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**DON'T MISS...****No need for YSRCP to attack...**

Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has made it clear that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is committed to Three Capitals and there will be no going back on the decentralised policy. The minister stated that Amaravati land pooling a real estate business as there are no real farmers in the agitation except Chandrababu Naidu and his benamis. He further said that the ruling YSRCP has no need to carry out attacks on the BJP leaders. Addressing the media persons...

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Remarriage no ground to deny...

Remarriage of a widow cannot be a reason to deny compensation to her under the Motor Vehicles Act for the death of her husband in a road accident, the Bombay High Court has said while dismissing an insurance company's petition. Ifco Tokio General Insurance Company had filed the petition in the high court, challenging the order of a Motor Accidents Claim Tribunal (MACT), which had directed the company to pay compensation to the woman, whose husband was killed in a road...

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'Financial frauds hamper country's...

Financial frauds cause "tremendous impairment" to the economy and hamper the overall growth of the country, a special court here observed while convicting three bankers in a 19-year-old case of fraud. Special CBI judge D P Singde found three officials of Dena Bank, Srikant Padale (51), Vijaya Nair (46) and V Radhakrishnan (61) guilty of charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act and Indian Penal Code. The order passed on March 30 was made available on Saturday...

-MONEY

Why tornadoes are still hard...

Texas. As a deadly tornado headed toward Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on March 24, 2023, forecasters saw the storm developing on radar and issued a rare "tornado emergency" warning. NOAA's Weather Prediction and Storm Prediction centres had been warning for several days about the risk of severe weather in the region. But while forecasters can see the signs of potential tornadoes in advance, forecasting when and where tornadoes will form is still extremely difficult. We asked Chris Nowotarski, an atmospheric scientist who works on severe thunderstorm computer modeling, to explain why and how forecast technology is improving. Why are tornadoes still so difficult to forecast? Meteorologists have gotten...

-SPORTS

OBTUSE ANGLE

KVP faults YSRCP, TDP for maintaining silence

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Congress party senior leader and former Rajya Sabha member KVP Ramachandra Rao has slammed the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP for not opposing the disqualification of Congress MP Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha.

Addressing a meet-the-press programme at the Vijayawada Press Club on Saturday, KVP said that the YSRCP is maintaining closeness with the BJP due to 'special circumstances' and he did not know what they were.

"The YSRCP has neither condemned the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha nor opposed it," KVP said, regretting that there are 25 Lok Sabha members and 11 Rajya Sabha members of YSRCP and TDP but none of them opposed the disqualification in the Parliament.

KVP also lashed out at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu for maintaining silence on Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha. He recalled that Rahul Gandhi extended support to Naidu when he embarked on Dharma Porata Deeksha in Delhi against Narendra Modi for not granting the SCS to AP.

Naidu is fighting against the anti-people policies of the YSRCP-led government in AP, and on the same lines, Naidu should go to Delhi and



■ KVP pointed out that Narendra Modi spoke against the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh while addressing a programme in New York a few years ago but nobody objected to speaking against a Prime Minister of India abroad.

■ If the Hindenburg did not disclose the Adani scam, Adani would have emerged as the world's richest person very soon. As long as YS Rajasekhara Reddy was the Chief Minister of AP, Adani could not step in AP.

■ "The YSRCP has neither condemned the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha nor opposed it," KVP said, regretting that there are 25 Lok Sabha members and 11 Rajya Sabha members of YSRCP and TDP but none of them opposed the disqualification in the Parliament.

■ Disqualification of Rahul Gandhi is not his personal issue. It is a matter of national concern as such acts will be detrimental to democracy.

join the opposition parties to oppose the disqualification, KVP said.

"Disqualification of Rahul Gandhi is not his personal issue. It is a matter of national concern as such acts will be detrimental to democracy,"

he said and called upon all democrats and secular parties to be united to oppose the BJP-led Centre's 'anti-people' policies.

India's unemployment rate at 3-month high of 7.8%

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's unemployment rose to a three-month high in March to 7.8 per cent as the country's labour markets deteriorated, according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).

Unemployment rate in the country surged in December 2022 to 8.30 per cent but declined in January to 7.14 per cent. It edged up again in February to 7.45 per cent, the CMIE data released on Saturday showed.

During March, the unemployment rate in urban areas was at 8.4 per cent while in the rural areas it was at 7.5 per cent.

"India's labour markets deteriorated in March 2023. The unemployment rate increased from 7.5 per cent in February to 7.8 per cent in March. The effect of this is compounded by the simultaneous fall in the labour force participation rate, which fell from 39.9 per cent to 39.8 per cent," CMIE managing director Mahesh Vyas told PTI.

This led to a fall in the employment rate from 36.9 per cent in February to 36.7 per cent in March, Vyas said, adding that employment fell from 409.9 million to 407.6 million. Among the states, unemploy-



Unemployment rate in the country surged in December 2022 to 8.30 % but declined in January to 7.14%. It edged up again in February to 7.45%, the CMIE data released on Saturday showed.

ment was the highest in Haryana at 26.8 per cent closely followed by Rajasthan at 26.4 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir at 23.1 per cent, Sikkim 20.7 per cent, Bihar 17.6 per cent and Jharkhand 17.5 per cent. Unemployment was the lowest in Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh at 0.8 per cent each followed by Puducherry at 1.5 per cent, Gujarat 1.8 per cent, Karnataka 2.3 per cent and Meghalaya and Odisha at 2.6 per cent each.

CIEL HR Services Director and CEO Aditya Mishra said that post the festive season of October-January, employment in retail,

supply chain, logistics, financial services and e-commerce has declined.

"Our sectors of IT, Technology and Startups have tightened their belts leading to a slowdown in fresh hiring. Thirdly, March being the month of financial year-end and examinations, the sectors of leisure travel, tourism, entertainment and hospitality are not witnessing high demand.

Most parts of India to reel under heatwave soon: IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Most of India, barring parts of north-west and peninsular region, is expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures from April to June, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday.

It said above-normal heatwave days are predicted in most parts of central, east and northwest India during this period.

"During the 2023 hot weather season (April to June), most parts of the country are expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures, except for south peninsular India and some parts of northwest India where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely," the IMD said.

Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana," IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mahapatra said in a virtual press conference.

A heatwave is declared if the maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the

plains, at least 37 degrees Celsius in coastal areas and at least 30 degrees Celsius in hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 degrees Celsius.

India logged its hottest February this year since record-keeping began in 1901, according to the IMD.



Centre hikes toll charges

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Central government has revised the toll charges once again that have come into force right from March 31 at midnight and the lorry owners across the State are feeling the heat of the increased toll charges.

The highway tolls have increased by around 10% across the country, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) issued a notification for the same a few days ago.

Tolls are tied to the Wholesale Price Index of inflation and are adjusted in response to changes in that index.

The requirements of the NH Fee (Determination of Rating and Collection) Rules, 2008 govern the revision of highway toll rates.

In FY23, the average increase in toll prices across the nation was 10.5%.

The price revision for toll charges, on the other hand, varies across the country.

Lorry owners, who are already struggling to operate their vehicles due to increases in fuel prices and other hidden expenses have to face the fresh toll charges burden of about 10 per cent.

Over 3 lakh lorries and transport vehicles are in Andhra Pradesh and the transport sector and about seven lakh workers, drivers, and cleaners including lorry owners depend on the transport sector in Andhra Pradesh.

Speaking to The Pioneer, AP Lorry Owners Association general secretary YV Eswara Rao recalled the logistic policy by Prime Minister Modi as a good move to connect all national highways, and ports and provide good road conditions and maintenance.

Half-day classes for schools in AP from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Starting from Monday, all schools in Andhra Pradesh will conduct half-day classes, said an official on Saturday, in keeping with the annual practice during the summer.

The classes will start from 7.45 AM to 12.30 PM for I to IX students until the last working day on April 30. However, schools hosting SSC examination centres will not conduct classes on exam days.

"These schools shall conduct compensatory classes for six days on the available public holidays during the period from April 3 to 30. The compensatory classes will also follow half day schedule," S Suresh Kumar, Commissioner of School Education said in a statement.

Kodali, Balineni may be reinducted into Cabinet

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Speculation is rife in political circles that former ministers Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) and Balineni Srinivasa Reddy are being considered for reappointment to the Jagan Mohan Reddy Cabinet.

According to sources, the decision comes in the wake of the YSRCP's defeat in the recent MLC elections, which saw the party lose all three seats in the graduate constituencies and one seat in the MLA quota.

Following a meeting with party MLAs, ministers, and key leaders,



the Chief Minister is said to have recognised that the current Cabinet lacks inspiring faces and wants to bring back Kodali Nani and Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, who have a significant following among the youth and can draw good crowds.

Sources say that CM Jagan believes the party's defeat in the MLC election can only be corrected by bringing back these two leaders, as he prepares

for the 2024 general elections. However, it remains to be seen who will be removed from the Cabinet to make room for their reappointment.

AP in deep debt trap: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu, on Saturday, said that the State is plunging into a deep debt burden with a whopping Rs 10.31 lakh cr. Chandrababu Naidu sought to know where

the borrowed money is going. "I am unable to understand which way the State is moving," He said that on the one hand, the government is imposing heavy taxes on the people and on the other it is borrowing lakhs of crores and this year alone the CM borrowed Rs 96,000 cr.

The Opposition leader felt that

this will certainly lead to an economic crisis and will push the State into bankruptcy. Despite borrowing such a huge amount of funds, the Chief Minister has neither completed the Polavaram project nor constructed even a single road in any part of the State, he remarked.

I am unable to understand which way the State is moving. He said that on the one hand, the government is imposing heavy taxes on the people and on the other it is borrowing lakhs of crores and this year alone the CM borrowed Rs 96,000 crore.

6,64,152 students to appear for SSC exams from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Education Department has announced that the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams for Class 10 students will take place from April 3 to 18. Around 6,64,152 students are expected to appear for the exams across the state, and the Education Department has made all the necessary arrangements to ensure a smooth process. Minister for Education, Botsa Satyanarayana, made this announcement at a press conference on Saturday, where he was accompanied by Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash, Commissioner S Suresh Kumar, SSC Board Director D Devananda Reddy, and others at the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan Project Office on the premises of KBC ZP High School at Patamata in Vijayawada.

Minister Botsa Satyanarayana stated that the exams would begin at 9:30 am and finish at 12:45 noon every day. He emphasized that no student would be allowed to enter the examination hall after 9:30 am, but in exceptional cases, the Chief Superintendent of the concerned center would have the



authority to permit a student to sit for the exam. To ensure the safety of students, government teachers would act as invigilators, even in private and aided schools.

The department has taken steps to accommodate 24 students in each room, and to conduct the exams strictly, the department has arranged 682 sitting squads and 156 flying squads. CCTV cameras have been installed in 104 examination centers this year.

Minister Botsa Satyanarayana also announced that electronic gadgets would not be allowed into the examination rooms. Even invigilators would deposit their mobile phones at the mobile counters to prevent malpractice and mass copying. The circular regarding the 74 teachers who com-

mitted illegality last year, which was issued earlier, was revoked at the request of the teachers' union leaders.

To assist students with transport, APSRTC is providing a free bus facility to SSC students. The students must carry their hall tickets during the travel time, and it would be treated as a bus pass. If any village has no bus facility, and many students need transport, RTC will send a bus following the request letter to the RTC bus depot manager through the concerned district DEO.

Half-day schools are scheduled from April 3 to 30 for classes 1 to 9, from 7:45 am to 12:30 pm. This system will be implemented in all government, ZP, Municipal, Aided, and Private Unaided schools. In schools where there are SSC examination centers, no

classes will be held on exam days. Compensatory classes will be conducted for six days on the available public holidays during the period from April 3 to 30, with a half-day schedule.

Minister Botsa Satyanarayana also announced that Summative Assessment 2 (SA2) exams for classes 1 to 9 will be conducted from 9 am to 12 noon. In view of the half-day school schedule, the government has revised the SA2 examination schedule.

Officials present at the press conference included Samagra Shiksha SAPD B Srinivasa Rao, APSPD and AP Open School Society Director Dr KV Srinivasulu Reddy, School Education Joint Director (Services) M Ramalingam, and others.



PT Usha in Vja for 'Ahimsa Run' today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president and Olympian PT Usha, who is also a Rajya Sabha Member, reached Vijayawada from New Delhi on Saturday.

Jain International Trade Organisation (JITO) representatives, along with Andhra Pradesh Athletics Association (APAA) representatives accorded a warm welcome to PT Usha at the Gannavaram Airport. Later, she went to Vijayawada by roadway and made a night halt at Novotel.

She will be taking part in the JITO 'Ahimsa Run' that will be held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium. Aiming to promote peace and non-violence, the JITO is going to conduct the 'Ahimsa Run' in 65 cities across the State on April 2. Around 2,000 athletes will be participating in the event in Vijayawada.

1,168 appointments approved on compassionate grounds in APSRTC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As many as 1,168 people would get compassionate appointments in APSRTC. To this effect, the state government has issued orders for appointments in APSRTC to the family members of the RTC employees who died from 2016 to 2019.

During the TDP regime, as many as 1,168 RTC employees died during 2016-19 and Chandrababu refused to give jobs to family members under compassionate appointments. Even though RTC was a corporation, the government did not show mercy for compassionate appointments and

ignored the union's request.

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy took up the issue with humanity towards compassionate appointments. It is noteworthy that RTC was merged into the government and agreed to give jobs under compassionate appointments. The government has issued orders to give jobs to 1,168 people under compassionate appointments.

APSRTC MD Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao issued an order to provide jobs to 34 people as junior assistants, 146 as RTC constables, 175 as conductors, 368 as drivers, and 445 as workers/assistant mechanics

based on the qualifications.

The RTC unions thanked Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for sanctioning the long pending compassionate appointments. They expressed happiness in issuing orders to provide jobs to 1,168 people in various categories. PV Ramana Reddy, President of the National Mazdoor Union, expressed joy and stated that this is proof that the government is dealing with RTC employees with a positive attitude. Employees

Union State general secretary P Damodar Rao thanked the government for resolving the long-pending issue.

No one is happy under YSRCP rule: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh has said that all sections of people are suffering a lot and no one is happy with the YSRCP rule. On Saturday, Lokesh's 'padayatra' entered the Dharmavaram Assembly segment, and the followers of Paritala Sriram received the leader. Later, he inspected the TIDCO houses.

Lokesh alleged that Chief Minister, Jagan Mohan Reddy, is reducing the number of beneficiaries of all the welfare schemes. "The TIDCO houses were built during the TDP regime and Jagan is now repainting these houses to claim them to be that of his Government," he stated.



Strongly condemning the State government's policy to neglect the Satya Sai Water Works project meant for drinking water Lokesh said that the non-payment of the power bills and the salaries of the employees clearly indicate the bankruptcy of the Jagan

Government

Lokesh interacted with those who have come to meet him and inquired about the problems they are facing. The majority of them complained that the prices of essentials are skyrocketing and no welfare schemes are being implemented. Lokesh met the handloom workers who narrated their woes. They said that the handloom sector has completely collapsed, particularly after the Covid pandemic and those who are dependent on the handlooms.

Lokesh assured them that the party will certainly stand by them and Chandranna Bheema will be implemented once the party is back in power.

Action sought against culprits in Dr Atchanna murder case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The members of the Andhra Pradesh state SC/ST Gazetted Officers Association have demanded that attacks against SC and ST community people in Andhra Pradesh be stopped. They demanded that the accused in the brutal murder of Dr. Atchanna, Deputy Director in the Animal Husbandry Department in Kadapa be prosecuted as per law and ensure that the accused is hanged to death. The association members appealed to implement GO No 2 and 5 properly for the reservation of SC/ST employees' promotion in government departments.

Joint Krishna District president N Jagadish said that the problems of SCs and STs have not been resolved in any office in the government and they

are not being allowed to ask the concerned officials. It has been requested grant dental surgeon posts in all PHCs and VHCs of the State to those who have completed the dental course BDS. They want to continue the contract employees who have been working so far and not remove the outsourcing jobs. He requested that appointments should be made through interviews with notification to work in Ramayapatnam port and other ports and the rule of the reservation should be followed, he said.

State honorary president P Seenaiah, Krishna District Honorary President Tirupayya, State Vice President B Shekara Rao, District Associate President Dr Saka Nagamani, D Srinivasa Rao also spoke on the occasion.

Navy Chief tests positive for Covid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar on Saturday tested positive for COVID-19 that forced him to skip the valedictory session of the three-day Combined Commanders' Conference in Bhopal, people familiar with the matter said.

The valedictory session of the conference was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The Chief of Naval Staff tested positive for COVID-19 ahead of the concluding session. He did not attend the session," said one of the people cited above. Admiral Kumar attended the conference on Thursday and Friday.

"He is asymptomatic and doing fine," the person said. The Navy Chief has returned to Delhi.

Fight BRS Govt jointly; Sharmila tells Bandi Sanjay, Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

YSRTP President YS Sharmila phoned Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar and TPCC President Revanth Reddy and asked them to fight jointly against the BRS government for the unemployed. She urged Sanjay and Revanth to join hands and march to the Pragathi Bhavan. She told them that there is a need for the opposition to unite to tackle Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. She added that KCR will not allow opposition parties in Telangana if they do not fight jointly.

Responding to Sharmila's appeal, Sanjay said, "It is true that Sharmila phoned me on Saturday. I made it clear to her that the BJP will fight for anyone who faces injustice from KCR. But I told Sharmila that the BJP will not fight

along with the Congress as the Congress and the BRS are actually one. Congress leaders themselves are saying that the Congress and the BRS will contest elections together. Jana Reddy said the same thing on Friday. Both the Congress and the BRS may give the impression that they are fighting each other but the Congress has been saying that they will join hands before or after the elections. How can we work the Congress then? The BJP is a disciplined party. We will take a decision on which party to work with after discussing it with everyone in the party."

Revanth said the time has come for the opposition to fight KCR jointly. A final decision will be taken after discussing the issue, Revanth said.

Half-day classes...

Continued from Page 1

The second Saturday in April, usually a holiday, will be a working day for schools this year, Kumar said.

Considering the scorching summer days during which children would attend schools, the Commissioner directed officials to supply adequate drinking water with the support of the gram panchayats and the RWS department.

Further, he cautioned them to avoid classes in open areas or under the trees and asked the authorities to stock up on some oral rehydration solution (ORS) sachets in every school for use in the event of a sunstroke.

Likewise, Kumar instructed officials to provide butter milk along with mid-day meals with the latter being supplied at the end of classes.

Some people have given...

Continued from Page 1

"Some people are sitting inside the country to support these people and some are doing their work sitting outside the country. These people have been continuously trying to spoil and tarnish Modi's image," he said. But India's poor, the middle class, tribals, Dalits, backward classes and every Indian has become the security cover of Modi, which made these people furious forcing them to adopt new tricks, he said.

Modi said such people have taken a pledge that "Modi Teri Kabra Khudegi". "Amidst their conspiracies, every countryman has to pay attention to the development of the country and pay attention to building the nation," he said.

Slamming Congress without taking its name, Modi said previous governments were busy with vote bank appeasement whereas his government is busy satisfying people. "They (the previous governments) considered one family as the first family of the country. They ignored the poor and middle class, and the Railway is a living example of this (ignorance)," he said.

The prime minister also expressed deep grief over the stepwell roof collapse tragedy in a temple in Indore which killed 36 people and injured 16 on Ram Navami. As Germany took note of Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha, senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh on Thursday thanked the German foreign ministry

Most parts of India to reel...

Continued from Page 1

"Forecast indicates ENSO neutral conditions are likely from April to June. A transition to El Ni o is favoured by July-September, with chances of El Ni o increasing through the fall," Mahapatra said. El Ni o, the warming of the waters in the Pacific Ocean near South America, is associated with the weakening of monsoon winds and less rainfall in India.

However, the Met office said that several models indicate the development of a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) in the coming months. The Bureau of Meteorology model also indicates the development of positive IOD by May 2023.

IOD is defined by the difference in the sea surface temperatures between the western part of the Indian Ocean near Africa and the eastern part of

the Indian Ocean near Indonesia. A positive IOD is considered good for the Indian monsoon. The monsoon accounts for around 70 per cent of the country's annual rainfall and irrigates 60 per cent of its net sown area. Nearly half of the population depends on agriculture directly or indirectly.

The weatherman said at least 100 weather stations across the country reported heavy rain events (64.5 mm to 115.5 mm), the highest since 2018.

The prolonged spell of pre-monsoon rain, thunderstorms, hailstorms and lightning strikes damaged crops in many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and other states. The mango crop in the country has been damaged up to 20 per cent because of the untimely rains, hailstorm and strong wind, according to

AP in deep...

Continued from Page 1

Maintaining that the per capita income of Telangana has now reached Rs 3.08 lakh taking the State to the top in the country, the former chief minister said that this is all because of the decisions taken earlier which yielded the best results now.

But the per capita income of Andhra Pradesh is Rs 2.19 lakh and one can easily imagine the difference between the two States, he stated.

He questioned Jagan Mohan Reddy where this whole money is being diverted. People are totally unhappy with the functioning of the Jagan Government, he said, and asked those YSRCP leaders who are unhappy with their party leadership to think of their self-respect.

China has granted visas to over 18,000 Indians since January

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

China has issued visas to over 18,000 Indians in the last three months, a Chinese diplomat said.

Interacting with a group of journalists in Kolkata, Minister Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, Chen Jianjun, said he was looking forward to more Chinese being given visas by India.

"The number of visa applications for China has been on the rise. Since January, we have given visas to 18,560 Indians," he said.

"Since August, 9,409 student visas have been issued to Indian students," he said.

However, Jianjun said, the number of visa applications is yet to reach the pre-pandemic levels.

In June last year, China announced plans to provide visas to Indian professionals and their families stranded in India following the strict restrictions imposed by Beijing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Separately, it also started processing visa applications of thousands of Indian students studying in Chinese universities who conveyed their interest to rejoin their colleges and universities. About 23,000 Indian students, mostly studying



medicine were stranded back home due to the restrictions.

Jianjun said China was working with India for an early resumption of direct flights between the two countries.

Flight services between the two countries have been disrupted ever since coronavirus was first reported in Wuhan in late 2019 and spread across the world.

The flight disruption turned out to be a major problem for hundreds of Indian students as well as families of Indians working in China and businessmen to travel back and forth.

Indians are currently travelling to China through Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar, and some other countries, shelling out an exorbitant amount of money on steep airfares. Jianjun also said that his country was looking forward to a more fair and friendly business environment in India.

OU Dean Ravinder Nath appointed VC of University of Kashmir

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Ministry of Education on Friday appointed Prof A Ravinder Nath, Dean, Faculty of Technology, Osmania University, Hyderabad, as the Vice Chancellor of Central University of Kashmir (CUK) for a period of five years.

As per an order, the appointment has been made as per Statute 2 of Central Universities

Act, 2009. "The appointment has been made for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office, or until he attains the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier," the order reads. As per the order, the terms and conditions of the services of Prof A Ravinder Nath as the Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Kashmir will be those as set forth in the Act, Statutes and Ordinances of the University.

MGNREGA SCHEME

75L person days allocated to combined Krishna & NTR dist

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Panchayat Raj and Rural Development (PR & RD) has allocated 75 lakh person days for the combined Krishna and NTR district to provide employment opportunities for poor families. Out of these, Krishna district has been allotted 30 lakh person days, while NTR district will have 45 lakh person days. However, the person days allocated for Krishna district have decreased by 1 crore when compared to the previous financial year.

The Ministry of Rural Development has increased the wage rate for this financial year by Rs 15 for NREGA laborers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the new fiscal year of 2023-24, effective from April 1.

The District Water and Management Agency (DWAMA) officials, who



oversee the implementation of the Upadhi scheme in the districts, mentioned that during the financial year 2022-23, Krishna district provided 70 lakh person days and paid Rs. 274.57 crores in wages. On the other hand, the NTR district had created 75 lakh person days and paid Rs 225.78 crore in wages. They further added that the central government would increase person days whenever the allotted days are completed.

For instance, Krishna district was allotted 30 lakh person days, but it has been provided with 70 lakh person days. Similarly, the NTR district had provided 75 lakh person days as against the allotted 45 lakh person days.

The NTR District DWAMA Project Director (PD) Jujjavarapu Sunetha spoke to 'The Pioneer' and said that during the 2022-23 financial year, the district administration paid Rs. 245 wages per day, against

the fixed wage rate of Rs. 252. She also mentioned that the Upadhi scheme implementation department is aiming to pay the maximum wage rate of Rs 272, and a plan of action has been prepared to provide employment opportunities for poor people in the district. She further stated that with the support of the district collector Dr. S Dilli Rao, DWAMA would complete its target. During the summer season, the department is prepared to employ anyone who asks for work.

Overall, the increase in wages for the Upadhi laborers is a positive development that will benefit many poor families in the region. The government's commitment to providing employment opportunities to those in need is commendable, and it is hoped that the implementation of the scheme will proceed smoothly.

Vishnu flays BJP propaganda against CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Planning Board Vice Chairman Malladi Vishnu has criticised BJP leader Y Satya Kumar for speaking lies. He strongly condemned the false propaganda being done by the BJP leaders against Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. He said that the Centre had earlier said that the decision of the capital is entirely up to the State.

On Saturday, during 'Gadapa Gadapaku Mana Prabuthvam', at 278 ward secretariat under 63rd Division, Vishnu said that whatever affidavit was filed by the Centre in the ongoing case in the Supreme Court, the same was filed in the AP High Court at that time. In that affidavit, the Centre clearly stated that the State government did not consult the Centre while enacting the CRDA Act. He said that the relevant matter is completely related to the state government. The center has nothing to do with it.

Vishnu pointed out that the BJP leader Satya Prasad was telling the other way around confusing the people. He



demand that the BJP's stand on Amaravati should be made clear by giving up their dual stance. On the other hand, Vishnu criticized the petty politics of Telugu Desam Party leaders as disgusting.

He pointed out that the opposition leaders have final-

ly come down to the level of mudslinging on the police system.

He recalled that during the TDP regime, all the public representatives used to register their protests at the Dharna Chowk. But it is a shame to come on the roads and threat-

en the police system. Vishnu criticized and warned that this is not Chandrababu's TDP government to keep calm, while attacking police stations and attacking the Transport Commissioner. He urged the opposition leaders to change their attitude.



New bus service from Gannavaram to BHEL

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APSRTC Gannavaram depot has started the new bus service from Gannavaram to BHEL, Hyderabad to facilitate the Hyderabad passengers. This bus service will start at 9 pm at the Gannavaram bus stand every day. Also, another bus service is available from BHEL to Gannavaram.

Gannavaram MLA Dr. Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan flagged off the bus service along with the APSRTC Vijayawada Zonal Chairperson Tatineni Padmavathi at the Gannavaram depot on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Vamsi Mohan said that the state government is taking all steps for the development of APSRTC. Public transport

is available at less cost with the RTC, he said. The government runs the buses to all villages and people have had bus facilities in his constituency, he added.

Zonal Chairperson T Padmavathi said that the Gannavaradm depot has a history and she suggested to the employees live up to it in the future. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is ready to fulfil all needs of the employees, she added.

APSRTC Executive Director (Zone 2) Gidugu Venkateswara Rao, Krishna District PTDO NVR Vara Prasad, Gannavaram MPP Anagani Ravi, ZPTC member A Elizabeth Rani, Co Option Member Md Gousani, Gannavaram Depot Manager Sivaji and others participated.

‘No need for YSRCP to attack BJP leaders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has made it clear that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is committed to Three Capitals and there will be no going back on the decentralised policy. The minister stated that Amaravati land pooling a real estate business as there are no real farmers in the agitation except Chandrababu Naidu and his benamis. He further said that the ruling YSRCP has no need to carry out attacks on the BJP leaders.

Addressing the media persons on Saturday, the minister alleged agitation in the name of Amaravati is being carried out to benefit Chandrababu and

the company. He said that from the beginning he was saying Amaravati cannot be fulfilled as lakhs of crores of rupees belonging to the people cannot be poured into silos in Amaravati villages and it is not correct to bring all the national wealth and put there.

Minister Satyanarayana said that the party will go for elections with the decentralization slogan for all-round development of the state. He opined that administrative capital should function at Vizag right from tomorrow. However, due to some evil forces, the shifting of the administrative capital is being delayed due to

ongoing court proceedings. The YSRCP government is 'decentralisation of development'. We are going to elections with the slogan of three capitals," said the minister.

The Minister stated that Chandrababu is anticipating early polls and if the polls are conducted now, TDP will further deteriorate in the election results. He claimed that People's trust in our government as it is stable under the leadership of CM Jagan Mohan Reddy. He affirmed that when people give us the opportunity to govern for five years, it works for the good of the people till the end.

DRM releases poster on summer camp

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Summer camp-2023 will be organized by East Coast Railway Sports Association-Waltair, for a period of Two months from April 3 to May 30.

In this connection, Divisional Railway Manager Anup Satpathy released a poster on Saturday. Various summer coaching camps will be conducted among the children in two sessions in the morning and evening sessions for children of age between 5 years to 15 years. The coaching will be organized in the athletics, boxing, basketball, cricket, ball badminton, football, shuttle badminton, skating, swimming, table tennis, tennis, and vol-



leyball disciplines.

Divisional Railway Manager Shri Anup Satpathy said that the summer coaching is open for all and it is a free coaching camp. Coaching will be given to boys and girls in various disciplines. Boys will be

given in athletics, boxing, basketball, cricket, ball badminton, football, shuttle badminton, skating, swimming, table tennis, tennis and volleyball disciplines whereas girls will be given in athletics, boxing, basketball, shuttle badminton, skating, swimming, table tennis and tennis.

The entries for this coaching camp are open for all whereas the coaching for cricket, swimming, and tennis is restricted entry as per the norms. For details and admission interest people can contact Shri VH Kiran (Mobile No. 8977355229 and General Secretary Shri R Srinivasa Rao at the Sports office, ECoRSA, Waltair –Visakhapatnam.

Congress to go ahead with like-minded parties

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president and former MLC Gidugu Rudra Raju has made it clear that the Congress party would move forward with like-minded parties. His party had a strong cadre not only in the State but also in the country and it would fight against people's problems, he said.

APCC president Rudra Raju

addressed the media persons along with former MP KVR Ramachandra Rao at the Andhra Ratna Bhavan in Vijayawada on Saturday.

He said that the BJP-led central government cancelled his party's senior MP Rahul Gandhi's membership for asking about the central government's failures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government are cowardly, he commented.

Former MP KVP Ramachandra Rao demanded that the Central government tell where Rs 20,000 crore from shell companies went. The Modi government is unable to answer Rahul's questions and that's why it suspended his membership, he said.

AP State affairs in-charges CD Meyyappan, M Christopher Tilak, Media and Social Media Committee Chairman Dr N Tulasi Reddy and others were present.



Sportswear presented to KRU softball team members

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna University Softball (Men) team has been selected to take part in the All India Inter-University Softball (Men) Championship that will be conducted at Punjab University in Chandigarh from April 5 to 9. The Krishna University team will leave Vijayawada on April 2 for Chandigarh to take part in this tournament.

In this connection, the sportswear presentation programme for the Krishna Softball (Men) team was held at the Vikas College of Physical Education at Nunna near Vijayawada on Saturday. Vikas Educational Group of Institutions Secretary and Correspondent Naredla Satyanarayana Reddy presented sportswear to the Krishna University team players.



Speaking on the occasion, he said that players should participate with sportsman's spirit and win the All India Inter-University Championship. He said that outstanding sports persons would get employment in the central government departments. Also, they would get special reservations in the admissions of higher education courses, he added.

Vikas College of Physical Education Principal Dr. G Raju, vice principal B Uday Kumar, lecturers G Raghunath, D Ratna Babu, and others

were present. Krishna University Team: Ch Gopikrishna Reddy, J Lokram Karthik, M Salmon, B Sai (Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada), V Sagar Babu, B Madhu, Md Rafi, V Ramakrishna, P Vijay Kumar (Vikas BPED College, Nunna), K Ajay Kumar, K Siva Venkata Subrahmanyam, R Raju (AG & SG Siddhartha College, Vuyyuru), K Lokesh, Y Sampath (SRR & CVR Government Degree College, Vijayawada), P Munna (Dr LHR GDC, Mylavaram).

‘State govt hiked taxes by 50% in three years’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Pattana Poura Samakhya State convener Ch Babu Rao has alleged that the State government has increased taxes by 50% over the past three years, with the pressure of the BJP-led Central government. He further claimed that the tax burden might increase by 100% in the next two years. The state government has imposed taxes such as garbage cess, water taxes, and petrol, gas, cement, and drinking water taxes in addition to property tax, which is an additional burden for the 1.50 crore people living in cities and towns, he alleged. Rao also accused the state and central governments of viewing local bodies as tax collection organizations.

Babu Rao Rao criticised the Central government's decision



He further claimed that the tax burden might increase by 100% in the next two years.

year's tax in the new fiscal year.

Rao demanded that the State government fix nominal penalties instead of the current 24%. He also criticized the government's failure to prepare a plan of action to prevent the drinking water problem in cities and towns. He alleged that at the government's pressure, all local bodies, including Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and other corporations' officials, are focusing on collecting taxes. In this situation, AP Pattana Poura Samakhya would organise agitations regarding people's problems, he added.

VMC chief Swapnil inspects outfall drain

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar inspected the outfall drain at the New Rajarajeswari Peta in Vijayawada on Saturday.

One-Town and Old Rajarajeswaripet areas are being submerged due to the obstacles created by the Railway department for the flow of the drainage water that comes from One Town, and the railway line at the New Rajarajeswaripet.

Local people are facing inconvenience so the civic chief directed the officials concerned

to remove the barriers immediately. Also, he has given instructions for removing the encroachments that are obstructing the drainage flow.

Further, he directed the Engineering department to prepare estimates for constructing the RCC canal in place of the earth canal.

VMC Chief Engineer M Prabhakara Rao, Executive Engineers V Srinivas, Narayana Murthy, Deputy City Planner Jubin Siran Roy, Health Officer Dr Suresh Babu, Railway ADEN Ashok and others accompanied the Commissioner.



Tension in Puttaprthi as TDP, YSRC activists clash

Police resort to lathi-charge to quell warring groups

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Tension prevailed in the spiritual town Puttaparthi in Sri Satya Sai district as the YSRCP and TDP activists clashed and the police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the clashing activists on Saturday. YSRCP MLA Sridhar Reddy uploaded some posts, criticising the TDP and Nara Lokesh, on social media and the TDP countered it.

Former minister Pallo Raghunath Reddy dared the YSRCP MLA Sridhar Reddy for an open debate on the development of the constituency and the district during the YSRCP regime.

The ex-minister challenged the MLA to come to the Sattemma temple for an open debate and went to the TDP office. When the MLA and the ex-minister were trying to go to the temple, the police detained the ex-minister in the TDP office itself. The police also



detained MLA Sridhar Reddy in his house. However, ex-minister Pallo Raghunath Reddy jumped off the compound wall of the TDP office and reached the Hanuman Junction area.

On seeing Raghunath Reddy, the furious YSRCP activists attacked his car by pelting stones at which the windscreens of the vehicle smashed. The TDP activists also countered the YSRCP activists leading to a clash.

The police resorted to lathi-

charge and dispersed the clashing activists which led to a tense situation in the area. Later the police arrested ex-minister Pallo Raghunath Reddy and whisked him away to the police station. However, he was freed later. The ex-minister, sometime later, went to the Sattemma temple, took 'harathi', and stated that YSRCP MLA Sridhar Reddy indulged in corruption and they have the evidence.

"If the MLA comes for an open debate, we will show the

evidence of his corruption," Raghunath Reddy challenged. The ex-minister said that with the fear of defeat and frustration, the YSRCP activists attacked them and they also spread false news against Nara Lokesh, he alleged.

Meanwhile, TDP national president and ex-chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu condemned the attack on Pallo Raghunath Reddy. The YSRCP resorted to attacking when the Opposition questioned their misdeeds, he alleged.

Nara Lokesh described the attack as a crowdie act of YSRCP. He spoke to the TDP leaders over the phone from Raptadu. Lokesh alleged that the YSRCP was creating anarchy in the spiritual town of Puttaparthi. TDP state president K Atchannaidu also condemned the attack on the ex-minister. He alleged that the police lathi-charged the TDP activists leaving the YSRCP activists scot-free.



Students should develop all-round skills: APSCHE chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) Chairman Prof Hemachandra Reddy has said that in the current competitive world, students should develop an interest in all fields and grow as all-rounders. Bloomingdale International School's 5th Annual Founder's Day was held on Saturday.

On the occasion, Prof Hemachandra Reddy, who was the chief guest of the programme, said that many changes are coming in the field of education and correspondingly there have been changes in the teaching pattern. He said that there should be an education system that can develop creativity especially among children.

NARAYANA MAY CONTEST FROM NELLORE

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ever since the ruling YSRCP won the 2019 elections with a landslide victory, TDP senior leader, former minister Narayana Group of Institutions chairman Ponguru Narayana has been keeping away from the TDP political activities. Party president Chandrababu Naidu has been struggling to bring back the glory ever since the party faced a massive defeat in the 2019 elections four years back. Narayana is not seen anywhere in the TDP programmes, agitations, and meetings.

On the other hand, he has been facing criminal cases in various scams – Amaravati land scam, outer ring road scam, and Class X question paper leakage scam. Though the party has stood by him, Narayana has hardly been taking part in the agitations, but trying to save his own skin.

There are rumours that Narayana might seek the help of the BJP by quitting the TDP and joining the BJP to protect his business interests. So, the TDP leadership appointed senior leader Kotamreddy Srinivasulu



Reddy as the in-charge of the Nellore (urban) constituency from where Narayana lost to YSRCP's Dr Anil Kumar Yadav.

Now that the elections are just a year away, Narayana has once again started lobbying for the TDP ticket from Nellore (urban). Sources say Narayana had reportedly met Naidu recently and requested that he be given the ticket again.

Interestingly, Chandrababu responded positively to the request made by Narayana and even announced his candidature, despite the fact that he is facing several criminal cases and is likely to get arrested in any one of the cases.

Sources say that it was not a request from Narayana, but blackmailed Naidu for the ticket because both were hand in glove in the Amaravati land issue. Narayana, who was the municipal administration and urban development minister during the TDP regime, played a crucial role in land allotments, If Naidu denies him the ticket, there is no surprise he may leak crucial information with regard to many of these land deals. The other fact is that Narayana can help the party financially for the next assembly elections. So, Naidu has no other option but to give him the ticket!

TDP promises creation of Markapuram district

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader and former MLA Kandula Narayana Reddy has promised to carve out the Markapuram district and the completion of the Veligonda project at the earliest if the TDP is voted to power in the next elections.

The ex-MLA embarked on a padayatra demanding the completion of the Veligonda project at the earliest. Narayana Reddy reached Kalujuvvalapadu village in Tarlapadu mandal where a meeting was organised to appreciate the former MLA for his padayatra. Speaking on the occasion, former MLA Damacharla Janardhan appreciated Narayana Reddy for this 'Praja Chaitanya' padayatra.



Kandula Narayana Reddy had striven a lot for the development of Markapuram constituency and to complete the Veligonda project works expectedly when he was the MLA, Damacharla said.

Narayana Reddy said that he promised the people during his padayatra that he would strive

hard for the creation of the Markapuram district and for the completion of the Veligonda project expeditiously if the TDP was voted to power in the next elections. TDP leaders Kamepalli Srinivasa Rao, Seshikanth Bhusan, and Bandaru Madan were among those who were present.

Women defeated TDP in the last election for betrayal: MLC

PNS ■ GUNTUR

MLC Lella Appireddy has claimed that the women defeated the Telugu Desam party in the 2019 election for the betrayal.

However, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy aimed at making the women self-reliant and giving priority in politics, he stated while addressing DWACRA women here on Saturday.

Since assuming office as Chief Minister of the state, Jagan Mohan Reddy has been giving importance to the welfare of women and giving important posts to the women, he recalled. "Even during the Caronavirus crisis, the government implemented welfare schemes in the state," he said, adding that education only can eradicate poverty.

The Chief Minister intro-



duced various schemes including Amma Vodi to encourage women to send their children to schools. House sites were given to all eligible women and the land was registered in the name of women, he added. If the women want the government to implement welfare schemes for them, they should vote for the YSRCP in the next election, he told the women.

MLA Maddali Giridhar said that women are excelling in all

sectors because of the programmes being implemented for them by the Chief Minister in the state. The efficient secretariat system has come as a boon to the common men as they are enrolling their names easily for the welfare schemes.

MLC Chandragiri Yesuratnam said that from infants to elderly women, all eligible are getting the benefits of various welfare schemes in the state.

31 red sanders logs seized, one arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The police seized 31 red sanders logs worth Rs 1 crore and arrested one smuggler at Yerravaripalyam village in Bakrapet circle.

SP Parameswar Reddy told the media here on Saturday that on a tip-off the police team led by Dwakra pet CI conducted a combing in the forest area. The police found the red sander smugglers in the forest area. After noticing the police team, the smugglers fled the scene leaving the 31 red sander logs.

The police seized the 31 red sander logs, worth Rs 1 crore, two cars, and a bike. Four smugglers managed to escape and the police launched a search to arrest them.



BJP stages dharna against attack on Satya Kumar

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The BJP activists led by senior leaders Jupudi Ranga Raju and constituency convener Thota Rama Krishna organised a dharna in protest against the attack on BJP national secretary Satya Kumar's car.

The BJP activists staged a dharna at Lodge centre here on Saturday holding banners, placards, and raising slogans condemning the attack. They denounced MP Nandigam Suresh and the YSRCP for the attack on Satya Kumar's car. A heated argument took place between the police and the BJP Yova Morcha activists during the programme.

Addressing the gathering, Jupudi Ranga Raju flayed that the anarchy of the YSRCP regime had reached its peak. The followers of MP Nandigam Suresh attacked Satya Kumar's car with stones and sticks which reflects how the law and



order situation deteriorated in the state. The BJP organised the protests across the state today, he added.

"The police are acting like YSRCP activists. The police behaved excessively on Yuva Morcha activists when we were organising a protest peacefully. The YSRCP will pay a heavy price for its misdeeds and anti-people policies," Ranga Raju lashed out.

The YSRCP government is extending patronage to the anti-socials and encouraging them to attack the opposition

party leaders. BJP leaders including Dr.Shanakkayala Aruna, Shanakkayala Umashankar, Eemani Madhav Reddy.

Meanwhile, the police acted high-handedly with BJP Yuva Morcha leader Kokkera Srinivasa Yadav. The police dragged him from the place and kicked him with the legs which he injured. He was shifted to the GGH where he was undergoing treatment.

The police also arrested Maila Harikrishna and took him to Arandalpet police station.

ACCUSED ARRESTED

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police arrested the person, who hurled stones and smashed the windscreen of the car in which BJP national secretary Satya Kumar was travelling. The police arrested Dunna Nitin alias George, who is a resident of Tallayapalem village in Thullur mandal for hurling stones at Satya Kumar's car.

SP K Arif Hafeez told the media here on Saturday that a jostle took place between the YSRCP and BJP activists on March 31. Cases were registered in Thullur police station on the complaints lodged by the BJP and YSRCP leaders.

The police identified the person, who hurled stones at Satya Kumar's car as Dunna Nitin alias George and arrest-



ed him. The accused was issued a notice under 41 (A) CRPC and actions would also be taken against those who abused the Chief Minister.

The SP said that BJP leader C Adinarayana Reddy made some controversial comments against the Chief Minister which made the YSRCP activists angry that led to the

clash. The police responded immediately and brought the situation under control.

The SP claimed that nobody knew that BJP national secretary Satya Kumar was travelling in the car. The intention of the accused was only to express protest and not to attack Satya Kumar.

Thousands of names removed from voters' list: TDP Ex-MLA

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) senior leader and former MLA GV Anjaneyulu alleged that thousands of votes of TDP sympathizers were removed from the voters' list.

The TDP activists took out a rally here on Saturday from the RTC bus station to Shivaiah stupa in protest against the removal of a large number of TDP sympathizers' votes. The TDP leaders and activists squatted in front of the Tahasildar office on the main road.

Speaking on the occasion, ex-MLA Anjaneyulu said that YSRCP local MLA Bolla Brahma Naidu had resorted to many corrupt practices and the people would defeat him in the next election.

"The votes of TDP sympathizers are being removed from the voters' list. So far 6000 votes in five mandal have been removed. The names of those who are working at other places were removed without intimation to the voter. Removing the names from the voter's list without intimation is an illegal act," the ex-MLA stat-



ed.

He said that a large number of people belonging to the SC/ST/ BC and minorities, who migrate to other places seeking livelihood were removed. They are working at various places temporarily and they will come back to cast their votes during elections," the ex-MLA observed. The BLO and VRO are working in favour of the ruling party and removing the votes violating the norms, he flayed. Later the TDP leaders submitted a memorandum to Vinukonda Tahsildar Kiran Kumar.

MDU operators to stop delivering PDS items

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The Mobile Dispensing Unit (MDU) vehicle operators expressed their inability to deliver ration in the month of April if their problems were not resolved.

The MDU vehicle operators deliver ration including rice and other commodities at the doorsteps of ration card holders every month. The MDU vehicles were given to the operators with subsidies by the SC/ST and BC corporations.

The MDU operators have to pay instalments to the Bank of Baroda. The government pays Rs 21,000 to the MDU vehicle operators and some of the amount they should pay as a monthly instalment to the bank.

Moreover, the MDU vehicle operators have to bear the oil expenditure and pay remuneration to the helper. Initially, the



MDU operators were promised that the banks would pay an insurance premium to the vehicles but that did not happen.

MDU vehicle operators association leaders said that there are

385 Mobile Dispensing Units in the district that distribute ration to the 6,59,576 families at their doorsteps every month in the Prakasam district.

Out of the Rs 21,000 payment

by the government, the bank deducts Rs 3000 as payment of the loan for the vehicle. The MDU operator is to spend another Rs 8000 towards oil expenditure and payment of

remuneration to the helper. The officials recently handed over the responsibility of delivering commodities to the anganwadi centres and schools and the officials assured of additional payment for the same. But even after several months, not a single rupee has been paid additionally.

Now the Mobile Dispense Unit operators have to begin distributing ration from April 1. However, the MDU operators announced that they would not operate the vehicles to deliver ration till their problems are resolved.

The MDU operators told the media that they have already taken their problems to the notice of Tahasildar and brought all their vehicles to the Tahasildar office parked there. Following the strike of MDU operators, the distribution of rations in the month of April is uncertain.

‘More and more vendors should onboard GeM’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Procurement of goods and services from Government e Marketplace (GeM) crossed the Rs 2 lakh crore mark in 2022-23, witnessing participation from women entrepreneurs, MSMEs and startups across the country, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday.

"The Rs 2 lakh crore procurement by the government within 12 months through GeM truly reflects the thinking of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is very demanding that the government should run with the highest level of integrity and transparency," Goyal said.

This is evident from the participation by all across the country in the government procurement cycle and an ability of women entrepreneurs, startups and MSMEs to participate in a fair and equitable manner, Goyal told reporters.

GST mop-up rises 13% to Rs 1.60 lakh cr in March

○ Second highest collection ever

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GST collection grew 13 per cent in March to Rs 1.60 lakh crore the second highest mop-up since the rollout of the indirect tax regime.

The return filing during March 2023 has been the highest ever.

Gross GST revenue collected in March 2023 is Rs 1,60,122 crore, of which Central GST is Rs 29,546 crore, State GST is Rs 37,314 crore, Integrated GST is Rs 82,907 crore (including Rs 42,503 crore collected on import of goods) and cess is Rs 10,355 crore, the finance ministry said in a statement.

The total gross collection for full 2022-23 fiscal stands at Rs 18.10 lakh crore, 22 per cent



higher than the previous year. The average gross monthly collection for the full year is Rs 1.51 lakh crore.

It is for the fourth time in the just gone by financial year that the gross GST collection has crossed Rs 1.5 lakh crore-mark, registering the second

highest collection in March since the implementation of GST.

Last month also witnessed the highest IGST collection ever, the ministry said.

In April last year, GST collection had touched a record high of Rs 1.68 lakh crore.

Revenue for the month of March 2023 is 13 per cent higher than the GST revenue in the same month last year, the ministry said.

During the month, revenue from import of goods was 8 per cent higher and revenue from domestic transaction (including import of services) is 14 per cent higher than the revenue from these sources during the same month last year.

The return filing during March 2023 has been the highest ever. 93.2 per cent of statement of invoices (in GSTR-1) and 91.4 per cent of returns (in GSTR-3B) of February were filed till March 2023 as compared to 83.1 per cent and 84.7 per cent, respectively a year ago.

Small tea growers make India self-reliant

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Emergence of small tea growers (STGs) has made the country self-reliant in the production of the beverage and to meet domestic requirements and exports, Tea Board said. STGs have also helped local economic conditions and livelihood of the people, the Tea Board said in a statement.

India annually produces nearly 1400 million kg of tea, out of which the contribution of STGs is more than 50 per cent, it said. Tea exports from India in value terms is close to USD 800 million. It attained a positive growth of 15 per cent in volume of around 220 million kg in 2022, the board said.

The country is now the second largest producer of the beverage after China and tea industry is one of the largest employers.

India is also the fourth largest exporter after China, Kenya and Sri Lanka, it said.

Govt's total liabilities rise 2.6% to Rs 150.95L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government's total liabilities rose to Rs 150.95 lakh crore in December quarter from Rs 147.19 lakh crore in the three months ended September 2022, according to the latest public debt management report.

The increase reflects a quarter-on-quarter increase of 2.6 per cent in October-December 2022-23.

In absolute terms, the total liabilities, including liabilities under the 'Public Account' of the government, jumped to Rs 1,50,95,970.8 crore at the end of December 2022.

As of September 30, the total liabilities stood at Rs 1,47,19,572.2 crore.

The report released by the finance ministry on Saturday said public debt accounted for 89 per cent of the total outstanding liabilities in December quarter, compared to 89.1 per cent at the end of



September. Nearly 28.29 per cent of the outstanding dated securities had a residual maturity of less than 5 years.

During Q3 of FY23, it said, the Centre raised an amount worth Rs 3,51,000 crore through dated securities, as against notified amount of Rs 3,18,000 crore in the borrowing calendar.

During the quarter an amount of Rs 85,377.9 crore due for redemption was repaid on maturity date, it said.

Weighted average yield of primary issuances hardened to 7.38 per cent in Q3 FY23, from 7.33 per cent in Q2 of FY23, it added.

Kia India sales dip 5% in March

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automaker Kia India on Saturday said its sales wholesales declined by 5 per cent to 21,501 units last month, as compared to 22,622 units in March 2022.

The company dispatched 8,677 units of Sonet, 6,554 units of Seltos, and 6,102 units of Carens last month to dealers. For the 2022-23 fiscal, the automaker sold 2,69,229 units, a growth of 44 per cent over 1,86,787 units in 2021-22.

"Our focus on offering futuristic design, combined with cutting-edge technology, has helped us in winning the Indian market and new-age customers alike. "With additional features and improvements in engine and transmission combinations in RDE-compliant vehicles, we are confident that we will continue our winning spree," Kia India VP and Head of Sales & Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said in a statement.

Global uncertainties hit office demand, gross leasing down 10 po



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's office demand has been affected by global economic uncertainties with gross leasing of workspace falling 19 per cent in January-March across six major cities, according to Colliers India.

Real estate consultant Colliers India on Saturday released data on the office market, which showed that the gross leasing fell to 10.1 million square feet in January-March

from 12.5 million square feet in the corresponding period of the previous year.

New supply declined 34 per cent during January-March to 9.5 million square feet from 14.4 million square feet in the year-ago period. Gross leasing does not include lease renewals, pre-commitments and deals where only a letter of Intent has been signed.

Colliers India said that the leasing of office space has fallen due to "delayed decision-

making by occupiers amidst continued economic uncertainties".

Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR accounted for half of the total leasing during the first quarter of this calendar year.

As per the data, the gross leasing of office space in Bengaluru fell 20 per cent to 3.2 million square feet in January-March from 4 million square feet. In Chennai, the leasing rose 7 per cent to 1.6 million square feet from 1.5 million square feet.

Delhi-NCR saw an 18 per cent rise in the absorption of office demand to 2.2 million square feet from 1.9 million square feet.

The demand for office space in Hyderabad fell 30 per cent to 1.3 million square feet from 1.8 million square feet.

Office leasing in Mumbai fell 19 per cent to 1 million square feet from 1.2 million square feet.

MONEY MATTERS

Sebi bans 3 individuals from securities mkt for 2 years



Sebi has barred three individuals from the securities market for two years and imposed penalty totalling Rs 90 lakh on them in a case pertaining to insider trading activities in the scrip of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL). The three individuals banned by the regulator -- Bijal Shah, Gopal Ritolia and Jatin Chawla -- have also been

Royal Enfield total sales up 7% at 72,235 units in March



Motorcycle maker Royal Enfield on Saturday reported a 7 per cent growth in total sales at 72,235 units in March, as compared to 67,677 units in the same month last year. Domestic sales were at 59,884 units in the month under review, as against 58,477 units in the year-ago month, a growth of 2 per cent, the company said in a statement. Exports grew 34 per cent last month at 12,351 units, as compared to 9,200 months in March 2022. For the fiscal 2022-23, Royal Enfield said it posted a 39 per cent growth with a record total sales of 8,34,895 motorcycles. The company's sales stood at 6,02,268 units in FY22. Exports were also at record high at 1,00,055 units in FY23, as compared to 81,032 units in FY22, up 23 per cent. Royal Enfield CEO B Govindarajan said it was a remarkable year for the company achieving new heights in sales and market share, and crossed 1,00,000 international volumes for the first time. "Our motorcycles, like the Hunter 350 and Super Meteor 650, have exceeded expectations and attracted new customers into our fold," he said, adding the Hunter 350 clocked over a lakh sales within six months of its launch.

MCL reaches new high in coal production, despatch



Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) on Saturday said the company has registered a record 193.3 million tons of coal production during the 2022-23 financial year. The MCL also posted the highest ever 192.7 million ton coal despatch to consumers, Chairman-cum-Managing Director Om Prakash Singh, said while addressing the AGM here. "The MCL registered a growth of 15 per cent for the financial year 2023-23, while coal despatch showed nine per cent growth over the previous financial year 2021-22," Singh said. The company has achieved all its targets much ahead of schedule and has helped Coal India surpass its target of 700 million tons set for the financial year 2022-23, the CMD said. He said 97 per cent of total production of MCL was through eco-friendly equipment surface miners. He said that the coal despatch to the power sector also increased from 127.12 million tons 2,922 to 148.8 million tons in 2022-23 with a growth of 17 per cent. Strengthening its business activities, the company made Capital Expenditure (CapEx) of Rs 3,850 crore during the financial year 2022-23, he said adding that MCL enjoys being the top company in Odisha contributing under CSR.

Ultra Tech Cement FY23 production up 12.4% to 105.7 mn tn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement maker UltraTech's consolidated sales rose by 12.4 per cent to 105.7 million tonnes (MT) in FY2022-23, Aditya Birla group firm said in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

The company produced 94 MT of cement in FY22.

Its total sales volume in the domestic market also crossed 100 MT for the financial year that ended on March 31, 2023.

UltraTech's total sales volume for the India market in FY23 was at 101.7 MT, up 13.63 per cent compared to 89.5 MT a year ago. "We are pleased to inform the company has achieved 100 million tonnes of production, despatches and

sales in FY23," it said.

Its grey cement production in the domestic market was at 100.1 MT in FY23, reporting 13.75 per cent growth while its white cement production was 1.5 MT, up 11 per cent.

UltraTech's overseas production, mainly grey cement was 4.4 MT in FY23. For the fourth quarter that ended on March 31, 2023, UltraTech's total consolidated sales volume was at 31.7 MT and its India volume was at 30.5 MT. UltraTech has a consolidated capacity of 132.35 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement. It has 23 integrated manufacturing units, 29 grinding units, one clinkerisation unit and eight Bulk Packaging Terminals.

‘Financial frauds hamper country’s overall growth’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Financial frauds cause "tremendous impairment" to the economy and hamper the overall growth of the country, a special court here observed while convicting three bankers in a 19-year-old case of fraud.

Special CBI judge D P Singade found three officials of Dena Bank, Srikant Padale (51), Vijaya Nair (46) and V Radhakrishnan (61) guilty of charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act and Indian Penal Code.



The order passed on March 30 was made available on

Saturday. Apart from the trio, the court also found one Nargis

Diventry (49) guilty in the case and sentenced all the accused to two years of rigorous imprisonment. According to the prosecution, the accused officials had entered into a criminal conspiracy with private persons to cheat and cause wrongful loss to Dena Bank's Kalbadevi Branch in 2003, here.

The accused had favoured some private parties for grant of credit facilities and the bank had lost Rs 2.35 crore in the fraud, it said.

The court held that the prosecution has fairly sub-

stantiated the charges against the accused beyond reasonable doubt. There cannot be two opinions on a proposition that bank money is public money, it said, adding that these crimes are more heinous in nature, as they intend to destroy the economic fabric and financial edifice of the state.

"Such offences are occurring in plenty and have resulted in stultifying overall growth of the nation and have also caused tremendous impairment to the economy of the nation," it stated.



India, Malaysia can now trade in Indian rupee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Malaysia can now use the Indian rupee to settle trade in addition to other currencies, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Saturday.

The move follows the decision by the Reserve Bank of India in July last year to allow settlement of international trade in Indian currency.

"Trade between India and Malaysia can now be settled in Indian Rupee (INR) in addition to the current modes of settlement in other currencies," the MEA said.

"This follows the decision by the Reserve Bank of India in July 2022 to allow settlement of international trade in Indian Rupee," it said in a statement. The MEA said the RBI's initiative is aimed at facilitating the growth of trade and supporting the interests of the global trading community in the Indian rupee.

Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors excel in wholesales



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors reported their highest-ever dispatches to dealers last fiscal, enabling the domestic passenger vehicle industry to log in best-ever performance to date.

The country's largest car-maker Maruti Suzuki India reported its highest wholesales to date at 19,66,164 units, up 19 per cent from 16,52,653 units in 2021-22.

Its domestic dispatches rose to 17,06,831 units in 2022-23, up 21 per cent from 14,14,277 units in 2021-22 fiscal. Hyundai Motor India said its overall wholesales last fiscal were the highest ever since commencing operations in the country. The automaker dispatched 7,20,565 units to dealers last fiscal, up 18 per cent from 6,10,760 units in 2021-22. Its domestic dispatches rose to 5,67,546 units last fiscal, up 18 per cent from 4,81,500 units in the 2021-22 financial year.

The country's second-largest carmaker said it was its best per-

formance to date in terms of sales volume in the domestic market in a financial year. Tata Motors also reported the best-ever passenger vehicle dispatches in the domestic market last fiscal at 5,38,640 units, up 45 per cent from 3,70,372 units FY22.

Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer, Marketing and Sales, Shashank Srivastava said the company reported its highest-ever sales in a financial year despite chip shortage continuing to impact the production activity.

He noted that the overall industry sales last fiscal rose to 38.89 lakh units, an increase of 27 per cent from 30.69 lakh units in 2021-22. "Both wholesales and retail were the highest for the industry last fiscal," Srivastava said. The industry sales were expected to rise to 4.05-4.10 million in the current fiscal, he added. "We expect the industry growth to be in the range of 5-7 per cent this fiscal and the company would like to perform better than the industry," Srivastava said.

He noted that with models like Jimny and Fronx in its kitty, the company expects to corner 25 per cent of the SUV market in the current fiscal. MSI ended the last fiscal with a market share of 12.6 per cent in the SUV segment with sales of 2,02,800 units.

Godrej Properties buys 4-acre land in Pune for housing project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties has acquired a 4-acre land parcel in Pune to build a luxury housing project with an estimated revenue potential of Rs 1,000 crore.

In a regulatory filing on Saturday, Godrej Properties informed that it has acquired around 4-acre land parcel near Korgaon Park in Pune.

The development on this land will primarily be a luxury housing project.

"The project will have a



developable potential of approximately 7.5 lakh square feet with an estimated revenue potential of approximately Rs 1,000 crore," the company said. The company, however, did not disclose the financial details of the transaction.

April 2023 to the 30th June 2023," Department of Financial Services (DFS) said in a tweet.

Under the campaign, camps are going to be organised at the Gram Panchayat

Gaurav Pandey, the MD and CEO of Godrej Properties, said the demand for luxury homes has remained strong over the past few years. "This will be our first luxury development in the city..." he said. Godrej Properties, the real estate arm of Godrej Group, is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It mainly focuses on development of housing projects in four key cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Pune and Bengaluru.

3-month finmin drive to boost micro-insurance schemes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To achieve saturation under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), the Finance Ministry on Saturday launched a three-month campaign.

"A special 3 months campaign has been launched by DFS at Gram Panchayat Level covering all districts in the country to saturate all eligible persons under the PMJJBY and PMSBY w.e.f 1st



A special 3 months campaign has been launched by DFS at Gram Panchayat Level covering all districts in the country to saturate all eligible persons under the PMJJBY and PMSBY w.e.f 1st April 2023 to the 30th June 2023

level across all districts in the country by the banks with active participation of the State administration and other Ministries of Government of India to ensure that benefits of the

two Jan Suraksha schemes reach the masses.

Chief Secretaries of States/UTs, Chairman/ MD and CEOs of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have been advised to extend full support during the campaign, an official statement said.

Lead District Managers (LDMs) will lead the campaign in consultation with State/ UT Level Bankers Committees of the States/UTs and District Magistrates/Collectors of the Districts. Line Ministries of

Government of India have been advised to utilise their field functionaries for identification and mobilisation of the Scheme beneficiaries for enrolment, it said.

All Nodal Officers from DFS have been instructed to participate in the special SLBC/ UT/LBC meetings and to undertake field visits for monitoring the Gram Panchayat level saturation campaign, it added.

The PMJJBY offers life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh in case of death due to any

reason to people in the age group of 18-50 years having a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

On the other hand, the PMSBY offers insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh for accidental death or total permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh for partial permanent disability to people in the age group of 18-70 years with a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

“Reflecting on where I came from helps me to appreciate and balance what I have now”
— Meghan Markle



Trump has become the first former president to be indicted in a criminal case after a grand jury investigation into hush money payments made on his behalf during the 2016 presidential campaign, write ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MEG KINNARD

TRUMP INDICTMENT & INVESTIGATION

Donald Trump's unprecedented indictment comes as the Republican faces other legal investigations and launches a bid to return to the White House in 2024.

The indictment will test the Republican Party already divided over whether to support Trump next year, in part due to his efforts to undermine his 2020 election loss.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and accuses prosecutors of engaging in a politically motivated “witch hunt” to damage his campaign.

Here's a look at the hush money case, the grand jury investigation and possible ramifications for Trump's presidential campaign:

WHAT'S THIS CASE ABOUT?

The grand jury spent weeks meeting in secret to probe Trump's involvement in a \$130,000 payment made in 2016 to the porn actor Stormy Daniels to keep her from going public about a sexual encounter she said she had with him years earlier. Trump lawyer Michael Cohen paid Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, through a shell company before being reimbursed by Trump, whose company, the Trump Organisation, logged the reimbursements as legal expenses.

Earlier in 2016, Cohen also arranged for former Playboy model Karen McDougal to be paid \$150,000 by the publisher of the supermarket tabloid The National Enquirer, which then squelched her story in a journalistically dubious practice known as “catch and kill.”

Trump denies having sex with either woman.

Trump's company “grossed up” Cohen's reimbursement for the Daniels payment to defray tax payments, according to federal prosecutors who filed criminal charges against the lawyer in connection with the payments in 2018. In all, Cohen got \$360,000 plus a \$60,000 bonus, for a total of \$420,000.

Cohen pleaded guilty to violating federal campaign finance law in connection with the payments. Federal prosecutors say the payments amounted to illegal, unreported assistance to Trump's campaign. But they declined to file charges against Trump himself.

WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?

The indictment has not yet been unsealed, so it's not totally clear.

Some experts have said they believe Trump could be charged with falsifying business records, which can be a misdemeanor or a felony under New York law. To secure a conviction on the felony charge, prosecutors would have to prove that records were falsified with the intention of committing or concealing a second crime. It's not clear what prosecutors may allege as the second crime.

WHAT HAS TRUMP'S LAWYER SAID?

Trump's lawyer, Joe Tacopina, said Thursday that the former president didn't commit any crime and vowed to “vigorously fight this political prosecution in court.”

Tacopina has accused prosecutors of “distorting laws” to try to take down the former president. He has described Trump as a victim of extortion who had to pay the money because the allegations were going to be embarrassing to him “regardless of the campaign.”

“He made this with personal funds to prevent something from coming out — false, but embarrassing to himself, his family, his young son. That's not a campaign finance violation, not by any stretch,” Tacopina said on ABC's ‘Good Morning America’ before the indictment.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Law enforcement officials have been making



“THE THUGS AND
CRIMINALS WHO ARE
CORRUPTING OUR
JUSTICE SYSTEM WILL
BE DEFEATED,
DISCREDITED AND
TOTALLY DISGRACED”
— DONALD TRUMP

security preparations for days for the possibility of an indictment and a court appearance by the president.

Trump was expected to surrender to authorities next week, though details were still being worked out, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss a matter that remained under seal.

WHAT'S THIS GRAND JURY AND WHO TESTIFIED?

A grand jury is made up of people drawn from the community, similar to a trial jury. But unlike juries that hear trials, grand juries don't decide whether someone is guilty or innocent. They only decide whether there is sufficient evidence for someone to be charged.

Proceedings are closed to the public, including the media. New York grand juries have 23 people. At least 16 must be present to hear evidence or deliberate and 12 have to agree there is enough evidence in order to issue an indictment.

David Pecker, a longtime Trump friend and the former chief executive of the parent company of The National Enquirer, returned to the courthouse this week where the grand jury was meeting.

Pecker's company, American Media Inc., secretly assisted Trump's campaign by paying \$150,000 to McDougal in August 2016 for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with Trump. The company then suppressed

McDougal's story until after the election.

The grand jury also heard from Cohen, as well as Robert Costello, who was once a legal adviser to Cohen.

The men have since had a falling out, and Costello indicated he has information he believes undercuts Cohen's credibility and contradicts his incriminating statements about Trump. Costello testified at the invitation of prosecutors, presumably as a way to ensure that the grand jury had an opportunity to consider any testimony or evidence that might weaken the case for moving forward with an indictment.

Trump was also invited to testify, but didn't.

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS FOR TRUMP?

Neither the indictment itself nor a conviction would prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

Last week in Waco, Texas, Trump took a defiant stance at a rally by disparaging the prosecutors investigating him and predicting his vindication as he rallied supporters in a city made famous by deadly resistance against law enforcement.

“You will be vindicated and proud,” Trump said in a speech brimming with resentments and framing the probes as political attacks on himself and his followers. “The thugs and criminals who are corrupting our justice system will be defeated, discredited and totally disgraced.”

Before the charges were handed down, many party leaders had also already begun to defend the former president.

During a visit this month to Iowa, former Vice President Mike Pence called the idea of indicting a former president “deeply troubling.” Another 2024 Republican prospect, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, has said there is a sense that the former president is being unfairly attacked.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, a declared candidate who also served as Trump's UN ambassador, has called Bragg's case an attempt at scoring “political points,” adding, “You never want to condone any sort of prosecution that's being politicised.”

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is considering joining the 2024 Republican field, slammed the investigation as politically motivated. But he also threw one of his first jabs at the former president in a quip likely to intensify their rivalry. DeSantis said he personally doesn't “know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some kind of alleged affair.”

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS?

The New York case is just one of many legal woes Trump is facing.

The Justice Department is also investigating his retention of top secret government documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, after leaving the White House. Federal investigators are also still probing the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol and efforts to overturn the 2020 election that Trump falsely claimed was stolen.

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has been investigating whether Trump and his allies illegally meddled in the 2020 election. The foreperson of a special grand jury, which heard from dozens of witnesses, said last month that the panel had recommended that numerous people be indicted, and hinted Trump could be among them. It is ultimately up to Willis to decide whether to move forward.



Trump at the end of primrose path

The spectacle around Donald Trump’s indictment and arraignment in a court will mark an unprecedented moment in American history that will demonstrate once again how dramatically Trump has upended democratic norms. But on a personal level, the indictment pierces the cloak of invincibility that seemed to follow Trump through his decades in business and in politics, as he faced allegations of fraud, collusion and sexual misconduct, writes JILL COLVIN

When Donald Trump steps before a judge next week to be arraigned in a New York courtroom, it will not only mark the first time a former US president has faced criminal charges. It will also represent a reckoning for a man long nicknamed “Teflon Don,” who until now has managed to skirt serious legal jeopardy despite 40 years of legal scrutiny.

Trump, who is the early frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, is expected to turn himself in on Tuesday. He faces charges, including at least one felony offence, related to hush money payments to women during his 2016 campaign. Like any other person facing trial, he will be booked, fingerprinted and photographed before being given the chance to enter a plea.

The spectacle that is sure to unfold will mark an unprecedented moment in American history that will demonstrate once again how dramatically Trump - who already held the distinction of being the first president to be impeached twice - has upended democratic norms. But on a personal level, the indictment pierces the cloak of invincibility that seemed to follow Trump through his decades in business and in politics, as he faced allegations of fraud, collusion and sexual misconduct.

“Boy, after all this time it’s a bit of a shock,” Trump biographer Michael D’Antonio said of the indictment. “You know I always thought of him as the Gingerbread Man, shouting, ‘You can’t catch me!’ as he ran away.”

“Given his track record,” he said, “I had trouble imagining he would ever be held accountable.”

“These are not things that Donald Trump ever thought in

his entire life, nor I, for that matter, that he would ever be confronted with,” Michael Cohen, Trump’s longtime fixer and a key witness in the case who served jail time for the payments, told CNN.

Of course, some of the celebration by Trump’s detractors may be premature. The former president could seek to have a judge quickly dismiss the case. And even if it moves forward, there’s no guarantee of conviction. Intensifying investigations in Atlanta and Washington are seen as potentially more serious legal threats.

Still, Trump and his team were caught by surprise when word of the New York indictment broke Thursday evening, following news reports that the grand jury hearing the case was set for a weeks-long hiatus. As the deliberations dragged on, some in Trump’s orbit had become convinced that the case had stalled and that charges might never be brought. That included Trump attorney Joe Tacopina, who said on Friday morning he had hoped the “rule of law would prevail.”

Trump, he said on the “Today” show, was “initially was shocked” by news of the charges, but quickly pivoted to his usual pushback playbook.

“After he got over that,” he said, Trump “put a notch on his belt and he decided we have to fight now. And he got into a typical Donald Trump posture where he’s ready to be combative on something that he believes is an injustice. ... I think he’s now in the posture that he’s ready to fight this.”

In the meantime, Trump and his team have tried to use the news to his advantage, hoping to energise his loyal base by painting the investigation as part of a larger plot to



derail his candidacy.

Already, the charges have been a boon to his struggling fundraising. The campaign announced Friday evening that it had raised over \$4 million in the 24 hours after the indictment became public, far smashing its previous record after the FBI search of Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club.

More than 25 per cent of

donations, according to the campaign, came from first-time donors. The average contribution: \$34.

His campaign also continued to blast out supportive statements from dozens of top Republicans who have rallied behind Trump, including several of his declared and likely challengers, underscoring his continued hold on the party.

Trump has been in contact by phone with key congressional allies, including members of House leadership and top committees, according to people familiar with the conversations, who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the response.

Trump ally Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., who formally endorsed the former president on Friday,

said Trump “doesn’t back down” and was going to “fight back,” telling a local radio show it was “yet another chapter where Donald Trump is going to come back on top in the end.”

The media maelstrom has catapulted the former president back into the spotlight he craves, at least temporarily limiting attention being paid to

his rivals, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is widely expected to challenge Trump for the nomination, and has been holding events across the county to promote his book.

Trump aides have been discussing other ideas to maximise the situation, including the possibility of holding a press event either before or

after the arraignment. Trump is expected to travel from Florida to New York on Monday and stay overnight at Trump Tower in midtown Manhattan before heading to the courthouse early on Tuesday. He will return to Florida after the arraignment.

Trump has long denied that he had a sexual encounter with the porn actor known as Stormy Daniels and has blasted Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg for pursuing the years-old case.

Trump is also facing continued investigations in Georgia, over his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, and in Washington, where a special counsel is probing the events of January 6, 2021, as well as Trump’s handling of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and potential obstruction of the investigation.

But Sam Nunberg, a longtime former aide who broke with Trump years ago, said that while he no longer supports Trump, he believes the Manhattan case is “a waste of time,” given the allegations, which remain under seal. And he said he was skeptical it would ultimately matter.

“It doesn’t surprise me,” he said of the indictment. “What would surprise me is if he actually ended up behind bars in prison and I don’t see that happening.”

D’Antonio said that sentiment - and a continued belief that Trump will somehow prevail and dodge the charges - continues among the many people who have reached out to him in the last 24 hours, despite the charges.

“They’re like, he’s going to get away with it,” he said. “Somehow, he’s going to get it thrown out.” AP

PERSPECTIVE

Demystifying philosophical layers of temples

A notion of sacred has held existential imperative for mankind from time immemorial, bestowing meaning on material pursuits. The onslaught of rapid urbanisation and technological progress has intriguingly rendered sacred spaces all the more relevant. With changes unfolding at breakneck speed, such spaces facilitate introspection and self-enquiry. People from the Indian subcontinent would generally be familiar with the sanctifying ethos of a temple, but a few recognise its philosophical and cosmological foundations. Temples pave the way for individual salvation and also stimulate congregational worship. It is precisely at an interface of these two processes that the philosophical moorings of a temple can be located.

For several centuries, Vastu-shastras have functioned as the principal textual manuals for constructing temples. Texts like Manasara and Mayamatam emphasise the need to construct temples or even towns on square grid plans. Shapes like squares, triangles, circles and even points are liberally employed in temple architecture, and they each carry a distinct meaning. In this case, a square represents the manifest territorial world that needs to be transcended. The square grid plans, which in the words of scholar Stella Kramrisch function as “forecasts for temples”, are known as vastu-purusha mandalas. Gods associated with each of the squares within the mandala are ritually invoked to pacify the vastu-purusha, and ensure that

peaceful conditions prevail.

Such diagrams also illustrate the underlying impulse of Indian philosophical traditions to collapse all distinctions between man, God and cosmos. The Samkhya philosophy stresses the unity between microcosm and macrocosm, while Advaita Vedanta extends this further in its theory of the union of atman and brahman. To that extent, each part of a temple is considered to represent the cosmos in a microcosmic capsule, and this imparts spiritual meaning to even the most insignificant components of a shrine. The components of a temple are generally named after parts of the human body, illustrating the organic unity underlying temple architecture in the Indian subcontinent.

This metaphysical union can also be most prominently noticed in the image-worshipping traditions that have passed on from time immemorial. If Vedic texts stress the importance of concentrating the mind on a single object, the Puranas and Agamas are known for their pronounced sectarian predisposition. Nonetheless, continuity can be seen in the way these texts extol aniconic traditions such as the worship of bana-lingas and salagramas.

The linga and yoni manifest forces embodied by Shiva and Parvati respectively. In other words, the stone shaft known as the linga represents Shiva as a silent spectator of the world whose existence is contingent upon the creative energies released by Shakti, who resides at the base. This creative



interplay of two opposing forces provides the dynamic equilibrium required for maintaining the cosmic balance. The salagramas, on the other hand, are stones resembling the discus of Vishnu, and generally acquire this shape because of weathering activity caused by rivers.

These continue to be venerated by Vaishnavites across the country, as was recently noticed in the ecstatic reception

to the Salagrama stones that arrived in Ayodhya from Nepal.

A regular visit to the temple is also suffused with philosophical import. Before entering the sanctuary, a devotee is greeted by the imposing structure of a temple, which in many ways resembles a mountain. Vastu-shastras frequently liken temples to Mount Meru, which is held in high esteem by Hindus. A devotee then enters

the porch and views several sculptures adorning the walls of any temple. Subsequently, the devotee sets foot into the hallowed precincts of the dimly-lit garbha-griha which — almost like a cave within a mountain — is unadorned and houses the chief deity. Texts suggest that an invisible axis connects this deity with the superstructure of a temple. In fact, it is during the consecration of a temple that the deity’s

attributes are manifested by the intervention of priests. This ritual process is called “pranapratishta” and literally suggests instilling prana (life) within the deity.

In other words, the deity is considered to have life just like a human being, and germinates within the womb-chamber (garbha-griha) of a temple. After seeking darsan of the deity, a devotee circumambulates the shrine, and attends to

the subsidiary deities placed on its side walls. This is also a profoundly meaningful exercise as it helps a devotee absorb the energies prevailing within a temple.

The power of visual motifs can also be discerned in the narrative friezes adorning the walls of several temples in India, illustrating stories from epics and Puranas. The Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, which is the only temple in the complex under active worship, contains such friezes and their stories are generally concerned with the restoration of dharma. The Kirat-arjuniya tale is illustrated in several temples of the region. This involves a conflict between Shiva in his incarnation as a hunter (kirata) and Arjuna, who seeks to consolidate his military powers when in exile. Arjuna is put through numerous challenges, before being blessed with the desired armoury. Such stories of perseverance, devotion and truthfulness serve to enhance a devotee’s spiritual experience within a temple.

For all these reasons, the structural features of temples are chiefly responsible for making them an integral part of India’s spiritual landscape. The vibrant temple culture of Bharat has withstood the ravages of time chiefly because of these empowering philosophical and cosmological concepts that subliminally enrich devotee’s experience within a shrine. These need to be acknowledged to foster a society that is rooted to its traditions even as it embraces cosmopolitan ambitions.

The vibrant temple culture of India has withstood the ravages of time chiefly because of the empowering philosophical and cosmological concepts that subliminally enrich devotee’s experience within a shrine. These need to be acknowledged to foster a society that is rooted to its traditions even as it embraces cosmopolitan ambitions



ANIRUDH NAVEEN

WORLD NEEDS BILLIONS TO AVERT UNREST, STARVATION

Without billions of dollars more to feed millions of hungry people, the world will see mass migration, destabilized countries, and starving children and adults in the next 12 to 18 months, the head of the Nobel prize-winning UN World Food Program warned Friday.

David Beasley praised increased funding from the United States and Germany last year, and urged China, Gulf nations, billionaires and other countries "to step up big time."

In an interview before he hands the reins of the world's largest humanitarian organization to U.S. ambassador Cindy McCain next week, the former South Carolina governor said he's "extremely worried" that WFP won't raise about 23 billion it needs this year to help an estimated 350 million people in 49 countries who desperately need food.

"Right at this stage, I'll be surprised if we get 40% of it, quite frankly," he said.

WFP was in a similar crisis last year, he said, but fortunately he was able to convince the United States to increase its funding from about

3.5 billion to 7.4 billion and Germany to raise its contribution from 350 million a few years ago to 1.7 billion, but he doesn't think they'll do it again this year.

The world has to understand that the next 12 to 18 months is critical, and if we back off the funding, you will have mass migration, and you will have destabilization nations and that will all be on top of starvation among children and people around the world

Other countries need to step up now, he said, starting with China, the world's second-largest economy which gave WFP just 11 million last year.

Beasley applauded China for its success in substantially reducing hunger and poverty at home, but said it gave less than one cent per person last year compared to the United States, the world's leading economy, which gave about 22 per cent.

China needs "to engage in the multilateral world" and be willing to provide help that is critical, he said. "They have a moral obligation to do so."

Beasley said they've done "an incred-



ible job of feeding their people," and "now we need their help in other parts of the world" on how they did it, particularly in poorer countries including in Africa.

With high oil prices Gulf countries can also do more, especially Muslim nations that have relations with countries in east Africa, the Sahara and elsewhere in the Middle East, he said, expressing hope they will increase contributions.

Beasley said the wealthiest billionaires made unprecedented profits during the COVID-19 pandemic, and "it's not too much to ask some of the multi-billionaires to step up and help us in the short-term crisis," even though charity isn't a long-term solution to the food crisis. In the long-term, he said what he'd really like to see is billionaires using their experience and success to engage "in the world's greatest need and that is food on the planet to feed 8 billion people."

"The world has to understand that the next 12 to 18 months is critical, and if we back off the funding, you will have mass migration, and you will have destabilization nations and that will all be on top of starvation among children and people around the world," he warned.

Beasley said WFP was just forced to cut rations by 50% to 4 million peo-



AI tool helps remove atmospheric 'blur' from images of cosmos

Scientists have adapted a well-known computer-vision algorithm, which works faster and produces more realistic images, and applied it to astronomical images from ground-based telescopes.

This innovation of the researchers of Northwestern University, US, and Tsinghua University in Beijing, China, could help remove errors and solve the "blur" in astronomical images, they said.

The research is published in the journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

"Astronomical images are used for science. By cleaning up images in the right way, we can get more accurate data. The algorithm removes the atmosphere computationally, enabling physicists to obtain better scientific measurements.

"At the end of the day, the images do look better as well," said Northwestern's Emma Alexander, the study's senior author. The blur, caused by the Earth's atmosphere through which the light coming from distant objects passes, becomes an issue when astrophysicists analyze images to extract cosmological data.

Studying the apparent shapes of galaxies helps astronomers in detecting large-scale cosmological structures' gravitational effects.

However, the atmospheric blur smears the image in a way that can distort the shapes of galaxies and make them appear rounder or more stretched than they are.

Removing the blur enables scientists to collect accurate shape data.

"If you look at an image from a ground-based telescope, a shape might be warped. It's hard to know if that's because of a gravitational effect or the atmosphere," said Alexander.

To tackle this challenge, Alexander's team combined an optimization algorithm with a deep-learning network trained on astronomical images, that included simulated data matching Vera C. Rubin Observatory's (currently under construction in Chile) expected imaging parameters.

The resulting tool produced images with 38.6 per cent less error compared to classic methods for removing blur and 7.4 per cent less error compared to modern methods.

'Hostile' parenting enhances childrens' risk of developing lasting mental health problems



Children on the receiving end of 'hostile' parenting at age three were 1.5 times likelier than their peers to develop mental health problems qualified as 'high risk' by age nine.

Young children on the receiving end of 'hostile' parenting were 1.5 times likelier than their peers to be in the high-risk band of developing

of over 7,500 children studied were at a high-risk for poor mental health and that those exposed to harsh parenting were likely to fall in this group.

The study involved researchers from University of Cambridge, UK, and University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland, and is published in the journal Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences.

Hostile parenting involves frequent harsh discipline, that could be physical and/or psychological. It could, for example, involve shouting at children regularly, routine physical punishment, isolating children when they misbehave, damaging their self-esteem, or punishing children unpredictably depending on the parent's mood.

Engineered kidney could allow for early detection of drug toxicity

Scientists have engineered an artificial kidney which allows for an early detection of adverse drug reactions.

The fundamental structural and functional unit in a kidney is a nephron, which encompasses an intertwined network of small blood vessels called the glomerulus. This along with glomerular capsules forms a kidney.

Researchers have fabricated a glomerular microvessel-on-a-chip, which includes glomerular endothelial cells, podocyte layers, and a glomerular basement mem-

brane (GBM) using a single step fabrication process.

"We have successfully replicated glomerular units of the kidney, which offer boundless potential for drug screening and nephrotoxicity testing in clinical practice," explained professor Dong-Woo Cho who led the study from Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH), South Korea.

The research findings have been published in the journal Biofabrication.

While the kidney eliminates toxic substances in the bloodstream, including metabolic waste, and maintains homeostasis in the body, toxicity can still be induced in the kidney through certain medications.

Why tornadoes are still hard to forecast



Texas, As a deadly tornado headed toward Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on March 24, 2023, forecasters saw the storm developing on radar and issued a rare "tornado emergency" warning.

NOAA's Weather Prediction and Storm Prediction centres had been warning for several days about the risk of severe weather in the region. But while forecasters can see the signs of potential tornadoes in advance, forecasting when and where tornadoes will form is still extremely difficult.

We asked Chris Nowotarski, an atmospheric scientist who works on severe thunderstorm computer modeling, to explain why and how forecast technology is improving.

Why are tornadoes still so difficult to forecast?

Meteorologists have gotten a lot better at forecasting the conditions that make tornadoes more likely. But predicting exactly which thunderstorms will produce a tornado and when is harder, and that's where a lot of severe weather research is focused today.

Often, you'll have a line of thunderstorms in an environment that looks favourable for tornadoes, and one storm might produce a tornado but the others don't. The differences between them could be due to small differences in meteorological variables, such as temperature.

Even changes in the land surface conditions fields, forested regions or urban environments could affect whether a tornado forms. These small changes in the storm environment can have large impacts on the processes within storms that can make or break a tornado.

One of the strongest predictors of whether a thunderstorm produces a tornado relates to vertical wind shear, which is how the wind changes direction or speed with height in the atmosphere.

How wind shear interacts with rain-cooled air within storms, which we call "outflow," and how much precipitation evaporates can influence whether a tornado forms. If you've ever been in a thunderstorm, you know that right before it starts to rain, you often

UNRELENTING IN US MIDWEST AND SOUTH

Unrelenting tornadoes that tore through parts of the South and Midwest killed at least 10 people, shredded homes and shopping centres, and collapsed a theatre roof during a heavy metal concert in Illinois.

Emergency responders across the region counted the dead and surveyed the damage on Saturday morning after tornadoes touched down into the night, part of a sprawling storm system that also brought wildfires to the southern Plains and blizzard conditions to the Upper Midwest.

The dead included four in the small town of Wynne, Arkansas, Cross County Coroner Eli Long told KAIT-TV. Other deaths were reported in Alabama, Illinois, Indiana and the Little Rock area.

Wynne City Councilmember Lisa Powell Carter said the town about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Memphis, Tennessee, was without power and roads were full of debris.

"I'm in a panic trying to get home, but we can't get home," she said Friday night. "Wynne is so demolished. ... There's houses destroyed, trees down on streets."

The storms also killed three people in Sullivan County, Indiana, Emergency Management Director Jim Pirtle said in an email. Some residents were missing in the county seat of Sullivan, near the Illinois line about 95 miles (150 kilometers) southwest of Indianapolis. At least one person was killed and more than two dozen were hurt, some critically, in the Little Rock area, authorities said.

In Belvidere, Illinois, the roof of the Apollo Theatre collapsed during a tornado, killing one person and injuring 28, five severely. Calls began coming from the theatre, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) northwest of Chicago, shortly before 8 pm, police said.

The venue's Facebook page said the bands scheduled to perform were Morbid Angel, Crypta, Skeletal Remains and Revocation.

Belvidere Fire Chief Shawn Schadle said 260 people were in the venue. Responders also rescued someone from an elevator and had to deal with downed power lines outside the theatre.



'Physical exercise could offset the negative effects of unhealthy sleep on longevity'



Physical activity has been found to counterbalance some of the negative effects of unhealthy sleep on longevity, according to a new study.

The study, claiming to be the first one to investigate the combined effects of physical activity and sleep duration on mortality risk, included included 92,221 adults aged 40 to 73 years in the

UK Biobank cohort, who wore an accelerometer wristband for one week between 2013 and 2015. "The study showed that increased physical activity levels weakened the mortality risks associated with short or long sleep duration," said study author Jihui Zhang of The Affiliated Brain Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, China.

The work is published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology.

Both sufficient exercise and healthy sleep contribute to prolonged life expectancy. However, the interaction between physical activity and sleep duration to promote health is unclear.

The study claims objective measurements were made as accelerometer devices were used to record movements of the participants, instead of relying on participants' self-reported behaviours which is subjective.

Moderate to vigorous physical activity was classified as meeting World Health

Organization (WHO) guidelines or not.

The scientists found that in people with low volumes of physical activity, short and long sleep were associated with 16 per cent and 37 per cent raised risks of all-cause death, respectively.

Short sleepers with low exercise had a 69 per cent elevated risk of death from cardiovascular causes, which disappeared when exercise was increased to moderate or high volumes.

Long sleepers with low exercise levels had a 21 per cent raised risk of death due to cancer which disappeared with moderate or high volumes of exercise.

In participants with intermediate amounts of exercise, only short sleep was detrimental, with a 41 per cent raised likelihood of all-cause death.

In those with a high amount of exercise, sleep duration was not linked with risk of death.

In participants not meeting the WHO exercise recommendations, short and long sleep were associated with 31 per cent and 20 per cent raised risks of all-cause death, respectively. These risks disappeared in those meeting the WHO advice.

For cardiovascular death, short sleepers who failed to meet the advice on intensity of exercise had a 52 per cent elevated risk which disappeared in those achieving the WHO exercise recommendations. For death from cancer, long sleepers not meeting the WHO exercise advice had a 21 per cent raised risk which disappeared in those following the WHO guidance.

"Our findings suggest that health promotion efforts targeting both physical activity and sleep duration may be more effective in preventing or delaying premature death in middle-aged and older adults than focusing on one behaviour alone," said Zhang.

In participants not meeting the WHO exercise recommendations, short and long sleep were associated with 31 per cent and 20 per cent raised risks of all-cause death, respectively. These risks disappeared in those meeting the WHO advice.