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DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL
BHUBANESWAR RANCHI
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DEHRADUN HYDERABAD
VIJAYWADA

LUCKNOW, SUNDAY OCTOBER 11, 2020; PAGES 14+4 ₹3



sunday pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

**USUAL SUSPECTS**
SWAPAN DASGUPTA

Free & fair polls seem impossible in Bengal

The move away from one-party dominance that took place after the general election of 1967 has meant that nearly all political parties have experienced spells in the Opposition, both nationally and at the regional level.

Being the ruling party involves a distinct experience for its members. Apart from normal issues of governance that preoccupies Ministers and a few others, the membership is preoccupied with securing posts that ensures a share of the power the party has secured in Government. This ranges from getting on to the personal staff of Ministers and legislators, securing appointments to Government bodies which can embellish visiting cards and generally basking in reflected glory.

The Opposition experience is altogether different. A party in Opposition doesn't have too much to dole out by way of patronage. There are, of course, the usual quota of appointments in the personal staff of the MPs and MLAs who managed to get elected. But these are few in number and usually taken up those who have been with a politician for long and acquired his/her trust and demonstrated loyalty. Most of the other active members rush to secure party posts of one description or another. I have often been struck by the sheer desperation of people to find a place — however meaningless — in the party's organisational wing. More than anything else it adds to their self-esteem and makes them feel extremely relevant in their own localities. It makes the wait for the next election, when there is another shy at winning power, more bearable.

Opposition politics also involves an additional experience that may not be all that forthcoming when in Government: street politics. Mobilising people for demonstrations and dharnas against the ruling party is the bread and butter of Opposition politics. The belief is that unless an Opposition party is seen to be active on the streets, it will lose its relevance. The conviction may not hold good in an age of 24x7 television and social media. But it would be fair to say that this is conventional wisdom. Parties often act according to this belief.

Mamata has signalled to her party faithful that their political battle with the BJP will have the full backing of the Government machinery. If this pattern persists, the prospects of a free and fair poll in 2021 will be seriously jeopardised

either because the demands are so outrageous or because the police are under instruction from the 'top' to come down hard on the Opposition. Ironically, even this serves a purpose. I know of party apparatchiks who insist that a member is unworthy of assuming responsibilities unless they have experienced lathi blows on the streets. In their world, cerebral politics has no relevance in a political party.

This narration of the political culture that prevails in Indian politics is useful to bear in mind when assessing the widespread disturbances in Kolkata on October 8. The State Yuva Morcha of the BJP had given a call for a mass march on Nabanna, the seat of the West Bengal Government, located just across the second Howrah bridge. Street politics has a long pedigree in Bengal, having been practised at different point by the Left, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee made her political mark through street agitations and even now she is most comfortable leading marches or encouraging her party members to fight the Opposition on the streets.

The BJP is a relative newcomer to this culture of street protests in Bengal, but in a very short span of time it has learnt the ropes. There is another reason why the State BJP feels the need to be visible on the streets. The local electronic and print media is so tightly in the grip of the ruling dispensation in Kolkata that to attract widespread attention to its challenge to Mamata Banerjee, it has to do things that are dramatic and spectacular. The march on the Government headquarters was precisely such an exercise.

However, to me, a more important question centres on the reaction of the State Government to this street politics. Last Thursday, Mamata Banerjee declared war. She shut the headquarters down, allegedly for fumigation purposes, and instructed the police that the demonstrators must be dealt with as harshly as possible. In simple language it meant that the police were under instructions to beat the BJP workers black and blue and break up every gathering.

The police followed these instructions faithfully, closed down important arterial roads and showed no tact or restraint in breaking up the four major gatherings in different parts of the city. The beatings were crude and there are video shots of a policeman mercilessly thrashing an elderly man as he tried to shield two children. There is disturbing footage of a Sikh security guard of a politician having his turban pulled off. And there are hospital shots of people with horrible bruises on their backs and legs.

As someone who witnessed a section of the protest march, I can say with certainty that the use of force was disproportionate and aimed almost entirely at teaching the BJP a lesson.

I fear the results will be quite the opposite. What the administration's over-reaction has done is made the BJP raise the ante. There was little prospect that the Assembly election in summer 2021 would be a gentlemanly affair. The spate of political murders and the attacks on BJP leaders has ruled that out. After last Thursday, there is compelling evidence that Mamata Banerjee is over-dependent on the police and administration to exercise political control. This will trigger an appropriate BJP response in the coming days. But more important, she has signalled to her party faithful that their political battle with the BJP will have the full backing of the Government machinery. If this pattern persists, the prospects of a free and fair poll in 2021 will be seriously jeopardised.

Finish rape probe in 2 months: MHA

Advisory to States/UTs on crime against women: Dying declaration can't be discarded

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid criticism of the Uttar Pradesh Police for its handling of the Hathras case, the Union Home Ministry on Saturday issued a fresh advisory to States and UTs on the mandatory action to be taken in cases of crimes against women.

It outlined that the probe in rape cases should be completed within two months, that the dying declaration of a victim can't be discarded merely because it has not been recorded by a Magistrate and that there has to be a mandatory medical examination, with the individual's consent, by a qualified medical professional within 24 hours of receipt of information of such a crime.

The detailed three-page advisory of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) also said there should be compulsory registration of an FIR in case of a cognisable offence under the CrPC, and any failure of police to adhere to laid down rules does not augur well for the delivery of justice.

The law also enables the police to register an FIR or a "Zero FIR", in case the crime is committed outside the jurisdiction of police station, in the event of receipt of information on commission of a cognisable



Activists hold placards during a protest demanding justice for the 19-year-old Dalit woman, who died after four men allegedly gangraped and assaulted her last month, at Ambedkar Bhawan in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

offence, which includes cases of sexual assault on women, said the detailed MHA advisory.

"However, even with stringent provisions in law and several capacity building measures undertaken, any failure of police to adhere to these mandatory requirements may not augur well for the delivery of criminal justice in the country, especially in the context of women safety," said the advisory, adding that stringent

action and investigation must be initiated against the officers responsible for the lapses in handling crimes against the women.

The MHA told the States that the Section 173 of CrPC provides for completion of police investigation in relation to rape in two months and Section 164-A of CrPC provides that in rape or sexual assault investigation, the victim should be examined by

Schools in UP to reopen for classes 9 to 12 from Oct 19

Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday said schools for students of classes 9 to 12 will reopen from October 19, after remaining shut for over six months in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Classes will be held in shifts and all necessary protocols including social distancing and proper sanitisation of premises will have to be followed by schools, it said.

Students will only be allowed to attend classes after furnishing written permission from their parents or guardians, the government said.

After proper consideration by the government, it was decided that classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 of all boards outside containment zones will be resumed, Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma said in a statement.

Classes 9 to 12 will resume with the physical presence of students from October 19, he said.

Sharma said schools will

run in shifts and proper attention will be paid to the health of students. In the first shift, classes for 9 and 10 standards will be held. Classes for 11 and 12 standards will be held in the second shift.

He said 50 per cent of the students should be called in every class on one day and the remaining 50 per cent the next day. Arrangement should be made to see that the students sit at a distance of 6 feet from each other, he added.

Sharma said the students would be allowed to attend classes only after they furnish written permission from their parents or guardians as their health and future are important.

Additional chief secretary, Secondary Education, Aradhana Shukla, has issued an order in this connection and a standard operating procedure (SOP) on health, sanitation and necessary protocols has already been issued for the reopening of schools, the statement said.

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India's daily recoveries surpass fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Seeking to send a positive signal amid all-round despair due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Centre on Saturday showcased how for the second consecutive day after a month India's active Covid-19 cases remained below the 9-lakh mark as the number of recoveries continued to surpass the fresh infections' tally.

There are 8,83,185 active cases of Covid-19 which constitute merely 12.65 per cent of the total cases of the country, the Ministry said, adding these are nearly 1/8th of the total cases in the country.

In the last 24 hours, 82,753 patients recovered while there were 73,272 fresh infections. The total Covid-19 recoveries stand at 59,88,822 now while India's Covid-19 caseload mounted to 69,79,423 by early Saturday. The death toll climbed to 1,07,416 with 926 people succumbing to the disease, as per the Centre's data.

"For the second day after the active cases dropped below the 9-lakh mark after a month, the progressive decline continues," it said adding that the national Covid-19 recovery rate has progressed to 85.81 per cent.

As many as 18 States and Union Territories have recorded recovery rates more than the national average, said the Ministry.

"This is the result of a collaborative action by States and UTs under the Centre's strategy of comprehensive testing, tracking, quick hospitalisation and adherence to the standard

treatment protocol," it said.

As many as 76 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 States and UTs namely Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Delhi, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh, the Ministry added. Maharashtra continues

to contribute the maximum with more than 17,000 single-day recoveries.

The second-most-affected country by active and total cases, and third by fatality, India's coronavirus cases has crossed over 70 lakh on Saturday. India now accounts for 10.84 per cent of all active cases globally.

Total soars to whopping 70 lakh

Covid-19 IN INDIA**TOTAL****CASES: 70,37,329****DEATHS: 1,08,046****RECOVERED:****60,45,564****ACTIVE: 8,82,656**

STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	15,06,018	39,732	12,29,339
Andhra Pradesh	7,50,517	6,194	6,97,699
Karnataka	7,00,786	9,891	5,69,947
Tamil Nadu	6,51,370	10,187	5,97,033
Uttar Pradesh	4,33,712	6,353	3,87,149
Delhi	3,06,559	5,740	2,78,812
West Bengal	2,91,194	5,563	2,55,838
Kerala	2,79,856	979	1,82,874
Odisha	2,49,693	1,059	2,24,273
Telangana	2,10,346	1,208	1,83,025
Bihar	1,94,966	944	1,83,007
Assam	1,93,387	811	1,63,352
Rajasthan	1,54,785	1,621	1,31,766
Gujarat	1,50,414	3,560	1,30,997
Madhya Pradesh	1,45,245	2,599	1,27,034
Haryana	1,41,090	1,572	1,28,841

China has 60K soldiers along LAC: Pompeo

Talks won't make China change its aggressive stance: US NSA

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

China has amassed 60,000 troops on India's northern border, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said as he hit out at Beijing for its "bad behaviour" and the threats it poses to the Quad countries. US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said China has attempted to "seize" control of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India by force as part of its territorial aggression.

The foreign ministers from the Indo-Pacific nations known as the Quad group - the US, Japan, India and Australia - met in Tokyo on Tuesday in what was their first in-person talks



since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of China's aggressive military behaviour in the Indo-Pacific, South China Sea and along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

"The Indians are seeing 60,000 Chinese soldiers on their northern border," Pompeo told The Guy Benson Show in an interview on Friday after his return from Tokyo wherein he

attended the second Quad ministerial with his counterparts from India, Japan and Australia.

"They see, the people of their (Quad) nations understanding that we all slept on this for too long. For decades, the West allowed the Chinese Communist Party to walk all over us. The previous administration bent a knee, too often allowed China to steal our intellectual properties and the millions of jobs that came

along with it. They see that in their country too," he said in the interview.

"CCP's (Chinese Communist Party) territorial aggression is also apparent on its Indian border where China has attempted to seize control of the Line of Actual Control by force," US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said in a remark on China early this week in Utah.

The Chinese territorial aggression is also true in the Taiwan Strait where the PLA (People's Liberation Army) Navy and Air Force continue to conduct threatening military drills, O'Brien said. "Beijing's signature international development programme, One Belt One Road (OBOR), involves impoverished companies taking on opaque and unsustainable Chinese loans to pay Chinese firms employing Chinese labourers to build their infrastructure," he said.

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Protesting family cremate body of slain priest after Raj assures aid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a day-long protest with the slain priest Babulal Vaishnav's dead body, his family finally performed his last rites after two days on Saturday when the Rajasthan Government assured it of ₹10 lakh financial assistance, a Government job and a house under PM Awas Yojana.

Taking to micro-blogging site Twitter, BJP MP Kirori Lal Meena announced that the aggrieved family has ended the protest and agreed to cremate his body after Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot announced a compensation of ₹10 lakh, job for a family member and a house under the PM Awas Yojana. The local SHO was transferred from the area, he added.

Earlier, the family had refused to perform the last rites of the victim priest until their demands of ₹50 lakh and a Government job for a family member were met by the Rajasthan Government.

It had refused Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Om Prakash Meena's request to the family to perform the last rites. The priest's death had created national outrage.

Earlier in the day, Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra spoke to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot about the situation as thousands of villagers protested in Rajasthan's Bukna village in Karauli against the brutal murder.

After the family refused to perform last rites, the Rajasthan government approached the family and announced that it would give the monetary compensation, a house, a job on contract to one of the family members and an assurance that all the

Continued on Page 4

Cabinet nod to enhanced security cover for CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a late Friday night move, the Uttar Pradesh cabinet decided to further beef up the security protocol of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

For the last few days, the chief minister has been receiving constant threats to eliminate him and against the backdrop of the development, the chief minister's security will be supersized.

Under the new plan, the chief minister's fleet will be more secure during road travel and no one will be able to distinguish it. From now on, Yogi Adityanath will be provided protection on the lines of the security protocol of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

For this, the UP cabinet passed the proposal by circulation on Friday. However, no official announcement was made in this regard while an official communiqué on cabinet decisions was released on Saturday evening.

As per government sources, the structure of the chief minister's security fleet has been fixed as per the instructions of the government approved Green Book (revised version, 2017) for the protection of the chief minister. Sources said that now the position of additional vehicle running in the chief minister's convoy will be changed. The additional vehicle is kept as a



reserve for emergencies and operates only between fleet vehicles. At present, the position of the additional vehicle is changed only in vehicles running for the protection of the prime minister. This change will be recorded in the Chief Minister's Green Book of Safety.

Earlier in 2017, the Green Book was reviewed for Yogi's security. Sources said that the security officials studied PM Modi's Blue Book of Security after which they recommended the change.

In view of the terror threat to the chief minister, his security has been reviewed from time to time. Earlier, a decision was taken to make the glass panes of the chief minister's office at Lok Bhawan bullet proof. This plan was prepared on the suggestion of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

Similarly, security arrangements have also been strengthened

at his residence at Gorakhnath temple in Gorakhpur and CCTV cameras have been installed. Besides, barriers have also been increased.

Meanwhile, the state cabinet also approved a proposal for a light rail transit system to ease traffic in Gorakhpur city and approved a detailed project report for the project.

Also, a proposal for demolishing some old buildings in Gorakhpur collectorate for construction of new ones also got the cabinet's nod.

It was also decided to run government polytechnics and industrial training institutes (ITIs) on the public-private partnership model.

The government also sanctioned guarantees to facilitate cash credit limit of UP Cooperative Bank and District Cooperative Bank for 2020-21 cane crushing season of cooperative sugar mills. The government raises this limit every year. In another decision, the government, under its Ease of Doing Business policy, empowered deputy excise commissioners to decide on liquor shops, instead of the present arrangement where only excise commissioner and the government are empowered for it.

For increasing the production capacity of liquor, a committee under additional chief secretary (excise) has also been formed.

If CM is insecure, what about the public?, asks Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav questioned further beefing up of the security of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday.

"If the chief minister feels so threatened then the state of the security of the common man can be anybody's guess in Uttar Pradesh," the SP chief said in Lucknow.

Yadav said that the security of the chief minister had been beefed up and a proposal was passed by the UP cabinet by circulation and also registered in the Green Book on CM's security.

The SP chief further said that the prime minister's security was detailed in the Blue Book and after its study, the chief minister's Green Book had been reviewed.

"Since the day the chief minister assumed power, his security has been reviewed from time to time. Hence the question arises that if there is so much threat to his security in 2020, what kind of state are the people in," he said.

Akhilesh pointed out that

as per 2019 report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there was a 12 per cent increase in total cases related to harassment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in UP.

"Besides, Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number of 59,853 cases of crime against women, including 272 cases of rapes of minor girls and 3,065 cases of rapes in 2019," he said.

Taking a jibe at the chief minister, the SP chief said that Yogi Adityanath was so worried about his own security that he did not have time to think about the life of the people of the state.

"If one scans recent cases, even Bharatiya Janata Party leaders are not safe in this regime. The uncle of the BJP MLA from Ghaziabad's Muradnagar was brutally murdered on Friday. Besides, a member of the block development committee was shot at in Azamgarh, while a youth in Mau, a woman in Etawah, an elderly man in Gauriganj (Amethi) were murdered. The police are not paying attention to incidents of crime against women in the BJP rule," he

alleged.

"These are just the tip of the iceberg. In Mainpuri, a five-year-old girl was raped in Kuravali police station area but instead of bringing the culprits to justice and ensuring medical treatment to the victim, a compensation of Rs 20,000 was provided by the accused in a panchayat to settle the matter. Is it not travesty of justice?" Akhilesh asked.

The SP chief further pointed out that a girl was gang-raped in Atrauli (Aligarh) and a 13-year-old girl was kidnapped and gang-raped in Noida. "Besides, a girl was raped in Banda and in Unnao, after being gang-raped, a victim was thrown on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway," he pointed out. The former chief minister of UP said that the reality of the BJP rule in UP was that criminals were scripting a new chapter every day while the ruling party chose to be silent on all these incidents.

"Law and order has spun out of government control and all the tall claims of the chief minister have been battered," Akhilesh charged.

Yogi asks people to beware of divisive elements

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After accusing opposition parties and anti-national forces of conspiring to incite caste conflict after the Hathras incident, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath once again warned the people to beware of the divisive elements in the state.

Yogi made these remarks while addressing party office-bearers of booth, division and sector of Deoria Assembly constituency which goes to bypolls on November 3, through a virtual meeting from his Lucknow residence on Saturday.

Without naming Congress,

Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, Yogi exhorted people to guard against their nefarious designs.

"Disunity, division, discrimination is in their DNA. First, they divided the country and now they are out to divide the society on caste, religion, community and regional basis," he pointed out.

The chief minister said that the BSP and the SP ruled the state for 15 years but had only corruption and anarchy as dubious achievements.

He asked BJP workers to disseminate the message of development initiated in this coun-

try by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The graph of the BJP is heading north by the day which has in fact upset the opposition apple cart," he said.

Yogi said that as many as 50,000 children died due to encephalitis in the eastern districts of UP between 1974 and 2017.

"Most of these deceased children were from poor families but nobody raised their voice for them. It is the present BJP government in UP that resolved to root out the menacing disease and its tragic aftermath," he emphasised.

The chief minister also

announced that Deoria medical college would start functioning from the next session and a permanent solution of drainage problem in the district would be found soon.

Yogi also lambasted the SP and the BSP governments in UP for selling out sugar mills one by one and in the process disbalancing the sugar economy of the region, once termed as the Sugar Bowl of India.

BJP state chief Swatantra Dev Singh exhorted partymen to work on the development model and make people aware of the welfare schemes run by the government.

Senior citizens account for 45 pc COVID-19 deaths

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Health department on Saturday disclosed that 74 percent of the COVID-19 deaths were due to comorbidity while 45 percent of the casualties were of people above the age of 60 years.

Disclosing these facts here on Saturday, Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said that in the audit report of 6,000 COVID-19 deaths so far of the total 6,353 deaths, it was found that citizen above the age of 60 years faced the brunt of the disease.

He said of the total 6,000 deaths, 71 percent were males and rest 29 percent were females while 63 percent were from urban and 37 percent from rural background.

"But the serious thing is that though the positivity rate of citizens above the age of 60 years is just 9.4 percent, their death percentage is 45 points. Besides, in the age group of 51-60 years, the positivity rate is 13 percent but the death rate is 25.3

percent," Prasad said. He said that comorbidity was the main reason for such a large number of deaths, accounting for 74 percent casualties.

The additional chief secretary said the government was concerned about such a high death rate among the senior citizens, hence it had asked the people of this age group to be cautious and follow all the Covid guidelines and take preventive measures.

Meanwhile, altogether 3,099 fresh cases of COVID-19 were reported on Saturday in Uttar Pradesh while 4,063 people recovered.

Now the tally of confirmed positive cases in the state has reached 4,33,712, out of which 3,87,149 have recovered and 40,210 are getting treatment in hospitals or in home isolation. The recovery percentage in the state has also increased to 89.26 percent.

A total of 6,353 people have lost their lives to the deadly virus with 60 fresh fatalities in the last 24 hours.

"The serious thing is that though the positivity rate of citizens above the age of 60 years is just 9.4 percent, their death percentage is 45 points"

Prasad said that on Friday a record, 1,76,514 samples were tested and now the total Covid tests in the state had reached another milestone of 1,17,26,075.

He said there were 18,654 asymptomatic patients in home isolation while 3,106 patients were admitted to private hospitals and the rest were recovering in government-run Covid hospitals.

Over 4.11 lakh surveillance teams have covered 1,36,383 areas of the state and visited 2.66 crore houses to check the health of over 13.18 crore people.

World Bank likely to fund ODOP scheme

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Multilateral financial institution World Bank is likely to fund projects under the flagship One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme of the UP government.

The ODOP scheme was launched on January 25, 2018, to promote the state's traditional and indigenous industries in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector by providing funding, training, marketing support etc.

The World Bank evinced interest to collaborate with the state under two different programmes. There is also a proposal to develop an ecosystem of 14 agricultural and food processing products related to the ODOP scheme to promote entrepreneurship through integrated cluster development.

The ecosystem of other ODOP and MSME products would be handled under schemes run by the Centre and the World Bank. Earlier this

week, a World Bank delegation had met senior officials of the MSME and Export Promotion departments.

Additional Chief Secretary (MSME) Navneet Sehgal said that the state government urged the World Bank to expedite the process of extending institutional and funding support to the MSME and ODOP enterprises in the state.

The MSME department briefed the World Bank officials about the ODOP scheme and the UP government was working closely with different funding agencies to facilitate flow of easy credit to entrepreneurs.

While 13 common facility centres have been inaugurated, 20,000 ODOP products have been integrated with online platforms.

So far, about 3,000 ODOP units have been benefited with more than Rs 100 crore under margin money scheme. In order to promote the ODOP products, the state government had earlier formed up alliances with different organisations and companies, including e-commerce

giants Amazon and Ebay, to provide global marketing platforms to such products, including leather goods, textiles, wood carving, brassware, glassware, marble products, carpets etc.

The state government is planning to launch exclusive retail outlets to market such traditional products across the country.

As per the proposal, a standard ODOP outlet will span 100 square metres in prominent markets, shopping malls, airports, railway stations etc. This will be partly financially supported by the state government and any government, semi-government or private organisation can run these outlets.

Besides, the state government is in the process of rationalising its investment and export promotion policies to attract companies exiting China owing to the resentment over the COVID-19 pandemic. The government is targeting to augment MSME exports in the next three years to touch the ambitious Rs 3 trillion-mark.

SCHOOLSCAN

CMS STUDENT WINS FIRST PRIZE

Garvita Mishra, a class XII student of City Montessori School, Aliganj Campus I, won the first prize in an inter-school instrumental music competition, bringing laurels for the institution. The competition was organised by Mount Carmel College. Garvita mesmerised everyone with her outstanding tabla skills. Judges of the event awarded a certificate to her.

Naxal twist to mystery woman at Hathras victim's house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another quirky twist to the alleged rape and murder of a Dalit girl in Hathras, the officers probing the case now suspect a Naxal angle on the premise that a woman, who identified herself as the victim's sister-in-law during media interactions, disappeared soon after Close Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras were set up around the perimeter of the house.

However, the woman challenged the probe team's claim within a few hours in Jabalpur and denied having any Naxal links.

The investigators have been looking for the mysterious woman who stayed at the victim's house before doing the vanishing act.

The police maintained that during meeting with political leaders and media persons, the woman used to be the central point and spoke on behalf of the victim's kin.

It was further alleged that in several videos, the woman instigated the kin and even tutored them on speaking to the media.

However, the victim's sister-in-law identified the woman as Rajkumari Bansal and said that she was based in Jabalpur.

The disclosure turned out to be true as Bansal appeared in Jabalpur and dismissed the charges of her posing as the victim's sister-in-law or having Naxal links.

Bansal, a physician by profession, works at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Medical College in Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh).

The medico said that it was all a figment of imagination of some media channels.

"I was present at the victim's house and if someone identifies me as the fake sister-in-law, I can't help. Did I claim I was her kin. I only speak on the basis of evidence," she said.

When asked about the purpose behind her visit to Hathras, the medico said that it was purely on humanitarian grounds as she was upset with growing "atrocities" in the last few years.

"I had planned to extend

some financial help and also gave them my one month's salary. I had planned to return the next day after spending some hours with the family but they requested me to stay there for a couple of days to which I agreed," she explained.

"I learnt that the UP SIT is linking me with Naxals. When they meet me, then only will I know what they are trying to probe against me. I was born and brought up in Madhya Pradesh and started working here," Bansal said.

The medico also dismissed any links to Bhim Army, but said that she had been active in social work since 2017.

Meanwhile, the Mathura police will enquire about Bahraich-native Masood Ahmed, who was recently arrested along with three others on way to Hathras from Delhi on October 5.

All four are suspected of having links with the Popular Front of India (PFI).

Superintendent of Police of Bahraich, Vipin Mishra, said on Saturday, "A team of Mathura police spoke to Ahmed's father and neighbours in Baraikaji locality of Jarwal Road area on Saturday and took their statements. The team also obtained details about Masood from the local police."

SSP of Mathura, Gaurav Grover, said, "Information and details were collected about the four accused with suspected links with CFI (Campus Front of India), the student wing of PFI. Details about them were also obtained from their Delhi residence. After collecting the evidence, the police will prepare its report."

Meanwhile, a delegation of Akhil Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha led by former Union minister Raja Manvendra Singh met the family members of the alleged rape and murder accused in Hathras and assured them legal help if they were innocent.

"After hearing their statements and checking the facts, we are sure that the youths are innocent. They have been framed by the victim's family to save their own skin," Singh told media persons after meeting the family.

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तातियागांज, कानपुर नगर- 209217

आवश्यकता है - सहायक आचार्य-एलएल.बी.

त्रिवर्षीय पाठ्यक्रम हेतु, कार्यालय लिपिक, कम्प्यूटर लिपिक, कार ड्राइवर, घरेलू सेविका एवं सुरक्षा गाड़। योग्यता व वेतनमान बार काउंसिल ऑफ इण्डिया,नई दिल्ली एवं विश्वविद्यालय के मानकानुसार । 15 दिनों के अन्दर आवेदन करें।
सिटी ऑफिस- 162-ए, अवधपुरी कालोनी , लखनपुर, कानपुर- 208024
सम्पर्क सूत्र- 9839620217, 9936114411, 0512- 2580133

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY **Notification No. 88/2020**

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR RAIL PASSENGERS

It is notified for information of general public that Railway Administration will run following special trains:-

(1) 09075/09076 Bandra (T) - Ramnagar -Bandra (T) Special SF train (Weekly)

- 09075 Ex.Bandra (T) From 15.10.2020 till further advice.
- 09076 Ex. Ramnagar From 16.10.2020 till further advice.

Days of run & Timings will be same as Train No. 22975/22976.



Train No.	From - To	Days of run	Rake Composition	Stoppages
09075	Bandra(T)-Ramnagar	THU	AC2-Tier-1, AC3-Tier-3, Sleeper-8, GeneralSecond Class -4, Break Van -2 = 18 Coaches	Borivali, Vapi, Surat, Bharuch Jn.,Vadodara Jn., Godhra Jn., Dahod, Ratlam Jn., Nagda Jn, Ramganj Mandi Jn., Kota Jn., Sawai Madhopur Jn.,Gangapur City, Bharatpur Jn., Achhnera Jn., Mathura Jn, Hathras City, Kasganj Jn.,Budaun, Bareilly Jn., Izzatnagar, Baheri, Kichha, Lal Kuan Jn., Bazzpur, Kashipur Jn.
09076	Ramnagar-Bandra(T)	FRI		

(2) 09021/09022 Bandra (T) -Lucknow- Bandra (T) special SF train (Weekly)

09021 Ex. BDTs From 17.10.2020 till further advice.

09022 Ex. UN From 18.10.2020 till further advice

Days of run & Timings will be same as Train No. 19021/19022.

Train No.	From - To	Days of run	Rake Composition	Stoppages
09021	Bandra(T)-Lucknow Jn.	SAT	AC2-Tier-1, AC3-Tier-5, Sleeper-9, GeneralSecond Class -4, Break Van -2 = 21 Coaches	Borivali, Boisar, Vapi, Surat, Bharuch Jn., Vadodara Jn., Godhra Jn., Dahod, Ratlam Jn., Bhawani Mandi, Kota Jn., Sawai Madhopur, Bharatpur Jn., Achhnera Jn., Mathura Jn, Hathras City, Kasganj, Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Kanpur Anwrganj, Kanpur Central.
09022	LucknowJn.-Bandra(T)	SUN		

- These trains will run with reserved accommodation.
- It is mandatory for the passengers to follow the guidelines issued for prevention and safety from Covid-19.

Chief Passenger Transportation Manager, Gorakhpur

CPRO/T-22

About any Passenger Amenity Complaint SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955.

"DO NOT SMOKE BIDI / CIGARATE IN TRAIN"

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Cases on decline in urban pockets

317 test +ve,
561 recover

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The urban pockets in Lucknow have now less than 50 Covid cases each. In some areas such as Aishbagh and Sarojininagar, there were less than 10 cases on October 9 even as Nagram, Maal and Itaunja have very few cases and can be comfortably termed silent zones.

A senior official at the CMO office pointed out that earlier, Gomtinagar, Indiranagar, Aliganj and Alambagh had more than 100 cases each. According to the official, seven lakh tests have been done in Lucknow — 3,54,000 through RT-PCR, 3,20,000 antigen tests and 32,000 through TruNat machines — under containment activities.

Meanwhile, 317 persons tested positive for coronavirus in the city on Saturday while 561 patients recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 51,498. There have been 772 deaths till now and there are 5,116 active cases in the state capital.

A senior official at the CMO office said the patients included 30 from Rae Bareilly road, 29 from Indiranagar, 28 from Gomtinagar, 15 from Hazratganj, 14 from Madaon, 13 each from Aliganj & Talkatora, 12 each from Gudamba & Naka, 11 from Jankipuram, and 10 each from Alambagh, Vikasnagar, Chowk and Chinchat. There were 10 deaths in the district and four of the deceased belonged to Lucknow while the rest from other districts.

Five patients died at KGMU, including a 58-year-old man from Lucknow, a 30-year-old man from Lucknow, a 52-year-old man from Sitapur, a 65-year-old woman and a 54-year-old man from Amethi.

Across the state, 3,099 persons tested positive, including



LMC workers conducting sanitisation inside family court premises on Saturday

Pioneer

161 in Prayagraj, 154 each in Ghaziabad & Varanasi, 153 in Meerut and 151 in Gorakhpur, taking the tally to 4,33,712. There were 60 deaths in the state, including four each in Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Meerut & Azamgarh, three in Prayagraj, two in Kanpur, Gautambuddh Nagar, Moradabad, Shahjahanpur, Lakhimpur Kheri, Etawah, Chandauli & Mau, and one each in Aligarh, Jhansi, Saharanpur, Agra, Deoria, Jaunpur, Maharajganj, Mathura, Sitapur, Sultanpur, Sonbhadra, Hapur, Ferozabad, Mirzapur, Auraiyya, Jalaun and Shravasti. As many as 4,063 patients recovered in the state, taking the total number of recoveries to 3,87,149 while there are 40,210 active cases across the state.

Meanwhile, Dr Ishwar Gilada from People Health Organization said that in the Covid-19 era, people were tired

of being told what is not to be done but their new poster clearly mentions what can be done at this stage.

“It is safe getting clothes ironed or laundered. We were surprised to learn from many people that they are scared of getting their clothes ironed or laundered because of Covid scare. Both the activities are safe and ironing or laundry will kill coronavirus,” he said.

He pointed out that online shopping is also safe. “During initial part of the pandemic, there was an undue scare of importing coronavirus from parcels. Till date, there has not been a single case of Covid-19 through this mode. One needs to use logic, ensure simple precautions. Use sanitiser to clean hands after handling such parcels, discard and dispose off the outer bag or box,” he added.

Dr Gilada said it was also

safe going for a walk or jog. “You do not get coronavirus infection from going out for a walk or a jog. What needs to be avoided is too much socialising, handshakes, hugging etc,” he said. He added that eating home-delivered food was also safe.

Meanwhile, a programme was organised at Collectorate on the occasion of World Mental Health Day and corona warriors who worked hard for containment of the virus were felicitated by District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash. CDO Manish Bansal was also felicitated for handling the Integrated Control and Command Centre in an efficient manner. Others felicitated were ADMs, block development officers and doctors from the Health department. The programme was also attended by CMO Dr Sanjay Bhatnagar.

Property dealer shot at by Mukhtar’s henchmen

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A group of miscreants, said to be henchmen of mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari’s protégé in Lucknow, shot at property dealer in Bakshi-Ka-Talaab police station area on Saturday after the latter refused to shell out Rs 5 lakh as extortion. Kin of the victim said he was being terrorised for the last few weeks. Police said they probing into the allegations and searching for the accused.

The victim, identified as Sudhakar Singh of Indaurbagh locality, was at a dhaba in the area along with his cousin Ashu Singh when his rival Anuj Singh and his henchmen in different SUVs reached the scene. They started abusing Sudhakar and even lobbed crude bombs at him while one of them opened fire. Sudhakar



suffered injuries in his leg. As people started converging on the scene, the miscreants sped off the scene while issuing threats to the victim. A profusely bleeding Sudhakar was rushed to hospital where his condition was said to be improving.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the victim was attacked around 2:30 pm. The dhaba owner told the police that the group of attackers first

had a verbal spat with Sudhakar and one of them shot at him in the meantime. They then lobbed crude bombs and sped off the scene.

In his statement to police, Sudhakar said Anuj and others are henchmen of Mukhtar Ansari and their handler is Babu Singh, who is said to be Lucknow’s agent of Ansari overseeing extortion work. He said he was attacked at the behest of Babu Singh who had demanded Rs 5 lakh as extortion money. He said he and others like him used to shell out extortion money goons. Sources said the goons extort money from businessmen and property dealers in the city. “The trend was popular earlier but witnessed a decline during the last few years. However, these goons have started raising their heads again,” they said.

Illegal liquor manufacturing unit busted; 12 arrested

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of 12 accused, Sarojininagar police claimed to have busted a manufacturing unit distilling illegal liquor. The team recovered 30,480 bottles of desi liquor, 13,725 litres of chemical/spirit used in preparing alcohol, 77,920 empty bottles, six sacks filled with bottle caps, two cartons filled with wrappers of branded companies of Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh, two RO cylinders and an RO machine besides other items.

Those arrested were identified as Badelal, Akash Kumar (both of Kushinagar), Arvind Kumar, Sangam, Akash Jaiswal, Akash Jaiswal (II), Pawan Kumar (all of Gorakhpur), Sonu Kumar of Vaishali in Bihar, Gajendra Chauhan of



Mirzapur, Nagendra Chauhan, Raju Chauhan (both of Bhadohi) and Arun Singh of Amethi. The factory was being run near the new tehsil in Sarojininagar and was being run in the guise of a manufacturing unit for sanitisers and RO water plant. It surfaced that the manufacturing unit was being run by Manoj Yadav of Biduna in Auraiyya district and in an under-construction warehouse. Manoj was running the factory in partnership with his relative Vikas Yadav and his friend Manjeet Jaiswal.

Meanwhile, an unidentified conman masquerading as a policeman duped a woman of two gold bangles, a gold chain and two gold rings in Viraj Khand locality under Vibhuti Khand police station area on Saturday morning. As per reports, Sunita Tiwari of Viraj Khand went to a temple inside a park close to her house in the morning. She was stopped by a man who, the woman said, appeared to be a Sikh. “He asked me to put off my gold ornaments as theft incidents were witnessing a spurt in the area and it was unsafe to wear ornaments while going out. He then wrapped my ornaments around a piece of paper with which he left along with his aide who was waiting with a bike for him outside,” she told the police. A case was registered in this connection.

2 girls mowed down by truck

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two girls were killed in a road mishap while their kin suffered grievous injuries in Kakori on Saturday morning. The senior among them was preparing for UP Police services. The deceased were identified as Khushi Gautam aka Aradhna (18) and Priya (16) of Sanyasibagh in Malihabad while the injured as Pinki Gautam (17) of the same locality. Priya is Khushi’s niece while Pinki is the daughter of Khushi’s uncle. They were hit by a speeding truck on Lucknow-Hardoi highway.

Reports said Priya died on the spot while Khushi and Pinki were rushed to KGMU Trauma Centre where Khushi succumbed to injuries. Khushi was preparing for a job in UP Police and would practise running everyday. Inspired by her, Priya and Pinki were also following suit. Khushi’s brother Santosh Kumar said she, along with Priya and Pinki, left the house around 5 am and met the mishap.

Gloom descended on the village after the news reached there. Villagers flocked to the scene and flayed the police for failing to regulate the speed of vehicles. They said the girls were running on the edge of the road but recklessness on the part of the truck driver cut short the lives of two promising girls. A case was registered in this connection while police launched a manhunt for the errant truck driver.

SUICIDE

A class XII girl student ended her life at her house in PGI police station area on Saturday. Rashmi Yadav (19) of South City was found hanging from the ceiling with a saree tied around her neck. The incident came to light around 1 pm on Saturday. Her family members took her to a hospital where she was declared brought dead. Her father, Ritendra Kumar Yadav is private company employee. The girl was said to have been upset over some issue.

LU VC asks associated colleges to submit academic audit reports

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University AK Rai on Saturday directed associated colleges to submit their academic audit reports. A meeting of associated colleges and officials of LU was convened under the chairmanship of Rai.

The discussion regarding the academic audit was done in the previous meeting and format of academic audit report has been sent by Dean CDC to each college. The VC noted that some colleges had not submitted the required information in the prescribed format while others have not submitted the report.

Rai emphasised that colleges must submit the academic audit reports immediately with complete information to the official mail or send a hard copy to the office of the CDC.

The meeting was called to review the preparation of e-content by teachers of the colleges, progress of academic audit report of the colleges for the previous academic session 2019-20, conduct of online teaching by the colleges, payment of salary to approved



teachers working in the colleges, admission of students to the new academic session 2020-21, conduct of the forthcoming semester examinations and the lax response to official letters issued by the university.

The VC informed the colleges about the centralised facility offered by LU for uploading their e-content on the Uttar Pradesh Higher Education Digital Library for the benefit of student community at large, especially those in remote areas.

Regarding online teaching, he stressed on the regular monitoring of classes by the authorities. He asked the managers and principals to keep a

record of the classes and should be furnished to the university, when required. Regarding the payment of salary to the approved teachers working in the colleges, the LU VC issued clear instructions to follow the GO in letter and spirit and pay salary in time.

The VC said that the direction given by the university from time to time regarding admission to the new academic session should be adhered to. “The decision regarding the forthcoming semester examination will be conveyed to the colleges and teaching and classes should continue smoothly till then,” he said.

Special lecture on self-reliant India organised

Lucknow (PNS): AKTU organised a special online lecture under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign, which was presided over by Vice-Chancellor Vinay Pathak on Saturday. The lecture was organised with collaboration of TEQIP-3 on ‘How to be ready for future’.

Chief information officer of RJ Corp Group Kamal Karnataka was the keynote speaker. Prof Subodh Variya said AKTU is working with a commitment for incubation and start-up to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

“AKTU is providing self-employment opportunities to students of affiliated institutes through programmes such as Kalam Internship League, Start-up Parikrama and Innovation Gallery”.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Vineet Kansal said the mantra of vocal for local needs to be imbibed in order to embody the concept of self-reliant India. In this sequence, a district is working in collaboration with MSME department in a product programme.

Kamal Karnataka called upon the students to join the self-reliance campaign.

Breast cancer: Early detection is the key

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Early detection is the key to prevention of breast cancer, which is the most common type in women in India and accounts for 14% of all cancers in women, said Dr Gaurav Agarwal from SGPGI’s Breast and Endocrine Surgery department while speaking at the breast cancer awareness programme on Saturday.

He said that a series of activities are being conducted, virtually by SGPGI Breast Health Programme in collaboration with various educational institutions, social and cultural organisations to create awareness about various aspects of breast cancer, and to promote breast screening and early diagnosis of this disease. “Breast cancer is the commonest cancer affecting Indian women, and will affect an esti-

mated 2.05 lakh women this year. It constitutes roughly 30 per cent of all cancers occurring in Indian women, and for about half of all cancer-related deaths in women in India. Even though males do not develop milk producing breasts, a man’s breast can still develop cancer, but it is rare,” he said.

He said there are a number of risk factors known to increase or decrease the risk of breast cancer for individual patients. “Women whose mothers or sisters had breast cancer carry a higher risk of developing this disease. As women get older, they are at higher risk of breast cancer. Women who started having periods earlier or entered menopause later than usual are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer. This is because their bodies have been exposed

to estrogen for longer duration. Women who smoke, eat high-fat diet and drink alcohol are more at risk of developing breast cancer. Frequent exposure to X-rays and CT scans may raise a woman’s chance of developing breast cancer. Overweight women are also at a higher risk of developing breast cancer,” Dr Agarwal said.

He pointed out that only a small percentage of lumps in the breast are cancerous. “For reducing the risk of having breast cancer, women should be physically active, control weight, limit alcohol, avoid hormonal contraceptives, limit dose and duration of hormone therapy, avoid exposure to radiation and environmental pollution,” he said.

“Women should be aware as to how their breast normally look and feel. If you feel any

change, consult the doctor. It is advisable for women around 40 years to get their mammography done. Mammography is a simple radiographic technique which helps in detecting irregularities in the breast tissue,” he added.

He further pointed out that a vast majority of patients with early-stage breast cancer can be treated with breast conservation and oncoplastic breast surgery without the need for removal of whole breast.

“Oncoplastic breast surgery is a hybrid surgery that expert breast surgeons do to achieve the twin goals of cure of cancer, while also maintaining breast shape, size, contour and symmetry,” he said. He added that breast cancer treatment, especially for late stage disease, can be quite long-drawn and expensive.

विशेष संचारी रोग नियंत्रण अभियान

1 से 31 अक्टूबर, 2020 तक

घर - घर पर दस्तक अभियान

1 से 15 अक्टूबर, 2020 तक

दिमागी बुखार की रोकथाम के लिये क्या करें

- जेई के टीके 2 साल तक के बच्चों को नियमित टीकाकरण सत्र में लगवायें
- घरों के आस-पास साफ-सफाई रखें
- मक्खर से बचने के लिये पूरी बाँह वाली कमीज और पैट पहनें
- स्वच्छ पेयजल ही पीयें
- आस-पास जल जमाव न होने दें
- कुपोषित बच्चों के प्रति विशेष ध्यान रखें

- व्यक्तिगत साफ-सफाई का विशेष ध्यान रखें
- खुले में शौच न करें
- रोजाना स्नान करें
- शिशु, विद्यार्थियों की साफ-सफाई पर ध्यान दें

बुखार में देरी पढ़ेनी भारी

बुखार होने पर बच्चों को बिना किसी देरी के उपचार के लिए सरकारी अस्पताल लायें। कोई भी बुखार दिमागी बुखार हो सकता है।

टीकाकरण से छूटे हुए बच्चों एवं गर्भवती महिलाओं को सूचीबद्ध कर टीकाकरण किया जायेगा।

नि:शुल्क एम्बुलेंस के लिए **108** पर कॉल करें

दिमागी बुखार के बारे में अधिक जानकारी के लिए नि:शुल्क कॉल करें **हेल्पलाइन 1800-180-5145**

139 COVID-19 patients found

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 139 new COVID-19 patients have been detected in the district here on Saturday, increasing the total number of cases to 14,822. Besides, the day also saw four deaths, increasing the toll to 243. During the day, the follow-up negative reports included 159 patients. Out of them, 156 patients were recovered from home isolation, increasing the number to 10,616 and just three patients have been discharged from the hospitals. With this, the number of cured patients from the hospitals has increased to 2,758, leaving 1,205 active patients. The total number of cured patients is now 13,371, leaving 1,212 active patients. The recovery rate has improved to 90.21 per cent but the mortality rate has

increased to 1.63 per cent.

Meanwhile, on World Mental Health Day, Department of Psychiatry, Institute of Medical Science, Banaras Hindu University (IMS BHU) has unveiled a book to spread awareness about mental health. The book in Hindi aims to make readers aware about various aspects related to mental health. The book, authored by doctors of the Department of Psychiatry, talks about causes, symptoms, treatment and key mental health problems and suggests ways to lead a healthy and happy life. In its message on World Mental Health Day, the Department of Psychiatry, said that Mental Health has always been relevant and attains even more importance in the time of pandemic. Realising this, WHO has coined the theme of 2020 as

‘Mental Health for all: Greater investment-Greater Access’. Head of the department Prof Mona Srivastava has said that the department is committed to work and strive towards a happy individual, society and nation.

According to the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh, in the first report of the day by 11 am, 105 positive patients were detected out of 4,021 received reports. Till then, the total test reports received were 2,47,229 and the results of 559 are awaited. Out of them, 2,32,441 were negative, while 14,788 positive. The total number of samples collected was 2,62,206. Earlier, a female aged 61 from Bacchawo (Rohania) and two males aged 75 and 66 from Visheshwarganj and Mirapur Basahi respectively succumbed to COVID-

19 at Sir Sundarlal Hospital (SSH), Banaras Hindu University (BHU). With the addition of 14 new red zones, the total number of hotspots has increased to 2,154 including 301 red zones.

One green zone has been converted into red zone again. There are 1,853 green zones with 22 new ones.

Earlier, under ongoing mass/ group antigen tests, six persons out of 415 tests were detected positive at Shree Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Hospital, Kabirchaura, while two out of 345 at adjacent Government Women’s Hospital, four out of 106 at Swami Vivekanand Government Hospital, Bhelupur and four out of 410 at SSH BHU. However, all the 117 tests at CHC Shivpur and 188 at LBS Hospital, Ramnagar were found negative.

178 more test positive in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

As many as 178 new Covid positive patients have been found, including vice-chancellors of the SHUATS in the last 24 hours. At the same time, 204 infected patients also defeated the deadly virus on the same day. One infected died during treatment. With this, the number of people who died of corona infection has increased to 284.

According to CMO Dr GS Bajpai, 4,883 samples were taken on Friday, broadening the scope testing. Of which 3,179 were tested through anti-gens, 1,570 RTPCRs and 134 were tested with Trunat. According to the report, 178 people have been infected with corona in 24 hours.

Of the 204 people who became infection-free in the district on Friday, 29 were discharged from various Covid hospitals and Covid care centres. At the same time home isolation of 175 people was completed. With this, 13,835 people have become infection free in home isolation so far. At the same time, 4,926 people have been discharged from various Covid hospitals after becoming infection free.



According to Nodal officer for Corona, Dr Rishi Sahai, among the infected patients found on Friday, the manager of SBI and PNB, the manager of IFFCO Phulpur, the controller of DRM office, etc had tested positive for COVID-19. Most of the people in the infected have applied home isolation. It was said that the Vice-Chancellor of SHUATS had gone to Gorakhpur for

some work. His health deteriorated after he returned from there. He and three of his family, including his wife, have been found to be corona infected. All three have opted for home isolation.

A total of 203 corona infected patients are admitted in Covid hospitals of the district. Of them, maximum 75 patients are admitted to SRN, 25 in Kalindipuram, 14 in

Railway Hospital, 40 in Beli, 25 in United Medicity, 24 infected are being treated at Sainath Vatsalya AMA Hospital.

According to the CMO, on Friday, one patient from the private Covid Hospital Sainath Vatsalya AMA Hospital, three from Kalindipuram, ten from Railway Hospital, four from Beli, three from United and eight from SRN Hospital were discharged and sent home.

DM inspects progress of project at Kaithi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma inspected the progress made in the expansion plan of Markandey Mahadev Temple and Mahadev ghat near the confluence of rivers Ganga and Gomti in Kaithi village here on Saturday, directing the officers to intensify the work. Executive Engineer (EE) of the Irrigation department apprised the DM of detailed work and assured him of completing the work in time. EE also informed that a letter had been sent to the government seeking funds and as soon as the funds would be received, the pending work including the railings on the side of the stairs will be installed for the purpose of security.

In reply, the DM sought the details of expenses. During his visit, the local people complained that there was no approach road to the Sangam Ghat. On the issue of dispute between the managing committee of Markandey Mahadev Temple and the local people, DM said that a team of officials would be sent to resolve the same as the cooperation of the people is important in all development works. Divisional Forest Officer, ADM (Administration), SDM (Sadar), Tourism Officer and some other officers were also present.

Earlier, Divisional Commissioner (DC) Deepak Agrawal made a hectic on-site inspection of ongoing projects



DM KR Sharma inspecting Ganga-Gomti Sangam site at Kaithi in Varanasi on Saturday

Pioneer

including Kalika Dham, Konia, ROB Ashapur, Kapasethi and Kazzakpura along with the officers of Bridge Corporation. During his inspection of ₹38.10 crore Kapasethi ROB, the DC was informed that 45 per cent work has been completed and a portion of bridge is being built by the Railways. Agrawal emphasised on making proper arrangements for rainwater drainage over ROB, service roads and adopting safety measures apart from ensuring to complete the project by June next year.

During his inspection at ₹ 19.13 crore Kalika Dham Varuna Bridge where three spans out of four have been built, DC terming the bridge as very important instructed the officers to intensify work by increasing the number of work-

ers. DC found that the work was going on at a rapid pace at ₹ 15.31 crore Ashapur ROB where 75 per cent work has also been completed. Agrawal said that the project should be completed by February next year. However, he found that no work was going on at ₹ 26.21 crore 100-metre-long Konia Ghat Varuna Bridge. Seeing this he instructed the officers to ensure starting of work there immediately. He was informed that about 40 per cent work has been completed. DC asked the engineers to complete the work by February next year. During the inspection of ₹ 62.78 crore 1355-metre-long Kazzakpura ROB Agrawal was informed by the engineers that the sewer lines are creating hurdles so that a revised estimate and design is being sent to the gov-

ernment. DC said that the work should be started where no changes in design would be made.

The DC also asked the officers to seek advice of experts on the modified layout for success of ROB.

DC emphasised to take special care on safety measures during the construction of ROB and bridges so that no untoward incident happens. According to him, with the construction of these ROB and bridges, traffic movement towards districts like Prayagraj, Azamgarh, Chandauli and Ghazipur would become smooth. Chief Project Manager of Bridge Corporation Deepak Govil, Deputy Project Manager Rohit Mishra and other officials were also present during the inspection.

V-C for making BHU a top global institute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Vice-Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Prof Rakesh Bhatnagar, highlighting the glorious journey of over 100 years of BHU, said that under the Institution of Eminence, the university is being given an amount of ₹1000 crore for five years. ‘In such a situation, it is our duty to take full advantage of this opportunity and make the university reach the Top-500 ranking institutions in the world,’ he said, appealing to newly-appointed faculty members to work on projects for research in their areas of interest and to present their plans to the university in this regard. ‘Under the system of providing fast grants to teachers for research, many projects have also received grants and many others are expected to get it in the

coming day,’ he said.

Addressing the new faculty members here on Friday, Prof Bhatnagar called upon them to take inspiration from the life and contributions of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, the founder of BHU as Mahamana connected the best people of the world to BHU and built a great institute. ‘We all should remember that an institution can be reached at a new height by bringing the best people in view to make it a globally famous,’ he said, adding that about 400 teachers have been appointed in BHU within the last one year and the process of appointments to more vacant posts is going on in the coming days. ‘The university had issued advertisements globally to fill these vacant posts so that people associated with the prestigious institutions of the world would

get their information and BHU would get the best teachers,’ he said, adding that the university is committed to provide all the facilities to the newly-appointed teachers, which will give them a favourable environment for new research so that they can enhance the reputation of the BHU.

‘No discovery or innovation in the world is possible without universities or institutes, in which case the role of teachers working in the university becomes very important,’ he said, calling upon the new faculty members to do something which is not only in the interest of the society as well as financially strengthening the institution. He said that there are many faculty members who have worked in renowned institutes of the world and are familiar with the research style there, so they

should include best research practices here as well.

Speaking on the occasion, Director of the Institute of Science, Prof AK Tripathi said that now the time has come for him to rise above the national ranking and concentrate on the global ranking. He said that there are high expectations from new and young faculty members. He said that the creation of new knowledge as well as the creation of intellectual capital is very important, so that the university also benefits.

Prof Sanjay Kumar, Coordinator of the Institution of Eminence Programme, BHU, discussed in detail about the scheme. Directors of the institutes, deans of faculties, heads of departments, senior faculty members and officers of the university were also present.

Boy operated for heart hole under RBSK

VARANASI (PNS): A nine-month-old boy from Dhaurhra Maniyar Patti village (Cholapur block) in the district, who was suffering with a hole in heart since his birth, was treated successfully under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakarm (RBSK), bringing happiness on the faces of his parents. The child is now fully healthy. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr VB Singh hailed the efforts of Cholapur RBSK team for its commendable work and expected that similar efforts would continue in the future also. According to Medical Officer Incharge of Cholapur Block Dr RB Yadav, when RBSK team comprising Dr Amit, Dr Pratibha, Poonam Pal and Sanjay Bharti saw Abid suffering from severe congenital defects in his heart and unable to play like normal children, it

contacted Abid’s father Lal Mohammed. The father informed the team that he had approached a private hospital for treatment twice, but due to the high cost of treatment, he was disappointed as he is very poor. Later, after identifying the child by the RBSK team, Abid was referred to Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh, which is contracted by the state government for the treatment of this disease.

In view of COVID-19 guidelines, the child and his parents were tested and when they were found negative, they were sent to Aligarh on October 7 last and then the child was admitted to the hospital. Dr Yadav said that after admission, the medical college did eco examination and other investigations immediately and then heart surgery was per-

formed successfully on October 9. After surgery, the child is fully healthy, bringing cheers on the faces of his parents. ‘I did not spend a single rupee during the complete treatment and donated his own blood during surgery,’ said Lal Mohammed, praising the hospital for its facilities.

RBSK Nodal Officer and ACOMO Dr AK Gupta said that the percentage of congenital defects in children born in the country is about seven per cent and out of them, around one per cent is born with heart holes. ‘The most common symptom of heart hole is blueness of hands, feet, tongue, inability to breathe and mother’s breast feeding properly apart from getting tired early while playing,’ said Dr Gupta, adding that to protect children from congenital defects, folic

acid should be fed for three months from the beginning of pregnancy and one red tablet of iron and folic acid daily from the beginning of the fourth month. If the pregnant woman has anemia, then she should take two red iron tablets daily.

DEIC Manager Dr Abhishek Tripathi said that under RBSK, the government provides treatment to children from birth to 19 years for nine different birth defects. Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) among congenital defects is a serious one which is commonly called a heart hole. It usually costs ₹4 to 5 lakh for its treatment, which is done free under the RBSK scheme. Under RBSK, there are 16 teams in rural areas in the district, who visit every village to identify congenital defects and try to treat them.

HC ruling on compounding of illegal construction

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

The Allahabad High Court has restrained Uttar Pradesh government and all the development authorities within the state from compounding any illegal construction pursuant to Compounding Scheme, 2020 notified by the state on July, 15, 2020.

The state government has issued a new Compounding Scheme, 2020, under which various constructions otherwise not permissible in the building bylaws have also been made compoundable.

Hearing a writ petition filed by one Mohd Meherban Ansari and three others, Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra also directed the Additional Secretary of Department concerned to file a reply justifying Compounding Scheme. The court has fixed October 20, 2020 as the next date of hearing.

Passing the above directives, the court observed, ‘A prima facie perusal of the compounding scheme, 2020 would go to show that the illegalities committed by violating the

provisions of the UP Urban Planning and Development Act, 1973 (Act of 1973) by raising illegal constructions are sought to be regularised upon payment of huge composition fee. The authorities of the State Government are expected to act in furtherance of the object of the Act, so as to stop illegal constructions and not to encourage such illegal constructions upon payment of hefty amounts. This would clearly discourage the honest citizens who ensure compliance of laws by obtaining prior permission as per the Act of 1973, inasmuch as they are subjected to stricter norms provided in the building bylaws, while those who violate the law are allowed to raise much larger constructions, which is not even permissible in the building bylaws. The compounding scheme, 2020, otherwise appears to be wholly beyond the scope of the Act of 1973 including Section 32. Section 32 only permits composition of offences and not permits raising of constructions contrary to the building plan. The compounding of development undertaken contrary to the

Act of 1973 is therefore, prima facie, found to be clearly contrary to the aims, objectives and the provisions of the Act of 1973.’

The court directed the state government to communicate this order to all the development authorities in the state for necessary compliance.

This order was passed on October 7.

HC DIRECTIVE TO KANPUR SSP: The Allahabad High Court has directed SSP Kanpur Nagar to forthwith take out, a Muslim girl who did inter-religious marriage, from alleged confinement of her father and brother and produce her before court on October 12.

The court also issued notices to the father of the woman to file her reply in the case. Justice JJ Munir passed the order on a petition filed by Shikha alias Sheeba and her husband Rohit Rathaur.

According to petitioners, on July 3, 2020 Shikha alias Sheeba converted to Hinduism at an Arya Samaj Mandir of Kanpur Nagar and then she married Rohit on the same day.

Later, the woman’s father lodged an FIR against Rohit but

during investigation she told police that she left her parent’s house freely and Rohit did not take her away, forcefully.

In the petition, it was alleged that the woman is 22-year-old but in spite of her statement given to police in favour of her husband, she was handed over to her father and brother by SHO of Bilhaur police station of Kanpur Nagar. Petitioner’s counsel argued that it is not just about rescuing Shikha alias Sheeba from illegal confinement, but also saving her life and preventing her from becoming a victim of honour killing.

The court on this directed SSP Kanpur Nagar to immediately release the woman from the detention of her father and brother and keep her in Nari Niketan till she is brought before court on October 12.

The court while passing the order observed, ‘Since, there is a serious threat of Shikha alias Sheeba becoming a victim of honour killing, it is preferable to err on the side of caution.’ The court has fixed October 12 as the next date of hearing in the case.

Preparations for Durga Puja festival stepped up

ALLAHABAD (PNS): The preparations for the Durga Puja festival in Shardiya Navratri have been stepped up. In a short time, Puja Committees are all set to give grandeur to Durga Puja pandal in the city. With the size of the pandals, the number of visitors, as well as social distancing, a guide line for visiting the pandal during the festival has been

created. On the other hand, sculptors have also started finalising the panoramic statues of goddess Durga. This time the Sharadiya Navratri will start from October 17.

Puja Committees have started preparing for the Navratri festival after the government released the Durga Puja, Ramliya and Chhath Puja guidelines. The Bengali Welfare

Association has formed a guideline for this purpose. According to the association’s secretary Dr PK Roy, the puja pandals will be made of 15 feet only.

Apart from this, two separate pandals of the same size will be made for female and male devotees. At a later time 10 pilgrims will be allowed to enter the pandals. People will

stand at a fixed distance between the shells made in pandals for darshan of Maa Durga. On the other hand, the work of decorating the Durga idols in Colonelganj has been speeded up. Sculptor Tapas Pal, along with 11 of his colleagues, are busy in painting the idols of Maa Durga, Mahishasura and Ganesh, Shadanan.

DC asks officials to speed up revenue collection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar, while addressing a tax and revenue collection meeting of the Kanpur division on Saturday, directed the officials to meet the given targets within the given time frame.

He asked all the district magistrates of the division to launch a special drive to accomplish the task in one month's time.

He also directed the district magistrates to identify the gram samaj land that had been encroached and get their physical verification done and file a detailed report in this regard.

The divisional commissioner said if there was any illegal encroachment on the gram samaj land then it be freed and the freed land be included in the land bank.

He stressed on physical verification of gram samaj land, adding that the land be photographed as supporting evidence.

He also directed officials to lodge FIRs against all fake registries of lands.

He also asked the officials to cross-check all the land leases given in the past 10 years, and if any lease was found to be illegal or fake, then it be scrapped and legal action be taken against the person concerned.

Shekhar directed the officials concerned of all the major construction projects to carry out physical verification and ensure that the construction work was given further momentum. He said after the physical verification, photographic evidence should be put up as well.

He directed the chief development officers to submit a list of all the panchayat bhawans that had been fully constructed.

The divisional commissioner also reviewed the progress of Ayushman Bharat Yojana and golden card preparation and directed the officials of Kannauj to give further momentum to the work.

He asked the district officials to form teams of ASHA, ANM, lekhpal, gram pradhan to complete work on the golden card at the earliest.

Reviewing the progress of the National Child Health Programme, Shekhar said it should be implemented trans-



Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Raj Shekhar holding a divisional review meeting at his camp office.

Pioneer

Construction quality found poor at Sajari Asara Awas Yojana: DC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Raj Shekhar carried out a surprise inspection of the Asara Awas Yojana at Sajari, Kanpur Nagar on Saturday. Later, addressing press persons, he said the quality of construction was found to be "very poor" and "below standards".

Shekhar said the plaster quality was very poor, finishing was poor, and masonry work was also poor.

He said in view of the gross negligence in the construction works, a show-cause notice had been issued to the DUDA, construction agency C&DS, Jal Nigam Unit 11, asking why they should not be blacklisted and legal action taken against the negligent officers for such poor quality work.

Shekhar said the project was started in the

year 2014 and around 1,104 houses were being constructed for identified homeless families under the Asara Awas Yojana. He said the total cost of the project was around Rs 51 crore. He said as of now around Rs 42 crore had been received and utilised and the last instalment of the project had been demanded from the government to complete the project.

He said the physical progress of the work was around 80 per cent and out of total 1,104 houses, around 456 houses had been completed. He said a high level technical committee comprising additional commissioner (administration), PWD chief engineer, KDA chief engineer, Jal Nigam EE and KESCo EE would visit site to check the quality of work and also collect samples for testing, if necessary.

The committee will submit a detailed report by November 10, 2020 for further action.

parently and in perfect order. He also directed the officials to work out plans to contain the spread of communicable diseases like dengue, with stress on cleanliness drives.

Shekhar also reviewed the Dastak project and directed officials to ensure that all the children below the age of 15 years were immunised. He warned against any laxity in this regard. He also interacted with the Irrigation department officials and said the water must reach the tail ends of canals and silt should be removed from canals on priority.

He said Alpika and Rajwaha committees be formed to ensure that water reached

the fields and officials should submit a report in this regard at the earliest.

The divisional commissioner directed the officials concerned to ensure that the cane dues were disbursed to the farmers at the earliest. He said ponds allocation be done and fisheries be promoted.

He also said the shops under National Food Security Programme that were vacant should be allotted as per norms so that public distribution work was carried out smoothly.

He also directed the officials to prepare PMAY's amended project and forward it to the government at the earliest.

Shekhar directed the offi-

cials of the Transport department to speed up enforcement works and recovery as per the given targets.

He lashed out at KESCo officials for the poor performance and directed them to streamline the functioning of the power distribution company by the next month.

He also found the land revenue collection at Etawah to be slow and poor and directed the officials to speed up recovery.

He said the mandi shulk (mandi tax) backlog should be completed at the earliest.

Senior officials of all districts of the division and various department were present in the meeting.

95 more test +ve

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Nagar reported 95 more coronavirus positive cases on Saturday evening.

Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil K Mishra said that 95 more people had tested positive for coronavirus infection between Friday evening and Saturday evening taking the tally of confirmed cases to 26,621 cases. He said one COVID-19 deaths in the city pushed the toll to 702 on Saturday evening.

The CMO said with 27 COVID-19 patients were discharged from hospitals the cured figure in the city was 6825 and at present 2879 active cases were undergoing treatment. Dr Mishra said 5,491 samples were sent for testing in the city.

Leaders of junior high school teacher meet BSA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A delegation of Junior High School Shikshak Sangh, led by its district president Yogendra Kumar Singh, met Basic Shiksha Adhikari Pawan Kumar and finance and accounts officer of Basic Education, Phool Chand Gupta, on Saturday.

The delegation said that teachers would not visit blocks for corrections in their salary bills and instead, the clerk preparing pay sheet should visit the office for this work for onward signature of block education officer in the meeting held every Saturday.

For the payment of uniform arrears (50 per cent for 2018-19 and 25 per cent for 2019-20), a letter was sent to the state administration.

The teachers' leaders also urged the BSA for completing entries/affixing photos in online forms for teachers' identity cards and ending the compulsion for physical presence of teachers in office for getting their pay scale sanctioned.

They also urged the BSA to write a letter to the Finance Controller, Prayagraj, for removing the anomalies in fixing the pay scale of teachers.

The BSA assured the leaders to look into their demands.

The delegation comprised of Sangh's district general secretary Dilip Kumar Saini, district secretary Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, treasurer Sayyad Nazir Hussain, Vijay Prakash Srivastava, Vikram Singh and Mohd Anas.

KUSFTA leaders meet higher education officer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Members of Kanpur University Self-Financed Teachers Association (KUSFTA) met Higher Education Officer Ripudaman Singh in his office on Saturday and apprised him of the plights of thousands of teachers employed in around 1,100 self-financed colleges affiliated to the Kanpur University.

The delegation comprised of KUSFTA president Kamlesh Yadav, general secretary Akhand Pratap Singh, Pankaj Chandel, Ajay Tewari, Sanjit Kumar, Arvind Sengar, Amit Katiyar and Sunil.

KUSFTA general secretary Akhand Pratap Singh told media persons that during their meeting with the higher education officer, the latter asked him to submit details of all the 17,318 teachers of self-finances colleges who were getting salary below and above Rs.8,000 per month. The higher education officer also sought details of teachers getting salary below and above Rs.15,000.

The KUSFTA delegation also told the higher education officer that the teachers of self-finances colleges had not been paid salary during the lockdown since April 2020. He assured the delegation to take up the issue with the respective college authorities for early release of salary.

Body found in forest identified

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

A body was found in the forest of Rajapur Pahadi under Madihan police station on Friday. It was later identified as that of Vijaypal, son of Nandlal, a resident of Patelnagar Bomaila under Handia police station in Prayagraj. An FIR had been lodged at Handia police station on October 1 so the Madihan police referred the case to it.

MEETING: DM Sushil Kumar Patel at a review meeting held at L2 hospital on Friday directed the RRTs to keep an eye on Covid patients who were under home quarantine. Emphasising on their treatment he directed the officials concerned to issue written guidelines and ask such patients to keep updated with the body temperature which might be helpful in getting proper cure. He directed the field staff to ensure contact tracing.

About the patients admitted in L1 and L2 hospitals the DM made it clear that meal as well as



breakfast should be provided timely. The DM was apprised by the officials concerned about the preparations to combat the infection. The DM was apprised about availability of medicines and tests through different sources. The meeting was attended by the officials concerned, including ADM UP Singh, CMO Dr OP Tiwari, ACMD Dr Rai, SIC besides deputy collector and nodal officer for Covid control room Anoop Shukla.

NABBED: Katra Kotwali police on Friday arrested a man impersonating as DIG CBI. As per the reports, a person posing as DIG CBI alighted from a train along with his family sought accommodation along with conveyance facility from the police which was provided to him along with security. Police became suspicious due to his behaviour so the CBI office was contacted to find out the truth. When interrogated he confessed that he was engaged in contract business. At this police lodged an FIR at Katra Kotwali under relevant sections of IPC and sent the accused, Rajiv Singh, son of Udayveer Singh, a resident of an area near Shivpuri Chauraha under Banno Devi police station in Aligarh, to jail.

GM praises efforts of Varanasi div

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

NER GM LC Trivedi on Friday through video conferencing held a half-yearly review meeting of Varanasi division. It was virtually attended by DRM VK Panjjar, principal head of the department and senior Railway officers of the headquarter and division, CPRO PK Singh said. While reviewing development works, schemes, facilities being provided to traders and industries, earnings from goods and parcel freight on Varanasi division GM said that extensive efforts should be made to increase its income and traders and entrepreneurs should be made aware of the concessions being given by the Railways. For fulfilling the goal of making the railway self-reliant, he laid emphasis on increasing the parcel and freight progressively in comparison to last year. For this along with providing facilities to traders and entrepreneurs, he suggested on bringing maximum goods transport to the division by establishing contact with them. Trivedi praised the works being done by Varanasi division and efforts being made to increase income. DRM Varanasi VK Panjjar elaborated on development works being carried out for strengthening infrastructure, development for providing facilities to passengers and special efforts being made for increasing income from parcel and freight. He said that electrification work on Varanasi division has been completed at a rapid pace due to which there has been a reduction of about 83 per cent in diesel consumption and expenditure on fuel worth ₹83.66 crore was saved. There has been a lot of improvement in the field of loading in Varanasi division, he said. Wheat and oil cake were also being exported to Bangladesh by NER, the DRM said. Several teams of commercial inspectors had been formed on NER which are working to bring traffic on the railways by going from place to place and are getting good results and loading and unloading was being mechanised, said Panjjar.

This led to more work in less time. He said many facilities, including rest rooms, are being provided to traders and workers at the goods shed. He said that in some goods sheds in Varanasi division lighting has been arranged along the lines of the airport. He said continuous efforts for prevention of Covid-19 are being made on Varanasi division. He said that Covid-19 test of all employees and their families had been conducted and they were motivated to wear masks properly, maintain social distancing and wash hands regularly. In order to reduce the entry of outsiders in the divisional office, an e-samvad room has been set up outside the office. Participating in the Covid-19 Jan Andolan campaign all employees and their families are being linked with it. In order to make the mass movement successful under the awareness campaign posters are being put in all offices, stations, hospitals, residential premises and units. At stations and trains through public awareness system extensive propaganda of messages for protection from Covid-19 was being done.

ADMINISTERED: Under the Jan Andolan (mass movement) Abhiyan and on the directive of the Railway Board the officers and employees at the RPF Training Centre, Gorakhpur, were administered pledge for protection from Covid-19 and its prevention on Friday. In addition in Varanasi during a security conference organised under the presidency of PCSO Atul Kumar Srivastava the RPF personnel of Varanasi division and DLW, Varanasi, were administered pledge for protection from Covid-19, CPRO PK Singh said.

FOUND: The RPF post, Gonda, found a nine-year-old girl in an unclaimed condition during patrolling at Gonda railway station on October 7. She was handed over to the Child Line, Gonda. Meanwhile RPF post, Gorakhpur, found a 15-year-old girl in train No 05066 while going to Darbhanga as she was upset with her family. She was handed over to Child Line, Gorakhpur.

Programmes under Jal Andolan campaign continue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the call of Jan Andolan (mass movement) campaign given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and on the instructions of Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, various programmes continued in Varanasi Division of NER and Diesel Locomotive Works (DLW) on the second day on Friday. A meeting of health workers was organised at Central Hospital in DLW in which corona warriors, patients and others were made aware to follow the COVID-19 guidelines. Chief Medical Officer Dr Sujit Malli, Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Devesh Kumar, other medical officers and health workers were present. Besides, Safety department



distributed masks, soaps and sanitisers in the workshops and offices under the leadership of Chief Safety Officer Nitin Mehrotra, Deputy Chief Safety Officer US Srivastava and their team. Along with this, they also motivated the employees to ensure public participation in the war against COVID-19. In NER on the instructions of Divisional Railway Manager Vijay Kumar Panjjar, the employees working in remote stations and tracks of Varanasi division were administered pledge under the mass movement campaign. The employees of various branch offices of DRM office also pledged to remain vigilant towards Covid-19 guidelines and mobilise others to follow the same.

Bandra Terminus-Lko spl to run from Oct 17

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

As per the instructions Assised by the Railway Board the railway administration for the convenience of passengers will ensure the movement of 09021/09022 Bandra Terminus-Lucknow-Bandra Terminus superfast weekly special train from Bandra Terminus from October 17 and from Lucknow Junction on October 18 till further notice. All coaches of this train are of reserved category, CPRO PK Singh said. The 09021 Bandra Terminus-Lucknow Jn superfast weekly special from October 17 every Saturday till further notice will leave Bandra Terminus at 12:55 hrs, from Borivali at 13:26 hrs, from Boisar at 14:23 hrs, from Vapi at 15:20 hrs, from Surat at 16:50 hrs, from Bharuch at 17:36 hrs, from Vadodara at 18:43 hours, from Godhra at 20:00 hours, from Dahod at 21:02 hrs, from Ratlam at 23:05 hrs, on second day from Bhawani Mandi at 01:10 hrs, from Kota at 02:45 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 04:05 hrs, from Bharatpur at 08:15 hrs, from Achhnera at 09:20 hrs, from Mathura Junction at 10:25 hrs, from Hathras City at 11:08 am, from Kasganj at 12:17 hrs, from Farrukhabad at 13:50 hrs, from Kannauj at 14:52 hrs, from Kanpur Anwaranganj at 16:53 hours, from Kanpur Central at 17:20 hrs and reach Lucknow Junction at 19:15 hrs. During return journey the 09022 Lucknow Jn - Bandra Terminus Superfast weekly special from October 18 every Sunday till further notice depart

from Lucknow Jn at 23:35 hrs, from Kanpur Central at 01:45 hrs, from Kanpur Anwaranganj at 02:02 hours, from Kannauj at 03:00 hrs, from Farrukhabad at 04:10 hrs, from Kasganj at 06:25 hrs, from Hathras City at 07:40 hrs, from Mathura Jn at 09:20 hrs, from Achhnera at 10:35 hrs, from Bharatpur at 11:40 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 13:50 hrs, from Kota at 15:45 hrs, from Bhawani Mandi at 17:35 hrs, from Ratlam at 21:20 hrs, from Dahod at 23:05 hrs, on the third day from Godhra at 00:25 hrs, from Vadodara at 01:37 hrs, from Bharuch at 02:27 hrs, from Surat at 03:27 hrs, from Vapi at 04:40 hrs, from Boisar at 05:42 hrs, from Borivali at 07:16 hrs reach Bandra Terminus at 08:00 hrs. A total of 21 coaches, including twoof generator-cum-luggage van, four of general second class, nine of sleeper class besides one of second AC and five of third AC. Meanwhile the railway administration will run the 09075/09076 Bandra Terminus-Ramnagar-Bandra Terminus superfast weekly special from Bandra Terminus from October 15 and from Ramnagar from October 16 till further notice. All coaches of this train are of reserved category. The 09075 Bandra Terminus- Ramnagar superfast weekly special from October 15 every Thursday will depart from Bandra Terminus at 05:10 hours, from Borivali at 05:40 hrs, from Vapi at 07:29 hrs, from Surat at 08:50 hrs, from Bharuch at 09:39 hrs, from Vadodara at 10:53 hrs, from Godhra at 11:58 hrs, from Dahod at 13:00 hrs, from Ratlam at 15:00 hrs, from Nagda at 15:55 hrs, from Ramganj Mandi at 17:37 hrs,

from Kota at 18:40 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 20:07 hrs, from Gangapur City at 21:00 hrs, from Bharatpur at 23:20 hrs, on the second day from Achhnera at 00:05 hrs, from Mathura Junction at 01:30 hrs, from Hathras City at 02:18 hrs, from Kasganj at 03:30 hrs, from Badaun at 04:45 hrs, from Bareilly at 06:10 hrs, from Izzatnagar at 06:54 hrs, from Bahedi at 07:32 hrs, from Kichha at 07:53 hrs, from Lalkuan at 08:45 hrs, from Bazzpur at 09:33 hrs, from Kashipur at 10:25 hrs and reach Ramnagar at 11:00 hrs. During the return journey 09076 Ramnagar-Bandra Terminus superfast weekly special from October 16 every Friday till further notice will depart from Ramnagar at 16:30 hrs, from Kashipur at 16:58 hrs, from Bazzpur at 17:20 hrs, from Lalkuan at 18:17 hrs, from Kichha at 18:36 hrs, from Bahedi at 18:54 hours, from Izzatnagar at 19:40 hrs, from Bareilly at 20:12 hrs, from Badaun at 21:02 hrs, from Kasganj at 22:50 hrs, from Hathras City at 23:40 hrs, on second day from Mathura Jn at 01:30 hrs, from Achhnera at 02:30 hrs, from Bharatpur at 03:35 hrs, from Gangapur City at 04:05 hrs, from Sawai Madhopur at 05:45 hrs, from Kota at 07:10 hrs, from Ramganj Mandi at 08:15 hrs, from Nagda at 10:50 hrs, from Ratlam at 11:45 hrs, from Dahod at 13:14 hrs, from Godhra at 14:40 hrs, from Vadodara at 15:52 hrs, from Bharuch at 16:42 hrs, from Surat at 17:40 hrs, from Vapi at 19:14 hrs, from Borivali at 21:20 hrs and reach Bandra Terminus at 22:00 hrs. A total of 18 coaches will be attached in this train.

Young couple commit suicide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A young couple committed suicide by hanging themselves together from a tree in Kotwali police area late Friday night as they could not marry each other.

No suicide note was recovered from the spot.

Investigations revealed that the couple were upset after their family members had fixed their marriage elsewhere.

However, kin of the deceased girl said that had she informed them about her affair with the neighbouring youth, they would have allowed her marriage with him.

According to reports, Vijay Laxmi's husband Horilal was a pump operator and he had died a few years ago following prolonged illness. In his place, her youngest son Sachin had got a job. Her sec-

ond son Ravi was a salesman in a milk agency and he was in love with a girl (20) who lived in a nearby house.

Vijay Laxmi said the family members of the girl were not ready for her marriage with Ravi. After dinner on Friday, Ravi went to sleep in his room. Around 1:30 am, the girl's father, Madan, and other family members knocked the doors and enquired about Ravi.

When Ravi was found missing from his room, Sachin went up to the main gate to trace him. On returning, he found Ravi and the neighbouring girl hanging from a tree.

Mother of the deceased girl said that her daughter had cooked the food on Friday night and she watched TV serials till 12:15 am. On being scolded, she switched off the TV and went to sleep in her room. Around 1:30 am, when

the girl was found missing from her room, the family members visited Ravi's house who was also not at home.

PLEDGE TO CONTAIN CORONA

On the directive of the district magistrate to launch mass awareness campaigns to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, officers and employees of Kanpur Development Authority were administered oath in the hall on the first floor on Thursday. They took a vow to contain the spread of coronavirus and following Covid norms by using mask, maintaining two-way distance, frequent washing of hands etc.

Officer on Special Duty Bhairpal Singh, Renu Pathak, City Planner Jyoti Prasad, Law Officer Shashi Bhushan Rai and Under Secretary KCM Singh along with other officers and employees were present

on the occasion.

38 APPLICATIONS HEARD IN KDA JANATA DARSHAN

In the Janata Darshan programme organised by Kanpur Development Authority on Thursday, 38 applications were received, most of them relating to unauthorised possession, freehold, registry, mutation, refund, etc.

Kanpur Development Authority Vice Chairman Rakesh Kumar Singh heard all the applicants and directed the officials to dispose them of within stipulated time limit. Some of the applicants who came to he Janata Darshan on Thursday included Deepa Shukla, Sitaram Verma, Ashish Kumar, Renu Dubey, Ramesh Chandra, Sheela Devi, Satyendra Kumar, Priya Pal and Munni Devi.

Stimulus hopes

Healthy Q2 expectations to keep sentiments high

■ NEW DELHI

The accelerated rise in equities will continue at least in the near future, as investors expect a stimulus bonanza for the economy right before the start of the festive season. Accordingly, traders are also expected to remain invested on the back of anticipated healthy quarterly results and the Reserve Bank's decision to continue with the accommodative policy. However, volatility might rise on account of profit booking due to expensive propositions along with the upcoming macro-economic inflation and industrial data points. "After a large weekly gain, the Nifty is close to a resistance band of 12,113-12,246. Hence the Index may inch up gradually, we may see a lot of stock and sector performances based on results and other announcements," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities, told IANS. "For traders this is a good period for short term flipping. The support from RBI in its recently concluded MPC meet

removes one macro concern." "Hence the correction in terms of index also may be limited as and when it begins. Banks seem to have some more upside in store." The Reserve Bank made an expected move last Friday by retaining key lending rates, but cheered investors and home buyers by giving a liquidity boost and an optimistic outlook. The RBI said it will resort to on-tap long-term repo operations and open market bond purchases to ensure liquidity in the banking system. It has also eased capital requirements on home loans to spur lending to the real estate sector. "Developments around stimulus package both from the US and the Indian government would keep the sentiments positive," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. "Going ahead, market is expected to remain positive but with very sector or stock specific actions. Investors would now track earnings season and watch out for management commentaries."

A positive outlook guidance from IT majors might also trigger fresh buying, cited analysts. Next week, IT firms Wipro, HCL Tech and Infosys may give some guidance on the outlook. "Markets are expected to continue their rally in the short-term in anticipation of further measures from the Indian government to provide a bonanza of stimulus," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. "Upcoming hearing of moratorium is also expected to drive the domestic market next week." According to S. Hariharan, Head - Sales Trading, Emkay Global Financial Services: "As Nifty approaches lifetime highs, we can expect rotation of performance among sectors with sideways movement in broader indices and a consolidation of strong market performance." "Defensive sectors can be expected to outperform in the near-term in such a scenario. Overall fund flow picture remains strong with DIIs and FIs net buyers incrementally over the last few sessions."

On path to recovery: Sept tendering and awarding grows 43%

■ NEW DELHI

Economic activity hit by Covid-19 pandemic may be gradually returning back to normal levels of last year as tendering activity, a good barometer to gauge the level of economic activity, growing by a staggering 43 per cent in September as compared to same month last year. Though the high growth during the month is largely on the back of low base YoY, still tendering in September has reached the highest level since March 2019, Emkay Global Financial Services said in a research report. With the gradual lifting of the lockdown, tendering and awarding activity had picked up in July but slipped again modestly in August and was still below the normal run-rate despite a low base, it has added now in September. The bulk of the pick-up in tendering during the month was driven by Water Supply (up 24 per cent yoy) and Roadways (up 57 per cent yoy) while Irrigation (down 34 per cent yoy) was weaker than recent run-rate. Average monthly run-rate of tender value after FY19 has been around Rs 45,000 crore as

compared to which September 2020 was at Rs 74,100 crore. The September 2020 tendering activity is still down 15 per cent yoy despite a low base in the second half of the previous comparable period. Emkay said that despite signs of a pick up, in FY21 with the fiscal situation of both the Centre and State governments already under pressure and further worsening likely due to Covid-19, tendering and awarding activity should remain subdued. The awarding activity in September 2020, in value terms, was up 25 per cent yoy. The total awards stood at Rs28700 crore for the month which compares with a monthly run-rate of Rs 30,000 crore until FY19 and L&T has so far reported an order inflow (ex-services) of only Rs 17,500 crore for the entire Q2FY21 as compared to a normalized run-rate of more than Rs 30,000 crore, the brokerage said. The breakdown of the orders suggests that bulk of the increase is due to orders such as a charter lease of FPSO from ONGC and renewable energy sector orders bagged by Sterling & Wilson, some of which may not be relevant or sustainable.

Bank credit offtake remained poor in Apr-Sept: RBI report

■ MUMBAI

Although the banks remain flush with liquidity and interest rates lowered significantly, credit offtake from banks was very low and "anaemic" during the first half of the current financial year (2020-21). The low credit offtake can be attributed to the weak demand and persistent uncertainty amid the pandemic. "During H1 2020-21, bank credit offtake was anaemic, reflecting weak demand and uncertainty in the wake of the pandemic," showed the Monetary Policy Report for the October 2020 released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It showed that non-food credit growth (y-o-y) was 5.1 per cent as of September 25, 2020, lower than 8.6 per cent a year ago, driven by weak momentum and base effects. It noted that the slowdown in credit growth was spread across all bank groups, especially foreign banks. Credit growth of the public sector banks remained modest, although with some uptick since March 2020. "Of the incremental credit extended by the scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) on a

Personal loans and credit to agriculture registered some improvement in July 2020, the momentum could not be sustained in August

year-on-year basis (September 27, 2019 to September 25, 2020), 62.3 per cent was provided by the public sector banks and 41.2 per cent by the private sector banks, while the share of the foreign banks turned negative," said the report. The deceleration in non-food credit growth was broad-based, with credit offtake slowing down in all the major sectors. Though personal loans and credit to agriculture registered some improvement in July 2020, the momentum could not be sustained in August. Credit growth to services and industrial sectors has also tapered off after showing some promise in the Q1 of FY21. Personal loans accounted for the largest share of total credit flow in August 2020, followed by services. While the share of personal loans, services and agriculture increased in August 2020 vis-a-vis the previous year, the share of industry contracted.

Goyal reviews progress of Pragati Maidan convention centre

■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday reviewed the progress of construction activities at Pragati Maidan which is being redeveloped into an Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC). Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs H.S.Puri, Principal Advisor to the Prime Minister, P K Sinha, Officers from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, IPTO, NBCC, and other agencies involved in the activity took part in the virtual meeting, an official release said. After going through the presentations and videos on the status of the construction activities, Goyal expressed satisfaction over the progress, as all the critical activities are under control. Construction activities, which had suffered earlier due to lockdown and subsequent migration of labour, gained momentum in June, and the same is being maintained. About 4800 workers are presently engaged in various activities at the site. The complete project is likely to be handed over by October 2021.

Despite odds, fund raising via equity issues jumps 28% in Apr-Sept

■ MUMBAI

The pandemic may have brought economic activities to a standstill but fund raising through public and rights of issue of equities increased nearly 28 per cent to Rs 76,830 crore during the first half of financial year 2020-21. During the same period last year, last fiscal, funds worth Rs 60,133 crore were raised through issue of equity shares. "Resource mobilisation through public and rights issues of equity increased to Rs 76,830 crore during H1 2020-21 from Rs 60,133 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year," said the Monetary Policy Report for October 2020 released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It also showed that Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) turned net buyers in the Indian equity market after panic sales in March due to flight to safety. Mutual funds, however, were net sellers to the tune of

During the same period last year, last fiscal, funds worth ₹60,133 crore were raised through issue of equity shares

Rs 24,801 crore during first half of the FY21. After undergoing intense volatility in the fourth quarter of 2019-20, following the COVID-19 outbreak with a massive disruption in business activity, the Indian equity market made a strong V-shaped recovery in the first half of FY21. The BSE Sensex gained 46.5 per cent in April-September 2020-21 after hitting a low of 25,981 on March 23, 2020. Strong rallies in global equity markets on the back of massive fiscal and monetary stimuli in major countries and the measures undertaken in India boosted domestic market sentiments.

Trade bodies urge Centre to set up shipping regulator to control surging freight charges

■ KOLKATA

Several trade bodies have urged The Centre to set up a regulator to deal with the rising freight charges, amid the problem of container shortages that exporters are facing. Engineering Export Promotion Council of India (EETPC) claimed that shipping lines are demanding high freight charges as inward traffic from different countries, particularly from China, has declined for which the exporters are required to pay a higher amount for outbound consignments. "Imports from China have fallen and the liners have increased freight rates. No shipping company likes to sail empty after delivery of export consignments," Sanjay Budhia, chairman of CII national committee on exports and imports, told PTI. He said all the exporters across the country are facing

this problem. "This is leading to a situation where cargo is lying at ports. We urged the government to set up a shipping regulator to control the freight rates," Budhia said, adding that exports have started to pick up despite the coronavirus crisis. After contracting for six months in a row, the country's exports grew by 5.27 per cent to USD 27.4 billion in September. The shipping companies have raised freight rates due to falling imports from China as liners do not have much cargo while they are returning, an official of the engineering exporters' body said. "This is making Indian exports uncompetitive in the global markets," an EETPC official said. After witnessing a sharp fall, engineering exports have somewhat steadied, though the contraction continues, he added.

No change in petrol, diesel prices for over a week now

■ NEW DELHI

Fuel consumers did not face any change in petrol and diesel prices for the entire week as stable global oil prices ensured that oil marketing companies did not need to go for a revision. Diesel price has stayed at the same level since last Saturday, completing one full week when the fuel did not see any revision. Petrol prices have been stable for a longer period, completing 18 days on Saturday. With no revision in fuel prices on Saturday, in the national capital, diesel continues to be priced at Rs 70.46 per litre. Similarly, prices of the fuel in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, is also stable at ₹76.86, ₹75.95 and ₹73.99 respectively. The price of petrol in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata remains at ₹81.06, ₹87.74, ₹84.14 and ₹82.59 per litre respectively.

Worst is over, economic recovery faster than expected: Keki Mistry

■ NEW DELHI

Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd's CEO Keki Mistry on Saturday said the "worst is behind us" and the economic recovery has been faster than expected. Stating that the December quarter growth could outperform the expansion logged in the corresponding quarter a year ago, Mistry said that the Indian economy has shown its resiliency. Benign interest rate regime will continue going forward and that rates will go up only after economic activity gathers more pace and inflation pressure rises. Mistry, vice chairman and CEO, HDFC Ltd, said at an online dialogue organised by the All India Management Association (AIMA). He, however, said that interest rates have bottomed out. The government should identify the job creating sectors and address their issues on priority, AIMA said in a release quoting him.

Mistry said housing and real estate sector is the biggest employer in the economy after agriculture, and that 80 per cent of the workforce in the sector require minimal skills. He also sought priority support for the manufacturing sectors. Talking about the repayment issues in the housing and the real estate sector, Mistry said that he expected non-performing loans to be in single digits. The veteran financial sector player also said that most of the job losses during COVID-19 were confined to low-income workers and the job losses for the kind of people who borrow money were not alarming. The non-performing individual loans could be in the range of 2.5-4 per cent, which is also the extent of loans that the RBI has allowed to restructure, Mistry added. On the economic condition, Mistry said the Indian economy had proved to be resilient. "The worst is behind us and the recovery has been faster than expected. By the end

of December, the economy would be at the pre-COVID levels for most sectors. The December quarter growth could be better than the growth in the December quarter last year," he said. However, Mistry qualified his optimism saying that a lot depended on whether another virus wave hits in the winter. Still, he said, the government was aware that India could not afford another lockdown. Job creation and leaving money in the hands of the people should be the top two priorities of the government, Mistry said. Consumption being 60 per cent of the Indian economy, the recovery and growth efforts have to be led by boosting consumption, he said. "The cost of lowering taxes would not be too high whereas the benefits from higher consumption would far outweigh the revenue loss to the government. While the corporate tax rates had gone down, the peak rate for individual tax rate had gone up from 35 per cent to 44 per cent," Mistry said.

Govt against further relief on loan moratorium

New Delhi (PTI): The Centre has told the Supreme Court that going any further than the fiscal policy decisions already taken, such as waiver of compound interest charged on loans of up to Rs 2 crore for six months moratorium period, may be "detrimental" to the overall economic scenario, the national economy and banks may not take "inevitable financial constraints". The Union Finance Ministry, through its additional secretary Pankaj Jain, filed the affidavit to not contain necessary details and had asked the Centre and the RBI to file fresh ones in the case. In the fresh affidavit, the Centre referred to its various fiscal policy decisions and the Reserve Bank of India and expressed inability in expanding the scope of reliefs already provided to different sectors. "It is... submitted that while taking... decision and to supplement the earlier fiscal policy decisions under the 'Garib

has decided to waive compound interest (interest on interest) charged on loans of up to Rs 2 crores for a six-month moratorium period announced due to the pandemic from individual borrowers in eight categories - MSME, Education loan, Housing Loan, consumer durable loan, credit card dues, auto loan, personal loans to professionals and consumption loans. The court, on October 5, had observed that the Centre's affidavit did not contain necessary details and had asked the Centre and the RBI to file fresh ones in the case. In the fresh affidavit, the Centre referred to its various fiscal policy decisions and the Reserve Bank of India and expressed inability in expanding the scope of reliefs already provided to different sectors. "It is... submitted that while taking... decision and to supplement the earlier fiscal policy decisions under the 'Garib

Kalyan' and 'Aatma Nirbhar' packages entailing substantial financial burden, the respondent government has rationalised the fiscal impact of the same, and that going any further than what has been decided and submitted to the hon'ble court may be detrimental to the overall economic scenario, and the national economy or the banking sector may not be able to take the inevitable financial constraints resulting therefrom." The official said the Centre's decision with regard to the question of waiver of interest on interest to bear the burden of compounding of interest in respect of certain categories of loans was taken in the larger public interest only in the specific context of the pandemic, which is, by itself, an unprecedented situation. Such fiscal policy decisions are taken after an elaborate exercise of gathering of facts, careful assessment of

these facts and considering various alternatives, keeping in mind the economic impact on financial strength of stakeholders and all other relevant factors, more particularly during the pandemic when the global fiscal scenario is equally bad and the fact that it is uncertain as to till what date the present global and national economic stress will continue, the affidavit said. The Centre said that the recommendations of the Kamath Committee have been broadly accepted by the RBI and the panel found "variable impact of the pandemic across several sectors, with varying degrees of severity and varying nature of problems". "A perusal of the entire report would show that it is neither possible nor desirable to arrive at any one particular formula, whether sector-specific or otherwise, to deal with the stress situation arising from the unprecedented pandemic," it

said. The Kamath panel had made recommendations for 26 sectors that could be factored by lending institutions while finalising loan resolution plans and had said that banks could adopt a graded approach based on the severity of the coronavirus pandemic on a sector. It said that the government extended relief through the "Garib Kalyan package of Rs 1.70 lakh crore and the Aatma Nirbhar package.. of Rs. 20 lakh crore" and various measures have also been taken by RBI to mitigate the adverse financial impact. It said relief such as "extension of moratorium, applicability of the resolution framework, fixation of interest rate, transmission of rate cuts, delinking of interest rate from credit rating of the borrower and moratorium on repayment of non-credit instruments" have been sought in the petitions.

Agri exports rise 43.4 pc in Apr-Sept: Govt

■ NEW DELHI

Exports of agri-commodities rose by 43.4 per cent to ₹53,626.6 crore in the first half of the current fiscal notwithstanding the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the Union Agriculture Ministry said on Saturday. Farm exports stood at ₹37,397.3 crore during the April-September period of the 2019-20 fiscal, it said. In September 2020, agri exports rose by 81.7 per cent to ₹9,296 crore from ₹5,114 crore in September 2019. "The consistent and concerted efforts of the government to boost agricultural exports are bearing fruit as despite of the on-going Covid-19 crisis, the export of essential agri commodities for the cumulative period of April-September, 2020 has increased by 43.4 per cent to ₹53,626.6 crore," the ministry said in a statement. Positive growth was recorded in export of groundnut (35 per cent), refined sugar (104 per cent), wheat (206 per cent), basmati rice (13 per cent) and non-basmati rice (105 per cent) during the April-September of this fiscal from over the year-ago, it said. Furthermore, balance of trade during April-September 2020 was significantly positive at ₹9,002 crore as against trade

deficit of ₹2,133 crore in the said period, it added. To boost agri exports, the government announced Agriculture Export Policy, 2018 which inter-alia provides for cluster-based approach for export-centric farming of cash crops like fruits, vegetables, spices, etc. Whereby clusters for specific agri products are identified across the country and focused interventions are carried out in these clusters. Eight Export Promotion Forums (EPFs) have been set up under the aegis of agri-export promotion body APEDA to boost export of agriculture/ horticulture products. The EPFs are created on banana, grapes, mango, pomegranate, onion, dairy, rice basmati and rice non-basmati. The EPF are making concerted efforts to identify, document particulars of, and reach out to stakeholders across the entire production/ supply chain of export for increasing these exports significantly to the global market, through various interventions, it said. That apart, the government has also announced Agri-Infra Fund of Rs 1 lakh crore to improve agri business environment which will promote agri exports in due course, the ministry said.

I-T dept raids Ahmedabad-based real estate group

■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax (I-T) Department, based on credible intelligence, performed a search and seizure action in Ahmedabad on a group engaged in real estate, construction and land trading business. The search was conducted at 27 premises on Thursday, which included the offices and residences of some associates of the group. During the search, unexplained cash of around Rs 69 lakh and jewellery worth around Rs 82 lakh were seized. Besides, 18 bank lockers have been found and placed under restraint. A large number of incriminating documents and digital data in mobile phones, pen drives and computers have also been found and seized. The group had around 96 companies at a few common addresses, which were being used for routing money and for land holding. Most of the companies were found to have no real business and very few returns of income have been filed. Many have not filed returns with the ROC. Some directors of these concerns, other than the main family members, have accepted to be dummy directors with mere signing roles. Innovative methods of tax evasion by increasing the cost of properties through intra-group transactions, on which tax is not paid, have been noticed by the department.

Exporters welcome RBI's relief measures

New Delhi (PTI): The Reserve Bank's decision to discontinue the system-based automatic caution-listing of exporters is a big relief to the industry at a time when the trading community is battling the hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic, say exporters. Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP) Chairman A Sakthivel said the caution-listing of exporters had become a threat since the outbreak of coronavirus. It will provide flexibility to exporters in realization of their export proceeds. Considering

the pandemic-related payment difficulties, its continuation was a threat to many exporters, Sakthivel said. RBI introduced Export Data Processing and Monitoring System (EDPMS) in 2014 for all banks to bring their transactions with the exporters online. In 2016, it launched the system-based automatic caution-listing wherein exporters were put on RBI's caution list if any shipping bill against them remained open for more than two years in EDPMS and

there was no extension granted by the bank or RBI. Besides, the authorized dealer (AD) banks also recommended names of exporters to be put on caution list. The automatic listing of exporters in RBI's caution list can further worsen the plight of exporters by denying them packing credit and the delay in bank documents can lead to high demurrage charges, he added. Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO) President S K Saraf said it was

a long pending demand of the exporting community. "It was a threat, more so, since the outbreak of coronavirus as exporters were not in a position to approach banks physically to get exports realisation entries updated in the EDPMS Module," Saraf said. RBI's decision will provide a big relief to exporters particularly since in a large number of cases the entries remain non-updated at the end of AD banks due to numerous factors. "The onus will be on AD banks to update exports remit-

tance and if payment is not realised, to report the same to RBI for appropriate action. The new mechanism strikes a nice balance between the responsibilities of exporters and bankers while simultaneously ensuring that realisation of exports proceeds is constantly monitored," he said. After contracting for six months in a row, India's exports grew by 5.27 per cent year-on-year to USD 27.4 billion in September while trade deficit narrowed to a three-month low of USD 2.91 billion.

TRUMP VS BIDEN

2nd presidential debate cancelled

Washington: The second presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden set for October 15 has been cancelled, the organisers have announced, after the incumbent US President refused to do a virtual face-off with his Democratic challenger despite concerns over his COVID-19 diagnosis.

In a statement, the non-partisan (CPD) confirmed on Friday that the second version scheduled to be held in Miami, Florida, would be scrapped. The CPD said it was preparing for the next debate to held on October 22 in Nashville, Tennessee, less than two weeks ahead of the November 3 presidential election.

The first presidential debate between Trump and Biden was held on September 29 in Cleveland, Ohio. The one-off debate between the vice presidential candidates Mike Pence and Kamala Harris took place on October 7 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

“On October 8, CPD announced that for the health and safety of all involved, the second presidential debate,



scheduled for October 15 in Miami, would be conducted virtually,” the CPD said in a statement, officially announcing the cancellation of the second debate.

“Subsequently, the campaigns of the two candidates who qualified for participation in the debate made a series of statements concerning their respective positions regarding their willingness to participate in a virtual debate on October 15, and each now has announced alternate plans for that date.”

“It is now apparent there will be no debate on October 15, and the CPD will turn its

attention to preparations for the final presidential debate scheduled for October 22,” the CPD added.

The cancellation is the culmination of a furious 48-hour back-and-forth between the commission and the Republican and Democratic campaigns over the format of the second presidential debate.

The commission, with the backing of their health advisers, announced on Thursday that -- because Trump tested positive for the coronavirus -- the debate that was scheduled for Miami would be held virtually, with the two candidates appearing from remote locations.

Trump swiftly rejected that plan, saying he would not show up and setting off a series of events that put the future of all general election debates into question.

The Trump campaign has alleged that the commission was “biased” towards Biden, while the Democrat’s team accused the president of ducking the debate.

Trump has been accused of downplaying the seriousness of COVID-19, which has killed more than 213,000 people in the US where 7,664,000 confirmed cases have been reported, making the country the world’s worst-hit nation.

Biden has reacted to the cancellation of the second presidential debate in a statement through a spokesperson, calling it “shameful” that President Trump “ducked the only debate in which the voters get to ask questions.”

“Vice President Biden looks forward to making his case to the American people about how to overcome this pandemic, restore American leadership and our alliances in

the world, and bring the American people together,” his campaign spokesman Andrew Bates said.

“It’s shameful that Donald Trump ducked the only debate in which the voters get to ask the questions -- but it’s no surprise. Everyone knows that Donald Trump likes to bully reporters, but obviously he doesn’t have the guts to answer for his record to voters at the same time as Vice President Biden.”

Trump’s communications director Tim Murtaugh criticised the “biased” commission for cancelling the second debate, saying “there’s no medical reason to stop” it.

The primary mission of the Commission on Presidential Debates is to ensure, for the benefit of the American electorate, that general election debates are held every four years between and among the leading candidates for the offices of President and Vice President of the United States.

The CPD has sponsored general election presidential debates in every election since 1988, according to the commission’s website. **PTI**

‘Any peace deal with Taliban will not be detrimental to India’s nat’l security’

New Delhi: Any peace deal with the Taliban “will not and should not be detrimental” to the national security of any country including India, and it is for New Delhi to decide whether to engage with the militant outfit, top Afghan peace negotiator Abdullah Abdullah said on Saturday.

In an interview to PTI, Abdullah, the chairman of the powerful High Council for National Reconciliation, also dispelled India’s apprehensions that a prominent role for the Taliban as part of a possible outcome to the ongoing intra-Afghan peace talks could be detrimental to its strategic interests.

“It is not in our interest if any terrorist group has any foothold in Afghanistan. The agreement should be one which is acceptable to people of Afghanistan. It should be dignified, sustainable and durable,” Abdullah said.

The influential Afghan leader also said if a peace deal is struck with Taliban, then all other terror groups “freelancing in mountains and deserts of Afghanistan and launching

attacks on us or any other nation” will have to cease their activities.

“Peaceful settlement will not be and should not be detrimental to any country’s national security including India. India is a country which has helped Afghanistan, contributed to Afghanistan. It is a friend of Afghanistan,” he said when asked whether he can assure that the outcome of the peace talks will not be detrimental to India’s security interests.

There have been apprehensions in New Delhi that Pakistan might leverage its influence over the Taliban to step up cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir if the militant group regains political prominence after a possible peace deal between it and the Afghan government.

Abdullah arrived here on Tuesday on a five-day visit as part of his efforts to build a regional consensus and support for the historic Afghan peace process.

During his stay, he briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the peace talks, and held

meetings with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

Asked whether he got any indication of India’s willingness to engage with the Taliban, Abdullah said, “personally, I encourage engagement of India in the peace process. I did not make the suggestion. It is for India to decide how to engage with a group or not engage with a group. I did not pursue it,” he said.

The Taliban and the Afghan government are holding direct talks, aimed at ending decades of war that has killed tens of thousands of people and ravaged various parts of Afghanistan.

On September 12, an Indian delegation attended the inaugural ceremony marking the launch of direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Doha. Jaishankar joined it through a video conference which was attended by a number of key leaders from several countries including US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. **PTI**

Nearly 50,000 voters received wrong ballots: Ohio county

Columbus: Nearly 50,000 voters received incorrect absentee ballots in the county that is home to Ohio’s capital and largest city, elections officials said Friday as they promised corrected ballots would be mailed within 72 hours.

With about 240,000 ballots mailed, that meant one in five voters received a wrong ballot.

The error happened Saturday afternoon when someone changed a setting on a machine that places absentee ballots into mailing envelopes, Franklin County elections officials said Thursday.

Some ballots had an incorrect congressional race, while others had the correct information but were sent to voters in a different precinct. The Franklin County Elections Board said 49,669 voters received incorrect ballots out of 237,498 that were mailed.

That represents 6 per cent of Franklin County’s approximately 880,000 registered voters, and 0.6 per cent of the 8 million voters registered statewide in the presidential battleground.

The process to print, stuff the replacement ballots in envelopes and mail them was underway Friday, the Franklin County Elections Board announced.

The board also said it will mail postcards to all affected voters detailing the situation and highlighting voters’ options moving forward. Those options include voting in-person at the board’s offices on the city’s north side.

The elections board said multiple checks are in place to ensure only one voter can cast a ballot, including rejecting any replacement ballots if someone went ahead and voted in person.

The news of the incorrect ballots brought renewed focus on an election seeing an unprecedented number of absentee ballot requests, spurred by the coronavirus pandemic and concerns about in-person voting. On Tuesday, Ohio’s elections chief announced that Ohio’s 88 elections boards received a record number of absentee ballot applications. **AP**

Armenia, Azerbaijan agree on ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh

Moscow: With Russia’s mediation, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh starting Saturday following two weeks of heavy fighting that marked the worst outbreak of hostilities in the separatist region in more than a quarter-century.

The countries’ foreign ministers said in a statement that the truce is intended to exchange prisoners and recover the dead, adding that specific details will be agreed on later. Minutes after it entered force at noon (0800 GMT), Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of breaching the cease-fire with new attacks. The claims couldn’t be independently verified.

The announcement of the truce followed 10 hours of talks in Moscow sponsored by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who read the statement. It stipulated that the cease-fire should pave the way for talks on settling the conflict.

If the truce holds, it would mark a major diplomatic coup for Russia, which has a security pact with Armenia but also cultivated warm ties with Azerbaijan.

The latest outburst of fighting



between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces began September 27 and left hundreds of people dead in the biggest escalation of the decades-old conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh since a separatist war there ended in 1994. The region lies in Azerbaijan but has been under control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia.

The talks between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan were held on invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who brokered the cease-fire in a series of calls with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian.

Since the start of the latest

fighting, Armenia said it was open to a cease-fire, while Azerbaijan insisted that it should be conditional on the Armenian forces’ withdrawal from Nagorno-Karabakh, arguing that the failure of international efforts to negotiate a political settlement left it no other choice but to resort to force.

Russia has co-sponsored peace talks on Nagorno-Karabakh together with the United States and France as co-chairs of the so-called Minsk Group, which is working under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. They haven’t produced any deal, leaving Azerbaijan increasingly exasperated. **AP**

Taiwan’s leader hopes for reduced tensions with China

Taipei: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said on Saturday she has hopes for less tensions with China and in the region if Beijing will listen to Taipei’s concerns, alter its approach and restart dialogue with the self-ruled island democracy.

Speaking at Taiwan’s National Day celebrations on Saturday, Tsai took note of recent remarks by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in a video message to the UN General Assembly that China would never seek hegemony, expansion or to establish a sphere of influence.

“As countries in the region and around the world are now concerned about China’s expanding hegemony, we hope this is the beginning of genuine change,” Tsai said in her annual address at the Presidential Office in downtown Taipei.

If Beijing can “heed Taiwan’s voice, change the way it handles cross-strait relations, and jointly facilitate cross-strait reconciliation and peaceful dialogue, I believe that regional tension can surely

be resolved,” Tsai said. China’s ruling Communist Party claims the self-governing island as Chinese territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Beijing cut contacts with Tsai’s government following her election to a first term in 2016 and has steadily increased diplomatic, military and economic pressure on the island of 23 million people to compel her to endorse its contention that Taiwan and the mainland constitute a single Chinese nation, which it refers to as the “1992 Consensus.”

In Beijing, a spokesperson for the Cabinet’s Taiwan Affairs Office responded to Tsai’s address by renewing China’s demand for concessions and accusing her of “disrupting the exchanges and cooperation” between the sides, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Zhu Fenglian also accused Tsai of “deliberately misleading the people of Taiwan” and “warning the Taiwan authorities to adhere to the 1992 Consensus.” **AP**

Nepal records highest single day spike of over 5,000 new COVID cases



Kathmandu: Nepal on Saturday reported the highest single day spike of 5,008 new COVID-19 cases, taking the national tally to 105,684, the health ministry said.

A total of 19,320 PCR tests were conducted in the last 24 hours across the country.

This is the highest single-day COVID-19 spike in the country since the first case was reported on January 23 this year.

As many as 1,229 people were discharged during the period from hospitals after recovery. With this, the number of total recovered patients has reached 74,252.

A total of 1164,557 PCR tests have been conducted across the country so far, it said.

At present, there are 30,818 COVID-19 active people across the country.

The total number of COVID-19 deaths in the country has reached 614. **PTI**

UK plans new 3-tier system of COVID-19 lockdown

London (PTI): UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to unveil a new three-tier system of measures alongside local regions across the country being handed greater decision-making powers as part of efforts to slow the spread of coronavirus.

The new so-called traffic light system, to be laid out in the House of Commons on Monday, will see the most severe measures imposed for areas of England fall within the third tier and people being ordered not to have any social contact with anyone outside their household...

The new so-called traffic light system will see the most severe measures imposed for areas of England fall within the third tier and people being ordered not to have any social contact with anyone outside their household...

The government is operating under the misguided, arrogant and counterproductive view that Whitehall knows best, that decisions can be made behind closed doors, without any real consultation or even picking up the phone to those on the frontline, Opposition Labour Party Leader Kier Starmer wrote in The Daily Telegraph earlier in the week.

Meanwhile, the British Medical Association (BMA) also criticised the government’s approach to reduce the spread of the virus and called for compulsory face coverings across all settings.

COVID-19 is just as infectious in offices as in supermarkets. We need clear consistent policy now requiring masks in all settings where people mix outside their household and not 2 metres apart, said Dr Chaand Nagpaul, BMA Council Chair.

A number of areas in the northern and Midlands of England are already subject to stricter restrictions, with the new tiered system being designed to try and better organise the differing set of rules for different parts of the UK.

Public Health England’s national infection service warned that the number of cases was rising all over the country, but more quickly in the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humber than the South. Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson said he expected Liverpool where there are currently 600 cases per 100,000 people to be placed in tier three, under the highest set of restrictions.

Other cities, such as Leeds and Sheffield, could fall in the top tier. There is also a debate about whether the tiers should be tightly drawn around larger cities, or include the suburbs where infections are less.

Meanwhile, London Mayor Sadiq Khan repeated his warnings that tougher restrictions in the UK capital are inevitable.

You’ve got three buckets: level one the least restrictions, level three the most similar to lockdown-type measures. What’s clear to me is that it’s inevitable there will be additional restrictions in London, he told LBC Radio.

And one of the things we are discussing as one London that’s me and the 32/33 boroughs is what we think the right level should be and then work with government to make sure we have the right level there, he said.

Pak Opposition parties come out openly against powerful military

Karachi: For the first time, Pakistan’s two major Opposition parties have come out openly against the country’s powerful military, accusing it of rigging the 2018 elections that brought Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party to power.

In the past, political leaders have only indirectly pointed to the involvement of the military establishment in the country’s political affairs but this is the first time that the leaders of the two main Opposition parties - the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim

League Nawaz (PML-N) have openly criticised the military.

Former prime minister and PML-N supremo Sharif, who is in London since November last year and facing a number of corruption cases, fired the first salvo at the inaugural meeting of the Pakistan Democratic Movement, an alliance formed by Opposition parties last month to oust Prime Minister Khan.

Sharif alleged that the military rigged the 2018 elections to bring Prime Minister Khan to power.

He said interfering in politics in uniform amounts to treason under the country’s Constitution.

His allegations sparked an angry response from Khan, who said Sharif was “playing a very dangerous game” by humiliating the military and intelligence services. He dismissed the allegations of rigged elections as baseless.

Sharif served as Pakistan’s prime minister three times, first removed by a president in 1993, then by military ruler Pervez Musharraf in 1999. A

court in 2017 ousted him from power over corruption allegations. Khan, a former cricketer, came to power in 2018.

After Sharif, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Friday accused the military of rigging the 2018 elections.

Bilawal warned that any interference in the coming legislative assembly elections in Gilgit-Baltistan would lead to a strong reaction from his party, including a siege of Islamabad and a sit-in in the city.

“Such things were never witnessed even in dictatorships

of General Zia and Gen Musharraf,” Bilawal was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

“I wonder how you deploy a soldier inside and another outside the polling station. That was so strange. Even if you (military establishment) have done something wrong or not, you would be blamed either way. This should not happen,” he said.

He said the “PPP would not allow anyone to steal the peoples mandate in the coming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan.” **PTI**

Report: 29 million girls, women victims of modern slavery

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

A new report estimates that 29 million women and girls are victims of modern slavery, exploited by practices including forced labour, forced marriage, debt-bondage and domestic servitude.

Grace Forrest, co-founder of the Walk Free anti-slavery organisation, said Friday that means one in every 130 women and girls is living in modern slavery today, more than the population of Australia.

“The reality is that there are more people living in slavery today than any other time in human history,” she told a UN news conference.

Walk Free defines modern slavery “as the systematic removal of a person’s freedom,

where one person is exploited by another for personal or financial gain,” she said.

Forrest said the global estimate of one in 130 women and girls living in modern slavery was made based on work by Walk Free, the International Labour Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration, both UN agencies.

“What this report has shown is that gender stacks the odds against girls from conception throughout their lives,” she said.

Pak Army’s actions guided by Constitution: Gen Bajwa

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said on Saturday said that the military’s all actions were guided by the Constitution and were in the “national interest.”

Addressing a passing out parade of cadets at the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Kakul, Gen Bajwa said the army would continue to support the government and “defend our democratic values to the hilt”. The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. Gen Bajwa’s remarks came amid allegations by two major Opposition parties that the powerful army rigged the 2018 elections that brought Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party to power. In the past, political

leaders have only indirectly pointed to the involvement of the military establishment in the country’s political affairs but this is the first time that the leaders of the two main Opposition parties - the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) have openly criticised the military.

Gen Bajwa said that all actions of the army were guided by the Constitution and the national interests of Pakistan. He also said that the army would come to the support of the government, whenever asked according to the guidelines of the Constitution and the law. “We Pakistanis have proved that we can do wonders when we keep our national interests above our parochial, institutional and personal interests,” he said.

Three-time former prime minister and PML-N supremo

Sharif, who is in London since November last year and facing a number of corruption cases, last month alleged that the military rigged the 2018 elections to bring Prime Minister Khan to power. He said interfering in politics in uniform amounts to treason under the country’s Constitution.

His allegations sparked an angry response from Khan, who said Sharif was “playing a very dangerous game” by humiliating the military and intelligence services. He dismissed the allegations of rigged elections as baseless.

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HOME THEATRE

Peppy and fun



GINNY WEDS SUNNY
Netflix
***ing: Yami Gautam, Vikrant Massey, Suhail Nayar, Rajiv Gupta, Ayesha Raza Mishra**
Rated: 5.5/10

If one is looking for a movie that is not thought provoking or makes one to an introspection, then *Ginny Weds Sunny* is the perfect film to watch. Sit back and enjoy the lighter moments that it touches upon — Punjabi people who believe that there are only two things that they have to call their own — emotions and *paneer*. Directed by debutant Puneet Khanna, *Ginny Weds Sunny* is sweet, peppy and fun for most of the time. Other times, there is confusion — whom to marry. Definitely a big problem for our hero played by Vikrant Massey (Sunny) who is desperate to get married so that he can open his restaurant. Go figure this one out and unravel it. But then, the film is set in Delhi-NCR. People living here will understand the dilemma, our protagonists face. While the film has a few drawbacks, there are plenty of laughs. Take this for example. Ginny's real name is Princess Simran — not that she is from the royal

family. But they are Punjabis and what more can be expected of them Or the Jonty Weds Rimpi sign or the fun interaction between Rajiv Gupta (Sunny's father) and Ayesha Raza Mishra (Ginny's mother). Their dialogues are funny and entertaining. Unfortunately, their screen presence is limited and hence one doesn't get to see much of their rather great performance here. Massey and Gautam are brilliant as well. Though Ginny's character lacks the conviction she wants to portray. She says she doesn't need a man in her life, but she wants to get married. She gets angry when she feels that Sunny has betrayed her, yet when he is all set to marry another, she wants to marry him. And which man spends an entire day with a woman, when he is getting married to another the next day? But then the title of the movie gives the entire plot away. No guesses what happens in the end despite the twists and turns. The soundtracks and the songs are peppy and one will hum them for the next few weeks and Mika and Badshah's *Sawan Mein Lag Gayi Aag* is bound to be played by almost all DJs in the coming weeks. Overall, the movie is a light entertainment.

— Shalini Sakseena

Nice, sweet & funny

HUBIE HALLOWEEN
Netflix
***ing: Adam Sandler, Kevin James, Julie Bowen, Ray Liotta, Rob Schneider, June Squibb**
Rated: 5/10

Since Halloween is an alien concept for us here in India, we really don't understand what the hullabaloo is all about. But that doesn't mean we don't understand how big this is world over with some of the witchery magic ending up in our backyard. Most of us have grown up listening to stories about how people were executed between 15th and 18th centuries. We have also heard of Salem, Massachusetts, US, a town for its witch trials. Now, bring the two together and one has *Hubie Halloween* even though it is not one till October 31. Why would the makers want to release the movie at least three weeks in

advance, makes one scratch one's head. The sad part is that the movie is sad for the most part. Imagine a grown 40-something man, still continues to be bullied and not just by people his age but kids too. Why? Because of his way of talking or because he is too nice or because he gets spooked easily? Apparently, it is all three. But if one can get past this, *Hubie Halloween* is a nice, sweet and funny film to watch. Sandler with his funny accent, sometimes difficult to follow what he is saying is entertaining as he rides through the Salem streets ducking things that are thrown at him by people and kids alike. For most part, one will end laughing till something happens to make you cringe. But these are far between and one can enjoy Sandler's goofiness and part stupidity. While nothing here is original, nobody said that stupidity can't be funny and make one laugh.

— Shalini Sakseena



Plan Your Day



Amazon Prime Video on October 9 announced a brand new slate of nine highly-anticipated movies that will premiere directly on the streaming service. Spanning five Indian languages, the diverse line-up features titles such as *Coolie No 1* starring Varun Dhawan (*Judwaa 2*, *Street Dancer 3D*) and Sara Ali Khan (*Simmba*), *Chhalaang* starring Rajkummar Rao (*Trapped*, *Stree*) and Nushrat Bharucha (*Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweeti*), *Durgavati* starring Bhumi Pednekar (*Shubh Mangal Savdhaan*, *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*), *Bheema Sena Nala Maharaja* (Kannada) starring Aravinnd Iyer, *Middle Class Melodies* (Telugu) starring Anand Devarakonda, *Maara* (Tamil) starring R Madhavan, and *Manne Number 13* (Kannada) starring Varsha Bollamma (*Bigil*), Chetan Gandharva (*Melody*) along with previously announced Zakariya Mohammed's *Halal Love Story* (Malayalam) and Suriya starrer *Soorarai Pottru* (Tamil). The movies will premiere exclusively on Prime Video within 2020 and will be available in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. The new slate follows the successful launch of the first wave of direct-to-service premieres of 10 films across five languages, which led to Amazon Prime Video expanding its footprint in India with viewership for these movies coming from over 4000 cities and towns, across the country. Viewership titles in languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam received more than 50 percent viewership from customers outside the home states, with customers from Lucknow, Kolkata, Pune and beyond streaming *Penguin*, *Ponmagal Vandhal*, *Law*, *French Biryani*, *Sufiyum Sujatayum*, *CU Soon V* and *Nishadham*. The movies were also streamed and enjoyed by TV audiences in 180 countries and territories, allowing Indian filmmakers to reach a wider audience through Prime Video's global presence. Hindi titles *Gulabo Sitabo* & *Shakuntala Devi* emerged as the two most watched movies since the launch of Prime Video in India. *Gulabo Sitabo* and *Shakuntala Devi* were also the most watched Hindi movie on Prime Video globally! "Gripping content transcends geographical boundaries. The audience are always on the look-out for great entertainment, and good content will always find an audience. The resounding success of our first wave of direct-to-service movie premieres is a testament to that. This further reinforces our commitment to offering our customers a selection of riveting movies, cinematically produced, across a wide range of genres and languages," Vijay Subramaniam, Director and Head, Content, Amazon Prime Video, India, said.

‘Proud of what I have achieved thus far’

KRITI VERMA, a GST Inspector with Mumbai who was last seen in Bigg Boss 12 and given the Young Achiever Award by Dadasaheb Phalke Film Foundation Award, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA how she ended up on TV, her association with #vocalforlocal and upcoming projects

■ How did you get into TV?

I love watching the *Roadies Xtreme* show. My job in Mumbai meant that I was able to go for an audition with my friend. Everyone, since I was a child, would tell me that I exuded confidence. I am also health conscious and work out but am not a fitness freak. People think that *Roadies* is all about being fit but this is not the case. One just has to follow a healthy lifestyle. What the show is looking for is how confident one is and the 360-degree dimensional personality. This made me an ideal candidate for the show.

■ From a GST Officer to Bigg Boss 12. How did that happen?

Bigg Boss 12 was offered to me after *Roadies Xtreme*. In that show, I was the most popular contestant. That is how the *Bigg Boss* team contacted me. I saw no reason to turn it down. After all, it is a Salman Khan show. I am sure there are very few people who would turn down the opportunity to be part of a show where he is the host.

■ How have the two shows changed your life?

The shows have definitely changed my life for the better. Before I was on TV, I was a GST officer and the girl next door. People in the neighbourhood don't recognise you apart from those with whom you work. After these two shows, people on the street stop and acknowledge me and greet me and shower so much love and warmth sometimes it is overwhelming. I get gifts from people (fans).

■ Was it tough to be in front of the camera for the first time?

It was not that tough. I have always been a confident person. I used to participate in extra-curricular activities in school. I represented India in Pakistan at the International Theatre and Dance Festival. Facing the camera was not as challenging. **■ You are a GST officer and Bigg Boss as a show is different. Was it tough to perform for the House and yet be within the ambit fit for an Inspector?** My being a GST Inspector actually helped me when I was



a national level. This made me proud.

■ What was your family's reaction when you told them you would be on TV?

Actually, my family has always been supportive of whatever I have wanted to do. They were proud when I became a GST Inspector. Almost 32 lakh people took this exam and only 3,000 were chosen. I was one of them. My parents were thrilled for me. Doing a TV show was a feather in cap. Due to my popularity, people now recognise my parents too. They are happy that I have met Salman Khan and Rannvijay Singh.

■ Do your colleagues see you in a different light now?

I have not changed. I am the same with my friends. I am a grounded person. But people who don't know me, think that I am a celebrity. But that is not the case. Of course, fans send me gifts or just land up to get a selfie at the office address. People at the office smile and look at me a bit differently.

■ Is it difficult to do your job when you are out in the field?

Sometimes, it does. It does become difficult to do the work that I am supposed to. *Bigg Boss* as a format is so different for the other shows on TV. Also, it is not always possible to get leave to be on TV. My department has been very kind to me but it is not fair to keep asking for leave all the time. I try to either push the work over the weekend or do it after office hours.

■ How did you get associated with #vocalforlocal?

I take pride in being an Indian. I support Indian products and services. This initiative is taking things on a much larger platform to the public. This is a great app and each Indian must subscribe to it.

■ Are there any upcoming projects?

I have signed a film as a lead. The shoot was to begin in April but now it has been postponed for November-December. I have done a web series as well. There is a music video that I am part of. The lockdown has put things on a slow burner but things will get back on track soon.

Sambhavna is back

After a hiatus, SAMBHAVNA SETH is back on TV with &TV's Gudiya Humari Sabhi Pe Bhari. She speaks with MUSBA HASHMI about her role, YouTube channel and how has her life changed after she started vlogging

She is known for her straightforward attitude and doesn't believe in sugar coating things at all. Not to mention her passion towards whatever work she takes up, be it playing her true self in *Bigg Boss* or Shah Turkan in *Razia Sultan* or Mahua in *Gudiya Humari Sabhi Pe Bhari* of late.

Meet Sambhavna Seth, an actor, dancer and also a vlogger, who is creating waves on social media with her YouTube channel, Sambhavna Seth Entertainment. that has recently reached the 1M milestone.

Ask Seth of what attracted her to play Mahua and she is quick to reply — the quirkiness and lots of shades in the character.

"Mahua is neither a negative nor a positive character. There are many shades to it. This was one of the reasons that I said yes to the role. Also I haven't done a comedy show before, so I got to do something different in this show. The character does have grey shades but then there's a reason behind it, otherwise Mahua is a very good and loving person," she tells you.

The role, she says, gave her space to not just act but also show her groovy moves with a pinch of comedy.

"I have only played out and out negative roles till date. Mahua was something different and I was very excited to play it," she adds.

During Corona, this is Seth's first outing and her experience, she says, has been good.

"One can't just stay cooped up in his house. Yes, things are not too good, but then we don't have an option. Corona is for real and it can happen to anyone anywhere. In such a situation, there are only two options — one, live with the constant fear of catching infection and two, take precautions and face things. But this doesn't mean one has to go out for no reason. We have to accept the fact that this virus is not going anywhere till the mid of 2021 atleast. Hence, we can't live with the constant fear. Also, work is just as important," Seth explains.

Apart from her work in the industry, what earned Seth much love and fame is vlogging. So much so that she is often stopped by her fans on road to click a picture or two.

"I call myself an accidental vlogger. Vlogging was not on my cards at all, it was my husband Avinash, who encouraged me to take this up. And once I stepped into this, there was no looking back. It has become a hobby now," she tells you.

I call myself an accidental vlogger. Vlogging was not on my cards at all, it was my husband Avinash who encouraged me to take this up. And once I stepped into this, there was no looking back. It has become a hobby now



It is because of vlogging, she says, that she is able to showcase her true self and change people's perspective towards her. "I was misunderstood for all these years. It was only when I started vlogging that I was able to show people how actually Sambhavna is. The audience got to know about the real me. The way people perceived I was, did bother me a lot. It felt bad when people said something negative about me," she says.

While vlogging is not everyone's cup of tea, Seth feels that it is not that difficult. However everything has its pros and cons.

"If you are showing your true self in your vlogs than vlogging is not tough. The challenge comes in when people try to act differently in front of the camera. But yes, now people come to my house and at my shoots, even during the pandemic I have people waiting outside my building. It becomes a bit difficult to stop them and ask them not to. People recognise me whenever I am out on the road and come to meet me. It does feel that our lives are quite public but then it's fine. It is because of their love that I am here. And it is much better from the days when people didn't know me and spoke rubbish about me. Now they atleast know me and love me for who I am," she says.

She tells you that out of dancing, acting and vlogging, dancing comes naturally to her and vlogging is where her heart is.

"I am a born dancer. I can dance with my eyes closed. Dancing comes easy to me. Even on the sets of *Gudiya Humari Sabhi Pe Bhari*, there was no assigned choreographer. They just played the song and I started dancing. As far as acting is concerned, it doesn't come naturally to me, but if others can do it, I can do it too. A dancer can definitely be a good actor, but an actor is not always a good dancer. And vlogging is something very new to me, but I enjoy doing it.

I switch on the camera and start talking, that is all. So both dancing and vlogging actually come naturally to me," she tells you.

For all those aspiring vloggers, Seth has a piece of advice to share.

"Be true to your self. Don't imitate others, it won't help you in the long run. Come up with your original content. Be inspired from popular vloggers but don't become one if you don't want it from all your heart," she tells you.

No matter how sick one feels, but just when we enter a doctor's clinic and spot the man in a white coat festooned with a stethoscope, all the pain seems to disappear. Such has been our faith in the doctors who are considered nothing less than a God in a country like ours. The pandemic seems to have highlighted the importance of doctors even more, not that they were considered any less before.

However, what can't be ignored is the fact that around 515 doctors have sacrificed their lives in the fight against COVID-19. The question here is why? Perhaps because our fragile healthcare system could have done nothing much to save them, because this is how unprepared we were in the fight, to say the least.

Not only doctors, but several nurses and other healthcare workers have fallen prey to the disease, may be because they didn't have proper safety gears. Whatever the reason may have been, the loss in itself is huge and terrible.

Dr Shuchin Bajaj, Founder-Director, Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals, tells you that the scariest part is that more than 2,500 family members of the doctors have lost their lives too.

“Doctors have been at the frontline of the fight against COVID and it’s no wonder that more than 500 doctors have been martyred during this war. The scarier part is more than 2,500 family members of the doctors have lost their lives because the doctors had got the infection home. The Government has put healthcare at the bottom of its priority for a long time and no election in India has been fought with healthcare as the main agenda, contrary to the Western countries like the US, UK and the European countries where healthcare is the biggest election manifesto in every polls,” Bajaj says.

He adds that the National Healthcare Service has been the topic of every election that has happened in the UK. “The Obama care bill was the biggest issue in the last elections, which the Republicans had fought on. Healthcare has been the biggest issue in all of the countries but in India. The Government has really disregarded it completely and the healthcare expenditure in GDP in India is lower than each and every country in the world. It’s worse than countries like Cambodia too. So, nobody is prepared and the poorest of the poor goes to private healthcare facilities and they have to sell their houses and lands to access healthcare. Supply chains were completely broken when pandemic hit. The Government doctors especially had to work without masks, PPEs and that’s how they got the infection. The infection load was very high because they were seeing so many patients continuously. That’s why there were so many lives lost,” he explains.

So, the blame, he says, is completely on the Government. “They are never ready to fight any health challenge. They have outsourced it conveniently to private healthcare. The Government needs to reconsider its priorities and work on the health sector a lot by increasing the expenditure, make sure that the Government healthcare facilities are as good, if not better than the private. We need to protect our doctors and nurses because each doctor treats hundreds and thousands of patients. One loss of a doctor’s life is a huge loss for the Government as it spends crores on one doctor’s training to treat patients. And, if we lose a doctor at the prime of his life, it’s a big loss to the entire community. So, we need to protect them by ensuring good quality masks, PPEs and well-equipped infrastructure. We also need to ensure that there are sufficient doctors so that one doctor doesn’t have to work 24X7 and gets enough time to rest in between to rebuild his immunity, which is of utmost importance today,” Bajaj tells you.

Commandar Navneet Bali, National Convener, AHPI, tells you that since the pandemic has broken out a huge shift has been witnessed in the healthcare sector. "Since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, a huge shift is witnessed in the private as well as public healthcare sector. Many organisations came forward to help and also many companies started manufacturing ventilators which helped in fighting the pandemic to a great extent. Surely we need to do better as far as the healthcare infrastructure is concerned. We also need more workforce. Hence, the recently launched two-year diploma courses by the Government are much appreciable as our country needs more specialised healthcare workers," he says.

Saving ourselves from this virus and taking care of ourselves and our family members in order to reduce the burden on the healthcare workers, he says, is one of the best ways to convey our regards and to thank them. "Wearing a mask is a must. Remember, our careless attitude has been one of the reasons behind the increasing fatalities. Our society needs to learn several things at different levels. Since the outbreak, we have even come across reports people misbehaving with doctors and assaulting them. This is unfortunate and makes us think that a lot has to be done even now to acknowledge the valuable contribution of our doctors and pay them much needed respect. This is not the first time we have witnessed a pandemic, but now is the time to learn from the past and present as well and be prepared for the future," Bali tells you.

DEAR DOCTOR

According to the list put out by IMA, at least 500 doctors have lost their lives in the fight against COVID-19. The unfortunate event raises many questions as to who is to be blamed for the loss. MUSBA HASHMI speaks to doctors and experts who analyse the situation and tell you if these could have been saved



IMA dedicates the sacrifice of 515 Indian doctors in the fight against Covid 19 pandemic to the nation. We salute the martyrs. We salute all the nurses and the health care workers who sacrificed their lives as well.



Dr. Priyank M Singh	Dr. Ranamelli Mandal	Dr. Shree Prasad	Dr. Jagdishbhai	Dr. M.A.K. Sarim	Dr. Om Prakash Choudhan	Dr. Rajesh Shah	Dr. Shash Arifin	Dr. Tejinder	Dr. J.P. Jhal
Dr. A.S. Prakash	Dr. Reshappa Rajappa Kargale	Dr. D.N. Rai	Dr. Javed Ali	Dr. Mahesh Gargia	Dr. Shakti Gargia	Dr. Rajesh Kulkarni	Dr. U.C. Ghosh	Dr. K.C. Singh	Dr. K.P. Singh
Dr. Akash K. Nag	Dr. Reshappa Gowda	Dr. Srinivasbhai Bhosale	Dr. Javed Ali Khan	Dr. Mahesh Sahai	Dr. P. Sarma	Dr. Ram Kumar Saini	Dr. Shashintha Vargha	Dr. Umashankara Rao	Dr. LAJHARI KHURSI S.
Dr. Akhavan	Dr. Reshappa	Dr. DODHI DEEPAK UMESHKAR	Dr. Javed Ali	Dr. Mahendra Choudhary	Dr. P. Srinivasan	Dr. Ram Nareish Singh	Dr. Shashitosh Chatterjee	Dr. Umashankar	Dr. M.A.S. Subramanya
Dr. Abdul Hameed	Dr. Reshappa Sonmal	Dr. Dr. R.K. GARDIN	Dr. Jagdishbhaiji Pandey	Dr. Mahendra Jain	Dr. P. Thyagarajan	Dr. Ram Sarojan	Dr. Shashitosh Sekar	Dr. Umesh Bhargava	Dr. M.M. Agrawal
Dr. Abdul Majid	Dr. RASHAM	Dr. Durgesh Gupta	Dr. Jagdishbhai Shankar	Dr. Mahesh Verma	Dr. P. PRATHEEP	Dr. Rama Rao	Dr. Shashitosh Puri	Dr. Umeshchandra verma	Dr. Purnachandra
Dr. Abhishek Bhargava	Dr. Rattachari	Dr. Rikambam	Dr. Jashan	Dr. May Singara Rao	Dr. Padma Prasad	Dr. Ramachandran	Dr. Shashitosh A	Dr. Upendra Vithalan	Dr. R.R. Jha
Dr. Abdul Razzaque	Dr. Rishi Vaghi	Dr. G.C. Mohan	Dr. Jashan	Dr. Mallappa Shrinivasan	Dr. P.N.M.	Dr. Ramesh Patel	Dr. Shree Prasad Shewli	Dr. Ujjwal Bhushan	Dr. R.R. Bhattacharya
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Dr. R. V. Asokan
Hony. Secretary General, IMA

protective gears available for doctors at the frontline. That's why many Government doctors got affected in the course of the disease. The Government should provide social and financial security to the doctors, who are actively on the line of duty. Hospitals suffered huge losses during the lockdown, forcing many doctors to come outside and earn. As a result, the healthcare professionals got the blow of the pandemic directly on them and as a result a lot of lives have been lost," he tells you.

Recently, the Centre has said that there is no database of deceased doctors, Dr Amitabha Ghosh, Senior Consultant — Internal Medicines, Columbia Asia Hospital, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, has a take

on that. "I don't have an idea about what the Centre has said in view of the deceased doctors list. But if such a comment has been made and if its true, then its unfortunate," he opines.

In order to improve our healthcare infrastructure, he says, the annual budget allocated should be increased. "Then only we will be able to provide more manpower and implement things in a more systematic way," Ghosh adds.

Dr Anand Bansal, Medical Director, Action Group of Hospitals, tells you that instead of playing the blame game, it is high time that we should focus on that no more lives are lost in this fight.

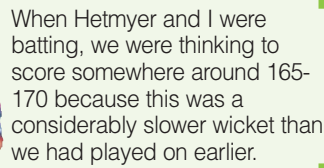
our doctors in this fight against pandemic but instead of blaming, we surely need to introspect and work for a solution collectively. The need of the hour is to ensure safety and security of our doctors and also provide best treatment facilities to get rid of this infection as soon as possible. They should be provided PPE kits, good quality masks and a favourable working environment to treat patients. Also society should learn to respect doctors' instructions and Government guidelines and stop living in oblivion," he asserts.

Infrastructure, he says, is prime in healthcare, especially when it comes to private sector apart from beds and proper medication there should be enough space

to cope with other needs of the hospital. Take for example if a doctor is serving in a private hospital and is not able to go back home, then there should be proper space and arrangements for them to take rest and stay overnight in hospital. Also there should be subsidies for life saving equipment used in hospitals like ventilators and testing kits. The Government should provide ventilators at very economical costs; plasma donation should be rewarded and encouraged widely across the society. "Remember, pandemic outbreaks never come with alarms, all we can do is take lessons from history, and work with a holistic approach," Bansal says.

The least we can do for all the frontline

workers is to show respect and consider them as soldiers, if not more. “They are also fighting our country’s enemy in order to save our lives while putting theirs at risk. Government should ensure their safety, security and reward them for their work. Society should learn to respect them. The recent unfortunate news reports about violence with doctors during the lockdown were disappointing and heartbreaking; our society also needs to learn at large. Stay at home as much as possible, follow social distancing and wear a mask in public places. Saving ourselves from this virus will also add to our doctors’ respect and will be a small token of our love towards them,” Bansal tells you.



Recently, the New Zealand's women's team also had to go through a 14-day quarantine in Queensland, where it was allowed to train, before its series against Australia.

IGA IS NEW FRENCH QUEEN

AP ■ PARIS



With the poise of a veteran and the shots of a champion, 19-year-old Iga Swiatek picked the perfect place for her first tour-level title: the French Open. Unseeded and ranked merely 54th, Swiatek grabbed the last six games to beat Sofia Kenin 6-4, 6-1 in the final at Roland Garros on Saturday, becoming the first Polish tennis player to win a Grand Slam singles trophy.

When she smacked one last forehand winner to the corner to end things, Swiatek placed her right hand over her mouth then crouched, shaking her head.

"It's crazy. Two years ago, I won a junior Grand Slam, and right now I'm here. It feels like such a short time," Swiatek said, her voice cracking. "I'm just overwhelmed."

Hard to believe? Maybe. This was, after all, only her seventh major tournament; she'd never been past the fourth round.

But the way she played these two weeks made this outcome less of a surprise.

Swiatek is the first woman to triumph in Paris without ceding a set since Justine Henin in 2007. She lost only 28 games across seven matches, too. She is the first teen to win the women's title at the French Open since Iva Majoli in 1997.

And Swiatek did it with victories over such opponents as 2018 champion Simona Halep and 2019 runner-up Marketa Vondrousova, both by scores of 6-1, 6-2.

So it made sense that Swiatek would be able to get past Kenin, a 21-year-old American who was trying to claim her second major title of 2020 after winning the Australian Open in February.

"A great tournament. A great match," Kenin told Swiatek during the trophy ceremony.

Kenin was 16-1 in Grand Slam matches until Saturday. But she dealt with a leg issue in the second set and showed frustration by kicking her red-white-and-blue racket after lost points.

And then there was this: She ran into the composed Swiatek, who only recently completed her high school studies, listens to "Welcome to the Jungle" by Guns N' Roses before walking on court, travels with a sports psychologist and meditates during changeovers, breathing slowly with her eyes closed.

"I was just mentally consistent," Swiatek said. "I felt like today was really stressful for me, so it was kind of hard." This weekend is the culmination of an unusual two weeks, to say the least.

The tournament was postponed from May-June to September-October because of the coronavirus pandemic; the recently rising number of COVID-19 cases in France led the government to limit the number of spectators allowed on the grounds to 1,000 each day.

Some top women, including 2019 champion Ash Barty and three-time major champ Naomi Osaka didn't enter the event; 23-time Slam winner Serena Williams withdrew before the second round with an injury.

The temperature was in the mid-50s (low teens Celsius), with a slight breeze, and the hundreds of fans scattered in Court Philippe Chatrier were mostly subdued - other than a group that would shout out Swiatek's first name, stretching it out over several seconds each time to sound like "Eeeeeeeeeee-gah."

At the changeover after the third game of the second set, Kenin was visited by a trainer and went off the court for a medical timeout, then returned with her left thigh wrapped.

Kenin said after her fourth-round match Monday that she had slipped and maybe pulled something during practice the day before.

While Kenin was gone, Swiatek tried to stay warm by pulling on a white jacket and hitting some serves, earning applause from spectators.

When play resumed, Swiatek needed only 12 more minutes to wrap up the victory, finishing with a 25-10 edge in winners.

It's Rafa vs Novak

AP ■ PARIS

Go all the way back to June 8, 2006, when Rafael Nadal moved on at the French Open after his 19-year-old, 63rd-ranked opponent in the quarterfinals quit because of a bad back while trailing two sets to none.

That opponent's assessment of Nadal after facing him for the first time as pros: "He's the best on this surface, but he's not unbeatable. That's for sure."

Hmmmm.

That foe? Novak Djokovic. Fast-forward to the final at Roland Garros on Sunday, when No. 1 Djokovic and No. 2 Nadal will stand across from each other once again at Court Philippe Chatrier, only this time in October after the tournament was postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

It will be their 56th tour-level meeting - more than any other pair of men in the Open era, which dates to 1968.

And let's not forget the big picture: This match carries significant weight in the Grand Slam standings that so many fans, and the players themselves, keep tabs on.

Roger Federer, who is 39 and missed most of this season after having two knee operations, owns the men's record of 20 major championships. Nadal, who is 34, is next among men with 19; Djokovic, 33, stands third with 17.

After Sunday, either Nadal will pull even with Federer for the first time since they were tied with zero apiece, or Djokovic will gain on the leading duo and the totals will read 20-19-18.

For now, this is how each has filled his trophy cabinet: - Djokovic: 8 at the Australian Open, 5 at Wimbledon, 3 at the U.S. Open, 1 at the French Open; - Nadal: 12 at the French Open, 4 at the U.S. Open, 2 at Wimbledon, 1 at the Australian Open; - Federer: 8 at Wimbledon, 6 at the Australian Open, 5 at the U.S. Open, 1 at the French Open.

All three are greats of the game, regardless of where the numbers end up, of course.

Still, as much as Nadal wouldn't engage in a discussion about his chance to catch Federer after beating Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (0) in the semifinals Friday, he did acknowledge that "it's good for tennis" if others talk about it.



Rafael Nadal clenching his fist after winning the first set AP

Rest assured, they will.

Much in the way that for years, people will debate which of the Big Three duos had the most intriguing head-to-head matchup: Federer vs. Nadal, Djokovic vs. Federer, or Nadal vs. Djokovic.

"He's definitely my greatest rival," Djokovic said about Nadal on Friday after getting past Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 6-2, 5-7, 4-6, 6-1 in the semifinals.

"Playing him in so many great matches, of course the past will have some effect, in terms of respect towards each other, I guess -- motivation to get out on the court and play your best, knowing that we both have to be at our best in order to win against each other."

Nadal called Djokovic, who is 37-1 in 2020, the lone loss via disqualification at the U.S. Open last month, "one of the toughest opponents possible." "The only thing I know is: To play against Novak, I need to play my best. Without playing my best tennis, (the) situation is very difficult," Nadal said.

Fighter Tsitsipas is one of world's best player

IAN ■ PARIS

Seventeen-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic has heaped praise on Stefanos Tsitsipas, saying the Greek is a fighter and one of the best players in the world.

On Friday evening, Djokovic survived a fight-back from fifth seed Tsitsipas as he had to battle it out for almost four hours to secure a hard-fought 6-3, 6-2, 5-7, 4-6, 6-1 semi-final win in the ongoing French Open.

"Credit to him (Tsitsipas) for fighting back. He just played terrific tennis, especially in the fourth set when he was facing break points... He's a fighter. He's one of the best players in the world... There was a lot at stake for him," said Djokovic after the match as per the ATP Tour website.

"He was motivated to try to turn the match around, which he did very well. But in the end I think he ran out of gas. That's when I stepped it

up, used my opportunities when they were presented in the fifth and closed out the match in a great fashion," he added.

Djokovic started his 10th Roland Garros semi-final in great form, winning the first two sets quite comfortably. But as the match began to slip away from Tsitsipas, the world number six took risks and fired his backhand down the line regularly to turn the match in his favour and won the next two sets.

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Brazil and Colombia had no trouble beating two of the weakest South American teams to score their first wins in the opening round of World Cup qualifiers.

The matches took place without fans due to health protocols from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brazil easily beat Bolivia 5-0 in rainy Sao Paulo while Colombia scored all of its goals in a 3-0 victory in the first half in Barranquilla.

After the first round, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and Argentina lead with three points. Peru and Paraguay have one. Ecuador, Chile, Venezuela and Bolivia have none.

All five matches in the second round will be played on Tuesday: Peru vs. Brazil, Bolivia vs. Argentina, Chile vs. Colombia, Ecuador vs. Uruguay and Venezuela vs. Paraguay. Neymar, experiencing back pain

Bobby's back

Firmino nets twice in Brazil's 5 goal win over Bolivia

ahead of the match and who was only confirmed in the starting lineup at the last minute, had two assists. He had more trouble with the pouring rain in Sao Paulo than with Bolivia's chaotic defenders who barely touched him during the match.

Defender Marquinhos opened the scoring in the 16th minute with a header. Roberto Firmino netted the first of his two goals in the 30th minute, just pushing the ball into an empty goal after a low cross from Renan Lodi.

Firmino made it 3-0 in the 49th minute, assisted by Neymar, putting

the ball between the legs of goalkeeper Carlos Lampe. Then 19-year-old striker Rodrygo scored his first for the national team with a header in the 66th minute.

Philippe Coutinho ended the rout in the 73rd minute with a header, also assisted by Neymar.

"The team took this very seriously, we were very respectful," said Brazil captain Casemiro.

"We still need to improve teamwork. Match by match we will get it."

Brazil coach Tite said the team will continue to play aggressively.



Brazil's Roberto Firmino, right, fights for the ball with Bolivia's Jose Maria Carrasco during a qualifying soccer match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 AP

Bottas takes Eifel pole

AP ■ NURBURG

Valtteri Bottas ended Lewis Hamilton's run of five consecutive Formula One pole positions by claiming first place on the grid at the Eifel Grand Prix on Saturday.

Hamilton briefly sat atop the time charts after topping Max Verstappen in the third session, but his teammate Bottas sped through seconds later with an unbeatable time, fastest in all three sectors of the Nürburgring track.

"It's such a nice feeling when you get it done the last lap," the Finnish driver said, adding his final run was "spot on." Bottas' time beat Hamilton by .256 seconds and Verstappen by .293.

Ferrari recovered a little ground after a miserable run of races, with Charles Leclerc qualifying fourth and Sebastian Vettel 11th.

Teams went into qualifying with much less information about the track conditions than usual after bad weather wiped out both Friday practices, leaving only one hour on Saturday to perfect the setups.

It was especially hard



for teams to get the most grip from their tires in chilly conditions in western Germany.

Sunday's race could be held in temperatures of just 8 degrees Celsius (47 F), making it easily one of the coldest races in recent years. "If it's any colder than this, I'm going to have to race with my scarf on," Hamilton joked after qualifying.

"The cold makes it hard to get heat into the tires, which can cause understeer. Driving slowly behind the safety car if there's an accident will cause the tires to cool down even more.

However, the weather could also allow drivers to use the same set of tires for longer.

"We're all in the same boat. I don't really know how far the tires will go, but when it gets a bit cooler, generally they can go a bit further," Hamilton said.

Hamilton will have to overtake his teammate on Sunday if he's to match Michael Schumacher's record of 91 wins in F1. Bottas is hoping he can stage a comeback in the title race after cutting Hamilton's lead to 44 points with a win two weeks ago in Russia.

Mercedes drivers have taken pole for every race this season, with eight for Hamilton and three for Bottas. Nico Hülkenberg woke up on Saturday expecting to be a pundit on German TV for qualifying. He ended up driving for Racing Point after Lance Stroll felt unwell. He was in the nearby city of Cologne and joked it was like "a heart attack" when he got a call from the team. Hülkenberg missed practice and had just four laps in qualifying as he placed 20th and last.

All players will be treated equally regardless of their stature: Fowler

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Newly-appointed East Bengal head coach Robbie Fowler on Saturday said they would aim to create a team which dominates ball possession and where all players are treated equally regardless of their stature.

With a late inclusion to the top-flight Indian Super League, East Bengal appointed the former English International and Liverpool legend with less than two months left for the scheduled start of the tournament.

"We have been working very hard to bring in not only good players but great players. As far as I'm concerned, we have got a team full of marquee players," Fowler said in his first media interaction after his appointment.

"Our aim is to try and bring out the best in everyone. We're gonna have a team who will work all the same. No one will be treated differently than anyone else, regardless of whatever stature."

"We will create a team

that will work very well with each other. We want to be a possession-based team. We want to get results. Fundamentally football is all about getting the right results."

The addition of East Bengal would take the seventh edition of ISL to a new high, Fowler said.

"The ISL is a relatively new league as we know. I think it's got better every single season. Hopefully now with the addition of us, we can make the league a little bit better."

Fowler will come with a star-studded backroom staff including former Manchester City midfielder Tony Grant and former India captain Renedy Singh as his deputy who are tasked to rope in foreign and Indian players.

"His (Renedy's) stature in Indian football is absolutely great. We know as a coach how good he is. As a player, he was successful. He knows most of the local players. We've been speaking about the players who are right for us. Renedy has been instrumental," the 45-year-old said.

Fowler last managed A-League side Brisbane Roar FC and transformed the side from being 10th in the league to fourth position, building a strong defensive side who conceded just 25 goals in 24 matches.

"We've had a history where we've built a team that struggled and made them successful in Australia. So you know we could do it again. It is a challenge, but it's a challenge that we've accepted and would look to do very well," he said.

"I said before it's about

doing all the preparation right, getting the right methods and ethics into the players. It's a challenge that we can't wait to get started with."

"Not only the team, but the competition, a little bit more successful. We want to be as successful as we can. Obviously no other League, no other place is massively important," Fowler said from his home in Liverpool.

Before Fowler came on board with his deputy Grant, Brisbane Roar conceded 71 goals from 27 matches in 2018-19 as the duo would look to replicate the same magic. "We know the history between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan. With football, rivalry is healthy. It drives players, fans and football clubs to achieve the very best," he said.

"We've been involved in various games throughout our careers, and played various derbies that have been incredibly huge. We know what it means to the football clubs, to the fans," the Premier League's all-time seventh highest goal scorer with 163 goals to his name said.

Swimming Fraternity welcomes resumption of Olympic training

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian swimming fraternity has welcomed the decision to reopen swimming pools across the country after Sports Ministry issued the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Friday.

Virdhawal Khade one of six Indian swimmers who have achieved the Olympic qualification B mark and who participated in the 2008 Olympics welcomed the decision.

"It is an excellent decision. I am glad the swimmers will get a chance to get back to full form and race again soon. I hope the state governments take decision to fully support the decision taken by the centre at the soonest and 100% of the competitive swimmers can start training again," Khade was quoted as saying in a press release. In August, SAI had sanctioned a two-month training camp in Dubai, attended by swimmers Srihar Nataraj and Kushagra Rawat, both of whom have achieved the B Qualification mark along with Sajjan Prakash. Though he had trained in Dubai, Nataraj is happy to be training in India once again.

"I'm very glad that swimming pools are opening up in India, being able to train by staying at home does make me feel a lot better especially due to the fact I have my entire support staff available and the schedule can be designed for maximum efficiency," Nataraj said.

Despite the delays brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic, a postponed Olympics may just help Indian swimmers and Dronacharya awardee coach Nihar Ameen has said the resumption of training is a positive step in this regard.

"I am very optimistic that our Olympic B qualifiers will work very hard to attain the A qualifying time and all our swimmers across the country are very enthusiastic about resuming their training," Ameen said.



■ **How did you get into acting at such an early age?**

A friend of my father had a film magazine. He asked my father why he didn't let me act for a role. My father said no. He told my father that it was all clean. There was a bit of back and forth. My father agreed and I was in.

■ **W h a t**

Talktime

RUKHSAR REHMAN

The actor who played Amara Gujral in Voot's The Gone Game, speaks with Shalini Saksena about why she said yes to the role, the mantra that keeps her going and upcoming projects

made you say to The Gone Game?

There was a unique factor. Due to the pandemic, everyone was shooting from home. The good thing was that the story was such that it was possible to do the same. This got me interested. Also, the story was well-written. Of course, my family stepped in, my husband and daughter helped a lot. It was not just about shooting but setting up the place, acting and then sending the footage to the makers. I don't think I would have been able to manage all this on my own.

■ **I understand that this is your debut with the web series. What was the attraction of venturing into digital space?**

Actually, I had done a web series called *Haq Se* in 2018, a take-off on *Little Women* based in Kashmir that streamed on ALTBalaji app. But *The Gone Game* made more noise, hence people think that this is my debut web series. I have been saying this for long, in films, there is a female antag-

I would like to explore comedy as a genre. Most people think that I can't pull it off. But I know that I can be good at it. I would also love to play a character in period drama

onist and not many powerful roles are being written for women. But of late, in Indian web series, a lot of good roles are being written for women of all ages. This has drawn me to it. Then things end in a time-bound manner which is good.

■ **Why can't we replicate good content in TV and films?**

I think that every maker has a set of ideas. They are of the opinion that if they are making films, it has to be of a certain kind, if it is a web series, it has to be of a certain kind. Having said this, cinema has wider reach and old-age charm to it even if TV and web series are viewed by more people.

■ **You have done TV, films and stage shows. Where are you most comfortable?**

I am most comfortable when I am on the stage; when I am doing plays. That is where I am at my best.

■ **What lesson should we take away from this pandemic?**

While there is a huge lesson to take away but unfortunately, nobody is willing to make changes in their lives. There is a need to unite and walk forward as one. While there is bound to be jealousy, there

is a need to move away from this. We need to be more health conscious as well. I have learnt that material things don't give you peace or happiness.

■ **Is there a mantra that has kept you going in the industry?**

I enjoy my work. Whenever a project comes my way that I know I will love doing, I take it up and it keeps me going. I know that this is my career, this is what I do.

■ **Is there a character that you loved playing?**

I loved playing the role in *Sarkar* (2005). I played Amrita (Vishnu's wife). I loved doing *D-Underworld* and *PK*. All the three characters I played were so different from each other.

■ **Is there a genre that you like to explore?**

There is comedy. Most people think that I can't pull it off. But I know that I can be good at it. I would love to play a comic role and also a character in period drama.

■ **What are your future plans?**

There is another web series. But it got postponed. But hopefully we will start shooting in November.

The pandemic has hit all sectors and film shoots is just one of them.

MUSBA HASHMI speaks with SANDEEP A VARMA and RAJESH BUTTA about how they came up with the idea of Filmboard, how will it help and its benefits, among other things

SET UP THE SETS



Rajesh Butta and Sandeep A Varma

That film shootings or for that matter TV and web series shootings have suffered a hard blow from the pandemic is a no-brainer. Though the industry has started to get back on track gradually, a lot has changed in the process. Not that it has been any easier before, but COVID-19 has definitely added to the woes of the makers.

With limited cast and crew, a mandatory six-feet distance between people and a walk-in sanitising tunnel, a much dramatic movie scene has come to life today, all thanks to COVID-19.

What comes to the rescue during such a time is Filmboard, a brainchild of Sandeep A Varma, filmmaker and Co-Founder and Rajesh Butta, serial entrepreneur and Co-Founder, is sure to help you complete your dream project without much hassle and over-budgeting.

"Rajesh and I are BITS Pilani batchmates. That was 10 years back. After that our paths changed and we went ahead to pursue what we loved. I did a course in advertising and started making ad and feature films. Rajesh on the other hand remained true to his education and became a civil entrepreneur. We were habituated to complete the projects that we were offered on time and within the cost that we had only set for a particular project. So about 95 per cent of the time that did happen and the costs didn't increase much. But when I came into filmmaking, most of my films went over budget. I realised that this didn't both-

er my filmmaker friends much because it happens with most of the projects, but for me it was intolerable," Varma explains.

This hit Varma and he decided to do something about it. "The question that hit my mind was why did this happen and how we can sustain like this considering India is one of the largest film producing countries in the world and also the fastest growing. I had some ideas as to why it is happening and how it can be solved. Then fortunately, I met Rajesh after many years at a college reunion. I spilled all my ideas in front of him. He had different perspectives to my idea and explained how technology and an extensive database can help sort this out. This is how Filmboard, a novel marketplace for filmmaking where one can find everything in their budget, was born in 2017," Varma tells you.

One of the main reasons behind over-budgeting of projects, he says, is lack of professionals in the industry. "When a producer plans a film or a series, he is sure about two-three factors which ultimately helps in the decision making process. One, he knows the director. Two, he knows what the script is about. Three, he knows who are the top actors in the project. But there is much more that goes into the process. This is all Above The Line (ATL) things where the producer is negotiating and making direct payments to the concerned people. Then there is Below The Line (BTL), that is

When I came into filmmaking, most of my films went over budget. I realised that this didn't bother my filmmaker friends much because it happens with most of the projects, but for me it was intolerable. This led to the birth of Filmboard

— Sandeep A Varma Filmmaker and Co-Founder, Filmboard

provisioned on the set which includes, camera charges, food and logistics, art director and property charges and many others.

This provisioning is done by thousands and thousands of line producers who are operating individually all over the country. These people have no training at all. They are the ones who came into the industry to become actors, but since all the other fields including camera handling require expertise, they chose this field of work. The BTL part of the money is about 80 per cent of ATL budget. With these

untrained people, there is no transparency in the finalising of things. Hence, the budget keeps on increasing for several reasons, including poor camera quality, among others," he explains.

At Filmboard, he says, they have tied-up with national level brands for catering services, who will supply hygienic food which is untouched by human hands to the shoots, especially during COVID. "The perception will be that the cost of this food will be too high. But, the reality is that the rates are negotiable and are of the same rates as of the local catering *walas*. In short, we are organising this process and putting it on one single platform for everyone to see and decide what to choose and what not," Varma tells you.

Not only catering services, one can find everything from an actor, to spot boys and from producers to camera man at a single destination and at the price of their choice and budget.

Recently, they have also launched the COVID action plan via an app on their website to help simplify the process and not to mention within the allocated budget. "The app allows people to see if proper precautions are being taken at the shoot. There is an assigned officer who visits the shoots to check that all precautions are being followed. He then clicks and uploads a picture of the respective crew member on the app itself to verify it. To enhance the security, the photo option will redirect one to the mobile phone's camera and the picture has to be clicked then and there,

it can't be hampered," Butta tells you.

In case of any violations, Butta says, proper actions are taken against the offender.

Till date, they have worked with brands like Radio Mirchi, Gaana.com and Rebel Foods. "We have worked with big brands but on comparatively smaller projects. As we go forward, we see us doing larger projects. In 2021, we will be doing feature and animation films and our area of work will be focused towards OTT platforms," Varma tells you.

There is much more on the duo's cards in order to make the website better than ever. "This is the Version 3 of the website, but we will be going up to Version 5 and will revamp the website completely. For this, we have planned few technology-led innovations. One of them is AI-enabled auditions. In any particular audition, there is a queue of around 200 aspirants. From such a huge chunk, it is difficult to select one. Through this feature, AI will be short-listing candidates on defined parameters, including voice clarity and eye contact. About 70 per cent of the audition process can be done through this technology and the process becomes easier and less time consuming. The shortlisted contestants can then be decided accordingly," Butta tells you.

I don't want to restrict to a genre'

Music composer-director KARAN KULKARNI, who has composed music for *Shakuntala Devi* and background score for *Breathe: Into The Shadows*, speaks with SHALINI SAKSENA about how he got interested in music and if there is a formula for hit music

■ **What are you working on at present?**

I am working on a lot of TV commercials right now. A lot of shoots are on the cards while not are on the shooting stage but they will get there.

■ **What were the challenges that came with *Breathe: Into The Shadows*?**

The main challenge about giving music for any web series is the more specific *Breathe: Into The Shadows* is the length of the music. This web series has 12 episodes of 45-50 minutes each. This means creating music for around five-six hours. Compared to a film, this is a lot of work, like doing three-four films. Also, given that this was a web series releasing for me on a big OTT platform we had to keep in mind how it will sound on TV or laptops.

■ **Is giving a background score different from composing for a song?**

When it comes to composing, it is the same since at the end of the day it is all about making music. There is really no difference here. One can say that songs garner a lot more attention, that is how it has been historically and people sing songs. Background score is music without singing and we are trying to follow the story and support it. In a song, we are just making a song.

■ **In Hollywood, background music tends to stay with us and we identify the movie by it, why is it different in Bollywood?**

It is the nature of things. People pay more attention to songs since there is a singer — there is a face, there is a voice, they identify with him and sing along. People enjoy it separately too. But when it comes to the score, it is identified and tied with the film. When you listen to it, you listen to it with the film. We do have a lot of musicians who are very talented and give great background scores but we don't pay attention to it and they prefer to remain in the background. We pay more attention to films. So, it is a bit of all the above.

■ **How did you get interested in music?**

I was 15 when I started to play the guitar. This is probably how things start for many musicians. One thing led to another. I started to study it and got into music with a computer. I did a music production course in Australia. I came back and started getting work and here I am.

■ **How was the experience of working on *Shakuntala Devi* and then *Raat Akeli Hai*?**

On one hand, *Raat Akeli Hai*, it is dark and is a mystery-thriller. The sound and way you compose is different. *Shakuntala Devi* is brighter and more mainstream. Just the choices, sound, genres and characters you deal with here is slightly different. It is not a major thing to overcome. The industry we work in, requires us to work on all kinds of genres. I have had the opportunity to work on all kinds of music.

■ **Is there a formula for hit music?**

I don't believe this. Upbeat dance music has been pushed a lot. But there are listeners for all kind of music. Music is so wide. It is not just happy and item numbers and sad. There is melancholy and contemplative. One can make songs on these. There is a reason why certain kinds of music works because they are being promoted since they understand this. They get played a lot. But if you play any kind of music a lot, there will be listeners. If one looks at the history of music, as long as it is good music, it will work.

■ **What kind of music would you like to create?**

It is to create something new. I don't want to restrict myself to a genre. I want to challenge myself and be interesting.

■ **Is it tough to experiment given there is so much competition?**

Definitely. Everyone is connected to the Internet. They have heard everything that is coming out of Africa, the US and Japan. One knows all the sounds. It makes it tougher to be innovative. But every human being is unique and what he will create will be different. This will set you apart. Indian listeners have always evolved. There is a misconception. It is the people who are selling us the music who are not evolved.

■ **What do you agree that working for digital space is better than working for the industry?**

I totally agree with this 100 per cent. When you release something in theatre, there is someone involved and there is a lot of control on what they think is correct and what they think will work or not. All artists believe that the audience is ready if you sell it to them properly. People are watching Netflix, Amazon and stuff on the Internet. They are exposed to a lot of things globally. There is no need pleasing others. People have started to relax a bit since they are competing with global content.

SPICE UP YOUR IPL EVENINGS

With the cricket fever taking over the country, it is time to ramp up our snack game too! So, load up on these healthy and flavourful snacks with the added goodness of California Walnuts to keep your energy levels high during matches.

CALIFORNIA WALNUT NACHOS WITH GUACAMOLE

INGREDIENTS:

Nachos:

- 140g maize flour
- 120g sunflower seeds
- 20g California walnuts
- 60ml extra virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ teaspoon salt
- 125ml water

Guacamole:

- 2 avocados
- 1 medium tomato
- Half onion
- Salt to taste
- 1 tablespoon fresh coriander leaves
- 1 teaspoon cayenne



PREPARATIONS:

Nachos:

- Preheat the oven to 220°C.
- Chop the sunflower seeds and walnuts.

■ Put all the ingredients of the nachos in a big bowl and mix them with a wooden spoon. Add oil and combine it. Add water little by little, until the flour sticks together and forms a nice dough

ball. If it's wet, continue mixing up until it gets dry.

■ Divide the dough in two balls and place one of them between two baking sheets. Using a rolling pin, extend the dough until it has a thickness of 2 mm and mark with a knife the lines to break or separate them.

■ Retire the baking sheet off the top of the dough and place them in an oven tray. Bake around 10 minutes or until it turns gold. Let it cool and chop. Repeat with the same with the other ball.

GUACAMOLE:

■ Cut tomato and onion in little cubes.

■ Cut avocados, retire the filling and place it in a bowl. Using a fork or a wooden spoon, smash the avocado flesh and pour lemon juice so they do not rust.

■ Add tomato, onion, salt, cayenne and coriander into the bowl. Mix it until smooth.

■ Serve it with the walnut nachos. — By Chef Sabhyasachi Gorai

CALIFORNIA WALNUT GARLIC BREAD



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 French baguette
- 100g butter, softened
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed

- ½ x 25g pack parsley, finely chopped
- 50g California Walnuts, finely chopped

PREPARATIONS:

■ Preheat the oven to 200°C.

■ Cut the baguette in half and with each half, make deep slits diagonally at two cm intervals making sure not to cut all the way through. Place each on a large piece of foil.

■ Blend together the butter, garlic, parsley and walnuts, season and spread into the slits. Wrap loosely in foil and place both on a large baking tray.

■ Bake for 10 minutes, unwrap the foil to expose the top of the bread and cook for a further 10 minutes until golden and the butter has melted.

— By Chef Neha Deepak Shah



the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE

Introspect to sanitise your mind

Introspection is the best way to recognise our imperfections. By meditation and ethical virtues, we can lead a godly life

2



4

Learn to bear with the truth

Everybody comes to this world with their own Karmic carryover from the past, which they have to bear with

Our diversity is our strength. What a dull and pointless life it would be if everyone was the same
— Angelina Jolie



AGE OF THE FILTER BUBBLE

Creating content that can go viral is the holy grail for most marketing companies today, writes RAJA SAHI, as he advocates careful consumption of what is being thrown at us in the name of entertainment

Don't we love to be entertained. What started many thousands of years ago as cave art and guttural sounds around an evening fire has now become much more refined as endless series of content to see on *YouTube*, *Netflix*, *Amazon*, and the like. We have a near infinity of books that we can read both digitally and physically. We have so many TV channels to choose from that many of us feel like giving up during the selection process itself. And, if you wanted a quick fix, you can go check out the latest gossip on one of the *WhatsApp* groups you are in or just go to *TikTok*, make one choice and then let the application take it from there.

Being 46 and having grown up in New Delhi, entertainment for me, when in my teens, consisted of reading the newspaper in the morning and, after that, mostly of visiting someone's house and enjoying playing some board or card games there. The days of cable TV, smartphones and the capability to see whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted to, was still quite a few years away.

Look around you for a second. If you are affluent enough, and at home, chances are there is a TV, with a remote, nearby somewhere and that you are in possession of at least one smart mobile device. You are therefore just one or two button clicks away from choosing whatever form of entertainment you want, right from the luxury of wherever you are sitting right now.

DEMOCRATISING CONTENT CREATION

We are what we eat and breathe, but we, usually, become what we see. Our brains love learning and we are all sponges when we sit in front of our chosen entertainment medium. Be it a print newspaper or an electronic medium. We enjoy knowing about others and, in turn, we desire to tell others what is happening to us.

Technology has made things much easier. Any one of us, with enough drive, can decide to become an *Instagram* influencer, a *YouTube* celebrity or a *TikTok* personality. No need to purchase an expensive camera rig or procure and learn how to operate a very complex video editing software. Just using a smartphone, you can do whatever you wish.

The near ubiquitousness of mobile devices and the availability of free or really cheap software for the same has allowed for user generated content (UGC) like never before. Furthermore, platforms such as *YouTube* and *TikTok* allow for the distribution of such content in a very easy manner. You can even take steps on those, and other, platforms to market the content and make sure that it gets the desired number of eye-

balls on it. At one point, people needed to build bridges and buildings to be remembered. Now, all you need is an *Instagram* account. If you are an author you can publish and print books on demand. If you are an artist you can go to a website like *Etsy* and, suddenly, the whole world is your oyster.

EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY, INFLUENCERS AND MARKETING

A good word from someone you know goes a long way. Content aggregation platforms know this. Most applications and ecosystems are now designed with recommendation engines in mind. You are told what your friend watched or what someone else experienced so that you can be catalysed into taking a similar decision.

Apps and platforms are designed with liking content in mind so that everyone can be a critic. We are provided with the ability to share our experiences and this data is harvested, accumulated and shown to the crowd in a, supposedly, averaged sense. We, as a part of the crowd, are then influenced by this data that we are shown. Would you not go to a place that had a higher *Zomato* rating than a lower one? Wouldn't you rather buy that brand of clothing that the *YouTube*er you had subscribed to spoke about? Be careful to separate the wheat from the chaff though. You need to have an understanding as to which endorsement was paid for and which was not.

Chances are quite good that the first few entries you see on *Zomato* or *Google* are there because someone paid for them to get that top billing. Entertainment and content ecosystems similarly also allow for audience targeting. Advertisers and promoters can choose data sets that include you based on your geography, your marital state, your economic status, your earlier purchasing activity, the list only goes on and on.

Additionally, content is now being created, keyworded and headlined in ways that are engineered to grab our attention. Something gossipy or scandalous is always more likely to get hits. After all, why should one create content that only thousands will see when you can create something else that hundreds of thousands may be interested in so that you can get a higher rating or more ad revenue from the same? Creating content that can go viral is the holy grail for most marketing companies today.

DATA DRIVEN CONTENT CREATION AND PROMOTION

When *Netflix* started, they only shipped DVDs that were created by others. Even when they started streaming content, they had no choice but to license the same from other film and TV studios and related pro-



WE AS CONSUMERS MAY BE GETTING WHAT WE WANT, BUT, THERE IS AN UGLY SIDE TO IT TOO. WE ARE NOW SUSCEPTIBLE TO FILTER BUBBLES. THIS IS WHEN A PLATFORM, IN FILTERING CONTENT THROUGH TO US THAT THEY THINK WE WILL LIKE, ONLY PROMOTES CONTENT TO OUR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION THAT CLOSELY MATCHES WHAT WE HAD CONSUMED IN THE PAST. IN DOING THIS, WE HAVE THE RISK OF GOING INTO A FILTER BUBBLE



duction companies. But *Netflix* understood that, if they wanted to remain masters of their own destiny, then they needed their own catalog of content. Since *Netflix* had been shipping discs and streaming for a bit of time now, they had access to a lot of data. Data that we consumers had given them. All the shows we saw, that we stopped and never went back to, the genres of content that we consumed more than others, all gave *Netflix* a lot of valuable information about our behaviour as consumers.

Using this data, they figured out that actor Kevin Spacey and director David Fincher would be a great sellable combination for their viewers. They also realised that a lot of people liked political dramas. Thus, the US episodic version of *House of Cards* was conceptualised and executed. As the numbers had suggested to them, it was a blockbuster hit for *Netflix*.

Big data technologies are also being used by platforms like *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *TikTok* in order to promote content that they think we will like. Clearly, it is in their best interest to have us glued to our screens consuming as much content, as is possible, from them. So, they pattern match what we see, what our friends see, what others, as a group see, and then provide recommendations to us. If you have not wanted to leave your screen and, at some point, noticed that what started as a two min viewing session for you, became a two hour marathon, then you can rest in peace with the knowledge that the algorithms and the artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) models that the programmers have created, are doing their job pretty well.

Yes, we as consumers may be getting what we want, but, there is an ugly side to it too. We are now susceptible to filter bubbles. This is when a platform, in filtering content through to us that they think we will like, only promotes content to our immediate attention that closely matches what we had consumed in the past. In doing this, we have the risk of going into a filter bubble. A bubble where we only see what reinforces what we saw before and hardens what philosophies we may hold. In not being showing a diversity of content, and in us choosing not to search for it, we now have the risk of going deeper into a rabbit hole that we may be in. We become more prone to see only our side of an argument and not see the other side, though the other side may be in exactly the same position as we are.

This becomes an endless feedback loop. The more we see something, the more the platforms show it to us, the more they provide information to the creators that the something we saw is what we want and the more, new, closely matching things are created in turn to feed our demand.

CHANGING REALITY

Of late, newer forms of immersive entertainment experiences like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) have started emerging. AR and VR are still in their nascent stages. As these technologies and platforms develop, how will we adapt to them, sociologically speaking? What sort of content will we create for them? Will we look at them simply as ways to augment our current entertainment experiences? Games and simulations that straddle the digital and real worlds, perhaps making a *Minecraft* building inside your house or looking at yourself virtually trying on a new lipstick when you visit *Sephora*. Or, will we use these technologies in ways that tangibly benefit us as a whole? Using them one can create 3D digital art and edifices impossible in the real world. We can attend college with friends and go on vacations with family just as they were right next to us. Will we give up the real world as we know it and accept a digitally enhanced version of the same? Or will we be creative and driven enough to make both the real and the digital worlds as beautiful as we can in lockstep?

THE FUTURE

Simply put, the future is what we make of it. We, as consumers of all that is presented to us, make active choices, every second of every day. These choices matter. Even if we are not paying attention, the machines are. As are the people that read the reports generated by the machines and take decisions on how to give us more of what we desire.

Yes, we may be knowing, sentient beings. However, we can also be addicts and slaves to our desires. We can choose to consume something just to pass our time. Or we can choose to create something new, something of value. Both of value to us and to others. Something that we create, not just because we desire the celebrity or the money, but because we know that in our creating it and in others viewing it, both parties derive some wholesome benefit from what exists as the end product. Technology should be looked at as a vehicle that we can choose to drive wherever we wish. So please be careful of what you do with that vehicle. There are many paths ahead for our individual and collective journeys that we can choose from. Let us try to head in directions that bring us together, that make us happier, and those that we can look back at proudly many generations later.

The writer is a technologist, entrepreneur, and artist. As the CEO of TSN Group, Inc., he is currently working on a new, safer social networking solution

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Auditor should not venture into domain of policy auditing

Former top CAG official **KK Srivastava** the internationally acclaimed poet and author's recent book "Esthetic Blend of Flames of the Minds" on "Mann Ki Baat" programme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been well appreciated as it brings out the best features of 60 long episodes of "Mann Ki Baat" in just 4,000 words. Srivastava, before retiring as Additional Deputy CAG last month, had a long career, spanning over 36 years, believes an auditor should not venture into the domain of policy auditing as that means an attempt to usurp the role of a public representative. In a freewheeling conversation with *The Pioneer's Swarn Kumar Anand*, KK Srivastava talks about his experiences and more...

The Pioneer: On Google, I read articles; your conversations with poets/writers about your fourth book *Soliloquy of a Small-Town Uncivil Servant*, and articles you wrote. I want to engage you with some articles and your service experiences. Leading a retired life, is spending time an issue?

KKs: No. I spend much time in thinking; I take out books I have not read for decades. Before Covid-19 pandemic, I occasionally used to meet friends from your fraternity over lunch or dinner in Press Club of India. The milieu and discourses with journalists and writers are soothing. I often write articles/reviews. Now retired, I try to spend some time in company of my wife which, for reasons best known to her, she does not seem to relish much.

The Pioneer: I understand you wrote your first review in 2011. You analysed a single, short poem, 'I' by a Romanian poetess. It is a long psychoanalysis of a small poem. Please give some background.

KKs: I don't remember if it was the first review but certainly it was one of the earliest ones. I knew Veronica's works earlier. She is sober, quiet and perceptive with limited literary output. This poem ran on her imagination of an arriving train at a platform. I analysed it which became longish. In *Soliloquy of a Small-Town Uncivil Servant*, she went through two sample chapters and made suggestions. In 2013, I introduced her to World Poetry, Canada International. They published her. I don't know if she still writes or not.

The Pioneer: What prompted you to write 'Esthetic Blend of Flames of the Minds' on "Mann Ki Baat" programme of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is a mammoth piece which brings out the best features of sixty long episodes of "Mann Ki Baat" in just four thousand words.

KKs: Because it is apolitical and creative. "Mann Ki Baat" is about creativity of not only one mind i.e. of that of the Prime Minister but of minds of millions of Indians. It connects Indians to India and India to Indians. Being collective thoughts of millions of Indians, "Mann Ki Baat" represents an unprecedented oneness between the Prime Minister and the people of the country and vice versa. Listening to "Mann Ki Baat" is a must for all public, including civil servants. They ought to know India, its past glory and emerging NEW INDIA through the minds of millions of Indians. It gives physical, mental and spiritual solace.

The Pioneer: You reviewed Vinod Rai's book, *Not Just an Accountant: The Diary of the Nation's Conscience Keeper* in Kitaab Singapore. How did you view the book as a reviewer?

KKs: I read a much lesser publicised book by another CAG, late CG Somiah: *The Honest Always Stand Alone*. Somiah's was a complete book: a book of ease, Rai's was a hurried attempt. As a critic, I have to do justice with a book being critiqued. For me the book: its content, themes, influences and temperament matter. The writer stays invisible. I liked Somiah's book. It offered his

holistic life story. You digest complete, not partially covered periods unless you have the second volume. If you read my review in Kitaab Singapore, you will find in second but concluding paragraph my expectations of the same from Vinod Rai. Six years past, I am not sure if second volume came about his whole life experiences.

The Pioneer: Who are the writers in India you interact with or living Indian writers whose works you read?

KKs: Jayanta Mahapatra, the renowned poet from Cuttack, Odisha. He is above ninety and we have been exchanging hand-written letters for last fifteen years. His mental and intellectual alertness is amazing. Sometimes, I phone him. When he returned Padma Shri in November 2015, I wrote to him why I expected him not to do so. Columnist and writer A Surya Prakash's books and articles interest me. I critiqued Chief Editor of Indian Express Raj Kamal Jha's book *SHE WILL BUILD HIM A CITY* in my fourth book and currently reading his latest book *The CITY AND THE SEA*. I cherish eccentricity of his hallucinating themes in stylish prose. I planned to call on him after retirement but Covid has vitiated everything. I am also reading Vinod Kumar Shukla's Hindi poems.

The Pioneer: You had a long career, spanning over thirty-six and half years. You went in capacities from Deputy/Senior Deputy Accountant General, Accountant General, Principal Accountant General, to Pondicherry, Allahabad, Bombay, Ranchi, Jaipur, Rajkot, Delhi as Chief Auditor, New Delhi Municipal Corporation, Gwalior, Thiruvananthapuram and at the end CAG office Delhi and superannuated as Additional Deputy CAG. Your vast experience across the country and varied literary background gives you an enviable position to share your experiences with readers and civil service aspirants.

KKs: I feel amused you took the trouble of seeing my profile. If I saw India, its people, its cultural and intellectual strength, its different shades, it is through the organisation of CAG of India. Mine being a Central service with all India transfer liability, my postings to so many different places taught me uniqueness of Indian people: the oneness within different shades. I could know life people live. I could handle tough associations in places like Allahabad, Ranchi, Rajkot, Gwalior and Thiruvananthapuram. With my growing experience, I could easily relate to staff, their anxieties and strength. When I got posted as Principal Accountant General, Kerala at Thiruvananthapuram, the very next day of my assuming charge, I visited each section, met and shook hands with each and every member of staff. Towards the end, I visited Association room and met members of the association present there. The depressing atmosphere started becoming diminutive immediately. I did this every station I was posted to. It gave me confidence; it gave the staff confidence; it gave a relationship of ease vitally needed to run a big office. Similarly, I had interaction with Principal Secretaries in various States. In retrospect I feel happy to have an augmented life, courtesy learning from experiences of life of thousands of wonderful people.

The Pioneer: Did these transfers never affect your family?

KKs: The family stayed with me throughout.

The Pioneer: We hear various State Governments don't respond to audit. Which State was most responsive to audit? Please share a few experiences?

KKs: I had cordial relationship particularly with Principal Secretaries (Finance) in every State. It facilitated response from the Government. But Gujarat, where I was stationed at Rajkot,



was where officers showed inherent keenness to discuss particularly draft Performance Reviews and that too at very high level. There was an issue. Immediately, after taking over in 2008, I called on the then Chief Secretary who understood issues from me and within a month or so, remedial measures were taken by State Government with detailed work plan for a year in place. Similarly, in 2009, Performance Review on Modernisation of Police Scheme was to be discussed and the then ACS (Home), chaired the meeting spending full half-day in Gandhi Nagar conference room where many senior officers were present. He read each and every line of the draft report himself and requested authorities to respond and give comments/constraints, if any. He wanted me to appreciate and reflect these in the review. I learnt a lot from him during discussion. At the end, both audit and administration were satisfied. I moved from Gujarat but think the review featured in the Audit Report.

Kerala was equally responsive at very high level, though I was heading Accounts Office. Early 2016, perhaps January or February, one evening, ACS (Finance) telephoned me regarding a portion of work of our office and told me to meet Chief Minister without any delay. I sought appointment from him. Next day, it was a State holiday but he called me at his residence. I briefed two other PASG located at the station and urged them to accompany me. They promptly agreed. Next day, we met the Chief Minister and I explained to him how functioning of that work had improved very significantly in our office and showed him data. My two colleagues supported my contention wholeheartedly. Then he came up to the door where I, folding my hands, said, "Namaste, Sir. Kindly keep our request in view. Our office is performing well." He looked at me; it was reassuring. That important portion of work stayed with us. On taking over as DG in CAG office, I called on my earlier boss and told her about that episode saying "Ma'am, I did not bother you. I solved it locally." Appreciating it, she told, "That's why we call you, KK." Unfortunately, we lost her sometime back. Normally, I tried to solve issues without flagging these as big issues.

The Pioneer: Recently, when GC Murmu, an IAS officer of 1985 batch, was appointed as CAG, there were talks about his superseding six IA&AS officers (three from 1983 and three from 1984 batch). Is it IAS versus IA&AS

issue? Is it discouraging for the officers and organisation?

KKs: When I joined the service at the then Staff College, Shimla, a faculty member explained to us the meaning of the word, "cadre" in the context of IA&AS as a cadre. He clarified that the post of CAG is an ex-cadre post. The post of CAG is not a cadre post for IA&AS. Second issue is IAS versus IA&AS. No doubt IA&AS as a service is an excellent service, but its aspiring members cannot claim a comparison with IAS officers when it comes to appointment of CAG. IAS officers have wide range of experiences from the lowest ebb in a district to the top posts of Secretary to Government of India. They work with different regimes of political leadership which is a big learning opportunity for them. They have public dealings, they meet public, come to grips with people's grievances on day-to-day basis; they are a part of micro and macro socio-economic problem solving process. They prepare ground-work for political leadership in deciding policies and understand the essentials of policy

making. They are certainly better placed as compared to any other service including IA&AS, to occupy the chair of CAG of India. I agree that knowledge of audit and accounts may be beneficial for an outsider CAG, but that knowledge alone is not the sole criterion. Wise people accept immutably universal facts and don't lament over spilt milk at the last moment.

The Pioneer: What about the supersession of six IA&AS officers?

KKs: My answer is embedded above. I will clarify my understanding once more. Supersession is within a particular service. Supersession is never with reference to other services. It is unbelievable that an IA&AS officer of 1983 batch has been superseded by an IAS officer of 1985 batch, though it is quite possible and a fact an I A&AS officer of 1983 batch being successfully superseded by IA&AS officers of 1985 batch and who knows it better than me. Hence, GC Murmu has superseded no IA&AS officer. The post of CAG is a constitutional post and the Prime

Minister has the final word on his selection. I visited GC Murmu's Wikipedia page. Though it might seem preposterous on my part to say so, in my view, he is a very suitable selection for the post of present CAG and seems to be a down to earth man. Organisation needs such a CAG.

The Pioneer: It is alleged that there is lack of transparency in selection of CAG. How would you react?

KKs: First, I have no means to ascertain whether the process is transparent or not. Second, as I understand this issue has also seen judicial scrutiny in the past. Third, if certain individuals and groups think process is non-transparent, they should take timely and appropriate steps to elevate discussion, debates to higher plateau.

The Pioneer: Why only IAS officers? Why not other professionals like economists, chartered accountants, academics, scientists or even journalists?

KKs: I tend to agree. This should be debated in various forums.

The Pioneer: As a writer, your perception of issues will have a more matured interpretative value. A person can draw meaningful conclusions from your views. What are your suggestions to new CAG?

KKs: I am not sanguine if others will be so sure of what you say but still I will share my honest views. My point of view is CAG of India means he is CAG for 138 crore Indians. Audit Reports get processed and discussed through Public Accounts Committees and COPU. That is a fine arrangement constitutionally mandated. We chalk out audit plans for both Centre and States. I don't find any say by even a segment of Indian population on their suggestions. There is Audit Advisory Committee where experts are invited but these experts are not substitutes for 138 crore people. Therefore, my first suggestion to new CAG will be to open its website for one month in advance before the process of preparation of Audit Plans begins. During that month, public should be free to offer suggestions for topics to be covered in audit in next audit cycle. It will have two advantages. First, when nation is aiming to become an inclusive society, audit should open its gate to inclusion of nation's population. Let people express themselves. CAG's decision on audit plans will be final. Second, it will increase awareness in public about this august institution which is not there at present as it should be. When Sustainable Development Goals were being

finalised, views were called from across countries through its website.

Second, last month, I wrote an article *Kiran raises hopes for a robust New India*. Late evening of the day article appeared, I got a call from a Professor of Psychiatry, AIIMS who had read the article. He invited me to join as a panelist for a webinar on "India's first Mental Health Access Summit", organised by AIIMS in collaboration with Mental Health Foundation, India. I participated in it on 4th of this month. I shared my little bit with mental health professionals. The picture of mental health issues that came during panel discussion was alarming.

An All India Performance Review on Assessment of extent of mental disorders, population affected, availability of infrastructure and preparedness to handle this invading behemoth is the need of the hour. This report will be very handy to Government, Medical Institutes, and NGOs generating keenness in Public Accounts Committee and public. I am not sure if this exercise was done in recent past. CAG may like to consider it.

The Pioneer: I came across an interesting set of statistics. I saw profile of some officers in different batches from 1981 to 1990. There were/are some officers who stayed/are staying in Delhi and adjacent States like Jaipur, Chandigarh, Faridabad or even Noida for 20/25 years, including deputation period in different spells. They had/have repeated postings in Delhi/CAG office. A few of them from this group went abroad for posting. This trend is seen even in case of currently serving officers. There are clusters of some officers having these three commonalities in selected batches spending almost 60 to 70 per cent of their service in Delhi and around places alone? It seems there is an elite group. Does it not affect efficiency?

KKs: You remind me of a Hindi proverb, "Haath Kangan ko Arsi Kaya." The same thing has been felt by a majority of IA&AS officers over last so many years, even decades. Statistics is cited and statistics does not tell lie. Your observation is correct. It might affect efficiency at various levels.

The Pioneer: What are the expectations from new CAG in this respect?

KKs: New CAG may like to look into trends flagged. He may like to consider institutionalising steps as he deems necessary so that these end and corrective measures are taken. The new CAG seems to be a down to earth man.

The Pioneer: There have

been media reports about delay in finalisation of audit reports in recent past. Any comments?

KKs: During last about three years before retirement, I had nothing to do with processing of audit reports. Therefore, I cannot answer your question.

The Pioneer: Any comments on delay in placing the reports in Parliament/Assemblies.

KKs: The decision to place the reports has to be taken by the Government. The CAG has no role in it. His role ends with sending the reports to the President and Governors with the request to cause these to be laid in Parliament/State Assembly.

The Pioneer: Some audit reports become controversial. Why?

KKs: Late ST Kenghe was Director of IA&AS Staff College, Shimla when I was a probationer. He was a scholar. He quoted in Sanskrit from Vedas and Upanishads while talking to probationers. He was fond of saying, "Act as an auditor but don't adopt holier than thou attitude". He wrote the same thing in an article published in a book during late TN Chaturvedi's period.

Two lessons emerge from above. An auditor should never think he is a paragon of virtue. Second his reports should speak, if at all necessary. Controversies arise if an auditor talks about his "achievements". An audit report is a consequence of incessant hard work of more than hundred staff/officers. It should be kept in view. If these two criteria are respected, Reports will be respected.

The Pioneer: There were issues in the past weather an auditor can audit policies. What are your views and what role do you envisage for audit in current times?

KKs: I think an auditor should not venture into domain of policy auditing. Let me explain how I look at it. Political parties when they go to elections, go with their manifesto: a set of promises made to people. When a party comes to power, in order to convert the manifesto into action, they decide policies. Thus, a policy links public representatives and people through manifesto. Once an auditor tries to audit policies, he starts meddling with this link and thereby tries to usurp the role of a public representative which is barred in constitution. But he can always audit the outcome of policy which is normally done. Coming to the role of audit in current times, late CG Somiah, the then CAG's advocacy "Audit as an aid to administration" should be respected and followed. Audit should facilitate reforms undertaken by Government and help in formation of a NEW INDIA.

The Pioneer: Any advice to young IA&AS officers?

KKs: It is said of the community of auditors they never welcome advice to them but are first to offer unsolicited advice to others. It's in lighter vein. Audit organisation has intelligent and hardworking young officers. They should work for the organisation which has a long, glorious history. They should not suffer from 'fixity and rigidity' and should contribute to 'collective personality' of IA&AS and thereby strengthen the hands of CAG of India. Therefore, they should ponder over and learn from these lines of Salman Rushdie's *THE GOLDEN HOUSE*, "In these our degenerate times, men bent on nothing but vain-glory and personal gain-hollow, bombastic men for whom nothing is off-limits if it advances their pretty cause... and calling all who oppose them liars, envious, little people, stupid people, stiff, and in a precise reversal of the truth, dishonest and corrupt." My best wishes to them.

The Pioneer: Do you have any plans to write your autobiography?

KKs: The bridge is not visible to me. We will cross it if it ever comes.



The post of CAG is not a cadre post for IA&AS. Second issue is IAS versus IA&AS. No doubt IA&AS as a service is an excellent service, but its aspiring members cannot claim a comparison with IAS officers when it comes to appointment of CAG. IAS officers have wide range of experiences from the lowest ebb in a district to the top posts of Secretary to Government of India.



Lucky number 19
Lucky colour White
Lucky day Tuesday

Lucky number 15
Lucky colour Sky Blue
Lucky day Thursday

Lucky number 6
Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Friday

Lucky number 14
Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Thursday

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