made available at the hospital, the people of Tirupati and Rayalaseema region will

now have the access to high-end medical care.

While complimenting the Vigyan Bharati Charitable Trust and Hi-tech Group Chairman, Tirupati Panigrahi, and members of Sri Balaji Medical College, Hospital and Research Institute, Harichandan urged them to ensure that super specialty medical services are made available to the poorer sections of the society at affordable prices.

The Governor said the Vigyan Bharati Charitable Trust has been working to

improve the living conditions of the poor and needy people in Odisha for many years and has now joined hands with the Kanchi Kama Koti Peetam and Sai Foundation and started Sri Balaji Education Medical College, Hospital and Research Institute in Tirupati with the vision of providing better health care facilities to the poor and the middle class people.

The Governor said the Trust and Sai Foundation have done commendable work during the Covid-19 pandemic in Odisha and won the appreciation of all.

Andhra-Odisha border dispute...

Continued from Page 1

The alleged forced grabbing incident occurred at Kolaput area under Dumbbriguda Mandal and villages of Dekkaparu, Bodalamamidi, Nitamamidi and Kolaput have been affected.

The dispute arose after a local leader in Odisha with administration officials reportedly erected a sign-board about one kilometre into Andhra Pradesh claiming the forest land belonged to Odisha.

"About 30 families living in these two villages along with forest areas with over 100 teak trees and agriculture land would come under Odisha if not intervened by the Andhra Pradesh government, said Kilo Surendra of CPM.

The borders between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha were discussed and demarcated way back in 1953, when Andhra Pradesh state was formed.

Though the officials from Andhra side visited the spot and confirmed that the stones and signboards were shifted over 600 meters on the AP side, the officials from Odisha side continue to claim that the land belonged to Odisha.

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₹ 560	
SILVER	
₹ 64,200 (1kg)	
₹ 300	

CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹158
Without Skin	₹180
Broiler at Farm	₹109

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	438
HYDERABAD	420
VISAKHAPATNAM	435
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.38

‘Jagananna Thodu’ gives...

Continued from Page 1

Elsewhere, TDP national spokesperson Kommareddy Pattabhi accused the YSRCP Government of making false claims on the interest-free loans to petty businesses like vendors and hawkers without showing any commitment to the true welfare of the poorer sections.

Pattabhi described the newly-launched 'Jagananna Thodu' scheme as just a 'Jagananna Kabza' programme.

"The scheme is nothing but taking credit for the Prime Minister Swanidhi loans being given to the small traders all over the country. In fact, these small loans of Rs 10,000 were being given already in a big way in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana while Andhra Pradesh lagged far behind all these months," Pattabhi said.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP leader recalled that back in May, the Union Finance Minister announced the small loans scheme but now the Jagan regime was trying to make it look like its own programme. In the 'PM Swanidhi' website, it was clarified that nearly 15 lakh loans were sanctioned as against 28 lakh applicants for small loans.

The AP Government should explain why it could not avail

this Central scheme to extend this benefit to the small traders in the State till now, he demanded.

Pattabhi deplored that all of a sudden, the YSRCP government was releasing advertisements and has spent crores of public funds on publicity for the Chief Minister.

"For the last six months, AP has been sleeping on the loans programme launched under the Atma Nirbhara Bharath. The Central Government had announced already that Rs 5,000 crore liquidity was offered to the banks for implementing this scheme all over the country," he said.

The TDP leader objected to the manner in which the AP Government was asking for an advance payment of 7 per cent interest on these small loans. The same interest would be deposited back into the bank accounts at a later date. The poor traders cannot depend on this Government considering its shock to the farmers in the Sunna Vaddi scheme," he added.

Pattabhi said that the YSRCP government lacked credibility and Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy was going everywhere for loans but the banks were turning a deaf ear.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's Covid-19 caseload went past 92 lakh with 44,376 new cases reported in a day, while the number of recoveries surged to 86.42 lakh, the health ministry said on Wednesday.

The number of total coronavirus cases rose to 92,22,216 in the country, while the death toll due to the disease climbed to 1,34,699 with 481 new fatalities, the ministry's data updated at 8 am showed.

The active caseload shot up to 4,44,746, an increase of 6,079 cases from Tuesday, even

though it remained below five lakh for the 15th consecutive day, accounting for 4.82 per cent of the total cases, the data stated.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 86,42,771, pushing the national recovery rate to 93.72 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.46 per cent.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30-lakh mark on August 23 and 40-lakh mark on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29 and 90 lakh on

November 20.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), over 13.48 crore samples were tested for Covid-19 up to November 24, including 11,59,032 on Tuesday.

The 481 new fatalities include 109 from Delhi, 49 from West Bengal, 33 each from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, 30 from Maharashtra, 24 from Kerala, 22 from Punjab and 21 from Chhattisgarh.

Of the 1,34,699 deaths reported in the country so far due to the disease, Maharashtra

accounts for 46,683, followed by Karnataka (11,695), Tamil Nadu (11,639), Delhi (8,621), West Bengal (8,121), Uttar Pradesh (7,615), Andhra Pradesh (6,956), Punjab (4,653) and Gujarat (3,892).

According to the health ministry, more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that a state-wise distribution of the figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Nivar: Around 2,000 people in Chittoor evacuated

Continued from Page 1

An additional 20 teams will be on standby in Odisha's Cuttack, Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh and Thrissur in Kerala.

Paddy and tomato farmers could not harvest their crop as heavy rain lashed most of the Chittoor and Nellore.

Pilgrims to Tirumala also faced tough times with the

heavy downpour since morning of Wednesday. Routes of some trains passing through the likely to be affected areas were diverted.

Chittoor district administration announced holiday for schools for two days. Chittoor district collector Dr Narayana Bharat Gupta said nearly 2,000 people residing in 17 vulnerable mandals have been evacuated to safer places.



YSRCP eclipse has damaged Polavaram project, says Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP supremo and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday asserted that the ruling YSRCP's "bad propaganda and false allegations" have undermined the Polavaram project that has the potential to ensure water for two crops.

Naidu said that it was the "YSRCP eclipse" that has dealt a severe blow to the State's lifeline, Polavaram project. "Purposefully, the ruling party leaders indulged in mudslinging and crippled the project even though 72 percent project works were already completed," he said.

Addressing a meeting of the party leaders in Kakinada Lok Sabha constituency, the TDP supremo said that baseless allegations of corruption were made on Pattiseema and Purushothapatnam projects as well. "The YSRCP's misinformation campaign and vicious motives had caused irreparable harm to the whole state. As a result, all sections of the people were now being forced to pay a heavy price," he said.

Naidu accused the YSRCP regime of sabotaging real estate worth Rs 2 lakh-crore in Amaravati with its mindless and vain Capital shifting idea. "They could not bring Special Category Status about which the CM repeatedly promised. The Rs 15 lakh-crore investments brought by the previous TDP rule were prevented from

becoming a reality. The youth are made to suffer without job opportunities," the TDP chief said.

Stating that unabated atrocities were taking place all over the State, Naidu said that the YSRCP leaders were playing games with the lives of people and women. "The ruling party's gambling batches were rearing their ugly heads everywhere. MLAs and Ministers themselves are involved in illegal activities. The YSRCP leaders themselves exposed their corruption activities with their mutual attacks in the Kakinada DDRC meeting," he alleged.



Pay Rs 27,000 cr to Polavaram evacuees: TDP to Govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Accusing the YSRCP Government of pushing the lifeline Polavaram irrigation project into a crisis by frequently changing its designs and works, TDP MLA Eluru Sambasiva Rao on Wednesday said that the administration lacked enough commitment to complete the project. Sambasiva Rao demanded the Government pay Rs. 27,500 crore as compensation towards land acquisition and resettlement of the project evacuees.

"Polavaram dam should be constructed at a height of 150 ft in order to store 194 tmc ft water to meet the long-standing aspirations of the farmers," he said. The TDP legislator asserted that the Jaganmohan Reddy regime was neglecting Polavaram right from the time it came to power since "early completion of the project would bring credit to former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu". He said that it was only because of the dynamic steps taken by the

TDP supremo during his tenure that 72 percent of the project works were completed. "However, the YSRCP did not execute the works at the same pace but has instead been creating hurdles in the name of reverse tendering and redesign," Sambasiva Rao added. He vehemently objected to the proposal to reduce the dam height by over 15 ft, saying this would be injustice to the project evacuees. "The Chief Minister should give his explanation to the farmers and the evacuees. He did not make serious efforts except

writing a letter to the Prime Minister. No further action was taken on the R&R package. After Jagan became the CM, Polavaram project got caught in a deadlock," Sambasiva Rao added. The TDP MLA said that if the Chandrababu Naidu regime had been re-elected in 2019, Polavaram would have been completed by December of the same year. "Then, all the 13 districts would have got plenty of water supply to irrigate their lands and also to meet their drinking water needs," he claimed.

Botsa defends changes to property tax reforms

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Claiming that the revised method of property tax fixation is to make urban local bodies financially self-sufficient and would not burden the public, Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana on Wednesday condemned reports in a section of media on property tax reforms.

The Minister said the State Government, under the leadership of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has taken a decision after taking suggestions from the Central Government to change the system of levying property tax to strengthen urban local bodies (ULBs) and to provide better services to people.

The Minister said the property tax, till now, is levied from annual rental value basis (ARV System) where three months rent is levied as tax per annum. The State Government has revised the method of tax fixation and to levy tax based on capital value (CV) of the property, he said. Botsa pointed out that the new taxation system is already being implemented in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

The Minister said the percentage of the property tax so fixed, is between 0.10pc and 0.50pc of the Capital Value (CV) for residential buildings and it's between 0.2pc to 2pc for non residential buildings. "The Chief Minister is clear in his intentions not to burden the people with a revised taxation system and it is men-



tioned in the GO that increased tax shall be limited to 15pc of the existing tax," he said.

The Minister assured that property tax would not be increased more than 10-15 percent and appealed to property owners not to believe in "false propaganda promoted by a section of the media". "Only Rs 50 is levied as property tax for every house with a plinth area below 375 sq.ft and it is also because the property rights will be given only if taxes are paid," he said.

The Minister said State Government has decided to levy water tax between Rs 100 and Rs 350 per month for households (domestic) and is between Rs 30 and Rs 50 per kilolitre for bulk usage (like apartments), and is between Rs 60 and Rs 140 per kilolitre for commercial purposes and it is to be between Rs 40 and Rs 80 per kilolitre for industrial users.

He said the revised taxes are only to cover the ONM costs of the supply of water but not for additional income to the municipalities and added that the hike would be 15 pc.

SC order on expected lines: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana said that the State government's stand on the gag order had remained the same and the Supreme Court order was on expected lines.

Talking to reporters here on Wednesday, Botsa said that the only intention of the government was to have a clean and transparent investigation into the Amaravati land scam and this was why it had challenged the gag order issued by the High Court.

"The Supreme Court had also given the orders on similar lines because justice shouldn't differ from person to person, rich or poor. Justice has to remain the same for everyone. We will not be carried away when we get a favourable verdict nor will we be dejected on adverse remarks," he said. "The apex court ruling has been expected and we have been consistent in our stance," Botsa maintained.

Man held for raping minor girl

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vizag city police on Wednesday arrested a man on charges of raping a 15-year-old girl. The police said that a few months ago, Sai Kumar, a barber by profession and relative of the girl, allegedly eloped with her.

Recently, she was admitted to hospital following the health issues and she was found to be pregnant. Taking it as a medico-legal case, police registered FIR and arrested the accused.

In another case, a 15-year-old-girl went missing from her home at Kotha Jalaripeta in Vizag city. Based on the complaint from the parents of the girl, the One-Town police have registered a missing case and launched a search to trace the missing girl. The police said that on November 23, the girl's parents went to their relatives' home in Vizag city when they returned home, they didn't find her daughter.



Representatives of KIA Motors meet Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at his camp office at Tadepalli on Wednesday. The delegation, comprising KIA Motors (India) MD Kookhyun Shim, KIA Motors Legal HOD Jude Lee and Principal Advisor Dr Somashekar Reddy, thanked the Chief Minister for the support extended by the State Government to the company.

Who files FIR for encroachments?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Encroachment of lakes is a serious issue that Hyderabad has been dealing with. In fact it was one of the major reasons behind the recent floods in the city. However, when responsible citizens approach Police or Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) when they notice any encroachments, they receive no help.

Social activist, Vijay Gopal shares that according to three RTIs that he filed, neither GHMC, not the police is ready to file the case. So the question is who takes action when a lake is encroached?

He says, "I filed the RTI asking authorities to share how many cases were filed regard-

With the police and GHMC denying taking up lake encroachment issues, confused citizens don't follow up with encroachment cases

ing lake encroachment from 2014. And their reply was none. When I approached the Police regarding the issues, they said that we don't take these cases as they are civic issues. GHMC, on the other hand, issues only show cause notice or at the best they visit the place and take no action. In such scenarios, the only option left to the citizens is to move to court. And knowing how slowly the judicial system works in this country, most citizens leave the issue and

don't follow it up."

Recently, when the residents of Serilingampally approached the GHMC as a construction company by the name of Vertex Home Pvt Ltd was trying to alter the route of a nala that carries the rain water into the Nallagandla lake, they were routed to the Irrigation Department, which is yet to take any strict action.

A resident from the locality from the locality, Sumanta Saha, informs, "We started complaining to GHMC in 2017 itself. After many calls and visits the GHMC officials told us that this complaint should be made to the Irrigation Department. So, we approached the irrigation department, however they are also very lax about the matter."

1,800 kgs of ganja seized

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Vizag rural police have seized over 1,800 kg of dry ganja worth over Rs 2 crore near KD Peta under Golugonda Mandal in Vizag district.

Based on the concrete information, the police conducted vehicular checkups to nab the ganja laden vehicle.

However, the driver of the ganja laden lorry noticed the police teams and abandoned the vehicle and fled from the spot.

The police said that the lorry was coming from Rapula ghat towards KD Peta.

BJP bigwigs to descend on Hyd for GHMC poll campaign

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Several BJP bigwigs including union home minister Amit Shah and party's national president J. P. Nadda are likely to descend on Hyderabad over the next few days to campaign for the party in Greater Hyderabad civic polls. The saffron party is also likely to bring Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to bolster its campaign for December 1 elections to Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), party sources said.

After central minister Prakash Javadekar and BJP youth wing chief Tejendra Surya, another union minister Smriti Irani landed in Hyderabad on Wednesday as part of the party campaign. BJP OBC Morcha president K. Laxman said services of national leaders were being used to reach out to various sections of voters in the short time available for the campaign. BJP's women wing president Vanathi Srinivasan is also campaigning for the party.

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy, who is a member of Lok Sabha from Secunderabad, is already actively campaigning for BJP.

Buoyed by its recent victory in Dubbak Assembly by-election, BJP appears determined to wrest GHMC from TRS. "It was Dubbak yesterday, GHMC today and Assembly elections tomorrow," said Kishan Reddy.



BJP leaders see GHMC elections as semifinal before 2023 Assembly elections. The party is targeting the state to expand its presence in South India.

Tejasvi Surya, who campaigned for two days, exuded confidence that the series of victories for BJP will begin from Hyderabad. "It's not mere municipal elections. The whole country is looking towards Hyderabad. Winds of change are blowing in Hyderabad and Telangana," he said.

The MP from Bengaluru said the entire South India will be saffronised in 2-3 years. BJP had won only four seats in 150-member GHMC in 2016 elections. In 2018 Assembly elections, it could win only one seat. However, in Lok Sabha elections last year it put up an

impressive performance to win four of 17 seats in the state. Meanwhile, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) working president K. T. Rama Rao hoped that the central ministers will not come to Hyderabad empty handed but will bring funds from the Centre for the flood-affected Hyderabad.

Rama Rao, who is also minister for municipal administration and urban development, tweeted that he welcomes central ministers who are coming to Hyderabad. He said it would have been better if they had visited the city when it was battling heavy rains and floods. He hoped that the ministers will not come empty handed but bring Rs.1,350 crore flood relief as sought by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao.

Portal to help transgenders apply for ID cards launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A national portal to help transgender community members in applying for a certificate and an identity card online was launched by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thaawarchand Gehlot on Wednesday.

Gehlot said applicants can get their I-cards without any physical interface and without having to visit any office.

Through the portal, they can monitor the status of their application that ensures transparency in the process. The issuing authorities are also under strict timelines to process the applications and issue certificates and identity cards without any necessary delays," he said.

Once the certificate and I-card are issued, the applicant can download them from the portal itself. In case of delay or rejection, the applicant has the option to submit grievances through the portal which are forwarded to the person concerned and will be resolved at



the earliest, Gehlot said.

The issuing authorities through the dashboard provided to them can view the number of applications received, the applications approved and the applications which are pending or put on hold so that they can take the required action from their end, the minister said.

He hoped that the portal will

help a lot of people from the community to come forward and get Transgender Certificate and identity cards as per their self-perceived identity which is an important provision of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of State for Social Justice Rattan Lal Kataria said

the national portal is an end-to-end online process.

The members of transgender community can avail the services offered by the portal from anywhere.

Gehlot also e-inaugurated a 'Garima Greh: A Shelter Home for Transgender Persons' in Vadodara which will be run in association with Lakshya Trust.

"The purpose of the Shelter Home is to provide shelter to transgender persons, with basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and recreational facilities. Besides, it will provide support for the capacity-building/skill development of persons in the community, which will enable them to lead a life of dignity and respect," Gehlot said.

IIL to invest Rs 75 cr to set up viral antigen plant in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Biologicals firm Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL) on Wednesday said it will invest Rs 75 crore to commission a new viral antigen manufacturing facility in Telangana to increase its capacity for supplying vaccines.

The new facility will be specially designed as a multi-product facility and cater to the need for viral vaccines in the pipeline, including for dengue, zika and varicella, IIL said in a statement.

The company also plans to utilise the facility to manufacture Covid vaccines post completion of its R&D with Griffith University, Australia, it added.

The company also inaugurated a new sterile filling facility that was commissioned last year to increase its capacity to supply lifesaving vaccines such as the Anti Rabies Vaccine (ARV) -- Abhayrab,



IIL said.

"We are optimistic about the strategic investment as India is one of the key growth markets. As we mark as one of the major players on the pediatric and rabies vaccine, this expansion of our manufacturing facility is our commitment to securing a healthy and sustainable future," IIL MD K Anand Kumar said.

Delhi riots: Accused committed ‘crime against humanity’: Police

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The accused persons in the recent Delhi riots allegedly committed a crime against humanity carried out in an extremely brutal, grotesque and dastardly manner, police has said in its supplementary charge sheet filed in a case in a court here.

The charge sheet, which names former JNU student leader Umar Khalid and JNU student Sharjeel Imam as accused, said there was a tacit understanding between the accused persons to carry out an illegal act.

It stated that by a sustained and well-oiled campaign, they created an acute sense of fear and insecurity in the minds of the minority community.

All the accused persons came together in pursuit of an unlawful object. The offences



have been committed by the accused persons in an extremely brutal, grotesque and dastardly manner.

Innocent victims and helplessness were targeted of this ghastly, horrendous and horrifying crime. Precious lives were lost.

Accused persons are charge sheeted for commission of grave, serious and heinous

offences.

It is pertinent to mention here that their acts and commissions have shocked the collective conscience of the society. The accused persons' conduct exhibits total disregard for human values and shows a totally depraved, brutal and scheming mind. The accused persons have committed a

crime against humanity, Police claimed in the charge sheet filed on Sunday.

It further said that the criminal conspiracy was continuing and has suffered setbacks with the exposure and arrest of the accused persons but it was neither aborted nor abandoned.

The charge sheet said the brunt of the conspiracy was suffered by those who reside in most densely populated district of India where day to day survival requires blood and sweat of the toiler and the breadwinner.

With the leaders choosing to either remain safely glued to their television sets in the comfort of their homes in upscale locations of Delhi-NCR using their communication devices as the weapon of the enlightened or leaving Delhi for outside destinations to create the most acceptable

alibi, the brunt of the conspiracy was suffered by those who reside in most densely populated district of India where day to day survival requires blood and sweat of the toiler and the breadwinner. The crime committed by the key conspirators is not just legally but morally reprehensible, it said.

It alleged the charge sheeted accused had entered into a deep rooted and sinister conspiracy to do an illegal act with an objective to disturb societal harmony by their terrorist acts.

By a sustained and well oiled campaign, they created an acute sense of fear and insecurity in the minds of the minority community. Innocent people were killed as a result of this cold blooded, brutal, gruesome and diabolical conspiracy. Government and private properties were damaged, destroyed and destructed.

After Sushil Modi's sensational tweet, Lalu's audio clip goes viral

PNS ■ PATNA

Rashtriya Janata Dals jailed president Lalu Prasads alleged attempts to poach MLAs of the ruling NDA in Bihar and topple the newly formed Nitish Kumar government on Wednesday stirred the political waters in the state.

Sushil Kumar Modi, the Chief Ministers former deputy and trusted lieutenant in the BJP, who had made a sensational claim on the previous night that Prasad was having access to a mobile phone through which he was calling up NDA legislators, followed it up with an audio clip of a purported conversation between the RJD supremo, who is in Ranchi, and a saffron party MLA.

Modi shared the one and a half minute long clip on his official Twitter handle where in Prasad can be heard speaking, in his unique voice and distinct accent, to the Pirpainti



MLA Lalan Kumar.

"We will take good care of you. Just help us tomorrow in defeating the NDAs candidate for the Speakers post, Prasad can be heard saying in the audio.

In the audio, the MLA can be heard mumbling about the difficulties that he may face if he voted against his own party to which Prasad replies in an assuring tone "you need not worry. We are going to have

our own Speaker. We will also reward you further once we topple this government and form our own".

The BJP MLA sought to confirm the veracity of the audio clip and said the conversation took place in the very presence of Sushil Kumar Modi, apparently not in knowledge of the wily RJD supremo.

"I was in a meeting with Sushil Modi when my personal assistant came to inform that there is a call from Lalu Prasad on my mobile. I was surprised but thought that like many others he might have called to congratulate me upon recent electoral victory", Lalan Kumar told reporters here..

"He is such a senior leader. So I duly greeted him with a respectful pranaam. He began to speak of toppling the government etc. I tried to reason out that I am bound by party discipline.....After hanging up, I informed Sushil Modi", said the MLA.

Don't misunderstand party: Mamata to disgruntled TMC leaders

PNS ■ BANKURA (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in a message to disgruntled TMC leaders on Wednesday said she is aware of those in touch with the opposition camp and differences among individuals should not lead to any misunderstanding of the party.

Banerjee said she will henceforth personally look after the party as well as the administration.

"I have been in politics all my life. Through my experience I can never claim that everybody is good. There may be one or two people who are not good, but we will set right those mistakes. The TMC will rectify if some mistakes have been committed,"

she said in her first major public rally here in the post-Covid time.

"There can be misunderstanding or someone may be angry with some individuals, but please don't misunderstand the party for that," Banerjee appealed.

TMC, she said, has a mechanism for seeking ground reports about its leaders and had removed several leaders against whom there were complaints.

"Some have grievances over who will act as the party observer of which district. I want to make it clear that I am the party's observer for the entire state. When you are in a political party you need to take everybody along," she asserted.

Now Sabarimala pilgrims get medicinal drinking water in bottles

PNS ■ SABARIMALA

The sought-after medicinal drinking water, distributed among pilgrims at the famed Lord Ayyappa temple here while trekking, is now available in bottles, thanks to the COVID-19 vigil.

In the wake of the widespread virus outbreak, the Travancore Devswom Board (TDB), the apex temple body which manages the hill temple, has launched a new system of distributing the specially prepared drinking water in separate steel bottles to avoid the risk of the disease spread.

According to TDB officials, pilgrims can pay a deposit of Rs 200 to receive a steel bottle in which they can collect medicinal drinking water from the Anjaneya auditorium in Pamba, the base camp.

When the steel bottle is returned to the counter after



the darshan, the deposit amount would be refunded, they said.

Besides this, water is also distributed in disposable paper glass at various points like Pamba, Charalmedu, Jyothinagar and Malikappuram in the trekking route, as part of COVID-19 precautionary measures, they added.

The medicinal drinking water, distributed among Lord Ayyappa devotees during every pilgrim season, is prepared by boiling herbal articles like 'chukk' (dried ginger), 'ramacham' (vetiver) and 'pathimukham' (sappanwood).

Used paper glass, abandoned by devotees, is collected and disposed in an eco-friendly

manner. Medicinal drinking water is prepared at the distribution centres itself, they said adding that the employees who distribute it wear mask, face shields and gloves, adhering to COVID protocols.

Currently, there are three to four employees working on a shift basis at the four medicinal water distribution centres at Sabarimala. A total of 55 temporary employees were working eight hours a day there, the officials added.

Dhanu S Krishnan is the Special Officer for the medicinal drinking water programme.

The annual two-month-long Mandala-Makaravilakku season at Sabarimala began on November 16, adhering to strict Covid-19 guidelines.

It is the first annual pilgrimage season at the hill temple after the coronavirus outbreak.

People expect discipline from elected representatives: Kovind

PNS ■ KEVADIA

President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday said elected representatives should engage in a healthy dialogue in Parliament and legislative Assemblies and refrain from using unparliamentary language during debates in the House.

Use of unparliamentary language and indiscipline in the House by elected members hurts the sentiments of people who elect them, Kovind said addressing the inaugural session of 80th All India Presiding Officers' Conference at Tent City in Gujarat's Kevadia village, near the Statue of Unity in Narmada district.

"It is expected from elected representatives that they



remain committed to democratic values. The biggest challenge for elected representatives and democratic institutions is to fulfill the expectations of people," he said.

"I believe that people of this country expect that their elected representatives to follow parliamentary norms. People get hurt when their elected representatives use unparliamentary words or indulge in indiscipline in Parliament or in the Assembly," Kovind said.

Even if BJP arrests me, I will ensure TMC victory: Mamata

PNS ■ BANKURA (WB)

Calling the BJP "garbage of lies" and "biggest curse of the nation", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday dared the saffron party to arrest her and asserted she will ensure TMC victory in the upcoming elections even from the jail.

Election to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly is due in April-May.

Accusing the BJP of trying to poach TMC MLAs by attempting to bribe them, Banerjee, without naming anyone, said some people are acting as fence-sitters who are under the illusion that the saffron party might come to power in the state.

"The BJP is not a political party but garbage of lies. Whenever the election arrives, they bring up the issue of Narada (sting operation) and Saradha (scam) to intimidate TMC leaders.

Shivalik elephant reserve to be denotified, move to help in expansion of Dehradun

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand State Wildlife Board has decided to denotify the Shivalik Elephant Reserve, paving the way for expansion of the Jolly Grant airport here.

The decision was taken at the 16th meeting of the board chaired by Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat late on Tuesday.

The withdrawal of the 2002 notification on Shivalik Elephant Reserve will pave the way for increased development activities in an area spread over 5405 square km including the expansion of Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport, Chief Wildlife Warden, J S Suhag, told PTI.

"The notification on Shivalik Elephant Reserve had no legal sanction as it was just a government order which did not have the Cabinet's approval, he said, adding that its cancellation will facilitate land acquisition for development purposes in nearly a dozen forest divisions across the state, he said.

The Board also gave its nod to start four new trek routes in Nelang valley which falls within the Gangotri National Park to give a boost to tourism.

The current limit of five vehicles and 30 people per day



sions across the state, he said. The Board also gave its nod to start four new trek routes in Nelang valley which falls within the Gangotri National Park to give a boost to tourism.

The current limit of five vehicles and 30 people per day

for the area has also been increased to 20 and 100 respectively, Suhag said.

It can further be increased if the need to so arises in future, he said. The new approved trek routes are Nadung-Janakthal (10km), Jaspur-Brahmikhhal

(14km), Dumku-Chorgad (18km) and Jhala-Avan meadow (10km).

The board also decided to resend its proposal for Laldhang-Chillarkhal road to the national wildlife board for its approval.

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government on Wednesday decided to reimpose night curfew from December 1 in all cities and towns of the state, besides doubling the fine for not wearing masks. The fresh restrictions to fight COVID-19 were announced amid fears of a second wave of the infection in Punjab in the wake of the grim situation in Delhi-NCR.

The night curfew will remain in force from 10 pm to 5 am, said Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh after a Covid review meeting here, according to a government statement.

The fine for not wearing masks and ignoring social distancing norms too shall be hiked from the present Rs 500 to Rs 1,000.

The curbs, which shall be reviewed on December 15, also curtail operation timings of hotels, restaurants and marriage places and they will have to be closed by 9.30 pm. The CM



warned people against letting their guard down under any circumstances.

Given the inflow of patients from Delhi for treatment in Punjab, it has also been decided to review and optimise the availability of beds in the state's private hospitals.

The CM has asked Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan to work with the concerned departments to encourage more private hospitals to come on board and earmark beds for Covid care. To further strengthen the availability of oxygen and ICU beds, Singh also ordered the strengthening of the level-2 and level-3 hospitals, with constant monitoring of districts that

are not equipped with level-3 facilities.

The management practices in government medical colleges and hospitals and civil hospitals should also be examined in light of the recommendations of the report received from the expert group, he said.

The CM has also directed the health and medical education departments to make emergency appointments of specialists, super-specialists, nurses and paramedics, to further augment the manpower.

Recently, 249 specialist doctors and 407 medical officers were recruited.

The departments have also been asked to consider preparing fourth and fifth-year MBBS students as reserved back-ups, in case of need in the future.

On the testing front, the CM stressed the need to fully utilise the 25,500 daily RT-PCR testing capacity and directed targeted and regular testing of potential super spreaders, including government officials.

Former marine commando recalls night of 26/11 attacks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former marine commando Praveen Kumar Teotia, who led his team during the counter-terrorist operations in the wake of the 26/11 attack in Mumbai, gives a minute-by-minute account of that deadly night inside the Taj hotel in his memoir.

He suffered multiple injuries during the operation but his quick response and counter-attack saved more than 150 lives.

"26/11 Braveheart: My Encounter With Terrorists That Night", published by Rupa, is the story of Teotia and how he fought the terrorists.

On that fateful night, Teotia was heading towards his naval base around 8 pm.

"Who would have imagined that 10 men from Pakistan

would come sailing through the Arabian Sea in a small boat and would launch the most dastardly attack on the city? And hardly would have I imagined that a few hours from now, I will be facing these fideayen, inside the Taj, eye to eye, and my life would change forever," he says.

Giving details of what happened inside the Taj after the marine commando team of the Navy reached there, he says, "There was information given to us earlier that there were at least four terrorists inside. Later on, the High Level Enquiry Committee confirmed in its findings the presence of four terrorists in the Taj. Two terrorists had stealthily entered from the main lobby (of the Taj Towers) while the other two, who had fired at Leopold, entered by North Cote entrance (of the Heritage Taj) and joined up with



their partners.

"There was no chance of a police response when terrorists had attacked Leopold Cafe at about 9:30 p.m. These two armed men had suddenly walked in and began firing indiscriminately. After creating a bloodbath there, they hastened towards the Taj."

Ever since the team entered the Taj, there was death and mayhem around us - in the halls, the corridors, and the reception

area. "The lazy opulence of the place had been disrupted and what stood before us was a shaken Taj. Bullet-ridden bodies were lying amidst the inferno and bloodbath. Some lucky survivors had to be pulled out with corpses lying on top of them, an experience that would torment them for life," Teotia recalls.

He was badly injured while fighting the terrorists. Four bullets ripped through his body, a

lung was punctured, four ribs were shattered and splinters scattered all over his chest, doctors attending to him declared that his life had been cut short, that he could never swim or run. But he proved everyone wrong.

A Shaurya Chakra awardee, Teotia overcame his injury and went on to participate in several marathons and the Ironman championship. He is now a life coach and a physical trainer, and also gives special weapons and tactical training to state police commandos.

In the book, Teotia also writes about the quality of counter-operation gear and weapons.

When he and his team went to collect arms and gear from the armoury division, they came to know that there was no MP5 weapon (a close quarter battle weapon used in close encounters or operations) for them.

They were left with no choice but to take the AK-47s that were available.

For this key operation, they were given normal combat helmets that were good enough only to protect the head from stones or other objects, he says.

"But we could not have possibly gone without the headgear and hence had no choice but to wear the poor substitute. I, however, became a bit agitated when we were told by the armoury division that there were no specialised bulletproof jackets available," he writes.

"We were then provided with a normal buoyant bullet-proof jacket. In other words, this was a jacket that had a simple plate in the front and could only take shots from a pistol. This jacket was also used to prevent someone from drowning," he adds.

Shivakumar appears before CBI in disproportionate assets case

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Congress Karnataka unit president D K Shivakumar on Wednesday appeared before CBI officials in Bengaluru for questioning in connection with a disproportionate assets case registered against him, sources said.

The CBI had served Shivakumar a notice on November 19 asking him to appear on November 23 but he had sought time citing pre-arranged meetings at Ballari, Maski and Basava Kalyan.

Heeding his request, the CBI officials had allowed him to appear on Wednesday.

Ahead of appearing before the agency, Shivakumar said he will cooperate with the officials of the country's premier investigating agency.

The Kanakapura MLA told his supporters that there was no need to worry and he has done nothing that will bring a bad name to them.

The CBI on October 5 had conducted searches at 14 locations, including in Karnataka, Delhi and Mumbai at the premises linked to Shivakumar and others.

The investigating agency had said the searches have led to recovery of Rs 57 lakh cash and several documents, including property documents, bank related information, computer hard disk etc, and that the investigation is continuing. The CBI had also registered a case against Shivakumar and his family members on the allegations of possession of disproportionate assets worth Rs 74.93 crore.

Nivar to intensify into ‘very severe’, TN declares one more day holiday

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Severe cyclone ‘Nivar’ would intensify into a very severe cyclonic storm and it is likely to cross the coast between Tamil Nadu and Puducherry before dawn on Thursday, the India Meteorological Department said. Chief Minister K Palaniswami, meanwhile, declared Thursday a public holiday for 13 districts including Chennai, Vellore, Cuddalore, Villupuram, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Chengelpet and Kancheepuram considering the safety of people in view of the cyclone.

Wednesday has already been declared a holiday. In its latest bulletin, the IMD said Nivar would cross over between Karaikal and Mamallapuram “during the midnight of November 25 and early hours of 26 November.”

The storm, 250 km off Chennai and 190 km and 180 km from Puducherry and



STORAGE ALMOST FULL, AUTHORITIES START WATER RELEASE FROM KEY RESERVOIR

Chennai: As the storage level touched 3,000 million cubic feet in the Chembarambakkam reservoir as against its full capacity of 3,645 Mct, authorities on Wednesday began releasing about 1,000 cusecs into the Adyar river as a precautionary measure. As the surplus waters gushed forth with the opening of shutters after about five years, Chief

Minister K Palaniswami inspected the dam premises and reviewed the precautionary measures and the outflow. Palaniswami said he advised the officials to “carry out their work cautiously and without causing any inconvenience to the people.” On the dam’s storage position, the Chief Minister told reporters that it has reached 21.5 feet.

Cuddalore respectively is very likely to move northwards and cross coasts as a “very severe cyclonic storm with a

wind speed of 120-130 kmph gusting to 145 kmph.”

Under the influence of the cyclone, coastal and north inter-

FLOOD RELIEF KITS FROM RAHUL GANDHI FOUND ABANDONED, TRIGGER STIR

Malappuram: Flood relief kits provided by Wayanad MP and senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to his constituency have been found abandoned in a vacant shop at Nilambur near here. This triggered widespread protest from various quarters, including local residents and the Left parties.

The kits, including food packets, clothes and other materials, were found in the shop on Tuesday when a few people arrived to rent the space. The DYFI, youth wing of the ruling CPI-M, staged a protest-march against the

Congress party and asked its leaders to tender an apology to the people. Nilambur MLA P V Anwar (independent supporting LDF) on Wednesday sought a probe by the district Collector K Gopalakrishnan. He claimed after the matter came to light, Congress leaders allegedly destroyed other such stocks from across the constituency. “This is not an isolated matter from Nilambur. They (Congress party) had stocked food materials at many other places to influence voters in the upcoming local body elections.

rior Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal regions are likely to receive rainfall on Wednesday at most places with heavy to very heavy showers at a few places and extremely heavy rains at isolated places. South coastal Andhra Pradesh is also likely to witness showers at most places today.

Rainfall is expected to continue in many places in these regions Thursday too with heavy rainfall at some places. Surplus water was released from Chembarambakkam lake, one of the key drinking water sources to the city, since it almost neared its capacity, the government said.

INDIA CORNER

Goa approves employment scheme for young engineers

The Goa cabinet on Wednesday approved a scheme under the Chief Minister’s Rojgar Yojana (CMRY), which will help engineering graduates and diploma holders win government contracts for small works. Speaking to reporters here, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the state cabinet has approved the CMRY 2020 for Engineers, which will create a separate slot for young diploma and degree holders, where they can bid for small works in the state PWD. Engineers who have just earned their diploma or degree, and are below the age of 35, are eligible for the scheme, he said. Projects of up to Rs 5 lakh will be allotted to engineers with a diploma, while those holding a degree can bid for works of up to Rs 10 lakh, the chief minister said. The state-run EDC will issue loans to engineers who take up such projects, he said. Sawant said the scheme will weed out the monopoly of some contractors who often bid for small works and also provide employment for new engineers.



BJP, TMC clash in Birbhum, bombs hurled

Crude bombs were hurled and stones thrown at passing vehicles when ruling TMC and BJP activists clashed on way to a rally by the saffron party’s state unit president Dilip Ghosh in West Bengal’s Birbhum district on Wednesday. Police said the clash broke out when BJP activists travelling in a mini truck to the rally at Suri had an altercation with the local TMC workers while passing through Simurali in the district. As the vehicle’s windscreen was broken in the brick batting, the BJP men alighted from the vehicle and a clash ensued in which crude bombs were freely hurled. Many other vehicles, including two wheelers, which were passing through the area were damaged by the warring groups. A police team from Bolpur rushed to the spot and burstfire gas shells to quell the mob and cleared the highway. The clash, however, spilled to nearby village roads and the police intervened to bring the situation under control. BJP supporters have alleged that two of their supporters were injured in the firing by TMC activists during the clash but this was not confirmed by police.



Punjab, Haryana Congress leaders condole death of Ahmed Patel

Congress leaders from Punjab and Haryana on Wednesday condoled the demise of senior party leader Ahmed Patel and described him as a selfless politician whose death has left a void which will be difficult to fill. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said Patel was a dedicated worker, strong anchor of the Congress and steered it through difficult times. “Shocked & saddened to learn about the untimely passing away of senior Congress leader & friend #AhmedPatel ji,” Singh said in a tweet. “He was a dedicated worker, strong anchor of our party & steered it through difficult times. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends & workers. We will miss you,” Singh added. Former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda described Patel as a “selfless politician” and said he was deeply saddened to hear his demise and added that he has lost a “close and important friend”. His passing away has left a vacuum in the Congress Party, which will be difficult to fill,” Hooda, who is the Leader of the Opposition in Haryana, said.



Uproar over Covid deaths in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The three BJP-ruled municipal corporations here Wednesday again alleged the AAP-led Delhi government was under-reporting deaths due to coronavirus, a claim refuted by the ruling party which accused the MCDs of “politicising” the issue. According to Delhi govern-

ment data, the total number of coronavirus deaths in the city was 8,512 as on November 23, while the civic bodies claimed they carried out 10,318 funerals following COVID-19 protocols. East Delhi mayor Nirmal Jain said the Delhi government should explain why the official figures were lower than the numbers provided by the MCDs.

‘Tarun Gogoi was my guru’, says Rahul Gandhi

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Calling former Assam chiefminister Tarun Gogoi his guru, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday paid tributes to the grand old party stalwart and said his demise is a “personal loss”.

He said talking to Gogoi was like speaking with the entire state as the three-time chief minister used to only talk about Assam and its people.

After arriving in Guwahati on a special flight from Goa, Gandhi straightaway reached Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra, where Gogoi’s body has been kept for the public to pay their last respect.

He offered floral tributes to Gogoi’s mortal remains in the presence of the veteran Congress leader’s parliamentarian son Gaurav. “I think Gogoi ji was not just a leader of Assam. He was a formidable CM and a national leader. He inspired us by bringing



people of Assam together and bringing peace to the state,” Gandhi told reporters after having the last glimpse of the Congressman.

Gogoi did a “great service” to Assam and also a “tremendous service” to India, he said.

“I have spent many hours with Gogoi ji. He was my teacher, my guru. He explained to me what Assam is and what the people of Assam are. He explained to me the beauty of Assam. It’s a personal loss for me,” Gandhi said while stand-

ing beside Gogoi’s body.

The senior Congress leader died here on Monday while undergoing treatment for post-COVID-19 complications. He is survived by wife Dolly Gogoi, daughter Chandrima and son Gaurav.

From Kalakshetra, Gandhi went to Gogoi’s official residence in Dispur to meet his wife and daughter. He spent about 30 minutes with them before going to the airport to leave the city.

“Whenever I used to come, I used to sit with him in the car for hours. Gogoi ji never spoke about himself for a single minute. He used to talk only about Assam and its people. He had his views for Assam.

“So, whenever I used to talk with Gogoi ji, it was not like talking to one person but with the entire state. For him, everyone was equal. Assam is of all religions, all languages and it was in his heart. I learnt a lot from him,” Gandhi said.

Plea in HC claims traffic challan mechanism ‘faulty’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been moved in the Delhi High Court claiming that the mechanism of issuing challans under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act of 2019 was “arbitrary and faulty” and needs to be rectified using better technology.

Challans were being issued without proper and reliable technology in place and there was need for “standardization of the technology used for monitoring traffic violations”, the petition by Sonali Karwasra, a lawyer, has contended.

She has claimed that there are “several lacunas” in implementing the Act efficiently due to “obsolete and outdated technologies used by the authorities to detect traffic violations”. Her petition has alleged that there have been instances where hefty fines have been issued due to faulty equipment and then the penalties had to be revoked. One



such instance referred to in the plea is the alleged bulk recall of more than 1.57 lakh challans issued by the traffic department for over-speeding on NH 24 between August and October 10, 2019. “The speed violation detection technology, the drunken driving breath analyzing technology and the red-light violation technology are not in accordance with the changing times,” it has said.

It has also contended that the government “has not put the information regarding the

technology being installed to monitor these traffic violations and as such no information is available in public domain with respect to errors/limitations/restrictions of the technology used”.

The plea has sought directions to the Centre and Delhi government to ensure proper infrastructure is in place for monitoring traffic violations and to standardize and upgrade the technology being used so that it is in consonance with international norms.

FARMERS’ MARCH

Authorities put up barricades on borders

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Ahead of the farmers’ protest march to Delhi against the Centre’s farm laws, authorities in Haryana on Wednesday began setting up road barricades on borders with Punjab and deployed additional police forces to prevent farmers’ entry into the state.

A Punjab Police official on duty at Khanauri inter-state border told reporters that the Haryana Police used cranes to put boulders on roads and the movement of traffic to the other side has been stopped.

“We are diverting traffic from alternate routes now. We are also ensuring that movement of essential goods is not affected,” he said.

Asserting that farmers of Punjab will not be allowed to enter Haryana, police said they have placed water cannons and ambulances on the borders.

Haryana Police’s Ambala Range IG Y Puran Kumar told reporters that the Shambhu

inter-state border will be sealed for two days from November 26.

“Once movement of farmers takes place from Punjab side, the Haryana Police will act accordingly. So far, the border has not been sealed, those instructions are for November 26-27. But if movement (of farmers) takes place before that, we will act accordingly,” the IG said.

He said sufficient police force has been deployed to maintain law and order in the state. Restrictions have also been imposed at other inter-state border points with Punjab, including in Sirsa, Kurukshetra and Jind districts. Police have deployed additional force on Ambala-Rajpura Highway and Ambala-Chandigarh Highway and done multi-layer barricading on the highways.

Haryana Police officials said they cannot allow movement of a large number of people towards the national capital in view of restrictions due to COVID-19.

Farmers fined for burning stubble

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

Yet another farmer was imposed a fine for allegedly burning stubble in the field amid growing resentment against the air-pollution control measure that saw BKU activists dumping harvest residues in the office campus of a revenue official in Khatauli near here.

Ashok Kumar, a farmer from Sikandarpur village in Muzaffarnagar district was imposed a fine of Rs 2,500 on Tuesday, said Additional District Magistrate Amit Singh. Kumar was the 38th farmer in the district who was imposed the fine for burning stubble, said Singh adding 37 others were fined earlier -- some of them for burning stubble to clear the field, others for burning garbage or doing it to get relief from cold. A total of Rs 38,500 has been raised till now as fine from the erring farmers, he said. The demonstration, however, was called off following the intervention by district officials, he said.

ROSHNI ACT

Farooq’s sister, prominent hoteliers in second list

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah’s sister and two prominent hoteliers including a Congress leader figure in the second list of 130 people who have availed land under now-scrapped Roshni Act.

According to the fresh list uploaded on the website of Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, majority of the beneficiaries including a former bureaucrat and his wife legalised their residential places under the scheme, while there are also names of dozens of businessmen who have got

the ownership of their commercial buildings.

This is the second list of beneficiaries issued by the divisional administration in accordance with the October 9 directive of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court which has declared Roshni Act “illegal, unconstitutional and unsustainable” and ordered a CBI probe into the allotment of the land under this law.

The administration uploaded a list of 35 beneficiaries which included former finance minister Haseeb Drabu, some of his relatives and top hoteliers and a former bureaucrat earlier.

‘Ban on firecrackers an example of judicial overreach’

PNS ■ KEVADIA

Citing court verdicts on firecrackers and denying the executive a role in the appointment of judges, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Wednesday said some judgments gave a distinct impression of the judiciary’s overreach. He stressed that the legislature, the executive and the judiciary are bound to work within their respective domains as defined in the Constitution.

Addressing the 80th All India Presiding Officers’ Conference on “Harmonious Coordination between Legislature, Executive and Judiciary - Key to Vibrant Democracy”, Naidu said har-



mony lies in each organ doing its job, without interfering with that of the others.

This warrants a spirit of mutual respect, responsibility and restraint. Unfortunately, there have been several instances of crossing the

boundaries, he said.

Naidu said there have been quite a few judicial pronouncements that gave a distinct impression of an overreach.

“Since independence, the Supreme Court and the high courts have delivered several far-reaching verdicts in furtherance of socio-economic objectives, besides making cor- rectional interventions. But occasionally, concerns have been raised as to whether they were entering the domains of the legislative and executive wings.

The higher judiciary deciding on Diwali fireworks, denying the executive any role in the appointment of judges through collegiums, invalidating the National Judicial

Appointments Commission Act seeking to enforce accountability and transparency were some of the instances of judicial overreach cited by the vice president.

“There have been quite a few judicial pronouncements that gave a distinct impression of an overreach. These actions have resulted in an avoidable blurring of the contours demarcated by the Constitution,” Naidu said.

“At times, the legislature too has tended to cross the line. The 39th Constitution amendment placing the election of president, vice president and prime minister beyond the scope of judicial scrutiny in the circumstances in 1975 is one such instance,” he said.

Army recruitment racket: Kingpin questioned

PNS ■ SHAHJAHANPUR

The alleged kingpin of a gang involved in facilitating recruitment in the Army on the basis fake documents was remanded in police custody and questioned to find out if he had any links with the Pakistan’s ISI, an official said. Superintendent of Police S Anand said Suresh Som was taken in 12-hour custody on Tuesday and thoroughly questioned by the ATS, IB and the military intelligence.

The SP said he gave a list of 40 people who are working in the Army on the basis of fake certificates and are residents of Shahjahanpur and other places. The gang had got a large number of people recruited in the Army without police verification and so there are doubts about their links with the Pakistan’s ISI, he said.

An era ends in Congress

With the passing away of Ahmed Patel and Tarun Gogoi, the old order has receded further. Rebuilding just got tougher



Perhaps, the Congress is in its lost year indeed. Perhaps that's the trigger for that emboldening moment among its legacy holders to rescue the party. Electorally, it is quite done with trying to make a difference. Organisationally, it has been torn asunder like never before. And now an era that justified its bigness and relevance has ended with the passing away of two of its senior and indispensable leaders, Ahmed Patel and Tarun Gogoi. Both were organisation builders who used dissent as an opportunity to strengthen and glue the party further. But Patel's loss is indeed irreplaceable as the Congress has lost its Chanakya. And the Gandhis, their lone warrior and the gatekeeper, who kept them safe and convinced everybody else that the party indeed needed them. A self-effacing man, who masterminded the shrewdest backroom strategies, he ran the party much like the late Pranab Mukherjee ran the Government under successive Gandhis, from Indira to Sonia. But he never let his ambition show unlike the latter, helming the party through crisis after crisis, propping up Governments with coalition partners when the numbers seemed impossible, raising funds and building a worth that would be bigger than any chair. He became the party, the Gandhis the representable face. That doesn't mean he was a courtier, far from it. Or that he was shy, being socially one of the most accessible of Congressmen. He was just sagacious and discreet that made him the most trustworthy leader and the party's ablest troubleshooter. He got the job done. A fact that he put to good use to build connections within the party and outside. He was accessible to cadres, had his ear to the ground and addressed their grievances, a quality that junior leaders are yet to imbibe, believing in data analytics than the human connect. A failing described by the well-meaning and weathered senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad as "five-star" culture. In fact, Patel was the bridge in the perennial tussle between the old guard and the young Turks, between the Congress and its allies in the coalition era and between the party and the Opposition. And he endeared himself to corporates, a fact that even compelled Rahul Gandhi to bring him in as Treasurer though the latter was not too close to him unlike his parents. Patel never went public, choosing to settle matters in private, his last manoeuvre being calming the 23 senior "letter writers" and keeping the party leadership out of an ugly spat. In short, he embodied all that held the Congress together. And he had deep political foresight, winning the Bharuch seat swearing loyalty to Indira Gandhi in 1977, post-Emergency, when the tide was against her even in her own party. Rajiv Gandhi noticed his deliverer capabilities and made him party general secretary, a most wanted post back then. Then he became part of the first family circle. Obviously, he was left out in the cold after Rajiv's assassination but he never embarrassed PV Narasimha Rao despite being sidelined or chorused the then Prime Minister's critics. He had that stabilising quality. By the time Sonia Gandhi warmed up to politics and was ready for the 2004 Lok Sabha election, Patel became her strategist and advisor, finding relevant talk points in the campaign that demolished the "India Shining" blitz by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government. And despite the Modi wave, Patel made sure that the Congress at least had a moral victory by narrowing the BJP's margins in the Gujarat Assembly elections or clinching his own Rajya Sabha victory. But the best part was that for all the Congress' appeasement politics, Patel never ever played the Muslim card himself. Personal heft and consensus-building were also the virtues of Tarun Gogoi, who steadied the party's presence in Assam in the post-militancy years as Chief Minister, ensuring development, peace and growth and rescuing a ravaged State from the brink. Both these stalwarts did pull the party out of its morass and kept it on course.

The problem with the Congress now is that none of them is around to steer it back. The senior leaders are understandably adrift, unable to convince the leadership that the party should now give up the culture of nomination and restore organisational democracy first before renewing and rebuilding itself. Sonia, bereft of fresh ideas and now Patel, continues to be reluctant about anything that could challenge the continuity of the Gandhi bloodline at the helm of affairs. And with divisions so sharp, 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. Yet the dynastic entitlement has outlived its purpose in a politically empowered India, one that sees no potential in the leadership of Sonia's children but would certainly believe in a rebuilt party. The Congress last held CWC elections 1998 and holding one now would keep the field workers and grassroots leaders invested in the party. All of them are currently cut off by a sedimentary layer of loyal courtiers, who are interested in simply playing along as long as their posts are secure. Yet State leaders like Chhattisgarh's Bhupesh Baghel and Punjab's Amarinder Singh have proven that they are able organisers and can even articulate and take a stand on national issues. 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 for the sake of it. Dynastic stubbornness would have to give way to reason, wisdom and reconciliation. And if Rahul Gandhi still wants the adulation, he has to earn the confidence of the rank and file to be elected, not foisted, in the hardest of times. At least, he would have made a brave choice.

Beating Twitter?

While the makers of Tooter are hoping that a home-grown social network can take off, that bird has long flown



This is not the first time a new social network has popped up to take on the might of Twitter. A few months ago another network called Mastodon created a buzz and while many, particularly those of a certain liberal persuasion, populated the site, sadly its fate wasn't very different from the animal it was named after. The latest site to float up on your device is called Tooter, which is really just a rebadged version of the social network called Gab in the United States (US). While its makers claim it to be Indian or *swadeshi*, it turned out that even the "Terms Of Service" were copied almost verbatim from the American service. Without disparaging the efforts of those trying to create a new service, it would be good if Indian software engineers could create a new social network, one that integrates the best of the others and adds features, rather than blithely copying another product. On this front, India would be well served to learn from the Chinese internet experience.

That said, can Twitter or Facebook ever be replaced? There is an argument that says yes, given their monolithic power now as opinion makers themselves. Twitter has, in particular, played a dubious role in restricting access to certain information during the US election, or so the losing candidate, President Donald Trump, alleges. Then again, one could argue that without Twitter, Trump's popularity would never have soared. It is important that services like Facebook and Twitter, which are transnational, should come under some sort of regulatory mechanism and should not become some extra-constitutional force in nations like India. That said, the arguments for free speech and misinformation make for a dubious grey area and territories have to be clearly demarcated by the Government of the day. Also, a lot of the lamenting about Twitter being right or wrong for one side or another disguises the fact that it is what it is because of such issues and cannot be equal to the electorate. Much of what goes on in social media is happening at a level that the elite, on either side, have little or no idea about, on messaging applications like WhatsApp. Yes, social networks should be subjected to Indian regulations and it may not be a bad idea to create an Indian social network, but clearly, Tooter, like Mastodon, isn't the answer.



opinion

Bengal's revival

It is possible to make a quick start in reviving the State's economy without large investments but through governmental will and management



PRAFULL GORADIA

If I were still a resident of West Bengal, my first priority in the coming Assembly elections would be to retain the identity of our State. It should not in any way get compromised by Bangladesh or its concerns. We need to recall that on the eve of the Partition of 1947, Sir Abdul Rahim and the popular peasant leader, Fazlur Rahman, had come to Calcutta to convince Netaji's brother Sarat Bose that a united Bengal should be the third dominion besides Hindustan and Pakistan. The Communist Party then began to support the idea of an undivided Bengal. Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah also backed it because a Muslim-dominated Bengal would willy nilly side with Pakistan rather than India.

When it comes to song, music, language and literature, all Bengalis take pride in them. But when it comes to memories, most Bangladeshis would recall their social oppression at the hands of the zamindars and their camp followers. Many remember that even when they were invited to dinner at wedding celebrations, they would be asked to sit separately and after meals were expected to clear their clay *thalis*. This hierarchical rift ran so deep that a united Bengal would eventually be torn from within. In conversation a few years ago with some acquaintances from Dhaka, I was surprised to find that they resented how East Bengal was not given Calcutta during the Partition, although the city was, as it were, a stone's throw from Jessore. They believed it was unfair of the British to change the allocation at the last minute, and while conceding Lahore to Pakistan, they had done grave injustice to them. Calcutta was sought after because it was an economic hub and a port city; it supplied all the raw jute and the merchant princes of Kolkata reaped the benefit of jute mills and many other industries.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah was anxious to acquire Calcutta and the impression was that he was a capable negotiator. But obviously, he lost out, perhaps because his lungs were failing and his heart was set on getting Pakistan. The interests of East Bengal had a lower priority for him. Incidentally, the Qaid had never visited East Bengal until February 1948. The only so-called industry given to it was the Sylhet district, which was rich in tea gardens. Bangladesh has very few economic means, other



than subsistence resources, such as rice and fish. That is why, it needs to follow the Japanese model of importing raw materials from overseas and converting them into products with high technology for export. It is difficult for any people to have such techno-entrepreneurial genius as the Japanese. The legend of *Sonar Bangla* is now threatened because six of the western districts no longer receive the rainfall of yesteryears and they badly need river water from India. The other misfortune is that most of the land is low-lying and the sea level is rising. According to scientists, in two decades' time, 17 per cent of Bangladesh's land area is expected to be submerged. All these factors make Bangladeshis the highest number of migrants to other parts of the world. But West Bengal has borne the brunt of this influx.

My heart throbbed with delight when a few years ago, Mamata Banerjee, with all the fury at her command, threw a sheaf of papers on the Lok Sabha Speaker's table. She was then demanding an infiltrator-free West Bengal. The State has limited land and plentiful people and its resources have undoubtedly been stretched over the years, the refugees bulging that burden. Then the many industries — small, medium and heavy — that the State was proud of rapidly turned into industrial graveyards thanks to trade unions and poor management in years past.

Bengalis are a gifted people and certainly intelligent right down to the illiterate. If for

“BENGALIS ARE A GIFTED PEOPLE. IF FOR NOTHING ELSE, FOR THEIR TALENT, THE STATE DESERVES A BETTER ECONOMY. A REVIVAL IS OVERDUE AND IT SHOULD TOP THE NEW AGENDA FOR DEVELOPMENT”



nothing else, for their talent, the State deserves a better economy. A revival is overdue and it should soon set a new economic agenda. Setting up a new industry is like creating a brand, which would have to compete in this age of globalisation. On the other hand, education is a sphere in which Bengal enjoys a natural advantage as well as reputation. The first major thrust should be in the field of schools, colleges and universities. There is scope for developing a big knowledge economy because the catchment area can sweep UP, Bihar, Nepal, Assam and the Northeast, as well as Bangladesh. None of these regions is able to provide young people with quality education.

I would begin with medical studies. With efficient management and capable doctors, as many hospitals as possible across the State could be improved by deploying professional managers supported by medics. Let the doctors do their own specialised work. Management and medicine/surgery should not be mixed up. Thereafter, medical colleges along with as many hospitals as possible could be set up. The significant investment would largely be in creating medical colleges. The World Bank could lend the money since the Government could guarantee the loans. There should be an option, wherever possible, for expanding the hospital and adding another college, considering the best of technology is already available in India.

There is a crying need not for ordinary schools but for excellent ones with hostel facilities. The

New Education Policy (NEP) should be used as the lodestar for these schools to come up in the private sector with improved facilities. The land could be allotted by the State or there could be private-public partnerships. A similar strategy should be followed for colleges and universities. This would restore Bengal's pride as the seat of intellect.

Next, the Government should attend to sub-Himalayan West Bengal. There is space for a splendid international airport in and around Bagdogra, which is near the town of Siliguri. This is the place for proceeding to either Darjeeling, Kalimpong or Gangtok in Sikkim. The most glorious mountains in the world form the backdrop of these hill stations. Darjeeling is at 6,000 ft, and another 6,000 ft above that is Sandakphu, which is motorable, too, and from where one can view the Everest on a clear day. World class hotel groups and enterprising airlines could be lured with promises of support, a stable law and order situation and assurance that any obstacles in their path would be removed. Himalayan Bengal would become a brand in itself for Nature has indeed done its best to give North Bengal an unparalleled beauty. It is, therefore, possible to make a quick start in reviving the economy of West Bengal without undue large investments but with governmental will and excellence of management.

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

SOUND BITE

I am satisfied with the discussions with Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit on the issue of release of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassins.



DMK President
—MK Stalin

We cannot take any risks. We still have to wait and see when educational institutions can be opened. We will take up the matter with the experts.



Kerala Chief Minister
—Pinarayi Vijayan

I share a special bond with Mumbai. I have experienced failure way more than the success that I am enjoying now. Perhaps that is one of the reasons I value success!



Actor
—Angad Bedi

I remember missing a couple of Ranji Trophy matches to be with my wife for the delivery of my daughter. It is a very important feeling, especially when you are going to get your first child.



Former cricketer
—VVS Laxman

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Best of luck, boys

Sir — Cricket is also a game of luck and like any other sport has its ups and downs. India's top-most spinner has been neglected and put under quarantine by the Indian cricket board despite showing superb performance with the ball in all the three formats of the game.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) decennially honours some of the most prolific names in men's and women's international cricket. These players are voted for by respected members of the cricket fraternity and the general public.

Virat Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin are two Indians among seven players nominated for the prestigious "Player of the Decade" category. Ravichandran Ashwin is the only bowler in the ICC "Player of the Decade" repertoire. He finished the decade with the most number of wickets across formats (564). Let us all wish that the ball rolls in favour of India's top spinner and our captain Kohli, too, bags the prestigious honour. Let both the men walk into the hall of fame.

Gundu Maniam
Mumbai

Maharashtra's COVID plan a good move

It is good that the Maharashtra Government has made it compulsory for all travellers coming to the State from other parts of the country to carry RT-PCR negative reports. Due to the second wave of COVID-19, the State Government has issued new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to contain fresh triggers for a pandemic spread. Just like in international travel, fliers to Maharashtra should get themselves tested 72 hours before boarding. Those passengers who do not have the RT-PCR test reports will have to compulsorily undergo tests at the airports at their own expense. The Airports Authority of India has been requested to check the report before allowing the passengers to board flights.

People arriving in the State via train will have to carry an RT-PCR negative test report from a sample collected 96 hours before their scheduled arrival in Maharashtra. Those rail passengers who do not have an RT-PCR report will be screened for symptoms at the alighting railway stations. And only passengers without Coronavirus symptoms would be allowed to go home.

For those travelling by road, the District Collectors of the State's border districts shall make arrangements to ensure that people are tested for symptoms, includ-



ing body temperature. Those with Corona symptoms will have to undergo an antigen test and will be allowed entry in the State only if the report is negative. People with COVID-19 symptoms would be turned back.

This is being done as Maharashtra's COVID-19 tally has risen to 17,84,361 infections with 46,653 deaths. It is the first State under the Shiv-Sena-Congress-NCP rule to introduce such tough restrictions through notifications. This is a step in the right direction as the State will have to clamp down on imported infections if it has to get a grip on the pandemic on its own turf.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Better sense prevails

Sir — We appreciate the LDF Government in Kerala for bowing to public opinion and agreeing to put on hold the regressive Ordinance empowering the police to prosecute persons disseminating "defam-

atory content." Unlike other Governments, the Leftist Government in the State listened to sane voices, realised the scope of potential abuse of the Ordinance and made amends by keeping it in abeyance. One wishes that the Centre, too, would pay heed to

the voice of the people on undemocratic laws. Clearly, the text of the law was not drafted by those with a clear understanding of the niceties of constitutional provisions. A staggering ignorance of the landmark rulings of the Supreme Court on criminal

defamation was writ large on the Ordinance that had to be put in cold storage. The State Government may have had the good intention of curbing defamatory social media posts. But then the Ordinance, in the form in which it was promulgated, was seen as an attempt to gag the freedom of expression, which is the bedrock of democracy. The phraseology of the Ordinance, built on sweeping generalisations, did not indicate either discernment or sensitivity and gave the police blanket powers of crackdown.

The State cannot be seen to be arrogating to itself or arming itself with arbitrary powers in the guise of curbing abusive or offensive online content. Had the Ordinance been shown to Sitaram Yechury or the Politburo, the Kerala Government could have avoided the embarrassment of promulgating such a dubious law. Better sense has prevailed in the nick of time and saved us another round of Left-Right whataboutery.

David Milton
Maruthancode

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

A different ball game altogether

It is crucial to understand the financial behaviour and practices of SMEs which are totally separate from those of larger firms



HIMA BINDU KOTA

Although capital is a scarce resource for any business, it is even more scant for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Therefore, cash flow and working capital management are the most crucial challenges of organisations in general and SMEs in particular. Working capital is short-term in nature and refers to the funds required for the daily functioning of a firm. In business parlance it consists of accounts receivables (debtors and any pre-payments, stock or inventory) and accounts payable (creditors and short-term provisions). The timeline of any enterprise is the flow of cash and other liquid assets through a business cycle — a journey of collecting receivables from the debtors to pay off the creditors. This is also known as the cash conversion cycle. The efficiency and, therefore, the success of a business depends upon how fast the goods are converted into cash.

SMEs differ in many ways from large firms in terms of their financial behaviour and decision-making, mainly because of their characteristics and ownership. This ultimately reflects in their financial habits. So, what are the factors that affect the availability of capital to small enterprises? One of the most important issues is the size. According to researchers, during the start-up phase, the owner's personal savings are an important source of funds. Young and small firms do not have an established track record and may be characterised by informational opacity, making banks and other financial institutions reluctant to lend to them. In general, firms which are less than four years old, rely more on informal sources of funding.

However, when the SMEs increase in size and become larger, they have a greater network of banks willing to fund their business. The firm's ability to deal with multiple banks and other credit agencies generally grows with size, too. So, they rely more on long-term debt and external financing, including bank loans.

Second, the type of ownership is another important determinant for the source of funding. Any SME with a concentrated ownership, like in a proprietorship, should be more prepared to use bootstrap financing, as it would have greater difficulty in accessing a formal source of credit. From the lender's perspective, in such SMEs, there is no clear distinction between the owner and the firm, information asymmetry is prevalent and an ability to provide collateral is missing. On the other hand, a private limited SME may be viewed by financing agencies as more structured and credible. As a result, formal financing options are freely available to it. Third, the location of the start-up makes a huge impact. A firm's proximity to the banks has an influence on its ability to gain external funding. Research also suggests that one of the reasons for a company's failure is poor location that prevents customers and suppliers from reaching it. Therefore, despite high rentals, SMEs prefer to move to urban areas for the sake of better infrastructure and the ease of raising external finance.

Fourth, several researchers have provided evidence that the sector where the SME is operating has an impact on the short and long-term debt available to it. For example, short-term credit is used more in wholesale and retail trade as compared to manufacturing SMEs. Whereas the construction sector, hotel, hospitality and mining industries appear to depend more on long-term finance. And finally, availability of assets plays an important role in raising funds. From a lender's point of view, collateral, which is also known as the lender's second line of defence, is highly relevant while approving loans. Researchers Ono and Uesugi studied the Japanese SME loan market and found a positive relationship between the use of collateral and the ease of access to bank loans and external financing. It can also be understood that firms with lower tangible assets would face difficulties in accessing funds.

Additionally, the characteristics and gender of the owner too influence a firm's capability to raise external funding. According to several researchers in different countries, men and women differ in the way they raise cash for their businesses. There is empirical evidence that women entrepreneurs start their business with a smaller start-up capital, in fact less than half of the amount used by men. In addition, women also face discrimination from banks and other financial institutions. This is evident from the higher rates of interest charged from women entrepreneurs, the requirement of additional collateral, higher loan denial rate and so on. The age of the owner, too, impacts the personal financing preference. Older SME owners are less likely to take additional finance into their firms. Younger owners tend to use a variety of external cash sources like loans, overdrafts, credit cards and personal savings.

SMEs are the backbone of any growing economy. Therefore, it is crucial to understand their financial behaviour and practices which are very different from the financial management of large corporations. This would help policymakers come up with ways to improve the external financing scenario for such firms, as stronger SMEs make a stronger economy.

(The writer is Associate Professor, Amity University, Noida)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

A FEW DAYS AGO, THE HOME MINISTER WAS HERE. THE FOOD THAT HE ATE WAS COOKED IN FIVE-STAR HOTELS AND TAKEN TO THE DALIT HOUSEHOLD. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE





THE TMC HAS A HABIT OF PLAYING POLITICS ON EVERY ISSUE. THE FOOD THAT AMIT SHAH ATE AT BANKURA WAS COOKED AT THAT VERY HOUSE. — BJP NATIONAL SECRETARY ANUPAM HAZRA

A case for natural gas

Consumption of one fossil fuel over another will, on its own, not offer a long-term solution to climate change, but employing less emission-intensive fuels can reduce pollution significantly



JONATHAN SYIEMLIEH

As the winter approaches, Delhi-NCR is under its annual envelop of smog. Caused by an unhealthy combination of low wind speed, change in wind direction, dip in temperatures and stubble burning in parts of North India, air pollution is back in the headlines and our daily lives. According to a study of 28 cities by IQAir and Greenpeace Southeast Asia, air pollution in Delhi-NCR was linked to the loss of an estimated 24,000 lives and 5.8 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first two quarters of this year, despite a strict COVID-19 lockdown since March. In fact, the linkage between rising air pollution levels and increase in COVID 19-related cases and deaths is being confirmed by several studies from around the world.

A recent study published in *Cardiovascular Research*, which was the first of its kind to distinguish between fossil fuel-related and other human-generated sources of air pollution, estimated that long-term exposure to air pollution has been linked to an increased risk of dying from COVID-19. The study estimated that about 15 per cent of deaths worldwide from the virus could be attributed to long-term exposure to air pollution. In Europe, the proportion was about 19 per cent, in North America it was 17 per cent and in East Asia about 27 per cent.

A recent study by Harvard University indicated that an increase of only one microgram per cubic metre in PM2.5 is associated with an eight per cent increase in the Coronavirus death rate. Long-term exposure to chronically-high PM2.5 levels weakens the ability of the lungs to fight off infections, therefore making people more susceptible to COVID complications.

In 2016, the national Capital ranked third on a list of cities around the world reporting close to 15,000 deaths due to air pollution. Shanghai was ranked first among the cities with most premature deaths at 17,600, followed by Beijing with 18,200 premature deaths due to PM2.5 pollutants. A study undertaken by *Lancet Planetary Health* the following year stated that Delhi had recorded the highest annual population-weighted mean PM2.5 levels in its air. Further, in 2019, the World Air Quality Report, compiled by IQAir, listed Delhi on top of the list of the capital cities with most polluted air for the second consecutive year with annual PM2.5 levels nearly 10 times the limit prescribed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Other prominent NCR cities were also listed among the top 10 cities in the world with most polluted air.

Source apportionment studies, such as the ones conducted by IIT Kanpur (2013-2014) and National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (2017), have pointed out that secondary particles are a significant contributor to PM10 and PM2.5 concentrations in Delhi-NCR, with industrial point sources being the top four major contributors to PM2.5. Polluting fuels such as coal, diesel, pet coke and heavy fuel oil used by industries in Delhi-NCR are a major reason for this.

In such a dismal scenario, natural gas provides a good alternative to not only meet the energy needs of industries, but also as a less polluting option that can contribute to addressing environmental problems. The burning of natural gas for energy results in lower emissions of green house gas (GHG), Carbon Dioxide (CO2) and nearly all types of air pollutants in comparison to burning coal or other fossil fuels to produce an equal amount of energy. However, natural gas has not seen much penetration in industries, especially those situated in Delhi-NCR. According to British Petroleum, India's share of natural gas in the energy mix is lower than

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THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR NATURAL GAS PENETRATION IN THE MSME SECTOR PROVIDED THE PRICES ARE RATIONALISED, ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES ARE PUT IN PLACE, AND PROPER REGULATIONS IMPOSED TO RESTRICT CONSUMPTION OF POLLUTING FUELS. A POLICY DIRECTIVE FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO ENFORCE THE BAN ON USAGE OF NON-CLEAN FUELS LIKE COAL, WOOD AND SO ON COULD BE INTRODUCED IN A PHASED MANNER

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many large economies. It had reached a mere 6.2 per cent in 2019; this when the Government aims to raise the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030.

Switching to natural gas and displacing polluting fuels has contributed to lower GHG emissions and improved air quality in New York, Toronto and Beijing, according to a 2015 report by the International Gas Union (IGU). The benefits of increasing the use of cleaner-burning natural gas in the industry were acknowledged and put into force by policymakers in Northern China in 2017 where the shift from coal to natural gas in industries led to extensive reduction in GHG and air pollution. In Turkey, the industry around Istanbul, too, witnessed a reduction in air pollution as a result of switching from coal-lignite to natural gas in the early 2000s.

According to the 2019 *World Energy Outlook* special report analysis, an estimated 98 per cent of natural gas consumed today has lower life cycle emissions intensity than coal, when used for power or heat. The analysis incorporates both CO2 and methane emissions and indicates that, on an average, coal-to-gas switching reduces emissions by 50 per cent when producing electricity and by 33 per cent when used for heating purposes.

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in 2019 had assessed the potential and impact of a switch to natural gas from heavier polluting fuels among Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) units operating in Delhi-NCR. Data collected showcased the presence of thousands of MSME units operating in this region and using a variety of fuels ranging from coal to low sulphur heavy stock, light diesel oil, wood, bagasse, rice husk, other biomass fuels, high-speed diesel and natural gas. By and large, MSMEs were found to be disinclined to migrate to natural gas owing to high upfront costs such

as connection costs and security deposit, limited access to natural gas and economic viability in terms of increased unit price compared to other fuel options. To add to this, end users were also charged a conversion cost and had to bear the cost of internal piping infrastructure.

Obtaining the right of way and other clearances from State/local Government to lay natural gas pipelines also contributes to delays in setting up adequate pipeline infrastructure. Notably, micro units among MSME clusters in Delhi-NCR were found to be located in non-conforming areas and were especially not in favour of switching to alternative cleaner fuels as this would entail putting themselves under the ambit of regulatory compliances.

However, a switch to natural gas in MSMEs is not without precedent. The case of Uttar Pradesh's Firozabad glass bangle industry is a prime example of how switching from coal and wood to natural gas, coupled with the adoption of energy-efficient technologies, can reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions. Similarly, the Morbi-Wankaner area in Gujarat witnessed immediate reduction in air pollution as a result of the local ceramics industry shifting from coal to natural gas in 2019, following an NGT order the same year. The area recorded a 75 per cent reduction in PM2.5 levels, 72 per cent reduction in PM10 levels and an 85 per cent reduction in sulphur dioxide (SO2).

Further, in case of a shift to natural gas at a metal casting unit in Faridabad, Haryana, the learnings have highlighted that along with fuel switching, there is also scope for further reduction in energy consumption if MSME units follow best operating practices to improve energy efficiency. This requires understanding of technological best practices and their assimilation and adaptation to meet the needs of individual MSME units.

The provisions for upgrading and introducing new clean technologies in

MSME regulations can be capitalised in favour of natural gas augmentation in their energy mix. However, the diverse Government departments that have programmes and schemes related to enhancing clean energy measures in this sector are working in silos. It is important to achieve proper coordination among departments and link related programmes and schemes on clean energy, energy efficiency, technology upgradation, database generation, reporting and monitoring and capacity-building. This could ensure effective targeting and a confluence of actions at the intended delivery point.

There is an opportunity for natural gas penetration in the MSME sector provided the prices are rationalised, energy efficiency measures are put in place and proper regulations imposed to restrict consumption of polluting fuels. A policy directive from the Central Government to enforce the ban on usage of non-clean fuels like coal, wood and so on could be introduced in a phased manner. The city gas distribution companies could also be mandated by the Centre to completely erect the gas pipeline infrastructure in urban areas.

With the overall objective of increasing the adoption and usage of natural gas in the MSME sector, adopting a cluster-based approach would make natural gas penetration more effective. The Central and State Governments can play an important role in this area by facilitating the creation of necessary infrastructure and greener investments to ensure reliable and affordable supply of natural gas to MSMEs. Unabated consumption of one fossil fuel over another will, on its own, not offer a long-term solution to climate change, but employing less emission-intensive fuels such as natural gas can result in significant reduction in both CO2 emissions and air pollution.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, TERI)

A major leap for science and the Corona war

The mRNA technique may mean that future pandemics can be dealt with far quickly. The vehicle is available to carry the next vaccine



GWYNNE DYER

All the usual caveats apply: Don't go out and celebrate. Don't let your guard down because it is still going to be a long haul. This winter will be "hard", warns Ugur Sahin, co-founder and CEO of BioNTech, the German company that announced the first effective COVID-19 vaccine recently. "The vaccine can't be rolled out fast enough to reduce infections much in the current wave," he says.

The publication on November 16 of positive results for a second vaccine, this time by the US company Moderna, strengthened the optimism as did the fact that the AstraZeneca

vaccine is also ready to roll out, even if it does have an average efficacy of just 70 per cent. Clearly, this Coronavirus can be beaten, and there are nine more potential COVID-19 vaccines already in the third and final stage of human trials.

But again, the riders: There will be at least half a million more COVID-19 related deaths this winter — or over a million if people don't observe the lockdowns and other restrictions like social distancing and use of sanitisers and face masks that are meant to contain the spread of the virus.

"What is absolutely essential," says Sahin, "is that we get a high vaccination rate before autumn/winter next year." That's when it could really be over. And yet there is cause to celebrate, because of the 11 vaccine candidates that were already in third-stage trials, both the front-runners are "messenger ribonucleic acid" (mRNA) vaccines, an entirely new approach that allows a much faster response to Novel viral infections.

Traditionally, new vaccines took around ten years to be developed, tested and approved for general use. For the new mRNA vaccines, it has been ten months. It's a revolutionary science at work here.

After Chinese scientists posted the full genetic sequence of the COVID-19 virus online on January 10, says Drew Weissman of the University of Pennsylvania, "we were making RNA within a week or so". Weissman then supplied that RNA to both BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna.

RNA carries the genetic instructions from the nucleus of the cell to build whatever protein is needed, and for the past decade researchers have been trying to fabricate "messenger RNA" that could be inserted into human cells. The mRNA would then use the cell's own genetic machinery to make vaccines and other medically useful proteins.

By 2018, several companies had cracked the problem of getting the mRNA past the body's immune

defences. With the full RNA sequence of the new Coronavirus in their possession, all they had to do was choose which bit of the Coronavirus RNA to use in the vaccine.

Obviously not the whole thing, or it would rebuild the entire virus in the cell. Just a harmless segment of the virus' RNA, copied millions of times by the vaccinated person's cells, would alert the body's immune system and train it to destroy any invading virus with that sequence. Scientists chose the "spike" that the virus uses to attach itself to the human cell.

Several companies had mRNA vaccines ready for testing within two or three months, and the results have been spectacular. BioNTech/Pfizer has just reported 95 per cent efficacy for its vaccine and Moderna has reported 94.5 per cent success.

Even better, both BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna included all major ethnic groups and a significant number of elderly people in their third-phase trials. All categories responded well to

the shots (which is not always the case with trial vaccines).

Yet another mRNA vaccine in third-phase trials could be even better because it will be far cheaper than the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine (priced at ₹2,896 for two shots) or the Moderna jab (priced at ₹5,495 for two shots) if it pans out. At Imperial College in London, Robin Shattock's team is working on a "self-amplifying RNA" vaccine that may require as little as one-hundredth of the amount of vaccine.

The mRNA technique may mean that future pandemics can be dealt with far more quickly. Pfizer boss Albert Boura goes even further to say: "It is the greatest medical advance in the last 100 years." Well, maybe, though a vote taken today would probably plump for antibiotics instead. But we are only beginning to see the potential of the mRNA technique. There are already trials under way for a wide variety of other illnesses. Not just safer, more effective influenza, polio and

HIV vaccines, but immunotherapies for cancer, heart conditions, cystic fibrosis and other systemic and congenital diseases.

Whether or not mRNA now becomes the preferred way to make Novel vaccines, it is clear that a global health emergency on the scale of the present pandemic spurs scientific innovation at a much faster rate now. This is not just the consequence of all the resources and funding made available to those with solutions that might usually be regarded with more scepticism; it is also driven by the remarkable things that humans can achieve when thrust together by circumstances and given a common purpose.

There is a long, dark winter still ahead of us, no doubt, but miracles may await us over the horizon. And we can now be sure that the light at the end of this particular tunnel is not an oncoming train.

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



FOREIGN EYE



COMBATING RAPE CULTURE IN NEPAL

The Oli Cabinet has approved an ordinance proposing stricter laws on rape. Thankfully, lawmakers have let go of their demand of incorporating regressive provisions like the death penalty and chemical castration. Such provisions, if included, would have dealt a body blow to the principles of the modern criminal justice system. (Kathmandu Post editorial)

'India's decision to block 43 more Chinese apps violates WTO rules'

PNS ■ BEIJING

China on Wednesday said it was firmly opposed to India's decision to block 43 more Chinese apps on national security grounds, claiming the move violated WTO rules.

India on Tuesday blocked 43 more Chinese mobile apps, including Alibaba Group Holding's e-commerce app AliExpress, in a fresh wave of web sanctions amid its border standoff with China.

The banned applications, which include a few dating apps, were a threat to the 'sovereignty and integrity of India', an official statement said in New Delhi.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT issued the order for blocking the access of these apps by users in India based on the comprehensive reports received from Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center,



The Ministry of Electronics and IT issued the order for blocking the access of these apps by users in India based on the comprehensive reports received from Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center, Ministry of Home Affairs, the release said

grounds under the pretext of national security," he said.

"This behaviour violates market principles and World Trade Organisation rules, severely undermines the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies. China firmly rejects it," the spokesman said.

Zhao said Chinese government always asks its companies to abide by international rules and local laws and regulations when doing business overseas.

"Following the market principles, the Indian government has the responsibility to protect their lawful rights and interests of international investors, including Chinese companies," he said.

He said the nature of China India economic and trade cooperation is mutually beneficial. "We urge the Indian side to immediately correct its discriminatory behaviour and avoid further damage to bilateral cooperation," he said.

Union Cabinet approves MoU between ICAI, VRC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and the Netherlands-based Vereniging van Register Controllers (VRC).

The MoU would help in strengthening and development of accounting, financial and audit knowledge base between the Netherlands and India, according to an official release. "The engagement between the premier institutes of both the countries would help to generate greater employment opportunities for Indian chartered accountants and also greater remittances back to India," it added.

Central govt approves merger of Lakshmi Vilas Bank with DBIL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved merger of crisis-ridden Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) with DBS Bank India Ltd (DBIL) and removed restrictions on withdrawal of deposits by depositors.

The Union Cabinet has approved the merger of the LVB with DBS Bank India Limited, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters, adding the decision will provide comfort to 20 lakh depositors and protect the services of 4,000 employees.

"Cabinet approves Scheme of Amalgamation of Lakshmi Vilas Bank with DBS Bank India Limited; with this there will no further restrictions on the depositors regarding withdrawal of their deposits," the official spokesperson said in a



tweet. The minister said that those responsible for deteriorating financial health of the LVB would be penalised.

The government had earlier on November 17 on the advice of the RBI imposed a 30-day moratorium on the crisis-ridden LVB restricting cash withdrawal at Rs 25,000 per

depositor. The RBI simultaneously placed in public domain a draft scheme of amalgamation of LVB with DBIL, a banking company incorporated in India under Companies Act, 2013, and having its Registered Office at New Delhi.

The Reserve Bank had also superseded the board of the

The minister said that those responsible for deteriorating financial health of the LVB would be penalised

LVB and appointed T N Manoharan, former non-executive chairman of Canara Bank, as administrator of the bank for 30 days. LVB is the second private sector bank after Yes Bank which has run into rough weather during this year. In March, capital-starved Yes Bank was placed under a moratorium. The government rescued Yes Bank by asking state-run State Bank of India to infuse Rs 7,250 crore and take 45 per cent stake in the bank.

Stock market rally to continue in 2021 on virus vaccine hopes

PNS ■ BENGALURU

India's stock market rally is set to continue and hit new record highs in 2021, according to a Reuters poll of equity strategists who overwhelmingly expected corporate earnings to return roughly to pre-pandemic levels within a year.

The Nov. 12-24 Reuters poll of over 35 equity strategists predicted the BSE Sensex index, which is currently trading at a record high, would set new all-time peaks in the next year. It was forecast to rise about 3% from Tuesday's high to 45,750 by mid-2021.

It was then predicted to rise another 4% to 47,550 by the end of 2021, with forecasts ranging from 36,000 to 54,400.

Those forecasts were based on recent progress in developing COVID-19 vaccines even as cases rise around the world, according to over three-quarters of strategists, or 26 of 34, who answered an additional question.

Global stock markets have rallied since a sharp sell-off in March, ignoring deep recessions in most economies and driven largely by billions of dollars of fiscal and monetary stimulus and hopes for a swift economic recovery.

Emerging market assets have also gained on the weakness in the dollar, which hit a three-month low against a



basket of currencies on Monday. The Sensex has repeatedly hit record highs this month, surging more than 10% on hopes for an economic revival on coronavirus vaccine progress.

"Looking ahead, continued improvements in global risk appetite will further boost Indian equities, despite the weakness of the economy," said Shilan Shah, senior India economist at Capital Economics.

From a low of 25,638.9 on March 24 at the start of the pandemic, the Sensex has rallied over 70% to a record high of 44,601.6 on Tuesday, marking about an 8% gain for the year.

That was despite Asia's third-largest economy shrinking nearly a quarter in April-June, much worse than forecast and pointing to a longer road

to recovery.

India - the world's fastest-growing major economy until a few years ago - now looks to be headed for its first full-year contraction this fiscal year since 1979, according to a separate Reuters poll which predicted gross domestic product would take over a year at least to reach pre-COVID-19 levels.

But asked in the latest poll when corporate earnings would return to pre-COVID-19 levels, 28 of 32 strategists said within a year, including 10 who said within the next six months.

"We remain in a bull market that started in March, and even though one should expect corrections along the way, the equity market may have more legs before it tops out," said Ridham Desai, equity strategist at Morgan Stanley.

Rupee settles 10 paise higher at 73 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated by 10 paise to close at 73.91 against the US dollar on Wednesday as positive development on the coronavirus vaccine front enthused investor sentiment.

At the interbank forex market, the domestic unit opened at 73.98 against the greenback, and witnessed an intra-day high of 73.88 and a low of 74.02.

The local unit finally closed at 73.91 against the American currency, registering a rise of 10 paise over its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee had climbed 10 paise to close at 74.01 against the US dollar.

Traders said risk appetite increased on news that US



Aleor Derma gets tentative nod for testosterone gel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Alembic Pharmaceuticals on Wednesday said its joint venture Aleor Dermaceuticals has received tentative nod from the US health regulator for generic Testosterone Gel used for treating testosterone deficiency.

Aleor Dermaceuticals has received tentative approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for its ANDA for Testosterone Gel, 1.62 per cent (20.25 mg/1.25 gm actuation), Alembic Pharmaceuticals said in a regulatory filing.

The product is a generic version of AbbVie Inc's AndroGel in the same strength, it added.

MONEY MATTERS

JSW Cement aims listing by December 2022

JSW Cement has again pushed back its plans for an initial public offering by two years to around December 2022 due to slowdown and COVID-19 disruptions, a top company official said on Wednesday. The company has already drawn an ambitious plan to expand its combined cement capacity to 25 million tonne by 2023 from 14 million tonne at a Capex of Rs 3,600 crore.



SIDBI inks MoU with Tamil Nadu govt to develop MSMEs



Small Industries Development Bank of India on Wednesday said it has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Tamil Nadu government to develop micro, small and medium enterprises eco system

in the state. As per the MoU, SIDBI would deploy a project management unit (PMU) for training and capacity-building programmes in areas like technology transfer, intellectual property rights and research and development, among others. The setting up of the PMU aims at bringing focused engagement in various forms leading to a stronger 'Atma Nirbhar' state and country, SIDBI deputy managing director V Satya Venkata Rao said. The PMU is expected to bring a deeper engagement in financial and non-financial fronts, he said. SIDBI is also structuring a cluster development fund to support the infrastructural aspects of cluster development, he added.

RNLI takes 40,000 sq ft on lease at Adani to house corporate HQ

Royal Nippon Life Insurance (RNLI) has taken a 40,000 sq ft space on a five-year lease at an Adani Realty project in the BKC business district to house its corporate headquarters, officials said on Wednesday. Rental details of the transaction, one of the largest in recent times, were not immediately available. "RNLI has signed up to have 40,000 sq ft in Bandra Kurla Complex's (BKC) Adani Inspire for five years," a source said. When contacted, RNLI's chief executive and managing director Ashish Vohra confirmed the development while officials at Adani Realty were not available for comment. Corporate office relocations are a matter of long term commitment and the recovered business sentiment regarding the value of life insurance product gives us the confidence to make this decision.



ESIC scheme adds 11.49 lakh new members in Sept

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Around 11.49 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in September against 9.47 lakh in the previous month, official data showed on Wednesday, giving a perspective on formal sector employment in the country.

The latest data is part of a report released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Wednesday.

Gross new enrolments with the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) were 8.27 lakh in June, 4.87 lakh in May and 2.62 lakh in April, showing an increase in enrolments after easing of the lockdown, the latest data showed.

Later in July this year, the gross enrolments dipped to 7.61 lakh but improved to 9.47 lakh in August as per the latest data released on Wednesday.

The government had



imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 25 to contain the spread of coronavirus infection. Later restriction were eased for various economic activities in phases.

In March, as many as 8.21 lakh new members had joined the scheme run by ESIC, against 11.83 lakh subscribers in February, according to the

payroll data released in May. The NSO report showed gross enrolments of new subscribers with ESIC were 1.51 crore in 2019-20, against 1.49 crore in the previous fiscal.

During the period September 2017 to March 2018, around 83.35 lakh new subscribers had joined the ESIC scheme.

Govt to come out with model tenancy law soon

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra on Wednesday said the government will soon come out with the model tenancy law, giving a major boost to real estate sector especially rental homes.

The ministry had in July 2019 floated the draft model tenancy law.

Addressing a webinar organised by realtors body NAREDCO, he said the government's Affordable Rental Housing Complex (ARHC) scheme for migrants, which was launched few months ago, has been progressing well and the programme has the potential to stop creation of slums in cities.

Mishra said the housing sales have revived after unlocking of the economy on the back of several measures taken by the Centre as well as state governments.

He said some states like



Maharashtra and Karnataka have reduced stamp duty on registration of properties to boost sales.

The secretary said the Centre had advised all States/UTs to cut stamp duty for giving flip to the housing segment.

"Model Tenancy law is ready. It has been translated into various

languages as it has far reaching implications," Mishra said.

The deadline for feedback on the proposed model tenancy law ended on October 31 and now States have been asked to send those feedbacks after compiling it, he said.

The secretary said the model tenancy will come "very soon".

Mishra pointed out that 1.1 crore homes were vacant as per 2011 census as people fear to give their homes on rent.

The model tenancy law will eliminate anomalies and give a boost to real estate sector, he said.

The Centre will send the Model Tenancy Law, after approval from the Union Cabinet, to States for its adoption. The draft model tenancy law proposes that landowners will have to give a notice in writing three months before revising rent. It advocated appointing a district collector as rent authority and heavy penalty on tenants for overstaying. On the ARHC scheme, Mishra said the initial response has been very encouraging and the already completed units have been handed over in cities like Surat and Chandigarh.

"This scheme is the answer for ending slums in the country. No one wants to live in

slums," he said.

Talking about the Rs 25,000-crore stress fund to complete stuck real estate projects, Mishra said around Rs 13,000 crore has been committed so far in 135 real estate projects, which would benefit 87,000 homebuyers.

He said the government is regularly reviewing the progress of this stress fund -- Special Window for Affordable and Mid Income Housing (SWAMIH).

The secretary asked builders to take advantage of recent tax relief announced by the government in clearing their unsold inventories.

Recently, the government relaxed income tax rules to allow primary or first sale of housing units of up to Rs 2 crore at a price that can be 20 per cent below the stamp duty circle rate. Earlier, the law restricted differential between circle rate and agreement value at 10 per cent.

Cabinet approves Rs 6,000 crore infusion in NIF debt platform

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved equity infusion of Rs 6,000 crore in NIF Debt Platform sponsored by National Investment and Infrastructure Fund.

This was informed by Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar after the Cabinet meeting. The proposal to invest Rs 6,000 crore as equity into NIF is part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat 3.0 package announced earlier this month. To support the funding of the National Infrastructure Pipeline of Rs 111 lakh crore, Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech this year had said that about Rs 22,000 crore has already been provided.



Common citizens to one another's rescue

It was about 9 pm when a 40-year-old woman fell from her bike accidentally while moving over a speed breaker. She was a pillion rider on the two-wheeler. An Active bleeding control volunteer Narsimha, an auto driver witnessed the incident and approached the victim. He controlled the mob and ensured scene safety. On reaching the incident site, he assessed the victim and identified that there was active bleeding on her left thigh region. He also observed bleeding injuries on the forehead and on right lower limb. He took immediate steps in controlling the bleeding by applying direct bandage. Once the patient was stabilised, attenders requested the ABC volunteer to shift the victim to a hospital for further evaluation and management. As per follow up from the Research Assistant, Ravinder Odela, she was treated and discharged from the hospital after two days of In-Patient care after complete recovery.

Ever since, the volunteers/auto drivers and police saved nearly 30 accident victims lives. They are not only proud of the fact that they are in a position to save lives but are also humbled that they have become role models for others.

GV. Ramana Rao, GVK EMRI informs that the idea behind ABC was to enable common citizens to help each



Auto drivers in the city were able to save over 30 lives in the past year, thanks to the Active Bleeding Control programme. Here's to a few ordinary citizens, who turned saviours. They're not doctors, but socially conscious individuals. They volunteered, got themselves enrolled, trained themselves in the ABC programme, and saved lives. **By PNS**



other through Active Bleeding Control. GVK EMRI launched world's first Active Bleeding Control (ABC) Project & Research on a pilot basis to save accident victims by controlling bleed-

ing with a simple technique called Direct Pressure two years ago. The project is a joint collaboration between GVK EMRI and PediSTARS, India, PHFI, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Road Safety Club at Hyderabad,

Transport Department, Police department of Telangana.

The initiative has been yielding very good response. Nearly 40 per cent deaths in accidents are occurring due to uncontrolled bleeding. It takes at least 15 minutes for the

ambulance to reach to the accident spot. Lives can be saved by controlling bleeding with direct pressure. Everybody, even common people, with little training and understanding, can use this technique and save lives.

Under this program a total of 1,004 volunteers from various occupation groups have been trained. Of this 41 are auto drivers, 196 are police men, 113 are students; 21 shopkeepers, 51 Toll Plaza employees, and 54 bus drivers among others.

These ABC Volunteers who involved in saving the lives were also felicitated recently by ABC team to encourage and motivate them towards saving more lives. GVK EMRI wants more people to get involved in the ABC Volunteer program. It wants to reach out to more policemen, bystanders, auto drivers, bus drivers, students, NSS volunteers, petrol bunk staff, shop owners and others. All they need to do, is attended the 90 minutes training program, learn the bleeding control technique practically by demonstrating on their co-participants. Each of the participants will be given away certificates and ABC Kits also. The initiative hopes to save lives by educating bystanders on techniques to help stop severe bleeding.

Project Coordinator Devendar Karabu, can be reached on 9966673108, devendarkarabu@emri.in for training if any wants to get in ABC.



Just the right mix!

Gujarati music is reaching a crescendo. After several musical experiments, search-

ing for that perfect melody and composing songs that resonate with the sensibilities of the regional audience, Gujarati music is no longer about following a hit formula but also about creating a unique musical identity that is just as rooted in the Gujarati spirit.

Positioned as India's first Gujarati Hip Hop compilation, the new smashing record of UK-based rapper RaOol combines the musical aptitude of exceptional artists from across four continents and hailing from diverse musical backgrounds. RaOol has also collaborated with Bollywood playback singer Divya Kumar, British-Indian singer-songwriter Jaz Dhami who will be making his debut in Gujarati singing with Bollywood songstress Neeti Mohan who also will be seen rapping in Gujarati for the very first time!

Music director, rapper and a lyricist, RaOol who enjoys the patronage of being the only Gujarati rapper to have forayed in the Indian music industry has previously given hits in Bollywood films like *Housefull 3*, *Tum Bin 2*, *Dobaara* as well as crafted the theme song of *Star Plus*'s flagship dance reality show *Dance Plus*. RaOol, who frequently shuttles between Mumbai and London and is currently represented by Akon's Konvict Muzik Label, states, "When major labels told me to follow the trend of the Punjabi music scene to simply blend in rather than draw attention to my Gujarati heritage, I knew I had to do the opposite. This project is Gujarati music reimagined in my way and my first step in bringing Gujarati Hip Hop to the world. Punjab has made its mark, now it's our time so Gujarat Stand Up."

Be it giving Gujarati folk a contemporary makeover or experimenting with international genres like hip-hop, RaOol created a perfect musical balance of modern and traditional while being appreciated and accepted by the Gujarati music lovers. Who would have imagined a Gujarati rap with hip-hop beats? That's what this international rapper has brought to the table this time. Further

on Aishwarya Majmudar shares, "When I heard it, I was like, 'I'm definitely going to sing this song!'. This song is incredible. The drops and the growth, the lyrics! Oh, love love the lyrics. The thought is extremely relatable, especially to the generation today, and the music is a brilliant blend of cultures. I'm so proud of RaOol, this song couldn't have been better. I'm also so grateful to be a part of such an amazing international project! It's going to hit the Billboards and is here to stay!"

Move over Punjabi music and rap, it's Gujarat's time to shine, believes the first rapper from the community, RaOol! In an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL, he and Aishwarya Majmudar talk about their upcoming song, the uniqueness of it and how proud they are of it!



Towards safe food DELIVERY



For fans of the exquisite cuisines at Taj Krishna, you can now enjoy their signature dishes through their newly launched Qmin, Indian Hotels Company Limited's (IHCL) gourmet food delivery platform.

Food lovers can now order a repertoire of culinary experiences from the celebrated restaurants, Golden Dragon, Encounters, and Firdaus at the Taj Krishna Hyderabad. Qmin offers Curated dishes made with the highest Quality of ingredients, offering a variety of their favourite Quisines, delivered at your doorstep in the comfort and convenience of your home. This gourmet food delivery platform also offers a differentiated delivery experience with stringent protocols of safety and hygiene, including contact-less delivery and the mandatory use of protective gear for delivery executives. The delivery platform

came in at the right time when customers are still wary of the COVID situation.

Qmin's packaging is eco-friendly, utilising biodegradable materials, and with customized insulation boxes to preserve the food whilst being delivered.

Hyderabadi specialties like Kebab-e-Firdaus, Haleem and Shirmal, Murgh Tariwala, Lehsuni palak, Kacche Gosht ki Dun Biryani and Double ka Meetha are some of the most loved recipes, which guests can order from Qmin. The menu also offers a wide selection of Golden Dragon signatures, like Butter Chilli Garlic Prawns, Fish Schetzwan, Mapo Tofu and Shandong Veg Fried Rice, and Global specialties like Atlantic Salmon Grills, Fusilli Alfredo Con Pollo, Pizza Marinara, and more.

Yumm, is your mouth watering already? Experience these rich gastronomic delights at home, by calling 1800 266 7646 to place your order now!

Women dominate 2021 Grammy nominations

The 2021 Grammy Awards nominations are all about women power with Beyonce, Taylor Swift and Dua Lipa leading the way. Beyonce is leading the con- tender at the 2021 Grammy Awards with nine nods. She is fol- lowed by Taylor Swift, Roddy Ricch and Dua Lipa, who earned six nominations each. Brittany Howard, of Alabama Shakes fame, earned five nomina- tions for her solo debut. Earning four each were Billie Eilish, Megan Thee Stallion, DaBaby, Phoebe Bridgers, Justin Bieber, jazz pianist John Beasley and clas- sical producer David Frost, reports *Variety*.

As a shocker, *The Weeknd* didn't get nominated. Despite being pre- dicted to dominate the nomina- tions at the 63rd annual Grammys, the pop-R&B super- star's *Blinding lights* single and *After Hours* album got zero nomi- nations. Beyonce will be competing against herself in the Record of the Year category. She is nominated in the category for *Black Parade* as well as *Savage*. She fights Black Pumas, DaBaby, Doja Cat, Billie Eilish, Dua Lipa, and Post Malone for the trophy. Swift's six nominations include five for her *Folklore* album or its *Cardigan* single and one for her collaboration with Andrew Lloyd Webber on an original song for the film version of *Cats*. Her competition in the Album of the Year category include Dua Lipa, Post Malone, Coldplay, Jhen Aiko, Jacob Collier, HAIM and Black Pumas. K-pop super band BTS got a Best Pop Duo/Group Performance nod for their first single sung entirely in English, *Dynamite*. Dua Lipa got nominations in the categories of Record of the Year and Song of the Year for *Don't Start Now* and Album of the Year for *Future Nostalgia*. Dua Lipa and Beyonce are joined in the Song of the Year category by fellow six-time nominees Roddy Ricch and Taylor Swift. Ricch has the most Grammy nominations for any male artiste this year. He is up for Song of the Year for *The Box* and Record of the Year for *Rockstar* with *DaBaby*. The 63rd Grammy Awards will be held on January 31, 2021 and will be showcased live in India on Vh1 India.



Justin Bieber upset over his Grammy nominations

Pop star Justin Bieber finds his Grammy Award nominations strange, and is upset that his nominations were in pop instead of R&B categories. Bieber earned four Grammy Award nominations for his album *Changes*, including Best Pop Solo Performance (for *Yummy*), Best Pop Duo/Group Performance (*Intentions* featuring Quavo), Best Pop Vocal Album, and Best Country Duo/Group Performance (for his feature on Dan + Shay's *10,000 Hours*). A little after the nominations were

announced, Bieber wrote a short letter to the Recording Academy on Instagram, sharing his thoughts on how his mission to make an R&B album was not honoured properly by placing it in the wrong category. "To the Grammys," he started his letter, writing: "I am flattered to be acknow- ledged and appreciated for my artistry. I am very meticulous and intentional about my music. With that being said, I set out to make an R&B album. *Changes* was and is an R&B album. It is not being acknowledged as an R&B album, which is very strange to me. I grew up admiring R&B music and wished to make a project that would embody that sound. For this not to be put into that category feels weird, considering from the chords to the melodies to the vocal style, all the way down to the hip-hop drums that were chosen, it is undeniably, unmistakably an R&B album." He continued, "To be clear, I absolutely love Pop music, it was just wasn't what I set out to make this time around. My gratitude for feeling respected for my work remains and I am honored to be nominated either way." "Please don't mistake this as me being ungrateful, these are just my thoughts take em or leave em. Thank you to the people who fought for me to even have any noms," he wrote on Instagram while sharing the letter.



The Weeknd calls Grammys 'corrupt'




The *Weeknd* has called the Grammy Awards corrupt after the singer was overlooked for nomination in even one category this year. The three-time Grammy winner took to social media to criticise the Recording Academy after he was snubbed despite having the successful album *After Hours*. He had also topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart with *Blinding lights* and *Heartless*. "The Grammys remain corrupt. You owe me, my fans and the industry transparency..." he wrote on social media. The singer was referencing the process by which nominations are picked, which continues to be a well- guarded process with hidden

identities of the people on the committees that select the nominees. Recording Academy chief Harvey Mason, jr. has responded to his claims. "Congratulations to today's Grammy nominees, who have earned their peers' recognition for their incredible work. There were a record number of submissions in this unusual and competitive year," he said. He continued, "We understand that The Weeknd is disappointed at not being nominated. I was surprised and can empathise with what he's feeling. His music this year was excellent, and his contributions to the music community and broader world are worthy of




everyone's admiration. We were thrilled when we found out he would be performing at the upcoming Super Bowl and we would have loved to have him also perform on the Grammy stage the weekend before." "Unfortunately, every year, there are fewer nominations than the number of deserving artists. But as the only peer-voted music award, we will continue to recognise and celebrate excellence in music while shining a light on the many amazing artists that make up our global community." *The Weeknd's* absence from the Grammy nominations is being termed as the biggest snub in recent history.

FUN




ARCHIE






CALVIN AND HOBBS






GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Nearly

2 Wide smile

3 Tame animals

4 This colour plus red makes orange

5 One hundred years

6 Parts of a minute

7 Tired and drowsy

8 Meat and vegetables boiled slowly

9 Drink made from grapes

10 Happening every twelve months

11 The one bought most recently

12 Sleep in this room

13 Try

14 A puzzle with many pieces

15 A newspaper boss

16 A plant with fronds that grows in shady places

17 Absent

DOWN

1 Mountains

2 A parent

3 A law

SOLUTION

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E	O	E	R					
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E	U	E	G	O	I	N	G	
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KL 'would love to keep' in next three WCs

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India's white-ball vice-captain KL Rahul on Wednesday said he would be happy to keep wickets in the next three global ICC events if given an opportunity even though the team management has not yet spoken to him about it.

Rahul has now pipped specialist wicketkeepers Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson as the No1 glovesman in the limited overs format. Three ICC events — two back-to-back T20 World Cups followed by the marquee ODI World Cup — are scheduled in the next three years.

The 28-year-old's keeping does provide the team the option of having an extra batsman or bowler.

"It helps the team combination a little more and it's something I would love to do...If the opportunity presents itself and I can keep in three World Cups, I would love to do it for my country," Rahul said ahead of the limited-overs series against Australia starting November 27.

Has the team management spoken to him about keeping in ICC events?

"Nothing has been told to me and we are not thinking that far as a team. Obviously World Cups are important and that is a long-term vision for every team and country," he said.

"I think for me, we are just taking one game at a time. So if I put up consistent performances with bat and gloves, it gives us an option of playing an extra bowler or an extra batter," said the stylish Karnataka batsman.

In the ODIs, Rahul has been batting at No 5 and has opened in the T20 Internationals, and he admitted



that his position in the line-up will depend on formats.

"What the team wants from me and what combination sits better," said Rahul.

"Obviously, the last ODI series (against New Zealand) that we played, I batted at No 5, it's a role that I have enjoyed and (I am) happy to play whatever role the team gives me."

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's keeping was in a different league and the way he guided spinners went a long way in India's white-ball success.

Would he be able to chide a Kuldeep Yadav or Yuzvendra Chahal like Dhoni could, if he takes upon a similar role?

"Look obviously, nobody can fill MS Dhoni's place. He has shown us the way and how wicketkeeper-batman role is performed.

"With Kuldeep, Yuzi (Yuzvendra Chahal) and Jaddu (Jadeja), we have a decent friendship and obviously I will go and give them a feedback as to what is a better length if they are doing something wrong and anybody in wicketkeeper's role will have that responsibility," he said.

Rahul loved the role of an ODI keeper against New Zealand and hopes to continue with the good work.

"I did one series in New

I am blessed with certain skills and power-hitting is not one of them: Rahul

SYDNEY: The tag of being a power-hitter is quite sought after in international cricket but India's K L Rahul has no qualms admitting that he does not fit the bill and neither does he crave for it.

Known for his classical batting, Rahul said that even if he has to score at a high strike-rate of 160 to 170, he can do it minus the blitzkrieg.

"I wouldn't call my batting power-hitting, that's something I honestly feel like I have not been able to do or not what I am blessed with," Rahul said on the eve of the first ODI on Friday.

"I am blessed with certain skills and I try and play the role I feel the team requires me to play at that particular moment. If that means scoring runs at 160-170 strike rate, I try to do that to the best of my ability and if it's the other way around, I will try to do that," he added.

He hasn't played 50-over cricket regularly for India save for the past one year and is happy that he is in a situation where he has been in good form as far as white-ball cricket is concerned.

"...I have never got a long run like this. So yeah, it feels good that I am contributing to team's win and playing my role pretty well. Happy that I can put up consistent performances."

Talking about the Australian team, Rahul was all praise for Marnus Labuschagne but refused to call him an unknown entity.

"...I don't think he is unknown anymore. He is in the



top 5 and he has been getting a lot of runs in the last 12-15 months or before the Covid in the games that he played. He has been really consistent for his side.

"We have watched how Marnus played and fingers crossed hopefully, he won't score that many runs against us. We will have a plan set, we have a top quality bowling attack so it will be a good challenge for him and our bowlers as well."

Rahul also feels that his IPL teammate Glenn Maxwell is equally dangerous, terming him a great team man.

"Yes of course, he (Maxwell) will (be dangerous). That's one of the reasons why we picked him in our IPL franchise because he is a quality player.

"He is a gun fielder, he is always there to support his teammates. He will be eager to get out in Australian colours and perform for his country as well."

PTI

Have great respect for Indian bowlers: Langer

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia coach Justin Langer on Wednesday said he has great respect for the formidable Indian bowling line-up but his team's batsmen have become familiar enough with their tactics to be ready for the challenge they will throw up in the upcoming series.

Langer said the contest would likely be an exciting one thanks to the two teams being evenly-matched.

"Well, we know Jasprit Bumrah, world-class bowler, (Mohammed) Shami, really good opening combination. We have great respect for that and guys have seen a fair bit of them, through the IPL and the last couple of summers," Langer said in a virtual media conference on Wednesday.

"We have played 14 ODIs against India in the last few years and it's seven all," he added.

India are touring Australia with a lethal bowling attack, led by pace-spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, and comprising Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini and Shardul Thakur.

The spin department features Yuzvendra Chahal along with Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja.

Langer said the Australians would be ready for the challenge.

"...Our guys have seen a lot



of each other and that's what I love about the contest, you see which teams are growing, which players are growing. We have played a bit against each other now.

"So, we have great respect, great respect for their spinners, great respect for Bumrah, Shami, their other bowlers (Navdeep) Saini.

"Our guys know they are going to be on their toes all the time in all forms of the game against the Indian bowling attack. But they are working hard, they have seen a bit now and they will be ready for it," the 50-year-old asserted.

Langer sidestepped queries on India missing star opener

Rohit Sharma and pacer Ishant Sharma due to injury, saying that it was not his concern.

Rohit and Ishant, who suffered injuries during the IPL, are in danger of missing the Test series.

"It is not our business, we have our own challenges, we will come together for the first time as a group on the morning of the game, so it's up to India who they choose," he said.

"One thing, we have zero control or say in who India picks, they can pick whoever they want, we have our own challenges, so India whoever they put out on the park, we will be ready to take them on," he added.

Greg Barclay elected new ICC Chairman

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) head Greg Barclay has been elected as the ICC's new Independent Chairman after he comfortably defeated Singapore's Imran Khwaja to succeed India's Shashank Manohar.

The voting was carried out during ICC's annual quarterly meeting on Tuesday. The electronic voting process involved 16 board of directors — 12 from full member (Test playing nations), three associate countries and one independent female director (Indra Nooyi of PepsiCo).

"It is an honour to be elected as the Chair of the ICC and I would like to thank my fellow ICC Directors for their support. I hope we can come together to lead the sport and emerge from the global pandemic in a strong position and poised for growth," Barclay said.

"I look forward to working

in partnership with our Members to strengthen the game in our core markets as well as grow it beyond that ensuring more of the world can enjoy cricket," he added.

The Kiwi won 11-5, receiving the all important winning vote from the embattled Cricket South Africa in the second round of voting.

He had received 10 votes to Khwaja's six in the first round last week, but as per existing rules the winner needs 11 — a two-thirds majority of the 16-person ICC Board as the 17th member is CEO Manu Sawhney who is without voting rights.

Barclay, an Auckland-based commercial lawyer, has been a director of NZC since 2012. He is currently serves as NZC's representative on the board of the ICC but will step down from the position.

Both bilateral and ICC events important: Barclay

DUBAI: The concept of 'Big Three' doesn't exist for new ICC chairman Greg Barclay, who firmly believes that both bilateral as well as ICC events can peacefully co-exist helping the game's ecosystem.

The 'Big Three' was a concept where India, Australia and England were supposed to earn the lion's share of global body's revenue.

In the run up to the election, New Zealand's Barclay said a perception was created that he gives importance to bilateral cricket over

"everything else" but that is far from the truth.

"There has been a lot of misrepresentation in the media around that (that I am in favour of bilateral cricket over world events. But the fact is, of course I am an advocate of bilateral cricket, it is the lifeblood of cricket in all countries..." Barclay said in a video posted on the ICC website.

"Countries playing each other on a regular basis, sustained competitive relevant competition is what drives fan engagement. It is what drives the development pathways, it is a vital part of cricket."

But that doesn't mean that the world events are not as important, said the administrator from New Zealand who has also has BCCI's backing.

"The ICC runs world class events. If you look at what happened with the women's T20 all the way through the final, the ODI World Cup last year, they were amazing events.

"They are pinnacle events no doubt about that. I would need to say they (bilateral and global events) need to work in conjunction with each other, one can't sit in isolation to the other. I am very conscious of the delicate ecosystem that crickets sits on."

Referring to game's powerful nations India, Australia and England, Barclay said he doesn't believe in the 'big three' concept.

"There is no big three as far as I am concerned. I don't subscribe to it at all. All members are important and should be treated equally."

"I do accept concerns of members could be different ... I do accept that some of those bigger countries can provide certain outcomes to the ICC along the lines of hosting and revenue so again we need to take that into account and recognise that but there is no big three," he insisted.

PTI

Aus Open most likely to be delayed

AFF ■ MELBOURNE

The Australian Open will likely be delayed by one to two weeks, officials said on Wednesday, as talks continue over staging the tournament in Melbourne, which has only recently emerged from months of coronavirus lockdown.

A delay for a week or two to the first Grand Slam of the year, scheduled to begin on January 18, was now "most likely," said Martin Pakula, the Sports Minister of the Victoria State Government.

"I still think it's much more likely that it will be a shorter rather than longer delay," Pakula said.

The "very complex negotiations" were still under way but he remained confident it would go ahead in the early part of 2021.

Australian Open chief Craig Tiley had originally wanted players to start arriving in Australia from mid-December so they could undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine before playing traditional warm-up events.

But the plan was thrown into doubt by Victoria state Premier Dan Andrews, who reportedly will not allow players to arrive before January, which would make it all but impossible to hold the high-profile ATP Cup and other tournaments the start of the Open.

Still under discussion is whether players will be able to train or compete during quarantine.

Juve, Barca, Chelsea, Sevilla advance in CL

They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare

AFF ■ LONDON

Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla all claimed last-gasp wins as they qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Martin Braithwaite grabbed a double in Barcelona's 4-0 victory at Dynamo Kiev as they also secured a place in the knock-out rounds.

They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals.

There was no Lionel Messi for Barcelona, with the Argentine rested for the trip to Ukraine, but Ronald Koeman's side got the job done to make it four wins from four in Group G.

All the goals came in the second half, with Sergino Dest opening the scoring before Danish striker Braithwaite added another and then converted a penalty to make it 3-0.

On as a substitute, Antoine Griezmann wrapped up the win on the night young centre-back Oscar Mingueza, Brazilian midfielder Matheus Fernandes and teenage American winger

Konrad de la Fuente were all bloodied in the first team.

"We've achieved our objective," said Koeman. "We looked hungry and scored four goals. Important players were able to rest and the youngsters deserved their minutes."

LATE STRIKES

Juventus joined Barcelona in qualifying from Group G but the Italian champions needed a stoppage-time header by substitute Alvaro Morata to beat Ferencvaros 2-1 in Turin and seal their progress.

Albanian international Myrto Uzuni put the Hungarians ahead but Ronaldo drilled in the equaliser before half-time, meaning he has scored in 15 consecutive Champions League seasons.

Chelsea are through from Group E after edging Rennes 2-1 in France, with Olivier Giroud coming off the bench to head in an injury-time winner. Serhou Guirassy had cancelled out Callum Hudson-Odoi's breakaway opener.

Last season's Europa League winners Sevilla will not get to defend their trophy as they advanced to the last 16 of Europe's elite club



competition and did so with a 2-1 win over Krasnodar in Russia, in a rare game played before a sizeable crowd.

Sevilla and Chelsea are level on 10 points but Frank Lampard's side go to Spain next week, when the winner will secure top spot.

Manchester United are in pole position in Group H after a first-half Fernandes brace set them on their way to a 4-1 victory over

Istanbul Basaksehir that made up for a 2-1 defeat in Turkey last time out.

The opener by Fernandes was a thunderous strike from outside the box, while the second was a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal.

Marcus Rashford added a penalty, but there was a fightback from the away side, with Deniz Turuc's free-kick crossing the line before David de Gea could

claw it away.

Edin Visca crashed a shot off the bar, but Daniel James made sure of the victory on the counter-attack.

FRIGHTENING RECORD

Solskjaer's side are three points clear of both Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, after an early Neymar penalty gave the French side a 1-0 win over their German visitors.

PSG go to Old Trafford next week.

Borussia Dortmund need just one more point to qualify from Group F following a 3-0 win over Club Brugge as the prolific Haaland netted twice either side of a Jadon Sancho free-kick in Germany.

Haaland has 16 goals for the season, and has now scored 16 Champions League goals in just 12 appearances — Messi had two goals and Ronaldo none after the same number of appearances.

In the group's other game, Lazio beat Arsenal 2-1, with the second goal by a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal.

Parolo also netted for Lazio, with Artem Dzyuba scoring for Zenit.

Lewandowski, Messi and Ronaldo in race for FIFA best

Thiago Alcantara is the other player from European champions Bayern Munich to make the list

AFF ■ MILAN

European player of the year Robert Lewandowski is one of 10 players on the shortlist for the Best Fifa Men's Player award unveiled on Wednesday, alongside the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe.

Besides Polish striker Lewandowski, one other winner of the Champions League with Bayern Munich made the list, Spanish midfielder Thiago Alcantara, who joined Liverpool in September.

The English champions also count Senegal's Sadio Mane, Egyptian Mohamed Salah and Dutchman Virgil van Dijk on the shortlist.

Paris Saint-Germain, beaten Champions League finalists, are represented by Mbappe and Neymar.

Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne and Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos complete the list.

Argentinian coach Marcelo Bielsa, who led Leeds into the English Premier League, headlines a list for the men's coach award, which also features Bayern's Hans-Dieter Flick, Liverpool's Jurgen Klopp, Sevilla's Julen Lopetegui and Real Madrid's Zinedine Zidane.

Three finalists from categories also includ-



ing men and women's goalkeepers, and women's players and coaches will be announced on December 11, with the award handed out on December 17.

The list of nominees for Best FIFA Women's Player Award includes Lucy Bronze, Delphine Cascarino, Caroline Graham Hansen, Pernille Harder, Jennifer Hermoso, Ji So-yun, Sam Kerr, Saki Kumagai, Dzsenifer Marozsán, Vivianne Miedema and Wendie Renard.

In the men's goalkeeper category, the shortlisted candidates are Alisson Becker, Thibaut Courtois, Keylor Navas, Manuel Neuer, Jan Oblak and Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

Seasoned 'Mega' fan set to nurture young talent



Society looking down upon fans of film stars and not supporting the good work these fans do, is a common sight in the country, especially the Telugu states. It is considered that these fans cannot have a life of their own or can't bring bread to the dining table every day if they are involved in fan activities and do no other work. But a diehard Mega family fan has proved everyone wrong and rose to a level where he can now help other underprivileged people to his capacity. Remember SRK's dialogue from *Chennai Express*: "Don't underestimate the power of a common man"? This mega-fan has proved it true!

Meet Siva Cherry, all of 26 years old, who is currently an executive producer with Venkatadri Talks, a production house run by actor Sundeeep Kishan and whose own production house is underway. Speaking about his entry to Tollywood, Siva explains, "When I was a

child, in our village, there lived a fans' association president and during every release of a film, at least 10 people would run behind his bike for movie tickets. Since my dad too was Chiranjeevi *garu*'s fan, I turned out to be one too. I

From growing up idolising Megastar Chiranjeevi and the entire Mega family, and becoming the youngest Fans' Association president at 18, to now becoming a producer to help several others like him, Siva Cherry has come a long way. He talks to *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE about the struggle to get tickets, pursuing his engineering, working with Sundeeep Kishan and more.

always wanted to become fans' association president of Ram Charan *Tej garu*. Even the 'Cherry' in my name is added because I'm a huge fan of Charan *garu* whom everyone fondly calls Cherry. During the release of his first film — *Chirutha*, I became the youngest fans' association president in the entire country. I was not even 18 years old then. I was way too involved in social activities and that helped me become a president." Looking at his social work he does

under the name of Megastar Chiranjeevi and the outgoing nature of Siva, Chiranjeevi blood bank CEO Swamy Naidu called Siva to Hyderabad and got him admitted into an engineering college here. "While pursuing my engineering itself, I started meeting Bunny *garu*, Charan *garu* and I gained more interest in films and the Mega family. I now take care of most of the Mega events," he said. Siva says his fate changed after his work came under the notice of actor Sundeeep Kishan at an audio function. "I was working for an audio function when Sundeeep noticed me and rang me up the next day to know if I would be interested in working with him. It's because of him, I came to know more people from the industry personally, and it's because of him and my hard work that I now reached a stage where I can help other young talents." From not having money, to buy a bicycle for himself as a child, to now being the owner of a Mercedes Benz, nothing came easy for Siva and he says, he is forever indebted to Sundeeep Kishan and Swamy Naidu. Siva, who plans to set up a production house soon, says he wants to provide a platform for young talent where they can showcase their skills and help people from his hometown.



Malayalam actor Suresh Gopi to play VD's father?

Actor Vijay Deverakonda, who is currently awaiting a big hit after his two previous projects couldn't fare well at the box office, will next be seen in Puri Jagannadh's *Fighter*, a pan-India film starring Bollywood beauty Ananya Pandey. According to a few reports doing rounds in media circles, Puri Jagannadh has roped in Malayalam actor Suresh Gopi to play the role of Vijay's father in the film. Sources close to the

film unit say that the father and son relationship is one of the major highlights of *Fighter* and actor Suresh Gopi, who is a known face among Telugu audiences can do justice to the role. The makers are planning to resume the shoot of *Fighter* from December and it is expected to hit theaters during summer next year. Puri Jagannadh, Charmee Kaur and Karan Johar are jointly producing this big-budget film.



'Seethayanam' will give me the much-needed break'

Akshith Shashi Kumar's Trilingual debut *Seethayanam* 2nd single *Manasu Palike* was launched by actress Rashmika Mandanna on Wednesday. Written by Chandrabose, Shweta Mohan crooned this crazy lyrical song. Releasing as a Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil Trilingual film, *Seethayanam* is produced by Lalitha Rajyalakshmi under Color Clouds Entertainments banner and presented by Rohan Bharadwaj. The recently released teaser and anthem received a great response from the audience. Speaking about the same, Rashmika Mandanna says, "This melodious *Manasu Palike* will be loved in all the 3 languages. I'm sure this crazy

song will turn out to be a chart-buster. The teaser and songs seem very different and garnered interest. I wish the entire team the best." Hero Akshith Shashi Kumar says, "Our *Seethayanam*'s tagline 'Respect Women' is so apt and 100% justifies our story. I'm pretty confident that it'll give

me the much-needed break in all three languages. Also, I'm sure the audience will have a wonderful watch time experience." Director Prabhakar Aaripaka and Producer Lalitha Rajyalakshmi said, "Our 2nd single *Manasu Palike* launched by

Rashmika Mandanna will be a trendsetter. The breathless songs often attempted by the male singers have been extraordinarily crooned by Shweta Mohan with the beautiful stanzas written by Chandrabose in this song. The trailer will be released by a renowned celebrity soon. As we are close to wrapping up the movie post-production works, we are aiming for a grand release of it in 3 languages at the same time." The cast includes Anahitha Bhushan, Ajay Ghosh, Madhunandhan, Vidyulekha Raman, Bithiri Satti, Krishna Bhagavan, Gundu Sudarshan, Anant, Jabardast Apparao, TNR, Madhumani, and Meghna Gowda in impactful roles.



Mohan Babu's Son Of India Hyd schedule begins

Versatile actor Dr Mohan Babu, who has an in-depth knowledge of each department in film-making, has become very selective as he now wants to take up roles and films which will be remembered for ages. The actor is playing a lead role after a long time in a patriotic film titled *Son Of India* where he will be seen in a never-seen-before powerful role. The first look poster of the film has grabbed several eyeballs. The storyline and genre are said to be the first of its kind in Tollywood. Actor Mohan Babu is also the screenwriter for the

film. Diamond Ratnababu is directing the joint production venture of Sree Lakshmi Prasanna Pictures and 24 Frames Factory. Vishnu Manchu's wife and Mohan Babu's daughter-in-law, Viranica Manchu, turns stylist with the film and will be presenting Mohan Babu in a completely new *avatar*. Few important scenes and a song were canned in Tirupati and the shooting schedule in the temple town has wrapped up. On Wednesday, the team commenced a new schedule in Hyderabad, where major portions of the film with the lead cast are being shot.

Maestro Ilayaraja scores music for the film, while Sarvesh Murari is the cinematographer. The film has dialogues by Diamond Ratnababu and Thotapalli Sainath. Suddala Ashoka Teja pens lyrics, while Gautham Raju is the editor and Chinna is the art director.



Rakul denies doing film with Mohan Babu

News that Rakul Preet Singh will be seen alongside Mohan Babu in *Son of India* is doing the rounds for a while now. However, the actress manager, on Wednesday, clarified that the actor is not part of Mohan Babu's next as she is busy with her other projects. Her manager G Harinath said the actress has tight schedule going on with hand full of projects both in Tollywood and Bollywood. Nithiin starrer *Check*, and an untitled film of Krish has been wrapped up where Rakul will be seen in a village belle role. She also has a Tamil film with Sivakarthikeya and three Bollywood films i.e., one each with Arjun Kapoor, John Abraham and Ajay Devgn are in pipeline. With exciting projects in hand, Rakul is quite confident of delivering her best, said Harinath. Currently on a vacation, once Rakul returns, she will get back to being busy.

