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INDIA'S ECONOMY SET TO IMPROVE OVER NEXT 12 MONTHS: PWC REPORT

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IF GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY, IT WILL BE AN HONOUR TO CAPTAIN INDIA...

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



I NEVER TAKE UP ROLES FOR FAME AND FORTUNE: RAVI VARMA

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SC ASKS LAWYERS, LITIGANTS TO USE COMPUTERS FOR VIRTUAL HEARINGS

Hours after Chief Justice of India (CJI) N V Ramana expressed unhappiness over disruptions during virtual hearings due to the use of mobiles, the Supreme Court on Monday asked the advocates and litigants to use a desktop or the laptop with a stable internet connection to join proceedings conducted through video conferencing. "All advocates and party-in person are requested to join the CISCO Webex application for joining the court hearing through video conferencing (VC) via a desktop/laptop with a stable internet connectivity, preferably wired, to avoid any disruption and inconvenience to the Hon'ble Judges," the notification issued by the apex court registry said.

CENTRE VISTA PROJECT ON SCHEDULE DESPITE RAINS: PURI

With days to go for the Republic Day parade at Rajpath, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday visited the Central Vista Avenue redevelopment project site and said work is progressing as per schedule despite the recent "unprecedented" rains and the Omicron outbreak. The Union housing and urban affairs minister also shared on Twitter photos of the newly developed Rajpath that comes under the Central Vista Avenue stretching from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate. "Visited Central Vista Avenue to review progress of the project."

JAISHANKAR SPEAKS WITH EU COUNTERPART, DISCUSSES AFGHAN, MYANMAR

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday discussed the strategic facets of the India-EU cooperation with European Union's (EU) High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles and also deliberated upon global hotspots, including Afghanistan and Myanmar. Jaishankar also spoke with his counterparts from Hungary and Sweden separately and discussed bilateral cooperation. "A warm conversation with EU HRPV @Josep Borrell, our first this year. Reviewed trade & investment, connectivity, climate action and strategic facets of India-EU cooperation," Jaishankar said in a tweet after speaking with the EU official.

UP POLLS: AGRA CANTONMENT SEAT GETS A TRANSGENDER CANDIDATE

A transgender person is set to contest from Agra Cantonment assembly seat in the coming Uttar Pradesh election. Radhika Bai, aged nearly 26 years, on Monday filed her nomination papers from the seat to raise voice for the people of her community. Also known as Akash Soni, Radhika Bai claimed that she is the first transgender woman from Agra to contest the assembly polls. "The aim of contesting the election is that I want to do a lot for the people of 'kinnar' community. We have been neglected by society. I would educate people of my community that there is a lot more than dancing on roads and begging," Radhika Bai told PTI.

Jagan wants booster dose gap to be reduced to 3-4 months

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Amidst Omicron triggered Covid third wave scare, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has decided to write a letter to the Union government seeking to reduce the gap for administering precautionary (Booster) dose from existing nine months to six months. Only 1,100 Covid-infected people were hospitalised out of the 27,000 active cases and only 600 of them are in support of oxygen.



During a review meeting on Covid situation and the health sector with the officials held on Monday, the Chief Minister also decided to suggest to the Centre to look into the possibility of reducing the gap for the precautionary dose to three-four months so that it would benefit frontline workers and those who provide emergency services and also avoid many people from being hospitalised.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to focus on scaling up vaccination in five districts - East Godavari, Guntur, YSR Kadapa, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam with the lowest second dose vaccination. He said vaccination to the age group of 15-18 years has been completed 100 percent in Nellore and West Godavari, and it was 90 percent in the other five districts and 80 percent in the other four districts and directed the officials to expedite the vaccination process in Vizianagaram and Vishakapatnam districts.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that they are ready to face any kind of situation in the wake of the increase of covid cases and said they have prepared more beds compared to the second wave for treating covid patients and added that they have arranged 53,184 beds across the state.

They said only 1,100 people were hospitalised out of 27,000 active cases and only 600 of them are in support of oxygen. The Chief Minister instructed the officials to make arrangements for the availability of oxygen and medicines.

The officials said the patients used to take 14 days to get discharged earlier and it was only seven days at present. They said the state government has set up one COVID care center in each constituency and arranged 28,000 beds in them.

As staff mull another stir, 3 GOs issued on PRC recommendations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The criticism from government employees notwithstanding, the State government on Monday night issued GOs related to the decisions taken and agreed by the employees on fitment and other recommendations of the Committee of Secretaries appointed to study the report of the 11th Pay Revision Commission (PRC). The government issued three GOs including one about issuing DA arrears from July 2019 to December 31, 2021.

At a time when everyone thought it was a happy ending, government employees had again got onto an agitational mode. Representative of the AP Employees' JAC Bandi Srinivas on January 13 threatened to decide their future course of agitation after Sankranti.

Even as the government heads had heaved a sigh of relief after Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had announced 23 pc fitment, the HRA slabs now had turned a bone of contention between the employees and the government.

Srinivas, after a round of talks



file photo

with the senior officials on HRA last Thursday, said senior officials had assured them that GOs related to PRC will not be issued until Sankranti. He also added that the officials said they would discuss with the Chief Minister and get back to them shortly. Srinivas also said that with the new PRC their salaries would decrease.

In a major breakthrough in the ongoing and long-drawn tussle, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on January 7 announced a

slow of measures that had brought cheer to the agitating government employees.

Showering a bonanza on government employees, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had increased retirement age, pegged fitment at 23 percent and announced a timeline for CPS.

However, the employees have expressed displeasure over the recommendations of the committee on fitment. They demanded 27 pc of fitment.

Animal sacrifice goes awry, man killed instead of ram in Madanapalle

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In a bizarre incident, a man was hacked instead of a ram mistakenly at Valasapalli village in Madanapalle mandal on the night of Sunday.

Police here on Monday said that animal sacrifices were carried out in front of a village goddess. A man, Talari Chalapatthi was slaughtering the rams in front of the deity at the temple.

The deceased Suresh (35) went to the temple with his ram to sacrifice the animal to the village goddess. Chalapatthi who was in an inebriated state hacked Suresh who was holding the ram mistakenly. Suresh suffered a deep cut on the neck. He died before he was shifted to hospital.

The police arrested the accused and registered a case under Section 302 IPC.

'AP keen over joining hands with Centre to improve logistics infra'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Industries Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy has said that the government of Andhra Pradesh is very keen to work in tandem with 16 infrastructure ministries in the Government of India to synergise the plans for improving the infrastructure and the ranking of the Logistic Performance Index in the near future.

Goutham Reddy on Monday participated in the Southern Zone Conference on creating awareness on Prime Minister's Gati Shakti National Master Plan (PM GS - NMP) being organized by the Government of India's Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), involving all the stakeholders of infrastructure ministries of Government of India and the state governments.

"Under the dynamic leadership

of our chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Government of Andhra Pradesh is giving very high priority for improving the logistic network by investing heavily in the roads improvement, new and renewable energy, reaching Fibernet connectivity to every Gram Panchayat, development of industrial nodes and connecting with good quality external infrastructure to improve the competitiveness and reduce the logistic costs," he said.

The State Industries Minister said that aligned to the vision of Chief Minister on Maritime led economy, Andhra Pradesh is working towards integrated logistics-based infrastructure development

which means port-led industrialisation with ultra-modern/ multi-purpose ports, road and rail-based economic corridors having large industrial hubs, developing fishing harbours, processing zones etc.

He also said that airports are a region's gateway into national and global opportunities for growth and prosperity.

"We are ensuring that airports are well-connected to the road, rail and possibly sea connectivity via ports in close proximity to maximize their potential to become as multi-modal cargo hubs to drive industrial and economic development," he added.

Close edu institutes till Jan-end: Jana Sena

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Jana Sena Party (JSP) has demanded that the government close the educational institutions till the end of this month in the wake of the spike in Coronavirus cases in the third wave.

In a statement here on Monday, Jana Sena political affairs committee chairman Nandendra Manohar said that the spike in cases in the third wave is causing concern. In these circumstances, the educational institutions should remain closed till the end of this month so that students could be saved.

Manohar slammed Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh for his comments that it would be considered if the cases go up. His comments of taking decisions after a steep increase in cases reflect his irresponsibility, he criticised.

"Several states in the country

Liquor outlets to remain open till 10 pm in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Here is some good news to tipplers across the State. The State government on Monday extended the timings of closure of liquor shops by one hour from 9 pm to 10 pm. Special Chief Secretary Dr. Rajat Bhargava on Monday issued a memo extending the retail liquor outlets business hours by one hour till 10 pm.

In recent times, the State government has given relaxation in liquor tax bringing the prices down to some extent. Now, an extension of time by one hour for closure of shops is applicable to all retail outlets of the APSBCL.

Forest cover in AP's only Tiger Reserve shrinks

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Over a decade, the forest cover in Andhra Pradesh's only Tiger Reserve - Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisaillam has decreased. The assessment of forest cover in tiger reserves across the country done by Forest Survey of India (FSI) has shown that forest cover in Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisaillam Tiger Reserve has decreased by at least 39.77 sq.km between 2008-09 and 2019-20.

Around 52 tiger reserves are

spread across 18 states in the country. Despite a decrease, Nagarjuna Sagar - Srisaillam Tiger Reserve has the largest forest cover with 2932.95 sq.km among the country's 52 tiger reserves.

According to the last Tiger Census- 2018, currently the tiger population within tiger reserves is 1,923, which is 65 pc of the total tiger population of India. While the notified area of Nagarjuna Sagar - Srisaillam Tiger Reserve is 3,296.31 sq.km as per the last census, there are 38 tigers in the lone Tiger

Reserve of Andhra Pradesh. FSI had analysed the data of India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2011 and the current cycle ISFR 2021 within each Tiger Reserve.

The latest findings of the forest cover in Tiger Reserves have been presented in ISFR 2021 that was released last week.

FSI had also used the latest digital boundaries of Tiger Reserves available with Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for the forest cover assessment.

According to the ISFR 2021

4,108 more Covid cases in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Active coronavirus cases in Andhra Pradesh crossed the 30,000 mark to reach 30,182 on Monday as 4,108 fresh positives were added in the state.

In the 24 hours ending 9 am today, 22,882 samples were tested, which turned a positivity rate of about 19 per cent, a four per cent rise over Sunday.

The latest bulletin said 696 infected persons got cured in a

day, while no fresh Covid-19 death was reported in the state.

The cumulative positive cases now touched 21,10,388, recoveries 20,65,696 and deaths 14,510, the bulletin added.

Visakhapatnam district reported 1,018 and Chittoor 1,004 fresh infections.

West Godavari registered 46 and Kurnool 85 while the remaining nine added between 100 and 350 new cases each in a day.

Lakhs take holy dip in Ganga on Magh Purnima

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

An estimated three lakh devotees Monday took a holy dip in the Ganga and the Sangam here on the Magh Purnima, braving a surge in coronavirus cases in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country.

A Mela official said devotees started arriving on the banks of the river from early morning, and by evening about three lakh people had taken a dip.

He said that 25 'Covid Help Desk' have been set up in the Mela

area through which devotees and others visitors are being encouraged to follow all health protocols in view of the surge in coronavirus cases.

The Prayagraj district administration has already announced that it will be mandatory for visitors to carry a negative RT-PCR report, not older than 48 hours. They are also expected to mandatorily carry certificates of both doses of vaccination and maintain Covid-appropriate behaviour.

Naidu in a fix over tie-up with Jana Sena

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

TDP supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu is in a fix as Jana Sena President Pavan Kalyan is playing safe on the issue of a political alliance.

After the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election, there were indications that Pavan Kalyan will break ties with the BJP and opt for an alliance with the TDP.

Supporting this, Pavan Kalyan had launched a stir against the privatisation of the Vizag steel factory opposing the Centre's decision. In local body elections also in some places the TDP and the Jana Sena

had an alliance against the YSR Congress.

This happened as per the decisions of the local leaders of both parties. The leaderships of both parties did not object to this.

Accordingly, there were strong speculations in both the parties that the TDP and the Jana Sena will have an alliance in the coming Assembly elections against the YSR Congress.

TDP supremo Chandrababu also strongly believed that the Jana Sena will approach for an alliance with his party. But suddenly the

Kapu leaders of the BJP, the TDP and the Congress held a meeting and decided to work together to make a Kapu leader the Chief Minister after the next Assembly elections.

During preliminary discussions, they had three options for this. The options were to go with Pavan Kalyan, to go with the BJP if it proposes a Kapu leader as CM candidate or float a new political party.

Meanwhile, prominent Kapu leader Mudragada Padmanabham wanted to unite the Kapu, Backward Class and Dalit communities to make a Kapu leader the Chief Minister. After this, Pavan Kalyan changed his mind on an alliance with the TDP. While the BJP wants to continue the alliance with Jana Sena the TDP wants an alliance with the Jana Sena. After Kapu leaders' meeting, Pavan Kalyan is playing safe on the issue of an alliance with the BJP and the TDP.

Four killed as car plunges into tank

TODAY ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Pausa & Sukla Paksha
Tithi : Pratipada, Jan 18 05:18 AM to Jan 19 00:54 AM
Nakshatram : Pushya, Jan 18 04:37 AM to Jan 19 09:42 AM
Rahukalam : 3:13 PM to 4:36 PM
Yamagandam : 9:40 AM to 11:03 AM
Varjyam : 08:25 PM to 10:07 PM
Gulika : 12:26 PM to 1:49 PM
Amritakalam : 11:45 PM to 01:29 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:04 PM to 12:48 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: MOSTLY SUNNY
Temp: 27°
Humidity: 84%
Sunrise: 6:41 AM
Sunset: 6:00 PM
Updated: JANUARY 17, 2021 5:00 PM

BJP striving to render justice to all sections of people

With advent of Narendra Modi in mainstream national politics, the weaker sections, Backward Classes and down-trodden segments of population see a ray of hope in Modi. For, the BJP, being above caste and religious affiliations, is striving to render justice to all.

Compared to other parties, the BJP has a record of sending the highest number of BCs and Dalits to the Lok Sabha. In fact, in 1991, non-Yadav BCs and non-Jat BCs gave their mandate to the BJP government led by Kalyan Singh in the UP. As a result, the BJP was voted to power in UP with a tally of 221 seats.

With the BJP fielding Narendra Modi (who hails from the OBC community) for the PM post in 2014, awareness dawned among the OBCs in a big way across the country. Importantly, OBCs of UP took Modi under their

wings. Out of the 42.63 per cent of votes polled to the BJP, majority of the voters included OBCs and Dalits.

Out of the 80 Lok Sabha candidates, the BJP fielded 27 OBCs from UP. In an election rally, over 15,000 Rajbharas joined the BJP. Apart from non-Yadav BCs, non-Jat Dalits and other Dalit groups got attracted to Modi's leadership. Dalits across the country welcomed the Modi wave. Out of every four Dalits, one voted for the BJP, going by an analysis of the 2014 election results.

Myths about Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party among Dalits were dispelled with the emergence of Modi. They have realised the fact that the economic condition of the BCs and Dalits did not improve in independent India.

The concept of Atma Nirbhar would have meaning only when the fruits of economic reforms trickle down to all. All sections of society have valued BJP's economic philosophy. Under the direct benefit transfer mode, funds under various government schemes have been deposited in the bank accounts of beneficiaries, eliminating middlemen. The OBCs have been observing Modi's policies leading to increased representation of the OBCs and Dalits in the BJP and also among its elected people's representatives.

According to a CSDS survey conducted in 2019, one-third of the Dalits across the country - 34 per cent - have voted in favour of the BJP. The BJP gave top priority to non-Yadav OBCs in UP.

The credit for sending the highest number of OBCs, Dalit people's representatives

to Parliament and Assemblies goes to the BJP. The BJP also empowered those who did not receive socio-economic benefits among the OBCs and Dalits.

In the 2017 Assembly elections, the BJP gave 52.8 per cent of the seats to OBCs and SCs. Similarly, in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 57.5 per cent of the seats were given away to these sections. In these elections, 31.5 per cent of the OBCs, 20.8 per cent of the SCs, 0.49 per cent of the STs were elected MLAs. In all, 30.9 per cent of the OBCs, 19 per cent of the SCs, and 2.3



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

per cent of the STs constituted the BJP office-bearers. In Yogi Adityanath's Cabinet in UP, 35.1 per cent belong to the OBCs and 12.9 per cent to the ST communities. Among the BJP district presidents, 30 per cent are OBCs and 6.12 per cent are SCs. Out of 303 MPs of the BJP, elected in 2019 elections, 209 belong to castes other than Hindus. This constitutes 68.9

per cent of the total MPs.

According to a CSDS survey conducted in 2019, one-third of the Dalits across the country - 34 per cent - have voted in favour of the BJP. The BJP gave top priority to non-Yadav OBCs in UP.

In fact, 72 per cent of the non-Yadav OBCs supported the BJP. Out of the 113 OBC MPs, 53 are SCs, 43 are STs. Moreover, 61 per cent of the members of the Modi Cabinet are OBCs, SCs and STs.

The credit for giving ministerial berths to 61 per cent OBCs, SCs and STs goes to the PM. There are 27 OBCs, 12 SCs and 8 STs in the Cabinet.

In the first list of 105 candidates released by the BJP Parliamentary Board for the UP Assembly elections, there are 44 OBCs and 19 SCs. In fact, 60 per cent of the party

tickets were given to OBCs and Dalits.

Two or three ministers resigned from the UP Cabinet alleging injustice to Dalits and OBCs by the BJP. But the facts are different. There is no big deal in Ministers resigning from the party after failing to get party tickets to their political heirs and followers. One should not forget that Sanghamitra is the daughter of Swamy Prasad Maurya, who stepped out of the Yogi Adityanath's Cabinet. He aspired for party nomination to him and also to his son, but failed to impress the party leadership and joined the Samajwadi Party. Sanghamitra quit the BSP and joined the BJP and tasted electoral success. However, her brother contested the Assembly elections twice unsuccessfully.

The BJP would not give party nominations to political

heirs that easily. The BJP chose to give tickets to party candidates after intensive study of the background, on the basis of reports from observers without giving scope for any undue influences. What is wrong in it?

Another Minister in the UP Cabinet Dara Singh Chauhan, having lost at the hands of his BJP rival in the last Lok Sabha elections, quit BSP and joined the BJP. The BJP got him elected as MLA and made him BJP's OBC Morcha President. Another Minister who crossed over to the BJP from the BSP - Dharam Singh Saini - was given a berth in the UP Cabinet. Is there any meaning in their criticism that the BJP rendered injustice to the OBCs? The BJP is a disciplined party.

The BJP unleashed a social revolution in the UP. Those who had benefited by it are sure to patronise the BJP.



FSI assessment: Forest cover increases in AP Tiger Corridor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

While the forest cover has witnessed a drop in Nagarjunasagar - Srisailem Tiger Reserve, it has increased in Nagarjunasagar - Sri Venkateswara NP tiger corridor.

This tiger corridor connects Nagarjunasagar - Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR) and Sri Venkateswara National Park and passes through Sri Lankamalleshwaram and Sri Penusila Narasimha wildlife sanctuaries.

However, there are several national and state highways cutting across the corridor.

Tiger corridors constitute areas linking one Tiger Reserve with another, allowing movement of tigers, prey and other wildlife. They provide connectivity between tiger

Forest cover & tiger reserves - A reality check

- The Tiger Reserves in India occupy an area of approximately 74,710.53 sq.kms, which is 2.27pc of the country's geographical area
- The current assessment shows that the forest cover in the Tiger Reserves is 55,666.27 sq.kms, which is 7.80pc of the country's total forest cover and 74.51pc of the total area of Tiger Reserves
- India's Tiger Reserves fall in 18 states, categorised into five landscapes
- Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve (RVTR) situated in Bundi district of Rajasthan, is the latest and 52nd Tiger

Reserve in the country and was declared so on July 5, 2021

- According to Tiger Census, 2018, currently tiger population within Tiger Reserves is 1,923, which is 65 pc of the total Tiger population of India
- The highest number of Tiger Reserves are found in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra having 6 Tiger Reserves each
- In terms of extent, the largest Tiger Reserve is Nagarjunasagar Srisailem in Andhra Pradesh with 3,296.31 sq.kms followed by Manas in Assam with 2,837.10 sq.kms and Indravati in Chhattisgarh

with 2,799.07 sq.kms

- The smallest Tiger Reserve is Orang in Assam with 492 Sq Kms
- The tiger generally requires habitat that includes forests, scrub, grasslands and water resources for their survival
- The tiger corridors occupy an area of approximately 14,289.37 sq.kms, which is 0.43 pc of the country's geographical area
- The current assessment shows that the forest cover in the tiger corridors is 11,575.12 sq.kms which is 1.62 pc of the country's total forest cover

source populations. In the absence of corridors, the tiger

habitats may become isolated, making them vulnerable to

inbreeding and local extinction.

The FSI had carried out forest cover assessment for 2021 and thereafter compared with the 2011 assessment for decadal change analysis.

As per the latest assessment, forest cover in the Nagarjunasagar - Sri Venkateswara NP tiger corridor is 574.58 sq.kms out of which Very Dense Forest (VDF) is 11.07 sq.kms, Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) is 422.85 sq.kms and the remaining is 140.66 sq.kms.

The decadal forest cover analysis done between ISFR 2021 and 2011 assessment shows that the forest cover has increased from a total of 550.70 sq.kms in 2011 assessment to 574.58 sq.kms in 2021 assessment, showing a net increase of 23.88 sq.kms which is 4.34 pc.

Forest cover in AP's only Tiger...

Continued from Page 1

cover. According to ISFR 2011, forest cover in Nagarjunasagar - Srisailem Tiger Reserve was 2972.72 sq.km which has decreased to 2932.95 sq.km by 2020 as per ISFR 2021.

Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve in Andhra Pradesh is followed by Simlipal in Odisha with 2,562.86 sq.kms and Indravati in Chhattisgarh with 2,377.28 sq.km having the largest forest cover.

Maximum area under moderately dense forest is in Nagarjunasagar - Srisailem Tiger Reserve comprising 1,908.65 sq.km, which is 65.08 pc of its total forest

cover.

The extent of forest cover in Tiger Reserves is an important indicator of the health of the forest ecosystem. The forest cover determines the presence or absence of prey populations. Continuous, undisturbed and non-fragmented landscapes are essential for the survival of tigers. The distribution of tigers and their density in the forests vary because of several ecological factors such as forest cover, terrain and natural prey availability and also because of anthropogenic factors like presence of undisturbed habitat and management interventions," said ISFR 2021.

Lakhs take holy dip in...

Continued from Page 1

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 also been set up in the Mela area.

Uttar Pradesh on Monday reported 15,622 fresh coronavirus cases, pushing the active infection tally to 1,06,616, as nine more people died of Covid, raising the toll to 22,972, an official statement said.

Jagan wants booster dose...

Continued from Page 1

The officials informed that new ICMR guidelines stated not to conduct COVID tests on people without symptoms and also to conduct tests to high-risk people in contact of positive patients.

He also reviewed the progress of construction works of new medical colleges.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to set up big hoardings in Village/ Ward clinics and government hospitals displaying details of the AarogyaSri scheme. He said Village Clinics should be referral points for the AarogyaSri scheme, with detailed information on available treatment locations. The Chief Minister has reviewed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

prepared for the patient referral system under AarogyaSri and also on SOPs related to AarogyaMitras in Network hospitals, Village / Ward Secretariats, PHCs and medical officers for 104 and 108 services.

The Chief Minister said the medical services under the AarogyaSri scheme should be delivered efficiently and added that the mechanism of sending patients to the concerned hospital for treatment under the AarogyaSri scheme should be strong. He said that the referral system should be such that 108, 104, PHCs, and doctors of other health centers should be part of it and provide better services to the people and added that AarogyaMitras should play a crucial role in this regard.

He said an app should be developed using advanced scientific technology for the coordination of all these services. The officials said the app would refer the patients to the nearest network hospital. The Chief Minister instructed the officials to focus on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) so that the system would become more efficient, and added that it would make the referral system more transparent. He said ANMs should follow up on the condition of the patients after they were discharged from Network hospitals.

The Chief Minister said 104 call centres should work efficiently and added that necessary steps should be taken to ensure treatment through telemedicine to the callers of 104 services.



Four killed as car plunges into tank

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Four persons were killed when the car in which they were travelling plunged into an irrigation tank at Yerrabalem village in Mangalagiri mandal on Monday.

Police said that the deceased Sai, Srinivas, Narendra Kumar and Teja Ramji were going in the car. The driver of the car lost control while negotiating a curve resulting in the car fell into the irrigation tank. The passers-by immediately broke the windshields and extricated the four persons from the ill-fated car. But by that time, they had died. Three of the deceased Sai, Srinivas and Narendra Kumar belonged to Mangalagiri while Teja Ramji belonged to Yerrabalem village.

TDP leaders file complaint against organising casino

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A group of Telugu Desam Party leaders, on Monday, lodged a complaint with Krishna District Superintendent of Police Siddharth Kaushal against setting up casinos and organising gambling and obscene dance at K Convention in Gudivada town as part of Sankranti celebrations. The TDP leaders, in their complaint, said that gambling and obscene dance shows were held at the

venue owned by Civil Supplies Minister Kodali Srvenkateswara Rao (Nani) and demanded action.

As per the complaint, large-scale gambling activities were carried out there. The police, who are supposed to crack down on such activities, could not prevent them. On the day of Kanuma festival, betting, gambling and illegal activities were carried out indiscriminately at the K Convention owned by Minister Kodali Nani.

The TDP leaders alleged that about Rs 500 crore changed hands through the casino activities. They said that the sentiments of Telugu people were hurt. Anti-social elements were also involved, they alleged.

Varla Ramaiah, former MP K Narayana, MLA Gaddam Ramohan, MLC Bochala Arjunudu, former MLAs Bonda Uma, Raavi Venkateswara Rao and former minister Kollu Ravindra met the SP and lodged the complaint.

English to be medium of instruction in TS govt schools

ML MELLY MAITREYI ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant decision, the State Cabinet has decided to bring a new piece of legislation to introduce English as the medium of instruction in government schools from the next academic year as well as to regulate fees in private schools, junior and degree colleges.

The State Cabinet, which met at Pragathi Bhavan here on Monday with Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao in the chair, resolved to constitute a Cabinet Sub Committee to study the above two proposals and formulate required guidelines.

The Cabinet Sub Committee, to be headed by Education Minister Sabitha Indra Reddy, will have Ministers Koppula Eshwar, Thalasan Srinivas Yadav, Niranjan Reddy, Srinivas Goud, Jagadish Reddy, Harish Rao, Prashanth Reddy, Puvvada Ajay Kumar, Errabelli Dayakar Rao and K T Rama Rao as members.

The new piece of legislation will be introduced in the next Legislature session. The Cabinet also decided to strengthen government schools in the State. Towards this end, the Cabinet approved a special plan 'Mana Vooru- Mana Badi' (Our village- Our School) at a cost of Rs.7,289 crore to provide quality teaching in government schools and better basic amenities.

Nod for Mahila University in Telangana. The Cabinet approved the proposal of Education Minister Sabitha Indra Reddy to set up a Mahila University in Telangana State.

Close edu...

Continued from Page 1

Cases are on the rise across the country. Statistics show that the daily positivity rate has increased from 16.28% to 19.65%. Do not ignore the fact that the number of hospital admissions is steadily increasing. Sending children to schools and colleges in such situations is risky," Manohar said.

The Jana Sena leader, referring to the Education Minister's comments that vaccines are being administered to students so that schools could be reopened, said that despite vaccines for children between the ages of 15 and 18 years being given in Maharashtra the educational institutions were closed there. The vaccine is also being administered in Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The respective states have extended the holidays for the welfare of the students. "Physical distance is not enforced in primary, secondary and high schools. Sanitisers are not made available in schools. Does it make sense to open schools then?" he asked.

'AP keen over joining hands...

Continued from Page 1

He also said that government of Andhra Pradesh is investing around Rs 18,000 Crore in developing three new ports at Bhavanapadu, Machilipatnam and Ramayapatnam and constructing 9 fishing harbours to take advantage of longer coast line and to improve economic activity there by improving the jobs and reducing the logistic cost for various industrial nodes.

"We are all aware that the logistic cost as a percentage of GDP is still at 14pc in India compared to global average of 8pc making our exports uncompetitive. I am happy to note that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to reducing the logistic cost at least by five points

by ensuring development of massive infrastructure facilities in every sector," he said.

He reminded that the Government of India has come up with BISAG - N (Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics) developed by ISRO responsible for developing a geospatial technology-based platform to integrate data sets of different sectors both in spatial and non-spatial formats, planning tools and processes to bring the efforts of 16 ministries dealing with Infrastructure in Government of India and state governments in planning infrastructure in their ministries and help everyone in understanding the programme and planning of others.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
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Without Skin	₹252
Broiler at Farm	₹130

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	455
VISAKHAPATNAM	450
HYDERABAD	435
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Venkaiah for Vizag on 4-day visit from Jan 19

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vice-President of India M Venkaiah Naidu is coming to Visakhapatnam for a four-day visit on January 19. The Vice President will take part in various programmes during his visit to Visakhapatnam. He would stay at Visakhapatnam Port Trust's guest house.

Joint Collector, Venugopal Reddy, on Monday convened a meeting on the arrangements for the Vice-President. The Vice-President would move to New Delhi on January 22.

During the meeting, the Joint Collector appointed several senior officers to look after the arrangements and protocol management to the Vice-President's visit. During the meeting, the officials discussed the arrangements for the reception at the airport, stay at the port guest house, medical readiness, security, convoy arrangements and special honours at the programmes where the Vice President present.

At another meeting, the Joint Collector also reviewed the arrangements for the Republic Day celebrations to be held at Police Parade grounds. The Joint Collector directed the District Educational Officer to prepare the students to present in the cultural programmes following the Covid guidelines. He also directed the other department to gear up to display the progress of various welfare schemes and development activities in the district during the Republic Day celebrations.

Students back to school in good numbers: Adimulapu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Education Minister Audimulpu Suresh has said that 61 per cent of the students attended classes as schools reopened after the Sankranti holidays on Monday.

On the reopening day, Anantapur district recorded the highest attendance of 70 per cent, followed by Kadapa (69 per cent), Guntur (68 per cent), Prakasam and Kurnool districts (67 per cent). The minister said classes would be conducted by taking all precautions and special care for the safety of the students and following the COVID guidelines on the school premises.

Minister Suresh said the government had made all



arrangements in this regard and the parents didn't need to worry about the health of their children. Control rooms have been set up in the offices of the School Education and Intermediate Education Departments for students and

parents to clear their doubts. One can call the following numbers from 10 am to 5 pm: School Education Dept - 783388555, Intermediate Education Dept - 9440816025. The minister said that seven crore doses of vaccines had

been administered so far in Andhra Pradesh. Four crore people have received the first dose of the vaccine and three crore people have received the second dose. All the teachers in the State have been vaccinated. 95 per cent of children in the age group of 15 to 18 years have received the first dose.

The minister alleged that TDP leader Lokesh was spreading false propaganda on the vaccination drive. "The Opposition parties are stooping so low and politicising every issue. They don't even spare the Education Department. The government is taking care of the health of the students across the State," he added.

CM RELEASES DIARY



Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released the Andhra Pradesh Government Diary at the Camp Office in Tadepalli on Monday. Chief Secretary Sameer Sharma, GAD Secretary R Muthyala Raju and Executive Assistant to Chief Secretary P Prashanti were present on the occasion.

Vizag fully geared up to face Covid-19 third wave

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In view of the lessons learnt from the nightmarish experiences during the Covid-19 second wave, the government has directed the district administrations to get ready to face any emergencies. Following the government directions, the Visakhapatnam district administration convened a review meeting on the high-end preparedness to face the Covid-19 third wave. The number of positive cases has been increasing in the district during the past five days and

admissions in the hospitals have also seen a rise.

While reviewing the precautionary measures, Joint Collector Venugopal Reddy directed the officials to procure and arrange oxygen reserves at all the Covid hospitals. Besides 24/7 oxygen supply to all the beds, oxygen concentrators, MLO tanks and D-type cylinders should be arranged at all the Covid hospitals and Covid Care Centres, the Joint Collector said. He also directed the officials to form an exclusive team -- 'Oxygen Savers' -- at all the Covid hospitals, who

should ensure 24/7 oxygen supply.

A war room will be set up at the Collectorate to ensure oxygen supply to the hospitals. Joint Collector (Revenue), Deputy Commissioner (Transport), Additional Superintendent of Police, Deputy Director (Industries), Assistant Director of Drugs Control, and Indian Medical Association president, Visakhapatnam, would lead the war room activities, the Joint Collector said.

District-level officials from all the line departments attended the meeting.

Cyber cells and social media labs soon

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Director General of Police Gautam D Sawang has said that they will inaugurate district-level social media labs and cyber cells in the State very soon to combat the cybercrimes and punish the guilty. On Monday, the DGP said that cyber cells and social media labs will be equipped with advanced technology, software and computers and trained manpower. One Sub-inspector of police with B Tech qualification and five constables will be appointed to tackle cybercrimes in each social media lab. Besides, training will be given to 20,000 police personnel in the state in the coming years.

The DGP said that initially 300 police personnel will be given training at the Police Training Centre located in Ongole, Vizianagaram and Anantapur districts. Experts will train the police in social media crimes, cyber crimes and containment of cybercrimes.

DGP Sawang said the criminals are duping the gullible people with technology. He said many criminal cases related to OTPs, Covid vaccination crimes, Aadhar linked frauds, insurance-related frauds, BiCoin frauds, abuse against women and children



were reported. He said cybercrimes are a threat to personal liberty and reminded that from common people to prominent persons are falling victims to the cybercrimes.

Gautam Sawang said the cyber cells will be equipped with Cyber Crime investigation tools, Disk forensic tools, mobile forensic tools, password recovery tools, CDR Analysis tools, image enhancement tools, the proxy server identifies tools, E-mail tools, image enhancement tools, social media tools, etc. He further said cyber cells will have a forensic workstation, laptop, high-end computer and

advanced software and hardware.

The DGP has inaugurated training classes online for police personnel to combat cybercrimes. Additional superintendent of police, deputy superintendents of police, superintendents of police, and others will attend the training classes, he added. DGP said the advanced technology and trained staff will help to arrest and punish the guilty of crimes. He said the cyber police have already identified the 1551 professional cybercriminals and opened the cyberbullying sheets. He said the cybercriminals are under strict surveillance on their activities.

Covid care centres being set up at all mandal hqs in V'nagaram

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Learning a lesson from the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Vizianagaram district administration is setting up Covid Care Centres at all mandal headquarters to provide medical aid at the rural level. During the first and second waves, thousands of patients rushed to the district-level hospitals located at headquarters Vizianagaram from all the 34 mandals. The officials and medical staff had a tough time admitting patients and providing proper medical aid to them.

The third wave has already begun and multiple Covid positive cases are being registered every day. With this, the medical officers and all the frontline departments have suggested to the district administration to open Covid Care Centres at all mandal headquarters. The mandal Covid Care Centres are expected to provide a big relief for the district headquarters hospitals.

"The officials are on the job to set up mandal level Covid Care Centres to provide maximum medical assistance at the field level. The emergency and critical cases would be

shifted to the headquarter hospitals," Collector A Surya Kumari said.

The Collector also called up the NGOs and other organisations to join hands with the administration to prevent positive cases.

The positive cases are increasing in the border mandals of Visakhapatnam district and NGOs should create more awareness among the rural population to take up precautionary measures including sanitisation, wearing face masks and maintaining social distance at all the public gatherings, the Collector added.

TDP to step up field-level agitations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday decided to step up field-level agitations to expose the atrocious activities of the ruling YSRCP leaders in the public arena. The TDP leadership asserted that there was no need for anybody to be afraid of the fabricated cases and false arrests being made by the Government.

Expressing concern, the TDP accused the government of sleeping without taking necessary steps at a time when the people were getting hospitalised due to the rising Covid-19 third wave. Classes were postponed in over 12 States in the country. But, the AP regime was posing huge danger to the lives of students, teachers and parents. Positivity rate increased from 4.05 percent to 15.22 percent in just a week.

The Telugu Desam leaders deplored that the Government's indifference caused unhappiness in villages even during Sankranti. Crop compensation was not paid to farmers. The promise was not fulfilled to pay farmers within 21 days of procuring their food grain. Chilli and red gram farmers suffered heavy losses but they got no compensation. The Government should rescue every farmer who incurred crop losses.

The TDP strongly condemned the non-payment of salaries and pensions even after 15 days. The YSRCP Government was behaving ruthlessly towards the employees. For the first time in the

Objects to revocation of CI's suspension

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) senior leader and former MLA G V Anjaneyulu has taken strong exception to the government's decision to revoke the suspension of Circle Inspector for registering false cases against a farmer Narendra and alleged that the anarchy was prevailing in the YSRCP regime.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the TDP leader said that YSRCP MLA tried to slap a farmer with footwear when the farmer informed that the paddy produce was not being purchased in the RBKs. The police registered false cases against the farmer for informing that the paddy produce was not being purchased by the RBK to MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu in the Vinukonda constituency.

The police announced that the CI was suspended for registering false cases against the farmer. But the govern-



ment had revoked the suspension and the delinquent CI was taken into service. "During Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's regime, farmers were handcuffed. In the future, the Chief Minister will be handcuffed in corruption cases. Revoking suspension of delinquent CI is improper and unjust", he slammed.

The former MLA lashed out that the Rythu Bharosa Kendras are exploiting the farmers. When the farmers lost their chilli crop due to the Tamarapurugu pest, the gov-

ernment did not take steps to protect the pest hit farmers, he lambasted. He flayed that the Chief Minister was sitting at home while the ministers were running casinos.

Former MLA T Shreva Kumar questioned the propriety of the government in doing real estate business for money. He informed that many programmes including blood donations would be organised on January 18 on the occasion of TDP founder and former Chief Minister N T Rama Rao's death anniversary.

The TDP leaders decided to step up their demand with the help of MPs for Special Status, Polavaram, Reorganisation issues, railway zone and so on in the coming Parliament session. The illegal arrest of

Vinukonda farmers and the YSRCP attacks on TDP cadres in Tirupati, Parichur and Pulivendula were highly condemnable. Some police officials were conniving with the ruling party goons.

Lokesh tests positive for Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) general secretary Nara Lokesh on Monday tweeted that he was tested positive for the Covid virus, but was asymptomatic and absolutely fine. He, however, said he was isolating himself till recovery and requested all those who came in contact with him in the recent days to get themselves tested.

Interestingly, hours before announcing that he tested positive for Covid-19, Lokesh wrote a letter to chief minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, demanding that the state government close down the schools to prevent the spread of Coronavirus which is posing a threat to lakhs of students in the State.

He pointed out that many of the school students were yet to be vaccinated. All possible steps should be taken to prevent the Covid-19 third wave from taking a severe form in Andhra Pradesh.

Lokesh reminded that the neighbouring states Telangana and Tamil Nadu have already passed orders closing schools and physical classes till the end of January. Kerala has also closed its schools for two weeks starting January 21. The TDP MLC expressed concern that in the past 10 days, new cases recorded in AP have ballooned from 500 to 5000 per day.

IGNOU launches PG course in CSR

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has launched a Master of Arts in Corporate Social Responsibility (MACSR) programme from January 2022 session. It is available in ODL mode across the country. The programme is meant for CSR professionals and for graduates and Post Graduates interested to have careers in CSR.

India is the first country to make Corporate Social Responsibility mandatory for select categories of companies under the Companies Act 2013

enacted by the Government of India, encouraging a new workforce in the CSR area. Considering the demand, the IGNOU has developed a unique programme for CSR professionals and also for the graduates and PGs seeking careers in the field.

Dr. Dharmarao Gonipati, Regional Director, IGNOU, Visakhapatnam said that the programme would enhance the career opportunities by increasing the professional knowledge on various theoretical and practical aspects of CSR and development work. Any graduate from a recognised University

and Institution is eligible to take admission into the programme. The programme fee would be Rs.14000. The programme is a two-year duration course and can be completed in a maximum span of 4 years. Admissions would be only through online mode and can be taken from <https://ignouadmission.samarth.edu.in/>

IGNOU study centres situated in Dr.L. Bullayya College, Visakhapatnam and Government Autonomous College, Rajahmundry offer the programme in the Visakhapatnam Region, he added.

New building for Prema Samajam inmates opened

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, Visakha Dairy has constructed a new accommodation building for the inmates of the Prema Samajam, a noted old-age home in Vizianagaram. The Visakha Dairy constructed the new facility at a cost of Rs 68 lakh. The new building was inaugurated by Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development Botsa

Satyanarayana on Monday. The building was named as Tulasi Bhavan. Chairman of the Visakha Dairy, A.Tulasi Rao, who developed the dairy as one of the top five dairies in the country. There are eight living rooms in the building.

Chairman, Zilla Parishad, Vizianagaram Majji Srinivasa Rao, Lok Sabha Member B.Chandra Sekhar and Visakha Dairy Vice-Chairman A. Anand were present on the occasion.

Vellaturu and K Tadepalli win rural shuttle badminton titles

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vellaturu and K Tadepalli clinched titles in the EVE Friends Circle Open Rural Shuttle Badminton doubles senior and junior categories, respectively, as the three-day tournament concluded at Kotturu Tadepalli near here on Monday. As many as 34 teams participated in both senior and junior sections, and matches were conducted on a knockout basis.

In seniors' finals, Samuel and Satish (Vellaturu) beat the

team comprising Vijay and Bhanu (K Tadepalli) and bagged the title. However, in the juniors' category, Bhanu and Arvind of K Tadepalli beat Sai Dinesh and Venkat (K Tadepalli) to secure first place.

Later, Help Hospital CEO Chalapati Jayanth Prudhvi, Helping Hands founder Mareedu Sivaramakrishna, Triveni College principal (G Konduru) Pamarthi Srinivasa Rao, and Dr NTPPS Genco DEE Karampudi Srinivasa Rao presented trophies and prizes to the winners and



runners-up. Speaking on the occasion,

Chalapati Jayanth Prudhvi said that taking part in sports and

games would help people in their all-around development.

"Everyone should participate in at least one sports event. Choose an aim and then work hard to reach their target," he added. The State and Central governments have recruited outstanding sports persons into their departments, he said.

EVE Friends Circle chairman and engineer Eda Vedadri, physical education teacher M Daniel, circle representatives T Umamaheswara Rao, Puli Malleswara Rao, Palsagani Guravaiah and others were present.

New YSR statue coming up in place of 'disappeared' one

PNS ■ GUNTUR

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders performed Bhoomi Pooja for a new statue of former chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy in the place of the disappeared statue at Jonnalagadda village in Narasaraopet mandal on Monday.

YSRCP leaders, led by Narasaraopet MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu, MLAs Gopireddy Srinivasa Reddy, Bolla Brahma Naidu, Meruga Nagarjuna, Kasu Mahesh Reddy and GDCC Bank Chairman Lalpuram Ramu were among those who participated in the programme. The YSRCP activists led by their leaders took out a huge rally from the YSRCP office in Narasaraopet to Jonnalagadda village.

Addressing a public meeting on the occasion, MP Sri Krishnadevarayalu alleged that the Opposition TDP was creating trouble in the Palnadu region to vitiate tranquility, adding that the YSRCP activists could not be provoked as they go in a peaceful way. The MP appealed to the YSRCP cadres not to be provoked and to maintain calm.

MLA Mahesh Reddy warned the TDP not to test the patients of YSRCP cadres. The YSRCP activists would not keep quiet if the TDP resorted to such acts. MLA Brahma Naidu lashed out that the TDP leaders were behind the disappearance of YSR statue. The TDP leaders and their media are creating obstacles for investigation on the disappearance of the YSR statue. The TDP is plaguing the state like pest damaging crops, he



slammed.

MLA Meruga Nagarjuna said that the TDP, unable to see the support which the YSRCP is getting from the people is resorting to such acts. He predicted that the YSRCP would continue in power in the next 30 years. MLA Gopireddy Srinivasa Reddy alleged that TDP leader Aravinda Babu was playing drama by getting admitted to the hospital to protect those who were involved in the disappearance of the YSR statue. He said that the statue of YS Rajasekhara Reddy would be installed in 15 days at the village.

Narasaraopet ZPTC Chittibabu, MPP Muraboina Sreenu, Market Yard Chairman Hanif, Rompicharla ZPTC Pilli Obul Reddy and Mudiraj corporation director Swamy Master were among those who were present.

Home Minister lays foundation stone for UHC

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Home Mekathotu Sucharitha laid the foundation stone for the construction of an Urban Health Centre (UHC) at Yetukuru village in Guntur Rural mandal on Monday. The Home Minister also inaugurated the newly installed Micro Water Filter at Karemudi village. Later she inaugurated the newly constructed Anganwadi building, Panchayat office, and CC road. Speaking on the occasion, the Home Minister reiterated that the government is committed to implementing welfare schemes and ensuring that the fruits of welfare schemes are reached to all the eligible poor. Chief



Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy aimed to provide welfare schemes to each of the eligible, she added. Mayor Kavita Manohar Naidu, Yetukuru Vijay Sarathi, and other YSRCP leaders were present on the occasion.

Housing works will be completed in time: Official

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Special Commissioner, AP Housing, Rahul Pandey has said that the government is keen on completing the 'houses for all' programme in the stipulated time. The government has decided to complete 50 percent of the construction activity by the end of July. Basement level construction should be completed by June, he directed the officials.

The Special Commissioner convened a review meeting on the works in the region on Monday. While addressing the meeting, he said that the government was giving top priority to housing as it was listed in 'Navaratnalu' -- a nine-point programme of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Women's panel chief hails move to treat Mahila police as special cadre

PNS ■ GUNTUR



Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission Chairperson Vasireddy Padma has hailed the decision to notify the Mahila police as a special cadre within the cadre in the police department.

In a statement here on Monday, she said that issuing orders notifying the incorporation of the Mahila police in the police department as a special cadre within the cadre is a good sign. As per the new rules, 'Mahila police' have been divided into five categories which include Mahila police, senior Mahila police, assistant sub-inspector, sub-inspector, and inspector. While Mahila police would be appointed through direct

recruitment, all other categories will be by way of promotion.

She said that for the first time in the country, one Mahila police was being appointed to every village. Issuing notification pulled down curtains on speculations on the issue, she said. Vasireddy Padma said that the

reporting, supervision, and decision-making powers of the police department, from the constable to the CI, also apply to them.

She said it would also be good to provide indoor and outdoor training in 10 disciplines on a variety of topics, including peacekeeping, women and child protection, and public services. The women police would play a key role in educating students on road safety cybercrime, drugs, and the safety of women. The women police would also play a vital role in conducting counseling to the farmers to those who attempt suicide. They would also be helpful in questioning the accused in police stations regarding cases, she added.

Roadside fruit and vegetable business hit

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The fruit and vegetable vendors and pushcart traders did not open their businesses on Monday as they haven't returned from their native places after the Sankranti celebrations. They celebrate the festival for four days, namely, Bhogi, Makar Sankranti, Kanuma and Mukkanuma.

Mukkanuma is celebrated on the fourth day of the Sankranti festival in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States. Sankranti, also known as Makar Sankranti, is a harvest festival dedicated to Lord Surya and is an important festival in Telugu culture. It begins with Bhogi



and culminates on the fourth day with Mukkanuma, which is also known as 'Pasuvula Panduga'.

Mukkanuma is observed on the day after Kanuma and is dedicated to feasting and merry-making. No major rituals or pujas are held on this fun-filled day. In some regions, people visit distant relatives

and friends on the day.

According to sources, there are more than 5,000 street vendors under Vijayawada municipal corporation limits, more than 50 per cent of whom are from North Andhra Pradesh districts. They are settled in Vijayawada city and sell vegetables and fruits. All the hawkers and vendors go to

their home towns and villages to celebrate the Sankranti festival. No vegetable and fruits vendors were seen in the city on Monday.

Tavitaiah, who is into scrap business, said that Sankranti is celebrated in their native place for about a week. Hundreds of families from Srikakulam migrated to Vijayawada decades ago and settled in the city and are into various small businesses. Many sell vegetables and fruits, while many are engaged in various kinds of works. He said that people who go back to their native villages would return in a couple of days after celebrating Mukkanuma, which is considered an important part of the Sankranti festival.



IT Minister KT Rama Rao participated in PM Gati Shakti South Zone Virtual Conference chaired by Union Road, Transport & Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday.

Strengthen rail network in TS: KTR to Gadkari

Less than 120 km rly line added since 2014

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

TS IT and Municipal Administration Minister K T Rama Rao has expressed his displeasure over the fact that the railways have been neglected in Telangana since 2014.

The Minister participated in PM Gati Shakti South Zone Virtual Conference chaired by Union Road, Transport & Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday.

KTR said, "In 2014, Telangana had 1,753 km railway network and in November 2021, it increased to 1,870 km. Just about 120 km of railway line has been added since 2014. "This is something we should think about. We request you to increase the railway connectivity. While Hyderabad is well-connected by passenger train to all parts, there is a problem faced with the frequency of trains to ports."

KTR urged the Union government to consider increasing the frequency of trains for faster movement of goods.

The Minister said that running trains were often canceled owing to lesser load, often with little notice, creating uncertainty in the minds of exporters, who were being forced to use trucks as the mode of transport - which is significantly leading to increased logistic costs.

KTR said that Telangana was a landlocked State. A few businesses therefore consider it as a hindrance for free movement of goods. He highlighted the need for providing an exclusive cargo rail network to different ports with increased frequency. If additional financial incentives were sanctioned for creation of logistic infrastructure, the State would set up dry ports, integrated and multi-model logistics parks, he said.

TDP demands remunerative prices for farm produce

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) activists, led by former minister Nakka Ananda Babu, took out a padayatra from the TDP office to the Sub-Collector's office demanding that the government provide remunerative prices to the farmers for their agricultural produce.

Nakka Ananda Babu submitted a memorandum to the Sub-Collector urging him to provide remunerative prices for the agricultural produce.

Talking to the media on the occasion, he alleged that during the Padayatra, Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to protect the interests of farmers by providing support prices to the farm produce.



When he came to power, the farmers were completely ignored by the government. Ananda Babu questioned what happened to the price stabilization fund which was promised to be set up with a Rs 3000 crore corpus fund. The YSRCP leaders in disguise of mediators were selling fertilizer in the black market. The former minister said that in the delta areas the farmers

used to yield 40 to 45 bags of paddy using the Pattiseema lift irrigation water but now they could not yield even 35 bags, he regretted. When the farmers were in the lurch the YSRCP leaders resorted to gambling activities like rooster fights and casinos. There is no official response to the farmers in respect of supplying Urea fertilizer, he lamented.

Lorry Owners Assn opposes increase in Green Tax

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Lorry Owners Association leaders across the State have demanded that the State government cancel GO No 67. They urged the government to stop collecting Green Tax that is in force from the current month. The association says that they have been in a deep financial crisis since the Covid pandemic began. The association leaders have written a letter to Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy to consider their hardship and stop collecting Green Tax.

The lorry owners said in their letter that since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the transport sector had plunged into a deep financial crisis. It was very difficult to address the daily needs. As they failed to pay EMIs in time, thousands of lorries have been seized by the finance companies. While the transport sector was reeling under a deep financial

crisis, the Andhra Pradesh State government was the only government in the country to impose Green Tax on the lorry owners, they pointed out.

They said that increasing Green Tax from Rs 200 to Rs 20,000 has made the situation of the lorry owners worse. They further said that the fuel prices were high in AP compared to the neighbouring States and demanded a reduction in tax on diesel. They further demanded that the State government repair all the highways that were in a very bad condition.

AP Lorry Owners Association general secretary Y V Kewar Rao said that the lorry owners who own vehicles that were more than seven years old would face the brunt of Go No 67 imposed by the State government. He said that earlier, the Green Tax was Rs 200 per year and with the new GO, it would be ranging from Rs 200 to Rs 20,000 which is a huge burden on the lorry owners during the Covid crisis.

V-P on 3-day visit, reaches Nuzvid Railway Station

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu reached the Gannavaram railway station on Monday evening as part of the three-day visit to Krishna district. The Vice President was warmly welcomed by AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan.

Among those who welcomed the Vice President were State Endowments Minister Velampalli Srinivas Rao, Chief Secretary Sameer Sharma, DGP Gautam D Sawang, General Administration Secretary Prashanthi, Vijayawada City Police Commissioner Kranthi Rana Tata, DCP Vishnuvardhan, District Collector J Nivas, Railway DRM S Mohan, Vijayawada City Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi, Protocol Director Balasubrahmanya Reddy, Additional Director Sharma, Nuzvid RDO K Rajyalakshmi, Tehsildar Narasimha Rao, Revenue, Police



Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu being received by AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and Chief Secretary to AP Government Sameer Sharma upon his arrival by a train from Chennai, at Gannavaram on Monday night.

and Railway officials were present.

Later, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu left for Swarna Bharathi

Trust in Atkur by road from the railway station. The Vice President will stay at the Swarna Bharathi Trust for the night.

120 medics at Gandhi Hospital test positive

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Nearly 120 staffers at the Gandhi Hospital have reportedly tested positive to Covid-19. Of these, 40 are PG students, 38 house surgeons, 35 MBBS students and six are faculty members. Corona test reports relating to some more doctors and staff are yet to come. Once the results are in, the number of corona victims could rise further.

In all, 139 people with Covid-19 have been admitted in Gandhi hospital. As per doctors, the cases are not severe; while those that are severe are mainly due to underlying co-morbidities. Even in Chest Hospital, seven staff members have tested positive. The Erragadda Mental hospital witnessed a total of 57 in-patients testing positive for COVID-19. Mass testing was done after one patient showed symptoms on Sunday. Another 9 medical staffers also tested positive.

Nearly 500 cops test positive

A large number of staffers in many police stations are also suffering from corona. Nearly 500 cops reportedly tested positive for Covid-19 recently. In Medipally PS, 5 cops, 16 in Rajendranagar PS 16, and 12 in Yadagirigutta were diagnosed with the virus. It may be mentioned here that during the first wave, nearly 2,000 cops got infected.

SHORT TAKE

Woman kills drunkard husband, gives up to police



ONGOLE: Vexed with the harassment being meted out by the drunkard husband, a woman killed him by bludgeoning him with a pestle in her house at Sri Ramnagar colony in Giddalur on Monday. Police said that Ankalamma and Anji alias Chiranjivi got married 10 years ago. Anji was addicted to alcohol and he had been harassing her for the last few years. Unable to bear his harassment, she bludgeoned him with a pestle, later poured petrol and set him afire. He

died instantly. She went to the police station and surrendered before the police. CI Firoz and SI Brahma Naidu visited the scene of the offense, registered a case, and shifted the body to the government hospital for postmortem.

Yogi Vemana Jayanthi to be held at Kondaveedu Fort

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The birth anniversary programme of Indian philosopher and poet Yogi Vemana will be held at Yogi Vemana Mandapam located at Kondaveedu fort on January 19.

Kondaveedu fort development committee convener

Kalli Shiva Reddy in a statement here on Monday said that Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha, Chilakaluripet MLA Vidadala Rajani, MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu and Collector Vivek Yadav would take part in the birth anniversary programme.

The Yogi Vemana birth

anniversary programme is being organised for the last three years by the Bala Bharati and Kondaveedu fort development committee jointly.

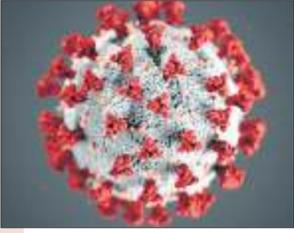
The Home Minister would release 'Vemana Telugu Calendar' and 'Vishwadharamam' collection poems of Yogi Vemana on the occasion.



INDIA CORNER

100% state-run school students have received COVID jabs: TN govt

The government has completed 100 per cent, the first dose of vaccination against COVID for state-run school students of 15-18 years of age, Tamil Nadu Health Minister Ma Subramanian said here on Monday. As far as government schools in Tamil Nadu are concerned, the vaccination for students in the 15 to 18 age group was inaugurated by Chief Minister M K Stalin here on January 3, the Minister said. Since that drive was launched in Tamil Nadu on the very same day it was rolled out by the Centre, the government has now completed inoculation for teenage students 100 per cent as regards state-run schools, the Minister told reporters. In private schools and other institutions like the polytechnic colleges, students of that age group are being vaccinated continuously, he noted. In total, 76 per cent students in the 15-18 age bracket have been vaccinated in Tamil Nadu (first dose) and it is a matter of big satisfaction, he said.



Daily virus cases in Russia double as Omicron spreads

Russian authorities on Monday reported a sharp spike in new coronavirus cases, apparently driven by the rapid spread of the omicron variant health officials warned about last week. The country's state coronavirus task force registered 30,726 new infections over the last 24 hours, which is twice as many as 15,830 just a week ago and the highest daily tally since early December. The task force has also reported 670 deaths. The omicron variant spreads much more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had previously been infected by prior versions of the virus. However, early studies show omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant. Infections in Russia steadily climbed all of last week, and officials sounded the alarm about a looming surge of cases driven by omicron's rapid spread.



Delhi's skill varsity begins prelims for National Environment Youth Parliament

The Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University (DSEU) has begun the prelims for the National Environment Youth Parliament 2022 - "Nurturing Environment Leaders" is being organised by Paryavaran Sanrakshan Gatvidhi (PSG) amongst universities across the country to sensitise the youth about the prevailing environmental problems posing a serious threat to the safety and welfare of humans. "Now that the discussion on environmental concerns has begun amongst our students, our aim is to ensure that we continue on this path and encourage our students to solve the most complex problems of the 21st century and find a way to create a sustainable future," said DSEU Vice Chancellor Neharika Vohra. The National Environment Youth Parliament 2022 will be organised at three levels - university level, regional and zonal level, and national level.



Largest flypast with 75 aircraft on Republic Day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Republic Day parade at the Rajpath this year will see the "grandest and largest" flypast ever with the participation of 75 aircraft to mark the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, an IAF official said on Monday.

The flypast will conclude with seven jaguar fighter aircraft flying in the 'Amrit' formation to commemorate the 75 years of Independence.

"The flypast this year will be the grandest and largest with 75 aircraft from IAF, Army and Navy flying during the Republic Day parade. This is in line with the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations," IAF PRO Wing Commander Indranil Nandi said at a press briefing.



"The flypast will include 'Tangail' formation which will have one Dakota and two Dornier flying in Vic formation. This is a tribute to the Tangail airdrop operations of the 1971 War. There will also be Meghna formation of 1 Chinook and four Mi-17s," he said. The flypast will begin with

the 'Dhwaj' formation with four Mi-17 aircraft, followed by 'Rudra' and 'Rahat' formations with four and five Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), respectively. Among the other aircraft that will display their might at the parade are Rafale, Indian Navy's MiG29K, P-81 surveillance aircraft and Jaguar fighter jets.

The Indian Air force also unveiled its tableau for the Republic Day celebrations, with assets like Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) armed with AT Dhruvastra missile, Ashlesha Mk1 radar, Gnat, Rafale, MIG 21 on display. Given the COVID-19 situation in the national capital, approximately 24,000 people will be permitted to attend the Republic Day parade on January 26 this year.

In 2020, before the pandemic struck India, around 1.25 lakh people were permitted to attend the parade, they noted. Last year's Republic Day parade took place amid the pandemic and close to 25,000 people were allowed to attend it, sources mentioned

Disappointed over rejection of TN tableau for Republic

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Monday expressed disappointment over the Centre's rejection of the State Tableau for the Republic Day celebrations in the national capital and sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's immediate intervention to have it included. Excluding the tableau would deeply hurt the sentiments and patriotic feelings of the people of Tamil Nadu, he said. "That the expert committee chooses to ignore and reject all the seven designs shown to it as per the modifications suggested by its members is unacceptable," the Chief Minister said. "I am given to understand that Tamil Nadu was not called for the fourth round of meeting and it was informed that Tamil Nadu has been left out while shortlisting," Stalin claimed in the letter addressed to the Prime



Minister, a copy of which was made available to the media here. Stating that this was a "matter of grave concern to Tamil Nadu and its people," he sought the PM's "urgent intervention to arrange to include the tableau of Tamil Nadu" that will showcase the freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu in the Republic Day parade 2022 in New Delhi. Expressing "disappointment" to know that Tamil Nadu has been deprived of the opportu-

nity to participate in the ensuing Republic Day parade on January 26 in New Delhi, he said the Defence Ministry had proposed 'India @ 75 Freedom Struggle, Ideas @ 75, Achievements @ 75, Actions @ 75, & Resolve @ 75' as the theme of the tableaux for Republic Day Parade, 2022. Accordingly, Tamil Nadu submitted sketches choosing the theme "Tamil Nadu in the Freedom Struggle" depicting the renowned freedom fighters from Tamil Nadu. The State representatives appeared before the expert committee for tableaux selection thrice. In the first meeting, the expert committee expressed satisfaction about Tamil Nadu's theme which depicted freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu during the British Raj at the front and during the East India company's period at the rear of the tableau, he said.

Environmentalist M K Prasad passes away

PNS ■ KOCHI

Noted environmentalist Prof M K Prasad, a prominent figure in the historic grassroot level movement to save the evergreen tropical rain forests in Kerala's Silent Valley from destruction, passed away on Monday morning, his colleagues said here. He breathed his last at a private hospital here while undergoing treatment for Covid related complications, they said. Prasad, 89, is survived by his wife and two children. His cremation was held at a crematorium in Raviapuram here. An all-time source of energy for environmental activists, Prasad gave effective leadership to a progressive people's science movement called "Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath" (KSSP).

SP promises MSP for every crop, free irrigation, cane arrear in 15 days

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav Monday made several promises to the farmers of Uttar Pradesh including MSP for every crop, free irrigation facilities, payment of arrears to cane-growers in 15 days, interest-free loans, and insurance and pension. Yadav also said that cases lodged against farmers during their agitation against the now-repealed farm laws would be withdrawn, and the families of farmers who died during the protest would be given Rs 25 lakh each. Speaking to the media here, the SP supremo said all these



promises would be part of the party's election manifesto for the assembly elections in the state. He said a special 'Farmers Revolving Fund' would be created, if needed, to ensure the payment of arrears to sugarcane farmers in 15 days.

Before announcing the blueprint, the SP chief took an "Anna Sankalp" (food commitment) to express his firm resolve for the welfare of the farmers in the state. He said the party has already vowed to provide 300 units of electricity to everybody. The Samajwadi Party, which has entered into an alliance with the Rashtriya Lok Dal, is trying to cash in on the recent farmers' agitation. The western Uttar Pradesh, from where many farmers had participated in the stir against the agri-marketing laws on Delhi borders, is scheduled to vote in the first phase of voting on February 10.

Time to revisit Inter-state River Water Act: Bommai

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Monday said the time has come to revisit the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act as it creates more disputes than resolving them. The Chief Minister spoke virtually at the inaugural of the 'PM Gati Shakti' southern zone conference chaired by Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari. "There are some legal interventions that are necessary. Delay is the most costly affair which has been affecting our infrastructure. The delay in our irrigation projects are bogged down by the Inter-

State Water Disputes Act. In fact, it creates more disputes than resolving them," Bommai said. He said the time has come to revisit the legislation and see to it that the multifold levels of addressing the inter-state water disputes are removed at one single stage. "Especially on the basis of maximum utility of a river basin capacity and using technology, and giving away all political considerations, a win-win situation for all riparian states can be the solution. Let us start thinking anew on that. The structure and content in resolving these issues has to be re-addressed by the Government of India, he added.

International Film Fest of Kerala postponed

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The 26th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) has been postponed in the wake of surging COVID-19 cases, State Cultural Minister Saji Cherian said. The festival was scheduled to be held here from February 4 to 11. He said the IFFK will be held after bringing the COVID situation under control. The new date will be announced later, the minister said in a Facebook post. The southern state has been witnessing a sharp spike in the COVID-19 cases for the past one week.

SC asks DMs to involve SJPUs, DLSA, voluntary organisations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday directed all the District Magistrates to involve Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPUs), District Legal Service Authority (DLSA), and voluntary organisations in the identification and rehabilitation of children in street situations, adversely hit by COVID-19 pandemic, without any further delay. A bench comprising Justices L Nageswara Rao and B V Nagarathna said the problem for these children in street situations would be in an aggravated form in winters and immediate steps should be taken by the states and Union Territories to shift them to shelter homes. "As the implementation of directions issued by this court on earlier occasions relating to identification and rehabilitation does not brook further delay, we direct all DMs to involve DLSA and voluntary organisations in the identification of children on streets without any further delay. The DMs are also directed to upload the information at all stages on the web portal of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (Baal Swaraj)," the bench said. The top court, hearing a suo motu case about the children who are adversely affected by the pandemic by losing either one or both the parents, also

directed the states with the guidance of NCCPCR to formulate a policy for rehabilitation after they have been identified and asked them to file a status report within three weeks. It also directed the states and UTs to instruct concerned authorities not to delay the identification and rehabilitation of children. At the outset, Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj, appearing for NCCPCR, submitted that many states have not uploaded the details of children in street situations on the Bal Swaraj Portal. Concerning Delhi, the apex court noted that while earlier 70,000 children were identified, the AAP government has now them it has identified only 428 children. "This is not a normal case. The problem would be in an aggravated form for these children in street situations. There are children who don't have anybody to take care of them. The condition of children would become worse in northern parts of the country. "Just imagine how they are surviving on the streets. You have to immediately shift them to 'rain basera', shelter homes. This is your duty. We need not tell you to keep doing this and that. Act immediately. This one month is very difficult. Let them be removed to a shelter home immediately," the bench said.

'Bulli Bai' case accused used Sikh names in accounts

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Three students arrested in connection with a case pertaining to the 'Bulli Bai' app, which targeted Muslim women, deceptively used names belonging to the Sikh community for their social media accounts with an intention to breach peace in the society and create animosity among religious groups, the Mumbai police told a local court on Monday. The city police's cyber cell submitted its affidavit before the metropolitan magistrate in suburban Bandra opposing the bail pleas filed by the three accused in the case - Vishal Kumar Jha, Shweta Singh and Mayank Rawat. Singh (18) and Rawat (21) were arrested by the Mumbai police's cyber cell from Uttarakhand on January 5, while Jha was nabbed from Bengaluru on January 4. All three are currently in judicial custody with Jha and Rawat quarantined in a BMC-run facility after they tested positive for coronavirus. The court heard the arguments put forth by the accused's advocates and posted the bail applications for further hearing on Tuesday. The police on Monday sought the court to reject their

bail pleas, arguing the accused could flee or tamper with evidence in the case. The cyber cell added that a police team has been sent to the national capital to seek custody of two more persons Niraj Bishnoi, arrested in another Bulli Bai app case lodged by the Delhi police, and one Omkareshwar Thakur, apprehended in the 'Sulli' deals app case. According to the police's affidavit, Jha, Singh and Rawat were part of several social media groups operating with a specific mindset. The accused were highly active on social media and were posting material which could cause breach of peace in the society, it said. These accused falsely included names and words from the Sikh community in their Twitter handles and also while posting messages through these social media accounts with an intention to create animosity between two religions, the affidavit maintained. The timely arrest of the accused persons has prevented a law-and-order situation, it said, adding the police were still on the look-out for other accused in the case.

HC allows re-examination of witnesses in actor sexual assault

PNS ■ KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Monday allowed re-examination of three witnesses and summoned five additional witnesses in the case relating to the sexual assault of an actress in which Malayalam actor Dileep is among the accused. Justice Kausar Edappagath allowed the state government's appeals and struck down the trial court's orders, declining its pleas to summon several more witnesses and get certified copies of the call detail records of the accused in the actor sexual assault case of 2017. "The entire exercise of adding additional evidence allowed as per this order shall be completed within ten days from the

date of the receipt of the copy of this order by the court..." the court said. The director general of prosecution shall see that a new special public prosecutor is deputed or some other alternative arrangement is made to conduct the case on behalf, the court said. Dileep was represented by advocates Philip T Varghese and Thomas T Varghese. The trial court, on December 21, had allowed the summoning of the three witnesses and rejected the request for summoning the others. The prosecution had contended that the lower court was wrong in holding that there was a delay in filing the application seeking the call records and original customer details.

Power sector employees to go on 2-day strike in Feb: APEF

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Power Engineers Federation (APEF) on Monday said that around 15 lakh power sector employees will go on nationwide strike for two days from February 23 to protest against privatisation. "National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees & Engineers (NCCOEEE) has decided to resort to two days nationwide strike along with call given by All India Trade Unions on 23rd and 24th February," an APEF statement said. According to the statement, the NCCOEEE has also decided that core committee leaders of NCCOEEE will meet Governor Punjab on February 1 and handover memorandum to

him against privatization of Chandigarh UT Power Department. APEF Chairman Shailendra Dubey said that on call of NCCOEEE about 1.5 million power employees & engineers across the country will resort to two days strike on 23rd and 24th February against privatization policies of the central government. He said that main demands of power sector employees are: withdrawal of Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021, scrap decision of privatization of profit making power departments of Union Territories Chandigarh, Dadra Nagar Haveli Daman & Diu and Puducherry, Integrate all unbundled power utilities in states like KSEB Ltd in Kerala and HPSEB Ltd in Himachal Pradesh.

Netaji's legacy partly exploited for political reasons: Anita

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Amid a controversy over the rejection of West Bengal's tableau for the Republic Day parade themed on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army, his daughter Anita Bose-Pfaff said on Monday the legendary freedom fighter's legacy has often been "partly exploited" for political reasons. She minced no words while acknowledging the fanfare that marked the start of the 125th birth anniversary year celebrations of Bose in 2021 in Kolkata had something to do with the elections in West Bengal.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, voicing her "shock" at the rejection of the tableau, which also featured other Bengal icons like Rabindranath Tagore, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and others. "I have heard about it. I don't know under what circumstances it happened and why the tableau was not included. There might be some reasons. We can't imagine that the Republic Day function in the year when my father would have turned 125 is being held and his tableau was not included, it seems very strange,"



Bose-Pfaff told PTI in a telephonic interview from Germany where she lives. "And last year, the opening of the anniversary year was cele-

brated in a bigger way, of all places in Kolkata, (it) had something to do with election and election prospects in Bengal. The fact that nothing happened this year...certainly the issue is not as important as last year," she said. "Certainly and partly for political reasons," she said while responding to a question about whether the legacy of the national hero was exploited for political purposes. She, however, proceeded to add that she would not criticise it as politics is about coming across people and communicating. "So if an event like that touches many people, they

would do it," she said. Banerjee, while urging the prime minister to reconsider the decision, said it will cause "pain" to the people of West Bengal. She said no reason was put forth for rejecting the tableau. Bose-Pfaff, who lauded the BJP government for declassifying files related to Netaji, however, deplored a high-level committee that was formed last year to plan a grand year-long programme to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of the freedom fighter never even contacted her. "I am supposed to be a member of that committee, but I have never heard that it has called a meeting... or any written com-

munication. As far as I know, there has been no meeting. For me, it's a non-existent committee," she said. Bose, who Mahatma Gandhi once referred to as the 'prince among the patriots', was one of the foremost icons of Bengal whose legacy the ruling TMC and challenger BJP had tried to appropriate in the run-up to the assembly elections last year. Bose-Pfaff once again asked the Government of India to ensure DNA tests are done on the ashes kept at Renkoji temple in Japan that many claim belong to Bose to bring out the truth and resolve the mystery surrounding his end.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shadowboxing

A section of population feels that the jab drive violates human rights and personal freedom

Strangely, the exit of Novak Djokovic from Australia saw more anti-vaxxers getting angry than tennis fans. An anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine group quickly surfaced in Australia wondering if the tennis great was the “beacon of hope” to lead the fight against vaccination. Such segments of population exist across the world today. To them, it is not a question of an unvaccinated person posing a risk to oneself and family and friends and colleagues. Refusal to vaccinate is for them a political issue, largely the right-wing variety. Western anti-vaxxers link their hesitation to growing distrust in Government institutions and policies. People’s frustration has generally mounted since 2020 because of lockdowns and restrictions turning their routines topsy-turvy. Their frustration often extends to vaccination campaigns to control the transmission of the Coronavirus. It is also true, however, that absence of scientific rigour in a few past cases of inoculation has made some Europeans wary of public health programmes. The pro-Djokovic camp in Turkey is an anti-vaccination party that fears vaccination guidelines violate human rights and personal freedom. A party in Austria is gaining popularity for a similar stand. In the United States, the Republicans are against vaccination, in contrast to the Democrats. Some countries like Russia, vexed with the anti-vaccination politics, want to bring in a QR code system to prevent the unvaccinated from accessing public places. France has a Government divided on the issue. President Emmanuel Macron raised a storm by making public his displeasure against the anti-vaxxers.



But his Sports Minister strangely said he would allow an unvaccinated Djokovic to play in the French Open. The vaccination drive is now stuck in a political row. India is not unaffected by the global movement. The opinion is sharply divided on Djokovic’s stand. The Indian Government, for the first time, clarified its stand when it told the Supreme Court that “no person can be forced to be vaccinated against their wishes”. It will also not make it mandatory to carry vaccination certificates for any purpose. The statement comes in the wake of some States and private businesses wanting to disincentivise people refusing to get vaccinated. To be sure, the unvaccinated are a risk to themselves and others. But one should notice a fundamental difference between the anti-vaxxers in India and the west. The Indians in this group are vaccine-hesitant, not anti-vaccination as such. They are not, as of date, part of a political movement like in Europe. Concerns of safety, side effects, rushed vaccine approvals, quick human trials and scientific scepticism are some of the factors that hold them from taking the vaccine. Hesitancy has reduced where their concerns have been redressed. The sudden onslaught of the highly transmissible Omicron variant made them quickly change their mind about vaccination. The priority is a trust-building national campaign to personally reach out to the unvaccinated. Prefer reason over a rule.

Now, let us examine whether the tribals have a “religion” as described by Kishore Chandra Deo. The concept of dharma is different from religion, as we all know. Even to assume that tribals have no religion is historically wrong. Here, I have just picked a few examples from the Santal segment of the tribal population. Surely, this is true of other tribal societies, too.

All human beings are born without a ‘belief system’ or religion is true but they embrace the practices, rituals and the overall religio-cultural traits from their parents and the immediate neighbourhood. Like picking up the mother tongue, it happens effortlessly and without any tutoring. One can assert that trib-

PICTALK



Locals look on as workers clear water hyacinth from the Powai lake, in Mumbai

Tribals and their divinity concept

Contrary to perception, tribals in India have a belief system which is no less profound and spiritual than other religions practised in the country



SARADINDU MUKHERJI

Former Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Kishore Chandra Deo, had in the last week of December 2021 said: “Tribals are not born into any religion and are treated as indigenous entities. Therefore, when certain sections of the Scheduled Tribes choose to practice any religion — say, Christianity or Buddhism in the Northeast, or Islam in places like Lakshadweep, or Hindu, Sikh or any other religion — it is never a case of religious conversion because, since the tribals are not born into a religion, there can’t be a case of them converting to a religion.” This, incidentally, is the opinion of an important politician who also belongs to the tribal community; this was said in the context of the Karnataka Anti-Conversion Bill.



LM Shrikant, the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, had pointed out on February 21, 1952, in a note that tribals in India have three common features: a) Tribal origin; b) Primitive way of life and habitation in remote and less accessible areas; and, c) general backwardness in all respects. He discovered after extensive travel all over India how the tribals lived in semi-slavish conditions, amidst abysmal poverty. He also noted the harm caused by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1926. In various reports, no one has ever mentioned that tribals lack a ‘belief system’ or religion.

Now, let us examine whether the tribals have a “religion” as described by Kishore Chandra Deo. The concept of dharma is different from religion, as we all know. Even to assume that tribals have no religion is historically wrong. Here, I have just picked a few examples from the Santal segment of the tribal population. Surely, this is true of other tribal societies, too.

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als in India have a belief system which is no less profound and spiritual than other religions/dharma that are practised in India. As Suniti Kumar Chatterjee had pointed out: “All the Austric tribes in India had just a little oral literature, handed down from generation to generation, consisting of their mythological and semi-mythological legends and traditions, and some folk poetry, partly relating to their religious ceremonies (*‘The Cultural Heritage of India’*; Vol 5, p.670).” Chatterjee had further observed: “In Bengal, there is a sizeable Santal population following its own traditional religion, which is in a way akin to Puranic Hinduism. Being within the orbit of Brahmanism, the Santals have been very largely influenced by Hindu notions (p.671).”

Chatterjee also complimented Ramdas Majhi Tudu for his *Kherawal-Vamsa* (or *Dharam-puthi* or ‘The Sacred Book of the Kherawal race’) which contains the traditions of his people “and their religious and social culture” (p.672). He has also referred to Sadhu Ramchand Murmu Thakur, described as a “religious reformer and teacher of the Santal philosophy of religion” (p.673). There is no



THE ORIGINAL ‘BELIEF SYSTEM’ OF HUMANKIND HAS REVOLVED AROUND NATURE WORSHIP — THE RIVERS, MOON, SUN, MOUNTAINS, TREES AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP. ALL THESE ARE IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS IN THE TRIBALS’ PERCEPTION OF THE DIVINE

dearth of examples to show how the tribals were never devoid of religion.

The original ‘belief system’ of humankind has revolved around nature worship — the Sun, the Moon, rivers, mountains, trees and ancestor worship. All these are important ingredients in the tribals’ perception of the Divine. Unfortunately, the conventional view of religion is based on a division of humanity into “believers” and “non-believers” where the conquest of “the other” is the *sine qua non*. The belief systems manifest in the Sanatan Dharma, paganism, animism and Shintoism across the continents are what the tribals in India consider sacred.

As Iravati Karve had pointed out, the “cultural compromise” that goes on in India was made possible because it was helped by “polytheism and its logical concomitant — an attitude of tolerance towards other gods, other creeds and other customs”. All scholars who have studied India’s tribal society — like Nirmal Bose, Ghurye and Kumar Suresh Singh — have also expressed similar views. James Cowan, writing on the aborigines of Australia, had observed that they “represent

the conscience of us all as they recognise and acknowledge at all times the metaphysical origins of the human spirit”.

We end this short essay with an anecdote. This was in 1902 at the Belur Math, where Santal labourers used to come for work. Swami Vivekananda liked their company immensely. Not only did he give them meals, he also took care that it was without salt. It happened because he had been told by them that they don’t take food that has salt in it or has been touched by others. Swamiji observed: “You are Narayans, God manifest. Today, I have offered food to Narayan.” After the Santals had retired for rest after the meal, Swamiji told his disciples that he found the Santals to be a “veritable embodiment of God” (*‘The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda’*, Vol 7, p.244-245). Perhaps this incident would prove once again how the tribals are to be judged regarding their ‘belief system’ and, that too, by one of the greatest Indians of all times and a true Hindu.

(The writer is an academic and historian. A former Member of ICSSR, he is currently Member, the Indian Council of Historical Research. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PT BIRJU MAHARAJ WILL BE MISSED

Sir — Padma Vibhushan awardee and legendary Kathak dancer Brij Mohan Nath Mishra, alias Pandit Birju Maharaj (83), died at his home in Delhi. Though he was best known as a Kathak dancer, he was also a singer par excellence, having command over *thumri*, *dadra*, *bhajan* and *ghazal*. He composed and sang for two sequences in Satyajit Ray’s *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* and also choreographed for *Devdas*, received the Filmfare Award for Best Choreography for *Mohe Rang Do Lal* from *Bajirao Mastani*, and was noticed for *Gadar*, *Vishwaroopam* and *Deh Ishqiya*. The versatile Kathak legend was also a superb drummer, playing nearly all drums with ease and precision; he was especially fond of playing the *tabla* and *baal*, besides being a poet and painter.

As per media, Panditji was also a master storyteller; he interlaced his performances with incidents from his life, narrated to captivate the audience. It will be great if some of his disciples carry forward his legacy beyond the heights he himself achieved. Such a great humble personality, Birju Maharaj never ran behind fame and that is the reason everyone has a lot of respect for him. We have lost one of India’s biggest traditional dancers of our era. May your soul achieve solace! Heartfelt condolences to his family, fans and disciples.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

BAD NEWS FROM CHINA

Sir — The companies are bracing for another round of potentially debilitating supply chain disruptions as China, home to about one-third of global manufacturing, imposes sweeping lockdowns in an attempt to keep the Omicron variant under control ahead of the Winter Olympic Games and the Asian Games, 2022. At least 20 million people, or about 1.5 per cent of China’s population, are in lockdown, mostly in the city of Xi’an in western China and in the Henan province in north-central China.

The country’s zero-tolerance policy has manufacturers — already on edge after spending the last two years dealing

Implement the poll rally ban



The Election Commission has extended the moratorium on open public rallies, except indoor meetings with 300 people or 50 per cent of the hall capacity can be held with COVID protocols. The onus of following the norms shall be on the political parties. The purpose of public rallies is to convince floating/undecided voters to vote for them. But most of the 300 people allowed will be dedicated party workers and the undecided voters will still remain out of reach. However, it is a welcome move by the EC to safeguard public health, which has been prioritised over

campaigning. Extending the ban on political rallies till January 22 would definitely be frustrating for major players and their over-eager candidates.

Contrary to the obvious dejection of the political class, all those citizens who fear mass gatherings would whole-heartedly welcome the EC’s decision for no right-thinking person would be happy at the prospect of deterioration in the already scary pandemic situation. Similar to all virus containment measures, effective enforcement of the ban would depend on the due diligence of officials who are entrusted to ensure compliance by the political parties. Unlike in the past, the upcoming elections would test the resilience and efficiency of the EC as the task ahead is not only limited to facilitating smooth transition of power in the five States but also ensuring compliance of all directions related to the poll code.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

with crippling supply chain woes — worried about another round of shutdowns at Chinese factories and ports. Additional disruptions to the global supply chain would come at a fraught moment for companies, which are struggling with rising prices for raw materials and shipping along with extended delivery times and worker shortages. If lockdowns become more widespread, their effect on supply chains could be felt across the United States. And major new disruptions could exacerbate inflation, which is already at a 40-year high.

MR Jayanthi | Mumbai

NEW ISRO CHAIRMAN AT THE HELM

Sir — The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has been blessed with yet another stalwart in space science in the form of S Somnath, who recently assumed charge as its chairman. The timing is crucial as India opens its space sector to private firms and startups to build rockets and satellites for both domestic and global markets. When the privatisa-

tion reforms got underway with the launch of the New Space India Limited (NSIL) in March 2019, Isro’s commercial arm was even more firmly established. Somnath has worked as Director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC). An alumni of the Indian Institute of Science, he was instrumental in developing India’s most powerful rocket, GSVL Mk 3, which can be an asset for our human space mission. He has also worked on the Cryogenic PSLV rocket.

Like the success stories of the Mars Orbiter Mission and Chandrayaan 2 had ignited new hopes and aspirations, his tenure will see the launch of Gaganyaan, the human space flight, considering that India aims to send astronauts into space on its own by 2023. He has its task cut out in terms of increasing the agency’s output, especially in the times of the COVID crisis.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Naimital

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

I don’t know under what circumstances it happened and why the tableau was not included. There might be some reasons.



Netaji Bose’s daughter — Anita Bose-Pfaff



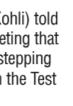
British Prime Minister — Boris Johnson

Looking forward to bringing to the audience the story of India’s most beloved *Funkaar*, Kapil Sharma.



Film director — Mridhdeep Singh Lamba

He (Virat Kohli) told us in a meeting that he will be stepping down from the Test captaincy.



Indian pacer — Jasprit Bumrah

I assure you that the roads will be smoother than the cheeks of film actress Kangana Ranaut.



Jharkhand Congress MLA — Dr Irfan Ansari

A curious move

If Punjab poll date can be deferred, why not delay this entire round owing to Omicron?

At the outset, let it be made very clear that this write-up seeks to cast no aspersions on the intent of the Election Commission of India, which is an autonomous body established by the Constitution. If anything, it only tries to assess whether the deferment of the Punjab Assembly election date is a case of double standards or even misplaced priority. The point is pertinent because all the major political parties in the fray in Punjab had in one voice demanded that the election date be put off in view of the Guru Ravi Das Jayanti celebrations, which would be celebrated on February 16. They said a large number of people were expected to move from Punjab to Varanasi



for participating in the celebrations. The Election Commission acquiesced and has postponed the date to February 20. Now, the development spawns a couple of related questions. One, aren’t the parties clearly in a game of upmanship here to woo the electorate by showing how much they care for the latter’s religious sentiments? And, isn’t the poll panel looking like it is playing into their hands rather than diligently fulfilling its constitutional mandate?

Two, is the issue of celebrating Guru Ravi Das Jayanti, or any other religious or community-based festival for that matter, is of bigger importance than the collective health and well-being of our nation’s people? Because, admit it or choose to ignore it at your own peril, the truth of the matter as bright as daylight is that the Omicron-led third wave of the pandemic is well and truly upon us. Highly transmissible as this COVID-19 variant is, our population is contracting it left, right and centre, as is evident by the skyrocketing number of the people contracted thus far. Also, by the parties’ own admission, lakhs of devotees would travel from Punjab to Varanasi for participating in the celebrations. Isn’t it a logical corollary and real and present risk that they could transmit the highly infectious virus to other, unaffected people on their two-way journey? And if the decision has come about for considerations other than a prominent sect’s religious sentiments, then why not extend the same yardstick to the other four States too that are going to polls in February and March? After all, by any measure, safety and good health for all citizens take precedence any day over a region- and religion-specific demand, isn’t it?



FIRST COLUMN SOCIALISING DIGITAL BRAND COMMUNICATION

Digital avatars and 'phygital' communication are the new drivers



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY SANTOSH K BISWAL

In the wake of technological upgradations, the space of media and communication is getting re-defined. Digital capital, digital representation, leap-frogging, technological determinism and communication revolution are the new buzz words. Narratives of digital marketing communications are changing fast. The advent and proliferation of 5G, increasingly adoption of popular culture and technological determinism have become the new landmarks of brand communication. There is no novelty in digitalizing the brand communication. However, socializing the digital platforms is the fad in the world of brand communication. Digital avatars, 'phygital' and immersive communication are the new explorations which have started influence the world of brands. Digital humanism is the larger talking point. Keeping Metaverse, social commerce and personalisation in their kitties, brand communicators are going to actualize the alternate digital realities in the dominant ecosystem of digital marketing space.



Metaverse espousing the unique digital articulations and communication will eventually shape up the influencer marketing. This new shift taking place in the business world must be reckoned with varied yardsticks. Content creators, brands and advertisers have come forward to capitalize on Metaverse. It is going to retell the narratives of advertising through immersive storytelling. Immersive storytelling through immersive communication is a multichannel, multisensory experience - what you can see and hear. It is non-linear and exploratory in which the audiences are free to interact with whoever they want to interact with or consume content and take full control over it. It is suitable for adding gamification and interaction. The frequency of inventions and upgrades in the technological world for the last few decades enriches the platform of the metaverse and one after one technical organisations eventually incorporate them. It has been observed that metaverse is one of the significant platforms for achieving success in executing the brand strategies.

Brands are now-a-days creating immersive experiences for their consumers. They are hiring metaverse engineering directors and utilising augmented tools to simultaneously collaborate on fashion, entertainment, and gaming innovations. Metaverse also opens up opportunities to involve consumers with the platform. Value creation is one of the key aspects of this platform. Metaverse has attempted to create a new universe of fashion. Fashion is an important aspect for the human for its self-expression and also beneficial for them to create identity like the way in real life. The new virtual digital platforms open the opportunities to experience a newly three-dimensional experience. However, various studies propose that fashion will top the virtual world than the physical world because of the involvement of metaverse in the daily lives of humans.

Digital avatars are the animated or photographic images, that web surfers use to identify themselves and communicate on the online platforms. Avatars tend to enhance the entertainment and information value and improve the overall satisfaction of web-based activities. Digital representation is getting more apparent. Apart from content creation, there is also the facility of interacting live with an audience using an avatar. Studies find that in high-involvement situation, the consumers are more likely to contemplate the content of an argument. That's why, avatar-mediated platform is providing Philip to business, branding and communications. Tellingly, metaverse will influence traditional jobs or activities including business activities. Its impact on human especially human and society in overall will be significant. Immersive, interactive, and collaborative form of communication is going to be next level order.

(Chakraborty and Biswal teach at Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow and Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, respectively. The views expressed are personal.)

Delink disinvestment & budgetary exercise

The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape undermines the disinvestment process



UTTAM GUPTA

With the financial year ending in two months, the Government is no close to meeting the target of ₹175,000 crore from disinvestment of Central Public Sector Undertakings set in the Union Budget for 2021-22. It has so far realized less than ₹10,000 crore. Even after adding around ₹100,000 crore, being the expected proceeds from sale of its 10 percent shares in Life Insurance Corporation of India, (on the premise that it goes through before the year-end), there will be a whopping shortfall of ₹65,000 crore. This is not new.

It is a continuation of a trend seen during the previous six years under the Modi dispensation when in all years except during 2017-18 (in that year, the proceeds from disinvestment of a little over ₹100,000 crore were slightly higher than the target; courtesy, sale of its 51.11 percent shareholding in oil downstream CPSU Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited to another CPSU in the upstream segment, ONGC), the collection was far short of the target.

During this period, the Government laid greater emphasis on 'strategic' disinvestment (a sophisticated nomenclature for share sale that reduces its holding in the PSU to below 50 percent). On this front also, the outcome has been disappointing. For instance, during 2015-16, proceeds from sale through this route were 'nil' against budget provision of ₹28,500 crore. For 2016-17, the target itself was reduced from ₹20,500 crore to ₹5,500 crore.

In the following two years, the target for 'strategic' disinvestment could be met largely because of the sale of Government's majority holding in one PSU to another: 51.11 percent shareholding in HPCL to ONGC in 2017-18 and 52.63 percent stake in the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to Power Finance Corporation (PFC) in 2018-19. During 2019-20, 100 percent of its shareholding in NEEPCO and 75 percent in THDC India Limited were sold to National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) - another CPSU in the power sector.

These sales can't be termed as strategic as the purchaser being another PSU namely ONGC/PFC/NTPC, the Government continues to have effective ownership and control over the divested entity viz. HPCL/REC/NEEPCO/THDC.

A number of major strategic sales such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited or BPCL (53.29 percent); Container Corporation or ConCor (30 percent); Shipping Corporation of India or SCI (63.75 percent) planned during 2019-20 besides Air India or AI (and its subsidiaries) - a carry forward from the previous year - didn't materialize. These sales didn't happen during 2020-21 also. While, AI et al were sold in September, 2021, sale of BPCL/SCI are unlikely to get



IN THE BUDGET FOR 2021-22, THE FINANCE MINISTER ANNOUNCED THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PRIVATISE ALL CPSUs IN NON-STRATEGIC SECTORS AND UNDERTAKE PRIVATISATION EVEN IN THE STRATEGIC SECTOR WITH A RIDER OF RETAINING AT LEAST ONE UNDERTAKING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR. THESE EFFORTS WILL BEAR FRUIT ONLY WHEN THE PROCESS IS UNSHACKLED FROM BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE AND BUDGET-MAKING

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



consummated even during the current FY.

An overarching reason as to why the actual proceeds from disinvestment have fallen short of the target has to do with the very premise of treating these as a source of revenue (albeit for plugging fiscal deficit) which is flawed. Unlike tax revenue, which can be projected with a degree of certainty, the same cannot be said about proceeds from disinvestment. In this case, a lot depends on the market scenario and, in particular, the perception of investors about the PSU in which share-sale is contemplated.

In cases, where strategic sale is mooted, the Government faces a bigger challenge as apart from a favorable market, it needs bidders with deep pockets. For instance, in case of BPCL (disinvestment in the oil behemoth was originally planned for 2019-20), it needed a strategic investor who could pay around ₹60,000 crore (prevailing share price multiplied by the number of shares corresponding to 53.29 percent holding).

The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape further undermines the chances of the Government kicking the ball rolling just around the time when the strategic investors are ready to put in their bets.

The NITI Aayog identifies companies for divestment which are then considered by the Core Group of Secretaries on Divestment (CGD), a long-drawn process by itself, which takes it to the Alternative Mechanism (AM) - a group of ministers including finance, road transport & highways, administrative reforms etc -

for approval. After AM's approval, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) moves proposal for in-principle approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). All put together, strategic divestment involves around 12 steps.

This leads to delay and by the time, all approvals are in place, the market scenario becomes adverse. In case of BPCL, during 2019-20, the international price of crude oil (fortunes of oil companies move in tandem with it) was hovering around \$70 per barrel. But the bureaucrats were not ready. During 2020-21, COVID-19 spoiled the party as the average crude price declined to just about \$40 per barrel (in April 2020, it had plummeted to a low of \$20 per barrel). During the current year, even as the price recovered ruling above \$70 per barrel most of the time, the officials are not ready yet again leading to deferment of its divestment to 2022-23.

In the past, successive governments used PSUs as milch cows to serve their budgetary needs. While, extracting high dividend, special dividend, bonus has been a standard practice, during 2004-2014, the then UPA - regime went a step ahead during the time to extend petroleum subsidies (for instance, ONGC was asked to give discount on crude supplies to Indian Oil Corporation or IOCL, BPCL and HPCL to enable the latter keep the price of diesel, petrol, LPG, and kerosene low; ONGC gave a total discount of over ₹200,000 crore during this period). The same mindset drives them to look for revenue even while divesting shares of these undertakings. The

ball does not stop here.

The official think tank is ever keen that even after completing the strategic sale, the Government remains in the driver's seat. A clear indication of this was given by the FM in her Budget speech for 2019-20. She had stated the intent was to change the existing policy from "directly" holding 51 percent or above in a CPSU, to one where-by its total holding, "direct" plus "indirect", is maintained at 51 percent. Such a signal deters potential investors.

To conclude, the government should delink disinvestment from budgetary exercise. In other words, while projecting its revenue receipt, the Government should not include any contribution from disinvestment proceeds.

For the purpose of executing share sale, it should set up a holding company on the lines of a bank investment company recommended by the RBI committee under P Nayak for public sector banks - where all its shares in the PSUs be vested. The HC to be manned by eminent professionals should be fully empowered and given freedom to take all decisions - in consultation with the management - in regard to valuation, quantum of shares, timing of sale, etc., keeping in mind the market conditions.

In the budget for 2021-22, the finance minister had announced the government's decision to privatize all CPSUs in non-strategic sectors and undertake privatization even in the strategic sector with a rider of retaining at least one undertaking in the public sector. These efforts will bear fruit only when the process is unshackled from bureaucratic red-tape and budget-making.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

I'M HURT BY THE DECISION OF THE GOI TO ABRUPTLY EXCLUDE WEST BENGAL'S PROPOSED TABLEAU WITHOUT ANY REASON.
—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER
MAMATA BANERJEE



THE TMC GOVERNMENT PURPOSELY MAKES SUCH TABLEAUX WHICH GET REJECTED, SO THEY CAN DO POLITICS OVER IT.
—BJP NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT
DILIP GHOSH

Readying India for the mammoth vaccination drive

A first-person, behind-the-scenes account straight from the trenches

Score: 156 crore vaccines. Pitch: Pandemic, War: Team Health India vs Covid-19. One year, 156 crore vaccinations. Roughly 42 lakh vaccinations plus daily. The story of the unparalleled journey of an extraordinary achievement of "Team Health India".

Before the world's largest vaccination drive was launched, several experts expressed doubts based on course of their experiences, facts, and hypotheses. Will we be able to make vaccines available as per the nation's needs? Do we possess storage capacities for such huge numbers? Do we have the necessary transport arrangements and trained manpower? It will take too long to ready the manpower to vaccinate such a large population.

Until now, the country has never vaccinated the adult pop-



MANOHAR AGNANI

(The writer is Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI and Nodal Officer for the COVID-19 vaccination drive. The views expressed are personal.)

ulation. We have not even digitized information on children's vaccination. How will we address vaccine hesitancy among people? How will vaccine reach timely and safely to far flung regions? Who will vaccinate them?

Amid this environment of criticism, "Team Health India" counted on known strengths:

- ◆ Decades of running our National Immunization Programme.
- ◆ Over 25 years of administering polio drops to almost 10 crore infants.
- ◆ Vaccinating over 35 crore children upto age 15 against measles and rubella.
- ◆ Experience of storing vaccines in 29,000 cold chain points and sending to far flung areas.
- ◆ Monitoring storage and distribution through e-Vin (Electronic Vaccine Intelligence



Network).

◆ Implementing 'Mission Indradhanush' to vaccinate left-out children and expectant mothers.

The most important reason behind this self-confidence was the unshakable conviction of the Prime Minister in the hidden potential of the citizens of our country, which became the greatest strength of "Team Health India".

The team first focused on resolving the doubts raised by the experts. So began an endless marathon of meetings on the vaccination drive. It was exact-

ly a year ago from today, before the launch of the world's largest vaccination drive by the Prime Minister, that we finalized the basic guidelines and completed necessary trainings.

"Team Health India" had the following ready much before January 16, 2021:

- ◆ Operational guidelines for Covid vaccination.
- ◆ Identified manpower for the drive and training them.
- ◆ Systems for transporting vaccines and extra storage capacities.
- ◆ Communication strategy for vaccine hesitancy, Covid Appropriate Behaviour.
- ◆ The CoWIN platform to enable vaccination in a digitized system.

A dry run was carried out in all States and UTs. The night of January 15 was a night to

remember, with chilling cold and nail-biting suspense to resolve a technical glitch CoWIN faced. Thousands were awake fixing the snag. Being the nodal officer for the National Covid Vaccination Programme, I too was present in the headquarters. I remember feeling like scientists sitting in a command centre about to experience the launch of a space shuttle. Words fail me in describing those moments of anxious anticipation or the deep sense of satisfaction on resolving the glitch. CoWIN was successfully kickstarted on time and we are all witness to the many benefits of the extraordinary Indian digital platform, which has continuously adapted to the evolving requirements of the programme.

This was just the beginning. In the first phase, vaccine avail-

ability was limited, and expectations were many. Rationalized distribution of the limited number of vaccines was a big challenge and criticism was inevitable. "Team Health India" worked on with virtual meetings for hours on end every day with vaccine manufacturers, vaccine transport agencies, storage centres, cold chain points and Covid Vaccination Centres with the singular aim-optimal use of every drop of the vaccine.

Next, imagine how the vaccines reached our remotest corners. Where there were no roads, cycles were used; in the deserts, camels helped; boats carried them across rivers; in the hills, vaccines were carried on backs. People were invited for vaccination with offerings of turmeric rice. For the vaccine hesitant, doors were knocked under 'Har

Ghar Dastak'. All this while, we didn't follow any western model; it bore the unique stamp of India's ingenuity.

The preparations required were enormous and time too little. We kept learning from experiences gathered from the field. In this pursuit, "Team Health India" neglected their personal needs, families, dreams; many even lost their loved ones to Covid. Despite that, there was an indescribable pride "Team Health India" felt in serving the nation in this once-in-a-century crisis. What I saw or write, is just the tip of the iceberg. For "Team Health India", there would be countless such moments of struggle and satisfaction, examples that are symbols of humanitarianism, examples that impart a sense of deep gratitude and hope.

India's economy set to improve over next 12 months: PwC report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth is all set to improve over the next 12 months despite the coronavirus pandemic-related problems and global headwinds, says the PwC Annual Global CEO Survey. The findings are based on a survey by the global consultancy that covered 4,446 CEOs in 89 countries and territories, including 77 from India, in October and November of 2021.

Despite a variety of headwinds, most notably those related to the ongoing pandemic, CEOs in India are significantly optimistic about the prospects for a stronger economy in the coming year, as per the survey released on Monday.

"99 per cent of CEOs in India believe India's economic growth will improve over the next 12 months, with 94 per cent of India CEOs being optimistic about global economic growth improving over the next 12 months as against 77 per cent of global CEOs," it said.



When it comes to the revenue prospects of their own companies, 98 per cent of CEOs are confident about growth during the same time period. While for the most part, CEOs globally are at least as optimistic as they were last year about the prospects for economic growth in 2022, the optimism of India CEOs, up from 88 per cent last year, stands out at 94 per cent. Sanjeev Krishan, Chairman

of PwC in India, said that while Omicron has cast a shadow and CEOs are focused on the health and safety of their employees at the moment, their confidence and optimism over the past one year is a testimony to the resilience of Indian companies. The vigour with which most Indian business leaders took the challenges brought in by the pandemic head on, coupled with the will to emerge stronger

in the face of adversity, has led to sustained growth for businesses in India, he said. "Perhaps owing to the futuristic groundwork done during the difficult times, 97 per cent of India CEOs are confident about their own company's prospects for revenue growth not only in the near term but also over the next three years," he said. Last year, 70 per cent of India CEOs viewed the pandemic as a top

threat to growth while 62 per cent considered cyber threats as an impediment to growth.

This year, 15 per cent of CEOs in India are apprehensive about cyber risks hindering their company's ability to raise capital. "India CEOs also agree that cyber risks could cause severe revenue disruptions, with 64 per cent of respondents fearing a breach could hinder sales of products or services. Besides business disruptions, 47 per cent of chief executives believe cyber threats could impede their ability to develop products and services," the survey said.

Further, it said that among the India companies that participated in the survey, 27 per cent already have a net-zero commitment (22 per cent globally) in place, 40 per cent are in the process of developing and articulating their commitments (29 per cent globally), and only 30 per cent have neither made nor are in the process of making any net-zero commitment (globally 44 per cent).

Budget 2022: FADA seeks GST rate cut on two-wheelers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile dealers' body FADA has urged the government to reduce GST rates on two-wheelers to 18 per cent in order to generate demand in the segment. The Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA), which represents over 15,000 automobile dealers having 26,500 dealerships, noted that two-wheelers are not a luxury item and hence GST rates need to come down.

"FADA requests the Ministry of Finance to regulate and reduce GST rates on two-wheelers to 18 per cent and continue to move our nation to global leadership," the industry body stated on Monday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget 2022-23 in Parliament on February 1.

It is noteworthy that two-wheelers are used not as a luxury thing but as a necessity to travel distances, especially by people in rural areas, for their daily working needs, it added.

"Hence the rationale of 28 per cent GST + 2 per cent cess which is for luxury/sin products



does not hold good for the two-wheeler category," FADA noted.

At a time when vehicle prices are increasing after a gap of 3-4 months due to rise in input costs and various other factors, a reduction in the GST rate will counter the price hike and help spur demand, it added. "FADA believes that the growth in demand and the ripple effects it will have on many dependent sectors will increase the tax collections. In the mid to long-term it will actually be revenue positive and also help bring in positivity in the overall consumer sentiment and thereby the overall economy," the industry body stated.

It also sought a uniform GST

rate of 5 per cent on the margin for all used vehicles, to create a win-win situation for the government, dealers, and vehicle owners.

"With the reduction in GST, it will help the industry to shift from unorganised segment to organised segment thus bringing in more business under the ambit of GST helping in putting brake on tax leakages," FADA noted.

The government currently charges GST on used cars at the rate of 12 and 18 per cent.

The cars under 4,000 mm are charged 12 per cent GST and the vehicles above the 4,000 mm mark are taxed at 18 per cent.

Hiring activity in Dec grew 2 pc sequentially on demand

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Hiring activity in December 2021 showed a marginal growth of two per cent compared to the previous month, mainly on positive demand in retail and agro-based industries, according to a report.

December 2021 saw a monthly rise of 2 per cent in hiring activity compared to the previous month as retail and agro-based industries witnessed a positive incline of 12 per cent on account of multi-channel approaches, technological adoption and government initiatives, according to the Monster Employment



Index, a report by Monster.com, a Quesst company. However, demand for talent surged 12 per cent year-on-year in December 2021, compared to the same month in

2020, showcasing an optimistic recovery cycle at the close of the year, the report added.

The report showed that month-on-month, the demand for roles in healthcare witnessed a surge of 6 per cent on account of rising COVID-19 cases in the country, while roles in HR and admin (5 per cent) and finance and accounts (4 per cent) also saw an uptick.

Further, it is quite encouraging to note that the demand for entry-level and intermediate roles saw the highest monthly growth at 2 per cent compared to other experience levels, it added.

Tech Mahindra acquires European tech firm for EUR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT company Tech Mahindra on Monday announced acquisition of 100 per cent stake in Europe-based Comtec Co IT (CTC) and 25 per cent stake in two IT platforms for a total of EUR 330 million (about Rs 2,800 crore). The company said the acquisitions will strengthen its digital engineering and insurance technology businesses. The acquisition of CTC is the second-largest acquisition that the company has made after scam-hit Satyam in April 2010.

Goenka takes over as AEPC Chairman; expects exports to register healthy growth in 2022

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Founder and Managing Director of Textport Industries Narendra Kumar Goenka on Monday took over as the Chairman of the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) and expressed hope that the sector's outbound shipments would record healthy growth in the coming months. He has replaced A Sakhivel. Goenka said the sector is witnessing a robust growth in exports and going by the orders in hand, this positive trend will further accelerate in the last quarter. "Apparel exports were 22 per cent up at USD 1.46 billion in December



2021 from USD 1.20 billion in December 2020. The same in the first nine months of this fiscal stood at USD 11.13 billion, 35 per cent more than USD

8.22 billion in April-December 2020. The trend is getting stronger," he said. Despite several disruptions in the global supply chain and demand, the

Indian apparel industry demonstrated its resilience by gradually inching back to the pre-pandemic growth path, he said, adding by the end of this financial year, "we will be looking at new targets". Goenka's Textport Industries is one of the largest apparel manufacturer-exporters in India and he has been associated with the council for more than two decades.

He was the Vice Chairman of the apex body of the Indian apparel exporters before taking charge as Chairman. "With global demand picking up gradually and industry reporting handsome orders in hand, apparel exports are likely to pick up in 2022.

Banks pitch for reduction of tax-free FD tenure to 3 years



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Banks have made a case for lowering fixed deposit (FD) tenure to three years for availing tax benefits, in line with mutual fund products like equity-linked savings scheme (ELSS).

Currently, the tax break is available on 5-year tax-saving FD schemes. One can claim an income tax deduction by investing money in a five-year FD scheme under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, 1961. Section 80C is a wide bracket with a ceiling of Rs 1.50 lakh.

"As compared to other financial products (such as ELSS) available in the market, the tax-saver fixed deposit (FD) has become less attractive and if the lock-in period is reduced, this would make the product more attractive and provide more funds to the banks," IBA said in a pre-Budget proposal submitted to the government.

The lock-in period should be reduced to three years from the existing five years, the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) said in its proposal.

Banks have also sought special rebates or additional depreciation for expenditure made on financial inclusion activities and promoting digital banking, among other activities.

IBA further said banks do a lot of activities for promoting the weaker sector, promoting digital banking and for implementing various schemes of the government under financial inclusion.

"By making expenditure of IT, banks give benefits to masses i.e. ease of doing business, digital banking, etc. Therefore, some special incentives in the form of the special tax rebate or deduction or additional depreciation (say 125 per cent) over and above the actual capital expenditure made on such activities may be provided," it said.

Banks also want a special dispute resolution mechanism for faster disposal of cases related to taxation.

Banks' appeals involve substantial amounts but these are treated on a parity with appeals involving small amounts, it said.

Rupee falls by 10 paise to 74.25 on high dollar demand

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined by 10 paise to close at 74.25 against the US currency on Monday, declining for the second straight day due to high dollar demand and forex outflows.

Dollar buying by banks on behalf of importers and weak economic data weighed on the local unit, analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local currency opened at 74.18 against the American currency and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.16 and a low of 74.36 during the session. The rupee finally settled at 74.25, down 10 paise over its previous close of 74.15 against the greenback. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six



currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent down at 95.11. "Weaker economic data, higher bond yields, and state-run banks dollar buying on behalf of importers weighed on rupee for the second day on the trot," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Global forex markets remain calm as the US market remained closed on Monday on account of Martin Luther King Day. Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.27 per cent to USD 85.83 per barrel. The rupee depreciated against the US Dollar

on Monday for the second straight session tracking losses in most regional peers, Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities said.

Most Asian currencies were weaker on Monday as a slew of Chinese economic data confirmed the deadening effect of coronavirus restrictions on consumer spending, prompting Beijing to again ease monetary policy, experts said.

China's economy expanded by 4 per cent y-o-y in the fourth quarter as Covid-19 restrictions and property woes hit demand. On the domestic equity market front, the BSE Sensex ended 85.88 points or 0.14 per cent higher at 61,308.91, while the broader NSE Nifty advanced 52.35 points or 0.29 per cent to 18,308.10 points.

50 more in wings to be unicorns; over 100 startups with over \$1 bn

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India has 50 startups with the potential to achieve the coveted unicorn status in 2022 and by the end of the year, the list of the new-age companies valued at over USD 1 billion will be at least 100, a report by a consultancy firm said on Monday.

In 2021, which witnessed a huge spike in company valuations in the listed and unlisted space driven by ample liquidity, according to some watchers, India added 43 startups to the list and the number of unicorns shot



up to 68 by the end of the year. Over USD 10 billion was invested in the Indian startup ecosystem in the October-December quarter alone, according to the

report by PwC India. We can see that the base of the companies in the growth stage and late-stage deals have improved significantly in CY21, depicting a stronger base of companies having the potential to reach unicorn status, the firm's partner for deals and startups Amit Nawka said.

He added that market sentiments are placed favourably towards startups, and when coupled with the large base of startups, the number of unicorns will go well beyond 100 by the end of 2022.

Banking institutions staring at frauds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of COVID-19 and new digital operations, banking and financial institutions have been struggling to deal with an increasing number of fraud incidents and the trend is expected to continue, a Deloitte India survey said on Monday. Key reasons identified for the increase in fraud incidents over the next two years include large-scale remote working models, increase in customers using non-branch banking channels and the limited/ineffective use of forensic analytics tools.

Mahindra's Truck and Bus Division's mileage scheme

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mahindra's Truck and Bus Division (MTB), part of the Mahindra Group, on Monday announced the 'Get More Mileage or Give Truck Back' guarantee for its entire range of BS-VI trucks. MTB offers a complete range of trucks from 3.5 tonnes to 55 tonnes, comprising HCV Blazo X, IVC Furio, and LCVs Furio 7 and Jayo range.

Third COVID wave undoes gains of biz

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The fast-spreading third wave of COVID-19 has undone the gains achieved due to resumption of business since the end of the lethal second wave last year, a Japanese brokerage said on Monday.

The Nomura India Business Resumption Index, which compares activity against the pre-pandemic levels of March 2020, fell to 102.9 for the week ended January 16 as against 107.9 in the previous week. The index has fallen by 17.4



percentage points (pp) since the third wave struck at the cusp of the new year.

The third wave -- which has seen daily infections climb to over 2.5 lakh from 1.70 lakh in

the week ago -- has undone business resumption gains since the second wave, Nomura said.

It can be noted that already, economists are estimating a dent of up to 0.40 per cent to the GDP because of the third wave, wherein an increasing number of states have resorted to restrictions on movements to contain the spread of infections.

The Omicron variant is said to be less potent as compared to the earlier Delta variant. For the week under review, the

Japanese brokerage said there has been an inevitable drop in mobility with the Apple driving index down 14.4pp, Google retail and recreation mobility 11.1pp lower, and workplace mobility down 1pp from the previous week.

The labour participation rate fell further to a nine-week low of 39.7 per cent from 40 per cent in the prior week, it said, adding that power demand contracted by 0.4 per cent as compared to the previous week, after a 2.1 per cent fall in the week before.

MONEY MATTERS

Sensex, Nifty advance on gains in auto, energy stocks



Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty edged higher on Monday following gains in IT, energy and auto stocks amid a firm trend in European markets. In a largely range-bound session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 85.88 points or 0.14 per cent higher at 61,308.91. As many as 19 of Sensex stocks advanced while 11 declined. The broader NSE Nifty rose by 52.35 points or 0.29 per cent to 18,308.10 points as 34 of its components advanced. Nifty opened flat, fell in the early trade and kept bouncing up from intraday falls before closing in the green. Ultratech Cement was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, surging by nearly 3 per cent. The cement giant announced nearly 8 per cent growth in its third-quarter net profit at Rs 1,710.14 crore.

India's apple exports up 82 pc since 2014: Commerce Min



India's apple exports have jumped 82 per cent since 2014, while fruit imports increased marginally by 3.8 per cent during the same time, according to the commerce ministry data. Increase in exports is helping the growers in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to further push the outbound shipments in different parts of the world. In value terms, exports rose to USD 14.45 million in 2020-21 from USD 8.6 million in 2014-15, the data showed. Apple exports during April-November this fiscal stood at USD 12.25 million, indicating healthy growth over the years. On the other hand, imports have increased 3.8 per cent to USD 240 million in 2020-21 from USD 230.8 million in 2014-15. About 82 per cent of apples imported into India are from Chile, New Zealand, Turkey, Italy, Brazil and the US.

Sebi examines alternative dispute resolution mechanism



To provide efficacious mechanism for resolving disputes between investors and regulated entities, capital markets regulator Sebi is examining introducing an alternate dispute resolution mechanism, a release said on Monday. Sebi in November 2021 published the 'Investor Charter' for securities markets to further augment its efforts to protect investors' interests, promote transparency in markets and enhance awareness, trust and confidence among investors. Since then, various steps have been taken to implement the charter, the regulator said. Separate charters regarding investor-related activities of various intermediaries have been developed by Sebi in consultation with the respective entities. The charter contains information related to details of various services provided by the intermediaries to investors, their timelines, importance of preservation of relevant documents by the investors, investor grievance redressal mechanism, etc.



Gemma Arterton on her *The King's Man* character

British actress-producer Gemma Arterton, who essays the character of Polly, the nanny of Harris Dickinson's Conrad in the recently released spy action comedy *The King's Man*, describes her character as an alpha that heads the household.

Talking about her character, the actress says, "She is Conrad's nanny, so she's taken care of him. But she's sort of the boss of everyone, including Oxford. She's very tough. She doesn't take any crap. She's the cleverest person in the room. She's very, very smart. But also very funny. A wise-cracker." She continues, "And because she's a servant and part of the staff, she is from a different social background. She's working class. So she isn't posh. There are a lot of gentlemen in the film, and high society, and she's a bit more practical."

Commenting on her preparations, Arterton decided that the character should hail from the North of England. "We decided that Harrogate was the perfect accent, because it's a soft Yorkshire accent, but it's quite muscular."

She adds, "We wanted it to sound like a period of the time, but I like it because it gives her a bit of sass. She sounds different to everybody else in the film. A little bit cheeky. A bit sassy."

Producer Karl Gajdusek refers to her as a "crackshot nanny," explaining, "She's one thing in front of the world and another thing behind closed doors, or with a gun in her hand."

Matthew Vaughn, director of the movie adds, "Gemma is an incredible actor. She's funny, she can do any accent, she's good at action. She's the whole package. So we were extremely lucky that she said yes to this."

Bridal trends for this year!

Every bride in India wants to be picture-perfect on her wedding day. Exquisite jewelry, vibrant colours, and royal attire are all part of the ritual.

Mohey has put together a stylish wedding collection with stunning embroidered work set in premium quality craftsmanship and design. To ensure that you look your best at all of your nuptial events, here are the bridal trends of 2022 from the brand's new wedding collection:

Colourful embroidery

While monochromatic lehengas are beautiful in their own right, multi-coloured lehengas call attention to and highlight the bride's vibrant and jazzy side, letting her to stand out among the crowd. Traditional functions such as Haldi and Mehendi ceremonies are all about colour and intricate

decor, so choose a colourful drape, skirt, and lehenga to go with it. Keep it discreet with light floral jewellery or accessories.

Love for red and maroon

Red is one of those colours that will never go out of style. Use a combination of thread work embroidery on red or maroon velvet lehengas with floral patterns and designs to make your bridal ensemble breathtakingly lovely.

Drape a lehenga dupatta

Do you appreciate dupattas and wish to make them the focal point of your ensemble? The sight of a voluminous veil or dupatta falling down a bride's gown is breathtaking. The dupatta adds a well-designed touch to your wedding gown by emphasising the classic and current style of a bridal lehenga. For an

attractive and classy look that may make or break your wedding ensemble, choose a dupatta that contrasts with the lehenga or go monochrome.

Shades of pink

Choosing a wedding lehenga colour is a difficult task for any bride who wants to avoid the traditional red. If you want to stand out from the crowd, go for a bright and cheerful pink wedding lehenga. This vibrant colour looks great on all skin tones and gives the bridal look a unique twist. These colours range from soft pastel pink to dusty pink and are suitable for both daytime and evening ceremonies.

Plunging neckline

Brides are opting for a deep neckline, which provides a whimsical twist and grace to traditional wedding attire while also adding a hint of seduction to the traditional style.



5 activities kids can indulge in as curfew kicks in

The transition from half-day school to having to sit at home all day has had an impact on children's capacity to participate in physical activities and do things that are not limited to their mobile phones. With the arrival of the new variation, schools have reopened and online sessions have resumed. There are many activities that a child can indulge in without having to step out of their home. And yes, these activities have got nothing to do with technological gadgets. We have curated a list of activities that a kid needs to try out:

Clay art

Clay art is one of the most engaging ways for your child to express his or her creativity. Scented clay packs available in the market help youngsters recognise different colours as well as shape, size, and texture differences. These come in 12 colours: white, yellow, orange, red, ruby,



pink, light green, dark green, light blue, dark blue, purple, and black along with moulds and multicolour rollers.

Monopoly deal card game

The monopoly card is a terrific source of fun for adults as well as youngsters. This is a family-friendly card game that takes about 15 minutes to play. It's a fantastic

deck of cards with excellent quality. Property cards, rent cards, house and hotel cards, and wild property cards are among the 110 cards included. Players can use action cards to accomplish things like charge rent and negotiate shady agreements. Rent values are increased by using house and hotel cards. Players establish proper-

ty sets using wild property cards, and they pay their debts with money cards. To win, be the first player to gather three complete sets of property cards in different colours.

Reading a personalised book

Personalised books like *The Tingling Finger* by Merlinwand are a great way for kids to spend their weekend. The book is

about discovering the world of magic and observing as objects everywhere shrink and expand, written by Dr. John SLight and illustrated by Srimidhi Srinivasan. The most intriguing aspect of the novel is that the reader gets to choose the protagonist's name and appearance. They also have the option of choosing one of three themes: birthday party, zoo, or school.

Attending a fun fest virtually

Some established edtech platforms are now coming up with virtual fun fests to celebrate learning through Education, Entertainment, and Inspiration. Recently organised one such fest by Extramarks had various live sessions in the form of virtual talks and workshops led by renowned storytellers, inspirational achievers, and impact creators across domains such as nutrition, mental health, parenting, creativity, photography, music, entrepreneurship, public speaking and many more.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



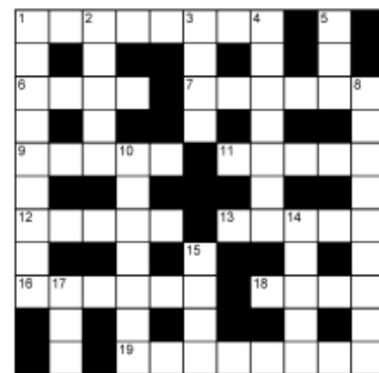
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Air-holes in your nose
 - Become larger
 - A spider's trap
 - Topic
 - A chopping tool
 - An insect that flutters by
 - Speaks
 - Baby cats
 - The body's pump
 - Uncles' wives
 - Took away illegally
 - Hot coals left from a fire
 - Meat from a cow
 - Unexpectedly, without warning
- DOWN**
- A frightening dream
 - Small seat without a back
 - A feeling that makes you want to scratch



NANCY

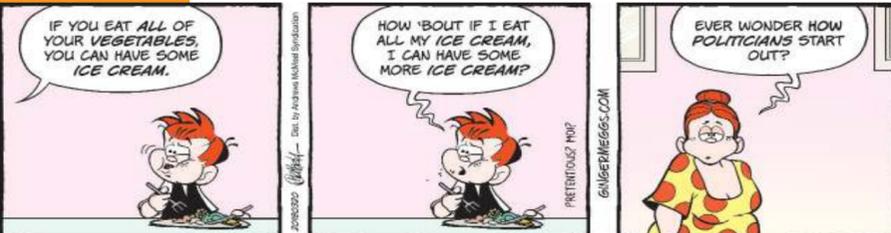


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- Yesterday's solution**
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| 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 9 |
| 7 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 6 |
| 9 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 5 |
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| 1 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 4 |
| 6 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 8 |
- Rules**
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

GINGER MEGGS



Striking a balance



While several business-ess were hit due to the pandemic, the art market was among a few which was not affected much due to the economic dishevel. Like others, the business of art also went online, with online art exhibitions, auctions and art previews. It resulted in reduced cost and carbon footprint by eliminating costs of printing catalogues, invites, international air travel for art fairs and packaging and shipping cost for fairs, et al. Also, going online proved to be a blessing in disguise for the art world with millennials becoming the new customers for art.

Choyals from Rajasthan, the three generation of artists who believe in striking a balance between the offline and online medium and have been actively tapping the online medium for their art, also did seemingly well this year.

"To understand the various nuances of the artwork and appreciate it, a physical display and exhibition of art is very important and you can't just do away with it. However, having a sizeable number of foreign art lovers, we do have our website running for more than a decade and have been showing online as well," says Akash Choyal, the youngest Choyal, known for his 3D illusion art and fibreglass sculptures.

"During the pandemic, being online certainly helped and added a new dimension to the art. Even the gallerists and art curators are tapping the medium but certainly not doing away with the offline shows. In fact, since mid 2021, physical shows are back

and the artists, art lovers and art collectors are indulging in it. The family of five artists sold quite a few artworks this year. Among their new art collectors were millennials, who are getting enthusiastic about the art as a viable investment option," Akash adds.

Swati Pasari, an spiritual-based artist from Kolkata saw a 15 per cent growth in sales of her artwork in 2020 and 2021. "The pandemic proved to be a blessing in disguise, as I ventured into the online space and could increase my sales. I participated in more than five exhibitions this year, both online and offline and am planning to continue my foray into the online exhibitions and art shows," shares Pasari.

She continues, "As people spent more time in their homes due to lockdown, they invested in decorating their space by buying colourful artworks, this was one of the major reasons for the growth in the art market. Also, along with decorating their space, people wanted to bring in more positivity in their homes," A Delhi based art curator and the founder of Art School & Gallery, The Art Hub, Bhavna Minocha, expresses, "During 2021, a year of challenges, despite the contraction of sales overall from the impact of Covid-19, it was interesting to see the new trends of shopping of art. In-person events went down, of course, but online sales went up. Interest in culture increased in the lockdowns. Young collectors were the highest spenders with online platforms enhancing accessibility. Affordable art created at our studio by upcoming artists sold very easily, but art collectors are waiting to buy the master's art when the studio is going to be a safer place for all of us to meet personally."

Meet Bros on touching bitter-sweet memories of *vidaai*



Bringing the most emotional moment of a wedding in the form of melodious tunes, Meet Bros has wowed their magic again. They made the 'just married' tag a little more elaborate but by taking you on an emotional roller-coaster moment. In the western countries, this event is mostly celebrated with laughter, while bidding farewell to the bride with smiles and cheer. But here in India, things are a bit more intense and that's what the sibling duo presented with the help of television actress Divyanka Tripathi. They emphasised and appreciated the actress well enough for the kind of strong emotions she portrayed but while in conversation with them, we realised it was a song dedicated to the composer duo's father. It was a change for their audiences too, from grooving onto their peppy tracks, they boiled down to a really sentimental song called *Babul Da Vehda*. They felt lyricist Kumaar has done an amazing job by penning down the indescribable emotions because the song left everyone emotional and speechless, most surreal emotions were portrayed on screen with a mesmerising aura!

Further in conversation, they shared, "From childhood, our father used to always speak about how women get married and leave everything behind. It's a lot for a father to let go of their child, to describe that there was a folk song he used to tell us about. It's been in our mind to do a song, when he was alive we couldn't do it and sadly we lost him last year but this is our way of dedicating a tribute to him." Sharing the idea behind the song, they explain, "Everybody spoke a lot about *vidaai* songs in India, but couldn't portray the complete emotion of it. So we came up with the idea of a song written in Punjabi slang. The motive was to portray the exact period. On one hand, all the festivities of the wedding are going on, and there comes a moment when the bride sits in the car and bids goodbye to her family weeping. On the other hand, when she reaches her *sasural*, she's looking for a warm welcome. It's a sad reality that exists where one home is celebrating the welcome of their daughter in law, the other is grieving that their daughter left the home. *Babul Da Vehda* was made, tapping on that — a song which reminisces every emotion and memory connected to *vidaai*."

Both the brothers didn't shy away from giving their strong opinions on a bal-

ance to be maintained in the marriage and gender equality issues. They opine, "We totally believe in the culture of our country. Let's take an example of one situation where a girl lives with her mother and they don't have a father, and has some needs to be taken care of. Another situation where a guy lives far away from his family, due to his work and makes his own home in another city. In such situations if a guy comes out and takes the charge, what's the harm in it? We should absolutely be open to such things. It's emotionally the same to bring up a girl or boy, so why not this could be also in respect to a culture that if somebody wants to do it in another way." Harmeet Singh continues, "The best compliment that I received was when someone said that this song is like an initiative. In a world where everything is completely dominated by men and women have to leave their houses — we should approach women organisations and ask why can't men leave their house and come and live with us? Why do women have to leave their houses, where they have been brought up and their whole childhood resides. *Sab chod chad ke*, they leave for another country or a city. It should be balanced. Women should take an initiative called *#marriagebalance* for an example. If a song can bring a revolution in the human kind and on the planet, why not. Even abroad, women leave their houses and come."

Manmeet asserts, "When we got these videos, we saw old men crying, watching the video. An emotion which takes a lot of stirring up, and a man who never cried, we see them weep and that's a big compliment in itself."

The biggest challenge for the composers was to bring into light, a face which is very relatable and easy to connect to. They have known Divyanka for a while and when they approached her saying they wanted to do a song with her, she felt so connected and gave an instant nod. Sure there are happy moments when everyone blesses the bride with a life full of happiness and love. But there is also an overwhelming sense of loss. Especially felt by the parents of a bride who find it extremely hard to say goodbye to their beloved daughter and that's what you'll see in *Babul Da Vehda*.

strengthens core muscles and hamstrings, glutes and external rotators. Keeping the hands behind your head during the walk loads the muscles around the shoulder, giving you a good burn. This

looks easy but it's not a cake walk either," says Zaineb Ali, a certified pilates instructor shedding light on an unusual exercise that initially caught the eyes of stars like Jennifer Lopez and Anne Hathaway.

Pilates is used by physiotherapists all over the world, to increase postural awareness and to alter faulty patterns of movement by addressing muscle imbalances. Through pilates,

many have noticed greater control in their spinal stability, pelvic stability and mobility, enabling them to improve their posture, inner strength and balance leading to an overall healthy movement, minimising stress to joints during everyday activities. Don't believe us? Check out your favourite star's social media accounts to cross-check. A lot of celebrities swear by pilates! From Deepika

Padukone to Sara Ali Khan, they love this form of exercise and often take to their social media accounts to share snippets from their fitness sessions. Katrina Kaif is the latest celebrity to join the pilates fan club.

Swearing by Pilates is the new thing to do

Doing pilates is the new OG thing to do! People, especially women are trading their sneakers and workouts for pilates because it has proven to be more popular than ever. If there was any good that came out of pandemic, it was to leave us with a greater appreciation for fitness and making us prioritise health like never before!

The months of lockdowns saw our living rooms turn into workout studios. A day back, actress Elli Avram shared a short glimpse of her pilates routine on her Instagram profile and it is redefining dedication, flexibility and balanced movements for us. In the video, Elli can be seen standing on a rail of sorts with her legs stretched to both sides. Then she can be seen bending her body and touching her feet with her other hand. She can be seen doing the process repeatedly and slaying it with her balanced movements. In the caption, Elli also clarified that even though the routine looks easy, it was very difficult to ace it and so does a fitness enthusiast seconds her opinion.

Shobana Mahansaria, Director of CoreFit Plus says, "What happens when you are suddenly told one day that you will never be able to walk again? In some cases, it can completely crush one's self esteem to live, but not in my case. Having an illness called Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis, it can be life-changing for anyone, as it was for me in many ways. But pilates also turned my life around."

To be able to rebuild her body back from the basics, to walking with a stick at the age of 35, to constantly be told that she should feel happy with her condition, just because she was better off than many, was a constant struggle for Shobhana which was not only physical but mental as well. But she learnt quickly that it is her mind that controls her body! "I have always felt that no matter how we feel on the inside, it is very important to get dressed and show up for recovery. Pilates has played a very important role in my recovery, which is why I

would recommend it to anyone who is struggling with rehabilitation of any kind. Pilates is a systemised form of exercise, which focuses on core strengthening, including our abdominal and our back muscles," she adds.

Pilates can seem very intimidating for someone who hasn't done it before, but it is really safe in which one focuses their concentration on each movement that are precise. It also includes a steady and controlled form of breathing. So, pilates can be done on an apparatus which works with spring, tension and resistance, called a reformer, or it can be done on a mat with the help of your own body weight. According to Nira Shah, a certified yoga instructor, "Pilates helps in strengthening mental health but is not a form of spiritual exercise. Pilates helps in gaining abs and other muscle groups. Pilates movements target a specific muscle group and they are repeated while breathing is controlled and it helps in maintaining endurance during repetitions. It is designed to make you feel stronger, aligned and flexible. It helps in the physical movement of the body efficiently."

Pilates is great not only for losing weight but for also chronic fatigue, and for rehabilitation purposes as well. The director of Corefit continues, "As it is a low impact exercise designed to strengthen key muscle groups without causing full-body fatigue, I could do pilates because my trainers could customise my exercise routine to a level that my body could tolerate, without too much of exertion. For me, pilates is a great way to ease into fitness and build strength. Since I am someone who has always tried to be active, given my physical limitations, it wasn't very hard to start it. Pilates helped me become attuned to my body and taught me how to really control my movement through proper breathing, correct pelvic and spinal alignment. This is how it automat-

ically helped in reduction of my pain because while performing these exercises breathing played a very important role. When my oxygen levels are good, I feel better and breathing also simultaneously helped in recovery of my muscles."

With this extraordinary vision for wellness in mind, she wanted to bring up spaces in India that facilitated holistic wellness among individuals starting at a very early age stressing on the comprehensive development of children and later, adults! "The 'Platypus Walk' is an incredibly accessible exercise done with a wide stance with feet turned, requiring loads of external rotation at hips. Standing and walking in that stance



IF GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY, IT WILL BE AN HONOUR TO CAPTAIN INDIA: JASPRIT BUMRAH



PTI ■ PAARL (SOUTH AFRICA)

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday said he is not averse to leading the national team if an opportunity comes knocking at his door in the near future.

With Virat Kohli's captaincy tenure in all formats coming to an end following his resignation from Test leadership, there are questions about who could be his long-term successor considering that Rohit Sharma will be 35 next year. "If given an opportunity, it will be an honour and I don't see any player (who) would say no and I am no different," Bumrah, who is KL Rahul's deputy for the ODI series against South Africa, replied to a query from PTI in a press conference ahead of the three-match rubber starting Wednesday. "Be it any leadership group, I always look to contribute however I can, to the best of my abilities," he added.

Bumrah said taking responsibility and helping teammates comes naturally to him.

"I look at this situation in the same manner... Taking responsibility and talking to players and helping them out has always been my approach and it will

always be my approach going further keeping any situation in mind."

The India pace spearhead believes that there would be no tangible change in his role although he is the vice-captain now. "Having post or not doesn't matter. I always focus on how I can contribute," he said.

"For me, the role doesn't change at all. I have to do my job first, isn't it? Trying to contribute as much as I can and then helping KL if he needs any assistance on the field and sharing a bowler's mindset on what kind of fields you can keep that I always look to do," Bumrah said.

In fact, he has done all this and more even when he wasn't appointed the vice-captain. "Even when I am not vice-captain, I try to talk to some of the younger guys, have a lot of discussions on what kind of fields that need to be set and the same role I will try to do that again as well."

"No specific role or added pressure I am going to take. Yes, helping KL in any way possible and trying to keep a calm head."

New Team Management? "Change is the only constant" The Indian team manage-

ment, following Virat Kohli's complete exit from captaincy roles across formats, bears a new look but Bumrah doesn't see "anything weird" and believes that one needs to respect the new set-up that's in place and start moving ahead.

"I can't speak for everyone but I can say that for me, it doesn't really make much of a difference. I am here to help all in whatever way I can. All the players are responding to the changes that have and everybody is respectful and understand how the processes are going."

"Change is the only constant and we are happy everybody is contributing and we are getting (acquiring) a lot of knowledge and trying to contribute to that. I don't think anybody is facing a problem or is in a weird space with the change that is happening," Bumrah spoke for himself.

Acceptance is key and that's what Bumrah expects from everyone. "Everybody understands change and have played enough cricket to understand that this is the way the game goes and this is how you move forward. So everyone in the team is quite positive and eager to contribute."



Rohit close to getting match-ready

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's white ball captain Rohit Sharma is recovering well from his left hamstring injury and has a bright chance of making a comeback for the six-match home white-ball series against the West Indies next month.

Rohit, who was also the designated Test vice-captain for the tour of South Africa, sustained a left-hamstring strain during a net session just prior to the team's departure for the tour and had to pull out.

He was subsequently also forced to skip the ODIs in South Africa, starting this Wednesday, as he couldn't attain full fitness before the selection committee announced the team.

"Rohit's rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy is going pretty well. He is

expected to be okay for the West Indies series.

It's still close to three weeks from now before the first ODI is played in Ahmedabad from February 6," a BCCI source privy to developments told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The series against the West Indies comprises three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals. The one-dayers will be played February 6 to 12, followed by T20Is from February 15 to 20.

For Rohit, the hamstring has been a recurrent problem which also forced him to miss the first two Test matches as well as the white-ball leg of the tour of Australia in 2020-21.

He did make a comeback for the final two Tests after serving a two-week hard quarantine in Sydney for the last two Test matches.

Sindhu looks to end title drought at Syed Modi International



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu will look to recover from her unexpected semi-final loss at the India Open and end her title drought at the Syed Modi International, which begins here on Tuesday.

The 26-year-old from Hyderabad was well on course to win her first title since the 2019 World Championship triumph last week before left-hander Supanida Katethong of Thailand shattered her hopes with a three-game win at the India Open.

Sindhu, who had finished runner-up at Swiss Open and World Tour Finals last year, will hope to turn things around this week when she begins her campaign against compatriot Tanya Hemant. The Indian will be itching to settle scores against Supanida, whom she is likely to face again at the semifinals at the Babu Banarasi Das Indoor Stadium here. Second seeded Canadian Michelle Li, a Commonwealth Games silver medallist, will be one of the strong contenders for the title in women's singles, which also has Polish eighth seed Jordan Hart, second seed Iris Wang of USA and Russia's fifth seed Evgeniya Kosetskaya.

Men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty has decided to give the Super 300 tournament a miss after claiming their maiden India Open Super 500 crown. Lakshya Sen, who secured his maiden Super 500 title at New Delhi on Sunday, also is likely to follow suit after playing continuously since October last year.

Among others, World Championships silver medallist and top seed Kidambi Srikanth also is unlikely to compete this week as he is undergoing seven-day mandatory quarantine after withdrawing from the main draw last week following a positive COVID-19 result.

Third seed B Sai Praneeth, who had pulled out of India Open after testing positive, is also awaiting a RT-PCR test result, while Ashwini Ponnappa and Manu Attri are yet to recover from the virus and will miss the tournament.

Ashwini is part of the top seeded women's doubles pairing, while Manu and B Sumeth Reddy are seeded third in the men's doubles event. On a comeback trail, former top-10 player H S Prannoy gave a good account of himself before being stopped by 20-year-old Sen in the quarterfinals last week.

England register seven-wicket win over Bangladesh

PTI ■ BASSETERRE (ST KITTS AND NEVIS)

Defending champions Bangladesh suffered a seven-wicket loss against England in a lop-sided contest to make a poor start to their campaign at the ICC U-19 World Cup here.

Opting to bat, Bangladesh were bundled out for a paltry 97 by England, who then returned to overhaul the target in 25.1 overs.

England produced a lethal bowling effort to reduce Bangladesh to 51 for nine in the 25th over at Warner Park in the Group A match.

No.11 Ripon Mondol hit 33 not out in a spirited last-wicket stand of 46 with Naimur Rohman (11) to drag Bangladesh close to the 100-mark.

Left-arm pacer Joshua Boyden was the pick of the bowlers for England with figures of four for 16, while right-arm fast bowler Thomas Aspinwall scalped two wickets, giving away 18 runs.



Besides, Tom Prest (1/5), Fateh Singh (1/29) and James Sales (1/29) took a wicket each.

In reply, England lost opener George Thomas (15) and captain Tom Prest (4) but Jacob Bethell (44) and James Rew (26 not out) put on 65 before the former was run out just shy of the finish line as England cruised to victory.

Earlier, Bangladesh's decision to bat first backfired

as they lost wickets at regular intervals and slumped to 26 for five by the 14th over.

Bangladesh made a slow start to their innings before losing their first wicket -- Mahfijul Islam -- in the fifth over.

Bangladesh's struggle from the onset can be gauged from the fact that only four of their batters managed double digit scores, with last man Mondal top-scoring with a 41-ball unbeaten

knock which was studded with five boundaries and one six.

Chasing the total, England got off to a slightly nervy start as Bethell survived a run-out scare when SM Meherob could not gather the ball at the stumps with only five on the board.

He survived a close lbw appeal off Ashiqur shortly after before opening partner Thomas began to up the ante after a cautious start.

But having hit three fours, Thomas perished for 15 when he miscued another attacking shot off Ripon to leave England 20 for one in the ninth over.

That breakthrough gave Bangladesh a small glimmer of hope but when the English captain Prest nicked one behind off his counterpart Rakibul for four soon after, the game was very much on.

However, Rew joined hands with Bethell and together they batted superbly, counteracting the Bangladesh spin attack to alleviate any potential English nerves.

Ireland's historic ODI series win over West Indies

AP ■ KINGSTON

Ireland achieved a historic series win over the West Indies after winning their deciding one-day international by two wickets at Sabina Park.

The 2-1 come-from-behind series victory from the third ODI gave Ireland a first ODI series win away from home against a full member.

This also was only its second series win against a full member, after Zimbabwe at home in 2019. After bowling out the West Indies for 212 inside 45 overs, Ireland reached a winning 214-8 in the 45th.

It was a remarkable end to a COVID-19-disrupted two-nation tour which began with Ireland's own historic loss to a hosting United States in a Twenty20.

An over-eager William Porterfield was lost to the first ball of Ireland's chase on Sunday but the batting was mainly patient and practical.



The poised top order did its job. Stand-in captain Paul Stirling, dropped before he scored by Jason Holder in the slips, made 44 off 38 balls with five boundaries and a six. Stirling was out at 73-2. No. 3 batter Andy McBrine, after taking four wickets, scored 59 off 100 balls before he edged behind. He was out at 152-3 and eventually given a second straight man of the match award. That also earned him man of the series. His offspin earned 10 of the West Indies' 30 wickets in the series.

No. 4 Harry Tector notched a third half-century in three matches with his 52 off 76 balls. Tector lifted Ireland to the brink of victory when he was out at 197-6 in the 42nd over.

Two wickets in three balls by Akeal Hosein added some late drama, but tailender Craig Young completed Ireland's triumph with a boundary for the match and series with 5.1 overs to spare. The West Indies won the first ODI by defending 269 runs, lost the second on Thursday after making 229.

Djokovic heads for Belgrade after deportation from Australia

AP ■ DUBAI

Novak Djokovic was heading home to Serbia on Monday after his deportation from Australia over its required COVID-19 vaccination ended the No. 1-ranked men's tennis player's hopes of defending his Australian Open title.

An Emirates plane carrying him from Australia landed in Dubai early Monday, and Djokovic was later seen on board a plane due to land in the Serbian capital of Belgrade at 12:10 CET. His lawyers had argued in an Australian court on Sunday that he should be allowed to stay in the country and compete in the tournament under a medical exemption due to a coronavirus infection last month. Djokovic has won nine Australian Open titles, including three in a row, and a total of 20 Grand Slam singles trophies, tied with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most in the history of men's tennis. Federer is not playing while recovering from injury, and Nadal is the only former Australian Open men's champion in the tournament that began Monday.



Djokovic's visa was initially canceled on Jan. 6 by a border official who decided he didn't qualify for a medical exemption from Australia's rules for unvaccinated visitors. He was exempted from the tournament's vaccine rules because he had been infected with the virus within the previous six months.

He won an appeal to stay for the tournament, but Australia's immigration minister later revoked his visa.

OSAKA, NADAL ADVANCE IN AUSTRALIA

AP ■ MELBOURNE

The first test of Naomi Osaka's new approach to tennis might have been when she completely whiffed an overhead to give her opponent a break point on Day 1 of the no-Novak-Djokovic Australian Open.

Osaka didn't chuck her racket. She didn't roll her eyes. She smiled.

"There are situations where I previously would get upset. But at this point in my life, like, I'm here because I want to be here and because I find that it's fun for me," Osaka said. "Might as well enjoy it while I still can."

In Osaka's mind, the drama involving nine-time champion Djokovic's deportation on the eve of the Australian Open was



something for the players in the men's draw to worry about. Her title defense began smoothly enough: She won the first five games on the way to a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Camila Osorio on the main court.

With so much attention on the 11-day saga of Djokovic's attempt to participate in the year's first Grand Slam tournament, and bid for a fourth consecutive title at Melbourne Park, the returns of Osaka and Rafael Nadal have been

overshadowed.

Osaka wasn't bothered by that. Nadal didn't seem to be put off by it, either, renewing his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam singles title with a 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 win over Marcos Giron.

"Growing up, I've looked up to him," said Giron, a 28-year-old from the U.S.

"He's one of the absolute legends of the game." Nadal is tied with Djokovic and Roger Federer with 20 major sin-

gles titles each, the most in the history of men's tennis. With Djokovic unable to defend his crown in Melbourne because he didn't meet Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination criteria, the door is slightly more ajar to Nadal.

Osaka's main concern, meanwhile, is winning a fifth major title, and her third at the Australian Open.

"To be completely honest, it didn't really affect me," Osaka said about what went on with Djokovic.

"My goal, like even before this whole situation, is to just focus on myself more, what I need to do to become better."

"Me, I'm a tennis player. I'll focus on my matches. You as, I guess, an audience, focus on whatever is in the news, no?"

Real Madrid tops Athletic 2-0 to win Spanish Super Cup

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid won't be going a second consecutive season without a title.

After failing to lift a trophy under Zinedine Zidane last season, Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid secured the Spanish Super Cup with a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in Saudi Arabia. Luka Modric and Karim Benzema scored a goal in each half of the final as Madrid comfortably defeated the defending champions to reinforce its status as the top team in Spain this season.

Madrid has already beaten Barcelona twice — including in the

Super Cup semifinals — and Atlético Madrid once, and is more than 15 points ahead of both rivals halfway through the Spanish league season. Ancelotti has also led Madrid to the knockout stage of the Champions League.

Madrid went without a trophy for the first time in more than a decade last season under Zidane.

"This is motivation for us to keep going," Ancelotti said.

"We have to keep competing like this." Madrid's 12th Super Cup title moves the club only one behind Barcelona, the competition's most successful team. Athletic was seeking its fourth Super Cup trophy.

It was Madrid's second Super Cup title since the competition was moved to Saudi Arabia in 2020. It had won the first edition of the tournament in the Middle East country by beating Atlético in the final.

The Super Cup returned to Spain in 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Spanish soccer federation has had to defend itself from criticism from human rights groups for its decision to play in Saudi Arabia in a deal reportedly worth 30 million euros (\$34 million) a year through 2029.

Athletic was seeking its second consecutive title after defeating Barcelona in last year's final. It beat



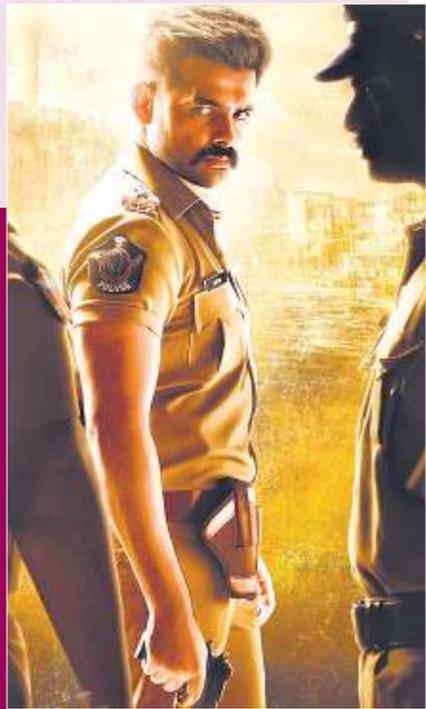
Atlético in this year's semifinal in the revamped "Final Four" format.

Modric opened the scoring with a curling shot into the top corner after being set up by forward Rodrygo just inside the area in the 38th minute. Benzema added to the lead by converting a 51st-minute penalty kick after a handball determined by video review. Athletic had a chance to move closer in the final minutes but Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois saved Raúl García's penalty kick with his left foot. Madrid defender Eder Militao was sent off for the handball that prompted the penalty.

"We could have gotten back into

the game but Courtois ended our chances with that save," Athletic defender Oscar de Marcos said.

"It's a shame but we have to be proud. It's not easy to make it to these finals. We competed against great teams." Madrid's triumph gave veteran Brazil defender Marcelo a record-tying 23rd title with the club since he arrived in 2006, joining Paco Gento. It moved him ahead of former central defender Sergio Ramos, who is now with Paris Saint-Germain. It is Marcelo's fifth Spanish Super Cup title. He entered the match as a substitute in the 86th and lifted the trophy as team captain.



Ram dons khaki for the 1st time in *The Warrior*

The makers of director Lingusamy's film with Ram Pothineni in the lead on Monday announced that the film had been titled *The Warrior*. The Tamil-Telugu bilingual is an action drama that has triggered huge interest ever since it was first announced. On Monday, the team chose to release the title and the first look of the film. *The Warrior* poster features Ram Pothineni as a police officer wielding a gun with a tough look, while cops surround him. Says director Lingusamy, "The poster has triggered curiosity about the story that has the energetic star at its center. Fans are sure to find this film exciting as they will see Ram donning the khaki for the first time". Sources close to the unit say that a fresh schedule of *The Warrior* has commenced in which crucial scenes are being shot. The movie's team vouches that it will surpass the

expectations of fans and that it will be one of the memorable police stories of south Indian cinema. Aadhi Pinisetty, who is popular in both Kollywood and Tollywood, plays the antagonist. The film has Krithi Shetty in the lead, while Akshara Reddy will be seen in a pivotal role." Producer Srinivasaa Chitturi says, "We are happy to announce our association with Ram Pothineni and we have kickstarted 2022 with lots of excitement and are striving to bring the best to the audiences. We hope to make a film that is loved and enjoyed by the audience thoroughly. We hope we make the audience happy with our content." *The Warrior* is expected to be a feather in Srinivasaa Silver Screen's hat after the success of its recent sports drama, *Seetimaari*, which had Gopichand and Tamannah Bhatia in lead roles. The upcoming action-drama will be presented by Pavan Kumar and is a Devi Sri Prasad musical.

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Initially, whether he wanted to make his living as an actor or not, the one thing Tollywood actor Ravi Varma knows now for a definite fact is that he wouldn't want to be typecast ever in this industry. This fine-drawn actor is known for being cast opposite T-Town biggies like Jr. NTR, Mahesh Babu, Vijay Deverakonda, and the list goes on. It was the movie *Vennela* that brought him so much of fame and marked his position here in the Telugu industry. Whenever there's a new antagonist role coming up, directors look for Ravi Varma. In a candid conversation with this well-spoken man, we heard from him saying, "I have given multiple interviews but nobody has ever touched upon the real aspects of acting that involves the combination of passion and emotion and here I am talking about it for the first time with you guys. If you see acting through my eyes, it's like living another life. I was always surrounded by doctors and principals, never knew I'll be an actor someday. I wanted to be each one of them and what better job than an actor's? Since the time I have joined films, it made me realise cinema is timeless."

His life as an actor also entailed a lot of sacrifices and struggles. While the biggest stars were commanding some of the heftiest paychecks in the world, there was actor Ravi Varma struggling to join the best acting course abroad but couldn't due to initial financial setbacks. Acting in Telugu industry didn't come steady for him but today he has joined the coveted ranks of best working actors here and that's what keeps him going. He recollects with us, "I am an easy Godavari child, I at first visited Hyderabad to explore my acting opportunities and landed up in Ram Gopal Varma's office. One of his associates suggested me to join an acting course abroad! I couldn't accomplish acting opportunity in USA, it was financially getting tougher for me to survive there. Surprisingly, I ended up doing my masters in maths and computers there. Even an acting diploma is so expensive there. The only thing I could manage was to get trained in New York Film Academy for a tenure of three months yet I managed to crack the code and started working for Telugu films and now happily foraying into Kannada language too." He calls himself to be a lucky chap who got selected for a Hollywood movie that left a great impact on the audiences, so much so that it was re-made in Telugu titled as *Vennela*. His role as an antagonist that garnered so much of appreciation across the state landed him opposite Jr. NTR in a very crucial role titled *Rakhi*.

"I was playing the brother in law of NTR, it was worth the wait especially being directed by a prominent director of his time that's Krishna Vamsi. People still call me Vennela Ravi and Rakhi Ravi but I never want to be typecasted. I don't like prefixes being added before my name!" he added. He has been so compliant since the time of his childhood that once his

teacher associated him with a bonafide artist of the same name, actor Ravi felt it so deeply that he begun painting. Moving ahead from there, he started training himself in the Kathak dance form, mime, bhanga, and naga dance form. He wasn't just stopping in pursuit of becoming one of the creative man alive! Also, dancing became his forte. He started expressing himself well and this helped him quite well whenever he's acting with emotions on-screen. Moreover, he strongly feels if he wouldn't have done mime acts in his life, he wouldn't have grabbed onto the depth of acting here. "I would love to play the role of a consequential actor than the protagonist having long dialogues on screen. My eyes do the talking! Maximum roles that I have played hits the chord of momentous than emotional aspect. I do

believe eyes are a reflection of your art, I consume this as a solemn truth. I never take up roles for fame or fortune! I do it as an experimental activity. Until now, I have played a villain in ten Telugu movies but the aura is always different," he mentioned. Sharing one of his fondest memories with Jr. NTR, he couldn't hold his excitement back on the telephonic call, and goes onto say, "It was my third Telugu movie in this industry and wasn't still known to be an experienced actor. And then, to deal with the A-listers of the entertainment era was another ball game for me. Shooting for *Vennela* went really smooth, did it in a single take but when there's an experienced actor present on the set, it's only human for us to shake up a little. But I figured it out on the sets of *Rakhi*. I still remember the scene where

NTR had to touch my feet, he eventually started ragging me. He cracked a deal to me for this — he said I'll have to accompany him to the movie screening and sit in the front row with him. His fans tortured me on a hilarious note because I was the 'bad guy' in the film." He also continued to reveal that Jr. NTR is a highly competitive colleague, but at the same time knows how to comfort his co-stars. Ravi can never forget the surprise birthday celebrations Jr. NTR held for him and took the effort of remembering his birthday on the sets. Ravi Varma was overwhelmed! He continued, "The co-director approached me asking whether am I free on my birthday or not. I said yes, and then he goes 'Perfect, we'll shoot your death sequences that day' and I was taken aback amusingly. NTR forced me to come on sets that day (he laughs hard). He ensured a grand celebration in the afternoon for me, both NTR and Krishna Vamsi *garu* smashed my face into the cake. Can never forget these happy memories." Not just this, his birthday present was equally amazing as the celebrations! He discloses to us, "On the same day, I had a shoot with Mahesh Babu for the movie *Sainikudu* and Gunashekhar *garu* added a whole scene for me present-ing me with some dialogues on the occasion of my birthday. Such things have happened here with me in

Tollywood which makes me work for them more." Looking forward to his Kannada stint now, actor Ravi Varma is all set to expand his horizons in the acting fraternity without being generalised in that industry. He concluded, "My profile always suggests directors to cast me as a villain, I am not going to do that anymore until and unless it's anything but crucial. My perspective is more inclined towards a supporting actor who is equally important as the protagonist these days!"

I never take up roles for fame and fortune: Ravi Varma



Director Kalyan Krishna who delivered Sankranthi blockbuster with Akkineeni Nagarjuna and Naga Chaitanya starrer *Bangarraju* will be collaborating with KE Gnanavel Raja of Studio Green production house for his next directorial venture.

One of the popular production houses in south India, Studio Green has been making content rich movies, besides producing high budget entertainers with star heroes. Equally popular in Telugu, several films made under the banner were dubbed and released in here.

"Happy to Announce, we have collaborated with Telugu Sankranti BLOCK BUSTER #Bangarraju Director @kalyankrishna_k for his next Big venture. Other details Soon.. @kegvrja #Sankranti #Bangarraju #BlockbusterBangarraju," announced the producer.

Kalyan Krishna joins hands with KE Gnanavel Raja

Known for making perfect family entertainers, Kalyan Krishna has been winning accolades for coming up with an ideal Sankranti movie with *Bangarraju* which is turning out to be a huge blockbuster. Other details will be announced soon.



Ganesh Bellamkonda drops feel-good glimpse

Swathi Muthyam is a refreshing family entertainer bankrolled by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi under the production house Sithara Entertainments. The film that marks the acting debut of Ganesh Bellamkonda, features Varsha

Bollamma as the female lead. Directed by Lakshman K Krishna, Swathi Muthyam has music by Mahathi Swara Sagar. Commemorating Sankranti, the makers have launched the film's first glimpse.

The first glimpse of *Swathi Muthyam* takes viewers through a tale of two youngsters on the cusp of marriage. A guy and a girl agree on an alliance fixed by their parents and meet each other. While the guy tries hard to get into the good books of the girl with a few gestures that turn unintentionally funny, the girl surprises him with her confidence when she asks him about his virginity. The glimpse ends on a funny

note when the bridegroom washes the legs of the bride's father as part of *kanyadanam*. Ganesh Bellamkonda's innocence and Varsha Bollamma's next-door-girl appeal in the first glimpse instantly win you over. Filming of major portions of *Swathi Muthyam* neared completion.

Anushka too scared to shoot

It has been a while since someone saw Anushka Shetty either on screen or at any of the film events.

Sometime back Anushka Shetty announced a film with Naveen Naveen Polishetty to be directed by a newcomer Mahesh P. However, the film is yet to go on floors. The reason we hear is that Anushka is too scared to step out amidst the pandemic. We hear that the actress is in no mood to begin shooting and is not giving the dates for the shoots.



Dimple Hayathi tests positive for Covid

Actress Dimple Hayathi, who plays the female lead opposite Vishal in his upcoming action entertainer *Veerame Vaagai Soodum*, has announced that she has tested positive for Covid.

Taking to Instagram, the actress wrote, "Hi everyone, I have tested Covid positive yesterday, despite taking all the precautions. I am down with mild symptoms. Otherwise I'm fine."

"I am self isolating at home as per the (advice of) authorities. I'm double vaccinated, probably that's why the symptoms are mild. I request each and everyone to get vaccinated and wear masks and get sanitised every now and then. Will get back stronger."

The actress had only recently attended a press conference called by the *Veerame Vaagai Soodum* unit.

