

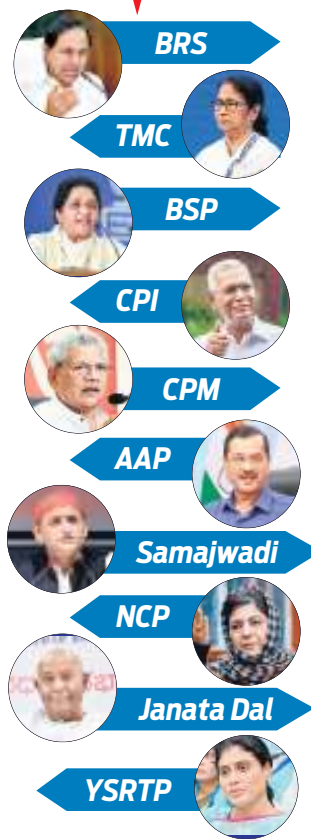
# sunday pioneer

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## Democracy is watching!

Parties that condemned Rahul's disqualification



Parties silent



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



P:5

Packing **PUNCH** for opposition



Dilse: 8&amp;9

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**'Unemployed March' should be held in front of PM Modi's house in Delhi and not in Telangana. During the 2014 elections, Modi said that he will provide 2 crore jobs per year; so, 18 crore jobs should have been given in these nine years. Monkey menace has increased in opposition parties of Telangana.**

- K. T. Rama Rao

Minister of IT of Telangana

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

■ 'Democracy has finished in this country'

■ Union ministers of 'lying' against me in Parliament

ified from Lok Sabha.

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

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

Gandhi has often targeted late

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

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

## AP-CID notice to Chintakayala Vijay

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Crime Investigation Department (AP-CID) has once again issued a notice to Chintakayala Vijay son of TDP senior leader Ch Ayyanna Patrudu. The notice was given in the case of posts against YS Bharati on social media.

It is mentioned in the notice that Vijay should appear before the agency on March 28. The CID officials went to Vijay's residence in Narsipatnam and handed over the notices.

Vijay was not at home when the CID officials went, and the officials gave the notices to his father Ayyanna Patrudu.

Earlier, a case was registered on October 1 last year with crime number 14/2022 and Vijay approached the court.

The court has suggested that notices should be issued for investigation not to take any stern action. Chintakayala Vijay has already attended the CID investigation in this case.

Vijay was accused of posting offensive posts against YS Bharati, wife of AP Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

These tweets were made from the ITDP Twitter account and the CID filed a case against Chintakayala Vijay for his alleged involvement.

**DON'T MISS...**

## Low prices worry mango farmers

Mango farmers in the State are facing financial difficulties due to the low prices of the fruit at the Nunna mango market located near Vijayawada, the biggest mango market in Asia. Despite exports of 100 to 150 tonnes of mangoes per day, mango farmers are not receiving remunerative prices for their crop. This year, the Banginapalli mango price registered a minimum of Rs 10,000 and a maximum of Rs 45,000 per tonne, which is much lower than the Rs 35,000 to Rs 1 lakh per tonne in the previous years...

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## 2,000 chickens killed in truck...

Over 2,000 chickens were killed when the mini-truck which was transporting them overturned in Giddalur town on Saturday. Police said that the chickens were being supplied to the chicken shops from Narasaraopet to Giddalur in the ill-fated mini-truck. Over 2,000 chickens perished in the accident. The mini-truck fell on a scooter that was parked on the roadside. However, no one was injured in the incident. The accident took place as the driver drove the mini-truck at high speed and recklessly, an eyewitness of the accident...

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**YSR AASARA**

## CM releases Rs 6,419 cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released Rs 6,419.89 crore, benefiting 78.94 lakh women under the third tranche of YSR Aasara besides laying foundation stones for several developmental activities virtually. Distribution of Aasara funds to the beneficiaries across the State will continue for 10 days.

Releasing the amount with the click of a button here on Saturday, the Chief Minister reiterated that the Government would continue to work for the education, social, economic and political empowerment of women.

He said the government has so far distributed Rs 19,178 crore to self-help groups of women as part of the promise made to them in Feb 2019 during his 'padayatra'. The YSR Aasara is being implemented to help the women stand on their own following his assurance to write off their bank loans that stood at Rs. 25,516 crore as on March 31, 2019. The government distributed Rs



12,758.28 crore in the first two tranches of YSR Aasara towards the repayment of the bank loans of women's self-help groups.

Observing that the government has so far spent Rs 2,25,000 crore toward the welfare of women in the

last 45 months through various welfare schemes like 'Ammam Vodi', 'YSR Aasara', 'Cheyuta', 'Kapu Nestam', 'EBC Nestam', 'Vidya Deevana' and 'Vasathi Deevana', he

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## Publicise Centre's welfare schemes: Murugan

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

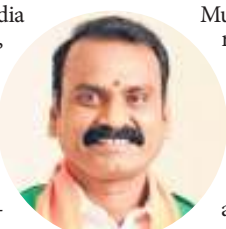
Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Dr. L. Murugan has directed officials of government media organisations to extend wide publicity to the Centre's welfare measures and reach out to the public through various genres of programmes on AIR, Doordarshan, and publicity campaigns of Central Bureau of Communication so that maximum benefit reaches the beneficiaries.

Dr. Murugan held a review of various government schemes and welfare initiatives and their implementation

with the officials of All India Radio, Doordarshan, Central Bureau of Communication, and Press Information Bureau, in Tirupati on Saturday.

He said the Union Government is implementing several welfare programmes for the benefit of people, especially the poor, which need to be highlighted with wide publicity so that more and more people utilise the measures.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr.

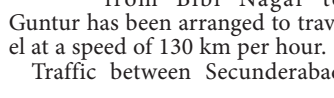
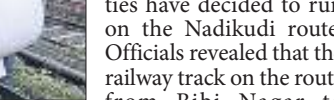
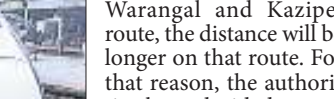
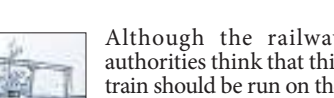
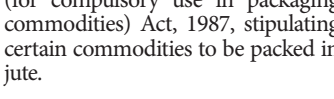
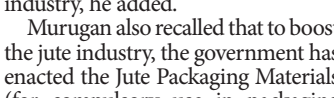
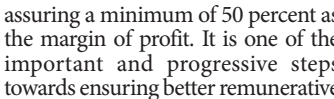


Murugan cited the Centre's recent decision to approve the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Raw Jute at Rs. 5050 per quintal for 2023-24 season, which ensured a return of 63.20 percent over the all-India weighted average cost of production.

The Union Minister said it is in line with the principle of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times all India's weighted average cost of production as announced by the Government in the Budget 2018-19,

assuring a minimum of 50 percent as the margin of profit. It is one of the important and progressive steps towards ensuring better remunerative returns to the jute growers and incentivizing quality jute fibre, as it would help four million farmers and 0.4 million workers associated with the jute industry, he added.

Murugan also recalled that to boost the jute industry, the government has enacted the Jute Packaging Materials (for compulsory use in packaging commodities) Act, 1987, stipulating certain commodities to be packed in jute.



**MLC POLLS**

## Jagan's overconfidence deals a blow to YSRCP

**MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM**  
■ VIJAYAWADA

The overconfidence and cavalier attitude of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy helped the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) win the lone MLA quota MLC seat, political experts say.

In fact, the possibility of winning an MLC seat was bleak to the TDP but it won comfortably. The YSRCP leaders challenged the TDP leaders of winning the seat and the TDP took the MLC election prestigiously, pooled all its resources, and won the seat.

The TDP won 23 MLA seats in the 2019 elections of which four have defected to the YSRCP reducing the strength to 19. TDP needed 22 seats to win one MLC seat in the MLA quota election.

The YSRCP had tasted a bitter experience in the Graduate constituency MLC election as the TDP had won three seats.

Before recovering from the shock, the YSRCP suffered another blow in the form of the MLA quota MLC election.

Like rubbing salt in the wound, TDP candidate Rajagopal Reddy secured a majority in Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's home constituency Pulivendula.

Sources said that Jagan Mohan Reddy solely depended on Prashant Kishore's team to select candidates.

The YSRCP leaders also told the media privately that they are being neglected by the party Chief.

Getting the appointment of Jagan Mohan Reddy has become difficult for the Ministers, MPs and MLAs. The Collectors and SP are not caring for the ministers and MLAs. The CMO is doing all. The YSRCP leaders are disappointed with the cavalier attitude of the party chief,

some YSRCP leaders said. Senior leaders like Anam Ramana Reddy could not endure such humiliations and they rebelled, a YSRCP leader felt.

A few weeks ago, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy no one in the State could challenge YSRCP and this reflects his arrogance and over-confidence. The Chief Minister also told the YSRCP MLAs and MPs why the YSRCP could not win all 175 MLA seats when it was implementing many welfare schemes.

The TDP leaders often use the Chief Minister's comment of "Why not 175" to ridicule the YSRCP's overconfidence and greed. Interestingly, at the same time, the YSRCP conducted mock polling for its MLAs one day before the MLA quota MLC election and the leaders could not imagine that four dissident MLAs would vote for the TDP candidate.

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**OBTUSE ANGLE**



## Sec'bad - Tirupati 'Vande Bharat' Exp from April 8

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'Vande Bharat' Express service from Secunderabad to Tirupati via Guntur would start on April 8. The officials are confident that once the service is commenced on this route, it will be very successful. If Vande Bharat runs on this route, the travel time between Secunderabad and Guntur is likely to be reduced and also the travel time from Guntur to Tirupati will be reduced.

It seems that the railway authorities have decided to run the



Secunderabad-Tirupati Vande Bharat train on the Bibi Nagar-Nadikudi route via Miryalaguda.

Guntur has been arranged to travel at a speed of 130 km per hour. Traffic between Secunderabad

and Tirupati is usually heavy and officials believe that if 'Vande Bharat' train is introduced on this route, it will be convenient for the passengers. It is said that this will increase the popularity of 'Vande Bharat' train. Recently Union Minister Kishan Reddy also said that 'Vande Bharat' train is likely to commence between Secunderabad and Tirupati. As soon as the green signal is received from the Railway Board, the officials have made all arrangements to run the Vande Bharat train.

It seems that the track has been developed so that the train can travel at a speed of 130 to 150 km per hour on this route. It is informed that Vande Bharat train ticket price starts from Rs 1150 on this route. Narayanadri Express is running on this route between Secunderabad and Tirupati. The journey time of this train is 12 hours. However, officials say that if the Vande Bharat train becomes available, it can go to Tirupati in 6 to 7 hours. However, it is not clear at which stations this train will stop.



# No addl burden on power consumers: APERC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In good news to the customers, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has ensured that there shall be no electricity burden on the consumers. For the year 2023-24 electricity tariff has been announced by Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) Chairman Justice CV Nageswara Reddy in a statement on Saturday. He further made it clear that for the year 2023-24, there shall be no burden on the consumers.

The Commission, for the first time, assessed the demand and availabilities of generation Time of Day (ToD) wise to realistically arrive at the shortages and surplus scenario of power during FY 2023-24 since consideration of the availability of gener-

The subsidy covers nine hours of free power supply to eligible farmers, the concessions extended to various classes of consumers like SC, ST, MBC, and aqua farmers, and uniform tariffs for domestic consumers.

ation at normative value is not reflecting the reality with respect to market purchases by the DISCOMS. The Commission is strictly implementing Regulation 1 of 2022 in controlling the short-term power purchases being made by DISCOMS.

The Commission agreed to bridge the total revenue gap determined by the APERC of Rs 10135.22 crore for FY 2023-24 as a subsidy under Section 65 of the Electricity Act, 2003. Exempted kVAH billing to

power looms consumers and flour mills up to 10 HP based on the mass representations on this issue and practical difficulties being faced by them. The option to exercise off-season has been changed to two times a year from once a year.

The subsidy covers nine hours of free power supply to eligible farmers, the concessions extended to various classes of consumers like SC, ST, MBC, and aqua farmers, and uniform tariffs for domestic consumers.

The tariffs for the energy-intensive industries are much lower than the Average Cost of Supply of DISCOMS, the DISCOMS have proposed tariff hikes for industries for Demand Charges to Energy Intensive Industry on par with HT Industry General i.e., Rs 475 per KVA per month as against NIL demand charges now. The ToD Charges to the Energy Intensive category are on par with HT Industry General. The Guaranteed Consumption @ 85% Load Factor, a fresh condition.

Regarding ensuring the nine hours supply to agricultural consumers, the DISCOMS are directed to place the reports or minutes of the District Committees ( to review the quality of power supply and consumer satisfaction)

# ‘Startups in AP rise by 65% in 2 years’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has witnessed a 65% rise in the registration of startups in the last two years from 231 in 2020 to 382 numbers in 2022. At the national level, the number of entities recognised as startups by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) went up from 14,498 in 2020 to 26,542 in 2022. Minister of State for Commerce & Industry Som Parkash provided this information in Rajya Sabha to a question raised by MP Parimal Nathwani on Friday.

According to the data provided, the number of entities recognised as startups by DPIIT in the State of Andhra Pradesh was 231 in 2020, 296 in 2021, and 382 in 2022, while 110 entities from AP have been recognised as startups upto 28 February in 2023 – thus taking the total number of entities recognised as startups to 1,019.

Since the launch of the



Startup India initiative in 2016, DPIIT has recognised 92,683 entities as startups as on February 28, 2023. Specifically, in the last three years (2020, 2021, and 2022) and the current year (as on February 28, 2023), 67,223 entities have been recognised as startups by the DPIIT, according to the

statement of the minister. Sector-wise, the highest number of 7,587 startups have been registered in IT Services followed by Healthcare and Lifesciences with 6,459, and Education with 4,164 startups registration, during the period under review. Nathwani requested infor-

mation about the number of Start-ups registered in the country in the last three years and the current year, the number of Start-ups that have turned unicorns during the same period, and the steps taken/being taken by the Government to promote Start-up culture in the country.

Under the Startup India initiative, the Government constantly undertakes various efforts for the development and growth of the startup ecosystem in the country, as per the statement. It also added that the flagship Schemes namely, Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS), and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS) support startups at various stages of their business cycle to enable startups to graduate to a level where they are able to raise investments from angel investors or venture capitalists or seek loans from commercial banks or financial institutions.

## VMC bags Skoch Silver award

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) bagged the Skoch Silver award. City Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi, and Additional Commissioner (Projects) KV Satyavathi received the award on Saturday from Skotch Chairman Sameer Kotcher. On this occasion, Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar congratulated all the staff and thanked the citizens who voted.

## Jagan Mohan Reddy's overconfidence deals a blow to YSRCP

Continued from page 1

The YSRCP hoped that except for Anam and Kotamreddy, no YSRCP MLA would vote for the TDP candidate. Now the TDP candidate P Anuradha won the election.

Jagan Mohan Reddy took the advice of the PK team, YV Subba Reddy, Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, and Prabhakar Reddy. The CM did not take the advice of the Minister and other senior leaders in formulating a strategy for the MLC election, a YSRCP leader admitted.

“Now we have lost four MLC seats and who should be blamed for this, the PK team? or Jagan Mohan Reddy?” a senior YSRCP leader questioned.

The YSRCP senior leaders expressed fear that some more MLAs might revolt against the leadership in the coming days.

They also expressed concern at the news that 16 YSRCP disident MLAs are in touch with Chandrababu Naidu.

At least now, Jagan Mohan Reddy should mend his ways and style of functioning by interacting with the MLAs and MPs while taking major decisions, a YSRCP leader said.

# CM directs DC to take steps to help the sick

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has shown his compassion towards the ill and suffering families by instantly instructing the District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh to take steps and provide help.

During his visit here on Saturday to disburse the funds under the YSR Aasara scheme, B Ganapati native of Denduluru informed the Chief Minister that his son B Kranti Prasad (31) was suffering from a brain tumour and had spent around Rs 15 lakh for performing two major surgeries. Considering his plea, the Chief Minister has assured of providing all necessary medical support for Ranjit. Following the Chief Minister's directions, the Collector has sanctioned Rs 1 lakh for medical treatment. In another instance, P Krupa Rao (39), Ratnalakunta Village informed the Chief Minister around Rs 5-6 lakh was required for his kidney treatment.

Similarly, Y Mosheraju



from Denduluru and Kosana Arjun from Kaikaram village of Unguturu mandal are suffering from kidney disease and requested the Chief Minister to provide the necessary support. Responding to their plea, the Chief Minister informed that steps will be taken for transplantation operations for the victims through Arogyasri network hospitals if donors are available. Financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh was immediately distributed to Moshe Raju, Krupa Rao and K Arjun by the Collector. K Sudha Rani. of Goparaju Padu sought financial assistance from the

Chief Minister for her daughter K Dedeepya's liver treatment. Her husband Durga Rao was a daily wage and was not in a position to provide better treatment.

Following the Chief Minister's instructions the Collector has provided financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh to Sudha. In another instance, P Revathi from G Kothapalli sought financial assistance for her daughter P Venkata Lakshmi (5) suffering from permanent hearing loss. So far, Rs 1.5 lakh was spent on her treatment and it costs Rs 22 lakh for cochlear implantation.

The Chief Minister, assured necessary support for the five-year-old girl's treatment and directed the Collector to provide immediate financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh for Revathi. K Priscilla from Denduluru told the Chief Minister that his daughter was suffering from Malformation. The Chief Minister assured of providing better treatment for her and directed the Collector to provide Rs 1 lakh financial assistance.

In another instance, E Prasad from Denduluru informed the Chief Minister that he was suffering from respiratory problems and sought a monthly pension for him. Considering his plea, the Chief Minister directed the Collector to provide financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh financial assistance and evolve steps for providing a monthly pension for him.

J Hemalatha from Kovali told the Chief Minister that her 10-month-old daughter Bhavya Sri Malika was suffering from heart-related ailments and she underwent surgery at Padmavathi hospital.

# Gandhis won't apologise, will go to jail...

Continued from page 1

At the presser, he said that he had made appeals that he be allowed to speak in Parliament but was not given permission.

"Wrote to the Speaker twice, then went to him personally and said 'you are the protector of democracy, allow me to speak', he smiles and says 'I can't do it'. If you cannot do it, who can do it, I may have to go to Modi ji then but he will not allow me to speak," Gandhi said.

He said he would continue to ask questions on the Adani issue, adding the moot questions remain that who invested Rs 20,000 crore in Adani shell firms and what is the businessman's relationship with the prime minister. He vowed he will keep raising these questions.

Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday, a day after a court in Gujarat's Surat convicted him in a 2019 defamation case. The disqualification will bar Gandhi (52), a four-time MP, from contesting polls

for eight years unless a higher court stays his conviction.

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

He also said that the BJP was trying to divert the issue by alleging that he had insulted OBCs and he would continue to ask what is Modi's relationship with businessman Gautam Adani.

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

"Disqualify me for life, put me inside jail, I will keep going. I will not

stop," he said, noting that it makes no difference to him.

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

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

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

He said when somebody is guilty of something, they want to distract everybody's attention. "If you catch a thief, the first thing he says is 'I did-

n't do it', the second thing he says is 'look there, look there...' That is what the BJP is doing."

Asking where the money into Adani group has come as Adani does not generate this type of money and that money has come from someone," he said all this drama - OBC, disqualification, anti-national, is being orchestrated to distract from the panic that prime minister is feeling that his relationship with Adani is going to be exposed.

"That relationship is going to be exposed. Nobody is going to stop that. It is going to happen, because the opposition is going to find that answer," he said.

Asked if he was hopeful that his membership would be restored, Gandhi said, "I am not interested in hope. (Whether) I get my membership back or not, I will do my job. Even if they permanently disqualify me I will do my job, if they reinstate me, I will do my job. It does not matter to me whether I am in Parliament or outside it.

## AP districts receive TB-free status awards

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

For the efforts being put in by the Medical and Health department officials of Andhra Pradesh in achieving TB-free status, many districts in the State received awards at the national level. From Andhra Pradesh, Eluru district was awarded 'Gold'. Visakhapatnam and Konaseema districts won silver awards. Srikakulam, Anakapalli, Kakinada, West Godavari and Guntur won Bronze awards.

The awards were presented in Varanasi at a function marking World TB Day which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and various international dignitaries. On the occasion, the Prime Minister launched newer initiatives to accelerate the progress towards TB-free India

The states and districts were awarded for their efforts in achieving TB-free sStatus. A Sub National Certification (SNC) assessment was carried out throughout the country to assess the efforts in achieving TB-free status. The states and districts were award-



ed Bronze, Silver, Gold, and TB-free awards depending upon their progress.

Out of 337 districts assessed, 18 were awarded gold, 28 silver, and 65 bronze awards. From Andhra Pradesh, Eluru district was awarded 'Gold'. Visakhapatnam and Konaseema districts won silver awards. Srikakulam, Anakapalli, Kakinada, West Godavari and Guntur won bronze awards.

These awards reflect the performance of the districts in reducing TB incidence over the period from 2015 to 2022. The SNC was carried out

through three different methods in a rigorous assessment under the supervision of the Central Tuberculosis Division and the National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis, Chennai. A community survey was carried out throughout the State in the months of December 2022 and January 2023.

In Andhra Pradesh, 92,177 TB cases were newly diagnosed in 2022. Currently, there are 19987 cases under treatment. All efforts are being made to test the suspects and provide regular treatment to the diseased individuals

## CM releases Rs 6,419 cr...

Continued from page 1

said that 9,86,616 women have so far been able to launch their own business units like provision stores, poultry farms, food processing units, vegetables shops, cloth stores and dairy farms with the financial assistance provided under the YSR Aasara.

While the Government has entered into MoUs with corporate companies like L&T, Reliance, PG, ITC, Amul, and Mahindra to guide the self-help groups of women in turning entrepreneurs, it has also made the banks reduce the interest rate to 7 to 9 per cent from the 13 per cent, he said, adding it is negotiating with the banks to reduce it further.

Calling the Government women-centric, the Chief Minister said that while the zero-interest scheme was dissolved by TDP rule, the present

Government had to pay Rs 3615 crore for reviving it. After YSRCP came to power, banks advanced Rs 3036 crore as zero-interest loans to the self-groups afresh.

He said that the Government's efforts to strive for the economic empowerment of women are yielding expected results as the loan recovery from self-help groups has reached 99.55 per cent now. Women in the State have become role-model for the women's groups in other states and other state Governments are observing the systems being adopted here.

Ours is the only Government in the country that enacted an Act to allow 50 per cent of the nominated posts to women in trust boards of temples, Corporations and ZPTCs, he observed, saying the Government is paying utmost priority for the safety of women.

## RISE IN COVID CASES

# Nationwide drill to take stock of hospital preparedness

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

The exact details of the mock drill shall be communicated to the states in the virtual meeting scheduled on March 27, the advisory stated.

The joint advisory highlighted that

in the past several weeks, COVID-19 testing has declined in some states and the current testing levels are insufficient as compared to the standards prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO), i.e 140 tests per million. Testing at the levels of districts and blocks also varies, with some states heavily relying on the less sensitive rapid antigen tests.

"Hence it is critical to maintain optimum testing for COVID-19, equitably distributed (with suitable modifications to address emergence of new cluster of Covid cases) across the states. This is especially important to identify any emerging hotspots and take pre-emptive steps to curb virus transmission," it stated. The joint advisory is in continuation of the Union Health Ministry's earlier communications dated March 10 and 16 on the issue of



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

The advisory signed by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and

Director General of ICMR Dr Rajiv Bahl stated that a gradual but sustained increase in trajectory of COVID-19 cases in the country is being witnessed since mid-February.

As on date, most of the active

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

"While the rates of hospitalization and death due to the disease remain low, largely because of the significant coverage achieved in terms of COVID-19 vaccination rates by all states and UTS, this gradual rise in cases needs reinvigorated public health actions to contain the surge," the advisory said.

The states and UTs have been asked to keep a close watch on the evolving etiologies (causes of diseases) of Influenza Like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) cases, adding India usually sees a seasonal rise in Influenza cases from January to March and again from

August to October.

Currently, the most prominent subtypes of Influenza in circulation in the country seem to be Influenza A (H1N1) and Influenza A (H3N2).

"As you may be aware, COVID-19 and Influenza share a number of similarities in terms of mode of transmission, high risk population, clinical signs and symptoms.

"While this may present a clinical dilemma for the attending doctors in terms of diagnosis, this also renders both these diseases easily preventable by following simple public health measures like avoiding overcrowded and poorly ventilated settings, using handkerchief/tissue while sneezing or coughing, wearing a mask in crowded and closed settings, maintaining hand hygiene, avoiding spitting in public places, etc," the advisory mentioned.



# YSRCP govt committed to empowering women: Dy CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Remaining committed to the empowerment of women, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is implementing welfare schemes irrespective of caste, religion, and politics in the State, said Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Excise and Prohibition M Narayana Swamy.

He presented a Rs 276.79 crore specimen cheque to women at a function held at the NTR District Collectorate in Vijayawada on Saturday.

Deputy CM Narayana Swamy attended the function that marked the distribution of the third tranche of the YSR Aasara financial assistance to the Self Help Group (SHG) members from Vijayawada collectorate on Saturday.

After completion of the programme, Deputy Chief Minister Narayana Swamy presented a Rs 276.79 crore specimen cheque to the women along with Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu, West MLA Velampalli Srinivas, NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao, and others. As many as 3,21,178 lakh SHG members would benefit under the third phase



of the YSR Aasara scheme.

Speaking on the occasion, Narayana Swamy said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is committed to his election promises and proved this after assuming the post. To empower women and overcome financial problems, his government is releasing YSR Aasara funds for the past three years, he said.

He said the State government has reached MoUs with L & T, Reliance, ITC, Amul, Adani, Mahendra and other multinational companies to provide job opportunities to women. Loans are given to start shops through banks to strengthen SHG women financially, he added.

Though the financial situation of the State is not healthy,

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released Rs 19,178 crore in financial assistance to 78.94 lakh women, he said. These funds would be credited into women's bank accounts up to April 5, he added.

Andhra Pradesh Gowda Corporation Chairman M Sivaramakrishna, Kapu Corporation Chairman Adapa Seshagiri, Viswabrahmin Corporation Chairman T Srikanth, APIDC Chairperson Bandi Punyaseela, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Deputy Mayors Avuthu Sri Sailaja, Bellam Durga, Zilla Grandhalaya Samstha Chairperson Jamala Purnamma, DRDA PD Srinivasa Rao and others were present.

## 31,336 women benefit in Krishna

In the Krishna district, 31,336 SHG women members benefited to the tune of Rs 297.04 crore under the third phase of the YSR Aasara scheme. Krishna District Collector P Ranjith Basha presented a specimen cheque to the women in a programme that was held at the ZP Convention hall in Machilipatnam.

Machilipatnam Mayor Moka Venkateswaramma, Deputy Mayors Lanka Suribabu, Tantipudi Thomas Noble, MUDA Chairperson BN Durga Bhavani, Joint Collector Aparajitha Singh, DRO M Venkateswarlu, DRDA PD P Sivaram Prasad, DIC GM Venkata Rao, and others were present.

# Low prices worry mango farmers

DASARI SRINIVASA RAO  
■ VIJAYAWADA

Mango farmers in the State are facing financial difficulties due to the low prices of the fruit at the Nunna mango market located near Vijayawada, the biggest mango market in Asia. Despite exports of 100 to 150 tonnes of mangoes per day, mango farmers are not receiving remunerative prices for their crop. This year, the Banginapalli mango price registered a minimum of Rs 10,000 and a maximum of Rs 45,000 per tonne, which is much lower than the Rs 35,000 to Rs 1 lakh per tonne in the previous years.

The king of mangoes, the Banginapalli variety, comes from NTR, Krishna, and West Godavari districts in the State and Khammam district in Telangana state. Mango prices during the start of the season would usually be Rs 75,000 to Rs 1 lakh per tonne based on the size of the fruit. However, this year at the start of the season, the Banginapalli variety mangoes were sold at Rs 75,000 per tonne in the Nunna mango market, Mylavaram, Tiruvuru, and Nuzvid areas in the NTR and Krishna districts respectively.

Despite this, mango prices have fallen over the past three days at the Nunna mango market. Banginapalli mango prices registered a minimum of Rs 10,000 and a maximum of



Rs 45,000 per tonne. Mango farmers are concerned over the poor mango prices even at the start of the season.

Around 150 tonnes of mangoes arrived at the Nunna mango market on Friday night from NTR and Krishna districts in the State besides Khammam in Telangana. Buyers from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and other states have arrived at the mango market to purchase and export mangoes to their states. However, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh buyers are expected to come within two or three days.

Mango farmers said that such low prices were not witnessed in earlier seasons. If the

mango price per tonne does not touch Rs 35,000 mark, farmers may have to face severe financial troubles.

According to a mango farmer hailing from Chandrala village of Mylavaram mandal in the NTR district, after paying the tractor transport charges and harvesting charges besides deducting trader commission, they will only get Rs 10,000.

Mango traders and buyers are being accused of colluding and dropping the prices of mangoes at the market. Marketing Department officials have not taken any actions to prevent this type of culture, according to the farmers. However, four years ago,

Marketing Department officials fixed the mango prices by comparing the prices in other markets such as Delhi, Hyderabad and other areas in the country.

Unseasonal rains across the country are also contributing to the poor mango prices, according to Nunna Mango Growers Association president Shaik Dariya Hussain.

Due to the rains, mangoes lost their quality and some of them were affected by 'Mangu' pest, causing the prices to plummet. If the remaining buyers from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh come to the market, and the quality of mangoes rises, the prices would also go up, he added.



## 9 Nunna ZPHS students bag NMMS ranks

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Class 8 students of the Zilla Parishad High School, Nunna, excelled in the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS) - 2023 examination which was held in February this year. Nine students have been selected for the NMMS scholarship for four years.

Pallapothu Rajesh scored 140 marks out of a total of 180 marks and got the first rank in NTR district.

Interestingly, Panakala Bhavya Sri scored 130 marks and Katuru Karunya scored 128 marks and these two students also stood in the second and third ranks in

the NTR district respectively.

The other students Thota Sri Sai Geethika, Bezawada Varun Teja, Gajla Sandhya, G Pranathi, B Blessy and Kasaravalli Harika were also selected for the NMMS scholarships.

School headmaster Vazrala Bhuapal Reddy appreciated the students at a function held on Saturday.

He further said that all nine students would get a scholarship of Rs 12,000 per year for four years from the Central government. The State government would credit the amounts to their bank accounts every year, he added.

## Kakatiya sculptures found in Durgi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Beautiful but broken sculptures of the Kakatiya period were unearthed at Durgi, a mandal headquarters in Palnadu district on Saturday while digging for the foundations in Sivalayam say Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, archaeologist, and CEO, of Pleach India Foundation.

The sculptures of Mahishamardhini, Brahma

Chennakesava, Chamundi, and Saraswati belonging to Kakatiya Ganapatideva's time based on the style of art and also the ancient inscription of Ganapatideva found in one of the temples of the town.

Dr Sivanagi Reddy appealed to the villagers and concerned authorities to erect them on pedestals with labels of historical details in the same temple and preserve them for posterity.



## PCCM of ECoR inspects 'Vande Bharat' Express

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



In order to check on-board amenities and to check catering services in Visakhapatnam - Secunderabad VandeBharat express, B.Nagya, Principal Chief Commercial Manager (PCCM) of East Coast Railway conducted a surprise inspection today.

Shri Nagya travelled in the VandeBharat express and inspected all the facilities avail-

able on the train.

He interacted with the passengers to take feedback on the services available in the train. He took feedback on catering services as well as on cleanliness.

Further, PCCM, East Coast Railway interacted with the on-board railway staff, house-keeping staff, and the loco pilots.

He also checked the punctuality of the train during his surprise inspection.



**GURUKUL ADMISSIONS**

## Last date extended

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Social Welfare Minister Merugu Nagarjuna said that the last date for admission to the 5th class and inter-first year in Dr. BR Ambedkar Social Welfare Gurukula Vidyalayas has been extended till March 31 for the academic year 2023-24. He explained that the notification deadline for the 5th class and inter-first year admissions in 189 SC Gurukuls across the State expired on March 24, but it has been extended to March 31.

Minister Nagarjuna said that applications for these admissions should be submitted online. He said that students currently studying in Class 4 are eligible for admission to Class 5 and students studying in Class 10 are eligible for Inter first-year admissions. Minister Nagarjuna asked the students seeking admission to Class 5 to submit their applications on the website <https://apggpcet.apcfss.in> and the students seeking admission to Inter through the website <https://apggpcet.apcfss.in/Inter>.

## AP Open Tennis Prize Money tourney today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Star Tennis Academy, Vijayawada and Global Sports Foundation will jointly organise Andhra Pradesh Open Tennis Prize Money Tournament at the Star Tennis Academy at Nidamanuru near Vijayawada on March 26.

In a press release here on Saturday, Star Tennis Academy director K Gopal said that competitions would be conducted for Under-12, 14, and 16 categories boys and girls.

Interested players should report at the academy at 8 am on March 26 (Sunday), he said.

## Sub-collector's stress on quality edu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR district Sub-collector Aditi Singh has said that apart from studying at the nursery school with a good plan, an educational institution with quality standards should be chosen. Addressing the gathering at the Edu-Conclave 2023, University fair and panel discussion on the topic 'Students future' organised by Bloomingdale International School on Saturday, the sub-collector said that many changes are introduced in the education system and according to them students should be encouraged and imparted quality education.

The programme was attended by dignitaries from the International Baccalaureate, schools, universities, govern-



ment, etc. The Chairman of the school, Vijayababu Atluri, formally launched the school's recently accredited Diploma Programme for Grades 11 and 12.

The keynote address for the colloquy was delivered by

Stefanie Leong, IB Regional Development Head Asia Pacific region and stalwarts like Rajesh Vasudevan and Vinayak Sudhakar were among the esteemed panel lists who provided valuable insights to the presentation which was made by the young students of

Grades 9 and 10.

The school warmly welcomed over 30 national and international universities that were represented at the fair. Members from the universities interacted with over 300 students from different schools and colleges.

# Democracy under threat in country: APCC chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president and former MLC Gidugu Rudra Raju has lambasted the BJP for the unfair disqualification of the Congress Party Parliament Member Rahul Gandhi. He stated that democracy is being imperilled in the country.

APCC President Rudra Raju addressed a press conference at the Andhra Ratna Bhavan in Vijayawada on Saturday.

Rudra Raju accused the BJP-led NDA government of

indulging in vendetta politics. He faulted the Central government for the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi in the Parliament. He pointed out that the case was being dragged into a Surat court and the complainant, a BJP legislator, had gone to the High Court and got a stay on his petition and then withdrew it.

Further, he stated that the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi was unfair and alleged that it was done at the behest of the BJP as Rahul Gandhi was persistently exposing the BJP's crony capitalism. He said that the Gandhi



family, which lost Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, is a family of

sacrifices and that the Gandhi family cannot be intimidated by

the BJP's undemocratic actions. He added that even though some BJP legislators in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka were convicted, they have not been disqualified.

Meanwhile, he condemned the misuse of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and other central agencies by the BJP to target opposition parties. People are silently observing the authoritarian streak of the BJP and will give a befitting reply, he said. Under the directions of the AICC leadership, the Andhra Pradesh

Congress would join hands with people and organise solidarity marches across the state, he explained.

He welcomed the solidarity statements shared by the opposition party's leaders and said that the need of the hour is opposition unity to safeguard democracy in India.

APCC working president Sunkara Padmasree, Vijayawada City president N Narasimha Rao, AICC leaders K Sivaji, M Rajeswara Rao, party leaders Lam Tantiya Kumari, and others attended the press conference.

## 'Jagan destroyed transport sector'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh has alleged that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has completely destroyed the transport sector that plays a crucial role in the economic development of the State.

Representatives of the Heavy Vehicles Drivers and Cleaners Association of Telugu States met Lokesh during the ongoing pada yatra on Saturday and narrated their problems. The representatives wanted the provident fund (PF) facility to be introduced to all the drivers and cleaners.

Lokesh promised to bring down the fuel prices immediately after the TDP is back in power and separate welfare schemes besides insurance facilities will be introduced for drivers and cleaners. He promised to take all possible measures for promoting the

transport sector.

At Gajukuntapalli, farmers met Lokesh and submitted a memorandum on the problems they are facing, including an appeal to revive the zero-interest loan facility and input subsidy.

Responding to their appeal, Lokesh said that the agriculture sector got totally destroyed after Jagan became Chief Minister and even the

Minimum Support Price is not being paid for farm products. He assured the farmers that all the schemes will be revived.

The petty traders complained about heavy power charges and Lokesh promised them to take necessary action immediately after the TDP is back. Girijans also narrated their woes to Lokesh to which he said that the TDP will certainly work for their welfare.





# Don't collect fees from Aarogyasri patients: Dilli Rao

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao convened a District Disciplinary Committee meeting on the implementation of Dr YSR Arogyasri Health Care Trust scheme in the district at his chambers on the premises of the collectorate in Vijayawada on Saturday. He reviewed the services rendered so far to the beneficiaries with the district coordinator Dr J Suman and District Medical & Health Officer (DM & Ho) Dr M Suhasini.

Speaking on the occasion, Dilli Rao said that the government is aiming for free health services on par with corporate hospitals for poor people in the district. He made it clear that



stringent action would be taken against private hospital management who are collecting fees from poor people taking treatment under this Arogyasri scheme.

He said several complaints have come that some of the private hospital managements are collecting fees from Arogyasri beneficiaries. The State govern-

ment is implementing the scheme to reduce the financial burdens regarding health treatment in private hospitals, he said.

He directed the officials concerned and the Disciplinary Committee members to prevent fee collection from patients. Also, the committee should monitor private hospi-

tals on the implementation of the scheme, he added. If any complaints arise, the officials should conduct an inquiry and submit a report immediately to him, he said.

Regarding complaints against the Amaravati Hospital in Tiruvuru, Smile Hospital and Vamsi Heart Care Hospitals in Vijayawada, the Collector directed the Dr YSR Arogyasri Health Care Trust district coordinator to conduct an inquiry and submit a report as early as possible. If allegations are proved, the government would take action against these hospitals, he added.

DCH Dr Swapna and Dr G Samaram attended the meeting.

# Govt committed to empowering women

PNS ■ NELLORE

Minister for Agriculture Kakani Govardhan Reddy reiterated that the government is committed to empowering women financially and their welfare. The minister participated in a programme organised here on Saturday on the occasion of releasing of benefits under the YSR Asara scheme by Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Speaking on the occasion Kakani Govardhan Reddy said that under the YSR Asara third tranche, Rs 290.17 crore was disbursed to 3,29,815 women of 34,443 groups in the Nellore district. He said that Rs 250.23 was disbursed under the YSR Asara scheme in the first tranche and Rs 285.18 crore was disbursed in the second tranche in the district to the women.

The minister said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy credited Rs 6,419.89 crore to the accounts of 78.94



lakh women in the state under the third tranche of the YSR Asara scheme today while participating in a programme held at Denduluru in Eluru district.

The government is committed to the welfare of women and making them financially self-reliant by implementing various welfare schemes for them, he added. Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy knew the problems of women during his padayatra and decided to empower them financially. Minister Govardhan Reddy

said that whatever scheme was introduced, the scheme is being implemented in the name of women, and benefits are credited into the accounts of women. The Minister highlighted that along with Ammavodi, Vidya Deevana, Vasatideevana, Asara, and Cheyuta schemes are also being granted in the name of women. He said that the government is encouraging the consumption of millet in the state.

JP chairperson Anam Arunamma appreciated the

Chief Minister for his commitment to the welfare of women. She exhorted the women to utilize the benefits of welfare schemes for their financial uplift. MLC Chandrasekhar Reddy also spoke.

The minister released pamphlets and sticks featuring the message of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy on the occasion. The minister also displayed a replica of a check. Joint Collector Ronanki Kurmanath, ITDA PO Manda Rani, and other officials were present.



# Donate blood, DC tells people

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi has appealed to the people to come forward to donate blood which saves the lives of many people.

The Collector inaugurated a blood donation camp organised by the India Red cross society, the district Agriculture department, and the agriculture officer's association here on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion the Collector welcomed organising a blood donation camp and donating blood by farmers and others. She said that since human blood can-

not be manufactured, there is no other alternative but blood donation.

The Collector said that every year there is a shortage of 80 lakh units of blood in the country and more than 10 lakh units in the state. She said that one's blood donation can be divided into three parts of plasma, red blood cells, and platelets, and save the lives of three people in danger.

Prashanthi maintained that blood is essential when people are injured in road accidents, undergoing surgeries, and during childbirth. She asserted that blood is needed for hemophilia, thalassemia, anemic,

and cancer patients.

The District Collector said that by donating blood, stay in society as life donors and be an inspiration to others. The Collector said that 300 people donated blood today which saved the lives of 900 people.

District Agriculture Officer Z Venkateswara Rao, RDO Dasi Raju, DMHO Dr B Maheswara Rao, Tehsildar Y Ravi Kumar, IRCS Chairman Dr. YV Siva Rama Bhadriraju and Association of Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Department Officers were present in this programme.

# 314 new products from TTD Ayurveda Pharmacy

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

An exercise is underway to manufacture 314 new medicines from TTD Ayurveda Pharmacy in Narasingapuram soon, said TTD JEO (H&E) Sada Bhargavi. Along with the officials, the JEO inspected the expansion works of the Ayurvedic Pharmacy at Narasingapuram on Saturday evening.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that in the first phase, a new shed will be opened on March 31, which will be equipped with advanced machines to manufacture 10 types of medicines.

She said the management has decided to manufacture additional 314 types of medicines to provide modern medicine to the patients. According to this, the pharmacy is being developed with Rs 5 crores, she said. She said that 30 types of medicines are currently being produced in the pharmacy. Recently, 314 drug formulas have received certification from AYUSH.

The JEO said that apart from providing medicines manufactured in SV Ayurveda



Pharmacy to patients in TTD Ayurveda Hospital, the Ministry of AYUSH has given permission to the government to pay 50 percent of the production cost of the medicines.

Earlier, the JEO inspected the installation of new machines and the sheds constructed in the premises of the pharmacy. Various instructions were given to the officials by JEO regarding the raw materials required for the 10 types of products to be

launched on 31st, as well the engineering department regarding arches, sign boards, catalog etc.

Chief Engineer Nageswara Rao, SEs Satyanarayana, Venkateswarlu, Ayurveda College Principal Dr Muralikrishna, Ayurveda Hospital Superintendent Dr Renu Dixit, Pharmacy Technical Officer Dr Narappareddy, EE Murali Krishna, DE Electrical Saraswathi participated.



# Poverty not a hurdle for pursuing edu, students told

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar has asked students not to feel that poverty is a hurdle for pursuing education and exhorted them to utilize the government schemes.

The Collector participated in the 'Coffee with Collector' programme here on Saturday. As many as 20 students of four social welfare hostels, who are studying 9 th class, participated in the programme. The Collector exhorted the students to set goals for themselves at the student stage itself and strive hard to achieve them. The Collector knew the family background of the students and their habits.

"Do not feel that poverty is an obstacle to pursuing education. You must have a clear

understanding of the changes taking place in society," the Collector told the students.

Collector Dinesh Kumar asked the students to improve and update their technical knowledge to utilize the benefits of the latest technology. The students should get their doubts allayed by the teachers. The students should make use of the special classes on career guidance being organised for them to select their targets after completing 10 th class.

The Collector distributed some books to the students in the programme. SC Welfare and empowerment officer N Lakshma Naik, assistant welfare officer T Lingaiah, hostel welfare officers D Anka Babu, K Srilatha, D Durga Lakshmi, and M Aruna were among those who were present.



# 2,000 CHICKENS KILLED IN TRUCK MISHAP

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Over 2,000 chickens were killed when the mini-truck which was transporting them overturned in Giddalur town on Saturday.

Police said that the chickens were being supplied to the chicken shops from Narasaraopet to Giddalur in

the ill-fated mini-truck. Over 2,000 chickens perished in the accident. The mini-truck fell on a scooter that was parked on the roadside. However, no one was injured in the incident. The accident took place as the driver drove the mini-truck at high speed and recklessly, an eyewitness of the accident said.

# 2 killed as tractor-trolley overturns

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Two labourers were killed and two others were injured when the tractor-trolley on which they were travelling overturned at Vinukonda town on Saturday. Police said that the tractor-trolley was carrying boulders. The two deceased workers were sitting on the trolley which overturned, killing the two workers instantaneously. The deceased were identified as Budaram (35) and Dego (24). The injured were admitted to a private hospital in Vinukonda. The deceased and the injured belonged to the Chattisgarh state. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem examination.

# 180 kg ganja seized, 2 held

PNS ■ BAPATLA

The police seized 180 kg of cannabis worth Rs 8 lakh and arrested two persons while transporting the contraband in a lorry illegally.

SP Vakul Jindal told the media here on Saturday that on a tip-off a police team conducted a checking of vehicles at Bollapalli toll plaza.

Noticing the checking of vehicles by the police, the driver and cleaner of the lorry started flee-

ing. The police overpowered them. When the police checked the lorry they found six bags containing 180 KGs of ganja worth Rs 8 lakh. The police seized the ganja, and the lorry and arrested the accused Kakati Lovaraju and Pitani Naga Appa Rao.

One of the accused Lovaraju was working as a lorry driver and he was taking a Gypsum load from Visakhapatnam to Gulbarga in Karnataka state. The ganja was loaded in the lorry at Anakapalli.



# Notorious bike lifter arrested, 18 bikes recovered

PNS ■ BAPATLA

The police arrested a notorious motorcycle thief and recovered 18 motorcycles worth Rs 5 lakh in Chirala town.

Chirala I town CI V Mallikharjun Rao told the media in Chirala on Saturday that the police arrested notorious motorcycle thief Venkanna Sahib. He was previously arrested in Tadepalligudem and sent to Tanuk sub-jail. However, he was freed on bail and again started stealing motorcycles.

He was addicted to vices and to earn money easily he started stealing motorcycles and selling them at a cheaper price. The modus operandi of his



offences was he would steal motorcycles at busy areas like bus stations and railway stations. He was an expert in unlocking the bike using duplicate keys. He committed

offences in the limits of Ongole, Guntur, Vijayawada bus station, and railway station. SP Vakul Jindal appreciated the police team for arresting the notorious motorcycle lifter.

## AMRIT JALADHARA' SCHEME

# Prepare list of SC, ST beneficiaries: DC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao has directed the officials concerned to prepare the list of eligible SC and ST beneficiaries to implement the Amrit Jaladhara scheme for setting up bore wells, drips and sprinklers under the Amrit Young Industrialists scheme in the district. As per the scheme, financial assistance of Rs 50,000 would be provided, he said.

The Collector convened a meeting with the officers concerned at his camp office in Vijayawada on Friday. He explained the Anusuchith Jati Abhyudaya Yojana (AJAY) and 'Amrit Jaladhara' schemes to the officers.

Speaking on the occasion, Dilli Rao said SC and ST farmers who possessed 2.5 acres of agricultural land and got loans from the banks and constructed bore wells, drip, and sprinklers' would be eligible for



these schemes. From this financial year, beneficiaries who were selected for loans would get Rs 50,000 or 50 per cent of the project cost, which is lesser for the financial assistance, he said.

He made it clear that farmers belonging to SC and ST who are cultivating agricultural lands by a single or mass that

has no irrigation facility would be eligible. Also, their annual income should be less than Rs 3 lakh, he said. He directed the official to finalise the beneficiaries list and distribute sanctioning papers by March 31.

Further, he said. The BC Welfare Department, DWAMA, Ground Water Department, Horticulture and

Lead Bank Managers should coordinate and complete the selection of eligible beneficiaries.

BC Welfare Development Officer B Chandra Leela, DWAMA PD J Suneetha, Ground Water Officer B Naga Raju, Industries Officer MV Sekhar and bankers were present.

# CPI protests at collectorates on Mar 27, 28

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State secretariat and council meeting passed a unanimous resolution to organise mass agitations at all district collectorates in the State from March 27 to 28 demanding that the height of the Polavaram Project should not be reduced.

Also, another resolution was passed and the meeting demanded that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy should take steps to conduct an all-party meeting to put pressure on the Central government to complete the project without the first and final phases.

The two-day CPI State secretariat and council meetings chaired by senior leader P Ramachandraiah began at the Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada on Friday. National secretary Dr K Narayana presented a report regarding national politics. State secretary K Ramakrishna explained the present political situation in the



State and the party's future programmes.

On the occasion, a big debate took place about the Polavaram Project's height. The meeting opined that reducing the height of the dam from 45.72 meters to 41.15 meters was not acceptable. However, the party flayed the first and final phases of the construction of the project

proposed by the Central government and demanded that the Centre complete the project as early as possible.

Speaking on the occasion, Narayana condemned the announcement of the Ministry of Jal Sakti Prahlad Singh Pate that the first phase of the Polavaram Project construction will be 41.15 meters. The Central government is trying

to reduce the height of the project from 45.72 meters to 41.15 meters in the name of the first and second phases, he alleged. However, Polavaram is a national project. If the height is reduced, it will turn into a reservoir, he said.


AIKS president Ravula Venkaiah, CPI secretariat member Akkineni Vanaja and others were present.



INDIA CORNER


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

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



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

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



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

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



# Victory over Left-wing extremism imminent

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

**PNS ■ JAGDALPUR**

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

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

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



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

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

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

### Woman made to walk on burning coal

**PNS ■ DURG**

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

Talking to PTI, the victim, Mamta Nishad, a resident of Karidih locality here, claimed that her husband's younger brother, his wife and her elder sister-in-law used to harass her by accusing her of being involved in witchcraft.

On the night of March 20, when her husband was away, the trio allegedly took her to a tantrik in Kailash Nagar and asked her to prove that she did not indulge in black magic, she alleged.

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

**PNS ■ MADURAI**

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

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

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



Court.

In his address, Justice Chandrachud said recruiting chambers were being "sceptical" about employing women, assuming that their "familial" responsibilities would come in the way of their profession.

Citing the "absymal" women-to-men ratio in the legal profession, Justice Chandrachud said, "Statistics inform us that for 50,000 male enrolments in Tamil Nadu, there are only 5,000 female enrolments."

"The legal profession is not an equal-opportunity provider for women, and the statistics are the same all over the country," he said. "The phase is changing. In the recent recruitment in the district judiciary, over 50 per cent are women. But we have to create equal opportunities for women so that they do not fall by the wayside because of the fact that they undertake multi-fold responsibilities as they progress in life."

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

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

### Health as critical agenda as trade: BIMSTEC

**PNS ■ KOLKATA**

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

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

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

### Arrested official falls to death from 4th floor

**PNS ■ RAJKOT**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PNS ■ PATNA**

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

Talking to reporters here



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

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

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

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

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

**PNS ■ LATUR**

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

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



The vehicles had been sent to the garage for repairs and painting. A fire erupted after the live high-tension line broke and fell

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

Firefighters later brought the blaze under control.

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



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

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

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

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

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

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

### MEHRAULI KILLING

### 'Last opportunity' to Poonawala's advocate

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

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

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

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

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



### Amritpal seen in jacket, trousers in fresh CCTV footage

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

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

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

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

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



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

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

### Canada watching developments in Punjab

**PNS ■ TORONTO**

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

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

of the flag, emblem and currency of Khalistan and videos of firearms practice by young men allegedly picked for the radical preacher's Anandpur Khalistan Fauz. The incriminating material shows the sinister designs of this nascent militia force and the enormous threat they would have become for peace and harmony of Punjab and national security police had said.



# Be vigilant about rate risks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## FM reviews performance of PSBs amid stress

sis in Credit Suisse.

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

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

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

The finance minister under-



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

crisis management and communication strategies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ KOCHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## Reliance names V Srikanth as new Chief Financial Officer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Srikanth, who has been

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW YORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

"Speedtest Intelligence data shows that median download

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

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

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

## Climate change threatening tea sector globally: ITA

PNS ■ KOLKATA

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

A spokesman of ITA said climate change is also threatening the long-term viability of tea industry, which is also causing increasing pest infestations making pesticide residue management surfacing as a major challenge.

To mitigate this, ITA said that the industry needs to adopt a multi-faceted to address the climate change issue by way of sustainable farming practices and reduction in carbon footprint. In this context, the association maintained the industry involving all the stakeholders to invest in research to come out with mitigating solutions. There has also been a decline in rain-



fall and increase in temperature in the tea cultivating regions for the last several years, ITA said.

According to the association, future projections indicate a substantial reduction in suitability in tea cultivation in areas where the crop is grown.

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

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

PNS ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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

## BPCL launches 19 EV fast-charging corridors

PNS ■ KOCHI

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

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

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



with 33 fuel stations in Karnataka and 10 corridors with 58 fuel stations in Tamil Nadu.

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

Ravi said the fast chargers were easy to use and could be self-operated without any manual assistance, even though support staff would be available if needed.

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

# Share of affordable homes supply across 7 cities slips

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

During 2018, a total of 1,95,300 units were launched across seven cities and out of that 40 per cent were in the affordable homes category.

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

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

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

The declining trend continued even last year and the share



fell to 20 per cent.

"There are several reasons why affordable housing is in the doldrums today. One, obvi-

ously, is land. While developers can easily recoup their land costs with mid-range and premium housing, affordable

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

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

Signature Global operates mainly in the affordable housing segment.

Anarock said the current demand is skewed towards apartments priced between Rs 40 lakh and Rs 1.5 crore.

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

The preferences of homebuyers have evolved from mere opulence and grandeur to sustainable, green and technologically advanced living spaces, he added.

"As the luxury real estate market continues to grow, developers must keep pace with the changing demands of the wealthy," Jain said.

## MONEY MATTERS

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



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

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

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



The Rs 865 crore initial share sale of electronic manufacturing services firm Avalon Technologies will open for public subscription on April 3. The three-day initial public offering (IPO) will close on April 6, and the bidding for anchor investors will open on March 31, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP). The company's Rs 865 crore IPO comprises Rs 320 crore from the fresh issuance of equity shares and Rs 545 crore through an Offer For Sale (OFS) of shares by promoters and existing shareholders. Earlier, it was looking to raise Rs 1,025 crore through the initial public offering. The size of the IPO has been reduced as Avalon completed a total pre-IPO placement of Rs 160 crore, consisting of 80 crore of primary or fresh issuance and 80 crore secondary share sales. In the pre-IPO placement, the company garnered Rs 60 crore each from UNIFI Financial Private Limited and Ashoka India Equity Investment Trust Plc and Rs 40 crore from India Acorn Fund Limited. Consequently, the net public issue now stands at Rs 865 crore. Proceeds from the fresh issue would be used towards debt payment, funding working capital requirements and general corporate purposes. In January, the company received capital markets regulator Sebi's go-ahead to float the IPO. Founded in 1999, Avalon is an end-to-end electronic manufacturing service solutions provider and counts Kyosan India, Zonar Systems Inc, Collins Aerospace, e-Infochips, The US Malabar Company, Meggitt (Securaplane Technologies Inc) and Systech Corporation as some of its key clients. It has 12 manufacturing units located across the US and India. As of fiscal 2022, its revenue from operations was at Rs 840 crore with an order book worth Rs 1,039 crore as of June 30, 2022. JM Financial, DAM Capital Advisors, IIFL Securities and Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited are the merchant bankers for this IPO.

## Tube Investments, Premji Invest to acquire Lotus Surgicals

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Murugappa Group's engineering firm Tube Investments of India and (TII) Azim Premji's private equity fund Premji Invest announced on Saturday that together they would be acquiring Lotus Surgicals, a maker of wound closure products, for a sum of Rs 348 crore.

Tube Investments will invest Rs 233 crore for 67 per cent stake, while Premji Invest will pick up the remaining 33 per cent at Rs 115 crore from the existing shareholders of Lotus Surgicals.

"Tube Investments and Premji Invest on Saturday signed a share purchase agreement to acquire 100 per cent equity capital of Lotus Surgicals Pvt Ltd from India Medical Consumables Holdings Ltd, a Samara Capital entity, and other shareholders", a statement released here said.

The two companies are partnering for the acquisition with the objective of setting up a medical technology platform, which aspires to become a global platform to design, manufacture and distribute innovative world-class medical products at affordable price points, the statement added. Plans for scaling up the platform include

organic and inorganic acquisitions. "The acquisition of Lotus Surgicals Pvt Ltd marks our entry into the med-tech business. We believe that the Indian medical industry is expected to be one of the fastest growing sectors driven by both demand and supply side factors," TII executive chairman M A M Arunachalam said.

"We are delighted to join hands with Premji Invest. Our deep expertise in establishing and managing large-scale manufacturing, coupled with Premji Invest's strong domain knowledge and investing experience, will enable Lotus to tap the immense potential in the med-tech business," he added.

Premji Invest Chief Investment Officer T K Kurien said, "TII has an outstanding track record of incubating and scaling businesses across diverse sectors and creating stakeholder value through manufacturing and execution excellence.

"Premji Invest is pleased to deepen its partnership with TII through its med-tech platform. There is a unique opportunity to create a global platform that manufactures and distributes world-class medical products by leveraging cutting-edge technologies," he said.





# TB: CURABLE & PREVENTABLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## DOCTORSPEAK

## Signs and symptoms of TB disease in children

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

Here's what parents should know.

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

Children and teens at higher risk include those who:

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

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

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

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

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

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

**How does TB spread?**

Tuberculosis usually is spread when an infected adult

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

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

**Symptoms of TB**

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 'NAVYA KITS' FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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

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

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

Dr Tanaya Narendra, popularly known as Dr Cuterus, an

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Patients Will Have to Wait for New TB Drug Therapy

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

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

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

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

However, while several countries including South Africa have already launched

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

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

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

2021 and is presently in the analysis stage.

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

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

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

"In high TB burden coun-



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



# ROBOTS & RITUALS

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

It isn't just artists and teachers who are losing sleep over advances in automation and artificial intelligence. Robots are being brought into Hinduism's holiest rituals – and not all worshippers are happy about it.

In 2017, a technology firm in India introduced a robotic arm to perform “aarti,” a ritual in which a devotee offers an oil lamp to the deity to symbolise the removal of darkness. This particular robot was unveiled at the Ganpati festival, a yearly gathering of millions of people in which an icon of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is taken out in a procession and immersed in the Mula-Mutha river in Pune in central India.

Ever since, that robotic aarti arm has inspired several prototypes, a few of which continue to regularly perform the ritual across India today, along with a variety of other religious robots throughout East Asia and South Asia. Robotic rituals even now include an animatronic temple elephant in Kerala on India's southern coast.

Yet this kind of religious robotic usage has led to increasing debates about the use of AI and robotic technology in devotion and worship. Some devotees and priests feel that this represents a new horizon in human innovation that will lead to the betterment of society, while others worry that using robots to replace practitioners is a bad omen for the future.

As an anthropologist who specialises in religion, however, I focus less on the theology of robotics and more on what people actually say and do when it comes to their spiritual practices. My current work on religious robots primarily centers on the notion of “divine object-persons,” where otherwise inanimate things are viewed as having a living, conscious essence.

My work also looks at the uneasiness Hindus and Buddhists express about ritual-performing automatons replacing people and whether those automatons actually might make better devotees.

**RITUAL AUTOMATION IS NOT NEW**

Ritual automation, or at least the idea of robotic spiritual practice, isn't new in South Asian religions. Historically, this has included anything from special pots that drip water continuously for bathing rituals that Hindus routinely perform for their deity icons, called abhisheka, to wind-powered Buddhist prayer wheels — the kinds often seen in yoga studios and supply stores.

While the contemporary version of automated ritual might look like downloading a phone app that chants mantras without the need for any prayer object at all, such as a mala or rosary, these new versions of ritual-performing robots have prompted complicated conversations.

Thaneswar Sarmah, a Sanskrit scholar and literary critic, argues that the first Hindu robot appeared in the stories of King Manu, the first king of the human race in Hindu belief. Manu's mother, Saranyu – herself the daughter of a great architect – built an animate statue to perfectly perform all of her household chores and ritual obligations.

Folklorist Adrienne Mayor remarks similarly that religious stories about mechanized icons from Hindu epics, such as the mechanical war chariots of the Hindu engineer god Visvakarman, are often viewed as the progenitors of religious robots today.

Furthermore, these stories are sometimes interpreted by modern-day nationalists as evidence that ancient India has previously invented everything from spacecraft to missiles.

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



**MODERN TRADITIONS OR TRADITIONALLY MODERN?**

However, the recent use of AI and robotics in religious practice is leading to concerns among Hindus and Buddhists about the kind of future to which automation could lead. In some instances, the debate among Hindus is about whether automated religion promises the arrival of humanity into a bright, new, technological future or if it is simply evidence of the coming apocalypse.

In other cases, there are concerns that the proliferation of robots might lead to greater numbers of people leaving religious practice as temples begin to rely more on automation than on practitioners to care for their deities. Some of these concerns stem from the fact that many religions, both in South Asia and globally, have seen significant decreases in the number of young people willing to dedicate their lives to spiritual education and practice over the past few decades. Furthermore, with many families living in a diaspora scattered across the world, priests or “pandits” are often serving smaller and smaller communities.

But if the answer to the problem of fewer ritual specialists is more

robots, people still question whether ritual automation will benefit them. They also question the concurrent use of robotic deities to embody and personify the divine, since these icons are programmed by people and therefore reflect the religious views of their engineers.

**DOING RIGHT BY RELIGION**

Scholars often note that these concerns all tend to reflect one pervasive theme — an underlying anxiety that, somehow, the robots are better at worshipping gods than humans are. They can also raise inner conflicts about the meaning of life and one's place in the universe.

For Hindus and Buddhists, the rise of ritual automation is especially concerning because their traditions emphasise what religion scholars refer to as orthopraxy, where greater importance is placed on correct ethical and liturgical behaviour than on specific beliefs in religious doctrines. In other words, perfecting what you do in terms of your religious practice is viewed as more necessary to spiritual advancement than whatever it is you personally believe.

This also means that automated rituals appear on a spectrum that

progresses from human ritual fallibility to robotic ritual perfection. In short, the robot can do your religion better than you can because robots, unlike people, are spiritually incorruptible.

This not only makes robots attractive replacements for dwindling priesthoods but also explains their increasing use in everyday contexts: People use them because no one worries about the robot getting it wrong, and they are often better than nothing when the options for ritual performance are limited.

**SAVED BY A ROBOT**

In the end, turning to a robot for religious restoration in modern Hinduism or Buddhism might seem futuristic, but it belongs very much to the present moment. It tells us that Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions in South Asia are increasingly being imagined as post- or transhuman: deploying technological ingenuity to transcend human weaknesses because robots don't get tired, forget what they're supposed to say, fall asleep or leave.

More specifically, this means that robotic automation is being used to perfect ritual practices in East Asia and South Asia – especially in India and Japan – beyond what would be possible for a human devotee, by linking impossibly consistent and flawless ritual accomplishment with an idea of better religion.

Modern robotics might then feel like a particular kind of cultural paradox, where the best kind of religion is the one that eventually involves no humans at all. But in this circularity of humans creating robots, robots becoming gods, and gods becoming human, we've only managed to, once again, re-imagine ourselves.

(AP/The Conversation)



# Credibility of China as peacekeeper under lens

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

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

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



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

Ukraine.

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

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

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

What does the Chinese

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

During all these strategic

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

Now it is worth knowing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# Xi offers lifeline to Putin to curb US influence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

A top analyst at the US Defense Intelligence Agency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As long as Russia can trade

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It has been very difficult, especially

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

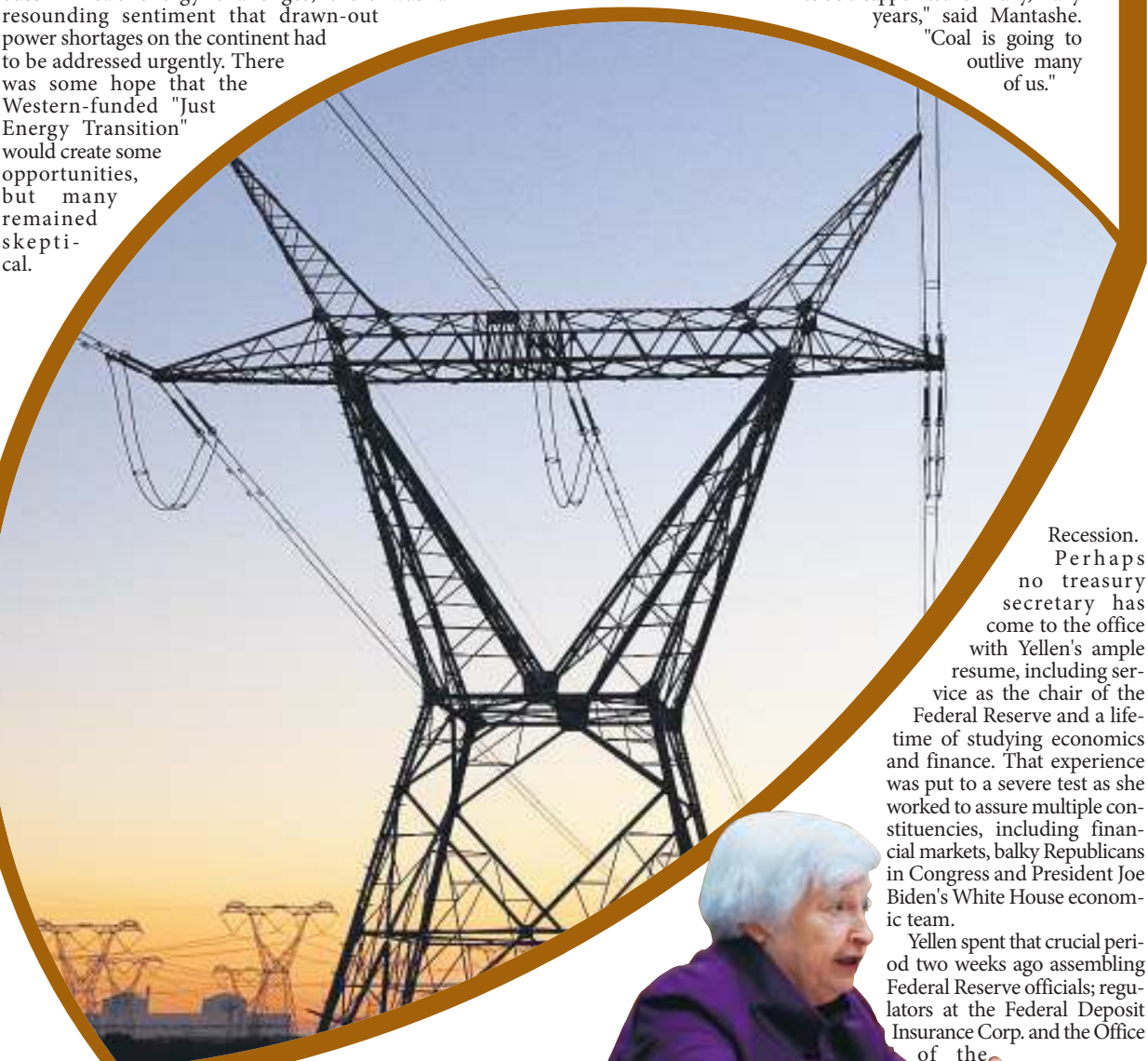
Businesses in Nigeria suffer an annual loss of 29 billion as a result of unreliable electricity, the World Bank said, with providers of essential services often struggling to keep their operations afloat on generators.

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

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

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

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



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

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

## Academic text produced by ChatGPT formulaic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Studying continental movement over 'hotspot'

Geoscience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They termed this phenomenon as

'network gain', that allowed the brain's internal compass to reorient after the mice were disoriented.

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

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

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

spread of virtual reality technology.

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

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

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

The findings are published in the journal *Nature*.