

Indian farmer at crossroads: Market, state or collective action?

Farmers are protesting against laws that deregulate the sale of crops, allowing private buyers free rein in a marketplace that has long been dominated by government subsidies. Farmers say the reforms that have long protected small landholders' place in the market will put them at risk of losing their businesses and land to big corporations.

However, what is missing in this narrative is the culpability of the market in the mess that the agricultural profession is in today, as well as evidence on whether, and how, the state and market have responded to the agrarian crisis that germinated over six decades.

The results after decades of agriculture development suggests that farmers continue to be vulnerable to frequent episodes of losses in their economic activity that neither the state nor the markets have been able to mitigate.

Market Economy and State
In his book, *Wealth of Nations*

(published in 1776), Adam Smith explains that in a market economy, guided by the motive of self-interest, individual decisions collectively determine the economy's allocation of scarce resources through free markets for the social good. In other words, operation of demand-and-supply forces, through a perfectly competitive market, results in optimal allocation of resources and a perfect market leads to social efficiency and maximum social welfare.

But, in the real world, perfect competition is not so 'perfect' as it appears at first. That means unless demand and supply reflect, respectively, all the benefits and all the costs of producing and consuming a product, the prices determined in perfect competition may not necessarily be 'perfect' or 'right' ones.

If so, perfect competition cannot ensure maximum social welfare or markets fail to achieve social efficiency.

Economists call this 'market failure'. In ordinary sense, market failure means that prices fail to provide the proper signals to economic agents—consumers and producers—so that the market does not operate in the traditional way. This is also precisely reflected in agriculture markets in India, where neither the producing farmers nor the consuming citizenry is satisfied with the prices.

However, government policy interventions, such as taxes, subsidies, wage and price controls, and regulations, may also lead to an inefficient allocation of resources, or government failure. Given the tension between the economic costs

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caused by market failure and costs caused by 'government failure', policymakers attempting to maximise economic value are sometimes faced with a choice between two inefficient outcomes, i.e., inefficient market outcomes with or without government interventions.

Government should play an important role in banking and securities regulation, channel investment support through direct transfers to enforce contracts and property rights. The real challenge today is about finding the right balance between the market and government and to



explore farmers' own institutions beyond the market and the state.

Collective Action and Cooperative Economics

The collective action or cooperative approach demonstrated by Elinor Ostrom and others challenges the current economic orthodoxy that there are indeed alternatives to state, privatisation and markets in generating wealth and human

wellbeing.

As is known, between the individual/market/government a range of voluntary, collective associations, producer organisations, cooperatives, and producer companies can evolve efficient and equitable rules to get the most out of common resources. We know that today there is an alternative secure, stable and sustainable model of business owned and controlled by 800 million people worldwide. Cooperatives with over 400-million-member farmers are responsible for over 50% of agricultural production and marketing in the world. It is no coincidence that the world's most successful and stable economies generally also happen to have the world's most co-operative economies.

Farmer collectives are therefore viewed as an important element in linking smallholders with modern markets (input and output) as they provide many benefits for this interface. Further, primary producers' organisations or collectives are being correctly

argued to be the only institutions that can protect small farmers from ill-effects of globalisation or make them participate successfully in modern competitive markets. Producers' organisations not only help farmers buy or sell better due to scale benefits but also lower transaction costs for sellers and buyers, besides providing technical help in production and creating social capital.

A striking example is The Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation with 28 lakh milk producers whose Amul brand is a household name. It transfers 82% of its retail price to farmers in the supply chain. A number of equally successful cooperatives are running today in India and the need to promote them in the interest of small and marginal farmers is immense.

A unique initiative of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), which are member-based farmers' institutions with the objective of integration of

smallholders into agricultural value chain, was taken by Government of India, NABARD over the last 10 years. About 5,000 FPOs were formed, of which around 3,200 are registered as Producer Companies which require not only technical handholding support but also adequate capital and infrastructure facilities including fair market linkages for sustaining their business operations. Such basic model of "beyond markets and states", is possible in communities with high levels of autonomy and internal trust when people have a reasonable expectation of influence over the things that affect their lives.

This is because unlike the market or state it is only collective action and cooperation where efficiency and equity can be combined and the profits arising out of their business are returned to those who trade with the business, thus keeping the wealth generated by local businesses in the local community for the good of the local environment and families.

Purandeswari disagrees with Somu Veerraju, gets an earful

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

If sources are to be believed, BJP AP president Somu Veerraju gave former Union Minister Purandeswari a piece of his mind for having expressed her opinion against sending holy water and soil from temples in Andhra Pradesh to build the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The outburst by Veerraju came during the party's mini-core committee meeting held at Purandeswari's residence here.

Veerraju, who broached the topic, invited opinions from other leaders of the party.

To this, Purandeswari, who is also the national secretary of

the party, voiced her opposition and tried to justify her view with political reasons.

"There is no use in implementing the idea of sending holy water and soil from the state to Ayodhya as it would make the BJP once again the target for criticism from various quarters. It will also remind the people of Prime Minister Narendra Modi bringing holy water and soil to build the capital Amaravati and also not implementing his promise of Special Category Status to AP", Purandeswari is believed to have said.

At this, Veerraju reportedly came down like a tonne of bricks on her, to the extent that she felt humiliated.

The irate AP BJP chief, is learnt to have chided her saying, "How can you still implement Chandrababu Naidu's agenda? Should the BJP follow his agenda and his political line? Should we dance to the tunes of yellow media? Should the BJP give up its political line fearing criticism?"

An embarrassed Purandeswari looked towards Union Minister Muralidharan for help but the latter was reported to have remained silent.

Purandeswari is known to adopt a neutral approach at party meetings and her opposition to opinion has come as a surprise.

Even while taking part in

party core committee meetings, there has been no instance of Purandeswari voicing her opinion, BJP sources say.

BJP and RSS leaders have been collecting donations for the Ram temple at Ayodhya from traders, business people with the help of the local party leaders in the districts setting aside the Tirupati Lok Sabha poll campaign for a period of 15 days.

Meanwhile, the party seniors welcomed the suggestion of Veerraju to send holy water and soil to Ayodhya.

They feel that Modi bringing holy water and soil to build Amaravati should not be linked to Veerraju's suggestion.

AP reports no Covid deaths, 173 cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday reported no Covid-19 deaths while 173 fresh cases were added to the infection count and 196 people recovered from the disease.

The states Covid-19 chart now showed 8,86,418 total positives, 8,77,639 recoveries and 7,142 deaths, according to the latest bulletin from the state government.

The active caseload reduced to 1,637, it said. In the last 24 hours ending 9 AM on



Wednesday, Chittoor district reported 46 fresh cases and Visakhapatnam 27. The remaining 11 districts reported less than 20 cases each.

After close to 1.27 crore sample tests, the overall infection positivity rate fell below the seven per cent mark to 6.99.

Kala Venkata Rao arrested for attack....

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Meanwhile, TDP leaders and activists alleged that the police are deliberately targeting and arresting party cadres and leaders.

Anticipating untoward incidents and protest from the cadre, the police deployed huge force at Rajam when they affected the arrest of Kala Venkata Rao.

Earlier, TDP activists and leaders allegedly attacked the convoy of Vijayasai Reddy while he was returning from Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple in Ramatheertham on

January 2.

The MP had visited the village after the idol of Lord Rama at the temple was beheaded. He had performed pujas along with some YSRCP leaders.

Vijayasai Reddy lodged a complaint with the Nellimarla police blaming Venkata Rao and his supporters for the attack, and added that they were acting on the TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu and party AP chief K Atchannaidu who also visited Ramatheertham on the same day.

Dalit youths accused of ...

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They suffered injuries on their legs, shoulders and back.

Their condition is stable, police said. The victims belong to the Mala community, categorised as Scheduled Caste in the state, while the accused are from the Kapu community.

Venkateswara Rao told the media, "On Monday, when we were going to a nearby village, we stopped at a shop in Gonthupadu village. While we were having a discussion whether we should fill fuel from the bottles available at the shop, Santosh grabbed a bottle. When the shop owner noticed this, she accused us of stealing petrol and made a scene asking if we were the ones stealing hens in their village."

BJP leaders meet Addl DGP, seek nod for Rath Yatra

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation of AP BJP leaders on Wednesday met Additional DGP Ravishankar Ayyanar and sought permission for the party's proposed Rath Yatra. They submitted details of the rally along with the route map.

As per the schedule, the Rath Yatra will start from Kapila Theertham in Chittoor district on February 4 and crisscross Nellore, Srisailem, Guntur, Vijayawada, Antarvedi, Pithapuram and finally reach Ramatheertham in Vizianagaram district after a week. BJP state general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy, who was part of the delegation that met Ayyanar, said that all the details, including the meetings planned during the yatra, have been given

to the police.

He said party national level leaders and Union Ministers will also participate.

After a public meeting on February 4 at Kapila Theertham, the yatra will begin its journey. He hoped that the police would not deny permission for the 'peaceful yatra'. "We hope police will give us permission to take up this peaceful yatra. If they deny permission then we will announce our action plan. As Hindus, we have every right to visit temples. All along the yatra, we will visit the temples that have been desecrated by miscreants. Is Covid protocol being followed at the Christian meetings with large gatherings close to the DGP office? How are those meetings allowed?" Vishnuvardhan Reddy asked.

HC: No action on ABV for 3...

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Articles of charges have been framed in December, 2020, and the same has been communicated to the officer.

A Review Committee, constituted by the government, has reviewed the suspension and recommended that it be extended for 180 days further with effect from August 6, 2020, which was accepted by the competent authority.

Jagan to launch door delivery of ration supplies to all today

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Using the volunteer system, quality rice will be distributed at the doorstep of the cardholders by taking their fingerprints and supplying ration in reusable bags with precise weight. Every bag of rice is sealed and tagged with a unique code, leaving no scope for adulteration.

By fitting GPS to all mobile vehicles, cardholders will be able to know the delivery details real-time through the

mobile app and each vehicle has to deliver the goods for an average of 18 days per month.

Nearly 9,260 mobile vehicles were purchased at a cost of Rs 539 crore to door deliver the ration supplies and these vehicles were provided by the government at 60 percent subsidy to eligible beneficiaries through various corporations under the Employment Guarantee Scheme for unemployed youth.

The value of each vehicle is Rs 5,81,000, of which Rs 3,48,600 was provided as sub-

sidy from various Corporations and Civil Supplies Corporation will be paid on a monthly basis for a period of six years.

Going into the details, 700 vehicles from ST Corporation?, 2300 vehicles from SC Corporation?, 3800 vehicles from BC Corporation?, 660 vehicles from Minorities ?Corporation?, 1800 vehicles from EWEB Corporation? were provided to unemployed youth.

In addition to these, the State government is also offer-

ing ration cards to eligible people across the State in just 10 days from the date of applying in five categories, which are issuing new ration card, division of a ration card, adding members to a rice card, removing members from a rice card and surrendering the rice card.

From June 2020 till date, 4,93,422 new ration cards were issued, people were added in 17,07,928 new rice cards, 4,38,013 rice cards were divided totalling 26,39,363 rice cards.

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AP, TS top India Innovation rankings

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh figured in the list of top-10 states in the country in Niti Aayog's India Innovation Index ranking released on Wednesday.

While Telangana retained its fourth place, neighbouring Andhra Pradesh climbed three spots to reach seventh place, up from the tenth spot it achieved last year.

Karnataka has maintained its top position, while Maharashtra has leapfrogged over Tamil Nadu to occupy the second place followed by Telangana, Kerala, Haryana,

Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

Among Union Territories, and North-Eastern and hill states, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh occupy the top spots respectively.

"As the world grapples with the Covid-19 pandemic this year, the significance of innovation is even more greatly felt," Niti Aayog vice chairman Rajiv Kumar said.

He added that while innovation has always been pivotal for higher productivity and economic growth, it is also crucial for bolstering a post-crisis economy. In this light, the foresight of the Central

government in fostering a culture of innovation through initiatives like the Atal Innovation Mission, Startup India, etc. is laudable.

"The second edition of the index will allow states to continue to evaluate their innovation environment and assess their progress. The division of innovation into two dimensions, namely innovation capabilities (Enablers) and innovation outcomes (Performance) will give the states a better perspective for identifying the critical focus areas," Rajiv Kumar added.

The last edition of the India

Innovation Index, released in October 2019, was a first-of-its-kind metric for assessing the innovation capabilities of Indian states and Union Territories. "Since then, India, and the world, have undergone a tectonic shift due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the pandemic triggering an economic shutdown, the role of innovation to revitalise the economy has never been more important," the report said. The 2020 edition builds on the previous year's methodology by introducing more metrics to provide a more holistic outlook of the Indian economy. The frame-

work is updated to include globally considered parameters for measuring innovation, such as the percentage of GDP spent on research and development, while keeping them specific to the Indian economy, it noted.

Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said, "I hope that the India Innovation Index 2020 can help the country recognise the key areas of developmental intervention, with innovation as the central driver for growth. NITI Aayog will continue to take such initiatives that play a significant role in promoting cooperative and competitive federalism."

Biden, Kamala take guard in US

Continued from Page 1

"Today, we mark the swearing-in of the first woman in American history elected to national office, Vice-President Kamala Harris. Don't tell me things can't change," Biden observed.

Earlier, Trump walked out of the White House for one last time on Wednesday and headed to Florida.

In his final remarks before leaving the White House, Trump said, "We love the American people and again it has been something very special. And I just want to say goodbye, but hopefully it's not a long term goodbye. We'll see each other again."

Health worker dies after jab

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As per the guidelines, post-mortem would be conducted by a team of doctors.

The district AEFI (adverse events after immunisation) committee is examining the matter and it would submit its report to the state AEFI committee, the release said.

The state AEFI committee would, in turn, furnish its report to the central AEFI panel for taking a view, it added. The inoculation drive began in the state on January 16.

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'e' Procurement Tender Notice No. 03/2020-21, Dt. 19.01.2021

Name of the work: Construction & Commissioning of Kondlapudi-1, Kondlapudi-2, Kommarapudi-1 and Devarapalem L.I. Schemes on NTS Channel and Donthali L.I. Scheme on Kanpur Canal in Nellore Rural Mandal of SPSSR Nellore District on turnkey basis including operation and maintenance of the schemes for two years. **Estimate Contract Value :** Rs. 634.73 Lakhs

Tender schedules can be had from 'e' Procurement web site for the above tenders: 20.01.2021 from 11.00 am to 03.02.2021 up to 4.00 pm.

Last date for online submission of tender: 03.02.2021 up to 4.30 pm.

Officer inviting tender: Managing Director, Contact Ph No. 9490959914.

Other details can be had from 'e' procurement website at: www.approcurement.gov.in or the Managing Director, APSIDC, Vijayawada.

R.O. No. : 560P/PC/LAW/NT/1/1/2020-21 Sd/- Managing Director

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HC relief for SC, ST farmers booked under Atrocities Act

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In major relief to 11 farmers from Krishnayapalem, the The AP High Court on Wednesday ruled that they cannot be booked under Sections of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

The farmers had filed a petition seeking quashing of the provisions of the Act against them. After hearing their arguments, Justice M Satyanarayana Murthy of the AP High Court ruled that the Sections should be removed and dismissed the cases against the farmers.

In October last year, farmers from Krishnayapalem in the State Capital region blocked an auto on its way to take part in a protest in support of the State Government's three capitals decision.

On the same night, Mangalagiri Mandal YSRCP SC cell president E Ravi Babu lodged a complaint with the police. He said he was threatened by farmers when he went to pacify the farmers.

Police registered cases against 11 persons under various sections, including the SC and ST Atrocities Act.

The arrested farmers from Krishnayapalem included five SCs and two OBCs and the

In October, farmers from Krishnayapalem iblocked an auto on its way to take part in a protest in support of the Government's three capitals decision.

police, ironically, booked them, along with four others, under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

They were charged with obstructing some Dalits from neighbouring villages, who had come to Amaravati last week to stage demonstrations in support of the three capitals plan.

The Amaravati farmers alleged that the ruling YSRCP leaders had brought outsiders to launch a counter-agitation in support of the three capitals decision.

The farmers say that they did not abuse them or attack them. "We only questioned their credentials while the police filed cases against us," they said.

YSRCP Govt's failures reason for farmer suicides: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLC Nara Lokesh on Wednesday accused the Jaganmohan Reddy Government of not taking remedial measures to prevent farmer suicides on account of rising debts and failure of crops.

Lokesh expressed concern over how tenant farmer Katta Lakshminarayana ended his life at Chandralapadu in Krishna district and left behind a letter narrating his woes. The tenant farmer happened to be a sympathiser and supporter of the ruling YSRCP, Lokesh claimed.

In a statement, the TDP MLC deplored that though over 753 farmers committed suicide, the Government was not taking any steps to prevent the crisis.

The anti-farmer policies of the Jaganmohan Reddy government has been causing distress among the cultivators, Lokesh claimed. He said



that the farmer from Chandralapadu wrote in his letter that he was not able to clear his mounting debt.

Lokesh lauded the Amaravati farmers for continuing their agitation for the past 400 days despite the harassment and false arrests made by the Government. The farmers, women, youth and workers in Capital City were waging a relentless battle for justice and fulfilment

of promises made on Amaravati by all the parties, he said.

Stating that the YSRCP lacked sincerity when it came to service, Lokesh said that the CM was solely focused on making easy money by selling cheap liquor but not taking steps for the supply of potable drinking water.

The Eluru public health blew out of control but the Government still has not taken any preventive steps, he alleged, adding that this was the reason that 28 persons were not battling ill health at Poolla village in Bhimadole mandal.

Lokesh demanded the government declared a health emergency in Poolla to take necessary steps for proper medical care. The ruling party leaders should come to the rescue of the public by ensuring safe drinking water rather than giving false statements or trying to hide the severity of the issue, he said.

YSRCP holds TDP responsible for Santhabommali incident

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Accusing leaders of the main Opposition party of intentionally desecrating idols to create communal disturbances, Minister for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Seediri Appalaraju on Wednesday alleged that desecration of Nandeeshwar idol at Santhabommali temple was the result of a conspiracy by the TDP.

Addressing the media here, he said that the conspiracy of TDP supremo and former CM N Chandrababu Naidu behind the desecration of idols was exposed with the Santhabommali incident, which took place under his direction. He claimed that Naidu has been spreading lies and falsely accusing the government. "A case should be filed against Naidu under Section 153A for exaggerating religious matters, and Sections 499, 500 for defaming a political party or person, just like during Gujarat riots," the Minister stated.

Appalaraju demanded to know why TDP leaders remained silent on the Santhabommali incident, while they made a huge ruckus over the Ramatheertham issue.

"Desecrating Nandeeshwar idol was clearly recorded in CCTV cameras and the accused are followers of K Atchannaaidu," he alleged.

Officer appointed for temple works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Endowments Minister Velampalli Srinivas on Wednesday said that the State government has appointed a nodal officer to start work on reconstruction of nine temples in Vijayawada that were demolished by the previous TDP government.

"Our Government has already sanctioned funds for the reconstruction of these nine demolished temples and very soon, the reconstruction work would begin," Srinivas said.

He said that endowments department additional commissioner-2 K Ramachandra Mohan has been appointed the nodal officer to oversee the work.

Srinivas reminded that recently, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had laid the foundation stone for the reconstruction of demolished temples and the Endowment department took initiative to start the work.



"The Rahu-Ketu temple would be reconstructed at a cost of Rs 70 lakh, Seethamma Padalu at a cost of Rs 9.50 lakh, Dakshinamukha Anjaneya temple at Rs 31.50 lakh, reconstruction work for the Saneeswara temple will cost Rs 2 crore, Anjaneya temple below the Durga temple Rs 20 lakh, Seetarama Lakshmana Dasanjaneya temple Rs 10 lakh, Veerababu temple Rs 10 lakh and Gosala Venugopalakrishna Mandiram Rs 20 lakh," Srinivas said.

The Minister alleged that former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu mercilessly demolished temples when he was in power but the BJP never raised its voice since its legislator was serving as the Endowments Minister.

"Now Naidu was performing dramas with an eye on the Tirupati by-election and has embraced the Hindutva agenda but the people are distrusting him," Srinivas said.

SHORT TAKES

Luggage sanitising kiosk starts at Vijayawada station

A UV sanitisation and baggage wrapping services kiosk has been made operational at Vijayawada Railway Station to help protect passengers from Covid. The contract for the kiosk was awarded under NINFRIS (New, Innovative Non-Fare Revenue Ideas Scheme). P Bhaskar Reddy, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Vijayawada Division inaugurated the kiosk set up at east booking office concourse (besides 'May I Help U' Booth) near the main entrance of Vijayawada Railway Station. The UV sanitiser facilitates 360-degree sanitisation of luggage with the help of UV rays. Luggage wrapping charges also include sanitisation. Both these services are optional and passengers can voluntarily get their luggage sanitised by paying the nominal fees. Bhaskar Reddy said that this was the first such arrangement and the division is expected to earn Rs 4.8 lakh per annum for the Railways. He also said that sale of Covid-care items is also permitted in the kiosk and appealed to passengers to avail these services for a safer travel.

Man accused of killing wife ends life

The sensational G Gayatri murder case in Chittoor district has taken yet another turn, with the main accused committing suicide on Wednesday. Delhi Babu, who was accused of brutally murdering his wife Gayatri on Tuesday, had fled into the forest while the police carried out a search for him. His body was found hanging on Wednesday afternoon at East Palli area of Penumuru mandal. Gayatri had fallen in love with Delhi Babu and the duo had eloped to get married in Tirupati. The girl's father then lodged a complaint with the Penumuru police who summoned them for "counselling". The police then separated them when the young woman changed her mind and said she would stay with her parents. Delhi Babu who thought that Gayatri was ignoring him decided to kill her. In this backdrop, Gayatri, who was on her way home on a two-wheeler with her relatives on Tuesday, was waylaid by him at Kothur and stabbed. The girl died while being shifted to Vellore in Tamil Nadu for treatment.

Vizag cops crack Rushikonda resort theft, recover gold

Cracking the major burglary that had been committed hours before a wedding function at a private resort in Rushikonda, Vizag city police have arrested 29-year-old Pokathota Gangadhar and recovered over 530 gm of gold jewellery worth over Rs 30 lakh. According to the police Gangadhar had been in prison for a different crime. Soon after his release, Gangadhar planned to scale the resort wall and steal ornaments and valuables during a marriage function in the resort. A clue left by the thief helped the cops crack the case after four weeks of manhunt. To solve the case, the cops visited various places in Andhra Pradesh and other states as well. The burglary incident took place on December 24 in a well-known resort near Rushikonda beach in the wee hours when the family members and relatives of the bride were asleep. Ity police chief Manish Kumar Sinha said that they have solved the case with technical evidence and he appreciated the efforts of his team. The accused Gangadhar, an orphan, is a native of Vijayawada city and had worked as a waiter in a restaurant in Vizag. He was involved in 18 property offences when arrested.

CID team to visit villages 'converted' by pastor Pravin

Sleuths of the Crime Investigation Department (CID) will visit the villages which pastor Pravin Chakravarti has claimed to have converted into 'Christian villages'. "Our team will visit the villages and find out if the pastor has indeed converted the people," said Superintendent of Police, cyber-crime wing, Radhika. The pastor was recently arrested for denigrating a religion and making provocative speeches on social media. A native of East Godavari district, Sodadasi Pravin Chakravarti is chairman of some Christian institutions, including Mother Theresa Schools, KTC Children Home, PVRM Educational Society and Shalom Blind Centre. The SP said the team has so far seized electronic devices belonging to Pravin found during searches of his properties. "Our teams are visiting villages to check his claims regarding conversion activities. A check on his financial dealings is also on. The raid is in connection with a video in which the pastor claims to have attacked temples," the police officer said. In a video, the pastor claimed to have kicked idols of Hindu gods.

CID officials were acting on a complaint lodged by one Singam Venkata Sri Lakshminarayana of Guntur.

SIT ordered not to interfere in Waltair Club civil row

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Terming it as a case of civil dispute and beyond the jurisdiction of the SIT, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday stayed the probe into the Waltair Club land dispute in Vizag initiated by the State Government.

After SIT chairman Vijaya Kumar asked the Waltair Club to submit the original document of the lease agreement with regard to 31 acres in its possession, the club management moved the High Court.

The club, located on 15 acres of prime land, was primarily leased, on perpetual basis, from one Chetty family in the year 1900.

But according to the SIT officials, the authenticated copy of the lease agreement, though registered, is yet to be made available to it and it was not renewed after 1999.

The Waltair Club argues that it got patta issued in 1951



under the Estate Abolition Act and by virtue of which they claim to be the owner of the land.

But according to the documents available with the SIT, they claim that even the copy supplied by the District Collector does not satisfy the registration criteria.

Arguing for Waltair Club, senior advocate N. Ashwani

Kumar and DV Sitharam Murthy contended that the prestigious institution was awarded with Settlement Patta way back in 1964 and findings were rendered by various revenue authorities that the Property of Waltair Club is purely private in nature and the government has no claim over it. Ashwani Kumar further argued that supplementing the

submissions of DV Sitharam Murthy that the term of SIT had ended and it lacked jurisdiction to inquire into the properties of the club, entertaining any petition in a private civil dispute.

The advocates said the High Court is of the view that the whole process of SIT undertaking an inquiry is unlawful, without jurisdiction and without power and is liable to be interdicted by the High Court.

Additional Advocate General P Sudhakar Reddy, appearing for SIT, argued that SIT was within its term and had power to examine any dispute.

The court was however unsatisfied with the submissions made and said interest of Petitioner Waltair Club is to be protected, granting a stay on all further proceedings before SIT and further directed SIT not to interfere with the title, possession, occupation and affairs of the club.

Ex-Sarpanch murder case solved, six held

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Guntur police on Wednesday said that they have cracked the murder of former TDP sarpanch P Ankulu by arresting six suspects.

Addressing the media in Guntur, SP Vishal Gunni ruled out any political motive behind the murder.

He identified the six accused as Karpurapu Venkata Kotaiah, Gurram Venkateswara Reddy, Pottasiri China Sankara Rao alias Sivaram, Mekala China Koteswara Rao, Pottasiri Anka Rao and Addanki Ramesh.

Four teams were formed and led by police officers of the CI rank under the supervision of Gurazala DSP.

"Free, fair and frank investigation was carried out to nab

the culprits in the case. Previous enmity led to the murder of Ankulu," the SP said.

He said that on January 3, Chinna Koteswara Rao informed the victim that party leaders had come to meet him. Chinna Shankara Rao and Chinna Koteswara Rao went to the apartment by auto, Anka Rao and Ramesh reached on a motorcycle. Ankulu came in a car and entered the apartment.

They served food mixed laced with sleeping pills. When Ankulu started feeling drowsy and tried to call his driver, the accused gagged and murdered him.

The police teams using the latest technology to identify the accused, the SP said.

GVMC demolishes Kamat hotel 1st floor for CRZ rule violation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Continuing its demolition drive against encroachment of government land and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) violation, GVMC officials, with the support of the police, on Wednesday demolished the first floor of the popular Kamat Hotel at Lawson's Bay Colony on the Beach Road.

GVMC found that the first floor was unauthorised and constructed in violation of CRZ norms. Also, a part of the hotel was on government land.

GVMC chief city planner RJ Vidyullatha said that the demolition drive against unauthorised and illegal constructions will continue. "We have asked town planning officials and employees to report illegal structures in their respec-



tive zones," she said.

"When the government announced its plans to make Vizag the executive capital, many started constructing compound walls illegally. We have taken up a special drive

against them. We are also checking CRZ violations along the stretch. We have received complaints about the violations by the facility and action was taken," Vidyullatha said.

Why is Jagan mum on SCS, asks TDP MP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MP Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar on Wednesday demanded the YSRCP Government to explain why it was not exerting pressure on the Central Government to fulfil fulfilling major State bifurcation promises like the Special Category Status for AP.

Ravindra Kumar demanded to know why the YSRCP MPs and Ministers were keeping details of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's Delhi tour a closely guarded secret. "It's unfortunate that in his Delhi visit, the CM has not reminded the Centre of its promise on Railway Zone," the TDP MP said.

He recalled how Jagan and YSRCP leaders promised to the people to pressurise the Central Government to confer SCS if their party was given a sizable number of MPs. "Though the YSRCP has 22 MPs, it's unable to exert pressure on the Centre, for reasons best known to its leaders," Ravindra Kumar said.

He asked the Government to explain whether or not undue favours were given in giving bulk cement orders to Bharati Cements, India Cements and Penna Cements. It was well known the Chief Minister's family holds 49 percent stake in Bharathi Cements of which YS Bharati Reddy is also a director, the MP said.

The Government had also raised cement rates abnormally only to give excessive benefits to these companies, he alleged.

BJP plans 90 ‘shakti kendras’ in Sagar to continue winning streak

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ HYDERABAD

To continue the winning streak in Nagarjuna Sagar by-poll too, the BJP has drawn strategy. As part of the strategy, the party is planning to set up its own survey wing and establish 90 shakti kendras, one for every three polling booths, in the constituency. To campaign for the party, the BJP will draw party workers from seven mandals and two municipalities. The survey wing will assess strengths and weaknesses of the candidates of the rival parties. For every 70 voters, a panna pramukh will be appointed, besides a 25-member booth committee. The party's vigilante teams will estimate the impact of various castes in voting and report back to the party. The report deals impact of castes in wards



and identifies the most influential person in the wards? They also study local factors, including caste, and submit a report to the party to enable it to formulate poll strategies. State unit vice-president and former MLA Sankineni Venkateswara Rao, who has been appointed in-charge for the by-poll, started holding consultations with party workers. According to party sources, Lambadas have a strong presence in the constituency with a population of 39,000 followed by Yadavs, 32,000. The Reddy population is put at 26,000. Out of the 22,000 SCs, 13,000 belong to the Mala community. The Mudiraj community population is put at 8,500. The strength of fisherman population, Munnuru Kapus and the Gowdas is put at 5,000 each. Kammas figured at the bot-

tom of the spectrum with a population of over 3,000. Leaders of these communities will be deployed to woo voters depending on the caste equation. The constituency in-charge said that the BJP would fire on all cylinders to snatch a victory deploying Union ministers and state leaders for the campaign. "Nagarjunasagar by-poll will set the agenda for the fall of TRS government. We will work from the grassroots level to prove the BJP's critics' predictions about the saffron party wrong," he said. The BJP has not been yet finalised the candidate, but aspirants Anjaiah Yadav and Sridhar Reddy are in the race for party ticket. However, party activists recommend party ticket to the latter. The party activists incline towards Sridhar Reddy's candidature as they feel that he would be able to match Congress strongman Jana Reddy in all respects. New entrant to politics Indrasena Reddy is also aspiring for the ticket. In fact, it is not a cakewalk for the BJP to defeat the Congress veteran Jana Reddy in the absence of a strong BJP leader in the constituency. The BJP is optimistic that a repeat of Dubbak by-poll would take place in Nagarjunasagar too. The BJP does not rule out giving ticket to Anjaiah Yadav in the event of the TRS fielding a family member of the deceased MLA Nomula Narsimhaiah. Congress nominee Jana Reddy has already transformed into poll mode and has begun meeting leaders of various caste groups and has been holding meetings with local leaders.

Will raise Amaravati issue in Parliament, says Jayadev

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Guntur MP and TDP leader Galla Jayadev said that he would raise the issue of Amaravati movement in the forthcoming Parliament session and would work till last for the protection of Amaravati as only capital of AP State. MP Jayadev participated in the Amaravati Sankalpa Rally organised to mark the completion of 400 days of Amaravati movement. Telugu Yuvatha Ravipati Saikrishna, CPI state assistant secretary, leaders of Communist parties and farmers participated in the rally in which MP Jayadev drive a tractor in support of Amaravati farmers. Recalling the High Court verdict on insider trading related Amaravati lands, Jayadev stated that the HC verdict proved the campaign of YSRC government about insider trading totally false. He said that judges can be changed but

the justice would not change and stated that Amaravati farmers would get justice from the Courts. MP Jayadev praised the efforts of Amaravati farmers for conducting continuous protests for the past 400 days. He alleged that the YSRC government did not have sensitivity hence it did not respond to Amaravati movement. He asserted on the need of converting Amaravati movement into a State wide movement to take the truth to the masses. He said that earlier MPs met home secretary and take the issue of Amaravati to his notice and now would meet union law secretary seeking protection of Amaravati as only Capital of AP State. M Jayadev said that he with other MPs would raise the Amaravati issue in the Parliament session which would start on January 29. Meanwhile, former minister and TDP senior leader Devineni Umamaheswara Rao tried to join the rally but the police did not allow him hence he conducted Deeksha protest in his house expressing solidarity to Amaravati farmers.

‘Mission Bhagiratha’ is reason for joining TRS, says Errabelli

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Rural Water and Sanitation Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao went candid on Wednesday, admitting that it was Mission Bhagiratha, the flagship programme of the TRS government that attracted him to the ruling party. "Though I was heading the opposition party then, I decided not to criticise Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao after seeing how efficiently Mission Bhagiratha was being implemented in the State. I then decided to resign from the TDP and join TRS," the Minister said, addressing a State level meeting on Mission Bhagiratha implementation at Komatibanda near Gajwel in the district. Pointing out that the water grid programme was first implemented in Siddipet by Chandrashekhar Rao, he said the TRS, after coming to power, subsequently replicated it across the State. He thanked the engineering staff who worked relentlessly for the successful completion of Mission Bhagiratha. "During my political career spanning four decades, I have seen people toiling hard to fetch a pot of drinking water



from far away places," he said. Though successive governments in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh had spent lot of money on drinking water supply, they could not resolve the problem permanently, he said, adding that people used to drill borewells spending thousands to meet drinking water needs. "And now, the Chief Minister has implemented a project that ensures supply of filtered surface water to each and every household in the State at their doorstep," Dayakar Rao said. Thanking those who played a role in successful completion of the works, the Minister called upon them to continue the work with the same commitment since new houses are being built everyday across the State. Secretary to Chief Minister Smitha Sabharwal said the Union government has certified that the Telangana government had completed Mission Bhagiratha since they were successfully supplying drinking water to 56 lakh households. "We achieved this feat within a short time because every engineering official from Engineer-in-Chief to Assistant Engineer worked with commitment," she said. Engineer-in-Chief Krupakar Reddy, CEOs, SEs, DEs and AEs from all the districts have attended the meeting.

BJP has sights set on Mulug

SAMPATH SUNKARI
■ MULUG

The unprecedented victory of BJP in Dubbak bypoll and GHMC elections has certainly boosted the morale of party leaders and cadre in the entire state. Cashing in on the opportunity provided by the recent victories, BJP leader and Rajya Sabha member Garikapati Mohan Rao, is taking all measures to strengthen the party in the Mulug district. Ever since, Mohan Rao took over as the party in-charge of the Mulug district, he is actively participating in the party activities. He has organised a couple of meetings at NSR Hotel and party training session at Jangalapally in the district in December last year. He has also constituted booth-level and district-level committees. Mohan Rao, on Monday, successfully organised meeting with over 2,000 cadres which is said to have created tremors among TRS and Congress party circles in the segment. It may be recalled that Garikapati Mohan Rao worked as publicity in-charge for former TDP chief and former Chief Minister of the united Andhra Pradesh Chandrababu Naidu when he organised Bus Yatra during 2014 General



Garikapati Mohan Rao strengthens party from grassroots in Mulug, forms booth-level and district level committees

Elections. Subsequently, Mohan Rao joined the BJP in 2019 and grabbed the attention of party national leaders. Mohan Rao has been associated with Mulug constituency since 1978. He worked as a pulp contractor in BILT Kamalapur unit and was later elected from the segment. He was a trusted lieutenant of former minister Chandulal and played a crucial role in the victory of MLA Seethakka from Mulug in 2009 polls. Going by the political developments in the segment, Mulug is likely to witness a triangular fight in the next assembly elections in 2023. Speculation is rife that disident leaders and cadres of TRS and Congress party are likely to join BJP. Moreover, philanthropic activities of

Veeraiah. DCC President Nallella Kumaraswamy is allegedly playing a key role in keeping aside the followers of Veeraiah. In TRS party too, followers of former minister Chandulal are distancing themselves from him ever since he lost seat in 2018 to Seethakka. Several MPPs and ZPTCs of TRS party are said to be unhappy over the step-motherly treatment of Mulug party in-charge Kusuma Jagadeeshwar. As Mulug seat is reserved for STs, segment in-charge is being given to ZP Chairman about which aspirants from Tribal community is in pathetic. Row over AMC chairman post Govind Naik who took VRS from government service and joined TRS in 2001 is being ignored by the party high command. During 2018 Assembly polls he was denied MLA ticket and was promised a nominated post. Subsequently, Govind Naik was appointed as AMC Chairman. In the meantime, the Advaisi tribals filed a suit against Govind Naik stating that Chairman post should be given to Agency area tribal candidate as per PESA Act. In all likelihood, Govind Naik's appointment could be nullified.



TSPSC to hold departmental test from January 27

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Public Service Commission will conduct Departmental Tests, November- 2020 session, from January 27 to February 3. The tests which are OMR based will held in the offline mode in nine district headquarters of the State including Hyderabad clubbed with Ranga Reddy and HMDA limits. Candidates who applied for the examinations can download their hall ticket from the Commission's website www.tspsc.gov.in from 5 pm on January 21, the TSPSC said in a press release on Wednesday. Hall tickets should be preserved carefully for future needs as duplicate hall tickets will not be issued under any circumstances, it said. In case of any difficulty in downloading the hall tickets, the candidates can contact help-desk contact number 040-22445566, it added.

Special camp to solve Aadhaar-related problems

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRICILLA

Collector Krishna Bhaskar on Wednesday advised the people to make best use of the camp being organised to solve problems related to Aadhaar details. "We are organising a special camp to solve Aadhaar related problems which could not be solved locally for the convenience of the people of the district," the collector said. The Collector, along with UIDAI Additional Director General Satyanarayana, lighted the lamp and inaugurated the camp at Sinaré Art Gallery in Siricilla. Krishna Bhaskar said that the people of the district need not go to Hyderabad for getting their Aadhaar issues solved. The camp would be held for two days, he added. Speaking on the occasion, UIDAI Additional Director General Satyanarayana said that people from different districts come to Hyderabad Regional Office to get their Aadhaar problems solved.



Grant timely permits for new units, Collector tells officials

District Collector Krishna Bhaskar on Wednesday directed the authorities concerned to grant timely permits to those who have applied for setting up of new industries in the district. The Collector presided over a meeting of the District Industries Promotion Committee held at his camp office and discussed with the committee members on the issue of granting permits to industries. Speaking on the occasion, Krishna Bhaskar said that timely permission should be granted for new rice mills, stone crushers, welding shops, cement bricks, etc. to be set up in the district. Also, Rs 148.50 lakh has been sanctioned to 57 SC / ST candidates who have purchased vehicles through the industrial subsidy scheme, the district collector said.

AHTU rescues 26 child labourers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As part of operation smile, the Rachakonda anti-human trafficking unit (AHTU), conducted raids and rescued 26 minor children, in four separate cases, who were employed for work against the labour laws in liquor bottle cleaning companies, furniture manufacturing workshops and samosa-making firms in Yadadri Bhongir district on Wednesday. The police have also arrested four persons for exploiting the children for labour. The accused persons were identified as Challa Babu Reddy, Beeram Venkat Reddy, Panjala Veeranna Goud and

Vikas Kumar. Manhunt is launched to nab the other accused involved in the case. Out of total rescued children, 18 are boys and eight are girls between the age group of 15 and 17. These children belong to states of Jharkhand (9), Chattisgarh (7), Bihar (3) Madhya Pradesh (3), Telangana (3) and West Bengal (1). These minors are counseled and handed over to their parents. The accused used to pay 25 paisa for washing one empty liquor bottle and Rs 300 for a day to each child working in furniture and cooler manufacturing firm. The accused used to pay an amount of Rs 50 for making 100 samosas.



‘Isolation rooms, PPE kits mandatory in all schools’

PNS ■ MEDCHAL

Medchal-Malkajgiri District Collector Swetha Mohanty on Wednesday said that necessary arrangements should be made in government and private schools across district in the wake of the state government's decision to start classes for students of Classes IX and X from February 1. Addressing a review meeting at her office, the Collector directed the officials to ensure that only 20 students attend the classes in a classroom and only one student must be allowed to sit on each bench. Medical and hygiene teams must be set up on the premises of each school, she said. She advised the officials to set up two isolation rooms in every school and two Personal protective equipment (PPE) kits should be made available. Every student should necessarily take permission from their parents to attend the classes, she added.



District Education Officer, officials of all the Welfare Departments and others attended the meeting. Collector clears 100 pening mutations District collector Swetha Mohanty cleared 100 pending mutations on Dharani portal till Wednesday. A review meeting was held with Tahsildars on Dharani portal at Collectorate. She asked the officials to complete the pending mutations

immediately so that the applicants could receive a copy of the documentation, land order copy and e-pass book within the stipulated time. She explained that the registrations of agricultural lands made by the farmers in Dharani were hundred per cent cleared and that no applications were pending. The Collector also directed the authorities to complete the registrations and mutations from time to time immediately.

Imposters held in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The father-son duo, who were moving around in a car that had stickers declaring them as the Intelligence Bur-eau (IB), was caught by the Nallakunta Traffic Police during a regular check. The car also had an emblem that resembled that of a government department stuck on it. Apart from this, there was a very high frequency wireless set akin to those used by the patrol vehicles that was placed inside the car so

that those outside would think that they were from the police or security force. The police arrested the duo, Murali Chand, 66, and his son Durga Bhavan Sun-dar, both residents of Bagh Amberpet. Enquiries reveal-ed that they had the 'Intelligence Investigation Bureau' as an organisation in 2018. Posing as special investigation officials, they roamed in the modified car with stickers, police said. There was no confirmation yet on whether they cheated anyone.

Another 15 mw Singareni solar power synchronised with Transco

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Another 15 megawatts from Singareni Solar Power plant has been synchronised with Transco at Ramagundam-3 area power plant on Wednesday to fulfill 30 per cent power needs of Ramagundam region. Out of the 50 megawatts, Singareni solar power plant at Ramagundam-3 area, another 15 megawatts solar division was synchronised with TS Transco on Wednesday and



with this, a total of 30 megawatts solar power has synchronised with Transco, Singareni Collieries Company

Limited (SCCL) Chairman and Managing Director N. Sridhar said in a release here. Earlier, 15 megawatts was synchronised with the grid. With this out of the 129 megawatts capacity in the first phase 85 megawatts Singareni solar power has been synchronised with Transco and the balance 20 megawatts division will be synchronised by the end of next month, he said. He congratulated the officials concerned and staff on the synchronisation of 15 megawatts

solar power. 300 megawatts Singareni solar power to be ready by December this year, however in the first phase of the setting up of solar power plants throughout Singareni area is almost completed. 30 megawatts from Manuguru, 30 megawatts from Ramagundam-3, 15 megawatts from Yellandu and 10 megawatts from Singareni thermal power plant have already been synchronised with Transco. Sridhar instructed the solar division officials that the bal-

ance 44 megawatts in the first phase is to be completed by the end of next month and erection of 90 megawatts plants in the second phase have to be completed by May, 2021. 30 per cent of usage through solar power plants only in Ramagundam region, he said. Since the balance of 44 megawatts installation will be completed from the first phase of 129 megawatts, 18.55 million units' solar power would be generated from the first phase plants by March.

Ministers start 10th round of talks with protesting farmer unions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The tenth round of talks between protesting farmer unions and three central ministers got underway here on Wednesday to break the over-a-month-long deadlock on the three new agri laws.

Ministers Narendra Singh Tomar, Piyush Goyal and Som Parkash, who is an MP from Punjab, are holding the talks with the representatives of around 40 farmer unions at the Vigyan Bhawan here.

The tenth round of talks was initially scheduled on January 19, but later got postponed to Wednesday.

In the last round of talks, the government had asked protesting farmers to prepare a concrete proposal about their objections and suggestions on the three farm laws for further discussion at their next meeting to end the long-running protest.

But, unions stuck to their main demand of a complete repeal of the three Acts.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at various border points of Delhi for over a month now against the three laws.



SC irked over aspersions cast on members of committee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Wednesday expressed strong displeasure over the aspersions cast by some farmers' unions on members of the court-appointed committee to resolve the impasse over new farm laws and said it has not given any adjudicating authority to the panel. The Centre, meanwhile, withdrew its petition seeking injunction against the proposed tractor rally by farmers on the

Republic Day after the apex court said it was police matter. On the issue pertaining to the committee, a bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said it had appointed experts in the panel as the judges are not experts on the subject. Controversy had erupted after the apex court appointed the four-member committee as some of the members had earlier reportedly expressed their views and favoured the contentious farm laws, following which one of the members had recused himself.

Union leaders reject suggestion of alternative route for rally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Farmer unions opposing the Centre's new agri laws on Wednesday rejected a suggestion by police officers to hold their proposed January 26 tractor rally on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway instead of Delhi's busy Outer Ring Road, sources said. Union leaders and officers of the Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana police forces had met at the Vigyan Bhawan here to discuss the route and arrangements of the proposed rally on Republic Day. The sources said that the farmer leaders were suggested by the police officers to take out their rally on the KMP Expressway, but they did not agree. The Outer Ring Road passes through several areas of Delhi such as Vikasपुरी, Janakपुरी, Uttam Nagar, Burari Peeragarhi and Pitampura. There might be another round of talks with the police officers on Thursday, a farmer leader, who attended the meeting, said. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and

Haryana, have been protesting at several Delhi border points against the laws for the last 56 days and unions representing them have begun holding tractor rallies at villages in Punjab to mobilise people for the demonstration on Republic Day. During the meeting, "we discussed several points with police officers on our tractor rally on January 26", a senior farmer leader said. Joint Commissioner of Police, S S Yadav coordinated the meeting from the Delhi Police, according to the sources. Police officials from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh were also present at the meeting, they said. The meeting comes on a day the Centre withdrew its plea seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor rally on January 26 after the Supreme Court said "it is a police matter". The police have the "authority" to deal with the issue pertaining to the proposed tractor march in Delhi on Republic Day, said a bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and Ramasubramanian.

Active caseload slips below 2 lakh after nearly 7 months

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's COVID-19 active caseload has fallen below the 2-lakh mark after nearly 7 months and comprises just 1.86 per cent of the total infections, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

It said that 72 per cent of the active cases are concentrated in Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal.

Thirty-four states and UTs have less than 10,000 active cases.

"The active cases have fallen to 1,97,201. This is the lowest after 207 days. The total active cases were 1,97,387 on June 27, 2020," the ministry underlined.

A total of 16,988 people have recovered in a span of 24 hours. This has led to a net decline of 3,327 from the total active caseload, it said.

India's daily new cases are on a steady decline which has also contributed to the shrinkage in active caseload, it underscored.

"Globally, India has one of the lowest daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million population in the last 7 days," the ministry said.

As on January 20, 2021, a total of 6,74,835 beneficiaries have received the vaccination. In a span of 24 hours, 2,20,786 people were vaccinated across 3,860 sessions. A total of 11,720 sessions has been conducted so far. The total recovered cases stand at 1.02 crore.

"The total recovered cases have crossed the active caseload by one crore a few days ago. The gap presently stands at 10,048,540," the ministry highlighted.



Loss of smell may be best sign of Covid, research confirms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Loss of smell may be the best predictor of COVID-19 among patients with symptoms of respiratory diseases, according to new research. The findings of two new international studies, published in the journal Chemical Senses, show that there is frequent loss of smell in COVID-19 patients which often lasts for a long time. Over 4,500 COVID-19 patients from a total of 23 nationalities responded to the researchers' questionnaire. The studies found that the average loss of the sense of smell was 79.7 on a scale from 0-100, indicating a large to complete sensory loss. "This emphasises how important it is to be aware of this symptom, as it may be the only symptom of the disease," said Alexander Wieck Fjaeldstad from Aarhus University in Denmark.

The research found that only around half of patients with a loss of smell got their sense of

smell back after forty days. "This differs from the picture we see with other viral infections and causes long-term discomfort for patients, both in relation to food and social contact, while at the same time causing them worry," Fjaeldstad said. The researchers also found that the sense of taste was also significantly reduced, to 69.0 on a scale from 0-100, adding the remaining sense of feeling in the mouth was also reduced to 37.3 on a scale from 0-100. "While the loss of smell in itself removes the ability to sense the aroma of food, the simultaneous loss of the other senses make it difficult to register what you're eating. Putting food in your mouth can therefore become a decidedly unpleasant experience," Fjaeldstad added. The study is of interest both to patients suffering sensory loss as well as clinicians and researchers who work with diagnostics and following-up on COVID-19, the researchers said.

Centre withdraws plea in SC against farmers' tractor rally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre Wednesday withdrew its plea seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor rally on January 26 by farmers protesting against the new farm laws after the Supreme Court said "it is a police matter". The police has the "authority" to deal with the issue pertaining to the proposed tractor march in Delhi on the Republic Day, said a bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian. "We have told you that we will not issue any direction. It is a police matter. We will allow

you to withdraw. You are the authority and you have to deal with it. You have the powers to pass orders, you do it. It is not for the court to pass orders..." the bench said in the hearing conducted via video conferencing. After the observation of the apex court, the Centre withdrew the plea filed through Delhi Police seeking an injunction against the proposed tractor or trolley march or any other kind of protest which seeks to disrupt the gathering and celebrations of the Republic Day. The hearing in the matter is still continuing.

Farmer dies after consuming poisonous substance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A farmer who allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at the Tikri border died during treatment at a hospital here on Wednesday, police said. The deceased has been identified as Jai Bhagwan Rana (42), a resident of Pakasma village in Rohtak district of Haryana. He had consumed Sulphas tablets at the farmers' protest site at Tikri on Tuesday, they said. In a purported suicide note, Rana said he was a small farmer and many peasants have taken to the streets to protest against the Centre's new farm laws. "The government says it is a matter of only two to three states, but farmers from all over the country are protesting against the



laws. Sadly, it is not a movement now, but a fight of issues. The talks between the farmers and the Centre also remain deadlocked," he wrote in the letter. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) A Koan said the man was taken to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital by CAT ambulance where he passed away during the course of treatment. He added that legal proceedings under CrPC have been initiated in the matter. Last month, a lawyer from Punjab

had allegedly committed suicide by consuming poison a few kilometres away from the protest site at the Tikri border. A Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, had also allegedly ended his life near the Singhu border protest site claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers". Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have been protesting at various border points of Delhi for over two months demanding repeal of the three laws -- the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, and the Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act.

NCP takes dig at BJP over Guj's bid to rename dragon fruit

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The NCP targeted the BJP over the Guja-rat government's decision to rename dragon fruit as 'Kamalam', saying the time may not be far when the saffron party would start calling the country as "Kamalastan".

The BJP has now started "branding itself on fruits also," NCP chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said in a statement. Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani on Tuesday said his government has decided to rename dragon fruit as 'Kamalam'. Reacting to it, Tapase said, "The BJP has now started branding itself on fruits also. We fear that the time may be not far when they would start addressing Hindustan as Kamalastan." The BJP's election symbol is lotus, which is called 'kamal' in Hindi. Rupani said the government has applied for a patent to change the nomenclature of dragon fruit, which is largely grown in Kutch, Navsari and different parts of Saurashtra, to 'Kamalam'.

Delhi BJP demands 13,000 cr 'dues' from Kejriwal govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leaders and workers demanded Rs 13,000 crore "dues" from the Kejriwal government for the party-ruled municipal corporations, displaying banners and posters at flyovers and foot overbridges in a protest across the city on Wednesday.

Delhi BJP vice president Virender Sachdeva claimed the campaign aims to make people aware about how the Kejriwal government is "depriving the party-ruled MCDs of their 'dues' of Rs 13,000 crore because of political reasons.

Delhi BJP media cell head Navin Kumar said they were displaying large banners and posters demanding that the

city government pay the "dues".

The AAP leadership has been attacking the BJP alleging "corruption and mismanagement" in the three municipal corporations ruled by the party. Recently, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced that Delhi the government will provide Rs 938 crore to the municipal corporations to pay salaries to its employees.

"Doctors, nurses, sanitation workers and other employees of municipal corporations have not been paid salaries due to the funds held back by the Kejriwal government. No money has been released so far despite Sisodia's announcement," said party spokesperson Virender Babbar.

TMC seeks release of defence ministry book on Azad Hind Fauj

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Days before India celebrates the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the TMC on Wednesday demanded that a book chronicling the history of Azad Hind Fauj (INA) - compiled by the history division of the defence ministry decades ago -- be made public.

TMC MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, during a press meet here, said the book, edited by historian P C Gupta, is still awaiting release, as both the UPA and the NDA governments at the Centre did not take any initiative to get it published.

He claimed that the Prime Minister's Office and the defence ministry have several files on Netaji and his exploits lying with them, all under wraps. "I have raised the issue many times in the Rajya Sabha," he said. Roy also pointed out that Bengal Chief Minister "Mamata Banerjee, however, released all Netaji-related files available with the state government".

Talking about the defence ministry manuscript on INA, he said Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) of India, responding to an RTI filed by some Chandrachud Ghosh of Haryana in 2009, had ordered its release. "...but the

then UPA government said more details will be added to the book before its release, a proposal turned down by a single bench of the High Court. The court ordered the book cannot be edited further and had to be released in its original form. "Subsequently, the government moved the division bench and the case is still pending," the Rajya Sabha MP explained.

He claimed that pages from 186 to 191 of the book had said Netaji did not die in a plane crash, a conclusion also arrived at by the Mukherjee Commission -- which was formed by the then Congress government.

Biden to sign 15 executive orders on day one as president

■ WASHINGTON

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

Biden's first presidential actions would also include sending a comprehensive bill on immigration to the Congress, incoming White House officials said.

The immigration bill proposes a eight-year pathway to illegal immigrants and removing the per country cap for employment-based green



cards, a move that would benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US, whose current wait period

for legal permanent residency runs into several decades.

"President-elect Biden is taking historic action on day one

to advance his agenda -- including signing 15 executive actions and asking agencies to take steps in an additional two areas. This compares to two day one executive actions from Biden's four predecessors in the White House combined," incoming White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

Biden will continue to take action over the next 10 days -- and over his entire time in office -- to address the four crises that he's laid out, she said. Biden will sign executive orders, memoranda, directives and letters to take initial steps to address COVID-19 pandemic, providing economic relief, tackling climate change and advancing racial equity, officials said.

Biden's immigration bill proposes to eliminate per country cap

■ WASHINGTON

Joe Biden, hours after being sworn in as the 46th President, will send a comprehensive immigration bill to Congress which among other things proposes to eliminate the per country cap for employment-based green cards, a move that would benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in the US, whose current wait period for legal permanent residency runs into several decades. Called the US Citizenship Act of 2021, the legislation modernises the immigration system, according to an incoming White House official. It prioritises keeping families together, grows the country's economy, responsibly manages the border with smart investments, addresses the root causes of migration from Central America, and also ensures that the US remains a refuge for those fleeing persecution, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Describing this as a common-sense approach to solving immigration challenges, focusing on what works, the US Citizenship Act 2021 creates a roadmap to citizenship for a population that lives and works in the United States. January 1, 2021 is the cut-off date for those undocumented workers. Two-thirds of undocumented immigrants have been in the US for 10 years or longer. It provides an immediate pathway to green cards for individuals who meet certain criteria as they were dreamers or have been recipients of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or are farm workers and meet certain criteria. They can apply for citizenship three years later. For those who don't meet those qualifications, there will be another path to citizenship, where they would be in an interim status for five years. Afterwards they would be eligible to apply for citizenship within three years after becoming green card holders.

2021 Assam polls to be held keeping in mind Rongoli Bihu, CBSE exams

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora on Wednesday said the 2021 Assam assembly polls will be held taking into consideration the Rongoli Bihu festival in April and the CBSE board examinations for students of class 10 and 12. The assembly elections will be completed before the CBSE board exams which are scheduled between May 4 and June 10, he said. "We have already taken the festival into consideration before coming here for the review meetings," he told reporters here. The commission is aware of the festivals held in the states, the CEC said. He said the commission has also held discussions with CBSE officials to decide on the poll schedule. "We have decided that the election process will be completed before the board exams which will start from May 4," he said. The elections will be held in strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols, Arora said, adding that the number of auxiliary polling booths would be increased. "The number of electors at each polling station has been restricted to 1,000 as against the existing 1,500," he said. He also urged the state election authorities and the people to ensure "fair, peaceful and COVID safe polls". The full bench of the commission, on a three-day visit to the state since Monday, had held discussions with the representatives of political parties and officials of the government to review poll preparedness.



Let the leaders lead

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



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

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

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

What's in a name?

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



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

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

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

INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUNDBITE

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



Congress interim president
Sonia Gandhi

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



Chinese President
Xi Jinping

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



Singer
Daler Mehndi

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



Former Pakistani cricketer
Wasim Akram

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos, Team India!

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

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

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

G David Milton
Tamil Nadu

Shun politics, stand united against China

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

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

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



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

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

India's jabs gain repute

Sir — We should feel proud that the vaccines developed in India have been tagged as the least risky across the world. This is indeed a great achievement and a testimony to the expertise we possess in the sector.

With all these titles, our vaccines are gaining a huge demand

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

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

Kavya Shah
Ujjain

Public holiday policy

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

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

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

Amit Singh Kushwaha
Satna

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A risky business

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



HIMA BINDU KOTA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Don't be an anti-vaxxer

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



VM KATOCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

the vaccine as we go into the mass vaccination phase.

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

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

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

A legendary feat by incredible Indians

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



VK BAHUGUNA

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

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

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

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

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

for his gutsy match-winning century and farsighted leadership.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Govt school transformation helped Delhi get highest NAS score

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Government think tank Niti Aayog on Wednesday lauded the landmark transformation of the government school system in Delhi, as government-aided schools helped the national capital achieve the highest NAS score.

According to 'India Innovation Index 2020', prepared by Niti Aayog, among all pillars under Human Capital, the states have performed the best on NAS scores (Class X), wherein the average NAS score achieved by all states is 35.66.

"Given Delhi's high income levels as well as the landmark transformation of the government school system, the national capital reported the highest NAS score (44.73)," it said.

Housing sales in Oct-Dec up 25 per cent across 7 cities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales rose 25 per cent year-on-year during the October-December period at 1,10,811 units across seven cities on pent up and festive demand, according to data analytic firm PropEquity.

Housing sales stood at 88,976 units in the year-ago period. Showing signs of recovery, total sales of home units in seven cities increased 78 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2020 to 1,10,811 units as against 62,197 units in the third quarter of 2020.

"Housing market has definitely improved, and we are witnessing green shoots of recovery as evident from the latest Q4 report. As India embarks on its COVID vaccination drive, we believe it will further cement strong recoveries in the sector," said Samir



Jasuja, Managing Director and Founder, PropEquity.

Residential real estate in India continues to be an end-user driven market as ready to move-in or to near completion properties are being preferred. Developers with excellent track records in quality and execution continued to witness substantial sales numbers across

projects.

Despite an increase in demand during October-December, residential properties' sales in the 2020 calendar year fell 16 per cent to 2,86,951 units from 3,41,466 units.

As per the full-year data, housing sales in Bengaluru declined 29 per cent to 33,363 units in 2020 from 46,969 in

the previous year.

Chennai saw 30 per cent fall in sales to 11,907 units last year from 16,940 units in 2019, while Hyderabad witnessed 14 per cent decline in demand to 26,716 units from 31,038 units.

Housing sales in Kolkata decreased 38 per cent to 12,026 units in 2020 from 19,272 units in the previous year.

The Delhi-NCR market saw 34 per cent fall in sales to 29,640 units last year from 44,894 units in 2019, while demand in Pune was 17 per cent lower at 62,043 units in 2020 as compared to 74,791 units in the previous year.

However, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) witnessed 3 per cent rise in sales to 1,11,256 units in 2020 from 1,07,562 units in the previous year.

Realtors' apex bodies CREDAI and NAREDCO do

not compile new supply and sales of their total 25,000 developer members.

The primary housing market data are being provided by a few property consultants and data analytics firms quarterly, but with considerable variations in sales and launch numbers.

Housing brokerage firm Anarock said that housing sales fell 47 per cent in 2020 across seven cities to 1.38 lakh units from 2.61 lakh units in 2019.

PropTiger reported a 47 per cent decline in housing sales across eight top cities to 1,82,639 units in 2020 from 3,47,586 units in the previous year, while Knight Frank India said sales fell 37 per cent to 1,54,534 units in 2020 across eight major cities as compared with 2,45,861 units in the last year.

Gadkari asks states to accord top priority to road safety

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has asked state governments to accord top priority to road safety, according to an official statement on Wednesday.

The Minister for Road Transport & Highways and MSMEs also asked the state governments to motivate people for safer movement on road, with the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), using social media on major basis for awareness and education about road safety measures.

He was addressing 19th meeting of the National Road Safety Council (NRSC) on Tuesday here.

The meeting of NRSC takes



place even as the country is marking its first-ever road safety month, which began on Monday.

Gadkari gave the example of Sweden where zero tolerance towards road accident reduction is adopted, the road transport and highways ministry said in the statement.

He suggested that there should be a three-day mandatory training of engineers of the ministry, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Public Works Department (PWD) and various agencies related to road construction for awareness about road safety.

Pointing out that there is a committee of MPs related to road safety, he requested all the MLAs to also focus on the issue of accident reduction in their constituencies.

The ministry has set up the NRSC with the mandate to advise on matters pertaining to the planning and coordination of policies and standards of safety in the road transport sector.

Sensex, Nifty soar to record highs amid global rally

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex rose by 393 points on Wednesday following gains in IT, energy and auto stocks amid strong global cues on hopes of fresh stimulus measures by the incoming US administration. The 30-share Sensex advanced by 393.83 or 0.80 per cent to close at its fresh record of 49,792.12.

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

World stocks advanced on Wednesday after US Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen called for a hefty stimulus to protect the US economy.



President-elect Joe Biden, who will be sworn into office on Wednesday, has laid out a USD 1.9 trillion stimulus package proposal to boost the economy. Among Sensex stocks, Maruti rose the most by 2.75 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra (2.67 per cent),

Mahindra & Mahindra (1.98 per cent) and Asian Paints (1.98 per cent).

Gains in Reliance, TCS, Infosys, HCL Tech, HDFC and ICICI Bank also helped the barometer extend its rally for a second day.

Among losers, Power Grid dropped 1.75 per cent and NTPC by 1.35 per cent.

Asian shares were mostly higher ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration as US president. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.4 per cent and South Korea's Kospi by 0.6 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 0.7 per cent.

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

Sundaram Finance makes changes in management

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Non-banking finance company Sundaram Finance on Wednesday announced that it has made key changes in its management.

The changes include the appointment of Rajiv Lochan as Managing Director succeeding T T Srinivasaraghavan with effect from April 1, 2021, the company said.

T T Srinivasaraghavan, fondly called as 'TT' among close circles, would retire after serving the organisation for over 38 years as of March 31, 2021. It was during his tenure the balance-sheet of the city-based company grew from Rs 800 crore to over Rs 30,000 crore today.

Srinivasaraghavan, during the last two decades, also led the diversification of the group from focus on medium and heavy commercial vehicles to a multi-product diversified financial services provider, a company statement said.

Lochan, who is the current Director (strategy) of the com-



pany, has over 25 years of experience in financial services and was a partner in the consulting firm McKinsey and Company.

Recently, he served Kasturi and Sons as its managing director.

He would be elevated to the role of Managing Director from April 1. Commenting on the tenure of Srinivasaraghavan, Sundaram Finance chairman S Vijji said, "Under his (Srinivasaraghavan) leadership, the company demonstrated its traditional focus on asset quality and most importantly its adherence to values of prudence and customer focus."

'Indian insurers prepared to withstand economic downturn'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

"Although the economic slowdown has had an adverse impact on Indian insurers, with general insurance growth slowing to 2.5 per cent and life insurers' new business premiums falling by 1.7 per cent in the nine months to December 2020, we expect general insurance premium growth to remain in positive territory," Moody's VP and senior analyst Mohammed Ali Londe said.

This premium growth will be driven by strong demand for health and protection coverage, he added.

In the nine months ended December 2020, health premiums grew by 13.7 per cent, helped by rising consumer awareness of these products during coronavirus pandemic and regulatory actions that enabled insurers to offer pro-



tection against the virus.

"We expect health premiums to continue growing strongly into 2021, when we anticipate that India's GDP growth will rebound to 10.8 per cent, leading to a gradual normalisation of economic activity," the agency said.

The growth prospects for general insurance are particularly positive, with the country's general insurance penetration rate standing at just 0.9 per cent. This is less than half the rate for China (2 per cent), which in turn lags behind developed markets such as the

US (8.5 per cent), the report said. According to Moody's, insurers in the country have also responded to the crisis by rapidly developing appropriate products and improving their digital offerings.

"This has led to an increase in sales of health and protection policies, which we expect will drive further growth in the future," it noted.

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

Govt raises capital of P&S Bank to Rs 10,000 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Punjab & Sind Bank on Wednesday said the government has raised its authorised capital to Rs 10,000 crore.

"Government of India vide Gazette Notification No.F.No.1 1/8/2019-BOA-I dated 06.01.2021 has increased the Authorized Share Capital of the Bank from Rs 3,000 crore to Rs Rs 10,000 crore," the bank said in a filing.

Last year, the government had approved capital infusion of Rs 5,500 crore into the bank through preferential allotment of shares.

The fund was approved from Rs 20,000 crore cleared by Parliament in September 2020 for capital infusion in PSBs as part of the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for 2020-21.



States' fiscal deficit seen spiking to historic high of 4.7%: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The combined fiscal deficit of the states will hit a peak of Rs 8.7 lakh crore or 4.7 per cent of their GDP this fiscal on the back of steep fall in tax collections due to disruptions inflicted by the pandemic, according to a report.

Revenue of the states have so badly fallen that as much as 70 per cent of the fiscal deficit is contributed by revenue deficit, which normally used to be only around 15 per cent, a Crisil study said on Wednesday.

Economic activity slumped from late March last when the country was brought under a lockdown, and subsequently improved as the restrictions were eased.

While the first quarter saw the economy tanking by a historic -23.9 per cent, by the sec-

ond quarter the contraction narrowed to 7.5 per cent and now analysts are expecting Q3 and Q4 to print in the green.

The pandemic has hit tax collections of the states and resulted in a near four-fold spike in their revenue deficits this fiscal over FY20, the report said. This will not only expand states' aggregate gross fiscal deficit to an all-time high of Rs 8.7 lakh crore, or 4.7 per cent of their gross state domestic product or GSDP but also skew its composition towards revenue deficit which is relatively less value-accretive towards future tax potential, it added.

Though tax collection may slowly recover with improving economic outlook, higher interest burden, because of the high debt funding of this year's gross fiscal deficit, coupled



with sticky revenue expenditure, may keep revenue deficit high for the states and the deficit composition skewed over the next two-three years, the report said, adding that this will, in turn, increase their credit risk.

The analysis is based on the data from 18 large states, which account for over 90 per cent of

aggregate gross state domestic product, the agency said.

According to Manish Gupta, a senior director at the agency, composition of gross fiscal deficit of the states apart from its level, is one of the critical indicators of credit quality. The higher contribution of Capex in a state's deficit composition is viewed positively as

it supports the capital formation and improves its tax potential.

This fiscal, revenue deficit would contribute around 70 per cent of fiscal deficit, sharply higher than the average 15 per cent seen over the last five fiscals, he said, adding this is because of a 15 per cent year-on-year decline in revenue this fiscal. Revenue expenditure may also remain sticky as these are either committed (related to salaries, pension and interest cost), making it difficult to cut or have been necessitated by the pandemic (such as grants-in-aid, medical and labour welfare-related expenses), the report noted.

High revenue deficit will also compel states to moderate their Capex so that they remain within fiscal borrowing limits, thus aggravating gross fiscal

deficit. To fill the gap, states will be forced to borrow more this year, further increasing their indebtedness.

Revenue collections are expected to reach close to the pre-pandemic level next fiscal, factoring in unlocking that began in July 2020 and a real GDP growth forecast of 10 per cent in FY22.

According to Ankit Hakhu, a director at the agency, the rising interest obligations due to higher indebtedness and modest revenue collections will weaken interest cover of the states to 5-6 times over the medium-term from 7.7 times in FY20.

Further, while states' Capex is expected to rise next year within the available fiscal space, its impact on tax potential will only be visible in subsequent years, he warned.

MONEY MATTERS

Power demand touches all-time high of 185.82 GW, says Sahai

All-India power demand on Wednesday morning touched a record high of 185.82 gigawatts (GW), said Power Secretary S N Sahai. "Power demand continues to surge. Yet another record - all India demand - 185.82 GW ie 185,822 MW at 09:35hrs today ie 20/01/21. It has crossed



previous all India demand of 182.89 GW i.e. 182,888 MW on 30th December, 2020", Sahai said in a tweet. On December 30, 2020, all-India power demand had touched 182.89 GW. According to data from the power ministry, the peak power demand met (the highest supply in a day) during January last year stood at 170.97 GW. The rising power demand shows perk up in economic activities leading to higher commercial and industrial demand which was affected due to the coronavirus pandemic. The government had imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 25, 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19. Peak power demand met recorded negative growth from April to August last year, due to the pandemic.

Maruti Suzuki India starts export of off-roader Jimny

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said it has commenced export of its compact off-roader Jimny from India, as its parent Suzuki Motor Corporation looks to make



the country a global production hub for the model. The first shipment of 184 units left from Mundra port to Latin American countries such as Columbia and Peru, Maruti Suzuki India said in a statement. The three-door Suzuki Jimny will be exported to the Middle East and African markets as well from India, it added. "With India as a production base for Jimny, Suzuki aims to leverage Maruti Suzuki's global production stature. As there is a large customer demand worldwide well beyond Suzuki Japan capacity for this model, Indian manufacturing will supplement capacity to meet this global demand," the company said. Commenting on the development, Maruti Suzuki India Managing Director & CEO Kenichi Ayukawa said, "Jimny manufactured at Maruti Suzuki's Gurugram plant shares the same specification as the export models produced at the Suzuki Motor Corporation's Kosai plant in Japan."

Mercedes-Benz launches 2021 edition of SUV GLC at Rs 57 lakh

German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz on Wednesday launched the 2021 edition of its popular SUV GLC in India with price starting at Rs 57.40 lakh (ex-showroom). The 2021 GLC is available in GLC 200 petrol and GLC 220d diesel variants, priced at Rs 57.40 lakh and Rs 63.15 lakh (ex-showroom, India), Mercedes-Benz India said in a statement.



The newly launched vehicle features the latest connected car technology - 2021 'Mercedes me connect', integrating Alexa Home, Google Home and parking locations on navigation system and App. It is also equipped with remote engine start allowing starting the car remotely for pre entry air-conditioning besides front seats with massage function, introduced for the first time in Mercedes-Benz India product line-up, the company added. Commenting on the launch, Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Martin Schwenk said, "The GLC has remained a key pillar of our SUV offense and has been the single highest selling SUV in our portfolio last year."

Federal Bank Q3 profit declines 8 per cent to Rs 404 crore

Federal Bank on Wednesday posted an 8.2 per cent decline in net profit to Rs 404.10 crore for the third quarter ended December 2020, mainly due to higher provisioning for bad loans. The private sector lender had registered a profit of Rs 440.64 crore in the year-ago period. Total income, however, improved to Rs 3,941.36 crore during the third quarter as against Rs 3,738.22 crore a year ago. Federal Bank said in a regulatory filing. Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) declined to 2.71 per cent of the total advances during the quarter, compared to 2.99 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2019-20. Net NPAs of the bank also fell to 0.60 per cent of the total assets in October-December 2020 as against 1.63 per cent a year ago. Despite the decline in bad loans, provisions other than tax and contingencies increased more than two-fold to Rs 420.62 crore as against Rs 160.86 crore during the same period last fiscal.



LT Foods acquires 30 pc stake in organic food firm

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer food company LT Foods, which owns basmati rice brands such as 'Daawat' and 'Royal', on Wednesday announced acquisition of a 30 per cent stake in the Netherlands-based organic speciality food company Leev.nu. Nature Bio Foods BV, a subsidiary of LT Foods, has acquired 30 per cent stake in Leev.nu, with an option to acquire a further 21 per cent stake at the end of five years, a joint statement said without disclosing the deal amount.

After this deal, Leev.nu will have access to the organic products grown by Nature Bio Foods. Commenting on the development, LT Foods Chairman & Managing

Director Vijay Kumar Arora said, "Leev.nu will now have access to 100 per cent organic products grown by Nature Bio Foods Limited's network of nearly 60,000 plus organic farmers, cultivated in 80,000 plus hectares of certified organic land in India."

Now consumers will enjoy organic ingredients from India with local distribution in the Netherlands. "This will further promote the share of India's organic in EU," he added. Leev.nu Director Leo Voorwinden said: "From a strategic point of view, it is critical that we build short supply chains. With NBF BV, a subsidiary of LT Foods coming on board, we can source our raw materials directly from organic farmers in India."



Kangana Ranaut's Twitter account restricted temporarily

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut never shies away from putting forward her opinions about different issues. This often lands her in controversies. Recently, the actress took to Twitter to reveal that her Twitter account was temporarily restricted. She said that even though her account can be suspended, she will continue to showcase her 'reloaded *desh bhakt* version' through her films. The alleged temporary restriction came after Kangana's tweet on the controversial web series *Tandav*, starring Saif Ali Khan.

Kangana Ranaut on Wednesday tweeted, "Librus cried to their *chacha* @jack and got my account temporarily restricted, they are threatening me *mera* account/virtual identity *kabhi bhi desh keliye shaheed ho sakti hai*, *magar* my reloaded *desh bhakt* version will reappear through my movies. *Tumhara jeena dushwar karke rahungi*."

Kangana has been in the headlines lately for joining Twitterati in slamming the recently released web-series *Tandav*. Kangana slammed the series, calling it "Hindu phobic, atrocious and objectionable".

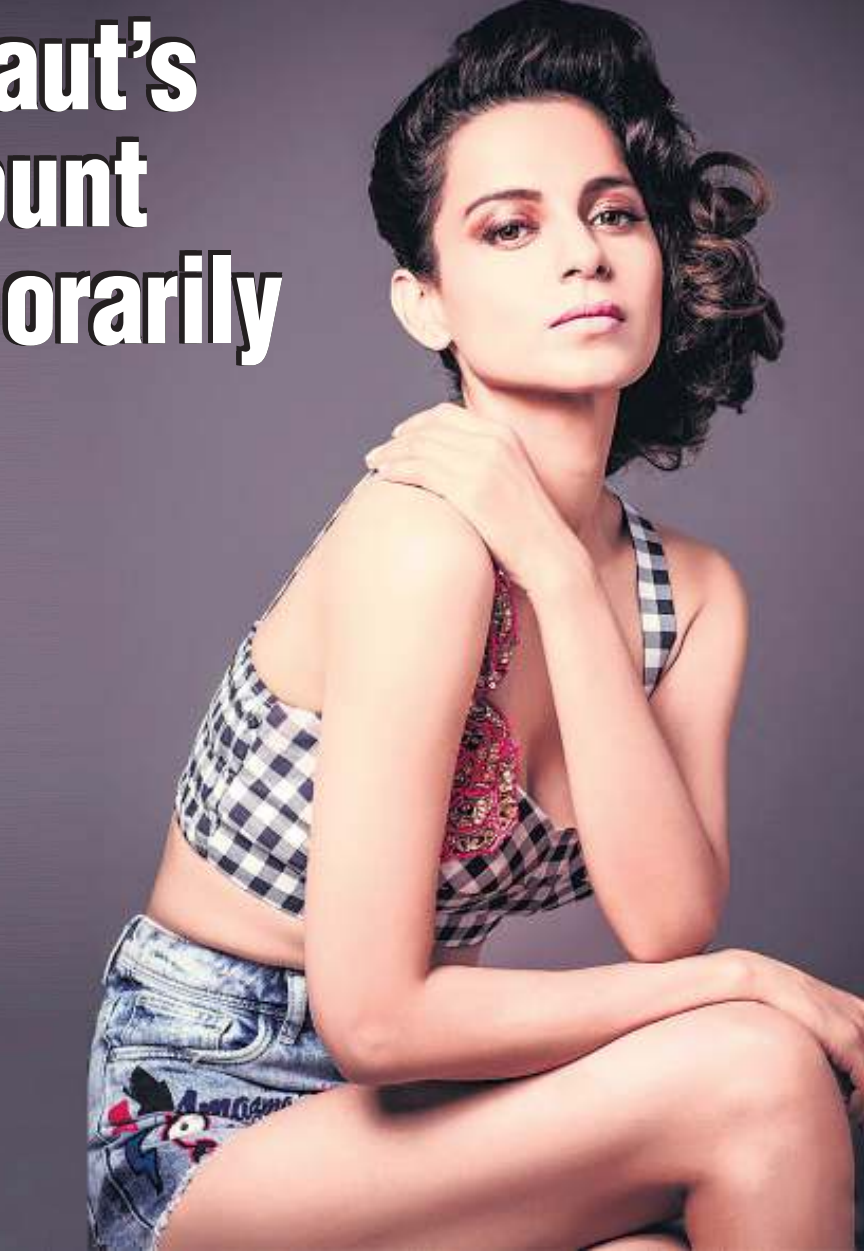
"The problem isn't just the Hindu phobic content, it's also creatively poor and deprived, atrocious and objectionable on every level hence deliberately placed controversial scenes. Put them in jail not just for criminal intentions but also for torturing the viewer *#tandavwebseries*," the actress tweeted from her account on Monday.

Kangana's tweet comes at a time when a criminal complaint has been filed before a Delhi court seeking action against OTT platform Amazon Prime and the makers of the web series.

The complaint filed under Section 200 of the CrPC seeks summoning, commencing trial and punishing the accused persons alleging that the web series is provoking communal disharmony and is hurting the sentiments of Hindus.

On a related note, Kangana Ranaut is gearing up for the release of her spy thriller *Dhaakad* which will release theatrically on October 1. In the poster, Kangana is seen wielding a sword against the backdrop of blood and gore, setting the action tone of the film. Kangana, who will play the role of Agent Agni, recently flew to Bhopal to kickstart the shooting of the film.

The film will also feature Arjun Rampal. The makers have also roped in Tetsuo Nagata, an award winning cinematographer.



Neha Bhasin: Bollywood probably does not understand my worth

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

"I do not want to sing a random song, just because it is of a Bollywood film. I do not want to sing something if my heart is not in it. Having said that, I think so far all the songs I sang are massive hits because they are some of the great compositions and lyrically good. I think Bollywood probably does not understand my worth, it never did. I really made peace with that," Neha told a news agency. The singer, who has delivered Bollywood hits such as *Kuch Khaas*, *Dhunki* and *Jag Ghoomeya*, however feels there is no dearth of good composers in the Hindi film industry.

"I would say there are some of the good music directors like Vishal and Shekhar and Salim-Suleman. People like them are making good music and are interested in working with me. But in the last one year, not much original music happened in Bollywood, it is all about remix. I do not want to do that, I have no reason to sing such songs, really," she said.

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

Recently, Neha released her new music video *Tu Ki Jaane*, in which she not only lends her voice but also appears in the video alongside model Bardeep Dhimani.

"I think this is the right time for independent music. I think the time will come when film music will have more to do with background score. The indie scene will grow again. The lockdown has changed a lot of things including the way people perceive art today. I started my career as a pop star and playback singing was never my priority," she claimed.

'Could do a lot because I'm not associated with a political party'

Actor Sonu Sood, who was lauded for his efforts to send migrants home safely during lockdown last year, dismisses allegations that he pulled off the entire operation using funds provided by a particular political party.

"I could do all this because I was not associated with any political party. Otherwise I would have had to ask 100 questions before doing a job like this. Since it was my decision to connect with people and help them, I was able to reach out. Whatever I did, was not about caste or religion. I reached out to people across society. I have been connecting with people a lot over the past year," Sonu told a news agency.

"I have been in this industry over the last 20 years and have done over 100 movies, but to reach out to every single person who loves me has not been possible. I think I have thoroughly enjoyed playing the real-life hero. This is not a film, but surely the almighty is the director," he adds.

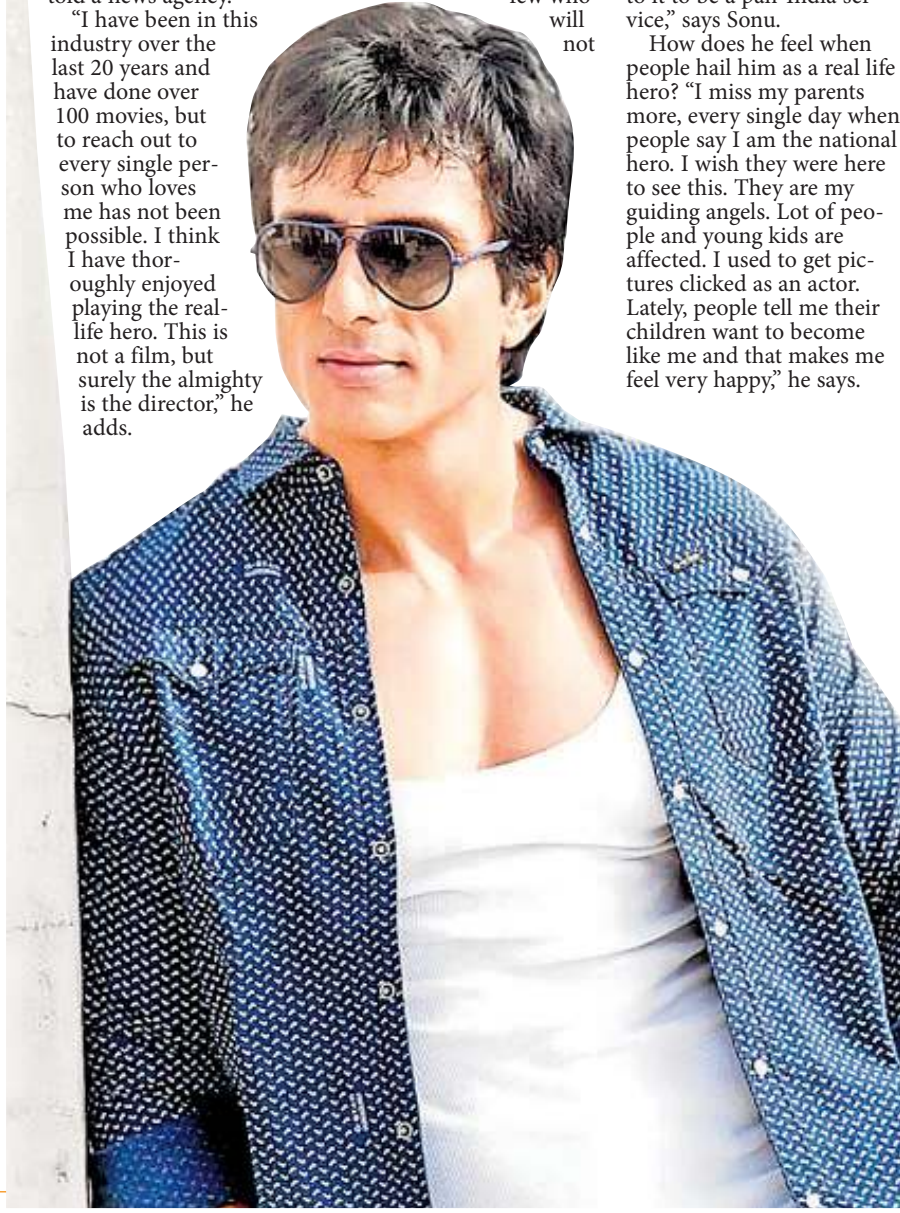
Questions were raised and theories floated over how he managed to send lakhs of people home on his own.

"I remember when I started this mission, Chandraprakash Dwivedi, director of my (forthcoming) film *Pritviraj*, told me people would want to bring me down, given the path I had chosen. The problem with the world is that people cannot see something right happening. When they see that, they question why this is happening, why is someone there to help others? But it fades off because there is no truth or spine to it. It won't stop me from doing what I am doing. It is a journey which I started with millions. There will be few who will not like it but I hope that one day they also become part of this journey," he says.

The actor woke up to the news on Tuesday that some people in Telangana have started a free ambulance service in his name.


"The service they have started is so beautiful. This is an ambulance service that is free of cost in Telangana and it is spreading across to Andhra Pradesh. I will also be helping them now, since it is a facility a lot of people would need. They will also start a toll free number especially for this. When they told me this, I was speechless. Since, I am associated with ILAAJ India Initiative, I know how difficult it is for people to get medical service. I would like to it to be a pan-India service," says Sonu.

How does he feel when people hail him as a real life hero? "I miss my parents more, every single day when people say I am the national hero. I wish they were here to see this. They are my guiding angels. Lot of people and young kids are affected. I used to get pictures clicked as an actor. Lately, people tell me their children want to become like me and that makes me feel very happy," he says.




FUN


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD



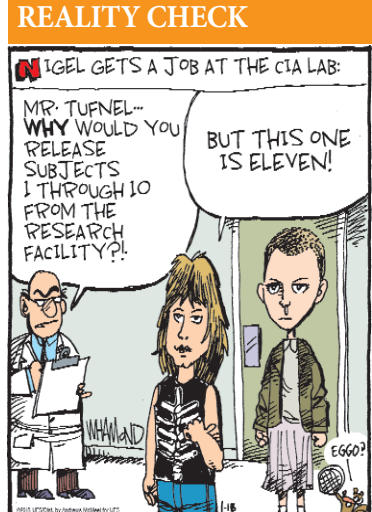
NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		
6						8
			7			
9				10		
12		13			14	15
					16	
17					18	
19						

ACROSS

1 Not sure

6 Numbers

7 Meadow

8 Decaying

9 The colour made by mixing black and white

10 Nearly

11 A short type of coat

12 Say again

13 A keyboard instrument

14 A hired car

15 Similar

16 A drawing of a building showing all the rooms

DOWN

2 A female relation

3 Comes to a finish

4 An animal with a shell

5 A house made of snow

SOLUTION

T	H	I	N	K	I	N	G
E	O	N	I	T	I	P	
S	C	A	R	D	I	C	I
S	A	K	I	N	G		
A	C	T	I	N	G	S	T
L	A	R	D	E			
A	R	C	H				
T	A	N	L				
O	L	I	V	E			
R	R	A	E	S			
P	O	R	T	I	D	G	E

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.

The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

Colorful bar

Irani chai, biryani & pearls — all things Hyderabad



RACHEL DAMMALA

The lockdown has given us all a break, longer than we needed. We missed a gazillion things during this time of staying home indoors — going out to watch movies, a quiet dinner date, a stroll in the park, and so much more. What we also missed is the city's iconic buildings, monuments, cuisine and so much more. Born of this very need to connect with the city we live in, is 'LittleHyderabadStories.'

The growing page on Instagram aims to give life to all kinds of stories about Hyderabad that one might want to share while building a community that can relate to each other's experiences. "Nine months ago, when the lockdown was announced, people moved to their homes to different cities and somehow missed the connection with the cities they were living in. They longed to recall and relish what their city felt like. We believe every city carries within itself an emotion of sorts, and so decided to give people that, for now, via social media," shares Mohit Ranjan, co-founder of Little Heights. The organisation has several other pages dedicated to stories from Pune, Delhi, to Bengaluru, and more.

Mohit and Devansh Jaipuria have grown in different cities and ended up living in different ones themselves and know what it feels like to miss the 'feeling' of a city. "We also know how migrants miss that and wanted to make them feel connected to their city," they say. It is easy to mistake their page to be a community page like that of Humans of New York. But a closer look at the page will show how the page is not just people-centric but city-centric. "It is all about a denizen's connect with his/her city, or a migrant's favourite, a memorable first moment at a restaurant in the city, and more things like that. This page gives people platform to express," Mohit explains.

"Hyderabad is rich in culture and is an ever-growing hub of technology. Its food, language, monuments, theHITEC City, among many others, make Hyderabad what it is. There is a constant influx of migrants and the city is known and loved for being accepting of all

people, the page is going to represent all of this and more," Mohit and Devansh share on what one can expect from LittleHyderabadStories. Their Hyderabad Playdate video has already gone viral with lakhs of views and shares. It's a beautiful video covering the true



essence of Hyderabad, so go check it out! Oh, and don't miss their post on 'Signs you're a true Hyderabadi'; it's as relatable as it can get!

A must-read guidebook to India's temples

or author and noted travel blogger Anuradha Goyal, who has penned the book *Lotus in the Stone: Sacred Journeys in Eternal India* on India's most sacred sites, temples, contain vignettes of our history, heritage, art history, folk tales, aesthetics. Condensing years of her travel into writing, Goyal presents a travelogue rooted deep into Indian history and culture.

Published and launched by Garuda Prakashan, the book holds in its pages a testimony to Indian art, culture, civilisation and spirituality. It makes for a rich, fascinating guidebook to India and its temples and hidden gems. Goyal narrates her mystical and magical experiences at places like Kumbh Mela, Ayodhya, Khajuraho, Thanjavur, Kolhapur, Odisha, Himalayas, and many more.

She holds that their grandeur is the testimony of our prosperity and that they were the centers of our social, cultural as well as economic lives. "We need to understand temples and their roles in our lives as it was and as it can be in the future. They are not the places to seek quick blessings when we need them, but we need to keep them alive enough for us to be able to go there to seek blessings. I have highlighted how ancient engineering and architecture should inspire future engineers and architects, as these are rooted in this land, and in sync with our climatic conditions. The chapter on languages introduces you to the common metaphors

that are well understood across the country despite us having a plethora of languages," the author told a news agency.

With her experiences and adventures in crisscrossing India for decades, the author shows us how ancient India's surviving



heritage and living traditions are a testimony to her history and the invisible threads and sacred geography that bind her people together. The book draws from the author's travels and personal pilgrimage to sites across the country, and from reading books on India — from ancient scriptures to modern renditions, and correlating both.

How did she conceive the book? "Lotus in the Stone" is a culmination of my travel experiences since childhood. I have been writing about my travels since 2004, but that happened destination by destination as I travelled. This book joins the dots that I

captured through my travels. It is my own journey of discovering an India that was all around me, but it took me walking around the country to see," she reveals.

Asked about her travels and visits to the country's sacred spaces, the avid traveller said that she has been travelling since childhood first with parents as they were posted at different places in the country, then during her own corporate career and now as a travel blogger.

"Most people like to travel but not many go beyond looking at travel as a leisure activity. Thanks to the ease of travel and the brag value that travel provides, a lot more people are travelling. It has become a part of the lifestyle for most of the middle class. Now I hope, people read my journey, and add the

layers of travel that would make their travels far more meaningful and something that would help them grow as individuals, help them achieve their goals. The book features a lot of places from all corners of India. I do not think it would be easy to create a list of places featured as it is not a travel guide, it is a journey that goes back and forth in time as it weaves the warp and weft of the sacred geography of India." According to Sankranth Sanu, Founder and CEO, Garuda Prakashan, the book is a celebration of India's plural syncretic culture.

The book gives readers a thorough peek into the

India that was — unhurried, trusting, simple and full of devotion and life — and the one that still continues to be so, when it comes to the lives around its sacred spaces and ancient temples. The camaraderie and the devotion generated in these sacred spaces, the trust and respect for the fellow traveller—the book has endeared insights for one to appreciate these hidden aspects of life.

The author, having traversed across the country along with friends and family, and with strangers, Goyal takes us to this riveting and endearing ride of an India, where we might have gone, but not seen the place.

Commenting on post-pandemic travel, especially to pilgrimage sites and temples, Goyal says that pilgrimage travel has been the backbone of domestic travel since time immemorial, and forecasts that it will get back on its feet as soon as the logistics are back on their feet.

"Domestic tourism will get a push due to limitations on international travel as well as due to fear of a second wave that might lead to unpredictable circumstances. I hope the Indian tourism industry will take it as an opportunity to not just tap the domestic tourists but also define the new paradigms in tourism that are rooted in Indic travel traditions. A good question to look at is — Can we make the travels more deeper and mindful and more than just chill out parties?"

(The book is available on the Garuda Prakashan website.)

A tool, not a threat

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are growing rapidly and unlocking new avenues for enterprises aiming to bring vital changes in the IT ecosystem. Here are top AI-ML trends to look out for 2021

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have been the hottest buzzwords in the decade that has gone by. According to a study, 77 per cent of the devices that we use in our day-to-day lives are now powered by AI and ML. From platforms like Netflix and Facebook to products like Amazon's Alexa and Google Home, AI has become the core of nearly every product and service that we come across.

In 2020, the enterprise world has also added to the capabilities of AI assistants as they help build strong customer relationships and smooth business operations. No wonder Conversational AI has become a fascination of global business leaders and SMEs alike. AI-ML industry is growing rapidly and unlocking new avenues for enterprises aiming to bring vital changes in the ecosystem. According to a Gartner study, around 37 per cent of all companies reviewed were found utilising some type of ML in their business. It is anticipated that around 80 per cent of modern advances will be based around AI and ML by 2022. The Global Artificial Intelligence

Hardware Market was valued at approximately USD 9.8 billion in 2019 and is pegged to grow with a healthy CAGR of more than 37.5 per cent over the forecast period 2020-2027. So as we begin a promising decade in the new normal, it becomes important to know about the trends of AI-ML that might follow.

Robotic Process Automation + AI = Hyper-automation

Hyper-automation was identified by Gartner as one of the best technology trends to be used in an organisation for automation. The pandemic has stepped up the adoption of the concept in which all the company's operations should be automated including legacy business processes. AI and ML are the significant drivers of hyper-automation. If Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Machine Learning (ML), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) work in harmony to automate complex business processes, then hyperautomation is a means for real digital transformation.

Power of Machine Learning (ML) + Internet of Things (IoT)

Kevin Ashton is considered as the father of IoT, which comprises a smart infrastructure connected via the internet to the cloud. The Internet of Things became a rapidly emerging segment in the last decade. Economic analyst Transforma Insights has forecasted that the worldwide IoT market will comprise 24.1 billion devices by 2030, producing \$1.5 trillion in income. Arthur Samuel is the inventor of Machine Learning who defined this term in 1959. The utilisation of Machine Learning is progressively interlaced with IoT. Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning, for instance, are now being used to make IoT devices and services smarter



and more secure.

Augmented Reality In Chatbots

Artificial Intelligence together with Augmented Reality (AR) is considered one of the main enablers of the Internet of Senses (IoS), a megatrend from 2021 toward 2030. AR is quite a unique technology which actually takes customer engagement to virtual reality. Innovation in this regard is the app for the users where chatbot leverages augmented reality to facilitate the purchase decision, prompting customers with relevant recommendations. For example, if you want to see how a particular shoe would fit you, you can use AR technology or use AR to determine the correct size for your shoes by clicking and uploading a picture of your feet.

Reinforcement Learning

Reinforcement Learning is the area of ML that can be used by companies in the future for deep learning, thereby improving the effectiveness of gathered data. An ideal illustration of reinforcement learning is a chatbot that addresses simple user queries like greetings, order

booking and consultation calls and through reinforcement learning builds and improves on these interactions giving it the ability to address more complex user queries such as product demos etc.

Business Forecasting and Analysis

This technology is strategised by experts to screen a set of data over a period of time which then is examined and utilised for making smart decisions. With the changing strategies, the ML networks can give conjectures with accuracy as high as 95 per cent. Companies will soon start fusing recurrent neural networks for high fidelity forecasting.

Increased adoption of Hyper Personalised and Contextual communication

2021 will bring in a change where we hear "context is king." With the adoption of AI and ML tools and methods, we will see brands and organisations increasingly adopt a more personalised and context driven approach. (The writer, Maaz Ansari, is the co-founder and CEO of ORI.)

Warne predicts huge fall out in Oz team

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Shane Warne believes the embarrassing Test series loss to an under-strength India will result in a "huge fallout" in the Australian team and said a few heads could roll in the coming days. India recorded one of their most memorable wins on Tuesday when they defeated a full-strength Australia by three wickets in the fourth Test here to pocket the four-match series 2-1 and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

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

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

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

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



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

AP

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

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

Warne was also critical of Tim

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

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

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

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

We were scared to lose: Clarke



PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CA lauds India for epic win

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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

"The unique challenges of inter-



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

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

Pant is now best-ranked keeper

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

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



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

AP

a five-wicket haul in the second innings.

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

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

Australia captain Tim Paine

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

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

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

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

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

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

50% crowd likely for Eng Tests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

The first two Tests will be held in Chennai, beginning on February 5, while the next two will be played at the renovated stadium at Motera in Ahmedabad. The BCCI is believed to be taking a cue from Cricket Australia which had allowed entry of spectators during the India series that concluded on Tuesday.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Shakib returns with 4-8

AP ■ DHAKA

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

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

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

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

West Indies, featuring six ODI debutants, to bat.

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

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

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

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

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

Maxi, Malinga released, Raina retained

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The left-handed Raina has been



Glenn Maxwell bats during practice session

KXIP/Twitter

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

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

Batting mostly in the middle order, he amassed 352 runs at an average of 25.14 and a strike rate of 148.52. With the ball, he took 13 wickets at an economy of 9.53.

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

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

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

After Wednesday, RCB's total

Sanju to lead RR now, Smith released

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Smith's contract ended in October 2020. The Australians,

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



SVP to roll in Dubai

Dubai has been chosen to host the first schedule of superstar Mahesh Babu's next, *Sarkaru Vaari Paata*, after the makers plan to get the project off the ground with a U.S schedule failed due to COVID-19 related reasons, finds NAGARAJ GOUD

Already way behind the schedule, the filming of superstar Mahesh Babu-starrer *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* (SVP) will commence in Dubai from January 25. Production houses Mythri Movie Makers and 14 Reels Plus initially planned to kick-off the proceedings in the U.S last month end and Parasuram even undertook a recce in the second half of last year to finalize locations but with the country still witnessing a spike in COVID-19 cases, the film's unit decided to start filming in Dubai, which holds the distinction of being one of the world's first cities to open up for tourism after the pandemic struck almost all the countries across the globe. Dubai is also a popular vacation spot for Mahesh and his family. Whenever they want to take a short retreat, they prefer Dubai. Films like *Rang De* and *Andhadhun* Telugu remake which had schedules in Europe also preferred to shoot in Dubai due to reasons related to coronavirus.

A source close to the unit tells us, "The Dubai schedule will go on for nearly a month, with Mahesh joining the action on day one itself. It remains to be seen whether the most

populous city in the United Arab Emirates will fill in for the U.S in the film or Parasuram changed the back-drop altogether. After this schedule ends, the action will shift to Hyderabad, where the remaining talkie portions will be shot."

Producer Y Ravi Shankar of Mythri Movies Makers remained unavailable for a comment.

Interestingly, Mahesh's last working day on a film's set was in December 2019 and his idea of taking three months off after *Sarileru Neekevuru* opened in cinemas last January extended beyond a year due to the pandemic. He did, however, participate in the filming of some commercials after the lockdown rules were relaxed. For Parasuram though, the wait has been long as it's been nearly two and half years since his last *Geetha Govindam*, a blockbuster, released. While story details of *SVP* are under wraps, we've already informed you that Parasuram drew inspiration from bank defaulters in the last five-six years and penned a fictional social drama laced with action. Obviously, his signature humour will be in abundance, so will be a dash of romance. Keerthy Suresh is paired opposite Mahesh in the film, a Thaman musical.

tollywood

Netflix announces Telugu anthology *Pitta Kathalu*

Netflix on Wednesday announced its first Telugu original, *Pitta Kathalu*, a four-part

anthology directed by young and talent makers Nandini Reddy, Nag Ashwin, Tharun Bhascker and Sankalp Reddy. The drama narrates the stories of four different women played by Lakshmi Manchu, Amala Paul, Shruti Haasan and Eesha Rebba, while the likes of Jagapathi Babu, Satyadev, Ashima Narwal, Saanve Megghana and Sanjith Hegde round off the main cast.

Produced by Ronnie Screwvala's RSVP Movies and Ashi Dua Sara's Flying Unicorn Entertainment, *Pitta Kathalu* will drop on the streaming giant on 19th February.

On collaborating with Netflix, Bhascker, who has directed *Ramula*, spearheaded by Lakshmi Manchu, said *Pitta Kathalu* is a labour of love, with every story in the anthology showcasing a beautiful landscape of the

country! He assured that the women-led stories will touch a chord with the audience. "It is time for regional Indian content to shine on the global stage," he said.

For Nandini, collaborating with Netflix and the accomplished cast of *Pitta Kathalu* has been a very rewarding experience.

She noted that working with gifted directors who sought to travel on newer paths of storytelling helped them bring forth authentic human stories with a fresh take on relationships. She directed *Meera*, top-lined by Jagapathi Babu, Amala Paul and Aswin Kakamanu.

Nag Ashwin, who directed *xLife*, starring Shruti Haasan, Sanjith Hegde, Sangeet Shobhan and Anish Kuruvilla, said, "With this being the first Telugu original by Netflix, I really wanted to push the boundaries of what people expect from the medium. I hope the four unique worlds we have created will connect with people, not just in the Telugu speaking states but across the world."



SP, Guru Films line up another Korean remake

Suresh Productions and Guru Films, which remade Korean hit *Miss Granny* as *Oh Baby* in Telugu, has lined-up another Korean film, *Luck Key*, to remake in Telugu up next. This would be their third Korean remake as they are attached to remake 2017 South Korean hit *Midnight*

Runners as well in Telugu, with Regina Cassandra and Nivetha Thomas set to play lead roles. Sudheer Varma has been tapped to direct it. Announcing the details of their new project on Wednesday, the esteemed Suresh Productions wrote, "@SureshProdns @guru-films1 & @skglobalent proudly announce the official Telugu remake of the

popular Korean film "*Luck Key*" (originally "Key of Life" — Japanese). We have acquired the rights for all Indian languages, currently packaging it with a Popular Actor & Director (sic). The original told the story of a hapless loser who assumes the identity of an amnesia victim without knowing that he is an assassin.



Lucifer remake launched; RB Choudhary joins the team



Lucifer remake, starring megastar Chiranjeevi, was launched at production house Super Good Films office in Hyderabad on Wednesday. When the project, a political drama laced with action, was announced last month, Ram Charan and NV Prasad were attached to it as producers

but Super Good Films chief RB Choudhary too will execute it at the production level. Allu Aravind, Ashwini Dutt, DVV Danayya, Niranjan Reddy, Nagababu, Koratala Siva, Tagore Madhu, Gemini Kiran, Satyanand, Meher Ramesh, Bobby, Ram Achanta, Gopi Achanta, Miryala Ravinder Reddy, Naveen Yerneni, Sirish Reddy, UV Creations

Vicky and others participated in the *muhurat* ceremony.

Speaking to the media later, Choudhary and Prasad said they are planning to start filming from next month. "Director Mohan Raja tweaked the original to suit our nativity. The project will not only be a mega-blockbuster hit but will also remain one of the

most prestigious movies in the career of the megastar," said the producers.

Mohan Raja said that it will not be a frame-to-frame remake, adding that they've taken the story outline and improvised it according to Chiranjeevi garu's image. "It will meet the expectations of the mega fans," he promised.

Raja has also assembled a

strong technical team for the project. Composer Thaman who is in red-hot form, has been tapped to score music for the film, while Nirav Shah has been signed on as the lensman. Suresh Selavarajan, whose art work for *Acharya*, has been the talk of the town, will design sets for this film as well. Lakshmi Bhoopal is penning dialogues.

Bangaru Bullodu revolves around gold: Naresh

Actor Allari Naresh, who will be next seen in *Bangaru Bullodu*, termed the film as the first comedy of the season. Directed by PV Giri of *Nandini Nursing Home* fame, it opens in cinemas this Saturday. "As we started discussing the project, Giri complained to me that my earlier releases had comedy but no story. He told me that

we should go with a story which has humour in it. That's how our journey began. Later, Veligonda Srinivas joined us as a dialogue writer. The film was supposed to release last April but due to COVID-19, we are coming now. I'm excited about the release," the actor said. He was speaking at the trailer launch of the film in Hyderabad recently. The actor also clarified that it has no connection

with the 1993 Nandamuri Balakrishna-starrer super hit *Bangaru Bullodu*. "In the film, I give gold loans to people at a grameena bank. Also, the film revolves around gold, hence the title," he pointed out and added that it was producer Anil Sunkara's idea to remix *Swathilo Muthyamantha* song from old *Bangaru Bullodu* for his film. "Composer Sai Kartheek had a herculean task in front of

him. The idea was not to spoil the reputation of the original if not bettering it, but he had done a fantastic job with the remix," the actor said.

Director Giri, who wrote the story of Naresh-starrer *Bendu Apparao RMP*, stated that *Bangaru Bullodu* is a rural comedy entertainer set in the backdrop of a bank scam.

"It's a film meant for the entire family," he assured.

