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**-SPORTS**

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The Election Commission of

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# Monday Mirchi

## RAMAKRISHNA RAO'S UNIQUE DISTINCTION

Call it a lucky streak or whatever; Finance Secretary K Ramakrishna Rao has had the unique distinction of preparing nine Budgets for Telangana State. For newbies, he was appointed as the Finance Secretary on February 29, 2016. The whispers in the corridors of power are that the recent exercise to help the state government seek a Vote-on-Account could be the Finance Secretary's swan song. For, going by the writing on the wall, long-standing bureaucrats may be moved out once their important tasks are accomplished or immediately after the Lok Sabha elections. Anyway, ahead of the presentation of a full budget, the Congress government has had hands-on experience with the state's economy through the Vote-on-Account.

## NO POSITIVE RESPONSE TO SPECIAL CHIEF SECRETARY'S REQUEST

When it comes to official matters; going strictly by the rule book counts regardless of the niceties in administration. No babu can afford to throw the baby out with the bathwater at the behest of political masters. Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar had sought from the Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department certain files related to the Formula E race so as to be in a position to reply to the Memo issued by the Chief Secretary. However, the MA&UD did not provide him the details. Yet, he replied, giving details based on his memory. Currently the portfolio of MAUD is held by Chief Minister Revanth Revanth Reddy. Bureaucratic circles doubt whether there would be a positive response to Arvind's request. It appears that, going forward; things would be made difficult for the senior bureaucrat. As for the issues surrounding Formula E race; when media persons had

approached Revanth, he said that officials were probing the issue. Responding to the same issues, former MU&UD minister K T Rama Rao said: "Let them probe officials".

## METRO CHIEF GETS TO STAY

Regime change does not necessarily override family bonds. HMRL MD NVS Reddy is likely to continue in his position even in the Congress government. Although the new government is keen on sacking officers continuing in various positions post their superannuation, NVS Reddy is likely to be an exception. NVS was closely associated with former Union Minister Jaipal Reddy; both having played a pivotal role in realising Hyderabad Metro. Revanth Reddy's bonds with Jaipal Reddy run deep. For starters, Jaipal's niece is Revanth's wife.

## BRS TURNS TABLES ON EX-DGP MAHENDER REDDY

When political fortunes change, those who used to hang on to the coattails of their political masters must also be prepared for the worst. Ex-DGP Mahender Reddy was no doubt among highly regarded persons in the erstwhile KCR govt during his term of service. Even just before his retirement, KCR had expressed his hope that Mahender could be roped in as an Advisor. During his multiple trips to Palair, KCR had made specific references to Mahender while envisioning the official's potential to develop the place. However, after Mahender Reddy was appointed as TSPSC chairman, the BRS demanded a judicial probe against him over amassing assets. These out-of-the-blue allegations have taken bureaucratic circles by surprise. Pink party and other circles are wondering which one is right: KCR's praise of Mahender's satta or the latest allegations. -- Yours truly

# 'LS polls a battle between corrupt, family parties and BJP'

## 5 Vijaya Sankalpa Yatras to start on Feb 20: Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The coming Lok Sabha elections will be a battle between corrupt, family-based parties and the BJP which stands for dharma, Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy said. The choice is between stability and instability, he added. Releasing the BJP's Vijaya Sankalpa Yatra poster on Sunday at the state BJP office along with Rajya Sabha Member Dr K. Laxman, former MP AP Jithender Reddy and the BJP MLA representing Nirmal, A. Maheshwar Reddy and others, Kishan said that corruption worth Rs 12 lakh crore took place during UPA

rule, but the Modi government has been providing a clean, stable administration.

Kishan appealed to people of all walks of life to support the BJP in the coming LS elections. He said that the Yatra being conducted in Telangana is meant for the nation's development.

He said that the BJP will contest all 17 Lok Sabha constituencies in TS during the LS polls and that they have decided to launch five bus yatras simultaneously to take the BJP's message to the people.

The Union Minister said that Yatras will be held from February 20 to March 1 from five places simultaneously. The



Komuram Beem Yatra will cover the Adilabad, Peddapalli and Nizamabad Lok Sabha constituencies. The Shathavahana Yatra will cover Karimnagar, Medak, Zaheerabad and Chevella Lok Sabha constituencies. The Kakathiya Yatra will cover

Khammam, Warangal and Mahbubabad Lok Sabha constituencies. The Bhagyanagara Yatra will cover Bhongir, Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Malkajgiri Lok Sabha constituencies.

The Krishnamma Yatra will cover Mahbubnagar, Nagarkurnool and Nalgonda Lok Sabha constituencies.

These Yatras will cover all Assembly constituencies and mandals. The Yatras will cover two to three Assembly constituencies each day. Roadshows will be conducted in all mandal headquarters, Assembly headquarters and district headquarters, he said.

## Tragedy: 5 teenage boys drowned in 2 incidents in AP

PNS ■ PADERU

Tragedy struck in two separate incidents as five teenage boys lost their lives in drowning accidents in the Eluru and ASR districts on Sunday.

According to police reports, a group of students had gone on a picnic to the Sitapalli stream at I.Polavaram village in the Rampachodavaram mandal of ASR district. Three of them ventured into the stream for a bath and drowned. The victims were identified as Kakara Veera Venkata Arjun (16), Andiboina Devi Charn (16), and Laveti Raman (16). Their bodies were recovered from the stream, and subsequent procedures were conducted at the area hospital in Rampachodavaram.

## BJP's giant killer Katipally instals complaint boxes in his constituency

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP's giant killer Kamareddy MLA Katipally Venkata Ramana Reddy has installed complaint boxes all over his constituency like in the Arjun starred film 'Oke Okkadu'. He installed a complaint box at Kaman in Kamareddy district headquarters on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Venkata Ramana said that he would provide complaint boxes in every village and would solve the problems of the people who file complaints through the complaint boxes. The BJP MLA appealed to the people to inform their problems to him through the complaint boxes.

It may be recalled that



Venkata Ramana Reddy demolished his own house and allowed the R&B department to widen the road in front of it. He handed over his house valued at Rs 6 crore on a 1,000 square yard plot to the R&B department.

The R&B department confirmed that the road from the Old Bus Stand to the Railway

Gate via Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple was 80 feet as per the old master plan in Kamareddy town. However, the road had shrunk to 34 feet due to encroachments.

The BJP MLA realised that there was a need to widen the road to solve traffic problems and decided to implement an action plan regarding that.

# Modi govt destroyed 'jawan', 'kisan': Kharge

PNS ■ LUDHIANA

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge Sunday hit out at the Modi government, accusing it of "destroying" 'kisan' and 'jawan' in the 10 years of its regime.

Extending his party's support to farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' call, Kharge claimed that the central government has not issued any notification on repealing the three farm laws yet.

In 2020, a large number of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh,

held a year-long protest on Delhi's border points -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- against the three now-repealed farm laws.

These laws were -- The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

Kharge was addressing the convention of Punjab Congress workers here ahead of the Lok



Sabha elections.

In his address, Kharge said former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's slogan, "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" fits best in Punjab. He said the state is

unique as it is only here that both 'jawan' and 'kisan' are found. He said that at some places there are 'kisan' but no 'jawan', and in some places there are 'jawan' but no 'kisan'. "But the Modi government destroyed both 'jawan' and 'kisan' in the last 10 years," he alleged.

He said that farmers had protested at the Delhi borders against the farm laws. "But they (the Centre) suspended the three farm laws. They did not issue any notification of repealing it," he claimed.

"Where is the notification of repealing these laws?" he asked.

The Congress president accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of calling farmers' names and describing them as 'terrorists' and 'andolan jeevis' (those who thrive on agitation) in a derogatory manner.

Referring to the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' call on February 13, Kharge congratulated farmers for heading to the national capital for their rights and extended his party's support to them.

## 'Stop referring to trial courts as 'lower courts'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asked its registry to stop referring to trial courts as 'lower courts'.

The apex court said even the record of trial courts should not be referred to as 'lower court record'.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan passed the order while hearing a plea filed by two persons challenging the Allahabad High Court verdict which dismissed their appeal against conviction and life sentence awarded to them in a murder case of 1981.

"It will be appropriate if the registry of this court stops referring to the trial courts as 'lower courts'. Even the record of the trial court should not be referred to as lower court record (LCR). Instead, it should be referred as the trial court record (TCR).

## IIT aspirant commits suicide

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 17-year-old intermediate student allegedly died by suicide at a private residential IIT coaching institute here on Saturday, police said.

The student, undergoing coaching for IIT long term at the institute, was found hanging from the fan in the hostel room by other students, who informed the principal, they said. The boy was taken to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him brought dead.

## Madagascar move to castrate child rapists prompts criticism and support

PNS ■ ANTANANARIVO (MADAGASCAR)

Madagascar's Parliament has passed a law allowing for the chemical and, in some cases, surgical castration of those found guilty of the rape of a minor, prompting criticism from international rights groups, but also finding support from activists in the country who say it's an appropriate deterrent to curb a "rape culture".

Parliament in the Indian Ocean island nation of 28 million passed the law on Feb 2 and the Senate, the upper house, approved it last week. It must now be ratified by the High Constitutional Court and signed into law by President Andry Rajoelina, who first raised the issue in December. His government proposed the law change.

Justice Minister Landy Mbolatiana Randriamanantenasa said it's



a necessary move because of an increase in cases of rape against children.

In 2023, 600 cases of the rape of a minor were recorded, she said, and 133 already in January this year.

"Madagascar is a sovereign country which has the right to modify its laws in relation to circumstances and in the general interest of the people," Randriamanantenasa said. "The current penal code has not been enough to curb the perpetrators of these offences."

Surgical castration "will always be pronounced" for those guilty of raping a child under the age of 10, according to the law's wording.

## CAA is against India's Constitution: AIMIM chief Owaisi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi on Sunday said the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was against the Constitution and his party will always oppose it.

Speaking to reporters here, the Hyderabad MP claimed that the legislation was enacted "on the basis of religion". "We were never against the

return (to India) of Hindus, Sikhs, and others who are living in Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Bangladesh. But, this CAA...it should not be seen alone...(it) must be seen with (and understood) with NPR-NRC.

The only intention of this law is to trouble Muslims, Dalits, and poor citizens of different communities. AIMIM was against it and

will always oppose it," Owaisi said.

The AIMIM chief was reacting to a query on the statement of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who said that the rules for implementing the CAA will be issued before the coming Lok Sabha polls and the process to grant Indian nationality to the beneficiaries will start soon after.

## Parties intensify...

Continued from page 1

The Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Zardari Bhutto got 54 seats, and the Karachi-based Muttahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India during the Partition, got 17 seats. Other smaller parties won the rest of the 12 seats.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the National Assembly.

Overall, 169 seats are needed to secure a simple majority out of its total 336 seats, which include the reserved slots for women and minorities which will be decided later.

The PML-N was leading the push to form the coali-

tion government on the pattern of one it set up after Khan, 71, was removed as prime minister through a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Party supremo Sharif, 74, tasked his younger brother former premier Shehbaz Sharif to hold talks on the issue.

The PML-N leaders on Sunday held a meeting with MQM-P leaders in Lahore. After an hour-long meeting, they have reached a "principle agreement" to work together in the upcoming government, according to a statement released by Sharif's party.

"We will work together in the interest of the country and public," the statement said, adding that basic points had been agreed upon by the two parties.

## Majority of staff feel difficult to...

Continued from page 1

On the contrary, 33 per cent did not advocate for such flexibility, suggesting a varying spectrum of opinions on this matter, it added.

"As we navigate the transition from remote work to the traditional office, our recent report reflects a diverse range of sentiments among employees." "While some express concerns about challenges associated with this shift, others showcase resilience and confidence in adapting to the renewed office environment. However, differing opinions exist within the workforce, emphasising the need for flexibility," Genius Consultants Chairman and Managing Director R P Yadav said.

## Cong to expose BRS...

Continued from page 1

The Congress government has released white papers on Telangana's finances and the power sector. Now the Congress government is going to release a white paper on the Irrigation

Department on February 12, that is, on Monday. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy organised a meeting of all Congress MLAs in the Praja Bhavan. Uttam gave a PowerPoint presentation to the

## Why is KCR not attending...

Continued from page 1

However, people ensured the victory of the Congress.

Beerla Ilaiah said that KCR allowed Andhra Pradesh to

loot water belonging to Telangana. He said that KCR is engaged in unethical politics and that once again he is trying to engage in sentiment politics like in the past.

Beerla Ilaiah said that Chief

Minister Revanth and Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy have explained how much Krishna River water is being used by Telangana in United Andhra Pradesh.

Mahesh Kumar Goud said that Ministers had shown the injustices meted out to Telangana region regarding waters from 2014. He said that the government would release a white paper on Krishna

waters on Monday and added that KCR looted thousands of crores in the name of projects.

Aadi Srinivas alleged that KCR is trying to confuse people once again in the name of KRMB. He said that Ministers have explained clearly as to how the Telangana region was subjected to injustice in project waters after the formation of the Telangana state.

KCR allowed AP to loot

Telangana's share even though the projects are in dead storage. The Congress government did not hand over projects on the Krishna River to KRMB but the previous BRS government handed over the projects to KRMB. He said that the Congress government asked the ENC to set the condition that as per the vigilance report on Kaleshwaram and ENC they have resigned.



TO PROVIDE BETTER HEALTHCARE SERVICE

# Govt strengthening Arogyasri & hospitals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha on Sunday said that the government is strengthening Arogyasri and government hospitals to provide better healthcare services to people.

Addressing a press conference, Narasimha said, "The government enhanced the number of ailments being treated under Arogyasri. Approximately 18,000 procedures are being treated under Arogyasri and the rates have been revised with an objective to strengthen Arogyasri and government hospitals and provide better services to common man. The Chief Minister is very keen to implement digital health cards."

Speaking at the inauguration of the latest branch of Prasad Hospitals at Pragatinagar, Managing Director Dr K Suma Prasad said, "It gives me immense pleasure in continuing Dr Prasad's vision of delivering world-class healthcare at



affordable prices, which he did through the Sridevi Nursing Home. Later, we started Prasad's Hospital at Nacharam, a 120-bed multi-specialty hospital. I have been practising infertility clinic in Kukatpally for over 15 years now, and I am happy to provide all my patients a very holistic environment for all their healthcare needs. Now we are launching this 150-bed hos-

pital at Pragatinagar. This hospital will be accessible to patients with modern facilities and services. Our next venture will be the Prasad's hospital at Manikonda, which will start providing services in another six months. Our main objective is affordable and highest standard care, accessible to common man. Prasad's hospitals is recognised by Arogyasri,

CGHS, EHS and Central and State government schemes."

K Naveen Kumar (MLC), Shambirpur Raju (MLC), Dr Ranjith Reddy (MP), Arekapudi Gandhi (MLA), Madhavaram Krishna Rao (MLA), KP Vivekananda (MLA), B Laxma Reddy (MLA) and Vikram Reddy attended the inauguration ceremony.

## CAPF constable exam to be held in Telugu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The constable recruitment examination in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) began in 13 regional languages including in Telugu. The examination is being conducted from February 10 - March 7.

Around 48 lakh candidates are appearing in 128 cities across the country. In addition to Hindi, it is the first time the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to conduct the exams in 13 regional languages.

The question papers are being prepared in the following 13 regional languages: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Manipuri and Konkani in addition to Hindi and English.

The MHA and Staff Selection Commission (SSC) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate the conduct of the examination in the 13 regional languages in addition to Hindi and English and the latter has issued a notification regarding it.

# Dakshin Bharat Sanskritik Kendra to be set up in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy said that over the last 10 years the Government of India has endeavoured to ensure that our cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is preserved, protected and propagated for future generations. One of the mandates of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture and an apex body in the field of performing arts, is the preservation and promotion of this vast intangible cultural heritage of India's diverse culture expressed in forms of music, dance and drama. To further promote the rich cultural heritage of South India, the Ministry of Culture now intends to set up a regional centre of Sangeet Natak Akademi in Hyderabad that will be known as Dakshin Bharat Sanskritik kendra.

The Union Minister stated, "Matter of pride that South India's rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage that is renowned globally will be further strengthened through this dedicated South India Cultural Centre of the Sangeet Natak Akademi."

The akademi has no pres-



**One of the mandates of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture and an apex body in the field of performing arts, is the preservation and promotion of this vast intangible cultural heritage of India's diverse culture expressed in forms of music, dance and drama.**

ence in South India so far. The centre is envisaged for the promotion research and documentation of music, folk and tribal arts, theatre and puppetry and will be developed as a state-of-the-art regional centre and a leading cultural space that would foster the cultural growth and performative milieu of the State.

Further, the Ministry of

Culture, Government of India, commemorated the 100th birth anniversary of the legendary musician par excellence, freedom fighter and Padma Awardee Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao through year-long celebrations starting in December 2022 and culminating in December 2023.

Keeping the contributions of Ghantasala in mind, the Sangeet Natak Akademi under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India has proposed the construction of an auditorium that shall be known as "Bharat Kala Mandapam" within the "Dakshin Bharat Sanskritik kendra" at the CCRT Campus in Madhapur, Hyderabad.

The foundation stone for the Bharat Kala Mandapam auditorium and the inauguration of the South India Cultural Centre of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Dakshin Bharat Sanskritik Kendra will be performed on Monday, February 12 at 5 pm at Shilpa Kala Vedita, Hitech City, Hyderabad and will include a cultural programme that will celebrate the contributions of Ghantasala. Former Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu and Minister G Kishan Reddy will inaugurate the Centre on February 12.

## City students win Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards



Vivaan, Ishan and Haasini

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Three students from Manthan School, Hyderabad, have received Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards to acknowledge their exceptional performance in the March 2023 Cambridge International Education examination series. They have received their 'Top in the World awards' in the ceremony hosted at The Lalit, Mumbai on Sunday.

The Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards programme celebrates the success of students who have taken Cambridge examinations in over 40 countries around the world. The students who won the competition have excelled in the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examinations.

Cambridge qualifications equip students with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to thrive in and outside the classroom, at university, and beyond. The qualifications are recognised and valued by leading universities worldwide. Haasini and Ishan

received awards for being Top in the World in Cambridge IGCSE Economics, and Vivaan received two awards - Top in the World in Cambridge IGCSE Mathematics (without coursework) and Top in the World in Cambridge IGCSE Information and Communication Technology. Ruchika Upadhyay, the Vice-Principal and Head of Academics and Social Studies at Manthan, said that the awards recognised the talent and commitment of both learners and staff. She said, "Receiving these awards is a credit to the diligence, determination, and intellect of our teachers and students. All the best for your future endeavours."

Poulami Ghosh, Manager of South India, Cambridge International Education, said, "Congratulations to Cambridge learners and teachers at Manthan School who have worked so hard to achieve tremendous success in Cambridge exams. With these Cambridge qualifications, students are well-prepared for their next steps and all the exciting opportunities that lie ahead. I wish you all the very best for the future."

## TSRTC gears up for Sammakka Sarakka Jatara

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) is making arrangements for the Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara in Medaram. TSRTC Managing Director VC Sajjanar has reviewed it two times. In 2022, around 20 lakh devotees used TSRTC buses. This year, TSRTC has estimated that around 30 lakh passengers would be visiting the shrine.

A TSRTC official said that after the implementation of the Mahalakshmi scheme, passenger traffic has increased in buses. In view of the huge rush to Medaram, for the first time, around 1,000 women constables will be deployed at the bus stops to prevent chain-snatching incidents and other illegal activities at the bus stops.

For a week, from February 18 to 25, TSRTC has planned to run 6,000 buses. There are five parking places that have been arranged for the buses. Out of the 6,000 buses, 1,500 private buses are likely to be



deployed for the Jatara. The special buses would commute from 51 traffic-generating points. The official mentioned that most of the passengers would come from the erstwhile Khammam, Warangal, Karimnagar and Adilabad districts. So in view of the traffic, TSRTC is preparing tents and water facility at the traffic points. TSRTC is taking all measures for pilgrims to reach the Medaram Jatara safely. The corporation has already set up

a temporary bus stand in an area of 55 acres in Medaram. Last time, it was 40 acres. There are 47 railings with a length of 7 km. In 2022, 40 queues were arranged.

Around 15,000 TSRTC employees would be deployed for the Medaram jatara. Accommodation work is underway for them. Approximately 10 teams will be working for maintenance, food, parking, boarding and other facilities.

GEORGE REDDY, GADDAR'S HISTORY NOT SHOWN

## Student unions obstruct laser show at Osmania

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police arrested the leaders of the various student unions for trying to obstruct the laser show on Sunday at Osmania University. The university has been conducting laser shows every Saturday and Sunday through dynamic lighting and

sound system at 6pm and exhibiting the history of eminent personalities.

However, some student unions tried to obstruct the show alleging that the organisers are not exhibiting the history of George Reddy and Gaddar.

Tension prevailed for some

time at Osmania University, when the students protested. The police entered the scene and detained the student leaders. The student leaders raised slogans chanting 'Johar Gaddaranna...Johar George Reddy'. The police shifted the student leaders to the police station.

## Four booked for trespassing confectionary

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Madhuranagar police on February 10 booked a group of people for trespassing into Agra Sweets at Jaya Prakashnagar.

In his complaint Dinesh Kachwa, owner of Agra Sweets, stated that a group of persons including Dinesh Kachwa, owner of Agra Sweets, stated that Bajrang, Babul, Krishna and others, along with the a woman advocate, trespassed into the shop and threatened the employees.

A case was registered and the matter is under investigation.

## 69.3 million cats and dogs homeless in India: Study

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

About 69 per cent (69.3 million) of cats and dogs in India are homeless as per the largest ever international study on pet homelessness - 'State of Pet Homelessness Project' released by a global coalition of animal welfare experts in partnership with Mars Petcare India on Wednesday. The project sets out to understand the scale of pet homelessness in 20 markets, and factors that contribute to pets being on the streets or in shelters, shining a light on the needs of a sizable hidden population of pets. The report reveals that one in three pets are homeless in the world, estimating almost 362 million pets are still waiting to find a home. The global average of homeless pets across 20 markets is pegged at 35 per cent of the total dog and



cat population.

The findings from India reveal a stark picture with 69 per cent of all cats and dogs without a home. Most homeless pets (60.5 mn) in India are living on the streets, while others (8.8 mn) are in shelters waiting to find a home. In India, 2,565 experts were interviewed from urban (1,402) areas and rural (1,163) areas for the Project. The project also included interviews with pet professionals from nine metro and non-metro cities in the

country. About 60.5 million (71 per cent) dogs live on the street or in shelters in India, accounting for approximately 39 per cent of the global homeless dog population. 8.8 million cats live on the street or in shelters, accounting for 4.25 per cent of the global homeless cat population. While adoption from shelters is still low, 53 per cent of respondents from urban and rural areas would recommend adopting from shelters in the future.

## Illegal immigrant's prostitution ring uncovered in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police in Hyderabad have apprehended a Bangladeshi woman who had entered India illegally and was indulging in prostitution.

Police have also arrested a couple which had given the woman shelter and used her for flesh trade. The 22-year-old Bangladeshi had illegally entered India two months ago and reached Hyderabad via Kolkata and was staying at a house in Chandrayangutta area in the city.

The foreign national's illegal stay came to light when she went to a customer without informing the couple, resulting in a fight between

them. The police investigation revealed that Sheikh Sania (27), whose mother is a Bangladeshi and father in India, had many contacts in Kolkata. She had a love marriage with one Mohammed Salman (24), a worker at a garments shop, and the couple was staying in Chandrayangutta.

Sania told police that she came in contact with a Bangladeshi woman Akhter (22) on a chatting app used by Bangladesh and Myanmar nationals. They became friends and the Bangladeshi woman enquired with her if she could earn some money in Hyderabad. When Sania told her that she can earn Rs10,000 a month by work-

ing as a maid and Rs 20,000 through prostitution, the Bangladeshi woman replied she is ready for any work to make money.

After illegally crossing the border to enter India, she reached Kolkata and from there boarded a train to Secunderabad. Sania and her husband picked her up from the railway station and brought her to their house. They then started using her for prostitution. Sania used to accompany her to customers and bring her back. On February 9, when Sania had gone to her neighbour's house, the Bangladeshi woman received a call on the former's mobile phone. A customer wanted her to come

to Attapur. She took an auto-rickshaw and reached the location.

Meanwhile, Sania started looking for Akhter and on not finding her checked her mobile phone. She called the number from which the last call was received. The person told her that Akhter had come to Attapur. The couple reached there and had an argument with Akhter. The Bangladeshi woman snatched the mobile phone from Sania's hand and dialled 100 to inform the police.

Subsequent investigations revealed that Akhter has a husband and two children in Bangladesh. Police registered a case against the trio and took up investigation.



# KCR should apologise to people before setting foot in Nalgonda

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has insisted that former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao should enter Nalgonda only after tendering his apology to people.

Addressing a media conference at his camp office here on Sunday, Venkat Reddy said that KCR did nothing to develop Nalgonda district. Moreover, the BRS had given a short shrift to the district.

Venkat Reddy said that KCR failed to keep up his word to the people that he would ensure completion of Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC). KCR should rub his "nose to the ground" (tender apology) before stepping into the district.

KCR should address the gathering only after tendering an apology to the people of the district, he demanded.

The Congress, in a novel way of registering its protest, would place a chair with a pin towel on it, at the venue of the public meeting. It would remind KCR of his promise that he would sit in a chair and ensure completion of SLBC.

Speaking on the Vote-on-Account budget, the Minister described it as a comprehensive exercise to ensure that all sectors get allotment. Besides giving priority to the welfare and development, the Congress government is committed to development of all



Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy addressing a media conference in Nalgonda on Saturday

## Minister lays foundation for Hanuman statue

Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkata Reddy and Municipal chairman Burri Srinivasa Reddy on Sunday performed bhumi puja for installing an 18-feet tall Lord Hanuman statue on the Lion's Club premises here.

Venkat Reddy said that economic self-development programmes would be taken up by further upgrading the skills of member of self-help groups in preparing useful goods recycling the waste materials. A project to develop skills of the unemployed was launched, he said.

Further, he said that he would implement several income generating programmes for women on his own and also on behalf of the government for women of his constituency and also those in the district.

The Minister announced release of Rs 15 lakh out of his own funds for the purchase of a machine that manufactures tea cups using agricultural waste. In all, 20 products made out of waste material have been put on display at the expo.

Under Maha Lakshmi Scheme, so far 17 crore

travelled by RTC buses. The Gruhalakshmi scheme is going to be implemented in two months, he said.

The scheme to provide LPG connection for Rs 500 would be launched in 10-15 days. Measures have been initiated to impart new courses to SC and ST students of Mahila Degree College, he said.

District Collector Dasari Hari Chandana felt that women would be able to achieve economic self-sufficiency by taking up income-generating schemes. She assured the Self-Help groups that the district administration would give fillip to the schemes meant for them.

DRDA project director Kalindi spoke. Local bodies additional collector Hemant Kesav Patil, RDO Ravi, MEPMA project director and others took part. The Bangalore-based organisation titled Head Holdup High has been imparting training to women in preparing products using waste material and purchases goods manufactured by them under a buy-back facility.

Venkat Reddy said that KCR failed to keep up his word to the people that he would ensure completion of Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC). KCR should rub his "nose to the ground" (tender apology) before stepping into the district.

all sectors, he said.

The present budget was only vote-on-account budget. The full budget would be presented in the State only after the Centre presents the full budget, he explained.

The budget has made allocation to repay the loans borrowed by the previous BRS regime, he said, adding that no leader has no right to criticise the current budget. He called criticism voiced by former Ministers T Harish Rao and KTR as hollow.

Venkat Reddy suggested that one and all take part on the debate on Kaleswaram and Medigadda projects. It was KCR and Harish Rao who affixed their signatures endorsing entrusting the Krishna River projects to the Centre. They signed relevant KRMB files. He called KCR as the one who came to power duping the people of the state. He criticized KCR for claiming to have brought statehood to Telangana by undertaking fake fasts.

# Rajgopal Reddy calls upon people to boycott BRS public meeting

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MLA from Munugode Komatireddy Rajgopal Reddy on gave a call to the people to boycott the BRS party's public meeting to be held on February 13 in Nalgonda. He appealed to the people cutting across political affiliations to spur the BRS party's call to people to attend the public meeting.

Rajagopal Reddy alleged that the former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao signed an agreement to hand over the projects in Krishna basin to the Centre and is now intentionally making allegations against the Congress government. He wondered there was greater amount of betrayal than this.

While speaking to the media at Chanduru on Sunday,



Rajgopal Reddy alleged that KCR, who turned south Telangana as desert, is now organising a public meeting to provoke the sentiment among the people. He questioned KCR, who failed to complete the Nalgonda projects even though he was in power for 10 years, to tell whether he was

ashamed of organising a public meeting.

The MLA slammed KCR saying that the people did not get justice in getting R&R Package to the land oustees. He said that there is no clarity till now on the water to be brought to Dindi Lift Irrigation Project from Palamuru-Rangareddy project from which way.

Rajagopal Reddy recalled that the former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao assured that he would complete the SLBC project by sitting in a chair at the project site and KCR also assured that he will complete the Shivanna Gudum project. However, KCR colluded with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and extended cooperation to the latter to take the water to APA

## NEWS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

# Jagan to intensify poll campaign from Feb 16

YSRCP likely to release manifesto on February 18

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As the 2024 election season looms, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy of the ruling YSRCP has positioned himself as a frontrunner in candidate selection, aiming to secure victory under any circumstances. Amidst reports of some sitting MLAs and MPs being sidelined, causing internal strife within the party, CM Jagan has initiated the 'Siddham' programme to address concerns among party leaders and activists statewide.

The electoral campaign is set to kick off on February 16 with the YSR 'Cheyutha' programme, followed by the 'Siddham' final meeting in Anantapur on February 18, where the manifesto will be unveiled. Subsequent events include the release of input subsidies to farmers in Annamayya district on February 21, the launch of YSR e-BC Nestam third phase in Kurnool on February 24, and the release of Vidya Deevana fourth quarter in Guntur on February 27. The second phase of Vasithi Deevana is scheduled for release in Sathya Sai district on March 5, with the final Cabinet meeting slated for March 6.

Expected to be released in the third week of February, the election notification signals CM Jagan's readiness for an intense campaign, scheduled from March 7 to April 14, spanning 120 constituencies and 21 parliamentary segments with three meetings per day for 40 days.

**Confident of a prolonged tenure for the YSRCP, CM Jagan is strategically selecting candidates, aiming to secure a continued grip on power. Analysts suggest that the continuation of existing welfare schemes in the party's manifesto could bolster its electoral prospects, though proposed additions such as free bus travel for women may pose fiscal challenges.**



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In preparation for the polls, CM Jagan has reportedly devised a comprehensive action plan, intending to immerse himself in public engagements from February 16 to April 14. Despite discontent among some sitting MLAs, MPs, and aspirants over ticket distribution, CM Jagan has been personally engaging with each aspirant to mitigate tensions and ensure party cohesion.

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schemes in the party's manifesto could bolster its electoral prospects, though proposed additions such as free bus travel for women may pose fiscal challenges.

Reflecting on past electoral strategies, political analyst Kommineni Srinivas noted similarities to previous elections, emphasising the importance of sustaining and adopting successful welfare schemes to maintain public support. As the electoral landscape takes shape, CM Jagan's meticulous planning and outreach efforts indicate a calculated approach to both governance and electioneering, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between the government's achievements and the party's electoral prospects.

# TDP representation in Rajya Sabha set to end after March

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

**With the terms of Vemireddy Prabhakara Reddy (YSRCP), CM Ramesh (BJP), and Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar (TDP) set to expire by April 2, the Election Commission is expected to issue a notification for elections to fill these vacant seats by the end of February or the first week of March. Given the numerical supremacy of YSRCP in the Legislative Assembly, these three positions are all but assured to bolster the party's representation. This will elevate YSRCP's tally in the Rajya Sabha to 11, securing all seats in the state quota and leaving TDP with no representation**

In a historic turn of events for the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the party will face an unprecedented absence in the Rajya Sabha after March 2024. The ruling YSRCP is poised to secure all three vacant Rajya Sabha seats, leveraging its dominance in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly.

The decline of TDP has been gradual since Chandrababu Naidu assumed leadership from its revered founder, Dr. NT Rama Rao.

This impending absence marks a significant setback for the party, symbolizing its diminishing influence in the upper house. With the total Rajya Sabha membership capped at fewer than 250, the current count stands at 245, with 233 members elected by state legislators and 12 nominated by the President. Notably, the state quota accounts for 11 members.

Ahead of the 2019 elections, YSRCP held two seats while TDP held nine in the Rajya Sabha. However, the landscape shifted dramatically in the 2019 state elections, with YSRCP securing a commanding victory,

clinching 151 legislative seats with a staggering 50 per cent of the votes, relegating TDP to a mere 23 seats and a resounding defeat.

In a strategic manoeuvre to counter the ruling BJP at the Centre and navigate ongoing legal challenges, Chandrababu Naidu orchestrated the defection of Sujana Chaudhary, CM Ramesh, Garikapati Mohan Rao, and TG Venkatesh—all elected to the Rajya Sabha under the TDP banner—to the BJP.

Consequently, the Election Commission conducted elections in 2020 to fill the vacancies left by the defections, resulting in three seats for TDP and one for YSRCP from the state quota.

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# TS govt declares Feb 15 holiday to honour Sant Sevalal Maharaj

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The state government has taken a key decision by declaring a holiday on February 15 in Telangana. The Telangana government has declared on February 15 as an optional holiday. The 15th of this month is the birth anniversary of Sant Sevalal Maharaj, the deity of Banjara.

To this extent, Telangana State Minister Komatireddy Venkata Reddy discussed this matter through the media.

Speaking on this occasion,

the Minister assured that a statue of Sant Sevalal would be installed in Telangana capital Hyderabad by next year's Jayanti.

He said that the Congress government in Telangana is committed to the development of all communities in the state, and the state government is also taking special measures for the development of tribals.

Former MLC Ramul Naik asked the government to install a statue of Sevalal Maharaj on Tank Bund in Hyderabad.

Minister Komatireddy Venkatareddy responded on this occasion.

Sant Sevalal was born on February 15, 1739. He was a great social reformer and spiritual teacher. Sant Sevalal was a devotee of Jagadamba. Sant Sevalal Maharaj was a celibate. He gained fame with his unique teachings. Sant Lal fought many battles for the rights of the Banjaras, the Nizam and the rulers of Mysore. Sant Sevalal played an important role in the struggle especially in the 18th century.

# Jail warden attempts suicide in front of in-laws' house

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Protesting against his wife refusing to divorce him, warden of a jail here on Sunday made a bid to commit suicide by slitting his throat on the road in front of his in-laws' house at Ramannapeta village of the district in full view of the public.

The locals immediately came to his rescue and sent him to the local hospital with the help of an ambulance service. His condition was stated to be critical due to heavy loss of blood.

He was identified as Sama Kaladhar Reddy, who works as warden at the jail here.

According to reports, he married the daughter of Gaddam Raji Reddy of Ramannapeta. Initially, every thing was fine and the couple lived happily.

None knew what transpired

between the husband and wife. Later, she left her husband and started living with her parents for a long time and refusing to go back to live with her husband.

As his wife was in no mood to listen to him and not willing to go back to him, Kaladhar Reddy took the extreme step on Sunday.

He decided that it was better for him to divorce his wife as she is not likely to come back to live with him.

He sought divorce from her. His wife, who is living with her parents, is refusing to divorce him. Kaladhar Reddy alleged that his wife is torturing him by not living with him and also not divorcing him. A highly-agonised Kaladhar Reddy wants to decide the matter either this way or that way and made a bid to commit suicide by slitting his throat in public view.

# Asifabad candidate tops Group-4 exam

PNS ■ ASIFABAD

In the Group-4 services, Sriram Sivakrishna of Asifabad town emerged as top scorer in, securing a total of 220.458 out of the total 300 marks.

He claimed to have prepared for the recruitment test accessing information on You Tube and Google and other related channels. He claimed that his objective is to secure Group-1 job. He is the eldest of the two sons of Sriram Satyanarayana and Vanisri. His father works as a teacher in Sisu Mandir school. He graduated from Basara IIIT and obtained a B Tech degree in EEE.

Later, he worked about a year in Infosys and left the job to secure a government job.

Besides the Group-4, he is also preparing for Group-1 Mains examinations. Though the examination has been cancelled, he was not disappointed but focused on preparing for other exams.

He passed the SCCL recruitment test and secured 12th position at the state level. For some time, he has been working in SCCL mines. While in that job, he prepared for the Group-4 examinations.

He was felicitated by his school teachers at a programme here on Sunday.

Gundeti Koteswar, principal of Sri Saraswathi Shishumandir-Asifabad, said Shivakishna had brought recognition to the district, his parents and the school as well.



# Yet another girl commits suicide in Social Welfare hostel

PNS ■ SURYAPET

A second-year Intermediate student Daggupati Vaishnavi was found hanging in a room in the Scheduled Castes Welfare residential college at Imampet in Suryapet district on Saturday night. The student's death by suicide came close on the heels of suicide by two class 10 girls Kodi Bhavya and Gade Vaishnavi at a Social Welfare Hostel in Bhongir on February 4 in Bhongir.

As for the suicide by the girl, the hostel authorities said that Vaishnavi participated in a farewell party on Saturday evening. She shared the details of the farewell party celebrations with her mother on a WhatsApp video call, the authorities claimed. Vaishnavi abruptly left party at the end of the farewell and went into her room. She hanged herself from a ceiling fan in her room. Her parents raised doubts over their daughter's death. They suspected foul play. They expressed the suspicion that the authority were portraying murder as suicide. The police registered a case and an investigation is underway.

## BSP demands Rs 1 crore ex gratia for Vaishnavi's parents

PNS ■ SURYAPETA

Bahujan Samaj Party chief RS Praveen Kumar expressed his solidarity with the protesting parents of the second-year Intermediate student D Vaishnavi, who committed suicide at the residential school here on Sunday. The parents staged a sit-in on the road in front of the residential school here. Death of Vaishnavi was shrouded in mysterious, he said. The incident came on the heels of alleged suicide of two class 10 girls in Bhongir social welfare hospital.

The parents of students are worried about the safety of their wards in social welfare hostels. He wondered why the suicides of students did not figure in discussions on the floor of

the State Legislative Assembly.

The Chief Minister should respond immediately and announce an ex-gratia of Rs 1 crore to each of the bereaved families. He also demanded a government job to a family member. Meanwhile, tension prevailed at Imampet with the Vaishnavi's family members staging a protest on Penpahad road in front of the residential school. Relatives and students' unions expressed their solidarity with the protesting parents. They raised slogans against the residential college and vowed not to move from there till justice was not done to the family. Movement of vehicular traffic has been affected on the Pen Pahad road because of the protests.

# Hyd tourist killed in paragliding accident in Kullu

PNS ■ KULLU (HP)

A tourist from Hyderabad died in a paragliding accident on Sunday in Himachal's Kullu district, police said on Sunday. A tourism officer said the accident may have happened due to a "human error".

A paragliding pilot has been arrested and a magisterial inquiry has been ordered

into the incident, the officer said.

According to preliminary reports, the pilot allegedly failed to properly secure the safety belt of the tourist.

Speaking to PTI, tourism officer, Kullu Sunaina Sharma said investigations suggest that a "human error" led to the unfortunate accident. She said the site and equipment were approved, the pilot was regis-

tered and there were no weather-related issues. Paragliding activities have been suspended in the area, she added. A case under IPC sections 336 (act endangering personal safety of others) and 334 (voluntarily causing hurt) has been registered and the pilot has been arrested, the official said. A magisterial inquiry has also been ordered into the incident, she added.



INDIA CORNER

## 5 killed, 15 injured in two road accidents in Odisha

At least five people were killed and 15 others injured in two separate road accidents in Odisha on Sunday. In the first incident, four people were killed and nine injured when a pick-up van carrying them collided head-on with a truck on NH-49 near Lakhanpur in Jharsuguda district around 10.30 am, a police officer said. The coal-laden truck overturned after hitting the pick-up van. The injured passengers were taken to Lakhanpur Community Health Centre. Later, the seriously injured were shifted to the district headquarters hospital, Jharsuguda, the officer said. Police sent the bodies for autopsy and initiated an investigation. The second accident took place near Aradi Chhak in Bhadrak district in the early hours of Sunday, another police officer said. One person died while six others were critically injured, he said. The accident happened when a vehicle carrying passengers from Puri to Balasore collided head-on with a truck.



## Landslide early warning system likely to set up in Odisha

The Odisha government is planning to set up a user-friendly landslide early warning system (EWS) in Gajapati district as a proactive measure, officials said on Sunday. A team of seven experts from Coimbatore-based Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham's World Centre of Excellence on Landslide recently visited landslide-prone Gajapati district to conduct a comprehensive study on the causes of landslides and potential mitigation measures, including setting up a user-friendly landslide EWS. During their two-day field visit, the expert team surveyed the most vulnerable areas for landslides, including Baraghara and Madha in Rayagada block of the district. The district administration has identified 139 sites highly susceptible to landslides across six blocks in the southern Odisha district. The experts conducted assessments on various factors such as topography, landscape pattern, soil textures, vegetation, slope percentage, rainfall trends, rock types, agriculture patterns, and the location of water bodies.



## 17-year-old stabbed in Delhi, 5 juveniles apprehended

Five juveniles have been apprehended in connection with the stabbing of a 17-year-old boy in central Delhi's Patel Nagar area, an official said on Sunday. The incident took place when the boy was returning home after tuition on Friday night. The call about it was received at the police control room at 9:45 pm, police said. The official said that a team was dispatched to the spot and the boy was rushed to a hospital for treatment for stab injuries. "He told police that when he was returning home, seven to eight boys thrashed him and stabbed him. Our teams apprehended five minors later," the official said. The official said that during questioning, the accused told police that they had an argument with the boy a few days ago. "We have recovered the knife used for the crime. An FIR under sections 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered. Further investigation into the matter is underway," said the officer.



# BJP will get 370-plus seats in LS polls: PM

PNS ■ JHABUA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he is confident the BJP will cross the 370 seats-mark in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, and even the opposition leaders in Parliament are saying the ruling coalition will get more than 400 seats. Addressing a public meeting of tribal community members in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, PM Modi ((donning a tribal waistcoat)) said the Congress was anti-tribal and thought of villages, farmers and the poor only during elections. He also said he had got overwhelming love from the people as he visited temples associated with Lord Ram in the south of the country. Aware of their imminent

## 'Slams Cong for 'loot and divide'



**He also said he had got overwhelming love from the people as he visited temples associated with Lord Ram in the south of the country**

defeat, the Congress and its allies are resorting to last-ditch tactics, the PM said, adding that 'loot and divide is the motto of the Congress. The Congress and other opposition leaders abuse him because he is working for the

betterment of tribals and the poor, Modi said. "The Congress when it is in power indulges in loot, while out of power engineers divisions (in society) based on language, region and caste. Loot aur phoot Congress ke oxygen

chain (Corruption and politics of division are Congress' oxygen), he said. But the people know the truth about the Congress and will never let it succeed in its motives, the PM said. The Congress has drowned in its own sins and the more it will make efforts to come up the further it will slide down, the PM asserted. It got decimated in the 2023 (Assembly polls) and will be wiped out in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, he said. "The people showed the mirror to the Congress in the Assembly polls. The mood of the nation is similar in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," Modi asserted. PM Modi asked voters to ensure polling of an additional 370 votes in each booth.

## PM to distribute over 1 lakh appointment letters to recruits in govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will distribute more than 1 lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits in central government departments on Monday via video conferencing. On this occasion, the prime minister will also lay the foundation stone of Phase-I of the Integrated Complex "Karmayogi Bhavan" here. This complex will promote collaboration and synergy among various pillars of Mission Karmayogi. Prime Minister Modi will distribute more than 1 lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits on February 12 at 10:30 am via video conferencing, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said. The Rozgar Mela will be held at 47 locations across the country and recruitments .

## Govt, Oppn likely to lock horns over Centre-State row

### Karnataka Budget session begins today

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka legislature's Budget Session, which will begin on Monday, is expected to be fraught, with the Centre's alleged discrimination against the state and the accusations of corruption and poor governance faced by the Siddaramaiah-led government likely to take centre-stage. The Congress government is expected to showcase its agenda ahead of the Lok Sabha polls later this year through the Governor's address and presentation of the State Budget, while the opposition BJP and JD(S), which are set to fight the polls jointly, look to show the government in poor light by highlighting the allegations against the administration. The 10-day session, which will commence with Governor Thawarchand Gehlot's address to the joint session of both



houses of the state legislature, will see Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presenting his record 15th Budget on February 16. The session, which will conclude on February 23, is also expected to be stormy as the united opposition of the BJP and JD(S) are likely to corner the government on a host of issues, which the ruling Congress has vowed to strongly counter them. The BJP and JD(S) are expected to attack the Siddaramaiah administration,

alleging poor management of the drought situation, lack of development, deteriorating law and order situation, mismanagement of state's finances, and corruption, among other issues. Karnataka State Contractors' Association President D Kempanna's recent allegation that the former BJP administration's practice of taking 40 per cent 'commission' on government contracts continues even under the Congress dispensation because of corrupt officials.

## A few switching sides won't impact INDIA bloc

### Mamata Banerjee still part of alliance: Pilot



**He also said the BJP talking about 370 seats for itself and 400-plus for the NDA was more of "bravado and rhetoric" than a practical assessment on the ground**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI(RAIGARH)

Amid some INDIA bloc constituents switching sides to the NDA, Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Sunday said the opposition alliance is 'strong' and the BJP is attempting a "frantic rejig" of the political landscape as it is worried over the collective strength of the coalition. In an interview with PTI, Pilot also said West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee is very much part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), and expressed confidence that a way forward will be found in seat-sharing talks with her party. He also said the BJP talking about 370 seats for itself and

400-plus for the NDA was more of "bravado and rhetoric" than a practical assessment on the ground. As the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra travels through Chhattisgarh, the AICC general secretary in-charge of the state dismissed suggestions that the yatra was adversely affecting the poll preparations of the party and asserted that talks for seat-sharing with allies were going on simultaneously. "As we speak, we are finalising seat-sharing agreements with most of our allies in different states. So it is not a question of either/or. The yatra is going on but other things are being handled by the AICC leadership and the state in-charge.

## Lunch with PM: Cong backs UDF leader Premachandran

PNS ■ KANNURU(KERALA)

A day after he was criticised by the ruling CPI(M) for having lunch with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UDF MP N K Premachandran on Sunday received support from the Congress leadership in Kerala who made it clear that there was nothing wrong in accepting the invitation extended by the prime minister. Whole-heartedly backing the Kollam MP, KPCC chief K Sudhakaran and Leader of Opposition in the assembly V D Satheesan said the Marxist party was deliberately creating controversies as they had nothing else to say. Premachandran is a leader of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), an ally of the Congress-led UDF Opposition in the southern state. While jointly addressing a press conference here, the leaders said Premachandran is one of the best parliamentarians in the country and a popular MP. What was the controversy about him having lunch with the prime minister at the Parliament's canteen, Satheesan asked. "Even when Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is politically opposed, the Opposition leader and



(UDF) MLAs attend the meeting called by him. Similarly, Premachandran also received an invitation from the Prime Minister's Office," he said. While answering a question, the LoP also said the Congress party didn't criticise Vijayan when receiving Modi and saw him off during his recent visit to the state. Like the BJP, CPI(M) was also playing the trick of creating communal polarisation in the society to get votes, Satheesan further charged. Sudhakaran also criticised the ruling party for creating a row over the incident and asked whether CM Vijayan hadn't gone to meet Modi. "There is nothing wrong with Premachandran accepting the prime minister's invitation," he added. In Thiruvananthapuram, senior Congress Leader and

MP K Muralaeeharan also extended support to the Kollam MP and said if he received a similar invitation from the PMO, he would also have accepted it. Premachandran's lunch with the prime minister triggered a political row in Kerala on Saturday, with the ruling CPI(M) taking a dig at him pointing out his "closeness" with Modi. The Kollam MP was among the parliamentarians, selected from different parties, with whom PM Modi had lunch at the Parliament canteen on Friday. While Premachandran justified his accepting the invitation from the PMO saying it was a friendly meeting beyond politics, senior CPI(M) leader and Finance Minister K N Balagopal made fun of him.



## 'BJP scared of AAP, wants to defame, crush us'

PNS ■ TARN TARAN(PUNJAB)

The BJP is only scared of the AAP and wants to defame and crush it, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal alleged on Sunday. Addressing an event here to mark the recent acquisition of a power plant by the Punjab government from a private company, he also accused the Centre of withholding Rs 8,000 crore funds of AAP-ruled Punjab. "Today the BJP is scared of only one party and that is the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party). The AAP is not letting it sleep," Kejriwal said. He said in a span of 10 years, the AAP has formed governments in Delhi and Punjab, and has MLAs in Gujarat and Goa. "Wherever we fight elections, we secure many votes.

## Pawar targets BJP, says its leaders don't face ED action

PNS ■ PUNE

Veteran politician Sharad Pawar on Sunday claimed that no BJP leader has faced action from the Enforcement Directorate since the party has been in power. On the Election Commission recently recognising the faction led by his nephew Ajit Pawar as the 'real' NCP and allotting the party's poll symbol 'Clock' to his group, Sharad Pawar said such a situation has never been witnessed in the country and the people will not support such a decision. Ajit Pawar walked away with a majority NCP MLAs in the Maharashtra assembly in July last year and joined the Eknath Shinde-led state government. The EC has allotted 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as the party name for the group led by Sharad Pawar. Addressing an event here, Sharad Pawar claimed that misuse of power is evident when anyone opposes the ruling BJP. "The ED has conducted investigations across the country, with 6,000 cases registered from 2005 to 2023. But, substantial findings were obtained in 25 cases, and 85 per cent of



the cases involved political leaders from the opposition," he claimed. "Since the BJP has been in power (from 2014), no leader from the party has faced action from the ED. Moreover, investigations against BJP leaders were halted after the party came to power," he further claimed at the Aarogya Doot Abhiyan organised by his party here. Later, when reporters at a press conference asked him about the EC's decision on the NCP name and symbol, the Rajya Sabha member said he had contested his first election on the symbol of a pair of bullocks. "Thoughts and ideology are more important than any symbol, he said. "The EC's decision is surprising. Our political party was given to other people.

## El Nino weakens, raises hopes of 'bountiful monsoon'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After delivering a warm 2023, El Nino conditions are set to dissipate by June this year raising hopes of "bountiful monsoon" rains this season, meteorologists have predicted. At least two global climate agencies announced last week that El Nino, the warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean that impacts weather across the world, has started to weaken and there is a probability of La Nina conditions setting in by August. Weather scientists in India, tracking the developments closely, have said that La Nina conditions setting in by June-August could mean monsoon rains would be better this year than the last year. However, they also struck a word of caution citing the 'spring predictability barrier', considered a forecasting headache as weather models



have a harder time making accurate forecasts. Madhavan Rajeevan, former secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, said there is a good probability of La Nina developing by June-July. "Even if El Nino transitions into ENSO-neutral conditions, the monsoon this year should be better than the last year," he said. The southwest monsoon

delivers about 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall, critical for the agriculture sector that accounts for about 14 per cent of the GDP and employs more than half of its 1.4 billion population. The United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said last week that there is a 79 per cent chance that El Nino will transition to ENSO-neutral by

April-June and a 55 per cent chance of La Nina developing in June-August. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) confirmed that El Nino has started weakening. La Nina is the cyclic counterpart to El Nino. "Currently, we cannot say anything with certainty. Some models indicate La Nina, while some predict ENSO-neutral conditions. However, all models suggest an end to El Nino," D Sivananda Pai, a senior scientist at the India Meteorological Department, said. NOAA, the American national forecaster, said there was a historical tendency for La Nina to follow strong El Nino events. "The forecast team is in agreement with the latest model guidance, with some uncertainty around the timing of transitions to ENSO-neutral and, following that, La Nina,"

the US agency said. "But even if El Nino transitions into ENSO-neutral conditions, the monsoon this year should be better than last year," the senior meteorologist said. India received "below-average" cumulative rainfall of 7820 mm compared to the long-period average of 868.6 mm in the 2023 monsoon season, which was attributed to a strengthening El Nino. Assuming El Nino continues through the first half of 2024, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) earlier predicted that 2024 would be warmer than 2023, Pai said. "If La Nina develops, 2024 would not be warmer than 2023," he said. Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, said latest forecasts indicate a quick transition to La Nina by June, which could result in an on-time and bountiful monsoon.

## 'Is laying thorns, nails on farmers' path 'amritkaal' or 'anyaykaal?'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Sunday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over reports of barricading and laying of nails on roads at certain points near the Delhi border ahead of the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march. Sharing a video of nails laid on roads and multiple barricades put up to stop farmers from marching into the national capital on X, the Congress general secretary asked why the tillers were being treated in this manner. Prohibitory orders under CrPC section 144, which bars large gatherings, were imposed in the northeast district of the national capital on Sunday in view of the farmers' march on February 13, an official said



here. A large number of farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab are expected to march towards the national capital on Tuesday as part of the march organised by around 200 farm unions. "Is laying thorns-nails in the path of farmers' amritkaal or 'anyaykaal'? This insensitive and anti-farmer attitude had cost the lives of 750 farmers. Working against farmers and not even allowing them to

raise their voice what kind of government does this," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi. "The promise made to the farmers was not fulfilled neither was the MSP law made nor was the income of farmers doubled if farmers do not come to the government of their own country, where else will they go," she added. "Mr Prime Minister! Why such behaviour with the country's farmers? Why don't you fulfil the promises made to farmers," the Congress leader said. According to an order issued by Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey, farmers were likely to sit at Delhi borders till their demands were met. "Keeping in view the kind of behaviour and adamant approach farmers showed during protests in the past.



## An exhilarating term

Parliament adjourns for the last time before LS polls are held and the next Govt assumes office

As both Houses of Parliament have been adjourned sine die one last time before the general elections, it is time to reflect on the Government's achievements, challenges and legacy of the past five years. This period has been marked by significant policy reforms, legislative milestones and moments of both triumph and controversy. The concluding session of Parliament holds special significance as it serves as a crucial juncture for the Government to showcase its accomplishments and for the Opposition to hold the former accountable for its actions. Over the past five years, the Government has introduced a plethora of reforms across sectors, ranging from economy and governance to social welfare and national security. Initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and ambitious welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have left a deep impact on the nation's socio-economic milieu. However, alongside these successes,



the Government has faced its fair share of challenges and criticism. Issues such as economic slowdowns, agrarian distress, unemployment and social unrest have tested the administration's resolve and elicited strong reactions from both critics and supporters. Debates on contentious issues like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), farm laws and handling of COVID-19 pandemic have dominated parliamentary discourse. Besides, the Government's inability to take timely action to quell Manipur violence would also be a blot on its tenure. As the 17th Lok Sabha is bid farewell, the parliamentarians must assess the overall progress made and identify areas that require further attention. This

introspection is essential not only for the ruling party but for the entire political spectrum to understand the pulse of the nation and address people's aspirations effectively. Beyond legislative achievements, the last five years have witnessed significant shifts in the political landscape with coalition dynamics, rise of regional parties and evolving voter preferences shaping the electoral narrative. The general elections present an opportunity for citizens to voice their verdict on the Government's performance and chart the course for the nation. Moreover, the conclusion of the session marks the beginning of a new chapter in India's democratic journey, where the electorate will exercise its right to choose the next set of leaders to steer the country forward. It is time for political parties to engage in constructive dialogue, present their vision and earn the electorate's trust. In this transitional phase, lawmakers must uphold the principles of democracy, foster inclusivity and prioritise mass welfare. The Government's legacy will be defined not only by its legislative accomplishments but also by its commitment to upholding democratic values, promoting social justice and growth for all. As the nation embarks on the next phase of governance, let us reflect on the lessons learnt and communicate effectively to our would-be lawmaker representatives.

### PICTALK



Children fly kites in a field in the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, in Agra

PTI

## Synergise regional and national science academies

It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote science through regional media and provide regular updates

Science education in the country is at a crossroads, because of the declining trend among the new generation to pursue a career in Science. Across the country, many brilliant students move towards professional courses that fetch them a good placement soon after their studies. No one will wait 5 or 10 years to get a good placement. Even our policymakers neglect basic science education, forgetting the fact that it's the backbone for building a strong Viksit Bharat. The trend of student exodus to foreign countries is increasing. The public's initial encounter with scientific advancements often occurs through newspapers, television programs, and various other media outlets. The reduction in space or airtime allocated to Science can be viewed as a direct challenge to the field. Many media organisations prioritise commercial considerations when making decisions about content allocation. They may contribute to a lack of public awareness and understanding of scientific concepts, potentially hindering progress in scientific literacy and societal



engagement with Science. This lack of awareness leads to parental pressure on students to move away from science courses. It is where our regional science academies in the country can play a lead role in building a robust scientific force for the future. We have three national science academies in India - the Indian National Science Academy, the Indian Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences, India. Even though our National Science Academies are doing their service to promote Science, it doesn't reach every nook and corner of the country. Here, regional science academies come into the picture. Regional science academies can play a crucial role in fostering scientific advancement, education, and collaboration within specific geographic

regions. These academies are well-positioned to address and prioritize issues that are specific to a particular region. They can focus on problems related to geography, climate, biodiversity, and other factors that may vary from one region to another. By bringing together scientists and researchers from a specific region, science academies help build a strong and collaborative scientific community. This facilitates the exchange of ideas, expertise, and resources, fostering a culture of innovation and cooperation. It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote Science through regional language media channels, maintain regular interactions with journalists, and offer science updates in accessible format. Apart from science popularisation activities, many regional academies conduct studies on various topics that could affect the enhancement of Science in society, for example, student exodus to foreign countries, public perception of science and scientific research, etc. Regional academies can offer insights into

the unique challenges faced by their communities and contribute to developing informed policies that address regional needs. Regional science academies can promote diversity and inclusion in Science by supporting underrepresented groups within the region. This contributes to a more inclusive and equitable scientific community. Regional science academies' contributions to nation-building and developing scientific temper are well documented in history. In our journey towards a Viksit Bharat, we should take various regional science academies and the National Science Academies' by affiliating them to the National body. When both academies work with a common goal, it can foster significant advancements in Indian Science. By aligning their efforts and resources, these academies can synergise their strengths, expertise, and networks to tackle scientific challenges more effectively.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

## Messi confronts China in his own way

China's psychological warfare extends from visa manipulations to Messi's 'snub,' providing a taste of their own strategy in return

Last year, three Indian Wushu players i.e., Nyeman Wangsu, Onilu Tega and Mepung Lamgu, were given stapled visas to travel to China, for the World University Games. All three were proud Indian Arunachalis, and the entire Indian squad pulled out of the competition in protest of the Chinese sleight. It was reminiscent of the 2016 incident when the Manager of the Indian Badminton team, Bamang Tago, was denied a visa to travel to China - he too was an Arunachali! Much earlier in 2011, a 45-team Indian Karate team travelling to China were issued standard visas, except five members who were given stapled visas, again all Arunachalis. Chinese are past masters in psychological warfare and no domain or opportunity is too irrelevant for them to resist partaking a 'ping'. It is culturally part and parcel of their patented 'three warfare' approach where they relentlessly invoke psychological, legal, and public opinion warfare. The recurring bone of contention is the Indian State Arunachal Pradesh which expansionist China falsely claims as so-called 'South Tibet', and therefore shadow boxing on the same. It's the same pressure tactic that it applies with Taiwan and forces its athletes to compete under an unfamiliar name called 'Chinese Taipei', in Olympics and other events. Taiwanese athletes also compete under an alien flag (1981 agreement with the International Olympics Committee led a newly designed white flag with a flower outline around a sun and the Olympic rings in the middle) with an unheard flag-raising song. The Chinese are constantly looking to score a symbolic and psychological 'hit'. Therefore, with such fixation with political posturing and insinuations in everything that it does and imagines, it also leads to hallucinations or perceived indignities whenever it is on the receiving end, deliberately or inadvertently. The latest issue of a 'non-starter' by the global football superstar, Lionel Messi, whilst in Hong Kong owing to an ostensible 'swollen and painful injury' got



doubly compounded by the football icon subsequently playing in Japan, within three days thereafter. The angst against Messi started early with fans booing the 'no-show' on field (which extended to even avoiding interacting with fans or receiving the trophy). The Chinese were not amused and were seen openly questioning the intent of the player and called out what they thought was a 'deliberate and calculated snub'. All hell broke loose when just after a couple of days Messi took to the ground in Japan. As it is, China has major beef with Japan. An indignant Global Times echoed Chinese frustrations in its editorial, "The match in Hong Kong became the only one in Messi's six pre-season friendly matches on this trip where he was absent. The situation... has magnified these doubts and suspicions on the integrity of Inter Miami and Messi himself." The Chinese finally got a flavour of a dish that they so routinely serve, even if Messi who is an Argentine (which little or no sovereign stakes for or against China) is not known to make political points, unlike some other stars. This incident harks back to 2019 when the then Arsenal football club legend Mesut Ozil openly condemned China's treatment of the coun-



PERHAPS THE ONLY TIME THAT MESSI DID COME UNDER POLITICAL SUSPICION WAS WITH HIS PURPORTED MOVE TO SAUDI ARABIA EARLIER, A MOVE RIFE WITH SUSPICIONS OF SAUDIS 'SPORTSWASHING' THEIR MURKY CREDENTIALS BY LURING SPORTSMEN WITH MONEY

try's Uighur minority - the thin-skinned Chinese reacted furiously, and Arsenal club had humiliatingly buckled under pressure, offering meek clarification, "The content published is Ozil's personal opinion. As a football club, Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics". The Chinese had flexed muscle and extracted their revenge. For the Chinese, football is particularly important given its global popularity and Xi Jinping's penchant in the same reflecting with its declared aspiration to be a 'soccer powerhouse' with the stated intent of winning the Football World Cup in 2050! Perhaps the only time that Messi did come under political suspicion (indirectly again) was with his purported move to Saudi Arabia earlier, a move rife with suspicions of Saudis 'sportswashing' their murky credentials, by luring sportsmen with money. But Messi didn't move, finally. Despite a long career he has remained steadfastly apolitical and steered clear of political controversies. With a permanent house in Barcelona, Messi took no position on the contentious Catalan-independence issue, given its resonance in Barcelona region. However, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner has somehow never played against England at internation-

al level, with whom the Argentinian emotions date back to the 1982 Falkland War and Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' moment in 1986. In fact, Messi now plays for Inter Miami owned by the English star David Beckham, who had his own 'moment' against rival Argentines when he kicked their captain Diego Simeone in the crucial FIFA World Cup match of 1998. So, it is extremely unlikely that Messi would be making a political point this late in his career, and especially given the lucrative contracts he has with Chinese conglomerates. If anything, Messi has been in the news for milking his stardom by signing brand endorsements without bothering too much about the brand product or service itself. Incidentally, he had signed up with the now-in-news Byju's as their global ambassador, only to be put on hold when the company started going belly-up. Nonetheless, the Chinese are feeling insulted and aggrieved, Messi's likely innocence and apology notwithstanding. But it is a providential taste of China's own medicine. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### POWER SECTOR WOES

Sir — The government in Andhra Pradesh seems to be under complacency with the pittance of Navarathnas Scheme provided to the poor section. Though the beneficiaries are thankful for the small benefit they are equally upset over the increase in the burden imposed by an increase in the power bill. The functioning of three companies in the power sector seems to be let loose to function the way they want. Inadequate planning by distribution companies results in purchasing power from private players, who dictate unfavorable Power Purchase Agreements. This compels the distribution companies to burden consumers with charges like FPPCA I, FPPCA II, True Up Charge. Government offices' delayed power bill payments, subsidies, and unauthorized payouts of ₹1,400 crores to a private company further strain consumers, leading to unjustified extra charges of ₹500 and an unfair share of system-induced losses. To add to the woes Smart meters are going to be provided to each consumer. Each consumer has to bear the cost of it, which is likely to be around ₹13,000/- . It is to be paid in monthly instalments for a few years. The smart meter lacks consumer benefits, focusing on prepaid and dynamic tariffs that favour private entities. Prepaid setups benefit companies, while dynamic pricing confuses consumers, hindering consumption planning. Reforms prioritize profits over people's well-being, urging the government to prioritize citizens over private interests for a better quality of life.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

### INFLATION RISING

Sir — The Reserve Bank of India is trying to control the inflation rate. According to the RBI report, the inflation rate between April and December in the current financial year has been 5.5 per cent. The inflation rate is estimated to be 5.4 per cent during the entire current financial year. The inflation rate is likely to come down in the next financial year, and it may remain at 4.5 per cent.

### Well-deserved Bharat Ratna



The Bharat Ratna, the Country's highest civilian honour has been given to three distinguished personalities of the country P V Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh and Swaminathan who have made monumental contributions to the nation in different sectors. P V Narasimha Rao the 9th prime minister of India, was a statesman and distinguished scholar of our times. He held the reins of the country during a politically tumultuous time in the wake of the assassination of for-

mer Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when the nation was facing an extremely grave economic crisis and was on the brink of bankruptcy, indeed there were several challenges galore for him, the shattered Economy and several internal security problems, but with his visionary leadership he steered the country through successfully. Narasimha Rao's unmatched legacy secures his pivotal place in Indian history. Chaudhary Charan Singh dedicated his life to farmers' rights, earning the title 'champion of farmers.' A principled socialist, he advocated higher taxes for the wealthy and opposed luxury consumption. MS Swaminathan, a distinguished agricultural scientist, played a crucial role in India's transformation from a food-importing to a self-sufficient, food-exporting nation, earning him the moniker 'father of the green revolution' during challenging times marked by droughts.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

However, the efforts of the Reserve Bank of India and the claims of the government are in their place, but the bitter reality is that the food plate of the common man of the country is still expensive. This inflation is likely to increase further. In other words, the growth rate of our economy has been more than 7.5 per cent. But for the common man, economic development means that he gets relief from inflation and adequate employment opportunities. If inflation is not under control and youth are not getting employment, then the figures of economic progress have no relevance to the life of the common man.

Jahangir Shaikh | Mumbai

### GRAHAM STAINES' DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Sir — A few days ago, on January 22, residents of Manoharpur, a remote village in Keonjhar district of Odisha observed the 25th death anniversary of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons. Graham Staines had been working with leprosy patients in Odisha since his coming to India in 1965 till his death in 1999. "For 35 years, Saibo, clad in casuals with

his trademark hat, pedaled his rickety bicycle, a familiar sight in Baripada. Known for doing God's work, he cared for leprosy patients in a dedicated home on the outskirts. Tragically, Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy (6) and Philip (10), were burned alive while sleeping in their jeep in a Manoharpur forest." When Dara Singh and his followers had set fire to the vehicle, they woke up and tried to come out. But those fanatics used their long stout sticks to shove them back into the fire, till they died close to midnight of January 22, 1999. His wife Gladys Staines told television reporters, "I forgive those who have killed my husband and my two sons." After his husband's death, she continued to serve leprosy patients and managed to turn his husband's home for the wealthy into a hospital. Every year, January 22 will come and remind us about the warning signs of religious fanaticism on the road to our evolutionary progress.

Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

## A JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS AND HEALING

The Buddhist approach offers a grounded and rational way to cope with grief



The doctor was an early riser. Upon waking he hit the gym. He remained fit and in proper shape by maintaining this regimen. The medico was a noted pediatrician, his wife an eminent cardiologist. Unfortunately, their only daughter suffered from a compromised heart condition. The trio had attended a party the previous evening. It was time to drop the daughter to school and the father knocked at the door. But the cherubic girl did not respond. Life was snuffed out; tragedy had struck the family and a pall of gloom descended.

A few weeks back an old aunt had kicked the bucket. It was a double whammy for the family, and they were inconsolable. Several centuries ago, in the time of the Buddha, a woman lost her only child to the cruel hands of fate. In an anguished state she implored the Enlightened One to resuscitate the dead child. Buddha, the compassionate, agreed to perform the miracle. He asked the lady to collect mustard seeds from all the houses of the village which had never seen death or grief. The woman knocked at the doors of all the houses in the village but returned empty handed. Handling grief is a challenging task and only skillful minds can undertake this responsibility.

The doctor couple who could not save their precious child were subsumed into a cesspool of anger, guilt, sadness, pangs of loneliness, numbness, and a yearning for their beloved one. To overcome their grief and desolation, the husband, a moderate drinker, became a quotidian one and his spouse began administering herself sedatives.

Several eminent psychologists like Parker, Arewill and Worden have zeroed in on the point that those suffering from grief, need to move on from the feeling of numbness, pining, depression, a feeling of shock and despair



to the process of recovery. It is important for the grieving to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of the departed one, adjust to the environment of living without the deceased person.

Medical science has made rapid advancements such that proper diagnosis, therapy, and counselling along with proper medication can trigger the change agent in the wrecked mind. Alternatively, there are techniques like hypnosis and even providing ECT (in the worst-case scenario) to address the problem.

The Theravada Buddhist traditions have dealt with the subject of handling grief in a dynamic manner. The human mind by the process of strong internal resolution can overcome this vicissitude in life by mindfulness. The process is called Satipatthana.

The emotionally wrought can find solace and succour by becoming aware of the reality about the impermanence of events, happenings, and people. The mind should become strong to accept the reality and look ahead. There are breathing techniques like Vipassana and Sudarshan Kriya which have proven ability to transfigure the mind from a depressed state to a positive one. Both the techniques have been validated by medical science as alternative therapies and have the power to alter the thought process, bringing it to the present moment.

Several grieving souls adopt holistic measures like the breathing techniques mentioned, meditation, pranayama, yoga, chanting of mantras, being in communion with nature or seva to overcome their grief and restore normalcy in their lives. It is the recalcitrant human mind which acts as a deterrent and needs to be tamed. "Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is remaking of life," writes Anne Roiphe.

*(The writer is a CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)*

# Celebrating women in science: Recognising their achievements

Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers, including gender bias, unequal representation and limited access to opportunities

Yesterday, we celebrated the International Day of Women in Science, a day dedicated to recognising and honouring the achievements of women in the field of science. This annual event serves as a reminder of the invaluable contributions women have made to scientific progress and innovation throughout history. It is an opportunity to highlight their accomplishments, shed light on the challenges they face, and inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in science.

Recently, while presenting the interim Budget 2024, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted that female enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses



has reached 43 per cent, which is one of the world's highest figures. She said, "Female enrollment in higher education has gone up by 28 percent in ten years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 percent of enrollment—one of the highest in the world. All these measures reflect the increasing participation of women in the workforce." She also mentioned the empowerment of women through entre-

preneurship, ease of living, and dignity, mentioning, "Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs."

From historic figures like Savitribai Jyotiba Phule, who was the first female teacher of India and founded the first girls' school, to Lady Abala Bose, who was the first Indian woman to study medicine at Madras University, to Kamala Sohonie, the first Indian woman to receive a PhD in a scientific discipline, to Ayyalasomayajula Lalitha, India's first woman engineer, to Shakuntala Devi, who was popularly known as the "Human Computer," women continue to leave an indelible mark on the scientific landscape. Today, women scientists are assuming leadership posi-

tions in groundbreaking projects like Chandrayaan-3 and the Aditya-L1 solar mission, showcasing their continued influence and expertise in pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration.

The Government has taken significant strides to bolster STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, recognising its pivotal role in driving innovation, economic prosperity, and societal advancement. Initiatives like the Vigyan Jyoti Scheme, spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, are breaking gender barriers by empowering young girls in STEM fields through exposure and mentorship programs. Additionally, programmes like INSPIRE foster innovation

among students through scholarships and research opportunities, while Atal Tinkering Labs nurture creativity and problem-solving skills among school students.

The Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan promotes a culture of innovation in schools, bridging the gap between theory and real-world applications. Moreover, the government provides research fellowships and grants, digital learning resources through the National Digital Library, and skill enhancement programmes via Skill India, all aimed at nurturing a skilled workforce and fostering growth in STEM-related industries. These concerted efforts underscore the government's commitment to nurturing a robust ecosystem for scientific inquiry and tech-

nological advancement in the country.

Women in STEM in India have been steadily challenging stereotypes and contributing significantly to various disciplines. Pioneers like Dr. Tessy Thomas, known as the "Missile Woman of India," have shattered glass ceilings in fields traditionally dominated by men. Indian women researchers are excelling in areas like space technology, biotechnology, and mathematics, making remarkable advancements.

Additionally, the government's Vigyan Jyoti scheme aims to encourage young girls to pursue STEM education and careers, fostering inclusivity. Women have made groundbreaking strides in diverse scientific domains, ranging from astronomy and biology to

engineering and computer science. Their discoveries, innovations, and leadership have enriched our understanding of the world and advanced technological progress.

Women have played a pivotal role in shaping the scientific landscape, yet their contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued. By celebrating the International Day of Women in Science, we aim to rectify this imbalance and bring attention to the remarkable achievements of women scientists. It is crucial to showcase diverse role models in science to inspire young girls and women to pursue their passions and break down the barriers that still exist in the field. While progress has been made, women in science still face numerous challenges.

Gender bias, a lack of representation, and unequal opportunities persist in many scientific fields. It is essential to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in science. By providing equal opportunities, mentorship, and support, we can empower women to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to scientific advancements. Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers. By encouraging and showcasing the achievements of women in science, we hope to ignite a passion for discovery and innovation in young girls.

*(The writer is an IPS officer and the director RACE Lab, Samvedna India, views are personal)*



MONEY MATTERS

## StartupTN launches Smart Card to boost entrepreneurs

StartupTN has launched Smart Card and other new initiatives to meet the needs of aspiring entrepreneurs in the early stage of building their startup. StartupTN is backed by the Tamil Nadu government and aims to nurture a vibrant startup ecosystem in the state to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship-driven employment and economic growth. The Smart Card initiative offers a comprehensive selection of products and services at subsidised rates to entrepreneurs. Some of the services offered pertain to legal and compliance, marketing and business consulting, finance and insurance, and software and information technology, among others. Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises T M Anbarasan launched the Smart Cards at an event here recently, and gave away 10 Smart Cards to startups on the occasion. In a statement on Sunday, StartupTN said it has collaborated with various partners to provide a diverse range of products and services to equip budding entrepreneurs with essential resources and support at a reduced cost.



## Mcap of 4 most valued firms jumps Rs 2.18L cr; LIC, SBI lead

Four of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 2.18 lakh crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation and State Bank of India emerging as the biggest gainers. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and SBI were the gainers. They collectively added Rs 2,18,598.29 crore in market capitalisation. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC faced erosion from their valuation to the tune of Rs 1,06,631.39 crore. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined by 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent. Market valuation of LIC jumped Rs 86,146.47 crore to Rs 6,83,637.38 crore. The share price of LIC on Monday jumped nearly 6 per cent to hit the Rs 1,000 mark for the first time. SBI added Rs 65,908.26 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,46,365.02 crore.



## Akums Drugs files draft IPO papers with Sebi

Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The initial share-sale is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 680 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 1.86 crore shares by promoters and an existing investor, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Saturday. Those selling shares in the OFS are Sanjeev Jain, Sandeep Jain and Ruby QC Investment Holdings Pte Ltd. The company is looking to raise Rs 136 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If such placement is undertaken, then fresh issue size will be reduced. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund working capital requirements of the company, pursue inorganic growth initiatives through acquisition and for general corporate purposes.



### Close to Rs 750 cr stuck in Qatar projects: Voltas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group firm Voltas is facing a major headwind in Qatar as around Rs 750 crore has been stuck due to delays in the realisation of overdue receivables and execution timelines, said its MD and CEO Pradeep Bakshi.

In some projects, bank guarantees were "unethically" encashed by some contractors, which was an "uncalled" action to make quick money, derailing the international project business of Tata Group firm in the December quarter, he added.

"Unprecedented things are happening in that area, especially in Qatar, wherein, unfortunately, our dues are not being paid to us timely, and inordinate delays are happening. We have completed the project and handed it over, and despite that, payments are not made," Bakshi told PTI.

Voltas has already approached the Indian government for help on the issue and also approached the Embassy in Qatar.

# Govt examining FDI flow from China in Paytm firm

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said.

In November 2020, PPSL had applied for licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways. However, in November 2022, RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to resubmit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co.

Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022 with Government of India for past downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press



Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines.

An inter-ministerial committee is examining investments from China in PPSL and decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and comprehensive examination, sources said.

Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land bor-

der with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

When contacted, a Paytm spokesperson said PPSL applied for an online Payment Aggregator (PA) application for online merchants and the regulator subsequently asked

PPSL to seek necessary approvals for past downward investment and resubmit the application.

"This is part of the regular process where everybody applying for a payment aggregator licence has to get FDI approval," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson said PPSL followed the relevant guidelines and submitted all relevant documents to the regulator within the stipulated time. During the pending process, PPSL was allowed to continue with its online payment aggregation business for existing partners without onboarding any new merchants.

"Since then the ownership structure has changed. The Paytm founder remains the largest stakeholder in the company. Ant Financial reduced its stake in OCL to less than 10 per cent in July 2023. Subsequently, it does not qualify for beneficial company ownership. OCL founding promoter now holds a 24.3 per cent stake.

### PM Modi, Sri Lankan President & Mauritius PM to watch UPI services launch

PNS ■ COLOMBO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth will witness on Monday, via video conferencing, the launch of Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, it was announced here on Sunday.

The launch will enable the availability of UPI settlement services for Indian nationals travelling to Sri Lanka and Mauritius as well as for Mauritian nationals travelling to India, the Indian High Commission said in a statement.

"India has emerged as a leader in Fintech innovation and Digital Public Infrastructure. Prime Minister has placed a strong emphasis on sharing our development experiences and innovation with partner countries. Given India's robust cultural and people-to-people linkages with Sri Lanka and Mauritius, the launch will benefit a wide cross-section of people through a faster and seamless digital transaction experience and enhance digital connectivity between the countries," the statement said.

## Commissioning of India-assisted refinery in Mongolia by 2026

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mongolia's ambassador to India Dambajav Ganbold has said the India-funded green-field oil refinery project in South Gobi is on track and will be operational by 2026.

However, he acknowledged some delays from the Indian side in delivering products for the refinery plant.

"Of course, there are some delays from the Indian side in delivering the products, but overall, the project is progressing well," he told PTI. "It is crucial for our relations, and we eagerly look forward to its completion."

With a USD 1.2 billion line of credit announced by India during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mongolia in 2015, the refinery's construction has been delayed by 1.5 years due to COVID-19.

"The work on the refinery project is going well. Because of COVID, it has been delayed by one and a half years. We



believe that it will be operational by 2026," Ganbold said.

The refinery aims to reduce Mongolia's reliance on Russian oil imports. Upon completion, it will have a capacity of 30,000 barrels per day or 1.5 million tonnes annually, helping the country meet its demand for gasoline, diesel, aviation fuel, and liquefied petroleum gas.

Mongolia anticipates a visit by the Indian Prime Minister in 2025, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"We expect our President to visit India in the second half of this year, and we will celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations in 2025.

## Inflation, industrial production data, global trends to drive market trends this week

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets would take cues from the upcoming macro-economic data announcements and global trends besides keeping a watch on the trading activity of foreign investors, analysts said.

The last batch of the ongoing earnings calendar would trigger stock-specific action, traders said.

"This week, we have to deal with macroeconomic data on both the domestic and global front. Our IIP and retail inflation numbers will be released on February 12, while WPI will be released on February 14. The



US CPI numbers will be released on February 13, while their retail sales numbers will be announced on February 15.

"Amid these numbers, the movement in US bond yields and the dollar index will be watched. Apart from this, movement of crude oil and flows from institutional investors will be other important factors. The

last batch of Q3 earnings can lead to stock-specific movements," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investment Ltd.

NHPC, SAIL, BHEL, Hindustan Copper, Mahindra & Mahindra, among others would announce their quarterly earnings this week.

"This week, market will react to the global and domestic economic data, FII (Foreign Institutional Investors), DII (Domestic Institutional Investors) investment pattern, crude oil inventories, ongoing quarterly earnings, movement of the rupee against the dollar, trend in the global stock market.

### Adani Ports secures top position for climate actions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said it has secured top position for its climate actions and environmental performance in assessments done by four global rating agencies.

The assessments were done by CDP, S&P, Sustainalytics and Moody's. While the company secured leadership band' in CDP Climate Assessment 2023, it ranked first on the environmental dimension among 324 companies in the transport and transport infrastructure sector by S&P Global CSA 2023, a statement said.

## FPIs infuse over Rs 15,000 cr in debt mkt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 15,000 crore so far this month, on the back of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index along with relatively stable economy.

This followed a net investment of Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out more



than Rs 3,000 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

"The main trigger for this divergent trend in equity and debt is the high valuation in the Indian equity market and the rising bond yields in the US," V K Vijayakumar, Chief

Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, attributed the outflow from equities to the uncertainty surrounding the interest rate environment, both domestically as well as globally.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 15,093 crore in the debt markets in this month (till February 9).

With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 34,930 crore in 2024.

They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months.

FPIs infused Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October.

"The Indian debt markets witnessed a reversal in FPI flow trend last year after the announcement of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This was one of the major drivers for the robust flows from FPIs, along with relatively stable economy," Srivastava said.

JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024.

## Direct tax collection reaches 80% of revised FY24 target at Rs 15.60L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year.

"The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to 10th February, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs 18.38 lakh crore, which is

17.30 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement.

Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till February 10 of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year. This collection is 80.23 per cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24.

## LIC expects income tax refund of Rs 25,464 cr in Q4

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation of India has received an income tax refund order of Rs 25,464 crore, and it is likely to be realised during the current quarter, its chairman Siddhartha Mohanty said.

Last month, the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), Income Tax Department, issued intimation for a refund of Rs 25,464.46 crore. The refund is related to interim bonuses to policyholders in the past seven assessment years.



"We are pursuing the matter, and we are hopeful of getting a refund from the Income Tax Department during this quarter itself," Mohanty said during the post-result interview. During the quarter, he said, the Life Insurance Corporation

of India (LIC) would be launching more new products, including child protection. In the third quarter, LIC launched Jeevan Utsav, Index Plus and some more products, helping it to increase the value of new business (VNB) margin levels to 16.6 per cent.

The refund is likely to boost the bottom line of the corporation in the fourth quarter.

The state-owned insurer last week reported a 49 per cent jump in net profit to Rs 9,444 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023 against

Rs 6,334 crore in the year-ago period.

Its net premium income improved to Rs 1,17,017 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal from Rs 1,11,788 crore in the same period a year ago.

LIC's total income also rose to Rs 2,12,447 crore in the latest December quarter compared to Rs 1,96,891 crore in the year-ago period.

The LIC board has approved an interim dividend of Rs 4 per equity share of face value of Rs 10 each for FY24.



## Large-cap mutual funds garner Rs 1,287 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors flocked to large-cap oriented mutual funds with influx of Rs 1,287 crore in January, making it the highest fund infusion in 19 months, as a significant run-up in small and mid caps prompted them to book profit.

This is a huge turnaround following a net outflow of Rs 281 crore in December. Also, the quantum was 80 per cent higher than inflows of Rs 716 crore in January last year.

The latest inflow helped push the asset base of large-cap equity category by 26 per cent to Rs 3 lakh crore at January-end from Rs 2.38 lakh crore a year ago.

According to latest data by Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), equity mutual funds focused on large-cap received inflow to the tune of

Rs 1,287 crore in January. This was the highest level since July 2022, when the category saw an inflow of Rs 2,052 crore.

Given the significant run-up in small and mid caps, investors are booking some profits and rebalancing into large-caps, Kaushtubh Belapurkar, Director - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Akhil Chaturvedi, Chief Business Officer, Motilal Oswal AMC, said, "Large-caps demonstrated positive contributions in January, reversing the net outflows experienced in December 2023. This shift in trend is in line with valuation differentials among large v/s mid and small caps, suggesting that large caps or flexi caps oriented schemes may attract higher flows in the future."

# ‘Rich’ to ‘lean’, four price changes -- the deal highlights

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Petronet renewing a contract to buy 7.5 million tonnes of LNG from Qatar annually from 2029 for 20 years is the largest-ever extension of super-chilled fuel in the world, and will support India's clean energy goals, officials said.

The original 25-year deal was signed in 1999 and supplies started in 2004. Qatar has since then never defaulted on a single cargo and neither did it slap penalties under take-or-pay clause when the Indian firm did not take deliveries because prices

were too high, top Petronet officials said.

Supplies under the extended contract would start after Petronet takes deliveries of 52 cargoes it had failed to take in 2015-16 when prices had shot up sharply. While the volumes in contract have not changed, price changed four times, including the latest one when the contract extension was renegotiated.

The composition of the gas promised to be delivered has also changed. RasGas, which is now QatarEnergy, had originally signed to supply 'rich' or gas containing components of ethane and



propane that is used as feed-stock in petrochemical complexes. It supplied 5 Million Tonnes (MT) a year of LNG that contained methane (used to produce electricity,

make fertilisers, turned into CNG or used as cooking fuel), as well as ethane and propane on a firm basis and the rest on best endeavour basis.

In the revised contract agreed last week, where the price is also lower, QatarEnergy will supply 'lean' or gas stripped of ethane and propane. But Petronet officials said Qatar will continue to supply 'rich' gas as long as they don't have a facility to utilise ethane and propane. "We will continue to receive 'rich' LNG," a top company official said.

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) spent Rs 30,000 crore on building a petrochemical complex at Dahej in Gujarat to use ethane and propane from LNG coming

from Qatar, to make products that are used to manufacture plastics to detergents.

"They (ONGC) will continue to get those components," another official said.

In 1999, in response to a tender, RasGas had offered to sell LNG to Petronet LNG Ltd, a joint venture of state-owned oil firms, headed by the Secretary in the Oil Ministry, at USD 2.53 per million British thermal unit at a crude oil price of USD 20 per barrel. The LNG price was to rise or fall by 2 cents per mmbtu in tandem with every dollar movement in oil price.



Actor Varun Sood, who is currently the talk of the town for his much-deserved OTT debut with *Karmma Calling*, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing his feelings on his journey being a slow process, his fanboy moment, staying away from social media, and more.



TEJAL SINHA

## Varun Sood: The ‘thirst trap’ will be constant, so will be my private life

Undeniably, Varun Sood is the heartthrob of the industry, and one cannot stop adoring him. Lately, the actor has been the talk of town with his performance in the Raveena Tandon-starrer *Karmma Calling*, unleashing his charm as Ahaan Kothari. From initially playing a cameo in *Jug Jugg Jeeyo* to a remarkable main cast in *Karmma Calling*, he enthuses, “I’m just extremely grateful for every opportunity I have got. I’m glad that it’s been a slow process because it gave me time to learn and also be humble about every step that I climbed.”

Basically, for the series, it was the opportunity that drew him to the project. For an outsider, he says, “We need people to believe in us, and I knew this was a really big show, and the audience will also be massive. The audience is what makes an artist, and I took this as an opportunity for the audience to accept me as an actor.”

The biggest star of the show is Raveena Tandon. As one of her co-stars, his biggest fanboy moment was when he saw her picture with the rest of the cast during the look test. And then, “When I stepped outside the room, there she was. I was in awe. Someone who I have admired all my life is now standing in front of me, and I will be sharing screen space with her. It still gives me jitters! Her aura is magical and powerful.”

All the characters in this show are so layered and complex. But talking of his character, Ahaan, he says, he had individual readings with everyone to develop characters. So what was the brief for Ahaan Kothari? It was the poor billionaire boy who wanted to make something special of his own. She is a pretty humble and loving person, but she has grown up among the Kotharis. The *MTV Roadies* fame had to find a right balance that didn’t take away Ahaan

from the fact that he also belongs to that world.

Apart from the intensive workshops, Varun had his own method of getting into the skin of a character. “I try to look different physically for every character I get. For Ahaan, I hired a trainer for the first time ever. I was on this crazy fancy diet!” All this was not to feel like Varun but to build on Ahaan.

What you put out will come back to you in the most unexpected ways, they say about *karma*. In fact, the makers too have rightfully personified *karma* and made it appear believable. But does Varun personally believe in it? “Oh yes, I do believe in the concept of *karma*,” shares the handsome hunk, adding, “I have always wished well for others. No matter what has happened to me in my life, I don’t wish bad things on others at all. Maybe unknowingly, I have hurt some people, but I also believe *karma* has done its job for that. I believe I’m a good human being, and I’m honestly grateful that *karma* works both ways, good and bad. Basically, it’s all the good *karma* I’ve done, which gave me a beautiful family and such amazing friends. All in all, a beautiful life, indeed!”

Well, guess what? Every day was so special for the rising star that he had his amazing moments on the sets, just by loving to spend time on the set. So much that he kept looking forward to being back on the sets and now misses it much.

With much discussion happening around the challenges for young actors to maintain the balance between their work and social media personalities, the *MTV Splitsvilla* fame gleefully shares, “I think it’s a choice we have to make. Social media is in our control, and we get to choose what to make of it. For the last 2 years, I have been away from social media because I only want people to see my work and very less of me on my social media. I’m inten-

tionally keeping my private life, my travels, and my family time to myself. Being yourself on social media is very important, and it’s important to be honest, but everyone should find that healthy balance between what to post and what not to.”

Not to forget, though Varun has made sure to keep his private life private, the ‘thirst trap’ has been incessant. And he couldn’t agree much, as he asserts with a laugh, “The thirst traps will be a constant, and so will be my private life. I was in the public eye ever since I was 19, and because of the things happening around me, it was hard to keep things private. And it was probably affecting me in some way. So in the last 2 years, I thought of working on myself, travelled, and had a lot of fun without letting the world know about it. But only for myself.”

From being that outsider making a mark in this industry to headlining a big-scale show, he feels it’s all just getting started, and further comes a revelation: “I have two more releases in 2024.” An ecstatic Varun further shares, “I’m just happy that I have people around me who believe in me and trust me with their vision. And I’m just hoping that in the future, as my work comes out, more and more people will start looking at me as a bankable

actor. So yes, every moment is fireworks in my body. But I just have to keep my head down and do good work. For me, what matters is the depth of the role, what that character is bringing to the table, and how he affects the story.”

So is it that he is more focused on becoming a full-time actor or completely removing himself from the reality TV pool? Well yes! “I’m completely out of it. I don’t mind hosting or judging a reality show. But that is the only association I would like to have with reality TV now.” The promising actor, who also loves comedy, hopes something around the genre happens soon, as well as a superhero film, having been a fan since his childhood!



## Tips for successful home plumbing

Plumbing needs tend to be your first priority when it comes to home maintenance. To maintain the integrity of their home, homeowners should be aware of a few plumbing-related topics. By using these suggestions, you can maintain your plumbing system functioning and prevent more serious issues.

### 1. AVOID POURING OIL OR GREASE DOWN THE DRAIN

Grease and oil residue can accumulate over time in your drains, leading to blockages. Grease and oil should be disposed of in a container, like an old coffee can, to prevent this.

### 2. PUT STRAINERS IN YOUR SINK

This will assist in accumulating contaminants and food particles that may clog your drain. To ensure that your strainers continue to function properly, make sure to clean them frequently.

### 3. UNDERSTAND WHAT NOT TO FLUSH

Disposable products such as paper towels, sanitary napkins, and diapers can block your plumbing system severely. Empty the toilet only of human waste and toilet paper. Pro tip: It might not be a good idea to use those “flushable” wipes as well.

### 4. REGULARLY CHECK YOUR PIPES

Every year, inspect your pipes for leaks or cracks, and get them fixed as soon as you find them. This will

lessen the likelihood that your house will sustain additional damage and save you money on future, more involved repairs.

### 5. KEEP YOUR SHOWER DRAIN CLEAN

We are aware that it’s an unpleasant task that requires time, and who would like to perform it right after a refreshing shower? However, a build-up of hair can seriously clog your drain. After every usage, make it a habit to unclog the shower and bathtub drains by pouring a solution of cider vinegar and bicarbonate of soda down the drain every few months.

### 6. MAKE SURE YOUR SHOWER AND FAUCETS ARE CLEAN

Mineral buildup can be a problem for faucets and shower heads, but it’s easily preventable. One useful preventive technique is to tie a little bag filled with vinegar around the shower head or tap and leave it there for the night. The build-up can simply be cleaned off in the morning.

### 7. USE OPTIMAL FITTINGS

Use water efficient Sanitary Ware and Sanitary fittings (kitchen taps, wash basin taps, showerheads, dual flush toilets) as per IS 17650 Part 1 and Part 2 to reduce water consumption at source by about 40-50% without compromising the user comfort.

(The author, Gurmit Singh Arora, is the National President of Indian Plumbing Association)



SHIKHA DUGGAL

In the Punjabi entertainment industry, Ihana Dhillon is an artist who has adeptly balanced several aspects of her life! *The Pioneer* was keen to learn that she has the aptitude and capacity to handle everything brilliantly, from acting to production. She will also be appearing in the upcoming film *Je Paisa Bolda Hunda* shortly. There’s a great deal of enthusiasm and expectation surrounding it! It’s noteworthy that a few of the songs have already received widespread praise from the public, which further heightened our excitement for this exclusive interview.

Ihana is passionate about this for a number of reasons. She shares, “It is a really straightforward family film. Compared to the other characters I have played thus far, my character and appearance are distinct. For the first time, I had a tanned appearance to fit the character. It tells the tale of a recently married couple’s struggles in life. People can relate to this story, especially those who live in rural Punjab.”

Ihana Dhillon chose to take a break from her career after suffering a major injury more than two years ago. The Punjabi actress adds that after recovering from her accident, she opted to take a break from her profession for health concerns, purposefully opting to work on a small number of projects in a year. She also now values quality over quantity in her career! She continues, “This script just so happened to come to me, and after only one narration, I locked it and made the decision to both produce and act in it. We spent several months refining the storyline and characters, and the result is fantastic. There weren’t many difficulties encountered throughout the production because everyone knew exactly what we were shooting, and the other actors were really helpful and character-specific. By God’s grace, everything went extremely well.”

She is adamant that the audience will identify with the characters and plot. Since she is from rural Punjab herself, she could identify with this script when she first heard it. Her goal is to portray the struggles of everyday people and how they must battle the system to reclaim their property. Thus, she thinks Punjabis will enjoy this film. She has total faith in the finished outcome!

Talking about the recreation of a very famous track with a modern twist, she says, “The song *lakk tunuu tunuu* is a promotional track. Although it contra-

## ‘FOR THE FIRST TIME, I HAD A TANNED APPEARANCE TO FIT THE CHARACTER’

Artist Ihana Dhillon, who will be appearing in the upcoming film *Je Paisa Bolda Hunda*, shares with *The Pioneer* her excitement for the project, the recreation of a popular track, among others.



dicts the movie’s plot, it nevertheless reinforces it! The best part about this song, in my opinion, is how the music directors updated the track while leaving the vocals same. It remains in the honourable Surjit Bindrakha ji’s voice. The late Surjit Bindrakha ji sang this iconic song, and it remains special. Manan Bhardwaj recreated the music of the recently released hugely popular song *Arjan Vailly*.”

The actress also revealed that there are really not one but too many scenes that will draw in viewers. Since the film is about to be released and she doesn’t want to ruin the surprise, she can’t give away the entire narrative! However, she thinks each character is different, and each exchange is meaningful and different. She adds, “I am working with Hardeep Grewal for the first time. He came to mind as we were writing the script for the *Ginda* character since he is a great fit for the role! Hardeep had been of great assistance and support. He puts forth a lot of effort and is meticulous about how his persona is portrayed. Thus, it really helped the film. He is an extremely quiet and reserved person. I also didn’t have a lot of time to interact personally because I was a producer on the sets too! However, we did talk and usually arranged our dialogues together on set. The audience would undoubtedly like that on-screen chemistry.”

We realised in our talk with the famous actress of *Hate Story 4* how she usually considers the story’s overarching narrative before focusing on the contributions her character makes. She doesn’t care how big or tiny the role is; her character should matter to her! “I cherished every role I had played up until this point. However, I suppose Rani is someone I will always remember. Since I am from a village myself and have experienced the struggles Rani faces in the movie since I was a young child, I have always wanted to play a humble village girl. Thus, I truly see how I am connected to Rani. I always select music videos also that allow me to showcase my artistic abilities,” she gracefully finishes the interview.





RP.Patnayak



Sunitha

Sunitha Upadrashta, the well-known musician who won numerous accolades, including a National Award in the light music, nine Nandi Awards—the highest honor given annually by the Andhra Pradesh government—for lifetime achievements in Indian cinema, Telugu theater, and Telugu television amongst many others with her team is returning to Hyderabad after a five-year hiatus, and she says this will be the ideal comeback concert. The show is organized and presented by SVM Grand hotel.




Soku




PARTY

Soku, a company that produces multipurpose skincare products that seamlessly combine natural ingredients with science-backed innovation and founded on the concept that good skincare should be simple, affordable, and effective brings you something new! With the official debut of skincare and beauty brand SOKU Cosmetics in India, it's on its way to produce multipurpose skincare products. With a wide assortment of products including eyeliners, lipsticks, compact powders, face washes, face moisturizers, and sunscreens, the cruelty-free company hopes to enable everyone to obtain healthy, glowing skin without the effort!



Prama India and C-DAC



SV Chary

A new technological cooperation has been launched by Prama India and C-DAC (Meity) through the "Transfer of Technology" (ToT) Pact for Thermal Cameras. Prama India, a technology partner, is now able to produce, sell, and support the cutting-edge products. For thermal camera technology, Prama India and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (Meity), Government of India, recently inked a Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement. Prama India has set a new standard for the Indian security industry with this noteworthy initiative. It's new initiative will support research and development as well as the creation of creative uses for thermal technology.



Satyanarayan Sons Jewellers



Satyanarayan Sons Jewellers

The magnificent new showroom of Satyanarayan Sons Jewellers, renowned for its captivating jewelry designs, spectacular Hyderabad jewelry, gold jewelry, and stone fusion Nizami jewelry, was inaugurated in Shaikpet, Hyderabad. In 1949, the brand that has endured for 75 years was founded! This generational jeweler has made a name for themselves in the jewelry industry with their incredible design expertise and it goes on.



Run For A Girl Child



Run For A Girl Child



Run For A Girl Child

Hyderabad's Gachibowli Stadium, Seva Bharathi Telangana hosted the eighth edition of Run For A Girl Child - 2024, an awareness-raising event aimed at empowering girls through the "Kishori Vikas" program. About 10,000 runners and their families showed up for the run with great enthusiasm, all of them joining together to support a very worthy cause. Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan, the governor of Telangana, Rahul Bhatia, the managing director and head of Indian operations at GlobalData, and Chandra Shekhara Reddy, senior vice president of marketing at Freedom Oil, flagged off the marathon.



Partners Meet



Partners Meet

A Partners Meet was arranged by Greentek India and Adani Solar at the Hotel Hyatt, Banjara Hills. Cecil Augustine, National Head of Sales at Adani Solar, and N. Janaiah, Vice Chairman & Managing Director, Telangana State Renewable Energy Development Corporation (TSREDCO), inaugurated the meeting. Meanwhile, Adani Solar's TOPCON high-efficiency solar panels were introduced to the markets by Janaiah, Cecil Augustine, and Satya Kiran Gannarapu, the founder and chairman of Greentek India Ltd.



Skill Development Conference




Skill Development Conference

An awareness conference on skill development was arranged by Telangana at Harita Plaza Hota, Begumpet, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Employment and Training, Director of Industries, Productivity Council, AP. As the main guest, High Court judge Justice EV Venugopal congratulated the participants by giving them diplomas. This program's primary goal was to close skill shortages in the workforce. He declared that the goals and advantages listed in the Skill Gaps Study are praiseworthy. As the other main guest of the awareness conference, Justice Ivi Venugopal, Shri Nagesh, Madhukar Babu, Srinivasa Rao, and others also took part in this program.


FUN

ARCHIE




Archie Comics

CALVIN AND HOBBS




Calvin and Hobbes Comics

GARFIELD




Garfield Comics

NANCY



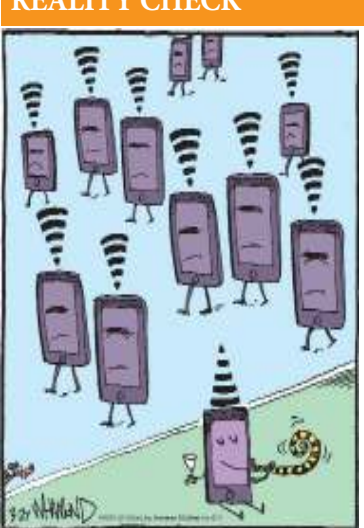
Nancy Comics

GINGER MEGGS



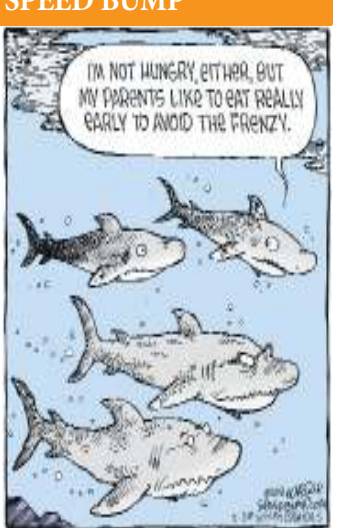
Ginger Meggs Comics

REALITY CHECK



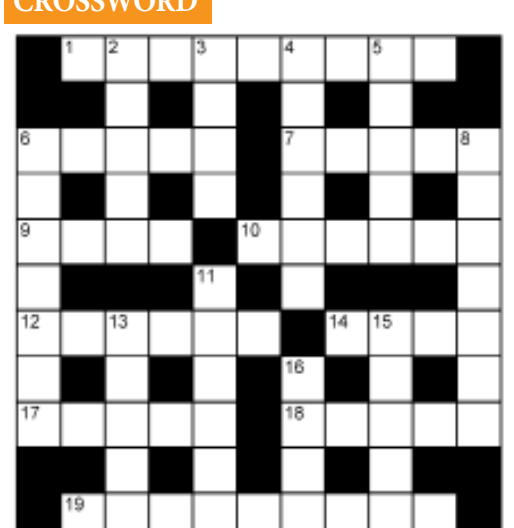
Reality Check Comics

SPEED BUMP



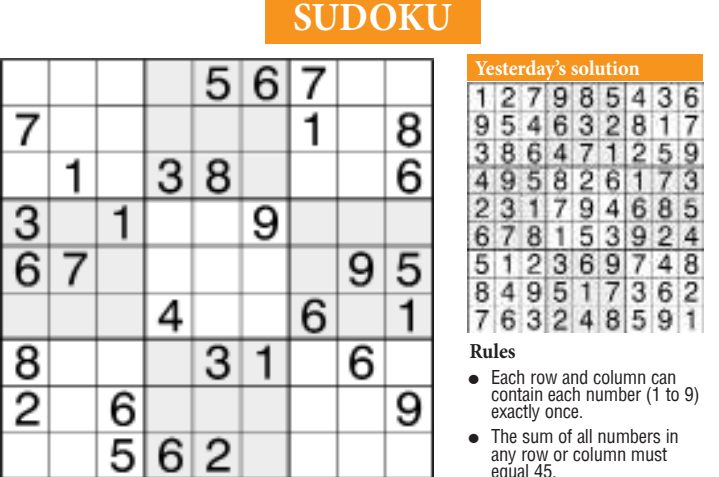
Speed Bump Comics

CROSSWORD



Crossword Puzzle

SUDOKU



Sudoku Puzzle





# FORTHCOMING, IS A TIMELY FILM LIKE MYRA

# tollywood



Pan-Indian film *Myra* is originally directed by Smile Sreenu in Telugu. Smile Sreenu is a well-known name in Kannada where he works under the Padma Shri Tridandi Devanatha Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamiji, who suggests that the times we live in require a film with such a strong message. According to Swamiji, "it seems that this film will be very useful for today's

times when our way of living is antagonistic towards sustainable living and environment," implying that contemporary living has harmed nature. "Please see this movie in a number of languages, not just Telugu and Kannada. I will support a movie this good," he declared. The film's director stated, "I am appreciative of Swamiji's blessings. He proposed that the film be produced as a pan-Indian production. In addition, he made some recommendations on the subject of coexisting peacefully with nature. His remarks have increased our bravery. We will soon make more information public about our plans to film this Telugu movie featuring a famous heroine too."

## Samyuktha Menon is working hard for her next

Samyuktha Menon, the heroine of Kalyan Ram's *Devil*, is regarded as having the "golden leg" because the majority of the movies in which she starred were commercial successes prior to *Devil*. There were rumours that said she was getting married to her longtime lover, and after she stopped signing new film projects!

According to the most recent information, she has begun to intensively train for her upcoming movie, Nikhil's *Swayambhu*. The actress, who is learning to ride a horse for the movie, posted photos of her exercising with the animal. "I promise you that the journey has been enlightening and spiritual." Speaking of the experience, she exclaims, "Being in harmony and synchrony with the horse, looking deep into the horse's soul and make sure we are working as a team is beautiful and liberating!"



## KALKI 2898 AD GLIMPSE OUT NOW

Santhosh Narayanan shares the theme of *Kalki's 2898 AD* glimpse. Fans are excitedly anticipating the premiere of Prabhas and Deepika Padukone's next film *Kalki 2898 AD* in May 2024! The excitement around the film is quite evident. A tantalizing sneak peek of the film's unreleased theme song was recently given to spectators at singer Santhosh Narayanan's *Neeeye Oli* performance in Chennai, adding to the frenzy. The captivated audience responded well to the two-minute clip which purportedly included Prabhas' entrance moment, greatly increasing the excitement around the film's premiere too. Santhosh Narayanan's mesmerizing score sets the tone for this future tale, and *Kalki 2898 AD* is sure to enthrall viewers with its inventive graphics, gripping story, and outstanding acting. The anticipation for the picture is growing as the days before its release draw closer, and it seems like a great movie experience for everyone.

The film's star power is further enhanced with the inclusion of the outstanding Disha Patani in a prominent part alongside Prabhas and Deepika Padukone. Filmed concurrently in Telugu and Hindi, *Kalki 2898 AD* is anticipated to be a visual extravaganza, with breathtaking cinematography by Djordje Stojiljkovic and fluid editing by Kotagiri Venkateswara Rao! With a star-studded ensemble cast that includes the renowned Amitabh Bachchan and the famed Kamal Haasan in key roles too, *Kalki 2898 AD*, directed by Nag Ashwin, is adding to all its allure and popularity among moviegoers.

## The director of *Dhamaka* is accused of being 'indecent' to actress Payal Radhakrishna

Director Trinadha Rao Nakkina, of *Cinema Choopistha Mava* and *Dhamaka* fame, spoke for sixteen minutes on a wide range of topics at a film event in Hyderabad recently. Allegedly, he made actress Payal Radhakrishna feel uncomfortable for a minute!

*Nenu Local* director got off to a regular start. "Payal is a girl from Telugu. She was raised in Bengaluru." Then he began to make her look embarrassed. "She's hugged everyone on the set but me. She has always had my whole affection. If she hugs me, what does she think she will lose?" stated Trinadha Rao. In an attempt to be funny, he continued, "She is not hugging me even though I, the producer of this film, have cleared all her payments with GST!" Trinadha Rao's so-called sense of humour increased when Payal approached the director and patted him. "Can you call this a hug? Is this what people in the world refer to as a hug? The ultimate must be a hug," he continued.



With Tollywood actor Mahesh Babu, renowned filmmaker SS Rajamouli is presently in pre-production for his next project. With the working title *SSMB 29*, the project has been making waves for a very interesting reason. For several days now, speculation on social media has been rife that Chelsea Elizabeth Islan, an actress from Indonesia, would play a significant role in *SSMB 29*. Since online users saw her recent Instagram activity, these unfounded rumours have gotten stronger. She has started to follow SS Rajamouli on social media. It's important to note that she follows Deepika Padukone and Disha Patani, the female leads of *Kalki 2898 AD*, rather than Mahesh Babu. Under Durga Arts, *SSMB 29*—a traveling adventure in the style of Indiana Jones—will be developed by

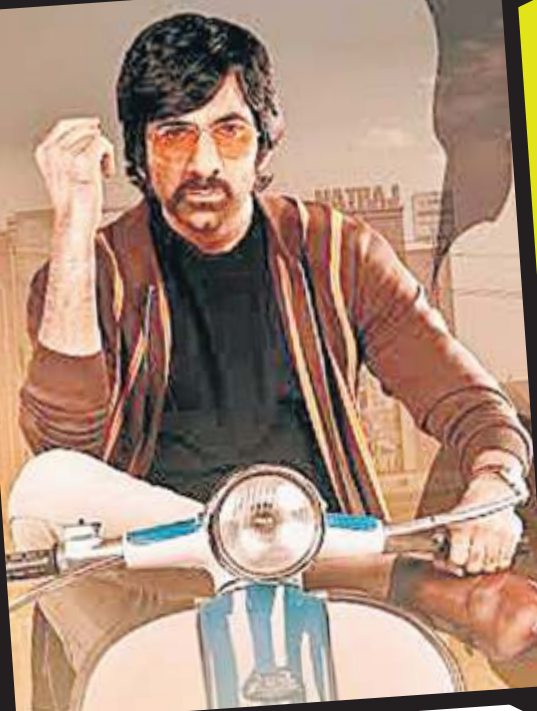
KL Narayana. MM Keeravaani is the music director, and Vijayendra Prasad writes the screenplay.



SSMB 29: REPORTEDLY, INDONESIAN ACTRESS CHELSEA ELIZABETH ISLAN WILL BE LANDING A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE MOVIE

## Harish Shankar drops an update on *Mr Bachchan*

*Eagle*, which was recently released and was directed by Karthik Ghattamaneni, is currently bringing in a lot of money for Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja. In the middle of the festivities, *Mr. Bachchan* has been making news as his next project. The most recent schedule of *Mr. Bachchan*, directed by Harish Shankar, has just finished. The director announced the completion on social media and thanked DOP Ayananka Bose and Ravi Teja for their steadfast support. He increased excitement for the movie by sharing enticing on-set stills with the announcement! Bhagyashri Borse is making her Tollywood debut in this movie, and the prestigious People Media Factory is supporting the venture. Mickey J Meyer, who takes on the position of music director for this exciting endeavor, heightens the anticipation.



## BUZZ: IS RAKUL PREET PLAYING SHURPANAKHA?

Right now, Nitesh Tiwari is working hard on the fascinating project called *Ramayana*. Pre-production for the movie is presently underway, and the directors are also focussed on deciding on the main actors. Rakul Preet Singh is rumored to be joining the cast as well! The official cast list for the movie has not yet been released. However, it is essentially known that Ranbir Kapoor will play Lord Sri Ram. Although Sai Pallavi has expressed her intention to join, she has not yet given her approval to portray Sita. There are talks for Rakul Preet Singh to play Shurpanakha. It is a pivotal figure in the *Ramayana*, and most of the previous *Ramayana* filmmakers portrayed her negatively. However, Nitesh wants to highlight her beauty and give her a new perspective on life. The cast and crew details will be formally revealed by the team at a press conference.





# Nagal, Ramkumar draw French rivals in opening round of Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian ace Sumit Nagal is pitted against Geoffrey Blancaneaux, while wild card entrant Ramkumar Ramanathan will face Maxime Janvier in the men's singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open beginning here on Monday. World ranked 121 Nagal will aim to extend his dominance over French player Blancaneaux, whom he has beaten three times, including in the Australian Open Qualifiers. India No 2 Ramkumar has a 1-1 head-to-head record against Janvier of France and if he clears the first round hurdle, he is likely to run into top-seed Italian Luca Nardi, who has been drawn to meet a qualifier in his opening round. Australian Adam Walton has been seeded third and will open his campaign against



Indian wild card entrant Prajwal Dev. In the doubles main draw, Frenchman Dan Added and Korea's Yun Seong Chung have been given the top billing and will clash with the Australian pair Tristan Schoolkate and Adam Walton. Australia's Christopher Matthew Romios and Poland's Piotr Matuszewski are seeded second and will take on Taipei's Ray Ho and Australia's Calum Puttergill. There are nine Indians in the doubles main draw. N Sriram Balaji and Andre Begemann of Germany will clash with the German duo of Mark Wallner and Jakob Schnaitter. The ATP Challenger event is being organised by Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association at KSLTA Stadium. Qualifying rounds began on Sunday, while the final is scheduled on February 18.



## Man City keeps pressure on Liverpool

AP ■ LONDON

Watch out, Premier League. The competition's most lethal attacking combination is back in tandem. Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne - both recently back from long injury absences - linked up for the clinching goal in Manchester City's 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday in what will be a worrying sight for the defending champions' rivals. Liverpool remained in first place after a 3-1 victory over Burnley but City is ominously placed on the leader's shoulder, two points behind with a game in hand, and with its superstar attackers back in the groove. Make it 12 times that De Bruyne has set up Haaland for a goal since they started playing together at the beginning of last season following the striker's move to England. No other Premier League partnership has delivered that many goals in this period.

"With him, I know I'm going to get it perfect. You know the ball is going to come," Haaland said of De Bruyne, English soccer's king of the assists. "I watch a lot of football and I already saw for many years where he plays the ball, and he hasn't changed anything for the last five years. For me, it was about coming in and finishing those actions." And there was something so familiar with the way De Bruyne collected the ball in center-field and deftly slid in Haaland, who bundled his marker off the ball and opened his body to steer home a finish in the 85th minute. It was Haaland's second of the game, after he broke Everton's stubborn resistance in the 71st by pouncing on a loose ball following a corner. "I like to win this type of game - suffering and knowing how difficult everything is - because we learn the lessons for what's coming," City manager Pep Guardiola said. City has won six games in a row in the league, and 10 straight in all competitions. Still, Liverpool is holding strong at the top, with Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - the starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scoring at Anfield. Vincent Kompany, the Man City great in charge of Burnley, couldn't do his old club a favor. Liverpool bounced back

from only its second league loss this season, at Arsenal last weekend, though there might be concerns over the fitness of Trent Alexander-Arnold after the right back came off at halftime with a recurrence of a recent knee injury, when the score was 1-1. "Same area in the knee. Nothing really bad but he felt it again," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said. SON'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN Son Heung-min marked his return for Tottenham after more than a month away at the Asian Cup by creating a dramatic winner against Brighton. Son, whose South Korea team was eliminated in the semifinals on Tuesday, started on the bench for his comeback game, came on at 1-1 and set up Brennan Johnson for a goal in the sixth minute of stoppage time that made it 2-1.

"It's fair to say that we are still a work in progress but we had a world-class player in Son who makes the most difficult ball look simple to set up Brennan," said Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou, whose team jumped above Aston Villa into fourth place. GUIMARAES DOUBLE Bruno Guimaraes continues to be the shining light in a difficult season for Newcastle. The Brazil midfielder scored in each half, including a superb curling shot for the winner, as Newcastle beat Nottingham Forest 3-2 to climb two places to seventh. Guimaraes' performances have been consistently excellent for Newcastle while, crucially, he has stayed healthy in a campaign that has seen manager Eddie Howe lose player after player to injury. Forest stayed two points and two places above the relegation zone but, like third-to-last Everton, was recently charged with breaching the league's financial regulations and could yet be facing a points deduction. IN-FORM TONEY Ivan Toney scored for the third time in four games since his return from a ban for breaching betting regulations as Brentford won 2-0 at Wolverhampton. Last-place Sheffield United won for just the third time this season, 3-1 at relegation rival Luton, and Fulham was the winner by the same score at Bournemouth.



## Inter wins 4-2 at Roma to end De Rossi perfect record

AP ■ MILAN

A sublime second-half performance from league leader Inter Milan saw it win 4-2 at Roma in the teeming rain and end Daniele De Rossi's perfect record. Goals from Gianluca Mancini and Stephan El Shaarawy had given Roma the lead at halftime following Francesco Acerbi's opener for Inter. But the Nerazzurri turned things around immediately after the break with a strike from Marcus Thuram, who also forced an own-goal from new Roma defender Angelino. Alessandro Bastoni sealed the match late on as Inter moved seven points above second-place Juventus. The Bianconeri can cut the gap to four points with a win at home to relegation-threatened Udinese on Monday but will then have played a match more than Inter. Roma remained a point behind fourth-place Atalanta after De Rossi's first loss. The former Roma player had won all three of his matches as coach after replacing the fired Jose Mourinho. The Nerazzurri were without coach Simone Inzaghi on the bench in Rome after he picked up his fifth yellow card of the season in last weekend's win over Juventus. The suspended Inzaghi watched from the stands as his team took the lead in the 17th minute - with the help of a former Inter player. Former Nerazzurri forward Romelu Lukaku headed away an Inter corner but only as far as Acerbi, who headed it into the back of the net. However, Roma leveled in the 28th minute when a free kick was floated over the top and Mancini headed it into the bottom right corner from close range. And Roma turned the match around on the stroke of halftime as a counterattack sent El Shaarawy sprinting into the area and he unleashed a shot which hit the crossbar and the left post before also bouncing off the right post and going in.

## Qatar win Asian Cup titles after beating Jordan 3-1

AP ■ LUSAIL (QATAR)

Akram Afif dropped to his knees. Pretty soon he was being thrown into the air by his joyous teammates after the forward's hat trick of penalties secured back-to-back Asian Cup titles for Qatar. Afif, the outstanding player of the tournament and leading scorer with eight goals, was nerveless when converting his spot kicks in a 3-1 win against Jordan at Lusail Stadium on Saturday. Just over a year ago it had been Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe who had lit up this spectacular venue in arguably the greatest World Cup final of all time. On this occasion it was Afif taking center stage and becoming the first player to score a hat trick in the Asian Cup final. He had been his country's standout performer from the start of the tournament and did not disappoint when it fell to him to produce the decisive moments against Jordan as Qatar became the first back-to-back winner since Japan in 2000 and 2004.

In front of more than 86,000 fans and with the pressure on, Afif never looked likely to miss from the spot and he sparked wild celebrations with each goal. (I scored) the penalties because of the confidence my teammates had in me. It is not about technique, it is about the feeling that people are behind me - my team," Afif said. He won and converted his first penalty in the 22nd minute. And after Yazan Al Naimat leveled the game in the 67th he struck again from the spot in the 73rd and sealed the win in the fifth minute of stoppage time. Afif had spoken earlier in the tournament of his wish to return to European soccer after spells in Spain and Belgium at the start of his career. His performances, which also earned him the award for the Asian Cup's most valuable player, will likely have caught the attention of clubs far and wide. While this was a personal triumph for him, it was redemption for Qatar, which had endured a miserable World Cup on home soil in



2022 when exiting the tournament after three straight defeats in the group stage. Even as host and defending champion, Qatar had been an unexpected finalist, let alone winner. Captain Hassan Al-Haydos noted on the eve of the final how critics had expected little of the team ahead of the tournament. How satisfying for him, then, to be draped in the same type of black Qatari ceremonial robe that Messi had worn to lift the World Cup. After the pain of that tournament, here was a

moment of national celebration as the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani handed Al-Haydos the trophy and shortly after there was an eruption of tickertape and fireworks. Earlier, Qatar's Spanish coach, Márquez López slumped in his seat, seemingly exhausted, as he waited out 17 minutes of stoppage time. The exertions of the past month appeared to have taken its toll. He had only been hired in December and Qatar had been beaten 2-1 by Jordan in a friendly in January.

## Shankar wins season opening meet in Belgium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres. Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday. The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m. Shankar is also focusing on decathlon and had won bronze and silver in the discipline in the Asian Championships and Asian Games last year.



Shankar has trained his eyes on a Paris Olympics berth but for that he will have to achieve a qualifying standard of 2.33 metres. The other Indian in fray, Jesse Sandesh finished joint-10th with a jump of 2.09 metres. Shankar will next be seen in action at the Hvezdy v Nehvizdech athletics meet in Nehvizdy, Czech Republic on February 20.

## Jota, Diaz, Nunez score for Liverpool in 3-1 win over Burnley

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - Liverpool's starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scored for the Premier League leaders in a 3-1 win over Burnley. The Reds responded to Manchester City's extremely brief return to the league's summit, after its 2-0 victory against Everton hours earlier, with a triumph that tested their mettle even more than their stretched resources. While the three points reestablished Liverpool's two-point advantage, the less-than-convincing nature of victory against the league's next-to-last side was not quite befitting the occasion of the hosts' biggest league crowd of 59,896 after the full opening of the Anfield Road stand. For a time it appeared Liverpool, which was without goalkeeper Alisson Becker



and defender Joe Gomez because of illness as well as the injured Salah, was still suffering a hangover from the defeat at Arsenal last week. It took the familiar right boot of Trent Alexander-Arnold, setting a new mark of 58 for Premier League assists by a defender, and the equally reliable head of Jota to put

them ahead at a corner in the 31st. The sloppy concession of an equalizer, when Dara O'Shea headed in at a corner on the stroke of halftime, posed further problems as did the withdrawal of Alexander-Arnold - only recently returned from a knee injury - at the break. It was the England international's replacement, Harvey Elliott, who set up headed goals for Diaz in the 52nd and Nunez in the 78th to ease the pressure. However, had on-loan Chelsea forward David Fofana been as clinical as he was scoring twice last weekend, then not only would Liverpool be looking up at City but questions would have started to be asked about their ability to match their long-time rivals. Liverpool should have Salah and Dominic Szoboszlai back from injury in the next couple of weeks.

# Paul, Giron advance to Dallas Open final

AP ■ DALLAS

Second-seeded Tommy Paul Sand unseeded Marcos Giron won in straight sets to set up an all-American final in the Dallas Open. Paul beat No. 3 seed Ben Shelton of the U.S., 6-2, 6-4, and Giron rolled over a seeded opponent again, beating No. 4 seed Adrian Mannarino of France, 6-1, 6-3, in the semifinals. The 30-year-old Giron, who beat top-seeded American Frances Tiafoe in the

quarterfinals, is seeking his first ATP Tour title Sunday in his second trip to a final. Paul's only title came in 2021 in Stockholm. Paul won the final four games of the first set before a break early in the second set held up against the 21-year-old Shelton in the hardcourt event on the SMU campus. Giron took a 4-0 lead in the first set a day after going up 5-0 in a straight-set win over Tiafoe, who was the highest-ranked player in the tournament at No. 14.



The first break of the second set came when Giron made a

lunging save with a forehand, then ran down Mannarino's

volley for a backhand crosscourt passing shot and a 5-3 lead. Giron, who hasn't lost a service game in four matches in the tournament, had little trouble closing out the match on his serve. With three victories over seeded opponents, Giron has a chance to surpass his career-best ranking of 49th from 2022, when Giron lost his only previous final in San Diego. Giron reached the semifinals in Dallas two years ago, losing a three-setter to Jensen

Brooksby while having match points. The final two sets went to tiebreakers. "That stuck with me, and that's hard," Giron said. "I have experience. I know what it's like to lose. I know what it's like to win. Having a big win yesterday was awesome, and I'm really, really happy to be able to come back today." Paul reached two finals last year, losing in a grass-court event at Eastbourne and a hardcourt tournament in Acapulco. The 26-year-old Paul

converted three of eight break points against the hard-serving Giron while saving all three break points he faced. The 15th-ranked Paul, who stopped a six-match losing streak against top 20 opponents, had dropped his previous two matches against Shelton, who is No. 16. "Obviously, his serve is unbelievable," Paul said. "These courts kind of help me a little bit. You don't have to jump in quite as high. Kind of kept the ball in my strike zone.