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Nellore Mayor announces support to Kotamreddy

PNS ■ NELLORE

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) rebel MLA Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy's episode has taken another interesting turn as Nellore Mayor Potluri Sranthi has announced his support to Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy.

"I have become mayor of Nellore city because of Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy. I will continue to support him. I am ready to resign to the Mayor post happily if needed," Mayor Sranvanthi announced while addressing a press conference along with Kotamreddy here on Saturday.

She said that YSRCP leaders asked her over phone on which side she would be and



she made it clear to them that she would continue to support Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy.

Meanwhile, Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy said that he intended to join the Opposition calmly without controversy but the 13 ministers, regional coordinators

and advisors spoke against him degrading his personality.

Responding to agriculture minister Kakani Govardhana Reddy accusations that he betrayed Jagan Mohan Reddy, Kotamreddy said that he would be loyal to which party

he works for. "I am not such a person to backstab. I wanted to join the Opposition from the ruling party..is it betrayal?," he asked.

Kotamreddy said that Anam Ramanarayana Reddy has given political life to Kakani Govardhan Reddy by making him ZP chairman. But now Kakani is working against Anam, he slammed.

"Kakani obstructed the installation of the YSR statue at Podalakur village during Jagan Mohan Reddy's Odarpu Yatra. If Kakani is loyal to the YSR family, why did he prevent installing the YSR statue," he said, adding that the YSRCP leaders criticized him only to fall into the notice of YSRCP leadership.

AP achieved 11.43% growth in 2021-22, says Buggana

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy has said that the Andhra Pradesh government, under the leadership of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, achieved a growth of 11.43 percent during 2021-22. He recalled that the whole world appreciated the way the people of the AP state came out of the Corona crisis without any difficulty and without forgetting the election promises even during the time of Covid.

The Minister said that for the year 2021-22, the AP GSDP at constant prices is 11.43 percent as per the report released by the Department of Statistics on the State performance of Andhra Pradesh. He pointed out that compared to



any other state; AP is at the top in this category. He explained that State GDP is at 18.47 percent at current prices and refuted allegations of Telugu Desam leaders of (-) 4 percent as AP GSDP. He further explained that it is a known truth that the state's GSDP is 2.73 percent higher than the central GDP while the national GDP is 8.7 percent. He

mentioned that in the statistics of the same year, the neighbouring state of Telangana is limited to the fourth position with 10.88 percent in the constant price growth rate.

The minister stated that the growth rate of AP state in the agriculture sector is 11.27% which is at the all India level is only 3.0%. He further stated that in this regard, our state has recorded 8.27% higher than the national growth and is far ahead. He mentioned that under agriculture and allied sectors, livestock registered 11.63% growth, horticulture 9.69% and fishing and aquaculture 9.08% growth.

He said that even in the time of Covid-19, India's growth rate was (-) 6.60%

but Andhra Pradesh achieved 0.08% growth during Corona times. He recalled that in the year 2018-19 during the TD government, 3.54 percent GSDP was recorded in the agriculture sector which was increased and recorded at 11.27 percent for the year 2021-22 during Jagan government. He further recalled that in the year 2018-19, GSDP was recorded at 3.17 percent in the industrial sector in TD regime, while it was recorded at 12.78 percent for the year 2021-22 in Jagan rule. He said similarly in the year 2018-19, GSDP was recorded at 4.84 percent in the service sector in TD government and it was recorded at 9.73 percent for the year 2021-22 in Jagan governance.

AP best for biz...

Continued from Page 1

He said that the State stood first in the Ease of Doing Business rankings for the year 2020-21, which is a proof of the business-friendly environment offered by the State and said that the Global India Business Forum can promote the industrial investment in the State by showcasing business opportunities available to prospective investors from across borders.

Earlier, Governor Harichandan presented mementoes to winners of the National Award for Business Excellence - 2023. Arunkoemar Hardien, Ambassador of the Republic of Suriname, Jacob, Trade & Industry Minister, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador of Nepal, Kamlesh Prakash, High Commissioner of the Republic of Fiji, have attended the International Business Seminar-2023, as Guests of Honour. Dr Jitendra Joshi, Global President, Global India Business Forum, and other delegates attended the programme.

Foreign doctors to treat Taraka Ratna

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It may be recalled that Nandamuri Taraka Rathna suffered a massive heart attack and fell down during the first day of Nara Lokesh's padayatra in Kuppam on January 27.

He suffered a heart attack while coming out of a local mosque along with Lokesh and a huge crowd.

The party cadres immediately shifted him to the KC hospital from where he was rushed to PES Medical College. Later, they conducted an angiogram and a stent was fixed for proper blood circulation.

With no chance to shift him via air ambulance from Kuppam, his uncle Nandamuri Balakrishna sought the Karnataka government's help to shift the patient to the Manipal Hospital in Bengaluru through green channel. Since then, he has been undergoing treatment in Bangalore.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹293
Without Skin	₹312
Broiler at Farm	₹160
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	411
VISAKHAPATNAM	420
HYDERABAD	346
RETAIL PRICE ON Vijayawada	₹4.11

Bopparaju elected AP JAC Amaravati chairman

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bopparaju Venkateshwarlu and Paliseti Damodar Rao were unanimously elected as chairman and general secretary of AP JAC Amaravati on Saturday. Elections were held for Andhra Pradesh Government Employees Joint Action Committee (AP JAC) Amaravati for the State Executive Committee at Kurnool Revenue Bhavan on Saturday.

As many as 21 executive committee members have filed nominations for various posts. The elected members of the executive committee will be officially announced in the council to be held on Sunday, said Election Officer K



Bhavana Rishi and Assistant Election Officer Krishna Rao.

The other key leaders elected are associate chairman TV Phani Perraju, Treasurer VV Murali Krishnam Naidu, Organising secretary S Krishna Mohan Rao and others were elected unanimously.

Phone-tapping not easy: Ex-CBI JD

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The ruling YSRC politics has been marred with allegations of phone-tapping for the past few days by rebel YSRC party MLAs from Nellore Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy have created a sensation in the political circles. To this effect retired IPS officer and former joint director of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) VV Lakshminarayana came to the rescue of the ruling party.

With regard to Kotamreddy's allegations of phone tapping, Lakshminarayana said it was not clear whether it was phone tapping or phone recording. The truth will come out only if the recording data is sent for forensic examination, he said and added that if the MLA had



Only top agencies like intelligence bureau, CBI, NIA and RAW have the powers to tap telephones of anybody. They are all under the control of the central government, and not the state government

any doubts, he can approach the court for forensic examination or any other inquiry.

In an interesting statement JD Lakshminarayana said that it is not so easy to do tapping of others' mobile phones. He said that "Only top agencies like intelligence bureau, CBI, NIA and RAW have the powers to tap telephones of anybody. They are all under the control of the central govern-

ment, and not the state government." He pointed out that even these agencies have to take any decision, they have to take the Union home ministry's permission.

"Though the state governments, too, can do telephone tapping, they can do it only under exceptional circumstances, that too, with the permission of the Union home

Film personalities express shock

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil film personalities including actors, singers and musicians expressed shock over the demise of legendary singer Vani Jayaram on Saturday.

The national award-winning singer, who completed half-a-century of professional singing, was found dead at her Chennai residence with an injury on her forehead. The police said she could have sustained an injury after she fell. She was 77.

Several personalities in the music world and her fans expressed shock over her sudden death, on Twitter. The acclaimed singer was recently honoured with the Padma Bhushan.

"It is with utmost shock & disbelief I heard about the sudden passing away of Vani amma. Spoke to her just two days back. A true legend. A very versatile & multi-lingual singer with strong classical foundation. May her soul rest in peace. #VaniJayaram," noted play-

back singer Chitra tweeted.

Actress Radikaa Sarathkumar, too, took to twitter to express her sorrow. "This is so shocking #vanijayaram, just last night I was playing her song and telling my husband how beautifully she was rendering the song in #KVishwanath sirs film. I am so shocked," she said in a tweet. Singer Chinmayi Sripaada said, "Vani Jayaram is the OG. She'll be cherished, adored, celebrated always, by all of us. Wish she'd been able to take her

Padma award."

Political analyst Sumanth Raman said in his tweet: "RIP Vani Jayaram. Great singer who never got her due in the film world. Good that the Govt recognised her contributions with a Padma Bhushan recently. Om Shanti."

Music composer D Imman said he couldn't accept the hard-hitting reality that legendary singer Vani Jairam is no more. "We miss you Amma. Met her and recorded for my upcoming film 'Malai' last

August. And I'm shocked to know that she's no more today. My prayers. May Her soul Rest in Peace," he tweeted.

Meanwhile, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) general secretary T T V Dhinakaran said Vani Jayaram captivated the hearts of Tamils with her mesmerising voice.

"She sang in the films featuring 'revolutionary' leader M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa," Dhinakaran tweeted.

Renowned singer Vani Jayaram found dead

Continued from Page 1

Vani Jayaram won three national awards and sang more than 10,000 songs in 19 languages, including in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Gujarati, Odia, Marathi, Haryanvi, Assamese, Tulu and Bengali. She had won state government awards from Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh.

Born at Kalaivani in Vellore to a traditional Tamil Iyengar family of classical musicians, Vani was initiated into the world of music by Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar and later by Kadalur Srinivasa Iyengar, T.R. Balasubramanian and R.S. Mani. She was employed at the State Bank of India in Secunderabad and she quit the job after she started training

for Hindustani music under Ustad Abdul Rahman Khan of the Patiala Gharana.

Vani was regarded as one of the very few South Indian singers who had an in-depth knowledge of Hindustani classical music and was at ease belting out Hindi, Gujarati and Haryanvi songs.

Her first music album was a duet with Kumar Gandharva composed by Vasant Desai.

A highly accomplished musician, Vani Jayaram was at ease with old music directors as well as the new generation. She was a favourite for both Ilaiyaraaja and AR Rahman.

The Tamil Nadu Police registered a case of suspicious death over the passing away of Vani Jayaram after she was found dead in her house on Saturday.

SC gets five new judges

Continued from Page 1

He said the prime minister had cleared the file on February 2, a day before the SC made the observations, and the appointment process was already in the final stages.

The appointments came in due course, he added.

The President signed their warrants of appointment on Saturday.

The Centre had on Friday assured the Supreme Court that the Collegium's recommendation for the appointment of five judges in the apex court will be cleared soon.

Attorney General R Venkataramani had told a bench of justices S K Kaul and A S Oka that the warrant of appointments of these five

names is expected to be issued shortly.

Once the five take oath early next week, the strength of the apex court will go up to 32 judges. At present the top court is functioning with 27 judges, including the Chief Justice of India. Its sanctioned strength, including the CJI, is 34.

On January 31, the Supreme Court collegium had recommended two more names for elevation as top court judges -- Allahabad High Court Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Gujarat High Court Chief Justice Aravind Kumar.

Once they are appointed and take oath, the top court will have its full strength of 34.

While recommending the two names, the SC Collegium

had said that the names sent by it on 13 December 2022 "shall have precedence over the two names recommended presently for appointment to the Supreme Court."

Acting chief justices have been appointed in the high courts of Rajasthan, Manipur and Patna following the appointment of their respective chief justices to the apex court.

While Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava has been made acting chief justice of the Rajasthan HC, Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh will hold the office of the chief justice of the Patna HC till a regular appointment is made.

Justice M V Muralidharan has been appointed acting chief justice of the Manipur HC.

Mental health needs to be included in health insurance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Majority feel that mental health consulting should be included in their health insurance and one-third are hesitant in reaching out to mental health experts because of the cost implication, as per a survey.

According to the Aditya Birla Health Insurance Report,

about 85 per cent of the population prefer cutting down on some luxury items and spend more on health insurance, while 89 per cent of the respondents believe that mental health consulting should be included in their health insurance.

Hence, there is an urgent need to increase awareness on

mental health, it said, adding the insurance sector is now getting actively involved as the scale of mental health issues in the 'New Normal' has never been bigger.

The report is based on research conducted with 6,600 respondents across 19 cities in India.

The survey said more than

half of the respondents searched and watched online fitness videos, whereas 69 per cent use wearables to check their health stats and track their targeted number of steps.

However, nearly one in every three respondents (32 per cent) admit that they do not monitor health stats regularly, such as weight and blood

pressure.

Mayank Bathwal, CEO, Aditya Birla Health Insurance, said, "Due to the pandemic, in the 'New Health Normal', people are realising the importance of a health-focused lifestyle and are actively seeking avenues that can support this healthy lifestyle - both online and offline."

Website, two books on NTR to be launched

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR centenary birth anniversary celebrations committee chairman and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) political secretary, TD Janardhan said that they are preparing a website on NTR with complete information and will publish two books besides conducting various programmes in Vijayawada and Hyderabad as part of the centenary celebrations. He said that the committee had designed the grand programme such that NTR's inspiring life should be a guide for Telugu people forever.

The committee chairman said that NTR's website is being designed with comprehensive information about the actor-turned-politician's film and political career as well as his personal life. He said that a special issue will

be published with the articles, messages and rare photos of the actors, technicians and leaders who worked with Rama Rao in the film industry, leaders who were close to him in the political field. He further said that we are also publishing two more books with historical speeches and speeches made by Rama Rao in the Legislative Assembly.

He said that it has been 27 years since Rama Rao passed away physically. He stated that they are organizing two programmes in Vijayawada and Hyderabad to reflect the Telugu culture and traditions in order to show the glory of NTR in which national leaders and celebrities from the film industry will participate.

Senior TD leaders MA Sharif, Atluri Narayana Rao, Ravula Chandrasekhar Reddy, Atluri Ashwin and others addressed.

Naidu behind Viveka...

Continued from Page 1

Even after the death of Vivekananda Reddy, Naidu remained the chief minister for three months. "Then why could not he nab the culprits? Why a charge sheet was not filed against him?" Nani said and added that the culprits were not caught because Chandrababu was involved in the murder. At that time, Naidu banned CBI from entering this State, because he was afraid that the CBI will expose murder politics That is why the CBI should investigate the phone calls of AB Venkateswara Rao, then DGP, Kadapa SP, Lokesh, Chandrababu Naidu TDP leaders in Kadapa district, demanded Nani.

MLA Nani further said that, if TDP founder Dr NTR's successors are coming to join the TDP, there are conspiracies and heartbreaks and accidents. Junior NTR came in the 2009 election campaign and met with an accident, now Taraka Ratna has also joined the Lokesh 'Padayatra' and suffered a massive heart

attack.

Nani recalled that Tarakaratra told his friends that he will be participating in the 'padayatra' and even told the press about the same. But NTR's grandson Taraka Ratna, who took part in the padayatra, was stuck in the huge crowd and people fell on him, so he suffered a heart attack under stress.

He pointed out that Lokesh started the 'padayatra' with about 400 private security personnel, but unfortunately they did not care for Taraka Ratna, though he is the true heir of NTR.

Nani said that Vivekananda Reddy case is being investigated by the CBI, so it has to investigate from all angles.

But the TDP supported media was writing as their wish about the phone conversation with MP Avinash Reddy and enjoying satanic pleasure said Nani.

He said, "If we want to talk to CM Jagan, we have to talk to OSD Krishna Mohan, or Naven over the phone and the TDP is making an issue out of this."

STANDING COMMITTEE MEETS

Krishna ZP chief riled by absence of officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna Zilla Parishad Chairperson Uppala Harika expressed her anger at the absence of the officials from NTR and Eluru districts at the Krishna ZP Standing Committee meetings in Machilipatnam on Saturday. She directed the ZP Chief Executive Officer (CEO) G Srinivasa Rao to submit a detailed report to the respective district collectors.

Meetings of the Krishna Zilla Parishad Standing Committees 1 to 7 were held during the day.

Harika directed the respective district collectors to take action against the officials who skipped the meetings. She asked the officials to prepare a plan of action to provide more work days under the MGNREGA scheme in Krishna district.



As many as 54 lakh work days were provided to the labourers so far and wages were paid to them at the rate of Rs 236 per day. Irrigation tanks and canals should be dredged in the coming days to store more water, she said and suggested that the officials take steps with avenue plantation on canal bunds and irrigation tanks.

The Krishna ZP Chairperson further said that the coming two to three months are suitable for the house construction and the officials concerned should reach targets in Krishna district.

As many as 2,38,862 beneficiaries are getting Rs 65.61 crore as social security pension every month in Krishna, the

highest for any district in the country, Harika said and disclosed that under the Pradhan Mantri Employment Guarantee Scheme loans up to Rs 50 lakh would be sanctioned in the industrial sector and up to Rs 20 lakh in the service sector through bankers. More than 167 applications were received and already 37 units were grounded, she added.

She directed the agricultural officers to resolve the shortage of gunny bags and moisture problems at the Paddy Purchasing Centres. Due to the mistakes of millers, the State government has faced criticism from the farmers, she said.

ZP vice-chairperson Garikapati Sridevi, CEO G Srinivasa Rao, DRDA Project Director PSR Prasad, DPO Nageswara Naik, and others were present.

Guv, CM, Pawan condole death of Vani Jairam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has expressed profound grief and sadness over the demise of Vani Jairam, veteran playback singer in Chennai on Saturday.

Governor Harichandan said Vani Jairam had sung in several Indian languages including Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Gujarati etc. and she won National Film Award for Best Female Playback singer for three times.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief and shock over the demise of Vani Jayaram, the rare and puritan version of classical music.

The Chief Minister said that the singer has struck a chord of strong classical base on a Pan-India level and conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family members.

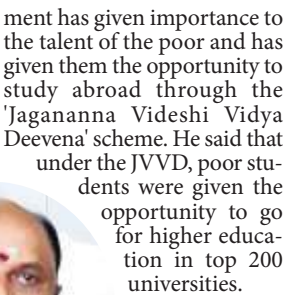
Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan has condoled the death of veteran cine playback singer Vani Jairam.

‘JVVD scheme a boon to talented students from poorer sections’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kapu Welfare and Development Corporation Chairman Adapa Seshu has said that the government has given the talented poor an opportunity to study abroad through the 'Jagananna Videshi Vidya Deevena' scheme. He said that under the JVVD, poor students were given the opportunity to go for higher education in top 200 universities.

The Kapu Corporation Chairman said that in the first phase, 213 students were admitted in top 200 foreign universities and 45 of them are Kapu students. The government will bear 100 percent of the fees of the students in top 100 universities and 50 percent of the fees for those who got a seat in universities with ranks from 101 to 200. He said that the Chief Minister is very encouraging in regard to making the poor students highly educated.



ment has given importance to the talent of the poor and has given them the opportunity to study abroad through the 'Jagananna Videshi Vidya Deevena' scheme. He said that under the JVVD, poor students were given the opportunity to go for higher education in top 200 universities.



23 RTC bus passengers have miraculous escape

PNS ■ PADERU

As many as 23 APSRTC bus passengers had a miraculous escape as the bus overturned while avoiding colliding with another bus at Manda village in Gummalakshimpuram mandal in ASR district on Saturday.

Police said that the Pallevelugu RTC bus was going to Parvathipuram from Gummalakshimpuram. The bus driver in a bid to avoid colliding with another express bus, hit the railing of the bridge resulting in the bus overturned on the road. All the passengers escaped unhurt.

Rally marks World Cancer Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Medical and Health Principal Secretary MT Krishna Babu said that there is a need to create awareness among the people on prevention and diagnosis of cancer disease and the doctors should cooperate to make Andhra Pradesh a cancer free state. Krishna Babu flagged off 5K walkathon held in Vijayawada on Saturday to mark World Cancer Day under the auspices of the American Oncology Institute.

On the occasion, he said the highest mortality was registered due to communicable diseases 20 years back and was reduced with advanced medicines available in the present days. However the mortality rate has increased due to non-communicable diseases.

The Principal Secretary said that according to the latest information 9 percent people die due to cancer. More than 35,000 people die of cancer every year in the state. He said that another 70 thousand people are newly affected by cancer. He said the treatment methods currently adopted are not only effective in



increasing the life span, but also in preventing and reducing the disease.

He stated as per the directions of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Rs 430 crore rupees were spent on cancer treatment last year under Aarogyasri. For the prevention of cancer disease, many medical procedures have been introduced in the network hospitals including cancer as the main disease, and medical procedures like palliative care from stage 1 to stage 4 have been made available like nowhere else in the country and an effort has been made to give comfort to the people from the clutches of the disease.

State Planning Board Vice

Chairman and MLA Malladi Vishnu said that it is necessary to keep the environment clean, change the diet and stay away from bad habits to avoid cancer. He said that there is a need to create more awareness among the people on cancer.

About 700 students, walkers association members, NGO representatives and denizens participated in the 5k walkathon.

Dr YSR Health University Registrar Dr Radhika Reddy, District Health and Medical Officer Dr M Suhasini along with AOI Mangalagiri Medical Director Dr N Subba Rao, Vijayawada Medical Director Dr Rajesh Kota, Regional CEO MV Mahendra Reddy and others participated.

REMARKS AGAINST CM

Cop held, suspended

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After a video went viral, the driver of a patrolling vehicle on the National Highway in NTR district was arrested and suspended for making inappropriate comments against chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and the state government on Friday. The armed reserve constable, identified as Tanneru Venkateshwarlu, reportedly made derogatory remarks against the Chief Minister, his family, and the government during an interaction with a villager at a petrol pump near Gouravaram village in NTR district on Feb 1.

NTR district police commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata said in a press communicate that the constable used obscene language and made inappropriate remarks on the government, the CM, and his family members. "Moreover, he used words that may incite hatred and hostility among people and communities. It is an offence for a responsible public servant to speak in such a manner," the CP said.

BCs pour out their woes to Lokesh

PNS ■ PUTHALAPATTU

The toddy tappers of Puthalapattu told the TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh, that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is not extending any assistance to them. The toddy-tappers demanded that 25 per cent of the liquor shops be allotted to them and said that the Chief Minister, Jagan Mohan Reddy, who promised pension for all Backward Classes (BC) women above 45 years, has failed to do so.

The local Vaddera community members demanded that they be enlisted in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category as the community has over two lakh population in the combined Chittoor district. The local Viswa Brahmin community too narrated their woes to Lokesh.

The State government is not even issuing community certificates to Padmasalis, they said. Rajakas too are very backward and the State government is not allotting 'dhobi' ghats to them and not extending any financial assistance to the com-



munity, they told Lokesh.

Responding to the problems, Lokesh said that the BC felt real independence only during the TDP regime as maximum possible funds were allocated for the community by the then government. With the percentage in reservations for BCs having been brought

down by CM Jagan, 16,500 persons lost their posts and he discontinued the Overseas Education scheme for BCs thus cheating the community, Lokesh felt.

Lokesh asked as to why the 'Adarana' scheme has been discontinued and why the 10 per cent deposit made by the

BCs for the scheme has not been refunded. Lokesh promised a separate plan for the welfare of goldsmiths and community halls will be built for every sub-caste as demanded by them once the TDP is back in power. He also said that the reservation percentage for BCs will be revived.

Speed up housing works, VMC chief tells officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar has directed the officials concerned to speed up housing construction. He asked them to provide internal roads, drinking water, electricity and other infrastructure facilities in the colonies. The Municipal Commissioner visited the Jagananna layout at Kondapavuluru of Gannavaram mandal in Krishna district on Saturday.

He enquired about the house sites and housing construction at the Kondapavuluru layout. He gave suggestions to the officials regarding speeding up the housing construction.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Swapnil said special officers should be taking care of the implementation of the 'Jagananna Sampurna Gruha Nirman' scheme. Contractors should complete the housing construction stipulated time, he added.

AP's school ecosystem comes in for praise

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The initiatives of the AP government in the education sector have come in for praise from the representatives of various states. They are not only inspiring but also worth being emulated, they opined.

Eminent educators and experts from several reputed organisations, NGOs and IAS officers working in the field of education visited a few schools in NTR and Krishna districts on Saturday. They visited Kolavennu Mandal Parishad Primary School, Punadipadu, Edupugallu Zilla Parishad High School, and interacted with education department officials in Krishna district.

They also visited Zilla Parishad Girls' High School, Patamata in NTR district, Rathi Forbes (Director Forbes Marshall Limited), Vivek Raghavan (Trustee, RG Manudhane Foundation CEO & President, Irvine Scientific), Nilesh Nimkar (Founder Trustee, Quest), Kavita Anand (Founder Vidyan Foundation), Murugan Vasudevan (CEO, Let's Dream Foundation, Ex-Head, Social Innovation, CISCO India and South Asia.), Minal Karanwal I.A.S., (Sub-Divisional Magistrate,



Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) Project Officer, Nandurbar, Maharashtra), Akanksha Gulati (Director, Act Grants), Prachi Vinlas (Director at Michael Susan Dell Foundation, India), Tarun Cherukuri (CEO, Indus Action), and Sneha Menon (Catalytic Philanthropy, Dasra) team visited the schools.

School Education Commissioner and Samagra Shiksha State Project Director S Suresh Kumar participated in the discussion organised with the guests. He explained the schemes launched by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy like 'Jagananna

Ammavodi', 'Mana Badi: Nadu- Nedu', 'Jagananna Vidyakanuka' and 'Jagananna Gorumudda' by giving high priority to education.

Similarly, 'School Maintenance Fund', 'Toilet Maintenance Fund', digital education, 'Smart TVs, interactive panels in classrooms', 'Distribution of tabs with Byzu's content for Class 8 students and teachers', 'Implementation of CBSE in government schools', 'Atal Tinkering Lab State Hub, Training Centre', 'Training classes to teach English language skills to students, six levels of foundational school cur-

riculum according to the National New Education Policy and providing the best training to teachers in prestigious institutes like IIMA were explained to the visiting team.

The delegates appreciated the efforts made by the State government in improving the entire education ecosystem. The reforms by Andhra Pradesh cover the entire gamut of education in a comprehensive manner keeping the children at the centre of all reforms, he added.

They appreciated the vision of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and his assurance to support the State in its

future endeavours. The representatives said that the schools they visited were satisfactory and praised them for their proactive cleanliness, happy learning environment, infrastructure and digital governance initiatives, as well as the creative instruction provided by teachers, they said.

Also, they said that the new apps designed by the Education Department to improve the understanding of the 'Teach Tool', teaching-learning methods and quality used by the principals, cluster resource persons and teacher mentors will be implemented in their states.



AP continues to occupy 15th place in ‘Khelo India’ Games

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh team continues to occupy the 15th place with five medals - one gold, one silver and three bronze - in the ongoing Khelo India Youth Games 2023 being conducted in Madhya Pradesh. The neighbouring State Telangana won 10 medals including two gold, two silver and six bronze.

On the sixth day of the Khelo India Youth Games, Andhra Pradesh's Mukesh won a gold medal in the 10 m Pistol category. He defeated Abhinav Chowdary of Rajasthan.

Also, two boxers from Andhra Pradesh won bronze

medals. Anjani Kumar Mummana participated in the 67 – 71 kg category and Mohammed Meherunnisa Begum participated in the 50-52 kg category and won bronze medals.

Similarly, in Badminton women's doubles, the Andhra Pradesh team comprising Jahnavi and Navya Kanderi stood third and won a bronze medal.

In the boys' Archery Compound category, Andhra Pradesh Archer T Ganesh Maniratnam missed the gold medal when he lost to Haryana's Kushal Dayal by 14-143 score and he secured second place and won a silver medal.

UHS sports selections in Vizag tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr YSR University of Health Sciences Roller Skates, Roller Hockey, and Inline Hockey (Men & Women) teams selection trials will be conducted at the Andhra Medical College in Visakhapatnam on February 6.

In a press release on Saturday, Dr YSR University of Health Sciences Sports Board secretary Dr E Trimurthy said that the selected teams would participate in the All India Inter University

Roller Skates, Roller Hockey, and Inline Hockey (Men & Women) Tournament to be held at Andhra University in Visakhapatnam from February 16 to 19.

Participants from all medical colleges, dental colleges, Ayurvedic colleges, homeopathic colleges, Unani colleges, physiotherapy colleges, B.Sc (Nursing) and B.Sc., (M.L.T) colleges affiliated with the Dr YSR University of Health Sciences should report to Physical Director, Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam on February 6 at 9 am, he added.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District School Games Cyclists selection trials, conducted by the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) Krishna district here on Saturday, evoked a good response from students . Around 60 cyclists participated in the selection trials.

SGFI Krishna district under-14, 17 secretary Thota Ajay Kumar conducted the selection trials with the support of the Krishna District Cycling

Association.

Ajay Kumar said Under-17 and Under-19 boys' and girls' inter-district cycling championships would be conducted from February 12 and 14 and the Under-14 championship would be conducted from February 16 to 17.

UNDER-14 BOYS

B Kartikeya (NSM School, Vijayawada), V Praveen (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada), M Harshith Kumar (ZPH School, Unguturu), A Shanmukh ((SKPVV



Hindu High School, Vijayawada) UNDER-14 GIRLS

Ch Ambika Lalitha (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada), G

Nikhitha (ZPH School, Unguturu), D Lakshmi Bai (ZPH School, Nunnna), K Jayasri (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada)

UNDER-17 BOYS

K Sailesh Kumar (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada), S Chaitanya (ZPH School, Unguturu), D Ram Chand Sri Eswar (ZPH School, Nunnna), P Barani Prasad) (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada)

UNDER-17 GIRLS

B Sasanka (NSM School,

Vijayawada), B Sirisha, Sk Sariya (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada), Y Nandini (ZPH School, Unguturu)

UNDER-19 GIRLS

G Akshaya, K Likhitha (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada), D Pujitha (ZPH School, Nunnna), Baby Rani (ZPH School, Unguturu)

UNDER-19 BOYS

A Satwik (Sri Chaitanya Junior College, Vijayawada), S Srinivas, T Naga Lokesh, A Tarakesh (SKPVV Hindu High School, Vijayawada)

Officials directed to speed up road widening works

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector P Prashanthi has directed the officials to expedite the works of widening and development of roads apart from incorporating the drainage system in the master plan.

The Collector held a meeting with the municipal officials here on Saturday and reviewed the progress of various development works.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that the municipal officials should work in coordination to executive the development works including the road widening. She underlined the need for developing roads in the city as Bhimavaram is a connecting centre and has become the district headquarter.

She directed the officials to



take steps to complete the DNR College road, Collector office road and Juvvalapalem road. If the existing contractor did not complete the works expeditiously, the works should be entrusted to a new contractor, she told the officials.

The Collector asked the offi-

cials to provide a drinking water connection to every household under the Amrit scheme and conduct a trial in this regard. The drainage planning should be evolved and it should be incorporated in the master plan, she told the officials.

The Collector asked the officials to provide a drinking water connection to every household under the Amrit scheme and conduct a trial in this regard.

She said that the approvals for the pending works would be given soon. Municipal Commissioner S Sivaramakrishna, Public health EE P Trinatha Rao and two planning ACP TPO Sarveswara Rao were among those who were present.

Woman, her daughter found murdered

PNS ■ ELURU



In a gruesome incident, a woman and her daughter were brutally murdered in their house at

NTR colony at Katrenipadu village in Musunuru mandal on Saturday.

CI Ankababu told the media that the deceased were identified as Yesu (36) and her daughter Akhila (15). Their bodies were found on the bed.

The deceased woman Yesu deserted her husband five years ago and she was allegedly maintaining a live-in relationship with a man.

CI Ankababu and SI Kutumba Rao visited the scene of offence, registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem. The double murders sent shockwaves in the colony.

Cancer awareness walk held

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Cancer awareness walk was held here on Saturday in which students of QIS College of Pharmacy and NSS unit volunteers participated. District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar flagged off the rally.

The cancer awareness walk was organised by the HCG MNR cancer hospital. The awareness rally began from the Collector's office to the RTC bus stand.

Collector Dinesh Kumar, municipal Commissioner Venkateswara Rao, HCG ANR Cancer hospital doctors and staff took part in the programme. Speaking on the occasion, the doctors said that Cancer is one of the diseases which is plaguing mankind. Cancer disease is prevalent across the world and many people die of cancer in the world every year.

The scientists identified over 100 types of cancers, every year over 13 lakh people are diagnosed with cancer across the world. Cancer Day is held on



February 4, the doctors said. The sooner the cancer is diagnosed, the more chances to save the patient, the doctors opined.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Dinesh Kumar said that everyone should be aware of cancer so they could be careful not to get affected by this disease. "Cancer can be controlled if it is detected and treated at an early stage. During the last three years, approximately 8 lakh people have been affected by cancer in

the country," the Collector said.

The number of cancer patients is increasing every year and people should be aware of this disease, the Collector said, adding that there should be changes in people's way of life.

Medical services have been expanded in Prakasam district through the family physician programme in the state, he said, stating that through this system, the medical system would go to the people.

YSRCP creating hurdles for Lokesh's 'padayatra': Gottipati

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MLA Gottipati Ravi Kumar has slammed the YSRCP for creating hurdles to Nara Lokesh's 'padayatra'.

Talking to the newsmen here on Saturday, he condemned the highhanded behaviour of the police on the TDP activists. "Unable to digest the overwhelming support from the people to the Yuvagalam padayatra of Nara Lokesh, the YSRCP led government is creating obstacles. The Raja Reddy Constitution prevails in AP," he lashed out.

Gottipati Ravikumar said that when the then Opposition leader Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy



embarked on a marathon padayatra, the then Chandrababu Naidu headed TDP government provided security and gave permissions. But now the present government is trying to prevent Lokesh's padayatra, he blamed. The TDP MLA strongly objected to setting 39 condi-

tions on padayatra, stating that no such restrictions were imposed when Congress MP Rahul Gandhi conducted padayatra in AP under his Jodo Yatra.

The police had seized the TDP vehicles in a bid to discourage the TDP cadres. The massive turnouts to Lokesh meetings at Kuppam, Palamaneru and Bagarupalyam panicked the ruling party leaders and that is why they were hatching conspiracies to foil the Yuvagalam padayatra, Gottipati Ravikumar flayed. The TDP cadre is ready to face any conspiracies and the Yuva Galam padayatra would continue, he added.

Seminar on GO No.1 on Feb 19

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'G.O.Ms.No.1 Raddu Porata Ikya Vedika' has passed a unanimous resolution to hold a state-level seminar on February 19 demanding to cancel GO No.1. Vedika convenor and senior advocate Muppalla Subba Rao chaired a meeting at the Makineni Basavapunniah Vignana Kendram (MBVK)

at Vijayawada on Saturday. 'GO No.1 Raddu Porata Ikya Vedika', comprising public associations, political parties, civil rights activists, advocates, labourers, farmers, women and others, attended.

Speaking on the occasion, Muppalla Subba Rao said that people are opposing GO No.1, as it is against the Constitution.



Another convenor of the 'Vedika' Sunkara Rajendra Prasad said that TDP, CPI, CPM, Congress Party, RPI, CPI (ML) Liberation leaders, and trade union and women forums extended their support.

He said the 'Vedika' would organise an agitation during the Assembly session if the government failed to withdraw the controversial GO.

Rs 1.22 cr for books to 102 libraries in EG

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Grandhalaya Parishad Chairman Mandapati Seshagiri Rao said that Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy was important for the development of Libraries and allocated funds to the tune of Rs 1.22 crore for purchasing of books for the 102 libraries located across the undivided East Godavari district.

He participated as a chief guest at the Manam Mana Grandhalayam programme held at the district central library here on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, he called upon the people to utilize the Libraries for improving their knowledge.

MP Vanga Geeta Viswanath, speaking on the occasion described the Libraries as the stepping stones for providing a bright future for the students. She said several unemployed youth had achieved success in the competitive exams by reading the books in the libraries.

District Library authority chairman Doolam Padma Venkanna Babu has presided.KUDA chairperson Ragireddi Chandrakala Deepthi, district central library secretary Prasad, Deputy Librarian R Venkataramu, Employees association president Tummalapalli Jayakrishna was among those attended.

3 MGNREGA workers run over by lorry

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

In a ghastly road accident, three MGNREGA workers were killed and four were injured when a speeding lorry ran over them while they were walking on the roadside at Mandada village at the outskirts of Amadalavalasa on Saturday.

Police said that a group of NREGA workers were going home after completing their

work on the Amudalavalasa-Palakonda road. A speeding lorry ran over them killing three workers instantaneously. Four workers were injured in the accident and they were admitted to the GGH in Srikakulam. The condition of one of the injured is said to be very critical. The deceased are yet to be identified. The lorry driver fled the scene after the accident.



'Centre did injustice to TS in Railway budget'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

State Planning Board Vice Chairman Boinapally Vinod Kumar said the BJP government at the Centre has once again done injustice to Telangana by not providing clarity. The centre also has left the state in the dark on the issue of railways.

"Railways budget was announced without giving a new railway line, without allocating enough funds for railway lines, without mentioning the bullet train to major cities of southern states, without opening the Kazipet railway coach factory, how much land is required for the Kazipet wagon manufacturing centre?" asked the PM.

Vice Principal Vinod Kumar said that the Centre has not made it clear how much land is required for the Kazipet Wagon manufacturing centre.

If they inform us the state government will cooperate to acquire the land, Vinod said. He demanded that the Central Government should clarify how much money will be given for the wagon manufacturing centre and how many new jobs will be given the Central Government.

Vinod demanded that the



central government should complete works on the Ramagundam-Manuguru railway line within the fixed time limit. Vinod said that only Rs 10 crore has been allocated for these works in the current budget, which is not enough.

He found fault about the attitude of the Centre by saying that if the Ramagundam-Manuguru railway line is completed, industry will develop a lot and that the most important railway line work has been delayed for a decade.

Vinod expressed disappointment that there was no mention of new railway lines for Telangana and not enough funds were announced for railway lines.

The Nizamabad - Armour -

Nirmal - Adilabad railway line has become unusable. Despite hopes that the Kazipet-Huzurabad - Karimnagar railway line will be sanctioned after the survey has been completed. It remains a disappointment. Funds have been allocated only for the third railway line between North India and South India".

He rued that the Central Government did not mention the bullet train to major southern cities like Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Chennai, Bengaluru and Kochi.

Vinod demanded that the Central Government should grant a coach factory to Kazipet as promised in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. Vinod said that while saying that the coach factory cannot be given in Kazipet, the BJP, the Congress, Central Railway Ministers are sanctioning railway coach factories in their states and indicates discrimination against the Kazipet coach factory.

He said that the Centre has announced that they have given more funds to the South Central Railway (SCR), but in actual form, they are limited to statistics and the actual situation is different from that.

'KTR for CM' gains momentum in BRS

Like Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao who is known for his Marathon press conferences and speeches, Industries Minister KT Rama Rao took the Assembly by storm for two hours on Saturday. The corridors of the Assembly echoed with talk about how KTR is a perfect fit for the Chief Minister's post. Several BRS leaders were discussing how KTR's speech on Saturday will remain a milestone in the history of the Telangana Legislative Assembly. The discussion on the Motion of Thanks is generally concluded by the reply of the Chief Minister or any other Minister. KCR picked his son to conclude the Motion of Thanks. BRS circles are now discussing how things are becoming certain on KTR driving the car in Telangana. A BRS leader didn't mince his words and said, "Clearly he is transforming to be the next CM. After listening to him on Saturday here, if anybody had any doubts, that should also go away. With KCR taking a lead role in national politics, KTR's role in the Assembly is just a trailer of what it would be like if he becomes the CM. It wouldn't be surprising if KTR leads Telangana after the next elections, said another BRS leader.

NOT DOUBLE ENGINE **SARKARS**

India needs double impact govt: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

India needs a double impact government and not a double engine one, Industries Minister KT Rama Rao said.

He said that the double engine claim of the BJP is intended only for publicity but double impact is for the people.

Speaking in the Assembly for nearly two hours on Saturday, KTR said, "Definitely a Kisan Sarkar will be formed at the Centre under the leadership of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao next time in India."

He said the BJP claims that miracles are happening in double-engine states but the fact is that there is power and water shortage in all BJP-ruled states.

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's address instead of KCR, KT Ramarao made it clear that BRS rule is nothing but family rule.

Giving a sharp counter to the opposition's criticism that KCR's family rule is going on in the state, KTR said, "Yes, there is family rule in Telangana. We believe in Vasudika Kutumba and the four crore people of Telangana are members of KCR's family. KCR is the head of the family."

He said that is why the opposition is saying that the BRS rule is family rule and added that the



BRS accepts the opposition's criticism of family rule.

KTR said that unlike any other state KCR is giving pensions to the grandparents of all families and is supporting them like an elder son. He said that he is taking care of four crore people like a sibling.

KCR, who is providing "quality" education to children through gurukulas and colleges, provides eyesight to the elderly and supports single women like an elder brother by giving them pension. He said that KCR also provides financial assistance to 12 lakh people through the Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak schemes.

"Welfare and development go hand in hand in Telangana. Rural development goes along with urban development. Information Technology grows along with agriculture exports and industry is growing and at the same time steps to protect the environmental are being taken," KTR said.

Targeting Prime Minister Modi and the BJP, KTR said that the Gujarat government has been announcing power holidays for industries.

"We are for Rythu Rajyam but the BJP wants Corporate Rajyam. We will campaign across the nation and our war cry will be the slogan "Ab Ki

Baar Kisan Sarkar," KTR said. "Telangana is number one in attracting foreign investments. Eatala Rajender was good when he was in the BRS but changed after joining the BJP," KTR said. "Telangana is number one in attracting foreign investments. Eatala Rajender was good when he was in the BRS but changed after joining the BJP. I haven't seen an atrocious Prime Minister like Modi anywhere else. The entire nation is now looking at KCR. There are no leaders and economists in the nation who do not like KCR. A leader has to work with a vision and not change dresses three times a day," he said.

Former legislators, sarpanches to join BRS

HYDERABAD: Many important leaders of Nanded, former MLAs, MPs and sitting sarpanches of 40 villages are likely to join the BRS in the presence of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Sunday. KCR will attend the meeting being held at the Gurudwara Sachkhand Board Ground in Nanded to welcome the new entrants to the party. Already sarpanches, public representatives and youth of the border district have joined the BRS during the fortnight-long stay of BRS legislators. Former CM Ashok Chavan and Sambaji Rajee are likely to attend the meeting. Nanded is all set for the BRS meeting. The meeting venue, a hall, was beautifully decorated by Sarvanga. Along with the town of Nanded, the entire area has turned pink for several km in all four directions. Huge hoardings, balloons

and stickers have been displayed everywhere. All arrangements have been completed for the BRS meeting in Nanded on Sunday. BRS president KCR will attend the meeting as chief guest. As the Nanded meeting is the first one being held at the national level after the launch of the BRS, the arrangements were made in a prestigious manner. Minister of Forest, Environment, Justice and Revenue Department Indrakaran Reddy, Government Whip Balka Suman, MLAs Jogu Ramanna and Shakeel, TSIC Chairman Gyadari Balamallu, Civil Supplies Corporation Chairman Undi Ravinder Singh and other leaders are spending the next few days in Nanded. Indrakaran has been staying in Nanded for a week and coordinating

with other leaders. Looking at the arrangements for the meeting, they are visiting villages and meeting sarpanches and other local public representatives and celebrities from various fields. Indrakaran is explaining the development and welfare schemes being implemented in Telangana under the leadership of KCR while greeting old men, women, farmers and youth in Marathi. They are informing about the efforts being made for alternative politics to bring about a qualitative change in national politics for the country's progress and seek support for the BRS. In Maharashtra, it is expected that a large number of BRS ranks and fans will be able to attend the meeting being held in Nanded district centre.

A large number of people from all the villages of Nanded South & North, Bokar, Naigam, Mukhed, Deglur, Loha Constituencies, Kinwat, Dharmabad Towns, Muthked, Naigam, Biloli, Umri, Himayat Nagar, etc and the mandals of Nanded district are likely to attend the meeting. People from Telangana constituencies like Adilabad, Both, Mudhol, Bodhan, and Jukkal as well as Nirmal and Nizamabad constituencies will also attend the meeting. Locals were reportedly surprised after the Gurdwara gave permission to hold the BRS meeting at the Guru Gobind Singh Grounds opposite the railway station in Nanded district centre. The Gurdwara has not allowed any political meetings at that place in the last 40 years.

Nation fast changing into developed one: Goyal

Karnataka is the 'jewel' that would drive that change

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal on Saturday said the country is on the path of rapid transformation into a developed nation and Karnataka is the 'jewel' that would drive that change.

He expressed confidence that BJP would come back to power in Karnataka with a big majority after the upcoming Assembly polls.

"India is on the path of rapid transformation into a developed nation. Karnataka, of course, is the jewel that will drive this transformation and the growth faster and more efficiently," Goyal said.



Speaking to reporters here on the Union Budget, he said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has made sufficient provision of Rs 7,561 crore for expansion of railway network in Karnataka, and also adequate allotment to speed up the work on the suburban rail system for Bengaluru.

He said he was happy about the Rs 5,300-crore assistance announced in the budget for the Upper Bhadra lift irrigation project in central part of Karnataka, benefiting people of the region.

Stating that the Finance Minister under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come out with the budget which lays the foundation for a developed nation, which would take prosperity to every single person in the country, Goyal said, "Our vision is inclusive growth, sustainable growth, holistic development of the entire country and prosperity for all."

"This budget has brought

series of steps, the outcome of which will naturally be the growth of the economy, more jobs, economic opportunity for youth, which will help every section of society. All of this will be on the back of green or sustainable growth," he said.

Listing out pro-people initiatives of the BJP government, the Minister said this budget is the first step in the journey of the nation to a developed one.

Highlighting the multiplier effect of infrastructure funding proposed in the Union budget, which would help propel economic growth, he spoke about ease of doing business and ease of living steps that have been initiated through the budget.

India a dependable partner, reliable friend of Sri Lanka: Union Minister

PNS ■ COLOMBO

India is always a dependable partner and a reliable friend of Sri Lanka, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said.

His remarks came as he attended Sri Lanka's 75th Independence Day. Several other foreign dignitaries also attended the event.

Muraleedharan said he was happy to represent India at "friendly neighbour" Sri Lanka's 75th Independence Day celebrations.

"This milestone coincides with 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries India is always a dependable partner and a reliable friend of Sri Lanka," he tweeted.

Muraleedharan also prayed to The Buddha at the sacred Gangaramaya Temple in



Colombo.

"Offered his respects to Ven Dr. Kirinde Assaji Thero," the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka tweeted.

Assaji Thero is the Chief Incumbent of Gangaramaya Temple.

Muraleedharan highlighted the close civilisational ties between India and Sri Lanka which are manifested, including through Buddhism.

requisite for Colombo to get the bailout package.

During mid-2022 Sri Lanka faced the worst economic crisis since independence which led to months-long public protests leading to a political crisis.

Shortages of essentials due to the forex crisis forced people onto the streets demanding the resignation of the then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Last year in April, Sri Lanka declared its first-ever debt default in its history.

Muraleedharan also interacted with the vibrant Indian diaspora in Sri Lanka.

"Appreciated their contributions in strengthening economic & people to people ties between India & Sri Lanka. Their role is even more significant today when Sri Lanka is on its path to economic recovery," he tweeted.

'K'taka Assembly polls before April 10-12'

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Predicting that the assembly polls in Karnataka is likely before April 10-12, Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa on Saturday exuded confidence that the party would come to power on its own in the state with absolute majority, banking on the achievements of state and Centre.



Insisting that there is no confusion in the BJP and all are united, the party strong man urged its workers and leaders to take the programmes of state and central government door-to-door, with special focus towards gaining the support of women, youth and SC/STs.

He also said, gone are the days of Congress coming to power using the means of money,

muscle and communal politics. "The assembly polls are expected before April 10-12. No one can stop the BJP from forming a government with clear majority by winning 130-140 seats in this election," Yediyurappa said.

Hitting out at Congress leaders Siddaramaiah and D K Shivakumar for going around the state claiming to be the next Chief Ministers, he said, "I want to ask Congress leaders, is Rahul Gandhi your leader? We (BJP) have a strong leader like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is loved and respected globally."

With the leadership of Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, there is no doubt that BJP will win all the upcoming elections, including that in Karnataka.

India, France and the UAE unveil plans for cooperation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India, France and the United Arab Emirates on Saturday unveiled an ambitious roadmap for cooperation in a plethora of areas including defence, energy and technology under a trilateral framework, a move that comes amid the geopolitical turmoil triggered by the conflict in Ukraine.

The plan was finalised during a phone conversation among External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, his French counterpart Catherine Colonna and UAE's Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

A joint statement said it was acknowledged that defence is an area of close cooperation between the three countries.

"Therefore, efforts will be undertaken to further pro-



mote compatibility, and joint development and co-production, whilst seeking out avenues for further collaboration and training between the three countries' defence forces," it said.

India, France and the UAE also agreed to boost cooperation in food security and circular economy and vowed to focus on key issues such as single-use plastic pollution and

desertification.

The trilateral initiative will serve as a platform to expand cooperation between the development agencies of the three countries on sustainable projects besides ensuring greater alignment of their respective economic, technological, and social policies with the objectives of the Paris climate agreement, according to the statement.

Percentage of Adivasis declining in J'khand under Soren govt

PNS ■ DEOGARH (JHARKHAND)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday claimed that demographic change in Jharkhand has seen the percentage of the Adivasi (tribal) population declining during the Hemant Soren government's tenure in power.

Addressing the BJP's Vijay Sankalp Maha Rally here, the senior party leader claimed that the population of Adivasis has declined from 35 per cent to 24 per cent due to massive infiltration from across the international border, which

has been "encouraged by the Hemant Soren government for vote bank politics".

He alleged that infiltrators were grabbing land in the state after marrying tribal women.

"The Hemant Soren government is the most corrupt in the country. Resources are being looted using railway wagons and tractors. People will unseat this government from power in the state as it failed to fulfil the 'aspirations of development' for which the separate state was created," he said.

Shah said the BJP will win



all 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the elections next year.

Referring to the killing of a

class 12 student, who was burnt alive by her stalker in Dumka last year, Shah said, "Adivasi girls are being murdered while the Hemant Soren government is indulging in politics of appeasement."

Earlier in the day, the Cooperation Minister said the Union government has decided to provide 300 services of the Centre as well as the state governments through the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS).

Shah said PACS would now function as Common Service Centres (CSC) and farmers

can avail benefits of 300 services including no-dues certificates, birth and death registration, and many more.

"The decision was taken on Friday. The IT Ministry has supported the Cooperative Ministry in this regard," he said, while laying the foundation stone of a Rs 450-crore IFFCO nano urea plant in Jasidih in Deogarh district.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Friday to enable the PACS to provide services offered by Common Service Centres.

Bengal govt failed to utilise Central funds: Smriti Irani

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Union Minister Smriti Irani on Saturday denied the allegations of Trinamool Congress that the Centre was not providing funds to the West Bengal government.

Irani instead claimed that funds given by the Centre are not being utilised by the TMC government in West Bengal.

The remark comes in the backdrop of the TMC government accusing the union gov-



ernment of putting an "economic blockade" in the state.

"Everyone needs to know the real truth behind what the TMC government is alleging. My ministry had provided funds to the Government of Bengal in the women and child welfare sector. That money is still lying, it has not been spent on the welfare of women and children of the state," Irani, the Union minister of Women and Child Development, said.

SC eases procedure to make it workable

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of the "insurmountable obstacles" in the implementation of advance medical directives of terminally-ill patients, the Supreme Court has eased the procedure to make it more workable.

A living will is an advance medical directive on end-of-life treatment.

The Supreme Court's 2018 order on passive euthanasia, wherein it recognised the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right and an aspect of Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution, notwithstanding, people wanting to get a

"living will" registered were facing problems due to cumbersome guidelines, prompting a reconsideration by the apex court.

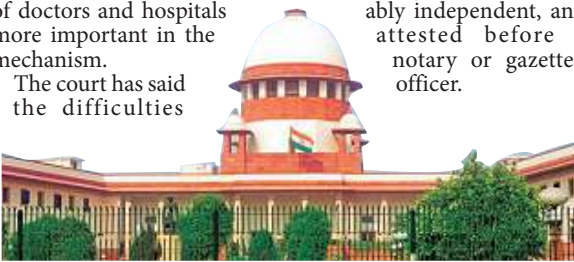
Issuing a slew of modifications, a five-judge Constitution bench, headed by Justice KM Joseph, has made the role of doctors and hospitals more important in the mechanism.

The court has said the difficulties

being encountered have been voiced by a large number of doctors and it has become absolutely necessary for the apex court to revisit its directions. The court said a living will now be signed by the executor in the presence of two attesting witnesses, preferably independent, and attested before a notary or gazetted officer.

"It should specify the name of a guardian(s) or close relative(s) who, in the event of the executor becoming incapable of taking decisions at the relevant time, will be authorised to give consent to refuse or withdraw medical treatment in a manner consistent with the advance directive."

"The document should be signed by the executor in the presence of two attesting witnesses, preferably independent, and attested before a notary or gazetted officer," the bench, also comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi, Aniruddha Bose, Hrishikesh Roy and CT Ravikumar, said.



FREE HIGHER EDUCATION SCHEME OF DU

Thousands of orphans will get opportunity to study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh on Saturday stated that thousands of orphan children, including those who lost their parents to COVID-19, will get an opportunity to pursue higher education free of cost with the university's new initiative to reserve seats for them.

The vice chancellor said the university has been responsible for providing edu-

cation to the students seeking higher education without any discrimination on any grounds.

The varsity recently decided to reserve seats in each of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for orphans under supernumerary quota from the next academic year.

Such students will also be exempted from payment of any kind of fees, he said.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the Executive

Council on Friday.

Speaking to PTI, Vice Chancellor Singh said, "The initiative will help thousands of children every year. We are coming out of Covid. Many children lost their parents during the pandemic. The initiative will also help those students."

In all colleges and departments of the university, one seat each will be reserved for orphan boys and girls in all classes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

"The University of Delhi understands the importance of providing higher education to every section of society, including those students who have unfortunately lost their parents and become orphans," he said.

The expenditure incurred for the admission and continuation of studies of such students in the university or its colleges will be met from the University Welfare Fund or the College Students' Welfare Fund.



Pakistani drone carrying contraband shot down by BSF along Raj border



Pakistani drone carrying about 6 kg narcotics has been shot down by the Border Security Force along the International Border in Rajasthan on Saturday, a senior officer said. The flying machine was brought down during the intervening night of February 3-4 in Srikanpur area of Sriganagar sector of the state. "A Pakistani drone along with two bags containing six packets of suspected narcotics, weighing about 6 kgs, has been recovered by a joint team of the force and local police," a BSF spokesperson said.

Western Air Commander reviews security scenario along N borders



Western Air Commander Air Marshal Pankaj Mohan Sinha on Saturday visited forward areas on the northern borders and lauded the strong counter-infiltration grid along the Line of Control (LoC), a defence spokesman said. The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief assured that the western command is vigilant for the aerial defence of the sensitive areas of various parts of North, North-West India, the spokesman said. The spokesman said the Indian Air Force has kept almost all its air bases at a 'very high level of readiness' to meet any eventuality relating to China and Pakistan. Air Marshal Sinha was briefed on the prevalent security situation and operational preparedness along the northern borders, the spokesman said, adding that the air officer interacted with senior officers and deliberated on various defence related issues.

India will get into global bond indices on own terms: Official

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India will not bend over backwards to get included in the global bond indices, a top finance ministry official said on Saturday.

Deploying a sartorial analogy, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan said the indices are an exclusive club or gymkhana, which insists on entry only for those wearing ties.

"...if we get into this club, it will be with our dhoti and saree. We will not change our domestic policies to suit foreign investors," he said, addressing a post-budget interaction with industry players in the financial capital.

He said there are both positives and negatives of such an inclusion, which was spoken about in a previous budget announcement, and India will not 'bend over backwards' to gain entry.

India's policies will be based on domestic requirements, and there will not be



any change to the stance to suit the fancy of global bond investors, he said.

The global indices should allow entry for India only if such a stance is acceptable to them, he said.

Positives of gaining entry include higher fund flows, but the same also exposes us to risks of volatility and pullouts due to non-domestic factors, Somanathan said, pointing to the experience of 'destabilisation' in some east-Asian economies.

Ajay Seth, the economic affairs secretary, hinted that there is no immediate plan of joining the indices.

Adani's FPO pullout has not impacted India's image: FM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's economic image is not affected due to Adani Group's recent decision to pull out Rs 20,000 crore FPO amid allegations of financial wrongdoings, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

The finance minister said there has been an accretion of USD 8 billion to the forex reserves in the last two days alone.

"...our macroeconomic fundamentals or our economy's image, none of which has been affected. Yes, FPOs (follow-on public offers) come in, and FIIs (foreign institutional investors) get out," Sitharaman told reporters here.

The minister said there are "fluctuations" in every market but the accretion over the last few days establishes the fact that the perception of both India and its inherent



strengths is intact. Answering a broader question on the allegations against Adani Group, she said the country's independent financial sector regulators will be looking into the aspect and added that capital markets watchdog Securities and Exchange Board of India has the wherewithal to ensure stability in markets.

"...for keeping the market and the markets regulated in prime condition, the Sebi is the authority. And it has the wherewithal to keep that prime condition," she said.

The finance minister also said that the RBI has already spoken out on the issue, referring to Friday's statement, which said the banking sector

is resilient and stable.

About ten days ago, US-based short seller Hindenberg Research made a slew of allegations on the corporate governance front against Adani Group. The Ahmedabad-based group has denied all the allegations and termed it as a calculated attack on India. It has cancelled the FPO even after managing subscriptions to it.

Finance Secretary TV Somanathan on Saturday stood by his comment on the controversy where he called it a storm in a teacup, clarifying that this is in the context of macroeconomic terms and the stability of India's public financial institutions.

Meanwhile, on the decision to convert outstanding dues into equity at Vodafone Idea, Somanathan said the transaction is being done as a package for all telcos.

Lack of demand for all categories of tea in Sale 05: CTTA official

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The downward trend in total demand and total offerings was in evidence once again for all categories of tea during Sale-05, a Calcutta Tea Traders Association (CTTA) official said.

The auction was held on February 1 and 2 and the market witnessed a lack of demand, he said on Saturday.

The total demand declined further by 28.56 per cent during this auction, he added.

According to CTTA official data, the total offerings amounted to 1,14,970 packages (33,17,286 kg) comprising 53,418 packages of CTC leaf, 38,952 packages of orthodox, 1,293 packages of Darjeeling leaf and 21,307



packages of dust tea.

CTC leaf met with fair demand at lower price level and a total of 12,13,470 kg of different categories was sold at an average price of Rs 152.88 per kg.

Around 61.41 per cent of the total demand was witnessed for CTC leaf at below

Rs 150 per kg price level and only 3.68 per cent was marked at above Rs 250 per kg level, it revealed.

Western India operated on liquoring teas and other internal markets marked good support. Some support was received from exporters on bolder broken, the data said.

BoM organises seminar on digital banking, languages

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Saturday said it has organised an all-India Hindi seminar on digital banking to sensitise bankers about the use of national as well as regional languages in digital transactions.

All the banks and financial institutions along with insurance companies participated in the event, inaugurated by Department of Official Language Secretary Anshuli Arya on Thursday, BoM said in a statement.

Arya, while addressing the event, said banking and financial institutions are the backbone of the Indian economy and bankers are serving the nation through banking services. He said the use of Hindi and regional languages in digital



banking is very important in the present scenario and customers from remote areas will also be benefitted by this, she added.

"This is the era of digitalization which holds great significance in banking and financial services. Hindi and regional languages are powerful mediums to further digitalization of various schemes across the country," BoM Managing Director A S Rajeev said. Various Hindi mobile apps of the bank and a booklet in Braille script were also released at the event.

Committed to ensuring market integrity: Sebi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging controversy over a meltdown in Adani group stocks, regulator Sebi on Saturday said it is committed to ensuring the stock market's integrity and all necessary surveillance measures are in place to address any excessive volatility in individual shares.

Without naming the Adani group specifically, the capital markets watchdog said in a statement that unusual price movement in the stocks of a business conglomerate has been observed in the past week.

Officials confirmed that the statement has been issued in the wake of the Adani matter only.

Godrej Properties sales bookings rise 77% to Rs 8,181 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties sales bookings rose 77 per cent year-on-year to Rs 8,181 crore in the April-December period on strong housing demand, and will cross the target of Rs 10,000 crore for the full fiscal, its Executive Chairman Pirojsha Godrej said.

The company's sales bookings stood at Rs 4,613 crore in the first nine months of the last financial year.

In an interview with PTI, Pirojsha Godrej said: "We are very happy with the quarter gone by. Operationally, it has been a very strong quarter."

Sales booking during the October-December period jumped over two-fold to Rs 3,252 crore from Rs 1,541 crore in the year-ago period.

"We have already done nearly Rs 8,200 crore of sales bookings in the first three quarters of this fiscal year and hopefully we will definitely cross Rs 10,000 crore annual guidance," Godrej said.



The sales bookings in the third quarter were the highest for the company for any quarter ever, Godrej highlighted.

Nevertheless, he said, Godrej Properties will not revise upwards its annual guidance for sales bookings.

According to an investors' presentation, out of the total sales bookings in April-December of this fiscal, the residential segment contributed Rs 8,124 crore, while commercial properties were just Rs 57 crore.

Scindia: Primary steel producers must use 50% recycled steel

PNS ■ KOCHI

Union Steel Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said his ministry will push primary steel producers to use 50 per cent of their input from scrapped/recycled steel by 2047 to help achieve the government target of moving into a circular economy.

Currently, the level of recycled steel usage in primary steel production is only around 10 per cent even though recycled steel contributes to 22.5 per cent of the domestic total steel production of 140 million tonnes, the minister said while addressing the last day of the three-day international conference of material recycling here.

The 10th conference is being organised by the Material Recycling Association of India and is attended by over 2,000 delegates from 38 countries.

Noting that recycling is the key cog in the wheel of manufacturing as economies move into a circular model of development, he said.

Axis Bank says exposure to Adani Group at 0.94% of total loans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private sector lender Axis Bank on Saturday said its exposure to crisis-ridden Adani Group stands at 0.94 per cent of its net advances.

"We extend credit, basis comfort on cash flow, security, and repayment capability of obligors as per the Bank's credit assessment framework. We remain comfortable with our exposure to Adani Group basis the same," the bank said in a regulatory filing.

The exposure to Adani Group is primarily to the operating companies in sectors like ports, transmission, power, gas distribution, roads and airports, it said. Fund-based outstanding as percentage of net advances is 0.29 per cent, while that of non-fund based outstanding is 0.58 per cent, it said.

Investments as percentage of net advances of the bank is 0.07 per cent as of December 31, 2022, it added.

In addition, the bank's fund based and non-fund based outstanding towards the group's JVs (with an MNC in the FMCG



The exposure to Adani Group is primarily to the operating companies in sectors like ports, transmission, power, gas distribution, roads and airports, it said

segment and with a PSU in City Gas Distribution segment) is at 0.02 per cent and 0.25 per cent, respectively, of the net advances.

Further, it said the bank has a resilient balance sheet with

standard asset coverage of 1.53 per cent as of December 31, 2022.

Stocks of Adani Group firms have taken a massive beating on the bourses after US-based short-seller Hindenberg Research made a litany of allegations in a report, including fraudulent transactions and share price manipulation at the Gautam Adani-led group.

The group has rejected the allegations. Hindenberg released the report on January 24 -- the day on which Adani Enterprises' Rs 20,000-crore follow-on share sale opened for anchor investors.

MONEY MATTERS

Reliance Jio launches True 5G services in Haridwar



Reliance Jio on Saturday said it has launched its True 5G services in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. With this, the telecom company has extended its True 5G network to 226 cities in the country. Haridwar is the second city in the state after Dehradun to get Jio True 5G services, a Reliance Jio press

release said. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said, "It is a matter of great pleasure that the 5G services by Jio network, which started from Dehradun in Uttarakhand, has been extended to Haridwar". With the beginning of this service, not only the people of Haridwar but also the pilgrims visiting the holy city from the country and abroad, including the pilgrims coming on Char Dham yatra in the near future will benefit, he said.

Lupin arm recalls 5,720 skin treatment cream tubes in US



Drug maker Lupin is recalling 5,720 tubes of a cream used in the treatment of various skin conditions, such as dermatitis, eczema and psoriasis, from the US market due to a manufacturing issue, according to the US Food and Drug Administration. As per the latest Enforcement Report by the US health regulator, Lupin Pharmaceuticals Inc, a US-based arm of the Mumbai-based drug

maker, is recalling Clobetasol propionate Cream, a steroid to reduce inflammation, redness and itchiness of the skin and prevent further irritation of the skin. The affected lot has been manufactured at the company's Pithampur plant in Madhya Pradesh and marketed in the US market by Baltimore-based Lupin Pharmaceuticals Inc. The USFDA noted that the company is recalling the affected lot due to "Subpotent Drug: Low assay result observed during long-term stability testing". The company initiated the Class III nationwide (US) recall of the affected lot on January 23 this year. As per the USFDA, a class III recall is initiated in a 'situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product is not likely to cause adverse health consequences'. The US generic drug market was estimated to be around USD 115.2 billion in 2019. It is the largest market for pharmaceutical products.

RP Sanjiv Goenka Group to invest Rs 10,000 cr in U P



RP Sanjiv Goenka Group said it will invest Rs 10,000 crore in Uttar Pradesh. The announcement was made by group head Sanjiv Goenka during a meeting with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. "Dr Sanjiv Goenka in a meeting today with the Honourable Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Shri Yogi Adityanath has announced

an investment of Rs 10,000 crore in the state..." the group said. Out of this, Rs 7,500 crore will be invested in renewables, while power distribution and retail sectors will receive Rs 1,000 crore each. Besides, the sports academies in the state will see an investment of Rs 500 crore, the group said. "With this Rs 10,000 crore investment, the total commitment of RP Sanjiv Goenka Group to the state of Uttar Pradesh is now pegged at Rs 20,000 crore," it added. The Kolkata-based group operates in sectors like power, IT-enabled services, media and entertainment, and retail. The group, with revenues of over Rs 26,000 crore, also owns the IPL franchise Lucknow Super Giants.

Bharti Airtel acquires 23% stake in Indus Towers



Telecom operator Bharti Airtel has increased its direct stake in Indus Towers by acquiring 23.01 per cent shares held by its completely owned subsidiary Nettle Infrastructure, a regulatory filing said on Saturday. Bharti Airtel now holds 47.95 per cent stake in Indus Towers. The telecom operator earlier directly held 24.94 per cent stake and 23.01 per cent through its subsidiary Nettle Infrastructure.

Bharti Airtel has acquired the 23.01 per cent stake of Indus Towers from Nettle to directly own 47.95 per cent in the mobile tower firm. This is pursuant to the 'composite scheme of amalgamation approved by the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Chandigarh bench, vide its order dated January 25, 2023 and becoming effective from February 1, 2023', the filing said.

In a first, BMC budgetary estimates cross Rs 50,000 crore-mark

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) commissioner and administrator I S Chahal on Saturday said the budgetary estimates for FY 2023-24 have crossed the Rs 50,000 crore-mark and the capital expenditure is more than 50 per cent, both unprecedented in the history of the country's richest civic body. The BMC has presented Rs 52,619.07 crore budget for the year 2023-24.

This is for the first time after 1985 that the Mumbai civic administration presented the budget to an administrator as the five-year term of corporators ended last year.

Chahal said health, education, environment, and trans-

parency are the main thrust areas of the budget which has also given importance to infrastructure. He said 37 years ago, then civic commissioner Kanga had presented a full budget as an administrator, and that he followed that example.

Queried about Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray's demand for presenting an interim budget in the absence of an elected body, Chahal said the budget will be reappropriated once the new body comes to power. "This is for the first time in the history of BMC that the budget estimates have crossed the Rs 50,000 crore-mark. It has never happened in the history of the BMC that the capital expenditure is more than 50 per cent," he told a press conference.

Labour Bureau to conduct demand-based survey

PNS ■ JODHPUR

The Labour Bureau will conduct a demand-based survey to identify the gaps in skilled manpower in the country, an official has said.

"We going to start a demand-based survey. So far, we have been doing a supply-based survey that these types of people are there. But now, the Labour Bureau is going to conduct a demand-based survey in which selected industries will be asked, through sample survey, what type of skill is required," Arti Ahuja, Secretary of the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment, said.

She said that industries will be asked about the required skills, shortages, surplus and

whether the available skill is adequate.

"Through this, we will get to know where the gaps are as per the demand of the industry," she said at a press conference on the concluding day of the three-day G20 Employment Working Group meeting held here.

Sharing the details of the deliberations held in different sessions, she said that consensus emerged on making a common nomenclature of skills and occupations.

"Some regions have done a kind of grouping and skill harmonisation, like it is there in Europe, ASEAN, and America has its classification framework. The time has come that under India's presidency, a decision should be taken to



make a common taxonomy and global snapshot," Ahuja noted.

This discussion on 'Addressing Global Skills Gaps' was held in a session.

International organisations ILO and OECD highlighted the

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-ARTI AHUJA, SECRETARY OF THE UNION MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

various types of imbalances between skills and qualifications in the labour market.

She said that skill mapping, aligning the vocabulary of jobs and occupations are very significant, and it will be a systematic reform if the G20 countries

make a consensus on it and its impact will be visible in the next few years.

"If G20 agrees upon this, this will be a major systematic change. After 5-6 years, its effect will be visible," said.

She said that megatrends like digitisation are happening across the globe. 85 million jobs will go away just because of these megatrends, but 91 million jobs will come as well.

"Artificial Intelligence and blockchain are replacing human jobs, but many other functions will come. Similarly, other technological changes are happening. So, our system should be agile, and it will be possible when we do mapping and data collection," she said.

Another session covered the

"I never thought being famous would be wonderful, but my limited exposure to celebrity has shown me the dark side big-time"
—Marianne Williamson



THE CITY OF FLOWERS NOW AN EPICENTER OF VIOLENCE

Peshawar was a peaceful place until the early 1980s when Pakistan’s then-dictator Ziaul Haq decided to become part of Washington’s cold war with Moscow, joining the fight against the 1979 Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan. Write RIAZ KHAN and MUNIR AHMED

Pakistan’s Peshawar was once known as “the city of flowers,” surrounded by orchards of pear, quince and pomegranate trees. It was a trading city, situated at the gates of a key mountain valley connecting South and Central Asia.

But for the past four decades, it has borne the brunt of rising militancy in the region, fueled by the conflicts in neighboring Afghanistan and the geopolitical games of great powers.

On Tuesday, the city with a population of about 2 million was reeling after one of Pakistan’s most devastating militant attacks in years. A day earlier, a suicide bomber unleashed a blast in a mosque inside the city’s main police compound, killing at least 101 people and wounding at least 225, mostly police.

Analysts say the carnage is the legacy of decades of flawed policies by Pakistan and the United States.

“What you sow, so shall you reap,” said Abdullah Khan, a senior security analyst.

Peshawar was a peaceful place, he said, until the early 1980s when Pakistan’s then-dictator Ziaul Haq decided to become part of Washington’s cold war with Moscow, joining the fight against the 1979 Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan.

Peshawar — less than 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the Afghan border — became the center where the American CIA and Pakistani military helped train, arm and fund the Afghan mujahedeen fighting the Soviets. The city was flooded by weapons and fighters, many of them hard-line Islamic militants, as well as with hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees.

Arab militants were also drawn there by the fight against the Soviets, including the scion of a wealthy Saudi family, Osama bin Laden. It was in Peshawar that bin Laden founded al-Qaida in the late 1980s, joining forces with veteran Egyptian militant Ayman al-Zawahri.

The Soviets finally withdrew in defeat from Afghanistan in 1989. But the legacy of militancy and armed resistance that the U.S. and Pakistan fueled against them remained.

“After the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1980s, Americans abandoned mujahedeen, Americans even abandoned us, and since then we are paying a price for it,” said Mahmood Shah, a former Pakistani army brigadier and a senior security analyst.

The mujahedeen plunged Afghanistan into civil war in a bloody fight for power. Meanwhile, in Peshawar and another Pakistani city, Quetta, the Afghan Taliban began to organize, with backing from the Pakistani government. Eventually, the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, ruling until they were ousted by the 2001 American-led invasion following al-Qaida’s 9/11 attacks in the U.S.

During the nearly 20-year U.S. war against the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, militant groups blossomed in the tribal regions of Pakistan along the border and around Peshawar. Like the Taliban, they found root among the ethnic Pashtuns who make up a majority in the region and in the city.

Some groups were encouraged by the Pakistani intelligence agencies. But others turned their guns against the government, angered by heavy security crackdowns and by frequent U.S. airstrikes in the border region targeting al-Qaida and other militants.

Chief among the anti-government groups was the Pakistani Taliban, or Tahreek-e Taliban-Pakistani, or TTP. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, it waged a brutal campaign of violence around the country. Peshawar was scene of one of the bloodiest TTP attacks in 2014, on an army-run public school that killed nearly 150 people, most of them schoolboys.

Peshawar’s location has for centuries made it a key juncture between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. One of the oldest cities

“DURING THE NEARLY 20-YEAR U.S. WAR AGAINST THE TALIBAN INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN, MILITANT GROUPS BLOSSOMED IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS OF PAKISTAN ALONG THE BORDER AND AROUND PESHAWAR. LIKE THE TALIBAN, THEY FOUND ROOT AMONG THE ETHNIC PASHTUNS WHO MAKE UP A MAJORITY IN THE REGION AND IN THE CITY. SOME GROUPS WERE ENCOURAGED BY THE PAKISTANI INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES. BUT OTHERS TURNED THEIR GUNS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, ANGERED BY HEAVY SECURITY CRACKDOWNS AND BY FREQUENT U.S. AIRSTRIKES IN THE BORDER REGION TARGETING AL-QAIDA AND OTHER MILITANTS”

in Asia, it stands at the entrance to the Khyber Pass, the main route between the two regions. That was a source of its prosperity in trade and put it on the path of armies going both directions, from Moghul emperors to British imperialists.

A heavy military offensive largely put down the TTP for several years and the government and the militants eventually reached an uneasy truce. Peshawar came under heavy security control, with checkpoints dotting the main roads, and a heavy presence of police and paramilitary troops.

TTP attacks, however, have grown once more since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul in August 2021 amid the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from that country. The Pakistani Taliban are distinct from but allied to the Afghan group, and Pakistani officials regularly accuse the Afghan Taliban of giving the TTP free rein to operate from Afghan territory.

On Wednesday, several police officers joined a peace march organized by the members of civil society groups in Peshawar, denouncing militant attacks and demanding peace in the country. Police said they made some arrest in connection with Monday’s mosque bombing but did not provide details.

Ahead of Monday’s suicide bombing, Peshawar had seen increasing small-scale attacks targeting police. In another spillover from Afghanistan’s conflict, the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group attacked Peshawar’s main Shiite mosque in March 2022, killing more than 60 people.

Shah, the former officer, warned that more TTP attacks could follow and said that Pakistan needs to engage the Afghan Taliban and pressure them to either evict the TTP or ensure it doesn’t launch attacks from Afghan territory.

“If we are to have peace in Pakistan, we should talk to TTP from the position of strength with help from the Afghan Taliban,” he said. “This is the best and viable solution to avoid more violence.” (AP)

Pakistan reaches out to Taliban supremo

Pakistan has decided to seek the intervention of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada to control the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group, according to official sources.

During an Apex Committee meeting in Peshawar, the civil and military leadership held the banned TTP responsible for the carnage in the city this week, and decided to take up the matter with the interim Afghan government at the highest level, with a clear message that Pakistan would no longer tolerate cross-border terrorism, The Express Tribune reported.

Although the TTP has denied its involvement in Monday’s suicide blast at a mosque in the Peshawar Police Lines, a briefing given to the Apex Committee suggested that the banned outfit was indeed the mastermind of the attack.

The meeting at the Governor House in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) capital was held in the wake of a deadly terrorist attack in the Police Lines in which more than 100 people, mostly policemen, were killed.

The meeting was presided over by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The participants of the meeting included Army chief Gen Syed Asim Munir, DG ISI Lt-Gen Nadeem Anjum, Peshawar Corps Commander, DGMO and other military officials as well as senior cabinet members, chief ministers of the four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was invited to the all-impor-



tant meeting but it did not attend. The marathon meeting discussed how the suicide bomber managed to enter the high security zone, who the perpetrator was and how the government would respond to the renewed threat posed by the TTP.

The meeting was informed that the TTP, indeed, carried out the attack but because of fear of backlash from the Afghan Taliban, it did not own it, publicly.

Insiders told The Express Tribune that Pakistan would seek the intervention of Akhundzada to control the banned terror outfit.

The meeting noted that despite the resurgence of terrorism in the country, terrorists did not hold any specific area, therefore there was no need for a full-scale military operations.

Instead, according to Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, the intelligence-based operations would continue. (IANS)

Yemenis' wait for war crimes justice lingers

The Yemen crisis continues. It has completed eight years. The country's internal political factions and Saudi-led military intervention have spawned the catastrophe. The intractable civil war initially has gradually transformed into a full-blown tragedy leading to the deaths of millions, especially children and women. And it has added more numbers to the international refugee crisis.

The real tragedy lies in blatant violation of all universal norms set by the UN and prescribed by the international humanitarian laws. The rules and principles of the global humanitarian framework provide full protection to all civilians and others who are not participating in the war. In fact, all sets of international humanitarian law demands and normally ensures from the conflicting groups the greatest possible measures to reduce human suffering during the conduct of fighting. Therefore, these laws clearly distinguish between military objectives and civilian objectives. The final objective is to minimise harm to civil society. What has been observed in Yemen is flouting all humanitarian restrictions while pursuing military objectives. It has led to disproportionate attacks over civilian targets. Thus, many civil society organisations and global human right agencies are claiming that indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks carried out by the warring parties in Yemen are akin to war crimes.

As long as there have been conflicts and wars, attempts have been made by international jurists and other experts to define "war crimes". However, only by the 20th century, the very concept of war crime was defined in the legal sense of the term. According to the UN, a war crime is a serious breach of international law committed against civilians or enemy combatants during an international or domestic armed conflict. So to have a war crime, there must be an armed conflict. An armed conflict, international or non-international or



Assault rifles and missiles seized by the French Navy lay on the deck of a ship at an undisclosed location on Wednesday. French naval forces in January seized thousands of assault rifles, machine guns and anti-tank missiles in the Gulf of Oman coming from Iran heading to Yemen's Houthi rebels, officials said on Thursday, the latest such interdiction amid West Asian nation's long-running war

involving an armed international group is a prerequisite to war crimes and grave breaches (Gary D Solis 2018). In contrast to genocide and crimes against humanity, war crimes have to take place in the context of armed conflict.

Further the meaning of war crimes is clarified in four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Article 147 of the fourth Geneva Convention defines war crimes as "wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including... wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person... taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly". So the war crime as per this land-

mark article has been recorded in many corners of the world. The International Criminal Court established by the Rome Statute is the first international criminal court when it first started in the year 2002 with 123 member nations. This court has the authority to prosecute individuals - heads of state, military members and others - under three broad frameworks of international criminal acts: crime against humanity, war crimes and genocide. Again, the three main pillars of humanitarian law are the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. And if any one of these is violated, it could be established that a war crime has been committed.

Now the reality in Yemen is grim. In the year 2019, the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) released a devastating

report on Yemen. The report was prepared by a panel of independent experts empowered by the UNHRC to find out violations of human rights in Yemen during this war. The report clearly established the fact that though it was ostensibly a civil war, the outside powers are both direct and indirect belligerents and are responsible for war crimes. And here the main lead is taken by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The report found a litany of crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition that has targeted civilian sites a number of times. The report strongly suggested that Saudi Arabia's western backers, including the US, the UK and France, bear responsibility for war crimes. These global powers are consistently supplying arms and ammunition to Saudi Arabia for carrying out the war

in Yemen. However, the US has also offered technical assistance to Saudi Arabian forces while conducting massive bombing raids over enemy targets all across Yemen.

Yemen, a small nation located in the Arabian Peninsula has become a permanent war theatre today. The country has turned out to be a grievous site of human suffering particularly of children, women and ageing population. All global governance institutions, including the UN, except delivering peace sermons and urges, have simply become mute spectators, failing to stop the human carnage. And sadly, it is led indirectly by the world's most powerful nation, the US, on one side and the Islamic Republic of Iran by supporting Houthi Rebels on the other side. Who will be stopping them? Probably, no one until they withdraw on their own from the war field. And Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, popularly known as MBS globally, simply wants to showcase his prowess by demolishing the Iran-backed rebels which are unstoppable for now. At home, MBS remains popular for his innovative strategies to recast the regimes economic and techno visions, but internationally he has been unable to shake off the veil of suspicion for his alleged role in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in the year 2018. He is finding it too difficult either to withdraw or to outrightly declare his country as the winner of the Yemen War.

It is well known that the Saudis did not start the conflict. It is the Houthis who did it by marching to the historic capital city of Sanaa and overthrew the legitimate Yemeni Government in late 2014. Nevertheless, the conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring of 2011. Then an uprising of the public forced the country's long-time authoritarian President Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand over power to his Deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The transition, as expected by interna-

tional political analysts, was supposed to bring peace and stability to Yemen, one of the poorest nations in the West Asian region.

However, unfortunately Hadi had to subsequently handle militancy, Islamic jihadists, military officers having continued loyalty to former President Saleh and most importantly an economic downturn propelled by massive corruption charges.

When the Houthi Shi rebels took over the capital city of Sanaa, President Hadi had to flee and the real existential crisis of the legitimate government of Iran began. Again, the conflict took a turn of a regional war in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia and eight other, mostly Sunni Arab nations, backed by the US, France, and the UK began strikes against the Houthis to restore the Hadi Government in Yemen. This has given the war an international angle too and the Islamic Republic of Iran openly supported the Houthi rebels. In fact, the Saudis are seriously concerned about the continued success and rampage of the Houthi militants as it would open a stronghold for its rival Iran in its southern backyard for future.

Truly, there has been disaster for everyone whosoever has been involved in the war. But for the most part, it is no other than Yemen's impoverished and malnourished population who have become the central target of the war. The Yemenis are killing the Yemenis by taking global support for arms and ammunition from warmongering nations. And at the same time, the regional warring parties like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the rival Iran are bleeding their own coffers simply to re-establish their superiority in West Asia. And the final sufferers are no other than the ordinary Yemenis. It's time to stop this war crime. Enough is enough.

(The writer is the Head of the Department of Arts and Humanities at Geeta University, Panipat)

The Yemenis are killing the Yemenis by taking global support for arms and ammunition from warmongering nations. And at the same time, the regional warring parties like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the rival Iran are bleeding their own coffers simply to re-establish their superiority in West Asia



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

Budget ensures economy's fundamentals remain solid

The 2023-24 Budget has proved all pundits wrong as they had predicted it to be a political Budget before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The last full-fledged Budget before the general elections is not populist on any parameter. It takes confidence and commitment to stick to the fundamentals of prudent fiscal management, when it makes complete sense to go all-out political. This attribute which was also visible during the handling of the Covid-19 crisis will keep the economy resilient.

The highlight of the Budget has to be the increased allocation for capital expenditure, which was hiked by 33 per cent to Rs 10 lakh crore and the total capex is expected to be around 13 lakh crore. After two consecutive years of blistering growth in Government capex, there was an expectation that the Centre would step off the accelerator and make more direct cash transfers under various social sector schemes. The increase in capex under this context is indeed a pleasant surprise.

The Budget continues to focus on the smooth functioning of the economy. Capital allocation for collateral-free lending to the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector has been increased to Rs 9,000 crore. This will lead to an incremental lending of Rs 2 lakh crore to this sector. Customs duties have been reduced on a number of commodities to make manufacturing in India more competitive, with raw material availability at lower costs. These steps, together with the continued work on the ease-of-doing-business, will help the micro, small and medium enterprise sector in a major way.

Relief in personal income tax was widely demanded and the Budget has lived up to the expectation of the taxpayers. An individual can now earn up to Rs 7 lakh per annum and not pay any income tax. This is a 40 per cent increase over the current exemption limit of Rs 5 lakh per annum and has led to considerable rejoicing in the middle class. The relief has also been extended with people with very high levels of income. The surcharge on income above Rs 5 crore per annum has also been reduced and the highest marginal rate of taxation will come down from 42.75 per cent to 39 per cent. The Government has thus shown that it is not afraid to provide relief even to the rich if it believed that the rate was too high and political considerations did not come in the way.

This year's Budget is also a document for the future. The Government has listed seven priorities that will guide policy making on the road to 2047. These have elements of green growth and energy transition while not losing sight of inclusive development and reaching the last mile. The focus and commitment to sustainable growth can be seen from schemes like Mishti, for Mangrove plantation, along the coastline and Amrit Dharohar, for preserving biodiversity in wetlands. Scrapping of old vehicles also finds a detailed mention in the Budget. Establishing a centre of excellence for Artificial Intelligence (AI) shows that the Budget has ambition. The Skill India scheme will, henceforth, include AI, robotics, 3D printing and so on. The Government plans to set up 100 labs for the development of

5G services.

The Government's support to the agricultural sector and its commitment to the rural economy are evident from the setting up of the Agriculture Accelerator Fund and the millet development programme. Schemes such as GOBARdhan yojana and facilitating natural farming are a case in point. The target for credit to the agriculture sector has been fixed at Rs 20 lakh crore. It will ensure that the agriculture sector continues to grow at a healthy rate.

A major achievement has been the management of fiscal affairs. Several challenges on the macroeconomic front that stemmed from external factors, and were unseen at the time of the presentation of the Budget last year, unfolded as the year rolled by. The actual expenditure on food and fertiliser subsidy for the current year is much more than what was initially budgeted, while the excise tax collected dipped due to excise duty cut on petrol and diesel by the Central Government. Despite this, the Narendra Modi Government has managed to achieve the budgeted target of 6.4 per cent for fiscal deficit for the year 2022-23. The fiscal deficit target for the coming financial year has been put at 5.9 per cent of GDP. Thus, the march on the path of fiscal consolidation continues and while there is an absence of a glide path, the Government has committed to bringing it down to the range of 4.5 per cent by the year 2025-26.

A Budget that is not swayed by considerations of politics shows the maturity of the Government and the confidence it has in the ability of Indian voters' judgement to reward performance over

Point-counterpoint



rhetoric. This Budget is, therefore, a historic document and shows the nature of changing politics unleashed by the Modi Government. This Budget will ensure that the fundamentals of the economy remain solid and the next Government will be able to build upon it.

(The writer is a Supreme Court advocate)



SAMBHRANT KRISHNA

Budget ignores 90% of India's population

that loves to claim its nationalist credentials at the drop of a hat, it is not surprising at all that the subject of defence was not mentioned in the Budget speech of the Finance Minister at all. The UPA Government under the Congress devoted more than 2 per cent of the GDP to defence and the BJP at that time used to shout that the allocation was not adequate and it will increase defence allocation when it came to power.

It must also be reminded that the India-China border was largely peaceful during that period and now that the possibility of a border clash between the two countries is a real possibility, the defence sector has been given a short shrift. It is also very likely that the subject of defence was not mentioned in the Budget so that it does not antagonise China and if that's the case then it's indeed shameful.

A lot of noise is being made by the Government on its target to reduce the fiscal deficit to 5.9 per cent of GDP next year. If one looks beyond the headlines, one can easily see that the fertilizer subsidy in the coming year will come down drastically as the global prices, which had spiked after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, have cooled down. Moreover, the Government has also stopped the free food grain distribution that it had started in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic and therefore the food subsidy will also come down. The planned reduction on the fiscal deficit therefore is not a result of sound fiscal management by the Government but is a result of the factors beyond its control.

Another aspect of the Budget is that the numbers presented are not honest. While the budgeted increase in capital expenditure is hogging the limelight, revenue expenditure has not been subjected to the scrutiny it deserves. The budget for 2023-24 has projected only a marginal increase in revenue expenditure over the revised estimate for the current year. In fact, if the interest payment is subtracted from the revenue expenditure, the amount is lower than revised estimates for the current year. This is clearly unrealistic and it is very likely that the actual revenue expenditure will exceed the Budget estimates. Moreover, it does not take much to puncture the claim of the Government on achieving very high Central Government capital expenditure as a percentage of GDP. The Government in its last 10 year period has raided the retained earnings of the public sector enterprises as a result of which the capital expenditure by PSUs has come down.

The Government's only objective seems to win praise from business newspapers and industry bodies. These people dominate any post budget discussion and the concerns of rural and the poor masses are always relegated to the background. The allocation to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MNREGA) has been reduced dramatically and the overall allocation to rural areas has come down. The Government likes to pretend that the country has fully recovered from the economic effects of Covid-19 but that is far from the truth. There is still widespread suffering in the rural areas and the Budget should have made increased allocation for the rural sector.

Unemployment is the biggest challenge facing our country but the Budget has nothing substantial for it. It seems that the youth will have no future to look forward to under the Modi Government. There was a lot of discussion on tourism in the Budget. It was projected as a magic pill to address the issue of unemployment in the country. However if one looks at the total allocation to the sector, it remains unchanged from what was allocated to it in the 2022-23 at Rs 2,300 crore.

The Budget is an all-round failure because it fails to prioritise its spending to areas that deserve urgent and continued attention of the Government. It criminally ignores 90 per cent of India's population and Indian voters will pay back in the coming State elections and the general election in the coming year.

(The writer is spokesperson, Uttarakhand Congress Committee)



DEEPAK BALUTIA

PREDICTION ALGORITHM IDENTIFIES ONCOGENES IN CANCER CELLS

AI could help personalise cancer treatments

Researchers have leveraged artificial intelligence (AI) technology to identify genes critical to a cancer cell's survival, and could help deliver personalised cancer patient treatments, according to a new study.

They analysed different types of cancer cells to understand different gene dependencies for identifying the genes, the study said.

Researchers at the University of Sussex, UK, have done this by developing a prediction algorithm that works out which genes are essential in the cell, by analysing the genetic changes in the tumour. This can be used to identify actionable targets that in time could guide oncologists to personalise cancer patient treatments, the study said.

"Our vision is to take advantage of the decreasing cost of DNA sequencing and to harness the power of AI to understand cancer cell differences and what they mean for the individual patient's treatment.

"Through our research, we were able to identify cell-specific gene dependencies using only the DNA sequence and RNA levels in that cell, which are easily and cheaply obtainable from tumour biopsy samples," said Dr Frances Pearl, Senior Lecturer in Bioinformatics at the University of Sussex.

"This is an incredibly exciting step in our research which means that we can now work to improve the technology so that it can be offered to oncologists and help in the treatment pathways for their patients," said Pearl.

Cancer treatments are primarily prescribed on the basis of the location and type of cancer.

Genetic differences in tumours can make standard cancer treatments ineffective.

Using a personalised approach to guide treatment could improve life expectancy, quality of life and reduce unnecessary side effects of cancer patients, the study said.

In each cell, there are around 20,000 genes that contain the information needed to make proteins.

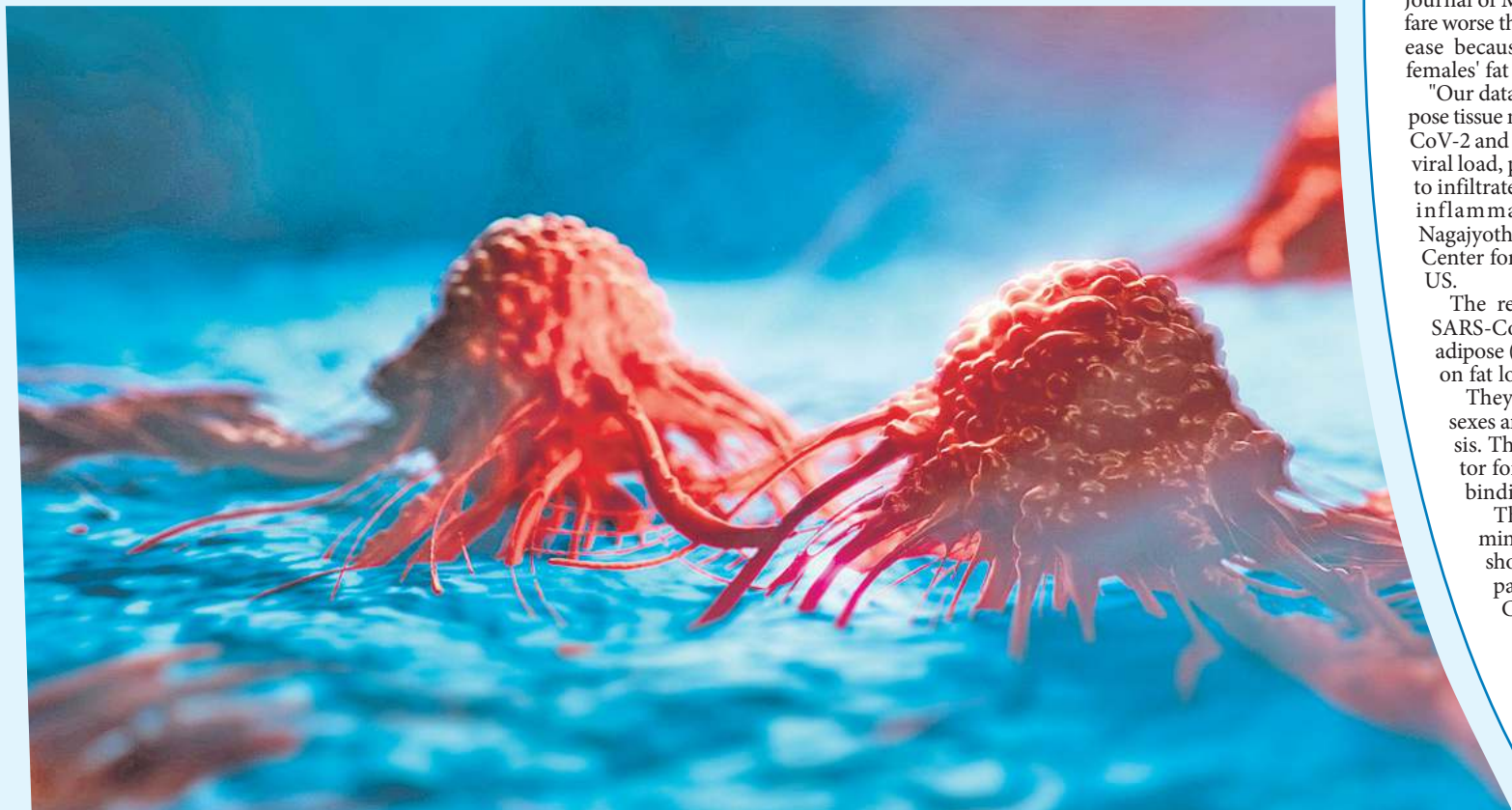
Around 1,000 of those genes are essential, meaning they are required for the cell to survive.

When normal cells become cancer cells, oncogenes, or genes with the potential to cause cancer, become activated and tumour suppressor genes become inactivated, causing a rewiring of the cell.

This causes the cell to become dependent on a new set of genes to survive, and this can then be exploited to kill the cancer cells.

By using this new AI technology to target protein products of tumour-specific dependent genes, cancer cells can be killed, leaving the normal cells which are not dependent on these genes relatively unharmed, the study said.

Although dependencies can be determined using intensive laboratory techniques, it is costly and time consuming and would not be feasible to analyse all tumour samples in this way, the study said.



Why COVID-19 kills more men than women decoded

Scientists have found new evidence that may explain why men are more susceptible to severe infections of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with increased death rates.

The research, published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences, indicates males fare worse than females with the COVID-19 disease because the virus more readily attacks females' fat tissue, in lieu of lung tissue.

"Our data suggested that in female mice adipose tissue may act as a sink/reservoir for SARS-CoV-2 and thus spares the lungs from a greater viral load, preventing pulmonary damage due to infiltrated immune cells and activated pro-inflammatory cytokines," said Jyothi Nagajyothi, from the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI), US.

The researchers evaluated the effect of SARS-CoV-2 infection on the function of adipose (fat) tissue and the impact of disease on fat loss in a COVID-19 model.

They examined hACE2 mice of both sexes and performed a comparative analysis. The hACE2 serves as an entry receptor for SARS-CoV-2 to infect people via binding to envelope spike proteins.

The Nagajyothi Lab's mouse models, mimicking the human immune system, showed that females lost more fat compared to males when infected with COVID-19.

The study found that males had more virus in their lungs, while the females showed more virus in their fat tissue.

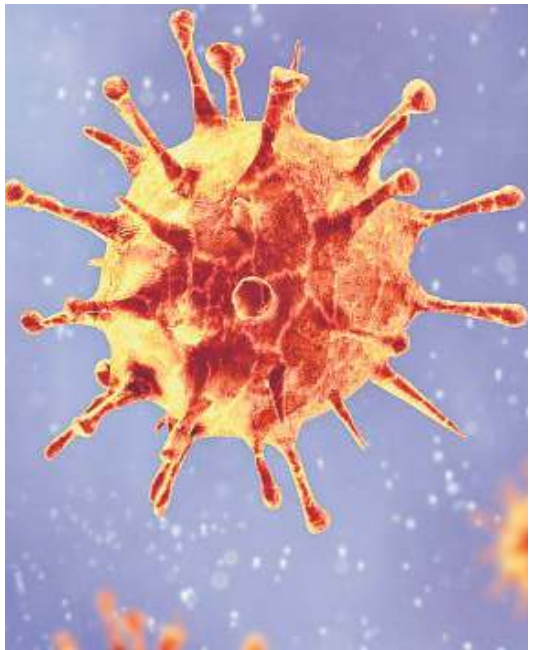
The theory is that the adipose (fat) tissue in females may act as a "sink" or "reservoir" of the virus, the researchers said.

The study follows a paper published last year in the journal Frontiers in Cardiovascular Medicine in which the team showed the virus infiltrated the lungs of males much more readily than it did in females.

The latest paper shows that an inverse relationship exists between the viral loads in the lungs and adipose tissue, and it differs between males and females, the researchers said.

They found that SARS-CoV-2 infection alters immune signalling and cell death signalling differently in COVID-19 infected male and female mice.

"These data may help explain the higher COVID-19 susceptibility in males compared to females," the authors of the study added.



Jupiter's moon count jumps to 92, most in solar system

Astronomers have discovered 12 new moons around Jupiter, putting the total count at a record-breaking 92.

That's more than any other planet in our solar system. Saturn, the one-time leader, comes in a close second with 83 confirmed moons.

The Jupiter moons were added recently to a list kept by the International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Centre, said Scott Sheppard of the Carnegie Institution, who was part of the team.

They were discovered using telescopes in Hawaii and Chile in 2021 and 2022, and their orbits were confirmed with follow-up observations.

These newest moons range in size from 0.6 miles to 2 miles (1 kilometer to 3 kilometers), according to Sheppard.

"I hope we can image one of these outer moons close-up in the near future to better determine their origins," he said in an email on Friday.



In April, the European Space Agency is sending a spacecraft to Jupiter to study the planet and some of its biggest, icy moons. And next year, NASA will launch the Europa Clipper to explore Jupiter's moon of the same name, which could harbor an ocean beneath its frozen crust.

Sheppard who discovered a slew of moons around Saturn a few years ago and has taken part in 70 moon discoveries so far around Jupiter expects to keep adding to the lunar tally of both gas giants.

Jupiter and Saturn are loaded with small moons, believed to be fragments of once bigger moons that collided with one another or with comets or asteroids, Sheppard said.

The same goes for Uranus and Neptune, but they're so distant that it makes moon-spotting even harder.

For the record, Uranus has 27 confirmed moons, Neptune 14, Mars two and Earth one. Venus and Mercury come up empty.

Jupiter's newly discovered moons have yet to be named. Sheppard said only half of them are big enough at least 1 mile (1.5 kilometers) or so to warrant a name.

Jury: Musk didn't defraud investors with 2018 Tesla tweets

A jury on Friday decided Elon Musk didn't defraud investors with his 2018 tweets about electric automaker Tesla in a proposed deal that quickly unravelled and raised questions about whether the billionaire had misled investors.

The nine-member jury reached its verdict after less than two hours of deliberation following a three-week trial. It represents a major vindication for Musk, who spent about eight

hours on the witness stand defending his motives for the August 2018 tweets at the centre of the trial.

Musk, 51, wasn't on hand for the brief reading of the verdict but he made a surprise appearance earlier Friday for closing arguments that drew starkly different portraits of him.

Not long after the verdict came down, Musk took to Twitter the bully pulpit he now owns to celebrate.

"Thank goodness, the wisdom of the people has prevailed!" Musk tweeted.

Musk's decision to break away from his other responsibilities to sit in on the closing arguments even though he didn't have



to be there may have had an impact on the jurors, said Michael Freedman, a former federal prosecutor who is now in private practice working for a law firm that has represented celebrities and business executives.

"It shows he has a presence," Freedman said.

China balloon: Spy in the sky?

A massive white orb sweeping across US airspace has triggered a diplomatic maelstrom and is blowing up on social media.

China insists it's just an errant civilian airship used mainly for meteorological research that went off course due to winds. With only limited "self-steering" capabilities.

However, the US says it's a Chinese spy balloon without a doubt. And its presence prompted Secretary of State Antony Blinken to cancel a weekend trip to China that was aimed at dialing down tensions that were already high between the countries.

The Pentagon says the balloon, which is carrying sensors and surveillance equipment, is maneuverable and has shown it can change course. It has loitered over sensitive areas of Montana where nuclear warheads are siloed, prompting the military to take actions to prevent it from collecting intelligence.

A Pentagon spokesman said it could remain aloft over the U.S. for "a few days," extending uncertainty about where it will go or if the US will try to safely take it down.

A look at what's known about the balloon - and what isn't.

The Pentagon and other U.S. officials say it's a Chinese spy balloon - about the size of three school buses - moving east over America at an altitude of about 60,000 feet (18,600 meters). The US says it was being used for surveillance and intel-

ligence collection, but officials have provided few details.

US officials says the Biden administration was aware of it even before it crossed into American airspace in Alaska early this week. A number of officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive topic.

The White House said that President Joe Biden was first briefed on the balloon on Tuesday. And the State Department said Blinken and Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman spoke with China's senior Washington-based official on Wednesday evening about the matter.

In the first public U.S. statement, Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, said Thursday evening that the balloon was not a military or physical threat - an acknowledgement that it was not carrying weapons.

And he said that "once the balloon was detected, the U.S. government acted immediately to protect against the collection of sensitive information."

Even if it's not armed, the balloon poses a risk to the U.S., says retired Army Gen. John Ferrari, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise

Institute. The flight itself, he said, can be used to test America's ability to detect incoming threats and to find holes in the country's air defense warning system. It may also allow the Chinese to sense electromagnetic emissions that higher-altitude satellites can't detect, such as low-power radio frequencies that could help them understand how different U.S. weapons systems communicate.

He also said the Chinese may have sent the balloon "to show us that they can do it, and maybe next time it could have a weapon.

So now we have to spend money and time on it" developing defenses.

LET IT FLY? SHOOT IT DOWN?

According to senior administration officials, President Joe Biden initially wanted to shoot the balloon down. And some members of Congress have echoed that sentiment.

But top Pentagon leaders strongly advised Biden against that move because of risks to the safety of people on the ground, and Biden agreed.

One official said the sensor package the balloon

is carrying weighs as much as 1,000 pounds. And the balloon is large enough and high enough in the air that the potential debris field could stretch for miles, with no control over where it would eventually land.

For now, officials said the U.S. will monitor it, using "a variety of methods" including aircraft.

The Pentagon also has said the balloon isn't a military threat and doesn't give China any surveillance capabilities it doesn't already have with spy satellites.

But the U.S. is keeping its options open and will continue to monitor the flight.

Balloon is for research, strayed accidentally: China

China's Foreign Ministry said Friday that a balloon the U.S. suspects of conducting surveillance was a civilian "airship" used for research, mainly meteorological purposes.

The statement said the airship has limited steering capability and "deviated far from its planned course" because of winds.

It said China regrets the unintended entry of the airship into U.S. airspace.

The U.S. was tracking a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon spotted over American airspace, and China said Friday that it would look into those reports, as the discovery further strained already tense relations between Beijing and Washington.

The Pentagon decided not to shoot down the balloon, which was potentially flying over sensitive sites, because of concerns of hurting people on the ground.

The news came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected to make his first trip to Beijing this weekend. The visit has not

been formally announced, and it was not immediately clear if the balloon's discovery would affect his travel plans.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said she had no information on the trip. But she said China has "no intention of violating the territory and airspace of any sovereign country" and urged calm while the facts are established.

Blinken would be the highest-ranking member of President Joe Biden's administration to visit China, on a mission to mitigate a sharp downturn in relations between the countries amid trade disputes and concerns about Beijing's increasingly aggressive stance toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea.

A senior American defense official told Pentagon reporters Thursday that the U.S. has "very high confidence" that the object spotted over U.S. airspace in recent days was a Chinese high-altitude balloon and that it was flying over sensitive sites to collect information. One of the places the balloon was spotted was Montana, which is home to one of the nation's three nuclear missile silo fields at Malmstrom Air Force Base. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.