

ANALYSIS 7
MAHATMA GANDHI AN ECOLOGICAL
ECONOMIST?

MONEY 8
INDUSTRY LEADERS CONFIDENT ABOUT INDIA'S...

VIJAYAWADA DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN HYDERABAD
*LATE CITY VOL. 4 ISSUE 87 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



SUNDAR PICHAI HINTS AT BRINGING BACK GOOGLE EMPLOYEES

London: Sundar Pichai has hinted that Google to offices 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.

AP's revenue up by 9 pc, deficit rises to 803.72 pc

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's own tax revenue was Rs 16,372.97 crore higher in the first eight months of the 2021-22 financial year, as compared to the corresponding period in 2020-21, but the State's revenue deficit zoomed to a worrisome 803.72 per cent by the end of November, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has stated.

Overall, there has been an 8.82 per cent increase in the state's revenue receipts between April and November 2021, touching a sum of Rs 88,618.58 crore, but still, the government borrowed Rs 49,570.31 crore, a jump of 133.87 per cent than the budgeted estimate of Rs 37,029.79 crore.

The latest figures of the state's accounts released by CAG showed a revenue expenditure of Rs



1,28,805 crore, including Rs 13,779 crore as interest payment on loans.

In the form of welfare schemes, the state spent Rs 61,746.91 crore in the first eight months of this

financial year, leaving little for budgeted development schemes.

AP's total borrowings and liabilities have now touched a staggering Rs 6,35,265.63 crore, as per the

CAG account.

At the end of the first half of the current financial year, the state's revenue deficit was 662.80 per cent and the fiscal deficit was 107.79 per cent. They have now shot up to 803.62 and 133.87 per cent respectively, according to the CAG's latest numbers.

Though the State targeted to spend Rs 30,571.53 crore during the year on capital works, only Rs 8,804.71 crore (28.80 per cent) has actually been spent in the first eight months, indicating low infrastructure development.

The State has received significant grants from the Centre amounting to Rs 23,273.33 crore between April and November, a jump of more than Rs 5,000 crore compared to last year.

2

Defying Covid surge, lakhs take Ganga dip

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 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 Khatri, Mela Ahikari Sheshmani Pandey and Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Kumar visited the VIP Ghat, Sangam Nose, 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.

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.

2

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

— RESIDENT EDITOR

GVL appointed Tobacco Board member

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Rajya Sabha member GVL Narasimha Rao has been appointed as Tobacco Board member, following a motion adopted by the Rajya Sabha, in its sitting, on December 14, 2021. This has been communicated to GVL Narasimha Rao by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

As per the Section 4(4)(b) of the Tobacco Board Act 1975, read with Rule 4(1) of the Tobacco Board Rules, 1976, Rajya Sabha elects one of its members to serve as a member of the Tobacco Board constituted under the said Act.

Under the same provision, two members of Lok Sabha are also elected to the Tobacco Board. Presently, Bandi Sanjay (Telangana) and V Balashowry (AP) are serving as Tobacco Board members from the Lok Sabha.

2



Gen Rawat's chopper crashed due to pilot error, probe finds

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.

2

YSR statue vandalised, MLA stages protest

PNS ■ GUNTUR

YSRCP activists, led by Narasaraopet MLA Dr. Gopi Reddy Srinivasa Reddy, staged a dharna on the Guntur-Narasaraopet national highway in protest against the damage of former chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy's statue. The statue of former Chief Minister Rajasekhara Reddy was vandalised by miscreants at Jonnalagadda village in Narasaraopet mandal.

The MLA tried to go to the village to see the damaged statue but by that time a large number of YSRCP activists had reached there.



Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and his wife YS Bharathi taking part in Sankranti Sambharalu at the Gosala at the CM's Camp House in Tadepalli on Friday

several public representatives were present on the occasion.

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 ammonium nitrate."

2

4 killed as lorry overturns

PNS ■ ELURU

Four persons were killed and 10 others were injured when the fish-laden lorry in which they were travelling overturned at Kondrupadu village in Tadepalligudem mandal in West Godavari district on Friday.

Police said that the lorry was carrying a load of fish from Duvvada in Visakhapatnam district to an ice factory located at Narayanapuram in Unguturu mandal. The lorry overturned, killing Saddam Hussain (25), Md. Rafi (25), Mohammad Abidullah (26) and Mohammad Jaleel (25). All the deceased belonged to Bihar state.

The injured were admitted to the government hospital in Eluru. District Collector Kartikeya Mishra visited the



injured persons who were undergoing treatment in the GGH. Doctors told the Collector scanning and X-ray were required to three of the seriously injured MD Khalil, Vasikur Rehman, and Saval Alam to perform surgery on them. He directed the doctors to provide the best treatment to the injured persons. All the injured belonged to Bihar state. Injured persons said that the driver of the lorry was in an inebriated state when the mishap occurred.

2

Six airbags in passenger vehicles must, says 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

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.

2

Dharmana, Avanti test Covid +ve

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSR Congress Party senior leader and Srikakulam MLA Dharmana Prasada Rao and Minister for Tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao tested Covid positive and they were isolated on Friday. Both leaders alerted the people who were in contact with them recently to go for Covid screening test.

Meanwhile, there is an acute rise in the Covid positive cases in the North Andhra region. As many as 992 positive cases were reported in Visakhapatnam, 385 in Srikakulam and 121 cases Vizianagaram during



the past 24 hours as at 9 am of Friday. A total of 3,658 people in Visakhapatnam, 1,222 in Srikakulam and 900 in Vizianagaram are under treatment for Covid.

Dharmana Prasada Rao was admitted to the Rajiv Institute of

Medical Sciences (RIMS), Srikakulam, while Tourism Minister Srinivasa Rao is in home isolation. They both participated in a number of official and unofficial programmes and were in contact with a number of people.

2

Least temperature rise projected for AP by 2030

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh is one of the five states in the country that is projected to witness the least temperature rise by the year 2030 compared to the 1860-1900 period.

According to a climate study done by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Andhra Pradesh may witness 1.06 degrees Celsius of temperature rise by 2030 whereas all India mean temperature is projected to increase by 1.52°C to 1.64°C compared to 1860-1900 period under moderate Green House Gases (GHG) scenario. The above projections are based on Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) 4.5 scenario.



Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are the key drivers of climate change. How emissions may grow in the future is represented by Representative Concentration

Pathways (RCPs). There are four RCP scenarios: RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5. Among these, RCP 8.5 is the high emission scenario, while RCP 6.0 and RCP

4.5 are moderate emission scenarios.

Forest Survey of India in tune with its mandate of monitoring and assessment of forests of the country has therefore undertaken a study to map forest hot spots in the country based on the computer model-based projections of temperature and rainfall in three-time horizons i.e. 2030, 2050 and 2085.

The study 'Mapping Climate Change Hotspots in Indian Forests based on Observed Climate Change and High-Resolution Climate Model Projections' has suggested that by 2050 Andhra Pradesh may witness 1.932 degrees Celsius of rising in temperature.

2

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Pausa & Sukla Paksha
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 : Mithunashirsha : Jan 14 08:18 PM to Jan 15 11:21 PM
Rahukalam : 9:39 AM to 11:02 AM
Yamagandam : 1:48 PM to 3:11 PM
Varjyam : 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

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: SCATTERED THUNDERSTORMS
Temp: 27°C
Humidity: 84%
Sunrise: 6:41 AM
Sunset: 5:59 PM
Updated JANUARY 14, 2021 5:00 PM



City Gas auctions: MEIL bags most geographical areas

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hyderabad-based multi-sector global engineering major Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) has emerged as the successful bidder for the highest number of geographical areas (GA) across India. Winning the bids for 15 geographical areas, MEIL bagged almost a quarter (24.6 per cent) of the total number of GAs that went under the hammer.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) called for bidding of the City Gas Distribution (CGD) project for 65 Geographical Areas (GA) across India.

In response, the MEIL bade for 43 GAs. Of the 65 GAs opened up for bidding, nobody has offered tenders for four geographical area, thus bringing down the total number of



GAs to 61.

The MEIL emerged a successful bidder in respect of 15 GAs.

The successful bidders who were awarded the parcels under the City Gas Distribution (CGD) project will have to construct city gate stations or mother stations, lay the main pipeline and

distribution pipelines and install CNG stations.

The CGD aims at promoting green fuel (Natural Gas) like Piped Natural Gas (PNG) for households and industries (for domestic or industrial consumption) and also Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) used as fuel for vehicles and automobile industry.

It may be recalled that MEIL was previously awarded 3 GAs under the 10th bidding of CGD.

Those GAs were the districts of Tumkur and Belgaum (Karnataka), Krishna (Andhra Pradesh) and Nalgonda, Warangal, Ranga Reddy, and Khammam (Telangana).

As many as 32 CNG stations became operational in 3 states under the brand -- Megha Gas.

MEIL had participated in previous City Gas Distribution bidding round no 5 and 10. MEIL won seven Geographical Areas in that round. In the previous bidding round (Round 10), the PNGRB has awarded 228 GAs -- which will have operations in 27 States and UTs, covering approximately 53 pc of the country's geographical area and 70 pc of its population.

AP's revenue up by 9 pc...

Continued from Page 1

The revenue earnings front is certainly looking good, with enhanced tax revenue showing up. At the same time, it is perplexing that the revenue deficit is mounting to unimaginable and unmanageable levels, a senior official of a revenue-earning department observed.

The official pointed out that the revenue deficit normally comes down after the first few months in a financial year but in AP's case it has only been scaling up in an abnormal fashion. A lot of course correction is inevitable to keep this trend in check. Else, it will be nothing but doom ahead, he warned.

Attributing the current financial situation in the state to "gross fiscal indiscipline", former finance minister

Yanamala Ramakrishnu said the government led by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy violated all constitutional and Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act norms.

The Centre stipulated that 64 per cent of the borrowings should be spent on capital works but the Jagan government has only been indulging in unbridled revenue expenditure. Fiscal deficit has crossed 13 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). The unmindful acts of the government have pushed AP into a serious economic crisis, Ramakrishnu, who is now the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council, said.

He pointed out that government expenditure was not in line with the approved budgetary allocations. This gov-

ernment has been showing utter disdain for legislative propriety. All budgetary rules are being flouted with impunity. It is high time that the Centre intervenes and conducts a high-level review of AP's financial management, the senior TDP leader said.

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath, however, blamed the peaking revenue deficit on the "legacy" left behind by the state's bifurcation in 2014. From a revenue surplus state, we have been pushed into a revenue deficit because of legacy issues. The economic upheaval caused by COVID-19 has only compounded the crisis, Rajendranath claimed.

We are now trying to ensure a sustainable economic revival, despite the hardships, the Finance Minister added.

GVL appointed Tobacco...

Continued from Page 1

Responding to his election, GVL Narasimha Rao thanked the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and its members and said that he would continue to raise issues concerning tobacco farmers and work even more actively for their welfare and for promoting tobacco exports.

GVL Narasimha Rao was earlier elected as Member of the Spices Board by Rajya Sabha and has been contributing to the growth of the spices sector. He has also been made Chairman of the National Task Force Committee on Chillies and worked actively in that role for the benefit of farmers and other stakeholders in the Chillies sector.

YSR statue vandalised, MLA stages...

Continued from Page 1

Addressing the gathering, the MLA demanded the arrest of those who vandalised the statue.

The MLA described the destruction of the statue as a cowardly act. Opposition leader Nara Chandrababu Naidu had started funeral politics in Palnadu, the MLA criticized. The MLA slammed that the opposition TDP, unable to see the peace and tranquility in the Palnadu villages is inciting political hatred.

He warned that if the TDP leaders did not change their attitude, they would have to face the wrath of YSRCP cadres. The MLA demanded that a life-size statue of YS Rajasekhara Reddy should be installed at the same place. Meanwhile, Narasaraopet DSP rushed to the place and pacified the agitating YSRCP activists, and dispersed them.

IED found at Ghazipur flower...

Continued from Page 1

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.

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 reece 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.

Six airbags in passenger vehicles must, says Gadkari...

Continued from Page 1

"In order to enhance the safety of the occupants in motor vehicles carrying upto 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 safe-



ty 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.

Last year, Gadkari in an interview to PTI had said small cars, mostly purchased by lower middle-class people, should also have an adequate

number of airbags and had wondered why automakers are providing eight airbags only in big cars bought by rich people.

His remarks had come against the backdrop of the automobile industry raising concerns that high taxation and stricter safety and emission norms for vehicles have made their products expensive.

Mostly, lower middle-class people buy small economy cars and "if their car won't have airbags and when accidents happen, then it may result in deaths. So, I appeal to all car manufacturers to provide a minimum of six airbags across all variants and segments of the vehicle," he had said.

The minister had acknowledged that additional airbags in small cars will increase their cost by at least Rs 3,000-4,000.

Least temperature rise projected for...

Continued from Page 1

By the year 2085 the temperature rise is projected to increase by 2.501 degrees Celsius.

Since FSI does not have expertise in computer model-based climate change projections, the task was outsourced to an expert team led by Dr. Rajiv Chaturvedi of the BITS Pilani Goa campus.

The observed change in the temperature and rainfall during the period 1951-2019 has been downscaled to the 10km x 10km resolution.

According to the FSI's study, the mean annual temperature in India has increased by 0.72°C (as per India Meteorological Department) over the period 1901 to 2019. However, the temperature rise has been especially rapid in the last

three decades.

Observed temperature change analysis in this study (1951-2019) suggests that the mean annual temperature has witnessed the largest increase in parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Ladakh, Gujarat, Southern Rajasthan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

"Looking forward in 2030, all India mean temperature is projected to increase by 1.52°C to 1.64°C compared to the 1860-1900 period. Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are projected to witness the highest temperature increase while Andaman and Nicobar Islands, West Bengal, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh are projected to witness the least temperature rise over this period," said the FSI study.

Continued from Page 1

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 and besides questioning all available witnesses to determine the most probable cause of the accident.

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 Sulur Air Force base in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore to the Defence Staff Services Colleges in Wellington, had crashed on December 8 last year.

The crash killed CDS Gen Rawat, his wife, and 11 others. Group Captain Varun Singh, a passenger on the chopper, miraculously survived the crash only to die of severe burn injuries a few days later.



Defying Covid...

Continued from Page 1

Crowds of devotees were seen at ghats in Varanasi too.

Meanwhile, a fire broke out inside a tent located in Arail 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 Arail 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.



Dec inflation zooms at 13.56%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's annual whole-sale price-based inflation eased marginally in December to 13.56%, but remained in double digits for a ninth successive month, reflecting rising input costs for firms, many of which are steadily passing on costs to consumers.

December's figure was marginally lower from the previous month's 14.23%, which was the highest in more than a decade, government data showed on Friday.

Rising input costs for products such as fuel, metals and chemicals have pushed up whole-sale prices, a proxy for producers' prices, in recent months, while headline retail inflation is hovering around 5%, still within the 2%-6% target of Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹160
Without Skin	₹200
Broiler at Farm	₹130

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	470
VISAKHAPATNAM	460
HYDERABAD	435
RETAIL PRICE IN VIJAYAWADA	₹4.70

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Eat Street opens, offers quality food at late night

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Eat Street, the night food court, was inaugurated by Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu in 23 and 24 divisions, adjacent to Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium, late on Thursday night. VMC Commissioner V Prasanna Venkatesh, City Police Commissioner Kranthi Rana Tata, Deputy Mayor Avuthu Sailaja Reddy and others were present on the occasion.

MLA Vishnu said that Eat Street was developed at an estimated cost of Rs 1.40 crore for the denizens to relish quality food at night. The food court will start its service at 10.30 pm after hotels and restaurants in the city are closed. These are planned at main centres in the city for the people to enjoy quality food in



a good and pleasant atmosphere. With the support of VMC, the Eat Street is designed in typical foreign style, the MLA said and complemented the VMC commissioner. Vishnu also said that a

request was made to the VMC commissioner to set up an Eat Street at BRTS road, too.

VMC Commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh said that without compromising on the cost and for the convenience of

the people, the food stalls were being set up following the suggestions of MLA Vishnu. He mentioned that the location was a very convenient and suitable place for people to come, eat and have a good time. "The stall organisers are required to comply with the regulations to ensure that clean, tasty and quality food is served to the people in a peaceful environment without causing interruption to the traffic," said the Commissioner.

Police Commissioner Kranthi Rana said that establishing Eat Street was a good initiative by the VMC, which was very much needed for a growing city like Vijayawada.

VMC Executive Engineers Srinivas and Prasad, Health Officer Dr. Ramakoteswara Rao, Sanitary Inspector Balaji and others were present.

Guv condoles death of NSU Vice-Chancellor

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 and his sudden passing away was a loss to the Sanskrit University.

The Governor offered his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members.

DIVINE WEDDING



Tollywood megastar Chiranjeevi along with his wife Surekha, MEIL MD PV Krishna Reddy and his wife Sudha Reddy participate in Godha Kalyanam at Dokiparru Maha Kshetram in Krishna district on Friday.

Bhogi celebrated across north coastal Andhra

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Bhogi, the first day of the harvest festival Sankranti, was celebrated in the North Andhra region on Friday. Street-corner bonfires and 'Rangolis' lent a rural ambience in the urban areas.

People started lighting the bonfires from the wee hours of

Friday. In most of the places, women and children danced in front of the bonfires.

The government conducted the Sankranti celebrations officially not only in the colonies and gated communities but also in the colonies. Senior officials, ministers, MPs, MLAs and others were present during the celebra-

tions. With the government directions, the district administrations have organised the Bhogi celebrations at all possible locations across the three districts. The officials have roped in traditional artists to dish out performances highlighting the importance of Sankranti.

Preparing special meals at home is part of any festival. However, the tradition of preparing food at home for the Sankranti festival has totally vanished even in rural areas these days. Most of the people buy food from sweet shops. Surprisingly, even the traditional tamarind rice is also brought from sweet shops nowadays during festivals.

The three-day harvest festival Sankranti, which is the first festival of the year, is celebrated in one's native villages. The three days -- Bhogi, Sankranti and Kanuma -- are celebrated in a traditional way by the entire family members together. Homemade food plays a key role during the festival as the women in the family are engaged in preparing a variety of food items and sweets right from Bhogi to Kanuma. However, the sheen has been lost during the festival celebrations for the past few years.

Preparing festival delicacies at home passe

Families even in rural areas depend on food shops during festivals

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Preparing special meals at home is part of any festival. However, the tradition of preparing food at home for the Sankranti festival has totally vanished even in rural areas these days. Most of the people buy food from sweet shops. Surprisingly, even the traditional tamarind rice is also brought from sweet shops nowadays during festivals.

The three-day harvest festival Sankranti, which is the first festival of the year, is celebrated in one's native villages. The three days -- Bhogi, Sankranti and Kanuma -- are celebrated in a traditional way by the entire family members together. Homemade food plays a key role during the festival as the women in the family are engaged in preparing a variety of food items and sweets right from Bhogi to Kanuma. However, the sheen has been lost during the festival celebrations for the past few years.

The special food items

Mango farmers' hopes turn sour

VKL GAYATRI
■ 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, Vizianagaram 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



farmers 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. After the third week of January, there will be big changes in the climate conditions which may help the mango crop. According to our calculations, the green mangoes will be ready for harvest in the first week of April. The king of fruits will lead the market dur-

ing May and June," said Joint Director, AP Horticulture, P. Hanumantha Rao.

Meanwhile, the US has relaxed its restriction to import Indian mangoes this year. Due to COVID-19, the US government had stopped the import of Indian mangoes. However, this year an expert team is coming to India to check the quality and quantum of the fruit.

"The horticulture officers will give several suggestions including watering, cleaning and continuous spraying to prevent the various viruses. However, the practices have become very costly and the returns are not matching the expenditure. Not only Suvarnarekha and Palakamanu, the Vizianagaram branded Peechumanu crop is also badly affected this year. There is no bloom to witness this year. The climate conditions have killed our hopes," Senapati Simhachalam, who is cultivating various mango varieties in Kothavalasa, Pendurty and Simhachalam, said.

AP records 4,528 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported 4,528 fresh cases of Covid-19, 418 recoveries and one death in 24 hours ending 9 AM on Friday. The latest bulletin said the number of active cases went up to 18,313. There were a total of 20,96,755 positive cases, 20,63,934 recoveries and 14,508 deaths so far. For the first time in about four months, a district registered more than 1,000 fresh cases in a day. Chittoor added 1,027 to the tally. Visakhapatnam logged 992. Ten districts reported less than 400 new cases each while West Godavari saw the lowest at 62. Chittoor district now has 4,020 active cases, the highest in the State, followed by Visakhapatnam with 3,658.

Prakasam district reported the lone death.

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.

The DRM convened a review meeting on public health response measures and preparedness to mitigate the potentially more contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19. Emphasising the importance of vaccination as a powerful defense against the deadly virus, a door-to-door awareness campaign has been planned.



Bhogi celebrated with pomp and fervour across Andhra

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Bhogi bonfire was organised in a traditional manner at various places across the State. Bhogi is celebrated on the first day of the three-day Sankranti festival at many temples. Ministers, MPs and MLAs also took part in the Bhogi celebration at various places.

Bhogi was celebrated at Kanaka Durga Temple atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada in the wee hours of Friday. Temple Executive Officer D Bramarambha and Temple Trust Board chairman P Sominaidu were present. Vedic committee members and temple priests performed special pujas on the occasion. The premises were beautifully decorated in a traditional style. The traditional plays by Haridasus and bonfires were a delight on the occasion. They also made some rounds of the bonfire. Bommala Koluvu and other arrangements organised on the temple premises were inaugurated by the Cominaidu and Bramarambha. Temple engineers V S Koteswara Rao, L Ramadevi and others were present.

Minister Velampalli Srinivas participated in the Bhogi bonfire and said that



people were celebrating in a traditional way and interestingly, youngsters took part in the celebrations in large numbers. The State is moving ahead with an all-round development and CM Jagan Mohan Reddy had fulfilled the dream of 32 lakh people of owning houses. He said that the Coronavirus should be burnt in a bonfire and the State should be free from COVID.

Meanwhile, Bhogi was celebrated by Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) in Machilipatnam at his residence with the family members.

MLA Malladi Vishnu took part in Bhogi celebrations in

Governorpet and said that all the conspiracy of the Opposition parties should be destroyed in the Bhogi bonfires. Vishnu, along with 23 division in-charge Atmakuru Subba Rao and others took part in the celebrations.

MLA Ambati Ram Babu took part in the Bhogi celebrations and participated in a folk dance programme with the artists.

BJP State president Somu Veerraju lit fire to the Bhogi bonfire and celebrated the occasion with the party leaders.

APCC president Dr Sake Sailajanath took part in the Bhogi celebration at his residence with family members.



Joint Collector Venugopala Reddy taking part in the Sankranti Sambaralu at VMRDA Office in Visakhapatnam on Friday



include Bobbatlu, Bellam Gavvalu, Ariselu, Kajjikayalu, Sunnundalu, Pulihora, Sweet Pongal, Perugu Garelu, Vada, Nuvvu Undalu, Badam Halwa, Rava Kesari, Pongal, Laddu, Paravannam, Payasam, Boorelu to name a few. The majority of these meals include

rice flour and jaggery, both of which are fresh and easily accessible during the harvest season. The younger generations hardly know the names of these dishes.

During the olden days, the preparations for the festival began as early as January 1 with

the purchase of various items used in the preparation of food, running to the flour mill to provision shops etc. But the whole exercise was made easy by a few home food sweet shops that were established a decade back.

G Amrutha, a retired teacher

from Machilipatnam, says that her two children are working in Hyderabad and Bengaluru in software companies. "Preparing traditional food is a tedious job and for the past few years, I have been ordering food from home food shops and they supply fresh homemade food a day before the festival. Without exertion at this age, all the food items are at the doorstep. Home food shops have made the festival preparations very easy for the past few years," she said and added that she was not sure if the service would be available this time around owing to COVID restrictions.

An engineer working in an MNC in Chennai, B Premesh Kumar, said that he did his schooling in a residential school and later joined a residential college. "Most of the time I was away from home and hardly knew these homemade foods or cooking stuff. During the festivals, we buy everything from the shops. There is no need to trouble the parents at old age," he said.



Sankranti celebrations begin with gaiety, fervour

PNS ■ ELURU

Sankranti celebrations began with fervour and gaiety in West Godavari district as Collector Kartikeya Mishra, MLA Kothari Abbayya Chowdary and the AP State Biodiversity Board Secretary Dr. D Nalini Mohan participated in the programme held in the ZP high school at Kovvali village in Denduluru mandal on Friday.

The Collector, MLA and Dr. Nalini Mohan were seen in the traditional attire. Children, women and girls wearing traditional dress attended the programme. They formally lit a Bhogi bonfire at the village and performed pooja to cows. District Collector Kartikeya Mishra said, "Sankranti is a great festival that reflects the culture and traditions that bring joy to all. We wish everyone a happy Sankranti festival, a symbol of tradition".

In view of the spread of Covid, he advised all to celebrate the Sankranti festival for three days happily following Covid restrictions. He said all measures had been taken to



check the spread of Coronavirus in the district. Medical facilities have been made available to deal with any situation, he informed.

Denduluru MLA Kothari Abbayya Chowdhury said that he was very happy to participate in the Sankranti celebrations. "We need to pass on our culture and traditions to our children. Both Godavari districts are very famous for Sankranti celebrations. Sankranti is a festival of farm-

ers. The government is committed to protecting the interests of farmers. The paddy produce is being purchased from the farmers and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is implementing various schemes for the farmers' welfare," he said. The farmers are being paid their money within four days for their paddy produce, he claimed.

State Biodiversity Council Member Secretary Dr D. Nalini Mohan said that Sankranti is a

reflection of culture. He said that even though Indian culture and traditions are orthodox, there is a need to carry out activities that are useful to all. He advised the farmers to give up the use of chemical fertilizers and adopt organic farming. He recalled that animal husbandry is a part of village life. Telangana state Tanduru MLA Mohit Reddy also participates in the Sankranti celebrations in the programme. Cultural programmes performed on the occasion attacked all.

Accused in TDP leader murder case arrested

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police arrested eight persons in connection with the murder of Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader Thota Chandrayya which took place at Gundlapadu village in Veldurthy mandal on January 13. The murder created a political commotion in the district.

Rural SP Vishal Gunni told the media here on Friday that the Guntur Rural police had arrested all the eight accused involved in the murder of Veldurthy mandal TDP party cadre Thota Chandrayya who was killed by at. The accused went absconding after the murder.

The SP said that the police formed 4 special teams to nab all the accused involved in the murder. Extra Forces were deployed to Gundlapadu village to keep watch over the sensitive village to ensure no untoward incident takes place. The visit of former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to the village to console the family of the deceased went off peacefully.

The SP said that the investigation revealed that the deceased Thota Chandrayya had personal previous disputes with the main accused Chintla Sivaramaiah owing to the construction of a cement road. The deceased and the



accused in the current case belong to the same Perika community. Chintla Sivaramaiah was informed by a few of his relatives that Thota Chandriaiah was plotting to kill and eliminate him.

Fearing an attack by his enemies by the deceased Thota Chandrayya and his followers, in a pre-emptive attack, Chintla Sivaramaiah along with seven others, hatched a plan to do away with the life of Thota Chandrayya.

In the early hours of January 13th, they observed the movement of Thota Chandrayya at

the village, waylaid him and attacked with stones, sticks and a knife and killed him. The Police after arriving at the scene took all the evidence available at the scene and brought the situation in the village to normalcy.

In the meanwhile, all the accused fled away from the scene. FIR U/s 302, 323 IPC r/w 34 IPC against 8 accused was registered. The SP said that four teams were formed to track all the 8 accused named in the FIR and the SP personally monitored the arrests. The police traced the hideout of the

accused and arrested all the accused in Nagarjuna Sagar limits.

Police seized the blood-stained clothes, the murder weapon in the possession of the accused. The accused confessed to committing the murder. The SP gave the names of arrested as Chintla Siva Ramaiah, Chintla YalamandaKotaiiah, B.Sani Raghu Ramaiah, Sani Ramakoteswara Rao, Chintla Srinivasa Rao, Thota Anjaneyulu, Thota Siva Narayana, Chintla Adinarayana.



Balayya celebrates Sankranti with family at Karamchedu

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Popular Telugu film actor and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna, along with his wife, is celebrating the Sankranti festival at Karamchedu village at the residence of his elder sister Daggubati Purandeswari and brother-in-law Venkateswara Rao.

Balakrishna along with his wife reached his sister's residence on the night of Thursday.

Balakrishna's presence at

Karamchedu village made the villagers happy. The villagers had never expected his presence during the Sankranti festival at his village.

Balakrishna, along with family members, participated in the sacred Bhogi bonfire.

He offered special pooja in the Shiva temple in the village.

Adding joy to the villagers, Balakrishna's other two sisters Lokeshwari and Umamaheshwari also reached the village to celebrate the Sankranti festival.



Sidda participates in Bhogi celebrations

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Former minister and YSRCP leader Siddha Raghava Rao, along with his family members, participated in the Bhogi celebrations on Friday morning at his residence here.

Bhogi celebrations were held with gaiety and fervour. Siddha Raghava Rao, his wife Lakshmi Padmavati, his son Sudhir Kumar and son-in-law Manyam Phanikumar, daughter M Sunita along with grandsons, took part in the

celebrations.

A sacred bonfire was lit at his residence in the early morning and he invoked Lord Agni to bestow happiness and prosperity.

They presented new clothes to Gangereddulu. Speaking on the occasion, the former minister wished all a happy Sankranti.

He appealed to all to celebrate Sankranti following the Covid restrictions by wearing masks and maintaining a physical distance.

Punters hell-bent upon cockfights

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sankranti celebrations have begun with cockfights, which are a part of the three-day festival. Despite restrictions by the police, punters and the cockfight organisers are hell-bent on gambling during the three days. The police repeatedly warned not to organise cockfights till Thursday. However, on Friday the police turned a blind eye. Cockfights were organised openly.

The three-day festivities began with Bhogi. The organisers of cockfights and punters have arranged facilities for gambling at many places in East and West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts. Crores of rupees have changed hands on the first day of the Sankranti fest.

Among all other activities during Sankranti, cockfighting



has a special place during the three-day celebrations as people of both Godavari districts, Krishna and Guntur believe that it is a matter of pride. The preparations start many months in advance. Cockfights are organised widely in P Gannavaram, Ambajipeta, Ainavilli, Amalapuram, Allavaram, Uppalagupam, Ravulapalem and Rajolu mandals. Especially in Polavaram

mandal, for the past four years, the latest technology has been used to organise cockfights. Floodlights and drone cameras are arranged. In the name of traditional games during Sankranti, cockfights and Gundata are organised. A lot of money is involved in the process as people from Telangana, Hyderabad and Bengaluru visit the venues. In the name of gambling, ganja is

also being supplied, sources say.

In Eluru, apart from cockfights, card games and dance programmes are also organised besides liquor sales. In Anaparthi, MLA Suryanarayana Reddy inaugurated gambling. In Mandapeta, Dwarapudi gambling was carried out widely.

In Guntur, Bhogi bonfire was not organised as it was raining. From 12 noon onwards cockfight was organised in coastal places with the support of the ruling party MLA and party leaders. In Repalle, apart from the locals, many people from Telangana came to participate in the betting. In Bhattiprolu mandal also, large-scale gambling was carried out and following the pressure from the politicians, the police did not take any action.



CPM State leader Ch Babu Rao at the Nowluru Smart Township layout on Friday

'Smart townships a positive move'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The smart township scheme designed for the middle class across the State by the state government is a positive move, said CPM State leader Ch Babu Rao. He said on Friday that it was delightful that the government was developing a township in Amaravati. "However, the government should not design the layouts to generate revenue and fixing Rs 17,500 per sq yd is not right," he said. If the government has integrity, it should sell a yard for less than Rs 10,000 and it should ensure that the price of layouts in other places in the State should be affordable for the middle-class people, he added.

Babu Rao said that the CRDA was trying to generate Rs 240 crore through the smart township layout in 80 acres. He recalled that each acre was procured for Rs 50,000 about 30 years back. He said that in 1993 VUDA (Vijayawada, Guntur, Tenali

and Mangalagiri) sold each yard for Rs 350.

The CPM leader said that the governments and Urban Development Authorities are worse than real estate companies in terms of infrastructure in layouts. The lack of infrastructure in the plots laid by VUDA in 1993 in Navuluru reflects the negligence of the governments. Due to the government's negligence, the layout of four hundred acres has turned out into forests and is unfit to undertake construction.

He said that it is unfortunate that even after six years of taking over 33 thousand acres of land from farmers in Amaravati, the plots are still not developed. "In this backdrop, the integrity of the government in the creation of infrastructure in the townships becomes questionable. To instill confidence among the people, funds should be allocated for infrastructure development and other facilities to Navalur and other townships," the CPM leader added.



Restrictions no deterrence for organisers of cockfights in WG

PNS ■ ELURU

Despite the efforts of police to curb cockfights, they were held in the presence of MLAs and other leaders at various places in West Godavari district on Bhogi day on Friday.

The police and revenue officials made massive efforts to prevent the infamous cockfight at any cost this year but their efforts went waste as they were organised as usually at various places with the patronage of political leaders including MLAs. The police destroyed the arenas erected to organise cockfights and bound over cases were registered against thousands of people. Several awareness meetings were organized to sensitize the people against gambling. Apart from

the cockfights, other gambling like 'gutta' were also organised without any hindrances on Friday.

The arenas were prepared during the night of Thursday and thousands of organisers and punters rushed there without giving time to the police to respond. Meanwhile, political leaders exerted massive pressure on the police to go liberally in respect of cockfights. Sources said that the police were asked by top officials and leaders to be lenient in taking action to check the cockfights.

In some areas the cockfights were organised some distance away from the police stations. Tents were erected and floodlights were installed. Enclosures for VIPs were also arranged at the cockfight arenas at some places. According to information

received here, as many as 500 arenas for cockfights were made in the district at Dommeru, Nandamuru, Tallapudi, Narasapuram, Undi, I Bhimavaram, Veeravasaram, Nowduru, Rayakuduru, Bobbanapalli, Lingapalem mandals.

MLA Talari Venkat Rao participated in the cockfight organised at Thimmapuram village in Dwaraka Tirumala division. Another MLA Elja saw the cockfights at Chintalapudi. The significance of this year's cockfights is online betting. On the lines of cricket betting, cockfight betting was being held online. The punters are now able to know the rooster on which they want to stake through WhatsApp live.

174 cockfight organisers arrested, 104 roosters seized

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The police conducted raids on Friday at 21 cockfight dens, arrested 174 persons, seized 104 roosters and Rs 3.72 lakh cash. Police said that the police in order to check the cockfights and other gambling activities conducted raids at 21 places in the district. During the raids they seized 104 roosters, 9 vehicles, Rs 3,72,134 cash and arrested 174 people in this connection.

Vedic scholar Malladi no more

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Famous scholar and television personality Malladi Chandrasekhar Shastri (96) passed away in Hyderabad on Friday. He was 96. He died of old age-related health problems. He was known as a dual theological scholar who made prophecies of calendar listening and mythology to be easily understood by the people.

Malladi Chandrasekhara Sastry was born on August 28, 1925, was a scholar and television personality who specialized in the Vedas and Purana texts in the Telugu and



Sanskrit languages. His works have included commentaries on All India Radio during Bhadrachalam's Sitarama Kalyanam and Brahmotsavam festivals. For Ugadi day, he recites the Panchanga Sravanam (almanac reading).

On television, he hosted shows 'Dharma Sandehalu' and 'Dharma Sukshmalu' where he answered questions regarding the Purana and various aspects of Hinduism.

The show is telecast on the Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel and formerly on the Doordarshan Saptagiri Channel. He is the principal of a college run by the trust named Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam where they do Pravachanam (spiritual discourse) on the Puranas. He received the Raja Lakshmi Award in 2005 and has also been conferred the title of Purana Vachaspati.

SC panel chief warns of action if self-respect of SCs is hurt

PNS ■ ONGOLE

SC Commission Chairman Marumudi Victor Prasad has warned of taking stringent action if the self-respect of the SCs is violated or degraded by anybody. The chairman, along with the officials, inspected the cemetery of SCs at Yerragudipadu village in Chimakurti mandal on Friday. The cemetery is mired in controversy with the construction of a road.

The chairman said it was unfair to build a road illegally in the village cemetery. Victor Prasad said the SCs had been using 2.70 acres of government land as a burial ground for decades. It is very unfortunate that the road was built over 7 tombs. When some people questioned the construction of the road, cases were registered against them. When the SC had removed the sluice from the burial ground, cases

were also registered against them.

He decried the officers for not allowing others to enter the place. He reiterated that humiliating SCs is a legal offense. If injustice is being done to the SCs, the commission would not keep quiet. He said the commission would take action against those who violated the rights of SCs. He directed the officials to erect a fence around the burial ground.



SC Commission Chairman M Victor Paul going to inspect the SC cemetery at Yerragudipadu in Prakasam district on Friday

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."

Media reports claiming under-reporting of Covid deaths ill-informed, baseless & misleading: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Health Ministry has refuted media reports alleging a "significant undercount" of COVID-19 deaths in the first two waves in India, saying these are fallacious, ill-informed and mischievous in nature.

The Government of India has a very comprehensive definition to classify Covid deaths, based on globally acceptable categorisation, it said.

In a statement, the ministry refuted some media reports alleging a "significant undercount" of the actual number of people who have died in India due to COVID-19 in the first two waves and that the final toll may be "substantially greater" crossing the figures of about three million.

"It is clarified that such media reports are fallacious and ill-informed. They are not based on facts and are mischievous in nature. India has a very robust system of birth and death reporting which is based on a statute and is carried out regularly from the gram panchayat level to the district level and state level," the statement said.



The ministry said the whole exercise is carried out under the overall oversight of the Registrar General of India (RGI).

"Moreover, the Government of India has a very comprehensive definition to classify Covid deaths, based on globally acceptable categorisation. All deaths are being independently reported by states, and are being compiled centrally. The backlog in COVID-19 mortality data being submitted by the states at different times are being reconciled in the data of Govt of India on a regular basis," it said.

A large number of states have regularly reconciled their

death numbers and have reported arrear deaths in a broadly transparent manner. Therefore, to project that deaths have been under-reported is without basis and without justification, it added.

The ministry clarified that there is an "extreme difference" in Covid case load and linked mortality between Indian states.

"Any assumptions putting all states in one envelope would mean mapping skewed data of outliers together with states reporting lowest mortality which is bound to stretch the median towards higher and wrong results," the ministry said.



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 'Mahamrtyunjaya' (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."

FIRST COLUMN

SEARCHING FOR ANTIDOTE TO COMMUNAL HATE

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



JAGDISH KAUR

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
MOLOY 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

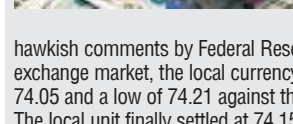


Markets regulator Sebi on Friday said it will auction two properties of Ravi Kiran Realty India Ltd and its promoters on January 28 to recover investors' money. The properties, located in West Bengal, will be auctioned at a reserve price totalling Rs 2.16 crore, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (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 yield 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.

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

Living with the past



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?

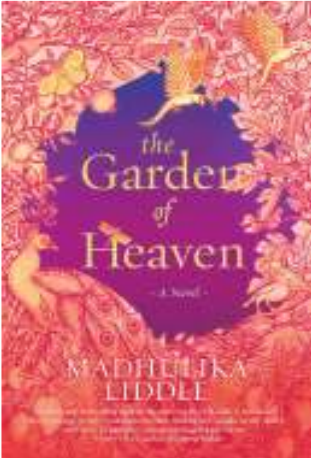
I think that's a very short-sighted, bigoted move. Wiping out mentions of the Mughal dynasty (or any other, for that matter) or trying, in other ways, to distort historical fact to suit one's own agenda serves nothing other than to propagate a falsehood. What will this lead to? A generation (many generations?) 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



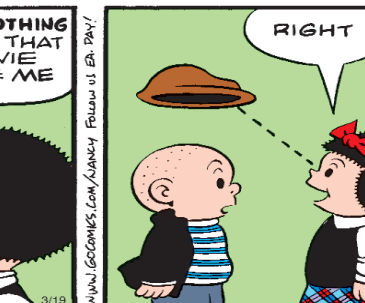
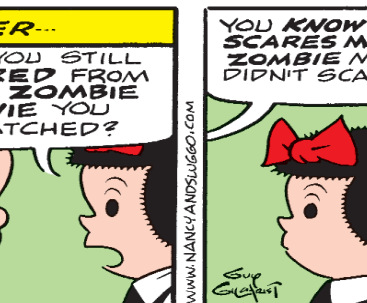
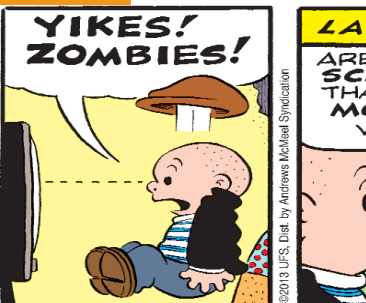
CALVIN AND HOBBS






GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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	3	8		9	4			6
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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

SOLUTION

U	N	C	E	R	T	A	I	N
A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
V	I	N	E	R	E	A	C	H
I	N	T	O	G	A	S	A	I
T	I	C	K	E	T	S	E	L
E	H	A	D	N	E	D	E	D
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N	C	A	I	T	A	L	E	R

‘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

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 keep-

ing 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.



Sindhu, Sen enter semifinals of India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu and world championship bronze medallist 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 Ongbammrunphan 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 over

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



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 Khariam, 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 Pukhrabam, 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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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.



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.

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.

‘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 *Ravanasura* being directed by Sudhir Verma under Abhishek Nama Pictures

took off on Friday on the auspicious occasion of Sankranti. 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

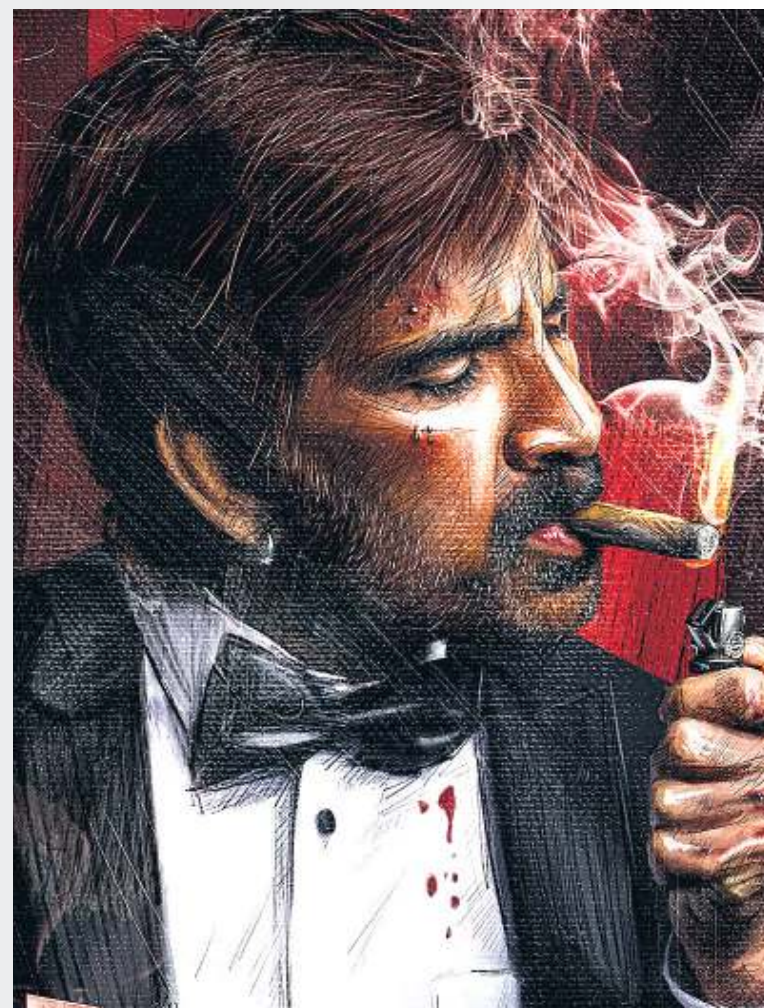
Abdullah, Daksha Nagarkar, Poojitha

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 *Ravanasura* 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. Nidhi 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. Sankranti is a positive sentiment for Nanna and me. Most of the films of Nanna released for Sankranti 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

Sankranti,” 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 Rami 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.

