

**'Real gold & diamonds worth 14 crores were used in *Shaakuntalam*'**  
P: 12

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# ‘No’ for crop insurance; ‘yes’ for blame game!

The risk of crop loss due to weather-related incidents like heavy rainfall, especially untimely rain, floods, and hailstorms, is an unfortunate and routine occurrence in our state, just like anywhere else in the country or the world. In the last nine months alone, we have seen untimely rains and hailstorms causing catastrophic losses to farmers in the state. Besides the recent downpours and hailstorms destroying crops in Khammam, Mahabubabad, and Warangal districts, River Godavari was in spate twice - in July and September last year, due to untimely heavy rainfall. The one in July was so sudden and devastating that our Chief Minister resorted to conspiracy theories involving foreign powers and cloud bursts to divert attention from the state

government's administrative failure.

For a state which relies heavily on agriculture, and with scientists warning that climate change will only make natural calamities more frequent and unpredictable, crop insurance is not a luxury but a minimum necessity to provide financial security against ruinous losses to our farmers. The finding that Telangana ranked fourth in the country for suicides by farmers and daily wage labourers in 2020, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, only adds urgency to the need.

Despite every logic dictating the need, the Telangana government adamantly refuses to offer crop insurance to our farmers. Instead, it discontinued the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana with no alternative. Whenever the Bharatiya

**The Telangana government adamantly refuses to offer crop insurance to our farmers. Instead, it discontinued the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana with no alternative. Whenever the BJP in the state demands the implementation of Fasal Bima to provide security to our farmers, the government argues that the Gujarat govt too had discontinued the scheme, though the Gujarat govt has introduced Mukhyamantri Kisan Sahay Yojana**

Janata Party in the state demands the implementation of Fasal Bima to provide security to our farmers, the government argues that the BJP-headed Gujarat govt too had discontinued the scheme - leaving out the crucial detail that the Gujarat government has introduced an alternative called the Mukhyamantri Kisan Sahay Yojana, which simplifies and broadens coverage.

With no crop insurance scheme in place, the Telangana farmer is at the mercy of those in power and the financial

solvency of the public exchequer for any compensation when disasters strike. And unfortunately, our Chief Minister's compassion is driven more by politics and elections than farmers' losses. 'Maximum politics and minimum governance' has been the hallmark of his administration.

So, for example, when there were no elections in sight, and farmers incurred heavy losses due to the incessant rains in September and October 2020, the government offered no assistance. The farmers had to



KISHORE POREDDY

approach the Telangana High Court for relief. Instead, the government tried to blame the Center, saying it did not release any funds. The HC had to come down heavily on the state and ordered it to compensate the farmers - including tenant farmers - and to provide crop insurance.

"Substantial amounts were available with the state government under the SDRF to provide relief to farmers who suffered crop losses caused by heavy rains in September and October 2020. Such funds included sums made available by the Union of India amounting to Rs 977 crore on April 1, 2020, itself and Rs 449 crore was released to the state government under the SDRF during 2020-21 (Central share), with Rs 149.67 crore being the state's share. The amount was credited to the account of the state government during 2020-21. So, it cannot blame the Union of India for not providing funds to it for the said purpose," the High Court bench remarked, debunking the state's excuse.

State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), mentioned by the HC in its order, is designed to be the last resort and a sup-

plementary source of relief like a top-up. Lacking crop insurance, SDRF has become Telangana's first and only resort to compensate farmers. For the record, every state's SDRF is funded by the Central and that state's governments in the ratio of 75:25, except in the case of North-Eastern States, where the Center provides 90 per cent of the fund. Even when the state had to bear only one-fourth of the cost, the Chief Minister did not see any benefit from compensating the farmers in a non-election year.

In contrast, the Chief Minister quickly announced relief when Hyderabad faced floods just before the GHMC elections and to farmers who lost their crops over the last week. In both instances, three things were recurrent. Upcoming elections, SDRF funds, and the blame game that

the Center has not released any funds - hiding that the Central government provided 75 per cent of the funds in SRDF. As usual, the Chief Minister broke his promise to the GHMC voters after the elections were over, just like promises made during the Huzurabad and Munugode elections concerning Dalit Bandhu and Sheep Distribution Schemes.

My only hope is that the Chief Minister, keeping his maximum politics model aside, delivers his promise quickly and fairly. That he does not, for political gains, involve his party MLAs in beneficiary identification as he did in Dalit Bandhu and Two Bedroom schemes. The farmers are in too much pain and do not deserve another ordeal.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson)

## Naidu, his associates facing probe into graft charges: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has said that Opposition Leader Chandrababu Naidu and his associates are facing an investigation from IT and other Central agencies for looting public money between 2014 and 2019.

Corroborating the sequence of events explained by IT Minister G. Amarnath in the Legislative Assembly earlier on how the TDP president made holes in the exchequer by forcing the agents of contractors to pay commissions, the Chief Minister explained the

**Chandrababu Naidu stooped down to such lows that he had forced L&T and Shapoorji Pallonji, the contractors of the Secretariat, High Court, the Assembly, and the TIDCO houses to pay commissions for awarding the contracts**

modus operandi adopted by Chandrababu Naidu.

He said Chandrababu Naidu stooped down to such lows that he had forced L&T and Shapoorji Pallonji, the contractors of the Secretariat, High Court, the Assembly, and the TIDCO houses to pay commissions for awarding the contracts.

He said commissions to the tune of Rs 156 crore were rerouted to his pockets through

shady Companies. These companies which got the bogus sub-contract work orders were run by his close associates.

Apart from Chandrababu, his secretary Srinivas and Manoj Vasudev Pardasanny, who played a role in transferring the commissions are facing an investigation from the central agencies, he said, adding that the former Chief Minister has already received

IT notices.

The IT Appraisal Report, prepared after the IT raids on Srinivas and Manoj says that crores of rupees were siphoned off to Chandrababu through these people.

While the TDP president pocketed public money and misused it for buying public representatives in elections and for selfish political gains, the Government has been working hard to improve the lives of the poor by implementing a plethora of welfare schemes and transferring money directly into their accounts through DBT, he said.

## Council poll outcome hints at future of AP: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The people of Andhra Pradesh have clearly predicted the future of the State by giving their verdict in the recent elections held for the Legislative Council seats, observed TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu, on Wednesday. Sobhakaruth Ugadi' celebrations are held at the TDP headquarters here under the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu in

which several senior party leaders participated in the programme.

Addressing the TDP leaders and party functionaries, Chandrababu Naidu said that the verdict given by the people in the Council polls has come as a shock to many in the State.

"People have revolted against the dictatorial government

despite issuing threats and creating various kinds of problems for them," said Chandrababu and felt that the ruling party leaders, who are expected to perform as per the public opinion are functioning most irresponsibly. The verdict given in the Council elections, the people of the State made it clear that activities of such leaders are no longer acceptable, he added.

Wishing that the farmers across the country, including in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, should remain happy and prosper with the increase in their revenue, Chandrababu felt that the people in Andhra Pradesh are already facing various kinds of problems with skyrocketing prices of essentials and large scale increase in taxes. Chandrababu called upon the party leaders and activists to stand by the people. The TDP chief said that Telugu is holding high positions in various fields across the globe and said that he prays to the Almighty that the Telugu community should prosper further.

Chandrababu Naidu felicitated the pun-dits, including Pulpula Venkata Phanikumar Sarma, on this occasion.



## AP's revenue...

Continued from Page 1

The funds provided to State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) were being kept idle from 2019-20 by transferring them to Personal deposit accounts illegally without being spent for drought relief as per sanctions was in violation of SDRF guidelines.

Outstanding Public Debt at the end of the year has increased by 6.97 per cent ( ` 24,257 crore) over the previous year. State Government has also a liability for off-budget borrowings of Rs 1,18,394 crore and committed liability on account of pending payments of Rs 17,804.20 crore to DISCOMs (towards electricity dues), pending payments towards irrigation projects and water supply schemes to the end of the year 2021-22 which it has not disclosed as part of its budget documents.

There were 1,99,616 adjustment transactions amounting to Rs 11,237.61 crore relating to Personal Deposits carried out during the year 2021-22. These transactions were carried out centrally by the Central Processing Cell (CPC) of CFMS, without routing through/obtaining necessary approvals of the Treasury as required.

The per capita income of the State at current prices was Rs 2,07,771 in 2021-22, which was higher than the all-India average of Rs 1,49,848. Andhra Pradesh registered a higher growth rate during the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 and reduced during the current year (2021-22) compared to the national growth rate. The reduction in the growth rate of GSDP of the State during 2020-21 was mainly due to economic turmoil caused by the global pandemic (Covid-19).

## Rahul disqualified from LS

Continued from Page 1

The court in Surat sentenced on Thursday Gandhi to two years in jail in a defamation case, filed on a complaint by BJP MLA Purnesh Modi for his alleged remark, "How come all thieves have Modi as the common surname?"

Following his disqualification, Gandhi would not be able to contest elections for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction and sentence.

Hours before the notification was issued, Gandhi attended Lok Sabha proceedings in the morning session. Before the proceedings commenced, he also participated in a meeting of party MPs in the Parliament complex.

Incidentally, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government, in 2013, had attempted to circumvent a Supreme Court ruling to set aside an RP Act provision

under which a person sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more shall be disqualified "from the date of such conviction" and remain disqualified for another six years after serving time.

Gandhi himself had opposed the ordinance at that time and tore the ordinance in a press conference as a token of protest.

Reacting to Gandhi's disqualification, the Congress said it was "a black day for Indian democracy" and asserted that the battle will be fought both "legally and politically".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP made all efforts to get him disqualified as he was speaking the truth.

"He has been removed from the House for speaking the truth, fighting for the Constitution and for people's rights," Kharge alleged.

"This was not a question of backward class, Lalit Modi and Nirav Modi are not of backward

class. They are trying to build a perception that Rahul Gandhi spoke against backward class. Gandhi was putting forward the truth before the country so they were not liking it," he said in an apparent reference to BJP chief J P Nadda's remarks that Gandhi had compared OBC communities to thieves.

The BJP would be thinking that their problem is solved by ousting him from Lok Sabha but it is not so as the demand for Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) would continue to be raised, he said. Opposition leaders have been demanding a JPC probe into the Adani issue.

"We will keep fighting for protecting democracy and even if we have to go to jail, we will do so. Our people are ready to fight," Kharge said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said in a tweet, "We will fight this battle both legally and politically."

## 3 Bills passed in AP Assembly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Friday passed the Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2023, the Andhra Pradesh Inland Waterways Authority Bill, 2023, and the Andhra Pradesh Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

The State Assembly passed by voice vote, the Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2023 moved by Minister for Women, Children, Differently Aabled and Senior Citizens Welfare KV Usha Sri Charan, the Andhra Pradesh Inland Waterways Authority Bill, 2023 tabled by Minister for Industries & Commerce, Infrastructure & Investment Gudivada Amarnath, and the Andhra Pradesh Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2023 introduced by Minister for Agriculture and Cooperation Kakani

Govardhan Reddy.

**APPROPRIATION BILL PASSED:** Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Friday passed the Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill, 2023 enabling the State government to spend Rs 2.79 lakh crore in the 2023-24 financial year beginning April 1.

The State Assembly passed by voice vote, the Bill piloted by Minister for Finance, Planning, Legislative Affairs & Commercial Taxes Buggana Rajendranath.

**HOUSE ADJOURNED SINE DIE:** Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly was adjourned sine die by Speaker Tammineni Sitaram here on Friday.

The session was held for eight days during which 27 Bills were passed, two short discussions were held and three resolutions were passed.

## Kotamreddy brothers join TDP along with followers

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In addition to Sridhar Reddy and another rebel Anam Ramnarayan Reddy, Mekapati Chandrasekhar Reddy and Undavalli Sridevi are also believed to have voted for the TDP. Like Sridhar Reddy and Anam Ramnarayan Reddy, Chandrasekhar Reddy is also from the Nellore district. Sridevi is an MLA from Tadikonda in the Guntur district. Sridhar Reddy alleged that the phone tapping started after he raised people's issues and spoke about roads, drinking water, and other civic problems in his constituency. He stated that phone tapping was not possible without orders from the chief minister.

## Rahul may have to vacate...

Continued from Page 1

According to rules, he will have to vacate his official bungalow within a month since the date of disqualification order," an official of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry said. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had to vacate her official Lodhi Estate bungalow in July 2020 as she was no longer eligible for it after her security cover had been downgraded.

The Congress party has said it would fight the conviction and disqualification of Rahul Gandhi politically and legally. Following his disqualification, Rahul

Gandhi would not be able to contest elections for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction and sentence. Hitting out at the government over the issue, the Congress said it was "a black day for Indian democracy" and asserted that the battle will be fought both "legally and politically". The opposition party also alleged that the action was driven by "political vendetta". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP made all efforts to get him disqualified as he was speaking the truth. "He has been removed from the House for speaking the truth, fighting for the Constitution and for people's rights," Kharge alleged.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPT.**  
**e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**  
No. 687 TO 788 /2022-23(A.T.O.) Date: 21-03-2023  
Providing FHTCs in 6 Mandalas (Parvathipuram, Balijepeta, Seethanagaram, Saluru, Bhamini, Kunupam) of 102 works in Parvathipuram Manyam District. The Estimated cost: Rs 1169.89 lakhs. Tender Document available date and time: 28.03.2023, 11.00 AM to 11.04.2023, 3.00 PM. Further details: www.eprocurement.gov.in. Ph: 9100120759. Sd-Executive Engineer, R.O.No: 8157/CLAD/7/2022-23, Dt. 24.03.2023 RWS&S Division, Parvathipuram

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# Naidu involved in a big scam in CRDA: Amarnath

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Industries Minister Gudivada Amarnath has said that a big scam was unearthed in AP-CRDA during the TDP regime under Chandrababu Naidu. He said during the Assembly session on Friday that massive corruption was committed by Chandrababu Naidu and his associates during TDP rule to the tune of Rs 143 crore, through fraudulent methods from infra giants such as L&T and Shapoorji Pallonji. He said that the investigation wing of the IT department in New Delhi began the probe in 2019 with two companies who were awarded various contracts by the TDP government, which were found to be bogus under the guise of sub-contracts. He said that the Income Tax dept has now



begun its probe against Chandrababu Naidu.

He said that soon the public will come to know the skills of Chandrababu in corruption and looting. Naidu looted public money by looking for opportunities in crises like state division. Naidu has looted public money in the construction of the Secretariat,

Assembly, and Courts. In February 2020, IT raids were conducted at the house of Chandrababu Naidu's former personal secretary and the Central Board of Direct Taxes found Rs 2,000 crores in the raids in which 40 places were inspected, bogus sub-contracts, invoices, bills, and other evidence were found."

He mentioned that during the previous government's tenure, by December 2018, Shaporji Pallonji had given contracts worth Rs.8,000 crore, TIDCO has given Rs 7,000 crore for houses and another Rs 700 crore worth of projects in Amaravati for various constructions to the company. He explained that Manoj Vasudev clarified that Chandrababu PS asked for Rs 100 crores under the party fund at the time of the election in lieu of

Amaravati contracts.

Minister Amarnath explained that Chandrababu PA Srinivas and Lokesh PA Rajesh Kilari are also involved in this case, Srinivas attached two persons Vicky Jain and Vinay Nangalia to Manoj, raised bogus invoices in the names of Vicky Jain and Vinay Nangalia and transferred Rs.52.5 crores and Rs.62.90 crores and Atul Soni, a representative of L&T was also attached to Manoj, Soni received Rs.41.90 crore and all this money was transferred to RVR Raghu, Krishna, Narayan, Srikanth, Anikad Balota through bogus vouchers. He alleged that apart from these, Rs.15.14 crore were given to Chandrababu Naidu in Dubai in Dirhams and a total of Rs. 143 crores changed hands like this.

## Budget session held for 43 hrs over 8 days

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the concluding day of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly session on Friday, Speaker Tammineni Sitaram said that the tenth session of the 15th Legislative Assembly was held for eight days from March 15 to 24 for 43 hours and 12 minutes. During the 8 days sessions, 69 starred questions have been answered orally while 29-starred and 2 un-starred questions were placed before the house. Two short note questions were answered. A total of 27 bills were introduced and passed in the house, discussion was done by 17 members. Two short discussions were held, no reports were presented, and the government passed three resolutions. The party-wise positions in the Legislative Assembly as of today Friday, YSRCP has 151 members, TDP 23, and Jana Sena with 1 member with zero vacant seats out of a total of 175 members.

The business hours carried in the Legislative council during eight days sessions was 28 hours, 57 minutes. A total of 66 starred questions have been answered orally while 23 starred were placed before the house. Three short note questions were answered. A total of 27 bills were introduced and passed in the house. One short discussion was answered and eight adjourned motions were taken during the sessions.

The party-wise positions in the Legislative Council are 25 to YSRCP, 14 to TDP, 1 BJP, five PDE, three Independent, eight Nominated, and two vacant with a total 58.

## 10 TDP MLAs suspended on final day too

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

It was deja vu in the AP Assembly on the final day. Soon after the Assembly session began on Friday, the TDP members started disrupting the House transactions while Vijayawada Central MLA and Planning Board Vice-Chairman Malladi Vishnu was addressing the House on the housing scheme on how the YSRCP has allocated lakhs of houses to the poor and how the TDP has indulged in corrupt activities to allocate houses to the poor in the name of Janmabhoomi committees.

The TDP members began raising slogans and displaying placards seeking an adjournment motion on GO No 1. However, Speaker Sitaram refused to give an adjournment motion on GO 1 for the TDP. Till then the TDP members were raising slogans standing from their respective seats and slowly moving forward towards the speaker podium.

On noticing the TDP members coming towards the podium, the speaker warned that there was a red line and that any member who crosses that line is deemed to be suspended. Despite the caution from the speaker the TDP members did not care for the speaker's words and barged toward the Speaker's podium crossing the red line. Though the opposition members violated the rules the speaker considered and asked them to go back to their seats the TDP members threw a deaf ear to the speaker's words and with no option left with the speaker, all the 10 opposition members were suspended.

The suspended members were B Ashok, K Atchannaaidu, Nimmakayala Chinarajappa, Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu, Mantena Ramaraju, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, Yeluru Sambashiva Rao, Dola Bala Veeranjaneva Swamy, Gorentla Butchiaiah Chowdary and Gadde Rammohan Rao.



## Govt accepts proposal of employees' unions on health scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary Dr. KS Jawahar Reddy chaired a meeting with the representatives of employee unions on the issues related to the health scheme and PRC of the state government employees.

CS Jawahar Reddy stated that the meeting agreed to the proposal of the union leaders that the health scheme contribution paid by the employees be kept with the Aarogyasri Trust instead of the Finance Department. CS Jawahar Reddy said that various pending issues related to PRC will be resolved as soon as possible.

Principal Secretary of Medical & Health, MT Krishna Babu, explained the measures being taken with regard to the health scheme of the employees. In particular, the deadline for the medical reimbursement of the employees will end on March 31. He said that the request of the union leaders to extend it for another year i.e. 2024 is pending with the Finance

Department, briefed the health PS.

Regarding the payment of various bills to the employees, Finance Chief Secretary Chiranjeevi Chaudhary and Departmental Secretary K Satyanarayana briefed the details of GPF, APGLI, SLS, TA, etc. paid so far. They explained about the process of paying the bills that are yet to be paid.

The representatives of various employees' unions brought to the notice of the officials various pending issues related to the employees, AP NGO Association president Bandi Srinivasa Rao, AP JAC Amaravati president Bopparaju Venkateshwarlu, AP Secretariat Employees Association president K Venkatrami Reddy, AP Government Employees Association president K Suryanarayana, and others were present.

Services Department Secretary P Bhaskar, Aarogyasri CEO Harindranath, and others participated.

## Move on quota for Dalit Christians hailed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A bill related to Dalit Christians proposed by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in the Assembly is a historic decision, said Andhra Pradesh Bishop Council state Chairman, Dr. Yalamanchali Praveen in a statement on Friday. The unanimous approval of the entire legislature is commendable, he said. He recalled that out of two children in a Dalit family, one continues in the same religion, and the second converts to Christianity, it is wrong to say that the reservation will not apply to the second child.

Today, the chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy who stands by the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh state has taken a historic decision and recognized that caste comes from birth and religion comes in the middle. The entire Christian fraternity is truly thankful to CM Jagan Mohan Reddy for saying that the state government will be implemented in the Supreme Court case after passing a unanimous resolution in the AP Assembly.

Dr. Praveen heaped praise on chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for introducing a bill in the Assembly to give SC status to every Dalit Christian is historic.



## A dark day for democracy: AICC member Sivaji

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

All India Congress Committee (AICC) member Kolanukonda Sivaji described the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi as a Lok Sabha member as a dark day for democracy.

In a statement here on Friday, Kolanukonda Sivaji said that in order to muzzle the voice of Rahul Gandhi inside and outside of the Parliament, he was disqualified as a Lok Sabha member. A false case was foisted against Rahul Gandhi and he was punished by the courts,

Shivaji slammed.

As soon as the court punished him, he was disqualified from being a Lok Sabha member, and Sivaji flayed. The BJP-led government is using the judiciary for its political needs, he criticised.

Kolanukonda Sivaji demanded that an inquiry by the Joint Parliamentary Committee should be conducted on the alleged financial scam of Adani.

Rahul Gandhi questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi during 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' about the links between Modi and



Gautam Adani and the financial scams involving Adani.

"In order to muzzle the voice of Rahul Gandhi he was disqualified. The people of the country were shocked by the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi. The Congress will fight against the fascist BJP in the court of justice along with other like-minded parties, organisations, and democrats", Shivaji announced.

The Central government is using the ED, CBI, and other Central agencies to oppress political opponents. False cases are being foisted against the leaders and sent to prisons. The BJP-led Centre is giving prior-

ity to the sympathisers of RSS in giving them vital posts, he lashed out.

"We appealed to the people to be part of the agitation to be carried out by the Congress against the BJP-led Centre's undemocratic acts. The Congress party will not be scared of such acts and will continue its fight to protect democracy", Shivaji said. It may be noted here that Congress leader and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi has been disqualified from Lok Sabha after a Surat court sentenced him in a criminal defamation case.

## 'Grama Darshini': Fifth phase held at Tarakaturu in Krishna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The fifth phase of 'Grama Darshini' was conducted at Tarakaturu of Guduru mandal in Krishna district on Friday. As part of Grama Darshini, District Collector P Ranjith Basha visited the Gram Sachivalayam, YSR Health Clinic, Anganwadi Centre, Mandal Parishad Primary School and the ZP High School in the village.

He checked the beneficiary lists of various welfare schemes displayed at the sachivalayam and enquired about the pending grievances. Later, he visited the YSR Health Clinic and asked the staff about the health services for pregnant women.

Also, he inspected the Anganwadi Centre and schools, where he taught mathematics to Class 10 students. He asked the students to prepare well for the SSC examinations to be conducted from April 3 to 17.



Later, he inspected the summer storage tank at Tarakaturu and the pumping houses. The officials told the Collector that from this summer, the water in the storage tank is being distributed to Machilipatnam municipal corporation, Pedana municipality and the surrounding villages.

Guduru ZPTC member Vemula Suresh Ranga babu,

Tarakaturu MPTC member Jakka Dharma Naidu, Sarpanch Chinnam Venka Ramanamma, Tahsiladar Prasad, MPDO Subba Rao, EOPR & RD Razaullah, Panchayat Raj SE Satyanarayana Raju, DEE Laskhmi Narayana, Machilipatnam Municipal Commissioner Chandraiah, Parents Monitoring Committee chairman Thota Srinu and others were present.



## Rs 352 cr sanctioned for Gooty-Pendekallu track doubling

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Ministry of Railways has sanctioned the doubling of the railway line between Gooty and Pendekallu stations in Andhra Pradesh for a distance of 29.2 km at an estimated cost of Rs 352 crore, said an official.

The Gooty-Pendekallu section is a critical one in the Guntakal Division of the South Central Railway (SCR) zone, which handles busy train traffic between Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

"This section plays an important role in connecting these cities and beyond as most of the trains pass through this section. Over the years, this section has witnessed a steady increase in both passenger and freight trains, leading to the saturation of the section," said the official in a statement.

Doubling will ease train movement and improve operational efficiency, including offering the opportunity to introduce more trains on this

section. The Ministry of Railways is giving a special emphasis on enhancing infrastructure with multiple developmental works, focusing on doubling of critical and saturated sections for incorporating agility in the mobility of trains.

Indian Railways has already sanctioned the doubling of the railway line between Pendekallu and Guntur sections as part of the Guntakal-Guntur doubling project.

Another key section, Gooty-Dharmavaram, has also been converted into a double line section recently. Now, the Gooty-Pendekallu doubling will enable seamless bidirectional movement of trains along double lines between Hyderabad and Bengaluru and beyond.

Moreover, the doubling projects will give a shot in the arm of socio-economic development in these regions with faster moving passenger and freight trains.



## City boy Ishaan wins AITA U-14 title

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Y Ishaan from Vijayawada won the Under-14 boys singles title in the All India Tennis Association (AITA) National Ranking Tennis Tournament that was held in New Delhi from March 19 to 24.

Ishaan represented Andhra Pradesh team in the tournament and defeated Aarav Gupta of New Delhi, 6-0, 6-2 and won the under-14 boys title. He is a trainee of the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium Tennis Complex and is taking coaching at the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Tennis coach Y Sivaramakrishna.

In this connection, NTR District Sports Authority (DSA) Chief Coach SA Azeez congratulated Ishaan.

## Roja promises support to develop soft tennis

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Youth Advancement RK Roja has said that the State government will give support for the development of soft tennis and made it clear that her government is committed to developing sports and games in the State. She congratulated the State soft tennis women's team that has qualified to participate in the National Games, which will be held in Goa this year.

Andhra Pradesh Soft Tennis Association chairman Daram

Naveen Kumar and 19th Senior National Soft Tennis Championship medal winners called on Minister RK Roja at her chamber on the premises of the secretariat on Friday. Players showed their medals and certificates to the ministers.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister congratulated the players for qualifying for the National Games. "Also, it's a good start to winning medals in the Goa National Games. The State government will extend its support to conduct the National Junior Soft Tennis Championship in



Vijayawada in July," she said.

Following the directions of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the State government is taking steps to provide infrastruc-

ture facilities for all sports and games. Her government has given jobs to the youth under the sports quota and she claimed that no other government had given

### KRU SOFTBALL TOURNNEY

## Andhra Loyola emerges champs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada, has won the Krishna University Inter-Collegiate (KRUIC) Softball Championship for Men, which was held at the Vikas College of Physical Education at Nunna near Vijayawada. While the hosts Vikas College of Physical Education stood second, AG & SG Siddhartha College, Vuyyuru, and SRR & CVR Government Degree College secured third and fourth places, respectively.

In the league stage, Andhra Loyola College won all three matches and stood first. Vikas BPED College won two matches and AG & SG Siddhartha College won one match, and stood second and third, respectively.



In the final match in the league stage, Vikas BPED College and Andhra Loyola College were involved in a tight contest. In the first two innings, both teams got one run each and in the final innings, Andhra Loyola College won another run and the match (2-1) and lifted the KRUIC Softball Championship.

At the concluding ceremony, Vikas

Educational Institutions secretary and correspondent Naredla Satyanarayana Reddy presented trophies to the teams that won the first four places.

Speaking on the occasion, Satyanarayana Reddy opined that students should be involved in at least one sports event apart from their studies. Winning a medal gives recognition to any student and also, outstanding players who win medals have job opportunities in the Central government departments, he said.

He informed the players that those who performed well in the tournament were selected to the Krishna University team that would take part in the All-India Inter-University Softball Championship for Men to be conducted at Punjab University in Chandigarh from April 5 to 9.

## Srisailam temple's 4,500-acre land bank to be demarcated

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The Endowments, Forest and Revenue departments have decided to demarcate the boundaries of Srisailam Devasthanam's land bank of up to 4,500 acres, to bring about a solution to a long-pending issue, an Andhra Pradesh Minister said.

Aimed at resolving the dispute between the revenue and forest departments over this land bank, Forest Minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy,

Revenue Minister Dharmana Prasada Rao and Deputy Chief Minister and Endowments Minister Kottu Satyanarayana held discussions on the issue.

"Finally there is a solution to the long-pending land issue of Srisailam (Devasthanam). The land boundaries of 4,500 acres belonging to Srisailam Devasthanam have been determined with sketches," said Satyanarayana in a statement issued late on Thursday.

Terming the development

the start of a golden chapter in the history of the temple, he said these three departments have inked an agreement.

Besides the land issue, the Endowments Minister said the various wings of the temple will be developed.

Satyanarayana highlighted that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the Srisailam temple to be developed on a large scale, considering its stature as the second most important temple in the southern state.



# Officials directed to complete anaemia tests for children

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector P Prashanthi has said that anaemia tests have been conducted on over 39,000 schoolchildren in the district so far and directed the officials to conduct blood tests for the remaining 1,000 students.

Prashanthi here on Friday reviewed the sustainable development goals set by the State government with the officials of the relevant departments.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that out of 40,000 children in various schools in the district, 39,000 children have been medically examined so far and 1,000 more have to be examined for anaemia. She directed the officials to complete testing of the remaining 1000 school children for anaemia.

She advised working with full understanding in achieving sustainable development goals. The Collector suggested that the data of indicators linked with Navratnas should be updated on the SDG website from time to time. The Collector suggested that steps should be taken to



ensure that the data is the same on the GSWS website, the Navaratna portal is the same, and the relevant departments have the same data on all the websites. The Collector suggested that the various schemes implemented through the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Health, Family Welfare, Education, Law, and Order, should be fully updated on the SDG and GSWS websites. "Family Welfare, Education, Law, and Order, should be fully updated on the SDG and GSWS websites. It should be ensured that school children are not

**Prashanthi said that out of 40,000 children in various schools in the district, 39,000 children have been medically examined so far and 1,000 more have to be examined for anaemia. She directed the officials to complete testing of the remaining 1000 school children for anaemia.**

anaemic under any circumstances, they should be provided with nutritious food from time to time and the relevant medicines should be provided twice a day," she directed the officials.

Collector Prashanthi suggested that anaemia should not be taken too casually. The school students between 10-19 years, adolescent girls, and 6,886 pregnant women were conducted blood tests and 1349 of them were found to be anaemic, she said adding that a monthly survey should be conducted and their anaemia should be recorded.

The Collector told the offi-

cials that if anaemia was reduced, IMR and MMR would automatically reduce and suggested that there are 735 dropout children in the district and directed the officials concerned to take steps to bring them back to school.

The Collector ordered the officials to ensure that toilets are available for girls in every school. The Collector directed the officials to ensure that the headmasters were updated in Prabanda F.CPO K Srinivasa Rao, GSWS Officer KCH Appa Rao, DM&HO Dr. D Maheswara Rao, DEO RV. Ramana and ICDS PD B Sujatha Rani were among those who were present.



## Arrangements for CM's visit inspected

PNS ■ ELURU

Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh and SP Rahul Dev Sharma on Friday inspected the arrangements being made for the Chief Minister's visit.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy will participate in a programme on Saturday to be held at Denduluru in which he will release financial assistance under the YSR Aasara scheme.

Collector Prasanna Venkatesh, SP Rahul Dev Sharma, and a host of officials inspected the entire venue. They gave directions to the officials. The officials made all arrangements including parking and diversion of traffic. The SP monitored the trial run of the convoy from the helpaid to the venue. SP Rahul Dev Sharma said that 5 additional SPs, 16 DSPs, 29 CIs, 85 Sis, 270 ASIs and 270 constables and other police personnel were being deployed for the Chief Minister's programme.

# MP, Collector inaugurate Secretariat building

PNS ■ BAPATLA

Rajya Sabha MP Mopidevi Venkataramana, Collector Vijaya Krishnan, and ZP chairperson Henry Christina inaugurated the Secretariat building constructed at a cost of Rs 75 lakh at Peteru village in Repalle mandal on Friday. They also inaugurated the RBK building constructed at a cost of Rs 21 lakh.

They launched the cluster building construction works, taken up at a cost of Rs 31.59 lakh, and 'Nadu-Nedu' work, taken up at a cost of Rs 60 lakh. They also launched the construction works of CC road taken up at a cost of Rs 40 lakh at the village.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Venkataramana said that during the last 4 years, Rs 4.28 crore worth of development works had been carried out at Peteru village.

The MP said that Rs 28 crore worth of benefits had been extended to the people of the village under various welfare schemes during the last four years. He said that 5,388 security guards posts for schools were sectioned.



MP Mopidevi Venkataramana said that since students passed without examinations due to the Coronavirus pandemic for two years, 2 lakh students of 10 th class failed last year. 'All in One book', worth Rs 70 lakh was distributed to the students, who failed 10 th class in the combined Guntur district, the MP said, adding that additional nutritious food is being provided to the 10th Class students in the district.

The MP said that English

medium education is being introduced in the government school, adding that revolutionary reforms were being brought in the education sector.

Collector Vijaya Krishnan asked the villagers to avail the welfare schemes being implemented for them by the government. She asked the parents to teach moral values to their children and not perform the marriages of their daughters till they attained 18 years of age.

# Allocation of Rs 100 cr for Veligonda project flayed

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Jana Chaitanya Vedika State president Vallamreddy Lakshman Reddy criticised the meagre allocation of Rs 100 crore in the 2023-24 budget for the construction Veligonda Project stating that the allocation was inadequate to expedite the works.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Jana Chaitanya Vedika state president Vallamreddy Lakshman Reddy said that in the 2023-24 budget which was introduced in the Legislative Assembly a few days ago, Rs 100 crore was allocated for the construction works of the Veligonda Project.

Lakshmana Reddy flayed the government for giving less importance to the project and allocating a meagre Rs 100 crore as insufficient to complete the project. The Veligonda project is being constructed aiming to provide drinking water to the flood-hit areas. If the Veligonda project is completed it would pro-

vide irrigation water for 4.5 lakh acres and drinking water to 15 lakh people, he stated.

"The construction works of the Veligonda project are snail phasing. The project works have been completed up to 90 percent but the government is unable to complete the 10 percent of works," Lakshmana Reddy flayed.

He said that in the previous government from 1952 to 2019, 10% to 15% allocations were made for the irrigation projects in the budget. But the present YSRCP government has allocated only 5% in the budget of which only 3% had been spent. Rs 1000 crore is required for the implementation of the R&R package, he added. He pointed out that the irrigation canals have not been dug up connecting the project to supply water to the agriculture fields.

He said that if the project was completed with a water capacity of 45 TMC, water would be provided to the farmers through gravity. According to the Land

Acquisition Act, of 2013, compensation should be paid to every evacuee who has completed 18 years.

Referring to the Centre's decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram project, Lakshman Reddy said if the height of the Polavaram project is reduced from 45.7 meters to 41.15 meters, water would not flow from the Polavaram project to the right and left canals by gravity and the project would become a lift irrigation project, he deplored. Since the government has no money for maintenance, the Annamayya and Pulichintala projects were damaged.

He said that a seminar on 'Progress of irrigation projects- Veligonda Project' would be organised on March 29 here in which APCC media cell chairman N Tulasi Reddy, CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna, CPM state secretary V Srinivasa Rao, TDP state vice-president Damacharla Janardhan and MLC KS Lakshman Rao would participate.



## Newly-elected MLCs thank CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Newly-elected MLCs under the MLA quota called on the Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at his chamber in the Legislative Assembly here on

Friday.

The Chief Minister congratulated MLCs M Rajasekhara, P Sunitha, Ch Yesuratnam, VV Suryanarayana Raju Penumatsa, B Israel, Jayamangala Venkataramana and S

Mangamma (Local Bodies Constituencies) for their victory. They thanked the Chief Minister for giving them an opportunity as MLCs. Several ministers, MLAs and MLCs were also present.

# Graduation Day celebrated at Anurag Montessori School

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Anurag Montessori School celebrated its graduation day programme at Rail Club, Visakhapatnam, on Friday. Parijata Satpathy, president, ECoRWVO, presided over the programme and DRM Anup Satpathy was the chief guest of the occasion. Manoj Kumar Sahoo, ADRM (Operation), was the guest of honour. Priyanka Sridevi, secretary, Sruthi Ranjith, Principal of the school, and executive members of ECoRWVO took part in the graduation programme.

Anurag Montessori School run by ECoRWVO comprises nursery, LKG and UKG classes and a day care center with the best available facilities. CC cameras, audio visual interactive classrooms and other modern facilities were developed in the school recently. DRM Anup Satpathy praised the school administration for its excellence in administration, teaching methodology and grooming of students. The DRM said that very few schools had such spacious and well equipped classrooms with an incredible teaching team. He



opined that the healthy interactive atmosphere would help in the overall personality development of the child. He said

parents should also concentrate on the overall growth of the child by making them self-reliant.

didate.

"I have voted for YSRCP candidate Jayamangala Venkataramana as per the whip of the party. Later I met the Chief Minister.

J a y a m a n d a l Venkataraman has won the election as I have voted for h i m , "

Chandrasekhar Reddy made it clear.

Mekapati Chandrasekhar Reddy claimed that he resigned from the MLA post and quit the Congress party in the combined state to extend support to Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy.

PNS ■ NELLORE

MLA Mekapati Chandrasekhar Reddy, who was suspended from YSRCP, has made it clear that he did not resort to cross-voting in the MLA quota MLC elections.

Talking to the media on Friday, he said that he condemned the malicious propaganda against him that he indulged in cross-voting. He lamented that his party leaders were spreading false campaigns against him and that he voted for the TDP candidate.



# 23.95 kg ganja seized; 11-member gang nabbed

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police seized 23.95 kg of ganja and arrested an 11-member gang. Informing this to the media here on Friday, Superintendent of Police KKN Anburajan said that the police arrested an 11-member gang that was selling ganja, seized 23.95 KGs of ganja, two motorcycles, and seven mobile phones.

Under Mydukur Urban limits, raids were conducted and four peddlers were arrested. The accused were identified as Koriyam Srinivasulu (46), Syed Moulali (23), and Shaik Hasan (27) natives of Mydukur, YSR district, Dugganapalli Babji (23) of Pulivendula Town.

Under Proddutur 3 Town limits four persons were arrested and identified as H.Venkata Siva Suresh (22), D.Durga Sai (21), S. Srinivasulu (20), Pavan (20) natives of Proddutur town. The other three peddlers, including a woman, were arrested under Atlur and Pulivendula Urban limits. 11 arrested accused were identified as local sellers who were selling cannabis in the

form of packets, the SP added.

Storage, consumption, or sale of cannabis is a serious crime and stringent action would be taken against those involved, the SP warned. The PD Act would be invoked on repeated offenders, SP said. Surveillance had been intensified across the district and the police are monitoring the suspects and their movements too, the SP said. District Police are identifying the persons who were addicted to contraband and were shifted to rehabilitation centres for treatment.

SP Anburajan advised the youth not to spoil their precious life by consuming ganja, drugs, gutkha, and other intoxicating substances. SP appreciated the team of police personnel, who arrested interstate smugglers and seized contraband under the supervision of Addl.SP (Admin) Tushar Dudi, ASP Proddutur Prerna Kumar, DSP Faction Zone Chenchu Babu, Mydukur DSP S.R Vamsidhar Goud, Special Branch Inspector B RajaPrabhakar, CIsBV Chalapati and Narayana Yadav, CI G Raju.

# Stone laid for YSR Seed Research Training Centre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The centre will be set up at Gannavaram with in outlay of Rs.46 crore

Minister for Agriculture, Cooperation, Marketing and Food Processing Kakani Govardhan Reddy laid the foundation stone for the Dr YSR Seed Research Training Centre at Gannavaram on Friday, in the presence of Krishna district in-charge minister and Minister for Tourism, Culture and Youth Advancement RK Roja and Gannavaram MLA Dr Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan. The training centre will be set up spending Rs.46 crore.

After the National Seed Research Centre in Varanasi, the Andhra Pradesh Seed Development Corporation is setting up this centre at Gannavaram keeping farmers' welfare in mind.

The research centre will come up in around eight acres. The construction is expected to be completed within one year.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Govardhan Reddy said that his government was committed to the development and welfare of the farmers in the State. The Dr YSR Seed Research Training Centre is the second such centre in the country after the National Seed Research Centre in Varanasi, he said. "If the seed has certain quality, then the farmers will get a good yield. The State government is concentrating on proper training in seed research," he added.

Further, he said the State gov-



ernment had set up 10,778 Rythu Bharosa Kendras in all villages to give suggestions to the farmers, besides Agri Labs in all Assembly constituencies. He said training would be given to Agricultural and Fisheries Assistants working in the RBKs on seed research, he said.

Minister Roja said the State

government was setting up the Dr YSR Seed Research Training Centre at Gannavaram to provide the best quality seeds to the farmers. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is implementing several schemes for the benefit of farmers in the State. She urged the farmers to stand with the Chief Minister.

# SP leads bike rally to create helmet awareness

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Superintendent of Police Siddhartha Koushal led a motorcycle rally here on Friday creating awareness of the wearing of helmets by two-wheeler riders. The SP rode a motorcycle leading the rally which began at the police office and went via the control room, kids world, and raj vihar, and reached the Collector's office.

Talking to the media, the SP said the government and DGP directed the police officials to create awareness among people



about road safety. The SP said that in the Kurnool district in 2021, 361 people died in road accidents and more than 700 people were injured. In 2022,

357 people died and 706 people were injured. In 2023, 45 people died and 109 people were injured. He said that every two-wheeler rider must

wear a helmet, adding that 70 percent of road accidents involve two-wheelers. It is said that people are losing their lives due to head injuries during accidents and not wearing a helmet is the main reason for this. If a person dies in a road accident, his family becomes headless and the family members will have to face many problems, he cautioned. "Personally, wherever I go as a district SP, I will definitely wear a helmet while riding a bike," the SP said. SP Siddhartha Koushal said that

the police department has issued orders that everyone who rides a bike should wear a helmet. A programme, 'Traffic Mitra' is being organised and if anyone is found guilty of traffic violations, a photo would be taken and sent to the Kurnool Traffic Mitra portal, the SP said.

Students of colleges, youth, and people should wear helmets even if they go for short or long journeys, the SP said adding everyone who wears a helmet and rides a bike will become a hero in society.

# TB awareness rally organised in Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao, along with Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi, flagged off the Tuberculosis (TB) awareness rally organised to mark the World TB Eradication Day, at the old government general hospital in Vijayawada on Friday. Afterwards, the rally went to various places in the city and reached the old government hospital.

Speaking on the occasion, the Mayor said that though the Central and the State governments were taking steps to eradicate TB, the support of doctors and voluntary organisations was necessary. The State government is allocating funds to establish health centres in the State to provide better treatment on par with corporate hospitals, she said.

She said the health staff including ANMs and Asha workers should pay door-to-door visits and create awareness among the people on the eradication of TB. Meanwhile, good results have been coming after the efforts made by the State government to control TB, she added.



INDIA CORNER

Women with mental illness twice at risk of developing cervical cancer: Study

Women with mental illness, neuropsychiatric disability, or substance abuse run more than twice the risk of developing cervical cancer, as they are less likely to go for gynaecological smear tests, according to a study published in The Lancet Public Health. The researchers at Karolinska Institutet, Sweden, stressed the importance of proactively approaching these women as a preventative measure against cervical cancer. The observational study included over four million women born between 1940 and 1995. In the women, the researchers compared women diagnosed by a specialist with mental illness, neuropsychiatric disability, or substance abuse with women without such diagnoses. They then calculated the risk of cervical cancer and precancerous cervical lesions, including their participation in screening programs for cervical cancer.



India to pitch for access to research among G20 countries: Prof Sood

India will make a pitch for interlinking of national archives of G-20 countries to make available scientific papers published by researchers free-of-cost when chief scientific advisors of the multilateral platform meet at Ramnagar in Uttarakhand next week. Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India Prof Ajay Kumar Sood will chair the G20- Chief Scientific Advisors' Roundtable, the first such initiative taken by the grouping, that will also deliberate on better response to future pandemics, tapping into traditional systems of medicine and setting up of a mechanism for continuous global science and technology policy dialogue. "The idea is to have a national archive which is effective and have interoperability of the archives," Prof Sood told PTI in an interview. Sood said author publication charges in peer-reviewed scientific journals have become exorbitant and so has access to published research papers.



NIA charge-sheets gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi, Goldy Brar, 12 others

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a fresh charge sheet against jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldy Brar, the alleged masterminds in the murder of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, and a dozen others, charging them with criminal conspiracy to unleash a wave of terror and carry out targeted killings of high-profile people. The prosecution complaint has been filed against these gangsters who, the federal anti-terror agency said, had "links" with the proscribed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and several other pro-Khalistan terrorist outfits. The charge sheet came in the second of the three terror-gangster nexus cases that are being investigated by the NIA. "All the 14 accused have been charged with criminal conspiracy to unleash a wave of terror and carry out targeted killings of well-known social and religious leaders, movie stars, singers and businessmen."



Corrupt Cong wants to make K'taka its ATM: Amit Shah

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the Congress is degenerating across the country, and has now set its eyes on Karnataka to make the state its ATM and fill its coffers at the national level.

Speaking in the poll-bound State, he appealed to people of Karnataka not to give a "half and incomplete government", and to form a BJP government with full majority and thereby strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai.

"Congress party is degenerating across the country, the Congress people don't have any state with them that can fill the Congress' central treasury, they want an ATM.... They want Karnataka to become Congress' ATM, and the corrupt Congress' eyes are now set on Karnataka," Shah said.

Addressing a beneficiaries' meet organised by Karnataka



Cooperative department and other departments, he asked people whether they will form a BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in Karnataka or a Congress government with Rahul Gandhi at the helm.

"Wherever the Congress has formed the government, their history is corruption, humiliation of Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis, and strengthening anti-national forces," he alleged.

Bommai, veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa, Karnataka Co-Operation Minister S T Somashekar among others were present at the event.

Highlighting that the Modi government banned Popular Font of India (PFI), Shah said, "Siddaramaiah's Congress government (earlier), used to withdraw cases against PFI, but Narendra Modi government by banning PFI has secured the entire South India, and also the entire country."

Highlighting that the Modi government banned Popular Font of India (PFI), Shah said, "Siddaramaiah's Congress government (earlier), used to withdraw cases against PFI

Claiming credit for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, he said, the Congress party was "delaying, obstructing and misleading" for 70 years, but Modi has laid the foundation for the temple and it will be ready very soon.

He also said that PM Modi, by abrogating Article 370, has put a bridge on terrorism in the entire country. "Modi's mission is to make the entire country prosperous, take forward every state including Karnataka."

Amritpal tried to incite Sikhs through speeches: Officials

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Khalistan sympathiser Amritpal Singh, before escaping a Punjab Police crackdown on his outfit and supporters, attended five events in 10 days, and in these, he tried to radicalise Sikhs, coaxing 800-1,000 individuals to remain prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, officials said.

The radical preacher's brazen activities evinced his methodical efforts to undermine the fabric of society, they claimed and added that he during his speeches and sermons alleged that the government was leaving no stone unturned in its quest to disarm Sikhs by revoking their weapons licences.

Amritpal Singh, who took over as 'Waris Punjab De' chief after its founder actor-activist Deep Singh's death last year, is on the run after police launched a massive crackdown on March 18 in the state and arrested several of his supporters. It began weeks after the preacher and his



supporters stormed the Ajnala police station near Amritsar on February 23 to secure the release of an arrested associate. The episode raised fears over the possibility of the return of Khalistani militancy to Punjab that borders Pakistan.

The officials said the preacher allegedly implored youngsters to unify for securing 'Khalsa rule' for the coming generations of Punjab, proclaiming that the division within the Sikh Panth made them "vulnerable to the enemy's onslaught".

The Ajnala incident had reignited fears of a resurgence of Khalistani militancy in the state, they said and pointed out that Amritpal Singh had ulterior motives to sully the peaceful ambience of Punjab, and this was exemplified by the abduction and assault on Barinder Singh.

Barinder Singh, in his complaint, had told police that Amritpal Singh's associates had abducted him from Ajnala and took him to an unknown place where he was brutally thrashed.

Under PM Modi, attempt is being made to destroy country: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched an attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday and said under his leadership, an attempt is being made to destroy the country.

In a speech in the Delhi Assembly, he also accused Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena of obstructing the work of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

"I want to tell BJP people that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, an attempt is being made to destroy the country. Those who want to destroy the country should be in BJP and those who want to save the country should leave BJP," he said.

There was an uproar in the Assembly when Kejriwal spoke about the prime minister.

Referring to the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha, Kejriwal targeted the central government and said "they are scared".

Oppn holds protest march alleging 'danger to democracy'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 30 opposition MPs, including those from the Congress, were detained on Friday as they took out a protest march from Parliament House, alleging that democracy is in "danger" and demanding a JPC probe into the Adani issue.

Prominent leaders, including K C Venugopal, Adhir Chowdhury, K Suresh, Manickam Tagore, Imran Pratapgarhi and Mohammed Javed, were stopped by the



police and detained at Vijay Chowk here for violating prohibitory orders, the opposition said. "Over 30 MPs from opposition parties had to be detained for violation of Section 144 (prohibitory orders)," a senior Delhi Police officer said.

The Delhi Police said those detained have been taken to a nearby police station. Earlier addressing the media at Vijay Chowk, several leaders, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, also

Maha: Crime more rampant than development: Ajit Pawar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party leader Ajit Pawar on Friday attacked the Eknath Shinde government in Maharashtra and said crime was more rampant in its rule than development.

Initiating a debate in the Assembly on the Opposition sponsored last-week resolution on the state's law and order, Pawar, who is the

Leader of Opposition, said the "double engine" government was making compromises to stay in power.

The Bharatiya Janata Party refers to governments of the party or its allies in the states as "double engine" dispensations, meaning development was being carried out through efforts of the respective state as well as the Centre.

Pawar said farmers were

distressed due to natural calamities and lack of minimum support price for crops, while unemployment and crime, especially against women, were on the rise, but the government was busy pressuring and harassing political rivals.

On the pretext of "love jihad", there is an attempt to vitiate the law and order situation in the state, the NCP leader alleged.

BID TO ELIMINATE TUBERCULOSIS

PM Modi launches slew of initiatives

PNS ■ VARANASI

India's ideology of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam" is giving the modern world an integrated vision and solutions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday as he launched a series of initiatives to eliminate tuberculosis.

Addressing the 'One World TB Summit' on World TB Day, Modi said the country is working to eliminate tuberculosis by 2025 as against the global target of 2030.

"India's image reflects in its ideology of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam' (whole world one family). This old thought is giving the modern world an integrated vision and solutions," he said.

As G20 president, India chose the theme of 'One Family, One World, One Future' based on such beliefs, Modi said.

India is forwarding the vision of 'One Earth, One Health' in the world, he said while underlining that India is realising the resolutions of global good with the 'One World TB Summit'.

The prime minister asserted that the thought and approach with which India worked against tuberculosis

after 2014 is "incredible".

"This effort of India should be known to the whole world today because this is a new model in the global fight against TB."

In nine years, India has united in this fight against TB on many fronts such as public participation, special campaigns for nutrition, new strategies for treatment, intensive use of technology and promoting good health through campaigns like Khelo India and Yoga," he said.

Another major resolution of India is to eliminate tuberculosis by 2025 as against the global target of 2030, Modi said.

Referring to the capacity and health infrastructure enhancement during the Covid pandemic, Modi underlined the high use of trace, test, track, treat and technology in the fight against the disease.

There is massive global potential in this local approach of India, said the prime minister.

Noting that 80 per cent of tuberculosis medicines are made in India, he said, "I would like that more and more countries get the benefit of all such campaigns, innovations and modern technology of India."



Lookback into MPs and MLAs disqualified after conviction

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who was suspended from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a criminal defamation case joins an ignominious list of members of Parliament and assemblies who faced similar action in the past.

According to the Representation of the People Act, a person sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more shall be disqualified "from the date of such conviction" and remain disqualified for another six years after serving time.

Here are some of the lawmakers suspended upon conviction and sentencing in criminal cases:

Lalu Prasad

The RJD supreme was disqualified from the Lok Sabha after his conviction in the fodder scam case in September

2013. He was an MP from Saran in Bihar.

J Jayalithaa

AIADMK supreme J Jayalithaa was disqualified from the Tamil Nadu Assembly in September 2014 after she was sentenced to four years in jail in a disproportionate assets case. She was the chief minister of Tamil Nadu at the time of her disqualification and had to resign from the post.

P P Mohammed Faizal

Lakshadweep MP P P Mohammed Faizal of the Nationalist Congress Party stood automatically disqualified after he was sentenced to 10 years in jail in January 2023 in connection with an attempt to murder case. However, the Kerala High Court later suspended his conviction and sentence. According to the MP, the Lok Sabha Secretariat is yet to issue a notification revoking his disqualification.



Azam Khan

Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan was disqualified from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly in October 2022 after a court sentenced him to three years in jail in a 2019 hate speech case. He represented Rampur Sadar in the Assembly.

Anil Kumar Sahni

RJD MLA Anil Kumar Sahni was disqualified from the Bihar Assembly in October 2022



after he was sentenced to three years in jail in a case of fraud. He represented the Kurhani assembly seat.

He was held guilty of attempting to avail travel allowance in 2012 using forged Air India e-tickets without having undertaken the journeys. Sahni, who was a JD(U) Rajya Sabha MP at the time of the attempted fraud, had submitted claims of Rs 23.71 lakh.

Vikram Singh Saini

BJP MLA Vikram Singh Saini was disqualified from the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly with effect from October 2022 after he was sentenced to two years of imprisonment in a 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots case. Saini was an MLA from Khatauli in Muzaffarnagar.

Pradeep Chaudhary

Congress MLA Pradeep Chaudhary was disqualified from the Haryana Assembly in January 2021 after he was sentenced to a three-year jail term in an assault case. He was an MLA from Kalka.

Kuldeep Singh Sengar

Kuldeep Singh Sengar was disqualified from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly in February 2020 following his conviction in a rape case. Sengar, who was elected from the Bangarmau constituency in Unnao, was earlier expelled by the BJP.

Abdullah Azam Khan

Samajwadi Party MLA Abdullah Azam Khan was disqualified from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly in February 2023, days after a court sentenced him to two-year imprisonment in a 15-year-old case. He represented Suar in Rampur district in the Assembly.

The case against Abdullah Azam Khan, pertained to a dharna on a highway after his cavalcade was stopped by police for checking following an attack on a CRPF camp in Rampur on December 31, 2007.

Anant Singh

RJD MLA Anant Singh was disqualified from the Bihar Assembly in July 2022 after being convicted in a case related to the recovery of arms and ammunition from his residence. Singh was an MLA from Mokama in Patna district.



## Inconsistent

ONDC is making a foray into the city transport sector but its very existence is problematic

Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC) has entered the city transport sector by tying up with a Bengaluru-based ride-hailing company. The objective is to check the market dominance of aggregators like Uber and Ola. ONDC, a Government-run protocol on the lines of UPI, is also reportedly negotiating with more companies in the sector in several other cities. While well-intended, there are fundamental flaws in the idea of ONDC. When it was launched in September last year, it was claimed that it would check the monopoly of global e-commerce giants like Amazon and Walmart. "After UPI, another game changing idea to democratise commerce - ONDC soft launch today to select consumers, sellers and logistics providers. Get ready for a world of choice, convenience and transparency," Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal tweeted the day ONDC was launched. But isn't checking monopolistic practices the duty of the Competition



Commission of India (CCI)? The Competition Act, 2002, was passed by Parliament in 2002, to which the President accorded assent in January 2003. It was subsequently amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007. In accordance with the provisions of the Amendment Act, the Competition Commission of India and the Competition Appellate Tribunal were established. The CCI is now fully functional with a Chairperson and six members, according to the CCI's website. The provisions of the Competition Act relating to anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position were notified on May 20, 2009.

"It is the statutory duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade carried on by other participants, in markets in India as provided in the Preamble as well as Section 18 of the Act," says the CCI website. The commission is also mandated to give its opinion on competition issues to government or statutory authority and to undertake competition advocacy for creating awareness of competition law, it adds. Against this backdrop, the very idea of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry setting up a body for the same purpose is duplication of work. Besides, it also militates against the principle Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated more than once: the government has no business to be in business. It is in pursuance of this principle that the Government has been privatising public sector undertakings. But, by launching ONDC, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry will be ensuring government interference in the economy — something that is not in tune with the Modi Government reformist agenda. On the face of it, ONDC's new forays may seem impressive but in reality these don't appear to be consistent with the newly emerging policy framework. Instead of zealously promoting ONDC, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry should focus on boosting manufacturing.

### PICTALK



Women in traditional dresses celebrate Zangtri as part of three-day Navreh (Kashmiri New Year) festival PTI

## Are you contributing to electronic waste?

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally. With the launch of newer devices, our greed leads us to buy the latest ones

Christian Lous Lange says "technology is an effective servant but a dangerous master". There is no denying everyone is addicted to technology in some way or another. Everyone has seen the transition from a wired telephone to the first cell phones followed by the latest, lighter and better version of cell phones. However, have we ever thought that today's technology will be obsolete someday? Today, technology has affected almost every aspect from advancements in education, medicine or transport to easy access to socialization, food, healthcare and productivity.

Every year, big tech companies come up with new versions of their devices. This leads to the market to shift to its updated version. As a result, many individuals replace their phones or gadgets with new ones, causing a lot of E-waste. Today, almost 10 billion people have smartphones, and in 3-4 years without access to repair these devices will add to an enormous amount of e-waste that already exists.

Though buying latest gadgets keeps an individual



updated, in the long run their constant use will affect our planet's health severely. According to a research, India is the 3rd largest E-waste producer after China and the USA. E-waste or electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world. It includes discarded electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, notepads, computers, radios and televisions. Computer devices account for nearly 70% of e-waste, followed by the telecom sector, medical equipment and electrical equipment.

Unfortunately, these devices end up in landfills, where they release hazardous gases into the atmosphere. The toxic components so released affect human health in terms of skin irritation, lung infections, kidney problems, nausea and others. They also contribute to soil contamination, polluting the envi-

ronment and most importantly harm and threat to wildlife. According to a recent study, E-waste has reached alarming levels with 5.3 billion phones thrown away every year. Since the last 5 years, waste has grown by 21% and is expected to reach 74.2 MT by 2030. If not recycled or disposed of properly, heavy metals in e-waste emit toxic substances causing serious environmental concern.

At the individual level, there are several solutions that can help reduce e-waste such as considering repairing a smartphone instead of buying a new one or preferring to donate old devices such as laptops, computers or notepads to schools or charitable organisations that can find a use for the product. Educating high-school students about e-waste's harmful effects has a greater impact on stopping its spread. Adopting changes in technology such as cloud computing and the internet of things can even help with dematerialization. In India, many e-waste recycling startups such as Cashify, Attero recycling, Namo E-waste, Binbag and many more have come up

with the objective of conserving resources by adopting economical and responsible disposal techniques of e-waste.

These startups are creating day and night to create opportunities to transfer waste into socially and industrially beneficial raw materials such as valuable metals, plastics and glass. They are using simple, cost-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies suitable for Indian conditions. As climate change effects grow, it becomes the responsibility of its citizens to help the planet and prevent e-waste issues. Also, with the 5G revolution, it is imperative to recycle old smartphones. It is important to understand that a difference can only be made at the individual level.

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally, as the moment electronic devices get introduced, an individual's greed leads them to buy the latest one while the old ones take space in the cupboard drawers. We need a safe channel for recycling obsolete equipment.

(The writer is a teacher at a reputed school in Delhi)



SAKSHI SETHI

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# Myanmar nightmare continues unabated

It's been more than two years since the coup, yet the low-intensity civil war raging on in our neighbouring country is set to last for a long time

More than two years have passed since the coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, which prevented the elected members of the National League for Democracy, which had won 396 seats out of 476 in the Lower House of Parliament in the country's November 2020 elections, from assuming office. The junta that perpetrated the coup arrested Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD-leader and iconic symbol of the country's struggle for democracy, and leaders of her party. It unleashed a vicious repression campaign.

The Government continues to face growing countrywide resistance with murderous violence. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 6, 2023, that, overall, the military's airstrikes against civilian locations increased by 141 per cent in the second year of its takeover, and its shelling of communities, including hospitals schools and places of worship, by over 100 per cent. During the same period, incidents in which homes and neighbourhoods were set on fire rose by 380 per cent. This led to an estimated 1,200 per cent increase in the number of homes destroyed. He further stated that reports continued to be received daily, particularly from the Sagaing region, north-west of Mandalay, of ongoing incidents, with soldiers reportedly moving from village to village, looting and setting fire to homes and farms.

Türk cited his UN colleagues as saying 39,000 structures had been burned in villages and towns by the military since the coup. Overall, credible sources verified that at least 2,947 civilians, including 244 children, had been massacred by the military and its affiliates during this period. More than one third of these confirmed deaths occurred in military custody. The actual number of civilians killed is far higher. He further said that, besides those killed in military or police action, detainees across Myanmar had reported severe beatings; mock executions; suspension from ceilings without food or



water; electrocution; and acts of sexual violence as well as squalid detention conditions.

The question is, how long will Myanmar groan under the Tatmadaw's—as Myanmar's army is called—iron heel? Despite the savagery of the generals' repression, the country, to all appearances, is slipping out of their control. Ranged against them is the National Unity Government (NUG) formed by some NLD leaders, activists and representatives of several insurgent ethnic organisations and minor parties, on April 16, 2021. Its armed wing, the People's Defence Force (PDF), was established on May 5, 2021. According to a report by Richard R Paddock in *The New York Times* of 6 June, 2022, it had a total strength of 60,000. As indicated by the latest reports, it now comprises 300 battalions with over 250,000 soldiers.

A report in Mizzima (A Burmese multi-media news organization) on September 9, 2022, cites a brief by SAC-M, released on September 5, 2022, as saying that the military does not effectively control the country, and is incapable of governing it. According to



THE QUESTION IS, HOW LONG WILL MYANMAR GROAN UNDER THE TATMADAW'S — AS MYANMAR'S ARMY IS CALLED — IRON HEEL?

the report, the National Unity Government (NUG) is the legitimate government of Myanmar and is at the centre of a democratic revolution shaped by organisations opposed to Myanmar's military junta. These organisations are the de facto authorities over more of Myanmar's population and territory than the junta, which has stable control over only 72 out of the country's 330 townships, which comes to only 17 per cent of Myanmar's land area, because many are small urban townships. In an article published on September 29, 2022, in *The Interpreter*, brought out daily by the Lowy Institute, an Australia-based independent think tank, Adam Simpson cites a report by the SAC-M, saying that the NUG and ethnic resistance organisations effectively controlled over 52 per cent of Myanmar's territory. Twenty-three per cent were contested and the junta dominated 17 per cent.

The Tatmadaw suffered from low morale and desertion. The latter rate has fallen recently because of tough action to curb it. Tatmadaw's other weaknesses remain. Its weaponry is more suitable for

conventional warfare than anti-guerrilla operations; its younger generation lacks combat experience. On the other hand, the People's Defence Force lacks numerical strength besides heavy artillery, tanks, and aircraft. This is essential for winning large battles in the plains.

What seems likely in the foreseeable future is a stalemate, with the Junta controlling the capital Nay Pyi Taw and some other towns and strips of territory and the NUG and the armed forces of the ethnic minorities controlling the rest. The Junta is being attacked even in townships where the Tatmadaw is present, and may lose control over them. That it is apprehensive and struggling to hold on to these is clear from the imposition of martial law in 37 newly formed towns on February 2 and three more on February 22, bringing the total number of townships under martial law to 50 out of 330. Even these moves may not help. It is difficult to reverse the flow when the tide turns against you.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### KANGAROOS HAVE A STRONG TAIL

Sir — Australians have come through a difficult phase and defeated Team India in their own den. This is a very rare occasion as we count on home wins in series after series. Team India struggled to tackle pace in the first two outings and succumbed to spin in the decider and won the series. The writing is on the wall in the ODI world cup this year. This is the second time India has lost a bilateral ODI series against Australia. And what's in common between their 3-2 loss in 2019 and the 2-1 defeat in this series is the fact that the Men in Blue were ahead on both occasions.

They led the 2019 series 2-0 before losing three in a row. Rohit Sharma and coach Rahul Dravid have a lot of work to do as they aim to regain the trophy later this year. For now, the Aussies will relish regaining the top spot in the ODI rankings. They will also fly back home with the ODI series trophy as a consolation after losing out on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy earlier in the trip. For Australia, the tail wagged, the spin did the trick and Aussie batsmen pulled up their socks to make a match of it.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

### LEAST PAINFUL DEATH PENALTY?

Sir — What is the most efficient method of death penalty enforcement? The Supreme Court sparked such a debate by asking the government to hold a discussion on the issue on Tuesday. However, this is a complicated issue because determining the method of capital punishment is considered the responsibility of the legislature rather than the judiciary. Perhaps therefore the Supreme Court has stated unequivocally that it will not issue an order addressing the method of applying the death penalty. However, this question is necessary to determine whether the current method of imposing a death sentence meets legal and constitutional requirements. The current hanging method was last upheld by the Supreme Court in 1983, but the issue must be revisited considering scientific and technological advances since then. This need is confirmed when

### Blessing in disguise



Rahul Gandhi's conviction in the defamation case can prove blessings in disguise to strengthen democracy. Rahul Gandhi was convicted in a defamation case by the Surat court and sentenced to two years' punishment. Bail was also granted to appeal in the upper court. Rahul Gandhi's conviction can strengthen Indian democracy. Just a few days ago Congress spokesperson also uttered unwanted words against Modi and had to approach the supreme court for bail. With Rahul Gandhi's conviction in the 2024 Parliament elections no unhealthy

language will be used and electioneering will be pleasant without filthy language. This will automatically strengthen the democratic structure of the country.

At present, there is pandemonium in both houses of the parliament due to undesirable utterances by Rahul on foreign land. The ruling party demands an apology from Rahul. It is expected that Rahul Gandhi will learn a lesson from this conviction. This is the first time that Rahul has been convicted for the first time, but he is habitual of using undesirable and unwanted language. In the last election, his slogan "Chowkidar chor hai" became very famous and was directed at Modi. In the last Parliament elections, he had to apologise before the supreme court for misinterpretation of supreme court orders. Let us hope that Rahul Gandhi's conviction may prove a blessing in disguise to strengthen democracy in India.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

we look at the situation in other countries around the world.

Whether the current hanging process is considered the least painful or any other method after considering all aspects—the principle of dignity of death is bound to be vindicated. If another method is found to be superior, the current method will be ruled unconstitutional. The revised method can then be ratified by the legislature. In today's era, when the discussion of direct encounters with criminals appears to be gaining traction in our country for a variety of reasons, it is expected that the apex court's initiative will make us more aware of justice criteria.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

### HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Sir — The US State Department releases its annual Human Rights Report every year. In those countries, human rights are violated indiscriminately. If the names of those countries are mentioned in this report even after evidence of human rights violations, will those countries accept those strong

allegations? They will reject outright and say that America has no right to interfere in our internal affairs. As India will now bluntly tell the US State Department. Because in the just-released report, it has been said for India that there are 'cases of human rights abuses and people from minority communities, critics of the government and journalists are targeted'.

In Monday's report, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was closely monitoring developments in India "including increasing human rights abuses in the country" in the presence of Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. There is no need to look for distant events. A day after the publication of this report, Kannada actor Chetan Kumar was arrested for a tweet criticising a Hindu nationalist ideology. Therefore, the US State Department's allegation has some substance.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)





FIRST COLUMN

NOW THE GOVT DECIDES WHAT WE EAT

Unlike the days of yore, Govts need to incentivise crops which suit modern life



SHUBHANG RATHI

In the early human civilisations, it was geography and weather that decided what crops were to be grown in any region. The same crop was consumed by the people of that area. Exports were tough and risky. But, in modern civilisation, Governments directly or indirectly control the food consumed.

Government subsidies are offered in various ways. It can be direct transfers to farmers by cash transfer (DBT) or by providing them with subsidized electricity, water, diesel, pesticides, fertilizer etc. Subsidies have also been provided in the form of MSP (minimum selling price) for certain agricultural products. Subsidies given to small and big enterprises are to set up export-oriented units or food processing units, cold storages, warehouses, or to set up SEZs or food parks to enhance the production of a particular cereal crop, fruit, vegetable, fish, meat products or certain packed products/processed food (dairy, apiculture) etc. By giving subsidies to farmers, the government incentivizes farmers to grow a particular crop, which can become a mass consumption item as government subsidies make it really cheap to produce and reduce the price of the products, and these crops when subsidized can change the dietary habits of not only millions but billions of people. A remarkable example of such action is the USA subsidizing corn and corn-related products which have flooded not only the American market but also the world market with products like corn flour, cornstarch, corn syrup etc. Another remarkable example is from India. Government subsidy on rice and sugarcane has made India one of the largest producers of this agricultural produce. It has also made India one of the biggest exporters of these both commodities and flooding not only the Indian market but also the world market with it. Also, the Indian government gives rice and sugar subsidised to public distribution centres.

Well, there is nothing wrong in giving incentives to farmers to produce more to get good rates for their produce, but in the case of India, the biggest problem that we are facing is, that both these crops are highly water-intensive crops and a country of 1.4 billion is already facing a lot of trouble with its groundwater and water irrigation. Exporting these crops is like exporting water from the country. Rice cultivation also produces a large amount of methane, which is a harmful greenhouse gas (GHG). Another problem is that both these crops are high in carbohydrates and combined with an unhealthy lifestyle can lead to diseases such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and other heart-related issues. Governments across the world should, before incentivising a certain crop, consider that incentivizing one crop can really impact the consumption patterns of the masses. It can have a detrimental effect on the health of millions of people.

Another remarkable example is from the industrialization period in Europe and America. Potatoes were made a mass-consumed vegetable as the labour working in the factories needed high calories and carbohydrates to function in the long shifts of the factories. This dietary habit continued even after the industrialization era ended. For the generations after that, potatoes still remained the go-to vegetable as it was a cheap vegetable and people ate it in the past, hence the generations copied the same eating habits even after changes in working and lifestyle.

Today's lifestyle requires less physical work and more mental effort, which requires crops and dietary habit changes. This change can benefit generations to come. For example, eyesight weakness and malnutrition are common problems children face these days. To curtail these problems vital vitamins like vitamin A and C-rich fruits and vegetables can be incentivized by the government. Less water-intensive cereals like Bajra, Jau, and Ragi can be incentivized to become part of the daily meal plan. The year 2023 has been declared the millet international year by the United Nations. This is "as it consumes 70% less water than rice and needs 40% less energy in processing and is climate-friendly and environmentally friendly."

*(The writer is the Director of Rath Public Schools)*



# Empower ‘Divyangs’ with skills, inclusion



DINESH SOOD

There is no dearth of opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, provided they are equipped with the right set of skills. The Govt is working in this direction



Divyangjan or persons with disabilities (PwDs) are a significant social group but are rarely provided with the right kind of opportunities, skills and platforms to showcase their talent and productive potential. It is unfortunately presumed that PwDs cannot make any meaningful contributions to our economy's growth, which is wrong. People with disabilities have immense potential to contribute significantly to the economy but they need skills that are best suited to them. It is an irony that PwDs, who account for more than 2 per cent of our total population, have not been allowed to be a part of mainstream discourse and pursuits aimed at empowerment through inclusion.

Unfortunately, the employability rate for PwDs is very low. It is estimated that only 36 per cent of India's 26 million PwDs are working. As per a report by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on PwDs, nearly 64 per cent of persons with disabilities in India don't have jobs. More disabled men than women have jobs. As per an assessment of market intelligence, Unearth Insight, only 34 lakh out of almost 3 crore PwDs are employed but 1.3 crores are employable. Most of them are employed in organised and unorganised sectors, government entities or self-employed. It is therefore necessary to ensure that most PwDs get gainful jobs but how?

In order to ensure that persons with disabilities lead a dignified life independently, they must be provided with high-quality education. This is so that they have the freedom to choose their careers and have equal employment opportunities. There are several examples where Divyang people have achieved impressive feats in many fields thanks to their indomitable courage, talent and determination. If provided with the right environment, opportunities and skills, they can excel in every field. Education, in particular skill-based education, is the key to empower-



AS PER A REPORT BY THE UNION MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION ON PwDs, NEARLY 64 PER CENT OF THEM DON'T HAVE JOBS. MORE DISABLED MEN THAN WOMEN HAVE JOBS

*(The writer is a co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner with the National Skill Development Corporation)*

ment for everyone, including those with disabilities.

There is no dearth of jobs for PwDs, provided they are equipped with the right soft and practical skills. Some of the most valuable soft job skills for adults with disabilities that employers look for: attention to detail; communication skills; conflict management skills; problem-solving skills; teamwork skills; time management skills; and enrichment and life skills. Similarly, some hard job skills for PwDs include accounting, engineering, technical writing, computer-related jobs, healthcare, career counseling, customer service, insurance agent, massage therapist, telemarketer, photographer in a wheelchair, desktop publisher, graphic designer, web developer, bank teller, receptionist, financial analyst, landscaper or groundskeeper.

National Education Policy 2020 also underlines the importance of enabling arrangements in providing equal opportunities for quality education for children with disabilities. The conversion of NCERT textbooks for Classes I to VI into Indian Sign Language for hearing-impaired children is complete. It is a crucial initiative to include hearing-impaired students in mainstream education. It is heartening indeed to note that the Government is taking several steps to empower Divyangjan. Inculcating self-confidence among Divyangjan is very important to empower them for which they need skills. There are talents and abilities in people with disabilities; in some cases, these are greater than those found in normal people. Inclusive growth, development and confidence must encompass PwD aspirations.

It is worth noting that the

Government enacted the Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which came into effect on April 19, 2017. It provides for 4 per cent reservation in government jobs for disabilities. The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, Accessible India Campaign, was launched by the Central Government on December 3, 2015. It provides universal accessibility for persons with disabilities so that they can live a meaningful life with dignity. Public buildings, transport systems and information and communication technology are included in this campaign. Keeping in view the problems related to accessibility faced by the masses, a mobile app has been developed to address accessibility problems in a quick and systematic manner.

The Government has also set up the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) to promote hearing-impaired persons' empowerment and to create sign language in the country. The institute, among other things, is continuously preparing sign language dictionaries that have so far included more than 10,000 words. The Government is also implementing a Unique Disability Identity Card (UDID) project to create a National Database for Persons with Disabilities. So far, over 84 lakh UDID cards have been prepared in 713 districts of all states and Union Territories.

The Disability Sports Centre is being established at Gwalior and the National Institute of Mental Health and Rehabilitation at Sehore, both Madhya Pradesh. Divya Kala Shakti is organised to showcase Divyang youngsters and children's talent and skills. However, they need a dedicated

programme to equip them with employable or gainful skills. The process of skilling and creating job opportunities for crores of youth through Skill India Mission and Kaushal Rozgar Kendra cannot exclude PwDs. Their needs require a specific and targeted approach.

We have the Skill Council for Persons with Disability (SCPwD) as a national body to fulfill the mission of mainstreaming PwDs through skill training to enable them to earn a livelihood and lead a life of dignity in the mainstream society and in turn contribute to the growing economy of the country. Skill training is also imparted at accredited training centres through trained and certified trainers. Trainers are trained on NSQC-approved job roles aligned to a specific disability. Trainers are also certified in disability orientation and sensitisation.

As of now, we haven't been inclusive in our approach to skilling people in any way. A few sectors' artisans received some attention, while many classes of artisans such as carpenters, iron smiths, sculptors, masons and others that are an integral part of society have been adapting to the changing times to fulfil the needs of society that were ignored.

PwDs were rarely discussed in relation to their skill set. Empowering every section of society is essential to our country's development journey. I totally agree with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's argument that they should get easy loans, skilling, technical support, digital empowerment, brand promotion, marketing and raw material. Development of traditional artisans and craftsmen while preserving their rich tradition must include PwDs.

## Innovative approaches are galvanising livestock economy

A conclave in Hyderabad recently brought more than 100 startups, 50 CII members and the fast-growing livestock sector together

The livestock sector, besides contributing to the national economy, plays a key role in providing livelihood to 80 million rural households and is growing at a high and consistent rate in the country, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.93 per cent between 2014-15 to 2020-21 (at constant prices), which is much higher than the general agriculture sector.

India currently ranks third in unicorns and has a thriving startup ecosystem. It is estimated that 15 per cent of the world's agri-tech startups are based here. Modern technical breakthroughs have impacted almost every component of India's dairy and livestock value chain. This is due to Government initiatives to encourage investments, ease of



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

*(The writer is Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying)*

doing business and innovation.

Animal husbandry and dairying have more than 700 startups registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. This proves that there is more room for technology deployment and monetisation of interventions in the related sectors.

**Startup conclave**

A recent startup conclave in Hyderabad on February 28 included showcasing of a 100 select startups, a pitch fest, a buyer-seller meet, and a workshop for startups to train the early-stage startups operating in the animal husbandry and dairying sector in pitching, building the main business pillars, and their story of impact. Beside more than 100 startups, 50 members from the Confederation of Indian

Industry also participated in the event, searching for creative solutions to the key issues facing the livestock sector.

**Startups' exhibition**

Startups showcased their goods and innovations, including cosmetics made of camel milk and donkey milk (they offer a mind-boggling rate of Rs 1,200 per kg of donkey milk to the owners of donkey farms), building products and panels made of cow dung, innovations in animal feed and insect feed, platforms for online livestock trade, platforms that connect farmers with embedded digital finance options, new yoghurt flavours, breed improvement technology for cattle, intelligent dairy automation solutions, and cold chain solutions. Startups benefited greatly from the expo as

it gave them access to investors, dairy cooperatives, and government partners.

**Pitch fest & shoring capacity**

A special pitching event with a panel of investors, including venture capitalists and angel investors, was organised for 10 startups. With innovative products and services, the startups represent the animal husbandry and dairy industries. These products and services include artificial insemination equipment, cattle reproduction solutions, traceability, heat detection, frozen semen thawing, veterinary care, nanotechnology, polymer chemistry, vaccines, and diagnostics, among others.

A concurrent workshop was held for early-stage startups to guide them in the art of pitching and developing

primary business pillars/story of impact, problem-solving, and government-e-marketplace. The speakers delved into investor psychology and expectations to help the audience understand what is required to have the highest chance of acquiring investment from a venture capital fund and PE and angel investors.

On the finer elements of pitching, term sheet preparation, legal rights, value, etc., the experts gave enlightening advice. The buyer-seller meeting was a fascinating session of the conclave that drew enthusiastic involvement from both sides. Of the prominent dairy cooperatives and enterprises participating in the event, ten start-ups delivered a sales pitch to market their products.

Technological advancements will lead to significant improvements in day-to-day operations and lower business costs.

The Indian Government employs numerous cutting-edge breeding techniques in the animal husbandry industry to maximise local bovine herd production. Startups are crucial for making such a system self-sustaining.

The growth of startups has improved this ecosystem's development, organisation, and resilience, mostly to the benefit of its most significant stakeholder—the Indian farmers—who make up the agriculture sector, which includes the livestock industry and forms the backbone of the nation's economy.

Innovative approaches to

the problems of animal health, online marketplaces, improved supply chains, products with value-added, mobile apps, drones, and other investments are not only empowering producers or entrepreneurs but also improving the market, making resources more available, preventing waste, maximising profits, creating scalable businesses, and removing bottlenecks.

The support that the Government gives to startups shows the importance and impact of startups in the Indian economy. The livestock industry in India is poised to grow and will continue to be crucial in advancing our Hon'ble Prime Minister's goal of building an Aatmanirbhar (self-sufficient) India.



MONEY MATTERS

## Xiaomi India teams up with United Way to upskill transgender community

Smart device maker Xiaomi India has joined hands with United Way India to upskill the transgender community through a skill development programme that will create employment opportunities for beneficiaries across Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru regions. According to a statement, the partnership aims to upskill 100 transgender persons with the knowledge of laptop, computer and mobile handset repair to enhance their employability and provide sustainable livelihood options to them. "With technology usage at an all-time high, this skill development programme is a gateway for the transgender community to secure jobs with leading mobile companies and pave the way for their entrepreneurial journey," the statement said. The selected individuals' training programme will span over four months and incorporate an experiential learning approach. It will cover different modules such as basic electronics, software and hardware, and hands-on practical training.



## WINDFALL TAX

# Vedanta deducts US\$ 91 mn from govt's profit to make up for tax paid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In signs of protests against the 9-month-old windfall tax, mining mogul Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd has withheld about USD 91 million from the share of profit due to government from its oil and gas fields, to make up for the additional tax outgo, according to sources and correspondence on the issue.

India first imposed windfall profit tax on July 1, 2022 joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. But the levy of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on locally produced crude oil was seen by producers as violation of the contract which provides fiscal stability.

The SAED initially was Rs 23,250 per tonne (USD 40 per barrel) and in fortnightly revisions brought down to Rs 3,500 per tonne.

This is in addition to the 10-20 per cent royalty on price of oil and gas realised and an oil



cess of 20 per cent. On top, the government is also entitled to a pre-decided share of profit after expenses are deducted from revenue earned from sale of oil and gas.

Vedanta on January 31 and on February 20 informed the ministry of petroleum and natural gas that it has made a deduction of USD 85.35 million for SAED paid on its prolific Rajasthan block, RJ-ON-90/1, and another USD 5.50 million for block CB-OS/2 in Cambay basin.

This was being done with a

view to restore economic benefits as mentioned in the signed contracts under which it operates, the correspondence, reviewed by PTI, showed.

It argued that the contracts, called production sharing contract or PSC, provides for fiscal stability for the contracting parties. The PSC states that in the event of change of law or rule or regulation that results in adverse change to the expected economic benefits to any of the parties, the parties shall consult promptly

and make necessary revisions and adjustments to the contract in order to maintain such expected economic benefits to each of them.

The ministry however in a February 22 letter called the "unilateral" deduction as "wrongful" and asked the company to pay the short paid profit along with interest within 7 days. Vedanta has not complied with the direction.

Vedanta's Cairn Oil & Gas, which operates the two blocks, did not answer emails sent for comments. Emails sent to the oil ministry too remained unanswered.

Sources said the ministry was the view that arbitration was the dispute resolution mechanism provided in the PSC and Vedanta was contemplating on that. But arbitrations are costly and time consuming.

Also, they carry reputation risk for the government that needs to be considered especially in context of promotion of ease of doing business.

## Rupee falls 24 paise to close at 82.44 against US\$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated by 24 paise to close at 82.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday weighed down by the strength of the American currency and massive selling in the domestic equity market.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened lower by 12 paise at 82.32 as the US dollar rebounded against global currencies.

During intra-day trade, the rupee touched a high of 82.20 and a low of 82.49 against the greenback.

The domestic unit finally settled at 82.44 (provisional) against the American currency, 24 paise lower against its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee settled at 82.20 against the US dollar.

According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the Indian rupee depreciated due to weak domestic markets and a positive Dollar. Sustained FII outflows also weighed on the domestic currency.

Dollar rose on safe-haven appeal amid weak Asian and European currencies and equities.

Dollar also gained on upbeat US current account deficit and new home sales data. Bank of England hiked interest rates by 25 bps to 4.25 per cent, the highest in 15 years, Choudhary said.

## Ansell TN UNIT to focus on making surgical and life sciences products

Superior health and safety protection solutions provider Ansell has unveiled its Go Live Ansell Kovai, packing and irradiation operations in the country set up at an investment of about USD 80 million, a top official said on Friday. The facility at Perundurai in Erode district would initially focus on manufacturing surgical and life sciences products and industrial products later, company managing director and chief executive officer Neil Salmon said. In July 2021, Chief Minister M K Stalin had taken part in the foundation stone laying ceremony at the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIP-COT) industrial growth centre. The manufacturing unit has been designed with ability to take up capacity expansion in future, accommodate products of Ansell including glove line. Salmon told reporters here. On completion of the project, Ansell Kovai would be spread across 43,000 sq metres and would have a post processing building, warehouse, packaging facility among others.



## Govt says 5,642 warehouse projects completed under WIF scheme so far

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Around 5,642 warehousing projects have been completed under the Warehouse Infrastructure Fund (WIF) scheme so far, Parliament was informed on Friday.

Under the Warehouse Infrastructure Fund (WIF) scheme, under the Ministry of Finance, about Rs 9,393.68 crore funds have been sanctioned till December 2022 for establishment of 7,953 warehouse projects spread across 21 states, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

The estimated storage capacity on completion of these projects will be 9.32 million tonnes, he said. Out of which, the cumulative disbursement of WIF loan till December 2022 was Rs 8,357 crore, against the sanctions. "As on date, 5,642 projects have been completed," the Minister said. Apart from the WIF scheme, Tomar said the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture facilitates medium-long-term debt financing for investment in viable projects relating to post-harvest management infrastructure through incentives and financial support.

## CIL to supply higher quantities of coal to non-regulated sector

State-owned CIL on Friday said it is making all efforts to supply higher quantities of coal to the non-regulated sector (NRS) without affecting supplies to the power sector, through increased production. The statement comes days after the maharatna firm stated that it is gearing up to meet the demand of coal from the power sector amid early onset of summer and a pick up in the industrial demand for electricity. Stepping up on supplies, Coal India Ltd (CIL) is poised to post 16.6 per cent growth in coal despatch to its non-regulated sector customers in the fourth quarter of the ongoing fiscal, compared to the preceding quarter. Coal despatch to NRS customers has been averaging 3.67 lakh tonnes per day in the fourth quarter of the ongoing fiscal till date. CIL is likely to close the ongoing quarter with 33 million tonnes (MT) supply to this sector. It would mean 4.7 MT more coal to NRS, or a jump of 16.6 per cent, compared to 28.3 MT that the company supplied in the third quarter of the year, the coal behemoth said in a statement.



# Lok Sabha passes Finance Bill

## ○ Tax benefits for debt mutual funds removed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Friday approved The Finance Bill 2023 with 64 official amendments including providing tax relief to some taxpayers opting for new tax regime, and removing long-term tax benefit for debt mutual funds to bring them at par with other interest earning instruments.

In a relief to taxpayers opting for deductions and exemption-free new tax regime, individuals earning marginally higher income than no-tax ceiling of Rs 7 lakh will continue to pay nil tax.

Under the new tax regime with effect from April 1, if a taxpayer has an annual income of Rs 7 lakh s/he pays no tax. But if s/he has income of Rs 7,00,100 s/he pays tax of Rs 25,010. Thus an additional income of Rs 100 leads to tax of Rs 25,010.

The amendment provides that the tax payable should not be more than the income that exceeds Rs 7 lakh. This means, an individual having income up to Rs 7,27,700 could stand to benefit from this marginal relief.



Other amendments include raising the tax rate on royalty and fee for technical services from 10 per cent to 20 per cent.

The Finance Bill, which includes tax proposals for the fiscal year beginning April 1, was passed without a discussion as parliament continued to remain stalled over demands for a probe into allegations against the Adani group.

Lok Sabha, which had on Thursday approved Rs 45 lakh-crore Budget for 2023-24 fiscal in just 9 minutes, passed the Finance Bill amid placards holding opposition MPs shouting slogans from the

well of the House.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman moved the Bill and the 64 amendments which were all approved by voice vote.

These will now go to Rajya Sabha and will become law once the President gives assent.

From April 1, investments in debt mutual funds will be taxed as short-term capital gains, stripping investors of the long-term tax benefits that made such investments popular. Currently, investors in debt funds pay income tax on capital gains according to the income tax slab for a holding period of three years.

## Farmers get Rs 514 as claim for every Rs 100 premium paid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday informed Parliament that for every Rs 100 of premium paid by farmers under the flagship scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), they have received about Rs 514 as claims.

Since implementation of PMFBY in 2016, around 38 crore farmer applicants have been enrolled and over 12.37 crore (provisional) have received claims, he said in his written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

"During this period, nearly Rs 25,252 crore were paid by farmers as their share of premium against which claims of over Rs 1,30,015 crore (provisional) have been paid to them. Thus, for every 100 rupees of premium paid by farmers, they have received about Rs 514 as claims," the minister said.

## SWELECT Energy's unit in Coimbatore goes on stream

PNS ■ COIMBATORE

SWELECT Energy Systems Ltd, formerly Numeric Power Systems, engaged in production of solar photo-voltaic module has launched its solar module manufacturing unit in Tamil Nadu, the company said on Friday.

With the launch of the new facility at Sarkarsamakulam, located on the outskirts of the city, SWELECT supersedes its 140 MW facility established in 2013 in Bengaluru.

The production at the manufacturing unit would be scaled upto 595 MW from the initial 385 MW, managing director R Chellappan said here. The company, which holds five per cent market share, has installed about 3,800 solar roof tops, 6,000 water pumps, he told reporters.

According to company web-



site, it has a fully automated photovoltaic manufacturing unit at Dabaspet in Bengaluru. The company operates a 140 MW class one lakh dust-free clean room, world-class photo-voltaic solar technologies manufacturing plant with research and development facility.

SWELECT also boasts of a 'Balance of Systems' manufacturing unit in Salem offering complete range of electrical and mechanical balance of systems including solar power conditioning unit and module mounting structures, the company said.

# Bank fraud: ED attaches Rs 252 cr worth 'Ambience Tower' in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate Friday said it has attached a multi-storied commercial complex, worth more than Rs 252 crore, located in Delhi's Shalimar Bagh area in connection with a money laundering investigation linked to an alleged bank fraud case against the Ambience Group.

The immovable property is named Ambience Tower and it



belongs to a company called Ambience Towers Pvt Ltd, a firm of the Ambience Group promoted by Raj Singh Gehlot, the agency said in a statement.

A provisional order, under the

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), was issued by the ED to attach the commercial building worth a total Rs 252.17 crore.

The money laundering case stems from an FIR and chargesheets filed by the Jammu and Kashmir anti-corruption bureau that found that a company named Aman Hospitality Pvt. Ltd, through its promoter director Gehlot, was sanctioned term loan facility of Rs 810 crore.

# Govt approval to 45 companies/JVs operating in defence sector with foreign OEMs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has given approval to "45 companies/joint ventures" operating in the defence sector with foreign OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), the Parliament was informed on Friday.

Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said this in written response to a query in the Lok Sabha.

"The government has given approval to 45 companies/JVs operating in defence sector with foreign OEMs," he said responding to a query on the number of foreign companies who have shown interest in manufacturing defence equipment under foreign direct investment in the country.

Further, the government has taken several policy initiatives in the past few years and brought reforms to encourage indigenous design, development and manufacture of defence equipment in the country, thereby reducing dependency on imports in coming years, he said.

"These initiatives, inter alia, include according priority to procurement of capital items from domestic sources under Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)-2020; notification of three Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs) by the Department of Defence Production (DDP), MoD with a timeline beyond which they will only be procured from the domestic industry," the minister said.



These three lists consist of total 3,738 items, out of which 2,786 items have been indigenised till February 2023. Simplification of industrial licensing process with longer validity period; liberalisation of FDI policy allowing 74 per cent FDI under automatic route; simplification of make

procedure; and launch of Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme involving start-ups and MSMEs, are among the other moves, according to the response.

Other steps include implementation of Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India), Order 2017; launch of an indigenisation portal namely SRIJAN to facilitate indigenisation by Indian industry including MSMEs; reforms in offset policy with thrust on attracting investment and transfer of technology for defence manufacturing by assigning higher multipliers; establishment of two Defence Industrial Corridors one each in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, it said.

## Individual taxpayers with income marginally over Rs 7L to get relief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to taxpayers opting for new tax regime, individuals earning marginally higher income than no-tax ceiling of Rs 7 lakh will pay tax only on the differential income after the government amended the Finance Bill.

The Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, has proposed a marginal relief to taxpayers under new tax regime. Explaining the provision, the

finance ministry said under the new tax regime with effect from April 1, if a taxpayer has annual income of Rs 7 lakh s/he pays no tax. But if s/he has income of Rs 7,00,100 s/he pays tax of 25,010. Thus an additional income of Rs 100 leads to a tax of Rs 25,010.

Hence, marginal relief is proposed to that so that the tax what one pays should not be more than the income that exceeds Rs 7 lakh (Rs 100 in this case), the ministry said.

# Starbucks CEO Laxman's new role: To work as barista once a month



PNS ■ NEW YORK

Starbucks' new Indian-origin CEO Laxman Narasimhan has said he will work as a barista once a month in stores to stay close to the company's culture, customers, challenges and opportunities.

Narasimhan, 55, officially became the Seattle-based coffee giant's chief executive on Monday, taking the reins from Howard Schultz about two weeks earlier than scheduled.

He was welcomed as incoming chief executive officer of Starbucks with a coffee tasting in the place where it all began at Seattle's Pike Place market store. In a letter to the

employees on Thursday, the Indian-American business executive said he will always be a "fierce advocate" for the company's partners and its culture.

"With you, I've experienced every aspect of the business to learn what it truly means to wear the green apron. You've welcomed me into our stores, trained me in how to be a barista all to help me deeply understand what we do, how we do it, and the challenges and opportunities facing us," he wrote.

Barista is a person who serves in a coffee bar. "To keep us close to the culture and our customers, as well as to our challenges and opportunities, I intend to continue working in stores for a half day each month," he was quoted as saying by CNN.

"I thought it was very important for me to put myself in the shoes of the partners and really understand what they do and how they do it. There were things I learned through experience in all of this. It taught me a lot," he said in a statement.







# Working diligently for the state he’s in

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Self-motivated, energetic and with excellent problem-solving skills escorted the additional collector of Vikarabad to come and serve our state — all the way from Punjab. Speaking of Rahul Sharma, his way of countering us demonstrated his proficiency in his arena of employment at a reputable position. Never has he offended any dignitaries, nor faced retaliation: all he’s busy doing these days is to take hold of his new station, while earlier posted at Nalgonda.

“I’ve always been brought up in a serene atmosphere. So, pacific that going over the board was never in my dictionary. Like a simple middle-class boy, used to wait for Lohri to come, and fly kites. It always set a cultural benchmark for me and was no less than a visual wonder which I miss here in the south. Especially the screams on the terrace, kite flying is a competition there! The household ambience was very disciplined from the beginning and probably that’s what brought me here to this position. And this discipline is imbibed from my father.”

Some authoritative approaches, and some consistent limits early in childhood validated the collector’s feelings and he turned out to be a determined man in the administrative sector.

He continued to share, “My father is a retired official now. He was equally in a dignified position as a principal of a university in Amritsar. In fact, even my mother is a retired lecturer from a government school. So, our educational background has been held in high regard since then! The whole atmosphere at home was to only study, and be a bookworm but be aware of your surroundings. My spouse is currently in the teaching faculty at ICFAI business school here in Hyderabad.”

From the time he’s been posted down south, a lot of many cultural differences are what he can spot and miss at the same time.

“We share the same democratic values, but sometimes there are stark differences that cannot go unseen. I am from a Hindi-speaking belt. South Indians love their rice but I seriously miss the Amritsari kulcha. And, there are many more differences as such.”

While the temples in the north can be found on the mountain top, here the gateways are opened for gopurams. That was just one of the other examples.

“And let me tell you, we are the most joyful people. It doesn’t mean that we do not have problems in our life but we have faith in our Waheguru. Whenever you visit my birthplace, you’ll find people always in a merrier state. A lot many times I miss the humility over here.”

It was while working in the IT sector, one fine day he decided to resign and pursue UPSC examinations. His active preparations were



Bringing to you the journey of the additional collector of Vikarabad Rahul Sharma, this week for our weekly segment of Hyderabad, we connect with the officer who speaks to *The Pioneer* exclusively.

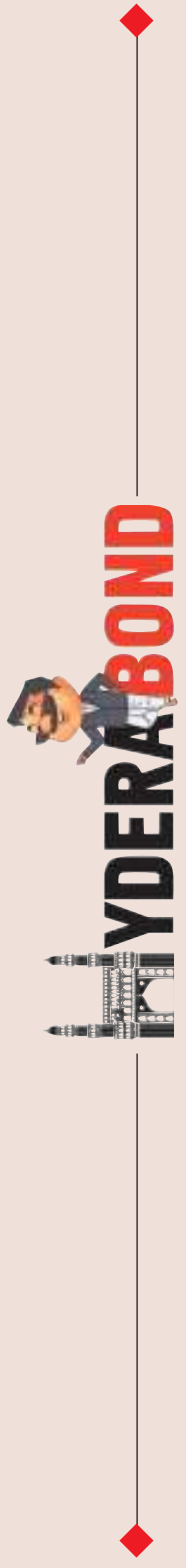
going on in Delhi on a high. He couldn’t crack the examination in the first go but his parents never let his hand go. As soon as he cleared the examination the cadre system allowed him to come to Telangana.

“My formula of being an upright officer is to work diligently for the state I am in. I always ensure that I am a role model for my subordinates here. I am still exploring Vikarabad but when I was posted in Nalgonda because it’s an

erstwhile district, everything was very systematic. The collectorship business is coming from the times before even Nizams were here. Vikarabad is still developing, so we are still exploring our options here. A new collector was designated just last year for Vikarabad. Dialect seems to be the only major difference between Nalgonda and Vikarabad. That’s it.”

The additional collector for the local bodies over here in the south, Rahul Sharma is honestly monitoring the gram panchayat and the municipal bodies. It includes sanitation practices, property tax collection, developmental programs and managing the Haritha Haram movement that falls under the green cover of Vikarabad.

“This job gives me immense satisfaction that I am able to help the poorest of poor, I am a part of the deep system that the country is running. I am in a position where I can get a few things done for poor people. That’s my motivational streak. I have noticed one thing the legislative members are extremely involved with the district they have been appointed in Telangana, by the way. If the main person is unable to come, he or she sends his or her PA to check the groundwork. While, by now I know you must have understood that I am a media-shy person, mostly the local channels cover us. My job is to provide them with all the adequate information! However, it’s good to witness how media and we have an interpersonal relationship overall.”



‘The more I break down human illusion and ego, the closer I get to the music’

In an exclusive interaction with *The Pioneer*, pianist Timothy Marthand discussed his interpretative style, his freedom of expression with music, and more.

SHIKHA DUGGAL

No, the concert halls are never empty when Timothy Marthand is playing. The idea of listening to him is in itself a contributory fact that you want to share music. Self-made pianist, born in Hyderabad is on his way to build a reputation for captivating audiences with his musical highs to bigger expansions. He is so emotionally and deeply involved with his musical instruments that when he speaks of them you can clearly feel from where he is coming, and his mission to keep the piano tradition alive in the city of Hyderabad. So much so that, today he owns a piano professorship.

When we got the news that he is playing again in the city, though we could not sit down with him, he obliged us with a quick telephonic call and discussed his interpretative style and more.

“Surprisingly an IAS officer is an avid supporter of creative arts. Arvind Kumar saw me playing recently and we met. That’s when I felt a little more encouraged to strive better in this musical scene in my own city. Many times people come up to me and ask “why am I not playing abroad frequently” and my only answer is “how can I take the total Hyderabad with me?” They even say I’ll be even more successful and will get more fundings.”

This was the exact honesty that attract-

ed us to interview him and all the great artists are his role models. He speaks further, “my freedom of expression with music inculcates all types of string instruments and we are not just discussing chamber music here.” Because the element is most famous for actually elevating all his pieces to sophisticated music.

He continued, “Multiple voices moving together is my forte. Indeed it’s a westernised concept but let me tell you, it’s more humanly evolved. Artistic expression is at par in it. In our musical terminology we call it the harmony element.”

Another way to say it is symphonic music, something related to Beethoven? “Because most of the time music is not written down, it differs here. When we use this element, something specific or accurate writing is used precisely. But there is a slight problem here — there are performance forums in the city; however, where is the infrastructure?”

The musician actually wants to create a wake up call in the government to which he says, “We need more infrastructure for creative arts to thrive in Hyderabad. There must be a concert hall in the town like we have in the western countries. The funding of arts is not even a concept to be heard of. Does it even exist I wonder! If states start funding creative arts, one can really come out of the computerised world without thinking a bit. We can celebrate life on an even merrier note.”

In reality the kind of music he does can take him to extremities, talking about the positives. The series of chords that he strikes fully expresses the way he is or the way he thinks.

He enjoys doing this music for almost a long time and, “the more I break down human illusion and ego, the closer I get to the music. I practice for incessant hours, and record a lot of recordings. I claim playing for Beethoven’s 250th anniversary in Berlin is my biggest career highlight. The reaction was epic in Germany. The world may not see the cultural roots of this music and consider it to be a western concept only but it takes me home. To my surprise I understand my country better with this kind of music. But I don’t like it when anyone is not interested in being a pianist as the primary profession. If parents give priority to this profession too, it will be an investment to their children’s soul. Everything is transactional, very calculative and I can write this in writing for you. That’s where the pit-stop is. Avenues can be only created by the leaders of the executive level. You can still think intellectually, having creative notes by your side. There was no reason for me to be at the IIT today but I am so glad to see that the founder has incorporated such courses in the university. Again this is my motivational streak to continue aching in this profession.”



# Alert! Your extended sitting could be harmful to your overall health

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Sitting disease is the term used to link the 34 chronic conditions that are commonly associated with lack of activity or excess sitting. Currently, working adults spend approximately one third to a half of their workday in a seated position and spend hours of leisure time on activities such as watching television, using computers, participating in screen-based recreation, and driving. Women who lead a sedentary lifestyle age nearly eight times more than women who are involved in physical work.

**Weak legs and glutes**

If you don’t use them, you lose them! By sitting all day, you are not depending on your powerful lower body muscles to hold you up. This leads to muscle atrophy, which is the weakening of these muscles. Without strong leg and glute muscles to stabilise you, your body is at risk of injury

**Weight gain**

Moving causes your muscles to release molecules like lipoprotein lipase, which helps process the fats and sugars you eat. When you spend most of your day sitting, the release of these molecules is lessened and your rear end is at greater risk of widening, according to research. You are also at greater risk for metabolic syndrome, even if you exercise.



## Protecting your eyes while swimming

Swimming is a remarkable activity for not only burning calories and exercising your muscles, but it is also an effective means of enhancing your mental health. Regrettably, swimmers may be familiar with the feeling of getting out of the swimming pool with a tingling sensation in and around their eyes. In fact, eye discomfort, also known as “swimmer’s eye” by some, is one of the most frequently observed grievances from ardent swimmers. To recognise how essential it is to safeguard one’s eyes while swimming, one must first fully grasp how water affects the eyes. To begin with, a thin film of tears coats the surface of the eyes, keeping them clear, smooth, and moist. This improves vision by focusing light and prevents the eyes from infectious agents like dirt, dust, and other irritants. Without the tear film, the eyes would start drying out. Blinking would be excruciatingly painful, and there would be a constant physical sensation on the edge of the eyes. The eyes would also become extremely light-sensitive.

### What’s in the water?

Disease-causing bacteria can be found in water, including pool water. So chlorine, the most widely used steriliser, is used to kill parasites, bacteria, and other infectious agents. The process is known as chlorination, and most drinking water contains chlorine for that exact reason. Although our skin is resistant enough that weak chlorine in water won’t harm us, you’ve probably noticed that if you stay in some swimming pools for too quite a while now, your eyes start to sting. This is because chlorine and other solvents used to clean public pools can wipe away the tear film, causing swimmers’ eyes to tingle. Additionally, some tougher bacteria might survive the chlorination, which could lead to eye infections that prey on already itchy eyes. Conjunctivitis, also identified as pink eye, blurred vision, dry eyes, red eyes, and bacterial eye infections are a few of the common eye problems identified with swimmers. Therefore, it’s crucial to take the necessary safety measures and actions to prevent your eyes from suffering severe harm.

Dr. Ajay Sharma, chief medical director of EyeQ shares multiple ways to accomplish this:

### Wear Watertight Goggles

By preventing pool chlorine from entering the eyes, watertight goggles safeguard the tear film. If you typically wear glasses with prescriptions, you can consult your eye-care specialist about purchasing prescription goggles. Swim goggles are specialised equipment, so they need to be treated with care. They ought to be flushed with fresh water after each use. Since the lenses have an anti-fogging coat-

ing, be careful when cleaning the inside of the lens. Allow the goggles to air dry naturally rather than wiping them. When the goggles are wet, avoid putting them in a closed container. Moreover, keep them out of the sun’s harsh rays.

**Enquire about the Chlorine Levels**

Hotels and neighbourhood swimming pools are obligated to disclose information about their inspection reports. Consult the supervisors to confirm that the pool’s pH levels are between 7 and 8. The optimum value should be 7.4. No exclusions should be made, even if it is a family pool.

### Stay Hydrated

It can be very physically demanding to swim. So keeping your body hydrated will be of great assistance both before and during swimming. Your body will continue to receive the nutrients it requires from drinking water if you want your tear ducts to continue generating enough moisture to lubricate your eyes.

### While in the Pool, Take Off your Contact Lenses

Swimmers with nearsightedness (myopia) or farsightedness (hyperopia) may favour using contact lenses while swimming for refractive correction. However, wearing contact lenses while swimming can be hazardous at times. As some contact lenses shrink in water, there is a good chance you will lose them. Besides that, the space between the lens and your eye is ideal for the growth of bacteria and other microbes.

### Wash and Hydrate Your Eyes

It is recommended to rinse your eyes with water after swimming. If you swim frequently, carrying artificial tears to cleanse and hydrate your eyes is essential. This is also useful if you have naturally dry eyes. Also, avoid staying in the water for a considerable time and take breaks at periodic intervals.

It is vital to take good care of your eyes as eye-related complaints account for 2-3% of all primary care office visits. Community education with a focus on nutrition and eye care safety can help to prevent eye diseases and injuries. More importantly, an effective primary and preventive eye care programme can train communities to recognise eye ailments. If comprehensive eye care protocols are not adhered to at every institution, eye care will lag behind other types of healthcare and will only add to the nation’s blindness burden.



Women who lead a sedentary lifestyle, age nearly eight times more than women who are involved in physical work.

### Anxiety & Depression

Lesser understood than some of the physical effects of sitting, are the mental effects. But the risk of both depression and anxiety are higher in people who sit the most!

### Cancer risk

Emerging studies suggest that prolonged sitting can increase your risk of certain types of cancer, including lung, uterine, and colon cancers.

### Heart Disease

Sitting can hurt your heart, potentially leading to cardiovascular disease. Experts say people who sit more, have a 147 percent higher risk of suffering from a heart attack or stroke

### Diabetes risk

According to research, People who spend more time sitting can have a 112 percent increased risk of diabetes

### Varicose Veins

Sitting for long periods of time can cause blood to pool in the legs. This can lead to varicose veins, or spider veins, a smaller version of the former.

### Stiff shoulders and neck

As with your legs, butt, and lower back, your shoulders and neck will also suffer from prolonged sitting. This is especially true if you are hunched over looking at a computer screen!

### Deep Vein Thrombosis

Deep vein thrombosis is a type of blood clot that’s most common in the legs. When part of this clot breaks off, it can cut off the flow of blood to other parts of the body such as your lungs, causing a pulmonary embolism.

The more time you spend sitting down, the likelier you are to die prematurely, studies show. And, sadly, exercising does not cancel out these pernicious effects. Future workplace intervention strategies may also seek to prioritise women who seem to be at greater risk of adverse health outcomes from sitting. Women need to understand that their chair is a health hazard and they are at more risk than men due to sedentary behaviour.

(The officer Dr. Shahid Shafi is a consultant internal medicine at Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals)



# WPL GAME EQUILISER: BARCLAY

There is no reason for men and women's game to be viewed as different, says ICC chairman

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Women's cricket has distinguished itself with the introduction of the WPL and it should not be viewed differently from the men's game anymore, says ICC chairman Greg Barclay.

He said the league will help uplift the women's game, thanks to the professionalism and money involved.

The first edition of the tournament will conclude here on Sunday.

"... As I say, I think it will be a great uplift for the women's game and I am looking forward to see how this tournament plays out," Barclay told the BCCI.

"Now, there is no reason for the two parts of the game, men and women, to be viewed as different. This is people playing cricket and they should be treated equally.

"Secondly, the professionalism and the remuneration that is afforded the players I think that's something that's going to be really important, again, for the women's game," he added.



The Women's Premier League, which was a long time coming, finally began on March 4 this year amid much fanfare.

"I think if you recognise the powerhouse that India is in terms of cricket, it's appropriate that they have launched the Women's Premier League. I know that Jay Shah (BCCI president) and his board and his team are really committed to making this one one of the biggest and best tournaments that it can possibly be.

"I am sure that they will be successful in that respect. I am really pleased and very appreciate that this has happened," Barclay said.

"I take my hat off to Jay and his team at the BCCI for the way they have approached this. That is exactly what I would have expected out of an Indian run competition, it's absolutely amazing. "Jay and his team are doing a wonderful job in leading the way in terms of getting the women's game to where it needs to be," he signed off.

Barclay is serving his second term as the chair of the game's apex body.



## ‘Hardik similar to Dhoni as captain’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Having watched both of them from close quarters, Gujarat Titans spinner R Sai Kishore feels that his franchise skipper Hardik Pandya is very similar to legendary MS Dhoni in terms of leadership traits.

Sai Kishore, before joining Gujarat Titans, was with CSK for a couple of years.

"Hardik and Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) are pretty similar in the way they handle things, they both are pretty calm," Sai Kishore told the media during a virtual interaction session on Friday.

"One thing that I really admire about Hardik is his ability to handle success and failure equally - that is something very unique about him. He is a level-headed guy and that works (for him)," he added.

The 28-year-old said Gujarat Titans, who won the IPL last year in their debut season, will have to replicate their performances from last season in order to be successful.

"The tag of being defending champions is up to us whether to take it or not. We played well last year and that is why we won. I think if we can do that (then) the tag won't matter much," he said. Sai Kishore said the new rule of having an 'Impact Player' in IPL will make it more manageable than what it was in domestic circuit.

"It is more like the super-sub rule where we can either use a

bowler or a batsman. It is basically like playing with 12 people. We have already played with this (rule) in domestic (cricket). The only change is that we can use it till the 20th over, in domestic it was restricted to the 14th over. In 20 overs, it should be a lot easier to handle," he said.

The Tamil Nadu left-arm spinner said he is eyeing a place in the Indian side via strong performances in the IPL.

"Yes, there are a lot of left-arm spinners in India and this (IPL) is a very good opportunity but I would like to be here now in the present and play well for Gujarat. In the last five years, my skill-set has gone up and I want to keep improving. If it happens that I do very well in the IPL, I am going to play for India," he said.

However, Sai Kishore admitted that he has to improve his batting to come into national reckoning.

"It is a work in progress. I have done well in domestic (cricket) also. I know the areas where I am good at and areas where I need to work on. I am trying to put in hours into my batting and fielding," he said.

"In the IPL and higher you go, you want to bat at the top. In Tamil Nadu, I have had the luxury of batting at the top in a few games. The death overs batting needs more work and attention. Finding a pattern or formula to score quick runs is what I am working on," Sai Kishore concluded.



## David Warner will have point to prove in IPL, says Watson

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Australia all-rounder and assistant coach of Delhi Capitals Shane Watson says the team's new captain David Warner will have a "point to prove" in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League, starting on March 31.

Warner, who joined Delhi Capitals ahead of the 2022 season, has been named captain for IPL 2023 due to Rishabh Pant being ruled out following a horrific car accident in December last year.

Warner has captained Delhi franchise in the past, the then Delhi Daredevils, and has had a successful run as a skipper in IPL with the Sunrisers Hyderabad, leading them to their only title win in the 2016 edition.

Warner had an overall successful stint with SRH, but his poor form with the bat and his subsequent fallout with the team management was followed by an undignified exit in the 2021 season.

The leading run-scorer among all overseas players with 5,881 runs, Warner was removed as captain and was also benched permanently by the franchise and eventually released ahead of the 2022 mega auction.

He also endured a poor tour of India recently, failing with the bat in the two Tests at Nagpur and Delhi and scoring 23 in the only ODI he played post recovery from a hairline fracture to his left elbow.

"David Warner for me is just at the top of the order. He's going to continue to have a point to prove and everyone's going to be like riding off the back of him. He's always scored so many runs in the IPL. And to be an opening batter, and set the platform like he does is going to be very important," Watson told Star Sports.

The former Australia vice-captain Watson backed Mitchell Marsh to continue with his devastating form with the bat that he displayed in the ODI series win for Australia against India.

"(For) Mitchell Marsh, this is going to be another really big season for him. He's got incredible skill with the bat alone and how he's batting and takes the game on is going to play a really big part," Watson said.

Watson picked South Africa's Rilee Rossouw as the trump card for Delhi Capitals in IPL 2023.

"Well, one in particular is Rilee Rossouw, he's someone you know, I've played with him in the Pakistan Super League for Quetta Gladiators. And to see

how he has come back into international cricket and he's a world class hitter of the ball.

"He can take down any bowler at any stage, in any conditions. So if he gets on a roll, he can just take the game away from the opposition," he explained.

The Delhi Capitals assistant coach said his side has got all-round cover for the upcoming season.

"There's a lot of very talented players. We've got some youngsters with the ball, fast bowlers, we've got (Kamlesh) Nagarkoti and Chetan Sakariya. And then we've got our spinners as well, like Axar (Patel) and Kuldeep Yadav.

"Those two guys, to be able to have world class spinners bowling especially through the middle, to be able to try and get wickets and also keep the runs down, that's so critically important," he said.

Watson backed the pair of Patel and Kuldeep to take advantage of a spin-friendly pitch in their homeground.

"For sure, Delhi's normally, conventionally a lower, turning sort of wicket and we've got the bowlers to exploit that with our spinners alone. With Axar and also Kuldeep Yadav, but also with the batters that we've got, can really make the most of those conditions. It's a smaller ground as well," he said.

Watson admitted the absence of Pant will be a huge miss for the side.

"The biggest challenge for Delhi is just to be able to consistently put good performances together. You know, the Delhi Capitals have got a really, really skilful squad, and we do again this year.

"Obviously Rishabh Pant not being a part of, not playing this tournament is going to be a huge, huge miss," Watson expressed.

CSK's 2018 triumph tells you about leadership: Gavaskar praises Dhoni

New Delhi, Mar 24 (PTI) Recalling an ageing Chennai Super Kings' remarkable triumph after returning to IPL from a two-year ban, batting great Sunil Gavaskar praised talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni and said his ability to get the best out of his players makes him stand out.

The upcoming edition of the IPL starts on March 31.

Speaking on Star Sports Network, Gavaskar recalled the highlights of the illustrious IPL career of Captain Cool and how he has brought out the best in his team mates.

## 13 suspicious cricket matches were played across globe last year: Sportradar report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There were 13 competitive cricket matches that came under the cloud of suspicion in 2022, according to a review report published by Sportradar Integrity Services.

Sportradar Integrity Services unit is an international team of qualified integrity experts who deliver analysis on irregular betting, match-fixing and other forms of corruption in sports.

The 28-page report titled 'Betting, Corruption and Match-Fixing' states that in calendar year 2022, an unprecedented "1212 suspicious matches" were detected across 12 sporting disciplines in 92 countries.

The company uses an application Universal Fraud Detection System (UFDS) to detect suspicious activity during matches.

While football accounted for 775 matches, which possibly could have been corrupted, basketball is second in the list with 220 such games, and lawn tennis is third with 75 questionable games.

Interestingly, among 12 sports, cricket only has 13 allegedly corrupt games and is sixth in the list. The report claims that 13 corrupt games could still be the highest for the sport in a single year.

"Although a number of sports contin-



ue to display relatively low numbers of suspicious matches, 13 suspicious cricket matches is still the highest annual figure recorded by Sportradar Integrity Services, and handball and futsal also recorded their highest ever number of suspicious matches," the report stated.

The PTI had sent a questionnaire to Sportradar to understand which format has been corrupted the most and whether it is international games or matches in the T20

leagues. However, a look at the report states that the company is not referring to any matches played in India as per the graphics depicted in the report.

Therefore, one could ascertain that none of the 13 corrupt matches mentioned in the report has been played in India.

Sportradar, in fact, had partnered with the BCCI's anti-corruption unit in 2020 to detect betting irregularities during IPL matches.

## Myanmar face stiff challenge against Kyrgyz in Tri-Nation football trophy

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Myanmar will square off against the Kyrgyz Republic in their second match of the Tri-Nation International Football Tournament at the Khuman Lampak Stadium here on Saturday.

The tournament sees international football being featured in the football-crazy state for the first time, as India play host to Myanmar and Kyrgyz Republic.

The two outstation teams have already been in Imphal over the past week, where they have been training in preparation for the tournament. Myanmar had faced India in the opening match, which the hosts won 1-0.

Myanmar head coach Michael Feichtenbeiner looked to ease the pressure off from his players' shoulders, as he chose to



focus on performance, rather than results.

"Our target is to improve our performance first, and then to improve as a team. Only then can we reach something in terms of results. Of course, we want to get better results, that's the main target overall," said Feichtenbeiner in a release.

Feichtenbeiner showed a lot of respect for the opposition team when asked about the Kyrgyz Republic.

"They have a strong line-up that will come to their advantage tomorrow. The last few matches were not as successful for us, but we want to change that and try our best," he said.

## Kimmich praises Nagelsmann amid reports Bayern coach out



AP ■ FRANKFURT

Bayern Munich midfielder Joshua Kimmich praised Julian Nagelsmann as an "outstanding" coach Friday amid reports that the 35-year-old manager is set to be fired and replaced by Thomas Tuchel.

Both Kicker magazine and German tabloid Bild reported Thursday that Bayern was ending Nagelsmann's spell in charge following the team's 2-1 loss at Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga on Sunday.

"I can only say that Julian Nagelsmann is an outstanding coach. Really, I've had a lot of coaches and a lot of top coaches and despite that

I'd say he's easily in the top three of my best coaches," Kimmich told reporters Friday as he prepares to captain Germany in a friendly against Peru on Saturday.

"As things stand at the moment, you can surely understand that I can't say anything" about the reports, he added.

Germany coach Hansi Flick, who was Nagelsmann's predecessor at Bayern, said he was "very surprised" to see reports saying Nagelsmann would be removed.

Bayern's defeat to Leverkusen dropped Bayern to second place in the Bundesliga, one point behind Borussia Dortmund before the teams clash in Munich in the "Klassiker" on April 1.

The Associated Press has asked Bayern for comment but the club has yet to make a statement about the situation.

Kicker reported that Bayern is in touch with Tuchel and that the German coach is expected to join Friday or Saturday. Tuchel led Chelsea to the Champions League title in 2021 and previously coached Paris Saint-Germain — losing the 2020 Champions League final to Bayern — and Dortmund.

Bayern faces Manchester City in the Champions League quarterfinals on April 11.

## Sharath Kamal pulls out of Nationals due to back spasms

PTI ■ JAMMU

Back and calf issues have forced defending champion Achantha Sharath Kamal to pull out of the men's singles event of the 84th UTT Inter-State Senior National Table Tennis Championships beginning here on Saturday.

The last-minute pullout because of the recurring back and calf spasms that Sharath has suffered in the past two months have dealt a blow to the organisers and the local spectators.

But his absence would help former national champion G. Sathiyana's cause as he eyes his second title. Sharath, a 10-time national champion, said he has to be cautious and continue the rehab programmes devised before the World Championships in Durban in May.

"The Worlds in May last

week is my focus, and I want to prepare well for the big event. Most importantly, I don't want to aggravate the situation. I am going straight to rehab and concentrate just on the Durban Worlds," he said in a release.

The PSPB paddler indulged in extra stretching before the quarters and semi-finals of the team championships to keep fit. He was in discomfort, but his commitment to the team's cause kept him going as he competed and won the matches without letting the cat out of the bag.

As for the matches on the fifth day of the championships, the top 16 seeded players in the men's section and eight in the women's category will get into action from Saturday when the second stage draw, the knockout, begins. The women will play three rounds, while the men will play two. With the group topper



emerging as the qualifier for the knockout round, there will be a tough fight among the players in 78 groups (women) and 96 in men's singles, respectively.

Meanwhile, the 16 men and eight women players will have a good day's rest before the battle for the title and the prize purse of Rs. 16 lakh gets hot.

The top-ranked players in both sections are:

**Men:** G. Sathiyana, Manush Shah, Harmmeet Desai, Manav Thakkar, Sanil Shetty, Anirban Ghosh, Sudhanshu Grover, Jeet Chandra, SFR Snehit, Soumyajit Ghosh, Anthony Amalraj, Ronit Bhanja, Payas Jain, Deepit R. Patil, Yashansh Malik and Subh Goel.

**Women:** Manika Batra, Sreeja Akula, Reeth Rishya, Diya Chitale, Sutirtha Mukherjee, Anusha Kutumbale, Swastika Ghosh and Pra



# ‘FOR THE FIRST TIME, Brahmanandam was scared that someone would laugh at him’



IRRESPECTIVE OF THE MIXED REVIEWS FROM THE CRITICS, **RANGAMARTHANDA** HAS BEEN MUCH LOVED BY THE FAMILY AUDIENCE. FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF THE FILM, DIRECTOR KRISHNA VAMSI, INTERACTED WITH THE HYDERABADI MEDIA ON WHAT WENT ON WHILE MAKING OF THE FILM.

AMARTYA SMARAN

While Covid-19 shook up the world, it also gave us the space and time for about a little over two years to reflect upon ourselves. It was during the mostly mundane days of the Covid lockdown that popular director Krishna Vamsi took time for himself and started working on *Rangamarthanda*, the Telugu adaptation of Marathi film *Natsamrat*(2016). The film opened to mostly mixed reviews from critics on

March 22, but as luck would have it, the family audience took a liking to the film.

The filmmaker is best known for *Gulabi*(1995), *Ninne Pelladata*(1996), *Sindhooram*(1997), *Antahpuram*(1998), *Khadgam*(2002), *Rakhi*(2006), and *Chandamama*(2007). His recent flicks like *Govindudu Andarivadele*(2014) and *Nakshatram*(2017) garnered varied reactions from the audience and critics alike. Finally, after six long years, the director is back with *Rangamarthanda*, starring Prakash Raj, Brahmanandam and Ramya Krishna in the lead roles.

“When I first watched the original, it moved me. I was shocked to see that the film could move someone who’s as stoic as me,” said the *Chandamama* director talking about his latest directorial. “I usually don’t prefer remaking films but now that Prakash Raj asked to watch the film, I watched it. Tears rolled down my cheeks when I first watched the film. That was my reaction. I couldn’t figure out why I was crying in the first place. The last time I got so emotional was during the shoot of *Antahpuram*, where Prakash Raj slaps Soundarya in a scene. Then I understood, it was about family relationships. Relationships are no longer the same. People have become selfish and the bond we share with family is going for a toss. Family is a unit. If the families are intact, then the world will come in order. I loved that element and that’s how it came about and Prakash Raj said it’d be great if I could direct the

project.”

*Rangamarthanda* is centred around thespian Raghava Rao(Prakash Raj), who retires from stage life and decides to lead a peaceful life. However, the turbulence within his family intensifies after he writes his property in the name of his son Ranga Rao(Adarsh Balakrishna).

According to Krishna Vamsi, the actor’s part preceded the quintessential familial aspects in the original. Here, he says, he did quite the opposite while adapting the film in Telugu. “For me it was not about who I was directing. I really wanted to present this idea of people not paying attention to family relationships anymore.”

Now that we spoke to the director after the film’s release, we could sense that the legendary director regained his lost artistic confidence. Although critics have been complaining about certain portions of the film, the audience reacted well. And for a filmmaker who’s been giving his all to reinvent himself in one way or the other, the encouragement from the audience is all he needs.

“I don’t know if I changed as director, but the process did change me on a personal level to an extent,” mused the ace filmmaker pondering over how the film brought about a change in him. “As a director, we must keep learning. I always feel I could do a lot better. That’s by default. As a person, the process taught me how to be patient. Maybe because of my experience or

age, I felt like maybe I should make this film. In this film, you will not find villains. It’s not about one person being moralistic over the other. It’s about everyone having their flaws. If you take me, for example, my interaction with my mother is minimal. Ramya(his wife and popular actress) keeps scolding me, ‘At least tell her where you’re going!’ (haha). These things have changed. I wouldn’t say completely, but to an extent they did.”

Whilst the director was speaking in awe of Brahmanandam’s performance in the film, *The Pioneer* asked him to describe that one incident where Prakash Raj prompted a line without moving lips while the legendary comedian was momentarily blank.

“Oh! This is the famous scene at Mahaprasthanam burial ground,” enthused Krishna Vamsi. “The sheer volume of dialogues he delivered in this film outbeats every other film that he had been a part of. He is someone who’s been making people laugh for over four decades and when he performs in front of the camera, soon after the first take, the entire crew cheers for him and laughs. For the first time in his life, Brahmanandam was scared that someone would laugh at him. Because if someone would laugh, that’d mean the performance isn’t working.”

He further continued: “He was worried that somebody would laugh given his image. In the midst of all these things, he missed out saying, ‘Neenu durmagudini ra’ I said cut and told him that it’s important to say that line out in the next take. And Prakash Raj looks at him in the suggestion. Just three or four seconds before the exact moment where Brahmanandam was supposed to say the line, he prompted the line without moving his lips and Brahmanandam was quick to catch up and finished the shot.”

With *Rangamarthanda* doing reasonably well, the director is hopeful that the positive word of mouth would pull in more audiences into the theatres. His next film is titled *Annam* and for the first time in many years he’s coming up with his original story. “I signed another two films and I will make the announcement soon,” wrapped the *Rangamarthanda* helmer.

## ‘Real gold & diamonds worth 14 crores were used in *Shaakuntalam*’; revealed director Gunasekhar

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Director Gunasekhar is expecting his next film *Shaakuntalam* to be an out and out iconic film. Diving deep into the pulp of history and still not failing to show romance is an all likelihood for the old-timer of Tollywood.

With a biggie like Samantha, he once again wishes to create a cult following, and at the same time transport us to a different time and place. Tracking his glory with this new film on board, we get to know what went into making this period piece with and how!

While on one hand, you get to experience a mythological love story, on the other hand, the filmmaker’s visual wonder will make you go bonkers.

The post production activities have been completed and the story which is based on Kalidasa’s one of the extracts — to your surprise it’s made with 3D technology. Even the promotions are going on very well, and in full swing. It is known that the famous fashion designer Neeta Lulla is the one who made the outfits for both the leading stars of the movie. Byte by byte we will reveal to you what kind of research was done to make this magnum opus!

For example the designer herself revealed, “The shoulder pad that was worn by the lead actor alone weighed 3 kilos and then we needed jewellery in the form of armour. We took about 8 months to do all of this. And standing out was the queen’s look! We took a 30 meter dress for Samantha’s look. But something different happened on the sets of *Shaakuntalam*. The lead actress was infact feeling very happy after wearing her heavy jewellery. You know what? It’s mostly the jewellery that is making the character very beautiful in the movie. It brought even more beauty to Samantha on screen. Level by level the making of jewellery was becoming an extensive process for us and even for the actress. Prior to three days, we used to bring the jewellery and ensure that Samantha does not have to be troubled for anything since she is in her recovery process.”

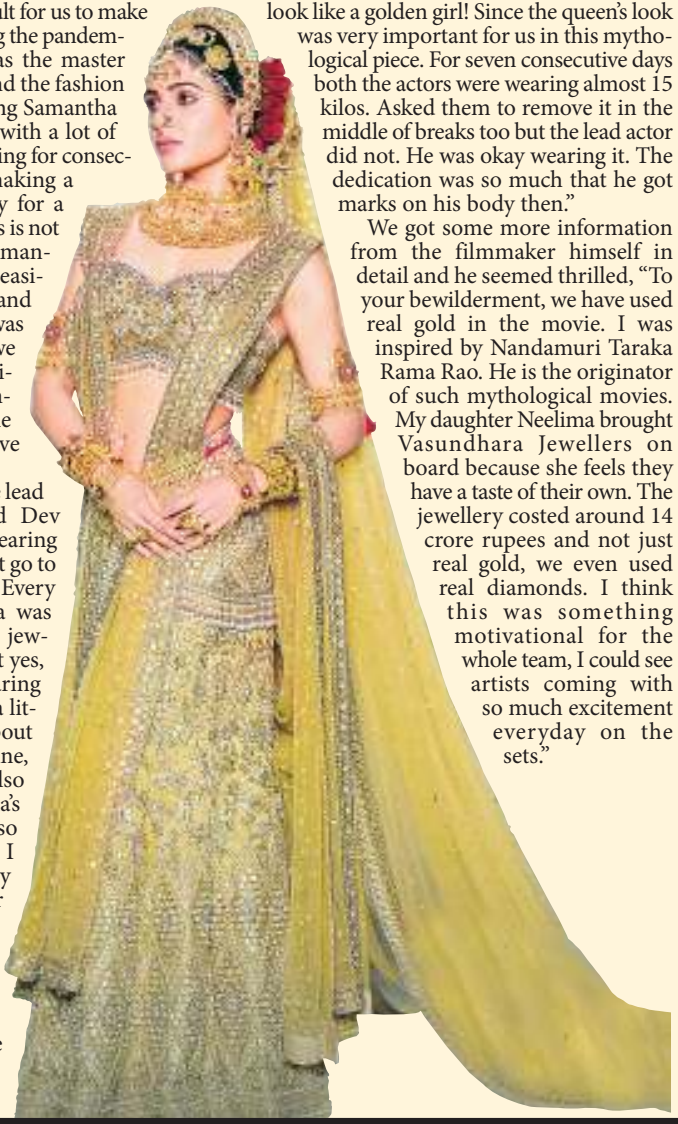
The jewellery that is made with the help of Vasundhara Jewellers team, had someone spe-

cial called Neha from there and she disclosed, “For the very first time, I was stunned to see our pieces fitting so well on the lead actor who is a male. Both the lead actors supported and cooperated with us a lot when it came to weightage. It was difficult for us to make them sit together during the pandemic but we did it. It was the master brain of the director and the fashion designer. I was watching Samantha wearing her jewellery with a lot of dedication, she was sitting for consecutive hours without making a scene. Doing jewellery for a period film or costumes is not an easy task. Machine manufacturing can still be easier but we were doing hand manufacturing which was very difficult because we never treated our business as something commercialised. This movie deserves to be a massive hit.”

It was the turn of the lead actor to butt in and Dev Mohan said, “After wearing this jewellery, I couldn’t go to the gym for a week. Every other day Neeta Lulla was coming with different jewellery to my home. But yes, whenever I was wearing some ornament I felt a little more confident about myself. More than mine, like most of us I was also waiting for shakuntala’s look and the vision is so beautiful to look at. I know how happy Samantha is. Whenever she was appearing on screen, I was forgetting to act. Wouldn’t lie, I was just staring at her. There are few scenes like that in the movie too.”

“Because we were making a film with the scope for fine jewellery we contacted Vasundhara Jewellers,” said producer Neelima Guna adding, “It took many sleepless nights for us to fulfill this dream. To make Samantha look like a golden girl! Since the queen’s look was very important for us in this mythological piece. For seven consecutive days both the actors were wearing almost 15 kilos. Asked them to remove it in the middle of breaks too but the lead actor did not. He was okay wearing it. The dedication was so much that he got marks on his body then.”

We got some more information from the filmmaker himself in detail and he seemed thrilled, “To your bewilderment, we have used real gold in the movie. I was inspired by Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. He is the originator of such mythological movies. My daughter Neelima brought Vasundhara Jewellers on board because she feels they have a taste of their own. The jewellery costed around 14 crore rupees and not just real gold, we even used real diamonds. I think this was something motivational for the whole team, I could see artists coming with so much excitement everyday on the sets.”



## Dr Naresh & Pavitra starrer Telugu-Kannada bilingual movie titled *Malli Pelli*

Navarasa Raya Dr. Naresh VK completes 50 golden years in the industry and the golden jubilee project was announced on Friday. Paired opposite Naresh in the movie is Pavitra Lokesh. The film is written and directed by mega maker MS Raju, while Naresh himself is producing it. Naresh revives the legendary production banner Vijaya Krishna Movies with this bilingual movie being made in Telugu and Kannada languages.

The film’s title, along with the first look and glimpse has been unveiled. *Malli Pelli* is the title of the movie billed to be a family entertainer. The first-look poster sees Naresh in traditional attire enjoying the process of Pavitra Lokesh making rangoli in front of their beautiful house.

The first-look poster is very pleasant and it assures the movie is going to be a complete family

entertainer. The glimpse is equally appealing as Naresh and Pavitra shared beautiful chemistry and the background score is captivating. The glimpse generates positive vibes.

Jayasudha and Sarathbabu play crucial roles in the movie which also features Vanitha Vijayakumar, Ananya Nagella, Roshan, Ravivarma, Annapoorna, Bhadram, Yukta, Praveen Yandamuri, and Madhoo.

Suresh Bobbili scores the music for the movie, while Arul Dev provides the background score. MN Bal Reddy handles the cinematography, where in Junaid Siddique is the editor of the movie. Ananta Sriram penned the lyrics and Bhaskar Mudavath is the production designer.

The makers have announced to release the movie this summer. Meanwhile, more details are awaited.



## Venky, Nithiin & Rashmika’s #VNR Trio officially launched



There is always a special interest in movies in successful combinations. The craze will be multiplied if the films which have a big backing. *#VNR Trio*-Venky Kudumula, Nithiin, and Rashmika Mandanna are set to join forces again to deliver something bigger than their previous movie *Bheeshma*. Furthermore, the movie will be produced by the leading production house Mythri Movie Makers on a large scale. The makers created a lot of curiosity with the announcement video which was funny, yet promised this movie is going to be more entertaining and more adventurous. The crazy project in this deadly combination has been launched grandly on Friday by none other than megastar Chiranjeevi gracing it as a chief guest.

Megastar Chiranjeevi sounded the clapboard for the

muhurtham shot, while director Bobby switched on the camera. Gopichand Malineni directed the first shot. Hanu Raghavapudi and Buchibabu Sana handed over the script to the makers. Naveen Yerneni and Y Ravi Shankar are the producers of the movie which will have a stellar cast in prominent roles and top-notch technicians taking care of different crafts. Nata Kireeti Rajendra Prasad and Vennela Kishore will be part of the movie.

GV Prakash Kumar scores the music, while Sai Sriram will crank the camera. Prawin Pudi is the editor and Raam Kumar is the art director. The other details of the movie will be revealed later.

Pawan Kalyan's #PKSDT to hit theaters on July 28, 2023

Powerstar Pawan Kalyan, who is currently busy shooting for numerous biggies and one of them is with the director Samuthirakani. Mega hero Sai Dharam Tej is also a part of the film. Tentatively titled *PKSDT*, the flick has made the headlines again. The makers of the movie have officially announced that the movie will be released in theaters on July 28, 2023. Scripted by Trivikram Srinivas, the movie has the soundtracks of Thaman. People Media Factory in association with Zee Studios produced this fictional comedy-drama on a massive scale. Keep browsing this page for more latest updates.

