

Does Rahul know about struggles faced by Savarkar?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the BJP or on behalf of the Union Government.

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

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



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

chor hain' was not proper. Those who occupy important positions in politics should exercise caution while speaking, the judge cautioned. Consequently, Rahul Gandhi had to apologise. Even after that, Rahul Gandhi, over the past five years, has been attacking Modi, coining new words. Unable to face the BJP in the public domain, Rahul started personal vilification of Modi.

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

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

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

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

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

Rahul's remarks against Adani.

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

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

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

MEIL delivers 10 e-buses to TTD as offering

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

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

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



busses donation to TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy and EO Dharma Reddy. Accompanied by other employees they all travelled in the buses and expressed satisfaction with the performance of the buses.

Electra Greentech Limited manufactured these 9-metre-long 10 pure electric buses under the Government of India's 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives, enabling MEIL to deliver

them to the shrine on time. The fleet of 10 e-buses will help speed up the TTD's efforts to decarbonise the holy pilgrim centre, enabling the hill shrine to fight air pollution, reduce noise and tackle climate change, making it emission-free beginning today. The TTD trust appreciated MEIL for its offering. On this occasion, TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy said, "TTD takes special care in protecting the environment on Tirumala Hills. We are working on providing noise and air pollution-free travel to Srivari devotees and keeping this in mind MEIL came forward by donating 10 e-buses which are Rs 18 crores worth to TTD.

Parl completes...

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After the Lok Sabha cleared the Finance Bill, which has 64 official amendments, the finance ministry on Friday issued a statement saying that there was a typographical error in the amendments with respect to the change in STT on options trading.

The error, the finance ministry said, will be rectified in accordance with the extant procedure of the government of India.

As per the amendments, the STT on options has been increased from 0.017 per cent to 0.021 per cent. The amended Finance Bill was then presented to Lok Sabha, which too approved it amid a ruckus that opposition parties created demanding a probe into allegations against Adani.

Soon after Lok Sabha reassembled at 4 pm, members of opposition parties wearing black clothes started raising slogans demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe in Adani issue.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Sukla Paksha

Tithi:Saptami: Mar 27 05:28 PM to Mar 28 07:02 PM

Ashtami: Mar 28 07:02 PM to Mar 29 09:07 PM

Nakshatram:

Mrigashirsha:

Ardra: Mar 27 03:27 PM to Mar 28 05:32 PM

Mar 28 05:32 PM to Mar 29 08:07 PM

Rahukalam:

3:23 PM to 4:54 PM

Yamagandam: 9:19 AM to 10:50 AM

Variyam: 02:50 AM to 04:37 AM

Gulika: 12:21 PM to 1:52 PM

Amritakalam: 07:58 AM to 09:43 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:57 AM to 12:45 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 36°

Humidity: 66%

Sunrise: 6:06 AM

Sunset: 6:20 PM

Updated: MARCH 27, 2023 5:00 PM

No interim relief for Kavitha

SC tags plea against ED with pending cases, to be heard after 3 weeks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BRS leader K Kavitha on Monday failed to get any interim relief from the Supreme Court on her plea, seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons by the Enforcement Directorate in the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, and tagged her petition with others.

A bench of justices Ajay Rastogi and Bela M Trivedi said it will hear the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader's petitions and other pleas after three weeks.

Appearing for Kavitha, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said, "whether she needs to be interrogated at home or in the ED office is the issue which is seized of by this court and notice has been issued in petitions filed by Nalini Chidambaram and Abhishek Banerjee. I have more to say



than tagging the matter".

He informed the bench that the plea filed by Nalini Chidambaram, a senior advocate and wife of Congress leader P Chidambaram, deals with a similar issue of summoning women accused by the ED.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju said that after the filing of Nalini Chidambaram's petition, a judgement was

passed by a three-judge bench upholding the provisions of the Prevention of the Money Laundering Act (PMLA) that squarely covers the provisions for summoning an accused.

The bench said it would be appropriate if all the petitions are heard together, and listed the matter after three weeks. Mehta sought permission to file a detailed note on the issue, which the bench allowed.

On March 15, the top court agreed to hear Kavitha's plea seeking protection from arrest and challenging the summons issued by the ED.

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

The BRS leader has denied all allegations against her.

During her questioning by the ED, Kavitha was confronted with statements made by Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramachandra Pillai, who has been arrested in the case, and a few others allegedly involved in the case, according to official sources.

Kavitha's statement was recorded under the PMLA.

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

The ED had claimed that Pillai "represented the south group", an alleged liquor cartel linked to Kavitha and others that paid kickbacks amounting to about Rs 100 crore to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to gain a larger share of the market in the national capital under the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy for 2020-21.

New Industrial Policy of AP investor-friendly...

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Special Chief Secretary Karikal Valaven said that the new policy is more favorable than the old policy compared to the rest of the states. He said that AP has become a friendlier and more favorable state than the rest of the states in India. He said that through GIS 2023 investors signed Rs 13.5 lakh crores and in the same spirit, a mobile app and web portal called YSR AP 1 was released. He said that this app will be an encouragement to those who are thinking of entering the business sector.

He said that the office of YSR AP 1 will be started in the port city. We are starting an innovation startup. We will also bring an incubation center. Research and development should be increased in all fields. We will take a special policy for logistics. AP Inland Water Authority will be set up. We will develop industrial parks under PPP mode while developing the coastal-based transport sector, said Special CS Karikal Valaven.

WB heaps praise on AP's...

Continued from Page 1

Lauding the reforms, Auguste Tano Kouame who is on his first visit to the State assured to cooperate with the state and extend all possible help for the next 25 years in tune with the mission and vision of the Chief Minister. He said that the welfare measures and development programmes being implemented in the State have made it a role model for other states.

He especially appreciated the programmes of support being extended to women's self-help groups, telemedicine, and Family Doctor concept and said the vision of the Chief Minister helped the State achieve a higher growth rate.

The team assured continued support to the Chief Minister in taking the State forward with his dynamism and foresight.

Besides Auguste Tano Kouame, the team consisted of Sudip Mozumder, Lead External affairs advisor, SAR, Karthik Pental, Education Specialist and TTL For education project, Andrew D. Goodland, Lead agriculture specialist, Hoon Sahib Soh, Practice Manager, MTI, Junko Onishi, Prog leader Human development, Trina S. Haque, Practice Manager, Health Nutrition and Population and Bhavana Bhatia, Prog. leader.

Medical and Health Minister V. Rajani, Chief Secretary Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, senior IAS officers MT Krishna Babu, Praveen Prakash, Sasi Bhushan Kumar, Satyanarayana, Suresh Kumar and Vinod Kumar were among those present.

Jagan has guts to act against rebels but not Chandrababu

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

The recent MLC elections once again brought out the difference between YSR Congress President Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and TDP supremo Nara Chandrababu Naidu.

In the elections to the MLAs' quota MLC posts, four YSR Congress MLAs engaged in cross-voting and that led to the victory of the TDP candidate and the defeat of the YSRC candidate.

After the MLC elections, the YSR Congress found that four

party MLAs, Anam Ram Narayana Reddy, Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy, Mekapati Chandrasekhar Reddy and Undavalli Sridevi, voted for the TDP candidate. The YSRC Congress suspended the four from the party for cross-voting.

From the TDP also four MLAs indulged in cross-voting. This is an open secret but TDP supremo Chandrababu did not take any action against the four MLAs like YSRC Congress President Jagan Mohan Reddy. TDP MLAs Vallabhaneni Vamsi, Karanam Balaram, Vasupalli Ganesh and Maddala Giridhar Rao themselves dis-

tanced from the party and openly extended support to the YSRC Congress.

In these circumstances there is no surprise in four TDP MLAs voting for YSRC Congress candidates in the MLAs' quota MLC elections. The TDP has only 19 Members in the Assembly after four MLAs distanced themselves from the party. The YSRC leadership knew that the two rebel MLAs, Anam Ram Narayana Reddy and Kotam Reddy Sridhar Reddy, will not vote for the party candidate.

After that also the TDP has only the support of 21 MLAs for

its candidate in the MLC elections against the required strength of 22 MLAs to win in the first round. But two more YSRC MLAs voted for the TDP candidate and he got the votes of 23 MLAs. While the YSRC suspended its four MLAs for engaging in cross-voting why didn't the TDP leadership take action against the four MLAs for not voting for the party candidate?

Suspending the four MLAs from the party proved that YSRC President Jagan Mohan Reddy has the guts to take action. By refusing to act against the four MLAs who voted

against the party candidate the TDP leadership showed that it has no guts.

The four rebel TDP MLAs are openly criticising the TDP leadership and are supporting the YSRC and Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. The TDP leadership is silent in the case of its four rebel MLAs as it always considers its political interests before taking a decision on the discipline front.

But the YSRC leadership gives first priority to party discipline and for it political interests are secondary. That is the difference between Jagan and Chandrababu.

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Floor, 934th Floor, 935th Floor, 936th Floor, 937th Floor, 938th Floor, 939th Floor, 940th Floor, 941st Floor, 942nd Floor, 943rd Floor, 944th Floor, 945th Floor, 946th Floor

‘Rs 33 K cr being spent on infra in Jagananna colonies’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP Housing Corporation Chairman Davuluri Dorababu, has informed that the state government was spending about Rs 33,000 crore to provide adequate infrastructure facilities to Jagananna colonies across the state. Speaking at the 31st board meeting of the Andhra Pradesh state housing corporation, he said that Rs 10,408 crore is being spent for roads inside the Jagananna colonies besides Rs 5237 crore for drainage, Rs 798 crore for underground drainage, Rs



2980 crore for fresh drinking water, Rs 4560 crores for electricity, Rs 707.48 for internet facility. For the second phase works Rs 7909 crores will be spent, he said.

The chairman stated that electrification is complete in

are being constructed for 1127 colonies, said the chairman, and added for providing temporary infrastructure facilities Rs 1650 crores was being spent.

Housing MD Lakshmisha said that for the completion of houses construction all the staff should cooperate and coordinate. He said that 18.63 lakh houses are under construction and by 2024 March the construction shall be completed. Housing department Joint MDM Sivaprasad, chief engineer GV Prasad, directors and other officials were present.



Vja Rly Divn earns record gross earnings of Rs 5244.34 cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Division achieved the highest-ever gross earnings of Rs 5244.34 crore in the current financial 2022-23, surpassing its previous highest annual freight earnings of Rs.5136.44 crore registered in 2018-19. On March 21 the Division breached the highest-ever earnings mark by clocking Rs 5157.58 crore, 10 days ahead of the financial year 2022-23 closure. As per loading projections, the Division would comfortably cross the Rs 5300 crore mark by the end of the financial year 2022-23.

The Division not only topped the previous earnings records but also accomplished the recently revised annual loading, and freight revenue targets of 33 Million Tonnes, and Rs 3850 cr respectively with ease. The goods earnings up to 26th March 2023 stand at Rs. 3866.49 crore. The division recorded, Passenger revenue of Rs 1225 crore as of

date, which is 75 % higher compared to last year's earnings. The contribution from different segments includes 74% from the freight business, 23% from the Passenger business, 1.7% from Other Coaching earnings (parcels, ticket checking), and 1.3% from sundries. The two major ports Krishnapatnam and Kakinada Port played a vital role by garnering a revenue of Rs 1868 crore and Rs 1205 crore in the current financial year respectively.

Shivendra Mohan, Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada Division congratulated Vavilapalli. Ram Babu, Sr DCM; D Narendra Varma, Sr DCM, staff of Commercial and Operating departments for the record-breaking freight performance during the current year. Shivendra Mohan commended the hard work of BDU teams, who are instrumental in achieving the annual loading target figures ahead of financial year closure.

‘Paramarsha Yatra’ seeking compassionate appointments begins

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Joint Action Committee - Amaravati (APJAC-Amaravati) chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu has demanded that the State government make compassionate appointments in the Education, Health and Medical, RTC and other government departments. “Though the government has the responsibility to make compassionate appointments, it has been

creating obstructions in various ways for several years,” he alleged.

As part of the agitation organised by APJAC-Amaravati, the leaders started the ‘Paramarsha Yatra’ in all 26 districts on Monday. The district leaders visited the families of the government employees who died before and after Corona at their houses. Bopparaju Venkateswarlu participated in the programme in Guntur district.

Speaking on the occasion, Bopparaju Venkateswarlu said that as

part of the programme, the APJAC leaders would extend their support to the victims’ families. Also, they would take their problems to the concern of the government. The State government should support the victims’ families by making compassionate appointments, he said.

Further, he alleged that those appointments had been pending in the departments of Education, Health and PTD for several years. “The government is making compassionate

appointments on a nominal basis. But a big number of compassionate appointments are pending in all departments,” he added.

APJAC-Amaravati Guntur district chairman K Sangeetha Rao, general secretary PA Kiran, AP Headmasters Association president Srinivasa Rao, Class-IV Employees Association president S Malleswara Rao, VROs Association State general secretary A Sambasiva Rao and others were present.

Vishnupad takes over as Dean of SLASS, SRM-AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Acclaimed researcher and academician Prof Vishnupad has been appointed the Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (SLASS) at SRM University-AP. With over two decades of teaching experience in various capacities across the USA and India, the seasoned academic has built a glory of his own. With a doctorate in Anthropology from Columbia University in New York, USA, he has received a wide range of research fellowships and awards throughout his academic career. He has taught in various capacities at renowned institutions such as SUNY, Binghamton; Columbia University, New York; Hampshire College, Amherst; and Azim Premji University (APU), Bangalore, India, before joining SRM University-AP as the Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

Prof Vishnupad will be a valuable addition to the growth of the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. His research has broadly involved



three significant themes: India's socio-cultural and political transformation following the liberalisation of the economy, including the pervasive spread of new social media; the ‘Secular’ question in India; and the Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis and continental philosophy. It's an honour to welcome Prof Vishnupad, whose impressive academic career spans over two decades and two continents, to SRM University-AP, added SRM University management.

Rs 50K cash award presented to Anusha Goud

The girl wins gold, silver medals at All India Inter-University Athletics Championship

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Siddhartha Academy has presented a cash award of Rs.50,000 to Mallala Anusha Goud, who won a gold medal in triple jump and a silver medal in long jump in the All India Inter-University Athletics Championship held at the Tamil Nadu Sports and Physical Education University in Chennai.

Anusha Goud is a first-

year student of Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala in Vijayawada. A felicitation programme for her was conducted on the college premises on Monday. College convener N Lalitha Prasad handed over the cash award to her.

Speaking on the occasion, Lalitha Prasad said that the Siddhartha Academy Educational Institutions were encouraging students

in sports and games. Several students there have won medals at State, national and international events in various sports disciplines, he said. His academy announced fees reimbursement for Anusha in this academic year, he added.

SDSM Kalasala Director Dr T Vijaya Lakshmi, Principal Dr S Kalpana and Physical Director V Lakshmi Kanaka Durga were present.



WB team studies development at Vanukuru

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The World Bank team, under the auspices of WB County Director, Auguste Tano Kouame, visited Vanukuru village of Penamaluru mandal of Krishna district on Monday. The visiting team observed the comprehensive primary health care services delivered by Dr. YSR Village Health Clinic at Vanukuru village. Auguste Tano Kouame has observed the live teleconsultation

made to a woman from the village clinic by a telemedicine hub specialist doctor.

The team also observed the family doctor programme conducted by the medical officer and also 104 services in the same village and expressed their satisfaction towards the health care deliverables at the village level through YSR Village health clinics.

They have interacted with the beneficiaries directly. They have

also observed the diagnostics tests conducted at village health clinics. They have also visited the village secretariat and RBK in the village.

Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare J Nivas, Krishna district collector P Ranjith Basha, Health Wellness Centres State Nodal officer K Syamala, Family Physician concept State officer Dr T Ramesh, DMHO Krishna Dr Geeta Bhai, PHC Medical officers and staff were present.

Initiate CBI investigation into land grabbing: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP general secretary, Nara Lokesh, on Monday demanded a CBI inquiry into the illegal land occupations in Peleru.

In a letter to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the TDP leader said that the TDP always wages a war against illegal land occupations in any part of the State. He pointed out that in Peleru alone the mafia grabbed 601.37 acres of land. Lokesh said that the District Collector ordered an inquiry into the land grabbings in 2021 and the sub-collector in his inquiry report recommended action against the persons concerned. There are reports that the State govern-



ment is not taking any action in the matter as the ruling party leaders are involved in it.

Vaddera community met Lokesh in large numbers and submitted a memorandum to him as not even a single wel-

fare scheme is being implemented for them, including Pucca Houses and Employment Guarantee Scheme. Lokesh promised to sanction houses to them soon after the TDP forms the government.

Nayi Brahmin community leaders met Lokesh and made an appeal to him that pension be granted to those who crossed 50 years of age and the community leaders be given representation in the trust boards of temples. Lokesh assured them that all the necessary measures will be taken for the welfare of the community and subsidy loans will be extended to those who are managing saloons.



Seven ambulances flagged off in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr. S Dilli Rao, along with Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi, Vijayawada-Central MLA Malladi Vishnu, and other people's representatives flagged off seven '104' vehicles allotted to the district at the collectorate in Vijayawada on Monday.

The State government is aiming to provide better health facilities to poor people on par with corporate hospitals in the state. Speaking on the occasion, the District Collector said that the State government is taking revolutionary steps to strengthen the health sector in the State. Through the family physician system, the health department is giving medical treatments in villages and distributing medicines free, he said.

Also, the authorities concerned have identified pregnant women, and infant mothers, besides several persons who are suffering from diseases for long days, and are offering the best

treatment to them, he said. After discharge from the hospitals, the medical teams which are accompanied by '104' vehicles would provide suggestions to them in the villages, he added.

Vijayawada Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi said the earlier TDP government neglected the health sector. However, the YSRCP government is taking steps to strengthen it. The '104' vehicles would provide treatments at the doorstep, she added.

Deputy Mayor Avuthu Sri Sailaja, AP Gouda Corporation Chairman M Sivaramakrishna, Viswabrahmin Corporation Chairman T Srikanth, DM & HO Dr M Suhasini, and others were present.

Earlier, District collector Dilli Rao, along with medical expert Dr P Vijayasekhar, suggested to the officials to create awareness among people on symptoms of heart attack and take steps to prevent deaths by administering first-aid. All district officials should take responsibility for creating awareness toward decreasing deaths, he said.

RTC to operate 90 spl buses to Bhadrachalam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In view of Srirama Navami, APSRTC NTR district authorities will be operating 90 special bus services in addition to the 30 regular services to Bhadrachalam to deal with the devotees' rush, on March 29 and 30. Of them, 71 special buses will start from Vijayawada, 15 from Tiruvuru depot and four will start from



Jaggaihapet.

APSRTC NTR District Public Transport Officer (PTDO) M Yesu Danam said in a press release that an online reservation facility would be

available for the special bus services. “If the rush increases, the RTC will run additional special bus services to Bhadrachalam,” he added.

Further, he said that special officers would be present at the Vijayawada Pandit Nehru Bus Station round the clock to monitor the bus services. Bus commuters may book their tickets online or from the nearest bus stations, he added.

SWISS OPEN MEN'S DOUBLES

AP Governor congratulates winners

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer has congratulated Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty for winning the Swiss Open 2023 Men's Doubles Championship title in the finals of the Super 300 badminton tournament held in Basel on Sunday.

Governor Abdul Nazeer has also congratulated Indian Women Boxing Champions, Saweety Boora (81kg), Nitu Ghanghas (48 kg), Nikhat Zareen (50kg), and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) for winning the Gold medals in their respective categories, at the Women's World Boxing Championships held in New Delhi. The Governor said that the Indian Men's Badminton Doubles champions and the women's boxing champions have made the country proud with their achievements and wished them to win many more such laurels in the future.

MLA, Collector flag off 16 ‘104’ ambulance services

PNS ■ ELURU

Former deputy chief minister and MLA Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas and Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh flagged off the ‘104’ ambulance services here on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas the aim of the government is to provide better medical services to the people and as part of it, 16 new 104 ambulances were flagged off today.

He said that the government has allocated 16 new ambulances to the Eluru district, adding that priority is being given to health care in the state by the government and many welfare schemes are being implemented to provide medical treatments to the poor.

Kalikrishna Srinivas said that the previous TDP-led regime neglected the Arogyasri scheme and failed to pay the Arogyasri resulting in the poor being unable to get medical treatment in corporate hospitals. But Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, after coming to power, had intro-



duced many schemes to protect public health.

The ex-deputy Chief Minister said that along with making the 108 and the 104 ambulance service vehicles available on a large scale, the bills of the network hospitals related to the patients, who received treatment under YSR Aarogyasri, are being cleared saving the lives of lakhs of people.

He said that keeping in mind that there are more PHCs in some mandals and the PHC range is also high, new vehicles have been made available to provide full-time medical care

to the respective villages. Stating that not only the family physician programme has been brought closer to the people through 104 service vehicles in the villages, but also the medical health sector has been brought into a strong system to provide treatment to the patients who cannot come to the respective secretariats and PHCs, he said that this programme is considered as significant in the health sector.

Collector Prasanna Venkatesh said that the family physician programme has taken up in a big way in the rural areas to bring medical

treatment to closure to the people. The YSR health clinics have already been made available under the secretariat limits and the ANM and Asha workers are providing medical services to the people.

The Collector said “The medical officer provides better treatment to the poor people through the family physician. As part of that 104 service vehicles are already available in 27 mandals and the government has given another 16 new 104 service vehicles to the district to provide complete medical services twice in each village secretariat of the mandal. Besides the 15 Ambulances, one additional ambulance was given to replace any vehicle in any area.”

The Collector said that 74 types of medicines are given free of cost and 9 types of medical tests are conducted under the Family Physical scheme. Mayor Noorjahan, AMC chairman N Chiranjivi, DOI Nageswara Rao, and Additional DMHO Ratna Kumari were among those who were present.



CM consoles Ashok Babu

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the residence of V. Ashok Babu, YSRCP in charge of the Kondepi Assembly constituency here on Monday and paid floral tributes to the mortal remains of his mother Kotamma.

The Chief Minister consoled Ashok Babu and other members of the bereaved family.

Three arrested in Animal Husbandry DD murder case

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police unravelled the mystery behind the sensational murder case of Deputy Director of Animal Husbandry Dr. Achanna by arresting three persons.

Superintendent of police KKN Anburajan told the media here on Monday that three persons were arrested in connection with the murder of Animal Husbandry DD Dr. Achanna and cases under Cr.No. 113 of 2023, Offence U/s 120(b), 364, 302, 201, r/w 34 IPC and Sec 3 (2) (v-a) of SC, ST (POA)Act, 2015 were registered against them. The arrested persons were Assistant Surgeon, veterinary hospital Kadapa Dr.Subhash Chandra Bose, Bavaluri Chenna Krishna, and Moode Balaji Naik.

The SP said that the deceased Dr. Achanna had been working as DD in the veterinary polyclinic here since 2021. One of the accused Subhash Chandra Bose had also been working at the same hospital since 2022. Differences erupted between Deputy Director Achanna and Subash Chandra Bose regarding duties.



to drink liquor and eat chicken. When the deceased Achanna was in an inebriated condition, the accused pushed him into a gorge from the protection wall. Later the accused took the mobile phone of the deceased Achanna and left the place. In a bid to destroy the evidence, the accused threw the SIM card and the mobile phone at different places.

On March 14, Dr.Clinton Chakravarti, the son of deceased Achanna, lodged a complaint with the one-town police station on the disappearance of his father. The police analysed the Call Data Record of the accused, got valuable clues regarding their involvement in the murder, and arrested them.

The police on March 24, found the body of Achanna in the Guvvala Cheruvu valley and registered a case under section Cr.No. 37/2023, U/Sec 174 Cr. P.C (Death cause not known). All three accused surrendered before the VRO and confessed to committing the crime. It may be mentioned here that the murder case of Animal Husbandry DD Achanna has created a sensation in the State.

‘Cong will intensify protests against Rahul disqualification’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Congress party in Andhra Pradesh will intensify the protests against the unjust disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha and called upon opposition parties to extend solidarity.

Talking to the Pioneer here on Monday, the APCC President said that agitations are being organised in all district headquarters, Assembly constituency headquarters, and mandal headquarters in protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi.

“The Congress party in AP is going to the people to apprise them of the unjust act of disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha after the court verdict. The APCC is taking up massive programmes protesting the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi,” Rudra Raju said.

Claiming that the Congress in the state is receiving overwhelming support from the people for their agitations, Rudra Raju said that the Congress party is organising



a massive programme ‘Praja Sanghibhava Sabha’ on March 29 here.

He said that former MP and senior Congress leader Rajiv Gowda would participate in a programme to be held here. The Congress party had received a huge response from the people for its ‘Sankalpa Satyagraha programme’ organised on March 26 here, he said.

“We call upon all political parties and like-minded par-

ties to join us to carry out massive agitations across Andhra Pradesh in protest against the unjust disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha. The Congress party is organising ‘Praja Sanghibhava Sabha’ on March 29 in Vijayawada,” Rudra Raju said.

Launching a scathing attack on the BJP-led Centre; the APCC President said that the CBI, ED, and IT agencies are being misused by the Central government to harass the Opposition party leaders. Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from Lok Sabha as he raised the Adani’s scams in the Parliament, he flayed.

“Unable to answer the questions raised by Rahul Gandhi in the Parliament on Adani’s financial irregularities, the Modi-led Centre disqualified Rahul Gandhi,” he lashed out. Rahul Gandhi’s grandmother Indira Gandhi and father Rajiv Gandhi sacrificed their lives for the country and the people of the country will not forgive the BJP for disqualifying Rahul Gandhi from Lok Sabha, Gidugu Rudra Raju added.



Collector inaugurates ambulance services

PNS ■ GUNTUR

District Collector M Venugopal Reddy here on Monday inaugurated the 104 ambulance services.

As part of the implementation of the family doctor concept more efficiently, four new ambulances were allocated for 104 ambulance services.

Speaking on the occasion, District Collector M Venugopal Reddy said that he advised the medical officers to go to the people in the rural areas and provide better medical services. As the state government is giving utmost priority to the education and

medical sector, the medical officers should perform their duties as per the objectives and provide better medical services, the Collector told the officials.

The Collector said that currently, there are 17 ambulances of 104 service in the district and the 4 vehicles added to the fleet today would serve in the villages under Mangalagiri, Tadepalli and Prathipadu constituencies. Joint Collector G Rajakumar, MLA Sk. Mohammad Mustafa, DMHO Dr.Shrevan Babu and GGH Superintendent Dr Prabhavati were among those who were present.

Land worth crores of rupees encroached at Ambapuram

Revenue & PR departments deny ownership of land

DASARI SRINIVASA RAO ■ VIJAYAWADA

While Vijayawada city is expanding towards Ambapuram and P Nainavaram villages of Vijayawada Rural mandal, which are adjacent to the Chinna Avutapalli-Gollapudi national highway four-lane bypass road, the revenue and panchayat land worth crores of rupees are being encroached in these villages.

The land grabbers are also erecting fences to protect the lands from other encroachers.

After the State bifurcation, Vijayawada city is growing towards Ambapuram and P Nainavaram villages. Prices of farmlands have touched Rs.10 crore per acre and even vacant plots cost Rs.50,000 to Rs.1 lakh per square yard.

Recently, a land-grabbing incident came to light at Ambapuram. One acre of land, the cost of which ranges from Rs.5 crore to Rs.10 crore, was encroached on by the villagers. The encroached land was ear-



grabbed by the villagers now. Though a farmer has complained about this revenue land encroachment, none of the officials has responded, said the sources.

The government has allotted Yellapu Cheruvu for digging the drinking water tank. Ambapuram village doesn’t have a drinking water tank and the villagers depend upon bore wells. Though the village is very near River Krishna, they are unable to drink the Krishna water.

However, the villagers said that the encroached land belonged to the Revenue Department, but the Revenue authorities refuted the claim. Meanwhile, the Revenue Department officials said that the land belonged to the Panchayat Raj & Rural Development. Due to technical problems and lack of coordination between the Panchayat Raj & Rural Development and Revenue departments, Yellapu Cheruvu remained unused.

‘Antharalaya Darshan’ to be provided to new couples

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam Trust Board has decided to make available Antharalaya Darshan of Goddess Kanaka Durga to the newly-married couple free of cost. Besides, the couple will be offered Veda Ashirvadam and Prasadam as VVIPs by the priests.

The Durga Temple Trust Board meeting was held atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Monday. Revealing the Trust Board agendas and resolutions, Temple Trust Board Chairman Karnati Rambabu addressed the media persons.

Karnati Rambabu said that on the lines of TTD, they would be offered darshan and a free laddu. He said that they were contemplating arranging high-security metal detectors for security purposes. He said that they had finalised the tender works for setting up changing rooms, cloakrooms and chappal stands at Durga Ghat.

Further, he said the Trust Board also decided to appoint three men on committees to control the illegal activities at the Kesakandana Sala by supervision. Also, a Golden Makara Thoranam will be manufactured for adorning Utsava Murthulu, he said. The Trust Board Chairman made it clear that they would set up suggestion and complaint boxes on the premises of the Durga temple to receive complaints from the devotees.

Ex-MLA’s ‘padayatra’ receives huge response

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Former MLA and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader Kandula Narayana Reddy received an overwhelming response from the people during his padayatra.

The ex-MLA has taken out ‘Praja Chaitanya Padayatra’ demanding the government to complete the construction of the Veligonda project at the earliest.

Narayana Reddy continued his padayatra on the second



day through Ambapuram, Buradapalem, and Bodapadu, Vagumadugu, Chintagunta villages in

Konakanamitla mandal on Monday where he was accorded a grand welcome by the villagers. Yerragondapalem TDP in-charge Guduri Erection Babu accompanied Narayana Reddy.

Speaking on this occasion, Narayana Reddy appealed to the people to defeat the YSRCP who lied to the people about the completion of the Veligonda project.

He promised that if they vote for Telugu Desam in the next election, the Veligonda project

would be completed and the Markapuram district would be carved out. Erection Babu said that if Rs 2000 crore was allocated the project works could be completed but only a meagre Rs 100 crore was allocated, he lamented.

He said that Narayana Reddy is creating awareness among the people with his padayatra on the importance of the Veligonda project. He said that if the TDP is voted to power Markapuram district will also be carved out.

Lightning kills teenage girl

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A teenage girl was killed and another girl suffered injuries when lightning struck them at Venkampet village in Parvathipuram mandal on Monday.

Police said that siblings including the deceased Patra Mounika (17) and her sister Kavya went to an open area to attend nature’s call. Lightning struck them killing Mounika instantaneously. Kavya suffered injuries and is undergoing



ing treatment in the government hospital in Parvathipuram.

MLA Vamsi inaugurates LED lights on ZPH school premises

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gannavaram MLA Dr Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan inaugurated the lighting system at the walking track at the ZP High School for Boys grounds at Gannavaram in Krishna district on Monday.

With the support of walkers and others, electrical poles were arranged around the walking track and LED lights were erected. After inaugurat-

ing the LED lights, MLA Vamsi Mohan said that walkers could now use the track during night also. Also, sportspersons could continue practice under the floodlights, he said.

Further, he said the government developed the ZP High School playground with floodlights. It will be used not only for sports, games and walking, but also for conducting meetings. State-level and national-level sports events will be con-

ducted there, he added.

Gannavaram Mandal Parishad President Anagani Ravi, ZPTC member Annavarapu Elizabeth Rani, ZP Co Option Member Md Gousani, Sarpanch N Sowjanya, School Headmaster Ravindra Bhavani, Gannavaram Walkers Association president M Balakrishna Murthy, Physical Director Dhaniyala Naga Raju and others were present.



Polavaram dam height opposed

PNS ■ ELURU

The CPI has expressed concern about the Central government’s decision of reducing the height of the Polavaram project and warned of opposing the move vehemently.

The CPI organised a dharna in front of the Collector’s office here on Monday to register their protest against the decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram project from 45.72 meters to 41.5 m.

Addressing the gathering CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna alleged that the Central government has decided to reduce the height of the Polavaram project from 45.72 meters to 41.5 meters in order to avoid payment of compensation to the evacuees.

He slammed Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy for not exerting pressure on the Centre government regarding reducing the height of the Polavaram project and granting Special Category Status. Jagan Mohan Reddy surrendered himself to the Modi-led Centre and did not raise the issues of state government when he met the Prime Minister. “The CPI, along with CPI (M) will examine the submergence areas of the project. If necessary, we will go to Delhi and



together with the MPs, Ministers, and the opposition parties raise the injustice being meted out to the Polavaram project,” Ramakrishna said.

CPI National Working Committee member Akkineni Vanaja deplored that compensation had not been paid to the flood victims who live in the submergence areas of the Polavaram project. She demanded the government expedite the Polavaram project works and complete the same at the earliest. CPI state committee member Dega Prabhakar recalled that the CPI had carried out many agitations for the Polavaram project and assured to stand by


the evacuees and people living in the submergence areas. The CPI leaders took out an eight days padayatra and collected one lakh signatures demanding the government to complete the project at the earliest, he said.

CPI state leader Chalasani Venata Rama Rao said that the Polavarma is a multipurpose project as it provides irrigation water as well as drinking water. State control commission secretary Bandi Venateswara Rao, CPI leaders Uppuluru Hemashankar, Badisa Ramu, and Sannepalli Saibaba were among those who participated in the programme.

INDIA CORNER


Deeply touched after visiting Tagore's ancestral house: Prez

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




Karnataka mining baron unveils party symbol

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



Deposited 50 per cent of interim compensation for Morbi victims

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



Delhi: AAP MLA Akhilesh convicted of hurting student

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

REMISSION TO CONVICTS

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Rahul's sentencing is hasty, says Yechuri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Another aide held under NSA, fresh Amritpal photograph surfaces

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

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



Cong needs to do some serious introspection, says Hardeep

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

FCI stops wheat auction under OMSS

○ Procurement of fresh crop begins next month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

India's heat action plans target vulnerable groups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Girl power

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

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



entry free for women and girls.

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

PICTALK



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

Role of technology in developing digital art

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



SAKSHI SETHI

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

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

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

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

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

Congress responded that the



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

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

Thirdly, though the pub-

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

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

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

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

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

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

(The author is a senior journalist)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

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

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

APPLY 'SOUND WAVE GIVING'

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

Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

RAHUL GANDHI DISQUALIFICATION

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

Far from over



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

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

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

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

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

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

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

HARD SELTZERS ARE REPLACING ALCOHOL

Hard seltzers are healthier alternative to traditional alcoholic beverages



VIMAL CHAND

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

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



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

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

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

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

(The writer is Co-Founder and CEO of SPYK, the first hard seltzer in India)

Fine tune PM-KISAN to be efficacious



UTTAM GUPTA

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

(The writer is a policy analyst)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have a positive mind and a healthy lifestyle

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

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

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

Salim, despite all his talent, became a heavy drinker,



RAVI VALLURI

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

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

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

Then there is the story of a certified yoga instructor, who helps individuals live their most fulfilling lives by staying physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually

fit. Before she became an instructor, she suffered from repeated migraine attacks. The intensity of the migraines was enormous which drained her completely.

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

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

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

By nature, the human mind gravitates towards the past or the future. This is true of most people, successful people and even achievers. When the mind constructs a nest in the past, it is full of regrets; when it builds a home in future, the tendency is to

become anxious. In both the situations it is not at peace and or in harmony with the self. Only when the mind is in the present does it find the sanctuary of happiness and peace.

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

A healthy and balanced lifestyle makes us grow and glow from within and the aura spreads. Without a doubt,

the principle of the Law of Attraction plays a significant role in rejigging our persona. If we emit positive thoughts we attract positive thoughts, feelings, emotions and people. Unfortunately, the contrary is also true.

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

MONEY MATTERS

Russian carrier Aeroflot increases flights on Delhi-Moscow route

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



Rupee gains 3 paise to close at 82.37 against US dollar

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



Govt sets up committee to monitor tur stocks to check hoarding

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



Sunnier days help solar projects improve their performance

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Longer sunnier days have ensured that the performance of solar power farms improved to 75 per cent in the current fiscal from 59 per cent in the year-ago period, according to a report.

Rating agency Crisil has prepared the report based on the performance of 115 solar projects aggregating to 4.6 GW of power generation and those having an operational record of at least one full year.

As per the report, 75 per cent of these projects reached P90 level of generation in the current financial year compared to only 59 per cent in the year-ago period.

P90 generation estimate indicates generation that is likely to happen with 90 per cent confidence during the project's tenure annually. For example, a P90 value of 10,000 kWh for the annual output implies that it will generate over 10,000 kWh power for 90 per cent of the time.

Amendment to Finance Bill to correct STT rate

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday moved an amendment to the Finance Bill in Rajya Sabha to correct the figures with regard to rate of Security Transaction Tax (STT) to be levied on sale of options as well as futures.

The amended Finance Bill 2023 by correcting STT rate has been returned to Lok Sabha, sources said.

The amended Bill is likely to be taken up by Lok Sabha either today or tomorrow and thereafter the Budgetary exercise would be complete. The Lok Sabha is adjourned till 4 pm.

In the Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, the Securities Transaction Tax on options is proposed to be increased to 0.0625 per cent from 0.05 per cent and on futures contracts to 0.0125 from 0.01 per cent.

After the Lok Sabha cleared the Finance Bill, which has 64 official amendments, the finance ministry issued a state-



ment saying that there was a typographical error in the amendments with respect to the change in STT on options trading.

The error, the finance ministry said, will be rectified in accordance with the extent procedure of the government of India.

As per the amendments, the STT on options has been increased from 0.017 per cent to 0.021 per cent.

"In case of STT, the rate is proposed to be changed from 0.05 per cent to 0.0625 per

cent. There was a typographical error which is being corrected," the ministry said.

In percentage terms, STT on sale of futures has been hiked from 0.01 per cent to 0.0125 per cent and in case of options it has been hiked from 0.05 per cent to 0.062 per cent.

Traders in the futures segment will now have to pay STT of Rs 1,250 on Rs 1 crore of turnover against the earlier levy of Rs 1,000.

The new rules will come into effect from the new financial year 2023-24.



Gold declines Rs 640; silver tumbles Rs 700

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price declined Rs 640 to Rs 59,220 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had ended at Rs 59,860 per 10 grams on Friday.

Silver also tumbled Rs 700 to Rs 70,140 per kilogram.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi market traded at Rs 59,220 per 10 grams, down Rs 640 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, both gold and silver were trading lower at USD 1,970 per ounce and USD 23.10 per ounce, respectively.

Gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Monday.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Immediate action by the government to help Indian startups in the aftermath of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) collapse ensured they were not adversely impacted by the "minor crisis", Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Monday.

He also exhorted the entire startup community to think of the Indian banking sector as their trusted partner.

Vaishnaw, Minister for IT and Communications, also noted the rapid strides taken by India in areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing.

Speaking at India Global Forum event, the Minister said while there was a time when India was only seen as a consumer of technology, today "many global developers like to have Indian startups, entrepreneurs and academicians as their partners, as technology gets developed".

"...In these two technologies, we would like use of Indian talent for developing solutions for India and for the world," he



said. To a question on whether India can produce something equivalent to ChatGPT, the Minister said "wait for a few weeks there will be a big announcement."

The Minister said it is important for global economy to have trusted partner like India.

All over the world there is a sense that India should emerge as a key semiconductor manufacturing destination, Vaishnaw said adding that Government is working "sincerely and diligently" to ensure a vibrant semiconductor ecosystem comes up in the country.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday said the country's first quantum computing-based telecom network link is now operational in the national capital.

While speaking at the first international quantum enclave, Vaishnaw said that the quantum communication link is now operational between Sanchar Bhawan and National Informatics Centre office located in CGO Complex in the national capital.

"The first quantum secure communication link between Sanchar Bhawan and NIC, CGO complex is now operational," Vaishnaw said and announced a Rs 10 lakh prize money for ethical hackers who can break the encryption of the system.

"We are also launching a hackathon, a challenge round, for anybody who breaks this system and system developed by C-DoT, we will be giving Rs 10 lakh per break," Vaishnaw said.

Cyber criminals exploiting ChatGPT popularity to spread malwares

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber criminals are exploiting popularity of ChatGPT to spread malware through hijacked Facebook accounts, cyber intelligence firm CloudSEK said on Monday.

CloudSEK in its investigation has found the presence of 13 Facebook pages or accounts including those with Indian content, totalling over 5 lakh followers, that have been compromised and are being used to disseminate the malware via Facebook ads.

"Cybercriminals are capitalising on the popularity of ChatGPT, exploiting Facebook's vast user base by compromising legitimate Facebook accounts to distribute malware via Facebook ads, putting users' security at risk.



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

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

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

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Global beverages major The Coca-Cola Company is bullish on the Indian market and is continuing to invest in the country through its partners, the company's President and Chief Financial Officer John Murphy said on Monday.

India's rapid progress in infrastructure, electrification and digitisation offer a long runway ahead for the economy to grow and it fosters confidence, he said at a media round table here.

A lot of development has taken place in urban and rural India, which has created an emerging middle class, ensuring growth for many years to come, he said.

"When you have an economy growing, our industry typically benefits from economic growth," he said.



"For us, there are tremendous ingredients to the growth equation that we are developing. And to manage growth, you have to invest. We are fortunate to have partners in India who believe in the opportunity they have and are investing in infrastructure and people," he noted.

A lot of investment is underway through franchise bottling partners in the country, who are investing while "believing the opportunity ahead", he said, adding that it is going to continue.

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex snapped two-day losing streak to close 126 points higher on Monday, propped up by buying in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, Maruti and SBI amid a higher opening in European equities.

However, investors remained cautious amid stress in the US and European financial systems, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 126.76 points or 0.22 per cent to finish at 57,653.86. During the day, the index witnessed a high of 58,019.55 and a low of 57,415.02. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 40.65 points or 0.24 per cent to end at 16,985.70, with 27 of its scrips ending in the green.

Reliance Industries emerged



as the biggest gainer in the Sense pack, rising 1.54 per cent, followed by Maruti, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and HDFC Bank.

On the other hand, Power Grid, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors were among the major laggards. A strengthening rupee

bolstered sentiment, even as relentless foreign capital outflows restricted the gains, according to traders.

"...the market ended mixed with marginal gains in large caps while mid and small caps had losses. Some certainty was seen in domestic banks and large caps due to ease in the US and European markets aided by reports on the acquisition of SVB by US lender First Citizens Bank.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Four projects of Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) worth Rs 2,338 crore are facing delay due to reasons like delayed placement of orders and supply of materials/equipment, Parliament was informed on Monday.

However, there is no cost overrun in these projects, Union steel minister

Jyotiraditya M Scindia said in a reply to Rajya Sabha.

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

EPFO to decide rate of interest on deposits today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The retirement fund body EPFO is likely to announce the rate of interest on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for 2022-23 at its two-day meeting beginning Monday.

EPFO had lowered the interest on EPF for 2021-22 to an over four-decade low of 8.1 per cent for its about five crore subscribers, from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21 in March 2022.

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

Besides interest rate, the CBT will also discuss the annual accounts of the EPFO

for 2022-23. The trustees will also deliberate on the action taken by the EPFO on the Supreme Court order for giving a four-month window to Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 subscribers to opt for higher pension.

The EPFO has provided the facility to opt for higher pension to its subscribers till May 3, 2023.

The 8.5 per cent interest rate on EPF deposits for 2020-21 was decided by the CBT in

March 2021. After the CBT decision, the interest rate on EPF deposits for 2022-23 will be sent to the Ministry of Finance for concurrence.

EPFO provides the rate of interest only after it is ratified by the government through the finance ministry.

In March 2020, EPFO had lowered the interest rate on provident fund deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent for 2019-20, from 8.65 per cent provided for 2018-19.

First Citizens acquires troubled Silicon Valley Bank



PNS ■ NEW YORK

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

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

Customers of SVB will automatically become cus-

tomers of First Citizens, which is headquartered in Raleigh. The 17 former branches of SVB will open as First Citizens branches Monday, the FDIC said.

European shares opened higher Monday, with German lender Commerzbank AG up 2.4% and BNP Paribas up 1.2%.

Investors worry that other banks also may crumble under the pressure of higher interest rates.

On Friday, much of the focus was on Deutsche Bank, whose stock tumbled 8.5% in Germany, though it was back up about 3.6% in early trading Monday.

Earlier this month, shares of and faith in Swiss bank Credit Suisse fell so much that regulators brokered a takeover of by rival UBS.

e3W likely to gain traction due to conducive economics

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Electric three-wheelers are expected to gain traction due to favourable operating economics, and the government's focus on cleaner means of transportation, domestic credit rating agency Icrs said on Monday.

According to a recent Icrs report, the electric segment is likely to account for 14-16 per cent of new three-wheeler sales (excluding rickshaws) by FY2025, up from 8 per cent currently.

Penetration is estimated to rise to 35-40 per cent by FY2030 as the product gains more accep-

tance and financing-related challenges subside, as per the report.

Icrs said, according to its recent channel check, most e3W dealers have seen double-digit growth in sales in the last two years, owing to various factors, such as lower operating costs, exemptions from registration and road taxes, and higher demand for last mile connectivity.

However, while demand for e3Ws (including e-rickshaws) is increasing, sales have been limited by a lack of financing options, with the loans being offered at high-interest rates, poor loan-to-value ratios, and



shorter EMI tenures, it said.

Furthermore, many large banks and NBFCs are not yet lending to this segment, limiting

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

availability will be the most effective way to boost e3W sales.

"e3Ws (including e-rickshaws) have been at the forefront of India's electrification journey, being among the early adopters. In 10M FY2023, the 3Ws (excluding rickshaws) recorded an electric penetration of 8 per cent, compared to 4 per cent for two-wheelers and 1 per cent for passenger vehicles," said Kinjal Shah, Vice President at Icrs.

While sales dropped substantially in the aftermath of the pandemic, they rebounded at a healthy rate in the current fiscal year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by a solid margin, she

added.

According to the rating agency, a favourable regulatory environment with central and state government subsidies to lower capital costs, as well as reduction or waiver of registration fees, road taxes, and permit requirements continue to be supportive of e-auto adoption.

Coupled with the inherently lower running costs, this results in a much lower (40-45 per cent) total cost of ownership (TCO) than conventional diesel or CNG three-wheelers, making the conversion to e-autos an attractive proposition, Shah stated.

Radhika Madan starrer *Sanaa* set to open UK Asian Film Festival

National award winning director Sudhanshu Saria's *Sanaa* starring Radhika Madan is all set to open the UK Asian Film Festival. The festival is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year with a remarkable line-up of films that centre on the British Asian experience. The festival will take place from May 4th to May 13th, 2023, with the opening night screening of *Sanaa* at the BFI Southbank in London where both, the director Sudhanshu Saria and the lead actor Radhika Madan will present the film in person. *Sanaa* has already gained a lot of attention and critical acclaim, having world premiered at the 26th Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival and had its North American premiere at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival with overwhelming response. The UK Asian Film Festival is organized by Tongues on Fire, a not-for-profit organization, and supported by the BFI and Arts Council England. This year's theme is 'Celebrating Our Stories', with a focus on films that centre on the British Asian experience. *Sanaa* is a perfect fit for this theme, as it explores mental health, trauma, and how they affect us.

Speaking about *Sanaa*, Director Sudhanshu Saria said, "What an honour for the entire team to launch the 25th edition of UK Asian Film Festival with our film! We are thrilled to be part of this wonderful event that has been celebrating diverse voices and helping change minds for the past 25 years. *Sanaa* is an intimate and raw portrait of the modern Indian woman and I can't wait to see how it resonates with British audiences." Radhika Madan added, "*Sanaa* is a very special film for me. It's a film that talks about unresolved trauma, something that a lot of people go through but never talk about. It was a challenging role for me, and I am so glad that it has been appreciated by audiences worldwide. I am really excited to present the film at UK Asian Film Festival and to share *Sanaa* with the audience there." *Sanaa* tells the story of a 28-year-old headstrong and ambitious woman working in Mumbai who is fighting an internal battle caused by unresolved trauma. The film stars Radhika Madan in the lead role, along with Soham Shah, Shikha Talsania, and Pooja Bhatt.



Wamiqa Gabbi took references from films of 1950s, 1960s to prepare her part in *Jubilee*

Actress Wamiqa Gabbi, who is known for her work in streaming anthology series *Modern Love Mumbai*, will be soon seen in another streaming series, this time a period drama titled *Jubilee*, and the role was a dream come true for her as she is a huge period drama fan. To prepare for her part, the actress saw the popular films from the 1950s to 1960s to sketch up her part. Having grown up in a family who watched black and white movies together, Wamiqa revealed she jumped on to the opportunity when she was offered *Jubilee*. It

was not just a huge nostalgic factor for her, but also a challenge as an actress. She said, "I have always been a fan of period drama films, especially from the black and white era. There was a time when I used to enjoy such films with my entire family in Doordarshan. When *Jubilee* was offered to me, I jumped at the offer, it was like reminiscing about the good old days." She further mentioned, "I got into the skin of the character in *Jubilee* by watching popular films between the 50s and 60s to take references from the actresses of that time. The soul of the character is completely mine, so that it does not look like a caricature. However, with context to their body language, facial expressions and dialogue delivery, a lot of actresses from that era inspired me."

The series, which also stars Aparshakti Khurana, Aditi Rao Hydari, Prosenjit Chatterjee, Sidhant Gupta, Nandish Sandhu, and Ram Kapoor in pivotal roles, is helmed by Vikramaditya Motwane, who is known for his extremely diverse filmography. *Jubilee* will be available to stream on Prime Video from April 7.

Michael Jackson 'lied' about being in a relationship with Brooke Shields

Actress Brooke Shields opened up about her friendship with King of Pop Michael Jackson and said the star once lied that she was his girlfriend. Back when she was 28 years old, Jackson told a live TV interview with Oprah Winfrey that she was his girlfriend but he was reportedly in a relationship with someone else, reports mirror.co.uk. Now 57, Shields said: "I called him up and I think I said, 'This is kind of pathetic that you need to do this. I am having a shot at a normal life - you cannot drag me into crazy town.'" She claims Jackson laughed it off and despite their closeness as friends, the pair never kissed or dated. She added: "There was one moment when we were in the car and the cameras were there and he grabbed me to kiss me and I said, 'No! Stop! We are just friends and you need me as a friend.' "I remember the early days when other actresses were after him and he was kind of cute, before the shift. But it never even crossed my mind," she told The Times. In her upcoming documentary titled *Pretty Baby*, Brooke is overcome with emotion as she sits at her dining table with her two daughters, Rowan and Grier Henchy as they discuss the 1978 film of the same name. She said she doesn't understand why her mother didn't help her when filming the kissing scene and claims director Louis Malle snapped at her for making a repulsed face. Her co-star Keith tried to reassure her, saying the kiss "doesn't count. It's pretend. It's all make-believe." Rowan says she will never watch the movie before asking her mother: "Would you have let us (do that) at the age of 11?" "No," Brooke replies instinctively and her shoulders collapse. Speaking about the scene in a new interview, Brooke said she found it difficult to speak to her daughters about the decision to make the film. "That was... that was hard for me, to not justify my mom to them, but when they asked me, I thought, 'Oh God, I have to admit this'." The actress added: "I mean, I could say, 'Oh, it was the time back then,' or 'Oh, it was art.' But I don't know why she thought it was all right. I don't know."

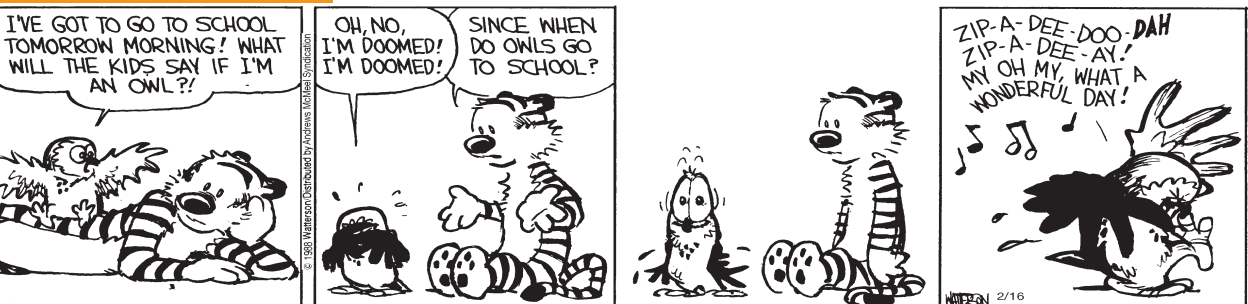


FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



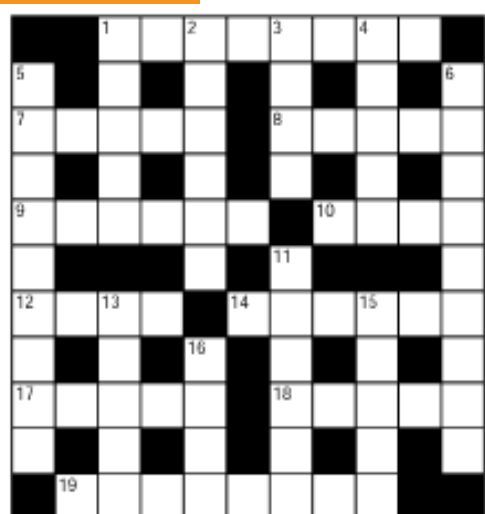
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

ACROSS

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

DOWN

- Indicate direction with your finger
- Moscow is in this country
- Shift
- A type of dance club
- Wrong
- Most powerful
- A sculpted figure
- Ruin
- Rome is the capital city of this country
- Large boat





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

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

SHIKHA DUGGAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A "fitness freak" mommy keeping it all together

TEJAL SINHA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



WINNING CRUCIAL MOMENTS KEY TO MI'S SUCCESS: HARMAN

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

"When we were doing well, the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sandeep replaces injured Krishna at Rajasthan Royals

PTI ■ JAIPUR

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

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

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

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

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

DC TO MISS ALL FOREIGN PACERS IN 1ST 2 GAMES

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

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

RANA TO LEAD KKR



PTI ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bangladesh beat Ireland in rain-hit 1st T20I

AP ■ CHATTOGRAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

At Indore, Australia had defeated India by nine wickets

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

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

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

Afghanistan thump Pakistan to claim T20I series

AP ■ SHARJAH

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

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

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

"It's a great honour and

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

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

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

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

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



Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

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

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

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

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

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

Pakistan captain Shadab Khan.

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

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

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

Farooqi finished with 2-19 in his four overs.

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

Keerthy eyeing on strong characters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Bindu Madhavi throws Glam Feast

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

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

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

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



PS-2 trailer to be launched in Chennai tomorrow

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

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

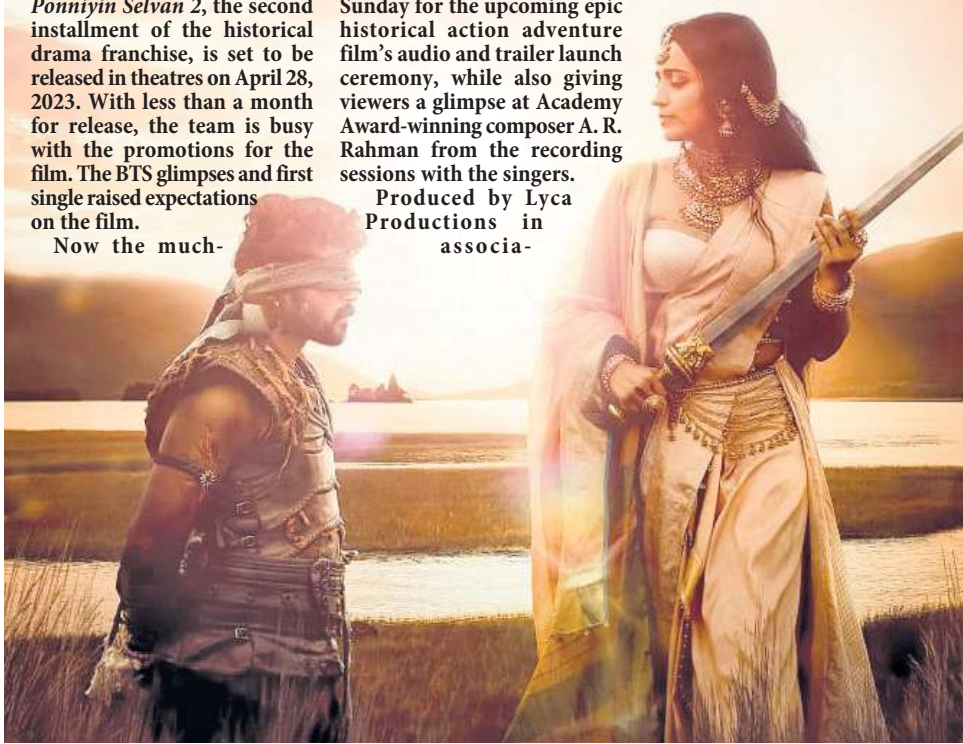
Now the much-

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

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

Produced by Lyca Productions in associa-

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



Ram Charan next film titled Game Changer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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