

ANALYSIS 7
MOBILE MONEY IS
NEW CASH**MONEY 8**
LUXURY CARMAKERS SEEK REDUCTION
IN TAXES ON AUTOMOBILES IN BUDGET**SPORTS 12**
NO STOPPING INDIAN
NEWCOMERS

HYDERABAD, MONDAY JANUARY 18, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3

the pioneer

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NEWBIE RASHI
BAGS A BIGGIE!

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LEGENDARY MUSICIAN USTAD GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAN DIES AT 89

Legendary Indian classical musician and Padma Vibhushan awardee Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan died on Sunday afternoon at his residence in Mumbai. He was 89. Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan's daughter-in-law Namrata Gupta Khan told PTI that the veteran breathed his last at 12.37 pm. "Today morning he was fine. We had a 24 hour nurse at home. During his massage he vomited and I ran immediately his eyes were shut and he was breathing slowly. I tried connecting to doctors and when they came he had already died," Namrata said. She said the family is in shock due to his sudden death as he was keeping well.

**STATUE OF UNITY GETS MORE TOURISTS THAN STATUE OF LIBERTY: PM MODI**

More tourists visit the Statue of Unity in Gujarat than the Statue of Liberty in the US, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday, adding almost 50 lakh tourists have visited the former since it opened two over years ago. In his address after flagging off eight trains to Kevadia from across India via video conferencing, PM Modi said that with increased connectivity over a lakh people will visit Kevadia daily, as per a survey. PM Modi inaugurated the Statue of Unity, billed as the world's tallest, in October 2018 on the occasion of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 143rd birth anniversary.

**UK INVITES PM MODI FOR G7, SAYS BORIS JOHNSON TO VISIT INDIA "AHEAD" OF SUMMIT**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited by the United Kingdom to attend the G7 summit to be held in the country's Cornwall region in June. The group that includes the world's seven leading democratic economies -- UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the USA -- and the European Union, will discuss global issues like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change and open trade. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had cancelled his India visit for this year's Republic Day event because of the detection of the mutant strain of the virus in Britain, is likely to visit the country "ahead of the G7", a press statement read.

**WON'T CALL OFF TRACTOR RALLY ON REPUBLIC DAY, SAY PROTESTING FARMERS**

The protesting farmers refused to call off their Republic Day tractor rally today, and said the probe by the National Investigation Agency is meant to break their big protest. Today, as the agency summoned 40 people -- including farmer leader Baldev Singh Sirsa -- for questioning in a case related to the banned outfit Sikhs For Justice, farmers alleged that the government has resorted to "atrocities". The government is opposing the tractor rally legally -- the matter will be heard by the Supreme Court tomorrow. "Action is being taken against those who cooperate in the movement," alleged a farmer leader.



Race for GHMC Mayor post heats up in TRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Jockeying for the GHMC Mayor post, with established netas backing ghar ke beti or bahu, has begun in the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), with the State Election Commission notifying the newly-elected corporators by issuing the requisite gazette notification on Saturday (January 16).

As per norms, the new Mayor should assume charge by February 15, considering there should not be a gap of more than one month between the issuance of the gazette notification and the new GHMC Council taking over. For the record, the GHMC Mayor post has been reserved for a woman this time. However, TRS MPs, MLAs and MLCs have stepped up lobbying to secure the Mayor post for their kith and kin. Even the Ministers have stepped in to do their bit. Prominent names that are doing the rounds in TRS as



aspirants for Mayor post include those of the daughters of former Congress heavy-weight leader from Khairatabad late P Janardhan Reddy (popularly known as PJR) and TRS secretary general, Rajya Sabha member K Keshava Rao, popularly known as KK. Interestingly, both PJR's daughter P Vijaya Reddy from the Khairatabad ward and KK's daughter Gadwal Vijayalakshmi from Banjara Hills ward got elected as corporator from TRS for

the second time in a row and both strongly believe that they deserve the Mayor post on the strength of this achievement.

This apart, Bharathi Nagar corporator Sindhu Adarsh Reddy, Alwal corporator Chintala Vijayashanthi, Manne Kavitha Reddy from Venkateshwara Colony ward and Mothe Sri Latha Reddy from Tarnaka ward are also said to be in the race for the Mayor's post.

Of them, Sindhu Adarsh Reddy is the daughter-in-law

According to official sources, the oath-taking ceremony of the newly-elected corporators is likely to be held on February 9 and 10.

of TRS MLC V Bhoopal Reddy, Chintala Vijayashanthi is the daughter-in-law of former TRS MLA Chintala Kanaka Reddy, who died in May 2019. Manne Kavitha Reddy is the wife of city TRS leader Manne Govardhan Reddy and Mothe Sri Latha Reddy is the wife of city TRS leader Mothe Shobhan Reddy. According to official sources, the oath-taking ceremony of the newly-elected corporators is likely to be held on February 9 and 10. The election of Mayor and Deputy Mayor is likely to be held on February 11 or 12.

447 cases of 'adverse events' reported during vaccination

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi, Jan 17 (PTI) Over 2.24 lakh people were given COVID-19 vaccine in two days in India, and 447 adverse events, including three requiring hospitalisation, have been reported, the Centre said on Sunday.

Of the three people hospitalised post-vaccination, two have been discharged from the Northern Railway Hospital and AIIMS in Delhi and one is under observation at AIIMS, Rishikesh and is doing fine, it said.

As many as 2,07,229 beneficiaries received the jabs on Saturday, the highest number of people vaccinated in any country on day one. Additional Secretary in the Union Health Ministry, Manohar Agnani, said.

"Today being Sunday, only six states conducted vaccination drive and in 553 sessions a total of 17,072 beneficiaries were vaccinated," he said.

He said a total of 2,24,301 beneficiaries have been vaccinated till January 17 as per provisional reports.

"A total of 447 AEFI (adverse event following immunisation) have been reported on January 16 and 17, out of which only three required hospitalisation. Most of the AEFI reported so far are minor like fever, headache, nausea," the official said.

He said an AEFI may or may not be related to the vaccine or vaccination process.

Noting that only a few AEFI cases may require hospitalisation which are classified under serious AEFI, Agnani said protocols are in place for reporting, immediate case



management at vaccination session site, transportation and hospitalisation and further care of such cases.

11 'mild side effect' cases in Telangana

According to the Telangana government, 140 sessions of coronavirus vaccination were held in 33 districts of Telangana, among which 3,962 beneficiaries were vaccinated from a target of 4,296. Out of these, 11 mild AEFI cases have been reported. The beneficiaries felt pain, giddiness and sweating which are the most common in any vaccination program. Dr Srinivas Rao, Director of Public Health and Family Welfare told a news agency that Telangana had managed to vaccinate 85 per cent of total beneficiaries on the first day of the nationwide vaccination drive.



AIMIM eyes Bidar civic body

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After having registered surprise victories in a few seats in Maharashtra and Bihar Assembly polls, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimen party is now focused on expanding its base in yet another state.

AIMIM supremo and Hyderabad Lok Sabha member Asaduddin Owaisi announced in December the party's plans to contest in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections as well as in Tamil Nadu polls expected in May this year. He is keen to spread this party's wings across the country, instead of allowing MIM to be reckoned as a



party confined to the Old City of Hyderabad. The MIM has already notched up victories in Maharashtra and Bihar. It has made its gambit for contesting in states like Tamil Nadu, Bengal and UP in the days to come. It is planning to foray into Gujarat too.

20 Indian-Americans nominated for key roles in Biden administration

■ WASHINGTON

Less than 100 hours ahead of his historic inauguration, US President-elect Joe Biden has either nominated or named at least 20 Indian Americans, including 13 women, to key positions in his administration, a new record in itself for this small ethnic community that constitutes one per cent of the country's population. As many as 17 of them would be part of the powerful White House complex.

The January 20th inauguration, the 59th in all, wherein Biden would be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States is already historic in the making as for the first time



ever a woman Kamala Harris would be sworn as the vice president of the country.

Harris, 56, is also the first ever Indian-origin and African American to be sworn in as the vice president of the United

States. It is also for the first time ever that so many Indian-Americans have been roped into a presidential administration ever before the inauguration.

BOWENPALLY KIDNAP CASE 15 more accused arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In all, 15 more persons among those involved in the sensational Bowenpally kidnap case were arrested by the Hyderabad police on Sunday, based on confessions of the key accused viz Bhooma Akhila Priya, N. Mallikarjun Reddy (32) and Boya Sampath (22).

The police have made significant progress in unraveling the case. Police have recovered incriminating pieces of evidence like toy pistol, mobile phones, vehicles and other objects and arms used in the commission of offence.

"Those arrested on Sunday include event manager Madala

Siddhartha who provided manpower for commission of offence and other accomplices directly involved in the abduction," said Anjani Kumar Hyderabad City Police Commissioner.

The arrested persons have been identified as Bojjagani Deva Prasad, Mogili Bhanu, Ragolu Anjaiah, Padira Ravi chandra, Pachigalli Raja, Bantho Sai, Devara konda Krishna Vamshi, Devarakonda Krishna Sai, Devarakonda Nagaraju, Bojjagani Sai, Kandula Shiva Prasad, Meesala Srinu, Annepaaka Prakash and Shaik Dawood.



Despite price cap on RT-PCR test, private labs still exploit patients

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India's demographic dividend needs to be leveraged: Naidu

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US biz advocacy group urges Minister Sitharaman to lower tariff in Budget

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NTR: The legend lives on



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TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Paush & Shukla Paksha Panchangam
Tithi : Panchami: 09:13 am
Nakshatram: Purva Bhadrapada: 07:43 am

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

Rahukalam: 08:16 am - 09:40 am

Yamagandam: 11:03 am - 12:26 pm

Varjyam: 06:11 pm - 07:56 pm

Gulika: 01:49 pm - 03:13 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Ahnikalam: 04:40 am - 06:25 am

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:04 pm - 12:48 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 28/17
Humidity: 51%
Sunrise: 06:49 am
Sunset: 06:03 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated January 17, 2021 5:00 PM

Ayodhya mosque project to begin on Jan 26

■ LUCKNOW

A tree sapling plantation drive and raising of the national flag will mark the formal beginning of the project to construct a mosque at Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya set to be built following the landmark Supreme Court verdict in the decades-

long dispute over its site, officials announced on Saturday. The IICF trust, which will build the mosque on a five-acre plot away from the site where the 14th-century Babri mosque was demolished by Hindu activists in 1992, said it was planning a ceremony to mark the beginning of the

project on January 26 at 8:30 am. The nine trustees of the foundation held a meeting on Sunday and said they discussed the programme and issues like the delay in getting clearances from the Income Tax Department and those for receiving foreign contributions.



uation in the state and they are selling a kg of mutton at Rs 1000 a kg. Also, the prices of

fish have increased by at least three times over their previous price, regardless of the variety

Centre seeks Amazon reply on 'Tandav'

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of the fish, to the detriment of fish food lovers.

The most common variety of fish like Ravalu and Boichelu are normally sold at Rs 120 or Rs 150 a kg. Now their prices have gone up to Rs 180-220 a kg. Korameenu variety of fish is now being sold at Rs 600-700 a kg. Reduced sourcing of fish during the festival season and the fishlings let into various tanks and reservoirs by the Government of Telangana are yet to mature.

Facebook, Twitter summoned by panel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary committee has summoned officials of Facebook and Twitter to discuss the issue of safeguarding citizens' rights, preventing misuse of social news media platforms and women security in

the digital space. The meet will be held on January 21.

The summons from the Standing Committee on Information Technology came amid a huge row over data privacy. The official agenda of the meeting circulated to the member MPs read: "Evidence

of representatives of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and to hear the views of the representatives of Facebook and Twitter on the subject 'Safeguarding citizens' rights and prevention of misuse of social/online news media platforms.



injunction against the proposed tractor march or any

other kind of protest by farmers which seeks to disrupt the gathering and celebrations of Republic Day on January 26. In an "extraordinary" interim order on January 12, a bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde had stayed the implementation of the new farm laws till further orders and had constituted a four-member panel to listen to the grievances and make recommendations to resolve the impasse.

Monday Mirchi

What a colourful change!

A British politician once compared civil servants with 'white rats' that run away to safer places much before an earthquake or Tsunami. This trait certainly holds water in the case of IAS officers in India. As soon as the Dubbak bypoll result came out, some officers in Telangana State started airing their views about the 'present state of administration in TS'. After GHMC results were out, their voices gained more decibels. Some officers, short of wearing saffron attire, are confirming with their media friends to clarify their own wishful thinking that such 'anti-establishment' feelings could be pervasive in Telangana. Without wording it as anti-incumbent wave or some such newsy term, they are predicting 'far more negative results' for the ruling TRS party without mincing words. Believe it or not, even those who were earlier branded as dyed-in-the-wool hardcore pink party supporters, who had backed the Telangana movement that resulted in the formation of the separate state, are now expressing views that are quite colourfully different and quite contradictory. A couple of officers scaled up their self-promotional ladder by reconnecting with their old pals in BJP and offering support to them in the hope of 'big' and 'fetching' postings in future. Apart from this bottom-up approach of many ambitious babus, those believing in top-down approach are trying for an opportunity to talk to BJP brass in the state to express their solidarity with them. They are obtaining numbers from the right saffron 'brigadiers' to contact the self-proclaimed desh bhakts. All along this chameleon-like change, amid the snakes and ladders game in babudom, was unheard-of in a state where the regional party has had a vice-like grip over the administration over the past six years.

Meticulous Chief Minister!

When the new AP Chief Secretary Adithyanath Das issued an order on communal harmony and appointment of harmony committee in G.O. No.6, everyone in the administration was surprised to see it laced with political comments. Opposition parties raised a hue and cry over the comments in question since the order, after all, was intended to ensure peace. The non-official comments, made in what looks like an unofficial manner, would have hurt Adithya much more because of his track record. For, when Chandrababu was the chief minister and wanted to release 'White Papers' on each department with the underlying aim of maligning the previous governments, Adithya refused to do it. He neither polishes nor whitewashes government. He does his job, period. When Ajay Jain and others yielded by bringing out White Papers showing the previous governments in poor light, Adithya said nothing doing. Finally, the Irrigation Department, helmed by Adithya, came out with a White Paper that did not find anything wrong in the previous government's work and a deeply hurt Naidu, as a face-saving measure, did not attend the release function! Adithya's peers are still wondering how Adithya let go a GO issued in his name with political comments. A little bird told us that though Adithya had prepared the G.O. setting out only facts, the order was modified finally went it when to the Chief Minister who vetted it minutely and made several changes in its operative portions. The post-operative order was apparently not brought to the notice of the Chief Secretary. This, some self-respecting babus feel, his height of unofficial micro management.

A gift wrapped in time warp

TS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao

delighted 9.36 lakh state government employees on December 29, 2020 by announcing salary and pension hike as "New Year 2021 gift". The gift means substantial increase in salaries for employees and hike in pensions for retired employees (pensioners) as per new the Pay Revision Commission's recommendations. He also declared the government's intention to increase the retirement age for government staff from the existing 58 years to 60 or 61 years etc. However, perhaps believing in the dictum 'Intezar ka phal meeta hotha hain', he charged a committee with the specifics and modalities of handing over the gifts. This implied that the beneficiaries cannot open their gift wraps till there is a nod from the committee, which has to await a super nod.

The three-member committee, led by CS Somesh Kumar and comprising principal secretary (finance) K Ramakrishna Rao and principal secretary, water resources development Rajat Kumar as members, has still not found time to open the 'sealed cover' in which the PRC chairman, led by CR Biswal, submitted the PRC report to the CS on December 31. Such covers are not sealed with a kiss; yet, they have a lot of emotional content. The CM did give timelines for the panel to come out with its suggestions by the end of January 2021, after talking to representative of unions on matters such percentage of salary/pension hike, extent of enhancement in retirement age, revision of service rules, revised policy for promotions, and the strategy to be adopted to obviate legal problems while implementing zonal system etc. in the context of increased number of districts.

As of today, employees unions waiting to unwrap their gifts do not know whether the PRC 'sealed cover' was opened. The CS is deemed to be currently busy with the vaccine rollout. His peshi merely says 'CS has no time till January 21'. Will not staff know how sarkari timelines work? They don't expect to open their gift wrap in January. The gift wrap has taken the delight out of the gift as employees and pensioners have been waiting for the D-day July 2018.

Shout-out from the looline

Babus shunted to the looline need initiative to resume action, no matter if it is going to be in another arena. The posting of senior IPS officer RP Thakur as RTC MD has surprised bureaucratic circles, considering that his peers expected him to rot as Commissioner of Printing and Stationery -- a position he got as punishment hours after YSRCP Chief YS Jaganmohan Reddy had taken charge of the state as the Chief Minister on May 30, 2019.

According to the grapevine, a senior IAS officer, who had recently landed a 'top job', lent his support to Thakur, who comes next only to former intelligence chief AB Venkateswar Rao when it comes to babus hated by the pro-YSRCP group. Aides of Jagan such as Rajya Sabha member V Vijaysai Reddy and government advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy never tired of putting down Thakur and Rao for 'furthering the interests of TDP bosses, instead of doing their job of policing'. Rao was kept idle without any posting for months together. The silver lining for the hated group of babus is that Thakur at least got a posting. On deeper analysis they found that, while Rao has been fighting his suspension and cases filed against him by the government, Thakur quietly found favour with the current dispensation and got back on his feet. If policing for one party does not work, driving for another even in the wrong direction might.

Yours truly

Hyd realty sector bounces back

Real estate sector seeks input tax credit on development of leased commercial properties

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the real estate sector throughout the country had declined. While Hyderabad's real estate sector witnessed an impressive growth in comparison to seven other metro cities in the country.

The sector has witnessed an increase in the sales of flats and new units. The absorption of office space stood at 46.5 million sq ft in 2019 across seven cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Pune and Bengaluru -- however, industry experts expect demand to bounce back this year with a recovery in the country's economic growth.

The government should allow commercial real estate developers to set off GST paid on inputs like cement from the tax liability on rental income to avoid double taxation and give a boost to the office market to



help India maintain its advantage in various sectors like IT and startups, realty firms and consultants said on Sunday.

In its budget recommendation for the 2021-22 fiscal year, industry body CII has demanded that Section 16 read with Section 17(5) of the CGST Act should be amended to enable the real estate players to avail ITC (input tax credit) on procurement of goods and services during the construction phase where the said immovable property is intended for commercial leasing or renting. The denial of ITC, leads to blockage of funds for a real estate player, it said.

"In case of commercial leasing of properties and outlets at malls, the renting of such premises attracts 18 per cent which is available as credit to the client. Disallowance of credit during the construction phase leads to the

increased cost of construction, working capital loss, increased financing costs impacting the entire supply chain," CII said.

Tata Realty & Infrastructure Ltd MD & CEO Sanjay Dutt mentioned that as per current GST provisions, input GST credit during the construction phase (for commercial properties) is not available for set-off against output GST liability from earning of rental income.

"In other words, the GST charged on input services (like procurement of cement, steel, works contract services, etc) is required to be capitalised to the cost of construction. Since the input GST rates on this score are significantly high (in the range of 18% to 28% for cement, steel and other big-ticket items), the developers are losing/foregoing substantial cash flows on this score," according to Dutt.

Centre seeks Amazon reply on 'Tandav'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has sought a response from Amazon Prime, sources said, after Maharashtra BJP MLA Ram Kadam on Sunday filed a complaint against the creators, actors and director of Amazon Prime Video's "Tandav", alleging the web series - which stars Saif Ali Khan and Dimple Kapadia - had "insulted Hindu gods and goddesses" and that this happened "every time".

He referred to scenes he said mocked Lord Shiva and demanded they be deleted and that Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, another actor in the series, apologise. He also called on I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar to set up a censor board to review content streamed by OTTs like Prime and Netflix.

20 Indian-Americans...

Continued from page 1

Biden is still quite far away from filling all the positions in his administration.

Topping the list is Neera Tanden, who has been nominated as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget and Dr Vivek Murthy, who has been nominated as the US Surgeon General.

Police arrested 15 accused

Continued from page 1

Investigations revealed that Devarakonda Krishna Vamshi, Kandula Shiva Prasad masqueraded as a constable in police uniform and participated in the offence.

It is pertinent to note that the main accused, masquerading as Income tax officials, kidnapped three real estate businessmen Katikaneni Praveen Kumar, Katikaneni Naveen Kumar and

Katikaneni Sunil Kumar, on Tuesday evening and abandoned them at Kokapet area during the wee hours of Wednesday.

After the victims were abducted, they were initially taken to 'safe house' -- guest of Bhargav Rao situated at Moinabad. There, threatening them with dire consequences, the gang members obtained the signatures of the businessmen on plain stamp papers and assaulted them with sticks.

447 cases of 'adverse events' reported...

Continued from page 1

The states and UTs have been advised to plan Covid vaccination sessions four days a week to minimise disruption of routine health services and some states have already publicised their weekly vaccination days, he said. Around 50 per cent of intended beneficiaries

have taken the jab in Delhi, Assam and Andhra Pradesh, local officials said and expressed the hope that the vaccination drive will pick up soon. Under the nationwide mega vaccination drive launched on Saturday, a total of 4,319 health workers against a target of 8,117 were administered the vaccines at 81 centres.

Mutton, fish...

Continued from page 1

These factors have jacked up prices of fish in the state. A kg of prawns, sold at Rs 250-350 a kg until recently, is now being sold at Rs 350-450 a kg. The sale of mutton under the GHMC limits crossed 100 tons during the festival time, as against the normal sales of 60-70 tons per day. Last week, mutton sales crossed 170 tons mark. In view of the demand being

enjoyed by people, officials have put a cap on the price of mutton at Rs 700 a kg. But this cap has remained on paper.

Minister for Animal Husbandry Talasani Srinivas Yadav said that he got news about traders selling meat at higher prices. He said that the officials were looking into the matter.

However, he said that he would make a statement on Monday about it.

SC to hear pleas on farm laws today

Continued from page 1

The committee comprised Bhopinder Singh Mann, national president of Bhartiya Kisan Union; Dr Parmod Kumar Joshi, Director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute; Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices; and Anil Ghanwat, president of

Shetkari Sanghatana.

The court had said it would hear the pleas against the farm laws after eight weeks when the committee would give its suggestions to resolve the impasse after talking to the protesters and the government.

The court's efforts seem to have hit a hurdle as Mann recused himself from the committee on January 14. A bench, also comprising justices L. Nageswara Rao and

Vineet Saran, may take into account the issue of recusal of Mann from the committee and take remedial actions like appointing a person to replace him in the panel.

On Saturday, farmer union, Bhartiya Kisan Union Lokshakti, filed an affidavit requesting the top court to remove the remaining three members of the committee and select people who can do the job "on the basis of mutual harmony".

Biden package backs gold, silver markets

As January 20 -- the day for transfer of power in the USA is rapidly approaching -- the situation is becoming tense with each passing day. This is so because of the unprecedented violence on January 6, when the citadel of the oldest democracy, the parliament building known as Capitol Hill, was attacked by hooligans among outgoing US President Donald Trump's supporters. Obviously, such a situation is not conducive to smooth functioning of the economy. However, the announcement of US \$ 1.9 trillion economy package by the President-elect Joe Biden on January 13 provided the

much-needed support to gold and silver market. Consequently, New York gold closed at US \$ 1,851.00 (per ounce), while silver closed at 24.79 ounce). Platinum and palladium closed at \$ 1065.00 (per ounce) and \$ 2,271.00 (per ounce) respectively. Other economic parameters remained moderate. Brent closed at US\$ 54.84 (per barrel) while Crude MCX oil was quoted at 3,827 (per barrel). While Gold MCX stood at Rs.48,700.00 (per 10 gms), MCX Silver closed at Rs.64,940 (per kg), Copper MCX

closed at Rs.605.13 (per kg). Sensex and Nifty 50 closed at 49,034.67 and 14,433.70 points. Leading foreign currencies' exchange rates were: US \$: Rs.73.13, British Pound: Rs.99.37, Euro: Rs.88.34, Singapore \$: Rs.55.09, Swiss Franc: Rs.82.24, Australian \$: Rs.56.43, Saudi Riyal: Rs.19.43, New Zealand Dollar: Rs.52.22, Kuwaiti Dinar: Rs.241.47 and UAE Dirham: Rs.19.91, Japanese Yen: Rs.0.70 and Hong Kong Dollar: Rs.9.41. In local markets, standard gold (24 carats) declined by

Rs.2,170 and closed at Rs.49,640 (per 10 gms). Ornamental gold too followed suit and was quoted in the range of Rs.45,400 - 45,500 on the closing day. Silver (0.999) also declined and closed at Rs.69,700 (per kg). COMMODITIES The sentiment in principal wholesale commodity markets in the twin cities turned moderate. Rythu Bazaars and the various commodity markets located in Begum Bazar, Kishangunj, Mukthiyargunj, Risala Abdullah, Mir Alam Mandi, Dilsukhnagar, Kukatpally, Bowenpally and General Bazar recorded moderate trade volumes. During the week, common

pulses such as tuar dal, masoor dal, moong dal and urad dal and spices like chillies, ginger and garlic remained unchanged at their respective last week's closing levels, while staple foodgrains and common edible oils ruled firm. Common vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, ribbed gourd, snake gourd, lady's finger, cucumber, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, French beans and leafy vegetables remained unchanged. The NECC wholesale price of egg in Hyderabad further declined by Rs.45 and closed at Rs.375 (per 100). The highest price of Rs.458 was recorded at Surat while Hospet recorded the lowest of Rs.370.

HC UPADHYAY ■ HYDERABAD

January 11 and 12 of the year 2021 will go down in the history of our democracy as very trying days for the judiciary. For, it was on these two days that the highest court of the country faced the herculean task of maintaining balance between its Constitutional obligations and self-respect because both these vital elements faced a threat from 'anti-India' forces.

After having miserably failed, despite a month and a half of relentless efforts, to provoke the government to use force (which they deserved very much) against their 'five star' agitation, fashionably packed as the farmers' protests, the Khalistani, jihadi, terrorist and extremist elements took the 'judiciary' route via proxy petitioners to get a snub from the apex court for the government. Had the much-needed force been used to protect the fundamental rights of the non-protesting citizens by the authorities, the bogey of 'assault on democracy' would have been raised by the masters and managers of the so-called

farmers' agitation on international arena. What transpired in the Supreme Court on January 11 and 12 was indeed unprecedented. The Chief Justice, without mincing words, conveyed his concern for the women and old people protesting in the shivering cold and asked the counsel of the farmers to convey his message to protestors.

In a bid to diffuse the situation, the apex court temporarily suspended the three contentious laws which have been the central point of the tangle. The court also formed a four-member Committee to meet the protestors and study the pros and cons of the contentious laws and finally submit the recommendations to the court. While

the government readily agreed to the verdict, the defiant farmers not only dissented with the apex court but also cast aspersions on the neutrality of the Committee members nominated by the court. The self-styled messiahs of the country's farmers in utter disregard of the apex court declared that they reject the Committee and will not be a party to the deliberations by the said Committee.

Meanwhile, the ninth round of 'talks' of the government with the much pampered farmer-leaders too ended inconclusive on January 15. Now the tenth round has been scheduled for January 19.

Indeed, this issue has become a naughty riddle. When the so-called farmers touted as the 'Annadata', have in the most

unequivocal terms declared that they want nothing less than scraping of three laws, and the government too, is rightly on its firm wicket that it won't succumb to the former's demand, where is the question of holding any parleys running into now double digit?

The real face of the agitation has been recognized by the people of the country and it is a pity that the government of the day does not want to recognize. Calling the foodgrain cultivators as Annadata is also a kind of excessive pampering. Applying the same analogy, the weavers should be called, Kapda daata and the cobblers as, Joota Daata. In fact, every vocation and rendering of service is based on the economic principle of give and take. Therefore, there is no question of glorifying one occupation to the detriment of others. In fact, while a huge majority of real farmers who toil in the

fields get a pittance from agriculture, the 'five star' farmers, with tax-free income, are capable of indulging in the arm-twisting game.

Needless to say, divisive forces, under the garb of 'farmers', have a full play. The apex court ought to take a serious and urgent note of this and come down heavily on such criminal gangs. A few well-to-do farmers claiming no links with the anti-national forces may be given a chance to bundle out their tractors, washing machines, massage wares and automatic food preparing kitchen-wares within one hour, failing which the law-enforcing agencies should be given a free hand to tackle the situation. It is high time, we take a leaf or two from other democracies like USA, France, Spain, Britain and Australia where threatening mobs in recent times have been shown their right place.

SCBA president on moral resigns ground

The president of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) Dushant Dave tendered his resignation on January 14, stating the term of the Executive Committee has already expired and as such, he has no moral right to continue in that position.

In a letter addressed to the Executive Committee, Dave said that, as the term of the Executive Committee had already ended, they had planned to hold virtual elections. However, due to reservations expressed by some lawyers, the same could not be done. He expressed deep gratitude to the Executive Committee while putting in his papers.

MANY Karnataka Courts to function normally

The Karnataka High Court has issued a modified Standard

Operating Procedure (SOP) stating that except for the specified seven districts, the rest of the districts in the State having less than 200 of Covid-19 active cases for last about 10 days will function in the normal manner as they were functioning prior to March 15, 2020. However, the courts will have to enforce 13 guidelines listed in the SOP.

TURKEY Mullah sentenced to 1,075 years' jail

Creating a sort of record, a Turkish court has sentenced a Muslim evangelist to 1,075 years in jail for sex crimes. Adnan Oktar, 64 was initially detained in 2018, along with more than 200 other suspects, as part of a crackdown on his group by the financial crimes unit of the Istanbul police. According to reports, he was convicted for crimes, including sexual assault, sexual abuse of minors, fraud and attempted political and military espionage. During the trial, Oktar

told the presiding judge that he had close to 1,000 girl friends. Along with him, two of his executives, Tarkan Yavas and Oktar Babuna, too have been sentenced to 211 and 186 years of imprisonment respectively.

Reeking of alcohol not 'drunk driving'

In a recent judgment, the Kerala High Court has held that in order to attract the offence of drunken driving under Section 185(a) of the Motor Vehicles Act, the accused should have been subject to a breathalyzer or any other test, including a laboratory test, and his blood must be found to contain alcohol exceeding 30 mg per 100 ml. The bench of Justice V.G. Arun in its order dated 8th January in a case of drunken driving, Manoj Kumar K Vs. State of Kerala, observed that the prosecution was based on the doctor's opinion who stated that the 'accused smelled like he had drunk' and observed that to prove the offence under Section 185 (a) of the MV Act, the aforementioned tests were mandatory.

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A legend in his lifetime, NTR breathed his last in his sleep, this day a quarter century ago.

With his demise, the country lost a colossus who dominated the world of Telugu films for about four decades and the political arena for over a decade at the regional and national level.

When Deve Gowda became the Prime Minister in 1996, the talk was that it would have been NTR occupying the seat, but for his sudden and untimely death.

NTR, who found his true calling as a film artiste at 26 years of age, excelled in the art like no other. His first film in the leading role was the classic Shavukaru, released in 1950 and the last was Major Chandrakant (1993), a major box office hit. In the intervening years, NTR essayed a variety of roles in over 300 films of different genres and except for his debut film in which he played a minor role, he was the hero in each. He was a rare talent pro-

ducing many meaningful films of which he directed 16 starting with Sita Rama Kalyanam in 1960, a tour de force. NTR daringly played Ravana, the anti-hero, in the movie at a time he had already been deified as Srikrishna and Srirama.

His prowess as an all-rounder can be gauged from the fact that he was the producer, director, screenplay writer and costume designer – a veritable one-man army – of the film Daana Veera Suura Karna in which he also essayed the diverse characters of Krishna, Karna and Suyodhana appearing on screen for four hours of 4 hours and 17 minutes duration of the film, the longest ever Indian movie to date. Often working 72 hours non-stop, wearing period cos-

NTR, who found his true calling as a film artiste at 26 years of age, excelled in the art like no other. His first film in the leading role was the classic Shavukaru, released in 1950 and the last was Major Chandrakant (1993), a major box office hit

tumes and heavy metal crowns, it's incredible that he made the movie in 43 days, a feat no one can dare replicate. The movie released in 1977 was a smashing hit.

NTR chose to stay with the Telugu film industry of which he was the mainstay for four decades rejecting Hindi film offers from V. Shantaram and Nadiadwala. The latter offered him the role of Krishna in a Hindi movie

tempting him with the highest remuneration ever for an Indian actor. Of the movies he acted, nearly half of were blockbusters. At least 50 of his films are watched with tremendous interest even today, and at least 20 would be sure to be viewed by the people as long as Telugu films survive.

When he turned 60, at the height of his career, NTR gave up films and entered the



DR K LAKSHMINARAYANA IAS (RETD)

political arena on March 28, 1982. He launched a political party and took on the till then, undefeated, Congress. He campaigned hard in his Chaitanya Ratham on dusty roads covering 35,000 miles, and rode to power in 1983 with a thumping majority.

As Chief Minister, politics was a distraction for NTR. He

had an abiding faith in dharma and that was the touchstone of his public policy. He was in a hurry to build a society free from social and economic injustice.

He tilted the social and political power in favour of the people belonging to the underprivileged and backward classes, giving voice to the voiceless. He awakened the weak and the poor who felt equal and confident like never before.

NTR unveiled scores of welfare schemes of which subsidised rice scheme, clothing for the poor and shelter for the marginalised sections stood out. He legislated equal right for women in property in 1984, a historic step to empower women. The Central Government followed his example after two

decades. NTR abolished village hereditary posts and created mandals to bring administration closer to the people. Realising that education is the driver of social change and economic progress, NTR laid emphasis on quality education.

Primary education in Telugu was his major concern and as one who knew the potential of cinema, his fertile mind ushered in video lessons for children, a pioneering effort.

He established residential schools (gurukuls), a boon for the children of disadvantaged sections. He carried out diligent nation-wide search for persons of integrity and proven eminence to head the universities.

This is only a small list of his many path-breaking ini-

tiatives. Ruthlessly honest, NTR expected his legislators to be clean. This created problems and he was overthrown. But he scripted perhaps the finest chapter in democracy by returning to power in 1984 in what has come to be known as the struggle for restoration of democracy.

NTR was not always right. He was obstinate sometimes. He was often too sure of himself. But his intentions were never suspect. His public life was an open book, the under song of which was Telugu pride and self-respect. His was a well lived life worthy of emulation.

'Every man is guilty of all the good that he didn't do,' said Voltaire. NTR was not guilty of this. He accomplished a lot both in films and politics. No wonder then that NTR is fondly remembered even 25 years after his death.

Apt to say a hero like NTR never dies.
(The author formerly served as secretary to NT Rama Rao)

Telangana people looking for change: Kishan Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy has said that the people of Telangana are yearning for a change of leadership. Addressing the BJP State executive here on Sunday, Kishan Reddy, quoting the senior IAS officers as saying, said that the senior officials are coming out openly to declare their opinion expressing their fear. The change would favour the BJP.

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao was devoid of morals and stability that is why people would not believe in his words. In his opinion, there was no difference between the former president of the US Donald Trump, KCR and KTR.

KTR has been taking part in inaugural functions in the association of TRS unsuccessful GHMC corporator candidates, he said. The family rule should end in Telangana and it should give way to the BJP



government, he said adding that the next two years are very crucial for the BJP.

A situation would not arise when the TRS would approach the people again seeking their votes, he predicted. Suspending payment of flood relief to the affected is atrocious. The people did not believe in the TRS promises of providing them with free drinking water and a waiver of property tax. Had the TRS not entered an alliance with the MIM, which he termed as illegal, the TRS

would have confined to single digit in GHMC polls. Had the TRS not misused official machinery, the results would have been different, he said. "Let us all work together to ensure the victory of the BJP MLC candidates Ramachandra Rao and Premender Reddy", he said. It is inevitable for the BJP to capture the Warangal Mayor post as the Centre provided 50 per cent of the project cost of Warangal ring road. The Centre declared

"Let us all work together to ensure the victory of the BJP MLC candidates Ramachandra Rao and Premender Reddy", said the Union Minister of State for Home

Warangal and Karimnagar as Heritage and Smart cities. There is every need for the BJP flag flutter over Nagarjunasagar, he said welcoming those from the TRS and Congress into the party. The party flag should fly high over the Golkonda Fort, he said adding that it should be the target of every BJP worker.

Fill vacant posts in 35 KVs with regular staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Planning Board vice-chairman B Vinod Kumar on Sunday urged the Centre to fill the existing vacancies with regular staff in 35 Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) being operated in the State.

He said of the total 1,208 sanctioned posts in 35 KVs, only 959 were filled with regular teaching staff. While about 131 posts were filled with contractual teaching staff, there was a shortage of 128 teaching staff.

In a letter to Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Vinod Kumar said some parents of students studying in Kendriya Vidyalayas in the State have complained about the non-availability of sufficient teaching staff. He stated that as a result, students were facing a lot of inconvenience and were also unable to get proper teaching from the contractual staff.

Telangana govt staff working in AP seek repatriation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Several government employees belonging to Telangana but ended up working in Andhra Pradesh for the past six years have been cursing their fate and expressing their desire to work in Telangana.

In fact, 120 employees belonging to Telangana State have been working in Andhra Pradesh, while 1,200 Andhra Pradesh government employees are working in Telangana, they said reminding Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao of his assurance to them.

A joint meeting of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana government employees was held at the Press Club in Somajiguda here on Sunday. National president of BC Welfare Association R Krishnaiah was the chief guest.

"We want to take part in the Telangana administration, but working in the administration of those rulers whom the people of Telangana want to get rid of," they lamented.

They said that their problem remained unresolved even seven



years after granting statehood to Telangana, they said appealing to the government to transfer them to their native States.

"While we work in Andhra, our families live in Telangana," they said pointing out how their dreams of working in the new State of Telangana have been shattered.

They are not prepared to work in Andhra Pradesh anymore as their mind is in Telangana, they said pointing out that the Andhra employees working in Telangana are facing similar problems.

They appealed to the government to show initiative in this regard and eagerly waiting for the Chief Minister to affix his signature on the relevant file.

Krishnaiah, addressing the gathering, observed that the employees were repatriated to respective States in less than a

year when the States of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand were carved out. In sharp contrast, the problem in Telangana is not getting resolved even six years after the formation of the new State. Therefore, he demanded that the Chief Ministers of the two States sit together and find a solution to the problem. He appealed to KCR to show initiative in this regard and affect the transfer of the government employees.

Prof R Nageswara Rao said that the exchange of government employees between the two States is the just demand of the government employees. He wanted the government to show a positive attitude of bringing back the Telangana government employees working in Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, the government should show generosity to send back employees of the AP government working here to their State. After the bifurcation of the State, the Telugu States shared Rajya Sabha members among them but conveniently forgot to exchange the government employees.

Ancient pot unearthed



PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

An ancient pot was found on a farm belonging to Raji Reddy, a farmer, at Ranganaikulagutta on the outskirts of Papaya Palli village in Huzurabad zone. According to police, the farmer's relative Swami Reddy found the pot when the JCB drivers were tilling the field at Ranganaikula Gutta.

On learning about the incident, Revenue Inspector Satish and Circle Inspector Madhavi reached the spot and inspected the surroundings. Later, they spoke to farmer Raji Reddy and enquired about the manner in which the pot was found in the ground.

The information was immediately provided to the Archaeological Department officials. The CI said that it would be possible to know the full details only after the Archaeological Department officials examine it.

Repeal new farm laws, Left parties to BJP govt

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The Left parties, farmers associations and others took out a mega rally and formed a human chain here on Sunday following a call given by the National Farmers Associations against the Central government for introducing new farm laws. The rally was started at Pavillion Ground centre and culminated at the Collectorate.

Speaking on the occasion, CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka alleged that the BJP government at the Centre was neglecting the peasantry by augmenting corporate powers. For the past two months, farmers have been staging protests against the Central government braving the freezing cold in Delhi.

The BJP, which claims to be a peasant-friendly government, has done nothing for the welfare of farmers. He also questioned what the Modi government had done for the welfare of farmers, who did not even care



A kid in the attire of a farmer holds a plough in a rally taken out by the Left parties in Khammam on Sunday. CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka and other leaders are also seen

about the lives of the farmers. The Left party leaders demanded immediate repeal of the frivolous laws, which were brought to do injustice to farmers. Leaders of all Left parties, various unions as well as Journalists' Unions and the

Chamber of Commerce have expressed solidarity with the farmers agitation.

CPM State secretary Tammineni Veerabhadram, CPI (ML) State leader Potu Ranga Rao, CPI district secretary Potu Prasad and others were present.

Karimnagar dairy targets Rs 400-cr turnover

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Chairman of the Karimnagar Milk Producer Company Limited (Karimnagar Dairy) Ch Rajeshwar Rao has said that the company targeted to cross the current turnover of Rs 347 crore to achieve Rs 400-crore turnover during the current fiscal year.

Addressing the media here on Sunday, he said that the company has been extending financial support to over 70,000 farmers to improve their revenue besides its normal activities of milk procurement and sale of milk and milk products.

The dairy has decided to set up 15 bulk milk cooling centres in Siddipet and Jangaon, Adilabad and Nizamabad districts extending its operations beyond Karimnagar district as part of the dairy expansion activities, he said.

Works on construction of a mega-dairy, with a capacity to procure three lakh litres of milk per day, at a cost of Rs 63 crore in Nallagonda village of Thimmapur mandal of Karimnagar district is under progress, he said. The State



Chairman of the Karimnagar Milk Producer Company Limited (Karimnagar Dairy) Ch Rajeshwar Rao addresses the media in Karimnagar on Sunday

government issued a grant of Rs 10 crore for the dairy, he added. The mega dairy operations would be completely mechanised, he added.

Sale of milk during 2019-20 was 550.42 lakh litres as against 539.83 lakh litres in 2018-19. The target fixed for the current year is to sell 600 lakh litres of milk, he said.

He said that solar energy is being used in bulk milk cooling centres and plans to sell fertilisers to farmers. The dairy has set up 25 retail counters to sell fertilisers to farmers to reduce its operational costs and improve profits. Recently, the dairy has set up a petrol

■ Works on construction of a mega dairy, with a capacity to procure three lakh litres of milk per day, at a cost of Rs 63 crore in Nallagonda village of Thimmapur mandal of Karimnagar district are under progress

pump and built 35 commercial complexes in Jagityal and 25 in Karimnagar to improve its revenue.

The curd prepared by the dairy enjoys good demand in the State. It sold 1.38 lakh litres of curd in 2019-20. There is good patronage from customers its other products like

doodhpeda, malai laddu, milk cake, basundi, lassi and butter milk.

In view of the COVID-19, the dairy has plans to launch a high-protein drink soon. Trials and lab testing activities for the same are underway, he said.

The dairy is extending Rs 60,000 loan to each dairy farmer to enable them to purchase milch cattle and also bear 90 per cent of the transportation costs and 90 per cent of the insurance.

Under the Kalyanamastu scheme of the dairy, the dairy spent Rs 86 lakh to provide mangal sutra and toe rings to brides in 760 dairy farmers' families. Under its Rytu Bharosa, each bereaved family of dairy farmer was given Rs 50,000 benefiting 101 dairy farmers' families. It extended Rs 9.96 lakh to 1,245 students.

This year chaff cutters were provided to farmers with 50 per cent subsidy. Directors of the dairy Swamy Reddy, Prabhakar Rao and advisor to it Hanumantha Reddy, managing director Sankar Reddy and others were present at the press meet.

MALLIKARJUNA SWAMY BRAHMOTSAVAMS

Police beef up security at Komuravelli

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Elaborate arrangements have been made for devotees, who arrive in Komuravelli village in Siddipet district to take part in Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy Brahmotsavams disclosed Husnabad ACP Mahender.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that the employees, who are deployed to supervise the arrangements, will be alerted through the VHF set from time to time by the officers on duty without to avoid inconvenience to devotees.

The ACP said that devotees coming to Patnam and Agnigundalu are advised to follow the special instructions and take part in a peaceful man-



Police take stock of arrangements made for Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy Brahmotsavams at Komuravelli village in Siddipet district on Sunday



ner. Signboards have been set up at all places for the devotees coming for the Brahmotsavams. ACP Mahender, Cheryala CI Srinivas Reddy, Husnabad CI Raghupathi Reddy and Komuravelli SI Narendar Reddy inspected the temple premises. While 10 CCTV cameras have been set up and police are monitoring the cameras round-

the-clock from the Control Room. He said everything that was monitored could be seen from the ACP Control Room.

Vehicles should be parked only in the parking lots provided. He said cases would be registered if anybody parks vehicles at other places across the road and vehicles that were obstructing traffic would be lifted.

Spl teams to create awareness on bird flu

A CHANDRASHEKHAR RAO ■ SANGAREDDY

The normal life is limping back to normalcy, which came to a standstill with the fear of Coronavirus, but the people are yet again scared of a new threat in the form of bird flu.

Precautionary measures have been taken even before the outbreak of bird flu cases in Medak district. Presence of a maximum number of poultry farms in the erstwhile Medak district has become a cause for concern for the people.

The AVN influenza virus, H-1, N-1, first infects birds and then spreads to domestic chickens, birds and ducks. These are said to pose a risk to humans. Officials say no cases have been



registered in the district where the virus has spread in the past. However, the district administration was ready to take precautionary measures.

In the erstwhile Medak district, a team was formed for each zone in Siddipet, Sangareddy and Medak. The Rapid Response Team (RRT) has

deployed special teams. Each team consists of five members. Two compounders, along with a doctor, and two other attendants were hired.

They will create awareness on the virus as well as preventive measures to be taken. It was suggested that blood samples will be collected by visiting the suspect-

■ The AVN influenza virus, H-1, N-1, first infects birds and then spreads to domestic chickens, birds and ducks. These are said to pose a risk to humans

■ Officials say no cases have been registered in the district where the virus has spread in the past. However, the district administration was ready to take precautionary measures in areas. Poultry breeders as well as people are advised to be aware of the flu outbreak. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits are provided for blood sample collection. Wherever chickens, peacocks, crows and other birds die suddenly, people are

asked to inform special teams. Six peacocks recently died in the Papannapeta zone of Medak district. Samples were sent to Sangareddy for testing and from there to the Veterinary Biological and Research Institute (VBRI) in Hyderabad, but the presence of the virus was not confirmed, according to officials.

People were alarmed by the news of the outbreak of bird flu in several States across the country. They are reluctant to buy chicken and eggs, which are responsible for the spread of the virus. With this, traders say the demand for chicken has come down to some extent during the week. But, no cases of flu have been reported in the erstwhile Medak district till date.

India's demographic dividend needs to be leveraged: Naidu

PNS ■ CHENNAI

India's biggest strength is its demographic dividend' and people need to fully leverage it to fast-track the country's progress in various sectors, Vice- President M Venkaiah Naidu said here on Sunday.

Naidu also called upon the youth of the country to be at the forefront in accelerating progress and scripting the country's growth story.

"One of our biggest strengths today is our demographic dividend.

We need to fully leverage this to fast-track progress in different sectors -- from agriculture to manufacturing and ensuring a sustained growth rate in coming years", he said, after releasing a biography on the former President A P J Abdul Kalam at the Raj Bhavan. The book -- 'Abdul Kalam - Ninaivugalukku Maranamillai' (immortal memories) -- has been penned by APJNM Nazema Maraikayar, the niece of the late President and by noted space scientist Y S Rajan.

"This is the time for the youth of the country to be at the forefront in accelerating the



progress and scripting India's growth story", Naidu said.

Paying rich encomiums to Kalam, who was known as 'people's president', Naidu urged the youth to take a leaf out of the book and believe in themselves.

They must aspire to become job creators rather than job seekers, he said.

Stating that Kalam would be remembered for his 'indomitable spirit' and "never-say-die attitude", Naidu said the former president pursued and persisted with discipline, hard work and confidence.

"Along with the development of India's indigenous

satellite launch vehicles, he (Kalam) is also credited with the development of India's integrated guided missile development programme (IGMDP)", the vice president said. Kalam can be credited with laying the strong foundation of 'AtmaNirbharta' in space and defence sectors on which scientists and engineers were building today, Naidu said. "The legacy of self-belief that Kalam left motivated us to develop our own vaccine today.

I must compliment the government and scientists for their untiring efforts in bringing out the vaccine for COVID-19.

My hearty congratulations

for the historic vaccination drive that kicked off yesterday", he said.

Quoting Mahatma Gandhi's comments 'My life is my message', Naidu said "this (the comment) very well be applied to Dr Kalam too, who practiced what he preached."

Underlining the need to overhaul the country's education system to make learning an enjoyable experience, right from primary education, Naidu said students must be encouraged to pose questions and think critically.

He said the Centre's new education policy is a great leap in this regard, as it does away with artificial segregation between curricular and extra-curricular activities and aims at the holistic development of the child.

Referring to the book that he unveiled today, Naidu said the biography traces Kalam's journey from his student days, including his family roots.

"Many incidents are presented from the family's point of view. I commend the authors for bringing out this book and enriching our understanding of Kalam", Naidu said.

Delhi's Transport dept firming up 'rent a bike'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tourists in the national capital may soon enjoy rides on rented two-wheelers as the Delhi government's transport department is firming up a scheme to issue licences for 'rent a bike' services in the city, officials said.

A presentation of the draft scheme is likely to be made before the transport minister next week for further discussions, a senior transport department officer said.

The presentation was scheduled earlier this month but it was postponed. Now it will be held next week. The draft proposal for bike rent service will require approval of the State Transport Authority (STA)," he said.

The proposed scheme stipulates issuance of licences to applicants having minimum five bikes with necessary permits and insurance cover, and sound financial condition to ensure maintenance of the vehicles and efficient management of the establishment, the officer said.

Under the scheme, licences will be issued to eligible bike operators by the STA to engage in the bike renting business.

SC-appointed panel on farm laws to hold meet on Jan 19



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court-appointed committee on the three new farm laws is scheduled to hold its first meeting on January 19 at Pusa campus here, one of its members Anil Ghanwat said on Sunday.

The Supreme Court had on January 11 stayed the implementation of the three laws, against which farmers are protesting at Delhi borders for over 50 days now, till further orders and appointed a four-member panel to resolve the impasse.

Bhartiya Kisan Union president Bhupinder Singh Mann, however, recused from the committee last week.

Apart from Ghanwat, agriculturists Ashok Gulati and Pramod Kumar Joshi are the two other panel members.

"We are meeting on January

19 at the Pusa campus. Only members will meet to decide the future course of action", Ghanwat, President of Shetkari Sanghatana (Maharashtra), told PTI.

One of the four members has backed out of the committee. If the apex court does not appoint a new member, the existing members will continue, he said.

The committee has received the terms of reference and will begin the work from January 21 onwards, he added.

Asked about the government holding parallel talks with protesting farmer unions after the setting up of the SC panel, he said, "We have no issue if a solution is found and the protests end from either (efforts of) our panel or from the government's separate talks with the protesting farmer unions."

'Doubling farmers income biggest priority of Modi govt'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said doubling farmers income was the biggest priority of the Narendra Modi government and that the three central farm laws would ensure manifold hike in their earnings. Since coming to power, the Modi government had increased the budget for the farm sector and also the minimum support price (MSP) for various crops, he said.

Speaking after laying the foundation stone and inauguration of farmer-friendly projects of the MRN group, headed by newly inducted Karnataka Minister Murugesh R Nirani, Shah listed out various programmes and initiatives of the central government for the welfare of the farmers.

INDIA CORNER

Delhi schools prepare to open the doors to classes 10, 12 students

Staggered and shorter class hours, frequent sanitisation, and entry and exit through multiple gates are among various new ways adopted by schools in Delhi as they prepare to welcome students of classes 10 and 12 back on Monday, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic forced closure of educational institutes in March last year. The Delhi government has allowed all schools outside COVID-19 containment zones to reopen for classes 10 and 12 from January 18 in view of board exams. However, it made clear that physical attendance is not compulsory and students will attend schools only with consent of parents. The Directorate of Education (DoE) has instructed schools to follow all COVID-19 guidelines when classroom studies resume.



Fire in luggage van of running train doused in time in Kerala

A fire broke out in a luggage van of a running train in Kerala on Sunday and was doused in time before it could spread to adjacent passenger coach, averting a possible major mishap, railway source said. The Thiruvananthapuram-bound Malabar Express from Mangaluru was stopped at Edava, about 60 km from here, after a gatekeeper there noticed smoke billowing out of the luggage van close to the engine and alerted officials around 7.40 am, they said. Fire force personnel said halting of the train in time averted a major blaze as the fire did not spread to other coaches. According to the railway sources, the gatekeeper informed the station master of Varkala, around 15 km from Edava, who in turn alerted the loco pilot and the guard, following which the train was halted immediately.



IndiGo flight makes safe emergency landing at Bhopal

An IndiGo Airlines flight going to Kolkata from Surat with 172 passengers on board made an emergency landing at Bhopal's Raja Bhoj Airport on Sunday due to a technical glitch, said an official. Raja Bhoj Airport Director Anil Vikram told PTI that the flight made an emergency landing just after 12 noon. "The IndiGo Airlines flight from Surat to Kolkata carrying 172 passengers made an emergency landing at 12.04 pm on Sunday. The landing was safe. The pilot informed the ATC (Air Traffic Controller) about the technical glitch and made an emergency landing safely," he said. Of the 172 passengers, 19 have to go further to Guwahati and Amritsar from Kolkata, and these passengers were sent to Bengaluru by flight to help them get connecting flights to their destinations, he said.



Wild elephant kills farmer, injures another in Erode

A wild elephant trampled to death a farmer and injured another while they were guarding their tapioca crop in Kadambur Athiyur village in the district, forest officials said on Sunday. The incident happened on Friday midnight. Periyasamy (46) and Sadaiyappan (50) were standing guard when the animal entered their land, the officials said. On seeing the elephant, the two burst fire-crackers to scare the animal away, but it attacked the men. Both sustained injuries and Sadaiyappan managed to escape. The elephant trampled Periyasamy to death and left, they said. On Saturday morning, the villagers conveyed the information to the forest officials, who visited the spot. Sadaiyappan is undergoing treatment in the Government Hospital, athyamangalam, they said.



Kumaraswamy accuses Shah of ignoring Kannada

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Accusing Union Home Minister Amit Shah of an anti-Kannada attitude, JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy on Sunday asked him to clarify to the people of Karnataka regarding the local language not finding place on the foundation stone plaque of the RAF unit in Bhadravathi, which he inaugurated.

Hitting out at Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and his Deputy Govind Karjol for ignoring the same, he said in a series of tweets that those who tolerate insult to the dignity and honour of the land as well as its language were not fit to hold the reins of the state's

administration, as he accused them of "betraying" Kannadigas.

Shah on Saturday had laid the foundation stone of a new battalion campus of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) near Bhadravathi in Shivamogga district in the presence of Yediyurappa, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and Karjol among others.

"...the inscription plaque unveiled on the occasion to mark the foundation stone laying is in only Hindi and English.

It clearly shows that Kannada has been ignored though the foundation stone that has been laid in Karnataka," Kumaraswamy tweeted.

Newsprint cost up 20% in 3 months; publishers seek waiver in import duty

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cost of paper used to publish newspapers and magazines has jumped 20 per cent in the past three months due to demand-supply imbalance following the pandemic, prompting news publishers to rush to the government seeking waiver of 5 per cent import duty to help cut cost.

An industry that was facing headwinds from a slowing economy even before the pandemic, was hit hard when most readers stopped buying newspapers and magazines on fears of them being carriers of viruses.

While there are no medical studies that have established the virus transmission theories, sales did not pick up even after



lockdown restrictions were relaxed, industry leaders said.

Now, the rising cost of newsprint created due to a drastic fall in supplies after 3 million tonnes of manufacturing capacities were either closed or converted to brown paper grades worldwide has dealt a second blow that is threatening the survival of the industry.

Indian Newspaper Society (INS) President L Adimoolam said most newspapers have stopped sending the hard

copies to the rural areas with readership of less than 50 copies, to reduce the distribution cost.

In a representation to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, INS has suggested cutting customs on import of newsprints. They also want a fiscal stimulus package for the industry or raising tariffs of government advertisements by 50 per cent.

"If working out a stimulus package for print media is difficult at this juncture, DAVP may please consider releasing advertisement for all its departments to all publications with an increased tariff of 50 per cent, which would be highly helpful for the industry as a whole," the INS representation said.

'Modi should have taken virus vaccine shot'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Senior Congress leader and former UP legislator Pradeep Mathur on Sunday said it would have been better had Prime Minister Narendra Modi taken the coronavirus vaccine shot on the first day of the inoculation drive, thereby injecting confidence among people.

"It would have been better had Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented an example like that of Joe Biden, the president-elect of the US, by getting himself vaccinated. By taking the vaccine shot, he would have injected confidence among people of the country. People are feeling hesitant in getting themselves vaccinated," Mathur said.



NGT to take cognizance of ammonia gas leak incident

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal is scheduled to take cognizance of the ammonia gas leak incident at IFFCO plant at Phulpur near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh on Monday.

A bench comprising NGT chairperson Justice A K Goel and Justice Sheo Kumar Singh had taken note of a Hindi newspaper report dated December 24, 2020.

Two officials of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) had died and its 16 other employees were injured in a major ammonia gas leak at the fertiliser major's plant at Phulpur.

The gas leakage that took place on December 22 at around 10:30 pm, however, was restricted and stopped in a short time, the fertiliser cooperative major had said in a statement.

Kolam drawings mark kickoff of Biden-Harris inauguration

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Kolam, a traditional Indian art form of drawing geometric patterns on the floors as a sign of welcome, was part of the virtual kick-off ceremony of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and his deputy Kamala Harris, who traces her origin to Tamil Nadu where these auspicious designs adorn almost every household.

In Tamil Nadu, where Harris has roots, women draw Kolams on the ground to invite health and prosperity into houses where they are displayed.

Pictures of thousands of Kolam tiles were on Saturday woven into a video to welcome Biden and Harris in the spirit of Presidency for All' and to showcase the multi-cultural heritage of America.

More than 1,800 individuals from across the US and many from India participated in the

online initiative to create thousands of Kolam designs to celebrate the historic event.

Many believe Kolams symbolise positive energy and new beginnings. People of all ages from various communities collaborated from their homes to create tiles with eco-friendly materials. What started out as a local project spread way beyond our expectations, said Shanthi Chandrasekar, an award-winning multimedia and multidisciplinary artist from Maryland who took the initiative along with several others.

The initial idea was to have these Kolam patterns from across the country in front of the White House as a symbol of good beginning to the new administration.

The Washington DC police gave permission to the organisers to have it near the Capitol Hill around the inauguration



venue. However, due to the unprecedented security measures that have been enforced in Washington DC, the permission was cancelled.

Pictures of thousands of Kolam tiles were on Saturday woven into a video to welcome Biden and Harris in the spirit of Presidency for All' and to showcase the multi-cultural heritage of America.

A date for the installation after the inauguration will be

come Biden when he takes office in a few days.

Hundreds of artists, citizens and students from across the country collaborated online to combine thousands of local pieces. This is what we wanted when we planned to have thousands of Kolam tiles in front of the White House, said Somnath. Students from 10 public schools in Washington DC participated in making the art. Lambert said the District of Columbia Public Schools arts curriculum focuses on equity and believes cultural representation is an important part of that effort.

This project provided an opportunity for our students to learn about another culture and the math skills needed for creation in the arts. As well, an opportunity to express their identity through visual arts and to see that united with others from around the country,

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said Lambert.

Major Democratic fund raiser Shekar Narasimhan, whose niece and grandniece joined many others to make tiles for the inauguration Kolam, supported the project.

Narasimhan said the project reflects and honours the history of America.

With the rise of diverse America, the energy behind this artwork is a reminder of what binds us together as Americans, he said.

I am so grateful and honoured to be able to share my love for Kolams through the #2021kolam community project. The real celebrities are the children who have invested so much of themselves into beautifying the dots and the shapes around them that will come together for our collaborative welcome offering for Inauguration Kolam #2021, Chandrasekar said.

It's here!

India kick-starts the world's biggest inoculation drive to beat Coronavirus but we must still follow the protocol



Time: A little after 11 am on Saturday. The nationwide anti-COVID vaccination drive began with a sanitation worker at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), who became the first person in the country to receive a shot. "I was not reluctant (to get the vaccine shot)... people should not be afraid," Manish Kumar said. It was thus that nearly a year after reporting its first case of Coronavirus, India kicked off the world's largest immunisation drive against COVID-19 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the offensive at the click of a button through video conferencing. As part of its plan to bring the pandemic under control with two locally-produced vaccines, Covishield and

Covaxin, the Government inoculated lakhs of healthcare and frontline workers, such as sanitation and security workers, to a collective sigh of relief that this could finally be the beginning of the end of the COVID-19 trauma. The next in line are Indians above the age of 50 or those considered as high-risk individuals due to pre-existing medical conditions. Around 100 persons received a vaccine at each of the 3,006 sites across India on the first day. As feared, there were some glitches but it's nothing considering the vast topography of the nation. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan visited the vaccination sites at Sir Gangaram Hospital and AIIMS, Delhi, and described the COVID-19 vaccines as "sanjivani" in the fight against the accursed virus as he urged people not to heed hearsay and, instead, put their faith in experts and scientists. "It's a historic day. We have been blessed by the Prime Minister all through our fight against COVID-19. It's the largest Coronavirus vaccination programme in the world," Vardhan said. "We have been able to put up a valiant fight against the disease during the past year. Adopting a pre-emptive and proactive strategy has resulted in a good performance. We have probably the lowest fatality rate in the world," he said. In a message to the nation's population, he said that nobody should indulge in spreading or believing rumours pertaining to the efficacy of either vaccine.

In the national Capital, the vaccination exercise was carried out at 81 sites across 11 districts. Six Central Government hospitals — AIIMS, Safdarjung, RML, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital and two ESI hospitals — had been chosen as sites for the drive. Besides these, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, the Delhi Government-run GTB Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, DDU Hospital, BSA Hospital, Delhi State Cancer Institute and the ILBS Hospital are among the vaccination sites. Then there are private facilities — Max Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Apollo Hospital and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital — which have also been chosen as sites for the exercise. However, many people at the RML Hospital were apprehensive, with some of them reluctant to go for the shot, and then there were others with mixed feelings. Dr Sharmila (name changed) of the hospital, who has been working in the COVID department, said: "I am scared as the vaccine's efficacy is not yet proved but this is my best bet. It is my leap of faith... I will take the plunge. Dr (Randeep) Guleria (AIIMS director) has also taken the shot; I believe in him." The day was also not bereft of politics — with Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari training the guns at the Government and referring to the Norway incident where 23 deaths occurred after taking the anti-COVID jab manufactured by Pfizer — but we, as a people, strongly believe that such bumps would not be able to derail the massive campaign that aims at achieving health for all its citizens.

Recasting Delhi

Narendra Modi wants to leave his imprint on central Delhi; the new Central Vista will be quite a mark



On the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti, the day millions of Indians worship the Ganga, construction began on India's new Parliament building, the first of several projects that will define New Delhi in the latter half of the 21st century. Many individuals and organisations have questioned as to why such an expensive infrastructure undertaking is being started now, as India's economy limps back into action following the pandemic. The fact is that large infrastructure projects have always been used by nations, whether it was Germany or Japan following the World War 2 or the United States during the Great Depression, to turbo-charge economic recovery as these projects provide large volumes of employment and leave behind a considerable legacy. Delhiites themselves have never denied heritage its place — Rajput, Islamic, European or Colonial — and made it a part of their living history, one where Lutyens' Delhi is a key chapter. The cluster of offices would undoubtedly change the skyline as we know it and their ramped-up security would rob us of an indulgent spread in the heart of the city. But was this particular infrastructure project needed?

There is a simple answer to this, asking anyone who has either worked or has visited any major Government office in New Delhi. While the buildings of Lutyens' yore are amazing pieces of architecture, structures like the North and South Block are awfully dilapidated and the post-Independence buildings such as Shastri Bhawan and Udyog Bhawan are downright awful. They are inefficient as modern working spaces and, worse still, environmentally unfriendly in terms of energy consumption. These buildings needed a thorough revamp at the very least and one could argue that they needed to be broken down and rebuilt. And it is the latter path that this Government is undertaking. However, as the Supreme Court has pointed out, this has to be done thoughtfully so as not to destroy the history and heritage dating back over a century when the colonialists rebuilt the Capital in the 1900s. But to argue that India does not need this, because it is Narendra Modi and his Government who are undertaking such a project, is nothing more than petty jealousy. The same people would have made completely different arguments had a Congress-led administration carried out the rebuild. India's Parliament too needs an urgent makeover. The Central Vista revamp is massive as it envisages a new triangular Parliament building with a seating capacity for 900 to 1,200 MPs and synergised administrative blocks, to be completed by August 2022. On its part, the Government had been arguing for a makeover of this part of Lutyens' Delhi for its functionality and efficiency, claiming that it would create spaces for a more streamlined operation of Ministry offices and free up more citizen-friendly spaces. It is the Modi regime's attempt to overwrite our Colonial past and redesign an institution as wholly Indian, as representative of its people and epoch-making simply because no Government had thought of this before. While the existing building, based on the 9-12th century CE circular Yogini temples, is a tremendous structure and a temple in its own right, if India is to have a larger Parliament that is representative of her population, a new building is essential. It was vital that this rebuild happens and while the public relations could have been better, this reconstruction of Delhi was needed. And it will leave Narendra Modi's mark on Delhi for years to come, whether some people like it or not.

BINDU DALMIA

A cautious and forced optimism pervades the start of 2021. As Lenin aptly said: "There are decades when nothing happens, and then there are weeks when decades happen." The year 2020 was one such when the velocity in medical science and tech adaptation crammed a decade's evolution into a single year.

That the vaccine would be the panacea for the economic woes of 2020 is not certitude, given the emergence of the mutating COVID-II strain. A second cycle of virulence could further burden healthcare systems, severely reversing the economic recovery. Confronted with multiple challenges, recovery even in the developed world is not anticipated before 2021 end despite their Governments' sustained stimuli on all three fronts: fiscal, monetary and credit. This is because the COVID-induced hysteresis will keep the growth rates suppressed much after the crisis recedes, as it did during the 2008 financial meltdown.

Set against the grim spectre of job and income losses and the inequality exacerbated by the crisis, there have been only two gainers during the lockdown of 2020: China as a country, and the American big tech oligarchs as a business class. Today, Apple, Amazon, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Netflix and Twitter's combined market capitalisation is \$8 trillion, which is more than double the size of India's national GDP. This is attributed to big tech's stakes in the online world of contactless social media and e-commerce which helped them increase their net worth by a whopping 30 per cent, to touch \$4 trillion.

And China's export-led economy rebounded the fastest due to being able to fill the void in global supply-chain disruptions as the country remained on a manufacturing overdrive while the rest of the world was in lockdown mode.

Broadly, the predictive global contours of change in 2022 will be seen in the spiralling of sovereign debt to GDP ratios; a partial revival of globalisation and a return to multilateralism with the advent of Joe Biden; a high rise in manufacturing productivity levels, yet conversely, a shrinkage in job creation due to digitisation and AI-led automation; and permanent changes in consumer behaviour.

Another dominant concern at the start of the year is with the surreal valuations of global stock

Trends to look out for

China will remain saboteur number one of global recovery in 2021 even though the new decade brings optimism and new vaccines



markets due to surplus liquidity infused by the Central bank's quantitative easing. This will likely fuel the next asset bubble and lead to a repeat of the 2008 phenomenon once stimulus measures are withdrawn toward the end of the year.

There are other anticipated trends that are likely to play out in the economy with the consumer and with corporates in 2021. For one, there are fears that the very country that unleashed the virus could sabotage global recovery by covertly unleashing another virulent strain so that the offender nation retains its economic heft.

And, sadly, the optimism is further watered down due to the lack of a unified action plan amongst like-minded coalition partners or allies to rein in an expansionist China. A multilateral and punitive response is needed to hold China accountable for subverting a rules-based economic international order and calls for an international backlash for its abuses on maritime and territorial incursions as also for the grotesque human rights abuses on Uighurs, or for the Chinese Communist Party's crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong and Tibet.

China's treatment of business magnate Jack Ma being browbeaten to "embrace supervision" (the Chinese synonym for detention) should have sent shock waves to the global

investor community. But, to the contrary, the West is hesitant to decouple from China. While the Biden Administration will persist with Trumpian-era tariffs and technology restrictions on China, the attraction of the Chinese market for the US and the EU investors is too strong to cut the cords of economic activity on grounds of geopolitical aberrations alone. The EU, which is the largest trading bloc, has recently approved a comprehensive investment agreement while American fund houses continue to solicit Chinese savers retirement funds.

When the strongest democracies are in descent and disarray, it has the propensity to embolden rogue dictators. More so after the theatre of the absurd that played out at Capitol Hill with Trump's "Be there, be wild" melee that pushed lawmakers to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove a sitting President from office. A weakened US then portends ominous signals in being able to contain an aggressive China, which does not augur well for free market economies.

And if the Capitol Hill was under siege, a similar kind of anarchy is being played out on the borders of the Capital of the largest democracy in the world, with the non-negotiable stance of the farmers' protest nearing two months. Anarchist trends in democracies are now a symptom of a deeper underlying

malaise, with a thin line demarcating excessive freedom of expression or the right to dissent from chaos, vandalism and lawlessness.

Dominant India-centric themes expected to play out

Coming to India, while the economists predict a strong rebound, it is important not to confuse rebound with growth in "absolute" terms. The World Bank estimates the growth in India to recover to 5.5 per cent in FY22, so the recovery from a lower base naturally quantifies as a higher rise. Herein, the speed of the vaccines' rollout and their efficacy will of course increase economic activity due to increased mobility, which will drive recovery in the non-farm sectors with the exclusion of the contact-intensive services sectors.

According to a McKinsey report, "Indian businesses have the potential to create economic value of about \$635 billion by 2030 if they can tap into the shifting preferences of Indians aspiring to a higher standard of living". The areas identified for quantum leaps are in businesses that provide higher-quality urban environments, cleaner air and water and more convenience-based services in the new ideas-based economy which can potentially create millions of productive jobs.

Another dominant trend is one of growing indignation against the "privately owned,

unelected, unaccountable American tech companies, who can unilaterally exclude anyone on Earth out of the internet". The other countries must unite to regulate these monopolistic internet giants who evade taxes in host countries, have a predatory, buy-out strategy towards startups which pose a threat to them in order to curb competition and have now self-appropriated the right to restrict freedom of expression at will.

Lastly, mainstreaming Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) will be one of the enduring hallmark business trends of post-pandemic prioritisation. The ESG verticals can vary from supporting sustainable natural materials, water conservation and CO2 reductions or espousing social causes such as human rights and poverty alleviation. We have to recognise that zoonotic diseases will continue to rise till the time we do not shift to sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Peering through the fog of uncertainty, it is impossible to conjure what the post-vaccine world will look like. But, for sure, what we will encounter on the other side of the tunnel will in no way resemble the pre-COVID world order.

(The writer is an author, columnist and Chairperson, NCFL, at Niti Aayog. The views expressed are personal).

SOUNDBITE

Mild infection after vaccination is a good sign because it shows the immune system of the body is reacting to the vaccine.



AIIMS Director
Dr Randeep Guleria

The world must act with far greater solidarity. Sadly, the impact of the pandemic has been made worse by the absence of a global coordinated effort.



UN Secretary-General
Antonio Guterres

Salt is a very sweet story about a woman who is an artist and her husband who is an engineer. Their relationship is sweet but comes with a pinch of salt.



Actor
Rituparna Sengupta

That's an irresponsible shot from Rohit Sharma. You've just hit a boundary a couple of deliveries earlier, why would you play that?



Former Indian captain
Sunil Gavaskar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Low-profile R-Day is good

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Virus shadow over R-Day' (January 16). The Modi Government had committed a mistake by extending an invitation to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in November last year, when both the countries were struggling hard with the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government should have concentrated more on dealing with the contagion rather than inviting dignitaries for the R-Day. Finally, Johnson declined the invitation and expressed regrets for his inability to visit Delhi due to the mounting COVID-19 cases at home.

There were days when people would walk and paddle with their children at the India Gate to witness the parade. Instead of organising the R-Day parade this year, the PM should have paid tributes to the martyrs at the National War Memorial and Amar Jawan Jyoti at India Gate. At a time when the pandemic has wreaked havoc, key celebrations should be observed on a subdued note.

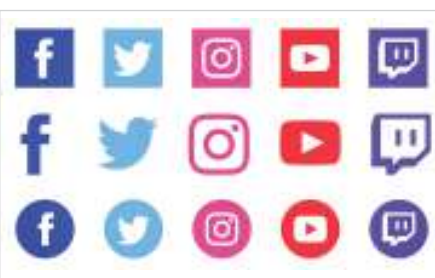
N Subramanian
Delhi

Privacy is the price for social media freedom

This refers to the editorial 'Privacy Matters' (January 16). On privacy and freedom, I would like to say that "When anything is free, your freedom is the price". Anti-apartheid and human rights activist Desmond Tutu had said: "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had Bible and we had land. They said 'let us pray'. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had a Bible and they had land."

Likewise, when social networking giants came, they had WhatsApp and Facebook and we had our freedom. They said it's free and we closed our eyes. But when we opened it, we had WhatsApp and Facebook and they had our freedom. Our attempts to save our privacy and freedom by switching over to other platforms like Signal and Telegram will not be of much help. The majority of people, including the very old and young, have become addicted to these social media platforms and happily share their personal details; thus compromising their privacy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the scenario, but for worse. Online classes for students have now become the norm but it is a setback to the privacy of



teachers. The teachers are asked by the school authorities to share their personal details like email and phone number with parents of all students, thus putting them at grave risk of breach of privacy. The breach is not only through WhatsApp; even video conferencing platforms are not safe. The Government and private sector must do something to safeguard the privacy and freedom of every individual before it gets too late.

N Nagarajan
Secunderabad

Puducherry suffers

Sir — The people of Puducherry are fed up of the tussle between the Government, led by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, and Lt Governor Kiran Bedi. Ever since the former IPS officer took charge as Puducherry's L-G in 2016, the tussle between Narayanasamy and her has done no good to the

administration or the people.

The ego war between them has no precedence in the history of the Union Territory. The duo has clashed over major as well as trivial issues. Narayanasamy would have been a much relieved man if the Centre had recalled Bedi. The 'obstructionist' in Bedi is an extension of her police career and the AAP stint. The L-

G should know she merely shares power with the CM and his cabinet and she is not the 'power'. Bedi has tried to usurp the domain of the Government by picking holes in the Government's ambitious rice scheme. Amid the power tussle, the UT and its people are suffering.

Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

Need to be reasonable

Sir — The ninth round of talks between the farmers and the Government remained inconclusive due to the adamant attitude of both. Farmers are rigid on their demands whereas Centre is ready for only some changes in the laws but not their revocation.

There seems no chance of any form of settlement in the future, too. Farmers need to be wary of self-styled intellectual activists who have wormed their way into the dispute. Farmers are unreasonable in not accepting the Supreme Court-appointed panel.

They seem to be motivated more by their animus against the Government rather than the welfare of the farmers. Thousands of farmers are protesting due to apprehensions that with the introduction of the new laws, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) would get abolished and there will be no mandi system. The Government should allay their fears and convince them that they would not be left at the mercy of the big corporates.

Yash Pal Ralhan
Jalandhar

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A new medium of expression

When the pandemic struck the world, it took several months to realise how dramatically the nature of communication would change



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The most common topics on which training programmes are held are leadership, communication, management of self and so on. In a programme on communication one of the essential topics is to explore the relationship between the message and the medium. One of the commonest statements is: "The message is the medium and the medium is the message." Typically, if a notice board is a medium and the message conveys affection or is proposing a marriage, no one uses a notice board for such a communication. The softer messages are usually more appropriate to convey with a flourish or a card, note, in person and in today's world on a personal chat. This would add a certain degree of gentility.

In the choice of the medium, too, there are at times flourishes that are used. Typically the use of calligraphy with a thick nib goes well with certain sentiments. There was a time in courts where after writing a death sentence, the judge would break the nib to underscore that he considered the task distasteful and did not want to write another such verdict. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on such approaches or sentiments. Messaging online has become a universal medium demanding some appreciation of technology and some familiarity with the computer keyboard and smartphone keypads. Those with a receding vision or limited understanding of the workings of the keyboard and smartphone increasingly face less tolerance.

Technology itself is a recent phenomenon in public spaces in India. In the early '70s even a photocopier was unknown in most public spaces of learning institutions. A microfilm reader was the acme of technology in an archival space which couldn't cope with heavy binding or with pages that were getting too brittle for regular use. Five decades down the line, even the storage disc has undergone multiple changes in size, density and machine.

Similarly, recording instruments have evolved, too. Those who could not detect how totally extinct an extant technology of storage could become, lost much data. That is a story which has often unravelled silently, with very little to evoke even a small interest in the theme of a technology which gets outdated with time. Indeed there were disc manufacturing enterprises enjoying a flourishing business, that were almost wiped out before they realised what hit them. New chapters on return on investment had to be written and the short, half-life of technology was difficult to keep pace with for most businesses. As a result, the impact was huge on Information Technology-related businesses and many suffered losses.

When the COVID pandemic struck the world it took several months to realise how dramatically the nature of communication would change. There was something rolling out which had no space in conventional learning, skilling or training. There was a mass exodus to online processes. Those who got left out belonged to a bygone era or were on the fringes of society.

Online learning, skilling, training were not all that new but never was it such a "no-choice" situation. I was a member of a policy group of educational governance dealing with management education, about 30 years ago. The role demanded me to become the chairman of a sub-committee on technology in management education. One of the recommendations was that online technology in management education would be a matter of bandwidth availability. Nearly 30 years later, many of the semi-baked management professionals were discovering that "online teaching is quickly becoming bandwidth intensive." It was also being discovered that reliable connectivity to the internet and multiplicity of web servers would be needed for prompt "net response and reliable service." The message was simple: The lack of a clear sense of direction when it could have happened led to a crash crescendo. Responding to this crash crescendo became fanciful and *avant-garde*. The truth was, it was a response to a miserable learning situation which no one was expecting or was prepared for.

Hence, what was often projected as a modernisation of the learning process had strong possibilities of becoming a learning disaster. Skilling was equally affected. What can be shared in skilling on the online medium would not be adequate for "operational skilling", simply because of the need to focus on competencies.

Similarly, the process of training landed in the deep end. Any person in the profession of training would know that there is very little substitute to personalised interaction, particularly in a short learning event like training. More problematic fallouts of such a situation can be flagged. For the present, suffice it to say that even the need to limit the losses in such sudden shifts — voluntary or otherwise — is slow to be registered or be acted upon. Hopefully some in the profession will awaken to this need, sooner than others.

(The writer is an internationally acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal.)

MANISH TEWARI AND THE CONGRESS ARE ONLY PASSIONATE ABOUT SPREADING DISTRUST AND RUMOURS (ABOUT THE COVID VACCINE).
—UNION HEALTH MINISTER
HARSH VARDHAN

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



IT'S NOT FEAR-MONGERING. SEE WHAT HAPPENED IN NORWAY. IT MAY BE A DIFFERENT SHOT BUT DO NOT HIDE BEHIND VACCINE NATIONALISM.
—CONGRESS LEADER
MANISH TEWARI

Mobile money is new cash

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown that the trend towards greater digitalisation of financial services in the country is here to stay



MOIN QAZI

Mobile finance finds itself at an inflection point as the world continues to tackle the socio-economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. In these critical times, mobile money has helped governments in navigating the financial dystopia and addressing the practical challenge of delivering affordable and efficient financial services. Mobile currency is as an effective and physical distance friendly option to avoid cash, which can act as a carrier of the Coronavirus. Contactless digital payments at the point of sale with the help of facial recognition, Quick Response (QR) codes or near-field communications (NFC), drastically reduce the possibility of the spread of the contagion.

Digitisation has turned a smartphone into a wallet, a chequebook, a bank branch and an accounting ledger. The ubiquity of the mobile phone has made it possible to deliver financial services to people for whom a bank account is a distant dream. Frictionless, real-time payment through smartphones is already ensuring that the financially excluded section is thinning fast. Mobile transactions can create the next wave of financial inclusion if we prudently address the concerns of consumers.

For instance, people in far-flung areas of the country and remote villages are now able to make payments, deposit money, transfer funds, receive social benefits and wages and buy rations — affordably and reliably without the hassle associated with the opening of a bank account. In emerging and developing economies, millions have cellular phones but no bank accounts, credit cards or debit cards. For them, mobile money has begun filling the gaps in financial services. It serves as a lifeline, bringing those who currently lack access to banking into the financial mainstream.

Further, the penetration of cellular phones puts developing countries in an advantageous position where making a quantum leap in financial inclusion is concerned. For communities with low literacy levels and sporadic incomes, digital money can transform the socio-economic landscape. Mobile banking is enabling women to overcome common barriers. It reduces the need to travel long distances to access banking facilities and also ensures a level of privacy and security.

In reality, despite the best of intentions banks cannot afford to set up branches in every nook and corner of the country as there are logistical, economic and security constraints. The high cost of building infrastructure for bank branches has been a major obstacle in extending financial services to the poor and the underserved in remote locations. Cellular phone banking eliminates the problem of geographical inaccessibility and high set-up cost of bank branches.

Banks, mobile operators and third-party providers are all leveraging technologies on mobile phones to offer basic financial services at a lower cost than traditional banking allows. Several new types of delivery channels are emerging such as managers, agent networks, payment aggregators and others who are helping in building a more far-reaching and efficient digital finance ecosystem.

Digital mobile finance offers at least three major advantages over traditional financial

“THE ONGOING CRISIS IS CERTAINLY GOING TO TEST THE WAY VARIOUS PLAYERS IN THE DIGITAL AND FINANCIAL ECOSYSTEMS RESPOND. GOVERNMENTS MUST CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES”



models. First, digital transactions are essentially free. In-person services and cash transactions account for a majority of routine banking expenses but mobile finance clients keep their money in digital form. They can send and receive money without incurring transaction costs from their banks or mobile service providers.

Second, mobile communication generates copious amounts of data which banks and other providers can use for developing more profitable services. It even acts as a substitute for the traditional credit scores.

Third, mobile platforms link banks to their clients in real time. This means that banks can instantly relay account information or send reminders and clients can quickly sign up for services on their own.

Further, digital footprints and transaction data can be of great help to assess individual creditworthiness. Mobile network operators are teaming up with banks, financial-tech companies and data analytics specialists to use the customer information to gauge their credit risk and offer microfinance products to some who would otherwise lack any proof of their capacity to repay a loan.

If the customer is a regular user of a digital money transfer service, the operator may also be able to assess how much disposable income they have.

In fact, mobile operators' data can be good enough to lower the lender's risk significantly, enabling interest rates to fall and making microfinance a more attractive proposition for small businesses and individuals.

But such success stories do not

happen in a vacuum. To begin with, everyone needs a cellular phone with an affordable data plan. It is entrusted upon governments and non-governmental organisations to extend mobile networks to remote areas. Governments must also ensure that networks between banks and telecommunications companies are interoperable otherwise, widespread use of mobile phones for financial services and payments would be impossible.

Mobile money transactions will also have to address the limitations which prevent countrywide adoption of the channel. Exchanging mobile money for cash can still be expensive. And digital and financial illiteracy are known to hinder adoption of digital mobile services. People in rural and remote areas may lack network coverage, easy access to money agents, or simply electricity. A robust identification system, widespread, consistent internet access and trustworthy ways to get money into digital formats could be important for digital payments to thrive.

Women's access to mobile finance is affected by the fact that fewer females possess a mobile phone as compared to men. The promises of mobile finance are certainly very seductive. However, the reality is much harder than we can imagine. It is easier to spread technology than to bring about extensive change in social and individual attitude.

Although mobile telephony might entail initial fixed costs, the variable costs associated with their use are significantly lower, enabling an overall reduction in transactions costs. Mobile

banking can be a strong income stream for telecom operators, helping them to counter slowing subscription growth and growing competition in traditional niches. The key is information technology spending in annual fixed costs for a mobile banking system. Again, that spending is significant for small providers, but is minimal for large players. This means financial firms looking to expand into emerging markets via mobile banking would require good financial stamina.

Since success is in everyone's best interest, mobile and financial industries and regulators should work collaboratively with each other to unlock the transformative social impact of cell phone money. It is only then that we will be able to deliver life-changing mobile financial services to millions of people across the world, who still have no access to traditional banking.

The pandemic has shown that the trend towards greater digitalisation of financial services in India is here to stay. The ongoing crisis is certainly going to test the way various players in the digital and financial ecosystems respond. Governments must close the digital divide to reap the benefits of digital financial services. This means finding the right balance between enabling financial innovation and addressing several risks: Lack of financial and digital literacy, insufficient consumer protection and unequal access to digital infrastructure and data bases.

(The writer is a well-known development professional of international repute. The views expressed are personal.)

To boycott, or not to boycott polls, that is the question

Radicals feel that shunning elections is vital to delegitimise a regime and claim the polls to be bogus. But evidence indicates that the cons outweigh the benefits



NADEEM PARACHA

On January 1, the multiparty Opposition alliance, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) announced that it would participate in the forthcoming by-elections and did not rule out taking part in the Senate polls, too.

After completing the first phase of its protest movement with a flurry of large rallies against the Imran Khan Government, the PDM is now entering the second phase of its initiative to oust the Prime Minister. The PDM has been claiming that Khan's Government was installed through a rigged election in 2018 by the military establishment. The alliance sees Khan as a willing marionette of the establishment that, it claims, is pulling his strings.

The PDM's decision to contest the by-polls and then possibly the Senate elections is being looked at with suspicion by some analysts. Some of them are not very fond of Khan's regime (and vice versa). Yet, they haven't held back in explaining the possible move by the PDM as an attempt to strike a deal with the establishment to oust Khan without having to resort to more extreme measures. They see a clash emerging within the PDM between the Zardari doctrine and the Nawaz doctrine.

It was the Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif who initially set into motion the PDM's startling anti-establishment agenda, which has clearly unnerved the regime and its non-civilian backers. Asif Zardari, the chief of the PDM's second-largest party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has advised a more gradualist approach. It was on this advice that the PDM agreed to contest the by-elections. But certain observers believe that the PPP, which is heading the provincial Government in Sindh, is hoping to come to some sort of an understanding with the establishment.

The PDM's more radical sympathisers were expecting a clear boycott of the by-polls and the Senate elections. It has been a long-established understanding within the PPP that election boycotts do not work. In her 1988 biography *'Daughter of the East'*, former chairperson of the PPP, the late Benazir Bhutto, wrote that one of the biggest mistakes of her political career was the boycott of the 1985 elections held during the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship.

At the time, her party was heading an alliance of anti-Zia parties, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). According to Benazir, MRD's boycott allowed easy access to pro-Zia elements to the corridors of power. Ironically, one of these elements was Nawaz Sharif.

In 2007, when an anti-Musharraf multiparty alliance, the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), decided to boycott the 2008 general elections, Benazir disagreed with the decision. She insisted that the boycott would facilitate General Musharraf to continue ruling the country as a dictator, with the help of parties that were already supporting him in the Parliament.

For Benazir, a boycott would have aided these parties to retain their hold on the Assemblies and continue to legitimise the Musharraf regime. Benazir was able to convince Sharif's PML-N to contest. Both the parties not only went on to win the majority of seats in the elections, but were also able to gather enough clout to force Musharraf to resign.

In a 2017 essay for the *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, G Buttorff and Douglas Dion wrote that the decision to take part in elections organised by an authoritarian set-up often poses a dilemma for parties opposed to such a set-up. The question is, will their participation in elections, which are likely to be engineered, legitimise the polls, or will a complete boycott of the elections fortify the possibility of the boycotting parties gaining political influence? Benazir believed that MRD's 1985 boycott relinquished its political influence to those who were handpicked by Zia to strengthen his position.

According to Dion and Buttorff, one of the main reasons that parties boycott elections is to expose "the bogusness" of a tampered electoral process. This is the reason being put

forward by those who want the PDM to boycott the by-elections and Senate polls. They believe no elections in Pakistan can be trusted to deliver a fair verdict if they continue to be "engineered" by the establishment and held by a "hybrid regime" like the one headed by Khan. But Dion and Buttorff add that the other reason parties sometimes boycott elections is that they fear "devastating electoral losses."

This reason can be understood on two levels. First, parties can tactically boycott elections if they believe that their vote-bank has weakened. Instead of confessing to this, they announce that they are not taking part in the polls because they fear it will not be fair. The Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) boycotted the 1997 elections because, as exhibited by the rout the party suffered in the 1993 polls, its vote-bank had shrunk considerably.

The party felt that another rout could plunge the outfit into a serious existential crisis. The JI also boycotted the 2008 elections. Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), too, boycotted the same elections because, at the time, it was a tiny outfit with no electoral influence —

even though, along with the JI, the PTI claimed that it was boycotting the polls because they were being held by a dictatorship. However, in 2002, both the JI and the PTI had taken part in elections held during the same dictatorship. Second, even parties with strong vote banks can withdraw from elections because they believe that their defeat, engineered by fraudulent polls, can dent their reputation. The PML-N harboured this fear in 2007. Benazir helped Nawaz overcome this fear, despite the fact that the PPP could have easily won Punjab had the PML-N not participated in the 2008 polls. The goal was to continue having at least some influence and presence, even in an engineered Parliament headed by a common foe.

To Dion and Buttorff, an elections boycott aims to disrupt a set-up that Opposition parties do not trust. The boycotting parties believe that once the electoral process is proven as bogus, those engineering it would be forced to back down. But this is rarely the case.

A study by Matthew Frankel of elections boycotts in various authoritarian set-ups from 1990 onwards,

shows that boycotts were unable to trigger any serious disruption, and many parties that had boycotted elections returned to contest them despite the polls being held by the same regimes they claimed were undemocratic.

According to Frankel, many boycotts lead to neither reform nor regime change, and leave Opposition parties worse off than they would have been had they participated. In a 2010 policy paper for the Brookings Institute, Frankel writes, "The boycotting party often becomes completely detached from the organs of power, setting itself up for further setbacks."

In her book *'Faith in Moderation'*, the political scientist Jillian Schwedler writes that, if the holding of elections offers a way for authoritarian regimes to maintain power, it also opens up a host of new opportunities for the regime's opponents. Once in, the Opposition has a better chance of utilising non-electoral options to push out a regime, than it has after completely shutting itself out through a boycott.

(The views expressed are personal. Courtesy: Dawn)



RECAPITALISATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

Finance Min looks at BIC model for affordable capital infusion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry is looking at other avenues for affordable capital infusion, including setting up of a Bank Investment Company (BIC), as the RBI has raised concern over the issuance of zero coupon bonds for recapitalisation of public sector banks (PSBs), sources said.

Setting up BIC as a holding company or a core investment company was suggested by the P J Nayak Committee in its report on 'Governance of Boards of Banks in India'.

The report recommended transferring shares of the government in the banks to the BIC which would become the parent holding company of all these banks, as a result of this, all the PSBs would become 'limited' banks. BIC will be autonomous and it will have the power to appoint the board of directors and make other policy decisions about subsidiaries.

The idea of BIC, which will serve as a super holding company, was also discussed at the first Gyan Sangam bankers' retreat organised in 2014, the sources said. They added that it was proposed that the hold-



ing company would look into the capital needs of banks and arrange funds for them without government support.

It would also look at alternative ways of raising capital such as the sale of non-voting shares in a bid to garner affordable capital.

With this in place, the dependence of PSBs on government support would also come down and ease fiscal pressure.

To save interest burden and ease the fiscal pressure, the government decided to issue zero coupon bonds for meeting the capital needs of the banks.

The first test case of the new mechanism was a capital infu-

sion of Rs 5,500 crore into Punjab & Sind Bank by issuing zero-coupon bonds of six different maturities last year. These special securities with tenure of 10-15 years are non-interest bearing and valued at par.

However, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expressed concerns over zero-coupon bonds for the recapitalisation of PSBs.

The RBI has raised some issues with regard to calculation of an effective capital infusion made in any bank through this instrument issued at par, the sources said.

Since such bonds usually are non-interest bearing but issued at a deep discount to the face value, it is difficult to ascertain

net present value, they added.

As these special bonds are non-interest bearing and issued at par to a bank, it would be an investment, which would not earn any return but rather depreciate with each passing year.

Parliament had in September 2020 approved Rs 20,000 crore to be made available for the recapitalisation of PSBs. Of this, Rs 5,500 crore was issued to Punjab & Sind Bank and the Finance Ministry will take a call on the remaining Rs 14,500 crore during this quarter.

With mounting capital requirement owing to rising NPAs, the government resorted to recapitalisation bonds with a coupon rate for capital infusion into PSBs during 2017-18 and interest payment to banks for holding such bonds started from the next financial year.

This mechanism helped the government from making capital infusion from its own resources rather utilised banks' money for the financial assistance.

However, the mechanism had a cost of interest payment towards the recapitalisation bonds for PSBs.

US biz advocacy group urges Minister Sitharaman to lower tariff in Budget

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

A top India-centric American business advocacy group has suggested Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to lower tariff in the Union Budget if the country wants to compete with China-backed mega free trade agreement Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

China and 14 other countries in November last year established the world's largest trading bloc that represents roughly 30 per cent of the world's GDP and population.

India walked out of the mega free trade agreement as negotiations failed to address New Delhi's outstanding issues and concerns.

The members of RCEP are 10-nation bloc ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia), China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

If India can focus on a much more predictable environment from a policy framework it will give more confidence to the investors.

Bringing a sense of transparency in policy making also sends a very positive signal. And if India is going to be competing, especially with the RCEP, then it has to look at lowering its tariff, Mukesh



Aghi, president of US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF) told PTI.

Pointing that in the last 12 months tariffs in India have been going up and up, he said, What it does is yes, it protects a local industry, but it doesn't make them competitive. So, it is important to protect the local industry, but at the same time, it is important to make them more competent intervals. Lowering of tariff is important."

In a recent submission to the Union Finance Minister, USISPF recommended specific measures to improve direct and indirect tax collection, which will promote private investment and ensure fiscal and monetary stability.

In a recent submission to the Union Finance Minister, USISPF recommended specific measures to improve direct and indirect tax collection

companies to manage their tax liabilities, and provide a needed boost to the economic activity during the next fiscal year, it added.

To increase MSME access to finance in India, USISPF has recommended specific steps to promote supply-chain financing, subsidise the insurance of MSME loans, improve the assessment of MSME credit risk and loan disbursement, and facilitate faster settlement of claims between healthcare providers and insurers.

We have recommended that the midsize public banks should be privatised. If you want large institutional investment to come in, then the clause you have management control and board control lies with the Indian partner has to be removed, Aghi said.

Because American corporate boards will not approve, an investment, if it goes in India and they don't have a management or board control over those investment. Recognising that the pandemic has accelerated digitisation of large swathes of the economy, we recommend the government ensure Digital India can transact securely by expanding the use of digital signatures in negotiable instruments, powers of attorney, deeds, contracts, and other legal documents, USISPF said.

MONEY MATTERS

Shift Freight expects its topline to touch ₹50 crore by FY2022

G7 On-demand shifting services provider Shift Freight expects its topline to touch Rs 50 crore by the end of fiscal 2022 on the back of a pan-India presence and a significant jump in daily movements, its Co-founder, Avinash Raghav has said. The Noida-based start-up entered the fast-growing logistic services space just prior to the imposition of the coronavirus-induced lockdown in March last year. The firm with presence across 10 cities including Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Jaipur, among others, conducts over 1,000 movements per month and is growing at 75-80 per cent month-on-month in terms of both order and revenue, with a fleet of 560 trucks attached to the platform, according to Raghav. "We launched in February and though we executed some orders till lockdown, our actual operations started, in a way, from June 2020 only."

KSUM Palakkad centre to hold session for tech entrepreneurs

Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) is organising a special session on January 19 for tech entrepreneurs to know more about the service and support system being provided by its incubation centre in Palakkad. The hour-long incubation programme would provide the participants a chance to explore the ecosystem at the KSUMs centre in this city, a press release said. The session would have experts providing advice on technical aspects and trade scene besides tips on support to investment and basic infrastructure. The Palakkad centre has been functioning for a year. As a nodal agency of the Kerala government for entrepreneurship development and incubation activities in the state, KSUM undertakes planning, establishment and management of technology business incubators and accelerators to promote technology-based ventures by creating the infrastructure and environment.

'Include certain elements in vax programme towards CSR spend'

The CII Taskforce on Vaccines has recommended inclusion of certain elements in the vaccination programme as part of the 2 per cent corporate social responsibility (CSR) expenditure required to be undertaken by a class of profitable entities, saying it will encourage the private sector to inoculate its workforce and help enhance the reach of vaccines. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Taskforce has made several important submissions to V K Paul, Member, Niti Aayog and Rajesh Bhushan, Health Secretary and the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC), sources said. Among these, the industry body has identified the elements in the vaccination programme, which if supported or undertaken by companies may be considered under the 2 per cent CSR spend. Under the Companies Act, 2013, a certain class of profitable entities are required to spend at least 2 per cent of their three-year annual average net profit towards CSR activities for social good or affirmative action. The taskforce has also recommended that the government utilise private sector capacity from phase one itself of the vaccination drive.

Franklin Templeton MF's six shut schemes generate Rs 13,789 cr

Franks Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund on Sunday said its six shut schemes have received Rs 13,789 crore from maturities, pre-payments and coupon payments since closing down in April. Franklin Templeton MF shut six debt mutual fund schemes on April 23, 2020 citing redemption pressures and lack of liquidity in the bond market. The schemes -- Franklin India Low Duration Fund, Franklin India Dynamic Accrual Fund, Franklin India Credit Risk Fund, Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, Franklin India Ultra Short Bond Fund, and Franklin India Income Opportunities Fund -- together had an estimated Rs 25,000 crore as assets under management (AUM). "The six schemes have received total cash flows of Rs 13,789 crore as of January 15, 2021 from maturities, pre-payments and coupon payments since April 24, 2020," the fund house said in a statement. Over the latest fortnight (January 1-15), these schemes received Rs 669 crore, of which Rs 617 crore was as pre-payments, it added.

Mzaalo partners with Mojo Boxx

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Digital entertainment platform Mzaalo has partnered with Mojo Boxx, to provide content for budget carrier SpiceJet's in-flight entertainment system, SpiceScreen.

Mzaalo through its content platform, offers Bollywood movies, regional cinema, original series, music videos, among others.

Mojo Boxx is an Indian technology start-up providing digital travel experience solutions in an unconnected environment for the Airlines, Railways, Metros, and long-distance road travelers.

The Gurugram-based airline had in last August launched a revamped complimentary in-flight entertainment system, SpiceScreen, with contents such as blockbuster movies, popular TV shows, cartoons and stand-up comedies. The IFE can be accessed by passengers on any of their personal handheld devices like mobiles or laptops. SpiceJet flyers can enjoy unlimited entertainment with Mzaalo's wide-ranging content on SpiceScreen, which is powered by just a pair of Mojo Boxx's special Smartphone IFE Box, Mzaalo said in a release on Sunday.

"Our partnership with Mzaalo will enable us to create deeper engagements with flyers not just in sky but even before departure and after arrival thereby offering a complete home-to-home digital experience for outbound travelers," said Manoj Kumar Gupta, Founder, Mojo Boxx. Vikram Tanna, COO, Mzaalo said "the partnership is a result of our collective effort to enhance customer experience by offering the most sought-after content to SpiceJet travelers".

The growing demand for quality content enabled Mzaalo's partnership with Mojo Boxx to cater to audiences across geographies.

Luxury carmakers seek reduction in taxes on automobiles in Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Luxury car makers Mercedes-Benz, Audi and Lamborghini expect the government to lower taxes on automobiles in the upcoming Budget, saying the premium segment of the auto industry has not been able to grow due to high taxation besides being hit hard by coronavirus.

Any hike in taxes on luxury cars will hit demand and prevent recovery from the disruptions witnessed last year, according to senior officials of the companies.

"Anything which is a deterrent to the demand in the sector we should stay away because at the end that will cause problem," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director & CEO Martin Schwenk told PTI.

He was responding to a query on the company's expectations on the tax front from the government in the upcoming budget.



Seeking a reduction on taxes on the auto sector, Schwenk said, "Already the auto industry is highly taxed...from the import duties to GST and cess which is 22 per cent (on luxury cars). I think the target should actually be to support the growth of the sector and reduce tax. We should try find an avenue."

Expressing similar sentiments, Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said the challenges for the luxury car segment, which is recovering from the COVID-19 induced disruptions, in 2021 are "more or less the constants from the past".

"One is of course the high taxation on luxury cars, including cess. That remains a challenge because what it has done is that it has not let luxury cars grow beyond 1 per cent (of the total automobile markets in India). It is just hovering around 1 per cent and in last year 2020 it could have dropped probably 0.7-0.8 per cent. That (high tax) remains the biggest challenge," he added.

Lamborghini India Head Sharad Agarwal said the expectation of the super luxury segment players from the government is to maintain a consistency because the segment has suffered a lot in 2020.

"We want the segment to at least bounce back to 2019 level in 2021. We are still not expecting growth to come back but we want to touch 2019 level in the segment. If there is any change (increase) in the tax structure in the segment it is going to hit the segment very negatively," he added.

BharatPe raises ₹139 cr debt from Alteria Capital, ICICI Bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech company BharatPe on Sunday said it has raised Rs 139 crore (about USD 20 million) in debt from venture debt firm Alteria Capital and ICICI Bank that will be used to strengthen its lending business and provide credit to merchants.

Founded by Ashneer Grover and Shashvat Nakrani in 2018, BharatPe offers merchants a single interface for all UPI apps like Paytm, PhonePe, Google Pay, BHIM, Mobikwik, Frecharge and others. It also facilitates loan facility for its merchant partners.

Speaking to PTI, BharatPe co-founder and CEO Ashneer Grover said Rs 90 crore in debt came from Alteria Capital, while the remaining Rs 49

crore was from ICICI Bank. "We have raised funds from ICICI Bank at a competitive interest rate of less than 9 per cent. We are aggressively building our lending vertical and our loan book is currently at Rs 400 crore.

"With this infusion, we can double down on our efforts and we expect the loan book to grow to Rs 700-750 crore by the end of March 2021," he added.

Grover said BharatPe had set a target of disbursing Rs 1,000 crore of loans in 2020-21, of which Rs 800 crore has already been disbursed.

"The latest tranche of debt raised will help further build the lending business and enable credit for millions of businesses, across the length and



breadth of India," Grover said.

Last week, BharatPe raised Rs 60 crore in debt from Innoven Capital. With this, BharatPe has raised a total of Rs 199 crore (USD 28 million) in debt till date. It had said it plans to raise over Rs 5,000 crore in debt funding in the

next two years to build its lending business.

"We have committed ourselves to provide USD 700 million of loans to small merchants and kirana store owners by March 2023 and are hoping to onboard more institutional debt partners in the near future," he said.

Grover added that the company aims to become a digital bank that is the one-stop destination for merchants for all kinds of financial services and this tranche of funds will get things rolling.

Merchants are the top priority for the company and it is committed to solving the credit problem for them, he said.

"The institutional debt raised will help catapult our lending business. We intend to raise

close to USD 700 million of debt capital over the next two years... By March 2023, our aim is to be present in 300 cities and have the lending product available in 200 cities," he added.

Grover said the company has already disbursed loans to more than one lakh merchants and aims to scale this up by 8-10 times and enable credit for a million kirana store owners in 2021.

Currently, serving over 50 lakh merchants across 65 cities, the company has grown business 30 times in 2019 and processed over six crore UPI transactions a month (annualised transaction processed value of over USD 7 billion).

BharatPe has raised close to USD 171 million in equity and debt till date.

'Kerala must use virus as opportunity to reskill non-residents'

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Amidst the return of a massive number of non-resident Keralites to the state following the pandemic, a renowned expert on migration has urged the state to use the calamity as an opportunity to re-skill these returnees/prospective migrants so that it continues to lead the human exports market.

Official data from the state shows that as of January 7, as much as 8.7 lakh NRKs (non-resident Keralites) have returned to the state from overseas, mostly from the Gulf since the first week of May last.

What is more, in a job-starved market like Kerala, a vast majority of them (5.7 lakh) have cited job loss as the sole reason for their return, ringing alarm bells in the government corridors and

among the planners.

More than a fourth of the over 1 crore Indians in the Gulf are from Kerala and of them around 7.5 lakh have returned to the state which heavily depends on their remittances, making it the highest in history since the Gulf boom started in the late 1950s.

The pandemic has forced a whopping 8.7 lakh Keralites to return home from abroad, mostly from the Gulf, since last May when travel began after the first lockdown was lifted, and pertinently a vast majority of them, 5.67 lakh to be precise, cited job loss as the sole reason for their return, show the data from the Norka (Non-Resident Keralites Affairs).

The same data also shows 1,11,151 of the 13,27,330 returned from within the country cited job loss as the reason



for their return. Overall, 21.89 lakh Keralites have returned to the state.

According to Norka, 40 lakh Keralites are living/working abroad and 13.73 lakh elsewhere in the country. The state

The pandemic has forced a whopping 8.7 lakh Keralites to return home from abroad, mostly from the Gulf and pertinently a vast majority of them, 5.67 lakh to be precise, cited job loss as the sole reason for their return

has a resident population of 3.48 crore.

However, S Irudaya Rajan, a renowned expert on international migration, doesn't agree with the official numbers especially on job losses, saying tens of thousands have already returned, some of them even with new jobs. Also, he says the data shows only the number of returnees and do not include those who have gone back.

Rajan, the chair professor at

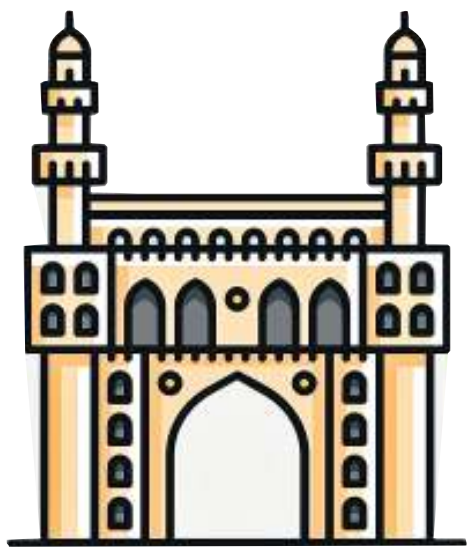
the ministry of overseas Indian affairs' research unit on international migration at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, also says the state should use the pandemic as a great opportunity to reskill/upskill its human talent so that it continues to lead the human export market.

"The good news for all us is that migration is picking up and it will pick up more as the pandemic recedes with the vaccina-

tion progressing. Kerala should think of a new migration policy to help them upskill and reskill so that we can resurrect the migration market again," Rajan told PTI.

"We should not be worry too much on how many have come back, as many are going back or have gone back already. We should instead worry about how to help them better, how to make them more skilled, thus helping better migration later," he added.

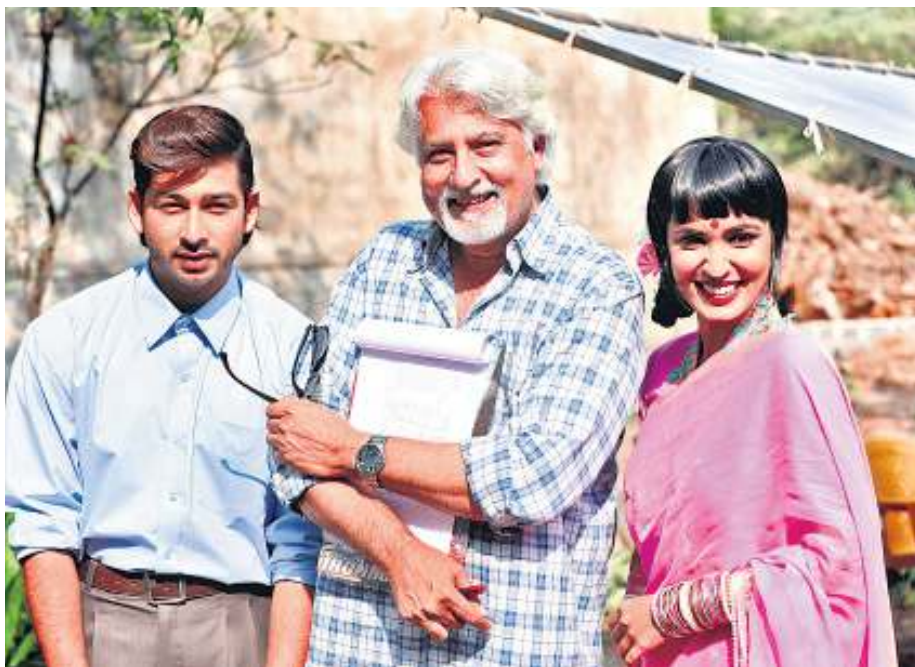
"We should work towards sending our human talent to other countries also but as better skilled," he said, and called up on the state to urgently unveil a policy to ensure that the state has direct flights to key European and US cities and not just to the Gulf as is the case now.



A true-blue Hyderabadi film

There is truly nothing in life that can warm a heart up like good romantic love story and it gives us hope that some true love does exist. You have probably seen many romantic gestures but love isn't just a fairytale but a heartfelt one. Continuing the trend of romantic stories, the director belonging to the royalties Tarun Dhanrajgir is here with a crunchy masala Hyderabad love story called *Bolo Hau*. Shining in the role of a classy romantic protagonist is his real life daughter Jahanvi Dhanrajgir who carries a very settled performance. What makes this love story so heartwarming to see is that despite it being a figment of one's imagination, it's still quite fascinating to watch! And, in these unprecedented times where everything is anyway feeling so daunting and chaotic, *Bolo Hau* comes as a good pill of romance for everyone!

Drowning in the depth of its romance, the lead actress shares a moment of laughter and says, "You are going to see Hyderabad in a way like you have never seen before! The authenticity of the city of Nizams and its various flavours will be an oozing point for the audiences, especially locals. It's going to revive that old-school romance in every teenager and who knows, it turns you into a hopeless romantic once again. A classic rom-com, this tale of love is anything sweeter that you'll find." The renowned actor



It's been a while since the city of Nizams has had a good Hyderabad film. *Bolo Hau* looks like a promising return of *dakhni* entertainment. *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL talks to the cast and crew of the film

and producer from the 90s seems to have taken a liking for the cinematic aspects of direction and looks forward to a successful opening in the

theatres. "Coronavirus halted our release but now when it's finally going to be available in the nearest theatres and I can see the audiences going

back to the cinema halls for many Telugu releases, I am hopeful we'll have a good opening too. There are no A-listers in my movie, yet, I believe new talent should always be given a welcoming hand so that they can prosper too. Life in itself is so full of risks, no matter on what budget, the film made is designed for a theatrical release only. Love stories cannot be compared, what's making it different is the Hyderabad atmosphere in the film. It's about real people falling in love," shares the director.

Nowadays, even horror stories have a pinch of romance in it, and a tale like *Bolo Hau* will help quench



your thirst for romance. Showing love as the only powerful emotion by the actress' father, Jahanvi Dhanrajgir seems to be really excited to watch her father in action! Considering film-making to be a giant umbrella, creatives from all the arenas come together to make a

blockbuster movie, nonetheless, she looks forward to working more as an actress in the entertainment industry. "I managed to create a really special bond with the city of Hyderabad, I am head over heels in love with the city of royals," adds Jahanvi.

Shubhrajyoti heaps praises on team
Madam Chief Minister



Actor Shubhrajyoti Barat, better known as Rati Shankar Shukla in *Mirzapur* Season 1 and the one who played a pivotal role in *Article 15*, will now be seen in *Madam Chief Minister* essaying the role of a leader. It stars Richa Chaddha, Saurabh Shukla and Akshay Oberoi too. On talking about his working experience with his co-actors he shares, "Richa Chaddha is a dear friend whom I like and admire a lot. I have known her from the time she was doing theatre. Apart from that I had worked with her before. So I was quite elated when I learnt that she was going to portray the titular role. Saurabh Shukla sir is again a senior from theatre itself! So it was a great experience all in all. The only actor who I didn't know was Akshay Oberoi who turned out to be a delightful young man. I thought I may feel alienated on the set but nothing of that sort happened." Talking

about how he landed the role, the critically acclaimed actor adds, "*Madam Chief Minister* came to me quite suddenly. I had met Subhash Kapoor ji at a common friend's place. I have always been an admirer of his work. I was introduced to him and he said that he really liked my work in *Mirzapur*. It was a brief meeting. So when I received a call after a few months, I was pleasantly surprised. He narrated the whole script and offered me the role. Obviously, I took it. Apart from the fact that it's a Subhash Kapoor movie, the role itself is one of the most important ones in the story. So a great role in a brilliant story to be directed by a brilliant director. The decision to do it was a no brainer."



The celebration of folk music with an urban touch



Rashmeet Kaur, to find a suitable groom and settle down. Rashmeet Kaur states, "*Bajre Da Sitta* is a very popular Punjabi folk wedding song. Our upbeat take on this iconic classic imbibes a blend of folk and old school hip-hop and we also added our own lyrics which talk about desi style of expression of love. It was an incredibly fun experience putting aq danceable number together and reintroducing a classic to the younger generation with a twist!"

The old song now is being rooted with a modern touch; it will no more be a song of history. For over two months now, borders have become home to lakhs of farmers staging protests and *Bajre Da Sitta* can be considered a song of amity too, according to singer Deep Kalsi. Using the composition of the song, the trio of singers wants to echo the strong union between the farmers because the allure of this folk song is like no other. An urgent call for a compelling creation — it's captivating the listeners with its rhythmic beats. The fretless melodies reverberates a rustic cultural hint that echoes the spirit of celebrations and revitalizes the mind of the listener. Some years ago, no one would have imagined seeing hip-hop singers sing folk songs with the blend of a fashionable and a hardcore rap that belts out loud lyrics changing the scenario of music completely. "While the original composition pivots around the harvest season, our rendition without meddling with the original composition embraces a quirky element that also celebrates love and friendship. This song is also our humble effort of saluting the farmer community who are the spirit and the backbone of this country," says Deep Kalsi

Isn't music an important aspect in everybody's life? Almost every area has its own folk music and the peppy bhangra of Punjab hasn't lost its popularity at all. Instead, with the advent of contemporary music, it has enhanced the folk songs' cultural diversity even more. The style in which it is sung and the way it is perceived, the songs and artists are cherished and celebrated by people across. History has it, inspiration from multiple styles have just resulted in a wealth of new collected works that comment on or reflect upon the present times. A happy marriage between a strong sense of tradition and the creation of originality, *Bajre Da Sitta*, a classic Punjabi folk ceremonial song whose popularity dates back to the 1940's will now have a modern rendition that blends fusion folk and boom rap beats, making it the perfect track to make the wedding squad groove this wedding season. Performed by the uber cool 'kalamkaar' discoveries singer-songwriter Rashmeet Kaur and singer, songwriter, producer Deep Kalsi with hip hop heavyweight Ikka cooking up an intoxicating rap storm, the glitzy rendition serves as a picture-perfect dance-floor offering for the wedding party!

Interestingly, the music video with its festive colorful pop vibe also showcases the debut of popular stand-up comedian Atul Khatri in the role of an anxious father nudging his free-spirited daughter, essayed by



The deep dive

The increasingly unsustainable use of marine resources for economic activities, fishing, boating, tourism etc, has hurt the health of our oceans, seas and coasts. However, the wake of Coronavirus and the lockdown has turned out to be a opportunity to revive the marine ecosystem. To throw light on the varied and vast marine ecology, Sony BBC Earth has brought a show called *Blue Planet Revisited*. The two-part series celebrates marine life from all corners of the globe, exploring the challenges facing the ecosystems and wildlife in two key locations — Australia's Great Barrier Reef and the Bahamas. As the breeding season gets underway, the series focusses on the action following whales and their calves, turtles and their hatchlings and the scientists who know our oceans best. It is packed with insight and spectacle. Incredible shark dives in the Bahamas. The underwater dawn chorus of the Great Barrier Reef, home to 600 different kinds of coral and more than 1500 species of fish.

To build relevance around the show through her expertise, the channel reached out and on-boarded Nayantara Jain, Executive Director of Reef Watch Marine Conservation — one of India's oldest and only organisations committed to protecting India's coasts and oceans. Excerpts:

Can you tell us about your journey as a marine biologist and what led to resource marine conservation India?

I learned how to scuba dive when I was 16. I think a lot of what drove me towards learning diving was the incredible nature documentaries that I've watched before, like the original *Blue Planet* and oceans and all the BBC documentaries, narrated by Sir David Attenborough.

Watching them really inspired me to

learn how to dive. And once I started diving, because I was very passionate about it that I became a scuba diving instructor. After working as a scuba instructor for a few years, I realised how our life on lands were impacting the ocean and especially coral reef ecosystems. That's when I became very passionate about conservation, and that's what led me to study marine biology and then work with Reef Watch.

Tell us about the various initiatives undertaken by Reef Watch Marine Conservation India?

We have two sort of key field placements. One is in the Andaman Islands, and the other on the coast of Karnataka, to the West coast of India. In the Andaman, we work a lot with coral reef restoration and conservation. So, we have various ongoing projects where we are looking at different ways to regrow and repair the damaged reef areas. In another mainland, on the West coast, the work that we're doing is to do with injured and stranded marine megafauna, like sea turtles, dolphins and even whales. We have a lot of them on our ports, even on the mainland, and a lot of them often get stranded on land, either dead or sometimes alive and injured. So, we have a project where we look after the injured or ill megafauna that come up to our coast and study the ones that was wash up dead.

What is your take on the show *Blue Planet Revisited*? Do you think shows like this one help people understand oceans and its life better?

Yes, and this is one of the main reasons I am associated with the channel, to talk about this show, because my

own journey began very much with shows like these. A lot of what I knew before I did my masters on the subject, a lot of what I knew about the ocean and the animals that live in it came from shows like this. Such shows also help dispel a lot of myths and bring things into the right perspective for a lot of people. One of the episodes of the show is about sharks. I believe they are one of the most misunderstood animals on our planet today, so many people are terrified of sharks. I was just telling somebody earlier that when I worked as a full time instructor, the question I was asked most frequently was, 'are there sharks in these waters and are they going to attack me?'

Shows like this and nature documentaries teach people a lot about these animals. They teach them which animals are dangerous and which ones are not. They create a lot of excitement and curiosity, leading to more people exploring these spaces in real life. It's wonderful to have such shows. One of my greatest dreams is to make a documentary about India's coast specifically.

Can you tell us about some of the astonishing encounters in your journey underwater? What keeps you going in this field?

One of my most memorable diving experience ever, was when I got to do something very similar to what they have shown on this show about the sharks in the Bahamas. A few years ago I got to dive in Galapagos Islands, which is another sort of shark sanctuary we have on our planet today. So, I

Marine biologist Nayantara Jain feels that shows like *Blue Planet Revisited* are needed to dispel myths around animals and help people explore marine life. — *PNS*

got to dive with hundreds of different species of sharks. And, I could see these really powerful, magnificent beings swimming around me — I can never forget that moment in my life. So, it was really cool to see something similar like that on a particular episode of the show.

What is the future of our islands and marine world, especially in India?

I've been working as a diver and then as a conservationist for the past 10 years. Over the years, I have seen a lot of damage to our oceans. Areas that boasted of a lot of sharks are completely fished out of it now. I've seen a lot of coral reefs being degraded over the years. There's an increasing amount of litter and plastics on our coastline and waters. It is very concerning, but the silver lining here is that I've seen a surge of young children concerned about the environment. They get in touch with me, wanting to be marine biologists or wanting to come and volunteer with the organisation or know how they can organise a beach clean-up in their city. Indians are coming in to learn how to dive and surf and just interact with the ocean more. This is really encouraging. Right now, the interest of youth in all of this is rising, if more people connect with the ocean and want to preserve it, things can change. We still have coral reefs in the Andaman, have sharks in our ocean, whales in the sea, and sea turtles along the coastline. This is really the time for us to act. If we as a society realise the importance of a healthy ocean and come together we can change.



● Jahnvi



● Ankit



● Adnan Sajid



● Prithi Nigam

SAY HAU TO LOVE

Bolo Hau, an exciting rom-com with a quintessential Hyderabad touch, is now playing on screens across the country. The beautiful Jahnvi Dhanrajgir and Ankit Rath light up the screens with their performances, taking India on a journey through our city. It's bound to be a good one!



● Sameera



● Niharika



● Mohammed Firdaus, Mohammed Iqbal, Parvez, and Imran Ali



● Ahmed Pasha Quadri



● Khan Ather

TIME TO CELEBRATE

Ahmed Pasha Quadri, Khaleeq Ul Rahman, Jabbar Patel and other celebs were spotted at the Valima ceremony of Alhaj Mohammed Firdaus Quadri with the daughter of Shaik Shalam Sahab. Celebs took part in the celebration at SNR Convention Hall in Attapur.



● Khaleeq Ul Rahman



● Kabeer Khan



● Jabbar Patel

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



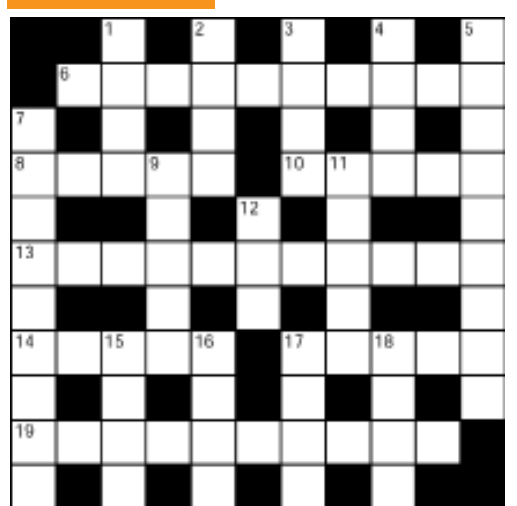
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 6 Transport for someone who cannot walk
- 8 With nothing in it
- 10 The outside ends of something
- 13 Vanished
- 14 Opposite of outer
- 17 The country with Tokyo
- 19 In all places

DOWN

- 1 A large boat
- 2 Extremely
- 3 A throbbing pain
- 4 The sound of an explosion
- 5 The leader of the USA
- 7 Large-lettered words above items in a newspaper

- 9 Annoy or bother someone for fun
- 11 A play
- 12 Secret agent
- 15 Require
- 16 Sunbeams
- 17 A boy's name
- 18 Meat from a pig

SOLUTION:



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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.

Ram finally discovers his competition

Actor Ram, who's *Red* released last week, says that ever since he made his debut 15 years ago with *Devadas*, he has been asked who he was competing against in the industry. "I've always answered such questions with 'I don't have competition with anyone as I live in my own bubble'. But I've now understood that my fans are my competition. From now on, it will be you versus me. Will it be the love you shower on me or the love that I shower on you with my work?" Ram said to a thunderous response from his fans in Visakhapatnam over the weekend. He was participating in the success meet of the film. Ram added that they've made *Red* as a suspense thriller packed with twists and turns but the biggest twist was awaiting them on the release day. "Reactions to the morning show have been mixed. But once families started watching the film from the evening, the talk improved in the favour of the film. The collections, however, are increasing day by day," he noted with a smile.



Newbie Rashi bags a biggie!

Rashi, who is taking baby steps in the industry, has been signed on by UV Concepts for their next, a murder mystery, top-lined by Naveen Chandra. The *Sashi* fame actress has got a role with substance, finds NAGARAJ GOUD

The *Pioneer* was the first to report (Jan 12) that Naveen Chandra is associating with leading production house UV Creations offshoot UN Concepts for a murder mystery, which has already gone to floors. To this end, the latest we hear is that newbie Rashi Singh has been zeroed in as the leading lady, and she has already started shooting for the project. Short filmmaker Rakesh Varma is making his directorial debut with the untitled film. Rashi, who left her job as an air hostess to pursue a career in acting, is thrilled about collaborating with UV for the project, says a source close to the unit. While she has done films opposite Sai Ram Shankar, Aadi (Shashi) and Arvind Krishna so far, this new project, she believes, will help her career more. "It's a performance-oriented role and Rashi is excited about bringing it to life. The nature of



the role cannot be disclosed at this juncture as there is a lot of mystery surrounding it. It is this role that drives the narrative forward with its numerous twists and turns. Naveen Chandra, however, will be seen as a cop," the source adds.

The project has been shot for over a week until now in the outskirts of Hyderabad and in another 25 days, the entire shoot will be wrapped up. Rakesh has written a whacky edge-of-the-seat thriller which revolves around the roles played by Ravi Varma, Ali Reza and Bhargavi. Darshan, son of revered cinematographer Madhu Ambat, is the film's lensman.

Actor Ram Charan, who recovered from COVID-19 last week, on Sunday joined the sets of Koratala Siva's *Acharya*, where he is playing a supporting role. Our Siddha is ready, read Koratala's tweet, welcoming Charan to the film, a socio-political entertainer. The actor's role is shrouded in mystery while some reports indicate that he will be seen as a student leader. He is also jointly producing the film along with Niranjan Reddy.

Pooja wraps up a month-long schedule of *Radhe Shyam*

Actress Pooja Hegde has wrapped up a long schedule for her upcoming multilingual film *Radhe Shyam*, headlined by Prabhas. Pooja posted a picture on her Instagram Stories. In the image, the actress is looking at the camera as she is seen sitting on a backseat of a car. [Schedule wrap on #RadheShyam after a long

30 day schedule... Now home for a fleeting second (airplane emoji)... Hyderabad—Bombay (airplane emoji)," she wrote on the picture. Prabhas will romance actress Pooja Hegde in the film, which, according to a source, will be wrapped up by the end of this month. *Radhe Shyam* is a period romantic-drama helmed by Radha Krishna Kumar. It will see a theatrical release sometime later this year.

Bellamkonda and Mahesh Koneru rally behind Dil Raju



Days after *Krack* Nizam distributor Warangal Sreenu alleged that Dil Raju and Sirish Reddy snatched away the theatres where *Krack* was running successfully to facilitate releases like *Master*, *Red* and *Alludu Adhurs*, producers Bellamkonda Suresh and Mahesh Koneru have come to the defense of Sri Venkateswara Creations. Speaking at an event of *Alludu Adhurs* in Hyderabad over the weekend, Suresh said that if it wasn't for Dil Raju and Sirish, the industry would've run short on producers. "They were instrumental in bringing people to theatres during Sankranti. If it wasn't for them, the distribution system in Nizam would've collapsed long back. Sreenu is speaking without facts. He still owes Hushaaru producer Bekkum Venugopal some money. He hasn't paid GST dues of the film yet. If he has issues, he should meet Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce president Narayandas or knock the doors of exhibitor and distributor sectors," Suresh said, reminding that he shares a 20-year successful association with Raju. Similarly, Koneru pointed out that as the industry is in business revival mode, controversial state-

ments are not the need of the hour. "Issues, any, should be solved personally. Personal remarks should be avoided. I've been associating with Dil Raju and Sirish garu from 118 and they've treated me like their own," he said. Koneru was speaking at a meet celebrating the success of *Master*, whose Telugu dubbing rights he bagged. SVC helped him aid the release. The producer added when he came to know that there are three Telugu films in the fray for Sankranti, his distributors told him that *Master* will get a good number of screens on day one but the second day will witness a drop. "I've accepted it. In Nizam, *Master* got 150-150 theatres on day one. Day one revenue was extraordinary. Theatres on day two have come down to 75- 80 yet the film's box-office was steady. I've got the least number of screens but I'm happy," he informed.

Charan joins *Acharya* shoot



Gnanavel Raja enters theatre business

Popular Tamil producer K Gnanavel Raja, who distributed many of Suriya and Karthi's films into Telugu and also produced Vijay Deverakonda-starrer *NOTA*, has entered into theatre business, with the launch Green Cinemas in Chennai on Sunday. The objective of Green Cinemas is to give the best and clean safety environment to the audience in the new normal. "The two screens are equipped with 4k projection, 3D projection and Atmos sound, with well-maintained spacious rest rooms, canteen and lobby. The parking space too is spacious," read a tweet from the production house. Actors Karthi and Arya extended their best wishes to Raja on his new endeavour.



NO STOPPING INDIAN NEWCOMERS

Thakur, Sundar 7th-wicket stand ensure India aren't out of Brisbane Test

4th Test, Day 4

Live from 5:00am IST

SONY TEN 1, 3 & SIX

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur punched above their weight with splendid half-centuries to keep Australia at bay and India bullish after an engrossing third day's play in the series-deciding fourth Test here on Sunday.

Australia's openers — David Warner (20) and Marcus Harris (1) — saw out six overs, and extended the home team's lead to 54 by stumps after India's first innings ended at 336.

However, Australia's lead could have been much more had it not been for a delightful 123-run partnership for the seventh wicket between Washington (62) and Shardul (67), who defied and then attacked the rival bowling attack with gusto.

Pacer Josh Hazlewood finished with a well-deserved 5/57 for Australia, a reward for consistently bowling with an impeccable line and length at a brisk pace.

Symbolising the courage shown by the visitors, now rendered almost second-string owing to a plethora of injuries suffered by their top players through the four-match series, Washington and Shardul mixed caution with aggression to bail their team out of a precarious 186 for six.

First, they turned unlikely saviours after three soft dismissals pushed India on the back foot, and in the final session, the two opened up and went after the world-class Australian attack.

If his nine fours were not enough, Shardul bludgeoned off-spinner Nathan Lyon, holder of 397 wickets, for a maximum over long-on to reach his maiden Test fifty in style in only his second match.

In fact, Shardul opened his



account with a hooked six off the world's number one bowler, Pat Cummins.

Playing in his first Test, Washington too soon got to his maiden fifty in the traditional format while finding the fence seven times and clearing it once.

He became the first visiting cricketer in Australia in 74 years

to grab three wickets and smash a half-century on debut. The one before him was also an Indian, Dattu Phadkar, who made 51 while batting at No 8 and took three wickets during a 1947/48 tour.

Earlier, Washington and Shardul did not let Australia run away with the game after

Hazlewood sliced through India's middle-order with the wickets of Mayank Agarwal (38) and Rishabh Pant (23) at the start of the second session.

At tea break, India trailed Australia's first-innings total of 369 by 116 runs at the Gabba.

This was largely due to the fight put up by Washington

Winning over Aussie crowd was Shardul's inspiration

PTI ■ BRISBANE

When Shardul Thakur stepped out to bat on Sunday, rescuing India from a precarious 186/6 was not the only target on his mind as he was also keen to impress the Australian crowd after being told how "rewarding" it would feel by coach Ravi Shastri.

India were staring down the barrel at 186 for six on the third day of the fourth Test but Thakur (67) joined hands with debutant Washington Sundar (62) for a combative 123-run seventh wicket stand which helped his team cut down Australia's first innings lead to just 33 runs.

"When I walked in, the situation was difficult I would not deny that. The crowd was cheering for Australians bowlers. But I remembered our coach Ravi Shastri saying right at the start of the One-day series that 'if you

perform in this country, you will be rewarded'" Thakur talked about the inspiration behind the unfazed manner with which he batted.

"People will love you for your performances and that one thing was also on my mind that people are going love me. Batting at number eight, Thakur impressed with his stroke-play, his drives coming straight out of coaching manuals.

"Eventually at the end of the day it would help my team, that was the biggest positive. These two things were on my mind. Crowd would make noise, but If I bat well, the same crowd will cheer for me," Thakur said at a virtual post-play press conference.

Cheered, he definitely was by not just the crowd but also his teammates, who gave him a standing ovation on his way back to the dressing room.

and Shardul who played their strokes without worrying about the end result, frustrating the high-quality Australian attack with their carefree approach.

However, India were in a spot of bother before their counter-attacking act.

If the visitors lost the big wicket of skipper Ajinkya Rahane (37) to a poor shot at the stroke of lunch, they were dealt another blow right after the break when the persevering Hazlewood lured Agarwal into a loose drive for Steve Smith to complete a catch at second slip on the rebound.

More trouble was in store for India as Pant failed to get past Cameron Green, who pulled off a sharp reflex catch at gully, after the batsman tried to work Hazlewood through that region.

Making a successful comeback after '10-ball' debut is dream come true moment: Shardul

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India fast bowler Shardul Thakur had a nightmare of a Test debut in 2018 as he got injured after bowling just 10 balls but on Sunday said his dream came true after doing well with both bat and ball in the ongoing fourth Test against Australia here.

Shardul took three wickets with the ball in Australia's first innings and then top-scored for India with a 67 as he got involved with Washington Sundar (62) in a fine rear-guard fightback to keep India in contention.

"It was not easy to bowl those 10 balls and get injured. I went back and grinded out in domestic cricket and whatever opportunities I got," Shardul said in an interview taken by senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, posted on *bcci.Tv*.

"Waiting for two years to play Test cricket again and getting the wicket (of Marcus Harris) in the very first ball, it is a dream come true. I am happy to contribute to the team's cause."

In October 2018, Shardul was forced to leave the field due to a groin strain after bowling just 10 deliveries on the first day of the second Test against the West Indies in Hyderabad.

But on Sunday, he and Washington rescued India from conceding a huge lead to Australia. After India were reduced to 186 for 6 in reply to the hosts' 369, the duo stitched 123 runs for the seventh wicket and defied the Australians for 36 overs.

In fact, Shardul began his innings with a six and also got to his half-century by hitting a stunning six.

Asked about it, he said, "At that point of time I was not looking to hit a six but it was more of a reaction. I saw the ball and played it instinctively. It came out well for me. I am happy about it"



On the cover drives he hit, Shardul said, "Honestly, I have not done practice for that but it was one of the days when I was batting really well. I did not want to miss any opportunity and any loose ball. I felt like putting it away. That is it"

Washington said Shardul was trying to hit a six off Nathan Lyon and he was not surprised when his batting partner reached to his 50 with a six.

For Washington, it was also a memorable debut as he got his first Test wicket in the form of Steven Smith and then got a half century.

Asked about it by Ashwin, Washington said, "Test cricket is the toughest format. I am very happy to start off in this fashion. God's grace and a lot of support from the family"

Another debutant, pacer T Natarajan said he did not try too much for his three wickets in Australia's first innings.

"I did not try too much. I came around the wicket because the plan of the team was that"

Eng need 36 runs to win 1st Test

AFP ■ GALLE

Sri Lanka rattled England with three quick wickets late on the fourth day of the first Test in Galle on Sunday, but the visitors remained favourites to win the match with just 36 more runs needed and seven wickets in hand.

England were expected to comfortably close in on a victory after Sri Lanka finished with 359 in their second innings, leaving visitors needing 74 to win.

But Sri Lanka struck early, with Dom Sibley (2) and Zak Crawley (8) falling to left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya. Captain Joe Root was run-out for one after a mix-up with Jonny Bairstow.

Bairstow and Dan Lawrence, who was making his debut, took a nervous England to 38-3 as bad light brought an early end to proceedings at Galle International Stadium.

Earlier, England's spinners had claimed three key wickets to tighten the noose around the hosts in their second innings.

Off-spinner Dom Bess removed Dinesh Chandimal (20) and Niroshan Dickwella (29) while left-arm Jack Leach sent back Dasun Shanaka for



four.

Sri Lanka were bundled out for 135 runs in their first innings. Angelo Mathews struck 71 after hitting his 36th half century in Tests to hold fort at one end after opener Lahiru Thirimanne made 111 to steady the innings.

This was Thirimanne's second hundred of his Test career and his first in seven years.

Mathews was batting on 51 with Wanindu Hasaranga (3) at the break.

England, who made 421 in

their first innings on the back of a fine double century by Root, struck in the first over after lunch, with Bess having Chandimal caught at first slip.

Mathews stitched a 48-run partnership with Dickwella before the wicketkeeper-batsman nicked one behind off Bess. England took a review against Mathews after the on-field umpire ruled not out to an lbw appeal from Bess. However, replays showed the ball was missing the stumps.

Axelsen, Marin win Thai titles

AFP ■ BANGKOK

Reigning Olympic champion RCarolina Marin bolstered her chances of defending in Tokyo later this year after daiming the Thailand Open in Bangkok on Sunday over top seed Tai Tzu-ying.

Despite having a cold, fourth seed Viktor Axelsen was electric in the men's final against Hong Kong's Angus Long, ranked eighth, claiming the title in straight sets.

Spaniard Marin, 27, a former world number one, was an imposing force with razor-sharp smashes, clever net work and an unmatched level of aggression and agility.

She screamed in delight as she won match point in the second-set after steam-rolling her 26-year-old opponent from Taiwan 21-9, 21-16 in 42 minutes.

The first non-Asian women's player to win an Olympic badminton Gold, Marin has faced an uphill battle to recover from a January 2019 knee injury in time to defend her crown in Tokyo.



Axelsen, meanwhile, took just 44 minutes to triumph 21-14, 21-14 over Long.

Indonesia's Greysia Polii and Apriyani Rahayu were too good for Thailand's Jongkolphan Kittharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai in the women's doubles final, prevailing 21-15, 21-12. In the mixed doubles, top-seeded Thais Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Sapsiree Taerattanachai beat Indonesia's Praveen Jordan and Melati Daeva Oktavianti 21-3, 20-22, 21-18.

In the men's doubles Taiwan's Lee Yang and Wang Chi-Lin beat Malaysia's Goh V Shem and Tan Wee Kiong 16-21, 23-21, 19-21.

We faltered in execution: Hazlewood

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia speedster Josh Hazlewood on Sunday credited Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur for taking India to a safe position with their century stand but rued the execution of home team bowlers in finishing off the visitors tail on the third day of the series-deciding fourth Test here.

"Yes, it is obviously a crucial partnership (between Shardul and Washington), but then we had them. I think, 6/200 around that mark, so we thought we (were) on top there but to be fair the guys batted really well," Hazlewood, who returned with figures of 5 for 57, said at the virtual post-day press conference.

"We didn't probably execute well as we could have in that period but (we) created a few little half chances. On any other day, hopefully we take those, but credit to those two guys (Shardul and Washington). They batted beautifully and I think it just shows the wicket is pretty good."

Hazlewood conceded that Australia let a few moments slip



in the day, which could have eventually made the difference.

"I thought the guys did bowl really well again and everyone else backed us up. Just let a few moments slipped, I think, and also a few a half chances there. If we could have grabbed them, it could have made a little difference," the 30-year-old said.

Hazlewood said the match is at present evenly-poised and

a call on declaration in their second innings will be made taking into consideration all factors, including the weather.

"I think, the way it is set up, it is probably going to be both. Probably depends (on) who bats, if Davy (David Warner) bats a long time, things happen pretty quickly as we know. I think it will be pretty similar to maybe Sydney, three-three and half sessions, maybe four sessions," he said.

Napoli hit Fiorentina for 6

AFP ■ NAPLES

Lorenzo Insigne scored twice and set up another as Napoli thumped Fiorentina 6-0 on Sunday to move into third in Serie A.

Napoli got back to winning ways in their newly-named Diego Armando Maradona Stadium after falling to promoted Spezia in their last home match.

Insigne got the first goal after just five minutes following good work from Hirving Lozano and Andrea Petagna.

Fiorentina missed three chances to equalise, twice through Cristiano Biraghi, with Napoli keeper David Ospina denying Franck Ribery before the hosts notched three goals in the last nine minutes of the first half.

Petagna found Diego Demme to finish off, with Insigne then bursting through to set up Lozano for the third and Piotr Zielinski adding a fourth before the



break.

Fiorentina could find no way past Kalidou Koulibaly and the Napoli defence.

Napoli were awarded a penalty after Gaetano Castrovilli fouled Tiemoué Bakayoko. Insigne converted from the spot for his ninth goal this season.

Substitute Matteo Politano completed the rout with a minute to go as Napoli got a major boost before next week's Coppa Italia against Juventus.

Napoli move ahead of Roma, who lost 3-0 to Lazio on

Milan lose Hernandez, Calhanoglu

Milan: Serie A leaders AC Milan will be without French defender Theo Hernandez and Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu for Monday's game in Cagliari after both returned positive tests for Covid-19, the club announced on Sunday.

AC Milan are already missing Croatian striker Ante Rebic

and Bosnian midfielder Rade Krunic, who have not featured since their positive tests on January 6.

It marks a new setback for Pioli, who is also without Ismael Bennacer, Alexis Saelemaekers and Matteo Gabbia, who are all injured, while striker Rafael Leao is suspended. AFP

Spurs pile misery on Blades

AFP ■ SHEFFIELD

Tottenham climbed back into the Premier League title race as Tanguy Ndombele's stunning strike sealed a 3-1 win against Sheffield United on Sunday.

Jose Mourinho's side took an early lead through a rare goal from Ivory Coast defender Serge Aurier.

Harry Kane's 19th goal of the season — the England captain's fourth in his last six games — increased Spurs' advantage before half-time.

David McGoldrick got one back for United in the second half, but Ndombele's sublime lob wrapped up the points at Bramall Lane.

The wonder-goal was the latest sign of Ndombele turning his Tottenham career around.

The 24-year-old's fine form is a stark contrast to his



struggles in his first season after arriving from Lyon, with Mourinho admitting the player had to change his mindset to get back on track.

Tottenham are on a seven-match unbeaten run in all competitions after winning at Bramall Lane for the first time since 1975.

With a home game against champions Liverpool looming next in the league on January 28, Tottenham still have a chance to mount a serious title challenge.

They sit fourth in the table, just three points behind leaders Manchester United, who were due to play third placed Liverpool later.

Meanwhile, after securing their first league win this season against Newcastle in mid-week, the bottom of the table Blades remain 11 points from safety after their 16th defeat of the campaign.

Mourinho's men made the perfect start as Steven Bergwijn's fierce effort was superbly tipped over by Aaron Ramsdale.

From the resulting corner, Aurier rose highest to meet Son Heung-min's delivery with a powerful header past Ramsdale to give Tottenham a fifth minute lead.

Tottenham have scored five goals in the opening five minutes of Premier League games this season, more than any other team.

Son nearly got on the scoresheet himself moments later when the South Korea forward fired against the post from Kane's pass.

With Tottenham on top, it was half an hour before Hugo Lloris had to make a save as he kept out Oliver Burke's shot.

Lloris had to save again from John Fleck's effort, but Kane doubled Tottenham's lead in the 40th minute.

Taking Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's pass in stride and shrugging off Chris Basham's

challenge, Kane drilled a superb low strike past Ramsdale from 20 yards.

Kane's sixth goal from outside the area was more than anyone in the Premier League since the start of last season.

He threatened to add another long-range screamer to that list with a thunderous strike tipped over by Ramsdale early in the second half.

McGoldrick gave the Blades an unexpected lifeline when he got above Ben Davies to head home from Fleck's cross in the 59th minute.

Tottenham's habit of sitting back to defend those leads proved costly when they conceded late equalisers against Fulham, Wolves and Crystal Palace in recent weeks.

But Ndombele crushed any hopes of a United comeback in the 62nd minute.