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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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THE LAGYAP STORY

Idle expenditure, revenue loss and untenable excuses

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Reports of idle expenditure by government departments or misplaced priorities leading to loss of revenue or the presenting of untenable excuses to explain delays are not rare. In fact, they are too common. It is rare, even for the somnolent bureaucracy, to deliver embarrassments in which all three factors are amplified and exposed. One such project finds ignominious mention in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Economic, Revenue and General Sectors for Sikkim for the year ended March 2018.

The ambitiously titled, "Restoration, Renovation and Modernisation of Lower Lagyap Hydel Project" in East district on dodgy credentials in November 2012 when the Energy & Power Department managed to convince the Land Revenue Department to divert nearly Rs 44 crore from the Rs

1,000 cr sanctioned by the Government of India for reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the 18 Sept 2011 earthquake.

The central assistance was not meant for renovation or modernization of any infrastructure and was sought and sanctioned explicitly for restoration of damages caused by that calamitous tremor. For restoration, renovation and modernisation, the Power Department should have made a separate project and applied for funding or included it in its budget projections. That, however, would have required foresight and planning and follow-up, skills which appear to be in short supply in the department as the Lower Lagyap HEP adventure reveals.

The diversion was sanctioned, and one cannot help but wonder which desperate repair and restoration was put on hold to provide Power Department Rs 44 cr to waste. As for the Power Department,

it justified the diversion on the ground that a modernized Lower Lagyap HEP would generate "substantial revenue" to the tune of Rs 20 or Rs 30 crore for the State. The irony of this fantastic claim convincing the diversion of desperately-required funds for earthquake repairs is stark.

Be that as it may, the funds were diverted in Sept 2012 and the Power Department displayed some urgency in expediting the project when it issued a Notice Inviting Tenders in November 2012 itself and on 23 May, 2013, awarded the project comprising of civil works, electromechanical and hydro-mechanical works for a "negotiated lump-sum" of Rs 43.22 crore. The project was to be completed within 18 months - latest by 03 December, 2014.

However, even as of Feb 2019, the "Restoration, Renovation and Modernisation" of Lower Lagyap Hydel Project had still not been completed.

The delay was noticed on the first deadline itself when two days before the scheduled date of completion, the contractor requested the Power Secretary for a time extension of 10 months [upto 11 Oct 2015].

This time, the contractor explained, was sought because work could not progress as scheduled due to hindrances by local public in the laying of water conductors. This was a hydel project, and the water conductors are clearly a crucial component without which no power can be generated. This should have been obvious to the engineers in the Department but was overlooked.

The 11 Oct 2015 deadline came and went, and this time neither the contractor seek time, nor did the engineer in-charge bother to check or authorize an extension. This, the CAG auditors view as "failure in exercise of due rigour in execution of the project."

An inspection by CAG auditors

revealed that the contractor had completed installation of electro-mechanical components of the project which means that the power house was ready for a trial run by November 2015 itself.

Remember the water conductors which have still not been laid? The water conduit pipes, the only components of the project which had been damaged by the 18 Sept 2011 earthquake, had not been completed and without water gushing to the power house, the electro-mechanical components could not be checked.

When CAG auditors checked again in June 2018, the electromechanical components, installed at the cost of nearly Rs 20 crore, were still sitting idle, never having been tested and their warranty of two years having expired.

But why could the water conduit pipes not be laid?

The Department explained in August 2018, six years after the

project was begun, that the people of the area had raised objections to the laying of head race pipes due to lingering fears of the 18 Sept earthquake. Officials in the Department claimed that the hindrance cause by the people was beyond its anticipation.

This excuse is patently false because residents of the area had petitioned the State Government through the CM, Speaker and the Department, in February 2013, barely three months since the work was awarded, seeking adequate protective measures to ensure safety of the villages lying below the are axis of the water conductor pipes.

"The EPD [Energy & Power Department] was thus aware of the concern of the public of the area right from the commencement of the work but had failed to address the issue effectively in time leading to loss of huge revenue to the State," the CAG Report concludes.

Girl trapped in cave, rescued



WANGCHUK BHUTIA

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

In what must have been a traumatic experience, a girl was rescued after being stuck head first in a rocky overhang at Lower Raktong in East Sikkim today.

The girl, Seti Gurung, had been missing from home since this morning and her family had failed to locate her. Someone eventually spotted her trapped head first in a rocky overhang below the road.

The terrain was difficult and rescue efforts fraught with risks. A brave boy from Jang village finally managed to reach the spot and got her out.

The entire rescue operation, which was joined by police and villagers, took around 4 hours.

The girl was then taken to Dikchu PHC, where she is currently undergoing treatment.

Students, teachers collectively boycott classes at JNU

NEW DELHI, JAN 13

(PTI): The students and the teachers of the Jawaharlal Nehru University on Monday boycotted classes amid standoff with the administration over the fee hike issue.

The classes were supposed to begin on Monday but could not start due to the collective boycott. Prashant Kumar, a PhD student at the varsity, said the masters and graduation students have decided to boycott classes. "The vice-chancellor has written to various centres to frame the time-table but there has been no development. The classes did not start today but might begin in a day or two," Kumar said.

A student from the School of Social Science, who did not

wish to be named, said, "We first want the issues to be sorted, only then can we focus on our studies. Just to start a fresh beginning, we cannot forget the past".

The campus saw violence on January 5 when a masked mob attacked students and teachers.

The students' union had earlier said it will ensure registration by paying only the tuition fees and not the increased hostel charges but kept the decision on hold after it found that the administration had blocked the registration portal for many students.

The teachers' association has also given a call for 'non-cooperation' in academic matters over a range of issues, including that of fee hike and

the January 5 violence.

Teachers and students have been demanding the sacking of Vice-Chancellor M Jagadesh Kumar.

According to Professor Hari Ram Mishra of the School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, some students attended classes but many of them are still not back in campus.

"The classes should commence in a proper way in the next couple of days," he said.

Another professor requesting anonymity, said, "The time-tables have not been prepared due to the ongoing situation. The teachers have been asked by the administration but the JNUTA has given a call for boycott."

In a meeting with Human Resource De-

velopment (HRD) officials, the JNUTA told officials that they "do not feel secure" on the campus and the atmosphere there was not conducive for academic activities.

"We do not feel secure on the campus, atmosphere not conducive for academic activities. Students who left campus after violence scared to return, how can we resume teaching?" JNUTA President D K Lobiyal told the ministry officials.

Opposition parties discuss anti-CAA protests, violence on campuses



NEW DELHI, JAN 13

(PTI): A meeting of Opposition parties convened by Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Monday deliberated on the current political situation following widespread protests against the amended Citizenship Act and the violence on campuses.

Significantly, the BSP, the AAP and the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC stayed away from the meeting attended by representatives of 20 parties in all.

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, Left leaders Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, JMM leader and

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, LJD chief Sharad Yadav, Rashtriya Lok Samata Party leader Upendra Kushwaha, RJD leader Manoj Jha, National Conference leader Hasnain Masoodi, besides Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Ahmed Patel and former prime minister Manmohan Singh were among those present.

Sources said top opposition leaders have already held discussions among themselves and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad is leading the

efforts.

The opposition is seeking to win over the youth and the students by supporting their protests against the amended citizenship law and any National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The sources said the Congress and other parties are seeking to take the students' movement forward and have lent support to their cause.

Last week, Sonia Gandhi had termed the CAA as a "discriminatory and divisive" law whose "sinister" purpose was to divide people on religious lines, and asserted

that the NPR (National Population Register) in form and content was "disguised NRC (National Register of Citizens)".

The joint opposition move also assumes significance as it comes soon after Delhi Assembly election dates have been announced.

Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 8 and results will be declared on February 11.

The last time a majority of opposition leaders got together was at the swearing-in of Hemant Soren as Jharkhand chief minister.

Par panel starts work on legislative impact assessment

NEW DELHI, JAN 13

(PTI): A parliamentary committee has started working on legislative impact assessment, days after Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu pitched for it, official sources said on Monday.

Legislative impact assessment is an informed law-making process under which social, economic, environmental and institutional impacts of legislative proposals are made.

It helps in realising the stated objectives

of various laws.

Naidu is of the view that informed legislation will help in realising the stated objectives of various laws. It requires a detailed impact assessment of legislation at the stages of both pre-legislation and post-legislation.

Now, the department-related parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and personnel, headed by BJP leader Bhopender Yadav, has started working on the issue and would

come out with a report on ways to assess the impact of a law on people, society and economy before and after it is framed, the sources said.

A similar move to have judicial impact assessment on laws could not take off in the past.

Based on the directions of the Supreme Court, a task force was set up in 2008 to study Judicial Impact Assessment.

But various experts had claimed that assessing judicial impact of a law was not

practical.

Later, a committee of experts was constituted in September, 2013 to examine the issue of implementing the methodology of Judicial Impact Assessment and suggest further action.

The committee in its report submitted on January 9, 2015 had concluded that Judicial Impact Assessment was neither feasible nor desirable as a method of proper budgetary planning and allocation of funds for the judiciary.

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Trolled You

Kirtey-parcha draftsmen playing with new toys

Gone are the days when trolls were these imaginary creatures which would jump out from under bridges and play villains in children's storybooks. They were almost cute, and invariably outwitted. Nowadays, trolls are often anonymous, but always insecure creatures of the online world who are bawled into duty when reasoned debate becomes too difficult to engage in for the pettiness which marshals these, to borrow from Hillary, "basket of deplorables".

So, who are these modern-day trolls? These are people, some using real names and then also using several online avatars, who find meaning in their life by being mean online. Being mean is no crime, but when the meanness degenerates to threats and obvious nuisance, something needs to be done. Cops in Sikkim as well as elsewhere pick up drunkards and book them for causing nuisance and public disorder even if they are just screaming gibberish on the streets in their drunken rants. And yet, agent provocateurs take nuisance and public disorder to offensive levels without facing any action. And so they get stronger. Roadside Romeos are often shamed and locked-up, and yet, in the online space, much worse than eve-teasing is played out on a regular basis and it is allowed to continue. Good policing, at least the kind that genuinely looks out for the people without first having received orders to do so, of course, is a bit too much to expect in our country of VIPs and VIPs-in-the-making, but what about the audience? Shouldn't they agree on a policy which immediately blocks trolls the moment one jumps up? Trolls purposefully stir up trouble in social media communities by being vicious, deceitful and nasty. While being nasty or even vicious is a personal choice which should not attract public comment, trolling starts venturing into criminality when the name-calling starts dealing in lies and character assassinations. Sikkim knows these kinds well since it has a long history of engaging in political debate through the medium of kirtey-parchas - the anonymous pamphlets - which proved that politicians think that the people are stupid and were convinced that politicking means dealing in fiction not facts. But that trade appears to be doing well for all sides (accept it, all sides did, and are using trolls to fight their battles). Modi-bhakt has taken this form of assault to a new, very scarily well-organised level, but it is not as if Sikkim does not see its own "local" trolls in offensive action on occasion as well. Much as trolls need to be condemned, sometimes, also spare them some sympathy. One needs to be dredging very deep in the pits which suck out self-respect to do obviously shameful things just to rise in the ranks of sycophants.

As for the targets of trolling, let's please not call them victims because that will give too much credibility to the sorry armies of trolls, they can begin by feeling good about it because only the important and significant voices are searched out from the sea of online voices for such treatment. And never feed the troll. Responding to them, or even noticing them, makes them relevant, feeds their hate. Ignore them, and this is not just for the targets but also for all those who even find them sitting on their timelines, and they will crawl back into the nothingness they have emerged from. Come on, we have managed to lose our morals and even our Gods by ignoring them; trolls could not be stronger than that. Since it is leaders who the trolls are out to impress more than the targets they appear to be hounding, maybe people should also consider unfriending/ blocking all leaders who share, forward or fail to condemn trolls. In fact, leaders - political and social, okay, also religious - need to take the initiative in such efforts. But they probably won't, or will do so, like always, selectively, and that does not work; so it will have to be the lay people who spit the trolls out of social media spaces.

Meanwhile, has anyone noticed that the young appear to have grown disgusted with us muddying their media (read Facebook) and have moved on to other platforms for social online engagements?

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The Attacks on Two Delhi Universities Reveal Modi's Targets: Muslims and Their Allies

MUKUL KESAAH
THE GUARDIAN

In the middle of December, Delhi police tried to shut down university protests against the religiously discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) by caning Muslim students into submission. Police officers smashed their way into the library at Jamia Millia Islamia university (where I teach history), trashed bookcases and beat the students inside, badly damaging the eyesight of one in the process. They threw tear-gas grenades into the reading room to force students out. Their excuse was they were chasing violent demonstrators who had taken refuge in campus buildings.

Last week, Delhi police also assembled outside another educational establishment. This time the police remained decorously outside the gates of Jawaharlal Nehru University, India's most well known, cordoning off the campus as masked goons armed with iron rods and improvised bludgeons ran riot inside. They broke into a hostel reserved for women students, inflicted head injuries on the president of JNU's student union, who is a woman, and attacked faculty members who tried to protect them. Some 20 students and teachers were hospitalised. After three hours of thuggery the police entered the university at the vice-chancellor's belated invitation but made no arrests because the criminals had mysteriously slipped away despite the police cordon.

The Delhi police was the common factor in the two assaults, in the first instance as perpetrator and in the second as auxiliary. The force reports to the home affairs minister, Amit Shah, prime minister Narendra Modi's right-hand man. Jamia and JNU are centrally funded universities that have attracted the violent displeasure of Modi's government for different but related reasons. Taken together, these reasons define

the ruling Bharatiya Janata party's majoritarian project - its reason for being.

The attack on Jamia was triggered by the BJP government's determination to snuff out protests against the CAA, which excludes Muslim migrants from the amnesty given to others from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Having smuggled into law a religious test for citizenship for one class of migrants, the government hopes to press its advantage further by forcing Indians to prove their citizenship to a latterday inquisition, the National Register of Citizens. The NRC is the citizenship act's evil twin; those who aren't able to document their claim to being Indian before the tribunals of the NRC will be cast into limbo - but non-Muslims among them can hope to be rescued by the CAA's amnesty.

Undocumented Muslims will have no such recourse; they will be interned and deported as Amit Shah promised in the speeches he made all over the country. This destabilisation of Muslim citizenship is a great prize for a majoritarian party such as the BJP which sees India as a Hindu nation, Hindus as its natural citizens and Muslims as potential fifth columnists with extraterritorial loyalties. Jamia was brazenly attacked by the police of this would-be Hindu nation because the government was confident that making a violent example of a Muslim university would play well in public.

It had good reason to be confident. Modi had won an absolute majority in parliament for the second time in 2019; the supreme court had awarded the site of a mosque demolished in 1991 by Hindu mobs, led by BJP leaders, to Hindu litigants who claimed it was the god Ram's birthplace; the government had successfully reduced India's one Muslim-majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, into two Delhi-administered union territories, and the citizenship amend-



ment bill had been expertly ushered through both houses of parliament with hardly any resistance from a divided and demoralised opposition.

Against the odds, this attempt to shock Indian Muslims into submission by brutalising a Muslim university backfired - for two reasons. First, the assault galvanised Muslims all over the country into spontaneous and sustained resistance to the CAA and NRC. Second, the police atrocities in Jamia led to huge demonstrations of solidarity in colleges and universities all over India and sparked a fire of resistance, against the furtive bigotry of the CAA, which continues to burn.

The BJP has long believed that its anti-Muslim project has two enemies: Muslims, and those non-Muslims who see Muslims as equal citizens under the constitution. The Delhi police made an example of Jamia as a warning to India's Muslims. When that didn't go according to plan, the same police travelled several miles across the city to help make an example of a university that the BJP sees as the institutional incarnation of the secularism that might yet thwart its dreams of a Hindu nation. Since majoritarian parties are constitutionally incapable of empathy, the BJP understands JNU's brand of secular solidarity as a form of Hindu self-hatred.

For the better part of Modi's first

term in office, there has been a running battle between JNU students and central government, a David and Goliath standoff that has turned student politicians into national figures. But the BJP's loathing of the university is obsessive and wildly out of proportion to the threat that its students and teachers pose. Stung by the pan-Indian support that Jamia's anti-CAA protests have provoked, Modi's government seems to have concluded that it was all JNU's fault. Otherwise it is hard to believe that a dispute over accommodation charges - the last source of conflict between JNU students and the authorities to make headlines - could goad a national government into risking complicity in this violent charade. The only other explanation for the attack is that it was an attempt to turn attention away from the anti-CAA protests by giving people something else to be outraged about.

It's hard to predict what lasting effect the assaults on these two universities will have on Indian politics. A party that controls the state will generally outlast spontaneous civil society movements that lack political leadership. For the moment, though, the passion (and existential panic) that has powered this campaign against sectarianism seems to have deranged Modi's leviathan.

Britain's Racism Pantomime: Now Starring Meghan and Harry

NESRINE MALIK
THE GUARDIAN

It's pantomime season again. Is Britain racist? Oh no it's not. Oh yes it is! The script is ready - all we need is to find new stars, maybe update the rest of the cast here and there. The last performance, at the end of December, featured Stormzy, a crowd favourite whose misreported quote about racism in Britain sent the country into days of absurd debate. Is it "100% racist"? Or is it definitely racist, yes, 100%?

The headlines were already well rehearsed. "100% wrong!" Sajid Javid hits out at Stormzy over claims the UK is a 'racist country', said the Daily Express. Javid has become a key character in these national circuses, cooing out denials with a robotic chirpiness on Twitter. Before Stormzy's starring role, there was the performance featuring Naga Munchetty - a special edition with the BBC as an endearingly bumbling villain. And did you see the one with Diane Abbott? It's one of the most popular - and long-running - of the "but is it racism?" shows.

This week there is a very special guest in the pantomime - Meghan. Has her treatment in Britain been marked by racism? Oh no it hasn't! Oh yes it has! The cast assume their positions. On one side of the stage, black and brown people are summoned to perform their parts in the pantomime - with frustration, disbelief, even tears. In the middle are the mediators, the TV and radio programme hosts - earnest, but clinically, unrelentingly goading. On the other side of the stage, the professional race-baiters, the red-tops, the "journalists", the online trolls elevated to respectability once again, and Piers Morgan. There is always Piers Morgan.

Britain's conversation about race endlessly repeats itself, first as tragedy, and for ever thereafter as farce. Instead of discussing race relations in this country through the issues of hate crime, systemic police prejudice and the dramatic disparity of opportunity between people of different ethnic backgrounds, we have decided to debate it by constantly arguing about whether it is relevant. Because things are so much better than they used to be, aren't they?

In many ways, any improvement in race relations has come with a proportional decline in self-awareness, and with it a degradation of the public conversation on race. The increased visibility of black and brown people in those spaces where this conversation takes place - in politics and the media - has achieved little apart from sift-



ing them into for and against camps. Whenever a public figure is subjected to racist behaviour, a sort of kangaroo court is set up, one with an impossibly high bar for proving a racist event has occurred - anything short of an explicit slur or a violent attack can easily be explained away. The outcome of the litigation is certain because the whole point of the exercise is the spectacle, rather than the inquiry. It's a set-up.

The subjects of the spectacle are not chosen by accident. As a nation, we love a celebrity racism row, and the media is happy to play both sides: everyone loves to read about celebrities, and it's easy work to tear down someone young, famous and wealthy for claiming to be a victim of racism. In fact, it is this cherry-picking of the most prominent figures that guarantees that the national conversation about race is diverted into one about privilege.

Is there a worse advertisement for victimhood than a literal princess? Are there worse advocates for the literal princess than the few black and brown people in the media - whose very presence in these exclusive debates (where they are generally not included unless race is the subject) is taken to demonstrate their own privilege? They will be accused of ungratefulness for living and thriving in a 100%-not-racist country that has provided them with the opportunity to appear on Newsnight approximately once a year to be sneered at.

The chosen protagonists - the princess, the pop star, the TV presenter, the politician - ensure that

the conversation is never really about racism. Confining our attention to elite victims conveniently shrinks the subject to something neat and quick: it can be packaged into a short viral video, a highly quotable column that is basically an extended tweet, a studio shouting match that will light up social media.

There will be no time to discuss the laziness, complicity and complacency of a media class that has turned racism into a spectator sport. There will be no time to discuss the unique toxicity of tabloid culture, and why it thrives in the UK. There will be no time to discuss the large swathes of a deeply conservative country that are goaded and taunted by a cultural showreel from the metropolis that inflames and excludes them.

There will be no time to talk about the rightwards creep of our political culture under successive Tory governments that have consistently turned up the dial on nativism. There will be no time to position these elite victims as central characters in a culture war led by the right - one that has weaponised the word "woke" to discredit any efforts, or even gestures, towards social justice. There will be no time for anything but performance.

And in the performance, behind a mask of innocent inquiry, the same old interrogation - which pretends to ask about racism in Britain, but in fact only hopes to smoke you out in the open and then draw some blood. Look out. It's behind you.

Start shooting for 'Succession' S3 this year: Sarah Snook

LOS ANGELES, JAN 13 (PTI): "Succession" star Sarah Snook says the team will start shooting for the third season of the satirical comedy-drama in 2020.

HBO gave a renewal order to its breakout show, created by Jesse Armstrong, last August.

Snook plays Siobhan "Shiv" Roy, the unlikely contender of the media empire owned by Logan Roy, essayed by Brian Cox.

Asked about the new chapter, the actor told Variety, "We know nothing. We know that we shoot this year and few other tidbits but like barely anything."

Snook was speaking on the sidelines of Critics' Choice Awards 2020. She was nominated in the best actress category but lost to Regina King for "Watchmen"

Overall, "Succession" bagged the award for drama series and best actor in a drama series for Jeremy Strong.

Also starring Hiam Abbass, Kieran Culkin, Alan Ruck, Nicholas Braun, Matthew Macfadyen and J Smith-Cameron, the show revolves around a media empire owned by a patriarch, whose dysfunctional family is vying for their ailing father's throne.



I'm recovering fast: Shahid on 'Jersey' injury

MUMBAI, JAN 12 (PTI): Actor Shahid Kapoor, who was injured during the filming for his upcoming film "Jersey", on Sunday said he has got a "few stitches" but is recovering fast.

The actor was shooting for the cricket movie, a remake of the 2019 Telugu blockbuster, in Chandigarh and got struck by a ball during a rehearsal shot earlier this week.

Shahid reached out to his fans on social media and thanked them for their concern.

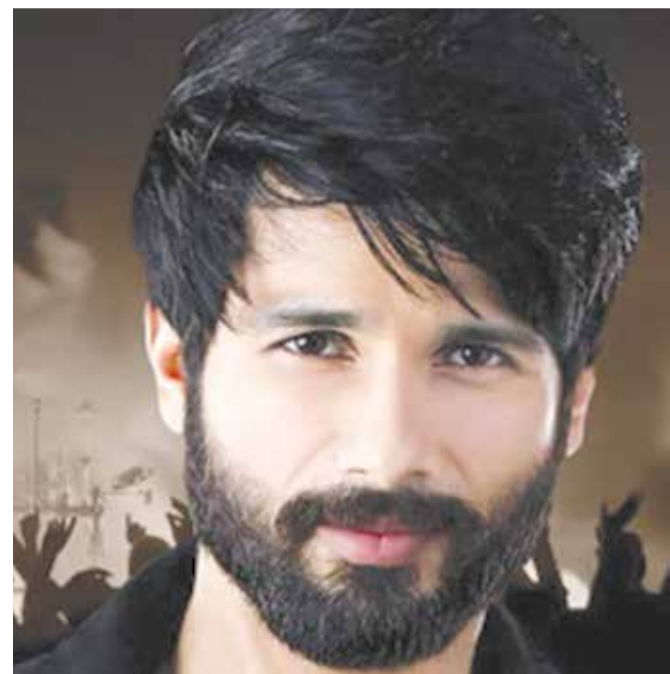
"Thank you for all the concern. Yes I have got a few stitches but am recovering fast. #jersey has taken a little bit of my blood but a script this good deserves that in the least.

"Have a good one you all. Keep it real. Make it count. Spread the love. Humanity above all," the actor wrote on Twitter.

"Jersey" chronicles the story of a talented but failed cricketer, who decides to return to the field in his late thirties driven by the desire to represent the Indian cricket team and fulfil his son's wish for a jersey as a gift.

The Hindi version of the sports-drama is being directed by Gowtam Tinnanauri, who also helmed the original 2019 Telugu film, starring Nani in the lead.

Also featuring Mrunal Thakur and Pankaj Kapur, "Jersey" is slated to be released in August.



My daughters and I have conversations about having the right to say 'no': Nicole Kidman



LONDON, JAN 12 (PTI): Actor Nicole Kidman says she makes sure to teach her two daughters about the right and need to say 'no'.

The actor shares Sunday Rose, 11, and Faith Margaret, nine, with husband singer Keith Urban.

Kidman, 52, said sexual harassment

impacts people differently, and her latest release "Bombshell", aims to educate and encourage people to talk about it.

"Every woman has encountered it (sexual harassment) in some way, shape or form. A lot of it is making it safer for people so ultimately we have a safer world, a safer workplace," she told The Daily Telegraph.

"I'm raising two little girls right now so there's a lot of conversations in our house about having the right to say no to many different things," she added.

Directed by Jay Roach, "Bombshell" is based on the accounts of several women at Fox News who set out to expose CEO Roger Ailes for sexual harassment.

Kidman claimed to have not experienced sexual harassment in the industry, but had witnessed it.

The Emmy-winning actor earlier said the marriage to her "Days of Thunder" co-star Tom Cruise inadvertently shielded her from being sexually harassed in Hollywood.

Kidman was married to Cruise, 57, for 11 years. They finalised divorce in 2001.

'Star Trek: Picard' renewed for second season



LOS ANGELES, JAN 13 (PTI): "Star Trek: Picard", the new series from the sci-fi franchise based on veteran actor Patrick Stewart's iconic character, has received a second season order even before its debut.

The CBS All Access show will see Stewart reprise the role of Jean-Luc Picard as the title character. He played Picard for seven seasons on "Star Trek: The Next Generation".

Julie McNamara, the ViacomCBS owned streamer's EVP, Original Content, made the announcement on Sunday, reported Deadline.

"The energy and excitement around the premiere of 'Star Trek: Picard' has reached a magnitude greater than all of us at CBS All Access could have hoped for.

"We're thrilled to announce plans for a second season before the series' debut, and we are confident that 'Star Trek' fans and new viewers alike will be captured by the stellar cast and creative team's meticulously crafted story when it premieres on January 23," McNamara said.

However, there is no official word yet when season two will premiere and how many episodes it will have.

Also starring Isa Briones, Santiago Cabrera, Michelle Hurd, Alison Pill, Harry Treadaway and Evan Evagora, the 10-episode "Picard" starts streaming on January 23.

Ian McKellen releases journal entries he wrote during 'Lord of the Rings' shoot

LOS ANGELES, JAN 12 (PTI): Veteran actor Ian McKellen has shared his diary entries from the time he worked on Peter Jackson's fan favourite "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, giving a closer look to the fans at the making of the film series.

Based on JRR Tolkien's books, the movie franchise spawned into "The Fellowship of the Ring" (2001), "The Two Towers" (2002) and "The Return of the King" (2003), and a trilogy of prequels based on the author's children book "The Hobbit".

McKellen, who played Gandalf the Grey in the films, tweeted a link to his journal entries on Friday from over two decades ago.

"20 years ago, I arrived New Zealand to begin filming 'The Lord of the Rings'. I joined the cast on January 10, 2000. During that time, I kept a journal, which today would be called a blog. Perhaps you'll enjoy reading about those heady times," the 80-year-old actor wrote.

McKellen's journals date back to the time of his casting in August of 1999 and continue on through his travels to New Zealand - where the films were shot - pre-pro-

duction, filming, and premieres of all the films in the 'LOTR' trilogy.

"While filming 'The Lord of the Rings', I began recording my impressions in The Grey Book named for Gandalf the Grey, the wizard who leads the Fellowship of The Ring in its fight against Sauron, the Lord of the Rings.

"This was one of the earliest blogs, launched before the term came into widespread use. Originally posted like a blog, with the newest entries at top, in 2010 the entries on this page were rearranged into chronological order from 20 August 1999 to 14 December 2001. After 2001, I began an additional volume of entries called The White Book," McKellen wrote.

The veteran stage-film actor covers a range of topics like trying on the Gandalf costume and beard for the first time, working with his cast mates and his scheduling conflicts with the X-Men franchise -- he also played another popular character, mutant Magneto/ Eric Lensherr.

Fans and followers can read his diary entries on McKellen.com.

Aries:

Failure is temporary. What makes it permanent are the sentiments and expectations attached to the action. Beware of clinging to the past or playing the old tape over and over in your head. What's gone is gone and it's time for you to accept that. Could there be a silver lining somewhere in here? As Thomas Alva Edison famously said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Taurus:

"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is an instant language." Miuccia Prada knew what she was talking about, Taurus! So where are you in your style evolution? What is the message you want to give the world about yourself? It's time up the sartorial game

Gemini:

Quality time with la familia is on the cards. I know what you're thinking. How are you

going to be your most 'authentic self' with all of your relatives playing Judge Judy? All that inner work is going to be put to the test, Gemini. Watch your triggers, draw boundaries wherever necessary, and take everything they say with a pinch of salt

Cancer:

Cancer, pay attention to recurring thoughts and ideas. Your higher self is communicating with you and showing you the path you were destined to walk on. This is not the time to hesitate. Take the next step armed with courage and confidence. Yes, change isn't always easy to deal with, Cancer.

Leo:

Not everything we ask for is necessarily in alignment with our highest good. Know that when something isn't working out according to your plan, it's because you are being protected by the mysterious forces above. So let go of the resentment and regret. Let go of the 'could's' and 'should's'. As you do, you will be able to turn your at-

tention to what is being offered to you now.

Virgo:

We're 13 days into the new year. Safe to say, you haven't broken up with all your resolutions yet. Drastic changes are great, but they need above-average strength and resilience, which you may or may not be gifted with. Word for the wise: simplify things for yourself. Set realistic goals and intentions. For instance, if you wish to adopt a plant-based diet, going cold turkey on meat may or may not be a viable option. Getting on board the Meatless Monday bandwagon? Now that's completely up your alley.

Libra:

In the words of Anne-Maria Yritys, "Minimalism is not about having less. It is about making room for more of what matters." You may be best known for your penchant for luxury, but the turn of the decade has you looking at the world around you through a brand new lens. Consuming more does not necessarily equal a greater degree of happiness. In fact,

there are things in your possession that are no longer a source of joy and inspiration.

Scorpio:

Revelation, revelation: you cannot rush time. Everything is taking place in accordance with the divine plan. Trust the process. On your part, keep putting in the work knowing that your venture will eventually be a success. Remember, quality trumps quantity every time. Choose projects that you feel aligned with your higher self and don't feel bad about refusing the rest.

Sagittarius:

There are very few people in this world who can ace anything they set their minds to. I suppose that would make you an anomaly, but in the best possible way. So what are you going to do with that 'golden touch' you are gifted with? It's time to put that inner alchemist to the test, Sagittarius. Your manifestation abilities are also heightened at this moment

Capricorn:

Change is the only constant, and in your case it promises to bring joyous tidings. No opportunity is too big or small. Accept what's coming your way and be open to what it leads to. Your word for the day: happenstance. Follow your strange impulses, Capricorn. Listen to what your inner voice is guiding you to do.

Aquarius:

Beware of operating from the ego space. You are not better than them, just different. By walking against the team, you are stalling the work and coming in the way of your own success. Some of you may be feeling rather competitive. Remember, your journey is different from theirs.

Pisces:

"Within you there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself." These words by Hermann Hesse are giving you the sign you have been looking for. Keep work aside for a moment, Pisces, and focus on finding that inner balance.