

ANALYSIS 7
REPEAL OF FARM LAWS: PM
MODI'S VOLTE-FACE**MONEY 8**
NO PROPOSAL TO RECOGNISE BITCOIN
AS A CURRENCY: FINANCE MINISTER**SPORTS 11**
1ST TEST ENDS
IN DRAW

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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MEHREEN IS
RAW AGENT IN
GHOST?

Page 12

OMICRON RISK VERY HIGH

WHO warns of 'severe consequences' in case of surge

No deaths linked to Omicron till date

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The new Omicron variant of Covid poses a "very high" global risk and could have "severe consequences" where there are surges, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Monday, adding that it is not yet known how contagious and dangerous it is.

The Omicron variant is likely to spread internationally, the WHO said, urging countries to prepare by accelerating vaccinations and put mitigation plans in place

to maintain essential health services.

"Omicron has an unprecedented number of spike mutations, some of which are concerning for their potential impact on the trajectory of the pandemic," WHO said in a statement.

"If another major surge of Covid-19 takes place driven by Omicron, consequences may be severe," said a technical note, adding though that "to date, no deaths linked to Omicron variant have been reported."

"The overall global risk related to the new variant of concern

Omicron is assessed as very high," said the organisation. More research is needed to understand Omicron's potential to escape protection against immunity induced by vaccines and previous infections, said WHO.

Crucial data on Omicron is expected in coming weeks. WHO believes it can affect vaccinated people too. "Covid-19 cases and infections are expected in vaccinated persons, albeit in a small and predictable proportion," it said.

Countries start shutting down borders

Tokyo: Japan said on Monday it would close its borders to foreigners, as the world's third-largest economy joined Israel in taking the toughest measures against the new coronavirus variant Omicron, which also cast a cloud over Australia's re-opening plans. Markets, however, regained some composure as investors await more details of the variant, after sinking last week on fears it could bring fresh curbs, threatening a nascent economic revival from a two-year pandemic. Potentially more contagious than prior variants, Omicron, first identified in South Africa, has been found in Australia, Belgium, Botswana, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, and the Netherlands.

New Covid variant stokes concern but vaccines still most important tool

The Omicron variant carries concerning mutations that may make it more transmissible and allow it to evade immunity, scientists said on Monday, stressing that the one certainty in the uncertainty of the many things unknown is this -- Covid is not a short-term crisis and vaccines are still a critical tool. As the world and India slides into escalated Covid anxiety and the global scientific community grapples with the emergence of a new strain with multiple

mutations, several experts here said current Covid vaccines are likely to be effective against Omicron too. The B.1.1.529 Covid variant, first detected in South Africa last week, was designated by the World Health Organisation as a Variant of Concern (VOC), the health body's top category for worrying coronavirus variants. Public policy expert Chandrakant Lahariya noted that Omicron has around 50 mutations. Of these, 32 are in spike proteins, which the virus uses to enter the human cells, and 10 are mutations of high relevance. These include H655Y, N679K and P681H mutations which potentially increase the transmissibility.

OMICRON SYMPTOMS

1. Patients infected with this strain show extreme tiredness. This is not limited to any age group. Young patients also show extreme tiredness.
2. There is no major drop in oxygen saturation levels.
3. Patients infected with Omicron strain have not reported loss of taste or smell.
4. Patients of Omicron variant have, however, complained of "scratchy throat"
5. Most patients of Omicron strain have recovered without hospitalisation, say doctors.

'No case of new 'Omicron' variant of Covid detected

No case of the new Omicron variant of coronavirus has been detected in India yet, a senior government official said on Monday. The B.1.1.529 Covid variant or Omicron, first detected in South Africa last week, was designated by the World Health Organisation as a 'variant of concern', the health body's top category for worrying coronavirus variants. A senior official said no case of the new Omicron variant has been detected in India yet

and Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia INSACOG is closely monitoring the situation and expediting the results of genomic analysis of positive samples of international travellers. Amid the mounting concerns over 'Omicron' spreading to many countries, the Centre on Sunday introduced stricter guidelines for people travelling from or transiting through 'at-risk' countries.

Expedite vax drive: Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has directed the officials to expedite the vaccination process and complete it by fixing targets. He held a review meeting at the Camp Office here on Monday on the prevailing COVID situation in wake of the new variant Omicron.

He instructed the officials to start a drive on using masks, and ensure no mass gatherings and added to continue door-to-door fever survey and vaccination. He instructed the officials to check the facilities in the hospitals used to treat COVID patients in the past and also to ensure facilities in empaneled hospitals. He directed the officials to inspect quarantine centers, covid care centers and covid call centers once again. The Chief Minister directed the officials to keep a target to complete two crore doses of vaccination by end of December and said to focus on the districts where the process is slow.

CBI pressured me to make false statement: Ex-CI of Pulivendula

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Even as the fingers are being pointed at the immediate family members of former Kadapa MP, YS Vivekananda Reddy for his murder, doubts are now being raised against the CBI that is investigating the sensational murder that had taken place on the intervening night of March 14 and 15, in 2019 just before the polls.

In a letter purportedly written by then Pulivendula town Circle Inspector J Sankaraiah to Kadapa Superintendent of Police KKN Anburajan in October, he had charged CBI SP Ram Singh with pressuring him to turn approver and also make a statement under Section 164 CRPC against the facts.

In the letter, seen by The Pioneer, Sankaraih said that he had met Ram Singh on August 10, 2021, at the R & B guest house in Pulivendula as part of the ongoing investigation into the murder. Sankaraiah also said that Ram Singh told him 'You deserve hanging' and should be given third-degree treatment so that he gives a statement as the CBI senior official



desires.

Sankaraiah wrote the letter to the Kadapa SP on October 7. The CI who was the first police official to reach the residence of Vivekananda Reddy in Pulivendula on March 15 at 7:25 am, said that he was also asked by the CBI senior official to depose falsely that he was threatened by YSRCP leader Devireddy Sankar Reddy who is now in the police custody.

Man fears threat to life from YS Sunita, gets police protection

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/ANANTAPUR

In a shocking revelation, the SP of Anantapur has received a complaint from a person named Gangadhar Reddy, claiming that an SP cadre officer of CBI and daughter of YS Vivekananda Reddy, YS Sunita are coercing and threatening Gangadhar to confess to the murder of YS Vivekananda Reddy and implicate MP YS Avinash Reddy and others as the masterminds behind the same, by misleading the CBI court with a false testimony.

While speaking to the media, post lodging the complaint, Gangadhar said, "A month ago, two officers of the CBI, including an SP level officer, came to my house and asked me to testify in the Vivekananda Reddy murder case. When I told them that I am no way related to what happened, they pressurised and threatened me to testify before the court that I committed the murder, in

return for 10 crore given by YS Avinash Reddy, Bhaskar Reddy and Devireddy Shankar Reddy."

The complainant declared that he feels that YS Sunita and her followers pose a threat to his life and requested the SP of Anantapur to provide adequate security. The CBI officer and YS Sunita approached, threatened and tried coercing him to testify that YS Avinash Reddy, Bhaskar Reddy and Devireddy Shankar Reddy were involved in the murder of YS Vivekananda Reddy and that he was hired by them to execute the murder.

This raises multiple questions on the fairness of the investigation being carried out by the CBI. A person who claims to have nothing to do with the murder being approached to falsely testify before the court and implicate innocent individuals hints at a conspiracy of the highest level, it proven right.

Be compassionate while assessing rain damage, CM urges Central team

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has urged the Central team to be more compassionate and humanitarian in the entire approach of assessing the damage.

The inter-ministerial Central team, constituted to gauge the extent of flood damage in Andhra Pradesh, met Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at the camp office and lauded the Chief Minister for the effective steps taken in flood-hit areas.

He said there is no escalation in the estimates and added that there was a robust model at the grass roots level for the estimation of flood losses. RBKs are present in

every village, e-cropping is completed for every crop, social audit is also done and physical and digital receipts for e-cropping were given to every farmer and added that the damage is estimated at village level. The Chief Minister said the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) has been depleted for COVID containment measures and urged the Central team for replenishment of ad hoc funds to SDRE.

NDMA Advisor
lauds AP govt's
effortsTODAY
ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Kartik & Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Bhadashi 26:13

Nakshatram : Hada 20:34

Rahukalam : 2:50 pm - 4:13 pm

Yamagandam : 9:19 am - 10:41 am

Varjyam : 3:58 am - 5:27 am

Gulika : 12:04 pm - 1:27 pm

Amritakalam : 2:51 pm - 4:22 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:42 am - 12:26 pm

VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 27 °C

Humidity: 68%

Sunrise: 06:19 AM

Sunset: 05:33 PM

Updated NOVEMBER 29, 2021 5:00 PM

Dollar Seshadri no more

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Senior priest and Officer on Special Duty (OSD) of Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple, Tirumala, Dollar Seshadri died after he suffered a massive cardiac arrest here on Monday. He was 74. Representing TTD, Dollar Seshadri arrived in Visakhapatnam to participate in

the Karthika Deepotsavam, a spiritual event, Sunday. He stayed at TTD Kalyanamandapam located at MVP Colony in the city. He was also present in the 'Pavalimpu Seva' of Lord Venkateswara Swamy in the Kalyana Mandapam Sunday night. After having dinner, he went to sleep.



'3 capitals' cases adjourned to Dec 27

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Amaravati farmers have refused to withdraw their petitions filed against the formation of three capitals for Andhra Pradesh by the ruling YSRCP government. Shyam Diwan and Suresh, counsel for the petitioners, told the High Court division bench headed by Chief Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra that the State government, while repealing the

'three capitals act', also said it stood by its decision to create three capitals.

The petitioners' advocates argued that Amaravati should be the only capital of Andhra Pradesh and that the master plan also mentioned the same. So, the arguments against the three capitals should continue, they said. Meanwhile, the State government's advocates brought to the notice of the High Court that the bills had already been repealed and that the

government filed an affidavit in the High Court in this regard. So, the petitions challenging them would become infructuous.

The High Court, after hearing the arguments from both the petitioners' counsel and the State government advocate for half-an-hour, said a final decision would be taken on the repeal of the three capitals bills after the issuance of the gazette notification.

2 die in noxious gas leak at Vizag pharma city

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a tragic incident, two young men died after reportedly inhaling poisonous gases, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Pharma City in Parswada. The mishap took place at the sewage pump house, in the wee hours of Monday, police sources said.

PARLIAMENT PASSES BILL TO REPEAL THREE CONTENTIOUS FARM LAWS

Parliament on Monday passed The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, to repeal the three contentious agri laws against which farmers have been protesting for over a year, with its passage in Rajya Sabha. Earlier in the day, Lok Sabha also passed the Bill within minutes of its introduction. As soon as Rajya Sabha met in the afternoon, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar introduced The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 shortly. Before the motion was adopted for the passage of the bill, Deputy Chairman Harivansh allowed Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge to speak for two minutes.

VETERAN JOURNALIST VINOD DUA 'BEYOND CRITICAL', SAYS DAUGHTER

Veteran journalist Vinod Dua, who was hospitalised with Covid earlier this year, is in the ICU and his condition is "beyond critical", his daughter, actor-comic Mallika Dua, said on Monday. The 67-year-old journalist, a pioneer in broadcast Hindi journalism with stints in Doordarshan and NDTV, lost his wife, radiologist Padmavati 'Chinna' Dua, in June after a prolonged battle with Covid. "My Papaji is beyond critical in the ICU. His health had been deteriorating rapidly since April. He also is unable to come to terms with losing the light of his life. He has lived an extraordinary life," she wrote.

12 OPPOSITION MEMBERS SUSPENDED FROM RS FOR ENTIRE WINTER SESSION

Twelve opposition members in Rajya Sabha, including Congress MP Chhaya Verma, Shiv Sena's Priyanka Chaturvedi and TMC's Dola Sen were on Monday suspended for the remaining part of the winter session for their misconduct and unruly behaviour during the last session. Among the suspended members, six are from the Congress, two each from the TMC and Shiv Sena and one each from the CPM and the CPI. The Upper House had witnessed ugly scenes when the opposition members were protesting against the three farm bills during the Monsoon session.

OVER 5 L COS WENT OUT OF BIZ, 7 LAKH NEW ONES REGISTERED IN NEARLY 6 YRS

More than 5 lakh companies went out of business while over 7 lakh new companies were set up in the last nearly six years, according to official data. The data for the period starting from April 1, 2016, till date showed that a total of 5,00,506 companies were shut down. During the same time, 7,17,049 new companies were registered under the Companies Act, 2013. Sharing the data as part of a written reply to the Lok Sabha on Monday, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Rao Inderjit Singh also said the ministry does not "maintain data on event base".

BJP will remain unique, never allow dynastic politics

Going by the conduct of national and State-level parties, one begins to doubt whether Parliamentary democracy has a place in Indian politics.

Monarchy has officially left the country, but it is still practised unofficially.

Kings, princes, princesses, brothers-in-law of kings, spouses of kings and other family members are continuing in power in some or the other form.

Speakers describe Jawaharlal Nehru as a leader who strengthened the country and its institutions but never say that he only strengthened the institution of his family.

Mahatma Gandhi never encouraged his political heirs unlike Nehru, who gave importance to his family members. While Motilal encouraged Jawaharlal, Nehru encouraged his daughter

Indira Gandhi. He made his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit a Governor and as India's Envoy to the USA, USSR and the UK.

Following the footsteps of her father, Indira initiated her sons Rajiv and Sanjay into politics.

During the Emergency, many atrocities were perpetrated under the leadership of Sanjay Gandhi. After the death of Indira, the reins of administration were handed over to Rajiv Gandhi. His spouse Sonia Gandhi played a crucial role behind the scenes. After Rajiv, PV Narasimha Rao became the Prime Minister. He took independent decisions and initiated reforms, which was not welcomed by Sonia Gandhi and her close aides.

During his tenure as PM, Manmohan Singh became a puppet in the hands of Sonia Gandhi. Congress was washed

Dynastic rule gives scope for heirs to loot the public. Efficient leaders are forced to be subservient. Those who see power as their birthright would have scant respect for the law and judiciary. In one way, dictatorship in the garb of democracy is perpetrated.

away in the country under the Modi wave, but Sonia Gandhi thrust Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra onto the party. Congress leaders dismiss Rahul Gandhi as inefficient but he is still allowed to call the shots in the party.

Several regional parties emulate the Congress in perpetuating family rule.

People got the message that the regional parties are synonymous with family rule. The Abdullah family is exercising authority in J&K, Mulayam Singh's family in UP, Veerabhadra Singh family in

Himachal Pradesh, Deve Gowda family in Karnataka, Biju Patnaik family in Odisha, Sharad Pawar family and also that of Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra, Karunanidhi family in Tamil Nadu.

There is no end to atrocities perpetrated by Jaganmohan Reddy, who came to power in Andhra Pradesh using the image of his father YS Rajasekhara Reddy. He encouraged YV Subba Reddy, Balineni Srinivas Reddy, Ravindranath Reddy and even Avinash Reddy.

Opposition leader



Chandrababu Naidu is no different in promoting family members in politics. When he was in power, he made his son a Minister. In Telangana, KCR encouraged son, daughter, nephew and relatives and others and they have been wielding power indiscriminately.

What is the harm in families exercising power? Even if

they resort to corruption and irregularities, there is no real alternative for the people to elect.

Dynastic rule gives scope for heirs to loot the public. Efficient leaders are forced to be subservient. Those who see power as their birthright would have scant respect for the law and judiciary. In one way, dictatorship in the garb of democracy is perpetrated. Sons will not be accountable for the corruption of the father, and the grandson would not be held accountable for the son's misdeeds.

Whenever an opportunity arises, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explains to the people the adverse impact of hereditary politics. He says that dynastic politics is a threat to democracy.

He never said that the politi-

cal heirs should not take part in politics but condemned the culture of the same family controlling both the party and the government.

Speaking at the National Youth Parliament in January, Modi welcomed youth to plunge into politics and end dynastic politics. In connection with the National Constitution Day on November 26, he expressed concern over the disappearance of a healthy democracy due to dynastic politics.

He said that there is no scope for dynastic politics in the BJP. There is no culture of a single family ruling the country and the party. Anyone who is committed to the party policies and ideology will be able to rise to the top, he said.

That is why a school teacher like Vajpayee, and Advani who

left his property in Karachi and worked as an ordinary activist of BJP, Venkaiah Naidu who hails from a farmer's family and chaitwala Modi reached top positions in the party.

In spite of holding top positions in the party and government and their family members being in active politics, they gave positions to the efficient.

On several occasions, the BJP gave opportunities to heirs, after the parents stepped down, purely on merit.

BJP is the only party that keeps aloof from practising dynastic politics and gives importance to efficiency. That is why, a majority of the youth in the country lean towards the BJP.

When people choose between ruined families and the BJP that worked for promoting the country's culture and to strengthen the economy, they are inclined towards the BJP.

2 die in noxious gas leak at Vizag pharma city

Continued from Page 1

The deceased, identified as Manikanta (22) and Durgaprasad (21), were contract workers on the night shift. According to police sources, the two workers inhaled toxic gases leaking from a valve that they were turning. Both of them died on the spot. Police are investigating the matter and said the leak has been contained.

Meanwhile, the bodies have been shifted to the King George Hospital here for post-mortem.

Monday's incident is the latest of several mishaps in the port city over the past two-and-a-half years. In May 2020, styrene vapours leakage at the LG Polymers plant had left 12 people dead. Meanwhile, CPM

District Secretary K Lokanatham alleged that due to the gross negligence of the Pharma City management in maintaining the safety standards several workers are paying with their lives in a series of incidents. The CPM is demanding criminal action on the management in the incident. There are 85 industries and over 32,000 workers are working in the Pharma City. During the past five years, over 10 major accidents were reported and 30 workers died and 80 workers were faced with permanent disorders. However, the government is not taking any action on the management. He demanded that the management pay Rs 50 lakh compensation to the victim families immediately, Loknatham demanded.

Dollar Seshadri...

Continued from Page 1

In the wee hours of Monday, he suffered chest pain and called up his close associates for help. Some TTD employees and his close associates rushed to MVP Colony and shifted him to Apollo Hospital at 4.30 am. The doctors at the hospital announced that he was brought dead. The body has been kept in King George Hospital for some time. Later, mortal remains of Seshadri were shifted to Tirupati and the final rituals would be held on Tuesday at Govindadham, Tirupati.

Seshadri had served the famous hill shrine since 1978. Though he attained superannuation on July 31, 2006, successive governments had extended his term as OSD.

Well versed with history of the temple and all the rituals, Seshadri was the most prominent figure in TTD, which manages the affairs of the world's richest Hindu temple. His presence was considered a must whenever a VIP used to visit the temple. Seshadri was the divine guide for then President Giani Zail Singh, Prime Ministers P V Narasimha Rao, A B Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, Narendra Modi, chief ministers and governors of several states and others VIPs during their visit to the temple.

No more role in Anna Abhaya Hastham: LIC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a major development, the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has announced that the corporation has no role in one of the Andhra Pradesh government's prestigious welfare schemes Anna Abhaya Hastham and that the State government has withdrawn funds to the tune of over Rs.2,000 crore deposited in the LIC. Not mentioning the fund, the LIC made it clear that the corporation had no more role in claims and transactions as the MoU was cancelled by the government.

In 2009, in the combined Andhra Pradesh State, the then Chief Minister Y.S.Rajasekhara Reddy initiated the scheme Anna Abhaya Hastham, to ensure basic pension for all the self-help group members through an insurance scheme. According to the scheme, the self-help group members would save Re 1 (Rs 365

per annum) and the government would also pay the same amount to the insurance company. Once the member attains 60 years, she would get a minimum pension of Rs. 500 and a maximum of Rs.3,000, considering the age of the member. The State government also inked an MoU with LIC.

However, according to the LIC's announcement, the agreement was cancelled on November 3. As the MoU was cancelled, the corpus fund of the scheme deposited in the LIC was transferred to the nodal agency of the scheme, the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP).

The LIC also made it clear that after the cancellation of the MoU with the government, the corporation has withdrawn from Anna Abhaya Hastham and it has no responsibility in any transaction regarding the scheme, the LIC said in the statement. The LIC also informed the

people that the responsibility of already filed claims, pending claims and any further transactions related to the scheme was on SERP only.

According to the guidelines of the Anna Abhaya Hastham scheme, the beneficiaries receive not just the pension. If a member aged between 18-59 dies, the relatives will get Rs.30,000. In cases of accidental deaths or permanent disability, the amount is Rs.75,000. If the member suffers partial disability as a result of accidents, they will get Rs.35,000.

The officials of the Finance Department refused to respond on the matter. However, sources said that the government, through SERP, would take the responsibility for claims, pensions and whatever assurances given in the scheme. The sources did not rule out the possibility of roping in another insurance company to lead the scheme in the future.

Guv re-admitted to hospital, stable

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan was re-admitted at the AIG Hospital for post-COVID follow-up after he complained of minor gastric issues. His clinical parameters and vitals are stable. He is maintaining normal oxygen saturation at room air, according to the health bulletin released by the AIG Hospital on Monday morning.

Governor Harichandan is under the constant supervision of a multidisciplinary team led by Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy. As seen in most of the patients suffering from post-COVID issues, the Governor was presented with raised inflammatory markers, mild diarrhea, and anaemia, which are being evaluated thoroughly. According to sources in the Raj Bhavan, during a post COVID-19 check-up on Sunday, doctors observed differences in certain parameters. The Governor was immediately rushed to Hyderabad in a special flight.

On November 17, the

Governor was tested COVID positive after returning from the 51st Governors Conference presided over by President of India Ram Nath Kovind in Delhi. Harichandan suffered a minor illness after returning from New Delhi and complained of cough and cold. As a precautionary measure, an RT-PCR test was conducted and he was diagnosed with COVID-19 after which he was shifted to Hyderabad by a special flight and admitted to the AIG.

After undergoing treatment, the Governor recovered and was discharged from hospital on November 23. According to a hospital report at that time, his clinical parameters had shown full recovery.

'3 capitals' cases adjourned to Dec 27

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the High Court division bench said that the repeal bills passed by the State government in the Legislative Assembly had not yet been given assent by the Governor. It would take up the matter after the issuance of the gazette notification and adjourned the cases to December 27.

The court revoked its interim orders that stalled the implementation of development works due to the capital cases, subject to the purview of the law. At the same time, it extended status quo orders that prohibited the shifting of government offices and departments to Visakhapatnam.

CBI pressured me to make false make...

Continued from Page 1

"I told CBI SP Ram Singh that when I reached Viveka's residence his body was lying in the bedroom and the bloodstains in the bedroom and the bathroom have been wiped. However, he said there is an eyewitness Inayathulla who said bloodstains were wiped in my presence and when I reached the residence the body was in the bathroom. However, it is not true. They prepared a statement against the facts I told them and asked me to submit the same in the court which I refused. Ram Singh also said he will

book me under Section 201 of IPC," Sankaraiah told in the letter. He had also said in the letter that Ram Singh asked him to depose that Devireddy Sankar Reddy had threatened him.

"In the presence of the staff and Inayathulla, the CBI SP said, 'Bring a big lathi. Let's give him the third degree. Only then he will listen to us,'" Sankaraiah said.

Sankaraiah had worked as Pulivendula town CI from December 31, 2018, to March 22, 2021. He had filed the initial FIR into the murder.

He had also told in the letter that neither Viveka's aide

MV Krishna Reddy, the slain leader's daughter Dr. YS Suneeta nor her husband N Rajasekhara Reddy had informed him about the letter purportedly written by Viveka or his mobile phone while conducting Panchanama and other formalities.

A suspect in the case, Shaik Dastagiri, had mentioned Siva Sankar Reddy's name in his confessional statement a few days ago. Siva Sankar Reddy is a close associate of YSRCP MP Avinash Reddy. His name is on the list of 15 suspects mentioned by Dr. Sunitha Reddy.

Already, the CBI has filed a charge sheet in the Vivekananda Reddy murder case.

Curiously, CI Sankaraiah was in the past suspended on charges of failure in discharging the responsibilities related to the Vivekananda Reddy murder case.

The then Kadapa SP Rahul Dev Sharma, in a statement, said Sankaraiah failed to prevent the culprits while tampering with the evidence and shifting the dead body from the scene of an offence to the hospital without performing inquest and other investigation procedures.

Bharat Biotech begins export of virus vaccine

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bharat Biotech on Monday announced that it has commenced export of Covid vaccine Covaxin. Long-pending export orders have been executed during November, to be further expanded during the following months, the Hyderabad-based company said in a statement. With the number of countries that have granted emergency use approvals for Covaxin increasing, exports to additional countries will also commence from December, it said. The vaccine maker thanked the Government of India for approving exports. Covaxin will now become an integral part of the global fight against this pandemic.

Countries start shutting...

Continued from Page 1

It could take "days to several weeks" to understand the level of severity of the variant, says the World Health Organization (WHO), which flagged Omicron as a "variant of concern". As a precaution to avert a worst-case scenario, Japan will close its borders to all foreigners from midnight on Tuesday, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

"Japan will first of all ban the entry of foreigners," he told reporters, adding that Japanese returning from specified nations would face quarantine in designated facilities. While Japan has not yet found any Omicron infections, Health Minister Shigeyuki Goto said tests were being run to determine if the new variant had infected a traveller from Namibia who tested positive for the virus.

Israel's ban took effect from midnight on Sunday. It has also vowed to use counter-terrorism phone-tracking technology to combat the new variant.

Australia said it would review plans to reopen its borders to skilled migrants and students from Dec. 1, after reporting its first Omicron cases. A national security panel is to meet later in the day to assess border easing due from Wednesday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said, but added that it was a "bit too early" to reinstate two-week hotel quarantine for foreign travellers. "So we just take this one step at a time, get the best information, make calm, sensible decisions," Morrison told broadcaster Nine News. Symptoms of Omicron are so far mild and could be treated at home, a South African doctor, one of the first to suspect a different variant, has said.

New Covid...

Continued from Page 1

The mutations R203K and G204R are being considered to be associated with higher infectivity. Similarly, there are deletions at NSP6, which could result in immune escape, Lahariya, also a physician and epidemiologist, told PTI. A mutation means a change in a nucleic acid base or amino acid molecule. Mutations eventually accumulate to generate variants that differ from the original virus more and more. According to Lahariya, any emergence of variants should be treated as an important starting point and with utmost caution but not with panic or exaggerated knee jerk responses of border closures at the drop of the hat. Immunologist Satyajit Rath added that the emergence of the new variant suggests that we need to stop treating the Covid pandemic as a short-term crisis that needed short-term measures but has already passed.

Man fears threat to life from YS Sunita, gets police protection

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Anantapur district Superintendent of Police Fakirappa on Monday said that the police would provide security to Kalluru Gangadhar Reddy who complained to the police about threat to his life from the followers of slain Vivekananda Reddy, CBI

officials and Madakasira CI and the then SIT official Sriram. He also alleged threat to the life of his family members. Gangadhar Reddy, who hails from Pulivendula but lives in Yadiki of Anantapur district lodged a complaint with the SP. He alleged in the complaint that the CBI officials have been pressurising him to give

evidence to implicate YS Avinash Reddy in the case. He mentioned in his complaint that CBI officials contacted him through a WhatsApp call. He alleged that the CBI officials and Madakasira CI Sriramulu have been mounting pressure on him to depose as witness in Vivekananda Reddy murder case.

Gangadhar Reddy expressed concern over foisting false case against him. He said that he appeared before CBI officials on November 20. The CBI officials have been threatening him almost daily and alleged life threat to him from YS Vivekananda Reddy's followers.

Expedite vax drive: Jagan

Continued from Page 1

He suggested the officials conduct mock drills of Oxygen Generation Plants in all hospitals. He directed the officials to set up special medical teams at airports of Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad and screen people who are arriving to Andhra Pradesh.

He said to conduct only RTPCR tests and avoid rapid tests and added to complete

arrangements for the medical colleges for which tenders were finalised.

The officials informed the Chief Minister recovery rate in Andhra Pradesh is 99.20 and the positivity rate is 0.64. Daily average cases were 197 and total active cases were 2,140. They said calls to 104 numbers were reduced and preparations were made to tackle the third wave.

They said there are 82 hun-

dred beds in government hospitals and added that 87.43 percent of the people completed the first dose and 62.19 percent completed two doses of vaccination and they would complete the vaccination process by January.

They informed the Chief Minister that the new variant Omicron has been mutating and spreading fast and research is being conducted in various countries on this variant.

NDMA Advisor lauds AP govt's efforts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Advisor Kunal Satyarthi, who was part of the inter-ministerial Central team, has lauded the efforts of the officials of the State government and said dynamic, dedicated and young team of officials have worked exceptionally well.

He said YSR district has faced huge loss and added that livestock was dead, roads, buildings and irrigation projects were damaged.

He said that it was not a classical flood situation and the system was not ready to receive so much water and there were no adequate reservoirs and dams to regulate the water and added that the existing dams

were not designed for such huge inflows. He said the extent of damage is large at the location of breach of Annamayya project, some parts of Chittoor and Nellore. Infrastructure and agricultural loss is more in YSR district and floods damaged bengal gram crop and water schemes badly.

Drinking water supply system of Annamayya project has severe damage, bridges and roads were damaged leading to no connection to some villages. He said the emergency services were restored immediately and added that the district collectors have released funds immediately due to which the works were expedited. He said 40 percent of damage is to roads, buildings, 32 percent to

Agriculture and allied sectors, and 16 percent to irrigation and assured all sorts of possible help.

The Central Team comprising, Kunal Satyarthi, Abhey Kumar, Dr K Manoharan, Srinivasu Bairy, Shivani, Shrayan Kumar Singh and Anil Kumar Singh attended the meeting.

Chief Secretary Dr. Sameer Sharma, Agriculture Special Chief Secretary Poonam Malakaondaiah, Municipal Administration and Urban Development Special Chief Secretary Y Sriakashmi, Water Resources Special Chief Secretary Dr. K S Jawahar Reddy, Finance Principal Secretary S S Rawat and other officials were present in the meeting

Be compassionate while assessing...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister said the suggestions of the Central team will be considered and necessary measures will be taken to control such disasters in the long run. He said the State government is improving the canal system to discharge more water capacity and added that an automatic water gauging system is being planned. The State government has sought to relax the rules on paddy procurement and added to give relief in terms of moisture and other conditions as crops are damaged due to heavy rains.

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Heavy rain: Collector asks ryots to be alert

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector J Nivas on Monday appealed to the farmers to be alert and take precautionary measures in the wake of the Meteorological Department's warning of heavy rains along with winds across the district on December 4 and 5.

The Collector said that the Meteorological Department warned of another low-pressure area in the Bay of Bengal, which is likely to bring heavy to very heavy winds with rain in the next three to four days. The sea would be rough, too. He appealed to the people and farmers, especially those in the coastal areas, to be alert. The district has been receiving



heavy rains for the past two months, which has had a severe impact on crops. Now, the low pressure that will form on the Bay of Bengal on December 4 and 5 would bring an average of about 100 mm

rainfall. The Collector asked the farmers to make all arrangements for the harvest of paddy crops before December 3.

The Agriculture Department officials are inspecting the fields that have suffered crop damage due to the recent heavy rains and are assessing the losses.

He appealed to all the farmers to register the details of their crops on e-crop immediately. He also specifically requested the farmers that KYC be done as well. He appealed to the people residing in low-lying areas, especially in the coastal areas, to be vigilant and told the fishermen not to venture into the sea for fishing.

RINL CMD releases brochure of ISTD national meet

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Chairman-cum-Managing Director, RINL, Atul Bhatt, released the brochure of the National Conference of Indian Society for Training and Development (ISTD), to be held on January, 7 and 8, 2022 in association with RINL at Steel Township. The theme of the conference is "Beyond the Pandemic - The Way forward for HR - The Road to Digital Transformation of HR".

Speaking on the occasion, the RINL CMD applauded the efforts of the organising team and appreciated the fact that the conference is going to provide an excellent opportunity to PSEs, Government organizations, NGOs, MNCs, Industries, MSMEs and others to showcase their best practices in HR and exchange knowledge.

Jana Sena backs stir by AP govt staff

PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

The Jana Sena Party (JSP) has announced its support to the agitating State government employees and expressed concern at the pathetic state of the farming community.

Addressing party workers in Amalapuram on Monday, Jana Sena political affairs committee chairman Nadendla Manohar announced solidarity with the state government employees who were preparing for an agitation demanding the government to concede their legitimate demands.

The government is not in a position to resolve the issues of state government employees themselves. Since there was no response from the government, the employees were preparing for a stir. Janasena party chief K Pawan Kalyan also stood by the employees, he made it clear.

Stating that the farmers in the agriculture-rich Konaseema region are shedding tears due to huge damage to their crop, the



heads of the government should tell why the farmers are in a pathetic state in the agriculture-rich Konaseema region.

"Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's failures have put the farming community and the common men in lurch. The farmers narrated their pathetic tale when I visited their fields. The farmers deplored that the government did not insure their crops. The government machinery did not appear in the affected fields. The people's representatives did not visit the affected areas either", he said.

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy deceived people



by assuring them that he would provide good governance. People trusted him and gave him 151 seats, he said. "But he has not come out of his palace when the flood and rains devastated many districts and damaged crops in lakhs of acres. He just conducted an aerial survey. What can people expect from such a Chief Minister", he flayed.

The Chief Minister had taken Rs 230 crore panchayat raj funds which were extended by the 15 FC for the development of rural areas, he slammed.

When the people were in deep trouble with the floods and rains, the government was busy

implementing the One Time Settlement. The volunteers were going house to house and threatening those who had taken loans for the construction of houses to pay the loans under OTS", he criticised.

Mr. Manohar handed over Rs 50,000 cheque to the bereaved family of tenant farmer Madhu Saibaba who died of cardiac arrest at Samanasa village in Amalapuram rural mandal. He inspected the damaged crop at Samanasa village and interacted with the farmers. Earlier, a huge rally was taken out to welcome Nadendla Manohar in Amalapuram.



Mayor flags off 60 garbage vehicles

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To improve further sanitation management in the city, City Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi on Monday inaugurated about 60 garbage collection vehicles at Makineni Basavapunnayya Outdoor Stadium in Singh Nagar. Deputy Mayor Shailaja Reddy and others were also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the mayor said that the State government has allotted 225 vehicles to Vijayawada city through Swachh Andhra Corporation for garbage collection as part of the Clean Andhra Pradesh (CLAP) programme.

The mayor inaugurated 15 vehicles 4 sanitary circles within the city limits and told the vehicle operators that they should use these vehicles as their own vehicles with care. Officials also suggested that the vehicles be inspected at the field level on a regular basis to ensure that people are made aware of the cleanliness of the surroundings through a microphone fitted to the vehicles along with garbage collection, said the mayor.

Corporators Md Sheena, K Malleswari, chief medical officer Dr. G Geetabhai, health officers Dr. Suresh, Dr. Iqbal, Dr. Rama Koteswara Rao, Dr. Sridevi, sanitary supervisors and others were present.



Rare surgery saves youngster's life

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a gruesome incident that happened at Cheemakurthy in Ongole district, a group of friends accidentally inflated the stomach of a young boy by placing a high pressure air pump in his anus. The boy collapsed immediately and went into a comatose state.

He was rushed to the Ramesh Sanghamitra Hospital in Ongole where an emergency surgery was performed on him by surgical gastroenterologist Dr Karthik Babu Perumalla and anesthesiologist Dr Nanditha, eventually saving the boy's life. The patient, belonging to Bihar, is a daily wage worker in Cheemakurthy.

Speaking about the patient's condition, Dr. Karthik Babu Perumalla said that due to the high-pressure air insufflations, the intestines got ruptured leading to a condition called 'Tension Pneumoperitonium'. "The operation had to be done immediately or else the patient's life would have been at risk. These sort of incidents rarely happen in the world and require good clinical acumen, advanced infrastructure for early diagnosis and emergency surgery to save the life," said the doctor.

Hospital MD Dr. P Ramesh Babu congratulated the emergency critical care and surgical teams for saving a precious life.

Doctor said that due to the high-pressure air insufflations, the intestines of the boy got ruptured, leading to a condition called 'Tension Pneumoperitonium'.

Flood relief yet to reach victims: TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday presided over the party strategy committee meeting when they resolved to wage a relentless struggle till justice is done to the victims of recent cyclones and floods in Rayalaseema and Nellore districts. The TDP expressed concern that the cyclone relief had not yet reached the families and the farmers who suffered severe crop and property losses. It was 'sheer inefficiency' on the part of CM

Jaganmohan Reddy to say that field-level visits would hamper the relief and rescue activities in the flood-hit areas.

The TDP leaders demanded a 'judicial inquiry' into the miserable failure of the YSRCP Government in flood management, which caused havoc. All the deaths in the cyclone-hit areas should be treated as government murders. The input subsidy given to farmers in the TDP rule was not reduced. Over Rs 1,100 crore of disaster management funds were diverted without paying anything to the flood victims.

The Telugu Desam accused Jaganmohan Reddy of betraying the farmers by not paying premium towards crop insurance. The flood-hit farmers were now not able to get insurance since the State government had not paid its share which resulted in denial of the Central share as well. In the 2020 floods also, the Jaganmohan Reddy regime did not pay a premium but told falsehoods in the Assembly that it had made the payments. Field level surveys would be held on non-payment of crop insurance premiums.

The TDP leaders demanded that the YSRCP regime withdraw its proposal to collect Rs 14.261 crore from the poor families in the name of a one-time settlement (OTS). The YSRCP government was illogical and atrocious as it proposed to collect OTS for houses built from 1983 to 2017. The poor families were being forced to pay this though the officials were describing it as not mandatory. The TDP would provide free registrations the moment it comes to power.

CARING FOR ANIMALS



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy visited the newly-set up Gosala at his residence in Tadepalli on Monday. Government whip Chevreddy Bhaskar Reddy and others accompanied the Chief Minister.



Orientation prog for newly-appointed child welfare panel members begins

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kritika Shukla, Director, Department of Juvenile Welfare, Correctional Services & Welfare of Street Children, has informed that the State government has appointed the new chairpersons and members in the Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards in all the 13 districts, to deal with the children in need of care & protection' and 'children in conflict with law' under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015.

On Monday, Shukla inaugurated a four-day training programme for the newly appointed chairpersons and members of the Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards till December 2. The Child Welfare Committees comprise a chairperson and four members and the Juvenile Justice Boards comprise a Principal Magistrate and two Social Worker members.



She has further stated that all the chairpersons and members of the committees and Boards are to be provided orientation mandatorily as per the Juvenile Justice Act. Accordingly, a four-day programme is being conducted.

The Director said that during the four-day training programme, the newly appointed chairpersons & members of the committees and boards will be trained on their roles & responsibilities under the

Juvenile Justice Act along with other child-related laws. Eminent speakers in the field are providing training. The department will also conduct sensitisation programmes and refresher programmes regularly to help the members to equip knowledge on the subject and to deal with the cases of the children produced before them effectively.

The new Child Welfare Committees' chairpersons are

U Sri Lakshmi - Srikulam, G HimaBindu - Vizianagaram, M Rama Lakshmi Radha - Visakhapatnam, P Surya Prabhavathi - East Godavari, B Rebka Rani - West Godavari, K Suvartha - Krishna, G ArogyaPrameela - Guntur, V Ramanjaneyulu - Prakasam, T Madhavi - Nellore, S Zubaida Begum - Kurnool, VV SambasivaRao - Kadapa, M Rama Lakshmi - Anantapuram and M Vasantha - Chittoor.

ACB arrests top official in DA case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) sleuths on Monday conducted raids and searches at the office and residence of Billuri Nagabhushanam, Managing Director, Most Backward Classes Welfare Development Corporation (MBCWDC).

The ACB officials found assets disproportionate to his income in the search conducted in Vijayawada and Hyderabad. The officials conducted searches at the office of MBCWDC in Poranki, the outskirts of Vijayawada. The ACB teams also conducted searches at Begumpet in Hyderabad.

Nagabhushanam is a native of Guntur and joined the government service in 1996 as the District Social Welfare Officer

at Ongole and was promoted to DD in 2012. He was later promoted as the Joint Director in 2017 and later as Additional Director in 2019.

The ACB officials conducted a search at a farmhouse in Moinsabad and bank lockers in Hyderabad.

In a press release on Monday, the ACB officials said they had noticed assets worth Rs 4.34 crore disproportionate to his income. The officials found five flats, one plot, one building with a cellar and five floors, three 4-wheelers, one motorcycle, electronic gadgets, gold, silver articles, cash balance, and others assets and valuables worth Rs 5.93 crore. The accused was arrested and produced in the Special ACB Court for SPE & ACB Cases in Vijayawada on Monday.

UOSA signs MoU with DIET

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The University of Silicon Andhra (UOSA), California, US, and Dhanekula Institute of Engineering and Technology (DIET), Gangur has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Monday. The MoU was signed by Raju Chamarthy, Provost and Chief Academic Officer of the USA, and Dr. DKRK Ravi Prasad, Director, DIET. The MoU was exchanged by Anand Kuchibotta, president and CEO of UOSA, and Dhanekula Venkata Bhavani Prasad, secretary, DIET.

The MoU has placed an immediate focus on reaffirming the long-standing relationship between the UOSA and DIET to build a

world-class platform for highlighting and developing Indian languages, Yoga, Medicine, Bio-Technology, and Ayurveda using artificial intelligence and machine learning.

On the occasion, DIET, principal Dr. K Ravi shared the valuable suggestions given by Buddha Chandra Sekhar, Chief Coordinating Officer, AICTE, 'making the students utilise the laboratories to the full extent. On this signing ceremony during the visit to all the laboratories established in the college.

D Ravindranath Tagore, founder and chairman of DIET, Dr. Pappu Venu Gopala Rao, Board chairman & treasurer, UOSA, Jyothi Chithalapati, director student outreach, UOSA, and others were present.

Krishna SP presents award to constable

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna district Superintendent of Police Siddharth Kaushal presented the weekly best performance award to constable Ch Rajasekhara, attached to Kalidindi police station for successfully preventing communal disturbance and resolving the local land related issue for construction of a Secretariat in the village.

When the officials prepared for the construction of the Secretariat in the village, some local residents raised an objection

stating that the land should be used for the construction of Sivalayam. The constable had collected evidence that false proof was produced to prevent the officials from constructing the Secretariat.

The SP Kaushal was impressed with the intelligence used by the constable to prevent disputes in the village and help the administration for the construction of the Secretariat. The SP enquired about the service and personal details of the constable and praised him for preventing disputes in the village.



Rs 500 cr for modernisation of Guntur Med College: Alla

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Deputy Chief Minister and Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas said that the Government Medical College here is being developed at a cost of Rs 500 under the Nadu-Nedu programme and the government is giving priority to the education and medical sectors.

The Health Minister, along with Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita, laid the foundation stone for the construction of a pylon on the Government Medical College premises for the ensuing platinum jubilee celebrations. They also unveiled the plaque in this regard. The platinum jubilee of the medical college would be organised in a grand manner.

Talking to the media on the occasion, the Health Minister said that with the Rs 500 crore funds of the Nadu-Nedu programme, all facilities and infrastructure were being provided in the Guntur Government Medical College and hospital. He said that the tender process was completed and the works had already been started. All the development works in the medical college and hospital would be completed within three years. Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy would inaugurate the newly constructed building of the medical college, he said.

The Health Minister said that in 1946, the then Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu had played a vital role in the establishment of the government hospital and med-



ical college here. In fact, efforts were being made then to shift the medical college and the government hospital to Madurai in Tamil Nadu but Prakasha Pantulu ensured that they were established here.

"Those who completed medicine in Guntur medical college have earned reputation, fame and working at leading institutions across the world. The government medical college buildings have reached a dilapidated state. The government has taken steps to construct new buildings, renovate some existing buildings and provide the modern infrastructure to the hospital and medical college", he said. He said that 1200 beds are available in the GGH here. He said

that 250 medical seats and 120 PG seats are available in the medical college hospital here.

Mr.Kali Krishna Srinivas informed that the state government had allocated Rs 1,600 crore for the construction of buildings for government medical colleges and hospitals across the state. He said that the required number of doctors would also be appointed in the GGHs in the coming days to ensure that all the poor would get medical treatment in the government hospitals. He said that the fever hospital here was being developed with the funds of Nadu-Nedu.

The Health Minister said patients from 5 districts come to the Guntur GGH for treatment and facilities and infra-

structure was being developed to meet the patients' rush. Previously only 1051 diseases were in the Aarogyasri scheme now the medical treatment under the Aarogyasri would be available for 2426 diseases.

Mr.Kali Krishna Srinivas said that the Aarogyasri bills are paid to the respective hospitals within 21 days. ZP chairperson Henry Christina, Mayor K S Manohar Naidu, MLAs M Giridhar, Mohammad Mustafa and JC Ranakumari, Medical college principal Dr.Padmavati Devi, DMHO Dr.Yashmis, GGH in-charge superintendent Dr.Nageswari, organising secretary Dr.Venkateswara Rao were among those who were present.



'Replaced damaged houses with new ones'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has directed the officials to sanction new houses for completely damaged houses in the recent floods and provide temporary accommodation to the ones who lost houses and ensure basic facilities at those places.

He held a video conference with the district collectors of flood-hit areas and reviewed the progress of relief works.

He said Rs 2,000 should be given to all the households who received essential commodities and directed the officials to be generous towards people's requests while touring flood-affected areas. He said all the arrangements were made for the distribution of seeds through RBKs.

He said to take measures to ensure no leaks to ponds and interlink ponds and added that excess water in ponds should be diverted to canals.

He said water cannot be stored as Annamayya project was breached and directed the officials to make arrangements to ensure no shortage of drinking water in those villages and towns.

He instructed the officials to carry out social audit after completion of crop enumeration.

Govt should lift paddy from purchase centres: Nakka

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Telugu Desam party leader and former Minister Nakka Ananda Babu lamented that the farmers had borne the brunt of heavy rains as they suffered crop loss and demanded the government to set up paddy purchase centres to purchase paddy from the farmers.

The former Minister visited some of the rain-affected fields at Jampani, Butumalli and Champadu villages in Vemuru mandal and saw the damaged paddy crop. He interacted with the farmers and knew their problems.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that 50 percent of the paddy crop was damaged due to heavy rains. The farmers are in the grip of fear at the forecast of the second spell of rain now. The farmers were afraid that they would not yield produce in the Kharif season.

The farmers disheartened and have lost hopes of their paddy produce now, he lamented. He demanded the government to set up paddy purchase centres and purchase paddy from the farmers. The YSRCP leaders are coming in the form of brokers to plunder the paddy farmers.

The TDP said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy announced the setting up of a price stabilization fund by allocating Rs 3,000 crore and asked what the government had done with the money.

"The officials should immediately enumerate the loss of crop and disburse compensation to the farmers. The TDP will stand by the rain-affected farmers and extend solidarity with them", Ananda Babu said.

MP Galla Jayadev seeks Centre's assistance to flood-hit districts

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Guntur Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MP Galla Jayadev requested the Union government to extend financial assistance to the flood-battered Nellore, Chittoor, Kadapa and Anantapur districts in Rayalaseema region.

The MP in the Lok Sabha on Monday said that cyclone wreaked havoc in Nellore, Chittoor, Kadapa and Anantapur districts of AP and floods hit the Cheyyeru and Penna rivers. Life in these districts has come to a standstill. Rail connectivity between South and Eastern India is cut off, traffic on NH-16 has halted, many villages are submerged and reeling under complete power cut initially.

He said that initial estimates show the death of 60 people and thousands of livestock. Preliminary estimates show a crop loss in more than 7 lakh acres.



Villages and towns are flooded with water, while people are stranded without food, water, medical support and other essentials. Infrastructure, including rail, roads, bridges, power washed away at many places.

"Looking at this destruction, I appeal to the government of India to declare this cyclone a National Disaster and provide immediate financial and other relief to the people of AP. I also request the government of India for providing relief to the farmers for crop loss," he said.



Collector, JCs take part in bike rally

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector Kartikeya Mishra and Joint Collectors participated in a motorcycle rally here on Monday to create awareness among the youth to enrol their names in the voters' list.

The "Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation Awareness" rally began at the Collector's office and concluded at the fire station centre. Collector Kartikeya Mishra and Joint Collectors drove motorcycles in the rally. The Collector released a balloon, flagged off the rally and participated in it.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that those who will attain 18

years of age on January 1, 2022, should enrol their names in the voters' list. The rally was taken out in order to create awareness among those who are going to complete 18 years of age on January 1, 2022, to enrol as voters. He asked the officials to prepare the voters list without any flaws, adding that preparing the voters list is a perennial process.

The Collector said that the voters' list would be released on January 5, 2022. Joint Collectors Himanshu Shukla, Dr B R Ambedkar, Suraj Ganore, Padmavati, ZP CEO Hari Harinath and DPO Ramesh Babu were among those who participated.



TDP MLAs urge Collector to extend assistance to rain-affected farmers

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MLAs have appealed to district Collector Pravin Kumar to extend all possible help to the rain-affected farmers.

TDP MLAs Yeluru Sambashiva Rao, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, former MLA Muthumula Ashok Reddy, Kandula Narayana Reddy, Damacharla Satya and G Babu met the Collector here on Monday and submitted a memorandum explaining the plight of the farmers who suffered heavy crop loss.

Speaking on the occasion, the MLAs said that since the



paddy produce was soaking in the rainwater the produce was getting rotten. The farmers made huge investments to raise their chilli, tobacco, cotton

and black gram crop but the unexpected heavy rain damaged their crop.

They said that when the farmers at many places were

making preparations for the harvest of their paddy crop, the heavy rain damaged the crops.

The paddy crop was now soaking in the rainwater, they lamented. Moreover, the horticulture crops and vegetable crops were also damaged in a large extent of land in the district. Since the government has not announced compensation so far, the farmers were in the lurch. The TDP leaders urged to provide seeds and fertilisers at free of cost to the affected farmers. The government should deploy officials to enumerate the damaged crop, they urged.

Students exhorted to set goals, strive to achieve them

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

SRKR College CEO SRK Nishant Varma exhorted the students to set higher goals and strive hard to achieve them.

The orientation programme for freshers was organised at SRKR College here on Monday. Principal Dr. M Jagapathi Raju presided over the programme.

Addressing the students, Nishant Varma asked the students to set goals, strive hard to achieve them to scale heights in their careers. He asked them to work hard to become brilliant engineers, win accolades from all and excel in their respective fields.



College director K Jeevasagar asked the students not to be disheartened or frustrated at any step and continue to go forward with confidence to reach the

heights. Mechanical head Dr.K Brahmaraju, Professor Dr.BHVN Lakshmi, and deans of various departments were among those who were present.

RTC bus falls into gorge, 10 injured

PNS ■ KURNOOL

As many as 10 APSRTC bus passengers were injured, four of them seriously, when the bus fell into a gorge at Upper Ahobilam in the Nallamala forest area on Monday.

The bus veered off the road and fell into the gorge when it was coming from Ahobilam pilgrim centre. The injured were shifted to the government hospital in Kurnool.



Minister assures water for Rabi crop

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing Cherukuvada Sriranganadha Raju has assured the farmers of the district to provide irrigation water to each acre during the Rabi season.

Addressing the Irrigation Advisory Council (IAC) meeting here on Monday, he said that steps were being taken to provide irrigation water to 3,42,286 acres for the rabi crop based on the availability of water. Terming as unfortunate the damage of crops in the untimely rains, he said that the Swarna variety of paddy got the maximum extent of the damage. Efforts are being made to compensate for the loss of crops in the Kharif by providing water in the rabi season.

Asking the rain-hit farmers not to worry about the crop loss,



the minister assured that the soaked and shrivelled paddy would be purchased by the government at a minimum support price. Stating that there are 90 percent tenant farmers in the WG district, he deplored that the most affected were the tenant farmers and there is a need to extend help to them.

He asked the irrigation council members to ensure that the farmers yield 50 to 60 bags of rice in each acre in the rabi crop by providing water to the crop. "Irrigation water will be supplied till April 15 for the rabi crop.

Repairs for the irrigation canals could not be taken up due to the Coronavirus crisis", he said and directed the officials to take steps to complete the removal of silt in the irrigation canals by December 10.

Irrigation advisory council chairman and Collector Kartikeya Mishra said that all steps were being taken to remove impediments in providing irrigation water to the rabi crop. He asked the officials to ensure that the harvesting of the Kharif crop would be completed at the earliest.

The Collector said that as part

of delta modernization, estimation should be prepared for the priority works and the works should be completed within one month. MLAs M Prasad Raju, Puppala Srinivasa Rao said that silt and creepers in the canals should be removed. Denduluru MLA K Abbaiah Chowdary said that steps should be taken to provide irrigation water to the tail-end fields. MLAs K Satyanarayana, Nimmala Ramanaidu, Mantena Rama Raju also spoke. Joint Collectors, Sub-Collector and irrigation engineers were among those who present.

Grievances received at Spandana programmes

PNS ■ ELURU/GUNTUR

West Godavari Superintendent of Police and Guntur District Collector on Monday received grievances from the people and directed the officials concerned to take steps to resolve the grievances at the earliest.

In Eluru, Superintendent of Police Rahul Dev Sharma received grievances from the public. The Spandana programme was held in the SP office following the Covid norms and precautions. Officials said that most of the grievances received today were on the dowry harassment,

land disputes, boundary disputes and civil disputes.

A woman complained to the SP that some persons befriended her, took her gold jewellery and did not return them. A woman complained to the SP that she invested money in a chit fund company but they did not pay her money. The SP telephoned the officials concerned and directed them to resolve the grievances.

Speaking on the occasion, the SP said befriending unknown persons who appear on social media is harmful. He also asked people not to join

as members in the chit fund companies which are running unauthorisedly.

In Guntur, District Collector Vivek Yadav received grievances from the people in the Collector's office. He, along with Joint Collectors, received grievances from the people. The Collector directed the officials concerned to resolve the grievance received in the Spandana programme at the earliest. Joint Collectors A S Dinesh Kumar, G Rajakumari, Anupama Anjali and RDO P Kondaiah were among those who received grievances from the general public.



Guntur District Collector Vivek Yadav receiving grievances from people at Spandana programme

ED nabs absconding Hyd-based jeweller

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The ED has arrested promoter of Hyderabad-based Ghanshyamas Gems & Jewels Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, an absconding accused wanted in a money laundering case linked to smuggling and 'diversion' of duty-free gold imported by agencies like the Metals and Minerals Trading Corporation (MMTC) and some others.

Sanjay Agarwal, the agency said in a statement on Monday, was arrested on Sunday from Aamby Valley in Maharashtra's Lonavala while he was attending a wedding there.

He had been on the run for



more than six months after a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Kolkata issued a non-bailable

warrant (NBW) against him in April in connection with this case, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said.

Even his anticipatory bail application was rejected by the Calcutta High Court earlier this month, it said. After his arrest, Agarwal was produced before the same special PMLA court which sent him to seven days of ED custody. "Agarwal is involved in smuggling and diversion of duty-free gold, imported through nominated agencies like MMTC and Diamond India Limited."

"Such imported gold was originally meant for export purposes," the ED said.

INDIA CORNER

Veteran journalist Vinod Dua 'beyond critical'; daughter rejects rumours

Veteran journalist Vinod Dua, who was hospitalised with Covid earlier this year, is in the ICU and his condition is "beyond critical", his daughter, actor-comic Mallika Dua, said on Monday and asked people to not spread rumours about his death. The 67-year-old journalist, a pioneer in broadcast Hindi journalism with stints in Doordarshan and NDTV, lost his wife, radiologist Padmavati 'Chinna' Dua, to Covid in June. "My Papaji is beyond critical in the ICU. His health had been deteriorating rapidly since April. He also is unable to come to terms with losing the light of his life. He has lived an extraordinary life and given us the same. He deserves no pain. He is immensely loved and revered and I request you all to pray that he experiences as little pain as possible," Mallika Dua wrote. As news of his ill-health spread, so did rumours that he had passed away and some people even posted condolence messages, prompting his daughter to request people to not spread rumours.



Nawab Malik gets bail in defamation case filed by BJP's Mohit Bharatiya

A magistrate court here on Monday granted bail to Maharashtra minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik in a defamation case filed against him by former Mumbai BJP youth wing president Mohit Kamboj Bharatiya. The Mazagaon magistrate court allowed Malik's bail on a personal bond of Rs 15,000. The court had earlier this month issued a process (notice) to Malik on the criminal defamation complaint of Bharatiya, who had alleged that the NCP leader defamed him and his brother-in-law after the NCB's raid on a cruise ship last month. The court had then noted that prima facie Malik's statements harmed the complainant's (Bharatiya's) reputation and offence under Section 500 (defamation) of the Indian Penal Code was made out against the NCP leader. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) last month raided the cruise ship off the Mumbai coast and claimed to have seized drugs onboard. The agency subsequently arrested 20 people, including Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan, in connection with the cruise drugs case.



Tiger deaths due to poaching reduced in last 3 years, Centre tells Lok Sabha

The number of tiger deaths due to poaching has come down significantly in the last three years while elephant deaths because of the same reason have gone up, the Lok Sabha was informed on Monday. In response to a query in the House, Minister of State for Environment Ashwini Kumar Choubey said in the last three years, 58 tigers were victims of poaching, out of which seven were killed in 2020, 17 in 2019 and 34 in 2018. Sharing the data of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Choubey said 14 elephants died due to poaching in 2020-21, which is higher than 2019-20 (six deaths) and 2018-2019 (nine deaths). The minister shared with the Lok Sabha details of cases involving illegal trafficking of endangered animals. In the last three years, there has been a decline in the number of cases of illegal trafficking of endangered animals and consequently the number of arrests, the House was told. While in 2019, as many as 805 cases of illegal trafficking of endangered animals were recorded, in 2020 the number came down to 601.



12 parties condemn Centre for RS members suspension

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders of 12 opposition parties on Monday condemned the government for bringing a motion that led to the suspension of 12 members of Rajya Sabha for their unruly behaviour during the last parliamentary session.

The opposition leaders termed the suspension as "unwarranted" and "undemocratic", and alleged that the action is in violation of all rules and procedures of the Upper House.

"The leaders of the opposition parties unitedly condemn the unwarranted and undemocratic suspension of 12 members in violation of all the Rules of Procedure of Rajya Sabha pertaining to suspension of members for the entire duration of the Winter session," the joint statement signed by leaders of the opposition parties said. "The motion moved by the Government for suspending the members in regard to the unfortunate incident that occurred in the previous ses-



LS adjourned for the day amid continuous protests by Opposition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Proceedings of the Lok Sabha were adjourned for the day on Monday amid continuous protest by Opposition members over issues pertaining to farmers. After the initial two adjournments, the House met again at 2 pm, but adjourned for the day as Opposition members continued with their protests, raising slogans and holding placards, demanding justice for farmers. Rajendra Agrawal, who was chairing the proceedings, requested members to allow the House to function but later adjourned it till Tuesday morning. Earlier, a bill to repeal the three contentious agricultural laws, against which farmers have been protesting for over a year, was passed within minutes of its introduction by Lok Sabha, without a discussion.

sion is unprecedented and violates the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha)," it said. The signatories of the joint statement are

In LS, BJP members greet PM with 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'; Oppn shouts 'Jai Kisan'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Monday greeted by members of the BJP with thumping of desks and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' slogan as he entered

Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and members of the Congress, DMK, SP, NCP, Shiv Sena, RJD, CPI(M), CPI, IUML, LJD, JDS, MDMK, TRS and AAP.

the Lok Sabha chamber on the first day of the Winter Session of Parliament. Members for the Opposition raised the 'Jai Kisan' slogan. The prime minister reached the Lok Sabha minutes before the House met for the day.

Chaos forces RS adjournment for day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day on Monday after repeated disruptions amid continuous Opposition protest over issues pertaining to farmers.

The house proceedings were first adjourned for an hour as a mark of respect to sitting MP Oscar Fernandes who passed away recently. When the House reassem-

bled at 12.19 pm, Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said he has not accepted various notices given by Opposition members for suspension of business and to take up their issues.

Opposition members objected to this and started raising slogans.

"Some people have come determined to disrupt the House," Naidu said as his repeated attempts to pacify agitating members did not yield results.

Param Bir Singh appears before CID

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh appeared before the Maharashtra Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on Monday to record his statement in connection with two extortion cases registered against him, an official said.

Following a notice issued by the CID, Singh reached its

office at Belapur in neighbouring Navi Mumbai around 3.30 pm, he said.

The agency is investigating the extortion cases registered against Singh at the Marine Drive police station in south Mumbai and Kopri police station in adjoining Thane city.



The CID had earlier arrested police inspectors Nandkumar Gopale and Asha Korke in connection with the Marine Drive case.

Earlier in the day, a commission probing corruption allegations against former Maharashtra home minister

Anil Deshmukh cancelled the bailable warrant issued against Param Bir Singh after the latter appeared before the panel.

The Justice K U Chandiwal Commission was formed by the Maharashtra government in March this year to probe the allegations levelled by Singh against the then home minister and NCP leader Deshmukh.

Hari Kumar hands over charge of Western Naval Command

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Vice Admiral R Hari Kumar, who takes over as the country's next Navy chief on November 30, handed over the charge of Western Naval Command to Vice Admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh at a ceremony held here, officials said on Monday. Kumar will take charge as the next Navy chief

in New Delhi from Admiral Karambir Singh who superannuates on November 30.

Vice Admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh has a unique distinction of heading Navy's two operational commands.

Prior to his appointment as the Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command, he was heading the Eastern Naval Command.

Ad shoot: DSGMC urges MEA to take up issue with Pak

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee on Monday wrote to Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, demanding him to take up with the Pakistan government the issue of a business promotion agency using the premises of Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib for promotion of women apparel. Guru Nanak spent his last days in the gurudwara.

Three arrested for UPTET paper leak

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

Three people have been arrested in connection with Uttar Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test (UPTET) question paper leakage in Shamli, police said on Monday.

The UPTET examination, scheduled to be held on Sunday, was cancelled following the leakage of its question paper, Additional Director General Law and Order Prashant Kumar announced shortly before the exam was to begin. According to Superintendent of Police Sukirti Madhav Mishra, Dharmendra, Manish and Ravi were arrested and one other person, who is absconding



and is accused of being involved in the case, has been booked.

Police said a search is on to nab him.

A car, 50 photocopies of the question paper and Rs 17,000

were recovered from the three accused, they said.

During interrogation, they revealed that they had been involved in 60 such cases and received Rs 50,000 each for solving papers, police said.

SC to hear plea over Tripura violence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a plea of an advocate seeking an independent probe into the recent "communal riots" in Tripura and the alleged complicity and inaction of the state police in it. A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and AS Bopanna issued notice to the Centre and the state government and sought their response within two weeks.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner Ethesam Hashmi, said that they want an independent probe into the "recent communal riots and investigation into the alleged complicity of police in it".

"There are several cases related to Tripura before the court. Few lawyers, who went on fact finding missions, were served with notices. UAPA charges were slapped on journalists. Police did not register a single FIR in the cases of violence. We wa-



nt this to be investigated by an independent panel monitored by the court", Bhushan said.

The bench said it is issuing notice to the parties and listed the matter after two weeks. It directed that copy be served to the central agency and standing counsel for Tripura.

The north-eastern state recently witnessed incidents of arson, looting and violence after reports emerged from Bangladesh that Hindu minorities there had been attacked during 'Durga Puja' on allegations of blasphemy.

The plea by Hashmi has alleged that police authorities were hand in glove with the perpetrators and not a single

arrest was made with respect to the rioters, responsible for vandalism and arson.

It said that police and state authorities instead of attempting to stop the violence kept on claiming that there was no communal tension anywhere in Tripura and further denied reports of any religious structure being set ablaze.

On November 11, the top court heard a plea of two advocates and a journalist seeking quashing of a criminal case lodged under the harsh UAPA provisions against them for allegedly bringing facts through social media about the "targeted violence" against the minority community in Tripura.

BODIES ROTTING SINCE 2020

Horror for two families struck by covid

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Nearly a year and a half after they lost their loved ones to Covid, two families in Bengaluru have received news that s as painful as their loss - the bodies have been rotting for over a year in the hospital's mortuary.

Durga Sumithra, 40, and Muniraju, in his 50s, died on July 2 last year, as per documents from Employees' State Insurance Corporation and Model Hospital at Rajajinagar in Bengaluru. At the time, the second wave of the pandemic had triggered a surge in cases, putting severe strain on health infrastructure across the country. The second wave had also thrown up heart-rending

scenes of families not getting a final glimpse of the ones they lost owing to infection risks.

In Bengaluru, the civic body Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) was overseeing the hospital bed situation and had also taken control of a part of beds in private facilities to ensure people in need can get admitted.

Family members of the two patients say civic and hospital authorities did not hand over the body to them, citing infection risks, and informed them that they were cremated.

A year later, in a rude shock, the families were informed that the bodies of their loved ones were actually rotting in the hospital's morgue after housekeeping staff chanced



upon them and alerted authorities. Hospital authorities have now come under fire for this act of negligence. An investigation has been launched to find out how this happened. As for

the bodies, a postmortem will be conducted and legal formalities completed before they are handed over to the families.

Visuals from the hospital showed the shell-shocked fam-

ily members as they reached the hospital after getting information about a development that has stoked their grief.

Sujhata, sister of Durga, said they had found the bed at ESI hospital after a frantic search last year. "She (Durga) was infected with Covid. We were searching for a bed desperately but could not find any. Eventually, we found one at ESI hospital. She died after 4 days in hospital," said Sujhata.

"Because it was Covid, they didn't hand over the body to us. We returned home. After a few days, we received a call from the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), stating that they cremated the body. It is almost 15 months now and three days back we

received a call. When we got the call, we were scared whether it was true or false," she added.

Muniraju's son Satish had a similar experience to share. "When we received a call from the hospital, saying that he was no more, we asked them for the body. But BBMP authorities told us that it was cremated. Later, when we went to collect the death certificate, they reiterated it and told us to sign the relevant documents.

Meanwhile, Rajajinagar's BJP MLA Suresh Kumar has written to Karnataka Labour Minister A Shivaram Hebbar, requesting him to raise the matter with the Union Labour Ministry, under which the hospital falls.

Iron parameters with values more than prescribed in drinking water at 414 sites

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Iron parameters were found to have values more than the prescribed standard for drinking water at 414 sites located in certain river basins for the period of August, 2018 to December, 2020, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said on Monday. Responding to a question in Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Bishweshwar Tudu said the value of nitrates was found beyond prescribed limits for drinking water (as per Bureau of Indian Standards) at eight out of 588 sites in the period of June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020. "According to the information for the period August, 2018 to December, 2020, iron parameters were found to have values more than the prescribed standard for drinking



water (as per BIS) at 414 sites located in certain river basins falling in the states of Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Gujarat, Manipur, Delhi, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim," he said in a written response.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cutting loose

After centuries under the British monarch, Barbados finally cuts ties to become a Republic

Barbados, in the Caribbean, is now a Republic, the world's latest. Importantly, it cuts off its ties with the British monarchy and with it, the last link to a brutal colonial past dating back to the 17th century. Barbados is the land of pristine beaches and glorious cricket, of Everton Weekes and Gary Sobers, Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes, and Malcolm Marshall and Joel Garner. The Republic now shapes a new legacy, of democracy, and is a beacon light for the handful of countries that still remain tethered to their past colonisers. In 1627, Barbados became a British colony, dependent on a plantation economy run by slaves from Africa. Slavery was outlawed only in 1807. It became an independent State in 1966 but remained part of the Commonwealth Realm. The Realm, not to be confused with the Commonwealth of Nations, is a sovereign State with British Queen Elizabeth II as its monarch and Head of State. As of date, there are 15 such realms excluding Barbados. It severs its ties with its former coloniser on the 55th anniversary of its independence. The last Governor-General is now the first President of the country. Both are titular posts, but the latter represents the free will of the Barbadians. Its Prime Minister indicated the direction in which Barbados is moving and expects the world to move: "Barbadians want a Barbadian Head of State. This is the ultimate statement of confidence in who we are and what we are capable of achieving." Other Caribbean countries that exited the Realm are Guyana,



Trinidad and Tobago and Dominica. The new Republic rises at a time when Britain's colonial past is coming under scrutiny from its people and the Queen's family itself. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have urged the country to acknowledge its colonial past, however uncomfortable it might be, in order to move forward.

There are still several countries, many of them blips on the map, even today under the jurisdiction of the United States, France, Australia, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand apart from the UK. It is the emergence of these countries as independent republics that will conclude the clash between the colonists and colonies that spread a wave of decolonisation in the world throughout the 20th century, freeing so many colonies and restoring their independent rule, dignity and identity. Colonialism is exploitative and runs counter to the principle of equality and sovereignty, the cornerstones of the United Nations. The fact that the archaic mode of exploitative governance is still in vogue in some places even though it should not be, needs to be iterated in light of the Barbados example. The agenda of decolonisation is based on one principle alone: independence of a country from any form of external governance and independence of its people to have a free association with any form of Government. The 21st century expects the remaining countries to follow the Barbados model and embrace independence along with the human right of self-determination.

PICTALK



Indian Navy sailors participate in rehearsal parade for the Navy Day at Gateway of India, in Mumbai

PTI

Govt's harvest

The Government was hoping to browbeat the farmers but it got caught in its own game

The BJP-led Union Government has, as promised, passed a Bill to repeal the farm laws. But it must ask itself that one year down since the nation's farmers — especially those belonging to Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, and then their number went on rising steadily — rose virtually in revolt against the passage of the three farm laws, was all the trouble worth it? There was a siege at the Capital's entry points; there was vandalism and lawlessness on the ramparts of the Red Fort on a momentous day like the Republic Day and then, the biggest shocker proving the Centre's cavalier attitude, the Lakhimpur Kheri incident which claimed the lives of at least nine people. In the interim, several farmers committed death by suicide and a few were allegedly murdered while protesting on Delhi's borders against the "devilish" laws. Quite recently, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha leaders and Bharatiya Kisan Union chieftain Rakesh Tikait, during a rally in Lucknow, warned the Centre that their agitation would be prolonged unless their demands on issuing a guarantee on the MSP and sacking Union State Minister for Home Ajay Mishra Teni, besides doling out suitable legal punishment to his relatives, were not met.



The angry leaders had gone to West Bengal prior to the Assembly elections there and the embarrassing drubbing the Trinamool Congress handed out to the BJP is a matter of record. In the same vein, the still-unsatisfied farmers have now hinted that they would pool in their resources and might in the UP elections against the BJP. No wonder then that the Opposition parties have been overtly siding with the farmers and, now that the Centre has been forced to repeal the contentious farm laws right at the start of the winter session of Parliament ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls, are quick to jump at the chance and taunt the Government. While Congress president Sonia Gandhi and other leaders staged a protest outside Parliament on Monday before the Bill repealing the laws was passed, AIMIM supreme Asaduddin Owaisi mocked the BJP-led Government, saying it had repealed the laws now as it feared losing political capital and electoral advantage in the upcoming elections. All said and done, it now appears that the Government was indulging in upmanship and hoping to browbeat the farmers but it got caught in its own game and didn't know when to get off the ride. There is a lesson in this for all the stakeholders.

Is India working its way back in Nepal?

The black hole in India-Nepal relations remains the economic blockade of 2015 and New Delhi's grudging acceptance of the 2015 Constitution

Returning to Nepal after a 20-month COVID lockdown was not easy given the erratic flight schedules and hassles in border entry. A clear blue sky, glistening sunshine and a majestic Himalayan parade led by Machapuchhere and Annapurna welcomes us back to Pokhara. The two-year long power struggle in the largest communist alliance failed to deliver the political stability it was congenitally endowed with (two thirds majority) after Prime Minister KP Oli and former Prime Minister Prachanda parted ways much to the chagrin of China, paving the way for the ruling five-party democratic alliance led by Nepali Congress Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. The two governance issues, however, trouble the Government: the crisis in judiciary over impeachment of Chief Justice Chandra Rana; and divisions over US Millennium Challenge Corporation award.

Dominating the political landscape are ongoing and forthcoming general conventions of CPN UML (Oli), Nepali Congress (Deuba) and CPN Maoist (Prachanda). The leaders named against parties are sure to return as chairman/president. In the next elections, the NC is aiming to emerge as the single largest party as Defence Minister Minendra Rijal explained: "we have a 36 per cent vote share which, by next year, will grow to nearly 40 per cent and with PR, we will win nearly 160 seats (in 275-member house)." The UML, which is the single largest party today with 93 seats, remains the most popular and stable party with a solid electoral base and Oli's charisma all intact. According to an Indian diplomat, the UML and NC could be neck and neck. Prachanda is accused of breaking the Left alliance giving the sympathy vote to Oli. Prachanda has urged the other breakaway faction — now CPN (Unified Socialists) led by former Prime Minister Madhav Nepal — to consider a pre-poll alliance so that they can emerge as the third largest party though Maoists have always aspired for second position. Some fear they may decline to fourth position if the



Janata Samajwadi Party (Upendra Yadav and Mahanta Thakur) can re-unite. But it is early days as the election is due only at the end of 2022.

The Chinese are very disappointed with Oli for not saving the Left alliance they helped cobble up and instead turning to India for salvation. But they are still in the game, though some feel Beijing has shot its bolt. Nepal is quite scared of China, especially after ominous warnings by President Xi Jinping from Kathmandu during his first visit in 2019. He said to the effect that anyone who dares to split China will be 'crushed' and those who attempt anti-China activities will have 'their bones shattered'. Two recent books by Nepali authors — Sanjay Upadhyay's *How India Lost Nepal to China* and Amish Raj Mulmi's *All Roads Lead North* illustrate China's high stake game in Nepal. While Beijing's capacity in reconstructing the Left alliance seems limited, as it is pitted against India and the US, it will not give up. Many see the MCC as part of the Indo-Pacific strategy to contain China which is why it is unlikely to pass muster in the present Parliament.

The black hole in India-Nepal relations remains the economic blockade of 2015 and New Delhi's grudging



THE CHINESE ARE VERY DISAPPOINTED WITH OLI FOR NOT SAVING THE LEFT ALLIANCE THEY HELPED COBBLE UP AND INSTEAD TURNING TO INDIA FOR SALVATION. BUT THEY ARE STILL IN THE GAME, THOUGH SOME FEEL BEIJING HAS SHOT ITS BOLT

acceptance of the 2015 constitution. After Prime Minister Modi's 2014-15 visits and his captivating speeches, expectations from India were very high but the opposite happened. Fortunately, some of the anti-India feeling has ricocheted to China due to its unabashed interference in domestic politics while trying to rescue the Left alliance. Shortly, Nepal which in 2017 was load-shedding upto 18-hours a day, will be in a position to export power to India though only a modest 39 MW and increase its sale capacity as power transmission lines are developed southwards. A tricky Oli legacy issue is incorporation of India's Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiadhura in Nepali maps which was legislated by a full House. Nepal is consulting India on methodology for conducting its 12th national census there without trespass of territory. Oli said last Sunday at the UML convention that if returned to power, he will get the land back from India through dialogue.

Some Nepalese told me that it is no longer a border issue but one of sovereignty. Like Pakistan sought J&K from India as a peace offering, Nepal also wants a grand gesture from India conceding Kalapani and other territory. They also complained about New Delhi suppressing the



GEN ASHOK MEHTA

Eminent Persons Group report. Meanwhile, Baba Ramdev was in Kathmandu last month and hosted by Nepal's cabinet. Although Deuba and Prachanda inaugurated the Patanjali TV station dedicated to yoga, Ramdev is seen as a Trojan horse for revival of Hindu rashttra. But the nationalists, Maoists and other republicans will obstruct restoration of any form of monarchy and Hindu State, even though Oli had announced last year that Ram was born in Chitwan Nepal. Many State and public buses carry bills that Buddha was born in Nepal to remind the Southern neighbour of the sanctity of ownership: be it Ram, Buddha or Kalapani.

Still, strategic geography compels Kathmandu to discreetly follow an India first policy — like Maldives more openly and Sri Lanka cautiously — though China's shadow is a speed-breaker. Beijing would give its right arm to break the ruling democratic alliance and restore Left's primacy validating Upadhyay's theory that India has lost Nepal to China. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A LOOMING NEW THREAT

Sir — The Union Health Ministry revised guidelines mandating that all international passengers entering India have to submit 14-day travel details and upload a negative RT-PCR test report on the Air Suvaidha portal before the journey. The new guidelines will come into effect from December 1. The RT-PCR test has to be taken within 72 hours of starting the journey. Travelers from countries 'at-risk', including the UK, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore have created panic among Indian citizens and the Government is acting in full swing.

There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with Omicron are different from those from other variants. The RT-PCR tests continue to detect infection with Omicron — which was first detected in South Africa earlier this month — and studies are ongoing to determine whether there is any impact on rapid antigen detection tests. Until more information is available, it has become utmost important that we follow COVID protocols diligently and avoid unnecessary travel because we have just started to come out of the danger of the Delta variant and now a new one is knocking on the door.

MR Jayanthi Maniam | Ghaziabad

POLITICAL FESTIVITIES IN GOA

Sir — Midnight trysts, vocal denunciations, some detectable undercurrent of animosity and a fair amount of absurd theatrics seem to have added a splash of colour to the on-going election campaign in Goa. While such oddities tend to break the monotony of having the same set of faces staring down from election hoardings across the State term after term, the indecisive nature of all the parties with regard to the selection of its candidates is throwing up various possibilities. Moreover, with improved statistics of the 'arrivals and departures' to and from its folds, most of the parties should be pardoned for predicting their invincibility in the ensuing polls.

Yet, despite the availability of so many alternatives at its disposal, the elec-

No debate in Parliament?



What transpired in Parliament on the first day of the winter session did our democracy not proud. Rigorous debate on issues of public importance and interest on the floor of Parliament is a salient feature of a vibrant democracy. But the Modi Government thought otherwise and repealed the farm laws at breakneck speed without any debate whatsoever in both Houses of Parliament and gave it the dubious distinction of being the fastest repeal ever in the annals of India's parliamentary history. It showed its scant respect for something as

basic as debate. It took just a few minutes for the Government to get the Bill repealing the farm laws passed in the Lok Sabha by voice vote amid sloganeering by the Opposition, a record of sorts. Alas, the Government was unwilling to mend its ways!

A democratic Government that refuses to allow or countenance debate cannot be said to be worth its salt and worthy of the adjective. The 'tyranny of majority', reflected in the repeal of laws without debate and the suspension of 12 Opposition MPs, does not equal democracy. The irony of it all is that the Parliament repealed the laws without a debate in utter disregard of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurance in his customary brief address before the start of a session that his Government was ready to discuss all issues and answer all questions. The Parliament saw the inversion of Modi's counsel on 'debate and disruption'.

G David Milton | Maruthancode

torate continues to harbour the feeling that it has so little to choose from. These sentiments seem to stem from the fact that none of the political dispensations in the State, including the ruling, are absolutely certain of their electoral chances. Depending more on the rhetoric rather than an unpretentious approach, their leaders too have failed to put it across to the body of voters that they mean business. Basically it is the wish to remain a part of the winning combination, and also have an effective say in its affairs, that is driving most of the heavyweights, their party affiliations notwithstanding, to hold their cards close to their chests.

Pachu Menon | Margao

DON'T BE SOCIAL MEDIA SLAVES

Sir — Nowadays, most of the youngsters spend a lot of time on social media due to which they have, knowingly or unknowingly, become addicted to social media. Excessive use of social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram etc affect their daily routine and studies and

causes unhappiness and dissatisfaction without any significant reason. It also aggravates mental health issues such as anxiety and depression and can give rise to inferiority complex and even suicidal thoughts. It has become an issue of concern because it hampers students from achieving their goals.

How can we break out of social media slavery? Deleting social media applications is not a solution but we have to control the urge to scroll for hours. Instead, we can open a book that is as addictive but far more knowledge-giving. We should remove our phone from our morning routine, try not to post our personal information, turn off unnecessary notifications and keep the phone away as much as possible. By making these little changes in our habits, we can stop the addiction of social media and be happy for what we are.

Mitesh Rao | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

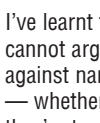
Corruption in recruitment and paper leak has become the identity of the BJP Government.

Congress general secretary — Priyanka Gandhi



A very happy Chanukah to Jewish people in the UK and around the world who will be lighting the menorah this week.

UK Prime Minister — Boris Johnson



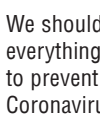
I've learnt that you cannot argue against narratives — whether or not they're true. People have a certain fixed notion.

Actor — Saif Ali Khan



We have to have faith in our spinners and know that they can really put the Kiwis under pressure.

Indian batsman — Shreyas Iyer



We should do everything possible to prevent the new Coronavirus variant from entering India.

Delhi Chief Minister — Arvind Kejriwal

FIRST COLUMN

ON THE MOVE BUT REACHING WHERE?

The islands of prosperity will find it difficult to survive in a sea of deprivation and dissonance



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Globally there are several health and economic crises. They are not always stable geographically. As the health crisis of one region recedes, it could surface in another. Same with economic crises. Not enough data is available for any cogent reflection or scientific analysis. Yet, for insights, analyse we must. The bottom line is clear: health crises and economic crises are in many ways inter-linked. The economic crises reduce the resources available and the health crises impede any long-range view. In such a situation, power play becomes inevitable and unabashed. The sectors and conglomerates which have gained out of the pandemic are being increasingly identified. The pharmaceutical industry has gained like never before. Some financial investors with a flair for investment have struck it rich, again, like never before. In spite of the understandable push for vaccination, there are patches in the African sub-continent which are still relatively immune from the virus even without vaccination. The data which the media feeds is often focussed on territories where tools of analysis can be applied. The territories outside this framework of analysis are large. This would definitionally make a global pattern read-



ing a huge challenge. Add to this the normal economic need of food, shelter and clothing. They have their own logic and one could say compulsions. In the case of India, the growth rate between 2019 and 2020 has been five per cent. In the preceding five years, it was seven per cent. If the forecasts have to be believed, the likely rate will probably go down for the current year to the lowest level since 1991. This kind of situation will have a direct or ripple effect on everyone. Even the organisations, entities and business groups who have struck it rich in the last two years are going to be affected. Putting it simply, islands of prosperity will find it difficult to survive in a sea of deprivation and dissonance. While the above is a derivation of simple logic, in the present context, logic itself appears to be a bit of a casualty.

This is so because the tools to do a logical think-through are probably inadequate. The seemingly contradictory evidence which keeps surfacing, even with reference to the virus, will take time to settle down. The implications of that kind of situation are comprehensible for policy formulation. This holds true even in relatively removed sectors, like farming. There is no apparent correlation between the virus effect and the framing of the three farming laws. The withdrawal of the farming laws and the reasons which led to it are still in the domain of speculation, debate and what can at best be called my-guess-is-better-than-yours. Evidence-based policy formulation is not always possible in times such as the present one. The scientific method further goes for a bump in the absence of any precedence of the present context. Yet, this cannot be the reason for giving up an attempt to be logical. What one does know is that in the first wave of COVID-19 in India, around April 2020, there was evidence of a two-speed economy. During that time, the rural sector was flourishing. There was technology upgradation; low ticket electronic items graduated to become essential commodities; mobile phones moved centre stage. As compared to this, the urban sector was floundering. Interestingly, the agricultural/rural sector which had no restrictions and no hindrances registered a 3.6 per cent growth in that period. Where was the disruption? The best which can be said is that that the present situation is of work-in-progress.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal.)

Repeal of farm laws: PM Modi's volte-face



UTTAM GUPTA

The arthiyas, large farmers and traders have successfully protected their turf while small farmers, who constitute the overwhelming majority, have lost

On November 19, 2021, announcing his Government's decision to repeal the contentious three farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi apologized for not being able to convince a section of the farmers about the benefits that these laws would bring them. Are these laws so complex as to become incomprehensible to the farmer?

The "Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holdings of Households in Rural India", SAS in short, released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), covering the period July 2018 to June 2019, reveals widespread dissatisfaction among farmers with the price realized from sale of their produce. Their highest dissatisfaction is with sales in the Agricultural Produce Market Committee or APMCs mandi (marketplace notified under the State APMC Act) followed by sales 'private local market'. Nearly 83 percent farmers sell their produce in these two outlets.

The low price from sale in APMC has to do with extant State laws under which farmers can sell their produce only in the 'designated' mandi. In the mandi, the arthiyas — local term for commission agents — arrange for the auction and delivery of the produce. They and the licensed trader/buyer rule the roost. The duo ensure that the farmers get a low price and even then faces problems like rejection of crop, crop deliberately weighed less, payments delayed, etc. Levies such as market fee, arthiyas' commission and rural development cess (RDC) further add to their woes.

As for sales in the private local market, though legally it is barred, small farmers who normally don't have access to the APMC are forced to sell to the very traders who dominate the mandi and at throw-away prices. The latter have the blessings of corrupt bureaucrats and politicians and hence, do not face any action for violating the State law.

In short, under the existing State APMC laws, farmers face a raw deal. The only way they can get a fair deal is to give them a chance to sell in other outlets. In the past, States had made some moves in this direction: 20 States have allowed contract farming; 23 States allow 'direct purchase' from farmers; 22 States/UTs allow private wholesale markets, while 15 have excluded fruits and vegetables from the APMC Act. These are piecemeal efforts and are far from giving unfettered access especially to small farmers who account for over 80 per cent of the total. The three central laws fill the existing void as these legitimize sales on all non-APMC platforms without disturbing the APMC mandis.

There is nothing in these laws that farmers do not understand. Even if there was anything that was too complex, that must have been understood during the



WITH THE REPEAL OF THE THREE LAWS, AGRI-MARKET REFORMS HAVE REACHED A DEAD END. THERE IS NO HOPE OF RESURRECTING THESE IN THE NEAR TERM. MEANWHILE, IN VIEW OF FARMERS' LEADERS RAISING MORE DEMANDS AND THE GOVERNMENT BEING ON THE DEFENSIVE, THE COUNTRY COULD BE ENTERING A DANGEROUS ZONE

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)



marathon talks the Union ministers had with them. The latter had even agreed to make several amendments as demanded by the former. Besides showing willingness to make more amendments, the Prime Minister went a step ahead to offer to defer implementation of the laws for a period of up to two years.

Despite so much accommodation shown by the establishment, if the farmers' leaders wanted nothing less than 'repeal', it has to do with the stony desire of a certain class of farmers (those with large land holdings) from Punjab and Haryana and the arthiyas to maintain their dominance in sale and purchase and keep potential competition from other entities at bay.

The central agencies procure 30 percent of wheat and rice produced in the country albeit at the minimum support price (MSP). Nearly 30 percent of wheat production comes from Punjab and Haryana whereas in rice, their share is 14 percent. However, in their total procurement, the agencies pick up 60 percent of wheat and 35 percent of rice from these two states alone. Furthermore, almost all of this comes from large farmers. This class of farmers apprehends, if the field is opened for all, they will lose this privilege.

As for arthiyas, they too have a vested interest in protecting their commission as well as exercising control over the small farmers. If the latter get a chance to sell at non-APMC outlets, the former will lose control over what we may term as

the golden goose (taking grains from the small farmers at throw-away price and making a windfall by selling at high rates; they also lend money to those very farmers at high rates and earn huge interest income).

The arthiyas and big farmers and traders have succeeded in protecting their turf even as the small farmers who constitute the overwhelming majority have lost. A collateral damage is in terms nipping in the bud any chance of increasing private investment in agri-infrastructure — a pre-requisite for ensuring sustainable growth of this most crucial sector. This is baffling but it has happened. Here are the plausible reasons.

First, while staying implementation of the laws in January, 2021, the Supreme Court had set up a Committee to recommend the way forward after consulting all stakeholders including farmers. In its report submitted in March, 2021, the Committee reportedly favored the three laws. But the court has kept the issue hanging.

Second, in public discourse, the farmers are projected as a homogenous entity, without recognizing the vast disparity between the large and small farmers in terms of assets, income, etc. This enables the large farmers to call the shots. The small farmers being unorganized, their voice is not even heard.

Third, the big farmer/trader lobby has also succeeded in obfuscating the issues. For instance, they aver 'a wheat farmer receives

just about half the MSP of Rs 1975 per quintal' thereby signaling that this is what the Centre's laws have delivered. The reality is that 'the laws are not even in force, courtesy the stay granted by the SC'.

Four, they have managed to distract the attention of small farmers from the 'real cause' behind their plight namely the oppressive State APMC laws and making them believe that MSP guaranteed by a Central law is a panacea for all their woes.

To conclude, with the repeal of the three laws, agri-market reforms have reached a dead end. There is no hope of resurrecting these in the near term (a Committee set up by Modi to see 'how MSP can be made more effective' is a sheer cosmetic). Meanwhile, in view of farmers' leaders raising more demands and Government being on the defensive, the country could be entering a dangerous zone.

A legal guarantee for MSP has the potential of making the national exchequer bankrupt, overstraining the handling and storage facilities, increasing wastage manifold and embarrassing India at the WTO as food subsidy (albeit trade distorting) to farmers balloons. The exemption for farmers from the Electricity (Amendment) Act will lead to bleeding power distribution companies and ever-increasing stress on State finances. Their exemption from laws on climate will not only add to pollution but also send a wrong signal to the world community.

Will Modi muster the courage to stem the slide?

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION. WE WANT QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT AND ALSO PEACE.
—PRIME MINISTER
NARENDRA MODI



HOLLOW WORDS, MR PRIME MINISTER. YOU RAN AWAY FROM DISCUSSING #PEGASUS AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISRUPTING THE MONSOON SESSION.
—TMC LEADER
DEREK O'BRIEN

India's super growth journey high on debt

Steering the country is not easy. It is true that international organisations are cautious while the Government feels that its efforts are being stymied

India joins the world aiming for a super growth on a high debt and infra push for an economic panacea.

India's heavy investment over ₹233.08 lakh crore investment in infrastructure, including ₹10,500-crore Jewar airport adjacent to Delhi, is officially expected to give a major boost to the economy.

India is not alone. The entire world is trying to do that. The result is hyper-growth in world debt to \$226 trillion. In its 2021 Fiscal Monitor report, the IMF said India's debt increased from 68.9 per cent of its GDP in 2016 to 89.6 per cent in 2020. It is projected to jump to 90.6 per cent in 2021 and then decline to 88.8 per cent in 2022, to gradually reach 85.2 per cent in 2026.



SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

Jewar has accelerated a process of development in UP with an eye on the state elections. It may make this part of the National Capital Region one of the most crowded places inviting large number of migrants that may stretch local resources.

The severe crash in the stock market has added a new concern. The nation hopes to fly on expectations but airport projects, high altitude Himalayan development, large-scale tree felling and acquisition of farm lands raise ecological concerns. But a nation striving hard to come out of the Coronavirus pandemic is looking for faster development so that there is cash flow.

The Government expanded the 'National Infrastructure



Pipeline (NIP)' to 7,400 projects. According to Department of Industry and Internal Trade, 217 projects worth Rs. 1.10 lakh crore (\$ 15.09 billion) were completed as of 2020. Through the NIP, the government invested \$ 1.4 trillion in infrastructure development as of July 2021.

However, the more investment is made in infrastructure, the more the nation's cost to deliver. Unless there is an overall growth in activities — from industry to agriculture

— the benefits become expensive to afford.

The IMF says that constraints on financing are particularly severe for poorer countries. Noting that in 2020, fiscal policy proved its worth, IMF director for fiscal affairs Vitor Gaspar says the increase in public debt in 2020 was fully justified by the need to respond to COVID-19 and its economic, social, and financial consequences. But the increase is expected to be one-off, he said. So how to bring down the debt is the question. Debt dynamics are driven by a strong contribution from nominal GDP growth, accompanied by a much more gradual reduction in the primary deficit, he said.

The IMF said risks to the fiscal outlook are elevated.

This calls for India to review its policies. Let us not forget that the 2007-08 global meltdown followed an unsustainable financial behaviour.

The results would be high inflationary tendencies that would add to costs further and create an unstable global economy leading to more conflicts. India's inflation has risen to 12.5 per cent. Prices are rising, wages too would be rising and a cycle of inflation may continue.

This is also being seen in a regime of high taxations and high penalties on cars and car uses across the country. The silliest is the clampdown on outside state registered vehicles in Bihar, and HSRP plates. These are ignored as small issues but these small things are making lives of people difficult.

User charges are being recklessly increased. At some private railway stations, parking charges are going through the roof. Ostensibly, nobody can be blamed as 'the prices are rising' but that needs a holistic review.

The IMF projects growth at 9.5 per cent in FY2021-22 and 8.5 per cent in FY2022-23. Headline inflation sees elevated price pressures. The contraction in economic activity, lower revenue, and pandemic-related support measures are estimated to have led to a widening of the fiscal deficit to 8.6 and 12.8 per cent of GDP in FY2020-21 for the central and state governments, respectively.

But the IMF is concerned that despite policy support, bank credit growth has

remained subdued, while large corporates have benefited from easier conditions in capital markets. Net inflows and improvement in the current account have supported an increase in foreign exchange reserves. The current account balance is projected to remain in deficit as oil prices rise.

The overall toned down IMF report indicates not an easy situation in the coming years.

Steering the country is not easy. It is true that international organisations are cautious while the government feels that their efforts are being stymied. India hopes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts belie the IMF and infra push takes the country to the targeted growth.

No proposal to recognise Bitcoin as a currency: Finance Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has no proposal to recognise Bitcoin as a currency in the country, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a reply to the Lok Sabha on Monday.

She also informed the House that the government does not collect data on Bitcoin transactions.

Whether the government has any proposal to recognise Bitcoin as a currency in the country, the Finance Minister said "No, sir".

Bitcoin is a digital currency that allows people to buy goods and services and exchange money without involving banks, credit card issuers or other third parties.

It was introduced in 2008 by an unidentified group of programmers as a cryptocurrency as well as an electronic payment system. It is reportedly the first decentralised digital currency where peer-to-peer transactions take place without



any intermediary.

Meanwhile, the government plans to introduce the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill 2021 in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament. The Bill seeks to ban all but a few private cryptocurrencies to promote underlying technologies while allowing an official digital currency

by RBI.

In reply to another question, Sitharaman said, ministries and departments have spent Rs 2.29 lakh crore as capital expenditure during the April-September period of the current fiscal.

This is 41 per cent of the Budget Estimate (BE) of Rs 5.54 lakh crore for 2021-22. The actual expenditure during

Inform about introduction of bill on crypto: HC to Centre

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Monday directed the Union government to apprise it on January 17, 2022 about the introduction of the bill on cryptocurrency and what further action has been taken on the issue.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice M S Karnik said it cannot direct the parliamentary legislation to enact a law.

The court was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by advocate Aditya Kadam, seeking directions to the central government to formulate laws to govern the use and trade of cryptocurrency within the country.

Kadam highlighted the unregulated business of cryptocurrency in the country which, he claimed, affects the rights of the investors as there is no mechanism in law to redress their grievances.

NIP is expected to improve project preparation, attract investments into infrastructure, and play pivotal role in economic growth, she said.

National Monetization Pipeline (NMP) was also launched on August 23, 2021 to unlock the value of investments in public sector assets by tap-

ing connectivity of infrastructure and also reduce travel time for people, she added.

On inflation, the Finance Minister said price situation of major essential commodities is being monitored by the government on a regular basis and corrective actions are taken from time to time.

Sensex advances 153 pts amid Omicron worries

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex advanced by 153 points on Monday following gains in index heavyweights Reliance Industries and TCS, even as investors remained cautious over the Omicron variant of the coronavirus spreading to more countries.

In a volatile session, the 30-share Sensex closed higher by 153.43 points or 0.27 per cent to 57,260.58. The index had tanked more than 500 points or over 1 per cent in opening trade in line with weak global cues.

The broader NSE Nifty edged higher by 27.50 points or 0.16 per cent to end at 17,053.95.

Reliance Industries rose by 1.26 per cent after its telecom arm Jio announced a hike in prepaid tariffs from the next month. Bharti Airtel also advanced on reports that the recently announced tariff hikes would boost the financials of telecom firms.

Kotak Bank rose the most among Sensex scrips, spurring



2.92 per cent amid reports that LIC will up its stake in the private lender to 10 per cent.

Gains in HCL Tech, TCS, Infosys, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finance and Titan helped Sensex close in the green.

On the other hand, Sun Pharma, NTPC, Axis Bank, Nestle, Bajaj Auto and SBI were among major losers.

Asian stock markets declined further after governments imposed travel controls due to the spread of the new coronavirus strain.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo fell 1.7 per cent after Japan

announced an entry ban on foreigners from Tuesday. The Shanghai Composite Index dropped 0.4 per cent and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong tumbled 1.2 per cent. The Kospi in Seoul declined 0.9 per cent and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 fell 0.5 per cent. Meanwhile, Brent crude jumped USD 2.82 to USD 74.41 per barrel in London.

Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital market on Friday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 5,785.83 crore, as per exchange data.

MONEY MATTERS

Gold climbs Rs 242; silver zooms Rs 543

Gold in the national capital on Monday rallied by Rs 242 to Rs 47,242 per 10 gram in line with gain in international precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had settled at Rs 47,000 per 10 gram. Silver also gained Rs 543 to Rs 62,248 per kilogram from Rs 61,705 per kilogram in the previous trade. In the international market, gold trading with gains at USD 1,794 per ounce and silver flat at USD 23.34 per ounce. Gold prices traded higher with spot gold prices at COMEX firm at USD 1,794 per ounce on Monday. Gold prices traded up on Monday on growing virus worries despite of stronger dollar and rise in US bond yields, according to HDFC Securities, Senior Analyst (Commodities), Tapan Patel.



Bharat Financial Inclusion top officials resign



Top executives of BFIL, a fully-owned subsidiary of IndusInd Bank, have resigned from the company last week, the bank said on Monday. The bank said it has appointed an Executive Director and another person to oversee day-to-day operations of the company. Shalabh Saxena, the Managing Director & CEO, and Ashish Damani, the Executive Director & CFO of BFIL, are to join rival microfinance lender Spandana Sphoorty, over which the two companies are apparently at loggerheads. "Shalabh Saxena and Ashish Damani, currently employed with BFIL in the capacity of the Managing Director & CEO and the Executive Director & CFO, respectively, have tendered their resignations pursuant to emails addressed to the Chairman of the board of BFIL on November 25, 2021," IndusInd Bank said in regulatory filing. The bank said, in the interim, it has nominated J Sriharan as Executive Director on the board of BFIL and appointed Srinivas Bonam to oversee the day-to-day functioning of BFIL.

Steel demand drops by 5 pc in FY21, says Union Minister

Demand for steel from sectors like infrastructure, automobile and engineering fell by more than 5 per cent to 94.9 million tonnes during the financial year ended on March 31, 2021, Parliament was informed on Monday. Building and construction sector along with infrastructure, automobile, engineering and packaging and defence had consumed 100.2 million tonne (MT) steel during 2019-20 fiscal, Union Steel Minister Ram Chandra Prasad Singh said while replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha. According to the information shared by Singh to the house, the building and construction sector consumed 41 MT steel in 2020-21 as against 43.4 MT in 2019-20. The demand in infrastructure sector also fell to 23.8 MT from 25.1 MT a year ago.



6,018 people avail skill loans under central scheme



The government on Monday said as many as 6,018 people have been benefited under the Skill Loan Scheme as of October 31 this year. The government launched the scheme on July 15, 2015, to provide loan facility to aspirants wanting to do skill development courses aligned to National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). Any person who has secured admission in a course run by Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics or in a school recognised by central or state education boards can avail loan for the purpose. Amount of loan varies from Rs 5,000 to Rs 150,000 depending on the course and has a repayment period of 3 to 7 years, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. "Under the Scheme, as on October 31, 2021, 6,018 persons have been benefited," he said.



Net direct tax revenue rises 68% to Rs 6.9L-cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The net direct tax collection grew nearly 68 per cent during April 1 to November 23 to more than Rs 6.92 lakh crore, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said on Monday.

"The Net Direct Tax Collection figures for the FY-2021-22 as on 23.11.2021 are at Rs 6,92,833.6 crores showing a growth of 67.93 per cent and 27.29 per cent over the net collection figures for the corresponding period FY2020-21 and FY 2019-20," he said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

The net collection between April 1 - November 23 in 2020-21 and 2019-20 fiscals was over Rs 4.12 lakh crore and over Rs 5.44 lakh crore respectively.

The gross direct tax collec-

tion (before adjusting refunds) as of November 23 stood at over Rs 8.15 lakh crore, a 48.11 growth over the collections in the corresponding period in last fiscal.

Chaudhary further said that the gross GST collection in the current fiscal (April 2021-March'22) post Covid-19 outbreak is showing an increasing trend. The gross GST collection for full 2020-21 ended March 2021 was over Rs 11.36 lakh crore, while the same in the current fiscal till October stood at Rs 8.10 lakh crore.

In reply to a separate question on whether incidents of tax evasion are increasing in Delhi and other parts of the country, Chaudhary said there is no evidence to suggest that incidents of income tax evasion are increasing in Delhi and other parts of the country.

Strive to place India among top digital economy globally: Mos IT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The primary objective of the government is to make the country a trillion dollar digital economy and at least one of the top two digital economies in the world, Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Monday.

He said that there will be focus to intensify digitalisation of government services and forming laws that are of global standards that will clear ambiguities and result in inclusive development.

"Primary objective is to make sure that our digital economy is a trillion dollar economy - the largest in the world. If not the largest then at least one of the top 2 digital economies in the world," Chandrasekhar said while summarising the broad objective of the government for the next 25 years.

He was speaking at week-long Azadi ka Digital Mahotsav.

The government has been aspiring to make India a USD 1 trillion digital economy by 2025.

Economy in better shape than a year ago

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's macroeconomic situation is certainly better than what it was a year ago, eminent economist Pinaki Chakraborty said on Monday, while expressing hope that the country will be back on the path of economic growth if there is no major third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an interview with PTI, Chakraborty, who is the director of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), said that inflation may remain at an elevated level as there was a significant



fiscal and monetary expansion in the last 18 months.

"The current macroeconom-

ic situation is certainly much better than what it was one year back. We are seeing recov-

ery in most sectors," he said.

Chakraborty noted that COVID-19 vaccination has been going on at a very fast rate in India.

"And hopefully if there is no third wave, we will be back on a path of economic growth which will be sustainable and increasing," the eminent economist added.

According to Chakraborty, COVID-19 vaccination brings a sense of health security and should help resumption of normal economic activity, particularly in the services sector, which contributes more than 50 per cent of India's GDP.

RBI supersedes board of Reliance Capital; appoints administrator

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Monday superseded the board of Reliance Capital Ltd (RCL), promoted by Anil Ambani's Reliance Group, in view of the defaults in meeting payment obligations.

The RBI said the board has been superseded "in view of the defaults by RCL in meeting the various payment obligations to its creditors and serious governance concerns which the Board has not been able to address effectively".

It has also appointed Nageswar Rao Y (Ex-Executive

Director, Bank of Maharashtra) as the administrator of the NBFC.

"The Reserve Bank will shortly initiate the process of resolution of the company under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency and Liquidation Proceedings of Financial Service Providers and Application to Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2019," the central bank said in a statement. The Reserve Bank will also apply to the NCLT, Mumbai, for appointing the administrator as the Insolvency Resolution Professional.

CAG flags anomalies in accounts of units under IT, telecom ministries

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Monday reported multiple irregularities in the accounts of units under the IT and telecom ministries, including purchases of hardware and software worth Rs 890 crore by NICS in contravention of rules.

In its audit report for financial years 2017-18 and 2018-19, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has flagged anomalies in the decision taken by state-run telecom firm BSNL, C-DoT, the Department of Posts, ITI Limited and CDAC that had adverse financial implications.

"NICS procured hardware and software costing Rs 890.34 crore through the 'Strategic Alliance' route in contravention of General Financial Rules, 2005 and departmental instructions and thus failed to ensure transparency and com-



petitiveness in the procurement process," according to the CAG report tabled in Lok Sabha on Monday.

The National Informatics Centre Services Inc (NICS), which provides IT infrastructure to government departments, prior to September 2015 had been making procurements using SAs (strategic alliances) based on the approval of its board but without obtaining any PACs (Proprietary Article Certificate), it said.

"This was in contravention of Rule 154 of GFR, 2005 and MeitY's subsequent instructions of June 2014," the report added.

According to the rules cited by the CAG, procurement from a single source can be resorted in cases where only a particular firm is the manufacturer of the required goods, and/or for standardisation of machinery or spare parts based on advice of a competent technical expert and approval of the competent authority.

NICS had approached the Department of Expenditure (DoE) for inclusion of strategic alliance (SA) as a process of procurement and providing of ICT goods and services (including solutions).

DoE while not specifically allowing incorporation of SAs in general financial rules (GFR), conveyed to NICS in August-2015 that they have no objection if it enters into strategic alliance as per rule, subject to the condition that before placement of each order it should provide PAC.

The report said from September 2015 onwards, NICS has been procuring from a single source. A test check revealed that these were being furnished and used without mentioning clear, specific and cogent reasons as per the format prescribed in GFR, for procurement through a single source.

NICS and the Ministry of

Electronics and IT (MeitY) in their reply explained to the CAG their rationale and the chronology for adoption of the SA route.

According to the replies, NICS has been making such procurements on the basis of PACs and after receiving the advice of DoE.

CAG said though NICS has claimed that it was subsequently procuring goods and services from a single source only after obtaining PAC, a test check of PACs showed that due diligence was wanting both while furnishing and accepting PACs. "Further, MeitY has itself admitted (September 2019) that common items worth Rs 133.55 crore were procured under Strategic Alliance though these could have been procured through rate contracts or open bids," the report said. The CAG has also flagged delays, shortcomings and non-establishment of laboratories by

Telecommunication Engineering Centre (TEC).

It recommended that a high-level Technical Committee from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) should review the status of all the nine laboratories and draw up a blueprint for their completion as early as possible. The CAG said that as a result of delays and non-establishment of required labs, TEC could not ensure creation of a suitable testing infrastructure in a time-bound manner to support its mandate as a testing and certification agency of DoT.

In case of the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), the CAG said that autonomous body disbursed ad-hoc bonus amounting to Rs 97.70 lakh for the years 2015-16 and 2016-17, even though no orders were issued by the Ministry of Finance for payment of ad-hoc bonus.



'The very definition of a bubble is now etched in my mind forever'

Created by award-winning director Ram Madhvani, *Aarya 2* co-produced by Endemol Shine India and Ram Madhvani Films brings to light Aarya Sareen's journey from being powerless to fearless.

After emerging as one of the most gripping thrillers from India with an International Emmy nomination for best drama series, *Aarya* is set to hit the digital scene with Season 2. What makes it one of the most anticipated OTT series is that its trailer is rife with surprising twists. The key question its trailer raised is — 'Can Aarya Sareen escape her past, or will her own family betray her, yet again?'

Ahead of the release of the second installment of *Aarya*, Sushmita Sen has opened up on her experience of

shooting for the show in the midst of a pandemic. Sushmita shared, "We've become lockdown specialists now! We either release during a lockdown or shoot during it, that's our new thing! When we completed the shoot for *Aarya 2*, on our farewell, we said how blessed we were to be working during the pandemic. There were so many people who had to sit at home, but this is also a nice culmination of teamwork. We had Disney+Hotstar, Ram Madhvani film, the entire crew and the cast together. Everyone just pulled in following the rules and making it possible."

Sushmita added, "My God! The very definition of a bubble is now etched in my mind forever. For any crew member to work in a PPE kit, covered from head to toe for 10 hrs a

day is seriously tough! And the constant tests, making sure we lived away from our family, the quarantine for 7-10 days before starting to work, all these measures initially seemed difficult. But in the bigger picture, we were full of gratitude to be working at such a time and being able to create something that you love. I mean *Aarya season 2* is a big leap from the first season!"

Lastly, "It's delightful to see the same series move with such pace and difference, when you've already taken the story miles ahead and it was always used to be a question mark! Ram Madhvani used to say what are we going to do in the rest of the season? There's already so much and then he would say, wait for it, we have a lot of content; we

have a fantastic subject! So, working during the lockdown period was amazing, we had to shoot in Jaipur which is Aarya's hometown and of course patchwork was executed in Mumbai, so our schedule was executed pretty much through the lockdown."

The second season of *Aarya* follows the journey of a mother battling the dark world of crime and enemies closing in on her family and children. Will her family continue to be her strength or will her own trustworthy people turn against her? Sushmita Sen will be seen reprising the role of Aarya Sareen and she will be joined by actors Sikandar Kher, Vikas Kumar, Mayo Sarao, Ankur Bhatia, Akash Khurana, Dilnaz Irani amongst others.

Ajay Devgn and Rakul Preet Singh starrer *MayDay* renamed *Runway 34*

Bollywood superstar Ajay Devgn on Monday announced that his upcoming directorial venture is now titled *Runway 34*, featuring Amitabh Bachchan and Rakul Preet Singh. Billed as an edge-of-the-seat drama, the film was earlier titled *MayDay*.

Devgn, who also stars in the movie, shared the new title in a series of posters on

Twitter. *MayDay* is now *Runway 34*. A high-octane thriller inspired by true events that is special to me, for reasons more than one! #Runway34 — Landing on Eid, April 29, 2022, as promised," read the caption of the tweet.

Runway 34 marks Devgn's third directorial, after *U Me Aur Hum* in 2008 and *Shivaay* in 2016.

The team commenced shooting last year in December.

In the film, Devgn will appear as a pilot and Singh as his co-pilot, the makers have kept the details of Bachchan's character under wraps. It also stars Angira Dhar. *Runway 34* will be released on April 29, 2022, under the banner Ajay Devgn FFilms.



Spider-Man: No Way Home to release in India a day ahead of US

Spider-Man: No Way Home, the new Spider-Man film starring Tom Holland and Zendaya, is all set to release in India on December 16, a day ahead of its release in the US. "We have some exciting news for all the Spider-Man & Marvel fans! Our favourite superhero will be swinging in one day earlier than the US! Catch #SpiderManNoWayHome on December 16 in English, Hindi, Tamil & Telugu,

tweeted Sony Pictures India. In the film, with Spider-Man's identity now revealed, Peter asks Doctor Strange for help. When a spell goes wrong, dangerous foes from other worlds start to appear, forcing Peter to discover what it truly means to be Spider-Man. The film will also feature appearances from Benedict Cumberbatch as Doctor Strange, Jacob Batalon as Ned Leeds and Marisa Tomei as Aunt May.

Anil Bishnoi will make his Bollywood debut with Abbas-Mustan's thriller based on *Money Heist*

TV actor Anil Bishnoi is excited to be a part of the upcoming Bollywood movie *Three Monkeys* directed by Abbas-Mustan.

It is based on the Spanish series *Money Heist*.

The leading roles in the heist thriller are played by Mustafa, Arjun Rajpal, and Priya Prakash Varrier.

Anil says, "I'm really excited about being part of the film. It will be my Bollywood Debut. I enjoy the experience and will put my best effort to impress my audience. I will play the role of a researcher. It is an interesting and challenging role."

"It was a great experience and a learning experience to work with these talented actors and directors. Anil shares his experiences work-

ing on TV and OTT," he said.

"I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work on all screens, digital and TV in the past and Bollywood now. I was also involved in ads and TV shows. Finally, I got my first Bollywood movie within six months of my stay. This is only the beginning," he added.

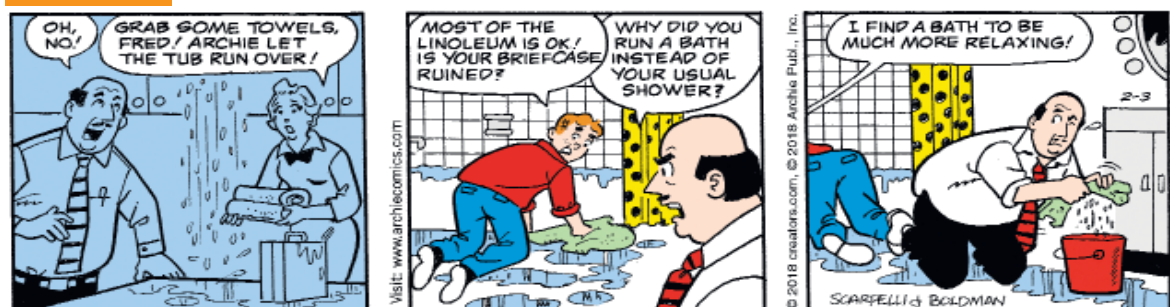
"I don't want any one screen to be my limit. I look forward to being a prominent character on any of these screens, so people can recognize me," said the actor.

Anil started his acting career as an actor and theatre artiste. He appeared on TV shows such as *Zindagi Mere Ghar Aana*, *Paapnaashini Ganga*, and *Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye*, among others.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



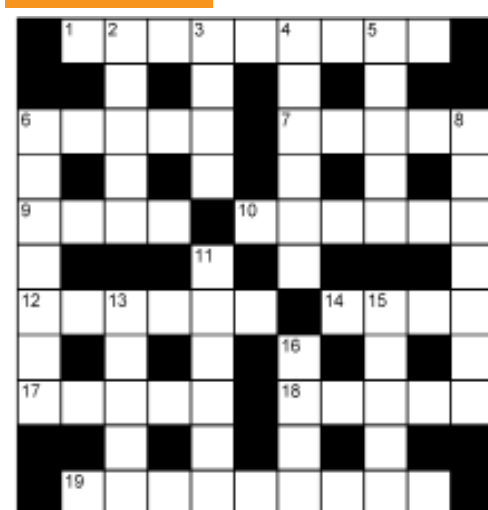
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



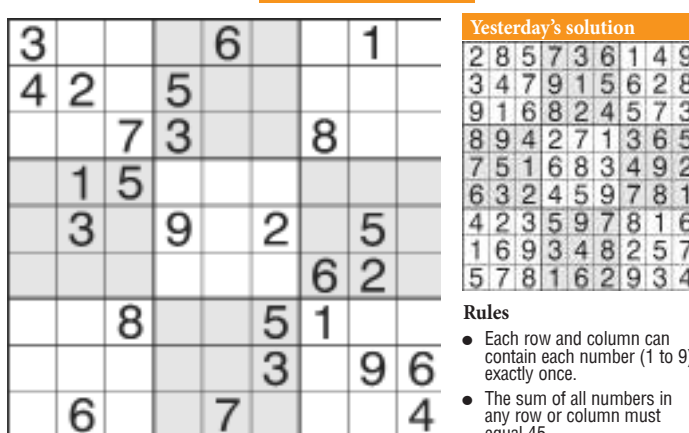
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- A ship's right side
- Perspire
- Young person
- Take a break
- Very rarely
- A passenger needs this
- Sky colour
- Divide into two equal parts
- Acted dramas
- Lucky


DOWN

- These are cut down for paper manufacture
- Decays
- The gas we need to live
- Circular in shape

- Make longer by pulling
- Carpenters and engineers use these
- Say again
- A stringed musical instrument
- Fewest
- Twirl



A full-page photograph of actress Shikha Taneja. She is sitting on a grey, textured couch, leaning forward slightly with her legs crossed at the ankles. She has long, wavy brown hair and is smiling broadly at the camera. She is wearing a white, off-the-shoulder, long-sleeved top with a tie detail at the waist, and light blue denim shorts. Her left hand is resting near her face, and her right hand is resting on her right leg. The background is a bright, minimalist interior with a large window and a white wall. The overall mood is cheerful and relaxed.

A circular portrait of a young woman with long, wavy, light brown hair, smiling gently. The portrait is set against a white background and is framed by a thick orange border. The overall design of the page features a blue background with orange geometric shapes.

INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND

Indians defy India!



1st Test ends in draw

PTI ■ KANPUR

Two Indian-born cricketers, Ajaz Patel and Rachin Ravindra, showed remarkable resilience under fading light and on a deteriorating track to defy India's famous spinners, eking out a thrilling draw for New Zealand in the opening Test here on Monday.

Indian spinners, led by Ravindra Jadeja, put up one of their most persevering performances in recent times but Mumbai-born Patel (2 off 23 balls) and Karnataka-born Ravindra (18 not out off 91 balls) consumed 8.4 overs after the fall of the ninth wicket to keep New Zealand on even keel in the two-match series.

A lot of credit should also go to night-watchman Will Somerville (36 off 110 balls), who played the entire fifth morning and to first raise visions of the improbable draw.

A victory target of 284 was always out of question but the gutsy New Zealanders didn't lose any wicket in the first session of the last morning before the Indian spinners, who had saved their best for the last, finally showed their skills but couldn't end on a winning note. The result at Green Park is the first time that New Zealand has gone 10 Test matches undefeated (eight wins, two draws) with the current streak starting against India at the start of 2020.

The last half an hour was a thriller with umpires Nitin Menon and Virender Sharma checking light and Ravindra appreciating Patel for every copybook forward defensive stroke. Ashwin (30-12-35-3), Jadeja (28-10-40-4) and Axar Patel (21-12-23-1) had to really push hard but it once again showed that Indian spinners might not be completely effective on tracks that don't start cracking from at the least second day. There was low bounce for sure but the slow turn made it easy to negotiate and also the failure of the two senior pacers put immense pressure on the

spin troika who still took 17 of the 19 Kiwi wickets to fall. But they couldn't take the all-important final one. It was one of India's most hard-fought Test matches at home in recent times and no one would grudge the 'Good Men' from New Zealand again showing their wares in adversity.

Indian batter Shreyas Iyer deservedly and expectedly walked away with the Player of the Match honours for his assured debut which yielded him a century and a half century. The only thing that went in favour of India on the final day was the low bounce as defending for a very long period wasn't an option.

After this draw, there are some probing questions for the team going into the next Test. There will be serious question marks regarding stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane's place in the playing eleven with skipper Virat Kohli coming back in the next game.

Veteran pacer Ishant Sharma (22 wicket-less overs in match) is looking completely off-colour since England and his place in the eleven ought to be questioned. Tom Latham (52 off 146 balls) scored his second fifty and, along with Somerville, became the key man to in taking the game deep into the fifth day. In the final context, even Kane Williamson's (24 off 112 balls) would mean a lot and so would Tim Blundell and Kyle Jamieson playing 30-odd balls each. These were little contributions that mattered and in the end, a little bit of luck also went their way.

However, the low bounce did him in as he dragged one back during the post lunch. With that scalp, Ashwin in his 80th Test, crossed Harbhajan Singh (417 in 103 games) to become the third highest wicket-taker for India in the five-day format.

"I would like to congratulate Ashwin on his milestone. Well done and hope he wins many more matches for India," Harbhajan told PTI.

Dravid gives ₹35,000 to groundsmen for preparing sporting pitch

He has always been different from the rest and India's new head coach Rahul Dravid proved it once again by giving Green Park's groundstaff, led by Shiv Kumar, ₹35,000 for preparing a sporting pitch for the first Test against New Zealand.

The Indian-born Ajaz Patel and Rachin Ravindra showed remarkable resilience under fading light and on a deteriorating track to defy India's famous spinners and eke out a thrilling draw for New Zealand after an engrossing fifth and final day of the opening Test here on Monday.

Scoreboard

INDIA 1ST INNINGS: 345

NEW ZEALAND 1ST INNINGS: 296

INDIA 2ND INNINGS: 234-7 DECLARED

NEW ZEALAND 2ND INNINGS: (OVERNIGHT 4-1 IN 4 OVERS)

Tom Latham b Ashwin 52

Will Young lbw b Ashwin 2

Somerville c Gill b Umesh 36

Kane Williamson lbw b Ravindra Jadeja 24

Ross Taylor lbw b Ravindra Jadeja 2

Henry Nicholls lbw b Axar 1

Tom Blundell b Ashwin 2

Rachin Ravindra 18*

Kyle Jamieson lbw b Ravindra Jadeja 5

Tim Southee lbw b Ravindra Jadeja 4

Ajaz Patel 2*

Extras: (B-12, LB-1, NB-4) 17

Total: (For 9 wicket, 98 overs) 165

Bowling (India)

Ravichandran Ashwin 30-12-35-3

Axar Patel 21-12-23-1

Umesh Yadav 12-2-34-1

Ishant Sharma 7-1-20-0

Ravindra Jadeja 28-10-40-4



- The draw breaks a sequence of 14 successive result Tests in India, the longest such streak. Between 1988 and 1994, there were 13 successive results in Tests in India. India were 12-1 in those Tests, with the only defeat coming against New Zealand in Mumbai, which was the last time they won a Test in India
- Ashwin in his 80th Test, crossed Harbhajan Singh (417 in 103 games) to become the third highest wicket-taker for India in the five-day format

Feels absolutely nothing at all: Ashwin

PTI ■ KANPUR

Feels like absolutely nothing at all." With these words off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Monday played down his milestone of becoming India's third highest wicket-taker in Test cricket.

Ashwin dismissed Tom Latham to claim his 418th Test wicket and go past Harbhajan Singh on the fifth and final day of the opening Test against New Zealand here. He is now only behind Anil Kumble and Kapil Dev in the overall standings.

After India could not close out the game against New Zealand, Ashwin was asked what the milestone made him feel.

"Absolutely nothing at all. These are milestones that are constantly kept on tab, it's wonderful. Ever since Rahul bhai has taken over, he's kept saying how many wickets you take, how many runs you make in 10 years time, you won't remember them," Ashwin said.

"It's the memories that matters so I want to have some special memories going for-

ward in the next 3-4 years," he added after the drawn game.

The match lasted full five days though bad light played a part every evening. Ashwin was diplomatic while talking about the surface.

"Anytime pitches are being spoken about and I am asked a question, it turns into a controversy. So, I'll try and keep a tab on that," Mumbai-born Ajaz Patel (2 not out off 23 balls) and Karnataka-born Rachin Ravindra (18 not out off 91 balls) consumed 8.4 overs after the fall of ninth wicket to eke out a memorable draw for New Zealand in fading light.

"Getting down to the last session, last mandatory over, I think it's played its part, some wonderful Test cricket. The young boy, Ravindra, batted beautifully, showed great composure, Ajaz Patel with his defence," Ashwin said.

"It just tells you a story. Everybody hangs in there, everybody can defend well these days, so it's not as easy as it used to be once upon a time getting these tail-enders out. Great day of Test cricket, I hope people who

watched it enjoyed it." It was a close game and Ashwin was all praise for the traditional format.

"The beauty of Test cricket is that you need to want it. It's really hard, it's not one of those formats where you turn up, have a good day, have a good four-over bowl or have a good 20-overs bat.

"There is a lot of pain, there is a lot of hard work, there's a lot of tenacity you need to bring into play. Definitely I am someone who wants to play this format and I enjoy it."

He added that they bowled well on the final day though the last New Zealand pair denied them a win.

"We were actually keeping things under control. We were bowling in good areas and we knew if we had the time to go on and put some pressure on them, we could get the job done but light was always going to come in the last session.

"There has been bad light in every single day of this Test match so we did expect it, so no complaints. Couldn't get the job done but we stuck together well."

MOST WICKETS FOR INDIA IN TESTS

Bowler	M	I	Balls	Runs	Wkts	Avg	S/R	5W	10W	Best
Anil Kumble	132	236	40,850	18,355	619	29.65	65.99	35	8	10-74
Kapil Dev	131	227	27,740	12,867	434	29.64	63.91	23	2	9-83
R Ashwin	80	150	22,105	10,261	419	24.48	52.7	30	7	7-59
Harbhajan Singh	103	190	28,580	13,537	417	32.46	68.53	25	5	8-84
Zaheer Khan	92	165	18,785	10,247	311	32.94	60.40	11	1	7-87
Ishant Sharma	105	188	19,160	10,078	311	32.40	61.60	11	1	7-74

Don't think we could have done anything different: Rahane

PTI ■ KANPUR

India failed to bowl out New Zealand on a deteriorating track on day five of the first Test but skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised his players saying they tried their best and couldn't have done anything different.

Mumbai-born Ajaz Patel (2 not out off 23 balls) and Karnataka-born Rachin Ravindra (18 not out off 91 balls) consumed 8.4 overs after the fall of ninth wicket to eke

out a memorable draw for New Zealand in fading light.

"It was a very good game of cricket, they played really well. We came back really well after the first session. "We wanted to get that partnership going. We were looking to bowl 5-6 overs in the end, but we needed that partnership to carry on. I don't think we could have

done anything different," said Rahane at the post-match presentation.

He was also asked if he could have declared earlier in the final session on day four but Rahane replied in the negative.

The light metre was out after every over in the last 30 minutes of play on Monday. Rahane said the right call was

made under the circumstances. "The (frequent) chat with the umpires was about the light. They made the call and I think they were right. I thought on this wicket the spinners have to bowl long spells. It was all about rotating the bowlers."

Rahane, who has been short of runs for a while now, also praised debutant Shreyas Iyer but did not divulge who would make way for Virat Kohli in the next Test in Mumbai.

DRAVID SPEAKS

Pitch was quite unresponsive on fifth day, outside edge was out of equation: Dravid

Kanpur: India head coach Rahul Dravid on Monday commended his spinners for putting up a great show on "quite an unresponsive" fifth day track with outside edges not coming into play in the drawn first Test against New Zealand. The Indians got nine New Zealand wickets but failed to dislodge the last pair of Rachin Ravindra and Ajaz Patel as the vis-

itors managed a creditable draw after being down and out in the post-tea session. "We showed great composure and fighting spirit and worked really hard in that final session. It was quite an unresponsive pitch on the fifth day and really good effort to have taken eight wickets after lunch, three in that session and five in last session.

PTI

Phenomenal achievement: Dravid on Ashwin's feat

Kanpur: India coach Rahul Dravid on Monday drew attention to the manner in which Ravichandran Ashwin has "grown" and "evolved" into a champion off-spinner, who has now become the country's third highest wicket-taker in Tests. Ashwin dismissed Tom Latham to claim his 418th Test wicket and go past Harbhajan Singh on the fifth and final day of the opening Test against New

Zealand here. He is now only behind Anil Kumble and Kapil Dev in the overall standings. "I think it's a phenomenal achievement. I think you know Harbhajan Singh was a really fine bowler, someone I played a lot of cricket with; terrific bowler for India and what Ashwin has done, to be able to go past him in just 80 Test matches is phenomenal achievement," Dravid said.

PTI

Satwik-Chirag pairing qualifies for BWF World Tour Finals

PTI ■ BALI

World no 11 duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty has become the first Indian men's doubles pair to qualify for the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals starting here on Wednesday.

Satwik and Chirag had finished at the semifinals of the Indonesia Open last week but made the cut after Japanese pairing of Akira Koga and Taichi Saito also lost in the last four at the Super 1000 tournament.

The Indian pair thus leapfrogged the Japanese pair in the Road to Bali to book the berth at the year-ending event.

Satwik and Chirag needed to beat World No. 1 pair of Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Kevin Sukamuljo in the semifinals to make the cut but they ended up losing 16-21 18-21.

Akira and Taichi had lost to fellow Japanese duo of Takuro Hoki and Yugo Kobayashi 22-20 21-14 to pave the way for the Indian pair.

"Fell short in the end against Kevin/Marcus today. But nevertheless happy with the way we played this week. On the positive side we have qualified for the World Tour Finals!" Chirag wrote on his instagram page.

India A face South Africa A in 2nd unofficial Test

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

Cooped up in a bio-bubble while a new COVID-19 variant causes panic all across here, the India A cricket team will take on South Africa A in the second unofficial Test from Tuesday with some senior side aspirants hoping to make an

impression. The first four-day game ended in a draw due to inclement weather on Friday last week even as the detection of the B.1.1.529 COVID-19 variant, which was named Omicron by the WHO, forced many coun-

tries to impose international travel restrictions on South Africa. The uncertain situation

also led to the Netherlands abandoning their last two ODIs against South Africa which were scheduled at Johannesburg.

However, India A have stayed put in Bloemfontein inside a bio-bubble.

The matches are being played without spectators and India senior team is also due to

arrive in the country by December 9 for a nearly seven-week assignment starting December 17. If the situation deteriorates, it can jeopardise the tour which involves three Tests, three ODIs and four T20Is across four venues — Johannesburg, Centurion, Paarl, and Cape Town.

Vinicius' late strike script Real's win

AP ■ MADRID

Vinicius Júnior ran to the corner and performed some samba moves by the flag before his teammates rushed in to embrace him.

The young Brazilian forward had just scored another decisive goal for Real Madrid. His beautiful late strike sealed a 2-1 come-from-behind win over Sevilla on Sunday in a match between two of the best teams in Spain at the moment.

Vinicius Júnior neatly controlled the ball with his chest by the sideline before making a run past a couple of defenders.

He fired a well-placed shot into the top corner from outside the area for an 87th-minute winner which delighted Madrid fans at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium.

It was the second goal in the last three matches for Vinicius Júnior, and the 11th in total in what has been his best season by far since joining Madrid.

He has already scored more



goals now than in his previous three seasons in total. Karim Benzema, another red-hot player for Madrid, also scored to give the league leaders a four-point advantage at the top over defending champion Atlético Madrid, which won 4-1 at Cádiz.

Real Sociedad dropped to third after losing 1-0 at Espanyol, while Sevilla stayed fourth, five points off the lead.

Sevilla, which had been unbeaten in six consecutive league

games, opened the scoring with a header by Rafa Mir in the 12th. Benzema equalized from close range after a blunder by Sevilla goalkeeper Bono in the 32nd.

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois came up with a big save in stoppage time to guarantee the win for the hosts and keep Sevilla winless on the road against Madrid since 2008.

Napoli tharsh Lazio 4-0

Dries Mertens scored twice as Napoli beat Lazio 4-0 to take the outright lead of Serie A on the night it paid tribute to football great Diego Maradona.

As well as Mertens — who has taken over several of Maradona's records at Napoli — Piotr Zielinski and Fabián Ruiz also netted to help Napoli move three points clear of second-place AC Milan, which earlier lost 3-1 at home to Sassuolo.

It was a special night for Napoli fans as the match came three days after the one-year anniversary of Maradona's death. Maradona led Napoli to its only

Serie A titles in 1987 and 1990 and is considered a god-like figure in the southern city.

A statue to the former Argentina player and coach was unveiled in the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, while the players wore special shirts.

Man Utd appoint Rangnick as interim boss

Manchester United announced on Monday they had appointed Ralf Rangnick as interim manager until the end of the season following the sacking of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

The 63-year-old German joins from Lokomotiv Moscow, where he was manager of sports and development. At the end of the season Rangnick, whose appointment is subject to work visa requirements, will take on a consultancy role at Old Trafford for a further two years.

He takes over from first-team coach Michael Carrick, who has been in caretaker charge for two games since Solskjaer was sacked

US eliminated from Davis Cup Finals after loss to Colombia

Washington: US captain Mardy Fish hinted at a lack of passion within his team after the record 32-time champion Americans were eliminated from the Davis Cup Finals by following up a lopsided loss to host Italy with a humbling defeat to Colombia.

The Americans left Turin 0-2 when Reilly Opelka and Jack Sock retired from the decisive doubles match while trailing 3-0 in the opening set against the accomplished Colombian pair of Juan-Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah.

AP

Pakistan closes in on victory in 1st test with Bangladesh

AP ■ CHATTOGRAM

Fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi claimed 5-32 as Pakistan closed in on victory in the first cricket test against Bangladesh on Monday.

Afridi's fourth five-wicket haul in tests wrapped up Bangladesh's second innings for 157 on Day 4, setting Pakistan a 202-run target to win. Openers Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique then helped Pakistan reach 109-0 at stumps, leaving the team needing 93 more runs on the final day.

Ali, who scored 133 in the first innings, was on 56 and debutant Shafique was unbeaten on 53 when bad light ended play early for the fourth consecutive day.

Bangladesh had a 44-run first-innings lead after posting 330 and then bowling Pakistan out for 286.

"We just had a terrible last session yesterday which put us under a lot of pressure in the game," Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo said.

"They (Pakistan) need another 93 runs, so it will need something really special. Anything is possible in test cricket. We have to come tomorrow morning believing we still have a chance. If we can pick up one or two wickets in the first half an hour, anything is possible."

just over a week ago following a terrible run of results for the 20-time English champions.

'Changed my mobile display picture to Balayya sir's picture'



K RAMYA SREE

Akhanda is everywhere these days. The film will see the return of the hit combination — Nandamuri Balakrishna and director Boyapati Sreenu. Releasing on December 2, the makers of the film are too busy promoting *Akhanda* in every way possible. We caught up with actress Poorna to discuss further about the film, her role, and more.

Poorna will be playing Padmavati in this film. It was sheer luck she bagged this role as it was initially written for someone else. The actress is happy to come on board *Akhanda* as this will be her next big cinema after *Seema Tapakai*.

Poorna shares, "Female characters in Boyapati *garu's* film are very strong. Boyapati had earlier said that my character is very dominating and that I should blurt really strong lines in front of Balakrishna sir. I was scared. But Bala sir was very supportive. He made me feel extremely comfortable."

The actor was all praises for Balayya Babu's energy on sets. She says, "His energy is not normal. Each fight lasted about 17 days. Everyone on sets used to look tired after the fight sequence. But Bala sir is a lion. He was very energetic throughout. I changed my mobile display picture to Bala sir's photo just to get and feel those energies of Bala sir."

"Seeing Balakrishna as aghora, felt like I am watching a God," Poorna claims.

"I have three scenes in this film and they are very powerful. I am sure people will talk about my work after watching the film, thanks to the mature, dominant health minister character I play in *Akhanda*," adds Poorna.

The actress whose lucky number is five says she will have a total of five releases in 2021 and that off-late she is being offered good characters that carry enough weightage. "Most of the offers came after the lockdown. I want my character to leave an impact even if I have just four scenes."

The actress feels humbled to get good roles in this highly-competitive industry, despite hailing from a neighbouring state — Kerala. She credits her mother for giving her the strength to fight the competition and make a mark for herself in the film industry.

It's not just acting. Poorna was initially known for her dancing skills and she in fact judges a dance show even now. "I can dance well. But such characters didn't bring me this far. If you want to go on for a long time, you have to choose good films," says Poorna thanking *Dhee* dance show, because of which she became closer to the Telugu audience.

"We are public figures. We become celebrities because of people. They make positive and negative comments. I take it all the same. I read all the comments on social media. I changed a lot after reading negative comments," concludes Poorna who is hoping to get good characters after *Akhanda* is released in theatres.

Priya Banerjee to star in Netflix's biggest multi-starrer!

Priya Banerjee will be starring alongside some of the biggest stars in a multi-starrer show on Netflix. The cast is absolutely humongous to say the least. Priya Banerjee, known for films like *Kiss*, *Asura*, *Joru*, is a terrific actress and it would be a project worth the wait for a powerhouse performer.

Reports are definitely rife about this. The reports suggest that the show is probably comparable to *Baahubali*. We can only imagine the scale and the infiniteness of the project with a streaming giant where the world is the audience. Priya reportedly is preparing exceptionally hard for such a project and she wants to keep no stone unturned.



Pushpa: The Rise theatrical trailer out on Dec 6

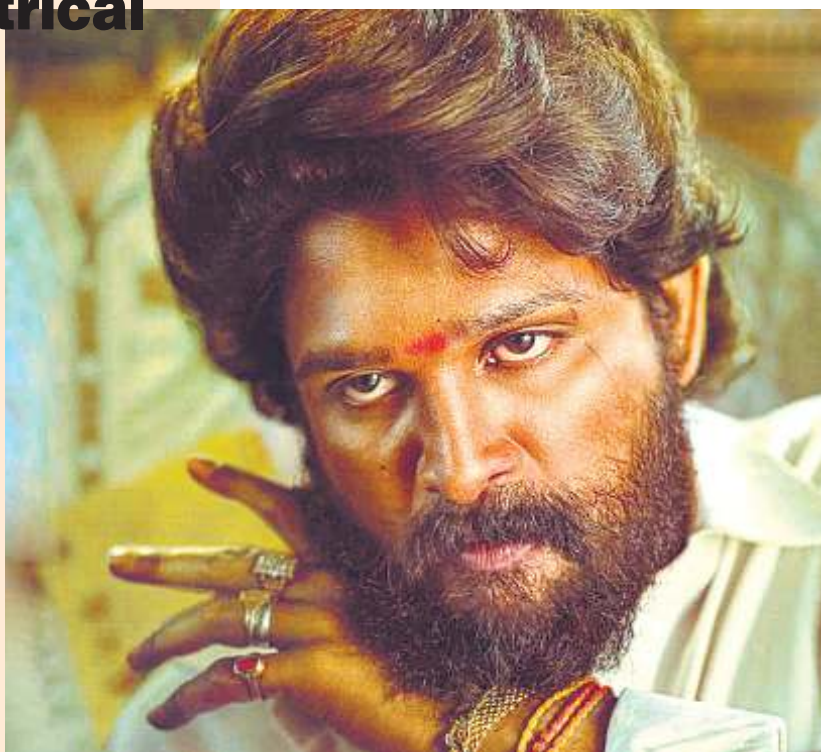
Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna-starrer *Pushpa: The Rise* is to be released soon and it is helmed by ace director Sukumar.

The makers of *Pushpa* have readied the theatrical trailer, which is expected to amplify the hype around the Allu Arjun starrer. The makers, on Monday, took to their social media to announce the release of the theatrical trailer.

As per the official announcement by the makers, the theatrical trailer of *Pushpa: The Rise* will be out on December 6. The makers also released a new poster, in which Allu Arjun is seen doing the ferocious *Thagade Le* impression.

This brand new poster also publicises the trailer's arrival date. "The WILDEST MASS festival begins #PushpaTrailer on DEC 6th," the makers tweeted.

Pushpa's team is to commence the promotional activities soon, as the movie is in its final leg of making. A special song will feature Samantha Ruth Prabhu dancing alongside Allu Arjun, which is expected to be a blockbuster song from the album. Mythri Movie Makers back the two-part red sandalwood smuggling-based action thriller, while Devi Sri Prasad composed the music. 'Pushpa' will see its box-office release on December 17.



Mehreen is RAW agent in Ghost?

Actor Nagarjuna busy with *Bangaraju*, *Soggade Chinni Nayana*, has signed another film *Ghost* under the direction of Praveen Sattaru.

We hear that the makers of the film finalised their leading lady.

Earlier, it was reported that Kajal Agarwal will play the leading lady in *Ghost* and that she even shot a few scenes. Later the actress opted to be out of the project. The latest we hear is that the makers of the film contacted Mehreen Pirzada.

Mehreen agreed to do the role and the makers narrated her the script and story. Mehreen will be playing the role of a RAW agent and she will be undergoing training for the role. Gul Panag and Anikha Surendran are playing important roles while, Bharatt Saurabh is the music director and Mukesh G and Dharmendra Kakarala are handling the cinematography and editing departments.



Dhanush wins best actor award at BRICS

Actor Dhanush won the Best Actor award at BRICS Film Festival for his performance in action and revenge drama *Asuran*. The film *Asuran* also won three National Awards. BRICS Film Festival was held alongside the 52nd edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) that came to a close on Sunday evening. This is the 1st time that the BRICS Film Festival has been conducted alongside the IFFI.

The BRICS festival had films from India, China, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa participating in it. The Chinese Director Yan Han was awarded the Special Mention Award for his movie *A Little Red Flower* at the festival. Based on the Vekkai

novel, Dhanush played a farmer in the film, which was produced by Kalaipuli S Thanu under the banner of under V Creations and directed by Vetrimaaran. The movie *Asuran* was also remade in Telugu titled *Narappa* by Venkatesh Daggubati and National award winning actress Priyamani.

Asuran actor Dhanush won the Best Actor for his performance in the recently concluded National Award. The action drama was also adjudged as the Best Tamil film. On the other side, Dhanush was last seen in Karthik Subbaraj's directorial venture *Jagame Thandhiram*, which premiered directly on Netflix. Currently he is busy with the shooting of his upcoming films, *Maaran* and *Thiruchitrambalam*.



In an article headlined 'Saaho singer weaves his magic again' published on November 29, 2021, it was stated that Kasyap has sung for the aforementioned movie. However, it has been brought to our notice by the discussant that Kasyap was instead involved with the background score of the film. The error is regretted.