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I'VE BEEN QUITE LUCKY: NABHA

Page 12

CO-OWNER OF MUMBAI'S "MUCHHAD PAANWALA" CHAIN HELD IN DRUGS CASE

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has arrested Ramkumar Tiwari, one of the owners of "Muchhad Paanwala", Mumbai's famous chain of shops selling betel leaf, or paan. Tiwari was arrested late on Monday evening after he failed to "satisfactorily" answer NCB's questions on the half-a-kilogram of marijuana recovered from his shop. The shop, located in south Mumbai's Kemps Corner area, is famous for being frequented by some celebrities. Tiwari sold paan laced with drugs to some clients, NCB suspects. The confiscated marijuana has been identified as OG Kush.



'KHALISTANIS INFILTRATED FARMERS' PROTEST,' GOVERNMENT TELLS SC

The Supreme Court today put on hold three farm laws that are the cause of protests near Delhi by thousands of farmers. In the hearing, the government argued that "Khalistanis" had infiltrated the protests. As Attorney General KK Venugopal made the statement, the Supreme Court asked him to file an affidavit. The top government lawyer said he would do so by tomorrow along with inputs from the Intelligence Bureau (IB). The Khalistan reference emerged when a farmer group in favour of the central laws alleged that banned organisations had entered the protests.



TADA COURT FRAMES CHARGES AGAINST YASIN, 9 OTHERS IN RUBAIYA KIDNAP CASE

A special TADA court has framed charges against Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Mohammd Yasin Malik and nine others in a 31-year-old kidnapping case involving Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of then union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Malik is presently lodged in Tihar jail, Delhi, after he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in April 2019 in connection with a terror funding case, a month after his group was banned by the central government. In March last year, the special TADA court had framed charges against the JKLF chief and six others in January 1990.



INDONESIA LOCATES BLACK BOX FROM CRASHED SRIWIJAYA AIR PLANE

A black box from the crashed Indonesian passenger jet has been recovered, the transport minister said on Tuesday, days after the plane with 62 people aboard slammed into the sea. "The FDR (flight data recorder) has been found," minister Budi Karya Sumadi told a live television briefing. The recorder is one of two black boxes -- the other being a cockpit voice recorder -- that could prove crucial to explaining why the aircraft plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 metres) in less than a minute before crashing into waters off the capital Jakarta.



SC gives jolt to Centre, stays implementation of farm laws

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed the implementation of controversial new farm laws till further orders and decided to set up a four-member committee to resolve the impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting at Delhi borders.

A bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justice AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said that it will pass an order to this effect.

The top court stayed the implementation of the three laws - the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act - against which several petitions have been filed challenging their constitutional validity.

The bench which read out four names of members of the committee said that it will look into the farmers' grievances on the issue.

The four names of members include Bhupinder Singh Mann, President of Bhartiya Kisan Union; Anil Ghanwat, President of Shetkeri Sangthana, Maharashtra; Pramod Kumar Joshi, director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute, and agriculture economist Ashok Gulati.



During the hearing, the top court sought the cooperation of the protesting farmers and made it clear that no power can prevent it from setting up a committee to resolve the impasse over the controversial farm laws.

The observation of the bench asking protesting farmers' unions to cooperate assumes significance in view of reports that they would not go to any apex court-appointed panel for resolution of the dispute and wanted the laws to be repealed.

Before pronouncing the order, the bench commenced the hearing and asked the farmers' unions to cooperate and go before the committee to be appointed by it to resolve the dispute.

"We are concerned about protecting the lives and prop-

erty of citizens of India and we want to solve the problem," said the bench.

In the proceedings, conducted through video conferencing, it reiterated that the apex court has powers to suspend the legislation in order to solve the problem.

The bench said those who "genuinely want resolution, will go to the committee" on farm laws. This is not politics. There is a difference between politics and judiciary and you will have to cooperate," it said to farmer unions. When the bench was informed that an application has been filed before it alleging that a banned organisation is extending support to the agitating farmers, the top court asked attorney general KK Venugopal about it.

2

All panel members had backed govt earlier

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Protesting farmer unions on Tuesday asserted they will not appear before the Supreme Court appointed panel, alleging it was "pro-government", and said they won't settle for anything less than the repeal of the three contentious laws.

The four members of the committee are BKU president Bhupinder Singh Mann, Shetkeri Sangathana (Maharashtra) president Anil Ghanwat, South Asia Director for International Food Policy Research Institute Pramod Kumar Joshi, and agriculture economist Ashok Gulati.

Gulati, who was also a member of Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council from 1999 to 2001, has written opinion pieces in national dailies, and also spoken to the media in support of the farm laws.

2



AP receives 4.96 lakh doses from Covaxin; vaccination starts Jan 16

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday received 4.96 lakh doses of Covaxin, the much awaited coronavirus vaccine.

A special cargo plane brought the vaccine to the Vijayawada airport at Gannavaram from Pune on Tuesday afternoon.

From there, the consignment was shifted to the state vaccine depot in Gannavaram. State Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar said the first consignment of vaccine doses would be sufficient to vaccinate about 3.7 lakh healthcare workers in the first round beginning January 16.

The state government made elaborate arrangements for storing the vaccine in temper-

ature-controlled cold storage units.

Refrigerated vans will be used to transport the vaccine to over 1,900 session sites where the chosen healthcare workers will be given the vaccine from January 16.

The first consignment was received by Krishna district collector A Md Imtiaz who was accompanied by Medical and Health joint director Srihari and joint collector Sivashankar. "We have ensured that the vaccine was transported to the storage centre under prescribed temperature conditions" said Imtiaz.

He said that a facility that can store 35 lakh doses has been set up at the airport.

Imtiaz said that the vaccines will be transported to various

districts across the state through 19 special vehicles, with care being taken to ensure that the temperature remains between 2 to 8 degree Celsius.

"In Krishna district, the first phase of vaccination will begin on January 16 at 30 centres and it will be administered to about 3,000 healthcare workers. Till now, about 36,500 people have registered for the vaccination," Imtiaz said.

He added that in the second phase of vaccination, frontline workers, including municipal, police, revenue, panchayat raj and other Covid warriors will get the vaccine shot. There are about 50,000 people among the frontline warriors, said the collector. Among the frontline warriors, 18,000 people have registered in CoWIN.

2

Capital in Vizag soon: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Advisor to the Government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Tuesday said locating the executive capital in port city Visakhapatnam (Vizag) is certain and the litigation in courts was only delaying its establishment.

"One month this way or that

way, but locating the Executive Capital in Visakhapatnam is certain.

We have decided to make Vizag the Executive Capital as part of decentralisation of administration," State Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala told reporters here.

The ongoing litigation in

courts was only delaying the establishment of the Executive Capital in Vizag, he pointed out.

"We hope there will be a favourable outcome (in the court) and we will move to Vizag in the next three-four months," Sajjala added.

2

TDP Christian cell leaders dump party

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major blow to the Telugu Desam Party, the party's Christian Cell leaders from across the state tendered their resignation here on Tuesday.

The TDP Christian Cell leaders met at a private hotel in Vijayawada and later informed the media that they had taken

a decision to tender their resignation from the post of the party's Christian Cell district presidents and also from the TDP membership.

They said that they have taken this extreme step of quitting the TDP in protest against the comments made by party supremo N Chandrababu Naidu a few days back.

TDP Christian Cell president Y Praveen Kumar said that pastors, community elders, Christian Cell leaders and members of the community in general were shocked by the comments made by Naidu against the community.

"We have been associated with the TDP for a long time and have been working for the

party's development. The remarks made by Naidu on January 5 has hurt the sentiments of the community. Naidu has insulted the Christian community and their sentiments," Praveen Kumar said. He reminded that Naidu never made such degrading comments on Christians earlier.

2

SEC surrenders secretary, seeks replacement

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After dismissing a joint director in his office from services on Monday, State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on Tuesday surrendered a high ranking official — poll panel secretary G Vani Mohan — to the state government stating her services were not required at the SEC office.

While the reasons behind Vani Mohan's surrender were not immediately known, the SEC also wrote a letter in this regard to Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, asking the latter to send a panel of three names for appointment as the next SEC secretary.

It remains to be seen how the State Government responds to the latest move by SEC who has been at loggerheads with the government.

A 1996 batch IAS officer, G Vani Mohan, was appointed Secretary in the office of SEC in May last year.

On Monday, SEC issued proceedings discharging GV



Nimmagadda Ramesh

Sai Prasad, who was the senior-most functionary after the Commission's secretary, from duties as per the penal powers vested with the SEC under various provisions of the Constitution.

In his proceedings, the SEC said since it was not a honourable discharge but the dismissal with disgrace, Sai Prasad was not entitled to any terminal benefits and also barred from entering any other government service directly or indirectly.

SEC briefs Governor on standoff over polls

Vijayawada: State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on Tuesday met Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and briefed him about the ongoing standoff with the State Government on conducting Gram Panchayat elections.

The meeting lasted for around 40 minutes during which Ramesh Kumar apprised the Governor about the poll schedule that he had issued on January 8 and how it was challenged by the State Government in the High Court.

2

HC posts SEC's review petition for January 18

Vijayawada: In a minor setback to State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, the House Motion petition moved by him seeking urgent hearing challenging the interim order of the single judge bench related to the suspension of notification for panchayat polls has been posted to January 18.

A single-judge bench had on Monday suspended the election notification issued by the SEC to conduct panchayat polls.

The two-judge division bench comprising Justice U Durga Prasad Rao and Justice B Krishna Mohan took up the SEC's petition on Tuesday morning and

A single-judge bench had on Monday suspended the election notification issued by the SEC to conduct panchayat polls

then heard it in the afternoon.

Counsel for the SEC prayed that there was urgency in the matter as the entire process of preparations for the polls, especially the preparation of electoral rolls, would be hampered with the suspension of the notification.

2

TDP says quid pro quo, targets Chalameswar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP senior leader KS Jawahar on Tuesday accused former Supreme Court judge Justice Jasti Chalamaswar of trying to influence the judiciary in favour of the YSRCP government. In a statement, Jawahar said that Justice Chalamaswar was favouring the State Government as his son Jasti Naga Bhushan was appointed as Additional Advocate General of Andhra Pradesh.

Jawahar also alleged that Justice Chalamaswar was behind the attack on the judiciary which he said had damaged the self-respect of the system.

"Jagan, who faces charges of financial impropriety, and is Accused No 1 in a Rs 1 lakh-crore scam, has turned lawless with the cooperation of senior advocates," Jawahar said.

The former minister questioned the motive behind the appointment of Jasti Naga Bhushan as Additional Advocate General, saying that



Justice Jasti Chalamaswar

it was clear that such an appointment was a reward for cooperating with Jagan.

"Jasti Naga Bhushan never argued a single case but was given one of the highest posts in the state judiciary. It's nothing but 'quid pro quo' agreement between Jagan and Justice Chalamaswar. The public is aware of Jagan's attempts to persuade and defame High Court judges," Jawahar said.



'Dynastic politics burdens country with incompetence'

5



SEC, Govt face-off inexplicable, harmful to democracy

2



Sensex jumps 248 pts to end at new peak; Nifty tops 14,500

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Margashirsha & Krishna Paksha Panchangam

Trithi : Amavasya: 10:29 am

Nakshatram: Uttara Ashadha: 05:28 am (Next Day)

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

Rahukalam: 12:24 pm - 01:47 pm

Yamagandam: 08:16 am - 09:38 am

Variyam: 02:03 pm - 03:36 pm

Gulika: 11:01 am - 12:24 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritkalam: 11:18 pm - 12:50 am

Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 32/21
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 06:49 am
Sunset: 06:00 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated January 13, 2021 5:00 PM

SEC, Govt face-off inexplicable, harmful to democracy

Undoubtedly, the most crucial cog in the wheel of a healthy democracy would be elections. Elections are also a tool for gauging public opinion on governance. The general perception is that local body polls reflect the mood of the people on the functioning of the ruling party though they are held on the basis of local issues. A ruling party candidate who seeks public support to head the village level governing body or local government will only lose if the voters are not satisfied with the Government. For a moment, if we set aside the question of who will blink first in the ongoing tussle between the State Election Commissioner and the Government, the fact remains that ultimately, the issue will have a negative



PIN POINT

impact on democracy itself, since it's already been given a political colour. Detractors of SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar have gone to great lengths to portray him as a stooge of the TDP, and as someone implementing a grand conspiracy to malign the Jaganmohan Reddy Government. To support this allegation, they point to the fact that the SEC was appointed during the rule of Chandrababu Naidu. Some of the more excitable ones 'advise' the SEC to put in his papers, join the TDP and contest the next general elections. It's unfortunate that no one, including Members of the State Cabinet, have condemned such a serious allegation. As of the moment, the SEC has approached a divi-

For a moment, if we set aside the question of who will blink first in the ongoing tussle between the State Election Commissioner and the Govt, the fact remains that ultimately, the issue will have a negative impact on democracy itself, since it's already been given a political colour

sion bench of the High Court against the single bench order settling aside the election schedule released by him. In his plea, the SEC has pointed out that there has been no instance of the election schedule being disturbed by any court across the country. Interestingly, both the AP Government and the SEC are contradicting their earlier stand. A year ago, the State

Government had been exceptionally enthusiastic on conducting the local body polls, pointing out that the State stood to lose Rs 4,000 crore from the Finance Commission if the elections were to be delayed. Refusing to go ahead with the elections on account of Covid-19, the SEC asserted that the Finance Commission could be convinced by 'explaining' the situation arising from the pandemic.



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

The SEC's decision upset the Government, and its plans. Clearly, the Government did not take too kindly to the decision, since it was enjoying what is known as the 'honeymoon period' and its chances of a sweep at the hustings would have been extremely bright. The Chief Minister let his

anger show, going to the extent of even criticising Ramesh Kumar on caste lines and accusing him of trying to benefit the TDP. The rank and file of the YSRCP followed Jagan in lambasting the SEC. The criticism reached a crescendo, and the Government appeared to be wishing for a 'favourable' SEC to help it fulfil the election process made to local bodies. The Government tried to replace Ramesh Kumar by bringing septuagenarian Kanagaraj, a retired judge from Tamil Nadu after curtailing the tenure of Ramesh Kumar from five years to three. How Justice Kanagaraj managed to Vijayawada from Tamil Nadu when the entire country was under strict lockdown is a mystery that confounds still. It's a different matter alto-

gether that Ramesh Kumar overcame all the hurdles he faced and was able to return to his job. His latest salvo at the Jagan Government, in the form of the election schedule, was deflected by the High Court. Expectedly, the court verdict was hailed by the YSRCP, understandably so since the Jagan Government has a record of receiving negative verdicts. This may not be the end to the story; the case may wind up in the Supreme Court. By trying to get the elections put off, the Government may have led to the perception that it is scared to face the electorate, probably due to a rather poor record on basic amenities. There have been instances where the ruling dispensation suffered reversals in the local body polls after sweeping the general elections. In

1987, the Congress won more seats than its own expectations, leaving the then ruling TDP in disarray. The fact that the Government has been citing Covid as the reason to get the local body polls put off holds little water. The Government's commitment to arrest the spread of Covid has come under a cloud after the 'Amma Vodi' programme conducted at Nellore resembled a public meeting. None of those on the dais, except the security personnel, were seen wearing face masks. After such scenes, it appears strange that even government employees associations are citing Covid to get the SEC put off the elections. Strangely, these same associations kept silent when carrying out their duties at liquor shops that witnessed heavy crowds soon after they were reopened.

Efforts on to bring back past glory of ancient port

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

An ancient port town in Motupalli of Prakasam district, dateable to Chola times, is under active consideration for an all-round development, according to Motupalli Parirakshana Samiti president Ronda Dasaratha Rami Reddy. Motupalli is an international port right from the Chola times and continued during the Kakatiya, Vijayanagara and Qutb Shahi periods, according to well-known archaeologist E Sivanagireddy, who is also the CEO of the Cultural Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati. Dr Reddy recalled that Marco Polo, an Italian traveller visited Motupalli, a busy port where brisk export and import activity was reported in 1287 and reported on the flourishing state of the port to the reigning empress Rudramadevi



of the Kakatiya dynasty. Dr Reddy said that Motupalli is also known worldwide for its unique and only one of its kind inscription on Marine insurance for seaborne traders issued by the Kakatiya emperor Ganapati

Deva in 1234 AD engraved on four sides of a pillar now located in the local Veerabhadra Swamy temple known as Abhaya sasanam was further renewed by Anavemareddy and Vijayanagara emperor Devaraya.

The Motupalli Parirakshana Samiti has slated a plan for its restoration in archaeological norms and invited Dr Reddy to offer his expertise on heritage conservation. Dr Jyoti Chandramouli, historian also visited the temple. Dr Reddy who visited the historic Rama temple on Tuesday took measurements to prepare a detailed project report. He said that the DPR would be submitted to TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy for financial and technical support. The villagers are confident that the TTD will take up the works so that the temple could attract tourist influx from all over the state. Dr Reddy and Dr Jyoti Chandramouli felt the need of an open-air archaeological museum to showcase the scattered historical sculptures to ensure safety and security.

SEC briefs Governor on...

Continued from page 1

The SEC also briefed the Governor on how the Government heads were "provoking" the staff and other employees to not cooperate with poll panel in conducting the election. He had brought various statements by the Government employees associations and police department on their ultimatum not to cooperate with the SEC. Ramesh Kumar reportedly sought the Governor's intervention terming the ongoing tussle as a 'constitutional crisis'. He also gave an example on how prima facie it was established a joint director in his office had encouraged staff at his office to go on leave en masse to paralyse the functioning of his office. Ramesh Kumar is believed to have objected to the way the Government has been functioning in the matter related to holding panchayat polls.

TDP Christian cell leaders dump party

Continued from page 1

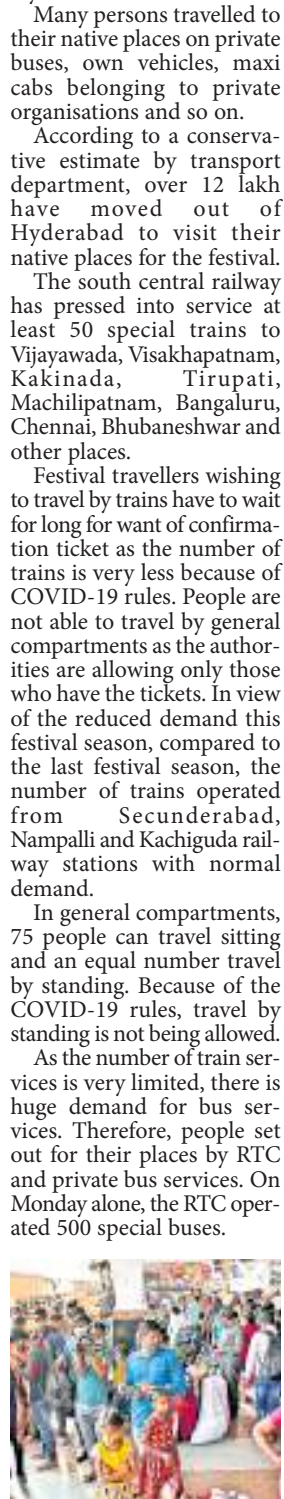
Praveen Kumar said that the TDP Christian Cell leaders demanded a rejoinder from Naidu on two things — the reason behind his diatribe against Christians and his departure from the ideals of secularism that the TDP was founded. He recalled that Naidu had offered prayers in churches and mosques and sought blessings of all communities during festivals and special occasions. "In a secular country like India all the people gather and greet each other during festivals. What is wrong if a Church priest is paid Rs 5,000?" Praveen Kumar asked. He also found fault with Naidu saying that Christians were resorting to forcible conversions and said that this allegation had insulted Christians across the state. "Naidu should prove his allegation," he said. Praveen Kumar also demanded to know why Naidu

had not implemented the promises made during the TDP rule. "We have been working for the overall development of the party while Naidu was insulting the Christian community," he said. He also lambasted Naidu for saying that new churches were sprouting everywhere. "There are churches in most of the villages across the state since ages," Praveen Kumar said. He said that during the five years of TDP rule, many corporations were established but for Christians, a corporation was set up barely three months before the term of the government ended. DV Kumar (Bose Babu) Sriakulam, V Surendra Babu (Nellore), P Samuel Paul (Prakasam), N Timothy (West Godavari), K Ratna Raju (East Godavari), Benhar Babu (Visakhapatnam), E Swamy Das (Anantapur) and other district leaders were present on the occasion.

Over 12L leave Hyd for AP to celebrate Sankranti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Many residents of the city started their home-bound journey for the Sankranti festival not only to enjoy the festival but also relieve themselves of the stress of the busy city life and the stress caused to them for about 10 months by the pandemic. Lakhs of people have set out for their native places in Telugu states to celebrate the festival. In fact, people are on the move for the last one week. However, on Monday the festival rush reached peak stage as the festival is just two days away. In view of the COVID-19 rules, only those who have confirmed reservation are being allowed on trains. The waiting list for reservations runs long for all trains. The TSRTC has pressed into service over 4900 special buses. This is in addition to the 3500 regular bus services to Telugu states from Hyderabad. Many persons travelled to their native places on private buses, own vehicles, maxi cabs belonging to private organisations and so on. According to a conservative estimate by transport department, over 12 lakh have moved out of Hyderabad to visit their native places for the festival. The south central railway has pressed into service at least 50 special trains to Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Kakinada, Tirupati, Machilipatnam, Bangaluru, Chennai, Bhubaneswar and other places. Festival travellers wishing to travel by trains have to wait for long for want of confirmation ticket as the number of trains is very less because of COVID-19 rules. People are not able to travel by general compartments as the authorities are allowing only those who have the tickets. In view of the reduced demand this festival season, compared to the last festival season, the number of trains operated from Secunderabad, Nampalli and Kachiguda railway stations with normal demand. In general compartments, 75 people can travel sitting and an equal number travel by standing. Because of the COVID-19 rules, travel by standing is not being allowed. As the number of train services is very limited, there is huge demand for bus services. Therefore, people set out for their places by RTC and private bus services. On Monday alone, the RTC operated 500 special buses.

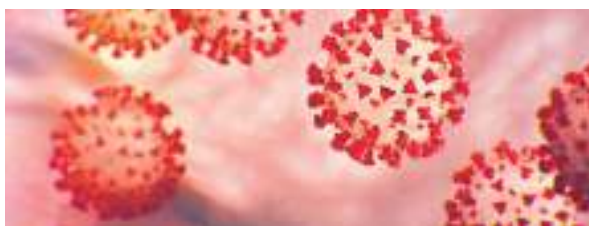


197 new Covid cases, 2 deaths in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Close to 41,000 sample tests yielded 197 fresh Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh as the gross went up to 8,85,234 on Tuesday. A health department bulletin said 234 patients had recovered and two more succumbed to the pandemic in the state in 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday. The total recoveries has touched 8,75,690 and deaths 7,133, leaving 2,411 active cases, it said.

Krishna district accounted for the highest number of cases 49, followed by Chittoor 32 and Guntur 31. The remaining 10 districts added less than 20 new cases each, with seven of them seeing less than 10 each. Krishna and Kadapa districts reported one fresh Covid-19 fatality each, the bulletin said. The overall infection positivity rate in the state skid to 7.14 per cent after a total of 1.23 crore sample tests.



All panel members had backed...

Continued from page 1

For instance, in December, he had said that the three farm laws would benefit the farmers. Ghanwat is the president of the Shetkari Sangathan, which is a group based out of Maharashtra that had celebrated the new farm laws. Ghanwat had told media that farmers should get the right to market their produce and underscored the need to "reform" the new laws. Amendment of the existing laws was what the government had offered farmers, making it clear that there would be no repeal as they demanded. He, however, also said the government should have consulted the farmers before going ahead with the legislation. Hailing the Supreme Court's order that underscores the need for discussion, he said, "There was not much discussion with farmers' organisations before the new agricultural law was made, due to which many misunderstandings have spread among the farmers." Mann was part of a group of farmers that met Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar in December, to express support for the new laws. The fourth member of the committee, Joshi has written multiple opinion pieces in the past, supporting the new



farm laws. In a piece co-written by him, he said "Any dilution in the farm laws will constrain Indian agriculture in harnessing the emerging global opportunities." "Scrapping the three farm laws will be disastrous for the entire agriculture sector, more so for the farmers," reads another piece co-written by Joshi. Ordering the formation of the committee today, Chief Justice of India SA Bobde said, "We want to solve the problem and that's why we are making the committee." "We have the power to appoint a committee, which will submit to us. All who are genuinely interested in solving the problem can go before the committee". In its order for the formation of the committee, the court made attendance mandatory for representatives of all the farmers' bodies.

Capital in Vizag soon: Sajjala

Continued from page 1

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy first mooted the three capitals idea in December 2019 and his government moved to enact an enabling legislation in the state Legislature in January 2020, with the Executive Capital in Visakhapatnam, Judicial Capital in Kurnool and Legislative Capital in Amaravati. That, however, did not happen as the Decentralisation Bill faced a hurdle in the Legislative Council, with the opposition parties stalling it. But, using the provisions of the Constitution, the government passed the Bill a second time and secured the

Governor's assent. The new Legislation, however, then faced a legal hurdle with the High Court imposing a stay and directing the state government not to go ahead with its plan of relocating the capital from Amaravati. "We need to showcase the fruits of decentralisation to the public in the next three years for which the government has been putting up effective arguments in the High Court in the ongoing cases filed against the three-capital plan," Sajjala told reporters at the party office at Tadepalli. He said that the recent events have shown that some political forces were conspiring to divert the people's attention



from government welfare initiatives. He also accused TDP leaders of conspiring to prevent publicity for government schemes by diverting the people's attention to political issues. "The government has constituted an SIT to investigate the acts of desecration and attacks on idols and has already resolved some of the cases," the

senior leader said. "State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar released the Gram Panchayat poll schedule in such a way that it favoured the TDP, casting aside his responsibility as head of an independent constitutional body," Sajjala said. He also alleged that the election schedule was unveiled to stall the Amma Vodi initiative. He wanted Ramesh Kumar to say why he didn't conduct the local body elections in 2018 and why he didn't use his constitutional powers to conduct polls during the TDP rule. Sajjala said that it was clear that desecration of idols in temples was a conspiracy to

hurt the sentiments of the people and divert attention from the house site distribution programme. "Never before has any state launched a scheme to hand over 31 lakh house sites to the homeless. A festive atmosphere prevails in the state. Unable to digest these good deeds, the opposition has conspired to create unrest in the State and caused such unfortunate incidents by vandalising temples," he said, adding that faith is a personal matter that should not be used for politics. The government is very serious about desecration of temples and a SIT has been constituted for investigation, he added.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 50,400 (10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 330 (1kg)	
₹ 69,800 (1kg)	
₹ 1700	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹133
Without Skin	₹152
Broiler at Farm	₹92
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	390
HYDERABAD	516
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE	₹3.90 (IN HYDERABAD)

HC posts SEC's review...

Continued from page 1

To this, Advocate-General Sriram Subrahmanyam argued that the state's Chief Election Officer (CEO) was yet to receive the electoral rolls from the Election Commission of India. He added that the CEO expected the electoral rolls from ECI on January 15 and the government will get them on January 22. He argued that when the electoral rolls are not yet ready or either received there was no urgency in the matter. Satisfied with the argument of the AG the two-judge bench posted the matter to January 18 after the Sankranti vacation.

Vizag police ignore GO; curbs dent food biz

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The restriction being imposed by the Vizag City Police to close the restaurants and eateries by 10 pm is not only denting the food business but also causing inconvenience to the tourists landing in Vizag during night time.

The restriction of cops contravenes a GO issued by AP government in 2018 allowing licensed restaurants, hotels, and eateries to operate till 12 midnight. The cops have thrown the GO to the wind much to dislike of owners of eateries and restaurants.

The government had issued the GO extending the time limit from the usual 10.30 pm to 12.00 midnight for the convenience of tourists and visitors arriving late in Vizag city by trains and flights.

The owners of hotels and restaurants fear a loss in business during the peak tourists' season owing to the latest order issued by the Vizag city police.

The hoteliers say that for the past one week, the police have been asking them to shut down the restaurants and eateries by 9.30 pm citing various reasons. They blame the police for their ignorance about the state government order and unnecessarily creating troubles for the industry.



A Venkata Ramana Murthy of Andhra Pradesh Hotels' Association (APHA) said that AP government a few years ago lifted the restrictions on night-time business on their request to promote tourism.

In October, 2018, the labour department issued an order (GO MS 25) to allow night business. The government decided to allow hotels, restaurants and eateries to operate till 12 midnight as earlier the food

joints were closed by 10.30 pm.

"However, the police are again imposing the restrictions of closing the hotels by 10 pm causing loss to our business. While the bar-and-restaurants in the city can operate till 11 pm, what's the problem with the hotels and restaurants operating till midnight," Murthy asked.

As per APHA, Vizag city has over 600 hotels and restaurants, including over a half-a-dozen

■ Vizag City police forces owners of eateries and restaurants to close by 10 pm breaching the GO issued in 2018 allowing them to operate till 12 midnight

star hotels. The police are either unaware of the government order or deliberately violating the order. Vizag is tipped to be a smart city and executive capital of Andhra Pradesh and it is necessary to operate the hotels and restaurants till midnight, they added.

A representative of a star hotel, on the condition of anonymity, said that Vizag is a peaceful, cosmopolitan, socio-cultural and tourism hub in the state. Vizag city draws a good number of visitors in between December and February. But, the recent diktat of the police to close the hotels and restaurants by 10 pm will not only cause inconvenience to visitors, but brings losses to the hotel industry.

The last flight lands in Vizag at 9.30 pm and by the time the visitors reach the hotels, the restaurants would be closed, he added. The police, on the other hand, said that as per norms, restaurants, shops and other establishments should be closed by 10 pm only.

APCLF hails TDP Christian Cell leaders' decision

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh Christian Leaders Forum (APCLF) hailed all the members of the Christian Cell of the Telugu Desam Party who tendered resignation en masse in protest against the derogatory remarks of their chief Chandrababu Naidu.

"The entire Christian community was anguished and upset with the unwanted and derogatory remarks made by TDP president Nara Chandrababu Naidu. APCLF had organised a huge protest in Visakhapatnam on January 11 demanding an apology and withdrawal of the said comments," said APCLF Chairman, Oliver Rayi.

"The stand of the TDP Christian cell members, for the sake of Christianity, setting aside personal ambitions and interests, is indeed an exemplary one and on behalf of the entire Christian Community of Andhra Pradesh, we assure them of our prayers," said APCLF, a body of the Christian Community in Andhra Pradesh consisting of Archbishops, Bishops of mainline Churches, independent, multi organisational bodies, Para Church Organisations and Christian Leaders.



TTD Additional EO AV Dharma Reddy, JEO P Basanth Kumar, Guntur District Collector Samuel Anand, Guntur Rural SP Vishal Gunny and other officials inspecting arrangements for Kamadhenu Gopuja at Sports Authority Stadium Grounds in Narsaraopeta on Tuesday.

CM to attend Gopuja at Narsaraopeta on Jan 15

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Jaganmohan Reddy will take part in the prestigious Kamadhenu Gopuja to be organised by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam on the auspicious day of Kanuma on January 15 at Narsaraopeta in Guntur district.

TTD Additional EO AV Dharma Reddy and JEO P Basanth Kumar on Tuesday inspected arrangements for Kamadhenu Puja (Gopuja) scheduled to be held at Sports Authority Stadium Grounds at Narsaraopeta. The TTD will organise the programme as part of its agenda to promote Sanatana Dharma.

TTD Additional EO and JEO directed officials to coordinate efforts with local MLA Dr Gopireddy Srinivasa Reddy and Guntur District Administration and make all arrangements on a war-footing. Gopuja also to be held at 996 temples of Endowments wing.

Speaking to media, TTD JEO P Basanth Kumar said since decades TTD has been conducting Gopuja on Kanuma festival day. This year, besides the 50 temples in TTD, Gopuja will be conducted at all 996 temples of State Endowments Department at 3.45 pm on January 15.

He also confirmed the participation of Chief Minister YS

Jaganmohan Reddy in the Kamadhenu Gopuja which bestows prosperity and good health on entire mankind.

Local MLA Dr Srinivasa Reddy said that it was a good fortune of the people of Narsaraopeta that the event would be conducted in Narsaraopeta by TTD where CM would take part. He expressed his confidence that this sacred event would bring good fortunes to State.

Guntur District Collector Samuel Anand, Guntur Rural SP Vishal Gunny, Kotappakonda Temple EO Annapureddy Ramkoti Reddy, local ISKON representatives, TTD CVSO Gopinath Jatti, Chief Engineer Ramesh Reddy and others were also present.

Minister: Govt keen on empowering youth

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Youth Advancement and Tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao said that skill development centres being set up in Andhra will empower the youths.

The State government is implementing innovative methods and changing the education system to develop skills among youths in an attempt realise Make in India dream, he said.

Participating as the chief guest at a function to commemorate the 159 birth anniversary organised by the department of youth services in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, the minister said skill development university and skill development institutes were being set up in the State shortly so that the youth would be equipped with necessary skills to get better opportunity for employ-

ment. "Human resources are the greatest assets for the country," the minister said. Earlier, he garlanded the portrait of Swamy Vivekananda and spoke about his ideals and message for the youth.

He presented cash awards to three school students who won the Swachh Bharat Summer Internship 2019-2020 selected by Nehru Yuva Kendra. He presented Rs 30,000 cheque to Ch SM Ratna Kumari of Payakaraopeta, Rs 20,000 to S Sivakrishna of V Madugula and Rs 10,000 to T Madhu of Bhimili.

Participating in a function organised in Boys Degree College in Srikakulam, former minister and YSRCP MLA Dharmana Prasada Rao said that the country has demographic advantage and asked youth to emulate the thoughts of Swamy Vivekananda.



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy greets Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatreya at Vijayawada on Tuesday. The Himachal Pradesh Governor was on a day's visit to Krishna district.

Jagan calls on Himachal Governor Dattatreya

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday called on Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatreya, who was on a day's visit to Krishna district, here at Gateway Hotel. The Chief Minister presented a flower bouquet and extend-

ed greetings to Bandaru Dattatreya. Earlier in the day, Dattatreya visited Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy temple atop Indrakeladri and offered prayers to goddess Kanaka Durga.

The temples priests welcomed him as per temple traditions. After prayers, they blessed him and gave

prasadams. Endowments Minister Vellampalli Srinivas and Executive Officer Suresh were present.

AP DGP Goutam Sawang also called on the Himachal Pradesh Governor. Meanwhile, Dattatreya consoled the family members of BJP leader LRK Prasad who died two months ago.

JC wants rice exports enhanced from anchorage port

PNS ■ KAKINADA

East Godavari district Joint Collector G Lakshmisha on Tuesday asked the rice exporters to take steps for enhancing the rice exports from the anchorage port from the existing 20 lakh metric tonnes to a minimum of forty lakh tonnes annually.

Interacting with the leaders of the rice exporters' association at Collectorate here, he said the rice exporters should aim at increasing the rice exports to a maximum of 50 lakh tonnes annually.

He wanted them to utilise the facilities available at deep water port also for achieving the target and submit a concrete action plan for approval.

Stating that the loading of cargo would be done only in the morning in anchorage port, Lakshmisha advised them to ensure night loading also pressing in to service more number of workers.

Lakshmisha assured them of securing the required approvals from the government.

Assistant commissioner of Labour N. Bulli Rani, Cocanada chamber of commerce chairman V V Raghavulu, Rice exporters association president B V Krishnarao, members D .Virabhadrareddy, Vinod Agarwal, Dantu Bhaskarao and others participated in the meeting.

Jagan releases diaries, calendars of employees' associations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday released diaries and calendars of various Employee's Associations and Trade Unions for the year 2021 here at his camp office. He unveiled the diaries and calendars of State Teachers' Association (STU), AP NGOs Association, AP JAC Amaravati, Union Teacher's Federation, AP Revenue Services Association, Panchayat Raj Diploma Engineers' Association, AP Teachers' Association, and National Mazdoor Union.

SHORT TAKES

Couple, kid consume pesticide; die by suicide

VISAKHAPATNAM: A couple eking out their livelihood by working in agriculture fields as labourers committed suicide along with their one-year old child on Tuesday. The incident occurred at Palakoderu village in West Godavari. Parushuram made her wife, Savitri, and child drink the pesticide-laced water. Later, he also consumed it to end life. According to relatives, the couple took the extreme step due to mounting financial burden. As the villagers informed, the local police rushed to the spot and sent the bodies for post-mortem. A case has been registered and investigation is on.

Naidu lauds all-women crew for AI's longest direct flight

VIJAYAWADA: TDP chief and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday heaped praise on Air India's women pilots for their spectacular achievement of flying the world's second largest flight over the North Pole. Naidu congratulated Captain Zoya and her three co-pilots who scripted history by flying the San Francisco-Bengaluru flight through Air India's longest direct route over the North Pole. He said: "They made entire India proud with their exceptional performance. The women pilots created a record by flying Boeing 777 non-stop for over 13,993 kms in just 16 hours." Pilots Zoya Aggarwal, Thanmei, Akanksha Sonaware and Shivani Manhas deserve praise for successfully achieving this feat. India is proud over the achievement of women pilots, he said.

35,296 to be vaccinated in the first phase in Chittoor

TIRUPATI: Chittoor district is all set for Covid vaccine disbursement from January 16 onwards, District Health and Medical Officer (DMHO) Dr Penchalaiah said. Speaking to the media, Dr Penchalaiah said the district administration fully prepared to provide vaccine to 35,296 beneficiaries in the first phase at 155 centres. The health has trained 3,688 vaccinators for the task. The initial launch will be at 29 centres across the district. It has made special arrangements for the safekeeping of vaccine vials in ice-line refrigerators at the paediatric unit of Ruia hospital in Tirupati, he said. Dr Penchalaiah said that three refrigerators of 270 litres capacity have been installed for storing 60,000 doses of vaccines. Beneficiaries must register their names on the CoWIN mobile app by Tuesday, he said. In the second phase, frontline volunteers of revenue, municipal, panchayat raj and police departments will be given preference and their details must be uploaded on the Co-WIN app. He directed medical officers to collect data of people above 50 years age and people with co-morbidities for vaccination.

Covid vaccination to be held at 33 centres in EG

KAKINADA: East Godavari Collector D Muralidhara Reddy said that the dry run was conducted successfully in 190 centres on Tuesday and that the stage was set for administering Covid vaccine to health workers in first phase in 33 centres on January 16. Speaking to the media after inspecting the dry run exercise at urban primary health centre at Yetimoga, the predominant fishermen locality in the city, he said that a total of 34,500 health workers would be covered in the first phase of Covid vaccination programme. He said the second dose would be administered within an interval of 28 days using the same vaccine. After vaccination, the people would be kept under observation room for half-an-hour and send them to their houses if no complications are reported. People developing complications would be shifted to hospital for medical care, he added. The Collector visited Karapa PHC and inspected the arrangements made for the vaccination including waiting room, data entry system vaccination room and observation room. Municipal commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar and additional DMHO Dr Prasanna Kumar accompanied the collector.

Five held for ganja smuggling, thefts

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Vizag city police on Tuesday arrested five persons in four separate incidents for their involvement in the ganja smuggling and property offenses.

In the first case, the police arrested an inter-state ganja smuggler and seized 154 kg of dry ganja worth Rs 15.4 lakh when a three-member gang was transporting the ganja in a seafood export van.

The arrested were identified as Praveen Prabhakaran, 35, of Kerala, while two others Abhishek, 33, and Prasanth, 32, natives of Kerala managed to escape. Based on concrete information, the police rushed to Akkayapalem and intercepted two vehicles, including a seafood export van and seized the contraband. The trio procured the weed from Vizag

Agency to transport it to Kerala.

In another case, two persons were arrested in connection with the theft of Cera company taps at Modern Fish Market, Fishing Harbour area, in the city. The arrested were identified as K Naresh and I Ranga Rao. The police recovered the stolen property worth Rs 75,000. A 22-year-old-youngster was arrested for stealing two mobile phones from the retired Naval person's house at Malkapuram in the city. The arrested was identified as V Mahesh. The police have recovered the two mobile phones from Mahesh.

Similarly, G Pentababu, 36, was arrested for stealing a motorbike at Kancharapalem area in the city. The cops recovered the stolen vehicle from the repeated offender Pentababu..

Woman stabs boyfriend to death on bike

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In an incident of betrayal killing, a young woman in her 20s, stabbed her boyfriend to death from behind after going on a long bike ride with him in West Godavari district.

The man, identified as Tataji, died on the spot and the cops have arrested the woman,

Pavani, who belonged to Malakapalli village of Tallapudi mandal, late on Monday.

According to Kovvur Rural Inspector M Suresh Babu, Tataji had proposed to Pavani and both developed a relationship. However, after knowing of their affair, the parents of Pavani did not allow her to go to college in 2018.

However, they again came into contact after a year when Pavani joined a college in Kovvur. After some months, Tataji ignored Pavani and was allegedly double-crossing her. He had even sent clips of his intimate moments with other women to Pavani's mobile. Enraged over this, Pavani decided to eliminate Tataji. She laid

a plan and called her boyfriend to go on a bike ride till night. When they reached the outskirts of Dharmavaram village, Pavani was a pillion-rider stabbed Tataji multiple times from behind. After he fell from the bike, she repeatedly stabbed him with a knife 20 times. Tataji succumbed to stab injuries on the spot.

When sky turns into a death trap for birds

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU ■ HYDERABAD

Makar Sankranti- the traditional Indian harvest festival is celebrated every year throughout the country to enjoy the rebirth of nature.

Kite-flying has always been a way of expressing one's happiness on this occasion. Still, no one realises that their skies of celebration are turned into death fields for the local and migratory bird populations.

Manja (kite string), which is used in kite-flying, is often glass-coated with adhesive and powdered or finely crushed glass or metal to make it sharp and, in particular, it is the non-biodegradable Chinese manja. It is deadly for thousands of pigeons, parrots, crows, owls, endangered vultures and more, which often fail to notice these delicate strings when in flight and get entangled, leading to severe wounds, nerve injuries, mutilation of wings or are killed in many cases.

A similar situation is seen when the kites again soar in the skies on Independence Day.

That is how the sky then becomes a death trap to all the birds with the high density of strings and birds in it.

Thus, the number of injuries has risen over the years as more n more kites have started competing for space with birds.

With the kite festival around the corner, people are excited to fly kites and compete with

the rivals. However, bird lovers and environmentalists are wary of the safety of birds being entangled in the 'manja' used to fly kites and get killed.

A barn owl which has been entangled in Chinese manja has been rescued by Greater Hyderabad Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (GHSPCA) at Vanasthalipuram. After the thread was removed and checked by a veterinary doctor it was released back on Sunday.



#ME TOO:

Ramani failed to prove charges, Akbar tells court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former union minister M J Akbar on Tuesday told a Delhi court that journalist Priya Ramani failed to prove her charges of alleged sexual misconduct by him 20 years ago.

Akbar made the submission before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravindra Kumar through senior advocate Geeta Luthra during the final hearing in a criminal complaint filed by him against Ramani for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct.

Ramani had made allegation of sexual misconduct against Akbar in the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018.

"There has to be something to prove it (meeting). It can't be in the air. You (Ramani) have to prove it. Just by calling it my truth, doesn't make it the truth.

"You have not discharged the onus. You have not shown telephone record, car parking, CCTV," Luthra said, adding that Ramani's "version and story is a figment of imagination".

She further said that "in a stroke, you finished his 50 years of hardwork".

"There were remedies available in law. They were available from 1860. Fact is, anytime there is a grievance at workplace, there is availability," she said.

The court will further hear the matter on January 14.

Akbar had filed the criminal defamation complaint against Ramani in October 15, 2018.

He resigned as Union minister on October 17, 2018.

Akbar had earlier told the court that Ramani had defamed him by calling him with adjectives such as 'media's biggest predator' that harmed



Ramani had made allegation of sexual misconduct against Akbar in the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018.

his reputation.

He has denied all the allegations of sexual harassment against the women who came forward during #MeToo campaign against him.

Over 20 women came up with accounts of the alleged sexual harassment by Akbar while they were working as journalists under him.

He termed the allegations "false, fabricated and deeply distressing" and said he was taking appropriate legal action against them.

Farmers welcome SC verdict; stir to continue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Farmer leaders welcomed the Supreme Court order to stay the implementation of three farm laws on Tuesday, but said they would not call off their protest until the legislations are repealed.

The Sankhyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of around 40 protesting farmer unions, has called a meeting later in the day to decide the next course of action.

The farmer leaders said they are not willing to participate in any proceedings before a committee appointed by the Supreme Court, but a formal decision on this will be taken by the Morcha.

"We welcome the court's order to stay the implementation of the farm laws, but we want a complete repeal of these laws, which is our main demand," Abhimanyu Kohar, a senior leader of the Morcha, told PTI.

Another farmer leader, Harinder Lokhwal, said the protest will continue until the contentious farm laws are repealed. "We do not have faith in the idea of a committee and we have been saying this since the very beginning, when the government had suggested the formation of a committee. But this time, it is the Supreme Court and we will see the functioning of this committee," All India Kisan Sabha (Punjab) vice-president Lakhbir Singh said.

The Morcha issued a statement on Monday, saying the unions are not willing to participate in any proceedings before a committee that may be appointed by the top court.

The Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the controversial farm laws till further orders on Tuesday and set up a four-member committee to resolve the impasse between the Centre and the farmers' unions protesting at Delhi's borders over the legislations.

The committee will look into the farmers' grievances against the three laws.

"We welcome the Supreme Court's decision, but it is still a stay and not a repeal of the

Farmer leaders said they are not willing to participate in any proceedings before a committee appointed by the SC, but a formal decision on this will be taken by the Morcha.

three laws. So we will not move from here until the laws are repealed.

"The agitation will continue. We are against the idea of a committee, but there is a difference between a committee formed by the government and a committee formed by the SC," Bharatiya Kisan Union (Punjab) senior vice-president Manjeet Singh said.

The four members of the committee set up by the apex court are BKU president Bhupinder Singh Mann, Shetkeri Sangathana, Maharashtra president Anil Ghanwat, Pramod Kumar Joshi, director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute, and agricultural economist Ashok Gulati.

The top court has sought the cooperation of the protesting farmers and made it clear that no power can prevent it from setting up a panel to resolve the impasse over the controversial farm laws.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Haryana and Punjab, have been protesting at several border points of Delhi since November 28 last year, demanding a repeal of the three laws and a legal guarantee to the minimum support price system for their crops.

Enacted in September last year, the three laws have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed their apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the MSP and do away with the "mandi" system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Centre must repeal farm laws or it will cost BJP-JJP heavily, say section of JJP MLAs

The Centre should repeal the three farm laws or it will cost the ruling BJP-JJP alliance in Haryana "heavily", a section of JJP MLAs said on Tuesday, hours before their party chief and Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah here. Chautala and Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar are scheduled to meet Shah in the national capital, and they will be accompanied by BJP state president O P Dhankar. The BJP, which won 40 seats in the 90-member Haryana assembly in the 2019 polls, formed government with the support of 10 Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) MLAs and several Independents. The Centre should rollback these laws as farmers of Haryana, Punjab and the country are up in arms against the legislations, JJP MLA Jogi Ram Sihag told PTI. "We will request Dushyant ji to convey our feelings to Amit Shah ji," he said. Before meeting Shah, Chautala will hold a meeting with all his party's MLAs at a farm house here. "I have nothing to do with the JJP (meeting)... not going to Delhi... the sentiment in Haryana is against the three farm laws and it will cost the ruling BJP-JJP



alliance heavily in the coming days," JJP MLA Ram Kumar Gautam said. The meeting being organised by Chautala is being seen as an attempt to keep his flock of MLAs in the alliance as the farmers' agitation dominates the political narrative in Haryana. Last week Khattar could not address a farmers' rally in his Karnal constituency after farmers ransacked the venue. In a similar incident a few weeks back, protesting farmers dug up a helipad in Chautala's constituency, Hisar. Moreover, Independent MLA Somveer Sangwan has already withdrawn support from the government. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Haryana and Punjab, have been protesting

at several border points of Delhi since November 28 last year, demanding a repeal of the three laws and a legal guarantee on the minimum support price for their crops. Farmers are protesting against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. The three farm laws, enacted in September last year, have been projected by the government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

Rahul to visit TN to support 'Jallikattu'

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi would visit Tamil Nadu on January 14, the Pongal day and witness a bull taming event, 'Jallikattu,' the party's state president K S Alagiri said here on Tuesday. Gandhi would lend his moral support to farmers protesting against the new farm laws across the country by witnessing the sport at Avaniapuram in Madurai district, he told reporters here. "The bull is a symbol of farmers and part of their lives," the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president said. His visit is to "honour the farmers and the valorous Tamil culture on the day of harvest festival and he will not engage in election campaign on that day," he said. Assembly elections are due during April-May in the state. "The general public should gather in large numbers for the event." Billing Gandhi's event as 'Rahulin Tamil Vanakkam,' he said it was also intended to dislodge the 'inept' AIADMK regime, 'subversive' to the Centre. Only Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami and his party the AIADMK supported the Central government's three farm laws and no other political party favoured it, he claimed. Gandhi is scheduled to arrive at Madurai by 11 am on Pongal day and would be spending about four hours in the temple town. Though there are no other scheduled events like interaction with farmers, such programmes might take place if the leader so desired, Alagiri said. Gandhi also has no plans to visit the alliance party DMK's president M K Stalin or other leaders, he said. During his visit to western Tamil Nadu, likely towards the month end, Gandhi could meet allies, he said adding his party senior leader had a plan to campaign extensively in Tamil Nadu. Priyanka Gandhi would also be invited to the state in the run up to the polls, he said. To a question, he mocked at the AIADMK alliance in Tamil Nadu and alleged the partners in the ruling party led combine could not even agree upon the Chief Ministerial candidate.

Stay on farm laws a positive step: NCP

The Supreme Court staying implementation of the three controversial new farm laws enacted by the Centre is a welcome and positive step in the right direction to get justice for farmers, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) said on Tuesday. The apex court has stayed the implementation of the new farm laws till further orders and decided to set up a committee to resolve the impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting



at Delhi borders. "The Honourable Supreme Court's stay on implemen-

tation of Farm ssLaws is a welcome & positive step in the right direction to get Justice for our farmers. "Central Government must now stop their rigid ways of functioning, accept their mistake and rectify it," Maharashtra minister and NCP national spokesperson Nawab Malik tweeted. The Sharad Pawar-led party is one of the constituents in the Shiv Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government along with the Congress in the state of Maharashtra.

UDF walks out of Kerala Assembly over alleged backdoor appointments

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Opposition Congress-led UDF on Tuesday lashed out at the LDF government in the Kerala Assembly over the alleged backdoor appointments and attempts to make permanent the contract staff en masse in various state-run institutions and later staged a walkout even though Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan denied the charges.

The opposition claimed the government had made double the number of temporary appointments than the total number of recruitment by the state Public Service Commission (PSC), the apex recruitment body in the southern state.

They also released a letter written by the state Film Academy Chairman, Kamal to Cultural Affairs Minister, A K Balan reportedly requesting that contract employees having leaning towards Marxist ideology in the institution be made permanent to maintain the Left leaning nature of the institution.

Rejecting the charges raised in the adjournment motion, the Chief Minister, however, said the opposition was trying



to create a smokescreen on the government appointments.

The Left government had taken a firm stand that all appointments should be made in a transparent manner without any corruption.

"Steps are being taken to report as many vacancies as possible to the PSC, the constitutional body, and thereby make appointments," Vijayan told the Assembly.

According to the latest available data, 1,51,513 persons have been given either appointment or issued advisory memo through the PSC, he said.

Listing details of appointments in various government institutions, he said 27,000 permanent vacancies in various government institutions had been created after the Left

Opposition claimed the government had made double the number of temporary appointments than the total number of recruitment by the state PSC

front government came to power.

This includes 5,985 new vacancies and appointments in the health and social justice

department, 4,933 appointments in police departments, 721 in the higher education sector and so on, he said.

Stating that making permanent those persons who have worked in an institution for decades was a 'humanitarian consideration', the chief minister said they were not part of any particular political front and the previous UDF government also did the same thing.

Moving the motion, Shafi Parambil (Congress) alleged Kerala had become the graveyard of PSC rank lists and the 'Public Service Commission had become the party service commission'.

Alleging that over one lakh people had been appointed through the backdoor by the LDF government and other agencies, Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala told reporters outside the House that the appointments had been made in at least 42 PSUs, besides government and semi-government institutions.

These appointments have been made even as the government's term is almost over, thus cheating the jobless PSC (Public Service Commission) rank holders, Chennithala claimed.

Vivekananda's birth anniversary celebrated

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Swami Vivekananda's 158th birth anniversary was celebrated on Tuesday across West Bengal with political leaders and people making a beeline at his ancestral house here to pay tributes to him.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and party leader Suvendu Adhikari garlanded the statue of Swami Vivekananda at his north Kolkata residence.

Trinamool Congress MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay and state minister Sashi Panja also paid floral tributes to him, whose birth anniversary is celebrated as National Youth Day.

Months before the assembly elections, both the BJP and the TMC are involved in a political one-upmanship over claims on Bengal's culture and heritage.

A towering spiritual philosopher, Vivekananda, was born in 1863 in Kolkata and is credited for popularising the Vedantic ideas.

Taking to Twitter, Governor Jagdeep



Dhankhar, who is scheduled to visit Swamiji's ancestral house during the day to pay tributes, said, "Youth empowerment is key to Bharat becoming Vishwa Guru (world leader)."

Paying tributes to Swamiji, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, "His message of peace and universal brotherhood is of utmost relevance today and inspires all of us to strive hard in safeguarding these ideals in our beloved nation."

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, leader of the Congress party in the Lok Sabha, said the spirit that the great saint imparted to the world is eternal.

Guj unveils new tourism policy, focus on 'high priority' areas

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

The Gujarat government on Tuesday announced its new tourism policy for 2020-25 with special focus on attracting new investments in the state's 'high priority tourism centres' by offering lucrative incentives to entrepreneurs.

Unveiling the policy here on Tuesday, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said tourism projects, such as hotels and resorts, which would come up in these high priority centres will qualify for subsidies on investment and other incentives.

Some of these high priority centres are Kutch, Devbhumi-Dwarka, Narmada, Gir-Somnath, Porbandar, Junagadh and Dang districts.

Some specific talukas of

other districts, such as Dhari in Amreli and Dabhoi in Vadodara, are also included in the list of high priority tourism centres.

"Instead of focussing on the entire state, our aim is to develop tourism infrastructure in these high priority areas. Under the new policy, incentives will be given where it was needed the most," Rupani said.

"Some of the new avenues which we are targeting are beach tourism, caravans and rural experience-based tourism," he said.

Under the policy, the government will give subsidy of 20 per cent on capital investment for setting up a hotel in the designated high priority centres.

While the minimum investment required is Rs 1 crore,



there is no cap on maximum investment, which excludes the cost of land, as per the policy document.

For setting up theme parks or amusement parks in these priority centres, the subsidy

will be 15 per cent for an investment in the range of Rs 50 crore to Rs 500 crore.

To attract large investments in this avenue, the state government will provide land on lease, in addition to the 15 per

cent subsidy, for projects of more than Rs 500 crore proposed investment, according to the policy.

Other tourism projects which would be eligible for 15 per cent subsidy on investment are - convention centres with a seating capacity of over 2,500 people, NABH-accredited wellness centres, tourism hospitality and training centres, tents, cottages and container accommodation.

To encourage caravan rental services, the state government has announced to give 15 per cent subsidy on investment up to Rs 10 lakh, for starting such projects in high priority centres.

To encourage new investment in the adventure tourism sectors, entrepreneurs will be

offered 15 per cent subsidy, with the limit of Rs 15 lakh, for buying various adventure sport equipment, said the policy document.

Under the new policy, foreign tourists will be offered a 5 per cent discount if they stay at a state government registered hotel.

Rupani said to guide foreign tourists arriving in Gujarat, the state tourism department will set up a dedicated tourism desk at the Ahmedabad international airport.

To promote rural tourism, fair organisers will get an assistance of Rs 5 lakh per year to organise "all inclusive annual fairs and festivals showcasing indigenous culture, dance, handlooms and handicrafts", the policy document said.

SHORT TAKES

Imtiaz Ali to produce satirical movie with Gajraj Rao as lead



Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali is set to produce a satirical feature, starring seasoned actor Gajraj Rao in the lead. A source close to the project told PTI that the movie, titled "Thai Massage", will be directed by "Malaal" filmmaker Mangesh Hadawale. "Gajraj Rao is playing the main protagonist and Divyendu is also on board. There will be a bunch of other actors," the

Teenage girl gang-raped, murdered in Aligarh



The body of a minor girl, who was allegedly gang-raped and then killed, was recovered from near railway tracks in the Gandhi Park area here, police said on Tuesday. They said efforts are on to nab three persons accused of the crime. According to police, the girl student, aged 15-16 years, had gone missing from her house in a village under the Harduaganj police station area on Sunday morning. Shortly after her family received a message that she has been kidnapped and demanded Rs 5 lakh as ransom for her release, they added. The kidnappers warned that if the money was not paid, a video showing the victim in a compromising position would be posted on social media, police said. According to the complaint filed by the girl's family at Gandhi Park police station on Monday, they were unable to raise the money and were desperately trying to search for her when they were asked by police to identify a dead body of a girl which was found several kilometres away from their village along the railway tracks.

20-year-old man dies as kite string slits his throat



A 20-year-old two-wheeler rider died after the 'manja' string of a kite slit his throat in Jatatarodi area here on Tuesday, police said. Pranay Prakash Thakre, a resident of Dnyaneshwar Nagar, Ajni, was returning from Tehsil area with his father and both were riding separate motorcycles. When they were passing through the Jatatarodi square, Pranay got entangled in the razor-sharp string of a kite which slit his throat, police said. He fell from the motorbike and died due to excessive bleeding before police took him to hospital, they said. A case of accidental death was registered and further probe is on, an official of Imambada police station said. Incidents of sharp manja string, often coated with crushed glass, causing fatal injury to bike-riders are reported in various parts of the country though the use of such strings is banned in most cities.

Coronavirus vax drive set in motion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A massive pan-India inoculation drive against COVID-19 was set in process with more than 56 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine leaving Pune for 13 cities across India on Tuesday, four days before the vaccinations are scheduled to begin on January 16.

The first consignment of the vaccines rolled out of the Serum Institute of India facility in Pune early Tuesday and reached Delhi a few hours later.

The vaccine movement has started, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Twitter.

Four airlines will operate nine flights to transport 56.5 lakh doses of the vaccine from Pune to 13 cities across the country on Tuesday, he said.

Covishield is developed by Oxford University and British-Swedish company AstraZeneca and manufactured by the SII.

The first two flights operated by "SpiceJet and GoAir from Pune to Delhi and Chennai have taken off", the minister said in the morning.

"I am happy to share that SpiceJet has carried India's first consignment of COVID vaccine today. The first consignment of Covishield consist-



ing of 34 boxes and weighing 1,088 kg was carried from Pune to Delhi on SpiceJet flight 8937," said Ajay Singh, chairman and managing director, SpiceJet.

The Delhi flight was followed by multiple flights to different cities with the airline transporting close to four million Covishield vaccine doses weighing around 11 tonnes on the very first day of shipment, the Gurugram-based airline said in a statement.

The SpiceJet flight carrying the vaccines landed at Delhi airport around 10 am. It left for the national capital around 8 am.

A 'puja' was performed before the three temperature-controlled trucks rolled out of Serum Institute gates shortly before 5 am and moved towards the Pune airport, about 15 km away, from where the vaccines were flown across India.

The "vaccine to kill the dis-

ease is being loaded onto the aircrafts for distribution all over the country now", Pune airport tweeted.

Other airlines that transported the vaccines from Pune on Tuesday are GoAir, IndiGo and Air India.

Air India said it carried its first consignment of 2,76,000 vaccine doses, weighing 700 kg approximately, from Pune to Ahmedabad.

IndiGo said it moved 900 kg from Pune to Chandigarh and

Lucknow via flight 6E 6515 and 6E 882, respectively.

"We will be carrying multiple vaccine consignments to different Indian cities including Guwahati, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Bengaluru, Patna and Vijayawada through the day today. SpiceJet is fully committed and prepared to transport the Covid vaccine both within and outside India," added the SpiceJet CMD.

Giving details, SpiceJet said its consignments included 276,000 doses to Guwahati, 996,000 doses to Kolkata, 3,72,000 doses to Hyderabad, 480,000 doses to Bhubaneswar, 648,000 doses to Bengaluru, 552,000 doses to Patna and 408,000 doses to Vijayawada.

GoAir, another budget carrier, also kickstarted the vaccine transportation with its first flight from Pune to Chennai carrying 70,800 vials.

"We at GoAir are overwhelmed with the kind of responsibility bestowed upon us to transport the life-saving COVID-19 vaccines. We are grateful that we have got an opportunity to be able to contribute to the vaccine movement and support the noble cause," GoAir CEO Kaushik Khona said in a statement.

1st batch of vaccine vials reaches Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The first batch of Covishield vaccine vials reached Delhi's central storage facility at Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital (RGSSH) Tuesday afternoon, sources said. A SpiceJet flight carrying the vaccine batch landed at the Delhi airport around 10 am on Tuesday, four days ahead of the launch of a nationwide drive against the coronavirus. Thereafter, the Delhi Police formed a "green corridor" to safely transport the vials to the hospital, the Delhi government's largest COVID-19 facility. The truck carrying the vaccines arrived at the hospital around 3:10 pm, a source said. A special cold storage facility has been created at RGSSH to store the vaccine vials. Deputy Commissioner of Police (IGI Airport) Rajeev Ranjan said adequate security arrangements have been made at the storage site, and Police Control Room (PCR) vans will also cover them in their patrolling plans.

Active Covid cases dip to 2.16L, account for 2.07 pc of total cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's active Covid caseload dipped to 2,16,558 on Tuesday with its share in the total coronavirus cases reported so far further shrinking to 2.07 per cent, according to the Union health ministry. While India recorded 12,584 new cases of coronavirus in a day, the lowest in around seven months, a net decline of 5,968 cases has been registered during the same period. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,01,11,294, on Tuesday pushing the national

Covid recovery rate to 96.49 per cent. The country recorded 167 deaths recorded in a day. 25 states and Union Territories have less than 5,000 active cases, the ministry highlighted. With a sustained, pro-active and calibrated strategy of the Centre based on 'whole of government' and 'whole of society' approach, the daily new cases have seen a consistent decline. This has ensured a steady fall in daily fatalities too, the ministry underlined. As a result of expansion in testing infrastructure, the Covid positivity rate too has also dipped.

K'taka receives first consignment of vaccines

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The first consignment of 6.47 lakh doses of Covid vaccines has arrived here on Tuesday, and the Karnataka government said it was committed to conducting the vaccination drive in a transparent way. According to official sources, the flight carrying the Covishield vaccines landed at the Kempegowda international airport here. Karnataka Health Minister K Sudhakar's office issuing corrections to his statement earlier in the day, said 6.47,500 doses of vaccine arrived in Bengaluru and Belagavi in the northern part of the state will receive next consignment

tomorrow. Earlier, addressing reporters Sudhakar said, 7.95 lakh vials of Covishield vaccines were arriving in the first consignment. The vaccine consignment was transported to the state vaccine store in the city in a refrigerated truck. "The state government will conduct the vaccination drive-whether it is storage, supply or administering as per guidelines- in a transparent way, as directed by Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa," Sudhakar said. Covid vaccination drive will start on January 16, and the state government has already said that about 16 lakh frontline workers in the state will be administered a vaccine against COVID-19 in the first phase at 235

sites. Noting that the DCGI has given approval to Covishield and the Centre has purchased 1.1 crore doses, Sudhakar claimed that there was no other country in the world that has fixed the price of the vaccine at such low rates. "It has been procured at Rs 210 per dose including GST from the Serum institute, Pune. The total cost is Rs 231 crore," he said. The central government will be vaccinating about 3 crore people in the country in the first phase for free of cost. Observing that each vial contains 5 ml and it will be 0.5 ml per dose, Sudhakar said 10 people can be administered in each vial of vaccine.

6.89L vax doses arrive in Bengal

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The first consignment of 6.89 lakh doses of Covid vaccines arrived here on Tuesday in a special flight from Pune, a senior official of the West Bengal health department said. The first consignment of Covid vaccines from Pune reached the city at around 1.40 pm. There are 6.89 lakh doses of the vaccines," he said. The consignment will be transported in two insulated vans from the airport to a store at Baghbar, the official said.

Ready to deal with any eventuality: Army Chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Army Staff Gen MM Naravane on Tuesday said he was hopeful that India and China will be able to reach an agreement to resolve the eastern Ladakh standoff but at the same time asserted that Indian troops will maintain a high state of combat readiness to deal with any eventuality. Addressing a press conference ahead of the Army Day, Gen Naravane said the operational preparedness of the Indian armed forces has been of very high level and they will continue to hold onto their ground. "We are prepared to hold our ground as long it takes to achieve our national goals and objectives," he said.

'Dynastic politics burdens country with incompetence'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday blasted dynastic politics as the "biggest enemy" of democracy and said it gives rise to a new form of "dictatorship" and burdens the country with "incompetence".

Addressing the valedictory function of the second National Youth Parliament Festival, Modi launched an all out attack on dynastic parties, saying those who rise due to their dynasties have no respect and fear of law as they believe if their previous generations were not accounted for corruption, none can touch them as well.

"They see such examples in their own families. So they have neither respect nor fear of law," he said, asking youngsters to join politics as this is "necessary" to save it.

Though he did not name any party but he has in the past often hit out at opposition parties, including the Congress, for being run by families.



He said, "It is true that (in politics) the fortunes of those who have been winning elections on the basis of surnames are dwindling. But in politics, this disease of dynastic politics is not completely finished."

They, he said in a reference to these dynasties, are also a very big reason behind political and social corruption in the country.

Though people have now been supporting honesty and performance, and the legacy of "corruption" of those in dynastic politics have become a burden for them, but the "disease of dynastic politics" has not been fully eradicated, the prime minister said.

"There are still people whose conduct, ideas and goals are all aimed at saving their

The biggest enemy of democracy still exists and that is dynastic politics. Dynastic politics is such a challenge before the country that has to be rooted out, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi

family politics and their families in politics. Dynastic politics gives rise to a new form of dictatorship in democracy and burdens the country with incompetence. Dynastic politics only strengthens the sentiment of 'me and my family' instead of 'nation first,' he said.

Modi, however, added that things have changed from a time when people associated politics with "violence, corruption and loot" and thought it cannot change. A youngster joining politics was seen as someone who has gone astray, he said.

People are now so aware that

they stand with honest people in politics and give them a chance, he said, asserting that honesty and performance have become "first essential requirements of today's politics".

This has happened due to pressure created by the awareness in the country, he said, before noting that some changes are still required and highlighting dynastic politics as the "biggest enemy" of democracy.

"The biggest enemy of democracy still exists and that is dynastic politics. Dynastic politics is such a challenge before the country that has to be rooted out," he said.

Cold wave alert issued for north Indian plains

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With temperatures falling, an orange alert was issued by the India Meteorological Department on Tuesday for the northern plains with a forecast of a cold wave for the next four days.

A similar alert has been sounded for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry with a forecast of heavy rains.

The IMD said that the minimum temperature over the north Indian plains is likely to be below normal during this period.

"Due to the prevalence of dry north/northwesterly winds, the minimum temperature is very likely to be below normal over most parts of northwest India during next 4-5 days which are very likely to cause cold day/severe cold day conditions at some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh & Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand during next three days.

"Cold wave/severe cold



wave conditions at some parts are also very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and in isolated parts over Uttar Pradesh, north Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan during next three days," the IMD said.

Ground frost is also very likely in isolated pockets over south Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and north Rajasthan during the next two days.

The IMD said that dense to very dense fog conditions at isolated places are very likely over northwest India during the next 4-5 days.

High alert in Uttarakhand for bird flu

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A high alert has been sounded across Uttarakhand with the samples of two dead crows testing positive for bird flu in the state

Samples of two dead crows sent to a lab in Bhopal tested positive for avian influenza on Monday, forest officials here confirmed. With the confirmation of bird flu in Uttarakhand a high alert has been sounded across the state, State Animal Husbandry Minister Rekha Arya said.

Officials have been asked to remain vigilant and keep a tab on import of chicken and eggs from neighbouring states like Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, she said.

"However, so far bird flu has been confirmed only in wild birds in Uttarakhand. The poultry sector is by far free from the virus," Arya said.

"Still all precautions are being taken. People have been asked not to touch a dead bird and report the death to the authorities concerned," she said. Forest personnel engaged in collecting samples of dead



birds or burying their carcasses have been asked not to do it without wearing PPE kits, the minister said.

Nearly 300 birds mostly crows have been found dead in different parts of Uttarakhand including Dehradun, Rishikesh and Kotdwara over the past few days.

While a majority of the carcasses have been safely buried, some of them have been sent for testing to the National Institute of High Security Animal Disease in Bhopal and Indian Veterinary Research Institute Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh.

College shut for day after bird carcass found on premises

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

A college in Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district was shut for a day after the carcass of a migratory bird was found in its compound, amid an outbreak of bird flu in the state, officials said on Tuesday.

The carcass was found on Monday, they said. Chief Animal Husbandry Officer Yashvant Singh said a team collected the carcass and sent it for forensic examination to check for avian influenza. The college was closed for a day for sanitisation, he said.

Officials order culling of birds in Kendrewadi, Sukni

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

The administration in Maharashtra's Latur district has ordered culling of birds in the villages of Kendrewadi and Sukni after samples collected from these areas were found positive for bird flu, an official said on Tuesday. Latur district collector Pruthviraj B P has ordered culling of birds in 1 km radius from where birds infected with avian influenza were found in Kendrewadi and Sukni, the official said. At least

225 birds have died in Kendrewadi till Monday, while 12 hens have died in Sukni and four in Wanjarwadi of Udgir taluka. Samples of dead birds from Kendrawadi and Sukni were sent for testing and their results came out positive for the infection, he said, adding that reports for Wanjarwadi are awaited. "Kendrewadi has witnessed deaths of 225 birds till January 11. We have completed fitness tests of our work force and will leave for Kendrewadi for the culling

operation," an official from the animal husbandry department said. There are nearly 15,000 birds in the 1 km radius of the place where the infected birds were found in Kendrewadi, the official said. On January 10, the Latur district administration had ordered the creation of an "alert zone" in a 10-km radius around Kendrewadi in Ahmedpur tehsil. According to officials, after Parbhani and Beed, Latur is the third district in Maharashtra to report cases of bird flu.

INDIA CORNER

Rajnath visits Union Minister Shripad Naik in Goa hospital

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday visited Union minister Shripad Naik, who is admitted in the Goa Medical College and Hospital near here after he met with an accident in neighbouring Karnataka. Singh arrived the INS Hansa base in Goa by a special flight in the afternoon and around 2.40 pm, he reached the GMCH, where Naik is undergoing treatment. Naik (68), the Union Minister of State for Defence and AYUSH, underwent surgeries at the government-run hospital during the night, a senior official from the hospital said in the morning. His health condition is stable, the official said. Naik received injuries, while his wife Vijaya and an aide died on Monday when their car met with the accident near Ankola in Uttara Kannada district, while he was returning to home state Goa from Dharmasthala in neighbouring Karnataka. Naik, the BJP MP from North Goa, was shifted to the GMCH car Panaji late Monday night.



Left Front Govt in Kerala mulling law to rein in loan apps

The Kerala government was contemplating formulating a law to rein in loan apps and at least 63 cases have been registered in the state so far, Industries Minister E P Jayarajan said on Tuesday. The irregularities being committed by the loan apps had come to the government's notice. Police have informed that there are at least 400 such apps, which function from outside the state. Jayarajan said in the assembly on a calling attention motion by Congress MLA K Sabarinath on the matter. Jayarajan, speaking for Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, said 63 cases have been registered and crime branch was investigating two cases. The government was mulling bringing in a law as early as possible to rein in the loan apps, the minister said. Sabarinath wanted the state government to enact a comprehensive legislation taking into account the social issues created among the youth of the state due to lending apps.



Ex-CEC Quraishi seeks to bust population myth in new book

Former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi will come out with a book next month which evaluates India's demographics from a religious perspective and seeks to bust the myth that Islam is against family planning. "The Population Myth: Islam, Family Planning and Politics in India" is a detailed analysis of the 'Muslim rate of growth' in the light of population data and national and international reports, says publishers HarperCollins India. It discusses how these myths have been often used to stoke majoritarian fears of a demographic skew. The author uses facts to demolish these and demonstrates how a planned population is in the interest of all communities. The book, which will hit the bookshelves on February 15, delves into the Quran and the Hadith to show how Islam might have been one of the first religions in the world to actually advocate smaller families, which is why several Islamic nations today have population policies in place."



PIL seeks to dispense with Class X, XII board exams

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the Centre and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to treat as representation a PIL seeking dispensing with physical exams for class 10 and 12 board examinations in view of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said it was not going to entertain the petition, moved on behalf of the parents association of a private school here, and suggested that either a representation be moved before the Centre and CBSE or the matter be withdrawn, else it will dismiss the plea with costs. Subsequently, the counsel for the parents association said the plea be treated as representation. The court, thereafter, directed the Centre, represented by central government standing counsel Ajay Diggapal and advocate Kamal Diggapal, and CBSE to treat the PIL as a representation and to take a decision in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy applicable to the facts of the case.



'Will ensure poultry players get insurance'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Amid the poultry sector facing bird flu threat, Maharashtra Animal Husbandry Minister Sunil Kedar on Tuesday said the government will soon take steps to ensure that unorganised players engaged in poultry farming get insurance cover. The minister said that a mention will be made in this regard in the forthcoming budget of the government. "What I have noticed as the minister of the department is that insurance companies entertain organised players from the poultry business, but not the unorganised ones. "The government will take a step to take insurance schemes to the last common man," Kedar said. He said the issue had come up for discussion during a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister on the bird flu situation on Monday.

It's farmers now

SC moots panel of agri experts, asks protesters to forward names. Farmers should give court mediation a chance



The Supreme Court may have been disappointed with the Government for abandoning its negotiation skills to resolve the farm laws crisis and showed its actionable intent by setting up an expert committee but the question remains: Is this mediatory framework agreeable to farmers, who consider it another diversionary tactic through the judicial route? The court, though, by insisting on “fair play”, seeking suggestions on agri experts — including those whom the protesters are comfortable with — and assuring them that “nobody’s land will be sold” has now lobbed the ball in the farmers’ court; especially by highlighting the difference “between politics and judiciary” and asking them to make a moral choice. The farmers, who have anyway signed up for the long haul, should, therefore, give this court-mediated exercise a chance. The court would present them with a serious forum to voice their concerns, something that got drowned in Parliament as the Government steamrolled the Bills. This is their opportunity to publicise their arguments against the much-feared corporatisation of agriculture. One cannot disregard the fears of farmers as they cite how corporatisation of agriculture in the US, where factory farming gave birth to an uninterrupted chain of “farm to fork”, has wiped out rural communities, their organic methods, their unique produce and their relevance. It all began in the 1970s with the dream of becoming big enough to command the world’s food market with industrialised processes, merging of lands and shifting priorities to commodity crops. But in no time there was a glut due to over-production; farmers could never get the commensurate prices and were driven to debts. They had no option but to foreclose and sell out. Luckily, our contentious clauses are confined to certain provisions, which can be worked out if there is political will.

While the Government insists that the new laws will help create “one nation, one market” and remove trade barriers, the farmers fear that in an open, competitive market, they would not get the minimum support price (MSP) that the Government promised to continue. Besides, they feel that entering into contracts with corporations would willy-nilly give the latter greater control over them. And, that although the older system would continue as a weakened parallel mechanism, it would ultimately crumble before emerging monopolies. For example, the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, allows buys and sales outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis*, thereby limiting their cartelisation tendencies. It also prohibits the State Governments from collecting any market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets. The farmers want clarity on what “outside” means and, contrary to perception that they want the middlemen out, they actually have a trusted bond with their existing commission agents as their licence is proof enough of their credibility and delivery abilities. The Government, after several rounds of talks, had agreed to certify and define buyers. As for contract farming, at the moment it is undertaken with regard to specific crops, particularly those of processing grades or those that are tailor-made for the food majors. As for the sale and purchase of farm produce outside the premises of APMC *mandis*, the use of the word “trade” for agricultural produce can be made conditional on farmers selling their produce first on their terms directly or to the *mandis* and the trader taking off from there. Finally, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020, aims to remove cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from a regulated list, except in emergencies. But considering that stock limits apply only to traders, the farmers are not affected directly. In such cases, farmers can be incentivised with cash transfers.

Hate, in vogue?

US citizens already divided by Trump have a new issue to bicker over. V-P Kamala Harris’ cover photo in *Vogue*



When Kamala Harris’ team agreed to do a cover story with *Vogue*, little did the US Vice President-elect or the magazine itself imagine that they would be raising a controversial storm and making a splash for all the wrong reasons. However, that is exactly what happened and now both sides are making counter-accusations about *Vogue*’s February issue. The trouble began when the magazine tweeted two photographs of Harris. The one on the cover shows Harris wearing her trademark Converse sneakers, standing in front of a pink and green drape. The other shows her in a powder blue suit, her arms crossed in front of a golden background. While the second photograph — which shows her looking confidently into the camera — has been appreciated for the sense of glamour and power it exudes, the first image came in for a lot of flak from the netizens, Twitterati, activists and the media alike for the fact that it was a badly clicked photograph that made Harris look washed out. It invited comments like: “I’ll shoot shots of VP Kamala Harris for free using my Samsung and I’m 100 per cent confident it’ll turn out better than this *Vogue* cover.” Some also pointed out that Harris, who is quite proud of being coloured, appears whiter in the picture than she actually is. Which is understandably offensive given that Harris will be the first Black woman and the first woman of Indian heritage to occupy the office of the Vice-President of the US. Any other time in the history of America, this image might have slipped under the radar of a nation that has, under US President Donald Trump, become highly polarised on racial lines. Consequently, as Harris enters the White House, she and President-elect Joe Biden will have to address a major threat to the nation’s unity as hate crimes are on the rise and White supremacists and other domestic extremists have been emboldened by the outgoing President.

But with the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, the race riots and the attack on the Capitol Hill by Trump’s White supremacist supporters so fresh in people’s memory, this “whitewashing” of a coloured woman by *Vogue* has not gone down well with a section of the people. Little does it matter that Tyler Mitchell, the person who did the cover shoot, is Black, just like the editor, Gabriella Karefa-Johnson, and writer of the piece, Alexis Okeowo. America is sitting on a tinderbox of overcharged emotions and anything can spark a racial storm. Plus, the fact that *Vogue*’s iconic veteran editor Anna Wintour has time and again courted controversy for being openly racist did not help matters. In fact, so sharp are the divisions in the world’s most respected fashion magazine that Tyler Mitchell actually made history as late as 2018 for being the first Black photographer to shoot a *Vogue* cover. So, it is no wonder then that the choice of the cover has raised hackles because it is being seen as an attempt by the editorial team at *Vogue*, under Wintour’s tutelage of course, to undermine the authority of a powerful coloured woman who has worked her way to the second-highest seat of power in the US and made history as the first woman to become the Vice-President of the US. Now, with the accusations of Harris’ team being “blindsided” by the magazine and counter-accusations by *Vogue* of the team agreeing to the pics that appeared on the cover, flowing thick and fast, one cannot help but wonder if this will be the face of things to come. No matter how much the Biden-Harris team tries to douse the flames of hate that have been fanned by the Trump Administration, peace and tranquility in the United States of America, which has of late become more divided than united, will be a long time coming.

Ab ki baar Trump sarkaar?

The PM may have distanced himself from Trump following the Capitol attack but we have recently seen many examples of violence in India, too



AJOY KUMAR

As a doctor, one of the fundamental things you are taught in the medical college — and, frankly, a lot earlier — is the difference between the symptom and the disease and the importance in tackling the disease rather than just the symptom. A fever, for instance, is a good example of the symptom that is common to a number of illnesses, such as various types of flu as well as different types of infections. However, a paracetamol or Crocin cannot cure such illnesses, though such medicines may prove effective in containing the fever briefly. The ill-informed may be led to believe that the disease is cured but, in reality, the disease is alive and kicking and, without proper care and attention, the symptoms (including the fever) would also return.

In today’s time and age, we are battling and struggling with a disease that has turned our world upside down: A virus that has literally brought the world to a standstill and whose inertia we are still trying to break away from. The COVID-19 crisis has gripped the entire world but afflictions like fake news, propaganda and conspiracy theories that endanger our fundamental understanding of democracy are possibly where the true threat to humanity lies. The most recent example of this harm that these diseases can cause is when violent mobs stormed the Capitol (which is the American equivalent of our Parliament) on the back of calls from outgoing President Donald Trump and other politicians and commentators from the Right wing to stop the transition of power in the United States of America. While Trump and these leaders did attempt to distance themselves from the violence and said that they never intended any violence to take place, it is hard to argue that by stirring emotions and by acting contrary to the fundamental principles of a democracy, the President and his supporters (both in the media and in politics) do not have blood on their hands.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi distanced himself from his good friend, Trump, by tweeting against the attack. However, what should pain Modi more than the unceremonious exit of his dear friend from the office is the fact that India too has, unfortunately, not been immune to the disease of unsubstantiated propaganda, and provoked — or, at the very



least, inspired — violence. And after the Emergency of 1975, the most severe impact of these illnesses has been seen in his tenure as the Prime Minister. Therefore, while the attack on the Capitol was shocking, we have seen just as many disturbing examples of violence recently in our very own country.

In the attack on the students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, for example, we saw a mob enter the campus of a major university and beat up and threaten students and teachers alike. While reports show that there are video clips and reasonable evidence of the prime actors of this violence being from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the Right-wing student organisation affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), there has been no substantial action against the instigators, including those who are clearly seen on camera.

We have also seen several of the Union Ministers raise a rallying cry on the election trail in New Delhi, raising slogans of “*Desh ke gaddaaron ko...*”, with the faceless crowd responding with chants of “*...goli maaron saalon ko*”. Similarly, during the protests against the BJP’s Citizenship Amendment Act, we had another shocking incident where a man fired at least two shots from a distance of 50 metres from the stage of the protest. In a video captured by eyewitnesses, the man can be seen brandishing his gun and shouting: “*Hamaare desh mein kisi ki nahi chalegi, sirf Hinduon*

MUCH LIKE THE MOB IN THE US, AFTER BEING FED HOURS AND HOURS OF LIES AND FAKE NEWS, WE, TOO, HAVE SEEN MOBS IN INDIA THAT ARE FED STREAMS OF FAKE NEWS TILL THEY ARE STIRRED INTO A VIOLENT FRENZY

ki chalegi (No one except Hindus will have their way in our country).” The man was subsequently identified as Kapil Gurjar and this same man was a few months later inducted into the BJP at a public function. At the ceremony, which took place in Ghaziabad, the district convener of the BJP inducted him into the party with the words: “Kapil Gurjar has joined with hundreds of supporters. He has influence and support base in the area. He has been impressed by the party’s policies, the work being done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi *ji* and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath *ji*.” While one does not expect such honesty from politicians, the BJP at least removed him from the party and cancelled his membership in the face of the serious backlash that followed.

Similarly, in a shocking case of mob violence in Bulandshahr, a police inspector, SK Singh, was shot and killed by a violent mob over an alleged incident of cow slaughter. According to reports, those named in the charge sheet for Singh’s murder include Bajrang Dal’s local convener Yogesh Raj and the BJP’s youth wing leader Shikhar Agarwal. Other than this, we also saw the horrific abuse of power in Hathras where the UP Police claimed that there was no evidence of rape but the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has subsequently filed a charge sheet against four men accused of the gang rape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman.

The above instances are

horrific examples of violence and show a clear disregard for the fundamental principles of an effective democracy. However, these acts of violence and disorder only catch our attention when they reach a terrifying crescendo. Much like how the mob in the United States (US), after being fed hours and hours of lies and fake news, was convinced that they were participating in an act of legitimate defiance; so have we too seen mobs in India that are fed streams of fake news and falsehoods through social media and through “legitimate” news outlets till the point that they are stirred into a violent frenzy. It is here where the BJP and the Prime Minister have been found woefully wanting. While the Prime Minister may not himself be making such inflammatory statements, his acceptance and silence around the conduct of those he has direct control over and those who regularly engage in such malpractices speaks volumes. While Modi has tried to distance himself from Trump and his horrific legacy, he has much to do to address and fix his party’s own legacy in the country. In the words of Voltaire, “Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities”, and by allowing such people to face no consequence for their action, Modi is leaving his own legacy which has just as many black marks as the man who called him “a great friend”.

(The author is a former IPS officer and member of the Congress party. The views expressed are personal.)

SOUNDBITE

The Government’s efforts to confuse farmers are futile; the farmers know the motive and their demands are clear — withdraw anti-agri laws.



Congress leader
Rahul Gandhi

With smart policies and the right investments, we can chart a path that brings health to all, revives economies, builds resilience and rescues biodiversity.



UN Secretary-General
Antonio Guterres

I had an amazing experience in India and I definitely want to come back and work more in India with Indian actors. I don’t know what I’m doing next.



Hollywood filmmaker
Christopher Nolan

I’d like to say sorry to Siraj and the Indian team as racism and abuse are not in any way acceptable or tolerable anywhere at any time.



Australian cricketer
David Warner

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More power to women

Sir — Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan batting for raising the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years is indeed a welcome step which will give more power to women. All States should raise the legal age of marriage for women. If the legal age of marriage for boys is 21 years, why can’t it be the same for girls?

Due to marriage at an early age, girls are often forced by circumstances to put a break to their careers and studies and do only household chores. In such a situation, women are not able to pursue the career of their choice and fulfil their aspirations. Further, marriage at an early age also has an adverse effect on their mental and physical health.

Girls and women should not be scared and must come forth to report the crimes and violence against them. Further, it is the responsibility of their parents and the society to create an atmosphere in which girls do not hesitate or feel shy of sharing their problems. The country will not be empowered in the true sense unless its women are.

Amit Singh Kushwaha
Satna

Govt is responsible for grim economic situation

Even though our economy has experienced many slow-downs and shocks since Independence, the current contraction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is unprecedented and presents a grim picture. The consumer sentiment is still weak though the economy has been reopened. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and incompetency of the Centre are responsible for the sad state of our economy.

However, the policy response to the pandemic in terms of strict and sudden lockdown has much to do with the magnitude of this contraction of GDP. A more demand-generating policy stimulus would have kept the contraction a little more in check and GDP figures would not have been so dismal.

It is pertinent to note that the Centre’s budgetary proposals are based on the estimated nominal GDP and hence the Finance Minister will have a difficult task fixing fiscal strategies and budgetary schemes on February 1 when the new proposals are placed before Parliament for the fiscal year 2021-22. Further, the financial sector is in a mess and unemployment figures are high. Some industries are on the verge of collapse



and food insecurity looms large. There is a lot of confusion with regard to the schemes that were announced earlier. The Government must take urgent steps and measures to rescue the nation from the current economic crisis. Not only combating COVID-19 but also improving the state of economy should be the priority. The Finance Minister has a very tough task ahead.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

SC and farm laws

Sir — An end to the farmers’ agitation is nowhere in sight. The Supreme Court should have concerned itself about the question of the constitutionality of the farm laws.

What is really worrisome, though, is the precedent the top court is setting for various inter-

est groups for future debates over the contentious laws. By allowing for an extra-parliamentary method to settle debate over laws, the court is not only undermining the legislative but also the nation’s faith in representative democracy. It is telling the masses that the way to arm-twist the Government on laws that affect their interest is to generate

enough heft to lay siege to the Capital and the Parliament House.

It is hard to see how the court-appointed panel can come up with an amicable solution. If the eventual solution is not agreeable to the farmers, it will be back to square one.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

Punish racist bigots

Sir — Racism has again raised its ugly head, this time at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The recent racial abuse of two cricketers is definitely a blot on international sports. It has to be condemned by one and all.

It is appalling that such things are happening when most part of the international cricket has been lost in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though matches are being played of late, there is little spectator capacity.

The time has come for the ICC to treat racial abuse as a serious issue and take stern action against the offenders. It must ban the offenders from entering stadiums for a fixed period. During the IPL games in India, cricketers from different parts of the world are greeted and treated equally. Everyone should realise that colour, caste, gender and religion in no way decide the behaviour, skill, happiness, opportunities and success of a person.

V Nagendra Kumar
Hyderabad

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Preserve medical knowledge

It is important to make optimum use of cloud storage to preserve information on specimens and procedures, which can help save lives in the future



KM CHERIAN

We are living in fascinating times where we are discovering new things in the medical field every single day. This is all thanks to the major technological strides that we have taken. For instance, take the COVID-19 virus. Ever since its emergence in 2020, we have been discovering a new fact about it daily. This is all due to the technological advancements that mankind has made in the field of medical science, especially in the branch of surgery.

It is important for future surgeons and healthcare professionals in the country to understand the history of various procedures and build on it further. However, not all progress in the medical field is documented in the right way. Therefore, there is a need for earnest attempts towards utilising latest technological processes, preserving and imparting knowledge for medical posterity worldwide.

In this era of knowledge exchange through the internet, it is important to make optimum use of cloud storage to preserve information on specimens and procedures, which can help save many lives in the future. Although Nalanda was one of the first universities in the world, the knowledge gathered through various studies at that time could not be preserved for perpetuity. This was a big loss for mankind.

Hence, in order to ensure continuity and development in medical science, the first thing that needs to be done is digitisation of case files and procedures. Although a lot of hospitals and healthcare organisations have digitised their patient files and stored them server-backed medical record systems, it is important for smaller establishments to do that as well.

Live surgeries can be captured through body cameras or CCTV cameras. In addition, it is imperative to store these files properly on a secure cloud server since there is a chance that hard disks and drives can be corrupted, stolen or tampered with. Given the fact that they contain confidential data about patients which could be misused if they fall into the wrong hands, it is vital to protect these files and maintain security.

Second, there is a dire need for us to get insights from the data we have and use it for treatment, surgeries and research and development. Data are available in abundance, but we need to use the right set of tools such as Big Data and analytics to draw insights from the information given and create an impact. Analytics can be used in predicting the pattern in certain medical conditions and how it can be treated. For example, if we take all the cases of bypass surgeries conducted so far (in the last few decades) in a particular age group and find a common pattern, it would be extremely useful for the future.

Similarly, 3D printing and 3D modeling are very important innovations for training doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. 3D printing, or additive manufacturing is a process in which a three dimensional object is created by laying down successive layers of material, all of which are thinly sliced sections of the proposed object. Then the said object is designed on the computer using a Computer-Aided Designing Software and made suitable for 3D printing requirements. Since it is not possible to have actual models/cadavers every time to train medical students (especially in the COVID-era) where the intricacies of each organ can be explored, having 3-D models with movable parts will be very useful for mock surgery training.

Another significant step for future training of surgeons and healthcare professionals is making knowledge accessible. This means the information should be available across mediums and platforms for everyone alike, without any bias. We must not put monetary caps and restrict the free flow of knowledge. Instead, we should aim at creating virtual knowledge hubs, specialised in each field of medicine and surgery. World-renowned experts can be a part of this panel and help aspiring professionals with guidance from time to time.

Nalanda University was one of the first universities in the world, founded in 5th century BC, and was reported to have been visited by the Lord Buddha during his lifetime. At its peak, in the 7th century AD, Nalanda hosted some 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers when it was visited by the Chinese scholar Xuanzang. It had multiple specialties including arts, science and medicine. But all the knowledge was lost due to the lack of the technology needed to preserve that know-how.

It is important to connect ancient wisdom with modern science. These efforts will result in transmission and retrieval of data to educate the future generations, thus preventing another knowledge massacre. Fortunately, we are in a position to preserve knowledge now.

(The writer is a Padma Shri awardee and cardiothoracic surgeon credited with India's first bypass. He is Chairman and CEO of Frontier Lifeline Hospital. The views expressed are personal.)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

IS BEING A LEFT SYMPATHISER A CRITERION TO GET A PERMANENT GOVERNMENT JOB? THIS GOVERNMENT IS MIRED IN CORRUPTION FROM NECK TO TOE.
—KERALA LEADER OF OPPOSITION
RAMESH CHENNITHALA



THE MINISTER HAS ALREADY SAID THAT NO GOVERNMENT JOBS OR POSTINGS IN KERALA ARE BASED ON CASTE, CREED, COLOUR OR POLITICS.
—KERALA CHIEF MINISTER
PINARAYI VIJAYAN

Embrace the change

Blockchain technology is finding its relevance across trade and supply chains. Although it may not be the solution for every business objective, it has the power to change other industries, too



HIMA BINDU KOTA

Blockchain is one of the latest technologies used in the business world. Though this technology was around since 1990s, it started gaining popularity in the last decade, with the advent of cryptocurrencies. Although it is fast gaining attention, its applicability to business needs to be comprehensively understood and its potential is still to be realised fully. The world is in the early stages of acceptance, testing and implementation of blockchain technology and there is still some time before it hits the mainstream. Blockchain is a type of database where data is stored in blocks which are chained together. Any new data is entered into a fresh block which is then chained to the existing data in a chronological order. Therefore, it differs structurally from any of the existing databases where the data is structured as tables and which is accessed either by an individual or a group of people. Although accessibility is easier, since data sets are owned and managed by businesses, they have control over statistics and they can be changed and manipulated to suit the firm's requirements. This loophole is addressed in the blockchain technology and since information is stored in blocks, it becomes permanent once it is entered and remains part of a timeline, chained to other blocks of data having a precise time-stamp.

There are four aspects of this unique technology. First, consensus of all the relevant users is taken and the information is updated only after the transaction is validated by all of them. Second, any transaction once approved, automatically gets created across ledgers for all the users. Permanency of records, or immutability, is the third aspect. Once the blocks are added, they cannot be removed. Fourth and the main aspect of blockchain technology is security, as only authorised users can create and access blocks of data. Although blockchain technology is mainly associated with cryptocurrency such as bitcoins, once the extent of its applicability is understood properly, it has the potential to transform how businesses operate and can develop exciting value propositions when different businesses work together as an ecosystem. New processes can be developed opening up fresh avenues to make merchandising more competitive. Blockchain technology can help businesses do some social good along with their regular activity. One of the fields where this new technology finds its application is in the food industry. The journey of food from farm to fork can be tracked using it. For instance, in 2006, the US had an outbreak of escherichia coli, particularly in spinach. It took the Government about two weeks to find the source of the bacteria and, in the meanwhile, tons of spinach was discarded due to the fear of the vegetable being contaminated.

Blockchain technology has enabled transparency in the supply chain, across different companies and their ecosystems, to precisely locate the origin of contamination. Several large companies like Walmart, Nestle and Unilever are using this technology to have more control on the quality of raw materials.

In one of the experiments conducted by Walmart, it was able to trace the origin of sliced mangoes back to the farm in 2.2 seconds using the enterprise blockchain platform. Earlier, such an activity using traditional methods to

“IN THE PRESENT AGE, DATA HAS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE AND PROTECTING PRIVACY IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT APPLICATION OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY. IMPORTANT INFORMATION LIKE USER IDENTITY, PASSWORDS, ADDRESS, PERMANENT ACCOUNT NUMBER, BANK DETAILS AND SO ON, ARE SPREAD ACROSS THE INTERNET, LEAVING US VULNERABLE TO DATA THEFT”



track the sliced mangoes to their origin would have taken approximately seven days.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently adopted this technology for food labeling requirements to inform consumers about “added sugar” to the product. This makes it easier for companies producing end products to track the suppliers of ingredients through the information recorded in the blocks, thereby saving both time and money.

In the present age, information has a very special place and protecting its privacy is another important application of blockchain technology. Important information like user identity, passwords, address, Permanent Account Number (PAN), bank details and so on, are spread across the internet, leaving us vulnerable to data theft.

Out of 3.2 million fraud cases reported to the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2019, nearly 20 per cent were related to data and identity theft. According to the 2019 NortonLifeLock Cyber Safety Insight Report, around 40 per cent of Indian consumers have experienced identity theft and have lost approximately ₹1.2 trillion in 2019 due to cyber crime.

Blockchain technology finds its application in securing the data of individuals by providing privacy of information. Instead of having a central database, which is the current practice, a blockchain ledger acts as a digital rights management system providing relevant permissions to access required information. For instance, if information related to age is required, then only that statistic is released instead of additional data like address and so on. Since information is not present in the form of a central database, it's vulnerability to theft is drastically reduced.

Blockchain technology also makes the tracking of digital information difficult because of three-layered secure data exchange. The data seeker, data provider and the network operator do not know each other. Going forward, this may be the best strategy to protect consumers' data and ensure privacy.

Supply chain is another invisible area which has a huge impact on the operations of any business. Any interruption can lead to an overall disruption. Blockchain technology provides increased transparency by providing participants increased visibility across all activities in the supply chain. It also builds a resilient system, pre-defining business conditions, so that contracts are automatically kicked-in when these conditions are fulfilled.

This technology also streamlines the addition of any supplier or vendor into the business, which traditionally is a time-consuming activity. Using the unique aspect of immutability, the process of recording new vendor details in a trustworthy manner, is less time consuming. Other industries where blockchain technology can provide transformational opportunity are banking and financial markets, insurance, risk management, the healthcare industry, research and clinical trials, commerce, retail management, media and the automation industry, to name a few.

Globalisation is the mainstream of today's world with ever-increasing cross-border trade and business. However, the missing link is trust. This lack of confidence can also lead to disruption in traditional business models, which are usually process related and have several stakeholders. Blockchain technology can bring about a transformational shift by developing faith between the parties. Such new business models have been used by com-

panies like Uber, Airbnb and Netflix. Although the potential of blockchain technology is immense, there are certain challenges. This know-how is not mature as yet and it may take some time for it to evolve further. A cue can be taken from the fact that internet technology is still making advances after being introduced four decades ago. Other challenges include the readiness of businesses to adopt this technology and their ability to find a value proposition in it, ensuring the correct governance structure, and placing the correct team to lead the adoption of this know-how.

Additionally, the feasibility of adopting blockchain technology may also be limited due to Government policies, business environments, laws, regulations and bureaucratic red tape. A complex governance structure can lead to ambiguity, interruptions and higher expenditures. In the same vein, blockchain technology adoption in the public sector is mired in delays and has a higher risk when compared to private or hybrid participants.

Blockchain technology is already finding its relevance across industries, like finance, cross-border trade and supply chains. Although it may not be the solution for every business objective, it has the potential to transform other industries as well. Many business leaders want to know the direct correlation between using blockchain technology and improved sales growth or competitive advantage. Blockchain technology, because of its unique characteristics of immutability, transparency and trust, opens up new ecosystems and business models and fresh opportunities for revenue generation.

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

Nurture local leadership for a resilient society

Govt must work towards building an enabling environment for nurturing local leaders and integrate them into the process, thereby ensuring no one gets left behind



MANU GUPTA

The migrant workers who once appeared on the front pages of newspapers and dominated television news were no longer visible in the months following the nationwide lockdown, which was necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic. Once they reached their respective villages and hometowns, all thoughts of them were erased from public memory. It was as though the crises of hunger and homelessness had been effectively resolved. But nothing could be farther from the truth and the misery of the silent workforce continued in the hinterland as it was plagued by “lockdown hunger.”

After the Government announced

In June 2020, when cyclone

the lockdown on March 24, 2020, States and the country at large were reminded of the fact that its cities were incapable of providing a dignified life to a significant section of its residents. They remained confined to the margins despite making significant contributions to the local economy. To make matters worse, relief schemes announced by the Centre and State Governments in response to such calamities seldom reach the most vulnerable, creating gaps in local governance and management.

The pandemic and similar disasters in the past, have underscored the role of the local leadership in filling the critical governance gap. In their communities, these leaders take charge, understanding very well, the socio-cultural nuances and the language of the people they seek to help. What sets them apart are their courageous actions, often going beyond the call of duty and acting with a sense of urgency to serve those facing a calamity.

Nisarga made landfall in Maharashtra, it caused widespread damage in the Raigad area, tearing down homes, devastating farms and felling power poles and trees. The cyclone had hit the coastal districts of Maharashtra from the Arabian Sea with wind speeds that reached up to 120 kilometres per hour. At this time, Pascal Sinor, a priest at the Mary of Nazareth church in Alibaug, Raigad district, distributed rations to 250 families in his parish and, about a 1,000 families in 13 neighbouring tribal villages. With the help of a local civil society agency, Sinor could also arrange for clothes and roofing material for 40 households.

The priest showed the importance of local leadership. He showed that in a crisis, the leadership challenge is an unusual one: The leader needs to act with spontaneity, take inconvenient decisions and confront a system that is paralysed, albeit temporarily, by the calamity.

In the cyclone-prone State of Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik boldly declared just before a major



twister hit the State in 2013 that he would “like to see zero casualties.” This, in a State that had borne the brunt of a devastating cyclone in 1999 that claimed more than 10,000 lives! To set such a goal for his Government, in a region that suffers from endemic poverty and has poor infrastructure, was a huge political risk. He, nevertheless, announced his goal.

Not only did the State succeed in saving thousands of lives, but it also set an international best practice and now is a model for other States in the

country. In May 2019, too, when Cyclone Fani made landfall in Odisha, loss of life was minimal despite the severity of the storm.

Actions by leaders like Patnaik, in serving people threatened by disasters, have been recognised in a recent report on local leadership for disaster resilience, published by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). The report, which documents the journey of several local leaders across Asia through the course of different crises, aims to inspire many more local lead-

ers to contribute to the achievement of the Sendai Framework's goal of disaster and risk reduction in communities.

Perhaps a silver lining in managing the COVID-19 pandemic is also the emergence of many local leaders — ordinary people who have risen to meet the needs of others. For instance, Sourav Bhattacharjee, a theatre student of Rabindra Bharati University in West Bengal, got the idea to open a community kitchen called “Mohamarir Heshel (pandemic kitchen)” during the lockdown in March. He went back to Khowai district of Tripura, his hometown, and started this initiative by recognising the fact that many people had lost their livelihood and could not bank on their savings throughout the pandemic.

Bhattacharjee is just one of the many local leaders that the pandemic gave birth to. Whether these remain one-off initiatives, limited to a story in the media or we enable a system that nurtures and recognises such leadership, is a call for all of us to take.

Despite their crucial role, local leaders face considerable challenges in their work, persevering even in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, ranging from a lack of funds to indifference in their communities. At the same time, they might also lack access to technical know-how and nuances of humanitarian action. Local leadership and action deserve acknowledgement and enhanced support from national governments, international organisations, civil society, businesses, and academia. The role of such people is indispensable in the hour of crisis. Involving them in planning allows for better resilience of local communities.

Governments and civil society must work towards building an enabling environment for nurturing local leaders and integrate them into the process, thereby ensuring no one gets left behind.

(The writer is co-founder of a disaster readiness, response and rehabilitation NGO, SEEDS. The views expressed are personal.)

Sensex jumps 248 pts to end at new peak; Nifty tops 14,500

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex jumped 248 points to end at a fresh life-time high on Tuesday, tracking gains in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and Bharti Airtel amid positive global cues and persistent FPI inflows.

After touching an all-time high of 49,569.14 during the day, the 30-share BSE index ended 247.79 points or 0.50 per cent higher at 49,517.11.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 78.70 points or 0.54 per cent to a fresh closing peak of 14,563.45. It scaled a record 14,590.65 during the session.

On the Sensex chart, SBI was the top gainer, rallying around 4 per cent, followed by Bharti Airtel, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ITC, Axis Bank and NTPC. On the other hand, Asian Paints, HUL, Nestle India, Titan and Kotak Bank were among the laggards.

According to Binod Modi, Head- Strategy at Reliance Securities, domestic equities remained resilient as they recovered sharply from the day's low and recorded fresh highs. Banking stocks once



On the Sensex chart, SBI was the top gainer, rallying around 4%, followed by Bharti Airtel, Reliance, HDFC Bank, ITC, Axis Bank and NTPC. On the other hand, Asian Paints, HUL, Nestle, Titan and Kotak Bank were among the laggards

again defied red flags raised by RBI's Financial Stability Report by recovering sharply from early losses, he said,

adding that auto stocks continued to see healthy traction as well with expectations of good Q3 earnings and strong

outlook.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers in the capital market as they purchased shares worth Rs 3,138.90 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo ended with gains, while Seoul was in the red. Stock exchanges in Europe were largely trading on a positive note in early deals.

BMW Motorrad sales increase 7 pc to 2,563 units in 2020

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BMW Motorrad, the two-wheeler arm of German luxury carmaker BMW, on Tuesday, said its sales increased 6.65 per cent last year at 2,563 units from 2,403 units in 2019.

In the last quarter of 2020 (October-December), the dispatches grew by over 51 per cent as compared to the same period in 2019.

"In a particularly tough year, BMW Motorrad once again delivered a stellar performance against all odds and became the number one selling premium motorcycle brand. This hard-earned success came on the back of carefully planned launches, a visionary strategy and most importantly - our relentless focus on what our customers desire," BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah said in a statement.

The winning combination of the company's products with outstanding aftersales and attractive financial solutions is the centrepiece of this success, he added.

"Our aim is to continuously grow the BMW Motorrad community and culture here in India and we will keep delivering on that promise," Pawah said.

'Mount honest attempts to settle litigation for revenues'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Ahead of the Union Budget, SBI economists on Tuesday pitched for avoiding new taxes and urged the government to mount "honest attempts" to settle past litigations to raise resources instead.

Given the pandemic and the resultant lessons, an additional expenditure of over Rs 2.5 lakh crore will have to be provided on the healthcare front, the economists at the country's largest lender said, adding the government spent only 1 per cent of the GDP under this head in FY21.

"One suggestion. There must not be any new taxes in the Budget. Let us have a tax holiday budget, with carefully crafted policies for immediate fiscal lubrication.

"A game changer in the budget could be an honest attempt by the Government to settle the cases under tax litigation once and for all," they said in a note, adding that as of data available till FY19, the total amount under dispute was around Rs 9.5 lakh crore.

The amount under litigation includes Rs 4.05 lakh crore in corporation tax, Rs 3.97 lakh crore stuck in income tax cases and another Rs 1.54 lakh crore on account of commodities and services tax, the note said.

It also hinted that there can



For FY22, it expects the Finance Ministry to target to get down the fiscal deficit to 5.2 per cent in the Budget

be a cess on the vaccine administration on the anvil and sought the same to be implemented only for a year.

For senior citizens, some tax incentive for savings is an essential action and added that it has minimal fiscal implications.

From a fiscal position perspective, the note said, the combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and states will go to 12.1 per cent of GDP in FY21, with the Centre's alone at 7.4 per cent of the GDP (gross domestic product).

For FY22, it expects the Finance Ministry to target to

get down the fiscal deficit to 5.2 per cent in the Budget, assuming that the expenditure growth is curtailed at 6 per cent and a 25 per cent jump in receipts.

It pegged the overall disinvestment proceeds to be budgeted at Rs 2 lakh crore but did not expand the major candidates.

The fiscal situation at the state level is also stretched, but a bit better than what was initially anticipated, it added.

On the controversial aspect of GST shortfall, it said the payables to the states from the Centre will narrow down to Rs 25,000 crore, assuming that 50 per cent of the IGST collected is disbursed to the states by March 2021 and states will end the fiscal with an overall shortage of Rs 3 lakh crore in tax revenue.

In the wake of reports suggesting the government is thinking of a Keynesian approach, the SBI economists backed the plan, saying a push to infrastructure such as roads, civil aviation and agriculture will be a well advised strategy.

With the government creating a DFI (Development Finance Institution) and given the abundance of financial savings, there should be a clear plan to mobilise such savings for financing infrastructure, it suggested.

ETG Agro commissions nuts processing plant

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ETG Agro India on Tuesday said it recently commissioned a state-of-the-art nuts and almonds processing plant with a capacity of 10,000 tonne per annum in the Kheda district of Gujarat.

The company in a statement said it will source nuts such as walnuts and cashews from domestic growers, and almonds from global origins such as the US and Australia.

The company has established partnerships with key suppliers. For the financial year 2021-22, the company is estimating the sales of over 8,000 tonnes, it added.

Nuts will be marketed under the brand 'ETG AGRO NATURZ-PRO NUTS' in both bulk and consumer pack formats with almonds and then expand to walnuts, pistachios, and cashews.

Commenting on the company's entry into nuts business, ETG Agro India CEO Parage Gadre said it is part of

long-term strategic business plan to diversify into growing foods, commodities, value added processed staples, plant-based protein applications and ingredients which are developing higher resonance among consumers.

In the near future, the plant also aims to produce nuts ingredients meant for sweets, biscuits, ice-creams, and other user industries.

ETG Agro India has put special emphasis on generating employment for local women and accordingly, has employed a workforce of over 100 local women after imparting requisite skill sets to operate the sorting line of the plant.

The company is part of global agri-conglomerate ETG Group, with Japanese company Mitsui as its strategic investor. It has a total pulses processing capacity of 5,00,000 tonnes per annum spread across three facilities in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal.

SAT sets aside Sebi's penalty on SBI, BoB, LIC in UTI AMC case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) has set aside a Sebi order to impose Rs 10 lakh fine each on three state-owned financial institutions - SBI, Bank of Baroda and LIC - in UTI AMC's stake dilution case.

Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), in August 2020, levied the fine on three financial institutions for failing to reduce their stakes to below 10 per cent in UTI AMC within the stipulated timeline.

The three companies were required to bring down their stake in UTI AMC to 10 per cent each by March 2019. They were holding an 18.24 per cent stake each in the fund house.

The entities were non-compliant with the Sebi mutual fund (MF) Regulations. Under the norm, no sponsor of a mutual fund is allowed to hold over 10 per cent of any other mutual fund or a trustee firm.

LIC, SBI and BoB are the

sponsors of LIC MF, SBI MF and Baroda MF and at the same time, they were holding over 18 per cent stake in both UTI MF and UTI Trustee Company.

Following the Sebi's order, State Bank of India (SBI), Bank of Baroda (BoB) and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) had moved the tribunal.

In an order passed on January 7, the SAT said it did not find any justifiable reason to impose any monetary penalty in the present matters, as every technical violation need not be visited with a monetary penalty. In these matters a warning is sufficient.

"All three appeals are partly allowed by substituting the monetary penalty of Rs 10

lakh each imposed on the appellants (SBI, BoB and LIC) with that of a warning," it added.

According to the SAT, three entities were facing excruciating factors in achieving their stake dilution in UTI AMC. Though it is a fact that DIPAM was approached only in January 2019, the entities were not free to approach DIPAM directly but had to go through other departments in the Finance Ministry.

The tribunal said it noted correspondence since March 2018 (when Sebi came out with new norms on mutual funds) made by the entities on the need for complying with the mutual fund norms and the need for expeditiously doing so.



Mahindra Lifespace ties up with SBI for faster home loan approvals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd on Tuesday said it has signed an MoU with SBI for faster home loan approvals as well as to offer special discounts to customers and employees of both the companies.

Mahindra Lifespace and SBI have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enable an improved and more seamless experience for homebuyers across India.

"As part of the agreement, which includes various co-promotional activities and outreach initiatives, customers and employees of SBI and Mahindra Lifespaces" will be able to avail the benefits of faster home loan processing and approvals, and special discounts and schemes," the statement said.

Arvind Subramanian,



Mahindra Lifespace and SBI have signed a MoU to enable an improved and more seamless experience for homebuyers

Managing Director and CEO, Mahindra Lifespace Developers said, the company has partnered with the State Bank of India to make Mahindra homes more conveniently accessible to customers and employees of both companies.

Chief General Manager and Head of the Real Estate vertical of State Bank of India Shreekanth said, "State Bank of India has already approved Mahindra Lifespace's projects across MMR, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai and Nagpur. With this partnership, homebuyers stand to benefit by saving on the expenses incurred on obtaining TIR (Title Investigation Report) and valuation, for approved projects. A shorter turn-around-time on sanctioning of such loans is one of our key USPs."

Established in 1994, Mahindra Lifespace Developers is the real estate and infrastructure development business of the USD 19.4 billion Mahindra Group. The company's development footprint spans 25.1 million sq ft of completed, ongoing and forthcoming residential projects across seven Indian cities.

Spectrum auction: Telcos attend pre-bid conference

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom firms like Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea on Tuesday participated in pre-bid conference for spectrum auctions, as the telecom department asked telcos to submit written queries regarding the rules and processes by January 15, according to sources.

During the pre-bid conference, operators raised queries on aspects such as earnest money deposit and roll-out obligations in the bid document, an industry source said.

The Department of Telecom (DoT) sources said telcos, including Jio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea, attended the pre-bid conference on Tuesday. The department has now asked the operators to send their written queries on the issues raised at the pre-bid conference by January 15.



The DoT has already released a notice inviting applications for the spectrum auctions in seven bands - 700, 800, 900, 1800, 2100, 2300 and 2500MHz bands, and the bidding is scheduled to begin on March 1.

Last month, the Union Cabinet had approved a proposal for the auction of 2,251.25 Megahertz (MHz) of spectrum worth Rs 3.92 lakh crore at the base price.

Telecom operators will need to submit their application by February 5 for participation in the auction.

BNP Paribas, last week, had said that spectrum auction in India has turned into a buyer's market, and may see "minimal competition" with operators going after airwaves that yield the best value for money instead of focusing on renewing all expiring spectrum.

With the count-down now on for spectrum auctions, ICICI Securities had said it expects the final prices across spectrums to be equal to the reserve prices due to significant supply of radiowaves, and likely limited demand for expiring radiowaves.

Five per cent more income tax returns filed this year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Income tax returns filed this year have risen by about 5 per cent to nearly 6 crore as more businesses and entities filed annual income statements.

Over 5.95 crore income tax returns (ITRs) for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2020 (2019-20) were filed by January 10, the Income Tax Department said.

The ITR filing deadline for

individuals ended on January 10 while for companies it is till February 15.

The tax department in a tweet said 5.95 crore ITRs for Assessment Year 2020-21 were filed till January 10, 2021, as compared to 5.67 crore ITRs filed for the previous Assessment Year by September 10, 2019. The total returns for 2019-20 are 33.35 lakh higher than the previous year as total ITRs filed stood at 5.61 crore

on the last date which was August 31, 2019. "We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of our taxpayers & tax professionals," it said sharing the data of ITRs filed for AY2020-21 up to January 10, 2021.

An analysis of the data showed that filing of tax returns by individuals for 2019-20 has slowed in the current year, while filing by businesses and trusts has increased.

Over 2.99 crore ITR-1 were

filed till January 10 this year, lower than the 3.11 crore filed till September 10, 2019.

ITR-1 form is filed by resident individuals having income less than Rs 50 lakh in a year.

Over 1.49 crore ITR-4 were filed till January 10, as compared to 1.29 crore filed till September 10, 2019.

Returns in ITR-1 Sahaj are filed by individuals whose total income does not exceed Rs 50 lakh, while form ITR-4 Sugam

is meant for individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs) and firms (other than Limited Liability Partnership) having a total income of up to Rs 50 lakh and having presumptive income from business and profession.

Over 46.12 lakh ITR-2 (filed by people having income from residential property, capital gains and foreign assets) were filed till January 10. ITR-5 (filed by LLP and Association

of Persons) filings stood at 10.50 lakh, while ITR-6 (by businesses) filings were at 4.72 lakh.

Last year, ITR-6 filings till September 10, 2019, were 49,398. ITR-5 filings were 5.89 lakh.

ITR-7 (filed by persons having income derived from property held under trust) filings stood at 1.46 lakh till January 10, 2021, as compared to 65,298 last year.

Rupee recovers losses, settles 15 paise higher at 73.25 against US \$



The rupee recouped early losses and provisionally closed 15 paise higher at 73.25 against the US dollar on Tuesday, supported by weakness in the dollar index and recovery in domestic equities. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened weak at 73.42, but recovered lost ground and finished 15 paise higher over its last close. During the trading session, the domestic unit witnessed an intra-day high of 73.24 and a low of 73.44. On Monday, the rupee had closed at 73.40 against the American currency. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.09 per cent to 90.38. On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 247.79 points or 0.50 per cent higher at 49,517.11, while the broader NSE Nifty advanced 78.70 points or 0.54 per cent to 14,563.45. Foreign institutional investors were net buyers in the capital market as they purchased shares worth Rs 3,138.90 crore on Monday, according to provisional exchange data.

FHRAI urges govt to bring tourism under Concurrent List

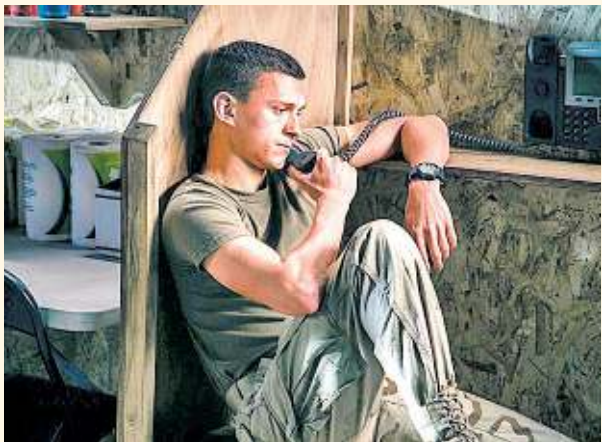


The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has urged the Union government to bring tourism under the concurrent list and to grant the 'industry' status to the hospitality sector. In a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel, the FHRAI said the hospitality sector in the country is engulfed in massive losses and mounting debts ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country and is staring at a horrendous future with no solace to be seen in the near future. "It is the need of the hour to bring the tourism sector in the concurrent list of the Indian constitution for effective legislation to place tourism on the national agenda," the letter by FHRAI Vice-President Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said. Tourism should be included under the concurrent list so that both the state tourism department and the central tourism ministry have clearly defined responsibilities in their respective domains, it added.

Tom Holland sheds quarter of his body weight for his role in *Cherry*!

Many actors have gone to extreme measures for a movie role — especially when it comes to gaining or losing a significant amount of weight. In Tom Holland's case, he did the latter to convincingly play a spiraling drug addict in his new movie, *Cherry*. Now its filmmakers are getting real about the scary amount of weight he lost for the role. The Russo Brothers were probably well aware of Tom Holland's commitment to his craft before they directed him in *Cherry*. The familial filmmaking team have, after all, worked with the actor multiple times during his stint as Spider-Man in the Avengers films.

Still, there's a big difference between what Tom Holland has done during his tenure in the MCU and what



he did to prepare for his role in the Russos' *Cherry*. The movie tells the story of its eponymous character, played by Tom Holland, a former soldier with PTSD who falls in love with a young girl (Ciara Bravo) and resorts to robbing banks in order to pay for drugs.

During a recent Q&A, attended by CinemaBlend and other news outlets, Joe Russo described what he watched the two young actors do in order to nail their performances: "They shredded themselves physically and emotionally for this. I just want to bring up

that, you know, Tom lost almost a quarter of his body weight. I know Ciara lost a lot of weight, and you know what it's like when you do that for a while, and you're living with that every day. You're starving yourself and you're having to go to work and deal with these emotionally fraught scenes. These two really shredded themselves. Kudos to you guys, because you laid yourself bare, you laid yourself raw for these performances, to get as much authenticity as possible out of it. It's some of the most impressive performance work we've ever been a part of. And it came at a real physical cost to both of them." It sounds as though Tom Holland and Ciara Bravo were both fiercely committed to their roles in *Cherry* — especially given the fact that other actors like George Clooney have suf-

fered health issues when they've dramatically changed their weight. Indeed, the first images we saw from *Cherry* a few months ago showed that Tom Holland would be virtually unrecognisable in the film. So while it isn't a complete surprise, it's nice for the Russo brothers to give the actors credit where credit is due for seeking authenticity in their performances. The Avengers films alone have proven that the directors expect quite a bit from their stars, and they always seem to manage to get the best out of them. *Cherry*, like many other films since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, will be released on multiple platforms, so fans around the world have options when seeing it.

It hits theaters on February 26 and will be available on AppleTV+ on March 12.

Madonna visits five countries in three weeks amid pandemic!



Madonna has reportedly visited five countries in just three weeks clocking up a massive 11,707 air miles, despite Covid travel bans.

The Queen of Pop is said to have flown from Los Angeles to London then to Malawi and Kenya in east Africa as part of a lavish winter trip.

The singer, 62, has been accompanied on the getaway by her boyfriend, American backing dancer Ahlamalik Williams, 26. She was also joined for much of the trip by five of her children. On Christmas Eve, she, Williams and her four adopted children — David Banda, 15, Mercy James, 14, and twins Estere and Stella, both eight — flew from LA to London. There they collected Madonna's eldest son Rocco, 20, her only child from her marriage to British director Guy Ritchie, who joined the group on their visit to Africa. On December 28, the group flew to Malawi, where she adopted the children, via a stopover in Egypt. It is believed the singer's personal photographer, Ricardo Gomes, was also flown out to capture the holiday. They spent a week in Malawi where they met with President Lazarus Chakwera, mixed with locals and visited a hospital which Madonna founded.

On Wednesday they flew to Kenya to go on safari. Yesterday, she shared a video of herself and Williams with the Pokot tribe of western Kenya.

Sources close to Madonna told The Sun the family have all been taking regular coronavirus tests.

The singer, who is worth £630million, is believed to have travelled by private jet.

Pumped and excited: Sanjay Dutt about role in *KGF 2*

Always making his presence felt on screen, and lighting up each frame, Sanjay Dutt has undoubtedly carved his own niche in the industry. Be it the role of an antagonist or the protagonist, the actor has always given out his best performance. Recently, the much-awaited teaser of his film, *KGF: Chapter 2* was released, which saw Sanjay Dutt in a very fierce look. His character, Adheera, became the talk of the town in no time. With powerful action scenes to intense dramatical sequences, Sanjay Dutt as

Adheera will be a sight to behold. Talking about the same, the actor reveals, "It is after a long time that such a role was offered to me, I got pumped and excited for it. The character is strong and charged me up to play the role, it was an immediate yes from me!"

Apart from *KGF: Chapter 2*, Sanjay Dutt will also be seen in *Bhuj: The Pride Of India*, *Shamshera* and *Toolsidas Junior*. All of his films will see him in a different light in a very short span of time, speaking volumes about the actor's versatility and dedication to his art.



Netflix's hush-hush project with R Madhavan and Surveen Chawla being shot in Goa

Netflix India is off to a flying start with a slew of new films to be shot over the next six months. One such project is already being shot in Goa. It's a film called *Decoupled* which features R

Madhavan and Surveen Chawla as a troubled couple trying to get their derailed relationship back on the track. The film is being directed by debutant Hardik Shah. While Madhavan has just delivered a huge success *Maara* on Amazon Prime

Video, Surveen makes a comeback in *Decoupled* after 5 years. She was stunning in her last film *Parched* in 2015. In 2018, she starred in a web series *Haq Se*. Thereafter, she took a break for marriage and motherhood.



FUN

ARCHIE



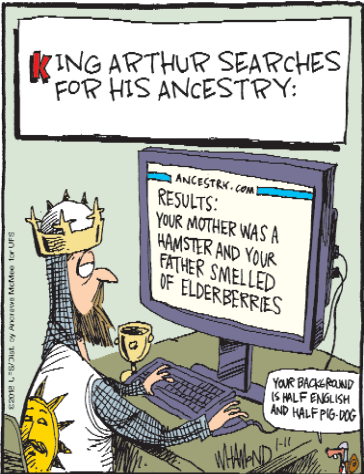
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



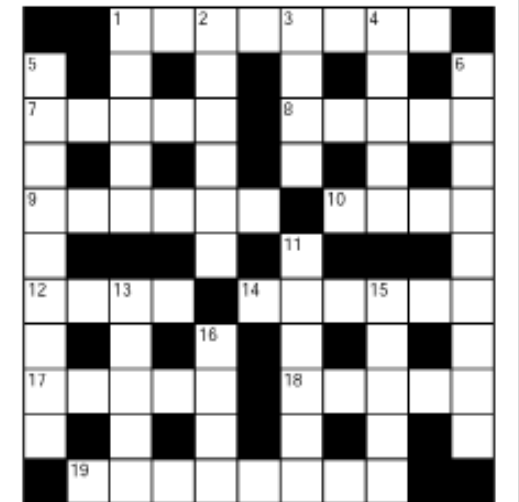
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Tiniest
- 7 A fish in rivers and lakes
- 8 Stick this on an envelope
- 9 Having a meal
- 10 Shout
- 12 Seeds in an apple
- 14 Opposite of weak
- 17 Precise
- 18 Nips with the teeth
- 19 Half of twenty-eight

DOWN

- 1 Fire a gun
- 2 Pretending
- 3 Mislead
- 4 Frighten
- 5 Tried



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

		4	7					
				9	5		3	8
			1					7
2			7					3
6		3		1				9
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Yesterday's solution								
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4	9	8	3	6	2	1	5	7
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9	6	1	8	4	5	3	7	2
8	4	5	2	3	7	9	1	6
3	7	2	1	9	6	5	8	4
6	5	3	9	8	4	7	2	1
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Rules

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

How do movies make money from OTT platforms?

The year 2020 changed everything, especially the way we consumed entertainment. Theatres were shut, same was the case with outdoor activities. What did people do? They turned to their mobiles, laptops or television screens. OTT platforms were the only respite amid the pandemic. There was a time when it was all about PVRs and INOXs, while today, all one could hear, is a new release on *Amazon Prime*, *Hotstar*, *Netflix*, *Aha*, etc. From a distance, the movie business may look pretty glamorous where you watch celebs gliding down red carpets, clutching Filmfares or Nandi awards, and vacationing in Budapest. But did you ever stop to wonder how the economics of movies or webseries workout? There is a lot of money put into making a show or film, many being risky investments because sometimes even having an A-lister doesn't help. So how do they compensate the losses? Also, with the advent of OTT platforms right now, how is OTT content making revenues? To address such questions that may be lingering in your mind, *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL talks to experts in the industry for answers. Read on..



You will definitely second the opinion that digital penetration is the driving source in India today. The world is more mobile-connected than it has ever been and OTT is the new trend. In fact, during the cricket season before the pandemic, viewership on *Hotstar*, which hosts live cricket actually mirrored the trend on television. More and more people are seeking access to the internet for cheaper ways of consuming entertainment. But how is the performance of a movie or web show evaluated? Does OTT streaming guarantee a film or a show, profit? Everybody owns a smartphone today and the mathematics of earnings on an OTT platform is pretty simple. It goes from buying the rights of a film to the producer getting a good sum for it, depending upon the deal based on the language of the venture, and then it's show-time! According to sources, an Akshay Kumar film, on an average, would fetch Rs. 150 crores but since his *Laxmmi* hasn't had a theatrical release, the digital rights were sold at an even bigger price making an extra profit from the production costs. "An app like *Rizzle* hosts a plethora of mini-series and its analytics make a big difference when compared to biggies like *Amazon Prime* or *Netflix*. The popularity of a star also makes some distinction apart from the financiers we have. When it comes to OTT, there no more is a struggle of acquiring several screens or finding a fine date for the release. The binge-watching phenomena is also what's getting us viewers, that in turn leads to more revenue. Secondly, the loop button, that automatically shows the next episode where the cur-

rent one finishes, doesn't let the watcher hover anywhere else. On a technical note, when we receive emails for a new web-show or pilot scripts, the team, at first, reviews the whole scheme behind the upcoming release and then based on that, a monetary compensation deal is locked. New subscribers, the price per data that has been streamed, and placement ads, are some other factors that help us earn more profit," shares Sana Afreen, program manager for *Rizzle* app. "If *Bangaru Thalli* released around March-end, it could have occupied the theatres in April, and the film could have gone to the OTT platform in May. But the film couldn't release due to the lockdown. So the producer had already lost box office revenue. The makers had already signed a deal with an OTT platform. If the movie was not given to them on time as per the agreement, the producer would have lost that money too. So in order to save the producer, the film released on OTT. However, the media exaggerated the amount given by *Prime*. A producer should sell the digital rights of a film to OTT platforms only after 30 days. Likewise, to a channel after 100 days. These resolutions were passed recently. But producers are transferring the rights before the stipulated time," shared Kalaipulli S. Thanu, a big-budget film producer and distributor, known for his films produced in Tamil cinema, in a self-explanatory video on his YouTube channel. Giving us some more insights about how a web series makes money from an OTT platform, Arunabh

Kumar, founder, promoter and executive director for TVF says, "The performances for a show release on OTT is decided primarily by the views that it gets. Whether a platform is willing to share the number of views of the content, is their prerogative. SVOD (subscription video on demand) platforms don't share their numerical while AVOD (advertising-based video on demand) platforms, like YouTube, do. In other cases, the number of conversations that an OTT show generates can also give a good idea of its performance. A show like TVF's *Panchayat* ended up trending on Twitter and IMDB and had lakhs of people talking and making memes about it across various social media platforms. The production costs vary from film to film. It has quite a few factors like including what the cast looks like, what the scale of the show is, and who the partners are or whether it's a brand cum franchise. In the world of digital content, one can decide accordingly." Because the world of video is changing, the business models for OTT have also evolved. The day of selecting a programme from a handful of television channels is gone; it's the new period of waiting for the next season. The catch-all terms for this new generation of entertainment businesses are TVOD, SVOD and AVOD. So every user, when downloading any content, pays a fee for it, which eventually leads to transaction on every download or the user paying every month for a certain time frame. Users watching ads in between the content too gets revenue to the content being streamed on OTT! Here are some of the eminent monet-

sation models that OTTs have: **SVOD:** Similar to traditional television packages, it allows users to consume as much content as they wish to, at a flat rate on a monthly basis. It offers greater flexibility to users continually challenging with retaining consumers by providing exclusive new content with an aggressive pricing scheme. **TVOD:** In this, consumers purchase content on a pay-per-view-basis. Either you can pay through electronic sell-through where you have to pay once to gain permanent access to a piece of content or download to rent where customers can access that piece of content for a limited time for a smaller fee. They tend to offer more releases providing rights holders with higher revenues and the watchers' timely access to new content. Having some attractive offer incentives, there seems to be a way for returns too in future. **AVOD:** And with films collecting up to 90 per cent of their lifetime gross during the first four weeks of release, AVOD is free to the customers. The ads that appear when watching a Dailymotion or YouTube video are an example of that. It may, at times, generate lower revenues but it's interesting to know that many of the apps have moved their subscription-based models to ad-based ones, like YouTube. No doubt, the film business has changed today. Film trade and business analysts are of the opinion that films directly releasing on OTT wouldn't affect the box office much. Popular names always have their reservations set, giving their target audiences the desired cinema experience on any platform. Earlier, satellite rights saw a similar wave, where television channels were paid a great amount of money to buy a film's satellite right. But with the advent of theatres, the interest of producers shifted again. What matters is that the exhibition sector must keep rolling!

Emerging technologies to aid in timely detection of lung cancer

Precaution is definitely better than cure. Another way to ensure health conditions don't turn fatal is early detection.

In India, the incidence of lung cancer is 6.9% of all cancers and it causes approximately 9% of all cancer deaths. Approximately, 80,000 new cases are diagnosed annually and the highest risk factor for lung cancer is smoking tobacco either in the form of beedies or cigarettes. The current pattern of lung cancer in India resembles that of Western world 40 years ago.

But with the advancement in research and technology in recent years it is possible to test people who are at a high risk for lung cancer, even when they are healthy and are asymptomatic. This is known as screening for early lung cancer. Low dose CT scan of the chest is an effective method for diagnosing lung cancer, for age more than 55 years who have been heavy smokers or who gave up smoking within the last 15 years. In the West, such people are recommended to go through screenings annually. A recent study published in November, 2020, based on 8 trials with more than 90,000 patients reported a significant decrease in death rate (mortality) due to lung cancer amongst people who underwent low dose CT chest and were diagnosed with lung cancer at early stages.

Other detection methods Besides low dose CT scan and other emerging technologies to diagnose lung cancer are fibre-optic bronchoscopy, endobronchial ultrasound (EBUS) and EBUS guided biopsy or fine needle aspiration cytology (FNAC) especially for central or bronchial cancers. During EBUS, tissue of fluid samples is obtained from the lungs and surrounding lymph nodes. It takes place under general anaesthesia using a bronchoscope that goes inside through patients' mouth. A fine needle and an ultrasound processor are fitted in an endoscope that is guided through the patient's trachea. The method offers a real-time image of the surface of the lungs, airways, lymph nodes and blood vessels. The images permits the doctor to access smaller lymph nodes and reach areas that are difficult to be viewed. Broncho-alveolar lavage (BAL) can be conducted by the chest physician at the time of bronchoscopy which is an endoscopy of the trachea and main airways (bronchus). For cancers closer to the chest wall, either a CT guided or ultra sound guided biopsy or FNAC can be done under direct visualization by the Interventional Radiologist. The advantage of Fine needle aspi-

ration cytology is that it includes detection of those tumour types like small cell carcinoma, lymphomas which are more aptly treated by chemotherapy rather than surgery.

Lung cancers are known to shed cancer cells, called circulating tumour cells (CTCs) and the nuclear products of cancer cells example cell free RNA, micro RNA or cell free DNA (cfDNA). Liquid biopsy is, taking the blood sample of a person and identifying the CTCs or nucleic acids (RNA and DNA) in the blood sample to confirm the lung cancer or any genomic mutation in the cancer cells. The technology of Liquid biopsy can diagnose an early lung cancer, assist in identifying a recurrence or progression of a cancer while on treatment. This is a very valuable aid to doctors to modify the treatment of a patient which may include targeted therapy or immunotherapy. Lung cancer staging is assisted by a positron emission tomography and early brain metastases can be picked up with an MRI brain for non-symptomatic lung cancer patients. These emerging technologies help a physician identify the type and stage of lung cancer thereby facilitating cancer directed appropriate therapy.

Exploring new avenues

The pandemic has brought in new challenges adding to existing many challenges, but the persistence of human race has never faltered. A research collaboration worth €10 million is underway facilitated by Industry leaders like Johnson&Johnson, Roche, Inivata, BC Platforms and others, two leading universities of the United Kingdom — namely Universities of Southampton and Leeds, and NHS, UK. The research aims to find new and alternate ways to diagnose Lung cancer that is not hefty on the pocket and aids early detection.

Credit it to such research and technologies, we have more hope for patients battling with Lung Cancer, but early detection is crucial. Patients should not disregard the primary symptoms and should seek timely intervention. Detecting lung cancer in its early stage can help prevent the spread of cancer to other organs of the body, increasing the survival chances of the patient. Moreover, in a country like India where lung cancer is the fourth leading cause of deaths, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the advanced technological treatments are accessible to patients all across the country.

(The writer, Dr. Tejinder Kataria is the Chairperson at Radiation Oncology, Cancer Institute, Medanta, Medicity, Gurgaon.)

No child will be deprived of insulin in 2021

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Haven't you had such times where your grandparent, who loves eating several types of desserts, tried to sneak in a little snack but you asked them to avoid it due to risks of diabetes attached to it? Lack of a hormone called insulin escorting to diabetes is a lifestyle disease eating up several people today. Usually caused by wrong dietary choices or for living a very sedentary lifestyle, many people, including kids, are known to be suffering from it. In order to control their blood sugar



Jazz Sethi

levels or to reverse the conditions, often people make very simple lifestyle changes to get rid of it and boom, it sometimes does work! Considered to be one of the known health threats to humankind these days, it can, at times, create havoc on your body, unknowing-

ly leading to serious health issues. Lack of insulin is considered to be one of the major factors for our body's inability to not respond to this illness. What you've been consuming, or how much you workout, etc. plays a pivotal role in managing your blood

sugar levels. It's you who is in charge of breaking or making the body system!

In regards with the very same view, Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India, at the juncture of World Insulin Day, announced a much-awaited development called 'Type-1 Diabetes Network', an insulin project. With a mission to build a positive bionetwork for T1D care across the nation, it is empowering doctors, educators and patients with ample awareness scientifically. "We are going to have forty centre of excellence having satellite hubs educating healthcare professionals on T1D management with

the help of our newly launched modules. Children who are in urgent need of treatments will be given free supplies of insulin and each centre will take responsibility to train at least hundred doctors across the country every year including honorarium support. Via an NGO, RSSDI will be reimbursing expenses for insulin along with basic care, comprehensive care and advanced care. So, let us join hands to make our country a happy place to thrive from T1D," shared Dr. Banshi Saboo on the vision and mission of this very project. While it may not sound like a big deal, diabetes is indeed a

serious condition that can cause damage if not controlled at the right time. In fact, it has also been put in the high-risk category for coronavirus.

Preying on your health, it can create a malfunction to the body which is surely detrimental to your health. Jazz Sethi is one champion with T1D from Ahmedabad, who tells us how stronger a force can be whilst overcoming the ill health with the help of a powerful dance performance. The choreographer dancing all over the house always is currently occupied with her foundation called 'Diabesties' that aims to make an enjoyable, compassionate and a

motivational lifestyle for T1D patients as she was diagnosed with it too, while she was just thirteen years old. "During these unprecedented times, I have been engaging in a lot of virtual conferences — all focused on Type 1 diabetes including team meetings, educational sessions and speaking at conferences. As 2020 has already been the year of smiling and speaking into a laptop screen, we should continue to do so," she adds.



Bumrah out of Brisbane Test

Jasprit sustains abdominal strain; Agarwal, Ashwin participation also in doubt



Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah reacts during Day 4 of 3rd Test @jaspritbumrah93

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The injury-ravaged Indian team was dealt another telling blow on Tuesday as pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was ruled out of the fourth Test against Australia due to an abdominal strain.

If that wasn't enough, Mayank Agarwal — tipped to be Hanuma Vihari's replacement in the playing XI in Brisbane — has sustained a knock on the hands and it could be a hairline fracture.

To make matters worse, Ravichandran Ashwin's back spasms have aggravated after battling for three hours on the final day, leaving little options

for India on the bench.

Bumrah, key to India's attack, sustained the strain during the drawn third Test in Sydney.

It has been learnt that Bumrah's scan reports showed a strain and the Indian team management does not want him to aggravate the injury, keeping in mind the upcoming four-Test series against England.

"Jasprit Bumrah suffered an abdominal strain while fielding in Sydney. He is going to sit out of the Brisbane Test but is expected to be available against England," a BCCI source told PTI.

While the Indian team

India's injury list which affected Oz Tour

ISHANT SHARMA

The senior pacer suffered a left side strain after playing only one match in the IPL in September and after that was ruled out of the Australia series. Ishant got bowling fit before the series but needed more overs under his belt before taking on the rigours of Test cricket. He has just returned to competitive cricket for Delhi with the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and will be selected against England in Tests.

BHUVNESHWAR KUMAR

The white-ball specialist and reserve pacer of the Test team injured his right hamstring during an IPL game and had to undergo an extensive rehabilitation programme which led to him missing the Australia series in full. He has just returned to action with the Mushtaq Ali T20 for UP and will be back in national team for England series.

VARUN CHAKRAVARTHY

One of the finds of the IPL, Kolkata Knight Rider's Varun Chakravarty was a left-field selection in the Indian T20 team but the old national selection committee with interim chairman Sunil Joshi didn't know that he was playing with a serious shoulder injury which

ruled him out of his maiden national tour.

ROHIT SHARMA

Perhaps the most high-profile left hamstring injury that happened during the IPL. The Mumbai Indians skipper played through pain in the final but was ruled out of the white ball series against Australia. Due to hard quarantine of 14 days in Sydney, Rohit, despite being fit, couldn't play the first two Tests and was back in action from Sydney where he hit a half-century in the second innings.

MOHAMMED SHAMI

India's craftiest pace bowler sustained a fractured forearm while trying to fend a short ball from Pat Cummins in the Adelaide Test and was then ruled out of the remaining three Tests. He is doubtful for the first two Tests against England at home as well.

UMESH YADAV

The senior India pacer hobbled out of the field during Australia's second innings with a calf muscle injury and will soon be at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru for a rehabilitation programme. There is a chance he might be back for the England series next month.

KL RAHUL

After a decent outing in the white ball leg, KL Rahul sustained a wrist injury while batting at the Melbourne Cricket Ground nets and was sent back to India to recuperate before the England series. His departure led to India's back-up middle-order being next to nil.

RAVINDRA JADEJA

India's premier all-rounder received a knock on his left thumb from a short delivery bowled by Mitchell Starc in Sydney and scans revealed dislocation as well as thumb fracture. He will be out for at least a couple of months, ruling him out of the England home series as well.

RISHABH PANT

The keeper-batsman received a knock in the left elbow from Pat Cummins and couldn't keep wickets in the second innings in Sydney. However, it was not a fracture and played after popping in a lot of painkillers which provided him initial relief. He will play in Brisbane in the fourth Test.

HANUMA VIHARI

The hero of the Sydney Test, after his epic 161-ball

vigil, has a serious hamstring injury (grade 2) and will be out of the fourth Test in Brisbane as well as the following series against England.

RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN

The man who has bowled more than 134 overs in the series, most by an Indian bowler, is suffering from back spasms and found it difficult to even sleep or tie his boot laces. With medication and physiotherapy sessions, India will expect their senior-most bowler on the park in Brisbane.

MAYANK AGARWAL

Having failed in the first two Tests, Agarwal was dropped in Sydney and who would have known that during a net session, he would get hit on the gloves and taken for scans. He was supposed to replace Hanuma Vihari and if it's a bruise, Agarwal is expected to play through pain.

JASPRIT BUMRAH

He suffered an abdominal strain during the late evening on the third day while chasing a ball to the boundary. He didn't come out and bowl his spells but it has been learnt that he is in considerable discomfort and will sit out of the next Test in Brisbane.

My leadership wasn't good enough: Paine

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian captain Tim Paine on Tuesday apologised for his on-field behaviour during the drawn third Test against India, saying that his leadership wasn't good enough and he ended up "looking like a fool" by sledging R Ashwin.

Paine has come under fire for a verbal duel with Ashwin when the Indian held vigil with an injured Hanuma Vihari to eke out a draw for his team. Paine said he was "distracted, agitated and a bit grumpy at times" during the game.

"I spoke to him (Ashwin) really quickly after the game yesterday, as I said to him, look I ended up looking a fool, didn't I? You open your mouth and then you drop a catch and had a bit of laugh about that," he said at a virtual press conference on Monday.

"...I do want to apologise for the way I went about things yesterday on someone who prides himself on the way I lead this team and yesterday was a poor reflection of that," Paine said.

The 36-year-old wicket-keeper dropped three catches during the match, including of Vihari after the con-

frontation with Ashwin. Paine conceded that it was the pressure of the game that got to him and that affected his mood.

"My leadership wasn't good enough, I let the pressure of the game, I suppose get to me and it sort of affected my mood and then from there affected my performance," he elaborated.

"So, yesterday when I came off the ground, my reflection was purely on my wicket-keeping...I think I said to my players, I had a really poor game as a leader, not so much as a captain, but certainly as a leader."

"...Yesterday I fell short of my expectations and our team's standard," he added. According to Paine, his behaviour on Monday wasn't a reflection of the way he wants to lead the Australian team.

"So, I want to apologise for the mistakes that I have made yesterday. Certainly, as I said, not a reflection of the way I want to lead this team. "We have set really high standards over the last 18 months and yesterday was certainly a bit of blip on the radar and something I felt I needed to come out and address," he asserted.



'Smith wasn't scuffing Pant's guard mark'

Sydney: Australian skipper Tim Paine on Tuesday defended Steve Smith, who was accused of scuffing up the guard mark of Rishabh Pant during the drawn third Test, asserting that the Indian team would have raked up the issue if any wrong was committed.

Smith, a former Australia captain, was seen scuffing up the batsman's guard during drinks break in the first session on Monday.

"I have spoken to Steve about this and I know he is really disappointed with the way it has come across. And if you watch Steve Smith play Test cricket, that is something that

he does every single game five or six times a day," Paine said. Paine said had Smith changed the guard marks, the Indian team would have taken up the issue.

"Smith was certainly not changing guard and imagine if he was, then the Indian players would have kicked up a bit of stink (at) that time," he said.

"But that is something I have seen Steve doing many a times in Test matches and Shield games that I have played with him, when he is in the field, he likes to sort of walk up to where he bats and visualise how is he going to play," Paine elaborated. PTI

SINGLES

KOHLI LOSES 2ND SPOT TO SMITH IN RANKINGS

KARACHI: India skipper Virat Kohli was on Tuesday pushed to the third spot by Australian batsman Steve Smith in the ICC Test rankings for batsmen but middle-order batsman Cheteshwar Pujara gained two places to be number eight. Kohli has 870 points in the latest chart, issued on Tuesday. Smith (900 points) is placed second behind Kiwi skipper Kane Williamson (919), who reach the best ever-rating points by a New Zealand player and consolidate his position at the top. Pujara, whose dogged half-centuries (50, 77) in the third Test helped India draw the match, is placed eighth, just behind his stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who lost one place.

BENGAL, MAHA WIN IN MUSTAQ ALI MATCH

KOLKATA: Opener Vivek Singh hammered a 64-ball 100 to star in Bengal's 16-run win over Jharkhand in an Elite Group B match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament on Tuesday. Bengal rode on left-handed Singh's stroke-filled century to make 161 for 6 in 20 overs. Singh's knock was studded with 13 fours and 3 sixes. In another match in the group, Hyderabad pulled off a six-run win over Odisha. In Vadodara, Kedar Jadhav and Naushad Shaikh struck unbeaten fifties as Maharashtra defeated Chhattisgarh by eight wickets in their Elite Group C game. Chhattisgarh posted a mammoth 192 for five on the board, but Jadhav (84 off 45 balls) and Naushad Shaikh (78 off 44 balls) made light work of the opposition bowlers and ensured that their team emerged triumphant.

RANJI FROM FEE IN 'MUSHTAQ-LIKE BUBBLE'

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket board is all set to organise a curtailed Ranji Trophy tournament from next month, and in all likelihood, in the same six bio-bubbles created for the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. A decision with regards to this will be taken during the virtual BCCI Apex Council Meeting on January 17. There are seven items on the agenda and right at the top of the list is domestic cricket, which also includes junior and women's categories. The logic behind having the same bio-bubbles is that it's already set and will be more convenient for operational purposes.

2021 F1 SEASON TO START IN SAUDI

LONDON: The start of the F1 season has been delayed a week and will start in Saudi Arabia after the Australian Grand Prix was postponed from March to November because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Australian race in Melbourne, initially set to open the season on March 21, has been rescheduled to November 21 with F1 organizers citing "the ongoing situation regarding Covid-19". The Chinese Grand Prix has also been postponed but no new date has been set for the race. The season will start with the Bahrain Grand Prix on March 28 at Sakhir, less than four months after the same venue held two races as part of the 2020 season.

LIVERPOOL VS MAN UTD IN FA CUP 4TH ROUND

MANCHESTER: Manchester United will face Liverpool in the blockbuster tie of the FA Cup fourth round, while League Two Cheltenham host Manchester City. Liverpool and United will clash for two consecutive weekends with the top two also facing off in the Premier League on Sunday. National League North side Chorley's reward for their victory over a depleted Derby was a home tie with Premier League Wolves. Should Chorley pull off another upset, they could face holders Arsenal in the fifth round. League Two Crawley, who thrashed Leeds 3-0 in the third round fixture, travel to Bournemouth. The fourth round ties will be played across the weekend of January 22 to 25 with the fifth round taking place between February 9 to 11. Agencies



India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja posts picture on his Twitter account with caption "Out of action for a while, surgery completed. But will soon return with a bang!" @imjadeja

CA delay call on Pucovski's fitness

Sydney: Cricket Australia on Tuesday said it will delay making a decision on Will Pucovski's availability for the fourth and final Test against India, giving the opener every opportunity to prove his fitness as he recovers from a partial dislocation of his shoulder.

CA confirmed that Pucovski suffered a "shoulder subluxation injury", which is a partial dislocation of the shoulder joint, when the ball of the upper arm

bone partly comes out of the socket in the shoulder.

"He will continue rest and rehabilitation over the next two days before a decision is made on his fitness for the fourth Vodafone Test match," a CA spokesperson told cricket.Com.Au. The 22-year-old had hurt his right shoulder after diving for the ball at mid-wicket in the 86th over of India's innings on the fifth day of the drawn Sydney Test on Monday. PTI



Saina, Prannoy test Covid negative hours after +ve results, cleared for Thailand Open

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal and HS Prannoy were cleared to compete in the Thailand Open after they tested negative for Covid-19, invalidating their previous positive results that forced them out of the tournament hours earlier on a chaotic Tuesday.

Both the Badminton World Federation (BWF) and Badminton Association of India (BAI) confirmed the development.

"Both Saina Nehwal and HS Prannoy have been cleared to participate in the ongoing Yonex Thailand Open after the fourth-round tests reports confirmed that both shuttlers have been tested negative for Covid-19," BAI said in a statement.

The national body said it was possible after the national body took up the matter with BWF.

"BAI have taken up the matter with topmost BWF officials to ensure if tests were negative, matches for respective players should be rescheduled and no walkover is given," BAI added.

Earlier in the day, chaos gripped India's campaign at the tournament when Olympic medallist Saina was forced out following a positive Covid-19 test, while Prannoy's participation hung in balance after his sample came out negative following a positive result in a bizarre turn of



events.

Former Commonwealth Games champion Parupalli Kashyap too was forced to withdraw "due to close proximity" with wife and fellow shuttler Saina.

But the day ended on a better note for the Indians following the two shuttlers' clearance.

"BWF and Badminton Association of Thailand (BAT) can confirm three of the four players who tested positive for Covid-19 earlier today at the Asian Leg of the HSBC BWF World Tour have been

Team India denied basic facilities in Brisbane hotel

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Srikanth's nose bleeds after virus tests Former world number one shuttler Kidambi Srikanth got a bloody nose after undergoing multiple Covid-19 tests and miffed at the poor treatment of health officials at Thailand Open, the Indian on Tuesday called it "unacceptable".

"We take care of ourselves for the match not to come and shed blood for THIS. However, I gave 4 tests after I have arrived and I can't



clear to take their place in the draw," the apex body said. "They are confirmed as Saina Nehwal (India), HS Prannoy (India), and Jones Ralfy Jansen (Germany)," BWF added in its statement. The BWF said the said players who had earlier tested positive for the virus, are "not currently infected".

The matches will be rescheduled for Saina and Parupalli Kashyap for Wednesday. However, Kashyap's participation will depend on the result of his test conducted in the afternoon.

Regarding Prannoy, the BWF had said he would be retested after conflicting reports came out of earlier samples.

New Delhi: The Indian cricket team, which landed in Brisbane for the fourth and final Test against Australia, was in for a shock on Tuesday as it was lodged at a hotel which "lacked basic facilities", prompting an intervention from the BCCI top brass.

It is learnt that BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, secretary Jay Shah and CEO Hemang Amin have all got in touch with their Cricket Australia counterparts after complaints reached them and have been assured that the the Indian contingent will be made to feel comfortable

from here on.

"There was no room service or house keeping facilities. The gym is very basic and not of international standards and the swimming pool can't be accessed. This wasn't what they were promised when they checked in," a senior BCCI source told PTI.

India will be playing the fourth Test in the Queensland capital from January 15 where the surge of Covid-19 cases and a border lockdown with New South Wales has led to a strict hotel quarantine for the Ajinkya Rahane-led team.

Asked if the players were being allowed to mingle, the Board source said: "Yes, they have been provided with a team room and are allowed to meet each other inside the hotel."

When asked whether the team had protested with the hotel authorities, the source said: "When the manager enquired about how these things are not being taken care of, all they said was, 'the rule applies to both Indian and Australian teams. There is no one team that has been subjected to hard quarantine rules.'" PTI

Ankita in final round of Aus Open qualifiers

Melbourne: India's top-ranked woman player Ankita Raina moved to the final round of the Australian Open Qualifiers with a gutsy three-set win over world number 118 Katarina Zavatska but it was curtains for Ramkumar Ramanathan in the men's singles.

In the women's singles qualifiers being held in Dubai, the 180th ranked Ankita overcame a second-set lapse to win 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 in the second round against the Ukrainian.

She will next take on 20-year-old Serbian Olga Danilovic, ranked 183. It will be their first meeting between the two players.

It is Ankita's sixth attempt



to crack the singles main draw of a Grand Slam and she is now just one win away from creating history.

In the men's singles being held in Doha, Ramkumar lost his second round 3-6, 2-6 to Chinese Taipei's Tung-Lin Wu in 69 minutes. PTI

Sindhu, Praneeth lose on return

Bangkok: World champion P V Sindhu suffered a shock defeat on her return to international badminton, losing in three games to Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt in the opening round of YONEX Thailand Open Super 1000 event here on Tuesday.

Months after the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the international calendar, Sindhu, seeded sixth, returned to action with a 21-16, 24-26, 13-21

defeat to world No 18 Blichfeldt in a 74-minute battle.

In men's singles, world No 13 B Sai Praneeth too suffered a straight game loss to Thailand's Kantaphon Wangcharoen on his return to competition.

Frontrunner to represent India at the Olympics, Praneeth went down 16-21, 10-21 to the world No 15 Wangcharoen for only his second loss to the

Thailand player. Earlier in the day, the Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwik and Ashwini claimed a 21-11, 27-29, 21-16 win over the Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Widjaja.

However, the women's doubles pair of Ashwini and N Sikki Reddy couldn't cross the opening hurdle, going down 16-21, 7-21 to fourth seeded Korean pair of Kim So Yeong and Kong Hee Yong. PTI



Never felt low in the lockdown due to *Ala....*: Allu Arjun

At a reunion bash held at Geetha Arts office, Hyderabad on Tuesday, the team of *Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo* celebrated the first anniversary of the colossal hit. Barring Tabu, Jayaram, Sachin Khedekar, Easwari Rao and Murali Sharma, the other cast members were in attendance at the do.

Speaking later, film's writer-director Trivikram said the film demanded a lot from everyone after the script was approved by joint producer Allu Aravind. "As we locked the edit and exhibited the film to the key members before it opened for a theatrical release, Allu Bobby expressed his reservations about one particular scene. We immediately felt it was a valid suggestion and reshot it," the star director said.

He added that the interval scene — where Bantu (played by Allu Arjun) discovers who his real parent's are — was more crucial than the climax. "I was sure if we get it right, we would

pass the muster. Our confidence that the scene would come alive got a short in the arm when Eeswari Rao garu gave a brilliant take in the first shot of the scene," he recalled.

Allu Arjun said while the year has been bad for everyone, he couldn't complain as it was special because of the film. "It is my best film. If we had released it for summer, I would've lost out on experiencing such a wonderful feeling. I was mostly confined to home during the lockdown but I never felt low even for a second because wherever I've been, people just kept talking great things about the film, thereby giving me more energy. If it wasn't for it, I wouldn't have been in good spirits for sure," the actor stated.

The film revolves around Bantu who grows up being constantly subjected to his father's scorn, until he learns of his real parentage. He later finds a way to enter Vaikunthapuram, the home of his real parents and confront those who threaten his family.

I've been quite lucky: Nabha

Nabha Natesh talks to NAGARAG GOUD on injuring her left hand in Dubai, playing a swimmer in *Alludu Adhurs*, sharing the dance floor with Bellamkonda Sreenivas and reprising Radhika Apte in *Andhadhun* Telugu remake

Nabha Natesh hasn't had much time to celebrate the moderate success of the first big release of the industry, *Solo Brathuke So Better*, after theatres were shuttered for over eight months last year following the COVID-19 induced lockdown. Post the release, she immediately had to attend shooting for *Alludu Adhurs* and also juggle between the promotions of both the films. She still has the release jitters but is excited and pumped up for the release of *Alludu Adhurs* for Sankranti. In between, she also injured her left hand while she was in Dubai to film for *Andhadhun* Telugu remake. "I had to come back, get surgery done and take a couple of weeks rest. I was later required for the song shoot of *Alludu Adhurs* in Kashmir. Sekhar master supported me a lot and ensured that my right hand does the heavy lifting during the choreography. It was fun," she tells us.

As far as her role in *Alludu Adhurs* is concerned, she points out that it's a role with different variations and is different from her two previous outings — Chandini (from *iSmart Shankar*) and Amrutha (*SBSB*). "It's a role I wanted to play as an actress. I play a swimmer and I had to learn swimming for it. I would shoot for the film in the morning and take swimming classes in the evening. As a kid, I saw one of my friends get tanned after a swim session and out of fear I never took swimming classes. For the film though, the director conceived a lot of underwater shots, and it was quite a different experience shooting for them. It's a proper entertaining role with surprises as well," she shares.

While commercial films revolve around the male lead, relegating the heroine to a few scenes and shaking a leg with the hero, Nabha admits that she

has been quite lucky so far in the industry. "Irrespective of my running time, I always had something to do as an actress. I come from a theatre background and I'm a little greedy about roles. Maybe the universe is blessing me with those kinds of roles in spite of the films being commercial in nature and featuring stellar cast," she maintains.

Her co-star in *Alludu Adhurs*, Sreenivas, is known for his nimble-footed skills on the dance floor and the petite actress insists that dancing with him was a lot of fun. "He performs tough steps without rehearsals. It was inspiring. The title track is full of dance movements and we didn't have time for rehearsals. Jani master was the choreographer and we used to rehearse 10 minutes before giving the actual take. When your co-star is energetic, you will also have the *Josh* to pull off the moves," she points out, revealing that Sreenivas has an extremely positive outlook towards life and believes in hard work.

Nabha will be next seen in *Andhadhun* remake where she reprises the part that was played by Radhika Apte. The film being her first remake, she had her own concerns. "I was scared before going to the sets because we are remaking a national award-winning film but as I began to work, my nervousness eased off thanks to director (Merlapaka) Gandhi *garu* who knows what he wants. So I will not watch the original and get influenced by it. I will go by what the director wants me to do," Nabha concludes.



Believe India enters into distribution agreement with Rana's South Bay

Independent digital music distribution and artist services company, Believe, has recently entered into agreement with South Bay, YouTube Channel owned by actor, producer, and entrepreneur Rana Daggubati. The partnership aims to support upcoming music labels in creating path breaking collaborative music and taking it to a global scale with a mix of best technology and well-trained music experts.

Excited at the association, Rana said, "We are really excited to have Believe Distribution Services as our exclusive distribution partners at South Bay. Right from South

Bay's inception, we're looking for collaborations that will help us build edgy, quirky content and music is one of the verticals we are heavily focusing on. Right from giving a platform to independent artists to working on commercial content, we want to tap everything, and this partnership will help us reach our goals."

South Bay, which was launched recently, intends to associate with diverse, quirky content and dialogue between the creators and the audience. It is also planning to host a varied mix of content on their YouTube channel, from live chats, snackable short forms, news, music, animation, fiction, and non-fiction.



Charan tests negative for Covid-19; to join *Acharya* next week



Actor Ram Charan on Tuesday informed that he has tested negative for Covid-19 — more than 12 days after he took to Twitter to announce that he contracted the virus. "Happy to share that I have tested negative for Covid-19. Can't wait to be back to work very soon. Thank You again for all your good wishes!! (Sic)," he said in a statement.

Speaking about work, a little birdie tells us that Charan will join the sets of *Acharya* next week in Hyderabad, having allotted three days. Director Koratala Siva will be filming solo scenes on the actor in the three days. His combination scenes with dad Chiranjeevi will be shot next month. "Charan has given dates in March as well. All this while, he will also be shooting for SS Rajamouli's *RRR*," a source said.

Small films book their dates

Buoyed by the response *Solo Brathuke So Better* and *Krack* received at the ticket window despite cinema halls operating at 50 percent occupancy, the makers of many small films have decided to book their release slots. On Tuesday, AK Entertainments announced that their next, *Bangaru Bullodu*, with Allari Naresh in the lead role, will grace screens on January 23, while Prasanth Varma also stated that his anticipated next,

Zombie Reddy, will have a big screen rollout on February 5th. Prasanth initially announced the film for Pongal but with industry bigwigs advising him against competing for the festival, which is packed to the brim, he decided to defer it to February 5th. Similarly, Pradeep Machiraju-starrer *30 Kojullo Preminchatam*, which has been waiting for a proper release date for almost a year, has been reserved for a theatrical release on January 29. The film is a romantic musical, co-starring *Bigil* fame Amritha Aiyer.



Master clips leaked; makers urge fans not to share them

Ahead of its mammoth release today, a few clips of *Master*, starring Vijay and Vijay Sethupathi, were leaked online on Monday evening much to the shock of the makers and scores of fans of Vijay. Requesting for patience, film's director Lokesh Kanagaraj tweeted, "Dear all, it's been a 1.5 year long struggle to bring *Master* to u. All we have is hope that you'll enjoy it in theatres. If u come across leaked clips from the movie, please don't share it. Thank u all. Love u all. One more day and *Master* is all yours."

Production house XB Creators too urged fans and netizens to refrain from sharing the leaked content.

"Team *Master* requests you all not to forward/share any leaked content and if you come across anything of these sorts, please share it with us at report@blockx-piracy.com," a statement read from their Twitter handle.

It is believed that an employee of Sony Digital Company is behind the leak and the makers are planning to take legal action against him and the firm.

Initially, *Master* was scheduled to hit cinemas in April, 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, the release date was moved to 2021. In the Telugu states alone, the film is opening in 700 screens — a massive number bearing in the mind the Sankranti competition.

