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10TH CLASS IS  
VERY SPECIAL TO  
ME: AVIKA

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## INDIA'S 1ST WOMAN RAFALE PILOT SHIVANI IN R-DAY AIR FORCE TABLEAU

The country's first woman Rafale fighter jet pilot Shivangi Singh was part of the Indian Air Force tableau at the Republic Day parade on Wednesday. She is only the second woman fighter jet pilot to be part of the Indian Air Force (IAF) tableau. Last year, Flight Lieutenant Bhawna Kanth became the first female fighter jet pilot to be part of the IAF tableau. Ms Singh, who is from Varanasi, joined the IAF in 2017 and was commissioned in the IAF's second batch of women fighter pilots. She had been flying MiG-21 Bison aircraft before flying the Rafale.

## IMMUNE RESPONSE TO OMICRON EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALISES DELTA TOO

An ICMR study has demonstrated that individuals infected with Omicron have significant immune response which could neutralise not only the Omicron, but also other variants of concern, including the most prevalent Delta variant. It suggests that the immune response induced by the Omicron could effectively neutralise the Delta variant, making the re-infection with Delta variant less likely, thereby displacing the Delta as dominant strain, the study said emphasising upon the need for Omicron-specific vaccine strategy.

## VIRAT, ELITE HORSE OF PRESIDENT'S GUARD, RETIRES; GETS PAT

Virat, the President's Bodyguard Commandant's black horse, retired from his years-long service after the 73rd Republic Day parade today. Virat was the mount of President's Bodyguard Commandant Colonel Anup Tiwary and took part 13 times in Republic Day parades. President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh patted and bid farewell to the magnificent horse after the parade. Virat was awarded the Chief of the Army Staff Commendation on the eve of Army Day on January 15.

## RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE 'WILL CHANGE THE WORLD': JOE BIDEN

The United States on Tuesday warned Moscow of damaging sanctions, including measures personally targeting Vladimir Putin, if it moves ahead with an invasion of Ukraine, as Russian combat troops massing around the pro-Western country launched new exercises. Tension appeared to be increasing, with the White House saying the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine "remains imminent." Warning that such a move would prompt "enormous consequences" and even "change the world," President Joe Biden said he would consider adding direct sanctions on Putin to a raft of measures being drawn up.

# Govt issues notifications proposing 13 new districts

Proposed districts are named after NTR, Alluri, Lord Balaji, Annamayya, Sri Satya Sai

SNV SUDHIR  
VIJAYAWADA

In a tearing hurry and with lightning speed, the Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy government issued gazette notifications for formation of 13 new districts in addition to the existing 13 in Andhra Pradesh at midnight of Tuesday.

If everything goes well as planned by the government, Andhra Pradesh will have 26 districts by April 2, Ugadi, the Telugu New Year day.

In the notifications, the government has sought objections or suggestions from those residing in the proposed districts. The objections or suggestions should be submitted in writing to the

Collectors of the existing districts within 30 days.

Though re-organising of the districts has been on the cards since quite some time in line with Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy's poll promise, the government sprang a surprise on Tuesday. Making each parliamentary segment a district was Jagan's poll promise in 2019.



**Names of districts: Jagan plays it to the gallery**

The Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy government has also tried to make a strong political point with the names of the proposed districts. As promised by the Chief Minister in 2018, his government has now proposed to name Krishna district after legendary actor, former Chief Minister of AP and TDP founder N T Rama Rao.

Not Machilipatnam, Vijayawada named after NTR

Instead of Machilipatnam parliament segment, as expected earlier, the State government has proposed to name Vijayawada parliament segment after legendary actor and TDP founder N T Rama Rao. Interestingly, NTR's native village Nimmakuru falls in Machilipatnam parliament constituency.



Sathya Sai devotees thank Jagan

The devotees of renowned spiritual leader Sathya Sai are celebrating the government's proposal to carve out Sri Sathya Sai district. Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust's managing trustee RJ Rathnakar stated that it was a historic day, and profusely thanked the Chief Minister for conferring the 'great honour'.



State needs to pass Centre's test

The State government may have to pass a test for its proposal to re-organise the districts to be implemented as planned. The Centre had, in the past, frozen the activity of redrawing the bound-aries of the districts and villages across the country in the wake of the latest population census. As the census could not be taken up as per schedule due to Covid pan-demic, whether the Centre would accept the proposal by the State government after the due procedure is followed here or not has to be seen.

| NEW DISTRICTS         | HEADQUARTERS  | NEW DISTRICTS | HEADQUARTERS       | NEW DISTRICTS | HEADQUARTERS | NEW DISTRICTS | HEADQUARTERS |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Srikakulam            | Srikakulam    | Krishna       | Machilipatnam      | Guntur        | Guntur       | Ananthapuram  | Ananthapuram |
| Vizianagaram          | Vizianagaram  | NTR           | Vijayawada         | Bapatla       | Bapatla      | Sri Satyasai  | Puttaparthi  |
| Manyam                | Parvathipuram | Kona Seema    | Amalapuram         | Palnadu       | Narsaraopeta | YSR Kadapa    | Kadapa       |
| Alluri Sitharama Raju | Paderu        | East Godavari | Raja-mahendravaram | Prakasam      | Ongole       | Annamayya     | Rayachoti    |
| Visakhapatnam         | Visakhapatnam |               | Bheemavaram        | SPS Nellore   | Nellore      | Chittoor      | Chittoor     |
| Anakapalli            | Anakapalli    | West Godavari | Eluru              | Kurnool       | Kurnool      | Sri Balaji    | Tirupati     |
| Kakinada              | Kakinada      | Eluru         |                    | Nandyal       | Nandyal      |               |              |

## GST authorities arrest 27-yr old for issuing bogus Rs 1,000 cr bills

PNS ■ MUMBAI

An 'accountant' has been arrested for allegedly issuing bogus bills of Rs 1,000 crore and committing an input tax credit (ITC) fraud of Rs 181 crore, GST authorities said on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old man, who had studied till class 12 and worked as an accountant and GST consultant, was arrested by officers of the Palghar CGST Commissionerate of the Mumbai Zone, as per an official statement.

Investigations into the matter started based on specific inputs received from data mining and data analysis, which pointed to M/s Nithilan Enterprises being engaged in availing and passing of fake ITC by issuing fake invoices without receipt of goods or services, it said.

It later transpired that the accountant -- whose identity has not been disclosed -- had stolen the identity of one of his clients for committing the GST fraud for monetary gains, the statement said.

Confronted with material evidence, the accountant confessed to the offence of issuing more than Rs 1,000 crore of bogus bills and availing of fake ITC of Rs 181 crore, after which he was placed under arrest on Tuesday.

# Dolo's popularity has not hit city paracetamol makers

NAVEENA GHANATE  
HYDERABAD

The paracetamol tablets distributed by the Telangana government to fight the Covid-19 pandemic are 'Made in Hyderabad' by a city-based pharmaceutical company named Granules India.

The company is committed to supplying 16 crore paracetamol tablets to the Telangana government free of cost.

Krishna Prasad Chigurupati, the founder of Granules India said, "Granules has supplied around 7.5 crore paracetamol tablets till date which costs around Rs 4.5 crore. We will continue to supply them as committed."

The drugmaker claims that the popularity of Dolo 650 is not hindering the manufacturing of



The drugmaker claims that the popularity of Dolo 650 is not hindering the manufacturing of Paracetamol. Krishna Prasad said, "Granules primarily focuses on exports to North America and Europe, our primary markets. Paracetamol constituted around 30 per cent of the overall sales of the company in FY 2021."

Paracetamol.

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constituted around 30 per cent of the overall sales of the company in FY 2021."

# Committee on movie ticket prices to meet on Feb 2

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Actor Chiranjeevi is likely to be invited to the meeting with the committee to resolve the movie ticket price issue that has been scheduled on February 2. The committee has sent an invite to

the exhibitors, distributors and the members of Cine Goers Association.

Earlier, two meetings were held in this regard.

Chiranjeevi said the CM had revealed that he would meet the committee during a recent lunch

meeting.

Meanwhile, the case in connection with the ticket price issue will be heard by the AP High Court on February 10.

Doubts have been expressed over Chiranjeevi attending the meeting as he was infected from Covid.

## TN CM to soon launch All India Federation for Social Justice

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Wednesday said he will soon launch an All India Federation For Social Justice and strive to achieve the principles of federalism and social justice at the national level.

This federation will be adequately represented by leaders of the depressed classes from all the states, he said while addressing a national webinar on "Taking forward the struggle for social justice and joint national programme (JNP) for social justice movement," held on Republic Day under the aegis of various social organisations across the country.

"Those truly concerned about social justice will be part of it.

## 9 non-BJP ruled states oppose Centre's proposal on IAS officers' central deputation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as nine non-BJP ruled states have opposed the Centre's proposal that gives it an overriding power while deciding on central deputation of IAS officers, whereas eight others have given their consent, officials said on Wednesday.

A reminder will soon be sent to the states and Union Territories which have not yet responded to the proposal on making changes in the relevant service rules, they said.

Odisha, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan have raised their voice against the amendments, the officials said.

On the other hand, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur,

Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have given their consent, they added.

Karnataka and Meghalaya had opposed the proposal initially sent to them last month but are expected to send a revised proposal, the officials said, adding that Bihar had also opposed the move earlier.

While the nine states opposed the suggested changes saying they were against the federal structural of the country, the Centre has defended its proposal asserting that the states are not sparing sufficient number of IAS officers for deputation which is affecting its functioning, the officials said.

Tableaux win hearts of guests

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month &amp; Paksam:

Pausa, Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Dashami : Jan 27 04:34 AM to Jan 28 02:16 AM

Bedeahi : Jan 28 02:16 AM to Jan 28 11:35 PM

Nakshatram : Vishaka : Jan 28 10:05 AM to Jan 27 08:51

Anuradha : Jan 27 08:51 AM to Jan 28 07:10 AM

Rahukalam : 1:52 PM to 3:16 PM

Yamagandam : 6:52 AM to 8:16 AM

Varjyam : 12:34 PM to 02:03 PM

Gulika : 9:40 AM to 11:04 AM

Amritakalam : 09:30 PM to 10:59 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:06 PM to 12:51 PM

VIJAYAWADA

WEATHER

Forecast: PARTLY CLOUDY

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 6:41 AM

Sunset: 6:05 PM

Updated JANUARY 26, 2021 5:00 PM

# Employees see conspiracy by govt not to pay salaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Continuing their ongoing stir, the government employees on Wednesday handed over symbolic memorandums to the statues of Dr B R Ambedkar across the State. While participating in the protest programme in Vijayawada, one of the key members of PRC Struggle Committee, Bopparaju Venkateswarlu, opined that the government had been conspiring so that the employees would not receive salaries for December and playing tricks in the name of CFMS,

HRMS etc.

He said that they had already requested the government to pay them salaries as per the old scales. He wondered if the PRC was announced to increase or decrease the salaries of the government employees.

He alleged that the government was trying to create unrest among the employees by not paying salaries and also derail the agitation movement they had launched against the new

# Employees are integral part of Govt: Guv

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and other dignitaries attended the 73rd Republic Day celebrations held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) stadium here on Wednesday. Governor Harichandan hoisted the tricolour, reviewed the Republic Day parade and received the guard of honour from the contingents.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said that the foundation for the 75 years of flourishing democracy stemmed from the foundation laid by the spirit of freedom fighters and the Constitution.

The Governor said the employees were an integral part of the government and vital to provide various welfare benefits and services to the public, especially those



belonging to the poor, vulnerable and downtrodden sections. In spite of financial difficulties, the government had sanctioned an unprecedented 27 per cent IR, which has cost an additional burden of Rs

17,265 crore on the government. In spite of the Covid-induced economic distress, the government was implementing the 11th Pay Revision Commission, which was going to put an additional financial

burden of Rs 10, 247 crore on the government's exchequer, he said.

Governor Harichandan said the government had given a fitment benefit of 23 per cent to the employees. "In addition to this, ours is the only government in the entire country to increase the retirement age of government employees to 62 years. Gratuity has also been increased from Rs 12 lakh to Rs 16 lakh."

The Governor said in line with the election promise for the delivery of more efficient services to people and for good governance, they would be creating 13 more districts in the State of Andhra Pradesh on the auspicious day of Ugadi. Two districts will be exclusively for the tribal population. With this, the total tally of districts in the State will go up to 26.



The Nation is turning 75 and it is preparing to celebrate 'Azadika Amrit Mahotsavam'. This journey of 75 years has been a spectacular one. From an impoverished nation, it is today the world's third largest economy. India is today one of the leading countries in Information Technology, Space Science, Defence and Pharmaceuticals. India has shown the world its capability by vaccinating more than one and a half billion people in record time. Under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi India is recognised today as a super power.

One area in which the country needs to utilise its resources is sports. Despite being the world's second most populous country with 70 per cent of its citizens young, India ends up at the bottom of the Medals Tally in international competitions like Olympics. Barring a few team sports like cricket and hockey and flashes of individual brilliance in games like badminton, shooting, tennis, wrestling, boxing, etc., the

# India@Sports superpower

**One area in which the country needs to utilise its resources is sports. Despite being the world's second most populous country with 70 per cent of its citizens young, India ends up at the bottom of the Medals Tally in international competitions like Olympics.**

Central and State Governments. Prime Minister Modi interacting with sportspersons before events, congratulating them personally on winning medals and later felicitating them has given a lot of encouragement to sportspersons. Now, Olympic medal winners are also treated as national heroes. Many new training academies have been added in the recent past along with world-class coaching. Some actions that we could

take are:  
i) The country should focus on some key sports where India has been performing well, eg. badminton, wrestling, boxing, weightlifting, shooting, archery, hockey, throws (javelin, shot-put) etc. We need to identify sports where India can do well, for eg. track and field items.  
ii) The early spotting of talent should be done by organising "talent hunt" competitions in three age groups: 6 – 10



AJAY JAIN, IAS

years; 10 – 14 years and 14 – 18 years.  
iii) For each sport, top 50-100 children and teenagers should be identified and then imparted coaching.  
iv) Central Ministries/PSUs, State Governments and private com-

panies should join hands to develop sports infrastructure for training the spotted talent.  
v) Each sport should be adopted by one Central Ministry or PSUs of that Ministry; one of the State Governments and one private company. The Orissa Government adopting hockey helped the Indian men's hockey team tremendously and it won a bronze medal in the recent Olympics.  
vi) All the three above should develop world class academies and coaching in the identified sport. This would include upgrading existing infrastructure.  
vii) For developing new infrastructure, the State Government shall provide land and infrastructure; the Central Government/PSU shall fund the cost of building and equipment while the private compa-

ny shall look after operation and maintenance of the Academy.  
viii) World-class coaches should be engaged. Top Indian players who have excelled in that sport should be engaged as coaches.  
ix) The players who pass out from these Academies shall be Brand Ambassadors of the concerned Central Government/PSU/State Ministry/PSU/State Government and the private company. This would encourage the above Ministries/State Government and the private sector to adopt the sport. Already, spending in sports is part of Corporate Social Responsibility.  
x) Domestic tournaments like the IPL, Hockey League, Kabaddi, Badminton, etc. should be conducted in all sports. International players should also be invited to take part in such tournaments. The experience of conducting IPL has shown that such tournaments go a long way in promoting talent.  
xi) The concerned federa-

tions should also be involved in that sport. Federations should be kept away from politics and only professionals should be involved in those federations.  
xii) Sports science and sports medicine should also be promoted. Top-class physiotherapists and personnel should be engaged.  
xiii) The above Central Ministries/PSUs, State Governments and private companies should also take the responsibility of developing sports infrastructure in schools and colleges.  
xiv) India should aim to achieve top five ranks by 2047 when India turns 100. (100 Medals by 2047) should be our motto.  
Initiatives like these will help provide the groundwork to make sports a viable career for Indians and put India on its way to sporting glory. Hopefully, we will see not one, but hundreds of Neeraj Chopras in coming years.

(The views expressed are personal)

## Tableaux win hearts of guests

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the Republic Day celebrations held at Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium, 16 tableaux were exhibited to showcase the development and welfare schemes of the State government.

Of the 16 tableaux, the one by the Agriculture Department displayed the services of Rythu Bharosa Kendras. The tableau of the Fisheries Department was based on the Matsyakanya Bharosa, aqua laboratories, and other programmes. The tableau of the Animal Husbandry Department explained the benefits of Jagananna Pala Velluva.

The two tableaux of the Education Department highlighted the importance of Nadu-Nedu and Amma Vodi schemes. The other tableaux showcased Jagananna Vidya Deevena, Vasathi Deevena, Aarogyasri, Nadu-Nedu, and



the medical services being extended to people during the Covid pandemic through the Medical and Health Department.

The tableaux of the Village/Ward Secretariats showcased 541 services being provided by the government. The Housing Department's tableaux portrayed the mod-

els on Jagananna Sampoorna Gruha Hakku (One Time Settlement) and Jagananna housing colonies. Anganwadis, Pension Kanuka, Cheyutha, Aasara, MSMEs, Clean Andhra Pradesh and Jagananna Pacha Thoranam also formed part of the Republic Day celebrations, showcasing the development



and welfare schemes of the State government.

On the occasion, Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan gave trophies to the top three tableaux. The Village/Ward Secretariats' tableau secured the first prize and Principal Secretary Ajay Jain received the trophy. The second place was secured by the Women

and Child Welfare Department's tableau. Department Director Y. V. Anuradha received the trophy. The third prize was secured by the Health Department and Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal received the trophy from Governor Harichandan.

## Govt issues notifications...

Continued from Page 1

Though Andhra Pradesh has 25 parliament segments, which should translate into 25 districts, the Araku segment has been proposed to be made into two districts due to the huge geography spread in multiple districts.

While the offices of the CCLA and the Planning Department have been working on the proposal to re-organise the districts for some time, the draft notification was circulated to the State Cabinet ministers in virtual mode late on Tuesday evening, which was approved by the

Cabinet.

Before sending the draft notifications and proposals to the Cabinet, Chief Secretary Dr Sameer Sharma had held a video conference with the District Collectors to seek their views 'urgently' on the recommendations of the State-level committee constituted for creation of new districts.

The recommendations of the committee were forwarded to all the District Collectors on Tuesday for obtaining their views. During the Zoom conference, the Collectors consented in principle with the recommendations of the committee and submitted that they

would send further remarks, if any, before the final notification. Meanwhile, after getting the State Cabinet's nod, the notifications were issued at midnight.

The government is re-organising the districts in the State as per Sub Section (5) of Section (3) of the AP District (Formation) Act, 1974, in the interest of better administration and development of the areas concerned. Mandals and revenue divisions that come under the existing districts have also been re-organised according to the boundaries proposed for the new districts.

## Names of districts: Jagan plays it to the gallery...

Continued from Page 1

There has also been a demand from several quarters to name a tribal district after celebrated freedom fighter Alluri Seetarama Raju, who had waged a guerrilla war against the British in Vizag and East Godavari Agency tracts.

One of the new districts to be carved out of ST reserved Araku parliament segment, with Paderu as headquarters, has been proposed to be named after Alluri Seetarama Raju. Surprisingly, another proposed district was named after Lord Sri Venkateswara as Sri Balaji district with Tirupati as headquarters, another after god man and spiritual leader Sri Satya Sai Baba with Puttaparthi as headquarters, and another after saint poet Annamayya

with Rayachoty as headquarters.

Along with proposals from the government, demands have now cropped up for naming the other districts also. Interestingly, BJP's former minister Kanna Lakshminarayana and Rajya Sabha member G. V. L. Narasimha Rao have proposed two different names for the newly proposed Palnadu district. While welcoming the decision of the Jagan government to carve out Palnadu district, Lakshminarayana has proposed to name it after freedom fighter Kanneganti Hanumanthu. Narasimha Rao has proposed the name Greater Palnadu.

NTR's daughter and former union minister Daggupati Purandheshwari, who never misses an opportunity to

attack the Jagan government, tweeted welcoming the decision to name Krishna district after NTR. She said the wish of the public had been fulfilled.

Araku parliament segment has been proposed to be divided into two districts -- one to be named Manyam with Parvatipuram as headquarters and the other, Alluri Seetharama Raju district with Paderu as the headquarters.

Rajampet parliament segment is proposed to be Annamaya district with Rayachoti as the district headquarters. Amalapuram segment has been proposed to be made a district with a new name Kona Seema.

Narsaraopet segment is proposed to be Palnadu district with the town as district headquarters.

## Committee on movie ticket prices to...

Continued from Page 1

Nani had an interesting conversation over Twitter on ticket prices a few days back.

He said like RGV, anyone from the film industry could come and talk to him on the decision to reduce ticket prices in the State. When compared to the GO No 100 issued in 2013, movie ticket prices in the State were high now, he pointed out.

## Constitution of India...

Continued from Page 1

The TDP chief unfurled the National Tricolour at his Undavalli residence. He garlanded the photos of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr B. R. Ambedkar on the occasion.

Chandrababu Naidu said that the fundamental rights and all protective provisions in the Constitution should be strictly implemented to ensure overall safety and security to all sections of people. The constitutional provisions should be made available to all people, he said.

## Dolo's popularity...

Continued from Page 1

The Covid pandemic has resulted in an increase in the production of paracetamol leading to Hyderabad-based bulk drug manufacturers registering increases in both volumes and demand. As per a recent study, the Acetaminophen (Paracetamol) market is expected to grow in the period 2022 to 2029. Not only Covid-19, but the increasing prevalence of chronic disorders and conditions requiring pain management drives the paracetamol market.

## Employees see...

Continued from Page 1

Venkateswara also said that they were ready to take part in the talks if the government was ready to implement their demands. He further said they would approach the respective Collectors requesting not to put pressure on them regarding the work related to the re-organisation of the districts newly proposed by the government.

## State needs to pass Centre's...

Continued from Page 1

The government is re-organising the districts in the State as per Sub Section (5) of Section (3) of the AP District (Formation) Act, 1974.

A six-member panel headed by former chief secretary Nilam Sawhney had already submitted its report on the re-organisation of the

districts to the government. Three more committees have been formed to initiate the district re-organisation procedure.

As per the laid down procedure after the 30-day mandatory period after issuing the notification, a draft gazette will be issued by the State, which will be sent to the Union Government for its nod.

## Employees are integral part of Govt: Guv...

Continued from Page 1

He said the government had fulfilled 95 per cent of the promises made in the manifesto. The government has distributed a record sum of Rs 1,67,798 crore to 9,29,15,170 beneficiaries under the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and non-DBT during the last 32 months. Out of which, an amount of Rs 1,27,173 crore of financial assistance was directly credited into the bank accounts of 6,80,62,804 beneficiaries under DBT and has given government assistance and assets worth Rs 40,625 crore to 2,48,52,366 ben-

eficiaries under non-DBT. "The government accords top priority to the welfare of farmers and the farming sector as agriculture is the backbone of our State's economy. Development of agriculture and allied sectors will increase the living standards of nearly 62 per cent of the population depending upon agriculture. "Andhra Pradesh stands first in total fish production in the country with 29.67 per cent share. It contributes 8.67 per cent to GVA (Gross Value Addition) and is providing livelihood opportunities to 26.50 lakh people. AP is producing more than 75 per

cent culture shrimp in the country and stands as the aqua hub of India. The State has the lion's share in the seafood exports in the country with about 36 per cent share and exported sea food worth Rs 15,832 crore," said the Governor.

The Governor further said that the government considered education as a passport to the future. Keeping this in view, the government has spent Rs 34,619.24 crore benefitting 1,99,38,694 beneficiaries so far on various education schemes like Manabadi Nadu-Nedu, Jagananna Goru Muddha,

Jagananna Vidya Kanuka and others.

Health services are provided by 10,032 YSR Health Clinics, 1,145 Primary Health Centers, 177 Community Health Centers, 54 Area Hospitals, 14 District Hospitals, 11 Teaching Hospitals and 15 Specialty Hospitals. Apart from these, 560 Urban PHCs are facilitating health access to the people of the State. To ensure that every mandal has two PHCs, we are also constructing an additional 172 PHCs, the Governor said.

The government is fully committed to the overall development and empowerment of

women and also caring and compassionate for their safety and security. With a noble intention to provide every poor family in the State with a home of their own, the government has started the construction of YSR Jagananna Colonies. The government distributed a whopping number around 32 lakh free house site pattas recently to the Below Poverty Line women beneficiaries. The government is constructing around 30 lakh houses of which 15,60,227 are being constructed in the first phase, added Governor Harichandan.

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# Important to perform fundamental duties: Vice-Admiral Dasgupta

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vice-Admiral Biswajit Dasgupta, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command (ENC), emphasised the significance of Republic Day and brought out that whilst we were well aware of our fundamental rights, it was equally important to know and abide by the fundamental duties enshrined in the Constitution. He exhorted everyone to continue to follow the Covid appropriate behaviour of maintaining personal hygiene, maintaining social distancing and wearing masks during the ongoing third wave of the pandemic.

Addressing the Republic Day celebrations, the C-in-C added that preparations were in place for hosting the President's Fleet Review on February 21 and the Multilateral Naval Exercise MILAN from February 26 to March 4 at Visakhapatnam. He urged everyone to work diligently for the successful conduct of both events. A large number of dignitaries, including the President, Prime Minister, Governor and Chief



Minister of Andhra Pradesh and a large number of Central and State ministers, MPs, MLAs would be attending these events.

A ceremonial parade was held at the ENC parade grounds at INS Circars. The Vice Admiral took the salute and inspected a 50-men guard. He later reviewed the platoons of naval personnel drawn from all ships, submarines and establishments. Vice Admiral Sanjay Vatsayan,

Chief of Staff, ENC, was the conducting officer of the parade, which was attended by all Flag Officers, Commanding Officers of all ships, submarines and establishments at Visakhapatnam. All Covid norms and protocols were adhered to during the ceremony.

The Naval Investiture Ceremony was also conducted during the parade. Vice-Admiral Dasgupta presented Nao Sena Medal (Gallantry)



to Naveen Kumar, Leading Seaman (UW), for displaying indomitable courage, conspicuous gallantry and bravery beyond the call of duty resulting in the elimination of two hardcore terrorists in Kashmir.

The C-in-C also presented Nao Sena Medal (Devotion to Duty) to Commodore Rahul Vilas Gokhale in recognition of his overall contributions to the Navy for over twenty-nine years. Commodore Tushar Bahl (Retired) was presented

the VK Jain Memorial Award for outstanding applied research in the field of embedded technologies and SAVL Haranandh POA (AH) was presented the Ravi Dhir Memorial Gold Medal for promoting flight safety in Naval Air Operations. The C-in-C also presented the Unit Citations for the year 2020 to Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam, and INS Jalashwa for their outstanding performance.



## Run organised on R-Day

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Managing committee members of Vizag Runners Society organised a maiden club run on the occasion of the Republic Day at beach road for the Vizag Runners Society members and families. A 5-K run was con-

ducted from RK beach to Palm Beach hotel, and back to RK beach. The organisers distributed medals sponsored by Sri Kanya Steels and Cements and T-shirts to all participants. Post-run felicitation ceremony was attended by two town Inspector of Maharani Peta, Soma Sekhar.

Society president Bala Krishna Rai, vice-president Bharat Chouhan, secretary Satish Movva, joint secretary DT Naidu (Arjun), joint treasurer Dr Radhika, and other managing committee members were present.

## Waltair rly division puts up a good show

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Waltair Railway Division, overcoming various challenges, came up with good performance in the 2021-22 fiscal. The division stood in the forefront in all the fields including safety, security, infrastructure development, amenities improvement and innovative measures. The division managed to load 50 million tonnes freight by the first week of January 2022 that showed 14.4 percent growth and 18.4 percent growth in passenger traffic earnings. The gross earnings reached Rs 6,040 crore in the financial year till December.

The Waltair division bagged six shields for the best performance by various departments at the 66th Railway Week Awards. On Republic Day, artists of



the Divisional Cultural Association presented cultural programme and patriotic songs. RPF commandos performed daredevil motorcycle stunts, while the special squad of RPF presented a narrative

skit on the Railway Help line and Meri Saheli by. A magnificent performance by the dog squad was another attraction.

The DRM announced cash awards to various departments which made arrangements for

the successful conduct of the Republic Day programmes. ADRM (Operations) Dr. C. Surya Lakshmi and ADRM (Infrastructure) Sudhir Kumar Gupta were also present on the occasion.

## Cyberabad cops rescue 223 children

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad Police rescued 223 children including 39 girls in a fortnight from January 1 to 15 during the 'Operation Smile - VIII' drive. The police had formed Operation Smile teams in the three zones which will work throughout the year to rescue children from child labour, begging, rag picking, etc. According to the police, of the children rescued, 45 were sent to the rescue homes and 178 children were handed over to their parents. Of them, 200 children were rescued from child labour, 14 from begging, and 2 from rag-picking.

Among these children, many belong to other states including Odisha, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

## Long-pending demand of Krishna people coming true

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State government is issuing a gazette notification on formation of 13 new districts along with the existing 13 districts, and Machilipatnam will be a full-fledged district headquarters henceforth for the new Krishna district.

The new Krishna district will be formed with 25 mandals with the assembly segments Machilipatnam, Penamaluru, Pamarru Gannavaram, Pedana, Avanigadda and Gudivada. Mandals of Bandar and Gudivada revenue divisions will be in Krishna district.

People of Eastern Krishna are also happy with the creation of the new district with headquarters at Vijayawada.

They had not been happy for a long time because the district officials stayed in Vijayawada. Though Machilipatnam is the district headquarters, most senior officers prefer to stay in Vijayawada. After bifur-

cation of the district, the officials of Machilipatnam will stay in Machilipatnam and supervise the administrative activities and take steps for the development of the backward regions.

Meanwhile, the people of Western Krishna will also be happy as their long-pending demand for a new district with headquarters at Vijayawada is being fulfilled. The new district is likely to be named NTR district.

The YSRCP, in its election manifesto, had stated that every Lok Sabha constituency would be made a separate district for better administration. As per the manifesto, the State government has taken a decision to increase the total number of districts to 26 from 13.

People living in the western Krishna region of Nandigama, Jaggaiahpet, Chandarlapadu, Veerulapadu and Penuganchiprolu and other areas had been demanding creation of a separate district with headquarters at Vijayawada for a

long time. They had been facing many hardships to visit the present headquarters in Machilipatnam as the journey took four to five hours.

The government has decided to create two new revenue divisions along with the existing one. The NTR district will have three revenue divisions of Vijayawada, Nandigama and Tiruvuru.

Vijayawada revenue division will have mandals of Vijayawada East, Vijayawada West, Vijayawada Central, Vijayawada North, Vijayawada Rural and Ibrahimpatnam.

Proposed Nandigama revenue division will have mandals of Nandigama, Veerulapadu, Kanchikacharla, Chandarlapadu, Jaggaiahpet, Vatsavai and Penuganchiprolu.

Proposed Tiruvuru revenue division will comprise Mylavaram, Tiruvuru, G Konduru, Reddygudem, Gampalagudem and A Konduru mandals.

## Lokesh blames CM's attitude for crimes by YSRCP activists

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh on Wednesday expressed concern that the followers of the ruling YSRCP leaders were not hesitating to commit any sort of atrocity as their Chief Minister would always be there to save them. Lokesh said YSRCP MP Mopidevi Venkata Ramana's right hand Bhooshankar had proved what sort of heinous offences they were capable of perpetrating. The YSRCP follower and Mopidevi's right hand was an accused in the molestation of a minor girl.

In a statement here, Nara Lokesh said that the situation in the ruling YSRCP was like, 'as is their top leader so are the party cadre'. They were following in the footsteps of CM Jagan Reddy and Mopidevi, who were the first and the seventh accused in the Rs 43,000-crore illegal assets cases.

## Krishna Dist achieved significant progress on all fronts: Collector Nivas

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector J Nivas said that Republic Day was a day to raise awareness about the Constitution of India and make everyone aware of the protection of constitutional rights. The Collector hoisted the flag on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day celebrations held at AR grounds in Machilipatnam on Wednesday.

Collector Nivas and SP Siddharth Kaushal inspected the Republic Day parade and received the guard of honour from various platoons. The parade, display of tableaux and various cultural programmes organised on the occasion attracted the guests.

Addressing the gathering, the Collector read the Republic Day message and stressed the need for being aware of the Constitution. The Collector expressed deep sympathy to Covid victims' family members. He congratulated the frontline warriors, doctors, medical personnel, sanitation workers and others. They have



administered booster vaccine doses to 22,000 health workers, doctors, medical staff, and senior citizens over 60 years of age. About 1.98 lakh teenagers in the age group 15-17 have been vaccinated till now, he said.

He said that the government strongly believed that real development would come with education, medicine and agriculture and hence the medical sector in the district was being developed in all ways. Under

the Nadu-Nedu scheme, construction of 10 new health centers was underway in the district at a cost of Rs 18.35 crore. Advanced medical facilities were being set up at 80 primary health centers at a cost of Rs 28.52 crore. A medical college has been sanctioned in Machilipatnam at a cost of Rs 550 crore.

The Collector said 16 Covid Care Centres had been set up in Krishna district and 2,000 beds had been made available

to treat the people infected from Covid. About 10,000 people were being tested every day in the district. Nine hospitals have the advanced oxygen facility to treat Covid patients. The government has set up 15 oxygen plants with 9,007 LPM capacity in the district.

Transport Minister Perni Venkataramaiah, ZP chairperson U Harika, Joint Collector Dr K Madhavilatha, Sivashankar and others were present.

## Historical remains found in Nalgonda dist

1,000-year-old rare sculptures found at Bhattugudem village under Peddavura mandal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

An archaeological site studied with Neolithic, Megalithic and Satavahana remain is reported by Dr E Sivanagireddy, Archaeologist and CEO, Pleach India Foundation at Bhattugudem village under Peddavura mandal in Nalgonda district on Wednesday.

Based on the information given by G Saidareddy and K Venkata Reddy of the village, he conducted an extensive survey in the fields of Nakkala Nagireddy and



Kunireddy Ramanuja Reddy, and spotted a well-polished stone axe belonging to the



Neolithic period (4000 BC), iron slags of the Megalithic period (1000 BC) and shreds

of red polished ware of the Satavahana period (1st-2nd centuries AD). Dr Reddy

also noticed beautiful and rare stone sculptures of Bhairava, Brahma in Trimurti form, Valli Subrahmanya, Surya and Mahishamardini representing the Rastrakuta and Kalyani Chalukyan styles lying uncarved on the premises of Isthakameswara temple. During the exploration, he could also spot a few hero stones of the Kakatiya period (13th century AD) are depicted mounting on an elephant and holding swords revealing that he these heroes lost their lives in

local fights and are welcomed by the celestial maids Ramha and Urvasi. According to him the sculptures are of Bhairava and Brahma are rare in their form and iconography. He expressed concern over the sad state of neglect of the temple pillars and sculptural panels dumped in the garbage pit located close to the temple. Sivanagireddy after sensitizing the villagers on the need to preserve these sculptures of historical importance and appealed to protect them for posterity.

## Doctors suspended for denying treatment to tribal woman

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

District administration on Wednesday suspended the Superintendent and duty doctor of Achampet Community Health Centre for refusing to provide treatment to a woman in labour on Tuesday. A tribal woman, named Lalamma, from Banala village under Balmoor mandal, was brought to the Community Health Centre. Though she was in the advanced stage of pregnancy, the doctor and the health staff refused to provide treatment to her on the suspicion that she was infected with Covid-19. The

woman at last gave birth to a baby on the premises of the centre. On knowing the incident, Minister for Health T Harish Rao directed the district administration to take action against those responsible for denying treatment to the tribal woman. The Minister directed Achampet MLA Guvvala Balaraj and MP P Ramulu to ensure that those responsible for dereliction of duty are punished. The Medical and Health Department officials, after an inquiry, placed Superintendent Hari Babu and duty doctor Krishna under suspension.





# Welfare, development prioritized in Prakasam in district: Collector

PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector Pravin Kumar said that implementation of welfare schemes and developments of the district are going on equally on priority basis.

Unfurling the national flag on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day here on Wednesday, the Collector said that Prakasam district is going ahead in implementing welfare schemes precisely and carrying out various development works. He said that 1058 village and ward secretariats were set up in which 10,352 secretariat staff and 17,965 volunteers are working.

Pravin Kumar said that 20,03,336 services had been provided by the village/ward secretariats so far. During



spandana 1,89,976 grievances were revived of which 1,87,973 had been resolved so far. He said that 3,017 acres of land were acquired to distribute 88,135 beneficiaries as house sites. Rs 383.56 crore was extended to the farmers as input subsidy and the crop loss is being disbursed using the e-

crop system, he informed. The Collector said that 17,000 liters of milk was procured from 201 villages and 6,708 buffalos were distributed to 4,823 beneficiaries. He said that the construction of 75,327 houses is being carried out in the first phase. Under YSR Cheyuta scheme 668.52 crore

was disbursed to 3,40,567 beneficiaries. Rs 904 crore was disbursed to 58,006 self-help group women. Rs 18.82 crore was disbursed to 12,613 beneficiaries under Kapu Nestam scheme, Rs 81.51 crore was disbursed to 54,341 under EBC Nestam to women beneficiaries, Rs 109.90 crore was disbursed to 4,31,088 as YSR pensions, Rs 49 crore was disbursed to 58,505 beneficiaries under Jagajanna Thodu scheme. The Collector informed that 1,48,687 people tested positive for Coronavirus so far in the district and steps were taken to face the third wave efficiently. He said that 49 Covid hospitals were ready to treat people and the government machinery and doctors were put on alert in view of the third wave threat, he said.

## Youth critically injured while taking selfie

PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a bizarre incident, a youth suffered serious burn injuries when he tried to take a selfie photo atop a goods train at Piduguralla railway station on Wednesday.

Police said that Katikam Veera Brahma Naidu climbed a wagon of a goods train to take a selfie. When he was taking a selfie photo with his mobile phone, he came into contact with a high tension electric wire, sustained 70% burns and fell down from the wagon. He was shifted to the government hospital in a 108 ambulance. His condition is said to be very critical.

## Overcoming Covid obstacles, WG is going ahead with development: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector Kartikeya Mishra made it clear that West Godavari district has overcome the Covid obstacle and is going ahead with the development, and at the same time, the welfare schemes being implemented.

The Collector hoisted the national flag on the occasion of 73rd Republic Day on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the district effectively tackled the second wave of Coronavirus and prepared to face the third wave challenge. He said that 24 children orphaned by the Covid-19 were extended Rs. 2.40 crore financial assistance. He said that 146 Government hospitals had treated 4.10 lakh Covid patients.

Mishra said that under YSR Aarogyasri scheme 62,305 operations had been performed for which Rs 138 crore disbursed.



Rs 12.85 crore was disbursed to 21,227 beneficiaries under YSR Arogya Asara scheme.

The Collector said that 2,29,548 beneficiaries were distributed house pattas and 1,56,541 houses were sanctioned. Under YSR Cheyuta scheme Rs 356.41 crore was disbursed to 1,90,086 beneficiaries, Rs 92 crore was disbursed to 90,301 beneficiaries under Jagajanna Thodu scheme. Rs 80 crore was disbursed to 53,000 women beneficiaries under Kapu Nestam scheme, Rs

43.10 crore was disbursed under EBC Nestam scheme to 28,736 women beneficiaries, Rs 26.37 crore was disbursed under Chedodu scheme. Rs 275 crore worth power subsidy was extended to aqua farmers in the district, he said.

Kartikeya Mishra said that 10,000 liters of milk is being procured under Jagajanna Palavellu from 142 villages in 12 mandals. The Collector said that Rs 51 crore allocated for the modernization of Godavari delta and 22 works in this regard are being taken up. He said that it was targeted to complete the Polavaram irrigation project by 2023. Out of the 48 crest gates 42 gates had been erected so far to the project, he informed.

SP Rahul Dev Sharma, Joint Collectors Himanshu Shukla and Dr.B R Ambedkar were among those who were present.

## Police prevent attempt to hoist national flag on Jinnah tower

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police prevented the attempt of hoisting the national flag on the controversial Jinnah tower by some activists belonging to a Hindu outfit here on Wednesday. Mild tension prevailed at the Jinnah tower centre in the heart of the city as some Hindu Vahini activists rushed there to hoist the national flag on the occasion of Republic Day.

However, the police chased, overpowered and whisked them away to the police station. The Hindu Vahini activists a few days ago dared to hoist the national flag on the Jinnah tower. As a precautionary measure, the police held BJP district president Patibandla Ramakrishna in Tenali in his house.

The BJP leaders are demanding to change the name of Jinnah tower as Abdul Kalam tower. The BJP activists threatened to demolish the Jinnah tower if the name was not changed. The BJP objects the name of Jinnah to the tower stating that Mohammad



Ali Jinnah was responsible for the bifurcation of India.

In the backdrop of the threats, the municipal corporation erected a strong fence around the tower and set up a police post. Responding to the incident of police preventing activists from hoisting the national flag at the tower, BJP GVL Narasimha Rao condemned the incident. GVL Narasimha Rao in social media on Wednesday said "In Srinagar's Lal Chowk, Indian flag is hoisted with pride today

but in AP's Guntur town, YCP government is not allowing unfurling of India flag on 'Jinnah Tower'. Do you consider Muslims in Guntur less patriotic or you (Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy) are using even this to appease Muslims.

BJP AP state affairs co-in-charge Sunil Deodhar said on twitter "Entire Nation wants to Know from you whether Jinnah Circle in Guntur of Andhra Pradesh is part of Republic of India or not?"

## India is going face constitutional crisis because of Modi: CPI

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Communist Party of India (CPI) National secretary Dr K Narayana on Wednesday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's style of functioning is driving the country to a constitutional crisis.

Addressing a gathering after flag hoisting at the CPI office here on the occasion of 73rd Republic Day celebrations, the CPI senior leader slammed that Modi's unwise acts were consistently weakening the world's largest democracy.

He said the BJP is striving to rewrite the history of freedom struggle and also hijacking the fundamental rights of state governments in the federal structure of the country as is evidenced in the distribution of power sector and allotment of IAS.

The NDA-led BJP government has failed to bring the petrol and diesel prices under GST regime in spite of its slogan of 'one nation, and one tax' and charged that Modi has become a dictator, the CPI leader said.

## Kanna urges CM to name new district as 'Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu district'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

BJP National Executive Member Kanna Lakshminarayana appealed to Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy to name of after the new district as "Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu district".

In a letter to the Chief Minister here on Wednesday, the BJP leader said that the naming district Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu district is a long cherished dream of Palnadu region people. Kanneganti Hanumanth was born in 1870 in Minchalapadu

**"I request you to utilize this opportunity to recognise the selfless sacrifice of brave son of soil and name the new district as "Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu District", Kanna Lakshminarayan urged the Chief Minister.**

village near Durgi and he revolted against the British government.

"I request you to utilize this opportunity to recognise the selfless sacrifice of brave son of soil and name the new district

as "Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu District", Kanna Lakshminarayan urged the Chief Minister.

Meanwhile Palnadu Intellectuals Forum President, Koduru Sambashiva Rao in a

statement here today said that they welcome the Government's decision to form the district despite decades of desire by the people of Palnadu.

"The people of the area have been wanting the district as the center of Narasaraopet for decades. However, we request the government to form the district as "Kanneganti Hanumanth Palnadu" district under the name of Kanneganti Hanumanth, the freedom fighter who fought against the British in the name of Pullari movement in Palnadu area".

## Despite Covid hurdles, welfare schemes being implemented: Collector

PNS ■ GUNTUR

District Collector Vivek Yadav said that despite the Covid hurdles the welfare schemes are being implemented, and at the same time, priority was given for the development of the district. Hoisting the national flag on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day on Wednesday, the Collector recalled the supreme sacrifices of freedom fighters and paid homage. He underlined the need of remembering the architect of Indian Constitution Dr.B R Ambedkar.

The Collector said that the government is giving priority to education, medicine and agriculture. Rs 19,000 crore had been spent for the education of 91 lakh students since 2019 in the district. The Collector handed over a



cheque of Rs 463.34 crore to disburse 4117 Self-help group women beneficiaries on the occasion.

The tableaux of various government departments including the welfare, Health, Co-operative Bank, Public Banking Services, Rural Water Supply and Works carried out

by Jalajivan Mission in Rural Areas, Sanitation Department, YSR Animal Husbandry Scheme, Animal Husbandry Department on Jagannanna Dairy Schemes, the RBKs, Civil Supplies Department, Manabadi Nadu demonstrated the developed.

The Collector gave away

appreciation letters to the beneficiaries. MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy, MLC KS Lakshmana Rao, ZP chairperson Henry Christina, Urban SP Arif Hafiz, Rural SP Vishal Gunni, Joint Collectors AS Dinesh Kumar, B Rajakumari, Anupama Anjali were among those who were present.

## Assets worth Rs. 332.55 cr distributed in Kadapa

PNS ■ KADAPA

District Collector V Vijaya Rama Raju and SP KKN Anburajan participated in the Republic day celebrations here on Wednesday.

As part of the 73rd Republic Day celebrations, the District Collector, SP, Joint Collector and other officials visited stalls set up by various government departments on development and welfare programs at the Police Parade Ground.

On this occasion, the Collector distributed assets



worth Rs. 332.55 crore to 44,784 beneficiaries out of

5274 units. Rs 328.13 crore distributed under the bank linkage through the DRDA and the MEPMA. Rs. 4.33 crores under stree nidhi, Rs 2.55 lakh worth of laptops and touch phones by the Department of physically disabled welfare department. The horticulture department distributed two tractors worth Rs. 2.00 lakhs as part of Farm Mechanization by the Horticulture Department.

Earlier, the Collector hoisted the national flag at the police parade ground and took guard of honour.

## Admission to new medical colleges to begin next year

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Admission to eight new medical colleges in the State will begin from the next year, according to Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences B Karunakar Reddy on Wednesday. Speaking at a function, shortly after unfurling the National flag on the occasion of 73rd Republic Day here, the Vice-Chancellor said the medical education in the State would make significant progress with the State government extending support. He further said the new medical colleges would help increase the medical infrastructure in the State.

## Prasanna Venkatesh takes charge as District Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

Prasanna Venkatesh took charge as West Godavari district Collector on Wednesday. Prasanna Venkatesh who worked as the Vijayawada city municipal commissioner, was transferred as district Collector of West Godavari district.

Speaking on the occasion, Prasanna Venkatesh said that he would strive for the development of the district. He would give importance to the implementation of Navaratnalu welfare schemes



and the welfare of farmers.

He said that he would take steps to resolve the grievances of people and take the services to the doorsteps of people. The

**Speaking on the occasion, Prasanna Venkatesh said that he would strive for the development of the district.**

purchase of paddy and implementation of welfare

schemes for farmers and MGNREGA would be carried out efficiently. Focus would be laid on taking steps to mitigate the Coronavirus pandemic and completing the vaccination programme, construction of houses to house-less poor and building smart township and providing basic amenities at the rural areas.

Joint Collectors Himanshu Shukla, Dr. B R Ambedkar, P Padmavati and RDO Panabaka Rachana were among those who were present on the occasion.

## Collector pays surprise Visit to social welfare hostel

PNS ■ ELURU

Taking everyone by surprise, district Collector Prasanna Venkatesh, within a few hours of taking charge as Collector, paid a surprise inspection to a social welfare boy's hostel at Ameenapet near here on Wednesday.

The District Collector took charge only this morning and inspected the welfare boy's hostel in the evening. He inspected the rice and other items being served to the students. He interacted with the students. When the students found difficulty to answer the questions in English, he directed the hostel warden to engage a private tutor to enhance their English knowledge.

The Collector tasted the rice and expressed satisfaction



on the quality of the food and taste. The Collector also inspected toilets and the compound wall of the hostel. He directed the social welfare department Joint director to take steps to erect fences to

those hostels which did not have compound walls. Joint Collector P Padmavati and social welfare Joint Director Madhusudhan were among who accompanied the Collector.

## NTPC retains its leadership position: CGM

PNS ■ RAMAGUNDAM

Republic Day celebrations were held at NTPC Ramagundam on Wednesday. The programme was held at M G stadium. Chief General Manager Sunil Kumar hoisted the National flag and took the salute at the march-fast by the CISF. Speaking on the occasion, Sunil Kumar stressed on the significance of Republic Day. He highlighted the glorious history of NTPC and its contribution to the development of the country. He spoke about the success story of NTPC-Ramagundam and its plant performance. Despite Covid disruption, the NTPC-Ramagundam is all set to achieve its annual target during 2021-22.

## New district being created with Bhimavaram headquarters

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

A new district is going to be created with Bhimavaram as headquarter and the Cabinet has approved for the same. The new Bhimavaram district would comprise seven Assembly constituencies in the Narasapuram Lok Sabha constituency.

The Cabinet approved the formation of new districts in the state. The draft notification was also released in this regard. The government has decided to complete the reorganization process soon and start administration in the new districts by Ugadi.

The newly forming Bhimavaram district would comprise 19 mandals and 2,718 square KMs with 17.80 lakh population. The



Assembly constituencies which would be incorporated in the new Bhimavaram district are Achanta, Palakollu, Narasapuram, Bhimavaram, Undi, Tanuku and Thadepalligudem. There will be two Revenue Divisions

in the new Bhimavaram district and they are Narasapuram and Bhimavaram.

Narasapuram Revenue Division will be formed with Achanta, Poduru, Palakollu, Yalamanchili, Mogalur, Narasapuram, Penumantra,

**The newly forming Bhimavaram district would comprise 19 mandals and 2,718 square KMs with 17.80 lakh population.**

Penugonda and Mandals while the Bhimavaram Revenue Division will be formed with Veeravasaram, Palakollu, Bhimavaram, Akividu, Undi, Kalla, Tanuku, Attili, Iragavaram, Thadepalligudem and Pentapadu zones.



INDIA CORNER

## Chhattisgarh govt will give financial help to labourers for empowerment of girls

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Wednesday said a new scheme will be launched to promote empowerment of girls under which the first two daughters of labourers will be given financial assistance for their education and employment. The state government will also implement a five-day week working system for its employees in a bid to increase their work efficiency and productivity. The contribution of the state government under the employees' Contributory Pension Scheme will be increased from 10 per cent to 14 per cent, an official release quoted the CM as saying. Baghel was speaking at a function held at the Lalbagh Parade ground in Jagdalpur after unfurling the national flag to mark the 73rd Republic Day. Jagdalpur is the headquarter of the Bastar district, located over 300 km away from the state capital Raipur.



## Two Guj families who became 'untraceable' in Turkey found; in touch with parents: police

Amid reports that six members of two families from a village in Gujarat's Gandhinagar district were abducted in Istanbul by traffickers, police on Wednesday cited their parents saying they are found and currently staying at a hotel in Turkey and will return in the next two-three days. Police also denied any abduction angle citing their relatives. The six members became untraceable after reaching Turkey on the visitor visa earlier this month, a senior police officer said. Though there were reports that the two families, comprising two couples and two children, were abducted in Istanbul by human traffickers, their parents back here denied the abduction angle, said a senior police officer of the Ahmedabad crime branch who had questioned the agent through whom the two families had acquired visitor visas. "These two families have already been found."



## Freedom fighters, Constitution makers worked for country against odds

Gartala, Jan 26 (PTI) Tripura Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya on Wednesday called upon the people of the state to pay tribute to the freedom fighters and the constitution makers, who worked for the development of the country despite facing several difficulties. Unfurling the Tri-colour at the Assam Rifles Ground here on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day, he hailed the state government for its selfless work to make Tripura a model state. "I appeal to all to pay tribute to the freedom fighters and be grateful to the constitution makers, who during the days of the freedom struggle had faced several difficulties, but worked for the development of the country. 'I also appreciate the work undertaken by the state government to make Tripura a model state."



# Vedas to Metaverse: Education Ministry tableau at R-Day parade



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education and Skill Development's tableau at the 73rd Republic Day parade on the Rajpath showcased the key aspects of the new National Education Policy through the theme 'Vedas to Metaverse'. The front part of the tableau depicted the glorious past of the country in the area of education starting from the Vedas, the Gurukul system of educa-

tion and ancient universities such as Nalanda where students from all over the world used to gather. The rear part had a glowing bulbous brain-like structure symbolising innovation and creativity. Students of different age groups, accompanying the tableau, portrayed skill development, joyful learning while emphasising the latest technologies like augmented reality and virtual reality. Video on the LED screens of

the digital book placed atop the tableau illustrated multi-disciplinary education, research and innovation, startups, robotics and metaverse. Images of educationists and scientists from ancient times to the modern age could also be seen on both sides of the tableau. The NEP approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020 replaced the 34-year-old National Policy on Education framed in 1986 and is aimed at paving the way for transfor-

## Shah compliments JK Police's valour and commitment

New Delhi, Jan 26 (PTI) Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday complimented the Jammu and Kashmir Police for its valour and commitment and said its dedication has been reflected as it got the largest share of 115 gallantry awards announced on the occasion of Republic Day. The Jammu and Kashmir Police has been in forefront in fighting the Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the sensitive union territory for more than three decades now. J&K Police has been spearhead of India's fight against terrorism. It is a matter of immense pride to the entire nation, that the @JmuKmrPolice has won the largest share, 115, of the gallantry awards today on Republic Day. This reflects their valour and commitment," Shah tweeted. Congratulating the Jammu and Kashmir Police, he said on this momentous achievement, he salutes their bravery. "PM Shri @narendramodi Ji led central government stands committed to recognising and honouring our brave police personnel," he said.



mational reforms in school and higher education systems to make India a global knowledge superpower. A choice between three or four-year undergraduate courses, multiple entry and exit options in degree courses, adding 3.5

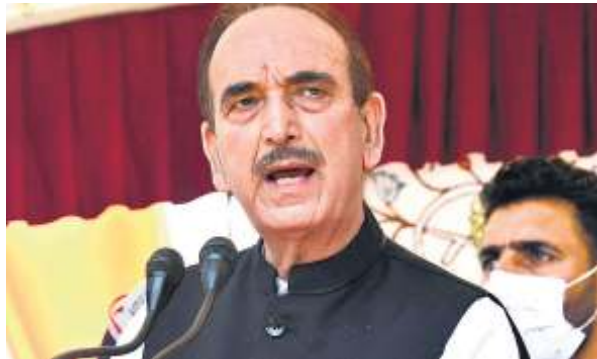
crore seats in higher education institutions, which will now have a single regulator, discontinuation of M.Phil programmes and fixation of fees are among the higher education reforms outlined in the new policy.

## 'CHANGE IN TWITTER PROFILE' 'Mischievous propaganda', says Azad over speculations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after he was awarded the Padma Bhushan, former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and Congress veteran Ghulam Nabi Azad on Wednesday sought to scotch speculation about his future political plans. Reports had claimed that he had changed his Twitter profile, but Azad, who has been critical of his party leadership and is the lone Congress leader to be awarded this year under the Modi dispensation, denied it. "Some mischievous propaganda being circulated by some people to create confusion. Nothing has been removed or added to my Twitter profile. The profile is as it was earlier," Azad said on Twitter.

Azad's Twitter profile has nothing written on it and there is no reference to the Congress party. In the age of social media, the Twitter profiles of leaders are keenly watched as many tend to change them before formal switching parties. Azad, the former Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, is a prominent member of the G23 dissident leaders who have been demanding an organisational overhaul in the Congress



**Reports had claimed that he had changed his Twitter profile, but Azad, who has been critical of his party leadership and is the lone Congress leader to be awarded this year under the Modi dispensation, denied it.**

and has faced backlash from a section of the party. After the announcement of the Padma awards on Tuesday evening, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, while commenting on CPI (M) leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's refusal to accept the award, said, "He wants to be Azad not Ghulam". However, senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal, who is also

in the G23, said on Wednesday that it was ironic that the Congress does not need Azad's services when the nation recognises his contributions to public life. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had showered praise on Azad during his farewell speech for the Congress leader in the Upper House and the latter had returned the sentiment.

## 'Meghalaya to be made one among top 10 states'



PNS ■ SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday said his government has laid the foundation for the state to become one of the top 10 states in the country in the next 10 years. Unfurling the Tricolour on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day at the Polo ground here, he said the state with 3.8 million people need to grow together with the rest of the NE states and present to the world one North East market like the European Union. "We (the state government) have laid the foundation and it will become one of the top 10 states in the country in the next 10 years. We will do it. We need to realise the importance as a society to move positively in the direction that we have set," the chief

minister said. He said 3.8 million people (Meghalaya's population) is a small number in a global markets and if Meghalaya has to grow, it has to grow as one of the entities of the NE market. "I am happy to inform you that today the state's expenditure is touching close to Rs 14,000 crore... This is possible because of tapping of external agencies, timely implementation of projects and running central schemes in efficient manner," he said. Sangma said the state has mobilised Rs 7,500 crore from external agencies, a big jump from Rs 2,500 crore in 2018. "Funds from these agencies support projects in tourism, water catchment area, road construction, integrated transport system, early childhood development programme besides others," he said.

## Rail job aspirants go on rampage Exams suspended; Grievance panel set up, minister appeals for calm

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Railways suspended its NTPC and Level 1 exams on Wednesday after the candidates went on a rampage in some states alleging irregularities in the process whilst minister Ashwini Vaishnaw urged them not to destroy public property and assured redressal of their grievances.

The suspension of exams and the statement by the minister are being seen in certain quarters as a step down from the earlier decision to bar applicants found indulging in vandalism given that elections are due in five states, including the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh.

"I am telling the aspirants that this is their own property. Why are they destroying something that is their own? However, authorities will follow due process if public property is damaged," Vaishnaw said at a press conference. The Railway Ministry formed a high-level committee, headed by Deepak Peter Gabriel, the principal executive director of industrial relations in the ministry, to examine the aspirants' grievances. Sources say it was the protests by the job aspirants in



Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh for two days and the fear that the agitation may fan out in other parts of the country through the aggressive social media campaigns being run by the candidates forced the Railways' hand. Bihar, home to a majority of the job aspirants, saw violent protests for the third day in a row. A crowd stormed the Gaya Junction and set on fire the Bhabhua-Patna InterCity Express. But nobody was injured. East Central Railway CPRO Rajesh Kumar told PTI-

Bhasha, "The rakes were empty and parked inside the yard when miscreants set a coach on fire. It has not resulted in disruption of rail traffic." In Sitamarhi, police fired in the air to disperse the demonstrators at the railway station. Protests were also reported from Patna, Nawada, Muzaffarpur, Buxar and Bhojpur districts. In Uttar Pradesh, police arrested two persons and lodged a case against around 1,000 unidentified people for allegedly rioting and blocking

the train tracks. Six police personnel were suspended with immediate effect for using unnecessary force on Tuesday. A police official said it appears the accused had taken "money from some political parties" to cause unrest. Police were also probing the incident from this angle. A video of the incident surfaced on social media, following which Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra condemned the use of force against the protesting job aspirants.

## SP picks nominee for Ayodhya seat

PNS ■ AYODHYA

With the Samajwadi Party nominating old hand Pawan Pandey on the Ayodhya seat, all eyes are on the BJP which is yet to name its candidate for the high-profile constituency after buzz on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stopped with the party fielding him from the Gorakhpur Urban seat. The BSP and Congress are also yet to come out with the names of their candidates but people here see the poll as a direct fight between the SP and the BJP. Akhilesh Yadav's party on Tuesday night declared the candidature of former MLA Pandey on the seat.

A promising youth leader from Lucknow University, Pandey had won the seat in 2012 but lost in 2017. He was also a minister in the Akhilesh Yadav government. Even as the SP has come out with the name of its candidate, BJP supporters are still guessing whether it will be sitting MLA Ved Prakash Gupta or someone else. Like in the past, Ayodhya is being used as a springboard by all major parties to launch its election campaign this

time too. Suraj Kumar of Nayaghat says, "There is resentment against the incumbent MLA as he could not fulfil the aspirations of the people. If the BJP changes its candidate, it will be to its advantage." "A lot of work has been done here due to which land was acquired and for development work, demolition also took place. When there is development, some structures are to be razed," he noted. When asked about the resentment prevailing among the traders, Ayodhya Vyapar Mandal President Nand Kumar Gupta, said the widening of road from Saadatganj to Ayodhya Ghat requires demolition of shops. "These shops are on properties of Raja (Ayodhya) or temples. The shopkeepers here will not be getting any compensation. It's a matter of their livelihood as they are here for the past three-four generations," Gupta said. According to the proposed plan, two stretches of the road in Ayodhya dham (Old Ayodhya town), including the one leading to the historic Hanuman Garhi temple, would be widened.

## 'Total prohibition can't be achieved by any govt'

PNS ■ INDORE

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday said that the total prohibition cannot be achieved by any government by banning the sale of liquor. He said that for achieving this goal, the trend of drinking alcohol in society will have to be changed by launching a de-addiction campaign. Addressing the Republic Day function in Indore, the chief minister said, "the consumption of alcohol by people cannot be stopped just by banning it by the government. It



will end only when we change the trend of drinking liquor in the society". Chouhan unfurled the national flag at the Nehru

Stadium here and inspected the customary parade on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day. He also appealed to people

to run a de-addiction campaign in their villages and cities. The CM said people will have to take a pledge to not consume alcohol if the goal of the total prohibition is to be achieved in Madhya Pradesh. The chief minister also emphasised the need to launch a de-addiction campaign. Interestingly, the BJP government in MP is facing flak from the Opposition over its new Excise Policy approved by the Cabinet recently. In the new Excise Policy meant for the next Financial Year, the government has decided to allow the sale of

liquor at all airports and select supermarkets in four big cities, and issue home bar licenses to those earning Rs one crore or more annually. Chouhan said the state government has been supporting industrialisation and self-employment at a rapid pace. The government has set a target to create at least 2 lakh new opportunities of livelihood in the state, he added. The chief minister said that the state government had recruited 44,000 people in government jobs last year. By the next year, around one lakh government jobs will be given, he added.

## Missing Arunachal boy: Rijiju says PLA responded positively

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A hotline was exchanged on Wednesday between the Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army which responded positively, indicating handing over of the missing youth from Arunachal Pradesh, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said. The PLA suggested a place of release, the minister said. "They are likely to intimate date and time soon. Delay attributed to bad weather conditions on their side," he wrote on Twitter. On Tuesday, Rijiju



had said that India had shared details of the missing Arunachal Pradesh teenager with the PLA to corroborate the

identity of the youth in their custody. "Hotline exchanged on Republic Day by Indian Army with Chinese PLA. PLA responded positively indicating handing over of our national and suggested a place of release," he said on Wednesday. The Union minister, who represents the state in Lok Sabha, had earlier said that the Chinese side had conveyed to the Indian Army on January 20 that they had found a boy on their side and requested for further details to establish the identity.



## Kiss and tell

A court has closed the Shetty-Gere case, which was actually just a trifle

Today as we celebrate the 73rd year of India becoming a Republic, can we take a moment to digress from freedom and heroism to ask ourselves where we stand on the subject of kissing? The context is a Mumbai court discharging actor Shilpa Shetty in an age-old kissing case involving Hollywood actor Richard Gere. At an event to promote AIDS awareness in 2007, Gere suddenly held Shetty's hand on the dais and kissed it. He then gave her a quick hug, bent her back in what he later explained as a dance hold from his movie *Shall We Dance* and kissed her on the cheek. Many Indians were angry. They called him indecent. They blamed Shetty for not objecting to the kiss. They filed cases against both. The case against him was quickly dismissed. Gere apologised, saying he had no bad intention at all. Shetty was left languishing, the case a millstone around her neck. She was called a conspirator or perpetrator just because she did not object to the kiss. The Indian judicial system chugged along all these years to finally 'discharge' her, pointing out what was evident in 2007 itself that she was victimised. The case should have been dismissed on the day it was filed instead of waiting all this while. Looking back, were we prudish in 2007? It is not easy to answer because we tend to mix up our sensibilities when dealing with real and reel incidents of oscular affection. The former, we oppose. The latter, we enjoy.



Remember when actor Padmini Kolhapure kissed Prince Charles in Mumbai in 1980? The orthodoxy went into spasms for days. Did not Shabana Azmi raise the hackles of conservative Muslims in 1993 when anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela kissed her at an event in Cape Town? There was no social media then or else the visuals would have gone viral like the 2016 video of Girija Srinivas, a panchayat member, kissing then Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. If we were prudish, or hypocrites, for these kisses to shock us, imagine the reaction back in the 1930s when Devika Rani, the first lady of the Indian cinema, did an intimate kissing scene with Himanshu Rai in *Karma*. Bollywood has ensured that our conservatism loosens up to the beats of modernity by inserting kissing scenes regularly in films. *Bobby* thrilled viewers, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* sizzled them, *Dhoom2* was consummate. *Raja Hindustani* introduced kissing in family films. Even a film titled *Hey Raam* had it. If not most Indian viewers, Bollywood certainly has kept time with ever-changing relationships. Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das portrayed lesbian love in *Fire*. Saqib Saleem brushed lips with Randeep Hooda in *Bombay Talkies*. A kiss is an expression of endearment. Not every kiss is sexual. It can be civil or perfunctory, too. If our censor board, which frowns upon just about everything in films, could pass hot kissing scenes, there is every reason for us to be neither prejudiced nor hypocritical.

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### PICTALK



The CPWD tableau during the Republic Day Parade, at Rajpath in New Delhi

# It all boils down to appetite for conflict

A tired 'Free World', noticeably the US, is no match for autocratic regimes like China and Russia that are not answerable to anyone for their amoral acts

Irrespective of the governmental spine, the popular mood in Australia sums up the awkward conundrum: There is simply no appetite for conflict with China. With China's intimidating expansionism in the Indo-Pacific waters, Australia had hit back with suggestions for an independent inquiry into the origins of COVID-19 — a furious Beijing responded immediately by decoupling economic ties, and Canberra upped the ante by seeking nuclear submarines and forming AUKUS (partnership amongst Australia, the US and UK). Given Australia's pacifism and wariness of nuclear technology, this change of official stance was significant, though not commensurate with societal apathy, as the 'participation fees' for Australia in any potential conflict with China is widely imagined to be too high. The Chinese society is never allowed to harbour contrarian views from that of its expansionist regime, therefore the drums of war directed towards a Taiwan, Japan, Australia, or even India, are forever beating.

If the appetite for conflict for the US in the restive Middle Eastern theatre had visibly waned with the unsaid acceptance of the Iranian-Syrian triumph in the decisive fight for reclaiming ISIS-held territories, the meek flight from Afghanistan completed the picture. A year into the office, Joe Biden has openly conceded that there are "a whole range of things around the world that we can't solve" — the issue on hand was ability of the so-called 'most powerful military in the world' to defeat the Taliban mujahideen in Afghanistan.

Even earlier, during the bloody Indo-Chinese border standoff in 2020, the ostensibly 'muscular politics' of Donald Trump only led to an offer by the POTUS to "mediate or arbitrate" as he was "ready, willing and able"! Constant Chinese attempt to shift the existing norms and status quo on the Line of Actual Control was left for India to fend. Today, as a record number of Chinese fighter jets routinely intrude into Taiwan's Air Defence Zone, wary Taiwanese genuinely ponder: "Will the US show up?" in case Xi Jinping decides to



hold good his threat of the "historical task of complete unification". Even though the Biden Administration has ostensibly shed its traditional 'strategic ambiguity' vis-à-vis the official position and committed itself to defend Taiwan militarily, should China attack, the credibility of that commitment is a bit suspect, given the recent history and the apparent lack of appetite for conflict.

Recently, riots broke out in the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan, and the world watched with bated breath to see which international power would step in. Pitted against each other was the undemocratic, repressive and illiberal Kazakh regime (given to its own power struggles and intrigues among the elites) against the suffering masses who desperately sought reforms and relief from economic hardships. Expectedly, the security forces responded brutally and disproportionately by killing over 100 protesters even as unbacked claims of "20,000 bandits", "armed aggression by well-coordinated terrorist groups", "radical Islamist groups" etc were randomly postulated by the Government, with a brazen 'shoot to kill' order. The US, which has literally no leverage in the region, was left spouting platitudes like "deeply concerned", whereas the Russians under the aegis of Collective



QUASI-DICTATORIAL REGIMES LIKE RUSSIA (OR CHINA) CARE TWO HOOTS ABOUT 'INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION' WHEN IT COMES TO SAFEGUARDING THEIR PERCEIVED INTERESTS; IN THIS CASE, STOPPING UKRAINE'S BID TO JOIN THE NATO

Security Threat Organisation (CSTO) sent in 2500 troops to 'stabilise' the situation. Even the Chinese offered support towards 'counter-terrorism' to ward off portents of colour revolution (euphemism for the West-supported pro-democracy movements).

Basically, the autocratic regimes of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping demonstrated an intent and sent an unmistakable message that whenever autocrats are in crisis, they could seek help from fellow autocrats as they would retain the appetite for conflict, unlike a tired 'Free World'.

Concurrent war of wits is escalating in neighbouring Ukraine, with Russian troops menacingly amassed on the borders, prepping for a possible invasion. Earlier in 2014, too, Russia had forcibly annexed Crimea from Ukraine and the US-led 'West' has since pitter-pattered with 'sanctions', to no avail. Even now, Biden has sheepishly admitted that "the US going to unilaterally use force to confront Russia from invading Ukraine is not...on the cards right now", added unconvincingly that there would be "severe consequences". Nonetheless, no one in Ukraine would be reassured with that kind of a back-up plan as they know that should Russia roll in, nothing and no one will hold out. Biden worsened the optics by

admitting that his allies were divided on how-to-respond to even a 'minor incursion' of Ukraine by Russia, let alone a full-fledged invasion.

Meanwhile, quasi-dictatorial regimes like Russia (or China) care two hoots about 'international condemnation' when it comes to safeguarding their perceived interest; in this case, stopping Ukraine's bid to join the NATO.

Insecure one-party regimes, like that of China, embed an invaluable message with their cross-border aggression, that is aimed as much for their own domestic audiences as it is for the countries attacked. Pandemic era has already worsened the economic conditions of the 'Free World', and the all-important opinions of the electorate in democracies are not for any external interventions. However, the Chinese or Russian regimes who are not answerable to anyone for their amoral conduct, and are relatively well-placed economically, do retain a bigger appetite for conflict. Evolving triangular tensions of 'One-against-One (US versus China), plus another one (Russia)' will be, eventually, all about appetite for conflicts.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LEADER SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE

Sir — One should be a diarch practitioner of morals before he starts preaching to others to follow. The entire nation is aware how the ruling dispensation has been amending the Constitution to enact Acts as per its whims without caring for the Opposition's demand to have at least discussions over such Bills, making it seem like a right in view of its brutal majority in Parliament. We have seen how the farmers affected by the draconian farm laws were treated for over a year, unmindful of their agony. We know how writers, journalists and NGOs have been tortured by stalling their operations and freezing their bank accounts.

The latest sad episode is their doing away with "Abide with me", a Christian hymn and the one most loved by Mahatma Gandhi, from the Beating Retreat ceremony this year, of course based on their rights gained through the majority in Parliament. The BJP Government is conveniently forgetting that it also has a bounden duty to the nation's people who had brought it to power. Is it not an irony that PM Modi says the country has wasted a lot of time "fighting for rights" and "neglecting one's duties"? A good leader is one who sets an example for others.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

### THE SC IS RIGHTLY CONCERNED

Sir — The Supreme Court has recently expressed concern over the freebies and other sopas as major poll promises by almost all political parties, which is certainly not misplaced. The apex court has asked the Union Government and the Election Commission to spell out their stand on such misgivings that cheat not only the unsuspecting electorate but also go against the spirit of the Constitution. The amount spent on the promised freebies can out run an entire State's budget, is what was rightly expressed by the judiciary. Practically, however, it may be difficult for the Election Commission to impose checks on such promises made by the political parties in electoral fray.

## A part of our history relocated



To put it plainly, the eternal flame (Amar Jawan Jyoti) in the National War Memorial at India Gate, which has been burning for more than five decades to honour the martyred soldiers, has been extinguished. Indians are told, the flame was carried to the newly built NWM 400 metres away and 'merged' with the new flame there. However, history will remember this 'merger' only as one more added to the group of great flames extinguished

in the past. By the same logic, any memorial, monument, mausoleum, pillar or obelisk can be demolished and 'merged' with a new one elsewhere. Treating Amar Jawan Jyoti as a going concern under the Companies Act or any other legislation subject to amalgamation, absorption or reconstruction was a sacrilege.

Many countries have constructed more than one war memorial with ever-burning fires to honour war heroes. In France, under the archway in Paris, a flame has been burning in memory of all who died in World War I since 1921 and another one at Arras, at the Notre Dame de Lorette war memorial. Russia has two war memorials in Moscow: one at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Alexander Garden and another one at Victory Park. Perhaps, the ruling establishment fears that the NWM built under PM Narendra Modi's aegis would not gain importance, as long as the Amar Jawan Jyoti is aflame at the India Gate.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

## Outreach

PM Modi's head cap and stole were a message to the voters of Manipur and Uttarakhand

Deviating just a little from sporting his usual type of headgear this Republic Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to don a cap from Uttarakhand and stole from Manipur around his neck. Normally, as seen on previous R-Day and Independence Day celebrations, he prefers to opt for a bright, multi-coloured *saafa* or turban. On Modi's cap was inscribed a 'Brahmakamal', which is interestingly the State flower of Uttarakhand. To be fair to him, though, the Prime Minister is apparently fond of the 'Brahmakamal' and uses the flower whenever he offers prayers at the Kedarnath temple. Similarly, the white, black and red woven stole that he draped around his neck is a leitmotif of the Meitei tribe in Manipur. Once again, his choice to wear these accessories may be seen as an attempt to cosy himself to voters in the two hilly States. No wonder, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami immediately took to Twitter to point out that the PM wore the famous 'Brahmakamal' cap, different from the colourful turbans that he has worn during the previous R-Day celebrations.

For his part, Minister Biswajit Singh wrote: "Moment of great pride and honour for entire #Manipur on seeing Adariniya PM @NarendraModi Ji wearing a Manipuri stole, Leirum Phee, on the glorious occasion of 73rd Republic Day of India, showcasing the exquisite tradition of the state."

The Leirum Phee has been seen on the PM on many occasions in the past, especially during live addresses to the nation. The Prime Minister's hint to both Uttarakhand and Manipur, besides three other States where elections have already been notified, was rather vigorous than subtle. Uttarakhand votes on February 14 and Manipur on February 27 and March 3. However, the jury is still debating whether, legally or not, it behoves someone of the stature of the Prime Minister to use a national festival to further his party's agenda and send out a signal of endearment especially to the electorate in the poll-bound States. Continuing in the same vein, the choice of national heroes featured in the tableaux could have been more exhaustive. The grand parade depicted Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, quite deservedly; still it skipped any chances of showcasing a glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, all of whom have also been tall national leaders. The nation's moment of pride might just have been one more shade happier.



## SOUND BITE

Make videos on the good works of Delhi Govt and share these on social media, appealing to people to give Kejriwal a chance.

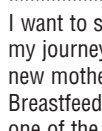


AAP national convener — Arvind Kejriwal



It's important to preserve the unity of all EU members in protecting the sovereignty of our State.

Ukraine President — Volodymyr Zelenskyy



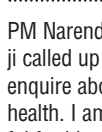
I want to share my journey as a new mother.... Breastfeeding is one of the most natural things you can do.

Actor — Evelyn Sharma



I found a parallel in both the Test and ODI defeats. The same mistake was responsible: Team selection!

India ex-cricketer — Sanjay Manjrekar



PM Narendra Modi ji called up to enquire about my health. I am thankful for his concern and good wishes.

NCP president — Sharad Pawar



## FIRST COLUMN

### PLAYING WITH THE NATION'S HERITAGE

People feel that Amar Jawan Jyoti shouldn't have been merged with another flame



SHIVAJI SARKAR

Never before perhaps a national memorial to soldiers has sparked such a major controversy as the decision to extinguish the 50-year-old eternal flame -Amar Jawan Jyoti - at India Gate or the installation of Netaji's statue at a disputed canopy. Earlier, a proposal to install Mahatma Gandhi's statue there was not considered befitting to his stature and abandoned. Then how can Netaji's statue be installed there? India Gate was a memorial for the 80,000 Indian soldiers killed in foreign wars. The Jyoti was lit at its arch in 1972 by the then prime minister Indira Gandhi to commemorate the victory against Pakistan in 1971, creation of Bangladesh and in tribute to the soldiers. The dispute has now been sparked by an apparent targeting of the Congress at the height of the elections to UP and four other states. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is the other target whose Netaji tableau for Republic Day parade was rejected and



BJP is alleged to be appropriating Netaji's legacy. The Government says though the flame was lit in 1972, the names of 3,843 martyrs of the 1971 war were not inscribed. The National War Memorial next to India Gate is the first national monument, with whose flame the one at Amar Jawan Jyoti has been merged. An unseemly situation is developing. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi slamming the government says that flames are for our soldiers and would be lit again. "This is insulting history and memory of the martyrs of Bangladesh war. It is shocking outrage", says former Congress minister Anand Sharma. Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan says it is an "unnecessary controversy" and the opposition lacks knowledge of history.

The Congress is accusing the present government of not giving due to leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi even as BJP appropriates freedom fighters like Vallabhbhai Patel, BR Ambedkar Patel and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. The people in Delhi feel that the Jyoti is historic and should have continued. Many Hindu shrines, including in Badarinath, have jyoti lit continuously for centuries. It is being echoed that now it is not the same jyoti at the NWM. The nation has to respect, honour and be proud of its heritage. Doing anything new is not a novelty. Let the nation think, consider, discuss and then do. The government says that dignitaries cannot pay tributes at two shrines. On the other hand, people wonder why suddenly the decision to install the Netaji statue was announced without a discussion. The statue of George V was removed from the canopy in 1968. In 1991, former prime minister Chandra Shekhar wanted the canopy demolished and a Gandhi statue erected there. But since the canopy housed a colonial occupier, who was removed by Indian freedom fighters, a statue of an Indian leader was found inappropriate and insulting. So Gandhi was never given that place.

Netaji has been raised to an icon by RSS executive member Indresh Kumar who initiated an event in Andaman to celebrate Netaji freeing the island and setting up the first national Azad Hind government every December end. Most senior leaders feel Netaji should have an independent place and not a "tainted" one. But it is more than this. Narendra Modi wants to trounce Mamata Banerjee. In 2021, he tried by having the 125th birth anniversary celebrations on eve of Bengal elections at Kolkata's Victoria Memorial, an incongruous British symbol. Mamata had stolen the show. Now the government wants to install the Netaji statue to spite her. Would that help BJP? Unseemly battles do not behove a great nation. But politics is at a new low.

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

# Can expenditure tax be alternative to I-T?



SUBHASH CHANDRA PANDEY

If personal income tax is abolished but corporate income tax stays, as was done in some nations, it will be an open invitation to all sorts of manipulations

The budget for the next financial year is approaching and the pink press is full of comments and suggestions. Expectations are high on the post-pandemic economic recovery. For some, budget is all about taxation, particularly personal income tax.

There is a common gripe that the fixed-income group of salaried class and pensioners bear the brunt of income tax while flexible-income group of professionals and businesses have enough legal loopholes available to avoid paying income tax.

There are also voices against the very idea of taxing incomes because that means taxing low spenders and high spenders alike and actually discouraging savings. Here is an attempt to present different dimensions of this interesting debate.

Nearly 5.95 crore Income Tax Returns were filed for the financial year 2019-20 till the extended deadline of January 10, 2021. For the financial year 2020-21, over five crore ITRs were filed till December 29, 2021.

Out of total population of over 130 crore, only about 1.46 crore actually paid income tax for financial year 2019-20.

A detailed analysis of about 5.87 crore ITRs for FY2017-18 showed that 5.53 crore were from individual filers, 11.3 lakhs from Hindu Undivided Families, 12.7 lakhs from firms and 8.4 lakh from companies.

Out of the reported gross total income of ₹51.33 lakh crore, business income was ₹24.37 lakh crore and salary/pension income was ₹20.04 lakh crore. Taxable salary/pension (above ₹5 lakh pa limit) returned was ₹15.55 lakh crore with tax liability of about 3.95 lakh crore.

The salary/pension income is a major but not the dominant source of income tax. Total income tax collected in 2018-19 was ₹11.37 lakh crore out of which companies alone paid ₹6.64 lakh crore.

Of course, the argument that business and professional income is more evasion prone than salary/pension income is unassailable.

Efforts to curb income tax evasion revolve around tracking major expenditures and indicators of high conspicuous consumption (foreign travel, electricity consumption etc). Increasingly, high consumption and investment both are tracked by taxmen following the digital footprints left behind by PAN AAD-HAAR linkage.

Can any expenditure tax yield over ₹11 lakh crore to substitute expenditure tax? Over and above GST collection which at current rate of monthly collection of about ₹1.3 lakh crore comes to about annual collection of about ₹15.6 lakh crore?

To tax income or to tax expenditure? Which is more efficient and equitable way of collecting tax? An expenditure by one person is the income of another person



MOST INCOMES ARE LUMPY WHILE EXPENDITURES ARE MORE DIFFUSE. HARDER TO TRACK CRORES OF SALE/PURCHASE TRANSACTION, MORE SO IF MADE IN CASH. GETTING LUMPY INCOME IN CASH IS HARDER THAN SPENDING IN CASH. A LOW TAX BASE EXPENDITURE TAX WILL NOT COMPENSATE THE LOSS OF REVENUE BY ABOLITION OF INCOME TAX AND A WIDE BASE EXPENDITURE TAX WILL PROVE MORE REGRESSIVE WITH CASCADING EFFECT UNLESS GST-LIKE MEASURES ARE TAKEN

(The writer is President, Institute of Public Auditors of India and former Special Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The views expressed are personal.)



and vice versa. Whether you tax salary income of employee or salary expenditure of employer, the effect is the same. (Knife and water melon - what falls on what is immaterial.)

Just as some incomes are harder to detect by taxmen so are some expenditures. It all depends on how diffused is the income/expenditure streams. For some, income comes in big chunks for others it comes in bits and pieces. Some expenditures are lumpy some are micro payments. It all depends on what rate of expenditure tax is applied on what class of expenditures.

The philosophy underlying taxation of spending rather than income was propagated as early as the seventeenth century by Thomas Hobbes who considered it unfair to tax low spenders and high spenders having same income alike.

In spite of the endorsement by some economists exempting saving from taxation, an expenditure tax has never been used in any industrial country.

Prof Nicholas Kaldor of Cambridge University made a strong case for expenditure tax in 1955. He proposed an expenditure tax be substituted for the surtax on higher income taxpayers in Britain. India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) had adopted Kaldor's suggestion to introduce an expenditure tax for a few years but dropped it by 1966. The tax was different from that recommended by Kaldor and the small revenue yield was considered not worth the burden of compliance and administration.

Kaldor received reconsideration in India when Expenditure Tax was re-introduced in 1987 with very limited scope. Under the

Expenditure Tax Act, 10 per cent tax is charged on payment made at a high-end hotel (with room rent exceeding ₹3000 per day).

The proponents of expenditure tax argue that the Income Tax burden falls on salaried class/pensioners and abolition of income tax will be a big relief to these harassed taxpayers freeing them from the tedium of filing tax returns (big loss to chartered accountants and lawyers and a dip in national income!)

The Income Tax Department tirelessly scrutinises millions of returns, which are followed by queries, clarifications, refunds and protracted correspondence. However, what is the guarantee that expenditure tax will not bring more hassles of record keeping. Most incomes are lumpy while expenditures are more diffuse, harder to track crores of sale/purchase transaction, more so if made in cash. Getting lumpy income in cash is harder than spending in cash.

A low tax base expenditure tax will not compensate the loss of revenue by abolition of income tax and a wide base expenditure tax will prove more regressive with cascading effect unless GST like measures are taken.

Every time money changes hands and every transfer/disbursement /payment is not EXPENDITURE. When some bank is given money to disburse salaries or pensions or dividends, the expenditure is only by the employer or company, the disbursing bank is only an intermediary, a courier. The money does not belong to the bank. Postman delivery of cash is not postman's expenditure. So obviously all such remittances would be out of expenditure tax.

We are talking of expenditure tax not transaction tax.

If we include salary, pension, interest, rent payment within expenditure tax, the recipient will not only face effective income tax but will be further liable to suffer more expenditure tax when spending the received income by way of salary/pension/ interest/rent.

Complexities of deciding which income to tax at what rate will be substituted by perhaps more complex task of taxing different types of expenditures at different rates. (Imagine a tax dispute: This is not wedding party but pre wedding or post wedding party taxable at lower rate!)

If personal income tax is abolished while corporate income tax stays as was done by some countries, there is open invitation to all sorts of manipulations. Personal expenses of shareholders and employees will get shifted as corporate expenses and promoters will drain out corporate profits by being lenders, landlords and employees of their own companies!! Have seen it all.

One of the reasons why expenditure tax did not find favour with major countries as the assessment that this tax will discourage spending (encourage savings) and would impede growth.

The risk of discouraging such spending as is reportable to tax department hurting overall economic growth is very much there. People resent government trying to snoop around finding what they earn. They will be more alarmed and more hassled if government starts hassling them and snooping around what they spend!!

I think expenditure tax is an idea whose time has gone.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

WHO ALL FROM THE SENA PARTICIPATED IN THE RAM JANMABHOOMI MOVEMENT? YOUR HINDUTVA IS MERELY ON PAPER. —BJP LEADER AND FORMER CM DEVENDRA FADNAVIS



HUNDREDS OF SENA WORKERS STOOD BY HINDUS DURING THE 1993 RIOTS AFTER BABRI MASJID'S DEMOLITION. MANY SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES. —SHIV SENA RAJYA SABHA MP SANJAY RAUT

# Ties with India can help Cambodia's long-term interests

Despite its increasing reliance on China, Cambodia must revitalise its relationship with other key and major partners in the Indo-Pacific

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's declaration of 2022 as the ASEAN-India friendship year goes beyond ceremonial rhetoric. India seeks to improve the level of partnership with key Southeast Asian countries. Recent developments indicate this trajectory. From high-level engagements with Indonesia and Vietnam to finalizing the sale of the BrahMos shore-based supersonic cruise missile with the Philippines, India has endeavored to bolster its strategic partnership with these countries. However, it will be interesting to assess the status of India-Cambodia relations given that both countries will be celebrating their 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year. Though the relations between India and Cambodia have been growing steadily over



DON MCLAIN GILL

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the past years, Cambodia has been seen to be moving deeper into China's sphere of influence. Being Cambodia's largest trading partner, China continues to increase its influence there. China has funded at least 70 per cent of Cambodia's key infrastructure, particularly, roads and bridges. China promised to deliver an amount of RMB 4 billion (US\$588 million) in aid between 2019-2021. During the pandemic, China has also greatly supported Cambodia.

This heavy dependency on China has led to a series of diplomatic problems for Cambodia. From the deportation of Uyghur asylum seekers to blocking the issuing of joint communiqué on the assertion of China in the South China Sea, Cambodia has constantly been under the spotlight due to actions that con-



tinue to compromise its standing in the regional and global level. In fact, in 2020, former Singaporean diplomat Bilahari Kausikan highlighted how Southeast Asian countries may need to consider rethinking Cambodia's ASEAN membership due to its vulnerability to external pressure. Recently, the US announced a new set of restrictions on Cambodia, including an arms embargo, due to its notorious human rights abuses and China's growing military influence.

Despite its inevitable and increasing reliance on China, Cambodia must attempt to revitalise and diversify its relationship with other key and major partners in the Indo-Pacific that seek to ensure the maintenance of a rules-based and transparent regional order as a foundation for international relations. Among these partners, India significantly stands out due to its historic relationship with Cambodia based on principles of mutual benefit and non-interference. As Cambodia assumed its role as ASEAN Chair for 2022, it will be a pragmatic option for both countries to step-up their relations. On January 10, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke with Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn to emphasize India's steadfast com-

mitment to boost its partnership with ASEAN. Moreover, both officials discussed a wide array of regional security issues that directly impact Southeast Asian countries.

India is among Cambodia's top 1 foreign investors and offers a massive market of 1.3 billion people for a much needed diversification of Phnom Penh's exports. Being recognised as one of Asia's most stable post-colonial countries and the world's largest democracy, India can serve as a practical model for Cambodia in its quest to maximize peace within its borders. Furthermore, as India's capabilities are growing exponentially in terms of economic capacity, military strength, and soft power, its role in Southeast Asia and the greater Indo-Pacific in general will also be expected to increase.

Given the intensifying power competition between the US and China, it will be imperative for Cambodia to bring in India into its overall strategic calculus to balance and safeguard its interests. This will also benefit India's Southeast Asia strategy as it seeks to present itself as an important security provider, capacity builder, and strategic partner in the region. Moreover, forging robust relations with India will not only improve the China-dependent narrative often attributed to Cambodia, but will also provide the latter with an opportunity to balance and diversify its external relations without directly getting embroiled in the existing US-China competition. India's adherence to strategic autonomy will provide Cambodia with a less controversial position vis-à-

vis its relations with China and serve as a complement to the overarching India-ASEAN partnership. It is therefore crucial for Cambodia to maximize its engagements with India given the geopolitical and economic uncertainty brought by the intensifying power competition and the crippling effects of the Covid pandemic.

However, India must also maintain a proactive level of consistency in applying its Act East Policy. The lack of momentum in the past has allowed countries like China to monopolize influence over key Southeast Asian countries. It will be necessary for India to project itself as a responsible stakeholder in the stability of the region and a trustworthy partner that seeks to achieve mutual gains.



# Budget 2022: Insurers urge higher 80 C investment limit; reduction in GST

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Insurance companies are seeking a separate deduction limit of Rs 1 lakh for insurance premium payment under Section 80 C of the Income Tax Act in the upcoming Union Budget to bring in more people under the ambit of insurance.

The insurers also want reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) rate of 18 per cent currently applied on health insurance products to 5 per cent to make such products more affordable to common people.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget for 2022-23 on February 1.

"The industry has long pending expectations from the policy makers for incentivizing people to get life insurance by giving a separate deduction limit of minimum Rs 1 lakh for insurance premium payment under Section 80C," Tarun Rustagi Chief Financial Officer Canara HSBC OBC Life Insurance said.

Life insurance is a long-term solution, unlike other financial products which have a shorter investment horizon



and are covered under the 80C provision.

Currently, all financial purchases are clubbed under the same IT deduction section (80C) capped at Rs 1,50,000.

"We expect the budget to consider creating a separate section for tax deduction on premium paid towards life insurance. This would enable a more logical segregation of customer's funds into long-term and short-term kitties," Edelweiss Tokio Life Insurance Executive Director Subhrajit Mukhopadhyay said.

Ageas Federal Life Insurance Managing Director

and CEO Vighnesh Shahane said the Section 80 C is currently cluttered with several investment options such as Public Provident Fund (PPF), Equity-Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS) and National Savings Certificate (NSC) amongst others. "At least, a separate section for term policies would be helpful given the current scenario and the huge protection gap in the country," Shahane said.

Future Generali India Life Insurance Senior VP and Head Products and Development Chinmay Bade said that life insurance is a proxy to social

## Bring natural gas under GST to realise PM's vision of gas-based economy

The government should bring natural gas under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime to realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for a gas-based economy and raising the share of the environment-friendly fuel in India's energy basket, an industry body that represents the likes of Reliance Industries as well state-owned firms, has said. Natural gas is currently outside the ambit of GST, and existing legacy taxes -- central excise

duty, state VAT, central sales tax - continue to be applicable on the fuel. In its pre-Budget memorandum to the finance ministry, Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry (FIPI), which boasts of members from across the oil and gas spectrum, also demanded rationalization of GST on transportation of natural gas through pipeline as well as on re-gasification of imported LNG to help bring down cost of the environment friendly fuel.

security in case of death of a person as well as survival and, therefore, the exemption limit of 1.5 lakh under Section 80C needs a revision.

As per IRDAI's Annual Report-2020-21, insurance penetration in the country is at 4.2 per cent of the GDP vis-à-vis a global average of 7.4 per cent. As of March, 2021, the non-life insurance penetration stood at barely 1 per cent.

Liberty General Insurance CEO and Whole-Time Director Roopam Asthana said due to the uncertainty spurred

by the COVID-19 pandemic, health insurance has become an everyday need in order to protect oneself from uncertainties and is more relevant than ever. "Therefore, the government should consider a drastic reduction in the GST applicable on health insurance premiums which is currently charged at 18 per cent. This will encourage people to purchase health insurance and additional top-up plans to protect themselves from medical crises and emergencies," Asthana noted.

# Air India likely to be handed over to Tata group today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian government is likely to hand over Air India to the Tata Group on Thursday, nearly 69 years after it was taken from the conglomerate, officials said on Wednesday.

After a competitive bidding process, the government had on October 8 last year sold Air India to Talace Private Limited - a subsidiary of the Tata Group's holding company - for Rs 18,000 crore.

Meanwhile, two airline pilot unions - Indian Pilots' Guild (IPG) and Indian Commercial Pilots' Association (ICPA) - on Monday warned Air India's CMD Vikram Dev Dutt of legal action as "multiple deductions and recoveries have been projected" on the dues owed to pilots.

"This recovery exercise is entirely illegal, and we demand that this anomaly is rectified and the amount due is repaid with immediate effect," the letter sent by the two unions said.

Additionally, two other unions have opposed the carrier's January 20 order to check grooming and measure the body mass index (BMI) of cabin crew members at the airports just before their flights.

These unions - Air India



Employees' Union (AIEU) and All India Cabin Crew Association (AICCA) - on Monday wrote to Dutt opposing the order on the grounds that it is dehumanising and in violation of rules prescribed by aviation regulator DGCA.

"BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in metres. A high BMI can indicate high body fatness," stated the website of US' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Three days after Air India's sale was announced on October 8 last year, a Letter of Intent (LoI) was issued to the Tata Group confirming the government's willingness to sell its 100 per cent stake in the airline. On October 25, the

Centre signed the share purchase agreement (SPA) for this deal.

Officials said on Wednesday that the airline will most likely be handed over to the conglomerate on Thursday as all the formalities are close to completion.

As a part of the deal, the Tata group will also be handed over Air India Express and a 50 per cent stake in ground handling arm Air India SATS.

Tatas had on October 8 beat the Rs 15,100-crore offer by a consortium led by SpiceJet promoter Ajay Singh and the reserve price of Rs 12,906 crore set by the government for the sale of its 100 per cent stake in the loss-making carrier.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Feb, March to see increase in demand: Shriram Transport Finance



Signaling a return to normalcy, India's largest truck lender, Shriram Transport Finance Company on Wednesday said its collection efficiency returned to 100 per cent in the second half of January after undergoing a brief blip in the first fortnight.

Shriram Transport Finance Company Vice-Chairman and Managing Director Umesh Revankar said the collection rates would rise in February and March as more people get vaccinated and the Omicron variant was less impactful on business than originally feared. Collections rates reflects confidence levels in borrowers, often seen as a proxy of economic activity. Third wave (of Covid-19) was only temporary. Doctors advise normal treatment and people have come out of fear and business has returned to normal. Some state governments imposed some restrictions but later it was reversed, by most of them. Everything appears normal now," he told PTI. The company pegs disbursements to reach pre-Covid-19 levels and expects demand to "shoot up" in coming months. "For February and March we feel it will be good. We feel things will be normal and it will be pre-Covid-19 levels, demands will shoot up soon", he said. He expressed hope that additional allocations in the union budget for infrastructure would propel demand for trucks.

### Vedanta demerger call by March-end: Anil Agarwal



Metals and mining group Vedanta Ltd will announce the contours of a proposal to spin off key businesses into separate listed companies by March-end, its chairman Anil Agarwal said, as he looks to simplify and streamline the corporate structure to create value. While the zinc business is already housed in a listed subsidiary, the plan is to

demerge the aluminum, iron and steel, and oil and gas businesses into standalone listed entities. This will unlock value for all stakeholders as well as create businesses that are positioned better to capitalise on their distinct market positions and deliver long-term growth and enable strategic partnerships, he told PTI in an interview. It will also help tailor capital structure and capital allocation policies based on business-specific dynamics as also create distinct investment profiles to attract deeper and broader investor bases. "It (demerger) is a natural thing to do. Market is very good and production (at different divisions of Vedanta) is going well. And so we think having separate companies will create valuation," he said. "I think, maybe in a month and a half, sometime before March-end we will announce the full (contours)." Mumbai-listed Vedanta Ltd had in November last year announced that its board of directors had formed a sub-committee to evaluate a potential spinoff of its aluminum, iron and steel, and oil and gas businesses into separate listed companies.

### Coal Ministry CPSEs clock 28.33 pc growth in capex



The government on Wednesday said the Ministry of Coal, through its CPSEs, has registered a 28.33 per cent year-on-year growth in capex achievement at Rs 12,605.75 crore for the period ending December, 2021. The Ministry of Coal, through its Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), had registered a capex achievement of Rs 9,822.28 crore for the period up to December, 2020, "As compared to the last year's achievement of Rs 9,822.28 crore for the period up to December, 2020, Coal Ministry CPSEs have done capex of Rs 12,605.75 crore, thereby giving a major impetus to the COVID-struck economy," the coal ministry said in a statement. This capex achievement is also 75 per cent of the Ministry of Coal's annual target, the statement added. Coal India (CIL) is one of the CPSEs under the coal ministry. CIL had earlier said that its capital expenditure jumped more than two-fold to Rs 1,840 crore in the first quarter of 2021-22, compared to Rs 844 crore in the year-ago quarter.

# Jio-BP opens EV charging hub in Delhi; petrol pump count inching up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A joint venture of billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) and energy supermajor BP has opened one of the country's largest EV charging hubs in Delhi, as the duo scale up the fuel retail network, offering multiple fuel choices including EV charging infrastructure.

Reliance BP Mobility Limited, operating under the brand name Jio-bp, is working with multiple demand aggregators, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and technology partners with a vision of being the leading EV charging infrastructure player in India, RIL had said in its third quarter earnings announcement last week.

"Jio-bp has constructed and launched one of the country's largest EV charging hubs in Dwarka, Delhi with BluSmart as its primary customer," it had said.

RBML had launched its first



Jio-bp branded Mobility Station at Navde, Navi Mumbai in October last year. And since then it has been scaling up the network.

In 2019, BP had bought a 49 per cent stake in over 1,400 petrol pumps and 31 aviation turbine fuel (ATF) stations owned by Reliance for USD 1 billion. The existing petrol pumps of Reliance had since been transferred to the joint venture, which plans to scale them up to 5,500 by 2025.

Reliance holds the remain-

ing 51 per cent stake in Reliance BP Mobility Limited (RBML). RBML has already received the marketing authorisation for transportation fuels. Petrol pumps with RBML have since increased to 1,448, according to latest information available from the petroleum ministry. RBML had 1,427 outlets at the end of September 2021. India's auto fuel retailing is dominated by public sector oil companies that own the majority of 81,099 petrol pumps in the country.

# Indian Biogas Association urges govt to set up Fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has urged the government to set up a 'Biogas Fertiliser Fund' with an initial provision of Rs 1.4 lakh crore for five years, as it has the potential to benefit five crore farmers and to reduce fossil fuel import bill.

For materializing the envisaged target of 5,000 plants under the SATAT (Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation) scheme, creating a 'Biogas-Fertiliser Fund' with an initial provision/corpus of Rs 1.4 lakh crore for the first five years period should be a welcome step, IBA said in a statement.

"The government has con-



stantly been talking about doubling the income of farmers by 2022. 50 million farmers will be benefitted with the outlay. Biogas Fertiliser Fund will not only ensure that India imports less fossil fuel but also help

farmers with bio-fertiliser," A R Shukla, President, IBS said.

The IBA has also suggested defining a blending quota for statutory mixing of bio-methane (CBG) in the city gas distribution network and nat-

ural gas pipeline. A tentative blending quota of 5 per cent for the first five year, followed by progressively increasing it up to 10 per cent at the end of 10 years. It also stated that the GST council recently notified the escalation of the GST slab from 5 per cent to 12 per cent for biogas plant-related equipment and their parts.

"This has put the biogas producers in a challenging situation. With the end product, biogas, and its other upgraded forms being slated at 5 per cent GST slab, the GST rate escalation further aggravates the existing inverted tax structure concerns, which eventually cascades onto an increase in the overall project price," it pointed out.

# To highlight economic growth, Biden goes shopping

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden pledged last week to chat more with everyday Americans and took an initial step Tuesday afternoon by visiting a gift shop and ice cream store in Washington's Capitol Hill neighbourhood.

Biden went shopping at Honey Made, a boutique that opened up last year amid the pandemic. The president perused the store, choosing a hoodie for his grandson and a necklace for his wife, Jill. He then picked up a mug with a picture of Vice President Kamala Harris on it.

"I'll get this one, too," he

said. The excursion occurred as the administration is trying to spotlight the healthier parts of the economy, at a time when many Americans are fretting over inflation at a nearly 40-year high. Higher prices have overshadowed the clear gains under Biden's watch as the unemployment rate has improved sharply to 3.9% and the economy is poised for the strongest growth since 1984.

The White House issued a fact sheet as Biden shopped that said the administration had provided \$400 billion in aid to more than 6 million small businesses.

# TCS 2<sup>nd</sup> most valuable IT services brand globally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has become the second most valuable brand in the IT services sector globally, while Infosys and four other Indian tech majors have firmly established their position among the top 25 IT services brands tally, according to Brand Finance.

Following TCS and Infosys (third spot), there are four more Indian brands now firmly established among the global elite - Wipro (7th), HCL (8th), Tech Mahindra (15th) and LTI (22nd), as per the Brand Finance IT Services 25 2022 report.

All six Indian brands feature among the top 10 fastest-growing IT Services brands over the course of 2020-2022, the brand valuation firm added.

Accenture retained the title of world's most valuable and strongest IT services brand, boasting record brand value of

USD 36.2 billion, as per the report.

Indian IT services brands made a leap with average growth from 2020 to 2022 at 51 per cent, compared to a seven per cent drop for brands from the US.

A global turn to remote working for professional services and an accelerated digitalisation trend across the global economy have facilitated expansion of IT services hubs within India.

With strong IT services brands and a large population of people with digital skills, India will continue to play a major role in developing infrastructure for artificial intelligence, data analytics and Internet of Things (IoT), it added.

The report said as IBM has gone down to fourth rank, TCS has risen up to second spot in ranking, following 12 per cent growth year-on-year



and 24 per cent since 2020, to a brand value of USD 16.8 billion.

TCS - in a regulatory filing said - this growth is attributed to the company's investments in its brand and its employees, customer equity and strong financial performance.

Strong revenue growth in 2021, saw TCS cross an important milestone, hitting USD 25 billion in revenue for the first

time, with an industry-leading operating profit margin of over 25 per cent.

"TCS continues to rise up the IT services rankings to become the second most valuable brand in the sector for the first time.

"This great achievement is the result of strong financial growth, strong and continued investments in a new global brand positioning last year... I also see TCS' focused commit-

ment to serving the needs of its employees, customers, and communities, which always - in the long run - drives brand performance," David Haigh, CEO and Chairman of Brand Finance, said. TCS CMO Rajashree R said the ranking is a landmark milestone for the company and a validation of its increased market relevance and focus on innovation and transformation of clients, their customers, and the larger community. "With our differentiated 'customer focused' strategy, superior execution, investments in building newer capabilities and sustained focus on research and innovation over the last decade, we are indeed well positioned to capitalise on the multi-year technology transformation opportunities that lie ahead," Rajashree added.

Infosys, at the third spot, emerged as the fastest-growing IT services brand globally fol-

lowing 52 per cent brand value growth since last year and 80 per cent since 2020 to USD 12.8 billion. Over the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the change is even more impressive with the brand recording an 80 per cent gain, the report said. Strong business results can be attributed to the brand's ability to credibly adapt its offering to fast-evolving needs of today's economy as well as to its continued investment into innovative solutions that help clients securely accelerate their journey to the cloud, the report noted.

Infosys has also continued to build brand recognition globally by nurturing sports collaborations with ATP, Roland Garros, and the Australian Open, while also forging new ones with Madison Square Garden and media-heavyweights - The Economist, Financial Times, Bloomberg, it added.



# Bond with the best this February

From stories that detail the shenanigans of animals, to the BCCI's impact on Indian cricket, to discovering the unity in diversity that is India through the workings of the 15th Finance Commission, to the saga of India's first manufacturing park for medical devices to lessons homemaker-CEOs can teach MBAs, corporate managers and businesses, to magical foods that will change your life, to the agony and ecstasy of falling and failing in love, *Rupa Publications* invites you to Bond with the best this February.

**Here's what's on offer:**  
**All Creatures Great and Small – By Ruskin Bond**

'Samuel was a snail of some individuality. Some considered him to be the bad snail in the family, but that was because he did not listen to his elders and liked to do things on his own... Birds and butterflies recognized no man-made borders, so why should snails?' If there is one thing that never gets old or boring or repetitive, it is stories that detail the shenanigans of animals. Often extremely entertaining, animals act in certain ways that are intriguing, wondrous and fascinating. In *All Creatures Great and Small*, Ruskin Bond, known for his signature simplistic and witty writing style, brings us stories and personal essays that speak to this animal-human equation. He takes us into the world of ambitious snails, conniving eagles, monkeys that love hot baths, humans who befriend them and many other exciting tales!

**On Board: Test, Trial, Triumph – My Years in BCCI – By Ratnakar Shetty**

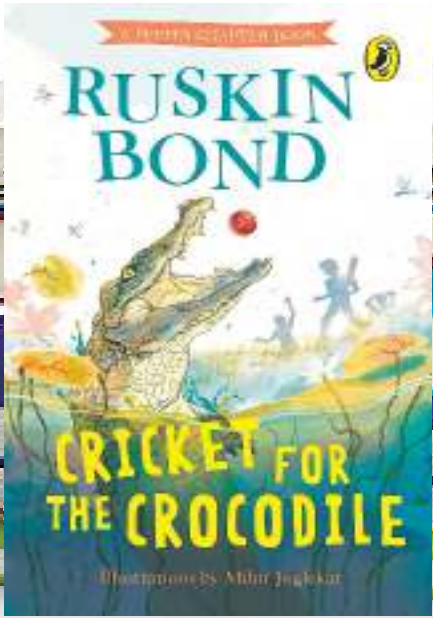
The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is an institution that elicits extreme reactions. While some marvel at the remarkable work it has done to promote and develop cricket in India and elsewhere, others decry it as being myopic, arrogant and money-minded. However, nobody can deny the impact the BCCI has had not only on Indian cricket, but also international cricket and the influence it commands. Over the years, the professionalism and excellence displayed by Indian cricketers on the field has been complemented by the zeal and diligence of those who worked

tirelessly behind the scenes to take Indian cricket to where it is today. *On Board* offers the reader an opportunity to walk through the corridors of this extraordinary institution and enter its meeting rooms, where many issues were discussed and momentous decisions taken.

Penned by Prof Ratnakar Shetty, who has been an integral part of the BCCI's evolution from being just a member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) to the most powerful cricket board on the planet, the book is an engaging read.

**Those Were the Days: Tales From The 15th Finance Commission – By Ashok K. Lahiri**

The Finance Commission has played a critical role in India's federal structure since 1952.



staff of the Commission gain while visiting all the states of our large and diverse country, and their interpersonal interactions.

*Those Were the Days* captures vignettes of such experiences of the 15th Finance Commission. It is a book not of history or economics or even secret deliberations within the Commission, but one that captures the joys of working as a team, a sense of discovery of the unity in diversity that is India and the great camaraderie that it enjoyed with leaders and civil servants in the different states.

**Made in Lockdown: India's Meditech Growth Powered by AMTZ – By Jitendra Sharma**

AMTZ is India's premier medical technology park with common manufacturing and scientific facilities that include specialized laboratories, warehousing and testing centres such as the centre for electromagnetic compatibility and safety testing, centre for bi-material testing, centre for 3D printing, centres for lasers, MRI magnets, gamma irradiation, moulds and many other industrial service centres.

This book highlights the real strength of AMTZ – not just the products to fight the pandemic, but a broader ambit of the healthcare value chain. *Made in Lockdown* is all about how AMTZ showcases modern India as a leader in the medical technology global stage.

**Every Mother Is a CEO: Management Lessons From My Mother – By Dhanjit Vadra**

Homemaker-CEOs can teach MBAs, corporate managers and businesses much more than you ever imagined. Doesn't managing a home's finances, nurturing the family's nutritional and emotional needs and planning the workflow of everyday activities of different

family members count as management? *Every Mother Is a CEO* answers these questions and more. In a breezy, conversational style, the author Dhanjit Vadra – Managing Director, Allen & Alvan Pvt Ltd and CEO, Allen & Alvan Defence & Aerospace – recounts the ways in which his mother Urmil Vadra worked tirelessly towards managing a large household, raising a family and assisting his father build a hardware manufacturing empire from scratch.

**Heal With Foods: Magical Ingredients That Will Change Your Life – By Manjari Chandra**

A vibrant, healthy you starts with your gut! Our food choices are driven by what we subconsciously feed to our brain, influenced by advertisements, peers, societal norms and many environmental factors. Immaculately designed packets and their strategic placement on store shelves compel us to buy foods that, in reality, we do not need. These are the foods that deteriorate our overall health, particularly the gut, when in fact, the gut defines and influences every aspect of our health – from digestion and body weight, to mood, hormonal balance and immunity. And gut health can only be enhanced by eating nutritionally rich, wholesome foods.

**Premier Amour: First Love – By Abhay**

A love story that is at once exciting and tender! The fact and fiction about love stories inevitably merge at some point, and one becomes the other. The proof lies between these pages.

Just like the lovebirds in real life, Bhanu and Bhushan experience the ecstasy and agony of falling and failing in love. But will they rise again in love? Will their first love give them a second chance? Those who have loved will get a clue from these lines:

A woman's heart in love is like a peacock in the rains. It has to give in to much singing and dancing, flutter its rainbow feathers and spread them in an oversized arch, then strut all over the place wearing that colourful cloak, announcing to the world that it is the season of love. First love is a rare lucky charm. Always wear it close to your heart.

To love and to lose in love is worse than not to love. I am still recovering from a fractured heart, and it is unfair to give someone something that is broken. Some women prefer to win their man, not steal him.

Let's ride the tide, love is by our side. — IANS



## TRANSFORM will make you a better leader, manager

Widely known for his bestseller books *Catalyst* and *Get Better at Getting Better*, the late Chandramouli Venkatesan's third book titled *TRANSFORM* was completed just before he succumbed to pancreatic cancer. It was intended to be a part of a longer series of books he wanted to write to help guide people to better navigate their careers. In this new book, published by Penguin, Mouli does what he does best, highlighting the most important ways to grow and improve through a key skill – people management.

Having a proven 29-year track record across companies like Asian Paints, Onida, Mondelez (erstwhile Cadbury) and Pidilite, Mouli has worked across multiple disciplines and brings all his experience to life through the insights he provides in this book.

During his career, Mouli observed that people management skills are a near universal requirement in all industries, and their impact in making a person successful is high. He also found that the people at the top are not necessarily the most technically competent or the most creative, but they were almost always good leaders and managers – making them good at people management. He viewed people management as one of the four key levers to achieving success in one's life and work.

We often view people management to be the actions that "leaders" and "managers" take, and many of us dream of being "leaders" one day ourselves. Mouli's writing style, however, makes you rethink concepts such as leadership and management and how they actually aren't one

dimensional in nature.

This book is based on a development program Mouli used to run called *Lead & Manage*. The book aims to bust certain myths we have – such as "leaders" only being those with leadership built into their role, like a CEO. In fact, he argues that no matter your role, your actions must be to both lead and manage simultaneously.

What makes *Transform* different is that Mouli has developed a practical work plan for his readers. By completing the few simple exercises in the book rigorously, you can learn to drive various behavioural and action based shifts in the way one approaches their career.




On book, Anand Kripalu, Managing Director & CEO, EPL says, "Mouli has been one of my best reportees. The book shares insights on people management to help young managers move up the corporate ladder fast. I am sure the book will leave a lasting impact and accelerate the careers of those who read it"

Dr. Ranjan Banerjee, Dean – BITSom, says, "How do you grow your people and in doing so, grow yourself? As somebody who has been both CEO and HR head, Mouli is/was uniquely placed to speak about this. Clear, simple and actionable, this is a must read for both aspiring and current leaders." Insightful and practical, *TRANSFORM* is a comprehensive book on leadership and management which covers many important concepts to improve chances of corporate success.





Available at book stores and on Amazon.in  
Hardcover | Non-fiction | Rs 399

## FUN




ARCHIE






CALVIN AND HOBBS






GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 A season

3 Strike with an open hand

7 Jump over

8 Having a sharp sour taste

10 Applauded

13 Bumped

16 Sleepy

17 A biting, jumping insect

18 Require

19 Something built over a river

6 A permit to drive

9 The language of Spain

11 Concealed from view

12 Shouted

14 Gown

15 A strong box for storing valuables

SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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



## Write from home now!



**D**on't you think that the tech industry is shaping the future of this country? Well, the 21st century is earmarked as IT driven and we are at the centre of global attraction considered as a knowledge powerhouse. And, taking this act ahead Xebia, the US head-quartered IT consultancy firm has joined hands with Microsoft for their first ever blog-a-thon contest! The blog-a-thon invites IT professionals, students, developers, and leaders to participate by sharing solutions on a pre-identified list of topics that are critical for business applications.

The blogs will be further evaluated by the Xebia — Microsoft jury and winners will be provided a global visibility to showcase their perspectives and win prizes along with Azure credits and mentoring sessions by Xebia and Microsoft subject matter experts. "This initiative will not only enable the students, IT aspirants, developers to showcase their skills but also get the right exposure for future career endeavors. The seasoned professionals, developers and leaders on the other hand will have their tech strategy heard in the right way globally. It is also an opportunity to IT professionals and developers to learn more about Microsoft's path breaking technologies and empower them to build the India of tomorrow," says Runki Goswami — Chief Marketing Officer — Xebia Global Services.

As we all know, India ranks third among the most attractive investment destinations for technology transactions in the world. This modern India has had a strong focus on science and technology, realising that it is a key element for economic growth! The country has regularly undertaken space missions, so why not this now? Runki further says, "Covid times saw an unprecedented number of blogs presenting an array of perspectives in technology. Some never got the right highlight or a definitive call to action. Looking at the innovative potential of techies and developers, we thought of give the bloggers a strategic platform for thought leadership. This was away from the regular

coding games and could bring out brilliant ideas that can be the base for tomorrow."

Blogging seems to be like the new-gen thing and capitalising on it quickly is Xebia's strategic mind to infuse it with an interesting initiative like this! It proves how over just a few decades, the internet went from being a research project to being perhaps the most important piece of technology we have in modern society. The spokesperson continues, "The covid-19 crisis has brought about years of change in the way companies in all sectors and regions do business. Digital adoption has taken a quantum leap at both the organisational and industry levels. With new tech trends being introduced every quarter and information becoming obsolete, it's now an obligation to stay relevant and learn about the newest technologies including digital industry, social media, and the web in general. Updated technology trends today helps indicating new markets, open up new merchandise and also introduce new of development."

Why do they have a strong belief in this specific initiative and how are they aggressively working towards establishing pioneering leaders in technological development? To that she replies, "We believe such collaborations bring out the best of different worlds. This is the digital age and making opportunities for IT aspirants and leaders to share their opinions on relevant subjects surely helps in bringing out brilliant ideas and summarizing the pros and cons of certain trends. This initiative will not only enable the aspirants to showcase their skills but also get the right exposure for future career endeavors. The seasoned professionals, developers and leaders on the other hand will have their tech strategy heard in the right way globally."



## Shama Sikander all excited about future projects

**S**hama Sikander who spent her time in Dubai recently dazzled in the latest photoshoot by keeping super fit and indulging herself in spreading smiles. The actress is flying high even during these difficult times as she says there is no other way she knows to live life. We absolutely adored her pictures and we wanted to know more about her life in Dubai, what she feels about the situation back home and what was her idea behind the shoot.

We spoke to Shama on the current condition and her photoshoot and here is what she says, "It's not easy staying away from home during such a situation. But all thanks to the almighty that everyone is hail and hearty. Everyone follows the

rules there and there are punitive implications otherwise. We are although quite disciplined even at home. This photoshoot happened as one of my friends approached me with this concept and it seemed very exciting as you all know how much I enjoy doing new photo-shoots it keeps my creative side excited and busy So we rallied quickly and made it happen. There is a lot more coming on that space. I do get to see the scenic landscape here but I missed home as much because now I have Casper my puppy to come back to along with my family and friends. I'm happy to be back now and super excited for some good acting projects coming my way."

She loves Dubai and Dubai loves her. We loved those stills from the inimitable shama and we wish she keeps them coming.



## Chatbots to rescue

**D**elivering proper care to those with mental health issues has always been a big challenge. India is on the verge of a mental health epidemic, yet it's hard to find a public discourse on ways to prevent mental health disorders or treat them.

According to a report by the World Health Organisation in 2019, over 264 million people are affected by depression and almost 8,00,000 people die by suicide each year. The situation has been further worsened by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The isolation because of lockdown, uncertainty and fear due to job cuts and general discomfort due to the inability to control different aspects of life has triggered severe mental trauma in people across India. The issue has been

There are chatbots designed to detect subtle changes in facial expressions, length of pauses or rates of speech and build a diagnosis accordingly. In case the chatbot detects a deep-seated problem in the patient, an option to meet an actual therapist is offered to them, and relevant helpline numbers are shared.

A part of the population especially, the millennials and Gen Z, believe that chatbots are a great way to address the issue of the mental health crisis in India. The young crowd is tech-savvy and more comfortable in sharing responses with a chatbot rather than a real person. This makes sense when we think about how workplaces are becoming more remote, and increasing internet conversations are making human interaction more limited.

However, not all are convinced and it can be debated whether one ought to be. Issues related to mental health are complex and articulating how one feels

nuanced inflections in body language and even tone. Compared to that, using a chatbot may seem superficial.

Apart from that, there are other issues as well. A chatbot is trained with underlying neural nets and learning algorithms and can inherit the prejudice of its makers. The algorithms behind a chatbot have to be designed in a way that makes sure it behaves in a specific manner, which is helpful for the person talking to it on the other side. The people developing the chatbot need to be well aware of the nuances of mental health.

### Bridging the gap

Human beings are complicated creatures, even those who are not struggling with mental health issues. Those suffering from anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and suicidal thoughts have several layers of thinking and multiple faces that they put on for their interactions. A chatbot, in this scenario, often helps to bring down the 'wall' since its biggest weakness is its greatest strength too. A chatbot is never judgemental, it will never

show empathy too. Most questions used by chatbots are fed in an algorithm based on the CBT technique. The lack of emotional bonding is often what a person suffering from mental health is often looking for. However, it is important to remember that chatbots can be effective in early interventions and a primary diagnosis of mental health disorders but it is best not to let chatbots engage in full-blown mental health therapy without any human supervision.

In conclusion, chatbots can offer support, companionship and therapy which can lessen the load on therapists drastically. It is indeed a viable option for people who face challenges in terms of affordability and accessibility. In the years to come, technology companies need to develop chatbots that can strike the right balance of being empathetic without being judgemental. Those using them must be made aware of the limitations of the chatbot and the areas in which it can help — a transparent system is what is required.

made even more complicated by the fact that no one has any idea when things will ever return to normal.

To tackle the issue of rising mental health issues among people, technology companies are leveraging Artificial intelligence-based solutions to develop chatbots tuned to help patients with mental health concerns. These conversational agents support patients with mental health issues while offering a high level of privacy and anonymity.

Chatbots can be effective but are they really the answer? Dr Prakriti Poddar, Mental Health Expert Director at Poddar Wellness, answers it all.

A chatbot is able to simulate a conversation on different platforms using audio or text and sometimes video too. While some chatbots are fully automated, some utilise human interfaces. The AI frameworks required to be trained with vast amounts of data to make these chatbots compatible with the complexity of human communication have the ability to understand cultural nuances.





"THE CONDITIONS MIGHT HAVE CHANGED A LITTLE BIT AFTER THE ROOF WAS CLOSED — SLIGHTLY FASTER, NOT AS BOUNCY AS BEFORE.

# Tsitsipas advances in Australia

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Stefanos Tsitsipas maintained his perfect record in Grand Slam quarterfinals, beating No 11-seeded Jannik Sinner 6-3 6-4 6-2 on Wednesday to reach the last four of the Australian Open. The 23-year-



old, No 4-ranked Tsitsipas improved to 5-0 at this stage of a major. It's the semifinals he's yet

to master, winning just one — at Roland Garros last year — from four so far.

He'll next player either Daniil Medvedev, who made his Grand Slam breakthrough when he won

**Tsitsipas didn't face a break point and converted all four he got on Sinner's serve in the match that lasted just over two hours, considerably less than his five-set fourth-round win over Taylor Fritz.**

last year's US Open title, or No 9 Felix Auger-Aliassime. No. 2 Medvedev and Auger-Aliassime were meeting later on Wednesday in a night match.

Tsitsipas didn't face a break point and converted all four he got on Sinner's serve in the match that lasted just over two hours, considerably less than his five-set fourth-round win over Taylor Fritz.

The only real delay came from a weather disruption, when a late afternoon storm meant the roof over Rod Laver Arena had to be closed when the Greek star was already up a set and a break.

"I knew I was heading toward the right direction," Tsitsipas said. "The conditions might have changed a little bit after the roof was closed — slightly faster, not as bouncy as before. I tried to adapt to the new conditions, and it just worked."

Dozens of ball kids and staff used towels to soak up water on the court in the 15-minute break.

The temperature dropped from the highs of the afternoon, when Iga Swiatek took three hours in the afternoon heat to beat 36-year-old Kaia Kanepi 4-6 7-6(2) 6-3, with the payoff being a spot in the semifinals against Danielle Collins.

"This match was crazy," the 20-year-old, 2020 French Open winner said.

"First set I think my mistake was I had so many break points, I felt like I missed my chances. In the second set ... I felt like she's playing so fast that I can't be tight. I had to finish my forehands."

The temperature reached 36 degrees Celsius (97 degrees Fahrenheit) on Day 10, continuing a week of hot weather.

Collins won the opening match before the heat peaked, swinging it in her favor with a key service break in the final game of the opening set on her way to a 7-5 6-1 victory over Alize Cornet.

No 115-ranked Kanepi was coming off an upset, three-set win over No 2-ranked Aryna Sabalenka and took the match to Swiatek, who saved nine set points before losing the first set.

Swiatek rallied in the second, exchanging service breaks twice before winning it in a tiebreaker.

After getting on top in the third, Swiatek was broken in the eighth game when she was serving for the match. She eventually clinched on Kanepi's serve, scrambling to stay in the last point until the Estonian player sent a forehand wide.

After the first three quarterfinals were decided in straight sets — Ash Barty beat Jessica Pegula and Madison Keys beat Barbora Krejickova on Tuesday — the last one went all the way.



## Quarterfinals spot secured but Australia not dropping guards against Thailand

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Title contenders Australia have secured their place in the quarterfinals after two dominating wins and they would look to continue their strong show against Thailand in their final group B match of the women's Asian Cup here on Thursday. That the Matildas will be one of the eight teams to advance to the knock-outs is certain, but they require at least a point against Thailand to be sure of becoming group winners.

The Thais, on the other hand, will have a complicated knockout stage equation when they face the 2010 champions at the Mumbai Football Arena. Australia head coach Tony Gustavsson warned his players against expecting a drop in their standards during Thursday's match. Gustavsson's side have taken no prisoners since touching down in Mumbai, piling on 22 unanswered goals in wins over Indonesia and the Philippines, and living up to their billing as title contenders.

The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup co-hosts have fielded exceptionally strong starting line-ups in their group stage matches, with stars like Sam Kerr, Ellie Carpenter and Steph Catley all starting on both occasions.

Gustavsson hinted at possible changes for his side's third and final match in Mumbai but declared there would be no letup in terms of how they approach the match itself.

"We're going to treat that game the same way we've done with these two. We have two main targets for the group stage. One was to win the group, and two was to get out of the group peaking physically and mentally going into the playoffs," he said.

"Now we have secured a spot in the playoffs. A tie in the last game would secure that (top in group). We're going to do that in a way that makes sure we have as many players as possible available for the quarter-final, but also peaking." Australia's path to winning the group -- and booking a quarter-final date with either Japan or Korea Republic -- is clear, but Thailand's position in the race for the knockout stage is far more complicated.

The Thais are level with the Philippines on points after a Kanyana Chatthabutr-inspired 4-0 win over Indonesia on Monday, but the loss they suffered to Alen Stajcic's side in their first match means they still sit third in the group standings.

AP ■ SAO PAULO

With World Cup spots secured, Brazil and Argentina appear set to test players in qualifying who are beloved by fans while trying to prove themselves with national teams.

Vinicius Junior has not scored in his first nine appearances for Brazil and Paulo Dybala has two goals in 31 games for Argentina.

Vinicius Junior is expected to replace Neymar for the Selecao against Ecuador and Dybala is likely to take the field in place of Lionel Messi against Chile.

Four South American nations qualify for this fall's tournament in Qatar and fifth places advances to a playoff against an Asian opponent, leaving two automatic berths still in contention. Only last-place Venezuela, with seven points, is out of contention.

Brazil leads with 35 points, followed by Argentina (29),

Ecuador (23), Colombia, Peru (17), Chile, Uruguay (16) and Bolivia (15).

The contenders each have four games remaining.

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### ECUADOR VS. BRAZIL

Vinicius Junior's top form at Real Madrid has drawn criticism at home for Brazil coach Tite, accused of not giving the 21-year-old enough time to show his dribbling skills and quick passes. Some allege the coach has difficulties to innovate and test rising players in new roles.

Tite maintains the winger requires patience. Based on Tuesday's training session, Vinicius Junior appears likely for the starting lineup.

Midfielder Casemiro, who plays with Vinicius at Madrid, agrees with his national team boss on not rushing the youngster.

"He has been exceptional. I see him every day. I saw him grow at the club," Casemiro said. "With the national team there is a different style of playing, another period to adapt. The competition is different. The quicker he adapts, the better. But we can't forget he is just 21 years old."

Ecuador, coached by Argentinian coach Gustavo Alfaro, should clinch with four points from its remaining games.

## PM Modi writes to Gayle, Rhodes on Republic Day

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As India celebrates its 73rd Republic Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written to celebrated cricketers Jonty Rhodes and Chris Gayle, acknowledging their "profound connection" with the country.

While South African Rhodes, a former Mumbai Indians fielding coach who resides in the country for a considerable part of the year, has a daughter named 'India', West Indian swashbuckler Gayle has been a big hit among cricket fans for his exploits in the IPL.

Modi, in his letter to Rhodes, wrote: "I would like to convey my Republic Day Greetings to You."



"Over the years, you have developed a profound connection with India and its culture. This is truly reflected when you named your daughter after this great nation. You truly are a special ambassador of the strong relations between our nations,"

the letter that Rhodes shared on his social media page said.

"India is witnessing a series of historic socio-economic transformations.

I am confident these will empower lives and contribute to the global fund."

Both Rhodes and Gayle thanked the Indian Prime Minister for his gesture.

"Thank you narendramodiji for the very kind words. I have indeed grown so much as an individual on every visit to India. My whole family celebrates RepublicDay with all of India, honouring the importance of a Constitution that protects the rights of the Indian people JaiHind," Rhodes tweeted.

Jamaican Gayle, who represents the West Indies in international cricket, also spoke about his special bond with Indian people.

"I would like to congratulate India on their 73rd Republic Day.

## Anthony Martial seals move from Man United to Sevilla

AP ■ SEVILLE

Anthony Martial will play for Sevilla on a loan from Manchester United until the end of the season, the Spanish club said. United manager Ralf Rangnick said last month that the 26-year-old Martial wanted to leave after tumbling down the list of forwards at the club, behind Cristiano Ronaldo, Marcus Rashford, Edinson Cavani, Jadon Sancho

and Mason Greenwood.

The France forward became the world's most expensive teenage player when United signed him from Monaco in September 2015 for 36 million pounds (then \$55.1 million) that could potentially rise to 58 million pounds (\$78 million).

There was no reported transfer fee or option to buy.



## Santosh Trophy football tournament postponed due to rise in COVID-19 cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy, which was scheduled to be held at Malappuram in Kerala from February 20 to March 6, was on Wednesday postponed till further notice due to rise in COVID-19 cases.

The All India Football Federation said it will review the circumstances next month before announcing the new schedule.

"The AIFF has communicated to participating state associations that in wake of rise in COVID-19 positive cases, and after consultation with the Government of Kerala, the competition schedule for the Hero National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy has been deferred," the federation said in a release.

"A review of the circumstances will be undertaken in the third week of February to decide on new dates and the new schedule."

# Dennerby blames AFC for COVID outbreak in Indian team

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian women's football team coach Thomas Dennerby on Wednesday squarely blamed the AFC for the COVID-19 outbreak that led to the country's ouster from the ongoing Asian Cup here, alleging that his players were infected by the hotel staff in a bio-bubble that was not "foolproof". In a scathing attack on the continental body, Dennerby said India's dream of taking a shot at the FIFA World Cup was shattered not because of any fault of the players but due to the weak bio-bubble created by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). He said the AFC did not show any "respect, compassion, empathy" to the team to deal with the "extraordinary" situation in such a high-stake tournament.

"We were all negative of COVID when we reached team hotel (on Jan 13)

and after arrival tests. The first positive case came on the day we went out of hotel for training and a day later (January 17), seven hotel staff tested positive. It is not rocket science to know how the outbreak came," he told PTI after a virtual media interaction. "The first huge outbreak was among the hotel staff. From my point of view, it's very clear where it (COVID) started, it definitely did not start in the team. It came from the AFC bubble inside the hotel," he said. "The hotel staff was tested for every six days and not every three days as done in case of teams. We know tests were conducted on hotel staff on Jan 11 and then on Jan 17 and seven positive cases were known on Jan 18. But the information was given only on Jan 19 afternoon. What was AFC doing for whole one day, we don't know." India were forced out of the AFC Women's Asian Cup on Sunday after a



dozen COVID-19 cases among their players led to the cancellation of a group match against Chinese Taipei minutes before kick-

off here. The AFC had said given the situation, Article 4.1 of the tournament rules came into effect, which made it clear

that if a team failed to assemble for a match, it would be "considered to have withdrawn from the relevant Competition."

Dennerby said the AFC should have asked the infected hotel staff to leave immediately and not have any contact with players. "We don't know why the AFC did not take immediate action. AFC should have called the hotel directly and asked the infected staff to immediately leave and not to have any contact with players," said the Swede who will also coach the Indian team in the FIFA Women's U-17 World Cup in October. "Several hotel staff infected with COVID, including team India coordinator, kitchen staff, chef, housekeeping, service staff, all of them taking care of us, cooking and serving food, cleaning our rooms, while we were inside isolated in our rooms, still the AFC waited for a whole day."

### CHILE VS. ARGENTINA

Under coach Lionel Scaloni, Argentina won last year's Copa America.

Following decent form at Juventus, the 28-year-old Dybala is expected to replace Messi in a match played at nearly 7,900 feet (2,400 meters) at Calama, in northern Chile's Atacama Desert.

Dybala also started for Argentina in November's 1-0 qualifying win at Uruguay, when Messi was recovering from a knee injury and entered in the second half.

Despite Argentina's early qualification to the World Cup, goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez said he and his teammates "are still hungry" and "not relaxed."

"We want to continue uniting as a team and as a group. We have to give our best to be in the final list,"

he said.

"We will try to win every match or play them as if they were our last. People have to see the best version of us in this World Cup year and we want to reach that goal."

Messi will miss these games while regaining fitness following a positive COVID-19 test last month.

"We don't have (Arturo) Vidal and we have to win. If our opponent doesn't have Messi, we have to beat them too," Chile coach Martin Lasarte said Tuesday.

No. 7 Uruguay will need a win at ninth-place Paraguay on Thursday to climb back to a qualifying position and to start strong under coach Diego Alonso, who took over after Oscar Tabarez was fired.

Fourth-place Colombia will host No. 5 Peru, and Bolivia will play at Venezuela.





## Chiranjeevi tests positive for Covid

**A**ctor Chiranjeevi tested positive for COVID-19, announced the actor through his Twitter account. The actor stated that he is experiencing very minor symptoms and is confined to his house. He also advised everybody who had touch with him to get tested and stay careful. The actor resorted to Twitter to express his feelings, writing, "Dear All, Despite all precautions, I have tested Covid 19 Positive with mild symptoms last night and am quarantining at home. I request all who came in contact with me over the last few days to get tested

too. Can't wait to see you all back soon!"

This is the second time the actor tested positive for Covid.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Chiranjeevi has four exciting projects lined up. He is waiting for the release of his next film *Acharya* directed by Koratala Siva. The film also stars Ram Charan, Kajal Aggarwal and Pooja Hegde. *Acharya* is scheduled to release in theaters on April 1, 2022. The actor also has *Bhola Shankar* directed by Meher Ramesh with Keerthy Suresh, Godfather directed by Jayaram Mohanraja and Mega154 directed by Bobby.

## 'We are silently spearheading socially driven cinema'

SHIKHA DUGGAL

**L**oser 2 explores the numerous dimensions of what it means to be an aspiring athlete in India and *Jathi Ratnalu* fame Priyadarshi Pulikonda left no stone unturned in tutoring himself to be best air rifle shooter the team have on block.

Describing about the tutelage process he had to go through for Telugu webseries *Loser 2* streaming on Zee 5, he begins, "Coaching for the sequel of *Loser* was so similar to reading your most favourite book after an interval. This time, training for an air rifle shooter twitched me up a little more. It was like a library calling me to open those best-loved pages! All this was going on when I headed back to the association where I trained all this while. I was falling back to that discipline which is so essential in my life because I remember the prolific coach advising me to stop smoking and going to the gym, doing this is not necessary to be an ace player. He narrated to me an example of the guy with a punch who got us a gold medal in air rifle shooting. He had no six-pack abs, flamboyance or chiseled arms — this is how he suggested that people who are likely to win gold for the country do not necessarily need to extremely physically fit. He asked me to focus heavily on building a deeper concentration instead. Fitness is desired, but a 1 rather believe in a fit mind. Suri Yadav is the gun and vice versa!"

He was building another guy in himself which slightly took on a toll on him, it was taxing as he mentioned. He continued, "Maybe there will be a season 3 of *Loser* and Suri Yadav will re-emerge. There's no official confirmation yet. I'll wait for the reactions and reviews to pour in by next month because during promotions, we made it a point to revisit *Loser* primarily. We are aware that the num-

ber of people haven't subscribed to Zee 5 Telugu but when it comes on television, they do watch it on a mass level! At the moment, I have wrapped Suri Yadav and placed him in the warehouse of my mind and hoping to revisit if and only there's a season 3."

As an air rifle shooter in the web-series, Priyadarshi is not just aiming for the practical target but also aiming for the highest viewership simultaneously. Talking a little about his admiration for the Telugu film industry, he stated, "Pandemic has changed the whole scenario here. Before it, Tollywood was all about commercial success! Nowadays, there's a different set of cinematic content hovering around. Fans have shown immense acceptance. We are silently spearheading socially driven cinema. Because of a pandemic, we really look up to cinema in its truest form which is



art! Though the industry suffered huge losses recently unlike the software industry, today we are running so well that sometimes we have a shortage of equipment, vanity vans and cinematographers. I have seen production houses moving to our city to shoot quickly these days not because Telugu cinema is star spangled or known to be a 'film city', but because the kind of stories we are churning out." He just couldn't swathe his interview without mentioning a very pertinent name from the Telugu film industry who according to Priyadarshi gave a new face-lift to Tollywood. He draws to a close, "Rajamouli is the name — he gave Tollywood a new spectacle. He bought in an advanced technology with *Baahubali* franchise. Tollywood became a level-playing field in all its cinematic aspects. Years ago we were watching a Malayalam movie with the help of torrent but today we have OTT platforms. Film stories are crossing borders, Allu Arjun's *Pushpa* proves it. Nagarjuna Akkineni mentioned at the press conference of *Loser 2* on how Rajasthan has demanded twenty prints of *Bangararaju* — this is indeed pan India."

## 10th class is very special to me: Avika

**1**0th Class *Diaries* starring Avika Gor and Sriram in the lead roles is all set to get a grand release. Noted Telugu cinematographer Anji is making his directorial debut with this upcoming film. Touted to be a romantic and youthful

drama, the film is produced by Achyuta Rama Rao P and Ravi Teja Manyam. Recently, director Harish Shankar unveiled a peppy mass song *Silaka Silaka*.

Speaking about the film leading actress Avika Gor said, "My 10th class is very special to me. I did *Uyyala*

*Jampala* when I was in 10th class. The Telugu audience accepted me with that film. Therefore, I will always remember 10th class. My character in this film is very interesting. I am hoping you will like me playing a bubbly character. This role is very different."

## Adivi Sesh on *Major*: Important to me that his story be shown in theatres

**A**ctor Adivi Sesh, who has been waiting for his upcoming movie *Major* to hit the screens, pens down a heartfelt note on the occasion of Republic Day. As the *Kshanam* actor reflects on the beautiful moments spent with 26/11 martyr Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan's parents, he shares some pictures on his social media handles. Sesh also pens a note about the release struggles being faced by the *Major* team and explains that he only wants the movie to be out when it is safe for everyone to watch it in the theaters. "On this #RepublicDay I reflect on some beautiful moments I spent with #MajorSandeepUnnikrishnan's parents, @NSG base #Mumbai", Adivi Sesh's note reads.

Sesh's emotional note also reads, "It's important to me that his

story be shown in theaters across the country, at a time when it's truly safe. No waves threatening public health."

"No theatres closed in cities like #Delhi. This is what he would want I feel. Safety. Protection. Of his people. Of his country. He was always a Soldier first. :) I'm thankful to find a small place in the hearts of his parents. His family," Sesh wrote, concluding his Republic Day post. Sesh is seen having a wonderful time with Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan's parents, as featured in the pictures shared by him. Sesh, who portrays the role of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan in Mahesh Babu's *Major*, has always maintained a close relationship with the martyr's family. *Major* was supposed to hit the screens earlier, but is now postponed due to the uncertain times of the Covid pandemic.



## Ravi Teja's action-packed poster wows fans



**M**ass Maharaja Ravi Teja and director Ramesh Varma's action entertainer *Khiladi* produced by Satyanarayana

Koneru has been carrying good buzz, thanks to aggressive promotions by the team. As part of musical promotions, the makers on the special occasion of Ravi Teja's birthday unveiled lyrical video of fourth single *Full Kicku*.

Rockstar Devi Sri Prasad, who is the master in rendering mass tracks, has come up with an energetic mass and dance number which makes fans go crazy in the theatres. Sagar and Mamta Sharma crooned the number with high pitch vocals, while Shreeman's lyrics are mass appealing. Shekar VJ has choreographed, while Ravi Teja and Dimple Hayathi offers mass blast with their graceful mass moves. Ravi Teja appears in lungi and vibrant outfits, Dimple Hayathi is

a sizzler. It will be an eye feast to watch the song in big screens with full visuals. Meanwhile, Ravi Teja's unique action thriller *Ramarao On Duty* being directed by debutant Sarath Mandava

under Sudhakar Cherukuri's SLV Cinemas LLP and RT Teamworks is gearing up for its theatrical release. They will begin canning a song from Wednesday in Ramoji Film City. The makers have released a new poster to wish Ravi Teja on his birthday. Ravi Teja appears aggressive in the action-packed poster that also shows his various emotions. He can be seen with his wife in one image, while his family can be seen in another. While one poster sees Ravi Teja busy with his work in office, we can also observe him in action in some other image. The other image shows burning train. The poster indeed suggests *Ramarao On Duty* is a film of all emotions and will have elements for all sections.

Divyansha Koushik and Rajisha Vijayan are the heroines opposite Ravi Teja in the film where Venu Thottampudi will be seen in a vital role. The film also features some noted actors in important roles. Music for the flick is by Sam CS, while Sathyan Sooryan ISC cranks the camera. Praveen KL is the editor.

