

ANALYSIS 7

GRAFT-FREE
GOVERNANCE

MONEY 8

EIGHT CORE INDUSTRIES' OUTPUT
CONTRACTS 0.8 PC IN SEPTEMBER

SPORTS 11

CSK SPOIL
KKR'S PARTY

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY OCTOBER 30, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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CHANDINI TO
HEADLINE A THRILLER
ON LINGUISTIC
FORENSICS

Page 12

KOLKATA INTERNATIONAL FILM
FESTIVAL DEFERRED TO JANUARY

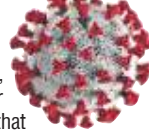
The Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF), scheduled to be held in November, has been deferred to January next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday. Initially the 26th edition of the KIFF, with limited number of visitors, was scheduled to be held from November 5 to 12. It will now be organised from January 8 to 15, 2021. Banerjee posted on her twitter handle, "After receiving global film fraternity's consent, I hereby inform all stakeholders of Kolkata International Film Festival & cine lovers that our festival has been rescheduled, given the current circumstances. 'It will now be held from Jan 8-15, 2021. Let the preparations begin!'"

PAKISTAN WOMAN GANG-RAPED
AFTER BEING SOLD BY HUSBAND

A woman in Pakistan's Punjab province was allegedly sold for rupees 5,000 by her husband to four persons who gang-raped her for 21 days. The incident took place in North Sargodha, some 200 kilometres from Lahore. The suspects took her to their place and gang-raped her for 21 days before she managed to flee and reached the local police station. The woman on Wednesday submitted an application in the sessions court Sargodha after police refused to file a case against her husband and four rapists. Additional sessions judge Muhammad Ijaz issued a notice to district police officer Sargodha and sought a report on the matter on November 2.

SOME RECOVERED CORONAVIRUS
PATIENTS MAY STILL CARRY VIRUS

Some recovered COVID-19 patients may still carry the novel coronavirus, according to a new study which recommends that people leaving quarantine avoid close contact with others, wear a face mask, and possibly undergo an additional test to confirm if they are free of the virus. The study, assessed 131 COVID-19 patients who met the World Health Organization (WHO) criteria for discontinuation of quarantine, and found that close to 17 per cent of them, who were considered fully recovered, tested positive for the virus in follow-up screening. "Our findings indicate that a noteworthy rate of recovered patients with COVID-19 could still be asymptomatic carriers of the virus," said study co-author Francesco Landi from Fondazione Policlinico Universitario in Italy.

US TO SCRAP COMPUTERISED
LOTTERY SYSTEM FOR H-1B VISAS

The Trump administration has proposed to scrap the computerised lottery system to grant H-1B work visas to foreign technology professionals and replace it with a wage-level-based selection process, a move that is expected to counter the downward pressure on the wages of US workers. A notification on the new system is being published in the Federal Register on Thursday. Stakeholders have 30 days to respond to the notification, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Wednesday, less than a week before the US presidential election. Replacing the computerised draw of lots to decide on the successful H-1B applicants, the DHS said it is expected to help counter the downward pressure on the wages of American workers that is created by an annual influx of relatively lower-paid, new cap-subject H-1B workers.

Sensex sheds 173
pts amid F&O
expiry; Nifty slips
below 11,700

8

Left govt on the
backfoot after
Sivasankar's
arrest

5

Edu institutions
get ready to
reopen with Covid
protocols

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksam:

Ashwin & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi: Chaturdashi: 05:44 pm

Nakshatram: Revati: 02:57 pm

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

Rahukalam: 10:34 am - 11:59 am

Yamagandam: 02:50 pm - 04:16 pm

Varjyam: NIL

Gulika: 07:42 am - 09:08 am

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 12:15 pm - 02:03 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:36 am - 12:22 pm

VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 31/22

Humidity: 70%

Sunrise: 06:13 am

Sunset: 05:45 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated October 29, 2020 5:00 PM

POLAVARAM

Naidu's letter 'accepting' revised cost comes back to hurt AP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

By all accounts, the road taken by the State government to convince the Centre to release the funds required for completion of the Polavaram irrigation project is a thorny one - the thorns in the form of not only a financial crunch but also of some 'missteps' by the previous TDP government.

With the country facing a financial crisis of unprecedented magnitude, convincing the Centre to release the required funds is becoming increasingly difficult.

The latest stumbling block to the State government's effort is a letter by former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu to the Prime Minister, in which the Andhra Pradesh government accept the revised cost of the project at the price level as on April 1, 2014 and requested the Prime Minister to approve the revised cost.

A copy of the letter sent by



Naidu, dated January 12, 2018, to Modi requesting the Government of India to fulfil the promised made in the AP Reorganisation Act-2014 states: "As per the orders issued by the Ministry of Finance,

Government of India Vide F.No.1(2)/PF-1/2014(pt), Dt.30.09.2016, revised cost of the Project at the price level as on 01.04.2014 has been submitted to the Central Water Commission (CWC). I request

the kind intervention of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to direct the concerned for early approval of the revised cost (sic)".

A senior YSRCP leader told The Pioneer that Naidu's letter

“Total expenditure incurred on Polavaram project under National Project upto December 2017 is Rs 7780.07 Crores. Out of this, an amount of Rs 4329.06 Cr has been released to Govt. of Andhra Pradesh by Government of India. The balance amount of Rs 3451.01 Cr (Rs 7780.07 Cr - Rs 4329.06 Cr) is still to be released by the Government of India. Early reimbursement of the same would ensure speedy completion as per schedule.

As per the orders issued by the Ministry of Finance Government of India Vide F.No.1(2)PF-1/2014(pt), Dt.30.09.2016, revised cost of the Project at the price level as on 01-04-2014 has been submitted to Central Water Commission (CWC). I request the kind intervention of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to direct the concerned for early approval of the revised cost.

— N CHANDRABABU NAIDU,
In his letter to the Prime Minister dated January 12, 2018

(1035432/2018/EXOF PSL SECY-GAD)

was now being used by the Centre to press the State Government to accept the revised cost of the project at the prices prevailing on April 1, 2014. "How can this be acceptable to us?" the YSRCP leader said, on condition of anonymity since

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy is pursuing the matter with the Centre and he does not want to jeopardise the talks that are at a 'delicate' stage.

"The CM has been pursuing the matter regarding Polavaram construction and its comple-

tion with the Centre. But it must be noted that he has to contend and undo the damage done by Chandrababu Naidu during his rule. The previous government had accepted every decision taken by the Centre without murmur or objection. This is now proving costly to the State," the YSRCP leader said.

He said that Naidu's aforementioned letter to the Prime Minister may prove to be quite a major stumbling block in the Chief Minister's efforts.

Earlier, sources familiar with the matter had told The Pioneer that Jagan has been given 'concrete assurance' by the Jal Shakti Ministry that Andhra Pradesh will not be burdened with the cost of resettling and rehabilitating the people displaced by the project. 'in principle' and the Centre will honour the promises made in the AP Reorganisation Act-2014.

2

NGT halts AP's RLIP project

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The National Green Tribunal on Thursday ordered a stay on construction work of the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Project (RLIP) proposed by the Andhra Pradesh government across the River Krishna in the backwaters of Srisaillam reservoir to draw three tmc ft of water per day to irrigate parched lands of Rayalaseema.

Acting on a petition filed by a Telangana activist Gavinolla Srinivas, the green tribunal made it clear to the AP government that it should not go ahead with the construction of Rayalaseema lift scheme, unless it obtained all clearances from the Centre, including environmental clearance.

It also directed that the AP government submits a detailed project report (DPR) to the



Ministry of Jal Shakti and unless the project report is approved, it cannot take up construction work.

The NGT gave its order based on the report submitted by the Union Ministry that the scheme does not have any approval from the Centre and

that the state had not submitted its DPR to the ministry till now.

The NGT bench comprising Justice Ramakrishnan and irrigation expert Sibal Das Gupta brushed aside the argument of the state government that the scheme was not a new project

but only part of the Telugu Ganga project and there is no additional ayacut involved.

Telangana has been pressuring the Centre to issue immediate direction to Andhra Pradesh to stop work on expansion of Pothreddypadu regulator and construction of Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme.

TS Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu had written to Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, saying that this could be done by immediately handing over operational control of Srisaillam reservoir to Telangana.

In his letter, KCR said that the Rayalaseema Lift irrigation project would "irrevocably compromise the interests and rights of Telangana".

2

Govt to invest Rs 17,300 cr
in AP's health sector: Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government would be spending Rs 17,300 crore to revamp existing government hospitals and for setting up 16 new medical colleges in AP under Nadu-Nedu initiative.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who chaired a review meeting on Nadu Nedu in hospitals here on Thursday, directed officials to finalise the tenders for new medical colleges by January.

The Chief Minister sought details on the establishment of new medical colleges, development of village clinics, primary healthcare centres, community health centres, area hospitals and district-level hospitals



under the Nadu-Nedu initiative.

Reiterating that all the hospitals in the state should have better medical facilities, the Chief Minister said that there will be no compromise on the quality of infrastructure or the services being provided in

the hospitals.

He stated that the hospital authorities should be accountable and responsible in all aspects and directed them to ensure that all facilities are in place and make sure that patients coming to the hospital should experience the feel of corporate hospitals. He said that there shouldn't be any complaint on sanitation or other facilities.

The Chief Minister instructed the authorities to study best practices in the construction of hospitals and implement them in the State. In addition to these, he also stressed on following environment friendly initiatives and setting up green buildings.

2

‘Dharani’ a trendsetter: KCR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu said on Thursday that the path-breaking Dharani, one-stop portal for all matters concerning land transactions across the State, would emerge as a trendsetter for the nation.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the por-

tal at Moodu Chintalapally in Medchal-Malkajigiri district, the Chief Minister said: "Gone are the days when people, particularly farmers, had to make the rounds of various offices for land transactions, including registration and mutation, often greasing the palms of corrupt officials."

2

Senior IPS officer Ravindranath
alleges harassment, resigns

PNS ■ BENGALURU

A senior Andhra Pradesh batch Indian Police Service officer has resigned from the service accusing a few individuals of harassing him indirectly.

According to top police sources, Dr P Ravindranath, who is serving as Additional Director General of Police in the Forest Cell tendered his resignation to the Chief Secretary T M Vijay Bhaskar through the Director General of Police Praveen Sood on October 28.

The sources added that in the recent transfer and posting list order, two top IPS officers Amar Kumar Pandey and T Suneel Kumar were promoted to the rank of the Director General of Police. However, Ravindranath's name was missing. In his resignation letter, Ravindranath stated that he had served the people of Karnataka with utmost devotion but in the last four years he faced "problems created by a few individuals."

2

LG Polymers case: SC asks NGT to defer hearing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

LG Polymers Ltd, from whose plant at Visakhapatnam poisonous Styrene vapour got leaked on May 7 leading to the death of 15 persons and hospitalisation of scores of others, has challenged the suo motu hearing of the case by National Green Tribunal.

On behalf of the company, senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi filed a petition in the Supreme Court stating that the NGT had no locus standi in taking up suo motu the case of the Styrene gas

leakage.

He brought to the notice of the SC that the NGT was hearing the case on November 3.

The Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Lalith, which heard the arguments of both the sides, asked the company representatives to submit their objections within 10 days over the findings of the committee appointed by NGT in the case.

The Supreme Court directed that till it gave further orders, the NGT should not take up hearing but defer the proceedings. The court post-



poned the case to November 16 for further hearing.

The Visakhapatnam police had in July arrested 12 persons including the chief executive officer and two directors of LG Polymers Ltd. They include

company's managing director and CEO Sunkey Jeong, technical director D S Kim (both South Korean nationals), additional director (operations) Pitchuka Poorna Chandra Mohan Rao, head of the department and shift in-charge Kodi Srinivas Kiran Kumar, team leader (production) Raju Satyanarayana.

However, all of them were released later on bail. The Korean officials were also given permission to leave the country.

The state government sus-

pended deputy chief inspector of factories KBS Prasad for alleged negligence in inspecting the LG Polymers plant for any potential hazards in its design.

Besides, Visakhapatnam zonal environmental engineer R Lakshmi Narayana and regional environmental engineer P Prasad Rao were also suspended for allowing operation of LG Polymers plant without environmental clearance and the import and storage of huge quantities of styrene without verifying safety and environmental issues.

2

Raju style: Taking on the powers-that-be

Narsapuram MP Kanumuru Raghu Rama Krishna Raju has been in the thick of news of late for rebelling against his party — the YSRCP — line and making no bones about it.

The MP has been facing protest by activists of his own party and had sought security to visit his own constituency, fearing an attack. In a conversation with The Pioneer, he tells Prasad VSD Gosala that he is being targeted as he is standing up for what is right, and after raising the agenda of 'Hindutva', for speaking out against conversion of Hindus, and protecting the lands belonging to the TTD, the plight of farmers in Amaravati and other burning issues.

Q: Why have you picked up Hindutva agenda?

A: I am only talking about the Constitutional provisions that no government should be involved in propagation of any religion and give financial assistance to build churches. This government has proposed to give Rs 5,000 per

month to around 29,500 pastors and is also giving money to build churches.

Also, no government has any right to the lands owned by the Lord. So how could the State government decide to auction TTD lands? Naturally, I opposed the decision.

Q: Is your stand not against your party line?

A: I am advising YSRCP leaders to respect the Constitution in the interest of the party. Since we are elected by the people for the people, it's our duty to uphold the values and respect the Constitution always, irrespective of party line.

Q: How aligned are you with the YSRCP ideology?

A: I am associated with the ideology that does not go against the Constitution. I opposed the move to scrap the medium of instruction in the mother tongue as it's against Article 350(A).

Q: Have you been ill-treated by the party leadership?

A: My party has already filed a disqualification petition against me with the Lok Sabha Speaker. As the petition was not in accordance with the Schedule 10 of the Constitution, it was rejected. So my party has kept me at a distance, but I have not kept the party at a distance.

Q: You have been facing criticism for not visiting your constituency even after getting central protection. Why are you not going to the constituency?

A: I have been advised against visiting my constituency for one month as some of

those opposed to me plan to file a Covid norm violation case. However, I am in touch with my constituents through videoconferencing on a daily basis.

Q: Is there any proposal from you to end the rift between the party and yourself?

A: I neither sent any proposal to the party nor the party sent any proposal to me for a patch up. Since they sent the disqualification petition in a hasty manner, perhaps they are not able to proceed further.



Edu institutions get ready to reopen with Covid protocols

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

At a time many states in the country are in a quandary over reopening of schools with fear of a third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Andhra Pradesh government has decided to open educational institutions on November 2 with all precautionary measures in place.

The State government has decided to reopen schools and colleges from November 2, Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney had said in her order.

The schools would be run on alternate days in three phases for which officials are making arrangements. Precautionary measures would be taken to contain the spread Covid-19, the CS order said, giving details on the schedule of classes.

All government schools and colleges would reopen on November 2. Classes 9, 10, 11 and Intermediate first and second year would function on alternate days only for half-a-day.

All the higher secondary colleges would also start functioning from November 2 on a rotation basis and from November 23, Classes 6,7 and 8



Plan for teacher mobilisation, prioritising regions that were worst hit by the crisis.

- Explore, as an exceptional measure, the emergency deployment of teachers to areas affected by high teacher mortality rates during the crisis.
- Train teachers to monitor children and identify those experiencing particular difficulties when they are back in school.

would start functioning on half-a-day basis.

Classes 1,2,3, 4 and 5 would start functioning from December 14. On alternate days and on half-a-day basis. The

same schedule would apply to all government schools and colleges, she said.

Meanwhile, there is a mixed response from the parents regarding the reopening of

UNESCO's plan

- with health authorities the safety of school buildings and their surroundings before reopening.
- Establish conditions that must be met before schools are reopened. This will lessen the probability of a new outbreak and boost the confidence of parents, students, and teachers in terms of school safety.
- Ensure communities' trust in the health and safety measures taken by schools to guarantee the well-being of returning students and to ensure that the risk of contagion is minimised.
- Renovate, improve, or install (as necessary) hygiene facilities like washrooms, toilets, and bathrooms; guarantee that hand washing stations will be available; and provide running water as well as, for example, soap and disposable hand towels.

schools. Doubting hygiene and social distance enforcement, some parents may not send their kids to schools.

Governor, CM greet Muslims on Milad-un-Nabi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Thursday conveyed his greetings to members of the Muslim community on the occasion of "Eid-Milad-un-Nabi", the birthday of Prophet Muhammad.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy too conveyed his greetings on the occasion.

"I extend my warm greetings to the Muslim brethren on the occasion of Eid-Milad-un-Nabi, the birthday of Prophet Muhammad," the Governor said in his message.

He said that the life of the Prophet has been an inspiring saga of love, brotherhood and virtue to mankind.

"The Prophet's mission is fulfilled when we serve our fellow countrymen with faith, trust, care and compassion.

May the birthday of Prophet Muhammad usher in peace and goodwill amongst all," the Governor said.

"Prophet Muhammad preached peace, harmony and universal brotherhood," the Chief Minister said in his message.

Telangana relaxes EAMCET eligibility criteria for this year

NAMRATA SRIVASTAVA
■ HYDERABAD

The eligibility criteria for Telangana State Engineering, Agriculture and Medical Common Entrance Test (TS EAMCET) candidates, who qualified in the exams, has been relaxed only for this year.

Now, instead of 45 per cent marks, students who have cleared their Intermediate examinations and qualified in the entrance test are eligible for admission.

The State government's move of doing away with minimum qualifying marks comes after the Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed the authorities concerned and Jawaharlal Nehru

Technological University, Hyderabad (JNTU-H) to postpone the second phase of counselling, scheduled to be held between October 29 and November 5, to enable students, who have now been rendered ineligible, to appear for counselling.

The decision will benefit students of Telangana Open School Society (TOSS) and those who were to write the Intermediate Public Advanced Supplementary Examinations, but were instead promoted with 35 pc.

This year, the Telangana State government promoted several students without conducting the exams and they were awarded minimum marks.

Thus many students who qualified in the EAMCET could not get the ranks as they failed to meet the eligibility criteria of 45 per cent marks in the Intermediate.

As per the rules, the TS EAMCET candidates should obtain at least 45 per cent marks (40 per cent in case of candidates belonging to reserved category) in the subjects specified taken together at 10+2 pattern except for B Pharmacy course.

This is a one time measure in the wake of the ongoing pandemic situation.

The authorities have also revised the schedule of admission in EAMCET colleges, keeping in mind the relaxations given to the students.

State to invest Rs 17,300...

Continued from page 1

He directed the authorities to immediately release Rs 5,472 crore for revamping the existing hospitals under the Nadu-Nedu programme.

Tender for medical colleges to be finalised by November end.

Meanwhile, the officials informed that the tenders for medical colleges in Paderu, Piduguralla, Machilipatnam and Pulivendula, will be finalised by the end of November, and for Bapatla, Narsapuram, Eluru, Anakapalli, Markapuram, Madanapalle and Nandyal medical colleges the tenders will be done by December.

For Vizianagaram, Rajahmundry, Penukonda, Amalapuram and Adoni medical colleges the tenders will be finalised by

January. For all these medical colleges it is estimated that Rs 7,500 crore will be utilised.

Discussing the Aarogyasri referral programme, the Chief Minister stated that village/ward secretariats will be acting as referral centres on a temporary basis, until the establishment of YSR Health Clinics.

The list of empanelled hospitals has to be displayed at all secretariats and the health assistant or ANM will be guiding the patients in receiving treatment from the best hospital.

As the Aarogyasri programme will be made available to the remaining six districts from November 13, the Chief Minister directed the authorities to add any treatment or procedures to the list if necessary.

NGT halts AP's RLIP...

Continued from page 1

"I want to express strong objections of Telangana to the taking up of expansion of Pothireddypadu Head Regulator and the newly proposed Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme. The original project itself is completely illegal as it has no water allocation, no approval by any statutory authority, and is meant to send water outside Krishna Basin", KCR wrote.

He said that though the Rayalseema Scheme was never sanctioned by any statutory body, Andhra Pradesh has proposed to lift 3 tmc ft per day from the bottom of Srisailem reservoir and transport it to the Pennar and adjoining basins.

AP slashes liquor prices...

Continued from page 1

An analysis of the inflow of illegal liquor into State of Andhra Pradesh during the period of one month — from September 15 to October 15 — revealed that 1,211 cases of smuggling have been registered, out of which 630 cases were in respect of smuggling from Telangana, 546 cases in respect of Karnataka, 24 cases in respect of Odisha and 11

cases in respect of Tamil Nadu.

The most smuggled liquor brands are in the category of medium and premium segments. The report points to the large difference between the MRPs of medium and premium liquor brands, observing that the prices of some brands of liquor in AP are more than double the MRPs prevailing in Telangana and Karnataka.

"The report therefore suggests reduction in the MRPs of

medium and premium brands of liquor so as to prevent smuggling of liquor in these segments and consequent drain of the revenues of the State," the order said.

The government also reviewed the matter and noticed that apart from an increase in the smuggling of liquor into the State, there have been unfortunate deaths due to consumption of sanitizers and methyl alcohol.

DEE arrested for accepting bribe of Rs 4K

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The ACB officials caught B Ramu, Deputy Executive Engineer (DEE) of the Rural Water Supply (RWS) department, Narsampet, red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 4,000 from a contractor at his office in Narsampet in the district on Thursday.

Ramu had demanded Rs 24,000 bribe for the clearance of bills worth Rs 20 lakhs from the contractor, Rajako-muriah in Khanapuram mandal.

Naidu's letter ...

Continued from page 1

The Chief Minister's efforts had been redoubled of late following the failure by the Centre skipping mention of the rehabilitation and resettlement cost in its response to an RTI query, leading to confusion that it would release funds only for the execution of the irrigation component of the project.

In its reply to the RTI query, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said that so far, Rs 8,614.16 have been released for the project since 2015. While the Centre gave Rs 950 crore for the project on its own,

NABARD released Rs 7,664.16 crore, it had said.

"Not just this past week, but right from the day he has taken charge as the Chief Minister, The absence of R&R component in the response to the RTI query may have been inadvertent, especially since the question was precise and so was the answer too," the source said. "The total expenditure incurred on the Polavaram project under the National Project upto December 2017 is 7,780.07 crore. Out of this, an amount of Rs 4,329.06 crore has been released to Andhra Pradesh by the Centre," Naidu's aforementioned letter said.

IPS officer Ravindranath ...

Continued from page 1

He stated that he had approached the Central Administrative Tribunal and High Court and obtained relief.

He added that the Supreme Court too gave him justice on October 15 with respect to his service matter.

"But a few individuals prevented justice for me. Therefore, having undergone agony of the indirect harassment, I submit my resignation herewith to lead

a peaceful life," Ravindranath said.

He asked the Chief Secretary to accept his resignation.

The 1989 batch IPS officer from Andhra Pradesh had landed in a controversy six years ago when he was accused of allegedly clicking pictures of a woman at a cafe in Bengaluru.

The woman in her complaint to the police had stated that when she and her cousin were at the cafe they saw a man staring at them and clicking pictures.

'Dharani' a trendsetter: KCR

Continued from page 1

Telangana had achieved tremendous progress in all sectors of the economy, including power, agriculture, industry and irrigation, KCR said.

Dharani portal was an important step towards resolving issues pertaining to lands across the State. "With this exercise, about 1.45 lakh crore acres of land in the State now have clear titles. This was not

an easy task, but one which we had to take up," he said.

Developed by the Telangana State Technical Services (TSTS) Department, Dharani comprises two separate parts for agricultural lands and non-agricultural lands.

Going forward, the revenue portal was bound to have an impact across the country since both the Union and other State governments would be under pressure to introduce

similar measures to ensure transparency in land dealings and simplify procedures, the Chief Minister surmised.

"Even before the formal launch of the portal, during the trial run in the past three to four days, officials reported heavy traffic since thousands of people not just from the State but also from other countries were accessing Dharani as they were keen on knowing its functioning," KCR said.

Covid caseload breaches 80L mark with 49,881 new cases

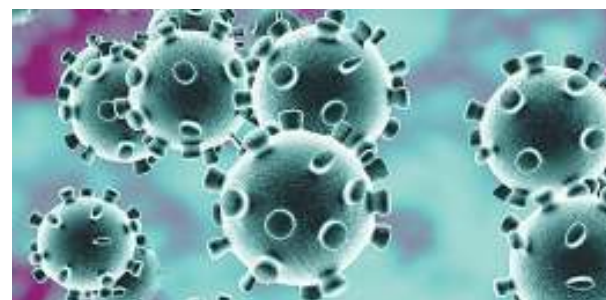
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's Covid-19 caseload surpassed the 80-lakh mark on Thursday, 18 days after it had gone past 70 lakh, with 49,881 new cases while the recoveries surged to 73.15 lakh pushing the national recovery rate to 90.99 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 80,40,203 and the death toll climbed to 1,20,527 with the novel coronavirus virus claiming 517 lives in a span of 24 hours in the country, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The Covid-19 case fatality rate has further declined to 1.49 per cent.

There are 6,03,687 active cases of coronavirus infection



in the country which comprises 7.5 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

According to the ICMR, a cumulative total of 10,65,63,440 samples have been tested up to October 28 with 10,75,760 samples being tested on Wednesday.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on

August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28 and crossed 70 lakh on October 11.

The 517 new fatalities include 91 from Maharashtra, 60 from West Bengal, 55 each from Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, 40 from Delhi, 35

from Tamil Nadu and 27 from Kerala.

A total of 1,20,527 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 43,554 from Maharashtra followed by 11,046 from Karnataka, 11,018 from Tamil Nadu, 6,958 from Uttar Pradesh, 6,643 from Andhra Pradesh, 6,664 from West Bengal, 6,396 from Delhi, 4,158 from Punjab and 3,701 from Gujarat.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

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

Over 88K tests in AP yield 2,905 Covid positive cases

Vijayawada: A new record high of 88,778 samples were tested in a single day for the coronavirus in Andhra Pradesh but only 2,905 of them turned positive, in what is seen as a clear indication of the continuing decline in the spread of the infection.

The latest bulletin said a total of 78,62,459 tests had been done in the state so far, which revealed an overall infection positivity rate of 10.40 per cent, after 8,17,679 cases were confirmed.

In 24 hours ending 9 am on Thursday, as many as 3,243 patients had recovered from the disease, taking the total to

7,84,752. Another 16 patients succumbed, the lowest in a day in many months, as the overall toll mounted to 6,659, the bulletin said.

The active cases slumped to 26,268.

West Godavari district added 494, East Godavari 414, Krishna 361 and Guntur 359 fresh cases.

Kurnool reported the lowest 25, Vizianagaram 70, Srikakulam 90 and SPS Nellore 96 new cases. Four districts SPS Nellore, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and Kurnool now have less than 1,000 active cases each.

6 arrested for trying to sell leopard skin

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

In a joint operation, sleuths of Task Force, Special Branch and Devapur police arrested six persons for allegedly trying to sell leopard skin at Gunduguda village in Kasipet mandal. The accused were identified as Gopathi Vamshi, Sikram Gangu, Jupaka Durga Prasad, Shaik Jameel, Wajid Khan and Avula Sai Krishna.

Gangu admitted that he contacted his friends Gopati Vamashi who in turn approached his cousin Murali for disposing the skin of the carnivore which was reportedly poached by Shankar in the forests of Mangi, a fortnight back.

Govt to unveil tourism policy soon

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The government will unveil the tourism policy soon, disclosed Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao, Minister for Tourism, Culture & Youth Advancement, at the CII Andhra Pradesh Tourism conclave.

The Confederation of Indian Industry organised the Andhra Pradesh Tourism conclave with a theme focusing on 'Restarting Tourism and Hospitality Sector - Andhra Pradesh as most preferred Destination' through digital mode. Delivering the keynote address at the Tourism Conclave, the Tourism Minister said that tourism in the country has grown by leaps and bounds over the years, with each region of the country, contributing something to its splendour and exuberance.

Srinivasa Rao felt that Andhra Pradesh has the distinction of being a leading tourism destination in the country and is presently, the third most visited State in



terms of domestic tourism. In view of Covid-19, Andhra Pradesh would continue to promote the State domestically to attract more number of tourists into the State.

The State is a microcosm within itself - offering unmatched tourism potential to investors and tourists. It offers a multitude of theme based options to explore across its length and breadth. He highlighted the major strengths of Andhra Pradesh tourism

themes such as beach and water-based, eco-tourism, Buddhist, religious, heritage, spiritual or wellness and medical, which has the great potential in the coming days.

The minister also stated that the government would soon unveil the tourism policy to attract private investments across the State. He assured all support for industry in view of Covid-19.

Vinod Zutshi, IAS (retired) former secretary - Tourism, Government of India &

President, New Tourism Foundation, stated that Andhra Pradesh could take a lead in re-start operations of tourism in the State. He said that Andhra Pradesh has great locations based on coastal advantage, eco-tourism and pilgrimage tourism.

He advocated that in view of Covid-19 there is a need to promote Andhra Pradesh tourism with new brand concepts to build confidence among all stakeholders. He also mentioned that it is time for promoting successful case studies to encourage people to visit short distance places due to pandemic.

He also suggested that there is a need to effectively manage the supply side and demand in the tourism sector.

In this context, he advocated for the State-level Tourism Investors Summit, which would create a platform for investors about new avenues of opportunities.

Pravin Kumar, IAS,

Managing Director, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation, Government of Andhra Pradesh, said that the tourism sector is contributing significantly to Gross/Net State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the State.

He mentioned that the government has put required Standard Operating Protocols (SOP) to restart tourism operations in the State. In fact, in view of Covid-19 digital platforms have emerged as a viable option to market Andhra Pradesh tourism strengths.

The suggestions emerging out of conclave include focusing on destination based tourism, which has great opportunities in the coming days, need to create pockets of excellence with required infrastructure and nature tourism and engaging the local communities for sustainable tourism operations in the State. The conclave witnessed sixty participants through digital mode.

Advanced technology will help curb disasters: Home Minister

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Technology will be incorporated extensively to prevent accidents and mitigate the situations during disasters, said Home Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Mekathoti Sucharita.

Speaking to the reporters after inaugurating additional building at the fire station in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, the Home Minister said the State has 185 fire stations of which 12 are in Srikakulam district.

The State disaster relief officials served people for 22 days non-stop during the Titli cyclone and recently rescued and rehabilitated people in East Godavari and West Godavari and Krishna districts during the floods.

Apart from preventing human loss, the SDRF personnel also saved the livestock. "Some of our personnel were also sent to Kerala



Home Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Mekathoti Sucharita announced that Forensic Laboratories would be set up soon in Visakhapatnam, Tirupati and Vijayawada. She further stated that a Police Training School would be set up soon but the location was not yet decided

and Hyderabad during floods to carry out rescue and relief operations," she reminded.

The police department won accolades from all over the country and recently won 48 of the 83 awards announced at the national-level," she said.

On the occasion, she presented merit certificates to fire service personnel BJDS Prasant Kumar, K Srinu

Babu, Durga Reddy, P Rambabu, Rajasekhar and P Chakradhar. Director General of Fire Services Mohammed Hasan Reza was present on the occasion.

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One of the representatives of South Korean leading steel manufacturer POSCO having a word with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at the camp office in Tadepalli on Thursday

Korean delegation calls on CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Representatives of South Korean leading steel manufacturer POSCO called on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at the camp office here on Thursday and expressed their willingness to invest in the State. The Chief Minister said the industrial policy of the state is transparent and encourages

investors for industrial development. Natural resources will help for industrial development in the State, he added

POSCO India Group Chairman and Managing Director Sung-Lae Chun, Chief Financing Officer Goo Young An, Senior General Manager JungLe Park and other officers were part of the delegation that met the Chief Minister.

Botsa blames Naidu for delay in Polavaram project

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana lambasted opposition leaders over the Polavaram project and large-scale corruption in TIDCO housing during the TDP regime.

The minister alleged that it was Chandrababu, who exploited the project for the sake of commissions from contractors, which ultimately led to a reduction of funds from the Centre. "Unlike Naidu, we are not interested in contracts, or commission, we will convince the Central government to complete the Polavaram. If necessary, we will also go to court for funds," he stated.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, the minister criticised Naidu for failing to sanction houses meant for the poor during his term and said TDP leaders have looted huge amounts in the name of houses for the poor. The previous government had laid the foundation



for only three lakh houses despite the Union government sanctioning seven lakh houses.

"Out of three lakh houses, 2,62,216 reached the basement level while only 81,040 houses came up to 90-95% works and in 71,488 houses only 20-40% works were completed in the five-year term of TDP," he pointed out.

The previous government had fixed Rs 2,000 per sft for providing a house in 300 sft and charged over Rs 2.6 lakh from the poor. For houses in 345 sft and 430 sft, the beneficiaries have to pay Rs 3.25 lakh and Rs 4.65 lakh. Though the price per sft is only at RS 1,200, the TDP government had charged over RS 2,000 and pocketed all the money, with-

Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana alleged that it was Chandrababu Naidu, who exploited the project for the sake of commissions from contractors, which ultimately led to a reduction of funds from the Centre

out even clearing bills to the contractors, or completing a single house, he added.

Seeing the plight of the poor, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has decided to allocate 30 lakh houses free of cost, along with the TIDCO houses. By spending RS 600 crore, the State government had completed all those pending houses and geared up for distribution. However, "TDP leaders approached the High Court and stalled the distribution of house patts. He stated that all the 30 lakh beneficiaries might stage a protest in front of Naidu's house for obstructing the distribution of houses.

CM to hoist flag on Formation Day on Nov 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government has issued orders to conduct the AP Formation Day celebrations following the Covid-19 protocol on November 1. Chief Secretary (political) to Government Pravin Prakash issued orders on Thursday in this regard. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy will hoist the national flag at 9 am at the camp office in Tadepalli and pay floral tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Srimoulai by garlanding his portrait.

Furthermore, district in-charge ministers, ministers and collectors will celebrate the Formation Day in their respective districts.

Jumbo attack claims farmer's life

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A 25-year-old farmer died in a jumbo attack in Vizianagaram district. The deceased was identified as Y Narayana. He sustained severe injuries in the attack last Tuesday at Gumpa village in Komarada mandal of Vizianagaram district and he succumbed to injuries in KG Hospital on Thursday.

The herd of wild elephants wreaked havoc in Bangar-ampeta and a few other areas in Komarada mandal of Vizianagaram district damaging the standing paddy, maize, cotton and a few other crops for the past few days.

The jumbo menace is giving sleepless nights to farmers.

K Samba Murthy of Komarada said that elephants ventured into their villages a few days ago in search of food and water and damaged standing crops and a few houses.

He said that they have been facing the elephant menace for the past few weeks but none of the officials took any measures to send the elephants back to the jungle.

Farmers ran away from their fields soon after the tuskers entered their fields. The attack by the tuskers on the standing crops confirmed their worst fears and the villagers are alleging that the officials didn't give any compensation for the damage of their crops citing various reasons.

TDP leader protests govt inaction on online harassment

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Former MLA and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) politburo member Vangalapudi Anitha has protested against the government inaction over her complaints on online harassment.

"What is the use of 'Disha Police' dedicated to women's protection when they do not take action on my complaints," said Anitha. Joined by a group of women, she lashed out at the government for not taking action against people posting objectionable messages about her on social media.

'Include energy conservation under 'Nadu-Nedu'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant development, Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney has directed government departments to include energy conservation and energy efficiency programmes under the State government's flagship Nadu-Nedu programme with an objective to take energy efficiency momentum up to village-level.

During the executive committee meeting of Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) conducted through a video conference with Special Chief Secretaries of Higher Education and Industries department, Principal Secretaries of School Education, Women and Child Welfare and Secretaries of Medical & Health, MA&UD, the Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney has given clear directions to senior officials to give utmost priority for imple-



mentation of energy efficiency and energy conservation in their respective departments.

The government has decided to aggressively promote efficient use of energy and its conservation, which is the least-cost option to achieve energy security, meet the energy demand, along with enormous economic, environmental and social

benefits. As part of this, the Chief Secretary has directed the departments to take up energy efficiency programmes under Nadu-Nedu programme and asked Energy Secretary Srikanth Nagulapalli to organise frequent meetings with departments such as Housing, Education, Medical & Health, Women and Child Welfare ,

Roads and Buildings(R&B), Industries and MA&UD where construction activities are actively going on. The Chief Secretary also directed to take immediate steps to sensitise the engineers over the concept of energy efficiency and green buildings and suggested training programmes to impart knowledge on effective implementation of Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) in their respective departments.

The Chief Secretary also directed the energy department to conduct training programmes to the employees from the Village Secretariat and Ward Secretariat levels to promote energy efficiency and energy conservation up to the grassroots, which ensure effective implementation of energy efficiency even at the village-level.

No action in 'mass killing' of stray dogs in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Animal activists have been seeking action from the GVMC and local police against mass killing of stray dogs but in vain. Local authorities are turning a blind eye to the brutal acts though it is evident from photographs showing carcasses being dumped at the municipal dump yard.

Finally, the Vizag District Legal Service Authority has issued a notice to the GVMC authorities to intervene in this regard. Earlier, the Animal Welfare Board of India had also requested the GVMC Commissioner to investigate the incidents as complained by the animal activists.

The Municipal Administration Department has also asked the GVMC Commissioner to take necessary action in the incident based on a complaint filed by animal activist and founder



Carcasses dumped at the municipal dump yard in Visakhapatnam

secretary of Blue Cross (Guntur) Suresh Jagu. The activist has also filed a complaint with the assistant commissioner of police, Dwaraka Sub-division, attaching the picture of the carcasses of seven dogs being dumped in the Mudasarlova dump yard.

"We have learnt from vari-

ous sources that the street dogs captured from different localities for several reasons in Vizag are killed in mass using unidentified injection. The injection causes pain, suffering and at last death. I have attached photo evidence that clearly show either dog carcasses on the dump yard premises,

The Municipal Administration Department has also asked the GVMC Commissioner to take action in the incident based on a complaint filed by animal activist and founder secretary of Blue Cross (Guntur) Suresh Jagu

or the vehicle carrying dogs by untrained dog squad on an average of eight dogs a trip loaded on garbage collecting vehicles at Mudasarlova dumpyard under Arilova police station limits," Suresh alleged.

"The dump yard is meant for waste disposal. But the carcasses of stray dogs are also dumped, which is clear animal cruelty and against the animal buried procedures and provisions stated in Gazette notifications issued for Prevention and Control of Infectious and

Contagious diseases in Animals (Central) Act- 2009 and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act- 1960 of Section 3 among other rules and regulations," the animal activist explained.

The Animal Birth Control (ABC) operation unit in Arilova is violating the clear layout guidelines, he protested adding that the brutal incident is also a violation of AP Municipal Administration recent circular on 11/05/2020 and the Supreme Court interim orders.

"I was informed that the issue was brought to the notice of the Chief Secretary office, which forwarded the complaint to the Home department. And, as per the instruction of DGP and CP of Vizag, it is now pending with the Arilova police station," he said, hoping that police would soon issue notice to the GVMC in this connection.

COVID-19 EFFECT

Govt to promote spice cultivation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Horticulture Department embarks on a special project to promote the cultivation of high-value spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon, black pepper, turmeric, ginger and a few others as intercropping with coconut in the State.

The Covid-19 pandemic has fuelled the demand for the spices as more people are taking to higher consumption of spices citing immunity boosters.

The horticulture department has observed that there is a need to promote high-value spice crops in the State as there is a big opportunity for spice promotion.

The country will need double production of spices in order to meet the growing demand for domestic as well as international markets. There is an ample opportunity to grow high value spices in Andhra Pradesh as the State is blessed

The Horticulture Department has observed that there is a need to promote high-value spice crops as there is a big opportunity for spice promotion

with different climatic conditions, which is suitable for a wide range of horticulture crops.

Chiranjiv Choudhary, Commissioner of horticulture, Andhra Pradesh, said that the realising the demand for spices, they have decided to promote high value spices as intercropping in coconut orchards. Among new crops, nutmeg, pepper and cinnamon have been successfully introduced for commercial cultivation in the State. The department initiated innova-

tions for promotion of spices in the State and established Master Pepper Nursery in Chintapalli for large-scale multiplication of new ICAR-IISR pepper varieties. The government will spend around Rs 44 lakh under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).

The Horticulture Department is procuring quality planting material of pepper and nutmeg from the Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) at Kozhikode in Kerala for the development of mother blocks at the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)

at Venkataramannagudem and Vijayarai. These KVKs will supply planting material to farmers. The department in partnership with Rainforest Alliance working for development of spices in Eastern Ghats to uplift the income levels of Tribal farmers.

BJP decries 'political vendetta'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP leaders Nallu Indrasena Reddy, former MP AP Jithender Reddy on Thursday met Dubbak central observer (law and order) Saroj Kumar Thakur at Mission Bhagiratha Guest House. The BJP leaders submitted a memorandum to the special officer regarding the recent incidents in Dubbak.

Speaking to the media, Indrasena Reddy alleged that the police are arresting BJP activists in the name of bind over cases. They urged the special officer to beef up security on the polling day as there is a scope that the ruling party may indulge in malpractices. "The ruling party wantedly attacked Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar and conducted raids in the houses of BJP candidate M Raghunandan Rao's relatives



house, he alleged. Taking photos at KTR, he said that the Chief Minister is criticizing PM as he wished. Jithender Reddy alleged that the Telangana police are harassing BJP activists for the last one week. The police turned as sycophants of the ruling TRS. On the other hand, special officer Takur urged all political parties to extend their cooperation to conduct elections peacefully.

Fast-track 'justice' in hour of grief

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The fast-track courts set up in state to try cases of atrocities on women and children have been rendering justice to the victims delivering verdict speedily with officials submitting pucca evidence to the courts.

On Wednesday, a court in Warangal district sentenced a man to death for killing nine migrant workers by throwing them into a well after mixing sedatives in their food. The court verdict came five months after the shocking incident as First Additional District Court magistrate found 24-year-old Sanjay Kumar Yadav guilty of the gruesome killings and sentenced him to death.

The police investigations had revealed that to hide the murder of a woman with whom the Bihar man, had a live-in relationship, Sanjay Yadav committed nine more murders by throwing the victims into a well at Gorrekunta village near Warangal town on May 20.

In the sensational rape of



Telangana

On Wednesday, a court in Warangal district sentenced a man to death for killing nine migrant workers by throwing them into a well after mixing sedatives in their food

Abhya in IT corridor in 2013 by cab drivers, a fast-track court was constituted to try the case. Since then constitution of

the fast-track courts had begun in the state. The verdict in the rape case was delivered in 209 days. Two youth were sen-

tenced to undergo 20 years of jail term each. Of late, the fast-track courts have been delivering verdicts one after the other.

On the night of June 19, 2019, a nine-month-old baby sleeping by the side of her mother was kidnapped, sexually assaulted and killed by strangulation. The Warangal Police Commissionerate took investigation of the case seriously and investigated the case and filed charge sheet in court in 20 days. Thirty witnesses tes-

KCR to inaugurate Rythu Vedika tomorrow

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao will inaugurate Rythu Vedika at Kodakandla Mandal head quarters in Jangaon district on October 31. The Chief Minister will visit Village Natural Forest in the vicinity of the Rythu Vedika. He will address the farmers and general public. The Chief Minister will explain the reasons behind setting up of the Rythu Vedika, their importance, programmes and utilities.

Rythu Bandhu district, Mandal and Village Committees in the erstwhile Warangal district are invited for the programme. Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy, Ministers from the erstwhile Warangal district Dayakar Rao, Satyavathi Rathod, Rythu Bandhu state President Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, MPs, MLAs, and MLCs from the combined Warangal district will participate.

Cotton procurement begins

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao on Thursday formally launched the cotton purchasing at the Enumamula agriculture market yard.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said, "Cotton procurement centers were set up at 22 notified ginning mills in the combined Warangal and the CCI has begun the procurement today," and added that the cotton was grown in an area of 7,58,560 acres in the combined Warangal district and they were expecting 6,25,285 tonnes of cotton arrivals. Stating that cotton is grown in an area of 82,842 acres in Warangal Urban district with a yield of 79,114 metric tons of cotton, the Minister said that the CCI had raised procurement centres in the Urban district from 18 to 28



this year. He said that there are a total of 30 ginning mills in Warangal. "Besides cotton, grain, turmeric, chilli and green gram will also be purchased at the Enumamula market that has a storage capacity of 19 lakh metric tonnes," he said and added that there were 24 cold storages with a storage capacity of 24,45,000 bags under Warangal market limits. He further said that the farmers had already

stocked 22,37,765 bags of farm produce in the cold storages this year. He also urged the farmers to bring cotton adhering to the norms of the CCI standards, and added that the moisture content of the cotton should be below 12 percent.

Reiterating that the government is committed to buy the last bag from the farmers, the Minister directed the authorities to work in coordination to make the process hassle free.



BJP will win big in Dubbak: Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP Chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Thursday launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao and termed the latter as 'passport broker'. "KCR earned crores of rupees by deceiving the unemployed youth. KCR is deceiving BCs," he alleged. "The Chief Minister didn't even utter a word on Kondagattu

bus accident. KCR slept in farmhouse when the Hyderabad city was battling floods," he alleged. While participating in election campaign, Bandi Sanjay exuded confidence that BJP will hoist its flag in Dubbak. Dubbak BJP candidate M Raghunandan Rao called upon the people to give a befitting reply to the TRS and Finance Minister T Harish Rao.

'New chapter in land management'

PNS ■ NIRMAL

Forest and Environment Minister Allola Indrakaran Reddy said the launch of Dharani was a new chapter in the management of lands in the State. He opined that the portal would play a vital role in protecting assets and that it heralded a new phase for the government to render transparent services to the public and prevent them from being fleeced by middlemen. He further said the TRS-led government embarked on a revolutionary system to simplify land transactions and to put an end to the saga of challenges of the agrarian community in registering their assets, carrying out mutations and receiving passbooks.

MARK OF RESPECT



Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao garlanding the statue of Veera Reddy at Moodu Chintalapalli Village in Medchel-Malkajigiri district on Thursday

Send central forces to Dubbak: Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MP from Bongir Komati Reddy Venkat Reddy on Thursday addressed a letter to Central Election Commissioner requesting to send central forces to conduct elections in Dubbak.

The MP, in his letter, alleged that TRS and BJP are trying to win election on wrong path. "Finance Minister T Harish Rao is misusing his powers and threatening local opposition party leaders. The police found cash in BJP candidate M Raghunandan Rao's relatives house," he allege in the letter.

The Congress MP demanded the Election Commission to initiate action against the leaders violating election code of conduct. He asked the EC to appoint central observer to each mandal of Dubbak constituency.



Govt to procure 75L tonnes of paddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Civil Supplies Gangula Kamalakhar has sought cooperation of the Civil Supplies Corporation chairman Mareddy Srinivas Reddy, rice millers association president and secretary and district level rice millers' association leaders to ensure that the paddy procurement during the current Vanakalam would be smooth and without any hiccups.

He held a review meeting with Civil Supplies Corporation Chairman Mareddy Srinivas Reddy and Rice Millers' association president and secretary and district level rice millers' association leaders over the paddy procurement.

In a release here on Thursday, the Minister said that it was decided to procure 75 lakh tonnes of paddy through 6,467 paddy procurement centers.

So far, 16,702 tonnes of paddy worth Rs 3.15 crore was procured through 1,071 procurement centers. He said that district level officials have been given directions to open procurement centers in districts depending on the needs. He appealed to farmers to bring paddy as per the specification standards prescribed by the center for procurement. He told the rice millers that the state government is ready to solve the problems of the millers and offered to take their problems to the notice of the CM for resolution.

More funds for conservation of tigers in Telangana

PNS ■ BHUPALPALLY

With a view to protect the tigers, mainly in the forests of Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Mulugu and Peddapalli districts, the authorities of the Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Telangana States have resolved to work in tandem to protect the forests by preventing timber smuggling and poaching in the forests of Godavari basin.

An Interstate coordination meeting on forest and forest and wildlife protection' was conducted at Chelapur Genco Office in the district on Thursday. Addressing the meeting, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF)



R Shobha said that the continuous surveillance would be possible to protect forest habitats through mutual coordination, regular meetings and sharing views between bordering states and bringing awareness among forest officials.

Inspector General (IG) of the National Tiger Conservation Organization (NTCA), NS

Murali lauded Telangana State's initiatives for forest conservation, and assured to see that more funds would be allocated for the conservation of tigers in Telangana. He said that there was a very much possibility of development of forests as the tiger movement was spotted in Mulugu, Bhupalpally and Peddapalli districts recently.

Babli gates closed Dharani will end graft: Minister

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Central Water Commission (CWC) officials on Thursday closed the 14 Babli project gates in the presence of irrigation officials from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Supreme Court had ordered that every year the Babli project gates should be lifted on July 1 and closed on October 29 to facilitate flow of Godavari water into Sri Ram Sagar Project.



This monsoon, a total of 356.23 TMC of Godavari water flowed into SRSP in the last five months. The project released 225.76 TMC's of excess water downstream into the river Godavari. The SRSP now has 90.313 TMC of water and was receiving inflows of 9,984 cusecs.

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The launch of Dharani portal unveiled a new era in land administration in the State, Transport Minister P Ajay Kumar said on Thursday.

He along with elected members and officials watched the launch of Dharani portal by Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao and addressed a public meeting at Raghunathapalem in the district on Thursday.

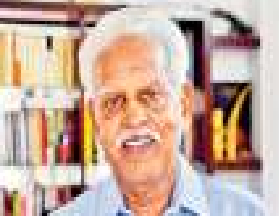
Speaking on the occasion,

Expeditiously consider Varavara Rao's bail plea: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Bombay High Court to expeditiously consider hearing the plea filed by the wife of Telugu poet and writer Varavara Rao, arrested in connection with the Koregaon Bhima case, seeking bail for him. Taking note of the fact that the bail application has not been heard by the High Court since September 17, the top court said Rao's medical condition demands attention of a particular character and time.

A bench of Justices U U Lalit, Vineet Saran and S Ravindra Bhat said the matter raises questions regarding the prisoner's human rights. During the hearing, senior



advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for Rao's wife Pandeyala Hemalatha, said he has been suffering from various health problems which have affected his capacity to make decisions and mental comprehension.

The bench told Jaising the medical report filed in the matter was of the month of July, and asked when the bail application was last heard by the Bombay High Court.

MEA-related services under single roof: Union Minister

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister V Muraleedharan on Thursday said passport application process has become much more user friendly due to efforts made by the ministry, and expressed hope that work would resume in full swing and reach pre-Covid-19 level in due course as the economy reopens. The Minister of State for External Affairs was speaking after virtually inaugurating the renovated premises of Regional Passport Office, Hyderabad, which will house MEA's second integrated complex, after Mumbai.



passport offices were working to bring down the passport pendency. "Now international travel is gradually picking up despite the ongoing restrictions. MEA has taken a decision to resume passport operations throughout the country. We are closely working with the Department of Posts to reopen all post office passport sevakendras," Muraleedharan said.

On the integrated complex, he said MEA offices located in Hyderabad including the MEA's Branch Secretariat, the Protector of Emigrants office and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations Regional Office will be shifted to this facility. As a result all MEA related services, whether it is passport or immigration services, will be available under a single roof within the premises of RPO Hyderabad, he said. "This makes Hyderabad the only second city in India after Mumbai to have an integrated MEA complex. Today's inauguration of the renovated premises of the Regional Passport Office Hyderabad is a milestone in the operation of RPO Hyderabad," Muraleedharan said.

Tiger safari for tourists from November 1

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After throwing open zoo park and urban natural forests in and around the city four weeks ago, the Forest Department now has decided to allow jungle safari in Amrabad tiger sanctuary in Nallamala forest area and Kawal tiger sanctuary in Adilabad district from November 1.

With the retreat of monsoons, relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, the Forest Department is providing an



opportunity to tourists to experience nature. Because of the pandemonium, the officials

prohibited tourists visiting Nallamala forest area since seven months. As part of the

Forest Dept has decided to collect Rs 50 from each vehicle travelling to Umamaheswaram and Maddimadugu temples

Centre's unlock procedure of the lockdown, several tourist places have been thrown open for tourists. The Centre opened

zoo parks and urban natural forests for tourists four weeks ago. Similarly, the Forest Department is allowing tourists visit the reserve forests. Therefore, the tiger safari will resume in Amrabad and Kawwal from Sunday onwards. The Forest Department has decided to collect Rs 50 from each vehicle travelling to Umamaheswaram and Maddimadugu temples in Nagarkurnool district and sent proposals to the state government in this regard.

‘Can excessive media reporting hinder justice?’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai, Oct 29 (PTI)The Bombay High Court on Thursday asked the Union government to clarify whether "excessive" reportage by the press on an ongoing investigation amounted to interference in the administration of justice under the Contempt of Courts Act.

A bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G S Kulkarni asked the government to state by November 6 if such reportage adversely affects the probe and subsequent trial, and if the court should lay guidelines on media reporting.

"If there is excessive reporting, that can put an accused on guard, and he may resort to destroying evidence or absconding. Or if that person is actually innocent, the excessive media reporting can damage his reputation," it said.

"We would not like the media to cross it boundaries



"We would not like the media to cross it boundaries and we would also like to be within our boundaries," the court said and asked the state if such reportage would amount to interference

and we would also like to be within our boundaries," the court said and asked the state if such reportage would amount to interference and if the government thought the HC had the jurisdiction to frame guidelines.

"Whetherexcessive reporting by media in an ongoing investigation amounts to interference in administration of justice under Section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act and should we lay guidelines? This is the issue before us,"

HCsaid.

It also asked the government's counsel, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Anil Singh, to consider scenarios where such reportage on an ongoing probe, where a charge sheet was yet to be filed, influenced the investigating officer, or resulted in a witness being threatened.

It asked if the court must step in and formulate guidelines to regulate the press to avoid such scenarios.

"If media identifies that a person is a very vital witness, he could be won over, threatened, or he could be even physically harmed so that he does not give evidence," it said.

On the possibility of the press influencing an investigating officer, the HC said, "Think of a police officer. Can anyone guarantee that he will not be influenced?"

"He may be following a particular track. Media says no no this must be the track. He loses track and rounds up an innocent person," it said.

Centre introduces new law to tackle pollution in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to tackle the persistent problem of air pollution in Delhi-NCR, the Centre has introduced a new law through an ordinance which comes into force with immediate effect.

Violation of the provisions entails a punishment of a jail term up to five years or with fine up to Rs one crore or with both, the ordinance released by the Ministry of Law and Justice on Thursday said.

"The ordinance may be called the Commission for Air Quality Management In National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance 2020. It shall apply to national capital region and also adjoining areas in so far as it relates to matters concerning air pollution in the NCR. It shall come into force at once," it said. The ordinance was signed by the president on Wednesday. As per the ordinance, the adjoining areas where it shall be in force include Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, adjoining areas of the NCR and Delhi where any source of



As per the ordinance, the adjoining areas where it shall be in force include Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, adjoining areas of the NCR and Delhi

pollution is located which is causing an adverse impact on air quality in the national capital region. The commission will consist of over 20 members who will ensure strict compliance."Any non-compliance or contravention of any provisions/rules or order/direction of the

Commission will be an offence punishable with a jail term up to five years or with fine up to Rs one crore or with both," it said. The members will include a chairperson, who is or has been a secretary of Government of India or chief secretary of a state, a representative of Environment secretary and five ex-officio members who are either chief secretaries or secretaries in charge of the environment departments of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, it added.

The commission will also include two full-time members who have been joint secretaries to the central government, three full-time independent technical members who have specific scientific knowledge regarding air pollution and others.



MHA confirms suspension of MP IPS officer

PNS ■ BHOPAL

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has upheld the suspension of senior Madhya Pradesh IPS officer Purushottam Sharma, who was seen purportedly thrashing his wife in a video that went viral last month.

In a letter issued to the Madhya Pradesh chief secretary on Wednesday, the MHA also directed the state government to chargesheet Sharma by November 27. The state government had suspended Sharma from the post of special director general on September 29 following his viral video, in which he was seen beating his wife after she confronted him at the house of a news anchor with a regional channel. After the incident came to light, Sharma had said that it was a family dispute which would be sorted out.

INDIA CORNER

TRP scam: Court grants bail to Fakt Marathi channel owner

Mumbai court on Thursday granted bail to Fakt Marathi channel owner Shirish Pattanshetty, who was arrested in the alleged fake TRP scam. Additional sessions judge P R Sitre granted bail to Pattanshetty on a surety of Rs 50,000, his lawyer Aniket Nikam said. Nikam earlier argued in the court that his client had not done any rigging of the Television Rating Points nor there was a rise in the TRP of the Fakt Marathi channel. The revenue of the channel had also not increased during the relevant period, he said, alleging that this was a "witch-hunt". He further submitted that during the custodial interrogation of Pattanshetty, who was arrested earlier this month, nothing was recovered and his further detention was unwarranted. The alleged fake TRP scam came to light after ratings agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) filed a complaint with Mumbai police through Hansa Research Group, alleging that certain channels were rigging TRP numbers to lure advertisers.



Maha govt directs GRP to fine commuters travelling sans masks

In a bid to check the spread of COVID-19, the Maharashtra government has directed the Government Railway Police (GRP) to impose fine on commuters found without masks in local trains and on stations here, an official said on Thursday. In a letter to GRP Commissioner Ravindra Sengaoankar, state disaster management department director Abhay Yawalkar has said the fine will be in line with the circular issued by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) on September 9, or any further circular issued by the civic body. The MCGM currently imposes a fine of Rs 200 on people found without masks in public places. "The state bequeaths powers to the Government Railway Police to impose fines on commuters found to be travelling without masks in the local trains or inside the station premises," Yawalkar said in the letter. In order to avoid resurgence of COVID-19 cases, it is imperative that all related protocols are followed by commuters, the letter said.



EC orders removal of Munger SP, DM over violence

The Election Commission Thursday ordered immediate removal of the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police of Munger over violence during goddess Durga idol immersion that had left one dead and scores injured, officials said. The poll panel has also ordered an inquiry into the entire incident by Magadh Divisional Commissioner Asangba Chuba Ao, an election commission statement said. The probe has to be completed within a week. Rajesh Meena is District Magistrate and Lipi Singh is SP of Munger. The EC statement said Munger will get a new DM and a Superintendent of Police Thursday itself. One person was killed and over two dozen others, including security personnel, were injured in firing and stone-pelting during goddess Durga idol immersion late Monday night.



HM Amit Shah condoles death of Keshubhai Patel

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday condoled the death of former Gujarat chief minister Keshubhai Patel and said his long public life was devoted to the service of the people of the state. Patel died in Ahmedabad after prolonged illness. "I have received the sad news of the death of former Chief Minister of Gujarat Keshubhai Patel. His long public life was devoted to the service of the people of Gujarat. With the death of Keshubhai, a void has been created in the politics of Gujarat which is not going to be filled easily. My condolences to his family," Shah tweeted in Hindi. The home minister said Patel, while in the BJP, played an important role in strengthening the party in Gujarat and as a trustee of the Somnath Temple, he always supported the development of the temple.



Mayawati suspends seven rebel MLAs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BSP leader Mayawati suspended seven of her party's rebel MLAs who had opposed the nomination of its official candidate Ramji Gautam for the elections to the Rajya Sabha. Amid speculation that the MLAs could switch sides in Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati also said that to ensure defeat of Samajwadi Party candidates in future MLC elections, her party will vote for BJP or any other party's candidate.

She said as soon as the rebel MLAs join any party, the BSP would take action against them under the anti-defection law. She said the party organisation has been informed that the suspended legislators should not be invited to any party function.

SC stays summons to Delhi resident over objectionable post

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has granted an interim stay on summons issued to a Delhi resident, accused of allegedly making an 'objectionable' Facebook post against the West Bengal Government, by an investigating officer in the state.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and Indira Banerjee said the court should restrain the exercise of judicial review in the matter of police investigation. However, it must safeguard the fundamental right to the freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

There is a need to ensure that the power under section 41A CrPC is not used to intimidate, threaten and harass, the bench said. Section 41A of



CrPC deals with notice of appearance before a police officer. "We are, however, of the considered view that to require the petitioner at this stage to comply with the summons under Section 41A during the pendency of the proceedings before the High Court would not be justified in the facts as they have emerged in this case. "Hence we grant

an ad-interim stay against the implementation of the direction of the high court requiring the petitioner to appear before the Investigating Officer at Ballygunge Police Station," the bench said. This is subject to the condition that the petitioner undertakes to respond to any queries that may be addressed to her by the Investigating Officer and, if so required, attend to those queries on the video conferencing platform with sufficient notice of twenty-four hours, the apex court said.

Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani, appearing on behalf of the petitioner, stated that the petitioner would cooperate in all respects though after the order of 5 June 2020, no query was addressed to the petitioner, despite five months having elapsed since then.

Venkaiah bats for stronger, greener India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday said development and environment conservation should go hand in hand as "we not only need a stronger India but also a greener India".

He also urged finance commissions and local bodies to encourage green buildings through tax incentives.

The vice president said it is time to consider making all new buildings to mandatorily go green and environment friendly.

Inaugurating CII's Green Building Congress, he said existing buildings too should be retrofitted to make them environment friendly by adopting green practices that promote energy efficiency and water conservation.

He termed sustainable buildings as an important component in building resilient communities and called for extensive use and promotion of low carbon technologies. "We not only need a



stronger India but also a greener India," he said according to an official statement.

Drawing attention to the increasing number of extreme climate events such as droughts, floods, and wildfires, Naidu said climate change is as real as daylight and countries all over the world must adopt drastic and revolutionary measures to mitigate the problem of global warming.

Calling for the sustainable approach to development, the vice president said the challenge is to marry development and environment.

"If we take care of nature, the nature in turn will take care of the mankind," he said.

Left govt on the backfoot after Sivasankar's arrest

PNS ■ Thiruvananthapuram,

The arrest of suspended IAS officer M Sivasankar by the Enforcement Directorate has put the Left Democratic Front government and the CPI(M) in Kerala in a spot at a time when the state is getting ready for the crucial local body and assembly polls.

The Left party and its leaders cannot simply wash their hands off the development by saying Sivasankar, said to be a close confidant of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and once the most influential official in the CMO, was just one among the several civil ser-



vice officers in the state cadre, according to political observers. Sivasankar, the former principal secretary to Vijayan, was on Wednesday arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the controversial gold smuggling case, after

over six hours of interrogation by the ED, probing the money trail in the case. The arrest has given the opposition-Congress and BJP-an unexpected political weapon to attack Vijayan, heading the lone Communist government in the country.

Rajini says he underwent renal transplant in '16

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Breaking his silence, actor Rajinikanth on Thursday said he has been advised against entering politics by doctors as he had undergone a kidney transplant and due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Rajinikanth said on his twitter handle that though a statement -that hints that he may reconsider his political entry given his health condition- doing rounds in social media was not from him, the content related to his health status and doctors advise to him "is all true."

PDP leaders stage protest; arrested

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Several PDP leaders were on Thursday detained by police as they tried to stage a protest against the new land laws notified by the Centre for Jammu and Kashmir. PDP leader

Khursheed Alam, party spokesman Suhail Bukhari and youth president Waheed Parra were among those detained by police as they came out of the party's Srinagar office at Sher-e-Kashmir Municipal Park, officials said. The party leaders

wanted to hold a protest rally against the amendments made to the land laws of the Union territory by the Centre on Tuesday which allow people from other parts of the country to buy land in the region. The mainstream parties of Kashmir

have decried the amendments and termed the move akin to putting Jammu and Kashmir up for sale.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti tried to reach the PDP office, but was asked by the police to return to her residence.

Delhi court closes defamation complaint against Kapil Mishra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has closed a criminal defamation case against BJP leader Kapil Mishra after he tendered an unconditional apology to AAP leader and Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

The complaint was filed by Jain against Mishra in 2017 for his defamatory statements against him and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The case was closed on Wednesday after Mishra agreed to tender an unconditional apology before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Vishal Pahuja.

"It is submitted by the accused (Mishra) that he is ready to make a statement before the court tendering unconditional apology. Complainant (Jain) also submitted that in case the accused gives his statement before the court, he shall withdraw the present complaint," the Court recorded.

After recording the statement of Mishra, as well as Jain, the Court disposed of the defamation complaint as withdrawn.

In a press conference held in 2017, Mishra had accused Jain of handing over a bribe of Rs 2 crore to Arvind Kejriwal.

Jyotiraditya's test

The MP bypolls would prove if he can indeed get even with former CM Kamal Nath and earn his stripes in the BJP



The byelection in Madhya Pradesh may have got swamped by the Assembly polls in Bihar and its results may not threaten the ruling BJP Government in the State. But it is significant in deciding the political future of stalwarts both within the BJP and the Congress. The number game is fairly settled. The BJP currently has 107 seats in the 230-member Assembly, with the support of Independents, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) MLAs. So, given its ambition to do without props of any kind and consolidate its position as the single largest party, it would just about need to win nine of

the 28 seats going to the polls and cross the half-way mark. The Congress has 88 MLAs after Jyotiraditya Scindia revolted and took 22 loyalists with him to the BJP, toppling the Kamal Nath Government. It would need to win all 28 seats to cross the halfway mark, a tall order, though party hopefuls are arguing that even 20-plus seats could keep it in the running as it could manage the deficit by co-opting smaller parties. This presumptive logic isn't much to bet on. The desperation of the Congress is understandable considering it wants to prove a point to Jyotiraditya that his exit hasn't really affected the party's grassroots matrix. In one word, therefore, the bypolls are his test. He may have defected with his loyalists but can he ensure vote transference with such ease? Particularly when the Congress is relentlessly calling him a traitor, even drawing on his family history to show how the Scindias betrayed Rani Laxmibai. Besides with most of the seats going to the bypolls being located in the Gwalior-Chambal region, which has the highest number of caste atrocities and violence and where the Dalit vote swing matters politically, Jyotiraditya has to have an umbrella appeal to win and not just depend on his legacy. His being in the BJP could actually be a liability as this is a BSP bastion and its people were at the forefront of protests against the dilution of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 2018. Besides, the BSP is contesting all seats here this time and unless, as a kingmaker, its chief Mayawati decides whom to side with in the event of a mixed verdict, the going could be tough for Jyotiraditya. Of course, his staunch follower and Dalit candidate, Imarti Devi, whom Kamal Nath insulted, could mop up some of the sympathy votes from the community at the expense of the Congress. The BJP has obliged Jyotiraditya for catapulting it back to power by giving tickets to the rebel MLAs loyal to him. This has not been to the liking of its Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who wouldn't want Jyotiraditya to challenge his stature. So the latter has to prove his mettle in his adopted party by ensuring the maximum wins. If he does, his stakes will rise but if he fails, then he could be badly marginalised. As it is, the State BJP campaign is still pivoted around Chouhan and has hardly taken note of the new entrant. This is Jyotiraditya's big chance to prove his political currency and if he fails, he will be of no use to any party. Not even Congress. In fact, if Jyotiraditya succeeds, it would be the most effective message of getting even with Kamal Nath and convincing the grand old party of the need for a generational change. If he does really well, he could even get a Central Ministry, something he has been wanting since he crossed over.

Though the BJP needs single digits to coast home, Chouhan wants to win at least half of the seats to show that he is not dependent on Jyotiraditya's clout. Having conceded tickets and ministerial berths to the young leader's group following Central pressure, the Chief Minister wants to show he is in command. But Chouhan is caught between the criticism of his handling of COVID-19 and the challenge from Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who has the blessings of the Central party leadership to undercut him. As far as Kamal Nath is considered, the bypolls are his last chance to take another shot at chief ministership. But with below the belt attacks and scorning a woman legislator, he may have just scripted his own downfall. Kamal Nath has an axe to grind with Imarti Devi, who is a Jyotiraditya Scindia loyalist and defected with him to the BJP. In fact, the sexist remark against her came days after and probably as a hitback to her accusation that Nath bribed MLAs when he was Chief Minister, that he gave cash doles of ₹5 lakh to Congress MLAs who could not be granted ministerial posts. In retrospect, her needless victimisation only drew attention to his greed for power by managing numbers. Of course, the seasoned politician he is, he knows how to work the arithmetic in case of an adverse scenario. But the old-style politics may not work at a time when the BJP won't be sparing any resources either to ensure that one party-rule flows from the Centre to other States.

DU imbroglio

The power tussle between the Vice-Chancellor and the Pro-VC only harms the most prestigious university



Delhi University (DU) is not only India's largest and most prestigious Central university, home to several top colleges of the country, it is also the most politically active. However, what is happening in DU right now is unprecedented in its 98-year history as President Ram Nath Kovind has ordered an enquiry against Vice-Chancellor Yogesh Tyagi on the grounds of "misconduct" and "dereliction of duty." Tyagi has been suspended till the probe is completed since he can influence the investigation while in office. Much of this has been precipitated by the health of the Vice-Chancellor, who had to be admitted to AIIMS

on emergency grounds back in July and a Pro-VC, Professor PC Joshi, had to be appointed. However, after Tyagi returned to work, he tried to invalidate several appointments made by the Pro-VC, even those that had been cleared by DU's Executive Council. The row escalated when Tyagi appointed Professor PC Jha as the interim Registrar despite the Union Ministry of Education's claims that the new order was not effective as the VC was still on leave while issuing it. However, the Executive Council resolved that Professor Suman Kundu would continue as Director, South Campus and acting Registrar till a permanent Registrar was appointed. This was followed by Tyagi removing Professor Joshi as Pro-VC and appointing Geeta Bhatt in his place. Meanwhile Joshi had notified the appointment of a new Registrar, Vikas Gupta, whose interview had been completed and appointment cleared by the Executive Council. This is a truly bizarre and ridiculous situation, particularly when the 2020-2021 academic year is about to start. By initiating an enquiry against Tyagi and completely clipping his wings, his term is as good as over. However, the Ministry should take its fair share of the blame here. When the V-C was admitted to hospital in an emergency condition, it should have stepped in to put a system in place. At the same time, it has consistently overlooked past lapses flagged against Tyagi, including not filling vacant positions, delay in redressal of sexual harassment cases and vigilance complaints in university, mishandling of the issue of ad-hoc teachers, which led to a massive agitation, and non-submission of detailed plans for implementation of the Institution of Eminence (IoE). The last straw came in the form of certain appointments he made while being on medical leave.

This mess needs to be immediately rectified by the Ministry and if Tyagi is to be removed, a new V-C must be found post-haste. This is a situation that is unprecedented and if elections and a pandemic were not ongoing, this would be the top headline of the day. This development is not surprising after decades of Ministers and bureaucrats striking at the autonomy of Central universities. Institutions of higher learning thrive when they are allowed to function independent of the Government and where the V-C is prided for his integrity and not seen as a political appointee.



REENA AMOS DYES

In mid-October, a 17-year-old girl, Neema (name changed) was found by the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Police in a dazed state, hungry and delirious. Sold to traffickers by her poverty-stricken parents, on the advice of "well-meaning" neighbours in her village in Madhya Pradesh, the teenager had escaped from her tormentors in Delhi. Neema walked and hitch-hiked for three days to cover a distance of 200 km before she was spotted by concerned passersby and the police in Hathras. Unaware of her whereabouts and determined to reach home, she was still 794 km short of her home in Mandla district when she was rescued. The girl told the police that there were 12 other minors like her, confined to one room in Delhi. Fortunately, they all managed to escape.

Neema is not the only child from her village to have been trafficked. Several others like her have been sold by needy parents. This story is repeated over and over again in India, particularly in rural areas. India is starving and its children are bearing the brunt of this hunger. They are being sacrificed at the altar of the crippling poverty that has worsened because of the sucker punch delivered to the already tottering economy by the Coronavirus. As feared by the experts in the field of rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked children, the number of minors, particularly girls, sold to traffickers for as little as ₹10,000-₹50,000, has grown alongside the number of people rendered jobless by the pandemic. As a result, desperate parents, having to choose between survival of the family for a little while longer and their love, chose the former. So many girls and boys were sold to traffickers across the country.

This is despite the fact that Articles 23, 39, 14 and 21 of the Constitution guarantee every child freedom from exploitation in any form. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 was enacted in pursuance of the International Convention signed at New York on May 9, 1950 and it was amended in 1986 to widen its scope to cover all citizens. However, according to rights advocates, the Act has glaring lacunae as it fails to define the term "traffic" or "trafficking" and aims to penalise those who aid and abet commercial sexual exploitation. Therefore, its focus on the def-



inition of the term brothel leads to the inference that commercial sexual exploitation takes place only in a brothel and not in other places, such as in a house. The Act is clearly not victim-centric as women and children, who are forced into prostitution, are also treated as criminals and arrested when raids are conducted.

Similarly there are several other laws to protect the rights of children, such as the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2001. The rights of child labourers can be adequately secured only if the monitoring and controlling provisions contained in the said statutes are fully implemented. However, they are not despite the Supreme Court insisting upon their applicability.

In 2013, the top court lamented that despite its directions, little or no progress was made by the States in protecting the rights of children. Thus, we have horror stories emerging from across the country. Desperate children, sold to traffickers by impoverished parents, making hopeless bids to return home to the same parents who pushed them into the hell in the first place.

Though Neema and several others like her have escaped for now, not everyone is so lucky. Thousands of children are being trafficked globally for initiation into the sex trade, to be recruited as bonded labour, drug runners, child terrorists or human shields. The International Labour Organisation has predicted that with the pandemic ravaging economies globally,

the world may witness an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years and there is a huge risk of years of progress in this arena being reversed. First, it was hunger induced by the lockdown that fuelled the trafficking. And now that the economy has opened up, it is the demand for cheaper labour and bigger margins by businesses. Closer home, ever since the lockdown was imposed and then eased a few months later in phases, Delhi-NCR has become a hub of trafficking as more and more children are being rescued from factories and brothels.

The Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights rescued 93 children from gold and jewellery factories in Karol Bagh in May. Of them, 57 were below the age of 14 and some were even 10-year-olds. The rest of the children were between 14 and 18. Then in July, nine child labourers were found working at several scrap shops in North East Delhi's Mustafabad. But these rescues are like a drop in the ocean as the lockdown slowed down such initiatives as well. There was a time when only 27 per cent of the Anti-Human Trafficking Units were functional. Thankfully, in September, 36 children under 14 years were rescued from bangle-making units in West Delhi's Jahangirpuri area where they were made to work for 15 hours a day and sleep in the same dingy room. All lured or sold on the promise of food and a roof over their heads.

Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi, Chairperson of NGO *Bachpan Bachao Andolan*, estimates that in Delhi, "at least five lakh children are in full-time

jobs. That means every sixth child is out of school and working somewhere."

Every time we hear such statistics, we are shocked and angry. Even more disturbing is the fact that these children are there in our midst, suffering abuse, hardship, deprivation and long hours of work in dingy, dark and polluted places where they have no business to be. We are blissfully ignorant of this invisible, silent and hapless workforce. The tiny factory workers, who are well hidden from our sight, toil to pander to our penchant for buying things at discounted prices, the cheaper the better. But we are content sweeping our collective guilt under the carpet, simply because they do not torment us visibly.

We do know that certain industries traditionally employ children. Like *bidi* factories, the carpet industry, the garment sweatshops, incense and firework factories, brick kilns, the farm sector and so on. But when buying these products, do we ever take the pain to ensure that the brand that we are purchasing has nothing to do with child labour? It is our demand for cheaper products that in turn creates the demand for child labour as businesses then can keep the cost of production down and their margins up. We don't bother to boycott goods over unethical trade practices. If we did so, the factory owners would have revised their norms. So, by extension, we are as guilty as the perpetrators of the crime of trafficking and hiring child labour.

And what about child labourers, who are staring us right in our faces? What of the minor

hired to "baby-sit" children? Or the ubiquitous *chotus* (apprentices/assistants) all over India, selling *chai* at the local tea shop and even delivering it to our offices and at the railway station? What of the little boy cleaning the car in the neighbourhood, his little hands and muscles straining to carry a heavy bucket full of water? Or the shoeshine boy, the child manning a roadside *dhaba*, serving food to customers? Have we ever bothered to question the people who hire them or even inform the law enforcement authorities about their presence? Clearly we do not want to get out of our comfort zone and easily attribute it to a societal crime, without realising we form the society that condones it. We could have picked up the phone and called the NGOs and rights activists who can help the child in distress. But we don't do that either.

And what about children caught in the sex trade? If people stop watching child pornography, there will be no market for it. If men stop violating minor girls for a price, there will be no market for it again. So, on all counts, society is as guilty as the criminals who traffic children.

Apart from a mindset change, there has to be community alertness and personal accountability by each citizen. There must be non-Governmental and Government intervention to ensure that hapless parents do not take the extreme step of trading their children for a dole. There is no time to be lost, else a nation will forget the meaning of *bachpan*.

(The writer is Senior Editor, The Pioneer)

SOUND BITE

Some experts told us informally that air pollution is not only caused due to stubble burning, but there are many other causes too. You lawyers will also have to get down from your big, beautiful cars and ride cycles.

Chief Justice of India
—SA Bobde



There is total lawlessness. Jammu and Kashmir has been converted into a jail. We are not Twitter politicians, we won't stay inside, we will come out.

Former Chief Minister
—Mehbooba Mufti



We have 2,25,000 deaths, the modeling tells us we're going to get one hundred or more thousand as we get into the winter, that is just something that's unacceptable.

US disease expert
—Anthony Fauci



If we talk about my cricket career, then the only and biggest regret is that we failed to win the semi-final of the 2011 World Cup in Mohali.

Cricketer
—Umar Gul



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Poor football

Sir — As per the Centre's guidelines, many cinema halls are re-opening. However, the football remains in single digits. Currently, the halls are permitted to operate with 50 per cent capacity; one seat between two persons is to be kept empty to ensure social distancing. Other mandatory norms include wearing of masks, applying sanitisers, compulsory thermal scanning, adequate ventilation and freezing temperature settings of all air conditioning at 23 degree Celsius or above. Even with strict guidelines in place, people are extremely hesitant to visit the theatres. Also, no big-time releases are slated for now as it is preposterous to imagine a producer or an actor risking his/her fortune during such crucial times. Over the months since the lockdown, the loyal film audience has adapted to online streaming apps. Adjusting to big screens again might take some time. Also many are cutting on expenditure owing to their financial stress.

The cinema hall owners, too, are in a quandary because of the financial losses they have been bearing due to the complete clo-

Punjab makes a point for its farmers

The Punjab Assembly has passed three farm Bills as the farmers' protests against the recently passed farm Acts intensify. The Central laws are silent about the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for agricultural produce. Sale of produce to the private traders, companies, corporates and other agencies cannot take place in the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) *mandis* anymore, and levy of fee for trades has been prohibited. Thus, farmers have no option but to approach the courts for dispute resolution. The thought of a takeover of the agriculture sector by traders using their financial power is haunting the farmers.

According to the State Bills, "no sale or purchase of wheat or paddy shall be valid unless the price paid for such agricultural produce is equal to or greater than the MSP" announced for the two crops. And if an individual or a company or any other agency compels or exerts pressure on a farmer to sell the agro-produce at a price below the MSP, then such person shall be deemed to have committed a punishable offence. The



Bills also have a provision to levy a fee on trade platforms outside the markets established under the Punjab Agricultural Produce Markets Act 1961 to fund welfare activities. These proposed amendment Bills are not just meant to counter the Centre's laws but to save the peasantry of Punjab.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

sure of the theatres for the past several months. In addition to electricity and ancillary costs, the huge challenge of sanitising the halls after every show can be taxing. Many are hoping that the festive season might make some difference but given the current scenario, the future of movie halls seems rather bleak.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Defence agreement

Sir — On October 27, India and the US signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to further military ties between the two countries. India will now be able to keep an eye on the movements of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). BECA will help us get real-time

access to American geospatial intelligence that will enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones. Sharing information on maps and satellite images will help us gain access to topographical and aeronautical data. The signing of the long-negotiated defence pact comes against the backdrop of a tense border standoff with

China in eastern Ladakh. The increasing defence and security partnership between the two nations will help monitor the situation in the Indo-Pacific at a time when China is attempting to expand its economic and military clout in the region. In June, India and Australia had signed a pact allowing their militaries to access each other's bases. A similar agreement with Japan also came to fruition last month after years of negotiations. It is also hoped that the sharing of technology will contribute significantly towards bringing India closer to the lofty goal of *atmanirbharta* in the defence sector.

Yash Pal Ralhan
Jalandhar

Ban firecrackers

Sir — The air quality has further worsened as hundreds of Ravana effigies and firecrackers were burnt in the Capital on Dussehra. The Government needs to wake up and put a blanket ban on firecrackers this Diwali.

Yugal Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Make the right policy choices

A continued prosperity for nations will only be achieved by allowing and championing a global open market for trade, goods and digital services



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

It is festival time globally, and not just the religious and fun variety but also the vital festival of democracy or elections. It is for the first time in our lifetimes that festivities, mostly associated with huge crowds jostling to reach the ballot box or *bedi* (the pedestal on which the idols of deities are kept), are taking place in the shadow of a raging global pandemic. Forced departures from well-known rituals associated with festivals make these times a case study for future generations. Many would have seen a video on social media of an idol being immersed using mechanised trolleys, with least human intervention, in the recently-concluded Durga puja festivities. Now switch to the theatre of democracy in Bihar, where Assembly elections are being held. The common thread between the two festivals is, technology. Bihar, would perhaps be the first State in the country where technological interventions played a key role in the elections.

First, the Election Commission (EC) allowed online filing of nominations for candidates and many political parties chose to reach out to their constituents through virtual rallies and put up huge LED walls for public viewing. Given the absence of many veterans active in Bihar elections for at least three decades, most of the young scions of the colourful, vociferous and politically-influential families were suddenly catapulted to the centrestage of a new narrative. This young brigade of Biharis, technologically more versatile than their parents, sought votes on issues. Something hitherto unheard of in a State, known for its divisive caste and religious biases. It was surprising to see rival candidates promise lakhs of jobs to young voters in a State grappling with the problem of the jobless migrant labourers.

The most welcome aspect of this election has been the reliance on technology in a State which could well be a case study on the digital divide between India and Bharat. Many statisticians will point to a survey which revealed that more than half of Bihar's women and around 40 per cent men have no access to mass media. This, when extrapolated over digital media, means a significant part of the population can either be completely insulated from the impact of technology or could be the next addressable unconnected millions, who need to be put on the information technology expressway of prosperity.

Now let's jump across the Pacific to the US, which, too, is about to witness one of the fiercest and cacophonous elections on November 3 amid the COVID threat, deaths and economic destruction. The common binary binding Bihar elections, Durga Puja festivities and US elections is again, technology. After all, the new dominance game and the race to be a global superpower is now increasingly getting defined by your first tap on a smartphone, first digital payment/electronic transaction, first contact-free shopping for world-class brands from the comfort of your home and perhaps the first digital date after months of trying to understand each other's typos and abbreviated texts.

Therefore, restrictions on digital applications, depending on the country of origin, to applying the same principles to hardware solutions in technical infrastructure, to forming an alliance of like-minded technology fraternity of nations were some of the key highlights in the election campaign of the two presidential candidates of the world's richest democracy. What it also highlighted was the fact that increasingly, the physical restrictions (read policies) of trade and commerce dominating economic relations between a bunch of nations will now be enthusiastically copy-pasted in the digital arena to prevent loss of sovereign powers and dominance at the global high tables.

COVID has put the spotlight on public policy issues, which, till February, were still in advanced stages of intellectual discourses. It has challenged our ability to adapt and eventually recover from the disease. And the only sector which has truly helped this advancement is technology. It reacted quickly and ensured teachers, parents and children were handed online course materials for seamless academic learning and doctors were given online tools for initial digital health interventions for patients. It gave the Government effective platforms for interaction and empowered it to push critical policy goals. Technology enabled digital live *darshans* of beautiful but deserted *pandals* and online delivery of *prasad* for the religious, too. If the human race has been pushed ahead by three decades in one stroke by the lockdown and technology has taken centrestage, it is also time to think and refresh many global policy challenges and perhaps release an update. Policymakers have to realise that imposing strict restrictions, based purely on case-by-case models, and having a physical worldview of digital policy issues can be self-defeating in the long run. A continued prosperity for nations will only be achieved by allowing and championing a global open market for trade, goods and digital services. It must be kept in mind that the new normal for policy-making at sovereign-level negotiations must be dictated by a set of principles. This should be compulsory in all digital agreements between consumers and technology providers, governments and their counterparts across borders. A multi-lateral approach must be championed. It is time to click on the right button.

(The writer is a policy analyst)

THIS DUSSEHRA THE EFFIGIES OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND INDUSTRIALISTS WERE BURNT. IT IS SAD, BUT IT IS HAPPENING AS FARMERS ARE UPSET. —CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



THIS SHOWS HOW DESPERATE THE CONGRESS IS. SHOULD THE FORMER CONGRESS CHIEF TALK LIKE THIS? HE HAS NO POLITICAL STANDING LEFT. —UNION MINISTER RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD

Graft-free governance

A metrics-based system for oversight over governmental processes will bring transparency and spur digital innovation to make any administration robust without inhibiting public interest



RAJESH RANJAN

Among the issues in public discourse that have caught the attention of the country is the problem of corruption, which elicits strident criticism. The issue has triggered a slew of reforms aimed at strengthening the fabric of integrity, like the enactment of the Public Procurement Bill, the Lokpal Act incorporating, *inter alia*, the public disclosure of assets by public servants, reforms in higher judicial appointments and so on. While anti-graft activists differ in terms of strategies and focus areas, there is a unanimous acceptance of the fact that technology and e-governance promote greater transparency. The rationale is very simple. Deny the opportunity for manual manipulation and replace it with technology, crafted around well-defined protocols and legal safeguards with minimal human intervention.

It has been five years since India adopted the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Corruption in general and venality in public life in particular adversely affect the fulfilment of these SDGs. Therefore, a proactive and preventive vigilance regime forms the backbone of good governance and is critical to their realisation. How then do we make governance more effective without inhibiting its objectives? Today, administrative affairs grapple with leakages in public delivery of welfare and development goals on account of manual processes that can be manipulated. But by leveraging technology, these leakages can be plugged. Incremental improvements to technology should continue to be the mainstay of advancements in administration.

In the recent discourse on procurement methods, transparency of policy, procedure and practices is increasingly being seen as an imperative of using public monies to remove any allegations of opacity and inconsistencies in decision-making. Achieving transparency ensures that procurement is open to public scrutiny, which results in best value for public monies. For example, the transparency of procedure as achieved in online applications is one of the simpler yet effective features of digitisation, as it shifts the onus of submitting correct information and data to the applicant. This, once verified by the public servant, retains the maker-checker wedge in a direct way.

In an effort to plug leakages in procurement systems, the Government launched the Government E-Marketplace (GeM) in 2016 as an end-to-end marketplace for goods and services required by Central and State Governments as well as Public Sector Undertakings. As per an assessment by the Centre for Public Impact, the savings impact of GeM has been substantial, wherein a maximum price reduction of approximately 56 per cent of goods and services, coupled with demand aggregation, has already led to savings to the tune of ₹40,000 crore annually. Given the fact that the public procurement economy constitutes about 20 per cent of India's GDP, it is imperative to build on this initiative through amplified efforts and bring as many goods and services on board as possible. And in order to make the platform more robust, addressing the issue of quality control should be the next level of sophistication that GeM should aspire for.

In the next 10 years, the business of Government will experience massive disruption. This comes on the back of technological enhancements that reduce the need for intermediaries and ensure that the sanctity of process remains unimpeachable. One such technology which has been discussed widely in recent times is blockchain. A NITI Aayog discussion paper has identified use-cases where the technology can potentially improve governance, ranging from tracing of drugs in the pharmaceutical supply chain to verification of education certificates. The three key principles of the blockchain technology are: Transparency, decentralisation and accountability.

“HOWEVER, A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN BLOCKCHAIN'S SUCCESS WILL BE A COUNTRY'S ABILITY TO DEVELOP/REFORM LAWS AND BUILD ROBUST DATA PROTECTION AND MAINTENANCE REGIMES. TILL SUCH TIME WE ADDRESS THESE ISSUES, BLOCKCHAIN IS NOT LIKELY TO HAVE A MONUMENTAL IMPACT IN CREATING AN INTEGRITY-FIRST GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM”



One of the most interesting areas of intervention for this technology would be in the space of land records. Ever since the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793, the issue of land records has occupied the administration and citizenry with its complexities, misgivings and fraud. The system is riddled with inefficiencies that reduce trust in the Government. Currently the UNDP is involved in certain Proof of Concept (POC) pilots across India. The underlying theory intends to create an immutable history of transactional records that helps in checking authenticity; a tamper-proof system to avoid forgery; a distributed ledger so that all stakeholders see the same information; and a secure encrypted environment, where updates are available in near real time. The NITI Aayog paper also identifies this value proposition. For example, the paper notes that, in order to ensure that transactions are not fraudulent, the physical presence of witnesses is mandated at the time of sales deed registry. Deployment of blockchain would potentially eliminate the need of these processes while maintaining the sanctity of the transaction.

This helps create a tamper-proof audit trail that allows for tracking decision-making and ensures that they are in accordance with anti-corruption principles. It addresses concerns around cyber security. Currently there are interesting pilots being conducted across the world, where deployment of blockchain is being tested for public procurement, wherein systems are being built in to identify graft with a view to disincentivise corrupt actors from accessing the system at the outset.

From the perspective of Internal Controls and Governance (Vigilance), it is strongly recommended to employ a five-part test while assessing such deviations from process: Whether the issue being pursued has corrupt connotations; the general reputation of the employee involved; whether better options were available and ignored without valid reasoning; whether the situation inhibited the selection of any

other option but the one finally chosen and finally, whether the larger interest of the organisation was safeguarded or not.

Deployment of technological solutions like blockchain can potentially remove the need or significantly reduce the time taken for making such assessments. In a recent paper released by Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, titled *Code to Integrity*, the authors have highlighted how blockchain can be a powerful tool in the fight against Government corruption. The report cites case studies of countries like Kenya, Rwanda and Ghana where Government records pertaining to court systems, education and land rights are migrating to distributed ledgers.

However, a significant factor in blockchain's success will be a country's ability to develop/reform laws and build robust data protection and maintenance regimes. Till such time we address these issues, blockchain is not likely to have a monumental impact in creating an integrity-first governance ecosystem.

The general environment now is in favour of a regime which ensures that companies not only do profitable business but do so in a manner which is ethical. The United Nations Convention against Corruption, ratified by India in 2011, as well as the anti-corruption principles expounded by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) cover a wide gamut of vulnerable areas and aspects of business operations, including anti-bribery, public procurement and conflict of interest. More and more countries in the coming years will be obliged to establish laws and mechanisms in place to ensure clean business operations as well as seize and confiscate assets derived from corrupt practices.

India, too, needs to review its existing legal framework to address issues around data security, corrupt practices and corporate governance with a view to address our anti-corruption objectives and provide the necessary guidance to well-intentioned officials in the Government.

The Centre made a significant change to the Prevention of Corruption Act in 2018. The element of intention has been added under definition of criminal misconduct. Similarly, broadening the definition of "unfair advantage" and introduction of corporate criminal liability will go a long way in apprehending or deterring bad actors on both sides from indulging in bribery. The amendments also have ensured that our obligations under the UN Convention against Corruption are adequately addressed and bring us closer to leading anti-bribery legislations in the world such as the UK Bribery Act.

While these amendments will go a long way in guiding the work of internal control agencies, it would be important to institutionalise a system, wherein compliance against said legislation and established processes can be checked and quantified. A metrics-based system for oversight over governmental processes will bring transparency, build trust and spur further digital innovation to make any administration more robust without inhibiting public interest-oriented decision-making.

It would be incorrect to end this discussion without addressing the well-intentioned public servant who finds the processes leading to greater transparency and ensuring value for taxpayers' money cumbersome and time-consuming and who is, therefore, tempted to short-circuit it. Well-intentioned though it may be, but any attempt to overwrite the processes, despite even demonstrable honesty of purpose, carries the major risk of opening up the system to misuse by corrupt players and would lead to eventual loss of public trust and decimation of the structure of public procurement. Thus, the intent of processes involved is to keep the proverbial Caesar's wife above suspicion. Through robust yet streamlined procedures, a bureaucrat can achieve the intended outcome and avoid unintended consequences.

(The writer is an IPS officer. The views expressed are personal)

Nurture e-retail in a post-pandemic world

This approach would be in keeping with the Centre's focus on a Digital India where citizens are able to leverage their connectivity into better opportunities



MOHIT CHAUDHRY

Most nations imposed some form of shutdown to limit the spread of the Coronavirus. India's lockdown, which involved a near cessation of all movement and economic activity, has been rated as one of the most stringent across the world. Not surprisingly, it had a severe impact on our economy.

A sector that was hit particularly hard is retail. This is due to several reasons. First, shops and warehouses were closed during the initial phases of the lockdown. This brought the

operation of both physical and digital retailers to a standstill. Second, restrictions on inter-State movement of goods and the opening of only specific industries disrupted supply chains. For instance, the Centre recognised both medicines and processed foods as essential goods and allowed their sale. However, similar status was not granted to units which manufacture the packaging for medicines and processed foods. Hence, sellers of these goods found it difficult to operate. Third, the system of issuing passes and permits to personnel working for physical and digital retail was not well-implemented. It was unclear which authority would issue the passes and for how long they would remain valid. Further, personnel having to travel across districts were required to obtain separate passes from the authorities for each district. Fourth, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order directing all employers to ensure full payment of wages to all employees even if they were unable to work.

As a result of the order, several migrant labourers returned to their towns and villages once restrictions on movement of persons were lifted. A survey of retailers selling their products online, conducted as part of the Esya Centre's report on e-commerce, shows that nearly 60 per cent of such entities will be unable to recover losses suffered because of the lockdown. Given that people are likely to be wary of entering shops and stores even after lockdowns are eased, it is important to explore different avenues through which retail outlets can avoid further losses.

One such avenue is e-retail. A report by Global Trade and Regional Integration Unit of the World Bank highlights the utility of e-commerce in the post COVID normal. Not only can e-commerce help reduce the risk of new infections and preserve jobs, it can also increase the acceptance of prolonged social distancing measures among the population. Further, previous research has shown that there are

numerous benefits for MSMEs that adopt e-commerce, in the form of better price discovery, access to new consumers, support with logistics and inventory management. It is in recognition of the above that several nations, such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand, have given preference to digital forms of retail both during and after the lockdown. However, India is one of the few countries that has not leveraged the numerous benefits that e-commerce brings, particularly during a lockdown.

Policy-making towards e-commerce, both before and during the lockdown, may have hindered the operation of e-commerce entities. Prior to the lockdown, legacy government rule-making on e-commerce presented several barriers to the growth of the sector. These included ever-changing FDI rules, unresolved issues of data localisation and source code disclosure as well as the over-regulation of platforms. During the lockdown, the Government failed to adopt

a clear and consistent approach to policy formulation *vis-a-vis* retail. As an example, both physical and digital retailers were only allowed to sell essential goods in the initial phase of the lockdown. This continued till about mid-April, when the Government issued a notification which allowed e-retailers to deliver non-essential items from April 20. In conformity with this order, e-commerce firms began to make predations to resume their full scale of operations. However, on April 19, the Government withdrew its notification, seemingly under pressure from industry organisations that represented small and medium traders. Subsequently, relaxations regarding delivery of non-essential items were first given to physical outlets while e-retail continued to be limited to essential items for 8-10 days thereafter. The zonation framework introduced by the Government additionally preferred physical outlets in Red zones, as they could sell a wide range of merchandise while e-retail tasks were limited to

essential goods.

As pointed out, e-commerce enjoys numerous advantages over physical retail, particularly in a situation where social distancing continues to be important. Hence, there is a need to provide a policy environment that fosters the uptake and adoption of e-commerce by both consumers and sellers. To achieve this, we recommend a five-step recovery process. The first steps are geared towards fostering an atmosphere of trust and credibility between the Government and market entities.

This can be achieved by holding regular consultations, opening avenues for feedback and providing sufficient notice before major changes. Further, policy actions should not skew competition between physical and digital business models. Instead, both models should be allowed to leverage their respective strengths. Finally, the Government must reassess what it seeks to achieve through its proposed e-commerce policy. In the current sce-

nario, a policy framework governing e-retail or e-commerce in general, should look to assist small enterprises in capacity-building for a digitally enabled future through the provision of finance, skill development and underlying infrastructure. There is, therefore, a need to move away from legacy regulatory institutions, based on licensing and control, to an entity that actively participates in capacity-building and development of small and medium retailers in India. In this context, it is worthwhile to explore the role being played by digital economy development authorities in countries such as Malaysia and Vietnam, which actively promote the adoption of digital solutions and e-commerce for SMEs as well as consumers. This approach would be in keeping with the Government's focus on a Digital India where citizens are able to leverage their connectivity into better opportunities and prospects.

(The writer is a research assistant at the Esya Centre)

Eight core industries' output contracts 0.8 pc in September

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Contracting for the seventh consecutive month, the output of eight core infrastructure sectors dropped by 0.8 per cent in September, mainly due to decline in production of crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and cement.

The production of eight core sectors had contracted 5.1 per cent in September 2019, data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed on Thursday.

The decline in output during the month under review was lowest since March.

Barring coal, electricity and steel, all sectors -- crude oil, natural gas, refinery products,



fertiliser and cement -- recorded negative growth in September 2020.

During April-September, the sectors' output dropped by 14.9 per cent as compared to a growth of 1.3 per cent in the same period of the previous

year. The output of crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, and cement declined by 6 per cent, 10.6 per cent, 9.5 per cent, 0.3 per cent, and 3.5 per cent, respectively.

On the other hand, the coal, steel and electricity sector out-

The production of eight core sectors had contracted 5.1 per cent in September 2019, data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed

put grew by 21.2 per cent, 0.9 per cent and 3.7 per cent, respectively, during the month under review.

Commenting on the numbers, Icria Ltd Principal Economist Aditi Nayar said,

the substantial improvement in the core sector performance in September 2020 was driven by the base effect-led uptick in coal production, related to heavy rainfall and labour issues in some mines in September 2019. With improved mobility of people and goods, the contraction in refinery products halved in September 2020, an encouraging trend that may continue in the immediate term, she said.

"While many lead indicators have displayed signals of a strengthening economic recovery in September 2020, we caution that the sustainability of the upturn may not be universal, and await signs of its durability," she added.

Sensex sheds 173 pts amid F&O expiry; Nifty slips below 11,700

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity benchmark Sensex tumbled 173 points on Thursday, tracking losses in index majors HDFC twins, L&T and HUL as volatility persisted amid expiry of month derivatives contracts.

Lacklustre cues from global markets also kept domestic investors on the edge, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex ended 172.61 points or 0.43 per cent lower at 39,749.85. The broader NSE Nifty fell 58.80 points or 0.50 per cent to 11,670.80. L&T was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, dropping around 5 per cent, followed by Titan, ONGC, Axis Bank, HUL, M&M and HDFC. On the other hand, Asian Paints, UltraTech



Cement, HCL Tech, Kotak Bank and Reliance Industries were among the gainers. According to traders, market volatility was heightened as October futures and options contracts expired. The Indian market opened on a subdued note following mixed global cues as coronavirus cases in the Europe surged and several

countries considered re-imposing strict lockdown measures, said Narendra Solanki, Head- Equity Research (Fundamental), Anand Rathi Shares & Stock Brokers.

During the afternoon session, the markets continued to trade weak with selloff in metals, auto, realty and financial stocks, he added.

BP pitches for infra sharing with cos like ONGC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of starting the next wave of gas production from the KG basin, UK-based super-major BP Plc has pitched for oil and gas producers sharing their infrastructure to help cut costs and monetise small and marginal discoveries.

BP, which in partnership with Reliance Industries Ltd is investing USD 5 billion in developing three sets of discoveries in the Krishna Godavari basin block KG-D6, also wanted sanctity of contracts to be



honoured and policy stability.

Speaking at the India Energy Forum of CERWeek, BP's India head Sashi Mukundan said policy and decision making must support raising

domestic oil and gas production by adopting best international practices. He also made a case for offering incentives for doing better than targeted production rather than imposing penalties.

One of the things that surprised me when I came to India was that you don't see upstream companies working together and sharing infrastructure," he said, giving an example of a hub called Nikara that BP and Royal Dutch Shell have created in the Gulf of Mexico.



Govt hikes ethanol price by 5-8pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday raised the price of ethanol for doping in petrol by 5-8 per cent, I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar said.

The move will help farmers get remunerative price while also cutting down oil imports, he said.

As much as 10 per cent ethanol is doped in petrol.

The move also checks pollution as ethanol is environment-friendly, the minister added.

Mutual funds offer transparent options

PNS ■ MATHURA

Mutual funds offer one of the most transparent and cost effective investment options to all categories of investors, irrespective of gender or financial constraints and other considerations, Surya Kant Sharma, Senior Consultant - North India, Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) said on Thursday.

"To counter COVID-19 type challenges in life, financial planning has to be an integral part of wealth creation," Sharma said while delivering the keynote address for a webinar on 'Strategy for managing personal finance including mutual funds during and after COVID-19'.

He said each family should

maintain an emergency fund for catering to basic needs for at least 9-12 months to safeguard against unforeseen developments like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mutual funds provide not only short-term investment options but also medium-term and long-term investment solutions for sustained wealth creation for all investors, he said.

"Even during distress situation like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, investors have the option to continue, defer, suspend or discontinue their investments in mutual fund schemes," Sharma said.

Investment in mutual funds paves the way for better return than a savings bank account, he added.

Vodafone Idea Q2 loss narrows

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden telecom firm Vodafone Idea on Thursday reported narrowing of its consolidated loss to Rs 7,218.2 crore for the quarter ended September 2020.

The company had posted a loss of Rs 50,897.9 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal on account of making provisions for statutory due payments. Total income declined by about 3 per cent to Rs 10,830.5 crore during the reported quarter, from Rs 11,146.4 crore in the corresponding period of 2019-20. Vodafone Idea MD and CEO Ravinder Takkar said while challenges related to COVID-19 continue, the second quarter has shown signs of recovery with a gradual improvement in economic activities.

Teachmint raises \$3.5mn from Lightspeed India, others

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Teachmint, an online teaching platform, on Thursday said it has raised USD 3.5 million (about Rs 25.9 crore) in seed funding, led by Lightspeed India and existing investors, Better Capital and Titan Capital.

This is the second round of funding for Teachmint after it raised its first round in August this year, a statement said.

Teachmint will leverage this funding for building out its product suite, introducing additional offerings and increasing geographic reach to more tutors, it added.

Launched in May this year by Mihir Gupta, Payoj Jain, Divyansh Bordia and Anshuman Kumar, Teachmint enables offline tutors to digitise their classrooms, engage online with existing students as well as reach out to a wider student base. Teachmint has



developed a mobile-first, video-first product that enables ease of content delivery, engagement and evaluation and business workflow tools. Within five months of launch, Teachmint has added more than 1.2 lakh tutors across over 1,000 cities and towns to its platform.

Harsha Kumar, Partner at Lightspeed India, said India's tutoring and coaching market is estimated to be over USD 25 billion, and is fragmented into millions of tutors and coaching centres.

REA to buy controlling stake in Elara for up to USD 70 mn; News Corp to hike stake

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Australia-based REA Group Ltd will hike its stake to take controlling interest in Elara Technologies, which owns three leading realty portals in India including Housing.com, in a cash and equity deal estimated up to USD 70 million.

US-based News Corp, which has a majority stake in online realty firm REA group, will also increase its stake in Elara Technologies to 38.9 per cent from 22.1 per cent by acquiring preference shares worth USD 34.5 million.

REA Group said in a statement that it has "entered into a binding agreement to increase its ownership interest in Elara Technologies Pte Ltd."



On completion of the deal, REA will hold five out of nine board seats and is expected to have a shareholding between 47.2 per cent and 61.1 per cent, it added. "The total consideration for the transaction is expected to be in the range of USD 50 million-USD 70 mil-

lion with USD 34.5 million payable out of existing cash reserves and the balance in newly issued REA shares," REA said. According to market sources, the deal has been entered at an enterprise value of over USD 160 million (around Rs 1,200 crore).

Laurus Labs Q2 net profit jumps over four-fold to Rs 242.27 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Laurus Labs on Thursday reported an over four-fold jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 242.27 crore for the quarter ended in September on account of robust sales.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 56.55 crore for the corresponding period of

the previous fiscal, Laurus Labs said in a filing to BSE.

Consolidated revenue from operations of the company stood at Rs 1,138.84 crore for the quarter under consideration. It was Rs 712.42 crore for the same period a year ago, it added. The board of directors has approved an interim dividend of 80 paise per equity share of Rs 2 each, the filing said.

Sebi fines Biocon staff for violating norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has imposed a fine on an employee of Biocon Ltd for violating insider trading norms while dealing in the company's shares.

The employee, P Ravishankar (noticee), general manager of the project department of Biocon at the time of investigation and also a designated person, has been penalised Rs



3 lakh by the regulator for violating provisions of the Prohibition of Insider Trading (PIT) norms.

The watchdog conducted

an investigation with respect to his transactions between August 31, 2018, and October 1, 2018.

The investigation carried out by the regulator found that Ravishankar, who held 19,500 shares of the company, acquired through exercise of employee stock option plan (ESOP), sold 5,000 shares in September 2018 without seeking pre-clearance from the compliance

officer. He had also indulged in contra trades of buying and selling shares, Sebi noted. In terms of PIT Regulations, every promoter, employee and director of every company shall disclose to the company the number of securities acquired or disposed of within two trading days of the transaction if the value of the securities traded crosses a certain threshold.

Govt bans export of onion seeds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday banned exports of onion seeds with immediate effect amidst rising prices of the bulb in the domestic markets.

Earlier, the export of onion seeds was in the restricted category, which means an exporter was required to obtain a licence or permission from the government for shipments.

"The export of onion seeds is prohibited, with immediate effect," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

It added that the provisions under transitional arrangement shall not be applicable.

PLEXCONCIL targets \$25 bn shipments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Plastic export promotion council PLEXCONCIL said it expects positive growth in the sector's outbound shipments in the coming months on the back of global demand and government support to boost local production and looks to achieve exports of USD 25 billion by 2025.

Plastics Exports Promotion Council of India (PLEXCONCIL) Chairman Ravish Kamath said that exports are growing as customers in Europe and the US are looking at India as a reliable supplier.

He said that exports recorded positive growth in September, "so we expect this trend to continue and plastics exports will post much better results. The council intends to



target plastics' exports of USD 25 billion by calendar year 2025, while posting 20 per cent growth in the exports during this fiscal and next".

He added that the government is supporting to increase domestic production by setting up of 18 plastic parks.

Talking about challenges faced by the sector, he told PTI

Plastics Exports Promotion Council of India (PLEXCONCIL) Chairman Ravish Kamath said that exports are growing as customers in Europe and the US are looking at India as a reliable supplier

that finished goods are waiting in factories and cannot be exported due to shortage of containers, which is leading to expiry of LC's (letter of credit) and breaching of delivery schedules.

"This will greatly affect credibility of Indian exporters if not corrected very quickly. Similarly, as India is import dependent on polymers,

import shipments are not getting loaded at ports in Europe,

and the US for India due to which a panic situation has arisen doubting the availability of raw materials on time," he said.

This has led to an unprecedented hike in polymer prices, specially for PVC Resin wherein India produces only 45 per cent of its mammoth consumption, he added.

Kamath suggested the government to continue with the export incentive scheme -

MEIS (merchandise export from India scheme) and fixation of liberal refund rates for the sector under RoDTEP (Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP)).

He also stated that availability of polymers at competitive prices in India is a challenge for the sector boosting its domestic production would help adequate availability of polymers in the country at competitive rates.

"India does not have any trade agreements with any of these regions / countries due to which our exporters are unable to compete. If the government can forge a trade agreement with these regions / countries, our exporters would be able to increase exports," he said.

Nokia profit up, new CEO pledges to boost 5G investments

Telecom equipment maker Nokia has reported improved third-quarter earnings largely in line with expectations, but acknowledged it faced challenges in the race for new generation 5G networks.

It pledged to invest more in those networks and said it would revamp business strategy under its new CEO. The Espoo, Finland-based maker of new-generation 5G mobile and other networks said Thursday that net profit for the July-September period was up 14% at 305 million euros (\$358 million). Sales were down 7% at 5.3 billion euros. Nokia's quarterly report is the first one under new CEO Pekka Lundmark, who took over the company's top spot on Aug. 1. He said "more change is needed" within Nokia, which has played catch-up to China's Huawei and Sweden's Ericsson in the lucrative 5G market. "Our financial performance in 2021 is expected to be challenging," Lundmark said.



Gold declines Rs 121, silver plunges Rs 1,277

Gold prices fell Rs 121 to Rs 50,630 per 10 gram in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 50,751 per 10 gram in the previous trade. Silver prices also declined Rs 1,277 to Rs 60,098 per kilogram from Rs 61,375 per kilogram in the previous trade. In the international market, gold rose marginally to USD 1,878 per ounce, while silver was trading flat at USD 23.30 per ounce. "Gold prices traded under pressure with strong dollar recovery which dampened safe-haven demand for gold," HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said.



TALE OF THE BANARASI BABU

Few actors in the entertainment industry have always mesmerised the audiences with their outstanding performances! Fewer of them have successfully created a huge impact. One such actor, who has proved his dedication towards the craft by delivering a flawless performance is Gagan Anand. Tinsel town's rising star Gagan has been enthralling viewers all over the country with his charming looks and versatility ever since he released the teaser of his upcoming web series *Bicchoo Ka Khel*. This multi-talented actor, through his different qualities, has left the audience wanting for more. He talks to **SHIKHA DUGGAL** on his journey, his latest projects, dream role and more

What made you take up this project?

Dark roles always fascinated me. This is a very complex character with unlit undertones of revenge, sexuality and politics. Apart from my character, the overall story and dialogues are so cool that I couldn't say no to it. Ashish Shukla is the director of the series and he's as humble as can be. I saw *Undekhi* earlier, it really made me want to work with him. His main focus has always been to extract incredible performances from his actors.

How was the shooting experience post an extensive lockdown?

With proper precautions and norms laid by the government, we started shooting. I was extremely happy to resume shooting. We've come back with even more positive energy for the shoot. Everybody is taking precautions and wearing protective gears, sometimes funnily leading to confusions about who's who. We are very positive and I hope everything will go

smoothly. We are coming to meet our audiences!

Tell us something about your character and how you prepped for it?

I am playing an assassin who is hired to kill people. In real life, I am a man of few words but reel life differs, I was asked to adorn a Banarasi accent. I did a couple of readings with the dialogue writer and worked religiously on my physique. Due to the lockdown, the gyms were shut, so I had to work extra for my body and maintain a balanced diet. There will be disputes and money etc., with some startling action sequences. Hopefully, this series will stand out! Will I succeed? To know more about it, wait for me to nail it in *Bicchoo Ka Khel*.

How was it working with Mirzapur-fame Divyendu Sharma?

Amazing fun — he is a great actor and we all know it. Outdoor shoots were even more fun with him. Though we were running on a busy schedule in Banaras, he always man-

aged to find time to chill after pack-up. We were balancing work with fun!

What's your dream role?

Referred to as the tale of lust and valour, my dream role has always been to play Allauddin Khilji from *Padmavat* because I look to raise the bar. The character comes across as very royal, opulent, grand and breathtaking. I would love to experiment with an eye-catching look like that, similar to one of the characters from *Game of Thrones*.

How do you think OTT platforms are changing the dynamics?

Thanks to OTT, I didn't sit at home for even a second in these last two years apart from the lockdown. It has changed our lives drastically! We all have become so busy because of it. Talking about creativity, OTT has given us the liberty to express our thoughts and present it in our own uncensored manner. OTT is absolutely the new flavour of the season and has already been accepted by the audiences.

REFERRED TO AS THE TALE OF LUST AND VALOUR, GAGAN'S DREAM ROLE IS ALLAUDDIN KHLIJI FROM PADMAVAT, BECAUSE HE LOOKS TO RAISE THE BAR.



Fashion Forward 2020

Earlier this week, Hyderabad's upscale restaurant Olive Bistro hosted a dining experience of a different kind. With social distancing being the new and accepted norm for in-house dining, as well as fifty percent occupancy, what better way to ensure it than getting mannequins to occupy a couple of tables? "While mannequins are being used globally at the finest restaurants in Paris, London and New York to ensure social distancing, we at Olive took the trend a step ahead by dressing the mannequins in haute couture," shares Shaaz Mehmood, partner Olive Bistro Hyderabad.

So, couturier Gaurav Gupta, who opened the India Couture Week 2020 conducted digitally this September, (India's first-ever virtual fashion show of this scale) gets to showcase his ethereal wedding gowns in all their drapy silhouettes for a fortnight from now. "We are planning *#TheBistroRunway* as a bi-monthly affair, so in two weeks from now, it will be designer duo Shantanu & Nikhil who will get to showcase their collections and going forward, we will be perhaps continuing with other designers," adds Shaaz.

Perceived as a win-win situation for both the designer and the restaurant, it is the closest one can get to a physical fashion show, minus the models and the ramp walk, of course, in this Covid era.

"It is a brand collaboration of the best kind, the designer gets brand visibility



Olive Bistro launches its *#TheBistroRunway* initiative with Gaurav Gupta

which might get converted to orders and for the restaurant, it adds to both visual quotient and the footfalls, hopefully," opines Rajveer Kaur, marketing and PR professional.

For diners who were invited to this select preview, sipping on their G&T's and chomping Prawn Fritti, fashion zoomed into focus, with the city's best fashion bloggers getting a preview of the season's collections.

For fashionpreneurs like Kamini Saraf, online customisation and fittings are the way forward, although Angasutra, the high-end designer store, which she partners, recently launched physically, the hugely popular online designer shopping portal Pernia's Pop-Up

Studio and is now currently hosting a high-end jewellery showcase by Raj Mahtani. "In the US and Europe designer brands are held liable for size misfits etc. In India, perfection in brands is yet to be realised, therefore I would always prefer physical shopping and customised fittings, wherever possible. Having said that, I don't think I have shopped as much online in all these years as I have done during the pandemic," adds Kamini, who had to forego hosting the triannual Fashion Yatra, for the first time in fifteen years.

"We had a sale of Manish Malhotra's collections at Angasutra, brand hosted fabulously well, but I thought we should also practise some

business ethics by not hosting physical exhibitions, especially in cases like Fashion Yatra, which has designers participating from across the country, and in this situation I could not even think of hosting it at all this year," adds Kamini.

But what about recession and the loss of jobs and business revenues, isn't that impacting high-end designer brand sales? "I think the biggest takeaway from Corona is that we are perhaps learning the more humane values of life, like compassion and patience. We have seen bigger struggles this year, people struggling to hold onto their jobs and lives, migrants to their homes etc. And working from home has meant that



we are prioritising comfort and our ego of how I should dress up and look my best, has taken a backseat," shares Shivani Mohan, brand hostess of dining app Dineout Passport, and a spiffy dress-

Olive took the global trend of maintaining social distancing a step ahead by dressing them up in haute couture



SWATI SUCHARITA, Senior journalist

bar on socialising and big-ticket events has meant that shoppers like me who feel tempted to buy for every occasion have learnt to rein in temptation and make do with one's wardrobes, recycling and revamping," adds Shivani.

"Online shopping is certainly the way forward and is here to stay," agrees marketing consultant Shailya Mehta Bhandari, who helped design and curate The Pink Flamingo, an online luxury shopping extravaganza, which was hosted by the Ladies Circle of the Round Table, Rotary Club of India recently this month.

The portal offered a great platform for displaying skill sets of locked-down, creative women who had stuff ranging from clothes (both for men, women and children), lifestyle accessories to edibles for showcasing. "Interestingly, we had participants from outside Hyderabad too and while it was initially slated for 3 days, we eventually had sellers exhorting us to extend it for two more days, as they were doing very well. The sale proceeds, which came from the exhibitor's fees went towards a NGO in Domakunda, which offers vocational

training to women," adds Shailya.

With Diwali and the marriage season round the corner, can fashion designers still afford to be high-end? "My friend in Hyderabad shopped for an Anamika Khanna outfit from her store in Mumbai and got a whopping 50 percent discount after the designer's team did extensive video calling and back and forth," shares Shailya.

"For any wedding, be it Telugu or Marwari or Punjabi, there is a given budget for brideswear. But I guess the pre-wedding events this year like sanget, mehendi will see recycled wardrobes not just for the families, but also for the bride and groom. Also, fashion industry is hugely labour-intensive and this year, there are fewer collections, and even in pret wear, like Zara and H&M, you see the same old stuff being recycled," adds Kamini.

Clearly this year is not the best place to ve for designers, as prudence will rule for a while, till the vaccine comes along and the economy bounds back. Till then, happy window-shopping for not-so-urgent shoppers and prudent negotiations for the serious buyers!

Akshay Kumar-starrer Laxmmi Bomb renamed Laxmii

The Akshay Kumar-starrer *Laxmmi Bomb* has been renamed *Laxmii*, following suggestion of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The decision was taken by Akshay along with co-producers Shabinaa Khan and Tusshar Kapoor on Thursday.


The news was confirmed by trade analyst Taran Adarsh on Twitter. "NEW DEVELOPMENT... #LaxmmiBomb title changed... New title: #Laxmii... Premieres 9 Nov 2020 on #DisneyPlusHotstarVIP... Stars #AkshayKumar and #KiaraAdvani," tweeted @taran_adarsh.

The film directed by Raghava Lawrence was submitted for censor certification and the decision was taken after the screening for the CBFC members.

According to earlier reports, the makers had received a legal notice from the Rajasthan-based outfit, Shri Rajput Karni Sena, claiming that the name Laxmmi Bomb was demeaning towards Goddess Laxmi, adding that the title insulted sentiments.

The horror comedy starring Akshay Kumar and Kiara Advani is a remake of a successful Tamil film, *Muni 2: Kanchana*.

Laxmii is slated for release on November 9 on the OTT platform Disney+ Hotstar VIP.



Pop star Bebe Rexha to make Hollywood debut as actress

Pop star Bebe Rexha is all set to make her debut as an actress in a crime comedy film titled *Queenpins*, starring Kristen Bell.

Rexha will be playing the character of Tempe Tina, an eccentric computer hacker in the film, which is inspired by a true story of the biggest coupon counterfeit scam, reports *variety.com*.

The film is developed by STXfilms. Adam Fogelson, chairman of the STXfilms Motion Picture Group said: "This is a perfect film for Bebe to be making her live-action film debut. She's an incredible talent and international superstar and we love her for this role as Tempe Tina, an eccentric computer hacker who helps our heroines with their coupon scam."

"We know she will add so much fun, talent and personality to this cast."

Queenpins is written and directed by Aron Gaudet and Gita Pullapilly. The cast also includes Vince Vaughn, Paul Walter Hauser and Kirby Howell-Baptiste.

In the film, Bell plays a suburban housewife who is tired of being overlooked by the world, and plans to take back control of her life.



Dua Lipa to bring virtual 'Studio 2054' gig to India

Nelinternational pop star Dua Lipa is all set to bring her virtual show, Studio 2054, to India, adding that she hopes to be back to the country and perform before a live audience again.

Studio 2054 is said to deliver a brand new multi-dimensional live experience.

"It's almost exactly a year since I last performed in India and I've been dying to come back and play my new album for you. I can't wait for you to come and join me for my Studio2054 live experience where I'll perform lots of new songs as well as some old favourites like you've never seen before," Dua Lipa said.

Shot live in a massive warehouse location, Studio 2054 will see her move through custom-built sets, roller discos, and ballrooms. Accompanied by a cast of musicians, dancers, skaters, aerialists and acrobats, the singer will be joined by a host of surprise superstar guests in the show.

Featuring tracks from *Future Nostalgia*, *Club Future Nostalgia* and her debut album, Studio 2054 is expected to be a musical blend of past, present and future.

Studio 2054 will be streamed from Friday at different times across global territories.


Tickets will be available on BookMyShow from October 31.

The *One kiss* hitmaker performed in India for the first time last year.




FUN


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5
6		7		8
9	10	11		
12		13	14	
16	17		18	
		19		

SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

5	6	1	7	3	2	8	9	4
9	3	2	5	4	8	6	7	1
7	8	4	9	1	6	2	5	3
6	7	9	2	5	3	4	1	8
8	1	3	4	6	7	9	2	5
2	4	5	1	8	9	3	6	7
1	2	8	6	7	4	5	3	9
4	5	6	3	9	1	7	8	2
3	9	7	8	2	5	1	4	6

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- A large animal
- Poultry product
- Shriek
- A teacher, usually for one pupil at a time
- Train tracks
- Follows an order
- Car engine
- Very easy to do
- A young sheep
- A building material that sets hard

DOWN

- These are held when people choose their government
- The number in an octet
- As well
- Big whirlwind
- A drink
- Very unhappy
- World sports games held every four years
- Buy and sell
- Observed
- Unwell

SOLUTION

P	E	A	S	M
M	O	T	O	R
E	U	P	H	A
D	I	R	T	E
U	C	E	L	A
A	T	T	E	I
T	I	G	H	T
F	R	A	N	G
I	R	O	V	E
N	W	K	D	S

The team management and Rohit told me before the start of the tournament that you have played enough to take the game deep. I am glad I have been able to do it

It is (opening innings) something that I have sort of always wanted to slowly and gradually get into. So yeah, really enjoying the opportunity and responsibility I've been given here at the Royals

We always spoke about one of the top three batters, or top four batters, bat all the way through if you are chasing and win the game for us. He (Surya) has done that more often than not

He (Suryakumar) has had a good tournament and today he was the difference, getting that score and scoring as quickly as he did. (He) put Chahal under pressure, with some good boundaries and sixes

Backing experience over youth backfired for Chennai: Lara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chennai Super Kings' unflinching reliance on experience over youth has been their undoing this IPL season, said West Indies batting icon Brian Lara, urging the franchise to give its younger lot a chance in the remaining games. One of the most successful sides in the history of the tournament, CSK are languishing at the bottom of the points table. While most sides nurture youngsters, that has not been the case with the Mahendra Singh Dhoni led side, often referred to as *Dads Army*.

"I think they (CSK) have got a lot of older players. There are not any young players coming through the line-up. You look at it. Even their overseas players, they have been around for a long time," Lara said on *Star Sports' Select Dugout*.

"So, they have backed experience over youth, and this has really turned upside down for them," he added.

It is the first time Dhoni and his men have failed to clear the league stage, having managed only eight points so far after four wins.

The three-time champions' poor run this season has put a question-mark on their approach, leading to heavy criticism of Dhoni, who has been accused of not showing enough faith in the youngsters.

"It's just an unbelievable season so far. You know, every time they turn up, we're very hopeful that CSK is going to turn it around," Lara said.

"We all came here thinking this was going to be the time when Dhoni turns things around with his team. And game after game, it just went, and they just kept hoping."

"But it's a situation where they can just try to build from next year. In the few coming games that they have, see what they can do with the younger players they've got," Lara said.



Nitish Rana reacts after scoring his fifty against Chennai Super Kings | IPL20

CSK SPOIL KKR'S PARTY

PTI ■ DUBAI

Opener Nitish Rana's 87 and a late burst helped Kolkata Knight Riders get to 172 for five against Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match here on Thursday.Following Rana's 61-ball effort, cameos from skipper Eoin Morgan (15 off 12) and Dinesh Karthik (21 not out off 10) allowed KKR to put up a competitive total. CSK, who pulled things back in the middle overs after a fine start from KKR openers Rana

and Shubman Gill (26 off 17), leaked 66 runs in the last five overs.Lungi Ngidi (2/34) was the best bowler for CSK while Sam Curran also bowled well early on.

The KKR innings was built largely on Rana's knock which comprised 10 fours, four sixes.The southpaw mixed caution with aggression and overcame a sluggish period in the middle overs with some lovely shots.Rana hit three consecutive sixes off Karn Sharma in the 16th over to up the ante as KKR looked for quick

runs.Sent in to bat, KKR got off to a solid start with Gill and Rana putting on 53 runs for the first wicket.Gill looked in good touch and hit four boundaries before falling to leggie Sharma.Sunil Narine (7), sent in at number three, smashed the second ball for a six and fell four balls later, unable to clear a Mitchell Santner delivery with Ravindra Jadeja taking the catch.KKR decided to send Rinku Singh, who was picked for the first time this season, ahead of Morgan at number four.

Won't be surprised if MS leads CSK in 2021: Gambhir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Chennai Super Kings owners share such mutual trust and fabulous relationship that he could be retained as captain of the side in 2021 despite enduring an abysmal IPL season in the UAE, says former India opener Gautam Gambhir.

"I keep saying that why CSK is CSK is because of the relationship between the owners and the captain. They have given all the freedom to MS, and MS has received all the mutual respect from the owners as well," Gambhir was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*.

"So I would not be surprised if they continue with MS and MS plays till the time

he wants to play. And then next year he still continues to be the captain and have a much different squad than what he has this time around."

"He deserves that much of appreciation from the owners."

The 39-year-old Dhoni's future has come under scrutiny in the wake of CSK's mediocre performances in the ongoing IPL.

Gambhir, who flourished under Dhoni's captaincy in international cricket, pointed out his overall record as CSK skipper.

"What he has done for the franchise and how the franchise actually deals with MS and treats MS is a fabulous relationship.

"And that is how every franchise should deal with their captain, who has deliv-

ered for them."

Gambhir said, "MS has won them three (IPL) trophies, couple of Champions Leagues, he has made them one of the top successful sides in the IPL after Mumbai Indians.

"So CSK saying they are going to continue with MS — it is just the relationship, it is just the mutual respect.

"That's why MS has been so loyal (to the Super Kings). That's why MS has given everything: heart and soul, his sweat, sleepless nights — I'm sure he must have had sleepless nights while he has continued captaining CSK."

Earlier, the CSK management has said that Dhoni would be retained at the next mega auction, which is likely to be held in 2022.

KXIP meet Royals in must-win game

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Rampaging Kings XI Punjab would look to extend their exceptional run and inch closer to a Play-offs berth while Rajasthan Royals would be desperate to stay alive in the tournament when the two sides clash, here on Friday.

It has been a dramatic turnaround for the KL Rahul-led side after a string of losses earlier in the tournament.

They have managed to weave together five consecutive wins against the top four sides in the tournament, infusing life into their campaign. They are in fourth position with 12 points from as many games, while the Royals have slumped to the penultimate spot with 10 points having suffered seven defeats from 12 outings.

It's a mad scramble for the play-offs. With Mumbai Indians

all but through, six teams are in the hunt for the remaining three spots.

The Royals can't afford to slip up, if they lose on Friday they will be out of the reckoning while a defeat for Punjab will dent their chances for a top-four finish.

They would expect their skipper Rahul, the leading run-scorer of the tournament, to fire in the crucial game after three underwhelming performances with the bat.

The addition of Chris Gayle has done wonders for the team's confidence.

It is to be seen if Mayank

Agarwal, who missed two games with a bruised knee, returns to the side. In his absence, Mandeep Singh revelled in the role of an opener with a match-winning unbeaten 66 in the win against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Punjab's bowling, which has been their weakest link throughout the tournament, has been exceptional in their recent wins, choking the opposition for runs.

The Royals will also be high on confidence after their morale boosting win over table toppers Mumbai and would be desperate to keep the winning momentum going.

The biggest positive for the Royals is Ben Stokes roaring back to form after rusty displays in previous five outings. The English all-rounder, who has been elevated to the role of opener, smashed an unbeaten 107 to help seal a seven-wicket win over Mumbai.

Sanju Samson is also back among runs, while Jos Buttler has looked erratic. That skipper Steve Smith is in the middle of a lean patch will augur well for KXIP.

The Jofra Archer-led bowling attack has looked ordinary. The Barbados-born English pacer, who is having a stellar individual season with 17 wickets from 12 matches with an economy of 6.71, has done most of the heavy lifting with the ball without adequate support from the rest of the bowlers.

MATCHES	20
KINGS XI PUNJAB	08
RAJASTHAN ROYALS	11



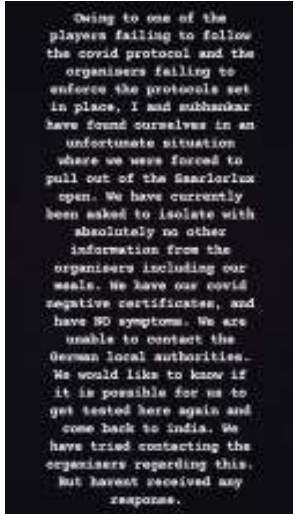
Jayaram, Subhankar seek to return after withdrawal over Covid-19 contact

SAARBRUCKEN: Indian shuttlers Ajay Jayaram and Shubhankar Dey were on Thursday forced out of the SaarLorLux Open after being put in isolation owing to contact with Covid-19 positive father-cum-coach of defending champion Lakshya Sen, who has already withdrawn.

The 19-year-old Lakshya withdrew on Wednesday after his father D K Sen returned a positive test for the virus.

"BWF can confirm three players have been withdrawn from the SaarLorLux Open 2020 as a precautionary measure for all participants after they were in contact with a member of their team entourage who tested positive for COVID-19," the BWF said in a statement. "The three players: Lakshya Sen, Ajay Jayaram and Subhankar Dey will not compete further in the tournament, which began on Tuesday," it added.

Later, Jayaram, in a Twitter post tagging sports minister Kiren Rijiju, the national badminton federation and BWF, said that he and Dey would like to return to India as the organisers have not given them any information or assistance apart



from asking them to isolate.

The Sports Authority of India assured that it will pay for the expenses to be incurred by the two players "for the length of their quarantine in Germany from October 30 to November 10, on humanitarian grounds." "SAI will be paying a total of ₹1.46 lakh for their hotel stay and food expenses and will release 90 percent of the amount immediately," SAI said in a statement.

PTI

Pakistan leave out Haider Ali for 1st ODI

Rawalpindi: The Pakistan team management has left out the promising duo of batsman Haider Ali and uncapped Abdullah Shafique in its 15-member squad for Friday's first ODI against Zimbabwe in Rawalpindi.

Vice-captain Shadab Khan was not considered after being ruled out of the first match due to stiffness in his left upper-leg. Senior batsman Mohammad Hafeez and young fast bowler Mohammad Hasnain were also not picked even though they were named in a preliminary squad, like Haider and Shafique, last week for the white-ball series against the visitors.

Pakistan's top batsman, Babar Azam, will be leading the team for the first time in an ODI series and said he wanted to start his tenure on a winning note.

"I'm keen on winning the ODIs as this is my first series as captain," said Azam.

"No team is easy in international cricket so we won't take Zimbabwe lightly," PTI

AFP ■ TURIN

Marcus Rashford was again the star for Manchester United in the Champions League with a hat-trick in a 5-0 thumping of RB Leipzig on Wednesday as Barcelona put their off-field troubles to one side to win 2-0 away to a Juventus side deprived of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Rashford's late goal earned United a 2-1 victory away to Paris Saint-Germain last week and at Old Trafford, the England striker came on as a second-half substitute and scored three times from the 74th minute on in what was a fine win against last season's semi-finalists.

Paul Pogba released Mason Greenwood to open the scoring in the first half, before the youngster made way for Rashford after the break and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side ran away with the game to make it two wins from two in Group H.

Anthony Martial also netted from the penalty spot as United ruthlessly exposed the side who currently top the German Bundesliga and went clear at the top of the section.

"We looked dangerous throughout and that we could score every time we

Hat-trick hero Rashford

Substitute Marcus nets thrice in Utd's 5-0 win; Barca beat Cristiano-less Juve

went forward," said Rashford. "It was a real team performance."

Meanwhile PSG got their campaign up and running by beating Istanbul Basaksehir 2-0 in Turkey, although they lost Neymar to an adductor injury in the first half.

Both PSG's goals were scored in the second half by Moise Kean, the on-loan Everton striker heading in Kylian Mbappe's corner in the 64th minute and then turning to fire in the second late on.

BARCA BOUNCE BACK

In Turin, Barcelona bounced back from their week-end defeat in the Clasico against Real Madrid and shut out the boardroom crisis which led to president Josep Maria Bartomeu resigning on Tuesday.

Ronald Koeman's side had luck on their side as they took the lead through a



Lionel Messi hugs Leonardo Bonucci after Barca beat Juventus in Turin on Wednesday

deflected Ousmane Dembele strike and then saw Alvaro Morata have three goals disallowed for offside for the hosts.

The absence of Ronaldo because of a positive coronavirus test meant no chance to see him renew his on-field rivalry with Lionel Messi, but the Argentine got his name on the scoresheet late on, netting a stoppage-time penalty to seal Barca's second victory in as many Group G outings.

"This was our best game all season," said Koeman.

Juve had Turkish defender Merih Demirel sent off late on as their underwhelming start to the season under novice coach Andrea Pirlo continued.

Their next game is away at Ferencváros, who came from behind to draw 2-2 with 10-man Dynamo Kiev in Budapest.

ZIVECH IMPRESSES

In Group E Chelsea were comprehensive 4-0 winners away to Krasnodar in Russia, with Jorginho missing a penalty before Callum Hudson-Odoi opened the scoring.

Timo Werner smashed in a spot-kick on 76 minutes to double Chelsea's lead, with Hakim Ziyech and Christian Pulisic adding late goals.

Sevilla beat Rennes 1-0 in the same section with Luuk de Jong scoring the only goal.

Borussia Dortmund claimed their first points in Group F with Jadon Sancho's 78th-minute penalty and Erling Braut Haaland's stoppage-time strike securing a 2-0 win over Zenit Saint-Petersburg.

The Germans are a point behind Lazio and Club Brugge, who drew 1-1 in Belgium with a Hans Vanaken penalty securing a draw for the hosts.

DUGOUT



Old tweets of Suryakumar Yadav praising RCB skipper Virat Kohli have resurfaced after Surya's match-winning knock for Mumbai



Rohit Sharma knew it way before that Suryakumar has the potential to be a big player. In his tweet that he posted way back in 2011, Rohit Sharma had stated that his IPL and state teammate Suryakumar would be a player to watch out for in future.











Former cricketer Manoj Tiwary praised Team India head coach Ravi Shastri's tweet on Suryakumar Yadav after his match-winning knock against Royal Challengers Bangalore

MORRIS, HARDIK REPRIMANDED
RCB all-rounder Chris Morris and his Mumbai Indians' counterpart Hardik Pandya have been reprimanded for a verbal altercation during their teams' IPL clash. The incident took place in the 19th over of MI's chase when Pandya struck Morris for a massive six and gestured towards the South African. Morris got his revenge when he dismissed Pandya in the fifth ball of the over and gave him a send off. A press release from the IPL said that both of them admitted to breaching the Code of Conduct.

FEELING VERY GOOD, SAYS KAPIL DEV

A week after undergoing angioplasty, the legendary Kapil Dev on Thursday greeted his former India teammates from the 1983 World Cup, saying he is "feeling very good" and eager to meet everyone soon. The 61-year-old underwent the procedure after suffering a heart attack. "My family 83. The weather is very pleasant and I am very eager to meet you all. I am feeling very good. Thanks to all for your wishes and concern," an enthusiastic Kapil, dressed in a purple T-shirt, said in a video which he shared with his 1983 teammates. "I am hoping that we all will meet pretty soon. I will try to meet you all as early as possible. We have approached the end of the year and I am confident that we will have a great start to next year. Love you all," he added.

POINTS TABLE							
		P	W	L	NRR	PTS	
1		MI	12	8	4	+1.186	16
2		RCB	12	7	5	+0.048	14
3		DC	12	7	5	+0.030	14
4		KXIP	12	6	6	-0.049	12
5		KKR	13	6	7	-0.467	12
6		SRH	12	5	7	+0.396	10
7		RR	12	5	7	-0.505	10
8		CSK	13	5	8	-0.532	10



CHANDINI TO HEADLINE A THRILLER ON LINGUISTIC FORENSICS

The Vizag girl, who is basking in the glory of *Colour Photo*, will be seen in a challenging and interesting role in the untitled film written by lyricist-filmmaker Krishna Chaitanya, reports NAGARAJ GOUD

Besides being a prominent lyricist who has penned some blockbuster songs, Krishna Chaitanya has proved his range and depth as a script writer with his directorial efforts, *Rowdy Fellow* and *Chal Mohan Ranga*. Before he embarks on the ambitious journey of directing his two-part high-voltage political drama, *Power Peta*, with Nithiin from early next year, the director, *The Pioneer* has exclusively learnt, has penned a story, which has been picked up by a new production house headed by Charan.

A source close to the development tells us, "It's a female-centric thriller on linguistic forensics. The subject matter is some-

thing new to the Telugu audience and Charan is upbeat about it. He has roped in Chandini Chowdary to spearhead it, while debutant Kalyan, a mass communications student who has been an assistant director on multiple films in the recent past, has been signed on to helm it. Chandini has got a challenging and interesting role. She needs to prep extensively for it before filming."

The source adds that filming will commence next month in Hyderabad and the makers are in the process of finalising the technical crew and other cast members. "The official announcement is around the corner. Krishna Chaitanya has also written the film's dialogues," the source concludes.



Sam thanks uncle Nag for helping her 'overcome hosting fears'

Samantha Akkineni, who hosted an episode of popular reality show *Bigg Boss* 4 last week due to the unavailability of her superstar uncle Nagarjuna, dubbed the experience as something she will remember. Taking to her Instagram space on Thursday, the actress, who hasn't watched a single episode of the show before taking over the hosting duties, extended thanks to Nagarjuna for helping her overcome her jitters. "An experience to remember... Never thought I'd be on the Big Boss stage as host! Only

because I was given this responsibility by my Mamagaru.. I could find the strength to overcome my fears... the fear that I had no experience hosting, the fear of Telugu.. I had never even watched an episode before.. Thankyou mama for helping me overcome my fears and trusting me with this (sic)," she wrote.

Although the critics may have been divided on her hosting skills, she is happy for all the love she received after the episode. "I was jumping with joy And GK Mohan garu for handholding me through a very demanding Maha episode of #bigbossseason4," she wrote further.



Flaunting bridal glow

The wedding festivities of Kajal Aggarwal, who will tie the knot with entrepreneur Gautam Kitchlu today in Mumbai, are at full-swing at her house. On Thursday, she posted a picture from the mehendi ceremony, flaunting the deep colour of henna on her hands. She was dressed in a mint green salwar suit with golden chandbais, while being all smiles for the camera. She captioned the picture stating, "#kajgautkitched".

Balayya-Boyapati film back on sets



Nandamuri Balakrishna's untitled next with Boyapati Sreenu has resumed in Hyderabad on Thursday-nearly eight months after its shoot was put on pause mode due to the pandemic. While the makers confirmed the same, they refused to reveal information about

whether Balayya had joined the sets on Thursday or not. The film's team, however, is following safety protocols. The present schedule will go uninterrupted until December 3, with majority of the filming set to take place at Ramoji Film City, Hyderabad.

In the action-entertainer with an underly-

ing social message, Balayya will be seen in dual roles — of which one role is that of an aghora. Expectations are high on this untitled film as it marks the reteaming up of the actor and Boyapati after successful ventures like *Simha* and *Legend* in the past. Produced by M Ravinder Reddy, the film has music by Thaman.

Colour Photo wins Jagapathi's heart



Streaming on *aha* since last week, *Colour Photo*, fronted by Suhas, Chandini Chowdary and Sunil, continues to be a beneficiary of positive feedback from the industry. After the likes of Ravi Teja, Nani and Sai Tej, the latest to have raved about the film is actor Jagapathi Babu. Taking to Twitter, the senior actor said that the film's success is a testimony to the fact it is heart and soul that makes a film to succeed but not stardom and money. "I am glad this film once again proves that it is not just the currency and stardom that makes movie a hit..it is more heart and soul...most of the times I wonder about what am I doing here when the youngsters are pacing far more ahead in cre-

ativity and naturality (sic)," the actor posted on Thursday. Lauding the efforts of the principal team, he added, "Seeing what I believed in. I am totally impressed by watching #ColourPhoto. super kid @SandeepRaaajdid a great job for his age. @ActorSuhas a good actor proved to be a hero, @kaalabhairava7 whom I am really fond of as a person and his sensibilities of music always impresses me (sic)," Jagapathi wrote. Actor Satyadev too posted an appreciation message on Thursday. "Been some time since I've watched a touching love story. Edipinchesaru! Love you my darlings for making a beautiful film. Every department excelled and thus we have a smile," he wrote on Twitter tagging the film's key team.

Allari Naresh completes Naandhi

The filming of Allari Naresh's next, *Naandhi*, with debutant director Vijay Kanakamedala has been wrapped up, film's producer Satish Vegesna said on Thursday. Before the pandemic forced the unit to take an extensive break of six months, the film was 90 percent wrapped up.

Inspired by a true story, the film follows an undertrial (played by Naresh) brought to

Chanchalguda prison, Hyderabad, for a crime that he didn't commit. A hard-hitting social drama, it will draw attention to the torture he faces at the hands of cops and how he finally comes out of the prison.

The film, which is Naresh's 57, co-stars Varalakshmi Sarathkumar, Priyadarshi, Praveen, Harish Uttaman, and Devi Prasad in supporting roles. A Sri Charan Pakala musica, it has dialogues by popular writer Abburi Ravi.

