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PRIYANKA GANDHI'S UP CM TEASER: 'CAN YOU SEE ANY OTHER FACE?'

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra served up a major surprise on Friday morning - that she could be her party's chief ministerial candidate for next month's Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. Gandhi Vadra, who was releasing a manifesto outlining job creation plans for the youth of UP, was asked about speculation over the Congress' chief ministerial candidate for this election, given the BJP will line up behind Yogi Adityanath and the Samajwadi Party is led by Akhilesh Yadav.



GOVT ORDERS BLOCKING OF 35 PAK-BASED YOUTUBE CHANNELS, 2 WEBSITES

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has ordered the blocking of 35 YouTube channels and two websites which were running anti-India propaganda and spreading fake news "in a coordinated manner". These websites and YouTube channels were being operated from Pakistan, I&B Secretary Apurva Chandra told a press conference on Friday. Indian intelligence agencies were closely monitoring these social media accounts and websites and flagged them to the ministry for immediate action, he added.

TAMIL NADU ANNOUNCES LOCKDOWN THIS SUNDAY AMID COVID SURGE

Tamil Nadu has announced a lockdown this Sunday amid a surge in Covid cases, Chief Minister Stalin announced today. Autos and taxis will be allowed to go to airport, bus and rail stations. On Thursday, Tamil Nadu recorded 28,561 new Covid cases to take the state's infection tally to 30,42,796. Recoveries climbed to 28,26,479 with 19,978 people getting discharged in the last 24 hours, leaving 1,79,205 active infections. Minister for Medical and Family Welfare Ma Subramanian said the health department expects to administer 'precautionary booster dose' to 10 lakh people by end of the month.

2ND CHARGESHEET IN LAKHIMPUR CASE, FARMERS NAMED FOR KILLING BJP MEN

A second chargesheet has been filed in the Lakhimpur Kheri case where an SUV -- allegedly driven by the son of a Union Minister -- ploughed into a crowd of protesters last year. While the first chargesheet named Ashish Mishra, son of Union Minister Ajay Mishra, over four farmers and a journalist who got run over, the second one involves the violence that followed, in which two BJP workers and the driver of the SUV were beaten to death. Seven farmers were arrested by the police during their investigations in this case, but it is not clear year if all of them have been charged with murder.

AP Cabinet okays new PRC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The threats from the employees notwithstanding, the State Cabinet that met on Friday had approved the 11th PRC, increasing the government employees' retirement age to 62 years among others.

The new PRC revised the pay scales of the government employees with modified HRA slabs and did away with the City Compensatory Allowance (CCA) which turned into a bone of contention between the government and the employees who have announced an action plan of their proposed agitation including work strike from February 7.

Briefing the media after the Cabinet meeting, Information and Public Relations Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) said that the Cabinet had discussed the third wave of Covid-19, measures taken for containing the spread and vaccinations to ensure zero-deaths in the State.

He said the Cabinet had approved the decision to raise the



I&PR Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting at the Secretariat on Friday. I&PR Commissioner T. Vijay Kumar Reddy is also seen

retirement age for State government employees from 60 to 62 years and had given nod for implementing the 11th PRC.

The minister stated that the cabinet has also approved providing jobs on compassionate grounds for those in the families of government employees who lost their lives due to Covid. As part of this, vacant posts in village and ward secretariats will also be filled based on the

candidates' qualifications and process the appointments by June 30.

The State Cabinet had given a green signal for reserving 10 per cent of the land in Jagananna Smart Townships for government employees, 5 percent land for pensioners, and offer 20 percent rebate for government employees.

2

Act to be amended to facilitate TTD special invitees

VIJAYAWADA: The State Cabinet on Friday gave its nod for the ordinance with amendments to the Endowments Act 1987, regarding the appointment of TTD special invitees. It may be recalled that the State government's move to appoint 52 special invitees to the TTD board that runs the world-renowned temple of Lord Venkateswara had turned controversial. The high court in September last year had struck down the GOs related to the appointment of the TTD's jumbo board while passing the orders in a batch of PILs filed by BJP and TDP leaders, contending the appointments as in violation of the provisions of The Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1987.

Govt staff to strike work from Feb 7

■ PRC Sadhana Samithi, 12-member steering panel to be formed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government employees have decided to go on an indefinite strike from February 7 and would serve the strike notice to the government on January 24. Various unions of the government employees that have decided to get onto a single platform on Friday announced that they are forming 'PRC Sadhana Samithi'. A 12-member steering committee to lead the agitation has also been decided to be formed.

On Friday, after a marathon of meetings, representatives of the Samithi met Chief Secretary, Sameer Sharma, and outlined their three main, important and immediate demands and also sought time on January 24 to serve strike notice. The Samithi representatives handed over a memorandum to the Chief Secretary and said every government employee is opposing the new PRC as it will incur a huge loss to the employees. They made it clear that with the new PRC their salaries will be

reduced.

"We have decided to step up the stir and all the unions have joined hands and came onto a single platform. Our first demand is that the government should withdraw the GOs of the revised pay scales, second demand is to implement recommendations of Asuhitsoh Mishra and the third demand is to revise the newly revised pay scales. The ward and village secretariat employees should be given new pay scales," said AP Secretariat Employees Association president K Venkata Rami Reddy after the meeting with the chief secretary.

The union representatives also found fault with the senior government officials bringing pressure on the treasury to staff to process the salaries of the employees as per the revised pay scales.

They urged the chief secretary in writing in the memorandum to drop such plans and give the December month salary as per the existing pay scale.

2

Govt open for talks with staff: Perni

VIJAYAWADA: Information & Public Relations Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) has reiterated that the government is compassionate towards the government employees. Talking to reporters after the Cabinet meeting, Nani said that the doors of the government are always open for talks. Nani also said that he was unaware of any committee formed to hold talks with the employees.

He also reminded that his government had announced Interim Relief (IR) within 30 days after coming to power.

He appealed to the employees to come forward for talks and also found fault with abusing a loving leader, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

2



AP to rope in IndiGo for resuming flights from Kadapa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh government on Friday decided to enter into an agreement with Inter-Globe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) for resuming flight services from the Kadapa airport in the Chief Minister's native district.

The State Cabinet, which met here under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, approved a proposal to cancel the existing Selected Airline Operator Agreement with Turbo Megha Airways (Trujet) and enter into a new pact with IndiGo, official sources said.

The Cabinet approved an expenditure of Rs 20 crore to support IndiGo operations from Kadapa and also to meet the state's 20 per cent share under the Regional Connectivity Scheme-UDAN for other airports like Kurnool.

2

Rs 1,392.33-cr NABARD loan for 3 med colleges

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NABARD has sanctioned a loan of Rs 1392.23 crore under its Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) for establishment of three new medical colleges-cum-hospitals in YSR Kadapa, Vizianagaram and East Godavari districts, and five multi-specialty hospitals in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari and Prakasam districts. These infrastructure projects would improve the healthcare facilities in the State and also provide timely healthcare in remote tribal areas of the State.

The medical colleges-cum-hospitals will be having facilities for major operation theatre, clinical OPDs, dialysis, burn ward, casualty ward, specialized clinical cum surgical ward, oxygen plant, etc. besides providing quality infrastructure for improved medical education.

The Multi-specialty hospitals will have consultation rooms, Aayush clinic, treatment procedure room, dialysis ward, diagnostic labs, OT complex, OPD, General/Pediatrics/orthopedic wards, etc.

NABARD, Andhra Pradesh Regional Office, Chief General Manager, Sudhir Kumar Jannawar, said, the bank has been actively partnering with government in improving the health and education infrastructure in the state.

NABARD has so far sanctioned Rs 3092 Crs to school projects being implemented under the Government of AP's flagship Nadu-Nedu programme. The support will enable the creation of additional classrooms, providing toilets and drinking water facilities in 25648 schools. NABARD has also supported the State Government in the establishment of Anganwadi Centres and Integrated Agri-Aqua labs, he said.



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vice-President of India M Venkaiah Naidu has stressed the need to focus on increasing indigenous crude oil production and reducing imports to not only save precious foreign exchange but also to ensure energy security. With increasing population, urbanisation and industrialisation, the use of petroleum products is only expected to increase, the Vice-President said.

Attending as chief guest of the first convocation of the Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy (IIPE) in Visakhapatnam on Friday, the Vice-President said that for India, the primary energy demand is expected to grow at an average rate of more than 3 percent till 2045 as compared to less than 1 percent growth in the rest of the world during the same period. This is the highlight of the importance



Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu addressing the convocation of IIPE in Visakhapatnam on Friday

of local exploration of petroleum and shifting to alternative sources, he added.

From the discovery of the first oil reserves in Digboi, Assam in 1889, the industry has seen a phenomenal rise in India, greatly aiding the country's progress post-independence. India today is the

third-largest consumer of crude oil in the world. The government's policy reforms, including hydrocarbon exploration licensing policy (HELP), aim at increasing domestic production, liberalising exploration of new sedimentary basins, including ultra-deepwater blocks, the Vice-President alerted

the IIPE graduates.

As a dedicated university for petroleum research, the IIPE should take the lead in two aspects including bridging the supply gap of skilled manpower for the petroleum sector and aiming for excellence in the research of petroleum and its by-products. As a recognized institution, the IIPE should live up to that expectation in the years ahead, the Vice President blessed.

Rameswar Teli, Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Labour and Employment, Dr.Seediri Appala Raju, Minister for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries and Dairies Development, Prof P.K. Banik, President of the Board of Governors, IIPE, Prof VSRK Prasad, Director, IIPE and Vice Chancellors of various Universities were present.

2

CII compliments AP govt's efforts in handling Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has complimented the State government's efforts in handling the COVID-19 pandemic despite revenue shortage.

After almost two years of combating the health emergency, it is critical to ensure that economic recovery remains on track to enable people to

CII Andhra Pradesh Chairman, D Tirupathi Raju, appreciated the government efforts to control Covid-19 in the State.

recover to pre-pandemic income

2

Govt to hand over O & M of thermal plant to 'others'

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Even as its third unit is getting ready to be commissioned, the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government, due to mounting operational costs, had decided to handover the operation and maintenance (O&M) of APGENCO run Sri Damodaram Sanjeevaiah Thermal Power Station at Krishnapatnam in Nellore district to outsiders- others through bidding.

It effectively means that any private player or Central PSUs having experience in the power sector may participate in the bidding to take up O & M of the Krishnapatnam thermal power plant.

A decision in this regard has been taken by the state cabinet that had met here on Friday. The German state-owned development bank KfW and Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC) had financed this super-



critical power station.

While initially in stage 1 two units of 800mw each have been operationalized in 2015 and 2016 in phases, construction of the third unit of another 800 mw has just been completed and ready to launch the commercial operation.

"While the power generation cost at Krishnapatnam power plant has been Rs 3.14 per unit, its only Rs 2.34 per unit in the near-by thermal power plants in the same region. The operational costs have been heavy and unviable.

2

Daily Covid positivity rate rises to 30% in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The daily infection positivity rate shot up to 30 per cent as 44,516 tests turned out 13,212 Covid-19 positive cases in Andhra Pradesh in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday.

Consequently, the number of active cases climbed to 64,136.

The state reported five fresh Covid-19 fatalities and 2,942 recoveries in 24 hours, the latest bulletin said.

The cumulative case count is now 21,53,268, recoveries 20,74,600 and deaths 14,532, the bulletin added.

Visakhapatnam district reported the highest of 2,244 fresh coronavirus cases and three deaths in 24 hours.



Chittoor district registered 1,585 more cases and one death.

Anantapuram added 1,235, Srikakulam 1,230, Guntur 1,054 and SPS Nellore 1,051 new cases.

SPS Nellore also reported one death in a day.

Kurnool logged 961, East Godavari 816, Prakasam 772, Vizianagaram 681, Kadapa 649, West Godavari 596 and Krishna 338 fresh positives.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Pausa, Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Chaturthi, Jan 21 08:52 AM to Jan 22 09:14 AM

Panchami : Jan 22 09:14 AM to Jan 23 09:12 AM

Nakshatram : Purnima Pralamb, Jan 21 09:43 AM to Jan 22 10:38 AM

Uttara Pralamb, Jan 22 10:38 AM to Jan 23 11:09 AM

Rahukalam : 9:40 AM to 11:04 AM

Yamagandam : 1:51 PM to 3:14 PM

Varjyam : 05:59 PM to 07:37 PM

Gulika : 6:53 AM to 8:16 AM

Amritakalam : 03:48 AM to 05:26 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:05 PM to 12:49 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: PARTLY CLOUDY

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 6:42 AM

Sunset: 6:03 PM

Updated JANUARY 21, 2021 5:00 PM



High drama as TDP leaders try to barge into K Convention hall

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The police had a tough time controlling the TDP leaders and activists who tried to barge into K Convention hall owned by Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) on Friday. High tension prevailed in Gudivada for a while as miscreants damaged TDP leader Bonda Umamaheswara Rao's vehicle. To bring the situation under control, the police arrested a few TDP leaders.

The TDP has formed a Fact Finding Committee (FFC) to find out the truth behind casino and gambling being organised at K Convention hall. On Friday, FFC members Nakka Anand Babu, Bonda Uma, Varla Ramaiah, Alapati Rajendra Prasad, K Ravindra and Tangirala Soumya planned to inspect K Convention hall in Gudivada. The FFC members, accompanied by a large number of party workers, started the journey, but were stopped by the police at Pamarru. After a discussion with the police, only 10 vehicles continued the journey to Gudivada.

The TDP leaders and supporters first reached the party office in Gudivada, and from there they tried to go to K Convention hall despite the police denying permission. However, discussions were held



between the TDP leaders and the police and the cops took the TDP leaders into custody to prevent any untoward incidents. In the meantime, some miscreants broke the window pane of Bonda Uma's car leading to a tense situation. The TDP leaders alleged that YSRCP supporters damaged the car.

Speaking to media persons, Bonda Uma alleged that Minister Nani organised gambling in his own convention hall. "The minister brought casino culture to Gudivada in the name of 'NTR to YSR' and also organised anti-social activities. If the minister tries to evade investigation by saying that he



was undergoing Covid treatment in Hyderabad, we will move legally to take action against the minister. The minister is now caught red-handed and should be expelled," demanded Bonda Uma.

Varla Ramaiah alleged that Nani was organising such activities hurting the sentiments of the Telugu people by degrading their culture and tradition. Ramaiah demanded that the DGP should clarify whether a casino was set up at K Convention hall. He alleged that the police were silent spectators when Bonda Uma's car was damaged and questioned why they couldn't control the YSRCP supporters.

Meanwhile, the Gudivada police arrested YSRCP leader Peddi Kishore for attacking TDP leader Mullapudi Ramesh Chowdary and injuring him. The ruling party leaders and supporters barged into the TDP office in Gudivada and attacked the party leaders, injuring Ramesh.

Kodali denies charges

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Brushing aside the allegations of running a casino at a convention centre owned by him at Gudivada, Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali

Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) dared the Opposition to prove the charges. "I am prepared to quit my post if the charges are proved and if they fail to do so, what will the Opposition and its friendly media do?" he challenged during a brief media interaction here on Friday. He also invited neutral media to probe the matter at Gudivada and slammed Chandrababu Naidu and his son Lokesh for raking up the issue. The minister alleged that the TDP standards were evident when they sent incompetent leaders like Varla Ramaiah in the name of finding out the truth. "The people of Gudivada are there, to tell the truth about my convention centre. I don't need a certificate from the TDP's verification committee to prove anything," he said. "If necessary, the media can go and verify," he stated.

Live up to expectations of people, gram panchayats told

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vizianagaram Zilla Parishad Chairman Majji Srinivasa Rao has called upon the gram panchayats to perform their duties as per the expectations of the people. The gram panchayats where the governing bodies are unanimously elected are an inspiration to the other panchayats, he added.

The chairperson distributed special incentives sanctioned by the State government to the gram panchayats, which have elected the governing bodies unanimously, on Friday. In order to create a non-political atmosphere in the villages, the State government announced special incentives to the villages where they elect the governing bodies unanimously. In Vizianagaram



district, as many as 146 villages became eligible for the special incentives, for which the government has released Rs.8.75 crore. While presenting the checks to the sarpanches, the ZP Chairman appealed that the special incentives be used for fulfilling the needs of the people. As the Covid-19 third wave has hit us, the elected sarpanches should focus on the sanitation

works and the villages should be maintained clean, he added.

District Panchayat Officer Subhashini said that special incentives of Rs. 5 lakh would be given to the villages where the population is below 2,000 and Rs.10 lakh to the villages where the population is below 5,000 and Rs.15 lakh to the villages where the population is below 15,000.

Kin of Covid victims will get jobs: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government is committed to the welfare of the employees working in the Housing Department, said Minister for Housing Ch Sri Ranganatha Raju. The minister said on Friday that jobs on compassionate grounds would be provided to the family members of the employees who succumbed to Covid-19. The minister unveiled a diary of the State

Housing Department Assistant Engineers Association in Vijayawada on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that the long-pending promotions for the employees working in the department had been given to all the eligible persons after the YSRCP Government came to power. The minister said that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government was striving for the

welfare of the poor. The minister appealed to the employees of the department to work tirelessly to complete the housing projects being implemented by the government in a timely manner.

The minister said that many poor people were receiving benefits of the Jagananna Sampoorna Gruhahakku Scheme. The beneficiaries in rural areas would be allowed to pay Rs 10,000 in two instalments.

VRLD Lab starts functioning at Srikakulam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Collector of Srikakulam district Sriresh Lakshmi directed the officials, medical and health staff to conduct the Covid screening tests at massive level. Unless the screening tests conducted on massive scale, it is not possible to isolate the positive tested persons, he added.

The collector visited the district central hospital to check newly established VRLD Lab for Covid screening tests. He inquired about the available technical and paramedical staff to attend the tests. The collector also inquired about the capacity of the lab to examine the samples per day. The doctors informed that the lab was established with a capacity to conduct examinations for 2,000 samples.

Later, at a review meeting the collector directed the officials to prepare and send the proposals to increase the screening capacity at the central hospital and also at the Tekkali hospital aiming to conduct the tests 5,000 per day. The new buildings of the central hospital would be inaugurated on January 26. The collector reviewed the oxygen plants, infrastructure and other developmental activities.

AP Guv invited to Statue of Equality inaugural event

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has been invited to the inauguration of the Statue of Equality, during the programme scheduled to be held from February 2-14.

Chevireddi Bhaskar Reddy, Chandragiri MLA and Thalasila Raghuram, MLC and other disciples of Chinna Jeeyar Swamy Ashram, met Governor Harichandan at Raj Bhavan on Friday and extended the invitation to him on behalf of Chinna Jeeyar Swamy Ashram.

They informed the Governor that the 216 feet panchaloha statue of the 11th century Vaishnavite Saint



Bhagavad Ramanuja, was erected in an area spread over 200 acres in Muchintal near Hyderabad in Telangana and a Sahasrakundatmaka Lakshmi Narayana Yagam along with 1035 Homa Gundams will also be organised on the occasion.

Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji spoke to Governor

Harichandan over the phone and invited him to attend the inauguration programme and said that due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation he could not personally meet the Governor and extend the invitation in person.

RP Sisodia, Special Secretary to the Governor was also present on the occasion.

Avanti recovers from Covid

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Tourism and Youth Affairs M Srinivasa Rao recovered from Covid on Friday. The minister tested Covid positive eight days ago and he was isolated at his home located at Sithammadhara.

The minister again went for the Covid-19 screening test and he was tested negative on Friday.

On all the eight days, the minister did not even come outside and carried out official transactions over the phone.

His health is stable. After recovering, the minister thanked all the party cadre, officials, employees and others who supported him during his isolation.

Naidu asks cadre to fight for solution to local issues

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu asserted that the people of Andhra Pradesh were totally vexed and disappointed with the non-stop misrule of the YSRCP in the past three years. The time has come for the TDP local leaders to step up their agitations on local problems so as to bring greater pressure on the ruling party leaders. At some places, the TDP leaders should change their style and start creating awareness on the misdeeds of the YSRCP.

Addressing an online meeting with party leaders, the TDP chief lauded the Covid services being rendered by the

NTR Memorial Trust and urged the TDP cadres all over to avail of these services to help the people. All sections of society were suffering because of the policies of the present Government. Higher taxes, ruling party frauds and thoughtless decisions have crushed the day-to-day lives of the people.

The TDP chief said the corruption of the YSRCP local leaders was crossing all limits. The TDP leaders should hold local agitations at the mandal and assembly constituency levels. The local leaders should also remain alert to find out the misuse of grama and ward volunteers to enroll bogus voters. The voters of a single-family were being dispersed in differ-

ent polling booths to sabotage the election process. As a political party, the TDP should constantly carry on agitations to prevent greater injustice. The Government had greatly betrayed the employees in respect of PRC. The TDP would give total support to their agitation for a better PRC.

The TDP chief said the NTR Trust Covid telemedicine services should be taken to the village level. The party mandal and village leaders should take an active part in reaching the Trust services to the patients. Naidu thanked Trust Managing Trustee Nara Bhuvaneshwari for rendering good services. Free medicine was also being provided to patients.

Lokesh urges Railways not to evict poor families

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Friday urged the Vijayawada Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) to give time to 650 families to vacate railway lands in Tadepalli in Guntur district considering their helpless situation.

Lokesh wrote a letter to the

DRM, saying that more time was needed as the poor families would not be able to find alternative shelter immediately. They may be allowed to continue to live on these railway lands till the State Government fulfilled its promise to provide housing.

Expressing concern, Lokesh said: "About 650 families have

been living on railway lands located in 6, 14, 15, 16 wards in Tadepalli, Guntur district, that falls under Vijayawada division. Many of these households belong to socially vulnerable and down-trodden sections like Dalits, Backward Classes and Minorities. Suddenly, the railway officials served eviction notices to these families asking them to vacate the

land by January 22, 2022."

The TDP MLC said these 650 households have been living on this land for more than four decades and do not have any alternative shelter. Moreover, many of the households earn their income through manual and unskilled labour work.

Nara Lokesh said that the

COVID-19 pandemic had pushed them into severe financial distress and the present eviction notice completely makes them homeless. All political parties from this region have unanimously agreed that the Government of Andhra Pradesh should provide housing on an alternative land at the earliest.

Free medical camp for devotees begins at Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Free medical and health service Dharmapatham started in Kanaka Durga temple at Vijayawada on Friday providing traditional treatments.

Durga temple chairman Pyla Somi Naidu, who launched the free medical camp, said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy instructed the officials to offer free medical service under the Dharmapatham programme.

He said that Ayurvedic and Homoeopathic doctors will

examine the patients including devotees and temple staff and required medicines would be given free of cost.

He said that the free Ayurvedic medical camp would be held on every Friday and a homoeopathic medical camp on every Saturday and Sunday.

Somi Naidu said that further free homoeopathic medicines were distributed to devotees to contain the Omicron variant of Covid-19 and appealed to devotees to make good use of Dharmapatham.



Rare eye surgery performed on infant

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Shankar Foundation Eye Hospital has successfully performed a rare surgery on a one-month-old infant. A team of doctors led by Dr. Suparna, a specialist in pediatric ophthalmology, performed the surgery.

The child's mother delivered the baby at INS Kalyani Hospital and the doctors found that there was some problem with the vision in the baby's left eye. The parents were shocked to know this and the baby was referred to



the Shankar Foundation by INS Kalyani Hospital.

In cases where a cataract is

there in only one eye at birth, surgery has to be done as early as possible. As the baby was very small, giving anesthesia was risky. The doctors explained this to the parents and they understood the problem. The hospital anesthesiologist took care of it and the surgery was done successfully.

Dr. Suparna performed the cataract surgery and prescribed contact lenses after one week. The parents were asked to close the right eye and allow the baby to use the left eye. The baby is smiling

and responding to light even when the right eye is closed. Dr. Suparna explained that the chances of getting vision in unilateral cataract (one eye cataract) is very less, but the baby was able to follow the objects as per his age with the left eye, which is a great achievement. After attaining the age of three years, the child has to be operated on for implantation of Intraocular Lens (IOL), she added.

K B N Manamala, managing trustee and CEO, Shankar Foundation, congratulated the doctors on the achievement.

Akshaya Patra distributing food packets at govt hospitals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Akshaya Patra Foundation has started the distribution of food packets at government hospitals and to needy people. On the first day, the foundation distributed 6,000 lunch packets. The Akshaya Patra Foundation has started the programme across the country with the help of kindhearted people.

The foundation has two centralised kitchens - one at Industrial Estate, Kancharapalem, and the other at Gambhiram village near



Anandhapuram. Food is prepared at these two kitchens for

the Covid patients admitted to government hospitals and



Covid Care Centres. The foundation also distributes food

packets to the patients' attendants, health workers and daily

labourers. Due to the Covid situation, attendants and health workers are facing difficulty getting food at hospitals. The foundation is distributing food from its own vehicles.

Presently, food is distributed at ENT Hospital, Mental Care Hospital, Chest Hospital, Victoria Hospital, Old Post Office Junction, railway station, Simhachalam, Ramji Estate, Tathichatlalalem, Relliveedhi, Primary Health Centre, Anandhapuram, and Primary Health Centre, Bheemili.

Students asked to prepare for exams in line with Covid norms

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector Pravin Kumar has asked the students to prepare well for examinations and follow the Covid restrictions strictly. The Collector inspected the ZP high school at Pernamitta village in Santhanuthalapadu village on Friday. He inspected the school, classrooms, furniture and the school premises.

Interacting with the students, he asked them some questions on the syllabus. He also enquired with the teachers on the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme. After seeing some students not wearing masks, he questioned them. Headmaster Pramod informed the Collector that 406 students are studying in the school of which 110 are studying in the upper primary section. The Collector asked the teachers to provide quality education to the students.

Pravin Kumar exhorted the students to excel in studies so that they could get a seat in reputed colleges. The teachers told the Collector that out



of 54 high school students only 9 students have midday meals in the school and the rest of the students go home to have lunch. He expressed displeasure on this stating that since the quality of mid-day meal is not good they are not taking mid-day meal in the school.

The Collector directed the Mandal Educational Officer to submit a report on how many students having mid-day

meals at the school and how many going home for the same. Pravin Kumar asked the students to be prepared well for the examinations and follow the Covid restrictions strictly.

When the students told the Collector that 97% of the syllabus had been completed, he asked them some questions for which the students answered. He advised the students to be healthy to write the ensuing examinations and asked the

students who suffer from cold, cough and fever not to come to school.

The Collector received complaints that since Aadhaar was not linked some are not getting Amma Vodi welfare scheme benefits. The Collector spoke to DEO over phone and directed him to resolve the problem. Tahsildar B Rama Naidu, MEO MVR Anjaneyulu and other officials accompanied the Collector.

Boy falls to death while flying a kite

PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a tragic incident, a boy fell from the third floor of a building while flying a kite and died at Gurralachavidi colony in Chilakaluripet town on Friday.

Police said that the deceased Arshad (10) was flying a kite on the terrace of the third floor. He accidentally fell down while flying the kite. He was taken to a private hospital and later shifted to the government hospital here where he died while undergoing treatment today. A pall of gloom descended on the family with the death of the boy.



Awareness should be created on blood donation: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

West Godavari District Collector Kartikeya Mishra has emphasised on the need for creating more awareness among the people, especially students and youth, on blood donation.

District Collector, President, Indian Red Cross Society Kartikeya Mishra on Friday inaugurated the Ambulance Shelter at the Red Cross building on the premises of Government Hospital, which was constructed in memory of the late B V Ranga Reddy, father of District Red Cross Chairman BV Krishna Reddy,

to park 3 ambulances.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector asked chairman BV Krishna Reddy to expedite the setting up of the dialysis centre. The Collector said that the Red Cross Society should extend a helping hand to dialysis patients and those who are suffering from thalassemia disease and asked the Red Cross Society to expand social service programs. Krishna Reddy said that a dialysis centre would be set up soon.

He said that Dr. Kakarala Rajendra Prasad's daughters Dr.K Aparna Devi, DR. Gowry, Dr. Sabhana had donated money to set up one dialysis

centre. Previously Dr. Palepu Subba Lakshmi donated for the setting up of a dialysis machine. He said that Oxygen concentrators are available at the Red Cross blood banks at Eluru, Tanuku and Narsapuram in the district for those in need of oxygen concentrators.

RDO Panabaka Rachna, District Hospitals Coordinating Officer Dr. AVR Mohan, DHMO Dr. B Ravi, Former District Library Chairman B V Naga Chandrareddy, District Red Cross Secretary B Benny and Red Cross Component Blood Bank Medical Officer Dr RSRK Varaprasad.



Special Court opened virtually

PNS ■ KADAPA

Chief Justice of High Court Prasant Kumar Mishra inaugurated the VII Additional District and Session Court cum Special Court for Trial of Offenses against Women on Friday virtually.

Speaking on the occasion,

the Chief Justice said that in order to complete trial of cases at the earliest and provide judicial protection, the VII Additional District and Session Court cum Special court for Trial of Offenses against Women was opened.

The High Court appointed G Gita as honorary in-charge

to the newly inaugurated VII additional district and session's court. District Administrative Judge M Matam Venkataramana, Justice Amanullah Khan, Justice M Satyanarayana Murthy, Justice Kongara Vijayalakshmi and Justice Battu Devanand were present on the occasion.

MLC objects to merger of primary high schools

PNS ■ ELURU

MLC Sheikh Sabzi objected to the government's decision of merging 3rd, 4th and 5th classes of primary schools with high schools.

In a statement here on Friday, he said that as per the directions of the Andhra Pradesh government, the Department of Education would merge 3rd, 4th and 5th classes of primary schools within a radius of 3 km with high schools which he was opposing.

The MLC said that the students of 3rd, 4th and 5th of pri-



mary schools, after merging the classes into high schools, have to go to high schools for which they have to cross rail-

way gates and national highways in West and East Godavari districts which are risky for the little students. He questioned the government on how students below 10 years of age cross the national highways and railway gates.

The irrigation canals flow brimful, he said and asked how the parents could send their little children to schools alone.

The government had taken the decision without keeping in view the safety of school-going children, the MLC said and appealed to the government to reconsider the decision.

CITU stages dharna demanding revocation of GO on PRC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The CITU-affiliated Andra Pradesh Municipal workers and employees federation organised a dharna in front of the Municipal office here on Friday demanding to scrap of the PRC Government Orders (GO).

CITU city unit president Palivela Virababu regretted that the GOs had reduced the HRA in Kakinada city from the existing 20 per cent to a mere eight per cent.

The trade union leader demanded the government to revoke the GOs and make public the report of

Ashutosh Mishra committee and regularise the services of the Municipal contract and outsourcing employees as promised by the Chief Minister. He also wanted the minimum wage to be raised to Rs. 24,000.

The agitators presented a memorandum listing out their demands to Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar.

Union leaders Bangaru Sathibabu, Ponna Sathibabu, Varre Ramana, Bavisetti Gurumurthy, Bandi Srinivasarao, CITU district committee member Mediseti Venkata Ramana led the dharna.



MP inaugurates village secretariat

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Narasaraopet MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu on Friday inaugurated the newly constructed village secretariat building, constructed at a cost of Rs 40 lakh at Mutyalapadu village in Dachepalli mandal.

The MP also inaugurated development works taken up at a cost of Rs 23.40 lakh under the Nadu-Nedu programme at MPUP school. Gurajala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy and Guntur Parliamentary constituency YSRC in-charge Modugula Venugopal Reddy were also present. Speaking on the occasion, the MP said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had

brought in the village secretariat system to make all services available at the village level. He said that Village Secretariat, RBK, Health Center are being set up taking a village as a unit.

Solving the problem of drinking water in the Gurazala area, under the Jal Jeevan Mission program, water taps would be provided to every household in Gurazala. The process has been delayed due to a lack of funds due to corona, he explained. The process for the Dachepalli-Macherla national highway development is being expedited and the funds for the same had already been sanctioned. The construction of a medical college is being carried out.

Awareness should be created among farmers on ZBNF: Panel

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The District-Level Agriculture Advisory Council passed a resolution to create awareness among the farmers on the 'Zero Based Natural Farming (ZBNF)'.

The district-level Agriculture Advisory Council meeting was held here on Friday chaired by Chairman Alla Ravindra Reddy in the Collector's office. MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy and MLA M Suheedhar Reddy were also present.

Speaking on the occasion, Ravindra Reddy said that 20 farmers had taken up ZBNF farming in the Kothapatnam mandal. "The ZBNF should be encouraged and the farmers should be created awareness in

this regard", he said.

He advised the officials of agriculture and its allied sectors to take steps to remove bushes and creepers in the irrigation tanks in order to enhance water resources. He asked the officials to send proposals to the government seeking compensation for those who incurred crop loss due to rains and floods.

MP Srinivasulu Reddy said that the AAC should be helpful to the farmers to resolve their problems. The officials at the mandal level should take steps to resolve the problem of farmers.

MLA Suheedhar Reddy directed the officials to send proposals to the government for compensation for the death

of livestock. He said that the condition that compensation should be paid if three heads of livestock die at once should be removed.

Even if one cattle dies the farmer should be paid compensation, the MLA suggested. On this occasion, a poster and a pamphlet on the brucellosis vaccination program were unveiled.

The meeting was attended by Agriculture Minister G.D. Srinivasa Rao, Animal Husbandry Department JD, Bebirani, Fisheries Department JD Chandrasekhar Reddy, A.P. MIP P.D. Ravindra Babu, NABARD G.M. Venkataramana, DWAM P.D. Srivareddy and Civil Supplies D.M. Naradamuni.



Surprise checks on Covid testing labs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Surprise checks were conducted on seven Covid testing labs in the district on Friday. On the instructions of District Collector J Nivas and Joint Collector L Sivashankar, DM&HO Dr M Suhasini, along with health staff, conducted the surprise checks. During the checks, they found that three labs were charging more than Rs 350 prescribed by the State government for tests as per GO 28.

Checks were conducted at Kamineni Hospital, Apollo Laboratory, Remedies

Laboratory, ABC Diagnostic Center, iRIS Laboratory, Omicron Diagnostic Center, and Sai Balaji Diagnostic Center. The team found that Kamineni Hospital, Omicron Diagnostic Center and Sai Balaji Diagnostic Center were charging Rs 499.

The three labs have charged more amounts from 471 persons, that is a total of Rs 80,000, and they were asked to refund the amounts to the customers. No action was taken against them. The inspection team warned of severe action against collecting additional amounts from the patients for Covid tests.

Fair probe demanded into death of Aslam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leaders of various political parties and Muslim organisations have alleged that the death of local businessman Syed Aslam (42) is unnatural, as evident from the wounds on the body. Addressing media persons at the Press Club on Friday, they said that the family of Aslam was apprehensive that the truth would not come out due to political interference.

Syed Aslam was found dead in Mahantipuram on January 15 and his second wife lodged a complaint with the police two days later. The police registered an FIR on January 19, TDP leader Md Fataulla, MIM leader Sameer, local corporator Arshad and others spoke to the media. Fataulla said the actual reasons for the death of Aslam might not be revealed. He said wounds were clearly visible on the body of the deceased and added that he could have been murdered.

He said the police should verify the CCTV footage at the residence of his first wife and mobile data should be collected to get information in the case.

Special training for police officers to check cybercrimes

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Additional Director General of police N Sanjay said that special training is being imparted to the police officials with the coordination of Delhi-based 'Centre for Research on Cyber Intelligence and Digital Forensic (CRCIDF)' organization to curb the cybercrimes in the state.

Additional DG (Training) and DIG (Technical Services) G Palaraju inaugurated virtually from Mangalagiri the two-day Advanced Cyber Training programmes on Friday.

The two-day Advanced Cyber training programme is being organised at the police training college here on the

direction of DGP Gautham Sawang with the cooperation 'Centre for Research on Cyber Intelligence and Digital Forensic (CRCIDF)' in Ongole. The training programme is being monitored by the PTC principal AR Damodar. SP Malika Garg and other officials took part in the inaugural programme on Friday.

Addressing the programme Additional DG N Sanjay said that special training is being imparted to the police officials who are working in the police commissionerate and districts to curb the cybercrimes.

"It is imperative to the officials to improve technical knowledge and proficiency to curb the cybercrimes and carry



out investigation efficiently. A modern cyber laboratory will also be set up especially for this purpose. Cyber tools will be made available to every district to carry out cybercrime investigations efficiently. All need-

ed steps are being taken to prevent cybercrimes in the state", N Sanjay explained.

DIG (Technical) Palaraju said that due to various problems cybercrime cases were resolved previously. This spe-

cial training would help the police officials to resolve the cybercrimes and increase the recovery.

He said that due to the high incidence of money loss and defamation cases in cyber-

crimes, the victims do not come forward to complain to the police. Moreover, the recovery rate in financial cybercrimes was low. The training programmes would help to take up the recovery to 90 per cent through. He said that the sophisticated tools that were brought for cyber-crime investigation would increase the efficiency of a cyber investigation by 5 times.

SP Malika Garg said that cybercrimes are taking place in new forms. Cybercrimes are taking place in the form of online cheatings using Aadhar, Covid vaccine, KYC, OTP and PIN. Women and girls are being harassed by blackmailing and using social media.



TTD Chairman invites Kanchi Seer for Yagam

TIRUPATI: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) board chairman Y V Subba Reddy couple invited Kanchi seer Sri Vijayendra Savaraswati to attend the Poomahuti programme of the Navakundamaka Sriyagam being solemnized by the TTD at Tiruchanur. The Subba Reddy couple met seer and personally invited him to attend for the spiritual event which began here Friday. The Kanchi seer was invited to attend to Poomahuti to be performed on January 27 as part of the Navakundamaka Sriyagam.

INDIA CORNER

Maha: Six arrested for poaching tiger in Gondia forest

Six persons have been arrested in connection with the poaching of a tiger, who was found dead without two teeth and whiskers in Arjuni-Morgaon forest range of Maharashtra's Gondia district, an official said on Friday. A five-year-old tiger was found dead at Arjuni-Morgaon forest range on January 13, following which the Gondia forest department had announced Rs 25,000 reward for anyone who shared information about the death, the official said. As per the probe, the accused Dhanraj Chachane and Madhukar Waghade had on January 11 stolen electricity from a private farm using electric steel wire and laid it in 1.5 km range in the forest area for poaching herbivorous animals, said Kulraj Singh, deputy conservator of forest of the Gondia Forest Department. A tiger came in contact with the wire on the night of January 11, following which the accused took two teeth and whiskers of the animal, he said.



SC notice to Centre on plea for creating Indian Environment Service

The Supreme Court Friday sought the Centre's reply on a plea for creation of "The Indian Environment Service" on the lines of All India Service for environment safeguards at the ground level. A bench comprising Justices S K Kaul and M M Sundresh, while issuing notice to the Union Environment Ministry, expressed doubt whether it could issue a mandamus for creation of a separate all India service. The apex court said however that an inquiry can be made whether the Centre intended to implement recommendations of the committee headed by a former Cabinet Secretary. The top court was hearing a plea filed by advocate on record Samar Vijay Singh who referred to the report submitted by the High-Level Committee formed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests under the chairmanship of former Cabinet Secretary T S R Subramanian in 2014 which recommended creation of a new All-India service, the "Indian Environment Service".



Karnataka govt opposes TN's water project at Hogenakkal

The Karnataka government on Friday said it will oppose the proposed water project at Hogenakkal along the border with Tamil Nadu stating that the neighbouring state cannot take up the work unilaterally. "It has come to our notice through media reports that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has announced finalising a Detailed Project Report worth Rs 4,600 crore to undertake Phase-2 of the Hogenakkal project," state Irrigation Minister Govind Karjol said in a statement. He said the neighbouring state has to undertake projects in Cauvery valley region according to the Cauvery Tribunal and Supreme Court orders related to water distribution. "Karnataka government opposes the project whose details have not been furnished before the tribunal and the apex court. Tamil Nadu cannot take up this project unilaterally," the minister said.



U'khand Polls: BJP shows preference for Congress defectors in first list

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The BJP in its first list of 59 candidates has once again shown a preference for Congress defectors rather than its own cadres to field in the state polls on February 14. According to the list released on Thursday, the party has not only chosen to field leaders who revolted against the Harish Rawat government in 2016, but also those who defected to its camp over mere past few days.

Such leaders include former Pradesh Mahila Congress president Sarita Arya and Durgeshwar Lal, who had joined the party on Thursday



just a few hours before it announced its first list of candidates. Durgeshwar Lal enters the fray from Purola while Arya is slated to contest from

Nainital - a seat she had lost to BJP's Sanjeev Arya in 2017.

Sanjeev, son of Yashpal Arya, a prominent Dalit face of Kumaon, is now in the

Congress. Most of Congress defectors -- several of whom had been made ministers in 2017 -- have been nominated from the seats they represent in the state assembly.

These include Satpal Maharaj from Chaubattakhal, Subodh Uniyal from Narendra Nagar, Pradeep Batra from Roorkee, Umesh Sharma Kau from Raipur, and Rekha Arya from Someswar.

Khanpur MLA Pranav Singh Champion -- one among the 10 Congress defectors who had joined the BJP in 2016 -- may have been dropped from the list due to his controversial image, but the seat remains in the family with his wife

Kunwarani Devyani chosen to fight the contest instead of him.

It is not unlikely that a few more Congress defectors find place in the party's second list of 11 candidates, to be announced soon. The trend has left a section of workers disappointed within the BJP.

Pradesh BJP secretary (organisation) Balbir Ghuniyal said it dents the morale of dedicated party cadres.

Ghuniyal, who had sought a ticket for himself from Tharali, said he has been trying for it since 2007 but he was overlooked in favour of Bhopal Ram Tamta, who quit the Congress to join the BJP in 2018.

ED raids: Punjab Cong comes out with 'PunjabChanniDeNaalHai' campaign

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Under fire from its political rivals over the ED raids, the Congress in Punjab has launched a campaign on social media stating that the entire state is with Charanjit Singh Channi and blaming the BJP-led Centre for trying to defame Punjab's first chief minister from the scheduled caste community. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday had said it seized cash amounting to over Rs 10 crore, including about Rs 8 crore from a relative of Channi, during raids conducted in connection with an anti-money laundering investigation against illegal sand mining operations in the poll-bound state.

It had also said, "incriminating" documents related to "illegal" sand mining and property transactions, mobile phones, gold



worth more than Rs 21 lakh and a Rolex watch worth Rs 12 lakh were also seized during the searches that ended on Wednesday. The Punjab Congress has come out with a social media campaign 'PunjabChanniDeNaalHai' and has posted video clips of several persons coming out in support of Chief Minister Channi on its Facebook page. Channi was

appointed as the chief minister of Punjab last September after the Congress made Amarinder Singh resign from the post.

Opposition parties in Punjab have asked the Congress to explain the money recovered from the premises of Channi's nephew during the ED raids, with BJP's state unit dubbing the ruling party as 'Ghotale bajCongress' and 'CongressChor'.

Dharma Sansad case: Haridwar courts reject bail pleas of Narsinghanand, Tyagi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Two courts in Haridwar have rejected the bail pleas of Yati Narsinghanand and Jitendra Narayan Tyagi who have been arrested in connection with the controversial Dharma Sansad where alleged hate speeches against Muslims were delivered. On January 16, a Haridwar court had sent Narsinghanand, the organiser of the Dharma Sansad and the head priest of Dasna temple, to 14-day judicial custody.

He was arrested on January 15 from Sarvanand Ghat of the Ganga, where he was staging a 'satyagraha' against the arrest of Tyagi two days ago.

Tyagi was formerly known as Waseem Rizvi and changed his name after converting to Hinduism. The court of the chief judicial magistrate in



Haridwar rejected the bail application of Narsinghanand, while the court of the additional district and sessions judge dismissed Tyagi's plea after virtual hearings held on Thursday. The Dharma Sansad was held in Haridwar from

December 17-19. Two FIRs have been lodged in Haridwar against more than 10 people, including Narsinghanand and Tyagi, in connection with the highly provocative speeches against Muslims delivered at the event.

Maha: Coach of empty passenger train derailed at Pune

PNS ■ PUNE

A coach of an empty passenger train derailed at Pune railway station in Maharashtra on Friday morning, a railway official said. The incident took place around 9.30 am when the empty train was being moved from the railway yard to the platform, he said. "An empty train was being moved to the platform from the yard, when one of its coaches derailed during the shunting work in the morning," the official said. The work of restoration was underway, he said, adding that the rail traffic remained unaffected.

Officials working overtime to meet Covid vaccination target before UP polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Facing the daunting task of holding a Covid-safe election in Uttar Pradesh, officials are working overtime to achieve the target of fully vaccinating at least 90 per cent of the eligible population before the first phase polling on February 10.

The state election office intends to ensure 100 per cent inoculation of officials and security personnel to be deployed for the seven-phase polls in the state ending on March 7. The results will be declared on March 10 along with other four poll-bound states -- Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur.

Entrusted with the big responsibility, Chief Minister



Yogi Adityanath holds a review meeting on the coronavirus situation daily and gives necessary instructions on testing and vaccination.

"We are aiming to ensure the eligible population gets at least

one dose by January 25," Additional Chief Secretary Navneet Sehgal told PTI-Bhasha.

So far 63 per cent of the targeted population has received two doses of vaccine and the

effort is to scale it up to at least 90 per cent by the time the state witnesses the first round of voting on February 10, said Sehgal, who is also the nodal officer on COVID-19 in the state.

The officer said around 97 per cent of the 18-plus population has got their first dose of the vaccine by now. On an average 25 lakh people are administered vaccine daily as part of a speed-up inoculation drive. Adityanath has asked officials to increase it to 30 lakh a day.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Ajay Kumar Shukla told PTI-Bhasha that more than 7.5 lakh officials would be deployed on poll duty and efforts are on to fully vaccinate them beforehand.

'Danger of Covid has subsided in Delhi, situation under control'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Friday asserted that the danger of COVID-19 has subsided in the national capital and the situation is "quite under control".

He also said that the virus was the primary cause of death in only three of the 43 fatalities recorded the previous day. The national capital is expected to record 10,500 cases on Friday with a positivity rate of 17 to 18 per cent, Jain said. Considering the dip in daily cases and the positivity rate, he said, the government has written to Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal

on withdrawing the weekend curfew, lifting the odd-even rule for opening of shops and allowing private offices to operate at 50 per cent capacity. "Experts had warned that Delhi can record one lakh cases daily during this wave but that danger has been averted. We will take a call on lifting of more restrictions within three-four days," the minister told reporters here.

Delhi has passed the peak of the ongoing wave of the pandemic, Jain said. He said that after recording around 28,000 Covid infections last week, Delhi is now reporting a sharp decline in the number of daily cases and the positivity rate.

North-East, once infamous for corruption now uses funds for development: Shah

PNS ■ AGARTALA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah today said there was a time when the Northeast was known for corruption but now the funds sent from Delhi are fully utilized for the development in the region.

Addressing the fifty years of statehood day of Tripura through video conferencing said, Shah Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been trying hard to reduce the gap between Delhi and Northeast to ensure speedy development in the Northeastern states.

The home minister said the



plan for Tripura's development over the next 25 years has been laid out in a vision document 'Lakshya Tripura'.

Addressing a gathering here on Tripura's 50th statehood day through video conferencing, Shah said, huge infrastructure for connectivity of the land-locked state through roads, railways were built and initiatives were taken for better connectivity through neighbouring Bangladesh.

The 15-km long Agartala-Akhaura rail link which has been built would connect the north eastern railway tracks with Bangladesh railways to reach up to Kolkata, the minister said. Shah said, the last king of Tripura, Maharaja Bir

Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur had decided that Tripura would join the Indian territory after partition.

When Muslim infiltrators were entering Tripura after partition, Maharani Kanchan prava Debi, the widow of the Maharaja had contacted the then union Home Minister Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel, who intervened to facilitate the princely state to the Indian union, he said. "To respect Maharaja's contribution, the Modi government had to change its policy and renamed Agartala Airport after his name", he said.

'Bihar heading for midterm polls with NDA in disarray'

PNS ■ PATNA

Bihar is tipped for midterm polls as constituents of the ruling NDA are at each other's throat, former ally Chirag Paswan claimed here on Friday. Paswan claimed that likelihood of early polls became evident when Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, "who does not venture out until faced with elections", recently planned a state-wide tour.

He was replying to queries from journalists about recent squabbles between Kumar's JD(U) and the BJP, primarily over

the manner in which liquor prohibition law is being implemented in the state.

"Since the day assembly polls results came out, I have been saying that this government is not going to last. The straw in the wind is now for all to see," said Paswan who heads a splinter group of Lok Janshakti Party. An ugly spat ensued after a JD(U) spokesman took potshots at state BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal over his offer of help to family members of those who died in a hooch tragedy in West Champaran district last year.

Amar Jawan Jyoti merged with eternal flame

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Amar Jawan Jyoti at the India Gate was merged with the eternal flame at the National War Memorial (NWM) here on Friday.

In a short ceremony, a part of the Amar Jawan Jyoti flame was taken and merged with the flame at the NWM, which is 400 metres away on the other side of India Gate.

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff Air Marshal B R Krishna presided over the ceremony. The Amar Jawan Jyoti was constructed as a memorial for Indian soldiers who were killed in action in the 1971 Indo-Pak war, which India won, leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

In a short ceremony, a part of the Amar Jawan Jyoti flame was taken and merged with the flame at the NWM, which is 400 metres away on the other side of India Gate.

It was inaugurated by the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, on January 26, 1972. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on February 25, 2019, inaugurated the NWM, where names of 25,942 soldiers have been inscribed in golden letters on granite tablets.



Cong didn't respond to Sena's pre-poll alliance plan in Goa; it is to be blamed if BJP wins: Raut

PNS ■ PANAJI

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Friday said that he agrees to the view expressed by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) that the Congress should be held responsible if the BJP wins the next month's Goa Assembly elections and continues to occupy power in the state.

He said that although the Sena had presented a proposal to the Congress to form a pre-poll alliance along with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Goa Forward Party (GFP), the grand old party did not respond to its plan. Raut was talking to



reporters after announcing the party's first list of nine candidates for the February 14 assembly elections, which it will be jointly contesting with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP. Goa has a total of 40 assembly seats. TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee had on Thursday

said that if the Congress fails to dislodge the BJP from power in Goa, the Congress' state in-charge P Chidambaram should take the responsibility and resign. He said the TMC had approached Chidambaram with a formal offer for pre-poll alliance, but nothing happened in that direction.

"I agree with the comments of Abhishek Banerjee. We had also tried to hold talks with Congress. We had held a meeting with (Congress leaders) Dinesh Gundu Rao, Digambar Kamat and Girish Chodankar with the proposal that Congress, NCP, GFP and Sena should form an alliance," he said.

The medium

To teach in English or in mother tongue?
A multilingual approach is the answer

The Telangana Government has decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction in Government schools from the next academic year. The State language, Telugu, will be parallelly available as the other medium of instruction. On the face of it, there is a readymade explanation for the change. More and more parents of children in Government schools of Telangana feel the kids, when they reach the college level, fail to catch up with the standards of English-medium students. Secondly, private schools, hitherto limited to the urban centres with their English-medium education, have of late mushroomed across rural Telangana offering education in the English medium. That has led to a near-exodus from Telugu-medium Government schools, many of which have either closed down or merged with bigger schools, or relocated for want of students. The Government in any case runs a few residential schools with English medium and thinks offering English medium across the State would not be much of an issue. The problem the Government faces is finding teachers who can teach in English. They are scarce. The majority of the teachers is proficient in Telugu. The Government has to re-train these teachers — a tough task



— and encourage prospective teachers to take up B Ed courses in English. But by and large, not many eyebrows are being raised as the English medium creeps into the Government school system in Telangana where ‘going to America’ is a popular cry and Telugu-medium students shell out big money to enrol in private English-language courses.

The issue, however, points to a disturbing fact. Even after 75 years of Independence, we are stuck with basic stuff, like what should be the medium of education in our schools. We are still debating whether children should be taught in English or their mother tongue. We

are also not sure whether mother tongue constitutes languages or dialects, too. For instance, millions speak Bhojpuri but it is considered a dialect of Hindi. Only last year, a Minister in Bihar mooted the idea of making the “mother tongue of the region” the medium of teaching. It just shows India never had an exhaustive debate on the subject. Linguists backing cognitive education insist that children learn skills in their mother tongue, a language they grow up with. The aspirational, social-empowering, rights-based argument favours English because it is the language that works in the world. Thus, the medium of instruction carries the baggage of ideology and elitism in the world’s largest multi-lingual federation that is India. In contrast to parents’ eagerness for their children to be taught in English, the Centre’s National Education Policy (NEP) largely prefers the mother tongue. The answer is a bilingual or, preferably, a multilingual approach. Technology makes it possible. In a country where most children live their lives in two or three languages, multi-lingual teaching methods provide a level playing field for diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds while reconciling the desires of both parents and the NEP.

PICTALK



A troupe of folk singers during a rehearsal on the Red Road for upcoming R-Day function, in Kolkata

PTI

Ill at ease

As Kerala grapples with rising COVID cases, its ‘immaculate health care’ balloon has burst

As the number of daily COVID-19 cases soared to 46,487 on Thursday, Kerala’s boast of being a role model for health care came crashing down like a pack of cards. The death toll in the State till Thursday stood at 51,501. Kerala has not been free from the pandemic’s onslaught since India’s first COVID-19 case was diagnosed in the State in early 2020. However, the State administration-sponsored media blitzkrieg portrayed an “all is well” image. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is currently recuperating in a US hospital, had addressed the media daily to tell the world that Kerala was the only State taking on the pandemic by the horns. The daily briefings, which were telecast by all satellite news channels, were used by Vijayan to campaign for the 2021 Assembly election. He claimed that Kerala was receiving global acclaim for its health care system and other countries were emulating its example. But after the LDF retained power following the 2021 Assembly election, he discontinued the practice of addressing the media daily; the opportunist in Vijayan the politician chose to ignore people as the next major election is due only in 2024.

When the cases of COVID-19 surged, the Government turned to blaming people for the transmission of the virus. The truth, however, is that no worthwhile efforts were made to study the pattern in the spread of the disease. The State Government continued to tom-tom and live by its past laurels, when some agencies had praised the Kerala model of health care. The health department was complacent throughout this period, and manipulated figures failed to cover up the administration’s malpractices. A 600-bed COVID hospital at Kasaragod, built by the Tatas and handed over to the Government in early 2021, is yet to become fully operational. The Government doctors were on a path of agitation for the last one year, demanding restoration of allowances which were cancelled citing financial crunch. The much-touted Kerala model was virtually a red herring spawned by friendly media. EMS Namboodiripad and C Achutha Menon, the Communist Chief Ministers of the State, used to fly to Romania and East Germany for medical treatment while Vijayan and his conscience-keeper Kodiyeri Balakrishnan prefer the “imperialist” US as their medical caretaker. It’s time for the Comrades to see the writing on the wall, isn’t it already?

Afghan women’s rights are still far

The Taliban’s recent announcements fail to inspire confidence and don’t go far enough to impress the international community



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Two news items, published in newspapers on January 20, 2022, merit attention. The first by AFP, carried in the Delhi edition of a leading daily, is about Acting Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund’s appeal on January 19 to Muslim countries “to take the lead and recognise us officially”. He was speaking at a conference to address Afghanistan’s massive economic problems. The second, by PTI, featured in the Delhi edition of *The Pioneer*. It cited Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Xiao Lijian as saying at a media briefing on January 18 that he hoped that the Afghan side would respond further to the international community’s expectations that it would “establish an open and inclusive political architecture, adopt moderate and prudent domestic and foreign policies, firmly combat all sorts of terrorist forces” and be “on friendly terms with other countries, especially its neighbours and integrate into [the] international family at an early date”.

The statement, made following a mention of the Taliban seeking China’s help to get global diplomatic recognition, clearly indicated that the world did not think that they had established an “inclusive” Government or that their policies towards women would not be a repeat of the horribly repressive ones that marked their earlier stint in power from 1996 to 2001. And this, when they had promised that women would enjoy all the rights to education and work available under Sharia law.

In fact, the UN and its bodies have, on several occasions, asked the Taliban to implement their promises and made critical observations about their actions. Its secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, told reporters on October 7 last year, “I am particularly alarmed to see promises made to Afghan women and girls by the Taliban being broken.” He added, “I strongly appeal to the Taliban to keep their promises to women and girls and fulfil their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.” Speaking at the Human Rights Council, an inter-govern-



mental body within the UN system responsible for promoting and safeguarding human rights, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said on September 13, 2021, “My office has received credible allegations of reprisal killings of a number of former ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces) personnel, and reports of officials, who worked for previous administrations, and their family members being arbitrarily detained.... In some cases, the officials were released and, in others, they were found dead.” Bachelet also highlighted “deeply troubling information” about Taliban raids on offices of some advocacy groups.

The UN bodies have acted. On September 17, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution asking the Taliban to establish an inclusive Government that has “the full, equal and meaningful participation of women” and upholds human rights. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on October 7 to have, from March 2022, a special rapporteur, supported by UN experts, on the ground to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

There are some indications

“
THE FIRST
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TO WORK.
CLEARLY, NEITHER
ANNOUNCEMENT
MEANS MUCH

that the Taliban are reacting. Abdul Baqi Haqqani, Minister for Higher Education, announced at a press conference in Kabul on January 12 that the Government would soon reopen public universities for male and female students. He also announced that these students would be segregated and cited Afghanistan’s economic crisis and the lack of separated classes for male and female students, as reasons for the delay.

Earlier, in a decree on December 3 in the name of the Acting PM, the Taliban had stated that a “woman is not a property, but a noble and free human being; no one can give her to anyone in exchange for peace...or to end animosity”. Both women and men, it had added, “should be equal” and that “no one can force women to marry by coercion or pressure”. The decree also enabled a widow to re-marry 17 weeks after her husband’s death — against the longstanding Afghan tribal custom of her marrying one of her husband’s brothers or relatives after his death. Further, the Taliban leadership has reportedly ordered Afghan courts to treat women fairly, especially in cases of widows seeking inheritance as next of kin. The announcement also cites the

Taliban as saying they had asked their Ministers to spread awareness about women’s rights across the population.

Significantly, the first announcement does not mention the precise date when public universities will reopen. Nor does it mention women’s right to work. The third *sura* of the *Koran* (ayats 193 and 194) forbids the wasting of anyone’s — whether a man or woman’s — labour. The fourth *sura* (ayats 36 and 37) says, “To the men a share of what they have earned,/ and to the women a share of what they have earned...” (translation from *The Koran Interpreted* by Arthur J Arberry). The second announcement says nothing about women’s right to education and work, which are crucial issues with the international community. Also, the rights the decree announces regarding marriage have all been enshrined in Islamic jurisprudence since the time of Prophet Mohammad. Clearly, neither announcement means much and is unlikely to impress the international community sufficiently for the purse strings to be loosened generously or recognition to be forthcoming soon.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAJOR MIDAIR COLLISION AVERTED

Sir — A major midair collision was averted earlier this month in Bengaluru’s skies as two aircraft of the same airline, which had taken off almost simultaneously from the city’s Kempegowda International Airport, almost brushed against each other. While one of the planes was headed for Kolkata, the other aircraft was flying passengers to Bhubaneswar. It was a really shocking incident as to how the two aircraft were allowed to take off at the same time. It is a matter of grave concern as to how the planes were in this dangerous situation; besides, the air traffic control (ATC) didn’t even report this incident nor made a record of it in the log book.

Luckily, an alert radar controller spotted the potentially grave error and immediately alerted both the pilots, thus saving hundreds of lives. In recognition of his presence of mind, both the radar controller and his swift action should be applauded and he should be suitably rewarded, too. The Government should order a thorough probe into this matter and ask the DGCA to conduct an in-depth investigation, which should be followed by taking necessary action in what could easily have been one of the biggest air safety lapses at the Bengaluru airport and in the country in recent history.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

ANOTHER BLOW TO SPIRIT OF FEDERALISM

Sir — It appears that the BJP Government at the Centre is determined to curtail the powers of the States by introducing controversial Acts and amendments to the Constitution and other existing regulations, despite protests from the States concerned. Before the din on the undemocratic denial of the participation of the tableaux from non-BJP ruled States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal in the upcoming Republic Day parade on flimsy grounds could die down, the Centre has now proposed changes to the IAS cadre rules which, when implemented, would remove power from the States and their rights as far as transfer/deputation of the

Respect history, and monuments



I’m not at all surprised to hear that after burning for five decades, the Amar Jawan Jyoti will be put out at India Gate, and merged with the National War Memorial 400 metres away. The Jyoti has a cenotaph and a monument to honour our fallen soldiers, on a marble pedestal, with a rifle and a soldier’s helmet on it. The flame, lit to pay tributes to the soldiers martyred in the 1971 war, was inaugurated by then Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi on the Republic Day of 1972. Actually, one can learn from PM Narendra Modi how to kill two birds with one stone. Just as the nation commemorated 50 years of the 1971 war, the Defence Ministry announced that the Jyoti will be put out.

Similarly, in August 2021, Modi suddenly renamed the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna as Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna. All this is nothing but an attempt at “freeing” India of the Gandhi-Nehru name and legacy while, at the same time, rewriting history in favour of Modi by decisions such as building the Central Vista. Sadly, the Modi Government seems to have forgotten that respecting history involves conservation of the old while building new institutions. Hence, instead of extinguishing one memorial after the other, the Government will do better to make sincere and concrete attempts to spark the fire of patriotism among all countrymen.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

IAS cadres to the Centre are concerned.

This amendment would entail the Union Government to transfer IAS officers without the consent of the States, which is clearly against the spirit of cooperative federalism. Though many Chief Ministers have raised their voice against this amendment and termed it draconian, it is alleged that the BJP Government, as usual, is going to implement the amendment unmindful of the objections. This amendment, if implemented, will be another blow to the democratic norms and cooperative federalism the country has been cherishing all these years.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

OBC QUOTA IN NEET UPHELD

Sir — The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of reservation for OBC candidates and it is a right step in the right direction. While upholding the constitutional validity of reservation for OBCs in AIQ seats, the court elaborated on the concept of merit and

observed that it is not of one’s own making. It noted that “reservation is not at odds with merit” in open competitive exams. While open examinations present equal opportunity to candidates, reservation ensures distribution of such opportunities, the court said.

It added that privileges of forward classes include not just having access to quality schooling and good coaching centres but also social networks and cultural communication, including good speaking skills, accent and academic accomplishments. All these ensure that children from forward classes take up jobs commensurate with the family’s standing whereas first-generation learners from Other Backward Classes, who lack these, are placed at a disadvantage. Marks alone are not an indicator of merit, but also the resilience required to uplift oneself from the conditions of deprivation.

MR Jayanthi | Mumbai

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

An agreement on extending a \$190 mn Line of Credit from India to Mauritius will be exchanged.

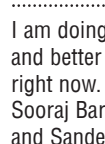


Prime Minister
— Narendra Modi



I think Vladimir Putin will move in on Ukraine but (he) does not want a full-blown war.

US President
— Joe Biden



I am doing bigger and better projects right now. I have a Sooraj Barjatya film and Sandeep Vanga’s next with Ranbir Kapoor.

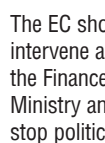


Actor
— Parineeti Chopra



Only the captain has the answer as to why Venkatesh wasn’t bowled even once.

Former India captain
— Sunil Gavaskar



The EC should intervene and direct the Finance Ministry and ED to stop politically motivated raids (on Punjab CM’s relatives).

Congress leader
— Randeep Surjewala

FIRST COLUMN

QUICK COMMERCE: A NEW RETAIL MANTRA

Essentially large warehouses, dark stores enable fast delivery of goods in localities



MICHAEL CHANDA



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

A wise person can create 'The Advantage of Adversity'. And you can very much learn this from retail marketers at this crucial juncture. Coping with the crucial situations of COVID-19, retail marketing is scaling newer heights. Business climate for retail marketing is getting conducive as there is a win-win situation for both the marketers and the clients. Today, retail industries are resorting to varied strategies to meet up consumers' demands. Moreover, the modus operandi of delivering the goods and services is becoming digitalized and even fast-paced. Consequently, understanding and innovating the retail has become a new business mantra. So much so Amazon, Flipkart, Ola, Uber, Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy, Dunzo, Bigbasket and other business units are surprisingly found to be engaged with quick commerce companies. Owing to fasten the business, dark stores have been founded in the local area for treading



purposes. Essentially, dark stores are large warehouses that are the central points of retail distribution. They cater exclusively to local needs through online shopping. Quick commerce is indeed the next generation of e-commerce. It is an international business process that caters to the wishes of the consumers to bring instant delivery of goods. It provides instant support to the modern communities which are in dire need. Groceries, stationaries hygiene products etc., are coming under the ambit of quick commerce activities. Quick commerce websites are used to provide an online platform for various trading in the country. However, this business method helps the online shoppers to make safe purchases for their stores. Such a business model wants to be the biggest kirana store in the urban colony. It should be expressed that a dark store hits a frequency of more than 200 orders per day. The unit economics depends on the fact that there is a mixture of perishable and non-perishable in transaction. Tellingly, quick commerce remains a new and evolving business management with the effective inclusion of information technology. Many e-commerce companies are turning to social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram to showcase their vast array of products. Customization is the key of this trade. It will facilitate speed and efficiency. Quick commerce addresses are meaningful. The customers can use their mobile devices for shopping. However, quick commerce can invite online fraudulent activities. Credit card frauds are persistent in online businesses. It is apparent that quick commerce or electronic commerce is above all a commercial transaction over the Internet. It is a space mainly to watch out for logistics and e-commerce players. The expectations are likely to settle in at a sweet spot of thirty minutes' delivery or so. According to industry players, ten minutes' delivery model will see rationalization over time. Subscription-based e-commerce is another new venue that is being explored. It customers to subscribe to a product on a recurring basis depending on their need. However, the local kirana stores in the local area lose business due to the rise of dark stores that modernises the trading process. The local businessmen cannot afford to make big capital for having dark stores. These stores are losing customers due to the higher discount offerings of the companies. The companies have appointed a number of bikers and cyclists to deliver the commodities to the customers from dark stores. The corporate giants should pay minimum heed to the interest and survival of owners of kirana stores.

(Chanda is an author-activist and works as an advocate at High Court, Calcutta. Chakraborty teaches at Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal.)

Cinema ticket pricing vs bloated film costs



RAMACHANDRA MURTHY KONDUBHATLA

The Andhra Govt has issued an order fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, *nagar panchayats* and village *panchayats*

Two controversial Government Orders issued by the Andhra Pradesh Government related to entertainment and culture have created a lot of heat. The first Go issued in April 2021 was aimed at regulating film industry. The second one was recently issued banning a popular and message-oriented stage play 'Chintamani'. Both the issues could have been dealt with skilfully had the Government consulted the stakeholders before taking the decisions.

The Government of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy which has been dabbling in controversies of all kinds has added two more, involving the film industry and stage plays.

About 170 of the 950-odd theatres in Andhra Pradesh have been closed since the GO was issued. The exhibitors say they lost hugely due to Covid during 2021 when the theatres were completely shut. They were reopened with 50 per cent occupancy on July 31, 2021. Even before that, the State Government issued GO 35 fixing slabs for tickets in cinema halls in municipal corporations, municipalities, nagar panchayats and village panchayats under economy, deluxe and premium classes for multiplex, AC theatres and non-AC theatres.

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma met AP Information, public relations and cinematography minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) and told him that the Government has no business to intervene in this issue. It is for the exhibitors and audience to decide the price of tickets. Pawan Kalyan, film hero-cum-politician (president of Jan Sena which has alliance with the BJP) was rather aggressive in his criticism. He said since the Government has no money, it is indulging in online ticketing and fixing ticket prices. Minister Nani asked the actor why would the government which has no money would reduce the ticket price instead of increasing. Senior actor, Pawan Kalyan's elder brother and former union minister Chiranjeevi tried to break the ice when he travelled to Amaravati to meet Jagan Mohan Reddy over lunch on last Thursday. Some news channels and newspaper said Chiranjeevi was offered a Rajya Sabha seat by the YSRC chief which was promptly and curtly denied by the mega star. He said the problem would be resolved soon.

What is the problem? Is it peculiar to Tollywood? So, it appears. The problems in the industry started with stardom. At least six stars today charge a fee of ₹45 crore each for a movie. Heroines also are paid in crores, though their remuneration is nowhere near the actors'. Directors donot take all the remuneration by cheque or cash but ask for share in the revenue area wise. Together they eat away three-fourth of the budget.

Persons working in 24 crafts in films get a pittance. The presence of Chiranjeevi, Prabhas, Mahesh, Pawan Kalyan, NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja makes the budget



THE PRESENCE OF CHIRANJEEVI, PRABHAS, MAHESH, PAWAN KALYAN, NTR (JR) AND RAM CHARAN TEJA MAKES THE BUDGET OF ANY FILM CROSS ₹100 CRORE. IN ORDER TO EARN THAT KIND OF MONEY, THE EXHIBITORS ORGANISE BENEFIT SHOWS AND EXTRA SHOWS TO COLLECT MORE. FOR BENEFIT SHOWS, THE PRICE OF THE TICKET WOULD BE ABOVE ₹1,000 FOR BIG-TICKET MOVIES

(The writer is Editor, Primepost, the news website based out of Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal.)



of any film cross ₹100 crore. Each actor acts in one movie in one or two years.

In order to earn that kind of huge money the exhibitors organize benefit shows and extra shows to collect more. For benefit shows, the price of the ticket would be above ₹1000 for big-ticket movies in which one of these stars acts.

If you have two stars like NTR (Jr) and Ram Charan Teja and a star director such as Rajamouli of Bahubali fame, as in RRR (Raudram, Ranam and Rudhiram), the budget would be around ₹300 crore. The film RRR was supposed to be released on January 7 after three postponements. Some other films slated to be released on Sankranti postponed their dates thinking that RRR would be released by then. The release of Sarkaruvaripaat (featuring Mahesh Babu) was put off till April 1 and Bhimla Nayak (Pawan Kalyan, Rana) till February 25. It happened because when a big budget film, such as RRR, is released, it is exhibited in most of the theatres for one week with special shows and higher ticket prices to earn back the huge investment. The poor and the middleclass among the audience are made to pay through their noses to pay to the stars. During that week no theatres would be available for other films.

Small cinema which used to flourish earlier has been thoroughly discouraged. Small producers have to depend on OTT platforms or sale of the cyber rights. The remuneration for artists is far less in Kannada, Malayalam and

Marathi movies.

Once late Raj Kumar, the Kannada Kanteerava, invited all Kannada producers, directors and exhibitors to his residence, gave them sumptuous dinner and politely asked them permission to raise his remuneration by ₹25,000 since he has a number of children. The guests were stunned and told him he could enhance his fee by lakhs.

The late NTR acted for twenty years for less than a lakh of rupees for a film. The days of NTR, ANR, Sobhan Babu and Krishna were golden for Tollywood. Beside the heroes, actors, directors, technicians and other craftsmen used to live happily. If the prices of tickets are low, small movies can get theatres and reasonable revenue. Some exhibitors went to AP High Court which asked the government to appoint a committee to study the issue. In the absence of compliance, the HC has stayed the operation of the GO. Then the government organized raids on theatres which were running without proper license and selling refreshments at higher prices. The result is bad blood between the government and the industry.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Government has agreed to the demand of the film industry and allowed fixing of ticket prices by the producers and exhibitors. Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu did not want any trouble on this count. The ideal solution would be for both the chief ministers of Telugu States to sit with the important persons from Tollywood to sort out the matter once for all. The remuneration of the stars, the stranglehold of four families on hundreds of theatres in both the States (Families headed by Dil Raj, Allu Aravind, Daggubati Suresh and Sunil Narang) and the unethical exploitation of the film lovers, scope for small budget film producers to survive and the welfare of technicians and others (estimated to be more than 50 thousand) have to be discussed threadbare to arrive at a comprehensive and amicable solution. Sooner it is done the better for both government and film industry.

The ban on Chintamani, the popular stage play, imposed by Rajat Bhargava, the Principal Secretary through a GO, was not warranted although the complaint of a community is genuine. The original play written by social reformer, writer and poet Kallakuri Narayana Rao, exactly one hundred years ago, was sophisticated and enlightening. It was a critique of the Devadasi system. Subbi Shetty, a character in the play, is a vaisya (bania), who loses his wealth to Chintamani and his character is used to engage the audience through his teasing chat with Chintamani's mother Srihari and sister Chitra. It is true that some actors introduced vulgarity and obscene dialogues between Subbi Shetty, Chitra and Srihari, hurting the sentiments of a community.

The Andhra government should have allowed the play to run with a condition that vulgar characters and dialogues are removed. Even today, the play has great relevance. The AP Government's decision needs to be revised.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE DOUBLE-ENGINE GOVT PEOPLE ARE DISMANTLING EACH OTHER'S WHEELS. THE DELHI CAMP HAS SHUNTED THE CM TO GORAKHPUR. —SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF AKHILESH YADAV



THOSE NOT GETTING TICKETS TO RIDE THE DOUBLE ENGINE ARE BUYING TICKETS IN BLACK TO RIDE THE BICYCLE. —UP BJP CHIEF SWATANTRA DEV SINGH

Will Russia play the 'Cuban card'?

But Russia stopped being Communist 30 years ago

After a week of intense discussions about 'security' between Russia and the NATO countries, this is the week when the Western allies will send their written replies to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Various pundits, some of whom have actually been to Russia, warn us that there will be 'War in Europe' if Putin's demands are not met.

(You there, at the back. Stop giggling! This is no laughing matter! Peace is hanging by a thread!)

Historians keen for a moment in the limelight are being wheeled out to draw parallels with past diplomatic disasters like the Munich conference of 1938 (appeasement of Hitler) and Yalta in 1945 (carving up Europe and giving Stalin the eastern half in 1945).



GWYNNE DYER

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'The Shortest History of War'. The views expressed are personal.)

And this just in! Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, just back in Moscow from the talks, told Russian television that if the talks failed, he could "neither confirm nor exclude" that Russia would send "military assets" to Cuba and Venezuela.

Wow! A dagger - no, two daggers - pointed at the heart of America (although they'll have to work on the length of the Venezuelan dagger, since it's 2,000 km. from Caracas to Miami). If that does not force the Americans to give in, what will? I'm sorry. That's enough sarcasm. It's just that all this prancing around and mugging for the camera gets tiresome. This is a minor diplomatic spat that has been deliberately inflated far beyond its merit, and it is being taken much too seriously. Let's start with Russia play-



ing the 'Cuban card'. Cuba is still a Communist country, and Maduro's regime in Venezuela also has aspirations in that direction - but Russia, in case you've forgotten, stopped being Communist thirty years ago.

Putin's regime in Moscow is nationalist-populist, and Cuba has absolutely no motive to host Russian troops and risk triggering a confrontation with the United States. In any case

Russian troops in Cuba would pose no military threat to the United States. What are they going to do? Invade Florida?

Ryabkov's intention was obviously to do a "How would you like it if...?" on American diplomats. How would like it if there were Russian troops '90 miles from Florida' (as people used to say during the Cuban crisis of 1962), and not NATO troops 450 km. from Moscow

(which is where they are now).

The grown-up American answer to that would be "Who cares?" In real life, there are a number of troglodytes in the US Congress who would work themselves up into a lather about Russian troops in Cuba - but since the Cubans would not agree to it in the first place, it's really quite irrelevant.

Well, then, what about the alleged historical precedents: Munich and Yalta? They were both about granting a 'sphere of influence' in Europe to a great power (Germany in 1938, the Soviet Union in 1945) that could easily enforce its wishes on the ground.

Russia is effectively demanding a comparable sphere of influence in its old 'satellite' countries, which would not be allowed to have friendly foreign troops on

their soil even though they are NATO members, but it's a complete non-starter. Russia lacks the military capacity to enforce its will on the ground.

So will there be 'War in Europe', as the feverish headlines suggest? Not in the sense they imply: massive armoured forces rolling across whole countries, with the threat of nuclear war looming in the background. But there might be some shooting on or just inside Ukraine's border with Russia.

Of course, there's already a little bit of shooting along that border, in the Russian-backed breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. As Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Friday, Putin may now be planning to cause a little more.

Kirby warned that Russia "has pre-positioned a group of

operatives to conduct what we call a false-flag operation, an operation designed to look like an attack on them or on Russian-speaking people in Ukraine, as an excuse to go in." He may be right - and he may be wrong. The satellites can see their location, but not their intentions.

Something has got into Putin, and he's seeking concessions that he should know he cannot extract, with threats that he cannot enforce.

It is possible that he could blunder into a local clash that would bring harsh sanctions down on Russia.

It is extremely unlikely that he would try to conquer all or even half of Ukraine.

It is almost inconceivable that this will end up with Second World War-style battles between large armoured forces.

MONEY MATTERS

Hindustan Zinc Q3 net profit rises 23 pc to Rs 2,701 cr

Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd on Friday reported a 22.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,701 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2021. The company has reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 2,200 crore in the year-ago period, Hindustan Zinc Ltd said in a filing to the BSE. Its consolidated income during October-December 2021 period increased to Rs 8,269 crore, compared with Rs 6,483 crore a year ago, the filing said. "We delivered the best-ever 9M (nine months) mined metal production and historic-high quarterly refined metal production. At the current run rate, we are confident to deliver on the one million mark this year. Hindustan Zinc is also geared to invest in world-class technologies and equipment to produce value-added zinc alloy products and provide matching international quality in the domestic market," the company's CEO Arun Misra said.



Gems, jewellery exports grow 5.76% to US \$ 29 bn in Apr-Dec 2021

Gems and jewellery exports in the April-December 2021 period grew by 5.76 per cent to USD 29.08 billion on account of healthy demand in major countries including the US, Hong Kong and Thailand, the GJEPC said on Friday. The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said that exports in December 2021 rose by 29.49 per cent to USD 3.04 billion. "Holiday and festive demand was robust in important trading centres such as the USA, Hong Kong, Thailand and Israel. And we have every reason to believe that this momentum will carry through the end of FY2022, bringing us closer to the set target of USD 41.67 billion in exports," GJEPC chairman Colin Shah said in a statement. Cut and polished diamond exports during April-December 2021 grew by 23 per cent to USD 18 billion. Similarly, gold jewellery exports during the period too rose by 25.41 per cent to USD 6.91 billion, the council said.



HDFC Life Q3 profit rises to Rs 274 crore

HDFC Life on Friday reported a 3 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 273.65 crore for the third quarter ended December. The private sector insurer's profit stood at Rs 264.99 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal, HDFC Life said in a regulatory filing. However, total income declined to Rs 14,222.22 crore in the latest December quarter from Rs 21,126.80 crore in October-December 2020. The company's solvency ratio too declined to 190 per cent from 202 per cent as on December 31, 2020. The regulatory requirement is 150 per cent. "On January 1, 2022, the company has issued 8,70,22,222 equity shares at an agreed issue price of Rs 685 per share on a preferential basis and paid balance Rs 725.98 crore in cash to Exide Industries Limited in lieu of 100 per cent equity shares of Exide Life thereby completing the acquisition of Exide Life," it said. With effect from January 1, 2022, Exide Life has become a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company.



Over 2,250 startups added in 2021, raised US \$ 24.1 bn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 2,250 startups were added in the year 2021, over 600 more than what was added in the previous year, a report by Nasscom and Zinnov said on Friday.

The study titled 'Indian Tech Start-up Ecosystem: Year of The Titans' said with rising investor confidence, startups leveraging deep-tech, and tapping unexplored talent pool, the Indian tech startup base continues to witness steady growth.

As per the report, startups raised USD 24.1 billion in 2021, a two-fold increase over pre-COVID levels.

In comparison to 2020, there was a 3X increase in number of high-value deals (deals more than USD 100 million), demonstrating investor confidence with a pool of active angel investors of more than 2,400 and a readiness to take significant risks, it said.

While the US remains the



leading source of foreign direct investment in startups, worldwide involvement is also growing. About 50 per cent of the deals had at least one India-domiciled investor, it added.

The report said the startup ecosystem saw a 2X gain in cumulative valuation from 2020 to 2021, with an estimate of USD 320-330 billion, demonstrating the sector's development and recovery throughout the pandemic.

It added that more than USD 6 billion has been raised

via public markets with 11 startup IPOs in 2021.

In the last decade, the ecosystem has played a key role in growing direct and indirect job opportunities, providing 6.6 lakh direct jobs and more than 34.1 lakh indirect jobs. The industries that saw the most net new job creation were banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI), edtech, retail and retail tech, foodtech, SCM (supply chain management) and logistics and mobility.

On the back of internet commerce, freelancers, and service industries, indirect jobs have also recovered, it said. "The performance of the Indian startup ecosystem in 2021 has proved the resilience and dedication being put by multiple startups across segments. The ecosystem has grown immensely and positioned itself as a vital contributor to the growth of India's digital economy," Nasscom President Debjani Ghosh said.

She added that with record-breaking funding, an increase in the number of unicorns, jobs being created in the near term, the Indian startup ecosystem's future looks even brighter going ahead in 2022. "When compared to the UK, US, Israel, and China, 2021 has been an outstanding year for the Indian startup ecosystem, with the highest growth rate in terms of deals, both in seed stage and late-stage funding, and number of startups," Zinnov CEO Pari Natarajan said.

Sensex tumbles 427 pts; Nifty retains 17,600

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Extending its losses for the fourth straight session, equity benchmark Sensex slumped 427 points on Friday, tracking weakness in Bajaj Finserv, L&T and Infosys amid a widespread sell-off in global markets.

Relentless foreign fund outflows further weighed on the bourses, traders said.

The 30-share BSE index ended 427.44 points or 0.72 per cent lower at 59,037.18. Similarly, the NSE Nifty plunged 139.85 points or 0.79 per cent to 17,617.15.

Fag-end buying in some select blue-chip counters helped the bourses limit the losses.

Bajaj Finserv was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding 5.37 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel, L&T, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance and Infosys.

On the other hand, HUL, Maruti, HDFC twins, and TCS were among the gainers, rising up to 2.68 per cent.

B2B spending in India expected to grow 10.3% in 2022: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The total business-to-business (B2B) spend for India is expected to rise by 10.3 per cent in 2022 with the spend of the country's businesses growing three times faster than the expectations from its comparable peers in other countries in the third quarter of last year, according to a study.

The total business-to-business (B2B) spend for India rose 9.4 per cent in Q3 2021 on a year-on-year basis, as per the India Business Spend Indicator (IBSI) report by American Express, India and Invest India in partnership with the Centre for Business and Economic Research (CEBR).

Stating that the India spending is on the rise across nine key B2B categories, the report said, "it is expected to rise by 10.3 per cent in 2022."

The study, which interviewed 500 financial decision makers in India on how their business spending habits are changing, found bullishness and greater confidence with 74 per cent of businesses expecting to spend more on technol-



ogy and 72 per cent planning to make more capital investments in 2022.

Manoj Adlakha, SVP and CEO, American Express Banking Corp, India said, "India saw the highest B2B spending growth compared to expectations of six other major economies. This year, the total B2B spend for India is expected to rise by 10.3 per cent compared to 2021."

This, he said, "Shows that the Indian economy is very much in its bounce-back phase from the economic difficulties caused by the pandemic crisis."

The survey also reveals that some of the trends that have emerged or accelerated during the pandemic such as payments automation and new approaches to manage the supply chain are likely to stay, Adlakha added.

The trend includes benefits of digital payments, which 59 per cent of B2B sellers considered to be the speed of payment and ability to track spends, while 83 per cent of eligible respondents said that the government's 'Make in India' campaign has helped their business.

PVR consolidated loss narrows to Rs 10.2 cr in Q3

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Multiplex chain operator PVR Ltd on Friday reported narrowing of its consolidated loss after tax at Rs 10.2 crore for the third quarter ended December 2021, on the back of easing of COVID-19 related restrictions.

The company had posted a consolidated loss after tax of Rs

49.21 crore in the same period last fiscal, PVR Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated total income during the period under review stood at Rs 709.71 crore as against Rs 320.13 crore in the year-ago quarter, it added.

"The impact of COVID-19 on cinema operations was the least in the Q3 FY22 as com-

pared to the preceding quarters since the time the pandemic has hit the economy," PVR said.

By the end of November 2021, except for Maharashtra and a handful of smaller states, almost all the other states where the group has substantial presence had allowed cinemas to operate at 100 per cent capacity, it added.



Jyothy Labs posts 29% drop in Q3 net profit at Rs 38 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG firm Jyothy Labs Ltd on Friday reported a 28.57 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 38.02 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, 2021 on account of higher expenses.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 53.23 crore in the same period last fiscal, Jyothy Labs Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated total income during the period under review stood at Rs 542.66 crore as against Rs 482.99 crore in the year-ago quarter, it added. Jyothy Labs Ltd Managing Director M R Jyothy said the company has been able to grow sales in spite of a challenging higher input price environment resulting in increase in retail prices which impacts consumers' purchas-

ing power. "While we continue to face margin pressure, we will focus on our strategic levers to offer better value proposition to consumers and focus on distribution which will aid in accelerating us towards higher revenue growth," she added.

Fabric care segment clocked revenue of Rs 209.08 crore in the third quarter as against Rs 175.87 crore in the year-ago period. The segment has seen improvement in sales across all brands with acceleration in sales at modern trade and canteen store department. Further, post wash segment has seen sequential improvement every month and has reached pre-Covid levels, the company said. Dishwashing category registered Rs 201.13 crore revenue as compared to Rs 182.09 crore in the third quarter last fiscal.

FedEx Express commences electric vehicle trials in India

PNS ■ MUMBAI

FedEx Express, a subsidiary of leading global express transportation company FedEx Corp, on Friday announced the commencement of electric vehicle (EV) trials in India with Bengaluru to begin with, as part of its global goal to achieve carbon-neutral operations by 2040.

The trial, which is expected to conclude within a month in Bengaluru, will test the vehicle technology within FedEx Express operations, assessing the vehicles' operational effectiveness on a standard route fully loaded with packages, the company said in a statement.

Following positive trial results, FedEx Express will extend the trial to Delhi, it said.



The company said that with last-mile delivery, burgeoning growth, each new electric vehicle added to the FedEx delivery fleet in India can reduce fuel consumption and emissions equivalent to five passenger cars.

"FedEx has a mission to con-

nect the world responsibly and resourcefully, and I'm incredibly pleased to announce the launch of our electric vehicle trial in India, which is in line with our global goal to achieve carbon-neutral operations by 2040," Mohamad Sayegh, vice-president (India Operations) of FedEx Express, said.

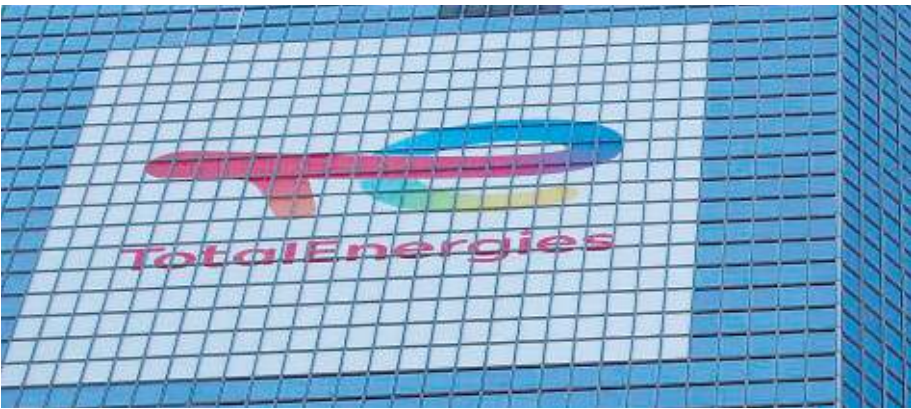
Chevron, Total exit Myanmar over human rights abuses

PNS ■ PARIS

TotalEnergies, one of the world's largest energy conglomerates, said Friday it was stopping all operations in Myanmar, citing rampant human rights abuses and deteriorating rule of law since the country's military overthrew the government. Chevron also said it was planning an exit.

The announcement came just a day after the French company called for international sanctions targeting the oil and gas sector, which remain one of the junta's primary sources of funding.

Total and Chevron had come under increasing pressure over their role in running the offshore Yadana gas field, and Thailand's PTT Exploration &



Production. Total has a majority stake in the venture and runs its daily operations, while MOGE collects revenues on behalf of the government.

"Since the February 1 coup,

we have seen the evolution of the country and it is clearly not favourable: The situation of rule of law and human rights in Myanmar has clearly deteriorated over months and despite

the civil disobedience movements, the junta has kept power and our analysis is that it's unfortunately for the long term," Total said.

Since the takeover, the mili-

tary has cracked down brutally against dissent, abducting young men and boys, killing health care workers and torturing prisoners. Total said it would withdraw without financial compensation and hand over its interests to the other stakeholders. About 50 per cent of Myanmar's foreign currency comes from natural gas revenues, with MOGE expected to earn USD 1.5 billion from offshore and pipeline projects in 2021-2022, according to a Myanmar government forecast. Prior rounds of US and European sanctions against the Myanmar military have excluded oil and gas. In a statement released shortly after Total's announcement, Chevron said it too was planning to leave "in light of circumstances."

SBI Life Q3 profit jumps 56 per cent to Rs 364 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

SBI Life Insurance on Friday reported a 56 per cent rise in net profit at Rs 364 crore for the third quarter ended December. The private sector insurer's profit stood at Rs 233 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal, according to a regulatory filing. However, total income declined to Rs 20,458.31 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 26,551.90 crore in October-December 2020 period. The company's solvency ratio stood 209 per cent as on December 31, 2021 as against the regulatory requirement of 150 per cent. The asset under management rose to Rs 2,56,900 crore at the end of December 2021 compared to Rs 2,09,500 crore in the year-ago period.



IDBI Bank Q3 net profit surges 53 pc to Rs 578 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC)-promoted IDBI Bank on Friday reported a 53 per cent jump in standalone net profit at Rs 578 crore during the third quarter ended December. The lender had reported a standalone net profit of Rs 378 crore in the October-December quarter of the previous year.

However, total income fell to Rs 5,772.86 crore during the

quarter compared to Rs 6,003.91 crore in the same period of 2020-21, the private sector lender said in a statement. The bank's net interest income rose by 31 per cent to Rs 2,383 crore during the reported quarter as against Rs 1,817 crore in the year-ago period. Net Interest Margin (NIM) improved by 86 basis points to 3.65 per cent as compared to 2.79 per cent in Q3 of the previous fiscal, it said.

Global shares slide after more losses on Wall Street

PNS ■ BANGKOK

Shares were lower in Europe and Asia on Friday after a late afternoon sell-off wiped out gains for stocks on Wall Street.

Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.9% to 7,518.47, while the DAX in Germany declined 1.2% to 15,720.00. In Paris, the CAC 40 lost 1.2% to 7,110.09. The future for the S&P 500 slipped 0.2% while the future for the Dow industrials was flat.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 1.78% from 1.83% late Thursday.

On Thursday, the S&P 500 lost 1.1% to a three-month low, with nearly 85% of stocks in the index falling. It's now down 6% for the year.

The Nasdaq composite index fell 1.3% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 0.9%. In Asia on Friday, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index lost 0.9% to 27,522.26 after Toyota Motor Corp announced production cuts due to parts shortages. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong edged 0.1% higher, regaining earlier losses, to 24,965.55. The Shanghai Composite index shed 0.9% to



3,526.19.

Hong Kong-traded shares in e-commerce giant Alibaba fell 4.4% after a Chinese-made documentary suggested its financial arm might be implicated in a corruption probe.

The S&P/ASX 200 in Sydney dropped 2.3% to 7,175.80. South Korea's Kospi slid 1.1% to 2,830.82. Thailand's benchmark fell 0.5%.

Investors are bracing for higher interest rates and stocks are headed for weekly losses in what has so far been a losing month.

Surging coronavirus cases

have added to jitters over supply chain problems that are disrupting manufacturing.

Investors are closely watching to see how US employment data might affect the Federal Reserve approach to weaning the economy of its support by raising interest rates.

The Labour Department provided a disappointing update, reporting Thursday that the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose to its highest level in three months as the fast-spreading omicron variant continued to disrupt the job market.



Squid Game will get a second season

The popular Korean survival drama *Squid Game* will be getting a Season 2, co-CEO and chief content officer Ted Sarandos has confirmed. On Netflix's fourth quarter 2021 earnings interview, Sarandos was asked whether there would be a second season of the violent South Korean survival drama, which has scored as the company's No. 1 most-viewed TV series, reports *variety.com*. "Absolutely," Sarandos replied. "The *Squid Game* universe has just begun." He put 'Squid Game' in the category of Netflix's burgeoning bouquet of entertainment franchises that the company sees as having growth potential outside the core streaming service, with live experiences, games and merchandise. Sarandos called out *Bridgerton*, the second most-viewed Netflix original TV show, with the Season 2 set

Vikrant Massey returns to TV to host historical docu-series

Actor Vikrant Massey is set to return to television after eight years with documentary series *Kahani Navbharat Ki*, which will chronicle key moments that shaped the country's history and its evolution. The show is set to be launched by Times Now Navbharat with a special curtain-raiser episode on January 26. Massey said he was drawn to host the series as it is a timely reminder of India's history. "What prompted my return with the show is the simple fact that there is a dearth of informative content on TV today. When we recognised that we are celebrating 75 proud years of our independence, this felt like just the right show for me to come back and interact with my audience. It is a highly researched non-fiction show, which I am doing for the

first time in my life," Massey told *PTI*. Directed by Aparna Sanyal, the 10-part series will commence from January 30 and air every Sunday. The 34-year-old actor, who was last seen on the TV show *Ajab Gajab Ghar Jamai*, said *Kahani Navbharat Ki* has an inspiring quality attached to it which will reach out to the audience, especially the younger generation. "The kind of historical anecdotes, stories, and inspiring personalities I came across — especially the ones I was not really aware of — that inspired me a lot. I thought, if I could feel this way there is a huge possibility for the audience, especially the younger generation, to feel the pride." The actor said the series aims to unearth forgotten historical incidents and present them to the viewers with utmost "authenticity". Massey said the show's research team worked on it for more than

two years in an attempt to bridge "the information disparity" between the younger generation and what transpired 75 years ago when the country attained independence. "Due to the advent of social media, we have a lot of chatter chatter going around. But we don't really have an in-depth understanding of what really happened. We want to go back to those archival materials, those incidents or anecdotes which have been far forgotten. We want to revive them and share them with people. These stories chronicle pivotal moments in the founding of the country," he added. According to the makers, the show will use a hybrid form of storytelling for its narration, employing elements, like sketches, animations, stylized graphics, full-frame illustrations, contemporary footage and interviews in addition to rare archival footage.



Composer Michael Giacchino unveils *The Batman* theme

Oscar-winning composer Michael Giacchino has finally unveiled *The Batman* theme ahead of the Robert Pattinson-led film's much-anticipated March 4 release. Giacchino has scored the music for just about every memorable film made in recent history, from *Mission: Impossible* and *Jurassic Park*, to *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*, and also the video games Medal of Honor and *Call of Duty*. Reporting on the theme music for the Matt Reeves film, *Variety* writes: "The orchestration hints at other iconic Batman themes and is a powerful, emotional and moody cue that starts softly before soaring to a grand majestic finale. The theme aligns with the film's trailers that reveal an unmistakably dark and violent cinematic outing for the Caped Crusader." *The Batman* centres on Pattinson as Bruce Wayne and his early days of fighting crime. In his pursuit of justice, the vigilante uncovers cor-



ruption in Gotham City while pursuing the Riddler, a puzzle-obsessed serial killer portrayed by Paul Dano. The movie also stars Zoë Kravitz as Catwoman, Andy Serkis as Batman's butler Alfred Pennyworth (previously played by the inimitable Michael Caine), Colin Farrell as the rising crime lord known as Penguin, and Jeffrey Wright as Gotham City's police chief James Gordon.

Godzilla and the Titans live-action series in development

Network Apple has ordered a live-action *Godzilla* series from Legendary Television. According to *Variety*, the untitled series continues the story of the Legendary Monsterverse established in films like *Kong: Skull Island* and 2014's *Godzilla*. Following the battle between *Godzilla* and the Titans that leveled San Francisco and the shocking new reality that monsters are real, the series explores one family's journey to uncover its buried secrets and a legacy linking them to the secret organisation known as Monarch. Monarch is a secret government entity that has played a major role in the Monsterverse franchise, working to cover up the


existence of and defend the world from creatures like *Godzilla* and the other Titans. Chris Black and Matt Fraction co-created the series with both executive producing. Black will also serve as showrunner. Joby Harold and Tory Tunnell of Safehouse Pictures will also executive produce along with Hiro Matsuoaka and Takemasa Arita of Toho Co. Ltd. Toho is the owner of the *Godzilla*

character and has licensed the rights to Legendary for the series. There have been four films in the rebooted Monsterverse to date: *Godzilla* in 2014, *Kong: Skull Island* in 2017, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* in 2019, and most recently *Godzilla vs. Kong* in 2021. There is also a *Skull Island* anime series currently in the works at Netflix.




FUN


ARCHIE




GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS




CALVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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

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.

CROSSWORD

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8			9			10		11	
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ACROSS

6 A machine in a kitchen

8 Frequently

10 A room just under the roof

13 A country famous for making watches

14 Imagine things while you are asleep

17 Normal

19 A large African animal with a horn on its nose

7 Thinks over

9 More than is needed

11 Speaks

12 Not many

15 A door out of a building

16 This orbits the Earth

17 Second-hand

18 On

DOWN

1 Fog

2 Skinny

3 Molten stuff from a volcano

4 Closed

5 A large reptile with a long body and sharp teeth

SOLUTION

W	O	O	N	D	S	A	D	S	
A	B	S	E	A	V				
L	E	A	D	P	L	A	I	N	E
K	N	O	O	S	E				
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100RBH's new single *Zanjeer* dedicated to Babasaheb Ambedkar legacy

Courageous and cognizant, the rise of India's underground hip-hop scene has given birth to a fierce movement of expression. Regional rap artists now use their art to raise their voices, reflecting on social constructs and socio-political discord.

Honouring this multi-dimensional perspective, DIVINE's Gully Gang Entertainment has freshly signed sought-after rapper from the regional hip-hop scene 100RBH aka Saurabh Abhyankar whose pedigree is socially-conscious rap music. On the heels of this exciting association, the 23-year-old announces his brand-new Marathi single *Zanjeer*, which releases on Gully Gang Records on 21st January 2022.

Featuring the hard-hitting voice of the Amravati bred rapper, the single produced by Karan Kanchan, showcases the artist's penchant for razor-sharp lyrics, socio-political critique and witty humor.

Releasing across all major streaming platforms, the single with its hyper-intensive bass-heavy rhythms and poetic speech laser focusses on societal discrimination and government apathy. The music video directed by Joel D'Souza was shot in the busy streets of

Amravati as a mark of respect to the artist's cultural roots.

Talking about the single 100RBH states, "Society at large is taking giant leaps when it comes better forms of food, housing technology, education but we continue to undermine that progress by our discriminatory practises on the basis of race, gender and caste. I hope that Zanjeer serves as a catalyst as we usher in a new year after a long haul with a pandemic and helps listeners to break free from socio-psychological conditioning while we make tangible progress in other materialistic areas of life. This single is inspired and dedicated to the progressive movement spearheaded by my role model, Babasaheb Ambedkar."

Reinforcing his commitment to making music that is a torchbearer of change he adds, "I write revolutionary songs to spotlight attention on critical issues that have social relevance. My art is a representation of social inequalities and the brushed-under-the-carpet truths. The themes and languages that I explore are what the common man can relate to as I'm desirous of spearheading a nationwide movement. Rap has grown in India since the 2000s, embracing activism in the recent past."

'Hyd will always be known for its hospitable nature'

SHIKHA DUGGAL

In this new day and age, people are paying a lot of attention to health and fitness. Hyderabad body builder Shafi Sami have more specifically blurred the lines between traditions and made a name for himself in the bodybuilding world. Did you know? This 34-year-old has his ancestral roots dating back to the Armed forces and the family has well inscribed their names in golden letters. Taking the legacy ahead, he joined the body building arena and there's not even a singular accolade that he hasn't been able to accomplish! When we insisted upon his association with the Hyderabad city, he was all bonkers about the the crux of Hyderabad and that's the Old City. He says, "The Old City is still so alive, foreigners come and like to visit the Old City first instead exploring the trade town at the other corner of Hyderabad. Till today, it has managed to remain the royal seat! I am born and brought up here, I take so much pride in its possession. There is a magnificent antiquated structure like Charminar, our domical mosque Mecca Masjid and palaces around. It's all a landmark."

He always had the dream to become a successful body builder of this state. Today, when he is in his early 30's, he is a competent man in this field. He intends to go a long way in this domain and despite achieving so much in this field, he calls himself a novice only and tells us how has the city been supporting him throughout out. He mentions, "Various initiatives are taken by the state government to promote sports in the state. They assured us to provide necessary help for the promotion of the sport and they are doing it too. Bodybuilding is becoming increasingly popular. There has been change in the outlook towards various techniques, but a majority of traditions have still remained intact. I took it up for my passion but there are some in the city who have the urge to develop oneself both mentally and physically and Hyderabad has been the best city in that manner! I have never seen such support coming my way from any other city, inspite of venturing in multiple cities around." Nothing came easy to this man, times had been really tough on him. He never knew he would lose his parents at such an early age, but it's his willpower that didn't let him give up and thereafter he just progressed immersively in his life. He turned his tragedy into an asset to work even more harder in life! One thing that always strikes his mind whenever anyone call out Hyderabad is obviously the Biryani. He is

so fond of it. He continues, "I am fond of heavily spiced biryani like any other guy from Hyderabad. For the hard-core biryani lover here, methods and regions are no bar. Whether it's a fine dine restaurant or a small eatery, none can miss a Hyderabadi biryani."

Having talked about the likeable factor, on the other hand, there's something that this body builder can't stand happening in Hyderabad and that's the communal propaganda. This is what he dislikes about this city now. He recalls, "While growing up, I was taught that we all are one. Today, the religious division has become such an agenda in our city too that we are separated on the basis of you are a Muslim and you are Hindu. I can't stand mob lynching happening around me ever! This city is alive because of the Deccani people, we are a princely state. Since ages we have been carrying a collective culture so why is it now that we are being divided so easily? We were, we are and will always be known for our hospitable nature. And, that shouldn't change at all."

2020 was the year of the virus, 2021 was the year of the fight-back and Shafi wants 2022 to be the year of the end of the pandemic! He wants no more lock-

downs because, "I have seen people in miserable conditions due to the lockdown. Pandemic took away our loved ones. There were problems related to work, meeting ends for a family and personal well-being emerging. Don't want this no more, we have had enough of it. This city is known for it's cheer, we want that back." At the end of the special weekly interview, he proposes to drop all expectations and he meant it. He is going into the year 2022 expecting absolutely nothing! "I don't want to anticipate anything good, bad, or indifferent. A blank slate. There is beauty in casting aside expectations sometimes. If you are not stuck on what might be, you can try to focus on what is," he concludes.



Tech transforming healthcare

In this unprecedented health care crisis caused by Covid-19, hospitals across India faced multiple challenges of access, safety, supply chain logistics and financial stress. All this resulted in huge patient loads and fatalities, heavy financial losses and a sharp decline in revenues. Elective procedures were cancelled or postponed to prioritise hospital capacity, while patients limited hospital visits because of concerns about potential exposure to infections. Many of them died from the lack of care for non-Covid diseases. There were layoffs, furloughs and salary cuts to contain costs and maintain financial viability. The second wave led to an even bigger, people have learnt their lessons from the pandemic and have started implementing policies which could redefine the way health care is managed and patients are cared for.

Similarly Navia Life Care, a health startup startup aims to address a major issue of information imbalance, i.e. lack of complex and perceptive information made available to different players in the healthcare ecosystem. This includes lack of availability of electronic medical records for easy access by patients and doctors, or view on prescription patterns for pharma, or even smaller scale issues such as unavailability of waiting times in OPDs for patients or information about drug availabilities at their nearest drugstore, especially after seeing the covid crisis.

Gaurav Gupta, Co-Founder of Navia Life Care - a health tech start-up, started the company with Kunal Kishore Dhawan five years ago because of a shared passion in healthcare and life sciences.

Coming from families with chronic disease patients, and having studied and worked in the field, starting a company in the healthcare industry was a natural decision while making

a difference to the ecosystem was a collective passion. Recently, Nupur Khandelwal joined Navia as a co-founder and has been an integral part of the functioning of the company since.

In conversation with us, Gupta talks about the company and what sets them apart. "The simplicity of our products is our key differentiator. The main reason for the failure of products in this industry is the complexity of the product, the expectation of behavior change, and the timing. We have worked on two



of the three factors and we believe the time is just right currently. Our products are very simple for the doctors to use, there is no change of behavior required by the doctor or other stakeholders. Our voice assistant for doctors is so simple to use that doctors can create prescriptions easily. The second key differentiator is our innovative business model — we keep ourselves lean with a focus on exponential growth keeping unit economics as the focus. To do this, we are increasingly looking at expansion through partnerships, instead of being feet-on-street heavy."

Healthcare in India has always been an industry with ample opportunities, and this covid times this sector has witnessed massive growth, he says, "Technology can

help in education, better care delivery, improved outcomes, and making patients and doctors aware of better lifestyle choices. In more ways than one, technology has proved to be the most effective way to transform the healthcare industry in India."

India has a large patient population to cater to and an equally large number of healthcare workers, each having a role to play in the implementation of technology to improve access to quality healthcare. Also, with the increasing penetration of health insurance, both government and private organisations are bringing the need for technology to the forefront, which entrepreneurs are always keen to leverage. "The scope is huge and the impact we can make using technology in people's lives is also very huge," he states.

Initially when the pandemic began to take effect, Navia was very quick in understanding the changing needs of the doctors and patients due to the lockdown and other restrictions. It emerged as a leading telemedicine and EMR company which helped, and received a stellar response from both doctors and patients who actively took up the use of its products which helped them in continued medical care during these difficult times.

He speaks about his vision for the future, saying, "We have an ambitious vision for ourselves to achieve by 2025, we wish to enable more than 250 thousand doctors and over 200 million patients in over 10 countries by our digital health platforms. We envision an ecosystem where patient care and patient outcomes are the primary objectives and information is available to all the stakeholders to achieve these objectives. We see us playing a central role in this ecosystem by enabling data generation and data sharing among these stakeholders."

People experience health issues pertaining to the vascular system i.e. arteries, veins and lymphatic vessels due to lifestyle

or hereditary factors. Vascular diseases can also be triggered by lifestyle choices of people with uncontrolled diabetes or smoking addiction, and in the long run, can only be corrected with vascular surgery.

Dr. C. Chandra Sekhar, Vascular and Endovascular Surgeon, DNB, FIVS, MCH (Vascular), Apollo Spectra Hospitals, says, Vascular disorders can be treated using both open surgery and endovascular methods. Vascular surgery deals with all the blood and lymph vessels of the body except that of the heart and the brain.

Vascular surgeons undertake a wide range of operations. The doc lists out some of the procedures followed in vascular surgery:

- Carotid endarterectomy: This operation is done to open a carotid artery in order to prevent strokes.
- Dialysis access: Patients who require dialysis treatment for failing kidneys have many options for gaining access to a blood artery.
- Repair and treatment of bulges and tears: Bulges and tears in blood vessels are treated using both classic "open" surgery and less invasive endovascular (within the blood vessel) techniques.
- Angioplasty: Angioplasty is a minimally invasive technique that involves the use of a device such as a balloon or a stent to unblock a blocked artery and restore blood flow.
- Stenting: Stents are tiny devices inserted in the afflicted artery by a vascular surgeon utilising a minimally invasive method to expand and hold open blocked arteries.
- Vascular bypass surgery: Vascular bypass surgery involves surgically rerouting blood vessels to allow blood to flow freely around an obstruction.

Symptoms of vascular diseases are not severe until the late stages of the condition and hence, it is essential to be aware of its existence. One can also have a professional opinion in case of a family history of vascular disorders. Consult a vascular surgeon to get a clear understanding of treatment options if one is suffering from pelvic congestion syndrome, uterine fibroids, venous diseases like venous insufficiency, and arterial diseases. Vascular surgery may be required for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- Aneurysm: An aneurysm is a vascular swelling produced by a weakening in the arterial wall. Depending on the extent of the

aneurysm, endovascular therapy or watchful waiting may be an option. In some cases, significant surgery is required.

- Blood clots: Deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism may require surgery if medical treatment fails to clear the blockage or if the situation is life threatening.
- Atherosclerosis: Plaque builds up inside one's arteries and causes atherosclerosis. Plaque is an unwanted material found in the blood that is made up of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other chemicals. The accumulation of plaque hardens and narrows the arteries over time. This reduces the amount of oxygen-rich blood that reaches your organs and other body components. Because this illness is a leading cause of stroke, the surgical procedure is usually the most effective treatment choice for the severe disease.
- Peripheral artery disease: It is a condition that affects the arteries in the legs and arms. Depending on the severity of the ailment, open vascular major surgery may be required.

Allergic reactions of the body to anesthetics, bleeding, blood clot, irregular heart rhythm, heart attack, injuries during the operation are potential complications of vascular surgery. "Post-surgery care is an essential component of the recovery process. In case of fever or chills, bleeding, and increased pain in the affected area, one must immediately alert the doctor to avoid further complications. After open vascular surgery, patients should anticipate spending five to ten days in the hospital and three months at home for complete recovery. For a period, sponge baths can be used instead of frequent showers to keep the surgical region clean and dry. One can ask the doctor for medications to relieve pain. For a week or two, one may also require assistance with domestic work and other daily activities. It is not advisable to drive until doctor's approval is obtained," concludes the doc.



SOUTH AFRICA HAND 'OUT OF SYNC' INDIA SERIES DEFEAT



PTI ■ PAARL

A young South Africa punished a jaded Indian team for its outdated approach, handing it one of the most comprehensive series defeats in recent times with an easy seven-wicket victory in the second ODI here on Friday.

A target of 288 was below-par on a flat track and the seasoned Quinton de Kock (78 off 66 balls) in the company of rising sensation Janneman Malan (91 off 108 balls) added 132 for a match-deciding opening stand.

The home team eventually reached the target in 48.1 overs to take an unsailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

KL Rahul's captaincy ambitions and head coach Rahul Dravid's wish to see him being anointed in the long run, however, suffered a rude jolt following back-to-back defeats in 50-over games on a track, which was more Indian than South African in nature.

India's archaic approach, a very '90s safety first mind-set, hurt the team as has been the case for a while now in the white-ball format.

INDIA'S ARCHAIC APPROACH, A VERY '90S SAFETY FIRST MIND-SET, HURT THE TEAM AS HAS BEEN THE CASE FOR A WHILE NOW IN THE WHITE-BALL FORMAT.

A tour that started with a great Test win at the Centurion is now in tatters and the Indian contingent would be looking to board the charter flight back home on Monday after the inconsequential third ODI at the Newlands, which would be a spicier track compared to the one at Boland Park.

The batting, save Rishabh Pant's cavalier style, was too defensive starting with skipper Rahul, whose 55 off 79 balls was an innings of bygone era, which cannot align with the fearless cricket that teams want to associate with now.

The match slipped away from India's grip during their innings once Pant was gone as the others simply failed to get going when the ball didn't come on to the bat and it was not a track that offered firm and even bounce.

It's not a new malaise to plague Indian cricket but what should be worrying is that nothing has been done to address the issues.

A veteran like Bhuvneshwar Kumar (8-0-67-0) was swept as well as pulled for sixes by De Kock while Malan would come down the track to hit him through the covers signalling that his early 130 kmph speed, with lack of variations, was simply not working.

For Shardul Thakur (40 not out and 5.1-0-36-0), the quality batting show won't save him if he doesn't curtail the number of bad balls that he is bowling per spell.

And Ravichandran Ashwin (10-1-68-0)'s second coming in white ball cricket might end in a whimper even before it gathers enough wind to sail through.

Yuzvendra Chahal (10-

0-47-1) tried his best but his confidence, after being unceremoniously dumped from the T20 World up final squad, has been in tatters.

Venkatesh Iyer (22 off 33 balls and 5-0-28-0) is still a work in progress and his fast-tracking in the limited overs set-up is less of pragmatism and more desperation to find a fresh version of injury-plagued Hardik Pandya.

Iyer might develop into a good cricketer but he is a far from finished product and may be some time away from being a success at the international level in all conditions.

As of now, he is not a natural No.6, who can be a finisher like Pandya was in his best days before injury.

Had Pant not played the role of an enforcer to perfection, even a target of 288 wouldn't have been possible. And this was after it seemed India would score close to 315 when he was having a steady stand of 115 with his skipper.

But there dismissals in quick succession saw Proteas make a comeback on a Boland Park strip where stroke-making wasn't an easy proposition for a new batter.



Devoid of options, Covid-hit India to take on Uganda

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Rattled by a COVID-19 outbreak but through to the last-eight stage, India will have just 12 players to choose from in their final Under-19 World Cup group B clash against Uganda on Saturday as five of their six isolated squad members returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR tests, here.

Only Vasu Vats came out negative but it is likely that the team management will field the same playing XI that thumped Ireland by 174 runs on Wednesday and secured a place in the quarterfinals. Skipper Yash Dhull, his deputy Shaik Rasheed, and Aaradhya Yadav, all of who tested positive in the Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT), have been confirmed positive in the latest RT-PCR reports along with Manav Parakh, who had tested negative in RAT.

Sidharth Yadav had already tested positive in the RT-PCR test before the Ireland game. Fortunately, India already have two victories in pocket and an easy opponent to tackle in the final Group game on Saturday.

Considering that Uganda is not a strong team, India, despite limited options, is expected to steamroll the minnows from the African region and finish on top of Group B.

If the team does that, all the infected players, including the worst-affected Dhull, are expected to be back in the reckoning for selection for the January 29 quarterfinal.

National Cricket Academy Head VVS Laxman had lauded the players for the way they responded to the situation ahead of the Ireland game.

"Tremendous show of character and maturity from the U-19 team. With just 11 players available, to go out and express themselves the way they did was phenomenal. Can't say how proud I am of them! The Ireland match is one they will cherish for life," Laxman had tweeted.

The game against Uganda is inconsequential mathematically for India but it would have been ideal if the affected players got some time in the middle to be ready for the knockout stage.

The team would have obviously preferred to have all its best players on the park as it eyes a fifth trophy.

So far, openers Harnoor Singh and Angriksh Raghuvanshi have shown terrific form and are likely to continue in the same vein but the following middle-order batters need to score at better pace.

Not surprised at Kohli's decision to quit captaincy: Pietersen

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former England skipper Kevin Pietersen has suggested that the "harsh" bio-bubble life could be one of the reasons for Virat Kohli's stunning decision to quit Test captaincy and backed Rohit Sharma to lead India in all formats of the game going forward.

Kohli stunned the cricketing world by stepping down from the Test captaincy following India's 1-2 series loss to South Africa. He had relinquished T20 captaincy after the World Cup last year, and was subsequently removed from ODI leadership, leading to a war of words with the BCCI on the sequence of events leading to these developments.

"People who are critical of the modern day sportsmen I think are foolish because these bio-bubbles are very hard to play in," the former England star batsman told PTI in a group interaction on the sidelines of the Legends League Cricket here.

"It will be very unfair to be too harsh, to be critical. Because you have not looked at Virat Kohli.



Kohli needs crowds, he gets going (from it), he is an entertainer.

"I think it's very difficult for his personality to perform to the best of his (Kohli's) abilities (in the bubble)," he reasoned as he reflected on sportspersons' life in a COVID-scarred world.

The 33-year-old Kohli held the record for most Test wins by an Indian captain (40) with only Graeme Smith, Ricky Ponting, and Steve Waugh having won more

matches than him.

Pietersen said he was not surprised when Kohli quit captaincy from all formats.

"A lot of players have suffered. It is the greatest job in the world. But when you put them in a bubble, it's certainly not the greatest job because there is no fun," the 41-year-old said.

"I'm actually not surprised that Virat wants just a little bit of a break from that extra pressure because it's

damn difficult playing in these bubbles," he said.

"It's very difficult to judge all International sportsmen, be it premier league footballers or any sportsman around the world, playing in a pandemic," Pietersen said from his perspective, he would not have performed well for two years without any crowd in the stadiums.

"As a batter, I feed on the energy of fans, and there are a lot of these players, be it in football, rugby or tennis."

Vice-captain KL Rahul is leading India in the ongoing ODI series in South Africa with Rohit Sharma injured. Pietersen backed Rohit to captain India across all formats once he regains fitness. The big-hitting batter is expected to be back for the home limited-overs series against the West Indies next month.

"I've always loved 'Hitman' Rohit Sharma. He's a fabulous player, every time he's batting I've got to watch. His captaincy is great for the Mumbai Indians too. So he's probably next in line," Pietersen said.

Stupid to blame IPL for England's Ashes debacle

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Former captain and batting star Kevin Pietersen has said that it's "stupid" to blame the Indian Premier League for England's embarrassing 0-4 loss to Australia in the recently-concluded Ashes series.

England great David Gower was "annoyed" after their Ashes defeat and said current skipper Joe Root had players who were "unavailable" because of the IPL.

Pietersen, an Ashes winner in 2005, 2009, 2010-11 and 2013, laughed at the remark.

"It is stupid. You can't blame the IPL for the demise of Test cricket in England. It's crazy. I've commented on it quite a lot. It's the system, it's the county cricket system, which is poor. So there's no blame," Pietersen, who is representing World Giants in the Legends League Cricket here, said during an interaction here on Thursday.

"It's crazy to blame the Indian Premier League because if you have a look at the Test team, there's only maybe (Ben) Stokes (Jonny) Bairstow and (Jos) Buttler who play the IPL..."

"Hardly any of the Test team players play the IPL... So how can you blame the IPL? You can't blame the IPL. It's crazy," a former captain of the IPL's Delhi franchise added. Off-



the-field, the English cricketers were also mired in a controversy after a report claimed that there was a "drinking culture" in the team with the players and coaches drinking late into the night before police broke up the session. Pietersen said there was no harm in it as the players are affected by the strict bio-bubble restrictions.

"It's stressful. It's incredibly stressful. I've never played in a bubble. I can't imagine but I think it must be very lonely.

"You're not allowed to go to coffee shops. You're not allowed to go down to the restaurants, you're not allowed to do anything. And what else do you do?

India to open T20 WC campaign against Pakistan

PTI ■ DUBAI

In a blockbuster T20 World Cup opener for India, the team was on Friday drawn to clash with arch-rivals Pakistan on October 23 at the iconic MCG as the International Cricket Council (ICC) released the fixtures.

India had lost to Pakistan for the first time in an ICC tournament when the teams clashed in last year's T20 World Cup in Dubai.

India's second Super 12 match in Group 2 will be on October 27 in Sydney against a qualifier (runner up of Group A) and will be followed by matches against South Africa (October 30 in Perth) and Bangladesh



(Adelaide Oval on November 2). The Men in Blue's last Super 12 match is scheduled for November 6 against the winners of Group B at the MCG. The Super 12s -- round two of the tournament, with two groups -- will begin on October 22 with hosts and defending champions Australia playing New Zealand at the SCG on October 22 in a re-match

of last year's men's T20 World Cup final.

The Black Caps will also face England at The Gabba on November 1 in a re-match of their epic semi-final encounter at the 2021 event. In Super 12s, Australia are in Group 1 with world number one England, New Zealand, Afghanistan plus the winner of Group A and the runner-up in Group

B from the first round.

The semi-finals will be played at the SCG and Adelaide Oval on November 9 and 10, respectively. It will be the first time the Adelaide Oval will host a World Cup semi-final.

The MCG will host the final, which will be contested under lights on November 13.

In the first round, 2014 champions Sri Lanka and Namibia will play the opening match at Kardinia Park, Geelong on October 16. They'll be joined by two qualifiers in Group A.

Two-time champions West Indies will also start in the first round, joined in Group B.

U19 World Cup Updates

England, Pakistan cruise to quarterfinals, Bangladesh bounce back with win

PTI ■ BASSETTERRE (ST KITTS)

Skipper Tom Prest smashed an unbeaten 154 as former champions England cruised to the Super League quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup with a thumping 189-run win over the UAE here.

Continuing his incredible run of form, Prest powered England to a mammoth 362 for six after electing to bat.

The English bowlers, led by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed (4/30), then

put up a disciplined effort to bowl out UAE for 173 in 38.2 overs.

Prest blasted 13 fours and four sixes in his scintillating 119-ball innings, while Jacob Bethell (62), William Luxton (47) and George Thomas (41) also chipped in as the 1998 edition winners England put up an imposing total.

Bethell and Thomas gave England a blistering start, adding 69 runs in 11.5 overs.

The Young Lions' total always looked like it would be a big ask to overhaul and the UAE were reeling



when they were reduced to 61 for five in the 15th over.

Ali Naseer's counter-attacking 54 off 44 balls helped reverse some of the momentum as he put on 59 with Nilansh Keswani for the sixth wicket. But when Nilansh departed, the last four wickets fell for 53 runs as leg-spinner Rehan excelled in his first outing in the West Indies with four for 30 from his allotted ten overs. Pakistan qualify for quarterfinals with win against Afghanistan.

Pakistan too booked their place in the Super League quarterfinals with a 24-run victory over Afghanistan.

Afghanistan did well to restrict Pakistan to a modest 239 for nine in the group C match at Brian Lara stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad.

However, the Afghans got the pace of their innings all wrong in

reply, managing 215 in the designated 50 overs.

The top three soaked up far too many balls in pursuit of the target.

It took them 170 balls to bring up 100 runs with Bilal Sayedi (42 off 81), Nangeyala Kharote (12 off 32), and Allah Noor (28 off 49) managing strike rates under 58.

Despite the slow start, Afghanistan took the contest deep although their innings was characterised by some wild running between the wickets, with three run outs as well as a number of near misses. Noor Ahmad blasted three sixes to leave his side in with a chance of a shock victory, needing 28 off the last two overs with two wickets in hand.

Reigning champions Bangladesh bounce back against Canada

Bangladesh bounced back from defeat with a dominant eight-wicket triumph over Canada.

Off-spinner SM Meherob and pacer Ripon Mondol snapped four wickets each as Bangladesh bowled out Canada for a lowly 136 in a group A match at Conaree Sports Club in Basseterre.

Bangladesh then galloped to the target in 30.1 overs to register their first win of the tournament.

Iftakher Hossain anchored the chase for the defending champions with a well-made 61 off 89 balls while Prantik Nawrose Nabil (33) and Aich Mollah (20 not out) also chipped in.

Earlier, opener Anoop Chima stood amid the ruins with a 117-ball 63 as Canada's decision to bat backfired with only four of their batters reaching double digit figures.

Jai Bhim, Marakkar make it to Oscars 'submission list'



Jai Bhim, which raised the hackles of the PMK, a political party in Tamil Nadu that represents mainly the Vanniyar community, is based on a true incident in 1993, involving a case fought by former Madras High Court Justice K. Chandru, when he was an advocate. Behind him in this legal battle was Sengeni's wife, Rajakannu. Two Indian films — the controversial Tamil film *Jai Bhim* starring Suriya and Lijomol Jose and Priyadarshan's Malayalam period drama *Marakkar: Arabikadalinte Simham* (Marakkar: Lion of the Arabian Sea), with Mohanlal playing the titular character — are on the list of 276 movies eligible for this year's Academy Awards. The voting for the Oscar nominations is set to begin on Thursday, January 27, and it will continue until Tuesday, February 1. The announcement limits the eligibility year to 10

months. Last year, the Academy had extended it until February 28, 2021, because of the pandemic.

All of the presumed Oscar contenders, reports *Variety*, are on the list. These include *Being the Ricardos* (Amazon Studios), *Belfast* (Focus Features), *CODA* (Apple Original Films), *Dune* (Warner Bros), *Encanto* (Walt Disney Pictures), *House of Gucci* (MGM/United Artists), *The Power of the Dog* (Netflix), *A Quiet Place Part II* (Paramount Pictures), *Spencer* (Neon/Topic Studios), *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (Sony Pictures) and *West Side Story* (20th Century Studios).

Some of the international features from the Oscar shortlist are also eligible for best picture, in addition to the best international feature category, such as Japan's much-awarded *Drive My Car*, Italy's *The Hand of God*, Iran's *A Hero* and Norway's *The Worst Person in the World*. Directed by Priyadarshan, *Marakkar* is one of the most expensive films in the history of Malayalam cinema. It narrates the epic tale of Kunjali Marakkar IV, a Malabar sea lord and his epic battles against the Portuguese. The movie had won three National Awards — Best Feature Film, Best Special Effects and Best Costume Design.

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this legal battle was Sengeni's wife, Rajakannu.

The only other film to make the cut from South Asia is Bhutan's *Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom*, a 2019 film directed by Pawo Choyning Dorji. It had its world premiere at the BFI London Film Festival. The film was selected as the Bhutanese entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 93rd Academy Awards, but later disqualified. It was resubmitted as Bhutan's entry for the 2022 Oscars and was shortlisted for the awards. Nominations for the 94th Academy Awards, according to *Variety*, will be announced on Tuesday, February 8. The ceremony is scheduled to be held on Sunday, March 27, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood and will be televised on the American network ABC and in more than 200 territories worldwide.



Keerthy Suresh's *Good Luck Sakhi* releasing on Jan 28

National award-winning actress Keerthy Suresh will next be seen in a woman-centric sports rom-com film *Good Luck Sakhi*, where she played the role of a shooter. Aadhi Pinisetty will be seen as male lead, while Jagapathi Babu essayed a crucial role in the film boasts proudly of a female dominated crew lead by co-producer Shravya Varma.

The makers on Friday announced the release date of the movie. *Good Luck Sakhi* will be releasing on January 28, two days after the Republic Day. The film will most probably have no competition, as no

noted film will be arriving on the week. The makers will strengthen the promotions, as there is only one week left for the release.

Directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, *Good Luck Sakhi* is a multi-lingual film made simultaneously in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam languages. Popular producer Dil Raju is presenting the film while Sudheer Chandra Padiri is producing it on Worth A Shot Motion Arts banner. Rock star Devi Sri Prasad has scored music, while Chirantan Das has cranked the camera. Teaser and other promotional content of the film got good response from all the corners.

After the big success of *Bangaraju*, Akkineni Nagarjuna along with his wife Amala visited Tirumala on Friday and had the darshan of Lord Venkateswara. After the darshan, the actor interacting with the media, expressed his happiness on visiting Tirumala after two years.



Sam deletes divorce announcement post

Many hearts were broken when actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu announced her divorce with Akkineni Naga Chaitanya a few months back. Both the actors took to their social media handles to announce their divorce. However, we found that Samantha has deleted her divorce statement post from Instagram account. While the post

remains on Chay's account, Sam's action kept netizens wondering as to why she deleted the post. On the work front, Chay has *Laal Singh Chaddha*, *Thank You* in pipeline, while Samantha has signed a list of movies for this year. She is also making her Hollywood debut with *Arrangements of Love*.



Dulquer Salmaan tests positive for Covid

After his superstar father Mammooty announced he is Covid positive, his actor son Dulquer Salmaan has also shared that he has caught the virus. Dulquer took to Instagram, where he shared that he has mild flu symptoms and is currently in isolation. He wrote: "I have just tested positive for Covid-19. I'm isolating at home and have mild flu symptoms but am otherwise ok. People who were in close contact with me during the shoots over the last few days, please isolate and test if you notice symptoms." The actor urged everyone to mask up and stay safe.

"This pandemic is not over and we must stay vigilant. Please mask up and stay safe," he added.

Five days ago, Mammooty tested Covid-19 positive. In view of this development, the shooting of his movie franchise 'CBI 5' directed by K. Madhu has been suspended. Dulquer will next be seen in 'Hey Sinamika'.



Puneeth Rajkumar's last three films to get OTT releases



of his most memorable movies — *Law*, *French Biryani*, *Kavaludaari*, *Mayabazaar* and *Yuvarathnaa*, available to watch for free, even for non-Prime members, for 1-month starting February 1. Not just limiting to Prime members and making these five movies free-to-stream worldwide on the service for anyone who has an Amazon account is a modest attempt to allow wider audiences and fans to pay their love and respect to the legend.

Talking about the association with PRK Productions, Manish Menghani, Head, Content Licensing, Amazon Prime Video said, "Over the last few years, we have had a successful association with PRK Productions. This collaboration, is our effort to pay a humble tribute to the

Puneeth Rajkumar, Producer, PRK Productions said "Puneeth Rajkumar's distinct vision for cinema fascinated audiences for years, earning him the massive fan following and honour he so rightly deserved. It now remains our endeavour to carry that legacy forward. We are happy to continue our successful association with Prime Video and take our films to viewers world over.

The three-film announcement is an ode to the craft and legacy of the late actor and filmmaker whose contribution to cinema stands unmatched. Featuring popular faces from the Kannada film industry, this repertoire of films will premiere on Prime Video in India and across 240 countries and territories worldwide. While *Man of the Match* is a modern-day reflection of human emotions and social challenges

starring some of the finest upcoming actors like Atharva Prakash K Jayaram, Dharmanna Kadur and Nataraj, *One Cut Two Cut* brings the story of a day when everything went haywire in a mad-cap comedy featuring Danish Sait, Prakash Belavadi and Samyukta Hornad. *Family Pack* is a romantic comedy starring Likith Shetty and Amrutha Iyengar in lead roles. With these three movies, Prime Video aims to carry forward Puneeth Rajkumar's legacy.

creative excellence of Late Puneeth Rajkumar and his unique vision of storytelling. His contribution to cinema is immense and we are sure, these films will offer an immersive experience to his fans and admirers in India and beyond. We are happy to present some fun, relatable and highly engaging stories through this association in the loving memory of the legend Late Puneeth Rajkumar. At Prime Video, we're always endeavoring to take the most authentic homegrown stories to a global audience." Ashwini