

Vasanthalakshmi gets 'Nritya Kalanidhi' award

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Classical dancer and choreographer Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari was presented with the 'Nritya Kalanidhi' award at the 17th Dance Festival of the Music Academy, which began in Chennai on Wednesday.

Presenting the award, Edgar Pang Tze Chiang, Consul-General of the Republic of Singapore in Chennai, recalled that Ms. Narasimhachari and her late husband and dance exponent, M.V. Narasimhachari, were dance tutors at the Singapore Fine Arts Society in the 1970s. They had trained many Singaporean dancers and created multicultural performances.

Highlighting Singapore's cultural links with Tamil Nadu, Mr. Chiang said Tamil population made a significant segment of Singapore's Indian community.

Tamil is one of the four official languages and its historical people-to-people links are intertwined with heritage and tradition of the fine arts of Tamil Nadu.

Noting that Singapore Indian fine arts musicians and dancers have participated in past editions of the Academy's dance festivals, Mr. Chiang said this year too, Aravindh Kumaraswamy, artistic director of Apsaras arts dance company, would perform on January 15.

Lauding the Academy for being a key custodian of south India's rich cultural heritage, Mr. Chiang said the festival stands as a testament to the Academy's commitment to musical education and cultural preservation. He also released the dance brochure and presented prizes to winners of Spirit of Youth festival, HCL Concert series and mid-year dance series.

Earlier, N. Murali, president of The Music Academy and Director, The Hindu Group of Publications, said this year's edition would feature several genres of the classical art form, including Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Yakshagana and Mohiniyattam, both as solo and group performances.

Felicitating Ms. Narasimhachari as one of the foremost exponents of classical dance, he said she and her husband were exposed to various other dance genres such as Kathakali and Odissi. The duo has many distinctive creations to their credit through their Kalasamarpana Foundation.

Accepting the award, Ms. Narasimhachari described it as a significant moment in her life. "It is not Vasanthalakshmi, the individual, who is being acknowledged and felicitated but Vasanthalakshmi, the artiste who has found life's purpose in her art," she said.

T.N. to launch semiconductor and electronics policy at investors' meet

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government will unveil a 'Semiconductor and Advanced Electronics Policy' during the upcoming Global Investors Meet (GIM), scheduled for January 7 and 8.

Confirming this, a senior government official said these were the sunrise sectors that the State was focusing on and a policy would bring more investments into this space.

According to Industries Minister T.R.B. Rajaa, the focus was on developing exclusive policies for semi-

conductors and advanced electronics, underpinning the strategy to become a semiconductor and advanced electronics hub. "A critical part of this strategy is preparing our labour force for industry demands. We produce the highest number of engineers and have the largest R&D [research and development] output in India. Schemes like *Naan Mudhalvan* are pivotal in training our youth for this sector," he added.

The Minister further said: "Tamil Nadu, India's leading electronics hub, is the country's top electron-

ics exporter, having achieved \$5.37 billion in electronics exports last year. This year, we are on track to reach \$8 billion. Our next phase involves advancing to high-end design and manufacturing high-value electronics ..."

According to this year's data from National Import-Export Record for the Yearly Analysis of Trade (NI-RYAT), till November 30, 2023 (for the financial year 2023-2024, beginning April 2023), Tamil Nadu's total exports stood at \$5.59 billion. This was nearly 31.51% of India's total electronics exports for this pe-

riod, which was \$17.74 billion.

The State has also invited Chris Miller, author, *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* – a book that explains how computer chips have made the modern world and how the U.S. and China are struggling for control over this fundamental technology – to address the GIM. "Inviting Chris Miller aligns with our objectives. His presence is meant to energise and inspire our youth, while also fostering meaningful policy discussions in this sector," Mr. Rajaa added.

55% of patients given antibiotics only as a preventive measure, says survey

A key reason for antimicrobial resistance is the excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics, says NCDC survey released by Health Ministry; 94% of patients were prescribed antibiotics even before a definitive diagnosis of the infection; only 6% were given antibiotics after confirmed diagnosis

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Over half of the almost 10,000 patients surveyed recently were given antibiotics to prevent infection, rather than to treat it, amid growing concerns about the rise in resistance to antibiotics, shows a Health Ministry survey. As much as 94% of the patients surveyed were given antibiotics before the confirmation of a definitive medical diagnosis of the precise cause of infection.

Earlier this week, the Ministry released the results of the survey conducted by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), mapping the patients treated for one to five days each at 20 tertiary-care institutes across 15 States and two Union Territories between November 2021 and April 2022.

Of the 11,588 admissions and 9,652 eligible patients, 72% were prescribed anti-

biotics. Of them, only 45% were prescribed antibiotics for therapeutic indications, meant to treat infection or disease.

The remaining 55% were prescribed the drugs for prophylactic indications, meant to prevent the occurrence or spread of an infection. Only 6% were prescribed antibiotics after a confirmed diagnosis of the specific bacterium causing their illness, called definitive therapy. The remaining 94% were on empirical therapy, based on the doctor's clinical experience in assessing the likely cause of an illness.

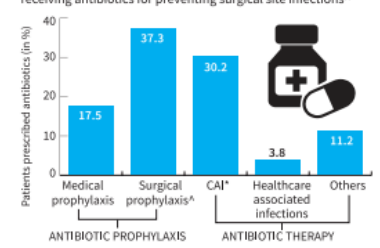
Major threat

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as one of the top threats to public health. It is a natural phenomenon as bacteria evolve, making drugs used to treat infections less effective.

However, as the NCDC

Is prevention better than cure?

As per a NCDC survey, 55% of eligible patients were given antibiotics for disease prevention (prophylaxis), with 37.3% receiving antibiotics for preventing surgical site infections*



*Community acquired infections

survey notes, one of the main drivers for the development of antibiotic resistance is the excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics.

To deal with the challenge of limited information on how antibiotics are prescribed and used at the patient level, the WHO has introduced the global point prevalence survey

methodology to understand the prescribing patterns in hospitals, with repeated surveys showing the changes in antibiotic use over time. Few studies have been conducted in India with this methodology.

Wide variations

The NCDC survey report noted wide variations between hospitals, with some

prescribing antibiotics to 37% of the patients, while the prevalence was 100% in other institutes.

Overall, there were 12,342 antibiotic prescriptions, with 86.5% of these prescribed through the parenteral route, meaning that they were not taken orally.

Using the WHO's Access, Watch and Reserve (AWaRe) classification, it was found that only 38% of the prescriptions were for antibiotics belonging to the Access group, which "offer the best therapeutic value, while minimising the potential for resistance". However, a much larger 57% of the prescriptions were for antibiotics belonging to the Watch group, which are "only indicated for specific, limited number of infective syndromes and are more prone to be a target of antibiotic resistance". Just 2% of the antibiotics prescribed were from the "last resort" Reserve group of drugs.

"About 3% of the prescriptions were of the 'not recommended' group. The high use of Watch group antibiotics is of concern as these antibiotics have a higher potential to develop antibiotic resistance," the survey noted.

Monitoring network

The NCDC is the nodal agency for India's national programme on AMR containment, of which one of the key components is the surveillance of antibiotic usage.

To achieve this goal, it has established the National Antibiotic Consumption Network (NAC-NET) through which network sites compile data on antibiotic consumption in their respective health facilities and send it to the NCDC.

According to the NCDC, a major contributing factor to antibiotic resistance is the overuse of antibiotics, with approximately half or more hospitals using antibiotics inappropriately.

Blow to Netanyahu

Israel's government should end the war, not focus on judicial overhaul

The Israeli Supreme Court's decision to strike down a law passed by the Knesset last year that sought to limit the judiciary's powers is a clear setback to the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which is fighting a brutal war in Gaza. The law, passed with 64-0 votes in the 120-member Parliament after an opposition boycott in July 2023, had scrapped the reasonableness doctrine, a legal standard used by the country's judges to assess government decisions and ministerial appointments. The legislation, which amended Israel's Basic Laws, was part of a reform package by the right-religious government to strengthen the hands of the government over the judiciary. Despite street protests, the coalition government passed its first part in the Knesset. Government supporters claimed that the court had no powers to rule on a Basic Law, which it had not done in the past. But on Monday, the court, sitting with a full panel of 15 judges for the first time in its history, stated, 12 to 3, that it had the powers to rule over the Basic Laws; eight judges, against seven dissenters, ruled in favour of striking down the law that scrapped the reasonableness standard.

The reasonableness doctrine is not a unique standard employed by Israel's courts. Judges in other liberal democracies such as Australia, Canada and the U.K. assess the reasonableness of government decisions. In Israel, a country with a single House of Parliament, a ceremonial President and with no written Constitution, the independence of the judiciary is critical to ensure that there are checks and balances in the system. Israel's far-right government was trying to tip this balance in favour of the Knesset, which is dominated by right-wing, pro-settler and ultra-Orthodox parties. The Supreme Court has put the brakes on this overhaul plan, for now. Its decision comes at a precarious time for Mr. Netanyahu, who has seen his popularity plummeting after his government failed to detect and stop the October 7 Hamas attack that killed 1,200 Israelis. The war of almost three months in Gaza, claiming at least 22,000 lives, has triggered a humanitarian tragedy, but Israel is far from meeting its declared objectives. On the day of the court ruling, the Israeli military announced the drawing down of thousands of reservists from Gaza and sending them back to work to strengthen a shrinking economy. In a recent poll, 69% of Israelis want elections immediately after the war is over. Mr. Netanyahu had claimed unity when he declared war on Hamas, but as the war drags on, divisions have started resurfacing. Any attempt to press ahead with the judicial overhaul plan would only weaken his government further. Instead, the Prime Minister should focus on bringing the war to an end.

PM

Striking fear

Drivers' strike is a test for severity of hit-and-run clause in new penal code

The provision in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) that treats hit-and-run accident cases as an aggravated form of the offence of causing death by rashness or negligence will be the first in the new, yet-to-be implemented code to be scrutinised for its severity. With truck drivers worried about the implications of Section 106 of BNS abstaining from work, the government has promised to bring it into play only after consultations with the All India Motor Transport Congress. However, with the transporters' body taking the stand that the strike was primarily resorted to by the drivers who feared additional criminal liability, the issue will require tactful handling. It has now become an issue that concerns transport workers rather than those running the business of transportation. It may appear that a strike against a law that makes penal provisions concerning hit-and-run accidents more stringent is unjustified, especially in the context of road accidents becoming a leading source of fatalities in the country. However, it has also drawn attention to the question whether there was a case for increasing the jail term for accidents from two to five years in all cases, and to 10, in the case of failure to report them to the authorities.

Section 106 of the BNS will replace Section 304A of the IPC, which punished the causing of death by rash and negligent act that does not amount to culpable homicide. The existing section provides for a two-year jail term. There are three components to Section 106: first, it prescribes a prison term of up to five years, besides a fine, for causing death due to rash or negligent acts; second, it provides for reduced criminal liability for registered medical doctors of two years in jail, if death occurred in the course of a medical procedure. The second clause concerns road accidents in which, if the person involved in rash and negligent driving "escapes without reporting it to a police officer or a Magistrate soon after the incident", the imprisonment may extend to 10 years and a fine. Drivers flee an accident scene out of fear of lynching. In such cases, the authorities seem to believe that such drivers can move away from the scene of crime and then report to the police. The term 'hit-and-run' is one in which the offending vehicle is not identified. It must be emphasised that once the person causing a fatal accident is identified, the onus on the police to prove culpability for rashness or negligence remains the same. Given that many accidents are caused due to poor road conditions too, a relevant question is whether the law should focus on raising prison terms or on a comprehensive accident prevention policy package covering imprisonment, compensation and safety.

Why is upskilling necessary for the rural youth?

How can youth in rural India be made employment-ready? What are the skills they need to acquire and how can the government and NGOs facilitate this?

Simran Kaur

The story so far:

At a group discussion held by Life Skills Collaborative, most of the rural youth when questioned about their aspirations for the future said they preferred staying in their village. With the prevalent trend of urbanisation – the UN projects that almost 50% of the Indian population will be living in urban areas by 2047 – it is crucial not to overlook those who choose to stay behind in villages.

What is main source of rural income?

Farming is the main source of rural livelihoods, with children from many rural families supplementing their family's income by working on family-owned farms. But the rural economy is experiencing a major occupational shift with more farmers quitting agriculture to join non-farming jobs, hinting at an agrarian crisis. The

National Sample Survey Office data recorded 34 million farmers leaving their farms and transitioning to other sectors such as construction during 2004-05 and 2011-12. This highlights the need for not only making agriculture an aspiring vocation among rural youth, but also creating alternative employment opportunities.

How can migration be controlled?

To control migration of these youth to urban areas in search of meaningful employment, it becomes imperative to provide vocational training to students to imbibe relevant rural skills in them so that they can secure a living where they currently live. During discussions at schools, it was found that most students' educational/employment aspirations were limited to choices that were available within the vicinity of their villages. Upskilling opportunities similar to what the Delhi government is trying to achieve with the 'Skills On Wheel' initiative must

be brought to students' doorsteps.

What is the current vocational education opportunity?

The current vocational education landscape in rural India is interspersed with Industrial Training Institutes to upskill rural populations, but with little to no placement opportunities. Presently, rural education scarcely focuses on skill development, a blow to the majority of youth who reportedly rely on schools to learn life skills. The LSC Voices 2023 survey – of 15,856 young people across 11 districts – revealed that two thirds of youth aged between 19 and 22 had never taken any kind of vocational training with only 5% of them enrolled in these courses. If learning is infused with rural life skills in schools, rural education will have the potential to nurture a generation capable of thriving.

How can education be improved?

Effective rural education should be

tailored such that technical as well as life skills, needed to empower youth in these areas, become accessible to them through formal education. There are many ways this could be done, as educational evidence from other developing economies suggests – such as Mexico's tele-schools and Bhutan's well-being-infused curriculum. The tele-schools provide lessons on subject matters as well as values, thereby providing a much higher level of access to value-based secondary education for remote areas where secondary schools are scarce. This has shown to have trickling benefits in the local economy with improved attitudes and increased aspirations among children and parents.

Closer to home, organisations such as NIFT Foundation and Pratham Institute are working with children in rural areas to provide upskilling opportunities. Hybrid life skill programs are offered both by NIFT in collaboration with UNICEF through its self-learning platform, and Pratham, which offers courses in both industry-specific skills (such as in healthcare, electrical, construction) and life skills. By offering rural populations skills in fields like agricultural mechanisation, pollution monitoring, nursing and digital technologies via e-learning, rural India can boost employability in both traditional and non-traditional trades, leading to a vibrant economy.

Simran Kaur is an incoming MPP student at Kaulitya School of Public Policy.

The portrait of an insurgent movement: the rise and decline of ULFA

Writers trace the reasons and political circumstances for the growth of the United Liberation Front of Asom, and why it weakened over the years. While a new peace agreement holds hope, not all factions are on board yet

Sudipta Datta

The Arabinda Rajkhowa faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) had joined peace talks with the Centre in 2011, and it took it 12 years to sign a memorandum of settlement with the Union Home Ministry and the Assam government last week. The fact that it took this long to arrive at an agreement on issues the ULFA has been fighting for, including protecting land rights for the indigenous people and an end to illegal migration, is an indication of the complexity of the situation. In the initial years, one of the key aspirations of the ULFA was sovereignty and an independent Assam.

At the signing, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma brought up the elephant in the room when he said doors were open for the Pargana Baruah faction of the ULFA, which has been hostile to the process, to join the talks. The ULFA (Independent) is a much weakened force but Baruah has found sanctuary in the Myanmar forests, which have sheltered many insurgent outfits of the Northeast in the past.

The origins

Tracing the ULFA movement's rise and decline, Sanjoy Hazarika dedicates a chapter to it in *Strangers of the Mist* where he writes that the ULFA took shape in 1979 at the deserted Rang Ghar pavilion in Sibsagar, once the seat of the Ahom kingdom, and the sporting and cultural centre of that dynasty of immigrants who 'assimilated', as did many others, with the people they conquered.

The young men who met there, he says, were to become household names a decade later – Rajiv Konwar, better known as Arabinda Rajkhowa, Golap Barua (also known as Anup Chetia), Samiran Gogoi and Pargana Baruah. In the years that followed, particularly the 1980s and 1990s, ULFA leaders and cadres "virtually dismantled the administration and ran a parallel government", striking terror through the State. Unhappy with the Assam Accord of 1985, particularly the clause on the cut-off year for citizenship in Assam being 1971, the ULFA ranks began to swell with youngsters flocking to the movement.

Some of the key figures of the ULFA belonged to dispossessed communities like the Motoks (who lost their lands when the British set up tea plantations) and this factor, points out Hazarika, bonded them to other disaffected ethnic groups. An intelligence official told him: "ULFA began really as an expression of opposition to more than 100 years of exploitation."

Ascent to power

The ULFA's ascent to power, says Hazarika, coincided with the years of the Asom Gana Parishad regime. But by 1990, widespread extortion campaigns, attacks and killings were attributed to the ULFA cadres and the outfit was declared a terrorist and secessionist organisation and banned. There's a detailed account of the first ULFA camp that was struck by the Army at Lakhpathar, in the heart of a forest near Digboi and Dibrugarh, the oil and tea capital of the State.

"ULFA's power was not drawn solely from money and arms, though both were

crucial factors," he writes. "It lay in its understanding of the Assamese who were fed up with annual floods, failure of political promises, growing unemployment, unease that the anti-alien [those who migrated from Bangladesh] movement had not won them tangible gains despite the AGP's presence and the knowledge that New Delhi was still trying to bulldoze its diktat through." For peace to prevail, this perception will have to change.

At the agreement signing in Delhi, Mr. Biswa Sarma harped on the key points of the peace accord, pointing out that at least 96 out of 126 Assembly seats in Assam would be reserved for indigenous people and the future delimitation exercise would follow this principle. "This will address the question of political insecurity of the people of Assam," the Chief Minister said. He spoke about protecting land rights and putting restrictions on migration from one constituency to another.

Several books have documented how the ULFA campaign became internationalised with the outfit's leaders reaching out to Bangladesh and Pakistan in the late 1980s. Later, facing pressure from security forces in Assam from late 1990 and after Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino, the outfit set up camps in Bhutan which were ultimately dismantled in an army operation in 2003.

Foreign links

For his new book, *The Mirage of Dawn*, Rajeev Bhattacharyya travelled the ULFA trail which took him to remote places in Assam – to rebel camps in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and New Delhi. He

writes about the outfit's "conflicting accounts of its history, the internecine squabbles within and the wide range of clandestine activities in neighbouring countries, not all of which were known to all of its own leadership." He puts a greater focus on the ULFA's foreign bases and operations – after all, the changing situation in the outfit's foreign bases had a decisive impact on the trajectory of the separatist campaign in Assam.

Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty's two books, *Assam: the Accord, the Discord* and *The Assamese: A Portrait of a Community*, also go into the backdrop of why such a movement like the ULFA could hold sway in Assam, looking into issues of identity, language, religion and other social and economic factors.

Will there be peace until the Baruah faction comes on board too? "The firm stance taken by the Baruah faction," writes Barooah Pisharoty, "is hinged on the outfit's original argument that the British usurped Assam not from the Assamese but from invading Burmese forces as part of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, and therefore, once the British left Assam, India should have returned Assam to the Assamese and negotiated the terms for political co-living." But as Hazarika points out, the insurgency movement has been weakened for several reasons, not least the decision of one of the most powerful groups in the region, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, to seek peace talks (a framework agreement was announced in 2015, but awaits a final settlement).

"That process is critical to the continuance of peace in the Northeast," says Hazarika.

SpaceX's Falcon-9 to launch India's GSAT-20; satellite to spread broadband coverage

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

NewSpace India Ltd. (NSIL), the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation, will launch GSAT-20 (re-named GSAT-N2), on board SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket during the second quarter of 2024.

The GSAT-20 is a high-throughput Ka-band satellite (HTS), which will be fully owned, operated and funded by the NSIL.

The agency said GSAT-20 offers Ka-Ka band HTS capacity with 32 beams having pan-India coverage, including the Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands. The satellite, weighing 4,700 kg, offers an HTS capacity of nearly 48 Gbps and has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote and unconnected regions.

As part of the space sector reforms announced by the Union government in



Falcon 9 is a reusable two-stage rocket. Photo shows a lift-off from Florida in 2022. REUTERS

June 2020, the NSIL was mandated to build, launch, own and operate satellites in "demand-driven mode" to meet service needs of the user.

As part of this, the NSIL successfully undertook its first demand-driven satellite mission, GSAT-24, in June 2022, and the capacity-board of the satellite was fully secured by Tata Play. GSAT-24 mission was fully

funded by the NSIL. At present, the agency owns and operates 11 communication satellites in orbit.

"On similar lines, during the second quarter of 2024, NSIL will be undertaking the GSAT-20 satellite mission to offer cost-effective Ka-Ka band HTS capacity primarily for meeting the broadband, as well as IFMC and cellular backhaul service needs. The bulk of the HTS capacity on board GSAT-20 satellite has already been secured by Indian service providers," the NSIL said.

The NSIL is realising the GSAT-20 satellite through ISRO and will be launched on board Falcon-9 under a contract between NSIL and SpaceX, USA, it said.

According to SpaceX, Falcon-9 is a reusable, two-stage rocket designed and manufactured by the Elon Musk-founded company for the reliable and safe transport of people and payloads into Earth orbit and beyond.