



Centre, states
to work on EODB

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Congress, TMC come in way
of Opposition unity

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Can speccraft
deflect asteroid

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In brief

SKM suspends Nov 29 tractor march to Parliament

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha has suspended its November 29 tractor march to Parliament and it will hold a meeting next month to decide its future course of action, farmer leaders said on Saturday. The decision to suspend the march comes two days ahead of the commencement of the Winter Session of Parliament, during which a bill to repeal three central farm laws is slated to be introduced. The SKM, an umbrella body of farmer unions protesting against the laws for the past one year, also said it wants an assurance in Parliament on their demand for a legislation guaranteeing farmers Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their crops.

Dead man wins Panchayat poll in Bihar!

A dead man has won a Panchayat poll held on Wednesday riding on a sympathy wave generated by his own death. The real-life tragicomedy was detected in this impoverished district, situated about 200 kms from the state capital, when officials were handing over certificates to candidates who won the polls held on November 24. Sohan Murmu, who won ward no. 2 of Deepakhar village, falling under Khairabad block, was nowhere to be found. On enquiry, we learnt that Murmu had died on November 6, more than a fortnight before voting took place. Khairabad BDO Raghavendra Tripathi said with a sense of bewilderment.

Goods train derails as Naxals uproot tracks in Dantewada

Eighteen wagons and three locomotives of a goods train derailed on the Kirandul-Visakhapatnam railway section in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district after Naxals uprooted railway tracks, a police official said on Saturday. No casualty was reported in the incident that took place in a forest area around 8.30 pm on Friday. However, the movement of trains was disrupted between Jagdalpur and Kirandul, he said. "Naxals uprooted tracks between Bhansi and Kamaloor stations, causing 18 wagons and three engines of a goods train to derail," Dantewada Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said. The train, loaded with iron ore, was on its way to Visakhapatnam from Bachel, he said, adding that there was no report of any casualty in the incident.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Kartik & Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Navami upto 05:30 AM

Nakshatram : Purne/Praagni upto 10:06 PM

Time to Avoid

Rahukalam : 04:08 PM to 05:33 PM

Yamagandam : 11:55 AM to 01:20 PM

Variyam : 05:11 AM, Nov 29 to 06:45 AM

Gulika : 02:44 PM to 04:08 PM

Amritakalam : 03:36 PM to 05:13 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:33 AM to 12:18 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 31 °C

Humidity: 56%

Sunrise: 06:28 AM

Sunset: 05:40 PM

Updated NOVEMBER 27, 2021 5:00 PM

OBTUSE ANGLE



NEW COVID VARIANT 'OMICRON' SCARY

PM asks States to take precautionary steps ❁ Not in favour of easing curbs on international travel curbs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As concerns grow over a new Covid variant, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called for a proactive approach and a review of plans for easing of international travel curbs and urged people to be more cautious while several states moved quickly to take precautionary measures and remain vigilant.

Two South African returnees to Bengaluru, meanwhile, tested positive for Covid-19 and their samples sent for further tests to determine the exact variant, said a Karnataka state official.

Modi, who was briefed by officials about the recently discovered variant Omicron during a comprehensive meeting here to review the public health preparedness and Covid-19 vaccination, also highlighted the need for monitoring all international arrivals, their testing as per guidelines, with a specific focus on countries identified 'at risk'.

Officials briefed the PM about the new Variant of Concern Omicron along with its characteristics and the impact seen in various countries, the PMO said in a statement.

The implications of the variant for India were also discussed, it said. The Omicron variant, which scientists say has a high number of mutations, was first detected in South Africa last week. A World Health Organisation panel has classified it as a highly transmissible variant of concern, the same category that

Two from South Africa test positive for Covid as threat of new variant looms

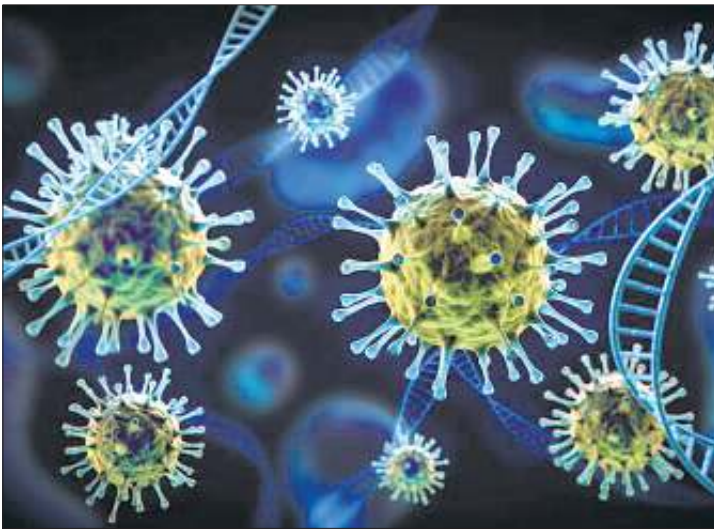
includes the Delta variant.

During the meeting which lasted for about two hours, Modi spoke about the need to be proactive in the light of the new variant and urged people to be more cautious and take proper precautions like masking up and maintaining social distance, the PMO statement said. The WHO also asserted that at no cost should "we let our guard down."

Modi asked "officials to review plans for easing of international travel restrictions in light of the emerging new evidence", the statement said, even as Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the PM to stop flights coming to India from those countries which are affected by the new variant.

The PM's directive to officials came a day after the Civil Aviation Ministry announced the resumption of scheduled international flights to and from India from December 15 after 20 months of coronavirus-induced suspension.

India's decision to resume scheduled international passenger flights also came at a time when various countries such as the UK, Germany, Singapore, Israel, France and Italy have restricted air travel from southern Africa where the cases of new coronavirus variant with serious health implications have been reported.



Transmissibility of new variant, efficacy of vaccines under examination: ICMR

Genomic variations and structural changes have been reported from other countries in the new variant of coronavirus but whether these alterations would impart increased transmissibility or make vaccines ineffective is under examination, senior ICMR scientist Samiran Panda said Saturday. "Vaccines which have been directed towards spike protein of the virus may find difficulty in mounting adequate immunity against the mutated version because of the structural changes that have been reported in the viral genome," the WHO said. "We have to wait and watch how this new mutant evolves and plays out," said Panda, the head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases Division, ICMR.

Experts ask people to be cautious, not paranoid

NAVEENA GHANATE
■ HYDERABAD

While 2021 may be coming to an end, the pandemic isn't, if one takes into account the 'deadliest' variant of Covid-19 that has spread to five countries already. Scientists are describing the new variant of the Coronavirus, labelled Omicron, first detected in South Africa as 'horrific'. The variant is being considered highly contagious because of the high number of mutations. WHO says early evidence shows new Omicron variant possesses a higher risk of infection. Dr Ranga Reddy Burri said, "Scientists are concerned the new mutation could get around immunisation from both vaccines and also previous infections. Though a "full lockdown" like the one last year may not be possible, disruptions look certain. Experts say that the broken global supply chain may further get aggravated, making it difficult to source medical products difficult for low medium income countries.

TS to review strategy to tackle new variant today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government is on high alert over the new Covid-19 strain 'Omicron'. Health Minister T Harish Rao will hold a meeting with senior medical and health officials on Sunday. The meeting will review the situation and also discuss steps to stop the spread of the virus through people reaching the State from countries where this new variant is spreading. The Union government too had recently alerted the State governments to be cautious. While there are no direct flights to Hyderabad from South Africa where the variant was first detected, the meeting will discuss on how to tackle those coming from Mumbai, Delhi and other destinations apart from tracing and testing. Meanwhile, officials have started strict screening of international passengers on the lines of a Central government circular in view of the increasing number of cases of Omicron variant being reported in five countries.

It's official! Cultivate paddy at your own risk

❑ Farmers should not take up paddy cultivation in Yasangi, confirms State government

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government on Saturday formally asked farmers across the State not to take up paddy cultivation in Yasangi.

However, farmers who have tie-ups with seed companies or with millers, as well as for self-consumption, can take up paddy cultivation in Yasangi at their own risk.

Paddy grown in Telangana in the Yasangi season is suitable only for parboiled rice due to seasonal conditions.

The announcement came a day after the Centre and the Food Corporation of India made it clear that they would not procure parboiled rice from Telangana.

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar,



along with DGP M Mahender Reddy, conducted a video conference from BRKR Bhavan on Saturday with all Collectors, SPs, CPs, Additional Collectors, District Agriculture Officers, District Supply Officers etc. on paddy procurement.

Paddy to be procured as per agreement: Centre

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Centre on Saturday clarified that all paddy procurement in Telangana should continue as before at the existing MP, as per the MoU between the State government and the FCI.

The Centre said that it already made it clear that it will procure 40 lakh tonnes of Vanakalam rice and the FCI will not procure Yasangi paddy. It was the State's demand that the Centre procure more Vanakalam paddy over and above the 40 lakh tonnes, to which it did not give any assurance.

Dissidents may upset TRS apple cart in six seats

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), despite the unanimous election of six of its candidates as MLCs, is facing rough weather in six other seats where elections would be held on 10th December. In spite of having full majority, the TRS is worried about dissidents, who may upset its apple cart in

these seats.

The MLC elections in Karimnagar, Khammam and Medak in particular may turn out to be problematic for the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samiti. In these three districts, some of the party's own leaders have become a thorn in the flesh, leave alone



those of opposition parties. Hence, out of six MLC seats, the TRS leadership has focused on these three seats.

The Karimnagar district was once a strong bastion for the TRS. In the past few years, the TRS has lost some ground in Karimnagar.

OU to charge outsiders using its facilities

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

The Osmania University's (OU) administrators have launched new initiatives to generate revenue. As of now, the OU authorities have identified two areas from which they can generate revenue.

One is charging Rs 100 for lunch at the OU Guest House and the other is a charge of Rs 200 per month for outsiders if they want to walk on OU's premises in the morning or evening.

The university introduced the lunch facility only around a month ago. It will also charge outsiders if they want to participate in sports on its playgrounds.

For this, they have to pay Rs 500 per month per head. If anyone



wants to use the gymnasium, he or she would have to pay Rs 1,000 per month per person.

The university will issue passes to those who pay the prescribed charge for using its premises for walking, sports or the gym.

The gymnasium and OU's playgrounds will be available on request for use by outsiders if they pay the user charges.

The gymnasium will be available

in two slots of one-and-a-half hours each during the morning (6 am to 9 am) and in the evening (5 pm to 8 pm) for a monthly charge of Rs 1,000 per person.

Similarly, the use of the ground is permitted from 6 am to 8 am and from 4 pm to 6 pm.

Those who want to use the basketball court, football ground and athletics camps should pay a monthly charge of Rs 500 per person for each facility.

Walkers intending to use the university campus for walking will have to pay a monthly charge of Rs 200 per person. The users will be issued passes which will allow them to access the facilities.

Only bonafide students with university colleges carrying ID cards, OU staff and the above mentioned pass holders will be allowed to use OU playgrounds, gymnasium and campus from December 1, 2021.

Osmania University Registrar Prof P Laxminarayana said that this initiative is not to earn revenue but to keep the campus clean and to protect the campus environment from outsiders.



Instead of procuring paddy, KCR has become a broker: Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC president A. Revanth Reddy on Saturday alleged that instead of procuring paddy, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has confined himself to becoming a broker.

The Chief Minister is not bothered even though farmers are dying on paddy piles and is also not extending the Rythu Bima scheme to them, he said.

He alleged that brokers are deciding prices for the produce of the farmers and KCR is the reason for the deaths of farmers.

It is shameful on the part of KCR to speak about Rabi paddy without procuring the paddy now at procurement centres, Revanth pointed out.

Addressing the two-day Vari Deeksha that started on Saturday at Dharna Chowk in Indira Park, Revanth demanded that the government procure paddy immediately, pay ex-gratia to farmers whose paddy had sprouted, stop looting farmers in the name of wastage and announce the its stand on Yasangi paddy.

Revanth asked KCR who had been stating that he had

built a project spending Rs 1 lakh-crore, to explain why he is not procuring the paddy produced by farmers.

He lashed out at KCR saying that the government had procured only 8 lakh tonnes of paddy till now although the Centre had assured that it will purchase 60 lakh tonnes of paddy from Telangana.

Revanth made it clear that the Congress will fight till the State government procures the entire paddy. He said that the TRS and the BJP will come to grief if they fail to procure paddy.

He reminded that the Congress is the party that provided nine hours of free power to farmers. He said the Congress introduced the FCI procurement policy and provided MSP to farmers.

Revanth alleged that KCR went to New Delhi to participate in dinners. He made it clear that the Congress will fight in Parliament on the paddy procurement issue.

Bhongir MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy asked farmers to beat TRS MLAs with slippers as the government was troubling farmers by not procuring paddy. He called



upon farmers to block the Chief Minister everywhere.

He said that he will work with anyone for the sake of the Congress.

"The Congress doesn't mean Komatireddy, Uttam or Revanth Reddy. We became leaders because of our cadres. I asked for the TPCC chief post. I will work for the party. I will ensure the victory of seven MLAs. The other leaders should also ensure the victory of 10 MLAs each. We will make Sonia Gandhi speak on the procurement of paddy in

KCR cheated farmers, alleges Uttam

Former TPCC president and Nalgonda MP Capt. N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Saturday accused Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao of cheating the farmers. Addressing the 'Vari Deeksha' organised by the TPCC, Uttam said that due to the negligence of the government in purchasing the paddy in time, the farmers were ruined. He said that Congress would put up a united fight against the Union and State governments on the issues of the farmers. He said that the party would fight in the Assembly and in Parliament on behalf of farmers. "We have two main demands. The government should purchase every grain of discoloured and soaked paddy and should not impose any restriction on cultivating paddy during the Yasangi season," he said. Coming down heavily on the Union and State governments, he said that farmers of Telangana were ruined by the

anti farmer policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and KCR. The Prime Minister, Chief Minister and Ministers have forgotten their primary responsibility of instilling confidence among the farmers on purchase of Paddy, Uttam alleged. "I want to know why we need the present Union and State governments which failed to purchase the produce of the farmers," he questioned. He pointed out that 50 to 60 percent of the population depends on agriculture in India and in Telangana. Lampooning the State government for its inaction, he said that even though the paddy has started to reach threshing floors and IKP centres in October and November the state government did not chalk out any action plan to purchase the grains. Charging the Chief Minister with cheating farmers, Uttam said that the government did not implement crop loan waiver and crop insurance schemes.

Parliament. We will stage a dharna at New Delhi and

invite Priyanka Gandhi to attend," Komatireddy said.

OU to charge outsiders using its...

Continued from page 1

"Some outsiders tend to come to the campus and they do not care about its cleanliness. They throw garbage and do as they wish. User charges are only to keep away casual visitors to the campus who do not care for the university. We will cancel the passes if any holder violates rules and regulations of the University," Prof Laxminarayana said.

Telangana Jagruthi State leader Narsanna who is an OU alumnus said the decision would not enhance the image of the 100-year-old Osmania University.

Most walkers and players who come to the OU are old students. Outsiders who don't have any connection to the university comprise only a small percentage, Narsanna said.

A PG student on condition of anonymity said that the new measures may control the rush

inside the OU campus.

Issuing identity cards to outsiders will definitely help the authorities control anti-social elements from entering the campus. These anti-social elements sometimes pick fights with OU students, the PG student said.

A professor from the Arts College said that the initiative may be a first step towards making OU a closed one like EFLU, MAANU, HCU etc.

It's official! Cultivate paddy at...

Continued from page 1

During the video conference, the Chief Secretary pointed to certain instances of paddy coming to PPCs from outside the State.

The Collectors and SPs/CPs were directed to ensure that no paddy brought from outside the State is procured by PPCs in Telangana. "Doing so will be against the interest of Telangana farmers as it is known that the Government of India has allot-

ted only 40 lakh MTs of rice as target for procurement of Yanakalam 2021," the Chief Secretary said.

The Collectors were directed to ensure that paddy procurement takes place smoothly. The Collectors were also authorised to open new paddy procurement centres (PPCs) if required.

The Chief Secretary said that Collectors and senior officers should visit PPCs on a regular basis to resolve issues if any.

TS has 400 startups, is top...

Continued from page 1

He urged the industry also to give preference to startups in availing the relevant solutions.

Speaking about funding, Jayesh Ranjan suggested micro analysis of funding systems for startups. He emphasised the need to nurture seeds of innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas to make the startup ecosystem more inclusive.

Jayesh Ranjan also complimented CII for organising Startup - Corporate Connect initiative under ICONN 2021.

Sriram Subramanya, Chairman, CII SR Start-ups & Entrepreneurship Forum and Founder, MD & CEO, Integra Software Services reeled out statistics saying that India has the third largest startup ecosystem in the world with about six startups being formed every single day.

There has been a 16-fold increase in startups formed in the last seven years, he said. Sriram Subramanya said that he was very optimistic about Telangana as it has one of the best start-up ecosystems in the country.

While talking about CII initiatives, Sriram Subramanya said that CII has launched a Centre of Excellence for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Start-ups (CIES) in partnership with the Government of Telangana in Hyderabad in 2020.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹160
Without Skin	₹200
Broiler at Farm	₹120
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	440
VIJAYAWADA	409
VISAKHAPATNAM	420
RETAIL PRICE (IN HYDERABAD)	₹4.40

NEW COVID VARIANT 'OMICRON' SCARY

Continued from page 1

In a tweet after the meeting, Modi said, "reviewed the COVID-19 and vaccination-related situation. In light of the new variant, we remain vigilant, with a focus on containment and ensuring increased second dose coverage."

During the meeting, the prime minister was also given an overview of the sequencing efforts in the country and the variants circulating in the country, the PMO statement said.

Modi directed that genome sequencing samples be collected from international travellers and community as per norms, tested through the network of labs already established under the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) and early warning signals identified for COVID-19 management, the statement said.

Prime Minister Modi also spoke about the need to increase the sequencing efforts and make it more broad-based. Bengaluru Rural Deputy Commissioner K Srinivas, under whose jurisdiction Kempegowda International Airport comes, told reporters that from (November) 1 to 26 a total of 94 people have come from South Africa and out of them two have tested positive for COVID-19.

Both the infected persons have been quarantined, are being monitored by authorities and their samples sent for further tests to ascertain the variant, he said.

Transmissibility of new variant, efficacy of vaccines under...

Continued from page 1

He said that vaccines used in India -- Covaxin and Covishield -- have been reported to work against previously identified mutants from within India and other countries. "Whether they would be effective against newly reported mutant B.1.1.529 needs to be seen over a period of time," he said. A World Health Organisation panel has named the new COVID-19 strain 'Omicron' and classified it as

a highly transmissible variant of concern, the category that also includes the delta variant. "Genomic variations and structural changes have been reported from other countries in the new emerging variant of coronavirus but whether these changes would impart increased transmissibility or make vaccines ineffective is under examination," he said. Panda said mRNA vaccines are directed towards viral spike protein and host cell receptor interaction and thus may need to be

tweaked as appropriate around the changes observed in the virus. Panda, meanwhile, also stressed on strengthening of the ongoing vaccination drive as well as strict adherence to Covid-appropriate behaviour where community engagement is the key intervention approach. Ramping up genomic surveillance in the country and for incoming international travellers will also help in forming programmatic intervention measures, he underlined.

Experts ask people to be cautious, not paranoid

Continued from page 1

India might also find it difficult to procure key raw materials for the pharma sector like vaccine, medical devices and other life saving healthcare products. "India and LMIC, using this occasion, should move towards the development of local sources for life-saving

health products," Dr Burri said. He added that current vaccines may not protect from new variants and hence they need to be tweaked on a 'war footing' rather than pushing the world for booster doses of the existing arsenal vaccines that have been developed based on the Wuhan strain. Experts advise citizens to take responsibility for Covid appropriate

behaviour. Apollo Hospitals Joint Managing Director Sangita Reddy said: "Be cautious not paranoid! Covid variant will remain an integral part of pandemic. Vaccines will mute mutations and data shows the disease is not devastating for the vaccinated population. Masking, sanitising and vaccinating is what will keep us safe!"

The WHO asked countries in the southeast Asia region to scale up surveillance, strengthen public health and social measures, and enhance vaccination coverage.

The global health body said festivities and celebrations must include all precautionary measures and crowds and large gatherings must be avoided.

"At no cost should we let our guard down," said Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO, South-East Asia Region, adding that countries must enhance surveillance and sequencing.

Based on updated information on circulating variants and response capacities, countries should assess the risk of importation through international travel and take measures accordingly, she said.

In a tweet, Chief Minister Kejriwal emphasised that the country had "recovered" from the COVID-19 pandemic with "great difficulty".

"I urge Hon'ble PM to stop flights from those countries which are affected by new variant. With great difficulty, our country has recovered from Corona. We should do everything

possible to prevent this new variant from entering India," Kejriwal tweeted.

Meanwhile, as much as 64 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted over the decision to allow scheduled international operations to and from India want the government to reconsider it in the wake of the emergence of the new coronavirus variant.

The survey was carried out by the online platform LocalCircles immediately after the government announced the resumption of scheduled international flight services, which

Covid-hit TechM University goes for a 15-day lockdown

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Tech Mahindra University on Saturday opted to close its campus for 15 days after as many as 30 students, faculty and support staff tested positive for Covid-19.

The decision to go for lockdown was taken after nearly 1,700 people, including 1,400 students, on the campus were tested for Covid-19. Of these, 30 have been tested positive.

Incidentally all these 30 people who tested positive were reportedly fully vaccinated. Consequently, the campus has been closed and students



asked to take classes for the remaining semester online.

Medchal-Malkajigiri DMHO Mallikarjun visited the campus to take stock of the situation. The DMHO said that the university has declared a holiday for 15 days and will switch to online classes.

Tests are being conducted on shopkeepers near the campus.

The university has announced that online classes will be conducted from Monday. It is the first university in Telangana to be locked down due to Covid-19 since the second wave of the pandemic.

BJP executive resolves to keep up the pressure on TRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Stating that the Huzurabad by-election has changed the political face of the State, the Telangana BJP Executive Committee has passed several resolutions at its two-day session.

The session asked the State Government to allot more funds for fees reimbursement, development and welfare schemes. It alleged that the TRS mafia had grabbed the mining industry.

The party also alleged that KCR had become a betrayer of Dalits. The TRS leaders are indulging in land deals in the name of the Dharani portal, the BJP Executive Committee said.

The Chief Minister's family itself has been demanding bribes for effecting changes in land records, the panel said.

It also passed a resolution demanding the State

Government implement the Dalit Bandhu scheme immediately.

Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy who attended the meet said the Centre will purchase paddy as per the written agreement between the State Government and the Centre.

He said that the Kalvakuntla family had made false allegations against the Centre. Family parties are a danger to the nation and its democracy, he added.

Kishan Reddy asked BJP activists to highlight the failures of the TRS government. He said that Pragathi Bhavan has changed totally after the Huzurabad by-poll. The TRS took up the paddy procurement issue to divert attention from the Huzurabad by-poll result, Kishan Reddy said.

The KCR Government is not implementing the crop insurance scheme, he pointed out.

Two from South Africa test positive for Covid as threat of new variant looms

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Amid fears of the spread of new Covid strain 'Omicron' looming large, two South African nationals have tested positive for the coronavirus, and their samples have been sent for further tests to ascertain about the variant, a top official said on Saturday.

Both of them have been quarantined and there was no need for worry, he said.

From (November) 1 to 26, a total of 94 people have come from South Africa, out of them two have tested positive for regular Covid-19. So people need not worry," Bengaluru Rural Deputy Commissioner K Srinivas, under whose jurisdiction Kempegowda International Airport comes, said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, both the infected persons have been quarantined, are being monitored by the authorities and their samples have been sent for further tests to ascertain the variant.

Noting that ten countries

have been identified as high risk, the DC said all those coming from there are made to compulsorily undergo tests, and those tested positive are being quarantined.

As many as 584 people have arrived in Bengaluru from ten high-risk nations from November one to 26, he said.

Observing that cases of the new variants have been detected in the last one week in countries like Botswana, South Africa, Hong Kong and Israel, state Health Minister K Sudhakar earlier today said guidelines have been given to airports stating those travelling from these countries to the city have to undergo a test despite having negative Covid test report, and they will be allowed outside the airport only after testing negative.

"Even after testing negative they will have to remain at home and after seven days they will have to undergo a test once again, and after getting a negative report, one can go out," he added.

Paddy to be procured as per agreement...

Continued from page 1

"It is to bring to the notice of all that factually wrong news is being spread around and being reported in a section of the media that the Centre has stopped paddy procurement

in Telangana State. The Department of Food and Public Distribution has clarified that all paddy procurement in Telangana will continue as before at the existing MSP", the release said.

Centre rejects yet...

Continued from page 1

This is despite the Union government's deciding to repeal the three contentious agricultural laws.

It may be mentioned here that on 20 November, KCR had demanded the Centre to bring in a law guaranteeing MSP. KCR had said, "Farmers are asking Minimum Support Price not maximum support price. In the upcoming Parliament session they should bring a Bill on MSP. On behalf of the TRS, we will raise our voice there as well. We are cer-

tain that the Centre will respond positively."

This was the second request from the Chief Minister which was rejected by the Central government in as many days.

On Friday, the State government had failed to get an assurance from the Centre to lift Yasangi paddy. Amidst mounting criticism of the State government over sluggish procurement of paddy from farmers during the current Kharif season, the Centre has turned down the State's demand to enhance the target.

GHMC spends Rs.10.68 cr on 7 night shelters at major hospitals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation has constructed seven night shelters at major State-run hospitals for the convenience of attenders of patients, at an estimated cost of Rs 10.68 crore.

Of these seven, the night shelter at ENT Hospital has been set up at a cost of Rs 2.90 crore, the one at Osmania General Hospital cost the GHMC Rs 3.37 crore while the Corporation spent Rs 95 lakh to build one at Mahaveer Hospital.

The night shelter at Niloufer Hospital was built at a cost Rs 2.60 crore, the one at Koti Maternity Hospital was constructed by spending Rs 1.96 crore.

Night shelters at NIMS



Hospital cost Rs 3.10 crore while that at the Nampally Area Hospital has been built at a cost of Rs 1 crore.

The GHMC, in a statement,

said that the work was undertaken and completed and handed over to the Hospital Development Committee for maintenance.

As per officials, "These night shelters have facilities for attendants of patients who come from far off places. Another 14 night shelters are run by the

respective circle under the auspices of the GHMC UCD Division."

Officials said, "People suffering from various chronic diseases come from all over the State for treatment at major government hospitals in Hyderabad for emergency treatment. The financially destitute or the poor come to government hospitals as they cannot afford private and corporate hospitals."

The officials said that the State government has taken steps to construct night shelters in all major government hospitals in view of the difficulties faced by the patient as well as family members for treatment. "GHMC has taken special measures for those who come to Hyderabad for treatment from different places," they said.

UP, Kerala, TN to study success behind T-Diagnostics initiative

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Endorsing the successful implementation of the Telangana Diagnostics (T-Diagnostics) initiative, officials from states like Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu will be visiting Telangana to study it closely.

Health Minister T Harish Rao said that the diagnostics services have the potential to be a model for the entire country. He said, "Bihar government officials visited our State last month to inspect the manner in which T-diagnostics services were being made available to the public. A team from Uttar Pradesh will be visiting next week. Kerala and Tamil Nadu governments would also be sending teams. All these are a testament to the better services our government is providing to the people"

At a review meeting on Saturday, Harish Rao directed authorities to track the progress in districts that are below the



Health Minister T Harish Rao chairs the video conference with top officials of the districts in Saturday.

State average in the health index and take immediate action. Harish Rao also directed the medical officers to ensure that Telangana is at the top in the health indicators and to work towards the dream of realising "Golden Telangana".

Officials were asked to conduct reviews on their performance on a monthly basis.

He said monthly growth in performance should be seen, and will be the stepping stone

to promotions and incentives. Officials were advised to look into the matter at the field level and keep reports ready.

Harish Rao said the State government was spending a large amount of money on public health and hence officials should pay attention to the implementation of health programs at the ground level.

He said the State should be in a better position in terms of tackling anemia. Reviewing

the malaria and dengue situation in the State, Harish Rao said special attention should be paid to the affected districts. He alerted the authorities of the affected districts.

The Panchayati Raj, in coordination with the Municipal Departments, was directed to take measures to improve hygiene and cleanliness and prevent proliferation of mosquitoes, thereby preventing the spread of the disease.

Harish Rao directed officials to work towards reducing maternal mortality and work towards the goal of increasing hospital deliveries from 97 percent to 100 percent. Most families want to see deliveries in government hospitals, he said.

"Instructions have been issued to begin cath lab services at Gandhi Hospital and Osmania General Hospital in two weeks. These services would also be started at the government hospital in Khammam," Harish Rao said.

160 new Covid cases, 1 death in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana on Saturday reported 160 new Covid-19 cases, pushing the tally to 6,75,479, while the toll rose to 3,988 with one more fatality.

The GHMC accounted for the most number of cases with 66, followed by Khammam (21) and Medchal Malkajgiri and Ranga Reddy (12 each) districts, a government bulletin said, providing details as of 5.30 PM today.

It said 148 people recovered, taking the cumulative number of those who recuperated to 6,67,946. The number of active cases stood at 3,545.

A total of 32,540 samples were tested, taking the total number of specimens examined so far to 2,84,88,719. The samples tested per million population was 7,65,414.

The Case Fatality Rate in Telangana was 0.59 per cent and the recovery rate, 98.88 per cent, the bulletin said.

Man booked for thrashing son

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Chatrinaka Police on Saturday booked a private employee for physically abusing his child.

In a video clip that went viral on Saturday, the man was seen hitting his child violently with a stick. Despite the child's desperate attempts to save himself and pleas for mercy, the man went on thrashing him.

Acting on a complaint, police detained the accused Ashok, 38, a private employee from Chatrinaka. According to the Police, a complaint was received from the 8-year-old victim's mother Jija Bai, who found Ashok thrashing their child black and blue with a thick stick.

Gold worth Rs 20.30 lakh seized at RGIA

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For the fourth time in seven days, the Hyderabad Customs detained a passenger at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport on Saturday for smuggling 320 grams of gold, valued at Rs 20.30 lakh. The passenger had come from Dubai.

Customs said the passenger had arrived at the Hyderabad airport by flight 6E-25.

"The gold was concealed inside tins of talcum powder and suitcase railings. We detained the passenger for questioning and investigation is going on," the officials said.



Burglar held with Rs 93 lakh booty

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The LB Nagar team of the Central Crime Station and the Saroornagar Police nabbed a burglar and seized valuables worth Rs 93 lakh from him on Saturday.

The arrested person, Gaffar Khan, 28, is a resident of Yakutpura in Charminar.

The police also arrested one Syed Khaja Pasha, 32, a gold polish worker from Yakutpura, who used to accept stolen ornaments.

Police seized gold ornaments weighing 1.805 kg worth Rs 89,92,500, Rs 1,90,000 in cash, 10 smart phones worth Rs 1 lakh and other valuables, in all worth Rs 93,62,500, from him.

Police said that Gaffar Khan was involved in 27 cases in the tri-commis-sionerate area.

The police recovered

gold items weighing more than a kg and Rs 1,90,000 in cash from him. He was earlier arrested by the Rachakonda, Cyberabad and Hyderabad City police.

After his release from jail, he again started thefts. The stolen gold ornaments were sold to Khaja Pasha and the money obtained was spent on online cricket betting.

Before his arrest on Saturday, Khan was involved in 21 cases and was arrested in a few of them too, the police said.

"Khan used to move on his two-wheeler and select villas, duplex and luxury houses. He jumps into the compound, enters the house and steals gold and silver ornaments and other valuables while the residents are sleeping and then flees on his two-wheeler," said Rachakonda Police Commissioner Mahesh M. Bhagwat.

Sanitation to be theme for this week's Sunday-Funday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The HMDA on Saturday said that this week, the Sunday-Funday event on the Tank Bund will be based on Swachhata (sanitation) theme.

In the Swachh Sarvekshan Awards 2021 recently announced by the Centre, Telangana bagged 12 awards with Hyderabad awarded 3-Star rating under Garbage-Free City Category and Best Self-Sustaining City at the national level. In view of this and to spread further awareness among the citizens on good practices in sanitation, this Sunday will be Swachhata Sunday-Funday at Tank Bund.

Teams from GHMC will be present all along the Tank Bund demonstrating ways to ensure segregation of waste and the importance of doing so. Along with this, a demonstration on home composting will also be made.

The teams will also be promoting community involvement and help Hyderabad



achieve a 5-star rating as Garbage-Free City from the existing 3-Star rating.

Videos on municipal solid waste management in Hyderabad, construction and demolition debris and other best practices will be displayed at multiple locations. Selfie points with sanitation as the theme are also being set up.

While the shopping and food stalls will be the same as every week, a few stalls promoting 'No Plastic Usage' will also be set up and will be showcasing alternatives to single use plastic in our everyday life.

The urban forestry wing of HMDA will again be setting up

Rachakonda SHE teams nabbed 56 eve-teasers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The SHE teams of Rachakonda have arrested 56 eve-teasers and booked 52 cases in the last four weeks. SHE officials registered 16 FIRs and 25 petty cases against eve-teasers and have also conducted 11 counselling sessions.

Of the 56 eve-teasers, 32 were majors and 24 were minors. The apprehended persons attended the counselling session conducted by Rachakonda SHE teams at the Commissioner's Camp Office in LB Nagar, along with their family members and were counselled by professional counsellors from the Bhumi Women's Collective.

Children in conflict with the law were counselled by a psychiatrist to bring about a change in their behaviour. A fraudster, posing as an IPS officer, was arrested when he uploaded a profile on a

matrimony website claiming to be an IPS officer. The complainant, who grew suspicious of the man, asked him to prove the bonafides of the documents he had uploaded.

The suspect then began threatening her. Based on her complaint, the police registered a case and arrested Vuppala Hari Prasad, 28, a private employee from Miryalaguda in Nalgonda.

The Bhongir SHE team conducted a decoy operation on November 24 and nabbed nine persons, including eight minors, red-handed while they were creating nuisance in public places and teasing girls.

Similar operations were conducted by the SHE teams of LB Nagar, Ibrahimpatnam, Vanasthalipuram and Choutuppal.

Decoy operations were conducted on Metro trains and eight persons who entered ladies compartments were fined.



Producer Shilpa Chowdary arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telugu film producer Shilpa Chowdary was arrested by the Narsingi Police on Saturday. She was detained for questioning on Friday after a complaint of cheating was filed against her.

The police arrested her on Saturday, produced her in court and the judge granted police custody of her for 14 days.

Police said two cases of cheating were registered against her involving an amount of Rs 4 crore. Police expect more victims to come forward as news of her arrest spreads.

Shilpa was reportedly



organising kitty parties for women from affluent families in Gandipet, Kokapet, Manikonda, Puppulaguda, Jubilee Hills, Vijayawada, Kurnool and other places since some years.

She told the women that she was well connected in the film industry and began

accepting money from them, sources said. She told the women that she can give good returns if they invest in a school run by her relative.

Police sources said that Shilpa was first detained on Friday evening, after a victim who claimed to have invested Rs 4 crore believing Shilpa informed the police about the fraud.

The victim said that many others were involved in the racket and the money involved is around Rs 100 crore.

The police have launched an investigation into the scam and are awaiting more complaints.

Viveka murder: Suspicion points to immediate family

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Even as the CBI has taken YSRCP leader Devireddy Siva Sankar Reddy into custody as part of the ongoing investigation into the sensational murder of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's uncle former Kadapa MP YS Vivekananda Reddy just before the 2019 polls, fingers are now being pointed at the immediate family members of the deceased.

Sankar Reddy, in his letter to CBI Director recently, had said that Mooli Venkata Krishna Reddy, who was acting as PA to Vivekananda Reddy during that time, was in touch with Vivekananda Reddy's daughter Narreddy Sunitha, her husband Narreddy Rajasekhara Reddy and other family members through a mobile phone and informed what was going on at the scene the next day when the murder came to light in Pulivendula.

"Thummalapalli Gangi



Reddy alias Yerra Gangi Reddy being the close associate of the deceased and his family took control of the situation. He asked Inayathulla to shift the body from the bathroom Lakshamma (cook-cum-maid) to clean blood stains. This he was doing in the presence of 200 and plus people and government officials including police. I was standing outside during this hour. Initially, it was presumed by family members of the deceased that he had a heart attack and fell on the commode, received a serious bleeding injury. This is confirmed by Shiva Prakash Reddy as he received the pho-

tos through Inayathulla's phone WhatsApp," said Siva Sankar Reddy in his letter.

He alleged that a letter purportedly written by Vivekananda Reddy when the incident took place and his mobile phone were handed over to the police only in the evening hours after the murder came to light. He also alleged that data in Vivekananda Reddy's phone was deleted by his family members.

"Dr Sunitha did not hand over those incriminating articles to the investigating agency immediately. She, her husband and Sivaprakash Reddy instructed Mooli Venkata Krishna Reddy to retain the same till they arrived at Pulivendula town. Even though Sunitha, her husband and Siva Prakash Reddy reached Pulivendula by 1 pm, they did not hand over the letter to the investigating agency till 3.30 pm and the mobile phone (lot of data deleted) of the deceased till 5.30 pm," said Siva Sankar Reddy.

Venkaiah urges pvt hospitals to aid govt efforts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Saturday called upon the private sector to supplement the efforts of the government in creating good healthcare infrastructure in rural India by opening satellite centres of their facilities.

Venkaiah inaugurated the second annual international conference on Interventional Pulmonology 'BRONCHUS-2021', organised by Yashoda Hospitals.

Addressing the gathering, he said: "While it is gladdening that such state-of-the-art diagnostic laboratories are coming up in cities and urban areas, it is also a fact that there is an acute lack of such facilities in our rural areas. Therefore, India's traditional strength in IT and telecommunication must be fully leveraged



to provide world-class telemedicine facilities to our villages."

The two-day event will focus on best practices in interven-

tional pulmonology from basics to the most advanced

diagnostics and therapeutics.

The Vice-President said, "The high level of out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare in India is another issue that needs to be addressed by all the stakeholders. The need of the hour is to make healthcare affordable and accessible to all."

Venkaiah cited a Niti Aayog report that mentions instances of private hospitals using rampant and less than justified use of technology for diagnosis and also prescribing excessive and expensive medicines for treatment. Highlighting the importance of creation of medical infrastructure, he said, "But a sure way of leading a healthy life is to adopt a healthy and disciplined lifestyle. I would like to call upon all youngsters to avoid sedentary habits, unhealthy diet and undertake regular physical activity like yoga or cycling."

'Make arrangements for MLC poll counting'

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Returning Officer, District Collector Prashant Jeevan Patil directed the officers to make all arrangements for the Nalgonda Local Bodies Legislative Council constituency counting. To this effect, he issued instructions to officers concerned to look into the arrangements to be made for the counting to be undertaken on 14th December at TTDC District Women's Federation Building (DRDO) building in the district center. After the polling on December 10th, a reception center will be set up for the receipt of polling material from the combined Nalgonda district divisional centers. CC Camera arrangements, security arrangements, officers on duty for counting management, access to staff, counting agents, barricading, parking, media room and other arrangements were discussed and instructions were given to the officers.

The Collector said that those who have an identity card at the counting center and have certified that the two doses of Covid vaccination have been completed will be allowed as per the Election Commission regulations to look into the arrangements to be made for the counting.



Why dilly dally on paddy?

Congress leader Bhatti questions Centre and state stance

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka on Saturday visited farmers in fields and told them that the state and central governments have been showing them an empty hand in paddy procurement.

He visited several farmers in their fields in Mudigonda mandals. The state and central governments have been adopting dilly-dally tactics to procure paddy this time, which is unprecedented in the history of undivided AP.

When the paddy was almost harvested the state and central

governments are slinging mud on each other, he said pointing out that the farmers in Telangana dried heaps of paddy on roads exposing them to the risk of paddy getting drenched as time passes by. At some places, the paddy became drenched, but the rulers apparently insensitive to the woes of the farmers.

Meanwhile, some farmers are approaching middlemen, he pointed out. KCR's Delhi tour to settle scores with the Centre proved to be a futile exercise, he said. Middlemen have been duping the farmers by procuring a quintal of

paddy at Rs 1050 to Rs 1200, which is par below the MSP, he pointed out. The state government, which is not able to procure Kharif paddy, is demanding the centre to buy rabi paddy, he said expressing wonder. The state government's delay is driving farmers to commit suicide, he said advising the state and central governments to stop their dramas and start procuring paddy through the SHGs. A day when farmers would teach a lesson to the government for having ignored farmers' interests is not far away, he remarked.



Kavita offers special pujas at Kondagattu temple

PNS ■ JAGITYAL

MLC-elect Kavita on Saturday visited Kondagattu Anjaneya Swamy temple and offered special pujas. In connection with her visit to the temple, she said that she is committed to the development of the temple. Moreover, the state government is releasing funds for the development of temples.

She recalled how she performed Akhanda Hanuman Chalisa's recitation at the temple. She thanked the elected people's representatives of Kamareddy and Nizamabad elected people's representatives and to the CM for having elected as MLC unanimously. She said that she visited temples only for the good of the people of the state.

Minister asks authorities to speed up procurement

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

District Collector Jitesh V Patil on Saturday told R and B Minister Vemula Prashant Reddy that 94 percent of the paddy procurement is over in Banswada, while 80 percent of the procurement is over in Jukkal.

He put the total quantity of paddy procured so far in the district at 3 lakh tons. He was replying to the Minister who addressed district authorities through video conference. The minister asked the district officials to procure hamalis, lories, and scales from Banswada and Jukkal areas to speed up procurement in Kamareddy and Yellareddy Assembly constituencies.

He asked the officials to monitor the paddy procurement at the field level to ensure that there are no hiccups in the procurement. The procured paddy should be sent to rice mills immediately. The paddy stocks at the procurement cen-



ters should be zero. The authorities should take steps to enter the details of procurement in the tabs and see to it that the farmers get money on time. He asked the officials to make available adequate weighing machines, gunny bags, and moisture measuring equipment at the procurement centers.

The officials should take steps to give information on the paddy details at the field level and stocks with the pro-

curement centers. Jukkal and Yellareddy MLAs Hanumant Shinde and Surender should ensure that there are no problems in procurement of paddy. Local bodies additional collector Venkatesh Dhotre, in charge district additional collector Madhava Rao, DCCB chairman Bhaskar Reddy, RDOs Srinu, Raja Goud, district cooperation officer Vasant, district transport officer Vani, Tahsildars and others were present.

Pay attention to health, judge tells employees

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Telangana High Court judge P Naveen Rao (administrative judge) has called upon one and all to pay attention to their health under the prevailing situation.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the health camp for the law department

personnel held on the premises of the district court here on Saturday under the aegis of district judge Nandikonda Narsing Rao. District judge said that the medical camp was held under the joint aegis of the Hanumakonda district medical and health department, Indian Medical Association, MGM Hospital and Department of Drugs. Naveen Rao expressed concern over the employee of the legal department, out of work pressure, have not been paying adequate attention to their health. He advised them to observe health principles and protect their health. The battery of tests was run to check blood, BP, diabetes, thyroid, allergy, asthma, dental, skin ailments, epilepsy, and a Rapid Antigen test was done to diagnose Covid-19 among the patients. Vaccines were administered for the prevention of Covid at the medical camp.



Will not allow encroachment of even an inch of land :JAC

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

The joint action committee of the students' union on Saturday threatened the vested interests of dire consequences for trying to encroach the 8.25 acres sports grounds of the Government Degree College with the help of the fake certificates. Leaders of the JAC have warned the land grabbers to get away from the college, otherwise, they would have to face stiff resistance from the students.

JAC leaders Balu, Lakshman Yadav, Nagaraju, and Stalin alleged on Saturday inspected the college lands and said that the students have been agitating for the past 15 years to prevent encroachment of the college lands. They alleged that some vested interests obtained a passbook for the land registered in the name of the college with the help of the forged documents. They said that a case with the court to claim the college land, the JAC leaders said

demanding the encroachers to withdraw the case. They vowed not to allow encroachment of even an inch of the college land however big maybe the politicians who have been supporting the encroachers. The responsibility to protect the land vests with everyone in Kamareddy. Because of the inefficiency of the politicians here, the college lands are being subjected to encroachment. Attempts to grab lands of educational institutions are taking place, as the educational institutions have kept the lands vacant. The JAC leaders wanted them to set up new

educational institutions and hostels to rule out any scope for the encroachment. TNSF state secretary Balu, Telangana Jana Samiti in-charge Lakshman Yadav, BDSF district president Stalin, BC students' association district president Neela Nagaraju, BC youth association district president C Swamy, and others were present.

Maintain fitness levels, police personnel told

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

Godavarikhani sub-divisional civil and armed reserve police personnel performed the weekly parade on Friday. Officer on Special Duty Sarat Chandra Pawar received the guard of honor presented by the police.

He also witnessed armed drills, foot drills and lathi drills, and personal drill. He said the armed drill presents an opportunity to the policemen and offers to ventilate their fitness-related problems and also other personal problems. Also, the policemen and officers would be able to communicate with their bosses the problems and other occupational hazards they face while discharging their duty.

He advised the policemen and officers not to get addicted to vices. The police should



have good living standards. The parade presents an opportunity for them to lodge complaints against their superiors if the behavior of the officials is objectionable, he said asking the police to discharge their duty with discipline. If the police discharge their duties with discipline, the officials will support them, he said. He explained the police personnel's do's and don'ts of their profession. He asked the police

personnel to work out during their leisure time. Good health prevents the police from falling sick, he said advising them to maintain their fitness levels always. He called upon the police personnel to undergo regular health checkups. Work out should be a part of their life, he said. Armed Reserve ACP Sundar Rao, RIs Madhukar, Sridhar, Vishnu Prasad, Cls, Sis and RSIs and others took part in the parade.

'Make Medaram festival flawless'

PNS ■ MULUGU

District Superintendent of Police Dr. Sangram Singh G. Patil on Saturday wanted the police authorities to focus on the prevention of traffic jams and making good use of the parking sites. Reviewing the security arrangements for the next year's Medram festival at the ITDA guest house here, he asked the police personnel not to repeat the mistakes that crept while beefing up security for the festival last time. He divided roles and responsibilities among the police officials pertaining to traffic clearance, parking places, beefing up security, accommodation, and food for the police personnel. He also spoke about precautions to be taken while bringing the forest deities of Sammakka and Saralamma onto the ele-

vated platforms and bidding good bye to them at the end of the festival. He appealed to all authorities to regard the festival as their own festival and make it a grand success. In case of any problems, they should immediately alert the senior officers, he said. He asked the police to ensure that there are no untoward incidents taking place in the festival with the coordination of other government departments. Mulugu ASP Potaraju Sai Chaitanya said that Mulugu district police would be employed at the parking places on Sundays and Wednesdays when there would be heavy rush of devotees. Yeturu Nagaram ASP Goush Alam, SB DSP Rehaman, DSP Devender Reddy, Kataram DSP Bonala Kishan, SB inspector Sarla Raju, CCS inspector Mohan and others took part in the meeting.

Prioritise differently abled in NREGS works: DC

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Additional Collector Tejas Nandlal Pawar has hinted at giving priority to differently-abled in all aspects under the NREGS and they will be able to receive wages on a par with the able-bodied even though they perform 30 percent less work. However, he said that the differently-abled persons would be provided 150 days of work in a

year as against 100 days for the able-bodied persons.

Differently-abled workers will get an additional Rs 10 as wages to attend their work in a radius of five km. Moreover, works would be provided to them at their choicest place, he said.

He was addressing the physically challenged NREGS workers in a meeting held here on Friday as a prelude to the International Day of Persons

with Disabilities celebrated annually on Dec 3. He spoke on the NREGS, Social Welfare department's activities and amenities provided by the various government departments, amenities, and other related issues. He also spoke about pensions for them and Sadaram certificates.

He assured them to provide basic amenities at NREGS workplaces. He suggested to author-

ities to constitute Shram Sakti groups with unemployed physically challenged and give them job cards.

In all, 12,800 physically challenged get pensions in the district. Of them, 6300 are women, he added. About Sundaram health camps, he advised the physically challenged to book slots in advance and get their certificates.

Besides providing employ-

ment and livelihood to the physically challenged, the district welfare department also arranges calipers, hearing aids. He asked various educational institutions to take steps for building ramps for easy navigation of the physically challenged. He presented merit certificates to three physically challenged workers for their increased work output, compared to others.

Blind to aid appeals of school for the blind !

The blind couple, who run the school plunges into debt for lack of aid from govts

A. SESHACHARYULU
■ NALGONDA

Governments day in and day out speak of the welfare of the divyangas and vow to come to their rescue so that they sustain themselves on their own. But the talk of rendering help to such people, it seems, stops at giving assurances. But there is no dearth of people in society who take up the cause and come forward to the help of such people. With an intention to help blind students to come up in their lives and to provide education to them a blind couple set up a school for the blind about 25 years ago and has been running it on their own but for the last two years, it has become impossible for them to run it due to lack of help from the governments at the Centre and in the state. Now the school has plunged into debt, leaving students starving and deprived of education.

The central government



has failed to provide funds to the school under the Dean Dayal Disability Rehabilitation Scheme for the past two financial years.

In this background, to run the school has become financially burdensome and the couple has been unable to pay salaries to the staff. The Deendayal Disability Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS Scheme) aims to create an environment of equal opportunities, equality, social justice, and empowerment of

persons with disabilities to promote voluntary action for the disabled.

It is a centrally funded scheme provided by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. All registered companies or organizations are eligible to avail of the scheme. Under this scheme, the Central Government provides Rs. 2000 are being sanctioned to each student.

The central government also provides funds in two phases every year. But the



government did not release funds in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial years.

Blind School organizers submit all utilization certificates and other required documents to the government every year.

But so far there has been no response from the central government. The order comes as the School for the Blind, run by the Development and Welfare Association of the Blind, getting an amount of interest from private financiers as it

becomes a burden to school organizers. The school currently has 80 students and has separate facilities for boys and girls.

School organizer Ponugoti Chokka Rao told 'the Pioneer' that if the central government provides funds to the school in a timely manner they will run the school without any financial problem.

He said as there is a condition for the blind to complete education up to 10th class, if proper facilities are provided to them they will definitely

achieve the target and adding that those students who have 75 percent attendance in school should be given Asara pension and if this provision is made, everyone will be able to study. He said that there was no need for special colleges and universities for the blind and urged the governments to set up integrated schools and provide computer education.

The Central Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment Director directed the Telangana state government to appoint an Independent State Commissioner as per RPwD Act 2016 but no action has been taken on this as yet. Chokka Rao believes that appointing a disabled person or a blind person as a commissioner it will help them a lot as he himself will know what are the real problems of blind people and will be able to solve their problems.

TNGOs' executive proposes house-sites for all employees

PNS ■ MEDAK

TNGOs' district president Donta Narender has said that the association works always for the welfare of the employees. Addressing the association executive body meeting held at the local TNGO Bhavan on Saturday, he said the government servants act as a bridge between the rulers and the ruled helps take the government schemes to the people.

The government servants won the appreciation of their superiors and also the people in the process. He described their services are evergreen in the public domain. The services of the medical and health staff, sanitation workers, the police

have been unparalleled. The TNGOs' association takes upon itself the responsibility to get the employees just demands through the government.

The meeting approved resolutions, moved by the association district secretary, like conducting elections after conducting enrolment drive for the various department for a, collection of advertisements for the 2022 diary, take steps to get house-sites for the employees through mutually-aided cooperative society (MACS). Assistant chairman MD Sadhik Ali, treasurer B Ramesh, vice-chairperson G Anuradha and other leaders of the association took part in the meeting.



Opposition unity at stake as Cong, TMC cross swords over leadership

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The opposition unity to fight the BJP seems to have run into rough weather as the TMC and the Congress are at daggers drawn over the recent instances of "poaching" by the Mamata Banerjee-led camp, with the grand old party finding itself in a tight spot.

Despite a show of bonhomie during the August 20 meeting convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the camaraderie fizzed out as the TMC, which is taking long strides to expand its footprint across the country, left no chance to vilify the party for its alleged failure to take on the saffron camp.

According to sources in the TMC, party supremo Mamata Banerjee, who has emerged as the doughtiest opposition face after winning one of the toughest elections of her career, apparently seeks to take up a larger role in national politics, possibly of the leader of the opposition coalition, a position



held by the Congress since the BJP stormed to power in 2014.

Lashing out at the ruling camp in Bengal, Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, Adhir Chowdhury, said, "I have been stating this from the very beginning that Mamata Banerjee is the trojan horse of the BJP.

TMC's activities indicate that her main aim is to weaken the Congress and help the BJP. But mind you, no one has

ever succeeded and no one will ever succeed in wiping out the Congress."

The issue of the opposition leadership and TMC's zealous efforts to establish its presence nationally, even if that happened at the expense of the Congress, seems to have thrown a spanner in the process of building a united opposition front.

According to sources in the TMC, assertions by a section of

TMC 'disinterested' to coordinate with Cong in winter session

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday said it is "disinterested" in coordinating with the Congress during the upcoming winter session of Parliament but maintained that it would cooperate with other opposition camps on various issues concerning people's interest, a party leader said on Saturday. The TMC "most probably will not attend" the

opposition parties' meeting convened by Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge on November 29, he said. The TMC's rebuttal to the Congress came days after Kharge, the leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha, had said the grand old party would coordinate with all opposition camps, including the TMC, during the winter session.

senior Congress leaders like Salman Khurshid that the party is still in a position to win at least 120-130 seats in the next Lok Sabha elections in a direct contest with the saffron camp did not go down well with the Banerjee camp.

Since then, gloves in the opposition camp seem to be coming off, with the two parties firing salvos at each other on multiple occasions, as BJP leaders watched the show,

probably with a chuckle on their faces.

In a deviation from the past, the TMC has decided against engaging in any form of floor coordination with the Congress during the upcoming winter session of Parliament, the sources said.

"The Congress has done nothing to fight the BJP in the last seven years. It is the TMC that put up a battle against the BJP.

Central agencies trying to frame me: Nawab Malik

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik on Saturday claimed that some unidentified persons tried to conduct a recte of his residence in Mumbai and also tried to gather information about himself and his family members. He also alleged that some Central agencies are trying to implicate him in false cases.

Addressing a press conference here, Malik said he will file a formal complaint with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Mumbai police commissioner Hemant Nagrale in this regard.

"I have proof that my house and my family members are being watched. When I was in Dubai last week, two persons with a camera tried to conduct a recte of my residence. They were trying to collect information about my home, schools, office, grandchild-

dren. When they were stopped by some people and questioned, they fled," Malik alleged.

He also claimed that one of the two persons writes against him on Koo handle.

Malik, also a spokesperson of the Nationalist Congress Party, further claimed that some officers from Central investigating agencies were preparing a Whatsapp draft of a complaint against him to be sent through email.

"I have proof of Whatsapp chats about this. If Central agencies are planning to lodge false cases against ministers then this is a serious matter and it will not be tolerated," he said.

Malik has been targetting the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and its Mumbai zonal director Sameer Wankhede after the anti-drugs agency raided a cruise ship and claimed to have recovered some contrabands last month.

Arrest warrant against ex-minister, two others in royal property case

PNS ■ KOTA(RAJ)

A chief judicial magistrate court issued an arrest warrant against former Union minister and Congress leader Jitendra Singh of Alwar and two others for allegedly cheating and forging a trust deed to take over the properties of Bundi's erstwhile royal family.

Police said the arrest warrant against Jitendra, his father-in-law Bijendra Singh and former zila pramukh of Bundi Shrinath Singh Hada was issued on November 18.

The court also ordered the police to arrest the trio and produce them before it on January 6, 2022.

In December 2017, the Bundi city police had registered a case against Jitendra and the two others under IPC sections 420 (cheating), 467 (forgery), 468 (forgery for the purpose of cheating), 471 (using a forged document as genuine) and 120 (B) (crimi-

nal conspiracy) based on a complaint lodged by Avinash Kumar Chandna, who claimed to be a friend of Ranjeet Singh, son of the erstwhile royal family's last king Bahadur Singh.

Jitendra Singh was Ranjeet Singh's nephew. Chandna had alleged that the former minister, along with the two other men, had hatched a conspiracy to take over the properties belonging to Ranjeet, who did not have a child, by forging his signature on a trust deed back-dating it to May 2008.

Chandna claimed that Ranjeet was his friend and had stayed with him in his Delhi house till his last breath in 2010 and that the royal family scion had transferred all the property to him in 2009.

Chandna alleged that

Jitendra set up Kul Devi Ashapura Mataji Trust and fraudulently routed all of Ranjeet's properties to himself through the trust.

The court, while issuing the arrest warrant, said Jitendra and the two others tried to deceive the court by submitting fake trust deed to gain unfair benefit.

The court also observed that Jitendra did not provide the original copy of the trust deed to the investigating officer, instead furnished a fabricated report issued by a private forensic laboratory.

Based on this report submitted by Jitendra, the Bundi city police had filed a Final Report on the case.

Chandna, however, moved the court challenging it.



Centre agrees to farmers' demand on stubble burning

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Appealing protesting farmers to end their agitation, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday said the Centre has agreed to their demand of decriminalising stubble burning.

Tomar, in an official statement, said the other demand of farmers was to have a discussion on the minimum support price (MSP) and crop diversification. This demand will also be fulfilled with the setting up of a panel as announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 19 on the day of Gurupurab.

"The farmers' demand was to decriminalise stubble burning. The Government of India has agreed to this demand," the minister said. With regard to withdrawal of cases against farmers during the agitation, Tomar said this is in the domain of the state governments.

"Looking at the severity of the cases, the state governments have to take a call and the issue of compensation is

Govt to introduce bill in Lok Sabha to repeal contentious farm laws

New delhi: To repeal the three contentious farm laws, the government on Monday will introduce in Lok Sabha a new bill, which states that though "only a small group of farmers are protesting" against these legislations, the need of the hour is to take along everyone for inclusive growth. The bill has been listed for introduction and passage in Lok Sabha on the first day of the Winter Session of

Parliament on Monday. The bill was passed by the Union Cabinet after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an announcement that all three farm laws will be repealed in the Winter Session. The bill will be introduced by the Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar in the house. The ruling BJP and main opposition party Congress have issued whips to their MPs to be present on the day.

also to be decided by them," he said, adding that every state will decide as per their state legislations.

Stating that there is no justification for the continuation of the agitation after the government announced repeal of the three farm laws, Tomar said: "Therefore, I appeal to all farmers organisations to end the protest ethically and show their big heart. They should return to their respec-

tive homes."

The minister said the protesting farmers' had initially demanded repeal of the three farm laws, which the government agreed to keeping their interest in mind.

The Cabinet has approved a bill to repeal the three farm laws, which will be introduced in the beginning of the coming session of Parliament starting November 29, he said.

BSF, BGB to check transborder crimes

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh have decided to enhance cooperation to check transboundary crimes and better management of the international boundary, according to a BSF statement.

The decision was taken in a conference of IGs of the Border Security Force and Region Commanders of the Border Guard Bangladesh, it said. "Both the border guarding forces decided further to enhance sharing of information and cooperation in all fields to ensure an effective border management system to fight the menace of transborder crimes, smuggling of drugs etc," the BSF said in the statement.

The four-day border coordination programme of the BSF and the BGB concluded here on Friday.

INDIA CORNER

Army personnel booked for drugging, raping Mathura girl



An Army personnel has been booked on charges of drugging and raping a 21-year-old woman, police here said on Saturday. The accused, Tejveer, was arrested on Wednesday and was booked for raping a woman he befriended through social media. On Saturday, he was slapped with a few more charges, including section 376 D (rape by more than one person) and 328 (drugging a person) of the Indian Penal Code, Superintendent of Police (SP) rural Srish Chandra said. He said a process to book them under Gangster Act has also been started. The officer said that since the initial FIR was registered by the brother of the woman, it had a few shortcomings. However, on the basis of the woman's statement the accused was charged with section 161, 164, 376D, and 328 of the IPC, he said.

Uphaar fire: Court reserves order on Ansals' jail terms



ADelhi court on Saturday reserved for December 3 its order on whether to suspend the seven-year jail terms awarded to real estate barons Sushil and Gopal Ansal for tampering with evidence in the 1997 case of Uphaar cinema fire, which had claimed 59 lives. Additional Sessions Judge Anil Antil reserved the order on appeals filed by the Ansals against their conviction and jail terms by a magisterial court. Besides challenging their conviction and punishment, the Ansals had urged the sessions court to suspend their jail terms till the appeal is decided.

NIA carries out search in mobile phone shop



The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday carried out a search in a mobile phone shop here as part of its probe into a case related to a training camp conducted by the CPI (Maoists) in Nilambur forest area in Kerala five years ago, police said. A team from Kochi searched the shop near

Vellalore and questioned the owner in connection with SIM cards which had been used by some people reportedly involved in the camp cases, they said. NIA had carried out searches at the residences of one Danish and Dinesh in the city and Santhosh Kumar at Angalakurichi in the rural limits a few months ago. Both are among the 19 accused against whom NIA had registered the case in connection with the seven day camp held from August 23 in 2016 at Nilambur, police said.

Situation must be conducive to implement laws: Rijiju



One cannot be in a situation where it becomes difficult to implement laws passed by the legislature and verdicts delivered by the judiciary, Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said here on Saturday. At times, in a bid to seek their rights, people forget about the rights of others as well as their own duties, he said, addressing the concluding session of the two-day Constitution Day programme organised by the Supreme Court. There is a need to find a balance between fundamental rights and fundamental duties, the minister added. He noted that bills passed by Parliament and state legislatures, and verdicts delivered by the Supreme Court are the laws of the land. "Aisi naubat hum kaise dekh sakte hain ki Supreme Court ya high court, assembly ya Parliament kanoon parit kar de, phir bhi laagu karne mein agar musibat hota hai, toh hum sab ko sochna hoga," Rijiju said.

Free speech even if not in line with majority: HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Free speech is not to be exercised only if it falls in line with the majoritarian view and right to dissent is the essence of a vibrant democracy, the Delhi High Court has said while dismissing a plea to stop the publication, circulation and sale of Congress leader Salman Khurshid's new book.

Justice Yashwant Varma, who was dealing with the plea which claimed the book "Sunrise Over Ayodhya: Nationhood In Our Times" "impinges upon the faith of others", said that rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including free speech, cannot be restricted or denied on perceived apprehension of being unpalatable and a democracy governed by the rule of law would be placed in serious peril if creative voices were stifled or intellectual freedom is suppressed.



In his six-page order, the judge quoted Voltaire, "While I wholly disagree of what you say, I will defend to the death your right to say it" and said that free speech "must be zealously protected" unless the work conclusively falls foul of the constitutional or statutory restrictions.

"The right to dissent or to have and express a contrarian view with respect to current affairs or historical events are the essence of a

vibrant democracy. That fundamental and precious right guaranteed by our Constitution can neither be restricted nor denied merely on the perceived apprehension of the view being unpalatable or disagreeable to some. The freedom to freely express ideas and opinions cannot be permitted to be overshadowed by the ominous cloud of being non-conformist," the court said in its order passed on November

25.

"The freedom to freely express ideas and opinions cannot be permitted to be overshadowed by the ominous cloud of being non-conformist," it added.

The court noted that in the present case, the book in its entirety was not even placed before the court for its consideration and the entire case rested solely on certain extracts appearing in one of the chapters.

In the petition, the petitioner had claimed that certain excerpts from the book were "agitating the Hindu community" while threatening the security, peace and harmony of the nation.

Counsel for the petitioner had contended that the book, in its chapter called 'The Saffron Sky', compared Hindutva to radical groups like ISIS and Boko Haram, which could harm public peace.

Reduce carbon footprint: Vice-Prez

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu expressed concern on Saturday over the deteriorating air quality in the major cities of the country, especially during winters, and urged people to reduce their carbon footprint to the extent possible.

He also emphasised the need to set up good healthcare facilities in rural areas and urged the private sector to supplement the government's efforts in this regard by opening satellite centres of their urban facilities.

Virtually addressing an event on interventional pulmonology from the Upa-Rashtapati Nivas, Naidu pointed to climate

change and vehicular pollution as important contributing factors for the deteriorating air quality, an official statement from the Vice President's Secretariat said.

He stressed the need for a serious rethink on people's approach towards development from a sustainability standpoint. He also called upon people to evaluate their lifestyle and try to reduce their carbon footprint to the extent possible.

Observing the challenge of an increasing number of non-communicable diseases, including respiratory disorders, in the country, the vice president advised the youngsters to adopt a healthy and disciplined lifestyle.

Mantras for positive ageing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A new anthology features 50 stories of eminent people productive beyond the age of 75 from all walks of life - celebrities, doctors, artistes, lawyers, and social activists.

"Mantras for Positive Ageing" ponders upon the belief that the post-pandemic world needs the experience of these people and asks its readers: "As you grow older, would you be interested in remaining optimistic, youthful, and energetic?"

Among those featured are politicians Karan Singh, Margaret Alva and Mani Shankar Aiyar, gender economist Devaki Jain, lawyer Fali S Nariman, actor Sushma Seth and activists Syeda Hameed, Subhashini Ali, Sunderlal



Bahuguna, Kamla Bhasin and Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee.

The book, published by Pippa Rann Books & Media, has been brought out to mark NGO Guild of Service's golden jubilee and is co-edited by the organisation's founder chairperson V Mohini Giri, and executive vice-president

Meera Khanna.

It has a foreword by The Dalai Lama. He says many of the contributors to the book are "friends I have known over the years" and "we have grown older together".

He stresses that the most important thing for everyone is to live our lives meaningfully and refrain from causing harm to others.

"All the writers have been in search of change and today we celebrate their strength. Their strength in contributing immensely to society and which has helped them to prove that age is only a number. This anthology reverberates with the message that the sky's the limit and the big canvas of the earth is their playground," says Giri.

For Karan Singh, ageing involves coping with life and coping with death.

"It is our unique privilege as human beings to be aware of these challenges and to mobilise our physiological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual resources to treat ageing as a unique learning experience which helps us on our eternal spiritual quest," he writes.

Centre, States making efforts to remove hurdles in EoDB: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre's effort along with states is to eliminate burdensome compliances, reduce the need for licensing and rationalise the renewal process with an aim to promoting ease of doing business in the country, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday.

He also suggested that the industry and the government together can engage with the judiciary on issues like fast resolution of commercial disputes and capping adjournments.

"Our effort, along with states, is to eliminate burdensome compliances, or reduce the need for licensing, reduce the regulatory burden, permissions, and rationalise the renewal process. But it only happens when we work together. Self regulation and self certification should be the way forward," Goyal said at the CII National Conference on Ease of Doing Business for Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

On fast resolution of commercial disputes, the minister said they are working on making mediation the preferred



mechanism rather than everybody rushing to courts.

He said members of industry body CII can engage some of the top lawyers and help the government understand what is feasible under the realm of India's systems.

"Some policy changes may be required, infra changes may be required, some amendment to laws may be

that, but it needs the buying by the judiciary.

"So may be what we need to do is government and industry both go together and engage with the judiciary....If both of us go together with our difficulties, I can assure you, we will not find the courts or honourable judges lacking in their support...They are in fact wishing to support us," he said.

Further, the minister appealed to the industry to visit the Regulatory Compliance Portal and industrial land bank portal and give their feedback to the government.

"We are looking at the availability of industrial land at affordable prices...Self-regulation must be the norm. I urge industries to suggest ways to move towards transparency and self-regulation," he said.

On licence renewals, the minister said he is now looking at changing the frequency of renewals and approvals.

"In many cases I am completely removing renewals so that all you need to do is update the information suo moto," he said.

Goyal asks gem, jewellery sector to focus on design

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday asked the gem and jewellery industry to focus on areas like design, diversification of export product basket and lab grown diamonds with a view to boost outbound shipments and job creation.

He said that exports from the sector have increased to USD 23 billion during the April-October period of this fiscal.

"Focus on four points in the coming period. Good design should be patented; include new things such as pearls, platinum and fashion jewellery in the exports basket; increase collaboration with businesses of other countries for fusion jewellery; and (focus on) lab grown diamonds," he said at the inauguration ceremony of Gems & Jewellery Manufacturing Association, 2021.

AIRCEL-MAXIS CASE

Court summons P Chidambaram, son Karti on December 20

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Saturday took cognisance of the chargesheets filed by the CBI and the ED against former Union minister P Chidambaram and his son Karti in the Aircel-Maxis case and summoned them on December 20.

Special Judge MK Nagpal passed the order after noting that there was sufficient evidence to summon Chidambaram and the other accused in the corruption and money-laundering cases lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) respectively.

The CBI and ED had earlier informed the court that letters rogatory were sent to the United Kingdom and Singapore, seeking certain information regarding the probe, and there were some developments in that regard.



Letters rogatory are formal communication in writing sent by the court in which action is pending to a foreign court, requesting judicial assistance.

The most common remedies sought by letters rogatory are service of process and the taking of evidence.

While the ED was represented by Special Public Prosecutor N K Matta, advocate Noor Rampal appeared for the CBI. The cases relate to alleged

irregularities in the grant of Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) approval in the Aircel-Maxis deal.

The approval was granted in 2006, when Chidambaram was the Union finance minister.

The CBI and the ED had alleged that as the finance minister, Chidambaram had granted approval to the deal beyond his capacity, benefiting certain persons, and received kickbacks.

MONEY MATTERS

Indusind Bank's Hinduja's welcome RBI move on holding

The Hinduja's, who had earlier applied to RBI seeking to increase their holding in Indusind Bank, on Saturday welcomed the RBI move to allow promoter holding of up to 26 per cent in private sector lenders. IHL Mauritius, the Hinduja's entity which is the promoter of Indusind Bank, had applied to RBI to increase its holding to 26 per cent from the

previous cap of 15 per cent, seeking parity after promoters of rival Kotak Mahindra Bank were given the permission to have their holding at 26 per cent after dragging the RBI to courts. "We believe this measure of increased promoter holding will be of benefit to all stakeholders: the regulator, the banking institution and its clients, particularly at this time when Indian economy is poised for exponential growth," Ashok Hinduja, the chairman of IHL, said. The RBI on Friday came out with revised guidelines on private sector banks, allowing for 26 per cent promoter ownership but did not go ahead with an internal working group's recommendation to allow corporates to promote banks after protests from various quarters including former governors. Hinduja said IHL now awaits operational guidelines as it gives the promoters an opportunity to inject capital to increase stake up to 26 per cent. The increased promoter holding will lead to enhanced financial strength of the bank and its clients will be protected, he added.

Bounce partners with Park+ for battery swap infra

Electric scooter rental startup Bounce, which is set to launch its first e-scooter Infinity early next month, announced on Saturday its collaboration with parking solution platform Park+ for setting up battery swapping infrastructure at more than 3,500 locations, spread over 10 cities. This smart framework will be available at locations like residential societies, key parking spaces, malls, corporate offices, among others, for customers to find the nearest swapping station on their Bounce App or Park+ app, the company said. The swapping stations would work on the lines of a fuel station. Bounce battery swapping stations will have charged and ready-to-go batteries that customers can easily swap with their near-empty batteries in under a minute, it said. With this infrastructure in place, customers wouldn't have to wait for the scooter to charge, be anxious about the range or remember to charge it, Bounce said.



Paytm Q2 loss widens to Rs 473 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Financial technology firm Paytm's parent One 97 Communications on Saturday reported widening of consolidated loss to about Rs 473 crore in the second quarter ended September 2021, mainly on account of increase in payment processing charges.

The company had posted a loss of Rs 436.7 crore in the same quarter a year ago, according to an exchange filing.

Its consolidated total income increased by 49.6 per cent to Rs 1,086.4 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 663.9 crore in the corresponding period of FY'21.

"We have improved our expenses, with continued and increased investments in technology and merchant base expansion. Clearly, the monetisation and focus on non UPI business is showing up in our results and costs. We are committed to innovation and continued investments in India's payment and financial services inclusion," a Paytm spokesperson said.

Paytm expense of payment processing charges increased by 36 per cent to Rs 670 crore



during the reported quarter from Rs 492.4 crore in the same period of 2020-21. The employee benefits expense was up 35 per cent to Rs 386.5 crore from Rs 286.2 crore while company's expense in software, cloud and data centre increased by 56.5 per cent to Rs 112.9 crore from Rs 72.1 crore during the period under review. "Our focus remains on continued customer and merchant expansion, and strengthening our business capabilities to cash in on the opportunities presented by the Indian internet ecosystem and rapid adoption of financial services," the spokesperson said.

Paytm's gross merchandise value (GMV) in the second quarter more than doubled to

Rs 1,95,600 crore from Rs 94,700 crore in the corresponding quarter of 2020-21.

The company's average monthly transacting users (MTU) during the reported quarter increased by 33 per cent on a year-on-year (YOY) basis to 5.74 million, Paytm said in a statement.

The revenue from payments and financial services grew 69 per cent YoY basis to Rs 8,42.6 crore while commerce and cloud services revenue grew by 47 per cent on Y-o-Y basis to Rs 2,43.8 crore, the statement said.

The company said that the number of loans disbursed grew by 714 per cent on YoY to over 28 lakh during the reported quarter.

Govt clarifies Starlink not a licensee; be wary public told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday said Starlink Internet Services is not licensed to offer satellite-based internet services in India, and cautioned the public not to subscribe to the services that are being advertised by the Elon Musk-backed company.

The Telecom Department also asked Starlink to comply with the regulatory framework for offering satellite based communication ser-

vices, and refrain from booking/rendering the satellite internet services in India "with immediate effect".

The Telecom Department, in a statement, said it has come to notice that Starlink has started pre-selling/booking of the satellite based Starlink Internet Services in India.

The same is also evident from the website of Starlink wherein satellite based internet services can be booked by users in Indian territory, the DoT noted.

Cash-strapped Pak to get US\$ 3 bn

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

Cash-strapped Pakistan will soon get USD 3 billion as loan from Saudi Arabia as the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Imran Khan has approved an agreement to keep the amount in the country's central bank, media reports said on Saturday.

The Saudi government had promised to maintain a reserve of USD 3 billion at the State Bank of Pakistan, Geo News reported.

According to the agreement, the aid will remain in the SBP's deposit account for a

year. "The SBP has finalised all arrangements and now everything is in place and the amount of the agreed deposit will be received within the next couple of days," official sources told The News.

The federal Cabinet approved the agreement to keep the USD 3 billion aid from Saudi Arabia in the SBP, the reports quoted an official document as saying.

Pakistan's entire liquid foreign reserves, according to the central bank, stood at USD 22.773 billion as of November



19, according to Geo News.

The numbers indicate that the SBP held USD 16.254 billion in foreign reserves, while

commercial banks kept USD 6.519 billion in net foreign reserves.

The SBP's reserves declined by USD 691 million to USD 16.254 billion during the week ended on November 19, primarily owing to external debt repayments.

According to sources, Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide USD 1.2 billion for the supply of refined Petroleum Oil Lubricants (POL) products, with the Economic Affairs Division (EAD) negotiating on behalf of the Pakistani government.

WTO postpones ministerial meet in Geneva

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has postponed the ministerial level meet, scheduled from November 30 in Geneva, for an indefinite period due to an outbreak of a particularly transmissible strain of the COVID-19 virus.

According to a WTO statement, no date has been set for the rescheduling of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC).

The announcement of travel restrictions and quarantine requirements in Switzerland and many other European countries led to the General Council Chair Ambassador, Dacio Castillo (Honduras) called an emergency meeting on Friday night of all WTO members to inform them of the situation.

"Given these unfortunate developments and the uncertainty that they cause, we see no alternative but to propose to postpone the Ministerial



Conference and reconvene it as soon as possible when conditions allow," Castillo told the General Council, which is the highest decision making body of the WTO after the ministerial conference.

Director-General Ngozi

Okonjo-Iweala said the travel constraints meant that many ministers and senior delegates could not have participated in face-to-face negotiations at the conference.

WTO members were unanimous in their support of the

recommendations from the Director-General and the General Council Chair, and they pledged to continue working to narrow their differences on key topics like the WTO's response to the pandemic and the negotiations to draft rules

slashing harmful fisheries subsidies, the statement said.

The General Council agreed late Friday to postpone the imminent Ministerial Conference after an outbreak of a particularly transmissible strain of the COVID-19 virus led several governments to impose travel restrictions that would have prevented many ministers from reaching Geneva," it said.

This marks the second time that the pandemic has forced a postponement of the 12th Ministerial Conference. The meeting was originally due to take place in June 2020 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

India has been a member of the WTO since 1995.

WTO is a 164-member Geneva-based multilateral organisation which frames rules for global exports and imports besides adjudicating in trade disputes between the member countries.

Mahanadi Coalfields to set up 50-MW solar plant in Odisha

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) will set up a 50-megawatt solar power plant in Odisha's Sambalpur district at a cost of Rs 301.92 crore as part of its goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2024.

This project will reduce carbon dioxide emission by 91,020 tonnes per annum and carbon offsets of around 24,824 tonnes per annum, the public sector unit said in a release on Saturday.

The Sambalpur-headquartered MCL has placed an order with a Chennai-based firm, which will establish this green energy project within 10 months.





the pioneer

agenda



Learning is the most important thing, no matter how you do it, or where you do it, or who you do it with
— Saoirse Ronan

FROM THE INSIDE

Exquisite prose poetry

Anita Nahal probes with the tenacity of a philosopher, existential questions of being & nothingness & of identity & subjectivity

8



Fit for sustainable future

Reduce, reuse, recylce and sustainability are no longer the buzz words. They are our present need and hold key to a better future.

9

The starting point of being an impact champion who sets the organisation on a socially oriented path is your own social consciousness and willingness to drive transformative innovations’ write
PRIYA NAIR RAJEEV & SIMY JOY

TIME TO AWAKEN CORPORATE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS?



The 2019 Global Wealth Databook from Credit Suisse reports that 73 percent of Indians have a net worth of less than \$10,000 (compared to just 19 percent in China), while 2.3 percent have a net worth of over \$1 million. India ranks fourth in the world in ultra-high-net-worth individuals (4,593), making us one of the fastest-growing yet unequal nations.

Private sector corporates often do not see addressing developmental inequities as their problem. Access to food, water, healthcare, and education is commonly understood as ‘poor people’s problems that the government and social sector organisations must solve. No doubt that the poor are the first to be hit, that too very hard, as we saw in a mass exodus of the migrant workers during the first wave of the pandemic. The middle class and above believe that they can access basic necessities by private means and from the private sector. The second wave of the pandemic showed us how false that sense of security is! With the relatively well-off scrambling for medical care, medicines, oxygen, and ventilators, it was apparent that none of us would be spared from the ill effects of our developmental shortcomings.

IMPACT CHAMPIONS: THE FLAGBEARERS OF CHANGE

If we were to survive together, the corporate sector organisations must enact social consciousness. This mindset understands and accepts the interconnectedness of the economic, social, and natural worlds. Socially conscious organisations do not come into existence without socially-conscious managers. We see such managers as ‘Impact Champions’ having the intent and capabilities to help their organisations positively impact the economy and society, and the environment.

Enamored by the glitz of the corporate careers in the liberalized Indian economy, MBA aspirants in the 1990s readily bought into the mantra of ‘profit maximisation’. But many Gen Z and Millennial MBA aspirants are a little more skeptical about whether that is the best way forward, as it has become apparent that their generation would bear the consequences of the social and environmental damage left by the unbridled pursuit of profits. Many of them harbor pro-social inclinations during their student days; however, they are unsure how to take it forward once they start a corporate career. In the ‘big, bad world of corporates’, beating competition and exceeding performance expectations are the basis for career advancement. Hence, they feel that there is little room for social ideals.

Time has never been more right for aspiring Impact Champions in the corporate sector to get into action. The UN has been driving Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs) to tackle the development challenges and climate change. SDGs urge the private sector to collaborate with the civic society and governments, to which influential corporates world over have

responded positively. In the global business circles, ‘Triple Bottom Line,’ with its focus on 3Ps — People, Planet and Profit, is widely discussed as a replacement for the traditional ‘bottomline,’ focusing singularly on ‘profits’. With avid support from the likes of Klaus Schwab (Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum) and Jack Welch (ex-CEO, GE), ‘shareholder capitalism’ has begun to make way for ‘stakeholder capitalism,’ which gives equal priority to the employees, customers, suppliers, and the community.

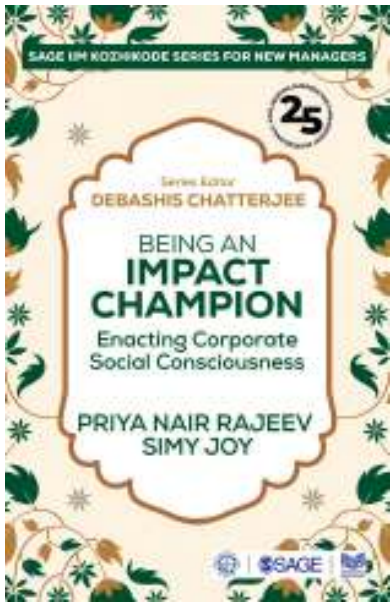
Indian corporates are slowly beginning to catch up with this global trend. However, they are in dire need of managers who can champion this transition.

HOW TO BE AN IMPACT CHAMPION?

● **Self-appoint yourself as an ‘Impact Champion’:** Most corporate jobs would demand you to mind only the impact on profit, not people or the planet. To be an impact champion, you have to self-appoint yourself as one and be sure that you do not leave your social consciousness at home while coming to work. When you operate with a ‘corporate mindset’ in a regular day’s work, you would accept and get on with decisions that look perfectly sensible and acceptable from the corporate and legal standpoints. It takes social consciousness to recognize when stakeholders or environmental interests are being compromised among what looks like business as usual. An impact champion not only recognises issues but also takes personal responsibility for action. New managers aspiring to impact champions may be unsure how to navigate organisational processes and culture in enacting social consciousness. They can find support in like-minded managers and mentors at the Impact Champions Forum, a seedbed for individuals who intend to transform organisations into socially conscious ones at CESI, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode.

P P Sukumaran (ex-HR Head, Murugappa group) had to retrench 200 plant workers post-TQM implementation. A perfectly legal decision, arrived at in consultation with the Union, still left him worried about the ‘social debris’ that this decision would leave — what were the chances that 200 middle-workers in a northern Kerala village find alternate jobs; even with the severance money will their families have financial security in a social setting where alcoholism was rampant. P P Sukumaran was determined to do something about it. However, he was not required either by law or by his organisational mandate to address this.

● **Get partners:** You have to do it yourself, but you cannot do it alone. Irrespective of where you are in the organisational hierarchy, you would need partners. Partners are people inside (sometimes even outside) of the organisation committed to addressing societal or environmental problems that you seek to solve through organisational means. In addition to moral and emotional support (which you will need aplen-



ALTHOUGH THE AMOUNT OF MONEY AND ENERGY INVESTED IN CSR AND CORPORATE SOCIAL INNOVATION IS GOING UP EACH YEAR, ENSURING THAT THEY DELIVER ACTUAL SOCIAL IMPACT SOMEHOW HAS TAKEN A BACKSEAT

ty), partners bring in legitimacy to the cause (especially if they are higher in the hierarchy or hold formal or informal positions of influence), knowledge and skills resources to develop a deeper understanding of the issue from multiple perspectives as well as potential solutions, access to networks and organisational resources, and political backing to elicit favorable decisions.

In the example, P P Sukumaran engaged in active discussions with his contacts within and outside his organisation. One of them directed him to Dr.Nalini Gangadharan, Livelihood Advancement Business School (LABS) of Dr. Reddy’s Foundation. LABS had a skilling model that Sukumaran found appropriate for retraining their redundant workers to suitably place them in alternate jobs or start their ventures. The model was later replicated in Chennai in partnership with other corporates for skilling at-risk urban youth, creating a corporate consortium model for financing such initiatives.

● **Explore Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Most corporates support CSR activities which are perhaps the easiest way to initiate action. If your company already has CSR departments and programs, you can get involved in that. If current CSR activities do not address pressing social issues close to your heart, you can always pioneer new activities. Given that CSR has been mandated by law since 2013 and many companies are struggling to identify worthwhile projects, you may not find it too hard to get buy-in for your ideas.

You can implement them through any of these four different formats:(a) as a foundation, otherwise known as a Section 8 company(e.g., Infosys Foundation); (b) in partnership with NGOs, trusts, or registered societies with a proven track record (e.g., ITC and Pratham working together in the Reach India Plus initiative); (c) in partnership with other companies (e.g., Mphasis and Uber launched Uber Assist and Uber Access that retro-fitted vehicles to help Persons with Disabilities as their joint CSR initiative); and (d) following an employee volunteer model (e.g., Calpine Technologies runs Engage — their CSR program that builds leadership skills in school children through football with the help of employee volunteers).

● **Pursue Corporate Social Innovation (CSI):** Business models can generate societal benefits by changing their perspective (e.g., including marginalized groups in the supply chain, new products for the old and disabled). As an impact champion, you can tweak the current models in innovative ways that generate social and/or environmental impact while serving corporate interests.

For example, ITC launched ‘e-Choupal,’ one of the most extensive Internet-based interventions in rural India, enhancing earnings and transforming the livelihoods of over 4 million farmers in over 35000 villages through 6100 kiosks across ten states. e-Choupal deploys information technology to virtually cluster all the value chain participants and vertically integrate various actors in the agriculture supply

chain. Village internet kiosks set up to access information are managed by farmers, who get information on the weather, market prices,scientific farm practices, and risk management in their mother tongue. They can use the kiosks to purchase farm inputs and get them at their doorstep. Real-time information has made it possible for farmers to make better decisions aligned with market demand, significantly reducing transaction costs.

● **Track ‘Impact’:** Although the amount of money and energy invested in CSR and Corporate Social Innovation is going up each year, ensuring that they deliver actual social impact somehow has taken a backseat. Even after introducing mandatory reporting of impact, most companies focus on the inputs (e.g., amounts spent) or outputs (e.g., the number of rooms built in a rural hospital, pieces of equipment they bought). Some try to pass on the number of beneficiaries that they have been able to reach as impact. But this is not the same as tracking if and how the initiatives have created tangible differences in the lives of the beneficiaries. Without a robust impact tracking mechanism, attempts to make an impact may not be as effective as you would have imagined.

We conducted an impact assessment for the Vidhyadhan Scholarship program, run by the Sarojini Damodaran Foundation (SDF). Since 1995, SDF Foundation has provided scholarships to academically bright children, primarily from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families who completed high school (class 10 in India) to pursue higher education. Thus far, the program has provided 13,500 scholarships, with over 10,000 beneficiaries currently pursuing their higher studies across ten states. The basic premise of any scholarship program is that the monetary support would enable them to build human capital in academic qualifications, which will help them find employment and thus lift them out of poverty. We found that this undeniably was the case for those who were able to find jobs. However, we also found that finding a job and future career progression depended on social capital in terms of networks. It was hard for those who were low on social capital to get jobs. This led to the realisation that in addition to monetary support, the students from disadvantaged backgrounds also would need support to build their social capital through mentoring and networking.

The starting point of being an impact champion who sets the organisation on a socially oriented path is your own social consciousness and willingness to drive transformative innovations. If you ever feel shaken by the scale of what you have to achieve, take a cue from a climber scaling a peak: You need to focus on where to place your next step. Then, step by step, you would reach there.

The writers have recently published Being an Impact Champion: Enacting Corporate Social Consciousness, with SAGE Publications India, under the SAGE IIM-Kozhikode Series for New Managers



Reduce, reuse, recylce and sustainability are no longer the buzz words. They are our present need and hold key to a better future. One company is trying to ensure that we live in a world that is cleaner by recycling plastic and making carpets out of it. SHALINI SAKSENA brings you a report

An alarming research came to light a couple of weeks back. Plastic waste from the COVID-19 weighing 25,900 tonnes, equivalent to more than 2,000 double decker buses, has leaked into the ocean. But what is even worse is that it doesn't end here. At the COP26, there were six facts linking the plastic lifecycle to climate change that must be taken into account. The most immediate being that South Asia is one of the largest generators of plastic waste; the region discards more than 26 million tons of plastics every day! This means that there is immediate need for action and reduce, reuse and recycle is the only way forward. Hence, the under the present situation, the success of any business is dependent on its sustainable development factor. In other words resource conservation protecting the environment is the need of the hour. Manufacturers and producers have to give importance to the sustainability factor while supplying products and services.

One such company that is trying its best to follow eco-friendly model is Carpets Inter. The company that originally started doing business in the 1950s is today recycling plastic to make carpets. From manufacturing all kinds of carpets in 1974 to relocating to Thailand in 2004 and getting acquired in 2017, the company is known for its customisation and innovation.

Richard Morris, global business director, Carpets Inter tells you that since their factory in the green field zone, they have had to be very environmentally conscious from the very beginning.

"Back in the 1990s also, we had adopted measures that were environment friendly. By the 2000s we

had started suing recycled material to manufacture our carpets. Over the years, recycling and sustainability has been a necessity because of the land where we are which has today become a residential area. This means that the factory has to be self-contained and that no waste goes into the landfill. We recycle our water through catchment area. All the wastage is also treated," Morris says.

The shift to sustainable manufacturing has not been as easy task. To run initiative one has to run for long period of time and learn along the way, Morris tells you.

"When it comes to conformity, there is a lot of investment. We are in a commodity-driven market. This means that we have had to keep the prices low. What has happened over the years is that several leading brands have raised their benchmark when it comes to conformity. Ten years back carbon foot print was not a term that was being used. It was all about recycle and reuse. This means that one has to look for recycling material and make a product.

As we started recycling plastic bottles to make carpets, the question staring at us was what happens to the carpets once they are past their shelf life? There is a challenge here. Thailand doesn't allow entry of refuse from another country. We have therefore had to look for ways to repurpose and recycle the product in the countries where we export. The good part is that within the country, we have been able to take back not only our product but our competitors and recycle it to make clean energy," Morris explains.

To manufacture one square metre of carpet, the company uses 55 reused 500 ml plastic bottles. These are either sources from within Thailand or China. To make plas-



tic carpets, the used plastic bottles are melted in a machine. It is then reverted into the pellet form. From the pellets, thin strands like a fishing line is made which is then cut up. This is then needle-punched into a fine felt. This is then lamented onto the carpets forming the base. The recycle plastic is the entire packing system that forms the entire layer under the modular carpet.

"What we using to manufacture the carpet itself are carbon-neutral nylons. We don't manufacture this nylon but source it from very large companies that are themselves recycling plastic like fishing nets. They use the similar process that we do and make filament and spin it into carbon-neutral fibres," Morris tells you.

There are several benefits of

using such carpets. First, they increase the life of the product. Usually, modular carpets come with hard packing because it is cheaper to use it. Today, the idea is to look for packing made from recycled material. The tile is going to be impacted by the foot fall and whatever is placed on top of the modular carpet. But if there is a cushioning, the underfoot impact is

absorbed by what is underneath increasing the longevity. The cushioning packing has other advantages as well. There is cost-saving benefits — from the installation firm to the investor to the manufacturer. There is benefit at the users' end too.

Second, the felt acts as a thermal barrier. It can withstand very high to low temperatures. In other words, if you live in a hot region it

will help to keep the room cooler reducing depending on the air conditioning. In cold climate, it prevents the heat from escaping keeping the room warm. Not only does it reduce the electricity bill but one is also reducing carbon foot print.

The felt also takes care of the accoustics. There are several organisations that are looking to reduce noise pollution. The eco-soft material acts as an accoutic barrier. It will increase the noise reduction by 150 per cent.

"A typical tile is 50x50 cm or 25cmx1m tiles. But we can customise it and manufacture up to 2 metre sq tiles that are 20 cm long. They are rolls of modular tiles. Hence there are several benfits of using ourproduct," Morris says.

In India, the company has its presence is in Gurugram. The focus here is to cater to the hotel and hospitality industry and MNCs. The good part is that the prices are competitive since there are several companies already in the industry.

"While we are aware that our product is expensive, the advantages that our modular carpet has outweigh the slight increase in the price. Our carpets are also aesthetically pleasing and colourful which gives us an edge. Till now we have sold carpets that would fit 25-30 buildings from top to bottom and we are growing steadily in the market," Morris says.

For now, the company is concentrating only on the commercial side of business in India. "Unfortunately, there is no demand at the retail level in the country. This is because of the saturation and hand-knotted carpets have been in the country for centuring. In the retail sector, the company is working through distributors in countries like Australia.

‘WE ARE DOING A LOT BUT UNFORTUNATELY NOT ENOUGH’

SUPRIYA RAMESH speaks with STEFANO FUNARI, an upcycling entrepreneur about climate change, how much we are doing about it and his project where women from Mumbai slums are employed to make products

What exactly is climate change? What is causing it? How is it affecting the planet right now? Climate change refers to all the long-term changes in our climate, including Earth's rising surface temperature, sea level rise, extreme weather, and ocean acidification. The cause of current climate change is largely human activity like burning fossil fuels, natural gas, oil, and coal. Burning these materials releases greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere.

Global warming and climate change are two terms used interchangeably in colloquial language but global warming, which refers to the Earth's rising surface temperature, is just one of the manifestations of climate change.

Climate change is posing a serious threat to human health and putting our lives at risk. The effects of climate change cause less predictable weather patterns and increase the number of natural disasters that occur worldwide, such as hurricanes and wildfires. And it goes beyond that by altering where species live, how they interact, and the timing of biological events, which could fundamentally transform current ecosystems.

While everyone around the world feels the effects of climate change, the most vulnerable are people living in the poorest conditions. "We see this every day in Mumbai, a city which is becoming warmer and facing extreme and unpredictable rainfall," Stefano Funari, an upcycling entrepreneur tells us.

What are we doing about it? "My opinion is that we are doing a lot but unfortunately not enough. This is a challenge of epochal proportions that calls for extraordinary measures from all the major stakeholders, Governments and large corporations in the first place. The long term risk of climate change is bigger than the one posed by COVID-19 but the resources invested are by far not at the same level. Financial interests are still absolutely dictating the agenda and we are running out of time," he adds.

10 years ago, Funari left his job in Europe and moved across the world to the slums of Mumbai. Because he needed purpose. Working in technology was just not cutting it for him. He never looked back and understood from the very beginning that the



only way not to be constantly lost in translation was to rely on a trusted group of local people. "The cultural gap is big and I need a constant dialogue with friends, partners and colleagues to read the situations and make my decisions. My biggest challenge has probably been to create this trusted group," says Funari.

Funari is an upcycling entrepreneur. His 'I was a Sari' project is a Mumbai-meets-Milan fashion label, making bold accessories and ready to wear from pre-loved Indian saris. They work with women from marginalised communities so that they can carve out a better future for themselves. Women and men all over the world are now dressed in saris. Saris in different avatars-re-imagined as loungewear, shoes and bags. "Inspired by the work of Bangladeshi Nobel Laureate and the founder of Grameen Bank, Prof. Yunus, I was a Sari, is implementing a sustainable, eco-friendly model which focuses on a 'triple bottom line' - constantly analysing its social, environmental and financial impact and viability, and understanding the relationship each has with the others," Funari explains.

Upcycling, also known as creative reuse, is the process of transforming by-products, waste materials, useless, or unwanted products into new materials or products perceived to be of greater quality, such as artistic value or environmental value.

"Upcycling can be compared to the Japanese technique of Wabi Sabi - turning something discarded into something valuable and desirable," says Funari. He says that through such a process their goal is to reduce the impact on our planet. But in their case they have a second important goal too. In fact, they employ women from Mumbai slums to make products. And what's beautiful is that these women get upcycled themselves as they transform their lives in so many ways. They start off as unskilled and unemployed and become talented artisans, the designers of their own future.

Talking about the environmental benefits of upcycling, Funari tells us, "In the textile field upcycling replaces the need to produce new fabric by using textile products that already exist. So we save the water and land used for growing materials like cotton. And

we save oil and water used for making synthetic fibres like polyester. All this means a huge reduction in our carbon emissions."

To create desirable and soulful products that empower people and respect our planet, and a platform for sustainable fashion brands that share social and environmental values, Funari set up a social business called 2nd Innings Handicrafts. "The very reason we exist is to empower women from not so privileged backgrounds to become the architects of their future. Business becomes more beautiful when women start thriving," says Funari.

He says that there is a beautiful transformation that takes place — from beneficiaries, these women become artisans as they learn the skill and start transforming saris into contemporary fashion pieces. They work with pre-loved or post-consumer waste and not virgin materials, which helps us reduce our carbon footprint and save gallons of water. Their aim is to work with more women so that they can make a considerable social impact, while they continue to create beautiful products that minimise waste.





Workers' paradise? Portugal's new teleworking law takes flak

Portugal's new law on working from home makes the European Union country sound like a workers' paradise. Companies can't attempt to contact their staff outside working hours. They must help staff pay for their home gas, electric and internet bills. Bosses are forbidden from using digital software to track what

their teleworkers are doing. There's just one problem: the law might not work. Critics say the new rules are half-baked, short on detail and unfeasible. And they may even backfire by making companies reluctant to allow working from home at all. "The law is badly written and doesn't meet anybody's needs,"

says José Pedro Anacoreta, an employment attorney at PLMJ, one of Portugal's main law firms. "It's not good for anyone. ... It doesn't make any sense." In many places around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a prior trend toward the digitalization of work and more flexible work arrange-

ments. Amid such a sudden and massive shift in the employment landscape, governments are scrambling to accommodate working from home in their employment laws. Those efforts are largely still in their infancy. Many Europeans have stopped going into the

office regularly since March last year to help curb the spread of COVID-19. In Europe, unlike in the United States, worker protections are widely regarded as cherished entitlements. Laying off a staff member, for instance, can entail substantial severance pay.

Families stuck in SA after sudden decision to ban flights

Hundreds of foreigners on family or business trips in South Africa desperately tried to get back home on the last available flights as several nations imposed restrictions on travellers due to the discovery of the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 in this country. The UK announced on Thursday that all flights to and from South Africa and five neighbouring countries would be banned from Friday noon following an announcement that the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 had been detected in South Africa. Many other countries followed suit, most of them indicating that only their own citizens would

be allowed back, subject to a quarantine period. In New Delhi, the central government asked all states and union territories to conduct rigorous screening and testing of all international travellers coming from or transiting through South Africa, Hong Kong and Botswana, where a new variant has been detected. According to the government's decision on Friday, airlines will be allowed to operate 50 per cent of their pre-COVID scheduled passenger flights between India and South Africa, Hong Kong and Botswana from December 15. India does not have an air bubble arrangement -- which allows special

passenger flights between two countries amid COVID-related restrictions -- with South Africa, Hong Kong and Botswana. Also, these three countries are classified under the 'at-risk' category by India's ministry of health.



Macao detains Suncity boss over illegal gambling

Macao police on Saturday detained the head of Macao's biggest junket organiser and others after Chinese authorities issued an arrest warrant for them over accusations that they ran an illegal cross-border gambling syndicate. The arrests in the gambling enclave came after prosecutors in Wenzhou, in the eastern province of Zhejiang, on Friday accused Suncity Group CEO Alvin

Chau and another person, Zhang Ningning, of leading cross-border gambling operations and setting up casinos across China. Casinos and most forms of gambling are illegal in mainland China, and Macao is the only Chinese city allowed to operate a casino. Mainland visitors are able to travel to Macao to gamble but are required to obtain a visa. "Based on evidence obtained from previous criminal investigations, the (Macao) police brought the criminal suspect Chau and other persons involved back to the police station for investigation in accordance with the law this morning," Macao's government said in a statement on Saturday. Authorities said they had

been investigating the case since July last year. They said that the gambling syndicate has 199 shareholder representatives, over 12,000 agents that promoted its gambling operations and more than 80,000 gamblers in its network. The syndicate also set up asset management firms to assist gamblers with cross-border fund transfers and to recover debts they owed, authorities said. In 2019, China's official Xinhua news agency accused Suncity of targeting mainland gamblers with online gambling and proxy-betting operations based in Cambodia and the Philippines. Suncity denied the allegations. Authorities said the syndicate "severely damaged

aged the social order of the country" and on Friday urged Chau to turn himself in in exchange for a more lenient punishment. Hong Kong-listed Suncity Group could not be reached for comment by phone and did not immediately reply to email inquiries.



Towering musical theatre master Stephen Sondheim dies at 91

Stephen Sondheim, the songwriter who reshaped the American musical theatre in the second half of the 20th century with his intelligent, intricately rhymed lyrics, his use of evocative melodies and his willingness to tackle unusual subjects, has died. He was 91. Sondheim's death was announced by Rick Miramonte, president of DKC/O&M. Sondheim's Texas-based attorney, Rick Pappas, told The New York Times the composer died

Friday at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut. Sondheim influenced several generations of theatre songwriters, particularly with such landmark musicals as "Company", "Follies" and "Sweeney Todd", which are considered among his best work. His most famous ballad, "Send in the Clowns", has been recorded hundreds of times, including by Frank Sinatra and Judy Collins. The artist refused to repeat himself, finding inspiration for his shows in such diverse

Friday at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut. Sondheim influenced several generations of theatre songwriters, particularly with such landmark musicals as "Company", "Follies" and "Sweeney Todd", which are considered among his best work. His most famous ballad, "Send in the Clowns", has been recorded hundreds of times, including by Frank Sinatra and Judy Collins. The artist refused to repeat himself, finding inspiration for his shows in such diverse

Could we really deflect an asteroid heading for Earth?

A NASA spacecraft the size of a golf cart has been directed to smash into an asteroid, with the intention of knocking it slightly off course.

The test aims to demonstrate our technological readiness in case an actual asteroid threat is detected in the future.

The Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) lifted off aboard a SpaceX rocket from California on November 23, and will arrive at the target asteroid system in September, next year.

The mission will travel to the asteroid Didymos, a member of the Amor group of asteroids. Every 12 hours Didymos is orbited by a mini-moon, or "moonlet", Dimorphos.

This smaller half of the pair will be DART's target.

Are we facing an extinction threat from asteroids?

We've all seen disaster movies in which an asteroid hits Earth, creating an extinction event similar to the one that killed off the dinosaurs millions of years ago. Could that happen now?

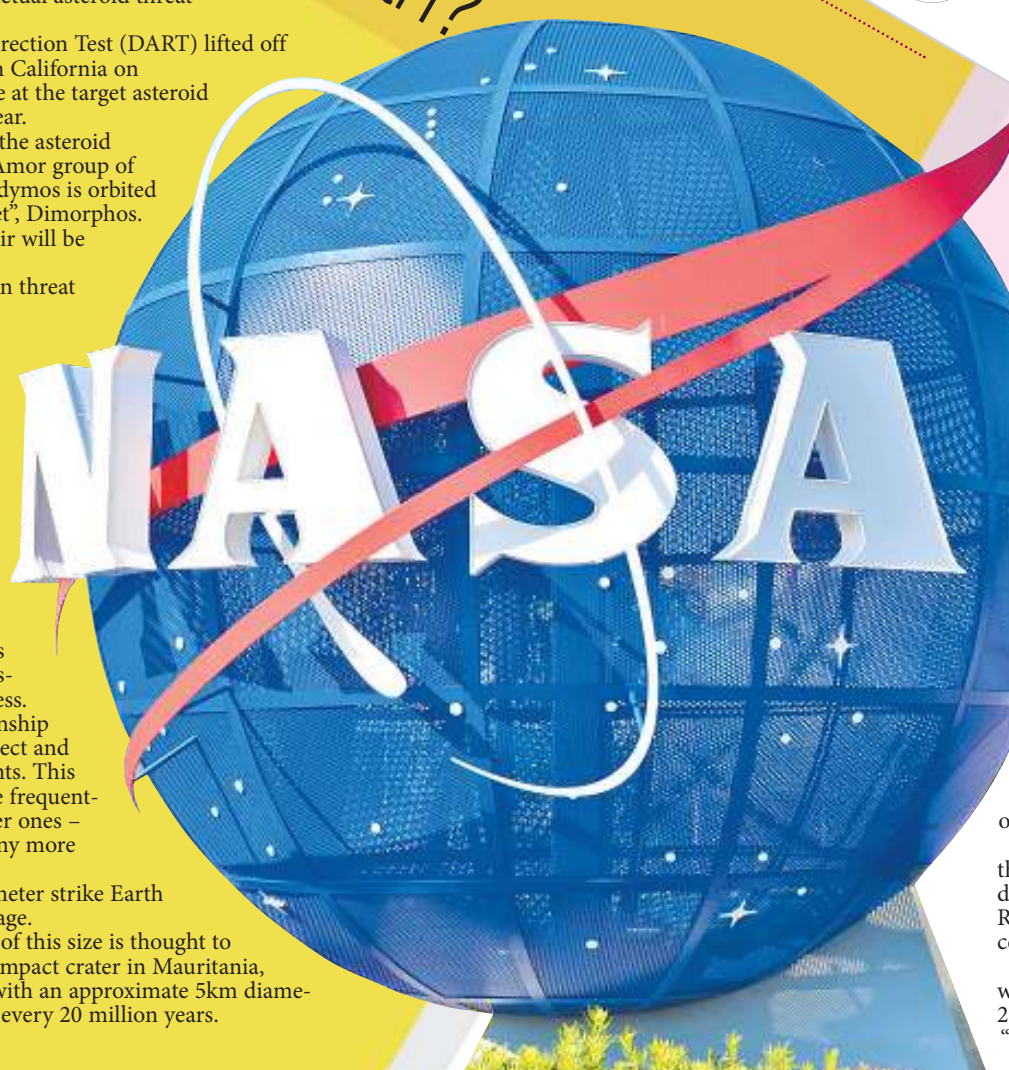
Well, Earth is actually bombarded frequently by small asteroids, ranging from 1-20 metres in diameter.

Almost all asteroids of this size disintegrate in the atmosphere and are usually harmless.

There is an inverse relationship between the size of these objects and the frequency of impact events. This means we get hit much more frequently by small objects than larger ones -- simply because there are many more smaller objects in space.

Asteroids with a 1km diameter strike Earth every 500,000 years, on average.

The most "recent" impact of this size is thought to have formed the Tenoumer impact crater in Mauritania, 20,000 years ago. Asteroids with an approximate 5km diameter impact Earth about once every 20 million years.



The hunt for coronavirus variants: How the new one was found and what we know so far

stating the situation," Professor Semple told the BBC. "Immunity from vaccination is still likely to protect you from severe disease. You might get a snuffle or a headache or a filthy cold but your chance of coming into hospital, or intensive care or sadly dying are greatly diminished by the vaccine and still will be going into the future," he said.

The new Omicron variant was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on Wednesday and has also been identified in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong and Israel.

Countries around the world are currently racing to introduce travel bans and restrictions on southern African countries in an effort to contain Omicron's spread.

Sample said that while it may not be possible to stop the variant coming to the UK, it is still important to delay its arrival.

"If you can slow the virus coming into your country, it gives you more time for your booster campaign to get ahead of it. It also gives the scientists longer to understand more about the virus in case there is anything we really should be worrying about," he said.

Meanwhile, a vaccine expert believes it is "extremely unlikely" that the new Omicron variant will trigger a major new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK.

Professor Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said it is "too early" to be certain whether the new variant will be able to evade current vaccinations, something unlikely to be known for up to three weeks.

But he said that most of the mutations in Omicron are in the same parts of the spike protein as those in the other variants that have emerged.

"At least from a speculative point of view, we have some optimism that the vaccine should still work against a new variant for serious disease, but really we need to wait several weeks to have that confirmed. It's extremely unlikely that a reboot of a pandemic in a vaccinated population like we saw last year is going to happen," said Professor Pollard.

SARS-CoV-2 variant has been identified, known as B.1.1.529.

To help us understand more, The Conversation Africa's Ozayr Patel asked scientists to share what they know.

What's the science behind the search?

Hunting for variants requires a concerted effort. South Africa and the UK were the first big countries to implement nationwide genomic surveillance efforts for SARS-CoV-2 as early as April 2020.

Variant hunting, as exciting as that sounds, is performed through whole genome sequencing of samples that have tested positive for the virus.

This process involves checking every sequence obtained for

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differences compared to what we know is circulating in South Africa and the world.

When we see multiple differences, this immediately raises a red flag and we investigate further to confirm what we've noticed.

Fortunately South Africa is well set up for this.

This is thanks to a central repository of public sector laboratory results at the National Health Laboratory Service, (NGS-SA), good linkages to private laboratories, the Provincial Health Data Centre of the Western Cape Province, and state-of-the-art modelling expertise.

In addition, South Africa has several laboratories that can grow and study the actual virus and discover how far antibodies, formed in response to vaccination or previous infection, are able to neutralise the new virus.

subjects as an Ingmar Bergman movie ("A Little Night Music"), the opening of Japan to the West ("Pacific Overtures"), French painter Georges Seurat ("Sunday in the Park With George"), Grimm's fairy tales ("Into the Woods") and even the killers of American presidents ("Assassins"), among others.

Afghanistan's key Taliban leaders studied at Pak madrassa



Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa, one of Pakistan's largest and oldest seminaries and dubbed as a 'university of jihad' by its critics for helping sow violence across the region for decades, has educated more Taliban leaders than any school in the world and its alumni now hold key positions in Afghanistan, according to a media report.

The seminary in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has had an outside effect in Afghanistan. The seminary's alumni founded the Taliban movement and ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The school has argued that the Taliban should be given the chance to show they have moved beyond their bloody ways since they first ruled Afghanistan two decades ago, The New York Times reported on Friday.

"The world has seen their capabilities to run the country through their victories on both the diplomatic front and on the battlefield," Rashidul Haq Sami, the seminary's vice-chancellor, told the NYT.

Seminary's late chancellor Samiul Haq, who was murdered at his residence in Islamabad in 2018 and was Sami's father, was known as the "father of the Taliban."