

**'Surgical strikes
broke back of
terrorists'**

CHARACTERS

Dasara: When a **BROODING** vagabond rises to the occasion

With the Karnataka Assembly elections only a few weeks away, political parties did not miss the opportunity to catch the attention of voters during the Sri Rama Navami festival on Thursday. In keeping with Karnataka's age-old tradition of celebrating Sri Rama Navami by distributing Paanaka* or Sharbat* and 'Kosambari' at public places, various socio-religious groups set up their Prasad* (offerings to God) distribution pandals...

Childhood interest in drawing and painting led Mahira Shah to the world of 'mandala' art and today she holds the world record for making the smallest mandala shikara. Mandala is an ancient Indian art pattern which involves drawing of circles in intricate designs. The art form was popularised by Indian artist SH Raza, who created several paintings of the mandala art and became world famous for them. Mahira Shah entered the Indian Books of Records for making...

Apparel exports body AEPC on Thursday asked industry players to take advantage of free trade agreements and diversify to Man Made Fibre (MMF) based products to cater to the global demand and boost exports. Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC) also said that it has collaborated with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) to organise a capacity building programme for promoting Noida as an export hub.

The never-ending speculations about Mahendra Singh Dhoni's impending 'last dance', Virat Kohli's endless pursuit of an elusive silverware and Rohit Sharma's customary nonchalance are things that make the IPL starting Friday a heady cocktail of cricket and entertainment. Megastars Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit have been the IPL's driving force in the past 15 seasons, getting the cricket crazy Indian fans hooked on the event for nearly two months every year. As it enters the 16th season...



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Thursday, with a view to confirming a new leader by early May. Over the next few months, you will see the World Bank undergo an important transition. We expect that Ajay Banga President Biden's nominee will be elected President of the World Bank," US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told lawmakers at a Congressional hearing on Wednesday. "He will be charged with accelerating our progress to evolve the institution to better address 21st century challenges. This evolution will help the Bank deliver on its vital poverty alleviation and development goals," Yellen said. If confirmed, Banga would become the first-ever Indian-American and Sikh-American to head either of the two top international financial institutions: the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Banga is expected to replace the current World Bank

president David Malpass, who will step down in June, nearly a year before his term is scheduled to expire. Malpass faced strong criticism over the bank's commitment to climate action and over his personal views on climate change. Last week, reports emerged that China sounded doubtful about backing Banga, saying it is "open" to supporting "other potential candidates" based on merit. Banga, however, received overwhelming support from major countries across the world, including India. Following Banga's nomination, he has travelled to several countries for support. A coalition of 55 advocates, academics, executives, luminaries, and former government officials -- including four Nobel Laureates -- wrote an open letter to welcome and support Banga's nomination as the next President of the World Bank.

Among all states, TS consumes maximum electricity for farming

It is estimated that there will be a demand for more than 16,000 MW during summer this year. "We are ready to supply electricity without any interruption regardless of demand," he clarified.

Telangana experienced the hottest day of this summer so far on Thursday. Bhiknoor in Kamareddy District recorded the highest temp of 43.8°C in the state and Tirumalagiri recorded the highest temp of 39.6°C in Hyderabad city. Parts of Nirmal, Siricilla, Nizamabad, Siddipet, Nalgonda, Jagtial, Adilabad, Kamareddy, Mahbubnagar, Gadwal, Medchal and Vikarabad reported temps above 40°C. In Hyderabad, Tirmalgiri, Serilingampally and

Saidabad recorded temps above 39°C. Hot weather will continue for another week. On Sunday, the city will witness dry, hot weather when the IPL match is being held.

Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals will play at the Rajiv Gandhi Cricket Stadium in Uppal from 3:30 pm. The TSDPS said that maximum temperatures are expected to range from 37°C to 41°C, while minimum temperatures will range from 23°C to 26°C from March 30 to April 2. In Hyderabad city, maximum temperatures are expected to range from 35°C to 38°C while minimum temperatures will range from 23°C to 25°C.

After that, a meeting of state leaders, district presidents and district in-charges will be held as usual at the party's state office in Hyderabad at 5.30 pm.

He wondered that although the Centre makes tall claims about importing crude at lower prices from Russia, the benefit is not passed on to the common man and two oil companies are reaping huge profits. "The Centre is importing crude at

KTR, Sanjay lock horns on Twitter once again -P:2

world," he said. KTR asked why the Centre couldn't control LPG prices although it is under GST. He said that the Centre is conspiring to stop the discussion on the price rise in Parliament. "Rejecting the BJP is the only way to stop the Centre's loot and reduce fuel prices," KTR added.

The celebrations remained largely incident-free in the rest of the country with people coming out on the streets with religious fervour and enthusiasm and law-enforcement

agencies on the watch.
Prime Minister Narendra Modi wished people on the auspicious occasion and said the life of Lord

Ram will be an inspiration for humanity in every era.

The TDP does not have any conflict of interest with the BJP support base in TS and can influence many important pockets in Telangana. As of now, the TDP has a definite share of 5,000 to 6,000 votes in TS constituencies. These votes can become

Sources in the BJP, however, say that it is too early to decide on an alliance. "The whole idea of winning over regional parties will be in question. However, as elections are coming, signals will keep coming from everywhere for an alliance. Whether we want an alliance or not will be decided by the high command."

Job hopeful Supriya said, “I took a break from my regular job and am surviving on my savings and preparing for TSPSC exams. I am single here in Hyderabad. We heard different versions about the examination schedule.

A large, brightly lit classroom with rows of wooden desks and chairs. Numerous students are seated at their desks, focused on their work, likely completing assignments or taking a test. The students are dressed in casual attire, and the room has large windows in the background, suggesting a well-ventilated and spacious environment.

“We have lots of exams. Banks, UPSC and universities are conducting exams. So we are struggling to fix a time for our exams. We are spending

two to three days deciding the dates of exams. After a lot of exercises, we released one schedule and for other examinations, we will be releasing the schedule in a week. When we finalise one exam date we are told that dates for other exams are coming up. The

schedules for major exams have been prepared. We have only exams for 100 posts, 50 posts etc remaining,” Chairman Dr B. Janardhan Reddy said.

Another hopeful says that as he was late in joining coaching he was told to pay a very high fee. After bargain-

ing the coaching centre reduced it. He says that he paid around Rs 25K and took the coaching but now he is sitting in his village doing nothing as exams have been postponed.

VH asks BJP: What did Modi do for OBCs?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Lashing out at Prime Minister Modi and BJP leaders for demanding that Rahul Gandhi should apologise to OBCs, senior Congress leader V. Hanumantha Rao asked Modi to reveal what he has done for OBCs during his tenure.

VH said that he is holding a round table conference on April 1, 2023, to discuss in detail what previous governments had done for OBCs and what the Modi government did in the last eight years. VH said that the round table conference will be held at the Somajiguda Press Club from 11 am to 2 pm.

In a statement, VH said, “Whatever Rahul said was regarding Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and other scammers. Rahul said that Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi were looting this country. He did not utter even a single word against the Prime Minister. He did not say anything against OBCs. The issue took place in 2019. It is quite astonishing that after all these years Modi realised that he was an OBC. BJP President Nadra and TS President Bandi Sanjay also began to criticise Rahul to divert public attention from Nirav Modi and others. The Prime Minister is targeting Rahul. He had just spoken on Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi.”

PM visits new parliament building, inspects works

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise visit to the new parliament building here on Thursday evening and inspected various works as well as interacted with construction workers, sources said.

The prime minister spent more than an hour inside the building.

Accompanied by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Modi had a look at the facilities coming up at both Houses of Parliament, the sources said.

He also interacted with the construction workers, they said.

The new building, which was earlier expected to be completed by November last year, is like-

Cong sets up panel to intensify protest against TSPSC leak

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress has decided to intensify its protest against the TSPSC leak like the BJP.

The Congress has appointed a special committee like the BJP which had constituted a task force. The committee will mount pressure on the government to identify all the culprits involved in the TSPSC leak.

The Congress appointed a committee as per the directions of TPCC President Revanth Reddy under the chairmanship of Senior Vice-President Dr Mallu Ravi.

The committee comprises Youth Congress state President K. Shivasena Reddy (Convener), NSUI state President Balmoor

The committee will tour all universities and hold review meetings with students and take their opinion on the TSPSC leak. The committee will also appoint regional committees and coordinators in all universities and would also visit government and private coaching centres, libraries and study centres and meet unemployed youth.



Venkat Narasimha Rao (Convener), TPCC General Secretaries K. Manavatha Roy (member), R. Bala Lakshmi (member) and PCC insurance and claims chairman Pavan Malladi (member).

Revanth constituted the committee to launch state-wide protests in consultation with other political parties and all sections of society like parents, students, unemployed youth and the intelligentsia.

DELHI EXCISE ‘SCAM’

Court extends interim bail of Mahendru

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has extended the interim bail granted to liquor businessman Sameer Mahendru on medical grounds in a money laundering case related to alleged irregularities in the now-scraped Delhi excise policy.

Special Judge M K Nagpal granted the relief for a week after the Enforcement Directorate said it needed time to reply to

the application seeking extension of the bail. ED's Special Public Prosecutor N K Matta told the court that the agency has emailed all medical documents of the accused to the doctors/hospitals concerned, but some of the reports are still awaited.

"In view of the above and as requested, the application is now directed to be listed on April 5. However, in view of the submis-

sions made in application, it is being directed that interim bail granted to the accused by this court vide order dated February 28, 2023 shall stand extended till then," the judge said in an order passed on March 29.

On February 28, the court granted interim bail to Mahendru on medical grounds for a period of 30 days after he claimed he was suffering from various ailments.

India unveils space design lab

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has unveiled a state-of-the-art design lab in Ahmedabad to enable space sector start-ups to transform their innovative ideas into implementable models at a faster pace. The Space Systems Design Lab of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) was inaugurated by ISRO Chairman S Somanath at Bopal in Ahmedabad earlier this week. The IN-SPACe design lab consists of high-end analysis and simulation software for mission simulation, modelling, visualising, optimising payload and spacecraft, ground station, and launch vehicle avionics, IN-SPACe Chairman Pawan Goenka said.

KTR, Sanjay lock horns on Twitter once again

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BRS and the BJP locked horns on Twitter on Thursday with Industries Minister KT Rama Rao and Bandi Sanjay criticising each other's party.

Industries Minister KT Rama Rao took to Twitter and said, "The four spineless BJP MPs from Telangana should be held accountable for the Modi government's outrageous flouting of the AP Reorganisation Act promises. While Telangana was denied a rail coach factory, PM's home state Gujarat got a Rs 20,000 crore locomotive factory."

"Prime Minister Modi has

‘Inform about stock market related transactions’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Centre has directed Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers to inform if their total transactions in stock, share or other investments exceed their six months' basic pay in a calendar year.

An order from the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, said: "With a view

to enable the administrative authorities to keep a watch over the transactions in any stock, share or other investments etc. In respect of members of All India Services (AIS), it has been decided that an intimation may be sent in the enclosed proforma to the prescribed authority every year, if the total transactions in stock, share or other investments etc. exceed six months' basic pay of government servant during a calendar year."

These rules are applicable to members of the three all India services. It referred to Rule 14 (1) of the conduct rules that says "no member of the service shall speculate in any stock, share or other investments but this provision will not apply to occasional investment made through stock-brokers or other persons duly authorised on licence under the relevant law".

The order was issued on March 20.

‘Paanakam’ counters attract voters in poll-bound Karnataka

PNS ■ BENGALURU

With the Karnataka Assembly elections only a few weeks away, political parties did not miss the opportunity to catch the attention of voters during the Sri Rama Navami festival on Thursday.

In keeping with Karnataka's age-old tradition of celebrating Sri Rama Navami by distributing Paanakam or Sharbat and 'Kosambari' at public places, various socio-religious groups set up their Prasad (offerings to God) distribution pandals in many parts of the city.

'Paanakam' are generally made of cantaloupe, Bael or lemonade since they -- as also Kosambari (a salad generally made of drenched green gram, grated coconut, and chilli, seasoned with mustard seeds and coriander) -- have a cooling effect on the body to beat the heat during summer.

What was interesting this time was the 'Prasad' counters put up by political parties.

Since the Model Code of Conduct is in force, they chose not to put up their party flags but dropped subtle hints for the people.

It was the flags and festoons that made the distinction for people to identify the political party behind these Pandals.

In Bengaluru, many such Prasad distribution counters popped up in close proximity.

In Thurahalli, there was a pandal dotted with saffron flags and yellow marigold flowers and those distributing them sported saffron scarves around their neck. Hardly 50 metres away, there was another counter with 'Torana' made of green mango leaves. People said they were set up by the BJP and Congress, respectively.

HATE SPEECH Mumbai cops register case against Raja Singh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A case has been registered in Mumbai against Goshamah BJP MLA Raja Singh. The police registered a case against him for making provocative remarks at a public meeting in Mumbai on January 29, 2023.

The Mumbai Police registered a case against Raja Singh under Section 153 A1 (A) of IPC for allegedly making a hate speech.

The Hyderabad Police also issued a notice to Raja Singh for making provocative remarks at an event held in Mumbai on January 29.

It was mentioned in the notice that the Telangana High Court had imposed a condition not to make provocative comments while granting bail in one of the cases. The police asked for an explanation regarding this.

An act against

Continued from page 1

The prices of 384 drugs and over 1,000 formulations classified as essential medicines by the government are set to see the highest-ever annual price rise of over 12 per cent, due to a sharp jump in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).

Annual hikes in the prices of drugs listed in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are based on WPI. These medicines are used in government health programmes apart from being sold directly to retail consumers.

Officials in the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority said that the WPI stood at 12.12 per cent between January 2022 and this year, citing the office of the Economic Adviser in the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

KCR insulting Hindus by rejecting ancient traditions

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has asked Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao to explain why he failed to attend the Bhadrachalam Sri Ramula marriage ceremony held on March 30. The VHP said that by refusing to follow the centuries-old Hindu tradition KCR is insulting Hindus.

In a statement, the VHP state Prachar Pramukh, Pagadaakula Balaswami, the President and Secretary, Suresh Reddy and Pandarinath asked KCR to reveal why he is discriminating against Dakshina Ayodhya Bhadradi.

They said that KCR offered Pearl Talamburu and Pattu Vastrams to Bhadrachalam Ramulavari in 2015 and 2016 after the formation of Telangana state. Later on, KCR stopped attending the Bhadrachalam Sriramula Kalyanam.

Stating that Pushkara Samrajya Pattabhishekam was held in 2011 and in 2023, VHP leaders said that it is shocking on the part of KCR not to attend such an important function.

They said that KCR has been neglecting traditions introduced by Tanisha in the 17th century of not offering Pattu Vastrams and Pearl Talamburu to Ramulavaru.

The VHP leaders said that KCR was not only ignoring centuries-old Hindu traditions but also insulting Goddess Rama by not allocating funds for the Pushkara Samrajya Pattabhishekam.

KCR allotted a namesake Rs 1 crore on March 29 although the temple authorities had informed the CMO in February that Rs 2.25 crore was needed for special rituals.

The situation is such that the temple authorities have to depend on hundi money. The VHP leaders made it clear that the VHP will not keep quiet if KCR adopts anti-Hindu policies.

Clashes mar Ram Navami

Continued from page 1

"Maryada Purushottam" Lord Ram's life was based on sacrifice, tapasya, restraint and resolve," he tweeted.

Ten women and a man died after the roof of a well collapsed during a havan, a fire ritual, at Beleshwar Mahadev Jhulelal temple in Indore's Patel Nagar, a senior official said.

Nearly 30-35 devotees fell into the well after the accident, Indore Police Commissioner Makrand Deoskar said, citing eyewitness accounts. An eyewitness said the roof of the well caved-in as a huge crowd of devotees gathered on it.

In the Aurangabad city of neighbouring Maharashtra, at least 12 people, including 10 policemen, were injured after a mob of around 500 people

went berserk and hurled stones and petrol-filled bottles when the personnel tried to control the situation following a clash between two groups near a Ram temple, officials said on Thursday.

The incident, in which 13 vehicles were torched by the miscreants, occurred during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday in the city's Kiradpura locality that houses the famous Ram temple, they said.

The police used tear gas and fired some plastic bullets as well as live rounds to control the mob, the officials said, adding that eight teams have been formed to identify and arrest the perpetrators.

Elsewhere, leaders of the BJP and RSS led processions in different parts of West Bengal

where the RSS organised about 1,000 small and large rallies across the state.

Chanting slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram', thousands of people took part in those processions in Howrah, Kharagpur, Barrackpore, Bhadreswar, Siliguri and Asansol. Drumbeats, saffron flags and large cutouts of Lord Ram featured prominently in these processions. Some of those participating in the processions were carrying swords and trishulas.

BJP leader Sajal Ghosh, who participated in one such rally in Howrah's Ramrajatala, said there was a need to use such weapons against the evil. "Lord Rama had used weapons to vanquish the demons," said Ghosh, a corporator of Kolkata. BJP national vice-president

Dilip Ghosh performed puja at the 300-year-old Ram Mandir in Ramrajatala. TMC leader Arjun Singh also took part in a Ram Navami procession organised by a religious outfit in Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas district.

The festival was celebrated with fervour and enthusiasm across Telangana with devotees offering prayers and also attending the celestial wedding of Lord Ram and Sita performed in temples.

Hundreds of devotees witnessed the 'Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam' at the famous Lord Ram temple at Bhadrachalam, about 300 kms from Hyderabad. Police made elaborate security arrangements for the 'sobha yatra' (processions) on the occasion of Ram Navami in Hyderabad.



Priests performing special 'pooja' at Vontimitta temple on the occasion of the beginning of the making of 'Goti Talamburu' for the Sita Rama Kalyanam to be solemnised at Vontimitta temple on April 5.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Sri Rama Navami celebrations were held with devotion at various temples and the sacred Dhawajorhanam and the making of 'Talamburu' began at the famous Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple at Vontimitta on Thursday.

The Sri Rama Navami was solemnised with devotion at various temples. A large number

of devotees thronged various temples across the state. At the famous Vontimitta temple, the making of 'Goti Talamburu' for the celestial wedding of Sri Rama and Sita to be solemnised on April 5, began on Thursday.

Minister for Water resources Ambati Rambabu visited the Vontimitta temple and offered prayers on Thursday. ZP Chairman Akepati Amarnath

Reddy, MLA Meda Malikhharjun Reddy participated in a special 'pooja' at Vontimitta temple.

The Sri Rama Navami festivities were observed with celestial fervour in Kodanda Ramalayam in Tirupati on Thursday. After performing Abhishekam to Mulavirat in the morning, Snapanam Tirumanjanam was rendered to the 'utsava' deities in Unjal Mandapam.

Hopefuls disappointed as TSPSC's...

Continued from page 1

Many people have requested 'The Pioneer' to publish the dates of examinations.

"Recently at a press confer-

ence Industries Minister KT Rama Rao promised to reschedule Group-1 exams. There are many hopefuls who would like to take the Assistant Motor Vehicles Inspector (AMVI)

exam which is scheduled for April 23, but no one is speaking about whether it will be held as per schedule or cancelled. We want information on it," said another hopeful.

Rama Navami celebrations fill city with religious fervour

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The temples in the city were filled with a festive spirit as they celebrated the birth of Lord Rama to mark Sri Rama Navami. Large crowds gathered at the temples to participate in Ram Navami puja on Thursday. Public representatives and ministers also actively joined in the celebrations with the general public for the festival.

Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav started the yatra to Rama's chariot at Mangalhat in Goshamahal constituency. Addressing the rally organised under the leadership of BRS leader Anand Singh, Minister Srinivas Yadav said, "Telangana government is planning to make strict arrangements to protect our cultural traditions and conduct the festival in a spirit of harmony."

Regardless of caste, religion and politics, everyone should meet with a sense of brotherhood." He said that the state government will officially conduct pujas at Bhadradi Rama temples. He said that strict security

Public representatives and ministers also actively joined in the celebrations with the general public for the festival. Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav started the yatra to Rama's chariot at Mangalhat in Goshamahal constituency

arrangements have been made for the rally organised under the leadership of Anand Singh which will continue as a procession till Hanuman Tekdi. He congratulated Nandu Bilal and Poojabal Vyasa, who are supporting Anand Singh and who have been celebrating this festival since 15 years with great grandeur.

Meanwhile, Jakkidi Charitable Trust Chairman Jakkidi Raghuvver Reddy handed over a silver makara torana to the Goddess at Sri Gali Pochamma temple in



Yerukala Nancharamma double bedroom residential complex in Mansoorabad division. On this occasion, president of BRS division Jakkidi Malla Reddy and Jakkidi Raghuvver Reddy performed a special puja to the Goddess.

The Sri Sitarama Kalyanam Mahotsav was also held at the Anjaneya Swamy temple in Veliminedu, which is the hometown of Ibrahimpatnam MLA M Kishan Reddy. The MLA said that he prayed to God that all the people of the constituency should be happy

and blessed. Several public representatives and the public participated in the event.

Another Sri Sitarama Kalyanam Mahotsav was conducted with great splendour under the guidance of Praveen Chikkoti on the premises of Sri Siddhi Vinayaka temple, Vinay Nagar Colony, IS Sadhan, Old Basti, Hyderabad.

Additionally, large groups gathered for the Rama Navami Shoba Yatra on Thursday. The police made elaborate arrangements for the event.

Yatra ends at Hanuman Gaushala

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Sobha Yatra taken out to mark Sri Rama Navami had begun by the Thursday afternoon from various routes in the city. It began from Akashpuri Hanuman temple in Mangal Hat Market Road and concluded at the Hanuman Gaushala grounds.

Artists from other states were hired to perform and every small temple performed Sita Ramalula Kalyanam for the first time and over 200 married couples sat in puja at Sitarambagh. Apart from this, hundreds of devotees were seen taking out bike rallies with flags and chanting Jai Sri Ram to join the Sobha Yatra.

Speaking with The Pioneer, the priest at Secunderabad Siva temple said, "This is an auspicious festival for all of us and we perform Sitarama Kalyanam."

These days we are also conducting Sobha Yatra irrespective of the whether it is big or small temple. It depends on the temple authorities to arrange music. If not traditional doli and sanai were arranged and devotees sang bhajans for the Sobha Yatra."

Technology helped in monitoring Sobha Yatra, says CP Anand

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Meticulous planning, supervision by senior officers of Hyderabad City Police and coordination with other departments helped in the perfect execution of commands by the field personnel and ensured that Sri Rama Navami Sobha Yatra procession ended on a peaceful note here on Thursday.

Thanks to the technology, which helped in live monitoring of the procession, crowd movement and traffic flow, it was a grand success, said City Commissioner of Police CV Anand. He paid a field visit to the entire stretch of the procession in the morning and encouraged the Utsav Committee to start their procession early which it finally did at 1:45 am. The processions led by activist Anand Singh and MLA Raja Singh followed and weaved their way through Mangalhat, Begum Bazaar Chhatra, Siddiambar Bazaar, Gowliguda, Koti areas and finally reached the Hanuman Vyamshala amidst huge and boisterous crowds. All the events were watched closely from the Joint Command



Control Centre in Basheerbagh where the officials of RTC, R&B, GHMC, EMRI, Fire and Electricity departments were present.

Anand monitored the live drone footage, CCTV feeds and radio communications and gave timely instructions to the field officers. Senior officers descended on the field and

ensured that the procession moved on.

Thousands of police personnel were deployed for bandobust in sensitive areas.

"The procession was completed peacefully with the cooperation of organisers, the government departments, devotees and general public," said CP Anand.

HIGHEST NUMBER OF ACTIVE CASES IN LAST SIX MONTHS

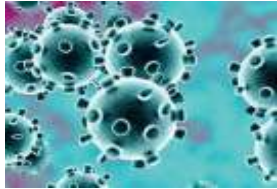
17 new Covid cases recorded in Telangana in one day

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A total of 17 new cases have been recorded in Telangana on Thursday with the total number of active cases sitting at 158 which is the highest number recorded in the state, compared to last few months.

A bulletin released by the state department of public health and family welfare said a cumulative number 8,42,479 cases have been recorded thus far while 8,38,213 have recovered. The state officials revealed that there is extensive testing in the state to control the pandemic.

There were 13,509 active cases in India as on March 30, while most of the big numbers were recorded in Maharashtra, Kerala, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh. The Centre has recently issued a notice to Telangana government in this regard and instructed the officials to take



necessary action.

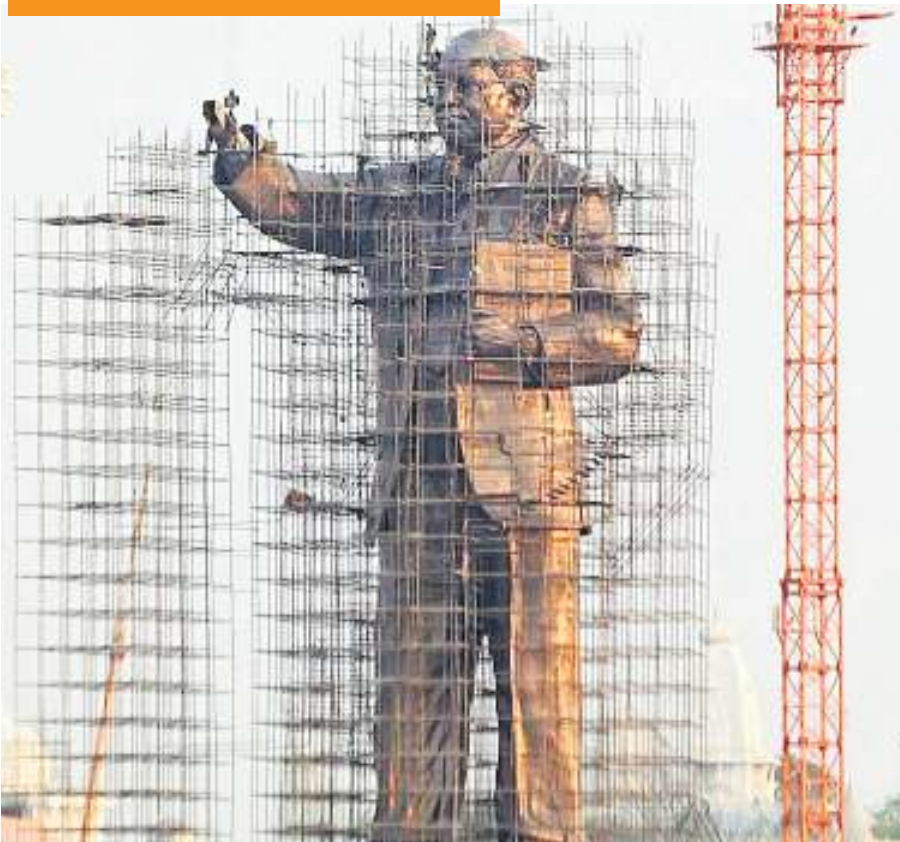
The state government has started testing at base level every day. According to the bulletin, 3,780 were tested on Thursday and 147 reports are still awaited. Officials said that there is no need for concern as no deaths were recorded so far. The fatality rate is at 0.49% while the recovery rate is 99.49%. The state has also vaccinated 153 people on Thursday, adding the total number to 7,75,54,31 people.

The officials said that vulnerable age groups are children, less than 10 years of age and elders above 60 years. They advised the

public to avoid going outdoors unless mandatory. They also added that there is a higher incidence of Covid in the age group of 20 to 50 years. Hence, people were requested to exercise due caution while going for work and essential activities.

The bulletin read, "In case of any flu or influenza-like symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, running nose, difficulty in breathing, body pains and headache, please report to the nearest government health facility and seek health services without any delay. People with co-morbid conditions like hypertension, diabetes, cardiac illness, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer or any other chronic illness are requested to stay indoors and avoid any kind of travel except for medical care in order to avoid exposure to Covid."

STANDING TALL



The 125-foot-tall bronze statue of Dr BR Ambedkar to be unveiled on April 14 at Tank Bund. MLC Kavitha shared the picture and said Baba Saheb Ambedkar and the Indian Constitution, standing tall to remind India and every single Indian of their duties towards the country.

Internshala launches Grand Summer Internship Fair

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Internshala launched a Grand Summer Internship Fair (GSIF-2023). The initiative brings 23,000 plus summer internship opportunities for the students from all fields of education.

Interested candidates can apply for the opportunities between April 2 to 20.

In GSIF-2023, 2,800 organisations will be hiring summer interns for a variety of profiles. A number of popular brands will participate in the Grand Summer Internship Fair and offer internship opportunities to students, including Airtel, Decathlon, Dunzo, SnapDeal, Tommy Hilfiger, IIT Bombay, No Broker, Cultfit, Lavie, Caratlane, Times Internet, SBI Fund Management, Bagzone Lifestyles, Lemon Tree Hotels, and ClearTax, to name a few.

As part of this initiative, internship is being offered to the aspiring students from all educational backgrounds. The internship profiles also include marketing, digital marketing, web development, Python



development, content writing, sales, human resources, business development, social media marketing, data analytics, operations, product management, graphic design, video editing, programming and finance.

It provides aspiring students with the stage to secure internship opportunities and earn a stipend as high as Rs 65,000 per month.

Sarvesh Agrawal, CEO said, "While internships are now being actively pursued by students across the year, summer still stands tall as the peak season to pursue internships. To fulfil this demand for summer internships among students, GSIF brings more than 23,000 internships offering big brands, work-from-home, short-term, part-time, in-office and PPO internships."

OVER 2,000 PARTICIPANTS EXPECTED

Ahimsa Run in city on April 2

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad will witness the IIFL JITO Ahimsa run being organised in 85 locations in the world on April 2. The marathon comprising 3,000 meter; 5,000 meters and 10,000 meter runs will be held across 65 locations in India and 20 locations abroad.

The marathon aims to create awareness for a better world to stop wars and hatred, establishing peace and nonviolence across the world. Approximately, 2,800 people are expected to participate in the Hyderabad leg of the marathon which will be held at Jalavihar.

The marathon will begin and end at the Jala Vihar parking zone. The route for the run will be from Jala Vihar towards Sanjeevaiah Park and back. The prize money for 10,000 meters is Rs 90,000.



The first edition of the run is being organised by JITO (Jain International Trade Organisation) Hyderabad Ladies Wing. It is called "IIFL JITO AHIMSA RUN for peace & for non-violence." JITO is a world-wide organisation of businessmen, industrialists, knowledge workers and professionals reflecting the glory of ethical business practices.

JITO ladies wing has been created to empower Jain women and provide a platform

where all Jain women regardless of their sects and faith can converge to create a powerful movement for the benefit of all.

JITO Hyderabad chapter was started in the year 2009 under the chairmanship of Gautam Pokarna with D.C Galada as its Chief Secretary. The marathon will also be conducted in the cities of the US and UK. The overall participation in the marathon is estimated to be one lakh people.

AIG chairman Nageshwar Reddy conferred Charaka Award

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Asian Institute of Gastroenterology (AIG) Hospital Chairman Dr D Nageshwar Reddy was felicitated by the Rotary Club of Guindy on Thursday.

Ramesh Babu S, President, Rotary Club of Guindy said, "It is proud privilege for all to have Dr Nageshwar Reddy as the recipient of the Charaka Award as it symbolises the epitome of medical profession and service to the patient community. We are truly hon-

oured that a Padma Bhushan awardee Dr Reddy accepted our gesture and also addressed the gathering."

During the felicitation, Dr Nageshwar Reddy said, "The Rotary Club of Guindy has been doing exceptional work in areas such as fighting diseases, providing clean drinking water and maternal health over the last three decades. It was indeed a gratifying moment for me to receive this award and will motivate many to work in the public health domain."



Two injured as building collapses in Jeedimetla

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two persons were injured as an old building collapsed in Jeedimetla police station limits on Thursday.

The old building in Cherukupalli collapsed while being repaired. Due to the debris falling on three adjacent buildings, the walls were partially damaged. A major accident was averted as there was no one in the collapsed building.

Two people in the adjacent building sustained minor injuries. Jeedimetla police said that they have registered a case and are investigating.



Direct train from city to Agartala from April 2

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South Central Railway (SCR) on Thursday announced a special weekly train from Secunderabad to Agartala, train number 07018, beginning from April 2.

The train will leave the Secunderabad station at 11 am on Sunday and reach Agartala at 11:15 pm on Tuesday.

The train will halt at Pagidipalli, Nalgonda, Miryalguda, Sattenapalle, Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Rajamahendravaram, Samalkot, Duvvada, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam Road, Palasa, Berhampur,

Khurda Road Junction, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Bhadrakh, Balasore, Khara gpur Junction, Andul, Dankuni, Bardhaman, Rampur Hat, Malda Town, Kishanganj, New Jalpaiguri, Jalpaiguri Road, Mathabhanga, New Cooch Behar [C], New Alipurduar, Kokrajhar, New Bongaigaon, Golpara, Guwahati, Jagi Road, Hojai, Lumding Junction, New Haflong, Badarpur, New Karimganj, Dharmanagar and Ambassa stations during the journey. It will comprise AC II Tier, AC III Tier, Sleeper and General Second Class coaches.

Singer Moguliah hospitalised, state aid announced

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The state government came to the rescue of Budugu Jangala artist, Moguliah, who rose to fame for his song in recent Telugu movie Balagam. The artist's story surfaced in the media recently, revealing that both his kidneys have failed during Covid pandemic and that his eyesight weakened due to Diabetes.

State IT Minister KT Rama Rao and Health Minister Harish Rao called for action in the matter and announced that the government will support Moguliah and his wife Komaravva, in this regard.

Moguliah's role and song in the movie Balagam, which represented stories of rural Telangana, went viral on the social media for touching sensitive topics and moving the audience to tears. The couple lives in Duggondi mandal centre of Narsampeta, Warangal. Moguliah's wife Komaravva, who also starred alongside her husband, revealed that they had spent around Rs 16 lakh for treatment and they are stuck in many debts.

Moved by the heart-wrenching story, IT Minister KTR announced that the government will bear the entire cost of medical assistance including



dialysis and medicines. The minister also called the local MLA of Narsampet constituency, Peddi Sudarshan Reddy, and instructed him to make appropriate arrangements. MLA Sudarshan Reddy sent BRS local representatives to visit the couple in hospital and instructed them to ensure proper treatment.

Health Minister Harish Rao also directed the officials of the Health Department to make arrangements to provide necessary medicines as per the wishes of Moguliah's family members. He advised them to arrange dialysis services on time and take the patient to the hospital in an ambulance free of cost and after the tests, bring him home in the ambulance. Moguliah's family members thanked Minister Harish for standing by him.

Meanwhile, the Telugu film industry has also announced its support to Moguliah's family. Balagam Director Venu Yeldandi has already received financial assistance of Rs one lakh and personnel of Dil Raju Production also promised financial assistance.

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Traditional grandeur marks celestial wedding of Lord Rama and Sita

PNS ■ BHADRACHALAM

Traditional grandeur marked the celestial wedding of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita at Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy Devasthanam here on Thursday.

A large number of devotees from across the State and also from other parts of the country thronged the temple to witness the celestial wedding. The devotees witnessed the celestial wedding of the divine couple at Mithila Stadium on the banks of the River Godavari.

The celestial wedding was performed by priests. The ritual was performed from 2 am and 9.30 am.

Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and several guests were present at the ceremony. Andhra Pradesh Assembly Speaker Tammineni Sitharam, Mp Maloth Kavitha, MLC T Madhushudhan, MLA Podem Veeraiah and Commissioner

of Endowments V Anil Kumar were present. District Collector Anudeep Durishetty and Superintendent of Police G Vineet supervised the arrangements.

Minister for Endowments A Indrakaran Reddy presented Pattu Vastrams and Mutyala Talambralu to the divine couple on behalf of the State government. Silk clothes and Mutyala Talambralu were also presented by TTD and Vaddiraju Ravichandra.

Meanwhile, Minister for Finance T Harish Rao celebrated Sri Rama Navami, along with the residents of Siddipet, on Thursday by visiting 22 temples to witness the celestial wedding. He spent six hours visiting temples.

The municipal chairman presented silk clothes to Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy temple in Siddipet town on the occasion of the Sri Rama Navami celebrations. Harish Rao took part in the celebra-



Chinna Jeeyar Swamy at the celestial wedding of Lord Rama and Goddess Sita at Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy Devasthanam in Bhadrachalam on Thursday

tions and offered special pujas to the deities.

Taking part in the celebrations held at Prasanna Anjaneya Swamy temple in the town, the Minister presented silver jewellery to the deities.

Taking part in Srirama Navami celebrations at various temples in Mahabubnagar on Thursday, Minister for

Prohibition and Excise V Srinivas Goud expressed the wish that the Mahabubnagar district prospers further with the mercy of Lord Srirama.

He took part in the celestial wedding celebrations held at various places in the town.

In the new State of Telangana, the State government developed Bhadradi,

Yadadri and Vemulavada temples and developed the Manyamkonda temple in an unprecedented manner. The places of worship faced neglect in the undivided AP regime. Development works in Manyamkonda commenced with an outlay of Rs 100 crore.

In Wanaparthi, Minister for Agriculture Minister S Niranjana Reddy and his spouse along with Municipal Chairman Gattu Yadav and other leaders proceeded in a procession carrying silk clothes on their heads and presented them to Lord Sri Rama and Goddess Sita in the Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple here. Atchampeta legislator and Government Whip Guvvala Balaraju, along with his spouse, presented silk clothes to Lord Srirama and Goddess Sita at the temple on Srisanganadla hillock in Charakonda mandal of Nagarkurnool district on Thursday.

Opposition may adopt differing strategies for LS, Assembly polls

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

Opposition parties who are opposed to an alliance with the Congress are likely to follow different strategies in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

The disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha has changed the attitude of the opposition towards the Congress. The latest statement of Trinamool Congress President West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee indicates this.

Like BRS President Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, Mamata was also maintaining equidistance from the BJP and the Congress. But on Wednesday Mamata called for a joint front of the opposition and urged opposition parties to join hands ahead of the 2024 LS elections.

Along with Trinamool Congress, the BRS leaders are also attending meetings organised by the Congress to fight

the BJP in the wake of Rahul's disqualification from the Lok Sabha. Sources said that opposition parties like the Trinamool Congress, the BRS, the Samajwadi Party and other parties are likely to have an alliance with the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections to defeat the BJP. During Assembly elections, these parties will treat the Congress as an adversary.

This means that during Lok Sabha elections the Congress will be an ally and during Assembly elections, the Congress will be an adversary. The Congress may have no objection to this as grabbing the Centre is more important than coming to power in states.

The BRS may also have an alliance with the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections depending on Telangana Assembly election results.

As per schedule, the Telangana Assembly elections will be held about six months before the Lok Sabha elections. The main political parties in Telangana are the ruling BRS

and the opposition parties are the Congress and the BJP and they are confident of coming to power in the next Assembly elections.

Surveys indicate that the BRS will retain power. So the BRS may opt for an alliance with the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections depending on BJP's performance in the Assembly elections.

If the BRS thinks that the BJP will win only a handful of seats in the Assembly elections it may contest alone in the LS polls. But if the BJP wins around 30 to 40 seats in the Assembly elections the BRS may not hesitate to have an alliance with the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections to defeat the BJP.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee may also follow the same strategy. The disqualification of Rahul from the Lok Sabha is helping to unite opposition parties against the BJP. If all opposition parties come together, the BJP will face a tough time in the Lok Sabha elections.

Leopard cubs found in agricultural fields

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

Panic has gripped the Gangaramanda village under Makloor mandal after leopard cubs were found in agricultural fields. Farmers are too scared to go into their fields.

A farmer, while working in his field, spotted two leopard cubs prowling. The farmers in the neighbouring fields took a video of the cubs running in an agricultural field using their mobile phones. The video went viral on social media.

The police visited the area and assured the people of protection. The Forest officials were alerted. The officials asked the farmers to



A police official examining the agricultural field where two leopard cubs are found prowling at Gangaramanda village under Makloor mandal on Thursday

remain alert.

A police official, who visited the fields where the leopard cubs were seen, walked

around the fields. Forest officials arrived in the village. The cubs could have been separated from their mother.

Alcoholic kills wife, son

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR
BHUPALAPALLY

An alcoholic murdered his wife and daughter in Bhupalpally on Wednesday. The incident came to light on Thursday.

The deceased were identified as Rama (43) and Chandana (17). Chandana was studying in the 12th class.

The police said that the accused, Ramana Charry, returned home in an inebriated state, and demanded money from his wife for buying liquor. When she refused to give money, he picked up a fight with her. As the arguments intensified, he picked up an axe and attacked his wife. He attacked his son also when the latter came to the rescue of his mother.



State Commission for Women Chairperson Sunita Lakshma Reddy speaking at a meeting in Medak on Thursday

50 villages to be free from discrimination

PNS ■ MEDAK

Telangana State Commission for Women chairperson Sunita Lakshma Reddy has said that 50 villages have been identified in Narsapur Assembly Constituency as part of the Commission's efforts to build a society which is free from discrimination.

She participated as the chief guest at the valedictory of the training programme in tailoring held for women under the aegis of AR Education Society

here on Wednesday. She distributed certificates to those who completed the training programme in stitching.

Addressing the gathering, she said that village-level committees are being constituted to check child marriages. The BRS government passed several laws for women and girls. There will be a solution to every problem. But one should be patient enough to find a solution. She advised people not to take extreme steps in the face of hardship.

Earlier, there were instances of couples in the region selling their children. To check the practice, the Purnakumbham scheme was launched to set up Anganwadi centres wherever necessary. She suggested that women should become economically self-reliant.

Additional Collector Pratima Singh, CDPO Hema Bhargavi, MPP Venkata Narsinga Rao, ZPTCs, MPPs, sarpanches and Anganwadi teachers and others took part in the event.

Miraculous escape for bus passengers

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Passengers in the Vijayawada-bound TSRTC bus had a miraculous escape when the bus in



which they were travelling caught fire at Moddula Cheruvu in Suryapet district on Thursday. The bus, which belonged to Miyapur dept, hit a motorcyclist and then hit the road divider. It burst into flames.

The bus caught fire as the motorcycle, which was hit, came under the bus. The passengers in the bus got off the bus. The passengers were panicked. The bus was completely reduced to ashes within a few minutes as petrol leaked from an ill-fated motorcycle ignited the fire.



Haridaspur gets best child-friendly village award

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao on Thursday congratulated sarpanch of Haridaspur as the village under Kondapur mandal in Sangareddy district received award as the best child-friendly panchayat.

The village received the state-level award for implementing many novel programmes for the children,

especially girls.

Other villages should derive inspiration from the unity of the people in Haridaspur village, the Minister said.

He wanted the village governing body to exhibit the same spirit in future too. The Minister congratulated the residents of Haridaspur, elected people's representatives and officials on the occasion.

SEXUAL HARASSEMENT CHARGE

Slanging match continues between MLA and dairy management

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

The controversy surrounding Bellampally MLA Durgam Chinniah has taken several turns and twists. Chinniah denied the allegation of sexual harassment.

Meanwhile, several farmers have alleged that Origin Dairy has cheated them promising milch animals. The dairy management allegedly collected lakhs of rupees from the farmers and several unemployed accused the dairy management of duping them promising jobs to them in bulk milk chilling units. However, the managing director of the dairy Adinarayana vehemently denied the charge.

Meanwhile, the Origin Dairy managing director Kandimalla Adinarayana and director Bodapati Sailaja levelled allegations against Bellampally MLA Durgam Chinniah that the MLA influenced the police to foist false cases against them as the management did not meet his demand.

Against the backdrop of the



allegations of the farmers and the unemployed, the dairy case took a new turn.

According to allegations, Origin Dairy managing director Adinarayana, who hailed from Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh and director Sailaja, who came from Anantapur district, and six others, launched Origin dairy in Bellampally in Mancheri district, are accused of collecting Rs 1.75 lakh from dairy farmers, in some cases Rs 2 to 3 lakh, promising milch animals and securing Rs 5 lakh loan for each farmer and

offered to buy back the milk from them.

In the name of partnerships and providing jobs to the unemployed, the dairy management collected money and got temporary sheds built and got them inaugurated by MLA Durgam Chinniah.

Afterwards, the management disappeared for eight months forcing the farmers and unemployed to lodge a complaint with the police.

However, the managing director claimed that he did not cheat anyone. He said that he sustained a loss to the tune of Rs 1.50 crore because the MLA demanded that his relatives be taken as partners in the firm. He sought partnerships for his relatives in the dairy as a condition to ensure that a loan is granted to the dairy under Dalit Bandhu. The MD alleged that the MLA took Rs 20 lakh from him for identifying suitable land for dairy construction and showed the land belonging to Shinde Devanand, a Lavuni patta landholder, as the site for the construction of the dairy.

CRPF gifts tricycles, bicycles to poor

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR
BHUPALAPALLY

Kataram DSP Rammohan Reddy and CRPF DSP Komal Preeti Kaur on Wednesday said that they felt satisfied after helping the poor.

Under the civic action programme of the CRPF G/58 and D/58 battalions, held separately in Kataram and Palimela mandals, the authorities distributed tricycles to five physically challenged persons, sewing machines to five poor women, five bicycles to the youth and sports T-shirts to five sports persons.

They said that helping the poor through civic action programme by the CRPF personnel working in forest areas under hard conditions was a notable development.

Mahadevpur and Kataram Circle Inspectors of Police Kiran and Ranjit Rao, Palimela battalion in-charge Subbaraju, Sis Srinivas and Arun and sarpanches took part in the event.

Prohibitory orders to be in force at SSC exam centres

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 Criminal Procedure Code will be in force within 500 yards in and around all Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination centres. The prohibitory orders, which ban the assembly of more than four persons in public, are intended to ensure smooth conduct of examination according to District Superintendent of Police K Narasimha on Thursday.

There are in all 59 examination centres in the district. The examinations are scheduled to be held between 9.30 am and 12.30 pm from April 13. The Superintendent of Police said that the prohibitory orders and also some security measures would be taken during the days when the examinations are held.

Apart from prohibitory orders, all photocopying centres in the vicinity of the examination centres should remain closed, he said. Students would not be allowed into the examination hall after the main gate is closed.



Mobile phones and smart watches are banned inside the examination hall. Invigilators and Examination Chief Superintendent also would not be allowed to carry mobile phones and smartwatches in examination halls, he said. He advised the students and the staff to dial 100 or report to the police in case of any problem.

FINANCIAL IRREGULARITIES

Margadarsi accountant held, sent to judicial remand

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Crime Investigation Department (AP-CID) police arrested Margadarsi Chit Fund Private Limited's accountant and auditor, Kudaravalli Shruvan, on Thursday on charges of financial irregularities. Shruvan was produced in the third additional chief metropolitan magistrate court and was sent to 14 days of judicial remand.

The CID officials said that Shruvan had admitted that he had not done due diligence in verifying branch-level financial statements or bank statements before certifying the financial statements of the Margadarsi. It has also been found that principles of auditing

were conveniently ignored at various levels by Shruvan, especially when it comes to financial statements of bank balances - both current and fixed deposits.

The CID is investigating the charges of non-payment of monthly subscriptions/instalments in respect of multiple tickets held in the name of the Margadarsi, which were later substituted with new subscribers.

The CID is also probing the charge that Margadarsi was illegally diverting the amounts deposited by the chit subscribers towards mutual funds, etc., to enable huge and unauthorised investments into speculation markets.

CM meets FM, seeks funds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy called on Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here on Thursday and urged her to release the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme) arrears of Rs 2,500 crore due to the State besides increasing its credit limit.

The Chief Minister appealed to her to enhance the credit limit of Rs 17,923 crore which was reduced from Rs. 42,472 crore in 2021-22 for no fault of the State Government and take steps to ensure that the Telangana Government clears Rs. 7,058 crore outstanding from the TS Discoms to APGENCO for the power supplied between 2014 and 2017.

He urged her to release the pending amount of Rs. 36,625



crore under Resource Gap Funding for the fiscal 2014-15 to the State, sanction Rs.10,000 crore immediately on an ad-hoc basis to expedite the construction of the Polavaram Project and another Rs. 2020 crore to fill the scourge pits formed at the main Dam site due to the wash away of diaphragm wall in the flash floods.

AP has so far spent Rs.

2600.74 crore on Polavaram Project from its exchequer, he said and sought the reimbursement of the same from the Central funds and accept the Technical Advisory Committee's revised estimates of Rs. 55,548 crore on Polavaram Project.

The Chief Minister also urged her to implement the promise of granting Special Status to the State.

TDP lacks proper leadership at segment level: JC Prabhakar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Criticising the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), senior party leader and Tadipatri Municipal Chairman, JC Prabhakar Reddy has said that the TDP has a strongly committed cadre but lacks proper leadership at the constituency level.

The senior TDP leader who joined party general secretary Lokesh's padyayatra in the Tadipatri area said that the TDP lacks proper leadership at the constituency level.

He said that the party workers have been struggling a lot for the last four years, but the leaders have disappeared and left the party in a lurch.

He advised Lokesh not to entertain leaders who become active only during elections

and further said that those should not be given tickets, irrespective of their seniority. It is better for the TDP leadership to encourage fresh leaders by fielding them in the elections. They will win the seats with the support of a strong cadre, he said.

JC asked the party leaders to come out of their slumber and fight against the government. "What will happen?"

The government may file cases against you. They filed 72 cases against me. Nothing happened to me. We need to fight with courage and conviction," he said.

JC said he, too, was not expecting any party tickets in the next elections, and he was ready to work for the party as an ordinary worker.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Fighting hate speech

Some sort of mechanism must be developed to curb hate speech, but it'd be better if it is informal

The Supreme Court and the Government made important points about hate speech on Wednesday. A bench of Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna said, "Hate speeches are like a vicious circle. One person will make it and then another will make it. When our Constitution was founded, there were no such speeches. Now cracks are coming up in the idea of fraternity. There has to be some restraint. Some sort of mechanism needs to be developed by the state so that we can curb these kinds of statements." The apex court's insistence on restraint is welcome, but the objective conditions are not conducive for it. The biggest reason is that politics, as practiced by all parties, has been reduced to realpolitik, in which principles and scruples play a very little role; emphasis is on winning elections, whatever be the cost. Hence mindless populism, with politicians vying with each other in offering freebies, throwing fiscal prudence and caution to the wind. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has underlined the perils of freebie culture but there is little to suggest that parties are willing to behave responsibly. Then there is the instinct to play to the gallery and appeal to the lowest common denominator. There are leaders who became popular and important not by public service but by making deplorable remarks. This is not surprising because political debate is rarely illumined

by cogent arguments and elevating oration; it is rather animated by loud sloganeering and sanctimonious posturing.

On the subject of hate speeches, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also made an important remark: such speeches are also made against Hindus. On the face of it, this might appear whataboutery, but this is factually accurate. Two wrongs don't make a right, so statements against Muslims or Christians are not justifiable because similar ones are also made against Hindus. Mehta informed the court that in Tamil Nadu, "a spokesperson of DMK" said "whatever Periyar says should have been done... if you want equality, you must butcher all Brahmins." Against such a backdrop, as the Supreme Court said, some mechanism has to be developed, but it would be better that this mechanism is informal rather than formal. There are already a zillion laws; what is needed is a code of behaviour that political parties, rather than the Indian State, should evolve together. Something like the model code of conduct that governs the behaviour of parties and candidates before elections. It is not legally enforceable, yet it is widely adhered to. We should not forget that behavioural patterns are difficult to change with laws, rules, and fiat; when people themselves realise that something should be avoided, they avoid that. After all, politicians do observe the code of conduct. Therefore, the best way out would be a consensus among politicians and parties that decency in political discourse would be nice.



Artistes dressed as Hindu deities distribute sweet juice and buttermilk to celebrate Ram Navami, in Bengaluru PTI

Let them write an essay on Khalistan

This protest has no content except vilification and terror. It dodges issues of territory, Government form, State-religion ties and economy

Indian diplomatic missions in the UK, USA, Australia and Canada have recently been subjected to violent and abusive protests by pro-Khalistan Sikhs. If I were at Ground Zero, I would have simply walked around with a sheaf of foolscap papers and asked the agitators to write an essay about the proposed Khalistan. The essay must address the issues of territory, a form of government, the relationship between the state and church (SGPC), economy, demography (38 per cent non-Sikhs in Punjab, and Sikhs in the rest of India) etc. However, the essay reveals the "Khalistan" (empty space) that exists in their minds.

Over the last 50 years, the 'movement' has preferred to dodge these fundamental questions. Thousands of lives have been lost in an organised misconception. Territory is the basic component of a sovereign state. The maps of the proposed Khalistan are ludicrous. In the 1980s, Khushwant Singh purchased a Khalistan map published in England, for £2. "According to this map," he wrote in 1992, "Khalistan will include



Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, New Delhi, chunks of UP, Rajasthan and Saurashtra to give the state an outlet to the sea. By rough reckoning, the Sikh population will be 13 per cent. What kind of Sikh state will this be? Clearly, not democratic." (*My Bleeding Punjab*, P.155-156).

A recent example of this lack of clarity is the fanciful Khalistan map issued by Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, of Sikhs For Justice, in June 2022 at the Lahore Press Club. Besides the Indian Punjab, it encompasses almost the whole of Haryana, Himachal, five Rajasthan districts, several Uttarakhand districts (including Dehradun and Haridwar), and a number of districts of UP. It included

Gurugram, though Delhi was left out. Shimla was the capital of Khalistan, though Sikhs comprised 1.95 per cent of the city. Pro-Khalistani graffiti was actually found pasted on the Assembly Building at Dharamsala (Kangra district) on May 8, 2022, and scribes in Himachal Pradesh received pre-recorded Khalistani threat calls on their mobiles. However, in the Melbourne round of a referendum by the outfit in January, the question was whether "Indian-governed Punjab should be an independent country—Yes or No". Where does that leave the June 2022 map?

As per the referendum, sovereign Khalistan would be a landlocked country between India and Pakistan. Punjab farmers, overwhelmingly Jatt Sikhs, are heavily dependent on rice and wheat from the Centre. This was borne out by the massive farmers' agitation (2020-21) compelling the Government to cancel the farm laws. One would be interested in knowing how Khalistan proponents plan to offload Punjab rice and wheat mounds.

Nobody has yet seen a draft Khalistan constitution

even after 50 years. The Khalsa Raj Party Constitution issued by Lt Col Partap Singh (Retd) on May 15, 1991, at Chandigarh, issued towards the end of the Khalistani insurgency, was expected to condense all wisdom on Khalistan. It advocates an independent, sovereign Sikh homeland and restricts its boundaries to Punjab and adjoining Punjabi-speaking areas 'fraudulently kept out during a Punjab reorganisation in 1966'. Herein, Lt Col Singh assumes all Punjabi-speaking persons in India are Sikhs, and vice versa, wherein in reality 38 per cent of Punjab population according to Census 2011 is Hindu. Will Khalistan be a democracy and a theocracy at the same time? It is open to multiple interpretations but it says nothing about the SGPC. The 'movement' is a bundle of imponderables, deliberately retained by its sponsors. It fits American author Paul Elridge's description, "Man is willing to die for any idea, provided that idea is not clear to him."

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi)



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

China resorts to 'buying' support

Bhopinder Singh

Globally, China is rapidly gaining influence over the US and asserting its diplomatic muscle by investing disproportionately in seedy regimes

In 2000, China accounted for less than 2% of South America's exports which spiralled thereafter at over 30% annually to reach \$180 billion in 2010, \$450 billion by 2021, and expected to exceed \$700 billion by 2035! Beijing is now South America's top trade partner with countries like Chile accounting for nearly 40% of their exports to China. It didn't happen by chance, but by concerted Chinese design. China had invested disproportionately and knowingly with a 'no-strings-attached' policy that necessitated no preachy conditions or reform insistence. This leniency appealed to a host of illiberal and undemocratic regimes (e.g., pariahised Venezuela was given loans of more than \$64 billion, causing fears of a debt trap to arise). China's internal 'South-South cooperation' policy was further bolstered by the inclusion of initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or even the more recent 'Covid-19 diplomacy' that ensured transactional support and investments. Besides the reciprocal gratification of raw materials and the emergence of an alternative power centre, China replaced US control and assert its diplomatic muscle and leverage on the world stage.

One obvious element of quid pro quo sought by the Chinese for loosening their purse strings in economically struggling South America was the switch to derecognize its nemesis Taiwan (Republic of China) to the 'One-China' policy (with the assumption that Taiwan is an essential part of the Chinese mainland, to be reunified one day). South American countries were especially in large numbers among those who recognised Taiwan as the Chinese had little or no leverage, historically – today, with its deep pockets and flexing of bargaining muscle, one South American country after the other flipped sides in favour of China. Oddly enough, even the US and India remain vested in the 'One-China' stance, grandstanding and sabre-rattling notwithstanding.

Honduras became the latest to fall prey to the Chinese 'buy-out' as its President, Xiomara Castro, did a brazen flip-flop within weeks of downplaying



rumours of a switchover. Xiomara remained garbled in her justification, "a sign of my determination to fulfil the government plan and expand borders", but her foreign minister, Eduardo Reina, did some plain speak when he said that the switchover was about, "pragmatism, not ideology" and that Honduras was in desperate need of finances as its urgent requirements were, "drowning the country"! This leaves the shrinking list of those countries that still recognise Taiwan to just 13 out of the 193 UN member states i.e., the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Tuvalu, Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis, St Lucia, Eswatini, the Holy See and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Access to the Chinese market and Treasury triumphs over all moral and diplomatic positions. Ironically, Taiwan remains formally unrecognised even by its most prominent allies, the USA (despite bipartisan unity on Taiwan). Jimmy Carter's abandonment of diplomatic ties with Taiwan to recognise Beijing instead, initiated a complexity and absurdity of relationship that the USA continues to grapple with as it supplies weapons to a nation that it does not fully recognise. China's unofficial mouth-

“THE CHINESE MAKE NO QUALMS ABOUT SIMPLY 'BUYING OUT' THE LAST BASTION IN SOUTH AMERICA, AS THE USA CANNOT MAKE A COUNTEROFFER THAT IS FINANCIALLY ATTRACTIVE ENOUGH TO SPURN BEIJING'S ADVANCES

piece, Global Times noted bluntly, "The US does not have enough resources to assist Honduras or make any effective pledges to Honduras in exchange for Honduras' change of mind. The case of Honduras shows that as long as countries stay firm, US obstruction and interference will not work. This will have a domino effect on Taiwan's remaining 'allies' such as Guatemala, Belize and Paraguay." The Chinese have no qualms about simply 'buying out' the last bastions in South America, as the USA cannot make a counteroffer that is financially attractive enough to spurn Beijing's advances. As if to confirm its intent, the Global Times concludes, "The sleepwalking of 'Taiwan independence' is ending."

Taiwan or its allies in Capitol Hill cannot compete with the Chinese coffers and are getting outbid, but that does not mean that there are no underlying concerns in accepting the Chinese terms. The reality of Chinese debt traps is legendary and short-term bailouts do not end well. Micronesia's outgoing President, David Panuelo had accused Beijing of 'political warfare' by insinuating that it was interfering and preventing the switchover from China to Taiwan. China remains hyper-

sensitive to the Taiwan issue and shows very short patience with what it insists are its internal issues. Recent developments in the wars in Afghanistan and Ukraine have exposed the limits of the so-called 'superpowers' ability to take over and control the targeted landmass infinitely. Therefore, ensnaring and controlling those regions through 'buyouts' is decidedly easier, and even more sustainable.

Honduras recognised the Taipei government for 82 years. However, the wanton lure of a hydroelectric dam and billions of dollars in 'aid' was irresistible. Not too many believe the Chinese line of Honduras sees through 'Washington's bullying diplomacy' as the pattern and accompanying terms of the switchover are eerily consistent and seemingly generous (initially). The price for the switchover was the upfront admission by the Honduran authorities that there is "only one China in the world". The days of principled diplomatic stands are over, and commerce and coercion define the new global order. China is the high temple of realpolitik.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WELCOME MOVE BY HIMACHAL BY CM

Sir — Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri who announced in the HP Vidhan Sabha on March 28 that no appointment would be made on an outsourced basis in the Jal Shakti Department in future is a praiseworthy decision. Outsourcing recruitment is a backdoor entry. It violates all recruitment requirements, such as ads inviting applications, competitive tests followed by personal interviews, meanwhile germinating corruption and exploitation by service providers because it is typically only known individuals who are appointed. The employees recruited through the outsourcing method need to be stopped in every department which generates corruption and hampers government functioning. The government should appoint the required staff regularly in all departments after following the due selection process.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

RAHUL'S MANOEUVRES

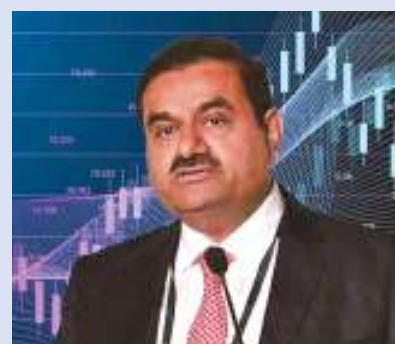
Sir — After being disqualified as an MP, Rahul Gandhi appeared before the media and said that whatever may come, he would keep asking questions in the Adani case. Rahul Gandhi's attention is more focused on the political fight than on the legal fight. Rahul Gandhi and Congress want to turn this court sentence into BJP revenge. But Rahul Gandhi and Congress have to accept that Rahul Gandhi has been punished for defamation. Rahul Gandhi has 30 days to appeal. It will be interesting to see how Rahul Gandhi's politics overshadow the BJP in the coming days and how Rahul Gandhi overcomes these difficulties.

Rohit Pandey | New Delhi

AMERICA'S DIVERSIONARY TACTICS

Sir — Playing blame games is the order of the day. As a result, our politicians play a crucial role in making the public feel bad about our country's expansion abroad. Moreover, they seek the help of a superpower and are not ready to face

Why not set up a JPC on Adani?



Addressing a gathering after inaugurating an extension of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters in Delhi, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi linked the coming together of opposition parties against the BJP to his Government's campaign against corruption and said "anti-India" forces are attacking constitutional institutions — the "strong foundation of a rising India" — to stall the country's growth. To hear this, an aam aadmi with heavy hearts wants to know from PM Modi, why the Government is not investigating Adani. In addition, what about shell companies, stock parking, and stock inflation? And don't forget the recent controversy over Elara and Shell's companies receiving defence contracts — what is going on there? People want to know if corporate cronies were given undue favours to jump from 600 to the top 10 in top business

rankings under your rule? They also want to know if the Government was involved.

Moreover, why the reluctance to call out fugitives Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijaya Mallya? The public wants transparency and accountability, and it's time for the government to answer these burning questions. Not only this, PM Modi fought to change the election funding law to secretly allow black money. Is PM Modi not the same who supports his Karnataka MLAs to take crores of bribes? He remains silent, even when BJP politicians get caught "red-handed" there, with crores of cash? Why are there no investigations by the CBI, ED or IT? Why do corrupt politicians from opposition parties join the BJP, and cases against them miraculously disappear? It means all BJP MPs/MLAs/politicians are absolutely above corruption. As people wonder when the honest PM Modi implemented demonetisation and secretly converted his friend's money from Black to White, or who changed coal mining tender rules for Adani so that he would benefit from them? Is he not the PM who doesn't have a problem with foreign companies owning defence projects? And the list goes on and on. In view of this, before PM Modi's declaration that all those involved in corruption have come together on one platform, the anti-corruption crusader should set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to investigate the Adani matter. Alas! He has no courage.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

elections in India as the winning chances are dim. It is impossible for a country as large and about to be the most populous in the world as India to function according to the whims and fancies of Johnnies and Alices in Wonderland at the US Department. The US has no *locus standi* to lecture India on democratic values. As the US's pathetic position worsens, they left their business and entered the Indian politics scene. When the US could not play a decisive role in bringing about its own economy's revival, the show

diverted towards India. That country's GDP is falling drastically and there is no hope for immediate improvement. India is better placed and so it could not see Indian progress and wanted to exhibit and poke its nose into Indian political scenario. However, India stands united and the erroneous elements will be eliminated sooner or later.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

JAPANESE THRUST TO OUR LOOK EAST POLICY

The policy needs more push for stronger relations with SE Asia through NE States



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India's vision of a 'Look East' policy and Japan's vision regarding a free and open Indo Pacific meet in India's landlocked northeast. India for long has championed its 'Look East' policy. This aims to develop deeper relations with countries in South East Asia and the Bay of Bengal region through northeastern (much to be tapped) States as a major gateway. Meanwhile, for more than a decade, Japan has been focusing on free, open and fair Indo Pacific policy, with emphasis on free movement of people, trade across land, sea and air routes, all through the region. India's northeastern States form an important access node.

Last week Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, during his India visit, reemphasised the desire to pursue a more engaged Indo Pacific policy. This has for the past two years become the most strategic foreign policy component for the US and Europe. It is also the glue holding together India, US, Australia and Japan in their QUAD grouping. Japan has been promoting key infrastructure projects in India's

northeast to create seamless trade and transport routes. It has been assisting in developing northeast road network connectivity improvement projects in Assam and Meghalaya, sewage and water supply projects in Assam, development of schools in Manipur, projects related to forest management in Tripura and Nagaland and sustainable agriculture projects in Mizoram. Japan's investment in the northeast is \$2 billion so far. In addition, the Japanese Government has picked up key infrastructure projects such as the MatarBari deep water port in Bangladesh. This will be complemented by the construction of connecting roads in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. Once completed, these infrastructure projects would provide seamless access from the northeast to Bay of Bengal sea ports. In addition, they would serve as a major trade transit route for goods from Southeast Asia and beyond.

This promises to bring more prosperity to the entire region, not just within India's geographical boundaries. It fits well into the Japanese vision of comprehensive economic and regional development, based on law. It may be noteworthy that the other Asian giant, China, has rapidly expanded its sphere of influence in the region through its opaque Belt and Road Initiative. This has tied many of these countries into multiyear fatal debt traps. India and Japan are the major economies not part of China's debt trap infrastructure financing projects. Their vision for the Indo Pacific is different from China's.

India and Japan, during the leadership meeting in New Delhi, highlighted the need for expanding the partnership to more ASEAN countries. Even the QUAD Foreign Ministers' meeting in March emphasised the centrality of ASEAN and the need for greater engagement. It is significant that Japan is working in a structured manner in India's neighbourhood. This is with some of India's most trusted allies such as Bangladesh on a path of regional prosperity. Japan has been working with India since 2017 to support NE's development. Japan has clearly articulated that it is keen to tie the two ports, one in Bangladesh and the other in India's NE, for greater economic cooperation.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh while addressing a BIMSTEC meet in Kolkata this week stressed the need for India's north eastern region to be the leading edge of India's Act East diplomacy. He emphasised the need for developing transportation facilities and trade within BIMSTEC partners. His caution for BIMSTEC countries was to follow a modest yet practical approach. Any creative solutions for increasing trade in this region also click well with Japan's push for increased economic prosperity and connectivity for the Indo Pacific.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)



Societal needs stretch beyond skill formation



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The current overemphasis on acquiring skills at the cost of compromising life fundamentals would be counterproductive in the long run and needs a relook

Nowadays, the most popular phrases are skill formation and employability. There's nothing wrong with that. These are apparently innocent favourites which also contribute to social growth. Even innocent phrases can have ramifications, even for the purpose of social growth. Illustratively, skill formation would reference educational institutions. Educational institutions cannot just focus on 'skill formation' and 'employability'. Educational institutions must have as their priority training the mind, educating a person and making him a worthy member of society capable of contributing to overall growth. There is indeed a school of thought which argues that education requires as its end objectives character building, preparing for responsible citizenship and the like. Ever since the current system of university education with its segmented approach to degrees came into being, there has been a running debate on the objectives of education.

Mind training and general orientation towards learning are multi-layered processes. Liberal education is supposed to cater for them. It is difficult to conceive of a skilled person who is not a good human being, ethical and contributes to collective welfare.

Individual growth, by definition, is embedded in a social environment with sound values and norms. There is clearly not much debate on the issues outlined above. However, factoring in the economic context, including gaps and shifts in livelihood processes, becomes a poignant element in its own right. An illustration may be in order; consider India's rural sector. There are various processes and learning segments in agriculture which give the farmer a position of primacy in the country's economic framework.

However, a closer look at the lay of the land, both literally and methodologically, will show two things. The amount of land on the subcontinent is constant. Other variables are not. The number of people who rely on a livelihood from agriculture has exponentially increased. This means, the number of people deriving their livelihood from agriculture has grown to the extent that the land available per head has substantially 'receded'. Further even as the productivity of agriculture has grown, the revenues to the farmer per head have declined. This is, also, because the portion of land per head has become smaller with an increasing population.

That is not the end of the story. Additionally, there is the factor of the switch in crops, at times, from cereal to cash crops, and from cash crops to cereal. This means that, in certain cases, the total income from agricultural products has gone down for various reasons. Not the least of which would be the consequences of continuing cereal cultivation. Further, however, if the farmer switched to cash crops, it would be difficult to sustain. This is due to a lack of understanding of how to choose, cultivate and market cash crops.

The problem does not end there. There are other shifts because of the economic transition as cereal land value declines. There emerges an exponentially rising demand for tertiary sector earnings in rural areas, such as for carpenters, blacksmiths, electrical workers, and the



AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, FEW STATES HAVE SHOWN A TENDENCY OR PROPENSITY TO FRAME ECONOMIC POLICIES THAT WOULD HELP CREATE A SOCIAL FEEDBACK LOOP

(The author is an internationally acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal)



like. This is different from the earlier dispensation. Then, it is not as if the blacksmith and the cobbler were not required. However, the rising demand for their numbers was consistent with the rise in population growth. If the income from the tertiary sector in the rural areas grew it still did not divert people, in terms of percentages, from agriculture in any significant way. In agriculture itself the market was not a prime determinant of switching from cash to cereal crops or vice versa. The market remained essentially local. The introduction of technology changed all that.

Technology caused a serious disruption of the economy and disturbed the economic viability and health of the existing socio-economic system of the villages. The present excessive serenading of technology virtues eschews taking a balanced view of the prerequisites and consequences of the technology factor.

To illustrate the point, consider a family of five young men living with an elderly gentleman (their father?). If three of them entered the wage market of the tertiary sector and two of them continued making their livelihood by tilling the land, even then there would be further land fragmentation. As a result, the return per head would go down since the 'elderly gentleman's' labour and talent would now be split among two

heads. This would be a generational issue.

Whether the output was cereal or cash crops would be a separate consideration. The one producing cash crops would likely be better off than the one producing cereals. So in effect, among the five young men in the family, there would be an income differential among those (three of the five) who earned from the tertiary sector and even between the two still tilling the land.

This economic reality is the outcome of social disturbances, which could affect the collective social fabric of the village's occupational profile. If allowed to run its course, the real need is economic policies at a local level. This would rationalise and smoothen the disruptions caused.

Unfortunately, at a local level, few states have shown a tendency or propensity to frame economic policies that would help create a social feedback loop. This will grow talent in each of the required income-generating avenues.

This is a serious matter that seems to be escaping the attention of policymakers at a time when it needs to be addressed. For a stable society, with proper wage-earning channels and comparable lifestyles arising therefrom, a requirement is viable and organic economic growth. Having a system so severely divided will create gaps in the economic framework

in general, not only in the hinterland but elsewhere. This could lead to manpower shortages in critical sectors of the economy and, among others, encourage population growth in urban areas. Social and economic equity require talent and compensation to be available in equal measure in all critical sectors of the nation's life.

As noted earlier it is not as if in the earlier dispensation the blacksmith and the cobbler were not required. It has also been analysed how, as the population grows and the income from the tertiary sector in the rural areas grows, fewer and fewer people take an interest in the tilling of the land. Further, even in the tilling of the land, cash crops are preferred over cereals.

It has further been argued that this is a serious distortion of the economy. It creates dissonance in the economic viability and health of the social fabric of the villages. Many professionals and policy makers seem to have missed the point, and employment promotion based on catchy slogans seems to confuse the issue.

To conclude, nobody grudges the emphasis on skill formation, but like everything else, overemphasis on skill formation to the neglect of fundamentals of life and distorted by profit oriented economics, is something which requires a good second and third look.

A film festival with its heart in the right place

The Habitat International Film Festival, an annual treat for the Delhi-NCR film lovers, was back in its full-fledged form this year

The 10-day Habitat International Film Festival (HIFF) was a visual treat for film-loving communities in Delhi and the NCR. Thanks to Sunit Tandon (Director, India Habitat Centre) and Vidyun Singh (Programme Head) along with her team to bring the award-winning, critically acclaimed films from Cannes, Berlin and other renowned film festivals.

This year, HIFF screened 60 films from 20 countries, with Australia as the focus country. From factual to fantastical, from surreal to sci-fi, this edition took place from March 17 to 26.

Tandon says, "The HIFF is back in its full-fledged form this year. We also bring a cutting-edge VR Section to the festival for the first time.



SANTANU GANGULY

(The writer is a Delhi-based film festival curator, freelance writer, filmmaker and producer)

Aspiring filmmakers will not want to miss the unique opportunity provided by Kieslowski Film School Documentary Workshop."

From Australia, six of the finest contemporary films of 2022 and 2023 have been screened with the opening film, *The Dreamlife of Georgie Stone*, showcasing the elliptical memories of the teen activist's historic fight for transgender rights; Ivan Sen's *Limbo* arrives fresh off the boat from its Berlinale 2023 premiere; others include *The Lonely Spirits Variety Hour*, *Sweet As*, and *Survival of Kindness*.

Filmmakers and editors from the Kielowski Film School from Poland trained the young minds in a four-day documentary workshop. Grzegorz Paprzycki, an

acclaimed upcoming voice in contemporary Polish cinema and Kieslowski Film School alumni was one of the workshop trainers. A hands-on workshop, with live editing sessions, discussions and practical exercises designed to hone their skills as filmmakers was an added advantage for the local young filmmakers.

For the first time as part of the festival, cinema's latest innovation — VR and 360° video — was presented in partnership with the Goethe Institute. The Virtual Reality programme — a package of animation, short and documentary films — explores the relationship between the past and present. It also adds a whole new dimension to film watching for the audience.

Four films in the MUBI

Friday section that approach the anarchy of love and its expression across different eras — the classic *In The Mood For Love* by Wong Kar-wai, to the contemporary *Paris, 13th district* by Jacques Audiard and *The Worst Person in the World* by Joachim Trier, even the futuristic *Crimes of The Future* by David Cronenberg.

Eight biggest attraction at HIFF were: *Elvis*, the buzzing Austin Butler-starrer, Baz Luhrmann biopic that premiered at Cannes (and has won many awards subsequently); *Rheingold*, Fatih Akin's (Germany, Netherlands, Morocco, Mexico) high-octane adaptation of the swagger and bombast of German rap star Xatar's 2015 autobiography *All Or Nothing*; winner

of 16 awards and 51 nominations, including the much-coveted Golden Bear (Berlinale 2022) - Carla Simon's (Spain), *Alcarras*, a deeply intelligent and empathetic humane drama that engulfs you in the heat and dust and dysfunction created by market forces; *Perfect Number* - the return of veteran Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi and his search for philosophical answers in mathematical theories; the poignant *We are Still Here*, an anthology film about stories of indigenous heroes from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific; winner of the Best Screenplay at Cannes 2022, *Boy From Heaven*, takes us into the heart of a ruthless power struggle between Egypt's religious and political elites; the

latest Berlinale awardee (2023), *The Survival of Kindness*, follows a black woman's escape from a cage in the middle of the desert to the city, recapture, and tragedy; and Oscar nominee *EO* by Jerzy Skolimowski (Poland) follows a donkey that encounters good and bad people, experiences joy and pain, exploring a vision of modern Europe.

Further enriching the feature line-up are some equally remarkable documentaries, shorts, and animation films. DOC NYC 2022 nominee *Closed Circuit* by Tel Inbar (Israel) is a documentary that captures the heart-pounding trauma of the 2016 terrorist attack in Tel Aviv's Saron Market; Winner of 'Best Documentary Feature' at The Roxbury International Film

Festival and Filmocracy Fest, *Hostile* by UK filmmaker Sonita Gale explores the UK's complicated relationship with its migrant communities; Winner at the Warsaw Film Festival 2022, *Region of Heroes* by Artur Lerman (Ukraine) is the story of those who selflessly saved thousands of Ukrainians during the Russian occupation; winner of the Special Jury Award at Roxbury Film Festival and the International Humanitarian Award at Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival, *The Bengali* by Kavery Kaul (USA) is the story of a writer from Louisiana who embarks on a quest to India to look for her grandfather's descendants. Curated packages from Poland and Sri Lanka also embellished the festival.

MONEY MATTERS

Domestic stainless steel demand will continue to see growth

Softbank-backed e-commerce firm Meesho has crossed the 11-lakh sellers milestone on its platform, with more than 6 lakh small businesses signing up in the last one year, the company said on Thursday. The company has achieved this feat in eight years of its inception and claims that half of the total sellers registered belong to tier 2 and smaller towns. "Meesho recently crossed the milestone of 1.1 million sellers on its platform," the company said in a statement. The unicorn e-commerce firm said that over 80 per cent of its 11 lakh sellers are new-to-e-commerce and Meesho was their first exposure to the world of online selling. "Nearly 50 per cent of these sellers come from Tier 2+ regions and deep corners of the country like Pulwama in Kashmir, Una in Himachal Pradesh, Nagamangala in Karnataka, Jowai in Meghalaya and Mount Abu in Rajasthan -- validating the company's mission to democratize internet commerce for everyone and bring the smallest seller online," the company said.



SpiceJet CMD Ajay Singh takes over as Assocham President

SpiceJet's Chairman & Managing Director Ajay Singh has assumed charge as the President Assocham, replacing Renew Power MD Sumant Sinha after the completion of his tenure. Sanjay Nayar, founder and Chairman of Sorin Investment Fund is the new Senior Vice-President of Assocham, the industry body said in a release on Wednesday. "I am taking over at times which are both exciting and challenging. As an economy, India stands out as a robust economy in the midst of global headwinds. Even when major economies of the world are facing the threat of recession, the Indian economy is growing between 6.5-7 per cent," Singh said. He emphasised that the chamber would stay engaged with the government, Centre and states, leading academicians, economists besides corporate leaders to find solutions to the issues, which may crop up in a fast-changing global economic and political landscape. Singh studied at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, where he received a degree in engineering, and got his Master's degree in Business Administration from Cornell University in the US.



Punjab govt sets up panel to look at alternative crops to paddy

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday said he has formed a committee under the chief secretary to look at alternative crops that require less water compared to paddy. Mann said sowing of the paddy crop over the years has led to several problems including depletion of underground water table and issues related to stubble burning. He said he has formed a committee under the chief secretary which will meet farmers in different villages and see which crops consume less water and bring more income to farmers as a replacement of paddy. The committee will submit the report to him, he said in a video message. The CM said his government was taking steps to promote basmati, cotton, moong and pulses. He said his government wanted to increase the area under the cotton crop. The CM said from April 1, canal water will be made available for irrigating cotton crop up to tail ends. He said 33 per cent subsidy was being given on cotton seeds which are certified by the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU).



Credai urges RBI not to hike repo rates

Says any rise in borrowing cost may hit housing sales

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realtors' apex body Credai on Thursday requested the RBI not to increase the repo rate in the upcoming monetary policy as this would raise the borrowing cost of builders and customers, impacting housing sales.

With retail inflation remaining above the comfort level of 6 per cent and most global peers, including the US Fed, continuing their hawkish stance, industry experts feel the Reserve Bank of India may go in for a 25 basis points hike in the bi-monthly monetary policy to be announced on April 6.

Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Association of



India (Credai), having more than 13,000 developers as members, has "urged the RBI not to increase the repo rate any further, citing the financial challenges faced by developers and the potential impact on housing sales due to the con-

sequential rise in prices and home loan rates".

In the last one year, the body said, the repo rate has increased from 4 to 6.5 per cent and another hike would lead to even higher borrowing costs for developers.

Credai National President Harsh Vardhan Patodia said, "In the last 1 year, the cost of construction has risen rapidly due to the gradual increase in repo rates by the RBI, which has adversely impacted many developers as they struggle to cope financially. Another repo rate hike would not only make certain projects financially unfeasible, but it would also deter homebuyers as home loan rates will be at an all-time high".

HCL Tech to hire 1,000 people in Romania

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company HCL Technologies will hire 1,000 people in Romania in the next two years as it scales up operations in that country.

HCL Tech, which completed five years of operations in Romania, will ramp up its offices in Bucharest and Las.

A third of the new roles will be offered to graduates recruited through partnerships with leading Romanian universities, the company said in a statement on Thursday.

The company plans to hire 1,000 people in the next two years in Romania.

Currently, it employs nearly 1,000 people in Romania to serve global clients by leveraging its portfolio across digital, cloud, engineering and software.

India needs \$540 bn investment by 2029 to meet renewable targets: S&P Global Ratings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India needs USD 540 billion of investment between 2020 and 2029 to meet its ambitious targets for electricity generation from renewable sources, S&P Global Ratings said on Thursday as it saw private-sector-led energy transition entering a new phase.

India is targeting to cut its emissions to net zero by 2070. In the transition to that, it is targeting 500 gigawatts (GW) of non-fossil electricity capacity, half of the energy from renewables, a reduction of emissions by one billion tonne and an emissions intensity of the GDP by 45 per cent by 2030.

"Meeting India's renewables target of 500 GW by 2030 requires more than 40 GW of new capacity additions annually (compared to 10-15 GW actual)," it said.

In its report 'Asia-Pacific's



Different Pathways To Energy Transition', S&P Global Ratings said the addition of renewables capacity in India is outpacing coal, but demand growth and intermittency issues are leading to greater coal usage and new coal plants. "Policies are creating an enabling environment while private sector investments will lead the energy transition," it

said, adding investments of USD 540 billion are required from 2020 to 2029 to meet India's renewables target.

Half of these investments will be in renewables and batteries, and another third in strengthening the grid.

"Private sector will lead generation capex while public sector utilities will likely lead grid investments," it said. "Domestic

long-term bank funding is available against projects and cash flows."

There is, however, limited appetite for unsecured holding company funding.

India is the world's fourth biggest emitter of carbon dioxide after China, the US and the EU. But its emissions per capita are much lower than other major world economies. India emitted 1.9 tonnes of CO2 per head of population in 2019, compared to 15.5 tonne for the US and 12.5 tonne for Russia that year.

Net zero, or becoming carbon neutral, means not adding to the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Energy transition refers to the shift from fossil-based systems of energy production and consumption - including oil, natural gas and coal - to renewable energy sources like wind and solar, as well as lithium-ion batteries.

Office space demand in Jan-Mar at 6-quarter low

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Net leasing of office space fell 34 per cent in January-March to 7.63 million square feet across seven major cities as corporates were cautious on expansion amid global uncertainties, according to JLL India.

The net leasing fell to the lowest in six quarters, as per the data by real estate consultant JLL India. Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune

Net leasing down 34 pc in top 7 cities: JLL India

saw a decline in demand, while office space absorption rose in Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru and Kolkata.

Net leasing stood at 11.55 million square feet in the year-ago period across seven cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune.

JLL India attributed the fall in net leasing or absorption of office space to reduced expansion activity, delayed space plans and a hybrid workplace strategy that is still evolving.

"Companies were consolidating and relocating to save on real estate costs, while there were fewer pre-commitments

in new completions during the quarter. This reflects the challenges faced by the corporate world amid global headwinds and an uncertain business environment," it explained.

Net absorption is calculated as the new floor space occupied less floor space vacated. Floor

space that is pre-committed is not considered to be absorbed until it is physically occupied.

As per the data, Bengaluru witnessed a 14 per cent increase in net office leasing to 1.91 million square feet in January-March 2023 from 1.67 million square feet in the year-ago period.

Net office leasing in Delhi-NCR rose 47 per cent to 1.96 million square feet from 1.34 million square feet.

BIF for comprehensive framework to address digital age issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A new report by Broadband India Forum (BIF) mooted suggestions for the proposed Digital India Act has underlined the need for improved institutional frameworks to deal with cybersecurity, established processes for oversight of surveillance, enable fairer con-

tent curation decisions and grievance redressal. As the country moves forward on the Digital India vision, it becomes imperative that the proposed Digital India Act (which will replace IT Act) promotes trust in the digital ecosystem. BIF noted that this requires careful balancing of multiple interests such as national security and

public order, online safety, protection of fundamental rights, and promoting innovation.

In the report, Rishab Bailey, Visiting Research Fellow, XKDR Forum, highlighted how they have examined the proposed law in how it dealt with four focus areas -- online censorship, intermediary liability, surveillance, and cyber security.

To repay US\$ 23 billion debt

Adani pins hopes on 20 pc earnings growth every year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Embattled Adani Group is looking at a 20 per cent growth in earnings across businesses spanning from sea ports to airports, edible oil and commodities, energy, cement and data centres, to repay about USD 23 billion of debt over the next 3-4 years in a comeback strategy, sources said.

Adani group executives have met bankers, bond holders, analysts and investors from Singapore to the US in the last three weeks to address stakeholders' concerns in the aftermath of a damning US short seller report that ripped off USD 135 billion in market value of listed com-



panies of the conglomerate. Sources aware of the development said Adani at these roadshows presented the growth story of the sprawling conglomerate that is refocusing its energies on higher efficiency in business and bringing down debt rather than a breakneck speed expansion.

The group saw a 20 per cent growth in EBITDA or earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization, helping it pare debt.

Between 2013 and 2022, earnings grew by 22 per cent year-on-year. And a 20 per cent growth will help bring down the debt-to-EBITDA ratio from 7.6 per cent to 3 per cent by 2025, they said.

CAG red flags slow development of hydro power

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) said out of 374 identified project sites with power generation capacity of 1,725.53 MegaWatts, only 10 projects with 79.75 MW capacity had been commissioned with time overrun ranging between four months and seven years.

The hydro power potential of Jammu and Kashmir has been estimated at 20,000 MW which includes 1,500 MW in respect of small hydro projects.

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Clawing the economy back to an 8 per cent growth path will require bringing savings and investment rates closer to 35 per cent on a sustained basis, which were

Small stocks lag behind in FY23; take bigger hit than bluechip firms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Small stocks have lagged behind the equity benchmark Sensex in 2022-23, falling nearly 6 per cent amid a host of negative factors like higher interest rate regime, high inflation and the Russian-Ukraine war.

According to market analysts, it was a tumultuous year for the Indian equity market.

The Russian-Ukraine war made the first quarter of the Indian equity market particularly difficult, but the second and third quarters witnessed a respectable rebound, they



noted. Headwinds such as high inflation, the Russia-Ukraine war and higher interest rates hit investors' appetite for small stocks. With just one day of trading left in the current fiscal, the BSE smallcap gauge has fallen by 1,616.93 points or 5.73 per

cent so far in 2022-23. The mid-cap index is down 270.29 points or 1.12 per cent in the 2022-23 financial year. In comparison, the BSE Sensex has declined 608.42 points or 1.03 per cent.

"Many factors contributed to the underperformance of the Indian stock market in FY23. The Indian market performed remarkably well in FY21 and FY22, as both the Nifty and Sensex produced double-digit returns. When the Indian stock market performs strongly for two years in a row, profit booking is inevitable in the third year.

CURRENT SAVINGS, INVESTMENT RATES CAN'T PROPEL GDP TO 8% GROWTH ORBIT: REPORT

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Clawing the economy back to an 8 per cent growth path will require bringing savings and investment rates closer to 35 per cent on a sustained basis, which were

30.2 and 29.6 per cent, respectively, in FY22, according to a report.

As per India Ratings, a large part of investments will have to be in infrastructure, which can help revive private investments by easing

supply constraints and offset the weakening of external demand due to global headwinds.

Higher investments will have to be accompanied by higher domestic savings to keep the savings-investments

gap under check. The big missing link now is the government's focus on stepped-up capital expenditure on infrastructure, but not enough commensurate steps to encourage savings, the report noted.

TAKING INDIA'S GOODS AND SERVICES EXPORTS TO USD 2 TRILLION BY 2030

India to unveil new Foreign Trade Policy 2023-28 today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will unveil its much-awaited new Foreign Trade Policy 2023-28 on Friday, with a view to boost exports amid slowing global trade.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will announce the foreign trade policy, according to the ministry.

The current foreign trade policy (2015-20) is in force till March 31, 2022.

The term of the previous five year policy had ended in March 2020. However, it has been extended repeatedly in wake of Covid outbreak and resulting lockdowns.

The last extension was given in September 2022 till March 31, 2023.

Goyal will announce the foreign trade policy which is expected to outline the vision statement for taking India's goods and services exports to USD 2 trillion by 2030.

The country is likely to end this fiscal year with total exports of USD 760 billion against USD 676 billion in 2021-22.

FSSAI allows labelling curd in regional names

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Food safety regulator FSSAI on Thursday revised its order and allowed the use of regional names in printed labels of curd packets amid political controversy in Tamil Nadu.

Food Business Operators (FBOs) are now allowed to use the term 'curd' along with any other prevalent regional common name in brackets on the label. For example, 'Curd (Dahi)' or 'Curd (Mosaru)', 'Curd (Zaamutdaud)', 'Curd (Thayir)', 'Curd (Perugu)' can be used, the Food Safety

Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said in a statement.

The order has been revised following various representations received recently on the omission of the term 'curd' from the Standards of Fermented Milk Products and only the word 'Dahi' was mentioned.

The controversy erupted after the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Milk Producers Federation -- which sells dairy products in brand name Aavin -- declined to use the Hindi term 'Dahi' in its printed sachets as directed by FSSAI



and said that it would only stick to the Tamil word 'Thayir'.

On Wednesday, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin

decided the move as an attempt to 'impose Hindi'. Dairy Development Minister SM Nasar said the government had received a letter asking it to implement the directive before August.

"The unabashed insistences of #HindiImposition have come to the extent of directing us to label even a curd packet in Hindi, relegating Tamil & Kannada in our own states. Such brazen disregard to our mother tongues will make sure those responsible are banished from South forever," Stalin said in a tweet.

Actress Avantika Dassani is soaring to the heights of success ever since her debut with *Mithya*, starring opposite Huma Qureshi. And so, *The Pioneer* connects with the actress for our weekly segment of Travel Tales, and she joyfully speaks to us about her trip to Bangkok.

Avantika Dassani

awaits a rooftop inn on a holiday

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Walking along the lines of history, some culture and architectural beauty was the latest actress in line Avantika Dassani, also the daughter of desirable actress Bhagyashree.

Avantika made a name for herself by giving a blockbuster hit series titled *Mithya* opposite Huma Qureshi and since then she is only soaring to the heights of success. Very swiftly, she agreed to do a special travel tales segment with us and we get to hear a lot about her time in Bangkok.

"This trip to Bangkok almost felt like a homecoming, these trips are something that mom and I started as a ritual for taking short holidays together. It's our favourite way to bond! Sometimes dad and brother tag along, however, we know how to reminisce about our time together and enjoy ourselves even though others are there."

So very recently they went for a celebration and, "We celebrated my birthday at a lovely rooftop bar called

Pastels and it had fabulous service. There were live performances by a musician playing the djembe and saxophones for us. Whenever on a holiday, I always look forward to a rooftop bar like this. There were other places like pastels where we went to grab some drinks and just take in the view of the Bangkok nightlife."

Totally agreeing with us that sometimes the hotel that one chooses is a staycation on its own and describing to us her favourite hotel hues, she says, "There was a wedding to attend and we were staying at Avani and

Riverside Resort, a stunning property with connected hotels. Give us an incredible view of Bangkok. So any spot where I can see a water body or sun setting is like my thing. Everyone knows I am a Bombay girl, grew up with the privilege of having Juhu Beach around but now that I have grown older I want some solace in the views that I see. It should be a lake view and I have never met a sunset that I can ever dislike." Yes, she had a frightening moment too — "I went on a trip to Edinburgh

with my best friend that included a bunch of haunted tours for us. Post having dinner, we went to our rooms and sort of tried to catch up with each other and didn't realise the time. We rushed out hoping to make it our last tour and while we were walking we got lost on our way back. Really quiet and dark lanes, we crossed under a bridge and

saw a huge castle looming over us and its shadow on the road. We ran our feet way back to the hotel, anyhow."

The next location she would like to tick off her bucket list is South America. Why so? because she really wants to see the Bora Bora islands and Peru. It's her dream destination! Sunny climate and a sandy beach will seal the deal for her. And if it's about Peru, she thinks

that while travelling if you watch multi-cultural and colourful places it liberate you even more.

Adding to it, "Shooting in Darjeeling, hands down became my favourite place. The tea plantations and a nearby forest were the best places to be at while shooting with Huma Qureshi."

Though it was her debut, what a debut at a hill station!

TEJAL SINHA

Actress Donal Bisht has been one of the most celebrated faces of the television industry. She is popularly known for her portrayal of Sharanya Bisht in *Ek Deewana Tha* and Ishika Patel in *Roop - Mard Ka Naya Swaroop*, and Kavya Thapar in *Tu Zakhm Hai*.

Donal, who is currently enjoying the success of the new season discusses with *The Pioneer* over an exclusive chat, about reprising her character, what was something that she enjoyed playing Kavya Thapar, and more. While she's known and been loved for playing strong characters, in *Tu Zakhm Hai*, it was for the very first time that she played the character of a psychologist. In fact, she also revealed that she always wanted to be a psychologist, and it happened with the series. "When I got to know that I had to play a psychologist role and there will be a lot of variations and lots of ups and downs in Kavya's emotions so I think I was well prepared (she laughs) for playing this. Since I had already studied psychology in my 11th and 12th, I was very excited to play the character. I had done a lot of research, and a lot of googling went on so that I could play the character well, as it is very important to study the background of the character you're playing. I always wanted to be a psychologist also and hence this medium, the film industry gives you the liberty to play different parts on screen."

The way Donal transformed herself into the character of Kavya is much appreciated by the fans and audience. And so, sharing about what was something that she'd enjoyed the most playing the character, she merrily replied, "The different kinds of emotions. Every scene is very different and the part that Kavya is playing with every different character is very different. I also enjoyed playing the character because of the thriller part of it actually. She is a hostage and captive yet she falls in love with the captor and how everything happens and the whole process of it and getting so good reviews from the viewers of it. I am happy that the kind of graphs the makers had given to Kavya is amazing and when people are able to connect to it, people said that it's very touching it feels great when you give your 100% to a project and then when it comes it's flying colours come in."

As we moved forward in the interview, Donal described the char-

acter as 'Ulta Coconut'. Seemingly, "(She laughs) Kavya might be soft and sweet but inside she's like this ultra coconut, outside needs to be soft and inside needs to be strong so aisa characters I get to play and with versatility definitely. It's great to play that sort of a part and people get inspired by what you're playing on the screen. People are still like we want a girl like Ishika from *Roop* in our house and the aunties and mummies were mailing me that 'we want a bahu like you'. So in this playing Kavya, people are very interested because she's the girl who understands everybody, understands everyone's emotions very differently and that is how Kavya is and that is why it's very very relatable to the people. I loved playing Kavya and also the love that we are getting from around the world outside. People have sent me videos of people watching the show and people are asking me about when is the 3rd season coming out."

What should you look for in a MOBILE PAYMENT SYSTEM?

Money moves across the spectrum in terms of refunds, cashbacks, rewards, and so on. Payments have undergone several changes in the last 4-5 years. With a goal to make payments convenient, instant, secure, invisible, and low-cost, we have seen many countries in developed markets achieve all of these, and this was possible by using cutting-edge modern technology to power digital payment rails like UPI in India.

TOKENISATION: In the year 2023, we will see more and more cards getting tokenised, introducing customers to a more secure and reliable payment experience wherein a 16-digit card will get tokenized into a unique code that varies every time a transaction takes place.

MERCHANT ACCEPTANCE: We will have more and more merchants accept digital payments by deploying QR codes, M-PoS, and contactless payments like TapNPay using NFC (near-field communication technology).

Mobile Wallets: They will continue to play a pivotal role in making cashless transactions possible. Newer use cases will emerge for mobile wallets in the next 2 years; wallets will be interoperable; and new use cases like mass transit, employee benefits, expense management, corporate gifting, rewards and recognition, banking for teenagers, etc. will grow over 3X in the next 2 years.

GEN Z: More specifically, the teen population of the Gen Z segment is a more tech-savvy or tech-exposed generation. This generation is ready to experiment, wants instant gratification, and will raise the demand for digital payment systems in 2023.

BUY NOW, PAY LATER: This has scaled because of its affordability and easy repayment process in most cases using Standing Instructions (SI). Customers find BNPL to be a convenient payment option, increasing merchant sales and allowing lenders to offer small-ticket loans with simple repayment terms while earning interest income.

FRAUD AND RISK MANAGEMENT:

With the increase in digital payments, we will also see an increase in fraudulent transactions. Modern RBA (risk-based authentication) will be used by banks and payment companies to detect and prevent fraudulent transactions while facilitating digital payments. We will see more tech service providers offering fraud and risk management solutions to banks and payment companies in 2023.

(The author Mehul Mistry is the Global Head-Strategy, Digital Financial Services & Partnerships at Wibmo, a PayU company)

In the year 2023, we will see the following trends in mobile payments across the world:

BIOMETRIC AUTHENTICATION: With the increasing trend and risk of identity theft and fraud, biometric authentication can become a reliable and secure option for all digital payment transactions. Further biometric authentication also helps reduce the cost of authenticating a digital payment transaction.

CENTRAL BANK DIGITAL CURRENCY: Like India, we will see the central banks of various developed countries and economies pilot and launch their own digital currencies in 2023. Digital currency, like the e-Rupee in India, is issued in the form of a digital token that represents legal tender. It is being issued in the same denominations as the fiat currency (modern paper currencies).



● Shezzi



● Dr. Nitika



● Kiran



● Sheela Krishnaswamy



● Niti

Almond Board of California hosted a panel discussion on 'Achieving holistic health with Ayurveda and Nutritional science' featuring celebrity fitness trainer Kiran Dembla, nutrition and wellness consultant Sheela Krishnaswamy and Ayurveda expert Dr. Nitika Kohli. RJ Shezzi moderated the panel.



● Taniya Hasan

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary



Kuchipudi Kalamrita presented the "Sobhamrutam: The Bond," a solo Kuchipudi recital by Amrita Singh, a disciple of the renowned Padma Shree Dr. Sobha Naidu, at Ravindra Bharati in Hitech city, Hyderabad.

Nourish You, announced that the acclaimed actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu has invested in the company. Samantha Ruth Prabhu's investment comes as part of Nourish You's seed funding round, which had earlier attracted pedigreed investors, including Y Janardhana Rao of Triumph Group; Rohit Chennamaneni, co-founder, Darwinbox; and Nikhil Kamath, co-founder, Zerodha, among others.



LISTINGS

Ahimsa run is to be held worldwide across 85 locations including Hyderabad, the US and the UK.

IIFL Ahimsa Run for peace and non-violence, which is being organized across 85 locations all over the world on a single day, will be held in Hyderabad on April 2 at 5 am. The IIFL Jito Ahimsa Run aims at creating awareness for a better world to stop wars, and hatred and bring peace and nonviolence in our surroundings. More than one lakh to participate in the 85 Runs that will be held in 65 locations in India and 20 Global Locations including US and UK. This run is expected to mark its entry into the Guinness World Records, Word Records India, and the Limca Book of Records for the most runners to run in multiple locations for the cause of Ahimsa (non-violence). Over 2800 participants are expected to participate in 3 Run in Hyderabad categories 3K, 5K and 10K to be held Jala Vihar, PV Narasimha Rao, Marg, Hyderabad. All ages and genders can run for Peace & Non-Violence. One can register for IIFL JITO Ahimsa Run at <https://jitoahimsa.org/about-us/> to become a part of the run.

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance launches an innovative savings product

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched ICICI Pru Gold, an innovative long-term savings product designed to enable customers to create an additional income stream to meet their diverse income requirements. Besides receiving guaranteed lifelong income, the life cover component in the product provides financial security to the family. To cater to the varied income needs of customers, this product is available in three variants i.e. Immediate Income, Immediate Income with Booster and Deferred Income. Customers opting for the 'Immediate Income' variant can choose to receive income after 30 days from the date of policy issuance, enabling them to immediately create a supplementary source of lifelong income.

BKT affirms alliance with Sunrisers Hyderabad as the 'Official Tire Partner'

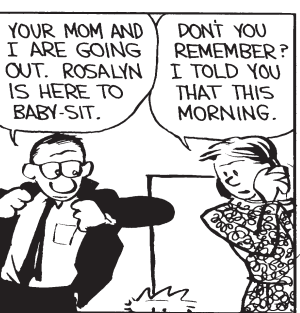
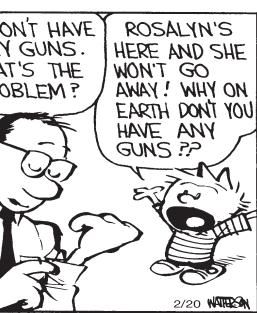
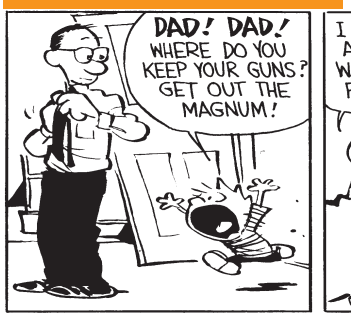
Balkrishna Industries Ltd. (BKT), the Indian multinational company and Global player in the Off-Highway tire market, will continue as 'Official Tire Partner' of Sunrisers Hyderabad, in the upcoming T20 League 2022, for the second consecutive season. The 16th edition of the T20 2023 cricket season will commence on March 31, 2023.

FUN

ARCHIE



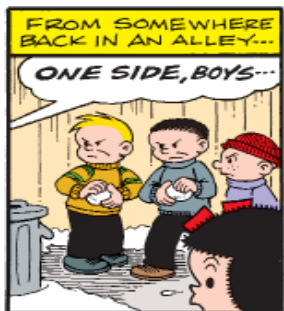
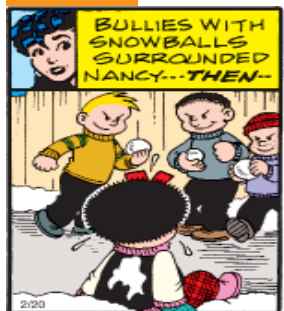
CALVIN AND HOBBS



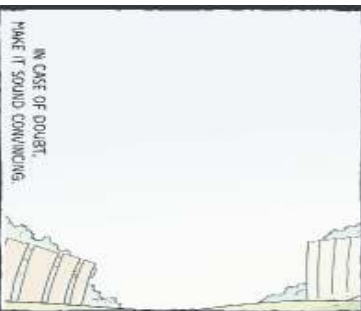
GARFIELD



NANCY



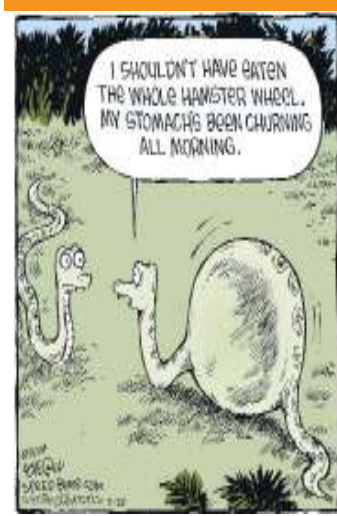
GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



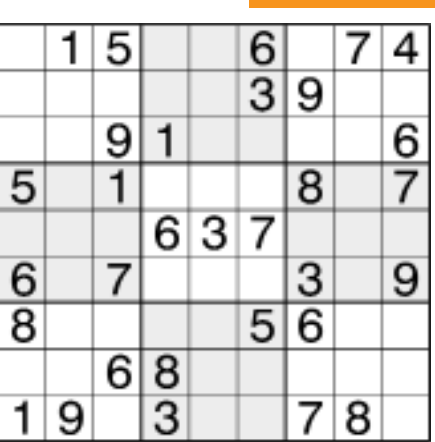
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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.

ACROSS

- 1 Train stops
- 6 Tumble over and over
- 7 Young cows
- 9 A tall type of building
- 11 A feeling of rage
- 12 Bees make this
- 13 One third of twenty-one
- 16 Instructions for cake making
- 18 The part along the side or end of something
- 19 Always ready to give away or share what you have

DOWN

- 4 Complete quiet
- 5 Tell a fib
- 8 People unknown to you
- 10 The late part of the day
- 14 A machine that can record television programmes
- 15 A type of blood vessel
- 17 Pixie



IPL TURNS ‘SWEET 16’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The never-ending speculations about Mahendra Singh Dhoni's impending 'last dance', Virat Kohli's endless pursuit of an elusive silverware and Rohit Sharma's customary nonchalance are things that make the IPL starting Friday a heady cocktail of cricket and entertainment.

Megastars Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit have been the IPL's driving force in the past 15 seasons, getting the cricket crazy Indian fans hooked on the event for nearly two months every year.

As it enters the 16th season, innovations introduced in the form of potential game changer like the 'Impact Player' rule, DRS on wides and waist-high no balls, and two broadcasting giants locked in an ugly war of 'TV vs Digital' act as ingredients garnishing the mouth-watering dish, which will be devoured by millions for more than 50 days.

However, the product will remain the driving force and players the main stakeholders, as the likes of Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit set the narratives for their respective franchises with amazing fan bases.

Nearing 42, Dhoni has defied the law of diminishing returns when it comes to his manic following among CSK fans, who thronged the Chepauk to see their 'Thala' hit towering sixes at his spiritual home.

They say it will be his last year in the 'canary yellow' jersey, but when it comes to MSD, never say never. Even Rohit agrees with that, and won't be surprised if his 'captain' continues playing till 45.

Having finished outside the play-offs in 2022, Dhoni would like to equal Mumbai Indians' record with five titles, and he knows how to get the best out of the resources available at his disposal.

He will have Ben Stokes in his roster to give him the firepower in batting — in powerplay and at the back-end.

Devon Conway and Ruturaj Gaikwad both understand the grammar of IPL cricket and Ambati Rayudu with the willow and Deepak

CSK, MI remain premier contenders as RCB eye fresh start



Chahar with the white Kookaburra have all been there and done that.

CSK have never been a grooming school. There it's more about the finished product or those in whom the skipper sees the potential, like he saw in Simarjeet Singh last year, or someone like Matheesa Pathirana, who could be an 'Impact Player' if the CSK begin with three foreigners. Stokes, Moeen Ali and Conway look sure-shot starters as of now.

For Rohit, it will be a season in which he would like to sing the redemption song. Rohit has a casual exterior but scratch the surface, and

he can be as intense as anybody, and being the most successful skipper in the history of IPL, losing isn't an option. Before last year, Rohit never knew what it feels to be the wooden spooner. This season however, Mumbai Indians appear to be the team to beat, at least on paper.

A lot will depend on the skipper's own batting form and the two marquee men in Ishan Kishan and the world's No. 1 T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav, who would like to brush off the three first-ball ducks against Australia recently as an aberration in an otherwise sterling journey.

Jofra Archer's presence does boost the pace attack, but Jasprit Bumrah's absence, to some extent, nullifies the advantage.

But what MI is doing is to prepare a team for the next five years with young guns like Dewald Brevis, Tim David, Cameron Green, Tilak Verma, Hrithik Shokeen and Kumar Kartikeya set to serve them for the longest time. This core will be a formidable one in the years to come.

Just like Dhoni and Rohit, Kohli has landed up in every IPL with fire in his belly, but the rub of the green hasn't gone his way.

He has had a 973-run season, in 2016, something that will be difficult to surpass even in these day and age where the shelf life of records is too less. He has played a few finals but, as far as winning the title is concerned, the IPL has had a fickle relationship with one of India's greatest batters. He is no longer the skipper and is probably in the best mental phase that he has been in the past three to four years.

The hunger is intact, but the desperation isn't there. The swagger remains, but the aggression is no longer there to be found.

With Michael Bracewell, Glenn Maxwell and Dinesh Karthik ready to do the heavy-lifting, Kohli will be free to play his own game and also help skipper Faf du Plessis in putting his best foot forward.

This season holds special significance for Hardik Pandya. Having led Gujarat Titans to title triumph in only their inaugural year, the 16th IPL will be a platform for Pandya to soar higher and higher with bigger ambitions.

With coach Ashish Nehra for company, he would want the Rashid Khans, Mohammed Shamis and the Shubman Gills to maintain the tempo of last year from start to finish. An encore would certainly make him Rohit's heir apparent in the ODI format post the World Cup.

The only tactical shift is the absence of Lockie Ferguson and the jury is still out on whether trading him to bring in Shivam Mavi was a good choice or not. For Aiden Markram, it will be an onerous task to lift a perennially under-performing Sunrisers Hyderabad.

However, the composition is better compared to previous years with talented Indian players like Mayank Agarwal, Rahul Tripathi and Abhishek Sharma in their ranks. Glenn Phillips and Harry Brook are among some top overseas batting recruits.

However, bowling remains a worry with Umran Malik, now well studied by analysts, and Bhuvneshwar Kumar past his prime. A lot will depend on whether SRH are able to use their fourth foreign player as per conditions. There is Marco Jansen with his left-arm seamers and Adil Rashid with his wrist spinners.

Punjab Kings under Shikhar Dhawan is another team that has never believed in continuity and never got results since their runners-up finish in 2014.

They have kept on changing captains, uncereemoniously dumping coaches after one bad season, and the team never had any stability. This time they have got Sam Curran in excess of USD 2 million dollars.

A good start is key but not getting Liam Livingstone (injury),

Kagiso Rabada (national duty) in the first couple of games could upset the team's tempo.

Save Arshdeep Singh, the Indian pace unit lacks quality and the PBKS could again be out of the play-off race. The team simply doesn't inspire confidence and the composition indicates lack of proper homework.

KL Rahul is having a nightmare 2023 and a good IPL can raise his profile which has been on a downward spiral despite him being a top performer in the league. Rahul's captaincy has been devoid of any tangible improvisation and his style of run gathering is archaic.

LSG have a balanced team and in Gautam Gambhir a tactician par excellence, one who could safely be called the non-playing captain. The presence of utility players like Krunal Pandya, Deepak Hooda and Ayush Badoni in the middle-order adds a lot of depth, while Mark Wood's 150 click thunderbolts will be a nightmare for the opposition.

Nicholas Pooran, who was paid an astronomical Rs 16 crore, would look to justify that billing after a forgettable last season with SRH.

When it comes to remote-control captaincy, there can't be a better example than KKR head coach Chandrakant Pandit, who will have to do all the planning and plotting on behalf of Nitish Rana, who will be leading a side that isn't looking very strong in the absence of regular skipper Shreyas Iyer.

In fact, Andre Russell and Sunil Narine's form will dictate how far KKR progress.

Ditto for Delhi Capitals, who will find it difficult to have anyone get remotely close to Rishabh Pant's impact, even though David Warner wouldn't mind winning a second IPL trophy.

Amid all the chaos in some teams, Rajasthan Royals look the most sorted outfit. The world's most dangerous T20 hitter Jos Buttler, wily wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, and the best cricketing brain, R Ashwin, will look to ensure that the legend of skipper Sanju Samson grows exponentially.

Its Dhoni vs Hardik in IPL 2023 opener



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Hardik Pandya's youthful leadership template will meet its match in Mahendra Singh Dhoni's time-tested improvisations as defending champions Gujarat Titans clash with eternal title contenders Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League opener here on Friday.

The 2022 was Pandya's first year as an IPL captain and despite his flamboyance on and off the field, he did invoke a certain sense of calm in Titans' campaign that had the an identical start to finish tempo, unmatched by any other team.

With Shubman Gill in the form of his life, Rashid Khan not losing one bit of his consistency and Pandya himself having his worth weight in gold, Gujarat are once again the team to beat.

David Miller's absence from the opener due to national duty will reduce some

middle-order muscle but Rahul Tewatia, who has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years, could compensate for the temporary miss.

Kane Williamson might not be most sought after in this format but in low-scoring games on difficult surfaces, he could still be the man to watch out for.

Pandya has never shied away from admitting that he has learnt the ropes of leadership from Dhoni, who has always been his 'Mentor'.

But at 42, playing from IPL to IPL, Dhoni knows the template of IPL success only too well. There have been blips here and there, like last time when they failed to qualify for the play-offs but even with shut eyes, one can vouch that there was no fault in planning but the execution wasn't on expected lines.

On Friday, as the 16th edition starts, it will be very different from earlier ones as 12

players per side will take part in the pitched battle at the Motera Stadium with the 'Impact Player' rule coming into play for the first time.

Dhoni, who manoeuvres his resources having put in a lot of thought into his actions, might well make himself the 'Impact Player' if need be during chases.

That for sure won't happen in the first few games as both teams try to make optimal use of the rule.

For CSK, the presence of Ben Stokes is sure to make the opposition wary but to Gujarat Titans' delight, the England Test captain perhaps won't bowl at least in the initial phase of the tournament.

That makes him an ideal candidate as 'Impact Player' depending on whether the team bats first or second and accordingly Dhoni can think of playing three foreigners instead of four.

Devon Conway, Stokes and Moeen Ali at this point look the non-negotiable three starters in the playing eleven.

A lot will depend on how well Ravindra Jadeja, Ambati Rayudu and Dhoni himself perform with willow as the Indian pace bowling unit of Deepak Chahar and Simarjeet Singh will have their task cut out.

How well Dhoni can use either spinner Mahesh Theekana or slinger Matheesa Pathirana will also go a long way establishing a pattern in selections.

As far as GT is concerned, there is one strategic decision which has been baffling and that is release of tearaway quick Lockie Ferguson and bringing in Shivam Mavi. However Alazarri Joseph's presence is a bit reassuring in this format.

Save Mohammed Shami, the only other pacer of repute is the skipper himself. Yash Dayal had a good first season hasn't been in great form in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with only 2 wickets from 6 games but to be fair, he was coming back from injury. Pradeep Sangwan and Mohit Sharma are both experienced campaigners but they are now well past their prime.

The other cause of worry for GT will be keeper's slot. While Wriddhiman Saha was decent as an opener last year, they have a better T20 batter in Kona Bharat this team round, who incidentally bats in the top order in the shortest format.

Vice-captaincy is reward of my hard work: Patel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Axar Patel is excited about his new role as Delhi Capitals vice-captain, terming the responsibility entrusted upon him as a reward for all the hardwork he has put in for the franchise over past few seasons.

"In my opinion, if you have gotten this role that means you are growing as a senior player. It's like getting a reward for all that you've done for the team. I'm excited about this role," the lanky all-rounder said in a video posted on DC's twitter handle.

"Our team is mostly the same, we have the same players from the last 3-4 years. We know our players well and that will be an important point."

Axar will be deputy to Australian David Warner, who has been named as DC skipper for this season in place of Rishabh Pant, who is currently undergoing rehabilitation following a horrific car accident in December.

Axar said that he would provide full support to new skipper Warner.

"David is a talented player. I will provide him with an atmosphere where he can make



best use of his abilities. It's a different feeling altogether when you join DC Camp. It's been 3-4 years with the franchise now and it feels like home," Axar said.

DC will start their campaign with an away game against Lucknow Super Giants on April 1 before returning to their home base to play defending champions Gujarat Titans on April 4.

"We are playing here at Kotla after so long. I feel it will be really important. We will have our fans here and I'm sure the fans would be excited to cheer for us," Axar said.

'IPL-16 wonderful opportunity for Bharat to showcase talent'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former national selection committee chairman MSK Prasad says the IPL-16 is a "wonderful opportunity" for wicketkeeper KS Bharat to showcase his talent in white-ball cricket and stake a claim for India selection.

"Bharat is a Test cricketer and now he has an opportunity to showcase his talent in white-ball cricket. So, it will be a wonderful opportunity for him to do that," Prasad said of the Andhra stumper, who made his Test debut in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia.

The wicketkeeper, however, came in for some criticism over his not being able to make big contributions with the bat.

Prasad, a former India player, said in an interaction, "He (Bharat) is there in a good fran-

chise like Gujarat Titans, so, it's a good opportunity for him to showcase his talent as a white-ball cricketer, too."

Noting that Bharat has performed reasonably well in domestic cricket (in white-ball), Prasad said it was a chance for him to deliver again.

"See, now it is in his hands. So he has done reasonably well in domestic cricket, so in a few opportunities that he got for RCB, he did well. So, this is a wonderful opportunity for him to again deliver in white-ball cricket and put himself in a strong position," he added.

Bharat was drafted into the Test XI after the flamboyant Rishabh Pant was unavailable after being injured in a horrific road mishap late last year.

Speaking about this year's IPL beginning on Friday, Prasad, a Star Sports Telugu commentator, said defending

champions Gujarat Titans would be expected to do well though they face a tough challenge.

He also said he expected the MS Dhoni-led Chennai Super Kings to bounce back strongly after a poor run in the 2022 edition.

"Gujarat because it is a young side, it has got a very good balance and it is led by a good captain also. CSK will come back very strong this time. Why, because they have had one of the worst seasons last year. So, they will come back strong and you never know, there are a lot of rumours that this could be Mahi's (Dhoni's) last year or something like that."

"So they will come with two times more vigour and more energy, to give a fitting tribute to what MS has done in the IPL and CSK."

Sindhu, Srikanth enter quarterfinals of Madrid Spain Masters

PTI ■ MADRID

Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth moved to the singles quarterfinals of the Madrid Spain Masters badminton tournament with straight game wins here on Thursday. Two-time Olympic medallist, Sindhu dispatched Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia 21-16, 21-14 in a little over half an hour to enter her first quarterfinal in 2023.

World no. 21 Srikanth, on the other hand, pulled off a 21-15, 21-12 second round win over compatriot B Sai Praneeth.

Second seed Sindhu has been struggling for form this

season since returning to action following a long injury lay off. It is the first time in 2023 that the 27-year-old former world champion has crossed the second round.

Sindhu, who has dropped out of the top 10 for the first time since November 2016, will take on 25-year-old Danish Mia Blichfeldt in the last eight stage of the Super 300 tournament.

While World no. 21 Srikanth, seeded fifth, has a tough contest ahead of him as the former world No. 1 is pitted against top seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan in the quarterfinals.

Nishimoto was handed a walkover by France's Arnaud



Merkle in their second round contest. Kiran George and Priyanshu Rajawat crashed out of the men's singles event after suffering second round defeats.

While George went down to Denmark's Magnus Johannesen 17-21, 12-21 in 31 minutes, Rajat was outplayed 14-21, 15-21 by eight seed Toma Junior Popov of France. Later in the day, Aakrushi Kashyap, Ashmita Chaliha Malvika Bansod and Sameer Verma will play their second round matches.

The men's and women's doubles pair of MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila and Sikki Reddy and Arathi Sara Sunil will also be in action.

Hazlewood to miss initial stage of IPL, Maxwell uncertain for RCB's opener

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bangalore is set to miss the initial stages of the Indian Premier League beginning in Ahmedabad on Friday. According to a report in cricket.Com.Au, Ha'zlewood is, however, hopeful of playing a part in the later stages of the T20 tournament.

The 32-year-old is currently recovering from an Achilles problem which kept him out of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India. Hazlewood will consult Cricket Australia's medical staff



before deciding on his participation in the IPL, the report said.

In another big development, all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, who missed Australia's final two ODIs against India earlier this month, is also doubtful for RCB's opening game against Mumbai Indians on April 2 in Bengaluru as he is yet to recover from a leg injury.

IPL beckons Northeast as Guwahati gears up for 2 matches

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Northeast is all set to debut as an Indian Premier League (IPL) host for the first time since the marquee tournament started, with two Rajasthan Royals' 'home' games scheduled in Assam's Guwahati next month.

The Assam Cricket Association (ACA) Stadium has been designated as one of the 'home' venues for RR, which will take on the Punjab Kings on April 5 and Delhi Capitals on April 8.

"We were allotted two IPL matches of RR in 2020. But, the matches couldn't happen due to the outbreak of COVID-19. We are happy two games have been scheduled here this year," ACA secretary Tridib Konwar said.

He said preparations are in full swing, and ACA is working in close coordination with the Rajasthan Royals team.

"We urge the cricket lovers of Assam as well as the entire Northeast to come and watch the matches. Rajasthan Royals has already started online ticketing for the games," Konwar said. The Jaipur-based franchise had earlier partnered with the association for a cricket academy, which is now functional at the ACA Stadium.

Devajit Saikia, joint secretary of the BCCI, said there are a lot of aspiring cricketers who cannot make it to the national side due to tough competition, and the IPL is a good opportunity for them. All eyes will be on local boy Riyan Parag, who plays for the Rajasthan Royals, during the two matches.