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Fight over Amma's legacy continues

REVATI KRISHNA SHREYAS UBGADDE

Amid the tussle over the control of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), rebel leader and former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam said his faction was the "real AIADMK".

Addressing a press conference at Selva Vaani Mahal in R K Nagar on the occasion of birth anniversary of the late Jayalithaa, Panneerselvam said he may have been forced to resign because he initiated a probe into the death of Jayalithaa during his brief tenure.

He demanded a judicial inquiry by a committee monitored by the Centre to pursue the probe further. "People want to know the truth," he said.

R K Nagar was Jayalithaa's constituency. It remains unrepresented in the Assembly after her death.

Panneerselvam claimed AIADMK MLAs were not being allowed to meet people in their constituencies.

"The Governor had given a 15-day period. The MLAs [supporting the E Palanisamy Government] should have gone to their constituencies and listened to what the people had to say," said



O Panneerselvam addressing a press conference at R K Nagar | SHREYAS U

Panneerselvam.

Edappadi Palaniswamy, who belongs to the faction led by the now jailed party General Secretary V K Sasikala, was nominated as Chief Minister and he won the trust

vote in the State Assembly. There were allegations that the Sasikala faction had coerced the MLAs into voting for Palaniswami.

K Pandiarajan, minister in the erstwhile cabinet, asserted that

AIADMK rank and file was with them. The OPS faction has complained to the Election Commission of India against what it called the illegal election of Sasikala as General Secretary.

Pandiarajan questioned the constitutional validity of Sasikala's nomination as the general secretary and said the ECI had also termed it as "temporary".

T T V Dinakaran, Sasikala's nephew, took over as the Deputy General Secretary of AIADMK on February 13. "There is nothing official about her faction. The party headquarters should naturally come to us," said Pandiarajan.

Panneerselvam said the invitation extended by Dinakaran to the rebels to join the AIADMK was "laughable". Dinakaran had no 'locus standi,' he added.

"The public will teach them a lesson. The party and the cadre will decide who will lead," he added.

Pandiarajan said Dinakaran was kept away from the party since 2007 and was not even allowed to enter the Rajya Sabha to discharge his duties.

On Jayalithaa's nephew Deepak Jayakumar's remarks not converting Poes Garden into a memorial for Jayalithaa, Pandiarajan said that Deepak was entitled to his opinion.

"But, from the party's point of view, it should be converted into a memorial," he added.

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Will contest from R K Nagar: Deepa

RUPALI PANGTEY

On Jayalithaa's 69th birthday, her niece Deepa Jayakumar announced her entry into Dravidian politics by launching the MGR Anna Deepa Peravai.

Addressing a press conference at her T. Nagar residence she said she would contest from R K Nagar constituency from where Jayalithaa had been elected.

"Under the blessings of Puratchi Thalaivi, my political journey is beginning today and I hope to secure the people of Tamil Nadu," she said. She said the Peravai was a federation and she expected to unite supporters of Amma.

Terming the present political current as unstable, she said "I see OPS (O Panneerselvam) as a family member and have no personal grudges against him and I believe he will not make any decision against her (Amma's wishes)."

She also hinted that she may



Deepa addressing a press conference | RUPALI PANGTEY

work together with the OPS faction. However, she also said, "There is no reason for me to back off even if OPS sends an MLA from his camp to stand for RK Nagar constituency; my political career has just taken off."

Swine Flu on the rise

Govt hospitals offer free vaccines, medicine

SAURYA SENGUPTA

The dengue and swine flu incidence shows no signs of abating, with more number of cases registered in just the first 20 days of February, compared to the whole of the previous month.

Whereas January saw 115 test positive with the virus, that number shot up to 238, as of February 20, despite the Greater Chennai Corporation laying out a slew of measures to abate the outbreak.

However, the virus has not claimed any lives till now in Greater Chennai.

Most cases were registered at the King Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research (89), while the Government General Hospital saw 27 positive cases.

Both these hospitals claimed that they had sufficient supplies of vaccines and medicines to deal

with the current number, and were well-stocked to deal with any potential rise in future.

Those diagnosed with the swine flu causing H1N1 strain were prescribed the Tamiflu immediately.

Vaccines and medication are available for free at government hospitals, and are distributed at the discretion of the medical officers.

All hospitals, private and government, have also been asked to conduct swine flu tests at no charge.

Dr. N.A. Senthil Nathan, the City Health Officer of the Greater Chennai Corporation claimed the lack of casualties was a sign that preventive measures were working well.

"Zonal Medical Officers on the ground are spread out across eleven zones, which Chennai has been divided into. Each officer records data, and maps trends to

prevent potential outbreaks in a specific zone. All hospitals are also required to send their reports on existing cases to us each day," he said.

The Public Health Department said they had briefed private hospitals, and asked them to maintain necessary protocol and not deny, or overcharge patients.

Senthil Nathan also claimed that the H1N1 strain was weakening, and would, in all probability, die out soon.

He said the increase in the number of cases being reported was because of people coming forward for treatment encouraged by better diagnosis, and the availability of free tests.

"Previously, the dengue and swine flu season was from March-April, so we only recorded data then. Now, with the spurt in cases since December, we have begun maintaining data from January."

Industrial waste pollutes canal

SHILAJIT MITRA

Industrial effluents released into the Buckingham Canal from the Perungudi industrial estate are creating massive layers of foam on the surface, affecting the environment and health of settlements along the canal bank.

Sewage outlets carrying untreated black-water and industrial waste are released regularly into the canal between Palavakkam and Perungudi.

The canal is thick with massive deposits of pungent-smelling foam that is floating on the water surface. Bubbles of foam are found rising up in the air.

Municipal waste from South Chennai is dumped on both banks of the canal, which then mixes with the foam and creates a frothy sludge.

P. Shankar, manager of MTAB Engineering PVT. LTD., one of the many mechanical factories in the Perungudi estate said, "This area has around 200-250 industrial establishments. There is not a single chemical factory here. The estate was established in the late



Effluents being let into the Buckingham Canal at Neelankarai | SHILAJIT M

90s solely for electronic and mechanical industries. We have a common underground sewage system that leads into the canal."

Shankar suspects that the newly-opened automobile service centers are the source of the foam-spawning effluents. "In the last five years, Mercedes-Benz,

Renault, Ford, Maruti Suzuki and numerous motorcycle companies have opened service centers in the estate. The foam is likely to be sourced from detergents, coolants and chemicals used by them."

Although the factories in the area are required to set up waste treatment plants, many are

suspected to be draining their waste directly into the common sewage system.

Perungudi is one of the major landfills in Chennai. The dump yard is a source of pollution with garbage being burnt there despite the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board banning it.



Dried up tar along Ennore High Road | SHOMIK B

Oil spill may affect food chain

SIDDHESH RAUT

Twenty days after the oil spill caused by the collision of two ships near Kamaraj Port in north Chennai, most of the sludge along the Ennore coast has been cleared.

The tar had been pumped out by the orange-vested workers since January 28. But some of it has dried up on the rocks of the shore and films of oil still floats on the surface of the water off the beach.

At the time of reporting, the clean-up efforts were on at two spots along the Ennore High Road.

"The oil will keep floating around. Unless a certain bacteria called the pseudomonas bacteria, is released to convert the oil into water and carbon dioxide, it will take a long time for the dilution to take place," says Dr. Sultan. Ismail, Ecologist and director of Eco Science Research foundation in Chennai.

Dr. Ismail says that the oil can reach the de-salination plants, located on the north and south of Chennai, which are the main source

of drinking water for the city. However Reverse Osmosis (RO) membranes can be used to filter out the hydrocarbons from the water.

After the oil-spill, the fishermen were forced to sell their product at less than fifty percent of the price. People were reluctant to buy fearing that the fish were contaminated.

Sharan G, a fisherman from the Kattukuppam village, says, "I have been helping with the clean-up. At least I am getting paid Rs 500 per day."

Dr. Ismail also mentions how the oil might enter the food chain. "The hydrocarbons of the oil might be absorbed by the phytoplankton, which in turn would be eaten by fish and in turn, consumed by humans."

He warns that the coastal regions may have higher concentrations of oil for greater periods of time, despite no visibility of black colour in the water to indicate otherwise.

"Families must be careful at the beach shore, especially since children have a tendency to play

Creek clean-up stalled

SIDDHESH RAUT

The dredging of the Buckingham canal and the removal of a road which runs across the Ennore Thermal Power Station (ETPS), both scheduled for October 12 last year, have lost steam.

After months of campaigning by activists, such as Magsaysay awardees T.M. Krishna, former State Women's Commission chair V. Vasanthi Devi and retired High Court judge Hariparanthaman and transgender rights activist Sankari in 2016, work had reportedly begun at the Ennore creek as per the directives of the State Disaster Relief Commissioner in

preparation for the monsoon rains from the October to December.

However, the fishermen, major stake-holders of the creek, have a different story to tell.

"They, (the Power Plant people) have only cleaned the debris at surface level. Unless it is fully cleaned the river will not flow properly," said R.L. Srinivasan, president of the Kaattukuppam Fishermen's Cooperative Society.

The failure of the monsoons which led the Centre to declare Tamil Nadu as a drought-hit state on January 10, as well as the recent oil-spill has shifted priorities for the authorities.

"There have been no concrete steps since October. The Port Trust promised that the dredging work would begin shortly. The Corporation people said that they were busy clearing up the oil-spill," said Srinivasan.

"No matter what is done, the creek keeps getting polluted. Worse, the oil spill and the drought have got people into a bad situation. Everyone here is apprehensive about the situation," he added, stating the precarious situation of the fisher-folk in the area, as the price of the drought-depleted catch has fallen sharply, upto more than fifty percent since.

with the sand and the water."

"It was the duty of the Environment Department and the fisheries department to have done

some analysis of the products (such as seafood items) to verify the claims about the safety." Meanwhile, the oil deposits were

spotted at the coastal town of Mamallapuram, approximately 85 km from the Ennore deposits last week.

Can you trust neighbours?

PRIYANKA P

Parents will now not only have to keep an eye on their children, but also on their neighbours, says Chennai-based psychiatrist Dr. Anbudhurai.

Just days ago, a seven-year-old girl from Mugalivakkam was sexually assaulted and murdered by her 22-year-old neighbour.

According to the National Crime Record Bureau records for 2015, in 35.8 per cent of the total number of registered cases of rape on children, a neighbour is the perpetrator.

Sulekha Baiju, mother of a nine and 13-year-old keeps constant vigil on her girls.

"I keep looking out of the window when they go out to play. I

don't know who I can trust anymore."

Dr Anbudhurai says such crimes have always been happening. "These cases rarely get reported, so we trust them."

He says parents can't stop their children from socialising so they will have to ensure their kids are always in groups and keep checking up on them. "Safety is in numbers."

But at the same time, he advises to be on the lookout for people who have a suspicious background.

"In the case of the seven-year-old, the neighbour was said to have already been facing theft charges," he adds.

According to Ezhil Arasi, a school counsellor, talking to your children might help prevent such



Parents need to protect their children

cases or at least bring it to light. "We can't just restrict our child's freedom. That will affect their relationships in the future." Instead,

Arasi suggests that parents need to instil confidence in a child that whatever happens, the child can always come and talk to them."

Sulekha's husband, Baiju P Shankar however blames weak laws for the increase in crimes. "First, the existing laws should be made stricter. Imagine

from a parent's perspective. These culprits come out after 5-10 years and roam free. But will the parents get back their child?" Under the

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, a sexual assault offender should be punished with imprisonment for not less than three years which may extend up to five years, and a fine.

Schools should also play a primary part in counselling students about such issues, says Arasi

"Few schools have counsellors and even if they do, they only teach soft skills," she says.

She feels that the counsellor should help the kids understand the difference between a good touch, bad touch and about their private parts in the easiest way possible.

"Every time we conduct such sessions, the kids seem so confused, they have so many questions to ask," she adds.

C-Sections on the rise

PRIYANKA P

Tamil Nadu recorded a 14 per cent increase in the number of caesarean sections between 2005-06 and 2015-16. According to the recent National Family Health Survey, the combined C-section rates of both private and public hospitals in Tamil Nadu are as high as 34.1 per cent.

The data also reveals that C-section rate in private hospitals is 51.3 per cent as compared to 26.3 per cent in the public hospitals. According to a 2015 World Health Organisation statement on Caesarean section rates, the ideal rate for a country would be 10-15 per cent.

A petition that was started by Mumbai-based Subarna Ghosh has garnered over 1.3 lakh signatures. It highlights the commercialisation of C-sections in India and asks for hospitals to reveal their C-section and normal delivery data per month.

Chennai-based gynaecologist and director of Seethapathy Nursing Home and Clinic, Dr. Uma Ram says there are two main reasons for this increase. Firstly, women themselves prefer Caesareans these days. "They do not want to undergo so much pain and want to be able to decide the day and time of the surgery," she said.

The second reason could be the unavailability of proper hospitals and clinics in smaller districts, says Dr Ram. "The doctors fear that if

the women living in such places want a normal delivery, it might be too late by the time they reach a hospital. So they suggest a caesarean." She disagrees that it has anything to do with the commercialisation of Caesarean sections.

Dr. S Baby Vasumathi, Director of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology doesn't think these rates are very high. "We are allowed to go up to 70 per cent if there are risks involved in the surgery. I don't know anything about the WHO norms. We only perform C-section if there is any risk involved." Dr Vasumathi refused to comment on reasons for these rates. But, she said that the government hospitals will never be ready to reveal their data.

Sowmya Vijay, a mother of twin boys who had to undergo a Caesarean section because of the risks involved in her case had to pay a bill of Rs 1.5 lakh. "This was 5 years back and I had no choice. But many of my friends are now opting for Caesarean sections because they do not want to go through the pain."

Speaking on the issue, Union and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi said that the doctors who carry out Caesareans without a valid medical reason should be named and shamed. However, Dr Ram says that ministers can raise the concerns about the rates but they cannot say it is unacceptable. "That is the job of a certified medical body."

60 % Chennai eateries don't have licence

SANJANA GANESH

About sixty per cent of the eateries in Chennai lack a valid food safety licence according to data released by the Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration department.

These include restaurants, street-food stalls, vendors, temples, government-owned ration shops, Anganwadis, TASMAC shops, and all other establishments which sell edible items.

The Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Regulations of food business) Regulations introduced in 2011 calls for any food business with a turnover of more than Rs. 2 lakh per year to comply with the Act.

Those with lower turnover must

register with the state food safety department.

The deadline for licence application was Aug 4, 2016.

According to Dr. R Kathiravan, Designated Officer, Chennai, most hotels, restaurants and distributors have acquired and renewed their licences.

The problem lies in the retail shops, *malligai kadai* (departmental stores) and vendors who sell food on push carts.

Narasimhan, the owner of the Mandavellipakkam Women's Cooperative says that his licence has not been renewed since 2008.

"There is no point because the goods at our ration shop are checked by the Civil Supplies Department. Why should I pay

additional money and register myself?" he asked.

He also complains that the health inspectors come once a year to collect the mandated fee and rarely check the products in the store.

The department also faces criticism from other groups.

R Srinivasan, Secretary of Tamil Nadu Hotel Association says the department is delaying the issue of licence.

"Higher officers should call for statistics from lower authorities about the number of applicants. Only then can they come to a conclusive number," he says.

Krishna Vummudi whose family owns the foreign undertakings of restaurants such as Saravana Bhavan, believes that the lack of

follow-up with respect to procurement of licence and follow up in India is the problem.

However, some others believe that the process of online and postal registration has eased the bureaucratic burden that was prevalent before last year.

Ganesh, the owner of Hotel Thejo, a 10-year-old restaurant in RA Puram says that the online application is fairly simple and transparent.

Ganesh pays Rs. 4,000 per annum and chides the Public Distribution System (PDS) and TASMAC shops which have not yet registered as he believes that government owned institutions should not flout the law.

No penal action has been taken

by the Food Safety and Drug Administration Department despite there being a provision in the law to shut the defaulting establishment, impose a fine ranging from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 1 lakh or sentence the owner to a 6-month jail term.

Ramraj S, a Food Safety Officer from Vadapalani says that since the Act is fairly new, the aim of the department is not to harass but to motivate the shop keepers.

Dr. Kathiravan states that Chennai's 40 per cent registrations is well above the state average.

He said that Tamil Nadu is 3rd or 4th in India in the number of registered establishments.

"Eateries without licence are common everywhere," he said.

AMMA'S BIRTHDAY

Crowds throng Marina Beach to pay respects

SOHINI GHOSH

Marking the 69th birth anniversary of late Chief Minister Jayalalitha, people thronged the Amma Memorial on Marina Beach on February 24 to pay their respects.

The Amma Memorial was visited by the late Chief Minister's niece Deepa Jayakumar at 8:30 a.m. According to the witnesses present, she laid some flowers on her tomb and left soon after.

The memorial was decorated with flowers and garlands and party flags were hoisted on either side of the tomb.

A nearly 10-foot tall portrait of Amma was installed. Apart from political leaders, film producers and film directors visited the memorial at around 11 a.m. They brought flowers and bowed down touching their forehead on the floor before they went around the tomb twice.

They were soon followed by the Minister of Higher Education, K. P. Anbalagan and Minister of Tourism, Vellamandi N. Natarajan.

A continuous stream of visitors filed past the tomb. The queue moved slowly. Many All

India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) supporters arrived with the party flags. Many were seen with tears rolling down their cheeks and beating their chests in grief as they mourned their leader's death.

The memorial which is adjacent to the memorials of the late chief ministers C N Annadurai and M G Ramachandran was being kept clean by the Greater Chennai Corporation workers.

Sivagami, a worker said, "We are working double shifts today - from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. without any extra wage."

Free food such as sambhar rice, tea and coffee was being distributed along with packaged drinking water.

Security was adequately deployed with police posts inside the memorial and barricades to control the crowd.

The memorial has been attracting crowds every day since Jayalalitha was laid to rest on December 6.

Jayalalitha who was admitted to the Apollo Hospital on September 22 died on December 5. Within a month, rival claims for the leadership led to a split in the party.



Late Chief Minister Jayalalitha's tomb on the Marina Beach decked with flowers on her birth anniversary | SOHINI GHOSH

Free medical camp at party hqrs

RUPALI PANGTEY

The 69th birth anniversary of the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Jayalalitha Jayaram took place at the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) headquarters here on Friday.

The celebrations began at ten in the morning where Chief Minister E Palanisamy and AIADMK General Secretary TTV Dinakaran paid floral tributes to the late CM's photograph. Access to give floral tributes was soon made open to all.

The road leading towards AIADMK headquarters was

blocked and traffic was diverted; while from the Cathedral road flyover flags were fluttering to mark the celebration.

Amidst heavy police security the people were chanting Amma and Chinamma's name. Apart from the MLAs, Apsara Reddy, transgender journalist who joined AIADMK in 2016 was also present to give her due respect.

A free medical camp, for a day, was set up from ten in the morning to four in the evening.

An assistant professor, three residents and interns from Sri Ramchandra Medical College were

sent to diagnose the public. Facilities provided during the camp, were from simple ECG and blood pressure measurement to multispecialty consultation. Within an hour 45 people had registered. These included the general public and party workers.

1000 lunchboxes containing lemon rice were distributed for free to the public.

Usha Rani, one of the distributors of the lunchboxes said, "Jayalalitha madam was kind and took care of the poor."

Chandrasekhar, who joined the AIADMK as a party worker in 1973

said that while he had joined the party out of sheer fandom for MGR, he had also observed Jayalalitha.

"She was a bold lady who had her own charm. The poor and those from the fisherman community always supported her. She was very talented, she knew seven to eight languages."

When asked about the present situation, he said, "Stalin wants to divide the party but with Amma's blessings and Chinamma's protection nothing will happen to the party."

Few kiosks selling Amma customized souvenirs were setup.

DMK goes on a hunger strike

RUPALI PANGTEY

Members of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) observed a statewide hunger strike as a protest against the trust vote on February 18, at the Vallur Kottam on February 22.

The hunger strike began at nine in the morning across all the districts in the state. It was a protest against the Speaker's decision to conduct an open ballot for the trust vote.

When the Speaker refused to heed the DMK's demand for a secret ballot, chairs were thrown around and microphones were ripped out. All the DMK MLAs including the party's working president M K Stalin were forcibly evicted from the House.

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami, won the trust vote by a show of hands. He is seen as a puppet of AIADMK General Secretary V K Sasikala now in jail on corruption charges.

J. Anbalagan, MLA from Chepauk constituency, at the hunger strike, said, "What happened on Saturday is a threat to our democracy. The hunger strike is a protest against this government which is corrupt and has put law and order at stake."

Peter Alphonse, senior Congressman, who was present at the protest venue, said, "We have planned two things, first form a coalition with DMK and secondly, discuss all the decisions with the oppositions."

"Traffic" Ramasamy, a social activist, urged the government to protect people.

"Edappadi Palaniswami is just a dummy ruler, who does not know the pulse of its citizens," he said.

Mixed feelings over closure of 500 TASMAC shops



Customers buying liquor at a TASMAC shop

SHREYA RAMAN

The State government has closed down 500 Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) on the birth anniversary of the late former Chief Minister, J Jayalalitha. The closure was a part of Jayalalitha's poll promise when she was elected back to power in 2016.

With this step, the number of closed TASMAC shops has increased to 1000. Jayalalitha shut 500 shops in May 2016.

The measure is seen as an attempt to deal with the problem of

alcoholism in the state. Sunil, a High Court lawyer said, "It is a good decision. With the shops closed, drunkards will have to go far and they might go for a day or two, but not every day. So, they will get less addicted."

However Vasu, a TASMAC manager, said, "They should close all shops. If 50% shops get closed, the other 50% will see increased sales. People who want alcohol will find the next shop."

"As long as they get alcohol, they will travel as far as it takes. It is very addictive. In fact, the closure will lead to opening up of

illegal alcohol shops and such shops will sell bad quality liquor."

He added, "Closing these shops partly is not a solution. It does nothing. It looks like they are improving the situation but it stays the same. Also, each of these shops have 4-5 workers. What will happen to them when the shops get closed?"

In response to the announcement, more than 500 TASMAC employees affiliated to TASMAC Employees' Association staged a demonstration in front of the Government Guest House in Chepauk on Wednesday. The

measure, they said, would lead to the unemployment of more than 2000 employees.

Durai Murugan, an Elite-TASMAC shop employee, said, "The Supreme Court ordered a ban on all alcohol shops on highways and now Edappadi Palaniswami wants to close more shops. Many people will get unemployed. The last time 500 shops were closed, more than 2000 workers lost their jobs. Many of them are graduates too. They can be absorbed in other departments."

"We don't have any problem with the closure of TASMAC

shops. But the government should find a solution for all these people who will lose their jobs."

Venkatesh Athreya, an economist said, "The closing of TASMAC stores is a complex issue. Yes, it will affect the revenue of the state, but then it was an election promise. Would you rather they not fulfil election promises?"

Vasu added, "It is a good measure if they close it completely. But they won't. Many politicians own companies that supply liquor to the shops. Now, they are doing this because they want to build up their image."

Panel to revise pay for govt staff

SHOMIK SEN BHATTACHARJEE

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced the formation of a five member committee to look into the recommendations of the Seventh Pay Commission, and pension for state government employees.

The committee which has been asked to submit its report by June 30, comprises secretaries of finance, education, home and labour as well as a member secretary. "This committee will suggest measures to implement the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations. The committee will have to tweak the recommendations to adapt them to the local requirements," said the newly appointed Chief Minister.

The panel, headed by additional finance secretary K. Shanmugam, includes Principal Home Secretary Apurva Verma, who is looking at revising pay scales for state employees.

While the teachers' associations and employee unions have welcomed the move, the implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission will exert pressure on state finances, claims an expert from the state's Finance Department.

"We have a number of persistent demands from the committee which include an interim relief of 20 per cent of basic pay as daily allowance to employees," said K.M. Thiagarajar, former Vice President and active member of the Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association (TNGEA).

"Our neighboring states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala have already started the implementation process, so Tamil Nadu is behind in progress comparatively, but we certainly welcome the move."

The abolition of the new pension plan has also been the TNGEA's major claim for retired state employees.

Muralidhar Rao, a former Income Tax officer said, "The government increased the basic pay for Central government employees by 14.27 per cent and more for certain higher posts, but cut down on as many as 51 allowances out of the existing 196."

"It is not that different for State government employees. It is expected that the changes to the recommendations will be minor," he added.

"Pay commissions are generally set up to offset the Consumer Price Index and that is what will be followed by the State government."

TNGEA members staged a fast across various districts of Tirunelveli, Nagercoil and Madurai, to revert to the older employee-friendly scheme from the new contributory pension scheme.

The implementation of the seventh pay commission which will increase the state's financial outgo by Rs 20,000 crores, will see a revision in pay for pension holders and retirement benefits to the state government pensioners.

TN freebies meant to 'blunt opposition'

SHREYA RAMAN

Edappadi K. Palaniswami, the newly appointed Chief Minister, signed five orders on Monday. The orders include four welfare schemes and the announcement of the closure of 500 TASMAC shops. The four schemes provide maternity assistance of Rs 18,000 to 6 lakh women, 50 per cent subsidy to one lakh women to buy two-wheeler vehicles, a fund of Rs 85 crore to build houses for fishermen and the releasing of the drought relief fund for farmers.

Palaniswami, while talking to media on Monday said, "When Amma (Jayalitha) was Chief Minister, she introduced a lot of public-welfare schemes. I am following Amma's policy and will work in order to fulfill all her dreams."

A.S.Panneerselvan, Readers' Editor at The Hindu said, "He announced these schemes so that DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) cannot attack him on these issues. These schemes are essentially a part of the DMK

manifesto. He is introducing such schemes to blunt the opposition."

"Politically, it is a sharp move but whether it will resonate with the ordinary people is not sure. Because ordinary people are sharp. They may not take this at its face value."

On February 14, the Supreme Court convicted Sasikala in the Disproportionate Assets case. Amidst the discussions of the political timing for the introduction of these schemes, their financial viability for the state was also questioned.

Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) is a state-owned company that controls the sale of the 'Indian Made Foreign Liquors' (IMFL) in Tamil Nadu. In 2016, the excise duty on alcohol alone was Rs. 6636 crores in a year.

L Venkatchalam, economics professor at Madras Institute of Development Sciences said, "The revenue from the TASMACs is a sizeable portion. So, closing down these shops will affect the health of the state economy. Furthermore, welfare schemes are not cheap.

They take up money and other resources."

"So, whoever decides such new schemes should not just introduce them to serve their political ambitions. Proper, exhaustive research should be conducted on the viability of each of these schemes."

According to the Revised Budget 2016-17 of the state, the fiscal deficit of the state this fiscal year is Rs 40534 crores, a 2.96 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

As the debt mounts up, many increasingly start blaming the 'populist' schemes in Tamil Nadu. "In the process of rolling out freebies, she (Jayalitha) also built a debt bomb for the state. At this point, Tamil Nadu's debt is over Rs 2 lakh crore. But, according to an India Spend analysis, Tamil Nadu's debt has witnessed a 92 per cent increase over five years ending 2015," said a Firstpost report.

Venkatesh Athreya, an economist said, "The word freebie, so popularly used by the media, has

such a negative connotation. We shouldn't call welfare schemes for the poor as freebies."

"Take for example the mid-day meal scheme. It essentially provides free food for the children. Can you consider that as a freebie?"

"As far as the objects that are given are considered, in some of the villages I went to, people said because of the TV provided in one similar scheme, they saw the news for the first time."

"In an illiterate society, the presence of a visual medium is very important. Other things such as scooters, mopeds and mixers are important."

"They help the poorest sections of the societies. The government should instead reduce the tax cuts and incentives the rich companies and industries get to pull out of the debt situation."

I think they should increase corporate taxes to compensate for the loss of revenue from the closing of the shops and to facilitate such important schemes."

Residents seek debt waiver

MURALI KRISHNA

Residents of Ritchie street Home for Homeless Cooperative Housing Society filed a signature petition on Tuesday, pleading Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to waive off their debts of over 70 lakhs to Housing and Urban development Corporation (HUDCO)

"The Debt Recovery Tribunal has already passed the verdict that we must pay the gross amount to HUDCO or else face eviction" said Arul Raj, who leads the campaign. This appeal to CM is their one last hope before they are to be thrown back to the streets, said Arul.

Out of the 96 families settled here, many are unable to pay, said Selvam, a resident who works at a construction site.

"I can only fend food and some basic necessities from the wages that I earn" he said when asked about how he was going to clear the debt.

In 2001, a four storied housing apartment was built for those who lived in the slum near Ritchie street. The project, majority funded by EZE (Rs.63 lakhs), a German missionary foundation, was undertaken by Community

Development Information and Action Center (CODIAC). Towards the project's completion, CODIAC had run out of funds due to a miscalculation in the project estimate and had to act as an intermediary between HUDCO and the tenants to avail loans for construction.

HUDCO gave Rs. 24 lakhs as loans, against which CODIAC collected and kept the tenement documents as security.

"Most of us were illiterate then and we hadn't known the gravity of the situation. They just got out thumbprints on paper" said Arul.

What happened later was the downfall of CODIAC. The organization was unable to perform according to what was decided in the loan agreement and had gone bankrupt. The tenants were also kept in the dark about the repayment of loans.

Now, HUDCO is adamant about getting back the whole amount in a single transaction. "HUDCO won't release your documents unless each and everyone pays" said Arul.

This year they had hired a lawyer, chipping in whatever they had, to get a stay for the eviction which was dismissed.



The Chennai airport Metro Station | REVATI K

Platinum rating for Metro stations

REVATI KRISHNA

The Indian Green Building Council had recently accredited Chennai Metro Rail Limited with Platinum rating of 72 points.

Thirteen elevated stations of the first phase of Chennai Metro have received this certification.

Water efficiency and indoor-environment temperature regulation have been the best features of the metro stations.

Of the 13 stations, five stations are in Corridor 1: Guindy, Meenambakkam, Nanganallur, Little Mount, and Airport.

The remaining eight stations are in Corridor 2: CMBT, Koyambedu, Vadapalani, Arumbakkam, Ekkattuthangal, Ashok Nagar, St Thomas Mount, and Alandur.

The metro stations rely

completely on natural resources. They do not use air conditioners and use electricity only at night, thus highlighting the energy efficiency parameter.

Also, solar panels have been installed at the Koyambedu Metro Station on a trial basis and the panels will be installed in other stations soon.

To encourage local employment, contractors within a radius of 400 miles were employed for the construction of the metro stations.

Water efficiency has been taken care of in the stations.

The authorities have installed rain water harvesting systems in all stations. Thus there is no scope for wastage of water.

The Operation Control Centre (OCC) takes care of the end to end surveillance of the stations.

MRTS station roofs in shambles

SHOMIK SEN BHATTACHARJEE

More than two months after cyclone Vardah uprooted trees and destroyed infrastructure in the city, over six of the 17 Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) stations have several portions of the roof missing.

While Chepauk, Light House, Mundakanniamman Koil and Tiruvalikeni stations had several portions of the polycarbonate roof missing, several windows were without panes at Kasturba Nagar and Thiruvanniyur stations. The cyclone which hit the city on December 12, shattered the window panes and tore off portions of the roof in the MRTS stations.

"The assessment of the repair has been submitted to the headquarters in a survey report, seeking the necessary sanction," said a senior official at the Southern Railway Divisional Manager's Office in Egmore.

The official was unable to provide a tentative date for the completion of repair though he added the damaged glass panels at several stations including Kasturba Nagar and Kotturpuram had been repaired.

K.S. Ravishanker, Station Manager at Chennai Beach, the point of origin for trains plying on the 19 kilometer stretch to Velachery, said "Work on the MRTS has been slower; we dealt with damages at Chennai Central and Egmore stations first, as they are more crowded."

Pointing out that the work would take longer than expected he said, "The allocation of funds will be a problem for the coming month after the new budget announcement, but the repairs should be completed by end April."

A passenger at Light House station said that while the damage did not affect the train service directly, the time taken to repair the damage was very shocking, Sampath, a regular traveller to Kotturpuram using the MRTS said, "It's not just an eyesore, but also leaves us exposed to pigeon droppings and the rain, despite the fact that it hasn't rained much this winter."



Broken roofs of Chepauk and Kasturba stations | SHOMIK B



Central gets foldable wheelchairs for the differently abled citizens

MURALI KRISHNA

Central railway station officials responded to a differently-abled, disability rights activist's petition earlier this month by issuing new foldable wheelchairs at the station.

Viral Modi, in the past, was groped by porters at three different railway stations in separate incidents while she was being 'assisted' to or from compartments. She filed a complaint addressed to the Railways Minister and the Prime Minister on change.org, asking for certain facilities for the differently-abled at train stations.

Except a few promises from the Railways Minister, nothing happened until the Chennai Central station officials had intervened.

Chennai Central Deputy Station Manager (commercial) said, "The wheelchairs, issued in response to the petition, can be carried inside coaches; thereby avoiding any physical contact between porters and differently-abled passengers" He also said that they've made more proposals for wheelchairs and



Foldable wheelchairs at Central Railway Station | MURALI K

ramps that can be attached to compartments. The wheelchairs, which are available at the All Women Passengers' Assistance Centre, are only for women.

Deepa V, facilitator at the Assistance Center, said that as much as two passengers make use of the foldable wheelchairs per day, on an average. "The centre is located near the entrance, hence it is easily accessible" she said. The wheelchair assistance, which is free

of cost, is also utilized by aged passengers at times. Totally, there are seven wheelchairs at the station, two for reserved passengers and five for unreserved. The facility to issue foldable wheelchairs for men is a 'work under progress', said Deepa. Apollo medical centre, inside the station, has an ambulance cart which can be utilized if the passenger is fully paralysed.

There are four battery operated carts and around twenty normal

wheelchairs available at the station. Ironically for normal wheelchairs, passengers have to porters a fixed rate of Rs. 65. "Around 15 differently-abled make use of the old wheelchairs" said M Raj, a porter. "If one is totally incapable of moving out of the compartment, we carry the person from inside" he said. The old wheelchairs widely in use here cannot be taken inside the trains.

"Currently no workers or porters are employed in this foldable-wheelchair assistance", said the Deputy Station Manager. The station also does not have any women porters to make sure if differently-abled women passengers are carried in and out with safety.

The station's restroom for differently-abled always remain closed. When asked about it, the Deputy Station Manager said that the beneficiary needs to collect the key from the station master. This set-up is quite an inconvenience as the Station Master's room is quite far away.

Working women to get two-wheeler subsidies

MOVE WILL BOOST TWO-WHEELER SALES

SAURYA SENGUPTA

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister E.K. Palaniswamy today announced a slew of measures and freebies, including a proposal to provide working women with a 50 per cent subsidy to buy two-wheelers.

A campaign promise of former Chief Minister J. Jayalitha, the scheme is aimed at making commuting easier and safer for women across the state.

The move is also expected to boost two-wheeler sales across the state, according to industry experts. "Scooter, motorbike, and generally automotive sales have taken a hit since demonetisation was implemented," says Mr. A. Veerappan, an official working with MPL Honda, Saidapet.

"This move should ideally provide a huge impetus to the Tamil Nadu market," he continued. However, the specifics of the move are yet unknown to people,

There is general confusion in terms of the implementation of the move.

It still remains unsure how the subsidies will be doled out in the first place.

Multiple showrooms and offices of two-wheeler manufacturers, including TVS and Bajaj declined to comment about the matter, saying they were not briefed about any process as yet.

What is known, though, is that the burden of the subsidy will be borne out of the state exchequer, and will not be passed on to manufacturers themselves.

This is expected to cost the state government over Rs. 128 crore each month, and over Rs. 1500 crores per year.

Swati, a resident of Anna Nagar, welcomed the move, saying it would enable young girls to travel to college, work, and far-flung places, which would have earlier been a problem.

"Public transport is abysmal in

Chennai. The MRTS has limited reach, as does the metro, and auto-drivers are waiting to fleece you. Giving cheaper scooters to women not only makes commuting convenient, but also a lot safer," she said.

Vijayalakshmi, also of Anna Nagar, had qualms about the move. She claimed that the specifics of the move needed to be worked out, and the process would have to be hassle free, to actually enable the purchase.

"These kinds of schemes usually involve running from door to door. If that ends up being the case, then nobody will bother putting in that much legwork," she said.

"If it is a simple slash on the cost price at the time of the purchase, then it is a positive thing."

She also wondered how far this would affect the traffic situation in the city given the increase in the two-wheelers would worsen traffic.

Republic TV in 2 months

Arnab Goswami's channel to be a 'catalyst' for youth issues

SHREYAS UGGADE

Former editor-in-chief of Times Now Arnab Goswami said, 'Republic TV' - his new television venture - will be launched within two months.

Goswami was here to deliver a lecture on: 'How Tolerant are we?' at the Chinmaya Heritage Centre in Chetpet on Monday.

"I do not have the satellite yet. My studio is not ready, but I will be back in two months. Republic is not just a news channel, it is a people's movement," said Goswami.

Goswami, who has been off air for more than two months now, said he missed not being on air especially after Jayalitha passed away, when Jallikattu protests were happening, during the 'drama of Sasikala' and when Suresh Kalmadi became the President of Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

"The people under no circumstances want the mandate to



Arnab Goswami at the event | SHREYAS U

be twisted by groups and self-styled cults in the way it has happened in Tamil Nadu," said Goswami, on the recent political

developments in Tamil Nadu. Criticising the 'Delhi-centric' approach of the English media Goswami said "You cannot make

Indian media Delhi-centric. During the Chennai floods, [the English] media woke up late. For the first 24-hours, the floods were largely ignored."

He added that one prominent anchor from Tamil Nadu would be on air for 'Republic'.

Goswami, who wanted to do some 'plain speaking', said India was a country of 'politically correct' people.

"Ever since I walked up the staircase of NDTV 21 years ago, I was told to never ever express my opinion," said Goswami.

"My journalism is clear plain vanilla journalism. If we need to believe in journalism of impact, it is only possible when you confront authority," he added.

"Media should have a controlling influence on our society. It should invoke a sense of fear. There has to be a fear of the camera, the camera is the watch on the behalf of the people."

"At Republic, we will seek

accountability on the behalf of people. Issues of youth will be given a place in a way where the media is seen as a catalyst," he added.

Asked about the 'negativity' on his television shows, Goswami said, "I do not do a deal with negativity. I attack it," he added.

Goswami said he took criticism in his stride and was ready to face the criticism that may entail after the launch of 'Republic'.

"Watch us, like us, hate us. [I will accept] your love, hope, criticism, affection, bouquets and brickbats," he added.

There were some brickbats already from participants at the event.

"I feel he should actually give people a chance to speak. [His shows would be much better] Only if he could have a proper conversation on the news hour without a lot of screaming," said Namrata, a student of College of Engineering, Anna University.



Movie buffs at the festival | SHILAJIT M

Chennai gets a taste of Chile

SHILAJIT MITRA

The Honorary Consulate of Chile in Chennai and the Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation (ICAF) hosted a three-day Chilean Film Festival between 20th and 22nd February at the RKV Film and Television Institute in Vadapalani.

Film buffs, diplomats, and film students queued at the RKV studios for the five masterpieces of contemporary Chilean cinema being screened at the festival. One standout film in the schedule was a family-drama titled 'Our Father' (2005), directed by Rodrigo Sepúlveda.

"I really enjoyed the characterisations in 'Our Father'. I could remember numerous experiences with my own family while watching it," said Mr. E Thangaraj, an old member of ICAF.

'My Best Enemy' (2006), directed by Alex Bowen, was another engaging film that was screened on the last day. The period film set around the 1978 Chilean-Argentine war captured the love-hate relationship between the two countries through a deeply

affecting story about soldiers stranded on the line of control.

The festival was inaugurated by Mrs. Sunita Shahaney, Honorary Consul of Chile in Chennai and chief guest Mr. Debendra Narayan Kar, Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) of Chennai. The films were screened at the Red Carpet Hall of RKV studios.

ICAF is a non-profit organization dedicated to promote parallel and non-commercial cinema in Chennai. They organize the Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF) and 2-3 mini-film festivals every month. These events are conducted in association with various consulates and embassies to promote cultural ties between countries. In March, they plan to organize an Iranian Film Festival.

"It is a privilege that these films are screened at our campus. A lot of world cinema is not available online or in DVD formats. These festivals are the only way for students to learn from great films," said V. Prakash, a student of Film Direction in the RKV film and Television Institute.

A home away from home

SHREYAS UGGADE

A steady stream of patients enters the North-East Help Desk adjacent to the Sindoori Block of the Apollo Hospital.

Mohammed Habibur Rehman (48), dressed in a white kurta-pyjama, stands in the crowd holding a file.

"I am diabetic," he says. In the last four months, Rehman, a farmer from the Navgaon district of Assam, has visited the hospital twice.

Sitting in a hall inside the building is a couple from Kolkata.

"He is a heart patient," says Rinku Das, referring to her husband Amit sitting beside her.

"Roughly 500 to 600 new patients register at the hospital daily. A lot of them come from West Bengal, Assam and even Bangladesh. The Sindoori Block is exclusively for the patients from Bangladesh," says Indubhushan, whose job is to assist patients from these states. He is from Assam and has been at the help desk for the past five years.

Not far from the hospital, snack bars, hotels, travel agencies line up with a steady footfall of patrons. The billboards - all in Bengali - offer the cheapest fares for tickets to Kolkata, Guwahati, Bagdogra, Agartala, Silchar and Dhaka.

"I used to run a fast food and biryani centre. Three years ago, I started offering Bengali food in my hotel," says Pawan Raj, who owns a hotel on the Greames Road.

"Bengali maloom nahi (I cannot speak Bengali)," he says. "All my cooks are from Odisha." The menu pasted near the counter - also in Bengali - says savouries like fish fry, Aalo Komdaa are on offer.



Sign boards in Bengali at Mackay's Gardens | SHREYAS U

Mackay's Gardens, off Greames Road in Thousand Lights area in Chennai, is now a second home for the patients who travel all the way from West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Bangladesh to the hospital for treatment.

"There are almost 3,000 rooms in hundreds of lodges at the Mackay's Gardens. Locals have rented out their places. Houses are out on lease. Some have even sold their plots and shifted elsewhere," says Bakar Iqbal, who also owns a hotel on the Greames Road.

For Aftabuddin Khan from Kolkata, the Mackay's Gardens is a place where he feels at home.

"It is my sixth visit to Apollo this year. I have been coming here since 2007," says Khan. His father is

suffering from a liver ailment.

"I get a room for Rs 300 a day. I can afford only that much," he adds.

Zakir Hussain, who runs a slaughter house in a lane at the Mackay's Gardens says, "This was a slum. I have spent my childhood here. With the efforts of MGR [M G Ramachandran, late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu] Apollo was established some 25-30 years ago. Over the years, Odias, Assamese and Bengalis set up hotels and lodges here."

Zakir's is one of the few plots not leased out.

Friction between the locals and the 'outsiders' is palpable. Hussain complains about the "problems" the "outsiders" create, although he

refuses to comment more on that.

"Brokers approached me asking if I want to lease out my house. I will not sell [it]," says Govindraj, also among the few locals who still reside at the Meckey's.

Pointing to a building next door, Govindraj says, "The owner of this lives in Triplicane. For three years now, it is being run as a lodge."

For some, Mackay's provides means to earn their bread.

Indranil, who hails from Kolkata, sells pan in front of a lodge.

"I have been here for 11 years now," he says.

"When the patients go back [to their states] they spread the word and people come here looking for work," says Govindraj.

Shortage of NCERT Books

PRIYA SHRIVASTAVA

As schools under the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) face a dearth of NCERT textbooks, the situation has left the teachers, pupils and parents confused.

As the academic year comes to an end, the teachers face a new dilemma. Recently, CBSE came out with a circular stating that only NCERT textbooks be used as they are sufficient to cover the syllabus and ordered schools to order books online.

Harish Swaminathan, father of a student in class VI, carrying her bag on his shoulders said, "We obviously have to buy books that the school recommends and if CBSE makes NCERT books compulsory then the bulk of books that my daughter has to carry will come down."

The Board has provided some clarification on the matter. "The circular was only an advisory and not compulsory," said G. Chandra, Deputy Secretary of CBSE.

A main complaint by the schools, parents and teachers alike is that the NCERT books are not published and delivered in time for the beginning of a new academic year. This leads to schools recommending private publishers which in turn creates problems.

First, the cost of textbooks by private publishers is higher as compared to the subsidized cost of NCERT books. Secondly, each student will have a preference to a different publication and this might create a problem for teachers.

However, the NCERT books that are available online may help the students but not the teachers. "We just do what the school tells us to do," said a teacher of DAV Public School.

Rolling rotis for survival

PRIYA SHRIVASTAVA

Employed in a tiny eatery in Adyar that goes by the name 'Rotiwala', is one of the many migrant workers

of Chennai, Aditya Raju, who feels at home in the State's capital.

A dropout and a runaway from home, Raju came to the city seven years ago to escape his school board exams. "I always ran away from it," he says. He described the train journey from Nawada, his hometown which is a small district near Gaya in Bihar till Chennai as a horrifying experience.

Luckily for him, he found other Hindi-speaking staff members at the Rotiwala eatery who are also migrant workers like him from North India. He now lives with them.

But going back home, he admits,

was the scariest part. "My parents were furious when I left but I ensured that I went back when everyone at home had calmed down and were just longing to see me come back home," says the 28 year old, who understands Tamil and has picked up a few words of the language.

"I find Chennai better than Bihar or Delhi for that matter where I went to work for a little while," says Raju.

He believes that Amma [Jayalalitha, former/late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu] had done a lot of service for poor people. "In which city can a poor man fill his stomach in just two rupees?," Out of the Rs. 8,000 that he earns as salary every month, he sends some of it back home to his parents.



Aditya Raju

Sujatha's work now in English

SANJANA GANESH

Renowned Tamil author Sujatha's works are now available to the English-speaking audience. Vimala Balakrishnan released her work 'Reliving Sujatha', a translated series of eight short stories and novellas at Writer's Café on Thursday.

The book was launched by Mrs. Sujatha Rangarajan, wife of the late author S. Rangarajan who took her first name as his pseudonym.

This was followed by a discussion mediated by journalist and writer Shobha Warrior.

"It was difficult to translate some words to English because it did not deliver the right meaning. I had sleepless nights because of one word," said Vimala when asked about her translating experience.

She had initially planned to write a biography and had obtained permission from Mrs. Sujatha but de-

vised to translate of his stories so that young readers across the world could gain access to his work.

Book lovers actively participated in the tete-a-tete with the author as they asked her questions about the nuances of humour in writing.

Sujatha Rangarajan who also interacted with the audience said that she was unaware that her husband used her name until it was published. She spoke about his passion for writing and said "He just wanted a book in his hand and food on time."

S Saraswathi from Vitasta publishers was overwhelmed by the number of people who participated. "We are definitely looking at another release soon. Our only hope is that these translations make their way to the bookshelves in all houses including those in places like Delhi," she said.



Author Vimala | SANJANA G

'Independent press is important'

SOHINI GHOSH

"Freedom of expression is something that governments do not like or would prefer not to hear," said Harald Sandberg, Swedish Ambassador to India her on February 22.

Sandberg was taking part in a discussion at Asian College of Journalism on freedom of expression, its significance and far-reaching consequences in democratic machineries.

Sandberg emphasised the importance of a free and independent press which allowed availability and transparency of public administration and "keeps everyone on their toes."

Finnish ambassador to India Nina Vaskunlahti, Icelandic Ambassador Thorir Ibsen and Norwegian Ambassador Nils Ragnar Kamsvag also took part in the discussions along with chairperson of Asian College of Journalism, Sashi Kumar, many faculty members and nearly 16 Indian students from the institute. The discussion was moderated by Dean Dr. Nalini Rajan.

The provision of reasonable restrictions in Article 19 of the Constitution of India, which deals with



From left: Harald Sandberg, Thorir Ibsen, Nina Vaskunlahti and Nils Ragnar Kamsvag | SOHINI GHOSH

freedom of speech and expression, was discussed along with its repercussions and how it has repeatedly disrupted a democratic discourse in India. Other archaic laws such as those against sedition and their impact on the freedom of expression for a republic such as India were further debated upon.

Speakers included Saurya Sengupta, Shyam Vasudevan and Harsh Shah from the student fraternity made a 40 minute long presentation to the Nordic ambassadors.

The presentation was followed

by a brief talk by the ambassadors on freedom of expression that extends to press in Nordic countries and the importance of an independent community like Ethical Community of Journalists in countries such as Finland and Iceland that protects the press thereby allowing adherence of high standards and integrity in reportage. Protection is given to the media and journalists and revelation of sources who refuse to be identified is illegal.

Concerns voiced by Thorir Ibsen were the prevalence of news culture

on social media and concentration of media ownership. He said, "Social media allows for a lot of democracy but it also allows a lot of abuse."

The talk ended with a question and answer session. The discussion that ensued involved comments by the ambassadors on few fundamental rights which they considered to be of utmost importance - gender equality, freedom of religion and child protection.

When asked on the rise of conservatism in Europe, Nina Vaskun-

lahti said, "When the world keeps getting complicated, people get scared and want simple solutions. However there are no simple solutions. Extreme political movements are coming to existence which claims freedom of expression in the wrong way, often turning it to hate speeches. Hence it is important to educate those with such sentiments."

Sandberg, questioning the legitimacy of the 'emerging extreme right', said, "Should we call it extreme right or extreme populism?"