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WINDOWS

'Women to be inducted as Army pilots'

NEW DELHI: Women will be inducted as pilots in the Army Aviation Corps from next year, Indian Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane said on Tuesday. Till now, women are only part of ground duties in the Army Aviation Corps. Women pilots would be flying helicopters to forward locations and be part of operations at the borders, the Army Chief said, adding that the proposal has been cleared. The Indian Air Force has 10 women fighter pilots. In the Indian Navy, women pilots are flying the Dornier aircraft and also as observers on board helicopters and P8I surveillance aircraft. Other than the 10 fighter pilots, the IAF has 111 women pilots who fly transport planes and choppers. Naravane said: "Last month, I had initiated a proposal that women officers can be recruited to Army Aviation. The next course which will begin in July this year, will induct women for training purposes in flying branch and after one year they will be able to join in operational duties."

Hyderabad-born lawyer at the forefront of Trump's Twitter ban

NEW YORK: When Twitter permanently suspended the account of Donald Trump, the microblogging giant's top lawyer, Indian-American Vijaya Gadde, was at the forefront of the unprecedented decision following the attempted insurrection of the US Capitol by supporters of the outgoing President. Hyderabad-born Gadde, 45, is Twitter's legal, public policy and trust and safety lead. On Friday, Gadde tweeted that the account of Trump has been "permanently suspended from Twitter due to the risk of further violence".



Vax drive set in motion

Planes ferry consignments to 13 cities on Day 1

NEW DELHI/PUNE

A massive pan-India inoculation drive against Covid-19 was set in process on Tuesday with more than 56 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine flown to 13 cities across India from Pune and taken to designated national and state-level stores amid tight security.

With the vaccinations scheduled to begin on January 16 starting with healthcare and frontline workers in the first phase, the Centre said all the vaccine vials -- 1.1 crore of Covishield from the Serum Institute of India and 55 lakh of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech -- will be received by January 14. 'Puja' was performed before three temperature-controlled trucks rolled out of Serum Institute of India gates in Pune shortly before 5 AM and moved towards the airport, about 15 km away, from where the vaccines were transported by planes across India.

The first consignment containing 2.64 lakh doses reached Delhi a few hours later on a Spicejet flight and was then taken to Delhi's central storage facility at Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital (RGSSH) through a 'green corridor' amid high security, officials said. "This is a proud and historic moment as scientists, experts and all other stakeholders took great efforts while making this vaccine in less than a year," SII CEO Adar Poonawalla said after the vaccine rolled out of the facility.

He said there are plans to provide five to six crore



more doses by February. Poonawalla said the SII has offered the vaccine to the central government at a special price of Rs 200. "This is one of the most affordable vaccines in the

world and we are offering it to the GoI at a special price just to support the Prime Minister's vision and to support the 'aam aadami' of our country," he added. He also said that once

the SII gets the requisite permission, the vaccine will be made available in the private market for Rs 1,000. Another vaccine consignment on threetrucks left SII for Mumbai in evening and will be sent from there to 27 places across the country on Wednesday.

Announcing the start of the vaccine movement earlier in the day, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Twitter that four airlines were operating nine flights to transport 56.5 lakh doses.

Vials reach Rajiv Gandhi Hospital

NEW DELHI

THE first batch of Covishield vaccine vials reached Delhi's central storage facility at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital (RGSSH) on Tuesday afternoon, officials said. RGSSH Medical Director B L Sherwal said around 2.50 lakh doses of the Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine were delivered to the hospital.

A SpiceJet flight carrying the vials landed at the Delhi airport around 10 am on Tuesday, four days ahead of the launch of a nationwide drive against the coronavirus. Thereafter, the Delhi Police formed a "green corridor" to safely transport the vaccine to the hospital, the Delhi government's largest COVID-19 facility.

"The truck carrying the vaccine arrived at the hospital around 3:10 pm," a source said. A special cold



The first batch of Covishield vaccine reaches central storage facility at Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty hospital in New Delhi on Tuesday

storage facility has been created at RGSSH to store the vials. Deputy Commissioner of Police (IGI Airport) Rajeev Ranjan said adequate security arrangements have been made at the storage site, and PCR vans will also cover them in their patrolling plans. Deputy Commissioner of

Police (Shahadra) Amit Sharma said, "We have deployed the personnel at the storage area of the Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital."

From RGSSH, the vaccine will be transported in a special vehicle under heavy security to the vaccination centres.

SC stays implementation of new laws on agriculture

Sets up expert panel to resolve the impasse

NEW DELHI

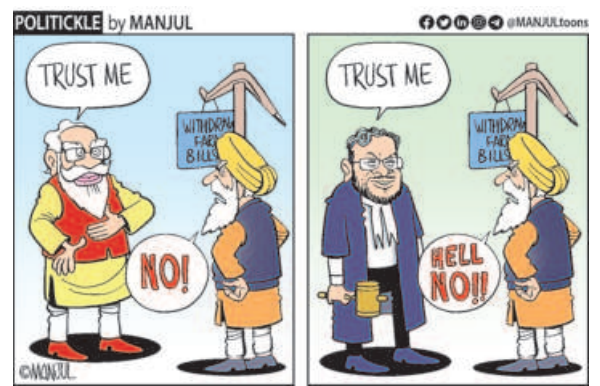
THE Supreme Court on Tuesday said the extraordinary order of stay of implementation of the farm laws will encourage the farmers' bodies to convince their members to get back to their livelihoods, both in order to protect their own lives and health and in order to protect the lives and properties of others.

A bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde and comprising Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian observed that the negotiations between the farmers' bodies and the government have not yielded any result so far.

"Therefore, we are of the view that the constitution of a committee of experts in the field of agriculture to negotiate between the farmers' bodies and the government of India may create a congenial atmosphere," it said in its order.

THE COMMITTEE

- **Bhupinder Singh Mann**
national president, Bhartiya Kisan Union and All India Kisan Coordination Committee
- **Dr Parmod Kumar Joshi**
Agricultural Economist, and Director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute
- **Ashok Gulati**
Agricultural Economist and former Chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices
- **Anil Ghanwat**
president, Shetkari Sanghatana



Farmers welcome verdict, but say protest to continue

NEW DELHI

FARMER leaders welcomed the Supreme Court's order to stay the implementation of three farm laws on Tuesday, but said they would not call off their protest until the legislations are repealed.

The Sankhyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of around 40 protesting farmer unions, has called a meeting later in the day to

decide the next course of action. The farmer leaders said they are not willing to participate in any proceedings before a committee appointed by the Supreme Court, but a formal decision on this will be taken by the Morcha. "We welcome the court's order to stay the implementation of the farm laws, but we want a complete repeal of these laws," Abhimanyu Kohar, a senior leader of the Mor-

cha, said. Another farmer leader, Harinder Lokhwal, said the protest will continue until the contentious farm laws are repealed. The Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the controversial farm laws till further orders on Tuesday and decided to set up a committee to resolve the impasse between the Centre and the farmers' unions protesting at Delhi's borders over the legislations. (PTI)



Bird flu: Civic officials to monitor meat shops

NEW DELHI

MEAT shops in the city will be under the scanner of civic officials in view of the avian flu situation in Delhi, even as the north corporation has planned to start a helpline for people to report death of birds, officials said on Monday.

North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash convened a meeting with officials to discuss the municipal body's preparedness to contain its spread.

"The North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) has consti-

tuted a committee under the chairmanship of the mayor, which will monitor the situation closely," the mayor's office said in a statement. Prakash said in view of the situation of bird flu, all stakeholders must come forward and work for citizens of Delhi. He said awareness campaigns will be conducted at different places and officials will regularly monitor the meat shops. He added that officials have been directed to also issue guidelines to all restaurants and hotels.

Minimum temp dips to 4.3 deg C

NEW DELHI

DELHI'S minimum temperature dropped to 4.3 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, and is likely to dip further in the coming days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 4.3 degrees Celsius, three notches below normal, an IMD official said. Delhi had been registering above normal minimum temperatures till Monday, as a cloud cover persisted over the city under the influence of successive Western Disturbances.

Delhi's minimum had settled at 7 degrees on Monday, 7.8 degrees Celsius on Sunday, 10.8 degrees Celsius on Saturday, 9.6 degrees Celsius on Friday and 14.4 degrees Celsius on Thursday, the highest in January in four years, according to IMD. The cloud cover over the national capital has prevented a steep decline in the minimum temperature so far, the IMD official said. Clouds trap some of the outgoing infrared radiation and radiate it back downward, warming the ground.

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Policy update doesn't affect privacy of messages: WhatsApp

NEW DELHI

WhatsApp on Tuesday said its latest policy update does not affect the privacy of messages as the Facebook-owned company sought to address concerns around security of user data on the platform.

In a blogpost, WhatsApp emphasised that it does not share users' contact lists or data of groups with Facebook for ads purposes, and

The update includes changes related to messaging a business on WhatsApp, which is optional, and provides further transparency about how we collect and use data

that neither WhatsApp nor Facebook can read messages or hear calls between users on WhatsApp. Last week, WhatsApp had informed users of an update in its Terms of Service and privacy policy regarding how it

processes user data and partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the social media giant's products. It also stated that users will have to agree to the new terms and policy by February 8, 2021, in order to con-

tinue using WhatsApp's service. This kickstarted a spate of conversations and memes on the internet over WhatsApp's alleged sharing of user information with Facebook, and many users have started shifting to rival platforms like Telegram and Signal.

"We want to be clear that the policy update does not affect the privacy of your messages with friends or family in any way.

Womenia

TWEET PATROL



PREITY G ZINTA
@REALPREITYZINTA

You were created limitless 🌟
#dailyinspiration
#positivevibes
#goodthoughts



KEEP YOUR CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE

If your family is stuck at home during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, it's likely your children are spending a lot more time online. School, chats with friends and grandparents, even music lessons — so much has shifted online.

Being connected helps children and teenagers reduce the impact of this new (temporary) normal and encourage them to continue with their lives. But it also presents a new set of challenges for every parent. While you would be busy with your work from home, you child might be unsafe with the increase of spending their time online. It's not an easy balance on a normal day, let alone when facing a health crisis like COVID-19. Here are a few ways that will help you to keep your child safe online.

Keep them safe with open communication

Have an honest dialogue with your children about who they communicate with and how. Make sure they understand the value of kind and supportive interactions and that mean, discriminatory or inappropriate contact is never acceptable. If your children experience any of these, encourage them to tell you or a trusted adult im-

mediately. Be alert if your child appears to be upset or secretive with online activities or if they are experiencing cyber bullying. Work with your child to establish rules on how, when and where devices can be used.

Use technology to protect them

Check that your child's device is running the latest software and antivirus programs, and that privacy settings are on. Keep webcams covered when not in use. For younger children, tools such as parental controls, including safe search, can help keep online experiences positive.

Be cautious of free online educational resources. Your child should never have to provide a photo or their full name to use these resources. Remember to check the privacy settings to minimize data collection. Help your child learn to keep personal information private, especially from strangers.

Spend time with them online

Create opportunities for your child to have safe and positive online interactions with friends, family and you. Connecting with oth-

ers is more important than ever at the moment and this can be an excellent opportunity for you to model kindness and empathy in your "virtual interactions. Help your child recognize and avoid misinformation and age-inappropriate content that may increase anxiety about the COVID-19 virus. Many digital resources from credible organizations like UNICEF and the World Health Organization are available for you and your child to learn about the virus together. Spend time with your child to identify age appropriate apps, games and other online entertainment.

Encourage healthy online habits

Promote and monitor good behavior online and on video calls. Encourage your children to be kind and respectful to classmates, to be mindful of what clothes they wear and to avoid joining video calls from a bedroom. Familiarize yourself with school policies and help lines to report cyber bullying or inappropriate online content.

As children spend more time online, they can be exposed to more advertising that may promote unhealthy foods, gender stereotypes or

age-inappropriate material. Help them recognize online ads and use the opportunity to explore together what is wrong with some of the negative messaging you see.

Let them have fun and express themselves

Spending time at home can be a great opportunity for your children to use their voices online to share their views and support those in need during this crisis. Encourage your child to take advantage of digital tools that get them up and moving, like online exercise videos for kids and video games that require physical movement.

Remember to balance online recreation with offline activities, including time outside, if possible.



Tips for long and lustrous tresses

Just as you care for your skin to evade pimples, dark spots, fine lines, and your hair also requires that extra effort to make certain that it receives adequate nutrition and tender care, for averting hair loss and thereby sporting lengthy, luminous locks.

Here are some simple yet highly effective guidelines that will guarantee a soft and nourished hair:

Do not wash hair frequently

If you're someone who washes your hair every day or even alternate day, then you got to drop this habit. Over-washing your hair, that too during winter, can strip the hair of its natural oil, and make it brittle and damaged. So, try reducing the frequency as much as you can to avoid any such situation.

Apply a hair mask at least once a week

If you want healthy locks, then you need to put in extra effort. Nourish your hair by applying a hydrating hair mask once a week. Masks penetrate deeper and can reverse the effects of dryness, so it is suggested that you do not skip this during winters. It not only protects and nourishes your hair but also makes it soft and manageable.

Wash hair with lukewarm water

We know washing your hair during winter is a real task, and no matter how tempted you are to use hot water, please spare your hair from all the damage. Hot water can zap all the moisture from your hair, making it frizzy and dry, and more vulnerable to breakage. Washing your hair with lukewarm water is the best thing to do.

Do not use a blow dryer

If it's not urgent, consider ditching the blow dryer in winter. Let your hair dry naturally and limit the use of hair tools. That's because blow drying your hair can make it more brittle and lifeless. But if you still have to use the blow dryer, opt for the cool setting and do not forget to apply a leave-in conditioner or a hair serum before blow drying.

Stay hydrated

We all are often guilty of drinking less water during winter, but make a point of drinking enough H₂O. Water is an essential component that keeps your hair hydrated and healthy. Drinking enough water will help to replenish the lost water content from your hair. This will also help to prevent itchiness, irritation, dryness of scalp or dandruff. So it is a win-win situation!



Colours to flaunt on drapes this festive season

The auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti is marked with grand celebrations all over the country, with different names in every state.

Call it Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Uttarayan in Gujarat, Sankranti in Maharashtra or Bhogali Bihu in Assam, the grandeur of this day is synonymous with pomp and splendor.

Speaking of festivities, there's no leaving out your wardrobe from the list of priorities. And since sarees have become the first choice for a traditional celebration, here's an array of them to choose from.

Classic black

In Maharashtra, everyone adorns black on the day of Sankranti. Follow the tradition and wear the customary black saree to take part in the celebrations.

Silken luxury

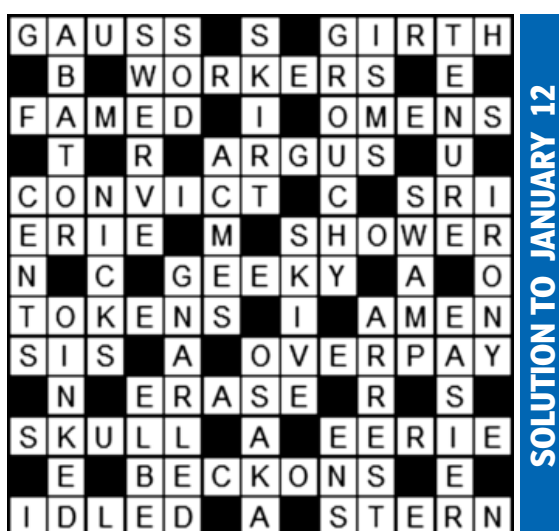
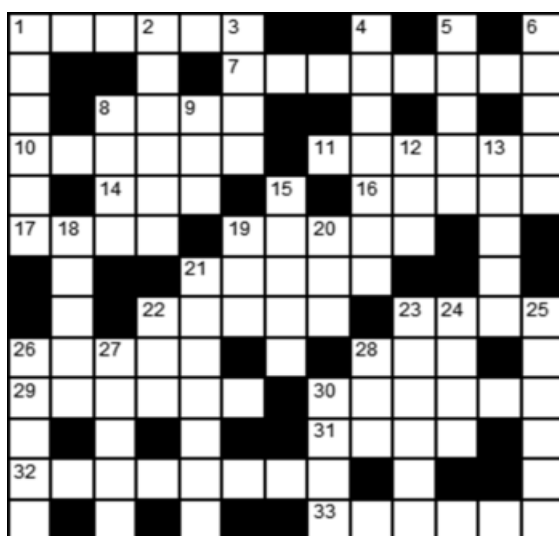
A gorgeous silk saree is a must for women who celebrate Pongal in the southern part of the country. While heavy Kanjeevarams are the most commonly worn fabric, wear a saree to exude the same refinement and elegance, albeit without the discomfort.

Soft, soothing green

In Bengal and Orissa, Makar Sankranti celebrates the end of a successful harvest season. To mark this, you can choose to wear green to resonate with the bounty of nature. Wear a somber shade of green in a lightweight fabric for a soft fall and luxurious sheen.

Bold red and green

Take part in kite flying with happiness and gusto. Instead of the restrictive and heavily-embroidered lehenga-choli sets, go for a traditional saree in fluid fabric to keep your spirits soaring high like the kites of Uttarayan in Gujarat. Go stylish this Makar Sankranti without compromising on comfort with fluid fashion sarees. Now prepare to hop onboard the festivities in your best traditional look.



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 12

CROSSWORD

Across

- 1 RNA component (6)
- 7 Repair (8)
- 8 Thailand money (4)
- 10 Musical instruments that might be grand or upright (6)
- 11 Alludes to, brings up or points out (6)
- 14 Modern (3)
- 16 Legendary ruler of Crete (5)
- 17 Makes inquiries (4)
- 19 New musical version of a song (5)
- 21 Easy gaits (5)
- 22 Implied (3,2)
- 23 Go in search of (4)
- 26 Author Kafka (5)
- 28 Boy (3)
- 29 Debates, contradicts or contests (6)
- 30 Potatoes, for instance (6)
- 31 Against poetically contracted (4)
- 32 Invigorate (8)
- 33 Looked slyly or maliciously or lasciviously (6)

Down

- 1 Ideal place (6)
- 2 Large wading birds with long legs (6)
- 3 A great deal (4)
- 4 Goddess of hunting (7)
- 5 Burdened (5)
- 6 Consecrate (5)
- 8 Financial institution (4)
- 9 In what manner or way (3)
- 12 Mend (3)
- 13 Path taken (5)
- 15 Himalayan country (5)
- 18 Ringo ___ of the Beatles (5)
- 19 Decay ? it's nonsense ! (3)
- 20 ___ halfway : compromised (3)
- 21 Medicated tablet (7)
- 22 African antelope (3)
- 23 Texas-Louisiana border river (6)
- 24 Adam and Eve's garden (4)
- 25 Touched with lips (6)
- 26 Destinies (5)
- 27 Concur (5)
- 28 Move heavily (3)
- 30 Chinese weight (4)

SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 12

NEWS ROUNDUP

Shilpa Shetty: Don't blindly believe all that you see on social media

Actress Shilpa Shetty feels we rarely share stories of struggles openly with the world, and says one should not blindly believe things on social media.

"We rarely share our struggles openly with the world. So, don't blindly believe or be influenced by all that you see on social media or hear otherwise," Shilpa wrote on Instagram on Tuesday.



Your journey, your achievements, your successes, or your setbacks will never be identical to another person's life. YOU are your ONLY competition. Work on being a better version of yourself

every day, instead of drawing comparisons with another person. Your physical and mental health will thank you," she added.

The actress also posted a picture of note, which read: "NOTE TO SELF: Dear me, don't be so hard on yourself. You're doing okay."

On the work front, Shilpa is all set to return to the screen after 13 years with two releases, "Hungama 2" and "Nikamma".

Directed by Sabbir Khan, the action-packed romantic comedy film "Nikamma" also features Abhimanyu Dasani and Shirley Setia. "Hungama 2" also stars Paresh Rawal, Pranitha Subhash and Meezan. The film is a follow-up of Priyadarshan's 2003 slapstick hit, "Hungama".

Let's not worry too much: IMA on safety, efficacy of vaccines

NEW DELHI

AMID the ongoing debate around the safety and efficacy aspects of Covid vaccines, the president of Indian Medical Association (IMA) has advised the public to not worry too much about it. Speaking to IANS, Dr. J.A. Jayalal, president, IMA said, "We should not be too worried about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines since enough evidence is available to prove its credibility. "The vaccines are never 100 per cent protective and efficacious at any time. It helps us to some extent in getting ahead of the disease but eventually, herd immunity will set in to control the viral spread. So let's not worry too much about the safety and efficacy part," he said. "What we know from the trials is that the vaccines approved for inoculation in India are found safe and elicit an

immune response. The technology of harnessing vaccines from inactivated viruses is a proven science. Our least expected efficacy criteria is 50 per cent while at the same time, other drugs we have been using for years are even below this benchmark of efficacy. We use influenza and vaccines against Tuberculosis but still people contract it," Jayalal explained. "Even natural infection cannot determine the level of antibodies it would create in the body. Some may develop less antibodies, some may exhibit high titers of it while a few may never develop at all. Good thing is that the vaccines are producing antibodies and it's enough at this stage," he added. Jayalal also said that the vaccine would work against the current and mutant strains of the coronavirus. Such claim was earlier made by Bharat Biotech for its Covid vaccine, Covaxin,

which is approved for restricted emergency use in a clinical trial mode'. However, the firm is yet to present the data confirming its claim. The apex association of modern medicine practitioners in the country has come out publicly endorsing the safety and efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines. In a statement issued on Monday, it said that the association stands with the scientists to endorse the safety and efficacy of both Covaxin and Covishield for public awareness and to counter myths on vaccine percolating in social media. The IMA has also appealed to its 3.5 lakh members in 1,800 local branches to actively take part in the mission of Covid vaccination programme rolled out by the Government of India. "Come out to get vaccinated first to show to the world that these vaccines are safe and efficacious," it had said.



Workers unload the first consignment of Covishield vaccine, which arrived from Pune's Serum Institute of India, at Chaudhary Charan Singh airport in Lucknow on Tuesday

HC: Remove hanging wires, cables in Chandni Chowk

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court on Tuesday directed various agencies including North MCD, MTNL, BSES and mobile service providers to comply with the order of removing hanging wires and cables in the Chandni Chowk area here which is undergoing redevelopment.

The high court made it clear that non-compliance of the order will invite contempt action against the agencies. A bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said, "We direct all the agencies including North MCD, MTNL and BSES, etc to ensure compliance so that all hanging wires and cables are removed. All service providers shall ensure compliance failing which we will be compelled to initiate contempt action."

The bench passed the order following a plea by the counsel for nodal officers, appointed by the court earlier, that an inspection of redevelopment project of Chandni Chowk was carried out on December 28, 2020 and MTNL was not cooperating in the project and feeder pillars are



yet to be shifted despite repeated directions in this regard.

Advocate Naushad Ahmed Khan, representing the Chief Nodal Officer and nodal officers of Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation (SRDC), said hanging wires and cables are required to be removed and sought direc-

tion to various agencies to remove wires. To this, the bench remarked, "if those hanging wires are removed, half of the Chandni Chowk will be left without electricity".

Khan informed the court that 'redevelopment of Chandni Chowk project' may be the theme

of Republic Day tableau for Delhi for this year and the agencies were not adhering to the timeline. The court was informed that the hanging wires on both sides of footpaths/ colonnades in the entire stretch are not electrical wires but they may be internet cables or DTH cables.

NIA files charge-sheet against 'ISIS doctor'

NEW DELHI

THE National Investigation Agency on Tuesday filed a charge-sheet against a doctor who allegedly joined the Islamic State terror group to further its ideology and illegal activities in India, an official said.

The charge-sheet was filed before a special NIA court here under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against 28-year-old Abdur Rahman of Bengaluru.

"Rahman has been charge-sheeted for furthering the ideology and activities of proscribed terrorist organisation ISIS/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in connivance with co-accused Jahanzaib Sami Wani and others for committing subversive/anti national activities in India," a National Investigation Agency (NIA) spokesperson said.

Earlier, a charge-sheet was filed on September 2 last year against Wani and Hina Bashir Beigh of Srinagar, Abdullah Basith of Hyderabad, and Sadiya Anwar Shaikh and Nabeel Siddick Khatri of Pune under sections of the IPC and the UAPA. The case pertains



to the arrest of Wani and his wife Beigh from Jamia Nagar in Delhi in March 2020 on receiving information that they were affiliated to the ISKP, a part of the ISIS, and were planning subversive and anti-national activities in the country, the official said.

The NIA took up the investigation, and during the course of the probe, Rahman was arrested in August 2020 from Bangalore by the agency. Rahman got radicalised when he was a student of MBBS at the Bangalore Medical College. He listened to online lectures of hardline Islamic preachers, including 'Anwar Awlaki', the NIA official said.

Documentary on Ram Temple movement released

LUCKNOW

THE Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has circulated a video on the social media, chronicling the 'struggle for Ram temple in Ayodhya'.

The 13-minute video, titled 'Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Vijay Gaatha' begins with the struggle for Ram Temple in Ayodhya beginning from 1528

when the temple was allegedly demolished by Mughal king Babar to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the launch of the construction for the temple at the site in 2020 after the Supreme Court's verdict in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title suit. "The documentary has been made by actor and director Chandra Prakash Dwivedi. But he has

not given his name in the documentary's credit. He has made it as a service to Lord Ram," said VHP spokesperson Vinod Bansal.

VHP sources said that the documentary was essentially for the young generation that may not be familiar with the history of the temple movement and was being misled by vested interests.

Little Singham: Kids learning app hits a million downloads

NEW DELHI

'LITTLE Singham: Kids Early Learning App' which was launched last year by Creative Galileo has hit a million downloads in just six months with an average rating of 4.70.

This educational app is a paradigm shift from traditional teaching practices and is targeted towards children from ages of three to eight years to teach them about colours, numbers, shapes, phonics, etc.

Delivered via extremely engaging storylines of Little Singham and his friends, Babli, Lattu, Hawaldar Karate, and many others, this app helps to inculcate values of friendship, kindness, helpfulness, and morality in kids. What is making the app a favourite among kids and adults is the use of cartoon character of Little Singham, whose popularity is growing by leaps and bounds.

Designed to make learning fun and embedded with a phonic program, the app gives kids access to thou-



sands of educational videos, audio-books and interactive games.

The clutter-breaking app has been developed by experts from the world of Education with an award-winning curriculum that focuses on six key domains: Language and Literacy; Numeracy; Discovery of the World; Motor Skills; Creative Expression; and Cognitive Development.

Talking about the app, founder Prerna Jhunjhunwala, said: "Traditionally, education and fun were supposed to be two things that are complete opposite of each other but we believe that when the children are having fun then they are more interested in learning. Our carefully curated content brings together the best of education and entertainment."

"A million downloads of 'Little Singham: Kids Learning App' proves that parents and children are hungry for content that holistically targets the learning of the children via unconventional teaching methods. A kids app that meets the end to end needs of parents and children".

Court grants bail to 2, casts doubt on credibility of police witnesses

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted bail to two persons in a case related to the north-east Delhi riots while casting doubts on the credibility of the two police witnesses in the matter.

Additional Sessions Judge Vinod Yadav granted the relief to Mohd Shoaib and Shahrukh in furnishing a bail bond of Rs 20,000 with surety of like amount in the case of alleged vandalism and torching of a shop by a riotous mob in Gokulpuri area.

The court noted that the prosecution was opposing both the bail pleas on the strength of their categorical identification by beat officers -- Constable Vipin and Head Constable Hari Babu -- in their statements recorded under section 161 (examination by police) of the Code of Criminal Procedure on April 7, 2020.

Their identification was hardly of any consequence, it said, adding that even though they were posted as beat officers in the area at the relevant time of the incident, they waited till April to name the accused when they had categorically seen and identified them allegedly indulging in riots on February 25, 2020

Akhilesh stopped me 12 times from coming to UP: Owaisi

VARANASI

ALL India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Tuesday mounted a blistering attack on Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and said that he had been prevented from coming to the state 12 times when Yadav was the Chief Minister.

Owaisi was accompanied by Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) president Om Prakash Rajbhar.

"Rajbhar is my friend and we will show our strength in UP now," he said.

Owaisi's attack on Akhilesh clearly implies that the AIMIM wants to elbow out the Samajwadi Party from the 'secular' space and establish its own hold on Muslim voters in Uttar Pradesh.

Owaisi is scheduled to visit Azamgarh, which is the par-



liamentary constituency of Akhilesh Yadav, and Jaunpur during his visit to the state.

"We will be meeting our workers and other people and draw up our strategy for the future," he said.

Last month, after a meeting between the two leaders, Owaisi and Rajbhar had announced that they would contest the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in 2022.

Will take decision on resumption of physical hearing after consulting medical experts, says Supreme Court

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court Tuesday said it will take appropriate decision about resumption of physical court hearing after consulting medical experts who have advised that assembly of people in the court at present could lead to spread of COVID-19.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, while hearing a petition which has raised the issue of problems faced during hearing conducted through video-conferencing, said that advice of medical experts on the issue is most important.

"We have been facing this problem for almost a year now. The most important thing is the medical advice which we have

received from authorities that it is dangerous to have congregation inside the court and it may lead to spread of virus and fatalities may be there due to this," said the bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that this issue is for the court to decide after consulting medical experts.

"In a huge country like ours, the courts have not denied access to justice even for a day and this deserves a salute," Mehta told the bench during the hearing conducted through video-conferencing. The top court, which is conducting hearings through video-conferencing since March last year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, told the

petitioner that several courts started physical hearings but they have to close it down as lawyers were not coming for physical court hearings.

"In Madras, lawyers were not coming for physical court hearings. In Madras and in Rajasthan, it had started but had to be closed down. We will take appropriate decision at the appropriate time after consulting with medical experts," the bench said, adding, "We are regularly reviewing it".

Dealing with the separate issue of extending assistance to needy advocates during the pandemic times, the top court asked the solicitor general to hold a meeting with lawyers, including Bar Council of India chairman

and senior advocate Manan Kumar Mishra, representing different bar bodies in the matter. The bench told Mishra to explore the possibility of getting contribution from bar members, who are willing to contribute. Mishra told the court that bar bodies have done everything possible to extend help to needy advocates during the pandemic time.

"We are asking you to explore the possibility, which we have explained, of getting funds. People have money and it is not that they don't have money. Ask them if they can contribute," the bench said, adding, "The primary responsibility is of the bar and secondary responsibility is of the government." One of the lawyers, representing a lawyers'

body, told the bench that government should be asked to give interest free loan to needy lawyers during this pandemic time. The bench told Mehta, "They expect the government to make some loan available for which the bar council will stand as guarantor".

Mehta said he will take instruction on the issue and get back to the court. "You can sit together so that in one meeting, it can be sorted out," the bench told Mehta. The solicitor general said he will hold a meeting with the lawyers appearing in the matter and discuss the issue of extending help to advocates affected during the pandemic. The bench said it will hear the matter after two weeks.



Centre unlikely to go for sops in Budget

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) contraction is likely to be around 7.7 per cent in the current fiscal, after an 11-year low growth of 4.2 per cent in 2019-20, as per the advance estimates released by National Statistical Office (NSO) recently.

Advance estimates assume significance for the simple reason that the forthcoming Union Budget, slated for February 1, will use these numbers for assuming GDP growth rate at current price for the financial year 2021-22.

Of course, the services and manufacturing sectors took a huge hit due to the Covid-related lockdown. In November too, industrial output contracted by 1.9 per cent due to the poor show of the manufacturing and mining sectors. The manufacturing sector shrank by 1.7 per cent while the mining sector registered a whopping 7.3 per cent de-growth. The country's industrial production went into the negative zone in November

after two months of positive growth. In this context, the farm sector offers some solace. But while services account for 55 per cent of GDP, the agriculture sector contributes merely 13 per cent.

After a record quarterly slump of 23.9 per cent in June, the GDP started showing green shoots from July onwards and stood at -7.5 per cent in September quarter. It is expected that GDP will be back in black in the third quarter this fiscal.

However, despite the Covid crisis, total GST revenue collected so far in the current fiscal reached Rs 7.80 lakh crore, which comes as a great relief and provides a comparison benchmark. Even excise duty, retail oil cess in particular, is also fueling the exchequer's growth.

As consequence, the share of indirect taxes in overall tax collections rose to about 56 per cent, while there was a sharp 26-27 per cent decline in the direct tax collections. Even though indirect tax revenue may con-

tinue to do well in the remaining part of the current fiscal, there is no hope of any improvement in direct tax collection for obvious reasons.

The central government did take some harsh measures like freezing of dearness allowance to its employees, slashing the salary of MPs by 30 per cent and also freezing their local area funds. However, these steps proved to be insignificant. So, it is very unlikely that the fiscal deficit, which currently stands at a high of 3.5 per cent, will be tamed.

Of course, the ever-rising stock markets may provide some succour. Now, Sensex is hovering around 49,000 and no wonder if it crosses magical 50k mark soon.

But given the precarious financial position the central government currently is in, the chances of doling out freebies in the upcoming Union Budget are slim. The nation is counting on the rollout of vaccines that kick starts on January 16 in a phased manner. The vaccine can slow the spread of Covid-19. Economic activity will further pick up post the Covid vaccine rollout. But it will be a while before GDP growth goes full steam.

Din on Delhi borders: To be or not to be

PAYAM SUDHAKARAN

Notwithstanding freezing cold and lashing rains, thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh – most of them senior citizens – are leading the biggest farmers' uprising in the history of the world, demanding repeal of the Centre's three new farm laws that the agitators perceive will spell doom to their livelihood. This is not the first time that farmers confronted the rulers for passing atrocious laws, depriving the former of their right to get decent compensation for their produce.

In a country where ancient scriptures taught us, "Annam Brahma, Raso Vishnu, Bhokta deva Maheshwara" (Food is Brahma, the essence in it is Vishnu, and the one who partakes of it is Maheshwara, the lord Himself), it appears to be totally ludicrous that the government that represents those who consider these doctrines as their handbook prefers to scuttle the movement.

Agriculture has a long history in the country and so has farmers' resistance. According to studies, agriculture in India began as early as 9000 BCE, with crops like wheat, barley, and jujube were cultivated in the sub-continent by that time. By the 5th millennium BCE, agricultural communities became widespread in Kashmir. Peas, sesame, and dates were also cultivated by farmers during the Indus Valley civilisation, the rice being the major crop. In fact, studies reveal that mixed farming was the very basis of the Indus valley economy.

Since then, farmers in India have always been not just part and parcel of the country's economic growth, they have also satisfied the hunger of the people, kept the generation going and made the intelligentsia's and politicos' brains working.

Some of Indian commercial crops including cotton, indigo, opium, and rice even made it to the international market under the British Raj in India. There was considerable rise in land under cultivation in the second half of the 19th century where agricultural production expanded at an average rate of about 1 percent per year by the later 19th century.

Along with the growth of agriculture, came several reforms, most of them aimed at exploiting the farmers by oppressing them, imposing higher taxes on them and taking away their rights over the land. The history of farmers' resistance dates back to British raj, where several movements were waged against landlords in many parts of the country. Post-Indepen-



The Union government, which is averse to understanding the real issues being faced by the farmers in the country today, should remember that fact that the great Bengal famine of 1943 during which millions of people died of starvation was not due to crop failure, drought or deluge, but because of British government's policy failures. A group of IIT Gandhinagar experts, after examining drought data of over one-and-half a century, recently concluded that policy lapses such as prioritising distribution of vital supplies to the military, civil services and others as well as stopping rice imports and not declaring Bengal famine-hit were among the factors that led to the magnitude of the tragedy

dent India witnessed farmers' uprisings including Telangana movement (1946–51), Tebhaga movement (1946–1949), Kagodu Satyagraha (1951), Naxalbari movement (1967) and Lalgarh movement (2009).

These and several other movements were against landlords and States for their exploitation of agrarian community, seeking land rights, hike in wages, high price for produce and the like. Following Green revolution in 1960s, capitalist farmers took out a movement to pressurise the government to formulate policies to commercialise farming. Rich farmers who derived benefits from the Green Revolution became the new power holders in the countryside. Since issues cropped up between small and marginal farmers and rich landlords, the bigger ones took side of the State and continued to exploit the poor.

Indian agriculture has, anyhow, been witnessing crisis since early 1990 resulting in poor growth of farming sector. The governments have been treating Indian farmers as insignificant despite the fact that the dining rooms of the mighty

have rich spread of delicacies prepared from the farm produce nurtured by farmers' sweat.

Thousands of farmers committed suicides in recent times in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana as they were caught in debt traps due to anti-farmer policies of respective governments.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "You cannot preach to a hungry man, you have to fulfil his hunger first." In fact, farmer is the one who feeds the whole mankind and of course is the direct representative of almighty. He is indispensable and should be treated with utmost respect. His produce should get adequate remuneration. He should be accorded dignified treatment.

The condition of Indian farmers, unfortunately, is not all that well.

The present dispensation at the Centre should particularly hold farmers in high esteem, as it talks too much about Indian tradition and culture at the drop of a hat. Floods, droughts and other disasters frustrate farm-

ers in our country year after year while crop loss and debts force them to consume pesticides meant for crops.

The Union government, which is averse to understanding the real issues being faced by the farmers in the country today, should remember that fact that the great Bengal famine of 1943 during which millions of people died of starvation was not due to crop failure, drought or deluge, but because of British government's policy failures. A group of IIT Gandhinagar experts, after examining drought data of over one-and-half a century, recently concluded that policy lapses such as prioritising distribution of vital supplies to the military, civil services and others as well as stopping rice imports and not declaring Bengal famine-hit were among the factors that led to the magnitude of the tragedy.

Today, Indian farmers are fighting yet another anti-agrarian policy by the NDA government, as Parliament passed three agriculture acts – Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers

(Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance, Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 – during its monsoon session culminating on 23 September.

Despite having huge uproar against the Bills across the country, the President signed them, making farmers coming on to the street in large numbers braving police water cannons and extremely hostile weather conditions. Only those who blindly follow the fundamentalist ideology of the ruling party came out to support the laws, claiming that they would "unshackle" the workforce engaged in the agriculture sector.

The reason why farmers are opposing these Acts tooth and nail is they will override various State Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee laws (APMC Acts) and promote barrier-free intra-state and interstate trade of farmer's produce. They also seek to provide farmers with a framework to engage in contract farming, where farmers can enter into a direct agreement with a buyer (before sowing season) to sell the produce to them at pre-determined prices.

They also provide for setting up farming agreements between farmers and sponsors. Any third parties involved in the transaction (like aggregators) will have to be explicitly mentioned in the agreement. Registration authorities can be established by State governments to provide for electronic registry of farming agreements. There is no mention of minimum support price (MSP) that buyers need to offer to farmers. Produce generated under farming agreements are exempt from any State Acts aimed at regulating the sale and purchase of farming produce, therefore leaving no room for States to impose MSPs on such produce.

Such agreements also exempt the sponsor from any stock-limit obligations applicable under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Stock-limits are a method of preventing hoarding of agricultural produce. They also seek to restrict the powers of the government with respect to production, supply, and distribution of certain key commodities. Cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion, and potatoes have been removed from the list of essential commodities. Farmers have serious concern about implementation of these laws, and they are hell-bent to get the Acts repealed. The government should consider farmers case – they are annadatas. Yes, they have the right to be heard.

volving all the stake holders fully. The CJI of the Supreme Court has rightly made its aggressive entry into the current burning issue of farmer's protests expressing it's unpleasantness on the attitude of the rulers and simultaneously advising farmers to follow a path of give and take instead of putting health hazards to senior citizen farmers, women and children in the severe cold situation prevailing in Delhi and other places.

The Supreme Court had to put all the three disputed farm laws in abeyance and form the 4member committee for discussions and decisions as regards every issue within the shortest possible time bringing normalcy in the issue. It is certainly better late than never for the government to restore peace amongst the farming community at least now by following supreme decision.

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2021 POLLS

Cine stars may fade away from TN politics forever

K NARESH KUMAR

Close to eight decades, ever since the first wave of 'political' potboilers began getting released in Tamil Nadu theatres, the intertwining of the reel and the real has been a constant in the State. For long, this was seen as a fascinating case study by researchers in the socio-political domain in many parts of the world. It was not just the trendsetting era it initiated that appealed to them, but the outcome of the rule of cine stars turned netas was enough for many scholars to delve deeper into this phenomenon, for years on end.

As the saying goes, the wheel has turned full circle. More than four years after the last representative of tinsel town, Jayalalithaa, departed from the political scene, the scene in Tamil Nadu is

Historians draw relevant references from the path MGR traversed and conclude that his reign was not that of a retired hero wanting to enter into a second innings under the spotlight. On the other hand, he played the understudy, kept his ambitions under check, manipulated the power structure of Dravidian politics and ensured he strikes out on a path which is at best a bare reference to that of his predecessors. His successor and legatee in a way, Jayalalithaa, upped the aggression quotient in her style of governance, kept the challengers on their toes and successfully cultivated the image of being an iron lady who can deliver what she promises, during her career between 1991 and 2016

thoroughly political once again. This is not just because the eternal challenger, Rajinikanth, has hung up his gloves and declared that he has retired officially from the game, without playing it in the first place. It is also because the other icon, Kamal Haasan, left in the race has already been bloodied in the battle during the 2019 elections and is not seen to be a serious challenger to the existing Dravidian parties.

If one looks around, with elections in the neighbouring State a few months away, there is none else there who is keen to get into the heat and dust of modern politics, grapple with known and unknown adversaries, campaign and canvass for his ideology aggressively and await the benediction of the voting public, as the race comes to an end.

Having been the first in the world to be a cinema star to head a government as an elected leader, M G Ramachandran's decade of rule from 1977 to 1987 was noticed for its achievements and startling failures. His benevolent dictator kind of an approach, (similar to the one he adopted after he overtook his screen rival

Sivaji Ganesan in the 1960s) was typical of a man who had combated rivals everywhere and beat them back almost every time with his guile and opportunistic generosity.

Historians draw relevant references from the path he traversed and conclude that his reign was not that of a retired hero wanting to enter into a second innings under the spotlight. On the other hand, he played the understudy, kept his ambitions under check, manipulated the power structure of Dravidian politics and ensured he strikes out on a path which is at best a bare reference to that of his predecessors. His successor and legatee in a way, Jayalalithaa, upped the aggression quotient in her style of governance, kept the challengers on their toes and successfully cultivated the image of being an iron lady who can deliver what she promises, during her career between 1991 and 2016.

During the same time, the current demi-gods were riding the wave of their first phase highs, carving out the Tamil film industry between themselves, creating 'friendly' camps, gallivanting with gals half their age and staying clear from local politics. In the 1990s, Rajinikanth, as Tamil media points out, piqued at being asked to get down from his car and having it frisked by the cops carried the grudge against the then CM, Jayalalithaa and went on to turn into a political sniper fire.

If this was his basis for making a grand entry into the local political scenario, it had to collapse under its light-weight durability for sure. Keeping the balance of power at a manageable level between the two leaders, Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa, Rajinikanth managed to get his releases out, without much trouble unlike Kamal Haasan (Vishwa Roopam case) and his juniors like Vijay who fell out of favour with both the leaders, time and time again.

To decide on a solid political path, come up with issues which would have resonance among the expecting fan clubs and also the Tamil public awaiting a real transformation from the Dravidian types, both Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth had to promise a total overturn of the system. Instead, with weak, ambivalent statements and confusing flip-flops on contentious issues – Cauvery water sharing, Sri Lankan Tamil issue- etc, the leaders-to-be disappointed the knowledgeable followers of theirs in no time. The star-struck were to also be jilted in a matter of time. It has happened with Rajinikanth, it may happen with Kamal Haasan after the poll results are out.

For the present, fence sitters may still want to give Kamal Haasan a chance of making a splash in the forthcoming elections. There are reports that the disillusioned fans of Rajinikanth are making a beeline to join the 'World Hero' as he is called and actualise their dream of seeing one of their favourites become the next chief minister.

Already, the social media has enough memes on the 66-year-old hero currently winding up his last projects. He is being featured as a muddle-headed speaker, whose language is convoluted and with a message delivery mode, highly enigmatic. Fortunate to be still being wooed by production houses for being featured in them, despite a not-so-impressive track record at the BO, Kamal Haasan can enjoy a glorious ride under the spotlights till the summer of 2021. Whether he will beat the odds and emerge victorious is shrouded in severe doubt. This may be a silver lining for a State which has kept its development indicators impressive, racing ahead on many parameters and competing for the larger pie of progress in India, irrespective of its leaders governing it.

SANKRANTI KANUKA

20kl free water promise fulfilled

- Domestic consumers need not pay water bill for using less than 20,000 litres water per month
- For water use above 20,000 litres, consumers have to pay a tariff as per meter reading.
- All eligible customers of the scheme are required to link their Aadhaar card to their CAN numbers
- This plan is applicable for domestic users only. The remaining categories will have to pay the bill
- The deadline for customers to set up meters for their connections is March 31, 2021
- Those living in slums do not need to install any meters

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD has become the second city after Delhi to provide free drinking water supply scheme for the people. “we have created a history and it’s a big day for Hyderabad,” said a proud

The scheme will benefit about 97% of the poor and middle-class families living in the city



MA&UD Minister KT Rama Rao interacting with an elderly woman during the launch of free drinking water supply in Hyderabad on Tuesday

MA&UD Minister KT Rama Rao while launching the free drinking water supply scheme here on Tuesday.

Under this scheme, the residential connections in Hyderabad will be provided with free drinking water supply up to 20000 litres. The scheme is expected to benefit nine lakh families, who use less than 20,000 litres of water every month.

“It’s a big day for Hyderabad which witnessed drinking water scarcity and people protesting with empty pots. At a time when other metro cities such as Chennai are suffering from the scarcity

of drinking water, it is due to the farsightedness of the CM that Hyderabad is not facing such problems,” said KTR and remarked Sankranti has come two days in advance for people in Hyderabad.

As a part of the Free Drinking Water scheme, Minister KTR handed over Zero Bills to the beneficiaries of Rahmath Nagar at their doorstep today.

Even though it started on Tuesday, the free scheme will come into effect from the December bill issued in January. However, those who consume over 20,000 litres of water will

have to pay black bills to that extent. In order for consumers to get this free drinking water facility, people have to set up meters properly to their respective connections. However, those living in slums do not need to install any meters and the scheme is applicable for domestic users only.

Ministers Talasani Srinivas Yadav, Mahmood Ali, CH Malla Reddy, MP Dr Ranjith Reddy, MLAs Maganti Gopinath, Danam Nagender, KP Vivekananda, Muta Gopal, MLC Yegge Malle-sham, Mayor Bonthu Rammohan & Chief Secretary Somesh Ku-

FESTIVAL HAS COME 2 DAYS EARLY
It’s a big day for Hyderabad which witnessed drinking water scarcity and people protesting with empty pots. At a time when other metro cities such as Chennai are suffering from the scarcity of drinking water, it is due to the farsightedness of the CM that Hyderabad is not facing such problems
— MAUD Minister K T Rama Rao

mar, Principal Secretary Arvind Kumar, HMWS MD Dana Kishore participated.



Kites sensitise public on Covid precautions

M M FAROOQUI
HYDERABAD

KITES this year come with messages which caution people to follow the Covid-19 norms like ‘wear mask to avoid Corona infection’ (in Hindi) and also ‘India fights with Corona’ to emphasize the fighting spirit of the Indians whose fatality percentage is amongst the least.

Sankranti, unlike other festivals, can be celebrated with minimum social gathering and people can easily adhere to social distancing norms. This brings smiles on youth and revelers who want to enjoy flying kites from rooftops, amidst cries of win while playing load music on DJ.

“After almost a year while fighting the dreaded Coronavirus, this year started with new resolves. Everyone is hopeful of celebrating the first major festival of the year with utmost cheerfulness and joy. We will be enjoying flying kites with the message of Covid norms,” said N Sateesh, a customer who was purchasing kites at Gulzar Houz in Charminar.

According to people who are seen purchasing kites, Sankranti is the festival where people can enjoy without social gatherings and easily follow the norms. Previously, every festival has been celebrated as a low-

key affair, but Makar Sankranti will be celebrated on a grand note. “Everyone has been frustrated by the virus and now it seems everything is returning back to normal. I have decided to celebrate like in earlier days, playing music and hullabaloo,” said Anil Neelam,



another customer at Charminar.

“Observing the pandemic and crunch in demand, making of kites has been reduced this year. The sale has been obviously low compared to the previous years, but people are purchasing kites above our expectations. Hopefully, as the festival is coming near the business is increasing. There are several new varieties of kites available in the market this year. Most of the customers are asking for the kites with messages of Covid-19 norms,” said Bhagwan Das Bajaj, a kite seller at Gulzar Houz.

AP gets 4.96 lakh doses from Covaxin

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

ANDHRA Pradesh on Tuesday received 4.96 lakh doses of Covaxin, the much-awaited coronavirus vaccine.

A special cargo plane brought the vaccine to the Vijayawada airport from Pune on Tuesday afternoon and the consignment was shifted to the state vaccine depot in Ganavaram.

State Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar said the first consignment of vaccine doses would be sufficient to vaccinate about 3.7 lakh healthcare workers in the first-round beginning January 16.

The state government made

elaborate arrangements for storing the vaccine in temperature-controlled cold storage units. Refrigerated vans will be used to transport the vaccine to over 1,900 session sites where the chosen healthcare workers will be given the vaccine from January 16.

A ‘puja’ was performed before the three temperature-controlled trucks rolled out of the Serum Institute gates before 5 am and moved towards the Pune airport, about 15 km away, from where the vaccines were flown across India.

Covishield has been developed by Oxford University and British-Swedish company AstraZeneca and manufactured by the SII.



Krishna district Collector Md Imtiaz (left) and other officials receiving Covishield vaccine at Gannavaram airport on Tuesday

Don’t pay heed to bird flu rumours: Ministers



“People should not have doubts about consuming eggs and chicken, which can prove detrimental to the poultry industry that has been already hard-hit by the corona pandemic,”
Talasani Srinivas Yadav, Animal Husbandry Minister, Telangana government

- Urge people not to spread false information with regard to bird flu
- Inform that special teams have been formed to monitor the situation in bordering districts

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

HEALTH Minister Eatala Rajender on Tuesday said that there was no bird flu in the State and informed that the State government was on high alert and monitoring the situation.

“Bird flu did not cause loss to

human beings so far and there is no need to panic. Rapid health action teams are formed to check its spread. People should not believe in rumours,” the Minister said, while attending a high-level review meeting on Tuesday. The meeting focused on the issue of bird flu which is spreading to other States.

Animal Husbandry Minister Srinivas Yadav, delegates of poultry industry, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar and other officers attended the meeting.

“Our State is free from bird flu and the people should not fear or worry about it. The government

is on high alert and asked the bordering districts to remain cautious and monitor. We are taking care of migratory birds with the help of special health teams,” the Health Minister said.

Talasani said as per Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao’s instructions, special teams have been formed to monitor the situation. People should not have doubts about consuming eggs and chicken, which can prove detrimental to the poultry industry that was already hard hit by corona pandemic. People should avoid rumours about bird flu, he said.

STAY ON PANCHAYAT POLLS

HC adjourns hearing to Jan 18, Nimmagadda meets Governor

AMARAVATI

THE Andhra Pradesh High Court on Tuesday deferred to January 18 the hearing of an appeal filed by the State Election Commission (SEC) against a single judge bench order suspending the schedule of elections to gram panchayats on grounds it would hamper Covid-19 vaccination programme.

A division bench comprising Justices U Durga Prasad and Krishna Mohan conducted a preliminary hearing on the SEC’s appeal but it remained inconclusive.

Since the court will be on Sankranti vacation from Wednesday, the appeal will be taken up for further hearing in the regular course on the January 18, sources said.

Passing orders on a plea by the state government, Judge M Ganga Rao on Monday suspended the schedule announced by the SEC for conducting elections to gram panchayats in four phases next month, observing it would

- A bench comprising Justices U Durga Prasad and Krishna Mohan conducted a preliminary hearing

- Likely to take up regular hearing after Sankranti vacation



- SEC Ramesh Kumar reportedly apprised the Governor on reasons for releasing panchayat polls schedule

hamper the COVID-19 vaccination programme, set to begin on January 16.

The SEC immediately filed an appeal before the division bench against the order, contending that it was in contradiction to the Supreme Court guidelines.

Overruling the objections raised by the government, the SEC on Friday, January 8, night announced the schedule for the polls to be held on February 5, 9, 13 and 17.

State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh

Kumar had announced the schedule hours after his meeting with chief secretary Aditya Nath Das and other top officials.

The state government challenged the SECs announcement saying that conduct of gram panchayat elections simultaneous to the coronavirus vaccination programme would be difficult.

Meanwhile, Ramesh Kumar called on Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan in the Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada and discussed the prevailing situation.

Temple attacks to divert attention of people, says Sajjala

AMARAVATI

ADVISOR to the Government (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy suspected the hand of political forces (TDP) behind the attacks on temples in remote areas to divert the attention of people when the state government launched house sites distribution programme in a big way.

Speaking to media persons at party office at Tadepalli on Tuesday, Ramakrishna Reddy said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy found that the incidents were aimed at diverting people’s attention. He said when the state government had decided to launch Amma Vodi programme and the State Election Commissioner (SEC) issued panchayat election schedule suddenly without taking into consideration Covid vaccination programme.

Referring to decentralisation of administration, Ramakrishna Reddy said that the process would be completed in the coming four or five months after clearance of legal issues.

He said the SEC who is in a hurry to conduct panchayat polls



- Points out that incidents began just before distribution of house site pattas by the State govt
- Says the 3 capitals’ process will be completed in 4-5 months after legal issues are cleared

now had failed to conduct panchayat elections in 2018 during TDP regime.

Ramakrishna Reddy said the opposition should not link the religion with politics as religion was a personal matter. He warned that government had decided to act sternly if any one tries to instigate people to disturb communal harmony.

Agriculture Minister welcomes SC stay on farm laws

- Seeks representation in the SCs expert committee
- Accuses media of suppressing voices of those questioning Centre’s policies

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

AGRICULTURE Minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy welcomed the Supreme Court’s stay on implementation of Centre’s new farm laws. In a statement released on Tuesday, the Minister termed the apex court’s stay order as the partial victory of farmers of the country.

Thanking the Supreme Court for granting stay on the farm laws, Singireddy said it was a welcome sign to appoint an expert committee to review the impugned farm laws.

“Agriculture is a state subject. The apex court-appointed expert committee should also give opportunity for the States besides the farmers’ representatives to voice their concerns,” the Minister said, accusing the media of hiding farmers’ agitation in Delhi and not giving priority to those raising questions against the said laws.

He added that the media has been compelled to give priority to farmers news following the intervention of the apex court.

Naidu terms CM ‘betrayal of farmers’

- Claims 1,779 farmers committed suicides in the last 18 months
- Calls for burning of YSRCP govt’s ‘anti-farmer’ GOs in Bhogi fires

AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday slammed the YSRCP government for pursuing “anti-farmer” policies for the past one-and-a-half years that eventually led to suicides of over 1,779 farmers in the state.

He said Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy came to power by making tall promises but after winning the elections, he had turned into a ‘betrayal of farmers’. Under the YSRCP rule, the suicides of farmers and agriculture labourers went up by 55 per cent.

Addressing a video conference with party coordinators and in-charges for the parliamentary and Assembly constituencies, the TDP chief alleged that the Chief Minister was behaving cruelly towards the Amaravati farmers and labourers who have been agitating in the



streets for nearly 400 days. He committed a breach of trust to the capital city farmers and labourers who had given valuable, ancestral lands. Over 30,000 Amaravati families had no choice but to take part in prolonged protests due to lack of income, livelihood and crops, he said.

The TDP chief called for burning of the ‘anti-farmer’ GOs of the Bhogi bonfires that would be organised as part of the Sankranti celebrations. The farmers should burn all the GOs relating to the fixing of motors on farm pumpsets, Sunna Vaddi scheme, caste-based division of cultivators and diversion of zero budget natural farming funds. This Sankranti should bid goodbye to all the problems of the farmers, he added.

IIT Guwahati researchers find new clues to how and why stars die

At the end of their life, the stars, especially massive ones, collapse resulting in an immense shock wave that causes the star to explode, briefly outshining any other star in its host galaxy. The research has been published in international journal Physical Review Letters

NEW DELHI

RESEARCHERS at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, claim to have found important clues to understand the death of massive stars and have also revealed the problems with the existing models. The research in collaboration with Max Planck Institute for Physics, Munich, Germany, and Northwestern University, USA, has also been published in international journal Physical Review Letters (PRL). "Supernovae -- the super explosions at the time of death of large massive stars -- are consid-

ered to be the cradle of birth for new stars and synthesis of the heavy elements in nature. At the end of their life, the stars, especially massive ones, collapse resulting in an immense shock wave that causes the star to explode, briefly outshining any other star in its host galaxy. "The study of supernovae and the particles they release helps us understand the universe because almost all matter that makes up the universe is a result of these massive explosions. However, the mechanism of these super explosions is not yet



completely solved and has remained one of the enigmas of nature," said Sovan Chakraborty, Assistant Professor, Department of Physics, IIT Guwahati. According to the team, the solutions to the toughest challenges to the core collapse mechanism of

the huge supernovae come from the tiniest subatomic particles called neutrinos. "During the core collapse supernova explosion, neutrinos are created in several particle processes. Due to their neutral nature and extremely weak interaction with stellar matter the neutrinos escape the dying star and carry 99% energy of the collapsing star. Thus the tiny neutrinos are the only messenger bringing information from the deepest interiors of the star. Neutrinos on the other hand have their own complexities," he said. "This information is very crucial for the

reason that in the extremely dense supernovae core neutrinos interact with other neutrinos and may interchange flavors. This conversion may happen rapidly (in nanosecond time scale) and flavor interchange can affect the supernovae process as the different flavors are emitted with different angular distribution. "These 'fast' conversions are nonlinear in nature and are not confronted in any other neutrino sources but supernovae. We for the first time did a non-linear simulation of fast conversion with 'all' the three neutrino flavors in supernovae," Chakraborty added.

‘DON'T FEED MIGRATORY BIRDS’

Bird flu spreads in 15 of 33 Raj districts, Jaipur zoo shut
Now poultry samples from MP district test positive

VARANASI

THE district administration in Varanasi has banned feeding of migratory birds in the Ganga river and along the Ghats. Public announcements are being made on the Ghats, asking people not to feed the birds in view of the bird flu scare. Migratory birds arrive in large numbers in Varanasi during the winter season and tourists go on boats and feed these birds. Chief veterinary officer Dr Vijay Pratap Singh said that these migratory birds stay in Varanasi for almost four months and are a major tourist attraction. Bird flu has spread its tentacles to 15 of the 33 districts in Rajasthan, with over 3,000 birds found dead in the state till date, officials said on Tuesday. Jaipur zoo has been closed following the death of four birds. Chief Wildlife Warden Mohanlal Meena said that four Black Storks and a few ducks were found dead. Bird flu in poultry birds has been confirmed in Madhya Pradesh, while it was already found in poultry farms in Haryana and Maharashtra.



A worker sprays disinfectant inside a poultry farm as a precaution against bird flu, in Karad, Maharashtra on Tuesday

Large number of crows, mynas, herons found dead

DUMKA: A large number of crows, mynas and herons were found dead at a village in Jharkhand's Dumka district, triggering panic over the possibility of the bird flu outbreak in the area, officials said on Tuesday. District Animal Husbandry Officer Awadhesh Kumar Singh said 40-50 birds were found dead at the Pokharia village near Mohulpahari in the Shikaripada police station area on Monday. The incident triggered panic among the locals as they feared the possibility of the bird flu outbreak in the area, he said. Samples have been collected and sent for examination to Ranchi, Singh said, adding that the test reports would confirm if it is the bird flu or there was any other reason for the deaths.

College shut for day after bird carcass found

MUZAFFARNAGAR: A college in Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district was shut for a day after the carcass of a migratory bird was found in its compound, amid an outbreak of bird flu in the state, officials said on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Maharashtra Animal Husbandry Minister Sunil Kedar on Tuesday said the government will soon take steps to ensure that unorganised players engaged in poultry farming get insurance cover. "What I have noticed as the minister of the department is that insurance companies entertain organised players from the poultry business, but not the unorganised ones..

‘Farm laws will cost BJP-JJP in Har heavily’

NEW DELHI

THE Centre should repeal the three farm laws or it will cost the ruling BJP-JJP alliance in Haryana "heavily", a section of JJP MLAs said on Tuesday, before their party chief and Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah here. Chautala and Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar are scheduled to meet Shah in the national capital, and they will be accompanied by BJP state president O P Dhankar. The BJP, which won 40 seats in the 90-member Haryana assembly in the 2019 polls, formed government with the support of 10 Janayak Janata Party (JJP) MLAs and several Independents. The Centre should rollback these laws as farmers of Haryana, Punjab and the country are up in arms against the legislations, JJP MLA Jogi Ram Sihag told PTI. "We will request Dushyant ji to convey our feelings to Amit Shah ji," he said. Before meeting Shah, Chautala will hold a meeting with all his party's MLAs at a farm house here. "I have nothing to do with the JJP (meeting)... not going to Delhi... the sentiment in Haryana is against the three farm laws and it will cost the ruling BJP-JJP alliance heavily in the coming days," JJP MLA Ram Kumar Gautam said.

No withdrawal of Chinese troops from Ladakh: Army chief

NEW DELHI

THERE has been no withdrawal of Chinese troops from the Ladakh frontier and the ground situation remains the same, said Indian Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane on Tuesday, stating that reports of Chinese soldiers' movement from depth areas has no relation to the deployment on the Line of Actual Control. Dismissing reports that 10,000 Chinese soldiers have been redeployed, General Naravane said too much should not be read into either their presence or their going back, as these locations are between 500 to 1,500 kms deep inside Chinese territory. He also said that the current conflict situation along the LAC in Ladakh remains the same and the Indian Army is keeping a strict vigil and the soldiers are in a state of high alert on the Indian side of the de facto border. "Today's situation in Ladakh is the same. As far as the (Chinese soldiers') withdrawal is concerned, every summer, they come to the Tibetan Plateau for training and return especially as winter sets in. These are traditional training areas from where they go back. We should not read too much into these, whether they are present or absent or go back



from these areas. This is nothing new," Naravane said. "These areas are well off in the depth areas anywhere between 500 to 1,500 kms away from the border. All the same, we keep an eye on them, as these are the forces that could be mobilised and reach the borders in 24 hours to 48 hours so there is a necessity to keep a watch in all the deployments in the Tibetan Plateau." Naravane said in May 2020, the Chinese PLA had the first-mover advantage. But in August 2020, India turned the tables when India had the first-mover advantage on the southern banks of Pangong Tso, where Indian soldiers occupied key heights bang on the Indian perceived LAC.

Farmers protest against Farm Laws

Congress questions impartiality of members on panel formed by SC

NEW DELHI

THE Congress on Tuesday questioned the impartiality of the members of a Supreme Court-appointed panel and reiterated that the three new central farm laws be instead withdrawn and direct talks by the Prime Minister with protesters. The Chief Justice had mentioned the names of agricultural experts Ashok Gulati, Dr Pramod Kumar Joshi, Anil Dhanawat and BS Mann as committee members to hear out the farmers' views on the new laws and help end the impasse. Except for Mann, the other three have allegedly supported the farm laws in the recent past. The Supreme Court appointed Bhupinder Singh Mann of Bhartiya Kisan Union and Anil Ghanawat of Shetkeri Sangthana to be part of the committee to hold talks with the government. NCP president Sharad Pawar welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to stay the implementation of the Centre's three controversial new farm laws, saying it will be a "big relief" for farmers. Bharatiya Kisan Union president Naresh Tikait has said the Central government should



Farmers rest inside a tractor trolley during their agitation against new farm laws, at Singhu border

abandon its "stubborn" attitude and resolve the issues of farmers through dialogue. He also accused the government of maintaining a stubborn attitude while farmers have long been protesting on roads. Enacted in September 2020, the government has presented these laws as major farm reforms aimed at increasing farmers' income, but the protesting farmers have raised concerns that these legislations would weaken the minimum support price (MSP) and 'mandi' (wholesale market) systems, leaving them at the mercy of big corporations.

"We issued a press note last night stating that we won't accept any committee formed by Supreme Court for mediation. We were confident that Centre will get a committee formed through Supreme Court to take the burden off their shoulders," says Krantikari Kisan Union chief Darshan Pal. Meanwhile, senior advocate Harish Salve raised the issue of four senior lawyers, who represented farmer unions, being absent in the hearing on farms laws in the Supreme Court on Tuesday, terming it "really concerning".

Imran allows Saudi royals to hunt Bustard

LAHORE

THE Pakistan government has issued at least seven special permits to Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and six other members of the ruling family to hunt the internationally protected bird houbara bustard during the 2020-21 hunting season, according to a media report on Tuesday. Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has earlier opposed such permits for Arab royals, this time personally approved the special pass, reported the Dawn newspaper.



CORONAVIRUS HITS CHINA AGAIN



A worker in a protective suit takes a swab from a child for a coronavirus test in Shijiazhuang in northern China's Hebei province. Lockdowns have been expanded and a major political conference postponed in a province next to Beijing that is the scene of China's most serious recent COVID-19 outbreak

Goa Minister against IIT project

PANAJI

TAKING a U-turn on the IIT-Goa campus project, state Health Minister Vishwajit Rane on Tuesday urged the Chief Minister to withdraw the project from his Valpoi Assembly constituency in North Goa in view of public protests. Rane, who earlier repeatedly insisted on going ahead with the construction of the Indian Institute of Technology-Goa campus at Melaulim village "at any cost", has now cited "popular sentiments" against the project for his about-turn. "I have written to CM Pramod Sawant that I do not want an IIT in my constituency. I have taken this decision in the people's interest... the people's sentiments are against

the IIT," Rane said in a video message on the social media. The Minister also urged Sawant to withdraw criminal cases filed against protestors who turned violent and also action against police officials for alleged assault on women who protested against the project last Wednesday. "I urge the CM with folded hands that the cases against people should be withdrawn," Rane said. More than 100 residents of Melaulim along with opposition politicians were booked, many on the charge of attempt to murder, for the violent protests against the IIT-Goa project. The IIT was allotted to Goa by the central government in 2014, but it was functioning from a temporary campus shared with Goa Engineering College in Farmagudi village in South Goa.

Tamil Nadu Assembly polls to miss star power this time

Now, many were pinning hopes on Tamil movie superstar Rajinikant to inject a huge dose of star power into State politics by his entry in the coming polls but his back-peddalling left many fans and supporters surprised and countless more dejected

NEW DELHI

ONCE dominated by former matinee idols like late MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalitha or DMK's writer-politician M Karunanidhi, Tamil Nadu politics is likely to miss the star power in the 2021 Assembly elections. The reason: The death of Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi since the last Assembly elections in May 2016. 'Dithering' by Rajinikanth to take the electoral plunge has also not helped the cause. Jayalalitha, who became the first Tamil Nadu Chief Minister since MGR in 1984 to be voted back into office after the 2016 electoral

battle, fell severely ill in September 2016 and died on December 5 that year due to a cardiac arrest after 75-day hospitalisation. The demise of M Karunanidhi on August 7, 2018, robbed the state politics of another star leader who could sway the voters towards his DMK. Now, many were pinning hopes on Tamil movie superstar Rajinikanth to inject a huge dose of star power into state politics by his entry in the coming polls but his back-peddalling left many fans and supporters surprised and countless more dejected. In a Twitter message to his followers on Monday, the southern superstar appealed to his fans not to organise events to urge him to



enter politics and thus make him more and more sad. The superstar initially decided to enter politics but later backtracked after his hospitali-

sation in December last. However, there are still some known faces from the regional cinema who are active in state politics but they lack the huge charisma

and larger-than-life persona that MGR, Jaya or even Karunanidhi commanded. For example, former actress Kushboo who in recent times had switched sides from the Congress to the BJP. Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) chief and another famous actor-director Kamal Haasan had also entered politics with much fanfare but has not been able to make a mark expected of him. In December last, he had said that he was just a "phone call away" if actor turned politician Rajinikanth wished to join hands with his party ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. Another actor and Desiya Murpokku

Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) founder Vijayakanth is also active in state politics. Tamil Nadu will witness Assembly polls this year, with ruling AIADMK and opposition DMK the main contestants. DMK trounced AIADMK in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and holds an advantage in Assembly polls as the ruling party doesn't have a charismatic leader like Jayalalitha to once again storm to power after two terms. While the DMK has an alliance with the Congress, AIADMK will likely go with the BJP. In the 234-member Assembly, AIADMK has 124 MLAs and opposition 105, including DMK's 97.

TODAY'S QUOTE

Khadi Prakritik Paint will boost rural GDP

“Initiatives such as ‘Khadi Prakritik Paint’ will strengthen the rural economy and has the potential to become a Rs 6,000-crore industry soon. It will lead to ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ and arrest the exodus of rural population towards cities.”


— Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister



VACCINE

Bharat Biotech will supply vax to Brazil

Bharat Biotech has signed an agreement with Precisa Medicamentos to supply its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin to Brazil. A team from Precisa Medicamentos visited the Bharat Biotech facility last week to discuss potential export possibilities of the vaccine, the indigenous antidote for the killer virus

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.64	South	
Euro	93.47	African Rand	5.46
UAE Dirham	21.93	Hong Kong Dollar	10.86
Thai Baht	2.8	Japanese Yen	0.81
British Pound	103.54	New Zealand Dollar	55.3
Australian Dollar	59.45	Saudi Riyal	21.46
Canadian Dollar	60.31	Swedish Krona	10.17
Swiss Franc	85.53	Singapore Dollar	57.9

DELHI WEDNESDAY 13 JANUARY 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

Hyundai's new initiative

Korean carmaker Hyundai Motor India Ltd on Tuesday launched Click to Buy, an end-to-end online car buying platform, curated to provide incredible future retail experience to Indian customers. This offers benefits like transparency & customer trust- precise on road price from the very beginning of on-line journey to enhance customer's trust in the buying process, quick response to customer enquiry, auto assignment of sales consultant to give quicker response to customer enquiries. W S Oh, Executive Director Corporate Planning, Hyundai Motor India, said: "Click to Buy will widen the purview of our customers and enable them towards safer, quicker and contactless transactions. We are committed towards making customers life a happy life and be future ready to set newer paradigms in the digital retail space."

Vedanta bags award

Vedanta bagged the 'Most Innovative Best Practice Award at the Digital Transformation (DX) Summit & Awards 2020 organized by CII Centre for Digital Transformation (CDT). The company remains as India's first and the world's third smelter to deploy the digital smelter technology at its Jharsuguda plant, which is the world's largest single-location aluminium smelter. Ajay Kapur, CEO Aluminium & Power Business, Vedanta Ltd., said: "We strive to make our operations future-ready by integrating best-in-class digital solutions, building in efficiencies, and optimizing costs and raw material consumption in our quest to become the world's leading producer of aluminium. Vedanta's Aluminium & Power business has implemented intelligent automation and digitalization at its plants to produce high-quality Aluminium and value-added products."

Lendingkart's new platform

Lendingkart Technologies Private Limited launches its omni-channel partner platform, Lendingkart xlr8. This provides capability to its partners for easy and seamless MSMEs working capital requests, equips its digital partners to initiate lending journey on their platform by offering an end-to-end API suite and provides a one-stop SaaS solution for creation, fulfillment, tracking and reporting. Harshvardhan Lunia, Co-Founder & Managing Director of Lendingkart Technologies, said: "Lendingkart's partnership with our partners for creating awareness and developing the omni channel reach out for collateral-free finance option available to MSMEs via digital medium has gone a long way for us. These efforts and initiatives for more than 5 years are having high impact in the new normal."

Vivo rolls out Y12s device

Smartphone maker Vivo on Tuesday launched the all-new Vivo Y12s in India. It offers 5000mAh battery that supports AI power saving technology. The product is priced at Rs 9,990 for 3GB RAM + 32GB ROM variant which is available for purchase in two attractive colour options Phantom Black and Glacier Blue on Vivo India E-store, Amazon, Flipkart, Paytm etc. Nipun Marya, Director- Brand Strategy, Vivo India said: "The youthful Y series by Vivo has always been about our commitment to fulfil the consumer needs for innovative features that meets the specific requirements in different price brackets."

Industrial production shrank 1.9% in Nov

Manufacturing, mining sectors register de-growth

NEW DELHI

INDUSTRIAL production contracted by 1.9 per cent in November, entering the negative territory after a two-month gap, mainly due to poor showing by manufacturing and mining sectors, official data showed on Tuesday.

The manufacturing sector - which constitutes 77.63 per cent of the index of industrial production (IIP) - recorded a contraction of 1.7 per cent in November 2020, as per data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Mining sector output too witnessed a decline, shrinking 7.3 per cent.

However, power generation grew 3.5 per cent in the month under review. The IIP had grown by 2.1 per cent in November 2019. Industrial production had plunged 18.7 per cent in March last year following the Covid-19 outbreak and remained in the negative zone till August 2020. With the resumption of economic activities, factory output posted a flat growth of 0.48 per cent in September.

The IIP growth for October has been revised upwards to 4.9 per cent from last month's provisional estimates of 3.6 per cent. The government had imposed a



lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19 infections on March 25, 2020. With the gradual relaxation of restrictions, there has been a relative improvement in the economic activities by varying degrees as well as in data reporting, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation had said in a statement issued in November.

The ministry had also given a disclaimer that it may not be appropriate to compare the IIP in the post-pandemic months with the data for months preced-

ing the Covid-19 outbreak. The manufacturing sector had recorded a growth of 3 per cent in November 2019.

Similarly, mining sector output grew 1.9 per cent, but electricity generation shrank by 5 per cent in November 2019. The output of capital goods, which is a barometer of investment, fell by 7.1 per cent in November 2020 as against a contraction of 8.9 per cent earlier.

Consumer durables output fell by 0.7 per cent, compared to 1.4

However, power generation grew 3.5 per cent in the month under review.

Inflation dropped to 4.59% in Dec

NEW DELHI

RETAIL inflation fell sharply to 4.59 per cent in December, mainly due to declining food prices, government data showed on Tuesday.

Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 6.93 per cent in November. Food inflation declined to 3.41 per cent in December in 2020, compared to 9.5 per cent in the previous month, according to the data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) factors in retail inflation while arriving at its monetary policy.

per cent contraction in November 2019. Consumer non-durable goods production fell by 0.7 per cent, compared to a growth of 1.1 per cent a year ago.

The IIP for the April-November period has contracted by 15.5 per cent, according to the data. It had registered a flat growth of 0.3 per cent during the same period last fiscal. (PTI)

Benchmarks scale fresh peaks for 3rd day

MUMBAI

EQUITY indices vaulted to fresh lifetime highs for the third session on the trot on Tuesday as investors remained in risk-on mode amid unabated foreign fund inflows.

Overcoming a wobbly start, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged to its all-time peak of 49,569.14 during the day, propelled by robust buying in index heavyweights Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank. The index finally finished at its new closing record of 49,517.11, up by 247.79 points or 0.50 per cent. On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 78.70 points or 0.54 per cent to a fresh closing peak of 14,563.45. It scaled a record level of 14,590.65 during the session. On the Sensex chart, SBI was the top gainer, rallying 3.65 per cent, followed by Bharti Airtel, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ITC, Axis Bank and NTPC. RIL and HDFC Bank accounted for the lion's share of the benchmark's gains. On the



other hand, Asian Paints, HUL, Nestle India, Titan, Kotak Bank and Sun Pharma were among the laggards, dropping up to 3.93 per cent. "The pace of the market rally continued despite RBI's caution over elevated NPA levels in 2021, supported by PSU Banks and auto stocks. Majority of the sectors traded in the green in anticipation of good quarterly result while pharma and FMCG experienced some selling. "US bond yield has changed its trajectory to a rising trend, which could impact EMs in the future. But FII inflows are strong and the dollar continues to be weak due to oversupply of USD led by the high amount of fiscal stimulus," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

RBI's Financial Stability Report (FSR), released after market hours on Monday, said banks' gross non-performing assets may rise to 13.5 per cent by September 2021, from 7.5 per cent in September 2020 under the baseline scenario, hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pegasystems buys speech analytics firm Qurious.io

NEW DELHI

SOFTWARE company Pegasystems has acquired Qurious.io, a Cloud-based real-time speech analytics solution provider, for an undisclosed sum. Pegasystems, which has its R&D centre in Hyderabad, said the acquisition will help it add capabilities to its software portfolio with an initial focus on 'Pega Customer Service' use cases. While automated chatbots are increasingly more popular with consumers, live service agents are still left to handle the toughest customer problems over the phone.

"Qurious.io's real-time speech analytics proactively helps agents resolve these difficult requests with revenue producing Next-Best Actions. Their cloud-native approach perfectly complements how Pega uses AI across engagement channels, enabling our clients to provide consistently superior customer service from end to end," explained Kerim Akgonul, senior vice president, products, Pegasystems.

Piramal holds upper hand in DHFL bidding war

Committee of Creditors is voting on Thursday to select the successful bidder

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

WITH the insolvency resolution process of the Dewan Housing Finance Limited (DHFL) near completion, the market is waiting to see how the Committee of Creditors (CoC) will vote to resolve the issue on Thursday.

Incidentally, the DHFL is the first financial services company to go through the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC). There have been numerous arguments made by all the bidders. Some companies submitted their bids even though they have no eligibility. It seems there is a fresh bid with CoC which has had over two weeks time to weigh the options before voting this Thursday. Sources said upon carefully studying the bids submitted by various entities, the two that have stood out have been Piramal Group and Oaktree Capital.

Piramal bid offered highest upfront cash and its bid is considered as the best bet. "Piramal plan in-



cludes the highest upfront cash that allows the creditors higher liquidity in this option. It's bid also scores very high on the mandated scorecard for evaluation," sources added. Though Oaktree's bid also stood out, it has multiple regulatory issues which might attract legal hurdles and challenges, prolonging the resolution process, it's said. Sources point out that Oaktree, a foreign player, can't own insurance business in India as it will violate the country's FDI norms.

While some have suggested an AIF solution, this has no precedent in India's insurance sector which is home to 24 life insurance companies. "IRDA is unlikely to approve

the route that Oaktree is proposing. This is critical for Oaktree as the resolution will be incomplete if the insurance business remains unresolved," sources said. The Piramal bid has an implementable straight offer of Rs 1,000 crore for the Insurance business, payable at DHFL level. This is unlike the

Oaktree offer which is payable at the level of a subsidiary (DIL), with no clear path to extract that amount for the benefit of the DHFL lenders. Besides, Piramal is infusing Rs 3,800 crore of equity into DHFL, with another Rs 16,000 crore available in the financial services business for future.

It is said that the CoC may go for a bid that is most lucrative, regulatory compliant and most of all offers the fastest turn-around time for the creditors. The implementation of the Piramal plan is expected to be much shorter, as insurance related complications don't exist. This reduces open ended commercial risk for lenders on interest income.

Textile traders take to social media to rev up sales

ASL NARASIMHA RAO HYDERABAD

THE emergence of social media and online apps has transformed all walks of life. And, businesses are no exemption. Even as there is a heated debate over how e-commerce biggies are taking a heavy toll on small retailers, traders and our neighbourhood stores, especially those in the textile business, are using social media channels, including YouTube, to rev up sales. Many have succeeded in their online endeavours, too!

Says Srikanth, a Hyderabad-based entrepreneur who has been running Classic Polo brand outlet for a while: "We established our own social media platforms to inform our customers about new arrivals, news offers and new



developments. These platforms helped in increasing our sales both directly and indirectly".

Encouraged by the positive response and enhanced sales, his firm hired two people specifically to run social media campaigns. The firm is spending anywhere be-

“Social media and other technology apps benefitted traders during the lockdown period as people received what they wanted, sitting at home

— Ammanabolu Prakash, president, TSFCCT



Cement makers allege cartelisation among builders

CHENNAI

CEMENT manufacturers on Tuesday sought the Centre's intervention to end the alleged cartelisation by builders who were adopting a 'profiteering approach.'

The manufacturers also alleged there was a lobby among builders and there was no administration to rein them in and their profiteering approach. The comments come days after Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari had said the big players in the steel and cement industry were indulging in cartelisation to jack up prices.

Speaking at an event in Mumbai recently, Gadkari had said, "regarding steel and cement, this is really a problem for all of us. Actually, I feel this is a cartel by some big people who are doing cement and steel".

Dramatic reversal: Saina, Prannoy, Kashyap to play at Thailand Open

BANGKOK

ACE shuttlers Saina Nehwal, Parupalli Kashyap, and HS Prannoy, who were forced to withdraw from the Thailand Open Super 1000 after they tested Covid positive earlier on Tuesday, were dramatically cleared by the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to compete by the end of the day.

Kashyap, husband of Olympic bronze medalist Saina, also had to withdraw as he was sharing a room with Saina and was asked to self-quarantine earlier on Tuesday. By the end of the day, all three were back in the draw and will play their matches on Wednesday.

Prannoy is set to face Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia on Wednesday while Kashyap faces Canada's Jason Anthony Shue. Saina faces Kisona Selvaduray of Malaysia in her first round fixture.

Earlier on Tuesday, Saina and Prannoy, who had recently recovered from Covid-19, were declared to have once again tested positive for novel coronavirus and as a result were withdrawn. The Indian squad, which travelled to Bangkok to compete in the Yonex Thailand Open followed by Toyota Thailand Open, and BWF World Tour Finals, had tested negative during the first two tests that were conducted earlier.

However, Saina and Prannoy returned positive during the third test conducted on Monday.

"We are constantly in touch with the BWF as well as the organisers and our team management and players. These are unprecedented times but BWF is doing everything to ensure full support to our players including their safety," BAI general secretary Ajay Singhania had said in a statement before the players' withdrawals were reversed.

After testing positive, both Saina and Prannoy were taken to the hospital to be isolated for a minimum of 10 days. Kashyap was asked to quarantine in his hotel room due to close proximity with Saina.

However, Saina had earlier claimed she hadn't received her Covid-19 test reports and it was only before the warm up for her Tuesday's match authorities told her that she had tested positive for coronavirus.

Saina reacted by tweeting: "I still didn't receive the Covid test report from yesterday it's very confusing and today just before the warm up for the match they tell me to get to hospital in Bangkok ... saying that I'm positive according to rules the report should take in four hours."

Saina was slated to take on Kisona Selvaduray of Malaysia in her opening round contest on Tuesday.

Prannoy, on the other hand, was to take on Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia while Kashyap was to take on Jason Anthony Ho-Shue of Canada in their respective opening round contests. (IANS)



Sindhu, Praneeth suffer shock first round exit

THAILAND OPEN

Satwiksairaj, Ashwini advance in mixed doubles

BANGKOK

WORLD champion P V Sindhu suffered a shock defeat on her return to international badminton, losing in three games to Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt in the opening round of YONEX Thailand Open Super 1000 event here on Tuesday.

Months after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the international calendar, Sindhu, seeded sixth, returned to action with a 21-16 24-26 13-21 defeat to world no 18 Blichfeldt in a 74-minute battle.

In men's singles, world No. 13 B Sai Praneeth too suffered a straight game loss to Thailand's Kantaphon Wangcharoen on his return to competition. Frontrunner to represent India at the Olympics, Praneeth went down 16-21 10-21 to the world No. 15 Wangcharoen for only his second loss to the Thailand player. The match lasted just over half an hour.

Earlier in the day, the Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa claimed a hard-fought win over the Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Widjaja to advance to the second round of the tournament.

Rankireddy and Ashwini defeated their Indonesian opponent 21-11, 27-29, 21-16 in the opening round contest which lasted one hour and 12 minutes.

The Indian duo will next face the Chinese pair of Chang Tak Ching and Ng Wing Yung for a place in the quarterfinals. Meanwhile, Ashwini and Rankireddy will now feature in the women's and men's doubles matches with their partners N Sikki Reddy and Chirag Shetty later on Tuesday.



However, the women's doubles pair of Ashwini and N Sikki Reddy couldn't cross the opening hurdle, going down 16-21 7-21 to fourth seeded Korean pair of Kim So Yeong and Kong Hee Yong.

In a match that lasted 36 minutes, the Indians raced to an 8-3 lead in the first game. The Koreans, however, won five consecutive points to lead 9-8. Ashwini and Sikki then took the next point to level the game again but Kim and Kong pulled away after that. The second game was a more one-sided affair with the Indian pair being limited to a single digit score.

Sindhu made a good start, opening up a 6-3 lead and never allowing her opponent to grab the advantage to take the opening game. In the second game, the Indian once again moved ahead to an 11-8 advantage but the Danish girl came back strongly and turned the tables at 15-14. After a neck-and-neck battle, it was Blichfeldt, who showed better nerves to make a roaring comeback.

In the decider, Blichfeldt carried on the momentum of the second game and opened up a sizable 11-6 lead at the break. She kept exerting pressure on the Indian, moving to a 14-8 advantage. Sindhu eventually handed a seven match-point advantage to Blichfeldt after finding the net and then hit wide as the Danish shuttler celebrated. (PTI)

Srikanth left with bloodied nose after multiple Covid-19 tests

BANGKOK

INDIA'S Kidambi Srikanth on Tuesday tweeted images of himself with a bloodied nose that he said came from the multiple tests he underwent for Covid-19 in Bangkok, Thailand. Srikanth, 27, is in the city along with the rest of the Indian badminton squad for the ongoing Thailand Open and two more tournaments that will take place this month.

"We take care of ourselves for the match not to come and shed blood for THIS. However, I gave 4 tests after I arrived and I can't say any of them have been pleasant. Unacceptable," Srikanth said in his tweet. The former men's singles world No.1 is scheduled to play compatriot Sourabh Verma in his first round match at the Thailand Open on Wednesday.



Nishchal beats Tejaswini, Anjum in T2 3P trials

NEW DELHI

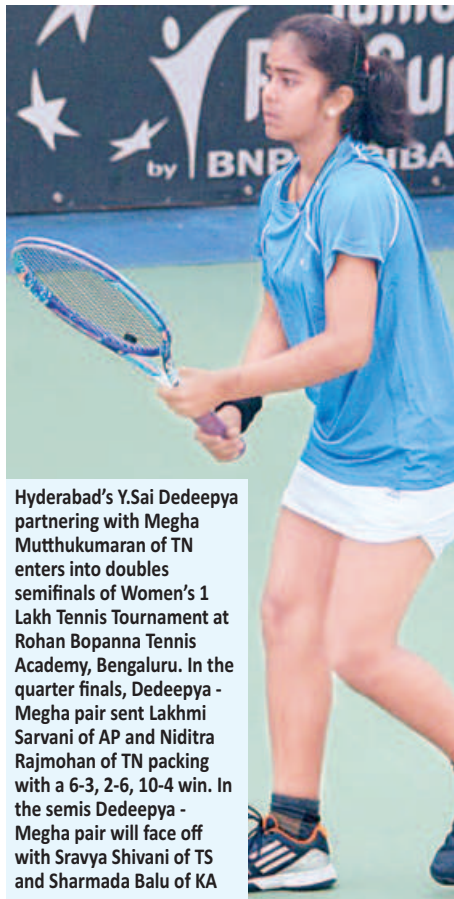
HARYANA'S Nishchal won the T2 women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) trials, outgunning a field that included Olympic quota holders Anjum Moudgil and Tejaswini Sawant at the Karni Singh Shooting range in Delhi on Tuesday.

Nishchal shot 459.1 to best T1 winner Tejaswini, who had to settle for second place with a score of 458.1. Nishchal had earlier finished third in T1 women's 3P.

Tejaswini still managed to beat fellow quota holder Anjum Moudgil for a second time in two days. Anjum finished third with an effort of 447.8 in the finals.

The day also saw the commencement of the T1 trap trials. Lakshay Sheoran and Rajeshwari Kumari were leading after the first three rounds of Day 1, in the men's and women's sections respectively. Aakash Khushwaha and Kirti Gupta were ahead in the junior men's and women's sections. (IANS)

EYING TITLE WIN



Hyderabad's Y.Sai Dedeepya partnering with Megha Muthukumaran of TN enters into doubles semifinals of Women's 1 Lakh Tennis Tournament at Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy, Bengaluru. In the quarter finals, Dedeepya - Megha pair sent Lakshmi Sarvani of AP and Niditra Rajmohan of TN packing with a 6-3, 2-6, 10-4 win. In the semis Dedeepya - Megha pair will face off with Sravya Shivani of TS and Sharmada Balu of KA

Brisbane hotel: Cricketers denied housekeeping services

BRISBANE

THE Indian cricket board is in talks with hosts Cricket Australia (CA) to allow the Indian cricket team leeway after the Indian cricketers checked in at the Sofitel Brisbane Central hotel to a 'Do It Yourself (DIY)' directive that denied them housekeeping services.

The directives also denied them the use of the swimming pool as Queensland, of which Brisbane is the capital, seeks to avoid community transmission of Covid-19. A couple of areas in Brisbane have, in fact, been declared as hotspot areas.

A official of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed to IANS that the team, which reached Brisbane on Tuesday afternoon, has been denied housekeeping, room service and the use of the swimming pool.

"The BCCI is in talks with CA over the matter," said the official, hoping that the issue will be resolved.

There was speculation that India wouldn't travel to Brisbane, though there was no official statement from either the BCCI or CA on this issue.

Both teams are being subjected to strict quarantine rules as they have arrived in Queensland from Sydney in New South Wales, which saw a rise in Covid-19 cases recently.

The state of Queensland saw a few Covid-19 cases in recent days which makes the precautions and a demand for hard quarantine understandable.

"Queensland has recorded one new local Covid-19 case and two in hotel quarantine while two Brisbane locations remain on high alert after they were visited by a man with the highly contagious UK strain," said a report on Channel 9 news website.

Queensland premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said that the state has 28 active cases. (IANS)

Fourth Test: Sans Bumrah, pacers' experience to be 4 Tests; Aus' 150

BRISBANE

IF fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah doesn't play in the fourth and final Test starting here on Friday, India's pace department could at best have a combined Test experience of four matches as compared to Australia's 150. And, if spinners are included, Australia's experience shoots up to



249 Tests against India's 78, including that of off-spinner R Ashwin. In case he is not fit to take field, and Chinaman Kuldeep Yadav does, India's combined bowling experience would be an abysmal 10.

Bumrah is doubtful after he suffered an abdominal tear during the third Test, which ended in Sydney on Monday, and although the Indian team management says the decision will be taken over the next couple of days on observing his progress, the brief three-day period between the third and the fourth matches could force the team to sit him out if he fails to recover. In Bumrah's absence, the Indian team could feature Mohammed Siraj, who has played just two Tests, Navdeep Saini, who has played one match, and Shardul Thakur, who has also played just one.

In case India include uncapped T Natarajan, instead of either Saini or Shardul, the experience will drop to just three Tests.

The Indian team already has a depleted look following injuries to Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, both of whom got injured after the first and the second Tests respectively.

Experienced pace bowler Ishant Sharma, who has toured Australia four times, didn't make it to the team for the Australia tour as he was recuperating from an abdominal tear. Though now he is fit and playing for Delhi in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament, the Covid-19 restrictions prevented replacements to be sent to Australia.

It leaves India with a weak line-up, one that is thin on experience.

For Aussies, in contrast, the combined experience of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood adds up to 147 Tests. With pace-bowling all-rounder Cameron Green's three-Test experience, it comes to 150. Even with Bumrah in, India don't have any pace bowler who has the experience of playing at the Gabba. He toured Australia for the first time in 2018-19 and India did not play any Test in Brisbane on that tour. The Gabba is considered to be a fortress for Australia and their pace bowlers are most well-equipped to bowl there.

India's other worry will be the availability of Ashwin, who woke up on Monday with a tweaked back and batted with it to help India draw the third Test with his dogged batting (39 off 128 balls).

If Ashwin doesn't play, then India may be forced to field Kuldeep. The left-arm wrist-spinner played just five IPL matches last season.

On this tour, Kuldeep has played just one ODI and one warm-up, in which he bowled just 16 overs. That has been the only cricket he has played post lockdown. Kuldeep's last Test match, incidentally, came exactly two years ago, on the last tour of Australia during the Sydney Test in which he took a fiver. India though will be hoping that Bumrah and Ashwin regain fitness for the fourth and the final Test. (IANS)

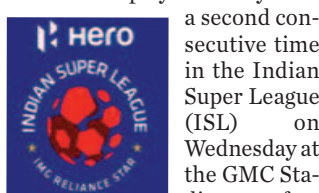


Odisha and Chennaiyin players in action. They played out a goalless draw just only over the weekend

Odisha, Chennaiyin hope to get three points in reverse fixture

BAMBOLIM (GOA)

ODISHA FC play Chennaiyin FC



a second consecutive time in the Indian Super League (ISL) on Wednesday at the GMC Stadium after

the two sides played out a goalless draw on Sunday.

The reverse fixture saw both teams missing a number of chances to take the lead and left both of them in the bottom four. While Odisha stay rooted at the bottom, Chennaiyin have now slipped to 11th. A win on Wednesday, however, will change the script for both teams.

According to Odisha coach Stuart Baxter, the disadvantages of facing the same team twice in four days is something that both sides have to bear.

"Is the glass half full or half empty? I think you can look at it both ways. Whatever it is, it is for

RESULT

NorthEast United FC draw with Bengaluru FC 1-1

both teams. If it is a positive, they've got just as much positives as we have. The only thing I can say is that it is going to be difficult for both teams," he said.

Baxter, however, refused to commit on whether he would opt for a change in tactics to make it difficult for Chennaiyin to predict what his team would do. "It's a possibility, yes, when you have these doubleheaders. Sometimes you do change tactics. But we have to look at a fresh set of players, we have to look at the injuries. We have a suspension in Jacob (Tratt). So that is on the table. We will make a final decision later in the

evening," he added.

Sunday saw Chennaiyin's goal-scoring woes in the league continue with Rahim Ali and Jakub Sylvestr both missing golden opportunities to get their team the three points. Chennaiyin have netted the least goals in the league and have now not scored in half the games that they have played. With their main creative force Rafael Crivellaro out for the rest of the season, their forwards can't afford to be wasteful anymore.

For coach Csaba Laszlo, it is now evident that this is his biggest headache.

"Our biggest problem according to me is actually scoring goals. We create a lot of chances. But somehow we haven't scored enough goals and if you don't score goals, it is very difficult to win games," he said. (IANS)

TODAY'S MATCH

Odisha FC vs Chennaiyin FC at GMC Stadium Bambolim 7.30pm