

ANALYSIS 7
CURB REGULATORY
OVERREACH

MONEY 8
ONE WEB SECURES FUNDING
FROM SOFTBANK, HUGHES

SPORTS 11
INEXPERIENCED ATTACK
KEEPS OZ IN CHECK

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY JANUARY 16, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



I THINK MY ENTIRE
JOURNEY HAS BEEN
SPECIAL: KIARA

Page 12

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DAY AFTER JOINING BJP, PM'S TRUSTED AIDE NAMED FOR KEY POLLS IN UP

Former IAS officer Arvind Kumar Sharma was named BJP candidate for the legislative council polls in Uttar Pradesh, a day after he joined the party, days after he opted for voluntary retirement from the service. Elections to 12 Legislative Council seats will take place on January 28. Sharma -- who has spent years in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's team and is among his most-trusted aides -- had surprised many after he applied for voluntary retirement this week, two years before his term was to end. Reports suggest Sharma after his election as a legislator will be given a key position in the Yogi Adityanath government.



IN BENGAL MULTI-CRORE PONZI SCAM, ROSE VALLEY CHAIRMAN'S WIFE ARRESTED

In a key arrest by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in West Bengal's Rose Valley Ponzi scam estimated to be worth over ₹15,000 crore, Shubhra Kundu, the wife of the firm's chairman Goutam Kundu was taken into custody in Kolkata on Friday. Rose Valley was one of many Ponzi groups in Bengal exposed in 2013 that continue to provide ammunition to the opposition against the ruling Trinamool Congress especially ahead of elections due this year. The company came under the scanner along with Saradha scam, which too was a Ponzi scandal and triggered allegations of corruption against top leaders of the party.



MODI TO FLAG OFF 8 TRAINS TO BOOST CONNECTIVITY TO STATUE OF UNITY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off eight trains connecting different parts of the country to Kevadiya, where the Statue of Unity dedicated to Vallabhbhai Patel is located, on Sunday to boost seamless connectivity to the tribal region in Gujarat. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said on Friday that Modi will also inaugurate several other railway projects related to Gujarat during the event via video-conferencing. He will launch new broad-gauge line and the new station buildings of Dabhoi, Chandod and Kevadiya. These buildings have been designed aesthetically incorporating local features and modern passenger amenities.



300-400 PAK-TRAINED TERRORISTS READY TO INFILTRATE INTO JK: ARMY CHIEF

Around 300-400 terrorists trained in camps across the Line of Control (LoC) are ready to sneak into Jammu and Kashmir, Army chief General M M Naravane said on Friday. In his speech during the Army day parade, he also said that there has been 44 per cent increase in ceasefire violations that reflects Pakistan's sinister design. Pakistan often provides cover fire to help terrorists sneak into Jammu and Kashmir. Gen Naravane said India's active operations and strong counter-infiltration grid not only inflicted heavy losses on the enemy but they contained infiltration attempts as well.



EC gives nod to use its data only during Covid vaccination drive

5

What pandemic? Wagers on cockfights cross Rs 1,000cr

Digital payments make entry, make it easy for gamblers to flout law

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Covid-19 pandemic, bird flu scare or police restrictions failed to deter cockfights organised extensively in Andhra Pradesh. Surpassing past records, it is expected that this year, the amount placed as wager on cockfights across the state may have crossed Rs 1,000 crore.

In a bid to ensure that cash is not seized during police raids, organisers started allowing digital payment platforms. The Covid-19 pandemic also did not deter enthusiastic people from betting on the blood 'sport'. Though the police warned of stringent action, no political leaders, who encouraged the cockfight events, were arrested. The West Godavari police claimed 9,601 knives used in cockfights were seized and 1,105 cases registered. Cockfighting was banned in the state in 2014 under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and the AP Gaming Act, 1974. The ban was upheld again in 2018. Regardless of its legalities, cockfighting continues unabated in the State, especially in East and West Godavari districts.

Cockfighting was banned in AP in 2014 under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and AP Gaming Act, 1974.

At Bhimavaram in West Godavari district, known for high-stake cockfights during the three-day Sankranti festival, the 'sport' continued unchecked. A wager of Rs 10 lakh is said to have been placed on each round of fight in each of the 200 designated fighting rings. Despite Covid, only a few people were seen wearing face masks as the vast majority were uncovered. "Though the sport is illegal and police warned of strict action, I don't feel these had any impact on cockfight and gambling. I am told about Rs 1,000 crore were bet on the cockfights," said a resident of West Godavari.



Economic slowdown has no impact on liquor consumption this Sankranti

Visakhapatnam: By all accounts, the saying "Eat, drink and be merry" is not only popular with, but practiced by the people of AP through the year, but more so when it is the festive season. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic triggered economic slowdown, there seems to be no impact on the liquor consumption this Sankranti festival as the sales touch Rs 300 crore in the four days between January 12 and 15. According to the Andhra Pradesh Prohibition and Excise department's real-time consumption details, the sale was Rs 310 crore by 7 pm of Friday.



Role-based decision-making in Mission Karmayogi

2

Direct involvement of TDP, BJP men in temple attacks: DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh police on Friday stated that 'direct involvement' of 21 people associated with the TDP and BJP was found in the temple attack incidents. DGP Gautam Sawang said that the police arrested 15 persons of both the political parties even as the investigation continued and efforts were on to nab the remaining culprits.



Sawang said that the police investigation revealed deliberate attempts and involvement of groups with vested interest, and also some political parties, behind these incidents of attacks on temples. He said that people can give information about the attacks to the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on 9392903400 and cooperate for maintaining communal harmony in the state.

ecration of idols in temples) were committed by treasure trove hunters, believers in superstition, drunkards and others.

Soon after, the TDP and BJP blasted the DGP over his latest claims and said Sawang should shun his khaki uniform and instead don the ruling YSR Congress scarf. "You will aptly fit as the spokesman of YSRCP rather than the state DGP," TDP state president K Atchannaidu said in a tweet.

He neither spoke of any conspiracy nor political guerrilla warfare behind the 44 major cases of attacks on temples in recent months.

BJP state general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy termed the DGP's claims a "new political drama" and a brazen attempt to mislead people, only to cover up police inefficiency. On January 13, Sawang had told a press conference that most of the offences (like des-

The DGP's line was in complete contrast to the stand taken by the ruling brass, including Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who had hit out at the opposition saying the attacks on temples were part of a "conspiracy and political guerrilla warfare" against his government to disrupt the welfare agenda. On Friday, the DGP hurriedly convened another press conference and listed out nine cases in which a total of 15 people, allegedly workers and sympathisers of TDP and BJP, were arrested for carrying out false propaganda related to attacks on temples. Six others were still at large, he added.

RSS plans major demo with prominent seers in north AP

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

At a time when BJP is vigorously working to seize the moment and strengthen in Andhra Pradesh, its ideological parent and the umbrella organisation of several Hindu centric outfits, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), is planning a huge demonstration in February with seers, peetadhipathi drawn from across the country in north Andhra against the acts of vandalism in temples across the state.



While it is not immediately known whether RSS chief Mohan Bhagawat will participate in the demonstration, it is reliably learnt important top leaders of the 'Sangh Parivar' -- the various affiliates of the

RSS like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) -- and most importantly the present head pontiff of Sri Pejavar Adhokshaja Matha in Udupi, popularly known as Udipi Pejavar mutt, Sri Vishwprasanna Theertha will

also participate in the massive demonstration planned in Vizag. Sources hinted that should not be surprised even Bhagawat turns up at the demonstration.

AP now has 4.05 cr voters, reveals CEO

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The total number of voters in Andhra Pradesh touched 4.05 crore, up from 3.93 crore during the General Elections in April 2019, at the end of the Special Summary Revision (SSR) on Friday.



State Chief Electoral Officer K Vijayanand published the final electoral roll here on Friday.

The state's elector-to-population ratio was 752, and gender ratio 1,025, the CEO said. East Godavari topped the list with 43.12 lakh voters while Vizianagaram was at the bottom with 19 lakh.

Andhra Pradesh now has 2,04,71,506 female electorates, 1,99,65,737 male voters and 4,135 third gender voters, according to a release from the CEO.

Vijayanand said the number of polling stations in the state has been increased from 45,836 to 45,917 with 1,500 voters each as the upper limit. "We have rationalised the polling stations by creating 84 new and merging three," he added.

The state has 66,844 service electors and 7,070 overseas electors, as per the final SSR. The gross number of voters was 4,05,08,222, including 2,83,301 first timers in the 18-19 age group.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Margashirsha & Krishna Paksha Panchangam

Tithi : 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 Muhurtam: NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 32/19

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 06:49 am

Sunset: 06:02 pm

Current Weather Conditions Updated January 15, 2021 5:00 PM

Pastor arrested after tall claims on YouTube

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A video that went viral on a social media platform led to the arrest of pastor S Praveen Chakravarty, a native of Kakinada.



Crime Investigation Department sleuths nabbed Praveen Chakravarty on charges of posting objectionable videos on YouTube and creating disharmony and conflict. Praveen Chakravarty's videos allege that his mission was to vandalise Hindu deities and he also claimed to have desecrated many idols. One S Venkata Sri Lakshminarayana from Guntur lodged a complaint with the CID on Thursday, following

which additional DGP PV Sunil Kumar filed a case against Praveen Chakravarty after verifying that his YouTube posts were against a particular religion. Police filed a case against the pastor under Sections 153A, 153B, 1C, 505, 295A, 124A and 115.

Controversial pastor has a chequered history

MARATHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ VIJAYAWADA

Complaints lodged against controversial pastor Praveen Chakravarty by women reportedly duped by him, have once again shifted focus to his criminal way of life.

It may be recalled that the pastor had in a YouTube video claimed that he desecrated the idols of Hindu deities and created hundreds of Christian villages. The police registered cases against the pastor on complaints filed by a Dalit

woman Varalakshmi alleging that he had duped her. She lodged the complaints with Sarpavaram and Kakinada Two-Town Police stations. These complaints had been lodged in February 2016 against Pravin Chakravarty, who is running a children's home and Mother Teresa English Medium School.

At that time, she had claimed before the media that the police did not do justice to her. In a similar allegation, another Dalit woman Sravya

claimed that she was duped by Pravin. She lodged a complaint with Sarpavaram police in East Godavari district in March 2016. She attached screenshots of her online chats with Pravin Chakravarty as evidence and also expressed doubts over the police investigation in the case. Talking to the media, she had alleged that the police were interrogating her instead of questioning Pravin Chakravarty.

At that time, she had claimed before the media that the police did not do justice to her. In a similar allegation, another Dalit woman Sravya

Transforming decision-making from rule to role-based is one of the objectives of Mission Karmayogi.

Role-based decision-making in Mission Karmayogi

Commonly, administrative roles are connected to the positions (posting) administrators occupy as they progress in their careers. In rule-based roles, decision-making, in the words of Paul Appleby, is conceived to be a "mechanical, merely technical, unvarying" activity, leading to "wholly scientific or technical and wholly right decisions".

On the other hand, role-based decision-making focuses on the process used by administrators to make decisions in different situations.

The most common process is the typical bureaucratic way flowing from the ideas of Max Weber. The steps in this process are — bureaucrats identify a goal based on public interest, make an exhaustive list of all possible courses of action with their consequences, and decide on a course of action that is most likely to lead to goal achievement.

The assumptions are that administrators know and are able to determine a goal based on public interest; politics has no role in decision-making, and policy-making is separate from implementation.

This process of conventional decision-making is found to be slow, costly, ineffective and unable to respond to unforeseen changes. To get over this, administrators reduce the extent of analysis by examining only a limited number of alternative courses of action.

Issues are addressed individually rather than in a holistic manner, no visionary goals are set, and the objective is to give small solutions to what are largely more complex problems.

When new problems arise, these are addressed through a new round of incremental decision-making. This short-term focus leads to faster and

Administrators use two variants of the incremental process. If the political environment so demands, the incremental approach is reduced to a hands-off role in which administrators operate only within the latitude permitted by the political executive

more politically relevant decision-making. This is called the incremental way of making decisions.

Administrators use two variants of the incremental process. If the political environment so demands, the incremental approach is reduced to a hands-off role in which administrators operate only within the latitude permitted by the political executive.

Administrators also introduce an element of long-term by following a mixed-method, which consists of setting a larger goal and then using incremental actions to achieve

short-term objectives. In this way, the incremental process acquires a long-term vision.

The pragmatism of incremental decision-making is based on the 'principle of bounded rationality' developed by Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon. The premise is that reality is complex and cannot be completely understood by any human brain; therefore, capacity to solve problems is also limited. As a result, human beings satisfice — settle for a course of action that is 'good enough' for the purposes at hand.

The conventional and the



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

incremental processes serve the welfare of all. Often, this permits the wealthy, outspoken and powerful to veer decisions in their direction. As a result, special interests of the poor and disadvantaged tend to be relegated to a subordinate status. This is addressed by following the advocacy way of selecting a course of action. In the advocacy way of

decision-making, administrators actively pursue the interests of a less-endowed group (e.g. tribals, differently-abled) and behave like lawyers arguing the case of their clients.

The conventional process of deciding on a course of action was overhauled in the 1970s. This is called the strategic process, and owes its origins to the private sector when managements of large corporates started to practice a strategic process in order to deal with an increasing uncertain future. The strategic process is oriented towards actions, results, and implementation.

It promotes broader and more diverse participation in the planning process, places more emphasis on understanding the external context, assumes competitive behaviour among people (and groups), and focuses on a community's strengths and

weaknesses in the context of external opportunities and challenges.

Communication to change the mindsets of people is a completely different way of decision-making. The changed motivations and emotions, in turn, drive action. Administrators aim to develop a public realm in which individuals can engage in free and open communication. Public interest also becomes the interest of plural communities, which is known through communication and discourse.

Some of the processes used by administrators are dialogue and discussion, consultation on projects during design and implementation, and the use of appropriate type of language and mediation in order to evolve consensus among individuals and groups of

people. Social media has spawned a new way of discourse and communication, having the potential to influence action by giving new meanings to information and issues.

Therefore, role-based decision-making involves knowing different ways of choosing paths of action, where all seem to be appropriate.

The selection of a particular path depends on the deep structure of assumptions, beliefs, and values held by administrators as well as requirements of the situation.

The task before the Mission Karmayogi is to build the capacity of administrators in order to empower them to choose and practice one way of being and doing over another.

(Author has a PhD from the USA and a DLitt from Kanchi University. The article is based on his research and practice and views are personal)

Local secretariats told to handle LED lights system

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has directed Panchayat Raj and Rural Development department to take all necessary steps to strengthen and revamp the LED streetlight scheme-Jagananna Palle Velugu in the State. In its directions, the State government asked the department to ensure effective maintenance of streetlights by attending to non-glowing LED streetlights within 48 hours from the time of receipt of the complaint.

The government entrusted the repair and maintenance activities of LED streetlights to the village secretariats headed by Panchayat secretary with an objective to ensure 100 percent perfect maintenance of LED street light in all districts.

The village secretariat headed by Panchayat secretary was made responsible for the operation and maintenance of LED



Street lights in coordination with AP DISCOMs of AP energy department. The government has directed to involve 2.6 lakh village volunteers into the new system in coordination of AP State Energy Efficiency Development Corporation

(APSEEDCO). Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Pedireddi Ramachandra Reddy chaired a review with officials of his department and said that the State government was very keen on enhancing the quality of life of the people in

the rural areas. The State government was considering the rural development as an important segment of total economic development of State.

"Successful maintenance of LED streetlights is our main priority. Improved light quality will enhance safety, security and visual comfort in villages and provide better quality of life to people. Government is very keen to ensure illumination of every street and every village and bring down complaints to an extremely minimum level in a phased manner," he said.

As per the new system, a web application of desktop and mobile phone based platform will be developed for ensuring transparency in handling the complaints and a toll free number shall be established and made available for public domain for reporting of non-glowing complaints.

Economic slowdown has no impact on liquor consumption...

Continued from page 1

This was more than Pongal in 2020, when it touched Rs 289.23 crore in the four days of the Sankranti season.

Consumption of liquor has of late become an essential part of festival celebration and this trend is on the rise with each passing year.

The Sankranti season began on January 12 and continued for the next three days. The festive season has generated good revenue for the excise department.

Guntur, Godavari districts and Krishna recorded far higher sales than other districts. The sale in the two Godavari districts where cockfights are popular hovered around Rs 60 crore.

As cockfights are being organised despite the ban, facilities for the participants and onlookers were made on a large scale. The organisers supplied unlimited liquor and food. Huge stock of liquor bot-



les and food was dumped at the camps and people were assigned the work for distribution of the same systematically.

In total, 2,98,468 IML cases and 82,402 cases of beer had already been sold in the four days by 7 pm on January 16.

The Andhra Pradesh government is planning to ban liquor sale completely, but in a phased manner.

If all goes as per its plan, the state should be liquor-free by

2024. AP will join only four other Indian states — Gujarat, Mizoram, Bihar and Nagaland — in banning the bottle. However, given the liquor consumption pattern, the blanket ban on the liquor may cause ripple effects.

Some districts are showing a negative trend in liquor consumption while a few in the positive growth this month, January compared to the previous corresponding time of 2020.

What pandemic? Wagers on cockfights cross Rs 1,000cr

Continued from page 1

The fighting roosters whose prices range from Rs 25,000 to Rs 2 lakh were sold like hot cakes in farms in Ravulapalem, Bhimavaram, Undi and various other places in Konaseema region.

The prices are fixed by the rearers based on the variety and its colour. The most popular species for the rooster fights were 'myla', 'rasangi', 'kaki', 'dega', 'poola', 'kodikaki', 'kakinemali', and 'teethuva'. Pachchakaki and 'kakinemali' are considered the most powerful and prize-winning of them all.



RSS plans major demo with prominent seers in north AP

Continued from page 1

It's well known the role played by former head pontiff Udipi Pejarvar Mutt, Sri Vishvesha Theertha Swami, who passed away in 2019, in the Ram Janam Bhoomi movement and for cow protection. RSS looks at the Udipi Pejarvar Mutt, one of the Ashta Mathas belonging to the "Dvaita" school of philosophy founded by Sri Madhvacharya, and considers the mutt as its 'anchor' in south India. The late seer had mentored many senior BJP leaders like LK Advani, Murali Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharathi and also the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Pejarvar mutt's words carry major influence over the RSS. Now, it is learnt that the Udipi

temple, revered by many Hindus. They strongly felt that its high time Hindu society needs to be 'woken up' from the deep slumber in Andhra Pradesh.

The attacks on Hindu temples in Andhra Pradesh are prominently discussed during a recent meeting between Mohan Bhagawat and Sri Vishwprasanna Theertha during the former's visit to Bengaluru a few days ago. It was at this Bengaluru meeting the Andhra demonstration was finalised.

Though the attacks on temples have been going on across Andhra Pradesh since some time, Hindu outfits, especially RSS, are pointing that vandalism in the state reached a peak with the Ramatheertham incident since the desecration of Lord Rama idol took place in the most ancient

temple, revered by many Hindus. They strongly felt that its high time Hindu society needs to be 'woken up' from the deep slumber in Andhra Pradesh.

As per the preliminary itinerary chalked out, the seers drawn from various parts of the country will first visit Ramatheertham temple in Vizianagaram district, offer special prayers and then stage a demonstration in Vizag.

"We have been hinted from our headquarters that Udipi Pejarvar Mutt pontiff and other seers from across the country will be visiting Ramatheertham temple and there will be a programme followed by it. More details are awaited," a senior RSS functionary who looks after the activities in three districts of north Andhra told The Pioneer.

Direct involvement of TDP, BJP men in temple attacks...

Continued from page 1

The DGP said that the attacks were part of a larger attempt to disturb communal harmony in the State and cause unrest and disturbance. He said that the police found direct and specific involvement of political parties in nine temple attack cases and this shows it was a larger game plan.

Sawang warned that police would take stern action against the culprits including those who misused social media to spread rumours about the temple attacks.

The DGP said that the investigation into nine cases showed involvement of persons associated with the TDP and BJP in the incidents and further investigation is underway in the remaining cases. "For instance, the involvement of cadres of TDP and BJP was found in the

desecration of idols and pasting of impure material to Lord Vinayaka idol in Rajahmundry. A case regarding this was registered in Bommuru Police Station," Sawang said.

He said that during investigation it was found that the material pasted to lord Vinayaka idol was not impure as alleged by false propaganda and FSL report also confirmed this. He said that four accused were arrested for making false propaganda.

The DGP further said that the involvement of four people, two each associated with the TDP and BJP, was found in nine incidents of temple attacks in AP.

In the Vinayaka idol desecration incident, the involvement of Vellapalli Prasad Babu @ Babukhan Choudary and Chitkena Sandeep, both cadres of TDP and Adapa Varaprasad

and Karturi Srinivasarao of the BJP was found, he said.

TDP activist Challa Madhusudhan Reddy was involved in the Goddess Saraswathi idol damage incident in Guntur district, TDP's Bojjana Subba Reddy was involved in garlanding slippers to Aanjaneya statue incident in Kodalaveedu of Kadapa district and Golla Peddaiah, Gadde Ramanjaneyulu, Barne Jayaramudu and Syed Fakrudin, all TDP supporters, were involved in desecration and damage of Maddamma temple in Kurnool district for treasure hunting, he said.

The TDP's Viswantha Reddy who is a temple committee chairman was involved in the desecration of Aanjaneya Swamy idol legs and stealing of hundi in Marlamanda village in Kurnool district, the State police chief said.

He said that six persons belonging to the TDP were involved in the damage to the idol of Gods in Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple at Singarayakonda in Prakasam district.

Two TDP activists spread false news about the breaking of Vinayaka idol hands which happened a long time ago at Yetigyrampeta in Visakhapatnam, Sawang said.

Regarding BJP, one Konchada Ravikumar who is Dompert BJP Mandal Secretary was involved in spreading false news about the damage of Hanuman statue which had earlier been damaged due to falling of a tree, the DGP said.

He said that BJP activist Dharmavarapu Acharya was involved in spreading false propaganda about breaking of Veena of Saraswathi Devi by people of other religions but the

truth was that it was broken a long time ago due to wear and tear in Etcherla in Srikakulam district, Sawang said.

The TDP immediately spit fire on the DGP for blurring out "blatant lies".

"Only two days ago you blamed thieves, drunks, insane persons and wild animals for destruction of temple idols. How come it has suddenly become political conspiracy," TDP AP president K Atchanaidu questioned the DGP.

"Your inefficiency in arresting the actual culprits involved has been exposed and now you are labelling some persons who forwarded social media posts as TDP sympathisers," he lashed out.

Vishnuvardhan Reddy said: "It is so disgraceful. People of AP lost faith in the police. Are the police working for the people or the YSRCP?" he asked.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 50,180 (10 gm)	
₹ 230	
SILVER	
₹ 70,600 (1kg)	
₹ 100	
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

Pastor arrested after tall claims...

Continued from page 1

Chakravarty is associated with, has 3,600 pastors and has changed 699 villages in AP into Christian villages.

He further alleged that Praveen Chakravarty raped a Dalit woman in Sarbavaram village in East Godavari district and no action was taken on him. Deodhar demanded a high-level probe should be initiated into the claims by Praveen Chakravarty.

He further said that US-based NGOs have pumped in about Rs 90 crore to the organisation run by the pastor.

Earlier, some locals had complained to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the flow of foreign funds and crores amassed by Pravin Chakravarty under the garb of social service. Pravin owned a big hotel and has a private army and openly flaunts his wealth and position, they said. Out of half a dozen cases registered against him, majority of them related to duping women.

Based on his claims on a YouTube video, the police registered cases against Pravin Chakravarty under various Sections. The conversations Pravin has had with a donor agency based in the USA through Twitter too created a

Controversial pastor has...

Continued from page 1

row.

He claims to have 3,642 pastors in his association, and has converted over 699 villages into Christian villages and exuded confidence of turning another 700.

Pravin Chakravarty's organisation receives donations from the US based Water of Life and Setfree Alliances.

Earlier, the Legal Rights Protection Forum complained to the Enforcement Directorate to probe into the funds received by Pravin to the tune of Rs 93 crore and how the funds have been spent.

On December 5 last year, the directorate complained to the Ministry of Home Affairs seeking it to cancel the licences of the organisation

being run by Pravin Chakravarty and its two US based donor agencies. Surprisingly, there was no action on these complaints.

The conversation Pravin Chakravarty has had with representatives of donor agencies that he is going to create more and more Christian villages by pulling down Hindu temples has been worrying the Hindu organisations.

BJP Dharmika Parishad AP president Tumuluri Chaitanya has opined that there is no use registering cases under non-bailable sections against Pravin Chakravarty.

He demanded Pravin Chakravarty to reveal the names of villages which he had converted into Christian villages.

India to stop...

Continued from page 1

District collector A Md Imtiaz said that the district received 45,000 doses of vaccine and is distributed to 30 session sites following the guidelines maintaining temperature, the vaccine will be administered to health workers from Saturday. The collector inspected the arrangements at the New GGH, Vijayawada.

He said that there would be two session sites in each constituency, and instructed the officials concerned to provide uninterrupted power supply to the session sites. Each centre will have a waiting hall, registration room, vaccination room and observation room.

As per the instructions of

the state government the first phase vaccination will be given to the health workers and the second phase will be given to frontline workers, later to people above 50 year and to people below 50 years with comorbidities.

In the third phase vaccination will be given to the rest of the population. As many as 36,007 health workers have registered for the vaccine, said the collector.

At each location, a team of six staff will work together to vaccinate 100 beneficiaries per day. Each team would be supervised by a doctor. Every day about 100 beneficiaries will be vaccinated.

SMS messages have been sent to all the beneficiaries who have been identified for vaccination.

Conspiracy behind desecration of temples, but not political: RSS brass

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
VIJAYAWADA

With the arrest of the controversial pastor Pravin Chakravarti of Kakinada, it has been established that there was no political conspiracy whatsoever to unseat YSRCP government in the state, according to senior RSS figures in the state.

The arrest points to a Christian conspiracy against the government, they said. The RSS functionaries say that their suspicion that some pastors were misusing Christianity as a shield and taking advantage of the situation was proven correct by the arrest of Pravin Chakravarti following his objectionable and insensitive statements made in a YouTube video. The pastor was arrested based on a complaint filed by one Singam Lakshmi Narayana of Guntur.

Over the past year, Hindu religious organisations have been getting increasingly restless over the desecration of temples. The RSS, which has taken a serious view of the attacks, has been claiming that there was no political conspiracy but political parties have tried to use the incidents to derive mileage.

The RSS is of the view that some pastors, taking advantage of the fact that it is "their government" in the state, resorted to the attacks on Hindu tem-



ples out of sheer recklessness.

RSS seniors say that Pravin's arrest justifies their suspicion. In fact, RSS functionaries reportedly sent a video clip of Pravin making sensitive remarks against Hindu religion to the DGP a week ago.

The RSS is of the view that the Jagan government is hesitating to take action against such pastors for fear of losing the Christian vote bank.

A section in the RSS believes that the attacks are the result of a tussle for supremacy among pastors. The pro and anti-

Jagan groups among pastors have been trying to get a grip over the community, this section believes.

At least half a dozen pastors who conduct gospel meetings enjoy a lot of popularity among Christians. Some of these pastors were inclined towards the TDP in the past and others, towards the YSRCP. With Jagan coming to power, a majority of them swung towards the YSRCP. However, after coming to power, Jagan kept them at a distance, leading to some discontent.

One Rajesh, who enjoyed considerable clout among the community, mobilised Dalit Christians for the YSRCP prior to the elections and campaigned extensively for the YSRCP. Using social media and other media, the anti-TDP campaign was launched through videos and other forms.

After a few months, Rajesh started raising his voice against Jagan, soon after he was arrested in a case.

Another section believes that some pastors who had

been against Jagan were behind the attacks on Hindu temples, their intention being to malign the image of the YSRCP Government.

As one, the RSS functionaries point to the fact that Pravin has no links whatsoever with any political outfit. Several cases were registered against him, including those in Saravaram.

They say that some pastors have been attacking temples acting as per a plan. This has led to people feeling that the attacks had taken place with the knowledge of Jagan.

According to Dalit Christian Forum chairman Perika Vara Prasad, society should see through the designs of people with vested interests to malign Jagan personally and the Christian community as a whole.

"Would any Chief Minister bring disrepute to his own government? How can the CM distance himself from people of a particular faith?" Vara Prasad said.

He said that seniors in the ruling party treat all religions and castes equally as they want support from all these religious groups.

"Christians are mainly peace loving. People of all religions live in AP in harmony. Hindu and Christians should beware of the conspiracy being hatched by some vested interests to bring a bad name to the Christian community," he said.

Stop charade over Gopuja, Atchannaidu tells Jagan



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP AP president K Atchannaidu on Friday advised the Jaganmohan Reddy Government not to use 'Gopuja' (cow worship) programme, considered by Hindus as 'the most sacred' for deriving political mileage and thereby to create religious differences in the State.

Atchannaidu wondered how the Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues could begin 'cow worship' programmes at the places of worship when they were spearheading attacks on temples and burning sacred chariots. Creating ill will and differences between different religions would not be good for the State as a whole, he said.

In a statement here, the TDP leader said that Jagan has a knack for 'doing bankrupt politics' in each and every issue right from the beginning. "Cow worship was also part of

his strategy to mix religion with politics. Nobody would believe the Chief Minister's trust or faith in any God or religion going by how he had not shown any sympathy in the murder of his own uncle YS Vivekananda Reddy," Atchannaidu said.

He said that the cow was considered a hallmark of the Hindu way of life since the Vedic times. In recent times, many cows at Gosalas had died because of lack of fodder and proper care. Instead of resolving such matters to rescue the cows, the Chief Minister had started a drama in the name of 'Gopuja' at the temples. The ruling party's ruthless policies had struck fear in the devotees of all religions in the State, he said.

Atchannaidu said that the ruling party would be reduced to ashes in the bonfires that it was setting ablaze to create clashes between different religions in the State.

CM participates in Gopuja Mahotsavam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday participated in Gopuja Mahotsavam organised by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) at the Municipal Stadium at Narasaraopeta of Guntur district here on Friday.

After extending Sankranti greetings to the people present the Chief Minister performed the rituals as per Hindu tradition and presented silk robes, garlanded a cow and the calf after the puja. Puja was performed to 108 cows at the event.

As part of the Hindu Dharma campaign, the State Endowments Department along with TTD conducted Gopuja at 2,679 temples across the State.

Ministers Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao, Mekathoti Sucharita, Cherukuvada Sriranganadharaju, TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy, Deputy Speaker Kona Raghupathi, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, public representatives, TTD officials and Vedic scholars were present at the event.

Malika Garg takes charge as Addl SP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Malika Garg, IPS, on Thursday took charge as the Additional Superintendent of Police (Admin) of Krishna district.

Garg later met the SP, Rabindranath Babu, and briefed him on her appointment. On the occasion, she said that she was happy to take charge as the District Additional SP and would do her best for the welfare and effective policing to the people and would have a special focus on women's safety.

She said that the State Government has undertaken a number of initiatives and would work to bring government schemes closer to the people. The police force under the district SP would work very well and would be happy to work with everyone in the district.

Garg is a 2015 IPS cadre officer from Delhi and had been posted to West Bengal as an officer in the year 2015. She served as ACP in Chandan Nagar, West Bengal, and Deputy Commandant RAF (Rapid Action Force) and later transferred to Andhra Pradesh IPS.

SEB ASP Vakula Jindal, Special Branch DSP Dharmendra, DSP Ramesh Reddy, AR DSP Vijay Kumar and other police officials congratulated the Additional SP.

YSRCP leaders change tune to suit their master's voice: Ashok Babu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLC P Ashok Babu on Friday accused the ruling YSRCP leaders and ministers of changing their stand on the panchayat elections only to suit their convenience and not in the interests of the

State or its people.

In a statement here, the TDP MLC named a lengthy list of ministers and YSRCP leaders who he claimed changed their tune to suit the occasion. "Without any fear, they were adopting double standards and telling lies

openly. Obviously, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy does not have the confidence in the effectiveness of his own rule," Ashok Babu said.

He added that a Chief Minister who speaks of credibility in public life was

afraid of facing the people now.

Ashok Babu asserted that the YSRCP leaders at all levels were clearly scared of seeking votes from the people at this juncture. There was all around disappointment against the Jagan

regime's policies, he said. "It was indeed shameful on the part of the YSRCP to urge for the local polls at the peak of virus infections but speaking against the same despite the prevailing virus lower risk now," he said.

The TDP leader said that

if the ruling party had any commitment to democratic ideals, it should face the people in elections in February. "The Government should file a petition in the High Court for revoking the stay on the local polls. Only out of narrow political inter-

ests, the YSRCP was attacking all the constitutional institutions with utter disregard for the spirit of democracy. The general public were eager to teach a strong lesson to the Jaganmohan Reddy rule at the earliest given opportunity," he said.

Baby boy survives serious accident with minor injuries

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A baby boy defied death and survived a serious car accident with minor injuries to his right side of the face.

The incident took place in Ashok Vihar of Upparpalli area under Rajendra Nagar police station on Thursday.

The baby boy was playing in front of the gate of his house when the incident took place.

The car driver, who had noticed the baby boy playing near the gate, did not apply brakes but went ahead. The boy's head got entangled behind the rear wheels of the car, which dragged the body for some distance before coming to a halt. In spite of the serious accident, the boy survived the accident with injuries to his right side of the face. The acci-



dent was recorded in the CCTV cameras present there. The locals alerted the parents about the accident. They immediately rushed the boy to hospital. The car was identified as the cab service that drops employees at the apartment complex. The parents lodged a complaint with Rajendra Nagar police.

Gold paste worth 19.98L seized at RGIA

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A passenger who tried to hoodwink customs officials with gold paste at Rajiv Gandhi international airport, Shamshabad has been arrested by the Hyderabad customs officials on Friday.

The officials seized gold worth Rs 20 lakh from his possession while he was trying to smuggle gold.

With a specific intelligence, air intelligence officials of Hyderabad Customs unit intercepted a passenger who arrived from Dubai in 6E-025 flight on Friday.

"On close examination, the officials found gold in paste form concealed in specially stitched pocket in waist portion of jeans trouser," said customs official.

As he couldn't produce required documents to verify the gold, he was taken into custody.

Police to take possession of Akhila's mobiles

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The city police have stepped up investigation in the Pravin Rao and his brothers' kidnap case in which former minister of Andhra Pradesh Akhila Priya figured as the main accused.

The police have been contemplating to move the court to take possession of two cell phones, which belong to Akhila Priya which the police said remained in her locked houses at the time of her arrest, as the police detected that she had used two phones to converse with the kidnapers. To speak with kidnapers, she used another mobile phone, which is a temporary one.

The police discovered that she used two mobile phones

during her journey from Vijayawada to Lodha apartments in Kukatpally.

The police feel that analysing the call details in her mobile phones would throw more clues in the case.

Meanwhile, the police have been searching for Jagatvikhyat Reddy, brother of Akhila Priya, Bhargava Ram's mother Kiranmayi, Bhargava Ram's brother Chandrahaas as the police are pretty sure that these persons were knowledgeable about the kidnap conspiracy.

On the other hand, the police have been searching for Bhargava Ram and Guntur Seenu, who are at large.

Currently, the police took at least 12 persons into their custody in connection with the case.

SHORT TAKES

Subbaiah's passing a irreparable loss, says Naidu

VIJAYAWADA: Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday expressed deep shock over the demise of former minister Patnam Subbaiah. Naidu said that the departed leader had rendered unforgettable services as a doctor, a three-time MLA and as a minister during his long political career. The former minister had strived hard tirelessly for the well being and prosperity of the weaker sections in society. In a statement, the TDP chief conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members. Subbaiah's death had left a vacuum that cannot be filled in the Palamaneru Assembly segment, Naidu said, adding that it was a big loss for the entire Chittoor district.

Air Force Academy to celebrate Golden Jubilee today

The Air Force Academy of Indian Air Force (IAF) based at Dundigal in Hyderabad will be celebrating fifty years of its glorious existence on Saturday. Air Force Academy has been rendering yeoman's service since its inception by training and commissioning brave and distinguished officers of the IAF from its famed portals. Several events such as golden jubilee marathon, academy utsav, blood donation camp, activities by Air Force Wives' Welfare Association (AFWWA) and others have been planned on the occasion of celebrations. The celebrations will culminate on January 19, 2021 with a training workshop and the release of Indian Postal Department's special cover by Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhaduria, the Chief of the Air Staff. The foundation stone of the Air Force Academy was laid by former President of India late Dr Zakir Hussain on October 11, 1967.

Chicago-Hyd weekly flight starts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The first Air India non-stop flight to Hyderabad from Chicago landed at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here early on Friday.

Airport officials and AI employees welcomed flight AI-108 with 237 passengers and 16 crew members, a press release from GMR group which manages the airport said.

Arriving passengers were treated to a cake cutting ceremony intermeshed with cultural events and photo opportunity with all sanitisation and social distancing protocols adhered to.

Later in the day, flight AI 107—the same aircraft— took

off to Chicago with 226 passengers and 16 crewmembers at around 12.50 PM, amid fanfare.

Senior officials from GMR Hyderabad International Airport along with Air India staff and other airport stakeholders were present at the terminal to see them off, the release said.

Flight AI-107 will operate once a week every Friday, departing from Hyderabad at 1250 hrs (IST) to arrive in Chicago at 1805 hrs (CST/Local US time) the same day.

The return flight AI-108 will operate every Wednesday leaving Chicago at 2130 hrs (CST/Local US Time) to arrive in Hyderabad at 0140 hrs (IST).

Army fulfils Nyorah Patra's dream, makes her day

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Unlike other children who want to play with dolls in their own fantasy world, the seven-and-a-half-year-old Nyorah Patra dabs around with paintings like her mother and spends time listening to music.

She decided to spend time with the soldiers of Indian Army on the Army Day celebrated on Friday.

She developed interest in Armed Forces when she watched the Republic Day Parade from her home in Hyderabad last year. Her curiosity further increased whenever her parents narrated the stories of sacrifices of brave soldiers.

A soldier's life always inspiring for many and Nyorah Patra was no different.

She was awestruck to watch the grandeur of the event and especially the exhibit of Indian Armed Forces.

By the time the bravery medals were presented, her parents narrated the roles and responsibilities of the soldiers and sacrifices they made for the nation.

While narrating the tales,



Nyorah Patra participating in Army Day celebrations in Secunderabad on Friday.

her father pulled out a few videos from social media and explained the toughest conditions in which soldiers discharge their duties.

Nyorah was so much connected to the selfless contribution of the soldiers that she fancied the uniform and wanted to see herself in the attire.

She wanted to meet the Army in person and started drawing a lot of paintings on the same theme.

Looking at her enthusiasm, her parents wrote to the Prime

Minister seeking permission to allow her to attend the celebration s of either Independence Day or Republic Day.

Much to their surprise, PMO made a special arrangement for Nyorah visit to Army establishment in Hyderabad.

A few days later, she was invited to Indian Artillery establishment at Golconda.

Nyorah was again wonder-struck by seeing for the first time real Army personnel and the visit left a mark in her heart and mind. Her joy doubled

when it was revealed that she might be one of the guests attending Army Day and Army Veteran's Day celebration.

She was escorted by an officer of Colonel's rank and two soldiers from her home to Veerula Sainik Smarak where Major General RK Singh, General Officer Commanding, Telangana and Andhra Sub Area, and the veterans graciously received her like a queen. She coyly in her own small way thanked them as they interacted with her and took

Nyorah developed interest in Armed Forces when she watched the Republic Day Parade from her home in Hyderabad last year.

photos with her which made her day.

Nyorah lives with her parents Samir Patra and Varsha Patra who returned to India after a long-stay abroad only to raise her in India. They have extreme admiration for the Armed Forces.

They believe that the experience of being invited to attend the Army Day and Veteran's Day celebration will leave a very strong impression in Nyorah's heart and mind. They sincerely hope that she grows up to see herself as a part of it.

Cops recover Bonsai stolen from ex-DGP's residence

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police recovered the expensive Bonsai tree which was stolen from the residence of retired Director General of Police V. Appa Rao in Jubilee hills and arrested the person accused in the case. The age of plant estimated to be 15 years.

The accused has been identified as Gollapudi Prasannanjanyulu, 21, a construction worker. The bonsai tree in front of the residence of retired DGP's house at Road No 18, Jubilee Hills, caught the attention of the accused while he was roaming in the area.

"Keeping in view the high demand for the tree in the market, the accused hatched a plan to steal the plant with the help of his friend Abhishek," said Jubilee Hills Detective Inspector A Ramesh. As per the plan on last Sunday (January 10) both the accused reached the spot at around 3.10 pm on a motorcycle stole Bonsai plant.

Yediyurappa non-committal on reallocation of portfolios

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Friday indicated that he may assign ministries to seven newly inducted Ministers after Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to the state, even as he remained non-committal on reallocation of portfolios, amid speculation regarding it.

"The plan is to do it (assigning of ministries to new ministers) after Amit Shah's visit. If possible will do it earlier itself," Yediyurappa told reporters here in response to a question.

He did not respond to a question whether there will be a reallocation of portfolios.

"Amit Shah is coming tomorrow, along with him I will go to Bhadravati and we will come back (to Bengaluru) and day-after tomorrow we will be heading to Belagavi," he added.

Shah is visiting Karnataka on January 16 and 17 during which he will be participating in various programmes in Shivamogga, Belagavi, Bagalkot and Bengaluru.

Ending a long wait, Yediyurappa had expanded his 17-month-old cabinet on Wednesday, inducting seven ministers as he also dropped



Excise Minister H Nagesh from the ministry.

There has been speculation ever since that the Chief Minister may affect a rejig by reallocating portfolios among the ministers in the cabinet.

The cabinet expansion has led to resentment within the BJP, with several MLAs expressing serious reservations about MLCs not elected by the people being made ministers, lack of representation with most ministers still from Bengaluru and Belagavi districts, and also on their 'seniority or sacrifice' not being con-

sidered.

Some legislators like Vijayapura City MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and MLC A H Vishwanath have been openly criticising the Chief Minister by accusing him of inducting ministers under blackmail.

Unhappy over the cabinet expansion, disgruntled legislators are expected to meet Shah and air their grievances, party sources said.

Amid talks of reallocation of portfolios, how Yediyurappa manages it will be interesting as several ministers including

the new inductees are looking for plum portfolios.

While some ministers have two portfolios, the Chief Minister, along with Finance, has Bangalore Development, Energy, Planning, DPAR, Information & Public Relations, Small Scale Industries, Backward Class Welfare Department, Tourism, Kannada and Culture, Youth Empowerment and Sports Department.

Among those portfolios with the CM, Bangalore Development and Energy are said to be the most sought after.

Rahul Gandhi leads Cong protest in support of agitating farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday led the party's protest in the national capital in support of the agitating farmers, and said his party will not relent till the new farm laws are repealed. He was accompanied by AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other leaders of the Delhi Congress at the protest outside the Delhi LG's residence here as part of the countrywide agitation. Addressing the gathering, the former Congress chief said the Congress party will not step back till the time the govern-

ment repeals these three farm laws.

"These laws are not to help farmers, but to finish them. These laws are aimed at helping corporates like Ambani and Adani instead," he charged and added, "That is why we are standing in favour of the farmers". "The BJP government will have to take these black laws back. Till the time these laws are repealed, Congress party will not relent," he told the protesting Congressmen. "The Narendra Modi government earlier tried to take away the land of farmers, when it brought the land acquisition Act and the Congress party

stopped them at that time. Now the BJP and their two-three friends are once again attacking the farmers and have brought these three farm laws," he also alleged. The Congress is taking out protest marches at all state capitals in the country and will gherao Raj Bhawans. The party is also protesting against fuel price hike. The Congress is observing the day as Kisan Adhikar Divas in support of farmers' rights. The protests come on a day the government is holding the next round of talks with leaders of farm unions to end the deadlock over their agitation.

SP slams BJP gov't over farm laws

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday lashed out at the ruling BJP over the new farm laws and accused it of extending benefits to a handful of people at the cost of poor farmers. Questioning the need for bringing the new laws, Yadav attacked the BJP for "bringing black laws for the farmers, laws which will benefit some people but not the common farmer and where the control of the market will go in the hands of a few". He alleged that the control on crops and its by-products will also be in the hands of other people because of these farm laws. "What kind of a decision is this of the BJP that poor farmers be finished and a handful of people are benefited," the SP president charged. Yadav also exuded confidence over the victory of SP candidates.

'PM doesn't respect farmers, wants to tire out those protesting laws'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PM Narendra Modi does not respect farmers and wants to tire out those protesting against the Centre's new agri laws, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged on Friday. He also said that the talks that are being held with the protesting farmer leaders are part of the government's delaying tactics. Farmers will not relent till the laws are repealed, said Rahul Gandhi at Jantar Mantar, where he along with Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra joined party MPs in their demonstration against the legislations. The former Congress president's remarks come on a day when

the government is meeting protesting farmer unions for the ninth time to break the over-a-month-long deadlock on the three new agri laws. "The talks are being held only to delay. PM Modi thinks he has the power and will tire the farmers out, but he is mistaken. He does not have basic respect for farmers. He does not even care if over 100 farmers die. He thinks he has the power and the protesting farmers will tire out after some days, but they will not relent," Rahul told reporters. Thousands of farmers are protesting at various border points of Delhi for over a month now against the laws. Rahul said this agitation has just started and the government will have to take back the laws.

Cong using Rajasthan to save its credibility: State BJP chief

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan BJP chief Satish Poonia on Friday said the Congress is shrinking across the country and using the state to save its credibility.

His comments were in reaction to a sit-in staged by Congress workers here against recent farm laws of the Centre and the rising fuel prices.

Describing it as "political hypocrisy", Poonia said the frustration of power slipping out of the Congress's hand is visible on the faces of its leaders, adding that "they should get used to sit in the opposition".

The BJP leader also said the Congress has no moral right to talk about farmers as it did no good to them even after being in power in the country for 50 years.

Govt notifies over 3,500 jobs for persons with benchmark disabilities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has notified 3,566 posts in the central government establishments as suitable for persons with benchmark disabilities. These posts have also been identified suitable for new categories of persons with disabilities such as dwarfism, acid attack victims, muscular dystrophy, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, specific

learning disability, mental illness and multiple disability have been added. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities notified 3,566 posts on January 4 in central government establishments as suitable for persons with benchmark disabilities (disability of 40 per cent and above) under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The Ministry of Social Justice

and Empowerment, in a statement, said this notification will broaden the scope for employment for persons with benchmark disabilities in government establishments. A list of 2,973 posts identified suitable for persons with benchmark disabilities was last notified in 2013 in terms of the repealed Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.

Ex TNCC chief Gnanadesikan dead

PNS ■ CHENNAI

B S Gnanadesikan, senior vice president of Tamil Maanila Congress and former Rajya Sabha member, died at a hospital here on Friday, the party said. He was 71.

A former president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC), Gnanadesikan quit the national party in 2014 to join the TMC floated by former Union Minister G K Vasana. A noted advocate and Vasana



loyalist, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha twice (2001-07, 2007-13) from Tamil Nadu. TMC president G K Vasana in a tweet condoled

Gnanadesikan's death and paid tributes to him.

DMK president K K Stalin, TNCC president K S Alagiri, MDMK general secretary Vaiko, Pattali Makkal Katchi founder-leader S Ramadoss and Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary TTV Dhinakaran condoled his death.

Gnanadesikan joined the Congress party during his student days and was a follower of veteran Congress leader G K Moopanar (Vasana's father).

Nine more victims of sexual abuse by BJP leader identified

PNS ■ JALAU

The police here have identified nine more victims, including seven minors, on the basis of data recovered from a laptop and other devices seized from an expelled BJP office-bearer arrested on charges of sexually exploiting two children, an official said on Friday.

Efforts are on to contact these victims and record their statements, said Station House Officer (SHO), Konch police station, Imran Khan.

Ram Bihari Rathore, the former vice-president of the BJP's Konch unit, was arrested on Wednesday on the basis of a complaint lodged by the two children.

Soon after Rathore's arrest, his laptop, DVD and hard disc were seized from his house. During their examination, nine more victims -- seven minors and two women -- had been identified, Khan said.

"Efforts are on to contact these victims and their families. Their statements will be recorded," he said.

Their statements will be recorded in connection with the existing FIR against Rathore. No fresh case is being



lodged as of now, he said.

In the investigation so far, Khan said, no evidence has been found to suggest that the obscene material was being sold to any porn site or in the market.

Superintendent of Police Yesh Veer Singh had also inspected Rathore's house and office, the SHO said.

The two children who had lodged the complaint against Rathore had alleged that he used to sexually abuse them in his office, he added.

Explaining how the matter came to light, Khan said a few days ago, Rathore had lodged a complaint with the police that his CCTV and digital

video recorder (DVR) had been stolen. Later, two minors were apprehended with the equipment and questioned.

During investigation, obscene material was found on the DVR. The children who had stolen the equipment were being blackmailed by Rathore with the obscene videos, he said.

Khan had on Thursday said 15 to 20 videos were found on Rathore's laptop, DVD and hard disc in which he is seen sexually exploiting children.

The accused would lure young children by giving them money and made their obscene videos that he would use to blackmail them, he had said.

Cold wave, thick fog in parts of UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Parts of Uttar Pradesh experienced a severe cold wave and dense fog during the last 24 hours, the Met office said on Friday.

Day temperatures fell appreciably in Varanasi, Ayodhya, Gorakhpur, Meerut, Allahabad, Kanpur, Agra, and Jhansi divisions, while they saw a rise in Bareilly, and Agra divisions, they said.

Churk was the coldest place in the state as the minimum temperature there settled at 3.7 degrees Celsius while Jhansi recorded the highest maximum temperature at 23.5 degrees Celsius.

According to the meteorological department, "dense to very dense" fog is likely to envelope some parts of eastern and western Uttar Pradesh on Saturday while cold wave conditions are likely to persist.

Legislative Council polls: SP candidates file nomination

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party candidates for the biennial elections to the UP legislative council, Ahmed Hasan and Rajendra Chaudhary, filed their nomination papers on Friday. The nomination papers were filed this afternoon, Returning Officer B B Dubey said.

Senior leaders of the party, including SP president Akhilesh Yadav, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ram Govind Chaudhary, state unit president Naresh Uttam and former ministers were present on the occasion.

The 12 seats in the UP legislative council will fall vacant on January 30 as the term of the members is coming to an end.

The MLCs whose terms are ending include UP Deputy CM Dinesh Sharma, Chairman of UP Legislative Council Ramesh Yadav and UP BJP chief Swatantra Dev Singh.

Polling will be held on January 28 and counting of votes will be done one hour after the completion of polls as per established practice.

Polling will be held on Jan 28 and counting of votes will be done one hour after the completion of polls as per established practice.

Nominations for the biennial polls can be filed till January 18 and scrutiny of the same will be held on January 19. The withdrawal of names can be done till January 21.

Of the 12 MLCs whose tenure is expiring, six are from the Samajwadi Party (SP) including Ramesh Yadav, Ahmed Hasan, Ashu Malik, Sahab Singh Saini, Ramjatan Rajbhar and Virendra Singh.

Deputy CM Sharma, UP party chief Singh and Laxman Acharya are from the BJP.

The tenure of BSP's Pradeep Jatav and Dharamveer Ashok is also coming to an end besides that of Naseemuddin Siddiqui, who left the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and joined the Congress.

Disability rights' groups oppose setting up of university

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Disability rights groups have sought withdrawal of a government proposal to set up a university for disability studies and rehabilitation sciences, saying it will take them backwards by promoting exclusion and segregation instead of inclusion.

Different disability rights groups including National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People and National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled have written to Shakuntala D Gamlin, secretary of Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, opposing the move.

In December 2020, the government had proposed to set up a "first of its kind" univer-

sity covering the entire gamut of disability studies and rehabilitation sciences in an accessible environment.

In a public notice issued on December 24, 2020, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, had invited comments from stakeholders on a draft bill to set up the university.

"At the outset, we would like to highlight that while the proposed University is one of its kind, it takes the disability sector backwards by promoting exclusion/ segregation rather than inclusion," the letter said.

"It goes against the progressive nature of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



(RPWD) Act, 2016 as also the concept of inclusion advocated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020," it said.

"Much emphasis needs to be given on setting up

centres/departments of disability studies in existing universities and higher education institutions on the lines of cross-disability and cross-gender approaches," it added.

The rights groups said the focus needs to be laid on increasing the number of trained human resources by offering courses which are in line with that of NIMHANS/IISC/IITs including doctoral degrees.

These also need to have on-line alternatives for delivery of courses based on Universal Design of Learning and Reasonable Accommodation as per the RPWD Act, NEP 2020, and Government of India and international guidelines for digital platforms, they said.

"Disability studies should be made part of the mainstream academic endeavours which the proposed university through its exclusionary approach fails to do," the letter said.

It said the draft bill lacks clarity on the actual disability studies by focusing more on the governance aspect of it and also deviates from the norms and practices of the higher education system. "We are also not in agreement with the proposal for running the university in a 'self-sustaining' model. To conclude, we would request to kindly withdraw the said Draft Bill," it said.

The proposed university will be a unique multidisciplinary academic institution conducting research, programmes and courses from the bachelor's level onwards to cater to various disciplines covering the entire gamut of disability studies and rehabilitation sciences in an accessible environment, the DEPwD had said.

SHORT TAKES

Leopard rescued from private well in Nanded



A leopard that had fallen into a private well at a village in Maharashtra's Nanded district was rescued after nearly two hours of efforts, a forest official said on Friday. The incident took place at Pangri village in Ardhapur taluka on Thursday afternoon, the official said. "We received a call around 2.30 pm that a leopard had fallen into a private well in the village. Range officers were intimated and a quick survey was done," assistant conservator of forest D S Pawar said. Teams that included volunteers used an earthmoving machine in the rescue effort and a cage was also taken to the spot, he said. The animal was trapped in the cage safely by the end of the operation, which lasted for nearly two hours, the official added.

2 including auto driver held for trying to rape student



An auto-rickshaw driver along with his accomplice was arrested for allegedly trying to rape a 20-year-old college student inside his three-wheeler on the Hisar-Delhi bypass road, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Wednesday when the victim boarded the auto-rickshaw from Kenchi Chowk here to go to her educational institute situated on the bypass road. However, upon reaching the institute, the auto driver kept driving. He and his companion then attempted to allegedly sexually assault the woman, said the police. Two police personnel including the driver of a deputy superintendent of police and his gunner were passing by and heard the shouts of the woman, they said. They nabbed the accused identified as Vinod of Shiv Nagar and Naveen, a resident of village Bhaini Amirpur here, said the police.

PM condoles loss of lives in road accident in Karnataka



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed grief at the loss of lives in a road accident in Karnataka's Dharwad district. Eleven people, including nine women, were killed in a road accident near Ittigatti village in the district. Most of them hailed from Davanagere district, police said. Posting a condolence message from the prime minister, the PMO tweeted, "Saddened by the loss of lives due to a road accident in Karnataka's Dharwad district. In this sad hour, my thoughts are with the bereaved families. I pray for a quick recovery of those injured: PM @narendramodi."

EC gives nod to use its data only during Covid vaccination drive

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission will extend "full assistance" to the government in identifying targeted beneficiaries at the polling station level for the Covid vaccination drive, but wants health authorities to delete the data once the inoculation exercise is over, sources privy to the development said on Friday.

On December 31 last year, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora requesting the commission's help in identifying people above 50 years of age at the polling station level, the sources said. On the issue of data security, the home secretary wrote that the government is complying with the current best practices for ensuring cyber security. He has assured the poll panel that the data will be used only for the purpose of vaccination, the sources said.

The EC, after detailed deliberations, wrote back to the home secretary on January 4, saying it has decided to render "full assistance" in the vaccination drive. But asked the government to ensure that the data is strictly used for the limited purpose for which it has been sought, the sources said.

The commission also said that the data should be deleted by health authorities once the vaccination exercise concludes, they said.

Some senior EC officials will be in touch with nodal officers of the Union home ministry and

the Union health ministry to settle day-to-day issues, the sources said. Last month, officials of the Union health ministry and the Niti Aayog had met the EC top brass seeking their help in the distribution of Covid vaccine given the poll panel's robust network at the booth level.

The letter by the home secretary is a follow up to the meeting, the sources said.

According to guidelines for the Covid vaccination drive, the latest electoral roll for Lok Sabha and assembly elections will be used to identify the pri-



Gujarat to launch drive from 161 centres

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

The COVID-19 vaccination drive in Gujarat will start for healthcare workers from 161 centres when the nationwide inoculation campaign kicks off on January 16, said Chief Minister Vijay Rupani on Friday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is scheduled to launch the nationwide vaccination campaign against coronavirus on Saturday, is expected to interact with some of the beneficiaries at Ahmedabad Civil Hospital (one of the sites) virtually from New Delhi, said officials.

"Vaccination against coronavirus will start from 161 centres in Gujarat when the

nationwide drive is launched by the Prime Minister on Saturday," Rupani said during a function in Jamnagar.

For the first phase, the Gujarat Health Department has identified 4.31 lakh healthcare workers such as doctors and nurses for inoculation, said state Immunisation Officer Dr Nayan Jani.

After healthcare professionals, 6.93 lakh frontline workers such as police personnel, 1.05 crore citizens above the age of 50 and 2.75 lakh people under 50 but with comorbidities will be covered under the drive, Jani added.

"We will administer vaccines to 100 health workers per centre every day. Beneficiaries will get an SMS

through CoWIN application about address of the centre and other instructions," said Jani.

CoWIN is an online platform for monitoring COVID-19 vaccine delivery and will act as the foundation for the anti-coronavirus inoculation drive.

Jani said around 15,000 vaccinators have been trained by the Health Department and the entire administration is fully prepared for the drive in Gujarat.

"While ministers will remain present at some of the designated 161 centres across the state, Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel will be at Ahmedabad Civil Hospital (on the first day of the drive)," said Jani.

Delhi geared up for vaccine roll-out at 81 centres

New Delhi: The national capital is all set for the roll-out of the Covid vaccination exercise on Saturday at 81 centres with healthcare workers who have been in the forefront of the fight against the pandemic to be given the shots first.

The inoculation drive will be kicked off from the state-run LNJP Hospital with a simple ceremony in the presence of Chief Minister Kejriwal and Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain.

The 81 sites include six central government facilities -- AIIMS, Safdarjung Hospital, RML Hospital, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital and two ESI state hospitals.

The rest 75 centres, spanning all 11 districts of Delhi, include Delhi government-run facilities such as LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, DDU Hospital, BSA Hospital, Delhi State Cancer Institute, ILBS Hospital, and private facilities such as Max Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Apollo Hospital and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

Goa: 700 healthcare workers to get vaccine today

Panaji: As many as 700 healthcare workers will be administered the COVID-19 vaccine in Goa on the first day of the vaccination drive on January 16, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said on Friday.

Vaccination will initially take place at seven centres, including two private facilities in the state, the chief minister said. At least 100 healthcare workers each will be inoculated at seven centres on the first day of the programme, he said.

Apart from five government-run facilities, the drive will also be carried out at Manipal Hospital and Healthway Hospital, both located near Panaji, a senior health department official said.

The dean of Goa Medical College and Hospital Dr Shivanand Bandekar said a special facility has been set up at the GMCH by converting an examination hall-cum-auditorium into a vaccination centre. Around 5,000-odd healthcare workers attached to the GMCH will be vaccinated in the first phase, Bandekar said, adding that the cleaning staff who work at the hospital's COVID-19 ward will be first to get vaccinated.



Jallikattu begins at TN's Palamaneru

PNS ■ MADURAI

Bulls and men tried to get the better of each other as the bull taming sport 'Jallikattu' began at the famed Palamedu here on Friday.

A test of grit was on full display with the animals fiercely trying to get past the waiting men while the tamers attempted to get on to their humps to emerge victorious.

The animals were let out one after the other from 'Vadivasal', a narrow entrance to the sporting arena after announcements on the bull, like who owned it and so on. As hundreds of spectators cheered from the gallery, over 300 bulls and men have taken part in the sport so far amid tight security and a number of people, which includes participants, sustained injuries.

Organisers repeatedly directed enthusiastic tamers through the public address system to ensure that only one of them took on the bull. The bull owners were given

prizes if their animals outmanoeuvred the waiting men and the participants were rewarded if they managed to hang from the hump of the bulls for a while.

Till now, 100 plus bulls and men - with some men managing to dominate four to five bulls one after the other - have been declared winners and the prizes on offer include a range of things including bicycles, utensils and chairs.

Elaborate preparations preceded the event, which coincides with 'Mattu Pongal' celebrations Monday to honour cattle that help farming. Men seeking to dominate the bulls were tested for coronavirus and animals were examined by veterinarians.

The opening 'Jallikattu' of the Pongal season was held at Avaniapuram here on Thursday.

It was witnessed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and DMK youth wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin and others.

INDIA CORNER

Night curfew to continue for 15 more days in four Gujarat cities

Even as fresh cases of coronavirus are on decline in Gujarat, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani on Friday asserted that night curfew will remain in place in four major cities of the state for the next 15 days as a precautionary measure. While urging people to be and cooperate with the authorities for some more days, Rupani said the viral infection has come under control due to the night curfew imposed in November, 2020 in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot. "The night curfew after 10 pm will continue for 15 more days in all four cities. There will be no relaxation for now, as there is a drastic decrease in new cases (because of curfew). People need to have patience and cooperate with the authorities," he told reporters in Jamnagar. A decision about lifting the curfew will be taken at an appropriate juncture, he said.



Celebrated biker dies after crashing into camel in Jaisalmer

King Richard Srinivasan, a celebrated biker from Bengaluru, died after his motorcycle crashed into a camel in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district, police said on Friday. The incident took place in Fatehgarh sub-division on Wednesday night when Srinivasan along with his three friends was headed to Jaisalmer, they said. A camel suddenly came in front of Srinivasan's motorcycle. He sustained head injuries in the accident and succumbed on Wednesday night. The body was handed over to his family members after a post-mortem examination on Thursday, said Head Constable, Sangarh police station, Sonaram Bhati.



Nobody is bigger than law, not even a minister: Deshmukh

Nobody is bigger than the law and it will not discriminate against anyone in Maharashtra, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said on Friday, in comments coming in the backdrop of his cabinet colleague Dhananjay Munde facing rape allegations. Munde, the Social Justice Minister, has been accused of rape by a Mumbai-based woman. The 45-year-old NCP leader has denied the charges and termed them as a blackmail attempt. Nobody is bigger than the law, not even a minister. The law will not discriminate against anyone in Maharashtra. "Our police will probe the matter properly and take proper action against whoever is guilty. The legal process is on, Deshmukh said.



EAM Jaishankar holds talks with Nepalese counterpart Gyawali

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday held talks with his Nepalese counterpart Pradeep Kumar Gyawali with a focus on various key aspects of the bilateral relations. The talks are taking place under the framework of the Indo-Nepal joint commission meeting (JCM), officials said. Gyawali arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit. He is the first senior political leader from Nepal to visit India after the ties between the two countries came under strain following a border row.



Goa govt decides to shift IIT project



PNS ■ PANAJI

Bowing to public pressure, the Goa government on Friday announced that the proposed IIT campus at Shel Melaulim village in Sattari taluka will be shifted to another part of the state.

The project has met with severe opposition from locals, who staged a large-scale protest at the village, insisting that they will not part with their land for the campus.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant held a meeting with the sarpanches and Zilla Panchayat members from Sattari taluka at his official residence on Thursday evening in presence of state Health Minister and Valpoi MLA Vishwajit Rane.

Speaking to reporters, the chief minister said the state government has decided to shift the project out of Sattari due to the constant opposition from locals.

"We respect the sentiments

of people, which is why we have decided to shift the project out of Sattari," he said, adding that the government is yet to decide on an alternative site.

The project was planned from the perspective of development, but the state government could not convince locals, he said.

Earlier this week, Rane had appealed to the chief minister to shift the project considering the opposition to it and had urged him to withdraw cases registered against protestors.

At least 12 policemen and several villagers were injured when both groups clashed in the forest area near Shel-Melaulim village last week. Sawant said that the police will review the cases filed against protestors.

"There are requests to withdraw the cases filed against protestors. There is a process which needs to be followed. We are reviewing the cases," he said.

Three civil defence volunteers held for fraud

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three civil defence volunteers have been arrested for allegedly issuing fake COVID-19 challans and collecting the penalty amount, police said on Friday. The accused -- Sunny (19), Yashwant Rathi (21) and Lucky (20) -- were posted in the office of SDM (New Delhi) in Jamnagar House, they said.

They mostly issued fake challans to people visiting the Talkatora Garden, they said.

The matter came to notice on December 31, when a resident of Shakarpur was issued a fake chal-



lan by the accused for not wearing masks when he was sitting inside the Talkatora Garden with his friend, police said. In his complaint, the victim alleged that the three volunteers came in Khakhi uniform and told him

that they were posted in the office of SDM, New Delhi.

They told us that since we had violated COVID-19 guidelines by not wearing face masks, challans of Rs 2,000 each will be issued, the victim alleged.

The complainant did not have cash so he paid them via Paytm, police said. However, the complainant got suspicious and approached the police.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Eish Singhal said, "We conducted a detailed inquiry and sought details of the Paytm beneficiary. We got to know that the mobile number was registered in the name of one civil defence employee named Sunny." The alleged challan was found not issued from the SDM office and was fake and forged, he said, adding that the three civil defence volunteers were then arrested.

Man held for duping 70 investors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 43-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly duping over 70 people of Rs 3 crore on the pretext of allotting them the kiosks on lease in a mall, police said on Friday. The accused identified as Shashank Jain, of Gurgaon, was arrested on Wednesday, they said.

Two more accused, Labsang Tenzing Bhutia and Gaurav Mittal were arrested earlier, police said. The complainants, all members of Rohini Monastery Market Association, alleged that Mittal and others told them that their firm Red Reality Infratech Pvt Ltd had taken an area of 9,607 square feet at City Centre in Rohini on lease for five years, police said.

India's new Covid cases in last 7 days among lowest in world

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India recorded 87 new Covid cases per million population in the last seven days which is one of the lowest in the world when compared with countries like the US, the UK, Russia, Germany, Brazil, France and Italy, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

It further said that only one new death per million population was reported in India in this period. "With a case fatality rate of 1.44 per cent, COVID-19 deaths per million population in India are one of the lowest in the world," the ministry underscored.

India's total COVID-19 active caseload continues to manifest a sustained down-



ward movement and has dropped to 2.13 lakh comprising just 2.03 per cent of the country's total infections, it said. The daily new cases added to the country's COVID-19 numbers have been below 20K in the recent

days, it said.

The number of daily new cases registered in a span of 24 hours is 15,590 while 15,975 cases have recovered and discharged during the same period. "New cases per million population in India in the last seven days are 87. It is one of the lowest in the world. The number is significantly low when compared with countries like Russia, Germany, Brazil, France, Italy, USA and UK," the ministry highlighted.

The total recovered cases stand at 10,162,738. "The gap between COVID-19 recoveries and active cases is steadily increasing and has crossed 99 lakh and currently stands at 99,49,711," the ministry underlined.

In a first, drone operations feature at Army Day parade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drones of the Indian Army carried out mock kamikaze attacks and first-aid delivery exercises as the service showcased its latest assets during the Army Day parade held at the Cariappa ground here on Friday.

This is the first time drones featured at the parade that also had detachments of the upgraded anti-aircraft weapon system Schilka, BrahMos missile system, infantry fighting vehicle BMP-2, T-72 bridge laying tanks and multi-rocket launcher system Pinaka.

Army Chief Gen M M Naravane conferred gallantry awards and unit citations at the event, which was also attended by Air Chief Marshal R K S Bhaduria, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh and Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat.



The Indian Army said it carried out a live demonstration of "drone swarming capability" using 75 indigenously designed and developed drones, which executed an

array of artificial intelligence (AI) enabled simulated offensive missions and close support tasks, at the event.

"This demonstration is a recognition of the Indian

Army's steady embrace of emerging and disruptive technologies to transform itself from a manpower-intensive to a technology enabled force to meet future security chal-

Army demonstrated drone swarming capability using 75 indigenously developed drones, which executed an array of AI enabled simulated offensive missions and close support tasks

lenges," it said in a statement.

Around 75 drones of the Indian Army carried multiple mock operations including kamikaze attacks, first-aid delivery and parachute payload delivery exercises at the event.

The first detachment of the parade was of the upgraded anti-aircraft weapon system Schilka and it was commanded by Captain Preeti Chaudhary of the 140 AD reg-

iment (self-propelled). Marching contingents of the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, the Mahar Regiment, the Garhwal Regiment and the Jat Regiment also participated in the parade.

Thirteen Army officers of the Northern Command, eight officers of the Eastern Command, one officer each of the Southern Command and the Central Command received unit citations from the Army chief, while 15 Army personnel were awarded the Sena Medal.

Army Day is celebrated on January 15 every year in recognition of Field Marshal K M Cariappa's taking over as the first Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from Sir Francis Butcher, the last British Commander in 1949.

It is celebrated in the national capital, as well as in all the six Army Command Headquarters.

Privacy matters

You wouldn't want anyone else seeing what you do online, would you? But they already do



WhatsApp's new privacy policy is in essence providing Facebook a way to monetise messages on the messaging app. At one level, it makes sense since users of the messaging app are getting a free service, and Facebook's algorithms go through your messages just like Google's algorithms go through every email you send and receive on Gmail. And most of us do use Google's service for email and the tech giant's search for everything and we post about our lives on Facebook and Twitter, so to suddenly cry 'wolf' about the new privacy policy does little but to expose our hypocrisy. Could Facebook and WhatsApp have handled it any better? Yes, they should have; many Indians will migrate

to other messaging platforms and apps over the coming weeks and some of them, at least for now, assure privacy. But with applications like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, there is something called the 'network' effect; it is difficult to use a service that few of your friends and relatives use, so while many people will download Signal and maybe even use it for some discussions that they'd rather nobody else sees, WhatsApp is unlikely to suffer much in the long term other than a bruised ego. It is more than likely that many groups, after discussing the new privacy policy threadbare with huge doses of misinformation, have gone back to their regularly scheduled "Good Morning" and "Good Evening" messages.

At a level, this comes down to our understanding of privacy as a people. In such a crowded country, the concept of personal privacy as understood in the western world does not simply exist. If one is really concerned about privacy, they should probably use better hardware devices, the iPhone for example, instead of Chinese-brand Android devices and pay for better messaging and email services. There has to be a realisation that there is a price for 'free services' because, as the saying goes, "You can't have your cake and eat it too". There is a cost to privacy when it comes to technology and when notions of personal privacy are so limited to begin with, teaching Indians about the need to keep things private is a difficult task. In many western countries, for example, it is a given that without the permission of a guardian, the pictures of children cannot be published; in India we do not think twice before doing such a thing. Remember, Indian cricket player Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka — among the most photographed couples in the country — had to very recently make an appeal to the paparazzi to refrain from taking pictures of their newborn daughter. The simple issue was the pesky photographers who often cross the fine line between the demands of the "profession" and intrusion of privacy. On the other hand, citing the case of the western world, is the instance of Hollywood actor George Clooney, who sued a member of the paparazzi brigade and his publication for climbing over the walls of the actor's villa and clicking photos of his child. Privacy is a luxury in a crowded nation and if we want it, we have to pay for it, such as living in a large house with a boundary wall. If we want luxury on the internet, we have to be willing to pay!

Anatomy of Uttarayana

Makar Sankranti is an event of the sidereal solar calendar while Uttarayana is a matter of tropical solar reckoning



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

Makar Sankranti marks the Sun's entry into Makar *raashi*, identified with the sign of Capricorn. The reference here is merely to the apparent motion of the Sun resulting from Earth's yearly revolution. Annually, there would be a dozen such Sankrantis, because of the Sun's transit across 12 signs of the celestial zodiac. No other Sankranti enjoys religious significance, though each of them marks the beginning of a new month in the sidereal solar calendar. In India, several States like Tripura, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Haryana and so on follow a sidereal solar calendar. Several other States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh-Telangana in addition to the Hindi-speaking belt follow the luni-solar calendar.

In the luni-solar calendar, the months are based upon a lunar cycle of 29-1/2 days, resulting in a year length of 354 days. Therefore, it has to be adjusted against the solar year by insertion of intercalary month (*Adhimasa*) every three years. The luni-solar calendar, besides being expressly followed in several parts of India, is also implicit to the solar calendar because of its religious significance. All Hindu religious festivals including *vrats*, *parvas* and most *jayantis* are determined as per the 354-day lunar calendar. This results in a drift of dates for religious festivities and austerities (within a bracket of 25 days) *vis-a-vis* the Gregorian calendar.

Why is Makar Sankranti celebrated with such great fanfare even in parts of India where the writ of solar calendar does not run? This is due to a belief that Makar Sankranti marks Uttarayana (literally meaning sun turning north). Uttarayana is a function of a tropical solar calendar like the Gregorian calendar. Tropical calendar has zero connection with zodiac background. It stands on four pillars — Vernal Equinox (March 21), Summer Solstice (June 21), Autumn Equinox (September 21) and Winter Solstice (December 21). In the two equinoxes, the day and night are of equal length all over the world. In June solstice, the day is longest across the northern hemisphere, shortest in the southern. In December solstice, the day is shortest in the northern hemisphere and longest in the southern. This interplay of 'light and shadow' is due to the fact that the axis of Earth's rotation is inclined to the plane of Earth's revolution at 23.5°. As a



result, different zones of the globe receive direct light whereas others pass into shadow. This, in the extreme, results in six months of day and six months of night between one equinox to the other in alternating polar zones — the Arctic and Antarctic.

In winter, the sun travels low across the sky in the northern hemisphere. On December 21, the declination is the least and the Sun is directly overhead the Tropic of Capricorn (23.5° S) at the local noon. The trend is, however, reversed on the morning of Solstice. The Sun, figuratively speaking, turns northwards. Thus, as per one belief, December 22 should be the real Uttarayana. A common factor, coincidental at first sight, is the name Capricorn. On December 21, the Sun is overhead the Tropic of Capricorn, an imaginary line; and on January 14 it enters the Sign of Capricorn. However, we realise that it is more than mere coincidence when the same thing is repeated in the summer. While on June 21 the Sun is directly overhead at the Tropic of Cancer, it enters the Sign of Cancer on July 16. The gap is 24 days.

Now, 24 days seems to be the new common factor. What explains this 24 days' time lag that links the name of a tropic (an imaginary line) with a constellation? The secret might lie in the factor called "precession of equinoxes" or "axial precession" called *ayana-chalan* in Sanskrit. The axis of the Earth is not exactly stable but describes a conical motion. This motion, similar to the wobble of a spinning top, results from the Sun's

rotation, goes round the entire zodiac. The amount of precession is 50" (less than 1/60th of one degree, when one segment of zodiac is of 30 degrees).

We get the seasons from the Sun, not from the zodiacal background. Thus, measuring seasons from the zodiac signs by ignoring the effect of precession (the Nirayana calendar) is not the best way. The sidereal or Nirayana year (365 d 06 hrs 09 m 10 s) is 21 minutes longer than tropical year (365 d 05 h 48 m 46 s). A sidereal year, therefore, would disengage from the seasons twice as fast as Julian calendar (which assumed year length to be flat 365 d and 6 hrs) did before being reformed by Pope Gregorian XIII in 1582.

"The difference between the sidereal and the tropical year is 20.4 minutes," says Bal Gangadhar Tilak, "which causes the seasons to fall back nearly one lunar month in about 2,000 years, if the sidereal solar year is to be taken as the standard of measurement" (*The Orion*, P.19). This would explain the mystery of the lost 24 days. Possibly two millennia ago, the Sun went overhead in the southernmost tropic when it entered the sign of Capricorn. In the ancient times, Uttarayana and Sun's entry into Capricorn would have coincided. That is no longer true.

Tilak (1856-1920), however, hinted at a different possibility on Uttarayana. Known as a tough politician, he was also a noted Sanskrit scholar who found time to delve deep into Hindu astronomy to reconstruct Vedic history. It is reflect-

ed in his books like *The Orion, or, Researches Into The Antiquity of the Vedas* (1893) and *Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903). In his book, viz., *The Orion*, the author says that Uttarayana is susceptible to two meanings. Tilak states: "It might mean 'turning towards the north from the southernmost point' or it may indicate 'the passage of the Sun into the northern hemisphere, i.e. to the north of the equator'. If we adopt the first meaning, Uttarayana and the year must be held to commence from the winter solstice while, if the second interpretation is correct, Uttarayana and the year must have commenced with the vernal equinox." Citing the *Rig Veda*, Tilak says: "The facts that the central day of annual *satra* was called *vishuvan*, the Vasant or spring was considered the first of the seasons and the *agrayaneshtis* or the half-year sacrifices were required to be performed every Vasant (Spring) and Shrad (autumn) clearly show that the second interpretation is more likely to be correct (*The Orion*, P.22)."

Tilak, thus, maintained that Uttarayana was the vernal equinox (March 21). He further believed that the six-month period from vernal equinox to autumn equinox, when the Sun moves along the northern latitude, is *Devayana* (way of the gods) in the *Rig Veda* and from autumn equinox to vernal equinox *Pitriyana* (way of the dead ancestors) as mentioned in the *Rig Veda*.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher. The opinions expressed are personal.)

Virus shadow over R-Day

No chief guest at this year's parade; the number of attendees as well as pageantry scaled down, too



The devastating Coronavirus pandemic has upended all our lives and nothing is the same again. Not the global economy, nor the way we socialise, nor the education and the healthcare systems nor the way we work, conduct business or even celebrate. If there has been a major disruptive force in living memory, it is the outbreak of the accursed virus. And now, in a historical first since 1966, India will celebrate its Republic Day without a Head of State as the chief guest to showcase its military prowess to. The pesky virus has ensured that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was supposed to attend the iconic Republic Day parade, had to bow out after he announced a fresh lockdown in the UK over the

new strain of the Coronavirus that has affected thousands of people there and reared its ugly head in India, too. The complete lockdown for England's 56 million people could last until mid-February, hence the Prime Minister was needed back home. This was supposed to be Johnson's first bilateral outing after the UK's departure from the European Union in December. But the contingency back home needed his urgent attention, so he had no choice but to cancel his visit that was expected to bind the Indo-UK relations even closer. The trip to New Delhi was being seen in the diplomatic circles as the UK's post-Brexit tilt towards the Indo-Pacific region, in which India is an important player. In fact, on December 15, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who visited New Delhi as a prelude to Johnson's trip, announced a closer collaboration with India on an enhanced trade partnership, and he also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss a 10-year roadmap for a new era in the UK-India ties. Apart from trade, the two democracies are also seeking closer collaboration on tackling the Coronavirus pandemic, climate change, enhancing defence cooperation so that they can better address key issues like terrorism and maritime security.

A disappointed India, which had been "looking forward to Johnson's visit", tried to fill the gap on the dignitary podium by approaching leaders in neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Bhutan, but lockdowns and various COVID-related issues made it impossible for others to step in. As it is, the parade this time had been restricted to a limited few from the masses instead of the thousands who used to throng it earlier. Even the marching contingents will be fewer and they will sport face masks and face shields, and the general distance between members in each of the contingents has been expanded from two to three feet. Even the number of dignitaries will be less and only a limited number of people will be invited; and they too will be seated far apart in order to maintain social distance. The highlight of the parade this year is expected to be the felicitation of the "Corona warriors". A few hundred people who have been in the frontline from the field of medicine — such as staff nurses, paramedics, doctors and sanitation staff — have been selected and they will be given certificates of appreciation on the occasion to show the nation's appreciation for the work they have been doing in battling the virus. This whittling down of the pomp and show that is usually associated with the R-Day parade makes one wonder why we never thought of this before? Each year, India spends hundreds of crores in organising the mega event. So this begs the question: Where is the justification in a poor country like India spending so much money on impressing the world's leaders when millions are dying of malnutrition and living below the poverty line in the nation? Would this money not be better spent on ramping up our healthcare and educational infrastructure? Or skilling the nation's *beti* and fighting crimes against women? If we can decrease our disease and hunger burden and increase our per capita income, it would really be something to showcase to the world. Else, we should adopt the Gandhian principle of leading a simple life.

SOUNDBITE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not respect the farmers. The Congress is with farmers and will support them till these laws are withdrawn.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

United States so far, at least the current administration, is doing all it can to hamper any chance for dialogue between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries.



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

I think every film mattered, right from my first film, because that is what gave me my first step into the film industry. My entire journey has been special.



Actor Kiara Advani

It is great to be coaching the young players of the West Indies and trying to guide them as we prepare for the World Cup at home.



West Indies Under-19 coach Floyd Reifer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ensure accountability

Sir — The Government must frame stringent laws to hold politicians accountable for corruption in the country. It is often seen in cases of corruption or malpractices in any Government department that the officials are usually taken to task by agencies like the CBI and ED while politicians belonging to the ruling dispensation, who are no less involved in the fraud, walk away scot-free. Our politicians, with their unchecked involvement in corrupt practices, have tarnished the reputation of our country. Over the past four decades or so, we have seen many cases of corruption. It will not be an exaggeration to say that most of the politicians are corrupt to the core and are involved in the dirty game of power and money. They have unaccounted money stocked in foreign banks or assets disproportionate to their income. It is high time for all political parties to think about this serious issue and join hands for making legislations that are more effective in curbing corruption by the politicians.

Seetharam B Telangana

India should provide vaccines to poor nations

As India is all set to launch the world's biggest vaccination drive on Saturday, many countries look towards it with hope. Apart from inoculating millions of countrymen, India should also provide the COVID vaccine vials to its neighbours and poor countries across the globe, either free of cost or on concessional rates. India's commitment to serve humanity is second to none and we, as a nation, have always helped those in need. It's beyond doubt that the chariot of self-reliant India is touching new heights everyday and the days are not far when we will become the torch-bearer of humanity and development. The manufacturers of the vaccines — Bharat Biotech (Covaxin) and Serum Institute of India (Covishield) — should take the lead and work out a plan with the Centre for exporting the vaccine to Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and so on. This will go beyond their realm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and be a true service to the mankind. We, as a nation, cannot fail those who look towards us for help during the COVID crisis. India must tread cautiously and care about its global image. If the



immunisation drive turns out to be successful, India will set an unprecedented example in the world's history. It will emerge as the world leader and its reputation will increase manifold.

The Opposition parties and leaders, who have unequivocally criticised the Modi Government during the initial phase of vaccine development, should also rise above politics.

Aman Jaiswal Delhi

Accept demands in toto

Sir — The Modi Government must immediately repeal the three farm laws that are the bone of contention between the Centre and the farmers. Although the Supreme Court has put a stay on these legislations but the farmers are not contented and the situation can turn volatile anytime.

The cultivators are not ready to settle for anything less than revocation of the laws and a legal guarantee on the Minimum Support Price (MSP). The NDA Government must realise that 70 per cent of the rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. They also constitute a large proportion of the BJP's vote bank and if they

turn against it in the next elections, it will severely mar the party's prospects of making it to the power corridors. Farmers are a peace-loving community and their leaders have clarified that the tractor rally on January 26 will take place only at the Haryana-Delhi border.

Bhagwan Thadani Mumbai

Army is our pride

Sir — On Army Day, we must remember those who choose to die for the nation. The sad part is that today's youth doesn't know about the stories of courage and valour that have shaped India's destiny saved us from enemies. Those who are ignorant about their past cannot shape their future.

It's time to remember our heroes like Field Marshal KM Cariappa, who was the first Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army and all the Param Vir Chakra (PVC) awardees like Major Somnath Sharma (first winner of the PVC), Naik Jadunath Singh, Lt Rama Raghoba Rane, Company Havildar Major Puru Singh and many others who made the supreme sacrifice for the nation. India's history is incomplete without its military history and our soldiers are our real heroes. We are safe because they are guarding our borders and fighting our enemies. We must pay our tribute to them on such occasions.

N Soumik Bhubaneswar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A shot at halting the virus' march

Vaccines take over six weeks to provide immunity. So it will be vital to continue with COVID protocols during the vaccination period and beyond



RAJINDER DHAMIJA

India begins its first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination drive from today. History is being created as it marks an important milestone in the pandemic's trajectory which began almost a year ago when three students returning from Wuhan were found to be COVID positive in Kerala. Since then, we have lost more than 1.51 lakh people and over 1.05 crore individuals have tested positive in India. The year 2020 was indeed a long one as lives were lost and livelihoods vanished as business closures, job losses and salary cuts became the norm. Politics overtook science in many countries and they eventually paid the price in terms of preventable deaths and sickness just because of a delay in instituting Corona protocols like masking, social distancing, hand hygiene and restriction of movement. As I had highlighted previously in these columns, the cold and pollution resulted in a surge in Coronavirus cases in India and globally, too. However, many mathematical models have been proved wrong in terms of hypothetical projections of the number of cases as well as the timelines of the pandemic's trajectory. Experimental therapies were tried in order to save lives, some of which failed to generate scientific evidence while others were withdrawn fearing more risk than benefit through their use. The learning curve continues as the contagion rages on and new mutations are being reported from different parts of the globe, keeping science and scientists on their toes. Consequently, physical distancing has led to social isolation for many, especially the elderly and vulnerable populations like people with disabilities and comorbidities. This has resulted in significant mental health issues. Social isolation is indeed a major risk factor not only for the psychological repercussions it has but also for those suffering from ailments. The approval of two Coronavirus vaccines and their rollout from today is a major step towards combating the pandemic in India and may be the beginning of the end of the COVID-19 outbreak. Covaxin and Covishield will be used during the initial phase of the inoculation drive and a priority group of three crore people will get the shots. The vaccination programme will use Co-WIN, an online digital platform developed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which will facilitate real time information of vaccine stocks, storage temperature and individualised tracking of beneficiaries for the shot. This digital platform will assist programme managers across all levels while conducting inoculation sessions.

This drive is a welcome step in the right direction and the Coronavirus shot is indeed a gift for mankind in the midst of this humanitarian crisis. Vaccines have historically saved lives from many deadly diseases in the past. A vaccine for the Coronavirus becoming available in less than a year seemed impossible at one time. However, it has become possible because of global efforts and collaborations by scientists and nations. Consequently, these shots have been developed in record time and have shown remarkable efficacy with safety. But India's vaccine campaign poses a major challenge in getting a substantial number of the population inoculated in view of scepticism and the undercurrent of vaccine hesitancy. So far these jobs have protected people from getting the virus, thereby preventing morbidity, hospitalisation and subsequent mortality. This is important not only for countries like ours with an inadequate and inequitable public health system but also for nations with a robust health infrastructure.

It is widely understood that a person protected by a vaccine or a natural COVID-19 infection acts as a dead end for the virus' transmission and an unprotected person who has not been inoculated or had the infection becomes a facilitator. We need most of the population to be vaccinated to break the chain of transmission. The shot will prevent the disease for sure in most of the vaccinated people but whether it will prevent the spread of the virus is still unclear. There is evidence, though not strong, that some of these shots do prevent the spread of the virus. Epidemiological methods reveal that we need at least 60 to 70 per cent of the population to be immunised either through jabs or natural infection to halt the transmission of the virus and develop "herd immunity." So how do we tackle these challenges with the vaccine rollout now becoming a reality? First we need to vaccinate as many people as possible by allaying fears and convincing citizens about the benefit of the vaccine not only for them but also for the community. The vaccine needs to be made as easily available as possible, keeping priorities in place. Plus, the importance of concise communication to the masses cannot be underestimated as is highlighting and stressing scientific facts over misinformation and myths prevalent on social media. It must also be anticipated that people may become complacent during the vaccination drive or after getting the shot. All vaccines take at least six weeks to provide immunity. So it will be critical to continue with all COVID protocols like before during the vaccination period and months or years after completing the two dosages of the shot. We will need to continue the new normal with all public health measures in place along with lasting change in our behaviour. The shot is here but we will have to live with the virus even after this. Vaccines will save lives and livelihoods but the virus is here to stay.

(The writer is Head of Neurology Department, Lady Hardinge Medical College and SSK Hospital. The views expressed are personal.)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

MAY GOD GIVE OWAIISI STRENGTH. HE HELPED US IN BIHAR AND WILL HELP US IN UP PANCHAYAT AND ASSEMBLY POLLS AND ALSO IN WEST BENGAL.

—BJP MP

SAKSHI MAHARAJ



PEOPLE OF UP AND WEST BENGAL HAVE ALSO SEEN THROUGH THIS NEXUS AND WILL NOT LET THIS MATCH-FIXING GO THROUGH.

—CONGRESS LEADER
JITIN PRASADA

Curb regulatory overreach

Neither the legislature nor the judiciary should be allowed to frame and pronounce punishment disproportionate to the crime as compared to other contextual offences



ABHAY RAJ MISHRA

Since time immemorial, human civilisation has maintained social order by framing rules and regulations which are implemented through various mechanism of imparting justice to people. Justice by its very nature represents something that is just and right. What is just may depend on the context but being fair, impartial and right is essential to the idea of justice. Professor Henry Sidgwick, a 19th century British jurist known for his ethical theory had opined that the best indicator of a nation's political success is to see how it administers justice.

In primitive societies punishment was targeted to evoke fear by subjecting offenders to brutality. This was supposed to act as a lesson and deterrent for others. However, with development and social evolution, punishment is now a subject of human rights with greater focus on reforming the wrongdoers, instead of tormenting them.

India as a welfare State has also adopted a reformative approach where the primary aim is to rehabilitate the offender. For instance, then IG (Prisons) Kiran Bedi took her reformist vision to Tihar Jail in 1993 and initiated a programme for the welfare of the inmates in the notorious prison, totally transforming the conditions inside Tihar. The reform policy had several aspects like changing prisoners' attitudes through education, meditation and yoga; imparting vocational skills; making the prison administration accountable; involving prisoners through mobile petition boxes, various panchayats and daily mass *sabhas*; providing a better diet and improving living conditions; assisting addicts through drug de addiction centres and undertrials through legal aid cells. Similarly, the introduction of the Model Prison reforms by the Government in 2016 was a major step which brought uniformity in laws, rules and regulations governing prisoners.

However, there remains a major gap when it comes to the structure and uniformity of sentencing guidelines. Despite this being raised by various committees from time to time, neither the legislature nor the judiciary has issued any structured sentencing norms. The Malimath Committee on Reforms of the Criminal Justice System that was set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs, in its report submitted in 2003, emphasised the need to introduce sentencing guidelines in order to minimise uncertainty in awarding sentences. A few years later the Madhav Menon Committee, too, reasserted the need for a sentencing policy in India. In 2010, the then Law Minister stated that India was planning to establish a "uniform sentencing policy" on the lines of the guidelines followed in the US and the UK. However, no progress has been made in this direction till date. Instead, the recent amendments proposed in the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2020 (COTPA 2020) signal a movement in the reverse direction.

COTPA 2020 amendments prescribe new excessive penalisation for petty street vendors or hawkers selling tobacco products. Exemplifying this is a seven-year imprisonment or a fine of ₹1 lakh for violations which involve immense subjectivity. Further, these violations are proposed to be made cognisable offences, which means police officers have the unilateral power to arrest these vendors, without a warrant or permission of a court and a bail will require appearance in front of a Magistrate.

These violations include selling tobacco products to a person below 21 years of age and selling

“WHILE THERE IS NO DEBATE ON THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF TOBACCO AND AN ONGOING REDUCTION IN ITS USE SHOULD BE PURSUED, SHOCKINGLY DISPROPORTIONATE DRAFT RULES MAKE A MOCKERY OF THE SYSTEM AND CREATE A LEGAL PARADOX, THEREBY RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LAW-MAKING PROCEDURE IN THE COUNTRY”



tobacco within 100 meters of an educational institute. Even selling loose cigarettes, which has been an age-old system, is going to abruptly become a crime attracting a jail term.

In a country where an 18-year-old is a legal adult with the right to vote or marry, this is regulatory overreach. A section of these petty retailers sell their goods on foot and we don't have a fixed definition of educational institutes which can vary, from a school to a private tuition centre. This proposal makes petty retailers look like heinous criminals who will be subjected to the whims and fancies of local police officers, many of whom can be compulsively corrupt.

Compared to other sentences and imprisonments prescribed under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), these are disproportionate and excessive. For instance the law prescribes a maximum punishment of six months' jail for sale of adulterated drugs (IPC 275); up to six months in prison for rash or dangerous driving (IPC 279); maximum two years for rioting (IPC 147); three years for extortion (IPC 384); three years for voluntarily causing hurt with a dangerous weapon (IPC 324); five years for voluntarily throwing acid (IPC 326B) and seven years for kidnapping (IPC 363).

This move has rightfully caused widespread consternation among small retailers who are being made to look like criminals. The potential social harm caused by the sale of a *bidi* or a cigarette to an 18-year-old adult with fundamental rights to make informed choices, does not equal to the acts of kidnapping or throwing acid or even sale of adulterated drugs which can kill or maim. If tobacco is a legal product with the Government earning hefty revenues, how can selling it to lawful adults become a

crime? This raises pointed questions on the process behind the framing of such rules. Is it the poor quality of research by bureaucrats drafting such proposals where they did not compare this with other existing provisions? Or is there an emotional overdrive to control tobacco consumption too fast? These retailers also sell other items of daily consumption like tea, water, juices, soft drinks, biscuits, savoury items and confectionary besides tobacco products. Their presence on every street corner forms the very character of India's urban retail activity and is a sign of self-reliance and micro-entrepreneurship among people at the bottom of the pyramid.

The critics of the Government might draw controversial conclusions and say this is a larger move to attack unorganised retailers and kill micro retail activity to benefit large business groups or networks seeking organised retail activity. NGOs might even term it a bid by foreign firms to push more international tobacco into India through smuggled and illicit products at the cost of Indian tobacco farmers. However, this is a clear case of loss of balance that legislators and the judiciary need to maintain while framing sentencing guidelines. Neither the legislature nor the judiciary should be allowed to frame and pronounce punishment, which is disproportionate to the crime as compared to other contextual offences. Otherwise the belief of the people in the rule of law will erode.

In the past there have been instances of disproportionate sentencing being overturned by the judiciary. In the *Soman vs. State of Kerala* case, 2012, the Supreme Court reversed the imprisonment sentence imposed on the accused by the High Court, who was a liquor retailer charged with selling spurious

alcohol which eventually led to the death of six people. Here the Supreme Court observed that: "Giving punishment to the wrongdoer is at the heart of the criminal justice delivery, but in our country, it is the weakest part of the administration of criminal justice." The court cited the need to consider a combination of three factors while directing the quantum of sentence: Proportionality, deterrence and rehabilitation, among which the principle of proportionality assumes highest prominence. A sentence must be commensurate with the seriousness or gravity of the crime. Here, the seller was the last and the weakest link in the supply chain of adulterated liquor comprising of an illicit manufacturer, the distributor and finally the retailer. Hence the court felt that reduction of the sentence from five years of imprisonment to three years was a fair decision.

While there is no debate on the harmful effects of tobacco and an ongoing reduction in its use should be pursued, shockingly disproportionate draft rules make a mockery of the system and create a legal paradox, thereby raising questions about the law-making procedure in the country. Such rules, affecting the livelihoods of many, need more debate and should be reviewed by expert committees comprising of judicial experts, socialists and industry representatives, before being put up for public review. If allowed, these will adversely affect the sense and sensibilities of judges who will have a dilemma while pronouncing sentences, given their disproportionate nature as compared to other crimes.

(The writer is president, not-for-profit organisation PRAHAR. The views expressed are personal.)

Biden holds promise for US-Taiwan relations

At the diplomatic level, Taiwan works as a major bargaining chip for the US to deal with an increasingly aggressive China



SUSHIR SINGH

SUMIT KUMAR

Just days before the US Congress certified President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lifted the long-standing restrictions on dealing with Taiwan. These "self-imposed restrictions", which were introduced decades ago to appease the mainland Chinese Government were declared "null and void" by Pompeo on January 9.

This allows US officials to engage with their Taiwanese counterparts on the same footing with

which they deal with functionaries of other countries.

While the latest development has elevated US-Taiwan relations to a new height, it is still to be seen whether Biden follows the trend or reverses the trajectory of bilateral engagement that has been achieved under the Donald Trump era.

Some experts, diplomats and commoners are speculative that the Biden Administration could backpedal US-Taiwan relations and instead favour China. Their apprehensions are not without a reason, as they cite a statement made by Biden in the US Senate in 2001 when he said that "Washington is not willing to go to war over Taiwan's unilateral declaration of independence."

However, it would be unfair to form an opinion about his foreign policies just based on some isolated statement. It is pertinent to recall that Biden had supported the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979. Even in 2020 he was among the first global leaders to congratulate Taiwanese

President Tsai Ing-wen on her reelection and said: "You are stronger because of your free and open society. The United States should continue strengthening our ties with Taiwan and other like-minded democracies." Biden has also supported US legislations providing arms and defence equipment to Taiwan under the outgoing President Donald Trump's Administration.

We should also keep it in mind that Biden had used strong words against China during his election campaign. He termed the communist nation a "thug" and even accused Trump of being too soft on China. Further, in an article published in a journal, Biden said: "We're a Pacific power, and we'll stand with friends and allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in the Asia-Pacific region," and "that includes deepening our ties with Taiwan." This, in turn, makes it aptly clear that Biden is fully conscious of the changing geostrategic, security and econom-

ic environment largely due to China's expansionist tendency.

Furthermore, some appointments made by Biden should indeed be viewed as a good signal for the East Asian nation. For instance, Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State-designate, has held talks with Taiwanese diplomats and in a tweet, Blinken mentioned that "stronger economic relations between the US and Taiwan will support our shared democratic values and our common commitment to regional peace and stability."

At the same time, the existence of Taiwan as an independent and vibrant democracy is also in the interest of the US for various reasons. First, Taiwan's geo-strategic location in the South China Sea (SCS) prevents Beijing from dominating sea trade routes. China controlling Taiwan would embolden Beijing to establish its dominance over the SCS and eventually it would pose a serious threat to East, Southeast Asia and the US. China can further assert its territorial

claim more aggressively against the Philippines, Vietnam and some other countries in the region.

Second, Taiwan is one of the leading export-based economies in the world. Taiwan succumbing to China would only accentuate Beijing's imperialist tendency. Third, at the diplomatic level, Taiwan works as a major bargaining chip for the US to deal with China. Fourth, while the recent attack on the Capitol Hill in Washington has bemused several countries across the world, the disappearance of Taiwan as an independent country would prove to be a big blow to the idea of democracy.

Taiwan can contribute significantly towards promoting the emergence of a strong supply chain free from the clutches of China. While Taiwan runs leadership training courses for the officials of the Pacific islands, its timely medical support to the rest of the world and its success in controlling the spread of COVID-19 have won the hearts of the international community.

But Taiwan could have certainly helped immensely had it been a member of the World Health Organisation.

The global perception about China has changed significantly in recent years as Beijing has become more repressive internally and aggressive internationally. China's repressive measures against peaceful protesters in Hong Kong and its attempt to cover up the outbreak of the contagion have finally ended the delusions about China's peaceful rise. It is all because of these factors that there exists a strong bipartisan understanding among US leaders about strengthening ties with Taiwan.

Now, the time has come when not only the independent existence of Taiwan should be a global concern, but efforts should also be undertaken to enable it to contribute to world affairs in an effective manner. For its pursuance, the US should take initiatives to sign the Free Trade Agreement with Taiwan, which in turn would propel other

countries to institutionalise their economic ties with it. The process will eventually not only reduce Taiwan's economic dependence on China, it would also integrate Taiwan into the regional and global economic groups.

The US should also take initiatives to include Taiwan into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). Since the East Asian country has fostered a strong relationship with India, Japan has already expressed its concern for the independence of Taiwan and Australia is facing an assertive China, Washington can explore the means of providing a role to Taiwan in this QUAD grouping.

While it becomes logical for the Biden Administration to sustain the momentum of the bilateral relationship, only time will tell if this transition leads to anticipated transformation.

(Singh is Professor at Delhi University while Kumar is former fellow at National Chengchi University, Taipei.)

'Celebi Aviation ready to handle COVID-19 vaccines'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Turkish aviation firm Celebi Aviation on Friday said it is operationally ready to handle COVID-19 vaccines and is working closely with existing airline operators and freight forwarders to understand their specific requirements.

The company has the infrastructure and capabilities to handle as many charters as required, at its facility and ensure a quick 'turnaround time', it said in a release.

Besides warehousing, the company offers ground handling services to these freight operators, Celebi Aviation said. Stating that it is "operationally ready" to handle the COVID-19 vaccines, the Turkish firm said the distribution of the vaccine will take place through its state-of-the-art pharma logistics center situated at Delhi Airport, which has the capacity of 72,000 MT annually.

"Celebi is able to play a leading role in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccine in India and globally. We understand the need for a strong emphasis on pursuing the highest standards in pharmaceutical cargo handling. These vaccines



Celebi is able to play a leading role in the distribution of COVID vaccine in India and globally

require rigorous temperature control throughout the entire supply chain, therefore, Celebi is operationally ready to handle the COVID-19 vaccines," said Murali Ramchandran, CEO India, Celebi Aviation. The company has also set up a special 24x7 duty managers desk to oversee these move-

ments, he said. The Center is equipped with the facility of temperature-controlled chambers for storage of consignments ranging between minus 25 to plus 25 degrees centigrade with humidity control to prevent moisture damage, according to Celebi Aviation.

In preparation for a domestic and global distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, Celebi Delhi Cargo Terminal Management is working on preparing proficient handling scenarios for the import and export of various types of vaccines in a safe and efficient way, the company said.

Celebi Delhi Cargo Terminal Management is the joint venture between Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), which operates and manages Delhi Airport, and Celebi Ground Handling.

Handling of trucks carrying vaccines, dedicated truck dock bays at Export Pharma Logistics Center, dedicated delivery gate for import of vaccine and quick turnaround time of all trucks are some of the measures the company has put in place as part of the preparations, it said.

Other facilities include cool dolly and "Tyvec" cover availability, along with dry ice, batteries, thermal blankets, among others, at pharma mini shop, it said, adding there is also provision for unitizing in temperature-controlled zones and data tracking and monitoring.

Celebi at present carries out ground handling activities at seven airports -- Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Cochin, Ahmedabad and Kannur -- in the country. The company claims it to be the first handler in India to deploy 'Cool Dollies' to extend the cool chain (-20 to +25 Celsius) till the aircraft bays on the airside.

PGIM India eyes Rs 500 cr from balanced advantage fund

PNS ■ MUMBAI

PGIM India Mutual Fund on Friday launched its maiden balanced advantage fund from which it expects to garner at least Rs 500 crore.

The new fund, which is an open-ended dynamic asset allocation fund with a floor of minimum 30 per cent equity, closes on January 29, PGIM said.

This product tries to deliver reasonable downside protection and lower volatility, making it suitable for investors who are seeking capital appreciation over a long period and is categorized as equity-oriented scheme.

A balanced asset allocation helps buy low and sell high, Ajit Menon, the chief executive of PGIM India MF said.

Its dynamic asset allocation model considers 15 years rolling price to earnings (PE) average as long-term average PE to capture changing trends in the equity markets.

"We hope to collect at least Rs 500 crore from the fund," Menon told PTI. The fund will be managed by Aniruddha Naha (for equities), Kumaresh Ramakrishnan (for debt and money markets) and Anandha Padmanabhan (for overseas investments), Menon said.

GAIL okays ₹1,046.35 cr share buyback to return surplus

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GAIL (India) Ltd, the nation's largest gas distribution firm, on Friday announced a Rs 1,046.35 crore share buyback programme as it looked to return surplus cash to shareholders, the biggest being the government of India.

In a stock exchange filing, the company said its board has approved the buyback of 6.97 crore shares at a price of Rs 150 per share.

The shares being bought represent 1.55 per cent of the total number of fully paid-up equity shares.

The company board also declared an interim dividend of 25 per cent (Rs 2.50 per share) for financial year 2020-21.

GAIL stock was down 2.2 per cent on the BSE and was trading at Rs 140.75 at 14.15 Hrs.

The government owns 51.76 per cent of GAIL and is expected to participate in the share buyback.

It stands to get Rs 583.6 crore from the dividend payout and another Rs 541.5 crore if it participates in the buyback by tendering a proportionate number of shares.

The buyback plan of Rs 1,046.35 crore represents "2.5 per cent and 2.26 per cent of the aggregate of the fully paid-up equity share capital and free



reserves of the company," GAIL said in the filing. The plan was within the statutory limits of 10 per cent, it said.

The record date for buyback of equity shares as well as payment of the interim dividend will be January 28, GAIL said.

The government has asked at least eight state-run companies to consider share buybacks as it scours for ways of raising funds to rein in its fiscal deficit.

The firms asked to consider share buybacks include miner Coal India, power utility NTPC, and minerals producer NMDC.

A buyback, also known as a share repurchase, is when a company buys its own outstanding shares to reduce the number of shares available in the open market.

Companies buy back shares for a number of reasons, such as to increase the value of remaining shares available by reducing the supply or to return surplus cash to shareholders.

The government wants public sector undertakings to either meet their targets for capital expenditure or 'reward the shareholder in the form of a dividend' or share buyback.

The government, which holds 51.76 per cent of GAIL, is likely to participate in the GAIL buyback just as it did in the case of NTPC, Engineers India Ltd, RITES and KIOCL.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had in her budget for 2020-21 set a target of raising Rs 2.1 lakh crore from privatisations and the sale of minority stakes in state-owned companies.

HCL Tech posts 31.1% rise in profits

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

HCL Technologies on Friday posted a 31.1 per cent rise in its December quarter net profit at Rs 3,982 crore on the back of strong momentum in its digital, products and platform segment, and exuded confidence in clocking further acceleration in bookings in the coming quarters.

The IT services major, which had registered a net profit of Rs 3,037 crore in the year-ago period, has also crossed the USD 10 billion revenue milestone in CY2020.

HCL Tech's revenue grew 6.4 per cent to Rs 19,302 crore in the quarter under review, from Rs 18,135 crore in the year-ago period (as per US GAAP).

The company recorded revenue growth at 3.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter in constant currency, beating its own estimate of 1.5-2.5 per cent growth for the December quarter.

HCL Tech has now revised its sequential revenue growth guidance to 2-3 per cent (including DWS contribution) in constant currency from its previous estimate of 1.5-2.5 per cent increase quarter-on-quarter for the March 2021 quarter. "The calendar year 2021 has



started on a very strong financial note. Our strategic bets continue to deliver outstanding results as reflected in our sequential revenue growth of 3.5 per cent in constant currency and 4.4 per cent in US dollars," HCL Technologies President and CEO C Vijayakumar said.

The company continues to see a strong pipeline and remains confident of "even further acceleration of bookings in the coming quarters", he added.

"Looking ahead, a combination of a strong pipeline, good order booking gives us a lot of optimism about the growth trajectory. I strongly believe that we are uniquely differentiated through a combination of solutions and services..." he said. HCL Technologies' revenue

has crossed USD 10 billion milestone in CY20, delivering 3.6 per cent year-on-year growth in constant currency.

Vijayakumar said the July-December period of FY21 -- which constitutes the first two comparison quarters since the closure of the IBM deal -- registered a y-o-y growth of 13.4 per cent.

HCL Tech had acquired select IBM software products for Rs 12,252 crore (about USD 1.8 billion).

"While it is early days, this is the fastest growing business from a year-on-year perspective for HCL and probably in the industry as well... Our geographic performance was led by Europe... In terms of verticals, five of the seven verticals showed good positive growth momentum. It was led by media and telecom," he added.

On a sequential basis, net profit was 26.7 per cent higher from Rs 3,142 crore, while topline was higher by 3.8 per cent from Rs 18,594 crore in September 2020 quarter.

Vijayakumar said the uptick in net income was on account of lower tax expense, primarily due to reversal of tax provisions related to prior years, and a couple of other factors.

Maruti rolls out online finance platform in Arena dealerships

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said it has launched an online financing platform at its Arena dealerships across 30 plus cities. With the launch of Smart Finance platform, 24 out of 26 steps in the customer vehicle purchase journey have been digitised, the auto major said in a statement.

The digital platform allows customers to choose the best-suited loan product, completion of all finance related formalities and disbursement of loan, with just a few clicks, it added.

The company's website will act as a facilitator between the customer and the financier providing real time status updates and in turn provide a hassle free and transparent financing solution, MSI said.

The carmaker said it has currently partnered with 12 financiers including State Bank of India, HDFC Bank, Mahindra Finance, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bank of Baroda, Cholamandalam Finance and Kotak Mahindra for the initiative.

Embassy REIT raises Rs 2,600 cr via debentures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Embassy Office Parks REIT on Friday said it has raised Rs 2,600 crore through issue of non-convertible debentures to refinance an existing debt of its IT park 'Embassy TechVillage' in Bengaluru.

In a regulatory filing at BSE, the company said it has "successfully priced and allotted by way of a private placement, Rs 2,600 crore or USD 351 million of rupee-denominated, listed, rated, secured, redeemable, transferable non-convertible debentures (NCDs) at a 6.40 per cent quarterly coupon."

The NCDs will be listed on the wholesale debt market of BSE. "We will use the funds raised to refinance a portion of the in-place Embassy TechVillage debt. Post this bond raise, we continue to maintain conservative leverage ratios and retain our flexibility to finance future growth," said Mike Holland,

Embassy REIT had on December 24, 2020, completed the acquisition of Embassy TechVillage for Rs 9,780 crore

Chief Executive Officer of Embassy REIT. On January 12, the debenture committee of the board of directors of the manager to Embassy REIT approved the issue of NCDs.

Embassy REIT had on December 24, 2020, completed the acquisition of Embassy TechVillage for Rs 9,780 crore. It recently raised Rs 3,680 crore as equity through an institutional placement to fund this acquisition.

Embassy REIT is India's first publicly listed Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), sponsored by global investment firm Blackstone and realty firm Embassy group.

MONEY MATTERS

NTPC's 1,320 MW Meja JV plant made fully operational



State-run power giant NTPC on Friday said its 1,320 megawatt (MW) joint venture power plant at Meja, Uttar Pradesh, has been made fully operational with successful completion of trial operation of Unit-2 of 660 MW.

First unit of 660 MW of the joint venture Meja Urja Nigam was made commercially operational in April 2019. "Based on achievement of approved norms, Unit-2 of 660 MW capacity of Meja Thermal Power Project of Meja Urja Nigam Pvt Ltd (MUNPL) (a joint venture of NTPC Ltd and UPRVUN Ltd) has successfully completed trial operation and consequently included in the installed capacity of MUNPL and NTPC group," a BSE filing said. With this, the total installed capacity of the MUNPL and NTPC group has become 1,320 MW and 63,635 MW, respectively, it added.

Bharti Airtel divests stake in Seynse Technologies



Telecom operator Bharti Airtel has divested its stake in Seynse Technologies, according to a regulatory filing. The stake was held through Bharti Airtel's wholly-owned subsidiary Nettle Infrastructure Investments Limited. The divestment of 6,824 equity shares was for a cash consideration. "...the company has divested its stake in

Seynse Technologies Private Limited held through Nettle Infrastructure Investments, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company," Bharti Airtel said in a late evening filing on Thursday. It, however, did not disclose the price at which the shares were divested "for the reasons of confidentiality". Seynse is a financial technology company that has created Loan Singh platform.

Sensex tumbles 549 pts; Nifty drops below 14,450

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex plunged 549 points on Friday, dragged by losses in index majors Infosys, HDFC and ICICI Bank amid a largely negative trend in global markets.

Profit-taking at higher levels kept benchmark indices volatile, traders said. The 30-share BSE index ended 549.49 points or 1.11 per cent lower at 49,034.67.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty tumbled 161.90 points or 1.11 per cent to 14,433.70.

Tech Mahindra was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shed-

ding over 4 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, ONGC, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement and HDFC.

On the other hand, Bharti Airtel, ITC, Bajaj Auto and Bajaj Finance were the gainers.

According to Binod Modi, Head-Strategy at Reliance Securities, domestic equities witnessed sharp pullback with increased volatility.

"However, we are not surprised with the day's fall as this was broadly expected as benchmark indices had been marking fresh highs for last couple of days, which made valuations quite stretched," he said.

Honda City tops mid-sized sedan segment in 2020

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Honda Cars India on Friday said its mid-sized sedan City led the segment last year with cumulative sales of 21,826 units.

Staying true to its legacy of being the Japanese automaker's longest running nameplate in India, the all-new fifth generation City was launched in July 2020 and has once again exceeded benchmarks with its design, technological prowess, safety and connectivity features, the automaker said in a statement.

The City's cumulative sales in July-December 2020 stood at 17,347 units.

December 2020 stood at 41 per cent in the segment, it added.

The model is not only leading the segment sales but also contributing to the overall growth of the mid-sized sedan segment which grew 10 per cent in July-December period, the carmaker said.

The cumulative sales for the segment in July-December period last year stood at 45,277 units as compared to 41,122 units in the same period of 2019.

The City's cumulative sales in July-December 2020 stood at 17,347 units.

Skoda launches refreshed version of Superb in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Czech automaker Skoda on Friday said it has launched the refreshed version of premium sedan Superb in India with price starting from Rs 31.99 lakh (ex-showroom). The model comes in two variants. While the Skoda Superb SportLine is priced at Rs 31.99 lakh, the Laurin & Klement variant of the model is tagged at Rs 34.99 lakh (all prices ex-showroom), Skoda Auto India said in a statement.

The model is powered by a 2-litre petrol engine mated with a seven-speed automatic transmission. Skoda Auto India Brand

Director Zac Hollis said, "Since its introduction, the Skoda Superb has been a favourite for many 'value luxury' seekers in India.

"The refreshed Skoda Superb hosts some contemporary updates that further elevates its appeal and shall be appreciated by all," he added.

The updated version comes with adaptive front-lighting system, the company said adding it has virtual cockpit - a customisable digital instrument panel that offers a vitalised perspective on comprehensive driving data and navigation, as a standard feature.

One Web secures funding from SoftBank, Hughes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Global and the UK government-led OneWeb on Friday said it has secured additional funding from SoftBank Group and Hughes Network Systems, bringing OneWeb's total funding to USD 1.4 billion," the company said in a statement.

OneWeb did not provide individual break-up of investments made by SoftBank Group and Hughes Network Systems. Earlier, the UK government and Bharti Global had announced a combined USD 1 billion investment (USD 500 million each) in OneWeb.

Commenting on the development, Masayoshi Son, representative director, corporate officer, chairman and CEO of SoftBank, said, "We are excited to support OneWeb as it

owned by the UK government and Bharti Global, announced today that it has secured additional funding from SoftBank Group and Hughes Network Systems, bringing OneWeb's total funding to USD 1.4 billion," the company said in a statement.

OneWeb did not provide individual break-up of investments made by SoftBank Group and Hughes Network Systems. Earlier, the UK government and Bharti Global had announced a combined USD 1 billion investment (USD 500 million each) in OneWeb.

Commenting on the development, Masayoshi Son, representative director, corporate officer, chairman and CEO of SoftBank, said, "We are excited to support OneWeb as it



increases capacity and accelerates towards commercialisation."

He added that the company is thrilled to continue our partnership with Bharti, the UK government and Hughes to help OneWeb deliver on its

mission to transform internet access around the world.

OneWeb Executive Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal said that both SoftBank and Hughes are deeply familiar with OneWeb's business, share its vision for the future, and

their commitment allows the company to capitalise on the significant growth opportunity ahead.

"We gain from their experience and capabilities, as we deliver a unique LEO network for the world," Mittal said.

In December, OneWeb launched 36 new satellites, built at its Airbus Joint Venture assembly plant in Florida, USA. It has brought the company's total fleet to 110 satellites, all fully-functioning and benefiting from International Telecommunication Union spectrum priority.

The recommencement of satellite launches by OneWeb had come within weeks of billionaire Sunil Bharti Mittal-run Bharti Group along with the British government taking over

as the new owners of the broadband satellite communications company, which emerged from bankruptcy.

Recently, the company said it is on track to offer global services to customers from late 2021, starting with the United Kingdom, Alaska, Northern Europe, Greenland, Iceland, the Arctic Seas, and Canada, with global service in 2022. The company aims to offer high-speed internet from OneWeb satellites in India by mid-2022.

"OneWeb's mission is to deliver broadband connectivity worldwide to bridge the global Digital Divide by offering everyone, everywhere access including to the Internet of Things (IoT) future and a pathway to 5G," the statement on Friday said.

Bridgestone India launches new tyre for commercial vehicle segment



Tyre maker Bridgestone India on Friday launched a new tyre, V-Steel Mix M721, for the commercial vehicle segment with an aim to establish a strong presence in the drive axle tyre category. The latest offering is specifically for the general cargo, long haul and highway

application, the company said. The new product addresses the issues of both tyre fuel mileage and cut-chip resistance. Bridgestone India said. "The commercial vehicle segment is focussed on optimising total cost of operations to achieve higher profitability. The V-STEEL Mix M721 is targeted towards the general cargo segment, which is the largest portion of the CV segment and delivers 15 per cent extra tyre mileage and subsequent reduction in cost per kilometre (CPK) for the fleet operators," said Parag Satpute, Managing Director, Bridgestone India. Pune-based Bridgestone India, which is a subsidiary of Bridgestone Corporation of Japan, had last month announced an undisclosed investment in fleet management firm Fleeca India to strengthen its positioning in the digital mobility space.

Rupee slips 3 paise to settle at 73.07 against US dollar



The rupee snapped its three-session winning streak and settled for the day 3 paise lower at 73.07 (provisional) against the American currency on Friday, tracking weaker Asian peers and heavy selloffs in domestic equities. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.07 and hit an intra-day high of 72.99 and a low of 73.15. It finally finished at 73.07, lower by 3 paise over its last close. On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 73.04 against the American currency. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose by 0.16 per cent to 90.38. "The movement in USD/INR spot is in tandem with other Asian peers and going ahead the optimism over US stimulus package will keep it lower," said Rahul Gupta, Head of Research-Currency, Emkay Global Financial Services. Gupta further said that there was not much volatility this week and also RBI's participation in spot was subdued.

what's brewing?

Get rid of winter stiffness with yoga

During winter days, the body becomes stiff which makes it prone to cramps, joint pain, and injury. Yoga can cure your winter lethargy and stiffness.

All you need is your yoga mat and as little as 20 minutes thrice a week to see the difference. Exercise heats up the body from the inside and releases stiffness from the muscles making you feel active and energetic. Grand Master Akshar shares a few yoga poses that may help deal with these winter woes.

Sukshma vyayam

Start your day with sukshma vyayam. In yoga, warming up of the body starts from the toes and goes all the way up. You can start with ankle rotations, warming up the ankle joints, moving on to your knees, hips, arms, neck, and head. Warming up the body ensures that your productive levels on the mat are high and you also remain free from injuries.

Go slow

Practise gently and slowly keeping awareness on each movement and syncing your breath along with each posture. When you practice slowly it ensures that you are mindful of your movements and this results in better

strength flexibility and a positive outcome overall. Establish the communication between the mind and the body through the breath in a gentle and slow manner. Practising any movements in a hasty way not only leads to injury but can also harm the respiratory and the nervous system.

Choose your environment

During the winter, choose a warm and cosy place for your practice. If indoors, choose a room or a spot where there isn't a cold draft in the air. If you are practicing outdoors make sure that you are well covered in warm clothing. Practise is vital to keep your body in good health and in a mobile condition. Practice the following yoga postures:

Yoga asanas

Upward facing dog - Urdvha Mukhi svanasana: Come to plank posture and from here gently drop the pelvis and the stomach down without touching the floor. Lift the chest and the shoulders towards the sky and look up. In this posture do not bend your elbows and squeeze the glutes to activate the back muscles.

Downward dog -- Adhomukhi svanasana:

To form downward dog, you can start in Child's Pose resting your pelvis on your heels and reaching out in front of you with your forehead on the floor. From here, bring your toes down to push your knees and pelvis up forming a triangular shape with the body. Make sure the distance between the palms and your feet is neither too far away nor is it too close.

These are simple and effective postures that can be performed by practitioners of any age. Once you are able to perform these postures with ease then you can add advanced level asanas in your practice such as Wheel Pose, Bow Pose, Peacock Pose, Headstand and so on. Along with your yoga practice, ensure that you monitor your food intake and consume water at room temperature.



Fitness apps that make your home-workouts interesting

Sitting at home for months has made people shift everyday fitness to virtual or online programmes. Here's a list of a few digital fitness platforms to help you reach your fitness goal from the comfort of home.

TREAD
It is an online fitness start-up that connects the country's top trainers and fitness experts with fitness enthusiasts and individuals free of cost. It covers Yoga to Zumba and Running to HIIT, allowing users to create their own schedules and ensure uninterrupted fitness training at home or on the road with the app. It organises interactive group workout sessions with live trainers, leading to trainer empowerment and incorporating the concept of working out

'Anytime. Anywhere.'
GOQii
GOQii's smart health ecosystem integration tools are real-time personalised coaching, a health e-commerce store, scheduling doctor appointments, and a unique 'GOQii Cash' programme where healthy behaviour is rewarded with cash discounts and insurance discounts. The smart tech-enabled startup already had a pre-existing platform of live videos, e-commerce, and doctor consultations.

Curefit
At cure.fit, one makes group workouts fun, daily food healthy & tasty, mental fitness easy with yoga and meditation, and medical and lifestyle care hassle-free. These guided workouts at curefit includes bodyweight exercises that will strengthen the mid-section, burn belly fat and help

improve your overall fitness.
Daily yoga
Daily Yoga inspires yogis worldwide with the largest yoga pose base. It helps one practice yoga on all mobile devices and multiple other platforms. It has more than 100 yoga and meditation classes to help people from all levels, including a whole series of beginner-friendly tutorials to help you find a different and better self in only 2 weeks. Most of them are between three to sixty minutes, and it's designed for both beginners and professionals.

If you are looking to incorporate yoga into your weight loss or staying fit program, the programs are designed for exactly that.

TWellness
Based in Bologna, Italy,

Technogym's new fitness app TW, (TWellness), helps users access specialised sessions conducted by master trainers at Technogym, across the globe. Technogym also offers a complete range of products for home fitness based on the space available, training needs, sport passions, or home interior style.

30 day fitness
The name of this app is quite relevant as this fitness app has the personalised 30-day challenges to help you achieve your goals of being more active, lose weight, or gain muscle. This app has 400-odd individual fitness workouts that are designed to be done at home or pretty much anywhere. These workouts are named after different cities of the world and under each city, there's a particular set of workouts to be completed.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



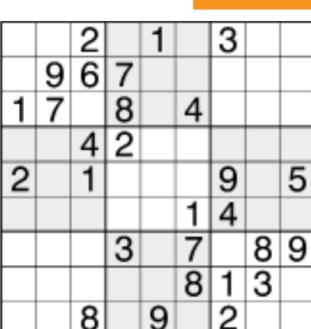
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Pepper might make you do this
- Use needles and wool to make something
- Quick
- Spread this on bread
- Rich
- Injured
- Repaired
- Factual
- Utters
- A weight to stop a boat drifting

DOWN

- Not in danger
- Less difficult
- A short letter
- Wearing
- Shoving
- Permitted
- Postage stickers
- Look carefully for
- Jealousy
- Expensive



GINGER MEGGS



Namrata Bhagtani Sadhvani is somebody to look up to as she always knew what she wanted from life and she's more than capable of getting it on her terms. Hailing from the city known for its palm trees, deserts and the Burj Khalifa - Dubai, this editor of a popular parenting website called 'Momspresso' volunteers for an NGO against gender-based violence called 'Sayfty' and is Hyderabad's most well-known mom blogger. She has a purpose to be working here, in the city of Nizams. She talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about her life in the city, her contribution and more.

Hyderabad, A POTPOURRI OF CULTURE



From recently appearing on a television show hosted by author, chef and well-known actor Arshad Warsi's wife Maria Goretti to being the only nomination from Hyderabad for digital women awards by SheThePeopleTV, Namrata Bhagtani Sadhvani has rightfully made several heads turn across the city by representing her 'karmabhoomi' across the nation. Defining a completely new relationship with the current city she has been progressing in, she shares that she moved to Hyderabad right after she got married in 2008. An individual who never thought of permanently settling down here in the city is today generating some good amount of business for it and rejuvenating her true self here.

language, understand the locals better and erudite the city's culture. Comparing both the cities, Life in Dubai was certainly fast-paced and denizens are always in a hurry. However, when I moved to Hyderabad I found the locals to be very loosened up, taking their time to process stuff which alerted me to buckle-up too," she laughs.

The very theme of exposing yourself to each other's influences is what helps in building a good city. Immensely in love with the culture of Nizams here, Namrata incorporated the same modernity and civilisation in her life as well. "The Hi-tech city is enormously developed today and there is a concurrent traditional Hyderabad lifestyle also that's going on," she adds. While talking about how Hyderabad played an essential role in expanding the very existent influencer industry, Namrata tells us that she has made her name for herself in this city right when there was a need for bloggers! She calls herself a mom-blogger with so much pride and certainly believes that if she had tried starting this career in cities like

Mumbai or Delhi, chances are that she wouldn't have been as successful as she is currently, since the market is already over-crowded there. "The one thing I dislike the

most here is the traffic! There's so much traffic in the city, it's hard to get around. And, people here are obsessed with non-vegetarian food. They say that

Hyderabad is no place for vegetarians, but I'd like to differ. I'd like to dispel myths and say Hyderabad is wonderful for vegetarians as well," she concludes.



For that flawless skin

Certain external factors and medication can cause skin pigmentation. Dr Nivedita Dadu shares tips that can help

Skin pigmentation refers to the colour of the skin. Skin pigmentation or dark patches are a common issue amongst both males & females wherein the skin becomes darker often in patches. Hence, one gets uneven skin tone. The main cause for skin pigmentation is over-production of the brown pigment called melanin. Melanin is the pigment responsible for the colour of the skin and is made by melanocyte cells in the skin. Skin rashes like rosacea, psoriasis, eczema, contact dermatitis, skin infections such as acne, ringworm, tinea versicolor, candidiasis, medical conditions, and hormonal changes due to pregnancy can cause the formation of skin pigmentation and dark patches.

generally harmless but can sometimes be caused by an underlying medical condition. Therefore, it is advised to consult a qualified dermatologist if someone is facing skin pigmentation problems.

There are several types of skin pigmentation such as age spots or solar lentiginosis (Liver Spots), melasma or chloasma, freckles (Ephelides) and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.

The following are some tips and home remedies one can follow to get rid of skin pigmentation and dark patches:

Apply sunscreen every day at least 15-20 minutes before heading out in the sun as it needs some time to get absorbed into the skin. Re-apply sunscreen after every 4 hours or use a physical sunscreen as it provides protection for long duration. This is the most important step towards preventing and treating skin pigmentation.

Apple cider vinegar contains polyphenolic compounds that are beneficial in managing pigmentation. One can apply it daily.

Take oral supplements like Vitamin C or glu-

tathione. These can boost the skin's resilience to the UV rays of sun.

Potatoes are known for their anti-pigmentation properties. It can work quite well on pigmented areas and blemishes. For this, cut a potato into half and dip the sliced part into water. Rub the potato slice on the affected areas in a circular motion for about 10 minutes. Wash off the face with lukewarm water. Repeat this procedure twice or thrice in a week to get rid of dark patches of the skin.

Apply black tea water on the skin. For this soak a cotton ball in black tea water and apply it on the pigmented skin at least twice a day.

Coconut oil helps to remove the dead skin cells and also protects it from the harmful UV rays of the sun. Take a few drops of coconut oil and massage it well so that it penetrates deep down the skin's layers. Leave the oil on the skin for about 20-25 minutes so that it gets absorbed. Wash the face and repeat this method thrice in a week.

(The writer is Dermatologist, Founder & Chairman of Dr Nivedita Dadu's Dermatology Clinic)

'BB opened many doors of work for me'

Big Boss is definitely one of the most controversial reality shows on Indian television. Despite all the negativity, every season has contestants with clean innings in the house. With the admirable Nagarajuna hosting the show, it has become a rage down south. History has it that whoever has been a part of this contentious show has gained both good and bad publicity. Correspondingly, a never-seen-before avatar of Gujarati actress Monal Gajjar in Bigg Boss 4 is grabbing headlines everywhere. Without any controversy, she played an individual game in the house where there are more cameras than contestants. Having made some long-lasting relationships, Monal came across as one strong and focused contestant. She talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about her time in the house, future projects and more

What was the finicky emotion you were carrying along while entering the BB house? There is one cliché quality in our personalities that can never be polarised and that is my magic pill - positivity. The reality show came across as another break for me to work for the Telugu film industry and to display more of my flair for the Southern audiences. It was like I was adding to the demographics of my active fan base. And why would miss a chance like this? I was consciously cultivating positivity in my mind so that it would help me get through anything inside the house.

Do you think that because you come from Gujarat, you were representing your fellow Gujaratis or were you there only as a public figure who has worked in many languages? I don't think I was there just representing Gujarat, but all the film fraternities I have been a part of till date, along with the responsibility of showcasing family values that I have inherited on my

way to success. Tabloids, glossy magazines, channels, public, etc they are constantly judging us based on the personality and habits we are displaying on the show so the accountability also levels up.

How emotionally challenging was it for you in the house?

The right expression would be "excessively challenging". The initial week began on a fine note, although from the second week the atmosphere was filled with so many misunderstandings. To be precise, it was a mess! I had to deal with so many feelings all at once, emotions change every second over there. Though it's absolutely normal to have intense thoughts, how one should deal with it amid a crowd of strangers is another challenge altogether.

What worked in your favor?

I have always believed honesty takes you places and it gives you happiness in return. That being my foundation for my core values, it helped me cut through what is rather deceptive in the house and allowed me to be the real Monal

that I am. Whatever was happening around me, I never gave up because it was such a wonderful opportunity that was pushing me to keep going. After all, you never know how close you are to succeeding.

Your personal life was 24x7 rolling on cameras for the public, were you apprehensive about anything?

No, I was prepared for it and knowing that, I signed up for Bigg Boss. There is nothing in my lifestyle that I will feel apprehensive of, I am a very transparent person and my life is an open book. In fact, I wanted my audience to know me up, close and personal.

What tactics did you apply inside the house to fight unwanted moments of aggression?

I tried to control my anger as much as possible so it doesn't take a toll on my mental health. Instances would definitely arise which would make one fume, but handling it healthily is the key. I always know how to collect my thoughts before speaking so I

don't regret anything later on. Even if I ever would have expressed my emotional vulnerabilities, it was always in a non-confrontational manner. I was also taking note of what made the other contestants leave before me and that I mustn't recede that way.

How surprised were you on being evicted?

Surprisingly, not much because I knew how badly every other contestant wanted me to exit. I was so close to the finale! But I state it to be a satisfying journey altogether along with the golden mic opportunity that I received. To be able to connect with your watchers while inside the house is something that I can never forget.

Can you tell us more about the connections that you formed inside? Will they last long?

Bonding always isn't meant to be associated only with partners. I made some really deep connections with Akhil and Sohail and we are still in touch despite the show having ended. We may not meet regularly, but I can surely say that all three of us will always be

there for one another whenever needed. Sohail takes so many efforts to stay connected. I am hoping it is a lifelong pursuit with them as good, close peers with a growing amount of affection and admirable respect.

How has Bigg Boss helped you bag more prospects in the showbiz industry?

I am currently appearing as a judge for the dance reality show called Dance Plus and a plethora of scripts have been listed out for me to start working on. The controversial show actually opened so many doors of first-class work for me and it has come as a boon for me in my life. If I ever get a second chance to go back and do the season, I won't mind at all. Nagarajuna sir hosted us so well; at times it felt as if we were being welcomed at his own residence. He was more of a mentor and a guide always directing us to not deviate from our goals. In fact, when Samantha visited for a day, she radiated so much of positivity! We were full of energy even after the episode ended.



Inexperienced attack keeps Oz in check

Debutants Natarajan, Washington shine as Australia score 274/5 courtesy Labuschagne ton

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The incredible underdog fairytale of Thangarasu Natarajan got better with his twin strikes on debut headlining a commendable effort from an inexperienced Indian bowling attack, which reduced Australia to 274 for 5 despite a stylish hundred from Marnus Labuschagne on the opening day of the final Test here.

The Indian attack, with a collective experience of 3 Tests and 10 balls and 11 wickets in its kitty, was pitted against a batting line-up with 59 hundreds.

After 87 overs, the two Tamil Nadu rookies Natarajan (20-2-63-2) and Washington Sundar (2-4-63-1) could hold their heads high for a lion-hearted effort on a good batting pitch in the absence of the injured Ravichandran Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah.

If tall off-spinner Washington set up a nice little trap to get rid of Steve Smith (36 off 77 balls), Natarajan forced centurion Labuschagne (108 off 204 balls) and Matthew Wade (47 off 85 balls) to miscue their pull-shots after a 113-run stand which threatened to put India in a spot.

At stumps, Tim Paine (38) and Cameron Green (28) had added 61 runs for the sixth wicket and the visitors would need a few quick wickets to keep the first innings total within a manageable range.

The distance between Palayampatti, a non-descript village in Tamil Nadu's Salem, to Australia's modern city Brisbane is 9035 km on a google map.

But add the hardships of a daily wager mother trying to put



Shardul Thakur hugs Washington Sundar after he dismiss Australian opener Marcus Harris on Day 1 of fourth Test at Gabba

food on table, being called for suspect action early in his career, not being privileged enough to get a paternity leave (his daughter is already three months old), it's a million miles emotionally that Team India's favourite Nattu has traversed.

Getting Labuschagne, who was on a rampage, with a short delivery ensured that Australia didn't finish the day with a score close to 350.

For someone, who was supposed to be a net bowler, India's Test Cap No 300, did well

enough on the first day despite not exactly being a natural. He also knows that he doesn't have the express pace to trouble batsmen (his average speed is 130 plus).

He bowled full during his first two spells and made the length shorter when the ball got old and that's how he induced Wade and Labuschagne to go for those pull shots.

Nobody would have blamed a Natarajan or a Shardul or "leader of the attack" Mohammed Siraj (19-8-51-1),

all of whom toiled manfully throughout their multiple spells in a battle of unequals.

The inexperience was palpable as Thakur (18-5-67-1) bowled a lot of full pitched deliveries which Labuschagne pounced on in the second and third sessions during an innings that had nine boundaries.

If all the injuries weren't enough, Navdeep Saini (7.5 overs) now seems to be in trouble as he has sustained a groin niggle moments after his skipper Ajinkya Rahane dropped a

dolly at gully when Labuschagne was on 37.

By far, Australia's most consistent batsman in the series, Labuschagne batted in two gears during the day.

In the first session, he faced 82 balls and sedately moved to 19 but in the next 113 balls, scored another 82 runs to reach his fifth hundred in 195 balls.

He trusted the bounce, hit some lovely drives and

4th Test, Day 2
Live from 5:00am IST
SONY TEN 1, 3 & SIX

was also ready to pull anything that was short.

During his partnership with Smith, the former Australian skipper was the aggressor but Washington, a specialist batsman till 2016 and now a frontline off-spinner, with the help of his seniors — skipper Rahane and his deputy Rohit Sharma — laid a beautiful trap.

Washington had bowled three maiden overs prior to lunch and the fidgety Smith, who is always looking to get a move on, fell for the leg trap that was set for him.

Rohit stationed himself at

Saini complains of groin pain



Brisbane: The injury-plagued Indian team took another hit on Friday when pacer Navdeep Saini was forced off the field during the fourth and final Test due to groin pain and taken for

scans. The 28-year-old Saini had bowled five balls of his eighth, and the innings 36th, over during the second session when he had to walk off the field because of the pain. With this, his further participation in the match, which began this morning, has been thrown into serious doubt.

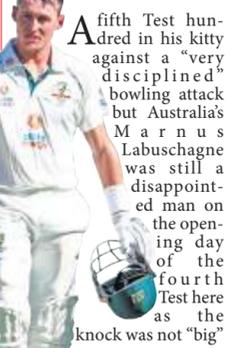
"Navdeep Saini has complained of pain in his groin. He is currently being monitored by the BCCI medical team," read a short statement from the BCCI on the one-Test-old bowler's condition. "Navdeep Saini has now gone for scans," added a brief update that came after the initial note. PTI

short mid-wicket for a whip that Smith plays on the on-side.

They were banking on the extra bounce that they had seen Washington generate with the white ball.

Labuschagne disappointed at not getting 'big score'

PTI ■ BRISBANE



enough for him.

Australia ended the day 274/5, thanks largely to Labuschagne's 108 off 204 balls. The 26-year-old said he should have done more.

"...I think, I am definitely disappointed not going on and getting a really big score, which would have put us in a better position as a team," Labuschagne said at the virtual post-play press-conference.

"Any Test century, it doesn't matter who it is against or against what opposition, you want to make sure you are scoring hundreds and probably for me (it was) today it was disappointing that (I) did not

end up making that a really big hundred," he stressed.

However, he credited the Indian bowlers for being disciplined early on and hardly giving away any scoring opportunities.

"...Indian bowling attacks, they are very disciplined and doesn't matter who is bowling, they are very planned, they are very strategic and we saw that today with their bowling attack.

"They were disciplined early and did not give us many of those scoring opportunities in the first session," the right-handed batsman said.

Siraj abused by Gabba crowd, called grub

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj was targeted for abuse by a section of the crowd on the opening day of the fourth Test, a newspaper here reported, claiming that he was called a "grub" by some spectators.

The reported incident happened a few days after Siraj was racially abused by spectators at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the third and fourth day of the drawn third Test. That had led to an expulsion of six people from the stands and an unreserved apology from Cricket Australia to the visiting team.

On Friday, a report in the Sydney Morning Herald quoted a spectator as saying that a

section of the crowd at the Gabba targeted Siraj.

"The guys behind me have been calling — shouting — both Washington and Siraj grubs," a spectator named Kate was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

"It started targeted at Siraj and it was a chant similar to the SCG one (in which fans sung to the tune of Que Sera, Sera but substituted the lyrics with Que Shiraz, Shiraz).

"But this time it was Siraj. I suspect it's not a coincidence that it's Siraj being targeted post the SCG stuff."

According to the newspaper, at one point, a man in the crowd was heard yelling, "Siraj, give us a wave, give us a wave, give us a wave. Siraj, you bloody grub."



Injured Hanuma Vihari on Friday left for India after being ruled out of the ongoing fourth Test in Brisbane. Vihari has sustained a grade 2 injury during the final day of his match-saving 23 and will now require rest, followed by intense rehabilitation which rules him out of England series. BCCI/Twitter

Sundar ready to bowl 40-50 overs

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Washington Sundar, prior to his unexpected Test debut on Friday against Australia, had bowled over 285 overs in first-class cricket and after dismissing Steve Smith, the Tamil Nadu off-spinner is ready to bowl 50 in an innings if that's what the side wants of him.

India's T20 specialist off-spinner was asked to stay back by the team management after the white-ball series to help as a net bowler but injuries to key players, including senior pro Ravichandran Ashwin, landed him in a mouth-watering duel with Smith which he won hands down.

"I have always felt that my skills are very good with red ball. I have bowled a lot of overs in first class cricket and first division league in Chennai as well.



Washington Sundar celebrates after he dismiss Steve Smith

I was just waiting for this opportunity and last couple of months, we were here, I did get to bowl a lot of overs and improve upon my skills," the shy bowler said after first day's play.

But does he have the stamina to bowl long spells that a team expects from its spinners

considering that he hasn't played first-class cricket since 2017?

His answer is 'bring it on'. "Like any bowler, I love bowling a lot of overs. It's just so much fun to bowl a lot of overs. Give me 20, 30, 40 or 50 overs. We had some plans going for Steve Smith and (Marnus)

Labuschagne and I am very glad they worked. The first wicket definitely felt good."

Washington kept Smith quiet for two overs and in the 13th delivery got him caught at short mid-wicket.

Did Ashwin versus Smith set a template for him?

"We did have some plans for Smith and it's a different game altogether. Last game was different, conditions were different and I had to bowl good balls over and over again. It happened (the dismissal) and it's great."

The former India U-19 World Cupper feels the wicket was good for batting and it was great effort to reduce to the hosts to 274 for 5.

"There was a little bit of spongy bounce till lunch and the wicket was good and bowlers did a good job to restrict Australia to 5 for 274."

Arjun Tendulkar makes debut for Mumbai senior team

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Budding left-arm pacer Arjun Tendulkar, who is the son of iconic former batsman Sachin Tendulkar, made his Mumbai senior team debut on Friday in a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match against Haryana, which the hosts lost by eight wickets here.

In the Elite E League group clash played at the suburban BKC ground, Mumbai made 143 after opting to bat first, a target which Haryana overhauled in 17.4 overs.

Arjun had an off day with

the ball as he returned with rather unimpressive figures of 1/34 in the three overs that he bowled.

He dismissed Haryana opener Chaitya Bishnoi (4) cheaply after he edged a delivery to wicket-keeper Aditya Tare to claim his maiden wicket for the Mumbai senior team.

Incidentally, his legendary father's last Ranji Trophy game was against Haryana back in 2013.

Arjun didn't get the chance to face a single delivery when Mumbai batted as the team was bundled out in

19.3 overs.

Haryana then rode on one-down Himanshu Rana's blazing unbeaten 75 off 53 balls to chase down the target with consummate ease.

The 21-year-old Arjun has now qualified for the IPL auctions, as he has made his debut for the Mumbai team.

Tendulkar junior was added to the Mumbai squad, along with another pacer Krutik Hanagavadi, by the Salil Ankola-led selection committee, after the BCCI permitted a total of 22 players to be selected.

Captain Root's 168* puts Eng ahead

AFP ■ GALLE

England captain Joe Root hit an unbeaten 168 as his side built up a lead of 185 over Sri Lanka on a rain-hit second day of the opening Test.

England were 320/4 when rain halted play in Galle. Root and Dan Lawrence, who scored 73 on his Test debut, built a 173-run partnership after the tourists resumed the day on 127/2.

Root, who is batting with Jos Buttler (7), hit his 18th Test ton and kept up the pressure on the home bowlers despite losing overnight partner Jonny Bairstow for 47 early in the day.

"I think the things could happen very quickly as the game moves forward, generally does here. It is really important that we make the most of this first innings lead that we have got now," Root told reporters.

"We will be really ruthless. I have spoken about this ahead of the series and make it count and put them under pressure. That way try and bat just once."

After a full opening day in the empty stadium in Galle, rain started falling just before the start of the second day and wiped out the final session.

Root started the day on 66 and passed 100 soon after lunch with a single off Dilruwan Perera. He raised his bat and hugged Lawrence. It was the star batsman's highest Test score in more than a year after going through 2020 without a century and said he felt "good" to make it count.

"Generally when I get a



hundred I make it really count," Root, who has a Test best of 254 in 98 Tests, said. "I have got a good record past 100. Tomorrow I will try to make another really big one and drive the game forward from there."

He added, "I felt I really got in a good mindset throughout this game so far. Will try and take that forward into the rest of this winter tour and beyond."

England will tour India for a full series including four Tests after the two matches in Sri Lanka as part of a hectic cricket calendar in 2021.

Lawrence, 23, stood firm with his captain, displaying confidence against the spinners as he brought up his fifty in 95 balls with five fours and one six.

Lawrence, who plays for English county Essex, survived two dropped catches on 60 and 68 and finally fell to Perera.

Arsenal remain in midtable after draw

AFP ■ LONDON

Mikel Arteta admitted Arsenal were suffering from fatigue after their recent revival fought to a halt in a scrappy 0-0 draw against Crystal Palace on Thursday.

Arteta's side had won their previous four matches in all competitions, but they were not fortunate enough to extend their unbeaten run to five games.

Palace were unable to convert several first half chances at the Emirates Stadium and, although Arsenal improved after the interval, they missed a chance to climb into the top half of the Premier League.

"I wanted to see a win and a few goals but we were fatigued. I cannot fault the spirit but it wasn't enough," Arteta said.

"We created a lot of situations against the low block but there was a period when we gave the ball away too much. We are playing a lot of games and you can see fatigue. Many players aren't fresh. We lacked the quality in the final third to win the game."

Arsenal sit in 11th place, eight points adrift of the Champions League places as they continue to pay the price for their worst start to a season since 1974-75.

Just before Christmas, Arsenal were only four points above the relegation zone, so their current position 12 points away from the bottom three affords Arteta some much-needed breathing space.

But this disjointed display underlined the attacking flaws that have stopped Arsenal building on last season's FA Cup triumph.

Palace have only won one of



their past eight matches in all competitions and are one point behind Arsenal in 13th.

Emile Smith-Rowe, Arsenal's promising young midfielder, started after scoring against Newcastle as a substitute last weekend.

But Kiernan Tierney was absent with muscle tightness and the Gunners missed the Scotland left-back's busy presence.

Aubameyang has endured a difficult season and, once again, Arsenal's captain was a difficult figure.

The Gabon forward briefly sparked into life and tested Vicente Guaita with a fierce strike that was parried by the Palace keeper.

But Palace were finding their feet on a wet evening and Granit Xhaka had to make a perfectly timed sliding tackle to stop Wilfried Zaha getting a shot away after the forward slalomed into the penalty area.

Palace broke through the Arsenal defence again when Christian Benteke scooped his shot wastefully over from 10

yards after good work by Tyrick Mitchell.

James Tomkins was inches away from giving Roy Hodgson's men the lead as the Palace defender got above Rob Holding to glance his header against the bar from Eberechi Eze's free-kick.

Arsenal were struggling to get out of their own half and Bernd Leno had to make a superb save to repel Benteke's header from Mitchell's cross.

Arteta's half-time team talk seemed like it might have the desired effect and Hector Bellerin drilled just wide from the edge of the area in the opening minute of the second half.

Arsenal threatened again as Bukayo Saka forced Guaita to block at the near post before Lacazette blasted into the side-netting after a flowing move.

Arteta sent on Nicolas Pepe and Thomas Partey, back after a month out with a thigh injury. But the expected push never came and Palace were able to keep the misfiring Gunners at bay with ease.

Pak drop Masood, Haris for SA Tests

Karachi: Six players, including Shan Masood, Haris Sohail and Imam-ul-Haq, from the recent New Zealand series were axed as Pakistan's new chief selector Mohammad Wasim on Friday announced a massively overhauled 20-member squad for the two-Test home series against South Africa.

Wasim rewarded several top performers of the domestic season and included nine uncapped players in the squad, which will be trimmed to 16 players ahead of the first Test.

Top scoring batsmen Saud Shakeel, Kamran Ghulam, all-rounder Agha Salman, left-arm spinner Nauman Ali, off-spinner Sajid Khan and fast bowlers Hasan Ali and Tabish Khan — all got call-ups for the series beginning on January 26 at the National Stadium here.



The selectors also upgraded young batsman Abdullah Shafique to the Test squad although he was selected for the New Zealand tour as a specialist T20 player. Similarly, the selectors have also called up pacer Haris Rauf, another T20 specialist for the two-Test series.

The selectors also dropped six players from the dismal tour

of New Zealand with Wasim insisting that fast bowler Naseem Shah was not in the Test squad because he had an injury.

Other players dropped from NZ tour include experienced pacers, Mohammad Abbas and Sohail Khan.

Wasim, insisted that selectors would follow a horses for courses policy now and the squad had been picked keeping in mind the conditions in Pakistan for the SA series.

Test squad: Babar Azam (C), Mohammad Rizwan (VC), Imran Butt, Abdullah Shafique, Abid Ali, Azhar Ali, Fawad Alam, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Kamran Ghulam, Agha Salman, Hasan Ali, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Tabish Khan, Haris Rauf, Sajid Khan, Nauman Ali, Yasir Shah, Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Nawaz. PTI

POPCORN entertainers

are Vijay Konda's first choice

NAGARAJ GOUD

Vijay Kumar Konda has chosen *Power Play* as the title of his next project, first look and motion poster was unveiled by Rana Daggubati on Sankranti. The film, a production venture of Mahidhar and Devesh under Vanamalee Creations, sees *Hushaaru* girl Hemal Ingle as the female lead, while noted actress Poorna has essayed a role with negative streak. Rounding off the supporting cast are Kota Srinivas Rao, Ajay, Madhunanandan, Dhanraj, Venu, Raja Ravindra and Ravi Varma.

The film was wrapped up last year and it is presently in post-production. Vijay Konda tells us they are planning to slot it for a theatrical roll out next month but it depends upon other releases. Talking about the storyline, he says, "Due to some people who wield power, a middle-class youngster (played by Raj Tarun) who is preparing for his Groups Exam faces a lot of trouble. How he rises up to the challenge forms the crux. As he is playing a mature role, Raj Tarun was required to give a restrained performance."

Vijay Konda has directed the project from a story of Nandyala Ravi and it is for the first time in his career he adapted someone else's written material. Known for his popcorn family entertainers, it is also his maiden shot at a thriller. "Ravi's storyline excited me but I did give my touch to it. As a filmmaker I thought it will be a welcome change for me from the kind of films I have directed in the past and for Raj as well. So we did it," he maintains, adding that if he comes across ideas like *Power Play*, he would direct them occasionally but his priority remains entertainment films.

Vijay has wrapped up the film in less than 40 days and speaking about his fast pace, he points out, "I'm a producer's director. I strongly believe the money should be seen on screen. As a filmmaker if you plan meticulously, the working days will come down, so will be the budget. People like Raj and Nikhil who have worked with me for the first time last year have expressed their interest to work with me again. *Power Play* with Raj was a step in that direction."



Vakeel Saab teaser breaks the internet

The teaser of *Vakeel Saab*, Pawan Kalyan's comeback film, was released by production house Sri Venkateswara Creations on Sankranti. The one-minute-long teaser has Pawan taking centre stage, beating people to pulp in a public restroom and metro train. Filled with his trademark swag and a killer one-liner as it culminates, the pulsating score of composer Thaman made the teaser all the more delectable for legions of power star fans, as the actor is returning to the silver screen after three years.

However, the teaser had to face some criticism as well, with many pointing out that it hardly gave any scope for the leading women who were the beating heart of the courtroom drama in *Pink* - which *Vakeel Saab* is based on. With the film set to discuss the importance of consent and how women are shamed in the name of culture, the fact that the three women - Nivetha Thomas, Anjali and Ananya - appear out of focus in the teaser had left many furious. Interestingly, earlier posters of *Vakeel Saab* too celebrated Pawan, leaving out the women.

Directed by Venu Sreeram, the film, a joint production venture between Sri Venkateswara Creations and Bayview Projects, is set to open in cinemas halls in April.



Salaar launched



Actor Prabhas' next, *Salaar*, with KGF helmer Prashanth Neel was launched at Ramanaidu Studios, Hyderabad on Friday. Besides the film's unit, the likes of Dil Raju, DVV Danayya, Yash, Sai Korrapati, and Ashok Kumar, Karnataka Deputy CM Dr Ashwath Narayan too graced the launch which went on with much pomp and show.

Produced by Hombale Films, the film, an underworld action saga, will see Prabhas play a "violent character". Early last month when the film was officially announced, the actor said *Salaar* provided him with an exciting opportunity to delve into a role he hasn't played before. "This is a very exciting film and my character is extremely violent, so this is something I haven't really done before. It's a pan-Indian film and I can't wait to be on the sets already," the 41-year-old actor said.

The film will go to floors in the last week of this month and it is believed that Prashanth will complete Prabhas' portions in less than two months. Taking to Twitter, Neel said he is overwhelmed with all the love and support coming the film's way. "Thank you @VKiragandur sir and #Prabhas sir for this opportunity. Thank you my rocky @TheNameIsYash for being with us today. Will not let you all down!! Overwhelmed with all the love and support coming our way. Thank you everyone (sic)," he wrote. KGF composer Ravi Basur is attached to compose music for this film as well.

**I think my
entire journey
has been
special: Kiara**

Actress Kiara Advani made her film debut in 2014 with *Fugly*, which was a no-show at the box office. However, she was later seen in hits such as *M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story*, *Lust Stories*, *Bharat Ane Nenu*, *Kabir Singh* and *Good Newwz*. The actress cannot name a particular role as a game changer in her career, but credits all her work for the success she enjoys today.

"For me I think every film (mattered) — right from my first film because that is what gave me my first step into the film industry. People also say *Kabir Singh* and *Lust Stories* (but) every film has been a turning point in my life. I would want every film to be like that, even my future films. So, I can't think of just one film. I think my entire journey has been special," Kiara says.

She will be next seen in the Sidharth Malhotra-starrer *Shershaah*, *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2* with Kartik Aaryan and the star-studded *Jug Jug Jeeyo*. She is also rumoured to be playing a role in *Acharya* opposite Ram Charan.

Interesting title for Simha's next

The filming of Sri Simha Koduri's next with debutant director Manikanth Gelli, who assisted Ajay Bhupathi, is in the last leg.

The makers on Sankranti announced the title as *Thellavarithe Guruvaram*, while simultaneously unveiling the first look of Simha. Dressed as a bridegroom, he is seen sitting clueless on a chair with a varmala in hand.

Being bankrolled jointly by Rajani Korrapati and Ravindra Benerjee Muppaneni under their respective banners Vaarahi Chalana Chitram and Loukya Entertainments, the makers also announced that they are looking at a March release date for the Kaala Bhairava musical.

A romantic-comedy, Manikanth is directing from a script by Nagendra Pilla. Co-starring Chitra Shukla and newbie Misha Narang, the film features Rajeev Kanakala, Satya, Ajay, Viva Harsha, Sharanya Pradeep, Giridhar, Priya and Ravi Varma in supporting roles.



Sudeep joins Uppi's pan-India project

The duo of Upendra and Kichcha Sudeep, Kannada heavyweights, are teaming for the former's *Kabzaa*, it was announced on Sankranti. This is the second time after *Mukunda Murari*, which was a remake of Hindi film *Oh My God* that they are sharing screen space together. The *Eega* star is on board for a supporting role *Bhargav Bhakshi* in the multilingual film, and according to sources he has allocated close to 25 days from his call sheet. He is believed to be essaying the role of a cop who is ordered to end the bloody mafia in the film. He will begin shooting next month. "As actors, we all r ambitious n wake up wth ideas, thirsty to narrate a story n a gud one. But Sometimes being a part of someone else's dream is being family. Im happy to to b a part of #Kabzaa and once again share screen with @nimmaupendra sir. Bst wshs #BhargavBakshi (sic)," Sudeep posted on Twitter.

An underworld gangster- retro period drama, *Kabzaa*'s story spans from 1947 to 1980. Lagadapati Sridhar is presenting the Telugu version, while director R Chandru is doubling up as the producer as well. Besides Kannada and Telugu, the film, being made on a whopping budget of Rs 80 crore, will release in Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Odia and Marathi.

