

OPINION 6
NEW AGRICULTURAL
PARADIGM**MONEY 8**
COVID DELAYS C'GARH STEEL PLANT
COMMISSIONING PLANNED THIS YEAR**SPORTS 11**
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REGISTER FIRST WIN

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 30, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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INTIMATE SCENES
GET DIFFICULT FOR
ME SOMETIMES:
SNEHA ULLAL

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UAE TO LAUNCH AN UNMANNED SPACECRAFT TO MOON IN 2024

A top official in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday said his country plans to send an unmanned spacecraft to the moon in 2024. The announcement by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who is also the ruler of Dubai, comes after the launch of a Mars probe earlier this year by the UAE. "It will be an Emirati-made lunar rover that will land on the surface of the moon in 2024 in areas that have not been explored previously by human missions," Sheikh Mohammed wrote on Twitter. If successful in 2024, the UAE could become the fourth nation on the Earth to land a spacecraft on the moon, after the US, the Soviet Union and China.

**CANNES FILM FESTIVAL TO HOLD THREE-DAY SPECIAL EVENT IN OCT**

Cannes Film Festival has announced a three-day event, scheduled to take place in October, where four previews of films from the 2020 official selection, the short films selected in competition and the Cinéfondation's school films will be screened. The Palais des Festivals will host a 'Special Cannes' event, which will run from October 27 to 29, the organisers said in a release posted on the festival's website. The announcement comes months after the 2020 edition of the prestigious movie gala was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The festival will be organising the event in collaboration with the Cannes City Council.

**VENKAIAH TESTS POSITIVE; IN GOOD HEALTH**

Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday tested positive for Covid-19, the Vice-President's Secretariat said. It said Naidu, 71, is asymptomatic and in good health. "The Vice President of India who underwent a routine Covid-19 test today morning has been tested positive. He is however, asymptomatic and in good health," the Secretariat tweeted. Venkaiah Naidu has been advised home quarantine. His wife Usha Naidu has been tested negative and is in self-isolation, the tweet said.

**INSTITUTES TO BE RATED BASED ON SUPPORT TO FEMALE STAFF**

Science and Technology institutes will be rated based on the support they give to female staff under the new Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP), 2020, that aims to make the arena more diverse. Besides stressing on support to female staff, the focus of ranking parameters will also be language and geographical locations. "There will be a separate chapter on equity, inclusion and diversity in the new science policy," Department of Science and Technology Secretary Ashutosh Sharma said. Deliberations are underway to have a new STIP which is expected to be unveiled by December, he said. The percentage of women in the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics is low.



Corona spread in rural areas remains worrisome

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

While the number of Covid-19 infections has seen a decline over the recent past, the fact that the number of cases being reported from rural areas has sent alarm bells ringing.

Rural areas had been reporting a gradual increase in the number of infections after the Centre announced the process of "Unlock".

According to the data released by the state government, more than 60 per cent of the infections are being reported from rural areas while less than 40 per cent of cases are being reported from urban areas during the past few weeks.

The concept of wearing masks and maintaining social distance has gone for a toss in rural areas. Besides group gatherings have become commonplace and these are among the major reasons behind the increase in the number of positive cases.

Initially, the rural population was more fearful of the deadly virus than urban people; however as the days passed, the fear was gradually replaced by acceptance that this is another phase of life that has to be taken in stride. This led to slackness in following basic Covid guidelines resulting in a rise in positive cases.

**Supreme Court tells states to provide dry rations to sex workers without ID proof****PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed all the states to provide dry rations to sex workers, who are identified by National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and legal services authorities, without insisting on any proof of identity. The orders will help about 96 percent of around 1.2 lakh sex workers in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Telangana who had lost

their source of earning in the pandemic. The apex court asked all the states to file compliance report within four weeks giving details of number of sex workers who got dry ration within this period. A bench comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Ajay Rastogi said that it would later deal with the aspect of whether financial assistance could be provided to them during the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

2

a few parts of the country which would be a concern in the days to come.

He said that a record number of corona tests are being conducted in Andhra Pradesh. Jawahar Reddy emphasised that while a 25 per cent dip in the number of positive cases, people must be wary of a second wave of the infection.

He said that random surveys are being conducted in non containment areas and there is no clarity about the people infected from Coronavirus for the second time in the state.

"More number of cases are being reported from East and West Godavari districts," Jawahar Reddy said.

He warned private hospitals of stern action and cancellation of licences if they try to fleece patients and their families. "Licences of 26 hospitals have been revoked in the state while licences of 17 hospitals in East Godavari alone have been revoked," he said.

Meanwhile, Krishna district collector A Md Imtiaz said that the authorities are declaring Corona affected villages as new containment zones and offering treatment to the affected people.

Venkaiah Naidu tests positive

■ Vice-President in good health; wife tests negative, say officials**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

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"The Vice President of India who underwent a routine Covid-19 test today morning has been tested positive. He is however, asymptomatic and in good health," the Secretariat tweeted. Venkaiah Naidu has been advised home quarantine.

His wife Usha Naidu has been tested negative and is in self-isolation, the tweet said.



Naidu reacts to DGP's 'ridiculous' advice

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'Ridiculous,' said TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday, describing DGP Ga-ut-am Sawang's letter asking him to send evidence, if he has any, in a sealed cover.

Naidu was reacting to the DGP's 'advice' to the former chief minister, asking him to send evidence regarding the involvement of YSRCP leaders in the deterioration of the law and order situation in the state.

Addressing TDP senior leaders through videoconference, Naidu wondered whether the police would investigate the case if he were to furnish evidence. "Investigation of cases is whose responsibility? Police or the Opposition?" the TDP supremo thundered.

He alleged that the state government has thrown in

the towel and accepted surrender, having failed in its efforts to rein in Coronavirus cases.

"The people are in shock over the extent of corruption being seen during the YSRCP rule," Naidu said.

He also accused the government of failing to stop attacks on temples and Dalits.

Referring to the attack on the brother of Chittoor judge Ramakrishna, Naidu said that the SP of the district first responded saying that the attack was not politically motivated.

"A case was registered against Kumar Reddy and three others on the day of the attack. But, by evening, YSRCP leader Kumar Reddy's name was removed to include the name of TDP leader Pratap Reddy," Naidu alleged.



Telugu film producer petitions HC for compensation

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Top Telugu film industry producer Ashwini Dutt has petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court for compensation for the land he gave for Gannavaram airport development as part of a land pooling agreement during the previous Telugu Desam Party government.

"We can claim loss of damage and loss of compensation against the respondents (government) due to policy decision taken by the state government for abandoning the development of Amaravati capital city as planned and promised by the TDP government," said Dutt's petition.

He said several developmental plans are abandoned. Incidentally, Dutt gave 39 acres 15 cents of land at Kes-rapalli village in Gannavaram mandalam for the Gannavaram airport expansion on land pooling basis.

2

AP Govt puts off reopening of schools till November 2

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has put off re-opening of schools across AP from October 5 to almost a month. Accordingly, schools in the state will now reopen from November 2.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy reportedly took the decision during a review meeting with collectors of all the 13 districts conducted via videoconference on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister said that he has decided on the deferment keeping in view the prevailing Covid-19 situation in



the state and the concerns expressed by a section of parents.

Earlier, it was decided that all the schools will reopen from October 5, after a long layoff of close to six months.

Even though the education department is fully geared up for this crucial exercise in all aspects, there was hesitation

among a few sections of parents who are worried about the safety and well-being of their children.

However, the state government will push ahead with its original plan of distributing kits to students under 'Jagananna Vidya Kanuka' on October 5. The kits, which includes three pairs of uniforms, textbooks, notebooks, a pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, belts and a schoolbag, will be distributed to each student of Class I to Class X in government schools.

2

Amnesty halts India operations, cites freezing of its bank accounts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amnesty International on Tuesday said it is halting all its activities in India due to freezing of its accounts and claimed that it is being subjected to an 'incessant witch-hunt' over unfounded and motivated allegations.

The Home Ministry, responding, said Amnesty International's statement was unfortunate, exaggerated and far from the truth.

2

Krishna flood affects over 2,000 families

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The surplus water being discharged from Prakasam barrage due to flooding in river Krishna has affected over 2,000 families living in the catchment area in Vijayawada and left hundreds of standing crops inundated.

Till 6 pm on Tuesday, 3,70,590 cusecs of surplus water was released at Prakasam

Barrage. The inflow was 3,84,977 cusecs. Though the flood discharge diminished, the agricultural fields remained under a sheet of water.

Lanka villages on either side downstream Prakasam Barrage, in Krishna and Guntur districts were marooned as the flood peaked to a high of 7.03 lakh cusecs during the day before slightly receding.

2



Two minor girls married off to alleged rapists

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a shocking incident, elders of a village in West Godavari "solemnised" the marriage of two minor rape survivors with the rapists. The incident came to light on Tuesday when one of the "grooms" accused of rape, rapist approached the local police to file a complaint of child marriage as he is just 17 years old.

The incident took place in a village under Dwaraka Tirumala mandal in West



Godavari district where the two minor girls (16) were mar-

ried off to two brothers — one of whom is a minor — who

allegedly raped and impregnated the girls.

As they received the complaint, the cops intervened and booked rape cases against the two brothers under the POCSO Act. The cops also filed a case against five villagers who performed the marriage.

According to Eluru subdivision in-charge DSP G Pydeswara Rao, two rape accused are brothers aged 17 and 19.

The two girls used to work in agricultural land in Dwaraka Tirumala mandal in West

Godavari district. The two brothers after befriending them were in a physical relationship.

When the girls became pregnant, there was uproar in the village. To resolve the issue, the village elders performed marriage of the 17 year-old boy with the 16 year-old girl on September 27.

Unhappy with the marriage, the minor boy, showing the photographs of his marriage lodged a complaint with the police stating that he was the victim of child marriage.

2

Auto driver burnt alive over affair

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a grotesque incident, an auto-rickshaw driver was burnt alive over an extramarital relationship at Agathavarappadu in Guntur district in the early hours of Tuesday.

Pedakakani circle inspector U Shoban Babu said that 25-year-old Tammisetty Ramakrishna from Pedakakani died while undergoing treatment in

GGH, Guntur later in the day. Revealing details about the murder, Shoban Babu said that Ramakrishna had developed an extramarital relationship with the sister of his friend M Vamsi.

The duo had gone to the fields at Agathavarappadu village in the early hours of Tuesday where the matter cropped up.

2

**Will Jagan adopt the political path that Naidu tread?**

2

**Oppn wants only middlemen to thrive, not farmers: Modi**

5

**India looking to store oil overseas in US: Pradhan**

8

TODAY**ALMANAC****Month & Paksham:**

Ashwin (Adhik) & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Chaturdashi 12:25 am (Next Day)**Nakshatram:** PurnaBhadrapada 03:15 am

(Next Day)

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam:** 12:05 pm – 01:34 pm**Yamagandam:** 07:38 am – 09:07 am**Variyam:** 07:51 am – 09:37 am**Gulika:** 10:36 am – 12:05 pm**Good Time:** (to start any important work)**Amritakalam:** 06:26 pm – 08:12 pm**Ahijit Muhurtham:** —**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER****Forecast:** Thunderstorm**Temp:** 31/24**Humidity:** 83%**Sunrise:** 06:06 am**Sunset:** 06:05 pm**Current Weather Conditions****Updated September 29, 2020 5:00 PM**

At times, politics throws up such dicey situations that even a questionable path adopted by one's arch-rival in the political arena sounds OK. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who has been running the government with self-confidence, is now not averse to adopting the path shown by his bête noire Nara Chandrababu Naidu, who had tactfully chosen to sail with the Bharatiya Janata Party to retain his power in the unified state of Andhra Pradesh 22 years ago! Is Jagan ensuring a safe and cosy political future for him in the present political situation that is BJP-centric country by tilting towards BJP? He appears to be seriously exploring this option as he knows well the benefits of joining hands with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an opportune time. Given the fact that BJP got a handsome majority because of Modi's charisma, Jagan may be weigh-



PIN POINT

ing the benefits of being close to the ruling party at the national level. What are the repercussions of getting close to BJP? Some adverse reactions can be witnessed from minority sections as they tend to brandy political outfit joining hands with BJP as one driven by political mileage rather than ideological basis. Will there be any such reaction from minority sections whose patronage is now being enjoyed by the ruling YSR Congress party? How can such situation be tackled without tarnishing the image of party? These are some of the questions making the rounds in some circles.

A sizeable number of Muslims supported the YSR Congress party in last year's Assembly elections. In return for their support, Jagan made

The YSCR may face difficulties if its traditional friends, including AIMIM, turn against Jagan and influence the minority community here against the Chief Minister. Jagan's bonhomie with Telangana counterpart K. Chandrasekhar Rao too helped a lot in the name of 'return gift' to Naidu to get people's mandate

one Muslim legislator Deputy Chief Minister, who is one among five Deputy CMs drawn from different downtrodden sections of society. So, some party circles feel that there is no scope for minorities getting angry, should YSRC embrace BJP.

Interestingly Naidu did not get adverse reaction from the Muslim community when he joined hands with BJP in 1998 first and continued friendship with the same party only

to forge an electoral alliance with BJP in subsequent elections of 1999 for the Lok Sabha. In the Assembly elections simultaneously, Naidu registered an impressive victory on the strength of Vajpayee's boosted image following the Kargil war.

Naidu, who was spearheading politics of the United Front that ruled the country for nearly two years between 1996-98, suddenly dumped the Third Front constituents,



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

sending shock waves to his political colleagues of non-Congress parties. Instead of maintaining equidistance from both Congress and BJP, Naidu aligned with BJP immediately after the conclusion of mid-term polls to the Lok Sabha in 1998. He decided to extend support to the BJP-led NDA

government headed by AB Vajpayee. He decided not to join the Union government to quell the criticism of joining hands with 'communal' BJP after fighting against the same party in the polls. Yet, he accepted the post of Lok Sabha Speaker offered to Telugu Desam and made GMC Balayogi Speaker then.

The YSCR may face difficulties if its traditional friends, including AIMIM, turn against Jagan and influence the minority community here against the Chief Minister. Jagan's bonhomie with Telangana counterpart K. Chandrasekhar Rao too helped a lot in the name of 'return gift' to Naidu to get people's mandate.

Presently, the Congress and Communist parties are taking out rallies to protest farmers' laws brought out by the Modi government. The opposition

parties have painted the laws as draconian laws and are striving to draw the attention of people, particularly farmers on this issue.

Jagan's YSR Congress party wholeheartedly supported the farm bills in Parliament, probably without knowing the seriousness involved in that subject. In their exchange of favours, YSRC and BJP are believed to have acted out of sheer mutual interests. Jagan even lambasted opposition parties for criticising farm laws passed by Parliament. How can farmers get remunerative prices in the absence of MSP and Agricultural Market Committees? How can poor farmers take on corporate entities? These are the concerns of farmers as well as general public now.

After supporting BJP for the first time in 1998, Naidu had gone for an alliance with BJP in

1999. He was in a position then to even demand Prime Minister Vajpayee whatever he wanted for the state. Once, during a visit to flood-hit areas, he suddenly stopped the convoy of vehicles on the middle of the road, got down his car, and made a telephonic call to Vajpayee in full public glare for apprising him of the flood situation. In 1998, Naidu's TDP won only 12 seats in the Lok Sabha. Naidu bagged 29 seats out of 42 in 1999.

Going by the same logic, Jagan may repeat the same as per the assessment of his party circles. If the current public mood, in the context of the recent farm laws, turns against the BJP-led government, the ensuing situation may not be favourable for the government headed by Jagan. It remains to be seen whether Jagan can tackle the backlash from farmers.

35 more deaths, Covid tally up by 6,190

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh's Covid-19 tally increased to 6,87,351 as 6,190 more cases were added on Monday, while 35 deaths took the fatalities to 5,780.

Also, the overall infection positivity rate dropped below the 12 per cent mark for the first time in over two months, standing at 11.99 per cent on Tuesday after a gross 57.34 lakh samples were tested so far.

The total recoveries also rose to 6,22,136 as 9,836 patients got cured in the last 24 hours, ending 9 AM on Tuesday, according to the latest bulletin. Another 35 patients succumbed, taking the overall toll to 5,780.

The number of active cases dropped to 59,435.

For the first time in weeks, all 13 districts in the state on Tuesday reported fresh cases in numbers below 1,000.

East Godavari, that saw its caseload rise by over 1,000 a day, added 991 afresh on Tuesday, while its neighbour West Godavari registered 907.

Krishna, which reported only 97 new cases on Monday, added 398 in 24 hours.

Prakasam district reported eight more Covid-19 deaths and Chittoor, six.

Naidu reacts to DGP's 'ridiculous' advice

Continued from Page 1

He alleged that the "ruling party has been managing the system".

The police are lifting cases against YSRC leaders and relatives of the Chief Minister while fabricated cases are being foisted upon TDP leaders, Naidu alleged.

He said that YSRC leaders have a single-point agenda — praising Jagan and abusing Chandrababu Naidu.

Recitation of shlokas to counter ill effects of Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 16-day Shodasadina Sundarakanda Parayanam, commenced on a devotional note at Vasantha Mandapam in Tirumala on Tuesday.

A 16-member team of Sundarakanda Upasakas recited 269 Shlokas from first and second sargas of the Sundarakanda comprising 2821 Shlokas from 68 Sargas on the first day.

Speaking to the media, TTD Additional EO AV Dharma Reddy said that the main concept behind the 16-day Sundarakanda Deeksha Parayanam is to revive the lost health, wealth and prosperity of the entire humanity due to the ill effects of Covid-19.

He said that in the



Shodasakshara Mantram, "Raghavo Vijayam Dadyanma Sitapathi Prabhu" - each syllable has some Beejaksharas and the total tallies to 68 that is equivalent to 68 Sargas. The Upasakas will recite Shlokas from different Sargas based on the number that implies to each syllable from the Maha

Mantra every day.

"On first day, the syllable "Ra" from the mantra is indicated with two beejaksharas and hence the Upasakas recited 211 Shlokas from first Sarga and 58 Shlokas from second Sarga and completed a total of 269 Shlokas from first two Sargas today. Tomorrow the

AP Govt puts off ...

Continued from Page 1

Jagan himself is likely to launch the scheme by participating in a distribution event at one of the government schools on October 5.

In the run-up for the reopening of schools from October 5, the state government and the education department had put in place all arrangements. Several thousands of schools were also renovated and developed

with all facilities under the 'Nadu-Nedu' scheme over the last few months.

In fact, the education department has already issued the standard operating procedures (SOPs) to all the schools on how to run the government schools while adhering to the Covid-19 guidelines.

But at the same time, there were divergent opinions on whether or not the time is conducive for the reopening of the schools.

Krishna flood...

Continued from Page 1

Four teams of National Disaster Response Force and one team of SDRF were sent to different divisions in the two districts to attend to any eventuality even as several affected families were moved out of relief camps from the flood villages.

After inspecting the flood situation, Information Minister Perni Venkataramaiah said the authorities were closely mon-

itoring the situation and have taken all steps to ensure safety of people.

"The flood is expected to recede gradually but we are fully geared up the district administration to aid the affected people," the Minister said.

As village streams remained swollen due to heavy rains, coupled with the flood flow in the river, road communication network remained cut off, particularly between Vijayawada and Amaravati.

Amnesty halts India...

Continued from Page 1

The ministry said all the "glossy statements" about humanitarian work and speaking truth to power are nothing but a "ploy to divert attention" from their activities which are in clear contravention of laid down Indian laws.

Amnesty India, in a statement, said the organisation has been compelled to let go of staff in India and pause all its ongoing campaign and research work.

"The complete freezing of Amnesty International India's bank accounts by Government of India which it came to know on 10 September 2020, brings all the work being done by the organisation to a grinding halt," it said.

The government has said that Amnesty has been receiving foreign funds illegally.

In 2018, the Enforcement Directorate had carried out searches at the headquarters of Amnesty International in Bangalore.

Auto driver burnt alive..

Continued from Page 1

A heated argument followed and an irate Vamsi doused his friend with petrol and set him on fire. He fled from the spot.

Screaming for help, Ramakrishna ran from the farmlands. Locals who saw the grotesque sight informed the police.

The police shifted him to GGH, Guntur where he died.

Telugu film producer...

Continued from Page 1

According to Dutt, one acre of that land is valued anywhere between Rs 1.25 to 1.5 crore, estimating the entire land he gave to land pooling to be valued at a very high premium.

The producer's petition said that the earlier government gave assurance that Amaravati would be developed as an economic hub, with nine economic thematic cities, such as

financial city, government city, justice city, knowledge city, media city, sports city, health city, electronic city and others.

"The state/AMRDA now unilaterally withdrew from its commitments under the agreements with respect to the airport land pooling," said the petition.

On Monday, Krishnam Raju, veteran Telugu actor, had also petitioned the High Court on similar lines.

Supreme Court tells states to provide...

Continued from Page 1

The top court, which posted the matter for hearing after four weeks, said that states would provide dry rations to sex workers and would identify them with the assistance of NACO, district as well as state legal service authority.

The bench was hearing a plea which has raised the issue problems faced by sex work-

ers on account of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The apex court was hearing an application filed by NGO, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee which had moved the top court to highlight the destitution faced by sex workers on the account of Covid-19, and sought relief measures for over nine lakh female and transgender sex workers across the country.

Tirupati LS by-poll...

Continued from Page 1

While by-polls to 54 Assembly seats would be held on November 3, those for one Lok Sabha seat in Bihar and two Assembly seats in Manipur would be held on November 7.

Votes for all the by-polls will be counted on November 10, alongside the counting of votes for the Assembly elections in Bihar.

Before announcing the schedule, the poll panel issued a separate statement on

Tuesday to say that it has decided not to hold "at this stage" Assembly by-polls in seven seats across Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and West Bengal.

The decision has been taken based on inputs received from the chief secretaries and poll officials in these states, the poll panel said in the release.

While there are two vacancies each in the Assemblies of Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, one seat is vacant in the West Bengal legislature.

Rape complaints reach pre-pandemic levels

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Although India saw a steep drop in reported cases of rape in the first month of the nationwide lockdown earlier this year, the menace is rearing its ugly head again with several incidents being reported from across the country and brutal rapes making national headlines once again.

As per the record of the complaints received by the National Commission for Women (NCW), after touching an all-time low in April 2020, reports of rape have shot up 12 times over following three months.

Commenting on the rise in incidence of sexual crime, DCP, Delhi Police, Suman Nalwa said: "While this was expected with the easing of



restrictions on public movement, safety of women and children remains our top priority. Even during this pandemic, we've been taking steps to equip our force with the training and resources for proper collection, handling, and transportation of DNA

samples to strengthen the prosecution's case. Not only can forensic DNA technology bring sex offenders to justice, it can also act as a strong deterrent by putting the fear of law in the minds of such criminals."

As incidence of rape and sexual assault reaches pre-

Covid levels, police investigators from around the country have been demonstrating how forensic DNA can be used effectively in identifying and convicting sex offenders. Recently, Uttarakhand Police arrested a youth for raping and impregnating a 17-year-old girl based on a DNA test, while another offender was convicted in a rape and murder case of a 7-year-old girl in Andhra Pradesh. In another first, the West Bengal Police tested the DNA sample from a cigarette found at the crime scene to convict two accused in a ten-year old case.

Dr Pinky Anand, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India adds, it has become critical for India's criminal justice system to quickly gear up with infrastructure and training for

widespread application of forensic DNA technology in rape cases.

Along with ensuring swift justice in sexual assault cases, it will also curb the incidence of rape by identifying habitual offenders who prey on women and children with impunity. Considering the conclusiveness of DNA evidence, the Government too is trying to institute the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill at the earliest. Once enacted, the Bill will go a long way in standardising protocols and preventing repeat crime through a regulated DNA databank.

The governments at both central and state levels are continuing work on strengthening forensic DNA policy framework and infrastructure.

72 RTC employees succumbed to Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APSRCT VC and MD MT Krishna Babu on Tuesday said that 4,500 employees of the corporation have been infected by the deadly Coronavirus, of whom 72 have succumbed.

Addressing the meeting of zonal directors and regional managers through videoconference, Krishna Babu, who is also the transport department principal secretary, said financial support will be extended to the family members of the deceased.

He pointed out that the family members of the employees are also infected. "One should encourage tax employ-

ees to attend duties and depot managers should ensure that they do so with commitment," Krishna Babu said.

The employees should follow the Covid guidelines by wearing masks, using sanitizers and maintaining social distance. As 30 to 40 per cent of the buses are permitted to ply at present, the employees can attend the duties on rotation basis, Krishna Babu said and added that they have decided to provide financial help of Rs 5 lakh to the families of the Covid victims.

He said that from October, buses should ply with 60 per cent occupancy and should cover at least 30 lakh km.

CAPSULE



Release 2 months pending salaries: Govt employees

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
The Andhra Pradesh Government Employees Association (APGEA) has demanded that the state government immediately pay the 50 percent of the salaries pending for two months of March and April, 2020 and release five pending Dearness Allowances starting from July 2018. Addressing a media conference here on Tuesday, Association state president KR Suryanarayana said the employees had been facing many hardships due to pending 50 percent salaries for two months. He said the state government paid only 50 percent salaries for March and April due to Coronavirus pandemic and the employees had been eagerly waiting for the payment of remaining 50 percent salaries. Suryanarayana said the DA arrears from July 1, 2018 to July 1, 2020 are pending and demanded the government to immediately release it. He said the state government employees had been attending duties inspite of the Covid pandemic in the state and been working for the implementation of the welfare schemes. Suryanarayana said the state government has not been paying DA arrears though the cost of living is increasing for the last two and half years. Suryanarayana said the Pay Revision Commission was constituted under the leadership of Asutosh Misra in July 2018 for the pay revision but the government is not taking initiative to implement the PRC. The APGEA president has demanded that the government take measures to pay retirement benefits to the retired staff as per the rules on the retirement day. He expressed concern that the government was not paying retirement benefits like GPF, gratuity, group insurance bills etc on the day of retirement and that pensioners and their families had been facing hardships due to not payment of benefits. He also demanded that the government should pay salaries on the first of every month to the contract and outsourcing employees working in various government departments.



Avinash blames TDP for flooding in Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
YSRCP leader Devineni Avinash on Tuesday lashed out at the previous TDP regime, accusing it of constructing a substandard retaining wall and abandoning the project midway, leading to flooding in parts of Vijayawada. "Because of the earlier regime's negligence, a substandard retaining wall was constructed and the project abandoned midway, which led to these floods," said Avinash, who toured the flooded areas on Tuesday. Due to heavy rains, Krishnalanka, Krishna Karakatta and other places have been inundated since Sunday. Avinash said that heavy inflows have reached the Prakasam Barrage, prompting officials to release massive amounts of water. However, he said the floods are slowly receding even as he cautioned the locals to take precautions. The YSRCP leader also criticised local MLA Gadde Rammohan, accusing him of making empty promises and not fulfilling them.

Covid cases dipping, keep it up, Jagan tells officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Pointing to the fact that the positivity rate has come down to 8.3 percent from 12 percent in the last couple of weeks, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday stated that Covid-19 infection spread is declining. During his videoconference with district collectors and SPs as part of the Spandana review here on Tuesday, the Chief Minister said that the number of tests has increased while the number of cases has decreased.

Reiterating that we have to live with Covid by taking precautionary measures, the Chief Minister instructed authorities to be vigilant and to make best use of 104 call centre in creating awareness among the public and to also provide information related to the availability of beds, test results, and hospitals.

He directed officials to ensure the helpline works without interruption and asked the district collectors to monitor the calls handled by the helpline by making mock calls. The Chief Minister stated



that AP was the only state offering Covid treatment under Aarogyasri scheme. He directed the officials to ensure that lists of Covid hospitals, including those empanelled hospitals, are displayed prominently in village and ward secretariats.

Jagan also directed officials to ensure standards in all 240 Covid hospitals and monitor if sanitation, staff and infrastructure are in place, proper food is being provided to patients and conduct periodical inspection drives.

The State government had recruited 30,000 medical staff

and equipped 37,000 beds in hospitals across the State. He said home isolation kits should be given to every patient who is in home isolation and Asha workers, ANM and PHC doctor must be in contact with them and follow up their treatment.

On YSR Health Clinics, the Chief Minister instructed the Collectors to speed up work for setting up the clinics and accelerate the tender process. He told the authorities not to delay the works and start the construction work at the earliest.

With regard to the setting up

of 16 new medical colleges in the State, the officials were told to expedite the land identification process for the medical colleges at Amalapuram, Madanapalle, Piduguralla, Adoni, Eluru and Pulivendula. The officials were also informed to accelerate the process of identifying additional land for expanding the existing medical colleges in Kakinada, Anantapur and Ongole.

The Chief Minister also told the officials that they were doing good work and not to bother about negative reports appearing in a section of press. "If there are any mistakes we will take corrective measures, otherwise we will take them to task. We are fighting not only Covid-19 but are also fighting against people like Chandrababu Naidu and others who have a negative mindset," Jagan said.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Nani, Ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Botsa Satyanarayana, Adimulapu Suresh, K Kannababu and other officials were among those who were at the Spandana programme.

APCC asks Prez to scrap new farm laws

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APCC president S Sailajanath on Tuesday submitted a memorandum to President Ram Nath Kovind and also to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, seeking withdrawal of the new farm laws.

In the memorandum, Sailajanath said that the Narendra Modi government has unleashed a diabolical conspiracy to defeat the 'Green Revolution' by bringing in the captioned anti-farmer laws. He said that the new laws were a well designed conspiracy to destroy the 'Annadatta' farmer and agriculture at the altar of a handful of crony capitalists.

Sailajanath said that 62 crores farmers and farm labourers are protesting against the new laws across India. Over 250 farmer's organisations are taking part in dharnas, and are on hunger strike, demonstrating across the length and breadth of the country.

"However, Modi continues to be blind to the agony of the farmers and suppress every voice of protest. The Modi government is dictatorially subverting the voice of farmers' representatives inside Parliament and has unleashed a draconian 'Lathi-Danda Regime' on the protesting farming community," he said.

"Modi has used the same specious arguments for bringing the three Bills," Sailajanath alleged.

On NREGA, he directed the officials to work keeping a target to utilise Rs 10 crore material component in a week in every assembly constituency. He instructed the authorities to take up the construction of Village and ward secretariats, RBKs, YSR Health Clinics, Milk cooling units, and Anganwadi Centres. Upon successful completion of works, additional works worth Rs 5 crore will be provided.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the damage done during the recent heavy rains and floods with the collectors of affected districts of Krishna, Guntur and Nellore. The estimates on the quantum of loss should be assessed and sent at the earliest. The enumeration should be displayed at RBKs, he said.

Eight persons have died due to the heavy rains and the Chief Minister announced ex gratia of Rs 5 lakh each to the family of the victims.



next year, with an estimated cost of Rs 6,300 crore. Facilities such as warehouses, drying platforms, collection centres, cold storage, janata bazaars, cattle sheds, and aqua infra will be provided to the farmers. The collectors should identify the lands next to RBKs in the coming 15 days, the Chief Minister said.

In addition to the agriculture sector, the Chief Minister also reviewed the functioning of Village Secretariats, and NREGA works across the State. He directed the district collectors to visit village/ward secretariats twice a week and the Joint Collectors four times in a week.

District collectors and JCs should own the Village Secretariat system as it directly connects to the people, Jagan said and added that the performance of District Collectors and JCs will be measured based on their active role in the village secretariats.

Govt to announce MSP for kharif crops on October 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops would be announced on October 1, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday directed officials to ensure that these should be displayed prominently at all Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBK) by October 5. During the Spandana review meeting here on Tuesday, the Chief Minister said that farmers should be informed in advance about procurement at RBKs. He asked officials to distribute coupons in advance.

The Chief Minister reviewed the procurement of agricultural produce and discussed the preparation, planning and cultivation of rabi crops. "The procurement and purchase of crops should be done effectively through RBKs," Jagan said.

He directed the authorities to expedite registrations of farmers on e-cropping platforms without missing any single farmer and told them to complete e-cropping listings for every crop without fail. The Chief Minister said e-cropping will make it easier for the government to pay the insurance premium for the crops and to provide farmers with a minimum remunerative price and compensation in case of crop loss.

He asserted that farmers should be given the highest priority and make sure that no farmer faces any losses.

Multi-Purpose Facilities Centre (MPFC) would be set up next to the RBKs by the

Sawang 'advises' Naidu to stop writing open letters

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Advising Leader of the opposition N Chandrababu Naidu not to write open letters pointing out shortcomings in the police department, DGP Gautam D Sawang on Tuesday said that such letters demoralise the force.

The DGP also found fault with Naidu for writing a letter to him levelling 'false' allegations based on unverified information being spread through social media.

Sawang asked the TDP chief to refrain from doing so in the future.

The DGP asked Naidu not to write such open letters but advised him to write to him in a sealed cover thereafter as his letters may contain 'unverified' information which could raise 'unnecessary' suspicion in the minds of the citizens.

He alleged that Naidu was trying to mislead the people by writing such letters without verifying the factual information.

"It is unfortunate that such allegations are levelled without verifying the facts and further going on to generalise and attribute the same to 'deteriorating law and order situation' in the state," the DGP said.

Sawang refuted Naidu's allegations of 'attack' on the brother of a suspended judge in Chittoor stating that it was 'sponsored' and 'orchestrated' by the ruling YSRCP.

"Investigation has proved that the victim suffered minor injuries due to a physical scuffle that he entered into, in a drunken state with the accused. Therefore, your allegation is far from the truth," Sawang said.

He also pointed out that the investigation had revealed that the accused (Prathap Reddy) was in fact a staunch TDP supporter.

TDP tells DGP to stop giving advice, act on YSRCP men

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that DGP Gautam Sawang was levelling allegations against N Chandrababu Naidu, Telugu Desam Party official spokesperson Kommareddy Pattabhi Ram on Tuesday demanded to know why YSRCP leaders behind the murder attempt on the brother of a judge were still free.

"The DGP must explain why no action has been taken against the YSRCP leaders responsible for the murder attempt on the brother of Dalit judge S Ramakrishna in Chittoor district. Naidu wrote a letter to the DGP only to say that this attack took place just a day after the judge addressed a Dalit Maha Sabha in Vijayawada. The timing of the attack has created doubts over the political intentions of the attackers," Pattabhi Ram said.

He told the media that while Naidu raised valid questions in his letter, the DGP asked the TDP supreme not to write open letters on such issues.

"The DGP had no authority to give such advice since it is the bounden duty of Chandrababu Naidu in his capacity as the Leader of the



Opposition to fight for justice for the victims of atrocities. If the DGP was interested in such political replies, he should write letters also to YSRCP MP Vijayasai Reddy, Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) and others for making wild allegations in their letters in the past," the TDP spokesperson said.

Pattabhi demanded the DGP to "at least act now" and file cases against Kodali Nani under Section 153 A for causing enmity among people on religious lines, under Section 295 for insulting religious sentiments of devotees and under Section 295 A for insulting a group of people with a malicious intent. The Minister should be arrested for committing non-bailable cognizable offences, he said.

Sawang told the TDP chief to present the evidence, if any, proving the involvement of YSRCP leaders or activists. "Should you hold any evi-

dence or reason for suspicion about the involvement of any individual, you may write to me in a sealed cover and help the police," the DGP said.

Govt to fill 56 nominated posts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP government is all set to announce nominated posts for various corporations on September 30.

According to reliable sources, the state government will be nominating people from the BC community for a majority of the nominated posts.

In all, the government will announce nominated posts for 56 BC castes that would support the economic and social growth of the respective castes.

The corporations are being established for all those with a population above 30,000 and women will be given priority in the nominated posts. Among the 56 nominated posts, 29 will be allotted to women and 27 to men, the sources said. For chairman and directors posts, all districts will be given equal importance.

The nominated posts will be announced for Rajaka Corporation, Kuruba / Kuruma Corporation, Thogata / Thogataveer akshetriya Corporation, Kunchiti Vakkaliga Corporation, Vanyakulakshatriya Corporation, Pala- Ekari Corporation, Mudaliar Corporation, Ediga Corporation, Gandla / Telikula Corporation, Perika Corporation, Agnikula Kshatriya Corporation, Ayyaraka Corporation, Shaikh Corporation, Vaddera Corporation, Kummari Shalivahana Corporation, Krishna Balija / Poosala Corporation, Yadava Corporation, Nayeey Brahmin Corporation, Padmasali Corporation, Noor Basha / Dudekula Corporation, Viswabrahmins Corporation, Sagara / Uppara Corporation, Gowda Corporation, Vaddelu Corporation, Bhatraja Corporation, Valmiki / Boya Corporation, Kurni / Karikalabhakthulu Corporation, Veerashaiva Lingayat Corporation, Besta, Mudiraj / Mutrasi Corporation, Jangam Corporation, Bondili Corporation, Muslim Sanchara Jathula Corporation, Chattadasrivaishnava Corporation, Arekatika / Katika Corporation, Devanga Corporation, Medara Corporation, Kalinga Corporation, Kalinga Komati/ Kalinga Vysya Corporation, Reddika Corporation, Polinativelamas Corporation, Kurakula / Pondara Corporation, Srisayana Corporation, Mastyakara Corporation, Gavara Corporation, Nagaralu Corporation, Yata Corporation, Nagavamsam Corporation, Turupu Kapu / Gajula Kapu Corporation, Koppula Velama Corporation, Sistakaranam Corporation, Dasari Corporation, Surya Balija Corporation, Setti Balija Corporation, Most Backward Classes Corporation and Atirasa Corporation.

Panic as hydrochloric acid leaks from tanker

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Panic prevailed at the Kaza tollgate on the Vijayawada-Chennai NH-16 for some time after hydrochloric acid started leaking from a tanker. However, officials shifted the tanker to a safer place on Tuesday in Guntur district, bringing the situation under control.

The driver of the tanker noticed the leakage when he stopped the vehicle at the toll-gate. He alerted the officials who shifted the vehicle with the help of NDRF to the vacant Bible Mission grounds opposite the Acharya Nagarjuna University.

Mangalagiri rural circle inspector P Seshagiri Rao said that the NDRF and Fire department officials, with the support of a mechanic, capped the leak and informed the filling station authorities of Rajahmundry.

The vehicle had started from Rajahmundry on Monday night after filling the hydrochloric acid into the tanker and was on its way to Chennai.

District Fire officer Y Venkateswara Reddy stated that there is no need to worry as the tanker was immediately shifted to the open place and leakage was temporarily stopped. He said that later, technicians from Rajahmundry reached Mangalagiri with an empty tanker, and the hydrochloric acid was pumped into the empty tanker.

New courses to begin in IITs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The IIT-Hyderabad is going to introduce B Tech bio-engineering course from this academic year with total number of 30 seats in the course.

This is in spite of Covid playing havoc with the academic year.

IIT-H director Murthy said that starting the course was necessary as need arose to study on ventilators and other medical equipment due to Coronavirus.

Tribals respond well to bandh call for their rights

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The one-day bandh (manyam bandh) call given by various tribal associations under the banner of Girijana Sangham, demanding Constitutional amendment to GO No 3 that was scrapped by the Supreme Court, evoked a warm response in the tribal pockets (agency areas) in Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam districts of North Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday.

Normal life was affected in the many pockets in the Agency areas in the three districts due to the 24-hour bandh

on Tuesday.

Business establishments remained closed and most of the public and private vehicles were off the road. However, the protesters didn't stop emergency vehicles and inter-state goods and passenger vehicles.

Tribals visited government offices, banks and tourist places such as Araku Valley, Borra Caves, Padmapuram Gardens, Chaparai Water and others in Vizag Agency seeking the support of the staff to observe the bandh by closing down the offices, hotels, restaurants etc.

K Samba, an activist in Vizianagaram region, said that



the scrapping of GO No 3 by

the Apex Court will deprive the

educated tribal youth in the

In spite of Covid, farmers raise crops in 1.33 cr acres in Kharif

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In spite of the Coronavirus at its virulent form in villages, farmers did not develop cold feet and raised crops in 1.33 crore acres in Kharif season.

Apart from this, vegetables, fruits, turmeric, red chillies, oil palm and other horticultural crops have been raised in 9.72 lakh acres.

The agriculture department has made it clear that cultivation of crops to such extent was unheard earlier.

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused hurdles to farming activities. Earlier, the agriculture workers used to travel en masse to fields on tractors. Now, the farmers feel that their input costs increased as they have to provide transport facility to agriculture workers in smaller vehicles.

Harvesting of the Kharif crops is likely to begin next



month. The officials in the agriculture department say that finding workers and transportation of harvested crops would become a major problem.

The agriculture department has said that paddy harvesters are available in the state. But there is no machinery to pluck

cotton. Lakhs of agriculture workers are needed since the area under cotton crop has increased during the kharif phenomenally.

According to Goverdhan Yadav, a farmer from Dhanora village in Adilabad district, agriculture workers from neighbouring Maharashtra are

not willing to travel to bordering Adilabad and Mancherial districts.

It is customary for the agriculture workers to arrive here from Maharashtra to take part in agriculture operations in bordering districts in Telangana. Agriculture works have been delayed as the work-

ers from Maharashtra did not arrive here over the fear of contracting the Coronavirus. In spite of the problem, he said that he raised turmeric in three acres, ginger in two acres, chillies in two acres, soya beans in six acres and cotton in 40 acres.

Similarly, another farmer from Gurrampodu village of Nalgonda district Velugu Yadaiah said that the farmers faced difficulties as shops remained closed during lockdown period. The shopkeepers were highly irregular in opening shops. Even if they open shops, they sold goods at higher prices. Somehow, he and other farmers managed to procure all necessary inputs and overcame the shortage of workers and cultivated lands. He said that the farmers would be happy provided they get good price for their harvested crops.

Telangana sees more Covid recoveries than fresh cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

More people recovered from Covid-19 than the new cases reported in Telangana during the last 24 hours, officials said on Tuesday.

A total of 2,259 people recovered from the pandemic while 2,072 were found infected by the virus.

Nine more people succumbed to Covid, pushing the death toll to 1,116.

The fatality rate in the state dipped marginally to 0.58 per cent against the national average of 1.57 per cent.

With fresh cases, the state's tally mounted to 1,89,283, of which 29,477 are active. These include 23,934 who are in home/institutional isolation.

The number of recoveries so far mounted to 1,58,690. The recovery rate has gone up further to 83.83 per cent against the national average of 82.88 per cent.

After the week-end drop in the number of tests, the authorities tested 54,308 sam-



ples including 23,895 primary contacts.

With this the state has so far tested 29,40,642 samples. According to a media bulletin released from the office of the director of public health and family welfare, samples tested per million population improved further to 79,206. It says the daily testing target for the state is 5,600 per day as per the WHO benchmark of 140 per million per day.

A total of 17 government-run laboratories, 43 private laboratories and 1076 rapid anti-

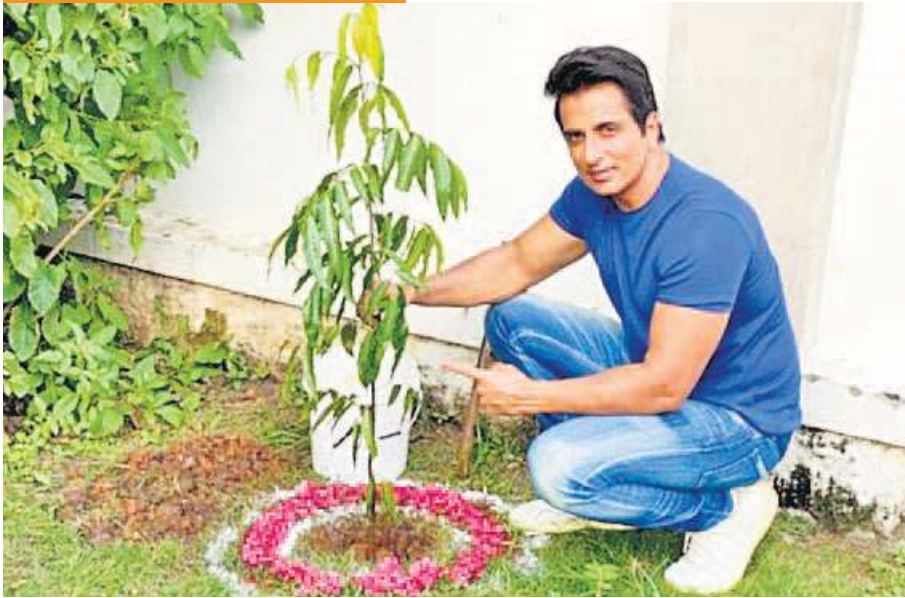
gen test centres are conducting the tests.

Out of 1,89,283, 70 per cent (1,32,498) are asymptomatic while the remaining 30 per cent (56,785) are symptomatic.

The data also shows that 64.13 per cent of those tested positive are in the age group of 21-50 years while 22.76 are above 51 years of age. Those below 20 years are 13.13 per cent.

Officials said 64.28 per cent of those tested positive were male while the remaining 38.72 per cent were female.

GREEN DRIVE



Actor Sonu Sood, who is often dubbed as the 'messiah of migrants' for his philanthropic work, participated in the Green India challenge by planting a sapling in the Ramoji Film City on Tuesday

SCR to run spl trains for UPSC candidates

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The South Central Railway (SCR) zone's Vijayawada division will operate two special trains between Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam to facilitate civil services examination candidates to appear for the exam.

"In order to facilitate the candidates attending Union Public Service Examination (UPSC), SCR will run two special trains between Vijayawada - Visakhapatnam - Vijayawada," said a railway zone spokesperson.

Train number 07233 from Vijayawada to Visakhapatnam will depart Vijayawada at 3 p.m. on Saturday and arrive at Visakhapatnam at 10 p.m. on the same day.

Likewise, the return train bearing the number 07234 will depart Visakhapatnam at 8:30 p.m. on Sunday and arrive at Vijayawada at 4 a.m. on Monday.

Enroute, the special trains will halt at eight stations, Eluru, Tadepelligudem, Nidadavolu, Rajamundry, Samarakota, Tuni, Anakapalli and Duvvada.

The civil services examination has been scheduled on Sunday. In a separate development, the railway zone restored train halts at several places in the southern state.

"Consequent upon permission of AP state government to restore stoppages, SCR has decided to restore the stoppages which were eliminated earlier," said an official.

Jagga Reddy: Cong will be stronger with new in-charge

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MLA from Sangareddy has opined that the Congress party will become strong with the decisions of new Telangana Congress Affairs in-charge Manickam Tagore.

He exuded confidence that he got confidence that the party would form government in Telangana in 2023 elections.

Jagga Reddy said that Manickam Tagore had not warned him of his absence in the Core Committee meeting; however, the media and social media misinterpreted his meeting with Tagore.

SWACHH BHARAT

Hat-trick by Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister E Dayakar Rao has said that Telangana achieved hat-trick by winning first prize three times in a row in implementing Swachh Bharat.

In the category of districts, the Karimnagar district ranked number three in the country, he said.

He attributed the success to Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao implementing Palle Pragati and Pattana Pragati programmes in the state.

He thanked KCR for implementing cleanliness programmes in villages and towns and the Centre, for announcing the awards. The Centre annually presents awards under Swachh Bharat.

Deputy director in the

department of water and sanitation Yugal Joshi said that Telangana ranked number one in the country in the implementation of the Sundar Samudayak Suchalaya campaign, Samudayak Sauchalay Abhiyan and Gandagi Mukh Bharat campaign implementation. Joshi sent a letter in this regard to panchayat raj department. The letter also indicated that Karimnagar district ranked number three in the country in implementation of the campaigns, he added.

The awards would be given away to the state on October 2. Union Jal Sakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekawat will distribute the awards in virtual mode. Panchayat Raj secretary Sandeep Kumar Sultania will receive the award.

Vinod Kumar selected to TISS advisory council

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Planning Board Vice-Chairman B Vinod Kumar has been appointed member of the advisory council of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Vinod will hold the position for two years.

Director of Hyderabad Campus Professor Shalini Bharat announced the decision of TISS Chairman S Ramadorai here on Tuesday. According to a statement, Vinod was selected for the position considering his years of experience in administration and his present post of Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Board.

The TISS was established in 1936 as Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work.

KTR: Bathukamma sarees to be delivered at doorstep

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In view of the Covid pandemic, the state government is going to take up door-to-door distribution of Bathukamma sarees to the beneficiaries from October 9 ahead of Bathukamma festival celebrations to begin on October 17. The sarees will be distributed through local women groups under the supervision of District Collectors.

Along with Ministers P Sabitha Indra Reddy and Satyavathi Rathod, Textiles Minister KT Rama Rao inspected the display of Bathukamma sarees at Haritha Plaza hotel in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

Handlooms and Textiles Director Shailaja Ramaiyer and other officials accompanied them.

Elaborating that all the religions are treated equally by the Telangana government, KTR



said that sarees are being distributed by the government during Dussehra, Ramzan, and Christmas.

The state government is spending Rs 317.81 crore to distribute about one crore sarees among women aged above 18 years and having white ration cards. A total of 99 lakh sarees will be distributed this time.

Speaking on the occasion, KTR said the state government

had spent about Rs 1,033 crore to distribute four crore Bathukamma sarees over the past four years since its launch in 2017.

About 30 lakh metres of cloth was produced by thousands of weavers through 26,000 powerlooms in the state.

He stated that the Education Department is ordering government school uniform to powerloom weavers.

SRSP discharges 127 tmc of water into sea

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

The Sri Ram Sagar Project (SRSP), which is considered as boon for the entire northern Telangana districts has discharged over 127 tmc into the sea in just 15 days as the project received over 1,00,000 to 1,50,000 cusecs due to the heavy rains in the upper reaches of the project in Maharashtra. The inflows guarantee second crop in at least five districts.

The irrigation department officials put the total inflows



into the project since the monsoon season commencement on June 1 was 234 tmc.

The SRSP, whose storage capacity was limited to 90 tmc, has been discharging

water into Godavari river. The project's flood canal empties the flood water in Mid-Maneru reservoir. Similarly, the authorities release excess water to Kakatiya, Saraswati and

Lakshmi canals.

The Bhabli project gates in Maharashtra will remain open till October 29 suggesting that the SRSP will receive inflows even in October.

The silt formation in the SRSP has reduced the storage capacity to 90 tmc from 112 tmc.

The project received inflows of 14.77 tmc in 2014-15, 4.42 tmc, the least, in 2015-16, 254 tmc in 2016-17, 85 tmc in 2017-18 and 87 tmc in 2019-20 and 234 tmc so far during 2020-21.

Cong: EVMs, ballot papers are risky amid Coronavirus

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TPCC Election Commission Coordination Committee chairman Marri Shashidhar Reddy has opined that both ballot papers and EVMs have equal chance of further spreading the Coronavirus infection, hence they are not risk free.

Shashidhar Reddy said that the party leaders held a meeting with the State Election Commissioner on September 25 in connection with the letter to all political parties, to elicit their views on whether to conduct GHMC elections using EVMs or ballot paper.

Since the SEC did not provide any note with the pros and cons of both the options, "We requested them to do so. However, they did not respond to this. Meanwhile, we got in touch with experts who were responsible for managing the H1N1 pandemic in 2008," he said.

With September 30 being the deadline for the political parties to respond to the SEC, the Congress party will have a meeting on September 30 at 11 am along with members of the TPCC core committee and senior leaders to decide about the party's stand after weighing both the options on the basis of expert advice obtained, Shashidhar Reddy said.

‘Revenue Act is a boon to farmers’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Forests, Environment, Endowments and Housing Allola Indrakaran Reddy termed that the new Revenue Act as a boon to the agrarian community and woes of farmers would be a thing of past. He was addressing participants of a thanksgiving bullock cart and tractor rally taken out by farmers at Narnoor mandal centre on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Indrakaran Reddy asserted that Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had brought the Revenue Act for eradicating land disputes and encroachments of properties belonging to weaker sections and corruption by certain officials of the revenue department.

He said that farmers were forced to move from pillar to post, seeking mutations and minor corrections in the rev-

enue records. "The ordeals of the farmers would end soon with the advent of the Act. And, the menace of the corruption will be rooted out. Various transactions relating to lands can easily be done online."

The time involved in getting the records is going to be drastically reduced. The move to abolish the system of Village Revenue Officers was historic. It will usher in a new era," he remarked.

‘Dharani portal not user-friendly’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The IT experts are finding it difficult to link the Dharani portal with the Computer-aided Registration Department of Telangana. The portal is described as not user friendly as far as the issue of encumbrance certificates.

The state government suspended registration of lands and other properties on September 7. On September 19, the state government passed the New Revenue Act - Telangana Land Rights, Pattadar Passbooks Act - 2020.

Meanwhile, the government has decided to integrate the Dharani portal with the card. But the experts find that the Dharani portal is not user-friendly.

Meanwhile, the IT experts are leaving no stone unturned to overcome the technical problems.

Earlier, the government has decided to include agricultural and non-agricultural lands in the website separately.

The Chief Minister has also



asked the officials concerned to update the portal accordingly.

When technical problems were taken to the Chief Minister's notice, he asked the experts to take their own time, but to develop the portal without any glitches.

On experimental basis, registration of lands in two mandals of Vikarabad district is going on. The official machinery is understood to have not analysed the performance of the website though the registration is under way since two years. In 2018 itself, technical problems surfaced while inclusion of lands from webland and

Ma Bhumi website in Dharani portal.

It was complained that Dharani portal was not user-friendly. However, the government inclined to continue with the services of the portal.

Mainly the problems pertain to checking encumbrance certificates.

In the portal, Telugu alphabets were found along with survey numbers. The card displays English alphabets A, B, C and D and others along with survey numbers. The official machinery is involved headlong in rectifying the discrepancies.

A committee has been appointed to resolve the technical problems. The committee says that the glitches can be overcome within a week. But it is evident that it is not that easy to resolve the problems.

Once the technical problems were fixed, training programme on registrations and mutations should be given for five days.

After cleansing of land records, tahsildars observed that at least 3,000 mistakes crept in land records correction in each mandal. The process to rectify them was deserted half way. In each revenue village, 10 per cent of the land records show discrepancies in area of the land. If there are discrepancies between survey numbers and land records registering the lands and performing mutations was ruled out. The software does not allow registrations and mutations to take place. Several express the view that a special drive should be conducted to rectify the defects over a period of six months.

Oppn wants only middlemen to thrive, not farmers: Modi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In a scathing attack on those opposing the new farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said they wanted only the middlemen to thrive and referred to the burning of tractor by Congress workers as an insult to farmers.

"They are opposing the freedom of farmers and want their problems to continue forever. By torching farming equipment, which the agriculturists worship, these people are now insulting farmers," he said without naming the Congress.

The Congress' youth wing activists on Monday morning set a tractor ablaze near India Gate, a few hundred metres from the Rashtrapati Bhavan and Parliament, to protest the contentious farm laws.

Modi said the opposition has only one way of doing politics in the country and that is by opposing things.

Terming it "opposition for the sake of opposition", the prime minister said that by

Modi said the opposition has only one way of doing politics in the country and that is by opposing things.

opposing big reformative steps by the Centre such as the farm laws, these forces were making themselves irrelevant in the society and in the country. He accused the opposition of opposing everything from GST, One Rank One Pension, Rafale deal, Statue of Unity, 10 per cent reservation for the poor and celebration of November 26 as Samvidhan Diwas.

He said that this politics of the opposition for opposition's sake was the root of the frustration of a party which had ruled for four generations.

"Frustration of a party which has ended up riding the shoulders of others despite wielding power for four generations is behind this politics



of the opposition for opposition's sake, Modi said.

He said none of the leaders of the political party had till date visited the Statue of Unity, built to honour the memory of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel whose contribution to unifying the country is well known. "Why? Because they had to oppose," he said.

He said people had seen for themselves the role Jan Dhan accounts played in direct benefit transfer schemes during the coronavirus pandemic and

they could also remember how it was opposed while being introduced by the Centre.

Without naming the Congress, he accused it of being neither with the farmers nor with the youth nor the soldiers and recalled that the party had demanded proof of surgical strikes instead of praising the bravehearts who carried out the exercise. He also recalled how it opposed the purchase of Rafale fighter jets.

Farm laws have to be opposed for country's future, says Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said the new farm laws will have to be opposed not just for farmers but for the future of the country, as he alleged that they were like a "stab in the farmers' hearts".

Interacting with a group of farmers from across the country, he said the GST and the noteban were also attacks on farmers, but these three laws will prove to be more detrimental.

Gandhi also claimed that the new farm laws will foster an East India company-like culture and this time, a "West India company" has come in.

"There is no difference between GST, noteban and these three laws. The only difference is that this is directly stabbing your heart with a knife," he said during the virtual meeting with the group of farmers.

"But I have clarity that this has to be opposed. Not for farmers, but for the future of India," he told the farmers in a nearly 11-minute long video shared on social media.



The Congress has opposed the new farm laws and party leaders and workers are protesting across the country, even as farmers' unions have launched a stir in Punjab and Haryana.

"The voice of farmers has a lot of strength. It is with the help of this voice that India attained independence and once again India will become independent through the farmers' voice," Gandhi said.

The former Congress chief said he had seen in Uttar Pradesh's Bhatta Parsaul village during his padyatra in 2011 that big businessmen wanted the farmers' land as well as their farm produce.

"The first fight I fought was

of land acquisition and the entire media attacked me," he said.

"They said this is a fight against black money but it was not true. The purpose was to weaken our unorganised sector and the poor, farmers and labourers," Gandhi alleged.

Talking to him, Dhirender Kumar, a farmer from Cham paran in Bihar, said farmers are being exploited in the name of these laws and they will be forced to commit suicide due to hunger.

He said the 2006 bill abolishing the APMC Act in Bihar should be brought back and be implemented in the state once again.

Ashok Bootra from Yavatmal in Maharashtra feared that no one would buy the farm produce at minimum support price (MSP).

"I feel any farmer who protests will be put in jail. In 1840, the East India company used to put out the price of cotton from England and the entire world would buy at that rate. But the businessmen would know of the price in advance," he said.

SHORT READS



Guj: 3 labourers killed in building collapse in Vadodara

Ahmedabad: Three labourers were killed after a three-storey under-construction building collapsed in Gujarat's Vadodara city in the early hours of Tuesday, an official said. Besides, one labourer was rescued from the debris, fire officer Amit Chaudhary said.

The under-construction building collapsed around 12.30 am in Bavamanapura area of Vadodara, located around 110 km from Ahmedabad, he said.

"Three labourers, including a woman, died in the collapse, while the fire brigade managed to pull out one labourer alive," the official said.



Three held in IPL betting racket bust

Sambhal: Three members of a gang betting on Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches were arrested from Chandausi area here, police said on Tuesday.

The arrests were made from a house in Kayasthan locality under Chandausi Kotwali police station area on Monday night, SP Yamuna Prasad said. Those arrested have been identified as Rohit, Jishan and Lakhna Singh, he said, adding 12 mobile phones, three calculators, diary, register and Rs 1,875 were recovered from them.



Bhim Army protests at Safdarjung Hospital

New Delhi: Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad and his supporters held a protest on Tuesday at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, where a 19-year-old woman from Uttar Pradesh's Hathras died days after being gang-raped, demanding the culprits be sentenced to death.

The Dalit woman succumbed to her injuries Tuesday morning. At the protest, the Bhim Army chief said, "I appeal to all members of the Dalit community to take to the streets and demand death penalty for the guilty. The government should not test our patience. We won't rest until the culprits are hanged."

Azad had earlier demanded that the Uttar Pradesh government shift the woman to AIIMS for better treatment. "The state government is equally responsible for the death of our sister," he alleged.

The woman was gang-raped a fortnight ago. The accused had tried to strangle her to death as she resisted their rape attempt and in the process, she had also ended up biting her tongue and suffering a severe cut on it. The four accused have been arrested.

Maha tribals can now build houses near forest areas

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Tuesday issued a notification modifying the Forest Rights Act, 2006 that will enable tribals and other traditional forest dwellers to "build houses in the neighbourhood forest areas". It will prevent migration of those living in forests and provide them housing areas by extending the village site into forest land in their

neighbourhood, a statement issued by the Raj Bhavan said.

The notification has been issued by the governor using his powers under sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 5 of Schedule V of the Constitution. This will "enable the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest-dwelling families to build houses in the neighbourhood forest areas," the statement said. The decision will provide a major relief to the scheduled

tribes (STs) and others living in forests in the scheduled areas of the state, it said.

During his visits to Palghar, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli and other districts having scheduled areas, it came to the governor's notice that certain STs and forest-dwelling families in the scheduled areas were moving out of their native villages and migrating elsewhere in the absence of housing areas for their growing families, it said.

13 held for charging money for entry into J-K

PNS ■ JAMMU

Thirteen people have been arrested for illegally charging labourers from outside Jammu and Kashmir on the pretext of facilitating their "smooth entry" into the Union Territory, police on Tuesday.

A probe has also been instituted against some policemen, including an assistant sub-inspector, after it came to light that they tried to allow entry of people from the second bridge over Ravi river in violation of the set protocol, Senior Superintendent of Police,



Kathua, Shailendra Kumar Mishra said.

"The entry to Jammu and Kashmir from outside is being allowed under certain guidelines as part of the efforts to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus... We came to

know that some mischievous elements, taking advantage of the situation, are misleading J&K-bound labourers in Punjab and charging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 per head," Mishra told reporters in Kathua.

Cautioning the labourers against the touts, he said there is no need to pay money to anyone as everyone wishing to enter Jammu and Kashmir has to follow the set protocol and undergo COVID-19 test, which is done at Lakhampur free of cost.

"The touts used to approach

the labourers on their arrival in Pathankot since the interstate bus service is suspended and make them believe that their entry into the UT is impossible without their help," the SSP said, adding the frightened labourer fell prey to them and thus ending up losing their hard-earned money.

The rush sometimes used to increase on the Lakhampur corridor as it was only entry point into J&K before the opening of Atal Setu recently and taking advantage of this, the mischievous elements made it a source of income.



SI arrested for 'shooting at friend, killing father-in-law'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested its sub-inspector Sandeep Dahiya who allegedly shot at and injured his female friend here and later killed his father-in-law in Rohtak, officials said on Tuesday.

"Sandeep Dahiya has been arrested. He was picked up from Rohini. He is being interrogated and will be produced before the magistrate concerned," a senior police official said.

Dahiya, 35, was posted at Lahori Gate police station from December 21, 2017.

According to the Delhi Police, Dahiya had allegedly shot at his woman friend on Sunday during a quarrel with her in his car in north Delhi's Alipur area.

Another Delhi Police sub-inspector, Jaiveer, posted at Shahbad Dairy police station, had spotted the woman lying on the side of the road while he was crossing the Sai Mandir on the G T Karnal road and had taken her to a nearby hospital.

'Will fight against farm laws on all fronts'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh extended his government's full support to the agitating farmers on Tuesday and assured them of all possible legal and other steps to fight the "draconian new farm laws", including a special session of the Assembly to discuss and decide the way forward.

Singh said the Punjab government stands in full support of the farmers in these "dark and difficult times".

Chairing a meeting with the representatives of 31 farmers' unions here to take their views on the matter, the chief minister said he would be discussing the issue with his legal team



later in the day to finalise the next steps, including challenging the farm laws in the Supreme Court.

Besides the farmer representatives, All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge of Punjab Harish Rawat attended the meeting, along with state min-

isters Sukhjinder Randhawa and Bharat Bhushan Ashu, MLA Rana Gurjit Singh, state Congress chief Sunil Jakhar and the state's Advocate General, Atul Nanda, an official statement said.

"We will take all possible steps to counter the Union government's assault on the state's

federal and constitutional rights and fight for the interests of the farmers," the chief minister told the farmer representatives.

Singh made it clear that his government has no qualms about convening an Assembly session if that is the best course in the current circumstances.

Asserting that the Centre had no right to enact these laws as it amounted to "violation" of the Constitution and an attack on the federal structure, the chief minister said his government shares the concerns of the farmers and will do "whatever it takes to scuttle the Union government's attempt to ruin the farming community with these draconian legislations".

Victims of Mumbai terror attacks yet to get justice

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has said that the victims of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and the 2016 Pathankot strike are yet to get justice because of the "unwillingness" and "non-cooperative" attitude of a particular country, in a clear reference to Pakistan.

At a virtual ministerial meeting of the 'Group of Friends of Victims of terrorism', India has strongly pitched for concerted global actions to effectively deal with terrorism and said it continues to pose a critical threat to international peace and security even in

the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Representing India at the meeting on Monday, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Vijay Thakur Singh also called for "redressing deficiencies" in the international efforts to ensure that perpetrators of terrorism are brought to justice.

"I would like to highlight that, for example, the victims of 2008 Mumbai terror attack and 2016 Pathankot terror attack are yet to get justice. This is due to the unwillingness and non-cooperative attitude of a particular country," Singh said.

No hope left from insensitive govt: Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday condoled the death of the Hathras gangrape victim, and said "no hope" is left from the "insensitive government".

"A dalit daughter, who was victim of gangrape and brutality ultimately died. I condole her death. No hope is left with present insensitive government," Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi.

A 19-year-old Dalit woman from Hathras died at Safdarjung hospital in Delhi on Tuesday morning.

Manager of lab in Kerala held for issuing 'fake' Covid certificates

PNS ■ MALAPPURAM

A manager of a private lab in Valanchery in the district was arrested on Tuesday for allegedly issuing fake COVID-19 negative certificates to those travelling to various Middle East countries.

Arma lab in Valanchery, a franchise of a Kozhikode-based reputed Laboratory, allegedly collected lakhs of rupees from people for conducting test for coronavirus, police said. The lab in Valanchery also allegedly issued fake COVID-19 negative certificates to around 2,000



people without actually testing their samples at the Kozhikode-based laboratory, which was given license by ICMR to conduct test for COVID-19. As per the agreement between the labs, the Valanchery-based Arma lab has been designated as an agency to collect samples,

which will be sent to the Kozhikode-based laboratory for testing.

Police said the Arma lab authorities, who had allegedly collected 2,500 samples in the past few months, did not send all of them to the Kozhikode-based laboratory for testing. "Instead they had sent only about 500 samples for testing and issued fake COVID-19 negative certificates in about 2000 cases. The Arma lab authorities made 'fake' letter heads of the Kozhikode-based laboratory and issued the COVID-19 certificates.

Linked private company under ED probe, not Amnesty NGO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is no ED investigation against Amnesty International India Foundation, which on Tuesday declared halting its operations in the country, but against a private company linked to the NGO that allegedly received dubious export proceeds worth over Rs 51 crore, government sources said.

They said the Enforcement Directorate, a federal probe agency to check money laundering and forex violation



crimes, is investigating two entities -- Amnesty

International India Pvt Ltd and Indians for Amnesty International Trust.

Both are being probed under the criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and under the civil proceedings of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), they said.

The agency had issued a show-cause notice to Amnesty International India Pvt Ltd last September for alleged contravention of FEMA to the tune of over Rs 51 crore.

Caught in Covid worries, the future is too far from their thoughts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Carrying bricks and cement by day and jerry cans of water when their shifts get over, the workday continues without end for thousands of pregnant labourers forced to live life on the precipice with little time to spare on thoughts of what the future holds -- for themselves or their unborn child.

Uncertainty has always been a subtext of their lives and the pandemic has only sharpened it. But thoughts of COVID-19 and the risks of stepping out to work as the disease rages are a luxury for these women, many of them migrants eking out a precarious existence as construction workers hundreds of miles from home.

Some like Marjina, who is seven months pregnant, have taken a loan to tide over the difficult times when jobs and money are both scarce, others like Lalitha, approaching full-term pregnancy, continue to work with truncated wages because they have no other choice.

Living in slums that have come up in the shadows of the high-rise buildings they are helping construct in Raj Nagar Extension in Delhi's satellite town of Ghaziabad, the women know that regular doctor visits and medical checkups are not on the anvil at a time when



even two square meals are difficult.

They are lucky to just find work when they can, say the women, most in their 20s or even younger and in frail health after multiple pregnancies at a young age.

Recounting her day, 27-year-old Marjina said she gets up earlier in the morning, cooks, finishes the household work and heads to the construction site with her eight-year-old

daughter Marish and husband Mazru. The family eats just once a day.

She gets tired but there is no option. "I have been working with my husband for six years. We always had two meals a day but can't afford it any more," Marjina told PTI.

While Marjina makes Rs 250 a day, her husband gets Rs 300. "We have cut down our meals to one a day because we have taken a loan from a relative and need to repay it," she said. Living one day at a time as jobs dwindle, the women are forced to step up to help their husbands bring in money and there is little thought for what will happen tomorrow.

Another silent Nirbhaya

Dalit girl from Hathras dies after being brutally gang-raped. Where are the deterrent laws and action? Will we have to wait years again?



The “*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*” campaign is being slandered with each passing day as it becomes a “*Beti Hatao, Beti Darao*” mission in reality, with heinous crimes against the girl child and women going up every day across the country. So it is that just two days after Daughter’s Day, a 19-year-old Dalit girl was brutally gang-raped in Uttar Pradesh’s Hathras district. In a chilling throwback to the Nirbhaya case and the incident in Hyderabad not so long ago, the girl was left with her tongue cut out, ostensibly to prevent her from testifying. Her legs were bruised so severely and her spine was so lethally battered that she was completely paralysed while her arms could just about register a movement. Still she fought for her dear life over 15 days in hospital but gave up despite being brought to Delhi’s AIIMS. Yet there was no outcry for the last fortnight till she became just another cold statistic. Nobody mourned a young life snuffed out in its prime due to caste-based hatred, sexual depravity and a deteriorating law and order situation, particularly in the Hindi heartland. Exacerbating the situation, as usual, were the poorly conducted investigations and a slow justice system. The conviction rate for rape is only 27.2 per cent despite the fact that it accounts for 11.5 per cent of the total crime statistics. On an average, 91 rapes were reported every single day across India in 2018, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) says that trial in rape cases should be completed in 60 days but that never happens because of the tardiness of police investigations. Then there are judicial flaws that need to be plugged when it comes to rape, the primary being bail to the accused, which should be denied till the probe is completed. Some independent studies indicate that the average time of finishing trial even in fast track courts is eight months. And even if one were to get death penalty, acquittals, appeals and mercy petitions mean that only about five per cent death penalties are actually upheld by the Supreme Court. A traumatised rape survivor hardly has the courage to go through such travesty and gives up midway. The 2012 Nirbhaya rape, which shook the conscience of not just the nation but the world, too, compelled our parliamentarians to strengthen the punitive justice delivery system based on the recommendations of a committee that included eminent jurists. It led to some crucial amendments to the law, which included changing the very definition of “rape”, the establishment of fast-track courts to ensure victims get justice without undue delay, harsher punishments for the accused with the provision of death sentence being added to it and the abolition of the two-finger test among others. Two other such incidents, in Kathua and Unnao, where two children were raped, had widened the scope of punishment for raping a child under 12 to death penalty. Undoubtedly, there has been an increase in reportage of crimes against women after Nirbhaya though much of them are still under-reported. Besides, as the Hyderabad incident has shown, question marks remain on the use of the death penalty as criminals are now murdering their victims to destroy evidence. For the criminal, there is no deterrent. But yes, he can be stalled if deterrence is built into the system by fast-tracking procedures and ensuring swift justice. Conviction rates need to go up proportionately. At present, fast-track courts are no different from the usual courts in terms of case pile-ups and vacancies. A quick, fair and unbiased judicial set-up with requisite number of judges is a *sine qua non*. A continuously responsive system is a bigger deterrent than one or two landmark rulings.

The unchecked crimes against women and the girl child are also skewering gender equity in the rural hinterland. According to a study supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), that was conducted in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, the increasing crimes against women have deepened preferences for a son. So much so that we have lost around 4,60,000 girls to sex selection at birth each year between 2013 and 2017, according to the UNFPA. When errands go scot-free and the woman’s family is left to wallow in pain and shame, a malaise becomes a societal archetype. And the girl child will continue to be vulnerable, either used as a tool in a caste war as the rapists in Hathras belonged to the upper caste, a sacrifice in a revenge drama or a family feud or a life cheap enough to be pawned by male-dominated codes. Predictably, there is a political slugfest over this latest incident, with the Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) slamming the BJP Government in UP for the sorry plight of law and order in the State. Their protests will once again be tainted by the ruling party as “crocodile tears” and a “political conspiracy” to “defame the Government.” The Opposition will predictably make the rape a subset of excesses on Dalits. But neither the Opposition nor the ruling party was there for the girl when she was writhing in hospital for a fortnight. And much to the shame of India’s most populous State, nobody wants to roll back UP’s unique distinction of reporting the highest crime spiral against women. As for justice, will we have to wait another seven years?

Amnesty shuts shop

The human rights watchdog may have looked at India through a Western prism but can we dispute its findings on Delhi riots?



The trouble with human rights watchdogs is that they have, by virtue of countering the establishment narrative, assigned themselves a certain kind of legitimacy and credibility without realising that some of their own investigations are compromised by subjective assessment rather than objective investigation. This has also been a problem with Amnesty International, which has many times been accused of looking at India through a Western prism. But as a robust democracy, we have it within ourselves to accept vilification and acknowledge cogent counterpoints. We shouldn’t need lobbyists to get the other side of the story; our media should be free to do that. Besides, by and large, the organisation has an international acceptability even if we take some of its reports with a pinch of salt. But by targetting Amnesty, which says it is now forced to shut shop in India because the Government has completely frozen its bank accounts here, we appear to be in the bracket of oppressor and authoritative regimes like China. And considering its activists have been particularly penalised for tracking dissent pan-India over the last two years, it gives them a moral upper hand and claim a witch-hunt. The reasons that the organisation lists behind the Government crackdown on it are the same as those cited by tormented civil society activists — namely “unequivocal calls for transparency in the Government, more recently for accountability of the Delhi police and the Government of India regarding the grave human rights violations in Delhi riots and Jammu & Kashmir.” Frankly, even without the Amnesty’s reports, there is far too much on-ground evidence of the charges it has made. And the way the disclosure statements and names in the chargesheet of the Delhi Police on the city riots have been circled out, targetting the liberal intelligentsia, protesters and activists while leaving out the inflammatory fringe Rightists, there is a move to freeze the right of democratic dissent. So the timing of its India exit suits Amnesty more than us at this point of time.

It would have made more sense had the Government zeroed in on Amnesty in 2016, when it was booked in a sedition case for allowing “anti-India” slogans on Kashmir at an event in Bengaluru. But to pursue it for violating foreign funding rules in 2019 obviously raises questions on intent. Amnesty though claims that its India operations have been funded domestically. The immediate context seems to be the report it released last month on the complicity of Delhi police in the riots. Yes we must defend our pluralism and challenge the official narrative. But by hounding out Amnesty, we have a public relations battle ahead. Nothing will happen to it. Nothing would have if it had been allowed to continue.

opinion06

New agricultural paradigm

The end of socialist-era impediments should ideally stimulate increased private sector investment across the value chain and help create jobs



SANDHYA JAIN

The over-hyped green revolution of the late 1960s introduced varieties of dwarf rice and wheat in northern India with a cocktail of chemical fertilisers and pesticides that sucked up groundwater and gradually made it unfit for drinking. The chemicals leached into the soil and water. State-sponsored propaganda about “miraculous yields” extended the phenomenon across the country, ruining soil fertility and the nutritious value of food crops; the impact on public health was noticed by the medical community but all voices were silenced. Today, Gurdaspur-to-Delhi trains are called “Cancer Express”, yet there has been no medical study of the harm caused by chemical agriculture to the health of humans, animals, soil and water resources.

Now, four momentous laws could pave the way for a revolution in which farmers drive the change, with technology playing a supportive role. If the Government repudiates the genetically-modified food crops lobby, India could return to farming methods that do not require costly inputs and force farmers into a vicious cycle of debt (and even suicide).

On September 16, 2020, one day before the three agriculture-related Bills were moved in Parliament, the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020 was passed, bringing all cooperative banks under the purview of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It means stricter supervision of 1,482 urban and 58 multi-state cooperative banks, with deposits of ₹4.84 lakh crore.

The legislation undermines the strongmen who control the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs), *mandis*, loans and so on in many States. It is noteworthy that large farmers are resisting the new laws; earlier they opposed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) as they had to match wages or lose farm labour. The ongoing COVID pandemic has also improved the bargaining power of farm labourers and added to the bitterness of large farmers.

Often, agents arranged debt-funding for farmers from private moneylenders, who charged usurious interest and enjoyed political heft; such debt has been linked to



farmer suicides in some States.

Simultaneously, the Union Cabinet approved the ₹15,000 crore fund for animal husbandry as part of the *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* stimulus package and a scheme for interest subvention of two per cent to “*shishu*” loan category borrowers for one year under the *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana*. These developments form the sub-text of the farm Bills.

The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 allows sale and marketing of produce outside notified APMC *mandis*. State Governments cannot collect market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets; inter-state trade barriers are nixed and provisions have been made for electronic trading of agricultural produce. No licence is needed; anyone with a PAN card can buy directly from farmers. The new system provides a dispute resolution mechanism in case farmers are not paid immediately or within three days.

The APMCs failed as they allowed vested interests to seize the system. States levied cess to earn extra revenue that was not part of the budget and was used for “discretionary” development spending, mostly under the Chief Minister’s orders. As the cess increased, political appointees took charge of the APMCs. Even the Food Corporation of India (FCI) paid cess. Small farmers were bur-

“THE NEW LAWS COULD PAVE THE WAY FOR A REVOLUTION IN WHICH FARMERS DRIVE THE CHANGE, WITH TECHNOLOGY PLAYING A SUPPORTIVE ROLE. IF THE GOVT REPUDIATES THE GENETICALLY-MODIFIED FOOD CROPS LOBBY, INDIA COULD RETURN TO FARMING METHODS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE COSTLY INPUTS”

dened with the cost of transport to take their produce to the *mandis* and deal with middlemen. For instance, waiting outside sugar mills, with heat evaporating the sugar content in the cane, desperate farmers have succumbed to agents (of near-by *mandis*) who arrive miraculously and dictate the price.

Under the new Act, politicians and urban elite farmers will find it difficult to get large “agricultural” incomes *mandi*-certified and pay zero per cent income tax, as payments have to be made against PAN cards.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 regulates contractual farming rules and State APMC Acts. Farmers can make contracts with a corporate entity or wholesaler at a mutually agreed price. The system already exists in 20 States; PepsiCo buys potatoes from 24,000 farmers across nine States. Further, 18 States already permit private *mandis* while Kerala and Bihar don’t have APMC *mandis* at all. More pertinently, the Act prohibits acquiring ownership rights of farmers’ land.

The Centre has funded ₹6,685 crore for the formation of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and the ₹1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF). The FPO will give farmers higher bargaining power while AIF and market reforms serve as additional enablers. They can invest

in farm equipment, infrastructure and build forward market linkages by making agreements with agribusinesses, thus improving access to technology and investment. Maharashtra Sahyadri Farmers Producer Co. Ltd, with 8,000 marginal farmers, exports 16,000 tonnes of grapes every season.

The end of socialist-era impediments should stimulate increased private sector investment across the value chain, creating jobs in logistics service providers, warehouse operators and processing unit staff. The rise of food-processing industries could create non-farm jobs in rural areas.

India processes less than 10 per cent of output (cereals, fruits, vegetables, fish, etc) and loses around ₹90,000 crore annually to wastage. Hopefully, market linkages will motivate farmers to diversify and grow crops such as edible oils and help reduce India’s edible oil import bill that currently stands at over \$10 billion.

Finally, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 removes excessive control on production, storage, movement and distribution of food commodities; removes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities, and paves the way for cold chain infrastructure to come up. Previously, control regarding the storage of essential commodities (onions, potatoes, edible oils, jute, rice paddy, sugar) gave draconian powers to authorities to raid “hoarders”, confiscate stocks, cancel licensing and even imprison offenders. This naturally discouraged investment in storage as entrepreneurs feared being prosecuted as “hoarders.” Lack of storage also contributed to volatility in prices as their stability depends on adequate warehousing infrastructure.

Henceforth, the ECA 2020 will be invoked only under extraordinary circumstances such as war, famine, natural calamity of grave nature and extraordinary price rise (100 per cent increase in retail price of horticultural produce over the preceding 12 months, or 50 per cent increase in retail price of non-perishables over the preceding five years).

Dismissing the propaganda that the new laws would end the minimum support price (MSP), the Centre has quietly ordered procurement, effectively nipping the canard that small and marginal farmers would be short-changed. Implementation will be the key.

(The author is a senior journalist. Views are personal)

SOUNDBITE

I think home quarantine can play a role in the future and it’s something that is being considered by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, particularly as we move beyond the phase we’re in now.

Australian PM
—Scott Morrison

There is an undercurrent of painful events — passing away of people, the tragedy of migrants walking home — everything is in the back of my mind.

Artist
—Atul Dodiya

Yogi Adityanath Government kept sitting for eight days. Why was no action taken against the culprits all these days? It was only when the case was highlighted that the administration woke up.

Congress General Secretary
—Priyanka Gandhi

I would say it is a very crucial time for the team and each player should have her own yardstick and must work on raising the bar.

Former hockey player
—Deepika Thakur

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Road to revival?

Sir — The 2015 Assembly elections in Bihar saw the Congress regain a reasonable space in the State legislature. After a gap of 15 years, the party’s tally rose to double digits, as 27 out of 41 candidates in the fray won their seats. But will the grand old party be able to revive itself this time again? The Congress began to lose its support base as it failed to address backward caste aspirations between 1988 and 1990, when four of its Chief Ministers were nominated to the top post only to be pulled down swiftly, giving in to the intra-party caste divides. The support base also suffered massive erosion following the desertion by Muslims after the Bhalgalpur riots in 1989 and Babri Masjid demolition in 1992. However, the electoral prospects for the party seem rather good this time, particularly for its role in mitigating suffering of the migrants and students during the lockdown and its active support to farmers’ protests against the enactment of the three new farm laws. Also, Dalits and Muslims are now mobilising in favour of Congress.

Nihal Raj
Noida

A reminder of the 2012 Delhi gang-rape case

A woman passenger was allegedly gang-raped inside a moving bus for the entire night on September 25. The police found her lying unconscious on Delhi Road in Meerut the next morning and rushed her to the hospital. This comes as a chilling reminder of the harrowing 2012 Delhi gang-rape case when the 23-year-old female medical student, who came to be known as Nirbhaya, was severely assaulted and gang-raped by five men and a juvenile inside a moving bus in South Delhi.

This is the third incident in the last one month in Uttar Pradesh when a woman passenger, on her way to Delhi, was gang-raped on a moving bus and that too by the staff. This highlights how law and order in the State has deteriorated drastically. The victim, according to reports, told the police that she had boarded a bus from Bhaivali bus stand on Friday night. En route, she was given a cold drink which had been spiked after which she lost consciousness and was raped by the driver and the conductor throughout the night.

Stormy affair

Sir — The tussle in the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), relating to the naming of the chief ministerial candidate for the 2021 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election, continues with no solution in sight. Both Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O

Panneerselvam, who are chief ministerial hopefuls, have dug in their heels and are slugging it out. Even the five-hour-long meeting of the AIADMK executive council on Monday failed to arrive at a consensus on who will be its chief ministerial candidate. The final decision will be taken on October 7. Hopefully, by then, Palaniswami and Panneerselvam will be able to sort out their dif-

ferences and come to a decision.

CK Subramaniam
Tirumangalam

Battle for the ballot

Sir — The popularity of the ruling Janata Dal (United) and the BJP-led Government, headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, is waning. While Nitish has been under fire for badly handling the

COVID outbreak and the returnee migrants, the BJP has taken on the defensive mode on questions of border security, economic stagnation and farmers’ backlash. This should be enough for the Opposition to challenge the State Government. However, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress together have not been able to push the Government on any substantial matter. Being held under exceptional circumstances, the battle for the ballot promises to be a challenging and exciting affair.

Yash Pal Ralhan
Jalandhar

Legal fiction

Sir — The investigation into Sushant Singh Rajput’s death seems to have been sidetracked as officials haven’t been able to find any concrete evidence. It has become a whirlpool of misreported facts and concocted lies and sheer entertainment in the name of news, reducing a tragedy into a sensational drama.

Devendra Khurana
Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

BJP all set to make it alone

It is well within its rights to expand its base and in times to come, go solo as the top brass believes in making the party electorally strong



KALYANI SHANKAR

The saffron party must slowly learn to live without its major allies now that its oldest partner, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), quit the BJP-led NDA alliance on Saturday. The BJP and the SAD had been partners even during the Jan Sangh days. However, with a brute majority in the Lok Sabha, the BJP's attitude now is "go if you want to leave." That is why there are no efforts to mollify miffed allies as it was done during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee era. There was a time in the eighties when it was difficult for the BJP to get allies but today Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in a strong position and hence the alliance partners are not needed by the party anymore.

The BJP had five major allies till two years ago. They were the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Shiv Sena, the SAD, the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). With the Bihar elections round the corner, the party is left with only the JD(U) as its major alliance partner now. The others are smaller parties. Out of all these NDA allies, the TDP was the first to leave in March 2018 over the issue of grant of special status to Andhra Pradesh. Soon after the TDP's departure, another one of the oldest allies, the Shiv Sena parted company in October 2019 on the issue of chief ministership in Maharashtra after the Assembly polls. The Sena formed the Government in the State under the Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray with the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) as partners. Now, the SAD too has left on the issue of the controversial farm Bills that were pushed through amid din and allegations of riding roughshod on the objections of the Opposition parties and allies alike.

The only partner the BJP itself dumped was the PDP in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In any case, the BJP-PDP alliance was an uneasy marriage of convenience and the late PDP chief Mufti Mohammad Sayeed termed it as "an alliance of the North Pole and the South Pole."

The NDA partners had been unhappy with the BJP for long, claiming that they were not consulted or even informed about major issues. "Where is the NDA," asks SAD chief Sukhbir Badal. The relationship under Modi has changed compared to Vajpayee's time when one of the partners was the convener of the NDA while Vajpayee or later Advani were the chairmen of the alliance. There were NDA meetings on important issues. Though Modi has included the representatives of the allies, despite the BJP having a majority in both 2014 and 2019, there is no formal NDA structure now. However, the BJP needed them in the Rajya Sabha for pushing the Bills where it was in a minority.

The BJP, under the leadership of Modi has learnt the art of dividing the Opposition and pushing through even some controversial Bills like the recent farm ones and the earlier Citizenship Amendment Bill. Also, the Punjab elections are in 2022 and the next Lok Sabha polls are even further off, in 2024. Who knows what will happen by then? However, according to insiders, the BJP wants to improve its performance by going solo in the coming polls. The main grouse of the allies is that the BJP, which was the junior partner in Maharashtra and Punjab, has expanded its base in the last six years. Not only has it overtaken the allies, it has become the richest party, too. Notwithstanding the concerns of its partners, the BJP is aggressively pursuing its objective of coming to power in States where it is not in Government. The only aim of the party is to consolidate Hindu voters even further by eating into the votes of its alliance partners. It has a major presence in most big States and is now eyeing the South and the North-East for expansion. The saffron party has replaced the Left in Tripura and edged the Congress out in West Bengal and Odisha as the main challenger to the ruling party.

In the 552-member Lok Sabha, the NDA has 335 seats, of which the BJP alone has 303 representatives. It does not need partners in 334 seats and is dependent on allies in 212 seats. When the BJP came to power in 2014, it had only 23 Rajya Sabha seats but today, it has 87. So far, the party has managed to push even controversial Bills like the bifurcation of J&K and the Citizenship Amendment Bill by dividing the Opposition. The three farm reform Bills, too, were passed similarly.

The Modi regime wants to have ties in which the BJP stands to gain. This has mostly worked in the last six years. The BJP has overtaken the Sena in Maharashtra and in other States too it has improved its electoral chances. It is indeed well within its rights to expand its base and in times to come, go solo as the top brass believes in making the party electorally strong.

Is it not said that in politics there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies? The BJP, too, is banking on the old allies coming back to its fold and new allies joining it. If one looks at the coalition politics, which is practised by both the main parties — the Congress and the BJP — the Congress-led UPA too is not in a good shape.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

THESE (OPPOSITION) PARTIES ARE INSULTING THE FARMERS. THESE REFORMS WILL STRENGTHEN LABOURERS, YOUTH, WOMEN, FARMERS OF THE NATION. —PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



EVEN YOUR ALLY OF 24 YEARS, THE SHIROMANI AKALI DAL (SAD) HAS DUMPED YOU (ON THE FARMERS' ISSUE). MODI JJ, IS THE SAD INSULTING FARMERS? —CONGRESS LEADER KAPIL SIBAL

Education as revolution

The poor have found innovative ways of helping themselves and visionary leaders from among these communities are nurturing a growing industry of good quality private schools



MOIN QAZI

The state of India's school education continues to be abysmal despite so many high-sounding policy prescriptions being tossed around. There are, however, islands of excellence and even in this bleak landscape there are shoots of green. While Government schools are the mainstay of school education for the poor, some exceptional private schools are affordable even to the extremely marginalised. The accepted wisdom is that private schools serve the privileged; everyone else, especially the underprivileged, requires public schools. This logic is grounded on the assumption that the poor need Government assistance if they are to get a good education. Which helps explain why many school choice enthusiasts believe that the only way the poor can get the education they deserve is through Government schools.

But if we reflect on some of the underprivileged communities, we find these assumptions lacking. The poor have found remarkably innovative ways of helping themselves educationally and visionary leaders from among these communities are nurturing a large and growing industry of good quality private schools. Tikiapara, a sprawling slum in Howrah, is a witness and a willing participant in a quiet revolution led by Mamoon Akhtar that has the potential to turn around the lives of its residents, especially of its children. Mamoon was forced to drop out of middle school because his parents couldn't afford to educate him further. Three decades later, he is the driving force two schools in Tikiapara with 3,000 students, most of them children of unlettered parents. Mamoon's extraordinary journey from a victim to champion of the underprivileged started the day he decided that just because his family couldn't pay for his schooling, he wouldn't forego education. Mamoon's passion helped him overcome his deprivation.

His father was keen that his son get a good education. So he put him in one of the area's leading schools, St Thomas. After his father died, the teenager had to give up his studies and took up a librarian's job at a private school in Tikiapara, supplementing his income by giving private tuitions. Life would have gone on as usual but Mamoon couldn't get over the tragedy he suffered on being forced to lose out on education. The young idealist believed in giving direction to the fire within, not in extinguishing it.

In 1991, he started an informal "school", teaching five to six children in his own house in the Tikiapara slum. Thus began his lifetime romance with education. As the residents of the area became aware of this "school", more and more children started coming and soon there was no place to seat them. The enterprising Mamoon constructed a room on his own 600 square foot plot of land. In that one room, the Samaritan Help Mission School was born with 25 young and eager children flocking to it daily. The good Samaritan stretched his every rupee and canvassed from door to door to raise ₹28,000 per annum (in addition to his own contribution of ₹10,000). The organisation has continued to steadily grow through the years. The catchment area of the school can break the determination of even the greatest optimist but Mamoon is alive and equal to the challenge. The parents come from very poor backgrounds, some are rickshaw-pullers, drug peddlers and daily labourers. But with Mamoon's effort, their dreams of educating their children in an English-medium school has become a reality.

Social responsibility: As an educationist, Mamoon is also sharply aware of his role of a social reformer. Most children come from families afflicted with social maladies, with a large number of them being children of drug peddlers. Mamoon believes that schools should have the right to exclude pupils

TIKIAPARA, A SPRAWLING SLUM IN HOWRAH, IS A WITNESS AND A WILLING PARTICIPANT IN A QUIET REVOLUTION LED BY MAMOON AKHTAR, THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TURN AROUND THE LIVES OF ITS RESIDENTS, ESPECIALLY OF ITS CHILDREN. MAMOON WAS FORCED TO DROP OUT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BECAUSE HIS PARENTS COULDN'T AFFORD TO EDUCATE HIM FURTHER. THREE DECADES LATER, HE IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND A SCHOOL WITH 3,000 STUDENTS, MOST OF THEM CHILDREN OF UNLETTERED PARENTS



only as a last resort and that too, to protect the other children in the class as well as teachers. The excluded children, he avers, can be affected by anxiety, depression and loss of self-worth. There is a decline in their mental health and children become very reclusive. The stress of the exclusion takes its toll on parents, too.

Mamoon knows the pain of deprivation only too well. At a time when there is a widespread practice of pupils being shunted off a school's rolls in order to manipulate its exam results or rankings in league tables — he is doing his every bit to ensure that children remain at school during the day. There are hundreds of pupils who joined his school after being booting out of another one. Taking in as many vulnerable pupils as possible is the core of this teacher's mission. His school is single-handedly ensuring pupils remain on the rolls. There are a number of youngsters who wouldn't be getting an education were it not for the Samaritan Help Mission School. In a world where schools are clearly pushing vulnerable pupils out through the back door with little thought to their next steps and best interests, he is embracing them with a cheerful heart.

With a little help from friends: When he canvassed for help from the community around him, Mamoon reaped a bonus — a strong connect with the community. In 2007, the Samaritan Help Mission School became accredited and recognised by the West Bengal Government. Today, it is a co-educational English-medium school, affiliated to the State Board of Secondary Education, with an enrolment of 1,300. The big thing is that with the school being an English medium one, it makes a major difference to the future prospects of the kids once they go out into the world. However, the odds are stacked against the children of this locality given the inter-generational nature of poverty and the poor developmental outcomes that families face. This impacts the children in many ways. They battle poor academic achievement, inferiority complex, maladjustment, lack of initiative and

an underdeveloped personality. Disheartened and discouraged by financial stress and their own inadequacy, parents are ill-equipped to adequately support their children. Sadly, parents in Tikiapara have little motivation to invest in their children's education. Fortunately, Mamoon's conviction and commitment are unflagging and his enthusiasm is contagious, sending hope in the community.

Some of the students are orphans; some have run away from home; all are underprivileged. The Samaritan Help Mission School charges them a measly ₹5 a year, and that too because the teacher believes that people will not value anything that is free. Funds to run the school come from Mamoon's savings and private donors whose motivation is inspired by the good Samaritan's devotion. This led to an addition to the original school on Mamoon's plot, the IR Belilious Institution on Belilious Road, covering two acres of land bequeathed by a Jewish couple, Rebecca and Isaac Raphael Belilious. The school today has a football field, basketball court, a water body, a two-storeyed school building and a bigger one coming up close by. As a child Mamoon swam there, to later see the water body turn into a municipal garbage dump and the Government school that used to run there become virtually defunct, the whole space go derelict and transform into a den of drug pushers. The land on which the second Samaritan Help Mission School stands had thus been a garbage dump for years until Howrah City Police and the Howrah Municipal Corporation got together to create a conducive atmosphere for Mamoon to expand his initiative. The police helped them (Mamoon and his staff) build a wall, remove encroachments and start a school there.

Creating safe spaces for children at risk: Many children studying in the two schools attest to the fact that they have a fun-filled, interactive and encouraging atmosphere and that the teachers are extremely supportive. Children are engaged in creative activities like sports,

quiz competitions, picnics and recreational programmes in the local parks. Regular cleaning campaigns in Tikiapara are organised in which students, teachers and other volunteers take an active part. Mamoon has also introduced a paramedic course for senior students. His policy of inclusive education has ensured that the constitutional right to primary education is a reality in this slum. There are schools which identify parents who are not well-educated and living in the slum. They are approached informally and told that it "will be difficult for your child to stay" in the hope that the parents agree to move out or home-school their child. But Mamoon's schools are a safe learning haven where no one is shunned — either because of creed, low academic scores or poverty.

Innovative approaches: Mamoon says that the process of teaching and learning is an intimate act that neither computers nor markets can hope to replicate. It is a small wonder then that the technology-centric corporate business model has not worked in reforming the school system as there is simply no substitute for the personal element. There is no substitute for a good teacher and nothing more valuable than quality classroom instruction. But we also need more involved parents to make learning more effective.

The core objective of a school is to provide high-quality instruction: Fostering good excellent teaching and a learning environment in which students can thrive. These schools don't develop randomly on their own; an essential ingredient behind each of these success stories is transformational leadership.

A lot of good programmes got their start when one individual looked at a familiar landscape in a fresh way. What they did was to simply change the fundamental approach to solving problems, and the outcomes have been truly revolutionary. Thus, people only need to summon their will power the way game-changers like Mamoon are doing to bring about change.

(The writer is a well known development professional)

How many child deaths will it take to stop hunger?

The wasted, stunted, anaemic and mentally underdeveloped youth of our country, who barely survived, cannot build a strong nation



AR SINDHU

In the fourth month of the lockdown, the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) had warned India that if the nation does not seriously address the issue of hunger and malnutrition aggravated due to the shutdown and make proper arrangements for providing adequate nutritional food to underprivileged children, 3,00,000 more kids under the age of five would die within the next six months and make the toll total of around 12-13 lakh this year.

Even before the Coronavirus pan-

demical struck, the situation was quite alarming. In 2018, a whopping 8.8 lakh children under the age of six died in India, says the UNICEF. Nearly half of all our children are underweight, about 45 per cent are stunted (too short for their age), 20 per cent are wasted (too thin for their height), 75 per cent are anaemic and 57 per cent are deficient in Vitamin A. Half of the world's malnourished children live in India.

The rate of malnutrition among India's children is almost five times more than China and double than that in Sub-Saharan Africa, says a World Bank report. A study commissioned by the UNICEF in 2019 had found that over 80 per cent of adolescents in India suffered from hidden malnutrition. This includes deficiency of one or more micronutrients such as iron, folate, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin B12, and vitamin D.

According to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Mission document of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, out of the total

child births of 2.5 crore annually in India, child survival is only 1.75 crore. Infant mortality is 0.8 crore annually or 80,00,000 children die every year in our country before six months of age. This means that on an average as many as 21,917 children die every day in India. Maternal and child malnutrition is one of the reasons for 68 per cent under-five deaths in India.

What has been the COVID-19 lockdown impact? With job and income loss on a large scale, closing of schools and consequently the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and Anganwadis that gave hot, cooked meals, a poor Public Distribution System (PDS) and poor implementation of the announced schemes of free rations during the last five months, there is a situation of absolute poverty and hunger in our country that will have a serious impact on the already pathetic nutritional status of our people, especially the children and women.

The UNICEF has estimated that 120 million children living in South

Asian countries, including India, could slip into poverty within the next six months due to the COVID-19 crisis, taking the total number of such kids in the region to 360 million. The UNICEF also warns: "In the worst-case scenario, where health interventions are reduced by around 45 per cent, there could be as much as a 44.7 per cent increase in under-five child deaths and 38.6 per cent increase in maternal deaths per month."

In the last two decades, there have been many dialogues, debates, and legal steps like the Supreme Court Judgment on Right to food Act and so on to address the issue of malnutrition. But the schemes or missions rolled out by respective governments proved to be inadequate. The ICDS, the flagship scheme to address this crisis, has been deprived of funds despite the apex court's judgment for universalisation of the scheme. The fund allocation pattern has been changed to 60:40 in the last few years, putting a major financial burden on the States. With the

ongoing issues of lack of funds in States, things are going to worsen. In addition, there were drastic budget cuts. As an impact, according to the Global Hunger Index 2019, wasting among children in India rose from 16.5 per cent in 2008-2012 to 20.8 per cent in 2014-2018.

The much-acclaimed "Poshan Mission" is just policing of the Anganwadi workers, who are already overburdened with non-ICDS work. Similar is the case of the other schemes like the MDMS and the National Health Mission. At present, despite the warning bells, the announced packages do not address the problem of malnutrition. Moreover, there is an absence of a national composite guideline to address malnutrition at the community level.

To stop further loss of precious lives, there is an urgent need for the Government to show political will to recognise the right to food/nutrition of every citizen of India, make quality infrastructure and basic nutrition ser-

vices schemes like ICDS, MDMS efficient with increased financial allocation, so that the most marginalised and vulnerable are benefitted as well.

The pandemic has shown that the lakhs of community-based women caregivers like the Anganwadi workers and helpers, Accredited Social Health Activists and MDMS workers, are the crucial link between the community and policymakers. Their work must be regularised with minimum wages and social security, as recommended by the 45th Indian Labour Conference. Otherwise whom do we expect to be "skilling" for the 'Make in India' projects? The wasted, stunted, anaemic and mentally underdeveloped youth of our country, who barely survived, cannot build a strong nation. How many more deaths do we need before we realise so many of our children are dying?

(The writer is general secretary, All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers and national secretary of the CITU)



FOREIGN EYE



TEST, TRACE AND TEACH

Final figures on the take-up of UK's university places are not yet known. But predictions that the recruitment of international students would collapse due to COVID have not come true. This worst-case scenario having been avoided, UK's universities must ensure that students get the education they deserve, while obeying pandemic rules put in place. (The Guardian editorial)

SHORT READS



Hindustan Zinc raises Rs 3,520 cr via NCDs

New Delhi: Hindustan Zinc on Tuesday said it has raised Rs 3,520 crore through issuance of non-convertible debentures (NCDs). The issuer today...approved the allotment of 35,200 rated, listed, unsecured, redeemable, NCDs bearing a face value of Rs 10,00,000 each, aggregating to Rs 35,20,00,00,000 on private placement basis (Issue) by Hindustan Zinc, the company said in a filing to BSE. Hindustan Zinc is a leading zinc-lead miner. It is a subsidiary of Vedanta Ltd which owns 64.9 per cent stake in the company while the Government of India holds 29.5 per cent stake.



OYO's co-living arm offers discounts on monthly rent

New Delhi: Hospitality firm OYO's rental housing arm OYO LIFE on Tuesday said it will offer a 20 per cent discount on monthly rent to its customers starting from the fourth month of their stay. It has also taken several other safety measures at its centres as part of its efforts to attract new clients. OYO LIFE has taken more than 200 buildings from landlords to provide rental housing to working professionals and students. It has presence in nine cities. The company said in a statement that it has launched a distinctive offer of 20 per cent discount on monthly rent starting from the fourth month of the long-term stay.



Etrio raises USD 3 mn from Singapore-based investors

New Delhi: Electric vehicle startup Etrio on Tuesday said it has raised USD 3 million from Singapore-based investors. The Hyderabad-based company said it has raised the capital in Series A round from investors. The group of investors is led by Janardhan Rao, founder of Triumph Global Group - a Singapore headquartered international commodity trading house with a consolidated revenue of over USD 900 million, it added. The investment would fuel the company's foray into new electric vehicles in three-wheelers and bicycle segments, Etrio said. "With this funding, we will strengthen our product portfolio to target B2B logistics platforms for growth with diverse product offerings and more geographical presence," Etrio Co-founder and CEO Deepak MV said. It targets to enter the highly-dense three-wheeler EV market, starting with the cargo segment - aimed at e-commerce logistics space, and then subsequently set up its channel network for driving both passenger and cargo three-wheeler sales across major states in the north and south India, he added.

India looking to store oil overseas in US: Pradhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India, the world's third-biggest oil importer, is exploring storing crude oil in the US and other commercially viable locations to hedge its supply risks, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Tuesday.

Also, the country has tied up long-term crude oil supplies from the US, Russia and Angola to diversify its import basket beyond its traditional suppliers in the volatile Middle-East.

Speaking at a conference on the 'Energy Security Towards Atmanirbhar Bharat', he said India is now importing crude oil from over 30 countries, including from Africa, North and South Americas as well as Southeast Asia.

"We are also exploring over-



The country has tied up long-term crude oil supplies to diversify its import basket beyond its traditional suppliers

seas crude storage facilities in the US and other commercially viable locations," he said.

India and the US had on July 17 signed a preliminary agreement for cooperating on emergency crude oil reserves, including the possibility of India storing oil in the US emergency stockpile.

The nation currently stores 5.33 million tonnes (about 38 million barrels) of crude oil in

underground storages at three locations on the east and west coast, hardly enough to meet its 9.5 days needs.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) prescribes its members to have at least 90 days of stock in the strategic reserves.

India has been looking to expand the storage capacity by another 6.5 million tonnes Chandikol in Odisha and

Padur in Karnataka and is also exploring the possibility of hiring storage in the US to stock some oil that can be used in times of extreme price volatility or supply disruption.

The nation is as much as 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs. It bought 101.4 million tonnes of crude oil from overseas during April 2019 to March 2020 - two-third of these coming from the Middle East countries such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"New long-term contracts have been entered into by our companies with their counterparts in the US, Russia and Angola," he said.

Also, the import of gas (in its liquid form or LNG) has been diversified from traditional supplier Qatar to the US, Australia and Russia, he said.

Covid delays C'garh steel plant commissioning planned this year

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The commissioning of state-owned miner NMDC Limited's Rs 21,000 crore three-million tonne capacity steel plant in Chhattisgarh, targeted this year, has been delayed due to COVID-19 and is now expected by July next year, a top official said on Tuesday.

Experts from foreign countries, engaged in the project work, could not undertake a visit for an inspection and clearance in view of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the city-headquartered NMDC's Chairman cum Managing Director Sumit Deb said.

Senior officials of the PSU had earlier indicated that the plant would be operational this year.

Replying to shareholders' queries at the virtual Annual General Meeting, Deb said NMDC has so far invested Rs



16,000 crore in the plant and the total cost would be Rs 21,000 crore once completed.

Nagarnar steel Plants targeted date was this year but due to COVID-19 impact foreign experts could not visit the plant. Now the revised target is it will start by July 2021, he said.

He also said the company planned to take some debt also before commissioning the activity.

"The plant is on the verge of completion. We have some

balance work which will be taken up, the official said.

According to him, the steel plant is expected to generate annual revenues of Rs 14,000-Rs 15,000 crore (at the optimum production levels) with EBITDA (Earnings before tax depreciation and amortisation) margins of 15-20 per cent. Replying to a question on the demerger of the steel plant, Deb said the Board of Directors has already given the clearance with mirror shareholding.

Yamaha hopes sales in North East to grow 5-8% in 2021

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Amidst slump in auto sales due to COVID-19 pandemic, Japanese two-wheeler major Yamaha is expecting its Indian subsidiary to clock 5-8 per cent growth in North East in next year, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The company's wholly-owned subsidiary Yamaha Motor India Sales, which earlier said this year's sales in the Indian market will be the lowest in a decade due to Covid, is hoping that the North East market will continue to grow despite challenges.

Cairn seeks \$1.4 bn in losses from retro tax demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

British oil explorer Cairn Energy Plc on Tuesday said it is seeking from the Indian government USD 1.4 billion (about Rs 10,300 crore) in losses arising from the expropriation of its investments to enforce a retrospective tax demand.

In its half-yearly earnings statement, the company said it expects an international arbitral tribunal to shortly give a decree on its challenge to the Indian government seeking Rs 10,247 crore in retrospective taxes. "The main evidentiary hearing of Cairn's claim under the (UK-India Bilateral



Investment) Treaty took place in August 2018 in The Hague with a final hearing in December 2018. All formal hearings and submissions have now been made and the tribunal is in the process of drafting its award," the firm said. The tribunal, it said, has indicated that "it expects to be in a position to issue the award after the end of the summer of 2020, with no significant delay expected as a result of Covid."

Cairn said it is seeking "full restitution for losses of more than USD 1.4 billion resulting from the expropriation of its investments in India in 2014; continued attempts to enforce retrospective tax measures; and the failure to treat the company and its investments fairly and equitably."

This is the second most high profile tax litigation. Last week, an international arbitration tribunal ruled that India's efforts to claim Rs 22,100 crore in past taxes from Vodafone were in breach of fair treatment under the bilateral investment protection pact between the south Asian nation and the Netherlands.

BPCL's block acquisition under scanner

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI will look into alleged irregularities in state-owned Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd's (BPCL) investment in a gas block in Mozambique, the government's approval to the firm's further spending in the block has recorded, sources said.

The approval to Bharat PetroResources Ltd (BPRL), the oil and gas exploration and production subsidiary of BPCL, investing its share of the USD 24 billion cost of developing the gas fields in the Rovuma Area-1 Offshore Block came with a noting that the CBI will continue to look into alleged irregularities,

Sources said the government is looking into reasons why BPCL did not buy the entire 20 per cent stake offered to it by Anadarko.



sources with direct knowledge of the development said.

BPRL had in August 2008 bought a 10 per cent stake in Area-1 Offshore of the Rovuma Block from the US energy major Anadarko Petroleum Corp for USD 75 million. That same month

Videocon through its subsidiary acquired a 10 per cent stake in the same block for an equivalent sum.

Sources said Anadarko had originally offered a 20 per cent stake in Area-1 to BPCL but the state-owned firm bought only half of it and the rest was

picked up by Videocon.

Videocon in 2013 sold the same stake to ONGC Videsh Ltd for USD 2.475 billion.

Sources said the government is looking into reasons why BPCL did not buy the entire 20 per cent stake offered to it by Anadarko.

Global stocks mixed after Wall St rally ahead of US debate

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Global stocks were mixed Tuesday after Wall Street rallied as investors looked ahead to a debate between President Donald Trump and his challenger in the November election, Joe Biden. London and Frankfurt opened lower while Shanghai and Tokyo advanced.

US stock futures were lower a day after Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index gained 1.6 per cent, boosted by announcements of corporate acquisitions and gains by big

US stock futures were lower a day after Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index gained 1.6 per cent



tech stocks. "This is welcome cheer, but does not redeem equities from a negative September," said Mizuho Bank in a report.

With no obvious catalyst, its

analysts questioned whether the rise was driven by little more than "month-end short-covering," or traders buying stocks to fulfill commitments to re-sell them.

Great Wall Motors hopeful of hearing soon from Ind govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chinese auto major Great Wall Motors, which had announced USD 1 billion investment in India earlier this year, is hopeful of hearing soon from the Indian government on clearances for its proposals, including acquisition of General Motors' factory in Talegaon, according to a company official.

In January this year, Great Wall Motors (GWM) agreed to buy General Motors' (GM) Talegaon manufacturing facility in Maharashtra, subject to requisite government and regulatory approvals.

The transaction was expected to close in the second half of 2020.

Later at the Auto Expo in February, GWM announced investment of USD 1 billion (about Rs 7,100 crore) in India in a phased manner in areas including research and development, manufacturing, and sales and marketing. It included acquisition of GM's Talegaon plant.



Sebi gives more time to investors of Blessing Agro

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has extended till October 16 the last date for investors of Blessing Agro Farm and Assure Agrowtech to submit claims for refund of money invested by them in the illegal investment schemes floated by the firms.

Earlier, the last date for submitting refund applications along with original proof of investment for investors of Blessing Agro Farm and Assure Agrowtech was January 31 and February 29, respective-



ly. The Sebi-appointed administrators had continued to accept claim forms from investors of the two companies even beyond the due date as there were many requests from investors to extend the dead-

line, the regulator said in two separate public notices on Monday.

"Further, considering the Covid outbreak and resultant lockdown imposed during the last week of March 2020, which has caused disruption in postal services, the claim forms were even continued to be received even after the stipulated date," it said.

Administrators have been appointed for sale of properties of the firms to realise money for making payments to the investors.

SII to produce 100 million Covid vax doses for India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Serum Institute of India (SII) on Tuesday said it along with Gavi and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will manufacture an additional up to 100 million Covid vaccine doses for India and LMICs.

The latest collaboration between the partners brings the total number of vaccine doses to be covered to an aggregate of up to 200 million doses, SII said in a statement. In August, SII had entered into a new partnership with international vaccine alliance Gavi and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate manufacturing and deliv-



ery of up to 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

The collaboration will provide upfront capital to SII to help it increase manufacturing capacity now, so that once a vaccine gets regulatory approval and WHO Prequalification, doses can be distributed at scale to LMICs, it added.

SBI Card, Amex join hands to leverage scale

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

SBI Card has joined hands with American Express (Amex) to leverage scale and differentiated offerings for its premium customers.

Under this partnership, SBI Card's top-end premium products will be available on American Express' network. "We have a card base of about 10.5 million at this point, this is still a very small number compared to the SBI customer base of 288 million. And if you look at the entire industry of 880 million debit cards, this is a long-long way to go," Ashwini Tewari, MD & CEO, SBI Card said.

‘Hiring rate, female workforce participation increase in India’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hiring rate and female workforce participation have increased in India, according to a 'Labour Market Update' put out by online professional network LinkedIn.

Hiring picked up by 25 per centage points by end of July as compared to June, it said. Female workforce participation increased from 30 per cent in April to reach 37 per cent at the end of July.

'Labour Market Update' is a monthly update on hiring trends and insights based on LinkedIn's 'Economic Graph',



adigital representation of the Indian economy built by conducting a close analysis of actions of more than 69 million members in India, it said.

Insights from its second edition show that hiring continues to recover, gender parity has improved, and disruptive digital skills can help to

increase the resilience of professionals to challenges in the current job market, it said.

One possible reason for increase in female workforce participation could be the strong support from live-in help and grandparents, as well as more flexible working hours with remote working schemes, which has allowed more women to enter the workforce despite schools and childcare facilities being closed during the lock-down, it said.

"The lockdown, which promoted acceptance of the work from home concept supported by flexible work hours, has

emerged as an opportunity for women to rebuild their careers and start afresh," said Pei Ying Chua, APAC Lead Economist, Economic Graph team at LinkedIn.

With the exception of the manufacturing sector, female representation across most industries increased during the lockdown period and continued to rise in subsequent months.

The data also showed that talent with more advanced digital skills have weathered the COVID-19 storm better than those with basic digital skills, it was stated.

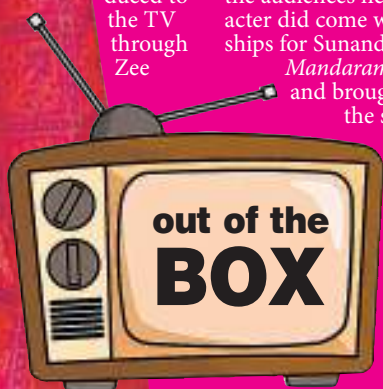
Varun remembers his earliest introduction to computers and coding, recalls having spent most of his childhood with computers after being gifted his own PC at the age of merely 7 years by his parents. His well-crafted entrepreneurial experience led him to introduce Avalon Labs & Avalon Meta to the world that has ventured into building everything from Software as a Service tool to Blockchain to Mental Health platforms since its inception in 2017. The organisation slowly built its way through success as it went on to work with numerous Fortune 500 companies as well as Series A, B funded start-ups from across the globe, and has now invested its resources into Meta which is on its way to change perspectives in the education world. “We focus on a free digital replacement for the existing education system combining higher education, new-age skills, and gaming, all set to leave a mark in the digital university space,” adds Varun, a widely known ed-influencer today!

Some urban farmers are on a mission to make cities self-sufficient, that's what Home Crop is all about. With a purpose to transform unused urban spaces into organic vegetable farms, HomeCrop wants to bring sustainable and healthy production of organic fruits and vegetables back to our cities. They have overcome a lack of space by introducing modular kitchen gardens that can be easily installed on rooftops, balconies, and other free areas. With their urban farming expertise, growing your own vegetables has never been this easy. 26-year-old founder Manvitha expresses, "Initially when I started growing food in my backyard, I used soil and realised the many drawbacks of soil. I was inspired by the Cuban organoponics — the movement that started when sanctions were imposed and import of the agricultural inputs was not possible at all. I wanted to enable urban dwellers to use the unused space homestead to grow their veggies — the quality of which is progressively declining. I was unequipped to deal with the nematodes that kept cutting away at my roots. That's when my team started looking into alternatives for soil and came across the concept of growing food in a soil-less medium." Homecrop hopes to make use of most of the urban spaces to grow food.



nels who wanted me to play a mother's character. I found it very funny. I told them it is not my age to play a mother's character and that I'm just 24 years old. I'm ready to play any character but Sunanda is confined to negative roles only for the small screen. I don't want to repeat the same in films or OTT. I want to debut with a good character.”

Teluguites sometimes feel there is no work for Telugu artistes here, on that she rues, “I feel there is not much work for Telugu actors here. Since a few actors cannot come from Chennai after lockdown due to reasons best known to them, such characters have been replaced by the people here. When we question the cast being hired from other states, we were given silly reasons like ‘Telugu girls don't have a stunning personality, etc’. We are not given important roles and there is nothing we can do about it.”





The CCB has so far arrested high-profile party planner Viren Khanna, alleged drug peddlers Loum Pepper Samba, Rahul Tonse, Prashanth Ranka and Niyaz in connection with the case. Other than the probe by the CCB, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is also conducting a parallel probe into the alleged money trail involved in this entire case involving two actors along with other co-accused on charges of money laundering. The ED has already got permission from the First Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate on Thursday that had granted permission to probe the charges.

Sandalwood drugs case: No bail for Ragini, Sanjjanaa

The special Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) court of Bengaluru on Monday denied bail to Kannada actress Ragini Dwivedi and Sanjjanaa Galrani for their alleged connection with the high-profile Sandalwood drugs case. The hearing on bail for these actresses as well as

other accused in the case was adjourned till September 30. The NDPS court also rejected the anticipatory bail applications filed by two accused in the case, Vinay Kumar and Shiva Prakash, who evaded arrest until now. The Central Crime Branch police are also on the lookout for actor Vivek Oberoi's brother-in-law, Aditya Alva, who has been named in the case.

Artiste community bearing brunt of event cancellations: Kathak guru Dr Rekha Mehra

Noting that due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdown, artistes were among the worst-hit communities, Kathak exponent Dr Rekha Mehra has organised an online talent hunt to assert that despite all odds, the artiste community is active and waiting for opportunities to exhibit

talent. Founder of Urvashi Dance Music Art and Cultural Society, Dr Rekha will be holding the online talent hunt named 'Sur Taal, Hunar Ka Kamaal' as a virtual global platform for performing artists of Indian classical dance and Indian light music. The participation is free, and the participants are asked to upload their video online on

a virtual platform till October 14, after which audition rounds begin, wherein the artists will be interacting with the dance masters and gurus online.

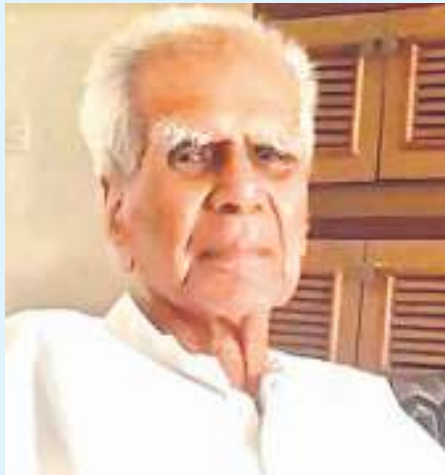
"Due to the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown, various artists suffered the brunt of the cancellation of the on-ground events. This online talent hunt during the Covid-19 spreads the message across the globe that despite all the odds the artist community is active and ready to perform to promote the tradition and culture even through a virtual platform. Besides, there is an immense talent and we just need to provide them with an opportunity to exhibit it," the Kathak exponent told IANSLife.

This event during the Covid-19 will give a direct message to the society that the artist community is also active despite all odds and the show must go on, she added.

As per the organisers, the talent hunt so far has received queries from across the globe as several dancers from Russia, Canada, England, USA, and Bangladesh. There is much excitement among the artist community who are without any performance since March 2020, notes Dr Rekha. She adds that the online hunt will give a chance and opportunity to all, based on the performance of the artiste.

Renowned exponents and gurus to be part of the jury panel are Pt. Krishna Mohan Maharaj, Padma Shri Ranjana Gauhar, Rita Mustaphi, Sudeshna Maulik, Tapan Roy, Nishi, Punita Sharma, Sujata Maheshwari, Pratibha Sharma, Shashidharan Nair, Hemant and Vaishali Panwar, Sonia Chaudhury, Rumela Mukhopadhyay, Tabassi Ahmed, Rani Khanam, Nandini Singh, Bala Vishwanath, and Sharmila Sharma.

Besides the prizes, the winner of the talent hunt will be given a chance to perform live at any auditorium in Delhi once it is safe. Performers can visit www.rekhamehra.com.



VERSATILE KANNADA WRITER-CRITIC G.S. AMUR PASSES AWAY

Noted Kannada writer and critic Dr G.S. Amur died here on Monday due to age-related ailments. He was 95. Amur passed away in his sleep at his residence, a family member told reporters.

The litterateur, known for his proficiency in both Kannada and English, was a recipient of several prestigious honours, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Rajyotsava Award and the Bharatiya Bhasha Award.

Born in Bommanahalli of Dharwad district in 1925, he started his career as an English professor and taught in various universities of Karnataka and Maharashtra.

As a noted critic of English literature, he wrote extensively about the works of late R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, both hailing from the state.

His much-acclaimed books in Kannada include *Are Kannada Kadambariya Belavanige*, *Arthaloaka*, *Vyavasaya* and *Kaadambariya Swaroopa*.

Amur's English works included *Forbidden Fruit*, *Views on Indo-Anglian Fiction* and *Colonial Consciousness in Commonwealth Literature*.

His works on the poetry of Jnanapeetha awardee, the late Da. Ra. Bendre, and on the works of A. N. Krishnaraya, Sriranga and on the evolution of the Kannada novel are highly acclaimed and enjoy a vast readership even to this day.

He received the Sahitya Academy award in 1996 and the highest literary award of Kannada, the Pampa award, in 2006.

It was just over a week ago that the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) announced this year's Nrupatunga award for lifetime's work in literary criticism to Amur. In his condolence message, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said, "Amur had equal command over English and Kannada. He was the leading figure in critiquing modern Kannada literature."

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



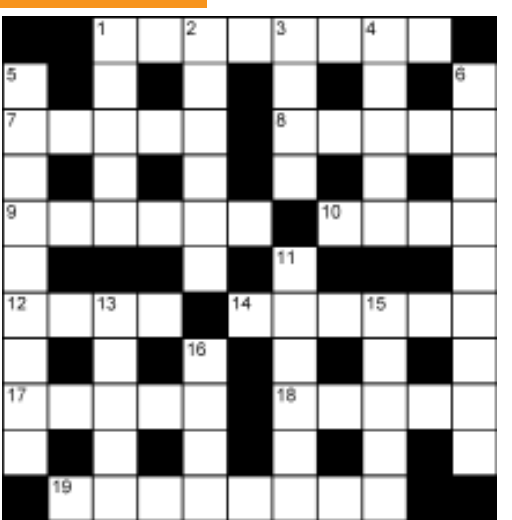
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

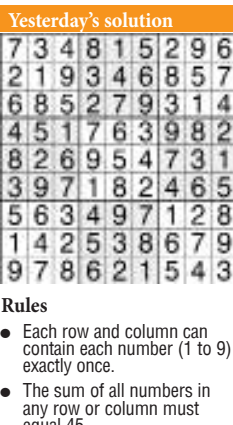
- 1 Motion
- 7 A spicy Indian food dish
- 8 Similar
- 9 Quit your job
- 10 At this place
- 12 Remedy
- 14 Mother or father
- 17 Of greater age
- 18 A fruit with pips
- 19 A place for sick or injured people

DOWN

- 1 Dirty stains
- 2 A long journey by sea or in space
- 3 Animal flesh for eating
- 4 Loud sounds
- 5 A figure in a field to frighten birds
- 6 One third of fifty-one
- 11 With nobody in it
- 13 A communication device
- 15 Kick out of school
- 16 Catch a mouse with this



SUDOKU



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.



Satish Vegesna JUMPS ON THE DIGITAL BANDWAGON

The filmmaker, after wrapping up his feature *Kothi Kommachi*, will be directing a web series, marking his digital debut. It will be an investigative crime drama, finds
NAGARAJ GOUD

Can't wait to mask up and watch movies in theatres: Nag Ashwin

Even as life around us is limping back to normalcy in Unlock 4.0, filmmaker Nag

Ashwin is keen on the theatres reopening. A strong advocate of big screen experience, he said that he is all for safety but at the same time but with many public places resuming activity; he feels that cinemas too should follow suit. "I'm all for safety, but with gyms, bars, restaurants, malls, temples, bus, train, metro, flights open, it feels about time even movie theatres open...cant wait to mask up and watch movies the way they are meant to be watched...not pause, fast-forward, rewind... (Sic)," the director

posted on Twitter on Tuesday, while indicating that he isn't a fan of watching content on laptops or mobile phones.

In May earlier this year, Ashwin even sought to know the opinion of his followers on drive-in theaters and whether it's a good idea "if theaters get license to serve beer/breezer/wine, like in other countries (sic)."

Ashwin is right now occupied with the pre-production of his next with Prabhas and Deepika Padukone. Touted to be a futuristic scientific-thriller set against the backdrop of an imaginary third world war, the film, a Vyjayanthi Movies production, will roll next year.

Haven't finalised actors yet for my next, says Swaroop RSJ

Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya helmer RSJ Swaroop was "pleasantly surprised" with the reports that Nani is spearheading his next, an action-adventure drama with a generous dose of humour. He was travelling to Hyderabad from Bengaluru on Monday when he saw the combination notifications on his Twitter timeline. "The news doing the rounds is absolutely false. My film doesn't have a hero or heroine as such. We are short listing the names of

the actors to spearhead the project. By October-end, we will finalise the cast and the technical crew," the director told *The Pioneer*.

To be set and shot in a village near Tirupati, Swaroop's new project official announcement earlier this month has piqued the cinephiles' interest as it is his second film after the commercial and critical success of Agent. He is collaborating with leading production house Matinee Entertainment for the untitled flick, which will have the cameras rolling in December. — NG

Joining the likes of Sukumar, Vamshi Paidipally, Maruthi and Venu Udugula who are at various stages of developing content for OTT space will soon be Satish Vegesna. According to a source in the know, the director, whose 2017 film *Shathamnam Bhavati* bagged a National Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment, will be delving into deeper waters as far as the genre is concerned. Branded as a family-genre specialist, he is already trying to shed the tag with his next film, *Kothi Kommachi*, fronted by Meghamsh and his son Sameer. The digital debut though will be a 360 degree turn for the filmmaker.

A source close to development tells us, "Satish's digital debut will be with a web series and the content is more or less ready. The project will get off the ground

THE SERIES WILL CONSIST OF NINE EPISODES. NO STREAMER IS ATTACHED TO THE PROJECT AS OF NOW. SATISH WILL TAKE A CALL ON IT MIDWAY INTO THE SHOOTING OR AFTER HE WRAPS IT UP.

after he wraps up *Kothi Kommachi*, which rolls in early November. It's an investigative crime drama and Satish wants to craft it as a gripping thriller. He is confident that the show will be refreshingly new for the Telugu audiences. A prominent production house

will bankroll it, while familiar names will spearhead the casting. He has already initiated the casting process."

The source further adds, "The series will consist of nine episodes, with each episode running into 30-35 minutes. No streamer is attached to the project as of now. Satish will take a call on it midway into the shooting or after he wraps it up. One name that is already on board is that of cinematographer Sameer."



Intimate scenes get difficult for me sometimes: Sneha Ullal

Actress Sneha Ullal, who is best known for her turns in Telugu films like *Ullasanga Utsahanga* and *Ala Modalaindi*, opened up about how she deals with intimate scenes.

"There are difficult scenes that I'm sure every actor goes through. For me, if intimate scenes are not organised correctly, or not choreographed correctly, they don't keep the ambience comfortable

then that affects me and my performance. I am the same in my personal life as well, I always need everything organised. Most of the times a lot of people get uncomfortable choreographing such scenes and the discomfort rubs onto me. So, intimate scenes get difficult for me sometimes," Sneha shared.

Sneha will be seen in the upcoming thriller show, *Expiry Date*, made in Telugu and Hindi. Directed by Shankar Marthand (of *Evvaraina Epudaina* fame), the narrative of the thriller revolves around two couples and their extra-marital affairs. The plot takes a turn when jealousy and anger bring about an inherent change in the nature of the protagonists. Resultantly, their betraying and vicious nature comes to the forefront.

The show also features Tony Luke, Madhu Shalini and Ali Reza. It will premiere on Zee5 on October 2.



Tanga Productions to introduce another director

Presently associated with Anand Deverakonda's third project as producers, Tanga Productions duo of Vijay Mattapally and Pradeep Errabelli has given their consent to another project. Like their maiden film, with this one too they are introducing a new director, Prithvisena Reddy, to T-town. An intense love story, the film, to be made in Telugu and Tamil simultaneously, will have Sunny MR's musical accompaniment, while P Vasu is cranking

the camera. Spelling out the reason behind making the film in Tamil as well, director Prithvi, who has completed a two-year direction course from Whistling Woods International, told us, "The story is close to Tamil nativity as well, prompting us to take a call in making it in Tamil as well. When I shared the script to some of my Tamil friends from film school for feedback, they suggested that it be made in Tamil alone. But as I'm a Telugu guy, I was determined to make it in Telugu."

Fairly new faces will be headlining the project, which will roll from October first week. The surroundings of Hyderabad will host the first schedule. "We are building an old café set right now. The story unfolds in a small town; it's set in a factory backdrop. We are adhering to all safety protocols for the shoot. The first schedule will progress with limited cast and crew," the director pointed out. The untitled film is being slotted for a Valentine's Day release next year.

— NG