

Does Rahul know about struggles faced by Savarkar?

Prior to the 2019 General Election, the Congress had resorted to mudslinging against the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleging large-scale irregularities in the purchase of Rafale fighter jets.

Describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a 'thief', the Congress had abused Modi with slogans such as 'Chowkidar chor hain'. It had termed GST as 'Gabbar Singh Tax' and called the Modi government as 'Suit-boot sarcar'. Ghulam Nabi Azad, then a senior Congress leader, had advised Rahul at internal meetings against calling a leader of the stature of the Prime Minister as 'chor'. For this, Ghulam Nabi Azad was insulted and sidelined.

In 2018, the Supreme Court gave a clean chit to the Modi government, saying that no irregularities had taken place in the Rafale fighter jets deal with France. In the General Election that followed, people defeated the Congress and Congress nominee in the tra-

ditional stronghold of Amethi was drubbed by BJP nominee Smriti Irani.

Today, a lot of developmental activity is going on across the country. The development of highways, ports, airports; construction of bridges, corridors; introduction of superfast trains, and excavation of tunnels are going on at jet speed.

an-Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile seeding has helped millions of people access financial services and benefits of welfare schemes. The Modi government took several measures to limit the adverse impact of Covid-19 on the economy. In all, 115 unicorns have achieved a total turnover of more than \$ 350 billion. In respect of improving the purchasing power of people, India ranks third -- after the USA and China. On the exchange rate front, India ranks number five.

At an election rally, the Prime Minister recalled how the Congress leaders had

At an election rally, the Prime Minister recalled how the Congress leaders had heaped abuses on him, calling him an insect in drainage, mad dog, Bhasmasura, Bandar Virus, Dawood Ibrahim, Hitler, Ravana, Duryodhana, bloodsucker etc., and wondered how many more such abuses were there in the 'love dictionary' of Congress leaders.

heaped abuses on him, calling him an insect in drainage, mad dog, Bhasmasura, Bandar Virus, Dawood Ibrahim, Hitler, Ravana, Duryodhana, bloodsucker etc., and wondered how many more such abuses were there in the 'love dictionary' of Congress leaders. The BJP brought out in June 2022 a 17-page document highlighting the abuses heaped on PM Modi on 80 occasions. Still, neither Modi nor BJP leaders filed any defamation case on behalf of

the BJP or on behalf of the Union Government.

How can Rahul Gandhi defame Narendra Modi? Responding to a defamation petition filed by an MLA whose surname is Modi in court, the court gave its verdict imposing a two-year jail term on Rahul Gandhi, who had abused people having surname of Modi as chor.

In 2019, Supreme Court judge had admonished Rahul saying that criticizing PM Narendra Modi as 'Chowkidar



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

serious view of Rahul abusing all those who had the surname of Modi. Since Rahul was a sitting MP, his comments were taken seriously. If Rahul Gandhi were let off with a mild punishment, it would have sent a wrong message to people. The objective of the defamation case will not be fulfilled, the Surat court remarked. Rahul should have admitted his guilt before the Surat court. Instead, he proclaimed before the Surat court that he did not commit any mistake by abusing people having the surname of Modi.

Later, addressing the media, Rahul Gandhi said that he was not Vir Savarkar to tender apology. In fact, the then British government had punished Savarkar handing him a punishment for 50 years. He was put in cellular jail for 14 years, confined to a dingy room. He faced torture at the hands of the British. Political

prisoners like Savarkar were used in place of animals to extract wood press oil.

As part of a political strategy, Savarkar, along with several Congress and Leftist political prisoners, signed on a template document urging the British to grant him freedom. Still Congress leaders and Rahul Gandhi have been slinging mud on Vir Savarkar, stating that Savarkar had apologized to the British. How atrocious!

Does Rahul know about the struggles faced by people like Savarkar to keep the country united? Did Rahul experience the difficulties that Savarkar had undergone? The Congress' ally - Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena, severely condemned Rahul's remarks. What is damaging more is that Rahul and Congress leaders are now linking the

punishment awarded by the Surat court to Rahul's remarks against Adani.

In the wake of the judgment passed by the Surat court, Lok Sabha Speaker, as per rules, took action against Rahul Gandhi.

There is no link whatsoever between the action taken by the Speaker and the remarks passed by Congress leaders against Adani. The Lok Sabha has disqualified many MPs. The only objective of several people with criminal record rallying behind Congress is to deflect public attention from developmental activities of the Modi government.

The law would take its course while dealing with people with criminal backgrounds. The forthcoming elections would see the emergence of Modi-led BJP victorious with a thumping majority. It is high-time Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders spoke in a cultured manner in a democratic country like India.

BJP is 'Balatkar Justification Party,' says KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Industries Minister KT Rama Rao said that the BJP is "Balatkaar Justification Party." He was responding to a tweet on Bilkis Bano rapists sharing the stage with BJP representatives.

"Welcome to Amrit Kaal. Balatkaar Justification Party and the brazen embrace of rapists is a true reflection of their mind," KTR said.

He responded to a tweet of Y. Sathish Reddy which read, "First they garlanded and celebrated the release of Bilkis Bano convicts. Now they are seen sharing the stage with BJP's elected representatives."

KTR blasts Amit over Hyd Liberation Day remarks

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao hit back at Union Home Minister Amit Shah's Sunday remarks in Karnataka about 'Hyderabad Liberation Day'.

KTR reminded Amit that September 17 was celebrated by the Telangana Government officially as 'National Integration Day' as Hyderabad state was integrated into the Indian Union on that day in 1948. KTR tweeted that Amit's blatant misrepresentation is unbecoming of a Union Home Minister.

"Some news clips for your ref-

erence," wrote KTR along with the posts of some newspaper clippings about the celebration of National Integration Day.

"To those who ask why can't we call it Liberation Day? Why do we celebrate August 15 as Independence Day and not as Liberation Day? What should matter is respectful commemoration of the sacrifices and struggles against oppressors, be it the British or the Nizam," KTR tweeted.

"Stop being a prisoner of the past. Become the architect of your future," he added.

During his visit to Karnataka's Bidar district on Sunday, Amit



had targeted the BRS government of Telangana for hesitating to celebrate Hyderabad Liberation Day.

BRS joins Cong, oppn MPs protest over Adani issue, Rahul's disqualification

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Wearing black clothes, BRS along with Congress and several opposition MPs on Monday took out a march from parliament to Vijay Chowk to protest against the government over the Adani issue and Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha.

The protesters, including Congress MP Sonia Gandhi and party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, gathered near the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the Parliament complex and raised slogans against the government.

Holding a huge "Satyamev Jayate" banner and placards with 'save democracy' written on them, the MPs proceeded towards Vijay Chowk where they staged a sit-in.

"How has Adani's wealth multiplied so much in the last few years. When you are going to foreign countries how many



times have you taken the industrialist with you. The PM has not been able to give answers to questions raised against Adani," Kharge told reporters at Vijay Chowk.

"We want a JPC on the Adani issue. Why is the government not agreeing to this? Why are you scared of a JPC

probe... it means 'dal mein kuchh kala hai' (something is wrong)," he said.

The opposition has been seeking a joint parliamentary committee probe into the allegations of corporate fraud and stock price manipulations against the Adani Group.

Kharge also raised the issue

of Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as MP after a Surat court convicted and sentenced him in a 2019 criminal defamation case.

"You want to defame Rahul Gandhi that is why you transferred the case to Gujarat even as the comments were made in Kolar in Karnataka. Today is a black day for democracy," Kharge said.

Kharge said opposition MPs were dressed in black as the prime minister is "finishing" democracy.

Trinamool Congress, which has so far stayed away from opposition protests, joined the sit-in on Monday.

Earlier, MPs of various opposition parties, including Congress, TMC, BRS, and SP, met at the Parliament complex to discuss a strategy to take forward the Adani issue as well as Rahul Gandhi's disqualification matter in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha.

Atmeeya...

Continued from page 1

KTR said that the whole point of holding the Sammelanams was to pacify leaders whose concerns were not addressed.

"Sammelanams are important and have to be completed by April 27. We should meet all our members. Some of our members may be angry over small issues like not meeting them or accepting their phone calls. Such issues should be instantly solved. Sit down and talk to the people at the Sammelanams. Pacifying our leaders is the main aim of Sammelanams," KTR said.

"I request our MLAs to organise a Sammelanam for every 10 villages and in cities. It is not a meeting or a speech. There should be 3 or 4 meetings with 1000-2000 people in all constituencies. Don't do it for the sake of doing it. If you don't want to do it, don't. Every day the CM is getting reports on how many attended each meeting. If meetings are not held properly, the CM will call.

BJP alleges job scam in SCCL, panel to tour varsities

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP Task Force Committee on the TSPSC leakage issue said that there were irregularities in Singareni Collieries Company Limited's (SCCL) recruitments too.

The Task Force said that it will tour universities on the TSPSC leakage issue and will examine all appointments that took place during KCR's rule.

In a meeting held on Monday at the BJP state office, the Committee decided to col-

lect full information on the irregularities that took place in filling up SCCL posts.

The Task Force Committee also decided to tour universities to take the opinion of students and candidates who had appeared for TSPSC exams.

The Task Force meeting was held under the chairmanship of former TSPSC member Vittal.

The other members, Boora Narsaiah Goud, Marri Shashidhar Reddy, Krishna Prasad and Karuna Gopal attended the meeting. BJP State

General Secretary Dugyala Pradeep Kumar and SC Morcha Secretary S. Kumar gave their views online.

The meeting decided to collect full information on the TSPSC leakage. The meeting also decided to concentrate on the irregularities that took place under KCR's rule and to focus on SCCL appointments as many allegations were coming in.

The Committee will collect full evidence, prepare a report and will fight legally with them.

TSPSC leak intended to help people connected to KCR's family: Rajgopal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Senior BJP leader Komatireddy Rajgopal Reddy said that the TSPSC leak was engineered to help people connected to KCR's family.

Rajgopal demanded that KCR and KTR, who are stating that they have no links with the leak, to resign as they are not capable to conduct exams. He made it clear that people will not keep quiet if persons responsible for conducting TSPSC exams say that they have no connection with the leak.

Participating in the 24th death anniversary of Gundagoni Maisaiah, who died in a Naxal attack, Rajgopal made it clear that government heads have to take responsibility for the TSPSC leak.

Lakhs of unemployed youth who are undergoing coaching by keeping their families at their native places and taking loans to pay huge fees are subjected to injustice by the leak.

Stating that they have no confidence in the SIT investigation, Rajgopal demanded that the government should order a sitting HC Judge to probe the leak.

He said that he had already revealed about BRS MLC Kavitha and her deals. He recalled that he had stated during the Munugode by-poll that Kavitha will soon play Bathukamma in Bihar jail. He said that was confident that Central agencies would not let go of those who looted Telangana.

He said the BJP will strive day and night to free Telangana from the KCR family.

Sanjay asks KCR to solve problems of electricity staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP President Bandi Sanjay Kumar sent a letter to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao asking him to solve the problems of artisans and employees of the electricity department immediately. He demanded KCR to provide GFP to employees appointed between 1999 and 2004.

He said that the BRS government has been adopting a negligent attitude towards employees regarding solving GFP and PRC and that the BRS government has been taking government employees lightly from the beginning.

The DA to be given to government employees and RTC workers is still pending, he said.

There is a response from the government on the new PRC, he said. He demanded the government hold talks with the employees and artisans on incentives, PRC and GFP.

KTR pays back Bandi Sanjay in...

Continued from page 1

Giving another example, KTC continued: "In Tirupathi's hometown Potharam, three appeared for Group-1 examination and none of them qualified. In Mallya mandal centre, only one qualified... In RajannaSiricilla district, 4,205 people applied and

3,254 appeared for the exam. In all, 250 people got marks between 23-90. No one crossed 100 marks. Where did I leak the paper?"

In stark contrast, KTR pointed out, 13 papers were leaked over the past eight years in the Prime Minister's home state of Gujarat. He then

remarked: "Has any Minister resigned in Gujarat? Has the Chief Minister resigned? Has any officer been fired? And how can you ask us to resign here? Why should the Minister resign here? Bandi Sanjay says to pay Rs.1 lakh for each aspirant. If it is not our money, they can talk anything".

No relief for Kavitha

Continued from page 1

On March 11, the 44-year-old BRS leader deposed before the ED to record her statement and was summoned again on March 16 for questioning. She was quizzed for about 10 hours on March 21, her third time of deposition before the agency.

The BRS leader has denied all allegations against her.

During her questioning by the ED, Kavitha was confronted with statements made

by Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramachandra Pillai, who has been arrested in the case, and a few others allegedly involved in the case, according to official sources.

Kavitha's statement was recorded under the PMLA.

Pillai was arrested by the ED earlier and he has moved a city court accusing the ED of forging his statements.

The ED had claimed that Pillai 'represented the south group', an alleged liquor cartel linked to Kavitha and

others that paid kickbacks amounting to about Rs 100 crore to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to gain a larger share of the market in the national capital under the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy for 2020-21.

In Pillai's remand papers, the agency also alleged that he "represented the benami investments" of Kavitha, who has also been questioned by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with the case.

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Soil testing starts for Airport Metro project

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Soil testing has commenced for determining the soil bearing capacity for Hyderabad Airport Metro project, said Hyderabad Airport Metro (HAML) MD, NVS Reddy.

He announced that soil testing will be done for about two months for 100 Metro pillar locations starting from IKEA and going up to Shamshabad International Airport. Soil testing will be done by taking borehole soil samples up to a depth of about 40 feet from the road surface at each location. Soil-bearing capacity will be determined through both in-situ tests and lab tests of the soil samples.

Indicating that a detailed soil investigation is required for the design of foundations, NVS Reddy has stated that the results will also determine other aspects like the type of foundation i.e., open foundation or pile foundation, required depth of the foundation, allowable bearing pressure, etc. Further, these results



will also guide the bidders to assess their competitive rates, as it would give them a fair idea about the soil condition.

The soil testing exercise which will be completed in two months is a parallel process to the tender preparation and

other pre-construction activities and it is being supervised by HAML engineering team led by Chief Project Manager B Anand Mohan and Superintendent Engineer Y Sayapa Reddy.

All precautions, including

proper barricading of the soil investigation locations, information about the presence of underground utilities, traffic management etc, are being coordinated with the utilities departments and Traffic Police, added NVS Reddy.

CP warns against provocative songs ahead of Rama Navami

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Commissioner of Police CV Anand on Monday warned against provocative songs during processions conducted as part of Rama Navami and other festivals.

Anand addressed an inter-departmental meeting ahead of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti. He emphasised upon streamlining the coordination based on the feedback collected following last year's processions. The Commissioner also highlighted the key issues that hindered procession movement last year and appealed to the organisers to amend this year. Following the meeting, Anand inspected the 6.8 km procession route. The meeting was attended by GHMC Commissioner Lokesh Kumar and Sri Ramanavami Utsava Samithi members. Suspended Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Raja Singh is set to lead the Shobha Yatra on March 30. The procession, which is scheduled to begin at 10:11 am, will start from the Akashpuri Hanuman temple located at Mangala Haat Market Road in the city.

GHMC asks businessmen to get fire safety certificates

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is taking special measures to prevent fire accidents in the city and asked small businessmen to obtain a fire mitigation or safety certificate for buildings with an area of about 100 square meters starting from Monday.

Small shop owners or those who rent and do business in plinth area of less than 100 square meters or more can get Fire Mitigation Certificate if they apply online to prevent fire accidents. This certificate will be issued online.

The process or procedure for businessmen to apply online is first click [www.ghmc.gov.in](https://firesafety.ghmc.gov.in) website and select fire mitigation/safety certificate or this link https://firesafety.ghmc.gov.in/Login/Citizen_login.

After logging in to the website/link, they have to enter their mobile number and enter the correct OTP. Select the empanelled agency of their choice from the list of fire extinguisher agencies. In case the applicant has a Tax



The process or procedure for businessmen to apply online is first click [www.ghmc.gov.in](https://firesafety.ghmc.gov.in) website and select fire mitigation/safety certificate or this link https://firesafety.ghmc.gov.in/Login/Citizen_login

House Index Number (TIN), the empanelled agency should confirm their selection along with the TIN number.

If there is no TIN number, after selecting the shop (establishment), address and circle or zone, the empanelled agency should select and confirm. After they have selected the empanelled agency, the agency will come to their

shop and do the fitting of the fire extinguisher and then the agency will enter the fitting on the website.

Further fire mitigation, safety certificates will be generated online. After that they can check their application status report. The generated safety certificate should be downloaded and displayed in the shop.



PM Modi to inaugurate Vande Bharat to Tirupati on April 8

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to inaugurate Vande Bharat train from Secunderabad to Tirupati on April 8. The schedule also added two other items, foundation stone for Secunderabad station redevelopment works and one doubling and electrification lane.

The sources said that official confirmation is pending from the Prime Minister's Office but the oral information from the Railway Ministry is that PM Modi is likely to visit Secunderabad and inaugurate the Vande Bharat 2 train. "PM Modi is expected, if not Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

will be there like the last time when the PM virtually inaugurated the train 1.

Another work is laying foundation stone for Secunderabad station redevelopment purposes and the third programme is to the completed doubling and electrification from Secunderabad to Mahbubnagar. Most likely, the PM will do dedicated works from the single stage of Secunderabad."

The estimated Rs 700 crore Vande Bharat Express being introduced between Secunderabad and Tirupati by the Indian Railways will be a semi-high-speed train with modern facilities. It is likely to be operated via Bibinagar and Guntur.

1.21 lakh street vendors get bank linkages

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has sanctioned Rs 242.62 crore (Rs 20,000 per vendor) to 1,21,672 street vendors in the second installment of disbursement of loans.

Telangana also ranked first in India in disbursement of loans under the 2nd installment. In the category of cities with less than one lakh population, nine towns from Telangana state achieved top 10 places in the country namely Sircilla, Siddipet, Nirmal, Kamareddy, Bodhan, Zaheerabad, Mancheryal, Palvancha, Sangareddy and Amroor.

In the category of mega

cities having a population of over 40 lakh population, GHMC ranked second in the country. The Telangana government has provided bank linkages of Rs 2,083 crore to 26,016 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) above the target of Rs 1,745 crore for 2022-23.

In the previous financial year, 33,324 SHGs were provided bank linkages of Rs 2,429 crore. In all, 18,02,284 women are registered with 1,77,503 SHGs in 143 Municipal Corporations, including Cantonment.

As part of the Patanna Pragathi programme, 618 vending zones have been identified and 2,676 sheds have been sanctioned. A survey by

the state government revealed that 4.24 per cent of the urban population which is 6,22,476 people, are found to be street vendors. As part of the programme's first installment, each of the identified vendors were provided a grant of Rs 10,000.

Telangana ranked first across India in achieving 100 per cent distribution of first installment of loans. Telangana has disbursed the loan amount of Rs 351.46 crore to 3,51,467 (103%) as against the target of 3,40,000 street vendors.

The government would provide loans to 2,214 people in the third installment (Rs 50,000 per street vendor) to further strengthen the street

vendors financially. Street vendors in Telangana also ranked top in loan recovery and digital payments.

Telangana street vendors received Rs 4.50 crore, out of Rs 23 crore cash incentive received across the country. They also got Rs 9.26 crore out of the total interest subsidy of Rs 66.56 crore received across the country.

Telangana government is developing 618 street vending zones with adequate infrastructure under Pattana Pragati across the state. The vending zones are playing the role of facility centres for local consumers and street vendors and also ease vehicular traffic problems.

13th regional ESIC meeting conducted at ESI hospital

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 13th Regional Board Meeting of ESIC was held regarding developmental works related to ESI hospital of Nacharam. Minister for Labour Malla Reddy has chaired the meeting and reviewed the works of CT and MRI facilities.

It was also discussed that a meeting will be held and a suitable decision will be taken on the arrangement of facilities such as lifts, fire-fighting



equipment, power-back-up, canteen service, water pump house repair, electrical, mechanical and structural works.

In Khammam, a new dispensary-cum-branch office (DCBO) will be established soon.

The Collector of Rangareddy was asked to take over the 100-bedded hospital of Shamshabad. The minister also asked ESIC officials to sanction the pending amount for developmental works.

TSRTC launches Lahari buses with modern facilities

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) is bringing new buses with modern features. Recently, 756 luxury buses have been purchased and they are getting good response from the people, said Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar on Monday, while flagging off the newly launched Lahari AC sleeper buses.

Ajay Kumar said that public transport is well received and people have a lot of confidence in TSRTC buses making them reach their destination safely. The management is making innovative ideas and taking bold decisions to make the company profitable. Every



day, on an average 30 lakh people are facing a lot of difficulty in reaching their destinations safely. Currently, the occupancy ratio is 69 per cent and the staff has to work hard to increase it to 75 per cent in the future. In cities like Hyderabad, it is suggested to connect metro to TSRTC buses to attract passengers, he added.

TSRTC Chairman and MLA Bajireddy Govardhan said that

better facilities have been provided to the passengers in AC sleeper buses which are being made available for the first time. He added that the 12-meter-long AC sleeper buses have a capacity of 30 berths with lower 15 and upper 15. Free Wi-Fi facility is also available in these buses.

A total of 630 super luxury buses and 130 deluxe buses have already been made available for the convenience of passengers.

The AC sleeper buses are being introduced for those going to distant places and 100 more AC sleeper buses will be started soon. Electric vehicles are being made available which are conducive to the environment.

Two held for selling drugs; ganja seized

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Special Operations Team of the Rajendranagar and Mailaredevpally police on Monday arrested two persons for selling drugs. Ganja, hash oil and weed were seized from them.

The accused were identified as Golli Kumara Swamy (20), a labourer; Jonna Swamy (20), a fisherman, both from Andhra Pradesh. The supplier identified as Laxman Rao is absconding.

Golli and Swamy were classmates at the ITI in Narsipatnam. However, they dropped out of college and began working as labourers due to financial issues.

The duo eventually decided to sell drugs in order to make money. They were held by the

Andhra Pradesh police while transporting 180 kg dry ganja to Tamil Nadu in June 2022.

After spending nine months in Rajahmundry jail, Golli and Swamy were released in February this year.

Following their release, they contacted Laxman, who previously transported ganja and weed to Hyderabad. He entrusted the duo with supplying drugs in Hyderabad. Based on Laxman's instruction, Golli and Swamy were heading to Hyderabad with the drugs when they were intercepted upon reaching the city. The police seized 28 kgs of dry ganja, three liters of hash oil and weed and two mobile phones from the accused, all worth Rs 10, 00,000.

Toddler killed as van runs over him

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 16-month-old toddler was killed on Monday after a Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) garbage-collecting van ran over him in Krishna Nagar Colony in Moula-Ali, Malkajigiri.

The incident was captured on CCTV cameras which shows the child being crushed under the vehicle.

The victim identified as Mohammed Rajak Ahmed Khadri, was playing outside his house when the GHMC van arrived in the area for garbage collection. The van driver, Mohammed Jeeshan, was reversing the vehicle when the child got scared and ran towards his house. While running back, the child was hit by the van after which the back tyre ran over him. Rajak was immediately rushed to a

nearby hospital and upon arrival the doctors declared him dead.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, B Ravi Kumar, Station House Officer of Malkajigiri police station said, "The parents of the child have filed a complaint that the driver's negligence is the cause for the death of their child. We have registered a case against the driver and investigation is underway."

IL receives regulatory approval for Measles-Rubella vaccine

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL) on Monday announced that it has secured approval from the Drugs Controller General of India and the State Drug Control Administration for manufacturing of Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccine.

It is a result of the Indo-Vietnam partnership, where IIL partnered with the Centre for Research and Production of Vaccines and Biologicals, also called Polyvac, Vietnam.

Measles causes severe complications, including pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and even death.

It is caused by a virus dwelling in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person and spreads through breathing, coughing and sneezing.

There is no specific antiviral drug available to treat the disease. One can prevent Measles through vaccination.

The measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine is a safe and effective method to protect people from diseases. Measles kills nearly 50,000 children every year in India.

As there is not enough evidence to suggest that mumps is a disease of public health significance, MR vaccine is being used instead of MMR vaccine in India for routine immunisation.

India and other WHO Southeast Asia Region member countries, have resolved to eliminate measles and control congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

In this regard, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is conducting measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign in the age group of nine months to less than 15 years in a phased manner across the nation.

The campaign is a part of global efforts to reduce illness and deaths due to measles and rubella/CRS.

DGP Anjani Kumar inaugurates free medical camp

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Director General of Police Anjani Kumar on Monday inaugurated a free medical camp at his office.

The medical camp was organised by Vasavi Hospital. Officials and staff at the DGP's office, Intelligence, CID, Police Housing Corporation, Communications and other departments were examined during the camp. Speaking on the occasion, Kumar said, "Maintaining good health is important which will help police personnel to serve people better." He urged police personnel and other staff to undergo mandatory health check-ups. Kumar thanked the management of Vasavi Hospital for organising the free medical camp at his office. Kumar has been organising various health camps at his office. He had organised Kanti Velugu camp at his office earlier this year.

GHMC proposes 90-day nala repair works

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) on Monday announced that it would take up 90-day-long nala remoulding work from AG Colony to Laxmi Complex on the National Highway 65.

The work will be conducted from March 28 to June 28. In the light of the announcement by the civic body, traffic restrictions will be

observed in the following areas: Commuters moving from Kukatpally towards Ameerpet will need to take a diversion at Kukatpally Metro Station, U Turn and take a left turn towards IDL Lake Road and go through Green Hills Road and take a U turn at Rainbow Vistas and then take a left turn at Khaitlapur flyover and turn left towards Parwathnagar and go through, Toddy Compound-Left turn towards Kavuri Hills

, Neerus Junction, Jubilee Check Post, left turn to Yousufguda Road towards Mythrivanam and Ameerpet.

Similarly, commuters moving from Kukatpally towards Begumpet will need to take a diversion at Kukatpally Y Junction and go through Balanagar flyover, New Bowenpally Junction and take a right turn towards Tadbund and then turn right towards Paradise Junction and head towards Begumpet flyover.

Commuters moving from Balanagar towards Ameerpet via Kukatpally Y Junction need to take a diversion from under Balanagar flyover and head towards New Bowenpally Junction, Tadbund and take a right towards Paradise Junction. Then turn right towards Begumpet flyover and head towards Ameerpet.

Commuters moving from Moosapet and Goodshed road towards Ameerpet must take

alternate routes towards IDL lake Road, Green Hills Road and then take a U turn towards Rainbow Vistas, then take a left towards Khaitlapur Flyover. Then take a left turn towards Parwathnagar and head towards Toddy Compound and then turn left towards Kavuri Hills, Neerus Junction, Jubilee Check Post and turn left towards Yousufguda road and head towards Mythrivanam and Ameerpet.

‘BRS will score hat-trick and win with 90-100 seats’

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao ridicules Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts to make “Adani rich”

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao on Monday predicted that the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) will win between 90 and 100 seats in the next Assembly elections and score a hat-trick. The people realised that the government under the leadership of K Chandrashekar Rao is "Srirama Raksha" for Telangana.

Addressing the BRS rank and file at Athmeeya Sammelanam at Narayankhed, the Minister ridiculed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts to make "Adani rich." "While BRS government has been moving and heaven and earth to help increase farmers' income, Modi is making Adani rich," he pointed out.

Harish went at the BJP hammer and tongs for "provoking communal divide" in the Karnataka election for electoral gains. He accused the BJP-led



Minister for Finance T Harish Rao at the training session in CPR at Sangareddy Collector in Sangareddy on Monday

Centre of not releasing funds to the State. The BRS government in the State overcame all hurdles and continued to implement welfare schemes for the poor. The government is committed to the welfare of

the poor and downtrodden, he said.

The government has been providing drinking water to every household in the State, including the Narayankhed constituency. The people in

many BJP-ruled States are struggling for potable water, he observed.

The Minister assured the sarpanches that the government would credit all the funds in the banks of Gram Panchayats with effect from April 1.

The Minister exhorted the BRS activists to take the party's message to every household and explain the developmental and welfare schemes undertaken by the government. The Congress party, if voted to power, would bring back goonda raj," he said.

Earlier, speaking, shortly after inaugurating the Cardiological Resuscitation (CPR) training session at the district Collectorate, Harish Rao said the government would

District Collector A Sharat, MLAs Chanti Kranti Kiran, K Manik Rao and others were present.

‘BJP wants to run country on basis of Manusmriti’

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

The BJP is bent upon destroying the secular fabric of the country by dividing people in the name of religion, said Communist party of India (CPI) State Committee secretary K Sambasiva Rao on Monday.

Speaking to the media at the party office here, Sambasiva Rao accused the BJP-led Central government of intending to run the country on the basis of Manusmriti. He stressed the need to protect the Constitution of India.

The BJP, he said, has unleashed a vicious vendetta campaign against the opposition. The saffron party was creating a rift among the people for electoral gains. It was trying to sabotage the Constitution. The Hindu religion existed before the emergence of the RSS. He termed the BJP's campaign that it was the custodian of the Hindu culture as ridiculous, the CPI leader said.

The country was witnessing an undeclared emergency-like situation due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

SC posts TS govt's plea to April 10

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Supreme Court on Monday posted to April 10 hearing on the Telangana government's plea seeking directions to the Governor to clear the 10 Bills passed by the Assembly.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala was told by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that he had discussions with the Governor on the issue and would make a statement during the next hearing. "Mr Solicitor General, you can have a word with the Governor and make a statement on the next date of hearing. List the matter on April 10," the bench said.

Senior advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for the Telangana government, said that in Madhya Pradesh, the Governor grants assent to Bills within seven days while in Gujarat Bills are cleared within a month.

"Why is it being delayed in Telangana? I seek the intervention of the Solicitor General and he can advise the Governor. What is the point in doing all this? Why can't the court insist that the Governor

PENDING BILLS ISSUE



plea filed by the state government. It had clarified that the court will not issue a notice to the office of the Governor but would like to see the reply of the Union of India on the state government's plea.

On March 14, the SC agreed to hear a petition filed by the Telangana government seeking directions to the TS Governor to clear the 10 pending Bills passed by the Assembly.

cannot delay Bills? There is no communication at all. Two constitutional bench judgments say that the Governor has to abide by the advice of the Council of Ministers. It sends the wrong message," he said. Mehta said that there are certain communications but he would not like to elaborate further. "I will take further instructions and make a statement on the next date of hearing," he said.

Dave said that it should be recorded in the order as people of the state are waiting for these Bills to be cleared.

The Bench, however, did not record anything in the order and simply adjourned the matter for hearing on April 10.

On March 20, the SC sought the Centre's response on the

The SC had agreed to hear the plea, after Dave mentioned it for urgent listing, saying several Bills of public importance are stuck.

The TS government said in its petition that it is constrained to move the SC under Article 32 of the Constitution in view of a "constitutional impasse" created on account of the refusal of the Governor to act on several Bills passed by the Legislature.

It said Article 200 of the Constitution empowers the Governor to either give assent to a Bill passed by the Assembly or to withhold the assent or reserve the Bill for consideration of the President. "This power has to be exercised as soon as possible," it said.

BJYM leaders suffering due to KCR gov't's deeds: Eatala

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP National Executive Committee Member Huzurabad MLA Eatala Rajender said that the KCR government committed an illegal act and that BJYM leaders are suffering the punishment for it. He said the TSPSC has become a brokers' den selling question papers for money.

Speaking to the media after visiting BJYM leaders at the Chanchalguda jail on Monday, Eatala said that people had respect for the TSPSC earlier but now they have lost it after KCR came to power a second time.

The KCR government jailed 11 BJYM activists including BJYM state President Bhanu Prakash instead of punishing culprits in the TSPSC leakage.

The BJYM leaders are in jail for the last 14 days and jail authorities are not allowing them to meet their relatives even though they are not criminals.

The BRS government is trying to keep the BJYM activists in jail by forcing the public prosecutor to go on leave. The BJP is not afraid of false cases and conspiracies and will not rest until it ends KCR's atrocities, he said.

Later, Eatala visited journal-



ist Theenmar Mallanna's family. Speaking to the media, Eatala said the KCR government had a grudge against Mallanna. BRS activists have been attacking Mallanna's offices and destroying computers and other equipment besides attacking journalists working in the office.

Moreover, the BRS government has been making the police file false cases against him. But Mallanna continued his profession, Eatala said. The government then made goons to attack Mallanna's office. Instead of filing cases against the goons, the police filed cases against Mallanna, he said.

Eatala said the KCR government will stay in power only this year and that it is not good for the police to become KCR's pawns.

MLA calls upon BRS cadre to repulse Oppn attack on govt

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Husnabad MLA Voditla Satish Kumar has called upon the party rank and file to give a befitting reply to the critics of the BRS. He advised the BRS activists to explain to people the development schemes and development of the State. The credit for developing Husnabad constituency in all spheres of activity goes to Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao.

Participating in the Atmeeya Sammelan of the BRS, the MLA said that development and welfare are the objectives of the government. In the present regime, the fruits of development are trickling down directly to the beneficiaries and quoted the example of schemes like Kalyana Lakshmi, Rytu Bima, 24x7 dpower, Rytu Bandhu and so on. The government has been implementing welfare and development schemes in an unprecedented manner, he said adding that the government works with the objective of public welfare.

PADDY PRODUCTION

‘Post bifurcation, TS records a new high of 1.47 cr tonnes’

PNS ■ YADADRI BHUVANAGIRI

Paddy production reached a new high of 1.47 crore tonnes in the new State of Telangana, Minister for Energy G Jagadish Reddy said. The paddy yield in the Telangana region in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh did not exceed 40 lakh tonnes, he recalled. The paddy yield in the undivided Nalgonda district is estimated at a record high of 47 lakh tonnes.

The Minister was laying the foundation stone for the farmer service centre at Bhongir on Monday. He also laid the foundation stone for a warehouse with a storage capacity of 1,000 tonnes to be constructed by the primary Bhongir Primary Agriculture Society.

Zilla Parishad Chairman Alimnenti Sandeep Reddy, MLA Pailla Sekar Reddy, Telangana State Cooperative Oilseed Growers Federation chairman Kancharla Ramakrishna Reddy, District Collector Pamel Satpathy and others were present.

Speaking on the occasion, Jagadish Reddy pointed out



Minister for Energy G Jagadish Reddy speaking at BRS party meeting at Bibinagar in YADADRI BHUVANAGIRI district on Monday

that the credit to make agriculture profitable should go to the BRS government under the leadership of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao. It was said in the past that practising agriculture is an exercise in futility. Now, the farmers were feeling elated over practising agriculture which turned out to be a fruitful exercise.

Later, speaking at a public meeting, the Minister said that the Chief Minister wanted to make the farmer a king and ensure that the farmers earn more income. He advised the farmers to take alternative crop cultivation. There are

several alternatives, he said. Water was released to Nagarjuna Sagar left canal 16 times so far after Telangana State was formed. The credit for it should go to the Chief Minister alone, he made it very clear.

Later, speaking at Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) 'Atmiya Sammelan,' the Minister expressed confidence that the BRS would emerge as the strongest party.

He exhorted the party activists to strike fear in the opposition by endearing themselves to the people through service.

TS tribals have no rights except voting right: Bhatti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka said that the tribals of Telangana have lost all rights except the right to vote.

He was addressing a press conference in Rebbena in Asifabad constituency on Monday to mark the completion of 170 km of his People's March.

During the last 12 days, Bhatti Vikramarka covered parts of Adilabad, Nirmal and Kommaram Bhim Asifabad district and now his padayatra will enter Mancherial district.

Bhatti accused the TRS government of derailing schemes

launched by former Congress governments that would have helped the region's people.

Bhatti said that tribals were not getting ration cards, pensions, pattas, jobs, healthcare or water for irrigation. He accused the KCR government of depriving tribals of resources by expelling them from the forests of the undivided Adilabad district.

He also pointed to the abolishment of the Assigning Committee system established during the Congress period, which aimed to distribute government land to the poor and tribals. He said local MLAs used to be the Chairmen of



Congress Legislature Party leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka during Hathi-se-Hathi Yatra in Rebbena mandal in Kurnuram Bheem Asifabad District on Monday

Assigning Committees. But the entire system was scrapped by the BRS government.

He also pointed out that despite opposing open mining during the Telangana move-

ment, KCR allowed it to continue by awarding contracts to companies like GLR.

He expressed disappointment over the lack of jobs for locals in coal mining. He crit-

icized the exploitation of Telangana's wealth by KCR and the companies of "Andhra Babus." He said the Telangana movement was all about getting freedom from the clutches of AP contractors. He said that KCR is handing over Telangana's wealth to AP companies instead of Singareni Collieries. Bhatti said that 64 small and medium irrigation projects in the district were not executed even after nine years. He said the Congress had approved several irrigation projects in the united Adilabad district which were to be completed by 2014, but the BRS government neglected them.

Congress holds Sankalp Satyagraha in Old City to support Rahul

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hundreds of Congress activists led by DCC President Sameer Waliullah marched through Old City in a show of solidarity as part of the nationwide Sankalp Satyagraha protests.

The protest, organised by TPCC General Secretary Cherukuri Srinivas, was held at Moosarambagh Crossroads near the SBI branch in the Malakpet constituency on Monday.

TPCC Working President M. Anjan Kumar Yadav, for-

mer minister K. Pushpa Leela, TPCC Vice President Chama Kiran Reddy, TPCC General Secretaries G. Niranjan, Uzma Shakir and Kanhaiya Lal, Hyderabad Congress Minorities Department Chairman Arshad Sheikh, Hyderabad candidates Feroz Khan, Charminar constituency in-charge Mujeebullah Shareef, Mohd. Ashwaq, Mirza Askar Ali Baig, Shabaz Khan, Amir Aslam Shareef, Sadeq Bin Musafir, Wadood, Dinesh, all division and block presidents and other leaders participated in the programme.

Congress leaders began their protest by washing the statue of Dr BR Ambedkar with milk and garlanding it. They also placed a petition at the statue condemning Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as an MP and called it a "murder of democracy."

Sameer Waliullah said that Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha was unfair and accused the BJP government of using defamation laws to hound opposition leaders and suppress dissent.

MEIL delivers 10 e-buses to TTD as offering

Electric buses will ply exclusively in the shrine area on the hill-top

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (MEIL) offered 10 electric buses to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Monday. The delivery marks the completion of the infrastructure giant's commitment made on October 21, 2022, when it announced the offering of 10 electric buses to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), Andhra Pradesh, as a gesture of thanks to Lord Venkateshwara for his continuous blessings. After performing a special pooja by Vedic pandits, Olectra



CMD KV Pradeep handed over the e-busses donation to TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy and EO Dhamman Reddy, accompanied by other employees they all travelled in the buses and expressed satisfaction with the performance of the buses.

Olectra Greentech Limited manufactured

these 9-metre-long 10 pure electric buses under the Government of India's 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives, enabling MEIL to deliver them to the shrine on time. The fleet of 10 e-buses will help speed up the TTD's efforts to decarbonise the holy pilgrim centre, enabling the hill shrine to fight air pollution, reduce noise and tackle climate change, making it emission-free beginning today. The TTD trust appreciated MEIL for its offering.

On this occasion, TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy said, "TTD takes

special care in protecting the environment on Tirumala Hills. We are working on providing noise and air pollution-free travel to Srivari devotees and keeping this in mind MEIL came forward by donating 10 e-buses which are Rs 18 crores worth to TTD.

These bus services will commence in the coming few days. E-buses will replace the existing diesel buses and make the shrine emission-free."

Olectra MD KV Pradeep said that they are delighted to have assisted MEIL in making this modest offering to the Lord.

SC HEARING IN KAVITHA'S PLEA PUT OFF

Relief or psychological torture?

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

Is the Supreme Court decision to adjourn the hearing on the petition filed by BRS MLC Kavitha to April 10 a temporary relief or psychological torture?

There are two versions in BRS circles regarding this. One group says that the ED may not take any step in Kavitha's case till the Supreme Court announces its verdict on her petition. So that means Kavitha has got some relief.

But another group thinks that even though the SC adjourned the case to April 10, it did not give any direction to the ED. So the fact that Kavitha's plea is pending in the Supreme Court is not a hurdle for the ED in taking further steps. The ED can summon

Kavitha at any time and this may result in mental torture to her. They say that Kavitha has to keep worrying about what the ED is going to do next. If the ED summons Kavitha she has to appear before them as there is no way to avoid appearing before the ED.

While the Supreme Court adjourned the hearing on the petition filed by the Kavitha to April 10, the hearing on the petition filed by 14 opposition parties against the Centre over the misuse of investigation agencies to hound opposition leaders has been posted to April 5.

Some BRS leaders think that until the Supreme Court delivers its decision on the petition filed by opposition parties and on the petition filed by Kavitha the ED may not take do anything in the Kavitha case.

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
4th Floor, Swarna Jayanti Commercial Complex, Amnagar, Hyderabad-500033.
(Public Notification U/s. 15 (4) of HMDA Act, 2008
(G.O.Ms.No.27 Ms. & G.O. Dated, dated 28.02.2023)

In exercise of powers conferred by Sub-Section (1) of Section 15 of Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority Act 2008 (Act No.8 of 2008), the Government hereby makes the following variation to the land use envisaged in the Notified Master Plan MDP-2031 issued vide G.O. Ms.No.33 MA dt: 24.01.2013 as required by sub-section (1) of the said section. The site in Sy. No. 561, 570 & 571 situated at Lalgauda (Malakpet (V), Shamirpet (M), Medchal-Malkajgiri District to an extent of 25722.62 sq.mts, which is presently earmarked as Conservation use zone as per the notified Master Plan (MDP) 2031 issued vide G.O.Ms.No.33 MA, dt: 24.01.2013, is now designated as Residential use zone. The Details of the above are available in web sites <http://gazette.telangana.gov.in/> and <http://hmda.gov.in/>.

Sd/- Metropolitan Commissioner
HMDA
R.O. No: 13879-PPCL/MDVT/11/2023-23, Dt: 27.03.2023

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
4th Floor, Swarna Jayanti Commercial Complex, Amnagar, Hyderabad-500033.
(Public Notification U/s. 15 (3) of HMDA Act, 2008
(Government Memo. No. 11678/P/L/11/2021 dt: 23.02.2023)


In exercise of the powers conferred by Sub-Section (1) of Section 15 of Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority Act 2008 (Act No.8 of 2008), it is proposed to make the following draft variation to the land use envisaged in the Revised Development Plan (Master plan), GHMC circle - IV (old circle no 11) of erstwhile Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad area (HMDA cons area) issued vide G.O. Ms.No.363, M&G.O dt: 21.08.2010 is now proposed to be designated as Multiple use zone. The Details of the above are available in web sites <http://gazette.telangana.gov.in/> and <http://hmda.gov.in/>. Objections/Suggestions would be considered from any person or body to the said proposals. They can submit objections/suggestions in writing either to the M.C., HMDA or to the Special Chief Secretary, MA & UD Dept., Telangana Secretariat, Hyderabad within Fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Sd/- Metropolitan Commissioner, HMDA
R.O. No: 13884-PPCL/MDVT/11/2023-23, Dt: 27.03.2023

INDIA CORNER


Deeply touched after visiting Tagore's ancestral house: Prez

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said she was deeply touched after visiting Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's ancestral house, Jorasanko Thakurbari in north Kolkata. Murmu went around rooms where Tagore was born, where he breathed his last and where he spent most of his time in and expressed awe over the preservation of the centuries-old structure, Registrar Subir Moitra of Rabindra Bharati University, which is housed on the premises, said. The President, who is on a two-day visit to West Bengal, also went to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's ancestral house in the city and paid homage to the freedom fighter. RBU authorities gave her four publications of Tagore and a photograph of his. Murmu, who was accompanied by Governor C V Ananda Bose, was greeted at the Jorasanko Thakurbari by state ministers Bratya Basu and Sashi Panja. Later, she wrote in the visitor's log book: "It is indeed a memorable experience for me to have visited the Jorasanko Thakurbari, the famous abode of the illustrious Tagore family of which Kavi Guru became a global icon."




Karnataka mining baron unveils party symbol

Almost three months after announcing his new party, former Karnataka Minister and mining baron G Janardhana Reddy on Monday announced 'foot ball' as its poll symbol, first list of candidates, and also manifesto, ahead of Assembly elections, due by May. Reddy, who is an accused in an illegal mining case, had recently formed 'Kalyana Rajya Pragati Paksha' (KRPP), snapping his two-decade-old association with the BJP. "When I was in politics earlier, I was treated like a foot ball by everyone, irrespective of whether they were my own or others or enemies. Now I have entered the fray to prove that I too can play football with everyone," Reddy told reporters after unveiling the party logo. According to some political observers, KRPP may have some impact on the BJP's electoral prospects in certain constituencies, especially in the Ballari belt, by cutting into its votes. KRPP is by and large concentrating on certain constituencies of Kalyana-Karnataka (earlier Hyderabad-Karnataka) region, and constituencies where there is considerable presence of Telugu speaking population.



Deposited 50 per cent of interim compensation for Morbi victims

Oreva Group has deposited 50 per cent of the interim compensation amount for the victims of the Morbi cable bridge collapse tragedy, the Gujarat High Court was told on Monday. The company told the division bench of acting Chief Justice A J Desai and Justice Biren Vaishnav that the first instalment (50 per cent of the total amount) was deposited on March 14, and the rest would be paid on or before April 11. Oreva Group (Ajanta Manufacturing Pvt. Ltd) was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the British-era bridge on the Machchhu river in Morbi that collapsed on October 30, 2022, killing 135 people and leaving 56 others seriously injured. The high court is hearing a suo motu (on its own) Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on the tragedy. On Monday, the HC took on record the affidavit of Oreva Group and granted the company time it had sought to deposit the remaining amount.



Delhi: AAP MLA Akhilesh convicted of hurting student

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has convicted Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Akhilesh Pati Tripathi in a 2020 case of voluntarily causing hurt to a student. Special Judge Geetanli Goel said the prosecution was able to prove the guilt of the accused "beyond reasonable doubt" for the offence under Section 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) of IPC. The court, however, acquitted Tripathi of the offence punishable under Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act), saying that the incident arose out of political rivalry, more so given the fact that the elections were to be held the next day. "In the circumstances of the case, it is difficult to believe the case of the prosecution that the accused had uttered any caste related remarks against the complainant, much less to show any intention to humiliate or intimidate the complainant as he belonged to Scheduled Caste," the judge said in an order passed on March 25. The court will hear on April 13 the argument on quantum of punishment where Tripathi may get a maximum one year jail term.

REMISSION TO CONVICTS

SC notice to Centre, Gujarat govt on Bilkis Bano's plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Centre, Gujarat government and others on a plea filed by Bilkis Bano, who was gang-raped and seven members of her family were killed during the 2002 post-Godhra riots. Bano has challenged remission of sentence of 11 convicts in the case. While posting the matter for hearing on April 18, a bench of Justices K M Joseph and B V Nagarathna said there is a gamut of issues involved and it needs to hear the matter in detail. The top court issued a notice to the Centre, the Gujarat government and the convicts.



It also directed the Gujarat government to be ready with the relevant files granting remission to the parties on the next date of the hearing. During the hearing, the bench observed that it would not be overwhelmed by emotions in the case and would only go by the law.

On January 4, a bench comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi and Bela M Trivedi took up the petition filed by Bano and other pleas. However, Justice Trivedi recused from hearing the case without citing any reason. Bano had moved the apex court on November 30 last year challenging the 'premature' release of 11 lifers by the state government, saying it has 'shaken the conscience of society'. Besides the plea challenging the release of the convicts, the gang-rape survivor had also filed a separate petition seeking a review of the apex court's May 13, 2022, order on a plea by a convict. The review plea was later dismissed in December last year.

Rahul's sentencing is hasty, says Yechuri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CPIM on Monday said Rahul Gandhi's sentencing and the "haste" with which he was disqualified as an MP was a "blatant" display of intolerance by the BJP and reflects the party's "abhorrent authoritarian" character. CPIM general secretary Sitaram Yechuri alleged that the Modi government is giving public money and capital to its friends like businessman Gautam Adani. "The Politburo condemned BJP's usage of the criminal

defamation route to target opposition leaders and disqualify them as MPs. The sentencing of Rahul Gandhi and the haste with which he was disqualified is a blatant display of the levels of intolerance to criticism and reflects the abhorrent authoritarian character of the BJP," Yechuri said, reading out from a party statement. The statement said this comes on top of the already "brazen" misuse of the Central agencies to target Opposition leaders. It said the RSS/BJP has also lodged FIRs and filed



cases in several states against political opponents on the flimsiest of grounds. It mentioned the arrest of AAP leader and former Delhi

deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and ED/CBI raids on RJD leaders Lalu Prasad Yadav, Tejashwi Yadav, K Kavitha (BRS) and others. Reiterating its demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe on the Adani issue, the party alleged that the BJP government is "shamelessly" defending the Adani group's acts of "brazen misdeeds, acts of omission and commission". Accusing the government of being in nexus with crony capitalists, facilitating the "looting" of people's hard-

earned savings from nationalised financial institutions, Yechuri said its "blatant refusal" to hold any sort of enquiry into the Adani saga is exposing it to the core. "On that he does not want to answer a question. This is the point. How come all the capital, all the ports, other infrastructure like airport, mines and mining were given to only one person? People lost lives during the pandemic, the economy worsened, but Modi ji's friend saw tremendous growth, became the richest person?"

New NCERT textbooks revised as per NEP likely from 2024-25

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New NCERT textbooks revised in accordance with the new National Education Policy (NEP) are likely to be introduced in schools from 2024-25 academic session, Education Ministry officials said on Monday. The textbooks will be developed as per the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). "The new textbooks are likely to be introduced from 2024-25 academic session. It is a tall task but we are aiming for

that. The textbooks will be revised as per the new NCF, work on which is already going on," a senior MoE official said. "Since COVID-19 has taught us that there is an appetite for digital learning, all the new textbooks will simultaneously be made available digitally so anybody can download them," he added. Noting that textbooks should not be "static", the official said an institutional framework will be developed to ensure that the textbooks are updated on a regular basis.

SC asks Centre to engage with states for setting up Haj panels

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court asked the Centre on Monday to "engage with" the states to ensure that they set up Haj committees for a smooth conduct of the annual pilgrimage. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala took note of the submissions made by Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj, who appeared in the matter on behalf of the Centre, that according to the instructions he has, all states except Odisha have set up Haj panels. The law officer further

informed the bench that the Central Haj Committee has also been set up by the Union government. "The subject matter of the petition primarily is regarding the Central Haj Committee and state Haj committees. Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj says that the Central Haj Committee has been constituted," the bench noted in its order. It directed the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs, the nodal ministry to conduct the annual pilgrimage in India, to engage with the states to ensure that they set up their respective Haj panels.



610 cases of Covid's new variant XBB1.16 found in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 610 cases of Covid's XBB.1.16 variant, which might have been behind the recent rise in coronavirus cases, have been detected across the country, according to INSACOG data. The samples have been found across 11 states and Union Territories. The highest number of Covid cases caused due to this variant has been found in Maharashtra and Gujarat at 164 each, followed by 93 Telangana and 86 in Karnataka, according to INSACOG data. The XBB 1.16 variant was first found in January when two samples tested positive for the variant. India has been witnessing an uptick in COVID-19 cases in the country recently. India logged 1,805 new coronavirus cases, while the active cases have surpassed the 10,000-mark after 134 days, according to the Health ministry data updated on Monday.

Another aide held under NSA, fresh Amritpal photograph surfaces

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A new picture of Amritpal Singh with his key aide Papalpreet Singh surfaced Monday on social media as another close associate of the radical preacher was detained under the stringent National Security Act. Amritpal Singh has remained untraceable since a police crackdown against him and members of his Waris Punjab De' began in Punjab on March 18. Officials said the picture was taken a day after the police operation against the Khalistan sympathiser began. Both men looked relaxed; Amritpal Singh is seen holding a beverage can. In another development, Amritpal Singh's close associate Varinder Singh alias Fauji was nabbed by the Amritsar Rural police. He was part of the private security set for the preacher, police said. A senior police official said the National Security Act has been invoked against Varinder Singh and he was being sent to the Dibrugarh Jail in Assam, where some alleged Amritpal Singh associates are already being held under the NSA.



Cong needs to do some serious introspection, says Hardeep

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday slammed the Congress, asking it to "do serious introspection" and ponder over what is acceptable in a political and legal system. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri's comments came amidst escalated agitation by the Congress over the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha and the Adani issue. "They really deserve to do some serious introspection," Puri said when asked about the Congress observing 'black day' on Monday, a day after their party's 'Satyagraha' protests at the Rajghat. "You know the lines of propriety, what is acceptable in the political system, the legal system. He (Rahul Gandhi) has been convicted by a court. Then, there are automatic procedures," he said, alluding to Rahul Gandhi's disqualification as a Lok Sabha MP after being convicted by a Surat court for his remark in 2019.



"And, then to bring in this kind of melodramatics? I mean people of India will judge them for what they are," the minister added. Puri also slammed the Gandhis for invoking Lord Ram and Savarkar in their arguments. "The other day he said 'I will not apologise because I am not Savarkar'. Do you know the contribution of people like Savarkar ji? You are getting, as I said, getting an **s to run a horse's race," he told reporters in Parliament complex.

With Opposition MPs continuing with their protest in Parliament complex, BJP members also staged a counter protest over the alleged insult to Savarkar and OBC by Gandhi. Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said Rahul Gandhi cannot be "Veer Savarkar" even in his "best dreams" as the freedom fighter never stayed abroad for months together neither he sought help from foreigners against his own country. It requires strong determination and love for the country to become V D Savarkar, he added. "Rahul Gandhi very rightly said that he wasn't Savarkar," Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said. "If Rahul actually wishes to know Savarkar, then he must go to the Andaman Jail and spend time there to realise who Savarkar actually was and the kind of sacrifices he made," he added.

FCI stops wheat auction under OMSS

○ Procurement of fresh crop begins next month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) on Monday said wheat sale at discounted rates via e-auction to bulk consumers, institutions and state governments has been stopped for now as procurement of the fresh crop begins next month. Under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS), the FCI has sold 33 lakh tonnes of wheat till March 15 through e-auction, out of which, buyers have lifted 31 lakh tonnes of the grain

so far. They have to lift the balance quantity by March 31. "The last e-auction of wheat to bulk consumers was undertaken on March 15. The auction has been stopped for now as the procurement of the fresh crop will pick up in the coming days," FCI Managing Director Ashok K Meena told PTI.

Sale of wheat to institutions like Nafed and state governments under the OMSS has also been stopped. The wheat auction will resume only if there is a need to intervene in the market, he added. The government in January had announced plans to sell wheat in the open market from its buffer stock under the OMSS in order to check rising

wheat and wheat flour prices. A total of 50 lakh tonnes of wheat was allocated for sale under the OMSS. Out of the allocated quantity, FCI was mandated to sell a total of 45 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk users till March 15 through weekly e-auctions. About 3 lakh tonnes of wheat was earmarked for state governments and 2 lakh tonnes for institutions like Nafed for converting it into wheat flour and then selling at Rs 27.50 per kilogramme.

India's heat action plans target vulnerable groups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A review of 37 heat action plans in India shows most of them do not explicitly carry out vulnerability assessments, leaving the authorities with little data on where to direct their scarce resources. Heat action plans (HAPs) are the primary policy response to economically damaging and life threatening heat waves. They prescribe a number of activities, disaster responses and post-heatwave response measures to reduce the impact of heat waves. Though the exact number of



HAPs in India is unknown, some estimates claim the existence of well over 100 HAPs nationwide. The Centre For Policy Research (CPR), which con-

ducted the "first critical review" of heat action plans at the city (nine), district (13) and state (15) levels across 18 states, said it was unclear to what extent actions prescribed in the

HAPs were being implemented. "India has made considerable progress by creating several dozen heat action plans in the last decade. But our assessment reveals several gaps that must be filled in future plans. "If we don't, India will suffer damaging economic losses due to decreasing labour productivity, sudden and frequent disruptions to agriculture (like we saw last year), and unbearably hot cities as heat waves become more frequent and intense," said Aditya Valiathan Pillai, associate fellow at CPR and co-author of the report.

Girl power

Four boxing gold medals, beginning of Women's Premier League — women's sports have arrived

The last few days witnessed a huge fillip to the cause of women emancipation; and the best part of it was that it didn't come from young girls, not from the pompous speech of some politician or some hyped welfarist measure. Boxers Nitu Ghanghas and Saweety Boora won gold medals in Women's World Boxing Championships in their respective weight categories on Saturday; the next day, Nikhat Zareen and Lovlina Borgohain became world champions. Quite deservedly, India won the best team award at the tournament. This is not the first time that India have won more than one gold medal in a single year. In 2006, MC Mary Kom, Sarita Devi, Jenny RL and Lekha KC won a gold medal each in their categories. On Sunday, women also made their presence felt in another sport. Harmanpreet Kaur-led Mumbai Indians also won the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League (WPL). The way all teams played in the tournament made the WPL very successful. While men's cricket is immensely popular in our country, the same cannot be said about women's cricket. Neither test matches nor one-day internationals nor T-20 games have been big draws till recently. In the beginning, WPL also had its anxious moments with concerns regarding filling up stadiums. The Board of Cricket Council of India (BCCI) was keen on audience attendance, so it kept



entry free for women and girls.

The BCCI did a lot to promote the WPL, so there were giant outdoor hoardings with women cricketers, something India is not much familiar with. A seven-storey wallpaper featuring the Mumbai Indians' trio Harmanpreet Kaur, Pooja Vastrakar and Nat Sciver-Brunt covering part of a 20-storey skyscraper near the busy Haji Ali Junction announced that women's cricket has arrived. There were other billboards as well. The point that needs to be underlined is that a lot of effort has gone into making women excel in sports. While it is true that Indians like cricket (cricket, it has been said, is an Indian game accidentally invented by the English), it was not making progress in our country till recently. The BCCI took a number of steps to promote WPL. Similarly, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) in particular and other sports bodies in general put in a lot of effort to make our pugilists successful. Just before the four girls won gold medals, BFI's Bernard Dunne told a newspaper, "We are not just 'attack, attack and attack.' There is a thought process involved. India has never lacked heart, never lacked hard work. We are trying to bring those little changes within the programme, in terms of reducing the load. If you speak with the athletes, they would see they feel a lot fresher. Our performances demonstrate that. We have got very clear goals now." It is not just the government but also the private sector whose initiatives have ensured that women's sports have made a giant leap. The endeavour must go on.

PICTALK



An artist makes paintings depicting the Uttarakhand culture as part of preparation ahead of the G-20 meeting PTI

Role of technology in developing digital art

Technology has greatly impacted the art world. It has added a number of techniques artists can use to express their creativity

Digital space thrives in almost every sphere. You name it and it's there. With a vision of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge-based economy by ensuring easy access, digital inclusion, digital empowerment and bridging the digital divide, the Government of India launched the Digital India programme on July 1st, 2015. Since then, there has been no turning back.

Art is a broad category that incorporates creativity with the goal of expressing aesthetic, emotional depth or intellectual concepts. Today, companies hire web designers and graphic designers who can create designs and art as per society's requirements. This is unlike the traditional form which required pen, paper, lots of money and time. Today, the traditional form of art is almost out of range. The world of art has always played a significant part in everyone's life. Anyone can express information, ideas, feelings, such as love, happiness, sorrow, or boredom through art. Art is



everywhere and can be experienced anywhere and at any point of time be it walking through the city, listening to the radio or even while driving a car. Behind every art there is a message that makes an individual aware of the world around them and how one reacts to each other.

We are living in a world where technology has provided artists with new tools of expression. Art and technology have allowed artists to cross over into new perspectives, thus giving birth to the booming term 'Digital Art'. Digital art is a growing creative evolution in which traditional painting techniques such as watercolour, oil pastel, impasto and acrylic are combined with powerful dig-

ital tools such as Coral Draw, Canva, Adobe Photoshop and much more. It encompasses a wide range of techniques from digital drawings to paintings and illustrations, photos, videos and many more.

Technology has greatly impacted the art world and the artists. It has not only opened numerous opportunities for artists but expanded the number of techniques they can access. Digital styles such as dynamic painting, digital photography, pixel art, 2D and 3D computer graphics are among the most in demand. Artists can paint or draw on an iPad or tablet with a stylus just as they can on canvas with a paintbrush and paint by quickly switching

between tools and colours in just a few clicks thereby having access to a wealth of colours, effects, layers and tools unlike traditional artists worrying about refilling colour palettes. Art has no universal definition, but perspectives evolve over time. Artists are often tempted to implement new media technologies and interpretations. Today, artists from across the globe can display their art virtually and viewers can access it at their convenience. The world is going through a digital revolution, India being one of them, thereby stretching the bounds of conventional media and generating a strong presence that aptly describes general societal perspectives on social, cultural, and other elements of existence.

Soon, its advancement in art will be worth observing considering the huge talent the country possesses. Also, it will be a great opportunity for artists both existing and aspiring in terms of employment and available in non-accessible geographical locations. Digital art will benefit India. (The writer is a teacher at a reputed school in Delhi)



SAKSHI SETHI

Is Congress leader Rahul Gandhi politically finished after the recent court verdict and his subsequent dismissal from Parliament? Is it an advantage or a setback for him and his party? It is too early to predict as it is an evolving story. But experience says that no politician is finished until he is finished.

The BJP is happy that the court has fixed Rahul and believes he is politically finished. However, the Congress claims Rahul is in a win-win position. It will be advantageous if a higher court stays or overturns the verdict. If it does not, Rahul is prepared to pay 'any price' and even go to jail, which might give him more political mileage.

Why did the court punish Rahul? Gandhi said at a campaign rally in Karnataka in April 2019: "Why do all these thieves have Modi as their surname? Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, Narendra Modi?" In response, a BJP politician Purnesh Modi filed a criminal defamation complaint accusing Gandhi of defaming the "Modi community."

The ruling could have been milder. The court pronounced a two-year sentence on Thursday. The court also gave him bail immediately and suspended the sentence for a month. This allowed him time to appeal against the punishment. The defamation provisions used against Gandhi date back to the 1860s, when India was a British colony. Section 500 of the IPC makes the crime punishable by up to two years in prison.

Rahul will also be unable to contest the Lok Sabha elections for the next eight years apart from losing his present membership in the lower house. According to a historic Supreme Court decision in 2013, the membership of an MP or MLA sentenced to two years or more ends immediately after the court convicts them. The Lok Sabha announced Rahul's dismissal the next day. Rahul needs three layers of support to escape the situation: the strong backing of the united party, the united Opposition and the support of the public.

Congress responded that the



conviction was to divert the Adani issue in Parliament. Congress has demanded a joint parliamentary probe into the Adani-Henderson report. Rahul Gandhi said he would not "back down" from asking questions on the Adani stocks issue or be intimidated by threats, disqualifications, and prison sentences. Refusing to apologize for the remark, Rahul said: "My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi. Gandhis don't apologize to anyone."

Secondly, the judgment united the Opposition against the ruling dispensation. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and other Opposition leaders, like Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin, Former U.P. chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, and former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray joined the condemnation of the act. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee was the first to condemn the action while opposing Congress for years.

Thirdly, though the pub-

“
RAHUL WILL BE UNABLE TO CONTEST THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS FOR THE NEXT EIGHT YEARS APART FROM LOSING HIS PRESENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE LOWER HOUSE

lic is shocked at the punishment, the complete response is yet to come. The Congress is yet to take it to the streets to involve the people. As a result of Rahul's punishment, other contentious issues, such as Rahul's controversial Cambridge speech, have become more prominent. The BJP has stalled business in Parliament, demanding an apology from him.

Even though the conviction was a psychological blow to Rahul, his party, and the entire Opposition, it all depends on how it is communicated to the people. This is because they must handle the situation, translate it into public sympathy, and sustain it until the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Critics are skeptical about this. Given the BJP's increasing popularity and tight control over the media, it might not be easy. But Gandhi will still be news.

In the coming months, before 2024, the Congress will face its first significant test in Karnataka, Rajasthan,

Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. This will be a direct contest with the BJP. If the party wins the elections in these states, it will cheer the opposition. If the party loses, it will be a setback before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and the party will have to reconcile itself with Modi completing the hat trick.

Rahul's success depends on many ifs and buts. This includes whether he will get a higher court order to stay his verdict and how the public reacts. Congress must also change the poll narrative for the 2024 polls. In short, the BJP cannot wish away Rahul. No politician is finished until he is finished. Rahul is no exception. The BJP probably realizes that it's best not to bring your opponent to the forefront of your campaign. The moral of the story is that politicians, whatever high positions they occupy, should have tight control over their tongues.

(The author is a senior journalist)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Sir — Small steps can bring big changes. The Uttarakhand government has chosen the Char Dham Yatra route that includes temples at Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. This is to implement the first waste-disposal system in the Himalayas, Uttarakhand tourism secretary Sachin Kurve has confirmed. Hemkund Sahib and the Valley of Flowers will also see the implementation of a QR-code-based system that will streamline waste collection and reduce the amount of garbage along the route. Visitors will scan a QR code on each plastic bottle and multi-layer plastic bag (of chips or biscuits) and pay a deposit over the maximum retail price (MRP). They can claim this amount back as a refund when they deposit the waste at a point at the end of the yatra. Up to 45 lakh QR codes are expected to be printed this year.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

APPLY 'SOUND WAVE GIVING'

Sir — When a bat touches the ground, within the crease (when stump out or runout occurs), the snick-o-meter "sound wave giving" technique should be used. Many times, in slow motion TV images, it is unclear whether the batsman's bat touches the ground or is slightly above the ground. Solution is, more microphones / sound sensors must be placed in the area near the crease and wickets (to enable a snick-o-meter to give a more powerful sound wave, if the bat is on the ground). Double benefit is snick- sound- waves (of bat and ball) can also be captured with greater clarity.

Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

RAHUL GANDHI DISQUALIFICATION

Sir — With lightning speed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi lost his position as a parliamentarian. The Lok Sabha secretariat moved in indecent haste and ensured Rahul Gandhi's removal from the house. This was before a higher court could stay the conviction. Rahul acquired the credentials of a Pan-India mass leader after the

Far from over



The major concern for convening a high-level COVID-19 task force meeting is necessitated by an increase in Covid-19 cases in the country. This is the first time this year that such a meeting has been convened, with the last such meeting. As in the past Kerala reported the first death and that is worrisome. By all metrics,

COVID-19 cases have increased over the past few weeks. As of March 23, India officially reported 1,300 newly reported Coronavirus cases over a 24-hour period bringing the overall tally of active cases to 7,605. In the previous few weeks, an average of 800 cases were recorded weekly. The death toll climbed to 5,30,813 with five deaths, one each recorded in Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Kerala, as of March 22. The number of daily deaths has been in the single digits in the past few weeks. Globally, about 1 lakh cases are reported daily. In 2023, far from being the end of pandemic, there is another dangerous phase that requires urgent attention.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

Bharath Jodo Yatra.. Rahul Gandhi was a consistent critic who highlighted Modi's role in Adani's issue. He was the biggest thorn in Narendra Modi's flesh. Now the Narendra Modi Government has taken unethical measures to silence Rahul Gandhi.

Because of disqualifying Rahul Gandhi as a parliamentarian, his voice is unlikely to be heard in Parliament. Rahul Gandhi is a thorn in many because he is straight forward, fearless and speaks from his heart. Now the voice that had pierced the iron curtain installed by the BJP Government and told the nation the story of crony capitalism of how an industrialist has jumped from 609th position to second spot on the global rich list earning lakhs of crores in a couple of years was silenced in Parliament. The voice has raised and roared against the Government on the progressive land acquisition, their farm laws on Demonetisation, on the price rise, unemployment, the flawed GST, the Rafael deal, covid mismanagement, the Chinese encroachment on Indian territory, attacks on Dalits and Muslims has been silenced in Parliament. The voice without fear has brought the story of 700 farmers were killed during the farmers agitation. The voice

roared like a Lion on how different institutions of our country, the press, the judiciary, the Parliament, the Election commission are under pressure. RSS is a fundamentalist, fascist organization, which he never hesitated to mention. The voice which said and called a thief a thief is sent to prison, whereas people like Anurag Thakur who is accused of chanting "desh ke Gaddaron ko Goli maaro salonko" are having no cases and now calling shamelessly Rahul Gandhi an offender. People like Pragya Thakur who is accused of terrorism are allowed to move freely in Parliament. Nearly 50 percent of Parliament members have criminal records and are in Parliament. The absence of Rahul means a dramatic change in Parliament. He was the most powerful voice on many issues. Now the Rahul Gandhi issue has brought to the foreground to the nation that the defamation laws are being misused in India to stifle free speech and settle scores and used as a weapon of vendetta politics and politics of witch hunt and harassment.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

HARD SELTZERS ARE REPLACING ALCOHOL

Hard seltzers are healthier alternative to traditional alcoholic beverages



VIMAL CHAND

As the Indian alcohol industry continues to evolve, we are witnessing the rise of the latest category of beverages — Hard Seltzers. Compared to other alcoholic beverages, hard seltzer has an unusual taste and is often described as refreshing and fruity. It is also relatively new, having only gained popularity in the past decade. It has seen significant growth in the US, Canada, and Australia. While still in its nascent stage in India, the global success of Hard Seltzers can be attributed to its low-calorie, low-carb, and gluten-free nature, making it an attractive option for the health-conscious consumer.

As the majority of India's population is under 40, consumer preferences are rapidly evolving and favoring innovative products that fit with their active and health-conscious lifestyles. Additionally, brands have leveraged the power of social media, collaborating with influencers and celebrities to increase their visibility and popularity. This has helped them create buzz around their products amongst younger consumers. In the United States, the Hard Seltzer market has grown unprecedentedly, with sales skyrocketing. It is estimated that by 2025, the global Hard Seltzer market will be worth \$14.5 billion, with the Asia-Pacific region being the fastest-growing market.



India, being a young and rapidly evolving market, presents a significant opportunity for Hard Seltzers to disrupt the traditional alcohol industry. Hard seltzers are low-calorie, low-carb, and lightly flavored alcoholic beverages marketed as a healthier alternative to traditional alcoholic beverages. Unlike beer, wine, or spirits, true seltzer has a low ABV (alcohol by volume) content, typically ranging from 4% to 6%. Hard seltzers are a brew of simple sugars, commonly known as Sugar Brews in the industry. Most of the natural sugars are converted into alcohol, resulting in low calories and carbs. A brewed hard seltzer is also far apart in taste from infused seltzers, leaving no taste of alcohol or artificial sweeteners. It also is incredibly light on the stomach compared to beers as there is no malt base.

Consumer preferences have steadily shifted toward low-calorie and low-sugar beverages. As health and wellness become increasingly a priority to consumers, traditional alcoholic beverages, which are high in calories and sugar, are losing their appeal. Hard Seltzers, low in calories and carbs, appeal to this new generation of active, health-conscious consumers. Historically, beer and other alcoholic beverages have been marketed primarily toward men, while wine and cocktails have been marketed toward women. However, true seltzer is marketed as a gender-neutral and inclusive drink. Its light and refreshing taste appeals to both men and women. Its packaging is often unisex, which allows it to appeal to a wider range of consumers.

While the Indian market is still in its early stages of adoption, we can draw comparisons from other countries that have already experienced Hard Seltzer disruption. In the United States, Hard Seltzers have replaced beer and wine as the preferred beverage choice for many consumers. Furthermore, the wide range of flavors available in Hard Seltzers has made it a popular choice for those looking to experiment with various tastes.


The rise of Hard Seltzers in the US can be seen as a glimpse of what is to come in India. With the launch of Hard Seltzers in India, we expect a similar shift in consumer preferences toward low-calorie and low-alcohol beverages. Seltzers are not just another alcoholic beverage. They are a revolution in the making, disrupting the traditional alcohol industry with its low-calorie and low-carb profile. *(The writer is Co-Founder and CEO of SPYK, the first hard seltzer in India)*

Have a positive mind and a healthy lifestyle

The key to success is to harness the power of human mind and tap its true potential

Recently, I watched a web series, Taj-Divided by Blood. I also read an Instagram post by a woman who had had two Caesarean operations. I also read another post about a woman who was extremely depressed yet emerged triumphant in life. The common reference point in the cases mentioned is the power of the human mind, how to harness and tap its potential.

The web series is all about the darker side of the Mughal Empire during the reign of Emperor Akbar. It is a riveting story about Shah Salim (later Jehangir), Daniyal Mirza and Murad Mirza, among the eleven children of the Mughal emperor. Salim, despite all his talent, became a heavy drinker,



RAVI VALLURI

(The writer was the Principal Chief Commercial Manager, Southern Railway. He was decorated with the Chief of Army Staff award)

an opium addict and spent most of his time in the harem satisfying his carnal instincts. Murad Mirza could never overcome his anger, arrogance and haste, though he was blessed with remarkable military acumen and craft. Daniyal Mirza, who was extremely obedient and religious, grappled with his demons. He grappled with his fears, sexuality and tried to be a worthy son, always searching for his mother. The three princes were all subsumed in the cesspool of negativity since they did not possess robust minds to reflect efficacious thoughts. They suffered immensely in life.

Now the hardy woman who had to undergo the Caesarean operation has become a master of her mind

and runs half marathons regularly. She began with baby steps—first walking, then brisk walking, and finally running. Running a half marathon of twenty-one kilometres was certainly an arduous task, but she accepted the challenge and began practising. On a few occasions even after adequate training, she ran only fifteen to eighteen kilometres, but her legs and body caved in and she could not breast the tape. But she eventually reached the goal of completing the marathon through sheer will power and a positive thought process.

Then there is the story of a certified yoga instructor, who helps individuals live their most fulfilling lives by staying physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually fit. Before she became an instructor, she suffered from repeated migraine attacks. The intensity of the migraines was enormous which drained her completely.

Finally, in desperation she joined the Art of Living Foundation and was immensely helped by the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya—proper vision process, pranayama, yoga and meditation. She spends quality time five days a week imparting yoga to a large number of candidates and inspires several thousand others through her LinkedIn posts.

In a succinct manner she puts it: to learn yoga one needs a willing, positive mind, the desire to pause and self-connect and a yoga mat. What

you do not need is expensive equipment, eye-catching gym wear, protein shakes/drinks or an extremely flexible body. A healthy and positive lifestyle is a way of living where the human mind has a significant role to play. Research has proven that the human mind is bombarded by 60,000-70,000 thoughts a day and most of them are antipathetic in nature. Consequently, we become slaves of our minds and become lethargic or destructive.

By nature, the human mind gravitates towards the past or the future. This is true of most people, successful people and even achievers. When the mind constructs a nest in the past, it is full of regrets; when it builds a home in future, the tendency is to become anxious. In both the situations it is not at peace and or in harmony with the self. Only when the mind is in the present does it find the sanctuary of happiness and peace.

There are some simple ways to train the mind to remain in the present. A regular regime of prayer, chanting, working out, meditating, planning the day in a systematic manner, practising gratitude and giving back to society, prioritising self-care, focusing on self-improvement, listening to our own gut feelings and appreciating each day as a fresh challenge and focusing on it are some methods.

A healthy and balanced lifestyle makes us grow and glow from within and the aura spreads. Without a doubt, the principle of the Law of Attraction plays a significant role in rejigging our persona. If we emit positive thoughts we attract positive thoughts, feelings, emotions and people. Unfortunately, the contrary is also true.

Therefore, it would be sagacious to look at the positive side by making our minds strong and lead a healthy lifestyle. And if nothing works, just surrender to the Almighty (if you believe) or surrender to your wishes and desires. Certainly, the mind will transfigure, and life and lifestyle will metamorphose for the better, nay the best. Like Buddha said, "To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one's own in the midst of abundance."



Fine tune PM-KISAN to be efficacious



UTTAM GUPTA

The inclusion of ineligible persons on the beneficiaries list of PM-KISAN raises concerns and undoes the very purpose the scheme was launched for



A significant decline in the number of farmers receiving income transfers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme from 104 million during 2021-22 to 80 million during 2022-23 and a corresponding reduction in payment from Rs 67,032 crore in 2021-22 to Rs 57,646 crore in 2022-23 has caused much consternation.

Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 24, 2019, and made effective from December 1, 2018, PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme under which the Union Government. It provides an income support of Rs 6,000 a year to farmers with a valid enrolment, paid in three equal cash transfers of Rs 2,000 each every four months. The money is credited to their account via the DBT mode.

Any landholding farm household is eligible for cash transfers, provided they don't pay income tax, hold government posts, or are retirees receiving pensions above Rs 10,000. The cutoff date for beneficiary identification based on Agriculture Census 2015-16 estimates is February 1, 2019. The total number of beneficiaries intended to be covered under the scheme was about 140 million.

Since the launch of the scheme, Rs 250,000 crore has been given to nearly 110 million farmers spread over 13 installments. Having decided who should be eligible to receive income transfer, with time, the number of beneficiaries can only increase as more farmers are added to the list. There is no reason for the number to go down. Unlike other schemes such as NREGA, where the number of beneficiaries covered and payments made thereof is linked to the availability of work, under PM-KISAN, all farmers in the beneficiaries list once decided are entitled to receive the money.

It is only plausible that the farmers (24 million) were incorrectly identified and, therefore, ineligible to receive assistance if there was a reduction. Their names have now been dropped from the list. This has ensured that they haven't received pay-



PM-KISAN WAS DESIGNED TO SUPPLEMENT THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS

(The writer is a policy analyst)

ments during 2022-23 and will not in the future. What about the money already given to them during 2021-22 and even before that?

The Centre claims it has a 'smooth' and 'transparent' recovery mechanism in place. This is whereby the ineligible beneficiaries are identified and the money is auto-transferred from the state nodal department's account to the Central Government account. Hopefully, it would have recovered all the excess payments made during the relevant years. The process should be expedited in cases where it hasn't been done yet. But the inclusion of 'ineligible' persons in the beneficiaries list raises concern. This is all the more relevant since the Centre has adopted a robust and foolproof IT-based process for beneficiary identification. Let's look at the steps involved.

The farmer registers on the PM-KISAN portal and the State validates her eligibility; after eligibility verification, the State uploads farmer details on the portal; the portal validates the records for junk data or duplicity; accepted data is forwarded to the public financial management system (PFMS) for account number and type validation; the list is sent back to States for the final approval; eligible records are available for generation of Request for Fund Transfer (RFT); signed RFTs are submitted to PFMS for generation of Fund Transfer Order (FTO); creation of sanction orders by agriculture ministry for approved FTOs; payment is processed and the beneficiary list is made available on the portal.

At all levels of authentication, the rejected data is sent back to the States for correction. At the foundation of this fintech architecture is 'confirming the genuineness of beneficiaries'; States have the sole

responsibility of doing this. In particular, it is important to know which documents they used for this purpose.

On a close scrutiny, it turns out that in the initial years, neither States used Aadhaar for validation nor the Centre made it compulsory; it was required to do so a year after the scheme's commencement. In such circumstances, a large number of 'ineligible' persons making their way to the beneficiary list was inevitable. Other issues related to the implementation of the scheme also deserve attention.

When launched, PM-KISAN was designed to supplement the financial needs of small and marginal farmers (SMFs), those with land holding less than 2 hectares, in procuring various inputs such as fertilisers, suitable quality seeds, pesticides, etc. To ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with farm income at the end of each crop cycle.

The scheme was meant to protect poor/vulnerable farmers (read: SMFs). Yet, within six months, from June 01, 2019, its scope was extended to cover all landholding farmers. In other words, the Government decided to give Rs 6,000 even to farmers with large landholdings who didn't deserve it. This meant an increase in beneficiaries by 25 million and expenditure by Rs 15,000 crore.

The Government should exclude better-off farmers from the beneficiaries' list. The money saved (Rs 15,000 crore annually) should be used to increase SMF support. Within this group, it may also consider giving more to marginal farmers, i.e., those with land holding less than 1 hectare in sync with PM Modi's philosophy of using national resources for the poorest of the poor.

Farmers in certain States don't benefit from the scheme. For instance, in Bihar, against a total of around 16 million potential beneficiaries, the state has uploaded only 6 million. West Bengal hasn't joined the scheme, thereby denying access to about 7 million farmers in the State; the Centre is now encouraging those farmers to apply directly on the portal. In other jurisdictions, coverage in some districts is poor. To address it, the Centre has taken some initiatives.

States that have achieved 90 per cent coverage are required to verify 100 per cent 25 randomly selected villages in districts where the coverage is low. In States where the coverage is less than 80 percent, they need to verify 25 villages even in districts that are relatively high. These efforts should be vigorously pursued to ensure that all SMFs get income transfer in every nook and corner of the country.

There are millions of farmers who cultivate the land but don't own it. But, under the current arrangement for income support under PM-KISAN, they are not eligible; instead, the money is sent to the account of the person who owns the land. This anomaly should be corrected by securing data on all such tenant farmers and transferring the money to their accounts.

Finally, PM-KISAN is meant to meet the small SMF needs. It can't replace assuring them of a reasonable income on a sustainable basis. This won't be possible unless they get a reasonable price for their produce. This in turn, will require the resurrection of the now junked three Central farm laws. Unless this is done, episodes similar to that of a farmer from Maharashtra's Solapur getting a measly Rs 2.49 from the sale of over 5 quintal onions will continue to reverberate.

MONEY MATTERS

Russian carrier Aeroflot increases flights on Delhi-Moscow route

Russian flag carrier Aeroflot has increased the frequency of its flight services on the Delhi-Moscow route to seven times a week against four weekly services earlier, from March 26, a statement said on Monday. In addition, the airline has also started operating a Boeing 777 jet along with Airbus A330 to cater to passenger traffic between the two capital cities, Delmos Aviation, which handles cargo operations for Aeroflot in India, said in the statement. India and Russia "in principle" agreed to revise their bilateral air services agreement earlier this month, allowing Russian carriers to operate up to 64 flights per week from 52 to India. Russian carriers are allowed to operate these flights to six Indian cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Kolkata, Amritsar and Ahmedabad. Aeroflot has commenced daily flight services on the Delhi-Moscow route from March 26. The airline will operate both Boeing 777 and Airbus A330 with a total seating capacity of 410 and 293, respectively, in three class configurations business, premium economy and economy, as per the statement.



Rupee gains 3 paise to close at 82.37 against US dollar

The rupee appreciated by 3 paise to close at 82.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as a positive trend in domestic equities and a weak dollar supported investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.36 against the American currency and finally settled at 82.37 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 3 paise over its previous close of 82.40. During the trading session, the rupee touched a high of 82.27 and a low of 82.42 against the dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.02 per cent to 103.09. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures advanced 0.68 per cent to USD 75.50 per barrel. According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the Indian rupee appreciated amid positive domestic markets and a soft Dollar. However, positive crude oil prices capped sharp gains.



Govt sets up committee to monitor tur stocks to check hoarding

The government on Monday said it has constituted a committee to monitor the stock of tur dal held by importers, mills, stockists and traders in order to check hoarding and speculation. The government is also closely watching the stock position of other pulses in the domestic market to take necessary preemptive measures in the event of unwarranted price rise in the coming months, an official statement said. The decision has been taken in view of the reports of market players not releasing stocks despite regular arrival of imports in good quantities, it added. The committee, under chairmanship of Additional Secretary Nidhi Khare, will monitor tur stocks in close coordination with the state governments. Earlier on August 12 last year, the government had issued an advisory to the state governments and Union Territories to enforce stock disclosure in respect of tur dal under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.



Sunnier days help solar projects improve their performance

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Longer sunnier days have ensured that the performance of solar power farms improved to 75 per cent in the current fiscal from 59 per cent in the year-ago period, according to a report. Rating agency Crisil has prepared the report based on the performance of 115 solar projects aggregating to 4.6 GW of power generation and those having an operational record of at least one full year. As per the report, 75 per cent of these projects reached P90 level of generation in the current financial year compared to only 59 per cent in the year-ago period. P90 generation estimate indicates generation that is likely to happen with 90 per cent confidence during the project's tenure annually. For example, a P90 value of 10,000 kWh for the annual output implies that it will generate over 10,000 kWh power for 90 per cent of the time.

Amendment to Finance Bill to correct STT rate

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday moved an amendment to the Finance Bill in Rajya Sabha to correct the figures with regard to rate of Security Transaction Tax (STT) to be levied on sale of options as well as futures. The amended Finance Bill 2023 by correcting STT rate has been returned to Lok Sabha, sources said. The amended Bill is likely to be taken up by Lok Sabha either today or tomorrow and thereafter the Budgetary exercise would be complete. The Lok Sabha is adjourned till 4 pm. In the Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, the Securities Transaction Tax on options is proposed to be increased to 0.0625 per cent from 0.05 per cent and on futures contracts to 0.0125 from 0.01 per cent. After the Lok Sabha cleared the Finance Bill, which has 64 official amendments, the finance ministry issued a state-



ment saying that there was a typographical error in the amendments with respect to the change in STT on options trading. The error, the finance ministry said, will be rectified in accordance with the extent procedure of the government of India. As per the amendments, the STT on options has been increased from 0.017 per cent to 0.021 per cent. "In case of STT, the rate is proposed to be changed from 0.05 per cent to 0.0625 per

cent. There was a typographical error which is being corrected," the ministry said. In percentage terms, STT on sale of futures has been hiked from 0.01 per cent to 0.0125 per cent and in case of options it has been hiked from 0.05 per cent to 0.062 per cent. Traders in the futures segment will now have to pay STT of Rs 1,250 on Rs 1 crore of turnover against the earlier levy of Rs 1,000. The new rules will come into effect from the new financial year 2023-24.



Gold declines Rs 640; silver tumbles Rs 700

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price declined Rs 640 to Rs 59,220 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had ended at Rs 59,860 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver also tumbled Rs 700 to Rs 70,140 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices in the Delhi market traded at Rs 59,220 per 10 grams, down Rs 640 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas market, both gold and silver were trading lower at USD 1,970 per ounce and USD 23.10 per ounce, respectively. Gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Monday.

Govt's steps ensured startups were not adversely impacted by SVB crisis: Min Ashwini

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Immediate action by the government to help Indian startups in the aftermath of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) collapse ensured they were not adversely impacted by the "minor crisis", Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Monday. He also exhorted the entire startup community to think of the Indian banking sector as their trusted partner. Vaishnaw, Minister for IT and Communications, also noted the rapid strides taken by India in areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing. Speaking at India Global Forum event, the Minister said while there was a time when India was only seen as a consumer of technology, today "many global developers like to have Indian startups, entrepreneurs and academicians as their partners, as technology gets developed". "...In these two technologies, we would like use of Indian talent for developing solutions for India and for the world," he



said. To a question on whether India can produce something equivalent to ChatGPT, the Minister said "wait for a few weeks there will be a big announcement." The Minister said it is important for global economy to have trusted partner like India. All over the world there is a sense that India should emerge as a key semiconductor manufacturing destination, Vaishnaw said adding that Government is working "sincerely and diligently" to ensure a vibrant semiconductor ecosystem comes up in the country.

'India's first quantum computing-based telecom network link now operational'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday said the country's first quantum computing-based telecom network link is now operational in the national capital. While speaking at the first international quantum enclave, Vaishnaw said that the quantum communication link is now operational between Sanchar Bhawan and National Informatics Centre office located in CGO Complex in the national capital. "The first quantum secure communication link between Sanchar Bhawan and NIC, CGO complex is now operational," Vaishnaw said and announced a Rs 10 lakh prize money for ethical hackers who can break the encryption of the system. "We are also launching a hackathon, a challenge round, for anybody who breaks this system and system developed by C-DoI, we will be giving Rs 10 lakh per break," Vaishnaw said.

Cyber criminals exploiting ChatGPT popularity to spread malwares

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber criminals are exploiting popularity of ChatGPT to spread malware through hijacked Facebook accounts, cyber intelligence firm CloudSEK said on Monday. CloudSEK in its investigation has found the presence of 13 Facebook pages or accounts including those with Indian content, totalling over 5 lakh followers, that have been compromised and are being used to disseminate the malware via Facebook ads. "Cybercriminals are capitalising on the popularity of ChatGPT, exploiting Facebook's vast user base by compromising legitimate Facebook accounts to distribute malware via Facebook ads, putting users' security at risk.



Our investigation has uncovered 13 compromised pages with over 500k followers, some of which have been hijacked since February 2023. We urge users to be vigilant and aware of such malicious activities on the platform," CloudSEK cyber intelligence analyst Bablu Kumar said.

CloudSEK claims to have uncovered at least 25 websites engaged in the nefarious practice of impersonating the OpenAI.com website, which are malicious sites that are duping individuals into downloading and installing harmful software, posing a severe risk to their security and privacy.

Bullish on Indian market; continuing to invest through partners: Coca-Cola

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Global beverages major The Coca-Cola Company is bullish on the Indian market and is continuing to invest in the country through its partners, the company's President and Chief Financial Officer John Murphy said on Monday. India's rapid progress in infrastructure, electrification and digitisation offer a long runway ahead for the economy to grow and it fosters confidence, he said at a media round table here. A lot of development has taken place in urban and rural India, which has created an emerging middle class, ensuring growth for many years to come, he said. "When you have an economy growing, our industry typically benefits from economic growth," he said.



"For us, there are tremendous ingredients to the growth equation that we are developing. And to manage growth, you have to invest. We are fortunate to have partners in India who believe in the opportunity they have and are investing in infrastructure and people," he noted. A lot of investment is underway through franchise bottling partners in the country, who are investing while "believing the opportunity ahead", he said, adding that it is going to continue.

Sensex snaps two-day losing streak on gains in RIL, Maruti; Nifty tests 17k level

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex snapped two-day losing streak to close 126 points higher on Monday, propped up by buying in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, Maruti and SBI amid a higher opening in European equities. However, investors remained cautious amid stress in the US and European financial systems, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 126.76 points or 0.22 per cent to finish at 57,653.86. During the day, the index witnessed a high of 58,019.55 and a low of 57,415.02. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 40.65 points or 0.24 per cent to end at 16,985.70, with 27 of its scrips ending in the green. Reliance Industries emerged



as the biggest gainer in the Sense pack, rising 1.54 per cent, followed by Maruti, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and HDFC Bank. On the other hand, Power Grid, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors were among the major laggards. A strengthening rupee

bolstered sentiment, even as relentless foreign capital outflows restricted the gains, according to traders. "...the market ended mixed with marginal gains in large caps while mid and small caps had losses. Some certainty was seen in domestic banks and large caps due to ease in the US and European markets aided by reports on the acquisition of SVB by US lender First Citizens Bank.

4 SAIL projects worth Rs 2,338 cr face delays: Steel minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Four projects of Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) worth Rs 2,338 crore are facing delay due to reasons like delayed placement of orders and supply of materials/equipment, Parliament was informed on Monday. However, there is no cost overrun in these projects, Union steel minister

Jyotiraditya M Scindia said in a reply to Rajya Sabha. As per the information provided by the minister, SAIL is executing a project of the modification in the washing circuit of CSW plant of Dalli mines at Rs 168 crore in Chhattisgarh and another project is installation of a new sinter plant with an investment of Rs 1,111 crore at its Bokaro Steel Plant in Jharkhand.

EPFO to decide rate of interest on deposits today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The retirement fund body EPFO is likely to announce the rate of interest on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for 2022-23 at its two-day meeting beginning Monday. EPFO had lowered the interest on EPF for 2021-22 to an over four-decade low of 8.1 per cent for its about five crore subscribers, from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21 in March 2022.

This was the lowest since 1977-78, when the EPF interest rate stood at 8 per cent. "The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's (EPFO's) apex decision making body Central Board of Trustees (CBT) is likely to decide the rate of interest on EPF for 2022-23 at its two-day meeting beginning on Monday afternoon," a source said. Besides interest rate, the CBT will also discuss the annual accounts of the EPFO

for 2022-23. The trustees will also deliberate on the action taken by the EPFO on the Supreme Court order for giving a four-month window to Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 subscribers to opt for higher pension. The EPFO has provided the facility to opt for higher pension to its subscribers till May 3, 2023. The 8.5 per cent interest rate on EPF deposits for 2020-21 was decided by the CBT in

March 2021. After the CBT decision, the interest rate on EPF deposits for 2022-23 will be sent to the Ministry of Finance for concurrence. EPFO provides the rate of interest only after it is ratified by the government through the finance ministry. In March 2020, EPFO had lowered the interest rate on provident fund deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent for 2019-20, from 8.65 per cent provided for 2018-19.

e3W likely to gain traction due to conducive economics

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Electric three-wheelers are expected to gain traction due to favourable operating economics, and the government's focus on cleaner means of transportation, domestic credit rating agency Icria said on Monday. According to a recent Icria report, the electric segment is likely to account for 14-16 per cent of new three-wheeler sales (excluding rickshaws) by FY2025, up from 8 per cent currently. Penetration is estimated to rise to 35-40 per cent by FY2030 as the product gains more accep-

tance and financing-related challenges subside, as per the report. Icria said, according to its recent channel check, most e3W dealers have seen double-digit growth in sales in the last two years, owing to various factors, such as lower operating costs, exemptions from registration and road taxes, and higher demand for last mile connectivity. However, while demand for e3Ws (including e-rickshaws) is increasing, sales have been limited by a lack of financing options, with the loans being offered at high-interest rates, poor loan-to-value ratios, and



shorter EMI tenures, it said. Furthermore, many large banks and NBFCs are not yet lending to this segment, limiting

the buyer's financing alternatives, it said, adding that almost three-quarters of the dealers polled believed that improving finance

availability will be the most effective way to boost e3W sales. "e3Ws (including e-rickshaws) have been at the forefront of India's electrification journey, being among the early adopters. In 10M FY2023, the 3Ws (excluding rickshaws) recorded an electric penetration of 8 per cent, compared to 4 per cent for two-wheelers and 1 per cent for passenger vehicles," said Kinjal Shah, Vice President at Icria. While sales dropped substantially in the aftermath of the pandemic, they rebounded at a healthy rate in the current fiscal year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by a solid margin, she

added. According to the rating agency, a favourable regulatory environment with central and state government subsidies to lower capital costs, as well as reduction or waiver of registration fees, road taxes, and permit requirements continue to be supportive of e-auto adoption. Coupled with the inherently lower running costs, this results in a much lower (40-45 per cent) total cost of ownership (TCO) than conventional diesel or CNG three-wheelers, making the conversion to e-autos an attractive proposition, Shah stated.

First Citizens acquires troubled Silicon Valley Bank

PNS ■ NEW YORK

North Carolina-based First Citizens will buy Silicon Valley Bank, the tech industry-focused financial institution that collapsed earlier this month, rattling the banking industry and sending shockwaves around the world. The deal could reassure

investors at a time of shaken confidence in banks, though the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and other regulators had already taken extraordinary steps to head off a wider banking crisis by guaranteeing that depositors in SVB and another failed U.S. bank would be able to access all of their money.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
e-Procurement Short Tender Notice
NIT No.57/EE-Div-28/SB2/GHMC/2022-23 Dated: 25.03.2023
The details can be seen by logging <https://www.tender.telangana.gov.in>. The date of events is detailed below: **Name of Work:** (1) Laying of CC Roads (2) Strengthening & Recarpeting of damaged ST road (3) Repairs to steps (4) Providing of Gym Materials in Div-29 Secunderabad, GHMC - 14 nos. of works. **Estimate Amount:** Rs. 250.85 Lakhs. **Start Date:** 28-03-2023 @ 4:00 PM, Last Date & Time for receipts of Bids: 04-04-2023 @ 04:00 PM, Name & Address of the officer concerned: Executive Engineer, Div-29, GHMC, Sec'bad, Cell No. 9963550957. Further details can be seen at e-Procurement @ <https://www.tender.telangana.gov.in>
R.O No: 13828-PP/CLAD/NTN/2022-23, Dt. 27.03.2023 Sd/- Executive Engineer, Div-29, Sec'bad, GHMC.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
TENDER NOTICE
No. 26/EE/SLD/2022-23 Dated: 28.03.2023
Engg - GHMC - EE/SLD - Tender is invited for the following work: (a) HVC - Engg - Lanes - Restoration of outlet and pipe line at Shikar Kunta, Waknagpet (V) Shankpet (M), Hyderabad District. **ECV amount:** Rs. 13.13.647/- **ECV:** Rs. 13.13 Lakhs. Download start date is Dt: 28.03.2023 @ 11:00 A.M. Last date and time for submission of all the above tenders is Dt: 03.04.2023 at 3:00 P.M. Note: For further details visit www.tender.telangana.gov.in, Address of the officer concerned: Executive Engineer, Hussain Sagar Lake Division, Budha Bhawan, 1st Floor, M. G. Road, Secunderabad-03, Ph: 9154369431. Sd/- Executive Engineer, R.O No: 13829-PP/CLAD/NTN/2022-23, Dt. 27.03.2023 Hussain Sagar Lake Division, Hyderabad.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Short NIT No.57/EE(M)/Sec-bad Zone/GHMC/2022-23 Dated: 27.03.2023
No. of Works: 12 Works, Estimated amount: Rs. 722.55 Lakhs, Bid Submission Start Date & Time: Dt: 29.03.2023, 1:00 PM, Bid Submission Closing Date & Time: Dt: 04.04.2023, 1:00 PM, Name & Address of the officer concerned: SE, Sec'bad Zone, GHMC, Cell No. 9969930374. Further details can be seen at @ <https://www.tender.telangana.gov.in> Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Secunderabad Zone, GHMC
R.O No: 13827-PP/CLAD/NTN/2022-23, Dt. 27.03.2023



Mahira Sharma, who has gained immense success post her *Bigg Boss* stint, is all set to make her upcoming debut in the Punjabi cinema. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, the actress gets candid about her debut, being a die-hard fan of Kareena Kapoor Khan, her desire to work down south and more.

Mahira Sharma: I didn't join the business of stardom for popularity

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Mahira Sharma is already a much loved Punjabi actress— what is perennial now is that her first liking of becoming a lead actress is fulfilling with her upcoming debut in Punjabi cinema.

She owes a lot of her success to one of the most popular seasons of *Bigg Boss* and becoming a film heroine was nothing less than a fascination for her. Always! When the team of *The Pioneer* sat down in conversation with the Kashmiri belle, she said, "My final avenue is here, my debut is here. I didn't join the business of stardom for popularity, but at a very young age that 'keeda' of acting sprung into me. I am not just a pretty face, I am not just associated with a controversial reality show nor am I only cute. I have an actress in me! Punjabi is not my native language, I am a Kashmiri by birth. I didn't allow anyone else to dub for me, I perfectly learnt the dialect. Everyone back in Punjab was stunned to see me."

Unnamed credit goes to Kareena Kapoor Khan too—because Mahira has been her die hard fan from the time the former debuted in *Refugee*. Recalling the time when Saif Ali Khan came on the sets of *Bigg Boss*, and she couldn't hold herself back from telling him how much

she loves his wife Kareena. The latter explained to us, "A pleasant coincidence happened to me. I have a web series coming up too and you won't believe I am playing the same character as Kareena in *Refugee*. The appearance is so similar. Even the camera shots are very similar. The director was screaming on the sets that I have got my second Kareena." A delightful moment for Mahira, one she has always hoped for.

As she can see, how the south movies are dominating the list, the bug has bitten her too. Mahira also wants to become a part of Southern buzz very soon. "I also want to become a pan India actress. There was a checklist that I made for myself when I was entering this business. It started from the television industry and now I would like to end it by becoming a part of Tollywood films. I am a big believer of Mahadev, and praise my success to him. I have noticed one thing that in the span of my career I am accepted very easily by any language. So whenever I start performing, everything gets settled on its own. Production really feels that Mahira was worth casting." After an Oscar winning moment, who wouldn't want to channelise their roots in the south industry by the way!

Mahira is still unable to absorb the success of her season, with every passing day she witnesses, "The impact of the season was

very huge. The fan base of *Bigg Boss* expanded to another level. I have seen a few of my fans crying for us, shivering while meeting us. All of this gives me a Wow moment of myself, they make me feel important on television." But, meanwhile, losing Sidharth Shukla was a devastating feeling for her! Sidharth and Mahira didn't start on a good note, but as the season was ending the whirlwind of emotions in both of them only rose to positivity. She was shocked, she was angry and deeply disturbed. She couldn't make sense of what was happening and as soon as she got the news she flew down to Mumbai immediately. She was there for Shehnaaz Gill as a shoulder to lean on in spite of anonymous contention.

A little too confident about herself, Mahira also shared, "The budget of the film never mattered to me, whenever you see any of my body of work it's always a blockbuster hit. Everything has changed post the success of *Bigg Boss* in my life, as everyone knew my mum was a little conservative so that she can protect me but spending most of the time in the Mumbai city now even she understood the nature of open mindedness. Perfect timing!"

So Mahira is living her dream now and she took action on them, that's why the possibility of the dream gave her strength to live it.



TEJAL SINHA

You might not really recognise her when we say, "Our guest for the day is Priya Ahuja or Priya Ahuja Rajda." But as soon as we say "Rita Reporter", we're sure you can hear this strong, bold, and a cutie for sure, saying "Main hoon Rita Reporter Kal Tak se" from one of the most loved shows, *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashmah*.

Having risen to fame with the hit show, the talented actress became a household name after she portrayed the role of a journalist. Acting for her was always something that she'd always wanted to do, ever since she remembers. In fact, having been inspired by the legendary actor Rekha, she said, "I think when I was in my second or third grade, when the teacher once asked me what we wanted to become, I always said "I wanted to become an actor." I always looked up to Rekha ji"

Lately, there have been talks stating that the actress has left *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashmah*, the reason being her husband Malav, who was also the director of the show. Refuting this, she confuted, "Noo! I haven't left Taarak. I don't know why people think that because Malav has left the show, I have left the show too. Malav as a human being is completely different, and his professional choices are completely different. I was already a part of the show from the first episode, and Malav joined in the 98th or 100th episode. We met in the show, we fell in love, we got married, and a lot of people think that I got the show because I am Malav's wife. It's because of the show that we got to know each other, and then of course we got married, and Malav decided to move on to explore something else. He wants to become a producer now, and he wants to do his own film, so he chose that, but I'm still a part of *Taarak Mehta*, and yes, it's been a while that I haven't shot for the show, and when I spoke to the team, they said currently there's no track of mine, but I'm very much a part of the show."

We're sure when we say that she's one of the hottest mamas in the industry, you all will agree too. Her social media proves how she's acing her motherhood phase and setting major goals. While motherhood is a beautiful phase in a woman's life, it's equally a challenging one too.

"As far as motherhood is concerned, it's been extremely challenging and tricky. However good you are at it, you still feel that you aren't that great and could do better overall for your child. A lot of times you get that guilt, but overall my journey has been very, very beautiful, and a big thanks to Malav, who has been the biggest supporter in this journey."

There's always this notion that once you have a baby, especially for an actor, the

career comes to a halt. To this, the actress couldn't agree more as she said, "Yes, it of course happens at times. You know, when you become a mother, your life changes a lot, and your priorities suddenly start changing in your life. But we have a lot of women working these days, even in our industry, who are great examples of women who are working after the baby also. Everything is determined by a person's personal choices and priorities in life. There are wonderful women who can balance work and their babies simultaneously and do it beautifully. It depends on women to women how much they want to balance their priorities."

Priya has always been a career-oriented artist, and "I agree that it's been a while that I'm not working." She's in fact given equal priority to both her professional and personal lives. However, "I won't say it has nothing to do with Ardaas but not much to do with him because he's a wonderful child and all kids are wonderful, so you know they balance it out. As mothers, we need to balance it out. I think I got this major break because of the pandemic because when that happened I wasn't sure if I would pick up work over Ardaas because it was all new for all of us, being a mother, and all of us being new to the virus, we were not aware of how this will react to a baby, how it is going to affect my child if I go out and work. Otherwise, I would have been working, when I was pregnant I thought I would start working after 3-4 months."

No doubt, mothers have their own struggles, and we don't know or understand them unless we become one. And according to the thespian, "The biggest struggle for women in their motherhood phase is their own emotions; we fight our own emotions the most, like I said, the mom-guilt. I think that's your biggest enemy. However good you are, at times deep down you keep thinking that you're not a great mother. Am I doing enough for my child? A lot of times when I go to some motherhood events as a celebrity, when I talk about my upbringing

Actress Priya Ahuja, popularly known as 'Rita Reporter', from *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashmah*, in an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, opens about her motherhood journey so far, maintaining a proper balance between her professional and personal life, and also refutes the news of her not being a part of the show.

and people are like, "Oh my god, you're doing so much, of course you feel great about it", but at the end of the day at times you feel you're not doing enough, so that is like one big challenge I have faced myself, and of course raising a child and balancing your work, raising a good human being is most important for me."

Oh, you're a mother now; how are you so active on social media? How are you wearing such clothes as a mother? How can you post such bold pictures? This is not something new for Priya. Recently, when she posted a few bold pictures of hers, she was mocked tremendously by people who passed on such comments on her post. Opening up on how she deals with such comments, just like a warrior, she said, "I genuinely don't care what people think about what I can wear, what I can't, what pictures I can post and what I can't, what I can wear, what I can't, anything and everything I do, and I just don't give too much

importance to people who are sitting behind screens and they are just there to comment on you or on anybody else. Harr cheez harr kisiko pasand nahi aati (Not everyone will like everything), and it's perfectly alright. I am not there to justify myself to anybody or even my situation, clarify anything, or think what this person will like or what people will say."

She further revealed, "I come from a kind of orthodox family, and leaving everything behind, I came all alone to Mumbai to become an actor. Agar parvaah karti toh Mumbai mai nahi rehti, actor nahi hoti (If I really cared, I wouldn't be here in Mumbai, nor be an actor), so I've never cared about those things, and I've never cared about people and the trolling that happens. I usually avoid replying to people who comment on anything that they say; in fact, I just delete those bad comments. I love peace in my personal and professional life. I'm a very peaceful person (she laughs). I don't like any kind of drama in my life, so I just avoid such things and ignore them."

'Marma point therapy' for your overall health & well-being

Marma in Sanskrit means something which is hidden or secret. It is a junction in the body where two or more types of tissues, such as muscles, veins, ligaments, bones or joints join. Sushruta Samhita, the first consolidated text of the Indic science of Ayurveda describes 107 Marma points within the body while the 108th point is given to the mind.

Major Marma points are connected to the seven Chakras, or energy centers of the body and the minor points are spread along the trunk and limbs of the body. These points are said to cover 22 points on the lower part of the body, 22 on the arms, 12 on the chest and stomach, 14 on the back, and 37 on the head and neck.

Interestingly, there also exist 12 such Marma points in the human body that can cause instant death to anyone if subjected to a harsh blow in that area. Martial Art masters from the southern part of India over 5000 years ago have said to use this knowledge to not only save their wounded soldiers, but also to inflict pain and injury on their opponents by striking on their Marma points. There are records of many a wounded kalari fighters who were nursed back to health using Marma therapy.

Marma Yoga is also a science, the application of which has been used as a cure in everything from warfare, surgeries, common ailments, cardiovascular & neuromuscular diseases, mental depression, anxiety disorders, menstruation issues and respiratory diseases. Over centuries, practitioners have used specific Marma-point massages to induce healing in the injured areas.

Radhika Iyer, founder of Anahata Organic, an entrepreneur, yogini, mountaineer and philanthropist said, "Marma therapy is administered routinely in traditional Indian sciences such as the Ayurveda and Siddha practices, where trained Marma technicians engage relevant Marma points to increase blood flow to the weaker parts of the body. There is deep scientific evidence to prove that Marma points therapy internally impacts everything in the body and mind; from the functioning of organs to the production of hormones in the gut and brain."

Both Ayurveda and Siddha medicine propagate Marma as an effective method to improve the biochemistry of the human body. It is said to release unwanted stagnant energy and replace it with vital pranic energy into the intricate nervous system of the body.

Marma therapy is often practiced with the use of medicated oils that are infused with medicinal roots, flowers and herbs that bring relief to the body. This is how practicing Marma Yoga at least once a month can help you:

- It will declog your energy channels, making you feel healthy and peaceful at all times.
- It will help anyone suffering from 'vata Dosha' enormously improving bone density and nerve function.
- It will create equanimity between the physical, mental and emotional plains reducing cell degeneration, improving stiff joints and strengthening metabolism.
- A session of Marma Yoga can make you experience a positive and powerful mental transformation almost instantly.
- The physical body will experience relief from acute pain after a 10 minute Marma session under a trained therapist.

Indic sciences believe that while stimulation of the Marma points can improve your physical and mental health immensely, injury to these points can also result in negative health effects in the body that cannot be treated easily. It is therefore important that one must experience this therapy only with technicians who have been trained in the field.

So the next time you feel like getting a massage, pause a moment to redirect that time to experiencing a fully curated Marma Therapy to completely uplift and detoxify you.





RJ Corp. unveiled its latest Nike store at Jubilee Hills, called Nike by Jubilee Hills, designed as a neighbourhood store that focuses on bringing the fitness community together through member events, bespoke product range and localised design elements.





Celebrating the wonderful beverage tea, Hybiz TV organised a one-of-its-kind second edition of Tea championship at HICC, Novotel, Hyderabad.



St Andrews School Keesara, organised a first-of-its kind family tournament for the parents, which was graced by renowned entrepreneur and philanthropist S.P.Reddy.






The International Association of Lions Clubs - Lions District 320A, celebrated the season 4 of the Ratnadeep Grand Queens Leadership Awards 2023, at Club Botanika in Gachibowli.






Swaranartana Academy, celebrated the birth centenary of the legendary Late Dr Nataraja Ramakrishna, the doyen of Andhranatyam and recreator Perini Sivatanavam, by hosting an evening of Andhranatyam dance performances by Padma Mohan Denduluri, at Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, Nampally.

FUN



ARCHIE






GARFIELD







NANCY





GINGER MEGGS



CALVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

4	9	6	5	8	1	2	3	7
8	1	5	2	3	7	9	6	4
2	7	3	4	9	6	5	8	1
1	4	8	3	7	2	6	5	9
3	2	9	1	6	5	7	4	8
5	6	7	9	4	8	1	2	3
6	8	1	7	2	4	3	9	5
7	3	2	8	5	9	4	1	6
9	5	4	6	1	3	8	7	2

Rules

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

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4		
5					6
7		8			
9				10	
				11	
12	13		14		15
				16	
17					18
19					

ACROSS

- Large stone buildings built in ancient Egypt as tombs
- Wrong
- Steel pins knocked into wood
- Call in on
- Get
- A song sung by one person
- Have a lie down
- Thin cord for tying parcels
- Fabric
- Defrosts
- So smooth it is difficult to get hold of

DOWN

- Indicate direction with your finger
- Moscow is in this country

SOLUTION

S	T	A	T	I	O
R	O	I	N	G	A
L	O	N	G	E	R
E	N	G	E	R	
H	O	N	E		
E	N	E			
R	E	C	I	P	E
L	N	I	E	R	
F	G	E	N	E	R

Keerthy eyeing on strong characters

The name Keerthy Suresh is synonymous with great acting. Her portrayal of yes-ter-year actress Savitri in Nag Ashwin's *Mahanati* (2018) is one of the most effective performances that the Telugu audiences got to witness on the silver screen in a long time. *Nenu Sailaja* marks Keerthy's debut in Tollywood. The film was considered to be the first blockbuster of 2016 and thus began her successful journey in T'wood. She starred opposite superstar Mahesh Babu in *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* (2022), which was a huge blockbuster.

Now, after a short sweet break, Keerthy is ready to set the screens ablaze with Srikanth Odela's *Dasara* starring opposite Nani. The film is set in Singareni coal mines near

Godavarikhani and depicts the lives of Dharani and Vennela who reside in the vicinities of the rural Telangana region. In her recent interaction with the media, the actress said everybody will be able to connect to her character in *Dasara*. The film is produced by Sudhakar Cherukuri under Sri Lakshmi Venkateswara Cinemas banner and is directed by debutant Srikanth Odela. The film will have a simultaneous release in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi languages on March 30th.

The *Mahanati* actress says she donned a challenging character in *Dasara*. The director of the film gave her a four hour narration and asked her to lose around 12kgs. However, Keerthy informed the director that she's already signed up for different films and wouldn't want the continuity of other characters to go for a toss. All told, she lost around 3 kgs to play the part.

"It used to take a few hours even for applying and removing make-up," recalls Keerthy talking about the many challenges she had to endure while filming. "We shot in a rustic background like dust and coal. It was initially difficult to play a character who speaks Telangana dialect. But I got used to it after a while. My character's name is Vennela. The character Vennela connects to everyone."

Now that the film is set in a rural backdrop, it is a necessity that characters speak in the native dialect. In one of her recent interviews, she admitted to having brought in a translator during the narration because she did not understand the slang. From not understanding the slang to dubbing for her part, she's come a long way, "Director Srikanth Odela's associate Srinath taught me the Telangana dialect. He is well versed with the accent. There is also a professor who helped me. A lot of small details have also been added. I dubbed for *Dasara*. Usually, I take two or three days for dubbing. But *Dasara* took five or six days."

She further adds, "Director Srikanth Odela has written this story brilliantly. He has a lot of clarity about what character should be. The director thinks the character and the story in one metre. After understanding that metre, I think of how I want to do it and what the director wants. We understood that and worked on how to build the character."

There is a feel associated with some films. "Even after finishing the movie, we feel an emotional connection with it. It happened for *Mahanati* previously and now I felt the same for *Dasara*," according to the *Good Luck Sakhi* actress.

The songs of the film are doing extremely well on all major streaming platforms. *Chamkeela Angelesi* is one song in particular that's mesmerised the audience to an extent where thousands of influencers from across India are churning out

reels on Instagram. Speaking of whether she anticipated the song to skyrocket the way it did, she said when she heard the song for the first time, she thought it'd be used in all weddings.

"The song has that vibe," enthuses the *Mahanati* star.

"The lyrics are very beautiful. We thought it would be a big hit. It was a bigger success than we expected."

Dasara is truly Pan-Indian in nature, but the leading man, Nani doesn't really like the word as much. However, we must say that the film has the potential to hit it out of the park for it's deeply rooted in its culture. "Now that *Dasara* is releasing pan-India, we have to see if I will get strong characters," shares the *Dasara* actress hinting at whether she'd be interested to star in B'wood films. "I like doing Bollywood. But first there should be good characters and stories."



Actress Keerthy Suresh starrer *Dasara* is all set to hit the theaters on March 30. Ahead of the film's release, Keerthy shares some interesting insights from the film.

Bindu Madhavi throws Glam Feast

Native Telugu girl Bindu Madhavi was recently seen in the Telugu *Bigg Boss* and has much caught the attention of the Telugu audience.

Bindu was recently seen in *Anger Tales*, a Telugu original series and impressed the Telugu audience with her fine performance.

In her new snap, Bindu can be seen throwing a glamour bomb at the viewers as she dons a stylish and suave suit that elevates her style game. Bindu is one of the progressive Telugu actors and she is now said to be looking for new and fresh characters that challenge the actress in her.

It has to be seen if the Telugu directors will catch the signals and come up with interesting roles for Bindu who is also a fine performer, apart from acing the glamour game. The actress is said to be in talks for 3-4 new projects that are in various stages of production and she will reveal more details in the days to follow.



PS-2 trailer to be launched in Chennai tomorrow

Ponniyin Selvan, the magnum opus directed by veteran filmmaker Mani Ratnam, is one of the most ambitious projects in Tamil cinema history. The first installment of the historical drama, which was released in theatres in September 2022, became one of the Tamil film industry's all-time highest-grossing films.

Now the highly anticipated *Ponniyin Selvan 2*, the second installment of the historical drama franchise, is set to be released in theatres on April 28, 2023. With less than a month for release, the team is busy with the promotions for the film. The BTS glimpses and first single raised expectations on the film.

Now the much-

awaited announcement of the venue for the *Ponniyin Selvan 2* music and trailer launch will be held at 6 p.m. at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium, Chennai, on March 29. The grand event will see the stars, celebrities and the whole team of *PS 2*.

Lyca Productions and Madras Talkies released a special announcement video on Sunday for the upcoming epic historical action adventure film's audio and trailer launch ceremony, while also giving viewers a glimpse at Academy Award-winning composer A.R. Rahman from the recording sessions with the singers.

Produced by Lyca Productions in associa-

tion with Madras Talkies. The film is a historic epic drama adapted from the novel written by Kalki Krishnamurthy. The magnum opus features Vikram, Aishwarya Rai, Jayam Ravi, Karthi, and Trisha Krishnan in important roles. Actors namely Prakash Raj, R Sarath Kumar, Prabhu, Parthian, Ashwin Kakumanu, and others are also a part of the project.



Uday Shankar and Megha Akash's new film takes off in Hyderabad

Actor Uday Shankar, who gained recognition for himself with his work, has signed another film that kicked off with a puja ceremony at the Film Nagar Temple in Hyderabad on Monday. Directed by Manmohan, this film is produced by Atluri Narayana Rao under the banner of Sri Ram Arts and presented by Dr. Saujanya R. Atluri. While Narayana Rao clapped the board for the muhurtam shot, Dinesh Chaudhary switched on the camera.

Starring Megha Akash in the female lead role, the film will also feature known actors like Madhuranand, Venkatesh Kakamanu, Shashi, and others in key roles.

Speaking on the occasion, actor Madhushan said, "I am happy that Uday is once again acting as a hero under this banner. I read the whole script, and I am confident that this film will give Uday a super hit and take him into the next league. All the best to the Sri Ram Arts banner and the entire team, wishing this movie a blockbuster."

Meanwhile actor Uday Shankar said, "This is my fifth film as a hero and second movie under this banner. I am very happy to be associated with producer Narayana Rao once again. In a way, it is like a family project. After *Nachindi Girlfriend*, I feel happy to act with Madhuranand again. He has a very important role in this movie. He is playing an exciting character that will generate a lot of humour. Manmohan came up with an excellent script for this movie. This film will be a romantic comedy. We are going to commence our regular shoot very soon. We need all your blessings and support."

Samantha Ruth Prabhu says 'who will love me like you do' to netizen asking her to 'date someone'



Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu, who sizzled the screens with her performance with *Oo Antava* in *Pushpa: The Rise*, has talked about dating in her recent tweet.

A fan on the micro-blogging website shared an edited picture of Samantha and asked "I know it's not my place to say, but plz date someone @Samanthaprabhu2."

To which Samantha, who was married to actor Naga Chaitanya, replied: "Who will love me like you do."

It was in 2021 when Samantha and Chaitanya announced their separation.

On the work front, Samantha is gearing up for the release of her mythological romantic drama *Shaakuntalam* which is scheduled to release on April 14. Directed by Gunasekhar, it also stars Dev Mohan in the lead role.



Ram Charan next film titled Game Changer

As he turned 38 on Monday, star Ram Charan shared that his *RC15* has been christened *Game Changer*.

Taking to Instagram, Ram on Monday shared a teaser and then the name of the film.

The clip begins with a game of Russian roulette wheel and ends with a chess board.

The actor posted the clip with the caption: "#GameChanger it is!"

Ram's co-star Kiara Advani dropped a comment on the teaser, which was also posted on page.

She wrote: "Happiest Birthday to my dearest friend and co-star @alwaysramcharan!! May this truly be a *Game Changer* in every way."

According to reports, the upcoming film is touted as an action drama with current-day politics.

WINNING CRUCIAL MOMENTS KEY TO MI'S SUCCESS: HARMAN

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet Kaur feels that focussing on winning crucial moments of matches and not the ultimate prize worked well for her side, as they lifted the inaugural Women's Premier League trophy after a seven-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in the final here.

MI chased down the target of 132 with three balls to spare in the low-scoring but tense summit clash at the Brabourne Stadium on Sunday, with England all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt playing sheet-anchor with an unbeaten 60.

"(Right from start) we were talking about winning the moments. We were not looking for the trophy, we were looking to win all the moments. (We thought) if we win the moments, the trophy will come automatically," Kaur told reporters after Mumbai Indians' title win on Sunday.

Kaur said she was waiting for this moment for a long time, to win a trophy as a captain.

"It feels very good personally also. I was waiting for this moment for a long time when I could win something as a captain. It is also very important for women's cricket," she said.

"Many times we were there but could not make it. But here the tournament was different, the teams were different. Every side is so balanced and did well in the tournament."

Kaur's run out on Sunday reminded of her dismissal in the T20 World Cup semifinal against Australia, but



the MI captain said there was enough in her team's tank to overhaul the target.

"Both the run outs were quite disappointing. I was confident in the last match (India versus Australia) because we had so many wickets in hand. I thought we would be able to do it.

"But the scenario was a lot different here, we had Nat in the middle and

she was well settled. I knew who was going to bowl and how. We were quite positive to finish the game one or two overs left. But when I got out we thought we had to go by the situation," she said.

She said playing the Eliminator against Gujarat Giants helped her side gain momentum into the final.

"When we were doing well, the

only thought in mind was to not get into the elimination round. But after losing two matches we were in search of momentum. It went in our favour that we got one more match to play before the final and everybody got into the rhythm.

"It worked well in our favour. If you play after a long gap, it is tough to get back into momentum," Kaur explained.

The India captain was impressed with how Delhi Capitals players Shikha Pandey and Radha Yadav added 52 runs from just 24 balls for the unbroken 10th wicket, and asked them after the game to play similarly for the national team.

"I told Radha after the match that the way they were playing, I want to see the same approach when you come and play for India. She promised to come with the same approach."

Kaur said the inaugural WPL was an open tournament and all the five teams played well.

"This was not a one-sided tournament. The next season will be more exciting. People will be waiting for this. Every team did really well," she said.

Delhi Capitals coach Jonathan Batty lamented his side losing wickets in heaps against Mumbai Indians in the final.

"Losing three early wickets hurts you. The partnership between captain Meg (Lanning) and Marizanne (Kapp) got us back but then lost a flurry of wickets. That made it really hard but full credit (to the team) for going into the last over, (losing by) three balls left. We still had a chance of winning there at the end," he said.

Batty said Delhi Capitals respected the call made by third umpire against Shafali Verma, who fell off a full toss from Issy Wong.

"We could not tell, the third umpire is in the best position to adjudicate on that and gave what they thought was a fair dismissal and we just lost a wicket, it was just unfortunate timing," he said.

Mayers or Hooda likely to open with KL Rahul in LSG's first two games



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In absence of Quinton de Kock, either West Indies southpaw Kyle Mayers or the flamboyant Deepak Hooda is likely to open the innings with skipper KL Rahul during Lucknow Super Giants' first two games in this edition of the IPL.

With the South African team playing two ICC World Cup qualifier 50-over games against the Netherlands on March 31 and April 2, none of their top players will be available for their respective IPL sides in the first couple of games.

Hence, LSG will be missing their regular opener de Kock, while their first match opponents Delhi Capitals will be without the services of Anrich Nortje and Lungi Ngidi.

LSG will take on DC on April 1 in Lucknow and then fly to Chennai for their next game against Chennai Super Kings.

"In case of De Kock, the best option is Kyle Mayers, who is also a left-hander and has a

decent strike rate of close to 135 in T20Is. On Sunday, he was brilliant against South Africa during his 27-ball-51. So Mayers is favourite to partner Rahul in first two games," a source privy to developments in LSG camp said.

In case, LSG wants to beef up their middle-order or bowling arsenal with overseas recruits, then there is a case for talented Hooda to face the new ball alongside his skipper.

Hooda has already scored a century for India opening the innings in T20 cricket and has shown that he can be an enforcer in the Powerplay overs with his improvisation skills.

Mohsin Khan, who is currently doing his rehabilitation with LSG's strength and conditioning unit, is expected to miss at least first leg of the tournament but team think-tank feels he might be available for the second phase.

Jaydev Nadkarni is the closest like-for-like replacement of Mohsin, although the Saurashtra

Sandeep replaces injured Krishna at Rajasthan Royals

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Veteran Punjab seamer Sandeep Sharma will replace injured Prasidh Krishna in the Rajasthan Royals squad for IPL 2023, the franchise confirmed on Monday.

Prasidh, a bowling mainstay for Royals, is out of action following a lower-back surgery. It was a lucky break for Sandeep, who has 114 wickets from 104 IPL games at an economy rate of 7.77, as he went unsold at the auction.

"Fast bowler Sandeep Sharma will represent Rajasthan Royals this season after being signed as a replacement for Prasidh Krishna.

veteran neither has the pace nor the lethal blockhole delivery like the UP man.

During the course of the tournament, Jammu and Kashmir's Yudhvir Singh Charak or Vidarbha's Yash Thakur, both of whom have made an impression at training sessions might be tried out depending on team's situation and pitch conditions.

DC TO MISS ALL FOREIGN PACERS IN 1ST 2 GAMES

In case of the Capitals, they are likely to miss their entire foreign pace unit during the first two games as Mustafizur Rahman will also be unavailable due to Bangladesh's ongoing series against Ireland.

Nortje and Ngidi are in the Proteas squad to play the Netherlands, while Kagiso Rabada will also be absent for Kings XI Punjab as he will also be on national duty.

RANA TO LEAD KKR



PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders on Monday named left-handed batter Nitish Rana as the team's new skipper for the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League.

Rana will replace Shreyas Iyer, who is likely to undergo back surgery and is in danger of missing the entire season.

In fact, KKR's statement was an indicator that Iyer's chances of an early return to play looks improbable at the moment.

"...Nitish Rana would captain the side in the absence of Shreyas Iyer, who is recovering from a back injury. While we are hopeful that Shreyas will recover and participate at some stage in the IPL 2023 edition, we feel fortunate that Nitish, with the captaincy experience having led his state side in white ball cricket and the IPL experience he has had with KKR since 2018, will do a great job," KKR said in a statement.

"We are also confident that under head coach Chandrakant Pandit and the support staff, he will get all the support needed off the field, and the highly experienced leaders in the squad will provide all support that Nitish may need on the field. We wish him the best in his new role and Shreyas a full and speedy recovery," it further stated.

While Rana has captained Delhi in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, the results have been far from encouraging for the southpaw. It is understood that he would be asked to implement the strategy prepared by coach Pandit, who along with team boss Venky Mysore and former Mumbai Ranji stalwart Abhishek Nayar will be calling the shots.

It may noted that Rana was dropped by Delhi in this season's Ranji Trophy squad due to his poor show and inept technique in red-ball cricket.

Rana has captained Delhi in 12 T20s in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, with eight wins and four defeats. The 29-year old middle-order batter was bought by KKR ahead of the 2018 season and has been retained by the franchise ever since.

Rana 74 matches for KKR, scoring 1744 runs at a strike rate of 135.61.

KKR will open their campaign against Punjab Kings at Mohali on April 1.

Bangladesh beat Ireland in rain-hit 1st T20I

AP ■ CHATTOGRAM

Rony Talukdar hit his maiden half-century to help Bangladesh secure a 22-run win against Ireland by DLS method on Monday in the opener of a three-match T20I series.

Talukdar struck 67 off 38 with seven fours and three sixes as opener to steer Bangladesh to 207-5 before rain halted the innings with four balls remaining.

Ireland's revised target was set for 104 in 8 overs but it managed only 81-5.

Put into bat first, Bangladesh made a fluent start with Talukdar and Liton Das adding 81 runs in the first powerplay,

eclipsing the previous high of 74 against Sri Lanka in 2018.

Paceman Craig Young, who claimed 2-45, broke through with the wicket of Liton in the eighth over. Liton hit four boundaries and three sixes in his 23 ball-47.

Talukdar slashed legspinner Ben White for a boundary through extra-cover to bring up his fifty off just 24 deliveries.

Shamim Hossain, who made 30 off 20, and skipper Shakib Al Hasan injected some spark as the side went past 200 runs for the fourth time in its T20 history.

Before the rain arrived, Shakib was batting on 20 off 13 with Mehidy Hasan Miraz on 4.



Paul Stirling, who is leading the team in the series after regular skipper Andrew Balbirnie was rested, and Ross Adair scored 18 runs in the first over of left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed to give the side a ray of hope. But pacer Hasan Mahmud rattled the stump of Adair (13) with a yorker and fast bowler Taskin Ahmed took the game literally away with three wickets in his first over.

He started with Stirling, who made 17, and then dismissed Lorcan Tucker and George Dockrell. Taskin then came back to get rid of Tector to finish with his career-best 4-16. Gareth Delany scored a team-best 21 not out.

Indore pitch rating changed from 'poor' to 'below average'

PTI ■ DUBAI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has changed the pitch rating of Indore's Holkar Stadium — the venue for the third Test between India and Australia — to 'below average' from 'poor' following a BCCI appeal.

The ICC also gave the Narendra Modi Stadium pitch in Ahmedabad, the venue for the fourth Test, an 'average' rating for the slow batting deck where both teams had one completed innings each. The match had ended in a tame draw, with India winning the series 2-1.

At Indore, Australia had defeated India by nine wickets

inside three days of the Border-Gavaskar Test to secure a World Test Championship final berth.

The ICC appeal panel reviewed the earlier decision of the match referee Chris Broad and found that there was not enough excessive variable bounce to warrant the 'poor' rating.

The pitch, which had initially received three merit points, will now get only one merit point. The ICC match referee however gave 'very good' rating to the Wankhede Stadium and Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, Visakhapatnam pitches, where the first two ODIs between India and Australia were played.

Afghanistan thump Pakistan to claim T20I series

AP ■ SHARJAH

Afghanistan overcame late nerves in the closing overs to beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the second T20I on Sunday and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

Needing 30 off the last three overs, and 22 from the last two, Najibullah Zadran and Mohammad Nabi hit a six each off pace bowler Naseem Shah in the penultimate over to reduce the target to five runs.

Zadran then hit the winning boundary off Zaman Khan's last over to chase down the 131-run target with one ball to spare.

"It's a great honour and

pleasure to lead this wonderful team," said Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan.

"It was a great effort with the ball, and then we took it deep and finished it."

He added: "I think 130 was a good total. We tried our best to take it deep and finish it. Our strategy was to go out there and make sure you take responsibility. We have players to finish it like Nabi and Najib."

Pakistan's 130-6 in 20 overs was built around a sedate 57-ball 64 not out by all-rounder Imad Wasim — his maiden T20I half century.

This was Afghanistan's first bilateral T20I series against any of the top six teams — India, England, Pakistan, South



Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

They have previously won a T20I series each against the West Indies and Bangladesh and five in five against Zimbabwe.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (44 off 49 balls) and Ibrahim Zadran (38 off 40 balls) set the platform during their 56-run second wicket stand.

However, their slow batting left Afghanistan needing to score 46 off the last 30 balls.

Najibullah (23) and Nabi (14) remained unbeaten to seal the victory.

"Our motive for this series was to check out talented young players and we have to back them in the future," said

Pakistan captain Shadab Khan.

Earlier, Pakistan's recovery was led by Imad who hit two sixes and three boundaries to rescue Pakistan from 63-5 after winning the toss and batting.

Imad and Shadab (32) added 67 for the sixth wicket.

Pakistan had got off to a disastrous start with left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi claiming Saim Ayub and Abdullah Shafique, both for naught, in the first over of the innings.

Farooqi finished with 2-19 in his four overs.

Shafique has now been dismissed for naught on four successive occasions in five T20Is since making his debut in November 2020.

WPL 2023 ends with promise of changing Indian cricket for better

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Women's Premier League made a captivating debut and promised a bright future for the aspiring female cricketers in India but the hurriedly organised first season also left a lot of scope for improvement going forward.

The WPL, played entirely across two venues in Mumbai, witnessed special performances from some of the best cricketers in the world but leaving aside left-arm spinner Saika Ishaque, did not unearth a plethora of local talent like it was expected to.

The five-team competition culminated on Sunday with Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet Kaur finally leading her side across the line in the summit clash against a team captained by Australian legend Meg Lanning.

The tournament began with plenty of scores over 200 with boundaries as short as 42-44 metres, but pitches tired out eventually and became spin-friendly.

Mumbai's Hayley Matthews won the Purple Cap for her 16 wickets — including four in the final — but Nat Sciver-Brunt was the overall top performer with 10 wickets and 332 runs.

Apart from Mumbai Indians' Ishaque, who took 15 wickets, Shreyanka Patil and Kanika Ahuja of Royal Challengers Bangalore made their mark on the big stage but there was a clear gap between those from the Indian domestic circuit and the world's best.

While Patil lit up the field with her energy and enthusiasm, 20-year-old Ahuja showed tremendous promise at a young age with her explosive batting.

Harmanpreet acknowledged that little-known Indian players did not get many roles and opportunities to play, but added value to their teams with their fielding, citing the examples of MI's Amanjot Kaur and Jintimani Kalita.

The Indian skipper hoped that young and uncapped Indian players would emerge wiser from the experience, knowing what they need to do in order to bridge the gap.

Delhi's head coach Jonathan Batty left with the message, challenging young Indian players to work on their game and fitness for season two.

While Mumbai Indians achieved the high of recording five consecutive wins en route to the title triumph, a team led by another Indian star, Smriti Mandhana's Royal Challengers Bangalore, endured a five-game losing streak when the competition got underway and the tournament ended for them even before it began.

Mandhana admitted facing difficulties handling a team full of players with bigger stature and more experience than her.

Her own form with the bat failed to inspire RCB, who also had the likes of Ellyse Perry, Heather Knight, Sophie Devine, Megan Schutt and Renuka Singh to name a few.

No doubt Mandhana, a leadership prospect with the Indian team, will emerge better from her first WPL stint as captain and player but it remains to be seen how the team responds after a horrendous first season.

Lanning's Delhi Capitals did not instill fear in the opposition as Harmanpreet's MI did but the Australian Lanning led from the front and ended as the tournament's leading run-getter.

But if Lanning was consistent with the bat at the top, Shafali Verma blowing hot and cold remained an issue which Delhi Capitals could not do much about.

If RCB had to bear with Mandhana's poor run with the bat, Delhi Capitals experienced the same with their vice-captain Jemimah Rodrigues. The right-handed batter failed to score even a fifty, but entertained the crowd with her athleticism in the field taking some stunning catches.

Gujarat Giants began with losing their preferred captain Beth Mooney halfway into the first game and endured a largely disappointing campaign, but Deol's contributions mixed with Ashleigh Gardner's prowess give them hope for the future.

Sneh Rana did her best as stand-in captain, but overall, GG were not good enough to advance to the knockouts.

Alyssa Healy's UP Warriorz got outplayed in the Eliminator by Mumbai Indians, but they were the first side to beat the eventual winners and showed a lot of promise with Navgire, Grace Harris, Anjali Sarvani and Sophie Ecclestone — who took joint highest 16 wickets — in their ranks.

The 22-game competition spread over as many days this March was held entirely in Mumbai, and like many, both Healy and Ecclestone also wished for home and away games from next season onwards.

It remains to be seen if the BCCI decides to organise the next WPL in the home-away format like the Indian Premier League, as crowd support plays a big part in the success of teams and also helps in creating a much needed fan base.