



sunday pioneer

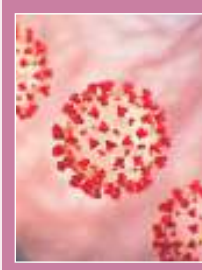
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**WHATSAPP DELAYS POLICY UPDATE
ROLLOUT TO MAY 15**

WhatsApp has decided to delay the rollout of its new policy update to May 15 after massive criticism from users globally, including India, over concerns that data was being shared with its parent company Facebook. The move assumes significance for users in India given that the country is among the biggest markets for WhatsApp with over 400 million users. In a blog post, WhatsApp said it is moving back the date on which people will be asked to review and accept the terms. "No one will have their account suspended or deleted on February 8. We're also going to do a lot more to clear up the misinformation around how privacy and security works on WhatsApp."

**DR REDDY'S GETS DCGI NOD TO
CONDUCT PHASE 3 CLINICAL TRIALS**

Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Friday said it has received approval from the Drugs Control General of India (DCGI) to conduct phase 3 clinical trial for the Sputnik V vaccine for COVID-19. The phase 3 study of Sputnik V will be conducted on 1,500 subjects as part of the randomised, double-blind, parallel-group, placebo-controlled study in the country, the Hyderabad-based firm said in a regulatory filing. Earlier this week, the Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) reviewed the safety data from the phase 2 clinical trial of the vaccine and recommended the phase 3 recruitment. The DSMB had concluded that no safety concerns were identified and the study met the primary endpoints.

**OWNER OF BULL AT ITS BEST IN DODGING,
ACE TAMER GET CAR IN TN 'JALLIKATTU'**

The jallikattu sport was flagged off by Chief Minister K Panneerselvam, here which saw more than 400 tamers and 800 bulls participating in the annual event held in connection with the Pongal festival. Kannan of Viralipatti, who managed to tame about 12 bulls in the Jallikattu, was adjudged the best among tamers and was rewarded with a car. Breeder Kuruvithural Santosh's bull, which displayed impressive strength and agility in evading the tamers, won the first prize - a car for its owner. Karupannan who tamed 9 bulls and Sakthi who tamed 8 bulls emerged as second and third, respectively, and were given 2 cows and a motorcycle, respectively.

**COVID PLAYS 'CENSOR' AS STARS' VIRTUAL
PRESENCE TAKES SHEEN OUT OF IFFI**

With Covid-19 necessitating restriction of the number of guests to 250 people at the inaugural ceremony of the 51st edition of the International Film Festival of India at Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium here on Friday, and with stars making the most of the 'hybrid mode' introduced this year, the usual euphoria over glitz, glamour and star power at Asia's oldest and India's biggest movie gala was replaced by masks, sanitisers and somewhat hyper anxious participants this year. In a first, this year the festival is being conducted in 'hybrid mode', under which delegates can participate and watch films and events virtually.

**'World's largest
vaccination drive
shows determina-
tion of a self-
reliant India'**

10

**'RBI policies helped
ease severity of
economic impact
of COVID'**

6

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Paush & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi: Chaturthi: 08:07 am
Nakshatram: Purna Bhadrakapala Full Night
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 04:36 pm - 05:59 pm
Yamagandam: 12:26 pm - 01:49 pm
Varjyam: 12:58 pm - 02:40 pm
Gulika: 03:12 pm - 04:36 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 11:11 pm - 12:54 am
Ahihi Muhurtham: 12:04 pm - 12:48 pm

**VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER**
Forecast: Mostly sunny
Temp: 33/20
Humidity: 63%
Sunrise: 06:49 am
Sunset: 06:03 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated January 16, 2021 5:00 PM

Modi launches vax war on Covid with a caution

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched India's Covid-19 vaccination drive while reassuring the country that emergency use authorisation was given to two made in India vaccines only after scientists were convinced of their safety and effectiveness, and urged people to beware of propaganda and rumours.

Addressing the nation ahead of the launch of what he described as the world's largest vaccination programme, Modi said these vaccines will ensure a "decisive victory" for the country over the pandemic, but asked countrymen to continue wearing masks and maintain social distancing even after receiving the jabs.

Emphasising the enormity of the vaccination drive, which he launched through a remote control amid chanting of Sanskrit shloka that meant 'let everybody be happy, let everybody be healthy', Modi said never before in history, has this type of a large-scale vaccination campaign been undertaken.

2



Sweeper, nurses among first vax recipients

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A government hospital sweeper and nurses were among the first recipients of Covid-19 vaccine in Andhra Pradesh as the programme was launched in the state on Saturday by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

Sweeper B Pushpa Kumari

and a senior staff nurse Naga Jyothi were administered the vaccine at the Government General Hospital in Vijayawada where the Chief Minister formally launched the drive.

A short while earlier, 40-year old staff nurse Manjula of the government hospital in Proddatur town in Kadapa

district, the native of Jagan Reddy, became the first person in the State to get the vaccine. Local MLA Prasad Reddy launched the vaccination drive midway through Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address after he flagged-off the nation-wide exercise.

2

OVER 19,000 HEALTH WORKERS IN AP ADMINISTERED VACCINE, 8 FALL ILL

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Over 19,000 healthcare workers were administered the coronavirus vaccine on the first day in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday.

Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar said eight cases of Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) were reported in three districts.

As against the target of 31,570 health workers, 19,108 turned up for vaccination on the first day.

Five cases of AEFI were reported in Kurnool district.



Elsewhere, another health worker Radha, who was given the Covid vaccine shot at the new GGH in Vijayawada, fell ill after vaccination. Fortunately, she regained her health after being attended by the doctors present.

2

Bharat Biotech to pay for side effects

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech, which has received a government purchase order for supply of 55 lakh doses of Covaxin, a Covid-19 vaccine, said the company will pay compensation to recipients in case of any serious adverse effects experienced after receiving the antidote.

In the consent form to be

signed by the vaccine recipients, Bharat Biotech said, "In case of any adverse events or serious adverse events, you will be provided medically recognised standard of care in the government designated and authorised centres/hospitals."

2

Modi quotes Gurajada in Covid vaccine rollout speech

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday quoted renowned Telugu writer and poet Gurajada Apparao during the launch of nation-wide Covid-19 vaccination programme, to drive home his point of helping others selflessly.

"Sontha labham kontha manuko, porugu vadiki thodu padavoyi. Desamante matti kadoyi, desamante manushuloyi," Modi recalled the famous quote of Apparao, which is part of the writer's poetry. The quote translates into English as 'Forego your self-interest to some extent and help neighbours. Nation does not mean just mud and soil, but people.'

Gurajada Apparao, who lived between 1862 and 1915, was born in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh and lived in nearby Vizianagaram.

2

PM announces Rs 1,000-cr 'Startup India Seed Fund'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the launch of Rs 1,000-crore 'Startup India Seed Fund' to support startups and help budding entrepreneurs pursue innovative ideas.

Addressing the 'Prarambh: Startup India International Summit', Modi exuded confidence that the growth of startups will help in generating jobs and improving lives of people in the region.

"In order to provide initial capital for startups, the nation is launching a Rs 1,000 crore Startup India Seed Fund. This will help in setting up new startups and promote their growth," the Prime Minister said. The summit marked the



fifth anniversary of the Startup India initiative launched by Modi on this day in 2016.

The government, Modi added, has been implementing the Fund of Fund Scheme to help startups raise equity capital.

Going forward, the government will also help startups in raising debt capital, he added.

India, the Prime Minister said, is home to the world's third largest startup ecosystem which has helped several budding entrepreneurs to come up with innovative technologies and become big corporations.

He further said that startups in India are not limited to big cities and about 40 per cent of such budding entrepreneurs are coming from tier-II and -III cities.

Modi said in 2014 there were only four startups in the unicorn club, but today there are more than 30.

He informed that 11 startups entered the unicorn club in 2020 itself. India is the world's third largest startup ecosystem.

There are over 41,000 startups in the country.

TRP scam: BARC ex-CEO hospitalised

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Former CEO of ratings agency BARC, Partho Dasgupta, who was arrested in the alleged fake TRP case, has been admitted in the ICU of state-run JJ Hospital in Mumbai, an official said on Saturday.

Dasgupta, a diabetic, was rushed to the hospital from the Taloja Central Prison in Navi Mumbai in the early hours of Saturday after his blood sugar levels went up on Friday midnight.

2

Ashok Gajapathi Raju's donation for a new Rama idol rejected

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In another humiliation meted out to Vizianagaram royal scion the AP Endowments Department on Saturday rejected the offer of a donation of Rs 1,01,116 by P Ashok Gajapathi Raju for a new idol of Lord Ram to be placed in the shrine at Ramatheertham.

The idol of Lord Ram was desecrated by miscreants last month, leading to an outcry and protests.

Venting his anger on Twitter,



Ashok Gajapathi Raju said "First, they unilaterally dismissed me as hereditary trustee / chairman without as

much as a notice in complete contravention of Section 28. Now, they reject my offerings to the Lord as a representative of the founder family for the vigrahas."

He attached the donation slip to his post.

Citing that the senior TDP leader failed to discharge his duties in temple administration, the AP Government had removed him from the post of chairman of three temples in the state.

2

DGP's U-turn sparks angry reactions from TDP, BJP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As expected, the TDP and BJP reacted angrily to the statement by DGP Gautam Sawang that some people associated with the two parties were directly involved in the acts of vandalism and desecration in temples across the State.

The DGP's statement is being seen as a clear U-turn from his earlier comments three days ago in which he had ruled out any political conspiracy behind the attack on temples across the State and has landed the department in a piquant situation.

Moreover, his statement handed a weapon to the Opposition parties to launch a frontal attack on the rul-

Veerraju hints at legal action on DGP over allegations against party activists

Visakhapatnam: BJP AP president Somu Veerraju on Saturday said the party may be compelled to take appropriate action against DGP Gautam Sawang following his statement that some people associated with the party were involved in the temple attacks.

Veerraju said that the party may seek legal



recourse under criminal law and also file a suit for

defamation seeking damages.

Shooting off a letter to the State police chief on Saturday, Veerraju said: "We request you to kindly issue clear clarification with regards to attacks on the idols and that there is no BJP workers involvement in the idol attacks".

2

ing YSRCP. The DGP had on January 12 blamed thieves, treasure hunters, those involved in

property disputes and mentally disturbed people for the desecration of temples in AP. Barely 72 hours later,

Sawang alleged a political conspiracy. The TDP and BJP see pressure from the State government for the

DGP's abrupt U-turn. On Friday, Sawang had alleged involvement of over 21 activists of TDP and BJP in the attacks on temples.

On Saturday, a belligerent Opposition took Sawang to task, demanding to know the reason behind his flip-flop.

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh, in a Twitter post, breathed fire on the DGP, wondering "whether a severe dressing down given to the DGP at Tadepalli official residence of the CM prompted him to shift his stand".

Lokesh asked why the DGP had failed to name YSRCP leader Damodar Reddy, whom he accused of pulling down the Lord

Anjaneya Swamy temple in Ponnakallu of Kurnool district, and also Pratapa Reddy, whom he accused of thrashing priests at Omkara Kshetram.

"Why has the DGP failed to file a case against Minister Kodali Nani whose remarks were indecent to say the least? Did not Nani say 'What if the head of Lord Kodandarama statue was severed? Does it mean death to Lord Rama', asked Lokesh.

The Opposition also accused Sawang of making such statements perhaps to shield the controversial pastor Pravin Chakravarti, who was arrested on Friday by the Kakinada police.

2

**PAGE 2: 2,066 VACCINATED
IN VIZAG, AMC PRINCIPAL
GETS FIRST SHOT**



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2,066 vaccinated in Vizag, AMC principal gets the first shot

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Medical College (AMC) Principal and Special Covid-19 Officer for Visakhapatnam, Dr PV Sudhakar, took the first Covid-19 vaccine shot in the district. Visakhapatnam district Collector V Vinay Chand was present.

Allaying the fear of any possible side effects from the vaccine, Dr Sudhakar said, "I got vaccinated as soon as the Prime Minister rolled out the drive this morning, making me one among the first few citizens to receive the vaccine shots today. I would like to tell people that the vaccine is completely safe and effective. There's no need for any fear or hesitation."

It is to be noted that the AMC Principal was given the Covishield vaccine, which has completed all three stages of trials as required under the protocol.

Meanwhile, Vizag district received 46,500 doses and the first phase, being administered at 32 centres, will continue for five days. The second phase will start after 28 days.

The target was to vaccinate



3,174 people, but the officials could do so only to 2,066 people, said the district medical health officer.

A committee comprising 17 members, led by the Visakhapatnam District Collector, will be monitoring the vaccination drive in the region.

During the first phase, it is expected that close to 60,000 healthcare workers, including doctors, lab technicians, and nurses among others, will be administered Covid-19 vaccine doses in Visakhapatnam. The second phase will have other frontline workers, who

amount to 2 lakh, receive the vaccine doses.

About 8 lakh people, aged above 50 years or report co-morbidities, will be administered doses in the third phase. The remaining population in Visakhapatnam will receive the Covid vaccine in the fourth phase. Every vaccination centre in Visakhapatnam will house an AEFI (Adverse Event Following Immunisation) committee, comprising a cardiologist, neurologist, neurosurgeon, general physician, and anaesthesiologist to monitor the condition of the patient in case of an adverse event.



Vaccine for Navy healthcare workers

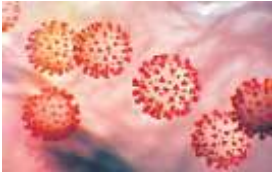
Visakhapatnam: Covid-19 Vaccination Programme of the Indian Naval Health Care Workers (HCW) was launched on Saturday by Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, at the Vaccination Centre, INHS Kalyani here. Covishield vaccine was given to 40 frontline Covid Warriors involving doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, health workers, ward sahyakas and medical attendants in coordination with district health

authorities at Visakhapatnam. The vaccination centre staff underwent rigorous training and a state of the art vaccination centre was set up at INHS Kalyani with dedicated manpower to conduct incident-free vaccination. A robust reporting mechanism for real-time monitoring of the programme and reporting of side effects was also established. Over the next few months, all service personnel of the Indian Navy at Visakhapatnam are envisaged to be vaccinated.

Active Covid cases fall below 2,000 mark in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

For the first time in more than seven months, active Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh fell below the 2,000 mark to 1,987. While 114 fresh cases were reported in 24 hours ending 9 am on Saturday, the state also saw 326 recoveries and zero deaths, a health department bulletin said. Incidentally, only 25,542 samples were tested in 24 hours, the lowest in a day in many months, because of the Sankranti festival. The state Covid-19 table showed gross positives of 8,85,824, recoveries 8,76,698 and deaths 7,139. Chittoor district reported 24 and Visakhapatnam 22 new cases in 24 hours while the remaining 11 districts added less than 15 each. The overall infection positivity rate fell to 7.06 per cent after 1.25 crore sample tests were done so far.



HEERA GROUP FRAUD

Centre asks TS to move for CBI probe

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Ministry of Personnel, Public grievances and Pensions, acting on a petition from the president of the association of victims of the Heera group fraud, shot off a letter on January 14th to the Telangana Chief Secretary for the second time asking the state to move for a CBI inquiry in the Rs 50,000 crore scam, considering that some Pakista-nis are among the foreigners involved in the case.

Shahbaz Ahmed Khan, president of All India Heera Victims Association, told The Pioneer: "

For the first time they have come out and agreed to pay the amount to victims. There are many foreigners involved in the fraud. The role of Pakistan in this also should be investigated and sought for CBI enquiry."

Based on Khan's petition, the Central ministry requested action from the state to initiate a CBI enquiry into Heera group of companies' alleged scam involving Rs 50,000. Previously the ministry had sought a CBI enquiry in 2019

. Nowhera Shaik, managing director of the Heera Group, is presently lodged in prison.

Meanwhile, according to an affidavit filed on behalf of the Heera group in the Supreme Court, there are around 27 FIRs registered in Maharashtra, AP, Kerala, TS and other states. Based on an analysis of the complaints, around Rs 25 crore had to be paid to the victims.

Claiming that the Heera group had sufficient amount to compensate all the victims, the plea in the SC sought interim bail for the MD.

Further, the petitioner sought six months' time to compensate the investors. However after further verification of records, the petitioner sought access to records which the authorities had seized from them.

It is pertinent to note that initially a case was booked against Nowhera Shaik by the Central Crime Station, Hyderabad for allegedly operating a Ponzi scheme illegally and collecting deposits from lakhs of investors on the promise of high returns. Later, the ramifications of the case surfaced.

TRP scam: BARC ex-CEO hospitalised

Continued from page 1

Dasgupta was admitted to the ICU of JJ hospital and is on oxygen support, he said.

Dasgupta was arrested in the alleged TRP rigging scam by the crime branch of the Mumbai Police on December 24 last year.

A Mumbai court had earlier this month rejected the bail plea of Dasgupta, stating that he played a vital role in the scam.

The Mumbai Police had earlier told the court that Republic TV Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami had allegedly bribed Dasgupta with "lakhs of rupees" to ramp up the news channels viewer-ship.

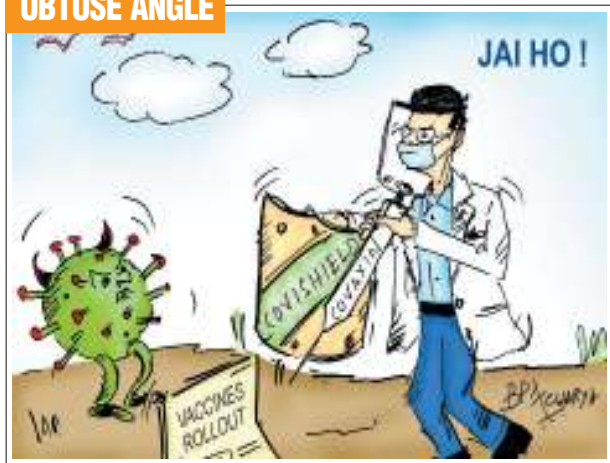


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OBTUSE ANGLE



Bharat Biotech to pay for side effects

Continued from page 1

"The compensation for serious adverse event will be paid by sponsor (BBIL) in case if the SAE is proven to be causally related to the vaccine," the consent form said.

In phase 1 and phase 2 clinical trials, Covaxin has demonstrated the ability to produce antidotes against Covid- 19.

However the clinical efficacy of the vaccine is yet to be established and it is still being studied in phase 3 clinical trials, the vaccine maker said. "Hence it is important to appreciate that receiving the vaccine does not mean that other precautions related to Covid-19 need not be followed," the consent form said.

According to an industry expert, the company is liable to pay compensation to people in case of serious side effects as the vaccine is being administered while in the clinical trial mode.

The central licensing authority has granted permission for the sale or distribution of Covaxin for restricted use in emergency situations in public interest as an abundant caution, in clinical trial mode.

Meanwhile, Joint Managing Director of Bharat Biotech International Ltd, Suchitra Ella, in her Twitter account said, "Covaxin & Bharat Biotech is truly humbled & honoured to be of service to the nation & the fraternity of all first responders of Covid who have served public health."



Ashok Gajapathi ...

Continued from page 1

Even earlier, Ashok Gajapathi Raju was removed as the chairperson of MANSAS (Maharaja Alak Narayan Society of Arts and Sciences) Trust and Simhachalam Devasthanam Trust Board and replaced with his niece, Sanchaita.

He was also removed from chairmanship of 104 temples in Godavari districts. "Ashok Gajapathi Raju has failed to discharge his legitimate duties and address the issues relating to the security aspects of the



temple and failed to take steps to prevent the vandalism of Lord Rama's idol in Sri Rama Swamy Devasthanam in Vizianagaram district," read the GO of AP government.

OVER 19,000 HEALTH WORKERS IN AP ADMINISTERED VACCINE, 8 FALL ILL

Continued from page 1

Krishna district DM&HO Dr Suhasini said that it appeared that the anxiety associated with being part of something new would have a psychological impact. She said that Radha also underwent a similar experience and regained her health after basic treatment.

One minor AEFI was reported in Anantapur district and two in SPS Nellore district," the Health Commissioner said in a release, but did not specify the nature of the after-effects.

Akhila, a health worker from Anantapur vomited soon after the Covid vaccine was

administered. She was rushed to the emergency ward where doctors attended to her. The medical officers later said that Akhila's condition was stable.

Sources said the AEFI cases mostly related to dizziness and headache and the affected persons were immediately provided necessary medicare.

The Covid-19 vaccination programme was taken up in 332 locations across the state with each session site supposed to cater to 100 beneficiaries per day.

Guntur district saw the highest turnout of 2,274 beneficiaries out of the targeted 3,100 while Prakasam saw only 436 against the target of 2,200

Modi quotes Gurajada in Covid vaccine...

Continued from page 1

Among his several writings, 'Kanyasulkam', written in 1892 is the most popular one.

Modi on Saturday launched the Covid-19 vaccination drive in the country and asserted that the made-in-India vaccines being rolled out will ensure a "decisive victory" for the country over the coronavirus pandemic.



Modi launches vax war on Covid with a caution

Continued from page 1

There are more than 100 countries in the world whose population is less than three crore and India is vaccinating three crore people in its first phase of vaccination, he said.

In the second phase, the number of those vaccinated has to be taken to 30 crore, Modi said, pointing out that only two countries other than India have a population in excess of 30 crore — the US and China.

The Prime Minister said that those who are elderly, are suffering from serious illness, will get vaccinated in the second stage.

"Dawai bhi, kadai bhi (vaccine also and strict discipline also)" should be the mantra going forward, he said.

"I want to remind people of the country that two doses of the Corona vaccine are very important. Don't commit the mistake that you take one dose and forget the second one. As experts have been saying, there will be a gap of about one month between the two doses," Modi said.

He asked people not to let their guard down even after taking the vaccine as only two weeks after taking the second dose, human body will develop necessary immunity against the virus.

During his speech, the prime minister also turned emotional as he spoke of the disruption the pandemic caused to people's lives, isolating victims of the coronavirus and denying the dead traditional last rites.

In a choked voice, the Prime Minister also referred to sacrifices made by healthcare and frontline workers, hundreds of whom lost their lives to the viral infection.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had earlier this month approved Oxford Covid-19 vaccine Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute, and indigenously developed Covaxin of Bharat Biotech for restricted emergency use in the country, paving the way for the massive inoculation drive.

Modi also reassured the country about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines

given approval by India for restricted emergency use.

"I want to tell the people of the country that only when our scientists and experts were convinced about the safety and effectiveness of both the made-in-India vaccines, only then they gave permission for their emergency use. That is why the people of the country should beware of any type of propaganda, rumours and misinformation," he said.

"Our vaccine scientists, our medical system and the process India follows holds a lot of credibility in the world...we have won this confidence due to our track record," Modi said.

His remarks come amid apprehensions being raised by opposition leaders, including some senior Congress leaders, about the process of approval to the Bharat Biotech vaccine.

"Indian vaccines compared with foreign vaccines are much cheaper and their use is also very easy. Even one dose of some foreign vaccines costs Rs 5,000 and have to be kept at minus 70 degrees Celsius, while

the Indian vaccines have been made with such technology that is tried and tested," Modi said.

These vaccines, from storage to transportation, are suited to Indian conditions, he said.

"These (made-in-India) vaccines will ensure a decisive victory for India against coronavirus," he asserted.

"India begins the world's Largest Vaccine Drive. This is a day of pride, a celebration of the prowess of our scientists and hard work of our medical fraternity, nursing staff, police personnel and sanitation workers," Modi said in a tweet after the launch of the drive.

In his remarks at the launch event, Modi also urged the country to show patience during the vaccination drive as it had shown till now in fighting the pandemic.

Normally, it takes years to make a vaccine but in such a short span of time, not one, but two 'made in India' vaccines are ready, Modi said, adding work on other vaccines is also progressing at a fast pace.

India getting two vaccines in

such a short time is a testimony to the country's capability, scientific efficiency and talent, the Prime Minister said.

"Our vaccination programme is driven by humanitarian concerns, those exposed to maximum risk will get priority," he said.

In its fight against the pandemic, India took the right decisions at the right time while keeping a vigil round the clock, he asserted.

On January 30, the first case of coronavirus was found in India, but even more than two weeks before that India had formed a high level committee, he said.

The country had issued its first advisory on January 17 and India was among the first few nations that started screening at airports, Modi said emphasising the speed at which India acted to deal with the pandemic.

Modi also talked about evacuation of Indians stuck abroad, saying that at a time when many countries of the world had left their citizens stranded in China, India evacuated not

only Indians but citizens of other countries.

The Prime Minister congratulated the countrymen for passing the challenge of discipline and patience during the 'Janata Curfew' in March.

He pointed out that the exercise prepared the country psychologically for the lockdown. Morale of the country was kept high with the campaigns like 'taali-thali' and lighting of diyas, the Prime Minister added.

Asserting that India's response to the crisis has been acknowledged globally, Modi said it was an example of the integrated and unified response from centre, states, local governments, government offices, social bodies who performed efficiently in unison.

According to the government, the shots will be offered first to an estimated one crore healthcare workers, and around two crore frontline workers, and then to persons above 50 years of age, followed by persons younger than 50 years of age with associated co-morbidities.

TDP fumes at ‘blamegame’ by DGP over temple desecration

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP politburo member Varla Ramaiah on Saturday sought an explanation from DGP Goutam Sawang as to why he had deliberately omitted the name of ‘notorious pastor’ Praveen Chakravarthy from in the list of 15 persons who were arrested in the cases related to desecration of temples in the state.

Ramaiah accused the DGP of stooping to low to satisfy Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy by targeting TDP leaders and implicating them in false cases.

It is not befitting for an official of DGP rank like Goutam Sawang to misrepresent facts and present wrongfully filed social media cases as those relating to attacks on the temples and idols, he ridiculed.

Addressing a press conference, the TDP leader asked as to why DGP remained silent on pastor Praveen who was arrested for making ‘extremely provocative’ statements that would harm religious harmony. “Video evidence is available in which pastor claimed to have demolished the temple idols and how he had his men doing it all over the state,” he said.

Ramaiah asked the DGP to do some soul-searching whether his latest statement and whether his actions in the past one-and-a-half year were befitting for an IPS officer.

“The DGP, on January 13, said that temple attacks were the handiwork of mad and mentally unstable persons.



BJP state general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy and other leaders addressing the media in Vijayawada on Saturday

BJP comes down heavily on state police chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Coming down heavily on the state police department and ministers, BJP state general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy on Saturday said that it was shameful for the AP DGP to say that the BJP leaders were behind the desecration of temples and idols in the state. Condemning the statement made by the DGP, he asked as to why he had changed his stand within 48 hours after giving clarity on

desecrations of temples. Alleging that police officials were acting as YSRCP activists, he demanded the immediate arrest of ruling party activists and leaders who were spreading provocative statements on social media. He said that the police should take action and arrest Civil Supplies Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao who was indirectly provoking attacks on temples. Vishnuvardhan Reddy alleged that a few police associations’ leaders were acting

as puppets at the hands of ruling party. Alleging that the police and the government were protecting a few pastors and culprits, he said: “Pastor Praveen Chakravarthy has claimed that he had kicked idols of gods and challenged the police department. He was seen with the YSRCP leaders on several occasions.” He added that the state government has completely failed to provide security to the temples, idols and temple properties across the state.

But, he changed his stand within two days and announced that some political parties were directly involved in the attacks on temples to create communal unrest on January 15,” he said.

“The DGP had said that 13 TDP and two BJP activists were arrested in cases related to attacks on temples.

However, on close scrutiny, it was proved that most of these arrests were related to social media cases,” he divulged.

Ramaiah deplored that the DGP had badly misrepresented facts on the Kadapa incident in which a person placed a garland of chappals on the Anjaneya statue. It was actually a protest against the government for taking over

his land, but the DGP included the incident in the list of attacks on temple, he said.

The DGP must explain why YSRCP leader Pratapa Reddy was not arrested though he whipped up priests at Omkara Kshetram. One Damodar Reddy desecrated Anjaneya Swamy temple, but no action has been taken against him so far, he said.

IMA extends support to drive, says will dispel myths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Extending support to the vaccination drive, the members of Indian Medical Association (IMA), Andhra Pradesh, said that they would strive to promote the drive by dispelling myths and fears of people regarding the safety and efficacy of the government approved Covid vaccine.

In a statement on Saturday, IMA president Dr N Subramanyam and IMA secretary Dr Nanda Kishore said that they have about 3.5 lakh modern medicine doctors as members spread across 1,800 branches in the country.

The IMA being a professional body of modern medicine accepts the challenge of putting Covid vaccination on the track.

IMA is already on the move to promote Covid vaccines namely the Covishield and Covaxin developed in India.

The IMA members said that it was the responsibility of the IMA to assist the vaccination drive in a professional manner. IMA has already appealed to their members to actively participate in the Covid vaccination drive and assist the state government in conducting the drive in a smooth and systematic way.

IMA praised the efforts of Indian scientists and vaccine manufacturers, SII and Bharat Biotech, for indigenously developing vaccines.

The IMA appealed to all its members to get vaccinated and make others get vaccinated.

Nani launches vax drive in Krishna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Transport Minister Perni Venkata Ramaiah (Nani) on Saturday inaugurated the Covid vaccination drive at the District Hospital in Machilipatnam, Krishna district.

The district administration has made elaborate arrangements to administer the Covid vaccine at 30 centres in the district.

The medical and health department has arranged a waiting room, a registration room, vaccination and an observation room at each centre.

At each centre, in the first phase, health staff will administer the vaccine to 100 beneficiaries per day.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister Nani said 40,000 doses of Covid vaccine has already been stored in cold storages in Krishna district and will be used in a phased manner.

Praising the services of health workers during the Corona pandemic, Nani said the medical health department staff, doctors, nurses, para medics, lab technicians, municipal workers and police did an excellent job in saving

the lives of people during crisis.

Recalling how the Covid - induced lockdown was implemented strictly, he hoped that the vaccination programme would be completed in six months

Municipal workers, police, people aged over 50 years and others will get vaccine, he said.

Krishna district superintendent of police M Ravindranath Babu, Bandar RDO Sk Khaja Vali, ASP Malika Garg and others attended the vaccination programme in Machilipatnam.



RINL Director (Projects) KK Ghosh and Bridge & Roof Director (Projects Management) SS Rawat exchange MoUs in the presence of RINL CMD PK Rath at Visakhapatnam on Saturday

RINL, Bridge & Roof sign pact to execute engg works

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

RINL-VSP entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Bridge & Roof Co. (India) Ltd on Saturday towards Project Management Consultancy from concept to commission for execution of miscellaneous civil, structural,

electrical and Mechanical engineering works of RINL. The MoU was signed by RINL Director (Projects) KK Ghosh and Bridge & Roof Director (Projects Management) SS Rawat, in the presence of RINL CMD PK Rath.

The MoU will be valid for three years and has a provision

to extend by two more years. It's worth mentioning that Bridge & Roof is a 'Mini Ratna' public sector enterprise under administrative control of the Department of Heavy Industries. It is associated with a lot of projects in RINL, both at Visakhapatnam and at Forged Wheel Plant at Rae Bareilly.

Inter First year classes to begin from Jan 18

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The classes for Intermediate first year will commence on January 18 in the state. As per the directions of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, first year admissions were conducted offline and the process would be completed by January 17.

The academic year for 2020-21 would continue up to May 2021 and the schedule for examinations will be announced shortly.

However, practical examinations for inter students would be conducted as usual.

About 30 per cent of the intermediate syllabus was reduced due to the Covid pandemic situation and subject-wise details have been sent to the respective colleges.

Earlier, the Educational Minister A Suresh, in a statement, warned that stern action would be initiated against junior college managements if they flouted government rules.

He said recognition would be cancelled if any junior college failed to follow the rules stipulated by the government in collecting fees and compliance with Covid guidelines.

He urged parents to lodge complaints against irregularities on WhatsApp No. 9391282578.

Keeping in view the Covid pandemic situation, the state government has decided not to enhance the intermediate examination fee.

Students can pay the fee as per last year's fee structure, Rs 500 for the first year and Rs 680 for the second year.

Tirupati bypoll is chance to end YSRCP's atrocities: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Describing the coming Tirupati by-election as a golden opportunity, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday urged the people to put an end to the atrocities of the Jaganmohan Reddy government.

Interacting with the party leaders of Tirupati parliamentary constituency, the TDP chief said that revolt had begun against the misdeeds of the Jaganmohan Reddy regime and that TDP protests everywhere have been receiving good response.

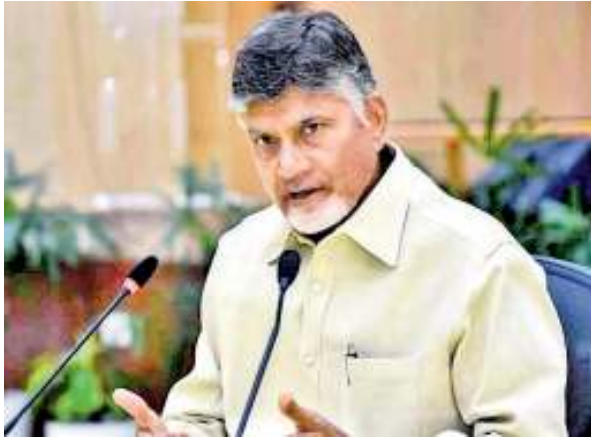
Naidu accused the AP DGP Goutam Sawang of acting as per the directions of CM Jaganmohan Reddy and as per the script written by Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy without abiding by the laws of the land.

The DGP, on January 13, had said that mad men were responsible for the attacks on temples, but changed his statement with 48 hours and held Opposition parties responsible for attacks.

Naidu lamented that innocent people exposing the incidents of attacks on temples were being falsely implicated to save some YSRCP activists who according to him were responsible for vandalising temples and idols.

Cases were filed against the TDP leaders for visiting Ramatheertham temple and no cases were filed against Vijayasai Reddy and YSRCP leaders who provoked the crowds. Stating that Chittoor district witnessed unprecedented development during TDP regime, Naidu recalled that Tirupati city bagged three national awards during TDP regime in the categories - safest city, most livable city and cleanest city.

Tirupati was developed as a hardware hub and a mobile manufacturing hub, he said.



Naidu claims vendetta behind attacks on TDP men

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu has decried the 'non-stop harassment' being meted out to the TDP activists by the police in the name of social media posts and false cases.

Naidu strongly objected to the 'physical attack' by the police on TDP activist Lakkoji Vinod at Palasa in Srikakulam district.

He said that Vinod was beaten up and tortured just for posting a comment on social media. Also, false cases have been booked against him, he added.

In a statement here on Saturday, the TDP chief said that Vinod was taken away at midnight and was physically attacked in the name of social media posts. When TDP MP

Rammohan Naidu held a protest at the Palasa police station, counter cases were filed against the victim.

Some police officials were conniving with the ruling YSRCP leaders to harass and persecute the TDP leaders out of political vengeance.

Stating that the law and order had totally deteriorated in the state, The TDP chief said that YSRCP leaders and police officials were not afraid even though the media has been exposing the lawless activities going on in the state.

"In a systematic way, the constitutional institutions are being targeted. A fear psychosis was created among people so that nobody could question the attacks and irregularities being committed by the government," he alleged.

The YSRCP failed to set up even a single new industry, but has cancelled the lands given to the Amara Raja

Infratech. The industrialists are being threatened and driven away from the state, he added.

SHORT TAKES

SCR to run two more special trains to clear Sankranti rush

HYDERABAD: The South Central Railway (SCR) will operate two more special one way trains on Sunday from Narasapuram and Anakapalli to Secunderabad to clear the Sankranti rush. "In order to clear extra rush during Sankranti festival, SCR will run two one way special trains from Narsapur to Secunderabad and Anakapalli to Secunderabad," said a railway official on Saturday. Train number 07460 from Narasapuram to Secunderabad will depart Narasapuram in West Godavari district on Sunday at 5.35 pm to arrive at Secunderabad at 4.10 am on Monday. Likewise, Sankranti special train, 07461, from Anakapalli to Secunderabad will depart Anakapalli in Visakhapatnam district at 8.50 pm on Sunday to reach Secunderabad at 8.50 am on Monday. Every January, thousands of people living and working in Hyderabad briefly visit their native places to celebrate Sankranti, the biggest Hindu festival in Telugu culture, with family and friends. Once the harvest festival ends, all of them again rush back to Hyderabad to resume their normal life, choking all modes of transport.

Indian Bank CMD Padmaja donates ₹20L to TTD's SVBC trust

TIRUMALA: Indian Bank Chairman and Managing Director Padmaja Chunduru donated Rs 20 lakh to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD)-run Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel (SVBC) Trust here on Saturday. She has handed over the DD to Additional executive officer and SVBC Managing Director (MD) AV Dharma Reddy at Srivari temple complex.

Edible oil factory gutted in fire

KAKINADA :In a major fire that broke out in the Madhavi edible oil factory along Yedida bypass road in Mandapet town on Saturday, most of the factory was gutted. No loss of life has been reported. Four fire tenders from Mandapet, Anaparthi and Ramachandrapuram rushed to the spot and brought the flames under control fighting for over five hours. According to reports, electrical short circuit is said to have sparked the fire accident. The loss of property is being enumerated, official sources said. BC welfare minister Ch Venugopalakrishna and MLA Vegulla Jogeswara Rao visited the scene of fire mishap.

Couple found hanging from a tree

VISAKHAPATNAM: A couple was found hanging from a tree in an orchard at Pittala Sariya village under Tekkali mandal in Srikakulam district on Saturday. The deceased were identified as I Rajesh and P Vennamma. Both were found hanging from a tree. The police are yet to ascertain the reasons behind the deaths. A case has been registered and investigation is on.

Vaccine is safe: EG Collector

KAKINADA: East Godavari district collector D Muralidhara Reddy on Saturday said that the Covid vaccine being administered to people as part of the vaccination drive was totally safe. People don't need have naany qualms over the effectiveness of the vaccine, he added. Launching the covid vaccination programme here at the Government general hospital vaccination centre, he said that each and every one in the district would be covered by the vaccination which is a continuous programme. Stating that the drive was being conducted in all the 19 assembly constituencies through 33 vaccination centres, he asked people not to be misled by the rumours being circulated in the social media on its side effects. He said: "If anyone develops side effects after vaccination, emergency response teams would attend to them immediately and no need to have any fear or apprehensions. A special control room at the district level was opened to address the problems related to vaccination." Health worker Reddy Satyavati was administered the vaccine first at the GGH vaccination centre and next was Dr K Babji, the principal of Rangaraya medical college. MP Vanga Geeta Viswanath, City MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy, Joint Collector development wing Keerti Chekuri, municipal commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar, DM&HO Dr Gourswareao, GGH superintendent Dr M. Raghavendrarao and others were present.

Plans afoot to enhance exports from anchorage port

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Plans are being chalked out for exporting additional cargo from anchorage port through the deep water port without having any problem to the port workers, said East Godavari district Joint Collector Dr G Lakshmisha on Saturday.

The Joint Collector was reviewing cargo exports with the AP Maritime Board CEO NP Ramakrishna Reddy, members of rice exporters' association and port workers' unions at a meeting held here at collectorate.

The Joint Collector said that

Union government keen on enhancing exports from the anchorage port through the Deep wate port, says Joint Collector

as per the directives of the Union government, efforts were being made to increase exports by exporting additional cargo from the anchorage

through the Deep water port without posing any problems to the port workers. He said that the rice was being exported to various countries through the age old anchorage port

He asked the port workers' union leaders to submit their views and suggestions in this regard by Monday so that further action could be initiated.

Port Officer Captain Dharma, Rice exporters' association president B V Krishna Rao, Cocanada chamber of commerce Chairman V.V. Raghavulu, Assistant commissioner of Labour M. Bullirani and port workers' union leaders attended the meeting.



Select new people for panel, farmer union asks Apex Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A farmer union requested the Supreme Court on Saturday to remove the remaining three members of the committee it had set up to resolve the impasse over the three contentious farm laws, and select people who can do the job "on the basis of mutual harmony".

The Bhartiya Kisan Union Lokshakti said the principle of natural justice is going to be violated as those appointed to the four-member committee "have already supported these laws".

In an affidavit, it also sought dismissal of a plea of the central government, filed through the Delhi Police, seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor march or any other kind of protest by farmers which seeks to disrupt the gathering and celebrations of Republic Day on January 26.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde had agreed to hear on January 18 the Centre's application against the proposed tractor march.

The Bhartiya Kisan Union Lokshakti is one of the 40-odd farmer unions spearheading the agitation on various border points of Delhi for about 50 days now, demanding repeal of



the farm laws.

In an "extraordinary" interim order, the top court had stayed the implementation of the new farm laws till further orders and had constituted the four-member committee to listen to the grievances and make recommendations to resolve the impasse.

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

However, on January 14, Mann recused himself from the committee.

The Bhartiya Kisan Union

Lokshakti, in its reply filed through lawyer A P Singh, urged the top court "to remove all these three members from the committee and appoint those persons who make the report on the basis of mutual harmony...."

"It is important to mention here with great regret that the principle of natural justice is going to be violated by making these persons as members of the committee.... how they will hear all farmers on equal parameters when they have already supported these laws," it said.

On the issue of the Delhi Police seeking injunction against the tractor rally, it said prohibitory orders under CrPC Section 144 were already in place in the New Delhi area.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western UP, are protesting at various border points of Delhi

for over a month now against the three laws -- the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act.

Enacted in September 2020, the government has presented these laws as major farm reforms aimed at increasing farmers' income, but the protesting farmers have raised concerns that these legislations would weaken the minimum support price (MSP) and "mandi" (wholesale market) systems and leave them at the mercy of big corporations.

The government has maintained that these apprehensions are misplaced and has ruled out a repeal of the laws.

400 farmers from Kerala join protest against three farm laws

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Around 400 farmers from Kerala have joined the ongoing agitation near the Rajasthan-Haryana border against three new farm laws. A group of farmers from Kerala came to Alwar's Shahjahanpur on Friday to participate in the sit-in launched by Sanyukt Kisan Morcha against the Centre's farm laws, former CPI (M) MLA Amra Ram said. He said the farmers are protesting on a 3-km stretch of the highway, which has one service lane opened for locals. "The farmers are protesting under intense cold conditions but the Centre is not bothered," he added.

Woman officer accuses man of raping, blackmailing her

PNS ■ PRATAPGARH (UP)

A woman officer posted in Lalganj tehsil here has lodged a complaint against a man accusing him of raping and blackmailing her, police said on Saturday.

Acting on the complaint, the police on Friday arrested the accused belonging to Basantpur in Shahjahanpur district, Station House Officer Ram Adhar said.

The woman officer had lodged a complaint with the police on January 2 alleging the man used to beat and harass her during the days when she was taking coaching and had also made an obscene video and pictures of her, Adhar said.

The officer alleged that when she got a job in a bank in Bareilly, the accused used to come there and harass her, he said citing the complaint of the woman.

On her selection in the Provincial Civil Service, she was posted in Pratapgarh in 2017 and the woman officer said the accused used to come to her officers' colony residence there, the SHO said, adding the man, along with his two associates, had come again there on December 18 last year but fled when she raised an alarm.

The woman has also alleged that the accused used to blackmail her family on the basis of the obscene video, Adhar said.

Based on her complaint, an FIR has been lodged against the accused and further probe is underway, the police officer said.

SC slams Gujarat for 'lethargy' in filing plea, slaps ₹25k fine

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on Gujarat for wasting judicial time, irked over the "lethargy and incompetence" of the state government in filing a petition before it after a delay of over a year. A bench, headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, pulled up the state for approaching the apex court in a "casual manner" and dismissed the plea on the ground of delay.

It observed that such kind of "certificate cases" are filed with the only objective to obtain a quietus from the top court on the ground that nothing could be done because the highest court had dismissed the appeal.

The petition was filed in the the top court by the state government after a delay of 427 days against an order of the Gujarat High Court passed in March 2019 in a case.

"The objective is to complete a mere formality and save the skin of the officers who may be in default in following the due process or may have done it deliberately. We have deprecated such practice and process and we do so again.

"We refuse to grant such cer-

State govt filed petition in the the top court after a delay of 427 days against an order of the Gujarat HC passed in March 2019 in a case.

tificates and if the government suffers losses, it is time when concerned officers responsible for the same bear the consequences," said the bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and Hrishikesh Roy.

"The irony, emphasised by us repeatedly, is that no action is ever taken against the officers and if the court pushes it, some mild warning is all that happens," the bench said in its order passed earlier this week.

The plea also noted the explanation given in the application for condonation of delay.

"The aforesaid itself shows the casual manner in which the state government has approached

this court without any cogent or plausible ground for condonation of delay. In fact, other than the lethargy and incompetence of the petitioner government, there is nothing which has been put on record," it said.

"We have repeatedly discouraged state governments and public authorities in adopting an approach that they can walk in to the Supreme Court as and when they please ignoring the period of limitation prescribed by the statutes as if the limitation statute does not apply to them," the bench said. The SC directed that amount of cost imposed on the state be recovered from the officers responsible for the delay in filing the plea and a certificate of recovery be also filed in the court.

"Looking to the period of delay and the casual manner in which the application has been worded, we consider appropriate to impose costs on the petitioner/state of Rs 25,000 for wastage of judicial time, which has its own value and the same be deposited with the SC Advocates On Record Welfare Fund within four weeks," the bench said, dismissing the special leave petition.

Maharashtra Congress takes out tractor rally against farm laws, fuel price hike in Nagpur

PNS ■ NAGPUR

Thousands of Congress workers and farmers took out a tractor rally in Maharashtra's Nagpur city on Saturday to protest against the Centre's farm laws and hike in fuel prices. Congress workers and party leaders rode on tractors and raised slogans against the Central government

in front of the Raj Bhavan here. State Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat, ministers Sunil Kedar, Vijay Wadetiwar, Nitin Raut, Bhai Jagtap and several other party leaders participated in the rally. The rally was earlier supposed to be held in Mumbai, but venue for the protest was changed in the last minute to coincide with Maharashtra

Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's visit to Nagpur from January 12 to 17. Taking to Twitter on Friday, Thorat had said that state Congress workers will "gherao" the Raj Bhavan in Nagpur to demand that the "draconian" farm laws be repealed and also to protest against the frequent hikes in fuel prices.

WB relaxes norms, allows net metering for households

PNS ■ KOLKATA

To make solar energy viable for households in Bengal, WBERC has relaxed rooftop solar regulations by allowing net metering starting from capacity of 1 KW against 5 KW capacity criteria required earlier and that too for restricted categories of consumers, an official said.

Earlier no individual or housing complexes except co-operatives, were permitted the benefit of net metering a key driver for rooftop solar adoption. Without net metering rooftop solar projects are not very economically feasible, the official said.

According to earlier regulations, only institutions, commercial, industrial and cooperative housings were allowed net metering benefit but that was from 5KW onwards.

The West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) in its recent amendments to the Cogeneration and Electricity Generation from Renewable Sources Regulations 2013 had allowed net metering from 1 KW but had restricted it to 5 KW, a top



official told PTI.

The new amendment mandates 'gross metering' facilities for solar system installation capacities above 5 KW.

The commercial benefit for a consumer is far less in case of gross-metering compared to net-metering thus making adoption less commercially attractive. A simple implication is, now a small installation up to 5 KW gets a boost but it deprives larger installations between 5 KW and 10 KW.

"To boost renewable energy use, we have allowed net-metering of solar power installation from 1 KW to 5 KW. Now there is no restriction and anyone can install rooftop solar.

Earlier regulations did not allow net metering for common households," a WBERC official said.

Pandya brothers' father dies at 71

PNS ■ VADODARA

India cricketers Hardik and Krunal Pandya lost their father Himanshu, who died on Saturday after suffering a heart attack. He was 71.

Krunal, who was leading Baroda in the Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy, left the bio-bubble created for the tournament to be with his family, association secretary Ajit Lele told PTI.

Hardik is not playing the national T20 tournament as he is preparing for the white-ball series against England. He has also left Mumbai, where he was

training, for Vadodara.

Himanshu had played a key role in the success of his cricketer sons.

Krunal scored a match-winning 76 in the opening game against Uttarakhand and has also taken four wickets in the first three games.

India skipper Virat Kohli and legendary Sachin Tendulkar, led the cricketing fraternity in condoling Himanshu's demise.

"Heartbroken to hear about the demise of Hardik and Krunal's dad. Spoke to him a couple of times, looked a joy-

ful and full of life person. May his soul rest in peace. Stay strong you two. @hardikpandya7 @krunalpandya24," tweeted Kohli.

"Really sorry to hear about the demise of your father @krunalpandya24 & @hardikpandya7. Condolences to your family and friends. May God give you strength on these difficult times," wrote Tendulkar.

Irfan Pathan and his brother Yusuf, both former India cricketers, also condoled the death of Pandya brothers' father.

Fresh FIR against ex-BJP leader as another boy alleges sexual assault

PNS ■ JALAUN

The police here have registered a fresh FIR against ex-BJP functionary Ram Bihari Rathore after a minor boy filed a complaint alleging that the man was sexually assaulting him since 2014, an officer said on Saturday. This is the third case against Rathore, who was arrested on Wednesday on charges of sexually assaulting two children, Superintendent of Police (SP) Yeshveer Singh said.

A minor boy lodged a complaint alleging that he was

being sexually assaulted by Rathore since 2014. On the basis of the complaint, another FIR was lodged against Rathore on Friday evening, he said. Some other boys have also come forward alleging that they were sexually assaulted by the accused. Efforts are being made to seek Rathore's police remand for the recovery of more videos, he added.

Earlier, the police had found 15 to 20 videos on Rathore's laptop, DVD and hard disc in which he is seen sexually exploiting children. Nine more

victims -- seven minors and two women -- were identified on the basis of these videos.

The SP said the stringent National Security Act (NSA) could also be invoked against Rathore, the former vice-president of the BJP's Konch unit.

Directives in this regard have already been received from the state government, he said.

Under the NSA, a person can be detained without a charge for up to 12 months if authorities are satisfied that he or she is a threat to national security or law and order.

Dolphin population in Odisha's Chilika Lake rises to 156

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After emerging as the favourite destination of migratory birds, the Chilika lake in Odisha has also turned out to be a safe haven for rare Irrawaddy dolphins.

This came to the light after the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) conducted an annual survey on the biodiversity of the lagoon, which is the largest lake along the east-coast of India. The population of dolphins has increased to 156 in 2020 against 150 in 2019, an official said.

The Irrawaddy dolphin is the flagship species inhabiting the Chilika Lake. The CDA in a statement said that the present distribution range of this species is only in Asia, from Chilika to Indonesia. Irrawaddy dolphins in India are protected

under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, CITES (Appendix-I) and IUCN Red List.

The CDA has initiated many conservation measures for the protection and conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in the past in close coordination with the Wildlife Wing of state Forest Department, CDA chief executive Susanta Nanda said.

He said that in the past there had been survey and identification of dolphin habitat in the lake for proper management, dolphin watching protocol was formulated, sensitization training of tourist boat operators was conducted, widening and deepening of Magarmukha channel was undertaken for free movement of dolphin from outer channel to the main lake.

The annual population estimation survey of Irrawaddy



dolphin has been conducted by CDA since 2003. The annual survey conducted on January 15, 2021 by "Transact Survey Method", followed worldwide for population of aquatic mammals.

Each survey team was equipped with binoculars, GPS, Range finder and data record-

ing sheets.

The movement has been facilitated by clearing of gherries (illegal embankments) at places. One significant population of dolphin is now observed in southern sector, by moving from other sectors, the official said.

A total of 18 teams had

Chilika Development Authority has initiated many conservation measures for the protection and conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in the past in close coordination with the Wildlife Wing of state Forest Department

conducted the annual count of the dolphin population for around six hours. While 10 teams of experts conducted the counting in Balugaon area and 8 teams were engaged for the counting in Satapada area, he said, adding that restriction on the visit of the tourists to the lake was also imposed during the counting period.

A bird census conducted on January 5, 2021 also revealed that a total of 12,42,000 individuals of 105 water bird

species and 26,405 individuals of 76 wetland dependent species, were counted from the entire lagoon.

"This year, more birds are found in Central and Southern sectors of Chilika. An increase in the population of open water preferring diving ducks was noticed during the current season, particularly in the prawn gherries evicted areas clearly indicating the beneficial impact of eviction for migratory birds," Nanda said.

SHORT TAKES

Banned tobacco products worth over ₹1.74cr seized; one held

THANE: The Thane police have seized gutka and banned tobacco products worth over Rs 1.74 crore from a container truck in Maharashtra's Bhiwandi town on Saturday, an official said. Acting on a tip-off, the police raided a godown at Dapoda in the early hours of the day and seized gutka and banned tobacco products from a container truck in the premises, the official from Narpoli police station said. The police also arrested truck driver Amin Ilias Khan (26), while a manhunt has been launched to nab owners of the vehicle and the godown, where the contraband was stored, he said. An offence under relevant sections of the IPC and the Food and Drug Administration regulations has been registered in this regard. A probe is underway to find the source of the contraband and where it was being transported.

TRP scam: BARC former CEO Partho Dasgupta hospitalised

MUMBAI: Former CEO of ratings agency BARC, Partho Dasgupta, who was arrested in the alleged fake Television Ratings Point (TRP) case, has been admitted in the ICU of state-run JJ hospital in central Mumbai, an official said on Saturday. Dasgupta, a diabetic, was rushed to the hospital from the Talaja Central Prison in Navi Mumbai in the early hours of Saturday after his blood sugar levels went up on Friday midnight. Dasgupta was admitted to the ICU of JJ hospital and is on Oxygen support, he said. Dasgupta was arrested in the alleged TRP rigging scam by crime branch of the Mumbai Police on December 24 last year. A Mumbai court had earlier this month rejected the bail plea of Dasgupta, stating that he played a vital role in the scam. The Mumbai Police had earlier told the court that Republic TV Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami had allegedly bribed Dasgupta with "lakhs of rupees" to ramp up the news channels viewership.

Rahul will be remembered for standing up to 'dictatorial regime'

SRINAGAR: History will remember Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for standing up to the "present dictatorial regime", PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said on Saturday. Taking to Twitter, Mufti said it is a fact that "new India is in the grip of a select few" and Gandhi is the only politician who dares to speak the truth. "Ridicule Rahul Gandhi all you want but he's the only politician who dares to speak the truth. Its a fact that new India is in the grip of a select few & crony capitalists. History will remember him for standing upto the present dictatorial regime (sic)," the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chief said. In another tweet, the former chief minister of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state said the Centre had "unleashed" its "pet agency" -- the National Investigation Agency (NIA) -- on farmer unions protesting against the three agri laws. "GOIs pet agency NIA is now being unleashed on farmer unions. The rot that has set into India's premier terror investigative agency can be gauged from the manner in which they are fabricating charges on Kashmiris, farmers & those who dare to dissent (sic)," she said.

Juvenile stabs man following quarrel

NEW DELHI: A 21-year-old man was stabbed allegedly by a juvenile following a quarrel between them, police said on Saturday. The victim has been identified as Satish, a resident of Kalyanpuri in east Delhi. He was admitted to a nearby hospital with a stab injury on his stomach and is stated to be stable now, they said. Police said the juvenile often passed derogatory remarks and harassed Satish. The incident took place on Thursday in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri area when Satish went up to the juvenile to ask why he harassed him so frequently. This led to a quarrel between them following which the juvenile stabbed Satish with a knife, a senior police officer said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Deepak Yadav said a case under section 307 (attempt to murder) of the Indian Penal Code was registered and the juvenile has been apprehended.



BIG FIGHTBACK

SHALINI SAKSENA brings you a story of 40-year-old APARNA RAJAWAT who has overcome several roadblocks in her life to become India’s 16-time national champion in martial arts and to travel the length and breadth of the country teaching 1.5 lakh young girls mental strength, legal rights and self-defence

She was all of seven when a martial arts teacher came to her colony in Agra, Uttar Pradesh to teach children this art. Like all kids, she came home running and told her parents she wanted to join these classes. Her family was extremely conservative and with six siblings — two elder brothers, there was no way that her parents allowed her to learn the art that was considered to be only for boys. The fact that she would be the only girl in the class went against her. Back then, in the late 1980s, it was unthinkable that a girl would learn martial arts. But she never gave up hope and spent the next one year trying to convince her parents. Finally, her mother gave her consent. That day and the next 12 years, she went on to excel in martial arts. So much so that by the time she was 19 years old, she had been 16-time champion. Meet 40-year-old Aparna Rajawat.

Everyone expected great many things from her in the future but a road accident left her with seven fractures in her leg. Her career to compete in martial arts came to an abrupt end. She was in the hospital for several months and the doctors told her that if she tried to compete professionally, she may end up in the wheelchair.

“When the doctors told me to stop competing I didn’t know what to do. I could train by not compete. Martial arts had been my life. I didn’t know anything else even though I started playing other sports like basketball. Back then there was no scope to take up martial arts as a profession. At best, all I would achieve is to become a coach and teach in a school. This avenue didn’t allow any growth. My dream was to join the Army. But after my accident I became unfit for the forces,” Rajawat recalls.

She had joined martial art classes to escape the bullying from her elder brothers. They would really trouble her a lot. She thought that if she learnt this art form, she would be able to defend herself. But after the accident she found herself with nothing to do. That is when she turned to her other passion — dancing. She came to Delhi; joined some classes and worked for the likes of Daler Mehndi. She worked as a choreographer for the next few years. But her leg started giving her problems once again.

The doctor didn’t have good news for

her. He told her that if she continued to pursue her present occupation she would become paralysed neck down. Another blow to her career. But she never allowed herself to be let down by bad news. Back home in Agra, while thinking of what to do she came across a tour manager with 15-20 foreigners. That got her thinking.

“When I saw this man talk to these foreigners, I realised that the work was something that I could do. I found out everything that there was to know about how to be a tour guide and started looking for work. That it was tough, is putting it mildly. Nobody would give me work. Some even told me that this is not a woman’s job but a man’s and the best option for me would be to take up teaching. But I never gave up. For the next four-five months, I visited as many operators as I could only be come back home frustrated. Finally, I went to a tour operator who agreed to give me chance when I told him that even Amitabh Bachchan was rejected for his voice. I told him how do you know that a woman wouldn’t be able to do this job unless you give her a chance. This person agreed to give me work. He told me that he would call if something came up,” Rajawat says.

The next day she landed up at the office with a book and her lunch box. The operator was surprised to see her and asked what she was doing. She told him that her house was an hour away and if he called her, it would take her time to reach and she would lose the opportunity. She did this for the next two months.

And finally, her day came. From being a local tour guide to tour manager with a Canadian company in India to an international tour director with a company in London. She would live six-seven months there and the rest here in India for another company that dealt with tourists in American and Nepal.

In 2012, she was in London when she heard about Nirbhaya. The next few months really disturbed her as she followed the case. However, she continued to work as an international tour director. But the lockdown put traveling on hold and that is when she decided to do what she had thought of doing while she followed the Nirbhaya case — provide self-defence classes to women.

“I knew that travel will be on hold for

I KNEW THAT TRAVEL WILL BE ON HOLD FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS. SO, I HAVE DECIDED TO SPEND MY TIME TEACHING SELF-DEFENCE TO GIRLS. DURING THE NIRBHAYA TRIAL, I SPENT YEARS TRYING TO READ AND FIND EVERYTHING THERE WAS TO KNOW ABOUT CRIME AGAINST WOMEN. I WAS OBSESSED. I THOUGHT OF NOTHING BUT HOW TO PREVENT CRIME AGAINST WOMEN



Aparna Rajawat showing moves on how to defend oneself

the next few years. So, I have decided to spend my time teaching self-defence. During the Nirbhaya case, I spent the next few years trying to read and find everything there was to know about crime against women. I was obsessed. I thought of nothing but how to prevent crime against them. My bullying days and things that I faced at the hands of cousin came to mind. I wanted to teach women the difference between good and bad touch and how they could defend themselves,” Rajawat says.

She tells you that even though she was living a good life — traveling the world, earning big bucks and have every comfort one could thing of — her bled every time she heard of a crime that involved a woman. She spoke with her mother, who was alive back then. She told her that despite her success, she was not content and wanted to do something for the women of this country. Her mother, who had always been

a great support to Rajawat and encouraged her to pursue what she wanted, told her that she must follow her heart.

“When I told her that I wanted to come back home, she told me I must do whatever my heart told me to do. She said that I had overcome every obstacle that life had thrown at me and excelled in whatever I chose to do. At death bed, what will go with you is not the money that you have earned but the good deeds, my mother told me,” Rajawat recalls.

That is when she came to India, in 2016. It began with her sponsoring girls who wanted to study more and didn’t have the finance. One day she was approached to give a motivational speech at a coaching centre. She spoke for 45 minutes about her journey and given the response she got, Rajawat realised the power of her words and how it can change people’s lives. That is when she started talking about the importance

of self-defence. That is how Pink Belt Mission came to life a couple of years later.

“Till now I have taught 1.5 lakh women how to defend themselves on five different dimensions — mental, emotional, legal and digital and physical strength. These are core areas where each woman needs to be taught. Without this even if one handed a loaded gun to the woman, it would be of no use. I hold workshops form time to time as I travel the length and breath of the country. Each workshop, meant for college going students, attracts 2,000-2,500 girls. At the workshop, I give a motivational speech, basically my life story, and how I overcame them. Of course, not all the girls come for the defense classes that I teach over a period of three days. These classes are extremely taxing and at the end of the day, the girls are well-equipped to defend against any assault. My aim is to teach 50 lakh women self-defence in the next few year,” Rajawat tells you.

Once these girls are ready, they are sorted in batches of four-five each. There is a reason why Rajawat chooses only college goers. They are the one’s who have the time to go to schools and train the girls there.

However, it is not just the girls who are taught their rights and what is right and wrong. Rajawat holds classes for boys as well to tell them hoe they should behave in front of women. She tells you that not many know that if a boy stares at a girl more more than 15 seconds, it is an offense. That if they look at girl and starting singing, it is an offense.

“It is so unfortunate that we don’t teach basic rights to our children. We must teach boys how to respect the women and that they are not second-rate citizens I tell girls who attend my workshop how they must give their children a good upbringing; this change is what we will see after 20 years,” Rajawat says.

She is now working on a campaign to spread awareness on how to provide immediate help to the survivors.

“The law says that if there is a sexual assault on a woman, no hospital can deny her medical treatment; there is no need for police to finish doing its job first. But nobody is aware of this law. We have been working on this. I will travel across the country to spread this message. We hope that this will prevent the crime from taking place to begin with,” Rajawat says.

‘I cried many times during the filming of Pink Belt Mission’

■Why did you choose to tell this story in a documentary style?

We chose to shoot *Pink Belt Mission* in documentary style because Aparna Rajawat was attempting to break the Guinness World Record for most persons trained in a self-defence lesson. It was to bring worldwide attention to her cause. I wanted to film her day to day struggle in that attempt. It was thrilling because we didn’t know if she would succeed. In the movie you see her, in real life, trying to overcome the obstacles presented to her. It’s quite thrilling because you didn’t know if she and her team can pull it off. For me it was like watching a great sporting event. I wanted her to win but the odds were against her.

■What made you tell her story?

I wanted to tell this story because she is a fighter, fighting for an important cause, women’s safety, education and teaching them self-defence. She is such a dynamic person you can’t say no to her. When I met her, her stories were fascinating and movies are only as good as the stories. I hope to give her stories the worldwide attention they deserve.

■What were the challenges faced?

A big challenge was the language barrier. Half of the movie is in English and half is in Hindi. I only know a few words in Hindi, so I had to have someone translate for me and each subject who didn’t speak English. Also,

it is a very tough subject matter and there are stories of violence against women that are heartbreaking. I would go back to the hotel after filming some of the sad stories and I deeply sympathised with these women’s pain. I felt it in my heart. I cried many times while filming. That was the most difficult part. And I felt such a responsibility to tell their stories the best that I could.

■The documentary is being premiered at the Jaipur International Film Festival (JIFF). How do you want people to perceive this?

I hope the film will bring attention to Aparna and the women of Pink Belt. To shine a light on all the wonderful works they are doing. It’s a story that



deserves an audience. I hope the audience will be moved and inspired by it. I hope it will reach young girls and women in the world and they will say: ‘If Aparna can do it, I can do it’.

■Don’t you think a commercial release would have been a better option?

The movie is in the competition portion of JIFF. I am hoping that it will win an award to help promote Aparna’s cause. To shine a light on *Pink Belt Mission*. One of the ways to bring attention to a film is to get laurels from film festivals like JIFF. It is our intention to release this documentary in a wide release in movie theaters when it is safe. This year the festival is online due to COVID-19.

When you met Aparna Rajawat, what was your first impression?

My first impression of Aparna was her hair. She had awesome short hair like no other woman I had seen in India. She told me the story of her family taking her to a psychiatrist because she wanted short hair when she was a young girl. That was my very first impression of her, so we filmed the very first scene of the movie at a barbershop. She is getting a haircut and telling the story of the psychiatrist.

■Do you think watching such documentaries will inspire women to be like her?

I think the Pink Belt Mission documentary will inspire young girls

and women in India, but Aparna is such a powerful person I think she will inspire women and men around the world. She never gives up no matter what obstacles cross her path. She continues to fight and it’s inspiring.

Even though it’s a very serious subject matter, Aparna triumphs and inspires. It’s the perfect time for such an uplifting film. I, as an audience member wanted to cheer for Aparna and I hoped she would win. Ultimately, I didn’t know if she would break the world record or not, but that didn’t matter. What was important is how many young lives she touched and uplifted. Aparna has really inspired me.

‘RBI policies helped ease severity of economic impact of COVID’

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on Saturday said the year 2020 could be marked as one of the toughest periods for human society caused by COVID-19 and the policies adopted by the central bank have helped in easing the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic.

"The year bygone could be marked as one of the toughest periods for human society. The unprecedented health and economic catastrophe caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and widened economic and social fault lines across countries", Das said.

The Governor made the comments while delivering the 39th Nani Palkhivala Memorial Lecture on Saturday.

"It is essential to evolve a prudent and judicious approach towards managing the financial system not only during the pandemic but also in its aftermath", he noted.



Need to support economic revival, financial stability: RBI Guv

PNS ■ CHENNAI

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Saturday said the financial stability is a public good, and its resilience and robustness need to be preserved and nurtured by all stakeholders.

Delivering the 39th Nani Palkhivala memorial lecture through a virtual platform, he said the central bank has directed its policy efforts to put in place a state-of-the-art national payments infrastructure, ensuring safe, secure,

efficient and cost-effective robust payments ecosystem.

The Reserve Bank of India is positioning itself to provide an enabling environment where regulated entities are catalysed to exploit these new avenues while maintaining and preserving financial stability, he said.

The regulated entities on their part need to strengthen their internal defences to identify emerging risks early and manage them effectively, Das added.

RBI remains steadfast to take any further measures to support growth: Das

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das on Saturday said the central bank remains steadfast to take any further measures as may be required to support growth without compromising on financial stability.

Delivering the 39th Palkhivala Memorial Lecture, the governor said the principal objective during the pandemic period was to support economic activity; and looking back, it is evident that policies of the RBI have helped in easing the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic.

"I would like to unambiguously reiterate that the Reserve Bank remains steadfast to take any further measures, as may be necessary, while at the same time remaining fully committed

to maintaining financial stability," he said. In a bid to maintain financial stability, Das emphasised the need for banks to raise resources in advance as a buffer. Going ahead, he said, financial institutions in India have to walk a tightrope in nurturing the economic recovery within the overarching objective of preserving long-term stability of the financial system.

The current COVID-19 pandemic related shock will place greater pressure on the balance sheets of banks in terms of non-performing assets, leading to erosion of capital, he said, adding building buffers and raising capital by banks – both in the public and private sector – will be crucial not only to ensure credit flow but also to build resilience in the financial system.

Gadkari for more research to identify import substitutes

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

Union MSME Minister Nitin Gadkari has pitched for more research to identify products that can be indigenously manufactured as cost-effective import substitutes.

The industries and industrial associations should do more research to identify these substitutes to curb imports, he added.

Instead of importing spare part, the industry should help their vendors to find an indigenous replacement, Gadkari said in a virtual meeting on Friday.

He was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of Atmanirbhar Innovation Challenge organised by Marathwada Accelerator for Growth and Incubation Council (MAGIC).

It is a branch of industrial association Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture (CMIA).

While identifying crucial products being imported into the country, the focus should be on how they can be manufactured here, he said.

The industry should help and support their vendors to create all types of parts in India, Gadkari added.



Initially, there could be 10-20 per cent rise in prices for the substitute, but when it will start production in large volumes, the industry can get those parts at a reasonable price, he said.

Now, it is the time to make import substitutes that will be indigenous, cost-effective and pollution-free, the minister noted.

While talking about Aurangabad, Gadkari said one of the national projects that have been planned is Damanganga-Pinjar project to collect water and bring it to the Godavari river valley.

From there, it will be supplied to those projects where there is a shortage.

"I have resolved issues related to many projects in various

states of the country. There were problems with this project, to be implemented between Maharashtra and Gujarat, that still remain unsolved," the minister said.

The industry should mount pressure on the Maharashtra government for this, he added.

The association has launched Atmanirbhar Innovation Challenge 20-21 to promote startup ideas and bring them into reality, MAGIC director Ritesh Mishra said.

This year, the challenge has received around 210 idea entries from 17 states.

CMIA president Kamlesh Dhoot, Secretary Shivprasad Jaju, MAGIC director Prasad Kokil, and Ashish Garde were also present on this occasion.



Shoppers Stop net loss widens to Rs 25.11 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shoppers Stop Ltd on Friday reported widening of its consolidated net loss to Rs 25.11 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2020.

The company had posted a net loss of Rs 6.51 crore in the October-December quarter a year ago.

Its total income declined 27.2 per cent to Rs 746.45 crore during the period under review as against Rs 1,025.53 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous fiscal, Shoppers Stop said in a regulatory filing.

Shoppers Stop's total expenses stood at Rs 778.78

crore during the quarter as against Rs 963.90 crore a year ago, down 19.2 per cent.

Shoppers Stop MD and CEO Venu Nair said, "Business recovery during the festive period has been encouraging. The festive period helped footfall into stores and also generated higher digital sales."

Its digital initiatives such as white-glove services (video assisted initiative), yellow messenger services (chat enabled) and appointment services (through website and app) have engaged customers to a new level and contributed to our growth in the third quarter, he added.

10 firms bid to redevelop heritage CSMT railway station

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Ten firms, including an Adani Group company, have bid for redeveloping the heritage Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) Railway station as part of an over Rs 1,640-crore project.

The station, a UNESCO-certified World Heritage Site from where the first railway chugged out over 170-years ago, will be redeveloped in multiple phases over a four-year period, officials at the Indian Railways Station Development Corporation (IRSDC) said.

The Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation (IRSDC) on August 20 invited the Request For Qualification (RFQ) for the redevelopment of the station into a worldclass terminus through the public private partnership (PPP) model. The redevelopment of the structure will be done on DBFOT (design, build, finance, operate and transfer) basis.

Over two dozen entities had initially evinced interest for the project, which was cleared by the



Union government's Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPAC) in August last year, of which ten have successfully submitted their bids, the IRSDC said.

The Adani Group, which has bid through Adani Railways Transport Ltd, has been upping investments in the mobility space in the recent past and have successfully bid to potentially become the largest private sector airport operator.

Others who have applied for the project which has a 60-year concession include GMR

Enterprises, ISQ Asia Infrastructure Investments, Kalpataru Power Transmission, Anchorage Infrastructure Investments Holdings, Brookfield Infrastructure Fund, Moribus Holdings, Godrej Properties, Keystone Realtors and Oberoi Realty, as per an official statement.

"We will now scrutinise all the ten bids, shortlist those who comply with requirements and float the request for proposal in four months after finalising the detailed project report," IRSDC's chief executive and managing director S K Lohia told PTI.

Lohia exuded confidence of awarding the project by December and added that it will be completed in four years in multiple phases.

The winning bidder will invest upfront in the construction of the project for which it may appoint sub-contractors, he said, adding that financial strength will be more preferred over technical ability while awarding the project.

The IRSDC has already gone to the heritage panels with the project report and will be going to the committee again with the final plan before construction begins, he said, claiming that the project will both "preserve and enhance" the beauty of the building.

The bidder who is chosen for the project will have the rights for revenues from the station, called as the concession period, of 60 years, he said.

Lohia explained that the winning bidder can get revenue from the realty side by renting out space, user charges which the passengers will be paying and also station revenue through aspects like kiosks, billboards etc.

‘Strong startup ecosystem critically important for business’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A strong startup ecosystem is critically important as it gives fresh ideas and new ways for doing business, said Godrej Consumer Products Ltd Chairperson Nisha Godrej.

Speaking at the 25th Wharton India Economic Forum, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) Chairperson Nisha Godrej



said companies can get ideas from startups and make changes as the business

cycles are getting much faster.

"Strong startup ecosystem is critically important for the business. You need people to come and disrupt industries," Godrej said.

Though in the older and larger organisation, it is difficult to disrupt (but) it's not impossible "as during the pandemic, we have seen large changes are possible", she added.

APEDA organises buyer-seller meet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Agri exports' body APEDA organised a Virtual Buyer Seller Meet (VBSM) in association with the Indian Embassy in Azerbaijan on Friday, bringing together stakeholders for strengthening strategic cooperation between India and Azerbaijan in the export of Basmati rice.

"The meet brought together key stakeholders from the respective governments and trade on a

common platform for strengthening strategic cooperation between India and Azerbaijan in export of Basmati rice," the commerce and industry ministry stated.

During the VBSM, presentations were made by leading Basmati rice exporters. The National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers') Organisations of the Republic of Azerbaijan explained their requirement or standards for Basmati rice imports from India.

‘Exports up 11 pc during Jan 1-14’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Driven by healthy growth in pharmaceuticals and engineering sectors, the country's exports grew about 11 per cent year-on-year to USD 11.81 billion in the first fortnight of January, an official said on Friday. The exports during January 1-14 last year stood at \$10.65 billion. Imports during January 1-14 this year too increased by 6.58 per cent to \$18 billion as against \$16.91 billion in the same period of 2020, the official said.

Pharma industry risen to occasion: Satish

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian pharma industry has risen to the occasion and has made efforts to ensure that medicines and vaccines reach people during the pandemic, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Chairman Satish Reddy said on Friday.

Speaking at the 25th Wharton India Economic Forum, he said the Indian pharma industry ensured the continuity of supplies.

He said the crisis itself presented the industry with several opportunities and allowed us to think differently. It asked us to act with a sense of urgency in the interest of the patients because they are looking at us for affordable and accessible medicines, he added.

Talking about the opportunities provided by COVID-19, Reddy said that when it came to therapeutics, Indian com-



panies have risen to the occasion, they did it by re-purposing the drugs.

They worked in a collaborative manner with the regulator, to ensure the medicines reach the market fast without compromising any safety standards, he said.

"About vaccines, India is in the forefront", even before to the pandemic, around 60 per

cent of the global production of vaccines came from India, he said.

When the pandemic came, it was incumbent upon Indian vaccine manufacturers to develop their own vaccines, which some companies such as Zydus and Bharat Biotech have done, and also there were collaborations, partnering with other companies, he added.

Serum Institute of India partnered with Oxford University, Dr Reddy's partnered with Gamaleya Institute of Russia.

"This augurs well for the industry because they have risen to the occasion, shown a sense of urgency, got therapeutics and vaccines to the market and not only to supply to the Indian market but to the global market," Reddy said.

Currently, the Indian pharma industry is about USD 40

billion, with potential in the next 10 years to go to USD 120 billion to 130 billion. This can be done by building on the existing strengths, and by building on the newer strengths, which can take us there, he added.

Right on the top of this is innovation in terms of value creation, another big opportunity in terms of value creation is in biosimilars. There is also a tremendous opportunity in active pharmaceutical ingredients and in generics also, Reddy said.

He added that Indian companies also have proved their mettle in complex and specialty generics.

Speaking on the occasion, Lupin Managing Director Nitesh Gupta said the Indian pharma industry took proactive actions during the pandemic and ensured that that manufacturing continued unhindered.

IRB InvIT Q3 revenue almost flat at Rs 333 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IRB InvIT, India's first listed infrastructure investment trust, on Saturday said its revenue for the December quarter this fiscal remained almost flat at Rs 333 crore.

It had clocked a revenue of Rs 330 crore in the corresponding quarter last fiscal, it said in a statement. "India's first listed Infrastructure Investment Trust will distribute Rs 2.50 per unit for Q3 FY21," it added.

With this, the cumulative distribution for the nine months in FY21 is now Rs 6 per unit, which includes Rs 4.80 per unit as an interest component and Rs 1.20 as return on capital.

The cumulative distribution of cash flow for the nine months of FY21 is Rs 348 crore, which includes the cash flow distribu-



tion of Rs 145 crore for the third quarter, the company said.

"It is encouraging to see the traffic rebound across all our projects, resulting in toll collections increasing beyond pre-COVID 19 levels. In the ensuing months, we expect it to improve further corresponding to the recovery in the economy. Additionally, increasing FASTag penetration across the projects helps in managing higher traffic in a more efficient and transparent manner," as per IRB Infrastructure spokesperson.

MONEY MATTERS

L&T Finance Q3 net profit slips 51 pc to Rs 288 crore

L&T Finance Holdings on Friday reported a 51 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 287.75 crore during the third quarter ended December 31, 2020. The company's net profit stood at Rs 591.47 crore during the same period in the previous fiscal. The non-banking financial company's (NBFC's) total income during the quarter under review declined to Rs 3,622.16 crore from Rs 3,735.79 crore in the year-ago quarter. Average assets under management (AUM) declined to Rs 68,976 crore from Rs 71,587 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago, the company said in a statement.



IRFC garners over Rs 1,398 cr from anchor investors ahead of IPO

The Indian Railway Finance Corporation on Friday raised a little over Rs 1,398 crore from anchor investors ahead of its initial share sale that opens for public subscription on Monday. A total of 5,34,563,007 equity shares have been allocated to 31 anchor investors at an upper price band of Rs 26 per equity shares, the company said in a statement. At this price, IRFC has garnered Rs 1,398.63 crore from anchor investors. The anchor investors include HDFC Trustee Company Ltd, Nippon Life India Trustee Ltd, Government of Singapore, Monetary Authority of Singapore, Kuwait Investment Authority Fund, Kotak Mahindra (International) Ltd, Goldman Sachs (Singapore) PTE, Tata AIG General Insurance Co Ltd and Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance Co Ltd. The issue is of up to 178.20 crore shares, comprising a fresh issue of up to 118.80 crore shares and offer for sale of up to 59.40 crore shares by the government. The company's principal business is to borrow funds from the financial markets to finance acquisition/creation of assets which are then leased out to the Indian Railways. The initial public offer (IPO) would open on January 18 and close on January 20. The price band of the issue has been fixed at Rs 25 to Rs 26 per equity share. At the upper end of the price band, the IPO is expected to fetch Rs 4,633 crore.



Walmart's e-commerce chief resigns after nearly 5 years

Marc Lore, Walmart's e-commerce chief, is leaving the world's largest retailer, nearly five years after he joined to super charge its online business amid stiffer competition from online leader Amazon. Under Lore's stewardship, Walmart led the redesign of the company's website, expanded its online assortment from 10 million items to more than 80 million and transformed its delivery network to add two-day and same day delivery. Lore, who served as CEO of Walmart's e-commerce division, joined the company in September 2016 when Walmart bought Jet.com, an e-commerce company he founded, for more than USD 3 billion.



Mahindra Group to seek COVID vaccines for employees

Diversified Mahindra Group on Friday said it has registered interest to seek COVID-19 vaccines for its employees, as per priorities and sequence to be specified by the government. The farm equipment-to-aerospace conglomerate said it would take the responsibility for the inoculation of its employees rather than have the government subsidise them. "We have registered our interest to seek vaccines for our employees, in accordance with the priorities and sequence to be specified by the government," a Mahindra Group spokesperson said in a statement. The spokesperson further said, "We believe it is our duty to take responsibility for the inoculation of our employees, rather than have the government subsidise them."



the pioneer agenda

FROM THE INSIDE



Starts on a good note

There is a thrill that comes with watching an action-thriller and when that is embellished with sci-fi the experience of watching the same is at another level

9



10

Hope in heart, prayer on lips, health workers get first jobs
'World's largest vaccination drive shows determination of a self-reliant India'

You cannot live your life looking at yourself from someone else's point of view
— Penelope Cruz



A region, that was considered to be shrouded in mystery and inaccessible, is turning into a hot destination for business and leisure, writes SAIMI SATTAR, as she explores the reasons behind it

NORTH EAST ON THE RADAR

In 2013-14 racial attacks on North Easterners were common. We were more often than not referred to as *Chinki* or Chinese. In 2014, a boy, Nido Taniam, was killed for his hairstyle in Delhi. This shook the conscience of the entire community, recalls Shyam Kanu Mahanta

It was this incident that made Mahanta sit up and take notice, egged on by other youngsters from the North Eastern states to do something to bring about a positive change. After careful thought, Mahanta, who after having worked across the country had turned entrepreneur, decided to start a festival that would represent the distinct culture, food and more of the place. Over the years his brainchild, the North East Festival, has become a must-visit event on the capital's social calendar and in many ways representative of the changes that are gradually enveloping the perception about a region which for the longest of time was considered distant, different and inaccessible. Powering this perception are several reasons which lie within the region as well as in the larger ecosystem of the country and the world.

FOCUS OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Mahanta believes that while the new government has undertaken several measures, it was former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee who kick-started the effort of connecting North East to the rest of the country. "He travelled to the region and then Manmohan Singh carried this integration forward when he became a Member of Parliament from Assam. Though he was not very vocal, this choice registered in the mind space of people," says Mahanta who runs MMS Advisory Pvt Ltd, a consultancy for road construction, besides the festival which he is better known for.

Ranjit Das, President of the Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), while talking about his industry pins the beginning of the rise in tourist numbers to one particular decision. He says, "In 2009-10 the DoNER Minister Mani Shanker Aiyer promoted tourism by persuading government officials to use their Leave Travel Concession to visit the region which led to a huge surge of tourists in the North East."

The changed political thought process, where there was focus on the region, meant that connectivity improved and development accelerated. Mahanta believes that the present government and especially the Prime Minister and the DoNER Minister Jitendra Singh's attention has been important in creating a positive impression among people and has put the region on the highway to development.

Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, Chairman and Managing Director, Pride East Entertainments Pvt Ltd, a regional media house, agrees when she says, "With Modi's emphasis on development, investment has poured in and new avenues have opened up." This naturally meant a positive impression all around.

FALLING INSURGENCY

Earlier the perception within the region of being neglected, and often times exploited, by the Centre gave rise to insurgency. "People felt that in order to get even something as simple

as a bridge or a refinery meant that they had to struggle for it. The distance from Indian mainland and mindset didn't help resulting in insurgency movements in 80s or 90s against the perceived discrimination of the region by the Centre," says Mahanta who believes that the increased attention was instrumental in bringing peace to the area.

Dr Parveez Ubed, CEO & Founder, ERC Eye Care (P) Limited which works towards democratising digital health (eye) care for the people in India & South-East Asia points out that insurgency affected business in different ways. "It meant that the offices were not operational every day which naturally led to erratic work conditions," he says.

Mahanta says that with more peace having prevailed, the conditions in Guwahati are almost similar to Delhi. "In fact, it is much safer for women. It has good restaurants, discotheques, all the major brands and a lot of people are coming to work here. It's very cosmopolitan. During insurgency people were scared of flaunting their wealth. Now they are buying expensive cars and splurging money which naturally helps the economy," says Mahanta.

STATE GOVERNMENT CHIPPING IN

Smitakshi B Goswami, Director, Pratidin Group which owns Asomiya Pratidin (the largest circulated Assamese daily) and Pratidin Time (a 24-hour Assamese news channel) says that the efforts of the state governments shored up the remaining gap. "When Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal conducted Khelo India in January last year, sports tourism got a fillip and people who came here saw the development as well as the future potential of the place. The international level stadiums were important in changing the thought process of the people who came from outside," she says.

ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

So, rather than the news of a flood or insurgency activities, there was positivity emanating from the region which grabbed eyeballs. While the ones who had visited the area saw the change for themselves, there were still others who were prompted to plan a trip because of the positive impression in the media. Das says, "During the TOAA's annual convention, we discussed the changing perception and dynamics due to the print and electronic media coverage. The international audience became more aware of the different kinds of experiences that the region held out thanks to programmes on channels like National Geographic." Road shows and participation in travel fairs by tour operators created awareness among domestic and international tourists about the scenic beauty of the region.

Moreover, the growth of social media



meant that potential travellers often got the information from people in their own circle who had been to the region. "Live streaming of a destination creates an impact like no other. The travel industry too tapped into the potential of the new media," says Das.

YOUTH POWERING CHANGE

Designer Jenjum Gadi, who calls Delhi home, believes that the change has been brought about primarily by the youngsters. "We have faced a lot of racism in metros and the youngsters worked on countering it by engaging in discussions, both online and offline, about the people, food and culture. This created awareness and dispelled myths." He has noticed a marked shift in the number of people wanting to travel to the region and being more tolerant of the food habits than they were when he came from a remote village in Arunachal Pradesh to the capital to study 16 years back.

The fashion world was the one of the first industries to integrate people from the North East since they have an inherent sense of style. "There are stylists, designers, graphic designers and more in the industry which, to begin with, was always open," feels Gadi.

Sharma believes that the new crop of youngsters has done their bit in bridging the gap which existed on both sides. "Slowly we are trying to assimilate ourselves in the mainstream. Earlier, people found a million reasons not to return to Guwahati after having studied or worked outside. It could be low salaries, standard of living or opportunities," she says and adds that media, like her channel, bring together all the eight states which, in turn, fuels newer ideas for cooperation and development. "We often hear of stories of a boy from some remote area developing software or something equally amazing. There is no dearth of talent here. With the availability of internet, there is an exchange of ideas and more exposure for the younger generation. The basic education system has been strengthened. The economically independent young minds are applying their knowledge everywhere," she says.

STARTUPS REVV UP

The entry of youngsters in tourism has transformed the way even this industry operates. Das says, "About 20 colleges and universities in Assam offering a course on tourism came up in the last four-five years. There are thousands of students pursuing these courses and, when they graduate, they are getting into different kinds of activities, exploring new destinations and looking at giving an authentic experience to tourist. People are now looking at tourism as an avenue of income and employment"

Dr Ubed, who faced an uphill task while setting up his company in 2013, recalls, "People

were surprised as they felt I was giving up a great career as a doctor. Start-ups were not a badge of honour. It was very difficult to get mentors to structure the business properly. I had to reach out to some friends in the US on Facebook who helped me. When I started in Jorhat, the local chartered accountants were not sure about how to register a local company as they hadn't done it before. Investors liked me, my idea and the opportunity it held out but did not want to come down to Assam to meet me."

He feels that the transformation in the eco system where there is a change in attitude as well as money and mentorship being easily available are the reasons why start-ups are thriving.

Gadi believes that a lot of youngsters have decided to head back home after getting an education in the metros as they no longer want a government job. "Home delivery for medicines, grocery and more are run by start-ups by youngsters. These developments are at par with what is happening in the country. Earlier, they did not think that this kind of thing can happen here as well."

However, Smitakshi says that it is the companies which are working with unique products like Eri Silk, organic farming and ingredients like Bhut Jolokia, the hottest chilli in the world, have created a unique footprint.

The change in the attitude towards start-ups, says Dr Ubed, is evident in the way he can now have the pick of people he employs. "Earlier they asked a lot of questions and would want to work for two-three days to see if the environment was good and whether I could pay or not. There is an attitudinal shift and the start-ups are now considered cool," he says.

COMMUNICATION, CONNECTIVITY AND AWARENESS

The connectivity has improved dramatically. According to the Ministry for Road Transport & Highways, 4484.9 km of National Highways were built in between 2014-2018 in the region. Guwahati, which was the first airport in the North East, is now the eighth busiest in the country. The Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport, which till three decades ago was handling only two or three flights a day, has over 120 commercial flights — both arrival and departure — in addition to chartered flights and aircrafts of the Indian Air Force. It registered over six million footfalls during 2018-19, which is a whopping 27.46 per cent increase from 2017-18. According to Airports Authority of India the airport handled 55,066 aircraft movements during 2018-19 which is a 20.99 per cent increase of aircraft movement over the previous 12 months.

Gadi's home state does not have an airport but Arunachal Pradesh would be getting one in another three-four years which, he says, would naturally make it more accessible. Sharma says that there is a flurry of activity, "Airports are coming up, there are investment summits taking place as the CMs take initiatives to improve connectivity."

This naturally has had a positive impact. Das says, "The perception has changed because of the development of communications network and also connectivity. Guwahati, for instance, has direct flights to all the metros."

Gadi feels that a lot of festivals like the Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh, Hornbill in Nagaland have also become must-visit events for travellers. "People who have gone to these festivals return with beautiful memories. That has naturally helped create a positive impression about the people and the place," he says. Mahanta offers a different take when he says, "The North East festival has united the states of the region. It is a meeting point where disagreements have been sorted out and barriers been broken. There is a common agenda for infrastructure, tourism, industry and more. The festival in Guwahati this year had just 100 visitors but saw three lakh digital footfalls worldwide."

As Sharma puts it, "Earlier, the odds seemed to be insurmountable but now the dots are being joined and everything is coming together." This is certainly not the last we have heard of the North East success story. ■

HOME THEATRE

Plenty of twists and intrigue



TANDAV
Amazon Prime Video
*ing: Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia, Mohd Zeeshan Ayub, Sunil Grover, Gauahar Khan, Kritika Kamra
Rated: 5.5/10

This 38-minute each episode created by Ali Abbas Zafar may not have been able to scratch the surface as far as intrigue and twists are concerned but that doesn't mean that they are missing. The Season 1 that has nine episodes takes you on a behind closed doors journey of politics where playing person against the other, murder and using the common man as a stepping stone to further one's career is fair game — all that matters is the position and the power that comes with it.

While the story appears to have been told many times, *Tandav* manages to keep one engaged. Who doesn't want to know how the game is played and however fictional the characters may be, a reference to a lady politician can't help one try and draw parallel

even if the said people are no more and the mere mention of the names can be construed in bad taste. But then, this is reel life not reality.

The makers have ensured that no one point is dragged for long and the story moves at a pace that is interesting and offers plenty of turns that may leave one stumped only to be thrown a curve ball with another twist — all within a span of minutes.

The performance too keeps one glued to this series. Sunil Grover as Guppal is a welcome change. It is good to see him move totally away from Dr Gulati's role in *The Kapil Sharma show*. Saif Ali Khan plays his role just as brilliantly.

As a wannabe king to a kingmaker, his character keeps the interest alive. Dimple Kapadia may look a tad old but one can't take away the elegance with which she portrays herself here. The others actors, and there are so many, do their bit.

It makes for a good watch since it gas plenty of twists and turns.

— Shalini Saksena

Starts on a good note



OUTSIDE THE WIRE
Netflix
Presenter: Anthony Mackie, Damson Idris, Emily Beecham, Michael Kelly, Pilou Asbæk
Rated: 6/10

There is a thrill that comes with watching an action-thriller and when that is embellished with sci-fi the experience of watching the same is at another level. It goes without saying that one must enjoy this genre otherwise it can be a drag as one tries to grapple with what is unfolding.

The storyline is simple enough to begin with — bring down a madman all set to wage a war against the US by going after the nukes that are in hiding. The curve ball? The setting is 2036 with a Civil War in Europe.

Then there is the whole thing about using machines to fight this unrest and caught in between are the locals who only want peace and go on with their lives. Machines fighting? Sound familiar? Remember the Terminator series? *Outside The Wire* takes that on to a whole new dimension — a humanoid — a prototype — capable of doing things out-the-box; a lean mean fighting machine but capable of emotions. Definitely dangerous because it means it can think independently of its maker.

Outside The Wire directed by Mikael Hafstrom is definitely an ambitious project that starts off on a rather intriguing idea and keeps one engaged for the majority of the film. Anthony Mackie who is also one of the producers here pairs up with Damon Idris, plays the role of an android officer rather well. The downer is that the movie somewhat loses its steam as it progresses to become a film that is all about killing the enemy — the US — in order for to stop its android soldiers' project since the prototype has gone rogue.

The repetitive shoot-out are a drag but those who love bullets flying at the drop of a hat would love this one. After all to watch machines go all out is what action thrillers are all about even if the climax is a bit of a let down given a good start.

— Shalini Saksena

TELLY TALE

ADITYA IS BACK WITH BAWRA DIL

Bringing forth an uncommon tale of Siddhi and Shiva filled with love and hatred will be Colors' upcoming love story *Bawra Dil*. Back on TV after a brief hiatus will be actor Aditya Redij who will essay the character of Shiva Lashkare. Like a force of nature, Shiva holds a powerful personality and usually comes across as an angry young man. Pure at heart but often misunderstood because of his brash nature, he is someone who doesn't follow the rules & conventions laid by society but instead makes his own.

His counterpart Siddhi Gokarna is an educated and intellectual young woman with a strong sense of morals and justice. But in a twist of fate, Shiva and Siddhi start off on a wrong note and their bond is fuelled by hatred

Shiva and Siddhi have strikingly different personalities and their colliding life principles ensure they are never on the same page about anything. But as fate has it they get married and unlike any happily ever after, the two vow to come together only to destroy each other.

Speaking about essaying the role of Shiva, Aditya said: "I am super excited for my new show, specially because I've been waiting to play a character like Shiva who is a 26-year-old rebellious self-made man. One who looks tough from the outside but has a child inside him. My last affiliation with Colors was a great success and I am sure that this one will do wonders too. I hope that my audience will like my performance as they watch me portray Shiva's character in *Bawra Dil*."

Talking about playing Siddhi, Kinjal Dhamecha said: "This is my debut show with Colors, a dream I always hoped would come true. Siddhi's role is very special to me, because of the strong and unique character that she is. She is someone who will always side with what is right no matter the price. She is fierce, determined and honest at the same time. The intensity of the character has impressed me alot. I can't wait for the day my fans will finally get to watch the show on TV."

DHARMESH ONBOARD FOR DD

Life is always better when you dance! With the lockdown behind us and

with everyone stepping into the new year with new vigour, it's time to put on your dancing shoes again and reignite your passion for dance as the biggest dance reality show is back. The stage of Dance Deewane, which is known to fulfil dreams and celebrate the spirit of the dance of all generations is set to return with its new season — *Wagt Ko Nachane, Dance Machane*. This time, the ace choreographer, Dharmesh Yelande, will be joining the charismatic diva Madhuri Dixit and the very talented Tuskar Kalia on the judges' panel and mentor the contestants to put their best foot forward.

The upcoming season of *Dance Deewane* will resurrect the power of dreams once again as dancers across different age groups will come together and make the stage a springboard for their talent. The contestants will dance their way into the judges' hearts in duos, trios and groups.

WHO'S YOUR ROOMMATE?

Ever imagined what would you do if you had a ghost for a roommate? This is what four bachelor friends (Nikhil, Kavi, Subbu and Sanki) are about to find out in MX Player's upcoming horror comedy — MX Original Series *Aapkey Kamrey Mein Ko Rehita Hai*.

In dire circumstances, the foursome — Nikhil (Sumeet Vyas), Subbu (Naveen Kasturia), Kavi (Amol Parashar) and Sanki (Ashish Verma) are ecstatic when they find a 4 B.H.K for a measly rent, in a city like Mumbai. But little did they know that they would be sharing their amazing new flat with a newly acquired roommate who is a ghost! Life gets further complicated when the beautiful Mausam (Swara Bhasker) comes for their housewarming party, and then begins the comedy of horrors. The five-episodic series, directed by Gaurav Sinha will stream for free, starting January 22 exclusively on MX Player.

Speaking about the same, Swara Bhasker says: "Picking roles that span across genres and varied character graphs has always been important to me. Whether it was as the sultry Shanoo, the amiable Beanie or now the free spirited Mausam, I've enjoyed portraying all, and I think this horror comedy will hit the right notes of laughter and unexpected drama."

Of history and hope

RAJESH SHRINGARPURE, who plays Malhar Rao Holkar in SET'S Punyashlok Ahilya Bai, tells MUSBA HASHMI what is the character about, the responsibility that comes with such roles and the reason behind the never-ending craze for historical shows

Retelling the tales of history and mythology on TV is a pure delight both for the makers and the audience. No matter how many times one sees such stories, they still look as fresh and entertaining. Take for example Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*, which even after so many years became one of the most watched series on TV during the lockdown or for that matter BR Chopra's *Mahabharat* which was also topping the list.

One wonders what is it with such shows that they can never go out of trend. "Our soul lies there. We are able to connect with these stories and that's the reason they are always on our watch lists. The other reason is that people get life lessons from them in an entertaining way. If we'll preach them something, the audience immediately lose interest, but instead if we teach them in a fun way they will learn from it," Rajesh Shringarpure, who plays Malhar Rao Holkar in SET's *Punyashlok Ahilya Bai*, says.

The story, he says, is the 17th century period drama and is not about the chronicles or glory of Malhar Rao, but the rapport that he shared with his daughter-in-law, Ahilya Bai Holkar. "Malhar Rao is compassionate, endearing and he understands even the smallest of emotions of every one. He has been given the title of *subedar* by the Peshwas. He came from a humble and subdued family. He supports his daughter-in-law in all walks of her journey. The relationship that is shown here between the father-in-law and daughter-in-law is very unique," he explains.

On what attracted Shringarpure to the show, he says, is of course the story itself. "It is a matter of pride for anyone to be a part of such inspiring stories. Also, the character itself is so strong. Not to mention, the progressive thoughts that the story has to offer, I was instantly attracted towards this role and the show," he says.

There is always a learning lesson when is a part of historical shows, he adds. "People always tell you to forget the past and move on. But when we become a part of such stories, it is then we realise that we shouldn't forget our past, roots, forefathers and what they did for us. It is because of them we are able to live a happy and independent life," he says.

With such roles, he says, comes a lot of responsibility to do justice to the



character. "When one plays a character who is praised like God by a society, there is a lot of things that one has to take care of. This is a huge character and there is a lot of responsibility on my shoulders. As an actor I need to execute it right. Since it is winters, the costume is not an issue. Come April, and then it will be a bit of hassle. Also, the body language and the mannerisms has to be spot-on. If he is with Ahilya, his tone will be different. He will talk to her like a man does to a girl. But, if he is with the other people, he will speak with authority. Fortunately, I have been blessed with a voice that can do justice to it, hence things get simpler," he tells you.

Shringarpure adds that if one has understood the characteristics of the character that he plays, then there is not much to research about. "If you know the characteristics, visualise what you play and then just layer it up," Shringarpure, who debuted with *Param Vir Chakra*, says. However, acting was never on his cards.

"In school and college, I was into dramas but never thought that I will be in this line. I wanted to join the Defence forces and I was selected as a pilot in the Air Force, but during the medical I got rejected due to some reasons. I was worried what to do next and then I got to know that RK banner was presenting a film *Param Vir Chakra*. Initially, I was apprehensive and I didn't feel like going to their studio. My friend insisted that I should give it a try. I went there and spoke formally with the director. The first thing about me that struck them was my voice. I didn't tell them the reason of my visit and they told me that I should visit them more often. I took it very positively and made it a point to go there twice a week. But I couldn't open my mouth in front of them, I thought that they should realise what I was there for. It went on for sometime.

One day, I got to know that they need an instructor to train the shortlisted candidates. A *jawan* came to teach them from Colaba and the director urged me that I should also join him and give commands to people. Then after a few days, a spot boy asked me why am I not playing the role in the film since I was trained enough. Then, the voting happened and everyone on the sets was in the favour of me getting the role. Fortunately, I got that project," he tells you.

'I had never done fantasy thriller'

MUSBA HASHMI speaks with ARJIT TANEJA, who has recently entered Colors' Naagin 5 as Farishta, about the attraction of doing a fantasy thriller, challenges and how did acting happened with him

■ What made you say yes to play Farishta in Naagin 5?

I have never done a supernatural fantasy show earlier and also I was getting a chance to work with Balaji after three-and-a-half years, so that's what attracted me to the role. Not to mention, that it is an interesting character and different from what I have done till date.

■ What all can the audience expect from this new entry?

There is a lot of craze for *Naagin* among the audience. I can't reveal the track but I am sure it will be as interesting as it has been all these years with me joining the show as a cameo.

■ Did the role offer any challenges?

The role is challenging because the technique to shoot a fantasy thriller is different from a daily soap. I have never joined a show midway and believe it will be fun and also a learning experience.

■ In all these years, what has been your biggest takeaway from the industry?

I am growing and evolving with every project that I do, not only as an actor but also as a human being. That's my biggest takeaway. I am fortunate enough to have been able to work with such good people all through. I am grateful for whatever I have achieved and my journey is nothing short of amazing.

■ You have been a part of a few music videos as well. How did that happen?

I got an offer, I had time and so I did it. I didn't give it much thought. And the last music video that I did — *Ek Dafa To Mil*, was shot and directed very well.

■ How did acting happen to you?

It happened after school. I always wanted to act. I told my parents that I want to go to Mumbai. They were supportive and encouraged my decision. They were happy of what I wanted to do. I came to Mumbai and started



I am growing and evolving with every project that I do, not only as an actor but also as a human being. That's my biggest takeaway from the industry

auditioning. Thankfully, within two months of coming to Mumbai, I got work. There was no struggle that I had to go through because of my parents or any other thing. It all went smooth for me.

■ Did you have any apprehensions?

Not at all. I knew what I wanted to do and I just went with my intuitions. A lot of people are worried about the future and they do want to

have a back-up plan if things didn't go their way. But I was dedicated enough to this craft and that is all I cared about. I was sure things will work out on their own and there was nothing that I was worried about.

■ What next?

There are a few things in the pipeline and I will talk about it and share more details soon as things will get confirmed.

HOPE IN HEART, PRAYER ON LIPS, HEALTH WORKERS GET FIRST JABS

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Healthcare workers, doctors and Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla were among the first recipients of the COVID-19 jab on the first day of the drive in Maharashtra, which was marked by enthusiasm and anxiety, with many viewing the vaccine as a kind of panacea that will offer

them immunity, and more importantly some hope. As coronavirus vaccines reached Mumbai's Cooper Hospital in morning, dozens of health workers clapped and cheered the "vaccine carrier" staff. With 'arti' thalis and sweets, the staff of the hospital waited outside the facility to welcome the first beneficiaries of the vaccination drive. Former Maharashtra health minister Dr Deepak Sawant, Dr Ranjit Mankeshwar, Dean, JJ Hospital and Dr Padmaja Saraf received the vaccine shots among others. While Sawant was administered the vaccine at Cooper Hospital, Dr Mankeshwar and Dr Saraf received the shots at JJ Hospital in Mumbai and at Jalna district hospital, respectively.

The inoculation drive is taking place at 285 centres in Maharashtra where 100 healthcare workers will be administered the shots in a day, and cover 28,500 workers, an official said.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray launched the inoculation drive at a COVID care centre at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) in Mumbai.

"It is a revolutionary step we are taking today. I salute to the Corona warriors who selflessly treated the COVID-19 patients when there was no remedy available," he told reporters.

In Pune, Dr Nitin Abhyankar (57) was among the first beneficiaries who received the vaccine.

"I feel extremely proud and happy that I could become the part of the inaugural inoculation drive that has started in the country to fight COVID-19," said Dr Abhyankar,

who looked perfectly fine after receiving the jab. In Pune district, more than 21 per cent of the registered healthcare personnel, including doctors and nurses, received the vaccine shots till 1 PM on Saturday. A total of 3,100 beneficiaries are

care personnel, mostly doctors, were given jabs on the first day. In Pimpri Chinchwad, 92 beneficiaries were administered the vaccine till 1 pm. Dr Murlidhar Tambe, Superintendent of Sassoon General Hospital, which is one of the 31 vaccine centres in Pune, was among the first beneficiaries who received the jab.

Healthcare workers, doctors and Serum Institute of India CEO Poonawalla were among the first recipients of the Covid jab on the first day of the drive, which was marked by anxiety & enthusiasm



"Till 1 pm, a total of 37 beneficiaries including doctors have been given the jabs of Covishield. As doctors, nurses are coming forward to take the vaccine, it will send a positive message among other healthcare workers and frontline workers," he said.

Rajesh Karyakarte, head of Department at B J Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital, who too received the jab,

said vaccination is the only solution to develop a 'herd immunity'.



'World's largest vaccination drive shows determination of a self-reliant India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the country began administering two made-in-India vaccines against COVID-19 on Saturday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said it represents the determination of a self-reliant India and is an important milestone in the fight against the pandemic.

Complimenting scientists as the world's largest vaccination drive was rolled out, Shah said in a series of tweets that India is one of the few countries which have achieved success to end the biggest crisis facing the humanity.

The home minister said the 'New India' led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is an India that transforms disasters into opportunities and challenges into achievements. "This 'Made in India' vaccine represents the determination of the self-reliant India. On this historic day, I bow to all our Corona warriors," he said in tweets in Hindi.

Shah said the country is witnessing a historic moment and has crossed an important milestone in the fight against the coronavirus under the

leadership of Modi. "The world's largest vaccination campaign shows the immense potential of India's scientists and the power of our leadership," he said.

The home minister said, "India is one of the few countries which has achieved success to end the biggest crisis against humanity."

He said every Indian is proud of this unprecedented achievement.

"This is the emergence of a new self-sufficient India on the globe. Many congratulations to all the scientists," he said.

The prime minister on Saturday launched India's COVID-19 vaccination drive and

asserted that the made-in-India vaccines being rolled out will ensure a "decisive victory" for the country over the coronavirus pandemic.



Mahesh Sharma among first lawmakers to get Covid vaccine

PNS ■ NOIDA

With a Covishield jab on his forearm, BJP leader and Gautam Buddha Nagar MP Mahesh Sharma on Saturday got vaccinated for coronavirus as a 'healthcare worker', becoming among the first parliamentarians in India to get inoculated for the infection.

Sharma, who is also a trained MBBS doctor, got vaccinated at 11 am at his Kailash Hospital in Noida Sector 27, hospital spokesperson V B Joshi told PTI.

The 61-year-old former Union minister was then kept in observation for 30 minutes at the hospital,

Joshi said.

"The

beginning of

end for COVID-19

has started today with

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi launching the world's

largest vaccination campaign. As a

doctor, I have also got vaccinated

for coronavirus. I am feeling

absolutely fine. The vaccine is

completely safe and all of you

should get vaccinated," Sharma

tweeted in Hindi.



Vaccination drive begins in Uttarakhand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The vaccination against coronavirus began in Uttarakhand on Saturday with healthcare workers getting the first shots of the vaccine at the Doon Hospital here in the presence of Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat.

A total of 3,400 healthcare workers will get the first shot of the vaccine at 34 centres, including government and private hospitals across the state on Saturday.

Thirty-two out of the 34 healthcare facilities where the vaccination exercise is underway are government hospitals, including AIIMS Rishikesh. Two private hospitals -- Himalayan Medical College and Guru Ram Rai Medical College -- are also among them.

Sanitation worker first to receive Covid shot in Jharkhand

PNS ■ RANCHI

A sanitation worker was the first person to receive the COVID-19 jab in Jharkhand, as the vaccination drive began across the country on Saturday, with Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressing hope that India would soon tide over the crisis.

Mariyam Gudiya, an employee at Ranchi sadar hospital, received the shot in the presence of Soren, and other senior officials, one of whom said 48 vaccination centres have been set up in 24 districts of the state.

"A complete action plan for the drive has been prepared in Jharkhand, in line with the guidelines issued by the central government," the chief minister said.

According to the health department, a total of 6,816 workers have been trained to administer vaccines to the people of the state, and 275 cold chains readied so far for storing the vials.

Arrangements have also been made to deal with emergency situations, in case anyone feels unwell after being given the dose, the department said.

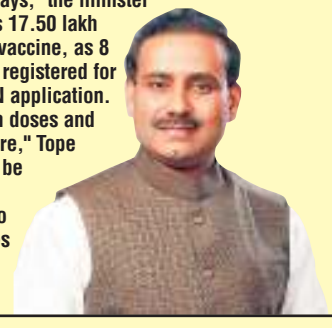


Frontline health workers would receive the shot before others, and every vaccination centre would be attending to 100 such people at the 48 centres for the next few days, Principal Secretary of health department Nitin Madan Kulkarni said.

The second dose would be administered after 28 days. "As many as 1.40 lakh health workers (private and government) have been registered on the 'Co-Win' portal for the first phase of the drive," Kulkarni said.

Maha has received 10L vaccine doses: Maha health minister

AURANGABAD/MUMBAI: Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Saturday said the state has received 60 per cent of the COVID-19 vaccine stock or 10 lakh doses so far and the remaining doses will be available in the next 10 days. Speaking to reporters after attending the vaccination drive in Jalna, Tope said at least 8 lakh health workers have registered for this programme, and for this, the state needs 7.5 lakh additional doses of the vaccine. "Although the state has received 60 per cent to the vaccine stock it needs, the remaining consignment will be made available in the next 10 days," the minister said. "Maharashtra needs 17.50 lakh doses of the coronavirus vaccine, as 8 lakh health workers have registered for the programme on CoWIN application. We have received 10 lakh doses and we still need 7.5 lakh more," Tope said. Tope said he would be writing to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan to make the remaining doses available as soon as possible.



Covaxin approval sans due process, alleges Manish Tewari

NEW DELHI: In the backdrop of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the country, senior Congress leader Manish Tewari on Saturday raised questions over the emergency use approval given to the indigenously developed vaccine Covaxin and alleged that it was "sans due process". India recently granted two vaccines -- Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin -- approval on restricted emergency use. "As vaccine roll out begins, it is all a bit puzzling India has no policy framework for authorising emergency use. Yet, two vaccines have been approved for restricted use in emergency situation," Tewari said in a tweet just before Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the vaccination drive. "COVAXIN is another story -- Approvals sans Due Process," the former Union minister added, tagging a media report which claimed scientists and doctors are divided on the issue of restricted use approval granted to the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.



Historic day, says SII CEO as he gets Covishield jab

PUNE: As the COVID-19 inoculation drive rolled out across India on Saturday, Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla joined the healthcare workers in getting the Covishield vaccine shot. Poonawalla shared a small video of him receiving the jab on Twitter. "I wish India & Sri @narendramodi ji great success in launching the world's largest COVID vaccination roll-out. It brings me great pride that #COVISHIELD is part of this historic effort & to endorse its safety & efficacy, I join our health workers in taking the vaccine myself," he tweeted. Covishield is developed by Oxford University and British-Swedish company AstraZeneca and manufactured by the Pune-based SII. Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the world's largest vaccination drive against the pandemic.



Virus vaccination commences in Bihar

PATNA: COVID-19 vaccination kicked off in Bihar on Saturday with five staff members of a super specially government hospital here becoming the first ones to receive the shots in presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Kumar was at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS), a state-run hospital modelled after AIIMS, where cleaning staff Ram Babu got the first jab, followed by ambulance driver Amit Kumar. Others vaccinated in presence of the chief minister were lab technician Sonu Pandit, junior resident Sanant Kumar and nursing officer Karamveer Singh Rathore. Kumar gave away citation letters to the first five recipients. About 10 kms away, at Patna Medical College Hospital, which is Bihar's largest public health care facility, inoculation began in presence of Sanjay Jaiswal, the state president of the ruling BJP.

Meghalaya CM launches first phase of Covid vaccination drive

SHILLONG: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Saturday launched the COVID-19 vaccination program in the state at a government medical facility, where 100 health workers were administered the shots. Another 732 people, mostly health workers and doctors, will receive the jabs in different districts of Meghalaya, including East Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills, officials said. A total of 16,000 health workers will be vaccinated during the first phase of the drive that will be completed in 3-4 weeks, they said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the nationwide rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination drive via video conferencing earlier in the day. "Today is a historic day, as we have been fighting against COVID-19 for almost a year now."



After first jab, surgeon hails nation's efforts against virus

KOCHI: Receiving the first shot of COVID-19 vaccine in this southern port city, renowned cardio-thoracic surgeon Dr Jose Chacko Periyappuram on Saturday hailed the country's efforts to wipe out the novel coronavirus and said he felt comfortable after the vaccination. Dr Periyappuram, who performed the first successful heart transplant in Kerala, urged people to not fall prey to the false propaganda unleashed on the social media against the global effort to end the pandemic. "Some people have some misconceptions about the vaccination. They are seen carried away by false propaganda unleashed through the social media," he said. "My message to them is that don't fall prey to such wrong information," he told reporters after completing a 30-minute observation following vaccination at the General Hospital, Ernakulam.

Resident doctors in RML Hospital want Covishield

■ Resident Doctors' Association of the Ram Manohar Lohia express 'bit apprehension' about Covaxin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Resident Doctors' Association (RDA) of the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here on Saturday requested the medical superintendent to vaccinate them with Oxford COVID-19 vaccine Covishield.

In a letter to the medical superintendent, the association said the resident doctors were "a bit apprehensive" about Covaxin and might not participate in the immunisation drive in large numbers thus defeating the purpose of the exercise which began in the country on Saturday. "We have come to know

that the COVID-19 vaccination drive is being conducted by the hospital today. Covaxin manufactured by Bharat Biotech is being preferred in our hospital over Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute.

"The residents are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in case of Covaxin and might not participate in huge numbers thus defeating the purpose of vaccination. We request you to vaccinate us with Covishield which has completed all stages of trial before its roll-out," the letter stated. Prime Minister



Narendra Modi on Saturday launched India's COVID-19 vaccination drive and asserted that the made-in-India vaccines being rolled out will ensure

a "decisive victory" for the country over the coronavirus pandemic. In the national capital, the vaccination exercise will be carried out at 81

sites across all its 11 districts. At the RML hospital, a security guard was the first one to receive the shot. Six central government

hospitals -- AIIMS, Safdarjung, RML, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital and two ESI hospitals -- have been chosen as sites for the drive. Besides these, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, Delhi-government run GTB Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, DDU Hospital, BSA Hospital, Delhi State Cancer Institute, ILBS Hospital are among the vaccination sites. Private facilities -- Max Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Apollo Hospital and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital -- have also been chosen as sites for the exercise.