

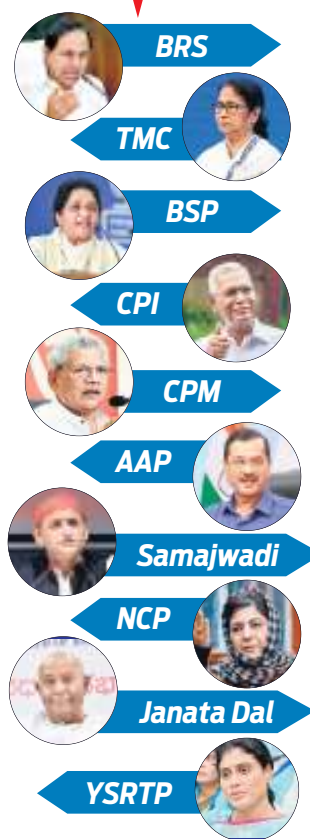
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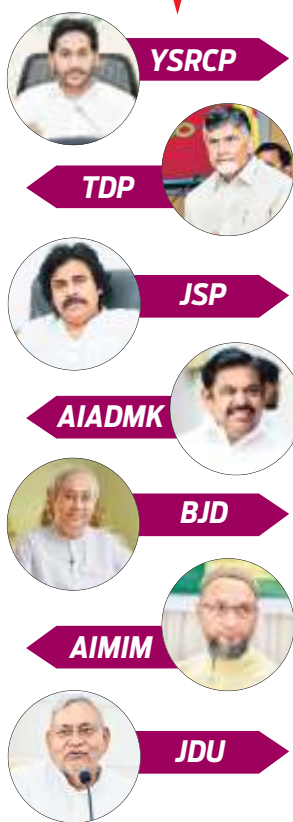
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## Democracy is watching!

Parties that condemned Rahul's disqualification



Parties silent



**'Women-men ratio in legal profession 'absymal'**

P: 5

Packing **PUNCH** for opposition

DilSe: 8&amp;9

# Gandhis won't apologise, will go to jail, asserts Rahul

**'My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi and Gandhi does not offer an apology to anyone'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A combative Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said he would continue to defend democracy in the country even if he is disqualified from Parliament for life or jailed and claimed that a "panic-stricken" government has handed the Opposition a "big weapon" by disqualifying him.

Addressing his first press conference after his disqualification from the Lok Sabha, Gandhi claimed that the action against him was taken because Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "scared" of his next speech in Parliament on the Adani issue and alleged that the "whole game" was to distract people from the issue and the panic the government was feeling over the matter.

"My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi and Gandhi does not offer an apology to anyone," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday responding to a query on repeated calls by the BJP seeking his apology over various issues.

The former Congress chief made the remarks while addressing a press conference after being disqual-

**'Panic-stricken' government has handed the Opposition a 'big weapon'**



■ 'Whole game' was to distract people from the Adani issue

■ Who invested Rs 20,000 crore in Adani shell firms

■ 'Democracy has been finished in this country'

■ Union ministers 'lying' against me in Parliament

ified from Lok Sabha.

Asked what he thinks about calls from the BJP seeking his apology for allegedly seeking foreign intervention and whether he could have regretted his remarks in court for

which he has been convicted for defamation, he said, "Rahul Gandhi thinks my name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi, Gandhi does not offer apology to anyone."

Gandhi has often targeted late

**Cong to observe day-long 'Satyagraha' across country**

The Congress will organise a day-long 'Satyagraha' on Sunday in solidarity with Rahul Gandhi in front of Gandhi statues at all states and district headquarters to protest against his disqualification from the Lok Sabha. The satyagraha will begin at 10 AM and end at 5 PM. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will stage the satyagraha at Raj Ghat in the national capital. The party feels that Rahul Gandhi's conviction and disqualification, which it has alleged was done in reaction to his consistently questioning the relationship between PM Narendra Modi and businessman Gautam Adani, poses a serious threat to the world's largest democracy.



**KCR to address BRS meeting in Loha today**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao will address a public meeting in the Loha town of Kandur constituency in Nanded District in Maharashtra on Sunday. Arrangements for the huge public meeting have been completed. BRS sources said that they expect a lakh people from 16 mandals to attend the meeting.

All main roads are decorated with pink arches and huge hoardings. Armour MLA Jeevan Reddy, Bodan MLA Shakeel, BRS Maharashtra Kisan Cell President Manik Rao Kadam, former Kandur MLA Shankaranna Dondge, former Kannada MLA Harshavardhan Jadhav, BRS leader Raghav and others are looking after arrangements for the public meeting.

Apart from the Congress, the BJP and the Shiv Sena, no other party has held a meeting on this level in the town.

**DON'T MISS...**

**Woman made to walk on burning...**

A woman was allegedly made to walk on burning coal and iron nails by her husband's relatives to prove that she did not practice black magic in Chhattisgarh's Durg town, police said on Saturday. The woman, who sustained burns on her legs, was hospitalised after the incident that took place in Kailash Nagar area of the town on March 20, an official said. The police have arrested two women and a man, and detained a minor boy, who claimed to be a tantrik, he said. Talking to PTI, the victim, Mamta Nishad, a resident of Karidih locality...

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**Brain's 'internal compass' could...**

Scientists have found that implementing a 'reset button' inside mice's brains allows for a rapid reorientation of its internal compass, which helps the animals out when exposed to confusing situations. The study, from McGill University, Canada, has implications for human beings as well, especially regarding mental processes those that could go wrong with neurodegenerative diseases like dementia, that leave people feeling lost and confused, the researchers said. They termed this phenomenon as 'network gain', that allowed the brain's internal compass...

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**'Central agencies are not above reproach' BRS trying to prove that agencies are not sacrosanct**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BRS is moving forward to prove that Central investigating agencies are not sacrosanct. By displaying phones and disclosing the questions Kavitha put to the ED, the BRS aims to create the impression that Central agencies are not above reproach.

"People often question the police. The opposition says they don't have confidence in the TS SIT. It is a myth that Central agencies are a breed apart. We need to challenge the impression that these institutions have created for themselves in the public mind," BRS sources said.

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and IT Minister KT Rama Rao repeatedly quote statistics to show how Central investigation agencies

are flawed. The direction by the CM asking Kavitha to display her phones changed the optics not only for the BRS but also for the public. Sources said that by displaying the phones before going for ED's questioning, MLC Kavitha made a point that the ED and the BJP were wrong when they claimed that her phones had been destroyed. After that, nobody has spoken about Kavitha destroying her phones. Secondly, Kavitha disclosing the ED's questions shows how the BRS has set the narrative that even the ED is answerable. Sources said all the questions are on record, so when reports are filed it will come out whether Kavitha was questioned or not.

The BRS approaching the

Supreme Court, irrespective of the outcome, proves to the investigation agencies that the BRS has confidence in the judiciary.

BRS sources said that party cadres who were uncertain about the Delhi liquor scam are now active.

Sources said that even the opposition was taken by surprise as neither Kavitha nor the BRS had bowed down.

"Way was Arvind Kejriwal's reaction when Sisodia was questioned different from that of the BRS? Even BRS adversaries were all praise and said that they haven't seen a fierce lady like Kavitha," BRS sources said.

**SIT asks Sanjay to appear today**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the TSPSC leak has issued notices to Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Saturday once again asking him to appear before it on March 26, that is, Sunday.

Earlier, the SIT had issued notices to Sanjay on March 22 asking him to appear on March 24. Sanjay did not appear on March 24 saying that he did not get the notice and was busy attending Parliament.

Sanjay said that he had invited SIT officials when the officials said that they are coming to his residence on Saturday. He said that he took the notices and will respond legally.

**BRS is for schemes, BJP is for scam: Jagadish**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Electricity Minister Jagadish Reddy said that BJP leaders will remain permanently unemployed in Telangana. He said that whatever the inductions the BJP leaders will not get jobs.

Jagadish along with MLA Gadari Kishore and MLC Ravinder Rao of BRSLP spoke to the media on Saturday. "Scams occur in BJP-ruled states. But in Telangana schemes are being implemented. BJP leaders are murderers who killed Vyapam scam witnesses in Madhya Pradesh," Jagadish said.

"Leaders of the opposition have been doing strange stunts since last week. BJP leaders are organising unemployment protests," Jagadish said

and added that Sanjay's dharna should be held in New Delhi and not here.

He said the Modi Government which destroyed jobs is not creating new jobs and that Modi cheated youth saying that he would create two crore jobs a year.

He said the people of Telangana will think of giving jobs to BJP leaders if they tell Modi to create jobs first.

The number of jobs created in Telangana is more than what all BJP states combined have offered. "Sanjay, can you prove that more jobs have been given in BJP states than in Telangana?" Jagadish said. He made it clear that state BJP leaders do not have the stature to talk about KTR.



**BJP's protest must be held in front of Modi's house**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Industries Minister KTR came down heavily on the BJP's plan to organise unemployment marches in all districts. He told the BJP leaders that the unemployment march should be held in front of Modi's house in New Delhi and not in Telangana.

KTR appealed to the youth and the unemployed not to believe the opposition. He spoke during the Pragathi Nivedhana Sabha of the BRS held at Pedda Amberpet in Ranga Reddy district.

"BJP leaders are staging dharnas for the unemployed. During the 2014 elections, Modi said that he will provide two crore jobs per year. As per that 18 crore jobs should have

been given in nine years," he said. "Modi said farmers' income will be doubled. But it was the hardships of the farmers that doubled," he said.

KTR termed Modi as an incompetent Prime Minister. "Aren't 16 lakh jobs vacant in Narendra Modi's government?"

"Do you think that this Telangana is blind and can't see your unemployment march? This is smart Telangana. Telangana is running under KCR's leadership. Telangana is not the place that will fall for your petty words. We know who is what," KTR said.

KTR said the monkey menace has increased in the opposition parties of Telangana.

**KTR OPENS LB NAGAR RHS FLYOVER**



Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister KT Rama Rao inaugurated the LB Nagar RHS Flyover on Saturday and said that the Metro will be extended during the next term of the BRS. "During our next term, the BRS under Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao will connect Hyderabad Metro from Nagole to LB Nagar, extend it till Hayath Nagar and connect LB Nagar to the RGI Airport," he said.

-PAGE: 2

**RISE IN COVID CASES**

**Nationwide drill to take stock of hospital preparedness**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising cases of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza, the government is planning a nationwide mock drill on April 10 and 11 to take stock of hospital preparedness.

According to a joint advisory issued by the Union Health Ministry and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Saturday, both public and private health facilities in all districts are expected to participate in the exercise aimed at taking stock of availability of medicines, hospital beds, medical equipment and medical oxygen.

The exact details of the mock drill shall be communicated to the states



in the virtual meeting scheduled on March 27, the advisory stated.

The joint advisory highlighted that in the past several weeks, COVID-19

testing has declined in some states and the current testing levels are insufficient as compared to the standards prescribed by the World Health

Organization (WHO), i.e 140 tests per million.

Testing at the levels of districts and blocks also varies, with some states heavily relying on the less sensitive rapid antigen tests.

"Hence it is critical to maintain optimum testing for COVID-19, equitably distributed (with suitable modifications to address emergence of new cluster of Covid cases) across the states. This is especially important to identify any emerging hotspots and take pre-emptive steps to curb virus transmission," it stated.

The joint advisory is in continuation of the Union Health Ministry's earlier communications dated March 10 and 16 on the issue of seasonal cir-

culation of pan-respiratory pathogens in the country as well as public health response to COVID-19 in states and Union territories.

The advisory signed by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and Director General of ICMR Dr Rajiv Bahl stated that a gradual but sustained increase in trajectory of COVID-19 cases in the country is being witnessed since mid-February.

As on date, most of the active COVID-19 cases in the country are largely being reported by a few states like Kerala (26.4 per cent), Maharashtra (21.7 per cent), Gujarat (13.9 per cent), Karnataka (8.6 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (6.3 per cent).

OBTUSE ANGLE





## Police hand over HC order on dharna to BJP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police handed over the High Court order allowing the BJP dharna to BJP state General Secretary G. Premender Reddy as around 500 people participated in the Nirudyoga Deeksha Maha Dharna held on Saturday at the Indira Park Dharna Chowk.

It may be recalled that the High Court gave conditional permission to the BJP's Maha Dharna saying that the police will take action if people exceed more than 500 at the dharna site.

Premender approached the HC seeking permission for the Maha Dharna after the police refused permission. The police handed over the HC order to Premender to remind him of the conditions mentioned by the HC.

Congress leader Gone Prakash Rao, unemployed youth and students from all universities including JAC leaders from the Osmania University and Kakatiya University, Nizam College students, ABVP activists, victims of DSC-2008, and the Telangana Journalists Union (TJS) had supported the BJP's Maha Dharna.

G. Premender Reddy told "The Pioneer" that he did not receive any contempt of court notice. He said that the police handed over Friday's HC order to him.

"I don't know whether the police have any plan to give me a contempt of court notice as they suddenly came to me and handed over the order copy. But we arranged only 400 people for the dharna. Without our knowledge students and unemployed youth visited the dharna location. That was not in our control," he said.

# Kharge asks TS Cong leaders to intensify fight against BJP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC President Mallikarjuna Kharge has directed Congress leaders to strengthen the party at the ground level against BJP's dictatorial rule and its policy of suppressing the opposition.

Kharge asked Congress leaders to use every opportunity to take Prime Minister Modi's anti-democratic rule to the people.

While going to New Delhi via RGI Airport from Karnataka, Kharge, along with Karnataka PCC President DK Shiva Kumar, had a one-hour meeting with Telangana Congress leaders Telangana Congress in-charge Manikrao Thakre, AICC in-charge Secretaries Nadeem Javed and Rohit Choudhary, TPCC President Revanth Reddy, and



senior leaders Ponnala Laxmaiah, Shabbir Ali, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, SA Sampath Kumar, Anil Kumar Yadav and Harkara Venugopal.

Kharge spoke to Telangana leaders about the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from

the LS.

Later, Revanth explained about the party's moves in the last two days in Telangana. Kharge enquired about the Haath se Haath Jodo Abhiyan programme and the padayatra of the PCC President.

Revanth told Kharge that his Yatra has gone through 31 Assembly constituencies. He told Kharge that the response of the people is good and that the Yatra has been infusing enthusiasm among party cadres at the ground level.

## Nehru family always disrespected India, says Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, G. Kishan Reddy, said that the Nehru family has a habit of disrespecting India and Constitutional institutions like the courts and the Election Commission.

Kishan responded to the declaration of support for the Nehru family, the Congress and the parties that are making a mockery of the Constitution after Rahul Gandhi was disqualified for his abusive remarks made during the Karnataka election campaign

in 2019.

He said the Nehru family has a history of mocking the Constitution and Constitutional institutions.

Kishan reminded that Indira Gandhi who could not accept the verdict of the Allahabad High Court disqualifying her as an MP killed democracy and imposed Emergency in 1975.

He said that it was the habit of the Nehru family to constantly insult the opposition, the courts, the Election Commission and democracy itself.

He said that Rahul has

proved this once again. The court gave a verdict on his offensive comments and out of ignorance the Nehru dynasty and the Congress describe it as a BJP conspiracy, he added.

He reminded that Rahul does not have even the least respect for the country as recently he spoke against India and its democracy at the Oxford University.

He said that he had openly insulted the Prime Minister and the Union Cabinet by tearing up publicly the copy of an ordinance which provided a chance to a disqualified MP.

## KTR OPENS LB NAGAR RHS FLYOVER

Continued from page 1

He said that before elections are held the Bairamalguda second level, right and left loop and 12 other works will be completed by September. KTR announced that the LB Nagar Junction will be named after Telangana Martyr Srikantha Chary and that the LB Nagar RHS Flyover will be named after Goddess Mal Maisamma. The 760-metre-long flyover was built under the Strategic Road Development Programme (SRDP). KTR said that earlier, it used to take around 20 minutes to cross LB Nagar junction and that traffic is flowing smoothly now due to the new flyovers. He said that a total of nine projects were completed under SRDP in LB Nagar and three more will be completed by September 2023. Altogether, 35 projects were completed under SRDP to ease traffic in Hyderabad and 12 more are under progress. He said that the Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS) in Gaddiannaram will be opened to the public soon.

## ‘Central agencies are...

Continued from page 1

Kavitha's petition in the Supreme Court asking the ED to question her at her home or through video conference in the Delhi liquor scam will come up for hearing on March 27.

Meanwhile, the BRS and other opposition parties have knocked on the doors of the Supreme Court citing the issue of Central law enforcement agencies being used against opposition parties and citizens exercising their fundamental right to disagree with the Union Government.

The petition states that there is a clear trend of using ED raids as a tool of harassment with the

action rate after raids, that is, complaints filed after raids declining from 93 per cent in 2005-14, to 29 per cent in 2014-22. The ED has managed to secure only 23 convictions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, (PMLA) so far even though the number of cases registered by the ED under PMLA has risen substantially (from 209 in 2013-14 to 981 in 2020-21, and 1,180 in 2021-22).

From 2004 to 2014, of the 72 political leaders investigated by the CBI, 43 (under 60 per cent) were from the opposition of that time. Now, this figure has risen to over 95 per cent.

## BJP will fight till KTR quits, declares Bandi Sanjay

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring that the BJP was declared war against the modern Nizam, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's corrupt family rule, Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar said that the BJP will show what fear is to the BRS government in case it fails to nab the culprits behind the TSPSC leak.

Sanjay demanded that IT Minister KT Ramarao should resign owing moral responsibility or else KCR must dismiss him.

He said that KTR had said that only two people were involved in the TSPSC leak, but the SIT had arrested 13 people and has issued notices to many others.

Sanjay made it clear that the BJP will continue its fight till KCR dismisses his son KTR and orders a probe by a sitting HC Judge into the TSPSC leak and pays a compensation of Rs 1 lakh each to all candidates who had appeared for TSPSC exams.

Addressing the Nirudyoga Nirasana Deeksha at Indira Park Dharna Chowk on Saturday, Sanjay said the BJP

## Sanjay's son gets relief from HC

Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar's son Bhagirath heaved a sigh of relief in the High Court on Saturday. The High Court issued interim orders to Mahindra University to allow him to attend classes till further orders. Bhagiratha had approached the High Court saying that Mahindra University had suspended him without seeking any explanation from him regarding assaulting a fellow student. Dealing with the petition on Saturday, the High Court directed Mahindra University to allow Bhagiratha to attend classes. The Mahindra University had suspended Bhagiratha for beating up a fellow student. The video of Bhagiratha beating a fellow student went viral and it became a big issue.

will intensify its protests on behalf of all the unemployed by conducting Nirudyoga marches in all districts from April 2 to 6 and later the party will conduct a Nirudyoga Million March in Hyderabad.

Sanjay asked the SIT to explain why it did not issue notices to KTR who had levelled several allegations against him.

Tamil Nadu BJP in-charge Ponguleti Sudhakar Reddy declared that the BJP will stand by the unemployed.

BJP National Executive Committee Member Vijayashanthi said the CM means Criminal Minister in TS.

The father-son duo is trying to sideline the TSPSC leak, she added.

Another BJP National Executive Committee Member Vivek Venkataswamy said that some people who appeared for Group-1 exam after returning from New Zealand got very high marks.

BJP National Executive Committee Member Huzurabad MLA Eatala Rajender asked unemployed youth to support Sanjay on TSPSC leak issue as the SIT did nothing in major criminal cases dealing with Miyapur lands, Nayeem's diary and drugs.

## Santhosh: BJP leaders must intensify moves

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Praising the efforts of Telangana BJP leaders to strengthen the party, BJP General Secretary (institutional affairs) BL Santhosh advised them to intensify their moves.

Santhosh gave the suggestion when Telangana BJP leaders including President Bandi Sanjay Kumar, General Secretary G. Premender Reddy and others met him at the RGI Airport on Saturday. Santhosh was going to Karnataka via Hyderabad.

BJP leaders introduced the newly elected Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahbubnagar Teachers constituency MLC AVN Reddy to Santhosh. The leaders also explained about

the Maha Dharna they held on Saturday against the TSPSC leak.

Responding, Santhosh asked BJP leaders to intensify their moves as elections are nearing.

Santhosh is going to Karnataka to participate in the programmes of Union Home Minister Amit Shah who is visiting Karnataka on March 26.

During his visit, Amit will unveil the statues of Kempe Gowda, the founder of Bengaluru, and Basaveshwara, a Lingayat social reformer, in front of the Vidhana Soudha.

In fact, Telangana BJP President Sanjay, TS General Secretary G. Premender Reddy and many others are also going to Karnataka on Sunday.

## PM makes a strong pitch for return of BJP govt

PNS ■ DAVANAGERE (K'TAKA)

Making a powerful pitch for the return of the BJP government in Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged the people of the State where Assembly polls are due by May, to give the party a full majority for a stable government.

Stressing that fast-paced development was the need of the hour, he urged the people of Karnataka to help bring the State out of the "politics of manipulation". The BJP wanted to make the State a driving force of developed India, while the Congress looked at it as "an ATM that fills the treasury of its leaders", he alleged.

# BJP's protest must be held in front...

Continued from page 1

"For every small issue they are behaving like monkeys making a mountain out of a molehill," he said. KTR said that KCR, who bent the necks of the Centre and brought 95 per cent reservations to locals, is standing by us.

"It is true that there was a leak in the TSPSC. Immediately we cancelled those exams. There is no question of letting go of those responsible. The Education Department and the IT Department should not have any links with the TSPSC. It is a constitutional body with a special mandate. Government support is limited to funds and the secretariat," KTR said.

"We are appealing to our brothers and sisters across the state. We have cancelled the exams to prevent mistakes as we love you more than them. I don't want to trouble you. Let's correct the shortcomings and move ahead. Please don't fall into the trap of these people. We know their conspiracy. The same BJP leaders said that we are conspiring to keep youth away from them by issuing job notifications. That's why there is a conspiracy to stop the appointments. There will be a conspiracy to stop the recruitment," he said.

KTR said that there is a conspiracy to provoke youth and the unemployed and asked them not to fall for it.

## SSC examination starting on April 3

Continued from page 1

DEOs have completed the verification of infrastructure in all examination centres.

The appointment of examination personnel, setting up of flying squads, supply of confidential material to storage points and other logistics like installation of CCTV cameras in exam centres, and issuing identity cards to the personnel appointed for examination duties have been completed.

The Health Department will depute one ANM at all examination centres along with ORS

packets and first aid kits on all examination days.

The TSRTC will run more buses to enable students to reach examination centres. The electricity department will also provide uninterrupted power supply during the days before the examinations.

Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari held a video conference with Collectors and DEOs and asked them to coordinate with the police to ensure security at all examination centres and for escorting vehicles transporting confidential material.

## SIT asks Sanjay...

Continued from page 1

In fact, the SIT officials said that they had issued notices to Sanjay under CrPC Section 91 and had asked him to submit the evidence he has in connection with the TSPSC leak case.

Sanjay has been saying that he will not submit the evidence he has to the SIT as he has no confidence in it. He has made it clear that he will submit the evidence only if the government orders a probe by a sitting HC Judge. Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar may not appear before the SIT on Sunday too. He may send his legal team to the SIT's office. BJP sources said Sanjay is going to Karnataka on Sunday to attend the programmes of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Sanjay will reveal his final decision on Sunday morning, it is learnt.

# Road traffic noise can up risk of hypertension

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Exposure to road traffic noise could elevate the risk of developing hypertension, according to a new study.

The risk was found, by researchers, to increase in tandem with the noise "dose". These associations were found to be held true even when researchers adjusted for exposure to fine particles and nitrogen dioxide.

The researchers at the American College of Cardiology, US, found this through a prospective study, conducted using UK Biobank data from more than 240,000

people, aged 40 to 69 years, without hypertension at baseline.

Over a median period of 8.1 years, the scientists followed up the participants for data on how many people developed hypertension.

They estimated road traffic noise based on the residential address and the Common Noise Assessment Method, a European modeling tool, they said in the study.

The scientists also found that people who had high exposure to both traffic noise and air pollution had the highest hypertension risk, showing that air pollution



may play a role as well.

"We were a little surprised that the association between road traffic noise and hypertension was robust even after

higher court stays his conviction.

Asserting that "democracy has finished in this country", the former Congress chief claimed that he never sought foreign intervention in his remarks made in the UK and accused Union ministers of "lying" against him in Parliament to which he said he wanted to respond but was not allowed.

He also said that the BJP was trying to divert the issue by

alleging that he had insulted OBCs and he would continue to ask what is Modi's relationship with businessman Gautam Adani.

"I am here defending the democratic voice of the Indian people, I will continue to do that. I am not scared of these threats, of these disqualifications, allegations, prison sentences. I am not scared of them. These people don't understand me yet, I am not scared of them," he said,

attacking the BJP. "Disqualify me for life, put me inside jail, I will keep going. I will not stop," he said, noting that it makes no difference to him.

"I have been disqualified because the prime minister is scared of my next speech. I have seen it in his eyes. So he is terrified of the next speech that is going to come and does not want that speech to be in Parliament," the former Congress chief alleged at the 30-minute press conference, flanked by Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Patel and party general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal.

He claimed that his attack on Adani was the reason for distraction through allegations and now disqualification.

Gandhi, when asked if he was worried, quipped: "Do I look worried. I am excited, I am happy that they have given me the best gift that they could give me."

## BRS is for schemes, BJP...

Continued from page 1

"Can BJP leaders tell the names of the IT ministers of other states? But Telangana IT Minister KTR is recognized by the whole world," he said.

He made it clear that KTR is a great person who has created many jobs in TS.

"BJP leaders are making false allegations against KTR driven by envy. It is not right to make allegations against KTR regarding the TSPSC leak. Why is Sanjay refusing to appear before the SIT? The unemployed do not believe BJP leaders," Jagadish said.

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# All nine medical colleges to start functioning from next July-August

● Minister for Health T Harish Rao held a review on the progress of construction works on medical colleges

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Health T Harish Rao directed the top officials to speed up the construction work of nine new medical colleges to be set up in the State this year. He said that the colleges should gear up for National Medical Commission inspections that are set to happen soon and asked them to secure their approval at all costs. He also said that the process of appointing and posting Assistant Professors is in the final stages.

The Minister on Saturday was holding a review meeting at MCHRD on the progress of newly-established medical colleges in the State for this year. Minister for Roads and Buildings Prashanth Reddy, Minister for Civil Supplies Gangula Kamalakara, Minister for Transport Ajay Kumar and several District Collectors were asked to act and coordinate in



Minister for Health T Harish Rao speaking at a review meeting in Hyderabad on Saturday

the matter and provide all necessary facilities, including hostel accommodation for medical students in nine colleges.

Harish Rao further said, "We are taking fast steps to start the MBBS academic year in Karimnagar, Khammam, Kamareddy, Vikarabad, Janagam, Nirmal, Bhupalpally, Sircilla and Asifabad districts this year. All the colleges should be prepared to get approval from the National

Medical Commission and satisfy their norms without errors during upcoming inspection.

"The process of appointment of 1,442 Assistant Professors has reached the final stage, the provisional merit list will be released in two to three days and steps should be taken to provide the final appointment documents within 10 days. Around 67 people have already been given promotions as part of the target of starting 9 medical colleges. It

has been decided to give posting to 210 Associate Professors through counselling within a week. Counselling will commence soon," he added.

The Minister said that all the colleges must start functioning by next July-August, so healthcare becomes more accessible to the people of the nine districts.

During the review meeting, Special Chief Secretary of Finance Ramakrishna Rao requested the Minister to clear the pending bills immediately. DME Ramesh Reddy suggested the minister to visit 9 new medical colleges in the next week and take steps to speed up the work accordingly.

Health Secretary Rizvi, DME Ramesh Reddy, TVVP Commissioner Ajay Kumar, NIMS Director Birappa, TSM-SIDC MD Chandrasekhar Reddy, Chief Engineer, other engineers and officials participated in the review meeting.

# TRSMA questions putting hall tickets on website

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Recognised Schools Managements Association has raised an issue with the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) public examinations hall tickets being available on the Board of School Education website.

The principals of various schools said that it is an unethical practice and students might resort to the forgery of principals' signatures.

In a letter to the Director of School Education, they said, "We respectfully submit to you that a paper statement was released

from your office on 23rd March 2023 stating that SSC students will be allowed to write the SSC Public Exams if they carry the Hall Ticket which is downloaded from the BSE website even without the concerned school Headmaster's signature."

"We would like to bring the following to your kind notice and immediate necessary action. If the hall ticket is not certified by the headmaster concerned of the school, there



For representation purpose only

is a high possibility of doing malpractice such as replacement of student's photo etc this leads to complications."

"Many of our member schools expressed the concerns. Therefore, we request you to make it mandatory to get the SSC students' hall tickets certified by the concerned school headmaster," they appealed to the authorities.

Shekar Rao, president of TRSMA said that the fee due

being paid is a secondary issue but students may indulge in wrongdoings. They may resort to malpractice and forge the principal signature or replace the photographs of others to write the examination on their behalf, they said.

There are schools which do not issue hall tickets if the fee is not paid. But such schools are very few. All 6,000 schools are against this rule said a principal of a private school

# Renovated police canteen inaugurated

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police canteen for Cyberabad Welfare Police Society called Angadi, was renovated and inaugurated on Saturday. Telangana Home Department Principal Secretary Jitender, Cyberabad Police Commissioner Stephen Raveendra, along with Joint Police Commissioner Avinash Mahanty, inaugurated it.

Telangana Home Department Principal Secretary Jitender said that he is happy to start this canteen and asked the police personnel to take advantage of this facility. He said that all the essential goods, food and electronic are available at a subsidy of 25% to 30% for the family needs of police personnel. The mini-supermarket has over 1,000 kinds of items for the police personnel.

Cyberabad Police Commissioner Stephen Ravindra, congratulated him for his efforts in setting up the Angadi canteen. Several police officers of Cyberabad commissionerate participated in the event.

# 400 youth take part in 'Neighbourhood Parliament'



Vikarabad DRO Ashok Kumar lighting the lamp to mark inauguration of Neighbourhood Parliament in Vikarabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Nehru Yuva Kendra Santhathan (NTKS), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of Government of India, organised 'Neighbourhood Parliament' at the Collectorate meeting hall here. Over 400 youth attended the meeting. Vikarabad District Revenue Officer Ashok Kumar was the chief guest. He exhorted the youth to make use of the opportunities being offered by the Central and State governments.

District Treasury Officer

K Dashrath, Assistant Director of Agriculture Swaroopa Rani interacted with the youth. They told the youth that they should be part of G20 and Y20 Presidency and transform the nation.

NYKS District Youth Officer T Ishaiha thanked Ace Engineering Collector supporting the programme. ICAR-IIMR, Hyderabad senior scientist Dr Seva Nayak, spoke on millet cultivation practices, health benefits, value addition, food processing, techniques and technologies.

# TOMCOM hiring for various overseas jobs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Overseas Manpower Company (TOMCOM) is hiring skilled labour for various job vacancies abroad.

The company is facilitating the application process and accommodation for migrants through legal means, the list of

vacancies is as follows. Australia: HD Maintenance Technician/Fitter, CNC Machinist and Chefs - Indian Restaurants.

UAE blaster painter, cleaner, foreman - blasting and painting, foreman plater, GTAW Welder, ITV Driver, Machinist - CNC, plumber, plater fabricator, scaffolders,

security systems technician, senior officer - operations, oracle functional lead, oracle technical lead, accounts officer and accounts manager.

Aspirants must have relevant experience and their passports must be valid for a minimum of two years. Interested people can visit the website or contact 7893566493/ 83286 02231.

## HEALTHY POLICING



Health camp being held for police personnel of Karkhana police station in Hyderabad on Saturday

# 'Snoring, sleep apnoea signs of hypertension, diabetes'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

City-based ENT specialist Deenadayal said that sleep-related issues like snoring and sleep apnoea are warning signs for hypertension, diabetes, heart and central nervous system ailments that are often ignored.

Speaking on the importance of ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) health, Dr Deenadayal said, "Every 4th person snores, and every 5th person has sleep apnoea. Both these ailments are modern age diseases. Though the prevalence is high, they are ignored, this despite being the underlying cause for serious comorbidities,

like hypertension, diabetes, heart ailments, central nervous system ailments. Besides affecting the quality of life, these two reduce the overall

life span. In fact, treating sleep apnoea at the earliest, right from childhood would make a huge difference to healthy living. DECC is recognised for the treatment of snoring and sleep apnea for its immense expertise and is an acknowledged center for training ENT surgeons."

The doctor spoke during the inauguration of an exclusive ENT care facility at the iconic Shenoy Hospitals, East Marredpally through Dr Deenadayal's ENT Care Centre (DECC) that is set to offer comprehensive ENT diagnosis and care under one roof. Speaking on the occasion Dr Deenadayal said, ENT has tremendous prominence because of the multiple specialties which no other specialty can boast off. "Out of the five senses we have, the

senses of smell, taste and hearing are treated by ENT. Among the treatments the commonest cancer is of head and neck cancers, which is treated by ENT specialists. Among the allergies, nasal allergies are the commonest, which leads to asthma if ignored," he added.

The new centre will perform advanced procedures include anterior skull base surgeries, head and neck surgeries of simple, benign and cancerous, rhinology, endoscopy of parotid and submandibular salivary glands, advance surgeries like Glomus tumor excision and cochlear implants and pituitary surgeries. The hospital officials said that they aim to make our specialized care accessible to more patients and replicate our care module.

# Telangana bags e-governance award 2022

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State's E-Procurement Project has won the SKOCH AWARD GOLD under the eGovernance category. The award was received by Pendyala Srinivas, Joint Director (eGov), ITE&C Department along with N Kalyan Chakradhar Reddy, Managing Director of Vupadhi Techno Services Pvt Ltd (service provider for E-Procurement services) on behalf of ITE&C Department at an event held at India Habitat Center in New Delhi. The award was given by Sameer Kochhar, Chairman of SKOCH Group.

Telangana received the Award of Excellence in State Category - Emerging Technologies for e-Governance



at the 20th Computer Society of India-Special Interest Group (CSI-SIG) awards 2022 on Saturday.

Telangana also bagged appreciation under the project category for the T-chits project. The award ceremony was held at Delhi Technological University, New Delhi. L Rama

Devi, Director of Emerging Technologies Wing, Information Technology, Electronics and Communications Department and Ruchita Projects Head, ET Wing, Information Technology, Electronics and Communications Department received the award on behalf of

the Telangana government. The award for the T-chits project was received by Pavan Adipuram, CEO of Chitmonks.

Expressing pleasure over the award, Telangana IT Minister KT Rama Rao said, "The award conferred to the State for Excellence in the adoption of Emerging Technologies is recognition of our efforts in leveraging technology to provide efficient and advanced services to our citizens. Telangana has adopted a unique approach to achieving our objectives, it's called the "PPP Approach" - Policies, Partnerships, and Projects. It pushes the boundaries of technology adoption in governance, lays a strong foundation for an empowered Telangana where technology is used to serve the common

man."

Speaking of the accolade, Principal Secretary for IT in Telangana Jayesh Ranjan said, "The government of Telangana has consistently taken a leading role in facilitating and promoting the utilization of cutting-edge technologies across various sectors."

"A first-of-its-kind dedicated vertical, emerging technologies (ET) Wing, was set up way back in 2017 to achieve Telangana's vision to drive the growth of deep tech in the country. The Wing has played a vital role in the integration and implementation of eight emerging technologies, notably AI, Blockchain, Drones Cloud etc. within the state. We believe that technology is an enabler that can transform lives," he added.

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The second phase of the Kanti Velugu camps organised by the State government to prevent vision related problems have covered 88,51,164 people so far, reaching 55.79 per cent of the target.

The Health Department has set a target of conducting eye examinations for around one and a half crore people and half of the target has already been achieved in 41 days since its inauguration on January 19. The government appealed to people to continue their support and help them reach the ultimate goal - to make Telangana avoidable blindness-free.

The people who visited the camps expressed happiness over the government's initiative to organise the Kanti Velugu programme. The programme will continue till June 15. There are around 1,500 camps in all the parts of the



State conducting the eye tests. Free reading glasses were distributed to 14.69 lakh people. Vitamin A, D, B complex pills are being distributed to those with infections along with eye drops. Doctors are giving advice and instructions to those who need surgery.

Dr Ubbu Narsimha, a Medical Officer, Veliminedu PHC, Chityala Mandal said, "According to the activity, we are doing eye tests in the villages under PHC. We are tak-

ing steps to avoid any trouble. We are conducting more tests than the target every day. We provide reading glasses immediately to those who need them. Prescription glasses are delivered at their home within a few days of conducting eye test. We are creating awareness for those who need eye surgery. We are appealing that operations should be done in a government hospital."

In another to promote and provide easier healthcare for women, The state government has established Arogya Mahile Kendra which is set to conduct free health camps village-to-village health every Tuesday. These camps conduct basic diagnostic, cancer screening, micronutrient deficiencies, urinary tract infections, PID, PCOS, family planning, menstrual problems, menopause management, sexually transmitted diseases, body weight and more, and provide appropriate treatment to women.

# Cyberabad CP calls for help of experts to curb cybercrimes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Cyberabad Police Commissioner M Stephen Raveendra on Saturday called for the cooperation of cyber experts to curb cybercrimes.

The Society for Cyberabad Security Council in collaboration with the Telangana State Police Command and Control Centre (TSPCCC) on Saturday held an interaction on "Financial and Emerging Frauds in Cyberspace."

The interaction was held as part of the "Thought Leadership Sessions" for the Chief Information Security Officers (CIOs).

Addressing the attendees,

Raveendra said, "The threats posed by cybercriminals are evolving at an alarming rate and police are constantly rising to the occasion to fight these threats. All cybercriminals work in an organised manner and the only way to counter this is to ensure that all good, knowledgeable professionals join hands with police and work together for the benefit of society."

"I congratulate all the CISOs for doing an excellent job of protecting the assets of the organisations and with the same enthusiasm and dedication you should put efforts to help the nation protect the country's assets," he added

# Cholangioscopy centre of training healthcare professionals launched

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A new Cholangioscopy centre of training and excellence was launched at AIG hospitals on Saturday. The hospital has collaborated with leaders of medical device company, Boston Scientific Corporation (NYSE: BSX), for this venture. The Centre is set to provide advanced training to a large number of healthcare professionals in GI endoscopy from every part of India as well as other South Asian countries, like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, among others in the region.

Multiple trainings will be conducted every year with the aim to bridge the gap in knowl-

edge and skills for cholangioscopy and ERCP (Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangio-Pancreatography) procedures, equipping healthcare professionals with the latest technologies to aid better outcomes for patients of biliary issues.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr D Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman, AIG Hospitals said, "It is essential to create a platform for collaborative growth as we work to advance healthcare innovations that benefit everyone, everywhere. By co-creating an ecosystem that will improve the provision of healthcare in India, especially for GI disorders, our objective is to train as many doctors as possible on several



Chairman, AIG Hospitals Dr D Nageshwar Reddy, Mike Jones, from Boston Scientific at AIG hospitals on Saturday

aspects of Cholangioscopy and ERCP that would lead to better

patient care across the entire South-Asian region."

Mike Jones, senior vice president and president, Endoscopy, Boston Scientific said: "We are focused on providing healthcare professionals with access to the latest innovative technologies, professional education programs, and training centres to advance the delivery of patient care. This facility will create a platform for healthcare professionals to learn from industry experts, exchange ideas, and enhance their knowledge and skills."

Technological advancement in medical care has led to the need for the rapid expansion of learning centres for healthcare professionals. The aim of this collaboration is to offer training for doctors and technicians in

the aforementioned clinical therapies and beyond Cholangioscopy is used to identify and address blockages in biliary, liver and pancreatic ducts, such as large, difficult-to-remove bile stones, gallstones and pancreatic duct stones.

Manoj Madhavan, Managing Director, Boston Scientific India added: "India, with its large population and substantial gastroenterological disease burden, needs constant upskilling of healthcare providers so advancements in treatment modalities reach the largest number of patients. This facility, focused on gastroenterological diseases, will be an important step towards that."








INDIA CORNER


### Fresh spell of snowfall, rain brings down mercury in Himachal

Wintery conditions are back in mid and higher hills of Himachal Pradesh as high-altitude tribal areas received another spell of moderate snowfall and mid and lower hills received widespread rains. The local Meteorological (MeT) station has warned of thunderstorms and lightning at isolated places on Saturday and rains in some places from March 25 to 29. Gondla and Keylong in Lahaul and Spiti district received 8.5 cm and 2.6 cm of fresh snow, respectively, while Dalhousie was wettest in the region with 81 mm rains, followed by Naina Devi 32.4 mm, Ghamroor 32.0 mm, Kangra 18.6 mm, Chamba 17 mm, Una 13.4 mm, Chamba 17 mm, Sundernagar 10.9 mm and Shimla 8 mm. Strong icy winds lashed the region and sky remained heavily overcast, causing sharp fall in minimum temperatures which stood two to four notches below normal. Keylong was coldest with a low of minus 0.9 degrees Celsius followed by Kusumseri which recorded a minimum temperature of 1.1 degrees Celsius, Kalpa 2 degrees Celsius, Narkanda 23 degrees Celsius, Dalhousie 2.9 degrees Celsius, Reckongpoee 5.3 degrees Celsius and Shimla 6 degrees Celsius.



### Conman Sukesh writes mushy letter to Jacqueline from jail

Sukesh Chandrashekhar, who is lodged in Mandoli jail here in connection with several frauds, wrote a letter to Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez on his birthday and confessed his love for her. He said that he was missing her on his birthday and referred to her as a "beautiful doll." "My Bomma, I miss you a ton on this day of my birthday, I miss your energy around me, I have no words, but I know your love for me is never ending, is all over me. I know what is in your beautiful heart. I don't need proof and that's all that matters to me, baby. But I must admit, I am missing you, you know how much I love you my botta bomma," he wrote in the letter. The letter further said, "You and your love is the bestest gift which is priceless in my life, you know I am here for you standing by you come what may. Love you my baby, thank you for giving me your heart. I also thank all my supporters and friends for all your wishes on my birthday. I have received hundreds of letters, greetings, I feel blessed, thank you." Chandrashekhar is accused of cheating many people, including high-profile individuals such as former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh's wife Aditi Singh.



### Delhi receives highest single-day rain in March in 3 years: IMD

Delhi received 12.2 mm of rainfall in a 24-hour period ending at 8.30 am on Saturday, the highest in a day in March in three years, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The city's maximum temperature settled at 30.4 degrees Celsius, normal during the season. The Safdarjung observatory, Delhi's primary weather station, recorded 12.2 mm rainfall between 8.30 am on Friday and 8.30 am on Saturday. The air quality of the national capital improved to satisfactory level as the Air Quality Index (AQI) at 6 pm was recorded at 80. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. The city recorded a minimum temperature of 15.3 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, the IMD said. The relative humidity oscillated between 85 per cent and 54 per cent, it added. The weatherman has forecast a partly cloudy sky for Monday and the maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to settle around 31 and 15 degrees Celsius, respectively. Heavy rain lashed parts of the national capital on Friday evening.



# Victory over Left-wing extremism imminent

## Amit Shah lauds CRPF's role in tackling Naxalism

**PNS ■ JAGDALPUR**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the fight against Left-wing extremism (LWE) seems to be in the final stage of victory in the country and the supreme sacrifices made by the CRPF personnel while battling the menace has a big role in it. Speaking at the 84th Raising Day event of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), he said security forces have put up a strong fight against the LWE in the last nine years and achieved success on all fronts.

Highlighting the role of CRPF in the fight against Naxalism, he said the credit of wiping out hindrances in the path of development in Maoist-hit areas goes to the CRPF personnel.

"The fight against Left-wing extremism seems to be in the

fought strongly against LWE in the last nine years and achieved success on all fronts. They have not only attained victory in pushing them (LWE elements) to the back foot, but also facilitated development to reach to tribals..." he said.

Extremists were hindrances in the construction of schools, roads, hospitals and fair price shops and installation of mobile towers. As a home minister I wanted to say the credit to wipe hindrances to these development works in Maoist-hit areas only goes to the CRPF personnel, he added.

Shah said the CRPF has also displayed an example of organisational skill by establishing coordination with the local police and carrying out joint operations against the activities of Naxalites. To check inter-state move-

### Woman made to walk on burning coal

**PNS ■ DURG**

A woman was allegedly made to walk on burning coal and iron nails by her husband's relatives to prove that she did not practice black magic in Chhattisgarh's Durg town, police said on Saturday. The woman, who sustained burns on her legs, was hospitalised after the incident that took place in Kailash Nagar area of the town on March 20, an official said. The police have arrested two women and a man, and detained a minor boy, who claimed to be a tantrik, he said.

Talking to PTI, the victim, Mamta Nishad, a resident of Karidih locality here, claimed that her husband's younger brother, his wife and her elder sister-in-law used to harass her by accusing her of being involved in witchcraft. On the night of March 20, when her husband was away, the trio allegedly took her to a tantrik in Kailash Nagar and asked her to prove that she did not indulge in black magic, she alleged.

# Women-men ratio in legal profession 'absymal': CJI

**PNS ■ MADURAI**

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Saturday flagged the "abysmal" women-to-men ratio in the legal profession and called for ensuring equal opportunities for women, asserting that there was no dearth of young, talented women lawyers.

He was speaking at an event held here to mark the foundation-stone-laying ceremony for the Additional Court Buildings in the District Court campus and the inauguration of the District and Sessions Court and that of the Court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate at Mayiladuthurai. The event was attended by Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, among others. Rijiju touched upon the alleged disagreements between the government and the judiciary and said it didn't mean that there was a confrontation between them.

Stalin requested the CJI to ensure social justice in the appointment of judges to the High Courts and the Supreme



ate equal opportunities for women so that they do not fall by the wayside because of the fact that they undertake multi-fold responsibilities as they progress in life.

"Chambers are sceptical about recruiting young women advocates. The reason for that is not a lack of young talented women," he said. "There is no lack of talented young women."

Stating that there were prominent stereotypes against women that translated into women being denied opportunities, the CJI said, "Firstly, recruiting chambers assume that women would be unable to put in long hours at work because of familial responsibilities. We should all firstly understand that childbearing and childcare is a choice and women should not be punished for taking up that responsibility." A young male lawyer may also choose to be actively involved in childcare and family care. "But as a society we force the responsibility of family care only on the women and then use that very bias against women that we hold, to deny them opportunities," he rued.

### Health as critical agenda as trade: BIMSTEC

**PNS ■ KOLKATA**

Dealing with pandemic-related woes and other public health issues has become a critical agenda for the member states of BIMSTEC over the last two years since the COVID-19 outbreak, a top official of the regional organisation said on Saturday.

Sri Lanka has been identified as the lead country for coordinating and planning on public health matters, he said.

"COVID-19 made us realise that pandemics and health per say is an important agenda, and as a region, we have to come together. "Before COVID-19, we were focusing more on trade, connectivity, energy, electricity and such sectors, but not much on health.

# Arrested official falls to death from 4th floor

**PNS ■ RAJKOT**

A senior official of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) died on Saturday morning after he allegedly jumped off his 4th-floor office here following his arrest in a bribery case, police said on Saturday.

Jawri Mal Bishnoi (44), a joint director of DGFT, was on Friday arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 5 lakh, the official said. The CBI then began searching his office located on the fourth floor of a building. DGFT is a government body responsible for implementing the country's foreign trade policy.

"CBI carried out a search operation at his office throughout the night and was about to finish it in the morning when at

around 9.45 am, the accused suddenly ran towards the window and threw himself out of it," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Sudhir Desai.

Bishnoi sustained serious injuries due to the fall from the fourth floor and was taken to the civil hospital where doctors declared him dead, the police official said.

A case of accidental death was registered at Pradyuman Nagar police station, and further investigation is being carried out, Desai said.

The version of the CBI officers will be taken in this connection, he said. "A group of people protested at the civil hospital (accusing CBI of Bishnoi's death). The police staff present at the hospital provided protection to the CBI officers and brought them to the police station for inquiry," he said.

### Rahul case not linked to Adani episode, stay not sought to cash in on K'tka polls: Prasad

**PNS ■ PATNA**

Senior BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Saturday rebutted the charge that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha because Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "scared" of his questions on the Adani issue.

Talking to reporters here



soon after Gandhi addressed the press in Delhi, Prasad also alleged that the Congress did not seek a stay on the conviction by a Gujarat court so that it could "encash" the episode in Karnataka, where assembly elections are expected in about a month.

He said, "Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's statement confirms that the Congress did not

press into service its famed battery of legal experts with the Karnataka polls in mind. What else can explain their failure to show the alacrity which was for all to see in Pawan Khera's case?"

"We are not here to hold brief for Adani. But Gandhi has sought to mislead the people to link his disqualification with Adani. He has been

disqualified because of conviction in a case that relates to defamatory remarks he made in 2019," added the BJP leader.

The Lok Sabha member from Patna Sahib asserted that Adani Group used to win contracts even when the UPA was in power at the Centre and was doing business in Congress-ruled states such as Rajasthan.

### Maha: 7 buses gutted as high-tension wire snaps

**PNS ■ LATUR**

Seven private buses worth nearly Rs 2 crore were gutted after a high-voltage electricity wire snapped and fell on a garage in Maharashtra's Latur, an official said on Saturday.

No one was injured in the incident that occurred at Sikandarpur chowk in the early hours of Friday, the official said.



on the garage. It engulfed the buses, valued at nearly Rs 2 crore, in no time, the official said.

Firefighters later brought the blaze under control.

State-run power distributor Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) is probing to ascertain what caused the wire to break, while police have registered a case, the official added.



# Passing out parade of 1st batch Agniveers on March 28

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The Passing Out Parade of the first batch of Agniveers is slated to take place at INS Chilka on March 28, the Navy said on Saturday.

Traditionally, Passing Out Parades have been conducted in the morning hours, however, this historic POP is scheduled to be conducted post-sunset, a first of its kind in the Indian armed forces, officials said.

Admiral R Hari Kumar, Chief of the Naval Staff will be the Chief Guest, and the Reviewing Officer of the POP, they said. The POP marks the successful completion of training of close to 2,600 Agniveers, including 273 women Agniveers, undergoing training at Chilka in Odisha. "The Passing Out Parade (POP) of the First batch of Agniveers is scheduled at INS Chilka on March 28," the Navy said in a statement. As part of their transformation to sea warriors, the Agniveers underwent 16 weeks of ab initio training at INS Chilka, the premier sailors' training establishment of the Indian Navy.

The training at INS Chilka encompassed academic, service and outdoor training,

### MEHRAULI KILLING

# 'Last opportunity' to Poonawala's advocate

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

A court here on Saturday provided the last opportunity to Aaftab Amin Poonawala's advocate to respond to the Delhi Police's arguments on charges against him.

Poonawala is accused of strangling his live-in partner Shraddha Walkar and chopping her body into pieces.

Additional Sessions Judge Manisha Khurana Kakkar noted that Poonawala had engaged a new private advocate in place of the legal aid counsel and that the new advocate sought time to respond to the prosecution's arguments on charges.

"...Counsel... seeks adjournment to address arguments on charges. Last opportunity given on the ground that he is engaged recently. It is made clear that no further opportunity will be provided," the judge said.



# Amritpal seen in jacket, trousers in fresh CCTV footage

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

As pro-Khalistan radical preacher Amritpal Singh remained elusive, a new CCTV footage emerged on Saturday purportedly showing him wearing a jacket and trousers and speaking on a mobile phone.

There was no official word from police on the undated footage, which is circulating on social media and is said to be from Patiala. In the footage, the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit chief could be seen holding a bag with his face covered with a white cloth. His key associate Papalpreet Singh could also be seen in the footage. In a second footage from the same spot, Amritpal Singh wearing goggles could be seen walking on the street and speaking on a phone.

The self-styled Sikh preacher continued to be on the run for a week now following the police crackdown against him and his Waris Punjab De outfit. The whereabouts of Amritpal Singh and Papalpreet Singh remain unknown after they were allegedly harboured by a woman at her home in

Shahabad in Haryana's Kurukshetra district on March 19. The woman, Baljit Kaur, was



nabbed on Thursday. She was being questioned by the Punjab Police. A CCTV footage had surfaced on Thursday showing Amritpal Singh wearing a shirt and trouser while holding an umbrella in Haryana's Shahabad in an apparent bid to hide himself from CCTV cameras.

Later, another footage came to fore, stated to be of March 20, in which he is seen again carrying an umbrella and moving on a road opposite Shahabad bus stand. On Friday, the Punjab Police had said that a phone recovered from an aide of Amritpal Singh carries pictures

### Canada watching developments in Punjab

**PNS ■ TORONTO**

Canada is 'very closely' following the developments in Punjab and will continue to address the concerns of the community, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly has said amid Punjab Police's crackdown on radical preacher Amritpal Singh. Joly was answering a question from Indo-Canadian MP Iqbal Singh S. Gaheer in the House of Commons on Thursday. "We are aware of the evolving situation in Punjab, and we are following it very closely. We look forward to a return to a more stable situation," she said. "Canadians can always count

on the Government of Canada to make sure that we will continue to address the concerns of many members of the community," she added. Gaheer said he had heard about the ongoing mass suspension of Internet services in Punjab and asked Joly to update the House about the situation in India. Responding to questions about foreign leaders and parliamentarians commenting on the action against Amritpal Singh, EAM spokesman Arindam Bagchi urged people residing abroad not to believe "inaccurate and motivated narratives" that are being circulated by some elements on social media.

of the flag, emblem and currency of Khalistan and videos of firearms practice by young men allegedly picked for the radical preacher's Anandpur Khalistan Fauz. The incriminating mate-

rial shows the sinister designs of this nascent militia force and the enormous threat they would have become for peace and harmony of Punjab and national security police had said.



# Be vigilant about rate risks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday reviewed the performance of public sector banks (PSBs) on various financial health parameters and their resilience in the wake of the current global financial scenario emanating from the failure of some international banks in the US and Europe.

She urged the banks to remain vigilant about the interest rate risks and regularly undertake stress tests.

During the two hours meeting with MDs and CEOs of PSBs, an open discussion was held on the global scenario amid the failure of the Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank (SB), along with the issues leading to the cri-

## FM reviews performance of PSBs amid stress

sis in Credit Suisse.

The meeting was also attended by Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi and other senior officials, an official statement said.

She also discussed the developing and immediate external global financial stress from both short and long-term perspectives.

During the PSB review meeting, she emphasised that the banks should undertake due diligence and adhere to the regulatory framework by focusing on risk management and diversification of deposits and assets base.

The finance minister under-



lined that PSBs must look at business models closely to identify stress points, including concentration risks and adverse exposures, the statement said, adding that she also exhorted PSBs to use this opportunity to frame detailed

crisis management and communication strategies.

The chiefs of PSBs apprised Sitharaman that they follow the best corporate governance practices, adhere to regulatory norms, ensure prudent liquidity manage-

ment and continue to focus on having robust asset-liability and risk management.

Further, she was also informed by the PSBs that they are vigilant of developments in the global banking sector and are taking all possible steps to safeguard themselves from any potential financial shock.

All the major financial parameters indicate stable and resilient PSBs with robust financial health, it added.

The minister also stressed that PSBs must leverage the full potential of branches opened in International Financial Services Centres in GIFT City Gujarat to identify international opportuni-

ties, including prospects related to Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

She asked banks to take focused measures to attract deposits, given the steps taken by the government to reduce the tax arbitrage in some debt instruments and pivot their strengthened financial position to support the credit needs of the growing economy.

The minister asked banks to focus on credit outreach in states where the credit offtake is lower than the national average, particularly in the north-east and eastern parts of the country, and enhance business presence in new and emerging areas like One District One Product (ODOP), e-NAM and drones.

## UK-India trade has potential to double by 2030, says British Deputy High Commissioner

PNS ■ KOCHI

Notwithstanding the impact of Russia's war with Ukraine, the UK and India are heading towards an era of positive engagement in trade and business relations, with steps underway to promote mutual investments in both the nations, British Deputy High Commissioner in charge of Kerala and Karnataka Chandru Iyer said.

Iyer who is also UK's Deputy Trade Commissioner for South Asia spoke in detail about the trade and investments between the UK and India and said there was potential to double the business by 2030.

He was in the state to take part in various official engage-



ments, including a meeting with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and also in connection with the port of call made by the British Royal Navy's frigate ship, HMS Lancaster, at Kochi.

Calling war a global phenomenon that affects all countries in more ways than one, the British Deputy High Commissioner hailed entre-

preneurs for being enterprising and resilient in the face of adversity.

"If you look at the flow of business or the trade numbers between the UK and India for the period ending Q4 of last year, the number stood at 34 billion British pounds. For the same period ending the year before last, it was around 19 billion pounds.

## Reliance names V Srikanth as new Chief Financial Officer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has appointed Srikanth Venkatachari as Chief Financial Officer effective June 1, according to a stock exchange filing.

He takes over from Alok Agarwal, who has been CFO since 2005, and will now assume the role of senior advisor to company chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani.

Venkatachari, 57, currently is the joint CFO for the company. Agarwal, 65, who joined Reliance in 1993, completed 30 years with the company.

Srikanth, who has been

sharing a part of the responsibilities of the CFO position with Agarwal for the last few years, has been with Reliance for the last 14 years.

He previously worked with the Citi Group for two decades in forex trading and derivatives and eventually became the head of markets.

Agarwal, Chief Financial Officer of the company will assume a new role as Senior Advisor to the Chairman and Managing Director of the company assisting him on a wide range of strategic issues with effect from June 1, 2023, after 30 years of distinguished service," the filing said.

Agarwal was appointed as the CFO of the company in 2005.

## Stocks waver over worries about Deutsche Bank, other banks

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Stocks are wavering on Wall Street Friday amid worries about banks on both sides of the Atlantic.

The S&P 500 was 0.3% higher in afternoon trading after slipping for most of the morning, on pace for its second straight weekly gain.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 73 points, or 0.2%, at 32,179, as of 2:53 p.m. Eastern time, while the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.1%.

Markets have been turbulent on worries that banks are weakening under the pressure of much higher interest rates.

That's led to rising concerns about a possible recession and heavy uncertainty about what the Federal Reserve and other central banks will do with interest rates going forward.

On Friday, much of the focus was on Deutsche Bank, whose stock tumbled 8.5% in Germany. Earlier this month, shares of and faith in Swiss bank Credit Suisse fell so much that regulators brokered a takeover of it by rival UBS.

Credit Suisse faced a relatively unique set of long-standing troubles. But the second- and third-largest U.S. bank failures in history earlier this month have cast a harsher spotlight across the entire banking industry.

# Jio installs 1 lakh towers to roll out 5G network

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio has installed close to 1 lakh telecom towers, nearly 5 times of its nearest competition, to roll out India's fastest and deepest penetration 5G telecom network to provide ultra-high speed internet, according to latest DoT data.

The latest daily status report from Department of Telecommunications' (DoT) National EMF Portal shows Jio has installed 99,897 BTS (base transceiver station)



across 2 frequencies it owns (700 MHz and 3,500 MHz). In comparison, Bharti Airtel has 22,219 BTS.

Additionally, for every base station, Jio has 3 cell sites while Airtel has 2, the March 23 report said.

The more tower and cell sites means faster speed. According to the February 28 report of Ookla, the global leader in network intelligence and connectivity insights, Jio's top median speed is 506 Mbps (megabytes per second) as compared to 268 Mbps of Airtel.

"5G has been in place in India for over four months and already it's having a tremendous impact on the state of mobile in the country," Ookla said in the report.

"Speedtest Intelligence data shows that median download

speeds across India increased by 115 per cent since before the 5G launch, from a 13.87 Mbps median download speed in September 2022 to 29.85 Mbps in January 2023."

5G performance has increased across early 5G adopters in most of the telecom circles, Kolkata achieved the fastest median 5G download speeds in January 2023 at above 500 Mbps.

"Jio experienced a top median 5G download speed of 506.25 Mbps in Kolkata, while Airtel of 268.89 Mbps in Delhi," it said.

## Climate change threatening tea sector globally: ITA

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Leading planters body Indian Tea Association (ITA) said climate change is threatening the industry globally which is resulting in lower yields and rise in production costs.

A spokesman of ITA said climate change is also threatening the long-term viability of tea industry, which is also causing increasing pest infestations making pesticide residue management surfacing as a major challenge. To mitigate this, ITA said that the industry needs to adopt a multi-faceted to address the climate change issue by way of sustainable farming practices and reduction in carbon footprint. In this context, the association maintained the industry involving all the stakeholders to invest in research to come out with mitigating solutions.

There has also been a decline



in rainfall and increase in temperature in the tea cultivating regions for the last several years, ITA said. According to the association, future projections indicate a substantial reduction in suitability in tea cultivation in areas where the crop is grown.

The other major area where work is needed to be done by the industry is that optimisation in the use of chemical fertilisers and greater use of renewable energy. In the latest data compiled by Tea Board, production in January 2023 in the country was 13.43 million kilogramme as against 16.22 million kilogramme in the same month of last calendar year.

## G20 second FWG emphasises on need to manage global inflation

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The second G20 Framework Working Group which met here over the last two days emphasised on the need to step up efforts to manage global inflation and remain vigilant towards emerging financial risks.

The Framework Working Group meeting which began on Friday was chaired by Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran along with the co-chair United Kingdom Chief Economic Advisor to the Treasury, Clare Lombardelli.

Around 87 delegates from G20 member countries, invitees, representatives from international organisations attended the meeting.

## BPCL launches 19 EV fast-charging corridors

PNS ■ KOCHI

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has announced that it has launched 19 EV fast-charging corridors along 15 highways in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

At approximately every 100 km on the corridors, one can find an EV fast-charging station, a top BPCL official said at an event here on Friday. "The fast-charging stations have been installed between 110 fuel stations which have been divided into various electric corridors."

BPCL Executive Director Incharge (Retail) P S Ravi said the company had launched three corridors with 19 fuel stations in Kerala, six corridors with 33 fuel stations in Karnataka and 10 corridors with 58 fuel stations in Tamil



Nadu. "It takes just 30 minutes to charge an EV, giving a driving range of up to 125 km at our fuel stations. Therefore we have maintained a distance of 100 km between two charging stations," Pushp Kumar Nayar, Head of Retail in the South, said at the launch.

Ravi said the fast chargers were

easy to use and could be self-operated without any manual assistance, even though support staff would be available if needed.

"BPCL has digitised the entire EV charger locator, charger operations and transaction process through the HelloBPCL app for an online hassle-free and transparent user experience," Ravi added.

# Share of affordable homes supply across 7 cities slips

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The share of affordable homes -- costing below Rs 40 lakh each -- in the total fresh housing supply across seven major cities dipped to 20 per cent last year from 40 per cent in 2018, according to Anarock data.

Real estate consultant Anarock attributed the fall in the share to various factors, including costlier land, low-profit margin and lack of adequate availability of finance at a cheaper rate.

According to the data, real estate developers launched 3,57,650 units in 2022, of which only 20 per cent were in the affordable homes category, costing below Rs 40 lakh per unit.

During 2018, a total of 1,95,300

units were launched across seven cities and out of that 40 per cent were in the affordable homes category.

The share of the supply of affordable housing in 2019 remained at 40 per cent in the total new launches of 2,36,560 units.

However, the share dipped to 30 per cent in 2020 in the total housing supply of 1,27,960 units.

In the 2021 calendar year, the share of new launches in the affordable homes segment further fell to 26 per cent. As many as 2,36,700 units were launched in 2021 across the seven cities.

The declining trend continued even last year and the share fell to 20 per cent.

"There are several reasons why



affordable housing is in the doldrums today. One, obviously, is land. While developers can easi-

ly recoup their land costs with mid-range and premium housing, affordable housing is another

matter," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said. Stating that profit margins were already wafer-thin in affordable housing projects, Anarock said it has become more difficult to develop budget homes amid a rise in input costs (cement, steel, labour, etc).

Delhi-NCR-based realty firm Signature Global Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal said, "One of the main reasons is that the cost of inputs and land prices have both risen significantly in the past few years, leaving no room for developers to launch projects in this category". Signature Global operates mainly in the affordable housing segment.

Anarock said the current demand is skewed towards apartments priced between Rs 40 lakh

and Rs 1.5 crore. Krisumi Corporation, which is developing a luxury housing project on Dwarka Expressway, Gurugram, MD Mohit Jain said, "We have witnessed a transformation in the luxury real estate market in India over the last few years".

The preferences of home-buyers have evolved from mere opulence and grandeur to sustainable, green and technologically advanced living spaces, he added. "As the luxury real estate market continues to grow, developers must keep pace with the changing demands of the wealthy," Jain said.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Assam govt signs MoU with Flybig to start flight services



In a bid to promote intra-state air connectivity, Assam government on Saturday signed a MoU with Big Charter Private Limited (Flybig) to facilitate air services in the non-Udaan sector. Flybig will operate flights between Guwahati-Dibrugarh-Guwahati and Guwahati-Silchar-Guwahati routes on a daily basis, an official of the company said.

Assam Tourism Development Corporation managing director Kumar Padma Pani Bora and Flybig director Sanjay Natavarlal Mandavia signed the agreement in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. According to the terms of the MoU, the flight operations will be started in line with the Centre's Udaan scheme with the state government operating the flights under viability gap funding. Speaking at the programme Sarma said the number of daily flight services will be enhanced and will add a new dimension to intra-state air connectivity, he services will give assured connectivity and price as it has been decided to keep a tab on the pricing with the maximum price fixed at Rs 4000. The new services will add a new momentum to Mohanbari airport at Dibrugarh and Kumbhirgram airport at Silchar, he said. The state government is also studying the feasibility to replicate the same services in Jorhat, Tezpur and other towns in the state, Sarma said. The chief minister said the intra-state flight services are a part of the budget proposal of the state government, he added.

### Avalon Technologies' Rs 865-cr IPO to kick off on April 3



The Rs 865 crore initial share sale of electronic manufacturing services firm Avalon Technologies will open for public subscription on April 3. The three-day initial public offering (IPO) will close on April 6, and the bidding for anchor investors will open on March 31, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP). The company's Rs 865 crore IPO comprises Rs 320 crore from the fresh issuance of equity shares and Rs 545 crore through an Offer For Sale (OFS) of shares by promoters and existing shareholders. Earlier, it was looking to raise Rs 1,025 crore through the initial public offering. The size of the IPO has been reduced as Avalon completed a total pre-IPO placement of Rs 160 crore, consisting of 80 crore of primary or fresh issuance and 80 crore secondary share sales. In the pre-IPO placement, the company garnered Rs 60 crore each from UNIFI Financial Private Limited and Ashoka India Equity Investment Trust Plc and Rs 40 crore from India Acorn Fund Limited.

Consequently, the net public issue now stands at Rs 865 crore. Proceeds from the fresh issue would be used towards debt payment, funding working capital requirements and general corporate purposes. In January, the company received capital markets regulator Sebi's go-ahead to float the IPO. Founded in 1999, Avalon is an end-to-end electronic manufacturing service solutions provider and counts Kyosan India, Zonar Systems Inc, Collins Aerospace, e-Infochips, The US Malabar Company, Meggitt (Securaplane Technologies Inc) and Systech Corporation as some of its key clients. It has 12 manufacturing units located across the US and India. As of fiscal 2022, its revenue from operations was at Rs 840 crore with an order book worth Rs 1,039 crore as of June 30, 2022. JM Financial, DAM Capital Advisors, IIFL Securities and Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited are the merchant bankers for this IPO.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR :: JOGULAMBA GADWAL FORM - VII As per Section -19 (1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 [Central Act No. 30(2013)] and sub Rule (1) of Rule -25 DECLARATION File No. A2/304/2015. Dt: 03.2023 District Collector, Jogulamba Gadwal Proceeding No. G/605/2022. Dt: 17.03.2023 Dist Gazette No. 07/2023 Where as it appears that total of Ac.0.90 Cts land is required for acquisition in the Notified Village of Dhanur Mandal Jogulamba Gadwal District, for public purpose, namely for providing of Package No. 99(A) Sub Minor 3(RUS) DS of Left Main Canal. Therefore declaration is made for the land measuring Ac. 0.90 Cts in Notified Village of Dhanur Mandal Jogulamba Gadwal District, which is needed for construction of above said project, whose detail description is as following, is proposed for acquisition. SCHEDULE Sl. No. Patta/ Inam/ Wet / Total Name of the Pattedar/ No. of No. PP or Govt Dry Extent to be acquired Name of the employer Cts 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 163 Patta Dry 0.90 1) Kurva Gopel S/o Hanumantha 2) Bojappalla Chinna Venkatasappa 3) S/o Kurva Huseenappa Ailes 4) Bojappalla Huseenappa 5) Bojappalla Venkatasappa 6) S/o Hanumantha 7) Govinda S/o Hanumantha 8) Bojella Venkatasappa 9) S/o Kurva Huseenappa Ailes 10) Bojappalla Huseenappa 11) Beavappa S/o Beavappa 12) Govindhantha Wo C. Thimmappa 13) Bojella Manikyanima 14) Wo Mabanna Total 0.90 This declaration is made after considering the objections from interested persons as provided under section 15 ( Central Act No. 30(2013). As there are No displaced Families/No livelihoods lost due to acquisition R&R Scheme provisions are not applicable. Mines of coal, Iron, stone or other minerals lying under the said land or any particular portion of the said land, extent such parts of the mines and minerals which may be required to be dug or removed or used during the construction phase of the project for the public purpose of which the land being acquired are not need. A plan of the may be inspected in the office of the land acquisition Special Deputy Collector (Land Acquisition), J.L.P. Gadwal on any working day during the working hours. Sd/- Spl. Deputy Sd/- Addl. Collector, Sd/- Dist. Collector, Collector (L.A.) Jogulamba Gadwal Jogulamba Gadwal J.L.P., Gadwal DIFR No.1366/LAPP-Pub/2022-23 <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th> <th data-kind="ghost"></th>									
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**GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**  
e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE  
Nit. No.: 102/SE (KZY) GHMC/TA/2022-2023. Dated: 24-03-2023  
No. of Works: Footpath-1, S/W-1 & VDDC-1, Total Amount: Rs. 415.50  
Lakhs, Bid Submission Start Date: 28/03/2023 @ 03.00 P.M. Bid Submission  
Closing Date: 04/04/2023 @ 03.00 P.M. Address of Officer Cell No.: SE (KZ),  
GHMC, Phone No. 879522144. Further details can be seen at e-procurement  
@ www.sprocurement.gov.in  
R.O.No: 13764-PPCL/ADVT/11/2022-23, Dt. 25.03.2023  
Sd/- Superintending Engineer (KZ)  
Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation



The predator wants  
your silence. It feeds  
their power, entitlement,  
and they want it to feed  
your shame  
— Viola Davis



# ROBOTS & RITUALS

Robots are performing rituals — some devotees fear they’ll replace worshippers, writes HOLLY WALTERS.

It isn’t just artists and teachers who are losing sleep over advances in automation and artificial intelligence. Robots are being brought into Hinduism’s holiest rituals – and not all worshippers are happy about it. In 2017, a technology firm in India introduced a robotic arm to perform “aarti,” a ritual in which a devotee offers an oil lamp to the deity to symbolise the removal of darkness. This particular robot was unveiled at the Ganpati festival, a yearly gathering of millions of people in which an icon of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is taken out in a procession and immersed in the Mula-Mutha river in Pune in central India. Ever since, that robotic aarti arm has inspired several prototypes, a few of which continue to regularly perform the ritual across India today, along with a variety of other religious robots throughout East Asia and South Asia. Robotic rituals even now include an animatronic temple elephant in Kerala on India’s southern coast. Yet this kind of religious robotic usage has led to increasing debates about the use of AI and robotic technology in devotion and worship. Some devotees and priests feel that this represents a new horizon in human innovation that will lead to the betterment of society, while others worry that using robots to replace practitioners is a bad omen for the future. As an anthropologist who specialises in religion, however, I focus less on the theology of robotics and more on what people actually say and do when it comes to their spiritual practices. My current work on religious robots primarily centers on the notion of “divine object-persons,” where otherwise inanimate things are viewed as having a living, conscious essence.

My work also looks at the uneasiness Hindus and Buddhists express about ritual-performing automatons replacing people and whether those automatons actually might make better devotees. **RITUAL AUTOMATION IS NOT NEW** Ritual automation, or at least the idea of robotic spiritual practice, isn’t new in South Asian religions. Historically, this has included anything from special pots that drip water continuously for bathing rituals that Hindus routinely perform for their deity icons, called abhisheka, to wind-powered Buddhist prayer wheels — the kinds often seen in yoga studios and supply stores. While the contemporary version of automated ritual might look like downloading a phone app that chants mantras without the need for any prayer object at all, such as a mala or rosary, these new versions of ritual-performing robots have prompted complicated conversations. Thaneswar Sarmah, a Sanskrit scholar and literary critic, argues that the first Hindu robot appeared in the stories of King Manu, the first king of the human race in Hindu belief. Manu’s mother, Saranyu – herself the daughter of a great architect – built an animate statue to perfectly perform all of her household chores and ritual obligations. Folklorist Adrienne Mayor remarks similarly that religious stories about mechanized icons from Hindu epics, such as the mechanical war chariots of the Hindu engineer god Visvakarman, are often viewed as the progenitors of religious robots today. Furthermore, these stories are sometimes interpreted by modern-day nationalists as evidence that ancient India has previously invented everything from spacecraft to missiles.

“DEBATES OVER USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND ROBOTIC TECHNOLOGY IN DEVOTION AND WORSHIP ARE INCREASING. SOME DEVOTEES AND PRIESTS FEEL THAT THIS REPRESENTS A NEW HORIZON IN HUMAN INNOVATION THAT WILL LEAD TO BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY, WHILE OTHERS WORRY THAT USING ROBOTS TO REPLACE PRACTITIONERS IS A BAD OMEN FOR THE FUTURE.”



**MODERN TRADITIONS OR TRADITIONALLY MODERN?** However, the recent use of AI and robotics in religious practice is leading to concerns among Hindus and Buddhists about the kind of future to which automation could lead. In some instances, the debate among Hindus is about whether automated religion promises the arrival of humanity into a bright, new, technological future or if it is simply evidence of the coming apocalypse. In other cases, there are concerns that the proliferation of robots might lead to greater numbers of people leaving religious practice as temples begin to rely more on automation than on practitioners to care for their deities. Some of these concerns stem from the fact that many religions, both in South Asia and globally, have seen significant decreases in the number of young people willing to dedicate their lives to spiritual education and practice over the past few decades. Furthermore, with many families living in a diaspora scattered across the world, priests or “pandits” are often serving smaller and smaller communities. But if the answer to the problem of fewer ritual specialists is more robots, people still question whether ritual automation will benefit them. They also question the concurrent use of robotic deities to embody and personify the divine, since these icons are programmed by people and therefore reflect the religious views of their engineers. **DOING RIGHT BY RELIGION** Scholars often note that these concerns all tend to reflect one pervasive theme — an underlying anxiety that, somehow, the robots are better at worshipping gods than humans are. They can also raise inner conflicts about the meaning of life and one’s place in the universe. For Hindus and Buddhists, the rise of ritual automation is especially concerning because their traditions emphasise what religion scholars refer to as orthopraxy, where greater importance is placed on correct ethical and liturgical behaviour than on specific beliefs in religious doctrines. In other words, perfecting what you do in terms of your religious practice is viewed as more necessary to spiritual advancement than whatever it is you personally believe. This also means that automated rituals appear on a spectrum that

progresses from human ritual fallibility to robotic ritual perfection. In short, the robot can do your religion better than you can because robots, unlike people, are spiritually incorruptible. This not only makes robots attractive replacements for dwindling priesthoods but also explains their increasing use in everyday contexts: People use them because no one worries about the robot getting it wrong, and they are often better than nothing when the options for ritual performance are limited. **SAVED BY A ROBOT** In the end, turning to a robot for religious restoration in modern Hinduism or Buddhism might seem futuristic, but it belongs very much to the present moment. It tells us that Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions in South Asia are increasingly being imagined as post- or transhuman: deploying technological ingenuity to transcend human weaknesses because robots don’t get tired, forget what they’re supposed to say, fall asleep or leave. More specifically, this means that robotic automation is being used to perfect ritual practices in East Asia and South Asia – especially in India and Japan – beyond what would be possible for a human devotee, by linking impossibly consistent and flawless ritual accomplishment with an idea of better religion. Modern robotics might then feel like a particular kind of cultural paradox, where the best kind of religion is the one that eventually involves no humans at all. But in this circularity of humans creating robots, robots becoming gods, and gods becoming human, we’ve only managed to, once again, re-imagine ourselves. (AP/The Conversation)



# TB: CURABLE & PREVENTABLE

TB, a chronic lung disease, is preventable and largely treatable if detected in time. The lack of awareness, stigma, fear, incomplete TB regimen and difficulties managing adverse drug reactions are killing three persons every minute. A report by THE HEALTH PIONEER.

In India, it is estimated that the five risk factors to which TB cases are mainly attributed are: undernourishment (7,38,000), harmful use of alcohol (2,58,000), smoking (1,10,000), diabetes (1,05,000) and HIV (93,000), as per a report from the Union Health Ministry which was released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World TB Day on March 24.

These risk factors together account for 44 percent of the total estimated incident TB in India which aims to eliminate the infectious disease by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 2030.

The number of tuberculosis (TB) cases being reported, which had reached a trough in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic, has started picking up again but is yet to reach the 2019 level of 176.2 cases per lakh population, as per the 'India TB report 2023'.

It shows that notifications for the disease currently stand at 172 cases per lakh population.

"The year 2022 marks a milestone year for TB surveillance efforts in India, with a record high notification of 24.2 lakh cases; an increase of 13 per cent as compared to 2021," said the report, which is part of the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan — the government's programme to eliminate the disease. The total number of MDR/RR (multidrug-resistant or rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis) TB cases diagnosed in 2022 is 63,801, it said.

"Sustaining the momentum of finding missed TB patients by strengthening case-finding efforts (both passive and active case finding) led to the above achievement under the programme," the report said.

India made tuberculosis a 'notifiable' disease in 2012, making it mandatory for cases to be reported to government authorities. At 26 per cent, India has the highest burden of tuberculosis and the rule was to ensure that no case falls out of the system.

Nikhay Poshan Yojana has been launched to provide nutritional support of Rs 500 a month for the disease.



**A part from lungs, TB can also be detected in other body parts such as lymph nodes, pleura, abdomen, genitourinary tract, skin, joints and bones, or meninges. The problem of detecting TB in these body parts also remains a challenge like in genital organs.**



**DR VIKAS TANDON, Senior Consultant - Spine Surgeon at Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, Delhi**

Of all the TB cases, bone and spine TB—also known as osteoarticular TB—constitute a significant portion, accounting for approximate-

ly 1-2% of all TB cases in the country.

Bone and spine TB occurs when Mycobacterium tuberculosis bacteria infect the bones and joints. The disease primarily affects the spine, causing a condition called Pott's disease. It can also affect the long bones of the limbs, hip, and knee joints. The incidence of bone and spine TB in India is high, primarily due to the country's large population, poor sanitation, and inadequate access to healthcare. The disease is more prevalent in rural areas, where access to medical care is limited, and people often live in crowded and unhygienic conditions.

Treatment of bone and spine TB involves a combination of antibiotics taken over a period of six to nine months, with some patients requiring surgery for the removal of the affected tissue.

The treatment of bone and spine TB poses unique challenges due to the difficul-

ty in delivering antibiotics to the infected area. As a result, doctors often recommend a more extended duration of antibiotic therapy, along with the use of immobilization devices to prevent further damage to the affected bones and joints.

In addition to antibiotic therapy, patients with bone and spine TB may also require nutritional support to promote healing and reduce the risk of further complications. Follow-up care is essential to monitor the patient's response to treatment and identify any adverse reactions to medication. Bone and spine TB remains a significant public health challenge in India. With improved access to healthcare, sanitation, and public education, the incidence of the disease can be reduced. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment remain the key to the successful management of bone and spine TB in India.



**DR JB SHARMA, Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, AIIMS, Delhi**

Tuberculosis can be a major factor in infertility among women. However, since the patients don't show many symptoms, it results in delay in early detection of TB in the uterus or fallopian tubes. If a patient suffers from irregularity in the menstrual cycle—either it gets stopped or doesn't happen as per cycle or is unable to conceive for a long time, then there are chances that she may have TB in the genital organs. Another reason

could be the woman may have had a history of TB in the past, during childhood.

The prime hurdle to tackling TB in the genital organs of women is its complexity in nature and the minimal symptoms that can be detected in the early stages.

Because there is no X-ray for genital organs, it is difficult to detect TB in the first attempt and must rely on three to four parameters for further investigations.

While a woman can get completely cured of TB if that happens in her genital organs but conceiving is not always so easy. Around 50-60% of infertile women detected early with TB have a chance of 30-40% pregnancy, and 25-30% can achieve pregnancy through IVF. If the ovaries are healthy then one can also opt for surrogacy unless TB has damaged those too.

If a woman is detected early and under medication for six months, then she has high chances of conceiving.

reduce the risk that, in the future, the infection will worsen into disease. Occasionally, in a small number of children or teens without proper treatment, the infection does progress. It can cause fever, fatigue, irritability, a persistent cough, weakness, heavy and fast breathing, night sweats, swollen glands, weight loss, and poor growth.

#### How is TB diagnosed?

If your child is at risk for getting TB or having severe disease, they should be tested.

#### Symptoms of TB

Fortunately, most children and adolescents exposed to tuberculosis don't become ill. When the bacteria reach their lungs, the body's immune system attacks the germs and prevents further spread. This symptom-free infection can only be identified by a positive blood test or skin test. However, even if your child has a symptom-free infection, they still must be treated. This is to

coughs the bacteria into the air. These germs are inhaled by the child or teen, who then becomes infected.

Children younger than about 12 years old with TB of the lungs rarely infect other people. This is because young children tend to have very few bacteria in their mucus secretions. Also, their coughs typically do not spread germs as effectively as when adults cough.

#### How does TB spread?

Tuberculosis usually is spread when an infected adult

## Signs and symptoms of TB disease in children

If your child has TB disease, they may have fever, tiredness, sweating at night time and weight loss. If they have TB disease in the lungs, your child will have coughing and chest pain. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the affected area.

Here's what parents should know.

#### Who is at risk for TB infection?

Children and teens at higher risk include those who:

Are living in a household with an adult who has active tuberculosis

Were born in a country that has a high prevalence of TB

Are visiting a country where TB is endemic and who have extended contact with people who live there

Some groups of children have a high risk of severe disease if they become infected. These include:

Children who are younger than 4 years old, or teenagers who have started puberty

Children who have a problem with their immune system (including those who are infected with HIV, or take medications that will decrease their body's immune system)

Tuberculosis usually is spread when an infected adult

# Patients Will Have to Wait for New TB Drug Therapy

On World TB Day on March 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the roll out of a shorter three-month course on preventive treatment towards achieving the goal of TB elimination by 2025, five years before the global goal 2030. But given that the jury is out on the effectiveness of the new regimen on the Indian population, the public launch of the new prevention programme is not likely to happen very soon, finds ARCHANA JYOTI

The proposed new regimen that the Prime Minister was referring to is BPaL (Bedaquiline, Pretomanid and Linezolid) and BPaLM (Bedaquiline, Pretomanid, Linezolid and Moxifloxacin), which includes a maximum of three to four drugs daily. While BPaL is for pre-Extensively-Drug-Resistant (pre-XDR) TB patients, BPaLM is for multidrug-resistant TB patients.

The new treatment which cures highly drug-resistant strains of tuberculosis will drastically shorten the treatment period—from existing 18-to-24 months' regimen to six months.

Clearly, with the treatment involving five pills of the three drugs daily taken over just six months—it makes easier to administer. This compares to between 30 and 40 drugs that multiple-drug resistant TB patients take each day for up to two years.

However, while several countries including South Africa have already launched

the shorter treatment therapy as recommended by the WHO, in India and the Prime Minister has raised hopes of several TB patients in India waiting for the new regimen, actual public launch is expected to happen only in 2025, if experts are to be believed.

"An ongoing ICMR study is evaluating the BPaL regimen in many centres across the country, including my hospital. Preliminary results are expected to be shared in 2024 and by 2025 we will have the final results to be able to roll out this regimen," Dr Surya Kant, Head of the Respiratory Medicine Department at King George's Medical University (KGMU) disclosed to a news agency recently.

Overall, there are 13 clinical trial sites in five states in the country which are conducting the BPaL regimen for pre-Extensively-Drug-Resistant (pre-XDR) patients. A total, 400 patients are enrolled in the trial, which started in October

2021 and is presently in the analysis stage.

A senior official from the Union Health Ministry explained that, "Given the degree of resistance in India, we have to be sure that BPaL results can be sustained and reinfections won't happen. Hence, ICMR is waiting for the trials to be completed."

BPaL was developed by non-for-profit outfit TB Alliance and was first approved in the US in 2019.

"The new WHO guidelines now recognize that the vast majority of patients with drug-resistant TB can be cured with a highly efficacious, safe, and affordable all oral, six-month regimen. The next challenge is for all countries, especially those with high burdens of DR-TB, to rapidly adopt this new standard to make treatment much easier for patients to take and save lives," according to TB Alliance president Mel Spigelman.

"In high TB burden coun-



**Given the degree of resistance in India, we have to be sure that BPaL results can be sustained and reinfections won't happen. Hence, ICMR is waiting for the trials to be completed**

tries including India, the availability of a 6-month all-oral regimen for the treatment of people with drug resistant TB can be a game-changer in ensuring that more patients can start and complete treatment sooner, with better outcomes and lesser side-effects," agreed Dr Animesh Sinha, HIV/TB/Hepatitis Advisor at Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) UK.

DR-TB patients have two issues with the present regimen—adherence to a prolonged course of treatment and multidrug toxicity, often contributing to the poor adherence.

The multiple drug toxicity includes side-effects like hearing loss, peripheral neuropathy, renal problems, depression and suicidal tendencies. Adherence to the treatment with this drug toxicity becomes a huge problem for many patients, as it is a prolonged treatment course.

"Results of the TB PRACTECAL clinical trial

(Pragmatic Clinical Trial for more effective, less toxic MDR-TB treatment regimen) show that the all oral six-month long BPaLM regimen was found to be effective in 89% of the patients (regardless of their HIV status) with rifampicin resistant TB of the lungs, as compared to less than 60% efficacy of the almost 24 month long standard of care regimen. Patients on BPaLM also had fewer side effects as compared to those on standard of care', Sinha added.

"Those who do not have fluoroquinolone resistance can receive BPaLM regimen and those who are later found to have fluoroquinolone resistance, can be given BPaL regimen for the rest of their treatment", pointed out Leena Menhane of MSF Access Campaign.

Toxicity related to Linezolid, one of the medicines used in these regimens, is of concern. But reducing the dosage and duration of linezol-

id has made the regimens more patient friendly and less toxic, without affecting their high efficacy, she added.

India remains one of the top 30 high TB burden countries and one of the 10 countries that have a high burden of all three: TB, HIV-associated TB and MDR-TB and rifampicin-resistant TB. India saw a 13 percent increase in tuberculosis cases in 2022 compared to 2021, according to the annual India TB report released Friday.

TB, a chronic lung disease is preventable and largely treatable if detected and treated in time. However, tuberculosis continues to be the top infectious killer, causing over 1.6 million deaths each year while last year there were more than half a million drug resistant TB cases in the world.

More than 10 million cases are recorded every year. The disease has worsened as it has become increasingly resistant to available medicines.

## NEWSBRIEFS

### LACK OF QUALIFIED WORKFORCE HURDLE TO 'WELLNESS FOR ALL' GOAL

Making healthcare affordable, accessible and available to all can help one attain the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring a healthy life and promoting wellbeing for all age groups, Bhubaneswar Kalita, chairperson of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare said on Wednesday.

"Our main challenge is the lack of a diversified and qualified workforce and we must work towards improving the status quo as the workforce is the soul of our healthcare system," Kalita said at 'Illness To Wellness' Summit, organized by ASSOCHAM, one of the apex trade associations of India. There should also be a focus on improving women's health for the larger interest of families, communities and nations in order to reduce the burden on public healthcare infrastructure and spending, he said.

The key objective of the two-day summit was to initiate a dialogue on promoting and building a 'New India-Healthy India'. Anil Rajput, chairperson, ASSOCHAM National CSR Council, said India is at the cusp of an exciting and transformative time as it aims to reach USD 26 trillion in economic prosperity in its 'Amrit Kaal'.

### 'NAVYA KITS' FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

To help young girls navigate puberty – which is often a time of significant physical and emotional upheaval – Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3) has been working in five schools of Pataudi district, Haryana. The initiative is supported by Open Text, and has been equipping over 1000 adolescent girls with life skills, digital and financial literacy, and information on menstrual health and hygiene.

C3 introduced an unique, first-of-its-kind resource - 'Navya Kits' - to the girls under this intervention. A collection of products and information that would help these young girls understand and manage their periods and dispel myths and taboos surrounding menstruation, these Navya Kits containing six reusable pads (that would last up to 2 years), a hot water bottle for menstrual pain management, a diary with interactive information on menstrual hygiene and taboos, and a detergent bottle that will help the girls wash and re-use their pads. To further supplement wider usage and safe disposal of sanitary napkins, C3 has also begun setting up incinerators in all of the five schools in which the initiative has been running.

Vandana Nair, Lead, Adolescent and Young People Program at C3, "said by providing them with accurate information and resources, we can help these girls understand and manage their menstrual cycle and dispel any myths or taboos surrounding menstruation."

Dr Tanaya Narendra, popularly known as Dr Cuterus, an

Instagram influencer with over a million followers and author, said "The initiative aims to improve the knowledge of adolescents on life skills, health and wellness, emotional and mental wellbeing, and gender, through participatory processes and digital technology. The program will also link adolescents with appropriate services to address their health needs."

### FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND ROBOTIC TRAINING FACILITY FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS AT AIIMS, DELHI SOON

The AIIMS, Delhi, and India Medtronic Pvt Ltd have signed a pact to co-create and develop a robotic training facility at the premier hospital, which had already floated an expression of interest to establish its campus.

Notably, this is the first-of-its-kind robotic training facility for healthcare professionals in a government setup in India and also the first faculty-led procedural training centre in the Asia-Pacific region.

The public medical research university and hospital in New Delhi said that it will train healthcare professionals on robotic-associated minimally invasive surgeries through technical and procedural training.

The implementation of a robotic surgery training facility will enrich the clinical community and enhance patient outcomes by utilizing procedural and evidence-based medical education activities.

### SHORTAGE OF DIALYSIS CENTRES, MANPOWER TAKING TOLL ON KIDNEY PATIENTS: EY-NATHEALTH REPORT

Lack of access to dialysis centres and machines and skilled workforce among others needs is leaving the patients of kidney ailments at the receiving end, according to a report by Ernst & Young (EY) in collaboration with the Healthcare Federation of India (Nathealth).

Nearly 2.2 lakh patients develop ESRD annually in India, leading to an additional dialysis demand of 3.4 crore treatment sessions while there are just around 5,000 existing dialysis centres and 3,340 nephrologists. While there are two major types of complementary treatments – hemodialysis (HD) and peritoneal dialysis (PD), almost 94 per cent of the dialysis patients in India are on HD treatment.

The report has suggested measures such as improving access to standalone dialysis centres through PPP and non-PPP channels, optimising use of human resources by maintaining standards and mitigating other costs, resolving empanelment delays through provision of default deemed approved status and increasing reimbursement rates considering the overall cost of treatment to providers.

For wider adaptability of PD treatment, it favored PPP mode for PD treatment delivery with private sector providers providing consumables and public sector providing care among others.



# Credibility of China as peacekeeper under lens

Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, is facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC), based in The Hague. The primary purpose of the ICC order is to make Putin accountable for the alleged atrocities he committed in the war against Ukraine. The ICC decision is historic in the sense that for the first time, the leader of a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) has been directly indicted.

Meanwhile, the US leadership is simply urging China to influence Putin to stop war crimes in Ukraine. Spokesman of the National Security Council of the White House John Kirby called on Chinese President Xi Jinping to persuade Putin to withdraw troops from Ukraine. Kirby added that a ceasefire would not be sufficient to stop the mindless violence. He said, “We hope President Xi will press President Putin to cease bombing Ukrainian cities, hospitals and schools.” It is significant at this juncture that the sole “superpower” has indicated its willingness to work together with China to prevent a likely Third World War. Although, many say it has already begun with the Russia-Ukraine War.

However, the request has come at a time when Washington has intensified its attack on Chinese expansion, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Washington’s profound distrust in the Chinese leadership as displayed in the recent assertions is counterproductive. In such a situation, the US’s hope that China will be successful in stopping Putin from further war crimes in Ukraine is misplaced. Washington is of the opinion that China will press Russia for a ceasefire. But this will eventually allow the mighty Russian troops to stay inside the occupied territories of Ukraine as long as they want. This will only help Moscow consolidate its position within the sovereign territory of



Volunteers and cynologists search for bodies of killed Ukrainian and Russian soldiers near a damaged Russian tank in the Kharkiv region, Ukraine on March 24 (Roman Chop via AP)

Ukraine.

Further, this again will simply legitimise Putin’s occupation of significant portions of Ukraine. It is clear that such a move will be suicidal and will once again embolden Putin to gather more strength to push Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy into a corner. In fact, this offers the tiring Russian forces, along with the Wagner mercenaries, to plan better and learn from the initial mistakes that Moscow made while trying to occupy the capital city of Kyiv and some other critical pockets. Certainly, a ceasefire will allow Russia to target the Ukrainian soldiers much better and also provide enough legroom for Kyiv to marshal more resources to halt the

advancing Russian Army. Truly, a ceasefire does not lead this bloody war to an end.

That means Beijing pushing Moscow for a ceasefire will simply provide Putin another chance to continue his war game and challenge the US-led NATO alliance in Europe. It is a big question for Xi whether his 12-point agenda will be good enough to persuade Putin to withdraw from the Ukrainian war theatre. It is again doubtful whether China’s new role of peacemaker will be acceptable to the international community at a time when that country is only becoming aggressive both towards its neighbours and many others in the Asia-Pacific.

What does the Chinese

President’s visit to Russia mean at this time? It is equally important and critical for the US and the western world to understand what China wants from the current geopolitical shift. It is certain that once Washington seriously gauges Beijing’s core concerns at the world stage, it would be much easier for its policy makers to handle the Asian dragon. Unless it is taken care of, the misunderstanding and probably gross miscalculation might take place between China and the US, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. For now, it seems, both the nations can easily avoid the historic Thucydides Trap that led Athens and Sparta to a bloody war.

During all these strategic

manoeuvring, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Ukraine and met Zelenskyy. This signalled how the US-led alliance is putting up against the bloody war launched by Putin. Kishida’s tour also demonstrated how strongly the US’s allies are exerting pressure on Russia. Unlike what Russian policy makers thought, this war has made NATO stronger in Europe. Further, this misstep of the Russian strongman has reunited the liberal allies all around the world against authoritarian leaders. In case such a situation emerges even in Asia, most of the American allies will marshal forces against China for sure.

Now it is worth knowing

what Putin is accused of by the ICC? First of all, the Russian strongman is accused of unlawfully deporting and transferring children from various occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. It is widely learnt that it is done by violating the historic Rome Statute of which Russia is a signatory. However, Russia after signing the Statute in 2000 refused to ratify the agreement to become a member. Russia withdrew from the Rome Statute in 2016 when the ICC classified its Crimea annexation as an occupation. Interestingly, Ukraine is not a state party to the Rome Statute. But in the past, Ukraine accepted the jurisdiction of the ICC in response to alleged war crimes that took place in its territory. This treaty is the only legal instrument that finally led to the establishment of the ICC. It was adopted at a diplomatic conference in Rome on July 17, 1998. But it came into force on July 1, 2002. Since then the ICC has been in the limelight while trying to book Ugandan warlord Joseph Rao Kony for forming a children’s army to fight his rebels. His notorious Lord’s Resistance Army, a Christian fundamentalist organisation to mobilise people in his favour.

The ICC rightly underlines that Putin committed war crimes directly, jointly with others and or through others. Further, Putin failed to exercise control over civilian and military subordinates in the war field. The court also highlighted that Putin might have allowed them to carry out these heinous crimes. The ICC has jurisdiction over international crimes such as crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes.

It is also noteworthy that the ICC issued another arrest warrant for the Russian Federation’s Commissioner for Children Rights, named Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, highlighting the same rights violations. According to the ICC, such forced child transfers and deportations from war

zones are a continued process. In fact, the Conflict Observatory brought to light that Moscow has already shifted nearly 6,000 children from Ukraine to Russia since the beginning of the war. However Russian officials strongly deny such claims by various human rights groups. Rather Moscow is of the opinion that it has been making all efforts to secure the safety and welfare of all affected, including the children in the war zones.

But the reality is that it is too difficult to prosecute a war criminal. Earlier President Biden called Putin a “war criminal” pointing at the massacre at Bucha in Ukraine in March 2022. This tragedy was all about the mass murder of civilians and prisoners of war by Russian soldiers while trying to capture the city which is an oblast of the capital city of Kyiv.

So far history shows that it has been too hard to investigate war crimes. Often it becomes a Herculean task to prosecute war criminals as many of them used to be army commanders, generals or state heads in many countries. And the tragedy is that no single international law, document or any such treaty codifies all war crimes. Further, the rules of war have been changed and expanded since the Geneva Conventions of 1949 following the Second World War.

Therefore, now the ball is neither in the court of the ICC nor in the US. Rather, it is a very tricky question of how to prosecute Putin at the ICC. Labelling charges against him are well taken. But Russia’s international backers like China will solidly stand behind Putin to prevent any such attempt to stop any international legal actions against Russia and Putin. The US-led liberal West needs to devise new strategies to corner Russia.

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

Will Xi Jinping’s 12-point agenda be good enough to persuade Putin to withdraw from the Ukrainian war theatre. It is doubtful whether China’s new role of peacemaker will be acceptable to the international community at a time when that country is only becoming aggressive both towards its neighbours and many others in the Asia-Pacific region



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# Xi offers lifeline to Putin to curb US influence

While profiting handsomely from Moscow’s desperate situation, Beijing would be certain to ramp up its support if it sees Russia dangerously weakened. Although Moscow increasingly looks like a junior partner to Beijing, Xi is likely to offer strong backing to Putin in efforts to reshape the world to try to limit US domination, writes VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

It was a revealing moment during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s tightly scripted visit to Moscow: Standing in the doorway of the Grand Kremlin Palace, he told Russian President Vladimir Putin that the two of them were “witnessing the changes that haven’t been seen in more than a century, and we are pushing them together.”

“I agree,” Putin responded. The remarks — caught on a Kremlin camera over a bodyguard’s shoulder — offered a rare glimpse into Xi’s ambitions and his relationship with Russia after more than a year of fighting in Ukraine.

While Moscow increasingly looks like a junior partner to Beijing, Xi is likely to offer a strong lifeline to Putin, his key partner in efforts to reshape the world to try to limit US domination.

Xi’s unusually blunt statement capped more than 10 hours of Kremlin talks, which ended with long declarations filled with florid rhetoric about expanding the “comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation” between Russia and China, pledges to champion a multilateral approach to global affairs and criticism of Washington.

In his concluding statement, Putin hailed the Chinese proposal for a settlement in Ukraine, which the West had all but rejected as a non-starter. The Russian leader also rolled

out a slew of initiatives that cemented his country’s role as a key source of energy and other raw materials for China’s giant economy. He proposed building new energy pipelines, invited the Chinese to fill the niche left after the exodus of Western businesses, and vowed to boost the export of agricultural products to China.

Xi remained tight-lipped, avoiding any firm commitments regarding specific projects and mostly sticking to general and vague rhetoric about expanding ties.

“A lot of things that Vladimir Putin would have liked to happen did not, in fact, happen,” Rana Mitter, professor of Chinese history and politics at Oxford University, told *The Associated Press*. “There was no point at which Xi explicitly said that he accepted Russia’s position on the Ukraine war over the position of Ukraine.”

In fact, there was “a sense that China was reserving for itself the right to step away from a complete endorsement” of the Russian position, Mitter added.

Moscow and Beijing said they would increase contacts between their militaries and stage more joint sea and air patrols and drills, but there wasn’t even the slightest hint from China about helping Russia with weapons, as the US and other Western allies feared. Speaking before a Senate



Chinese President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin as he leaves after their dinner at The Palace of the Facets in Moscow AP

committee, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said China so far has heeded strong US warnings against providing lethal material support for Russia in Ukraine. “We have not seen them cross that — cross that line,” he said.

A top analyst at the US Defense Intelligence Agency

said Beijing wants to be seen as a peacemaker and diplomatic heavyweight.

“So I think China would be very reluctant to be seen openly supporting Russia with lethal aid,” said Doug Wade, head of the DIA’s China mission group. “It would undermine their whole narrative about their

role in the world that they’re trying so hard to sell.”

US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the Putin-Xi relationship as “a marriage of convenience,” in which they pool efforts to challenge US leadership, and the Russians “certainly are the junior part-

ner.” He added at a briefing earlier this week that Putin sees Xi as “a lifeline of sorts” amid the fighting in Ukraine.

Many commentators argued that the summit marked Putin’s failure to win any specific aid from Beijing and cemented Russia’s increasingly subordinate role in the alliance with China.

“China’s domination of Russia is complete,” tweeted Sam Greene, professor in Russian politics at King’s College London. “While there were undoubtedly agreements we are not meant to know about, there is no indication here of a significant increase in military support for Russia — nor even of a willingness on Xi’s part to ramp up diplomatic support. A swing and a miss for Putin.”

After more than a year of fighting in Ukraine and bruising Western sanctions, Russia’s dependence on China has increased significantly. Facing Western restrictions on its oil, gas and other exports, Russia has shifted its energy flows to China and sharply expanded other exports, resulting in a 30 per cent hike in bilateral trade.

Western price caps on Russia’s oil forced Moscow to offer it to China and other customers at a sharp discount, but despite those lower prices, the vast Chinese market ensured a stable flow of oil revenue to the Kremlin’s coffers.

As long as Russia can trade

with China and other Asian states, it will face no danger of running out of money or being forced to concede on the battlefield, said Chris Weafer, CEO of the consulting firm Macro-Advisory.

While profiting handsomely from Moscow’s desperate situation, Beijing would be certain to ramp up its support if it sees Russia dangerously weakened.

“The nightmare scenario for China is that collapse of Russia militarily leads to collapse of the regime and installment of some pro-Western government,” said Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment.

Gabuev argued that Beijing would be unlikely to provide any direct military assistance to Moscow anytime soon simply because it doesn’t feel the pressing need to do so. “Russia is not doing great on the battlefield, but it’s obviously not losing it, so the need to support the Russian military efforts so far is questionable from both sides,” he said.

More than ammunition, tanks and rockets, Russia badly needs China’s help in skirting Western sanctions to maintain the flow of high-tech components for its weapons industries and other economic sectors. Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst, predicted that China could be expected to act more resolutely to help Russia get them.

“Russia doesn’t need weapons from China,” Markov wrote on his messaging app channel. “It needs microchips and components, and they will come.”

Some observers say that while Beijing has been coy about supporting Moscow, it has vital interest in shoring up its ally to avoid being left alone in any potential confrontation with the United States.

Mikhail Korostikov, an expert on Russia-China ties, said in a commentary for the Carnegie Endowment that China has been closely watching Russia’s experience in facing massive Western sanctions. “For Beijing, a close study and partial use of instruments and decisions used by Russia is a reasonable course in a situation when China’s confrontation with the West looks inevitable,” he said.

Korostikov noted that while Moscow’s dependence on Beijing is growing, China’s room for manoeuvring is also shrinking. “There is no alternative to Russia as a partner providing resources that China will critically need in case of an escalation in its confrontation with the West,” he said. “It helps balance the situation and allows Moscow to hope that Beijing will not overuse its newly-acquired economic levers.”

(The writer has covered Russia and other former Soviet nations for The AP since 1992)



# “What can we do?”: Millions in African countries need power

From Zimbabwe, where many must work at night because it's the only time there is power, to Nigeria where collapses of the grid are frequent, the reliable supply of electricity remains elusive across Africa.

The electricity shortages that plague many of Africa's 54 countries are a serious drain on the continent's economic growth, energy experts warn.

In recent years South Africa's power generation has become so inadequate that the continent's most developed economy must cope with rolling power blackouts of eight to 10 hours per day.

Africa's sprawling cities have erratic supplies of electricity but large swaths of the continent's rural areas have no power at all. In 2021, 43 per cent of Africans about 600 million people lacked access to electricity with 590 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the International Energy Agency.

Investments of nearly USD 20 billion are required annually to achieve universal electrification across sub-Saharan Africa, according to World Bank estimates.

Of that figure nearly USD 10 billion is needed annually bring power and keep it on in West and Central Africa.

There are many reasons for Africa's dire delivery of electricity including ageing infrastructure, lack of government oversight and a shortage of skills to maintain the national grids, according to Andrew Lawrence, an energy expert at the Witwatersrand University Business School in Johannesburg.

A historical problem is that many colonial regimes built electrical systems largely reserved for the minority white population and which excluded large parts of the Black population.

Today many African countries rely on state-owned power utilities.

Much attention has focused in the past two years on the Western-funded "Just Energy Transition," in which France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union are offering funds to help poorer countries move from highly polluting coal-fired power generation to renewable, environmentally-friendly sources of power.

Africa as a region should be among the major beneficiaries in order to expand electricity access on the continent and improve the struggling power grids, said Lawrence.

"The transition should target rural access and place at the forefront the electrification of the continent as a whole. This is something that is technically possible," he said.

The Western powers vowed to make USD 8.5 billion available to help South Africa move away from its coal-fired power plants, which produce 80 per cent of the country's power.

As a result of its dependence upon coal, South Africa is among the top 20 highest emitters of planet-warming greenhouse gases in the world and accounts for nearly a third of all of Africa's emissions, according to experts.

South Africa's plan to move away from coal, however, is hampered by its pressing need to produce as much power as possible each day.

The East African nation of Uganda for years has also grappled with power cuts despite massive investment in electricity generation.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has grappled with an inadequate power supply for many years, generating just 4,000 megawatts though the population of more than 210 million people needs 30,000 megawatts, say experts.

The oil-rich but energy-poor West African nation has ramped up investments in the power sector but endemic corruption and mismanagement have resulted in little gains.

In Zimbabwe, electricity shortages that have plagued the country for years have worsened as the state authority that manages Kariba, the country's biggest dam, has limited power generation due to low water levels.

Successive droughts have reduced Lake Kariba's level so much that the Kariba South Hydro Power Station, which provides Zimbabwe with about 70 per cent of its electricity, is currently producing just 300 megawatts, far less than its capacity of 1,050 megawatts.

Zimbabwe's coal-fired power stations that also provide some electricity have become unreliable due to aging infrastructure marked by frequent breakdowns.

The country's solar potential is yet to be fully developed to meaningfully augment supply.

This means that Harare barber Omar Chienda never knows when he'll have the power needed to run his electric clippers.

"What can we do? We just have to wait until electricity is back but most of the time it comes back at night," said Chienda, a 39-year-old father of three. "That means I can't work, my family goes hungry."

In Nigeria's capital city of Abuja, restaurant owner Favour Ben, 29, said she spends a large part of her monthly budget on electricity bills and on petrol for her generator, but adds that she gets only an average of 7 hours of power daily.

"It has been very difficult, especially

after paying your electricity bill and they don't give you light," said Ben. "Most times, I prepare customers' orders but if there is no light (power for a refrigerator), it turns bad the next day (and) I have lost money for that."

Businesses in Nigeria suffer an annual loss of 29 billion as a result of unreliable electricity, the World Bank said, with providers of essential services often struggling to keep their operations afloat on generators.

As delegates gathered in Cape Town this month to discuss Africa's energy challenges, there was a resounding sentiment that drawn-out power shortages on the continent had to be addressed urgently. There was some hope that the Western-funded "Just Energy Transition" would create some opportunities, but many remained skeptical.

Among the biggest critics of efforts to have countries like South Africa to transition quickly from the use of coal to cleaner energy is South Africa's Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy Gwede Mantashe.

He is among those advocating that Africa use all sources available to it to produce adequate power for the continent, including natural gas, solar, wind, hydropower and especially coal.

"Coal will be with us for many years to come. Those who see it as corruption or a road to whatever, they are going to be disappointed for many, many years," said Mantashe.

"Coal is going to outlive many of us."

Recession. Perhaps no treasury secretary has come to the office with Yellen's ample resume, including service as the chair of the Federal Reserve and a lifetime of studying economics and finance. That experience was put to a severe test as she worked to assure multiple constituencies, including financial markets, balky Republicans in Congress and President Joe Biden's White House economic team.

Yellen spent that crucial period two weeks ago assembling Federal Reserve officials; regulators at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Office of the



## Studying continental movement over 'hotspot'

Geoscience.

The hotspot was incredibly strong in its early stages, generating some of eastern Australia's most beloved natural attractions, according to one of the researchers, Al-Tamini Tapu.

"These large volcanoes were active for up to seven million years," Tapu said.

"The volcanoes formed as the continent moved over a stationary hotspot inside the planet, melting the land above it so magma could ooze upward."

"This left a treasure trove of volcanic landmarks in its wake, forming the longest chain of continental 'hotspot' volcanoes

lava outpourings in Tweed volcano, one of the 'shield volcanoes' and a popular tourist spot, may have weakened the hotspot, and caused the younger volcanoes to the south to become smaller and shorter-lived, the researchers said.

Associate Professor Teresa Ubide said that as the magma production waned, the volcanoes became internally more complicated, erupting lavas full of complex crystals.

"As

these cooled down and became more viscous, it became more difficult to generate eruptions, which may have been more explosive.

"We found that the arrival of new, hotter, and gas-rich magma acts like a shaken bottle of fizzy drink, causing a build-up of pressure in the magma, and, eventually, an eruption," said Ubide.

She said Australia's extinct 'hotspot volcanoes' provide a unique laboratory for researchers to investigate processes leading to volcanic eruptions across the globe.

"The effect of erosion over tens of millions of years allows us to access complete sequences of lava that can be difficult to access in more recent volcanoes," Ubide said.

"It then makes it possible to reconstruct the inner structure of the volcanoes, sort of like opening a doll's house, which gives us a much better understanding of hotspot activity globally."

"This is particularly important, given there are many active hotspots on Earth, including in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and in other continents, such as the United States' Yellowstone volcano."

"Volcanoes in these areas produce large volumes of lava and have an important role in the evolution of our planet and atmosphere so having a real-world 'doll's house' to play around in and observe variations with time and magma supply is very helpful," said Ubide.

## Academic text produced by ChatGPT formulaic

Academic style content produced by ChatGPT is relatively formulaic and would be picked up by many existing AI-detection tools, despite being more sophisticated than those produced by previous innovations, according to a new study.

However, the findings should serve as a wake-up call to university staff to think about ways to explain to students and minimise academic dishonesty, researchers from Plymouth University and the University of Plymouth, UK, said.

ChatGPT, a Large Language Machine (LLM) touted as having the potential to revolutionise research and education, has also prompted concerns across the education sector about academic honesty and plagiarism.

To address some of these, this study encouraged ChatGPT to produce content written in an academic style through a series of prompts and questions.

Some of these included "Write an original academic paper, with references, describing the implications of GPT-3 for assessment in higher education", "How can academics prevent students plagiarising using GPT-3" and "Produce several witty and intelligent titles for an academic research paper on the challenges universities face in ChatGPT and plagiarism", the study said.

The text thus generated was pasted into a manuscript and was ordered broadly, following the structure suggested by ChatGPT. Following this, genuine references were inserted throughout, the study published in the journal *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* said.

This process was revealed to readers only in the academic paper's discussion section, written directly by the researchers without the software's input.

Launched in November 2022, ChatGPT is the latest chatbot and artificial intelligence (AI) platform and has the potential to create increasing and exciting opportunities in academics.



## Bank failures and rescue test Yellen's decades of experience

Working against the clock to stop a developing banking crisis, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had until sunset on Sunday, March 12, to come up with a plan to calm the US economy.

She quickly turned to someone who had been through the fire before, and on a much larger scale: Hank Paulson.

Paulson, who ran the Treasury Department during the financial crisis in 2008, counseled immediate government action. "It's really hard to stop or even slow down a bank run. And to do that requires a powerful and quick government response," Paulson said, recounting what he told Yellen.

A bank run on Silicon Valley Bank had begun earlier in the week. Regulators took it over by that Friday afternoon. The move panicked shareholders and depositors, stirring stark reminders of earlier failures that triggered the Great

Comptroller of the Currency; lawmakers, including congressional leaders on banking Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C.; and Wall Street executives such as Jamie Dimon, the chief executive of J.P. Morgan & Chase.

But few could relate as well as Paulson, who had asked Congress for authority to buy up 700 billion in distressed mortgage-related assets from private firms to save the larger U.S. financial system.

His words to Yellen as she navigated the bank collapses: "We are fighting for the survival of our regional banks."

The Fed defines regional banks as those with total assets between 10 billion to 100 billion, not as small as community banks and not as large as national ones. Regional and community banking organizations constitute the largest number of banking institutions supervised by the Federal Reserve.

## Brain's 'internal compass' could have answers to why people with Alzheimer's feel lost

Scientists have found that implementing a 'reset button' inside mice's brains allows for a rapid reorientation of its internal compass, which helps the animals out when exposed to confusing situations.

The study, from McGill University, Canada, has implications for human beings as well, especially regarding mental processes those that could go wrong with neurodegenerative diseases like dementia, that leave people feeling lost and confused, the researchers said.

They termed this phenomenon as 'network gain', that allowed the brain's internal compass to reorient after the mice were disoriented.

To understand how visual information impacts the brain's internal compass, the researchers exposed mice to a disorienting virtual world while recording the brain's neural activity, the researchers said.

They said that having the means to record brain activity allowed them to explore how the Head-Direction cells, making up the brain's internal compass, support its ability to re-orient in changing surroundings.

While the mice were exposed to unnatural visual experiences, the researchers say that the settings are relevant to humans in the face of

spread of virtual reality technology.

These findings "may eventually explain how virtual reality systems can easily take control over our sense of orientation," said co-lead researcher Zaki Ajabi.

The researchers also expect the findings to play a significant role in helping with early diagnosis of and assessment of treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

"One of the first self-reported cognitive symptoms of Alzheimer's is that people become disoriented and lost, even in familiar settings," said Mark Brandon, co-lead researcher and associate professor at the university.

The findings are published in the journal *Nature*.