



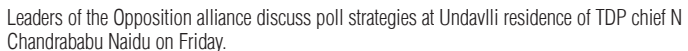
**- KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA**

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**-SPORTS**

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## 2



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Kumar charged that the phone of Lokesh, son of TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, is being tapped using Pegasus spy software and alleged Andhra Pradesh DGP K V Rajendranath Reddy and Intelligence chief P S R Anjaneyulu were resorting to unethical acts.

"The entire case is fake. What can I say about the CBI," said K. Kavitha after the hearing in the Delhi excise policy case.





## TDP promises ITDA in Srikakulam district

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

In a bid to address the long-standing grievances of tribal communities in Srikakulam district, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Lok Sabha candidate Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu and Palasa nominee Gouthu Sireesha pledged to advocate for the establishment of an Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) within the district. Their assurance comes as the existing ITDA, situated in Seethampeta, was relocated to Parvatipuram-Manyam district following the district's bifurcation.

During an extensive tour of tribal villages in Mandasa mandal of Palasa Assembly constituency, both leaders engaged with residents, listening attentively to their concerns and grievances. Many residents lamented the lack of access to welfare schemes and other benefits due to the absence of a dedicated ITDA office in the district.

Rammohan Naidu criticised the YSRCP government, alleging that the decision to relocate the ITDA was made without consulting the affected communities. He emphasised the importance of incorporating the opinions of the people in administrative decisions, particularly those impacting marginalized

Rammohan Naidu criticised the YSRCP government, alleging that the decision to relocate the ITDA was made without consulting the affected communities. He emphasised the importance of incorporating the opinions of the people in administrative decisions, particularly those impacting marginalized groups.

Echoing his sentiments, Sireesha highlighted the TDP's track record of implementing welfare schemes for tribal communities. She pledged to prioritize the improvement of health and education facilities in remote areas, underscoring the party's commitment to uplifting marginalized sections of society.

The promise to establish an ITDA within the Srikakulam district reflects the TDP's dedication to addressing the needs of tribal populations and ensuring equitable development across the region. As the election campaign unfolds, the party's candidates continue to advocate for policies that resonate with the aspirations of the local people.

## Turmoil in JSP's Pithapuram unit sparks leadership row

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The once-promising outlook for Jana Sena in Pithapuram has soured as criticisms mount over a perceived lack of organisation and leadership within the party.

Despite initial enthusiasm surrounding Pawan Kalyan's candidature, his intermittent presence has left supporters disillusioned and sparked debates about the party's future direction.

Critics within Jana Sena are increasingly vocal about the apparent disarray within the ranks, with Pawan Kalyan's sporadic appearances exacerbating concerns about leadership.

The absence of direct engagement with supporters and the absence of a capable spokesperson have fueled internal controversies, casting doubt on the party's ability to navigate the current challenges.

Growing dissatisfaction among party members has led to speculation about Jayasena's potential decline in this turbulent period. Political experts are



weighing in, expressing doubts about the party's stability amidst these internal struggles.

While Pawan Kalyan's initial decision to contest in Pithapuram generated excitement, subsequent absences have sparked discussions about neglect within his cadre. Despite promises of closer engagement, concerns persist about the lack of substantive

interactions beyond superficial publicity efforts.

Recent events, including Pawan's visit to Chebrolu in Gollaprolu Mandal, where he was met by a large crowd, have underscored supporters' frustration at feeling overlooked and unheard. Questions linger about the accessibility of party leadership and the effectiveness of their campaign strategy.

In Pithapuram, the absence of a visible leader actively engaging with constituents has raised doubts about the authenticity of Jana Sena's campaigning efforts.

While party leaders attribute the confusion to a lack of communication from higher authorities, the absence of clear directives from Pawan himself has only added to the uncertainty.

MP candidate Uday Srinivas' decision to focus on campaigning in other constituencies has further complicated matters, leaving supporters unsure about who is accountable for managing Jana Sena's affairs in Pithapuram.

Despite a willingness among party members to work tirelessly for Pawan Kalyan's victory, the absence of coherent policy decisions presents a significant hurdle. As Jana Sena grapples with internal strife, political analysts caution that failure to address these issues could result in a significant defeat in the upcoming elections.

## Ayyanna all set for 10<sup>th</sup> electoral battle

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



In the vibrant colours of Andhra Pradesh politics, one name shines brightly – Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu. He's primed for his tenth electoral battle in the upcoming Assembly elections, representing the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) from the Narsipatnam constituency.

Ayyanna Patrudu's journey is not merely a political odyssey but a saga of resilience and service spanning over four decades. From the moment he heeded the call of TDP's founding father, NT Rama Rao, in 1983, he has been a steadfast pillar of the party. Despite occasional differences with TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu, his allegiance to the party's ideology remains unshaken, a legacy he has cherished deeply since joining its ranks at inception.

Rooted in a family lineage steeped in politics, Ayyanna Patrudu inherits a legacy dating back to his grandfather, Lachchapatrudu, who served as an MLC in the 1970s. The Patrudu family's political narrative is rich with intrigue, marked by a longstanding rivalry with the Tangedu Rajus, embodying the intricate dynamics of Andhra Pradesh's political landscape.

Yet, Ayyanna Patrudu's journey hasn't been without its trials. Personal tragedies, like the loss of his brother Srinu to Naxal violence, tested his resolve. Nevertheless, he remained resolute in his commitment to public service, serving as a cabinet minister for six terms under

the stewardship of both NTR and Chandrababu Naidu, showcasing his adeptness in governance and administration.

His electoral journey, a tapestry woven with victories and defeats, bears witness to his steadfast dedication. Despite facing setbacks in 1989, 2009, and 2019, his dedication to the welfare and development of the Narsipatnam constituency has never wavered. Now, as he braces for his final electoral campaign, he faces off against Uma Sankar Ganesh, a former ally and the incumbent MLA, amid speculation about his intentions to pave the way for his son's political career.

Finally, the saga of Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu encapsulates the essence of dedication, resilience, and unwavering commitment. As he prepares to bid adieu to electoral battles after the 2024 elections, his legacy as a titan of Andhra Pradesh politics is poised to endure for generations, a beacon of inspiration for all who dare to dream and serve.

## Kavitha collected funds via...

Continued from Page 1

The Delhi court reserved the order on an application moved by the CBI seeking five days remand of BRS leader K. Kavitha in the Delhi excise policy case

The CBI custody report said that Kavitha paid Rs 100 crore and that Rs 80 lakh was paid by Sarath Chandra Reddy to Kavitha's Jagruti's organisation. The CBI revealed that Kavitha threatened Sarath Chandra Reddy and demanded money.

It is mentioned in the remand report that Kavitha threatened Sarath Chandra Reddy that if the land deal was not done, she would see how he would do

business in Telangana. The CBI remand report said that agreements and registration documents were created to purchase agricultural land without any actual land.

The CBI alleged that Kavitha took Rs 14 crore from Sarath Chandra Reddy in the name of the fake land sale. Sarath Chandra Reddy paid Rs 80 lakh to Kavitha's Telangana Jagruti organisation for introducing him to the Delhi liquor business.

Kavitha reportedly asked Sarath Chandra Reddy to pay Rs 14 crore after buying agricultural land in Mahbubnagar. As per the CBI report, Sarath Chandra Reddy said that he could not give Rs 14 crore as he did not

know the actual price of the land. But, the CBI stated in its custody report that Kavitha threatened that Aurobindo Pharma would cease to exist in Telangana if Rs 14 crore was not paid.

It is alleged that Kavitha asked Sarath Chandra Reddy to pay Rs 25 crore for five retail zones at the rate of Rs 5 crore per retail zone.

Kavitha also demanded Rs 50 crore from MP Magunta Srinivasularedy. The CBI said that he paid Rs 25 crore to Kavitha through his son Magunta Raghava. The CBI said that Kavitha paid Rs 100 crore to Kejriwal's associate Vijay Nair.

## Don't believe Naidu's ..

Continued from Page 1

He then urged the citizens to support the YSRCP by pressing the fan symbol on the upcoming ballots, emphasising that the election isn't merely a contest between individuals but a battle between the marginalised and those, like Chandrababu, associated with deception.

"Like 2014, Chandrababu-Pawan Kalyan-Modi has once again presented a colourful manifesto, destined to fade into oblivion," remarked CM Jagan.

Highlighting Chandrababu's track record of unfulfilled promises, Chief Minister Jagan pointed out the failure to deliver on pledges such as farm loan

waivers (amounting to 87,612 Crore) and assistance to Self-Help Groups (14,205 Crore), along with the Mahalakshmi Scheme promising Rs 25,000 deposit upon the birth of a girl child.

"Did any household receive financial aid between 2014 and 2019 due to the birth of a female child, as promised by Chandrababu?" queried CM Jagan, referencing Chandrababu's 2014 pamphlet that assured employment or a Rs 2,000 unemployment benefit to each household during his tenure.

Further underscoring Chandrababu's unmet commitments, CM Jagan highlighted

assurances like allotting 3 cents of land to eligible beneficiaries, a BC sub-plan amounting to Rs 10,000 crores, loan waivers for power loom and handloom units, establishment of a women's protection force, and the ambitious plan to develop the state akin to Singapore, including the construction of hi-tech cities.

Moreover, the Chief Minister denounced the opposition alliance's failure to secure special status for Andhra Pradesh under Chandrababu Naidu-Pawan Kalyan-Narendra Modi leadership, cautioning against their latest round of vague promises dubbed as Super Six and Super Seven.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Sukla Paksha

Tithi: Panchami:

Apr 12 01:12 PM to Apr 13 12:04 PM

Shashthi:

Apr 13 12:04 PM to Apr 14 11:44 AM

Nakshatram:

Mrigashirsha:

Apr 13 12:51 AM to Apr 14 12:49 AM

Ardra:

Apr 14 12:49 AM to Apr 15 01:34 AM

Rahukalam:

9:10 AM to 10:43 AM

Yamagandam:

1:49 PM to 3:22 PM

Varjyam:

09:29 AM to 11:08 AM

Gulika:

6:05 AM to 7:38 AM

Amritakalam:

04:01 PM to 05:37 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham:

11:51 AM to 12:41 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Sunny

Temp: 38°

Humidity: 53%

Sunrise: 5:53 AM

Sunset: 6:22 PM

Updated: Apr 12, 2024 5:00 PM

## Girls outshine ...

Continued from Page 1

In Krishna district, first-year boys achieved an 82 per cent pass rate, while girls excelled with 86 per cent. The lowest pass rates for boys were observed in Anakapalli at 39 per cent and for girls in Alluri Sitaramaraju district at 50 per cent. Moving to the second year, both boys and girls in Krishna district secured a remarkable 90 per cent pass rate. Anakapalli registered the lowest pass rate at 56 per cent, followed by Chittoor at 68 per cent.

Guntur and NTR districts also showcased commendable performance, with Guntur achieving an 81 per cent pass rate and NTR at 79 per cent in the first year. In the second year, both Guntur and NTR recorded an impressive 87 per cent, while Visakhapatnam secured a spot in the top three with an 84 per cent pass rate.

Students have the opportunity to apply for rechecking or reevaluation from April 18 to 24. Supplementary or improvement exams are scheduled from May 24 to June 1, with separate sessions for first and second-year students. Detailed schedules will be announced shortly.

## Tesla team to visit...

Continued from Page 1

"We eagerly await their response. Across every district, land is available, and we are prepared to offer it for their plant wherever they deem fit."

Highlighting the strategic advantages of the state, the official emphasised its proximity to manufacturing hubs such as Chennai and Bengaluru, as well as the accessibility of Krishnapatnam Port. Several potential locations, including the Kia plant in Anantapur district, Naidupet, and Sri City, have been proposed for consideration.

Notably, the government has expressed its willingness to take additional steps to ensure the success of this venture. "Should Tesla's team visit the state and select a suitable location, the government is ready to facilitate land acquisition, even

if it entails purchasing it from private owners," the official added.

While the envisioned plant is anticipated to span over 2,500 acres, the official expressed confidence in the state's capability to accommodate Tesla's requirements. However, they acknowledged that due to the prevailing Model Code of Conduct, any on-site inspections or negotiations are likely to occur after the general elections.

This recent development signifies a significant triumph for CM Jagan, who has actively pursued Tesla's interest since 2021. His endeavours present a sharp contrast to the previous TDP government's unsuccessful bid to secure the prestigious project. It represents a bold stride with vast potential for fostering innovation and driving economic growth.

## Alliance leaders ...

Continued from Page 1

With the poll fervour mounting, the NDA alliance has also lined up several prominent figures as star campaigners.

The meeting saw consensus on conducting special sessions from the grassroots to parliamentary levels to streamline coordination among the three parties during the elections. Additionally, plans were outlined to establish a state-level committee tasked with overseeing campaign affairs and devising strategies. Discussions also revolved around tactics to ensure effective vote transfer at the grassroots level. Attendees expressed optimism about the synergy exhibited by alliance leaders across various domains, deeming it a positive development. Sources indicate that the recent alliance gatherings in the Godavari districts have been met with resounding success, buoying activists' morale.

Looking ahead, NDA leaders have

resolved to convene similar joint campaign meetings in as many constituencies as feasible. They are committed to combatting instances of governmental power misuse by promptly reporting them to the Election Commission and advocating for necessary actions. Plans are underway to ensure strict adherence to the election code through continuous dialogue with the Election Commission, promptly addressing any concerns that arise.

Meanwhile, preparations are underway for the participation of BJP national figures such as Amit Shah, JP Nadda, Rajnath Singh, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the State's election campaign on behalf of the alliance. Leaders affirm that the alliance has garnered public support, dismissing propaganda by the ruling YSRCP. Setting ambitious targets, the coalition aims to secure 25 parliamentary seats and over 160 assembly seats through vigorous campaigning and strategic planning.

## BJP govt ...

Continued from Page 1

"What kind of alliance is this that wants to make India powerless," he asked. Modi said the Congress' thinking was anti-development and the country's border districts were deliberately deprived of development by former Congress governments.

"The Congress stands with every anti-national force. It ruled for decades but there is not a single major problem of the country for which it gave a complete solution," Modi said. "The Congress' thinking is anti-development. The country's border districts were deliberately deprived of development by former Congress governments," he said. While Modi is busy making India a powerful nation, people of the INDI alliance are trying to make India weak, he said.

The Congress is a constituent of the INDIA bloc.



# YSRCP's 'covert token strategy' raises alarms over electoral integrity

The tokens, resembling casino chips, offer covert monetary rewards

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a bold and unprecedented move aimed at solidifying its dominance in the political arena, YSRCP has introduced innovative tactics, including a clandestine token system designed to discreetly distribute funds to sway voters. This strategy, reminiscent of a high-stakes poker game, has sparked serious concerns about electoral integrity. The tokens, resembling casino chips, offer covert monetary rewards, sidestepping traditional financial scrutiny and the oversight of the Election Commission. However, the intrigue doesn't end there. It has come to light that YSRCP volunteers, functioning as a shadow



paramilitary force, possess detailed dossiers on 50 households each within their areas of influence. Armed not with weapons, but with information on potential voters' inclinations and affiliations, they exert a significant influence over the electoral landscape, raising doubts about fairness and transparency. Despite efforts by the Election

Commission to curb such practices, reports indicate that YSRCP volunteers, despite resignations, persist in their covert activities in Central Andhra's heartlands. Tokens are selectively distributed to individuals perceived as likely supporters of YSRCP, casting doubt on the fairness of the entire electoral process. YCP's overarching strategy

**The timing of these manoeuvres is crucial, with cash incentives distributed at the eleventh hour to maximise their impact on undecided voters. Mandal-level leaders, accompanied by a multitude of volunteers, are stepping down en masse, paving the way for the covert distribution of cash disguised as innocuous token exchanges.**

appears to rely on the strategic allocation of these tokens, meticulously calculated to sway votes at all levels of governance. Adorned with symbols of faith and vibrant colours, these tokens are not limited to rural constituents; they are also infiltrating urban areas, facilitated by house managers operating under volunteer supervision.

The timing of these manoeuvres is crucial, with cash incentives distributed at the eleventh hour to maximise their impact on undecided voters. Mandal-level leaders, accompanied by a multitude of volunteers, are stepping down en masse, paving the way for the covert distribution of cash disguised as innocuous token exchanges.

## Machilipatnam-V'wada section inspected

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

B Nagya, IRTS, Principal Chief Operations Manager, SCR, conducted an extensive inspection of the Machilipatnam-Vijayawada branch line section on Friday. D Narendra Varma, Sr DOM, Vijayawada, and officials accompanied Nagya throughout the inspection. Nagya commenced the inspection at Machilipatnam Station along with officials. The PCOM inspected platforms, SS office, and safety aspects. He took stock of traffic facilities and developmental works taken up under the Amrit Station Scheme. He also inspected the crew running room and coaching depots at Machilipatnam and appreciated the staff for the upkeep and maintenance of depots.

## BJP trying to deceive public: CITU

Purandeswari's statements regarding Steel Plant are mere election ploys with no genuine intent

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) State president D. Purandeswari of attempting to deceive the public ahead of the impending general elections. The allegations stem from Purandeswari's assertions that the Union government is committed to steering the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) towards profitability and preventing its sale. CITU leaders, including State president Nageswara Rao and general secretary Ch. Narasinga Rao dismissed Purandeswari's statements as mere election ploys with no genuine intent behind them. They pointed out that while both private and public sector



steel plants across the country have witnessed substantial profits over the past two years, VSP has incurred losses amounting to 74,000 crore. They attributed these losses to what they described as the lop-sided policies of the BJP-led NDA government. Further allegations were

made against the Union government, with CITU claiming that a notification was issued on January 27, 2021, for the 100 per cent strategic sale of VSP. They accused the Union Steel Ministry of entering into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with South Korea-based POSCO for the sale of the plant. Additionally, they claimed that another MoU was signed with the Jindal group for the supply of raw materials for the operation of VSP's third Blast Furnace, allegedly to eventually transfer ownership to the private company. CITU leaders asserted that Purandeswari's statements were aimed at diverting public attention from the impending sale of VSP and gaining an electoral advantage. They

emphasised the scepticism of steel workers and the public towards the BJP government's assurances. Contrary to BJP's claims that VSP's lands would not be sold, CITU argued that the sale of the steel plant would inevitably lead to the transfer of the 22,000 acres of VSP land into private hands. In light of these allegations, CITU demanded the revocation of the Centre's decision regarding the strategic sale of VSP. They also called for the allocation of captive mines and the supply of raw materials from the NMDC on loan. Additionally, they urged the cancellation of the agreement with the Jindal group for raw material supply to BF III and the implementation of pending wage revisions for workers and officers.

## BODY FOUND DURING UNLOADING OF SAND

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During the unloading of sand at a construction site in Ipurupalem of Chirala mandal in Bapatla district, workers made a grisly discovery—a deceased individual. Lakshmi Kagithala, the homeowner from Padmanabhampet, had contracted local traders for sand procurement for her ongoing house construction. It was during this process that the workers stumbled upon the body. Swiftly, they informed Lakshmi, who promptly notified the authorities. An official case has been filed, and a comprehensive investigation has been initiated. The deceased is estimated to be between 35 and 40 years old. According to police state-



ments, the body appears to have been there for approximately two days before its discovery. The head seems to have become detached from the body during the excavation, likely due to the use of heavy machinery. Chirala Rural CI Satyanarayana has visited the scene to collect evidence and reconstruct the

sequence of events. Police are actively working to determine the identity of the deceased, the source of the sand, and the circumstances surrounding the death. The body has been transported to Chirala government hospital for a post-mortem examination to ascertain the cause of death.

## Parties to include rescued sex workers' demands in manifesto

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vimukthi, a State-level forum for rescued survivors of trafficking and victims of commercial sexual exploitation, along with other NGOs, has sought the attention of political parties to resolve their issues. The rescued women sought to resolve problems like facing stigma and discrimination in their families, society and even by the government and denial of rehabilitation as well as compensation. Addressing the media persons on Friday, Vimukthi president Apurva stated that, as per the statistics of the Government of India, there were 1.40 lakh sex workers as of 2022 and the State of Andhra Pradesh topped that list. On average, 10-15 per cent of women between 18-40 years enter prostitution due to lack of livelihood options, financial conditions of family and other reasons. Also, studies say that



nearly 10 per cent of women are leaving this profession because of the age factor. She stressed that the State and Central governments utterly failed to facilitate fair rehabilitation, victim compensation and other support services by the State to rescue victims of human trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Pushpa, secretary of Vimukthi, said it is needless to underline specifically that, there is a clear provision for the right to live with enough dignity for every citizen under Article 21 of the constitution. But, these days, it seems far beyond the grounds

for women engaged in prostitution and their children to live with dignity who are facing severe stigma and discrimination in society. Their nine demands to be incorporated in election manifestos of all political parties are a specific policy for Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) in Andhra Pradesh, basic needs and services, education, provision for pension to all the women in prostitution who crossed 40 years of age. All the rescued survivors of trafficking and victims of CSE shall access victim compensation within three months.

## Naidu vows to provide water for 3 crops in Krishna delta

PNS ■ GUNTUR

During an election rally in Vemuru on Friday, TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu pledged to ensure the availability of irrigation water for three crop cycles annually in the Krishna delta region. Accusing Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy of burdening the public with soaring prices of essentials and increased power tariffs, Naidu criticized the government's policies. He highlighted the wasteful expenditure starting from Praja Vedika to the Pattiseema lift scheme, suggesting a pattern of mismanagement. In a direct appeal to the electorate, Naidu contrasted a vision of constructive governance with what he described as destructive rule, urging voters to choose development over chaos. He emphasized the need for responsible governance, particularly concerning the welfare of children, citing concerns over drug abuse facilitated by lax policies. Promising to prioritize employment opportu-



nities for youth, Naidu positioned himself as a champion for their prospects, asserting that his return to power would pave the way for job creation and economic stability. Naidu also assured to review and potentially repeal the Land Titling Act, citing concerns over its provisions. Introducing his party's candidates Krishna Prasad (for Lok Sabha) and Ananda Babu (for the Assembly), Naidu reiterated his commitment to addressing the concerns and aspirations of the electorate.

## Sri Rama Navami fete at Vontimitta on April 22

PNS ■ KADAPA

With meticulous planning underway, the upcoming annual Sri Rama Navami Brahmotsavams at Vontimitta temple and the State festival of Sri Sitarama Kalyanam are set to grace the hearts of devotees on April 22, from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm, announced Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer (EO) AV Dharama Reddy on Friday. Addressing the media here, he highlighted the commencement of the annual event with the traditional temple cleansing ritual, Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam. The Brahmotsavam festivities are



scheduled to kick off on April 16 with Ankurarpanam, followed by Dhvajaroahanam on April 17, coinciding with the auspicious occasion of Srirama Navami, and will culminate on April 25, as per the EO. Reddy emphasised the collaborative efforts of TTD and the local district administration in making comprehensive arrangements to accommodate the anticipated surge of pilgrims amidst the prevailing intense heat. He assured the provision of essential amenities such as

drinking water and Annaprasadam, with dedicated setups at galleries and entry points. Enhanced security measures, supervised by both the police and TTD personnel, aim to ensure the safety and smooth conduct of the events. District Collector Vijayaramaraju issued directives for the prompt completion of pending tasks, including barricading and installation of CCTV cameras and Public Address Systems, by April 15. Subsequently, the EO, along with district and TTD officials, conducted a thorough inspection of the ongoing arrangements at Kalyana Vedika.

## Fervour marks chariot rally

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Kodandarama temple in Tirupati shimmered with religious fervour as the chariot procession unfolded on Friday. Marking a pivotal moment in the annual Brahmotsavam of Tirupati, Sri Kodandaramaswamy, devotees gathered in droves to witness the majestic spectacle. From 7 am to 9 am, devotees fervently pulled the colossal wooden chariot, resonating with the divine names, as Sri Seethalakshmana Sameta Sri Ramachandra graced the celestial ride within. The atmosphere reverberated with spirituality as devotees sought blessings from the divine presence.

Later in the day, from 3 pm to 4 pm, priests conducted Tirumanjanam and Asthanam, further enriching the spiritual experience for the devotees. The Chariot procession saw the active participation of revered figures including Tirumala Sri Peddajiyarswamy, Sri Chinnajiyarswamy, Deputy EOs Govinda Rajan, Nagaratna, AEO Parthasaradhi, Superintendent Somesekhar, alongside engineering, police, and vigilance officers. The procession was not just a religious event but a convergence of faith and tradition, drawing a large number of devotees who immersed themselves in the divine aura of the occasion.



## Techno management fest begins at RGUKT

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TECKZITE-24, a national-level techno-management fest, was inaugurated by Prof K Hemachandra Reddy, APSCH, Chairman, on the RGUKT Nuzvid campus on Friday. The programme was organised by SDCAC, a student body of the RGUKT-Nuzvid campus. On the occasion, Prof Hemachandra Reddy, said the students of RGUKT are always ready to impart their talent through techno fests. RGUKT imparts quality and different education. Students need to learn the changes in technology to innovate new things for human welfare. Students need to ignite their minds to focus on the future. Technical fests like this will enrich the minds of students. Addressing the gathering, Prof M Chandra Sekhar, Director, RGUKT-Nuzvid, said the students need to improve their skills as technology is changing rapidly. To reach the industrial requirements one should have a dynamic curriculum. Students have to run in the race of technology and should have lifelong learning to reach the technology.

## KRMB allots 8.5 TMC to TG, 5.5 TMC to AP from NSP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The three-member committee of the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) has decided to fully utilise the 14 TMCs of water above 500 feet in the Nagarjuna Sagar reservoir for drinking purposes. Out of the available 14 TMCs of water, 8.5 TMCs have been allocated to Telangana and 5.5 TMCs to Andhra Pradesh.

Water will be drawn up to a depth of 500 ft, 10 ft below the MDL of 510 feet. Telangana ENC Anil Kumar and AP ENC Narayana Reddy participated in the three-member committee meeting held at the Hyderabad Jalasoudha under the chairmanship of KRMB Member Secretary DM Raipure. The meeting discussed the matter cautiously using the twin reservoirs of Srisailem and Nagarjunasagar for drinking

water needs till June in view of low water availability. The decisions taken in October and current needs were discussed. At that time, 45 TMCs were allotted to AP and 35 TMCs to Telangana. The AP ENC stated that they have a surplus of 5 TMCs and Telangana used an additional 7 TMCs. They demanded that 5 TMCs of water should be given to them immediately from Sagar.

Telangana ENC Anil said that AP used a large amount of Krishna waters and not everything was accounted for. He asked AP not to take water from Srisailem for any purpose. The AP ENC said that they have to meet drinking water needs in areas below the Sagar and have to supply water using tankers. He asked to give as much water as possible from the right canal. The Telangana ENC explained that most of the people in Nalgonda,

Suryapet, Mahbubabad and Khammam districts depended on Sagar for drinking water along with Hyderabad. He asked to allocate more drinking water considering the population of Hyderabad. With this, a decision was taken to allocate 14 TMCs of water above 500 feet in Nagarjunasagar to the two states. It was decided that the three-member committee should meet again in May.

## Industrial safety, green concerns dominate poll discourse in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With the specter of industrial accidents and environmental degradation looming large, Visakhapatnam emerges as the battleground for a heated political debate as elections approach. Candidates vying for seats in key Assembly segments such as Gajuwaka, Pendurthi, Anakapalle, Chodavaram, Madugula, and Bheemunipatnam are rallying around the issue of industrial safety, pledging to enforce stringent regulations on hazardous industries. Leading the charge is

Industries Minister Gudivada Amarnath, who is contesting from the Gajuwaka segment, promising resolute action against negligent industries. However, amidst these assurances, social activists raise concerns about the mere lip service paid to safety audits, labelling them as hollow promises. Despite warnings issued after the toxic gas leak near Brandix India Apparel City (BIAC) in Atchutapuram, accidents continue to occur with alarming regularity. The tragic incident involving the leakage of styrene monomer vapour from the LG Polymers unit in

Venkatapuram village in May 2020, resulting in 12 fatalities and subsequent court-ordered shutdown, serves as a grim reminder of the stakes involved. In a separate yet equally distressing incident, two fatalities and five serious injuries were reported at Jawahar Lal Nehru Pharma City (JNPC) in Parawada. EAS Sarma, a vocal social activist and former IAS officer, condemned the lax



**Despite warnings issued after toxic gas leak near BIAC in Atchutapuram, accidents continue to occur**

regulatory environment, attributing the situation to

alleged financial ties between political parties and pharmaceutical companies facilitated

through electoral bonds. He called upon voters to exercise heightened discernment, warning against empowering those complicit in endangering public safety. Environmental advocates paint a bleak picture of Visakhapatnam's future, describing it as a city perched perilously atop a powder keg. With its unique geographical layout characterised by hills on three sides and the sea on the other, escape routes in the event of a major catastrophe are limited. Urgent calls are made to shutter non-compliant hazardous units

and prevent the establishment of new pharmaceutical and petrochemical industries in densely populated areas. Arjili Dasu, a prominent fishermen activist, bemoaned the devastating impact of untreated effluent discharge on marine ecosystems, citing instances of widespread fish kill. CITU Anakapalli district general secretary K Loknadhama echoed these sentiments, stressing the imperative of holding erring industries accountable and curbing the unchecked proliferation of hazardous units.



“Crops withered only in two lakh acres, not in twenty lakh acres”. “Only 33 farmers have committed suicide since the Congress came to power in Telangana, not 209”. These two statements, made by Telangana Planning Board vice-chairman Chinna Reddy and Congress National Kisan Cell vice-president Kodanda Reddy, respectively, were intended to downplay the crisis the state's farmers are currently facing due to drought-like conditions in Telangana. Instead, the Congress leaders' statements in the face of criticism by the Opposition for the state government's lack of relief measures only exposed its apathy.

The current crisis is not the result of one season's deficit rainfall. It results from the exploitation of the farmers' needs by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and the Congress parties. While those running the previous BRS government, headed by Chandrasekhar Rao, used the farmers' need for irrigation as

# A drought and a perfect farm storm

a ruse to empty the state's coffers and enrich themselves, the Congress saw farmers only as a vote-bank to be lured to gain power by making promises it had no intent of keeping.

The two-week lockdown during the Covid pandemic, which dented revenue sources from liquor, petrol and diesel, exposed the dire financial straits the state's exchequer was in when the state government could not pay salaries to its employees. One season's deficit rainfall is all it took to expose the BRS government. When the Opposition criticised the then BRS government for escalating project costs and spending humongous amounts - almost a couple of lakh crores of rupies of public money on water projects, especially the Kaleswaram Lift Irrigation Project and Mission Kakatiya, they claimed that the utility of the projects

**The two-week lockdown during the Covid pandemic, which dented revenue sources from liquor, petrol and diesel, exposed the dire financial straits the state's exchequer was in when the state government could not pay salaries to its employees. One season's deficit rainfall is all it took to expose the BRS government.**

would be obvious when drought strikes. It did not take a severe drought to expose the truth; just deficit rainfall for one season was more than sufficient. The withering crops are a direct testimony to the fraud the BRS committed on the farmers of Telangana. In addition, the

Chandrasekhar Rao government discontinued the only safety net available to farmers. Claiming the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (crop insurance) was useless, it discontinued the scheme without creating an alternative, leaving farmers' fates to the vagaries of nature. Though the current



KISHORE POREDDY

Congress government promised to revive the crop insurance scheme from the following season, it did not promise any compensation to farmers who had lost their crops this season.

To come to power, the Congress party falsely promised to waive farm loans up to two

lakh rupees by December 9th, Sonia Gandhi's birthday. Not only did it not waive the loans, but it also avoided speaking on the topic from the day it came to power. Now, the farmers who stopped paying their loans expecting the Congress government to pay them as promised have become defaulters and are receiving notices from the banks. The Congress has effectively cut off farmer's access to low-interest credit from banks for the next crop.

In addition, the Congress government promised farmers and tenant farmers an input subsidy of 15,000 rupees per acre as Rythu Bharosa. If implemented promptly, farmers could at least get some money into their hands before the next planting season, which is only two months away. Unfortunately, the last season's experience shows no hope of

this happening. It also promised to pay an additional 500 rupees per quintal of paddy on top of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) as a bonus. A few days back, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) started procuring paddy from the last season. Once again, the Congress government has reneged and kept mum on this promise, too.

Currently, farmers' only option for raising funds for the next planting season is to approach money lenders for input costs. This means paying usurious interest rates ranging between 36 and 48 per cent per year.

The average land holding in Telangana is a meagre 1.12 hectares (2.8 acres), and 86 per cent of farmers in the state are small and marginal. This makes for a precarious financial situation even when everything goes right. Crop loss in a sin-

gle season is enough to push them into a debt trap. One shudders to imagine the situation when such small farmers lose their crops, but receive neither insurance nor compensation for their lost crops and are cut off from all institutional credit as well as timely input subsidies. We have been there earlier and saw our farmers sink into despair and commit suicides in the thousands per year.

The current Congress government's apathy is shocking. No Minister has conducted a field study to date. Instead of providing assistance and confidence to farmers, the Chief Minister is busy with politics, luring BRS MLAs into the Congress. The CM has openly declared that his current priority will be his role as the state Congress president. There is no more time to lose. It's time the current government acknowledged its responsibilities and focused on saving our farmers from an impending financial disaster.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

## ‘Jagan shielding Viveka killers’

PNS ■ KADAPA

APCC president YS Sharmila intensified her criticism of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleging that he not only shielded the accused in Viveka's murder, including Avinash Reddy, but also nominated him to contest for Lok Sabha.

YS Sharmila resumed her election campaign at Vempalle village in Pulivendula constituency on Friday, accompanied by her cousin sister YS Sunita, the daughter of the late YS Vivekananda Reddy. Sharmila reiterated her concerns over Vivekananda Reddy's murder and urged voters not to support Avinash Reddy, one of the accused in the case.

“Even after five years since the brutal murder of my uncle Vivekananda Reddy, the accused are still at large. Moreover, one of the accused, YS Avinash Reddy, is contesting for Lok Sabha from the Kadapa constituency. As YS Rajasekhar Reddy's daughter, I appeal to you to reject Avinash Reddy,” she urged voters.

She claimed that the CBI investigation had implicated Avinash Reddy in Viveka's murder. Accusing the ruling YSRCP of excessive spending in the elections, she asserted her commitment to fighting with moral integrity and urged voters to support righteousness.

“Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is shielding the accused in my uncle Vivekananda Reddy's murder. I have decided to contest from Kadapa to LS as the YSRCP has nominated Avinash Reddy, one of the accused in Viveka's murder case. YS Rajasekhar Reddy and Vivekananda Reddy were true sons of the soil, and we, their daughters, stand with the people,” Sharmila declared, emphasising the need for leaders like Rajasekhar Reddy and Viveka Reddy.

YS Sunita criticized the lack of development during YS Jagan Reddy's five-year tenure and urged people to hold him accountable in the upcoming elections. APCC media cell in-charge Tulasi Reddy also addressed the gathering.



Meanwhile, tensions rose in Lingala village as some YSRCP activists attempted to block YS Sharmila's convoy, but the police intervened and dispersed them. Commenting on the incident, YS Sharmila accused the ruling party of resorting to violence out of fear of defeat to disrupt the

Congress's election campaign. “I am no longer the younger sister of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, and I have severed ties with him since he assumed office. This is not a family dispute; it is about seeking justice for Vivekananda Reddy's murder,” clarified the APCC president.

## Cong urges CEO to provide protection to Sharmila

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Shivaji has appealed to Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena to protect APCC president and Kadapa Lok Sabha candidate YS Sharmila.

In a letter to the CEO here on Friday, Kolanukonda Shivaji said that some activists of YSRCP pulled the Congress flags and burnt them when YS Sharmila was addressing an election meeting at Lingala village. The YSRCP is trying to intimidate the Congress activists by resorting to violent acts, Shivaji said.

The YSRCP activists also attacked the Congress activists at the village, he

regretted. Unfortunately, the police remained mute spectators while the party activists were intimidating the Congress activists, he said.

The APCC vice-president urged the CEO to instruct the Superintendent of police of Kadapa and other higher officials concerned to take steps to provide adequate protection to YS Sharmila's meetings in the wake of violent incidents today. Kolanukonda Shivaji also requested CEO Mukesh Kumar Meen to direct the officials to submit a report to him on the violent incidents which took place in Sharmila's meeting and take stringent steps to ensure that such incidents do not recur in the future in the YS Sharmila's election meetings.



## POs told to gain full knowledge of election process

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector and District Election Officer AS Dinesh Kumar has directed the presiding officials to gain full knowledge of the election process to conduct the elections flawlessly.

A meeting was held here on Friday with master trainers and mentors. The Collector elicited the opinions of trainers and mentors on the flaws and steps to be taken to correct them.

The Collector said that training programmes were organized on April 5 and 7 for the POs and APOs, adding that the second phase of the training programme would be organized on April 13 and 14.

He said that training programmes would also be organized for OPOs. Orders were issued directing the OPOs to take part in the election work at reception centres and training classes would be conducted for them to inform them on their

duties. The Collector directed the master trainers to ensure that the POs, APOs and OPOs are imparted comprehensive training on conducting elections.

He also asked them to show the videos made by the Election Commission as part of the training programme.

Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna, DRO R Sriatha, Postal Ballot Nodal Officer Visweswar Rao and other officials were present.



## Rs 5.60 crore worth of gold, silver seized

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police seized Rs 5.60 crore worth of gold and silver ornaments while being transported in a vehicle at Peddapuram near here on Friday.

ERO Sitarama Rao told the media that on Friday a police team led by DSP K Lathakumari conducted a checking of vehicles at the Dargah centre in Peddapuram as part of enforcing the election code of conduct.

The police team seized 8.115 kg of gold and 46,900 kg of silver ornaments when being taken in a vehicle belonging to BVC Logistics to Visakhapatnam.

The gold and silver ornaments were being transported from Samrajya jewellery shop, located in Peddapuram, to Visakhapatnam, the driver of the vehicle Sriramachandra Murthy told the police. The seized gold and silver ornaments were handed over to the flying squad 2 chief Shivaram Krishna.

Meanwhile, another police team which conducted a checking of vehicles in the district seized Rs 12 lakh cash being carried by two persons on a motorcycle. The two persons failed to show relevant documents about the cash and the officials seized the cash and shifted to the RDO office.



## CEO directs action against MCC violators

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena directed the officials to take stringent action against the violators of the Model Code of Conduct and take all needed steps to conduct the election in a transparent and unbiased manner.

The CEO inspected the counting centres and EVM strong rooms on the campus of Sri Padmavati Mahila University here on Friday. He also inaugurated a Voter Selfi point in the Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme along with the district Collector Praveen Kumar and SP Krishnakanth Patel. He administered a pledge with the students on exercising the right to vote to uplift democracy.

Talking to the media on the occasion, Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena said that election notification would be issued on April 18, the nomination process would conclude on April 25 and the polling would be held on May 13. The CEO said that inspections are being conducted to see the performance of Collectors, SPs, flying squad and control room, formation



of SSSTs and how grievances are being redressed in the district.

As part of the SVEEP activity, every male and female citizen, who has completed 18 years of age, should get registered as a voter and everyone should come to the polling station and exercise their right to vote on the polling day, he stated.

When the draft roll was published in the state, the number of newly registered voters was only 3 lakh, but through awareness programmes conducted by the Election Commission and district Collectors and officials, the number reached 10 lakh,

Mukesh Kumar Meena added.

When asked about the unauthorized download of over 35,000 Electors Photo Identification Cards (EPIC), the CEO said that action has been taken against the officials starting from the IAS officer to the mandal level and the case is under investigation. “Notices were issued to Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu for violating the code of conduct. The MCC has been enforced strictly since the issuance of election notification,” the CEO made it clear.

Asking voters to exercise their franchise without being lured to the temptations of political parties, the CEO instructed the Collector and the SP to take stringent action against those who try to lure voters. He also said that voters should not be appealed on religious grounds and the election campaign should not be detrimental to the internal security of the country.

Joint Collector Dhyani Chand, municipal commissioner Adithi Singh, Mahila University Vice-Chancellor Bharati and Registrar Rajini were among those who were present.

## ‘EVM randomisation completed’

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh said that the first phase of the EVM randomisation process had been completed transparently.

The Collector, flanked by Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, representatives of various political parties including Nerusu Nelaraj (BJP), SB Prasad (Congress), Undavalli Balanandam (TDP), D. Suryachandra Rao (YSRCP), N. Kashi Naresh (Janasena) conducted the first phase randomization process.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that according to the guidelines laid down by the Election



Commission, the process of randomization of EVM machines was carried out in the presence of representatives of political parties.

The Collector said that 4184 ballot units, 4184 control units and 4534 VVPATs are available for 1743 polling stations in the Eluru district. He said that ballot units and control units would be allocated 20

per cent and VVPATs 30 per cent additionally and the randomisation would be carried out online in the presence of representatives of political parties.

District Revenue Officer D Pushpamani, Nodal Officer K Venkateswara Rao, DRD A PD R Vijayaraju and others were among those who were present.

## Jagan's bus yatra to reach Bhimavaram on April 15

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

The ‘Memantha Siddham’ bus yatra being taken out by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will reach Bhimavaram on April 15.

Informing this to the media here on Friday, YSRCP regional coordinator and MP PV Mithun Reddy said that after completing the bus yatra in Krishna district, the Chief Minister's bus yatra would enter Bhimavaram on April 15.

“The Chief Minister will participate in a roadshow and address a public meeting on the same day,” Mithun Reddy said.

Later the Chief Minister would go to Tadepalligudem where he stayed overnight. He



would participate in a road show there address a public meeting and proceed to Rajamahendravaram.

A complete route map would be released soon regarding the bus yatra, he said, adding that the Chief Minister's ‘Memantha Siddham’ bus yatra is being carried out successfully in the state. He claimed that lakhs of

people attended the Chief Minister's public meetings.

Ministers Kottu Satyanarayana, Karumudi Venkata Nageswara Rao, government Whip Grandhi Srinivas MLA Cherukuvada Sriranganatha Raju and MLC Vanka Ravindranath released wall posters of Siddham bus yatra.

## KTR offers to undergo lie detector test on phone tapping

### Revanth tapping phones of Bhatti, Ponguleti and Uttam's

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao said that he is ready to take a lie detector test in the phone tapping case in public.

Speaking to TV9 Telugu during an interview, KTR said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is tapping the phones of Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka, Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy and Uttam Kumar Reddy.

He challenged Revanth and Kishan Reddy to take a lie detector test if they were not tapping phones.

“Revanth is a lucky guy. He

achieved his goal of becoming the Chief Minister,” he said. “If given an opportunity, I will become the CM. But I will not work to become the CM,” KTR clarified.

He said the Centre used the Pegasus software to monitor leaders' phones. So Kishan Reddy should take the lie detector test.

He termed the arrest of MLC Kavitha as a ‘drama.’ “Why hasn't the trial started? If you are on their (BJP) side you are safe or it is the jail,” KTR said.

He said that he is not arrogant but self-confident. He said that

the opposition is projecting him as arrogant but that's not the case and asked the audience to cite an example of his arrogance.

“Cases are being filed against many people in this state today. If you post on social media, the CI, SI, or ACP will call and threaten you. If an effigy is burnt, bind-over cases will be filed,” he said.

Speaking about Danam Nagender, KTR said, “All these days that Daman Nagender was in our party. The 700 yards of land behind his house was not occupied. When he joined the Congress, he removed the board

saying that it was government land and occupied the entire land.”

“Some technical issues are involved in converting the BRS back to TRS. Only the name has changed. The flag has not changed, the leader has not changed, the symbol has not changed and our connection with Telangana is not gone,” he said.

“Nobody cheated KCR like Kadiyam Srihari. Kavya wanted to meet KCR. I facilitated it. They had food and after a few hours they joined the Congress,” he said.

## Control room set up for drinking water

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Rural Water Supply Department Supervising Engineer D Venkata Ramana said that necessary measures have been taken to prevent drinking water shortage in the current summer season.

He said that a “control room” has been set up for drinking water in the office of the supervising engineer of Vijayawada RWS.

He said that as soon as people complain to this control room about drinking water problems in the district, appropriate action will be taken and the problem of drinking water will be solved.



INDIA CORNER

## Committee set up to probe Haryana school bus accident

A committee has been set up to probe the factors leading to Thursday's accident involving a school bus in which six children were killed and around 20 injured in Haryana's Mahendragarh, officials said. Police arrested three people, including the principal of the private school as well as the driver of the bus who was allegedly drunk and driving rashly. According to an official statement, the committee has been set up by Mahendragarh deputy commissioner Monika Gupta for a thorough investigation to ascertain the causes leading to the accident. "In the light of the tragic incident where a school bus of G L Public School, Kanina carrying students met with an accident near Unhani resulting in the loss of lives of six students and injuries to several students, it is imperative that a thorough investigation be conducted to ascertain the causes and circumstances leading to this unfortunate event," according to an order issued by Gupta on Thursday.



## Smriti Irani accuses Rahul of neglecting development of Amethi for 15 years

Union Minister and BJP's candidate from Amethi, Smriti Irani, on Friday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and the Congress of neglecting the development of Amethi. "The government at the Centre was of his 'mataji' (mother, Sonia Gandhi) and that in UP had their support. But Rahul Gandhi never thought of the development of Amethi," said Irani, while speaking with the people from the Yadav community at her residence here. Irani defeated Rahul Gandhi in Amethi in the 2019 polls. The Congress party is yet to announce its candidate for the 2024 Lok Sabha election from the seat. Irani said the Gandhi family, especially Rahul Gandhi, wanted the people of Amethi to remain poor. That is why they cannot digest it when a poor man's son becomes the prime servant of India. "Neither the Congress nor the Gandhi family is able to accept Narendra Modi, becoming the 'pradhan sevak' of the country.



## SC rejects plea seeking review of verdict on compensation to veteran

The Supreme Court has dismissed a plea seeking review of its judgement directing the Indian Air Force (IAF) to pay around Rs 1.54 crore as compensation to a veteran who contracted HIV due to transfusion of infected blood at a military hospital in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba in 2002. A bench of justices Dipankar Datta and P B Varale said the verdict of September 26 last year does not suffer from any error warranting its reconsideration. "We have perused the review petition including the grounds urged in support of the prayer for review of the judgment and order dated September 26, 2023... The judgment and order under review does not suffer from any error, much less apparent error, warranting its reconsideration," the bench said in its April 3 order. "That apart, no other sufficient ground has been set up for granting the relief claimed in the review petition.



# Conspiracy to impose Prez rule in Delhi: Atishi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi on Friday alleged that a big political conspiracy is being hatched by the BJP-led central government to impose President's rule in the national capital.

"Arvind Kejriwal's arrest is a political conspiracy to topple his government. We have learnt from reliable sources that in the coming days, President's rule will be imposed in Delhi. But imposing President's rule in Delhi will be illegal and against the mandate of people," she said at a press conference here.

Reacting to the AAP leader's charge, the BJP said it was surprising that the fear of President's rule is haunting the AAP, which has 62 MLAs in the 70-member Delhi Assembly.

At the press conference, Atishi claimed that in recent times, many events have taken place that indicate the possibility of the imposition of



President's rule in the national capital.

In the last few months, no senior IAS officer has been posted in Delhi, she said.

"Posts are lying vacant in departments but no postings have taken place. Bureaucrats have stopped attending meetings called by ministers, citing the Model Code of Conduct. The lieutenant governor has been writing letters to the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) over the functioning of the Delhi government," she said.

Atishi further said the BJP

already knows that it cannot come to power in Delhi.

"The AAP defeated the BJP in the Delhi assembly elections in 2015 and 2020. That is why they want to topple the Delhi government. However, the imposition of President's rule would be illegal since the Delhi government enjoys a majority. We proved our majority through a floor test on February 17 this year," she said.

Later in the day, Atishi's cabinet colleague Saurabh Bharadwaj spoke in the same vein.

"The BJP and the lieutenant governor are talking about a constitutional crisis in Delhi. This shows that there is a conspiracy to impose President's rule in Delhi. The BJP has been defeated twice in Delhi in 2015 and 2020 and it knows it cannot form the government in Delhi. Even if elections are held today, Arvind Kejriwal will win," he said.

"President's rule was imposed in Delhi throughout 2014. We had approached the Supreme Court at that time. Subsequently, elections were held and the AAP came to power in 2015.

"People gave them a reply for imposing President's rule. If President's rule is imposed in Delhi, the people of Delhi will again give them a reply," he said.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva hit out at the AAP, saying it was surprising that the fear of President's rule is haunting the AAP, even though it has a majority in the assembly.

## Bihar getting a lot of support from Centre: Nitish at poll rally

PNS ■ NAWADA (BIHAR)

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Friday said the state was getting "a lot of support" from the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, and urged people to vote for the BJP-led NDA.

Kumar, who heads the JD(U), also referred to his flip-flops in the past one decade and asserted that his return to the NDA, in January this year, was for good.

"I have been with the BJP for long. We formed government in Bihar, in 2005, together. I may have gone hither and thither a couple of times. But now I am back, for ever", Kumar told a rally in Nawada, where he was canvassing for BJP candidate Vivek Thakur.

He said "What was there in Bihar before we took over? Infrastructure was in a mess. Things began to look up once we took over. Now, we are getting a lot of support from the Centre (Kendra Sarkar ka sahyog bahut zyada hai)".

"I therefore urge you all to



vote for the NDA", said Kumar, who, incidentally, was one of the key architects of the anti-BJP INDIA bloc.

Kumar, who has always been careful to project himself as a "secular" leader, also said "so much of Hindu-Muslim clashes Bihar used to witness until we came to power and set things in order. So much was done for the minority community during my tenure. I hope all that will not be forgotten just because I am back with BJP".

The JD(U) president, who has forged short-lived alliances with arch-rival Lalu Prasad's RJD, first in 2015 and then again

in 2022, also launched a stinging attack on his ally-turned-adversary. "He first ruled the state himself and when his own continuance in power became untenable he handed over the reins to his wife", said Kumar, without mentioning Prasad or Rabri Devi by name.

Hurling the charge of nepotism at his arch rival, the JD(U) chief said while "nobody even knows the names of my immediate family members", Prasad had been promoting "wife, sons and daughters".

"Just look at how many family members have enjoyed power and how many have got tickets", said the JD(U) chief, in an oblique reference to the RJD president's sons Tejashwi Yadav and Tej Pratap Yadav, who are former ministers, and daughters Misa Bharti and Rohini Acharya, who are RJD candidates from Patliputra and Saran respectively.

In an indirect reference to corruption cases against the RJD supremo and his family, Kumar said "They want to enjoy power and pelf.

## Woman dies at temple in Odisha's Balasore

PNS ■ BALASORE

A 58-year-old woman from West Bengal died while performing rituals at a temple in neighbouring Odisha's Balasore district on Friday, police said.

The incident happened at the Chandaneswar Temple in Bhograi near the inter-state border where the famed Chadak Mela was going on, they said.

The woman, a resident of Gomariyapal village in Paschim Medipur's Kharaagpur, was circumambulating the temple after taking a bath in the 'Nila Pokhari' when she collapsed.

She was immediately taken to a health camp set up for the fair. Doctors there declared her dead, police said.

"Arrangements are being made to send the body to her native place after post-mortem examination," a police officer said.

## Cong to become extinct like dinosaur in few years: Rajnath

PNS ■ GAUCHAR (U'KHAND)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh claimed on Friday that the Congress will become extinct like the dinosaur in a few years and likened the infighting in that party to the reality show 'Bigg Boss'.

"The exodus of leaders from the Congress continues. They are quitting the party one after another and joining the BJP," he said at a rally in Uttarakhand's Gauchar.

"I am afraid that in a few years from now, the Congress will become extinct like the dinosaur. In a few years after 2024, if we take the name of the Congress, children will ask, who?" Singh added.

He also commented on the infighting in the opposition party. "They are fighting with each other daily. The party has become somewhat like the



house of 'Big Boss' on TV. They are tearing each other's clothes daily," Singh said.

The senior BJP leader was here to campaign for the party's candidate for the Pauri Lok Sabha seat Anil Baluni.

The defence minister said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has emerged as a strong country. Its voice is heard distinctly on international forums and taken seriously, Singh added.

He claimed that the Russia-Ukraine war was suspended for over four hours following Modi's talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US President Joe Biden for the safe evacuation of 22,500 Indian students stranded in Ukraine.

Singh said the world is acknowledging the progress made by India over the last few years.

He also quoted US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti as saying that if the world has to see the future, it should come to India.

"We are manufacturing most of our defence equipment in India now. Earlier, we used to export defence equipment worth only Rs 600 crore. Over only seven years, we are exporting defence equipment worth over Rs 21,000 crore.

## India asks its citizens not to travel to Israel, Iran

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday asked its citizens not to travel to Iran or Israel amid escalating tensions between the two countries following a strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria 11 days ago.

Iran blamed Israel for the strike and there have been fears that Tehran may launch an attack on Israel soon.

In an advisory, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also urged the Indians residing in Iran and Israel to exercise utmost

precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to minimum.

"In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indians are advised not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice," it said.

"All those who are currently residing in Iran or Israel are requested to get in touch with Indian Embassies there and register themselves," the MEA said.

"They are also requested to observe utmost precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to the minimum," it added.

## Pilibhit has decided to defeat BJP: Akhilesh Yadav

PNS ■ PILIBHIT (UP)

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said Friday that the BJP government at the Centre scrapped the three "black" farm laws after realising the strength of the farmers and inflation has been caused due to the "money extorted by the BJP through electoral bonds".

At a rally here in the support of party candidate Bhagwat Saran Gangwar, Yadav also said the people of Pilibhit have made up their mind to defeat the BJP and that the saffron party is scared.



"The faces of the BJP people turn 'peela' (yellow) on hearing the name of Pilibhit," Yadav said.

This is the first political

rally of Yadav in Uttar Pradesh after the polls were announced. He started his campaign after releasing the poll manifesto in Lucknow on Wednesday.

The former chief minister also attacked the BJP government over the issue of electoral bonds and demonetisation.

"Tell me whether this electoral bond and the demonetisation are not the ways to turn black money into white. They have turned all their black money into white," he alleged.

Yadav attacked the state government for trying to crush the protest called by the farmers against the farm laws.

## Manipur violence: SC refuses to entertain plea seeking directions to quash FIRs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has refused to entertain a plea moved by a transgender activist seeking directions to quash the FIRs registered against her for fasting until death to protest against ethnic clashes in Manipur.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, however, granted liberty to the activist, Malem Thongam, to approach the Manipur High Court for the redressal of her grievances.

"The petitioner would be at liberty to move the High Court of Manipur in the exercise of



its jurisdiction under section 482 of the Code of criminal Procedure, 1973. Hence, we are not inclined to entertain a petition under Article 32 of the Constitution of India," the bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

Thongam began her hunger strike in the Delhi University

on February 22. She left Delhi for Manipur on February 27, where she continued her hunger strike at Imphal's Kangla western gate.

The Manipur Police arrested Thongam on March 2 on charges of attempt to die by suicide and promoting enmity between groups, but released her on March 5. A day later, she was arrested again on charges of protesting in public.

Manipur descended into chaos and untrammelled violence in May last year over a high court order directing the state government to consider including the non-tribal Meitei community in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs).

## 'Rahul takes out Bharat Jodo but talks about breaking country'

PNS ■ RAIPUR

Union minister Ramdas Athawale on Friday took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, saying that although the Congress leader takes out Bharat Jodo Yatra, he talks about breaking the country.

He accused the grand old party of provoking Dalits and Muslims to keep them away from the mainstream, and also alleged that it destroyed the Constitution and imposed Emergency in the country.

Talking to reporters at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's Raipur office 'Ekatma Parisar', he said, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has set the target of winning

400-plus seats in this Lok Sabha elections and it would not be difficult for it to win 50 more seats as its current strength in Parliament is 351.

"Congress and other opposition claim that the Constitution will be changed (if BJP-led NDA is elected to power again at the Centre). But they were the ones who imposed emergency and destroyed the Constitution. As many as 80 amendments (in the Constitution) took place during their (Congress) tenure," he said.

"The Constitution will not be changed...I want to ask Rahul Gandhi. He takes out Bharat Jodo Yatra, but talks about breaking Bharat.

## 'Priority is to free farmers from clutches of middlemen'

PNS ■ PATNA

Former Union Minister and NDA nominee from Karakat Lok Sabha seat Upendra Kushwaha has voiced concern over farmers of his constituency in particular and Bihar in general not getting minimum support price and being vulnerable to middlemen.

The Rashtriya Lok Morcha chief said the economy of my constituency in particular and Bihar in general is agriculture-based. Paddy, wheat and maize are the main crops. This area is called the rice bowl of Bihar.

"My top priority is to ensure a better price for the produce of the farmers and also free them from the clutches of middlemen," Kushwaha told PTI in an interview.

"The NDA government at the Centre, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has taken several steps to ensure the elimination of middlemen and to guarantee better prices for produce of the farmers. Steps have been taken to empower farmers and provide them with the benefit of modern technology. The NDA government gives 100 per cent guarantee for protection of the farmers' interests," he said.

Kushwaha said our PM is committed to the welfare of villages and farmers of the country. "Protection of farmers' rights at any cost is the top priority of the Central government. I am making farmers of my area aware of the



steps taken by the Central as well as the state government", said Kushwaha expressing confidence that his party will do its bit in ensuring victory of the BJP-led coalition in all 40 Lok Sabha seats of the state.

Kushwaha-led Rashtriya Lok Morcha has its base among the Kushwahas or Koeris, a dominant other backward caste (OBC) in Bihar.

Earlier, Kushwaha, who had floated the Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) in 2013 merged the party with JD(U) eight years later, fought the 2014 Lok Sabha polls as an NDA partner and became a minister in the first Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre.

Later, he merged his party with the JD (U). However, in February 2023, Kushwaha resigned from all positions in JD (U) and formed his own party called Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM). Now, his party is part of the NDA alliance in Bihar and contesting from Karakat Lok Sabha seat.

As part of the seat-sharing arrangement in the NDA, the BJP is contesting on 17 seats, the JD-U 16, the LJP-R of Chirag Paswan five and the HAM-S of former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi and the RLM one each.

Maintaining that there is no alternative to PM Modi in the country, Kushwaha, said, "The NDA under the leadership of PM Modi will win more than 400 Lok Sabha seats in the country and all 40 parliamentary seats in Bihar.



## Softening stance

China responds positively to Modi's peace overtures, says it is for stability in relations

In the realm of international relations, the delicate nurturing of ties between nations often involves a mixture of diplomatic rhetoric, strategic manoeuvrings and the occasional statement to assuage tensions. Recently, two of the world's most populous nations, India and China, indulged in this exercise, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments on the border situation drawing a positive response from China. In an interview with Newsweek magazine, Modi underscored the importance of urgently addressing the ongoing border situation; he expressed optimism that through constructive engagement, peace and tranquillity could be restored. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning emphasised the importance of "sound and stable" ties, highlighting mutual interests in regional peace and development. This response underscores China's commitment to maintaining constructive relations with India despite the border challenge. Mao's statement also sought to contextualise the border issue within the broader



framework of bilateral relations. Acknowledging the significance of the boundary question, she stressed that it should not overshadow the entirety of India-China relations. This perspective reflects China's nuanced approach to managing bilateral issues, advocating for dialogue, cooperation and strategic thinking to navigate differences. The backdrop against which these statements unfold is the protracted border standoff that began in May 2020, following a violent clash near Pangong Tso. A research paper shared at the DGPs' Conference revealed that India's access to 26 out of 65 Patrolling Points (PPs) has been compromised. In Ladakh, an estimated 1,000 sq km of territory has reportedly fallen under Chinese control. However, these figures have not been officially acknowledged. Subsequently, in June 2020, India and China withdrew their troops from Patrolling Point 14 in Galwan Valley. This was followed by disengagement from both the north and south banks of Pangong Tso in February 2021 and from Patrolling Point 17A near Gogra Post in August the same year. Despite numerous rounds of talks at the Corps Commander level, significant areas of contention remain unresolved. India's insistence on disengagement from specific regions, such as Depsang and Demchok, underscores the challenges involved in reaching a comprehensive resolution. The thawing of relations between India and China is not only crucial for both but also carries implications for the broader region and the world at large. As economic powerhouses and nuclear-armed States, their ability to manage their differences and cultivate stable ties is essential for regional peace and stability. Looking ahead, the path to normalised relations between India and China will likely be characterised by continued dialogue, confidence-building measures and pragmatic compromises. While the road may be fraught with obstacles, their shared interests provide a foundation upon which to build a more stable and constructive relationship.



Security personnel during a rehearsal for the Hirmachal Day Parade, in Shimla PTI

## Honouring the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh

As the nation commemorates the 105th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, it reaffirms its commitment to justice, equality and nonviolence

Somen Sengupta, in his piece "Jallianwala Bagh revisited" published in his paper's April 10, 2022 edition on its 103rd anniversary, reflected, "This incident alone serves as a damning testament to the collective atrocity of firing upon an unarmed gathering." The actual number of casualties likely far exceeded the reported count. Somen further notes, "Dyer, facing the Hunter Commission in Lahore, ultimately lost his position with a measure of reprimand." April 13, 2024, marks the 105th anniversary of this tragic episode. It was amidst the auspicious Baisakhi celebrations on April 13, 1919, that Punjab was engulfed in tragedy, as around 20,000 rural attendees congregated at Jallianwala Bagh, oblivious to the impending horror. Durgadas Vaidya, editor of Waqt newspaper, addressed the peaceful protesters who were voicing opposition to the oppressive Rowlatt Act, passed on March 21, 1919. The non-violent Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi against the Act on April 6, 1919, culminated in his arrest on April 9 near Delhi, along



with Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal. The unjust repercussions sparked widespread anger, leading to violent clashes, including the tragic killing of nearly 30 Indians on April 10 by police gunfire as they sought to cross Hall Gate Bridge into the civil lines. However, at Jallianwala Bagh, the scene turned chaotic as Brigadier-General Reginald ('Rex') Dyer arrived unannounced. Dyer, with meticulous planning, ordered troops to open fire on the unarmed crowd, plunging the gathering into chaos and leaving an indelible mark on history and the land. The bullet-riddled walls and the well, where desperate individuals sought refuge, continue to evoke shudders. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre claimed the lives of 379 individuals, with numerous others sustaining injuries.

The relentless firing of 1,650 rounds by British troops under Dyer's command resulted in a bloodbath. Moreover, Dyer's imposition of a curfew post-massacre exacerbated the tragedy, denying grieving families access to their deceased loved ones. The scale of suppression delayed the event's revelation in the media, only brought to light by courageous journalists like B G Horniman of Bombay Chronicle and later Amrita Bazar Patrika, prompting global leaders like Lenin to express solidarity with the suffering Indian populace. Professor K L Tuteja, a historian at Kurukshetra University, describes the massacre as a pivotal moment that drew sharp criticism both in England and India. Winston Churchill labeled it a 'monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation,' while former Prime Minister Herbert Asquith deemed it 'One of the worst outrages in the whole of history.' These reactions underscored the profound shock and dismay even among those who believed in the justness of British rule in

India. Within India, the massacre left a deep scar, with many viewing it as an unparalleled atrocity. Mahatma Gandhi's poignant response encapsulated the sentiment: "We do not seek to punish Dyer. We harbor no thirst for vengeance. We seek to transform the system that bred Dyer." The massacre significantly influenced the trajectory of the anti-imperialist struggle, bolstering forces that challenged British rule in India. Prominent figures like Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and Annie Besant vehemently condemned the massacre, advocating for peaceful resistance against British colonial oppression. Gandhi relinquished the title of 'Kaiser-i-Hind,' bestowed by the British, while Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest. Nehru denounced it as a 'monstrous crime,' emphasising the nation's duty to honour those who sacrificed their lives for political freedom. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

# A harbinger of justice and equality

As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar laid down the bedrock of fundamental rights and protections for all citizens

harat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar, born on April 14, 1891, will ever be revered for his contributions towards building a just and inclusive India. He was a guardian angel of social justice, a harbinger of inclusivity, justice and equality. As an eminent jurist, economist and social reformer, he dedicated his life to eradicating caste-based discrimination and uplifting the marginalised communities in our country. As the architect of the Indian Constitution, he ensured fundamental rights and safeguards for all citizens. As his legacy continues to inspire millions globally even today, standing as a beacon of hope for deprived communities striving for dignity and equality, there is a lot we can learn and inspire ourselves from his vision of social justice, which was profoundly rooted in the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. He recognised the deep-rooted inequalities entrenched within Indian society, particularly the caste system, which relegated millions to a life of discrimination and oppression. He fought for the abolition of untouchability, which is against the teachings of the Vedas, the Atrocious caste system had jolted him from within. To give shock treatment to Hindu society, he embraced Buddhism, which is so deeply rooted in Indian ethos and value system. He was not inimical to Hindutva. He had resentment against Hinduism but he was not opposed to Hinduism. He did not embrace any other alien religion though Islamic and Christian scholars tried their best to influence him. Coming from a very poor family, Dr Ambedkar suffered multiple social and economic hardships but he did not give up. He fought against the odds bravely. He was the 14th child of his parents. His father gave him good Zanskar and used to share stories and thoughts of great saints like Sant Tukaram, Sant Gyaneshwar, Sant Shiromani Ravidas, teachings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He did his matriculation in 1908 from Elphinstone High School. He studied Economics and Political Science at Elphinstone College. In 1912,

he got a degree from Bombay University. With a scholarship from Maharaja of Baroda, he went to Columbia University, New York City from where he got a Master's degree in June 1915 after completing his thesis on 'Ancient Indian Commerce'. In 1916, he went to the London School of Economics. In 1920, received the D Sc by London University! He also went to the University of Bonn, Germany. In June 1927, he was awarded a Doctorate by the University of Columbia. He was a rare Indian politician of his time who studied at Columbia University, LSE and University of Bonn. Dr Ambedkar inspires us to imbibe the principle of 'Study and Struggle' to create an incredible niche for himself as an intellectual as well. His vision of social justice emphasised the importance of education and political representation for the oppressed castes, viewing them as essential tools for empowerment and emancipation. He laid the foundation for a more inclusive and just society. He believed in the idea and ideals of dialogue. He was against armed struggle to restore the glory of every human being. He believed in the principle of co-existence, following the teachings of truth, non-violence and



respect for the people of all castes and religions. Dr Ambedkar viewed education not merely as a means of acquiring academic qualifications but as a catalyst for the liberation of the oppressed and marginalised communities. He emphasised the importance of universal access to education, particularly for those historically denied opportunities due to caste discrimination and social inequality. He was also an ardent champion of the cultivation of values such as empathy, justice and equality. According to him, the cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence. He was also a great champion of women's empowerment. He famously said: "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." Dr Ambedkar held strong convictions about national unity and integrity, recognising them as fundamental pillars for the progress and stability of any nation. Dr Ambedkar advocated for a society where every individual had equal rights and opportunities, emphasising the need for social harmony and mutual respect. He also played a significant role in shaping India's

HIS VISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE OPPRESSED CASTES, VIEWING THEM AS ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION

labour laws. His tireless efforts as India's first Law Minister paved the way for landmark legislation like the Factories Act, the Minimum Wages Act and the Industrial Disputes Act, which continue to serve as cornerstones of labour rights and industrial progress in the country. He stressed the significance of upholding the principles of democracy, secularism and constitutionalism to ensure the protection of the rights of weaker sections of society and the preservation of national unity. His vision for India was one of inclusivity and pluralism, where diversity was celebrated as a source of strength rather than division. He saw untouchability as not just a moral wrong but also a significant impediment to the social progress and unity of India. He advocated for its complete abolition, stressing the need for legislative measures and social reform. As we remember Dr BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary today, let us express our gratitude to him and commit ourselves to a democratic, secular and inclusive nation. (The author is the Governor of Haryana. The views expressed are strictly his personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### KEJRIWAL GAINS WEIGHT IN JAIL

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Kejriwal weight has increased by one kg in jail, say jail authorities", published on April 11, this is my response. The conflicting reports on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's health and treatment during his judicial custody have ignited a fierce debate. Tihar jail authorities claim a weight gain of 1 kg, contradicting earlier assertions by AAP leaders of a significant weight loss. While Tihar's report indicates stability in Kejriwal's weight and fluctuating blood sugar levels, AAP alleges deteriorating health conditions and infringement of basic rights, drawing parallels to historical atrocities. The rhetoric escalates as AAP accuses the Modi Government of employing draconian measures akin to Hitler's regime, emphasising PM Modi's suppression of Kejriwal's rights. Allegations of emotional manipulation and restrictive measures during legal meetings further intensify the political turmoil surrounding Kejriwal's incarceration. This saga not only reflects the contentious relationship between AAP and the central Government but also raises concerns about the treatment of political detainees and the politicisation of health issues in judicial proceedings.

Amanullah | Hyderabad

### YOGI'S DEVELOPMENT PITCH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Vote for Modi for continued peace, progress: Yogi at JK", published on April 11, this is my response. In a passionate appeal, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath advocated for the re-election of a Narendra Modi-led Government, highlighting peace and development as its cornerstones. Speaking at a rally in Kathua, he lauded the Government's efforts in combating terrorism and fostering development nationwide. Dr Jitendra Singh emphasised regional progress, invoking sentiments among voters. His critique of the Congress Party underscored historical grievances, while

### Byju's crisis



Apropos the news article, "Decacom's fall signals startup governance crisis", published on April 11, this is my response. The recent turmoil at Byju's, culminating in the ousting of its founder, highlights deeper issues plaguing India's startup ecosystem. The shift from edtech to hardware sales led to a loss of core value, undermining investor trust and causing a stag-

gering 95% drop in valuation. Corporate governance lapses, including financial opacity and delayed audits, have further eroded confidence. The Extraordinary General Meeting's decision to reconstitute the board signals a necessary step towards accountability. However, legal challenges and interim orders cloud the path forward. Amidst this uncertainty, one solution emerges: allowing investors a larger role in reshaping Byju's trajectory, akin to successful interventions in other startups. Beyond financial recovery, the focus must remain on Byju's original mission: democratising education for Indian students. Restoring faith in Byju's not only revitalises the startup landscape but also sustains aspirations nationwide. Ultimately, the road to redemption demands a return to Byju's roots as an edtech innovator, guided by transparent governance and investor stewardship.

Swapna Singh | Ranchi

praising the recent construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as a symbol of faith's resurgence. The event signals the BJP's concerted push in the Udhampur constituency, with Prime Minister Modi set to address a rally shortly. However, the opposition, notably Choudhary Lal Singh's camp, questions the fairness of campaign resources allocation, alleging undue favouritism. With a diverse electorate and a fierce triangular contest, the upcoming polls on April 19 in Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat promise to be closely contested, with each candidate vying for the crucial support of first-time voters.

Pritam Dubey | Gwalior

### CHARITY IS A UNIVERSAL VIRTUE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Essence of Charity: Insights from the Gita", published on April 11, this is my response. The essence of charity, extending beyond monetary assistance, resonates through various religious and philosophical teachings. The Bhagavad-Geeta delineates charity's nuances, emphasising its virtue in goodness, devoid of expectation or com-

pulsion. It stresses discernment in selecting worthy recipients, cautioning against enabling dependency. Lord Krishna's discourse distinguishes charity in passion, highlighting its pitfalls of transactionalism and begrudging giving. In contrast, true charity transcends materiality, manifesting through diverse forms — money, goods, labour, words and emotions — each bearing significance in uplifting others. Across faiths, the ethos of charity endures. Jesus' exhortation to aid the needy echoes alongside Islam's emphasis on generosity and compassion. Such teachings underscore that charity isn't merely an act but a reflection of one's inner disposition towards humanity. In essence, charity embodies a universal virtue, fostering empathy, kindness and communal upliftment. Beyond religious dogma, it stands as a testament to human solidarity and the intrinsic value of extending a helping hand to those in need.

Sumit Sharma | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com







MONEY MATTERS

## Retail inflation declines to 5-month low of 4.85 % in March

Retail inflation declined to a five-month low of 4.85 per cent in March mainly due to cooling food prices, according to official data released on Friday. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation was 5.09 per cent in February and 5.66 per cent in March 2023. Previously, CPI-based inflation was the lowest at 4.87 per cent in October 2023. The inflation in the food basket was at 8.52 per cent in March, down from 8.66 per cent in February, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). The government has tasked the Reserve Bank to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. According to the Reserve Bank, which factors in consumer inflation while arriving at its bi-monthly monetary policy, food price uncertainties continue to weigh on the inflation trajectory going forward. The central bank has projected retail inflation at 4.5 per cent for the current fiscal assuming a normal monsoon.



## Surge in customer queries for water-related services

Key urban cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad saw a sharp rise in customer queries for water-related services due to severe water scarcity, according to a report on Friday. Bengaluru experienced a 101 per cent surge while Hyderabad saw a 56 per cent jump in consumer queries related to water resources, suggesting that these two major metropolises are severely impacted by water scarcity, the report by local business search engine Justdial revealed. The recent El Nino phenomenon has further compounded the issue, leaving a significant portion of the country reeling under severe drought conditions, it said. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued warnings of a hotter and drier summer this year, attributing it to the El Nino effect, it noted. There has also been a significant rise in searches for water-related services.



## Vodafone Idea shares tank nearly 6% intra-day

Shares of Vodafone Idea on Friday declined nearly 6 per cent in intra-day trade after the floor price of its follow-on public offer was fixed at a discount to the last closing price, but the stock bounced back to settle flat. Struggling telecom operator Vodafone Idea on Friday said it plans to raise up to Rs 18,000 crore through share sale in the biggest follow-on public offer as it scrambles to mobilise resources to stay afloat. Voda-Idea shares will be issued, under the FPO, in a price band of Rs 10-11 apiece against Friday's closing price of Rs 12.96 on the BSE. The stock tanked 5.41 per cent to Rs 12.23 in intra-day on the BSE. However, later it recovered the early lost ground and climbed 2.55 per cent to Rs 13.26 during the flag-end of trade. The stock finally ended at Rs 12.96, marginally up by 0.23 per cent. At the NSE, the stock ended flat at Rs 12.95 after falling 5.79 per cent to Rs 12.20 in intra-day. The share sale will open on April 18 and close on April 22, Vodafone Idea, the country's third-largest telecom carrier, said in a stock exchange filing.



# Gold breaches Rs 73k-mark

## SILVER TOO HITS FRESH PEAK

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices rallied for the fourth straight session and hit fresh peaks on Friday, with the yellow metal gaining sharply by Rs 1,050 to breach Rs 73,000 per 10 grams level amid bullish global trend.

According to HDFC Securities, gold price surged Rs 1,050 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,350 per 10 grams in Delhi. It had closed at Rs 72,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Similarly, silver prices zoomed Rs 1,400 to hit a new record of Rs 86,300 per kg.

"Spot gold (24 carats) prices in the Delhi markets are trading at a record high of Rs 73,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 1,050, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Commodity markets were partially closed on Thursday on account of Eid-ul-Fitr.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex traded at USD

2,388 per ounce, up USD 48 from the previous closing level.

Gold reached a new all-time high in the early hours of the European trading day on Friday. Safe haven demand supported the spike in precious metals following heightened Middle East tensions and the possibility of Iran retaliating against an Israeli strike on its embassy in Syria, Gandhi said.

In addition, silver was also quoting higher at USD 28.95 per ounce. In the previous session, it had settled at USD 28.05 per ounce.

Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the MCX, gold climbed to an all-time high of Rs 72,828 per 10 grams in the intra-day trade. The most-traded June contract of the yellow metal was trading at Rs 72,681 per 10 grams, up by Rs 1,037 or 1.45 per cent.

According to Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, upcoming macroeconomic numbers to be announced by the UK and Germany as well as Chinese trade data will provide



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further direction for gold prices.

"The European Central Bank (ECB), as expected, kept the benchmark rates unchanged, but gave the indication that it could cut interest rates in June. The

ECB President Christine Lagarde signalled that growing confidence on cooling inflation would lead the central bank to cut rates at its next policy meeting on June 6," Singh said.



## Industrial production grows 5.7% in Feb

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's industrial production grew 5.7 per cent in February 2024, according to official data released on Friday. The factory output measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) witnessed a growth of 6 per cent in February 2023. India's Index of Industrial Production grew by 5.7 per cent in February 2024, an official statement said. The data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that the manufacturing sector's output grew 5 per cent in February 2024, down from 5.9 per cent in the year-ago month.

In February this year, mining production rose 8 per cent, and power output increased 7.5 per cent.

# India commands over 50 % of Global Capability Centres

PNS ■ CHENNAI

India commands over 50 per cent of the Global Capability Centres, and it remains the most preferred destination to set up such GCCs, a report by business consulting company ANSR said on Friday.

ANSR Global is a consulting firm that enables organisations to build and manage teams through Global Capability Centres. The company has established over 110 Global Capability Centres, using 12 million sq ft of office space and employs over 1.20 lakh people.

According to the quarterly report released on Friday, India commands over 50 per cent of the GCC market with a mix of unique talent and a robust startup system, and the country remains the most preferred destination to set up a GCC.

The study also revealed that nearly 80 per cent of GCCs were directing their focus on Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Data Analytics.



According to the quarterly report released on Friday, India commands over 50 per cent of the GCC market with a mix of unique talent and a robust startup system, and the country remains the most preferred destination to set up a GCC.

"We are witnessing a transformative shift in the Global Capability Centres landscape, with a strong focus on digital capabilities such as AI/ML, analytics, and cyber security driving unprecedented growth," said ANSR Co-founder Vikram Ahuja.

As per the findings, Bengaluru and Hyderabad have solidified their presence in GCCs with 30 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively followed by Delhi 15 per

cent, Mumbai 12 per cent, Pune 10 per cent, and Chennai 9 per cent.

As businesses aim to leverage India's skilled workforce and favorable economic conditions, the GCC sector, valued at USD 46 billion, is forecast to surge to USD 110 billion by 2030, the report said.

This growth trajectory is expected to employ over 4.5 million professionals across 2,400 Global Capability Centres.

# CNH expands India Technology Centre



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Italian-American off-road construction and agriculture firm CNH on Friday inaugurated the cutting-edge Multi-Vehicle Simulator (MVS) at the company's India Technology Centre (ITC).

The company also announced an expansion of the ITC with a new floor, spanning 32,000 square feet equipped with high-tech amenities including three R&D labs as well as collaborative work areas.

"This is the first-of-its-kind simulator technology in the off-highway vehicle segment in India," the company said in a statement.

Speaking at the inauguration, Friedrich Eichler, Chief Technology Officer, CNH, said the expansion and enhancement of ITC exemplify the company's unwavering commitment to innovation, harnessing India's rich talent

pool."This technological advancement also supports our sustainability goals by helping us reduce waste and improve quality by testing and evaluating our products in the virtual world before developing a prototype or testing them in the real world," he added.

Ashish Sharma, Vice President and Managing Director of ITC, CNH said, "This development is a further step towards CNH's vision to position India as a key technology location, in addition to its role as an industrial hub."

The MVS will play a pivotal role in CNH's global operations, the company said, adding that it will serve as a key platform for various functions, including ergonomics simulation, user experience testing of controls, customer clinics, design reviews for product development teams, product validation and employee training.

# Sensex, Nifty tank 1% after record-breaking rally

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty plunged by 1 per cent on Friday as investors booked profits after a recent record-breaking rally amid weak trends from Asian markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 793.25 points or 1.06 per cent to settle at 74,244.90 with 27 of its components in the red. During the day, it dropped 848.84 points or 1.13 per cent to 74,189.31.

The NSE Nifty declined 234.40 points or 1.03 per cent to close at 22,519.40 with 45 of its constituents ending lower.

From the Sensex basket, Sun Pharma, Maruti, Power Grid,

Titan, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were the major laggards. Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services and Nestle were the gainers.



In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading in the positive zone. Wall

Street ended mostly with gains on Thursday.

"US inflation soared by 0.4% MoM, surpassing expectations and triggering a spike in US Treasury yields. Investors are questioning the feasibility of the US Fed's anticipated three rate cuts this year, leading to underperformance in EMs. Meanwhile, European markets excelled as the ECB maintained policy rates but hinted at a potential rate cut soon.

"Indian markets consolidated amidst worries over delayed US rate cuts, escalating Middle East tensions driving oil prices up, and subdued Q4 earnings projections," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

## HFCL subsidiary bags Rs 65 cr order to supply optical fiber cables

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic telecom gear firm HFCL's subsidiary HTL has bagged an order of around Rs 65 crore to supply optical fibre cable to a domestic private telecom operator, the company said on Friday.

The company has to execute the order by July, it said in a regulatory filing.

"The Company along with its material subsidiary, HTL Limited, has received the purchase orders aggregating to approximately Rs 64.93 crores for supply of Optical Fiber Cables to one of the leading Private Telecom Operators of the



Country," HFCL said in the filing.



## TCS net profit rises 9 % to Rs 12,434 cr in Q4

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Country's largest software services company TCS on Friday reported a 9.1 per cent growth in its March quarter net profit at Rs 12,434 crore.

The Tata Group company's post tax profit during the January-March period last year stood at Rs 11,392 crore.

In the fiscal year 2023-24, the company's net profit grew 9 per cent to Rs 45,908 crore, as per an exchange filing.

In the March quarter, its revenue grew 3.5 per cent to Rs 61,237 crore year on year.

Its operating profit margin expanded by 1.50 per cent to 26 per cent. TCS scrip closed 0.45 per cent higher at Rs 4,000.30 apiece on the BSE on Friday as against a 1.06 per cent correction in the benchmark.

# Rupee falls, closes at 83.44 against US\$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at 83.44 against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by a massive sell-off in domestic equities and a strong greenback against major crosses overseas.

Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices also dented investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.36 and touched an intraday low of 83.44 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.44, registering a loss of 13 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee closed flat at 83.31 against the US dollar.

Forex markets were closed on Thursday on account of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.51 per cent higher at 105.82.

The US dollar rose to a five-month high on hot inflation. Headline and core inflation topped the forecast, leading to diminishing expectations of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve in June. Hawkish FOMC meeting minutes supported the greenback.

Forex traders said rising crude oil prices will have a negative impact on the rupee as it will threaten the current account dynamics of the country. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.97 per cent to USD 90.61 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak global equities amid hawkish US data and surge in global crude oil prices.



# 1 in 4 women feel inconsistency in workplace equity

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Even as companies are stepping up efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector, a report on Friday revealed that one out of every four women employees feel inconsistency in terms of recognition, fair pay, and workplace equity.

According to workplace assessment and recognition organisation Great Place To Work India, gender disparities persist despite overall positive sentiment within the BFSI sector, underscoring the need for focused efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.



Women employees are 5 per cent less satisfied with workplace equity compared to their male colleagues, the 'Insights from India's Best Workplaces in BFSI 2024' report, which presented insights gathered from a survey

among 12 lakh employees from 167 organisations, added. The report also revealed that there were notable disparities between Gen Z and Millennial employees, particularly in their intent to stay long-term, sense of pur-

pose at work, and perceptions of job security. Generation Z are those born between 1997 and 2012, while Millennial are those born between 1981 and 1996.

Almost 21 per cent of Gen Z and 15 per cent of Millennial employees are seeking meaningful work and a sense of impact within their roles, reflecting a shift in priorities and expectations.

Meanwhile, the report found that there has been a decline in employee sentiment in fintech, health and general insurance, and investment verticals.

This decline in employee sentiment is highest (10 per cent) among Millennial and Gen-Z managers early in their tenure, said the report.

These findings emphasise the importance of targeted strategies to address challenges unique to each vertical and demographic group, the report noted.

"The BFSI sector is witnessing robust hiring fuelled by both established players and innovative fintech companies. Banks are growing stronger, fintech is expanding, and investments and insurance are on the rise.

"Despite offering unique benefits and healthy profit-sharing practices, a concerning trend of disparity emerges within BFSI workplaces, which cannot be ignored," Great Place To Work, India, Serial Entrepreneur and CEO Yeshasvini Ramaswamy added.

# Bharti Hexacom shares make remarkable debut

## SETTLE NEARLY 43% HIGHER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Bharti Airtel's arm Bharti Hexacom Ltd listed with a huge premium and ended with a gain of nearly 43 per cent against the issue price of Rs 570 on Friday.

The stock started the trade at Rs 755.20, registering a gain of 32.49 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. During the day, it climbed 54.36 per cent to Rs 879.90. Shares of the company later ended at Rs 813.75, up 42.76 per cent.

On the NSE, the stock made its debut at Rs 755, rising 32.45 per cent. It ended at Rs 814, a jump of 42.80 per cent.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 40,687.50 crore. In traded volume terms, 20.94 lakh shares of the company were traded at the BSE and over 534.65 lakh shares at the NSE during the day.

The rally in the stock came on a day when the equity benchmark indices declined 1 per cent each. Bharti Hexacom's initial public offering received 29.88



times subscription on the last day of bidding on April 5.

This was the first public issue of the financial year 2024-25. The company's Rs 4,275 crore initial share sale was open for public subscription from April 3-5. The company had fixed a price band of Rs 542-570 per share for the Initial Public Offer (IPO).



## Young adult drama *Dil Dosti Dilemma* will globally premiere on April 25

Adapted from the popular book *Asmara's Summer*, this heart-warming young adult series, *Dil Dosti Dilemma*, has Seema Mohapatra and Jahanara Bhargava serving as creative producers under the banner of Ten Years Younger Productions. It has been directed by Debbie Rao, and written by Anuradha Tiwari, Bugs Bhargava Krishna, Raghav Dutt, and Manjiri Pulpala.

The series boasts a talented ensemble cast of emerging and seasoned actors, with Anushka Sen, Kush Jotwani, Tanvi Azmi, and Shishir Sharma in lead roles, and Shruti Seth, Vishakha Pandey, Revathi Pillai, Elisha Mayor, and Suhasini Mulay in pivotal roles.

The *Dil Dosti Dilemma* invites audiences into the world of Asmara, a popular, witty, and charming young girl. Her summer takes an unexpected turn when she is sent to her grandparents' neighbourhood as a form of punishment. To maintain appearances with her

friends, she pretends to be in Canada. Will this experience become a nightmare, a journey of personal growth, or both? Packed with plot twists and heartwarming revelations, join Asmara as she navigates a journey of self-discovery, nurtures family bonds, forges genuine friendships, and experiences the magic of first love amidst the enchanting bylanes of Tibbri Road.



## VINOD CHOPRA FILMS ANNOUNCES ZERO SE RESTART

Rennowned writer-director Vidhu Vinod Chopra has announced his latest project under the Vinod Chopra Films banner, titled *Zero Se Restart*. Being developed by his team, this film delves into the behind-the-scenes journey of the unprecedented success of *12th Fail*. Chopra has decided to unveil the making of the film in a feature film format, a rare move in Indian cinema.

Expressing his enthusiasm for this venture, he states, "The film *Zero Se Restart* narrates the journey of *12th Fail*, right from its inception to all the hurdles that came in its way, from no one believing in the film to the team even being advised against a theatrical release. It's a tale of triumph against skepticism and odds. This film is not a lecture on how to make movies, but a fun and crazy story of how it all actually happened. After *12th Fail* got so much love and support from the people, it only felt right that we share this story with them."

## Pop Icons Armaan Malik and Calum Scott unite for *Always*

Armaan Malik, the acclaimed Indian pop singer-songwriter and performer, and English singer-songwriter Calum Scott announce their legendary collaboration today with the release of their latest single, *Always*.

The track is an enchanting love ballad, adorned with soothing vocals by both Armaan and Calum, laced with enchanting piano and orchestral elements that serve as a tender embrace from a beloved partner.

With *Always*, Armaan Malik and Calum Scott transcend borders, merging their distinct musical styles to craft a song that encapsulates the essence of a surreal love story.

Sharing his thoughts on this release, Armaan Malik exudes, "Always is like a musical hug, a heartfelt confession to a love so enchanting, you

never knew you needed it until it became the closest thing to heaven. This collaboration with Calum felt so effortless because we ended up making this song in our first-ever session together. Both of us are known for love ballads, and I hope everyone who listens to *Always* gets to feel the feels!"

Expressing his excitement towards this collaboration, Calum Scott says, "Always is the kind of song I love to write. Just that beautiful, heavenly kind of love that we all aspire for! Working with Armaan on this song was so easy; he is extremely talented and has a very pure and authentic voice. This song came from our first session! I hope *Always* becomes the first dance for people all over the world!"

*Always* is sure to captivate audiences worldwide, inviting them to rediscover the beauty of love and the lure of eternal love through its simple yet heartfelt lyrics.

## Imtiaz Ali opens up about the making of *Chamkila*

Imtiaz Ali recently appeared on the IMDb Original series *On The Scene* to discuss his newly-released biographical directorial, *Amar Singh Chamkila*. The movie is based on the real-life pop star duo Amar Singh Chamkila and Amarjot Kaur, whose songs became massive hits in the 80s. The director shared interesting insights about the movie, including how he convinced Diljit Dosanjh to play Chamkila, the challenges Parineeti Chopra faced in recreating Amarjot's music, and much more.

When asked what draws him towards actors who are artists, the director replied, "There have been artists in my films. I don't know whether I do it because I am a writer and director. But I also feel interested in the lives of those people who don't toe the line, so to speak, and they do something unexpected that makes their lives more dramatic for cinema."

When asked how he convinced Diljit to play Chamkila, considering he had already portrayed a character based on him before, Ali said, "When I spoke to him, I assumed that since he is a musician, he would have heard about Chamkila from his childhood, especially being from the same area as Chamkila. So he knew everything about Chamkila. When I spoke to him for the first time, I found out that he had already made a film loosely inspired by Chamkila's life events. However, I had specific knowledge because I had conducted thorough research. I listened to stories and met people who knew Chamkila and Amarjot 36 years ago when they were alive. I met Tikki, who played

the dholak and was Chamkila's close friend. He was a mercurial character who greatly influenced Chamkila."

Ali further added, "I met Tikki several times. He became emotional and shared things with me that he later regretted or corrected. This was because I met him on multiple occasions. He even mentioned that he had cursed Chamkila to die. So for me, research involved meeting the people Chamkila had encountered, visiting places where he had lived, such as the office space in Ludhiana where all the artists and singers congregated. As my interest grew, I met more people in Punjab. It's interesting because Chamkila had a knack for entertaining the masses, and understanding what works with the



masses is a quality all artists and filmmakers would love to possess."

When asked about the challenges Parineeti Chopra faced in recreating Amarjot's music, Imtiaz Ali remarked, "Chamkila's compositions are always very high pitched, so for a woman to match that was extremely difficult. When a woman and a man sing at the same note and scale, it becomes more difficult for the woman because her voice is thinner, and Amarjot's parts were sometimes composed even higher by Chamkila. In real life, Amarjot had a problem singing on such high notes. Parineeti Chopra faced a similar challenge in the film, where she had to sing very high all the time, which is quite difficult. She's primarily an actor, not a professional singer, so she practised rigorously. We also enlisted the help of a singing diction teacher named Kittu from Ludhiana, Chamkila's hometown, who trained both Parineeti and Diljit. We knew they would be singing live, so we ensured they were well-prepared."

## December 2024 will see the thunderous arrival of *The Lion King*

Mufasa from *The Lion King* recently arrived in the world, and we are eager to see what the film studio has in store for us. First looks at intriguing forthcoming films were given to attendees, including Moana's return in *Moana 2*, the return of *Deadpool* and *Wolverine*, and a preview of the upcoming *Kingdom of the Apes*, *oggy: Alien: Romulus* revelation aroused curiosity as well.

*Mufasa: The Lion King*, directed by Barry Jenkins, is scheduled to open on December 20, 2024. Filming is expected to begin shortly. Disney and Jenkins debuted the first teaser for the upcoming movie at CinemaCon Las Vegas on Tuesday. A roar of applause greeted the first look, which showcased the film's gorgeous tone and images. The upcoming weeks will see the release of the teaser.

The narrative of the new story chronicles Mufasa's life and ascent to the throne, which he based on Jon Favreau's 2019 adaptation of Disney's 1994 animated masterpiece, *The Lion King*. With a global box office total of \$1.7 billion, the film was a box office hit and the highest-grossing Disney film ever. Jenkins expressed his pleasure by saying, "OMG, this is one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life."

## Captain America: Brave New World hints on President Thaddeus being rescued from assassins

Disney has made it big at Lionsgate CinemaCon, giving audiences a sneak peek at Anthony Mackie in *Captain America: Brave New World* as he dons the recognizable red, white, and blue uniform.

The video included a scene in which Harrison Ford's character, President Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross, is rescued by Sam Wilson, Steve Rogers' successor, from a group of mind-controlled assassins. The man in the American cape battles to defend the president during an outrageous attack on the White House amid gunfire and close-quarters fighting.

A moment when President Ross says to Wilson, "I want Captain America to help me rebuild the Avengers," is also shown in the teaser. This sequel continues the plot of the Disney+ series *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, in which Steve Rogers said adieu to his heroic duty and declared he would not be picking up his shield, prompting Wilson to pledge to live a life with the shield in hand.

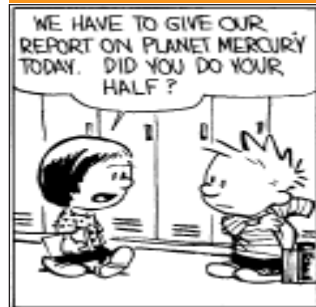
In addition to showcasing *Captain America 4*, the whole ensemble also presents Danny Ramirez, who ultimately becomes the primary role of the Falcon in Season 4. In addition, Wilson, who becomes Captain America after changing from a soldier, Julius Onah directed, while Tim Blake Nelson, Shira Haas, and Liv Tyler designed the motion film production.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



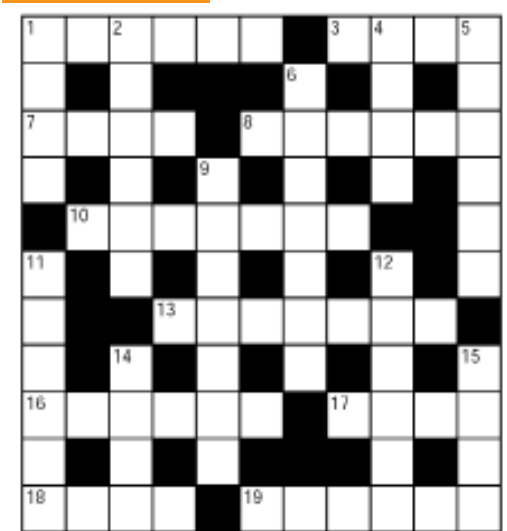
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- A season
- Strike with an open hand
- Jump over
- Having a sharp sour taste
- Applauded
- Bumped
- Sleepy
- A biting, jumping insect
- Require
- Something built over a river

### DOWN

- Not sick
- Just about
- Overdue
- A talking pet bird
- A permit to drive
- The language of Spain
- Concealed from view
- Shouted
- Gown
- A strong box for storing valuables



### SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution								
9	6	1	3	7	5	4	2	8
7	5	4	8	6	2	9	3	1
8	2	3	9	1	4	6	7	5
4	9	6	1	8	3	2	5	7
2	1	8	6	5	7	3	4	9
3	7	5	4	2	9	8	1	6
1	4	9	5	3	8	7	6	2
5	3	7	2	9	6	1	8	4
6	8	2	7	4	1	5	9	3

### Rules

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



## 'I STAY IN GACHIBOWLI, AND IT LOOKS LIKE THE USA FOR US'

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Growing up in Hyderabad since her childhood, Ratna Mehera Balabhadra's fascination with the runway ignited a dream: to grace the ramp at least once in her lifetime. Last year, that dream began to take shape when she participated in the Mrs. India Telangana pageant. After auditions and rigorous rounds, the culmination of this journey occurred in September 2023 during the grand finale held right here in Hyderabad.

"The city's vibrant energy and rich cultural backdrop undoubtedly influenced my path, infusing my pageantry experience with a unique blend of tradition and modernity." As she continues to explain, "I was passionate about ramp walks from my childhood, so that inspired me to believe that I should be ramped at least once in my lifetime, so my journey started last year in September with the Mrs. India Telangana pageant."

As a proud Hyderabad, she has witnessed a remarkable change in her beloved city—from its traditional roots as Nizams to the home of several global IT companies. The city has gone through a transformation and has emerged as a magnet for technology and innovation. The establishment of numerous IT companies, including her venture, reflects the city's dynamic business ecosystem. She expresses, "I am into business, so me and my husband started an IT company, therefore, every time we started something new, we received a good response from Hyderabad businesswise."

However, having grown up in this vibrant city, she shares her sentiments about the stark contrast between the past and the present. The Hyderabad of yesteryears exuded a regal charm with its historic monuments, bustling bazaars, and the iconic Charminar. Today, however, it is in a different landscape—one that resonates with modernity, progress, and global connectivity.

Take Gachibowli, for instance—a neighborhood that has become synonymous with cutting-edge technology and innovation. Its skyline boasts sleek glass towers, multinational corporations, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. As one walks through its streets, it's hard not to draw parallels with cities like San Francisco or New York. The fusion of tradition and modernity is palpable, creating an ambiance that feels both familiar and exhilarating! In her words, "I was born and brought up in Hyderabad, and I see a huge difference between the present Hyderabad and the one that is different now. The current Hyderabad is different. I stay in Gachibowli, and it looks

Ratna Mehera Balabhadra, who was recently crowned as the Classic Mrs. India Telangana, gets candid with *The Pioneer* for our special weekly segment of Hyderabad.



like the USA for us."

In this transformed Hyderabad, the aroma of Biryani still wafts through the air, but it mingles with the buzz of startup pitches and late-night coding sessions. Ratna Meher has some long-lasting memories in this city about her childhood at one of the renowned schools in Hyderabad, St. Ann's School. "I grew up in Secunderabad, so I attended St. Ann's School in my childhood; it was a very famous school in both the twin cities. I was proud to be in a famous school in twin cities. We used to have a fun and fair competitive spirit."

But ramp walking was always her dream, though she was unaware that a Mrs. India pageant even existed. She had always assumed it was only for unmarried women. When she discovered the truth, she wondered if it could also be a part of the pageant. She says, "I never knew that something called the Mrs. India pageant existed; we always thought it was for unmarried women. Only when I got to know, I was wondering if it's true or not and if it could also be part of the pageant." Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the world of pageantry, impacting both the contestants and the events themselves. Hyderabad provided access to good infrastructure for pageantry and crowned Mrs. India. As she says, "We wore a crown in the Novotel hotel in Hitech City, and it was arranged very elaborately and nicely. We felt good while doing that ramp. We usually don't expect that much, but Hyderabad's infrastructure is good; we can do pageantry more in Hyderabad." Hyderabad's infrastructure, particularly exemplified by the elaborate arrangements at the Novotel Hotel in Hitech City, played a pivotal role in creating a memorable pageantry experience for her.

Her words resonate: "Hyderabad's potential for hosting more pageantry events is indeed promising. During the Mrs. Telangana pageant, the mentors provided invaluable guidance and assisted with various tasks, including wardrobe and time management. The pageant experience taught me the art of reusing clothing, and I participated in grooming sessions to improve my stage presence. Not everyone is naturally extroverted, but these sessions helped me overcome stage fright. My mentors were unwavering in their support throughout every task and session."

She is also fortunate to have a supportive husband who has been there for her from the very beginning. His encouragement extends beyond the pageant, and he helped her in all aspects of life. Additionally, her children are understanding and supportive, allowing her to dedicate time to herself.

When asked about her hometown, Hyderabad, she expressed a longing for the lush greenery that adorned her surroundings as the concrete dreams took center stage, and while travelling across the city, she recollects all her memories of school and college life. She says, "I like everything about Hyderabad. As I was born and brought up here, each road holds a memory. Whenever I travel from Gachibowli to Secunderabad, all memories of my childhood, fun I had with my friends flash, and of course developments in the city, I dislike the traffic and way we are cutting down the trees."



A LOOK AT THE HOTTEST TATTOO TRENDS OF 2024

Tattoos have always been a timeless form of self-expression, and in recent years, they've become even more popular among individuals of all ages in India.

Here's a look at some of the latest tattoo trends captivating the hearts of Gen Z and Millennials across the country, from celebrity tattoo artist Vikas Malani, also the founder of BodyCanvas Tattoos!

**Minimalistic floral designs:** These tattoos are all about simplicity but still look stunning. They feature delicate flowers drawn with clean lines and soft colors, adding a touch of elegance to anyone's style.

**Geometric patterns tattoos:** These are modern and sleek. Think of intricate shapes and lines creating cool designs that look like they belong in an art gallery. From simple triangles to fancy mandalas, these tattoos are for those who want to stand out.

**Finger tattoos:** Couples are ditching traditional rings for tattoos on their ring fingers. The ring finger tattoo trend offers a stylish and permanent alternative to traditional wedding rings, symbolising love, commitment, and partnership in a personalised way.

**Sports player tattoos:** For sports enthusiasts, tattoos honouring their

favourite athletes have become a popular way to showcase their passion and allegiance. Whether it's a portrait of a beloved player or a depiction of a memorable moment on the field, sports player tattoos capture the adrenaline and excitement of the game, creating a lasting tribute to athletic heroes and iconic sporting moments.

**Watercolour tattoos:** These tattoos look like they've been painted on with watercolours. They're colourful, dreamy, and add a fun twist to any design, whether it's a landscape or a portrait. Watercolour tattoos add a splash of colour and creativity to any tattoo collection.

**Script tattoos with personal significance:** Script tattoos allow individuals to carry their favourite quotes, phrases, or mantras with them wherever they go. Whether it's a word of inspiration, a reminder of strength, or a tribute to a loved one, script tattoos hold personal significance and serve as constant reminders of what matters most in life.

Tattoo trends in India are as diverse and vibrant as the country itself. Tattoos reflect a blend of tradition, modernity, and personal expression, allowing individuals to wear their stories and passions on their skin with pride. So, if you're thinking about getting inked, there's no better time to join the trend and express yourself in your own unique way!

## Restoring glory is the goal!

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Managing Director of Myraa Group Ajay Chauhan's inspirational path is proof of the strength of resiliency and willpower in the face of difficulty. When he was sixteen years old, he was responsible for providing for his family when they were forced to flee because of the total collapse of the financial system. The hustler, on the verge of bankruptcy, was forced to put his studies on hold in order to support his family! Taking the plunge into entrepreneurship and offering some thoughts on it, he says, "For me, it has been an extremely hectic trip from the start. It all began when I was only 16 years old, driven by the stark truth of my family's financial collapse to travel to a different city with just 1500 rupees and an enormous amount of resolve. The metropolis, with its frantic pace, turned into my hub for bustle. I had to take odd jobs to make ends meet, therefore I had to start from scratch and learn the ropes of the hospitality business."

Equipped with doubt and unmatched tenacity, he began his journey at the busy VT station by meandering around until he happened to find his first position in the hotel sector. He applied the same strict work ethic to every hospitality position, no matter how tiny, and he was well-versed in the inner workings of the restaurant industry from the ground up. A turning point was reached at one of the eateries! At his place of employment, a fortuitous meeting led to a change in focus towards recruitment. This change signalled the start of an adventure that would completely alter his course.

"However, things changed when I happened to run into someone by accident while waiting tables at a restaurant. I wandered into the recruitment industry, and all of a sudden, I had a new road ahead of me! At Al Taher, which served as my launching pad, I put in a ton of work. And when the chance presented itself, I jumped at it, and my tenacity enabled me to transform my faltering company into a major player on the world stage. Yes, the journey from modest beginnings to managing director of Myraa Group has been quite an experience. However, I wouldn't alter a thing. Since each obstacle has helped me become the person I am today," the speculator spoke to us in a tone that conveyed

a distinct kind of spirit. "Moving from the hospitality industry to recruitment marked a significant turning point in my career," he says, continuing with the same level of zeal.

"The choice to switch to recruitment after starting my career in hospitality was not taken lightly, but it ended up being one of the best ones for my professional path. The disparities between the two industries made it difficult at first, but I made the decision to face it head-on and adjust as needed. I am appreciative of the mentorship I got, which enabled me to make the adjustment." The adventure that shaped him into the person he is today started in 1995. He put everything he had into working full-time at Al Taher, where he developed his client management skills and helped close the demand-supply gap. He soon left for the UK to seek a career in management course that served as the basis for a new chapter, and while working in the UK gave him experience, he began to doubt whether it was in line with his aspirations.

"Although going worldwide was a challenge, my life's events had equipped me to never give up. When the company underwent a restructuring in 1999, I recognised that the African market, which was then beginning to gather traction, had a lot of promise. I have to say that entering the African market was not easy, and the first three to four years were difficult without any significant clients. One pivotal milestone occurred in 2004 when, in spite of several challenges, including a short timeline, visa issues, and a dearth of technology, I managed to successfully hire 300 people for a project in Mali," he continues. After completing his management school and returning to India, he happened to speak with his boss, who had paid for his studies in the UK, about an unforeseen opportunity. The recruitment firm was about to close, so Ajay took the opportunity to suggest taking over. Along with the same tenacity and will, he traversed the complex terrain, turning the little hut into the cornerstone of a workforce that would eventually expand not just throughout India but the entire world! He continued, "Taking over the company when it was facing closure wasn't just a business move; it was about restoring its glory."

He revealed more such intriguing insights. "In February, we will have been together for 25 years, although it doesn't seem like that long. I'm glad I

took advantage of the chance to grow the business at the time and made it even better. My career with the company began when I decided to take a risk and transfer my emphasis to Africa, where prospects awaited. At the time, I was working with the Middle East market, but I also saw how saturated the sector was. My career was defined by the move from hospitality to recruitment, which also made me an entrepreneur." He reorganised the business in 1999 and set out on an arduous quest to acquire clients. The first major project involving the recruitment of 300 people for Mali in Africa in 2004 marked the beginning of new opportunities brought about by the expansion to Africa! His remarkable journey of diversification did not end there. Amidst the difficulties caused by COVID-19 in 2020, the firm changed its focus to contracting and building, landing a significant project in Madagascar. Investing in vocational skills training in 2019 demonstrated a dedication to upskilling the African labour force.

"Although obstacles are unavoidable, I have learned to view them as chances for improvement. Overcoming barriers has become simpler thanks to technological improvements like e-visas and better diplomatic services. In addition, my robust network—which is based on mutual respect and trust—has been crucial in getting over obstacles. The pandemic had caused havoc, and manpower consulting had stopped. Everyone was going through a difficult period, and my people's safety came first. I had to make a difficult decision since I couldn't jeopardise anyone's safety. However, obstacles might occasionally present unanticipated chances. I had a moment to reflect and take a



Myraa Group's MD Ajay Chauhan's inspirational path is proof of the strength of resiliency and willpower in the face of difficulty. He speaks to *The Pioneer* sharing his journey, shifting multiple career paths, and more.

step back during the break. It became evident to me that, in order to weather such storms in the future, I needed to diversify my business. At that point, the notion of going into contracting and building was raised. Since I witnessed some of my clients liquidate their businesses during the epidemic, I was initially hesitant to enter the industry. Although it wasn't a snap choice, my long history of closely collaborating with African construction companies gave me the courage to take the risk."

He made the decision to take the risk because he was confident in his knowledge and connections inside the construction sector. Although it took him some time to get the hang of the construction industry, he managed to succeed with the help of regional companies and the African government. The path has been full of benefits as well as hardships. Above all, it has enabled him to maintain the safety and well-being of his workforce.

He made sure to include, "Since 2012, taking up marathon running has evolved from a pastime to a lifestyle decision that has taught me discipline, which I use in both my personal and professional life. Running has allowed me to have more time for reflection. This path has influenced not only my physical health but also my outlook on life, which goes beyond the workplace." Running is Ajay's escape from the boardroom; he has been pursuing this hobby for the last seven or eight years. His participation in marathons all over the world—from Berlin to Bhutan, Amsterdam to Mumbai—testifies to his tenacity and resolve, both on and off the field.





# RAJASTHAN ROYALS NEED BETTER EXECUTION OF PLANS

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

A disappointed Rajasthan Royals will have to focus on better execution of their strategies for a swift turnaround when they face a highly inconsistent yet capable Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League match here on Saturday. The Royals had an excellent chance to register their fifth win on the trot and consolidate their totem pole position, but Rashid Khan's daring assault helped Gujarat Titans snatch a last-bat victory on Wednesday. It might have come as a rude shock for the Royals at Fort Jaipur, and as such, they would want to treat it as an aberration and dish out a more refined outing against the Punjab side. But it also highlighted some muddled thinking. The Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan outfit lost to the Titans because of the below-par effort from Kuldeep Sen (19th over) and Avesh Khan (20th over) at a vital passage, when they conceded 35 runs across 12 balls. Here, the Royals made a slight tactical error by not letting Trent



Boult complete his quota in that match as the veteran left-arm pacer ended the match at 2-0-8-0. There is no gainsaying that Boult could have made a change in the script, but Samson leaving that option unused was a tad perplexing.

Of course, Boult has been largely used with the new ball in this iteration of the IPL, but in crunch situations nothing counts more than experience. So, the Royals will be looking for an improvement in the strategising and execution part

against the Kings. The Shikhar Dhawan-captained side has blown hot and cold so far in the tournament, winning two and losing three out of five matches. The primary reason for their middling run this year is the

patchy form of their fancied batsmen as Punjab relied on cameos by uncapped Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma to boost their batting. Opener Jonny Bairstow (5 matches, 81 runs) and middle-order batter Jitesh Sharma (5

matches, 77 runs) are the most underwhelming of the lot, and it has robbed them of momentum upfront and in the business end of their innings. Sam Curran has been above average with the ball, taking six wickets from five matches but the England all-rounder's needle has fallen behind from the halfway mark with the bat, despite scoring a 63. The absence of injured Liam Livingstone from the middle-order too has reduced their firepower, and Kings will hope to have the Englishman back in their ranks at the earliest. On the contrary, the Punjab bowlers have done marginally better, but their propensity to concede big runs while bowling first will be a concern. A group consisting of bowlers such as Kagiso Rabada and Arshdeep Singh has given away 199, 199 and 182 runs in their last three matches and they will have to break the pattern against the Royals. It's easier said than done as the Royals' batting unit has been in good shape as 185 is the lowest total it posted while batting first. Outside the match calculations, the Royals will have another bigger worry to nullify. Over the last few editions of the IPL, the

Royals had begun strongly, just as they did this year, before tapering off after the mid-season. As a result, they have managed to qualify for the play-offs only twice across the last six seasons. Royals would dearly hope that the defeat against GT was not the beginning of another meltdown. The Teams (from): Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Prabhshimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidvath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw. Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dube, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

## Hardik enjoys challenges, fans will start loving him: Kishan



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hardik Pandya might have been at the receiving end of fans' ire in this IPL, but Ishan Kishan has little doubt that the Mumbai Indians skipper is "enjoying the challenge" of winning them over. Pandya, who replaced Rohit Sharma as the regular skipper of Mumbai before the start of this IPL, has been consistently getting booed by the spectators inside the stadium and the situation was no different on Thursday night when MI faced Royal Challengers Bengaluru. But he also found a small

corner of supporters at the Wankhede Stadium as MI registered a big win over RCB, and they were encouraged by star batter Virat Kohli. "He (Pandya) loves challenges, he has been in this situation before and he is in that situation right now. He is not someone who will come out and talk about it and say let's stop this or that," Kishan told the media here after MI defeated RCB by seven wickets. "I know that he must be enjoying it. I know him personally. I have spent a lot of time with him. He is ready for the challenges because you cannot complain to the fans,

they will come up with their explanations and their point of views," Kishan added. Kishan said the 29-year-old all-rounder could turn all anger around with his performances. "But knowing how Hardik Pandya thinks, he is happy with people doing it but I know that in the coming games he will do it with the bat and people will start loving him (again)," he said. Kishan highlighted Indian fans' tendency to recognise the hard work of a cricketer, irrespective of their personal feelings towards him. "People also recognise your hard work, what you are going through and still you

are doing so well for your team. I think people do recognise that." "Our fans will be a little harsh on you but at the same time when you do well, or when you show that it is (still) not bothering you and (that) you are in a very good headspace, that might change. If not today, tomorrow. If not tomorrow, day after tomorrow," he said. Kishan said Pandya's focus was on improving his outings. "I feel happy about him that even in this situation he is so keen on performing, hitting six on the very first ball knowing that things can go different way and people will question you again. But that is something which Hardik has in himself and other players don't," Kishan noted. Jasprit Bumrah was at the top of his game returning with 4-0-21-5 against RCB but the other MI bowlers were wayward. Kishan backed them to do well. "We will get through that because planning is always there, we keep talking to our coaches, our captain, our video analyst," he said. "The wicket was very good (for batters). When the wicket is so good, we cannot complain about our bowlers, who were also good, but (then) we finished the game in the 16th over. "We have to look at the positives that the bowlers did a great job in restricting RCB below 200," he added.

## It is in my muscle memory: Suryakumar on his audacious shots

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The world's number one T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav attributed the audacious array of shots he played against Royal Challengers Bengaluru to "muscle memory" and constant practice at nets. Suryakumar dazzled with a 19-ball 52 studded with four sixes and five fours to help Mumbai Indians chase down RCB's 197-run target in just 15.3 overs. "I just try to play the field. I practice these shots. It is in my muscle memory," Suryakumar said after MI's seven-wicket win in the IPL on Thursday night. Asked about his favourite shot in the match against RCB, he said, "I think all the shots. The slice over point was my favourite." Suryakumar was playing in his second match of this IPL after recovering from a sports hernia surgery. "It is always good to be back in Wankhede. Joining the squad was great. Mentally I was here, just physically in Bangalore (for recovery at NCA). "Coming at Wankhede, chasing 200, if there is dew it is important to take a chance. We wanted to finish early for the net run rate," said the 33-year-old. Asked about Jasprit Bumrah's five-wicket haul, Suryakumar said, "It is always good to have Jasprit by your side. It has been 2 to



3 years, have never batted Jasprit in the nets. Either he breaks my bat or my foot." On Ishan Kishan who make 69 off just 34 balls, he said, "That's what we have told him. Just go out and enjoy. His intent has been great. He

is enjoying the fruits." Later in an interview with 'JioCinema', Suryakumar said whenever he came out to bat he would try to see how he could change the course of the game. "I think about the shots I

play beforehand, because I have practiced all of them during the nets. I try to make sure that I bat according to the situation of the game. If the game is progressing slowly, then I think of how I could possibly speed it up. "Whenever I go into bat, I always try to see how I can change the game and how I can control it with my abilities," he said. On MI's performance so far, he said, "I think the train was always on track, it just took a while to get going. It's fine, we're coming back and have found our rhythm. "It feels great to have won two games in a row at the Wankhede. It gives us great confidence and has improved the team's atmosphere as well." Former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson said sky is the limit for Suryakumar when he's batting at his best. "When his mind's free, he just lets loose. The sky is the limit for him when he's batting like that. He can hit them and does hit them all around the ground," said Watson. "When he's in the type of form like he showed tonight, the poor bowlers, no one can bowl anywhere. "He's got an incredible awareness of the field but then the skill to be able to manipulate the ball into those gaps, it's freakish stuff. The Mumbai Indians are very lucky to have him."

## Mary Kom steps down as Paris Olympics Chef de Mission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Six-time world champion Boxer M C Mary Kom on Friday stepped down as India's chef-de-mission for the upcoming Paris Olympics, saying she is "left with no choice" due to some personal reasons. Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha announced that Mary Kom had asked to be relieved from her position in a letter addressed to her. "I consider it an honour to serve my country in every way possible, and I was mentally prepared for it. However, I regret that I will not be able to uphold the prestigious responsibility and would like to resign, owing to personal reasons," the 41-year-old stated in a letter to Usha. "It is embarrassing to retreat from a commitment, which I seldom do, but I am left with no choice. I am there to cheer on my country and the athletes



competing in this Olympic Games, with great expectations," she added. The IOA had announced her appointment on March 21. The celebrated boxer, who is also a bronze-medallist from the 2012 London Olympics, was to be the logistical in-charge of the country's contingent at the July 26-August 11 Games. "We are sad that Olympic medal winning boxer and Chairperson of the IOA Athletes Commission Mary Kom has stepped down citing

personal reasons. We respect her decision and her privacy," Usha said in a statement. "I shall make the appropriate consultations and soon make an announcement about the replacement for Mary Kom." Usha said she had a conversation with Mary Kom after receiving her letter. "I completely understand her request and respect her decision. I have also conveyed to her that she will always have my own support and that of IOA. I also request everyone to respect the legendary boxer's privacy," she said. Mary Kom has also won gold in the 2010 Asian Games besides being a multiple-time Asian champion. IOA has appointed six-time Winter Olympian and luger Shiva Keshavan as deputy chef-de-mission, while veteran table tennis player and reigning Commonwealth Games champion Sharath Kamal will be India's male flag-bearer.

## OTHER SPORTS

### ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

## Akash Dahiya reaches bronze medal round

PTI ■ BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

Indian wrestlers Akash Dahiya and Anirudh Kumar kept themselves in contention for bronze medals at the Asian Championships but three of their team-mates exited the tournament after losing at different stages in their respective categories, here on Friday. Competing in the non-Olympic 61kg category, Akash began with a close 10-8 win over Sardor Ruzimov from Uzbekistan and followed it up with a comfortable 7-3 victory over Korea's Sanghyeon Son in the quarterfinal. However, Kazakhstan's Assyl Aitakyn proved to be too strong for the Indian in the semifinal and could not score a single point, losing his bout by technical superiority.



He will now fight it out with Mongolia's Enkhbold Enkhbat. Yash Tushir (74kg) went out

of contention after losing his repechage round by technical superiority to Syrbaz Talgat from

Kazakhstan. Also bowing out early was Sandeep Singh Maan (86kg), who lost his qualification

bout 0-5 to Japan's Tatsuya Shirai. Vinay (92kg) also fizzled out in the 92kg qualification round, losing his bout by fall to veteran Kazakhstan wrestler Adilet Davlumbayev. In 125kg, Anirudh Kumar began with a 3-0 win over Pakistan's Zaman Anwar but was outplayed by Iran's Amir Hossein Abbas Zare in the quarterfinal, losing by technical superiority. Since the Iranian reached the final, it kept the door open for Anirudh and now he will fight for bronze against Bahrain's Shamil Magomed A Sharipov. India had won three medals on Thursday through Udit (57kg, silver), Abhimanyou (70kg, bronze) and Vicky (97kg, bronze). The men's free-style competition will conclude today and the women's bouts will begin on Saturday.



Playback singer Suryansh, who has been associated with various films so far, spoke about his latest song *Baaja*, his long association with AR Rahman, and more.



## PONNIYIN SELVAN SINGER MAKES HIS B'WOOD DEBUT

K. RAMYA SREE

Introducing playback singer Suryansh, an artist whose mesmerising voice has woven melodies that resonate with the soul. Hailing from Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, Suryansh has carved a niche in the realm of music with his unique blend of talent and passion. With a repertoire spanning across various genres, the singer has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the world of music, especially in South India and Bollywood.

He has been a music composer, arranger, producer, and playback singer in his career thus far. Well known for his work in films like *Vikram Vedha*, *Ponniyin Selvan*, *Master*, *Dil Bechara*, and *Mimi*, among others, the singer's work has been widely shared by the legendary AR Rahman, with whom he collaborated on a few projects.

Join me in exploring the enchanting world of Suryansh as he speaks about his latest release, *Baaja* from *Amar Singh Chamkila*, working in south films, especially *Ponniyin Selvan*, and more.

Beginning with his journey for *Ponniyin Selvan*, Suryansh finds working on the music for the film an extraordinary experience. He shared, "Being part of the creative process alongside legends like AR Rahman and Mani Ratnam was nothing short of exhilarating. The journey began in 2019, and from the outset, it was evident that we were embarking on something truly special. Witnessing the synergy

“BEING PART OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS ALONGSIDE LEGENDS LIKE AR RAHMAN AND MANI RATNAM WAS NOTHING SHORT OF EXHILARATING.”

between AR Rahman and Mani Ratnam was awe-inspiring. Their collaborative spirit was palpable as they delved into the intricacies of the film and its music, exchanging ideas and insights with a passion that was infectious."

As a music programmer and vocal arranger, his role was to assist in bringing their vision to life. Whether it was fine-tuning melodies, orchestrating arrangements, or ensuring the perfect vocal harmonies, for him, every step of the process was infused with creativity and dedication.

Taking us back to the most memorable moments he had from the sets of the *PS* franchise, he shared, "One of the most memorable moments from working on *Ponniyin Selvan* was walking into the recording room for the first time and witnessing AR Rahman and Mani Ratnam engrossed in discussion. Their shared enthusiasm and commitment to perfection set the tone for the entire project, inspiring everyone involved to strive for excellence."

As *Ponniyin Selvan* continues to captivate audiences with its enchanting melodies and compelling storytelling, he feels privileged to have played a small part in bringing this cinematic masterpiece to life.

He next spoke about his latest release, *Baaja*, which he considers his most special project so far, which is also again with AR Rahman, and he explained, "I received a

call from Rahman sir's team to sing a song, which turned out to be *Baaja*. I recorded the *Baj Baaja Baaja* parts in Mumbai in Rahman sir's studio, and the intro part where I sing *Ain Ishq Da Pehla Akkhar* was recorded in Rahman sir's Chennai studio."

This song is special for him because it marks his Bollywood debut as a singer. "It is a song for a film directed by Imtiaz Ali, with music by A. R. Rahman and lyrics by Irshad Kamil. Working with this trio is a dream come true. I believe *Amar Singh Chamkila* stands out now that *Baaja* is out. Since the first time I heard the music of *Rockstar*, I dreamed of working with Rahman sir, Irshad sir, and Imtiaz sir, and seeing that dream come true for such a huge film is incredible," he added.

Giving a gist of how his musical journey happened, the young composer and singer explained, "I've been singing since I was four and had the opportunity to sing with Late. Ravindra Jain. I gained recognition with an impromptu rendition of *Billo Rani* in 2011 with Richa Sharma. Around this time, I started doing YouTube covers and learned music production. I released my first single, *Chal Phir Wahin*, last year, which was well-received."

Having worked with legendary AR Rahman on so many hit projects, we asked him what's the biggest takeaway he learned from him, and his crisp answer was: "His passion for music, dedication to delivering the best, and fearlessness in trying new things."

Furthermore, the singer, who loves the richness of the music in South films, has some interesting Tamil music coming up soon, whose details he wishes to reveal in a little while.

He also has a few singles coming up, including one with *Ghodey Pe Sawaar* singer Siresha Bhagavatula.



## Kartikkeya's next is Bhaje Vayu Vegam

Actor Kartikkeya Gummakonda has announced his next film with UV Concepts. It has been a while since the actor did a film in Telugu and this announcement has taken everyone by surprise.

On Friday, Superstar Mahesh Babu took to social media to unveil the title, first look poster, and motion poster of Kartikkeya Gummakonda's upcoming film. Mahesh Babu expressed intrigue at the title and the first look poster, extending his best wishes to the entire team.

The film has been titled *Bhaje Vayu Vegam*. In the first look poster,

Kartikkeya is depicted running with a cricket bat, surrounded by a flurry of money. This intriguing visual has piqued curiosity among viewers, setting the stage for an exciting narrative. With the film nearing completion, fans can anticipate the announcement of its theatrical release date in the near future.

The film features Iswarya Menon as the female lead, with Rahul Tyson of *Happy Days* fame in a significant role. Directed by Prashanth Reddy, the film promises to offer fresh and engaging content to the audience. It has music by Radhan and BGM by Kapil Kumar.



## RAJ TARUN'S NEW MOVIE LAUNCHED

Exciting news for Raj Tarun fans! The actor's next venture has been officially announced as a crime comedy, marking a departure from his previous roles. Directed by debutant Ramesh Kadumulu, the film is set to commence shooting from April 15.

The film was inaugurated with a puja ceremony attended by esteemed personalities from the industry. Notable figures such as director Maruthi, producer SKN, and Nakkina Trinadha Rao graced the event, adding to the anticipation surrounding the film.

Speaking at the event, Raj Tarun expressed, "We are starting regular shooting from April 15. This is a very good story. This is a crime comedy genre film which is my favourite." He emphasised that the film boasts a captivating storyline bound to resonate

with audiences.

Director Ramesh revealed that the film's shooting will kick off on April 15, with plans to release it in October.

On the other hand, the heroine Rashi Singh said, "I thank the director and the producers for giving me the opportunity to act in this movie. When I heard the story, I liked my character very much. It is a pleasure to act with Raj Tarun."

Shekhar Chandra will be composing the music, while Aditya Jawwadi serves as the cinematographer and Praveen Pudi as the editor, ensuring a high-quality production on all fronts.

With its intriguing premise and talented team, Raj Tarun's upcoming crime comedy is poised to captivate audiences and add another feather to the actor's cap. Fans eagerly await further updates as the project progresses towards its release.



## PRASANNA VADANAM WRAPS DUBBING SCHEDULE

Sahas starrer *Prasanna Vadanam* has wrapped up its dubbing formalities, gearing up to captivate audiences on the big screen from May 3. Starring a talented cast including Payal Radhakrishna, Rashi Singh, the film promises to deliver thrills and excitement. Directed by Arjun YK, the film is bankrolled by Little Thoughts Cinemas and Arha Media. The teaser of the film was released recently and it suggested that the film will be a dark thriller with a lot of black humor and a unique concept.

## Sivakarthikeyan, Sai Pallavi's Amaran may release in Sept

The buzz surrounding Sivakarthikeyan's highly anticipated film, *Amaran*, continues to grow as it gears up for a September release, say sources. The movie, a biopic of Major Varadarajan, has been making headlines due to its compelling concept and powerful portrayal of real-life events.

With Sai Pallavi playing the female lead, this Kamal Haasan's production is nearing completion. Sources suggest that the makers are meticulously crafting a trailer to provide audiences with an immersive cinematic experience.

In *Amaran*, Sivakarthikeyan embodies the role of Major Mukund Varadarajan, a brave

soldier posthumously honored with the Ashoka Chakra for his heroic actions during an anti-terrorist operation in Jammu and Kashmir.

With its poignant narrative and stellar cast, *Amaran* promises to be a compelling cinematic experience, shedding light on the valor and sacrifice of India's unsung heroes. Fans eagerly await its release, poised to witness Sivakarthikeyan's transformative performance in this poignant biopic.



## Varalaxmi is hopeful that Sabari will be loved just like HanuMan

The Telugu audience is in for an exhilarating treat as versatile actress Varalaxmi Sarathkumar gears up for her first female-driven film in Telugu, *Sabari*. With notable appearances in popular films like *Krack* and *Veera Simha Reddy*, Varalaxmi's transition into the spotlight with *Sabari* marks a significant moment in her career. Directed by Anil Katz and produced by Mahendra Nath Kondla under the Maha Movies banner, this action-packed thriller promises to keep viewers on the edge of their seats.

At the unveiling of the theatrical trailer, Varalaxmi expressed her excitement about venturing into the realm of female-driven cinema in Telugu. She commended the producer, Mahendra Nath, for his dedication to bringing this lavish and engaging project to life. She expressed, "This is my first time doing a female drive film in Telugu and I am very excited about it. I am sure that *Sabari* will offer a thrilling experience to the viewers.

I hope this film will be as big of a hit as *HanuMan*. This film is a straightforward thriller and it will keep you on the edge of your seat from start to end. This is a wonderful script and the film shaped up extremely well."

Others present at the event, including actors Varun Sandesh, Shashank and others, echoed their anticipation for *Sabari*, emphasising its unique storyline and Varalaxmi's stellar performance.

## YASH JOINS PRIME FOCUS STUDIOS TO PRODUCE RAMAYANA

The announcement of the collaboration between Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios and Rocking Star Yash's Monster Mind Creations to produce a global epic adaptation of the *Ramayana* has sent waves of excitement throughout the entertainment industry. Joining forces with acclaimed director Nitesh Tiwari and backed by DNEG's expertise in visual effects, Namit and Yash are embarking on a monumental journey to present the *Ramayana* in a never-before-seen cinematic experience. Yash feels, "It has been my long-term aspiration to make films that will showcase Indian cinema on a global level. In pursuit of that, I was in LA to ally with one of the best VFX studios, and to my amazement, the driving force behind it was a fellow Indian. Namit and I had various ideation sessions, and coincidentally, our synergy on the vision for Indian cinema aligned perfectly. We brainstormed various projects, and during these discussions, the subject of *Ramayana* came up. Namit had a part of it in the works; *Ramayana*, as a subject, deeply resonates with me and I had an approach in my mind for it. By joining forces to co-produce *Ramayana* we are bringing together our collective vision and experience to create an Indian film that will ignite excitement and passion in audiences across the world."

On the other hand, Namit Malhotra expressed, "After years spent living between the US, the UK, and India, my personal journey has led me to the point that I feel ready to do justice to the incredible story of *Ramayana*, treating it with the due care and reverence that it deserves. My challenges from the start have been two-fold: to respect the sanctity of a tale which is held in such high regard by all of us who grew up with it, while also bringing it to the world in such a way that this incredible story is embraced by international audiences as a compelling big screen experience. In Yash I recognise a similar aspiration to share the best of our culture with the world. Inspired by his journey from Karnataka to the incredible international success of *K.G.F: Chapter 2*, I can't think of a better partner to help create a major global impact with this, the greatest of all our stories."



## Bhagyashri Borse in talks for two big T'wood films

Bhagyashri Borse is swiftly making waves in the Telugu film industry, capturing attention with her promising debut in Ravi Teja's *Mr. Bachchan*, helmed by director Harish Shankar. Amidst the buzz surrounding her debut, news has surfaced that she is in talks to star opposite Vijay Deverakonda in Gowtam Tinnanuri's upcoming project, marking another significant opportunity in her burgeoning career. Adding to the excitement, Bhagyashri Borse is also reportedly in discussions to feature alongside Nani in a film directed by Sujeth. The talks are said to be progressing well, raising anticipation about her potential involvement in the project. If finalised, this opportunity could indeed be a defining moment in Bhagyashree Borse's career, solidifying her presence in the Telugu film industry. With multiple high-profile projects on the horizon, Bhagyashri Borse is undoubtedly poised for an exciting journey ahead, as she navigates her way through the dynamic world of Telugu cinema.

## Zee 5 organises one of a kind event for Gaami

*Gaami*, the epic survival drama starring Vishwak Sen, has taken audiences by storm since its theatrical release on March 8, 2024, and is now available for streaming on ZEE5. In a remarkable promotional strategy, ZEE5 organised a press interaction at Snow Kingdom, recreating the chilling Himalayan ambiance where the film was predominantly shot. Attendees were left impressed by the immersive experience, further enhancing their anticipation for the film's streaming release.

Both Vishwak Sen and director Vidyadhar Kagita praised ZEE5 for their innovative approach in bringing the Himalayas setting to life for the press meet. They expressed confidence that viewers would appreciate the film's immersive quality on the platform, especially those who may have missed certain aspects during its theatrical run.

Vishwak Sen shared insights into his challenging role as an Aghora in *Gaami*, reflecting on the harsh conditions endured during filming in the Himalayas. Despite initial skepticism about the film's commercial prospects, he expressed gratitude for its success and emphasised the importance of believing in compelling storytelling over commercial elements.

He also expressed regret for not exploring such creative promotional ideas before the film's theatrical release.

*Gaami*, produced by Karthik Sabarish under Karthik Kult Creations in association with V Celluloid, boasts a talented ensemble cast and promises an enthralling cinematic experience.

