

ANALYSIS 7 MAHATMA GANDHI AN ECOLOGICAL ECONOMIST?

MONEY 8 INDUSTRY LEADERS CONFIDENT ABOUT...

HYDERABAD, SATURDAY
JANUARY 15, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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SUNDAR PICHAI HINTS AT BRINGING BACK GOOGLE EMPLOYEES

London: Sundar Pichai has hinted that Google is committed to bringing back a part of its employees to offices in a "more flexible future workplace". Though he did not say when it will be done, Mr Pichai shared images of the company's latest infrastructure acquisition in central London. In an Instagram post, the CEO of Alphabet, the parent company of Google, said he was excited that the company was purchasing its existing Central Saint Giles office in the British capital. "Looking forward to having space for 10,000 Googlers across our UK offices," said Mr Pichai.

SATYA NADELLA'S MEMO AS MICROSOFT STARTS REVIEW OF PROBE

Microsoft Corp., responding to a push from shareholders, has hired a law firm to review its sexual harassment and gender discrimination policies and scrutinize a 2019 board investigation of co-founder Bill Gates. The effort by Arent Fox LLP will include a summary of the board's previous probe into allegations against Gates as well as the results of any harassment investigations since 2019 against other board members or members of Microsoft's senior leadership team, the company said Thursday in a statement.

2 UP EX-MINISTERS JOIN AKHILESH YADAV, BIG JOLT TO BJP

Former Uttar Pradesh ministers Swami Prasad Maurya and Dharam Singh Saini - who resigned this week from the Yogi Adityanath government and the ruling BJP less than 30 days before Assembly polls - today joined the Samajwadi Party in the presence of opposition leader Akhilesh Yadav. Five other BJP MLAs - Roshanlal Verma, Brijesh Prajapati, Mukesh Verma, Vinay Shakya and Bhagwati Sagar - as well as Chaudhary Amar Singh of the Apna Dal, which is allied with the ruling party - also joined the Samajwadi Party today.

BISHOP FRANCO MULAKKAL ACQUITTED IN RAPE CASE, NUNS TO APPEAL

Bishop Franco Mulakkal, a former priest accused of raping a nun multiple times over two years in a case that sparked massive outrage and protests in Kerala, was acquitted by a court today. Franco Mulakkal, 57, was the first Catholic bishop in India to go on trial for rape on the complaint of a nun. After a trial of more than 100 days, the additional sessions court pronounced a single line verdict saying it had found him not guilty of the charges. He was seen exiting the court in Kottayam with a smile after the verdict. In 2018, the nun from the Missionaries of Jesus congregation had accused Bishop Franco of repeatedly raping her between 2014 and 2016.

HAPPY SANKRANTHI
The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a happy Makara Sankranti. As our offices will remain closed today (15-01-2022), there will be no issue of the newspaper on Sunday (16-01-2022).
— RESIDENT EDITOR

PM Modi to interact with more than 150 startups today

Third wave in TS dists now

NAVEENA GHANATE
■ HYDERABAD

When festive spirit and devotion-fervour combine to leave people oozing with energy, can Omicron, or even its *baap*, be scary?

With tens of thousands of people heading to hometowns for the Sankranti festival, Covid-19 cases, presumably due to the Omicron variant, are now spreading in various districts. Although no district has yet recorded triple-digit case count -- apart from Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Medchal and Malkajgiri -- many rural and semi-rural places have started reporting rising numbers of Covid-19 cases.

At the start of this year, 77% of the cases were from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area. However, the share reduced to 49% by Thursday and to 51.4% by Friday. Jayashankar Bhupalpalli, Mulug, Narayanpet, Gadwal and Wanaparthy on Friday reported single-digit cases.

An official from the Health



Department said: "The number of cases will increase in districts as there is movement of population. There are a lot of people who are going out of Hyderabad to districts in TS and neighbouring state. So, some people infected in GHMC, unknowingly will spread in districts."

We will know the true inten-

sity of the wave when it penetrates into the population, but people should follow the norms". Stating that it would be good to restrict movement of people during this festival season, the official stated that they were prepared to handle the surge.



Gen Rawat's chopper crashed due to pilot error: probe team

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pilot error caused the chopper crash that led to Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat's death last month, according to preliminary findings of the inquiry team investigating the matter.

"The accident was a result of entry into clouds due to an unexpected change in weather conditions in the valley. This led to spatial disorientation of the pilot resulting in a Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT)," the team found after analysing the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder besides questioning all available witnesses to determine the most probable cause of the accident.

'Covid will become a mild disease as Omicron is replacing Delta'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Covid will become a mild disease soon as Omicron is replacing Delta, AIG Cha'rman Dr D Nageshwar Reddy told The Pioneer on Friday, citing studies within the country and abroad.

Monoclonal therapy reduces severity of the disease and death in high-risk individuals infected with the Delta variant of SARS CoV 2 by 100%. This was proved in the world's first published study in a peer-reviewed, high-impact journal by AIG Hospitals, along with the Asian Healthcare Foundation, CCMB Hyderabad, and the Institute of Life Sciences. Nearly 75% patients who got the monoclonal therapy became RT-PCR negative by 7th day and 78% patients got relieved of their clinical symptoms like fever, cough,

etc. by the 7th day. The study points out that none of the study participants developed severe disease or died. There was no increase in inflammatory markers in these patients which cause severe disease.

In a silver lining, none of the patients reported any post-COVID symptom. Additionally, the neutralizing activity of the monoclonal therapy was similar in both the original Wuhan strain and the Delta strain.

Dr Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman of AIG, said, "The results are astonishing and will shape the public health policy for treatment of COVID-19, especially in high-risk individuals, those above age of 60 or even below 60, but with diabetes, hypertension, obesity, pregnant woman, people with chronic diseases, all will benefit immensely."



No hesitancy for booster dose

Calls for doorstep vax on rise



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

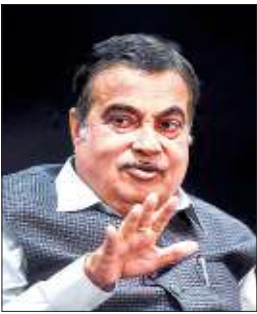
In just four days after the commencement of the drive to administer 'precaution dose', nearly 1.19 lakh doses have been administered in Telangana.

As per CoWIN dashboard, 22,574 persons were given precaution dose in Telangana. In all, 4,404 doses were administered in Hyderabad, 2,425 in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem and 1,555 doses in Sangareddy.

6 airbags to be made mandatory in passenger vehicles : Gadkari

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre will make it mandatory for carmakers to provide a minimum of six airbags in motor vehicles that can carry up to 8 passengers for enhanced safety of occupants, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday.



PM to attend Statue of Equality unveiling

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Modi will participate in the programme to unveil the Statue of Equality (Statue of Ramanuja) on February 5, Sri Thridhandi Chinna Jeeyar Swamy said here on Friday.

Speaking to the media, while participating in the Goda Devi Kalyanam in his Asramam at Muchintal, Chinna Jeeyar Swamy said that there are three layers at the venue.

The President, Ramnath Kovind, will place (Prathista) the Golden Statue at the mid-layer on February 13 and the infusing life (Prana Prathista) programme will be held on February 14.

IED found at Ghazipur flower market; defused

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An improvised explosive device (IED) stuffed with RDX and ammonium nitrate was found inside an unattended bag at the Ghazipur flower market here Friday morning but it was later defused, officials said. The explosive was kept in an iron box and concealed in the black coloured backpack.

The incident comes ahead of Republic Day celebrations on January 26 for which the security apparatus in the national capital is already on high alert. "The explosive prima facie looks to be a mix of RDX and ammo-



nium nitrate. It was about 3 kgs in weight and there were some sharpnel embedded," NSG director general M A Ganapathy told PTI. Another National Security Guard (NSG) officer said they were alerted by the Delhi Police about the suspicious object around 11 am and soon after a team of its bomb detection and disposal experts

and a heavy metal container called total containment vessel tugged to a truck reached the market, located close to Delhi's border with Uttar Pradesh.

Lakhs take holy dip in Ganga, defy Covid norms

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ (UP),

Tens of thousands of devotees took a holy dip in the Ganga here on the occasion of Makar Sankranti on Friday, braving severe cold and belittling the coronavirus threat.

Devotees have been flocking to the Magh Mela area since morning and around 5.5 lakh people, including children and the elderly, had taken bath in the river by 4.30 pm, an official of the annual religious event said.

District Magistrate Sanjay Khattri, Mela Ahikari Sheshmani Pandey and Senior Superintendent of



Police Ajay Kumar visited the VIP Ghat, Sangam Nosed, Arail Ghat and other major ghats.

Holding the mela amid rising number of coronavirus cases has emerged as a major challenge before the fair administration. In fact, many policemen on duty were found infected with COVID-19 even before the start of the fair.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has appealed to the people of the state in view of the surge in coronavirus cases that only those who have taken both doses of the vaccine and are completely healthy should come to bathe in the Magh Mela.

HAPPY MAKAR SANKRANTI

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Tithi : Trayodashi : Jan 14 10:19 PM to Jan 16 12:57 AM
Chaturdashi : Jan 16 12:57 AM to Jan 17 03:18 AM
Nakshatram : Mithunashra Jan 14 08:18 PM to Jan 15 11:21 PM
Ardra Jan 15 11:21 PM to Jan 17 02:09 AM

Rahukalam : 9:39 AM to 11:02 AM
Yamagandam : 1:48 PM to 3:11 PM
Variyam : 08:44 AM to 10:31 AM
Gulika : 6:53 AM to 8:16 AM
Amritakalam : 01:26 PM to 03:14 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:03 PM to 12:47 PM

HYDRABAD WEATHER

Forecast: SCATTERED THUNDERSTORMS
Temp: 27°
Humidity: 74%
Sunrise: 6:53 AM
Sunset: 5:56 PM
Updated JANUARY 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Meil, Adani Total Gas top winners of gas distribution licences

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) walked away with the most 15 licences to retail CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households in the latest city gas bidding round, while a joint venture of billionaire Gautam Adani's gas arm and Total of France got 14 licences.

According to the results of the bid opening for the 11th round of city gas distribution (CGD) bidding, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) stands to get nine licences and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) 6. While Assam Gas Company is winning three licences, Dinesh Engineers Ltd is set to bag licences for four geographical areas (GAs).

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), GAIL Gas Ltd, Think Gas Distribution Pvt Ltd, IRM Energy Pvt Ltd, Indraprastha Gas Ltd and Sholagasco Pvt Ltd are to get one

licence each.

An official of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) said the bids have been opened and the preliminary winners decided but a formal announcement will be made in the next few days after the documents submitted by the bidders are verified. Bids for 61 out of the 65 GAs offered in the 11th round were received at the close of bidding last month.

IOC had bid for 53 out of 61 GAs while Adani Total Gas Ltd had bid for 52 GAs.

Adani group had originally ventured into the city gas business in a joint venture with IOC but it later tied up with Total. Adani and IOC did not put any combined bid in the latest bid round.

PNGRB had bid out 65 GAs, including Jammu, Nagpur, Pathankot and Madurai, in the latest licensing round. Four GAs in Chhattisgarh did not receive a single bid. 1 Squared



Capital-backed Think Gas Distribution Pvt Ltd was the third largest bidder as it put in offers for 44 GAs. Privatisation-bound BPCL had put in bids for 43 GAs, while GAIL Gas Ltd the city gas arm of state gas utility GAIL India Ltd had bid for 30 areas.

HPCL bid for 37 GAs and Torrent Gas for 28. Indraprastha Gas Ltd the firm that retails CNG in the national capital and

adjoining areas bid for 15 GAs, Gujarat Gas for 14 and Assam Gas for 10 GAs. Megha Engineering had a winning percentage of 24.6 per cent, while Adani Total Gas Ltd was successful in 23 per cent of the GAs where it had bid. IOC was successful in 14.8 per cent and BPCL's success rate was 9.8 per cent.

While Torrent Gas drew blank, other major bidders had a success rate of just 1.6 per cent.

The bids were decided on the basis of those offering to give most city gas connections and those setting the largest number of CNG retail outlets. PNGRB had last month stated that as much as Rs 80,000 crore investment is envisaged in setting up city gas infrastructure in the 61 GAs.

The 65 GAs offered in the 11th bid round are spread over 215 districts in 19 states and one Union territory covering 26 per cent of India's population and 33 per cent of its area.

Gen Rawat's chopper crashed...

Continued from page 1

CFIT occurs when an airworthy aircraft, while under the complete control of the pilot, is inadvertently flown into terrain, water, or an obstacle.

According to the IATA (International Air Transport Association), the term refers to accidents in which in-flight collisions with terrain, water, or another obstacle occur without indication of loss of control.

The United States Federal Aviation Administration says CFIT is "...an unintentional collision with terrain (ground, mountain, body of water, or an obstacle) while an aircraft is under positive control." The critical distinction in such incidents is the fact the aircraft is under the control of the flight crew. A Mi-17V5 helicopter carrying Gen Rawat, his wife Madhulika, and 12 other armed forces personnel - from the Sular Air Force base in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore to the Defence Staff Services Colleges in Wellington, had crashed on December 8 last year.

Minister asks ready for anathor stir

ML MELLY MAITREYI ■ HYDERABAD

As the Sankranti festival shifts the focus to agriculture and as the harvest season is on in the State, Minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy has written an open letter to the Centre expressing concern about its anti-farmer policies.

In his letter released on Friday, Prashanth questioned the policies of the BJP government at the Centre.

He demanded that the Centre should respond immediately to the letter written by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao seeking a reduction in fertiliser prices.

He also urged farmers to think over the anti-farmer policies of the BJP government and get ready to launch another movement.

He said that farmers all over the country were waiting for KCR who has come to be regarded as a benefactor of farmers and soon another movement will be launched by farmers against the policies of the Centre.

He said that farmers all over the country were waiting for KCR who has come to be regarded as a benefactor of farmers and soon another movement will be launched by farmers against the policies of the Centre.

Stating that no country which subjected farmers to hardships would prosper, Prashanth said that KCR had always raised this point during the Telangana movement.

Schemes like Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bhima were the result of KCR's concern for farmers. Policies like free power supply 24x7, and schemes like Mission Kakatiya and projects like Kaleshwaram symbolise the CM's concern for farmers, he added.

KCR's reforms have transformed agriculture in the State and lands which were once drought-stricken have turned into the country's rice granary. The farming community of

Telangana is a model for other States, he said.

But the BJP government which should have played the role of a big brother in helping farmers is weakening the sector. It unveiled a plan to help corporates and turn farmers into labourers in their own fields, Prashanth said.

The BJP ruined the festive spirit of farmers by increasing the fertiliser prices by 50 to 100 per cent and is now planning to install electricity meters on agricultural pump sets, he added. He said he had seen the indifference of the BJP government when he went to New Delhi to request it to purchase paddy from TS farmers.

Aruna lashes out at KCR for skipping Modi's video meet

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP vice-president DK Aruna has alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has no sincerity in providing health-care services to the people of Telangana. Aruna demanded that the Chief Minister should explain why he had failed to participate in the video conference held by Prime Minister Modi with Chief Ministers on Thursday on the corona pandemic.



In a statement released on Friday, Aruna said the Chief Minister, who used to malign

the image of the Centre, didn't have any interest to know about the Prime Minister's suggestion to Chief Ministers that they should ensure that people are not burdened by medical expenses.

She alleged that the Prime Minister allocated time for the sake of the people but KCR was busy with other matters.

She said that the people are observing the attitude of the Chief Minister and that they will teach him a lesson.

Gross office leasing up 16 pc in 2021 across top 9 cities; Hyderabad sees maximum demand: CBRE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gross office space leasing across nine major cities rose 16 per cent to 41.1 million square feet during the last year, driven mainly by higher demand in Hyderabad, real estate consultant CBRE said on Friday.

Office space leasing or absorption stood at 35.4 million square feet during 2020, while the new supply was 42.1 million square feet. Releasing its office report 'CBRE Figures', the consultant said Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Delhi-NCR together account for 70 per

cent of the leasing activity.

"The physical office would be more effective for occupiers in India in supporting employee engagement, collaboration, team productivity and innovation, relative to remote working," said Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO - India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE.

While office utilisation rates across cities would fluctuate in tandem with infection rates owing to new variants (Omicron), he believed that occupiers would encourage employees to come back to

offices, with their safety and well-being at the forefront of their 'return to work' plans.

CBRE noted that the technology corporates drove leasing with a share of 30 per cent, followed by flexible space operators (15 per cent), engineering and manufacturing companies (14 per cent), BFSI (13 per cent) and life sciences firms (6 per cent). According to the data, office leasing in Delhi-NCR rose slightly to 5.6 million square feet in 2021 from 5.5 million square in 2020.

In Mumbai, the office absorption increased to 4.1

million square feet from 2.8 million square feet.

The office space leasing in Bengaluru rose to 12.4 million square feet from 10.9 million square feet. In Chennai, the office space leasing fell to 3.8 million square feet to 4.2 million square feet.

Hyderabad saw absorption of 10.8 million square feet last year as against 7.1 million square feet in 2020.

The absorption of office space in Pune fell marginally to 3.4 million square feet from 3.5 million square feet. Kolkata also saw marginal rise in leasing

to 0.6 million square feet from 0.5 million square feet, while absorption in Kochi stood flat at 0.1 million square feet. In Ahmedabad, the leasing fell to 0.3 million square feet from 0.8 million square feet. New supply grew 18 pc last year to nearly 50 lakh square feet. With the addition of new supply, CBRE said that the total office stock in the country has crossed 773 million square feet. Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Delhi-NCR drove supply during the year, accounting for a cumulative share of about 70 per cent.

Lakhs take holy dip in...

Continued from page 1

He has directed the Prayagraj administration to ensure that the COVID-19 protocol is followed. The district administration has already announced that it will be mandatory for visitors to the fair area to come with a negative RT-PCR report of a test conducted within 48 hours prior to the arrival. They are also expected to mandatorily carry certificates of both doses of vaccination and maintain Covid-appropriate behaviour.

At some places on Friday, health workers were seen conducting thermal screening of the devotees. Crowds of devotees were seen at ghats in Varanasi too.

Meanwhile, a fire broke out in Arai area in Magh Mela.

The fire, triggered by a leaking gas cylinder, was brought under control immediately, preventing any loss of life or injury to anyone. Fire officer Ram Kumar Rawat of Arai unit of the fire brigade said. The mela administration has divided the fair area into five sectors. Five pontoon bridges have been erected so that devotees staying in more than 3,200 institutions and camps in all these sectors can have an easy access to 12 bathing ghats in the Mela area.

Two 50-bed hospitals, named Ganga and Triveni, 12 health camps and 10 treatment centres have been prepared to provide health facilities to the Kalpavas, devotees and saints visiting the Mela area.

No hesitancy for booster dose

Continued from page 1

Most of them took the dose between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm. Across India, 36,89,339 people have been administered precaution dose. Senior citizens are urging the government to provide door-to-door vaccination. Banker and economist Yerramraju Behara said in a tweet, tagging the Health Minister: "Now that booster doses are announced in Telangana health minister Harish Rao may like to instruct the concerned to give the dose at home for those with a gap of 6 mths after the second dose,

to all the senior citizens or at the nearest Community Halls of RWS avoiding long queues".

Several states have launched at-home vaccination for senior citizens and those immobile. Chennai, Mumbai, Bengaluru are doing door-to-door vaccination.

Sources in the Health Department said that their mobile units on field were inoculating senior citizens with precaution doses in districts. However, there is no official communication about at-home vaccination for senior citizens.

6 airbags to be made mandatory in passenger...

Continued from page 1

In a series of tweets, the Road Transport and Highways Minister said his ministry had already mandated the implementation of fitment of the driver airbag with effect from July 1, 2019 and front co-passenger airbag with effect from January 1, 2022. "In order to enhance the safety of the occupants in motor vehicles carrying up to 8 passengers, I have now approved a Draft GSR

Notification to make a minimum of 6 Airbags compulsory," Gadkari said. GSR here stands for General Statutory Rules. He further said that to minimise the impact of frontal and lateral collisions on the occupants seated in both front and rear compartments, it has been decided that 4 additional airbags be mandated in the M1 vehicle category.

"...i.e two side/side torso airbags and two side curtain/tube airbags covering

all outboard passengers. This is a crucial step to make motor vehicles in India safer than ever," he said.

According to Gadkari, this will ultimately ensure the safety of passengers across all segments, irrespective of the cost/variant of the vehicle.

According to latest government data, total 1,16,496 road accidents occurred on national highways (NHs), including expressways, in 2020, causing 47,984 deaths.

5-kg IED found in bag in Punjab village close to Indo-Pak border: Police

PNS ■ PUNJAB

An improvised explosive device (IED) and some Indian currency notes were found on Friday concealed in a bag lying on the Attari-Bachind road in Punjab's Amritsar, close to the India-Pakistan border, a senior police official said. The Special Task Force of Punjab Police launched a search operation based on a specific input about drugs and explosives and recovered the bag, just a month before the assembly polls in Punjab.

It came on a day an IED stuffed with RDX and ammonium nitrate was found inside an unattended bag at the Ghazipur flower market in the national capital. After the recovery of the IED in Amritsar, the police have cordoned off the area.

"...the IED weighing 5 kg...was found concealed in a

bag on Attari-Bachind Road. Some Indian currency notes were also found inside," Assistant Inspector General of STF Rashpal Singh, who was present at the site, told PTI over phone.

He said experts and bomb-disposal squad members were called to the site and further investigation is underway.

On Thursday, close on the heels of busting a terror module backed by the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), Punjab Police had said it seized 2.5 kg of RDX, besides arms and ammunition, on the disclosure of the prime accused in two recent incidents of hurling of grenades in Pathankot.

Police had also seized a detonator, a detonating cord, five explosive fuses along with wires and 12 live cartridges of AK-47 rifles, Director General of Police (DGP) V K Bhawra said here on Thursday.

The explosive material was to be used in assembling IEDs, police had said.

"The recovery was made on the disclosure statement of accused Amandeep Kumar alias Mantri of village Lakhnawal in Gurdaspur, who is the prime accused in the two recent incidents of grenade attacks in Pathankot," the DGP was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the state police. Kumar was among the six ISYF operatives arrested by police on Monday. He has confessed to have hurled grenades in two separate incidents in Pathankot, according to the statement issued on Thursday.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Kanwardeep Kaur had Thursday said following the revelations made by Kumar, teams were sent to Gurdaspur district and the explosive material was recovered.

'Covid will become a mild disease as...

Continued from page 1

timab of casirivimab and imdevimab. The therapy is priced at ₹65,000-70,000. Dr Nageshwar said, "If we look at the cost of hospitalization due to COVID in India, along with the number of people living with diabetes, hypertension etc., the cost factor of the monoclonal therapy is quite considerate, given the fact that now we know it prevents deaths and severe disease by 100%".

The Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (a unit of CSIR) was involved in sequencing the genome of the virus strains collected to identify

and confirm the Delta variant and the Institute of Life Sciences, University of Hyderabad, tested the neutralizing activity of the cocktail against the delta variant in their lab.

"We are now studying the effectiveness of this drug cocktail among hospitalized patients and also exploring the possible use of this therapy as a prophylaxis" Dr. Reddy said. He said that the cases of reinfection among these patients had not been detected yet. The antibody cocktail works for three months.

PM to attend Statue of Equality unveiling

Continued from page 1

He said that he has already spoken to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao regarding works that has to be done through the government. He said the Chief Minister has already given directions to officials concerned.

He said that the kalyanam of 108 temples would be performed on February 14 at a single venue. He said they will perform homams in 144 yaga salas while constructing gundams. He said that the vastu shanthi programme will be held on February 2 and the Agni Madhanam programme on February 3. Infusing life into the statues in 108 temples would be held from February 7 onwards as per muhursats, he added.

formed on February 14 at a single venue. He said they will perform homams in 144 yaga salas while constructing gundams. He said that the vastu shanthi programme will be held on February 2 and the Agni Madhanam programme on February 3. Infusing life into the statues in 108 temples would be held from February 7 onwards as per muhursats, he added.

IED found at Ghazipur flower...

Continued from page 1

Fire officials said they received the information of the suspicious unattended bag at 10.19 am. Officials from the special cell of Delhi Police and fire department also reached the spot.

"The IED was destroyed around 1:30 pm by using a controlled explosion technique after it was lowered into a deep pit located in the area." The samples of the IED have been collected and a detail report will be sent to the Delhi Police," the NSG officer said.

A bomb suit wearing NSG personnel was also seen at the site apart from officials from the special cell and regular Delhi Police units. According to preliminary investigation, the bomb was placed at the main

gate of the flower market.

"It is suspected that the alleged person did the recipe before planting the bomb and we suspect there was a timer placed inside the bomb. The investigation is still underway to ascertain who and how was the bomber placed," a senior police official said. Case will be registered under explosive act as of now, he said.

All the CCTV cameras installed in and around the vicinity of scene of crime is being scanned to identify the accused and ascertain the sequence of events that unfolded. Two teams including senior experts of Rohini's Forensic Science Laboratory at currently at the spot for inspection and collection of exhibits, officials said.

Sanjay asks KCR to pay full fees of students

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government should pay the fee arrears and scholarships of BC students immediately, State BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar said on Friday.

He said that the arrears of fee reimbursement and scholarships amount to Rs 3,000 crore due to the non-payment of fee reimbursement and scholarships to BC students since two years.

He said that college managements are mounting pressure on students to pay fees due to the negligence of the government. Around 14 lakh BC students are facing pressure, Sanjay added.

In an open letter to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Friday, Sanjay explained that college managements are not giving the certificates of students who have completed BTech, BE, MBA, MCA and other courses as the government had not paid fee reimbursement funds to the colleges.

He reminded KCR that united Andhra Pradesh used to pay the full fees of engineering, medicine, degree and PG courses. But the TRS government is



not paying the fees of students and is weakening the fee reimbursement scheme.

Sanjay alleged that the TRS government is paying full fees only to students who got ranks below 10,000 and is paying only Rs 35,000 to students who got ranks above 10,000.

Due to this, poor students are keeping away from higher education as they are not in a position to pay the remaining fees. He demanded that the government should pay the full fees and scholarships to BC students.

He demanded that the TRS government should pay the full fees of engineering, medicine, IIT and other professional courses like united Andhra Pradesh government by amending GO No: 18.

Third wave in TS dists now

Continued from page 1

The official said: "In the end of the first wave itself we started providing treatment in district hospitals and the by second wave districts have been equipped to cure the infection. There 27,000 beds have been

converted to oxygen. Establishment of PSA plants and emergency equipment has been completed; drugs and disposals have already been acquired as part of preparedness plan. Fortunately, inpatients are less so far in hospitals."



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Govt to allow big developers to revive lakes as part of CSR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Lake development will be easy for big developers who are ready to do it as part of their CSR projects.

The government's move to conserve water bodies and to develop lakes in the city will be integrated with layout and building permissions henceforth to fix accountability. This move has been hailed by real estate firms.

Realtor G. Ram Reddy of CREDAI Telangana said, "The government's call to real estate developers to take up lake development responsibility is a good initiative, especially for big developers. We have some examples like Raheja developing the Durgam Cheruvu Lake Front and PEBL City restoring the Peerancheruvu Lake. These were taken up as CSR activities." On January 4, the Telangana government announced that the responsibility for protecting lakes in



the GHMC area will be handed over to real estate companies developing ventures in areas around the lakes.

However, green activists say that the WALTA Act of 2002 entrusts State, district and mandal authorities with the responsibility of protecting water bodies.

Madhulika of NGO Dhruvansh said, "All hunters become protectors in tiger reserves. All shooters become bird saviors in bird sanctuaries. This is a similar move. Sometimes declared crime is better than hidden crime. Lakes are being destroyed as killing lakes is not considered

a crime." Activists say that there are NGOs who are looking for support instead. "This is a wrong move as a lot of NGOs who are sincerely working for lakes are looking for support from the Telangana CM to use CSR funds," Activist Vinay Vangala said.

9 cops of Saroornagar PS test Covid positive

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two Sub-Inspectors, four constables and three home guards at the Saroornagar police station tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday. A few of them were down with fever and had exhibited symptoms.

As they continued to have symptoms, they got tested and with the results showing them to be positive, they were shifted to home isolation and their family members were advised home quarantine. The family members were also asked to get tested. After the positive cases, the LB Nagar zone police officials have got all the primary contacts tested and directed other constables who were primary contacts to the infected persons to be under home isolation.

Truckers ask TS govt to issue monthly permits

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Lorry Owners Association (TLOA) has urged the Telangana government to change the present collection of Rs 1,700 per trip to operate their vehicles between the two Telugu states and limit it to Rs 5,000 a month by issuing a single permit (Counter Signature Permit) which is being implemented across the nation.

In a statement issued here on Friday Telangana Lorry Owners Association (TLOA) president Manchireddy Rajender Reddy and general secretary SK Chand Pasha said that the Andhra Pradesh government had accepted their request for a single permit costing Rs 5,000 per month, but the Telangana government has not accepted it. Due to this, truckers have been paying Rs 1,700 for every trip for the last seven years, they said.

They said that AP Transport Minister Perni Nani had given an acceptance letter on



December 28, 2020, and the letter was given to Telangana Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar. But the TS Transport Department is not responding to the letter. Perni Nani had mentioned in the letter, "Telangana Lorry Owners Association had said that after the bifurcation of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, truckers are facing difficulty in operating in the two Telugu states due to non-issue of permits and have requested to grant permits to their vehicles to enable smooth operations in both the states. I request you to look into the matter and

suggest remedies for resolving the matter after conducting a meeting at the secretary-level of both our states. You are requested to indicate an appropriate date, time and venue for the meeting."

Rajender Reddy and Chand Pasha said there is no response from the Telangana government although they had made several requests. They said that due to the attitude of the Telangana government they have been paying excessively for permits. Most lorry owners operate only one or two trips a month paying Rs 1,700 per trip.

Pamula Vagu to be cleaned up soon

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Replying to a tweet of a resident of IDA, Bollaram, about the polluted Pamula Vaagu, Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar said that the lake will be restored soon.

The resident said, "The lake near ORR is getting polluted with chemicals near the Sultanpur Bridge.

The lake is flowing through many villages giving off the odour of chemicals and is polluting the groundwater."

Kumar tweeted that the lake will be restored in coordination with the Telangana Pollution Control Board

IMD forecasts more rains in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After receiving moderate rains on Thursday, a few parts of the city witnessed light drizzles on Friday as well. Malkajgiri received the highest rainfall of 2 mm. The temperatures in the city have also dropped due to the rainfalls and the night temperature recorded in the early hours of Friday was 19.9 degree Celsius.

According to the forecast by India Meteorological Department (IMD), Hyderabad, the city is likely to witness light to moderate thunderstorms throughout the week.

The sky will generally be cloudy, with surface wind



around 6 to 10 km per hour. While it is expected that most parts of the city will receive light drizzle, as per Telangana State Development Planning

Society (TSDPS) the eastern and southern parts of the city, including the areas of Kapra, Secunderabad, Uppal, Hayathnagar, Rajendranagar

and Malkajgiri might receive moderate rain on Saturday and Sunday. The minimum and maximum temperatures in the city are likely to be around 20 degree Celsius and 29 degree Celsius, respectively.

Telangana has been receiving unusual rains in the winter for the last few days. Several districts of the state, including Mancherla, Nirmal, Yadadri Bhongir, Khammam and Adilabad received up to 33.5 mm rainfall on Friday. Malayalapalli in Peddapalli received the highest rainfall of 39.3 mm. Most districts of Telangana are likely to receive light to moderate rainfall on Saturday and Sunday.

Burglars loot Rs 1 cr property from flat at SR Nagar in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Burglars looted and stole away property worth Rs 1 crore from a flat at Sri Sainivas apartments of Rajivnagar under S R Nagar police station limits in the city on Thursday.

The flat owner Sekhar is a businessman in stock market and has been living there with his family. As his father died, he and his family members went to his native village in AP. Taking this as an advantage, the burglars entered the flat and looted the property.

The miscreants broke the locks of the door and entered the flat. They took away 2 kg

gold, 4 kg silver and Rs 2.5 lakh cash from the house. Total cost of the stolen property is estimated at Rs 1 crore.

On seeing the doors open in the morning, neighbours informed to the victim and also to the police about the theft. Sekhar had kept the money, which he had received by selling his property at Shamshabad, at the flat. Similarly, his friend had given him Rs 35 lakh to keep with him and that money was also kept at the flat. However, the burglars did not take the money of Rs 35 lakh given by his friend. They have taken away the remaining property. Police have registered a case and are investigation.

Youngster stabbed to death in Humayun Nagar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Unidentified persons stabbed a youngster to death at First Lancer in Humayun Nagar on Thursday night.

The victim was identified as Sohail Quadri (25) from Bhola Nagar. Police said the assailants were suspected to have picked up an argument with Quadri over an unknown issue and stabbed him with knives. Quadri died on the spot.

The Humayun Nagar police have registered a case and are investigating. Previous enmity is suspected to have led to the murder.

Students resent entry of outsiders on OU campus

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Leaders of students' unions in Osmania University alleged that the management has been trying to provide facilities to private firms in the guise of collecting users charges. The unions have been opposing collection of user charges from members of walkers' association. The university has been collecting Rs 200 per person from the members of walkers' association. The university has been allowing the walkers from 5.00 am to 8.00 am in the morning and from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm in the evening by collecting Rs 200 per month for the member. The varsity

authorities have issued identity cards to the workers and facilities are provided to them. Students allege that the university management is planning to allot separate gardens for walkers which may be misused by the outsiders. It may be noted that there were disputes between students and walkers in the past. Students demand ban of outsiders' entry into the campus.

Already, several people sell food items on cycles within the campus. Some others even set up tiffin centres in small dhabas with the support of officials and local leaders, student leaders allege. Following complaints from students,

these tiffin centres were removed recently. But again such tiffin centres were opened and the university officials plan to collect user charges from them, students complain.

Outside stalls or firms are not allowed inside the Hyderabad Central University campus. Whey the OU authorities are allowing private persons into the campus, students question.

During the agitation for separate Telangana, both the gates of the university were closed and RTC buses were not allowed. But now, people can pass through the OU roads without any restriction, they comment.

Truck driver held for culpable homicide

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Narsingi police on Friday arrested the driver of a truck involved in a fatal road crash on the Outer Ring Road between Gachibowli and Shamshabad on Tuesday. He was booked for culpable homicide not amounting to murder. Police said P Nagaraju (28) from Chennai in Nalgonda district, had negligently reversed the truck and crashed into the auto trolley of Shaik Shoukath Ali, resulting in the latter's death. Shoukath Ali was proceeding from Gachibowli towards Shamshabad and when he reached the ORR toll gate near the Telangana State Police Academy, Nagaraju, who had stopped the truck on the road, suddenly took it in reverse. Nagaraju drove the vehicle in rash and dangerous manner in reverse direction on Outer Ring Road, by knowing clearly that the vehicles on ORR move in high speed and his act may result in fatal road crashes. This amounts to culpable homicide not amounting to murder," an official said. The Narsingi police booked a case and subsequently arrested Nagaraju and he was remanded to judicial custody.



As part of festive celebrations, visitors spend time at Shilparamam in Hyderabad on Friday

Transport Commissioner for stringent action against private vehicles for violations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Transport Commissioner MRM Rao on Friday said that stringent action would be taken against 104 private vehicles for violating the rules and hampering the movement of the public transport.

He said that he would not tolerate the omissions and commissions of the private travels. On directions from Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, 10 teams have been constituted to conduct raids on private transport vehicles violating the rules.

Entertaining commuters over and above the capacity of the buses, entertaining commercial luggage, collecting higher fare are some of the areas on which the authorities



have focussed, he said. Transport department is conducting special drive in this

regard. Several vehicles have

been seized for violating the rules.

On the outskirts of Hyderabad, the transport department has been conducting extensive raids, which will continue till January 17 in national highways and important junctions besides the city outskirts. He warned the private buses and other vehicles against roaming on the roads violating the rules and obstructing the movement of public transport. He threatened to seize such vehicles. The government feels that it is its responsibility to provide public transport to people with all amenities. He appealed to private travels to act as per the rules and cooperate for the smooth running of the public transport.

Sand de-casting put off near Eturunagaram Wildlife Sanctuary

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Sand de-casting has been put on hold at 29 sites near the Eturunagaram Wildlife Sanctuary. This has made the sanctuary extremely vulnerable to flooding.

The TSMDC and the Forest Department are at loggerheads over declaring the area an eco-zone. Forest Department officials at Mulugu are objecting to the sand de-casting at the 29 sites as land that comes in a 10-km radius from the national park or wildlife sanctuary comes under ESZ.

The TSMDC says that as per a decision taken at a meeting of the District Level Committee held in December it has been decided that the 29 sites does not come under ESZ and this proposal has been sent to the State

Committee for dispatch to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

But in January 2022, the Forest Department asked the Collector to warn people involved in sand de-casting at the 29 sand sites. While 15 of the sites are in Eturunagaram Mandal, 14 are in Kannaigudem Mandal.

TSMDC chairperson Krishank Manne said, "30 sites are clear and running in a phase-wise manner providing employment to tribal people. The remaining 29 sites are not in the eco-zone. The time available is only six months. After that, the specified lands will be flooded by the Godavari River and de-casting cannot be done. I have requested Minister KT Rama Rao to ensure immediate de-casting as that would



Minister KT Rama Rao with TSMDC chairperson Krishank Manne

help the tribal people and the TS government to earn some money."

"As per a Madras High Court judgement many of the

'29 sites are not in the eco-zone. The time available is only six months. After that, the specified lands will be flooded by the Godavari River and de-casting cannot be done.'

existing protected areas have witnessed tremendous development near their boundaries. Therefore, defining the extent of eco-sensitive zones around protected areas will have to be kept flexible and protected area-specific," he added.



'Rs 6,000 cr disbursed to 7,04,309 farmers under RB in united Warangal'

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao stated that farmers in Telangana are happy as they are getting adequate water for irrigation and input costs under Rythu Bandhu scheme. Such welfare schemes are not seen in any other state, he said.

Rythu Bandhu scheme was launched in the state in 2018 and rupees 6,000 cr and 11 lakh were paid into the bank accounts of 7,04,309 farmers in the united Warangal district under the scheme in the last four years, the Minister said. Giving details of payments, he said, Rs 970 cr and 77 lakh were deposited into the accounts of 1,24,191 farmers in Hanumakonda, Rs 987 cr 82 lakhs in the accounts of 1,32,387 farmers in Warangal, Rs 1,482 cro and 38 lakhs in the



accounts of 1,46,900 farmers in Janagam, Rs 1,275 cr and 4 lakhs in the accounts of 1,44,828 farmers in Mahabubabad, Rs 550 cr in the accounts of 66,861 farmers in Mulugu and Rs 734 crore in the accounts of 89,143 farmers

in Jayasankar Bhupalapally were deposited as input costs for farmers under Rythu Bandhu scheme during the last four years.

In addition, Rs 405 crore 90 lakhs were paid to the 8,118 families of those who died

during the last four years from 2018-19 under Rythu Bima scheme (insurance) in the united Warangal district, he stated. Under the scheme, Rs 70 cr 5 lakh to 1,401 families in Hanumakonda, Rs 75 crore 35 lakhs to 1,487 families in Warangal, Rs 82 crore 50 lakhs to 1,650 families in Janagama, Rs 96 crore to 1,920 families in Mahabubabad, Rs 32 crore 50 lakh to 650 families in Mulugu, Rs 50 crore 50 lakh to 1,010 families in Jayasankar Bhupalapally districts were distributed, Dayakar Rao said. Rythu Bandhu scheme is a unique scheme launched by Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao and about Rs 50,000 crore were deposited into the accounts of about 65 lakh farmers during the four years from 2018. There is no such scheme in any other state in the country in the past 70 years, he stated.

Extramarital affair behind auto driver's murder?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Previous enmity, triggered by an alleged extramarital affair, could have led to the brutal murder of auto-rickshaw driver Ch Rajesh in full public view in Shanti Nagar on Thursday.

The Lalaguda police said Rajesh (40), a resident of RTC Colony in Moula Ali, allegedly had an intimate relationship with a woman, and was also earlier arrested in connection with her husband's murder. He was recently released from prison on bail. On Thursday night, Rajesh went to meet his friends at Shanthi Nagar, when a group of persons attacked him in public view. They stabbed him multiple times with knives, resulting in his death on the spot.

Telangana BJP, Cong leaders to campaign in UP, TRS to decide soon

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TRS working president has said that the TRS will take a decision soon on whether to campaign for the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh or not. The Telangana BJP is also chalking out plans to checkmate the plans of the TRS. Already, the BJP leadership has directed leaders from Telangana to be ready to participate in the UP election campaign. It is learnt that the Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy, BJP president DK Aruna, BJP OBC Morcha president Dr K. Laxman, Madhya Pradesh in-charge P. Muralidhar Rao, and Tamil Nadu BJP co-in-charge Ponguleti Sudhakar Reddy have received directions from the BJP high command.

The Telangana BJP would also discuss what to do if TRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao participates in the UP campaign extending support to the



Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party. The Telangana BJP is getting ready to make state BJP leaders, particularly TS BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar and Huzurabad MLA Eatala Rajender, to campaign in UP if KCR campaigns there. Speaking to The Pioneer Tamil Nadu BJP co-in-charge Ponguleti Sudhakar Reddy said that KCR has been trying to divert attention from issues in TS saying that BJP would lose in Uttar Pradesh. The Ministers and MLAs, who quit the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, are corrupt and are joining Akhilesh Yadav's SP with plans to loot the people as they could not do so under

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he said. Another reason for them to quit the BJP is the fear that they would not get tickets, he said. Nothing will happen even if KCR participates in the Uttar Pradesh campaign as the people of UP favour the BJP, he said. Ponguleti said that he is in touch with the BJP high command and will participate in the UP election campaign. Telangana Congress leaders are also going to participate in the UP election campaign. TPCC working president Azharuddin and other leaders including TPCC chief Revanth Reddy may participate in the UP election campaign.

SP releases The Pioneer calendar

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

District Superintendent of Police R Venkateswarlu has lauded the role of the Press in development of society. Releasing the calendar for 2022 of the Pioneer at his chambers here on Friday, he said that the reporters work hard continuously to unearth many problems in society. Moreover, the Press acts as a bridge between the people and the government.

The impact of social media was such that, if any incident happens in any part of the globe



the news will spread quickly like wildfire. But, the media should exercise discretion between good and bad before rushing to the Press. The Press will receive

overwhelming support only when it exposes corruption and irregularities besides highlighting the people's problems, the SP remarked.

Door-to-door vax campaign planned

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In view of the steep rise in COVID-19 cases, the Waltair railway division has planned to organise a door-to-door vaccination campaign in the division for railway beneficiaries. Focusing on 100 percent first dose coverage and completing the backlog of second dose vaccination, Divisional Railway Manager Anup Satpathy directed the Health Department to conduct vaccination drives at railway colonies.

Dalit Bandhu to benefit 500 in Sangareddy

A CHANDRASHEKHAR RAO ■ SANGAREDDY

In all, 500 persons will derive benefit under the Dalit Bandhu scheme in Sangareddy district at the rate of 100 for each Assembly constituency. There are five Assembly constituencies in the district. Each of them is entitled to receive Rs 10 lakh under the Dalit Bandhu to encourage Dalits to take up self-employment programmes.

In fact, the total population of the district is put at 15.27 lakh, including a 2.76-lakh Dalit population. Out of the 2.76 lakh Dalits, 2.42 lakh are living in rural areas, while 34,000 are living in rural areas.

It may be recalled that at the time of the Huzurabad by-elections, the Dalit Bandhu was launched for the benefit of the Dalits. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao declared that Dalit Bandhu would be implemented across



the state soon.

The Beneficiaries will be selected on the basis of the comprehensive household survey undertaken earlier. As and when the guidelines are issued, the beneficiaries will be chosen. The Dalits have

been facing problems obtaining loans under the bank-linkage programmes. Only elected people's representatives and those who have deposits in banks are able to access the bank-linkage loans. In spite of being eligible to

get loans under the bank-linkage programmes, many Dalits are not able to get the loans. Their problems are indescribable. Because of the alleged negligence by the bankers, the delay is taking place in the grounding of the self-employment units in spite of having access to subsidised loans. There were instances of bank authorities canceling loans. Dalit Bandhu helps Dalits get loans bypassing the banks to benefit the eligible beneficiaries. According to SC Corporation Executive Director Babu Rao, "We are progressing as per the government orders.

As and when the guidelines are issued, beneficiaries will be chosen. Dalits should make use of the schemes meant for their self-employment. As they are to get financial support, bypassing the banks, the poor will have no problems at all. It will pave the way for the financial growth of the Dalits."

Upset over mother's death, man ends life

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Upset over losing his mother to cancer, a man died, allegedly by committing suicide, at Kachiguda on Thursday. He was found hanging at the crematorium where his mother's last rites were held.

Vinod Kumar (36), an auto-rickshaw driver was unmarried and was staying with his mother Laxmi Bai (60) and younger brother Vijay Kumar at Shyam Nagar in Golnaka. Laxmi Bai's husband Nagender died when Vinod and Vijay were still children and since then she had taken care of them. Police said Vinod, who was very much attached to his mother, was depressed after she passed away due to cancer on Tuesday.

SP seeks people's cooperation to prevent road accidents

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Superintendent of Police of Mahabubnagar district R Venkateswarlu stated that adequate measures were taken by the police officials to prevent road accidents in the district. Addressing a media conference here on Friday, the SP said that though the department has taken sufficient steps to prevent accidents, people's cooperation is needed to prevent mishaps. Drivers of the vehicles have to strictly follow the traffic rules to avoid road accidents, Venkateswarlu said.

Due to the spread of the Covid pandemic, people have been traveling in their vehicles in the past two years and were not following traffic rules strictly and due to this the district witnessed more number of road accidents in the last



two years. However, police conducted several awareness campaigns to bring awareness among people in the following traffic rules and due to this campaign, the number of accidents has come down gradually, he said. Stoppers and speed breakers were arranged on the highways to discourage rash driving by the drivers. Drunk-drive

checks were conducted frequently and it has been yielding good results. Indicators and radium stickers were arranged on highways to guide drivers, he said. Action will be taken against persons if they give their vehicles to minors or to those who do not possess valid licenses, he warned. Earlier, there used to be a number of accidents at Fatepuram Misamma in Nawabpet mandal and the number of accidents were reduced due to the steps taken by the police, he further said. Steps will be taken to reduce road mishaps on Kalwakurthy-Rayachur highway. The road accidents have come down significantly during the past three months due to hard work by the police and the cooperation of people, he added.

Jal Shakti Ministry lauds Siddipet officials

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Arun Baroka, Additional Secretary, Department of Drinking water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Union Government of India has sent an appreciation letter to the district rural development officials of Siddipet district.

"The Government of India appreciates the effective functioning of the drinking water and sanitation wing in Siddipet district. We also congratulate you for your participation in the short film competition - Swatch Filmon Ka Amrut Mahotsav-202. Under India-Mission

(Rural)-2, the Government of India has been implementing Sampurna Swatchata programme across the country and you have achieved given targets," the letter said.

We hope that the Panchayat & rural development officials of Siddipet district will continue to work hard in completing drinking water and sanitation works and will be a role model to other districts," Arun Baroka said in the letter.

It is to be noted that the Gram Panchayat secretaries in Siddipet had prepared 160 short films relating to drinking water and sanitation schemes being implemented

in the district to the Swatchata Filmonka Amrut Mahotsav-2021 competition. The officials of the Union government had witnessed the short films and sent the appreciation letter. The short films were developed under the supervision of Additional Collector (Local Bodies) Muzammil Khan of Siddipet.

As the drinking water and sanitation facilities were improved a lot, the Panchayats and villages in the Siddipet district witnessed outstanding development and stood as a role model to other districts. Results achieved by the field level officials and people's repre-

sentatives of local bodies will be an inspiration to the villages in other districts. The letter said and congratulated the sanitation staff, panchayat secretaries, and Additional Collector for Local Bodies. Muzammil Khan. The district was able to achieve development to this extent due to the guidance by the state Medical and Health Minister T Harish Rao, the Jal Shakti ministry said also congratulated District Collector M Hanumantha Rao for his initiatives in implementing drinking water and sanitation works in the villages of the Siddipet district.

Mango farmers' hopes turn sour

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The mango crop is in a big crisis in the upcoming season in the State as thrip (Nalla Thamara in Telugu) is attacking mango blooms. Normally, the mango blooms appear during Sankranti and the tender mangoes are witnessed in early February. However, this year in the majority of the areas, there are no mango blooms due to thrip attacks.

The north Andhra districts including Srikakulam,

Vizinagaram and Visakhapatnam are famous in both the Telugu States for the Palakamanu variety which gets ready for harvest early. The size and taste of the fruit is also very good. This variety is also famous for preparing pickles as they last an entire year. However, this year, no blooms are there in the lion's share of the trees in the three districts. Due to the severe cold conditions and dense fog, the mango crop was badly affected. As there are no flowers, the farm-

ers are in deep worry. Not only Palakamanu, the other varieties including Suvarnarekha are also badly affected by Nalla Thamara. The north Andhra region is sharing a huge quantum of mango exports across the world and also rules the domestic markets. However, with the adverse climate conditions, the farmers are losing their hopes as the contractors are not coming forward to buy the trees. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, mango exports came down in 2020

and 2021. Usually, mango traders inspect the fields during December/January and assess the expected crop from the trees and offer good amounts to the farmers. As there is no flowering even now, the traders think that this year there would not be much return from the crop. The mango crop completely depends on the rainy and winter season conditions. The untimely rains, cold and fog conditions will decide the fate of the mango crops.

Guv condoles death of NSU V-C

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has expressed his profound grief and sadness over the sudden passing away of Prof V Muralidhara Sharma, Vice-Chancellor of National Sanskrit University (NSU) in Tirupati on Thursday, due to massive cardiac arrest. Governor Harichandan said it was during the tenure of Prof. V Muralidhara Sharma, that the erstwhile deemed university Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth has been upgraded as the National Sanskrit University in Tirupati.



People making a bonfire of discarded objects to mark Bhogi festival in the early hours in Hyderabad on Friday



This rangoli reflects the agony of farmers and their feeble attempts to save agriculture. A peasant woman drew this rangoli naively in front of her house, making it the talk of the town. "Farmer should win and agriculture should sustain" is the pithy message of this rangoli, which is an awakening call for those who are bent on playing politics over agriculture, devastating the farming community

MALLEPALLI GOVERDHAN
■ NAGARKURNOOL

Even after a decade and half of the Manchala boat tragedy in River Krishna, which claimed 61 lives, the proposed road bridge across the river, linking Kalwakurthy district in Telangana and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh, remained a non-starter. Thanks to the protracted legal battles.

The boat tragedy took place in connection with Singotam Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple Brahmotsavam celebrations. About 15 years ago, the Brahmotsavam was celebrated in January second week on a grand scale. To watch the festivities, people from neigh-

boursing Nehru Nagar, Kondapaturu and Kottapalli in Kurnool district set out for Singotam which is in Telangana region crossing the river. As there is no proper road facility, the pilgrims opted to travel by river. The overloaded boat carrying visitors to the temple went down the water in the middle of River Krishna, leading to the death of 61. The boat capsized near the Manchalakatta region as the water flow speed increased in the river. The then Chief Minister Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy reached the accident spot and announced the construction of a road bridge between Somasila and Siddeswaram to prevent the



recurrence of such incidents. He announced the sanction of Rs 110 crore for the road bridge and released Rs 21 crore

on Feb 26, 2007, to start with and asked the officials to begin the construction works at the earliest. He laid the foundation

stone for the bridge and unveiled a pylon on Feb 13, 2009. Linking the proposed bridge, Dr. YSR laid the foun-

ation stone for the Rs 82-crore double road from Kalwakurthy and Nandyal and unveiled the double road pylon. Because of the court litigation of the lands, the road bridge has been postponed year after year. The road bridge did not materialise even today. The project figured as an inter-state problem between Telangana and AP. People of the region say that governments of Telugu states did not pay attention to the construction of the bridge to link the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district in Telangana with Kurnool district in AP. The people say that they have no other alternative except to risk their lives to undertake river travel.

INDIA CORNER

IMD's role crucial in country's crusade for climate preservation: Jitendra Singh

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Friday said the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is going to play a major role in India's crusade for climate preservation at international fora. The impact of heat waves is increasing owing to climate change, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading the world in this area of concern, the Minister of State for Earth Sciences said at an event to mark IMD's 147th foundation day. "The entire world is looking up to India and therefore, the action plan initiated by the IMD in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority is a great opportunity for us," he said. "The IMD is going to play a major role considering the position that India has undertaken under Prime Minister Modi as far as our crusade for climate preservation is considered at international fora," the minister said. The accuracy of the IMD's forecast is vindicated by the fact that many parents consult astrologers for wedding dates and finalise them based on the MeT department's prediction, Singh said in a lighter vein.



Not three-fourth seats, BJP meant it will get 3 or 4 seats in UP polls: Akhilesh

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday took a swipe at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, saying by the "80 versus 20" assertion, he meant only 20 per cent of the population will back the BJP in the Uttar Pradesh elections, while the remaining 80 per cent will support his party. But after the arrival of Swami Prasad Maurya and others in the SP, the saffron party would lose even this 20 per cent, Yadav said in his speech after giving party membership to Maurya and others here. "Baba mukhya mantri (Adityanath) should engage a math teacher," the SP president said, referring to the chief minister's "80 vs 20" remarks. Adityanath had recently said that in the Uttar Pradesh elections, while 80 per cent supporters will be on one side, 20 per cent will be on the other, which many thought was alluding to the 20 per cent Muslim population in the state.



Congress' SC leader Joginder Mann quits party

Senior Congress leader and former Punjab Minister Joginder Singh Mann on Friday quit the party, snapping his 50-year-old ties with the party. The leader from the Scheduled Caste community was miffed over "no action" against perpetrators of the alleged multi-crore post-matric SC scholarship scam and non-grant of district status to Phagwara. He resigned from the party and as Chairman of the Punjab Agro Industries Corporation. Sources said that Mann is likely to join the Aam Aadmi Party. In a letter to AICC chief Sonia Gandhi, the three-time ex-MLA from Phagwara, who remained a minister in Cabinets including those of Beant Singh, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Amarinder Singh, said that he had a dream that he would die as a Congressman. "But with Congress patronising guilty of post matric scholarship scheme, my conscience doesn't allow me to stay here," he said. "The maharajas, landlords, money bags and opportunist leaders like Capt Amarinder Singh, Navjot Singh Sidhu and others came in the party for sake of vested political interests due to which the party had drifted from its core values and focus shifted merely to contest the polls and grab power," he alleged.



PM Modi to interact with more than 150 startups today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with more than 150 startups from various sectors, including agriculture and health, on Saturday via video conferencing.

Startups from various sectors such as enterprise systems, space, industry 4.0, security, fintech, environment besides agriculture and health will be part of this interaction, the PMO said on Friday.

More than 150 startups have been divided into six working groups based on themes including growing from roots, nudging the DNA, from local to global, technology of future, building champions in manufacturing, and sustainable development, it said in a release.

'Maha CM should delegate powers of attending meetings to someone'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Opposition BJP on Friday said Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should delegate his powers to someone, who can attend daily meetings and visit places instead of him.

Thackeray, 61, had undergone a cervical spine surgery in November. He had remained absent during the entire five-day-long winter session of the state legislature held in December last week. However, he has been participating in official meetings, weekly cabinet meetings and other events through video-conference from his residence.

Talking to reporters in Kolhapur, Maharashtra BJP president Chandrakant Patil said, "People are saying that the chief minister has not met people for almost last 70 days. Therefore, Thackeray should delegate his powers to someone who can attend daily meetings and sometimes visit some places in the state."

"He is like our friend, so

I wish him a speedy recovery. However, the task of managing and controlling the state, which has a population of around 12 crore, cannot be done just by sitting at home. Such responsibilities should be taken more seriously," he said.

Commenting on Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's criticism of the BJP, Patil said, "Raut should understand that his party is losing due to this coalition government. A Sena candidate cannot win the election of Mumbai Bank, while an NCP candidate becomes its chairman."

If Sena is contesting upcoming elections in Goa and Uttar Pradesh, it is merely to

win certain number of votes in order to get the tag of a national party, he claimed.

"You need to get certain number of votes in more than one state to get such recognition," he said.



Commenting on Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's criticism of the BJP, Patil said, "Raut should understand that his party is losing due to this coalition government. A Sena candidate cannot win the election of Mumbai Bank, while an NCP candidate becomes its chairman."



IED found at Ghazipur flower market; defused

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An unattended bag containing an IED device was found at Ghazipur flower market here Friday morning, officials said, adding the device was later defused.

The incident comes ahead of the Republic Day celebrations in the national capital on January 26. The security apparatus in the city is on high alert in the run up to the event.

Fire officials said they received the information of the

suspicious unattended bag which was spotted in the flower market at 10.19 am.

A senior police officer earlier said a suspicious metal box was found in the market.

The officials from Special Cell of Delhi Police, NSG's bomb detection and disposal team and fire tenders soon reached the spot and cordoned the area. "We were informed by the Delhi Police about the suspicious object around 11 am. The improvised explosive device (IED) has

been destroyed by using a controlled explosion technique. The samples of the IED have been collected and the explosive will be ascertained and informed to the Delhi Police," an NSG officer said.

Official sources said the black-coloured bag weighed around 3 kg.

Bomb suit wearing National Security Guard (NSG) personnel were seen at the site where a bomb disposal container known as total containment vessel (TCV) was brought.

Defence Ministry sets up online portal to resolve pension issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Defence Ministry has set up an online portal to resolve pension-related grievances of ex-servicemen (ESM) and their dependents, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced on Friday.

The portal will allow them to lodge grievances directly with the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (DESW), he stated on the occasion of Armed Forces Veterans Day.

"I am happy to announce the setting up of Raksha Pension Shikayat Nivaran Portal designed to dedicatedly redress pension, including family pension-related grievances of ESM and their dependents for speedy redressal," Singh said on Twitter.

The portal will help existing and future military pensioners, he mentioned.

"An application of the portal will auto-generate and forward SMS and email to the applicants on their registered number and email, intimating confirmation and tracking status," he noted.



The minister also announced that the DESW has allotted Rs 320 crore to Armed Forces Flag Day Fund (AFFDF) to clear all backlog of pending applications for welfare schemes, especially education and marriage grants for widows or dependent children of ESM.

"This (allotment of Rs 320 crore) will benefit 1,66,471 ESMs," he mentioned. The minister also stated that the Directorate General of Resettlement has issued 22,278 job letters -- including 7,898 job letters to freshly retired/first-time entrants -- to civil life ESMs in government sector/PSUs/banks and private sector during the year April 2021-December 2021, he stated.

EAM Jaishankar speaks with counterparts from Japan, Netherlands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday spoke with his counterparts from Japan and the Netherlands and discussed bilateral ties as well as regional issues.

In a tweet, Jaishankar said he had a good conversation with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Wopke Hoekstra. "Wished him a fast recovery from Covid. And a Happy New Year. Discussed our bilateral cooperation, EU and Indo-Pacific," Jaishankar tweeted. They also exchanged views on celebrating the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, he said.

On his discussion with Jaishankar, Hoekstra said on Twitter, "Good to speak with @DrSJaishankar. This year, we celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations, a great milestone."



1.38 lakh migratory birds spotted in Odisha's Bhitarkanika

PNS ■ KENDRAPARA

A total of 1,38,107 winged guests were spotted in Bhitarkanika National Park in Odisha's Kendrapara district this winter, 2015 or 1.5 per cent more than the previous year, officials said on Friday.

Many rare and endangered species were counted in the census recently carried out in the wetlands, which is the country's second-largest mangrove ecosystem.

As many as 144 avian species were counted as compared to 121 last year. A total of 1,36,092 birds were spotted in 2021. The mid-winter census

was conducted by the Forest Department on Tuesday and the data was released a day later.

The number of geese and ducks was at the top, followed by gulls, terns, and skimmers. There were grebes, cormorants, darters, egrets, bitterns, ibises and finfoots, the officials said, adding that all these species come under rare or threatened categories.

The birds migrate to warmer destinations to escape the bitter cold in their native places during winter and return once the mercury rises.

Delhi CM flags off 100 low-floor, AC buses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The public transport bus fleet size at 6,900 has become the largest so far in Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday after flagging off 100 low floor and air-conditioned buses at Rajghat depot here.

The city transport department is also making efforts to have 300 e-buses on the road by April, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said on the occasion.

"With induction of these 100 buses now, the public transport bus fleet size has grown to 6,900 which is the highest so far. Earlier, there were around 6,000 buses at the time of Commonwealth Games (in 2010)," Kejriwal said.

The government is procuring many more buses including e-buses, he said.

"It takes 2-3 years for new buses to come due to tender process and other formalities, it cannot happen overnight. When our government was formed, there was much shortage of buses as no new buses were purchased for many years.

Blind faith among pilgrims 'masks' Covid safety norms

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Blind faith of the thousands of pilgrims thronging the city's Babu-Ghat (Steps leading to the river Ganges named after its builder Baboo Raj Chandra) en-route to Sagar Island for the Gangasagar Mela, saw many of them discarding Covid safety protocol, turning virus containment a tough proposition for the state administration.

Many pilgrims said that taking a dip in the Hooghly river here in the shadow of the Babu-Ghat's Doric-Greek pavilion with massive Cornithian pillars, would kill the coronavirus while several others blindly claimed that no virus would be able to touch them because they are on a holy pilgrimage.

A sadhu, Sanyasi Sukanta Giri from Haridwar's Shambhu Panchayati Atal Akhara, who was seen without a mask said that though he has got both the vaccine shots (a must-to be allowed to proceed to Gangasagar) "chanting the 'Gangasnan' (Ganges bathing) and 'Mahamrityunjaya' (conquest over death) mantras"



would help keep him safe from the pandemic.

"I don't want to talk about it. There is no coronavirus at the moment and even if there is any it will not be able to infect me because I am doubly vaccinated and I chant the 'Mahamrityunjaya' mantra (prayer) everyday," Sukanta Giri told PTI.

"Hum to mast hai. Coronavirus hum ko chu nahi

payega. Hum bindass hai. Hum Gangasnan ke liye aye hai. Corona kuch nahi kar payega humara (I am a fearless person and coronavirus will not be able to do anything to me because I have come here for the holy dip in Gangasagar)," HC Budhiraja, a resident of Ahmedabad, who has come with his old parents, Harshvardhan Budhiraja and Poonam, told this reporter.

Rajendra Pal of Rajasthan's Ajmer added that he firmly believed taking a dip in sea water at Sagar will "kill any form of bacteria or virus and ward off sins".

"Hum to bhagyashali hai ke hum Gangasagar mein dubki lagane ko aa paye hai. Coronavirus bol ke kuch nahi hain, aur Gangasagar mein nahane se sab bacteria, virus mar jata hai. Gangasagar ke pani

mein sab paap, virus khatam hota hai. (I am lucky to have come here for the holy dip. If you get a chance to take the holy dip, all coronavirus and bacteria along with your sins will be washed away)," Pal said.

Many of sadhus and the pilgrims were also reluctant to take the RT-PCR tests which have been made mandatory by the Calcutta High Court to go to the Sagar Island for the

annual congregation, a senior official of

the health department said. "It's like a test of our patience. They are reluctant and giving us funny excuses not to undertake the RT-PCR tests or vaccines. We have to literally fight with them to collect the swabs. At times we are taking help from policemen to explain that unless they are tested, they will not be able to

proceed from this point (Babughat)," the doctor said.

Senior police officers of Kolkata Police also echoed similar difficulties while managing the pilgrims at Babughat where several tens of thousands of pilgrims are passing through.

"We are only allowing those who test negative in the RT-PCR and have double vaccination certificates."

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Stepping up

The Govt and the SC are on same page on the need to bring about criminal law reforms

For the last few days, the Delhi High Court is hearing petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape. During the hearings, the Centre has informed the court that it proposes a comprehensive revamp of the criminal law. This is an echo of the Union Home Minister on Tuesday seeking views from the Chief Justice of India, Members of Parliament and Chief Ministers on forging a “people-centric legal structure”. The Home Minister said the same once before, way back in 2016, when he sought similar views on changes to the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, Arms Act, and so forth. The same year, the Supreme Court too asked the Centre to reform police laws as well. Better late than never, as they say. Several sections of these laws and many other statutes like the sedition law are of colonial vintage and are antiquated. They are still used, most in their breach, and should go at once. The one that decriminalises marital rape is another one that is so obviously not ‘people-centric’ and yet exists in the statute books. The Home Ministry is bound to get numerous suggestions on reformation and change. But it is for the Ministry to identify the provisions that require a revision. Some would say the reforms



need to be sweeping because some provisions related to classes of offences, legal procedures, the quantum of punishment and principles of criminal jurisprudence have not seen changes in decades.

The IPC, drafted in 1860, has seen only 77 amendments to date, 37 of them coming after Independence. The CrPC has amended 18 times between 1974 and 2014. Social progress and technology upgradation mean these laws need to be modernised to keep pace with the times. New types of punishments, with restorative and reformatory justice in mind, need to be introduced into the Indian

system. Principled sentencing is the need of the hour on the procedural side to ensure that different sentences for crimes of similar nature do not have major variations. The Government has to explain how it wants to give the reforms a ‘people-centric’ push. For, in democratic parlance, it means having suitable procedures in place to quickly identify the reasons for victimisation and reforming laws to uphold the rights of victims of crime. The extant laws of Macaulay’s time are tuned to serve the interests of the Crown. They need to be oriented towards people — once the victims of colonial rule who, after Independence, became the victims of colonial laws. They need to enjoy the benefits of victim protection schemes and victim participation in criminal trials, compensation and restitution schemes for victims. Victim advocacy and human rights are the thrust points. But that will not amount to much without the fundamental tightening of the mental resolve to tackle crime: One, political non-interference in the roles of crime investigation agencies; two, a change in the attitude of the police towards complainants; and, three, no external pressures on the police.

PICTALK



Pilgrims gather for a holy dip in the Ganga on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, at Gangasagar Mela

PTI

Rough & tumble

The game of UP’s throne is getting exciting by the day, and the Opposition is thrilled

With just about a month to go for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, scheduled to be held in seven phases between February 10 and March 7, there are significantly noticeable rumblings in the electoral playfield. Three Ministers in Yogi Adityanath’s Cabinet (Labour & Employment Minister Swami Prasad Maurya, Environment Minister Dara Singh Chauhan, Ayush Minister Dharam Singh Saini, besides legislators Roshanlal Verma, Brijesh Prajapati, Bhagwati Saran Sagar, Mukesh Verma, Vinay Shakya, Bala Prasad Awasthi and Avtar Singh Bhadana) have resigned in three days, and there is high probability that they may join the Samajwadi Party in the coming days. In fact, Saini warned the party that “every day till January 20, a Minister and two-three MLAs will resign from the BJP”. So far, a total of 14 lawmakers, including the three Ministers, have signalled their exit from the BJP since the poll schedule was announced on January 8. All the major political parties in the fray in the politically significant State — the SP, Congress, BSP and the AIMIM — are contesting separately and the BJP was hopeful that it would easily breast the tape yet again against a splintered Opposition.



Though Assembly elections are going to be held in five States, seen as a template for the Lok Sabha elections in 2024, all eyes are on UP. Only a few months back, everything was going well for the UP Chief Minister. Backed by PM Narendra Modi, Yogi Adityanath seemed unstoppable and ready to return to power, but sudden large-scale desertions have hit his Government and image hard. The recent resignations have dented the BJP’s efforts at consolidating the Hindu vote, which helped it win in 2014, 2017 and 2019. The formula was built around the BJP’s strategy of social engineering, a concept perpetuated by former general secretary and ideologue K Govindacharya, but it appears to be wearing off now. Needless to say, the recent developments are quite comforting to the Opposition camp, and the satraps would likely enter the humdinger of the electoral battlefield with renewed zest and vigour. Meanwhile, the saffron party would need a lot more than its social engineering formula and development slogans to keep its ship stable and on course. This is where the experience of poll-hardened veterans, including the Modi-Shah masterminds, could come in handy. Alas, time is not exactly a friend of the BJP this time.

Fear is the key to rule minds, or is it?

Today’s politicians exploit every opportunity to use fear for recruiting volunteers to their own personal causes without realising the flipside



DEEPAK SINHA

We live in a world that, as Canadian philosopher Brendan Myers puts it, is “utterly saturated with fear. We fear being attacked by religious extremists, both foreign and domestic. We fear the loss of political rights, a loss of privacy, or a loss of freedom. We fear being injured, robbed or attacked, being judged by others, or neglected, or left unloved.”

Politicians understand this well. With the COVID-19 pandemic having already laid us low and in the absence of any real health-revival hopes on the horizon, they have lost no time in using fear to entice and recruit volunteers to their own personal causes.

Former American President Donald Trump is a prime example of a politician who has successfully used fear to his advantage, and continues to do so despite having lost the Presidency by approximately seven million of the popular vote. With absolutely no evidence to show, he has still been able to sell the “Big Lie” that he was denied victory because the election machinery was compromised and allowed incumbent Joe Biden to win fraudulently, something that millions continue to believe even to this day.

This issue, as we are all aware, boiled over on January 6, 2021, the day Congress was to formally certify President-elect Biden’s win. An unruly mob of Trump’s supporters, egged on by him but he choosing not to join them, attacked Capitol Hill in an effort to stop Congress from carrying out its constitutional mandate. In the ensuing violence, two policemen were killed and over 150 injured, leading to the arrest of over seven hundred of those involved, with many more still at large.

One would have expected that the fanatics who attacked the Capitol and unleashed utter mayhem there would belong to the very fringes of American society. Surprisingly, that was not the case, as a study by the University of Chicago’s ‘Project



on Security and Threats’ found. Of those who have been arrested thus far, “over half were business owners, CEOs and from white-collar occupations. Over a quarter had college degrees and only a third had criminal records, while 13 per cent belonged to extreme right-wing militia groups”. It concluded that the mob was overwhelmingly White Non-Latinos, in ages between 35-50 years and the vast majority had come from pockets of Trump supporters in districts and States that were either majority Democrat or had swung towards the Democrats.

The most interesting aspect of the study was the revelation that the single most important motivation for those who participated in the insurrection was their belief in the “Great Replacement Theory”. A conspiracy theory first propounded in France by author Renaud Camus in which white nationalists claimed that the French white population was being demographically and culturally replaced deliberately by Non-European peoples. It has found much traction not just



THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN OBLITERATES ALL REASONING AND BRINGS OUT A PURELY EMOTIONAL RESPONSE. WHAT MOST PEOPLE OVERLOOK IS THAT WHILE IT IS RELATIVELY SIMPLE TO START A FIRE, THE CONFLAGRATION LEAVES NONE UNSCATHED

in France but also in other European nations and in the United States and New Zealand. In America, it has come to be seen as the Non-Latino White population being replaced by Blacks, Hispanics and People of Colour. In essence, a growing fear of losing their privileged and entitled position in society that the colour of their skin provided.

A fear that Donald Trump was able to effectively harness not just in the presidential campaign of 2016 but also, even more successfully, in his 2020 campaign despite his eventual loss. Interestingly, the Replacement Theory with appropriate modifications can just as easily be adapted in support of other extremist ideologies as well, both religious and ethnic. In our own context, for example, there are groups within the Hindutva fold that use a similar argument, not supported by any scientific data, to suggest that birth rates in minority communities are so high that they will eventually overtake the majority Hindu population in a few decades. There are groups

that have recently gone further in propagating even more radical views than this.

Clearly, one need not be a social scientist to understand that the motive for such baseless assertions is completely rooted in politics, and works as an effective tool for propagating fear to garner votes. What is truly dangerous is the insidious nature of the threat posed. The fear of the unknown, as we all know, obliterates all reasoning and logic and brings out a purely emotional response. Unfortunately, what most people overlook is that while it is relatively simple to start a fire, the conflagration leaves none unscathed. Those fanning the flames of religious bigotry would do well to heed 18th century English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s wise words that “in politics, what begins in fear usually ends in failure”.

(The writer is a military veteran, who is a Visiting Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PASSENGER SAFETY JUST FOR MANUALS?

Sir — Since the derailment of Seemanchal Express in February 2019 in Bihar where six people lost their lives, and the curtailment of the railways due to COVID-19, the Railways was trying hard to renew its claims of safety and development. Just at that moment, at least seven people were killed and over 40 injured after 12 coaches of the Bikaner-Guwahati Express derailed in West Bengal’s Jalpaiguri district. The people are unable to digest the claim that due to the pandemic, there were fewer passengers on board the train. It seems to be a wrong statement by the officials concerned. There were 550 passengers in the affected coaches and 1,100 passengers in the train; so, it’s not less.

Moreover, it’s 2022 and still these trains are using IFC coaches instead of LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) coaches. Instead of inaugurating stations after stations, there’s a pressing need to develop the rail compartments first. The silver lining amid the tragedy was to see about 50 ambulances reaching the spot in no time at such a remote place, also thanks in no small measure to locals for a quick helping hand and all parties for overcoming petty politics and joining hands to help the passengers. It shows that our medical system and coordination improved. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and praying for early recovery of those injured.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

TOLERANCE THERAPY NEEDED

Sir — We have too many people around whose sentiments are too easily hurt by what happens in the advertisements but not enough by what happens out there in reality. Added to the fact that we generally lack a sense of humour and every imagined slight is blown out of proportion, it has made it nearly impossible for any creative person to take a different, independent view from the accepted traditional view. After 2014, there is a growing constituency of eagle-eyed ‘protectors’ of Indian cultural and religious traditions waiting to get offended at the

Allay fears of the workforce



With the surge in COVID cases, the migrant workforce from other States is in the grip of fear as they had bitter experiences of the previous lockdown. They should not be left in lurch and it is expected of the authorities concerned to step forward and allay their fears as some of them have already started trickling homeward. Some reports indicate that labourers from Delhi and the NCR as well as the port hubs of Mumbai and Kolkata are getting infected

and returning to their native towns in UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. On January 1, PM Narendra Modi said India would not allow the pandemic to adversely impact the economic development, suggesting that India would not enforce another lockdown.

The workers, however, seem unconvinced as several States are imposing partial restrictions and night curfews and they are worried about being left high and dry if the situation worsens. These workers have to migrate to cities as in their villages, there is lack of economic opportunities. These migrant need to be given the confidence that even if the health situation worsens, their interests would be cared for by their employers as well as by the Governments. The agony of a daughter who travelled eight days along with her ailing father to reach her residence in Bihar is still fresh in the memory of many.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

slightest chance.

Thanks to the attitude of the Government in power and other elements that are patronised by it extra-constitutionally, which offers them protection from the essence of the law of the land, this creed believes they have the sole proprietary rights over Indian culture. Culture is dynamic and the fossilised thought processes of the many ‘guardians of Indian values’ need a changeover if the nation is to progress.

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

AMBIDEXTROUS BOWLERS

Sir — While cricket has seen a lot of innovations over the years like coloured clothing, emergence of T20 format, introduction of pink ball, etc, ambidextrous bowling is something that hasn’t made its way yet into the game. But being an ambidextrous bowler, and more so a fast bowler, is highly challenging and far more demanding in terms of physical fitness because the bowler needs to rewire his body very often dur-

ing the game. Across cricketing nations, only five cricketers have so far tested out ambidextrous bowling — Akshay Karnewar (India), Kamindu Mendis (Sri Lanka), Yasir Jan (Pakistan), Shaila Sharmin (Bangladesh) and Jemma Barsby (Australia.)

But how far can ambidextrous bowling be really effective and sustainable at international level is the moot question as these days, batsmen like Glen Maxwell are adept at employing switch-hitting at will, a shot which is highly productive in T20 cricket. In fact, ambidextrous bowling was in use long ago when Pakistan’s Hanif Mohammed tried it out a few times, though in desperation, like he did to Gary Sobers during his monumental knock of 365 n.o. at Kingston, Jamaica, in 1958. It’s believed to be the first-ever instance of ambidextrous bowling in international cricket.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Who will understand what the public wants more than Mamata Banerjee? The party’s policies are decided by her.



Trinamool MP
—Kalyan Banerjee



Imran Khan is my leader and prime minister and I did not tell him that I will not vote for him.

Pak Defence Minister
—Pervaz Khattak

Jab iski shakal dekhli thi na, mujhe nahi laga tha ye bachcha kar paega (to comedienne Bharti Singh’s husband Haarsh).



Actor
—Mithun Chakraborty



To come back after losing the first Test... then win the second and now the third Test is pretty incredible.

South Africa head coach
—Mark Boucher

Online games are a serious issue. We are bringing an act regulating online gaming.



Madhya Pradesh Home Minister
—Narottam Mishra

FIRST COLUMN

SEARCHING FOR ANTIDOTE TO COMMUNAL HATE

Hate speeches against any religion serve to imbalance public order and peace



JAGDISH KAURO

India woke up to the new year with shocking revelations regarding the "Bulli Bai" app targeting minority women in a derogatory and humiliating manner. The app had misused photographs of a number of Muslim women, including students, prominent personalities, journalists, and social workers. Protests were lodged all over the country. With pressure from human rights and women groups, the Bulli Bai app was blocked by Github. A couple of owners of the Bulli Bai App have now been arrested by the CERT-IN (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) and currently in police custody. The 'Sulli Deals' App, which was launched last year, had listed Muslim women for 'auction' with photographs sourced without permission and doctored. Its mastermind has also been arrested now. Will these arrests stop this kind of humiliating intent against certain religions, sects, communities, castes, or groups? Certainly not, because these are not one-time or stand-alone crimes. These are the



result of organized and sustained hate campaigns poisoning the minds of Indians, especially youth, against minority communities. For last some years, the social media has been extensively used to create platforms and material by these perpetrators of hate. As per Statista Research Department, most hate crimes during 2015-2019 were targeted at Dalits, followed by Muslims. There have been several reports of Muslims not being allowed to pray in certain places in North India and Christians being targeted on suspicion of being involved in religious conversions. Human rights groups which monitor atrocities against Christians in India have documented the violence by Hindutva groups from all states and released a fact-finding report titled 'Christians under attack in India'. The report released by the Association of Protection Civil Rights, United Christian Forum and United Against Hate at a press conference in Delhi in October 2021 says over 300 such instances were reported from across 21 states, particularly in North India, in nine months of 2021.

The farmers who protested for almost a year were repeatedly labelled as 'Khalistanis' and hate messages against them were doing the rounds on all social media platforms. Various forms of provocative incidences against minorities have been on the rise in the last few years. We keep hearing about the incidences of 'love jihad', 'ghar wapsi' and other newly coined terms to target certain communities. The Supreme Court has agreed to take up a PIL seeking probe into alleged hate speeches at two separate events at Haridwar and Delhi in December 2021. There are messages and videos circulating on social media regarding the atrocities committed on Hindus by Mughals (Muslims) during the Middle Ages. The voices for making India a 'Hindu Rashtra' are getting louder by the day. The hate speeches and hateful actions against any religion can only serve to imbalance the public order and peace in society. Educated young people are debating religion and hate rather than constructive issues for nation building. Do we have a solution? The harrowing trend of communal hatred is likely to meet with retaliation by those targeted in due course leading to destruction of the very fabric of multi-cultural Indian society. As Mahatma Gandhi said "an eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind". The Constitution of India enshrined and ensured equality and respect for all Indians. Hate campaigns against any religion, community or sect need to be condemned in the strongest words and strict legal action should be taken against the perpetrators. Politicians, religious and community leaders, and people from all walks of life should come together to oppose hate campaigns. School curricula should have mandatory content on communal harmony so that future generations learn to value of compassion and brotherhood.

(The writer is President, Women's Initiative for Liberation, Growth & Action, a national body working for women empowerment. The views expressed are personal.)

Mahatma Gandhi an ecological economist?

Gandhi's ideas could not be more relevant than today when India is witnessing jobless growth and facing the worst unemployment crisis



BKP SINHA

India was earlier known for its flourishing trade in spices and textiles, along with precious metal and stone. After Independence, India inherited an economy that was one of the poorest in the world with no industrial base and mostly devastated land deprived of forest and fertility. The British left a poor base for the already developed handicrafts universally acclaimed for their quality and craftsmanship.

In Mahatma Gandhi's view, industrial civilisation fostered by British rule was the main cause of India's social, ecological and economic distress. He believed that India's salvation lay in the restoration of its ancient civilisation where economic progress and moral progress intertwined.

Gandhi knew that "India lives in her seven lakh villages" therefore the economic and social revival of these villages is a pre-condition for reconstruction of India. He wanted to make the villages self-sufficient and build a rural economy which is not solely based on agriculture and allied activities but also has strong rural industries thereby generating employment for the villagers.

Gandhi once said, "If the village perishes, India will perish too". He imagined his ideal village will consist of cottages made from locally sourced materials with sufficient light, ventilation, proper sanitation and produce its own grains, vegetables, fruits, and Khadi. It will have wells, places of worship, a common meeting place, a common grazing field, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools where vocational training will be imparted and panchayats for settling disputes.

Gandhi was against the concentration of power and the system that makes the individual subservient to the machine and material. He wanted a development process which is harmonious, poverty free, non-violent, based on cooperation and ethics. Therefore, he proposed an ecological model centered on limitation of wants in contrast to the modern civilization that promotes material welfare and individual profits. He was sure that too much emphasis on materialism could lead to violence, unhappiness and a culture of oppression, exploitation, and dominance.

Gandhi's concept of sustainable development is rooted in a holistic approach which emphasizes the development of an individual and society as a whole in connection with nature. By preaching "simple living," Gandhi sought to curb both human greed and mindless exploitation of natural resources. He said, one should know the difference between 'need' and 'want' and taking more than required to fulfil our need, in a way is theft from other species, humans and the future.

Gandhi often said, "The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed".

He warned against the perils of massive industrialization and unsustainable patterns of consumption in the west. He



CLIMATE CHANGE HAS ONCE AGAIN SHED LIGHT ON GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MADE THE WORLD REALISE THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTISING A LIFESTYLE THAT HAS MINIMAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT. THESE PRINCIPLES REMAIN THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND ALL THE UN'S CLIMATE AGREEMENTS, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION TREATIES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

(The writer is a former Indian Forest Service officer. The views expressed are personal.)



described the process of urbanization as a "double drain", i.e., it will harm the villages and the villagers and thus proving fatal to both. Hence, in order to ensure economic balance, it is important that the urban sector does not drain the rural sector and shift the focus from centralization to decentralization. He argued, that a technologically sophisticated economy will have two major consequences: it would disempower the economic autonomy of the masses and greatly undermine the ecological fabric on which millions depend.

Therefore, to increase the productivity, we should avoid indiscriminate use and non-selective adoption of imported technology. He foresaw that the development of small-scale technology could boost efficiency in rural production without displacing rural labour and advocated an appropriate technological mix with controlled production to maximise the social benefits of science and technology and to maintain a proper balance between man and environment.

He emphasized the development of village and cottage industries where handicrafts, spinning, weaving, and likewise remain constant sources of income and revenue generation. This will protect the village crafts and the workers from the crushing competition of the power-driven machinery and ensure jobs for the villagers.

Gandhi's ideas could not be more relevant than today when India is witnessing jobless growth and facing the worst unemployment crisis in this pandemic situation. It is evident that the current paradigm of development is causing serious environmental problems which neither ecologically nor socially sustainable. It is leading the planet into a vortex of inequality, widening the rift

between rich and poor, and proved inadequate to address the issues of the millions living in poverty.

Gandhi was well aware of the pitfalls of such development as well as the consequences of unequal distribution of wealth between different classes. The World Inequality Report 2022 ranked India as the most unequal country in the world. The top 10 per cent and top one per cent hold 57 per cent and 22 per cent of the total national income, respectively, while the bottom half's share has come down to 13 per cent and they barely have anything. Thomas Piketty asserts in his influential book, Capital in the Twenty-First Century, that inequality is rapidly intensifying and global cooperation is desirable to prevent the wealthy from simply shifting assets into other jurisdictions. He proposed, an extremely high income-tax rates on upper-income taxpayers along with a global wealth tax. Economic progress devoid of moral elements will deepen divisions and increase dissensions among people.

With growing population, the increase in food demand has considerably altered land-use practices which has led to agricultural intensification at the expense of forests and grazing lands. Increased use of chemicals and fertilizers are causing pollution, soil and ground water contamination, loss of biodiversity and kill the beneficial organisms which increase fertility. Gandhi believed in sustainable agriculture and advised the use of bio-manures and bio-pesticides to improve soil fertility. Today, the experts in the healthcare are emphasizing the importance of chemical-free crops because excessive amounts of chemicals in plants are causing health related problems in humans as it affects kidneys,

lungs, may also cause cancer and congenital abnormalities like malnourished children, etc.

Gandhi's understanding of the ecological crisis was far ahead of his time and anticipated many of our greatest challenges of today. Knowing that afforestation can be an effective step to combat future water crisis, he urged people to plant trees. He also proposed, water harvesting for irrigational purposes to prevent droughts and famines.

Climate change has once again shed light on Gandhi's philosophy of self-sufficiency and sustainable development and made the world realize the importance of practicing a lifestyle that has minimal environmental impact. These principles remain the driving force behind all the UN's climate agreements, environmental conservation treaties, and sustainable development goals. Many of his ideas foreshadow the holistic thinking behind the "Agenda 2030: Transforming Our World" for Sustainable Development. The central idea of Agenda 2030 is captured by the tagline "Leave No One Behind." The plan aims to achieve prosperity for people and the planet and calls for "transformative" change, which includes changing the way we live, produce, and consume.

Thus, the current climate crisis and the need to find sustainable means has brought a long-suppressed and quintessentially Galbraith's unanswered question to the fore — "How much should a country consume?" — along with Gandhian corollary — "How much should a person consume?". They have become fundamental questions for the 21st century and will dominate the intellectual and political debates.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE POLICE CLOSE THEIR EYES WHEN THE RULING PARTY CONDUCTS RALLIES. WE WERE ONLY FIVE BUT THEY STOPPED US FROM CAMPAIGNING.
—BJP NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT
DILIP GHOSH



DILIP GHOSH IS LYING THAT ONLY FIVE OF THEM WERE CAMPAIGNING. HIS SECURITY GUARDS ALONE ARE FIVE IN NUMBER.
—TMC LEADER
MOJOY GHATAK

Poisonous tobacco products must be made unaffordable

The sale of 'sin products' needs to be limited and kept out of reach of the maximum number of citizens, especially teenagers

Tobacco consumption is a menace that is worse than the current Covid-19 pandemic and causes innumerable fatalities. Both Finance Ministry and GST Council appear to have overlooked the causes of this malady despite representations by civil society organizations, Members of Parliament, the medical fraternity, state representatives, Ministers and citizens.

There have been no major tobacco tax increases after the GST council placed tobacco products in the 28 per cent bracket in 2017. The option of tax increase on tobacco products gives the government a golden opportunity to raise badly required finances. Remember, lower taxes increase the affordability of



KIRIT BHAI SOLANKI

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tobacco consumers, especially teenagers and children. The Union Government has the option of hiking the excise duty and NCCD in the annual budget while the GST Council can increase the cess. This will ensure India has optimal tobacco taxation as mandated by WHO.

A submission to Parliament mentioned that a small excise duty hike ensured tax collection of Rs 4962 crores. This proves the point that raising excise duty and calamity duty substantially in the coming budget can fetch a handsome revenue.

The costs imposed on our society and our economy, both direct as well as indirect, have been huge. India has over 27 crore tobacco users today and the consumption of tobacco



kills more than 13 lakh Indians annually. At a global level, eight million deaths are reported every year. Over seven million deaths are due to direct use of tobacco while the rest are caused by passive smokers exposed to the poisonous smoke. As per the data of GYTS (Global Youth Tobacco Survey) in 2019, nearly one-fifth of the stu-

dents aged 13-15 have used any form of the tobacco product (smoking, smokeless, and any other form) in their life. Clearly, consumption of tobacco is not just about one's health at the individual level, but a societal problem we face nationally.

Tobacco taxes and, therefore, the prices have to be increased regularly, so as to significantly reduce the affordability over a period of time. This was the practice in the pre-GST era with additional options of the states adding VAT. Tobacco taxes and prices have not been increased enough over time to reduce the affordability of these products resulting in more numbers of consumers getting addicted. A long, four-year gap of no tax increase has tobacco companies share prices

soaring on the one hand, and on the other, we see rampant consumption leading to more deaths and spread of dreaded diseases. The tobacco industry may have its reason to look the other way, but the government has no such option.

The annual economic cost from all tobacco products is estimated to be Rs 177,341 crores in 2017-18 amounting to more than one per cent of India's GDP. This will continue to grow in the post-Covid era and the next GATS report will surely point out the alarming rise of casualties. In a country like India, an estimated 1.3 million deaths are accounted for by tobacco abuse. As per WHO data, the most common way tobacco kills is through cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) - nearly 4,49,844

deaths such deaths occurred in India as of 2018. The high prevalence of non-communicable diseases due to tobacco use is posing a huge challenge to the country's response to Covid-19 management, amplifying India's health burden in such difficult times.

It is time that the Finance Ministry launches a multi-pronged attack for the social cause of tobacco control by increasing taxes on tobacco products both in the annual budget and also in the GST council to wipe out the gap of the last four years. Doing this social good will not raise any eyebrows and citizens will welcome it for reasons of public health.

I am sure that the listening posts in the Ministry will convey the right message to the

Minister and also work out the modalities of tax rationalization which mandates that a sin product sale needs to be limited and citizens be protected. We are especially talking about children and teens who are major contributors to our economy.

A resilient healthcare system as an outcome will emerge that complements our 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' mission, which not only focuses on revival of the economy but also on overall improvement of the health of our citizens. To mark the National Youth Day which has the theme, 'Saksham Yuva, Sashakt Yuva', by making tobacco products unaffordable we may save the young generation from this deadly product and make them healthy and aatmanirbhar.

Industry leaders confident about India's economic recovery, expansion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Optimism and confidence are ruling high amongst Indian businesses as a significant percentage of industry leaders are positive about India's economic growth and expansion, despite the surge in COVID cases, says a survey.

According to the pre-budget survey by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP (DTTILLP), that collated a total of 163 responses from 10 industries, more than 75 per cent respondents were positive about India's economic growth and expansion.

The survey further noted that about 91 per cent respondents (compared with 58 per cent last year) believe that the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, coupled with monetary policy actions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) did contribute to bringing the economy back on track.

"They (industry leaders) expect the Union Budget FY 2022-23 to build on to this momentum," DTTILLP said in a release.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget in Parliament on February 1.

Further, about 55 per cent business leaders "believe that



providing extra tax incentives to long-term investors" for infrastructure investment can help promote growth in the country.

Adding to this, 45 per cent respondents believe that the budget should focus on announcing incentives for increased R&D spending. This would be beneficial for sectors such as life sciences, automobile, capital goods, technology, and telecommunication.

Enhancing export competitiveness, putting in place competitive import tariffs, and reducing administrative inefficiencies are some other expectations that industry leaders conveyed through the Deloitte

survey.

Commenting on the survey findings, Sanjay Kumar, Partner, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP, said, the economy has witnessed a steady recovery during 2021-22.

"The Indian economy will continue to witness the growth momentum if the government is able to sustain the efforts on implementation of reforms such as asset monetisation for the infrastructure growth, and PLI schemes," he said.

Moreover, most of the business leaders anticipate that the increasing startup activity, coupled with the government's stimulus packages and policies,

Commenting on the survey findings, Sanjay Kumar, Partner, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP, said, the economy has witnessed a steady recovery during 2021-22.

will push the ease of doing business in India, resulting in a quick economic revival, Kumar added.

As per the survey, about 59 per cent respondents believe that India provides a favourable atmosphere to run a business.

Encouraging digitalisation, simplifying tax regimes, and improving land and labour laws would help enhance the ease of doing business in India, it said. DTTILLP said the survey aimed to analyse the industry's expectations from the upcoming budget, with the standpoint of economic growth, the ease of doing business, and self-reliance.

Omicron leaves Germany on brink of recession as growth dips

PNS ■ FRANKFURT

The risk of recession is looming for Germany after Europe's biggest economy shrank at the end of 2021 and as it faces a bumpy start to this year, with the rapid spread of COVID-19's omicron variant deterring people from shopping and travel and supply bottlenecks holding back manufacturers.

Output in Germany fell by between 0.5% and 1% in the fourth quarter, the state statistics agency Destatis said Friday.

Forecasts are also shaky for the first three months of 2022, and two straight quarters of falling output would leave Germany in recession, according to one commonly used definition.

Germany helps set the pace for the entire eurozone, the 19 European Union countries that use the euro currency.

Many German companies have suppliers or factories in other European countries, so Germany's business activity can boost growth for its neighbours.

Goyal urges global VC funds to focus on startups in smaller cities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday called upon the global venture capital funds to focus more on startups from tier 2 and 3 cities of the country and explore new sectors for investing.

Chairing a roundtable with global venture capital (VC) funds, the minister said the government has already taken a number of steps to support startups and would do so in the future also.

Goyal invited the VC funds to explore new sectors for investing, promote and protect the intellectual property created by the young Indian entrepreneurs, provide expertise to scale up and explore greater capital infusion.

India is home to over 61,000 recognised startups spread across 55 industries, with 45 per cent of them emerging from tier 2 and 3 cities.

For the startup ecosystem, as many as 49 regulatory reforms



have been undertaken by the government to enhance ease of doing business, ease of raising capital and reduce compliance burden.

The roundtable was held through video conference as part of the Startup India Innovation Week.

Over 75 VC fund investors from countries like the US, Japan, Korea, and Singapore

participated in the deliberations.

"These funds have a total Assets Under Management (AUM) of more than USD 30 billion in the Indian region," the commerce and industry ministry said. A number of suggestions were made by them to further the investors' sentiment in the sector.

MONEY MATTERS

Ola Electric to open final payment window for scooter buyers on Jan 21



Ola Electric will open the final payment window on January 21 for all the customers who have already paid Rs 20,000 for its electric scooters, Ola Chairman and Group Executive Officer Bhavish Aggarwal said on Friday. The company, which had last month stated that it has dispatched its electric scooters to all who have purchased in the

previous round, will dispatch for the latest purchase during this month and February. Sharing a shot of its electric scooters at the company's factory while extending greetings for Lohri, Sankranti and Pongal, Aggarwal in a tweet said, "Sea of scooters awaits! Final payment window opens Jan 21, 6 pm in Ola App for all customers who've paid (Rs) 20k. We'll dispatch across Jan & Feb."

Ola Electric, which had in August last year made a foray into the green mobility space with the launch of its electric scooters, S1 and S1 Pro priced at Rs 99,999 and Rs 1,29,999, respectively, had postponed delivery timelines for its much-anticipated products citing the global semiconductor shortage issue. The company, after opening reservations at Rs 499 in July last year for its electric scooters, started the online purchase process in September and initially planned to start deliveries in October but was later pushed to November and then again to the second half of December last year.

Sebi to auction Ravi Kiran Realty's properties on Jan 28



Markets regulator Sebi on Friday said it will auction two properties of Ravi Kiran Realty India Ltd and its promoters on January 28 to recover investors' money. The properties, located in West Bengal, will be auctioned at a reserve price totalling Rs 2.16 crore, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a notice. Inviting bids for the sale of these properties, Sebi said the auction will be conducted through the online mode on January 28 from 10.30 am to 11.30 am. The regulator has asked the intending bidders to make their own independent enquiries regarding the measurement, nature, type, classifications, encumbrances, litigations, attachments and liabilities of the properties put on auction. In November 2021, Sebi had announced that it will auction four properties of Ravi Kiran Realty India and its promoters in December. Prior to this, the regulator had said in October 2020 that it will auction properties of the company in November of the same year. The company had raised funds by issuing redeemable preference shares (RPS) to 1,176 people without complying with the public issue norms. Under the norms, the firm is required to list its securities on the recognised bourse as the shares were issued to more than 50 persons. It was also required to file a prospectus, among other things, which it failed to do. In March 2016, Sebi had ordered the company to refund investors' money.

Rupee slumps 25 paise to close at 74.15 against US dollar



The rupee on Friday slumped 25 paise to close at 74.15 (provisional) against the US dollar, as muted domestic equities and elevated crude oil prices weighed on investor sentiments. Forex traders said the local unit fell following more hawkish comments by Federal Reserve officials. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local currency witnessed an intra-day high of 74.05 and a low of 74.21 against the US dollar. The local unit finally settled at 74.15, down 25 paise over its previous close of 73.90. US Fed policymakers signalled they will start to raise interest rates in March to combat inflation and this weighed on emerging market currencies. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent down at 94.78. Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 1.01 per cent to USD 85.32 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 12.27 points or 0.02 per cent lower at 61,223.03, while the broader NSE Nifty fell 2.05 points or 0.01 per cent to 18,255.75. Foreign institutional investors remained net sellers in the capital market on Thursday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 1,390.85 crore, as per exchange data.

Tata Sons, TICI to participate in TCS mega buyback offer, to sell shares

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Consultancy Services promoters - Tata Sons and Tata Investment Corporation Ltd (TICI) - intend to participate in the IT services major's Rs 18,000 crore buyback offer by tendering shares worth about Rs 12,993.2 crore.

On Wednesday, the TCS board approved an up to Rs 18,000 crore buyback offer entailing 4 crore shares at Rs 4,500 apiece.

According to a postal ballot notice by the company, Tata Sons and TICI intend to participate in the buyback offer.

Tata Sons, which holds about 266.91 crore shares, intends to tender 2.88 crore shares, while TICI (which holds 10,23,685 shares) intends to tender 11,055 shares, it added.

At Rs 4,500 apiece, the two entities stand to rake in about Rs 12,993.2 crore. TCS is seeking shareholder approval by way of special resolution for



buyback of equity shares of the company.

The remote e-voting period will commence from January 14, 2022 and end on February 12, 2022. The results of the postal ballot will be announced on February 15, 2022, it added.

The previous buyback of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), worth about Rs 16,000 crore, had opened on December 18, 2020, and closed on January 1, 2021, in which

group holding firm Tata Sons had tendered shares worth Rs 9,997.5 crore.

Over 5.33 crore equity shares were bought at that time (offer price was Rs 3,000 apiece) and out of the total, Tata Sons' 3,33,25,118 shares were accepted under the buyback offer. In 2018, India's largest IT services firm repurchased shares worth up to Rs 16,000 crore at Rs 2,100 apiece. A similar exercise was conducted in 2017 as well.

Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Friday, as positive macroeconomic data failed to lift spirits amid negative cues from global markets.

In a largely subdued session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 12.27 points or 0.02 per cent lower at 61,223.03. Similarly, the NSE Nifty slipped 2.05 points or 0.01 per cent to 18,255.75.

Asian Paints was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 2.66 per cent, followed by Axis Bank, HUL, Wipro, M&M, HDFC and Bharti Airtel.

On the other hand, TCS,

Infosys, L&T, Tech Mahindra and HDFC Bank were among the gainers.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Seoul ended in the negative territory.

Stock exchanges in Europe were also witnessing selling pressure in mid-session deals.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.86 per cent to USD 85.20 per barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital market, as they sold shares worth Rs 1,390.85 crore on Thursday, according to stock exchange data.

New life insurance policy: Insurers put in place

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People who have recovered from coronavirus infection will have to wait for up to three months before they can take a new life insurance policy, with insurers making the waiting period requirement applicable for coronavirus cases like other ailments.

As a standard practice, all life and health insurance companies require people to wait for a specific period with respect to certain ailments and diseases to gauge the risk before selling a policy.

This condition of waiting period for people who have recovered from coronavirus infection will be applicable only for life insurance policies.

Industry experts said the waiting period for individuals,



who have recovered from coronavirus infection, in order to take a new insurance policy has been implemented against the backdrop of high mortality rate related to coronavirus infection. Reinsurers have asked insurance companies to

bring coronavirus infection cases also under the standard waiting period norms as high mortality rates have impacted the reinsurance business. The waiting period is about one to three months, they added.

Reinsurance players provide

the cover for insurance policies issued by insurers.

Sumit Bohra, President of the Insurance Brokers Association of India (IBAI), said Indian insurers do not have the capacity to write all these risks. So, most of the insurance policies that are above Rs 10-20 lakh are reinsured and the reinsurers want "good risk to come into the system" due to which the waiting period has been made applicable for coronavirus infection cases also, he noted. "The term insurance plans are reinsured by the life insurance companies and given the last two years and the kind of experience that the industry has seen in terms of claims, this is a requirement that has been raised and put in place by the reinsurance companies.

India grants over US \$ 900mn aid to Sri Lanka

PNS ■ COLOMBO

India has announced a USD 900 million loan to Sri Lanka to build up its depleted foreign reserves and for food imports, amidst a shortage of almost all essential commodities in the island nation.

On Wednesday, the governor of the Central Bank Ajith Nivard Cabraal said that the island nation is negotiating a USD one billion loan from India to import goods from the country.

The Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay met Cabraal on Thursday and "expressed India's strong support to Sri Lanka in the wake of RBI extending over USD 900 million facilities over the last week".

"These comprise deferment



of Asian Clearing Union settlement of over USD 509 million and currency swap of USD 400 million," the tweet said. Cabraal on Wednesday said that billion-dollar loan negotiations with India had reached its advanced stage.

Commenting on India's gesture, analysts here said the Indian assistance could have contributed to Sri Lanka's doubling of reserves announced at the end of December. The central bank said that the reserve position

had doubled to USD 3 billion from being down to USD 1.5 billion by December or sufficient for just a month's imports.

Cabraal claimed that the forthcoming Indian loan would be for food imports.

JSW Infra raises US\$ 400 mn in international bond issue

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Group's port development arm on Friday announced a USD 400 million fundraise through a bond issue from international investors. The money raised in the issue by JSW Infrastructure will be used to repay the existing debt of the company and its subsidiaries.

The issue of the sustainability linked bond (SLB) is its debut issue in international bond markets, and the company could manage final pricing, which was lower than the guidance, as per an official statement. The seven-year notes were launched with initial guidance on the coupon at 5.25 per cent, but the company managed to get final pricing at 4.95 per cent, it said.

Investor roadshows for the issue were held across Asia, Europe and the US this week and the transaction was launched after the strong investor feedback, and the pricing could be tightened despite widening of yields in the high yielding bond markets.

The order book peaked at USD 1.35 billion, and the final order book was over USD 1.13 billion, the statement said, adding the transaction witnessed nearly half of the subscriptions from Asian investors, 30 per cent from Europe and the rest from the US. From an investor type perspective, 92 per cent were funds, private banks constituted 6 per cent and 2 per cent were banks and other entities.

‘Food is a religion in itself in Hyd’

Having been born and raised in Lucknow, moving to Hyderabad seems to be an all-new experience for Chef Balvinder Lubana. He, who brings with him about 13 years of rich experience in the hospitality industry, and having worked with a host of Indian and International luxury hotel chains including Oberoi, Taj, Marriott, and Hyatt Hotels, has recently been appointed as Executive Chef at Marriott Hotel in Hyderabad.

In this week’s Hyderabad, this passionate chef, who loves spending time with his family — whipping up new delicacies and traveling, shares with us his association with the food capital of the country — Hyderabad.

The chef, a big movie buff, says he landed in Hyderabad in the mid of November 2021.

Let us hear from the chef himself, the difference he finds between the two cities. He shares, “I would say Lucknow is the city of Nawabs and Hyderabad is the city of Nizams. Being an outsider, I love to explore the cuisines and all the specialties of this place. It’s time for me to explore more Nizami things. Lucknow and Hyderabad are two different places, but are similar with each other in terms of behaviour and the way the city looks and feels.”

The chef says he is presently enjoying every bit of his stay in this city right now. Right from the weather to its food, everything seems to have

impressed Balvinder so much that he is now finding Hyderabad a perfectly cool city to live in. “Coming from the north, people like me see only two kinds of weather — either its extreme winters or extreme summers. There is nothing in between. So far I am enjoying the weather here. It is neither too cold nor too hot,” says he, further explaining how he started to love the warmth the people of this city extend, “People here are very friendly, down to earth and humble. I have travelled a lot and been to different cities and regions of India. Of all, I found the people of Hyderabad to be very humble and there are no communication barriers. The acceptance of people here is very positive. They welcome you with open arms and this is the beauty of Hyderabad I am in love with.”

The chef was slightly skeptical before moving

here because of the language barrier, but he was shocked to see how people here can talk to you in multiple languages.

The one thing that comes to the chef’s mind when he thinks of Hyderabad is obviously food! “The food concept here, and the food is very balanced. The food here speaks in itself. When you eat food in Hyderabad, you aren’t just tasting the spices, you are eating the base of the preparation. For example Biryani — it is not just rice or meat, there is a soul to it. The food in Hyderabad, I would say is a religion in itself, when food comes to a religion, you have already your soul connected to it. That’s the beauty of the food I love in Hyderabad,” shares Balvinder, who also heard a lot of positive things about the hotels and restaurant joints in Hyderabad.

Having spoken all the nice things about Hyderabad, the one thing that irks this newbie is the traffic in the city. “I generally start my day early in the morning around 7-7.30. The traffic sense among individuals needs to be maintained. That is the only thing, which I get annoyed by here,” tells the star chef.

On a lighter note, he also shares his fondest memory in his two-month stay here and that is his cat giving birth to a kitten. “My wife and I had just relocated to Hyderabad along with our pets. We have two cats at home. My female Persian cat has given birth to a kitten. It’s a very exciting time for us. The little one is just 15 days old and she is keeping us occupied all the time.

All of us love to explore the city in our car,” Balvinder concludes this interview with a wide smile.



‘My journey as a singer has been very enjoyable and a lot of fun’

Shaan, the singer, who made his debut with superhit album *Naujawan*, speaks with *The Pioneer* about his latest track *Tanha Dil Tanha Safar*, importance of mental health awareness and his journey among other things

What is *Tanha Dil* about?

It is about a first person’s experience and journey through depression. How he has to fight it and how he has to overcome it. It’s in a beautiful song format.

When and why did you start working on this track?

The thought of creating a song on mental health has been on my mind for 2-3 years. With the original *Tanha Dil* completing 20 years, somewhere I felt like maybe we can connect these two dots and create something beautiful that will have a strong message as well as a strong melody.

How important do you think it is to spread Mental Health Awareness?

I think in this age and time the message of mental health awareness is extremely important. While all of us are putting a lot of time and effort to keep ourselves physically strong, we don’t tend to be doing the same to keep our mental wellbeing. Because of which the stress, anxiety levels, pollution around in our minds is definitely deteriorating our mental health. We have to be aware of it and take care of our mental health. To add to it, there is a stigma where people don’t talk about this and it’s very important for us to talk about it and be more patient with people who are going through mental health issue. To be able to understand them, accept them and help them get better.

Why has this version come after 20 years?

The fact that I made this song after 20 years is probably because you have to live your life that much to understand what these issues are. I have gone through a personal situation with mental health, which is in the last couple years now. Which is why it was just coincidental that I thought I should make a song on mental health. I have called it *Tanha Dil Tanha Safar* only because the phrase goes very well with my song.

Tell us about your journey as a singer:

My journey as a singer has been very enjoyable and a lot of fun. I have been able to explore different kinds of music as a singer, composer, lyricist. I probably have done the most music videos any Indian artist has and lot of collaborations with Bollywood, non-Bollywood, different genres.

It’s been a lot of fun and I believe that the party has just begun.

You have also hosted shows. How do you find hosting?

Yes, I started as a television host many years ago. Since 1996 I have been hosting a lot of shows almost till 2010. It used to be a lot of fun but very strenuous. It would take a toll on my throat too so I had to ease off from hosting. Sometimes I do hosting as its something I really enjoy doing.

How tough is to judge and decide a winner?

It’s very tough to judge, and to decide a winner because music is such a subject. It’s not like everyone runs and reaches the finish line earliest. It’s subjective like someone likes somebody’s singing. Someone else might like somebody else’s singing. To come to a unanimous decision is always difficult. As long as you do it with a lot of integrity and do it with all your heart, patience and Passion, you will more or less reach the right decision. And you have to trust your instincts.

You have acted and sung for movies in different languages. How many languages do you know? And how do you overcome the language barrier if any?

Honestly, I know Bengali, Hindi, English, Marathi and I can understand Gujarati to some extent. But beyond that no other language. Yes I have sung in 20 odd languages. It’s easy these days because you can prepare plans, there are supervisors and you don’t have to sing the entire thing in a go. You can do it line by line as long as you get the pronunciation right.

What is your favourite genre and why?

I don’t have a favourite genre of music but I think song and lyrics that merge beautifully and there is something original and fresh about the song, I love it. It could be a dance track, love song, ghazal, it doesn’t matter but it’s got to make a good marriage of music, lyric and mood.

Any song which is very close to your heart?

That’s a difficult question to answer. Too many songs to mention any one that’s close to my heart.

What are your upcoming projects?

Among upcoming projects, there will be more songs coming up in my Shaan music label. I’m in talks to be part of more television shows. Looking to explore new avenues like acting and composing more for film projects. It’s good and I’m happy to be excited about it.

Learn the importance of emergency medicine

Time is of essence in the management of a stroke. A stroke can be the result of a blockage in one of the blood vessels in the brain or the sudden rupture of a blood vessel. The former can result in impaired blood supply to the brain, while the latter can cause bleeding in the brain tissues. In both cases, the flow of oxygen to the brain is hampered, which can lead to the death of the brain cells within minutes.

Dr B.Srinivasan, Consultant — Emergency Medicine, Accident and Emergency Care, Manipal Hospitals, shares with *The Pioneer* emergency steps to take in the event of a stroke.

Symptoms that help in recognising stroke:

The warning signs of onset of a stroke can be seen on the victim’s face, arms, and in the speech. Remember, time is of essence — do not waste even a second:

- **F-Face:** If an individual experiences numbness or droop on one side of the face, it is the first warning sign of a stroke
- **A-Arms:** Another warning symptom is when a person experiences numbness or weakness in both arms
- **S-Speech:** Following either of the earlier two warning signals, the person could begin experiencing speech impediment
- **T-Time:** Do not waste time. Call

for emergency services immediately. Getting the person to a hospital and under the care of medical experts could make all the difference between life and death.

- Remember this acronym — **FAST** — when dealing with stroke victims.
- Among other symptoms experienced by stroke victims are blurred vision, dim vision, loss of vision, especially in one eye, headache, loss of balance, loss of consciousness, and loss of bowel control.

What to do during a heart attack

If the person has persistent chest pain or discomfort in breathing, experiences palpitations, or sweating, he

might be in the throes of a heart attack (cardiovascular arrest). In such a case:

- Convince the victim to stop all activity and help him/her to rest comfortably. If he/she has a known cause of heart disease and if the doctor has prescribed medication like aspirin or sorbitrate, you can give it to the person
- Shift the patient to a hospital as soon as possible
- In case the patient stops breathing or his/her heart stops beating, administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Emergency steps to take in the event of a stroke

- A stroke patient will face a sudden onset of weakness in one or more parts of the body, along with slurred

speech, facial asymmetry, and/or facial droop. In such an emergency, proper medical care has to be provided within 4 hours of the onset of symptoms. So, make sure to:

- Shift the patient to a hospital as soon as possible
 - Get a CT scan done of the brain.
- If there is a clot in the brain, the person would need urgent medical attention to help dissolve the clot.

The golden hour

The Golden Hour is a crucial period for a victim of stroke or accident.

Every moment counts in such a situation. Speedy action should be taken to reach the patient into the hands of medical experts. Following are the rules to be followed in such a situation:

- Assess the victim – 1 minute
- Resuscitate and stabilise the victim – 5 minutes
- Immobilise and transport the patient to a nearby hospital – 4 minutes
- Treatment of the victim – 50 minutes

According to the guidance of the American Stroke Association (ASA), the symptoms of stroke can lead to disability if clot-busting drugs are not administered within 4.5 hours. However, sometimes mechanical clot removals are performed up to 24 hours after the stroke symptoms are first seen.



Madhulika Liddle tells *The Pioneer* that Delhi, in her new novel, *The Garden of Heaven*, is a beautiful and diverse garden with its share of thorns, snakes in the grass, and the occasional poisonous plant

The first Indian to win the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's Short Story Competition in 2003, Madhulika Liddle is known for her deeply researched and engaging works. Afterall, the 17th century Mughal detective Muzaffar Jang is, indeed, her brainchild. Being born in Delhi, Liddle has embarked on a new journey to unravel the secrets from the pages of history of the city of love. Her freshly published work by the Speaking Tiger Books, *The Garden of Heaven*, is the first one in the saga of The Delhi Quartet. Beginning shortly before the invasion of Mohammad Ghuri, and extending till just after Partition; the saga will span 800 years of Delhi's history. And you guessed it, the first 200 years of that stretch are being covered in *The Garden of Heaven*. In a rather interesting conversation, Liddle talks about her works, and shares her thoughts on history, the city and the city's history. Read on for excerpts from an exclusive interview:

What inspired you to begin this saga?

The Garden of Heaven is a historical novel, the first in a four-book series called *The Delhi Quartet*. The entire saga will span 800 years of Delhi's history, as seen through the lives of a group of interconnected families. The first novel covers the period from 1188 CE, just before Mohammad Ghuri defeated Prithviraj Chauhan and established the Delhi Sultanate; to 1398 CE, when Taimur sacked Delhi. A somewhat similar, but much more ambitious book, Edward Rutherfurd's *Sarum*, inspired me to write this series. *Sarum* is about ordinary people living their lives against the backdrop of several thousand years of history (from the Ice Age to 1984) in and around England's Salisbury, which was earlier known as *Sarum*.

What is the significance of the title — *The Garden of Heaven*?

The Garden of Heaven is the name the stone carver, Madhav, gives to the exquisite stone frieze he carves in his later years, a frieze depicting a garden. I also meant the 'garden of heaven' to be a metaphor for Delhi itself, a beautiful and diverse garden, but (like any real garden), with its share of thorns, of snakes in the grass, and the occasional poisonous plant... A lot of people's lives are intertwined, their stories running in parallel lines in the book. Thus, making it deeply layered.

What is the objective behind the same?

I wanted to write a historical novel which focussed not on the important people, the larger-than-life historical figures of that era, but the everyday people: I wanted to explore how they might have felt, even as history was being made during their own lifetimes. I also wanted to show how people come together, how one family divides and separates, or how two disparate families come together: these are themes that interest me, and placing them in a historical setting helped me give it a new dimension: to explore how people cope with hardship, with circumstances outside their control.

Important people like Razia Sultan, Amir Khusro, Ibrahim Lodhi, Mohammad Ghori, Prithviraj Chauhan, and so on, exist and their personal endeavours are conveyed beautifully. How close to reality is the story? Can this qualify for a historical fiction?

Mostly, the episodes and incidents regarding the real personalities in this book are based on fact (or, as in the case of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, on folklore). Razia's tussles to gain and then retain her throne; Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq's attempts to suppress Nizamuddin; Taimur's invasion, and



so on: these are all factual. It is mostly only in their interactions with the fictitious characters (Madhav, Jayshree, Girdhar, et al) that a fictitious episode in the lives of these historical characters is introduced. So yes, I would call *The Garden of Heaven* historical fiction.

It is said that Dilli was destroyed and built seven times. Do you wish to encompass this journey in your books?

There is some debate on whether Delhi was destroyed and built seven times, or more — some historians believe there could be up to ten cities of Delhi, perhaps even up to fifteen. Enumerating all of these (or even just seven) in the course of four novels might lead to a too bulky set of books, so I am restricting myself to just telling the story in its broad outlines. At times, the destruction of the city (or rather, the falling away of one area and the coming to power of another) does become highlighted; at other times, the shift in power is rather less dramatic, and one city fades gently away, too gently for anything other than an oblique reference.

This is the first of the four of Delhi Quartet. What is your vision for the forthcoming books?

As in *The Garden of Heaven*, the other three books will also follow a similar pattern: ordinary people living in Delhi, their lives at times touched by the history being made in Delhi. Some important real-life historical personalities will appear now and then, but otherwise, the focus will be largely on the fictitious characters. Each book will cover, as did *The Garden of Heaven*, approximately 150-200 years of history.

Have you studied history since your novels are so well-researched. Would you be a historian, if not a writer?

I've always been interested in history, especially since my sister, Swapna Liddle, is a historian — her studying history inspired me too, to regard history with a lot more affection than most Indians seem to have for the subject. If I hadn't been a writer, I would probably have been one of the many professions I've followed in my career: hospitality manager, advertising executive, editor, instructional designer... for me, the interest in history came a little late in life, after I'd decided (as I thought) what career I was going to adopt. By then, it was too late to start studying

history in earnest. So my interest in history remains (and will remain) a love, not a profession.

Historicity and meaning. What, in your opinion, is the antinomy between history and truth?

I think history and truth are not quite synonymous, simply because — like science — history too is a discipline which draws conclusions from available evidence, coming up with logical theories to interpret that evidence. For example, old chronicles, artefacts, archaeological evidence, and so on, can help historians build up a picture of what might have happened in the past. While artefacts and archaeological evidence may be more irrefutable proof, chronicles can be biased, thus, distorting the truth. And, as in the case of science, until further evidences come to light, one history, one accepted truth, may prevail. Newly-discovered evidence may however change that truth. History, therefore, to me is perceived truth; believed truth. Some aspects of it might be factual, some may be reliably so, and others may be so till further evidence proves either way.

What do you think of the Education Ministry's move of wiping out the Mughal dynasty from the history syllabus of prominent universities? Are we depriving our future generation of historical truth?

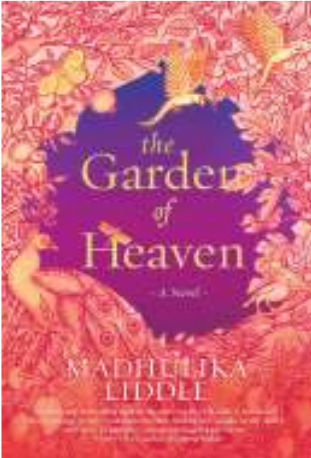
I think that's a very short-sighted, bigoted move. Wiping out mentions of the Mughal dynasty (or any other, for that matter) or trying, in other ways, to distort historical fact to suit one's own agenda serves nothing other than to propagate a falsehood. What will this lead to? A generation (many generations?) of Indians who are learning something nobody else in the world knows as history? A falsehood, too, which is completely unsupported by evidence of any sort? My take is that history cannot be changed; we have what we have. The past is done, and nothing we do now can change it. So what is wrong with living with that past? Good or bad, all of India's history is our history. To try and sanitise it is juvenile. I truly believe we need more female authors to write stories of women, since they were either wiped out from the pages of history or their truths misconstrued by male voices.

Care to weigh in?

I agree. Women have, for too long, been largely erased from the 'commonly known histories' — that's how I would describe it, since there are historians I know who have done research into women in history, and have come up with fascinating instances of women going far beyond what anybody can imagine in a patriarchal society like ours. The great queens of Odisha, for instance, or the padishah begums during the time of the Mughals: women with far greater agency than is now remembered by the common populace.

How do you like to portray your female characters? For Shagufta seems to be one bold woman in the face of atrocity.

I like to portray my female characters as a blend: not all strong-willed, not all flawless; human. Some are more feisty than others, some are far more conforming and meek than most, but I like to have at least one female character who stands up for herself, and is emotionally mature and intelligent.



Of small towns, big dreams and greater achievements

Growing up in the sleepy towns of Bhilai and Bokaro, Arundhati Bhattacharya

never imagined that one day she would go on to chair India's largest bank. It was by sheer chance that she came to know of the bank probationary officers' entrance examination through a friend. She applied, was selected and went on to chart out a glorious banking career spanning four decades.

Indomitable — *A Working Woman's Notes on Life, Work and Leadership* (Harper Business) is the story of Bhattacharya's life as a banker and the challenges she faced in a male-dominated bastion. She takes the reader through her growing up years and early education in the 1960s, getting to Kolkata for her college education and then into the State Bank of India (SBI), where she started her career.

The life of a woman banker with a family in a frequently transferable job isn't easy. In Bhattacharya's life, too, there were breaking points when she almost thought of quitting her career to balance her personal aspirations with her family's needs. But she didn't give up. Instead, she faced her challenges with humour and positivity and took up every assignment as a new chapter in learning and adapting.

In her role as the chairman of SBI, she steered the bank through some of its worst phases. She inspired confidence in the banking sector when the NPA crisis led to a significant public trust deficit. Under her leadership, SBI metamorphosed into a customer-centric and digitally advanced bank while playing a pivotal role in national development. Some of her human resources initiatives included industry-first practices that were appreciated and later adopted by other banks.

Candid, lucid and humble, *Indomitable* is the story that will galvanise you to embrace challenges, break barriers, push forward and achieve greater heights.

"From a very young age I listened to many older people talking about migrating to the Western world as it was defined as 'the land of your dreams'. First it was the UK then the US and Canada and thereafter Australia and Singapore. I often wondered why India couldn't become the land of one's dreams. But I was told in India things don't work unless you know people. That capital was scarce and that the multiple barriers to living out your dreams didn't allow for anything other than a mundane existence to people coming from small towns with no backers or backgrounds.

"Did that mean people like me couldn't dream? This book is written to prove that India can be the land of our dreams and it is our ability to reach out with the right attitude and the right ideas that will get us there. Today's generation is proving me right and I am so proud of them. So to all those who dared to dream — cheers! Hang in there and you will make it," Bhattacharya asserts.

She not only made it but has also gone beyond and is today the chairperson and CEO of Salesforce India, a cloud-based SaaS company, listed in the US and headquartered in San Francisco.

The book "is the story of small towns, big dreams and greater achievements. Arundhati's journey, growing up in the sleepy towns of Bhilai and Bokaro, getting into a challenging banking job and leaving her mark as an exceptional leader is an inspiring tale that will be etched in a reader's mind for years. We are excited and privileged to be publishing this book," says HarperCollins India Executive Editor Sachin Sharma.

FUN

ARCHIE



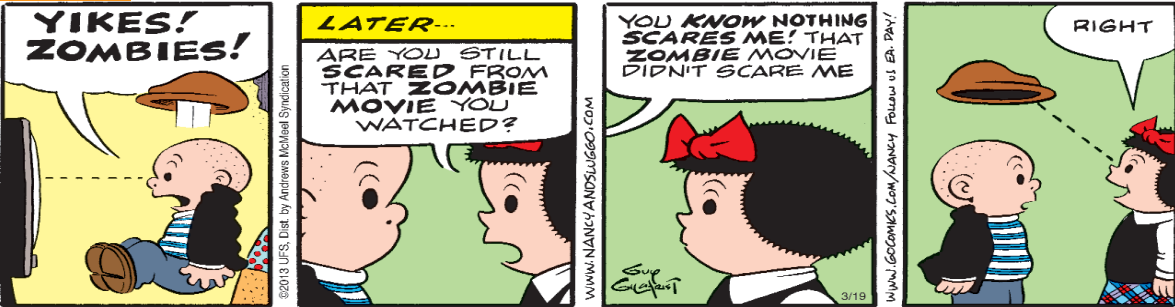
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



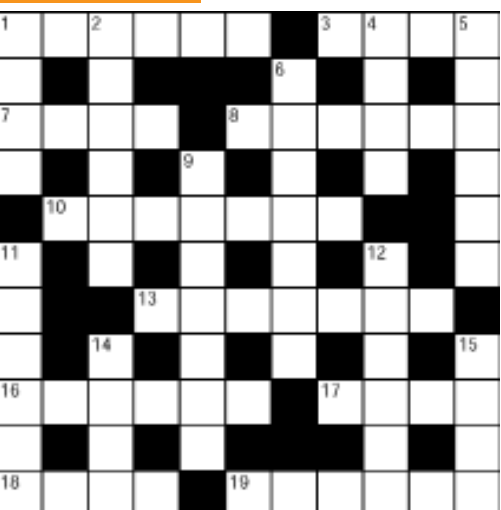
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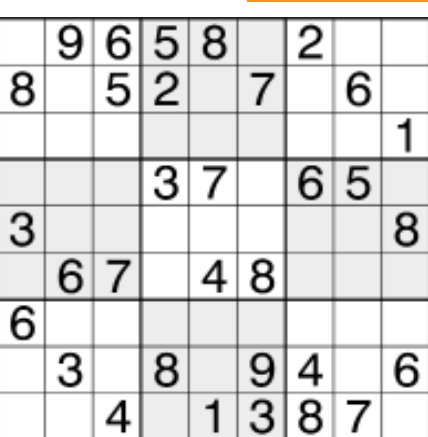
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- 1 An eight-legged creature
- 3 Small mark
- 7 Opposite of succeed
- 8 Well-mannered
- 10 Spectacles
- 13 Largest
- 16 A stringed instrument
- 17 Floppy
- 18 Uncommon
- 19 An imaginary fire-breathing monster

DOWN

- 1 Not in danger
- 2 A frozen drip
- 4 Twosome

5 One tenth of two hundred

6 From another country

9 A drug used for treating headaches

11 A precious metal

12 Enquiring

14 Bitter-tasting

15 Twirl





‘Allu Arjun is my inspiration’

Sree Harsha Konuganti's directorial *Rowdy Boys* starring Ashish Reddy and Anupama Parameswaran opened in theatres on Friday. Produced by Dilraju and Shirish under the banner of Sri Venkateshwara Creations, the film is a love story of Akshay and Kavya in the backdrop of gang wars between students of Engineering and Medical college students. How the love story unfolds and what unexpected circumstances lead to huge decisions form the crux of the story.

Ashish who is getting introduced as a hero with *Rowdy Boys* is fond of dancing since his childhood. He was the one who used to be at the forefront when it comes to performing at all family events.

He shares, “I love dancing and Allu Arjun is my inspiration. I want to learn and dance like him. I did some courses in various dance formats. I did film courses in New York. I worked as an assistant director for *Kerinta*.” When asked what made him choose *Rowdy Boys* to make his acting debut, Ashish tells, “The story of the *Rowdy Boys* is engineering vs. medical students. It is so relatable to my age group. I easily got connected to the story, hence I took this up.”

However, the actor found it very difficult to perform romantic scenes in the film.

Commenting about his future projects, he shares, “I will choose my next movies based on the response I receive for *Rowdy Boys*. I was able to get into this character very easily.”

Ashish is also happy that Devi Sri Prasad has rendered tunes to this film.

Ravi Teja-starrer *Ravanaasura* being directed by Sudhir Verma under Abhishek Nama Pictures took off on Friday on the auspicious occasion of Sankranthi. After the *puja*, director K. Raghavendra Rao provided the script, while megastar Chiranjeevi gave the clap for the *muhurat* shot. Cinematography Minister Talsani Srinivas Yadav switched on the camera. Leading directors KS Ravindra (Bobby) and Gopichand Malineni were also present at the event. A first look poster was also launched in which Ravi Teja is seen wearing a white shirt, lighting a cigarette. Blood and fire can be seen on his shirt. Interestingly, the film has many female leads including Anu Emanuel, Megha Akash, Faria Abdullah, Daksha Nagarkar, Poojitha Ponnada. While Sushant is playing the antagonist; Rao Ramesh, Murali Sharma, Sampath Raj, Nitin Mehta, Satya, Jayaprakash, will be seen essaying some key roles.

Ravi Teja's Ravanaasura takes off



The first-look poster of director Muthaiah's much-awaited action entertainer *Viruman*, featuring Karthi in the lead, was released on the auspicious occasion of Pongal on Friday. The film has triggered huge interest for a number of reasons. Aditi Shankar, the daughter of ace director Shankar, makes her debut as an actress in the film industry with this film in which she plays the female lead.

Secondly, director Muthaiah's previous film with Karthi, *Komban*, was a roaring hit and that has led to fans having huge expectations from *Viruman* as well.

The first look poster of *Viruman* shows Karthi deep in thought, with a spear on his lap.

Recently, actor Karthi had announced that *Viruman* had been completed because of great planning and execution by both director Muthaiah and cinematographer Selvakumar. The film has been extensively shot in and around Theni.

First look of Karthi's Viruman released





Superstar Krishna, MB all praise for Ashok Galla's Hero

Superstar Krishna's grandson, Mahesh Babu's nephew, and Guntur MP Jayadev Galla's son Ashok Galla's debut flick *Hero* helmed by Sriram Aditya and produced by Padmavathi Galla under Amar Raja Media and Entertainment has opened in theatres on Saturday. Nidhhi Agerwal played Ashok Galla's love interest in the movie. Meanwhile, Krishna and Mahesh Babu, who watched the movie, are all impressed by Ashok's performance.

Krishna said, “I've watched the movie and didn't feel boredom anywhere. There is a novelty in the subject. It's a first-of-its-kind story narrated engagingly. I hope this film will become a superhit. I request my fans and Ashok Galla fans to watch the movie and encourage him.” Mahesh Babu said, “I loved *Hero* thoroughly. Congratulations to the entire team, especially to Ashok, who delivered a brilliant performance. All the hard work Ashok has put in for the past 5 to 6 years is paying off and I am extremely proud of him. Sankranthi is a positive sentiment for Nanna and me. Most of the films of Nanna released for Sankranthi were blockbusters. My films like *Okkadu*, *Seethamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu*, and *Sarileru Neekevvaru*, which were released for the festival were massive hits. Ashok is another hero getting introduced from my family and I wish my fans and nanna fans support Ashok.”

Allu Arjun clocks 15 million followers on Instagram

Telugu film star Allu Arjun on Friday expressed gratitude to his fans and well-wishers for their unending love and support as he crossed the 15 million followers mark on Instagram.

The 39-year-old actor, who is currently basking in the glory of his latest release *Pushpa: The Rise*, shared a picture of himself on the photo-sharing app and celebrated the milestone.

“15 M. Thank you soo much for all the love you all shower. Humbled. Gratitude Forever. And Happy Sankranthi,” Arjun captioned the post.

Arjun made his debut in 2003 with *Gangotri* and rose to prominence in the next year with Sukumar's *Arya*.

In his two-decade-long career, he has featured in mainstream cinema films such as *Bunny*, *Desamuduru*, *Parugu* and *Ala Vaikuntapuramlo*.

Arjun is set to begin shooting from March for the second part of *Pushpa*, titled *Pushpa: The Rule*. He is also speculated to team up with filmmakers A R Murugodoss and Prashant Neel for their upcoming projects.



Arjuna Phalguna coming on Aha this R-Day

Telugu streaming platform Aha will premiere Sree Vishnu and Amritha Aiyer's action thriller *Arjuna Phalguna* on January 26 on Republic Day. The film, written and directed by Teja Marni, is produced by Niranjana Reddy and Anvesh Reddy has bankrolled the film under Matinee Entertainment. The film also stars Nares, Sivaji Raja, Subba Raju, Devi Prasad, Rangasthala Mahesh, Raj Kumar Chowdary of *Raja Vaaru Rani Gaaru* fame, and Chaitanya in key roles.

Arjuna Phalguna is billed as an engaging mix of action, romance, friendship, with a gripping screenplay that takes several riveting twists and turns. The story revolves around Arjun and a group of four inseparable friends in Andhra Pradesh. All attempts of the aimless youngsters to find a livelihood go in vain.

To bail themselves out of a financial crisis, Arjun and his friends turn drug dealers and carry cocaine across the border. However, a cop Subbaraju is committed to catching hold of them. Is there hope in sight for Arjun and the gang?

The film has music by Priyadarshan Balasubramanian, where the pulsating score and the foot-tapping songs contribute to the film's rustic ambience.

Sree Vishnu yet again clinches a unique script that is based on a series of true incidents. Amritha Aiyer's charming presence in addition to the on-screen camaraderie of the five friends keeps the viewer invested in the story throughout.

Director Teja Marni proves that he has a knack to pull off unusual stories yet again after his gripping political drama *Johaar* that had also been released on Aha.



Sindhu, Sen enter semifinals of India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu and world champion Lakshya Sen registered contrasting wins to advance to the women's and men's singles semifinals, respectively, at the Yonex-Sunrise India Open badminton tournament here on Friday. Top seed Sindhu, a former world champion, got the better of compatriot Ashmita Chaliha 21-7 21-18 in 36 minutes, while Sen rallied his way to a hard-fought 14-21 21-9 21-14 victory over H S Prannoy in another all-Indian quarterfinal.

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad set up a women's singles last-four clash with Thailand's sixth seed Supanida Katethong, who entered the semifinals after the third seeded Yeo Jia Min of Singapore pulled out of the tournament due to "high fever".

Sen, seeded third, will square off against Malaysia's Ng Tze Yong in the semifinals.

In the other women's semifinal, Aakarshi Kashyap will face second seeded Thai Busanan Ongbammrunghan after the Indian notched up a 21-12 21-15 win over compatriot Malvika Bansod on Friday.

Busanan trounced USA's Lauren Lam 21-12 21-8 in another last-eight clash.

Second seeded men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also entered the semifinals with a 21-18 21-18 win ver

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad set up a women's singles last-four clash with Thailand's sixth seed Supanida Katethong, who entered the semifinals after the third seeded Yeo Jia Min of Singapore pulled out of the tournament due to "high fever." Sen, seeded third, will square off against Malaysia's Ng Tze Yong in the semifinals.



Singapore's Hee Yong Kai TerryAnd Loh Kean Hean.

Haritha Manazhiyil Harinarayan and Ashna Roy also made it to the last four in women's doubles after beat-

ing Rudrani Jaiswal and Jamaludeen Anees Kowsar 21-16 21-16 in the quarterfinals.

The last time Sindhu won against Chaliha, at the 83rd Yonex-

Sunrise Senior National Championship in 2019, the youngster from Assam had produced a spirited performance.

On Friday, Chaliha took time to

get into the groove and put up a good fight in the second game but couldn't stop Sindhu from walking away with the match.

Sindhu came out all guns blazing

in the opening game, jumping to a 11-5 lead at the interval and then reeled off the last 10 points to earn the bragging rights.

Chaliha gave a better account of herself in the second game as she tied 9-9 before Sindhu managed a slender one-point advantage at the break. Sindhu zoomed to 15-11 but Chaliha again clawed her way back to 15-15.

Thereafter, Sindhu switched gears and grabbed four match points. Chaliha saved two match points before Sindhu closed out the tie.

In men's singles, it was the first international meeting but third overall between Sen and Prannoy as the duo engaged in a battle of supremacy. On a comeback trail, Prannoy, who had reached the quarterfinals at the last world championships, dominated the proceedings initially to secure a 6-2 lead. He got his acts together in time to turn the tables at 12-10 and then zoomed from 15-14 to pocket the opening game.

"The pace was high in the first game as both of us tried to up the pace but I made errors at 13-13 and it cost me the game," Sen said.

Sen, however, roared back into the contest in the second game as he ran up a huge 12-5 lead and didn't look back from that point, as Prannoy crumbled. In the decider, Prannoy took the early initiative, opening up a 6-1 advantage but couldn't sustain it as Sen moved to 11-9 at the interval and then pocketed nine of the next 11 points to seal the match in his favour.

India withdraws from Asian Under-22 boxing championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Boxing Federation of India has decided to pull out of the Asian Under-22 Championships for men and women in Tashkent, Uzbekistan due to the global surge in COVID-19 cases but is willing to participate if the tournament is rescheduled to a time when the pandemic subsides.

A reliable source in the federation has confirmed to PTI that a letter has been sent to the Asian Boxing Confederation as well as the tournament's organising committee confirming India's withdrawal.

The event was scheduled to be held from January 20 to 30. The Asian event was originally slated to be held from December 7 to 17 last year but was postponed because of the pandemic.

Indian boxing has been hit by a COVID crisis of its own. The men's senior



national camp in Patiala has reported 26 cases, including 20 boxers.

Boxers born in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 are eligible to compete in the event that is being held for the first time in the continent.

The competition was to be held in 12 women's and 13 men's weight categories.

The Indian men's squad featured the likes of Asian youth bronze-medallist Mohammad Etash Khan (63.5kg) and reigning national champion Rohit Mor (60kg) among others.

The women's squad featured the likes of world youth champion Arundhati Chaudhary (71kg) and international medallist Jaismine (63kg). Chaudhary had recently made the headlines by taking the Boxing Federation of India to court for not holding trials in her weight category for the world championships in Turkey.

HI announces core probable group for women's hockey team



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Friday announced a new-look core probable group for the senior women's team which will play in many major international tournaments this year. The group was selected following selection trials held in Sports Authority of India, Bengaluru for a group of 60 who were called-in on the basis of their performances in various nation-

al level events. "It is time for us to start afresh and plan for the future. We have grown over the past year with our experiences in Tokyo and we must continue to develop, and grow in the coming years, ahead of Paris 2024," India women's team chief coach Janneke Schopman said in a release issued by Hockey India. While an 18-member Indian team, led by Savita, will be travelling to Muscat for the upcoming women's hockey Asia Cup, the remaining players from the core group will stay on at the camp and continue to train for the FIH Hockey Pro League matches to be held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha next month. "The upcoming camp is important for us to recognise the players who are ready to showcase their skills on the biggest stages, and also to work on the areas where we need to improve upon," Schopman said. List of players: Savita, Rajani Etimarpur, Bichu Devi Khariyam, Deep Grace Ekka, Gurjit Kaur, Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Suman Devi Thoudam, Akshata Abaso Dhekale, Mahima Chaudhary, Rashmita Minz, Nisha, Salima Tete, Sushila Channu Pukhrambam, Jyoti, Navjot Kaur, Monika, Namita Toppo.



First target is to make quarters, which is realistic one: Dennerby

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian women's football team head coach Thomas Dennerby said his side is well prepared and its first realistic target is to reach the quarterfinals of the upcoming AFC Asian Women's Cup.

Hosts India will open their campaign against Iran on January 20. "I said from the beginning when we started, we said that yes, to come to the quarter-final is our first target, first aim," Dennerby said during a virtual media interaction in the run-up to the continental tournament on Friday.

"And if we come all the way to the quarterfinal, everything can happen because when we are in quarterfinal and it's a knockout stage, everybody, all teams will play under pressure. But definitely (reaching) quarterfinals is our target and we also think it's a realistic target."

The Indian team has been drawn against Iran (January 20), Chinese Taipei (January 23) and China (January 26) in Group A of the competition that consists of 12 teams.

Talking about the opposition, Dennerby said: "It is (like) three different teams with three different playing styles. I guess the first game against Iran will be a tough one for us because what we have seen so far (they are) defending very well. They are organized and they will play low, defending."

"They also have one really good striker that's always on the run. So, even if we dominate the game, as a defender you always have to be on your toes."

"They are also good on set pieces, they scored a lot of goals on free-kicks and corners, so we also need to be very sharp on that (front). Don't give them any corners or easy free-kicks," he added.

According to Dennerby, India's second game against Chinese Taipei will be an "equal game" but the final match against China will be a tough one.

"Finally, China, I will say from my point of view; classical Asian style with a lot of short passes with good combinations. It is going to be a tough one, of course, but still China is not at the level they were a couple of years ago and they won this tournament. But still a very good team and probably the toughest game for us," he noted.

The 62-year-old Swede said that the team is well prepared for the marquee tournament.

"We have (had) such a long preparation time now and we have been together for more than five months. In total there are over 200 different sessions including football, strength, running sessions and game against proper teams and different styles and all that. So, yeah, we finally feel that we are really well prepared now."

For Dennerby, all the 23 players are important as he refused to single out a player when asked who would be his trump card.

"For us, all the 23 players are very important and I hope that all players are prepared and ready to play," Dennerby said.

Visa revoked again, Djokovic faces deportation

AP ■ MELBOURNE



Novak Djokovic faces deportation again after the Australian government revoked his visa for a second time, the latest twist in the ongoing saga over whether the No 1-ranked tennis player will be allowed to compete in the Australian Open despite being unvaccinated for COVID-19.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said Friday he used his ministerial discretion to cancel the 34-year-old Serb's visa on public interest grounds — just three days before play begins at the Australian Open, where Djokovic has won a record nine of his 20 Grand Slam titles.

Djokovic's lawyers were expected to appeal at the Federal Circuit and Family Court, which they already successfully did last week on procedural

grounds after his visa was first canceled when he landed at a Melbourne airport.

A hearing was scheduled for Friday night. Deportation from Australia can lead to a three-year ban on returning to the country, although that may be waived, depending on the circumstances.

Hawke said he cancelled the visa on "health and good order grounds, on the basis that it was in the public interest to do so."

His statement added that Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government "is firmly committed to protecting Australia's borders, particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Morrison himself welcomed Djokovic's pending deportation. The whole episode has touched a nerve in Australia, and particularly in Victoria state, where locals went through hundreds of days of lockdowns during the worst of the pandemic and there is a vaccination rate among adults of more than 90%.

Australia is currently facing a massive surge in virus cases driven by the highly transmissible omicron variant. On Friday, the nation reported 130,000 new cases, including nearly 35,000 in Victoria state.

Although many infected people aren't getting as sick as they did in previous outbreaks, the surge is still putting severe strain on the health system, with more than 4,400 people hospitalized. It's also causing disruptions to workplaces and supply chains.

"This pandemic has been incredibly difficult for every Australian but we have stuck together and saved lives and livelihoods. ... Australians have made many sacrifices during

this pandemic, and they rightly expect the result of those sacrifices to be protected," Morrison said in a statement.

"This is what the Minister is doing in taking this action today."

Everyone at the Australian Open — including players, their support teams and spectators — is required to be vaccinated for the illness caused by the coronavirus. Djokovic is not inoculated and had sought a medical exemption on the grounds that he had COVID-19 in December.

That exemption was approved by the Victoria state government and Tennis Australia, apparently allowing him to obtain a visa to travel. But the Australian Border Force rejected the exemption and canceled his visa when he landed in Melbourne on January 5.

Djokovic spent four nights in an immigration detention hotel before a judge on Monday overturned that decision. That ruling allowed Djokovic to move freely around Australia and he has been practicing at Melbourne Park daily to prepare to play in a tournament he has won each of the past three years.

He had a practice session originally scheduled for mid-afternoon Friday at Rod Laver Arena, the tournament's main stadium, but pushed that to the morning and was finished several hours before Hawke's decision was announced in the early evening.

An Australian Open spokeswoman said tournament organizers did not have any immediate comment on the latest development in Djokovic's situation, which has overshadowed all other story lines heading into the year's first Grand Slam event.

Mauritius' Pandoo appointed as first HPD for weightlifting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry has approved the appointment of Mauritian Avenash Pandoo as the first High Performance Director (HPD) for weightlifting until the 2024 Paris Olympics. His appointment was recommended by the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Foreign Coach Selection Committee in conjunction with officials of the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF). According to a statement issued by the SAI, his annual salary will be USD 54,000 (approx Rs 40.50 lakh).

The HPD has been appointed with specific focus on development of junior talent, with an eye on 2028 Olympics and to create strong coaching structure with a capabilities

Imran Khan to visit China for Beijing Winter Olympics



Pakistan welcomes the Global Development Initiative put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping as a timely and good intention to facilitate implementation of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

Prime Minister Imran Khan will be travelling to Beijing next month to attend the opening ceremony of Winter Olympics, bolster the all-weather bilateral ties and seek more investments in various projects under the ambitious CPEC, the Foreign Office said here on Thursday.

The Beijing Winter Olympics will be held from February 4 to 20, followed by the Paralympics Winter Games from March 4-13, amid a diplomatic boycott by several Western countries, including the US and the UK over concerns of China's alleged human rights abuses.

"The premier will be embarking on a three-day visit to Beijing from February 3 on the invitation

of the Chinese leadership," Foreign Office Spokesperson Asim Iftikhar said during his weekly news briefing.

Khan will also have an interaction with the Chinese leadership to further strengthen Pakistan-China all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and to exchange views on regional and international issues, Iftikhar said.

Khan's visit is considered significant because several western and European countries have announced a diplomatic boycott of the event.

Tensions have risen between China and several Western countries over a number of issues.

The US has accused China of genocide in its repression of the predominantly Muslim Uyghur minority in the western region of Xinjiang - an allegation China has rejected.

While projects pertaining to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will be key to the talks between the two sides, Iftikhar opined that Khan's visit would help promote international cooperation required to overcome the challenges faced due to the ongoing pandemic and open up avenues of collaboration with other developing countries.

The USD 60 billion CPEC connecting China's resource-rich

Xinjiang province with Pakistan's strategic Gwadar port in Balochistan is regarded as the flagship project of the multi-billion Belt and Road initiative, the pet scheme of Chinese President Xi Jinping aimed at furthering China's influence globally with Chinese funded infrastructure projects.

Iftikhar said that Pakistan welcomes the Global Development Initiative put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping as a timely and good intention to facilitate implementation of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

"Pakistan and China are global partners, and we look forward to further strengthening this partnership under China's Global Development Initiative," he added.