

ANALYSIS 7
GOVT MUST STEP IN TO
HELP TOBACCO USERS**MONEY 8**
SEBI TONES UP FRAMEWORK
FOR GREEN BONDS**SPORTS 11**
AUSTRALIA GETS 'ASHWIN DUPLICATE' TO
TRAIN AHEAD OF INDIA TEST SERIES

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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'ADIPURUSH IS
MORE THAN A
FILM FOR US'

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**MAHA ST CONDUCTOR LEAVES BUS
MIDWAY TO DRINK ALCOHOL, SUSPENDED**

A Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation bus conductor was suspended for allegedly leaving his bus mid-route in Latur to drink alcohol, an official said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday morning on the route between Latur and Kalamb in Osmanabad, he said. "The conductor got the bus to halt at Katgaon village and got off. Irate passengers, who waited for more than an hour, set out in search of him and found him sitting at a local vend having liquor," the official said. "He was suspended after a medical check up showed he had consumed alcohol during duty hours. There were 38 passengers in the bus," the MSRTC Osmanabad divisional traffic controller said.

**1,200-YEAR-OLD IDOLS FOUND IN
NALANDA, ASI SEEKS POSSESSION**

Two stone idols believed to be about 1200 years old was found from a waterbody close to the ancient Nalanda University during desilting of a pond, an ASI official said. The idols were found earlier this week from Tarsinh pond at Sarlichak village near the ancient Nalanda Mahavihara, a world heritage site about 88 km from here, during desilting under Bihar government's 'Jal-Jeevan-Hariyali' project launched to protect and conserve water and the environment. Details of the two idols were, however, not divulged either by Archeological Survey of India or the administration.

**AI EXPRESS PLANE RETURNS TO ABU
DHABI AIRPORT AFTER ENGINE FAILURE**

A Calicut-bound Air India Express plane returned to Abu Dhabi airport early morning on Friday due to engine failure while taking off, and aviation regulator DGCA will probe the incident, according to officials. As per initial report, fire was noticed in one of the engines, a senior official at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said. The Boeing 737-800 aircraft had 184 passengers onboard and all are safe, an airline spokesperson said. A source said there was an engine failure. VT-AYC operating flight IX 348 from Abu Dhabi to Calicut was involved in air turnback due to No.1 engine flameout at 1,000 feet during climb, according to the DGCA official.

**EX-STUDENT LEADER FACING TRIAL IN
ULFA BLAST TOPS CLASS IN MA EXAM**

A former student leader facing trial for his alleged role in an ULFA-triggered bomb blast in Guwahati has been awarded the gold medal by the Assam governor for topping his post-graduation examination, which he took from behind the bars. Sanjib Talukdar, among the suspects in a 2019 Guwahati blast that had left 12 injured, topped his class in Sociology in which he enrolled and completed his Master of Arts from Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University (KKHSOU) while being lodged in a jail here. Governor Jagdish Mukhi presented the gold medal to the under-trial, who had scored 71 per cent marks, at the convocation here on Thursday.

**SCR gets Rs 13,786 cr
in Union Budget**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

South Central Railway (SCR) on Friday said it was sanctioned a sum of Rs. 13,786.19 crore for the year 2023-24 compared to Rs. 8,349.75 crore for the year 2022-23, nearly 65 per cent increase over last year's allocation in the Union Budget.

A press release from the SCR said Rs 3,374.44 crore was allotted for doubling, third line and bypass line works compared to Rs 1,531 crore last year. For new lines, the total budgetary grant, including capital and safety fund (excluding deposit), is Rs 819 crore compared to Rs 285 crore last year. For electrification work, the budgetary grant is Rs. 588 crore, the release said.

Total budget allocation for infra-structural projects and safety works, falling fully/partly in Telangana in 2023-24 is Rs 4,418 crore as against Rs 3,048 crore in 2022-23 which is 45 per cent more while the same is Rs 8,406 crore for Andhra Pradesh Rs 7,032 crore in 2022-23, a 20 per cent high.

'Jaganannaku Chebudam' soon**○ The new outreach programme aims at resolving people's grievances**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to gear up for the launch of the 'Jaganannaku Chebudam' programme, aimed at resolving the people's grievances.

During a review meeting held with the heads of various government departments on preparatory measures for launching the 'Jaganannaku Chebudam' at his camp office here on Friday, the Chief Minister thoroughly discussed the procedures to be followed in the disposal of grievances. Steps should be taken to track every request till it is resolved, he said.

The applications received should also be tracked and monitored, besides conducting weekly audits and reports should be taken accordingly for the smooth functioning of the programme. Elaborating further, he said that existing call centres should be linked to receive applications and complaints from various government departments. Officials should also re-examine



The 'Jaganannaku Chebudam' programme will be an improvisation of the existing Spandana programme, which will run smoothly only if the monitoring units are functioning effectively. Requests and complaints will be reported by the people if their work is not done properly by the concerned department

and restructure the existing methods for resolving grievances in various departments. Along with the CMO, there should be 'Jaganannaku

Chebudam' project monitoring departments in every government department. Later, project monitoring units should be established at the district, mandal, and municipal levels, he said.

The Chief Minister said that the 'Jaganannaku Chebudam' programme will be an improvisation of the existing Spandana programme, which will run smoothly only if the monitoring units are functioning effectively. Requests and complaints will be reported by the people if their work is not done properly by the concerned department. Finding a solution to public sat-

isfaction in such cases is a challenging task for the officials. The officials should go ahead by adopting patience, re-examination and restructuring the procedures, he said, adding that there are chances of receiving the highest number of complaints from Revenue, Panchayat Raj, Municipal, Home, Health and Family Welfare Departments as per the Spandana data once if the programme is launched.

The focus should be laid by the heads of respective departments for quick disposal of the complaints. He also directed the officials to upgrade the skills of staff through orientation programmes and formulate guidelines for setting up monitoring units to dispose of the requests in the stipulated time period by maintaining quality. A letter should be taken from the respondent after resolving his request, he said.

In case any request is rejected, the officials should act very carefully and the applicants should be satisfied with the process.

**'Adani crisis won't
impact economy'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The stock market turmoil created by rout in Adani group shares is a "storm in a tea cup" from a macro-economic point of view, Finance Secretary T V Somanathan said on Friday, emphasizing that India's public financial system is robust.

The senior most bureaucrat in the Finance Ministry also said that movements in the stock market per se is not the government's concern and there are independent regulators to take necessary action.

Replying to a question on the impact of the fraud allegations on the Adani group on financial system considering banks and insurance companies exposure to the group, Somanathan said India's public financial institutions are robust.

**Banking sector
resilient: RBI**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Amid concerns over banks' exposure to the embattled Adani Group, the Reserve Bank on Friday said India's banking sector is resilient and stable, and the central bank maintains constant vigil on the lenders.

Responding to media reports expressing concern about the exposure of Indian banks to a "business conglomerate", the Reserve Bank said in a statement that it is constantly monitoring the banking sector. However, the RBI did not name the Adani Group.

**SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS FOR AP
YSRCP to move private member's bill**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) will move a private member's bill in the current session of Parliament seeking the special category status to Andhra Pradesh.

The bill seeking to amend the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 was listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha on Friday but it could not be taken up due to the adjournment of the House.

"Our long-pending demand for special category status has not been met by the government. There was no option but to bring



Our long-pending demand for special category status has not been met by the government. There was no option but to bring a private member's bill

a private member's bill," Lok Sabha MP from Anantapur constituency Talari Rangaiah told reporters here.

The party members and the chief minister have raised this issue several times within and outside Parliament in the past few years, but unfortunately the central government has not fulfilled its promise made during the state's bifurcation, he said.

With this private member's bill, the YSRCP wants to raise awareness about the issue which is important for the economic development of Andhra Pradesh, Rangaiah said and expressed confidence of getting support from the Opposition parties. N Reddeppa, the Lok Sabha MP from Chittoor,

said the party has also demanded setting up of a railway zone in Vishakapatnam, Rs 5,000 crore allocation for AIIMS in Amaravati and budgetary allocation for inter-linking of rivers project. The party will continue to fight until the demands are fulfilled, he added.

Subhash Chandra Bose Alluri, the MP from Narsapuram, said funds are required for the development of the state. A special category status will help Andhra Pradesh attract more investments and revive its economy.

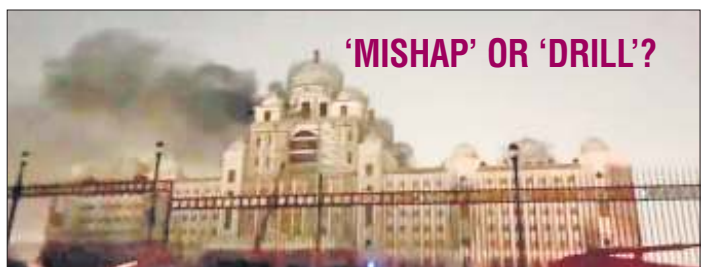
Smokescreen over TS Sectt fire

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A fire accident took place on the backside of the new secretariat building. The fifth and sixth floors caught fire at 3 am on Friday. The fire department was immediately alerted and they put out the fire using 11 fire engines.

The fire occurred as arrangements were going on for the inauguration of the new secretariat. Chief Minister K. Chandrabab Naidu had scheduled the inauguration on February 17, that is, his birthday.

Fire DG Nagi Reddy inspected the accident site. Officials have not given any explanation regarding the fire. They are trying to say that what happened was not a fire accident but just a mock drill. It is not-

**'MISHAP' OR 'DRILL'?**

worthy that even security personnel at the Secretariat said that it was a drill. During the fire, smoke billowed out of the secretariat building. A tomb at the back of the Secretariat turned black due to the smoke.

Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar said that the fire was an unfortunate incident. The fire

occurred as work was being done in a hasty manner ignoring quality norms. The fire occurred due to KCR's decision to open the secretariat on his birthday, he added. Sanjay said that KCR should postpone the opening of the secretariat on February 17 to April 14, the birthday of Dr BR Ambedkar.

**'Videshi Vidya
Devena':
CM releases
Rs 19.95 cr**

P2

**Eliminate me to silence
my voice: Kotamreddy**

PNS ■ NELLORE

Rebel YSRCP MLA Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy has made it clear that he would continue to raise his voice against the YSRCP and dared the government to arrest him.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy said that he is ready to be arrested. "My voice against the YSRCP will not stop. If you want to muzzle my voice, you should kill me in an encounter," he lambasted.

The dissident MLA reiterated that he revolted against party chief Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy as he was unable to stay where he was suspected. He said that he did not wait till the nominations day but he decided to quit the YSRCP now.

Kotamreddy took strong exception for dragging his children into politics by MLA and former minister Anil Kumar Yadav. He demanded that the conversations of YSRCP leaders with the sand contractors should be disclosed.

My voice against the YSRCP will not stop. If you want to muzzle my voice, you should kill me in an encounter

Responding to the demand of YSRCP leaders to resign from their MLA posts, Kotamreddy said that the Telugu Desam party MLAs who joined the YSRCP should resign first to their MLA posts.

"I know that I have to face a lot of problems if I revolt against the ruling party. I decided and am ready to face them. I am not a novice to politics. I have been in politics for 35 years. I was mentally upset by the tapping of my phone. After showing the evidence of my phone tapping, I have started speaking against the YSRCP leadership," he maintained.

CBI grills CM's OSD in Viveka case

PNS ■ KADAPA

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is probing the sensational murder of Y S Vivekananda Reddy, grilled Krishna Mohan Reddy, Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Chief Minister's Office, and Navin, who works in the house of the Chief Minister.

Both Krishna Mohan Reddy and Navin appeared before the CBI in Kadapa and the CBI officials questioned them for about six-and-a-half hours in the Central Prison here on Friday.

The CBI issued notices to Krishna Mohan Reddy and Navin based on the call data of MP YS



Avinash Reddy's phone.

According to sources, the CBI officials questioned them about where they were on the day when Vivekananda Reddy was mur-

dered, with whom they spoke over the phone, and who telephoned them.

It is learnt that CBI SP Ram Singh questioned them on various issues including whether they had given their mobile phones to somebody else.

According to reliable sources, the CBI officials grilled Navin separately.

It may be mentioned here that the CBI officials questioned YSRCP Kadapa MP Y S Avinash Reddy in the Vivekananda Reddy murder case in Hyderabad on January 28.

Sajjala rubbishes Oppn propaganda: P2**Viswanath, a rare distinguished director**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

It was 'Sankarabharanam', a flick by K Viswanath released in 1980, which created ripples in the Telugu film industry with movie critics and lovers unequivocally showering accolades, divided the history of Tollywood into two chapters-before 'Sankarabharanam' and after it.

The ace filmmaker breathed his last here on Thursday night.

Born in 1930 in Repalle in Andhra Pradesh, Viswanath was recognised as 'Kalatapasi' (sage of art) and shot into the limelight after 'Sankarabharanam'.

What naturally followed was fame and awards. It was exactly 43 years ago on February 2, the epic drama was released.



Though he was flooded with several offers, Viswanath chose to make films with the ideology he believed in. His films used to revolve around art and culture.

With over 50 films in his kitty in

a career spanning almost six decades, he was honoured with the prestigious Raghupathi Venkaiah Award for his contribution to Telugu cinema in 1991.

Besides the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, he was also felicitated with Padma Shri in 1992, five National Awards, 20 Nandi Awards (given by the Andhra Pradesh government) and 10 Filmfare trophies, including the Lifetime Achievement award.

As described by Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrabab Naidu, Viswanath was a rare distinguished film director who chose an ordinary story and turned it into a classic movie on the silver screen with his amazing talent.

Actors like Chiranjeevi and Venkatesh who had an action hero

image then, were portrayed in different shades in Viswanath's movies.

Viswanath was a celebrated filmmaker in the Telugu film industry. He had been active in Tamil and Hindi cinema also.

He debuted as a director with 'Aatma Gowravam' in 1965, which starred Akkineni Nageswara Rao and won the Nandi Award for the best feature film. The filmmaker followed it with 'Chelleli Kapuram', 'O Seeta Katha', 'Jeevana Jyoti' and 'Sarada'. Viswanath, who started his journey in the film industry as a sound artist, also made superhit movies in Hindi as well. 'Kaamchor', 'Sanjog' and 'Jaag Utha Insaan' were among them.

A nation first Budget that looks far ahead than a year

Although 'annual' budgets seldom look beyond the implied period, this year's Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman is an exception of gigantic proportions. It is a budget that visualises what a developed India looks like economically and socially and how, when and with whose participation the present leadership plans to get us there.

This year's budget comes against the backdrop of the Ukraine war, record-setting inflation afflicting major economies, the steep slowdown of the Chinese economy - the driver for global growth over the past few decades - and finally, a possible global recession. Yet, despite these global headwinds, and the fast-approaching General Election, the budget focuses on the Narendra Modi government's

blueprint for making India a developed country during the Amrit Kaal ahead.

The government's confidence to focus on long-term, transformational goals comes from its performance track record. Under the Modi government, the Indian economy has outgrown the South Korean, Canadian, Italian, French and British economies over the last nine years to become the fifth largest economy in the world. Moreover, it is the fastest-growing large economy today, with an inflation rate that is the envy of its neighbours and most developed economies. Couple this with the 'Nation first' ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the nature of this budget comes as no surprise.

Going through the budget speech delivered by the Finance Minister, the vision for a developed India becomes

Under the Modi government, the Indian economy has outgrown the South Korean, Canadian, Italian, French and British economies over the last nine years to become the fifth largest economy in the world. Moreover, it is the fastest-growing large economy today, with an inflation rate that is the envy of its neighbours and most developed economies.

clear. It is an India with world-class public infrastructure; a country in which every citizen can live with dignity. It is a healthy India with healthy citizens, land, and environment; a country that equips every citizen to contribute to its economic growth and organises them to obtain a fair share of that growth.

This budget has allocated a record-breaking Rs 13.7 lakh crore for building public infrastructure - roadways, railways, airports, seaports, inland waterways, mobile and high-speed internet connec-

tivity. In addition, this budget also makes huge allocations to improve private infrastructure for the poor so they can live with dignity: a life where every citizen has a pucca home to dwell in, with water and sanitation facilities; access to electricity, cooking gas, and roads, as well as health insurance and social security. The vision continues beyond. Every individual, especially the youth, are equipped with education and skills to enhance their living standards while contributing to the country's growth.



KISHORE POREDDY

A developed India will be a healthy India, a green nation. A country where its land, environment and citizens are healthy. India's agriculture is going to see a paradigm shift towards more and more organic practices. Focus on improving access to information, best practices and technology will enhance land pro-

ductivity, while optimising the usage of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, hydel, ethanol and compressed biogas blending, adoption of electric vehicles are all to be encouraged. From food security, India will move towards nutrition security for every citizen. Native grains like millet - 'Shri Anna' - and health practices like yoga will play a significant role in this transformation.

Until recently, India could only dream of catching up with the advanced world, especially in technology. The Covid experience involving indigenous vaccine discovery and production at scale, to using digital technology (CoWin) for fast distribution on the one hand and the innovations in financial technology with UPI (Unified Payments Interface) and their rapid adoption mak-

ing India the numero uno in digital transactions have shown the world that India's 'techade' has arrived. India will now focus on using technologies like Artificial Intelligence, hydrogen cells, drones, 5G and many more to achieve rapid economic development. A developed India will be a leader in technology innovation and its usage to improve Indians' lives.

The public and private sectors are the two major organised formal sectors in every world economy. Capitalist USA to Communist China, these are the only two large-scale formal sectors powering the economy. Imbalances in negotiating power arise from this structure where individual, small-scale producers and service providers are disadvantaged. The recent apprehensions over agricultural reforms introduced via 'Farm

laws' are an example. This budget lays a clear path for equalising this imbalance via the cooperative sector. Women, farmers, vishwakarma, small businessmen & producers - all will be encouraged to organise into cooperatives or collectives, enabling them to access finance, expertise and markets easily. Amul has been a great example. A developed India will be an India where economic participation is not disadvantaged due to lack of scale. This is undoubtedly a path-breaking initiative that can provide a new path to the world if India makes it a success.

To sum it up, this budget provides a glimpse of what this government envisages for India@100 and lays a solid foundation to achieve it.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson)

VIVEKA MURDER CASE

Sajjala rubbishes Oppn propaganda

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

YSRCP general secretary and Advisor to Government (Political Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has said that party MP Avinash Reddy telephoned Naveen and OSD Krishna Mohan Reddy to convey the news of YS Vivekananda Reddy's murder to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Responding to queries from media persons at the CM's camp office here on Friday, he asked what was wrong in communicating the news to Chief Minister.

Expressing anger at the false propaganda carried out by the yellow media on CBI calling for inquiry MP Avinash Reddy and Naveen who works in the Chief Minister's house, he said the TDP-friendly media is imprudently creating an unnecessary hue and cry over it.

Avinash Reddy went to the spot when he learned about the murder from Vivekananda Reddy's brother-in-law Sivaprakash Reddy and informed the same to the police, he said, adding that it was an open fact known to all and the TDP government which was ruling then had the call data in police records.

If you had inquired about the call data even then, the names of Naveen and Krishna



Mohan Reddy would have been revealed and both of them are associated with Jagan Mohan Reddy even today, he observed, commenting it was natural for Avinash Reddy to call them and inform about the murder as they were with Jagan Mohan Reddy. What is unnatural and sensational in this, he questioned, adding that the same phone numbers are used by the same people even today. It is known to everybody why the yellow media has been sensationalising it for the last four days only projecting a conspiracy angle.

YS Vivekananda Reddy, brother of YSR, and Avinash

Reddy, who is the cousin of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy are very close to each other politically and also family wise too, he said, pointing out further that any news to be conveyed to Jagan Mohan Reddy would be conveyed to the people working with him and not directly.

He said the same thing applies to even those who are trying to spin stories out of the incident.

You can also find through paper clippings and TV footage that YS Vivekananda Reddy participated in the election campaign for Avinash Reddy the day before the murder and anyone can see this openly, he said.

Sajjala said that Avinash Reddy was called for a CBI inquiry on hyped news stories that highlighted his hand in the murder. But now fresh attempts are being made to project a conspiracy angle with ulterior motives of dragging the family and this is only a small part in the dirty politics being played by Chandrababu Naidu, he remarked.

Since Naveen and Krishna Mohan Reddy were inquired by CBI, the yellow media is trying to link it somehow to the family of Jagan Mohan Reddy as they are working with him, Sajjala said, adding that people won't believe the false propaganda.

Given the background that yellow media is getting information in advance on the people to be questioned by the CBI and the way things are being sensationalised, it seems a conspiracy is going on to defame the Chief Minister and his family with a view of gaining political advantage in the next elections by creating doubts in the minds of the people, he said.

The sleeper cells in the BJP and Chandrababu have collaborated with the yellow media and are creating this false propaganda, he said, observing that their designs will be fully thwarted by the people.

30 Malaysians visit Hyd for tourism roadshow

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A group of 30 Malaysian tourism delegates visited Hyderabad to promote various tourism activities offered in Malaysia, on Friday. The tourism delegates, in collaboration with Tourism Malaysia and Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA), conducted a roadshow by visiting major Indian cities to revamp the Indian tourist traffic in Malaysia. The roadshow started in the city of Chennai, followed by Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

The roadshow is led by Mohd



Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, Senior Deputy Director of International Promotion (Asia & Africa) Tourism Malaysia, together with the Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA) and supported by 30 organisations, comprising one state tourism body, one airline, six hotel/resort operators, 20 travel agents and two product owners.

These series of road shows are scheduled across five cities from January 30 to February 7.

Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim said, "The pandemic has been tremendously challenging for us. Tourism Malaysia is ramping up its marketing efforts globally, including raising Malaysia's profile in the India market. We do hope this market will continue to play an important role in getting this number. India remains an important market for Malaysia. In terms of connectivity, there are currently 169 flights per week from India to Malaysia via Malaysia Airlines, Batik Air, AirAsia, and IndiGo.

'Adani crisis won't impact economy'

Continued from Page 1

"There is absolutely no concern from the point of view of financial stability, either for depositors, or for policyholders, or for anyone holding shares in these institutions. The share of any one company is not such as to create any impact at the macro level and so there is absolutely no concern from that point of view," he told PTI in a

post-budget interview. The stock price of Adani Enterprises fell by over 70 per cent from its peak of Rs 4,190 in December, last year.

Since January, the BSE Sensex has slumped by over 1,000 points largely driven by sell off in Adani group stocks.

Asked if the turmoil in stock market will impact revised estimates of disinvestment collections, Somanathan said these

gyrations do not affect the macro economy at all.

"They are a side show. They are of interest to those who are interested in stock markets and investment. From macroeconomic point of view, this is a non-issue. It's a complete non-issue from our point of view. It's a storm in a tea cup as far as macroeconomics are concerned, not in respect of markets."

The secretary further said that

the fluctuations in the stock market prices is not a concern and it is an universal phenomenon of all stock markets in all circumstances.

"The government's concern is with creating the right investment environment, creating a well regulated set of financial market... making sure there is transparency and that the market functions well; making sure the information asymmetry is

reduced; and making sure the government's own macroeconomic policies are sound," Somanathan said.

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

'VIDESHI VIDYA DEEVENA'

CM releases Rs 19.95 cr

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy deposited Rs 19.95 crore under the 'Jagananna Videshi Vidya Deevena' scheme as the first instalment of financial assistance to benefit 213 eligible SC, ST, BC, Minority and EBC students who have secured admission this year in the top 200 universities abroad ranked as per the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University rankings.

Depositing the amount by the click of a button virtually here on Friday, the Chief Minister called upon the beneficiaries to pursue academic careers seriously and bring name and fame to the State and the country on international platforms.

He said the scheme would usher in a golden era in the State's history as it extends financial support to meritorious students who want to pursue academic careers abroad but are facing financial difficulties. The government is investing more in Education than in any other



sector and considers it as an investment in human resources and students should reach great heights using it, he said.

Students should not lose educational opportunities abroad due to poverty, he said.

Great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr B.R. Ambedkar pursued higher studies in foreign universities while CEOs like Sundar Pichai of Google and Satya Nadella of Microsoft reached top positions after pursuing higher studies in world-class universities.

Even US Vice President Kamala Harris and British

PM Rishi Sunak also studied in world-famous Universities, he said, asking the students to remember the State when they attain top positions.

The Chief Minister also virtually interacted with some of the beneficiaries and their parents who thanked him.

During the TDP term the scheme lacked transparency and was marred in corruption had extended a meagre financial assistance of Rs 15 lakh to SC, ST, BC and Minority students and Rs. 10 lakh to EBC students, the YSRCP Government has been reimbursing the total tuition fee of Rs. 1.25crore fixed by the top Universities abroad.

TDP regime fixed an annual family income limit of Rs 6 lakh for implementing the scheme which was ultimately wound up as the arrears mounted to Rs. 318crores, he said, pointing out that the YSRCP Government enhanced the income limit to Rs 8 lakh to benefit more students. Under the scheme which is implemented in full transparency, Government would make 100 per cent reimbursement of tuition fees to SC, ST, BC and Minority students up to Rs.1. 25 crore and up to Rs 1 crore to EBC students who have secured ranks in the top 100 Universities, he said.

'Jaganannaku ...

Continued from Page 1

Directing the officials to be very hard on matters relating to corruption, the Chief Minister said that there should be a fear of doing wrong.

A coordination committee should be appointed at mandal/municipal level with Police, Revenue, Panchayat Raj and Municipal officials should meet every week to resolve the complaints received by the police, he said, adding that the heads of government departments should convene a meeting with the District Collectors soon and make them aware of the programme. Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Rana Krishna Reddy, Special Chief Secretary (Municipal Administration and Urban Development) Y Srilakshmi, Special Chief Secretary (Panchayat Raj and Rural Development) B Rajasekhara, Principal Secretary (Health and Family Welfare) MT Krishna Babu, Principal Secretary (Home) Harish Kumar Gupta, Municipal Administration Commissioner Praveen Kumar, SERP CEO A Md Intiaz and other higher officials were also present.

Eliminate me to silence...

Continued from Page 1

He claimed that 10 ministers, regional coordinators and advisors are making baseless allegations against him and launched a malicious campaign against him. "The YSRCP leaders are releasing leaks that I will be arrested. I am ready to be arrested," he said.

Taking a dig at Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, Sridhar Reddy ridiculed that the Sajjala

has that much knowledge of working as an advisor to the US President.

Kotamreddy denied allegations that he met TDP chief and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on December 25 and clarified that he was busy the whole day participating in various programmes on the day. Stating that he is free to meet any leader now, he asked the YSRCP leaders why they did not question

him if he met Naidu.

Responding to allegations that he betrayed Jagan Mohan Reddy, the dissident MLA said in 2008, MLA and ex-minister Anil Kumar Yadav was elected municipal corporator on the Congress ticket with the support of the Anam brothers.

He contested on the Congress party ticket in 2009 and he worked as chief election agent to him.

Banking sector resilient: RBI

Continued from Page 1

As per the current assessment, the RBI said, "The banking sector remains resilient and stable. Various parameters relating to capital adequacy, asset quality, liquidity, provision coverage and profitability are healthy."

"As the regulator and supervisor, the RBI main-

tains a constant vigil on the banking sector and on individual banks with a view to maintain financial stability. The RBI has a Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CRILC) database system where the banks report their exposure of Rs 5 crore and above which is used for monitoring purposes," the central bank said.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹205
Without Skin	₹215
Broiler at Farm	₹190

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	462
HYDERABAD	460
VISAKHAPATNAM	460
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.62

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SERVICES IN AMARAVATI VILLAGES

Smart edu, good healthcare for people: Spl Principal Secy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Special Principal Secretary Y Srilakshmi has said that the State government is offering Smart education and medical services for the people of Amaravati villages with the highest standards.

She visited Amaravati Smart & Sustainable City Corporation Limited (ASSCCL) pilot projects in Rayapudi and Kuragallu villages on Friday accompanied by APCRDA commissioner Vivek Yadav.

The Special CS visited the eHealth Center in Rayapudi and was informed that quality medical and health services will be provided to people soon. She said that the work of the health center which is being done at a cost of Rs 1.77 crore will be completed soon. She further



said that according to the instructions of Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, many pilot projects are being constructed locally including an e-health centre and a wellness centre. She said that yoga, pranayama and nutri food preventive medicine services will be available in these centres for the good health of the public. She explained that

the rooms are also providing accommodation facilities for the patients to receive treatment and an outdoor gym and an indoor gym are being provided.

Special SC instructed the APCRDA officials to grow medicinal plants and shade trees useful for patients, to establish panchayatva plants and to construct walking tracks for morning and evening walks.

Later, they visited the Model Anganwadi Center being constructed at Kuragallu. Lakshmi said that the Model Anganwadi centre has been equipped with good infrastructure with accommodation of child care centres. She said that 22 more Anganwadi centres will be made available with advanced facilities in Amaravati. Instructions were given to CRDA officials, contractors and engineers on the

quality standards of the buildings under construction.

APCRDA Commissioner Vivek Yadav said that 64 projects are being undertaken to improve advanced education and health facilities in 25 villages of Amaravati. He explained that Pilot projects will be taken up in Rayapudi, Kuragallu and Malkapuram villages. He further explained that Amaravati has been selected as one of the 100 smart cities across the country under CITIIS (City Investments to Innovate Integrate and Sustain) programme. He mentioned that the French Development Agency and Europeans are providing financial support to these pilot projects under 'Social and Institutional' innovation in low-income settlements in Amaravati.



8 shops gutted in mishap

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Eight shops were gutted in a massive fire which broke out at Sakarashikunta road in the city in the early hours of Friday. Six of the shops that were reduced to ashes were furniture shops.

The fire persons, on being alerted by the local traders, arrived at the spot and brought the fire under control. The fire started in one of the shops that was selling old furniture and door and window frames, the police said.

The loss was estimated to be huge. The shops were established in the residential area.

‘Only during TDP rule women had financial independence’

PNS ■ PUTHALAPATTU

Women in the State got financial independence only with the initiative taken by the TDP, said TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh. During his ongoing padayatra 'Yuva Galam', Lokesh interacted with women at Seshapuram in Puthalapattu Assembly segment on Friday. "Despite deficit in the budget in 2014, the then TDP government allocated Rs 20 crore for the Pasupu Kulkuma scheme keeping in view the welfare of women," he said.

"Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, who had promised pension for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and minority communities aged 45 and above, deceived them by not keeping his promise," Lokesh pointed out. The Disa Act is confined only to papers and there is no security for women in the



State, he said.

"The Centre on the floor of Parliament admitted that 52,587 women in Andhra Pradesh were victims of various kinds of atrocities and 900 women died due to different kinds of harassment. Was any accused in these cases sentenced to life imprisonment under the provisions of the Disa Act or subjected to any serious punishment," he asked. CM Jagan, who promised

total prohibition in the State, is now encouraging illicit liquor sale which is resulting in the loss of several lives, he said and added that illicit liquor was being manufactured in the distilleries owned by the benamis of Jagan.

YSRCP leaders attacked the TDP activists with beer bottles on January 7 resulting in serious injuries to many. Lokesh said that he would stand by them.

V&E officials inspect fertiliser shops

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The officials of the Vigilance and Enforcement department carried out inspections on 66 wholesale/retail dealers/traders of Fertilizers on Friday and booked 15 cases U/s 6A of Essential Commodities Act, 1955 for keeping excess stock of fertilizers beyond ceiling limits as per Consumer Affairs, Food, and Civil Supplies (CSI) Department.

During inspections, a few traders were found to have committed violations like the ground stocks of fertilizers did not tally with e-pos machines and book balance. Sale of fertilizers without "O" form and not maintaining stock registers

properly. Fertilizers are sold more than MRP for Urea, DAP, and other fertilizers. Nine cases were filed against the fertilizer traders who were charging farmers by selling more than MRP on Urea and DAP.

Stocks seized for keeping excess stocks of Urea and DAP are Eleven and seized 117.51 MTs worth Rs 11,46,305. Five cases were filed and fertilizer stocks were detained to the tune of 198.05 MTs worth Rs 35,32,919.

Pertaining to fertilizers four cases were filed and seized 26.70 MTs worth Rs 6,89,570 and six cases were filed and detailed fertilizer stocks of 200.15 MTs worth Rs 11,71,970.



NSS AWARDEES CALL ON CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NSS (National Service Scheme) national awardees and students who participated in the Republic Day celebrations in Delhi called on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at his Camp Office here on Friday.

The Chief Minister has lauded them for bringing name and fame to the State at the national level and wished them all success in the future.

The awardees Dr. P. Ashok Reddy, Dr. K. Jitendra Gowd, Ch. Parthasarathy, Siri Devanapalli, and D.Sai who received the awards from President Droupadi Murmu for the years 2019-20 and 2020-21, and students Vandana, Bhuvaneswari, Palavalasa Ramya, Sri Mahalakshmi, Dedipya, VSN Lakshman, Gowtam Deepak Reddy, B.Gopi, Reddy Jishnu, and J. Vasu who participated in the Republic Day Parade called on the Chief Minister.

Ashok Reddy, who is also the State NSS officer, told the Chief Minister that the NSS is striving to create awareness among people about various schemes of the State and Central Governments. He also



explained various activities taking place in 2173 NSS units in 36 Universities in the State. The Chief Minister asked them to work hard and bring laurels to the State.

Higher Education Principal Secretary J. Syamala Rao and NSS ETI Coordinator Dr. P. Ramachandra Rao were also present.

Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Governor Sri Biswabhusan Harichandan has congratulated the NSS Programme Officers and NSS Volunteers, for winning awards at the national-level and for partici-

pating in the Republic Day Parade held in New Delhi on January 26.

Sri J. Shyamala Rao, Principal Secretary, Higher Education, has called on the Governor at Raj Bhavan here on Friday along with NSS Programme Officers Dr. P. Ashok Reddy, Jitendra Gowd, Parthasarathy, Devanapalli Siri, D. Sai, who have won awards at national-level and the NSS

Volunteers Vandana, Bhuvaneswari, Ramya, Mahalakshmi, Dedeeppya, VSN Lakshman, GG Deepak Reddy, B. Gopi, S. Jishnu Reddy, J. Vasu, from various universities in the State, who have participated in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi, as part of the 148-member NSS contingent.

Governor Sri Harichandan has appreciated the selfless services provided by the NSS volunteers and wished them to win many more such awards in the future. Sri R.P. Sisodia, Special Chief Secretary to Governor, Sri P.S. Suryaprakash, Joint Secretary, NSS Coordinator Dr. Ramachandra Rao were among those present on the occasion.

‘Produce proof for phone tapping’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Social Welfare Minister Merugu Nagarajuna has demanded that rebel YSRCP MLA from Nellore Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy furnish proof of his mobile phone tapping. The minister alleged that Sridhar Reddy

was trying to blackmail through his baseless allegations. He stated that Sridhar Reddy, with Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu, conspired against the Jagan Mohan Reddy government under which they started fake propaganda through phone tapping allegations. The minister said that YSRC would initiate required disciplinary action against Sridhar Reddy in the coming days.

The minister said that Sridhar Reddy fell in the trap of Naidu and Nara Lokesh, hence speaking against the YSRC and the government. He stated that Sridhar Reddy claimed that phone tapping was registered two years ago, but he never took the issue to the notice of the government, CM Jagan and party leaders



and questioned why he was levelling baseless allegations after two years. He refuted the allegations of Sridhar Reddy about Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy conspiring to send him to jail and said that to get political attention, he was making false allegations.

Minister Merugu Nagarajuna said that Chief Minister Jagan gave a political career to Sridhar Reddy, but he was behaving without any concern hence the party would take action against the MLA. He praised that Jagananna Videshi Vidya Deevena was an innovative foreign education scholarship under which CM Jagan was offering full fee reimbursement to SC, ST, BC, and minority students giving them chance to study in famous universities in foreign countries.

World Cancer Day: Hair donation drive organised

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the occasion of World Cancer Day, HCG Cancer Centre, Vijayawada, organised a hair donation drive, Strands of Hope, as part of the #BaldAndBold campaign. Central MLA Malladi Vishnu was the chief guest of the programme. HCG, which works in partnership with Naturals Salon and Rotary Club of Vijayawada, is a beacon of courage and kindness for cancer patients nationwide.

MLA Vishnu said that the awareness programme on cancer was very useful for the public, especially the women suffering from cancer. He appreciated the women who came forward for the hair donation programme. He also expressed gratitude to the organisers for creating awareness. HCG Regional Director Dr

Gopichand said that a large number of people came forward to donate hair and show their support to the movement, giving inspiration to those fighting cancer. "We are happy to be organising the hair donation drive, which will help boost the self-esteem of cancer patients. People have actively come forward to donate their hair and have joined hands with us in making this event successful. We believe this initiative will help in building a larger network of support for cancer patients in the country," he said.

"Cancer, as a disease, is a difficult battle that requires tremendous mental fortitude to overcome. The drive recognises the generosity of so many hair donors who have come forward to donate their strands of love, joy, and best wishes to cancer patients," he added.



Ganji Chiranjeevi taking charge as APCO chairman at APCO office in Vijayawada on Friday. Pic by Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar



Problems of veteran sailors discussed

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The General Body Meeting (GBM) of the Veteran Sailors' Forum (VSF) was conducted by the Eastern Naval Command at Samudrika Auditorium on Friday. The meeting was chaired by Rear

Admiral Sandeep Pradhan Chief Staff Officer (Personnel & Administration) and attended by over 300 Naval Veteran Sailors and Sahara ladies residing in and around Visakhapatnam.

Issues on the welfare of veterans were deliberated and fresh

points and suggestions were collected for early resolution. Information related to the Health and Welfare of Ex-servicemen were disseminated to the Veterans by Regional Director, ECHS (Vizag), and Command Regimental System Officer.

Presentations by respective officials brought out the activities and achievements of the organisations in the last year. Various initiatives and future plans of the Indian Navy and Headquarters, ENC in respect of Veterans and Sahara ladies were intimated to

the gathering.

Helpdesks of ECHS, CRSO, INCS, Polyclinic, SBI, PNB, and NavPen provided a resolution to issues faced by the Veterans. The event concluded with the interaction of Vice Adm Biswajit Dasgupta Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, and senior Naval dignitaries with the Veterans and Sahara ladies.

Pall of gloom descends on Viswanath's native village

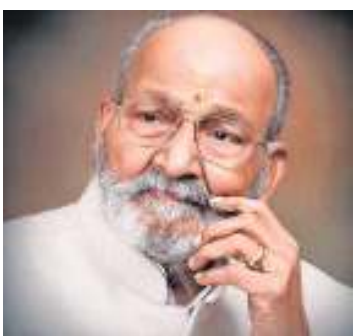
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A pall of gloom descended on Pedapulivarru village after learning about the demise of renowned movie director Kasinathuni Viswanath and the locals recalled the association of the director with the village.

Pedapulivarru in Bhattiprolu mandal in Bapatla district is the birthplace of Viswanath. The villagers say that Viswanath has done a lot for the village and they paid floral tributes to the portrait of the legendary director. The villagers recalled that Viswanath's family lived in Pedapulivarru until he was 10 years old. After that, the family shifted to Vijayawada as

Viswanath's father used to work as a cinema theatre manager there. Viswanath got his higher education in Vijayawada and further at Andhra Christian College in Guntur. Later, Viswanath's father introduced him to famous director and producer BN Reddy and sent him to the film industry. Village elders heaped praise on Viswanath and said that the legendary director used to be very friendly with the villagers and met the locals whenever he visited the village.

VS Rao, a village elder, said that Viswanath was a very down-to-earth person and was very jovial with the villagers during his visit. They used to go to Viswanath's house in Chennai



where they got a chance to view the film shootings with the recommendations of Viswanath. After becoming a

director, he did not cut the relations with the villagers and even contacted them over phone. Rao said that during Covid times, Viswanath donated oxygen machines to Pedapulivarru village. Currently, there is no one related to Viswanath's family in the village.

Sajja Basavapunniah was the one who purchased the house where Viswanath lived. He purchased the house and farmlands of Viswanath and said that all their fields were cultivated and farmed by his grandfather. He considers Viswanath's house very lucky for him as he got a job after buying the house.

The students and teaching faculties

at Vignan University paid floral tributes to Viswanath and recalled the great director's association with the university. University chairman Dr Lavu Rattaiah recalled that the varsity conferred honorary doctorate on Viswanath during its fifth convocation ceremony.

Meanwhile, Hindu College, Guntur, Principal PM Prasad and Vice-Principal K Durgaprasad stated that Viswanath studied intermediate in Hindu College and degree in AC College, Guntur. They recalled that whenever Viswanath visited Guntur, he used to come to their college and a felicitation was also held for him in the Hindu College.

Sand mining approved in Gundlakamma River

PNS ■ BAPATLA

The district-level committee approved sand mining in the Gundlakamma River through desilitation process in the district.

The district-level sand committee meeting, presided over by District Collector Vijaya Krishnan, was held here on Friday. The committee approved the extraction of sand from the Gundlakamma river at various reaches through desilitation process.

Collector Vijaya Krishnan said that an abundant amount of sand accumulation was found in the Gundlakamma River. As per the rules, approvals are being given for the extraction of sand from the river.

The Collector discussed the report submitted by the officials of various departments for sand mining in the river, rivulets, and streams.

The Collector approved sand



mining in Gundlakamma River by desilitation as per government norms and guidelines and the report submitted by the officials, adding that the orders would be issued to that effect soon.

The Collector said that there is a possibility of sand mining in Gundlakamma River through desilitation in an area of 6.54 s.km. She said that the mining of 2,95,072 metric tons of sand is officially approved in that area.

With this, sand would be available for public needs in the district.

Collector Vijaya Krishnan said that the JP Ventures company has got permission to mine sand under package-2. The JP Ventures would start the sand minding in the approved area in the Gundlakamma River, she said.

The Collector said that seven new sand reaches were identified for sand mining in the streams and rivulets in the Bapatla district.

Sand reaches were primarily identified at Vempara village, Narasimhapuram

(Gopalapuram), Ramayapalem, Thimayapalem, Velamuripudi, Modepalli villages in Addanki mandal, and Velamavaripalem village in Ballikurava mandal.

The Collector directed the officials in the committee to conduct a comprehensive examination of the availability of sand and the feasibility of sand mining in the area and give a clear report, adding that the needed amount of sand for the people's requirements in Bapatla district would be available.

The Collector directed the officials to take strict action if sand mining is carried out illegally at any place in the district and check the illegal transportation of sand.

Sand Committee members Joint Collector K Srinivasulu, Additional SP Mahesh, Minding department DD Jannadha Rao, and other officials were present.



Tiger spotted in Prakasam village

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A tiger is learnt to have been roaming in Kolukula village of Yerragondapalem mandal.

The forest officials led by Kolakula Section officer Venkateswarulu examined the paw marks of the tiger tank near the village. He said that the tiger has been roaming in the surrounding areas for the last 10 days.

The forest officials examined the areas on Friday and collected the paw marks and confirmed that it was a tiger. The forest officials warned the villagers in the surrounding areas not to come out at nights. However, the villagers expressed fear over the roaming of a tiger around their village.

Interstate cybercriminal held

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police arrested an interstate cybercriminal, who was involved in several cybercrimes using Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (Biometric), and seized a biometric scanner and a computer.

Talking to the media here on Friday, SP KKN Anburajan said that Sheshnath Vishwakarma @ Seshnath Sharma (27) of Choutarva village, Thana Khajani of, Gorakhpur district in Uttar Pradesh, had withdrawn money from the bank accounts of various individuals by using duplicate fingerprints extracted from the Aadhar cards.

The SP said one of the victims, S Rajasekhara Reddy, complained to the police that Rs 89,550 was withdrawn by an unidentified person without his knowledge from his Union bank and Canara bank accounts. He told the police that he did not reveal his OTP nor click any unknown links but money was withdrawn from his account. The police registered a case under section Cr. No.350/2022 u/s 420, 386 IPC & Sec 66 (D) IT Act.



A special team led by additional SP Tushar was formed to crack the cybercrime. The police identified the cybercriminal, collected the fingerprints with the help of bank business correspondent agents, and withdrew Rs 89,550 using the AEP system.

The police team ascertained that the cybercriminals were working based in Gorakhpur in UP. A police team led by CI Sri Ram and SI Amarnath Reddy was sent to Choutarva village in Thana Khajani in Gorakhpur district in UP arrested Vishwakarma @ Seshnath Sharma and he confessed before the police that he along with his accomplice Vikash

alias Aksh Yadav committed for the cybercrimes.

The duo using technology withdrew money from the bank accounts of various individuals in AP and Telangana states. The cybercriminals had withdrawn money from 440 bank accounts.

The accused cybercriminal Sheshnath Vishwakarma was arrested and brought to Kadapa on a transit warrant and was produced before the court. He was sent to judicial custody. The police seized a biometric scanner, one computer, and fake fingerprints from the accused. The police special team is searching for the other accused in the cybercrime, the SP said.

2 killed as lorry falls into gorge

PNS ■ PADERU

Two tourists were killed and three were injured when a lorry in which they were travelling fell into a gorge at Pamuluru village in Mareduhilli mandal on Friday.

Police said that a group of tourists from Darshi in the Prakasam district went to Chinturu in the ASR district to see the waterfalls. They boarded a lorry to go to Rajahmundry and the lorry fell into a gorge killing Narayana Reddy and Suresh. Three persons were injured in the accident.



Bright future possible with education: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh has said that education gives a radiant future to the students and exhorted the students to excel in education.

The Collector provided financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh under the PM Cares scheme to the children who lost their parents due to Covid at the Collector's office on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that 56 boys and girls who have lost their parents due to Covid-19 in the combined West Godavari district had been identified, and fixed deposits of Rs 10 lakh had been made under PM Cares under Post Office Deposit Scheme.

For those who are under 18 years of age, interest on a fixed deposit would be paid at the rate of Rs 5000 per month till the age of 18 years, and Rs 10 lakh would be given after



attaining the age of 18 years, the Collector explained.

Apart from those who are staying with their relatives, they are being provided education and accommodation facilities. The PM care beneficiaries would be provided

the education and required help.

The Collector said that the government would support those who have lost their parents due to Covid. The students who lost their parents would be provided all needed

help to pursue higher education, adding that required help would be provided to them so that they could stand on their own feet.

The PM care beneficiaries who lost parents due to COVID would also be given

training in skill development in their fields of interest and which would improve getting jobs and employment opportunities, he stated.

Prasanna Venkatesh said that he would meet the PM Care beneficiaries once a year and take measures to find out and solve their problems, conduct health tests, and provide treatment to those who need it. Ayushman Bharat health cards were also given to them.

The Collector said that the District Child Welfare Officer has been given the responsibility to check their well-being. On this occasion, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh interacted with the boys and girls and knew their problems.

NCD Program Officer and RBKS District Coordinator Dr. Ch Manasa, ICDS Project Officer KVL Padmavathy, District Child Welfare Officer Suryachakra Veni, and Child Welfare Officer Rajesh participated.



510 litres of jaggery wash destroyed

PNS ■ KURNOOL

The police and excise officials conducted raids at various places and destroyed 510 litres of jaggery wash meant to distil country-made liquor and seized 843 litres of illicit liquor.

SEB Additional SP Krishna Kanth said in a statement here on Friday that the police and SEB officials conducted a special drive at various places to check the brewing and selling of country-made liquor. During the raids, 843 litres

of illicit liquor was seized, 510 litres of jaggery wash was destroyed, and 450 KGs of jaggery was meant to distil country-made liquor.

The police arrested 61 persons in connection with illicit liquor and 38 cases were registered against them. The police also seized five vehicles during the raids.

The police also arrested 148 persons and registered 122 cases for illegally bringing liquor from Telangana state and seized 3,100 litres of liquor and 30 vehicles.

Krishna Tribunal hinges on Solicitor General now

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Appointing a new Krishna Tribunal is now in the hands of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. AG Venkataramani refused to give an opinion on whether a tribunal should be appointed or not.

The Centre has sought the Attorney General's opinion on the constitution of a new tribunal. However, the AG clarified that he could not give an opinion as he had appeared in cases on behalf of Andhra Pradesh in the past.

With this, the Centre sent the file to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for his opinion. A decision on the formation of a new tribunal is likely to be taken after hearing the opinion of Tushar Mehta.

Telangana is demanding a new tribunal to decide the distribution of Krishna waters between the two Telugu States. After that, Telangana approached the Supreme Court to notify the verdict of the Brijesh Kumar Tribunal.

However, the Centre promised to take a decision on setting up a new tribunal if Telangana's petition is withdrawn.

After this, Telangana withdrew the petition filed in the Supreme Court. But the Union Law Department initially expressed the view that there is no need to set up a new tri-

Central aid of Rs 232 cr for Rashtriya Krishi Vikas not used

A Central assistance of Rs 4,369.81 crore was released to Telangana from 2005-06 under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP). Of this, Rs 43.95 crore released in 2021-22 for the J. Chokka Rao Devadula Lift irrigation scheme was not utilised. The data was provided by the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar, in the Rajya Sabha to a question on funds released to the Government of Telangana under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) and the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Responding to BJP MP Dr K. Laxman the Union Minister said, "An amount of Rs 36.36 crore was released under the Command Area Development & Water Management which has not been utilized. Central assistance of Rs 104.56 crore was released for the repair, renovation and restoration of water bodies under the 'Har Khet Ko Pani' scheme and it has been utilised." Under RKVY, Central

assistance of Rs 579.87 crore has been released to TS from 2016-17 to 2019-20 out of which Rs 347.47 crore has been utilised. It means that an amount of Rs 232 crore was not utilised. During the year 2022-23, PDMC was implemented under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Under PDMC so far Central assistance of Rs 679.32 crore (2015-16 to 2018-19) was released to the State and it has been utilised. The Watershed Development Component (WDC-PMKSY 2.0) is implemented by the Department of Land Resources. Under WDC-PMKSY 2.0, a Central share of Rs 27.60 crore was released to State in 2021-22. During the current year, an amount of Rs 38.36 crore of Central share was released to the State. The Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) scheme is implemented by the Union Department of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare (DA&FW). PDMC had a component of PMKSY from 2015-16 to 2021-22.

bunal. The Centre then sent the opinion of the Union Law Department to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. After

getting Tushar's opinion, the Centre is likely to take a decision on setting up a new tribunal.

Parliamentarians from Germany visit Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A group of German Parliamentarians visited Telangana on Friday as part of the German-Indian Parliamentary Friendship. State Minister for IT, Industries and Municipal Administration KT Rama Rao met the German team in the committee hall of the Telangana State Assembly.



President Pocharam Srinivasa Reddy and State Power Minister G Jagadeeswar Reddy were the legislators who partic-

ipated. KTR explained to the team members about the business opportunities and incentives provided in Telangana state. He said that there are good opportunities for investments in Telangana and necessary support will be provided. On this occasion, KTR and speaker Pocharam honored the members of the German team with shawls.

TS one of the top performers in country, says Governor

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana is one state which is not only economically stronger, but also one of the top performers in the country in welfare and development, Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan said on Friday.

Speaking at the Joint Session of the State Legislative Assembly and Council, she said the inclusive and comprehensive growth of Telangana has become a role model in the country. The state is progressing in a phenomenal manner on every front.

"The extraordinary success of the state of Telangana is due to the blessings of the people. The skillful administration by the honourable chief minister and hard work of the people's representatives And the dedication shown by the government employees," she said.

The Telangana Assembly began on Friday with the Governor's address. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's government is expected to table the Budget in the House next week.

"Today, the state is not only economically stronger, but also one of the top performers in the country in welfare and development," she said narrating the KCR government's achievements in the past eight years.

The per capita income of the state which was Rs 1,24,104 in 2014-15 has increased to Rs 3,17,115 by 2022-23, she said.

When the state was formed in 2014-15, Telangana had irrigation facilities for only 20 lakh acres. The same has increased to 73 lakh, 33 thousand acres today, she further said.

Telangana is the only state in the country which has transferred Rs 65,000 crore to 65 lakh farmers as investment assistance under the Rythu Bandhu scheme.

"When the state was formed, the installed capacity of electricity was 7,778 MW only. Due to the enormous efforts made by my government, now the installed capacity has gone up to 18,453



MW," Soundararajan said.

According to her speech, Telangana is taking up recruitments for 2,21,774 jobs in a short period of eight and half years.

There was a time when the entire agriculture sector was distressed and today the state is able to supply to the rest of the country and has become the granary of India, she further said.

Soundararajan also said there was remarkable progress in the drinking water supply in the state.

There was a time when rural areas presented a picture of poverty and distress and from that today Telangana villages are completely transformed and have become models with a very high quality of life, she said.

Telangana today is investor-friendly and attracts the top class companies and multinationals in IT and mothers other sectors, she added. The Assembly session was adjourned till tomorrow.

Reacting to her speech, BJP Legislator E Rajendar told mediapersons that there is unrest among Telangana people and youth though the government made the Governor speak 'lies'.

"The Governor's speech is designed, written by the government itself," he said indicating that there were not great expectations.

No twists, turns in Tamilisai's address

Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan entered the Telangana Assembly after two years. Last year, Assembly sessions were held without the Governor's speech due to technical reasons. This year too, the government wanted to hold meetings without the Governor's speech, but it finally backed down. Amid dramatic developments, the government allowed the Governor's speech. However, no turns and twists took place during the Governor's address as expected by the media due to the differences between the Raj Bhavan and Pragathi Bhavan. But there was criticism against the Centre in the Governor's address. The Governor read the copy given by the government without skipping a single line. It may be recalled that the Governor criticised the BRS government on Republic Day saying that development doesn't mean farmhouses and constructing buildings. However, the same Governor on Friday said, "The new secretariat building is being constructed in a manner befitting the new state. I congratulate the government in this august House for deciding to name the new secretariat in the name of the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar."



TS CM TO VISIT NANDED TOMORROW

BRS Maha outreach begins

'KCR tum aage bado, hum tumare saath hai' among Hindi slogans galore

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao will visit Nanded in Maharashtra on February 5 and leaders are making huge arrangements.

Since Republic Day leaders like Indrakaran Reddy, and Balka Suman are almost stranded in Nanded. They are conducting meetings with sarpanchs and public representatives in several Taluks of Nanded district of Maharashtra.

They are speaking in Hindi. They are visiting all important people in the district. MLAs have even been saying "Jai Maharashtra" apart from "Jai Bharat" and "Jai BRS" during their preparatory meetings. "KCR Tum aage Bado, Hum Tumare Saath Hai" is another slogan often used.

The BRS joining a meeting to be held on February 5 will be at the Gurudwara Sachkhand Board Ground, Nanded, Maharashtra. They even checked arrangements at the Guru Gobind Singh Airport at Nanded, Maharashtra. Some are doing to and fro between budget meetings. Allola Indrakaran Reddy, Minister of Forest, Environment, Justice and Law, reviewed arrangements almost every day. MLAs Balka Suman, Shakeel, Jogu Ramanna, Vithal Reddy, TSIC Chairman Balamallu

and others supervised arrangements on Friday.

They reached the auditorium and spoke to the organizers. The minister inquired about the Assembly venue and vehicle parking arrangements. In view of the large number of BRS cadres, fans and well-wishers from Nanded district as well as various parts of Maharashtra and Telangana attending the meeting. All arrangements should be made carefully.

On this occasion, Minister Indrakaran Reddy said that arrangements are being made to make the first meeting of TRS and BRS successful in the neighboring state. They said that they are taking all precautions so that no shortcomings happen.

Minister Indrakaran Reddy said that he is happy to hold a meeting in Nanded, a bordering area of Nirmal district after TRS became BRS. It has been revealed that many leaders of national parties will participate in the Nanded assembly.

He said that the BRS is getting an unexpected response in Maharashtra and on the occasion of visiting many villages in Nanded district, it would be good if the welfare schemes implemented in Telangana are implemented in Maharashtra. Minister Indrakaran Reddy stated that they are also showing great interest in the expansion of the BRS.

INDIA CORNER

Bombay HC refuses to stop tender for sanitary napkins for govt schools

The Bombay High Court on Friday rejected a petition that objected to certain conditions in Maharashtra government's tender to procure sanitary napkins for girls in state-run schools, noting that the safety and hygiene of the students are important and that the clauses are necessary to maintain quality. A division bench of Acting Chief Justice S V Gangapurwala and Justice Sandeep Marne disposed of the petition filed by a start-up owned by a 69-year-old man challenging the conditions imposed by the state in its tender for the supply of sanitary napkins to 9,940 government schools. "Safety and hygiene of school girls are important and for that purpose, the quality has to be maintained. We do not find any illegality in the tender conditions," the court said. The conditions were that the bidders had to have three years of experience in supplying sanitary napkins and an annual turnover of Rs 12 crore.



Congress kickstarts Praja Dhvani Yatra covering parts of Karnataka

Former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and state Congress President D K Shivakumar on Friday embarked on separate bus tours as part of party's 'Praja Dhvani Yatra' ahead of the Assembly elections, which is about three months away. The team headed by Siddaramaiah will tour Assembly constituencies in north Karnataka region while Shivakumar will cover the southern districts. The Siddaramaiah-led team comprising 35 leaders started from Basavakalyan in Bidar district. He will visit 'Anubhava Mantapa' to pay respects to the statue of 12th century social reformer Basaveshwara before addressing a public meeting there. The state Congress chief's poll campaign started from Mulbagal in Kolar district after paying homage at the ancient Ganapati temple in Kudumalai. He later tweeted, "Worshipped Maha Ganapati's Saligram statue at Kudumalai in Mulbagal. I prayed that the Praja Dhvani Yatra should go on without any hassle in Kolar district."



Liquor, fuel to cost more in Kerala; Vehicle tax, land fair price value to go up

Petrol, diesel and liquor are to cost more and motor vehicle tax and fair price value of land to go up in Kerala as the state government acted tough to mobilise additional revenue to carry forward their social security schemes and development programmes in the budget presented here on Friday. Despite wide expectations, the social security pension received no hike but Finance Minister K N Balagopal, while presenting the budget for the fiscal 2023-24, assured that the financial constraints would not impact the welfare schemes of the Left government. The Health and Education sectors were allotted Rs 2,828.33 crore and Rs 1,773.09 crore respectively. The FM said it is proposed to levy a Social Security Cess on Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and on the sale of petrol and diesel as the commitment to continue protecting the decent lives to vulnerable sections of society require supplementing the financial resources.



'Govt doesn't want discussion on embarrassing issues'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Narendra Modi dispensation has been "stalling" the Opposition's demand for discussions on every issue which it feels would embarrass it, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor alleged Friday, slamming the government for "not allowing" discussion in Parliament on Adani Group stock rout.

Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned till 2 pm on Friday due to protests by opposition members demanding a probe by a joint parliamentary committee into the fraud-allegation-triggered rout in Adani Group company stocks.

The Thiruvananthapuram MP said Parliament is a place to discuss issues facing the nation so that people can see "the concerns of the MPs and what the MPs are focussing on".

"Sadly, however, our government doesn't see the merit of it. So they are stalling (dis-



cussions). As a result, now we have lost two days," he charged.

"All the opposition parties unitedly want to discuss this (Adani Group issue) extremely important issue as it affects the citizens of this country. They believe that this is a matter of sufficient importance that the government should permit," Tharoor told PTI in the Parliament House complex. But the government doesn't want to discuss any issue that it thinks would embarrass it, he alleged.

"The government didn't want China (border situation) to be discussed in the last

session. It also didn't want unemployment and price rise to be discussed," Tharoor claimed.

"I just hope there are some points they will see the merit in coming to an accommodation with the opposition and in working out an arrangement whereby every issue that matters to our public can be discussed," he added.

Opposition's demand for JPC probe into Adani issue not justified: Jethmalani

BJP MP Mahesh Jethmalani on Friday dismissed the Opposition's allegation that investments by LIC in the Adani Group were made at the government's behest and said there was no justification to the demands for a joint parliamentary committee probe into the matter. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned till 2 pm and 2:30 pm, respectively, on Friday due to

protests by opposition members into the fraud-allegation-triggered rout in the group's stocks, with members in the Lower House demanding a probe by a joint parliamentary committee (JPC). Wrongdoing in these investments, if any, would be probed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Rajya Sabha member said.

CBI searches 37 locations in J-K over irregularities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI Friday conducted searches at 37 locations in six districts of Jammu and Kashmir in connection with alleged irregularities in the recruitment exam of accounts assistants in the finance department held on March 6 last year, officials said.

CBI sleuths swooped down at the premises of middlemen and other accused at 30 locations in Jammu in R S Pura, Karan Bangh and several other areas on Friday morning, they said, adding the operation was conducted in other districts including Udhampur, Rajouri, Reasi and Doda.

The premises of several touts who helped candidates in the selection process were searched during the operation, officials said.

The CBI registered a case in November last year over alleged irregularities in the examination conducted by the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB), officials said.

Saradha: ED attaches assets of 'beneficiaries'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ED on Friday said it has attached assets worth more than Rs 6 crore of "beneficiaries" like Nalini Chidambaram, wife of former Union finance minister and Congress leader P Chidambaram, former CPM MLA Debendranath Biswas and a company owned by former Assam minister late Anjan Dutta in the Saradha money laundering case.

A provisional order for attaching movable properties worth Rs 3.30 crore and immovable assets worth Rs 3 crore has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the federal agency said in a statement.

These properties were owned by the Saradha Group and other people, who were beneficiaries of the "proceeds of crime" generated by the group, it said.

The "beneficiaries" include Nalini Chidambaram,



These properties were owned by the Saradha Group and other people, who were beneficiaries of the "proceeds of crime" generated by the group, it said

Debabrata Sarkar (East Bengal Club official), Debendranath Biswas (former IPS officer and ex-CPM MLA) and Anubhuti Printers and Publications owned by Dutta, a former Assam cabinet minister and president of state Congress party.

The money laundering case pertains to an alleged hit

fund scam perpetrated by the Saradha Group in West Bengal, Assam and Odisha till 2013. "The quantum of total money mobilised by this group company is about Rs 2,459 crore out of which nearly Rs 1,983 crore remains unpaid to the depositors till date excluding the interest amount," the ED said.

Five names recommended by Collegium for SC judges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Attorney General R Venkataramani told a bench of justices S K Kaul and A S Oka that warrant of appointments of these five names is expected to be issued shortly.

During the hearing, the Supreme Court also expressed displeasure over the delay by the Centre in clearing recommendations for transfer of high court judges, saying "it is a very very serious issue".

"Don't make us take a stand which will be very uncomfortable," the bench told the attor-



ney general.

The Supreme Court Collegium on December 13 last year recommended five judges for elevation to the apex court -- Rajasthan High Court Chief Justice Pankaj Mithal, Patna High Court Chief Justice Sanjay Karol, Manipur High Court Chief Justice P V Sanjay Kumar, Patna High Court judge Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Allahabad

High Court judge Manoj Misra.

Later, on January 31, the Collegium headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud recommended to the Centre the names of Allahabad High Court Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Gujarat High Court Chief Justice Aravind Kumar for elevation as apex court judges.

The top court, which has a sanctioned strength of 34 judges including the Chief Justice of India (CJI), is currently functioning with 27 judges.

The Supreme Court was hearing a matter related to the Centre's alleged delay in clearing names recommended by the Collegium for appointment as judges to the Supreme Court and high courts.

Woman rejects freebies from Meghalaya poll candidates

PNS ■ SHILLONG

An elderly woman in Meghalaya, where Assembly poll will be held later this month, has allegedly refused to accept freebies from contestants in East Khasi Hills district and has returned the 'gifts' given to her family.

Purity Phawa, president of the women's organisation in her locality, reportedly even told candidates' agents in person that she wants to elect legislators and not distributors. Election to all the 60 seats in the state Assembly will be held on February 27 and counting will be held on March 2.

Phawa's family, which resides at Lumdingjiri in West Shillong constituency, had reportedly received freebies from the agents of ruling National People's Party candidate Mohindro Rapsang and United Democratic Party (UDP) contest Paul Lyngdoh on January 28 and 30 respectively.

"I was not at home when the freebies arrived. When I returned, my daughter told me that the candidates had sent us a pressure cooker and two sets of imported bowls on January 28 and 30," Phawa told PTI on Friday.

"I called up the agents who had delivered the freebies and



they confirmed that the candidates had sent the gifts. The UDP candidate sent a calendar too," she said.

Phawa claimed that she returned the freebies on Thursday and asked the can-

didates not to distribute them if they want to become legislators. "Or else they can choose to become distributors," was her pithy rejoinder.

Phawa also claimed that she would meet the district elec-

tion officers on Friday to formally inform them of the 'freebies' being distributed by the candidates in her constituency, Rapsang, a first time MLA of the opposition Congress who switched over to the ruling NPP of Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma recently, has been reportedly distributing pressure cookers to the voters publicly in the run up to the elections.

He vehemently denied giving any freebies and insisted that the pressure cookers are from his MLA funds.

Paul is a sitting member of the tribal council and a former MLA who lost to Rapsang in 2018.

No proposal to use remote voting machine in "upcoming election"

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is no proposal to use the remote electronic voting machine (RVM) in the "upcoming election" in the country and it is also not proposed for the use of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) voters, Lok Sabha was informed on Friday.

Responding to a question in the Lower House of Parliament, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a written reply that according to the Election Commission (EC), it has "not proposed to introduce the RVM for the upcoming election in the country".

Several assembly polls are due this year, while the Lok Sabha elections will be held in 2024. The minister said the EC has also informed that the RVM is not proposed for the use of NRI voters.

Rijiju noted that public sector unit Electronic Corporation of India Limited (ECIL), under the guidance of the EC and the Technical Expert Committee of the poll panel, has developed a prototype of the Multi Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine. The EC, he said, had circulated



a concept note to all national and state political parties on improving voter participation of domestic migrants using remote voting. The note included matters such as defining a 'migrant voter', addressing the territorial concept, the method of remote voting and counting of votes, enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, and setting up of controlled environment to ensure free and fair voting.

Citing details shared by the EC, he said the introduction of RVM would not increase fake votes. The prototype RVM developed by ECIL is a robust and stand-alone system based on the existing EVMs... Independently, various statutes will ensure that the confirmation/genuineness of voter identity is verified," Rijiju said.

SC to Maha govt: No hate speeches at Hindu body's event

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court asked the Maharashtra government on Friday to ensure that no hate speeches are delivered if authorities allow the Hindu Jan Akrosh Morcha to hold an event in Mumbai on February 5.

A bench of Justices KM Joseph and JB Pardiwala was told by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared in the matter on behalf of the Maharashtra government, that the state undertakes that if the event is allowed to be held, it will be subject to the condition that "nobody will make any hate speech and act in defiance of law or disturb the public order". The bench recorded Mehta's statement and asked the state government to ensure that no hate speeches are delivered at the event.

"We also direct that in case permission is granted and in case the occasion arises for invoking power under section 151 of CrPC, it shall be the duty of the police officers concerned to invoke the provision," it said.

Houses in J-K's Doda develop cracks

PNS ■ DODA/JAMMU

Nineteen families were evacuated after their homes developed cracks at a village in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, officials said on Friday.

The authorities also declared unsafe a mosque and a religious school for girls at Nai Basti village in Thathri, 35 kilometres from Doda town along the Kishtwar-Batote National Highway.

A few structures in the village started developing cracks a couple of days ago but the situation was exacerbated by a landslide on Thursday with the



number of buildings damaged reaching 21.

"We have shifted 19 affected families to a safer location after their houses were rendered unsafe. We are observing the situation and taking steps as per need to ensure their safety," Sub-Divisional

Magistrate (Thathri) Athar Amin Zargar said.

The deputy commissioner and the senior superintendent of police visited the spot and assured all help to the affected families, he said.

Zargar, however, refused to compare the situation to that in Uttarakhand's Joshimath -- the gateway to famous pilgrimage sites like Badrinath and Hemkund Sahib -- that is facing a major challenge due to land subsidence.

"Comparing the situation in Nai Basti with the sinking town of Joshimath will be an exaggeration.

LOK SABHA AND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES

PIL to see feasibility of simultaneous polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A PIL has been filed in the Delhi High Court seeking to direct the Centre and the Election Commission to ascertain the feasibility of conducting polls for Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies simultaneously in 2024 to save money and reduce the burden on security forces and public administration.

The petition said the elections to assemblies whose terms are expiring in 2023 and 2024 may be brought together with the 2024 Lok Sabha polls by curtailing and extend-

ing the tenure.

If a consensus evolves among political parties, assembly elections of 16 states -- Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Telangana, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand -- can be held with the 2024 General Elections, it said.

Petitioner and advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay has also sought to direct the Centre and the poll panel to ascertain the feasibility of conducting elections on Saturday, Sunday



and some holiday to save time of schools, colleges, universities, service industries and manufacturing organisations.

The plea claimed that as per a provisional estimate, the conduct of 2014 Lok Sabha elections entailed an expenditure of almost Rs 4,500 crore and it is estimated that an

undisclosed Rs 30,000 crore was spent on the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Thus, doing away with several separate elections every year is likely to reduce expenditure substantially, it said.

The plea said conducting the elections together will save public money, reduce burden on security forces and public administration, ensure timely implementation of government policies and control election paralysis.

"There are many advantages in holding the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, panchayats and municipal

body elections together. It would reduce the time and cost involved in conducting elections in terms of the use of paramilitary forces, government staff on election duty and election commission staff organising booths, electronic voting machines and voter slips.

"In addition, the cost of campaigning for parties would be less. The imposition of the Model Code of Conduct delays implementation of central and state government projects and welfare schemes, and takes away time and effort from governance issues," it claimed.

Debate needed

Discussion in Parliament over the Adani affair will help the Government rather than the Opposition

The free fall of Adani scrips, which began after the US short-seller Hindenburg Research's report last week, continued on Friday. Bad news for the group continues to pour in; S&P Dow Jones Indices on Thursday removed Adani Enterprises shares from the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices. This, S&P Dow Jones Indices, said was "triggered by allegations of stock manipulation and accounting fraud." The carnage on Dalal Street found its resonance in Parliament. With the Opposition determined to have a discussion on the Adani Group, proceedings of the Budget Session were disrupted on the fourth day on Friday. While Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar adjourned the House for the first half of the day, in the Lok Sabha too the proceedings were adjourned till 2 pm. On Thursday also both Houses got adjourned for the day amid shouting by Opposition members. They wanted discussions over the allegations of fraud by the Adani Group. The issue seems to have united the Opposition, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge seeking an investigation into the matter either by a Joint Parliament Committee or a CJI-appointed panel. Neither the presiding officers of the two Houses nor the Government seems inclined towards a debate. Kharge is reported to meet the floor leaders of Opposition parties in his chamber on Friday. Evidently, the parties against the Bharatiya Janata Party scent an opportunity to launch a serious attack on it.

So far, the Opposition has not been able to hurt or even badly embarrass the BJP or its Government at the Centre. Anti-BJP leaders have said a lot of bad things about Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ruling party, and the saffron bodies seen aligned with the regime; the Government is flayed, rightly, over its inability to generate jobs; high oil prices and soaring inflation last year also attracted a great deal of criticism; allegations of cronyism are made routinely against the Government. But all the criticisms are just water off a duck's back; nothing sticks. This time, it may be different—this seems to be the idea that is animating the Opposition. The Government would be well-advised to let discussions happen over the subject; this will help the Government rather than the Opposition, for it would be able to easily deflect the charges of favouritism. This will also deprive the Opposition of the opportunity to say that the Government is fearful of discussing the issue involving a controversial tycoon. Second, this will send across a good signal to the public, investors, and the corporate sector that the Government is concerned about the capital market. Third, meaning discussions, if they take place in Parliament, can also throw up ideas that would strengthen the functioning of the stock market. Finally, this will strengthen our system, for good debates in Parliament are the soul of democracy. And when democracy is strengthened, it is a win-win situation for all parties.

PICTALK



Devotees take part in a religious procession ahead of Ravidas Jayanti, in Jammu

PTI

Rejig higher education

The UGC guidelines for foreign universities to setup campus in India are ill-conceived

Higher education in India has always been an underperformer. Though we have 40,000 colleges and 1000 universities most of them do not impart quality education to the students and leave them high and dry after they pass out. This is one big reason for unemployment as most students passing out from the colleges with degrees are unemployable as the curriculum, as well as the quality of education they receive, is below par. Though we have world-class institutions like IITs and IIMs, they can be counted on tips and even there after taking a subsidized fee structure students to leave the shores and give their best years to the multinational companies abroad. Some \$3 billion are spent by Indian parents to fund their children's education abroad. But the fact is most of them have good returns as they get employed easily and are able to pay back their loans etc. On the other hand, students who study in India go through a grind to get a job; their ordeal begins after they leave college and most end up working in jobs they were not trained for.



The government has recently come up with the idea to offset this lacuna by allowing foreign universities to open their campuses in the country. But that the UGC guidelines to this effect are flawed and would not lead to universities from abroad coming here and starting their classes here. The biggest problem is that in India education institutions cannot make a profit that is they have to work on a pro bono model. If the foreign universities set up campuses here, the same rule would apply to them and they would not be able to remit money. After all profit would be their motive to come here. Most private colleges make a profit by manipulating the account books to skirt this clause. Moreover, the foreign campuses would indeed hit the private colleges hard as they would not be able to compete with them on brand and facilities, curriculum, etc. Moreover, if foreign universities do come to India they would have their own agenda and not the best interest of India in mind which is another major drawback. UGC had earlier invited foreign universities, but none showed interest. So the Government would do well to go back to the drawing board and rethink the whole higher education policy rather than finding easy solutions. Besides the interest of the private colleges must also not be overlooked and a level playing field must be provided to all else it would destroy the education system we have.

A tale of two nations poles apart

Pakistan and Bangladesh charted their course differently, while former was fixated with the 'two nation theory' latter adopted a liberal approach



BHOPINDER SINGH

Two nations emerged from non-contiguous territories in 1971, one willingly and the other unwillingly, after violently disproving a religion-based assumption i.e., the 'two-nation theory' that beset the 'Idea of Pakistan'. Over fifty years since, both these countries have invested and institutionalized a starkly different path, trajectory, and consequently an inevitable socio-economic narrative. Bangladesh under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had inherited a land subjected to genocide and plunder that had ensured shipment of anything of value to West Pakistan (soon, just Pakistan) — even in defeat, Pakistani leadership had displayed unbelievable avarice and wantonness. While newly independent Bangladesh had gone about putting its ravaged house in order, Pakistan had simply refused to learn any lessons. The Pakistani leadership baton passed from its defeated dictator, General Yahya Khan, to an equally unhinged, imperious, and morally compromised, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Instead of reflecting on its regressive underpinnings of the 'two-nation theory', Pakistan under the civilian leadership of Zulfikar Bhutto further strengthened its religio-populism with puritanical moves — he appeased the pernicious clergy, declared Ahmadis as heretics, recklessly funded the 'Islamic Bomb', banned alcohol (even though he drank himself), etc. Whereas Mujibur Rahman decided to walk a contrarian path in terms of land reforms, nationalization, and perhaps the most revolutionary of all, adopted the word 'secularism' in its newly adopted constitution. It had inadvertently modeled itself like another Muslim-majority Turkey (of Kemal Ataturk's sensibilities, not Erdogan's) — whereas Pakistan after tenures of Zulfikar Bhutto and General Zia-ul-Haq went on a sliding slope of a total abyss.

Indeed, Bangladesh's story was not linear or smooth and it had to deal with its subliminal regressions, natural disasters, and frequent disruption to democracy. Mujibur Rahman himself toyed with a one-party state and



censorship when things were not going in his favour. He was assassinated in a military coup. Bangladeshi Military soon rewrote the constitution obliterating the word 'secularism' and the same was reinstated only in 2010, when the Bangladesh Supreme Court ruled that the removal was illegal, leaving Bangladesh with a coexistent State religion and the principle of 'secularism', to imply neutrality of religion. Again, the phenomenon of Pan-Islamism and political Islam has not spared Bangladesh either, yet in relative terms, Bangladesh under the current Awami League government has not gone the Pakistani route of religious puritanism.

Importantly, Sheikh Hasina has insisted, "You live in equal rights. You will observe your religion and celebrate festivals with equal rights. This is the real policy of Bangladesh and our ideal. I urge you never to think of yourself as a minority". While there have been multiple communal issues and provocations in Bangladesh, at least the leadership has spoken in favour of religious pluralism. Contrast this with Pakistan even in recent times, with the former Imran Khan (popularly known as Taliban Khan) promising a 'Riyasat-e-Madina' and even the current coalition government has Maulana Fazlur

“WHILE NEWLY INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH HAD GONE ABOUT PUTTING ITS RAVAGED HOUSE IN ORDER, PAKISTAN HAD SIMPLY REFUSED TO LEARN ANY LESSONS

Rehman, the emir of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, as its Presidents! These political-societal wirings have inevitable socio-economic consequences owing to governance structures and choices and therefore the contrasting fate of current Pakistan and Bangladesh is only natural. This week the headlines from Bangladeshi newspapers were 'Metro Rail transported 3.35 lakh commuters since opening', 'Two committees formed over mistakes and errors in textbooks', 'cancellation of Jamaat's registration', 'Bangladesh to get \$4.7 bn IMF package' etc., Whereas the headlines from across the Line-of-Control (LOC) were 'Death toll from an attack on mosque rises to 92', '35-rupee hike in petrol prices', 'failed policy of suing for peace with terror group' and 'No IMF loan, a mission to visit Pakistan for talks on 9th review!'. A combusting Pakistan grapples with abject political, financial, diplomatic, security, and social failure. On easily securing the IMF loan as opposed to a Pakistan, Bangladeshi Finance Minister said, "This loan approval proves that our economy is standing on a solid foundation and our fundamentals are better than many other countries". However, the Pakistani Finance Minister in 2023 was still banking on divine intervention as he stated incredulously, "If Allah can create Pakistan, then he can

also protect, develop, and make it prosper". Pakistan's fixation with its foundational 'two-nation theory' and its inevitabilities have led to imploding relations with neighboring Afghanistan to a perennially tense equation with Iran. Pakistan simply refuses to come to terms with its genealogical flaw, which was wisely skipped by the founding fathers of Indian independence and constitutionality who opted for an inclusive, liberal, and progressive agenda.

Bangladesh went ahead of even India in 2021-22 in terms of per capita income, and this is especially impressive as in 2007 (15 years back), India's per capita income at \$1028 was almost double of Bangladesh at \$558. It is the same story with various UN Sustainable Development Goals. The invaluable lesson to India, given that Pakistan suffers from ostrich syndrome and simply refuses to learn, is to put economic and progressive agendas over petty religious 'divides' and the supposed rewriting of history. Our politics could look westwards or eastwards for learning different lessons and implications of choices made.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUDGET

Sir — Apropos union budget 2023-24 is called the 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat ka budget' but it is very unplanned and unrelated with the ongoing socio-economic situation of the country. The trade deficit with China is soaring while there are hardly any steps to reduce imports of petroleum products from the gulf and mineral-rich countries.

The defense sector primarily depends on France and Russia for the import of modern aircraft and equipment. Modernization of agriculture has been overlooked. Budget allocation for the Education and Health Sector is decreased. There is hardly any serious mention or proposed roadmap about the mass employability and skill development of youths in the budget. Tax rebate is of no use for a large section of underprivileged or poor people in society.

However, macroeconomic indices like the economy's predicted growth rate of 7% and the reduction of the fiscal deficit to 5.9% of GDP are positive signs. The increased funding for the railroads and the encouragement of tourism expansion is both much-needed and always appreciated but time-bound completion of projects is still a major and critical challenge that often results in cost overruns and budget constraints. Overall, this budget is not much promising as several key components and areas of development are missing out with a big question mark.

Bishal Kumar Saha | Murshidabad

AMRIT ALL THE WAY

Sir — Nirmala Sitharaman needs to be complimented for a perfect budget. Even political leaders do not have words to criticize and waited for a day to provide false allegations after paying money to experts. Anyway, it was not a budget that stole Paul to pay Peter. Moreover, this government is functioning without corruption and that itself is a boon to the people. People around the world are admiring the state of affairs in India and admire the administration of 130 crore people in the most admirable way. In between such print media is look-

SBI at risk



India's largest bank, the State Bank of India has an exposure of around \$2.6 billion (over Rs 21,000 crore) of public money to the crisis-hit Adani group, the latest report from Bloomberg has claimed. SBI has reportedly given loans of this amount to companies of the Adani Group. The exposure of SBI to Adani includes \$200 million from its overseas units, the unidentified source further revealed. SBI

ing at Amrit all the way and poking their nose in an indifferent way.

After all, Budget means a balancing act and that is done most meticulously. When everything went normal and to the liking of many it was a fake call to find fault. Balancing growth and fiscal constraints will be a knack and the taskmaster had a task cut out and succeeded in a very successful way.

Chitra Krishnan | Mumbai

THE CONTROVERSIAL AWARDS

Sir — The Padma Awards have frequently generated controversy, especially in recent years. The main complaint has been that undeserving individuals have received them or that deserving individuals have been excluded, that the governments have weighed choices based on political, personal, and other factors. For instance, SM Krishna received the Padma Vibhushan. No doubt, he is a great man, but why not for HD Deve Gowda, the former prime minister? In the election-bound state of Karnataka, Krishna is a leader of the powerful Vokkaliga community, and Mulayam continues to be one of the most well-known figures among the OBCs, whom the BJP has been trying to woo with a

brazen political message.

Similar to how former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's surgeon was honoured in 2001, the surgeon who operated on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has earned a spot on the list. Even though treating a prime minister's health is crucial for the nation, it cannot be justified as a public service worthy of recognition. The majority of doctor awards have gone to people who work in the corporate sector, with doctors from Delhi receiving an outsized amount of these honours.

Former President Abdul Kalam has counseled then-Prime Minister Vajpayee to exercise caution in the selection of awardees. When KR Narayanan was vice president, and a committee produced some excellent proposals.

The Supreme Court once addressed the matter and established a process. Even after all of this, several undeserving individuals have succeeded in leaving with the honours, while deserving individuals have fallen short. The prestige associated with the awards has suffered, and they have been devalued in the process.

KV Chandra Mouli | Mysuru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Zindagi ke saath thi, ab Adaniji ke saath hai (remained with life, now with Adani). This is the situation of LIC. And the Prime Minister is silent on the issue.

Congress leader

— Pawan Kherra

Unfortunately, we see that the ideology of Nazism in its modern form and manifestation again directly threatens the security of our country. Again and again, we have to repel the aggression of the collective West.

Russian President

— Vladimir Putin

She was super chill the whole time. I was very impressed. It was wonderful to have her and my wife, (Priyanka Chopra), out.

Singer

— Nick Jonas

Shafali led from the front. She injected confidence into the team. She always said 'Chinta mat karo hum jeetenge'.

Wicketkeeper U-19 women's cricket team

— Richa Ghosh

This will play out in the market. This is one company's events and the regulator will have a look at whether they have adhered to the norms of the market.

Economic Affairs Secretary

— Ajay Seth

FIRST COLUMN

MILLETS' IMPORTANCE GROWS WORLDWIDE

They help us fight problems of malnutrition, obesity



SHARMILA OSWAL

Milletts were a major crop consumed in India and numerous other nations till about five decades ago. According to a 2014 National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) report, the plate share of millets has declined significantly in favour of wheat, rice, and processed foods.

As a result of increased land being used for wheat and rice production, the cultivation area for millets has decreased by 58 per cent for small millets, 64 per cent for sorghum, 49 per cent for finger millet, and 23 per cent for pearl millet since 1956. Millets are considered to be the sole crop that can handle critical challenges in the future such as food, fuel, malnutrition, health, and climate change.

With India's growing malnutrition problem—both under-nutrition (vitamin, mineral, and protein deficiencies) and over-nutrition (obesity, metabolic syndrome, and lifestyle diseases)—there is a growing awareness of the need to move to healthier, more accessible, and inexpensive diets that include millets. In addition to being naturally gluten-free and nutrient-dense, millets are also a rich source of protein, essential fatty acids, dietary fibre, and vitamin B.



When it comes to the global scenario of millet production, India is the top producer of millets in the world and the fifth-largest exporter of millets globally. As the demand for millets rises quickly, their exports are expanding dramatically. More business opportunities are being created for entrepreneurs as millets' demand rises.

The millet market has a value of over \$9 billion in 2018, and is expected to grow at a rate of over 4.5 per cent from 2018 to 2025, with a value projection of over \$12 billion.

Apart from creating business opportunities, millets also aid in the prevention of numerous non-communicable lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease, and are considered to be a potential choice or solution to lessen the negative effects of rising malnutrition and to improve the food and nutrition security of the nation.

Due to their adaptability to a wide range of temperatures and moisture regimes as well as their low input requirements, millets are resistant to climate change. They are resilient crops with small water and carbon footprints.

Millets can withstand droughts and can even survive on 350-400 mm of rain, making them an ideal crop for production.

As proposed by India to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets. The main goal of this initiative is to raise public awareness of the health benefits of millets and their suitability for cultivation under challenging conditions brought on by climate change.

The International Year of Millet provides an excellent chance to:

1. improve millets' contribution to food security
2. increase millet output globally
3. make sure that the processing, transport, storage, and consumption are efficient
4. and sustainable millet production and quality with stakeholder participation

Millet farming is still an area with a lot of room for ecosystem-level interventions. Promoting millets not only raises awareness of these wonder crops, but also of women farmers and their farming knowledge.

Raising awareness among farmers and the general public about the numerous benefits of millets can help to revitalise millets production and consumption in India.

(The author is Founder and MD, Gudmom by 10rganic, and Millet Evangelist)

Govt must step in to help tobacco users

PRITAM SENGUPTA

In several countries, the government has provided tobacco alternatives to deal with nicotine use and addictions

The Constitution asks citizens to develop a scientific temper and this could well be their greatest contribution to health. The Covid-19 has been an eye-opener to the importance of modern science. Many understand diseases better and that knowledge helps to combat it through vaccines, prophylactics and medical treatment.

That same scientific temper is lacking when it comes to tobacco use. More than a third of the Indian male population uses tobacco. The situation is particularly grim in rural India, where 42 per cent of men use tobacco products. It is time to employ science to combat death and disease by tobacco.

The data is culled from the National Family Health Survey, which is an important vehicle to understand the status of India's health. The most recent one, NFHS-5, was carried out in 2019-21.

The data from the NFHS on the consumption of tobacco in India has thrown up shocking data. There has been a little change in patterns of tobacco use amongst the Indian population despite advertising ill-effects.

There are graphic images on tobacco pouches and cigarette packets yet these seem to have little effect. The data on tobacco use also throws up several scary observations on the smoking population, which is quite high. But the message is not percolating down to the smokers, particularly in rural areas.

The study of tobacco consumption also shows that the prevalence of smoking decreases with increased exposure to schooling. The NFHS-5 reports that 39 per cent of men and nine per cent of women age 15 and over currently use any tobacco products. This percentage is less than reported in the NFHS-4 (conducted in 2015-16) which had shown that tobacco use amongst 45 per cent of men and seven per cent of women in the 15-49 age group.

However, it is far from ideal in the modern world. Those who smoke in a family are not smoking alone. The NFHS-5 survey revealed that, in 25 per cent of Indian households, at least one person smokes tobacco on a daily basis, exposing others to passive smoking and its ill-effects. This is down a few notches from 29 per cent in NFHS-4.

The percentage of men aged 15 years and above who use any kind of tobacco exceeds 40 per cent in most parts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Northeastern states, northern part of Maharashtra, western Gujarat, and southern Rajasthan.

Use of tobacco is also high (30-40 per cent) in Ladakh, Uttarakhand, most parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, northern parts of Rajasthan, and north-western Gujarat.

The lowest kind of tobacco use (below



THE NFHS-5 SHOWS THAT TOBACCO CONSUMPTION IS MUCH HIGHER IN RURAL INDIA THAN URBAN. AMONG WOMEN, THERE ARE 5.5 PER CENT TOBACCO USERS IN URBAN AREAS AND 10.5 PER CENT (OR NEARLY DOUBLE) IN RURAL AREAS

(The author is a data journalist with experience in reporting health and science)



30 per cent) is mostly observed in Punjab and southern states. The five states with the highest tobacco use in rural population are Mizoram (73.1), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (58.7), Manipur (58), Meghalaya (57.8), Tripura (57.2). For women, it's Mizoram (61.7), Tripura (50.5), Manipur (43.3), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (31.2), and Meghalaya (28.3).

The data shows that these five states have the highest percentage of tobacco users for both men and women. These five states are also the top five states of India with the highest tobacco consumption in rural areas.

The NFHS-5 shows that tobacco consumption is much higher in rural India than urban. Among women, there are 5.5 per cent tobacco users in urban areas and 10.5 per cent (or nearly double) in rural areas. For the men, there are 28.8 per cent tobacco users in urban areas and 38 per cent in rural areas.

Indians both smoke and chew tobacco. The smokers consume bidis and cigarettes and account for around 20 per cent of tobacco users in the country. The rest use different forms of chewing tobacco.

The chewing or buccal consumption of tobacco is a traditional practice that was once rooted in consumption of paan. Traditionally, tobacco (zarda, kimam, patti) was added to betel leaves along with betel nuts, ground limestone and other natural substances. That has undergone a sea change in recent years. Most chewing tobacco consumers prefer gutka, or packets of readymade paan-like products. Previously, these came in two varieties: a benign one

without tobacco and one with tobacco pre-mixed into it. Following changes in regulations, all manufacturers were asked to sell packets of tobacco separately with the risks of cancer advertised through graphic images on tobacco pouches, same as on cigarette packets.

The paan is a perishable item but the gutka packets are convenient to buy and store for long periods. The result is that there are different grades available and their quality is subject to manufacturing standards and preservatives may be added to make them last longer. This means that inorganic substances are added to preserve the tobacco or betel nuts in the packets.

Another popular form of chewing tobacco is khaini—raw tobacco mixed with limestone and stored in the cavity between the gums and the cheeks for the buccal absorption of nicotine.

Indian law prohibits the sale of tobacco to minors. But, when was the last time you saw a tobacco seller asking for proof of age? The NFHS-5 survey was conducted amongst those who are aged 15 and above. This itself is an indicator that minors in India are using tobacco products. Most minors use tobacco secretly and away from the gaze of their parents and guardians. There is no evidence that minor tobacco users have scientifically explained the consequences of using tobacco, that it leads to an addiction and attracts a range of diseases.

The NFHS report says: "Tobacco use is associated with a wide range of diseases, including several types of cancers and heart and lung diseases, diabetes, eye disease, and rheumatoid arthritis. Studies have shown that in addi-

tion to sharing the same health risks as men, women who use tobacco experience difficulty in becoming pregnant and are at an increased risk of infertility, pregnancy complications, premature births, low birth-weight infants, stillbirths, miscarriages, and infant deaths."

Earlier, some doctors would ask smokers to cut down during the course of ailments or treatments and would tell them to quit in case of some conditions. Now, doctors advise all smoking patients to quit smoking.

This is regardless of whether the patient has a lifestyle disease, a life-threatening one or one that directly affects the lungs. Even for bone or muscle injuries, physiotherapists and orthopaedic doctors advise quitting smoking because tobacco use can delay/stunt the healing time and process.

The NFHS-4 survey had found that around 50 per cent of all tobacco users were asked by a doctor to quit smoking tobacco in the 12 months before the survey. Where does science come in?

Creating regulations and following the bare minimum will also reap the bare minimum results. A sea change in attitudes is required and this is only possible with sustained, aggressive drives to create awareness amongst the Indian population.

In several other countries, the government has provided tobacco alternatives to deal with nicotine use and addictions. These alternatives have to be pushed especially amongst the rural population amongst India, where the numbers of tobacco users is increasing.

The celebration by a healthy, tobacco-free nation will be the biggest tribute to the republic.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THIS IS NOT MERELY AN UNWARRANTED ATTACK ON ANY SPECIFIC COMPANY BUT A CALCULATED ATTACK ON INDIA, — BUSINESSMAN GAUTAM ADANI



IT IS A MATTER OF CONCERN THAT A GROUP AGAINST WHOM SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE IS USING THE INDIAN FLAG AND HAS THE AUDACITY TO SAY THAT IT IS AN ATTACK ON INDIA. — RJD LEADER MANOJ JHA

Intelligent automation can transform businesses

It helps them streamline processes, reduce costs, improve compliance, measure performance, and optimise resource utilisation

In recent years, the business world has seen its share of dramatic changes, ranging from inflationary pressures to disruptions in supply chains and talent shortages. These factors have pushed businesses to become more agile and find new ways of improving efficiency. One such method is intelligent automation (IA)—a concept that combines artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning with human-centered design principles to streamline processes and make them more efficient.

IA can help businesses stay ahead of the competition by automating mundane tasks, freeing up valuable resources for higher-level jobs, increasing profitability, and enabling faster decision-making.

With the help of IA solu-



SRIVIDYA KANNAN

(The author is Director and Founder, Avaali Solutions)

tions, organisations can increase their operational efficiency and cost effectiveness while making better decisions in a more structured and data-driven way. For example, IA can be used to detect patterns in customer data or feedback that can automate decision-making processes, intelligent capture solutions, workflow automation, low-code/no-code solutions, and robotic process automation (RPA), which automates repetitive and rule-driven tasks such as data entry or invoice processing. The main benefit of using IA is that it can speed up processes while maintaining accuracy and reliability. Furthermore, IA solutions can help reduce costs associated with manual labor, thus improving overall profitability.

tions, organisations can increase efficiency without sacrificing quality or customer satisfaction. IA is a set of advanced technologies that allow computers to perform tasks that require human intervention. This includes machine learning algorithms that can automate decision-making processes, intelligent capture solutions, workflow automation, low-code/no-code solutions, and robotic process automation (RPA), which automates repetitive and rule-driven tasks such as data entry or invoice processing. The main benefit of using IA is that it can speed up processes while maintaining accuracy and reliability. Furthermore, IA solutions can help reduce costs associated with manual labor, thus improving overall profitability.

ty. IA solutions can help automate many activities, including customer service, financial management, marketing campaigns, and product delivery. AI-enabled robots can process large amounts of data quickly and accurately. Additionally, AI-powered solutions can be used for predictive analytics, which helps organisations make informed decisions about future trends based on past performance data. Another significant advantage of IA solutions is improved governance. Automation helps ensure compliance with regulations by providing accurate records and documentation which can easily be audited if required. This ensures that the organisation's activities are conducted within acceptable legal parameters.

Finally, IA solutions are also beneficial for companies looking to adopt sustainable practices as they can minimise their carbon footprint while still achieving their goals effectively. IA can be used to monitor energy consumption patterns more closely so that unnecessary usage can be avoided or minimised; this reduces both wastage and costs over time. The introduction of RPA within the organisation's supply chain could reduce waste generated due to inefficient manual processes while helping them comply with strict regulations set forth by various government agencies such as GDPR or other ethical rules related to consumer protection. Moreover, automated systems can optimise resource utilization more effi-

ciently than humans can do manually, thus reducing waste production while maintaining quality standards. The rise in IA presents a massive opportunity for businesses looking to improve their operations in the coming years; however, some challenges must be considered when introducing this technology into existing systems. Firstly, there is always the question of security when dealing with automated systems; ensuring that sensitive data remains protected and inaccessible by unauthorised parties is paramount when implementing any automated system. Secondly, organisations need to consider how they will manage any potential disruption caused by introducing new technologies into existing operations—ensuring

employees are aligned with how the process would run post-automation is essential for successfully adopting these solutions in the long term.

In conclusion, IA presents an exciting opportunity for business transformation in 2023 and beyond; by leveraging these solutions correctly, enterprises will be able to run more profitably while still adhering to sound governance principles and best-in-class sustainable practices that respect both the environment and society around them.

IA will enable organisations to streamline processes, reduce costs, improve compliance, measure performance, and optimise resource utilisation—helping them maintain a competitive edge regardless of industry or sector.

MONEY MATTERS

Gold tumbles Rs 681; Silver plummets Rs 2,045 amid weak

Gold price tumbled Rs 681 to Rs 57,929 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a decline in rates of precious metal globally, according to the HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had ended Rs 58,610 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also plummeted Rs 2,045 to Rs 70,335 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 57,929 per 10 grams, down Rs 681 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas market, both gold and silver were traded in red at USD 1,913 per ounce and USD 23.38 per ounce, respectively. Comex gold prices retreated from fresh high of USD 1,975 per ounce and closed lower by 1.94 per cent on Thursday as investors locked in profits after the precious metal scaled a nine-month peak on dovish remarks on the interest rates from Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, Gandhi said.



Sensex, Nifty jump over 1% on heavy buying in banking stocks

Equity benchmarks rallied over 1 per cent on Friday due to heavy buying in banking and financial counters amid mixed trend in the global markets. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex zoomed 909.64 points or 1.52 per cent to settle at 60,841.88. During the day, it jumped 973.1 points or 1.62 per cent to 60,905.34. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 243.65 points or 1.38 per cent to end at 17,854.05. From the Sensex pack, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, HDFC, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra and IndusInd Bank were among the major winners. HCL Technologies, Wipro and Tech Mahindra were among the laggards. Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul and Tokyo ended in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Equities in Europe were trading mostly lower during mid-session deals. Markets in the US ended mostly in the positive territory on Thursday.



Kansai Nerolac Paints net profit falls 13% to Rs 108.97 crore

Kansai Nerolac Paints Ltd on Friday reported a 13 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 108.97 crore in the December quarter, impacted by higher expenses. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 125.32 crore in the year-ago period, it said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations during the quarter under review stood at Rs 1,826.81 crore as against Rs 1,810.35 crore in the corresponding period last fiscal, it added. Total expenses were higher at Rs 1,684.74 crore as compared to Rs 1,648.39 crore in the same quarter last year. "The quarter witnessed good demand in automotive coatings. Demand in decorative was impacted on account of early Diwali, extended monsoons and higher than normal channel stocking due to price increases during October 21 and November 21," Kansai Nerolac Paints Managing Director Anuj Jain said. Raw material prices showed a decline during the quarter, which continued to witness a high exchange volatility with the rupee sharply depreciating further, he added.



Coal India arm MCL introduces drone technology in coal mines

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Coal India arm MCL has introduced drone technology in coal mines for environmental monitoring, volume measurement and photogrammetric mapping of mines for digitalisation of the mining process.

The technology has been introduced through the launch of a web-based portal 'VIHANGAM' along with a drone and ground control system.

"The portal allows an authorised person to access real time drone video from the mine through a dedicated 40 Mbps internet lease line near the mines," the coal ministry said in a statement.

There is a control station that flies the drone and the system can be operated through the portal from anywhere.

Sebi tones up framework for green bonds

Introduces concept of blue, yellow bonds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Friday strengthened the framework for green bonds by introducing the concept of 'blue' and 'yellow' bonds as new modes of sustainable finance.

Blue bonds relate to water management and marine sector, while yellow bonds pertain to solar energy. These are sub-categories of green debt securities.

For this, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) amended norms governing issue and listing of non-convertible securities, according to a notification.

The amendment came after the board of Sebi approved a proposal in this regard in December.

As per the notification, the



watchdog has strengthened the framework for green bonds by enhancing the scope of definition of green debt security by including new modes of sustainable finance in relation to pollution prevention and control and eco-efficient products. These measures have been taken in the backdrop of increasing interest in sustainable finance in India as well as around the globe, and with a view to align the extant frame-

work for green debt securities with the updated Green Bond Principles (GBP) recognised by IOSCO.

The regulatory framework defines Green Debt Securities as debt securities issued for raising funds that are to be utilised for projects or assets falling under certain categories.

Indian companies raised nearly USD 7 billion through ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) and green bonds in 2021 compared to USD 1.4 billion in 2020 and USD 4 billion in 2019.

Most of the green bonds issued by Indian issuers are listed on offshore exchanges as issuers are finding it more attractive to list on bourses falling outside Sebi's framework.

Rlys to upgrade its capacity of issuing tickets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The railways plans to upgrade its capacity of issuing tickets from 25,000 to 2.25 lakh per minute and attending to enquiries from four lakh to 40 lakh per minute, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday.

At a press conference here, the minister also said a target has been set to lay new railway tracks for a distance of 7,000 kilometres in financial year 2023-24.

"We plan to improve the passenger reservation system's back-end infrastructure. At present, the capacity of ticketing is around 25,000 tickets per minute. The target is to upgrade it to 2.25 lakh per minute," he said.

"The capacity for attending to enquiries will also be upgraded from four lakh per minute to 40 lakh per minute," Vaishnaw added.

Budget focuses on growth with inclusion: NITI CEO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NITI Aayog CEO Parameswaran Iyer on Friday described the Budget 2023-24 as 'very comprehensive and balanced' which will promote growth with inclusion.

He also observed that the Budget continues all the reforms and other social welfare programmes undertaken by the government over the past few years.

Iyer further said the Budget has something for all, from the bottom, right up to industry to trade.

"This is a Budget which focuses on growth, with inclusion. It's very balanced, it carries on from all the reforms and other social welfare programmes which the government has undertaken over the past few years," he told PTI in an interview.

Iyer noted that the Budget focuses on infrastructure



investment, social sector, and also on reaching out to the poor and marginalised section of society.

According to Iyer, the huge focus on infrastructure and capex in the Budget will also incentivise states.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman raised the capital expenditure by 33 per cent to Rs 10 lakh crore for infrastruc-

ture development and announced a lower fiscal deficit target of 5.9 per cent for 2023-24, while retaining it at 6.4 per cent for current financial year.

Replying to a question on the Modi government's Aspirational Block Programme (ABP), Iyer said ABP is under the Aspirational Districts Programme.

Wheat prices fall over 10% on sale of FCI wheat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday said wheat prices have fallen more than 10 per cent in the past one week following its decision to sell the grain in open market to check rising prices. State-run Food Corporation of India has so far sold 9.2 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk users at an average rate of Rs 2,474 per quintal on the first two-days of e-auction held this week.

Recently, the Centre decided to offload 30 lakh tonnes of wheat from the buffer stock in the open market under the open market sale scheme (OMSS). Out of which 25 lakh tonnes will be sold to bulk consumers, flour millers, 3 lakh tonnes to institutions like Nafed and remaining 2 lakh tonnes to



state governments.

"The e-auction has already left an impact of a fall in market prices of wheat by more than 10 per cent in the past one week," the Food Ministry said in a statement.

The 'prices are set to fall further' after wheat sold in the e-auction is lifted and wheat flour (atta) is made available in the market, it said. As per the

data maintained by the consumer affairs ministry, the average all India retail price of wheat was ruling at Rs 33.47 per kg and price of wheat flour was at Rs 38.1 per kg on February 2.

On the same date in 2022, average retail price of wheat and wheat flour stood at Rs 28.11 per kg and Rs 31.14 per kg, respectively, the data showed.

US India's top destination for goods exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The US has emerged as India's top destination for merchandise exports during April-December this fiscal at USD 59.7 billion, Parliament was informed on Friday.

In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the government has taken a series of measures to promote the country's exports.

The steps include an extension of existing foreign trade policy till March 31; an extension of interest equalisation (subsidy) scheme on pre and post-shipment rupee export credit till March 31 next year; and a roll-out of Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme.

‘Growth projection in Budget conservative; scope for upside’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Economic affairs secretary Ajay Seth has said that the Budget has taken conservative estimate of nominal GDP growth of 10.5 per cent with some scope for upside for the next fiscal beginning April 1.

In her fifth straight Budget, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has projected a nominal GDP growth of 10.5 per cent the next financial year.

"We feel that that is a conservative number with some scope for an upside, but not very significant upside. For example, in the current financial year we assumed 11 per cent and the actual is 15 per cent. So that kind of thing we don't expect next year. However, with 10.5 per cent we don't see any downside from that number," he told PTI



in an interview. With regard to real GDP, Seth said, somewhere upward of 6.5 per cent perhaps may be the number to make assumptions for the next year.

The Economic Survey 2022-23 released earlier this week too projected India's economy to grow at slower pace at 6.5 per cent in the fiscal year starting April but will remain the fastest

growing major economy in the world as it fared better in dealing with the extraordinary set of challenges the globe has faced.

India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.5 per cent in 2023-24 compares with an estimated 7 per cent expansion in current fiscal year (April 2022 to March 2023) and 8.7 per cent in the previous year.



Tata Power Q3 net profit Rs 1,052 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power on Friday said its consolidated net profit almost doubled to Rs 1,052.14 crore in the quarter ended December 2022 compared to a year ago, mainly due to higher revenues.

The consolidated net profit of the company was Rs 551.89 crore in the quarter ended on December 31, 2021, a BSE filing showed.

Total income rose to Rs 14,401.95 crore in the quarter from Rs 11,018.73 crore in the same period a year ago.

Total Energies says not re-evaluating investment in Adani companies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

French energy giant TotalEnergies, which had in past years taken stakes in two Adani group listed firms, on Friday said it has not performed any re-evaluation of its holdings because of volatility in stock prices following allegations of fraud. In a statement, the French firm said its investment in Adani group entities were undertaken in full compliance with the Indian laws and its own internal governance processes.

Moody's says stock plunge to hurt Adani's ability to raise funds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Investors Service on Friday warned that the rout in Adani Group shares could hurt the conglomerate's ability to raise capital, while its peer Fitch saw no immediate impact on its ratings.

Adani Group's listed companies have lost over USD 100 billion in value in just over a week after short-seller Hindenburg Research's scathing report flagged concerns about the ports-to-energy conglomerate's debt levels

and alleged stock manipulation, accounting fraud and the use of tax havens.

Adani Group has denied any wrongdoing and has threatened to sue Hindenburg.

"Given the significant and rapid decline in the market equity values of the Adani Group companies following the recent release of a short-seller report highlighting governance concerns, our immediate focus is primarily on assessing the rated entities' overall financial flexibility,

including their liquidity position and access to funding to support refinancing and ongoing growth initiatives," Moody's said in a statement.

Moody's said its ratings for Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd, Adani Green Energy Ltd, and Adani Transmission Ltd are underpinned by their regulated infrastructure businesses with long-term sales contracts, or their strong operating cash flows and dominant market position.

Rann of Kutch to host first G 20 Tourism Working Group meet

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

As part of India's G20 presidency, Gujarat will host the first Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting in the state's Rann of Kutch from February 7 to 9, an official said on Friday.

The TWG meeting, which will be attended by Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy, will be the second G20 event in the state after the 'Business 20 Inception' programme held in Gandhinagar last month, he said.

BoB Q3 net profit rises 75% on core income growth

PNS ■ MUMBAI

State-owned Bank of Baroda on Friday reported a 74.76 per cent jump in its consolidated net profit at Rs 4,305.66 crore during the quarter ended December 2022, helped by improving asset quality and higher core income.

On a standalone basis, the lender's net profit jumped 75.4 per cent to Rs 3,853 crore. Without naming the embattled Adani Group, the bank's managing director and chief executive Sanjiv



Chadha told reporters that BoB's overall exposure to the ports-to-media conglomerate's entities is one-fourth of the single group

exposures allowed under the Large Exposures Framework (LEF) but refused to share a number. He said the overall exposure has declined as a percentage of the balance sheet in the last two years, and the bank does not have any asset quality concerns pertaining to it.

For the reporting quarter, the lender registered a 26.5 per cent rise in the core net interest income at Rs 10,818 crore, helped by a nearly 20 per cent growth in advances and a 0.24 per cent widening of net interest margin to 3.37 per cent.

CBDT scheme to help dispose small appeals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) will soon come out with a scheme on the Budget announcement of reducing pendency of appeals related to TDS default issues, board chairperson Nitin Gupta said.

In her Budget speech on Wednesday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said she proposes to deploy about 100 joint commissioners of the Income Tax department for disposal of small appeals and to reduce the pendency of appeals at the commissioner level. "We will come up with a scheme, the appeals dealt here will be mainly relating to TDS

(tax deducted at source) default, the orders on TDS default, the orders on the processing of return of income where we feel that it requires adjustment and the taxpayer feels otherwise...there could be cases of small income (under dispute)," Gupta told PNS during a post-Budget interview.

The scheme will aim to expedite the process of disposal of appeals by the first appellate authority, which is the Joint Commissioner for Appeals, he said.

Under the Income Tax scheme, an order issued by the tax authority can be challenged by the taxpayer first before an officer holding the charge of



Commissioner (Appeals) followed by appeals to the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), the High Courts and the Supreme Court.

The CBDT chief said the

board will "divert" manpower from its present cadre to man the 100 posts of joint commissioner for this purpose.

Talking about another Budget proposal of the taxman

being "more selective in taking up cases for scrutiny of returns already received this year", Gupta said this was doable because of the increased use of technology tools by the tax department and introduction of measures such as the e-verification and ITR-U. The intent behind this proposal, announced by the finance minister, is that "we are now better equipped in terms of technology to identify cases which have more potential", he said.

Technology is enabling the department to look at the mismatches -- in returns filed by the taxpayer and data available with the tax authority -- and deepen and widen the tax base,

Gupta said. He said about 10 lakh updated returns (ITR-U) have been filed by taxpayers till now. "We are of the view that we can pick better cases for scrutiny... selection of cases can be more incisive and more specific and mismatch can be taken care through the route of e-verification. This will help to reduce litigation too," the CBDT chief said.

According to officials, the tax department currently picks a very "miniscule" number of cases, post filing of the returns, for limited or full scrutiny where an assessee is supposed to provide a number of documents, proofs and explanations to satisfy queries.

Rupee gains 34 paise to close at 81.86 against US dollar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The rupee appreciated by 34 paise to close at 81.86 (provisional) against the US currency on Friday, supported by a rebound in domestic equities and easing crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.15 against the American currency and finally settled at 81.86 against the greenback, registering a gain of 34 paise over its previous close of 82.20.

During the trading session, the rupee also touched a low of 82.31 against the dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a



basket of six currencies, declined 0.12 per cent to 101.63.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures advanced 0.39 per cent to USD 82.49 per barrel. "Indian Rupee appreciated on a rebound in domestic equities and weakness in crude oil prices. However, positive US Dollar capped sharp gains," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Coke Studio returns to India with 50 artistes, 10 new tracks

Music enthusiasts have a reason to rejoice as *Coke Studio* is set to return to India with *Coke Studio Bharat*. The new season will feature an amalgamation of over 50 artistes from across the country and its hinterlands coming together to create over 10 memorable tracks celebrating the roots of India. The platform will host music that pays homage to the various parts of India that artists call home, connecting with stories that are rich in history, with diverse languages, and using varied musical instruments creating magical melodies set to enthrall.

Arnab Roy, Vice President, Marketing Coca-Cola India, and Southwest Asia said: “*Coke Studio*, a globally acclaimed platform, has always aimed to celebrate authentic regional music. Musical traditions from multiple regions in India are at

an inflexion point not only in India but even globally. *Coke Studio Bharat* connects the truly distinct cultural dots of various regions in the country with artists whose music is defined by their roots. They are the real stars of the season, giving regional music a bigger impetus.”

This season of *Coke Studio* is curated by the acclaimed, award-winning musician and sought-after songwriter, Ankur Tewari. Breathing magic into *Apna Sunao*, Ankur has signed a think-tank comprising acclaimed poet, lyricist and scriptwriter Kausar Munir along with music producer K.J. Singh. Together they have hand-picked regional gems to give their sound a new voice.

The current season features celebrated artists and musicians like Amira Gill, Achint, Aditya Gadhi, Arijit Datta,

Amaan and Ayaan Ali Bangash, Ashima Mahajan, Armaan Malik, Bombay Brass, Burrah, Charan Raj, Deveshi Sahgal, Dhruv Vishwanath, Diljit Dosanjh, Donn Bhatt, Hashbass, Jasleen Royal, Kanwar Grewal, Mahan Sehgal, Mansa Pandey, Maithili Thakur and Brothers, Mohammad Muneem, Noor Mohammad, OAFF and Savera, Osho Jain, Prabhdeep, Rashmeet Kaur, Seedhe Maut, Sakur Khan and Sons, Sanjith Hegde, Shillong Chamber Choir and Tajdar Junaid. The season will also put the spotlight on regional Indian instruments like Algozha, Chimta, Duff, Sarod, Sarangi, Tumbi, and Rabaab.

Coca-Cola has partnered with Universal Music India (UMI) as executive producers for the launch season of *Coke Studio Bharat*. The first song of the season will be released on February 7, 2023.



After cancer and suicide attempt, Dwayne Johnson's mom survives car crash

Hollywood star Dwayne Johnson has revealed that his mum was involved in a scary road accident which left her car in a crumpled state.

The wrestler-turned-actor known as ‘The Rock’ posted the image of the messed-up car to his Instagram on Thursday, but thankfully told his 361 million followers that his mum Ata, 74, is okay, reports.

Alongside the image of the destroyed red Cadillac, the star wrote: “Thank you God. She’s ok. Angels of mercy watched over my mom as she was in a car crash late last night. She’ll survive and continue to get evaluated.”

As per Mirror.co.uk, he went on to list

all she’s survived in life so far, including lung cancer, a tough marriage, a head-on collision with a drunk driver and attempted suicide.

He continued: “She’s a survivor, in ways that make angels and miracles real. Thank you LAPD & LAFD for being so caring and focused. Thanks for staying on the phone and talking me through it all.”

And in a touching message to his followers, he concluded: “I got one parent left, so if you still have your mom and dad make sure you hug ‘em hard, because you never know when you’ll get that 3am call we never want to get.”



Jessica Simpson had an ‘enticing’ affair her ‘younger self would not be proud of’



Singer-actress Jessica Simpson said that she had an affair with a “massive movie star”. She is now married to Eric Johnson and has three children.

The 42-year-old was married to Nick Lachey from 2002 until 2006 - and wrote the story that she “never thought she would tell” as part of new short story for Amazon Original Stories, ‘Movie Star’, reports Female First UK.

She told People magazine: “This is a very personal story and I really thought I would never share it! The whole period was very surreal. There were times I had a lot of fun, don’t get me wrong! But a lot of the time it felt isolating because I am someone who likes to deeply connect with people and I didn’t know who was trustworthy and who was not. You can’t always take people at their very persuasive word - seems obvious but it really isn’t when you are dealing with someone who sells it so well.”

As per Female First UK, the *I Wanna Love You Forever* hitmaker went on to add that although the affair was “sexy and enticing,” it made her feel like a “call girl” and she knew her younger self would not be proud of her.

She said: “Yes, there was something sexy and enticing about all this, but there was also something demeaning about it. I felt like a call girl. I didn’t care if he was my teenage fantasy come to life, this was not a choice that the same girl, my younger self, would be proud of.”

“Not betraying your own heart and diminishing your self-worth actually feels so much better than immediate gratification of living in a lie,” she continued. “I also learned that there is a wide range of what monogamy means in Hollywood!”

Docu-series *The Romantics* to feature Rishi Kapoor, his association with Yash Chopra

One of the most revered actors of Hindi cinema Rishi Kapoor will be featured in the upcoming docu-series *The Romantics*. The streaming series celebrates the legendary filmmaker Yash Chopra, along with his production house YRF’s legacy and its impact on Indian pop-culture over the last 50 years.

The late actor had closely collaborated with Yash Chopra and then the latter’s son, Aditya Chopra in films like *Kabhi Kabhie*, *Chandni*, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (in which he was paired with his wife Neetu Kapoor), *Fanaa* and *Hum Tum*. In the new series, Rishi Kapoor will be seen speaking about his close relationship with Yash Chopra and what made their combination one of the most cherished director-actor duo in Hindi cinema, especially the romantic films.

The Romantics has been directed by Oscar and Emmy-nominated film-maker, Smriti Mundhra, who returns to Netflix after the success of *Indian Matchmaking* and the *Never Have I Ever* franchises.

Director of the series, Smriti Mundhra shared: “Rishi Kapoor was not only an iconic actor, he carried with him an encyclopedic knowledge of the Hindi film industry. On the day of our interview, which would be his last, he

was characteristically charming, erudite, and eager to reminisce. His death represents the loss of a significant piece of cinema history, and I’ll forever be grateful for the insights, anecdotes and perspective he shared.”

The four-part docu-series will also feature 35 personalities, including the mega-stars like Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Ranbir Kapoor, Amitabh Bachchan, Ranveer Singh, Anushka Sharma to name a few, who have closely worked with the studio conglomerate through its 50 year glorious existence.

Interestingly, the reclusive studio head, Aditya Chopra has also recorded his first on-camera interview for *The Romantics*.

The Romantics will drop on Netflix on February 14, 2023 as a tribute to Yash Chopra, who is regarded as the *Father of Romance* in India.

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

Inspired by tradition, infused by modernity

AMARTYA SMARAN

Angelique Dhama, founder of Obeetee Carpets, aims to spread the 100-year-old tradition of the carpet-making company across India. A few months ago, the century-old Obeetee Carpets launched its first-ever flagship store in Hyderabad at Jubilee Hills.

For this week's edition of Hyderabad, The Pioneer connects with Angelique Dhama, who shares what she likes about the city and why Hyderabad could be the best place for someone who's just starting out.

Born in Calcutta, Angelique pursued her English Honors degree and, soon after graduating, took up the role of a flight attendant. The repetitiveness of the job pushed her to make the much-needed switch. Although she initially found it difficult to find a job that would pay an equal amount, in 1996, a businessman who was setting up retail operations in Kathmandu, Nepal, approached her. He was keen on hiring someone with no experience and fixed notions about the retail industry.

The 22-year-old Angelique took up the job, and for one year she spent time understanding the trade. After her training period, she moved to Chennai and set up successful luxury brands like Swarovski and Lladro. Angelique mastered the retail trade and stuck with the company for 11 years. Then she made a segue into the fashion industry and worked in Bombay for three years before she moved to Timex.

Her journey with Obeetee began ten years ago when she got a call to join the company. "At first, I was hesitant because I had previously worked with very large brands. I was not aware of the legacy. The person who called me said, 'Angelique, you've been selling international brands in India. Now, you start selling Indian brands international-

This week for our weekly edition of Hyderabad, The Pioneer brings to you our interaction with Angelique Dhama, founder of Obeetee Carpets, who have recently launched their flagship store here in Hyderabad.

ly". It sounded interesting. So, I took up that experience, and for the last two years, I wanted to make sure that this brand was known in India. We opened our stores in Delhi, Mumbai, and now Hyderabad. We're also planning to launch a store in Kolkata," said Angelique.

In the process of setting up the first ever Obeetee store in Hyderabad, she has travelled to the city six times now, and she shared, "When you come from North India to set up something in South India, you are a bit skeptical. The scepticism comes from, 'Will we be accepted?' That's the big challenge. I have lived in Chennai for eight years. The people are really lovely there, but there is a language barrier. So it was quite challenging. Before we launched the store in Hyderabad, we did some reconnaissance and met some

architects and interior designers, and I was made to feel very welcome. Everybody was very excited that all the brands were finally coming to Hyderabad. They were happy that they didn't have to go outside to source products. Most of the time, they were either going to Delhi, Bombay, or Bengaluru. For the last two years, brands have been eyeing Hyderabad."

Talking more about the City of Nawabs, Angelique said, "I really like the Hyderabad biryani, and it's a beautiful city with lovely people. We did this show and met around 100 architects, and everyone was so warm. People here don't say things just for the sake of it. If they say they'll come, they come and support us. Also, the city shares that synergy with carpets, and people need no introduction to carpets here. The city is used to the culture of carpets, and it's not a new culture. It's just a matter of availability."

Looking at how enthusiastically she spoke about the city, we wondered if she'd ever move here in the near future. When asked about it, she quipped, "I'm done with all that experimentation. I am from Kolkata, and I worked in Chennai, Mumbai, and now Delhi. I have a pretty stable family life in Delhi. There's no chance of me rooting and coming to another city."

However, she has some interesting things to say to those who are considering making a move to Hyderabad. "When my colleague asked me if she could be posted in the city, I asked her what's so exciting about the city. You know, there's this buzz that's happening in the city. You guys are having a moment. The city is expanding in terms of technology and infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, and it would be wonderful to live here. There's a lovely airport where you land, and there's definitely a method to the madness. The whole city looks beautiful."

She further added: "I think I would say that expect a very westernised South City. When you go to the south, you think it's very traditional and conventional, but with this city, there's heritage also, and suddenly you'll see rocks coming out of a building, and then there's a huge multinational building. You know, it is a happening place, and for youngsters who're going to start out in their careers, it is an amazing place."

"We definitely want to be one of the top three brands in India when it comes to home. For the first time, there's a standalone store in Hyderabad. We came here with a lot of conviction because we believe there is a market here," Angelique concluded.



Case 'load' of overwhelmed oncologists

PNS | HYDERABAD

As per the cancer registry data, it is estimated that there will be about 800,000 new cancer cases in our country every year — alarming is the only emotion we can express right now. With a predominantly clinical approach to managing cancer, the relentless onslaught of cases not only causes distress to increase numbers of patients and caregivers but also puts oncologists and the healthcare system under inordinate stress!

"There are many reasons that this consideration is important, especially in a country with a ratio of one medical oncologist per 3000 new patients a year. For one, we cannot afford long consultations with such caseloads, even though longer consultation times are proven to lead to better health outcomes. Further, burnout is experienced by 20%-70% of practicing oncologists worldwide, leading to medical errors, professional misconduct, or leaving medical practice altogether. Reducing the case-load will improve the capacity of the healthcare system to deliver quality care, yielding more positive patient outcomes. This can be achieved by the twin approaches of prevention and palliation," enlightened Dr. Vishal Rao, Group Director for Head & Neck Surgical Oncology and Robotic Surgery at HCG Cancer Centre.

Up to 50% of cancer cases are preventable, though avoiding cancer altogether is tricky because we are all exposed to the ever-growing list of carcinogens to some degree. We can however take measures appropriate to our risk profiles.

For example, Dr. Rajesh Kumar Reddy, an Uro Oncologist at AINU shared something serious about urological cancers: "Theme of the close the care gap campaign is to address the inequities in cancer care is continued this year. Cancers found in the urinary and male reproductive organs are one of the most common tumors encountered in clinical practice. Risk factors of cancer development can be broadly divided into biological factors and lifestyle-related factors like consumption of tobacco products and alcohol, obesity, and dietary factors. Then there is environmental exposure and occupational risk factors like many chemicals, radioactive materials, and asbestos. The deadliest is the infectious cause which is the Human Papillomavirus! Early detection of cancer significantly increases the chances of successful treatment. Some signs of cancer include lumps or swellings, sores that fail to heal, blood in the urine, unexplained loss of weight, and loss of appetite. However, for all practical purposes most of the cancers, genitourinary cancers, in particular, are silent in the initial stages. These can only be detected with regular health screenings by means of lab tests or imaging. With the advent of recent technologies in medical care, cancer cure has become a possible entity for localised cancers. Robotic surgeries revolutionised urological cancer care over the past decade! Surgical robot featuring endo-wrist technology and 3D vision enables surgeons to perform surgical dissection with great precision. The advantages are minimal blood loss and fewer chances of injuring surrounding organs. A clear-cut benefit is seen for prostate cancer surgeries where nerve preservation is possible to preserve urinary continence as well as potency. The earlier the better is the final take-home message. This enables urologists to perform minimally invasive, organ-preserving surgeries with curative intent." Meanwhile, Dr. Vishal shared, "The real struggle lies in managing the social

determinants of health outside of individual control. Life today is hurried and intense, with crowded living conditions, increasing pollution, financial pressures, uncontrolled consumption, sensationalising media playing up threats around us, and so on. We need to introspect and collaborate as a society to reduce these triggers. Palliation enters the picture when the disease has taken root. Treatment protocols include chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation, or surgical measures. Each is accompanied by a host of side effects such as nausea, gastrointestinal distress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. But patients and caregivers experience pain and discomfort well before this point. Cancer is so feared that

free life during and after treatment. Altogether, it would result in better health outcomes across the board."

On the other hand, Dr. Madhu Devarasetty, senior consultant surgical oncologist and minimal invasive surgeon at KIMS Hospitals, stressed that the revolution in cancer care with technological advancements must reach village level too where cancer care needs to be streamlined. "This can be addressed by establishing more centers at the district level and recruiting more specialists. Organising more screening camps, promoting awareness through social media, and enriching knowledge through websites will help this society to know more about cancer. It's very important to know that most cancers are curable if they are detected early in breast cancer, thyroid cancer, colorectal cancer, etc. Awareness in society and standardisation of treatment will enable to close of the care gap," he added.

Seconding Dr. Dr. Madhu Devarasetty, Dr. Srinath Bharadwaj, consultant oncologist, Apollo Hospitals, Jubilee Hills, listed five major scientific milestones which have made a huge impact in care for cancer in the past decade.

Immunotherapy:

This is definitely one of the path breaking discoveries in the past decade. Tumors grow in our body by evading / misleading our immune system. This therapy brings back the cancer under the radar of our immune system and increases the effectiveness of other therapies in turn providing longer periods of remission. Significant impact has been seen in many cancers especially Lung cancer.

Next generation sequencing:

Massive Parallel Sequencing of tumor DNA / RNA to detect specific mutations in the genome which could have been the cause of his / her cancer. Once a mutation is detected, we also get to know if this is hereditary and if it is there is any drug which can target this mutation. This makes Cancer treatments more personalized. BRCA gene testing in breast and ovarian cancers, EGFR, ALK, Ros testing in lung cancers, MSI testing in colonic and many other cancers are examples.

Targeted therapies:

These medicines are a direct consequence of our ability to delineate targets in individual tumors through various molecular tests including Next Generation Sequencing. Most of the targeted therapies come in tablet form which makes administration very easy for the patients and avoids multiple chemotherapy injections.

PROTON therapy:

The therapies previously discussed are either tablets or injections. This therapy is a form of Radiation therapy. Conventional Radiation therapy Consists of Photons generated at Mega voltage to treat cancers. In proton therapy particles called Protons are used instead of photons to improve precision and decrease side effects and Apollo is the first hospital to introduce it in India. This is most useful in treating tumors which are nearby critical organs like brain and spinal cord.

Developments in supportive care:

Array of new Medicines have come up in the last decade which are much more effective in tackling nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapies. Scalp cooling machines are available which prevent hair loss for patients on chemotherapy. Various interventions from Radiology and Pain Medicine have made treatments more tolerable and the journey of fight against cancer more comfortable than ever before.



even the idea of

undergoing tests to diagnose it can be deeply unsettling! Without external support, they can only look to the already overburdened oncologist to take them through the entire process, from screening to treatment and after."

He continued, "The crucial significance of palliation cannot be understated. Early initiation of palliative care has been proven to reduce depression and anxiety because of its holistic, empathetic approach. Patients are also empowered on the clinical front because palliative care professionals ensure they are well-informed of the appropriate use of different medical treatments, can identify their own preferences, and are mentally prepared for possible outcomes. Everyone stands to gain when oncologists' caseloads are reduced through prevention and palliation. Systemic efforts are necessary to build awareness of prevention, and the capacity to provide palliative care. At the same time, each individual must do what is necessary for their particular positions, starting from the person taking adequate healthy measures to avoid meeting an oncologist, all the way to someone living a fulfilling and pain-

Stylish rooftop decorations for cafe-like terrace at home

Have you ever said to yourself, "I wish we could create such a vibe while having coffee at home" while enjoying a cup of coffee at one of your favourite establishments i.e your home? Rooftop cafes are becoming increasingly popular, and why not? A rooftop or terrace theme and a cafe theme go hand in hand because of the picturesque view and the small elements of nature that are the fancy elements of today's era. Now, imagine sitting at home in a casual cafe atmosphere; although the view may not be particularly picturesque, the cafe elements can undoubtedly transform your home terrace. There needs to be a solution to the problem of finding a place

for your after-party antics now that the holiday season is in full swing. If you have a balcony, terrace, or rooftop, you will love to find amazing decorating ideas for your rooftop terrace. For the readers of *The Pioneer*, Raghunandan Saraf, founder and CEO, Saraf Furniture, compiled a list of fun and simple ways to give your rooftop terrace home design the feel of a cafe.

Convenient seating

Cafes' flowy and convenient layout adds an incredible amount of ease to the atmosphere. Additionally, folding wooden chairs are the most cost-effective and straightforward rooftop design idea for providing comfortable seating.

They are easy to incorporate into a cafe terrace because they are adaptable and come in a variety of styles. You will need seating in addition to a table and chairs in order to host enjoyable gatherings on your terrace.

Welcome double duty details

Utilise utility features to add more ease and convenience to the view. A wall organiser can be a beautiful addition to your modern rooftop terrace design that can also be used to store essentials and give the space the vibe of a lively cafe. When purchasing cutlery holders or other high-quality storage items for your terrace, ensure that they appeal to art lovers. Your balcony or

terrace will undoubtedly take on the atmosphere of a bustling cafe if artistic detail is included in these rooftop decorations.

Create a background

Most of us only have one accent wall on our balcony or terrace, so make use of it. You can really make your space look like a cafe by using wallpaper that is quirky and textured. The majority of raw-looking cafes have the most authentic and aesthetic vibes, so incorporate the same vibe with brick print wallpaper. Another low-cost, easy rooftop decoration to add a cafe-like atmosphere to your terrace is this one.

Cafe vibe through cafe light

Lighting is a game-changer and the most important component for creating your preferred atmosphere. You can choose from a variety of pendant lights with vibrant bohemian mosaic or sophisticated, sleek lines. This section of rooftop decorations is entirely up to you. The most common cafe theme lights are tungsten lights, but if you want your favorite cafe to feel like an antique haveli or a natural wonder, you can also try lantern-style pendant lights or lights made of cane.



AUSTRALIA GETS 'ASHWIN DUPLICATE' TO TRAIN AHEAD OF INDIA TEST SERIES



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Australia have roped in Maheesh Pithiya, a 21-year-old spinner with uncanny resemblance to Ravichandran Ashwin, to train on spin-friendly tracks as part of their preparation for the upcoming Test series against India.

Off-spinner Ashwin may prove to be a major threat for Australia, who haven't won a Test series in India since 2004.

Expecting spin to play a major role in the four-Test series, the visitors have opted for tailor-made pitches and have availed the services of Pithiya to get accustomed to the action of Ashwin.

The four-Test series begins in Nagpur on February 9.

"Of all the stops Australia have pulled out to prepare for their trip to India, the most noticeable at their Test tour's first training session was the presence of a Ravichandran Ashwin duplicate," a report in cricket.Com.Au said.

"With facing spin the major focus on Thursday, Pithiya was the standout among the local 'netties', bowling tirelessly and virtually without break through the day as he troubled the likes of Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head, who all had long batting sessions."

Pithiya, interestingly, didn't see Ashwin bowl until the age of 11. Growing up in Junagadh, Gujarat he didn't have access to TV and when he finally watched the India

Aussies will miss Zampa's ability to zip ball: Sriram

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former Australia assistant coach Sridharan Sriram is disappointed that spinner Adam Zampa is not with the touring team for the four-match Test series against India beginning on February 9.

Sriram said that Zampa was someone who could "hold" his action for long periods of time like Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, something which Ashton Agar and Mitchell Swepson might find difficult in tough subcontinental conditions.

Veteran tweaker Nathan Lyon, Agar, leg-spinner Swepson and young off-spinner Todd Murphy got the nod in the 18-

member Australia squad with Zampa missing out.

Sriram, who served the Australian team for six years, has seen Zampa evolve his game, and felt the 30-year-old wrist spinner's ability to zip the ball would be hugely missed by Pat Cummins' side during the Border-Gavaskar series.

"I would have personally loved to see Zamps bowl here (in India), because he's got the pace, he's got that zip off the pitch," Sriram was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald' on Friday.

"That's something I keep an eye out for, who has got the ability to beat you off the pitch, so I think that Zamps has got that,"

said Sriram who has also played eight ODIs for India between 2000 and 2004.

Sriram, also a domestic heavyweight having scored more than 9,500 first-class runs, added Zampa was extremely keen to tour India and had even called him up a couple of times.

"He wanted it more than anyone, he wanted to play Test matches in India, he had called me a couple of times a couple of months ago saying 'Sri, I'm so excited that I could be on that tour', so he wanted it and he started to play first-class cricket for NSW. He did well, three wickets in each innings, so he's pretty disappointed that he's not on this tour."



India's 2007 T20 WC hero Joginder Sharma announces retirement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India medium pacer Joginder Sharma, who bowled the iconic match-winning final over in the 2007 World T20 summit clash against Pakistan, on Friday announced retirement from all forms of cricket.

The 39-year-old represented India in four ODIs and as many T20s between 2004 and 2007, picking five wickets. He played domestic cricket for Haryana.

"My journey from 2002-2017 has been the most wonderful years of my life for it was an honour representing India at the highest level of sport," he said in a message posted on Twitter.

"To all my team-mates, coaches, mentors and support staff: It has been an absolute privilege to have played with you all, and, I thank you all for helping turn my dream into reality."

Handed the ball by skipper MS Dhoni in the final over of the inaugural T20 World Cup final, the inexperienced

Sharma bowled India to victory, scripting one of the most iconic moments in the history of cricket.

Pakistan were well on course for a famous win with Misbah-ul-Haq reducing the equation to six runs off four balls. But the Pakistan batter mis-timed a scoop shot with Sreesanth completing a simple catch at short fine-leg to help India lift the trophy.

However, the final was Sharma's last game for India.

He turned out for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL before joining the police service where he served as the deputy superintendent of police and was on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharma added that he will be exploring new opportunities in the game.

"I am excited to announce that I will be exploring new opportunities in the world of cricket & the business side of it, where I will also continue to participate in the sport that I love and challenge myself in new and different environment."

Fit-again Jamieson hopes to make it count against Eng

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand pace bowler Kyle Jamieson is hoping to get his rhythm back after returning to the squad for the upcoming two-Test series against England following a long injury layoff.

The lanky seamer had to leave the field during the second Test against England at Trent Bridge due to a stress reaction in his back in June last year and since then has not played an international game.

He was included on Friday in the 14-member New Zealand squad for the Test series against England beginning at Mount Maunganui on February 16.

Jamieson, who has made a successful return to domestic cricket, will now be targeting a spot in the playing XI following his extended period of rehabilitation.

"It's nice to be included in the squad and back in the fold for the first time in a while," Jamieson told SEN Radio.

"My body is feeling good, I'm excited to be back with the group ... I've been bowling plenty of overs in practice and in training, I just need to get used to the rhythm of playing again. I've been bowling to empty nets for a long time so to see a few batters in the middle and see the ball get hit, it's a bit of a change."

He said he had full faith in coach Gary Stead and the support staff despite New Zealand having last won a Test series in 2021.



"Yeah, of course," said Jamieson.

"That's not something we've really thought about because there's so much confidence from the playing group in our coaching staff."

He added that the New Zealand side was a tight-knit unit where players had complete faith in the coaching staff.

"I'm not sure if it (pressure) is there or not, we sort of keep a pretty tight-knit circle. I have complete faith in our group and what we can do."

Jamieson is expected to play just one Test in series as his

recovery is monitored, and the pacer said the decision on which match he will play will depend on the conditions.

"It is a little bit different, the first Test will be under the lights with the pink ball. Wellington (venue for the second Test) with the red ball, it tends to be more seamer-friendly than the Mount (Maunganui)," he said.

"But at the Mount (Maunganui) with the pink ball under lights, it could be pretty spicy as well. We'll see how it unfolds and how it goes up there."

WPL: Rachel Haynes appointed head coach of Gujarat Giants

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Multiple-time World Cup winner Australian opener Rachel Haynes has been appointed head coach of the Gautam Adani-owned Women's Premier League (WPL) team Gujarat Giants while Nooshin Al Khadeer, who guided India to U-19 team to World Cup triumph, will be bowling coach.

The Adani Sportline-owned Gujarat Giants, bought for a whopping Rs 1289 crore, has already roped in former India captain Mithali Raj as their mentor and advisor.

Former senior women's team coach Tushar Arothe will be the team's batting coach and Gavan Twining will look after fielding department.

"Not only have they carved a niche for themselves in their roles, but their stories of resilience will be an inspiration for the team," said Mithali.

"Their combined strengths will enable Gujarat Giants to give their best performance on the ground at the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League, which will inspire several aspiring women athletes."

Haynes, who has played at the highest level for more than a decade, has won six world championship titles with the Australian team and was the vice-captain of the side from



2017-2022.

The left-handed batter, who was an integral part of the very successful national set-up, is a veteran of 84 T20Is and played crucial roles in the Australian team's title winning campaigns at the 2018 and 2020 T20 World Cups.

Haynes, who was part of the team that won the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand, has also turned out for the Sydney Thunder in the Women's Big Bash League, often leading the run scoring charts for her side.

"The Women's Premier League is such an exciting addition to the cricket landscape. The opportunity to be involved in the inaugural season with the Adani Sportline owned Gujarat Giants and work with the brilliant Mithali Raj is something I'm really looking forward to," said Haynes.

We will look to take positives from Tri-series into WC: Deepti

PTI ■ EAST LONDON

India all-rounder Deepti Sharma is pleased with their overall effort and said they will look to take positives from the Tri-series into the ICC Women's T20 World Cup beginning on February 10.

The Indian women's team, which had secured a maiden final finish in the 2020 ICC T20 World Cup, suffered a five-wicket loss to hosts South Africa in the Tri-series final on Thursday.

"There are lots of positives from the series, we did well as a bowling and batting unit. We have to just carry on these things in the World Cup as well," Sharma said in the post-match press-conference.

"Whether we play England or any other team, we have to just focus on the things we did well here and continue doing that over there as well."

"Obviously South Africa have home conditions. But as a team, we have to carry forward what we have done right in the Tri-series and not think about the opposition but our own team, what we can do better."

Adjudged player-of-the-series for taking nine wickets in five matches, Sharma said she got a lot of help from the wickets in South Africa.

"We have played in South African wickets, spinners get turn here. All these matches that we played in the Tri-series, we got a lot of help from the wicket," she said.

"Harry di (Harmantpreet



THE INDIAN WOMEN'S TEAM, WHICH HAD SECURED A MAIDEN FINAL FINISH IN THE 2020 ICC T20 WORLD CUP, SUFFERED A FIVE-WICKET LOSS TO HOSTS SOUTH AFRICA IN THE TRI-SERIES FINAL ON THURSDAY

Kaur) also told me that I should just pick my spot and keep bowling according to the situation and I think we produced a good bowling effort and bowled according to the plan."

The 25-year-old has taken 96 wickets from 87 T20Is so far in her career.

"I had worked with single wicket with different balls like heavy ball, light ball. It was a turning wicket, so I got a lot of help. I bowled to my strength," Sharma said.

"In the powerplay, I go for breakthroughs and it helped the team. Whatever sessions that I did before the World Cup has helped me in my bowling."

India will open their World Cup campaign against Pakistan on February 12 at Newlands, Cape Town.

MP beat Andhra by 5 wickets in Ranji QF, face Bengal in semis

PTI ■ INDORE

Riding on half-centuries from opener Yash Dubey and Rajat Patidar, defending champions Madhya Pradesh completed their remarkable fightback as they beat Andhra by five wickets to enter the Ranji Trophy semifinals here on Friday.

After conceding a big first innings lead of 151, MP bounced back on the third day on Thursday by skittling out Andhra for a mere 93 in 32.3 overs in the visiting side's second innings.

Set a target of 245 to win the quarterfinal match, MP were 58 for no loss on Thursday and they knocked off the remaining 187 runs in 61 overs on Friday to win the match with a day to spare.

The heroic efforts of Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari who batted one-handed in both their innings after a

wrist injury went in vain as his team could not stop MP from reaching 245 for 5 in 77 overs.

MP will now take on Bengal in the semifinals from February 8 in a repeat of last edition's last-four stage match. MP had won that match by 174 runs at Alur, Karnataka.

BENGAL BEAT J'KHAND
Kolkata: Packed with impact bowlers, a formidable Bengal demolished Jharkhand by nine wickets inside four days to progress to the semi-finals for the third time in a row.

Bengal had played the final in the 2019-20 season and after a COVID induced break, the team qualified for the semi-finals last year when it lost to eventual champions Madhya Pradesh.

Starting the day at 162 for 7, Jharkhand's lower-order, led by Supriyo Chakraborty (41) did delay the inevitable for just about 15 plus overs in the



morning before being shot out for 221.

The target of 67 was more of a romp for India A skipper

Abhimanyu Easwaran (28 not out) and in-form Sudip Gharami (26 not out) as the umpires extended the first ses-

sion to allow Bengal complete formalities in 12.4 overs after they lost opener Kazi Junaid Saifi.

Under new head coach Laxmi Ratan Shukla, Bengal's pacers Akash Deep (match figures 6/108), Mukesh Kumar (match figures 4/94), Ishan Porel (match figures 2/90) shared 12 wickets amongst themselves.

Rookie Akash Ghatak (match figures 4/36) and seasoned left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed (2/45 and 81 runs) also played the supporting role to perfection.

INNINGS WIN FOR K'TAKA

Bengaluru: Eight-time champions Karnataka dominated with both bat and ball as they thrashed Uttarakhand by an innings and 281 runs to enter the semifinals.

Resuming at their overnight score of 106 for 3 after following on, Uttarakhand batters could add just 103 runs before being bowled out for 209 in 73.4 overs on the fourth day of the quarterfinal match.

Swarnil Singh (51 off 100 balls) top-scored for Uttarakhand.

Shreyas Gopal turned out to be the star for Karnataka, as, after making an unbeaten 161 with the bat in his team's massive first innings total of 606, he returned with figures of 3/26 in Uttarakhand's second essay to claim the player-of-the-match honour.

Besides Gopal, Vijaykumar Vyshak (3/55), Vidwath Kaverappa (2/30) and M Venkatesh (2/44) also chipped in with wickets.

SAURASHTRA FIGHTBACK

Rajkot: Fighting half-centuries from skipper Arpit Vasavada, Chirag Jani, Prerak Mankad and Parth Bhut helped Saurashtra make a comeback in their quarter-final against Punjab on day four.

Having conceded the first innings lead to Punjab, Saurashtra recovered to score

379 in their second innings to set the opposition a 252-run target.

Vasavada (77) and Jani (77) shared a 160-run stand for the fifth wicket before Mankad (88) and Bhut (51) shared a valuable 92-run stand for the eighth wicket.

The game is nicely poised going into day five with Punjab needing 200 runs with eight wickets in hand. Pukhraj Mann (17 batting) and night watchman Siddarth Kaul (2 batting) were in the middle at close of play.

With the pitch offering a lot of turn, 2020 Ranji champions Saurashtra will back themselves to complete the job on Saturday. It will need a special batting effort from Punjab to reach the semi-finals.

Saurashtra got a shot in the arm when they removed the opening pair of Prabhsimran Singh and Naman Dhir, who both struck fine hundreds in the first innings to take Punjab to 431.

Michael

Sandeep Kishan tries to break the curse but gangster film falls apart

AMARTYA SMARAN

Produced by Karan C Productions LLP and Sree Venkateswara Cinemas LLP, and directed by Ranjit Jayakodi, Michael features Sandeep Kishan, Gautam Vasudev Menon, Varun Sandesh, Divyansha Kaushik, Vijay Sethupathi and Varalaxmi Sarathkumar in important roles. The film was simultaneously released in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Hindi on Friday.

With erstwhile 1980s and '90s Bombay as its backdrop, the story revolves around *Michael* (Sandeep Kishan), who's a loner and is fixated on the end goal of killing his father. Right from the onset, *Michael's* ideals are made clear to the audience. In the opening sequence of the film, where the local vendor beats his woman for asking money to feed her kid, the angry young *Michael* who's around the corner gets up, puts his plate down, washes his hands, goes straight to the store, and stabs the man. He grabs the cash from the counter and gives it to the woman. He says, "You shouldn't beg for the things that belong to you. You should just take it."

When the woman enquires in a loud tone, "What's your name?", the young *Michael* simply wears his "Walkman headset" and walks

away. The evidently emotional woman says, "One day the whole world will notice you!"

The entire story is narrated from the perspective of Swamy (Ayyappa P. Sharma), who's kidnapped by a rival gang. The narrative initially begins in the 80s and makes a quick transition into the 90s. For the most part, the film lingers in the 90s.

Gautam Vasudev Menon plays Gurnunath, a powerful gangster. Gurnunath is feared by every other gang in the city and he's not the regular villain. He reads William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Ernest Hemmingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in his free time. Young *Michael* grabs the attention of Gurnunath and the gangster takes a liking to the kid's attitude and agrees to help him kill his father. Years later, the grown-up *Michael* saves Gurnunath's life from the rival gangs. This makes their bond special and often brothers Gurnunath's wife and son.

Gurnunath's wife Charulatha (Anasuya) is a cunning woman who's always worried about losing her spot and goes to any extent to keep her son Amarnath (Varun Sandesh) in contention for the throne. At one point, she burns down the house of a club singer for having an affair with Gurnunath. Bonkers! Isn't it?

Varun Sandesh hits it out of the park with

this particular role. Everything about his performance is praiseworthy. He reminds us of Fredo Corleone from *The Godfather* (1972). He's mentally weak, often giving in to the pleasures of life and he wants that approval from his stoic father. He's caught up in this circle of proving his worth. In a nutshell, Amarnath is like the "Merchant of *Venom!*".

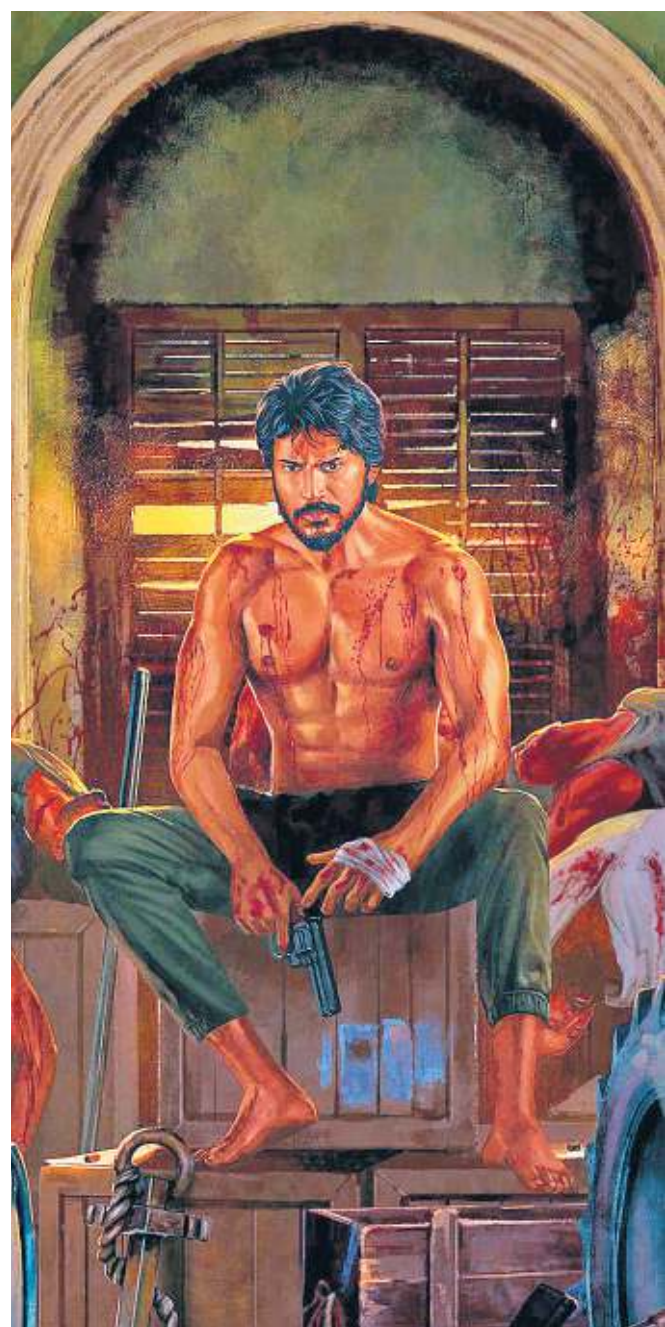
The driving plot point occurs when Gurnunath asks the grown-up *Michael* to kill the last of the six men involved in plotting against him. *Michael* sets off to Delhi to find the suspect. Here he meets Theera (Divyansha Kaushik) and everything goes downhill from there in *Michael's* life. In his interaction with the media, Sandeep described the film as a romantic drama set in the evil world of gangsters. This hinders the narration and tests our patience. The film is a slow burn. It has its momentary highs but it keeps falling flat. It shines at one moment and slips away the very next moment. If romance was supposed to be the film's main theme, the filmmaker certainly didn't succeed in packing it well. All said, it leaves the audience wanting for more of that romance from the lead pair. Divyansha plays her part with great conviction.

The best thing about the film is its aesthetic value. Ranjit excels in getting the best out

of cinematographer Kiran Koushik. The shots literally teleport you to the 90s. Each frame is pure gold. The orange-teal color palette looks fantastic on the big screen giving you a sense of visual cinematic brilliance. Editor R. Sathyanarayanan's editing is crisp and he makes no mistake in spoiling the flow of the film. The music scored by Sam C.S. enhances the highs and covers up the low points in the film. Sandeep Kishan carries the film on his shoulders. He's fit and looks the part and this has to be one of his best performances to date. Vijay Sethupathi and Varalaxmi Sarathkumar play a couple and make their entry in the second half. They do their usual thing with sheer perfection but the film would have been so much more enticing if their characters had more screen time.

Director Ranjit Jayakodi shows his technical brilliance. The film is a visual spectacle in the neo-noir genre. Let me put it this way, you will think the film is aging like fine wine. The content is packed in a glossy-looking bottle. However, the wine tastes just fine and it doesn't keep you buzzed for a long time either. *Michael* is a fantastic attempt by Sandeep Kishan to break his jinx at the box office but it is far from being the best film in the gangster genre.

Rating: 2.5/5



Writer Padmabhushan: Comedy & climax make it a perfect family entertainer

Cast: Suhas, Ashish Vidyarthi, Rohini Molleti, Tina Shilparaj, Sri Gouri Priya Reddy, Goparaju, and Praveen Kataria
Director: Shanmukha Prasanth
Producers: Anurag Reddy, Sharath Chandra, and Chandru Manoharan
Music: Shekar Chandra and Kalyan Nayak
Cinematography: Venkat R Shakamuri
Editor: Kodati Pavan Kalyan and Siddharth Thatholu



K. RAMYA SREE

Writer Padmabhushan (played by Suhas) is an assistant librarian and an aspiring writer. He publishes a book, borrowing some money; however, the book fails in the market, and he faces rejection everywhere despite his many efforts to make people read it for free. Sarika (played by Tina) and her father (played by Goparaju Ramana) happen to read across a book that is published under the name of *Writer Padmabhushan*. They even begin to follow weekly blogs on the internet written under the same name. Overjoyed, Sarika decides to marry Padmabhushan, and both families agree happily. However, in comes the twist, "the reveal". The books and blogs being written in the name of Padmabhushan are not written by Padmabhushan himself, and even the antagonist is not aware of who is doing all this. Now the many layers of the story begin to unfold as the first half of the film passes.

The story of *Writer Padmabhushan* is simple and plain, with elements like comedy, drama, and emotions that will impress the family audience. As you dive into the film, you will realise there's much more to the story than Suhas being a writer and his struggles.

The film takes off on a slow note where you might feel the narration is being dragged, however, it picks up after the entry of Sarika, and the cute moments between Sarika and Suhas will leave you with a smile on your face.

Suhas is a proven actor, and even in this film, he delivered a promising performance. He was apt for this middle-class family life story. He makes you both laugh and cry at the same time with his performance. But there is someone who stole our attention, and it is the leading lady of the film, Sarika. She was adorable, and her performance was enjoyable throughout. Her character was well-written, thanks to the director, who didn't romanticise her role and stuck to the story, which in turn

enhanced the entire narration of the plot.

Rohini and Ashish play Padmabhushan's parents. Rohini's character has good scope, and she was at her natural best as a mother, who can go to any extent to make her child happy. However, although Ashish did a good job with what was given to him, it felt like his talent was not put to full use in the film. We could have used a little more emphasis on his character.

Gouri Priya has a small part in the film, and she was good in her part. The other cast members gave full justice to their respective roles. We do not have much to say about other actors, as the film revolves around Padmabhushan alone.

Debutant director Prashant did a good job with his first film; although the screenplay and narration felt a little sluggish during takeoff, he managed to catch the pulse of the audience. The comedy looked very organic in the film, all thanks to the writer. While there are numerous films dedicated to our mothers, the director chose a different message, which was well received. It was thought-provoking and realistic. The visuals in the film were pleasing. Vijayawada was shown in the most beautiful way possible, and the camera angles were perfectly set. The film's music is now the source of disappointment. Except for the title song, the other songs failed to impress us. They are not something one would go back home and add to their playlist. You might just forget them as soon as you walk out of the theater. The production values were noticeable.

Lastly, the organic comedy and message in the climax, paired with the cast's brilliant performances, makes it a watchable film in the theater. Overall, the film clicks in parts for us, but the family audience is most likely to fall in love with the overall film and go home with a wide smile on their faces.

Rating: 2.75/5

Thalapathy 67's Kashmir schedule kicked off



There has been a downpour of updates related to Vijay's *Thalapathy 67*, which will be helmed by Lokesh Kanagaraj. While the makers recently took to social media to announce the cast, the first schedule of the film has begun in Kashmir.

The makers had shared a video of the cast and crew, flying to the location. Vijay is seen boarding the flight along with the director, and actor Trisha, who is playing the female lead in *Thalapathy 67*. The video also features Vasanthi, who played agent Tina in *Vikram*, thus hinting that *Thalapathy 67* might be placed within the cinematic universe of Vikram and Kaithi.

Thalapathy 67 marks the second time Vijay is working with Lokesh after *Master*. Produced by Seven Screen Studio, the wait for the title will end soon, as the makers will announce it on Friday evening.

The upcoming film also features Arjun, Mysskin, Priya Anand, Sanjay Dutt, Gautham Vasudev Menon, Mansoor Ali Khan, among others. The film's technical crew includes cinematographer Manoj Paramahansa, stunt choreographer Anbariv, editor Philomin Raj, art director N Satheesh and dance choreographer Dinesh.

'Adipurush is more than a film for us'

Kriti Sanon is currently gearing up for the release of *Adipurush*, starring alongside pan-Indian star Prabhas.

It is known that *Adipurush* is a mythological entertainer that features Prabhas as Raghav and Kriti Sanon, Saif Ali Khan in the roles of Janaki and Lankesh. The film is based on Ramayana and is directed by Om Raut of *Tanhaji* fame.

Sharing her thoughts of the genre of the film, Kriti said, "It is a film that the entire team is extremely proud of. I hope and pray that people will also equally be proud of it. It is something that is so important to all of us. It is just not a film for us, it is way more than that. I hope it gets its due. I have a feeling it will. It is important to make these stories. It is educational for kids. I feel if I had not seen it then, today's children would also have not seen it. I feel visual memory is way stronger than anything else. The best way to make kids know (this) story is to have it imprinted in their minds, it is important to watch it. If you are getting it out now after so many years, that same story also needs to relate to the audience it is catering to."

According to reports, the film is set for a grand release on June 16, 2023.



Dia Mirza: There is great joy in carving your own path

Dia Mirza is set to play a pivotal role in the upcoming *Bheed*, which is all set to be released on 24th March. Anubhav Sinha's next directorial venture is based on the backdrop of the COVID 19 pandemic and depicts the discrepancies people have faced during that time. Sinha, in his films, talks about issues which people tend to overlook which is something Dia resonates strongly with. Given how well her strong character in *Thappad*, also directed by Sinha, was received, this was a role the actress did not think twice to accept.

Dia Mirza's journey from India's very first Miss Asia Pacific International in 2000 to an acclaimed actor, producer, nature champion, eco-entrepreneur, and the UN Secretary General's Advocate for Sustainable Development Goals with a global platform is path-breaking, to say the least.

Today, as a doting mother, she is leading a very satisfying personal and creative life and says, "When I look back, I

realise that I have taken every big and small decision with complete conviction and never let circumstances or societal pressures change my trajectory. There is great joy in carving your own path and in exercising agency in every aspect of your life."

Dia continues to display the same mindful decision-making in the roles she is choosing today and says, "Yes, I tend to gravitate towards characters that do their bit to break gender stereotypes. Over the years, I have come to see a bit of me in them and a bit of them in myself because regardless of their circumstances, they have held on to a certain point of view and a very clear idea of who they are."

Her recent work in Sakshi Gurnani's short film *Gray*, in Anubhav Sinha's feature *Thappad* and her award-winning portrayal of Kainaaz in the ZEE5 series *Kaafir* encompassed diverse female characters who had something important to say. Dia says, "I played a therapist in *Gray* who simplifies the meaning of consent for a survivor

of forced intimacy. In *Thappad*, my character Shivani Fonseca, was a strong, independent, single woman who refuses to gaslight a victim of domestic abuse and very firmly articulates her take on the matter. Kainaaz of course was a deep dive into a woman's trauma whose humanity has been brutalised by border politics. Yet, her resilience, grace and dignity are phenomenal."

Dia is also very excited about her forthcoming film *Dhak Dhak*. This is a road movie about the journey of a lifetime where she plays a hijab. The best way to make kids know this story is to watch it."



King of Kotha starring Dulquer Salmaan in theaters this Onam

Marking the 11 years of his splendid career in the movie industry, Dulquer Salmaan's *King of Kotha* will hit the screens on Onam 2023. The second-look poster of the big-budget movie is already making a buzz amongst the fans. Similar to his much-loved getup in his debut movie, *Second Show*, DQ's rugged look in the Abhilash Joshy directorial is getting revealed in this poster too.

Produced by Zee Studios and Wayfarer Films, the shooting of *King of Kotha* is progressing in Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

Penned by Abhilash N Chandran, the movie is expected to be the next blockbuster of the pan-Indian star. While the cinematography is done by Nimish Ravi, the editing is taken care by Shyam Shashidaran. The movie's music is jointly done by Jakes Bejoy and Shaan Rahman.

