

ANALYSIS 7
FERTILISER DBT STYMIED
BY LOBBIES FOR YEARS**MONEY 8**
RBI TO CONDUCT OVERNIGHT VRR
AUCTION OF RS 75,000 CR**SPORTS 11**
BIG DENT TO KL RAHUL'S LONG-
TERM CAPTAINCY AMBITIONS

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



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LAKSHMI MANCHU
VENTURES INTO
METAVERSE, BUYS
'AZUKI' NFT

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No sweet news this: Allotment of 'chikki' bids under cloud

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ AMARAVATI

Eyebrows have been raised as the Government of Andhra Pradesh disqualified two Central government organisations taking part in the tender process to supply 'chikki', casting a shadow on the six companies that won the Rs 198-crore tenders to supply 'chikki' to the government schools across AP.

The State government disqualified the bids submitted by the Central government organisations Kendriya Bhandar and the National Cooperative Consumer Federation India Limited at the technical bids stage.

In fact, these firms have been supplying 'chikkis' to students in various states across the country under the PM Poshan scheme.

It said that the bids submitted by six other players – M for Millets, Victory Bazar

Ravulapalem, Sri Sambasiva Dairy Products, Sanwaria Sweets Private Limited,

Maruti Agros, Sri Balaji Groundnut companies – were found to be in order.

The bids have been invited as part of implementing the PM Poshana programme – a Central



government's scheme, which is implemented in AP as 'Jagananna Gorumudda'.

The Centre funds the scheme up to 60 per cent.

Doubts are being expressed on the qualifications of the bidders who won the bids. In AP, tender (No.53/MDM/2021 dated 29-9-2021) has been invited to implement the scheme in six packages.

Under the package-1, 20,69,944 kg of 'chikki' should be supplied to 9,799 government schools in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and

Visakhapatnam districts for about one year, benefiting 7,52,707 students, supplying 25 grams of 'chikki' per capita. Victory Bazar Ravulapalem and Sri Balaji Groundnut Oil Company bagged the tender.

In package-2, the tender called for the supply of 'chikkis' to students in the government schools in East and West Godavari districts was bagged by Victory Bazar.

Similarly, the Victory Bazar and Maruti Agros limited (Srikakulam) and Sri Balaji



Groundnut Oil Mill bagged the package-3 to supply the product to Guntur and Krishna districts.

The bid for supply of 'chikkis' to Prakasam and Nellore districts under package-4 were bagged by Victory Bazar, M for Millets, Sri Sambasiva Dairy products and Sanwaria Sweets Pvt Ltd.

The bids for Package-5 to supply the product to Kadapa and Chittoor districts was bagged by Victory Bazar, M for Millets, Sri Sambasiva Dairy products and Sanwaria

Sweets Pvt Ltd, Maruti Agros and Balaji Groundnut Oil Mill.

The bids under Package-6 were bagged by Victory Bazar, Sri Sambasiva Dairy

products and Sanwaria Sweets and Sri Balaji Groundnut Oilmills to supply the

product to Kurnool and Anantapur districts.

These companies are required to supply 'chikkis' to students on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

It is being alleged that the State government altered the tender rules

to suit the eligibility of the six companies that have been awarded bids, to rule out the participation of the other two companies in the process.

A Tata Company Consultancy was appointed as a third party to make

recommendations. The officials say that the bids were allotted to only those firms cleared by the consultancy.

There were also allegations about the involvement of a Minister in Jagan's Cabinet and government officials in the whole exercise. In fact, the official who is billed very sincerely succumbed to pressure from a crucial leader.

It is pertinent to note here that one of the bid winners is a company based in Rajasthan.

The Tata Company Consultancy was used as a shield and the strings have been pulled from behind to get the contracts awarded to the choicest companies, it is lamented.

Opposing the bid process, Kendriya Bhandar on December 3, 2021 moved a writ petition in High Court (Writ No. 28648 of 2021) contending that disqualification of it was not just. It alleged that it was disqualified in spite of hav-

ing all qualifications. It submitted its qualifications to the HC. Moreover, it highlighted the lack of qualifications of two other participants in the bid process to the notice of the court along with necessary documentary evidence. The court issued a stay in its favour. Surprisingly, what transpired behind the curtains was not known, the Kendriya Bhandar withdrew its petition all of a sudden on December 20. The HC allowed it to do so.

The Maruti Agros got its GST number only in Sep of 2020. But the tender rules

indicate that the participants should submit their three years IT returns and said that the bidders should have three years of experience in the supply of food products. Moreover, the Maruti Agros is not involved in making of 'chikkis' and its owner is a poultry farmer, the Kendriya Bhandar pointed out. Moreover, it applied for the factory license only in October of 2021.

The Kendriya Bhandar noted that the Balaji Groundnut Oil Mill has no capacity to supply at least 25 per cent of the amount of the 'chikkis' to the schools.

2

AP govt staff to strike work from midnight of February 6

■ Serve strike notice to govt, firm on talks only after rollback of PRC GOs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Standing firm on their decision and as expected, the employee unions on Monday served strike notice to the State government.

Listing out their demands and reasons behind their decision to launch strike, the representatives of the umbrella organisation of the unions PRC Struggle Committee had handed over the work strike notice to GAD Secretary Sashi Bhushan Kumar as Chief Secretary Dr. Sameer Sharma was not available as he was away in Delhi on official work. According to the notice, government employees will launch an indefinite strike from midnight of February 6 onwards.

The government representatives tried their best to avert the agitating employees from serving the strike notice. In the notice submitted to the government the 20 steering committee members of the PRC, struggle committee has said that the government issued orders on the 11th pay revision without taking objections raised and con-



cerns expressed by all the service associations in all the rounds of consultations.

"As the ordered pay revision is detrimental and adversely impacting the financial earnings of employees, teachers and pensioners all the associations and JACs have formed into one united forum in the name of PRC struggle committee and chalked out an agitation

programme including resorting to 'indefinite strike,' said the notice.

Already various associations have expressed their disagreements by demonstrating in various forms across the state demanding withdrawal of PRC GOs. As there being no response from the government to arrive at an amicable solution and instead there being provocation by actions of the government in the

Page: 2
Another HC
bench to hear
PRC plea

hurried and unilateral implementation of pay revision without providing even an option of choosing the effective date which is a customary practice, said the unions.

The steering committee of the PRC struggle committee has reviewed the situation critically keeping the demands of lakhs of employees, teachers and pensioners. The approach of the government has unanimously decided to proceed with the already chalked-out agitation programme demanding immediate settlement of their demands.

2

Panel will wait for union reps today too: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government on Monday finally acknowledged appointing a high-level committee of ministers to hold consultations with irate government employees. Even as there have been reports that the government has appointed a ministers' committee to hold talks with the employees there has been no official announcement on it.

The employee unions too questioned the legitimacy of such a committee without any information to them. They said they had only received calls from ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Perni

Nani to meet them and discuss their issues and concerns.

In the committee, ministers Buggana Rajendranath, Botsa Satyanarayana, Perni Nani and Government Advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy will be the members and Chief Secretary Sameer Sharma will be the member-convenor.

GAD Secretary Sashi Bhushan Kumar handed over the concerned note to the representatives of employee unions when they met him in the afternoon to hand over an indefinite work strike notice.

2



Secy-level meet held between Centre, AP: Vijaysai

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In what could be termed the first time in recent times a high-priority secretary-level meeting between the union government and the State government was held in New Delhi on Monday.

After more than two-and-a-half hours of the marathon meeting held at the North Block office of Ministry of Home Affairs in Central Secretariat in New Delhi,

Y S R C Parliamentary Party leader and Rajya Sabha member V Vijaysai Reddy said Andhra Pradesh will hear good news soon without elaborating much on it. He also said that Monday's meeting shows the priority Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led union government is giving to the Andhra Pradesh government.

2

TPD leader
Buddha
Venkanna
arrested

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Pausa, Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Saptami - Jan 24 08:44 AM to Jan 25 07:46 AM

Ashvini : Jan 25 07:46 AM to Jan 26 06:25 AM

Nakshatram : Chitra - Jan 24 11:15 AM to Jan 25 10:54 AM

Siddhi : Jan 25 10:54 AM to Jan 26 10:05 AM

Rahukalam : 3:16 PM to 4:40 PM

Yamagandam : 9:40 AM to 11:04 AM

Varjyam : 04:19 PM to 05:52 PM

Gulika : 12:28 PM to 1:52 PM

Amritakalam : 01:36 AM to 03:09 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:06 PM to 12:50 PM

VIJAYAWADA

WEATHER

Forecast: PARTLY CLOUDY

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 6:41 AM

Sunset: 6:04 PM

Updated JANUARY 24, 2021 5:00 PM

Hackers steal Rs 12 cr from Mahesh Bank

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Cybercriminals are on the prowl and this time, in what is regarded as the one of the biggest e-frauds in the city, they have hacked into systems of bank, leave alone an individual's account.

The server of Mahesh Bank Co-operative Bank (Hyderabad) in Hyderabad has been hacked and a lumpsum of Rs. 12 crore report-

edly looted. Much before the bank staff could smell it, the swindled money was transferred to about 100 different accounts. The management of Mahesh Bank has lodged a complaint with the Hyderabad Cybercrime police.

The Police, having registered a case, are investigating how the cybercriminals hacked the bank server.

2

TS opposes move to bring Medigedda barrage under GRMB

M L MELLY MAITREYI
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has objected to the proposal of the Godavari River Management Board to bring the Medigedda barrage and the Kannepalli pump-house under its jurisdiction. At the GRMB Sub Committee meeting held here on Monday, Telangana also rejected the suggestion of the AP government's

representatives that all components of Telangana irrigation projects be brought under the jurisdiction of GRMB.

The video conference of the GRMB Sub Committee was attended by GRMB Member Secretary B P Pandya, member Kutiyal as well as representatives of both Telugu States. In the previous meeting, Telangana had agreed to bring Peddavagu, common project in Khammam dis-

trict, under the jurisdiction of GRMB, and submitted all information related to the project to the Board, recalled Telangana Subcommittee member Sridhar Rao Deshpande.

However, when the Board discussed the handing over notes related to the Medigedda barrage, Kannepalli pump house to bring them under the GRMB, Deshpande said there was no need to bring other projects under

the GRMB jurisdiction. Telangana State has already written to the GRMB and the Jal Shakti Ministry requesting them to remove five projects mentioned in Schedule II of the gazette notification and also to move the components of some projects from Schedule II to Schedule III. However, there was no response so far, he said.

2

Law & order deteriorating in AP: Union Min

PNS ■ KADAPA

Union Minister for State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan has alleged that the law and order situation is deteriorating in Andhra Pradesh and the terrorist activity is growing.

The Union Minister, along with BJP leaders, met Kurnool BJP district president B Srikanth Reddy in the Central Prison here on Monday. B Srikanth Reddy was sent to prison in the Atmakuru violence incident.

Later, talking to the media, the Union Minister slammed that the police in the state were working as per the directions of YSRCP leaders. He said that false cases were registered against BJP Kurnool district leader B Srikanth Reddy when he



went to prevent the illegal construction of a place of worship. An attempt was made to kill the BJP leader by some anti-national in Atmakur, he alleged and criticized

that the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-headed government is trying to protect the culprits in the case.

2

BJP stooping too low: Perni

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Transport Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) lambasted Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan for visiting a prison to meet a local BJP leader in Kurnool on Monday. He had also suspected conspiracy in AP by BJP to create unrest.

Talking to reporters, he objected to the Union minister's remarks that Andhra Pradesh had turned a breeding ground for anti-nationals and anti-social elements.

2

Notification for dists reorganistaion likely

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YS Jaganmohan Reddy government is said to be contemplating to issue a notification regarding reorganisation of the districts in the state to carve out 26 out of the current 13 districts.

The notification is expected to be issued in a day or two. Making each parliamentary segment as a district has been the chief minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's poll promise in 2019. Though Andhra Pradesh has 25 parliament segments which should translate into 25 districts Araku segment will be made two districts due to the huge

geography spread in four districts.

Already, a six-member panel headed by former chief secretary Nilam Sawhney had submitted its report into the reorganisation of the districts to the government.

Continuous polls to both urban and local bodies, MPTCs, ZPTCs, by-polls to Tirupati Lok Sabha and Badvel assembly segment delayed the process of reorganisation of the districts. Now that all the elections are completed, the Chief Minister is said to have directed the officials to start the process.

2

Another bench of HC to hear PRC plea

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A High Court bench on Monday said that the petition filed by AP Gazetted Officers against the new Pay Revision Commission (PRC) may be posted to another appropriate bench.

The High Court bench comprising Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Justice BS Bhanumathi on Monday took up the petition filed by the AP Gazetted Officers' Association representative KV Krishnaiah last week stating that the GOs were against the spirit of the AP Reorganisation Act.

After a few rounds of arguments and once the hearing adjourned to afternoon, the High Court indicated to the parties that though the contention of the petitioner is that he is individually affected since the adjudication sought it granted by court, would affect a large number of employees, it is liable to be treated to be public interest litigation and matter to be posted before an appropriate bench after securing the orders of the Chief Justice.

During the course of the



hearing, the HC bench had also asked the union leaders to appear. In the context of the disclosure of the intent of strike indicated by the four employee organisations, the High Court asked that the representatives of the said four organisations be present in court at 2.15 PM.

However, GAD Secretary Sashi Bhsuhan Kumar informed the court at 2.15 PM that he had intimidated the said organisations to be present online and perhaps due to shortage of time they could not respond.

Appearing on behalf of the

government, Advocate General Sriram Subramaniam said the interim relief provided by the state before implementing the subsequent PRC cannot be the basis to verify what is the appropriate fitment.

He added it is a policy decision of the government based on so many considerations and amounts drawn on different heads of pay such as HRA cannot be made the basis for figuring out how the gross package has been worked out.

The High Court opined that the petitioner cannot rest on a percentage basis and has

to go on an actual receipt basis.

Advocate General said the total gross payout is shown in the annexure illustration shown in the GO where the basic pay under the tenth PRC is at Rs 58,000 and after the 11th PRC, it is touching Rs70,000.

He also said that the government policy of enhancing the retirement age, increasing the gratuity amounts to pensioners, 20 per cent rebate in the plots etc ought to be seen as a holistic view of the government.

He also said that government employees have issued a notice to meet the CS to apprise him of the course of agitation including the strike by them. Such a course is impermissible in law having regard to the judgements of the Supreme Court in the Tami Nadu case.

"Strike is prohibited under rule 4 of CCs rules. Government employee is a status and not a contract and therefore the government servants do not have the option of keeping the sword of a strike hanging over the head of the government, that too in Covid times," he said.

The Advocate General also said that the government has, since 2019, taken a series of steps on contract labour, Anganwadi and sanitation workers enhancing their wages and contract labourers being put into a corporation etc.

He said Interim Relief is always subject to final PRC implementation as mentioned in the GO vide which IR was released. No vested right arises in an employee for a particular fitment based on IR or based on ad hoc fixation of HRA pending PRC finalisation.

"The state-owned revenues have themselves reduced at a negative rate as opposed to groaning at 15 pc and under the present 11th PRC, the government has to expend Rs 10,685 crore to meet the same. Covid and omicron have reduced the state earnings and the state has tried its best to make it a win-win situation for government employees based on parity with Central government 7th PRC," he added.

The Counsel for the petitioner said that the government did not pay PRC as per the AP Reorganisation Act.

Kapu leaders to set up united forum in AP

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

The Kapu leaders of Andhra Pradesh, who met on Sunday, have decided to set up an 'Iyka Vedika' (united forum) to fight for their community.

The Kapu leaders held a Zoom meeting which was attended by leaders belonging to the community from the TDP, the BJP, the Congress and the Jana Sena, and some retired bureaucrats.

As in the past, Kapu leaders of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) kept away from the meeting. Prominent among them are former minister Vatti Vasanth Kumar, former TDP MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao, former TDP MLC Bonda Umamaheswara Rao, retired bureaucrats Rammohan Rao, MVGK Bhanu, Sambasiva Rao and some others.

Former minister Vatti Vasanth Kumar, who resigned from the Congress in protest against the TDP-Congress alliance during the last

Assembly elections, said that around 15 Kapu leaders of the TDP, the Congress, the BJP and the Jana Sena attended the Zoom meeting.

Speaking to The Pioneer Vatti Vasanth Kumar said that they have decided to meet personally in February and make a decision about their future. He said that they have decided that all Kapu leaders should fight for the cause of the community irrespective of political affiliations.

Vasanth said that they will take a final decision on the formation of the Iyka Vedika after discussing it with all leaders at the February meeting.

Before that, the Kapu leaders felt the need to set up a steering committee to handle issues.

The Kapu leaders said that after the death of YS Rajasekhara Reddy their community was not being given importance by any political party even though Kapus are a major group. They said that

to get political importance if necessary they would have to carry the BCs and Dalits with them.

It is a known fact that there is no unity among Kapu leaders. The Kapu leaders said that their first task is to forge unity among themselves.

"If Kammas or Reddies hold a meeting the media will ignore it. But if Kapu leaders hold a meeting the media will highlight it," commented a prominent Kapu leader.

As of now, the Kapu leaders have no clarity about their future action plan. After their February meeting, the Kapu leaders may get some clarity on this. Kapu leaders have different opinions regarding this. But in the February meeting, they may take a decision about their future plans.

The February meeting will decide whether Kapu leaders would continue in their present political parties or they should leave their parties and join the Iyka Vedika to fight for their community.

TPD leader Buddha Venkanna arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP leader and former MLC Buddha Venkanna was taken into custody by police on Monday evening for questioning in connection with the charges he leveled on DGP Gautam D Sawang. The police personnel went to the residence of Buddha Venkanna near Prakasam barrage and took him into custody.

Buddha Venkanna, while addressing the media in Vijayawada on Monday, levelled serious allegations on DGP Gautam Sawang. He questioned why DGP Sawang had not arrested Civil Supplies Minister Kodali Nani for conducting the Casino in Gudivada during the Sankranti festival. Kodali Nani had repeatedly denied allegations that he conducted Casino at his convention hall. Buddha Venkanna said Rs 300 crores changed the hands in Gudivada and asked how much DGP Sawang got his share in the episode.

The TDP leader alleged that the DGP is working at the behest of the ruling YSRCP. He said the meaning of DGP is 'Director of Jagan Party' in Andhra Pradesh.



Venkanna said Sawang had worked excellently in Vijayawada as the Commissioner of Police under the TDP rule. Venkanna said the police officials of the rank of DGP are not happy with the functioning of the DGP Sawang. He said he had contacts with some DGP rank police officials and they told him that they were not happy.

The incident took place in the backdrop of a war of words continuing between the TDP leaders and Civil Supplies Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao over the recent conduct of games in Gudivada. The TDP is alleging that Casino was conducted at the convention centre run by Kodali Nani. He however, denied the allegations several times.

Secy-level meet held between...

Continued from Page 1

A high-level delegation comprising several union secretaries including union finance secretary Ajay Seth, Jal shakti secretary Panjaj Kumar, economic affairs secretary Debasish Panda food and public distribution secretary Sudhanshu Pandey held a meeting with the state's delegation led by Chief Secretary Dr. Sameer Sharma, other secretaries, KS Jawahar Reddy, Karikal Valaven, Praveen Prakash, State Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath and Viaysai Reddy.

The meeting had discussed different contentious issues related to Andhra Pradesh that had been pending since seven years after the state bifurcation. These issues include clearing funds for the Polavaram project as per the revised estimates, increasing the FRBM limit, resource gap funding, renewal of site clearance for Bhogapuram international airports among several other important issues.

The meeting gained signif-

icance as it was held ahead of the union budget presentation in a few days. The PMO directed the MAH to hold detailed discussions with the AP government over these pending issues after chief minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy met the prime minister Narendra Modi in the first week of January.

Viaysai Reddy on Monday also said that the union secretaries were convinced about the necessity to approve POLvaram revised price estimates.

As Andhra Pradesh has been staring at a burgeoning financial crisis due to various reasons that included Covid-induced economic downturn, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on January 3 had pressed SOS and sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to restore the State's Net Borrowing Ceiling (NBC).

Restoring NBC helps Andhra Pradesh to borrow more to meet the state's fiscal needs.

Jagan, who went to New Delhi with a wish list on January 3, had an hour-long meeting with the prime min-

ister. After meeting with Modi, the chief minister had also met union finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman.

During the interaction, the Chief Minister also requested the Prime Minister to approve the revised cost estimates of Rs. 55,657 crores at 2017-18 price level, which includes drinking water component of Rs. 4,000 crores and also to release the pending payments of Rs. 2,100 crores already incurred by the State Government towards the Polavaram project.

The Chief Minister said the total revenue deficit for the 2014-15 financial year is Rs. 22,948.76 crores and the amount released to the state was only Rs. 4,117.89 crores and requested that the remaining portion of Rs. 18, 830.87 crores be released at the earliest, to support the state during this hour of need.

All the issues were discussed in detail and threadbare at the meeting held on Monday in New Delhi and the Centre may take a view after the union secretaries team submits a report.

'Be wary of extortion calls in name of customs officers'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi customs officers have asked people to be aware of instances of cheating by unscrupulous elements in the name of customs officers and report any such matter to authorities concerned.

It said instances have come to the notice that general public is being cheated by unscrupulous elements, by first becoming friendly through social media i.e., face book/matrimonial sites/messenger or through some other channel and subsequently promising them to send parcels of various articles to India against payment in the name of customs duties.

They then impersonate as customs officers by using their names and instruct the consignees (i.e., general public) to deposit money in the bank

account created by them for fraudulent purpose to extort money, it said in a public notice.

They may also issue fictitious receipts for duty demand purportedly made by customs, the notice said.

General public is hereby informed that customs officers never call anyone and ask to pay customs duty to any specific individual's account or into his account, it said.

It is also informed that the customs duty can only be deposited in favour of Commissioner of Customs (government account) 'A/c head 0037' customs duties through nominated banks such as Punjab National Bank, State Bank of India etc. for the Commissionerate of Delhi customs, said the notice dated January 20,2022.

General public is also informed that whenever any promise of so-called parcel at Delhi airport ostensibly sent by such unscrupulous elements is made, they can perform the due diligence by confirming the veracity of the tracking number of the parcels through the tracking service sites provided by authorised couriers or postal department, it said.

Further, the general public is alerted/advised not to pay any amount in the name of customs to any person or to any private account, if anybody demands such payments claiming to be officer of customs on the parcels alleged to be detained by Customs at Delhi airport/import/export shed/Foreign Post Office (FPO), the notice said.



Hackers steal Rs 12 cr from Mahesh Bank ...

Continued from Page 1

Similarly, the details of the accounts to which the stolen money was transferred are being examined. The technical prowess of the cyber-criminals, who normally attack personal bank accounts and make money, in hacking a highly secure bank server has become a cause of concern to investigating authorities.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹199
Without Skin	₹219
Broiler at Farm	₹107
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	437
VISAKHAPATNAM	435
HYDERABAD	415
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.37
(IN VIOUWADA)	

Cops arrest 4 offenders in theft & other cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police personnel from the LB Nagar CCS on Saturday arrested four members of a five-member gang involved in various offences like temple thefts, automobiles thefts and bank robberies.

Police Commissioner Mahesh M Bhagwat said that the gang had broken open a temple at LB Nagar on December 3, 2021, and escaped with gold ornaments weighing 21.5 tolas belonging to the deity.

AP govt staff to strike work from...

Continued from Page 1

"It's a painful day today. We never thought we would go for a strike. Without considering our views, opinions and concerns the government had issued the GOs unilaterally. The government was saying they have been listening to us but nothing has moved forward. It's not just us but the government is trying to mislead society also about our agitation. The decision to issue strike notice was taken as the outcome of yesterday's round table meetings held across the state.

Everyone should understand that it's agitation for 13

lakhs employees, teachers, and pensioners but not any ordinary stir," said one of the key members of the PRC struggle committee steering committee, KR Suryanarayana.

Another member Bandi Srinivas Rao wondered why is the government in a hurry to give salaries under the revised pay scales and bringing pressure on the treasury employees. He demanded that the government pays salaries as per the old scales.

AP Secretariat Employees' Association president, P Venkatrami Reddy, said that the new PRC had united all the unions. He reminded that the secretariat association had

never joined hands with other unions but the new PRC had forced it to join with other unions. He also said that they will take part in the talks with the government only after the PRC GOs are withdrawn and the Ashutosh Mishra committee report is made public.

Another union leader Bopparaju Venkateswar Rao has wondered if a ministers committee is usually appointed before the finalization of the PRC but not after.

It may be recalled that varying unions of the government employees had decided to put a united and joint fight against the government to withdraw the revised pay

scales. All the employee unions putting aside their differences had decided to come onto a single platform and under one umbrella.

Representatives of AP Employees JAC, AP Employees JAC Amaravati, AP government employees Association, AP Secretariat Employees Association, Bandi Srinivas Rao, Bopparaju Venkateswar Rao, M Suryanarayana and P Venkatram Reddy respectively had held talks in a private hotel in the city last Thursday and decided to put a united fight to bring pressure on the government and floated PRC Struggle Committee.

Law & order deteriorating in AP: Union Minister...

Continued from Page 1

The Union Minister expressed concern at growing terrorist activity in AP and cited the Kurnool SP's comments that there were some people who were affiliated to outlawed outfits in the district.

The Union minister demanded to withdraw cases against B Srikanth Reddy. Muralidharan warned of organising agitations in the coming days if the state government did not respond to the BJP's appeals. BJP state president Somu Veeraj, MP CM Ramesh, former minister C Adinarayan Reddy and other senior leaders were present.

Continued from Page 1

Thus, under the present circumstances, there was no need to discuss about Medigedda and Kannepalli pumphouse projects' inclusion under GRMB, 'Telangana members said.

Telangana officials also said the Board should first discuss the proposals for inclusion of irrigation projects under GRMB in the meeting. The visit to the projects and preparation of handing over notes' should be taken up only after the Board gave its permission.

The Sub Committee also discussed inclusion of Venkatanagaram pumping house in Andhra Pradesh

under the GRMB. The AP representatives said during the discussion that components of all Telangana projects be brought under the GRMB. However, Telangana rejected the suggestion as they were all taken up by the combined state of Andhra Pradesh and they would supply water only to ayacut in Telangana State.

As per the Godavari Award Clause IV, States have the right to transfer their share of Godavari water anywhere. Thus, there was no justification in the request of Andhra Pradesh to bring such projects taken up in erstwhile undivided State under GRMB, it was stated.

Panel will wait for union reps today...

Continued from Page 1

Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Perni Nani on Monday morning had waited for the employee union representatives to participate in consultations with them. They found fault with the unions for questioning the legitimacy of the talks and the committee when GAD Secretary Sashi Bhushan Kumar himself called them and invited them to take part in the talks.

Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that the committee has been appointed only to clear

the doubts of the unions about the new PRC. He also said that there can be some breakthrough in the consultations only if the unions come and talk to them.

He clarified that consultations will continue even after the strike notice has been given. Ramakrishna Reddy said on Tuesday too the committee members will wait for the union representatives to meet them and hold talks. He said GAD Secretary Sashi Bhushan Kumar had already informed the representatives of the unions.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
Panchayat Raj Department, Guntur
Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj Department, Guntur
Tender Notice No. 12/2021-22, e-procurement Tender Notification Dated 20-01-2022
MET No. from 7/2021-22 to 8/10/2021-22, Dated 20-01-2022. Tenders are being invited through e-procurement platform from 20-01-2022 to execute nine works, pertaining to various Assembly constituencies under the jurisdiction of SE, Panchayat Raj Circle, Guntur, with an estimated cost of Rs. 1297.26 lakh. The works have been sanctioned under OTS, DMF and MPEDA and NRIHM (COP) grants. Total: The estimated cost of 9 works is Rs. 1297.26 lakh. For further details, contact e-procurement market place www.approcurement.gov.in, Contact the office of the Superintending Engineer for works and other details during office hours. Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj Circle, Guntur. DMPR.No.2743/CIUAdvt/11/2021-22, Dt: 24-01-2022

'R-Day steps should reflect national unity'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector J Nivas has instructed the officials to make arrangements that reflect national unity for the 73rd Republic Day celebrations. Permissions are being given to a limited number of guests due to a spike in Covid-19 cases, by following strict guidelines. The Collector, MLC T Raghuram, protocol deputy secretary, director M Bala Subramanyam Reddy, senior police officers and others inspected the arrangements at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium on Monday.

There should not be any shortfall of drinking water and ensure that the surroundings are clean, the Collector instructed the VMC officials.

The Collector said that there would be six contingent performances. As many as 16 tableaux were being set up to showcase the development activities and welfare schemes being implemented by the State government. The Collector inspected the arrangements made for the commentators/anchor. Electricity officials were told to ensure an uninterrupted power supply and keep generators as backup. Medical camps with emergency medicines, ambulances, masks,



sanitisers, thermal scanners and other arrangements should be ready, said the Collector.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan will hoist the national flag. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, High Court Chief Justice and other

judges, ministers, MLAs, MLCs, and senior IAS, IPS officers would grace the occasion.

Collector Nivas asked officials to take care of traffic issues and provide details of car parking route maps. All arrangements should be made to address traffic issues while

the Governor, Chief Minister and other VIPs leave the premises.

Joint Collectors Dr. K Madhavi Latha and K Mohan Kumar, Sub-Collector G S S Praveenchand and other department officials were present.

Traffic curbs in city for Republic Day fete

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To avoid inconvenience to the people in Vijayawada due to Republic Day celebrations at Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium on January 26 (Wednesday), the city police have imposed certain traffic restrictions from 7 am to 12 noon. Elaborate security measures has been taken where Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, and other VIPs attending as chief guests for the RD celebrations. Commissioner of Police Kranthi Rana Tata, in a press release on Monday, informed that the traffic coming to Police Control Room (PCR) Junction and proceeding

towards Benz Circle will be diverted at RTC Y Junction, Swarna Palace, Vijaya Talkis, Chuttugunta, Ramavarappadu to Benz Circle signal. Similarly, vehicles will be diverted through Bandar locks, Raghavaiah Park, Old fire station, American hospital, Netaji bridge, Skew bridge to Benz Circle signals. Vehicles will not be allowed on Bandar Road from 7 am to 12 noon. APSRTC buses plying on Bandar Road will be diverted via Five number road and Eluru road. The police have divided the guests attending the parade into various classes AA, A1, A2, A3, B1 and B2 and separate car parking lots arranged for them at Handball ground, Football ground, City Armed Reserve police Ground and other places.



PM's Rashtriya Bala Puraskar for two girls

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Two girls from Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts received the Prime Minister's Rashtriya Bala Puraskar on Monday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with the award winners across the country in virtual mode and congratulated them.

The Union Government selected 32 girls for the award from various parts of the country and L. Ameya, a ninth standard student from Visakhapatnam, was chosen in the classical dance category. During the interaction, she told the Prime Minister that she wanted to promote Indian classical dance to greater heights.

On behalf of the Prime Minister, Collector Dr. A. Mallikharjuna presented the award to Ameya after the video conference.

At another programme held in Srikakulam, Collector Srilakesh Latkar presented the



award to G. Hima Priya. She bravely fought the terrorists who attacked Jammu Army Quarters in 2018. She was honoured with the award and a cash prize of Rs.1 lakh.

Hima Priya said that she was very proud to have been born in a soldier's family. Talking about the incident that took place on February 10, 2018, she said that at around 5 pm, a group of terrorists attacked the quarters when there were only her mother and her. "My mother was severely injured. However, I spoke with the terrorists and saved not only my mother and also those in the neighbouring quarters," Hima Priya said.

1,947 to get benefit under 'EBC Nestham' scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu has said that 1,947 people from the constituency have been identified as eligible for the 'EBC Nestham' scheme, an initiative of the State government to help the upper caste poor women financially. On Monday, Malladi Vishnu said that the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government is the only government in the State that is striving to uplift all sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Vishnu said that the previous



TDP government led by Chandrababu Naidu used upper caste people only as a vote bank. But the YSRCP government is working hard to improve the living standards and conditions of the upper caste poor people. As part of this, women between the ages of 45-60 will be given Rs 15,000

per year. A total of 3,92,674 people across the state are eligible for this scheme and the state government was spending Rs 589.01 crore. In the Central constituency 1,947 women were identified and Rs 2.92 crore will be credited in the accounts of the beneficiaries on January 25, said the MLA.

Vishnu appealed to the eligible beneficiaries, who were unable to register themselves for any reason, not to panic as Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will give them an opportunity soon.

Govt to net Rs 9,222 cr through true-up charges: CPM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During the year 2022-23, the State government will impose a huge burden on the poor and the middle-class people across the state to the tune of Rs 9,222 crore in the form of true-up charges, Rs 887 crore in the name of slab conversion on poor and middle-class people, increase in development charges, fixed charges, one-meter per house policy and many more alleged CPM State Executive Committee member Ch Babu Rao.

Ch Babu Rao, addressing the virtual public hearing of APERC here on Monday, said that as per the latest proposals on the change of slabs, the poor people



who consume less than 50 units per month would be burdened by 38 percent, those who consume less than 75 percent would be burdened by 26 percent, those who consume less than 100 units would be burdened by 54 percent and those who consume less than 200 units would be burdened by 45 percent. These proposals would burden

the poor people giving relief to the rich people, he pointed out.

Since the power generation expenditure is coming down throughout the world and the power purchase rates are also coming down, the power tariff should come down, he said.

Babu Rao demanded total abolition of true-up charge system and withdraw the propos-

al to enhance power tariff.

The State Cabinet's decision to hand over the Damodaram Sanjivaiah thermal power station at Krishnapatnam to a private person on lease for 25 years is nothing but suicidal, he said.

Referring to the decision to purchase solar power from Adani Company for 25 years is

detrimental to the interest of the State, he pointed out recalling that the government had announced earlier that it would cancel the agreements signed by the previous government to purchase power from private companies.

On the revenue deficit of the Electricity department, he said that the government failed to pay the subsidies, huge electricity bill arrears from various government departments, halting of power generation in the public sector plants and purchasing power from private companies are some of the reasons for the losses.

CPM activists staged a protest demonstration at the public hearing holding placards.

'Country develops with empowerment of girl children'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Secretary and Senior Civil Judge K.K.V. Buli Krishna has said that the country has developed with the empowerment of girl children. On the occasion of the National Girl Child Day, the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF), District Legal Services Authority and the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) jointly organised a panel discussion on various aspects of child marriage eradication law at V.B.V. High School in Seethammadhara

on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Buli Krishna said that various campaigns as well as awareness on the laws were needed to end child marriages. He called upon girls to scale heights in the fields of education, sports, skill development, science and technology with the aim of empowerment.

CRPF State convener Gondu Sitaram, general secretary B.Shakuntala, city secretary Dr. Y. Kusuma Kumari, Adv Rehamunnisha Begum, VBV High School Principal G.B.Usharani and several others spoke.

Navy School boy gets PM award

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMBRP) awardees via video conferencing. Veer Kashyap, a Class six student of Navy Children School (NCS) Visakhapatnam, received the certificate through Blockchain technology.

Later, District Collector Dr. A. Mallikharjuna handed over the certificate and appreciated Veer Kashyap for his innovative and educative game which spreads awareness about the ongoing pandemic. Veer handed over a copy of his board game Corona Yuga to the Collector.



Chief Minister's Camp Office in Tadepalli illuminated for the Republic Day celebrations on January 26

CM should break silence on casino row: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday demanded that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy break his silence on the illegal casino held in Gudivada in Krishna district.

The TDP slammed Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) for turning the birthplace of freedom fighters, stalwarts and intellectuals like Gudivada into a 'casino capital' for the sake of easy money. The attack on the opposition fact-finding commit-



tee members was highly condemnable.

The TDP strategy meet pointed out how CM Jaganmohan Reddy was missing in the top 20 best CMs' list in the

country. The TDP leaders urged CM Jaganmohan Reddy to open his mouth on the videos of Casino organised at the Minister's K Convention Centre and under the direct supervision of the ruling YSRCP leaders.

The Minister would not be able to silence the people with his abusive language and indecent counterattacks. Nani was caught badly as there was video evidence for the unlawful casino. Despite the glaring evidence, the Minister was trying to plead not guilty and making false statements. Kodali Nani

apparently had no valid defense which was why he started indulging in a misinformation campaign.

Chandrababu Naidu lauded the party leaders and fact-finding committee for putting up a brave fight against the casino organisers. The party decided to continue and step its agitation against the poisonous casino culture that was creeping into the State. Complaints would be made to various national investigation agencies about how hundreds of crores changed hands.

TDP seeks NHRC probe into 'custodial torture' of Dalit woman

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP politburo member Varla Ramaiah on Monday urged the Chairperson of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Delhi, to probe and take stringent action against culprits responsible for 'custodial torture' of a Dalit woman in Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh.

Ramaiah also urged the Chairperson of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) to investigate and take deterrent action against the persons responsible for the illegal detention.

Varla Ramaiah wrote separate letters to the Chairpersons of NHRC and NCSC, expressing concern that the State of Andhra Pradesh has become a hub for illegal detentions, house arrests, false cases, mid-night arrests, custodial torture, police harassment, etc. The latest in this series of incidents is the custodial torture of a Dalit woman, Umamaheswari, by the Chittoor town police.

The TDP leader said the police had summoned Umamaheswari to the police station continuously for two days and tortured her in the name of investigating a theft that she never committed. Umamaheswari was working as a domestic maid at the house of Venugopal Reddy, Chittoor Jail Superintendent, Chittoor.

Ramaiah said that an amount to the tune of Rs 2 Lakhs went missing from the house of Venugopal Reddy. Following this, a complaint was made and the police started torturing

Umamaheswari, a Dalit woman, to confess to the theft. The police brutality against innocent woman was highly condemnable.

Ramaiah said in this backdrop, it is appealed to the NRHRC to inquire and take stringent action against culprits for torturing a Dalit woman in police custody. True justice would be served to Umamaheswari only when the culprits were brought to book.



DRM Cup Republic Day tennis tournament held

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Division conducted DRM Cup- Republic Day tennis tournament at Railway Stadium, Vijayawada from January 22 to 23. As part of the 73rd Republic Day celebrations, men's doubles, ladies singles and mixed doubles tennis events were conducted. Total of five teams participated in the men's n doubles event in league style. Total 10 matches were played and K Rajendra Prasad, Divisional Commercial Manager, Vijayawada and SS Reddy, Retd. TTI, Vijayawada were the winners of the men's doubles event. Dr. K Prabhavati, Physiotherapist emerged victorious in the ladies singles event in a knock-out match. Shivendra Mohan,

Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada, D Srinivasa Rao, ADRM, Infrastructure, M Srikanth, ADRM, Operations, and Valleswara Babji Thokala, Sr DSC & Divisional Sports Officer congratulated the winners and runners up players. The winners will be awarded at the ensuing Republic day event.

The winners of the men's doubles event are K Rajendra Prasad, DCM, Vijayawada, and SS Reddy, Retd. TTI.

In the ladies singles event the winner was Dr. K Prabhavati, Physiotherapist, Railway Hospital, Vijayawada

In mixed doubles event, the winners are K Rajendra Prasad, DCM, Vijayawada and Dr. K Prabhavati, Physiotherapist, Railway Hospital, Vijayawada.



Parents request BIE to issue Inter marks memos

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Board of Intermediate Education (AP-BIE) is making all arrangements to issue Intermediate memos before January 31, according to the BIE officials. After the announcement of intermediate results, the BIE has issued marks memos to the students for seeking admissions for higher studies. However, the second-year Intermediate pass memos are yet to be issued to the students. Students who are

pursuing higher education in IITs and NITs and other universities are feeling the pressure from the institutions as the authorities are insisting on submitting the Intermediate Pass Memo as the academic year would be completed in a few months. While the BIE officials say that it would take a few more days to issue the same.

For students studying in other states, it is mandatory to submit the Intermediate Memo. People studying in other states including IITs, NITs and other univer-

sities there are roughly about 75,000 students and the authorities are insisting that the students submit the Intermediate memo by January-end failing which the students might lose one academic year. On the other hand, the parents of the students are feeling the pressure and request AP Intermediate Board to take up the issue seriously to safeguard the interest of students.

The AP Board of Intermediate Education has passed about five lakh, second-

year students, in 2021 and the results were announced based on Class 10 and intermediate first-year examinations. The marks memos were issued that would enable the students to pursue higher education. On the other hand, the BIE has given an option to take up a betterment examination which was conducted in September 2021. A handful of students took up the examination and the results were announced the next month in October. Due to the pandemic and other

reasons like re-verification of the Intermediate memo was delayed. The memos are likely to be issued in a week's time before January 31, sources say.

P Ravi Kumar, Regional Inspection Officer, BIE, Krishna district said that about 55,000 intermediate second-year students were passed in 2021 and about 250 students took up the betterment examination held in September. Due to various reasons the issuing of Memos was delayed and are likely to be

issued by January end, he added. A Rajasekhara Sarma father of an engineering first-year student said that the college authorities are insisting on submitting the Intermediate Memo as the BIE has initially issued marks memo for getting admission for higher studies and now the college authorities are putting pressure to submit the memo failing which the student would forego academic year and requested the concerned intermediate officials to issue the same at the earlier.



Minister directs officials to provide water for Rabi

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing Cherukuvada Sriranganadha Raju has directed the irrigation officials to provide water for the Rabi crop.

The District Agriculture Advisory Council meeting was held here presided over by the minister here on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that though desilting of canals and drains should be completed by summer the required plans were not prepared for the same. He directed the officials to extend all needed help to the farmers in providing irrigation water for rabi crops by coordinating with them.

The minister said that water going to waste as the maintenance of regulators is not proper and directed the irrigation officials to take steps to plug the leaking of water. The minister said that Rs 10 crore has been released for the regular provision of irrigation water to West Godavari and Krishna



district and the funds need to be fully spent.

The minister said that some of the contractors were not doing their job properly and the reason was the lack of supervision by the authorities. About 95 per cent of the farmers are tenant farmers. The Minister directed that the details of each bag of paddy produce grown under RBKs should be recorded in the respective RBKs so that the purchase and selling of paddy produce could be known.

Sriranganadha Raju informed that funds were being allocated in Krishna and West Godavari districts for paying an additional Rs 25 directly to farmers for other

expenses. The minister reviewed the purchases and selling of paddy produce of Kharif crop and directed the officials concerned to take steps to disburse payments to the farmers for their produce at the earliest. The minister told the officials to take steps to expand the cultivation of groundnut and vegetables in the state.

Collector Kartikeya Mishra said that every aspect of Rabi cultivation is constantly being environmentalised. He said that 3.69 lakh acres were set as target for rabi cultivation in WG district of which sowing operations had been completed in 3,46,225 acres. He directed officials to take steps for the

completion of sowing operations in 22,775 acres.

The Collector made it clear that irrigation water was abundantly made available and directed the officials to take steps to check the wastage of irrigation water. A total of Rs 211.83 crore had been allocated to construct 135 cross-bunds works which would provide irrigation water to 38,826 acres and the officials explained the details of the work being carried out under the four subdivisions. Unguturu MLA P Srinivasa Rao, district agriculture advisory council chairman Subba Rao and Joint Collector Dr. BR Ambedkar were among those who were present.



Deer run over by a bus, gives birth before death

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In a heart-wrenching incident, a deer ran over by a bus and it gave birth before death on the Tirumala ghat road on Monday.

On Tirumala ghat road an RTC bus knocked down a deer. It was critically injured in the accident. Just before death, the deer gave birth. After giving birth to a calf it died. The incident moved a large number of people who witnessed the incident. Some of the passers-by and bus passengers rescued the calf.

After receipt of the incident, the TTD and forest officials rushed there and shifted the calf to the zoo. Seeing the incident on social media, Tirupati MP Gurumurthy moved at the deer giving birth while dying. He said that he would instruct the officials concerned to take steps to ensure that such an unfortunate incident would not recur.

BJP trying to incite communal hatred: Mekathoti

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita has alleged that the BJP leaders were trying to incite communal ill feelings and animosity among people.

The Home minister talking to the media here on Monday responded to the comments of the Union Minister of State for External Affairs Muralidharan in Kadapa and meeting B Srikanth Reddy in the central prison.

She said that the Union Minister met the person who led to communal violence in Kurnool. She said that she was shocked to know that the Union minister went to the central prison to meet the jailed BJP leader.

She condemned the Union Minister's allegations that Andhra Pradesh had become a corrupted state and become a hub for terrorist activists. Sucharita expressed anger at the Union Minister stating that he had spoken in an irresponsible way. The police would not spare anyone who indulges in offences, she made it clear.



Cases were registered in connection with the Atmakuru incident against Srikanth Reddy and five of his followers.

The Home Minister said that if there were any objections, BJP leader Buddha Srikanth Reddy should have brought to the notice of official concern instead of going to the place with his followers where a mosque was being constructed in Atmakur town in Kurnool district.

The attempt to demolish the under-construction mosque is an unlawful act and not acceptable, she said. The police asked Srikanth Reddy to leave the place but he did not follow the directions of the police which led to violent incidents. The police gave protection to Srikanth Reddy

when he was mobbed by a violent mob on the day, Sucharita said.

Sucharita said that cases were registered in connection with the Atmakuru incident against Srikanth Reddy and five of his followers. The police also registered cases against 70 Muslim youth for resorting to protest. "The BJP is trying to use the incidents to gain political mileage. The BJP is trying to aggravate the Atmakuru incident for political mileage. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has given a free hand to the police to act freely and work in an unbiased manner," she said.

GVL resents bid to demolish Ram temple in Tenali

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP MP GVL Narasimha Rao vehemently opposed the move to demolish a 102-year-old Kodanda Rama temple in Tenali town.

He tweeted on Monday "Yet another crude attempted demolition of 102-year-old Kodanda Rama temple in Tenali town in Guntur district by the Municipality headed by Syed Khaleeda Naseem of YCP as chairman. I congratulate BJP cadres led by district BJP pres-



ident P Ramakrishna for resisting this crude action".

The BJP activists led by Ramakrishna held a protest

demonstration in Tenali on Monday opposing the attempts to demolish the 102-year-old Kodanda Rama temple.

Three students held, drugs seized

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) officials arrested three students and seized drugs including eight LSD stamps, EC tablets, ganja, and MDMA from them.

Police here Monday said that one of the accused Rohit was studying in Chennai and he had come to Bhimavaram for the Sankranti festival. The police on a tip-off seized 8 LSD stamps from him.

Another student Bhupathiraju Raja Upendra was found to possess 100 grams of ganja. The police seized the ganja and a Maruti

Swift car from him. Another student S Ritwik is studying BBA in Bangalore and came to Bhimavaram to celebrate the Pongal festival. The police seized 5 LSD stamps, MDMA 1 gram, Ecstasy tablets 5, 20 grams ganja from him. Rohit, Ritwik brought drugs from Chennai and Bangalore and used them here.

The police arrested Bhanuchandar in the case. The police arrested a youth named Rohit in Guntur a few days ago. On the information he had given to the police during the questioning the police laid a special focus on Bhimavaram. Rohit lived

in Bhimavaram for some time. The police seized 8 packets of drugs from him. The police brought Rohit to Bhimavaram and based on the information he provided arrested the three students. The police launched an inquiry on the students consuming drugs in the town.

Bhimavaram town hit headlines one and half years ago as the police found drugs worth Rs 12 in a parcel sent from the Netherlands. The parcel was sent to Kurella Bhanuchandar and the customs officials found drug pills in the parcel. The parcel was booked online.



SHORT TAKES



75 crore Suryanamaskar feat begins at NIT

ELURU: The mega feat of contributing to the initiative for 75 crore Suryanamaskars in 21 days began at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) in Tadepalligudem on Monday. The physical education department of the institution is organising the mega feat of doing 75 crore Suryanamaskar and the same was inaugurated virtually today. Physical trainer and sports trainer did 13 rounds of Suryanamaskar in 8 minutes. Speaking on the occasion, NIT director Dr.CSP Rao said that India is celebrating 75th Anniversary of Independence, and the occasion, Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav being organised. As part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav programme, NIT is organising the mega fate of 75 crore Suryanamaskars. As many as 180 students performed Suryanamaskars online on the occasion. Faculty in-charge Dr.Kiran Tiparti, department head Sandhya Rani and trainers Manikanta, Surya, Bindu, Sai and Srinivas took part in the programme.

TTD to launch cow-based Panchagavya products

TIRUPATI: The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the Venkateswara Swamy temple here, is set to launch 15 cow-based Panchagavya products on Thursday. TTD Joint Executive Officer Sri Veerabrahman told the media that TTD had taken up cow protection and promotion on a grand scale. As a result, the cow-based Panchagavya products were getting launched.

IGNOU offers online degree, PG, diploma courses

VISAKHAPATNAM: Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has started many online courses from January. The MBA recognised by AICTE and post-graduate courses including MA English, MA Hindi, MA Journalism, MA Rural Development, MCA, MA Gandhi and Peace Studies and more graduate, diploma, PG diploma and certificate courses are offered online. The courses have due recognition from statutory bodies including UGC and AICTE. The teaching-learning process will be through an online medium only. Academic counseling, evaluation and examinations will also be conducted online. Support for students will be given through internet/radio/television and they are not required to visit the study centres. Those interested can submit their applications through a separate link provided for this purpose: <https://ignouip.samarth.edu.in/>

Cops arrest 4 offenders in theft & other cases

HYDERABAD: Police personnel from the LB Nagar CCS on Saturday arrested four members of a five-member gang involved in various offences like temple thefts, automobiles thefts and bank robberies. Police Commissioner Mahesh M Bhagwat said that the gang had broken open a temple at LB Nagar on December 3, 2021, and escaped with gold ornaments weighing 21.5 tolas belonging to the deity. Based on clues, it became clear that at least five persons were involved in the theft and the police zeroed in on the gang. Police have arrested four persons and one offender is yet to be arrested.

Govt ready to face Covid third wave threat

PNS ■ GUNTUR

YSRCP MLC Lella Appireddy said the state government is ready to face the Coronavirus third wave threat, which is rampant around the world.

The MLC said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the officials to provide all facilities in hospitals including supply of oxygen. The staff was fully prepared and the authorities were fully prepared so that even the slightest inconvenience to the people would not arise, he said.

"The precautions we follow will save us", he said and urged all to wear masks and follow physical distance.

The MLC along with Mayor K Manohar Naidu, GDCC



bank chairman R Sitharamanjaneyulu, deputy mayors Vanama Balavajra Babu and Sheikh Sajee, visited the government general hospital here on Monday.

He enquired with the GGH Superintendent about the facilities being provided to the patients. He also enquired about the problems they were

facing in the hospital.

Talking to the media Appireddy that a total of 87 hospitals in the district, both public and private, were ready to provide medical services to coronavirus patients as per the directions of Chief Minister Jagan. Mohan Reddy. Among them, 6500 beds and 20 oxygen plants had been set up. The

MP Mithun Reddy inaugurates Rythu Bazar

PNS ■ KADAPA

YSRCP MP PV Mithun Reddy inaugurated YSR Rythu Bazar constructed at a cost of Rs 1 crore here on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion MP Mithun Reddy said that the state government was setting up the YSR Rythu Bazar which would do away with the mediators and help the farmers to sell their produce directly.

He said that the Rythu Bazars are also useful to provide remunerative prices for the vegetable farmers. All eligible vegetable farmers could sell their produce at the Rythu Bazars, he said.

Chief Whip G Srikanth Reddy said that



Anwar Basha to monitor the trading activity of rythu bazar and develop it as a modal rythu bazar.

The MP and the Chief Whip reviewed the crop model developed by the Department of Nature Agriculture at Raitu Bazaar. They directed the authorities to motivate the farmers on natural farming. The MP and Chief Whip directed that vegetables and fruits grown through natural farming methods should be put in the farmer's market. Municipal Vice Chairman Fayazur Rehman, Market Committee Vice Chairman Vijaya Bhaskar, DCCB Director S Venkatrami Reddy, ZPTCs, and other leaders were present.

Electricity consumers' public hearing begins online

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) launched the State electricity consumers' public hearing on Annual Revenue Requirements and Retail Prices for 2022-23 fiscal at the APERDCL Corporate Office on Monday. The video conference will be held at Visakhapatnam headquarters till Thursday through all State Electricity Circle Offices and Division Offices.

APERC Chairman Justice C.V. Nagarajuna Reddy and member P. Rajagopal Reddy received views, objections, and suggestions about DISCOMs from objectors through video

conferencing from all State Electricity Circle Offices and Division Offices.

Justice C.V.Nagarajuna Reddy said that in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and consumers' safety, the public hearing is being conducted in respect of all three DISCOMS (APEPDCL, APCPDCL and APSPDCL) through video conferencing from Visakhapatnam. The Commission would take decisions to ensure the balance between the interests of consumers and the financial well-being of power companies. He explained the decisions taken in the financial year 2021-22 as per the long-time priorities of the consumers. He said that Rs.1,000 crore was collected on



the initiative of APERC at the request of power distribution companies to collect arrears from various government departments. The Standards of

Performance (SoP) standards have been set for power distribution companies to enhance transparency in customer service. Farmers who have suf-

fered losses due to power towers and lines have been given a chance to get reasonable compensation by instructing them to quickly resolve the files pending with some Collectors for a long time.

CMDs of Power Distribution Companies K. Santosh Rao (APEPDCL), H. Haranadharao (APSPDCL) and J. Padmajanardhana Reddy (APCPDCL) revealed their proposals on the occasion. A total of 16 pre-registered people from across the State participated and expressed their objections, suggestions and opinions. APERC Secretary C. Ramakrishna, Deputy Secretary (Energy) B.A.V.P.

Kumar Reddy and DISCOMs' directors were present.

Meanwhile, opposing the revised proposals on the power tariff, the Left parties staged a dharna before the APERDCL office. Later, the leaders met the Commission and urged not to consider the DISCOMS proposal as it would be another burden on the consumers. The Left parties also explained how the governments were trying to impose more financial burdens on the consumers. The Commission should not compromise on safeguarding the consumers, who are already suffering from a big financial crisis due to the Covid-19, the Left parties demanded.

INDIA CORNER

ED attaches assets of businessman in Tamil Nadu cheating case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has attached assets worth Rs 69.14 crore of a Tamil Nadu-based businessman as part of a money laundering probe linked to an alleged cheating case against him and his family. A provisional order for attachment of properties of Dhanraj Kochar and his family has been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED case was filed on the basis of a scheduled offence registered earlier by the Chennai Police against the businessman on charges of cheating and criminal conspiracy involving more than Rs 100 crore. The federal agency had conducted raids at the premises of the businessman in September last year. The case pertains to one M S Hameed, Abdul Rawoof and Kochar who were the directors of a real estate company called D R Foundations & Estates Private Limited.



MP: Indore lab detects 21 Covid cases caused by Omicron sub-lineage BA.2

Twenty-one COVID-19 cases caused by the Omicron variant's sub-lineage known as BA.2 have been found in tests conducted over the past 18 days in the laboratory of a private medical institute in Madhya Pradesh's Indore. Those infected with this sub-lineage of Omicron variant include six children, an official from the private facility said on Monday. "Since January 6, a total of 21 cases of BA.2 sub-lineage of the Omicron variant have been found during tests conducted in our Molecular Virology Diagnostic and Research Lab, which is recognized by the Centre," Vinod Bhandari, founder chairman of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences (SAIMS) here told PTI. "Lung involvement ranging from 1 per cent to 50 per cent was observed in six out of 21 patients of this Omicron sub-lineage. Three patients are still hospitalized, while 18 have been discharged."



'Immense priority accorded to empowering girl child in development initiatives of Govt'

On the occasion of National Girl Child Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said immense priority is accorded to empowering the girl child in every development initiative undertaken by his government, and asserted that the focus is on ensuring dignity as well as opportunities to her. India celebrates the National Girl Child Day, an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, every year on January 24. "National Girl Child Day is an occasion to reiterate our commitment and further strengthen ongoing efforts to empower the girl child," Prime Minister Modi said. "It is also a day to celebrate the exemplary accomplishments of the girl child in different fields," he said in a tweet. "In every development initiative undertaken by our Government, we accord immense priority to empowering the girl child and strengthening our Nari Shakti," Modi said.



About 135 militants waiting to infiltrate into Kashmir: IG BSF



PNS ■ SRINAGAR

About 135 militants are present at launch pads across the border and are waiting to infiltrate into India, BSF Inspector General, Kashmir, Raja Babu Singh said on Monday.

However, he asserted that the overall situation at the Line of Control (LoC) is "peaceful" and said the number of infiltration bids was lesser in 2021 in comparison to previous years.

"The overall scenario along the LoC is peaceful. Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement, there has been a general peace all along the LoC in the Kashmir frontier," the Border Security Force (BSF) officer said while speaking to reporters here.

Giving details on infiltration bids, he said in 2021, 58 attempts were made, in which five terrorists were killed, 21 returned and one surrendered.

"There have been reports that 31 infiltrated in 2021, 130 in 2019, and 36 in 2020," the

inspector general (IG) said.

During 2021, the BSF successfully recovered or seized three AK-47 rifles, six nine-mill pistols, 1,071 ammunition, 20 hand grenades, two IEDs and 17.3 kg of heroin -- worth Rs 88 crore -- in different operational incidents, he said.

The IG BSF said there are reports that "104 to 135 terrorists" are present at different launch pads across the LoC and waiting to infiltrate.

"There are also reports that some guides have gone from here and crossed the LoC to that side. So, we need to monitor them as and when they return. Their families need to be monitored," he said.

Singh said there is a lot of synergy between the army and the BSF.

"The more we conduct area dominations, keep watch and surveillance, the more difficult it will be for them to infiltrate. We are putting in all-out efforts so that no infiltration is allowed, that zero infiltration happens," he said.

BSF on high alert along IB following inputs of threat

PNS ■ JAMMU

BSF troops deployed on the India-Pakistan border in Jammu and Kashmir have been put on high alert following a threat of anti-social elements creating trouble on Republic Day, the force's Inspector General for Jammu DK Boora said on Monday. He also said that the Border Security Force (BSF) has launched a number of operations along the International Border, including anti-drone exercises and those related to detecting tunnels. The BSF is also conducting joint patrolling with the army, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police to thwart nefarious attempts of terrorists, Boora said. "There is input that anti-national elements are likely to create trouble (in connection with Republic Day) but we are very, very alert on and along the border, including the Line of Control (LoC)," he said. "We have heightened our vigil on the border extensively," the inspector general (IG) told reporters here. Boora said intelligence inputs clearly point towards the possibility of some activities from across the border.



"We have got inputs (that such activities) like infiltration or induction of weapons, ammunition, explosives and its assembling inside our area or drug smuggling (can take place). But we are on high alert and we will not allow anyone to succeed in these nefarious designs," he said. Keeping in mind the present security scenario and intelligence inputs

ahead of Republic Day, the BSF is carrying out extensive anti-tunnelling drives, special patrolling and depth area domination despite extremely hostile weather conditions. "We had planned these activities,

which are being conducted on the border. Maximum number of troops and officers are present on the border. We have declared two weeks long heightened vigil on the border and extensively carrying out operations along the border, including anti-tunnelling exercises and anti-drone exercises," Boora said. "To strengthen border domination, mobilisation of troops has been done. Regular monitoring of suspicious activities of counter-parts is being carried out through surveillance equipment," he said.



Under-bridge in Gujarat's Rajkot named after Gen Bipin

PNS ■ RAJKOT

The Gujarat government on Monday named an under-bridge in Rajkot after General Bipin Rawat to honour the country's first Chief of Defence Staff who died in a chopper crash in December.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel inaugurated the under-bridge located in Laxmi Nagar area virtually. "In recent times, the head of all three wings of the armed forces, CDS General Bipin Rawat, lost his life in a tragedy. This bridge should be named CDS General Bipin Rawat Bridge," Patel said.

Earlier, Rajkot Mayor Pradeep Dav had asked the CM to suggest a name for the structure, which was built at a cost of Rs 48 crore.

Patel said his government was committed to spending money to build infrastructure in the state, and listed various development work undertaken in Rajkot.

General Rawat died on December 8 when his military helicopter crashed near Coonoor in Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. All 14 on board, including the general's wife, perished in the incident.

'Shiv Sena's Hindutva merely on paper, not beyond speeches'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A day after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's comments on Hindutva, senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Monday hit back at former ally Shiv Sena, saying its Hindutva is merely on paper and doesn't go beyond speeches.

Fadnavis said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a Ram temple is being built in Ayodhya. Modi also developed the Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor, the former Maharashtra CM said addressing a press conference.

On the other hand, the Sena (which is in power in Maharashtra) could not even rename Aurangabad as Sambhajanagar, and Osmanabad as Dharashiv. But, Allahabad was renamed as Prayagraj (under the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh), while the Sena kept merely mincing words, he said.

The Shiv Sena has time and again referred to Aurangabad — a city built by Mughal ruler Aurangzeb — as Sambhajanagar after second Maratha king Chhatrapati Sambhaji (the son of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj), and Osmanabad as Dharashiv.

The Sena fell out with the BJP after the 2019 Maharashtra polls and tied-up with the NCP and Congress to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state.

In his address to Shiv Sainiks on Sunday, which was also the birth anniversary of his father



and party founder Bal Thackeray, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the Sena has left the BJP and not Hindutva.

The CM had also said, "I believe that BJP's opportunistic Hindutva is only for power. The Shiv Sena had aligned with the BJP as it wanted power for Hindutva. The Sena never used Hindutva for the sake of power."

Reacting to the comments, Fadnavis on Monday said, "Who all from the Sena participated in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement? We are the ones who took bullets and lathis in the movement. Your (Shiv Sena) Hindutva is merely on paper."

"Modi ensured that Ram temple was built in Ayodhya (in Uttar Pradesh), but the Sena could not solve the Durgadi temple issue in Kalyan (town of Maharashtra). What is your Hindutva beyond speeches? You need to live Hindutva. It is not restricted to

speeches," the BJP leader said. Fadnavis also said even before the Shiv Sena was born, there was Bhartiya Jana Sangh — the erstwhile avatar of the BJP — its corporator in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and MLAs in the state.

In 1984, Shiv Sena leader Manohar Joshi contested the Lok Sabha poll on BJP's ticket, he said.

On Sunday, Uddhav Thackeray had also said that, "The BJP doesn't mean Hindutva. I stand by my comment that the Shiv Sena had wasted 25 years in alliance with the BJP."

To this, Fadnavis claimed that when the Sena was with the BJP, it became the number one party, but, when it not in an alliance with the BJP, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party has now slipped to the fourth position. He was referring to the recent local body polls where the Sena bagged fourth position.

Jammu-Srinagar NH opens vehicles

PNS ■ BANIAHAL/JAMMU

The strategic Jammu-Srinagar national highway was cleared for stranded vehicles on Monday as road clearance agencies pulled out a rice-loaded truck that was stuck in mud near Panthiyal in Ramban district for nearly 30 hours, officials said.

Senior Superintendent of Police, traffic, Shabir Ahmad Malik said 130 heavy motor vehicles and 10 oil tankers besides dozens of light motor vehicles, which were stranded on the highway, were allowed to move towards their destination after completion of the road clearance operation at Panthiyal, where the carriage-way is single.

However, he said no fresh vehicle was either allowed from Jammu or Srinagar for the second day on Monday.



The traffic on the highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with rest of the country, was suspended on Sunday following multiple landslides and shooting of stones from hillocks between Chanderkote and Ramsu and snowfall in Banihal sector.

While the road clearance agencies pressed its men and

machines and cleared the highway of the obstacles, a truck loaded with rice got deeply embedded in the mud at Panthiyal and could not be moved.

The operation was called off late Sunday evening and was resumed this morning with fire and emergency service joining the effort which proved fruit-

ful and the truck was pulled out around 1 pm, the officials said, adding the normal traffic is likely to resume Tuesday.

Officials said the helicopter service to Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district was briefly resumed this morning after remaining suspended for the past two days.

Pilgrimage through the new track to the shrine was also affected due to landslides triggered by overnight rains.

The officials said the yatra to the shrine was continuing smoothly when last reports were received.

A spokesperson of the Meteorological department said Katra, the base camp for the pilgrims visiting Vaishno Devi shrine, recorded the highest 24.7 mm of rainfall during the past 24 hours till 8.30 am.

Rai urges PM Modi to set up martyrs' memorial

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Cabinet Minister Gopal Rai on Monday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to set up a memorial for the martyrs of the country's freedom movement in front of Rashtrapati Bhawan to pay tributes to them.

Rai posted a video message on his Twitter account and said that there is no dedicated memorial for the freedom fighters who laid their lives for the independence of the country.

He said that India Gate was built by the Britishers in the memory of soldiers martyred during First World War and name of not even a single martyr of country's freedom move-



ment is there on India Gate. "The country is celebrating 75th year of Independence but in all these years we could not make even a memorial dedicated to our martyrs of

freedom struggle. I request you (Narendra Modi) to build a national memorial for martyred freedom fighters.

"I hope that you will construct a memorial for martyred freedom fighters in front of Rashtrapati Bhawan and start a new tradition of paying tributes to our lakhs of martyred freedom fighters at there on August 15 (Independence Day) and January 26 (Republic Day)," Rai said in his video message.

He added that it is unfortunate that instead of paying homage to the freedom fighters, for last 75 years our governments had been paying tributes at India Gate on occasions of Independence Day and Republic Day.

Netaji should be recognised as India's first PM: TMC

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh on Monday said the Centre should recognise Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as the first prime minister of the country, as he headed the Provisional Government of Free India formed in October 1943.

Ghosh also urged the West Bengal Education Department to include events related to the proclamation of the Azad Hind government by Netaji in the school curriculum.

"Installing a statue is not a real tribute; that would be to de-classify all files related to Netaji, DNA test of the Renkoji ashes and

recognising him as the first PM," the Trinamool Congress state general secretary told PTI. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced that a grand statue of the legendary freedom fighter will be installed at India Gate in New Delhi as a symbol of the country's "indebtedness" to him. Till the granite statue is completed, a hologram statue would be put up at the same place.

Ghosh said Netaji was also in charge of the Ministry of War and Foreign Affairs, and the Azad Hind government was recognised by nine countries, which had diplomatic relations with it. "Whether to accept this demand on recognising Netaji as

the first PM is for the Union government to decide. But, I would like to urge the state education department that as the first step towards it, the episodes of the proclamation of the independent government, the distribution of responsibilities, and its international recognition should be included in detail in the curriculum. The syllabus committee should look into it," he said.

The nation on Sunday paid homage to Subhas Chandra Bose on his 125th birth anniversary, with leaders hailing his "monumental" contribution to India's freedom struggle and Modi unveiling a hologram statue at the India Gate.

Anti-CAA protest: Delhi court frames sedition charge against Sharjeel Imam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Monday framed charges under sedition against JNU student Sharjeel Imam in a case related to alleged inflammatory speeches made by him during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) in 2019.

"Charges are being framed under sections 124 (sedition), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion), 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration), 505 (Statements conducive to public mischief) of Indian Penal Code, and Section 13 (punish-



ment for unlawful activities) of UAPA," Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat ordered.

As per the prosecution, Imam had allegedly made speeches at Jamia Millia Islamia on December 13, 2019, and at Aligarh Muslim University on December 16, 2019, where he threatened to "cut off" Assam

and the rest of the Northeast from India.

In his defense, Imam had earlier told the court that he is not a terrorist and his prosecution is a "whip of a monarch rather than a government established by law". Whereas, the prosecution claimed that violent riots took place pursuant to Imam's speech.

He is in judicial custody since January 2020.

Delhi Police had filed a charge sheet against Imam in the case, in which it alleged that he allegedly gave speeches inciting hatred, contempt, and disaffection towards the Central Government and instigated the people which led to the violence in December 2019.

FCRA registration: SC to hear plea against Centre's decision

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday said it would hear on Tuesday a petition which has sought quashing of the Centre's alleged decision by which 5,789 entities lost their Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration.

The FCRA registration is mandatory for any association and NGO to receive foreign funding.

The plea, filed by US-based NGO 'Global Peace Initiative', came up for hearing before a bench comprising Justices A M Khanwilkar and C T Ravikumar.

The bench said the matter would be heard on Tuesday. There were 22,762 FCRA-registered organisations till December 31, 2021.

On January 1, the number came down to 16,829. These are considered "live" organisations.

The officials had said the FCRA licences of 18,778 organisations were expiring between September 29, 2020 and December 31, 2021.

Out of them, as many as 12,989 organisations have applied for renewal of the FCRA licence between September 30, 2020 and December 31, 2021.



PAPER WITH PASSION

Cover-up

A few Karnataka colleges are debating whether girl students should be allowed to wear hijab

The New Year is all about hijabs and saffron scarves in some parts of Karnataka. On January 1, a pre-university college in Udipi barred a few girls from attending classes for wearing the hijab in contravention to college rules. The management says the girls can wear the hijab on campus but not in class. The reasoning is the teacher should have an unobstructed view of the students' faces while teaching. The girls, unconvinced, raised a protest. They say that they need to wear the hijab to cover their hair in front of men. One argument is why object to the hijab if it only covers the hair, like a scarf. If so, why fasten it with a pin to cover the face as well, runs the other argument. Things turned political when Campus Front of India (CFI), the student wing of the radical Islamic group, Popular Front of India, intervened, claiming religious freedom was being interfered with. The situation is unresolved. In another Karnataka village, Balagadi in Koppa district, some college students wore saffron scarves to protest the management allowing Muslim girls to wear the hijab in the classroom. In the third incident in Kolar district, a Hindu group staged a protest at a Government school, claiming the principal had permitted Muslim students to offer prayers in the classroom on Fridays. The district collector is probing the matter. Slowly but surely, these incidents are not just becoming controversial but triggering a debate on whether a hijab is part of the uniform.



In India, where public display of religion is quite common, these incidents should not have received publicity at all. But what's worrisome is that such sentiments are flaring up when Karnataka is readying for two major rounds of election. Elections to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike may be held along with or close to the Zilla Panchayat and Taluk Panchayat polls. That will involve a joint electorate of nearly four crore voters. And the State Assembly elections are slated for early next year. These issues are fodder for religious groups to vitiate the secular atmosphere already burdened by the politics of polarisation. The higher judiciary has to step in to settle the issue once and for all. India is not France, where the display of religious symbols in public is disallowed. In India, everybody wears religion on one's sleeve, whether the *bindi* and bangles or the hijab, the holy cross or the Sikh *patka*. The question of discrimination should not arise at all. The Constitution allows the freedom to practice religion, but the law limits the protection to practices found essential and integral to religion. In a 2016 judgment, the Kerala High Court said that a hijab and a long-sleeved dress are an "essential part of the Islamic religion". Then the only question the judiciary should sort out is whether the "essential practice" of wearing hijab offends the social order in a classroom and hampers the teacher's duties.

PICTALK



The snow-covered path to the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi, near Katra in Reasi district

PTI

Wet town

The Delhi Govt has reduced the number of dry days from the earlier 21 to just three

In a bit of good news that is certain to cheer up the Capital's Bacchus devotees, the AAP-led Delhi Government has announced its decision to curtail the number of 'dry days' this year from the earlier 21 to just three — the Republic Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti. The 21 'dry days' was one of the highest number as compared to other States and UTs in India. The official order, which was notified on Monday, is part of the city Government's new excise policy and ensures that the shutters of licensed liquor shops, bars, pubs and opium vends across the city can remain open and these can legally do business except for these three days. While the Government's decision to curtail the number of 'dry days' is welcome in the sense that it would remove the taint of 'buying liquor illegally' and instances of bootlegging in a major way, there is hardly any change in the situation expected on the ground. Just as it is a fact that the state of prohibition is a malady both for the taxpayer and for the Government's coffers, it's an open secret for decades that regular drinkers stock up their 'supply' in the days preceding 'dry days'.



Even otherwise, alcohol is available at the drop of a hat on 'dry days' if one knows his way around the city. However, the positive difference the

Government's decision would make is that a buyer won't be caught unawares if he fails to take into account in advance the closure of liquor vends to mark one leader's or another's birth anniversary. Also, in the days preceding the 'dry day/s', it's become the tendency of the salespersons to often 'push' certain brands over the counter owing to the handsome 'commission' they pocket from the distributor/manufacturer. Since the supplies run short and the queues get longer each passing minute on such evenings, the experienced buyers know that it is futile to argue with the salesperson or go hunting for his favourite tippie elsewhere. Adding another dimension to the consumer's "choice" would mean that the latter is harassed less; other such steps such as privatising the liquor vends and opening one in each ward of the Capital have already started showing results since one now does business with a courteous salesperson in a clean and not-so-shady outlet, which was invariably the case earlier.

FSSAI GM regulation puts health in a soup

The Authority has a new scheme to mix genetically modified organisms in our foods even though the EU doesn't allow GM food on its plate



INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

Careful of what you eat in 2022 as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has a new scheme to mix genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in our foods. The white and black bureaucratic-looking draft notification on GM food regulation has locked India's food fate with Big Ag. It's only a matter of time before a tsunami of GM food products floods the Indian market as the gates of our fortress have been opened from the inside.

But first, what are GM foods? These are foods that are derived from genetically modified crops. Companies like Monsanto/Bayer have developed patented crops varieties which have genes from two different life forms. For example India's only GM crop, Bt Cotton, uses a toxin producing gene from a ground bacteria, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, and combines it with a cotton plant. Some of the other popular GMOs are soybean, corn, sugar beets and canola. While some of these crops are owned by European companies, EU doesn't allow GM food on its plate. GM foods are also used for animal feed and biofuels. Apart from the EU, independent scientists have raised serious bio-medical concerns, linking the consumption of GM foods leading to a plethora of health defects.

So what does the notification say? Firstly, it allows for "1 per cent and below GM content foods" to go unlabelled. But why have this 1 per cent at all? Can't India have truthful labels, where the consumers know what they eat? Perhaps aware of the risks of GM food, FSSAI regulators have clearly stated that GMOs are "not permitted in infant foods". So why the obfuscation on labelling standards and then, in the same breath, the stance on infant foods? Is there something FSSAI knows and not telling Indians?

Let's take a second and look at our past. In the late 90s, India was flooded with cheap GM soybean oil imports that not only killed small mustard farmers but also destroyed the local oilseed markets. But now, also consider, GMOs are already trickling into our *thalis* with the rampant



blending of Bt cottonseed oil in our foods. Both FSSAI and GEAC were aware about it for years; in fact, Dr Vandana Shiva and I sent RTIs to both organisations and found out, FSSAI and GEAC both treated GMO cottonseed and natural cottonseed to be the same. This was an unscientific position, conveniently forgetting the genetic modifications on Monsanto/Bayer's Bt cottonseed. On further investigation, I found that biosafety documents submitted to GEAC came from Monsanto labs. No independent biosafety data was found at GEAC for Monsanto/Bayer's Bt Cotton. Currently, those pages are dead links on GEAC's website. In the draft notification too, FSSAI adhered to similar biosafety standards and, in some cases, allowed for the documents to be submitted by the applicant and not necessarily the regulatory authority-approved dossiers.

Now the next major confusion occurs when the notification calls for "(11) Once GMOs or Genetically Engineered Organisms or Living Modified Organisms having unique identification code provided by Biosafety Clearing House, Organisation for Economic Cooperation



INSTEAD OF DEREGULATING GM FOODS, FSSAI NEEDS TO FIRST DO HOUSE CLEANING AND TAKE COGNISANCE OF THE ILLEGAL GM FOODS THAT ARE BEING FED TO INDIANS. IF GM FOOD IS NOT SAFE FOR EUROPEAN CHILDREN TO EAT, THEN INDIAN CHILDREN OUGHT NOT HAVE IT

and Development etc, is approved by FSSAI, approval for the same will not be required for any other Food Business Operator. Approval will also not be required if it is used as an ingredient in any product."

On plain reading, this point appears innocuous. But the devil is always in the details. Given that EU doesn't allow for GM food, half of the influential countries are out. What does FSSAI mean as it wrote this point? Is it perhaps referring to the corporate food hegemony on GM standards? The US, along with many others in the Americas, is deeply entrenched in GM crops cultivation and freely allows for GM foods, labelled or unlabelled, to enter markets.

It is no surprise that US citizens along with their Latin American counterparts suffer from food-style related diseases. French scientist Eric Seralini, using peer review scientific journals, demonstrated how GM foods are harmful not only to cows but their toxicity including the pesticide/herbicide used to grow third-generations GMOs like RRF Cotton and hamper human health as well.

Monsanto/Bayer has already lost billions of dollars

to victims of Round-Up poisoning. Round-Up is a patented herbicide used to grow GM crops, and is known carcinogenic.

The parliamentary standing committee on GM crops, chaired by Renuka Chowdhary, has already pulled up FSSAI on GM food and a court order of August 2017 empowers petitioners to approach the court again in case the FSSAI rules are unsatisfactory.

GM or not GM? It is obvious that the FSSAI notification is doing someone else's bidding — corporates or Uncle Sam? Who knows? But as a concerned citizen, I urge them to reconsider. Instead of deregulating GM foods, FSSAI needs to first do house cleaning and take cognisance of the illegal GM foods that are being fed to Indians. We must aspire to have the most progressive GM laws on a par with EU, and not below them. For, if GM food is not safe for European children to eat, then Indian children ought not have it.

(The author writes on agriculture and environment, and is a former Director — Policy & Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A DESPICABLE ACT

Sir — We have been routinely witnessing how the rightwing Hindutva brigade has been belittling, denigrating and tarnishing the image of Mahatma Gandhi at the fall of a hat through their manifestations, particularly by praising Nathuram Godse in tune with the ideology of their parent organisation. While the nation has been saddened by their tirade against Mahatma Gandhi, the Government for its part has now dropped the traditional Christian hymn, 'Abide with me', believed to have been a favourite of the Mahatma, from the list of songs to be played at this year's Beating Retreat ceremony. The tune has been played at the annual ceremony every year since 1950.

By doing this, the saffron outfits may be happy that they have hit both, the Mahatma and the Christian community, with their intolerant act but the entire world that has great reverence and respect for the Mahatma would have formed a poor opinion about the Government and its unpalatable act against the Father of the Nation. At this rate, one will not be surprised if the Government's next move will be to remove the title "Father of the Nation" from Gandhi's name and confer it on one of their own ideologues.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

POISONING TURTLES HURTS US, TOO

Sir — In an unfortunate incident, dozens of turtles were found dead in a lake in Kalyan, Maharashtra. Wildlife conservationists feel that poisoning is the cause, probably by people who found that these creatures were consuming fish which they had been illegally breeding there. As freshwater turtle species are protected under India's 1972 Wildlife Protection Act, causing them harm can result in heavy penalty and punishment. The locals could have sought permission to breed fish from the authority concerned.

It is sad that most people are unaware about the usefulness of turtles in our ecosystem. They regulate the energy flow

Honour Bose's idea of India



The nation is celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as Parakram Diwas to acknowledge his monumental contribution. Whenever one remembers Netaji, one is reminded of his valour, courage, patriotism, extraordinary leadership skills and unflinching devotion to the motherland. In India, however, statues and streets are often named after political leaders, religious personalities, scholars, business tycoons,

of a given environment and consume and deposit seeds, which later germinate into vegetation needed for the maintenance of an area's ecosystem. No wonder they are called 'environmental engineers' and play an important role in the earth's food web. They are also vital for the health of seas, rivers, ponds and other water bodies. More campaigns must be launched to make people aware regarding the protection of such creatures.

M Pradyu | Kannur

THIRD TIME UNLUCKY

Sir — Each cricket match is like a game of chess and, therefore, every move counts in the shortest form of the game. Having lost the Test series in a one-day fashion, we could have chalked out a strategy to erase the mistakes committed in the longest form of the game. The major shortcoming is that the so-called "strong batting" failed to live up to the

eminent sporting personalities or kings, while our soldiers are rarely mentioned. In this context, the decision to instal Netaji's statue at India Gate must be lauded. His larger-than-life legacy is enough to prove that he played a stellar role in arousing the consciousness of society.

In fact, going by the Kautilyan adage "my enemy's enemy is my friend", Bose showed solidarity with the axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan which, he believed, could act as a counterpoise to the British imperialistic designs. Bose had a firm belief that if the loyalty of soldiers to the British Indian Army be turned around, the British would be left with no option but to leave. His militant agitation precipitated Britain's hasty withdrawal from India. Apart from being a great patriot and nationalist, it was his unwavering commitment to secularism that was destined to become the cornerstone of the Indian Republic. It was his idea of a united and inclusive India that is even more relevant in today's fractured society.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

expectations and the bowlers were put to test. In the event of a small total to defend, our strategy should be to dismiss the opposition within a low score. But to add salt to the wound, we lost both the ODIs and the T-20 World Cup chances through sheer lack of shrewd captaincy.

We had a team with the number one bowler in the world but we made him toil hard for a place in the side in England and in the T20 World Cup. The ODI and Test captain flattered to deceive. As a matter of fact, Ashwin accounted for the left-handers' wickets maximum in his international career and the captain made a mess of his role and proved unlucky for the third time and lost five out of the six games and finished the tour on a losing note.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The amendment proposal strikes at the very root of our federal polity and State autonomy.

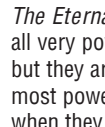


Tamil Nadu Chief Minister —MK Stalin



My wedding will not be going ahead (as the nation imposes new restrictions to slow Omicron's spread).

New Zealand Prime Minister —Jacinda Arden



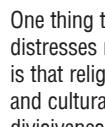
The *Eternals* are all very powerful, but they are the most powerful when they come together.

Actor —Salma Hayek



The desire to win the World Cup still gives me the motivation to be the best version of myself.

Women's team ODI captain — Mithali Raj



One thing that distresses me is that religious and cultural divisiveness take too strong a position.

Netaji Subhas' daughter — Dr Anita Bose-Pfaff

FIRST COLUMN

TRIBALS AND THEIR RELIGION

The Sanatana Dharma has ingredients of tribal worship



VK BAHUGUNA

Let us examine the theory of naming a few people as tribals by sociologists and others. The western media under the influence of Christianity has been for decades trying to declare tribals as indigenous people. The connotation of ‘indigenous’ in terms of the great Indian civilization, which grew with great saints who lived in syl-van surroundings in thick forests, is a travesty of truth. It is an insult to ancient Indian culture to call the tribals as indigenous or, for that matter, calling them tribal at all. For, the tribal traditions have great history of language, music, art, paintings, medicine and of course worship of nature in its different form which enriched the Sanatana Dharma and traditions. In fact, all Indians must have been once part of some tribe or the other and it is the lop-sided modern develop-ment which now differentiates between tribal and non-tribal people. Unfortunately, our constitution is also trapped in the tribal and non-



tribal verbosity. The raging debate that tribals have no set pattern of religion is basically a politically motivated and foreign-supported propa-ganda being launched in India by different churches thatbelieve in proselytization. The Sanatana Dharma which is now known as Hinduism has all the ingredients of tribal worship. In tribal areas most of the divinity is dominated by nature worships and many tenets and festivities of Hinduism are drawn from them. The argument by a few politicians that tribal people never had an organized religion does not hold water if we see the history of the country. The first organised census was held in 1871 - the first synchronized census was held in 1881 — in which the 95 percent tribal people have entered their religion as Hinduism. Only two percent people from the North-East declared atribal religion because of the interpretational bias during census. In 1891 only three percent were shown as following tribal religion and rest as Hindu.

In 1991 census information on sects of Christianity was also collected. In the first census after independence in 1951, 97-98 per-cent tribals had shown Hinduism as their religion. It only after sev-eral decades later when the Christian missionaries started convert-ing the tribals in central and eastern India that nature worship was systematically sought to be separated from Hinduism. In Tripura the Tripuri, Jamatias and other Tribes have been worshipping Shiva as depicted in the rock carvings. Similarly, Sarna method of divinity is focused on the worship of nature and spirits and holds all natural objects to be sacred. This belief system is followed by several trib-al groups in Jharkhand and neighbouring states, and it is fully reflect-ed in their social and cultural life. The ‘other’ category for religion in the census after independence had created this confusion because of the census staff relegating such tribal beliefs as the ‘other’. There is a well-orchestrated propaganda launched by a few political lead-ers for supremacy in the tribal belt aided and abetted by Christian missionaries and the naxalites to disconnect the tribal population from the larger part of Sanatana dharma. This writer during February 2021 has visited a tribal area in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh. In a corner of the fair, a person who spoke fluent English was sell-ing books deriding Hinduism and recommending a book, ‘Tribals are not Hindu’. I had to admonish the organizer, a foreign-funded NGO, for creating such a situation in the tribal belt. The issue today is not to interfere with religious beliefs and cultural lives of tribal people. The focus should be to bringing them to the mainstream by providing them best health, educational and livelihood and preserve their art, language, culture, and music.

(The writer is Chairman of Centre for Resource Management and Environment. The views expressed are personal.)

Fertiliser DBT stymied by lobbies for years



UTTAM GUPTA

When a subsidised product is not available in the marketplace, the dubious characters will have nothing to prey upon

It is budget time. After two years of splurge, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has alluded to a return to fiscal consolidation. A major area mer-iting attention is fertilizer subsidy which jumped from ₹80,000 crore during 2019-20 to ₹134,000 crore during 2020-21 and is likely to be ₹140,000 crore dur-ing 2021-22.

Fertilizer subsidy arises because the Union Government wants manufacturers/importers to sell fertilizers to farmers at a low maximum retail price, unrelated to the cost of production and import and distribution, which is much higher. In case of urea, it exercises manda-tory control on MRP and reimburses the manufacturers for the excess of cost over it as subsidy on a ‘unit-specific’ basis under the new pricing scheme. In case of phos-phatic and potassic (P&K) fertilizers, it fixes ‘uniform’ subsidy on per nutrient basis for all manufacturers and importers under Nutrient Based Scheme.

Subsidy per ton being the difference between cost and MRP, if the cost increas-es, MRP remaining unchanged, on each ton of fertilizer sold, subsidy will increase. On the other hand, if MRP decreases, cost remaining unchanged, then also subsidy will increase. Thirdly, for any given level of subsidy per ton, increase in the quantity of fertilizer sale results in higher total subsidy payment.

The factors impinging on the cost of urea are: cost of natural gas - feedstock/fuel used in its production and price of import-ed urea (it accounts for 1/3rd of consump-tion). In case of P&K fertilizers, the factors are cost of raw materials, viz. phosphoric acid, ammonia and price of imports in fin-ished form viz. di-ammonium phosphate (these account for nearly 50 percent of DAP consumption) and price of muriate of potash - entirely imported.

Given the preponderance of imports in making urea and non-urea fertilizers avail-able (even for producing domestic urea, 1/3rd of the gas requirement is met from imports), there is little that the Government can do to rein in these costs.

However, there are plant specific inef-ficiencies (besides inter-state variation in VAT on gas) that result in widely varying costs. Of around 35 million tonannual urea supply, there are tonnages supplicated ₹20,000 per ton, ₹25,000 per ton, ₹30,000 per ton and so on. The cost of import is even higher. During the current year, some supplies have even come at US\$ 900 per ton which works out to around ₹70,000 per ton at the farm gate.

A ridiculously low MRP of urea (cur-rently at ₹5360 per ton, it is almost the same as two decades ago) in the face of increas-ing costlies at the root of increase in sub-sidy per ton. Add to this, the quantity boost that comes from (i) excessive use: low price prompts farmers to use more than what is required by the soil; (ii) large/rich unde-serving farmersalso getting access to sub-sidized urea; (iii) large-scale diversion



THE CONTRACTION IN DEMAND FROM ALL THREE SOURCES WILL YIELD HUGE SAVINGS IN SUBSIDY (QUANTITY EFFECT). THERE WILL BE AN INDIRECT GAIN AS WELL. INDIA BEING A MAJOR IMPORTER OF FERTILISERS, A SIGNIFICANT DEMAND-INDUCED CUT IN IMPORT WILL REDUCE THE INTERNATIONAL PRICE AND, IN TURN, REDUCE THE COST OF IMPORTS

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



such as smuggling to neighboring countries, industrial use and so on - inevitable when the market price is 4-5 times higher. The outcome is ballooning total subsidy bill.

Excessive use is undesirable as it leads to imbalance in fertilizer use, erosion in soil health (this in turn, undermines the sustainability of agriculture in the medium to long-run) and adverse impact on the environment besides human health. Giving cheap urea to those (read: rich farmers) who can afford to pay more is also patently unfair. But, diversion or misuse of subsidized (albeit heavily) urea will shake the conscience of any right-thinking person. Yet, it has been going on for decades and could be as high as 30 percent. Look at the dynamics of how it is happening.

During the initial years of the subsisting scheme (it is in vogue since 1977), bulk of the subsidy amount was released to manufactur-ers on ‘dispatch’ of the material from the factory. Even as they were required to ensure that fertilizer was actually sold to farmers, there was no fool proof institutional mecha-nism to check it. Disappearance of the product at various levels in sup-ply chain viz. rail-head, stocking point in district and retailer was rampant.

Ein the early 2000s, the arrange-ment was changed to provide for payment of 95 percent of the urea subsidy on receipt of material in the district (for non-urea fertilizers, the share was 85 percent) and bal-ance 5 percent on confirmation by the state government (15 percent in case of P&K fertilizers). Under this

mechanism also, the field was wide openfor dubious players to prey on the subsidized stuff - beyond stock-ing point in the district.

From April 2018, the Modi government linked subsidy pay-ment to manufacturers to sale of fer-tilizers to farmers by retailers. Under the new scheme, manufactur-ers receive 100% of the subsidy after fertilizer is delivered to the farmer and his identity viz. Aadhaar is captured on electronic PoS machine at dealer’s shop. Though a significant improvement, even this is prone to diversion albeit at retail level. This is all the more because anyone(including non-farmers) with Aadhaar unique identity num-ber can buy the subsidized product.

The government has also tried other measures. These include (i) mandatorily requiring all manufactur-ers/importers to neem-coatall of urea supplies (2015); (ii) restricting purchase by each purchaser to 100 bags per transaction (down from 999 bags earlier) and capping num-ber of transactions per month (August 2020) and (iii) tracking top 20 urea purchasers in each district and initiating action against those violating purchase norms etc. These too have not delivered.

Now, the government is work-ing on a plan to cap the number of subsidized fertilizer bags that indi-vidual farmers can buy in any cropping season. But, this won’t help either.

In fact, so long as the core of the scheme, i.e., ‘routing subsidy through the manufacturers’ remains intact, there is no way it can make any dent on the scourge of diversion.

The way forward is direct ben-e-fit transfer (DBT) of subsidy. The Government should give subsidy ‘directly’ to the farmers and allow manufacturers to sell at market determined price. This will com-pletely eliminate diversion; when a subsidized product is not available in the marketplace, dubious char-acters will have nothing to prey upon. It will also curb excessive use; when, the product carries the right price tag, farmers will use it judiciously. It will also be possible to target subsidy to poor farmers only.

The contraction in demand from all three sources will yield huge saving in subsidy (quantity effect). There will be an indirect gain as well. India being a major importer of fertilizers, a significant demand-induced cut in import will reduce the international price and in turn, reduce the cost of imports. As a result, subsidy per ton will also decline.

To conclude, DBT will help fis-cal consolidation, reduce trade deficit, reduce imbalance in fertil-izer use, improve soil health, pro-mote sustainable agriculture and environment friendly. There will be losers too: inefficient/high cost pro-ducers who will have to close their shop; dubious traders and corrupt politicians/bureaucrats who make big money from leakage/diversion; rich farmers who are major benefi-ciaries of extant scheme.

DBT of fertilizer subsidy has been on government’s radar since 2012-13. So far, its launch has been stymied due to the clout of these lobbies. Can the Prime Minister sur-mount it?

POINT COUNTERPOINT

I AM NOT SAYING THAT I AM THE CHIEF MINISTER FACE OF THE CONGRESS IN UTTAR PRADESH ELECTIONS. —CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY PRIYANKA GANDHI



THE CONGRESS IS SO MISERABLE THAT ITS CM CANDIDATE FOR UP ELECTIONS CHANGED HER STAND WITHIN A FEW HOURS. —BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY CHIEF MAYAWATI

No breakthrough in military-level Indo-China talks

The stalemate will continue and about 75,000 Indian troops will continue to occupy the positions along the LAC facing the PLA

There was no break-through in the marathon military-level talks between India and China on January 13 with Beijing showing reluctance to complete troop disengagement at a fric-tion point in eastern Ladakh and refusing to discuss steps to diffuse the bigger problems of Depsang and Damchok.

The joint statement stated that “representatives from the defence and foreign affairs establishments of the two sides were present at the meeting” and they had “a frank and in-depth exchange of views for the resolution of the relevant issues” along the LAC in the Western Sector. Both sides “also agreed to consolidate on the previous outcomes and take effective efforts to maintain the security and stability on the



PK VASUDEVA

(The writer is former Senior Professor, International Trade and Member, Vivekananda International Foundation. The views expressed are personal.)

ground in the Western Sector including during winter” and to “stay in close contact and main-tain dialogue via military and diplomatic channels and work out a mutually acceptable resolu-tion of the remaining issues at the earliest” the statement said.

However, China on January 14 said that it hopes “certain individuals” in India will refrain from making “unconstructive remarks” fol-lowing Indian army chief General M M Naravane’s remarks that the threat in east-ern Ladakh has “by no means reduced” and Indian Army will continue to deal with the Chinese military in a “firm and resolute manner”.

China is unpredictable and is now building a bridge across the Pangong Tso as well as new



roads and helipads within its territory in the region for faster troop mobility, as part of its continuing consolidation of military positions facing India amid the 20-month-long con-frontation in eastern Ladakh.

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is further strengthening its military infra-structure with additional troop shelters, gun positions, helipads and jetties in the area between ‘Finger-8’ and its military bases to the east at Sirijap-I and II on

the north bank of the Pangong Lake. The new bridge, in turn, is coming up in the Khurnak Fort area further to the east. The bridge is being construct-ed, with prefabricated struc-tures, well within Chinese ter-ritory. But it will help the PLA move troops and weaponry much faster from the north to the south banks of Pangong Tso and vice versa. China obvious-ly wants to counter India’s quick-reaction capability that saw our soldiers take the Kailash Range heights on the south bank towards end-August 2020.

The LAC runs north to south at Finger-8 in the moun-tainous spurs region of the brackish 134-km long Pangong Tso, two-thirds of which is con-trolled by China as it extends from Tibet to India at an alti-

tude of 13,900-feet.

The PLA’s Sirijap complex is around six km east from the LAC at Finger-8, with the Khurnak area being another 20-km beyond it, as per officers who have served in the area. The PLA had captured the Khurnak area in the late-1950s, and then expanded its control westwards to the Sirijap area during the 1962 war.

With India having better connectivity between the two banks of Pangong Tso, China now wants to address the gap. Khurnak is one of the narrow-est points of the lake around mid-way during its length. Once the bridge is ready, the PLA can avoid the long loop through Rudok to reach the south bank. It will provide the PLA with an alternate route.

The subsequent troop dis-

engagement in February last year saw Indian soldiers pull back westwards to their Dhan Singh Thapa post between Finger-2 and Finger-3 and vacate the Kailash range heights. PLA troops, in turn, withdrew to their old positions east of Finger-8 to establish a buffer or no-patrol zone in-between.

China had refused to com-plete the stalled troop disen-gagement at Patrolling Point-15 in the Hot Springs-Gogra-Kongka La area during the 13th round. The standoff at ChardingNinglung Nallah (CNN) track junction at Demchok and the Depsang Plains is considered even more intractable, as was reported earlier. Consequently, the two armies continue to forward deploy around 50,000 troops

each, along with tanks, how-itzers and surface-to-air missile systems, for the second consec-utive winter along the frontier in the forbidding high-alti-tude area.

Consequently, after the 14th round of military level talks between the two giants, the stalemate will continue and about 75,000 Indian troops will continue to occupy the positions along the LAC facing the PLA. India has started constructing two-lane roads, bridges and permanent struc-tures all along the LAC so that troops movement, tanks, how-itzers and other heavy equip-ment can move smoothly to thwart any adventure of PLA and also for the sustenance of Indian troops in the extreme cold weather conditions.



Atrangi Re is 'beyond Chaka Chak', feels Sara Ali Khan

Sara Ali Khan's *Atrangi Re* clocked in one month of its release today, January 24. The actress took to social media to express her *Chaka Chak* feelings, and also opened up how special the film will always remain to her. Speaking about it, Sara Ali Khan shares with *The Pioneer*, "I can not believe, its already been a month since *Atrangi Re* released.. its definitely overwhelming to see so much love pouring in for the film till now. This film and my character, Rinku, will forever be a part of me somewhere. It has given me a lifetime of memories and will always remain super special. The feedback I have been receiving is humbling and truly motivating, and I'm nothing but grateful for it." She also shared a selfie of hers on social media, on which she wrote, "Happy One Month team #AtrangiRe Feeling beyond #ChakaChak" With *Atrangi Re*'s Rinku, Sara Ali Khan delivered her career's finest performance. Despite being a young star and only four films old, Sara managed to take on a complex character this early in her career and pulled it off with aplomb. The film, helmed by Aanand L Rai, also starred Akshay Kumar and Dhanush in the lead.

Wearing Boba's iconic armor gave me a sense of power: Temuera Morrison

Jon Favreau's newest venture into the Star Wars universe finds the legendary bounty hunter, Boba Fett and his mercenary friend, Fennec Shand, navigating the galaxy's underbelly when they return to Tatooine to stake their claim After decades of being a part of the Star Wars' history, the legendary bounty hunter with a wicked cool helmet — Boba Fett has finally taken the centre stage in his spinoff series *The Book of Boba Fett*. While known for terrifying all those who cross his path, Boba Fett is a highly-loved character within the realms of Star Wars fans. As the episodes of *The Book of Boba Fett* stream on Disney+ Hotstar, actor Temuera Morrison talks about Boba's iconic armor and how it made him feel powerful.


Picture of Anushka Sharma-Virat Kohli's daughter goes viral, couple requests privacy

Actor Anushka Sharma on Monday requested people to avoid clicking or publishing pictures of her daughter Vamika after the baby's face was revealed during the ongoing India-South Africa cricket series. On Sunday evening, the broadcast of the cricket match captured Sharma, with the one-year-old baby on her arms, seen in front of the camera for the first time, cheering for her cricketer-husband Virat Kohli. The camera lingered on the duo for a few seconds, before cutting to visuals from the pitch. Screengrabs from the video with the daughter's face soon went viral on Twitter, as the couple has been fiercely guarded regarding the privacy of their child. Sharma took to Instagram and posted a statement, writing that they were unaware that the camera was on them. "Hi guys! We realise that our daughters images were captured at the stadium yesterday and widely shared thereafter. We want to inform everyone that we were caught off guard and didn't know that the camera was on us. Our stance and request on the matter stays the same. We would really appreciate if Vamika's images are not clicked/ published for reasons we have explained earlier. Thank you," Sharma wrote. The couple had earlier urged the paparazzi to refrain from clicking pictures of their daughter and said in a statement that they have decided to not "expose" the child to social media. "We would request you to kindly not take or carry any content that has our child. We know that you will understand where we are coming from," the couple had written last year.




Bella Hadid quits drinking after seeing her brain scan

Supermodel Bella Hadid vows to never drink alcohol again. Bella shared in a new interview that she had decided to stop drinking, explaining that it had something to do with how alcohol has affected her health, reports *aceshowbiz.com*. Speaking with *InStyle*, Bella shared that her decision to give up on alcohol was made six months ago. The 25-year-old divulged that it became "hard to pick a lot harder to pick up the glass" after her doctor and medical advisor for her non-alcoholic beverage brand Kin Euphorics showed her the effects of alcohol on her brain. "I have done my fair share of drinking," the daughter of Yolanda Hadid claimed. "I loved alcohol and it got to the point where even I started to, you know, cancel nights out that I felt like I wouldn't be able to control myself." She said, "I don't feel the need (to drink alcohol) because I know how it will affect me at 3 in the morning when I wake up with horrible anxiety thinking about that one thing I said five years ago when I graduated high school." Bella continued, "There's just this never-ending effect of, essentially, you know, pain and stress over those few drinks that didn't really do much, you know?"




FUN


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD




REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



NANCY



CROSSWORD

	1	2	3	4	
5					6
7			8		
9				10	
				11	
12	13		14	15	
17				18	
19					

ACROSS

- The first teenage year
- A neck warmer
- This makes bread rise
- Having a meal
- Expensive
- A heat injury
- An artist's workshop
- Precise
- Shave with this
- A sheep minder


DOWN

- Easily burnt breakfast food
- Young child
- Things to play with
- Rub out
- Puts together from separate parts

SOLUTION

B	A	S	E	L	L
A	O	R	E	M	
T	A	C	K		
E	A	S	L		
E	R	A			
I	N	N	E	R	
E	R	A			
S	A	I	S		
R					

GINGER MEGGS





Dil se dil tak with Poonam Dhillon

SHIKHA DUGGAL

This actress, who has worked in the film industry for decades, has witnessed how dramatically the industry has changed over time. Veteran, old hand, expert, and connoisseur are all words that fall short of describing the profusion of films she has contributed to Indian cinema. Who do you

think we're talking about? *The Pioneer* reached out to Noorie actress Poonam Dhillon, who has recently entered the OTT space. This UP woman has done it all: she's been a part of *Miss Young India*, *Femina Miss India*, a controversial reality show called *Bigg Boss*, doing some television shows and venturing into the make-up van business, and acting in renowned films opposite many legendary actors. Now it's time for her to raid the OTT trade.

Since she has been in the industry for many years, Poonam is not in favour of screen tests, the reason she cites is one of her unpleasant experiences. Poonam who doesn't like rushing offers shares with us, "Last year I had a release, on and off I have been working for the movies with utmost devotion. I don't like the practice of rushing offers; I want the right project to come my way. I believe in quality work and acting. I am never randomly opting for the role of a mother, it is tedious. I also get annoyed when asked to do screen tests. I am fine with look tests but not screen tests. I had one experience which I didn't find pleasant. I asked if they wanted to do a look test, and they said no. So I said that the way you are putting it is a little you know what I mean. I also added that many people want to do auditions. But when they tell you they want to do your screen test, I said that go and see the screen. I have done like 120 films now, and if you want to see the recent one then see that too. After 40 years of working, one must understand that at least we as actresses know the basics of acting. A director wanting it is acceptable."

If you are running to be number one, you are in a way asking for anxiety and you are in a way not enjoying what you are doing, feels the actress. "When I started acting, I felt I knew nothing about the craft at that time, so I was busy learning. Whatever I have achieved in life, I got it quite smoothly and I was appreciated for my good work. I always wanted to do better and polish my craft, but not in terms of numbers. I had good luck working with super actors like Sanjeev Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Hassan, and Rishi Kapoor. They were all actors who inspired me," adds the actress who played the central character in *Dil Bekarar*, which made her grab the deal too.

Elaborating further on what made her take up this OTT project, Poonam shares, "My character is a mother to five daughters which was another fascinating reason for me to say a yes to an OTT project. Habib Faisal added more to its element! This OTT project wasn't compromised at all in any manner, there wasn't any point where the producer must have butt in and said 'array, yehnahi karte kyon ki bahut mehnga hora hai'. She is a friend; instead, I was wor-

ried that we were going over budget or something. I have even come across some producers who make commitments and then centric issues start arising; thankfully we had none for *Dil Bekarar*. It was so refreshing to see these youngsters acting alongside! All in all, it was a happy unit. For all the actors of the 80s, shooting the film together was a kind of reunion. We were all catching up after a long time. And, it was so much fun creating the 80s era because the web show is kind of place in the 80s."

Like many people, even Poonam feels that OTT will stay 'pukka' although it cannot replace theatres! "Directors have bifurcated into this mode of streaming without compromising on theatrical releases. Television and OTT have a vast difference! I have worked for TV and I had strict deadlines to meet. OTT in its place has a conscious style of working. The stress of television was too much to take back in those days, frankly. Episodes kept changing based on who was more popular that week whereas OTT is crisp. I tend to express myself more for OTT than TV. OTT subtly gives way to escapade."

Speaking about ageism in movies, Poonam feels it depends on what you are looking for. "If you are still looking at doing romantic roles, like what I did thirty-five years ago, then I would be disappointed. But, if you compare this scenario with Hollywood when it comes to getting meaty roles for women who are forty plus, then options are lesser. With OTT, things are opening up especially for women and men above forties," concludes Poonam Dhillon.

One step at a time

An excited teenager who played third or even fourth fiddle to Kareena Kapoor's Geet in *Jab We Met*, Wamiqa Gabbi has slowly but steadily started charting her course in celebdom.

Appearances in Punjabi films followed and she got recognition for *Tu Mera 22 Main Tera 22*, *Ishq Brandy*, *Nikka Zaildar*, *Parahuna*, *Dil Diyan Gaalan* and *Grahan*, the web series on 1984 riots.

The actress has appeared in many notable Bollywood movies and many other regional films too. Recently, Gabbi played cricketer Madan Lal's wife in the film, *83*. She shares, "I'm grateful to get the chance to be a part of this movie. You know when the film is made on such a historical moment, it's a different kind of happiness. So when Chhabra Ji's (Mukesh Chhabra) office called, nothing came to my mind regarding how that part is and what it is I just wanted to be part of this film and I'm so glad that people loved the film," she giggled.

Talking about the reason she took up the role, she shares, "A film on the 1983 World Cup was a good enough reason for me to be its part. And then, Kabir Khan was directing it! I knew that I wanted to work with him and I was excited to be part of a project like this. Deepika Padukone, who was the producer, played Romi Dev while I was Anu Lal. The two were like best friends and there were several scenes with her. When all this became clear, I was like, I'm quickly doing this."

Gabbi has primarily worked in Punjabi cinema and has done films in other languages too. She says, "I have worked in Punjabi films. And Telugu, Tamil as well as two Malayalam films. So there were no challenges. When you are working with good people, everything works out. Challenges arise when you are working with difficult people and when you feel that it's getting too difficult. But this was very pleasant, you know, the

atmosphere was such that it was good working in this. So, I'm really happy that I was part of *83*."

Further, while talking about *Grahan*, where Gabbi played the role of Manu, she elaborates, "Grahan was the first show, the first project I did after the pandemic. At our meeting, director Ranjan Chandel read paragraphs from the book Chaurasi/84 which touched my heart. He read out Manu and Rishi's love story which gave me goosebumps. While listening, Manu started seeming to be very beautiful and I got so excited that I would get to play this character. And Ranjan, Anshuman, all of us started preparing for our characters and Ranjan sir helped all of us in getting in the skin and bringing out the minute details."

Galwakdi, another Punjabi film released last month. She said, "We shot in London for a month and it was quite a ride. My co-star, Tarsem (Jassar) ji, is a very calm and patient person, I enjoyed working with him." On the challenges that she faced in the film, she expressed, "An accident takes place. I had never done that before so that seemed very difficult to me... but I'm glad that it looks good on screen."

About Galwakdi, to her fans, Gabbi says, "The film is not just a love story or it's not just about two people falling in love. It talks about life, its way and balance." In addition, while talking about choosing roles, she says, "Anything that touches my heart. Anything that I feel, that I should be part of *Yeh mere begair nahi banna chahiye*, to *uss cheez ko mai haan kar deti hun* (Wherever I feel that this should not be made without me, I say, yes)."

Her favourite actor is Irrfan Khan. "Unfortunately I'll never be able to work with him, that was one dream. I'll always remember him, he'll always inspire me as an actor. The kind of rawness that he brought to his character, *vo bohut kam dekhne ko milti hai* (It is not seen often) that rawness, simplicity and the small things that he brought. I would love to work with Ranbir Kapoor. He is one of the finest actors we have in our industry. I'm always excited to see what he has to offer, the kind of films he is doing, the characters that he is playing and what he is doing in those characters, so maybe in future in the next five-six years will get a chance to work with him."

While sharing about her current and forthcoming projects, she says, "Mai is also there of Clean Slate Filmz. It's for Netflix and also stars Sakshi Tanwar. Then *Khufiya* with Vishal (Bhardwaj) sir and Tabu. Working with Vishal sir, one of the best directors, along with Tabu is like a dream come true."



Super foods for the year

Eating seasonal food is the key to a healthy life. Not only does it allow us to benefit from the higher life force energy in such foods, but also adds variety to our meals. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are loaded with nutrients that help boost our immunity and prevent us from the infections that might occur in that season.

However, with technological advancement, preservation of food has become easy and all foods are available throughout the year. The modern generation hardly understands the concept of eating in sync with natural rhythms and its significance towards leading a healthy life.

January: Til

Til keeps the body warm in peak winters. It is loaded with calcium, zinc, omega-3, vitamin E, fiber and antioxidants. It is the go-to food not just for good hair and skin, but also for stronger bones, healthy heart, smoother digestion and balanced blood sugar.

February: Beir

Beir is filled with minerals like potassium, phosphorus, manganese, iron, and zinc which are essential for maintaining a good



heart health. Iron boosts haemoglobin production, which helps ward off anaemia. Beir is easily digestible as it contains dietary fiber, and is great for those who tend to suffer from constipation.

March: Kanji

This seasonal probiotic drink is a tasty health tonic. It improves gut health and boosts immunity as the season changes from winters to summer. Loaded with antioxidants and various vitamins and minerals like vitamin K and C, potassium and manganese, it offers protection against a variety of chronic lifestyle diseases like fatty liver, diabetes, and even cancer.

April: Amaranth

Amaranth is a gluten-free option to wheat. It has peptides and oils with anti-inflammatory properties which relieve pain and inflammation. Amaranth is also a good source of lysine which helps calcium absorption and increases muscle mass.

May: Phalse

With a natural cooling effect, phalse is a hyper-fruit that helps regulate electrolyte imbalance. The unripe portion of the berry helps in cleansing blood and helps heal respiratory problems like sore throat, cold and bronchitis.

June: Shehtoot (Indian Mulberry)

Mulberries boost liver health and purify the blood. They contain iron that is useful to maintain liver health. Also, they are high in vitamin K and calcium, which along with iron help build stronger bone tissues and bones.

July: Bhutta (Indian Corn)

Corn is rich in vitamin A and antioxidants, which helps in maintaining good eye health. Corn is rich in fiber, which is good from the perspective of



weight-loss too. Fiber helps in digestion which facilitates weight-loss. The fiber in corn also helps in reducing cholesterol levels.

August: Apricot

Apricots, with high amounts of vitamins, flavonoids, and potassium, have significant health benefits. Flavonoids are good for your blood vessels and reduce chances of inflammation. Potassium promotes nerve and muscle functioning and supports heart health.

September: Singhaada

Singhaada contains several antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. It has been known to promote hormonal balance in the body and also improve fertility. They are high in potassium and help regulate blood pressure, and boost cardiac health too.

October: Custard Apple

These tasty treats heal ulcers and prevent acidity. The micronutrients in these give skin a smooth tone. Vitamin C and riboflavin, which are plentiful in custard

apple, are good for your eyes, while flavonoids in them are believed to prevent certain types of cancers and tumours.

November: Amla (Indian Gooseberry)

Amla is known for its immunity boosting properties. Diabetics can include this fruit in their diet as it helps in improving insulin sensitivity and also regulates blood sugar levels. It also helps in regulating production of cholesterol and has cardio-protective abilities.

December: Jimikand (Elephant foot Yam)

Jimikand has a hot digestive effect on the body and is ideal for winters. Due to its thermal effect, it decreases mucus while increasing bile and thus aiding digestion. It also helps in improving bone health, electrolyte balance and anaemia.

(The writer, Madhavi Sharma, is Nutritionist and Certified Diabetes Educator, Founder, Informed Health)

Big dent to KL Rahul's long-term captaincy ambitions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A stand-in captain, who seemed stunningly short of ideas, few seniors at the business end of their careers and a dated approach in white-ball cricket -- India's woes during the tour of South Africa were many, turning what started memorably into an eminently forgettable outing.

The signs were ominous even before they departed with now former Test skipper Virat Kohli's much publicised acrimony with top BCCI officials.

The entire episode didn't leave the team in good stead and once there it all went haywire after the opening Test win.

Stand-in ODI captain KL Rahul was then left to do a lot with too little at his disposal against an opposition, which had gained invaluable confidence.

In the end, it turned out to be a nightmare with dark clouds hovering over the future of this Indian team and no sign of 'VIBGYOR' in the Rainbow Nation.

Kohli might not admit but the former captain is going through the toughest phase as a cricketer after having given up captaincy in two out of three formats and being sacked in another.

But Because he is Kohli and in a dif-



ferent class, he managed a fine 79 in the lost third Test, where he looked the best.

He also got two half centuries in ODIs with minimum fuss where he looked more like an accumulator rather than an enforcer that one associates with 'King Kohli'. The meltdown at Cape

Town with his misdirected anger at broadcasters for a DRS gone wrong also tarnished his reputation and letting the game drift away with mindless antics wasn't his finest hour when it came to judging his temperament.

But if one is very blunt, KL Rahul

perhaps blew his chance towards being a long-term option across formats once Kohli relinquished Test captaincy after losing the Test series.

"Did KL Rahul by any stretch look like a captain to you?" a senior BCCI official counter-questioned PTI when asked if he would be considered for the Test captaincy factoring in Rohit Sharma's track record of injuries.

It is understood that coach Rahul Dravid wants to see his namesake as a long-term option and it was evident that he didn't want to put a lot of blame on his captaincy.

"He did more than a decent job and a lot about captaincy is how your players execute the skills. We were short on the ODI side. He will grow constantly and get better as he leads more," Dravid's observation drifted towards the old adage of a captain being as good as his team.

But what would hurt Rahul more is his approach in batting which was more about self preservation. The 55 off 79 balls in the second ODI deserves more criticism for the balls wasted and strike not rotated rather than the runs accumulated by him.

It is for sure that Rahul, if he has to be in the white-ball scheme of things,

will have to bat in the middle-order and be a finisher.

His bowling changes didn't work in the middle overs and after watching Temba Bavuma make some inspired moves like starting the attack with Aiden Markram, he introduced Ravichandran Ashwin early in one game but that was more of a reactive move rather than a pro-active one.

What stuck out like a sore thumb is the fact that even the biggest of Proteas fans couldn't have imagined that a team facing huge transitional problems and a coach due to face a commission inquiring into his racial misconduct, would turn the heat on and win five out of six international matches and that too at a canter.

The South Africans played good cricket but were liberally helped by an Indian team that didn't walk the talk on its proclaimed cricketing philosophies.

There wasn't any fearlessness for better part of the tour, no innovative, out of box thinking and at times, they seemed short on execution of skills.

Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane showed some spark in the second innings of the second Test but for the better part, they were not playing their positive game.



Balance of ODI side an issue, accepts head coach Dravid

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India's head coach Rahul Dravid had no hesitation in admitting that the ODI squad lacked balance with the likes of Hardik Pandya and Ravindra Jadeja unavailable to execute their all-round skills at numbers six and seven respectively.

India lost the three-match ODI series 0-3 and Dravid answered a range of questions covering the poor show in middle-overs both in batting and bowling, KL Rahul's nascent captaincy career and how Venkatesh Iyer is not being thought of as a top-order batter.

"Yeah, we understand the template. Obviously, a large part of the template is also dependant on the balance of your squad," Dravid replied when asked if the Indian team needs to revisit its template in 50-over cricket.

"I think if you are a little bit honest, some of the guys who help us balance the squad out and give us those all-round options at Nos 6, 7 and 8 are probably not here, and available for selection," Dravid said, clearly talking about the absence of Pandya, who is trying to get his bowling fitness back and Jadeja, who is recuperating from a knee injury.

"Hopefully, when they (Hardik and Jadeja) come back, it will give us lot more depth, it allows us then to probably play in a slightly different style," Dravid made it clear as to what he missed in the series.

Dravid's assessment of his namesake's leadership skills was pretty lavish as he wanted people to factor in that he could only do as much with the kind of squad he had at his disposal. "I thought he did a good job. Not easy to be on wrong side of the result. He is just starting out as captain," he said.

".....And he will learn and a large part of captaincy is execution of skills by your players and quality of side you have got. We were a little bit short on the ODI side of things and I thought he did a very decent job, someone who is growing and will constantly be improving and get better as a captain."

There was no denying that India's batting lacked momentum in all three games especially between overs 20 to 40. "We certainly could do better with batting in middle overs," Dravid said.

"But having said that, even South Africa who batted first on two occasions scored 290 as well and if I think back and look at the 30th over in both those games, we should have chased them down.

"We didn't because we played some poor shots and we didn't play some smart cricket at critical situations," he said without naming anyone.

Dravid isn't someone who believes in taking names but when he spoke about demanding performances in lieu of security and extended run given to some middle-order batters, he obviously meant Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant.

Smriti Mandhana named ICC women's Cricketer of Year

IANIS ■ DUBAI

India opener Smriti Mandhana on Monday was named ICC women's Cricketer of the Year for 2021. After being named in the ICC's women's T20I team of the year, Smriti has now won the Rachael Heyhoe-Flint Trophy awarded to the ICC women's cricketer of the year for the second time after 2018.

The left-handed opener beat competition from Tammy Beaumont of England, Lizelle Lee of South Africa and Gaby Lewis of Ireland to clinch the honour. Smriti has also become the second women's cricketer after Australia's Ellyse Perry to win the honour more than once.

"I am truly honoured for receiving the prestigious Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year 2021. I am grateful to my teammates, my coaches, my family, friends and fans who believed in my potential and supported me in this journey," said Smriti in her acceptance of the award.

Despite India enduring a difficult 2021, Smriti stock continued to rise this year, scoring 855 runs in 22 international matches at an average of 38.86 with one century and five half-centuries.

In the limited-overs series against South Africa where India won just two of the eight matches at home, Smriti played a major role in both wins. She made 80 not out as India chased down 158 in the second ODI that helped them level the series and scored 48 not out to win the final T20I.



Smriti then played a sublime knock of 78 in the first innings of the one-off Test against England at Bristol that ended in a draw. She played an important knock of 49 in India's only win in the ODI series. Her 15-ball 29 and fifty in the T20I series went in vain though as India fell short in both the matches and lost the series 2-1.

"A recognition of such high class from the global governing body of cricket in an exceptional and difficult year will motivate me to continue to better my game and contribute to Team India's success going forward. I look forward to 2022 with a clear focus on winning the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022 in New Zealand as we continue to prepare as a team and unit," added Smriti. Smriti was in good touch in the multi-format series against Australia, starting with the ODI series where she scored 86 in the second match. She compiled a brilliant century in the only Test (the first of her career), and was awarded the Player of the Match for the same.

Lucknow IPL team to be called Lucknow Super Giants

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow franchise of the Indian Premier League will be called Lucknow Super Giants after its owners announced the name chosen by its fans.

The official IPL team of Lucknow, owned by RPGS Group, decided to take public opinions from its fans and the name was shared by owner Sanjiv Goenka in a video message on Monday.

"Thank you so much for your overwhelming response to the 'Naam banao naam kamao' contest. Lakhs and lakhs of people responded, based on that we are very happy to choose the name for the Lucknow IPL team," Goenka said in his message, while revealing the team name.

"And the name that we have chosen based on your recommendations is Lucknow Super Giants. Thank you so much for your response and love and continue to give us your blessings in the future as well."

The franchise owners had launched a consumer engagement campaign on social media on January 3 to decide the name of the new IPL side.

Lucknow and Ahmedabad will be the two new teams in the IPL from this year as the lucrative T20 tournament expanded its wings to become a 10-team contest.



India fined for slow over-rate after losing third ODI

IANIS ■ CAPE TOWN

India have been fined 40 per cent of their match fees for maintaining a slow over-rate against South Africa in the third and final ODI of the series in Cape Town on Sunday. In the match, India were bowled out for 283 in 49.2 overs while chasing 288 at the Newlands Cricket Ground, which meant South Africa won the series 3-0.

"Andy Pycroft of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after KL Rahul's side was ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration," said the International Cricket Council (ICC) in a statement.

In accordance with Article 2.22 of

the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

Rahul pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing. On-field umpires Marais Erasmus and Bongani Jele, third umpire Allahudien Palekar and fourth umpire Adrien Holdstock levelled the charge. After Quinton de Kock's 124 propelled South Africa to 287 in 49.5 overs, Shikhar Dhawan and Virat Kohli made 61 and 65 respectively while Deepak Chahar made a quick-fire 54 off just 34 balls. But the Indian trio's efforts went in vain as they fell short of getting over the line by four runs.

World Cup dreams over for Indian women football players

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For a bunch of Indian women football players hailing from humble back-grounds, life in the last one year has revolved around playing in the AFC Asian Cup and with that taking a shot at the elusive FIFA World Cup but that dream lay shattered after COVID-19 knocked them out of the tournament.

From captain Ashalata Devi to the youngest in the squad, Hemam Shilky Devi, the Asian Cup was a once in a lifetime opportunity and all of them were looking forward to qualify for the quarterfinals, which would have also taken them to the 2023 World Cup, before they were left "heartbroken". If not a World Cup berth, they would have made it to the intercontinental play-offs which would have been historic



in Indian football.

But it is now in the realm of 'ifs' and 'buts' after 12 players tested positive for the virus and the match against Chinese Taipei was called off. The Asian Football Confederation on Monday confirmed that India are deemed to have withdrawn

from the continental showpiece. "Absolutely devastated," said senior player and goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan aptly capturing the sentiment within the squad right now.

"In the last one year, our lives have revolved around the Asian Cup. Our sole aim was to

qualify for quarterfinals and take a shot at the World Cup," said another player.

"We are extremely sad and disappointed at the moment. But it is not the end of the world and the hope that we will get chances to achieve this in future if we keep on doing well is giving us solace."

Many of the players have fought tremendous odds to reach at this level.

Some took up to the sport as it was "cheaper" to pursue while others had to go against the will of their parents and community. Skipper Ashalata faced opposition from her family. Ditto was the case of Shilky, who is all of 16 and had the distinction of being the tournament's youngest player.

The journey wasn't easy for any of them and this setback is definitely going to cause turmoil in their minds.

National Poker Series returns with its 2nd edition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's most notable poker series - National Poker Series India is back with its 2nd edition in 2022. PokerBaazi.com, which is India's biggest poker platform, will continue as the hosting partner for the NPS. The series, scheduled to begin from March 6, has announced a prize pool of 18.5 crores for 84 tournaments across 15 days. With 252 medals on the line to be awarded to podium finishers in all 84 tournaments, and three NPS Podium medals for the three finishers with highest medal tallies, this year's National Poker Series will yet again have Golden Rush as one of its marquee events. Additionally, NPS Podium finishers will get to play the world's biggest international poker event in Las Vegas, USA. The qualifier tournaments, also known as satellite tournaments, have already commenced from January 15.

Babar Azam, Joe Root, Shaheen Afridi bag top honours

PTI ■ DUBAI

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was on Monday named ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year while England Test captain Joe Root took home the top honours in the red-ball category, beating competition from, among others, Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin. Babar's team-mate and left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi won the Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year. He was bestowed the honour for taking 78 wickets across formats in 36 internationals at an average of 22.20 in 2021.

The 27-year-old Babar scored 405 runs in six games at an average of 67.50 in 2021. He was the second-



highest run-scorer with 228 runs and was the Player of the Match in both of Pakistan's wins in the 2-1 series victory against South Africa.

The architect of Pakistan's chase of 274 in the first ODI, Babar made a century and laid the foundation with an 82-ball 94 in the final

ODI where the visitors posted 320 batting first.

He was the lone warrior for Pakistan when they were swept by England 3-0. He accumulated 177 runs in three games but found no support as none of the other batters managed to score more than 100 in the series.

Alize Cornet reaches quarterfinals at her 63rd Grand Slam

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Alize Cornet dropped to her knees on the hard blue court, clasped her hands and took a few moments to let it sink in.

In her 17th trip to the Australia Open, her 63rd run at a Grand Slam, and two days after celebrating her 32nd birthday, Cornet finally qualified for the quarterfinals at one of the four major events in tennis.

Cornet recovered after a second-set meltdown in the hot Melbourne sun on Monday to advance to the last eight at the Australian Open with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 win over two-time major champion Simona Halep.

"It's never too late to try again!" Cornet said in her on-court TV interview. "To be in my first quarterfinal. It's a dream come true.

"The journey goes on. I still

can't believe it."

Cornet led by a set and 3-1 before losing five consecutive games and 16 straight points as Halep took the match to a decider.

The match was 2-2 in the third set after Cornet held a service game at love, saying "allez" after every shot she hit.

Halep got a break-point chance two games later with a forehand down the line that just caught the outside of the paint and which Cornet could barely believe. She saved it and held serve, then broke Halep's serve for a 4-3 lead that set her on course for the quarterfinals.

Cornet will next play Danielle Collins, the No. 27 seed from the United States who beat 19th-seeded Elise Mertens 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 in an almost three-hour match to open play on Rod Laver Arena. Collins was a semifinalist in Australia in 2019.



Cornet made her main draw Grand Slam singles debut as a wild-card entry at the 2005 French Open. She lost five previous fourth-round appearances but had gone close to reaching the quarterfinals before, having match points in the fourth round in Australia in 2009 before losing to eventual runner-up Dinara Safina.

With a ranking of 61 — 50 lower than her career-high No. 11 — Cornet came into the 2022 season acknowledging retirement must be close and that it was now or never for a Grand Slam breakthrough.

"I don't know if it's helping," she said.

"I just told myself that if it should happen, then it will happen. Maybe leave it in the hands of fate, destiny, I don't know."

The marquee men's match was

on Margaret Court Arena, where U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev beat 70th-ranked Maxime Cressy 6-2, 7-6 (4), 6-7 (4), 7-5. The second-ranked Medvedev is trying to become the first man in the Open era to win his second major singles title in the next Grand Slam event. He's now potentially three wins from achieving that.

Medvedev was a runner-up in Australia last year but avenged that with a win over Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open final. Djokovic isn't defending his Australian Open title after being deported on the eve of the year's first major for failing to meet the country's strict COVID-19 vaccination criteria.

Cressy's serve-and-volley style created some frustrations for Medvedev, who said late in the fourth set that this was the "most

unlucky day I've ever had in my life."

His luck changed quickly. After saving eight break-point chances in the set, Cressy was broken in that game and Medvedev served out at love.

He will next play ninth-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime, who beat 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic 2-6, 7-6 (7), 6-2, 7-6 (4). Medvedev beat the Canadian in the semifinals at last year's U.S. Open. No. 11 Jannik Sinner ended Australia's last hope in the men's draw when he beat No. 32 Alex de Minaur 7-6 (3), 6-3, 6-4.

The temperature hit 34 degrees Celsius (93 degrees F) on Day 8, with extra breaks allowed for players to cope with the heat.

Cornet used bags of ice to cool down her head during changeovers, and draped cold towels over her neck.



Major postponed again!



Actor Adivi Sesh's first pan-India film *Major*, which was scheduled for a theatrical release on February 11, has been postponed owing to the aggravation of the covid situation and curfew/limitations in most parts of the country. The makers have announced the news officially.

"Owing to the aggravation of the covid situation and curfew/limitations in most parts of the country, the release of *Major* stands postponed. We would announce a new release date soon. Please adhere to all covid protocols and stay safe. Our nation isn't safe, till each one of us is safe," reads the official statement," said the makers.

Directed by Sashi Kiran Tikka, the film was shot simultaneously in Telugu, Hindi and it will also be released in Malayalam. The film's musical promotions kick-started recently with first single *Hrudayama* was unveiled recently. The song became a sensation. The visually stunning teaser shared earlier by the team struck a chord with the audience generating anticipation for the film. However, it stands postponed now.

Bringing to screen the untold story of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, the multilingual film *Major* traces the journey of Major Sandeep from childhood, teenage, glorious years in the army to the tragic events of the Mumbai attack where he martyred, touching upon the different aspects of his being. Sobhita Dhulipala, Saiee Manjrekar, Prakash Raj, Revathi and Murli Sharma are the other prominent cast of the film produced by Sony Pictures Films India in association with Mahesh Babu's GMB Entertainment and A+S Movies.

Natural Star Nani's rom-com entertainer *Ante Sundaraniki* being directed

by Vivek Athreya under the prestigious Mythri Movie banner is gearing up for its theatrical release in summer. The film's entire shooting has been wrapped up on Monday.

"It's a wrap for the roller coaster movie of the year. *#AnteSundaraniki*," announced Nani who has also shared a small video from the last day of the sets.

The first look of *Ante Sundaraniki* was released on New Year and Nani surprised with his atypical and funny look. Kasthuri Poorna Venkata Sesha Sai Pawana Rama Sundara Prasad is his character's name in the movie. *Ante Sundaraniki* marks launch pad of Nazriya Nazim Fahadh in Telugu. Niketh Bommi cranks the camera, while Raviteja Girijala is the editor for the film.

Nani wraps up *Ante Sundaraniki* shoot



Vikram's next heads to OTT



Mahaan, will see Vikram and his son Dhruv sharing screen space. While they had plans to release it in theatres, owing to the increasing Covid cases, the makers of the film have decided to release it on Amazon Prime Videos in three languages — Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam. It will be released on February 10. Karthik Subbaraju, known for films like *Jagame Thandhiram*, *Petta*, *Pizza*, and others, directed this action thriller.

Under the umbrella

of Seven Screen Studio, Lalit Kumar financed the film. Vikram and Dhruv Vikram star in the film, which also has Vani Bhojan, Bobby Simha, Simran Sananth, and Deepak Paramesh in supporting roles. The cinematography was done by Shreyas Krishna, the editing was done by Vivek Harshan, and the musical songs were sung by Santhosh Narayanan.

Despite the failure of his last films, *Jagame Thandhiram*, on Netflix and *Arjun Reddy*, at the box office, filmmaker Subbaraju is on the edge to gain fame through his next film *Mahaan*.

Lakshmi Manchu ventures into metaverse, buys 'Azuki' NFT



Telugu actress Lakshmi Manchu has taken her opening step into metaverse, with the purchase of her first non-fungible token (NFT). *Azuki*, an iconic manga character, is her first NFT purchase.

"The ownership of the *Azuki* NFT will allow me exclusive rights to content that can be opened up later for audiences who own *Azukis*. This content could be in the form of games, short stories and other digital assets," informed Lakshmi.

NFTs are a class of digital assets that can be transacted via blockchain technology on special platforms. They are non-interchangeable, unlike crypto currency, which are fungible or interchangeable.

Lakshmi said she had been wanting to explore the new meta world for some time. "I was very nervous as this is my first NFT and I can't say I know what this new meta world is, but it sure is exciting and I'm in love with my character," she added.

My daughters are far more superior than any man: Khushbu Sundar

Stating that she took immense pride in her daughters, actress and politician Khushbu Sundar on Monday said that they are "far more superior than any man, intellectually as well as emotionally". The actress, who took to Twitter to express her thoughts on the occasion of the 'Girl Child Day', wrote, "As we celebrate #girlchild-day today, we take immense pride to say we have two daughters. They are far more superior than any man, intellectually as well as

emotionally." "Celebrate your girl child. Welcome her with open arms and heart. Remember she is part of you just as your son." Union Minister for Women & Child Development Smriti Z. Irani too tweeted about encouraging and empowering girls. She said, "Educate, Encourage, Empower! Today is the day to renew our commitment towards providing equal opportunities to our girls. On National Girl Child Day, as we celebrate accomplishments of our daughters, we pledge to bridge the gender divide to build an inclusive & equal society."



Panja Vaishnav Tej's next titled *Ranga Ranga Vaibhavanga*



Panja Vaishnav Tej is captivating the attention of everyone by proving his prowess in a variety of films. According to the latest reports, his new entertainer's film has been titled *Ranga Ranga Vaibhavanga*. The film is directed by Gireesaaya, who

also directed *Arjun Reddy* in Tamil. In the film, Vaishnav Tej is romancing Ketika Sharma. With Vaishnav Tej and Ketika Sharma enticing all in a romantic manner with a butterfly kiss, the teaser piqued attention. The film is produced by BVSN Prasad and is presented by

Bapineedu under Sri Venkateswara Cine Chitra banner on a big budget. The film has music by Devi Sri Prasad, and Shamdat Sainuddin is the cinematographer. Vaishnav Tej made a dream start with Buchchi Babu Sana's rustic love storey *Uppena*, in which he romanced Kriti Shetty.