

**OPINION 8**  
THE USUAL  
SUSPECTS**WORLD 11**  
PANDEMIC, SURGING FOOD PRICES  
LEAVE MANY IN ASIA HUNGRY: UN**SPORT 14**  
WE WERE SCARED  
TO LOSE: CLARKE

LUCKNOW, THURSDAY JANUARY 21, 2021; PAGES 14 ₹3



# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



WANT TO ACT  
& GET BETTER:  
KUNAAL  
12 VIVACITY

# Govt offers to suspend farm laws for 18 months

Centre promises to form joint body to look into demands; unwilling to accept proposal, farmer leaders to revert after internal consultation; next talk on Jan 22

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a major climb down, the Centre has proposed that the three controversial farm laws will be kept in abeyance for a minimum of 18 months and it will form a joint committee to look into other pending demands of the agitating farmers, including repeal and legal guarantee to minimum support price (MSP).

The Government proposed these initiatives in the 10th meeting between the Government and agitating farmers. But farmer leaders did not immediately accept the proposal and said they will revert after their internal consultation on Thursday.

The farmers wanted a complete withdrawal of the laws as a mere suspension of the laws for some period of time will not bring about any change, farmer leaders said on Wednesday after the 10th round of talks concluded. The next round of meetings will be held on January 22.

After the meeting which lasted for five hours, including two breaks, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the Government has proposed to suspend the implementation of the three laws for 1.5 years, during which period a joint committee of representatives from the Government and farmers' sides



Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar, along with Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Minister of State Som Prakash, addresses the media after the 10th round of meeting with farmer leaders on new farm laws at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi on Wednesday

PTI

can discuss all issues related to the farmers' agitation so that an appropriate solution can be arrived at and those protesting on Delhi borders in extremely cold weather return to their homes.

During the talks the farmers' unions said they will discuss the Government's proposal in detail and will come for dialogue on January 22.

The Minister said the talks were held in a cordial atmosphere despite some "naram-garam" moments (softening and hardening of the stand) and farmers remained adamant on their demand for the repeal of the laws. "I feel that talks are progressing in the right direction and there is a possibility of finding a resolution on January 22," Tomar said.

After the meeting, Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan said, "The Government proposed to suspend the farm laws for one and a half years. We rejected the proposal but since it has come from the Government, we will meet tomorrow and deliberate over it."

Continued on Page 11

## SC irked at bias charge against panel members

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed strong displeasure over the aspersions cast by some farmers' unions on members of the court-appointed committee to resolve the impasse over new farm laws, saying no adjudicating authority has been given to the panel of experts who are "brilliant minds in the field of agriculture".

The top court said that it has serious reservations that committee members were called names and branded, which has "become a cultural

## Court seeks Govt's response on demand for panel reconstitution

thing now."

A bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde said, "You malign people according to public opinion. I am very disappointed and sorry to see the kind opinion which has been appearing in this press" and questioned, "How can you malign them just because they have expressed some views in the past?"

The bench also comprising Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian issued

notice and sought response from Centre in two weeks on a separate plea of "Kisan Mahapanchayat", a farmers' body from Rajasthan, seeking removal of three remaining members of the apex-court appointed panel and the replacement of Bhopinder Singh Mann, who had recused himself from the panel.

Taking note of submissions of a lawyer that opinions on the panel members have been formed on the basis of



media reports about their pro-farm laws views, the bench said, "You people unnecessarily cast aspersions. Can the people expressing their views in some other context, be debarred from the committee?"

Continued on Page 11

## Farmer kills self at Tikri border

New Delhi: A farmer who allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at the Tikri border died during treatment at a hospital here on Wednesday, police said.

The deceased has been identified as Jai Bhagwan Rana (42), a resident of Pakasma village in Rohtak district of Haryana. He had consumed Sulphas tablets at the farmers' protest site at Tikri on Tuesday, they said. In a purported suicide note, Rana said he was a small farmer and many peasants have taken to the streets to protest against the farm laws.

## Farmers reject police request to hold tractor march on KMP e-way

Parley again today as unions adamant on rally on Delhi's Outer Ring Road on R-Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has suggested farmers' unions to hold their proposed "Tractor rally" on January 26 on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway, instead of Delhi's

busy Outer Ring Road.

However, farmers did not agree to the suggestion. Sources said a meeting will be held again on Thursday with farmers regarding the routes for their tractor rally.

On Wednesday, senior police officials of the Delhi Police and its counterparts Haryana and Uttar Pradesh police officials met at Vigyan Bhawan to discuss the route and arrangements of the proposed rally on Republic Day. According to sources, SS

Yadav, the Joint Commissioner of Police, Northern Range coordinated the meeting from the Delhi Police with Depender Pathak, Special CP, Intelligence and Sanjay Singh, Special CP, Law and order.

"The farmers unions were suggested by the police officers to take out their rally on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway, but they did not agree. A meeting will be held on Thursday again to dig out a solution," said the sources.

Continued on Page 11

## Current jabs no panacea for future Covid strains: Study

Some coronaviruses may evolve to escape recognition by immune system

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Just when the newly-developed vaccines against Covid-19 had given some hopes to the world battling the pandemic, a new study pointed out that current vaccines may not work against future strain of the virus.

It also said that some coronaviruses — the family of viruses which includes the one causing Covid-19 — can evolve to escape recognition by the host immune system.

The study, published in the journal eLife, noted that if the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 which causes Covid-19 evolves in the same way as other pathogens, current vaccines against the virus may become outdated, requiring new ones to be made to match future strains.

"Some coronaviruses are known to reinfect humans, but it is not clear to what extent, this is due to our immune memory fading or antigenic

drift," said first author of the study Kathryn Kistler from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in the US.

Currently, at least 8 countries, including India, have begun or granted approval for vaccinating their people against the virus.

"We wanted to investigate whether there is any evidence of coronaviruses related to SARS-CoV-2 evolving to evade our immune responses," Kistler said.

When a person is infected by a virus, or vaccinated against it, cells part of their body's immune system produce antibodies that can recognise and bind to unique proteins on the virus' surface known as antigens.

In order to provide immunity against the virus, the immune system relies on being able to "remember" the antigens that relate to a specific virus, the scientists explained.

However, they said in some viruses, such as the seasonal flu, the antigens are likely to change and evolve in a process called antigenic drift, and the immune system may no longer respond to reinfection.

In the current study, the scientists looked at the four sea-

sonal human coronaviruses (HCoV) which are related to SARS-CoV-2 but typically cause milder symptoms, such as the common cold.

HCoVs, the scientists said, have been circulating in the human population for 20-60 years, meaning their antigens may have faced pressure to evolve against the human immune system.

Continued on Page 11



A medic vaccinates a health worker with Covishield vaccine during a countrywide inoculation drive against Covid-19 at Thane Civil Hospital on Wednesday

PTI

## Vaccination drive fails to gain momentum, Govt concerned

Only 7.86L healthcare staff vaccinated till 5th day of jab drive

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The anti-Covid-19 vaccination drive has failed to pick up the expected pace even after the fifth day when just 1,12,007 healthcare workers

received the jab on Wednesday.

A total 7.86 lakh healthcare workers have been vaccinated since January 16 when the anti-Covid jab programme was launched with much fanfare in the country. The Government fears that with such a pace, it will take years to inoculate an estimated 3 crore healthcare and frontline workers that it plans to cover in the first phase.

"On Wednesday, 1,12,007 beneficiaries were vaccinated till 6 pm across 20 States and Union Territories," said Additional Secretary Manohar Agnani at a press conference here. He, however, said that the final report for the day will be compiled by late in the night.

Ten cases of adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) — four in Delhi, two in Karnataka, and one each in Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and West Bengal — have required hospitalisation so far, Agnani said.

"Three people were hospitalised after vaccination in Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. All of them have been discharged. Four beneficiaries in Delhi were hospitalised after vaccination. Among them, one is under observation at Rajiv Gandhi Hospital, while three have been discharged. In Karnataka, one was discharged and one is under observation and in West Bengal, one is under observation," said the official.

"There has been no case of serious/severe adverse event attributable to Covid-19 vaccination till date," the official added.

Continued on Page 11

## MA appears, silent on vanishing act

His disappearance stirred speculation whether China's symbol of tech boom had been detained

AP ■ BEIJING

China's highest-profile entrepreneur, Jack Ma, appeared on Wednesday in an online video, ending a 2 1/2-month absence from public view that prompted speculation about the future of the e-commerce billionaire and his Alibaba Group.

In the 50-second video, Ma congratulated teachers supported by his foundation and made no mention of his disappearance or official efforts to tighten control over Alibaba and other internet companies over the past six months. The video appeared on Chinese business news and other websites.

The normally voluble Ma disappeared from public view after he irked regulators by criticising them in an October 24 speech at a Shanghai conference. Days later, regulators suspended the planned multi-



billion-dollar stock market debut of Ant Group, a financial platform that grew out of Alibaba's payments service, Alipay.

That prompted speculation online about whether the 56-year-old Ma, China's biggest global business celebrity and a symbol of its tech boom, had been detained or might face legal trouble. Alibaba and the government haven't responded to questions about him.

The Jack Ma Foundation said in a statement on Wednesday: "Jack Ma participated in the online ceremony of the annual Rural Teacher Initiative event on January 20." The foundation and Alibaba didn't respond to questions about Ma's status and when his next public event might be.

Continued on Page 11

## CAPSULE

### SC REJECTS PETITIONS TO REVIEW AADHAAR ORDER

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has dismissed pleas seeking review of its 2018 verdict which had upheld the Aadhaar scheme as constitutionally valid but struck down some of its provisions, including its linking with bank accounts, mobile phones and school admissions.

### TIGER TRIGGERS PANIC IN SHAHJAHANPUR VILLAGE

Shahjahanpur: The presence of a tiger and its cubs, seen in CCTV camera footage, in a village here triggered a panic among locals.

### 'TANDAV' SCENES CUT, BUT TROUBLE CONTINUES

Mumbai: At least two scenes were removed from the controversial web series "Tandav", which found itself in more trouble on Wednesday with an FIR against its makers, in Madhya Pradesh, and threats of another in Maharashtra.

# 'Democracy has prevailed', Biden lays out vision to heal US

## To sign Paris Climate, reversing the Muslim ban, among 15 orders

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Democracy has prevailed," newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday in his maiden speech as he called on Americans "to defend the truth and defeat the lies".

Speaking shortly after taking oath as the 46th President of the United States, 78-year-old Biden also pledged to repair America's global alliances, which suffered during his predecessor Donald Trump's four-year regime.

"This is America's day... Democracy has prevailed," Biden said, apparently referring to Trump's efforts to deny him victory in the November 3

election won by him.

"With unity we can do great things," he said referring to the challenges ahead of him from fighting the coronavirus to addressing racial injustice.

"Unity is the path forward," he asserted, laying out his vision to defeat the pandemic, build back better, and unify and heal the nation.

Hours after being sworn in as the 46th US president, Biden would sign 15 executive orders — including rejoining the Paris climate agreement, a 100-day mask mandate and reversing the Muslim ban — undoing some of the major policies of his predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden's first presidential actions would also include sending a comprehensive bill on immigration to the Congress, incoming White House officials said. The immigration bill proposes a eight-year pathway to illegal immi-

grants and removing the per country cap for employment-based green cards, a move that would benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US, whose current wait period for legal permanent residency runs into several decades.

Biden asserted that he will be the president for all Americans, all those who voted for him and those who did not vote for him.

In his speech that lasted for 21 minutes, Biden praised Americans for rising to the challenge and reclaiming democracy. He mentioned the attempt to undo it at that exact location two weeks ago, and renewed his campaign goals of overcoming the pandemic, bringing racial justice and fighting climate change.

Biden also criticised those who have stoked anger and division, and asked those who

opposed him to "hear me out."

He called out those who lie for political power and profit. "There is truth, and there are lies," he added.

In a message to the international community, Biden said that he would rebuild the alliances frayed over the past four years. "We can make America once again the leading force of good in the world."

## Trump skips Biden's inauguration ceremony

Washington: Donald Trump on Wednesday skipped his successor Joe Biden's inauguration and exited the White House for the last time as the US President to board a flight to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, which will be his permanent home after he failed to win his re-election bid.



President Joe Biden, his wife Jill Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff arrive at the steps of the US Capitol for the start of the official inauguration ceremonies in Washington on Wednesday

AP







# CM: Prepare database of frontline workers for next vaccination phase

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Expressing satisfaction over the more than 97 per cent COVID-19 recovery rate in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to keep the arrangements up to date for prevention and treatment of this dreaded disease. He said that full care should be taken at every level regarding the coronavirus pandemic and cautioned that even a little carelessness in this regard could prove to be a disaster.

The chief minister was reviewing the unlock system at a high-level meeting convened at his official residence in the state capital on Wednesday. He said that at present the COVID-19 vaccination campaign was underway in the state. Instructing officials to promptly prepare a database of the frontline workers for the upcoming phase of the vaccination campaign, he said that every action of the vaccination campaign should be in accordance with the guidelines and standards set by the Government of India.

Asking the authorities to maintain effective arrangements for treatment of COVID-19, he also said that adequate availability of essential medicines, medical equipment, backup of oxygen should be ensured in all Covid hospitals. "Keeping in mind the important contribution of testing in breaking the chain of coronavirus infection, the testing work should be done to full capacity in the state," he said.

Yogi said it should also be ensured that contact tracing and surveillance systems operated effectively, and stressed on creating more awareness amongst the people about the pandemic and ways to keep themselves safe and healthy.

## 510 vaccinators undergo training

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As many as 510 vaccinators were trained in screening of beneficiaries for Covaxin in addition to duties such as feeding on Cowin app and their roles and responsibilities for the vaccination drive on January 22. The training was organised at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan on Wednesday.

District immunisation officer MK Singh said that Covaxin is being sent to three out of a total of 35 vaccination centres, including Lok Bandhu Hospital, Civil Hospital and Rani Laxmi Bai Hospital. The remaining centres will receive Covishield.

Regarding the vaccination taking more time at these centres, with beneficiaries being briefed about the Covaxin factsheet, he said the vaccination time would be extended from 5 pm to 7 pm.

On a large number of people ruled out because of the various do's and don'ts for Covaxin, Singh said: "There are very few people who have allergies and apart from that, there are many other places in the country where Covaxin shots have already been given to people."

Nodal officer for Covid immunisation at Lok Bandhu Hospital Dr Arun Tewari, who also took part in the training, said they have been asked to set up a separate help desk where a format would be filled by two doctors regarding

screening of the beneficiaries for Covaxin.

"Lactating mothers, pregnant women and any person below 18 years cannot be given the vaccine under any conditions. As far as relative contraindications are concerned, people who have definite history of allergy to drugs, food items or allergy to some other medicine, Covaxin should either not be used at all or with some precautions. "Besides, if people are taking immunosuppressants, they should also not be given this vaccine," he said. He added that the format would be filled by the doctors and if the physician gave the green signal, people would be administered the vaccine. There were two sessions planned at the hospital and 200 health workers will be vaccinated. "Initially, there was hesitancy amongst health workers but when they saw that there was no adverse effects after the first vaccination, got ready for the jobs."

A senior health official said they have no information regarding whether the beneficiaries would have to sign consent forms for Covaxin. The beneficiaries will be briefed on the diseases mentioned in the advisory of Bharat Biotech, he said. Regarding any beneficiary refusing to have Covaxin, he said it was totally their choice.

Nodal officer for Covid immunisation at KGMU Dr Nishant Verma said the vaci-

nation would take place at 7 session sites. "A total of 10,000 health workers have to be vaccinated at KGMU but on January 22, only 700 will be vaccinated. Those who have already been vaccinated on January 16 will be vaccinated on February 15," he added.

Meanwhile, District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash carried inspected a land in Rehmankhara (Maliabad) for the proposed Institute of Virology. For the construction of this institute, land has been identified in three villages — Habibpur, Dugauli and Selmau in Maliabad.

Meanwhile, in continuation with the declining trend, 70 persons tested positive for coronavirus in Lucknow on Wednesday while 159 patients recovered. The death toll stands at 1,157 while there are 1,858 active cases in the district. The fresh cases included 12 from Hazratganj, eight from Gomtinagar, six from Chowk and five from Thakurganj.

In the state, 404 persons tested positive, including 11 in Kanpur, 17 in Ghaziabad, 29 in Gautam Buddh Nagar, 29 in Varanasi and 24 in Meerut, taking the UP tally to 5,97,628. There were eight deaths in the state, including one each in Varanasi, Meerut, Ayodhya, Shahjahanpur, Rampur, Chandauli, Unnao & Auraiya, taking the toll to 8,591. Besides, 682 patients recovered, taking the recovery figures to 5,81,164.

Uttar Pradesh had become the most e-consultancy providing state in the country. Through the e-Sanjeevani app in the state, online medical consultation has been received by 4.16 lakh people, which is the highest in the country.

## Former Guv of Arunachal Pradesh passes away



Congress leader PL Punia paying floral tributes to the mortal remains of former Arunachal Pradesh Governor Mata Prasad at Baikunth Dham in Lucknow on Wednesday

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Former Arunachal Pradesh Governor and senior Congress leader Mata Prasad died at SGPGI following a multi-organ failure, an official said on Wednesday. The 95-year-old leader was admitted to the hospital late on Tuesday night and breathed his last around midnight, a statement issued by Sanjay Gandhi Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences said.

He was admitted in a serious condition and was put on life support system but could not be saved despite all efforts,

the statement read. SGPGI director Dr RK Dhiman said Prasad died following a multi-organ failure. Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel condoled the death of Mata Prasad. Congress spokesman Brijendra Kumar Singh said Mata Prasad was a native of Machhlishahar in Jaunpur district and was party MLA from Shahganj (reserved) seat for five terms (1957 to 1974) and a member of the Legislative Council from 1980 to 1992. He was a minister in the ND Tiwari-led government between 1988 and 89. He was Governor of Arunachal

Pradesh from October 1993 to May 1999, the spokesman said. UPCC president Ajay Kumar Lallu extended his condolences on the demise of Mata Prasad and prayed for peace to the departed soul. Singh said that a condolence meeting was also held at the party headquarters and a two-minute silence was observed as a mark of respect.

Congress leader Dinesh Singh paid floral tributes to the dead leader on behalf of state party president Lallu at the Bhaisakund ground, where former MP PL Punia was present among others.

## Ornaments worth ₹2 lakh stolen from jewellery shop

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Thieves made off with ornaments worth Rs 2 lakh from a jeweller's shop in Chhatta Meel locality in Madaon some time on Tuesday night.

As per reports, jeweller Vikas Soni of Bharat Nagar closed the shop on Tuesday. On Wednesday morning, neighbouring shop-owners informed him about the theft. He reached the scene, only to find ornaments stolen. He said the thieves entered the shop by dismantling the tin shed.



Meanwhile, three persons were arrested on the charges of stealing household items and a scooter from a house in Sarojininar. Police recovered the stolen goods, including the scooter and 2 LED TVs. The accused were identified as Anurag Gautam, Suraj Gautam (both of Banthra) and Sani Kumar of Sarojininar.

In another case, a man, who was running away after stealing a mobile phone and purse from a car in Chowk on Wednesday, was nabbed by police with the help of commuters. However, his aide managed to flee the scene. The accused was identified as Imran of Sitapur. As per reports, complainant Aftab Alam of Sarfarazganj in Thakurganj was going to a hospital in the area by his car. As he slowed down his car for some work, two men tapped the windshield. "As I stopped the car, the man on the left picked up my mobile and a Rs-500 note from the dashboard, and both started running away. I hurriedly got down from the car and gave them a chase while raising an alarm," he said.

With the help of some commuters and policemen present near Charak Hospital, one of them was nabbed. However, before that, he handed the mobile to his aide who managed to flee the scene.

## Temple priest done to death in BKT

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A priest was killed and goods were looted from his shanty inside a temple premises in Bakshi-Ka-Talab police station area some time on Tuesday night. The incident came to light on Wednesday morning.

As per reports, Fakire Das Baba (85), who was a priest of Lord Shiv Temple in Shivpuri in the area, was found dead by a shopkeeper, Lalla of Kathwara village. Lalla reached the shop close to the shanty of the priest around 9 am and gave a call to him, but got no response. He went inside and found the priest unresponsive and covered by a quilt. He pulled the quilt and found the priest lying in a pool of blood. Lalla called the gram pradhan, Santosh, who later informed the police.

The police recovered two blood-stained axes and other sharp-edged weapons from the scene. It surfaced that the priest was a native of Sultanpur and he was taking care of the temple for the last several years. The temple is said to be sever

Meanwhile, a native of Rae Bareilly was found dead alongside railway tracks in Ashiyana police station area. Police said he was knocked down by some train near Aurangabad railway crossing. Identified as Ajeet (22) of Bachhrawan in Rae Bareilly, the deceased was a truck driver.

As per reports, station master of Transport Nagar informed police that around 1 am on Wednesday, the youth was found dead. A team led by sub-inspector Anoop Singh reached the scene and recovered a driving license and an Aadhaar card, on the basis of which the identity of the deceased was ascertained. The police said further investigation was underway and kin of the the deceased had been informed about the incident.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Yahiyanaganj Gurdwara on the occasion of 354th Prakash Parv of Guru Gobind Singh. He also listened to the shabad-kirtan. Speaking on the occasion, he said people should seek inspiration from the sacrifices of the Sikh Gurus and carry forward their views to the masses. Also seen in the picture is Deputy CM Dinesh Sharma

## Police disclose identity of injured shooter

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

### AJIT SINGH MURDER CASE

Police on Wednesday disclosed the identity of the shooter, who was injured in the return fire by the aide of a former block pramukh Ajit Singh, who was gunned down in the city recently. The police said the shooter belongs to a gang run by mafia Sunil Rathi, who is cooling his presently heels in Fatehgarh jail.

Commissioner of Police DK Thakur said the injured shooter was identified as Rajesh Tomar of Aligarh. He said the police would seek remand of Kuntu Singh and Akhand Singh as both were named in the Ajit Singh murder case. Both Kuntu and Akhand are presently in jail in connection with the murder of MLA Seepu Singh. Ajeet was an eyewitness in the murder case.

Thakur said both Kuntu and Akhand were summoned by a court in the murder case and police were granted a warrant against them. "We will

now move court seeking police custody remand of both," he said. On the fateful day, Rajesh Tomar was injured in the gun-battle as Ajit's aide Mohar Singh returned fire. He was taken to a flat in Gomtinagar and a Krishna Nagar resident and a close aide of mafia-turned-politician of eastern UP arranged a doctor for his primary treatment on the instructions of his mentor. The police are searching for that close aide of the mafia-turned-politician, the sources said.

The injured shooter was then shifted to a hospital in Sultanpur where another doctor treated him. "Both the doctors were summoned and interrogated. They pleaded innocence and said they did not know that the injured youth was a criminal," the sources said. They said Ajeet was a protégé of mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, who is

the arch-rival of the mentor of shooters. "Ansari is in the firing range and police have started raiding the premises of his aides and agents. He himself is lodged in a jail in Punjab. His jail stint gave enough chance to his rivals to try and ascertain their supremacy," the sources said.

Meanwhile, a close aide of dreaded criminal Babu Singh was nabbed by a police team in Madaon on Wednesday. He was identified as Sooraj Singh of BKT police station area. He was named in a case in which he had lobbed crude bombs on a youth, Samir Verma, a year ago and was absconding since then. The police said Sooraj is a protégé of Babu Singh, who is presently in jail. Babu Singh is a close aide of mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari and said to be managing the affairs in Lucknow at the behest of Ansari.

## First impulse oscillometer in state for lung function testing launched at KGMU

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The first impulse oscillometer for lung function testing in the state was launched at the department of Respiratory Medicine (KGMU) on Wednesday. The impulse oscillometer makes use of sound waves to diagnose respiratory diseases by measuring mechanical properties of the lungs, such as resistance and reactance. The session began with a virtual seminar on impulse oscillometry by Dr Sajal De from the Pulmonary Medicine department of AIIMS (Raipur). He sensitised the faculty, residents and staff of the department regarding the use and interpretation of this novel diagnostic modality. He said impulse oscillometry is

a simple, non-invasive method using the forced oscillation technique, requires minimal patient cooperation and is suitable for use in both children and adults.

"This method can be used to assess obstruction in the large and small peripheral airways and has been used to measure bronchodilator response and broncho provocation testing," he said.

It was followed by a question-answer session in which Dr De replied to the queries of the audience. Thirty PG students from the departments of respiratory medicine and paediatrics from all over UP actively participated in the lecture and interactive session. The session was followed by inauguration of the impulse oscillometry machine by head of the department of

Respiratory Medicine (KGMU) Dr Surya Kant, who highlighted the importance of this technique in Covid era.

He said this procedure generates minimum aerosol while evaluating the lung function and hence it is safe in Covid times. Dr Surya Kant also said it has the advantages of being easy to perform, and can be used for small children and the elderly. It can also be used for bed-ridden and ICU patients. It can also be used to diagnose respiratory diseases in preliminary stage. There was a hands-on training session on impulse oscillometer for the residents of Respiratory Medicine and Paediatrics departments, along with the technical demonstration of the procedure on a healthy volunteer.

सुरक्षित यात्रा  
सुरक्षित जीवन

**सड़क सुरक्षा माह**

21 जनवरी - 20 फरवरी 2021

का शुभारम्भ

परिवहन विभाग की

**₹ 55.70 करोड़**

की परियोजनाओं

का लोकार्पण/शिलान्यास

**योगी आदित्यनाथ**

मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तर प्रदेश द्वारा

गरिमामयी उपस्थिति

**अशोक कटारिया**

राज्यमंत्री, परिवहन (स्वतंत्र प्रभार)

संसदीय कार्य (एमओएस), उत्तर प्रदेश

**एवं अन्य गणमान्य महानुभाव**

दिनांक : 21 जनवरी, 2021 | समय : प्रातः 9:30 बजे | स्थान : 5, कालिदास मार्ग, लखनऊ

वाहन चलाते समय मोबाइल पर बात न करें

सीट बेल्ट का सदैव प्रयोग करें

पार्किंग के नियमों का पालन करें

दोपहिया वाहन चलाते समय हेलमेट अवश्य पहनें

नशे में वाहन न चलाएं

इंडिकेटर का इस्तेमाल करें

तेज रफ़्तार से वाहन न चलाएं

बिना लाइसेंस के वाहन न चलाएं

अपनी लेन में ही वाहन चलायें

**आइये, हम सब यातायात नियमों का पालन करने का संकल्प लें।**

यातायात नियमों का उल्लंघन दण्डनीय अपराध है।

112 108 1800-1800-151

उत्तर प्रदेश परिवहन विभाग

uptransportdept uptransportdept



**NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY**  
**INTRODUCTION OF 25kV**  
**AC TRACTION**  
**"WARNING TO ROAD USERS"**  
 It is notified for the Information of the Public that in connection with introduction of 25 Kv ac Electric Traction over the SRU-BHJ section of North Eastern Railway, height gauges have been erected all the level crossings with clear maximum height between of 4.76 Mtrs. to 4.78m above road level with a view to prevent loads of excessive height from coming into contact or dangerous proximity to Live traction wires (Contact wire), which shall be at a height of minimum 5.5m above the rail level at level crossings. Public are hereby notified to observe the height specified above for the purpose of loading vehicles and to see that the loads carried in road vehicles do not infringe the height gauges under any circumstances.

**The dangers of a load of excessive height are as follows:-**  
 (i) Danger to the height gauge and consequent obstruction to the road as well as the Railway line.  
 (ii) Danger to the materials of equipment carried or the vehicle itself. (iii) Danger of fire and risk of life due to contact with or dangerous proximity to the conductors.

**Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer/ Con.,**  
**CPR/EL-38** **Guwahati**

As per any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09798445955

**\*Never travel on roof and foot boards\***

**शुद्धि पत्र**

उत्तर प्रदेश पावर  
ट्रॉन्समिशन कार्पोरेशन लिमिटेड  
की The Pioneer में प्रकाशित  
निविदा दिनांक 19-01-2021 में  
अधीक्षण अभियन्ता विद्युत पारेषण  
मण्डल द्वितीय कानपुर गलत  
प्रकाशित हो गया है उसके  
स्थान पर अधिशासी अभियन्ता  
विद्युत पारेषण खण्ड द्वितीय  
गोविन्द नगर, कानपुर सही पड़ा  
जाये।

When they reached the Gorakhpur bus stand, two miscreants in police uniforms asked them to come out of the bus in the name of search. When the merchants

A case was registered in this regard and the bodies were sent for post-mortem.

**PNS**  **LUCKNOW**

**Lucknow (PNS):** The Physics department at Lucknow University is developing sensors which can detect LPG leak and are made of nanomaterial which can work at room temperature. Head of the department Prof Poonam Tandon said the aim is to avert mishaps. "Gas leaks are detected mostly by the smell and that too when the amount is large. Matchstick testing of leakage is not very safe. Gas leaks can go undetected if you have a cold or you are in a room far away from

the kitchen. Though nanomaterials can be operated only at high temperature, we are working on the nanomaterial which can operate at room temperature. The other thing which is important about the sensor is that it should be selective. If it is sensing LPG, it should not sense other gases in the air. If the sensor detects all the gases in the atmosphere, it would not be able to give information about LPG alone," she explained.

already worked on it for five years and are trying to get better material. "The material should also have a relaxation time and if it absorbs gas, it should also release and not saturate it. We are trying to develop the material with all such properties because one has to have an economical and viable material and a lot of work is required in this area," she said.

The HoD said they also have a centre of excellence at the department where this project is being carried forth as

The chief minister will be travelling to Noida on January 25 to attend the programmes scheduled to be held on the occasion of the UP Foundation Day. Though it will be the 71st Foundation Day of Uttar Pradesh, the state will be celebrating its Foundation Day for the third time after the idea to mark UP Diwas was implemented by Yogi Adityanath as soon as he became the chief minister of the state. On the same day, the CM also announced one of his ambitious schemes One District One Product.

S. N.	Name of Account	Borrowers/Guaranters property owners	Details of Mortgage Property	Demand / Possession Notice Date	Amt. as on. Branch Demand Notice date
1.	<b>Mr. Rohit Rameshwar Singh S/o Sri Rameshwar Jagdish Singh and Smt. Kanti Singh W/o Mr. Rameshwar Jagdish Singh</b>	<b>1.Mr. Rohit Rameshwar Singh S/o Sri Rameshwar Jagdish Singh R/o 1.Room no.-1,Bharat Singh Chawl,82 prakashwadi, Behind Cinemax Andheri (East). Mumbai, Chakala Midc Mumbai, Maharashtra - 400093</b> <b>2. S.M. Plot No 524, House No-D-58/23, Apartment Known as" PRS Square" on First Floor,- Mauza- Ramapura, Ward-Dashhashwamedh, Pargana-Dehat- Amanat, Tehsil &amp; Distt. - Varanasi -221001 (Borrower / Mortgagor)</b> <b>2.Smt Kanti Singh W/o Sri Rameshwar Jagdish Singh R/oR/o 1.Room no.-1,Bharat Singh Chawl, 82 Prakashwadi, Behind Cinemax Andheri (East). Mumbai, Chakala Midc Mumbai, Maharashtra - 400093</b> <b>2.S.M.Plot No 524, House No-D-58/23, Apartment Known as" PRS Square" on First Floor,- Mauza- Ramapura, Ward-Dashhashwamedh, Pargana-Dehat- Amanat, Tehsil &amp; Distt. - Varanasi -221001 (Borrower / Mortgagor)</b>	Em of Property:Flat/Residential Property bearing S.M Plot no- 524, House No-D-58/23,Apartment Known as" PRS SQUARE"on First Floor,Mauza-Ramapura, Ward-Dashhashwamedh, Pargana- Dehat Amanat, Tehsil & Distt. -Varanasi - 221001,Belonging to Mr. Rohit Rameshwar Singh S/o Sri Rameshwar Jagdish Singh and Smt.Kanti Singh W/o Sri Rameshwar Jagdish singh. Super Built-up 954.00 Sqft. Bounded By: North: Open land T/A road Sibra to Mahmooorganj, South: Building of kake Aahuja East: Land & Building of Damodar Singh West: Building of Apresh Kumar Laha.	<b>02.03.2020</b> <b>18.01.2021</b>	Godowalia Branch Rs. 6428630.00 + Interest + Other exp.
2.	<b>Shri Bhola Nath S/o Sri Shaling Ram And Smt. Rani Devi W/o Sri BholaNath</b>	<b>1.Shri Bhola Nath S/o Sri Shaling Ram R/o Village Jhauaa Taluka Asnav Tehsil Aurai, District Bhadohi. (Borrower / Mortgagor)</b> <b>2.Smt. Rani Devi W/o Sri Bhola Nath R/o Vill Jhauaa Taluka Asnav, Tehsil Aurai, District Bhadohi (Borrower)</b>	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Arazi No.947, Area 0.029 Hect. Mauza-Jhauaa, Taluka- Asnav, Tehsil - Aurai, District -Bhadohi in the name of shri Bhola Nath S/o Sri Shaling Ram Bounded: East: Khet of Manoj Tiwari West- others North: Khet of Ramjalan & nali South: Khet of Shankar & Paras Tiwari	<b>20.03.2020</b> <b>15.01.2021</b>	Thatra Branch Rs. 1594936.00 + Interest + Other exp.
3.	<b>Mr. Pramod K u m a r Jaiswal S/o Shiv Pujan Jaiswal</b>	<b>1.Mr. Pramod Kumar Jaiswal S/o Shiv Pujan Jaiswal R/o Bhaluwahi Badlapur Jaunpur. (Borrower)</b> <b>2. Mrs. Manju Jaiswal W/o Pramod Kumar Jaiswal R/o Bhaluwahi, Badalapur, jaunpur (Guarantor/Mortgagor)</b>	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Arazi No.58/3 (Part) Chak No. 641, Area -600 sq. ft. or 55.76 sq mtr., Vill - Bhaluahi, Pargana - Rari, Tehsil - Badlapur & District Jaunpur in the name of Mrs. Manju Jaiswal W/o Pramod Kumar Jaiswal. Bounded: East: Land of Mrs. Nirmala Devi West: Land of Mr. Raj Bahadur, North: Land of Mr. Shree Prakash, South: Proposed Rasta	<b>20.03.2020</b> <b>16.01.2021</b>	Babura Badlapur-Jaunpur Branch Rs. 750136.00 + Interest + Other exp.
4.	<b>M/s. Rishi Jal Dhara Prop. M r . Mohammad Rehan S/o Ali Hasan</b>	<b>1.M/s. Rishi Jal Dhara, Tarapur, Near Badlapur Road, Jaunpur- 222002. (Borrower)</b> <b>2. Mr. Mohammad Rehan S/o Ali Hasan R/o Tarapur, Near Badlapur Road, Jaunpur- 22002 (Proprietor/Mortgagor)</b>	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of House No. 387A,Area 41.82 Sq. Mtr. Mohallah Tarapur, Pargana- Haveli, Tehsil & Distt-Jaunpur in the name of Mr. Mohammad Rehan S/o Ali Hasan Bounded: East: Land and Tin shed Allabhej West: House of Guddu, North: 4ft. wide lane, South: Agriculture land of Siddik,etc.	<b>20.03.2020</b> <b>16.01.2021</b>	Jaunpur Branch Rs. 737878.00 + Interest + Other exp.
5.	<b>M/s.Siddhi Vinayak Communication Prop. Shri Akash K u m a r Jaiswal</b>	<b>1.M/s. Sidhi Vinayak Communication Prop. Shri Akash Kumar Jaiswal (Borrower)</b> <b>2. Shri Akash Kumar Jaiswal S/o Late Suresh Chandra Mohalla- Husseypur Kabulpur, Jaunpur-222180 (Proprietor/ Borrower)</b> <b>3. Smt.Meena Devi W/o Late Suresh Chandra Mohalla: Husseypur Kabulpur,Jaunpur- 222180(Guarantor/Mortgagor)</b>	EM of Shop/ Residential building of extent:33.45 Sq. Mtr. Mohallah Husseypur, Pargana- Bayalsi, Tehsil-Sadar, Distt.-Jaunpur-222180 in the name of <b>Smt.Meena Devi W/o Late Suresh Chandra</b> Bounded: East: House of Nirmala Devi, West: Land of Shiv Poojan etc.,North: Hata Nirmala Devi, South: Link Marg (Zafarbad to Deolkali)	<b>11.11.2019</b> <b>16.01.2021</b>	Jaunpur Branch Rs. 1121671.19 + Interest + Other exp.
Date: 21.01.2021 Place: Varanasi		For Commission & Omission in Publication, Please contact with the Branch or Regional Office.			Authorized Officer Indian Bank

**PNS** ■ **LUCKNOW**

He said that on the order of the administration, the construction work

SP (City) Kuldeep Gunawat also claimed that the local residents collected on Wednesday morning after rumours were spread by some mischief makers. He said that the situation was under control and they were making efforts to identify those who spread rumours to fuel communal tension and to defame the local police. A case has been registered and further investigations are on.

In his presidential address, Barik apprised the gathering of the contributions made by the institute in its endeavor to ensure clean and safe potable water. He said the discussions of the two day-seminar will help in finding a solution to solve the problem of safe drinking water.

Mumbai Central-Amritsar Express Special JCO will be diverted to run via Beas-Tarntaran-Amritsar on January 20 while on January 21, it will be diverted to run via Amritsar-Tarntaran-Beas, Bandra Terminus.



## PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Wednesday evening in which the suggestions from ministers, opposition leaders, members of the committee, and officers were taken to make the centenary celebrations an unprecedented affair. The meeting also decided to release the logo of the Chauri Chaura centenary celebrations commencing on February 4 next. The meeting decided to spread massive

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the message of Swadeshi, Swavalamban and Swachhhta would be spread during the celebrations and stressed through programmes highlighting use of khadi, local products under ODP, special agri-products. The women self-help groups will also be involved in this.





# PM Modi regrets not visiting Varanasi since long

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

‘It has been a long time, I’ve not been able to come to Kashi,’ said the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who represents Varanasi parliamentary constituency, during his virtual talks with Kamla Devi, a resident of Gram Sabha Ramnagar (Gajendra) in Pindra development block of the district on Wednesday. While addressing the beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin), he transferred the amount of first installment to 5.30 lakh beneficiaries and the second to more than 80,000 of UP directly in their bank accounts. During her talks, the local woman expressed her happiness over getting a house as she could not have a dream of having her own home. She also told the PM that she works in agriculture and goat rearing for her livelihood.

When Modi asked whether she was taking advantage of self-help groups (SHGs) formed for women, she replied that she had bought 10 goats with Rs 30,000 received from the SHG. She was among the other beneficiaries of the district who had received their first installment under the housing scheme digitally.

Out of total beneficiaries of the state, there were 4,099 and 1,648 of Varanasi district



Officers listening to PM on Awas Yojna (Gramin) in Varanasi on Wednesday

Pioneer

who had received Rs 1639.20 lakh and Rs 1153.60 lakh as the first and second installments respectively.

Among the beneficiaries, there were 557 who received first installment and 350 second from Arajiline block, 796 and 205 from Badagaon, 850 and 242 from Cholahpur, 382 and 102 from Harahuwa, 104 and 111 from Kashi

Vidapeeth, 688 and 335 from Pindra, 451 and 303 from Sewapuri and 271 as first

installment from Chiraigaon block.

In his address, the PM while referring to the previous government of UP, said that the list was being sought repeatedly from the PMO for providing accommodation to the beneficiaries of the scheme but it did not make the same available and the rural poor had to bear the brunt, which they have not forgotten yet. According to him, with the arrival of the Yogi govern-

ment, other development schemes including this one have gained momentum. In UP, 22 lakh poor villagers have been identified for the scheme and 21.5 lakh acceptance letters have also been issued and out of them, 14.5 lakh have also got pucca houses. In his welcome address, Chief Minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath said that the scheme was launched by the PM from Agra on November 20 in 2016.

# 19 more test positive in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 19 new COVID-19 patients have been detected in the district on Wednesday, increasing the total number to 21,805. No casualty has been reported during the day and the death toll remained at 375. During the day, the follow-up negative reports included 44 and 42 of them have been recovered from home isolation while two from the hospitals, increasing the number to 18,335 and 2,961 respectively. The total number of patients who have been recovered so far is 21,296, leaving 134 active cases. The recovery rate is

97.66 per cent, while the mortality rate is 1.71 per cent.

Meanwhile, Vistara, in its mission of supporting the government’s COVID-19 vaccine drive is closely collaborating with suppliers for effective transportation of the vaccines. The airline transported 1,77,500 doses of the vaccines from Mumbai to Varanasi in its aircraft UK 621 during the day. Vistara has been actively transporting vaccines to various cities across India since last week. The airline has ferried 2,30,000 doses of the vaccine from Hyderabad and Mumbai to various cities across India.

This includes 1,92,000 doses to Varanasi so far.

In the first report of the day, 18 positive patients were found out of 2,481 reports received. Till then, the total test reports received were 5,69,518 and the results of 3,371 are awaited. Out of them, 5,47,714 were negative while 21,804 were positive. The total number of samples collected was 5,96,260. Earlier, a male aged 70 from Phulwaria succumbed to COVID-19 at Sir Sundarlal Hospital, Banaras Hindu University (SSH BHU). The total number of hotspots has increased to 2,689 with 201

red zones. Four green zones have been converted into the red zones again. There are 2,480 green zones with five new ones. Meanwhile, mass / group corona antigen tests continued and all the 305 tests were found negative at SSPG Hospital Kabirchaura apart from 37 at CHC Shivpur, 85 at Vivekanand Hospital Bhelupur, 245 at LBS Hospital Ramnagar and 247 at SSH BHU. Along with this, samples of 198 from SSPG, 100 from LBS Hospital Ramnagar, 38 from Vivekanand Hospital and 133 from SSH BHU have been sent for RTPCR investigation.

# IIT, IMS join hands for Kala Azar vaccine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A study carried out at Indian Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University (IIT-BHU) in collaboration with Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS-BHU) offers a hope for a vaccine against Kala Azar, a major health challenge in India caused by Leishmania parasite. There is no vaccine yet available in the market for humans against this disease. The treatment of the disease mainly depends on some handful of drugs with limitations which is a serious concern towards the complete elimination programme of World Health Organisation (WHO).

Vaccination is the safest and one of the most effective ways to fight against any infectious diseases. A vaccine molecule trains our immune system to fight against a given pathogen. It stimulates several immune cells in our body that produce antibodies, cytokines and other active molecules that collectively work and protect us from infection and provides long-term protection. A vaccine would be helpful for complete eradication of leishmaniasis.

Scientists from IIT-BHU Prof Vikash Kumar Dubey, Coordinator of School of Biochemical Engineering in collaboration with Prof Shyam

Sundar, Department of Medicine, IMS-BHU investigated and tested a new recombinant vaccine against Leishmania parasite that halt the progression of the infection. Dr Sunita Yadav, a National Postdoctoral Fellow with Prof Dubey, is lead investigator.

The prophylactic potential of this vaccine was evaluated in preclinical studies in mice model that showed a significant reduction in parasite load in liver and spleen organs of vaccinated infected mice than infected control mice. ‘Clearance of the parasite burden in vaccinated challenged mice is correlated with immune response expected in a vaccine

candidate,’ said Prof Dubey. It is a type of defence mechanism that happens in our body after vaccination and helpful for prevention of disease progression. This research is recently reported in the prestigious journal ‘Cellular Immunology’.

This study provides insight towards the evaluation of vaccine molecules against Leishmania infection. In future, it might be utilised as a vaccine candidate against the pathogen. However, more study needs in this direction to better understand the mode of action of this vaccine.

The team plans to further evaluate its vaccine potential in other clinical trials.

# Guru Gobind Singh Prakashotsav held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Till late night hours there was rush of Sikhs at decorated Diwan on Wednesday on the auspicious occasion of 354th Prakastotsav of Guru Gobind Singh at both Gurdwara Gurubag and Badi Sangat, Nichibag Gurdwara, which is known as one of the holy religious places of the Sikhs as Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and last Guru, stayed here during his childhood. Right from the wee hours, the festival started with the light of Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji at Nichibag. In the Palki adorned with flowers, the Sikhs took part in Parikarma and Guru Granth Sahib was lighted by singing the Shabd Kirtan.

Then Nam Simran and Shabd Kirtan took place, followed by Ardas and ‘prasad’ distribution to mark the conclusion of 40 days of Shri Akhand Path. At Gurubag, in the morning Hazuri Ragi Jatha Bhai Narendra Singh (Gurdwara Gurubag) and Hazuri Ragi Jatha Bhai Ram Singh (Gurdwara Nichibag)



Guru Govind Singh Prakashotsav being celebrated in Varanasi on Wednesday

Pioneer

presented Shabd Kirtan while Chief Granthi Bhai Ranjit Singh narrated the Sangat. The children also sang Shabd Kirtan at Nichibag. Till midnight hours right from 7 pm, the devotees offered prayer at decorated Diwan. Bhai Narendra Singh and Bhai Ram Singh presented Shabd Kirtan and the Gurdwara was echoed with

the lines of ‘Sachu kaho sun lehu sabhe, jin prem kiyo tinhi prabh payo.’ and ‘manas ki jati sabe eke pahichanvo...’ After the end of Akhandh Path Sahib, Aarti was performed and then the members of Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee (GPC) greeted all for the Prakashutsav. At last the Chief Granthi (priest) of Nichibag

Bhai Ranjit Singh presented Ardas and then the grand ‘langar’ was organised. Earlier, Prabhat Phery was taken out a day ago which was started from Piplani Katra and after passing through Kabircharra, Maidagin, Bulanala it was culminated at Gurdwara Nachibag and then ‘prasad’ was distributed.

# 28 new Covid cases in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

As many as 28 new cases of Coronavirus was found in the last 24 hours on Tuesday night in Prayagraj district. The infected also included an account officer of the Higher Education Commission, a teacher at GHS. No one died of infection for the second consecutive day. At the same time, a total of 39 people beat corona.

Nodal Officer for Corona Dr Rishi Sahai gave this information. He said that on Tuesday, 5,244 people were tested for Covid. As against the testing, 28 new cases of the COVID-19 is bit relieving for the Health department.

At the same time, six out of 39 healthy people were discharged from various Covid hospitals and 33 people completed their home isolation.

Dr Rishi Sahai said that the account officer of Higher Education Commission, teacher of GHS along with a District Court advocate are also included in the list of infected. At the same time, the number of active patients has now come down to 367 in falling order.

**GOVT EFFORT IN FIGHTING COVID LAUD-ED:** The effort the government in fighting corona is commendable. Medical scientists and doctors are constantly in research. Everyone should thank these scientists. This



A healthcare worker collects a swab sample from a sadhu for rapid antigen test in Magh Mela in Prayagraj

Pioneer

was said by former Co-Education Director Prema Rai.

She said that the parties which are criticising the government and doctors about this are completely affected by negative thinking. Physicians and scientists are also being insulted by unrestrained comments. Unfortunately, some party leaders are calling this vaccine a vaccine for a particular party and covering its usefulness. Some are trying to spread religious hysteria by

calling it a vaccine designed to kill followers of a particular sect. Similarly, some intolerant scholars are promoting the rejection of this vaccine as being fatal due to its preparation in a short time.

The truth is that the horrific emergency in which the corona vaccine was prepared in a short time was to be praised. Some of the followers have given instructions to never use this vaccine by complicating its quality. The main objective of

such propaganda activities is nothing but a devious attempt to make the government’s plan a failure.

Prema Rai said that vaccination is optional, not mandatory. It is proposed to provide free vaccination to the employees who are directly involved in this work, giving top priority to their safety. Anti-government parties and leaders are doing vote bank politics, demanding that the vaccine be given free to all people, she added.

# Mishra elected Dist Bar Assn chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Radha Raman Mishra has been declared elected as the president of the District Bar Association of Prayagraj on Wednesday. The lawyers had cast their vote on Monday, but the counting took place on Wednesday. Amrish Tripathi will be the new auditor, while the treasurer will be Anirudh Prasad Mishra. Counting for the post of secretary was in progress till filing of this report.

Radha Raman Mishra scored a convincing victory over his nearest rival Girish Kumar Pandey. Radha Raman polled 1304 votes, while Girish could manage only 568 votes in his favour. The other seven were lagging far behind. Santosh Kumar Yadav polled 243 votes, Rajesh Kumar Tiwari 201, Rajendra Prasad Mishra 196, Laxmi Kant Mishra 133, Arun Kumar Pandey 89, Jyoti Swarup Singh 45 and Shitala Prasad Mishra 42 votes.

For the post of auditor Amrish Tripathi managed to get 982 votes to score a narrow margin victory over Priya Tiwari who could get 855 votes. Manoj Kumar Pandey polled 711, while Tribhuvan Nath Pandey could get 283 votes.



Radha Raman Mishra

Polling 488 votes Anirudh Prasad Mishra will be the new treasurer. He defeated his nearest rival Arvind Pratap Singh who could manage 472 votes in his favour. Awadhesh Kumar Yadav will 464 votes polled the third.

**DISCUSSIONS BEING HELD ON VOTER LIST FLAWS:** The dates for the three-tier panchayat elections

have not been announced yet, but the enthusiasts are running in full swing in the villages. The candidates are busy wooing voters. Discussions are being held on voter list flaws. This time too, many disturbances are coming before the elections. There are also names of people who have died in the voters’ list of Kamalapur Gram Sabha. This negligence of the BLO has

angered the villagers. Complaints have also been made about this, but the flaws still remain.

Responsibilities were given to the booths for deletion, addition of names and re-inspection in the voter list of Kamalapur Gram Sabha of Shringverpur block. But the names of a dozen deceased female and male voters are still present in the voter list. There is anger among villagers about voter list flaws. People have complained about the removal of such names from the list, objecting to the names of deceased voters in the list.

SDM Soraon Anil Chaturvedi said that the villagers should have objected to removing the names of the dead. Work is still being done on the voter list. The name of the deceased will be deleted from the voter list as soon as the complaint is received from the villagers. He also informed that those who are still missing can register their names in the voter list especially those who have turned 18 on January 1. Such voters, who are not named in the voter list, can be contacted at the tehsil headquarters. This work should be done soon, Chaturvedi added.

# NCR GM reviews status of works related to OHE modification

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

General Manager, North Central Railway and North Eastern Railway, Vinay Kumar Tripathi convened a detailed meeting to review field level preparedness for execution of important work for 160 Kmph speed raising on New Delhi-Howrah and New Delhi-Mumbai trunk routes falling on NCR. He specifically reviewed status of works related to OHE modification, and augmentation in power supply arrangement.

OHE and power supply augmentation works are most

critical component of 160 Kmph speed raising works and accounts for approximately 58 per cent of total value of this work.

In this meeting organised in DRM office Prayagraj, PCEE NCR Satish Kothari, DRM Prayagraj Mohit Chandra, DRM Agra SK Srivastava and concerned officers from HQ and Prayagraj division were present.

At the outset DRM Prayagraj welcomed the GM and other officers in this meeting after which a detailed presentation covering field level planning for execution, resource deployment plan,

assistance required from RDSO, RB was presented by DEE TRD Prayagraj. During the meeting plan related to integrate working by concerned departments for execution of work during traffic block was presented and discussed in detail.

Reviewing field level plan presented by division, GM Tripathi remarked that our detailed plan for 160 Kmph work should properly account for availability of DFC route in Bhaupur-Khurja section. He said that it will help in accurate planning for traffic block, deployment of resource, no. of work sites and timeline for dif-

ferent critical activities. He also assured Prayagraj and Agra division that all requisite inputs and assistance from HQ in execution of this important work shall be provided. This is second review meeting of 160 Kmph speed raising works at level of General Manger in quick succession and many issues related to deployment of additional officers, supervisors, machineries etc. required for this work have been resolved. This will bring impetus to execution of this important work aimed towards faster and comfortable journey experience to our valued customers.

# Another accused held in Idrish murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

Another accused was arrested on Wednesday in Gausanagar area under the Kareli police station in connection with the murder of advocate Idrish that took place 14 months ago in Prayagraj. The police are investigating those who harbored him. Information is being received about the whereabouts of Atishaan son of Kabbu resident of Kasari-Masari, who was absconding for 14 months. Police will get information

about such people and will also take action against them.

Atishan, the son of Kabbu resident of Kasari-Masari, escaped from here after killing the lawyer. During interrogation, it was found that he had gone to Delhi.

There he took refuge with a close friend. After some time he returned here, but did not come home for fear of arrest.

He lived at the home of some of his close relatives. He used to secretly communicate with his relatives. He did not

even tell his family where he was.

A resident of Sehuda village under Bara police station, Idrish was an advocate in the district court. He was also involved in sand trade. He had built a house in Gosnagar of Kareli and lived here with the family.

He returned home on his bike from somewhere around 3:30 pm on October 30, 2019. He had hardly arrived outside the house and did not even stop the bike that he caught his sight on the door. The lock

in it was broken. Before he could understand anything he was shot and killed by miscreants who came out of the house.

On November 21, 2019, the Crime Branch and Kareli police arrested five miscreants in the advocate Idrish murder case. The miscreants said that they had come to rob the house. When Idrish arrived, they started running away, on which Idrish had caught them. He was shot and killed. After this, the name of Atishan was revealed, added the police.





SANGATHAN SRIJAN ABHIYAN: Newly elected city and south city presidents, Naushad Ali Mansuri and Shailendra Dixit being felicitated at Tilak Hall on Wednesday

# ACS asks medical college to meet vaccination target

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Additional Chief Secretary (Medical Education) Dr Rajneesh Dube, while addressing a virtual meeting with the officials of GSVM Medical College, expressed concern over the low COVID-19 vaccination at the medical college centre and directed them to improve it at every cost. He said necessary arrangements need to be made to ensure that the second phase of the vaccination programme achieved the given target. A key official for the phase,

Dr Amit Kanaujia, said the second round of vaccination would be carried out at 19 centres and 32 booths on Friday. He said in this phase the target was to vaccinate 9,600 health workers. In order to ensure that the given target was achieved, the city has been divided into nine centres whereas in the rural areas two centres have been set up at the community health centres (CHCs) and two in private hospitals. He said vaccination would also be carried out at all the CHCs and all the old centres

had also been involved to ensure that the given target was achieved. He said the government had issued a directive to carry out counselling of the health workers so that the vaccination targets were met with. He said the second dose of the vaccine Covishield would be given on February 15. The first dose was administered on January 16 to 439 health workers. Additional Director Medical Health Dr GK Mishra said as the vaccination was on particular dates, the next dose

would be administered on February 15 to the health workers. He said the change of days had been directed by the UP government. He allayed apprehensions of adverse reaction of the vaccine and said some vested interests were creating doubts in the minds of the health workers but the fact was that the vaccine was perfectly safe. He also clarified that there was no wastage of the vaccine, adding that 10 per cent wastage was assumed but it could be much more lower than that.

# TT official explains benefits of registration under GST

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Trade Tax official DK Singh, while addressing a seminar on benefits of registration under GST, said, on Wednesday, that there were several advantages in filing GST registration in India. He said GST registration entitled a trader as a legally recognised supplier of goods or services. He said proper accounting of taxes paid on the input goods or services could be utilised for payment of GST due on supply of goods or services or both by the business. He said voluntary registration was self-registration by the dealers in order to get listed within the GST framework. He said it was applicable for those who were not within the parameters of registration and were not required to register in the GST. Singh said the GST Council would be requiring registrations to be strict and in compliance with the rules and regulations and had also declared that the business units having a turnover less than Rs 20 lakh (Rs 10 lakh for north-eastern states) and Rs. 40 lakh for small and medium enterprises could get away with the GST registration. He said under the new

rules and regulations, the government had been seeking some voluntary registrations which meant that the taxpayer whose turnover did not exceed Rs 20 lakh limit could also register under the GST. He said in the new provision all the rules and regulations inhibited by the GST rule-book would be applicable to all those voluntarily registrants like a normal taxpayer and would have to strictly complied with. Singh said that presently taxpayers knew that the threshold limit for registrations was Rs 20 lakh and if their business did not meet that mark they need not go for registration. He said voluntary registration brought some healthy chance for those dealers as speculated by the experts. He said small spare parts business unit may not be exceeding the limit but in case one supplied goods to a large dealer who was under GST ambit it would be the opportunistic side of the registration. He said as the input tax credit and invoice matching concept was swept for the reason and it required both the dealers and business units to be registered under the GST regime to avail of the tax cred-

it. He added that now it was a prerequisite from various business units to deal with the community who were registered under the GST. He said in the situation, it would be convincing for the spare part dealer to voluntarily register under the GST. Singh said some specific companies having turnover of more than Rs 20 lakh or selling online had to register mandatorily under the GST regime. He said businesses having turnover between Rs 20 lakh and Rs 1 crore also had the option to choose composition levy. He said composition levy had its own disadvantages as they would be not able to collect any tax from their customers or get benefits of an input tax credit. He said such SMEs preferred to register themselves as normal dealers rather than composition dealers. He said if the buyer and seller were registered then one could register oneself otherwise one could break the chain of the Income Tax Credit. He added that if one were sure that the end-buyers were unregistered then registering oneself would not be beneficial. He said in case one were planning to scale up business then one could go with a com-

position scheme. He said thus lesser taxes, lesser compliances had to be maintained and the easy bank loans became beneficial for one. Singh said one could cancel voluntary registration any time after completing one year. He said if a person had furnished voluntary registration for his business but failed to do business within six months after the date of registration, then the registration would be cancelled by proper authority officer or on request of the person concerned or on a request or application filed by the person's legal heirs, in case of death of such person. He said voluntarily registration brought ITC as the voluntary registrants and could avail of the input tax credit on all the purchases and services availed by them. He said GST registration would grant better compliance with the trading community as the rating based on the compliance would be fruitful for the compliance strict business units and would expand their customer base on behalf of their active presentation in the market. Prominent among those present were Lal Chandra, Savita Singh, Raj Kumar Kuril, SM Mishra, Vibha Singh and Naresh Bhati.

# Doctor stresses on early diagnosis of paediatric cancers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Every year, about 50,000 children in India are diagnosed with cancer, acute leukaemia, lymphoma, Wilms tumour, retinoblastoma, brain tumour, bone tumour, neuroblastoma, etc. which are common paediatric cancers. Addressing media persons, Hemato-oncologist Dr Priyanka Verma from Regency Superspeciality Hospital said that the cure rate in paediatric cancer was almost 85 per cent, which was quite good for elders. She said cancer cells

increased very rapidly in children but children were very sensitive to chemotherapy treatment. She said the worrying statistic was that the cure rate of paediatric cancer was very low in India because these patients were diagnosed at very advanced stage. The main reason for this is the lack of awareness of this disease due to which the diagnosis is very late and sometimes successful treatment is not possible, she added. Dr Priyanka Verma said, "Every month we get four to five cases of this cancer from Kanpur and surrounding

areas like Banda, Hamirpur, Mahoba and where the parents of the children have no idea that the child is suffering from cancer. Many parents go to a nearby clinic when they see symptoms of underweight or low appetite in their children and ask the chemists to give them medicines." She said the symptoms of each cancer varied but the main symptoms in paediatric cancer were underweight, low appetite, body lumps and fever. "Screening of your child should be done. It is not an infectious disease and does

not spread from one child to another. For better treatment it is important to have early diagnosis and early treatment. Its treatment is very long, so we should take care of the children at home too, she said, adding that in such a case, it was very important that hygiene was maintained at home and the child fed complete nutritious diet. "Treatment is our goal, realistically and practically achievable. After treatment, the child can live normal life like other children," she said.

# 9 more test positive in Kanpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Chief Medical Officer Dr Anil K Mishra said 9 more people tested positive of coronavirus infection in Kanpur Nagar during the past 24 hours. With this, the tally of confirmed coronavirus infections detected in the city reached 32,719 on Wednesday evening. The CMO said 5 COVID-19 patients were discharged. He said one COVID-19 death was reported in the city during the past 24 hours. Dr Mishra said 232 active cases were undergoing treatment in the city at present. He said 3073 samples were taken in the city on Wednesday for testing.

# KDA grievance redressal camp from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

As per the Kanpur Development Authority Board's decision, a 3-day grievance redressal camp/mela will be organised on the development authority premises from 10 am to 2 pm from January 21 to 23. The camp/mela aims at resolving grievances of the allottees and other people relating to mutation of plots/houses/flats, freehold from lease, registry, refund, illegal construction/illegal possession on Kanpur Development Authority property, building layout etc. Grievances relating to Zone-1 and Bulk Sale would be heard on Thursday. Likewise, applications relating to Zones 2 and 4 would be heard on January 22 while the problems concerning Zone 3 and World Bank would be resolved on January 23, said a press release issued by the Kanpur Development Authority on Wednesday. The allottees and other applicants are required to visit the camp on the prescribed day and time for redressal of their grievances, the release said.

# Max Bupa announces its expansion plans

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Max Bupa has announced its expansion plans in Kanpur and other markets of Uttar Pradesh as part of its next phase of growth. The company has opened an additional branch in Kanpur and aims to provide health coverage to over 20,000 people in the next five years. In a virtual press conference, Director (Retail) Ankur Kharbanda said the company's customers could avail cashless hospitalisation in 60 network hospitals in the city and would have access to benefits like pre-authorisation of cashless claims within 30 minutes, making quality health care more accessible. He said a survey conducted among the insurance agents across Uttar Pradesh revealed that lack of awareness and clarity on health insurance was limiting the purchase of health insurance products in Kanpur. He said understanding the need to bring more people under the ambit of health insurance, the company had expanded its presence in the city and other markets of Uttar Pradesh. He said the company had set a target to clock Rs.15 crore gross written premium and 20 times increase in policy purchase in the next five years in Kanpur. The company will also bring business opportunities for people in Kanpur as it plans to on-board around 2,000 agents by 2024-25. The company will provide adequate training programmes and encourage women and housewives living in the city to become insurance agents, thereby helping them to become financially independent.

# Vindhyachal DC takes charge

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Yogeshwar Ram Mishra took charge as Vindhyachal Divisional Commissioner on Tuesday. An IAS officer of 2005 batch he has worked in different capacities, including as DM of Ayodhya, Barabanki and Varanasi. While referring to his priorities he said apart from government priorities he will try to make his office as useful as possible for those who came for the redressal of their grievances. He said the work of



Vindhyachal Divisional Commissioner Yogeshwar Ram Mishra

Vindhya Corridor will be expedited along with other developmental works of the division. He said that he will identify the most backward places of the division for carrying out developmental activities. Earlier the DC visited Vindhyachal and paid obeisance to Goddess Vindhyavasini. He was accorded a warm reception by the officers of the district, including DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ajay Kumar Singh and Chief Development Officer (CDO) Avinash Singh.

# DM reviews development works

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar has warned the working agencies to complete the works within the deadline along with quality or else remained prepared to face the music. Reviewing development works costing above ₹50 lakh



DM Praveen Kumar Laxkar reviewing development works at the Collectorate on Tuesday

(except roads) the DM made it clear that neither inordinate delay nor laxity would be tolerated. He further said that increase in the cost or delay in the completion of work would be treated as a matter of action if no any satisfactory reason was found behind it. When some working agencies apprised the DM about the paucity of fund, they were directed to put up the draft of the letter before him without delay for the demand of fund to the appropriate

authorities. The DM reviewed the ongoing construction work at Police Lines too and directed the working agencies to complete the works related to the Tourism department without delay and inform him. The meeting was attended by statistics officer along with the officials concerned with the working agencies. **ROAD MISHAP:** A man died in a road mishap on Tuesday. As per the reports, Chandramani (32), a resident of Hanumana (MP), was going on his motorcycle on Rewa-Mirzapur road when he was hit by a truck near Bhaissod Balaay Pahad under the Halia police station. On getting information the personnel belonging to Dramondganj police outpost reached the spot and brought to the injured to a hospital but he succumbed to his injuries. The police informed his family members for further formalities. **WOMAN ARRESTED:** Halia police on Tuesday arrested Jagrani, a resident of Baskudia village under Halia block, who being ineligible had managed to get the fund under Pradhan Mantri Avas Yojna (PMAY) allegedly in connivance with the gram pradhan. Despite getting an amount of ₹1,30,000 she did not construct the house. During the inquiry when the matter came to light following which the department lodged an FIR against her in February 2019 but she remained at large since then. On information provided by an informer the police raided her residence and nabbed her.

# Porbandar-Muzaffarpur spl to run from today

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

The railway administration will for the convenience of the passengers run the 09269 Porbandar-Muzaffarpur bi-weekly special train from January 21 every Thursday and Friday and 09270 Muzaffarpur-Porbandar bi-weekly special train from January 24 every Sunday and Monday until further order. All coaches in these trains will be reserved category and passengers traveling in them will have to follow the Covid-19 prevention guidelines. Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) PK Singh said. The 09269 Porbandar-Muzaffarpur bi-weekly special train will from January 21 every Thursday and Friday depart from Porbandar at 19.40 hrs, from Jamnagar at 20.40 hrs, from Hapa at 22.25 hrs, from Rajkot at 23.46 hrs, from Wankaner on the second day at 00.28 hrs, from Surendranagar at 01.42 hrs, from Viramgam at 02.58 hrs, from Ambli Road at 03.37 hrs, from Palanpur at 06.23 hrs, from Abu Road at 07.25 hrs, from Marwar at 09.40 hrs, from Beawar at 10.44 hrs, from Ajmer at 12.00 hrs, from Jaipur at 14.20 hrs, from Bandikui at 15.45 hrs, from Alwar at 16.33 hrs, from Rewari at 18.02 hrs, from Gurgaon at 18.40 hrs, from Delhi Cantt at 18.57 hrs, from Delhi Sarai Rohilla at 19.20 hrs, from Delhi Jn at 20.35 hrs, from Moradabad at 23.58 hrs, from Bareilly on the

third day at 01.21 hrs, from Shahjahanpur at 02.27 hrs, from Lucknow (Northern Railway) at 05.50 hrs, from Gonda at 08.10 hrs, from Gorakhpur at 11.10 hrs, from Siswa Bazar at 12.40 hrs, from Bagaha at 14.13 hrs, from Narkatiaganj at 15.02 hrs, from Bettiah at 15.32 hrs, Sugauli at 16.03 hrs, Bapudham Motihari at 16.21 hrs, Chakia at 16.48 hrs, Mehshi at 16.59 hrs and reach Muzaffarpur at 18.09 hrs. During the return journey the 09270 Muzaffarpur-Porbandar bi-weekly special train will from January 24 every Sunday and Monday until further order depart from Muzaffarpur at 15.15 hrs, from Mehshi at 15.52 hrs, from Chakia at 16.04 hrs, from Bapudham Motihari at 16.41 hrs, from Sugauli at 16.59 hrs, from Bettiah at 17.22 hrs, from Narkatiaganj at 18.10 hrs, from Bagaha at 18.51 hrs, from Siswa Bazar at 20.35 hrs, from Gorakhpur at 22.40 hrs, from Gonda on second day at 01.50 hrs, from Lucknow (Northern Railway) at 04.40 hrs, from Shahjahanpur at 07.12 hrs, from Bareilly at 08.12 hrs, from Moradabad at 09.53 hrs, from Delhi at 13.05 hrs, from Delhi Sarai Rohilla at 13.21 hrs, from Delhi Cantt at 13.40 hrs, from Gurgaon at 13.58 hrs, from Rewari at 14.50 hrs, from Alwar at 15.52 hrs, from Bandikui at 16.39 hrs, from Jaipur at 18.35 hrs, from Ajmer at 21.40 hrs, from Beawar at 22.24 hrs, from Marwar at 23.38 hrs, from Abu Road on the third

day at 02.05 hrs, from Palanpur at 03.02 hrs, from Ambli Road at 05.15 hrs, from Viramgam at 06.09 hrs, from Surendranagar at 07.18 hrs, from Wankaner at 08.25 hrs, from Rajkot at 09.24 hrs, from Hapa at 10.34 hrs, from Jamnagar at 10.51 hrs and reach Porbandar at 13.45 hrs. A total of 23 coaches, including one of air-conditioned (AC) second class, five of AC third class, 10 of sleeper class, four of general second class, two of SLR/D and one coach of pantrycar will be attached in them. **TWO ARRESTED:** The Railway Protection Force (RPF), North Eastern Railway (NER), makes constant efforts to protect passengers and provide them better travel facilities. In the same sequence, the RPF post, Gorakhpur, in the circulating area of Gorakhpur railway station, found a 13-year-old girl in an unclaimed condition during patrolling. After questioning the girl was handed over to Child Line, Gorakhpur. On the other hand, the RPF post, Lakhimpur, found an 10-year-old boy in train No 05009 in an unclaimed condition. The boy was later handed over to the Child Line, Lakhimpur. Likewise the staff of RPF, Gonda, and CIB, Lucknow, arrested two persons along with signalling cables from near Dullapur-Chaipurwa. Action was taken against both of them under the Railway Property Act and a case was registered against them.

# NCL CMD meets 480 trainees

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) of Northern Coalfields Limited, a miniratna company of the Government of India, Prabhat Kumar Sinha, at the CETI premises-situated Management Development Institute (MDI) recently met 480 youths undergoing training in cadres like employment skills like heavy earth moving machinery (HEMM) mechanic, mine electrician, mine welder, data entry operator etc. This training is being given with the help of Skill Council for Mining Sector (SCMS). On the occasion Director (Personnel) of NCL, Bimlendu Kumar and other heads of departments of headquarters were also present. In his address, Sinha said that under the Government of India's campaign, Skill India, NCL is committed to preparing youths for employment by providing practical training to them in the skills required for the mining sector. He expressed confidence that all the youths undergoing training will get better employment opportunities in future. Sinha called upon all the trainees to complete the training with devotion while being disciplined and had a detailed discussion about the syllabus with the instructors. Speaking on the occasion,



Bimalendu Kumar said progress of youths around NCL is our first responsibility and this training programme for 480 trainees is an effort towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' campaign. Kumar told the trainees that this training besides increasing the chances of employment for them will also bring bring self-employment opportunities. Under this programme among the youths selected for training, the first priority is given to Project Affected Persons (PAP) and eligible candidates residing within 25 km radius of NCL and second priority to the eligible candidates of Singrauli and Sonbhadra districts. Under this programme eligible candidates who have completed training and related qualifications can also get the opportunity of apprenticeship with the stipend in NCL as per the Apprenticeship Act. In addition, SCMS can also help candidates for apprenticeship in other private sector industries. In this programme conducted under the corporate social responsibility (CSR), a total of 480 youths are being trained. All trainees will also be given a certificate.



# PM releases ₹2,691 cr to 6.1L to help build houses



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stressing that ownership brights were being given to women, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday released a financial assistance of around ₹2,691 crore to 6.1 lakh beneficiaries in Uttar Pradesh under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G).

“Owning a house gives confidence,” the Prime Minister said and pointed out that under the scheme two crore houses have been built in the rural areas.

Referring to the progress of housing scheme in UP, he said “this shows UP Government is active” and under BJP Government “UP ko nayi pehchaan aur nayi udaan mili hai”.

Assembly polls are due in UP, electorally the most important State in the country, next year with the political scene already heating up. BJP President JP Nadda is on a two-day tour of the state from Thursday.

Modi said expressways in the state would be speeded up and completed soon.

The Modi-Government has promised ‘housing for all’ by 2022 under PMAY scheme.

Union Rural Development Minister Narendra Tomar and



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath were also present at the launch, which was held via video conference.

The assistance would include the release of a first installment to 5.30 lakh beneficiaries, and a second installment to 80,000 beneficiaries who have already availed the first installment under PMAY-G.

“In the past few years, around 2 crore houses have been built in rural areas alone,” Modi said during the launch.

“Under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana, keys of 1.25 crore houses have been handed over to people. Around ₹1.50 lakh crore has been given by the Central Government alone, to build these houses,” he said.

The Prime Minister compared these figures with that of the Opposition’s, and said that people of Uttar Pradesh will never forgive the previous Governments for their wrong policies.

“I am talking about Uttarakhand Pradesh especially, the poor didn’t believe that the Government can help them

in constructing a house,” he added. “The previous Awaas schemes, the kind of houses built under them were not hidden from anyone.”

The Prime Minister said under the housing scheme his government has made special emphasis on giving ownership of houses to women.

PMAY-G is an extension of the Indira Awas, which was launched by the Congress Government in the 1980s. It gave ₹70,000 as cash incentives to rural families in need of pucca homes.

Modi’s PMAY has increased the amount to Rs 1.2 lakh per house in plain areas and ₹1.3 lakh in hilly or remote areas. Each house needs to be at least 270 sqft in size.

Popularly known as the “housing for all” mission, through the scheme, the government aims to subsidise the construction of 2.95 crore rural houses and 1.2 urban houses by 2022. So far, 1.26 crore houses have been built across the country under the scheme, according to a release by the Prime Minister’s Office.

# Leakage of secret military operations treason: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday upped the ante on Centre and journalist Arnab Goswami for his explosive WhatsApp chats saying the leakage of secret military operations was treason and those who were party to the act deserved no mercy and must be punished.

Led by former Defence Minister AK Antony, the Congress demanded an enquiry to determine the source of the leak and whether the leak compromised the Balakot operations. Antony was joined by former home minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, former external affairs minister Salman Khurshid and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad.

The attack on Centre and Goswami comes a day after former party chief Rahul Gandhi termed the leakage a criminal act and action to be taken with utmost importance. Rahul’s sibling and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi too took to social media to express her disappointment the way Government is handling the current defence related leakage and said how can the Modi government remain a mute spectator in this criminal act when lives of nation’s brave soldiers were lost in the Pulwama attack.

Expressing his shock on Goswami’s remarks to ex-BARC chief Partho Dasgupta three days before the IAF strike in Balakot that “something big is going to happen”, Antony said

leaking official secret is a crime but leaking information on military operations was an anti national act and those involved must be punished.

Antony also said only four to five civilians in the top echelons of the government had the Balakot strike information and “someone from among them has leaked it”.

“Having worked with the military people I am sure no one from the military could ever leak such information,” the former defence minister said.

“One of the top five civilians in the government is suspect. It has to be enquired immediately on war footing as to who that person is. Whoever is responsible for the leakage must be punished for treason and this journalist who was in possession of sensitive military operations he has to be punished. The Government must order a proper enquiry. Whoever is responsible, whoever is party to the leakage of this sensitive military operation deserves no mercy. He has to be punished,” said Antony.

Shinde said that “leaking of official secret is a criminal act but leaking of official secret about military operation, a national security matter, that too sensitive military operations especially a military strike is treason, anti national.”

It is not just criminal action it is anti national activity, said Antony. He said only three or four or five ministers and officials could have known of the operation.

# ED arrests founder and chairman of Mantena Constructions in PMLA case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has arrested Srinivas Raju Mantena, founder and chairman of Mantena Constructions and his associate Aditya Tripathi of Arni Infra who is a resident of Bhopal under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

They are accused in the money laundering investigation into the e-Tender Scam in Madhya Pradesh where a large number of infrastructure companies, mostly based in Hyderabad, have conspired with few senior Government officials and IT service providers of MPSEDC to tamper the eTenders and to illegally obtain large value contracts.

The accused were produced before the PMLA Court, Bhopal and have been remanded to judicial custody till February 3, officials said.

The ED had initiated investigation based on the EOW, Bhopal FIR No 12/2019 dated April 10, 2019, where in Max Mantena Micro JV Hyderabad and GVPR Engineers Ltd., Hyderabad are named as the main beneficiaries of this scam.

As per the FIR, the MP e-Procurement Portal is managed by MPSEDC and Antares Systems Limited, Bangalore



and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). They are given a contract for 5 years for the maintenance and operation of the said portal.

EOW, Bhopal has already filed a preliminary chargesheet and it has been established from the IP access logs that Osmo IT Solutions Pvt Limited of Vinay Choudhary and Varun Chaturvedi had misused the login credentials provided by Antares and had illegally accessed and tampered the e-tenders and changed the bid values of certain companies to make them L1, the ED said in a statement.

“In return they had taken illegal gratification from the bidding companies. Max Mantena JV Hyderabad had illegally won the tender No. 10030 worth ₹1,030 crore in this fashion. There are largenumber of other tenders which are also under scrutiny and are suspected to have

been won by using the same modus operandi,” it said.

During the investigation under PMLA, search operations were conducted in Hyderabad, Bhopal and Bangalore at more than 20 locations at the residence and office premises connected with Mantena Constructions, Max Infra, GVPR Engineers, Arni Infra, Osmo IT Solutions and Antares and large amount of incriminating documents and digital devices were seized.

Mantena group has seen a big spurt in successful bids in the last few years either directly or in association with other Hyderabad-based companies, it said.

Investigation conducted so far revealed that Srinivas Raju Mantena, has played a crucial role in the entire scam. With the assistance of his friend Aditya Tripathi he set up a front entity Arni Infra in Bhopal and used it to route funds for hawala activities.

# Centre stresses upon need for people-friendly, safe transport

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday stressed upon the need for making the public transport people friendly, safe, affordable, accessible, cost effective and pollution free. Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said there is a need of implementing the Intelligent Transport System (ITS) in the operation as well as the National Common Mobility Card in order to make its operation fully digitised and efficient.

Addressing the 40th Meeting of Transport Development Council last evening, Gadkari said that States must increasingly adopt the alternative fuels in the operation of busses and stressed the use of CNG, LNG, Electric vehicles and ethanol blended fuels.

Transport Ministers from several states including Assam, Aandhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Goa, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram partici-

pated in the meeting, along with their Transport Secretaries and Transport Commissioners.

Gadkari assured the states of his full support and cooperation in their endeavours to make public transport modern and efficient gave the example of the model of Transport for London. He said that state must avail all the schemes of central government such as FAME-II to gradually shift to electric vehicles as their cost would come down drastically in near future.

The Union Transport minister also stressed upon the need of innovation by the states and the need for improving the quality of buses and the public transport so that peoples are attracted to avail their services by shunning the personal vehicles.

Union Minister of State for RTH Gen (Retd) Dr V K Singh stressed upon the adoption of alternative fuels such as CNG, LNG and ethanol etc. which will not only reduce the vehicular pollution but would also save the precious forex.

# Bird flu cases on rise in six of 12 afflicted States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Avian influenza continues to spread among poultry in six of the 12 afflicted States, where culling and containment measures are on. According to the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, avian influenza for poultry birds has been confirmed in six States - Kerala, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Punjab. The disease has been confirmed in crow, migratory and wild birds in 10 states which include Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Rajasthan and Punjab.

In a statement, the ministry said that samples taken from two poultry farms and a dead crow in Punjab’s Mohali district, which reported the state’s first bird flu case, tested positive for the influenza on Wednesday. Reports of the



samples from the farms and the crow were received on Wednesday, while for the first case, the report of samples taken from a dead bar-headed goose was received on Tuesday. Samples were taken from two poultry farms at Behra village in Mohali district’s Dera Bassi and were sent to NIHSAD for confirmation on January 15 after the NRDDL stated them as suspected to be bird flu positive.

According to the ministry, the disease has been confirmed in Crow in SAS Nagar and Pinjore and Panchkula in Punjab.

“Control and Containment Operations are going on in the affected epicentres of Maharashtra,

Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Haryana. The central team formed for monitoring the situation in the affected areas of the country has visited Satara, Latur, Parbhani and Beed districts of Maharashtra to monitor the epicenters of AI outbreak and conducting epidemiological studies,” the ministry said.

Avian flu has significant economic impact. When chicken prices crash, they tend to bring down maize prices too, hurting farm incomes. Maize is a major feed used for poultry.

The poultry industry consumes about 14 million tonne of corn annually.

All the States are reporting to the Department on daily basis regarding the control measures adopted by the States/UTs based on the Revised Action Plan for Preparedness, Control and Containment of Avian Influenza 2021.

# Bronze statue of seated Mahatma at Parliament complex relocated

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The iconic bronze statue of a seated Mahatma Gandhi at the Parliament complex was on Wednesday relocated from its place facing the main gate to a space near Gate number 3, to make space for the ongoing construction of the new Parliament building.

The 16 feet high bronze statue of a seated Bapu has been a constant and most preferable site of protests by opposition leaders to protest against the Government’s policies. Sculpted by Ram Sutar, the statue was unveiled on Gandhi’s birth anniversary in 1993 by then President Shanker Dayal Sharma.

Initial plan was to do so during the one-month gap between the first and the second part of Budget Session that begins on Jan 29

The space in front of the statue has been a preferred location for the Opposition lawmakers to protest against the government policies and proposed laws. During the last



**The space in front of the statue has been a preferred location for the Opposition lawmakers to protest against the Government policies**

monsoon session, some Opposition lawmakers camped overnight in front of the statue to protest against the hurried passage of the farm bills.

Officials added the Gandhi statue is eventually planned to be installed just outside the current Parliament building, where that of late former Union home minister Govind Ballabh Pant currently stands. Pant’s statue is planned to be shifted to New Delhi Pant Marg named after him.

# Maratha quota: SC to decide on Feb 5 schedule of hearing pleas



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would decide on February 5 the schedule of hearing on the pleas pertaining to the 2018 Maharashtra law granting reservation to Marathas in education and jobs after the state government said a case of this nature be heard once physical hearing commences.

The apex court is presently hearing matters through video-conferencing since March last year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

A five-judge constitution bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan was told by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who was appearing for Maharashtra, that the state is requesting for an adjournment and the matter be heard in March.

# ‘Goli maro...’ slogan raised at Suwendu Adhikari’s rally

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ CHANDANNAGAR/HOOGHLY

The frightening “Goli maro slogan...” (shoot them) has traveled out of Delhi and continues to ride the poll pound air of Bengal with both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP mimicking the hate rhetoric coined by a Union Minister an year ago.

A Suwendu Adhikari-led saffron rally in Hooghly district picked up on Wednesday from where the TMC workers left in South Kolkata a day before calling upon the listeners to shoot down the traitors.

Even as the BJP supporters that walked the triumphant road show that ended at Circus Ground at Chandannagar shouted “*Desh ke Gaddaron ko Goli Maaro Salon ko* (shoot the traitors)” Suresh Sahoo the local BJP leader who led the slogan said “there is nothing wrong in the slogan as it was intended at persuading the army to shoot down the people who conspires against our motherland.”

His superior leader and State BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya however politely dissociated the party from such slogans saying “the BJP never supports such things,” only to quickly tell between the “Goli Maro...” of TMC and BJP.

“Though the BJP does not promote such kind of slogans

which might have been given in the heat of the moment ... but this slogan cannot be equated with the one raised by the TMC leaders as our supporters were shouting the slogan condemning the people who are involved in anti-national activities whereas the slogan was aimed at the people who have left the Trinamool to join the BJP ... this indicates provocation of violence.”

On Tuesday another rally of the Bengal ruling party led by senior leaders like Arup Biswas and Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay both Ministers shouted “Bangal ke gaddaron ko Goli maro salon ko (shoot the traitors of Bengal).”

Much like Bhattacharya his TMC counterpart too distanced his party from such “avoidable coinages” but added “the BJP is doing the same thing today after teaching the TMC the moral conduct yesterday,” asking “who are they asking the so-called army to shoot ... aren’t they asking the Indian citizens to be shot down ... is this the kind of political change they are planning to bring in Bengal.”

Meanwhile, Adhikari who led his fourth consecutive “house-full” road show on Wednesday once again challenged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to compete from Nandigram as she earlier promised saying “let me tell you madam (Banerjee)! I personal-

ly undertake to ensure your defeat at Nandigram irrespective of whosever contests from BJP against you.”

Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the “strongest Prime Minister with a definite vision ... who has taken bold steps which many Governments would not take for years,” Adhikari said “on the other hand TMC has been reduced to a private limited company with the Chief Minister as its Chairperson, her nephew (Abhishek Banerjee) as its Managing Director and an outsourced company (read the one of Prashant Kishore) as its electoral advisor.”

Saying that he could not take decisions despite holding three ministerial posts in the Trinamool Government the former Bengal minister said that “in that party there is only one post and rest are lamp posts and I too was one of them.”

Attacking the junior Banerjee he said “the Tolabaz (extortionist) nephew has to explain why he appointed Vinay Mishra as the vice president of TMC Yuva (party youth wing)” adding how Mishra — currently at large — is being frantically looked for by the CBI in cow, coal and sand smuggling cases. “There is one step for the CBI before it reaches the door steps of the ‘nephew’ ... it has only to arrest Vinay Mishra,” he said.

# Army urges veterans not to put on uniform, medals during political rallies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the backdrop of some veterans attending the ongoing farmers agitation in Army uniform, the Army has issued an advisory asking them not put on uniform or medals in political rallies. The advisory also said donning the uniform or medals in against the rules.

The advisory was issued recently to the Kendriya Sainik Board wherein various sections of the Army Act were enumerated to urge the veterans to refrain from attending the political functions in uniform. The caution was sent out after some veterans attended the agitation at the Singhu and Tikri borders of the national capital, sources said here on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the local commanders were also sensitising the serving troops especially from Punjab about the ongoing agitation and instructed that they cannot be part of any protest while in service.

This step was taken after some video clips surfaced showing some serving jawans raising banners and protesting in the farmers’ rallies some parts of north India. Officials also said the erring soldiers will be dealt with as per rules. These incidents took place when the soldiers had gone



**The Army said there needs to be awareness among the fraternity of ex-servicemen with regard to provisions of wearing of uniforms by non-effective personnel**

home on leave.

As regards veterans, they said the Army uniform can only be worn during official functions and not while attending a public gathering or protests.

The Army said there needs to be awareness among the fraternity of ex-servicemen with regard to provisions of wearing of uniforms by non-effective personnel.

# New petrol pumps to be at least 50 m away from water bodies, says CPCB

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Almost a year after directing Oil companies to ensure fuel stations are at least 50 metres away from schools, hospitals and residential areas, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has now asked them to maintain similar distance from water bodies too. The move is aimed at protecting the water bodies from getting any possible contamination due to seepage of diesel or petrol, if any.

The draft guidelines come in the backdrop of opposition by residents and environmentalists in Haryana over the Government’s plan to allot 15,000 square metres of forest land in Chakkarpur village to Indian Oil Corporation to set up a fuel station, which they alleged would contaminate a nearby water channel in the fragile area.

The CPCB draft guidelines said that all the surface water bodies irrespective of utility shall be protected from any possible contamination. “These include lakes, ponds, streams, rivers, wetland, sea and any other. Retail outlets shall not be located within a distance of 50 metres from the nearest point of water bodies. In case of streams and rivers, the distance shall be considered from flood plain.”

As a preventive measure, retail outlets coming within 50 meter to 100 metre from the nearest point of surface water



body shall have secondary containment by way of double walled tanks or concrete protection walls so as to minimise groundwater soil contamination, said the guidelines which have been posted on the CPCB website for comments and suggestions by February 2, 2021.

It further said that ground water quality monitoring of retail outlets within 100 meter from the nearest point of surface water bodies shall be conducted by the OMCs once in every quarter.

Last year, an expert committee comprising members from IIT Kanpur, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and CPCB had framed the guidelines for setting up of new petrol pumps in the country. It had prohibited setting up petrol pumps close to the schools, hospitals and resi-

dences citing health hazards.

The expert committee was set up on the directions of the NGT which is seized of a plea seeking a cap on the number of petrol pumps so as to avoid their adverse effects on the environment.

As per the guidelines, “Retail outlets shall not be located within a radial distance of 50 meters from schools, hospitals (10 beds and above) and residential areas designated as per local laws. In case of constraints in providing 50 meters distance, the retail outlet shall implement additional safety measures as prescribed by PESO (Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation).

“In no case, the distance between new retail outlets from schools, hospitals and residential areas shall be less than 30 meters. No high tension line shall pass over the retail outlet,” the CPCB guidelines said.



## Let the leaders lead

Like elsewhere, prominent personalities of India should get the shots so that the common citizen feels reassured



When the virologists in different countries developed vaccines for Coronavirus, there was a sense of relief and jubilation globally and people could not wait for the inoculation drives to begin. However, that euphoria turned into fear, distrust and vaccine hesitancy when side-effects and deaths began to be reported in nations like Norway, the UK, the US, and so on. In India, too, two people died after getting vaccinated on January 16 but, after the post-mortem reports came in, the Government declared that the deaths were in no way related to the COVID-19 jab, but to cardiopulmonary disease. Of course, the sceptics will take this statement with a pinch of salt. However, even if we were to attribute these deaths in India to

the vaccines, we must not let such incidents cloud our vision. If one were to look at the larger picture, the number of infections and deaths globally due to the pandemic till now is 96,700,231 and 2,067,913, respectively. In India, the number of infections has been 10,596,442 and the casualties have touched the 152,754-mark. As compared to this, of the 6,31,417 healthcare workers who have been vaccinated so far across 11,660 sessions in India, only nine adverse events requiring hospitalisation were reported. So, just 0.18 per cent minor adverse events have been reported and only 0.002 per cent of them needed to be hospitalised. According to the Health Ministry, this figure is in fact the lowest, so far as we know, in the world. So, it does not take a genius to understand that the advantages of getting the jab far outweigh the disadvantages. Plus, in such huge vaccination drives as the world is undertaking right now, adverse effects and some casualties are to be expected, particularly among the old, infirm and people with allergies. But the fact remains that globally, scientists and Governments are responding very quickly and, apart from the strong adverse event surveillance, they are being flexible and vigilant to finding out the causes and issuing directives on who can safely take the vaccine and who cannot. For instance, Norway has adjusted its advice on who should be administered the vaccine by giving individual doctors the discretion to make this decision.

In India too, Bharat Biotech, the company that developed Covaxin, is warning people with weak immunity and other medical conditions to consult a doctor before getting inoculated and, if possible, to avoid it altogether. However, till now the other vaccine that is also being used, AstraZeneca's Covishield, has seen a good response. Though India is battling vaccine hesitancy even among healthcare workers, the Centre plans to press on with the inoculation drive. This is because the Government realises that pandemics can be contained only when people become resistant to the disease-causing pathogen. There are two ways to acquire herd immunity: One, on exposure to the pathogen, people develop antibodies and immune response in the body and; second, the body develops antibodies when the vaccine is administered. Allowing the natural spread of a disease to generate herd immunity is not desirable as it comes at the cost of avoidable morbidity and mortality. With mass vaccination against COVID-19, the Government is determined to protect the people. We must help it in every way possible. We are a big country, and rolling out vaccines to 1.3 billion people is not an easy task. But we are a very determined country that successfully eradicated smallpox and polio. We have the resources and the experience. With the hard work of those leading and implementing the campaign and with the support of people, we are bound to succeed in our gigantic vaccination drive. However, if the Government truly wants the people to embrace the immunisation drive, prominent leaders of the country should get the shots like they did in other nations, so that the common citizen can feel reassured. The leaders of the country need to lead from the front and not let the common man feel like the proverbial guinea pig.

## What's in a name?

Rather than quibbling over Netaji's birth anniversary, the Governments should have celebrated the event together



On the face of it, one would consider it a matter of great national pride and patriotism, though a little belated, that the Union Government has decided to celebrate the birth anniversary of one of India's greatest nationalist icons who worked hard in the quest for the nation's Independence, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, on January 23 as 'Parakram Diwas'. However, the political controversy the announcement has kicked off is quite unnecessary and unsavoury, to put it mildly. There are allegations and counter-charges that the decision has been taken to usurp the legacy of the revolutionary leader, who was actually born in Cuttack, Bengal Presidency, British India. While the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC)

Government in West Bengal and the NDA Government at the Centre are in tandem on the issue of celebrating Netaji's birth anniversary, the bone of contention is the nomenclature the event should have: The Centre wants to call it 'Parakram Diwas' while the TMC and the All India Forward Bloc — which was founded by Netaji and emerged as a faction within the Indian National Congress in 1939 — demand that the day be celebrated as 'Desh Prem Diwas'. Both the parties are also angry that they were not consulted when the decision was being taken. The Culture Ministry recently issued a notification stating that in order to "honour and remember Netaji's indomitable spirit and selfless service to the nation", the Government has decided to celebrate his birthday every year as 'Parakram Diwas'. But the TMC leaders are sticking to their guns that it should continue to be called 'Desh Prem Diwas' (the State-level celebrations have been held at Darjeeling since 2014) and that January 23 should be declared a national holiday as Netaji was a national leader and the head of the Azad Hind Fauj, and "these two aspects are not clearly reflected" in the name 'Parakram Diwas'.

With West Bengal Assembly elections on the cards, and especially when it comes to Netaji's birth anniversary, no party wants to let the opportunity to lure the voters slip from its hands. The State is expected to go to the polls in the first half of this year with the BJP hoping to wrest power from the TMC after emerging as the second-biggest party in Bengal in the 2019 general elections. The regional party's leaders have gone so far as to claim that it was a "stunt" by the NDA Government keeping in mind the upcoming Assembly poll in West Bengal, and "not a mark of respect" to Netaji. The family members of Netaji also put their weight behind 'Desh Prem Diwas', saying that the name would have been more appropriate "but we're happy with the announcement". Hectic preparations have already commenced for the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji in Kolkata, both by the State Government and the Centre. While the TMC Government has planned a massive procession in Kolkata, the Centre is also making preparations for a grand event at the Victoria Memorial Hall, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to be present. Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan will participate in a programme in Cuttack, Odisha, where Bose was born. Another programme will be held in Haripura village in Gujarat's Surat district where Bose was elected the president of the Indian National Congress in 1938. But the bottom line remains that the true respect and honest tributes to Netaji had been if both the Governments had joined hands to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of one of India's greatest sons who strove to free India from the iron clutches of the British Empire.

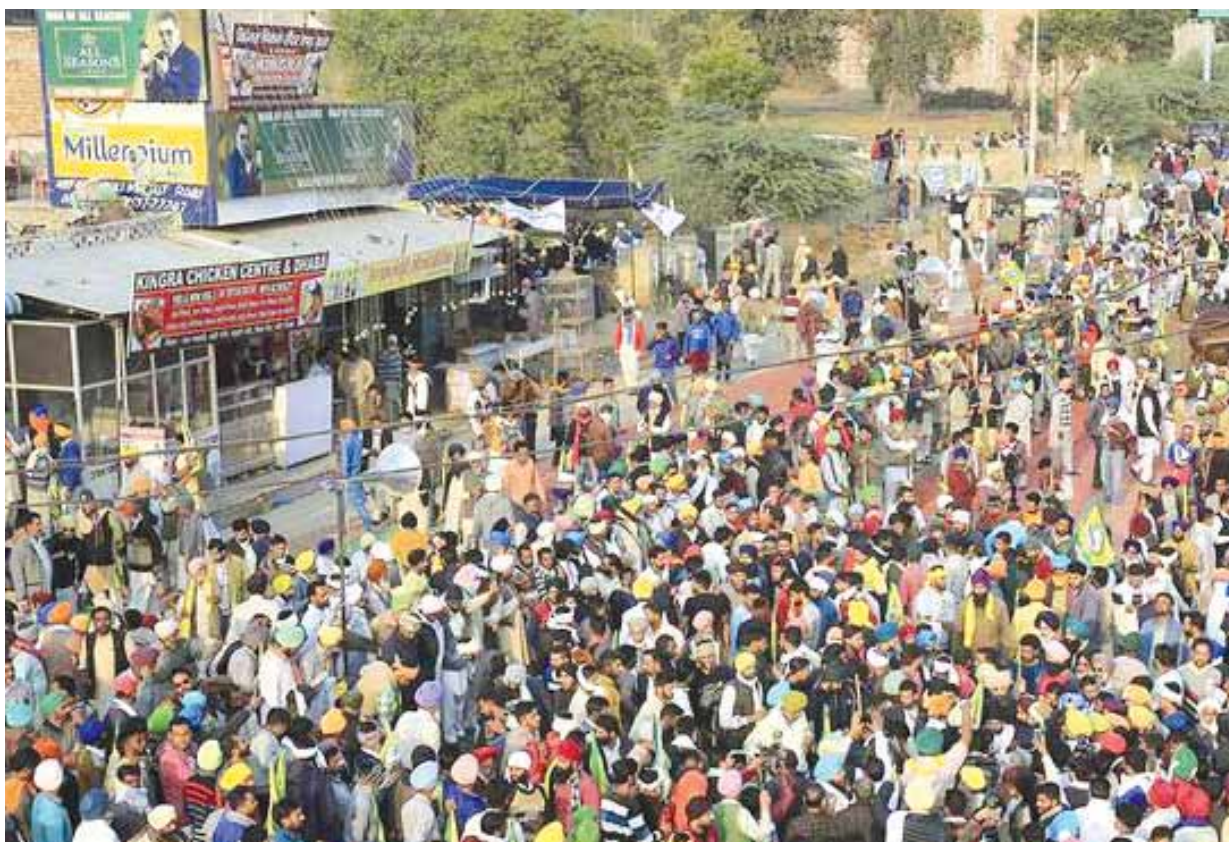


INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

As 2021 began, the Supreme Court (SC) appears to have got a taste for drama as it pitched a "biased committee" against the revolutionary, but peaceful, farmers camping on Delhi's borders. Why biased? Because all the four original members had unequivocally supported the farm "reforms". But the apex court believes that they will remain neutral; and Chief Justice of India SA Bobde orally observing that if a person on a panel has expressed views on the matter, it should not become ground for his disqualification from a committee and that "committee members are not judges; they can change their views". Meanwhile, Bhupinder Singh Mann rejected the SC's offer to be part of the committee and said he stands with Punjab. The three remaining members, who pledge to be "non-partisan", have only added to the mistrust of farmers because the media may see them as honourable but, to farmers, they are simply a neo-con economist, a known seed terrorist and a policy *sahib*.

Let us go back to the start of this mess. After repeated failure of talks between the NDA Government and the farmers, petitions were filed in the SC which gave them a patient ear and even admonished the Centre for its "handling of the issue". There was some jubilation when farmers were teased by names such as "P Sainath" to be included in the committee. But the celebration was short-lived; it was as if the SC was testing the waters before delivering the master-stroke: Four pro-Big Ag names were invited to the committee. They being men of the law, we can't expect the judges to understand much about agriculture but whosoever advised them, has put the integrity of India's top court in quagmire. Mann's polite refusal provides grist for this fact. Recently, committee member Anil Ghanwat has expressed fears that the farmers may not even participate in the proceedings.

How unbiased are the three remaining members — Ashok Gulati, Anil Ghanwat and Pramod Kumar Joshi? With a demonstrated history of promoting and advocating for Big Ag and US-style liberalisation, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Ashok Gulati, our neo-con economist, despite having worked in the Government for decades, is not-



rious as the poster child for Big Ag in India. His policy recommendations are hailed by the industry and vehemently opposed by farmers, whether on GM crops or farm-gate liberalisation. His economic models, to many farmers, are allied to the US industry interests and not to the welfare of Indian farmers and consumers. Gulati's models are a disservice to Gandhi's bread labour. Some would go so far as to say that his economic schizophrenia is so advanced for what he called the "1991 moment" for Indian agriculture, has turned out to be the biggest farmers' revolution in the history of our world.

Next we move to 'policy *sahib*' — Pramod K Joshi, who is the director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute. Without going too much into details about his personal views, the organisation he represents is heavily funded by the Big Ag corporations and allies. The Syngenta Foundation (Switzerland), The Rockefeller Foundation (United States), CropLife International (Belgium), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (United States), Cornell University (United States), the US Department of Agriculture (United States), KPMG East Africa and Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) are some of the biggies to generously donate to his kitty and push a global agenda through this organisation in countries like India. Farmers are

curious as to why did the SC's advisors think of this international body? Does India have a dearth of *swadeshi* agriculturists or agrarian policy experts? Why the swerve from Aatmanirbhar Bharat on policy matters? This name in the committee exposes the invisible hand behind the farm "reforms".

Finally, we move to alleged 'seed terrorist' Anil Ghanwat, who is the president of Shetkari Sangathana (SS). It didn't take illegal seeds from China to reach the US or India in May 2020 for any member of the cotton seed industry to understand the term "seed terrorism". India has been an area of operation for many such illegal seed schemes which want to destroy India's native seeds, public health and seed industry by using criminal means. 'Seed terrorists' smuggle and peddle unapproved foreign seeds on India's soils and fields. They claim that it's good for the farmers but actually, as the past year has shown, sound the death-knell for Indian biodiversity and public health as these seeds can be a gateway for getting new pests or plant diseases into the country. In a bid to protect our biodiversity, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh's (RSS) own Bharatiya Kisan Sangh has led a campaign in Maharashtra against this hazardous contamination and to curb the illegal spread of HT Bt Cotton. Keep in mind that COVID entered the country using humans as a gateway;

similarly, the American pink bollworm and fall armyworm have mysteriously entered India. We don't know what new disease could be in store next?

A note on the history of the organisation: SS founder Sharad Joshi, a farmer leader for few, was a pariah in the national farmers' resistance movement. His stance on the World Trade Organisation (WTO), inclusion of agriculture into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Dunkel Draft alienated him from the farmers who resisted this takeover in the late 90s. His obsession for "technology" and "progress" was only meretricious. His Frankenstein still lives eating into the profits and health of maize to oilseed farmers.

Following the same tradition, the SS has openly violated the Environment Protection Act, National Biodiversity Act and various other criminally punishable legislations by illegally planting and peddling an unapproved genetically modified organism (GMO) HT Bt Cotton in Maharashtra. This HT Bt cotton is a herbicide tolerant (HT) cotton variety that is unapproved by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC). The SC's technical committee on GM crops had also a few years ago put a moratorium on HT crops due to bio-safety issues. Despite this, Ghanwat's organisation has been unabashedly part of a criminal conspiracy to contaminate our native cotton seeds and biodiversity. Last year alone, he caused a damage of over ₹400 crore to the legal seed businesses, from Maharashtra to Telangana. Due to such fly-by-night operators, the legal cotton businesses are finding their seed lots contaminated by this unapproved variety and, in fact, many seed companies have been taken to court and their licenses suspended, yet Ghanwat's SS proliferates. They continue to do irreversible damage to our environment and health. The seed officials have booked various members for some of these offences, yet the ring leader — instead of being reprimanded — has been elevated to a power position.

The judiciary is an independent pillar of Indian democracy, and in no way should it be under pressure to echo the will of the Government of the day. For, if they acquiesce, Indian democracy will be dented. By appointing a committee without consultation, the SC may also have committed the same mistake as the Government. The CJI, if he wants the farmers and people to restore their faith in the judiciary, should disband the committee for now and evaluate the members' profile. People like Ghanwat and his organisation who openly defy the rule of law, should be punished, not honoured.

(The writer is the Director – Policy and Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal.)

## SOUNDBITE

Like millions of Indians, I am jubilant and proud at your heroic and historic victory at Brisbane. Your performance, against incredible odds, has brought glory to India.



Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi

The high-speed rail is a successful demonstration of China's independent innovation. China is now a world leader in high-speed rail technology.



Chinese President Xi Jinping

*Nachave* is a vivacious number that will definitely make you tap your feet. I always try to deliver a different and unique experience to music lovers.



Singer Daler Mehndi

No adversity could stop them, frontline players injured, & won after a remarkable turnaround from the depths of 36 all out, inspiring for others. Kudos, India!



Former Pakistani cricketer Wasim Akram

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Kudos, Team India!

Sir — What Team India pulled off in Oz — a Test series win — is no mean feat. It was a glorious victory in the game of uncertainties, the memory of which will be long cherished. Watching a bunch of plucky Indian youngsters playing so well against the world's best team in a match that otherwise looked like being a David and Goliath contest was an uplifting experience.

The absolutely stunning victory at Gabba is sweeter because it was achieved in a Test cricket that showcases skills, subtleties and sophistication more than any other format and it was clinched by exceptionally talented boys hailing from disparate and diverse backgrounds from across the country. For the legions of Indian cricket fans, India lifting the coveted Border-Gavaskar Trophy was a fairytale ending.

For most Indians, cricket is an absolute religion. The bouncers and racial slurs and other tricks tried by the host could not make up for what it lacked to snatch a victory from a resurgent and exuberant Indian team.

G David Milton  
Tamil Nadu

### Shun politics, stand united against China

This refers to the editorial 'Remove Chinese hamlet' (January 20). With China changing the *status quo* by constructing a village five km inside the disputed territory in Arunachal Pradesh, the ongoing tension between the two superpowers is going to escalate.

It appears that the Communist regime is hell-bent on strengthening and extending its territorial claims in violation of the international agreements and multiple treaties. The Chinese side doesn't respect the McMahon line, the demarcation between Tibet and India's Northeast, and constructs structures in the areas claimed by it. The development came as the Chinese and Indian troops are locked in a bitter standoff in eastern Ladakh since May 5 last year and multiple rounds of military and diplomatic-level talks failed to achieve any breakthrough.

The recent development has given yet another opportunity to the Opposition to take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the NDA Government. It is disheartening that at a time when President Xi Jinping-led China is undertaking such misadventures, we as a nation are



not even united over the issue. It sends a very wrong message to the world and is a setback to India's global image. The leaders, belonging both to the Opposition and the ruling dispensation, should talk and build consensus to deal with the matter in an effective and efficient manner. India's territorial integrity is not a political matter and it cannot be compromised for the sake of politics.

Bhagwan Thadani  
Mumbai

and the MEA is receiving requests for the export of these vaccines. It is a welcome move by India to supply the life-saving vials to six countries. India is supplying it to the nations who need it the most like Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles. It is also considering the applications by three other nations and these too are in

the final stages of approval. This step will help develop international cooperation and take India's diplomatic relations to a new high and, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, we are indeed honoured to have this opportunity to serve the world during the COVID pandemic.

Kavya Shah  
Ujjain

### Public holiday policy

Sir — It is a welcome move by the Supreme Court to seek the response of the Union Government on policy framework for declaring public holidays. A PIL complained that the Centre and State Governments arbitrarily notify public holidays.

It is true that the Governments declare public holidays on their whims and fancies to appease a section of population or vote bank. This is because in the absence of any guidelines or policy regarding the declaration of public holidays, the Governments use the opportunity to consolidate their vote banks.

At a time when we need to work diligently and incessantly with full devotion, increasing the number of holidays will decrease our productivity and output. It will make the Government employees lethargic and would give rise to a dilly-dally approach towards work. The need of the hour is that the Union Government should frame a national policy for declaring public holidays.

Amit Singh Kushwaha  
Satna

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

## A risky business

Share redemption is like a double-edged sword. The very advantage associated with it can backfire and become a major disadvantage



HIMA BINDU KOTA

The recent announcement by the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), pertaining to its share buyback worth over ₹1,046 crore as it looked to return surplus cash to bondholders — the biggest being the Centre — is perfectly in tune with the Government's efforts to raise funds for containing the rising fiscal deficit. The company's Board approved repurchase of the ₹6.97 crore dividend, which is about 1.55 per cent of the total paid-up capital, at a price of ₹150 per share. The Indian markets may see similar announcements by other Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like Coal India Limited, National Thermal Power Corporation Ltd and National Mineral Development Corporation in days to come. GAIL has also declared an interim dividend of ₹2.50 per share for the coming year. This share buyback forms a part of the target set by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for raising ₹2.1 lakh crore from the disinvestment of PSUs in 2020-21. Share redemption is the process by which companies buy their own dividends which are traded on the bourses at the market value, and in addition to its stock, is a preferred way to repay cash to the shareholders. Paying dividends to bondholders is an expensive affair as it increases the cost of equity. Therefore, paying off shareowners through buybacks is less expensive and reduces the overall cost of the capital. Since 2016 through 2018, it was one of the most favoured ways of returning excess cash to bondholders. In 2018, Indian stock markets witnessed bond repurchases worth ₹54,600 crore. This run was somewhat stalled in 2019 by the Government's decision to tax these transactions. As many as 70 companies announced share buybacks to the tune of ₹35,460 crore in the first half of 2019. In the 2020 Budget, however, the new tax regime made share buybacks lucrative once again.

There are several reasons why firms buy back shares. First, to consolidate their stake as diverse and numerous policyholders or owners make it difficult for the company to take an undisputed decision, as numerous stakeholders with voting rights indulge in a power tussle. By redeeming shares, companies increase their voting rights and exercise more control over governance. For instance, OYO's share buyback from Sequoia and Lightspeed in 2019 increased the stake of Chief Executive Officer Ritesh Agarwal from a meagre 10 per cent to 30 per cent, increasing his say in decision-making. Second, by redeeming its shares, a firm sends positive signals about its future prospects and growth potential. A company may also believe that the current stock price is undervalued and takes it as a good opportunity to increase its bondholding keeping in mind future prospects. This is known as the signalling effect. Third, share repurchase is one of the best uses for any idle cash reserve companies might have, especially when there are not enough chances to invest the excess money.

However, share redemption is like a double-edged sword. The very advantage associated with it can backfire and become its disadvantage. While competing in a high growth industry, buyback may not be considered a positive step as it may give an impression that the firm does not have enough avenues to invest its idle cash reserve. Long-term investors respond to such share buybacks by selling their stakes. For instance, IBM's buyback announcements between 1995 and 2000 made investors apprehensive about the company's ability to bring out new products and services. Further, share repurchase is not an isolated event and has to be always viewed in conjunction with other performance parameters. For instance, it will not send a positive signal about the future growth potential to the investors if profitability is declining or the financial outcomes are showing otherwise.

Basically, there are three ways in which companies buy back their shares. Open market repurchase is the most common buyback mechanism in which firms announce redemption of a certain number of bonds through a Press release but do not give details of price, timing and execution of the deal. In fixed-price tender offers, companies invite shareholders to sell their dividends to the firm at a fixed price, generally at a premium rate to the prevailing market price, within a given time frame. While in auction-based tender offers, firms disclose their willingness to pay a premium and seek tenders from owners for certain portion of shares. It is the responsibility of the shareholders to respond to the company about the quantity of shares to be sold within a specified time period. Studies on the impact of share buyback have found that share redemption boosts operating performance due to an increase in earnings per share, return on equity and return on assets, rise in stock prices and shareholders' value. But negative effects of share repurchase on the stock prices of the firms have been reported, too. Although buybacks bring a positive sentiment to the bourses, their attraction for firms and shareholders depend on factors that are unique to each case. The management has to decide the proper use of its funds — either to reinvest in its business or return cash to the shareholders — creating a balance between future growth and stockholder's value creation.

(The writer is Associate Professor, Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal.)

FARMERS WANT TO TAKE OUT A TRACTOR RALLY ON THE OUTER RING ROAD IN THE CAPITAL, AS THEY INTEND TO CELEBRATE REPUBLIC DAY.

—ADVOCATE  
PRASHANT BHUSHAN



OVER 5,000 TRACTORS IN THE CITY CANNOT BE ALLOWED, AS THEY CAN GO ALL OVER DELHI. IT'S LIKELY TO CREATE PROBLEMS.

—ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
KK VENUGOPAL

# Don't be an anti-vaxxer

There have been minor adverse events across India since the vaccination drive began on Jan 16. However, surveillance has been strong and will remain so in future, too



VM KATOCH

Vaccines go a long way in managing, controlling, eliminating deadly, sometimes debilitating infectious diseases. Smallpox was the first example of a dreaded disease, with a mortality rate as high as 30 per cent, being eradicated by a vaccine. But it was a long journey from the development of the vaccine to the elimination of the disease. Edward Jenner, an English physician, was the first to demonstrate the effect of a vaccine in 1796.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) initiated a campaign to eradicate smallpox in 1959, but despite their best efforts, smallpox was still widespread in 1966, causing regular outbreaks in multiple countries. Then in 1967 efforts were intensified and scientists came up with a higher quality freeze-dried vaccine, bifurcated needle and a stringent surveillance system. India achieved the target of eradication of smallpox in 1975 after a very intense vaccination and containment campaign. So, it took almost 200 years, when on May 8, 1980, the 33rd World Health Assembly officially declared the world free of the disease.

Smallpox is not the only example. Over the years, vaccines emerged as a powerful tool to protect populations against various disease-causing organisms. Our scientists have developed vaccines that provide complete or partial protection against diseases such as plague, cholera, rabies, polio, measles, rotavirus and influenza among others.

When COVID-19 hit the world last year, scientists across the globe came together to develop an effective vaccine against it. Interestingly, within 10 months of decoding the virus' genome sequence, many vaccines were not only developed but tested for their safety and efficacy. With vaccines we have achieved an important milestone in our fight against COVID. It is a matter of pride that two vaccines have become available in India. One has been fully made in India and the other has been developed in partnership and manufactured in the country. Till now, India had been trying to slow the spread of the infection and control the number of Coronavirus cases without a vaccine through conventional and known approaches like using masks, social distancing, hand hygiene, detection of cases, isolation, contact tracing and testing. Progress in medical management through modern as well as traditional medicine systems has also contributed to prevention and improved treatment outcomes in the country.

While all these methods will remain relevant till the virus is defeated, building the immune capacity of individuals and the population through vaccination can prove to be another highly effective shield against COVID. We are at an important juncture in our fight against the Coronavirus. On January 16, the Government rolled out the vaccines across the country. Its plan to inoculate 30 crore people in the first phase of the vaccination drive is an ambitious one, especially when the vaccine has to be given in two doses, at an interval of four-six weeks.

To execute this drive effectively, the Government has recruited an army of vaccinators, on-ground staff, experts to keep a watch on the adverse events that have been reported from many places, specialists to address these adverse events in the shortest possible time and data specialists to analyse the large amount of data the nationwide

“ALLOWING THE NATURAL SPREAD OF DISEASE TO GENERATE HERD IMMUNITY IS NOT DESIRABLE AS THIS COMES AT THE COST OF AVOIDABLE MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY. WITH MASS VACCINATION AGAINST COVID-19, THE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE. WE MUST HELP IT IN EVERY WAY BY GETTING RID OF OUR VACCINE HESITANCY”



vaccine drive would generate. It has also created the physical infrastructure for the storage and transportation of the vaccine.

This sounds like the Government had to do too much in too short a time. But times have changed and viruses are becoming smarter. With humans travelling across the world, viruses too are travelling to all nooks and corners of the globe. As a result, an endemic turns into an epidemic and an epidemic turns into a pandemic in a blink of an eye. As we all know, this is what happened with the Coronavirus too. So, the fight in these times is not only against viruses, but also against time. Especially where the COVID-19 is concerned.

A new strain with the potential to spread faster has appeared in the UK, and several other countries, including India. There are many pockets in the country which are still not exposed to the virus. We don't know how the virus is going to behave in the coming months. It can come back in small waves, then spread to newer areas and we may also see another severe wave. Hence, we need to put in practice all the lessons we have learnt during past vaccination drives. From redesigning a vaccine campaign, to recalibrating it to address various issues that arise after its launch, to the redevelopment of a vaccine itself to address the mutation in the virus, the vaccination process may need to be changed according to the demands of time. For example, the first polio vaccine the Salk, which was developed in the early 1950s, was an injectable one. It brought a significant drop in the number of polio cases. Later, in the 1960s the oral poliovirus vaccine was developed. It had a live attenuated virus.

Apart from aspects related to science, for a vaccine campaign to achieve its target, it may have to overcome various social and political challenges as well. Every time, we introduce a new vaccine there is vaccine hesitancy. People have a lot of concerns — some of them are genuine while some arise out of rumours and misconceptions about how the vaccine can affect their health. There are many historical examples of such lack of communication or miscommunication becoming barriers in India which could be overcome by establishing good connection with people and their leaders. Hence, peoples' concerns should be identified, addressed as fast as possible by sharing scientific facts with them and in the language, they can understand. Providing complete information in an effective way, maintaining the confidence of people in information from authorised Government sources as well as the mainstream media is as important as the logistics of providing vaccines with highest standards of quality. This was done effectively in the past and hopefully it will be done so now too, especially as there is already a lot of reluctance across the country to take the shots after a few adverse incidents. However, the fact remains that only nine adverse events following immunisation that required hospitalisation have been recorded so far in India.

Second, adverse event surveillance after the vaccination has been strong so far. It will continue to remain so as the drive goes forward. Besides, real-time analysis of the reports as well as data generated from the various vaccine sites across the country will be important to further ensure the safety and efficacy of

the vaccine as we go into the mass vaccination phase.

Whether it is smallpox or polio, we were able to eradicate the disease with a targeted approach. First, implement it at a wider scale. Slowly, identify the problematic areas. There could be places where the disease prevalence could be higher than the rest of the country, target that area. Then there could be pockets where people would be more hesitant to vaccines, target that area with clear communication strategies. Communicate with the community, the local leaders, address their concern. After some time, the country could face yet another wave of COVID, or issues of mutant variant(s) may emerge. We need a robust disease surveillance mechanism to handle any such situation and contain the outbreak before it spreads.

Pandemics can be contained only when people become resistant to the disease-causing pathogen. There are two ways to acquire herd immunity—one, on exposure to the pathogen people develop antibodies and immune response in the body and second, the body develops antibodies when we give the vaccine. Allowing the natural spread of disease to generate herd immunity is not desirable as this comes at the cost of avoidable morbidity and mortality. With mass vaccination against COVID-19, the Government is determined to protect the people. We must help it in every way by getting rid of our vaccine hesitancy.

(The writer is former Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research and Secretary, Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The views expressed are personal.)

# A legendary feat by incredible Indians

Our netas, scientists, technocrats and babus must learn from the tremendous performance of the cricket team and herald a new era of excellence in all walks of life



VK BAHUGUNA

On Tuesday the Indian cricket team scripted an incredible Test victory which will be remembered for a long time in the annals of the cricketing world's history. The Australians were proud of the mighty, world-class fast bowling attacks of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. All their former players and commentators overrated their overall capabilities to win and had almost written off this Indian team and predicted a complete whitewash.

However, they were stunned by the emerging talent of this underrated and inexperienced new breed of Indian cricketers. It is well-known that the Australians are masters of the nasty tactics of sledging. The despi-

cable practice was invented by Fay Allen (nee Thomas) whereby some players seek to gain an advantage by insulting or verbally intimidating the opposing player. The purpose is to try to weaken the opponent's concentration, thereby causing them to make mistakes or underperform. However, the Australians were torn to pieces by the Indian batters and bowlers in the last three Test matches.

The dubious records created by Indian cricketers in Adelaide in the first Test by scoring their lowest-ever 36 Test runs in an inning must have hurt the boys a lot. The team changed tack after this humiliating defeat and rose from the ashes and won the second Test after India XI captain Virat Kohli left for home on paternity leave.

The stand-in captain Ajankya Rahane, his colleague Cheteshwar Pujara and other second-line cricketers have shown the world that they cannot be taken lightly anymore. There is an old saying: "Sometimes you have to die inside in order to rise from your own ashes and believe in yourself and love yourself to become a new person." The Indian team did just that by winning the second Test with style. Full credit goes to Rahane

for his gutsy match-winning century and farsighted leadership.

The story of this Border-Gavaskar Trophy is something like this only. All the Australian experts and former cricketers had written off the Indian team by predicting a four-zero whitewash. All of them had forgotten that the trophy is still with India and times have changed. The Australian bowlers, with their short-pitched bodyline bowling reminded one of the bodyline tactics of England's cricket team for their Ashes Tour of Australia in 1932-33, in order to control the skills of the awesome Don Bradman.

The way India had batted in the second Test at Melbourne and the way Jadeja had launched a counter-attack with great courage and with an excellent exhibition of technique lower down the batting order, gave sufficient hints to Australian players that no matter what happened to them earlier in the Test, the Indians were determined to undo that ignominious defeat.

This was proved with sufficient firepower by our so far "second-string bowlers" who gave it back to the Australians and won India the



second Test and created a scare in the Australian camp in the third and fourth Test.

The way the Sydney Test was turned into a draw by the stubborn batting of an injured Hanuma Vihari and Ravichandran Ashwin, aided by Pujara and skipper Rahane, is the stuff of legends. They had taken several blows from the rising bouncers and short-pitched balls of Australian pacers, who left no stone unturned to intimidate the Indians.

In fact they were caught in their own game and the Indians resolutely defended and batted the whole day to deny the home team a victory. This solid batting by injured Indians will

be remembered for a long time by both the teams and the cricketing world.

However, the victory in the series clincher fourth Test outclassed the Australians by all means, in all the fields of the game. The second-string bowlers showed the Australians that they too, were top quality players and matched their rivals on all fronts of the game. The batsmen, led by a gritty Pujara who exhibited an unparalleled determination to guard his wicket, laid the foundation for others to complete the unprecedented task of snatching victory from Australia.

This Test series will be noted for the emergence of the young and dashing Shubman Gill as an elegant and technically-competent batsman who, if handled carefully, will be one of the batting superstars of the game along with an aggressive Pant.

On his part Pant, too, played positively and handled the bowlers with contempt and confidently scored runs in all directions with his determined and aggressive batting. He shattered the confidence of Australian bowlers and their Captain, too. This Test also revealed the makings of a world-class batting and pace

bowler in Shardul Thakur, who will in all probability find himself in the same league as the great Kapil Dev in the future.

One of the major finds of this tour is Washington Sunder the dashing Tamil Nadu opener who destroyed Aussie bowling with his Vivian Richard-like shots apart from being an outstanding wicket taking, off-spinner who has proved that it will be difficult to ignore him in all formats of the game now.

The Indian captain also showed great sportsmanship by gifting a signed jersey to Australian bowler Lyon for completing 100 Tests.

Going forward, this emergence of youngsters on the international scene will result in a tough time for selectors who will be spoilt for choice now. Plus opposing teams will be in awe as India has an excellent bench strength in all areas of the game.

However, the actions of one of India's former heroes, Rahul Dravid in shaping this new Indian team under his tutelage as the coach of India's 'A' squad cannot be ignored. There was a resilience in this team that 'The Wall' himself would have

been proud of. India's 'Young Turks' lifting the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is more than a redemption story, this is more than a coming-of-age story, this is an epic, a story for the ages. The Indian cricket team's determination is a story for the ages.

When India won the 2011 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium they got an open-top bus ride through the city of Mumbai. However, this is not possible now due to the pandemic. But just because this team cannot get one right now, it does not mean they don't deserve the same honour.

If Indian society shows this type of dedication in other spheres of life, there is no reason why we cannot scale new heights and become a developed country sooner rather than later.

Our political class, scientists, technocrats and the bureaucracy must learn from this tremendous performance of the Indian cricket team and herald a new era of excellence in all walks of life. After all, history is always written by the victor.

(The writer is a former civil servant. The views expressed are personal.)



# Sensex, Nifty soar to record highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks galloped to lifetime highs on Wednesday, in lockstep with global markets which surged ahead of US President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration amid expectations of fresh stimulus by the incoming administration. Rallying for the second straight day, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced by 393.83 or 0.80 per cent to close at its fresh record of 49,792.12.

The broader NSE Nifty jumped 123.55 points or 0.85 per cent to settle at a lifetime high of 14,644.70.

World stocks advanced on Wednesday after US Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen called for a hefty stimulus to protect the US economy. Biden, who will be sworn into office on Wednesday, has laid out a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package proposal to boost the economy.

Among Sensex stocks, Maruti rose the most by 2.75 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra (2.67 per cent), Mahindra & Mahindra (1.98 per cent) and Asian Paints (1.98 per cent).

Heavyweights Reliance

Industries, Infosys, HDFC and TCS accounted for the lion's share of the gains.

Among losers, Power Grid dropped 1.75 per cent, NTPC 1.35 per cent, HDFC Bank 0.83 per cent and ITC 0.59 per cent. "An optimistic western market aided the Indian market to touch lifetime highs with new buying in segments like auto, IT and PSU Bank. So far, the Q3 results are better than forecasted and this has led to continued buying across sectors.

"Ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as President, the US market is on an upbeat

mood with high expectations of a big US stimulus," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Sector-wise, BSE auto, energy, IT and teck indices climbed up to 2.18 per cent, while utilities, FMCG and telecom ended in the red.

In the broader markets, the BSE midcap and smallcap gauges jumped as much as 1.08 per cent. On the global markets front, Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.4 per cent and South Korea's Kospi by 0.6 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 0.7 per cent.

Japanese market, however, dropped 0.4 per cent due to fresh Covid-19 concerns.

European bourses were trading in the green in early deals. The rupee gained for the second straight day and closed 12 paise higher at 73.05 against the US dollar.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.70 per cent to \$56.29 per barrel. Foreign institutional investors were net buyers in the capital market as they purchased shares worth ₹257.55 crore on Tuesday, according to provisional exchange data.

## Working on addressing misinformation on user policy update: WhatsApp

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after India asked it to withdraw changes to its privacy policy, WhatsApp on Wednesday said the proposed change does not expand its ability to share user data with Facebook and that it is open to answering questions on the issue.

The Indian Government on Tuesday posed 14 questions to WhatsApp on its "invasive" changes in Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.

"We wish to reinforce that this update does not expand our ability to share data with Facebook. Our aim is to provide transparency and new options available to engage with businesses so they can serve their customers and grow," a WhatsApp spokesperson said. The spokesperson added that WhatsApp will



always protect personal messages with end-to-end encryption, so that neither WhatsApp nor Facebook can see them.

"We are working to address misinformation and remain available to answer any questions," the spokesperson further stated.

In a strongly worded letter to WhatsApp CEO Will

Cathcart, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has said the proposed changes to the WhatsApp Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, without giving users an option to opt-out, "raise grave concerns regarding the implications for the choice and autonomy of Indian citizens".

The letter noted that with over 400 million users in India, the changes will have a disproportionate impact on the country's citizens, it said.

It has also asked WhatsApp to provide details of the services provided by it in India, categories of data collected and permissions and consents sought. It has also asked WhatsApp to withdraw the proposed changes and reconsider its approach to information privacy, freedom of choice and data security.

## Flipkart-Aditya Birla Fashion deal gets CCI nod

**New Delhi:** Competition Commission of India on Wednesday said it has approved the acquisition of 7.8 per cent minority stake in Aditya Birla Fashion by Flipkart Investments Private Ltd (FIPL). Aditya Birla Fashion had in October last year approved plans to raise ₹1,500 crore by issuing a 7.8 per cent stake on a preferential basis to Walmart-owned Flipkart Group. "Commission approves acquisition of a 7.8 per cent minority stake in Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd by Flipkart Investments Private Ltd," the regulator said.

## Indian insurers prepared to withstand economic downturn: Moody's

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian insurance firms are geared to withstand the economic downturn, as premium growth in general insurance segment will remain in positive territory and life premiums will stay broadly flat despite the weakening economy, Moody's Investors Service on Wednesday said.

"Although the economic slowdown has had an adverse impact on Indian insurers, with general insurance growth slowing to 2.5 per cent and life insurers' new business premiums falling by 1.7 per cent in the nine months to December 2020, we

expect general insurance premium growth to remain in positive territory," Moody's VP and senior analyst Mohammed Ali Londe said. This premium growth will be driven by strong demand for health and protection coverage, he added. In the nine months ended December 2020, health premiums grew by 13.7 per cent, helped by rising consumer awareness of these products during coronavirus pandemic and regulatory actions that enabled insurers to offer protection against the virus.

"We expect health premiums to continue growing strongly into 2021, when we anticipate that India's GDP growth will

rebound to 10.8 per cent, leading to a gradual normalisation of economic activity," the agency said.

The growth prospects for general insurance are particularly positive, with the country's general insurance penetration rate standing at just 0.9 per cent. This is less than half the rate for China (2 per cent), which in turn lags behind developed markets such as the US (8.5 per cent), the report said. According to Moody's, insurers in the country have also responded to the crisis by rapidly developing appropriate products and improving their digital offerings. "This has led to an increase

in sales of health and protection policies, which we expect will drive further growth in the future," it noted.

The report said some Indian insurers' solvency remains inadequate due to weak profitability, resulting from the intense competition in the market.

The government in July 2020 halted a planned merger between state-owned insurers - National Insurance Co, The Oriental Insurance Co and United India Insurance Co and instead approved a capital injection totalling Rs 12,450 crore (USD 1.65 billion) designed to help improve their profitability, it added.

## Weak reform implementation, financial sector woes could lower India's medium-term growth: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Wednesday said India's medium-term growth potential is at around 6.5 per cent but weak implementation of reforms, combined with continued financial sector problems, could lower its potential. It said the revival of the reform agenda is among the

Indian Government's policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic shock.

"If implemented effectively, we believe these reforms may help to support India's medium-term growth and partially offset downside pressures to investment from renewed asset-quality challenges in the financial sector and damaged corporate balance sheets," Fitch said.

NIFTY 50						
SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE	
NIFTY 50	14538.30	14666.45	14517.55	14644.70	123.55	
TATAMOTORS	290	277.5	258.85	274.4	157.5	
ADANIPORTS	529	562.5	529	556.25	23.45	
WIPRO	434	447.85	433	449	14.65	
TECHM	997	1023.40	997	1019.45	26.95	
MARUTI	7882.00	8170.00	7860.25	8120.20	20.24	
UPL	563	581.85	556.5	575.5	11.5	
ASIANPAINT	2654.00	2707.15	2645.05	2695.00	49.95	
RELIANCE	2021.40	2058.00	2001.40	2053.00	36.6	
M&M	807	831.95	802	822	13.95	
INFY	1320.55	1348.40	1320.55	1338.85	22.2	
HCLTECH	991.75	1009.65	987.55	997.5	13.65	
TCS	3270.00	3327.95	3267.10	3305.00	44.3	
CIPLA	822.5	834.9	822.3	832.5	10.4	
SBIN	298.8	304.7	296.85	302.2	3.6	
HEROMOTOCO	3239.00	3292.50	3230.30	3268.00	35.1	
TATACONSUM	690.15	695.9	682.6	687.65	6.4	
IT	1369.00	1393.05	1362.55	1380.75	10.9	
ICICIBANK	546.45	554.6	546	550.75	4.3	
HDCLIFE	700	711.85	700	704	5.45	
ULTRACEMCO	5514.00	5542.25	5463.90	5532.30	42.2	
JSWSTEEL	395	402.9	393.45	398.4	3	
COALINDIA	140.5	141.95	138.65	141.5	1.05	
AXISBANK	664	680.05	664	673.7	4.95	
INDUSINDBK	936.9	953.85	928.25	946.85	6.95	
BHARTIARTL	592.3	602.5	589	596.3	4	
TTIAN	1519.90	1541.00	1519.90	1530.00	10.1	
HDFCANK	2666.00	2711.90	2622.60	2673.00	16.05	
BAFINANCE	4968.00	5032.60	4901.00	4980.00	20.85	
ONGC	99	99.8	97.85	98.5	0.4	
DIVISLAB	3630.00	3666.10	3597.05	3610.00	10.55	
BAJAJFINSV	8938.00	9025.00	8838.00	8934.90	10.75	
HINDALCO	251.6	253.65	248.6	251.6	0.05	
BAJAJ-AUTO	3640.00	3692.80	3629.35	3640.00	-1	
DREDDY	5102.30	5159.75	5065.05	5084.90	-4	
HINDUNILVR	2357.00	2373.95	2346.30	2359.30	-3.85	
EIGHERMOT	2882.20	2964.00	2865.65	2875.00	-8.5	
GRASIM	1020.80	1038.50	1014.80	1028.90	-3	
BPOCL	415	416.9	409.25	412.2	-1.25	
KOTAKBANK	1890.00	1890.00	1869.45	1880.90	-6.1	
BRITANNIA	3605.00	3641.00	3635.00	3587.10	-14.15	
NESTLEIND	1767.00	1794.00	1776.05	1768.20	-7.27	
SUNPHARMA	601.2	603.6	592.95	594	-2.55	
IOC	98.9	98.9	97.75	98	-0.55	
SBILIFE	905.1	910.9	895	898.3	-6.1	
ITFC	218.5	219	215.7	217.2	-1.65	
HDFCBANK	1501.00	1501.00	1486.00	1490.00	-13.85	
GAIL	140.05	140.6	137.55	138.2	-1.45	
NTPC	99.6	99.7	98	98.1	-1.55	
SHRECEM	24740.00	24740.00	23835.65	23930.00	-444.5	
POWERGRID	200	200.6	195.15	195.45	-4.2	

NIFTY NEXT 50						
SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE	
NIFTY NEXT 50	33,809.25	33,995.10	33,755.45	33,917.40	192.2	
ADANITRANS	421.7	458	418.1	456.75	38.65	
BANKBARODA	75.85	80.3	75.05	79.65	3.9	
NAUKRI	4920.00	5227.00	4915.00	5145.90	247.1	
BOSCHLTD	15,164.65	15,956.00	15,080.50	15,900.00	717.5	
SBICARD	969	1006.00	962.4	997	29.95	
TATACONSUM	588	602.7	583.6	598	15.3	
ADANIGREEN	994.65	1026.50	978.35	1016.50	23.65	
GODREJCP	789.9	804.9	785.2	799	12.3	
ALKEA	3,076.65	3,103.00	3,035.45	3,094.00	41.15	
PNB	36.75	37.3	36.3	36.9	0.4	
HAVELLS	1,024.75	1,032.45	1,012.00	1,029.80	10.6	
PIDILITIND	1,742.00	1,796.70	1,738.05	1,753.00	16.65	
IGL	560	563.3	553	561.45	3.9	
DLF	291.05	295	287.7	290.8	1.8	
MOOTHOOTPH	1,211.00	1,215.90	1,196.65	1,215.05	7.2	
AIROPHARMA	926.2	942	923.7	929.8	5.55	
SIEMENS	1,685.00	1,697.00	1,672.10	1,687.10	7.45	
BAJAJHLONG	3,247.95	3,273.75	3,203.45	3,250.00	14.25	
CADILAH	483.5	488.8	482.1	487	1.8	
PEL	1,590.50	1,609.85	1,576.00	1,595.50	3.95	
BERGEPAINT	795.65	815.8	788.35	791.5	2	
NMDC	120.95	122.35	119.65	121.05	0.3	
LTI	4,107.00	4,240.10	4,062.00	4,100.00	8.65	
INDIGO	1,663.85	1,674.75	1,642.25	1,668.00	3.25	
ICICIPRULI	515.55	526	513.5	516.5	0.95	
HDFCAML	3,208.00	3,245.05	3,180.00	3,209.00	4.4	
GICRE	140.95	144	140.05	140.15	0.1	
PETRONET	250.5	253.75	248.8	249.1	-0.25	
PGHL	11,390.00	11,434.45	11,262.00	11,360.00	-15.75	
MARICO	417.2	422.15	413.05	416.3	-0.85	
CONCOR	437.4	441.65	435.75	435.75	-1.25	
AMBUJACEM	261	263.85	257.65	261	-0.95	
LUPIN	1,093.95	1,102.05	1,085.85	1,084.30	-4.9	
OFSS	3,380.00	3,415.40	3,312.85	3,344.95	-17.95	
BIOCON	451.6	453.9	448.05	449	-2.6	
ICICI	1,492.50	1,507.20	1,452.05	1,501.00	-9	
MOTHERSUMI	160	161	155.55	158.5	-1	
DABUR	544	544.85	536.6	537.25	-4.15	
COLPAL	1,565.00	1,567.90	1,540.10	1,543.90	-12.2	
PFC	122	122.85	120.4	121.2	-1.1	
BANDHANBANK	362.95	367.3	357.1	359	-3.3	
DMART	2,797.85	2,798.00	2,740.10	2,748.25	-30.15	
HINDZINC	303.35	315	291.55	298.3	-3.5	
ABOTPHARMA	2,762.00	2,769.45	2,713.00	2,714.05	-36.85	
TORNENTIND	14,645.00	14,720.00	14,325.00	14,400.00	-20.7	
INDUSTOWER	258.7	259.7	253.7	254.5	-3.75	
UBIL	1,280.05	1,293.75	1,257.00	1,263.65	-18.8	
MCDOWELL-N	632	634.8	617.75	619	-9.75	

## BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP					
TCS	3265	3327	3265	3308.2	1620	1647.5	1615.2	1631.35	
TATAMOTORS	260	277.6	259	274.9	989	996	974.85	978.65	
RELIANCE	2022.5	2058.05	2001.25	2054.85	IDFC	32.85	33.25	32.1	32.25
TITAN	1520	1540.5	1520	1530.9	DIXON	45.25	46.2	43.9	45.4
BAJFINANCE	4964.2	5031	4900	4981.15	LICHSGFIN	15272	15400	14860.15	1510.85
IDEA	13.33	13.5	13.22	13.37	ASTRAZEN	430.5	433	419.4	431.4
WIPRO	433.9	447.4	433.5	444.95	HDFCLIFE	4053.95	4065.75	3901	3926.3
TATASTEEL	695	699.45	682.45	695.1	APPLE	704	711.6	699.55	702.8
HDFC	2671.1	2712	2623	2688.75	PEL	3560	3773.4	3560	3773.4
INFY	1318.6	1348.2	1318.6	1339.45	TATAMETALI	1601	1609.5	1577.9	1596.9
ITC	219	219	215.75	217.6	ABBOTINDIA	824.8	842	816.45	820.45
MARUTI	7960	8170	7863.4	8142.55	PHILIPCARB	14605	14725	14345.05	14404
TATAELXSI	2700	2826	2700	2788.6	BOMDYEING	189.9	194.4	185.6	190.2
CANBK	138.8	143.5	137.5	141.9	ADANINTRANS	79.1	80.95	78.5	79.65
BANDHANBANK	363	367.25	357.2	359.85	M&MFIN	420.55	458	418.5	455.55
IDFCFIRSTB	50.85	52.45	49.4	51.4	N&NL	182.5	185.05	180.95	184.6
SCHNEIDER	95.7	106.8	93.2	103.75	NESTLEIND	17815	17938.35	17630.45	17677.75
SBIN	299.75	304.6	296.9	302.55					
BHARTIARTL	592.4	602.5	589.1	596.2					
BANKBARODA	76.15	80.35	75.05	79.4					
NAUKRI	4934	5228	4934	5168.6					
ADANIENET	530.05	552.15	530.05	547.75					
FEDERALBNK	76	77.95	74.6	77.3					
PNB	36.8	37.3	36.25	36.95					
MINDTREE	1704	1794.1	1683.95	1784.35					
SKFINDIA	1794.25	1821.8	1794.25	1801.55					
LT	1372.9	1392.9	1365	1381.95					
INDIANBNDK	93.1	95.35	92.88	94.7					
HDFCBANK	1504.95	1504.95	1486.5	1490.95					
ASIANPAINT	2660	2660	2645.1	2697.9					
LT&TFH	108.15	108.15	102.8	103.85					
KMRFL	87880	94034.7	87616.65	92923					
KOTAKBANK	1895	1895	1869.55	1883.95	GRASIM	1033.85	1038.9	1014.7	1033.3
HCLTECH	991	1009.55	988.2	998.55	IRCTC	1445	1458.5	1436.95	1452.3
TATACACHE	528.35	542.9	525.5	535.8	BLISSGVS	201	209.5	198.2	199.2
DLF	251.5	294.9	287.7	290.4	GODRE/PROP	1405.05	1427.95	1405.05	1419.25
HINDUNILVR	2364.1	2374.1	2346.05	2355.4	ICICIPRULI	516	525.95	513.55	515.1
ADANIAPORTS	530	562.6	529.2	558.25	SHREENG	24384.05	24384.05	23838.75	23936.35
SBICARD	967.85	1006	962.4	998.6	JSWENERGY	74.9	79.2	73.7	77.2
COALINDIA	8930.1	9021.15	8844.1	8938.45	PRETAIL	74.55	77.8	73.9	77.9
JAIPALNSV	140	141.9	138.75	141.5	LAURUSLABS	365	377.05	365	371.9
ICPL	564.35	581.45	556.25	576.2	CADILAC	484.5	488.55	482.55	488.25
ICICIBANK	546.9	554.5	546.9	550.8	SIEMENS	1686	1697.3	1672.85	1683.2
APOLLOTYRE	189.95	204.2	189.95	200.95	CIP	823.9	834.55	822.5	832.9
AKSHARINFT	1238	1246.16	1219.35	1247.95	PHILFORT	602.5	625.55	603.5	618.2
ASHOKLEY	120	122.2	118.55	121.95	APLTD	1040	1045.55	997.97	997.97
ZEE	225	231.25	223.8	228.55	HEROMOTOCO	3237	3291.75	3221	3275.3
ADANIGREEN	997	1016	978.05	1020.5	INDIACEM	170	174	166.8	172.1
IKTIRE	90.9	108.2	90.85	106.25	RVNL	31.2	31.95	30.6	30.6
HINDZINC	303.95	314.8	291.2	296.45	SBILIFE	910.95	910.95	895.15	896.55
HINDALSTEL	296.5	306.6	294.1	304.95	CUMMINSIND	617.5	622.55	612.3	618.4
BHEL	39.8	40.7	39.4	40.5	INDIANB	97	97.4	94.55	95.95
B&B	808.8	833.1	801.5	824.15	FSL	92.05	97.25	92.05	95.9
MUMHSGFIN	229.45	229.8	224.6	225.75	IEX	245	253.9	237.5	245.35
SAIL	66.25	67.45	66	66.75	DMAT	2825	2825	2741.5	2758.3
TATACONSUM	589.45	602.8	584.15	596.8	HINDPETRO*	232.2	233.1	228.5	231.5
TATAMTRDVR	101	107.25	100.65	105.8	BANKINDIA	53.25	54.85	53.05	53.95
TECHM	95	102.25	99.5	101.92	SUNTV	515.85	528.35	511.45	525.4
CEATLTD	1290	1352.4	1290	1311	ANILNATHUM	45	46.35	45	45.55
TATAPOWER	6578	6788	6508.7	6535.95	GODREJCP	788.25	804.58	787	800.5
SANOFI	8295	8349.45	8275.5	8309.7	NCC	59.55	62.15	59.35	60.1
EICHERMOT	2892.25	2962.8	2867.2	2880.15	ULTRACEMCO	5510.2	5556.9	5464	5545.55
MOTHERSUMI	161.45	161.45	155.5	158.25	AVIOPHARMA	929	942.55	920	929.5
IDEFINEIND	200	201.2	197.6	200.15	TATASDRCT	32.6	32.95	31	31.9
ONGC	99.45	99.8	97.9	98.85	NAM-INDIA	339	343	332.3	334.8
GAIL	139.9	140.7	137.5	138	STLIFE	194.9	198.4	191.25	193.2
HAVELLS	1023	1031.9	1012.2	1019.85	TVSMOTOR	198.9	200.45	195.05	196.9
ICICI	1498.8	1505	1452.8	1495.05	BIOCON	448.35	453.05	448.35	449.3
AMBUJACEM	260	263.65	257.8	261.75	MAHABANK	16	16.45	15.75	16.05
AXISBANK	667.4	680.6	663.7	675.25	INOXLEISUR	325	328.9	319.65	322.3
VEDL	171.8	175.2	171.35	173.6	MFL	716.4	725.95	709.73	714.7
BHILDAART	3902.9	3982	3857.35	3970.65	AUBANK	902.2	930	892.9	920.6
IOC	99.65	99.8	97.75	98.3	TRIDENT	15.25	15.25	14.6	14.7
PVR	1520	1575	1520	1565.95	SPICEJET	90.9	93.6	89	90.7
WOCKPHARMA	530.05	556.55	521.5	534.75	GMRINFRA	27.25	27.35	26.8	26.9
JUBLFOOD	2820	2824	2783.3	2809.9	INDIGO	1673.5	1674.05	1643	1665.8
ALKALYLAMINE	4766.45	5179.95	4738.05	4904.25	NIALC	134.15	143.8	133.6	133.9
BOSCHLTD	15155	15967.9	15089.4	15887.9	ACC	1716	1717	1687.95	1701.6
BAJAJ-AUTO	3649.85	3690	3628.8	3637.3	IGL	560.8	563.1	553.05	561.9
JUSTDIAL	669	713.95	666.25	697.25	SUFZON	6.6	6.74	6.46	6.5
SUNPHARMA	603.7	603.7	593	594.45	COROMANDEL	843	848.6	832.55	846.5
DREDDREDDY	5118	5159.55	5068.95	5076.65	KPITACE	141.2	143.7	137.7	141.1
ENDURENCE	1331.05	1355.15	1319.5	1347.85	PHILJANT	985.95	993.2	958.85	989.2
HDFCCEM	3207	3240.1	3181.8	3205.9	PFIZER	4977.5	4977.5	4900.55	4929.25
INDIAMART	2588	2684	2580	2662.55	GDL	117.5	141	117.5	141
HINDALCO	7842	7542.2	7288.4	7323.15	DABUR	542.1	544.6	536.55	537.3
HINDALCOM	252.45	253.5	248.5	252.2	KAJARIACER	774.8	787.5	770.6	783.8
CHOLAFIN	107.95	109.7	1040	1051.25	MPHASIS	1616	1676.25	1616	1647.5
CESC	440	459	434.95	457.55	TORNTONET	249.5	251.65	248.9	249.9
CHOLAC	706.7	724	702.5	719.9	PETROPOWER	344	344	331.75	333.7
DIVISLAB	4110	4239	4065	4092.05	GRAPHITE	326.5	331.7	317.65	327.5
JSWSTEEL	395.6	402.75	393.25	400.8	DELTAACORP	150	153.8	149.75	152.5
SCORSTEEL	1285	1312.5	1276.9	1305.65	MCX	1652	1690.5	1650.05	1670.5
SWSOLAR	260.8	265.85	258.15	261.55	PMCT	121.95	122.45	119.65	121.1
IDBI	29.25	29.75	28.2	28.35	BPOF	121.55	123	120.4	121.4
RBLBANK	256.95	258.85	252.5	258.65	SAFE	25.85	26.35	25.35	25.8
LUPIN	1093.55	1101.6	1083.05	1087.45	NAVINFLOOR	2557.8	2557.8	2507.1	2528.6
BALKRISIND	1652	1702.9	1639.95	1699.55	PAGEIND	2859.9	29104.7	28257.35	28409.6
BPCPL	415	416.8	409.4	413.65	VBL	885	927	882.35	916.5
BREALEST	87.1	88.9	84.1	84.8	CHAMBLFERT	229.7	229.7	224.2	225.7
GLENMARK	502.1	510.4	500.4	508.85	TRENT	679.95	695	657.9	674.3
CESC	96.95	99.7	98.05	98.3	INDHOTEL	125.95	126.25	123.55	124.2
APOLLOHOSP	2646.4	2681.55	2644	2675.3	COLPAL	1560	1568	1540	1541
BRITANNIA	3613.5	3640	3585	3592.35	HEG	986	995.95	969.65	983.5
PIDILITIND	1754	1796	1739	1758.8	MUTHOOTFIN	1206.05	1216.55	1197	1212.1



FINAL HOURS OF HIS PRESIDENCY

Trump pardons ex-strategist Steve Bannon, 73 others

**Washington:** Outgoing President Donald Trump has pardoned his former political strategist Steve Bannon, one of the key architects of his 2016 electoral victory, as he issued a wave of pardons using the final hours of his presidency to grant clemency to 143 people.

The record 73 pardons and 70 commutations came in addition to the dozens of similar actions that Trump took after he lost the November 3 presidential elections to Joe Biden of the Democratic Party.

Biden, 78, will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on Wednesday.

The White House in a statement issued on Wednesday said that Trump granted a full pardon to Bannon, who was in charge of the final months of his 2016 presidential campaign.

Bannon was indicted in August when New York federal prosecutors charged him and three others with defrauding donors of more than a million dollars as part of an online



President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump board Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., on Wednesday AP

fundraising campaign purportedly aimed at supporting Trump's border wall.

The White House in its

statement said Bannon has been an important leader in the conservative movement and is known for his political acumen.

Besides Bannon, other pardon recipients included Elliott Broidy, a former top fundraiser for Trump's campaign who

pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy relating to a secret lobbying campaign to influence the Trump administration on behalf of a foreign billionaire in exchange for millions of dollars, and Ken Kurson, a friend of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner who was charged last October with cyberstalking during a heated divorce.

Trump also granted a full pardon to rapper Lil Wayne who had pleaded guilty to a gun possession charge in Miami.

Another rapper, Kodak Black, received a commutation after he pleaded guilty to a weapons charge.

Brett Berish of Sovereign Brands, who supports a pardon for Wayne, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter, described him as "trustworthy, kind-hearted and generous," the White House said.

Wayne has "exhibited this generosity through commitment to a variety of charities, including donations to research hospitals and a host of food-

banks," it said.

He also pardoned former Republican Congressman P Rick Renzi of Arizona. In 2013, Renzi was convicted of extortion, bribery, insurance fraud, money laundering, and racketeering. He was sentenced to two years in Federal prison, two years of supervised release, and paid a \$25,000 fine. **PTI**

**Bomb threat at US SC ahead of oath ceremony**

**Washington:** A bomb threat was made to the US Supreme Court on Wednesday ahead of the inauguration of Joe Biden as president, but nothing was found by security personnel, the court said.

"The court received a bomb threat, the building and grounds were checked out, and the building is not being evacuated," said high court spokeswoman Kathleen Arberg. **AFP**

Trump skips Biden's inauguration ceremony

**Washington:** Donald Trump on Wednesday skipped his successor Joe Biden's inauguration and exited the White House for the last time as US president, saying he had "an amazing four years" and hoping that it would not be a "long goodbye."

Trump left the White House on the Marine One presidential helicopter along with his wife Melania, hours before Biden's inauguration.

Following a short helicopter flight to Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, he received a sendoff ceremony with a red carpet, military band, a 21-gun salute and crowd of about 200 guests in attendance.

He then boarded a final flight on Air Force One to begin his post-presidential life at his palatial Mar-a-Lago golf

club in Palm Beach.

Trump, 74, had already announced that he will not attend the inauguration of Biden as President and Kamala Harris as the Vice President. He thus became the first president to skip his successor's inauguration since Andrew Johnson in 1869.

Trump also did not extend an invitation to President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris.

The meeting between sitting presidents and vice presidents and their successors is a time-honoured tradition that represents the peaceful transfer of power.

Walking down a red carpet rolled out for the departing leader, Trump and Melania both wearing black posed for a picture. **PTI**

Biden: From being one of the youngest senators to oldest Prez

**Washington:** Joe Biden, known as a peoples' person, a reformer, an unifier and a healer, rose remarkably from humble beginnings to become the oldest American president in US history on Wednesday, reaching the pinnacle of his political career spanning nearly five decades.

The 78-year-old six-term Democratic senator, who triumphed over Republican President Donald Trump in the November 3 presidential election, ran twice unsuccessfully for president - in 1988 and 2008.

The presidential dreams that the veteran leader from Delaware had harboured since childhood seemed all but over for a third time until he won



South Carolina's Democratic Party primary on February 29 last year, forcing most rivals out of the race and making one of the most dramatic comebacks in American political history.

Biden, who has spent five decades in Washington and served two terms in the White House as former president Barack Obama's vice president, capitalised on that experience to portray himself as a tested leader and a better alternative

to Trump.

While accepting the Democratic nomination in August, Biden pledged to restore the "soul of America", and be an "ally of the light, not the darkness."

Biden defeated 74-year-old Trump in the bitterly fought presidential election, becoming the oldest person ever to occupy the White House.

In his victory speech, Biden pledged to unite the country as he called it 'a time to heal in America'.

"I sought this office to restore the soul of America, to rebuild the backbone of this nation, the middle class and to make America respected around the world again, and to

unite us here at home," he said.

Biden has a strong track record of being an ardent advocate of a strong India-US relationship both as a Senator from Delaware for over three decades and then as deputy of President Obama for eight years.

During his presidential campaign, Biden had said that India and the US were natural partners.

From playing a key role in the passage of India-US civil nuclear deal during a Republican administration to setting up the goal of a \$500 billion in bilateral trade, Biden has strong ties with the Indian leadership across the aisle and has a large number of Indian-Americans within his close circuit. **PTI**

Kamala: The inspiring story of many firsts

**Washington:** First-time Senator Kamala Harris, popularly called the "female Obama", created history by becoming the first woman, first Black and first Indian-American vice president of the United States.

In a historic speech after her victory in November, Harris remembered her late mother Shyamala Gopalan, a cancer researcher and civil rights activist from India, saying she had prepared her for this big day in her political career.

She also said that while she may be the first woman to occupy the vice president's office, she would not be the last.

Harris, 56, is known for many firsts. She has been a



county district attorney; the district attorney for San Francisco — the first woman, first African-American and first Indian-origin to be elected to the position.

She has several firsts in her role as vice president also: the first woman, the first African-American woman, the first Indian-American and the first Asian-American.

When Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden picked Harris in August last year as his running mate recognising the crucial role Black voters could play in his determined bid to defeat Donald Trump, the then California Senator was the third woman to be selected as the vice president on a major party ticket.

Then-Alaska Governor Sarah Palin in 2008 and New York Representative Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 were the other two.

Before becoming Biden's running mate, Harris had her own presidential dreams, which she abandoned due to lack of the financial resources to continue her campaign.

She's one of the only three Asian Americans in the Senate and she's the first Indian-American ever to serve in the chamber.

During the Obama era, she was popularly called the "female Obama". A decade ago, journalist Gwen Ifill called Harris "the female Barack Obama" on the "Late Show With David Letterman".

Later, a small businessman from Willoughby Tony Pinto called her "a young, female version of the president".

She is considered to be close to Barack Obama, the first black American President, who endorsed her in her various elections including that of the US Senate in 2016. **PTI**

Biden's immigration Bill proposes to eliminate per country cap, to benefit Indian IT professionals

**Washington:** Joe Biden, hours after being sworn in as the 46th President, will send a comprehensive immigration bill to Congress which among other things proposes to eliminate the per country cap for employment-based green cards, a move that would benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US, whose current wait period for legal permanent residency runs into several decades.

Called the US Citizenship Act of 2021, the legislation modernises the immigration system, according to an incoming White House official.

It prioritises keeping families together, grows the country's economy, responsibly manages the border with smart investments, addresses the root causes of migration from Central America, and also ensures that the US remains a refuge for those fleeing persecution, said the official, who spoke on con-

dition of anonymity.

Describing this as a common-sense approach to solving immigration challenges, focusing on what works, the US Citizenship Act 2021 creates a roadmap to citizenship for a population that lives and works in the United States.

January 1, 2021 is the cut-off date for those undocumented workers. Two-thirds of undocumented immigrants have been in the US for 10 years or longer.

It provides an immediate pathway to green cards for individuals who meet certain criteria as they were dreamers or have been recipients of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or are farm workers and meet certain criteria.

They can apply for citizenship three years later. For those who don't meet those qualifications, there will be another path to citizenship, where they would be in an interim status for five years. **PTI**

McConnell: Trump provoked Capitol siege, mob was fed lies

**Washington:** Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday explicitly blamed President Donald Trump for the deadly riot at the Capitol, saying the mob was "fed lies" and the president and others "provoked" those intent on overturning Democrat Joe Biden's election.

Ahead of Trump's historic second impeachment trial, McConnell's remarks were his most severe and public rebuke of the outgoing president. The GOP leader is setting a tone as Republicans weigh whether to convict Trump on the impeachment charge that will soon be sent over from the House: "incitement of insurrection." "The mob was fed lies," McConnell said. "They were provoked by the president and other powerful people, and they tried to use fear and violence to stop a specific proceeding of the first branch of the federal government which they did not like." **AP**

Popular Thai politician charged with defaming monarchy

**Bangkok:** Thai officials on Wednesday filed criminal charges against a popular former politician, accusing him of defaming the monarchy by broadcasting criticism of government efforts to secure supplies of coronavirus vaccines.

The action against Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit came just a day after Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters that his government will prosecute anyone

who shares false information about coronavirus vaccines.

Thanathorn, former leader of the dissolved Future Forward Party, accused the government of acting too slowly in procuring the vaccines.

He also pointed out that the government's main contract for vaccine supply was made with a Thai company owned by the royal palace. The government and the com-

pany deny any wrongdoing.

"What Thanathorn said is not true at all. The monarchy has nothing to do with the vaccines and they are not in the position to respond to him in the public," said Thosaphol Pengsom, a vice minister attached to the prime minister's office.

Vice Minister of Digital Economy and Society Newin Chochaiyathip said at a news conference that anyone who

shares Thanathorn's broadcast or distorted information about vaccines and monarchy judged to be distorted would be prosecuted.

Thanathorn's office said he had no immediate comment. The government has increasingly used the law against defaming the monarchy to crack down on critics.

The law, widely known as Article 112, makes insulting King Maha Vajiralongkorn or

his family punishable by three to 15 years' imprisonment.

Thanathorn has long been a thorn in the side of Prayuth's government. His party, critical of the army, a pillar of the country's establishment, made a strong third-place showing in the 2019 general election, but he was forced out of Parliament when a court ruled that he had broken an election law. **AP**

Pandemic, surging food prices leave many in Asia hungry: UN

**United Nations:** United Nations agencies are warning that more than 350 million people in the Asia-Pacific region are going hungry as the coronavirus pandemic destroys jobs and pushes food prices higher.

The report issued Wednesday by four agencies says the pandemic is making it difficult for 1.9 billion people to afford healthy diets. It follows an earlier

report that forecast that in a worst case scenario that 828 million people might suffer from acute hunger because of the crisis.

The latest estimate is that nearly 688 million people globally are undernourished, more than half of them in Asia. The largest share is in South Asian countries like Afghanistan, where four in 10 people are malnourished.

UK virus strain detected in at least 60 countries: WHO

AFP ■ GENEVA

The UK coronavirus strain has been detected in at least 60 countries, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, 10 more than a week ago.

With the global death count now well past two million, and new variants of the virus causing deep concern, countries across the world are grappling with how to slow infections until vaccines become

widely available.

The South African strain, which like the UK one is believed to be more infectious, has now been reported in 23 countries and territories, the WHO also announced in its weekly update.

It added that the number of new deaths climbed to a record high of 93,000 over the previous seven days, with 4.7 million new cases reported over the same period.

FROM PAGE 1

GOVT OFFERS TO SUSPEND FARM LAWS ...

Another farmers leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said the Government appears to be on the "backfoot". "First the 32 unions will discuss, then the matter will be taken up with organisations from across India," he said.

Tomar, however, said the Government was keen to reach a final decision in today's meeting on the auspicious day of Gurupurab and therefore it started with greetings for the occasion. Asked whether the proposed committee will continue alongside the SC-appointed expert panel, Tomar said, "The Government is committed to the Supreme Court and will remain so. The committee appointed by the apex court is doing its job, but the Government also has direct accountability towards farmers and the situation arising out of the protest. Therefore, we are taking forward this discussion while discharging our responsibility."

"It will be victory for Indian democracy the day farmers' agitation ends and they return to their homes," he said in reply to a question whether it would be a victory for the farmers or the Government.

This is for the first time the Government has offered to keep the farm laws suspended for 1.5 to 2 years. Union Ministers had earlier urged farmers to let the laws be implemented for a few years and then decide. Sources said the Ministers also proposed that the Government is ready to give an affidavit in the Supreme

Court in this regard. The laws would remain suspended till the committee gives its report and urged farmer unions to suspend their agitation till that time, sources added. The Government on Wednesday once again offered to amend the laws as the 10th round of meetings started. The leaders stuck to their demand for a complete repeal of the laws and alleged that the Centre was avoiding discussion on a legal guarantee for MSP. In the first two sessions of the day, there was no breakthrough as the discussion went on the beaten track of amending the laws. The Government has been insisting on first discussing the three laws and wants to take up the MSP (Minimum Support Price) matter later. The Government has also advised the farmer leaders that they can go to Supreme Court for repeal of laws and the Government won't repeal it.

SC IRKED AT BIAS CHARGE ...

The CJI, who was visibly annoyed, said, "One of the committee members Sardar Bhupinder Singh Mann had called for amendments in the law. Does this mean a person expressing his opinion cannot be in a committee? You cannot brand people like this. People should have an opinion. Why should people not have an opinion? Even judges do have and express their opinions."

The bench said, "Everyone argues before a judge as if he is arguing on a clean slate but branding people has become a

cultural thing now. Even judges express views during hearing. That doesn't mean they can't decide an issue. The Committee was not given any adjudicatory power"

It told Chaudhary, appearing for 'Mahapanchayat', that it was not telling him personally but to his client, which has sought reconstitution of the committee and filing of the vacancy in the committee.

"If somebody has expressed an opinion, do you think there is a bias? If you don't want to appear then don't appear. But don't brand people and malign them and on top of that you cast aspersions on the court", the bench said, adding that "committee was not given any adjudicating powers but was asked to listen to the grievances of protesters and give us a report. Where is the question of bias in that?"

In a hearing conducted via video-conferencing, the bench said that experts in the field have been appointed on the committee to look after the grievances of parties affected by the new law and moreover, "we are not the experts".

MA APPEARS, SILENT ON VANISHING ACT

President Xi Jinping's government says anti-monopoly enforcement against internet companies will be a priority this year. Alibaba and other companies have been fined for violating anti-monopoly rules. Some social media services have been reprimanded for lapses in enforcing censorship.

FARMERS REJECT POLICE REQUEST...

The Outer Ring Road passes through several areas of Delhi such as Vikaspuri, Janakpuri, Uttam Nagar, Burari Peeragarhi and Pitampura. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been protesting at several Delhi border points against the laws for the last 56 days and unions representing them have begun holding tractor rallies at villages in Punjab to mobilise people for the demonstration on Republic Day.

"During the meeting the farmers union discussed several points with police officers on tractor rally on January 26. The police officials wanted us to change our venue and route," said a farmer leader.

VACCINATION DRIVE FAILS TO GAIN MOMENTUM ...

The Ministry also said that the deaths reported after vaccination have not been found to be related to vaccination. "The post-mortem of the Moradabad case confirms cardio-pulmonary disease, while the Bellary case autopsy suggests myocardial infarction. The Shivamoga case too is a suspected case of myocardial infarction. The Telangana case is under probe," the Ministry said.

With vaccine hesitancy and technical glitches hampering the pace as reported from various States, in a new letter sent to the States and Union Territories on

Tuesday, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the Government has tweaked the app and added the "features of session scheduling, beneficiary allocation and allocation of additional beneficiaries at the session site". Bhushan said, "The feature of 'Allot Beneficiary' in an ongoing session has been added in the vaccinator module and is live." He added, "The feature has been added to facilitate maximum utilisation of staff deployed at the session sites so that they can cater to optimal number of beneficiaries per session." Bhushan clarified that "such additional beneficiaries whose name exist in the database, can be added to the session". Names of the beneficiary are searchable through their mobile number. The latest tweak in the app is expected to increase the turnout at the Government hospitals who are struggling to reach even the half-way mark of their vaccination target.

India on January 16 rolled out the massive coronavirus vaccination drive under which two domestically manufactured vaccines -- Covishield and Covaxin -- are being administered to frontline health workers across the country. While Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield is being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, the Covaxin is being produced by Bharat Biotech.

CURRENT JABS NO PANACEA FOR FUTURE COVID STRAINS...

The researchers used computational

methods to compare the genetic sequences of many different strains of HCoVs and saw how these viruses have evolved over the years. They particularly assessed changes that might have occurred in proteins that could contain antigens, such as the viral spike proteins -- the projections on the surface of coronaviruses that are particularly exposed to our immune system.

From the analysis, the scientists found a high rate of evolution in the spike proteins of two of the four viruses, OC43 and 229E. According to the researchers, nearly all of the beneficial mutations appeared in a specific region of the spike proteins called S1, which helps the virus enter human cells.

Based on the findings, the scientists said reinfection by these two viruses can occur as a result of antigenic drift as they evolve to escape recognition by the immune system. They also estimated that beneficial mutations in the spike proteins of OC43 and 229E appear roughly once every two to three years -- about half to one-third of the rate seen in the flu virus strain, H3N2. "Due to the high complexity and diversity of HCoVs, it is not entirely clear if this means that other coronaviruses, such as SARS-CoV-2, will evolve in the same way," said senior author of the study Trevor Bedford from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

"The current vaccines against Covid-19, while highly effective, may need to be reformulated to match new strains, making it vital to continually monitor the evolution of the virus' antigens," Bedford said.



## Trend Slazer

### 'B'wood doesn't understand my worth'

Singer **NEHA BHASIN** has lately been concentrating on an independent music career lately. She feels Bollywood probably does not understand her worth as an artiste.

"I do not want to sing a random song just because it is of a Bollywood film. I do not want to sing something if my heart is not in it. Having said that, I think so far all the songs I sang are massive hits because they are some of the great compositions and lyrically good. I think Bollywood probably does not understand my worth, it never did. I really made peace with that," Neha said.

Neha started her journey as a singer with the Channel [V] all-girls pop band Viva before going solo.



**'I could do all this because I was not associated with any political party. Otherwise I**

**would have had to ask 100 questions before doing a job like this. Since it was my decision to connect with people and help them, I was able to reach out. Whatever I did, was not about caste or religion. I have been connecting with people a lot over the past year.'**

—Sonu Sood

Actor **KUNAAL ROY KAPUR** doesn't like malice when it comes to feedback about his acting. He adds that he is up for constructive criticism from the audience.



"I try to make the best of the opportunities that come my way. I don't know whether I am overrated or underrated. I just want to act and get better with each performance. I feel there are many areas where I can improve and there are many genres I would like to explore," Kapur said.

The actor is currently seen in the Kajol-starrer OT-released film *Tribhanga: Tedhi Medhi Crazy*.

### Emma on being pregnant

Actor **EMMA ROBERTS** says her close friends helped her through her pregnancy during the COVID pandemic.

"I feel so lucky because literally four of my close girlfriends were pregnant or have had a baby that year," Roberts said.

"So, I have had such a nice support group of other women that either were ahead of me in their pregnancy or on their second baby. I felt so lucky that I had people to text at all hours of the day and night. It's been so nice to have other women to talk to that are going through that. If I was the only one pregnant during this pandemic in isolation, then I would have felt even more isolated," she said, in an episode of *The Drew Barrymore Show*.



# THE GRIM REALITY

Actor **RICHA CHADHA** says that her forthcoming film, *Madam Chief Minister*, highlights the pertinent issue of caste-based discrimination. By **AYUSHI SHARMA**

The very first poster of the forthcoming film, *Madam Chief Minister* — where a woman held up a broom like a sword and the tagline at the bottom read, "Untouchable, Unstoppable," — raised hackles. Actor Richa Chadha, the lead, who plays a Dalit woman, was accused of stereotyping the community. Despite retracting the poster and the actor issuing an apology, Nawab Satpal Tanwar, the reported founder of Akhila Bhartiya Bhim Sena, has been continuously making and uploading videos on social media platforms to instigate violence against the actor and her film. If that was not enough, he even issued death threats and is now offering a reward to anyone who can chop off her tongue. The outrageous act is certainly driven by an agenda to grab eyeballs riding on the coat tails of the popular industry — something which has become the highway to popularity for many.

But Richa, is her non-chalant self as she says, "I don't want to amplify anybody. Let

them watch this film and then we can talk about it." Certainly, she doesn't seem to be intimidated.

The Bhim Army, a Dalit party with national presence, has condemned this threat and said that it is not to be confused with Tomar's Bhim Sena. Actor Swara Bhasker also tweeted in support of Chadha, "This is absolutely shameful and to be condemned in no uncertain terms. You can have ideological issues and problems with a film but this is criminal intimidation and incitement to violence. Ambedkarites, Dalit feminists and just sane people, stand up and call this out!"

The film highlights the pertinent issue of caste-based discrimination. It is the story of a woman from an oppressed community, who defies all odds to scale new heights of political success in Uttar Pradesh.

This is the first time Richa plays a political character on screen. She tells us that she has played every role with the same amount of love and zeal and this one is no different.

"Everything I play means something to me and it should convey something to the audience. So, a political character was no different but this one is quite close to my heart simply because she is a woman from a backward community. I wanted to ensure that I play her

to the best of my ability. I have worked very hard for this," says the actor, who was last seen in the biopic, *Shakeela*.

"This character is inspired from several real life anecdotes and is not focussed on any one particular leader. My director, Subhash Kapoor, was a political journalist. He met a lot of people and gathered the stories. I think such real life stories are important, especially when you are making a film. It is based on interactions with many leaders. It's everything that we have seen and read about Indian politics, how MLAs behave before and after the election results are announced. So these are some elements of the film," adds she.

In a country like India, where dissent, criticism and negative remarks are not looked upon kindly by the government, can a film like this voice the drawbacks about Indian government without facing challenges? She says, "I don't think this film passes a comment against the Indian or any other government. It's definitely a comment on the ugly reality of gender politics and

caste-based discrimination."

Richa feels that in India, the caste system is found in many forms despite there being several laws prohibiting it.

There are limits on interaction and behaviour with people from another social status. "I thought it only happens in slums and places that are removed from modern civilisation but that's not the case. When you read about the suicide of Rohith Vemula or the case of Pooja, a medical student and how she was bullied by her own medical practitioners, you realise that the reality is different. I don't know how we are ignoring such things. I hope that this film initiates some kind of a conversation. I learnt a lot about my own self and privilege while working on this," she says.

Let's hope India breaks the shackles of prejudice, discrimination and violence, and the country moves towards the heaven of freedom for all.

(The film releases on January 22. It also stars Manav Kaul, Saurabh Shukla, Akshay Oberoi and others.)



## Shilpa, Amit reunite for new single

Singer **Shilpa Rao** has joined hands with composer **Amit Trivedi** on a new single. The new song titled *Rusvaaiyaan*, has been composed by Amit, and sung by Shilpa and Shahid Mallya.

"There are many shades of love. We have seen in the history of music, people make song for lovers when they unite, the anticipation, the realisation the first time you see someone. But the other side of love is also kind of sweet pain that it brings, sometimes it doesn't work out and even if love brings you unhappiness or separation, love is still love and all shades of love have their own glory," said Shilpa.



"With *Rusvaaiyaan*, we are celebrating love in the form of pain that it brings to lovers, and all we trying to put out through the song is that we are all in this together so, even if you feel isolated, we are with you. I hope the song brings hope to people and they can keep having faith in love," she added.

In the non-film space, Shilpa and Amit had earlier collaborated on an upbeat track, *Raavan*. The duo had earlier worked together in films such as *Lootera* and *English Vinglish*.



## Best look forward

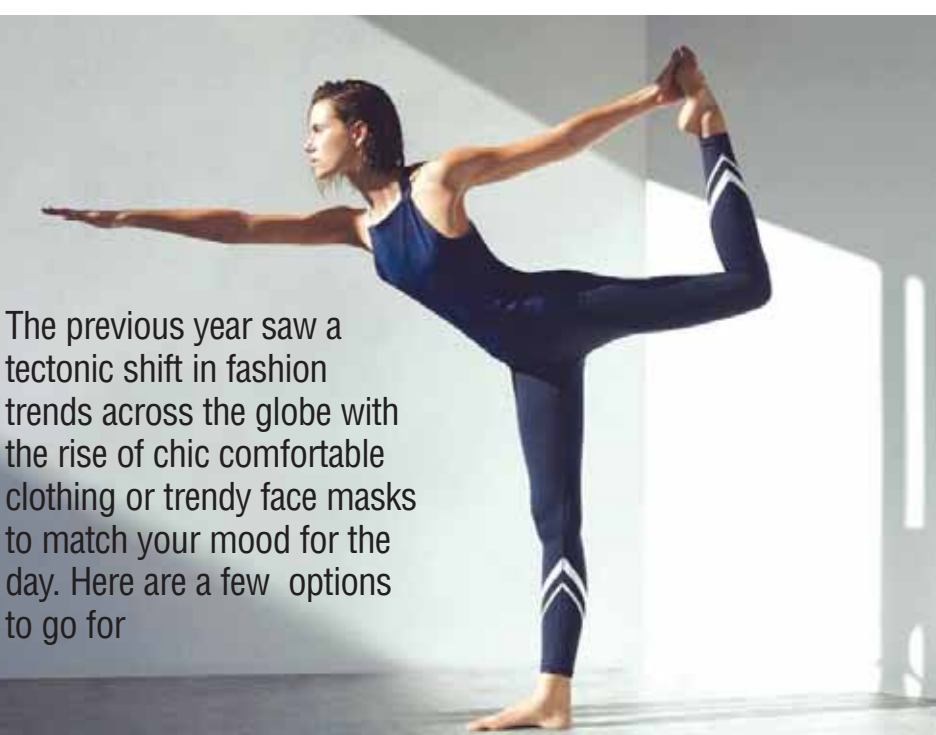
Look good to feel good is the Lumantra for men and women alike across all age groups. Everyone wants to appear on point and fashionably forward at all hours. The year 2020 has seen a major shift in fashion trends across the globe, be it the rise of chic comfortable clothing or trendy face masks to match your mood for the day. Businesses and designers have adapted to the current situation and directly translated their ideas into designs presented through live streamed shows, artful videos, YouTube streams and socially distanced in-person runways.

There is a collective hope that this year will be drastically different from the previous one while also bringing us an array of new trends. From 70s-inspired pieces of denim to decadent leather, check out the trendiest selections. Narendra Kumar, creative director, Amazon Fashion India, recommends some of the styles and looks to conquer 2021 fashion like a pro!

### FOR HER

**Floral print dresses:** They never go out of vogue and can be styled in a myriad ways. Pair a bright coloured floral dress with a sleek belt to add shape to the outfit or go bold with a chunky jacket. Finish with a pair of strappy sandals and a bold red lipstick.

**Square-neck tops:** Unique necklines have been all the rage since the rise of the Zoom culture. Square-neck tops, in particular, look feminine and give you a chance to show off those structured collar bones. Pair these



The previous year saw a tectonic shift in fashion trends across the globe with the rise of chic comfortable clothing or trendy face masks to match your mood for the day. Here are a few options to go for

with a pair of high-rise jeans and a classic pair of sunglasses for a day-to-night look.

**Pastel sweaters:** Liven up your wardrobe with sweaters in pastels like blush pink or baby blue for a cheerful look. You can also go monotone by choosing accessories like a baguette bag

and sandals in the same colour.

**Yoga pants:** Yoga pants have managed to slide their way back into our hearts. Workout in style with pants that are comfortable and match your aesthetic. Opt for solid colours or have fun with printed bold neon and animal prints to jazz up your ensemble.

**Tank tops:** As the athleisure trend continues to pick up speed, so do workout tank tops. A good quality tank top that allows you to move freely is an essential for any kind of workout. The colour options are endless.

**Midi kurtas:** Sophisticated and feminine, midi kurtas make for the perfect *desi* ensemble. Have fun with different patterns and colour options. You can also opt for a collared neckline to add a touch of elegance. Finish the look



with *jhumkas* and some colorful bangles.

**Terracotta-coloured culottes:** Terracotta has made a comeback by taking Instagram and Pinterest by storm. Pair them with knee-high leather boots in the colder months or go for classic sneakers in summer.

**Colourful bandanas:** Bandanas are unquestionably cool and will add some pop to your out-

fit. You can go for bright colours to lift the gloom and pair it with a casual tee or even a sundress. This versatile accessory can be used as a necktie, a scarf or even as a makeshift top if you are feeling adventurous.

**Digital watches:** A digital wristwatch with a smart yet definitive dial goes well with everything. Find one that complements your personal taste. With intelligent and unique features like heart rate monitor, alarms and timers, a digital watch is a must-have in 2021.

### Hoop earrings:

Hoops in all sizes are on the trend watch more than ever now! Whether you are looking for occasion-worthy earrings or an everyday style, these minimalist earrings will add just the right amount of vogue to your overall look.

### FOR HIM

#### Printed polo t-shirts:

There's nothing quite like the quintessential polo t-shirt. It's classic, yet simple and suits every occasion. You can also spice up your basic polo t-shirts by adding micro prints like micro-checks, fine stripes and geometric patterns or foliage and paisley prints for casual and evening wear.

**Classic denims:** Possibly the most versatile bottom wear, denim jeans are a smart and non-fussy piece of clothing. Remember, the most important rule while shopping for denims is that it must fit you well. The versatile garment can be paired with both formal and casual apparel.

**Printed hoodies:** A hoodie might not be the most fashion forward item in your wardrobe, but a printed one will completely change the game! For a contemporary urban outfit, consid-

er pairing a hoodie with a solid coloured bomber jacket or pair it with a long coat for a semi-formal look.

**Monotone joggers:** They have become the most preferred option for streetwear as it remains stylish and provides optimum comfort, be it indoors or outdoors. Style your pair of bottoms effortlessly with a graphic t-shirt and black Vans to go for that carefree look.

**Grey pastel trousers:** Be it a casual outing with friends or a conference at your workplace, a pair of grey pastel trousers can always work! Wear them with a teal coloured blazer and a printed t-shirt to complete that casual yet classy look.

**Geometric print shorts:** Slip into a pair of comfortable geometric print shorts this year to embrace the work-from-home culture. Pair it with your favourite casual t-shirts and espadrilles. To complete the look, pair with a brown or black hat.

**Colorful sneakers:** Sneakers have now become a staple in everybody's wardrobes. However, the shade-card has drastically changed from monotone and become less rigid. This year has seen a wide array of styles in shoes, especially in its colour mix, and the trend will continue in 2021 as well.

**Earthy fragrances:** An earthy fragrance adds a great sense of depth and warmth with natural elements coming to life through the senses. Dab a woody or a pine-scented perfume. Remember to choose one that is not too overwhelming.





# BRIDGING THE GAP

With the inauguration of Kevadiya rail line by PM NARENDRA MODI, the Statue of Unity now has seamless connectivity

The world's tallest statue — 'Statue of Unity' of Iron Man Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at Kevadiya came on Indian Railway's map on Sunday. On this occasion, PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the Dabhoi-Chandod rail line (18 km), new broad gauge railway line from Chandod to Kevadiya (32 km), newly electrified Pratapnagar-Kevadiya section (80 km), the new station buildings of Dabhoi Junction and flagged off eight new trains from various destinations to Kevadiya through video conferencing. With this milestone, a seamless connectivity by rail has been provided to pilgrims, passengers and tourists from different parts of the country visiting the various holy places nestled on the banks of river Narmada and other places of interest in the vicinity of the statue.

According to a press release issued by Sumit Thakur — Chief Public Relations Officer of Western Railway, Piyush Goyal, Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Govt. of India virtually addressed the event from H. Nizamuddin. This was followed by a speech from Vijaybhairu Rupani, Gujarat CM at Kevadiya and a short film showcasing the various milestones attained in commissioning the rail line and accomplishing the project within the set time. Uddhav Thackeray, CM, Maharashtra, Yogi Aditya Nath, CM, Uttar Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chauhan CM, Madhya Pradesh and Arvind Kejriwal, CM, Delhi also attended virtually.

On the occasion, Acharya Devvrat, Governor of Gujarat, Gitaben V. Rathva — Member of Parliament, Chhota Udepur and Alok Kansal — General Manager of



W. Rly were also present. Nitinbhai Patel, Deputy CM of Gujarat attended the joined event virtually at Ahmedabad station. The inaugural function was also attended at Pratapnagar station by Yogesh Patel, Minister of State of Narmada & Urban Housing, Govt. of Gujarat, Ranjanben D. Bhatt — Member of Parliament, Vadodara, Rajendra Trivedi, Speaker, Manisha Vakil, MLA and Seemaben Mohile, MLA. At Ahmedabad station, members of Parliament Dr. Kirit P. Solanki, Hasmukhbhai S. Patel and Narahari Amin attended the event. MPs Rahul Shewale, Gopla Shetty and Arvind Sawant alongwith MLAs Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Tamil R. Selvan and Kalidas Kolambkar were present at Dadar station. Sunet Sharma — Chairman & CEO, Railway Board along with its members, and various senior railway officers were also present through web link. Renowned celebrities from arts, music and sports attended the event virtually. All passengers trav-

elling in the inaugural trains from Kevadiya, Ahmedabad, Dadar and Pratapnagar were presented with tickets to commemorate this historic event.

Various passengers shared their experience and felt proud to participate in the mega event. Rajasthan Meter Gauge Pravasi Sangh, President, Vimal Ranka, ZRUCC Member & General Secretary of Mumbai Rail Pravasi Sangh, Kailash Verma and ZRUCC Member Yogesh Mishra appreciated the efforts and expressed gratitude for these development projects.

The details of the project are summarised as under:

#### SALIENT FEATURES:

- The project was sanctioned at a cost of ₹811 cr.
- Land acquisition for new line project was completed on July 2020 and the project has been commissioned in five months.
- It has seven stations with three major (crossing) stations and four

minor (halt) stations.

□ Out of these, four stations are new — Moriya, Tilakwada, Garudeshwar and Kevadiya.

□ There are eight major bridges, 79 minor bridges, nine road over bridges and 31 road under bridges.

□ The sectional speed between Pratapnagar-Dabhoi has been raised from 75 kmph to 110 kmph in a span of 75 days and Dabhoi-Kevadiya section has been built with 110 kmph. The speed of the entire section from Pratapnagar-Kevadiya will be further enhanced to 130 kmph.

□ The station buildings at Dabhoi junction, Chandod and Kevadiya have been designed aesthetically incorporating local features and modern passenger amenities. Also, Kevadiya station is India's first railway station with a green building certification since inception of construction.

□ Modern engineering techniques and equipment such as Mobile Flash Butt Welding machines, Ready

Mix Concrete (RMC), Heavy Earth Moving equipment, Heavy duty Road Cranes & Track Machines were deployed to quicken the pace of civil engineering work.

□ A unique technical solution for design of minor bridges has been adopted by using locally available RCC hume pipes. This has not only reduced execution time but has also garnered a savings of approx ₹ 27 cr.

□ Innovative technologies such as Factory Acceptance Test (FAT) & Sight Acceptance Test (SAT) for electronic interlocking signalling system through virtual mode (during COVID-19 pandemic) have been used to speed up the signalling works and to reduce commissioning time.

□ Tower Wagons, Over Head Equipment (OHE) wiring train were utilised for expedition of electrification works.

#### BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT:

□ Providing seamless rail connectivity to the world's tallest statue from various directions of the nation.

□ The new Kevadiya Railway station is located approximately 6.5 km away from 'Statue of Unity'.

□ The alignment passes through the tribal belt of Vadaj-Chandod-Moriya-Tilakwada-Garudeshwar and will bring development to the area/region.

□ It will also provide connectivity to important religious and ancient pilgrim places on the banks of river Narmada such as old temples at Karmali, Poicha and Garudeshwar.

□ It will boost both, domestic and international tourism.

□ It will act as a catalyst for overall socio-economic development of the region.

□ It will generate new employment and business opportunities.



## NTPC breaks record

NTPC group generated its highest ever gross generation of 1009 million units on Monday. The achievement reinforces the group's commitment towards excellence in operation across its power stations.

Recently, as per the data published by Central Electricity Authority (CEA), NTPC Singrauli Unit 1 in Uttar Pradesh (UP), which had commenced operation 38 years ago, achieved the highest Plant Load Factor (PLF) of 100.24 per cent for the period (April to December 2020). This

reflects the operation and maintenance capability of the group.

The group has achieved gross cumulative generation of 222.4 billion unit (BU) from April to December 2020, an increase of 3.8 per cent compared to the same period last year.

NTPC being an essential service provider, has maintained operations at its power stations during the lockdown phases while adhering to all the COVID related guidelines issued by the government.

## INMAS and CRPF launch bike ambulance

Central Reserve Police Force and CDRDO's Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) launched a bike ambulance RAKSHITA at CRPF Headquarters in New Delhi. Dr. A.P. Maheshwari, DG CRPF and Dr. A.K. Singh, DS & DG (LS), DRDO unveiled the bike ambulance developed by INMAS in collaboration with CRPF for golden hour life saving aid and evacuation.

DG CRPF expressed his gratitude to the team for their unrelenting efforts put in developing the bike ambulance and commended their tireless dedication and professional efficiency.

While expressing his deepest gratitude to DG CRPF for working together, giving regular inputs throughout the journey of the development of this life saving bike and entrusting INMAS with this innovation, Dr. A.K. promised to co-operate perpetually with CRPF for further improvements in 'Rakshita bike'.

In its endeavour to provide internal security to the nation, CRPF is deployed across the country. Most of these deployments are in remote and inhospitable areas like LWE affected areas, North East etc. where evacuation of sick or battle injured personnel becomes a challenge. Often, late evacuation results in loss of precious lives of the bravehearts. To mitigate this, in 2018 CRPF approached INMAS with the idea of developing an ambulance on motor bikes which is frequently used by CRPF for patrolling in these theaters. INMAS promptly put up a team of scientists and experts to make the idea a reality. The team developed a



prototype and improved it with the feedback from CRPF personnel deployed in disturbed areas.

Carefully custom built to the needs of emergency evacuation, 'Rakshita' is built on a Royal Enfield Classic 350CC and comes with quick fit in and fit out casualty evacuation seat (CSE) that has customised design reclining, hand immobiliser and harness jacket, physi-

ological parameter measuring equipment with monitoring capability and auto warning system for driver, dashboard mounted LCD for measuring vital parameters, air splint medical and oxygen kit, saline and oxygen administration on the move, adjustable footrest and hand and foot strap for safety among others. 21 bike ambulances were inducted into CRPF recently.

## IN SHORT



RITES Ltd has been awarded winner under the 'Plaque' category at the ICAI Awards for Excellence in Financial Reporting 2019-20. RITES' Director (Finance) Bibhu Prasad Nayak and Chief Financial Officer Parmod Kumar Narang received the award from Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Arjun Ram Meghwal.



Despite the adverse financial circumstances arising out of the pandemic, the Government of Rajasthan has shown its commitment to the all-round development of the state. All work is being done under the guidance of the CM Ashok Gehlot. The PD account system has been implemented in place of bank accounts for the payment of all departments, state institutions as well as Panchayat Raj institutions and autonomous ones. It is worth mentioning that the PD account is a kind of bank account operated by the state government. The state ensures consolidation of these institutions even in odd financial situations.



## GGSIPU celebrates Guru Gobind's birthday

Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University celebrated Guru Gobind Singh ji's birth anniversary with full fervor through *shabad kirtan* and *ardas* followed by a blood donation camp.

The celebration started with the inauguration of blood donation camp by the Vice Chancellor of the University Padma Shri professor Mahesh Verma in presence of Atul Garg, Director, Delhi Fire Services as guest of honour and other senior army officers.

Around 100 units of blood was collected by Indian Red Cross Society. The Vice Chancellor, who is also a senior doctor, encouraged the donors with a motivation saying, "Blood donation is not a small donation, especially on this auspicious day of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh ji, who sacrificed his entire life and family for the sake of humanity."

A dialogue on the 'New Education Policy 2020 — NEP Outreach' was organised by the Nehru Centre, London with National Book Trust, India (under Ministry of Education) as the nodal agency, on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', Minister of Education, Govt. of India said that under the leadership of PM Modi, the NEP-2020 has been implemented with a futuristic mindset, thereby turning the challenges into opportunities. It will equip India to hold a position in the global knowledge system while maintaining and developing its traditional knowledge system. "Through the policy, we are hoping to transform education and putting a significant thrust on learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative, multidisciplinary and how to innovate, adapt and absorb new material in the novel and changing fields. Pedagogy is expected to evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible and enjoyable," the minister added.

Vinay Sahastrabudhe, President ICCR, in his opening remarks said that the NEP-2020 is one of the greatest reforms. Hon Jo Johnson, Educationist, Former

## A dialogue on NEP



Minister for Universities, Science, Research & Innovation, United Kingdom, lauded India's NEP-2020 as an event of global significance and as a policy that will turn India into a global knowledge superpower, emphasising its strong focus on early years, teachers, universal numeracy and literacy. He also

mentioned that the exciting fact about NEP-2020 is that it proposes to shift the mode of assessment from summative to formative, testing higher order skills like critical thinking, analysis and conceptual clarity.

Johnson and Dr. Pokhriyal also engaged in a dialogue on various

provisions of the NEP-2020, such as teacher training, entry of top 100 foreign universities in India and education in Indian HEIs.

The engaging event was moderated by Amish Tripathi, Minister (Culture), High Commission of India, UK and Director, The Nehru Centre.



Kolkata Metro will run 118 services on Republic Day instead of 240 services in an interval of 15 minutes. The first service will start from both ends i.e. from Dum Dum and Kavi Subhash at 7 am and from Noapara at 7.09 am as usual. Only smart cards will be permitted. No tokens will be issued.

It was informed by Housing Commissioner Pawan Arora that Rajasthan Awashan Mandal has set a record by registering 50 projects in RERA in the shortest time.

On this occasion, RERA Chairman, N.C. Goyal congratulated Commissioner Pawan Arora. It includes 46 projects of group housing scheme and four projects of plotted development scheme.





# Warne predicts huge fall out in Oz team

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Shane Warne believes the embarrassing Test series loss to an under-strength India will result in a "huge fallout" in the Australian team and said a few heads could roll in the coming days.

India recorded one of their most memorable wins on Tuesday when they defeated a full-strength Australia by three wickets in the fourth Test here to pocket the four-match series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"I think there'll be a huge fallout from this (defeat). There's not too many times that you lose to the second or third (choice) side," Warne was quoted as saying by Fox Cricket.

"Their (Australia) tactics will come into question, and they have to. Bowlers will come into question, people's spot in the team will come into question. It has to. You can't just deflect it and flick it off and say India were too good for us," he added.

Warne was, however, effusive in his praise for the Indian team which braved injuries to its key players and absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli after the first Test on paternity leave to emerge triumphant.

"That's not taking anything away from those Indian guys that played but their first selection side, there's probably only two or three players in that side who would play."



India's Cheteshwar Pujara, second left, is congratulated by Australia's Matthew Wade after defeating Australia by three wickets on the final day

AP

The spin legend said Australia didn't grab their chances in the series.

"Yes they were, but Australia had so many chances in this series to bury it and crush India, but they couldn't do it. They just couldn't do it," he said.

Warne was also critical of Tim

Paine's captaincy and said the wicket-keeper didn't own up responsibility for his failed tactics.

"I think at times their tactics haven't been good enough, and I suppose that's got to come down to Tim Paine as captain," he said.

"It's not just Tim Paine's fault, the bowlers are allowed to say 'Tim I want to do this', so it's a combination between the bowlers and the captain. But at the end of the day, you are captain, you have to take responsibility. He'll be disappointed."

**"Their (Australia) tactics will come into question, and they have to. Bowlers will come into question, people's spot in the team will come into question. It has to. You can't just deflect it and flick it off and say India were too good for us,"**

## We were scared to lose: Clarke



PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former captain Michael Clarke has criticised Australia's "negative" approach in the Test loss to an under-strength Indian team, saying the hosts, instead of pushing aggressively for wins, seemed scared of defeat.

Clarke, however, refused to blame team leader Tim Paine for the unthinkable Test series defeat at home. An injury-ravaged India beat Australia by three wickets in the final game in Brisbane on Tuesday to win the series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. "I thought we might have been a tad neg-

ative at certain stages throughout because we were scared to lose versus attack hard and look to win the game," Clarke said on Big Sports Breakfast.

Clarke said it was the negative mindset that pegged Australia back.

"At the end of the day, whether we lost with 20 overs left in the game or on the last ball of the game, it didn't matter. We had to win that game to win that trophy."

"I sort of feel we should have approached the first ball of that game to the last ball of that game with a bit more of that attitude."

Clarke said there was a time when the buck stopped with the captain but it should not be the case anymore since there are other professionals, who call the shots in the Australian set up.

"When I played cricket, when I grew up watching my father ... The captain was accountable in the teams I played in. Through that transition of me captaining Australia, that changed."

"There had become a chairman of selectors that had more pull, there had become a high performance manager that had more pull, there had become a head coach who had more pull," he said.

## CA lauds India for epic win

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia on Wednesday saluted the Indian team's "resilience, courage and skill" during its historic Test series win over the hosts and expressed gratitude to the BCCI for the "sacrifices" it made to ensure a smooth conduct of the epic contest.

A second-string Indian team, led by Ajinkya Rahane, braved all odds to defeat a full-strength Australia by three wickets at the Gabba here to win the four-Test series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy on Tuesday in Brisbane.

"On behalf of everyone at Cricket Australia, we congratulate Team India for their resilience, courage and skill demonstrated in retaining the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in a series that will be talked about for generations to come," CA wrote in a Thank You note to the BCCI.

The note, written by CA interim CEO Nick Hockley and Chair Earl Eddings, was addressed to "friends in Indian cricket", the BCCI, acknowledging the role played by the Sourav Ganguly-led board in successfully completing the tour amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Australian cricket will forever be grateful to the BCCI for their friendship, trust and commitment in helping to deliver a series that has brought joy to many millions of people around the world at a time they needed it most," the letter read.

"The unique challenges of inter-



national touring during a global pandemic are considerable and we thank India's players, coaches and support staff for all they have given.

"Over the past nine weeks, the Indian and Australian men's teams completed outstanding One-Day International and Twenty20 International series, followed by one of the greatest Border-Gavaskar Test series ever competed," it added.

## Pant is now best-ranked keeper

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's Rishabh Pant became the top-ranked wicket-keeper batsman in the world after his sensational series-winning 89-run knock in the Brisbane match pushed him to a career-best 13th spot in the ICC Test batting rankings, issued on Wednesday.

Pant, who won many admirers for his fearless and mature batting, has 691 points in his kitty. South Africa's Quinton de Kock (677) is the next best wicket-keeper batsman in the list in the 15th position.

Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne's first-innings century in Brisbane took him past India skipper Virat Kohli (862 points) to third position with a career-best 878 rating points. Kohli missed the action as he was on paternity leave.

Young India opener Shubman Gill continued his upward trajectory, moving up from 68th to 47th spot after a crucial 91 in the second innings of the fourth Test, which India won by three wickets on Tuesday.

Middle-order mainstay Cheteshwar Pujara moved up one place to seventh after his dogged effort, while Mohammad Siraj jumped 32 places to 45th after taking six wickets in the match, including



Rishabh Pant plays a pull shot during final day of the third test match

AP

a five-wicket haul in the second innings.

Debutant Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur too gained in rankings following their useful contributions with both bat and ball.

Washington entered the rankings in 82nd (batting) and 97th (bowling) positions, while Thakur re-entered the batting list in 113th position and bowling list in 65th position.

Australia captain Tim Paine

moved up three spots to 42nd after scores of 50 and 27 while fast bowler Josh Hazlewood leapfrogged New Zealand's Tim Southee to the fourth spot after grabbing six wickets in the match, including a haul of five for 57 in the first innings.

England's Joe Root has returned to the top five with his highest rating points tally (738) in two years after scoring a first-innings 228 to help his team win the first Test against Sri Lanka by seven wickets in Galle.

Root has advanced six places, overtaking the likes of Pakistan's Babar Azam and Pujara in the process.

England spinners Jack Leach and Dominic Bess made notable progress after their five-wicket hauls in Galle. Leach's second innings' figures of five for 122 lifted him three places to 40th while Bess's five for 30 in the first innings took him from 67th to 50th position.

Jonny Bairstow (up five places to 58th in batting) and Sam Curran (up two places to 39th in bowling) also gained.

For Sri Lanka, Lahiru Thirimanne's second innings century helped him progress 12 places to 87th position while left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya (up six places to 47th) and medium pacer Asitha Fernando (up 11 places to 96th) also gained.

## 50% crowd likely for Eng Tests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI brass is seriously contemplating allowing 50 percent crowd attendance at both Chepauk and the newly constructed Motera Stadium during India's upcoming four Test matches against England.

The first two Tests will be held in Chennai, beginning on February 5, while the next two will be played at the renovated stadium at Motera in Ahmedabad.

The BCCI is believed to be taking a cue from Cricket Australia which had allowed entry of spectators during the India series that concluded on Tuesday.

"As of now, we are likely to allow 50 percent spectators for the four Test matches. The BCCI is in talks with both state cricket associations (TNCA and GCA) and also state health authorities," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

However, the BCCI is also factoring the fluid public health situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and if case load in either Chennai or Ahmedabad increases, then the decision will change accordingly.

"If you allow 50 percent crowd with all necessary precautions, then it will be an indicator if we can also allow spectators during IPL in India," the source said. In Ahmedabad, which can hold over one lakh spectators, spacing of seats to maintain social distancing will not be an issue.

Meanwhile, England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will name the squad for first two Test matches against India on Thursday.

This is the first time that a touring team is not naming a squad for full away series keeping the workload management of its players in mind.

The fact that Chennai and Ahmedabad will have two separate bio-bubbles and the teams will travel by chartered flight within the country may also be the reason that England, like the Indian team, decided to name its squad for two Tests.



## Shakib returns with 4-8

AP ■ DHAKA

Shakib Al Hasan claimed 4-8 on his return to international cricket as Bangladesh made a winning start to the three-match ODI series by beating West Indies by six wickets in the opening game on Wednesday.

All-rounder Shakib was back after being given a two-year ban by the International Cricket Council in October 2019, with one year suspended, for failing to report approaches from a bookmaker.

Thanks to his wily left-arm spin, Bangladesh bowled the tourists out for 122 in 32.3 overs before reaching 125-4 with 97 balls to spare in reply. Debutant Hasan Mahmud and fellow fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman also played key roles for the home team, taking 3-28 and 2-20 respectively.

Rain held the players up for about an hour after Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal won the toss and asked

West Indies, featuring six ODI debutants, to bat.

Shakib, in his first game for Bangladesh since the 2019 World Cup, bowled seven overs in a row and ripped through the middle order as West Indies lost three wickets for 11 runs.

Debutant Kyle Mayers and Rovman Powell, who hit two sixes, provided some resistance with a partnership of 59 for the sixth wicket.

Mahmud picked up his first wicket by having Powell caught behind for 28 and followed up by trapping Raymon Reifer lbw for naught with his next ball.

Mayers top-scored with 40 before being undone by a Mehidi Hasan delivery that spun sharply.

Tamim, captaining the side for the first time after being appointed last March, then gave Bangladesh a flying start to its reply by hitting 44 before being stumped off West Indies captain Jason Mohammed.

# Maxi, Malinga released, Raina retained

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chennai Super Kings retained veteran Suresh Raina for the upcoming IPL-14. The deadline for the eight franchises to submit the lists of retained and released players for the next edition of the lucrative league ended on Wednesday.

Also released by KXIP were West Indies all-rounder Sheldon Cottrell, Afghanistan's Mujeeb-ur-Rahman and New Zealand's Jimmy Neesham, who underwent a surgery recently to treat an injured finger.

CSK's Harbhajan Singh and Mumbai Indians' Lasith Malinga were among the other big names to be released by their respective sides ahead of next month's auction.

Harbhajan was joined by the likes of Kedar Jadhav, Piyush Chawla and Murali Vijay who were also let go by the franchise.

Also released by MI was Sherfane Rutherford, while Delhi Capitals decided to enter the next edition without English batsman Jason Roy, wicketkeeper Alex Carey, leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane and seamer Mohit Sharma.

Malinga had been a prominent part of MI's title-winning campaigns in the past though he was not there last time due to personal reasons.

The seasoned Raina was retained by the Mahendra Singh Dhoni-led CSK notwithstanding his sudden departure from the last IPL in the UAE.

It is believed the three-time winners decided to continue with Raina in order to bolster the batting order that struggled during a forgettable last season, which culminated in a seventh-place finish and a league-stage elimination for the first time since the tournament's inception in 2008.

The left-handed Raina has been



Glenn Maxwell bats during practice session

KXIP/Twitter

an integral part of the Super Kings from the beginning, emerging as their highest scorer while guiding them to two IPL titles.

Stoinis made useful contributions in the 2020 edition and helped the Capitals reach their first-ever IPL final.

Batting mostly in the middle order, he amassed 352 runs at an average of 25.14 and a strike rate of 148.52.

With the ball, he took 13 wickets at an economy of 9.53.

The Delhi-based franchise retained a total of 19 players including six overseas players.

KKR will be going into next month's auction with a 17-member squad after having released only five players from the team.

The two-time champions have released Tom Banton and Chris Green among the foreign players and Siddhesh Lad, Nikhil Naik and M Siddharth among the Indians.

After Wednesday, RCB's total

## Sanju to lead RR now, Smith released

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sanju Samson replaced Steve Smith as Rajasthan Royals captain after the Australian batsman and some other under-performing stars were released by their respective IPL franchises.

Samson was appointed to the top job after RR decided against renewing former skipper Steve Smith's contract.

"As the IPL has grown, the captaincy has become a year-round task, and as such strong local Indian leadership has become increasingly important," said RR owner Manoj Badale in a statement.

"Sanju made his debut as a Royal, and it has been a joy to watch his development over the last 8 years. He is the ideal person to lead the Royals into the 2021 season," he added.

Smith's contract ended in October 2020.

The Australians,

smarting from a Test series loss to an injury-plagued India, took a hit as the likes of the explosive Glenn Maxwell and opener Aaron Finch too were released by Kings XI Punjab and Royal Challengers Bangalore respectively.

Under Smith's captaincy, inaugural edition champions RR finished last in the 2020 IPL when the star Australian batsman played all the 14 league matches, scoring 311 runs at a strike rate of 131, including three half-centuries.

Ahead of the 2018 IPL, Smith was the only player retained by the Royals for Rs 12.5 crore. The same year, he was appointed as the captain.

However, his impact came under the scanner after the team's disastrous outing in the UAE last year.

"I am excited about the challenge that lies ahead of me as the leader of the team," said new captain Samson.

purchase increased from Rs 6.4 crore to Rs 35.7 crore, Delhi Capitals' swelled to Rs 12.8 crore from 9 crore, Rajasthan Royals' purse jumped to 34.85 crore from Rs 14.75 crore, Kings XI Punjab saw an exponential rise from Rs 16.5 crore to Rs 53.2 crore, and Sunrisers Hyderabad went

from Rs 10.1 crore to Rs 10.75 crore. Two-time winners KKR's purse went up from Rs 8.5 crore to Rs 10.85 crore and from Rs 15 crore, three-time champions CSK's amount in the kitty increased to Rs 22.9 crore.

Mumbai Indians were left with a purse of Rs 15.35 crore.