

sunday pioneer

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Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Harish Rao should tell us what is the secret pact between them. The dramas of Revanth and Harish are meant to create an Eknath Shinde. I am getting the doubt that Harish may become the Shinde. Revanth brought Harish's name on to the screen and they played a game. I am ready to resign if Revanth Reddy implements the six guarantees fully



- Alleti Maheshwar Reddy, BJP leader

DON'T MISS...

Nagole to have another...

The Hyderabad Airport Metro Limited (HAML) Managing Director NVS Reddy and other officials conducted a detailed inspections on Saturday, covering a 14km stretch from Nagole to Chandrayangutta, marking the starting phase of the Airport Metro link connecting Nagole to Shamshabad airport. Key decisions and directives were issued during the inspections, where the new Nagole Airport metro station will be situated closer to the existing Nagole station, towards...

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IAF helicopter roped in to...

An IAF helicopter was pressed into service to extinguish the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand's Nainital district on Saturday, a day after the flames reached the High Court Colony in the Pines area. The blaze came dangerously close to the houses in the colony and an Army cantonment around five kilometres away from the Pines, prompting the response by authorities. The Indian Air Force said a Mi-17 V5 helicopter was deployed to assist in the firefighting operations. "With a forest fire building up in vicinity of an Air Force..."

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Instagram, YouTube biggest...

Adult US TikTok users spend an average of 54 minutes on the app on any given day, more than Instagram, Snapchat or YouTube, according to research firm eMarketer. If TikTok were to disappear, those platforms — along with younger, smaller emerging rivals — would be scrambling for those valuable minutes of people's attention. But with an actual ban still likely years away, it's not clear what app will be the biggest beneficiary. Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, may see more advertisers amid...

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Myopia is at epidemic levels...

Myopia, or the need for corrected vision to focus or see objects at a distance, has become a lot more common in recent decades. Some even consider myopia, also known as nearsightedness, an epidemic. Optometry researchers estimate that about half of the global population will need corrective lenses to offset myopia by 2050 if current rates continue — up from 23% in 2000 and less than 10% in some countries. The associated health care costs are huge. In the United States alone, spending on corrective lenses, eye tests and related expenses may be as high as US\$7.2 billion a year. What explains the rapid growth in myopia? I'm a vision scientist who has studied visual perception and perceptual defects. To answer that question, first let's...

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'Confident of winning in CM's home turf'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS chief KCR said that he was confident of winning the CM's home turf Mahbubnagar. "We are winning Mahbubnagar and Nagarkurnool. I got our survey reports on Saturday," he said. Attacking the Congress and the BJP for not implementing their promises to the people, former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao said on Saturday that the BRS should be made victorious in the Lok Sabha polls to fight on behalf of TG.

He said that people have seen the Congress government changing its mind and have realised that they must give a shock to the government to reduce its arrogance.

Addressing a roadshow in the Lok Sabha constituency of Nagarkurnool, he said that the Congress came to power in the state by making deceptive promises and spreading lies.

He asked whether the promises of the Congress like 'Rythu Bandhu' investment support scheme for farmers, Rs 2 lakh farm loan waiver, two-wheelers for girls and Rs 500 bonus on MSP have been implemented to which the gathering replied in the negative.

He said the BRS government headed by him had ensured 24x7 power supply while electricity supply has become erratic under the Congress admin.



KCR joins X, complains of power outage

BRS Chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao joined 'X' (former Twitter) and Instagram. He goes by the ID @KCRBRSPresident.

In a tweet, he said, "Many strange events are happening in Telangana. An hour ago I was having lunch at the house of Mahbubnagar LS candidate Manne Srinivas Reddy and some former MLAs were having lunch at the house of former minister Srinivas Goud when the power went out twice. Every day the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister are saying there are no power cuts.

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Modi-Shah mulling 'surgical strike' on SC, ST, OBCs: CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Intensifying his attack on the BJP, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that the BJP is 'conspiring' to change the Constitution and abolish reservations in the country and that Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are planning a "surgical strike" on SCs, STs and OBCs.

He said that Adani and Ambani have joined hands with Modi and Amit Shah and are plotting to scrap reservations by 2025.

The RSS, when it was founded in 1925 had decided to declare the country as a 'Hindu country' and to scrap reservations after 100 years (by 2025), he said.

"The reason for the BJP's slogan of '400 paar' (above 400) is because they want to change the Constitution completely, abolish reservations and make India free of reservations," he told reporters here on Saturday.

"Narendra Modi and Amit Shah are planning a 'surgical strike' on this country's Dalits, STs and OBCs. They (BJP) have decided to make the LS elections the launch pad for their surgical strike," the CM said.

As the Congress is trying to counter the BJP's attempt to abolish quotas, Modi and Amit Shah are



Attacking the BRS, he said that the party president, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, is not questioning the BJP's conspiracy to scrap reservations. KCR had earlier favoured amending the Constitution, he said.

now launching indiscriminate attacks on Rahul Gandhi, he said.

The BJP is seeking 400 seats to implement the RSS ideology and to announce that the country is "free of reservations," he said.

The Modi government is implementing the ideas of the RSS like a

ban on triple talaq, scrapping Article 370, and imposing the Uniform Civil Code and the CAA, he said.

He also claimed that by scrapping reservations the BJP is attempting to make SCs, STs and OBCs 'slaves of companies.'

Rahul had announced that he would hold an OBC census and remove the 50 per cent cap on reservations, the CM who is also the TPCC President said.

"The Mandal Commission was set up in 1978 to give reservation to OBCs. The BP Mandal Commission suggested 27 per cent reservations for BCs. On that day pro-RSS groups opposed reservations. The Supreme Court also upheld the Mandal Commission report and said that

reservations should not exceed 50 per cent. Rahul received appeals from the people to implement reservations according to population ratio and he has promised to conduct a BC caste census and provide reservation according to population ratio," he said.

"Not only Bandi Sanjay Kumar and Kishan Reddy, why is Eateela who claims to be a leftist not speaking on this," he asked.

Attacking the BRS, he said that the party president, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, is not questioning the BJP's conspiracy to scrap reservations. KCR had earlier favoured amending the Constitution, he said.

2

CM Revanth cheating people in instalments, says KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

KTR accused Revanth Reddy of cheating the public in instalments. He said that after deceiving the people in the Assembly elections with fake promises he is now moving on to phase two cheating for parliament elections.

As part of his plan, Revanth is promising a loan waiver to farmers by August 15. KTR noted that the Chief Minister is now making vows before gods to deceive the people once again, indicating a lack of credibility.



KTR dismissed Revanth Reddy's challenge on farm loan waivers, reminding the media of his history of not keeping his word. He cited instances when Revanth had vowed

to quit politics if he lost in Kodangal and during the GHMC election but failed to do that.

2

Harish Rao has become 'Drama Rao': Kadiyam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Minister T. Harish Rao has become 'Drama Rao', Congress leader Station Ghanpur MLA Kadiyam Srihari said. Speaking to the media on Saturday, Kadiyam said that Harish challenged Revanth first and that Harish must stick to his challenge as the CM has accepted Harish's challenge that Harish will resign his MLA post if the CM waives farm loans by August 15. However, Harish changed his word saying that he will resign if the CM waives farm loans and also implements the six guarantees fully, Kadiyam said.

"What can we call Harish Rao if he changes his word? Is this not a drama?" he said. Kadiyam said the public is watching Harish's dramas. He said that MRPS Founder President Manda Krishna Madiga will come to his home and congratulate his daughter Kadiyam Kavya after her victory in the Lok Sabha elections.



KCR gave me drought as legacy: Revanth

Says only 18 farmers applied for Rythu Bhima

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that the "legacy KCR gave him was drought." It is not "a drought brought about by the Congress but a legacy given by KCR."

Dismissing KCR's claims that 200 farmers had died after December 2023, Revanth said that only 18 farmers had applied for Rythu Bhima after December 2023.

"Every farmer is insured. I made officials verify facts on the deaths of farmers. Only 18 farmers have applied for Rythu Bhima. Whatever may be the cause of death they will apply," he said. When asked about Kodandareddy's claim that 65 farmers had died, the CM said that might include farm labourers too. He said that the compensation for crop loss will be given.

When asked about hurling abuses against KCR, Revanth said that this is part of his struggle. KCR said that he used to scold people during



the Telangana agitation to provoke emotions but now the Chief Minister is using offensive language against him.

When asked about this Revanth said, "Even I am using it as a part of our movement."

He said that he is at war with onepmanship and about the water crisis in Hyderabad. "We are giving more water and electricity this year than last year," he said.

2

CPM withdraws candidate in Bhongir To back Congress

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The CPM has withdrawn from the electoral battle to help the Congress candidate in the Bhongir Lok Sabha constituency. CPM leaders held talks with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy regarding this on Saturday. Speaking to the media after the meeting, the CM said that he had held talks with the CPM and that the Congress had appealed to the CPM to support the Congress not only in Bhongir, but also in other constituencies to ensure that votes did not get split. "We also kept some other proposals before the CPM. CPM leaders agreed to support the Congress to defeat the BJP. The CPM is also working with the INDI Alliance. There might be ambiguity on one or two issues, however, we will come to a consensus after discussing with the high command by Sunday," the CM said.

'Revanth & Harish have entered into a dark deal'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and BRS leader T. Harish Rao have entered into a 'dark deal', Bharatiya Janata Party Legislature Party (BJPLP) leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy said.

Castling doubts about the CM throwing a challenge mentioning the name of Harish Rao, Maheshwar asked the CM and Harish to reveal the 'secret pact' between them.

"These dramas of Revanth Reddy and Harish Rao are intended to create Telangana's Eknath Shinde. I am getting the doubt that Harish may become Shinde. Revanth brought Harish's name on to the screen and they are playing a game. What is



Bharatiya Janata Party Legislature Party (BJPLP) leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy

going on behind the scenes? Is Harish going to become a Shinde? The CM and Harish have entered into a match-fixing deal," Maheshwar said.

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'Hindi Milap' Editor Vinay Veer is no more

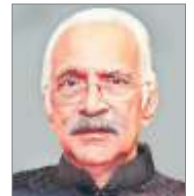
PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hindi lost a son on Saturday. Renowned journalist 'Hindi Milap' Editor Vinay Vir, who raised the flag of Hindi in the south, passed away on Saturday. He was 72 years old. Veer, who enriched Hindi

with his editing and management style, took Hindi to new heights. Whenever there is talk of Shri Vriddhi of Hindi in the South, the name of Vinay Vir will be taken with respect.

Vinay Vir, born in the family of freedom fighters Yudhveer and Sita Yudhvir,

was always a fighter. Sita was a Rajya Sabha Member of the Congress. This was the reason that he not only remained active till the end, but also the development of Hindi remained in his thoughts.



Renowned Journalist 'Hindi Milap' Editor Vinay Vir

2

'Can Indian space agency find water on moon?'

Space enthusiasts poser to ISRO chief Somanath

PNS ■ BENGALURU

When Indian Space Research Organisation chairman S Somanath threw the floor open for questions over Instagram on Saturday, not only did people want to know about next Chandrayaan, asteroid missions and space stations, but also if ISRO can find water and if ISRO can teach 10-year-olds to build nano satellite. But with only an hour earmarked for ask-somanathisro, Somanath could only answer a fraction of the questions posted by aspiring scientists and space enthusiasts. Questions on water

Somanath chose questions aimed to encourage students and enthusiasts to pursue careers in science and technology, even geology, emphasising that ISRO offers diverse opportunities beyond just astronaut roles.

on the moon and nano-satellite classes for 10-year-olds have to wait till next session. The session on April 27, between 6pm and 7pm, was attended by nearly 1,500 people. Somanath chose questions aimed to encourage students and enthusiasts to pursue

careers in science and technology, even geology, emphasising that ISRO offers diverse opportunities beyond just astronaut roles.

Answering a question on whether it would be possible for humans to build a fully sustainable space colony,



ISRO chief said it is not likely in the near future. "There are huge technical challenges to create a planet like earth elsewhere. It also requires huge investment, so in the immediate future I don't see it happening," said Somanath.

Kejriwal to SC: ED acted in most highhanded manner



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Telangana DPH issues advisory amid heatwave

P3

OBTUSE ANGLE





Gandhi Bhavan needs deep cleaning

It makes sense to clean up one's own backyard before pointing a finger at somebody else's. The Telangana unit of the Congress may be on cloud nine, having come to power 10 long years after the parent party was driven out of undivided Andhra Pradesh. Since the party over the party unit's return to power is obviously over, it is high time TPCC had a close look at the Gandhi Bhavan, which has been the undivided Congress party's headquarters since the late fifties. Although many legendary chief ministers have graced its portals, today 'Gandhi Bhavan' is deliberately mispronounced by some; instead of stressing the vowel 'a' in Gandhi, they utter it like schwa, making it sound like *gandhi* (dirty). Deep cleaning of Gandhi Bhavan is the need of the hour. Later the party unit can focus on the maintenance, before thinking about hygiene in other places. Gandhi Bhavan is once again a buzzing place now, but quite nauseating with pervasive cobwebs, grime, dust and peeling plaster, to name a few. It is a different matter that the Congress party is going to get a new party office. "They can't replicate certain memories of this building in the new structure", seasoned observers point out.

which was supposed to close by noon, ended at 2:00 pm. Visibly anxious, Minister Komatireddy Venkateddy urged officials not to let the women who had come to step out of their vehicle. He said, "In this heat, many won't even have footwear; we cannot risk their health for our campaign". The saving grace is that crowds these days, if any, are thin between 12 pm and 4:00 pm, going by drone shots of campaigns.

IS IT DOUBLE-ENGINE OR DOUBLE-FACED?

People know enough about the

REPORTERS' DIARY

to become supporters of Jagan and his party YSRCP. A wag commented: "The BJP has alliance with TDP to ensure the victory of YS Jagan in the coming Assembly elections".

SEALING RESIGNATION LETTER WITH SENTIMENTS

Former minister T Harish Rao unwittingly exalted all journalists to the stature of 'intellectuals' by putting in his papers before them at the Telangana Martyrs Statue in Gun Park on Friday, while picking up the gauntlet thrown by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. Having offered to give his resignation letter to 'intellectuals' while challenging Revanth also to follow suit, Harish gave his resignation letter to journalists noticeably on a sentimental note. He recalled that even journalists had played a key role during the Telangana statehood movement. The timed spotlight on journalists' role during the T movement also led to illuminating discussions among fraternal colleagues. What stood out in these discussions was that those journalists who had danced to the tunes of a particular political party benefited in a big way, while journalists who had sweated it out during the T movement were still facing troubles. Ironically, some of them are in deep trouble for having participated in the movement! A senior scribe recalled dharnas and other forms of protests by scribes at Gun Park during the Telangana movement, and said: "On hindsight, it appears to have been in vain".

(With inputs from SNCN Acharyulu, Naveena Ghanate and K Venkateshwarlu)

NETAS WARY OF CAMPAIGN IN HEAT WAVE

Politicians like to address crowds in jam-packed stadiums or grounds. But the current heat wave has changed the perspective of some netas about an election campaign. With road shows extending into the afternoon, at least some politicians are trying to be considerate towards visitors, whether mobilized or otherwise. One such campaign in Nalgonda district,

Niranjan asks ECI to extend polling hours

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress Vice-President G. Niranjan appealed to the Election Commission to extend polling hours given the hot summer and heat waves to enable more people to vote. Niranjan sent a letter to the Election Commission of India on Saturday regarding this. In his letter, Niranjan said that the elections to the Lok Sabha in Telangana would be held in the fourth phase on May 13.

The election is being held in mid-summer and the people are suffering from severe heat and heat waves. The authorities are cautioning the public not to come out of their houses between 12 am and 4 pm unless there is an emergency.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert for all districts in Telangana.

Revanth afraid of losing LS elections & his post: Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is afraid of defeat.

"The fear of losing his post if he loses the Parliament elections is evident.

He is saying sentimental things like cancelling reservations for Dalits and taking oaths on God. He is not talking about election promises," Harish said while addressing a press conference in Karimnagar on Saturday.

"If he goes to any town he deceives people by slandering the gods.

He is spreading the lie that the BRS and the BJP have entered into a match-fixing deal. His words are like a thief calling another thief. Revanth fixed the match with the BJP. Revanth indirectly helped the BJP to win by fielding weak candidates in Huzarabad, Dubbaka and Munugode. Both parties cooperated in Nagarjanasagar too," Harish said.

'Hindi Milap' Editor...

Continued from page 1

Vinay Vir studied at Nizam College. After that, he went to London for higher education. After returning from London, he dedicated his life to Hindi. Vir was not only a senior journalist but also a world famous photographer. He was also the secretary

of the Yudhvir Foundation created in memory of his father. This foundation has been rewarding people who have succeeded in their field. The last rites of Vir will be performed at 10 am in Whisper Valley in Jubilee Hills. The last journey of Vir will start at 9 am from his residence in Kattalmandi.

BJP to provide quotas based on economic status: Laxman

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP is planning to provide reservations based on economic status, the President of the BJP's OBC Morcha and Rajya Sabha MP, Dr K. Laxman, said during a chat-chat with the media on Saturday. He questioned Congress's stand on BCs, recalling Rajiv Gandhi's opposition to caste-based reservations. Laxman also asked Revanth Reddy to revise history and to remember Rajiv Gandhi's warning against caste-based reservations which will lead to divisions in society. He said the BJP is moving forward with Modi's guarantees to make India a developed country while the opposition hurls charges in the name of religion and caste emotionally impacting voters, especially Dalits and Hindus.

'Revanth & Harish...

Continued from page 1

Addressing the media on Saturday at the State BJP office, Maheshwar asked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to reveal whether only the farm loan waiver scheme will be implemented or whether all the other assurances will also be implemented. "I am ready to resign if Revanth implements the six guarantees fully. I am sending my letter on my letterhead to Gandhi Bhavan by speed post on Saturday itself.

He said that KCR did not come to the Assembly as he is afraid that he would not be able to answer.

When asked why he is campaigning so much in Mahbubnagar, he said, "Mahbubnagar is my home district. I will go any number of times there."

He said that he was confident that the Congress would definitely win 14 LS seats in TG. "We will win Secunderabad, Bandaru Dattatreya lost in 2004 and the same is going to repeat in Secunderabad," he said.

However, he expressed apprehensions about Hyderabad. He said that the BJP had fielded a Hindu in Hyderabad. If they were serious about winning they would have fielded a Muslim.

KCR gave me...

Continued from page 1

In Hyderabad, water consumption has increased. He said that borewells have dried up. Highrise buildings diverted Basti waters and some authorities are deliberately stopping the water supply, he said.

"Harish Rao has his men in the water supply department. They stop the water supply exactly at the peak hour. Earlier, they did this with power cuts. Once I gave orders and suspended a few linemen power cuts came down. There are now only power supply interruptions in the state," the CM said.

He said that he paid Rs 24,000 crore of the debts incurred by the BRS government in four months.

'Oppn bloc cannot even reach a three-digit figure'

Plans to have five PMs in 5 years if elected: Modi

PNS ■ KOLHAPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday targeted the Congress-led INDI alliance, saying it is mulling to have five prime ministers in five years if voted to power.

Addressing a rally at Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, Modi said the opposition bloc cannot even reach a three-digit figure or "at the doorstep of forming a government, but has plans to have one prime minister every year if they get a chance".

"In Karnataka, Congress has planned to rotate the post of the chief minister by handing it to the deputy chief minister after 2.5 years. They had this

"In Karnataka, Congress has planned to rotate the post of the chief minister by handing it to the deputy chief minister after 2.5 years.



arrangement in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan as well," he said. Modi said the Congress wants to extend the "Karnataka model wherein Muslims were inducted in the 27 per cent quota for OBCs", in the entire country. "The Congress-led alliance

Modi said the Congress had not only opposed the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya but also declined the invitation for its consecration.

Targeting Rahul Gandhi over wealth distribution, Modi said, "The Congress shehzade wants to search your wealth and distribute it to those who the party had said to have the first right on the country's resources".

"The Congress wanted to impose inheritance tax and rob people of their inheritance. Such people shouldn't get even a slight chance of coming to power," he added.

He said the NDA is leading 2-0 in the first two phases of Lok Sabha elections.

BJP wants to 'snatch away' reservation, says Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday claimed that it is clear from the statements of BJP leaders that their objective is to destroy democracy by changing the Constitution and "snatch away" the reservation of Dalits, backward classes and tribals.

Gandhi asserted that as long as the Congress is there, no power in the world can take away reservation from the deprived people.



In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "It is now clear from the statements of BJP leaders and those close to Narendra Modi that their

objective is -- destroying the democracy of the country by changing the Constitution. To snatch away the reservation of Dalits, backward classes and tribals and end their participation in running the country."

The Congress is standing like a rock in the way of the BJP to protect the Constitution and reservation, he asserted.

"As long as the Congress is there, no power in the world can take away their reservation from the deprived people," he asserted.

20 Cambodian soldiers killed in explosion



PNS ■ CAMBODIA

An ammunition explosion at a base in southwestern Cambodia on Saturday afternoon killed 20 soldiers and injured several others, Prime Minister Hun Manet said.

Hun Manet said in a Facebook post that he was "deeply shocked" when he received the news of the explosion at the base in Kampong Speu province. It was not immediately clear what caused it. Pictures from the scene showed several badly damaged buildings still smoldering, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital. Other photos showed houses with holes in their roofs.

Modi-Shah...

Continued from page 1

The CM said that the Congress has to win to protect reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs.

The CM claimed that the BJP would not get more than 10 to 15 Lok Sabha seats in the south out of the 130.

The Congress and the INDIA bloc would win more than 100 seats in the south, he added.

Modi will have to accept defeat this time like KCR did in the Assembly polls last year, the CM said.

Voting for all the 17 Lok Sabha constituencies in Telangana will be held on May 13.

Komatireddy Venkat with 22 MLAs wants to topple Cong govt: BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy said that Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy is conspiring to topple the Revanth government.

He said that Venkat had sent a message to him to talk to the BRS leadership about supporting him as he has 22 MLAs. He was addressing a media conference in Karimnagar.

"Venkat sent a man to me. He has the support of 22 MLAs. He said let's form a

Nadda to attend meetings in Kothagudem, Mahbubabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP President Jagat Prakash Nadda will address public meetings in Kothagudem and Mahbubabad on April 29.

He will address the Kothagudem public meeting at 11 am followed by the Mahbubabad public meeting at 12:30 pm.

Nadda will attend a roadshow at Nizampet in the Quthbullapur Assembly constituency in Malkajgiri LS constituency at 5 pm.

KCR joins X, complains...

Continued from page 1

The former legislators who were with me told me that electricity goes off 10 times a day in their constituencies. What can be a greater proof of the failure of the Congress? The people of the state should think 'Jai Telangana'." The TSSPDCL issued a press statement saying that the claim is false. "No interruption was found in the digital record of the

'Confident of winning in...

Continued from page 1

He claimed that about 225 farmers have died since the Congress came to power.

KCR said he needs people's support to make the Congress government implement all its promises.

Describing BJP as a relative that is not helpful he said fuel prices increased after the

Modi government assumed office.

Mentioning the schemes and promises of the NDA government at the Centre, including 'beti bachao beti padhao', Start-Up India and bullet trains he asked whether there has been a real change in the lives of the Dalits and the poor.

The BJP-led NDA government

has not sanctioned any medical colleges and Navodaya schools for the state although he had requested the Centre, he said.

Voting for the Congress in Nagarkurnool and Mahbubnagar Lok Sabha constituencies would lead to a BJP win, he said, asking Muslims to ensure that the BRS emerges successful.

1,060 nominations found to be valid

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As many as 1060 nominations filed by 625 candidates were found to be valid after scrutiny of 1488 papers received for May 13 Lok Sabha polls in Telangana. After the scrutiny on Friday, 428 nominations were rejected, a communication from Chief Electoral Officer Vikas Raj said on Saturday.

The number of nominations exceeds the count of candidates as some have submitted multiple sets of papers.

The last date for withdrawal of nominations is April 29.

Nominations were accepted from April 18 to 25 and scrutiny was done yesterday.

Telangana BJP chief and Union Minister G Kishan Reddy, the party's national general secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar and senior leader Etala Rajender are among their candidates while the Congress fielded BRS turncoats Danam Nagender and K Kavya, among others. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi is seeking re-election from the party's bastion of Hyderabad constituency and the BJP has fielded



Telangana BJP chief and Union Minister G Kishan Reddy, the party's national general secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar and senior leader Etala Rajender are among their candidates while the Congress fielded BRS turncoats Danam Nagender and K Kavya, among others. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi is seeking re-election from the party's bastion of Hyderabad constituency and the BJP has fielded a political novice K Madhavi Latha against him

ed a political novice K Madhavi Latha against him. Former IPS officer RS

Praveen Kumar and sitting MP Nama Nageswar Rao among others are in the poll fray from

BRS, the party led by former Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu.

TS POLYCET 2024 registration to end today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State Board of Technical Education and Training (SBTET) will conclude the online registration for the Telangana State Polytechnic Common Entrance Test (TS POLYCET) 2024 without a late fee on April 28. The candidates can apply until April 30 for the registration and enrollment with a late fee of Rs 100.

On Saturday the department of technical education advised the candidates to register on the official website before the deadline.

The TS POLYCET 2024 entrance examination is scheduled on May 26 for admission in diploma engineering, agriculture, veterinary and fisheries courses for the academic year 2024-25. Candidates can apply for the exam through polycet.sbtet.telangana.gov.in.

The TS POLYCET 2024, which was originally planned to take place on May 17. But the exam date has been rescheduled to May 26.

Nagole to have another station for Airport Metro

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad Airport Metro Limited (HAML) Managing Director NVS Reddy and other officials conducted a detailed inspection on Saturday, covering a 14km stretch from Nagole to Chandrayangutta, marking the starting phase of the Airport Metro link connecting Nagole to Shamshabad airport.

Key decisions and directives were issued during the inspections, where the new Nagole Airport metro station will be situated closer to the existing Nagole station, towards LB Nagar, with a wide skywalk at an entrance level for seamless passenger transfer.

NVS Reddy said, to avoid relocation of major water mains and high tension electrical lines, the alignment will be shifted approximately 10 meters to the left near Musi, and longer spans will be planned to facilitate Musi rejuvenation works. He also said, an additional station will be included after crossing the Musi river, providing connectivity to the road from Kottapet for nearby colonies.

NVS Reddy said the proposed Nagole RTO station will be positioned closer to Alkapuri junction (Lucky Restaurant), enhancing connectivity to the ORR. Challenges posed by LB Nagar



HAML MD NVS Reddy and officials conducting inspection of Nagole-Airport metro route in Hyderabad on Saturday

junction's underpass and flyovers will be addressed with a new station on the right side, connected to the existing LB Nagar station via a wide skywalk equipped with escalators.

He also said, to minimize the height of the Airport Metro corridor and Bairamalguda/Sagar road Jn Metro station, the alignment would be shifted to the right side of the flyovers, with the station located in the adjacent open space.

He said Stations at Mythri Nagar, Karmanghat, Champapetroad Jn, Owaisi Hospital, DRDO, Hafeez Baba Nagar would be positioned nearer to junction points to serve nearby colonies.

NVS Reddy said the proposed Nagole RTO station will be positioned closer to Alkapuri junction (Lucky Restaurant), enhancing connectivity to the ORR. Challenges posed by LB Nagar

challenges due to existing flyovers and terminal facilities required for extending the Old City Metro, along with integration of both corridors will be carefully managed with height adjustments.

He also said land purchasing for stations along the Nagole to Chandrayangutta stretch will be carefully planned to minimise private property purchase, considering the presence of numerous flyovers.

HAML's Chief Executive Engineer, DVS Raju, Chief Project Manager, S K Das, Chief Planning Manager, B. Anand Mohan, General Manager, B.N. Rajeshwar, Senior Engineer, Y. Sayapa Reddy, and engineering experts from consultancy organization Systra and other officials participated in the inspections.



Hyderabad District Election officer Ronald Rose with election training officers at the GHMC head office on Saturday

Polling officers advised to ensure trouble-free polling

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

District Election Officer (DEO) Ronald Rose said on Saturday that the constituency level training officers should work hard to ensure that no mistakes would arise on the Election Day. The polling officers and other election staff are advised to take all steps. On Saturday, the DEO held a meeting with training officers at the GHMC head office.

He said that there is a need to hold one more training session for Presiding Officers (PO) and Assistant Presiding Officers (APO) to ensure that no mistakes are made by POs.

The DEO said that the Election officials and staff have been given the opportunity to vote through postal ballot and they can also take special casual leave to vote in their hometown. The POs should be fully trained on how to conduct mock polls on election day and how to vote if one's name is on the absentee, shifted and dead (ASD) list.

Additional Collector Hemant Keshav Patil, Cantonment CEO Madhukar Naik, Deputy Collector Vijayalakshmi, Training Nodal Officer Sunanda, Chief Entomologist Dr Rambabu and others participated in this meeting.

Telangana DPH issues advisory amid heatwave

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Director of Public Health on Saturday issued an advisory against the prevailing heatwave in the State. The public has been urged to stay indoors as a measure of protection.

The authorities stressed on being hydrated. The people were advised to drink sufficient water as and when possible, even if they are not thirsty. Use oral rehydration solution (ORS), and consume homemade drinks like lemon water, butter milk / lassi with some added salts, fruit juices etc;

Carry water during travel. Eat seasonal fruits and vegetables with high water content like water melon, muskmelon, orange, grapes, pineapple, cucumber, lettuce or other locally available fruits and vegetables. People have been urged to stay covered and wear thin loose cotton garments preferably light coloured.

"Cover your head: use an umbrella, hat, cap, towel and other traditional headgears during exposure to direct sunlight." Wear shoes or slippers while



going out in the sun. Stay indoors as much as possible in well ventilated and cool places, block direct sunlight and heat waves: Keep windows and curtains closed during the day, especially on the sunny side of your house. Open them up at night to let cooler air in. If going outdoors, limit your outdoor activity to cooler times of the day i.e., morning and evening.

The DPH further asked the people to stay updated regarding the weather.

Vulnerable people including infants and young children; People working outdoors; pregnant women; People who have a mental illness; Physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood

pressure. The DPH also stressed on Don'ts including ; Avoid getting out in the sun, especially between 12-3 PM; Avoid strenuous activities when outside in the afternoon ; Do not go out barefoot ; Avoid cooking during peak summer hours. Open doors and windows to ventilate cooking area adequately ; Avoid alcohol, tea, coffee and carbonated soft drinks or drinks with large amount of sugar- as these actually lead to loss of more body-fluid or may cause stomach cramps; Avoid high-protein food and do not eat stale food; Don't leave children and pets in parked vehicles

Seek immediate medical attention from nearby government health facilities in case of Altered mental sensorium with disorientation: confusion and agitation, irritability, ataxia, seizure and coma; Hot, red and dry skin; Body temperature higher than 40 degrees Celsius or 104 degrees F; Throbbing headache; Anxiety, Dizziness, fainting and lightheadedness; Muscle weakness or cramps; Nausea and vomiting ; rapid Heartbeat or rapid or shallow breathing.

DCA seizes overpriced syrup, Ayurvedic drug

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Drug Control Administration on Saturday raided a pharmacy in Karimnagar and seized overpriced Supralax syrup. DCA Assistant Director M Srinivasulu said, "The firm increased the maximum retail price of the drug by more than 10 per cent in the last 2 months, violating the Drug Prices Control Order, 2013. P Kartik Bharadwaj, Drug Inspector Karimnagar, stressed the need for further investigation.

In a separate incident, the DCA officials seized stock of Bact-Q ointment 5 mg and Mupheal ointment 5 mg for being overpriced during a raid conducted on April 26. J Ashvin Kumar, Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri said, "The prices of the drug should be in accordance with the ceiling price decided by the central government." The manufacture Digital

Vision from Himachal Pradesh of Bact-Q Ointment 5gm was charging Rs 16.38 more than the MRP while Mupheal Ointment, manufactured by Healing Pharma, Vadodar, Gujarat, was charging Rs 29.40 more than the MRP.

According to the order, no manufacturer should increase the maximum retail price of the drug more than ten percent of maximum retail price during the preceding twelve months, DCA said.

The DCA also seized Ayurvedic medicines Rumalaya Liniment that claimed to treat rheumatism' (inflammation, stiffness, and pain in the joints or muscles) and Bhiringraj Choonam for claiming to treat fever, PileBan Cream, (Beclometasone Dipropionate, Phenylephrine HCl and Lignocaine HCl Cream), an allopathic formulation, for claiming to treat piles.

Water board MD inspects twin reservoir in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Board (HMWSSB) Managing Director Sudarshan Reddy visited Himayat Sagar and Osman Sagar on the outskirts of Hyderabad city on Saturday, where he inspected the drinking water supply from the both reservoirs.

Sudarshan Reddy said that 20 million gallons per day (MGD) of water is being pumped from Osman Sagar reservoir and 8 MGD from Himayat Sagar to the people of the city. Water is purified through Asif Nagar filter beds and vertical water treatment centers under Gandipet Conduit and then supplied to the respective areas of the city.

At present Osman Sagar has a storage of 2.4 tmc ft and Himayat Sagar has a storage of 2 tmc ft of water.

DEO presents voter information kit to CEO Vikas Raj

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Vikas Raj highlighted the importance of casting votes responsibly on May 13, the day of the Lok Sabha elections.

After visiting the CEO's house on Saturday, District Election Officer and GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose delivered the voter information slip, polling date, and a sticker indicating 'I am proud to be a voter'.

On this occasion, CEO Vikas Raj urged citizens to vote fearlessly, avoiding any temptations. He emphasised that voting is a weapon safeguarding democracy and shaping the nation's future. He said, The Lok Sabha elections on May 13 should be celebrated as a festival of democracy. Just having an epic card is not sufficient, one must ensure their name is on the voter list.



DEO Ronald Rose presenting voter information kit to CEO Vikas Raj in Hyderabad on Saturday

Ronald Rose elaborated on the voter slip and sticker distribution process to the CEO. He said that Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are visiting

every household to distribute voter information slips and stickers, with a higher percentage distributed compared to the last assembly elections.

Ronald Rose also visited the residence of DGP Ravi Gupta, presenting him with the voter slip and sticker.

Addressing the gathering, DGP Ravi Gupta said, stringent security measures are in place to prevent any unexpected incidents during the voting process on May 13. He also urged everyone to exercise their right to vote.

Khairatabad Zonal Commissioner B Hemant Sahadev Rao, Jubilee Hills and Begumpet Deputy Commissioner Prashanthi, Sammaiah, and other officials participated in the program.

Two held for chain snatching; property worth Rs 2 lakh recovered

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Commissioner's Task Force (South East) Zone in coordination with the IS Sadan police on Saturday arrested two persons involved in chain snatching and seized property worth Rs 2 lakh.

The accused were identified as Garala Prasad Goud (27) a dancer and resident of Ibrahimpatnam; Vadyavath Ganesh (21) a dancer and resident of Saroornagar. Apart from a 9.9 gram gold chain, the police seized a two-wheeler and two mobile phones from the accused.

Goud planned to snatch chains; both the accused targeted isolated places. Ganesh who is also a rapido rider



showed Goud places under IS Sadan police limits. On April 16, the two accused spotted a lady walking by herself.

They followed the victim, snatched the chain and fled the place. Based on the lady's complaint an FIR was registered under section 392 of the IPC.

GHMC aims to net Rs 800 cr in property tax through early bird scheme

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has collected Rs 623 crore in property tax with the help of Early Bird Scheme (EBS) till April 27 and a GHMC official said that for this year the GHMC would collect more than Rs 800 crore. This scheme has started from April 1 to 30 for the financial year 2024-25.

Chief Valuation Officer of GHMC Kulkarni said more than 5.50 lakh citizens utilised this scheme. He said, "Last year GHMC collected Rs 766 crore through the scheme. This financial year we are assessing that we will cross last year's collections." There are 5 zones and 30

circles in the GHMC. "Serilingampally zone and Khairatabad zone are top in the property tax collection and the lowest is from Charminar zone", he mentioned.

This scheme offers a 5 per cent rebate to those who pay their property tax. Approximately there are around 19 lakh tax assessments in the city. Most people would take advantage of the early bird scheme in the last three days.

Citizens can pay their property tax through GHMC website, My GHMC application, or GHMC Service Centres. Also People can utilise this scheme at the citizens centers of GHMC head office and circle office from 8 am to 11 pm.

Karimnagar hottest at 45.6 degrees Celsius: IMD

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hot and humid conditions prevailed over Telangana on Saturday as Hyderabad recorded 43.1 degree Celsius and the Indian Meteorological Department Hyderabad (IMD-H) predicted humid conditions to prevail until May 2. Karimnagar recorded the highest temperature of 45.6 degrees Celsius.

As per the IMD-H on April 27 dry weather prevailed over the state. On April 28, hot and humid conditions are likely to prevail in districts including Adilabad, KomaramBheem Asifabad, Nirmal, Nizamabad,

Jagtiyal, Peddapalli, Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Mulugu, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam, Nalgonda, Suryapet, mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Wanaparthy, Narayanpet and Jogulamba Gadwal. On April 28, light to moderate showers are likely to occur in parts of Telangana. On April 29, hot and humid conditions are expected to prevail across the aforementioned district.

On April 30, hot and humid conditions are expected to prevail in districts including Mancherial, Hanamkonda, Rajanna Sirsilla along with the aforementioned districts.



Similar conditions are likely to prevail in the state till May 2. Dry weather is expected to prevail on May 3-4. While Karimnagar Recorder the highest maximum temperature (45.6) it was followed by

Peddapally, Nalgonda (45.2), Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri and Jagtiyal (45.1), Wanaparthy and Warangal (45). Nizamabad, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Rajanna Sirsilla and Mancherial (44.8), Medak, Sangareddy, Kamareddy and Ranga Reddy (43.6).

As per the Telangana State Planning and Development Society (TSDPS) dry weather is expected to prevail across Telangana from April 27-30. The Maximum temperature during this period is expected to remain between 40-44 degrees Celsius and the minimum temperature is expected to remain between 25-28

degrees Areas under the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) are likely to experience dry weather from April 27-30. The maximum temperature is expected to remain between 41-43 degrees Celsius while the Minimum temperature is expected to remain between 26-29 degrees Celsius.

Among areas under the GHMC Chandanagar recorded highest maximum temperature (43.5) followed by Qutubullapur (43.4) Moosapet (43.2), Begumpet, (43.1), Khairatabad (41.9), Yousufguda (42.9) and Jubilee Hills (42.8).

Hyd Police nab two drug peddlers, marijuana worth Rs 2 lakh seized

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad police on Saturday arrested two drug peddlers involved in separate cases and seized marijuana worth Rs 2,05,000.

In the first case, The Commissioner's Task Force (South East) Zone in coordination with the Kancharbagh Police arrested a person involved in selling marijuana chocolates. The accused was identified as Mohammed Majeed (33) a Pan shop owner and a resident of Hafeez Babanagar. 20 packets

containing 800 marijuana chocolates were seized from Majeed.

On April 25, the Commissioner's Task force and the Kancharbagh police arrested a drug peddler and seized 2 kg of Ganja from him. The accused was identified as B. Satya Sai (27) a resident of Kukatapally. Sai was staying at PG in Madhuranagar.

The accused once visited Bhadradi Kothagudem and saw a person selling the drug at a high price. In 2022, Sai was addicted to marijuana, which he procured the drug from his acquaintances and sold it at a high price to consumers.



People missing BRS rule, suggests Harish Rao

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

The BRS journey that became with just one intensified and assumed the proportion of a huge tidal wave.



The BRS supremo KCR created awareness among the people. He stood like a rock in the face of stiff resistance from Andhra leaders.

The BRS supremo K Chandrashekar Rao created awareness among the people. He stood like a rock in the face of stiff resistance from Andhra leaders.

weathered many ups and downs, repressions and skepticism, he said.

He was participating in the 23rd BRS Foundation Day function here on Saturday.

Harish Rao greeted the people and BRS rank and file on the occasion.

KCR, in his long journey spanning over 23 years, never let the movement lose momentum. The pink flag liberated the people from servitude.

The people in the State

now have been facing difficulties under the Congress rule, he said. The Congress came to power by making false promises.

On the occasion of the BRS Foundation Day, Harish Rao hoisted the party flag.

On the BJP, Harish said that the saffron party had copied the BRS schemes and showed it as its own.

He assured the people that the BRS would continue to fight on behalf of people and exert pressure on the government to fulfil its election promises.

Gandhara Sub-Registrar in ACB trap

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Anti-Corruption Bureau officials trapped Gandhara in-charge Sub-Registrar Shivaram Suresh Babu, while he was allegedly accepting Rs10,000 bribe from one Akula Anjaiah at his office on Saturday afternoon.

The ACB officials laid the trap after Ajay Kumar, a resident of Sircilla, lodged a complaint that he was harassed by the Sub-Registrar. Kumar, in his complaint, said he had approached the Sub-Registrar for transfer of a plot of land his father owned to his name on gift deed.

The ACB officials said that they had caught the Sub-Registrar red-handed while accepting the bribe through his subordinate.

The ACB arrested both Suresh Babu and his subordinate Sridhar and produced them before the Karimnagar ACB court.

'BRS will soon launch movement to unseat Congress'

PNS ■ NALGONDA

The BRS which achieved statehood for Telangana by waging struggle for 14 years will soon launch a movement to unseat the Congress government which came to power by making 420 false promises, said former minister G Jagadish Reddy.



Former minister Jagadish Reddy speaking at a BRS Foundation Day meeting in Nalgonda on Saturday

He was taking part in the party 23rd foundation day celebrations held at BRS headquarters here on Saturday.

Zilla Parishad chairman Banda Narender Reddy, MLC Koti Reddy, BRS district unit president Ramawat Ravindra Kumar, Nalgonda MP candidate Kancharla Krishna Reddy, former MLA Kancharla Bhupal, party leaders Chirumarti Lingaiah and Bhaskar Rao were present.

Ramawat Ravindra Kumar hoisted the party flag on the occasion.

State BRS secretary Niranjana Wali, Nalgonda town party BRS president Bhuvanagiri

Devender, former presidents of various corporations, party functionaries, leaders of the female wing of the party, party activists and others were present.

Later addressing the media, Jagadish Reddy expressed the view that it was not new for the BRS leaders to deal with the opponents. Stricken economic distress, there was a spike in suicide deaths.

Not only the farmers have been facing distress, the weavers also are increasingly committing suicide, he regretted. In undivided Nalgonda district, three lakh tons of paddy was produced under the BRS regime, he said. After the

Congress came to power, the fertile lands turned into wastelands, he said.

Jagadish Reddy alleged that the Congress, because of the fear of defeat in Lok Sabha elections, has been forcing the police to foist cases on the BRS leaders and activists. He blamed Ministers Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and N Uttam Kumar Reddy for "misusing" the police force to harass the BRS leaders by foisting false cases against them. He also blamed the police for exceeding their powers. The ruling party leaders have been threatening businessmen too, he alleged.

Pracharaks lead party heads in BJP: Jagga Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) working president T Jagga Reddy on Saturday termed Telangana BJP president G Kishan Reddy as a 'script leader'.



TPCC working president T Jagga Reddy speaking at a media conference in Hyderabad on Saturday

While addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Saturday, Jagga Reddy explained that a foreign woman would become Indian if she married Indian as per Hindu traditions.

He alleged that there is no meaning in the words of BJP leaders. He said, "Sonia Gandhi faced a lot of troubles. The assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi happened. Sonia Gandhi made PV Narasimha Rao Prime Minister. However, BJP leaders are giving an impression that they made PV PM by giving Bharat Ratna.

Whether the BJP government could give Bharat Ratna to PV if Congress had not made him PM? he

asked.

Jagga Reddy said that the leaders like him are fighting for a MLA's position. Sonia Gandhi, however, declined Prime Minister post. BJP leaders Atal Bihari Vajpai and LK Advani gave political strength to Narendra Modi.

Jagga Reddy asked BJP leaders to tell whether they felicitated LK Advani, who was the reason for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Whether BJP leaders have ethics?, he asked. He said that Sonia Gandhi worked as president of the Congress party for 20 years in the history of

the grand old party.

Targeting BRS working president KT Rama Rao, Jagga Reddy said that the BRS Lok Sabha candidates are "wasteful candidates." Some are leaving the BRS party and returning B-form. Why is KTR speaking about CM Revanth Reddy? KTR and KCR are in frustration. "The previous BRS government did not give freedom to the opposition. But the Congress government is giving full freedom to opposition and hence they are speaking as they wish," Jagga Reddy said. He suggesting KCR, KTR and Harish Rao travel in TSRTC buses and understand whether the women are availing themselves of free bus facility.

Parties woo SCCL workers for votes

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Workers of Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) hold the key to the electoral victory of any party in the Lok Sabha elections.

Therefore, leaders of all political outfits have been making rounds to various open cast and underground coal mines to woo voters to their side. There are leaving no stone unturned to win their support. The contestants make promises assuring them to implement welfare measures and announcing sops to them in case they were elected.

They have been enquiring from the workers the work pressure, wage revision, income tax concessions applicable if any, security to them at work place among other things.

The candidates and important leaders of political parties have been visiting the underground as well as open cast mines in Ramagundam, Mandhani, Mancherial, Bellampalli and Chennuru to know their problems in the name of programmes titled Bavibata and Mulakaat by holding gate meetings.

Harish trying to consolidate his leadership in BRS

SNCN ACHARYULU

■ HYDERABAD

Why did senior BRS leader T. Harish Rao turn aggressive and issue a challenge to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy that he would resign regarding the waiver of farm loans?

Political observers think that it appears that Harish is trying to consolidate his leadership in the BRS while BRS MLC K. Kavitha, the daughter of BRS supremo K. Chandrashekar Rao, is in jail in the Delhi liquor scam case.

BRS President K. Chandrashekar Rao and his son BRS Working President KT Rama Rao are facing many allegations. The Congress government headed by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had ordered probes into several cases in which KCR and KTR are reportedly involved.

BRS circles are now apprehensive about what will happen after the Lok Sabha elections. The recent statements of Revanth indicate that he is firm in taking action



tioned time frame.

If Harish resigns his MLA post a by-election would have to be held in Siddipet constituency. It is very difficult for the Congress to defeat Harish in Siddipet. After KCR and KTR it is Harish who stands tall in the BRS. In fact, Harish has more acceptance among BRS ranks than KTR.

Right from the inception of BRS, Harish has maintained ties with village-level leaders and has worked to strengthen the party. He is known to every BRS activist.

When KCR and KTR are facing charges and if there is a by-election all eyes will turn towards Harish. Moreover, Harish challenged Revanth to resign not on political issues but on a farmer issue. BRS leaders think that the future of the party is in the hands of Harish. If Harish's resignation is accepted by the Speaker, a by-election will become inevitable.

If a by-election is held in Siddipet it will help Harish to consolidate his leadership in the BRS.

Padi Kaushik slams Komatireddy for unsavoury remarks against BRS leaders

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

BRS legislator Padi Kaushik Reddy has alleged that Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy is not an intelligent person.

Addressing the media here on Saturday, he termed the criticism made by the Minister against Harish Rao has no substance.

Venkat Reddy became arrogant after he became Minister, he said, accusing him of speaking as he wished.

Venkat Reddy has been abusing Harish Rao time and again without reason and



He took Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to task for not waiving Rs 2 lakh crop loans at one go as promised ahead of elections. Revanth Reddy also has been using abusive language against the BRS leaders. He challenged Revanth Reddy to resign if he could not implement a farm loan waiver by August 15 at one go.

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He took Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to task for

not waiving Rs 2 lakh crop loans at one go as promised ahead of elections. Revanth Reddy also has been using abusive language against the BRS leaders. He challenged Revanth Reddy to resign if he could not implement a farm loan waiver by August 15 at one go.

He asked Venkat Reddy to ensure that the Chief Minister resign if the loan waiver cannot be implemented by August 15. He said that Revanth Reddy could have promised to waive farm loans by August 15 only to gain votes in Lok Sabha elections.

Man held for stealing truck worth Rs 10 L

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Special Zone Crime Team of the Central Crime Station on Saturday nabbed a man for stealing a truck worth Rs 10,00,000.

The accused was identified as Masnaaji Raju (23) a native of Naded, Maharashtra.

He stole the truck from Sultan Bazar police limits. Raju had been in financial difficulties and planned to steal the truck. He was apprehended while moving suspiciously.

SP calls c-Vigil a great weapon in hands of people

PNS ■ NALGONDA

District Superintendent of Police Chandana Deepthi has appealed to people to lodge their complaints related to violation of Model Code of Conduct with authorities through c-Vigil mobile app.

In a release here on Saturday, she said the complaints would be addressed immediately. She described c-Vigil as a great weapon in the hands of the common man.

Threatening voters, offering inducements, distribution of cash, gifts and liquor, using public property for election campaign without prior permission, provoking voters by delivering inflam-



In a release here on Saturday, she said the complaints would be addressed immediately. She described c-Vigil as a great weapon in the hands of the common man.

matory speeches, transportation of voters to polling booths by political parties, spreading false stories and containing weapons would be viewed seriously. Uploading of the relevant

photos and videos will make the flying squad team swing into action within the stipulated time and reach the place and conduct an inquiry and take suitable action, she said.

CM unveils Navaratna Plus manifesto

NEWS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, on Saturday released YSRCP's election manifesto for next month's general elections. The manifesto promises the enhancement of financial assistance under Amma Vodi from Rs 15,000 to Rs 17,000 per year, zero-interest loans for self-help groups up to Rs 3 lakh, increase of social security pension to Rs 3,500 per month in the last two instalments, and enhancement of Rythu Bharosa amount from Rs 13,500 to Rs 16,000.



Cheyutha, YSR Kapu Nestham, Shadi Tofa, housing scheme and Arogyasri. The CM said that the manifesto would be a Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita for him and vowed to implement it to the fullest.

CM Jagan claimed that the past 58 months will be etched forever in our country's history as over 99 per cent of the manifesto promises have been successfully implemented by YSRCP. He said over the past five years, over 99 per cent of the Navaratna

schemes were executed. The YSRCP government has deposited Rs 2.68 lakh crore directly into beneficiaries' accounts through DBT (direct benefit transfer) and Rs 1.78 lakh crore through non-DBT methods, said the CM.

"We've allocated Rs 26,067 crore for the Amma Vodi scheme, Rs 4,275 crore for Jagananna Vasathi Deevana, Rs 12,609 crore to the Jagananna Vidya Deevana, and Rs 34,378 crore for YSR Rythu Bharosa," the CM claimed.

Despite the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic and revenue losses that happened thereafter, the government never made any excuses and meticulously executed the manifesto with a smile. "We can't compete with Chandrababu's fraudulent promises, but we can show our commitment to the people. This government is different from the previous one -- we don't make empty promises. We deliver, and that's our legacy," Jagan asserted.

CM Jagan said that the way poll promises were implemented in the last 58 months will be remembered for the years to come. The Chief Minister said that he stood by the people with a smile whenever there were any problems. The State government ensured the delivery of welfare schemes to the people at their doorstep even during challenging times like the Covid

pandemic. Jagan emphasised that the manifesto is a sacred document, unlike the colourful promises made by others during elections. The party distributed its manifesto to the government officials and the people. Our party also shared the progress report with the people on the poll promises made to them during the 2019 elections in the State, he added.

Taking a dig at TDP Chief Chandrababu Naidu, Jagan said people believed the words of the Opposition Leader and elected his party to power in 2014. However, he failed to fulfil the promises made in their manifesto. He also accused Chandrababu of deceiving the people regarding loan waivers to farmers, Dwakra loans, and zero-interest deductions. He remarked that Chandrababu had lied about developing the State beyond Singapore and building a hi-tech city in every city.

Women surge in Vizag politics

Despite lacking prior political affiliations, they have earned reputation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a notable trend, numerous women have secured victories in legislative assemblies within Visakhapatnam district, marking a significant shift in the political landscape. Despite lacking prior political affiliations, these women have earned commendable reputation as public representatives.

However, their journey has been riddled with challenges, with many unable to secure re-election and several facing defeat in subsequent attempts. The narrative of female representation in parliamentary roles dates back to 1989 when Uma Gajapathiraju, the spouse of Pusapati Ananda Gajapati Raju, the ruler of Vizianagaram in present day Andhra Pradesh, clinched victory from the Visakhapatnam parliamentary seat under the Congress

banner. Though her tenure was short-lived, it set a precedent. Daggubati Purandeshwari followed suit in 2009, securing the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha seat and later serving as a Union Minister, bolstering the reputation of women parliamentarians. In subsequent elections, names like Kothapalli Geetha and Dr. Bhisetti Satyavathy, among others, were added to the roster, emphasising the growing presence of women in parliamentary domains.

Transitioning to Assembly elections, the journey has been equally eventful. Boddu Kalavati's victory in 1972 from the Madugula constituency marked a pivotal moment, yet subsequent opportunities eluded her. However, her legacy paved the way for successors like Allu Bhanumathi and Rajana

Ramani, who made significant strides in assembly politics. Notably, the rural landscape, once less visible in terms of female representation, witnessed a shift with names like Vangalapati Anita and Giddi Iswari making their mark in the 2014 elections. The momentum continued in 2019 with Kottagulli Bhagyalakshmi's victory, highlighting a trend of increased female participation in rural constituencies.

As the political stage evolves, the upcoming elections promise another chapter in the narrative of female representation. Candidates such as Botsa Jhansi, Kothapalli Geetha, and Chetty Tanujarani are set to contest for parliamentary seats, while others like Vangalapati Anita and Giddi Iswari vie for assembly segments. With each election.

Make Modi PM again to rid nation of terrorism and Naxalism: Shah

PNS ■ PORBANDAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged people to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for the third term to rid the country of terrorism, Naxalism, and poverty, and to make India the third largest economy in the world. In the last 10 years, PM Modi took several tough decisions without caring for the vote bank, he said as he cited the scrapping of Article 370 and the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Addressing a public rally to drum up support for Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Porbandar constituency in Gujarat, Shah also said that after two phases of polls, it is now clear that people of the country have decided to bring Modi to power once again.



There are 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, of which the Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate from Surat has been elected unopposed. "I would appeal to you to vote for lotus (BJP's poll symbol) on the remaining 25 seats and make Modi prime minister for a third term. Making him PM for the third term means freedom from terrorism and Naxalism, freedom from poverty, making arrangements

opposed the move saying a river of blood will flow in Kashmir after that. But in the last five years, let alone the river of blood, nobody dared to throw even a stone there. Modi worked to finish terrorism and Naxalism from the country." When Manmohan Singh was the country's prime minister, anyone could enter the country from Pakistan and blow up bombs, he said. "When Pakistan carried out terrorist attacks in Pulwama and Uri, it forgot that Modi was the prime minister. Within 10 days, Modi carried out surgical and air strikes to finish off terrorists on Pakistan soil. Modi worked to secure the country and make it prosperous," he said. In 10 years of the Congress-led UPA government's rule (between 2004 and 2014), the country's economy was at 11th position, Shah said.

Unemployment rate highest under Modi govt: Priyanka

PNS ■ LATUR

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday hit out at the Narendra Modi government over jobs and inflation, saying the unemployment rate is the highest in the country. Addressing a campaign rally at Udgir in Latur district for the Congress candidate, she said 30 lakh posts are lying vacant in the Central government which have not been filled in the last ten years. "Hardships (of the people) and unemployment have risen in the last ten years. 70 crore people, youth are unemployed," Gandhi said. The AICC general secretary also said GST (Goods and Services Tax) has been imposed on every (piece of) agricultural equipment and promised to abolish it after Congress comes to power.

Kejriwal to SC: ED acted in most highhanded manner

EXCISE POLICY CASE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday told the Supreme Court that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has acted in a "most highhanded manner" in a money-laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam. In a rejoinder to the ED's reply affidavit filed on his petition challenging his arrest in the case, Kejriwal said he has always cooperated with the investigation. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said the ED, in its reply affidavit filed in the apex court, has said that one of the reasons which necessitated his arrest was that he did not remain present before the investigating officer (IO) despite being summoned nine times. Kejriwal said the ED has said in its reply that in such a



case, the IO was justified in forming an opinion that custodial interrogation would lead to "a qualitatively more elicitation orientated" questioning of the accused. "The aforementioned tenor, text and contents of the reply leave no manner of doubt that the ED has acted in a most highhanded manner in a gross affront to the due process of law," he said. Kejriwal further claimed

that a cumulative reading of the ED's stand in its reply would expose the "bogey and blatant falsehood" in the conduct of its proceedings. He said the record would reveal that each and every summons issued to him was duly responded to while seeking vital details and information, which under no circumstances can be claimed to be privileged or confidential by the ED. Kejriwal claimed that the ED has never spelt out the alleged non-cooperation by him. "What was the requirement in not calling the petitioner (Kejriwal) either through an authorised agent or seeking information or documents from him in writing or through a virtual mode and insisting on his presence physically in person, is not forthcoming," he said.

Modi hell-bent on 'revenge' since K'taka 'rejected' him: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been hell-bent on taking "revenge" on the people of Karnataka since they "decisively rejected" him in the 2023 assembly elections. The opposition party's attack came after the Centre approved about Rs 3,499 crore as drought relief to Karnataka following the state government taking the matter to the Supreme Court. Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X, "Ever since Mr Modi was rejected decisively by the people of Karnataka in the 2023 assembly elections, he has been hell-bent on taking his revenge. First, Modi tried to "sabotage" the Anna Bhagya food security scheme but the Congress government was unshaken and launched a direct cash transfer scheme for the 4.49 crore beneficiaries, Ramesh said. "Second, he cut off funds to Karnataka. Between April 2023 -- when he lost -- and January 2024, total central transfers to Karnataka have declined by 23 per cent. Central grants have fallen by

56 per cent," he alleged. Third, the Centre delayed the legitimate drought relief funds due to the farmers of the state, Ramesh further claimed. "223 out of 236 talukas in Karnataka are facing drought conditions, with 196 taluks being categorised as severely hit. As early as September 2023, the Karnataka government approached Modi sarkar to release funds of Rs 18,172 crore for drought relief. It was delayed for months," the Congress leader said. Today, after the Karnataka government dragged the Modi government to the Supreme Court for failing to provide drought relief, the Union finance ministry finally agreed to release more than Rs 3,498 crore to Karnataka's farmers, he said. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said the Centre has approved Rs 3,499 crore as drought relief and released only Rs 3,454 crore. He urged the prime minister to release the balance amount as soon as possible. The chief minister also thanked the Supreme Court for warning the central government and providing some drought relief to the state.



Modi's 'factory of lies' won't work forever, says Kharge

PNS ■ BARPETA (ASSAM)

Rejecting the BJP's claims that the Congress' election manifesto resembled that of the Muslim League, party president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday asserted that "Modi's factory of lies" won't work forever. Addressing an election rally at Kayakuchi in Barpeta district of Assam, he said unemployment is a big problem in the country and that 65

per cent of educated youths have no jobs. "The INDIA bloc will surely come to power and stop the BJP. Modi's BJP will be decimated. Once our government comes to power, we will control price rise and our focus will be on poor people. We will fill up 30 lakh vacancies in government departments," he added. Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'sardar (leader) of liars',



Kharge charged him with lying about providing two crore jobs annually, bringing back black money to the country and giving Rs 15 lakh to each citizen, and doubling farmers' income. "Modi's 'factory of lies' won't last forever. He even called the Congress manifesto Muslim League's manifesto and spoke lies about it," he added. Kharge also alleged that the BJP was "looting" the country's wealth and handing it over to the rich.

"PM Modi waived Rs 16 lakh crore loans of his few rich friends," Kharge claimed. He said that while party leader Rahul Gandhi led the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' crisscrossing the country, Modi was working for 'Bharat todo' or dividing the nation. "Prime Minister Modi is continuously attacking the Congress and the Gandhi family as he is scared and trembling in fear of losing power," he claimed.

No evidence of arms seizure in Sandeshkhali: Mamata

Says recovered items might be brought by CBI

PNS ■ KULTI (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday said there was "no evidence" of arms seizure in Sandeshkhali, asserting that CBI teams conducted searches without informing the state police. She expressed skepticism regarding the operations, stating that the recovered items "might have been brought by officials of the central agency". "Even if a firecracker goes off in Bengal, the NIA, CBI, NSG are coming to investigate. It seems that a war is going on. The state police were not informed. It is not known what was found. There was no evidence. The seized items might have been brought by them (CBI) in a car," Banerjee said here. She was addressing an election rally for TMC's Asansol



Lok Sabha candidate Shatrughan Sinha. The CBI on Friday seized arms and ammunition, including a police service revolver and foreign-made firearms, during searches at two premises of an associate of now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali, officials said. The searches were conducted in connection with the January attack on an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team by a

mob that was allegedly instigated by Sheikh, who was arrested by the West Bengal Police on February 29 in the case. Teams of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the bomb detection squad, the National Security Guard (NSG), the central paramilitary forces and the West Bengal Police were part of the searches at the village -- a riverine delta -- on the fringes of the Sunderbans in North 24 Parganas district.

Indian heart saves Pak teen girl in Chennai

PNS ■ CHENNAI

A Pakistani teenage girl who has been ailing since 2019 got a new lease of life after she received a heart from a 69-year-old Indian donor from New Delhi. The 19-year-old girl from Karachi successfully underwent a heart transplant surgery and was discharged recently, doctors who performed the surgery at a city hospital here said. "I am feeling fine (now). I thank the Indian government for giving me a visa. I got a heart transplant here," she said and also thanked the doctors for saving her. She was very sick upon her arrival in Chennai, her mother Sanobar said. "We got an emergency visa... the doctors saved her," she added. Getting the visa was very difficult; more than that the patient's family could not afford the treatment cost, Dr K R Balakrishnan said.

INDIA CORNER

School van driver arrested for molesting class 1 girl



The police have arrested a school van driver on Saturday for allegedly molesting a girl student, officials said. Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Kumar Meena told PTI that the victim, studying in class 1, had complained to her school teacher about the incident. However, she allegedly told her not to inform her parents about it. When the victim reached home, she informed her family who approached the police, SP Meena said. According to the complaint registered by the victim's family, the driver, Kamran made the girl sit on the front seat of the van and touched her inappropriately, he said. Based on the complaint, an FIR has been registered against the van driver under sections 354 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code and sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, he said. Further investigation is underway, he added.

Indian man jailed in UK for 16 years for attempted murder



A 25-year-old Indian man charged with attempted murder of a female student, also an Indian, in east London two years ago has been sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment by a court here. Sriram Ambarla, who was arrested at the scene of stabbing the female inside a Hyderabad restaurant in east London, pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey court on Thursday. According to a court report in 'MyLondon', they both came to study at the University of East London in 2022 where Ambarla pursued her and resorted to physical threats before the attack in March that year. The unnamed victim, a student from Kerala in her 20s, who was working part-time as a waitress at the restaurant in east London since completed her Master's course. Judge Philip Katz described Ambarla as "jealous, possessive and determined" when he attacked his former girlfriend, whom he had met in Hyderabad and split up with in 2019. "That she did not die is no thanks to you. She was within a hair's breadth of dying at your hands in a public and terrifying way," Judge Katz told him while handing down the sentence, which will run concurrently with a 12-month sentence for knife possession. Ambarla is also banned from making contact with his victim again through an indefinite restraining order.

'Nobody can break Delhi CM' Kejriwal's wife Sunita holds maiden poll roadshow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is a "sher" (lion) and nobody can break him, said his wife Sunita Kejriwal as she held her maiden Lok Sabha poll roadshow in support of the AAP's East Delhi candidate on Saturday evening. Standing through the sun-roof of a vehicle, Sunita Kejriwal greeted voters in the Kondli area of East Delhi constituency with folded hands. She said the Delhi chief minister was jailed because he built schools, provided free electricity and opened Mohalla Clinics. "We will vote to remove



dictatorship and save democracy," Sunita Kejriwal said. With Arvind Kejriwal behind bars in a money laundering case, his wife will spearhead the AAP's poll campaign and hold roadshows, including one in West Delhi Lok Sabha

constituency on Sunday, according to party leaders. Sunita Kejriwal will also campaign for AAP candidates in South Delhi and New Delhi constituencies as well as in Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab, the party leaders said.

Kerala Governor gives assent to five pending bills

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala governor Arif Mohammed Khan on Saturday said he has given his assent to five Bills passed by the state assembly which had been pending for long. The bills include the Land Assignment Amendment Bill, Kerala Co-operative Societies (Amendment), the Paddy Wetland Amendment Bill, the Dairy Cooperation Bill and the Abkari Law Amendment Bill. Governor Khan who met the media said the assent was given a few days ago and the details were revealed today as the General elections in the state had concluded yesterday.

We're alive because Modi ensured COVID vaccine for us: Fadnavis

PNS ■ PUNE

Indians are alive today because Prime Minister Narendra Modi facilitated the manufacture and administration of COVID vaccine during the pandemic, said Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday. The BJP leader said nearly 100 countries today credit Modi for providing vaccine doses to them and protecting their citizens from the onslaught of the coronavirus, referring to the Centre's 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative. Recalling the COVID-19 outbreak, Fadnavis said many people lost their loved ones to

the virus and the future appeared bleak amid prediction that 40 to 50 crore people in the country would perish as no one would come to India's aid. "Only a few countries had invented the vaccine. They believed that India would come seeking assistance (from them) in the form of COVID vaccines," Fadnavis said, addressing a rally in Sangli in western Maharashtra in support of BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Sanjay Kaka Patil. Fadnavis said the world did not know then that a stalwart was at the helm of India's leadership who knew how to protect his people.

IAF helicopter roped in to douse forest fires in Uttarakhand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

An IAF helicopter was pressed into service to extinguish the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand's Nainital district on Saturday, a day after the flames reached the High Court Colony in the Pines area. The blaze came dangerously close to the houses in the colony and an Army cantonment around five kilometres away from the Pines, prompting the response by authorities. The Indian Air Force said a Mi-17 V5 helicopter was deployed to assist in the fire-

fighting operations. "With a forest fire building up in vicinity of an Air Force Station near Nainital, #IAF activated its aerial fire fighting capability, employing a Mi-17 V5 helicopter for undertaking Bambi Bucket Ops," it posted on X. Forest officials said the helicopter collected water from the Naini and Bhimtal lakes in a Bambi bucket and poured it over the burning forests of the Pines, Bhumiadhar, Jyolikot, Narayan Nagar, Bhawali, Ramgarh and Mukteshwar areas.



The bucket can hold up to 5,000 litres of water at a time. Boating activities were briefly suspended in Naini

Lake due to its low water level, but in Bhimtal Lake, it has been stopped for now, an official said.

SDM Pramod Kumar said the fire has engulfed the forests from Pines to Ladiyakanta. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said all efforts are being made to bring the fires under control. Dhami undertook an aerial survey of the affected areas and reviewed the efforts made so far to extinguish the fires with officials of the Kumaon division at the Forest Training Academy in Haldwani. He issued strict instructions that forest officers should not be allowed to go on leave until the forest fires are completely

controlled and exemptions should be given only in cases of serious illness. The Army's cooperation is also being taken, Dhami said and issued instructions to take action against those found guilty of setting fire to the forests. State forest minister Subodh Uniyal said all DFOs are in the field to ensure the fires are effectively controlled. He hoped they would be controlled soon as they were surface fires and not ground fires which continue to rage for days on end.

Drug labs unearthed in Raj, Gujarat; 7 arrested: NCB



The NCB and Gujarat Police ATS Saturday busted three "clandestine" drug manufacturing labs in Rajasthan and Gujarat leading to the seizure of 300 kgs of narcotics and arrest of seven persons. Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Deputy Director General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh in a statement said that the labs were unearthed after about three months of "intensive" technical and ground surveillance that was mounted by the two agencies to identify the people involved in the network as well as locations of labs. A total of 149 kgs of mephedrone or 'meow meow' (both in powder and liquid form), 50 kg ephedrine, and 200 litres of acetone was recovered from the three labs located in Bhiinmal of Jalore district and Osian in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, the officer said.

Centre allows 99.5k tons of onion exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Saturday said it has allowed exports of 99,500 tonnes of onions, mainly sourced from Maharashtra, to six neighbouring countries despite the ban on shipments.

The Centre has also allowed exports of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially, for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

On December 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said the government has "allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka".

The export prohibition has been imposed to ensure adequate domestic availability against the backdrop of estimated lower Kharif and Rabi crops in 2023-24 compared to the previous year.

The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the agency for the export of onion to these countries, sourced the domestic onions to be exported through e-platform at L1 prices.



The ban was imposed amid an increase in demand in the international market, it added. The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the agency for the export of onion to these countries, sourced the domestic onions to be exported through e-platform at L1 prices.

NCEL has supplied to the agency or agencies nominated by the government of the destination country at the negotiated rate on a 100 per cent advance payment basis.

The offer rate of NCEL to the buyers takes into account the prevailing prices in the destination market and also international and domestic markets.

The quota allocated for export to the six countries is being supplied as per requisition made by the destination country.

"As the largest producer of onion in the country, Maharashtra is the major supplier of onions sourced by NCEL for export," the statement said.

The government had also allowed the export of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

"Being purely export-oriented, the production cost of the white onion is higher than other onions due to higher seed cost, adoption of good agricultural practice (GAP) and compliance to strict maximum residue limits (MRL) requirements," the statement said.

The procurement target for onion buffer out of Rabi crop

2024 under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) of the Department of Consumer Affairs has been fixed at 5 lakh tonnes this year.

The Central agencies, like NCCF and NAFED are tying up local agencies like FPOs/FPCs/PACs to support the procurement, storage and farmers registration to begin the procurement of any store-worthy onion.

A high-level team of the Department of Consumer Affairs, NCCF and NAFED visited Nashik and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra from April 11-13, 2024, to create awareness among the farmers, FPOs/FPCs and PACs about the procurement of 5 lakh tonnes of onion for buffer stock.

INDIA, CHINESE TAIPEI TO WTO

Delay ruling on ICT import duties dispute

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Chinese Taipei have asked the WTO's dispute settlement body not to adopt any ruling against New Delhi's import duties on certain information and technology products till July 26 as both sides are engaged in resolving the matter, an official said.

The issue came up during a meeting of the dispute settlement body (DSB) in Geneva on April 26.

In the meeting, the two countries asked DSB to delay consideration of a dispute panel's reports until July 26, 2024 in order to help facilitate resolution of the disputes, the Geneva-based official said, adding that the body agreed to that. Earlier also, DSB had agreed to three previous requests from India and Chinese Taipei to delay consideration of the reports.

As per rules of the WTO, the panel's ruling will have to be adopted by DSB for implementation within 60 days of the release of the order. However, countries can mutually request DSB for delay in

In the meeting, the two countries asked DSB to delay consideration of a dispute panel's reports until July 26, 2024 in order to help facilitate resolution of the disputes, the Geneva-based official said, adding that the body agreed to that.

adoption of the ruling. In its report, a dispute panel of WTO on April 17, 2023 said import duties imposed by India on certain information and technology products violate global trading norms. The ruling followed a case filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in WTO.

In May 2019, Chinese Taipei had filed a case against India in the WTO over the import duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets.

MONEY MATTERS

IDFC FIRST Bank Q4 profit falls to Rs 724 cr



IDFC FIRST Bank on Saturday reported 10 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 724 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024 due to substantial jump in provisions. The lender had earned a net profit of Rs 803 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to Rs 9,861 crore from Rs 7,822 crore a year ago, IDFC FIRST Bank said in a regulatory filing. Interest income grew to Rs 8,219 crore during the period under review, from Rs 6,424 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago. Net Interest Income (NII) grew 24 per cent from Rs 3,597 crore in Q4 FY23 to Rs 4,469 crore in Q4 FY24, it said. On the asset quality side, the bank's gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) reduced to 1.88 per cent of gross advances as of March 31, 2024, from 2.51 per cent by the end of March 2023. Net NPAs also came down to 0.60 per cent of the advances from 0.86 per cent at the end of 2024. However, provisions and contingencies increased by 50 per cent to Rs 722 crore in Q4FY24 as compared with Rs 482 crore a year ago.

Shakti Pumps order book touches Rs 2,400 cr



Shakti Pumps on Saturday posted a multifold jump in its consolidated profit after tax to Rs 89.70 crore during the quarter ended March 2024 on the back of higher revenues. It had clocked a net profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 2.2 crore during the fourth quarter of the preceding fiscal, the company said in a statement. During FY24, the company's PAT grew manifold to Rs 141.7 crore from Rs 24.1 crore in FY23. Its revenues surged over three-fold to Rs 609.3 crore from Rs 182.7 crore in the year-ago quarter. In FY24, Shakti Pumps' revenue jumped 41.7 per cent to Rs 1,370.7 crore from Rs 967.7 crore in FY23. Shakti Pumps (India) Limited Chairman Dinesh Patidar said, "FY24 has been a remarkable year for SPIL, as the company delivered its strongest performance ever in terms of revenue and profitability. This is well supported by our outstanding performance in both our government and export businesses, which reported a revenue growth of 52 per cent and 23 per cent YoY, respectively, in FY24".

Mufin Green board approves Rs 25 cr fundraising plan



Mufin Green on Saturday said it plans to raise up to Rs 24.84 crore by issuing non-convertible debentures. A proposal in this regard has been approved by the board at a meeting on Friday, the company said in a statement. The committee of the Board of Directors of the Company has approved "raising of funds through issue of rated, unlisted, secured, senior, redeemable, taxable, transferable, non-convertible debentures denominated in Indian Rupees through private placement basis for amount up to Rs 24.84,00,000". The proposal remains subject to the approval of the applicable regulatory authorities, Mufin Green said. As per the company, the proceeds will be utilised for working capital and expansions in the portfolio. Kolkata-based Mufin Green Finance is a non-banking finance company (NBFC), with a focus on financing clean energy and related projects.

RBI invites applications from eligible SFBs to become regular banks

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India invited applications from small finance banks meeting specified criteria, including a minimum net worth of Rs 1,000 crore, for becoming regular or universal banks.

The RBI, in November 2014, issued the guidelines for licensing of small finance banks (SFBs) in the private sector. There are about a dozen SFBs, including Au Small Finance Bank, Equitas Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank.

An SFB aiming to become a universal bank should have a minimum net worth of Rs 1,000 crore as at the end of the previous quarter (audited) and the shares of the bank should have been listed on a recognised stock exchange, the cen-

tral bank said. It should also have a net profit in the last two financial years and GNPA and NNPA of less than or equal to 3 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively, in the last two financial years.

Other conditions include a prescribed CRAR (capital-to-risk weighted assets ratio) requirement and a satisfactory track record of performance for a minimum period of five years.

On shareholding pattern, the RBI said: "There is no mandatory requirement for an eligible SFB to have an identified promoter. However, the existing promoters of the eligible SFB, if any, shall continue as the promoters on the transition to universal bank".

Further, the addition of new promoters or change in promoters would not be permitted for an eligible SFB during the transition period.

'Centre wants electronic component makers to ensure security interests'

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Electronic component manufacturers should ensure the country's security interests while starting new projects, said Union IT Secretary S Krishnan on Saturday.

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology Secretary Krishnan said the government was opening up on this topic and has been instructing companies to ensure that while designing a project, the country's security interests should be taken care of.

"We spoke about this briefly (in the past) and how cyber security is becoming more and more important. This is something I would especially want the senior citizens, here something we need to be extremely careful about on a day-by-day basis," Krishnan said.

He made those comments while delivering the 10th G Ramachandran Endowment Lecture on 'Building Economic Resilience Through Technology' organized by the Madras School of Economics and The Southern



"We spoke about this briefly (in the past) and how cyber security is becoming more and more important. This is something I would especially want the senior citizens, here something we need to be extremely careful about on a day-by-day basis," Krishnan said.

care of." he said. Krishnan also pointed out that the supply chain industry needs to be resilient and not impacted by any external factors including geopolitical risks.

Maintaining that supply chain constraints was witnessed in India during the COVID-19 pandemic, he said,

time that you (electronic component manufacturers) start designing a product. You design it in a way that the country's security interests are taken

if you look at the supply chain industry internationally semiconductor chips are dominated by Taiwan. "If something happens there (in Taiwan) what will happen to the supply chain of the chips? We need to ensure that there are supply chains which are resilient and we have to ensure that geopolitical issues do not append the economy," he said.

On climate change, he said it is another issue that India needs to address along with waste management and natural disasters are others that are of constant challenges.

The Ministry of Electronics is working with a number of other departments to see how the impact of climate change can be reduced, he said.

"Ministry of Electronics actually works with a number of other ministries, including Renewable energy to see what are the ways in which we can reduce the impact of climate change and optimize production in such a way that the usage of resources comes down and we become more sustainable", he said.

Office space leasing in Delhi-NCR drops 25 pc annually : Vestian

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The office space leasing in Delhi-NCR fell 25 per cent annually to 18.1 lakh square feet in January-March this year on lower demand from corporates, according to real estate consultant Vestian.

The office space absorption stood at 24 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

The leasing of office space in Delhi-NCR dropped 40 per cent from 30 lakh square feet in the October-December quarter.

The real estate consultant on Saturday released the data for office leasing across the top

seven major cities. Office absorption increased 13 per cent to 134 lakh sq ft in January-March 2024 from 118.5 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.



However, the absorption declined by 31 per cent during the first quarter of this year after peaking in the fourth

quarter of 2023. Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao said, "2024 started on a positive note, as major office markets of India witnessed sustained absorption activities".

"Return to office mandates are likely to renew demand for office spaces across the country and may drive the next wave of growth amid global headwinds," Rao added.

Southern cities (Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad) accounted for 61 per cent of the Pan-India absorption in Q1 2024.

Their combined share increased from 54 per cent a year earlier.

'India becoming attractive for clinical trials'

PNS ■ BOSTON

Over the past 10 years, clinical trials in India have become easier, more accessible and accelerated, experts from the pharmaceutical sector have said as top multinationals are increasingly looking at the country as their base for clinical trials.

Data from 2017 to 2023 shows that phase two and phase three clinical trials are growing at about 15 per cent to 18 per cent in India. This is primarily because of the 10 modifications done to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940, according to Badhri Srinivasan, head of Global Clinical Operations, Novartis.

Novartis is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in



the world and was the fourth largest by revenue in 2022.

"Given where we are, given what the landscape in the international community has happened, the regulators in India are starting to move and make changes to it. Since 2013, there have been 10 modifica-

tions to that act to try to make clinical trials easier, more accelerated, more accessible, et cetera," Srinivasan said at the 18th Annual BioPharma & Healthcare Summit in Boston on April 25 organised by the USA India Chamber of Commerce.

A new act of 2023 is in the works which addresses very significant changes. Medical devices, for example, are now a separate vertical. "We will have much more transparency, a lot more acceleration in clinical trials, a lot more standardisation, a lot more clarity on what ethics committees can do, their compensation, et cetera," he said, adding that modernisation is now happening.

"Hospital chains and hospital networks are actually also clearly modernising. Seventy per cent of the patients are in private hospital networks. Private hospital networks are now diversifying into tier two, and tier three cities, into tertiary networks as well. That gives you

broad-based access to patients. So this is all the things that are going on that makes India pretty attractive for clinical trials," Srinivasan said.

At the same time, Srinivasan and other experts felt that India has a lot of other improvements to make. "It is still harder to do clinical trials in India," he said at the summit, which was attended by top leaders from the American and Indian pharmaceutical sector.

Dr Sarah Sheikh, head of Global Development, Takeda, India can help companies like hers to bring medicines to patients faster. Some of the major changes are making clinical trials in India much more feasible, scalable, and predictable.

TIKTOK BAN Instagram, YouTube biggest likely winners

PNS ■ SUN FRANCISCO

Adult US TikTok users spend an average of 54 minutes on the app on any given day, more than Instagram, Snapchat or YouTube, according to research firm eMarketer. If TikTok were to disappear, those platforms — along with younger, smaller emerging rivals — would be scrambling for those valuable minutes of people's attention.

But with an actual ban still likely years away, it's not clear what app will be its biggest beneficiary. Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, may see more advertisers amid uncertainty for its biggest rival, according to analysts who follow the company.



Creators, dealing with uncertainty themselves are also expanding to other platforms if they weren't already. But users, especially the younger ones who are TikTok's bread and butter, are less predictable. Will they embrace Instagram, a possibly uncool mom favorite? Or could a newer app like Triller rise to viral fame? Here's a look at some notable

TikTok alternatives and how they measure up.

INSTAGRAM Meta has a long tradition of cloning competitive services, with varying degrees of success. The Instagram "Story" feature, which lets people share photos and videos that expire in 24 hours, is similar to Snapchat. The company also launched a TikTok knockoff called Lasso in 2018 but closed that down in 2020.

Then Instagram launched Reels 2020, a TikTok-like feed of short videos users can create or scroll through. It's proven to be massively popular. Could it replace TikTok? That depends. While many creators

post on both platforms, some experts say the youngest users are unlikely to migrate to a service made popular by their millennial parents. And while Meta's algorithm is addictive, it's still not TikTok.

"Replicating TikTok's algorithm is a nearly impossible task, as rival Meta would attest to," said eMarketer analyst Jasmine Enberg. "TikTok's ability to serve up relevant and entertaining content to its users is unparalleled in the social media world."

YOUTUBE While YouTube still dominates US teens' atten-

tion. Roughly nine in ten teens said they use YouTube, in a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, making it the most widely used platform among the 13-17 crowd. TikTok clocked in at 63 per cent, Snapchat at 60 per cent and Instagram at 59 per cent. Its parent company Google launched YouTube Shorts in 2020, shortly after India banned TikTok.

YouTube users can scroll through Shorts just as they can on TikTok or Reels on Instagram and Facebook, watching hours of bite-sized videos. As with Reels, many of the videos featured are from TikTok or creators who post to several different platforms.

ICICI Bank reports 18.5% growth in net profit

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Private sector lender ICICI Bank on Saturday said its March 2024 quarter consolidated net grew 18.5 per cent to Rs 11,672 crore.

It had reported a net profit of Rs 9,853 crore in the year-ago period.

On a standalone basis, the second largest private sector lender showed a 17.4 per cent growth in its profit after tax at Rs 10,708 crore for the reporting quarter against Rs 9,122 crore in the year-ago period.

The core net interest income increased 8.1 per cent to Rs 19,093 crore on a 16.8 per cent



growth in loans and a marginal compression in net interest margin to 4.40 per cent.

The non-interest income, excluding the performance of the treasury, came at Rs 5,930

crore, 15.7 per cent higher than the year-ago period.

The provisions more than halved to Rs 718 crore for the reporting quarter, as per the exchange filing by the lender.

"I've spent days in cinemas answering questions from the audience, in interviews, travelling abroad, and all they do is thank me nicely"
— George Lopez



CHRONICLE OF BIHAR, BEYOND ELECTIONS

In his travels across cities and hamlets of Bihar, DEEPAK KUMAR JHA discovers that the local populace loves to have extensive discourses on politics and engage in conversations where the rhetoric of caste is quite pronounced and audible

Still considered as some of the most backward districts of Bihar — Madhepura, Purnea, Saharsa, Supaul — the *Dehati* (rural) thatched structures until a few years ago have all metamorphosed into brick and mortar dwellings amidst lush green mango orchards, banana plants, and corns in the backyard. However, the basic problems of health and education are galore. In every election for the past five decades, people of this region have been promised 'upliftment' by various political parties and leaders in the fray but ultimately the caste die is caste-ridden, preventing their holistic development. Migration, which started in large numbers almost three decades ago when Bihar was in the stranglehold of 'Jungle Raj', continues unabated even under the much hyped 'Susahsan Raj'. "Sitting chief minister Nitish Kumar rode over former CM Lalu Yadav's Raj and people overwhelmingly voted for him going beyond caste and religion, but things are different now. The JDU leader seems to have run out of ideas after a good two terms. His last alliance with Tejaswi Yadav's RJD kindled some hope on the employment front. But such people-oriented development seems to have taken a backseat while caste and religion-ridden politics is back if you look at the pattern of ticket distribution," says Pushpendra Kumar, former professor and chairperson of the Patna Centre of the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) who is now working full time as a researcher of Bihar's society and polity. Partly, *Bijli*, *Sadak* and *Paani* (BSP) are visibly translating into votes but what remains invisible, not only in the *Dehati* areas but even in towns and cities, are negligible secondary, higher education facilities topped by the lack of healthcare facilities. Amidst these deficiencies the irony is that a plethora of coaching institutes of engineering, medical, and Government jobs across prominent towns and cities like Patna, Muzaffarpur and Bhagalpur have come up and there is a mushrooming of private medical clinics and diagnostics centres in the principle districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Gaya and Ara-Chapra. Come election time, there is 'Chah (not Chai) Par Charcha' across cities or hamlets where people love to have extensive discourses over Modi, Nitish, Rahul, Tejaswi or even Obama and Biden. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of caste is loud and audible in the

conversation of the locals, sitting on machans (bamboo cane cots), a fact that still dominates the entry and exit of these villages. The women folk have to volunteer to supply the motley crowd with tea doses. "Din bhar mein kum se kum 50 cup chai banta hai. Inko koi kaam nahi, din bhar sirf rajneeti ki baat karte hain. Unka bhi time katata hai," for them every day. They have no other work so they spend their idle time talking about politics) observes Neelam Devi, a villager of Satarwar in the Saharsa district of Bihar. The elderly male folks gather as early as 5 am and hang around till 8 am and then come back by 3 pm, remain until dusk at their machans, finding some time to revive the agriculturists in them. Evening chats are conducted within the precincts of temples every 100 yards with the smoke of incense sticks — one for spiritual rites and the other from mosquito repellants — emanating, providing a mixed essence in the clean atmosphere, resplendent with the aroma of cattle and cow dung heaps. And during the wedding season and *Janeu* rituals (thread ceremony), almost every household performs functions and celebrations in its neighbourhood as everybody looks forward to welcoming either an election contestant or any of his/her representatives preferably the dominant caste of that village or town. This reporter, who was covering the Lok Sabha 2024 elections in the Supaul area, got the divine opportunity to feast on chaste *dehati* flavours sitting on a *gamcha* (cotton scarf) rolled over the raw mud field. The serve was obviously *puri*, salads, *papad*, *aloo-parwal*, tomato chutney, *dal-bhaat* (cooked rice) which has now been replaced by Pulao alongside new *Shaheri* add-ons like *paneer* based *subji* and mixed-veg. Sweet delicacies, what they call *Sukha Mitha* (*gulab jamun*) and *Gila Meetha* (*rasgulla*), *Boondiya* (besan cooked sweet), and lot of curd, is a must to earn the tag of best *Bhoj*. However, elderly people regret the fact that in recent times the city culture is dominating as huge decibels DJs loaded on tractors is a must during celebrations. Further down to a visit to another village Bara in Saharsa, the author halted and then became part of the discussion over a patient, identified as Nepali Jha, being transported from Sadar Hospital to Patna in a serious condition. The patient was transported to Patna in an ambulance accompanied

by at least a dozen villagers who, en route, were simultaneously making attempts to establish 'contacts' so that the patient could be admitted at Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the State's Capital city. Despite their efforts the IGIMS turned down the patient and he was somehow 'accommodated' at Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH). All this while, the villagers accompanying the patient kept insisting with the hospital attendants that the patient be taken to IGIMS, but in vain. When this journalist witnessed their attempts turning futile and one of them claimed to even approach a sitting MP in Bihar, this reporter of *The Pioneer* volunteered to help using bureaucratic contacts in the administration for admission of the patient at IGIMS. The 'mission' was successful and the IGIMS agreed but by that time the patient had to be put on a ventilator back at PMCH and moving him in that critical condition was not feasible. In this grim milieu tea was offered and unfortunately the news about the patient's demise simply vanished from media attention. Although the villagers profusely thanked this reporter, they were equally troubled about their local leaders and MPs who were not of any help in their moment of crisis and used foul language to curse their apathy. "The need for better medical facilities is a must. While several elderly people have moved out of the villages to bigger cities to stay with their children, those who are fond of villages are left in the lurch. Several people have died due to lack of even basic medical facilities in backward areas like in Madhepura, Purnea, Madhepura, and here," said Gyan Mishra, a local villager. While the people in the districts of eastern Bihar struggled for a decade to get a sanction for an AIIMS at Saharsa, considered to be most backward, they are now annoyed with both the Central and State Governments as the project has been moved to neighbouring Darbhanga, considered to be prosperous. The Darbhanga AIIMS was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year but soon the project got mired in controversy over the tug of war between the neighbouring districts. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. Last year a group of 20 parliamentarians led by Madhepura MP Dinesh Yadav, cutting across party lines launched an intensive campaign for the construction of an AIIMS in Saharsa, and even met Union Health



minister Mansukh Mandviya and handed over a letter of their demand. The letter mentioned that the number of patients suffering from cancer, kidney, heart, liver and other such life-threatening ailments has been quite high in the north-eastern region, comprising Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul, Khagaria, Purnia, Katihar, Araria and Kishanganj districts. The letter stated that the Saharsa district magistrate (DM) had communicated to the State Government about the availability of 217.74 acres of land for the construction of an AIIMS, but the State Government announced the allocation of land for the AIIMS in Darbhanga. MPs from Siwan, Nalanda, Karakat, Gaya, Valmikinagar, Gopalganj and Jehanabad had also signed the letter despite knowing that the people from their regions will not be visiting Saharsa for their treatment. But, when we talk about Bihar, it would be incomplete without the world famed and internationally acclaimed Madhubani paintings which have received several Padma awards. Another delight for the people of Bihar is the folklores of various languages, including charting numbers of Bhojpuri. Most of the popular artists who dominate all rituals including the mega festival of *Chhath*, is Sharda Sinha, who too has been bestowed with a Padma award. Most common regional languages spoken in Bihar include Angika, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili, Magadhi Prakrit, Hindi as well as Urdu amongst other dialects. Currently, Bhojpuri singers have carved a niche for themselves on both social and political platforms and some of them have even become Parliamentarians or are in the current fray to be one. Therefore the raw, rustic lyrics of traditional songs have now been tuned discreetly among the youth on occasions as several of them are tagged as 'fuhar'. They have been duly banned by the State Government. In one's travels across Mithilanchal, one is struck by the public emotion when people get talking about Madhubani

paintings, *paan* (beetle), *makhana*, *maach* (fish) and *litti-chokha*. Seema Roy, Mithila Painting artist said earlier the paintings were done by women with vegetable dyes on the walls. "Now it is done on paper. The paintings normally depict village scenes, human and animal forms, gods and goddesses," Seema said. "Through your platform let me share the most significant tradition of Bihar, particularly Mithila, as you have already been apprised by its arts and crafts. An unnecessary fish-mutton issue has been derived in the ensuing political campaign by top leaders and we heard the new age media platforms, including social, discuss a lot on this subject. Let me be very clear, be it any day of the week, any festival like

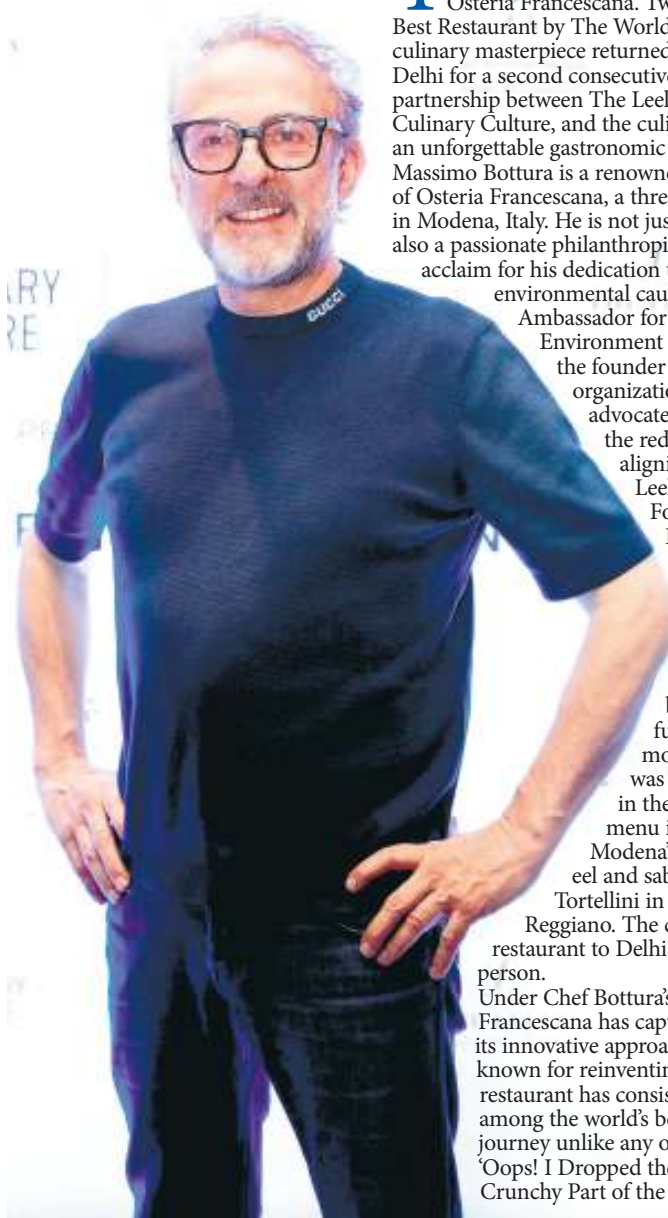


Durga Puja (we do not call it *Navratri* in Bihar), *Saraswati Puja*, *Mahashivratri*, or *Sawan* or any given Hindu auspicious day, we essentially cook and relish on (*maach*) fish. Mithilanchal is famous as we say *pug-pug* (every step) is fond of *paan*, *makhana*, *maach*, *pokhar* (pond)," opines a delighted Birender Thakur, a retired school teacher and villager in Bavangaon in Supaul. He also narrated a poem in the local language which had all the auspicious occasions where it mentioned the serving of non-vegetarian food, particularly fish. His companion, Nand Kishore Jha, who was part of the discourse, was quick to add that in Bihar non-vegetarian dishes only mean fish and mutton and not chicken or eggs. Although now eggs and chicken delicacies have made their way in the bylanes, *chowks*, and bazaars the elderly people do not appreciate the invasion. Bihar is also famous for its stone pottery, white metal statuettes, bamboo artifacts, wooden toys and leather goods. Several villages around Vaishali are into making of toys. Sikki Work is done by weaving a humble blade of grass into a beautiful basket and mats while Lac bangles are also made in Muzaffarpur. Bihar's rich traditional and culture legacy must not be drowned by the political din around.

“ IN EVERY ELECTION FOR THE PAST FIVE DECADES, PEOPLE OF BACKWARD REGIONS HAVE BEEN PROMISED UPLIFTMENT BY VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERS BUT ULTIMATELY THE DIE IS CAST IN FAVOUR OF CASTE, PREVENTING THE STATE'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT. ”

'Don't be afraid to commit mistakes' is Chef Massimo Bottura's mantra, that is how his iconic dish came to life, writes Gyaneshwar Dayal

'OOPS! I DROPPED THE LEMON TART'



The renowned Chef Massimo Bottura was in New Delhi once again with the culinary marvel, Osteria Francescana. Twice rated as The World's Best Restaurant by The World's 50 Best, Chef Bottura's culinary masterpiece returned to The Leela Palace New Delhi for a second consecutive year. This unparalleled partnership between The Leela Palace New Delhi, Culinary Culture, and the culinary virtuoso himself was an unforgettable gastronomic experience. Massimo Bottura is a renowned Italian chef and owner of Osteria Francescana, a three-Michelin-star restaurant in Modena, Italy. He is not just a culinary maestro but also a passionate philanthropist, earning international acclaim for his dedication to social and environmental causes. As a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the founder of the non-profit organization 'Food for Soul', Bottura advocates for sustainability and the reduction of food waste, aligning perfectly with The Leela's eco-conscious ethos. For the uninitiated, Chef Bottura is one of the top chefs in the world and people wait to eat at his restaurant Osteria Francescana for at least three months. Some say you need to be prepared because the restaurant is fully booked for four months. Osteria Francescana was ranked the #1 restaurant in the world in 2018. The menu includes dishes like Modena's bolognese, polenta with eel and saba, Aula on tempura, and Tortellini in cream of Parmigiano Reggiano. The chef brought his restaurant to Delhi for Rs 55,555 + taxes per person. Under Chef Bottura's guidance, Osteria Francescana has captivated global palates with its innovative approach to Italian cuisine. He is known for reinventing the Italian dishes. The restaurant has consistently secured its position among the world's best, offering a sensory journey unlike any other. Iconic dishes such as 'Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart', 'The Crunchy Part of the Lasagne', and 'Psychedelic



Cod Not Flame Grilled' will grace the special menus offered during the event. Bottura is a philosopher in his own right. He is passionate about making mistakes. That's right that is how his world-famous iconic dish 'Oops! I dropped the lemon tarts and came to life. Chef Bottura's culinary philosophy, is deeply rooted in embracing mistakes and turning them into culinary masterpieces. Bottura shared a story in his interactive session in Leela, about the creation of a dish that symbolises embracing imperfections. It originated when Francescana's sous chef Taka Kondo accidentally dropped a lemon tart. Feeling distraught, Kondo's perfectionist tendencies clashed with his mistake. Bottura intervened, reframing the mishap as a metaphor for the fusion of sweet and savoury, breaking boundaries. Bottura emphasised the importance of leaving room

for poetry in daily life, allowing for imagination and creativity to flourish. "If you don't make mistakes, don't dream big, you end up nowhere, won't learn a damn thing," he quips. This ethos of embracing imperfection and transforming it into something extraordinary resonates throughout his culinary creations. Chef Bottura hosted an interactive session, engaging in a conversation with Vir Sanghvi, India's foremost food expert, offering insights into his culinary journey and philosophy. During the conversation, they had a difference of opinions but agreed on two things. Italians like Indians are mama's boys and both two love their food. Sanghvi remarked, "Massimo Bottura transcends the role of a chef; he serves as a global inspiration, leveraging his influence to bring about positive changes worldwide.

Mr. Anupam Dasgupta, General Manager of The Leela Palace New Delhi, expressed his enthusiasm for this unique culinary collaboration. He stated, "It is our privilege to host Chef Massimo once more at The Leela Palace New Delhi. We eagerly anticipate the epicurean delight that Chef Massimo will curate for the pop-up dinners." Speaking with anticipation about his return to India, Chef Massimo Bottura expressed his excitement, saying, "Namaste, India! I am delighted to return to your beautiful country. In New Delhi, we are working with Culinary Culture and The Leela Palace. I love India - the food and the people - and can't wait to be back and give you all a big Italian hug!" Indeed, chef Massimo Bottura is just not a chef he is a philosopher and a package you could talk to and take lessons for your kitchen and life. Chef is all for dreaming big and how creativity and dreaming big means a lot in life. His mantra: Dream big, it costs nothing and don't be afraid to make mistakes if you don't mistakes you will never learn anything new. Just a trivia here, any guesses what Massimo Bottura was most excited about in the evening. It was his breakfast with the underprivileged children he had invited for breakfast the next morning. So the world waits for Massimo Bottura's dinner and he for a simple breakfast with children of lesser God who give him all the inspiration he needs for his next masterpiece



Standing Alone, and How



MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings, says **PAWAN SONI**

MKT at Chanakya stands out among Delhi's standalone, multi-cuisine restaurants with its delightful offerings. This spacious 144-seater, adorned with well-lit interiors, caters perfectly to both small and large groups, boasting several live kitchens that serve a variety of popular cuisines from around the globe.

While this was not my first visit to MKT, it was my first experience with their new menu. The shift towards modern Indian cuisine, complemented by a diverse Asian selection, came at the expense of the Mexican live kitchen.

Our culinary journey began with a tender coconut and poached lobster soup. While the lobster soup met expectations, the vegetarian tender coconut soup exceeded them. It offered a delightful tanginess, coupled with glass noodles, snow peas, broccoli, and chili-fried garlic. The sashimi platter, featuring salmon, tuna, yellowtail, scallops, and prawns, was remarkably fresh, accompanied by freshly grated wasabi. However, the standout dish of the day was the salmon belly. Though the three skewers at ₹1335 may seem pricey, this cut is a rarity in the city. Grilled on a robotayaki with a mildly sweet miso marinade, the salmon belly was incredibly tender and flavorful, justifying its price for the exceptional preparation. Once you have experienced this, you will never look back at the dry salmon tikka available at many other restaurants. A server-recommended starter, the Kimball mushroom, was a delightful mix of enoki, shimeji, king oyster, and shitake mushrooms tossed in Kimball sauce. This carb-free dish not only excelled in healthfulness but also in taste.

While our appetizers were satisfying, we also sampled two dishes from their Indian menu - Quinoa mutton seekh and Champaran mutton for the mains.



The mutton seekh was tender and flavourful, served with smoked lehsun chutney and khameeri roti, a refreshing departure from the ubiquitous mint chutney. The Champaran mutton was a pleasant surprise, as this rustic Bihar preparation with onions, mustard oil, and whole garlic showcased one of the best qualities of mutton.

Our chef revealed that they prepare a small batch every day in a traditional handi, ensuring authenticity and quality.

Our meal concluded with homemade ice cream, which was delightful and could have been enhanced further with the addition of mango chunks.

Overall, MKT impressed with its high-quality ingredients, well-informed and well-attired servers, excellent preparations, and comfortable interiors. It not only stands out among standalone restaurants but also outshines many star hotels with its overall offerings.

FACT SHEET

MKT, Lower Ground Floor, The Chanakya Mall, Yashwant Place Community Centre, New Delhi
Phone: 83769 86799 | Cuisine: Global
Rating: Food: 4.5/5 | Drinks: 4.25/5 | Service: 4.5/5 | Ambience: 4.25/5 | Overall: 4.5/5

Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com

REVIVING KASHMIRI PANDIT CUISINE

A culinary journey through Kashmir

CHEF RAHUL WALI, through his expertise and dedication brings forth a unique culinary experience that celebrates the distinct identity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine. **DIVYA BHATIA** had the chance to taste his lip-smacking delicacies

Kashmir is known for its scenic beauty but what people often miss on a trip to Kashmir is its Kashmiri Pandit cuisine which is a rich in flavors, influenced by the cultural heritage and geographical diversity of the Kashmir Valley. Renowned for its exquisite blend of aromatic spices and traditional cooking techniques, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is a true reflection of the region's history and culinary prowess. Staple ingredients such as rice, yogurt, and vegetables form the foundation of many dishes, which are often infused with an array of spices like fennel, cardamom, and saffron, lending a unique and complex flavor profile. Signature dishes such as Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Dum Aloo are cherished for their rich textures and vibrant taste. Moreover, the cuisine also features a variety of delectable vegetarian options, including Nadru Yakhni (lotus stem in yogurt gravy) and Haq Saag (collard greens cooked with spices). With its emphasis on fresh ingredients and intricate preparation methods, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine continues to captivate palates worldwide, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Recently, I had the opportunity to indulge in Koshur Wuriabal, a culinary extravaganza celebrating the exquisite flavors of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, at The Roseate House. Often overshadowed by the renowned Wazwan, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine boasts a distinct identity, tracing its origins back to 326 BCE, long before the arrival of Wazwan in the 16th century. Contrary to common perception, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine stands apart with its unique flavors and traditions. There are very few chefs who



understand traditional Kashmiri Pandit cooking, but Chef Rahul Wali stands as a beacon of tradition in this culinary landscape where authenticity is often diluted by modern interpretations. With a deep understanding of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, Chef Rahul introduced us to age-old recipes and forgotten culinary practices, offering a rare opportunity to savor the true essence of Kashmiri Pandit's gastronomy. Chef Rahul Wali talked about his journey and passion. Excerpts: **Could you share your journey as a Chef?** I was born in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, and spent my formative years in Mumbai and Pune. My culinary journey began after completing my Bachelor's in Hotel Management from Pune. I garnered extensive experience across various renowned brands in India and abroad, eventually pursuing an advanced Graduate Degree in Gastronomy from Le Cordon Bleu, Adelaide Australia. In recent years, I've been dedicated to reviving and promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine through pop-ups, festivals,



and collaborations with hotels and restaurants. **What inspired you to focus on promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine?** The inspiration stems from a dual purpose - preserving our culinary heritage and introducing the richness of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine to a broader audience. This cuisine, dating back to centuries, holds a distinct place in culinary history, characterized by unique flavors and techniques. Unfortunately, it has remained relatively obscure compared to the more widely known Kashmiri cuisine. I aim to change that by bringing it to the forefront and showcasing its diversity and depth. **How would you differentiate Kashmiri Pandit cuisine from other regional cuisines?** Kashmiri Pandit cuisine is distinctive in several aspects. Firstly, it predates the more commonly known Kashmiri cuisine, tracing its roots back to ancient times. Secondly, unlike many other Indian cuisines, it refrains from using onion, garlic, or tomatoes in its preparation. The focus is on a handful of traditional spices, meticulously blended

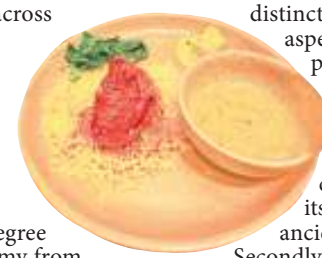
to create nuanced flavors. Additionally, the cooking method involves patience and slow cooking, preserving the authenticity of the dishes.

What challenges do you face in promoting Kashmiri Pandit cuisine outside its native region?

While the reception has been overwhelmingly positive, there are challenges, particularly in sourcing authentic ingredients. Additionally, there's a misconception that Kashmiri cuisine is solely suited for colder climates, which isn't entirely accurate. Educating people about the versatility and richness of our cuisine is an ongoing effort, requiring collaboration and support from various stakeholders.

How do you ensure an authentic culinary experience for guests during food festivals and pop-ups?

Authenticity is paramount, although it's essential to acknowledge that complete replication may not always be feasible, especially in diverse culinary landscapes. However, I strive to maintain the essence and integrity of Kashmiri Pandit cuisine while adapting to local ingredients and preferences. Each dish is crafted with care and respect for tradition, ensuring that guests experience the true flavors of Kashmir.



ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION FEDERALISM AT RISK OR UNITY FORTIFIED?

PRIYOTOSH SHARMA and **CHANDRIMA DUTTA** address this question posed by sceptics on whether the consolidation of electoral cycles could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power and potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens

In India's democratic landscape, elections have long stood as pillars supporting our diverse linguistic tapestry and regional pride for over seven decades now. Stating Amartya Sen, individuals can hold singular affiliations while valuing their multifaceted identities. But a pressing question arises: If one Nation, one Election were to happen, would national unity overshadow regional loyalties? Sceptics have raised concerns that the consolidation of electoral cycles as a question of national importance could lead to a domination of the political narrative by parties and candidates vying for power. The emphasis may shift away from citizen engagement and democratic participation towards partisan interests and power struggles. This could potentially undermine the essence of democracy by overshadowing the voices and choices of individual citizens.

It's noteworthy that the proposal of One Nation and One Election is not a recent development. As far back as September 1982, the Election Commission of India recommended simultaneous elections to both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Additionally, the Law Commission of India's Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections in August 2018 further explored this idea. Given this historical context, one might wonder why the ruling party suddenly embraced this proposal in their manifesto ahead of the 2024 general election. The sudden appropriation of the One Nation and One Election proposal by the ruling party likely reflects a strategic move to prioritise electoral reform and streamline governance processes. However, such a significant shift in policy approach raises questions about the underlying motivations and potential implications. India's governance model hinges on representative democracy, where elections serve as the bedrock of our political system. Campaigning, a pivotal aspect of elections, comes with substantial costs. A case in point is the staggering expenditure seen between February and May 2019, where Google and Facebook collectively reported political online advertising spending amounting to ₹58.67 crore. Notably, while Google declared 12,276 advertisements worth ₹29.3 crore, Facebook's India Ad Library disclosed a significantly higher volume of individual advertisements, totaling 132,419 and valued at ₹29.28 crore. Yet,



amidst this financial discourse, we often overlook the ripple effects of reducing the frequency of elections. Such a move could inadvertently disrupt sectors that thrive on heightened electoral activity, notably advertising, hospitality, and transportation. In light of this, it becomes imperative to carefully consider the implications of "One Nation, One Election" on federalism, regional dynamics, and political stability. For instance, the recent issue in Manipur over regional disparities highlights the potential risks and challenges associated with synchronising elections across different levels of government. As such, thorough deliberation and stakeholder engagement are essential in the electoral reform process to ensure that any changes uphold democratic principles and address the diverse needs of the

respective states. The ongoing debates outside of parliament surrounding One Nation and One Election are fueled by contrasting perspectives. Proponents argue that synchronising elections would bolster national unity by aligning electoral cycles and directing political discourse towards pressing national issues. At least for a brief period of time this narrative of one nation, one election, would appeal to the imagination of the public, as it would come on a platter of "national interest". However, sceptics raise concerns that this unity could merely be a facade concealing broader political agendas. Another significant issue that may raise eyebrows among the opposition is the prospect of diminished accountability if elections are held every five years.

THE ONGOING DEBATES OUTSIDE OF PARLIAMENT SURROUNDING ONE NATION AND ONE ELECTION ARE FUELED BY CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES. PROPONENTS ARGUE THAT SYNCHRONISING ELECTIONS WOULD BOLSTER NATIONAL UNITY BY ALIGNING ELECTORAL CYCLES AND DIRECTING POLITICAL DISCOURSE TOWARDS PRESSING NATIONAL ISSUES. AT LEAST FOR A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME THIS NARRATIVE OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION, WOULD APPEAL TO THE IMAGINATION OF THE PUBLIC, AS IT WOULD COME ON A PLATTER OF "NATIONAL INTEREST"

This could spark doubts regarding the government's responsiveness to pressing concerns, such as notably fluctuations in oil prices, sharp fluctuations in food prices and hikes in gas cylinder costs paralyse citizen's every potential to remove a party from power through electoral process at least in state legislative elections. In navigating India's vibrant democratic landscape, it's crucial to recognize the unique context and complexities inherent to our nation. While other countries like Belgium or Japan may offer valuable insights, it's imperative not to blindly emulate their electoral models. Instead, decisions regarding electoral reforms must stem from a grassroots consensus, voting behaviour tailored to India's diverse socio-political fabric. The denizens of the streets and the

daily wage earners exhibit scant enthusiasm for engaging with political rhetoric; rather, their electoral participation hinges largely upon aligning themselves with the party that they could benefit financially from, thereby rendering the manipulation of their sentiments a feasible endeavour. Nevertheless, this one election holds the potential to wield considerable influence, particularly in terms of cost saving, especially where the prospect of bifurcating public sentiment during concurrent elections remains plausible.

PRIYOTOSH SHARMA
(Faculty of Department of Political Science, Ramanuj Gupta Degree College)
CHANDRIMA DUTTA
(Student of Calcutta University, Political Science Department)

Education a must for the Panchayati Raj System to flourish

By **Vikash Kumar**

Panchayati systems are considered to be the fundamental pillar of local administration because it provides rural people with direct participation in the country's democratic process. The provision of local self-government has been in India since ancient times. In Indian democracy, since Independence, Panchayati systems were given their due importance for which different models were adopted. Mahatma Gandhi's ideology regarding the Panchayati Raj system was that the village panchayats should be made solid and self-sufficient so that they conduct all administrative activities at the village level. This is why the makers of the Indian Constitution had added separate provisions for this. India is the largest democratic country in the world, with about 90 crore voters registered, according to the Election Commission's 2019 list. According to the 'Rural Connection Network', there are

2,39,000 Gram Panchayats all over the country, which are a State subject mentioned in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. The responsibility for their management, financial system, election, and arrangement of the structure rests on the State Government. The governance system of India works at three levels in which the third level is local self-government (the Panchayati system). Article 40 of the Indian Constitution contains provisions related to it, which was not an enforceable procedure. The states were not in favour of giving constitutional status to the panchayat systems, saying it violated the federal system. This is why Rajiv Gandhi's 64th Amendment (1989) and VP Singh's constitutional effort (June 1, 1990) failed. Constitutional status was accorded to Panchayats in 1992 and 1993 by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao worked tirelessly on. The responsibility of conducting their elections rests with the State Election Commission, provided by



Article 243 (K) of the Indian Constitution. Some states have announced their election because of the Constitution; their tenure is for five years, which is provided by Article 243 (E) of the Indian Constitution, but the purpose for which the concept of Panchayati systems was implemented is today helpless in achieving its original objective. Voters and elected officials engage in conversations, yet the conversation does not begin since communication throughout an election is frequently devoid of substance.

Additionally, there are no discussions going on between the candidate and the voter. Prominent political party leaders attend these polls in order to tally their victories. The news certainly delighted the voters when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose too had to raise local issues like loans, housing commissions, what issues do you have with the water and roads, he had asked earlier. In these elections, health and education are burning issues. The headman often remains indifferent, even as voters focus

on the state of primary schools along with other local issues. Because of lack of knowledge or education, the candidates' intentions and professional experiences are also not scrutinised during these elections. While the Panchayati system has helped local bodies, only a portion of the projects are intended to serve the villagers. Under such circumstances, every voter ought to select the candidate who best reflects the desires of the people, not the 'sole' candidate who offers casteism, religion, regionalism, and self-interest. This process

can only proceed if there is evidence of improvement at the local level. Voters ought to cast their ballots voluntarily and with diligence in order to support local institutions' credibility and enabling the competent leader's directives to be carried out over a period of five years, both of which encourage advancement. Today, the Panchayati Raj system exists in almost the whole country, but in reality, self-reliance today is far from what was envisioned at the time of its implementation. A provision for reservations was made in the Panchayati system under Article 243A. However, women have been unable to take full advantage of it, so have the lower classes, because even today, voting in rural areas is inspired by several biased undercurrents. Only when the Panchayati system becomes solid and self-reliant will India's democracy be strengthened. The process of reforms can start from the village itself. Women have become sarpanches but they do not run the administration; their husbands step in. A person belonging to the SC/ST category becomes a

sarpanch, but only a handful of wealthy people run the administration. Even today, many states need to transfer their subjects to the Panchayati system. In Panchayat elections deceit and force are openly used. The person who has access to the top of the administration is the one who occupies critical positions, a reason why the purpose for which it was created has not been fulfilled. The Government allots crores of funds to the development of villages but the benefits instead are spent on things remote from a village or its voters. To this date, the Panchayati system is entirely self-sufficient and those whose dreams could not be realised. In the present circumstances, the Government should make Panchayati Raj self-reliant for which education is the most significant step ahead. Awareness is only possible with education because that alone can make citizens and voters politically aware. (Views expressed are personal. Author is President of the Indian Research Scholars Association and can be contacted at sagarvikash829@gmail.com)

IT'S 30 YEARS SINCE APARTHEID ENDED

South Africa's celebrations are set against growing discontent

PNS ■ PRETORIA

South Africa marked 30 years since the end of apartheid and the birth of its democracy with a ceremony in the capital Saturday that included a 21-gun salute and the waving of the nation's multicolored flag.

But any sense of celebration on the momentous anniversary was set against a growing discontent with the current government.

President Cyril Ramaphosa presided over the gathering in a huge white tent in the gardens of the government buildings in Pretoria as head of state.

He also spoke as the leader of the African National Congress party, which was widely credited with liberating South Africa's Black majority from the racist system of oppression that made the country a pariah for nearly a half-century.

The ANC has been in power ever since the first democratic, all-race election of April 27, 1994, the vote that officially ended apartheid.

But this Freedom Day holiday marking that day fell amid a poignant backdrop: Analysts and polls predict that the waning popularity of the party



The president, who stood in front of a banner emblazoned with the word "Freedom," also recognised the major problems South Africa still has three decades later with vast poverty and inequality, issues that will be central yet again when millions vote on May 29. Ramaphosa conceded there had been "setbacks."

once led by Nelson Mandela is likely to see it lose its parliamentary majority for the first time as a new generation of South Africans make their voices heard

in what might be the most important election since 1994 next month. "Few days in the life of our nation can compare to that day, when freedom was born," Ramaphosa said in

a speech centered on the nostalgia of 1994, when Black people were allowed to vote for the first time, the once-banned ANC swept to power, and Mandela became the country's first Black president. "South Africa changed forever. It signalled a new chapter in the history of our nation, a moment that resonated across Africa and across the world."

"On that day, the dignity of all the people of South Africa was restored," Ramaphosa said.

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The 1994 election changed South Africa from a country where Black and other nonwhite people were denied most basic freedoms, not just the right to vote. Laws controlled where they lived, where they were allowed to go on any given day, and what jobs they could have. After apartheid fell, a constitution was adopted guaranteeing the rights of all South Africans no matter their race,

religion, gender or sexuality.

But that hasn't significantly improved the lives of millions, with South Africa's Black majority that make up more than 80 per cent of the population of 62 million still overwhelmingly affected by severe poverty.

The official unemployment rate is 32 per cent, the highest in the world, and more than 60 per cent for young people between the ages of 15 and 24. More than 16 million South Africans — 25 per cent of the country — rely on monthly welfare grants for survival.

South Africa is still the most unequal country in the world in terms of wealth distribution, according to the World Bank, with race a key factor. While the damage of apartheid remains difficult to undo, the ANC is increasingly being blamed for South Africa's current problems.

In the week leading up to the anniversary, countless South Africans were asked what 30 years of freedom from apartheid meant to them. The dominant response was that while 1994 was a landmark moment, it's now overshadowed by the joblessness, violence, crime, corruption and near-collapse of basic services like electricity and water that plagues South Africa in 2024.



Teen loses life trying to save brother from fire

PNS ■ DEORIA

A 14-year-old boy died and his 8-year-old brother suffered burn injuries after four huts in a village here caught fire, police said on Saturday.

Laxman Prasad (14) and his brother Bharat Prasad were sleeping in one of the huts when the fire broke out in the Siswa village. While Laxman managed to get Bharat out of the burning hut, he, himself got trapped and died on the spot, Circle Officer

(CO) Aditya Kumar Gautam said.

He said that the incident occurred on Friday afternoon when four huts caught fire which led to the explosion of gas cylinders.

Bharat was rushed to a hospital and is said to be in stable condition, he said.

The reason behind the fire is yet to be ascertained. The body was sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, he added.



A tornado strikes the southern China metropolis of Guangzhou

PNS ■ BEIJING

A tornado sent debris swirling into the air in southern China's Guangzhou city during a severe rain and hail storm on Saturday, Chinese media said. There were no immediate reports on the extent of damage or any injuries. The China Meteorological Administration said the tornado hit about 3 p.m. in Baiyun district in Guangzhou, a sprawling metropolis and manufacturing centre near Hong Kong. Videos posted online showed a darkened sky in the mid-afternoon and the debris swirling

upward. Tornado warnings were issued for other parts of Guangzhou and there were unconfirmed reports that a second tornado appeared to have hit another district in the city later in the afternoon, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Guangzhou during an official visit to China earlier this month. The city, formerly known as Canton, also recently held the Canton Fair, a major export and import exhibition that draws buyers from around the world.

Climate change may cause biodiversity decline: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change could become the main driver of biodiversity decline by the mid-century, new research has found.

Studying changes in land-use patterns and their impacts on biodiversity, an international team of researchers found that biodiversity around the world could have declined by 2-11 per cent.

"By including all world regions in our model, we were able to fill many blind spots and address criticism of other approach-

es working with fragmented and potentially biased data," said Henrique Pereira, research group head at the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv), and the first author of the study published in the journal 'Science'.

Examining how biodiversity and ecosystems might evolve in the future, the researchers found that the combined effects of land-use change and climate change lead to biodiversity loss across all global regions, regardless of emissions scenario.

"We found that climate change poses an imminent threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services. While land-use change has histori-

cally been a significant factor, our findings indicate that climate change could overtake it as the primary driver of biodiversity loss by mid-

century," explained study co-author, David Leclère, a researcher at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Austria.

The researchers called for a "truly integrated approach" considering varied sustainability aspects to reduce conflicts between policies and safeguard biodiversity in the coming decades.

"For instance, while bio-energy deployment is still a critical element of the majority of climate stabilisation scenarios, it also poses a threat to species habitats," said IIASA Biodiversity and Natural Resources Program Director Petr Havlik, one of the study co-authors. The findings suggested that conservation and restoration efforts should be prioritised globally as necessary natural climate solutions, the authors said.

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Myopia, or the need for corrected vision to focus or see objects at a distance, has become a lot more common in recent decades. Some even consider myopia, also known as nearsightedness, an epidemic. Optometry researchers estimate that about half of the global population will need corrective lenses to offset myopia by 2050 if current rates continue — up from 23% in 2000 and less than 10% in some countries. The associated health care costs are huge. In the United States alone, spending on corrective lenses, eye tests and

the chicks' eyes and are adjusted to affect how much they see. Just like in humans, if visual input is distorted, a chick's eyes grow too large, resulting in myopia. And it's progressive. Blur leads to eye growth, which causes more blur, which makes the eye grow even larger, and so on.

Two recent studies featuring extensive surveys of children and their parents provide strong support for the idea that an important driver of the uptick in myopia is that people are spending more time focusing on objects immediately in front of our eyes, whether a screen, a book or a drawing pad. The more time we spend focusing on something within arm's length of our faces, dubbed "near work," the greater the odds of

that this unnatural eye growth can be interrupted by sunlight.

A 2022 study, for example, found that myopia rates were more than four times greater for children who didn't spend much time outdoors — say, once or twice a week — compared with those who were outside daily. At the same time, kids who spent more than three hours a day while not at school reading or looking at a screen close-up were four times more likely to have myopia than those who spent an hour or less doing so. In another paper, from 2012, researchers conducted a meta-analysis of seven studies that compared duration of time spent outdoors with myopia

effects and argued for much more time outdoors and changes in early-age schooling to reduce myopia prevalence.

What's driving the epidemic That still doesn't explain why it's on the rise so rapidly. Globally, a big part of this is due to the rapid development and industrial-

PNS ■ ADELAIDE

"Childhood" and "dementia" are two words we wish we didn't have to use together. But sadly, around 1,400 Australian children and young people live with currently untreatable childhood dementia.

Broadly speaking, childhood dementia is caused by any one of more than 100 rare genetic disorders. Although the causes differ from dementia acquired later in life, the progressive nature of the illness is the same.

Half of infants and children diagnosed with childhood dementia will not reach their tenth birthday, and most will die before turning 18. Yet this devastating condition has lacked awareness, and importantly, the research attention needed to work towards treatments and a cure.

More about the causes Most types of childhood dementia are caused by mutations (or mistakes) in our DNA. These mistakes lead to a range of rare genetic disorders, which in turn cause childhood dementia.

Two-thirds of childhood dementia disorders are caused by "inborn errors of metabolism". This means the metabolic pathways involved in the breakdown of carbohydrates, lipids, fatty acids and proteins in the body fail.

As a result, nerve pathways fail to function, neurons (nerve cells that send messages around the body) die, and progressive cognitive decline occurs.

What happens to children with childhood dementia?

Most children initially appear unaffected. But after a period of apparently normal development, children with childhood dementia progressively lose all previously acquired skills and abilities, such as talking, walking, learning, remembering and reasoning.

Childhood dementia also leads to significant changes in behaviour, such as aggression and hyperactivity. Severe sleep disturbance is common and vision and hearing can also be affected. Many children have seizures.

The age when symptoms start can vary, depending partly on the particular genetic disorder causing the dementia, but the average is around two years old. The symptoms are caused by significant, progressive brain damage.

Are there any treatments available?

Childhood dementia treatments currently under evaluation or approved are for a very limited number of disorders, and are only available in some parts of the world. These include gene replacement, gene-modified cell therapy and protein or enzyme replacement therapy.

Enzyme replacement therapy is available in Australia for one form of childhood dementia. These therapies attempt to "fix" the problems causing the disease, and have shown promising results.

Other experimental therapies include ones that target faulty protein production or reduce inflammation in the brain.

Research attention is lacking

Death rates for Australian children with cancer nearly halved between 1997 and 2017 thanks to research that has enabled the development of multiple treatments. But over recent decades, nothing has changed for children with dementia.

In 2017-2023, research for childhood cancer received over four times more funding per patient compared to funding for childhood dementia. This is despite childhood dementia causing a similar number of deaths each year as childhood cancer.

What is childhood dementia?

HOW COULD NEW RESEARCH HELP?

Childhood dementia is a rare and devastating condition that causes progressive cognitive decline and loss of skills. It is caused by genetic mutations and is currently untreatable. Research attention is lacking, and funding for childhood dementia is significantly lower than for childhood cancer.

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Myopia is at epidemic levels and the problem begins in childhood

related expenses may be as high as US\$7.2 billion a year. What explains the rapid growth in myopia?

I'm a vision scientist who has studied visual perception and perceptual defects. To answer that question, first let's examine what causes myopia — and what reduces it.

How myopia develops While having two myopic parents does mean you're more likely to be nearsighted, there's no single myopia gene. That means the causes of myopia are more behavioral than genetic.

Optometrists have learned a great deal about the progression of myopia by studying visual development in infant chickens. They do so by putting little helmets on baby chickens.

Lenses on the face of the helmet cover



Two recent studies featuring extensive surveys of children and their parents provide strong support for the idea that an important driver of the uptick in myopia is that people are spending more time focusing on objects immediately in front of our eyes, whether a screen, a book or a drawing pad.

having myopia. So as much as people might blame new technologies like smartphones and too much "screen time" for hurting our eyes, the truth is even activities as valuable as reading a good book can affect your eyesight. Outside light keeps myopia at bay. Other research has shown

incidence. They also found that more time spent outdoors was associated with lower myopia incidence and progression. The odds of developing myopia dropped by 2% for each hour spent outside per week.

Other researchers have reported similar

