

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You see what will happen after the Lok Sabha elections in Telangana. Their behavior is such. For a very long time they were not in power. So now suddenly they are in power and have no limits. What's the language used by the ministers? After elections, we will know whether it will be Himachal or Karnataka. Today their own minister is speaking. We need not have doubts. Such a situation may occur in Telangana. They just have 64 seats.

- Dr K Lakshman, BJP MP

P4

Work for developed India:

Murmu

5

RESTORATION

OF WTO DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM PRIORITY

8

Wedding bells ringing for Taapsee

PANNU

P12

DON'T MISS...

## Andhra Cricket Association...

The Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) has addressed the controversy surrounding Hanuma Vihari's recent remarks regarding his captaincy, asserting its stance against public disputes within the team. Responding to allegations made by Vihari on social media, the ACA emphasised the importance of professionalism and unity within the cricketing community. In a press release issued on Wednesday, the ACA refuted accusations levelled against the association by Hanuma Vihari, urging for transparency and adherence to...

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## Climate change may be reducing...

Climate change may be causing more competition for food in oceans, leading to a reduction in the weight of fish, according to a study. Researchers at the University of Tokyo in Japan found that fish weight in the western North Pacific Ocean dipped in the 2010s due to warmer water limiting food supplies. They attributed the first period of weight loss to greater numbers of Japanese sardines, which increased competition with other species for food. "With higher temperatures..."

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## 32% of India's super rich wealth...

India's super rich have allocated 32 per cent of their wealth in residential properties in the country and overseas, Knight Frank said in a report on Wednesday. As per real estate consultant Knight Frank's The Wealth Report 2024, 32 per cent of India's Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals' (UHNWIs) wealth is allocated towards residential real estate asset class. Nearly 14 per cent of their residential portfolio is allocated outside India. UHNWIs are individuals with a net worth of USD 30 million...

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## Rahul still feeling sore while...

Senior India batter K L Rahul is unlikely to feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala as he continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps. Rahul became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January but as per BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month. Rahul has now travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury and with the series in the bag, the Indian team management will not take the risk of playing him in the Dharamsala Test...

-SPORTS

# Work for landside victory

## Election victory is vital for progress of AP: Naidu, Pawan tells cadres

PNS ■ TADEPALLIGUDEM

Telugu Desam party national president and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan have given a clarion call to their cadres to work together for a landslide victory in the forthcoming election. They underlined the need for TDP-JSP alliance election victory for the bright future of AP.

Addressing a mammoth joint public meeting christened as 'Jenda' here on Wednesday, Chandrababu Naidu said that people of the state have made the TDP and JSP forge an alliance for the future of the state.

"For the redevelopment of the state, people should support the TDP-JSP alliance. We have evolved plans to construct a bigger capital city than Hyderabad. We prepared plans to complete the Polavaram project and provide water to every acre. But the psycho rule has spoiled our plans," Naidu lamented. Jagan Mohan Reddy is ruling the state with anarchies and no section of people are happy, Naidu lambasted.

Naidu cited the recent episode of cricketer Hanuma Vihari and explained how he was humiliated and forced to quit the captaincy. Jagan Reddy did not even spare his own sister either, he slammed. "Jagan Reddy enacted a drama in the name of providing water to Kuppam. I am confident of winning the elec-



TDP chief Naidu and Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan waving flags during a joint public meeting held at Tadepalligudem on Wednesday.

Naidu cited the recent episode of cricketer Hanuma Vihari and explained how he was humiliated and forced to quit the captaincy. Jagan Reddy did not even spare his own sister either, he slammed.

JSP chief Pawan Kalyan announced that the alliance would face YSRCP's 'Siddham' with 'Yuddam'. The JSP chief defended taking 24 seats to contest in the forthcoming elections by citing Gayatri Mantra has 24 letters.

tion in Kuppam with one lakh majority," Naidu hoped.

It is not important who is higher and who is lower in the TDP-JSP

alliance as all are working for the people with the objective of defeating the YSRCP, Naidu said, describing the Jana Sena party joining the

TDP as wind adds to fire.

JSP chief Pawan Kalyan announced that the alliance would face YSRCP's 'Siddham' with 'Yuddam'. The JSP chief defended taking 24 seats to contest in the forthcoming elections by citing Gayatri Mantra has 24 letters. The TDP-JSP's aim is to make AP YSRCP-free, he reiterated.

"The YSRCP leaders support whatever decisions taken by Jagan Reddy but my supporters criticize my decisions," Pawan Kalyan said, pointing at the open letters of ex-MP Chegondi Hari Ramajogaiah. "I want the leaders who support me in the election battle but I do not want the leaders who give advice to me," he made it clear.

"Five crore people are suffering for five leaders belonging to the Reddy community, Pawan Kalyan flayed. The JSP chief said they had launched a joint battle to defeat an anarchic rule. He took strong exception to Jagan Reddy commenting on his marriages, again abusing personally.

"The vast experience of Chandrababu Naidu is imperative for the development of the state," Pawan Kalyan opined and lauded Naidu as he was the creator of the modern city of Hyderabad. "I am in politics despite losing elections in two constituencies because I want to save democracy and save the state," Pawan Kalyan claimed.

## Lokesh's absence at Tadepalligudem meeting felt

Ex-minister quits TDP, joins YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP general secretary skipping the joint TDP-JSP meeting in Tadepalligudem on Wednesday has become the point of debate in political circles. There have been rumours among the political circles that Nara Lokesh and JSP chief Pawan Kalyan are unable to gel which has forced Lokesh from skipping the programme. It can be recalled that even a few days back while TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu and JSP chief Pawan Kalyan jointly announced the list of 99 candidates, Lokesh's absence was felt by the TDP and JSP leaders.

On the other hand, aspiring candidates who were denied seats have turned rebels and a few senior leaders have quit the party during recent times and the defection continued even on Wednesday. The alliance between Telugu Desam Party and the Jana Sena Party has dashed off hopes of several ticket aspirants in both the parties, as they are losing their bastions as part of seat sharing.

TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena Party president Pawan Kalyan are struggling to convince the disgruntled ticket aspirants as both the parties are forced to sacrifice their seats for each other.

Continued on Page 2

FOR RYTHU BHAROSA, INTEREST SUBVENTION

# Flow of welfare funds in AP

Rs 1,078.36 cr is meant for Rythu Bharosa under which 53.58 lakh farmers will receive Rs. 2,000 each.

10,78,615 farmers will receive Rs 215.98 crore towards interest subvention.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, on Wednesday, released Rs 1,294.34 crore towards the third tranche of YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan for the fifth year and interest subvention for the fourth year in a row under YSR Sunna Vaddi Panta Runalu.

Releasing the amount with the click of a button at the Camp Office

CM RELEASES RS1,294 CRORE



here on Wednesday, the Chief Minister stated that the welfare of the State depends on farmers' welfare and keeping that in mind the government has taken several steps for the welfare of farmers in the last 57 months.

Out of the Rs 1,294.34 crore, Rs 1,078.36 crore is meant for Rythu Bharosa under which 53.58 lakh farmers will receive Rs. 2,000 each directly into their bank accounts while 10,78,615 farmers will receive Rs 215.98 crore towards interest subvention for timely repayment of interest on crop loans taken during the Rabi 2021 and Kharif 2022 seasons. Under the scheme, the government pays Rs

13,500 each in three installments every year with the first and second tranches of Rs 7,500 and Rs 4,000 being paid in May or June for Kharif sowing and in October or November for Kharif harvesting and Rabi requirements, respectively. The third tranche of Rs 2,000 would be paid in January or February for Rabi harvest.

The Chief Minister said that the government has paid Rs 67,500 each under Rythu Bharosa in the last 57 months, paying an extra of Rs. 17,500 each than the promised Rs 50,000 in five years in the YSRCP election manifesto.

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# National parties declare Rs 3,077 crore income

## BJP gets maximum share of Rs 2,361 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The six national parties have declared a total income of nearly Rs 3,077 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal, with the BJP getting the maximum share of around Rs 2,361 crore, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said on Wednesday.

The ruling BJP's income constitutes 76.73 per cent of the total income of the six national parties during FY 2022-23, it said.

The Congress declared the second highest income at Rs 452.375 crore, which forms 14.70 per cent of the total income of the six national parties. Besides the BJP and the Congress, BSP, AAP, NPP and CPI-M have declared their income.

The BJP, Congress and AAP collected 49.09 per cent or Rs 1,510.61 crore of national parties' total income from donations through electoral bonds for FY 2022-23.



The BJP received Rs 1294.15 crore through electoral bonds, while the Congress received Rs 171.02 crore and AAP Rs 45.45 crore.

Citing data shared by the SBI in response to its RTI, the ADR said electoral bonds worth Rs 2,797.356 crore were redeemed by parties in FY 2022-23.

Fifty-four per cent or Rs 1510.62 crore of this has been redeemed by national parties.

Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the BJP's income increased by 23.15 per cent or Rs 443.724 crore from Rs 1,917.12 crore in Rs 2,360.84, the ADR said.

The income of National People's Party (NPP) -- the only party from the northeast to have the national party status -- increased from Rs 47.20 lakh during FY 2021-22 to Rs 7.562 crore during FY 2022-23, a rise of 1,502.12 per cent or Rs 7.09 crore.

Continued on Page 2

# Disney, Reliance to create Rs 70,000 cr behemoth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global media giant Walt Disney Co and billionaire Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries on Wednesday announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore-behemoth.

A successful completion of the deal would create the biggest firm in Indian media and entertainment sector, with over 100 channels in several languages, two leading OTT platforms and a viewer base of 750 million across the country.

"As part of the transaction, the media undertaking of Viacom18 will be merged into Star India through a court approved scheme of arrangement," a joint statement said.

"The transaction values the joint venture at Rs 70,352 crore (USD 8.5 billion) on a post-money basis, excluding synergies," it added.

## To merge India media operations



Nita Ambani, wife of Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, will chair the joint venture while Uday Shankar will be the Vice Chairperson.

Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent stake in the com-

bined entity while Disney will have the remaining 36.84 per cent share-holding.

Reliance has also agreed to invest at closing Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture to grow the OTT business.

A successful completion of the deal would create the biggest firm in Indian media and entertainment sector, with over 100 channels in several languages, two leading OTT platforms and a viewer base of 750 million across the country.

"Post completion of the above steps, the JV will be controlled by RIL and owned 16.34 per cent by RIL, 46.82 per cent by Viacom18 and 36.84 per cent by Disney," the statement said.

Moreover, Disney may also con-



# CS lauds NITI Aayog’s vision plan for ‘Viksit AP’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary KS Jawahar Reddy has said that the vision plan of the Niti Aayog for Andhra Pradesh, which was drafted for Viksit AP by 2047, is stupendous.

As part of this, the State government needs to implement various plans regarding agriculture, industries, infrastructure and other State-related issues for the overall development of the State.

The CS gave a PowerPoint presentation on Vikisit Andra@2047 in Velagapudi Secretariat on Wednesday. The programme was organised under the aegis of Niti Aayog.

Addressing the occasion, CS Jawahar Reddy informed that AP is at the top position in the sectors of green energy, development of the primary sector and port-based develop-



ment activities. He further recalled that AP is the ‘Rice Bowl of India’. The CS also informed that they were taking up robust initiatives to develop the ports across the State.

“AP is the second-largest State in terms of having the longest coastal area. We are undertaking more and more developmental activities to support the industrial sector in the State as Visakhapatnam-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru and Bengaluru-Chennai industrial corridors are passing

through AP,” he said.

He further said that the government is giving top priority to facilitating a large number of infrastructure facilities in hospitals and education institutions. For this, the government has been spending crores of rupees, he added.

Niti Aayog Advisor Parthasarathy Reddy, Special CSs K Vijayanand, Gopala Krishna Dwivedi, Special Secretaries Praveen Prakash, Suresh Kumar, Yuvaraj, Girija Shankar and others were present.

## Fin Minister visits AP pavilion at Bharat Tex

Expresses appreciation for the exquisite range of textiles on display



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath visited the AP pavilion at the Bharat Tex-2024 in Delhi on Wednesday. K Sunitha, Principal Secretary of Handlooms and Textiles, and MM Nayak, Commissioner of Handlooms and Textiles, were present on the occasion.

During his visit, the Finance Minister expressed deep appreciation for the diverse and exquisite range of textiles on display at the AP pavilion. He took the time to visit each stall, examining the craftsmanship and engaging in meaningful conversations with textile representatives and artisans. The minister's keen interest and involvement showcased the government's commitment to promoting and celebrating the flourishing textile industry in Andhra Pradesh.

Particularly impressed with the One District One Product (ODOP) booth, the Finance Minister examined every handloom product proudly presented from various districts of the state. In contrast to other stalls featuring one or two handloom products, the richness and variety displayed by Andhra Pradesh stood out, drawing praise for the State's dedication to supporting and protecting its handloom heritage.

The minister particularly appreciated the efforts of APCO and the department in having in-house designers and assisting the weavers in developing new products and designs. He was informed that they have been assisting weavers in making latest designs according to the changing design trends and also in making made ups from the unused handloom fabrics.

## Congress to...

Continued from Page 1

The Union government spends 30 per cent of its budget on SCS States and sanctions grants that need not be repaid by the States. YSRCP came to power assuring people of fighting for SCS and later ignored it. The Congress party got only 1.18 percent vote share in the 2019 Assembly elections. Still she joined the party only with the intention to fight for the SCS and develop the State, she said.

Sharmila further said the development of Andhra Pradesh would be possible only with SCS and the Congress government will sanction the same if it is voted to power in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge launched the Indiramma Abhaya Hastam scheme in Anantapur for the people of Andhra Pradesh assuring to sanction Rs.5,000 to every woman in Andhra Pradesh after the Congress party comes into power.

She added that former Chief Minister Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy lives in the hearts of the people of Andhra Pradesh because he gave equal importance to welfare and development.

## Poll symbol poses a problem to TDP-Jana Sena alliance

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

There is a new twist in the Jana Sena and TDP alliance which may pose a problem to the latter in the coming crucial Assembly elections. If the Election Commission follows the same policy that was applied in the recent Telangana Assembly elections in the allotment of election symbol, in the coming Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections, the TDP may fail in getting political advantage from the alliance with the Jana Sena. In the recent Telangana Assembly elections, the Jana Sena con-

tested in alliance with the BJP. Initially, Jana Sena planned to contest in 32 Assembly constituencies. The Jana Sena was given glass as its election symbol in 32 constituencies where it planned to contest. The Election Commission made the glass a free symbol which can be allotted to any other candidate in the rest of the constituencies, excluding in the seats where Jana Sena contested.

Now in the coming Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections, the Jana Sena is having an alliance with the TDP and would contest from 24 assembly seats out of a total 175 and

in three Lok Sabha seats out of a total 25 seats. If the Election Commission implements the same policy which was implemented in the Telangana Assembly elections, the independent candidates can be allotted glass symbol in the seats where TDP is contesting. If this happens, the TDP may lose the advantage with Jana Sena alliance. If the independent candidates contest with a glass symbol which is the Jana Sena election symbol, in the constituencies where TDP is contesting, the voters will be confused. They may think that the Jana Sena is also contesting in their constituencies

and may vote for the glass symbol.

In this way Jana Sena votes will not transfer to TDP. The glass symbol is registered in the minds of the people as Jana Sena election symbol as the Jana Sena is campaigning since long with glass as its election symbol. The ruling YSR Congress may field independent candidates where the TDP is contesting and get glass as its election symbol. But the Jana Sena does not have this symbol problem where it is contesting, because the TDP is a recognised regional political party in Andhra Pradesh. Its election

symbol cycle cannot be allotted to any other candidates in the constituencies where Jana Sena is contesting. Jana Sena failed in becoming a recognised regional party since its inception.

Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) MK Meena, speaking to The Pioneer, said that they did not receive any orders in making glass a free symbol in the constituencies where Jana Sena is not contesting. He said that they will take a decision in the allotment of election symbol to the candidates as per the guidelines of the Election Commission.

## Senior IAS officer takes VRS to begin political career

A MD Imtiaz to contest from Kurnool as YSRCP candidate

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

With candidates for a few Assembly seats yet to be announced by the ruling YSRCP, the party leadership and president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is considering a senior IAS officer for Kurnool constituency against TDP candidate TG Bharat, sources say.

On Wednesday, Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy issued GO 477 accepting the request of A MD Imtiaz, Additional Chief Commissioner of Land Administration, for his voluntary retirement from service. The officer is very much interested in serving the people directly after serving the State as an IAS officer in various positions.

A few days back, YSRCP was looking for a candidate to replace Kurnool MLA Hafeez Khan. Initially, Dr AM Iliyas Basha (Orthopedic) was considered as the YSRCP coordinator of Kurnool constituency. MLA Hafiz Khan and Dr Iliyas were invited to Amaravati for discussions on the selection of the coordinator.

However, the party high command realised that a section of YSRCP leaders were against Dr Iliyas, which made the party think twice before finalising the candidate.



A MD Imtiaz

Earlier, Imtiaz had expressed interest in joining politics and serving the people with the YSRCP high command. Imtiaz, who hails from Kurnool, did his schooling and college education in Kurnool.

His uncle, who is a doctor, is known as Rs 10 doctor. The family has a very good reputation across Kurnool and nearby places in the district.

Without wasting time, the senior IAS officer who comes from the minority community and is very much interested to enter politics, was chosen as Kurnool candidate by the party leadership.

A MD Imtiaz sent his request for voluntary retirement to the State government and Chief Secretary Jawahar Reddy issued the GO accepting the same and issuing a notification as per the Indian Administrative Service rules on Wednesday.

## TDP leaders join YSRCP



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP senior leader and former Minister Gollapally Surya Rao and P Gannavaram TDP leader Nelapudi Stalin Babu joined

YSRCP in the presence of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Camp Office here on Wednesday.

YSRCP regional coordinator PV Mithun Reddy and MP Kesineni Nani were present.

## Roshaiah replaces Venkataramana in YSRCP's 8<sup>th</sup> list

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP high command led by party president and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released the eighth list of coordinators on Wednesday night with five names. The coordinators for Guntur and Ongole Lok Sabha constituencies are Kilaru Roshaiah and Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy, respectively. For Ponnuru Assembly segment, the coordinator is Ambati Murali, for Kandukur, Burra Madhusudhan Yadav and for GD Nellore, the coordinator is Kalathuru Krupalakshmi.

Earlier, the coordinator for Guntur constituency was Umareddy Venkataramana. He has been replaced by Kilaru Roshaiah from the same family.

## Common for the political leaders to switch loyalties

Vijayasai responds to Magunta comments

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP national general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayasai Reddy has strongly reacted to the comments made by Ongole MP Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy who left the party ahead of the Assembly elections in the State.

Reacting to the resignation of Magunta from the ruling party, Vijayasai Reddy said on Wednesday that it is common for the political leaders to switch loyalties ahead of elections and this should be seen in the context. He said there will always be a reason for a political leader to change the

party. He also said that every party will have a few turncoats.

The YSRCP leader found fault with Magunta for attributing the lack of self-respect to leaving the party. Recently, MP Kesineni Nani crossed over from TDP to YSRCP. Does that mean there's no self-respect in the Opposition party, he asked.

Vijayasai Reddy further said that the comments made by Magunta are not appropriate. Magunta may have a reason for quitting the party, but he should know that the ruling party gives respect to all party members regardless of their position in the party, he added.

## CM Jagan attends wedding



CM Jagan Mohan Reddy attending the wedding of YSRCP leader Gunnam Nagababu's son at Bhimavaram on Wednesday

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy attended the wedding of YSRCP leader Gunnam Nagababu's son at the

Radhakrishna Convention Centre here on Wednesday.

The Chief Minister blessed the couple Manikanta Venkata Subba Rao (Subhash) and Vijaya Deepti.

## Flow of welfare funds...

Continued from Page 1

“The government has been implementing various welfare schemes with commitment for the benefit of farmers and hand holding them at every step, unlike the previous TDP regime that ditched the farming community by defaulting on the Rs. 87, 612 crore loan waiver promise,” he said. He further said that while an amount of Rs 34,288 crore was incurred under Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan so far, Rs 2,050.53 crore was spent on interest subvention that benefit-

ted 84.66 lakh farmers under YSR Sunna Vaddi Panta Runalu. The Chief Minister said that 50 per cent of farmers own less than half a hectare and 70 per cent of farmers own less than one hectare and stressed that these two schemes would be very helpful to the small and marginal farmers in meeting 80 per cent of cultivation expenses.

The government has also been implementing several other schemes for the farmers including nine-hour free power supply during day time and input subsidy, he said.

## Siddham meeting.... National parties...

Continued from Page 1

CM Jagan will speak to the people and the cadre on the good governance and welfare schemes offered by the government in the preparatory meeting, which will continue from 3 pm to 5 pm, he said. He said that the announcement of the election notification is likely to be made on March 13 or 14. “If we see the support the party is getting from the people, the confidence of winning 175 out of 175 seats in the election will be strengthened,” he added.

Later, answering the questions of the media, MP Vijayasai Reddy said that the preparation of the manifesto is going on and will be announced very soon.

He also said that all the candidates will be declared before the final Siddham meeting. “No matter who the Opposition has formed alliances with, people are still with the YSR Congress party,” he claimed.

The arrangements were inspected by Ministers Merugu Nagarajana, Adimulapu Suresh, former minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, MPs Mopidevi Venkataramana Nandigam and Suresh, MLCS Lella Appireddy and Talashila Raghuram, party coordinators of various constituencies Buchepally Siva Prasad Reddy, Karanam Venkatesh, and Hanimi Reddy, Prakasam district president Janke Venkata Reddy and others.

## National parties...

Continued from Page 1

The AAP's income increased by 91.23 per cent (Rs 40.631 crore) from Rs 44.539 crore during FY 2021-22 to Rs 85.17 crore during FY 2022-23.

Between the 2021-22 fiscal and 2022-23 fiscal, the income of the Congress, CPI(M) and BSP decreased by 16.42 per cent (Rs 88.90 crore), 12.68 per cent (Rs 20.57 crore) and 33.14 per cent (Rs 14.50 crore) respectively, it noted, citing their records submitted to the Election Commission.

It also said the BJP declared a total income of Rs 2360.844 crore during FY 2022-23, but spent only 57.68 per cent, which comes to Rs 1,361.684 crore of the total income.

The Congress' total income was Rs 452.375 crore while it spent Rs 467.135 crore, with its expenditure for that year exceeding its total income by 3.26 per cent.

The CPI(M)'s total income was Rs 141.661 crore while it spent Rs 106.067 crore - 74.87 per cent of its income.

Similarly, the AAP's total income was Rs 85.17 crore while it spent Rs 102.051 crore -- its expenditure for that year exceeding its total income by 19.82 per cent.

## Efftronics bags prestigious AI award

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Efftronics Systems Pvt. Ltd. has received the national AI award in acknowledgment of their groundbreaking AI-ready IoT hardware and predictive algorithms which are accelerating Indian Railways ambitious march towards Industry 4.0. They secured the second runner-up position in the category of Excellence in Best AI Technology/Products/Solutions by Industry, which was selected by an independent jury consisting of prominent experts from ITIs and Industry.

Recent years have seen an increasing focus within the railway transportation industry to improve the safety, punctuality and operations planning. Efftronics, in line with its vision of 'Analyse data and pro-

vide actionable real time decisions', has been working on end-to-end Internet of Things (IoT) platform indigenously and lately started deploying the solutions across India in the field of condition monitoring.

Dasari Ramakrishna, Managing Director of Efftronics, said: “We are very excited and happy to show that in addition to great technologies, it's the value we deliver to the customers that are differentiating us from the rest of the industry. This recognition in the area of cutting-edge AI technology at a national level demonstrates our core R&D capabilities. With native young talent, right intent, and sincere efforts, we proved that place doesn't matter for achieving results. We at Efftronics con-

tinuously upgrade with futuristic technologies & best practices there by continuously improving knowledge and skills to develop world class solutions for Railways and other domains.”

Speaking on the occasion, company vice-president Dasari Anvesh said: “Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Cloud and Digital Twins are going to play a major role in our lives going forward. Already we are witnessing an extraordinary rise of Generative AI (like ChatGPT) in the last couple of years. These AI technologies will bring a complete paradigm shift in how we work, and even how we live. It's high time for everyone to learn these technologies and upgrade skills required for the digital era.”

## Lokesh's absence at Tadepalligudem...

Continued from Page 1

In Rajahmundry (rural), there was a virtual clash between Jana Sena Party candidate Kandula Durgesh and sitting TDP MLA Gorantla Buchaiah Chowdary. Both Naidu and Pawan had to struggle a lot to settle the issue and finally, Durgesh agreed to move to Nidadavole constituency.

Similar issues cropped up at Razole in Konaseema district, which was allotted to Jana Sena Party as part of the seat sharing. Expressing anguish over the development, former minister and senior TDP leader Gollapalli Surya Rao resigned from the party on Wednesday.

In his letter to Naidu,

Surya Rao said he had been in politics since 1981 and served as a member of late N T Rama Rao and YS Rajasekhara Reddy cabinets twice. “As an MLA from Razole from 2014 to 2019, I did not cause any trouble to you or the party and strived for the party,” he said.

He said he had served as the State vice-president of the TDP since 2019 and as Razole con-

stituency In-charge. “I have upheld the reputation of the party by following every programme given by the state party with commitment and discipline even in the adverse situation,” he said.

Surya Rao said he was deeply saddened that his name did not figure in the list of 94 MLAs released by the party a couple of days ago.



GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH  
PUBLIC HEALTH & MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

NIT No. 1740/TDGP/AMRUT2.BWS/TO/2024-1  
Name of the work: Providing House Service Connections and Distribution Network in YSR Tadapalli Municipality under AMRUT 2.0 (Tranche-1). Estimate Value: Rs. 1339.47 Lakhs. Bid document download start date: 01.03.2024 from 11:00 AM. Further details visit: www.appeprocurement.gov.in, Ph.No.: 9849905736.  
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, P.H. Q.C Circle, Guntur.

NIT No. 1336/CL/AMRUT1/2021-22, Dt: 28.02.2024



# Focus on stress-free environment in pre-school

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Pre-primary classrooms should prioritise fostering a stress-free learning environment through collaborative activities and play, instead of focusing solely on academics and competition, advised Suman Sood, member of the national core committee of an association of pre-schools.

Speaking during a session for around 40 teachers from 15 schools on foundational literacy and numeracy here in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, Suman emphasised the importance of fostering a collaborative learning environment, stating, "Teachers should try to make the school environment and classrooms non-competitive. That will help children learn in a stress-free environment."

Suman highlighted the need to shift focus from comparing children's progress and reporting on 'what the child has not learnt' to a more encouraging approach. "The focus should be



on what the kids have learnt," she noted, emphasising the absence of rankings at the pre-primary level in most schools. However, teachers pointed out the pressure parents often put on their children, comparing grades and achievements with other students. "Parents of children in kindergarten compare their kids' worksheets and worry about mistakes, even though the child doesn't

understand grades yet," said one teacher.

Suman advocated for using play as the primary tool for learning. "Activities should be done through play, and children will pick up skills. They learn to share, to wait for their turn and to be patient," she explained. She further emphasised the importance of fostering social and language skills before focusing solely on aca-

demics. "Instead of asking children to colour within lines, they can be allowed to just draw, scribble and colour as they want," Sood said, suggesting ways to encourage open-ended exploration.

"Once they draw, teachers can sit with them and ask what they have drawn and why. This will help them think and speak up, developing their language skills," he added.



## CM releases book on agriculture

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released the book 'Vyavasayam Susampnam Rashtraniki Soubhagya' at the Camp Office here on Wednesday.

The book, compiled by the Agriculture Department, depicts the achievements made in the agriculture sector during the past five years.

# Collector discusses poll preparedness with parties

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector Dr A Mallikharjuna called a crucial meeting with representatives of political parties in his chamber on Wednesday. The meeting centered on ensuring transparent election processes, discussing rules of conduct, and addressing various logistical aspects. During the meeting, Collector Dr. A. Mallikharjuna announced the formation of seven teams in each assembly constituency. These teams will be tasked with monitoring election expenses, overseeing the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and addressing macro and micro-level aspects to ensure a smooth electoral process.

One of the key points discussed was the preparation of the voter list, the allocation of polling centers, and other related issues. The Collector emphasised the importance of collaboration between political parties, election officials, and the general public for the efficient conduct of elections. Dr. A. Mallikharjuna urged polit-



Collector Dr A Mallikharjuna attending a meeting with representatives of political parties on Wednesday

ical party representatives to actively participate in constituency-level meetings and provide valuable advice and suggestions. He assured that the election process in the district would be carried out with transparency and efficiency.

Providing updates on voter statistics, the Collector mentioned that as of the final list release on January 22, the district had 19,42,593 voters. Subsequently, 19,847 new vot-

ers have been added, bringing the total number to 19,62,440 as of February 28. He stated that 1,941 polling centres have been set up in accordance with the Central Election Commission's instructions. He clarified that additional polling centers would be established in areas where the number of voters exceeds 1,500, and applications for such adjustments would be accepted until March 5.



# 'Concrete steps needed to empower women to excel in software engineering'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Madhavi Boinapalli, Senior Director, Microsoft, India, has asserted the need for the empowerment of women in the software industry and asked students to update their skills according to the changing needs of the world. She addressed the students during the national-level Techno-Cultural Festival held at Siddhartha Engineering College at Vijayawada on Wednesday, which witnessed a convergence of talent, innovation, and cultural diversity from across the nation.

Madhavi said that as we navigate the digital age, software engineering has become increasingly central to our lives, shaping how we work, communicate, and interact with the world. "Yet, despite its importance, women remain vastly underrepresented in this field. It's time we address this disparity and take concrete steps to empower women to excel in software engineering."

Jithender Singh, H.R.

Manager, Congizant Technology Solutions, said: "In today's rapidly changing world, one thing is abundantly clear: to stay relevant and competitive, we must constantly update ourselves with the latest trends and technological advancements. Whether we're individuals striving for personal growth or businesses aiming at success, embracing change and evolution is not just important – it's essential. From Artificial Intelligence to blockchain, from renewable energy to space exploration, the possibilities are endless."

Dr. AV Ratna Prasad, Principal of VR Siddhartha Engineering College, added: "The National Techno-Cultural Festival of Siddhartha Engineering College is not just an event; it's a celebration of creativity, innovation, and cultural diversity."

As per the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an Ideathon was the special attraction of the programme.



# Three farmworkers die as TSRTC bus hits auto-rickshaw

PNS ■ SURYAPET

Three women farmworkers died on the spot and 12 others were injured in a road accident as a TSRTC bus hit an auto-rickshaw at Mothe in Suryapet district on Thursday morning.

The deceased were identified as Kandula Nagamma and Chevula Narayananamma from Vijayaraghavapuram and Pakala Anasuraya under Munagala mandal in Telangana State.

A TSRTC bus belonging to

the Madira depot rammed into the auto-rickshaw from behind.

The women farmworkers were on their way to Burkacherla under Mothe mandal in the ill-fated auto-rickshaw.

The injured persons were shifted to the Government General Hospital in Suryapet.

The condition of three of them was stated to be serious. The driver of the auto-rickshaw Sompangu Pavan also suffered injuries in the accident.

# Andhra Cricket Association refutes Hanuma Vihari's allegations

Ready to conduct thorough investigation into the matter

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) has addressed the controversy surrounding Hanuma Vihari's recent remarks regarding his captaincy, asserting its stance against public disputes within the team. Responding to allegations made by Vihari on social media, the ACA emphasised the importance of professionalism and unity within the cricketing community. In a press release issued on Wednesday, the ACA refuted accusations levelled against the association by Hanuma Vihari, urging for transparency and adherence to established procedures. Vihari's claims, which have garnered attention from certain political factions, have prompted the ACA to provide clarity on the matter.

According to the ACA, Hanuma Vihari, a prominent figure in Andhra Pradesh



cricket since 2017, has been involved in various age groups before representing both the State and national teams. Despite past accommodations for Vihari's requests for No Objection Certificates (NOCs), the ACA stated that his recent denial led to public outcry and emotional frustration, resulting in unfounded allegations against the association.

In response to Vihari's allegations of unfair dismissal from captaincy despite unan-

imous teammate support, the ACA announced its intention to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter. Concerns over the alleged intimidation of players in lodging complaints against Vihari will be addressed in the forth-coming report to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Moreover, the ACA dismissed claims made by Vihari against fellow player KN Prithviraj, highlighting Prithvira's commendable track

record in various cricket tournaments. Allegations of misconduct during a Ranji Trophy match against Bengal further compounded Vihari's issues within the team, leading to internal divisions and formal complaints.

The decision to change the team captaincy, according to the ACA, stemmed from recommendations by the Selection Committee following concerns over Vihari's behavior. The association clarified that it played no part in the decision-making process, reiterating the autonomy of the Selection Committee in matters of leadership. The ACA expressed disappointment over the politicisation of cricket, urging stakeholders to prioritise the integrity of the sport over personal agendas. The association emphasised its commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive environment for players and officials alike.



Caption: After inaugurating Gora Techno Hub, NTR District Collector Dilli Rao visiting the science exhibition on the premises of Nastik Kendram in Vijayawada

# Collector inaugurates Gora Techno Hub

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao praised renowned Dr G Samaram for establishing the Gora Techno Hub in Vijayawada in aiming of encouraging students to find new innovations.

On the occasion of National Science Day, the District Collector inaugurated the newly established Gora Techno Hub on the premises of Nastik Kendram near Benz Circle in Vijayawada on

Wednesday.

Collector Dilli Rao visited the science exhibition that was arranged on the premises of the Gora Techno Hub. He said that the youth will play a crucial role in leading the country to development in science and technology. The district administration will support the Techno Hub to achieve its target, he assured.

Dr Samaram, Prof. Lakshmi Devi, Prof. Naresh, Dr G Maru, G Rashmi and others were present.

## NATIONAL SCIENCE DAY

# Project Expo and Art Expo celebrations held at the RGUKT, Nuzvid Campus

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the occasion of National Science Day, the Student Development and Campus Activity Cell (SDCAC) of the RGUKT-Nuzvid campus conducted an Expo event for the PUC students at the IIIT campus at Nuzvid on Wednesday. This event aims to foster innovation, creativity, and appreciation for the scientific endeavor, while also highlighting the intersection between science and art.

Nearly 20 students studying PUC have the opportunity to explore a wide range of science projects, experiments, and innovations, spanning various disciplines such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Engineering, and Environmental Science. Some of the projects displayed are IOT IOT-based Agriculture, Railway platform accident prevention, Smart blind stick,



RGUKT Nuzvid Campus Director Prof. Chandrasekhara Rao speaking at the National Science Day programmes on the campus on Wednesday

Sound fencing with wind turbine, Automatic train gate open and close system, Prevention of accidents due to drowsiness etc.

The SDCAC has conducted an Art Expo with the theme "The Space". Nearly 40 students have participated in the Art Expo and exhibited their paintings. For this Expo, RGUKT, Nuzvid Campus Director Prof. M Chandrasekhar has been invit-

ed as a chief guest. He congratulated students who participated in this Expo and distributed mementoes for the winners of the Project and Art Expo.

The SDCAC faculty in charge and Department of Mathematics, V Ramu, SDCAC president, Pranay, Vice presidents, P Sai Bhavani and K Mohan. Treasurer Chandu and students of PUC participated in the programme.

# Negligence led to devastating fire in Gajuwaka Shopping Complex

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a devastating incident that shook Gajuwaka on Tuesday, Fire Department officials have identified negligence on the part of the building owner as the cause of a massive fire. The conflagration engulfed a shopping complex designed in a G+4 style, housing various establishments including a jewelry store, Byju's-Akash Academy, and a hotel. The fire originated on the prem-

ises of Akash Baiju's Academy situated on the second floor. Despite initial assurances of fire prevention measures during the building's construction, investigations revealed critical lapses in safety protocols. Although the structure obtained a Fire NOC from the GVMC Regional Fire Department, the certification



had expired less than five months ago, prompting the owner to seek renewal. However, upon inspection,

officials discovered several deficiencies in the fire prevention system, including malfunctioning equipment and inadequate safety protocols such as the absence of a designated fire safety officer.

Despite warnings from fire officials regarding the potential risks, the building owner reportedly failed to address

the concerns raised, disregarding the necessity for immediate action. Tragically, despite early warnings from concerned citizens and prompt notification to both the building owner and fire brigade, efforts to contain the blaze were futile.

District Fire Department Officer S. Renukaya emphasised the need for a thorough investi-

gation into the incident, with potential repercussions for the building owner pending confirmation of identified defects. He stressed that had the fire prevention system been functional, the catastrophe might have been averted at an early stage. As authorities prepare to issue notices to the responsible parties, the incident serves as a sobering reminder of the critical importance of adhering to stringent fire safety regulations to prevent such tragedies in the future.



# Officials asked to give reports on candidates' election expenditure

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector Sumit Kumar directed the officials concerned to prepare reports on the expenditure on candidates who are contesting in the forthcoming elections.

Training classes were conducted for the elections officials here on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector advised the trainees to prepare the expenditure reports of the candidates contesting in the upcoming Parliament and Legislative Assembly elections as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India.

Collector Sumit Kumar told the officials to read the guidelines and rules books issued by the Election Commission of India carefully and contact the concerned nodal officials if they have any doubts. Types of



election expenses, flying squad, static surveillance, video surveillance, accounting, duties to be performed by MCMC teams were explained by the Collector.

He said that a candidate contesting for each Parliamentary constituency is allowed to spend up to Rs 95 lakh and a candidate contesting for a Legislative Assembly constituency is allowed to

spend up to Rs 40 lakh. "Those candidates will lose their eligibility, if they spend more than that. All the teams should enter the details of expenses of the candidates as assigned to them in the respective registers," the Collector instructed.

The Candidates have to show their expenditure reports thrice to the Expenditure Scrutinizers. The details should

be entered in the Election Seizure Management System ESMS app as soon as any illegal cash or goods are transported or distributed anywhere, the Collector told the officials.

Joint Collector S Ram Sundar Reddy, DRO B Shivannarayana Reddy and RDOs K Srinivulu Raju, Achut Anand and Cehnaiah were a host of officials who were present.

# Minister volunteers playing vital role in implementing welfare schemes

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Health Vidadala Rajini lauded the services of village and ward volunteers stating that they are playing a significant role in implementing various welfare schemes.

The Minister participated in the 'Volunteer Ku Vondanam' programme, organized in the auditorium on the campus of medical college here on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has set up the volunteer system to ensure the efficient implementation of welfare schemes at the ground level.

She described the volunteers as a bridge between the government and the people, adding that the role of volunteers is very important in reaching the welfare and development programmes of the government to the people.

Recognizing their services,



the government is giving them awards. The volunteer system is the brainchild of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, she said. "The Volunteer system which existed in AP has become a debatable issue in the country. Several teams came from various states to AP to study the functioning of the volunteer system," she stated.

The people of the state wit-

nessed the atrocities of Janmabhoomi committees during the erstwhile TDP regime. Unlike the Janmabhoomi committees, the volunteers in the present regime go to every house and extend needed services with a smiling face, she extolled.

When they went to the people during the 'Gadapa Gadapaku' programme, people

praised the services of volunteers, the Health Minister claimed, adding that the government feels proud of volunteers.

"As many as 1597 volunteers in the Guntur West constituency were given awards for their efficient services of which five were given Seva Vajra award, 18 were given Seva Mitra award and 1574 were given Seva Mitra awards," the minister said.

Mayor K Manohar Naidu the government has recognized the valuable services of volunteers and honored them. MLC Chandragiri Yesuratnam said that the volunteers visit every household and help the eligible poor in getting the benefits of welfare schemes. MLA Maddali Girdhar Rao also spoke.

Differently-abled corporation chairperson Mumtaz Pathan, deputy mayor Bala Vajrababu, social welfare board director G Jhansy, deputy commissioner Venkata Krishnaiah and other leaders were present.

# Youth gets 10 yrs' imprisonment for raping minor girl

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Ongole POCSO court Judge MA Somasekhara sentenced a youth 10 years imprisonment for raping a minor girl. The court also imposed a Rs 4000 fine on him.

Prakasam district SP P Parameswar Reddy said here on Wednesday that the accused S Pradip Kumar (22) dragged the 17-year-old victim into his house when she went to fetch water.

He sexually assaulted her and video graphed the heinous act on August 20, 2017 and the incident took place at a village in Kottapatnam mandal. Later he started threatening her to



send the video and photos to others. He also foiled the marriage proposals of the girl.

A case was registered under the POCSO ACT in the Kottapatnam police station on September 14, 2018. As the

prosecution succeeded in producing strong evidence, the POCSO judge sentenced the perpetrator to 10 years imprisonment and also imposed a Rs 4,000 fine.

The SP appreciated the then Ongole two town CI N Suresh Kumar Reddy, present CI Jagadish, PP, court liaison ASI EV Swamy and police personnel for probing the case in the court and getting the accused punished by the court.

The SP warned of taking stringent action against those who commit crimes against minor girls and women. Steps have been taken to conduct efficient trials under the good trial monitoring system, he stated.

# Kakinada dist receives Rs 36.33 cr under Rythu Bharosa

PNS ■ KAKINADA/BHIMAVARAM

Kakinada district has received Rs 36.33 crore under the YSR Rythu Bharosa and PM Kisan.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy released Rs 1294.34 crore towards the third tranche of 'YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan' for the fifth year and interest subvention for the fourth year in a row under 'YSR Sunna Vaddi Panta Runalu' from his camp office on Wednesday.

As many as 1,80,609 farmers in Kakinada district were being disbursed Rs 36.33 crore under the 'YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan' schemes. Collector Krithika Shukla said that the amount would be credited into the accounts of farmers.

A programme was organized on the occasion of releasing



funds under the YSR Rythu Bharosa. The Collector released a replica of the cheque on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Kritika Shukla said that under the YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan scheme, 1,80,434 farmers had been provided input subsidy to the tune of Rs 1085.50

crore during the last four and a half years from 2019.

She said that for the 5th consecutive year, the third installment of Rs 36.33 crore financial assistance was being disbursed to the farmers. Similarly, 34,270 farmers who took loans and paid them on time in 2021-22 Rabi and 2022 Kharif, would get

Rs 5.33 crore. The money would be credited to their bank accounts.

Collector Kritika Shukla said that the state government is working with great commitment towards the welfare of the farmers and that the farmers should take advantage of the facilities and welfare schemes provided

by the state government. District Agriculture officer BVSC Hari, district horticulture Officer N Malikharijun Rao and APMIP PD GVVV Prasad Rao were among those who were present.

Meanwhile, West Godavari district received Rs 25.42 crore under the YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan. Collector Sumit Kumar Gandhi said that 1,27,114 farmers were being disbursed Rs 25.42 crore under Rythu Bharosa and 29,270 farmers being disbursed Rs 5.23 crore under zero interest crop loans.

The Collector called upon the beneficiaries to utilize the money properly. The Collector released a replica of the cheque on the occasion. District Agriculture advisory board chairman K Srinivasa Rao and a host of officials were present.



# Police seize liquor bottles while being transported illegally

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The police seized a huge quantity of liquor while being transported illegally at Palamaner on Wednesday.

DSP Maheswar Reddy told the media that on a tip off that a huge quantity of NDPL

liquor was being brought from Karnataka state, the police conducted checking of vehicles.

The police found liquor bottles worth over Rs 2 lakh being brought in a car from Karnataka state. The police arrested one person in this connection.



# Ganja crop in 1.5 acres destroyed

PNS ■ PADERU

The police conducted a raid at Mittagudem village in Dokarai mandal in ASR district and destroyed a ganja crop in 1.5 acres of land.

Police said on Wednesday that on a tip off, a police team led by Circle Inspector Gajendra Kumar conducted a raid at Mittagudem village in Donkarai police station limit. They found ganja was being cultivated in one and half

acres of land.

The police removed 550 ganja plants. Under the presence of Y Ramavaram deputy tahsildar K Sudhakar Rao, the police burnt the ganja plants.

The police arrested V Jisan, Buridi Sahadev, Korra Sonia, Pangi Nageswar Rao, K Nagesh and P Appa Rao for cultivating ganja illegally. The arrested persons were produced before the junior first class magistrate court.

# YSRCP suffers blow as MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy quits

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The ruling YSRCP has suffered another major blow as its Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy has quit the party.

Srinivasulu Reddy announced his decision of quitting the YSRCP while addressing a press conference here on Wednesday. He said that his family has been in politics for 34 years and people have been extending their support.

He has taken a decision in unavoidable circumstances to quit the YSRCP, the Ongole MP announced. "My son Magunta Raghava Reddy will contest from Ongole Lok Sabha constituency in the



forthcoming election," he disclosed.

"We have a special affection and association with the people of the region. I have been elected to Lok Sabha for 8 times and one time to Legislative Council during the last 33 years," he stated and claimed that the Magunta family has created a brand for itself in the district.

"The present happenings

## UTTAM SHARES FROM MINUTES OF MEETING

# KCR decided even the size of concrete block

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, who had been pictured wetting his feet during the construction of the Kaleshwaram, seems to have had a hands-on approach towards many aspects of the project, going by details of the minutes of certain meetings shared by Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy on Wednesday.

Sharing technical details, Uttam Kumar Reddy told the media: "In the minutes of meet-

ing (MoM), it is officially recorded, Chief Minister suggesting on the size of concrete blocks to be used, how much concrete needs to be poured. Increase it to 10,000 cubic metres per day"... We will release all these after vigilance releases their reports."

He said that they were vetting the minutes of the meeting legally so that they could disclose further details of the decisions taken by KCR.

Uttam said that the Completion Certificate was

given in a fraudulent way. Contrary to norms, the coffer dam was not removed. "There are dams and barrages that have life of 100 years. It was great KCR who built a barrage that collapsed in 3 years."

Uttam said that they would try to restore it by this summer season after they get NDSA report. "NDSA will tell us how to repair; we will do as advised. If they say to start from a scratch, we will. We have told L&T to take up the repair at their cost".



# I have given advice for their wellbeing: Rama Jogaiah

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Responding to Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan's comment, former MP and Kapu Samkshama sena president K Hari Ramjogaiah said that he had given advice for the wellbeing of both the TDP and JSP leaders.

In a statement here on Wednesday Rama Jogaiah said: "It seems my advice did not go well with them. I have nothing to do as that is their fate. 'Adi Vari Khurma'"

It may be mentioned here that while addressing the massive 'Jenda' public meeting at Tadepalligudem, Pawan Kalyan made it clear that he wants the leaders who support him in the election battle but he does not want the leaders who advise him, pointing the finger towards Hari Ramjogaiah without mentioning his name.

# Telangana netas keenly observing HP developments

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana legislators are keenly observing developments in Himachal Pradesh, where there is a burgeoning political crisis. Amid apparent wishful thinking among BRS legislators, BJP Rajya Sabha member Dr Laxman said one must 'wait and watch what happens after MP elections'. The senior

Himachal, but Telangana and Karnataka too."

Himachal is the only state in the north where the Congress is in power on its own. The Congress came to power with 40 MLAs in the 68-member Himachal Assembly in 2022. In the recent Rajya Sabha elections, six Congress MLAs cross-voted for the BJP candidate. In Himachal, where the



magic number is 35, the Congress looks to be walking the tightrope with 34 MLAs after the six MLAs had distanced themselves from the party.

"We had no role in the cross-voting as the Congress MLAs had openly voted against the official candidate and one Minister had expressed his frustration over not being able to do anything for the youth", he said.

Even in Telangana the margin for Congress is 64+1CPM. It is not a huge margin. BRS has been reportedly talking about toppling the government. On the other hand, Revanth Reddy has been challenging and speaking about it in every public meeting. Political analysts see that Revanth Reddy, by speaking about the 'toppling' of his government, is trying to create a sense of insecurity among people about their voting.

## DELHI EXCISE POLICY SCAM

# SC extends protection to Kavitha till March 13

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday extended till March 13 the protection it had granted to BRS leader K Kavitha from any coercive action in a money laundering case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

A bench comprising justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mishal extended the operation of its earlier order and said the matter will now be taken up for further hearing on March 13.

The ED had issued summons to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader on February 21 seeking her presence on February 26. However, Kavitha did not appear before the central probe agency.

The ED has alleged that Kavitha was a part of liquor cartel 'The South Group' which paid kickback of Rs 100 crore to Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in return for favours under the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

The top court had on February 5 also extended the



protection to Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao.

The bench had deferred the matter after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Kavitha, said it may be listed for final hearing.

Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the ED,

had told the court that Kavitha has been avoiding summons and not appearing before the agency.

On September 15, 2023, the ED had told the apex court that the summons issued to Kavitha for her appearance before the agency would be extended by 10 days.

The ED had issued the summons dated September 4, 2023 to Kavitha, seeking her appearance at the agency's Delhi office on September 15.

She approached the apex court with an application seek-

ing directions to restrain the ED from calling her by way of a notice or summons under section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) during the pendency of her petition.

In her plea, she sought protection from coercive action by the anti-money laundering agency on the ground that there are relaxations for women in various criminal laws, including the PMLA.

Section 50 of the PMLA deals with the powers of authorities regarding summons, produc-

tion of documents, submitting evidence, etc.

The application also sought a stay on the operation of the September 4 summons or any other summons and "all coercive measures relating thereto".

In a significant verdict on July 27, 2022, the top court upheld the ED's powers relating to arrest, attachment of property involved in money laundering, search and seizure under the PMLA that were challenged by multiple petitioners, including Congress leader Karti Chidambaram.







## Upper hand

Showing astute political strategy in RS polls, BJP seems all set for Lok Sabha elections

Even before the Lok Sabha elections, whose dates are yet to be confirmed, the BJP is busy securing one political citadel after another. Beyond the mathematical calculation of winning eight Rajya Sabha seats of the 15 available in three States, it has managed to bag two extra seats — the lone seat in Himachal Pradesh and one in Uttar Pradesh, dealing another body blow to the INDIA bloc, an Opposition alliance. Worse, the upset in Himachal would likely embolden the saffron party to demand a trust vote against the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu Government. Already, the Congress Government is seeing a fresh scramble for power amid abandonment by its own members, the latest being the announcement of resignation by State PWD Minister Vikramaditya Singh. Trouble has been mounting for the Congress since Tuesday, when it lost the sole Rajya Sabha seat to the BJP with six of its members cross-voting in the poll. The RS elections are often seen as a litmus test of political equations within



States and among parties. They reflect the ability of political parties to rally support and secure positions of influence in the Upper House of Parliament. However, the cross-voting has added a new dimension to the political landscape, indicating possible shifts in alliances and loyalties. The INDIA bloc, comprising 28 Opposition parties, had hoped to consolidate its position in the Rajya Sabha. However, this setback has raised questions about the cohesion and effectiveness of the Opposition alliance, even in States where the Congress is in power.

These instances of brazen cross-voting have not only raised eyebrows but also sparked speculation about

its potential implications for the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP's success in securing additional seats through cross-voting underscores its growing clout and organisational strength, especially in key battleground States. For the Opposition, the Rajya Sabha poll results serve as a wake-up call, highlighting the need for greater unity and coordination. The failure to prevent cross-voting not only reflects internal fissures but also raises questions about the effectiveness of their electoral strategy. As the Lok Sabha elections draw near, the Opposition parties must regroup and realign their priorities to present a formidable challenge to the BJP. At the same time, the BJP's latest triumph should not be viewed in isolation. It reflects the party's relentless pursuit of expanding its footprint across regions and States. The BJP's ability to capitalise on opportunities, whether through defections, alliances or cross-voting, underscores its status as a formidable political force. Looking ahead, the Rajya Sabha poll results indicate a shifting landscape where traditional alliances may no longer hold sway, and parties must adapt to changing realities to stay relevant. The BJP's latest success is a testament to its adaptability and astute political strategy. In modern times, political expediency is everything; moral values, ideologies and loyalties can be taken up later.

### PICTALK



Visitors during the Bharat Tex 2024, a global textile expo, in New Delhi

PTI

## Dropshipping: The human touch in a digital era

With its low-risk, high-reward approach, dropshipping offers a gateway to success, empowering ventures to thrive in the competitive arena

As technology has become more accessible to billions of individuals, the e-commerce sector has emerged as a dominating force in today's complex and global marketplace. According to Mordor Intelligence, India's e-commerce market size is expected to skyrocket to \$299.01 billion by 2029, with a CAGR of 21.50%, and is estimated to be \$112.93 billion in 2024. While it might seem easy to others, the truth is that succeeding in e-commerce requires significant effort. This is where to establish a trustworthy reputation in today's competitive era, dropshipping has emerged as a viable option for entrepreneurs and small businesses.



focus on marketing and customer service, ultimately creating a unique brand identity that appeals to their target audience.

Furthermore, this personal touch in the digital age sets them apart from their competitors and helps establish trust and loyalty among customers. As online shopping continues to grow, dropshipping will become a critical tool for staying competitive in the ever-changing e-commerce market. Plus, according to IMARC, the global dropshipping market is expected to reach \$1,787.4 billion by 2032, with a growth rate (CAGR) of 23.46% from 2024-2032.

**How to craft a unique brand identity with dropshipping:** In an era where having a

unique brand identity is imperative, dropshipping offers a convenient and cost-effective way to achieve this. With dropshipping, companies can customise their brand image and choose unique products to appeal to particular clientele groups. Through dependable supplier partnerships and efficient marketing techniques, entrepreneurs can also establish a distinctive brand identity that appeals to their intended market. This uniqueness helps firms stand out from the competition in the digital era and draws in customers while also encouraging brand loyalty.

**Empowering businesses to succeed!**

While dropshipping uses technology and automation to streamline operations, it is ultimately the human touch that sets businesses apart in the digital age. Thus, by embracing the human touch and prioritising meaningful interactions, small businesses and entrepreneurs can differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace and build a loyal customer base that transcends transactions. Furthermore, when business-

es dropship and focus their operations, a plethora of opportunities arise that empower them to succeed in today's ever-evolving era. In conclusion, as technology continues to democratise commerce, the e-commerce sector thrives, with India's market poised for exponential growth. Amidst this landscape, dropshipping emerges as a vital strategy for entrepreneurs and small businesses to navigate the competitive realm.

By leveraging reliable suppliers and focusing on branding, dropshipping facilitates unique market positioning, crucial for sustained success. As the global dropshipping market burgeons, embracing this model empowers businesses to craft distinctive identities, fostering customer loyalty and longevity. Ultimately, while technology drives efficiency, it's the human touch that propels businesses forward, ensuring relevance and resilience in the dynamic e-commerce sphere.

*(The writer is prominent player in the Indian eCommerce industry and domain expert of dropshipping; views are personal)*



PARAS THAKKAR

## The US presidential election: Trump redux

Former US President Donald Trump's recent victory over his challenger, Nikki Haley, in South Carolina has injected fresh energy into the American presidential election race

On Saturday, former US President Donald Trump's win over his challenger, Nikki Haley, intensified the American presidential election race. With this win, Trump is moving toward a clear path to the Republican nomination. He dominated the primaries so far, in which voters select a party's nominee who will compete in the general election. "On November 5, we'll get up here and say, 'Joe, you're fired! You're fired! Get out!'" Trump said after his South Carolina win.

According to polls, the next presidential election on November 5 is expected to be close. It will be a replay between the current President, Joe Biden, and the former President, Donald Trump, just like in 2020. Additionally, there will be third-party candidates in the upcoming election. Both presidential candidates are old. American media reports suggest that some people prefer a third option. They believe there is little difference between them. Fewer Americans are interested in a potential rematch between these two candidates. Biden wants to finish the work he started in his first term. He believes winning a second term is crucial to preserving America's democratic traditions. However, some people worry about his age and the reported memory loss, while others support him. Republicans have criticised him for this. Historically, since 1944, no US President has lost an election without a recession during the election cycle or just before. Being the incumbent President is in Biden's favour. He has no serious challengers in his party. Though Biden's poll numbers are low, the Democrats do not have an alternative plan. The two presumptive presidential candidates must complete several steps before the November elections. From January 15 to June 4, 2024, states will hold caucuses and primary elections to choose their preferred candidates. The two candidates with the most support from their party members will officially become the nominees during the conventions. The Republican National Convention will occur from July 15 to July 18



in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From August 19 to August 22, the National Convention of the Democrats will be held in Chicago, Illinois. Democrats and Independents prioritise preserving democracy and concerns about inflation and immigration. The campaign will focus on essential topics such as reproductive rights, climate change, democracy in America, and US support for Ukraine.

Suppose President Trump is re-elected for a second term; he may seek retribution against his adversaries. There are concerns about whether Trump intends to decrease the number of federal civil service employees, tighten immigration regulations, and terminate the Affordable Care Act. Trump has also vowed to make trade with China more challenging, hinting that he may not defend all NATO partners. Biden's low approval ratings and reported memory issues made it necessary to impress his supporters that he has the energy and ability to serve another four years as President.

He will be 81 when elections take place on November 5. Trump will be 77. Biden is confident that he is the only Democratic candidate capable

of defeating Trump. He has emphasised his role in protecting democracy overseas. In the campaign, he's been focusing on the threat to democracy within the USA. United States. As for his performance, Biden fulfilled vital campaign promises, like creating jobs and restoring normalcy after COVID. Americans tend to vote for the party that best serves their economic interests. Historically, they have tended to support the governing party during good times, while in bad times, they prefer the opposition. In 1992, Bill Clinton used the campaign slogan "It's the economy, stupid" to emphasise the significance of the economy in politics. Trump faces 91 criminal charges under four indictments. They are: For falsifying his business records in New York; For withholding classified federal government documents in Florida; And for attempts to overturn the 2020 election in two separate cases in Washington and the state of Georgia. Despite these serious allegations, a significant number of members of the Republican party continue to show support for him. He has the support of those who believe in

AMERICANS TEND TO VOTE FOR THE PARTY THAT BEST SERVES THEIR ECONOMIC INTERESTS. HISTORICALLY, THEY HAVE TENDED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNING PARTY DURING GOOD TIMES, WHILE IN BAD TIMES, THEY PREFER THE OPPOSITION

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### DIDI'S HOLLOW SLOGAN

Sir — The horrific events that have unfolded in Sandeshkhali have paid to Mamata Didi's vaunted slogan of Maa, Mati, and Manush. The political slogan coined by Mamata herself has turned out to be a grim joke on the state's people. Murder, Mayhem, and Molestation have usurped Maa, Mati, and Manush, going by the horror stories coming out of Sandeshkhali. The deliberate misreading of the Calcutta HC stay order on the formation of an SIT and CM Mamata Banerjee's stock response to the horrific incidents at Sandeshkhali - outsiders and BJP/ RSS people are involved - leaves nobody in doubt that the main accused, Shahjahan Sheikh, enjoys the protection and patronage of Didi. Now that the HC has rapped the West Bengal government on the knuckles, it has promised to arrest Sheikh within a week. This sudden volte-face indicates that Sheikh is within earshot. Didi has now no option left but to arrest Sandeshkhali's bête noire and her party's henchman, Shahjahan Sheikh. Here's hoping Didi will show some spine.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

#### SPENT FORCE

Sir — In the never-ending battle between the police and the Maoists, either in Chhattisgarh or Jharkhand, the former has almost decimated the latter. The latest was the killing of three Maoists in the Koyalibeda forest area of the Kanker district in Chhattisgarh on Sunday. Significantly, Home Minister Amit Shah in a series of posts on X on Friday had said that the Centre's holistic approach, contributing to health and educational upliftment in the tribal areas dominated by the naxals, resulted in curbing naxalism to a great extent. Familiarity with the surroundings and rapport with the locals have acted as weapons for the police. Intelligence gathering has been a Maoist forte: the police have succeeded in beating the opponents at their own

#### Poverty on decline



Niti Aayog has recently made an important claim about poverty in the country citing the Consumer Expenditure Survey. Poverty in the country has been reduced by five per cent. Just read the news that the National Sample Survey Office conducted the survey. For this, about one lakh seven thousand families in urban areas and one lakh fifty-five thousand families in rural areas were selected. Along with this reduction in poverty, per capita monthly expenditure has doubled compared to 2011-2012. It has been men-

tioned in the report that the per capita monthly expenditure in the urban section is 6459 rupees and the expenditure in the rural section is 3773 rupees. People in both urban and rural areas have achieved economic progress.

Due to this, the race for development is going on. Compared to 2011-2012, the gap has reduced now. It has now come to 71 per cent from 84 per cent. Especially in the year 2004, this difference was almost 91 per cent. There have been changes in lifestyle in both these areas. As the purchasing power of both regions increases, they seem to be spending more on milk, fruits, and vegetables. Overall, this survey has brought out a big issue regarding the reduction of poverty. This is the result of the economic progress that has been going on under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi in the last ten years.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

game. Counselling the local tribals against giving in to the Maoist demands figures right on top of the agenda.

Over the years, many Naxals have given up their violent ways, and the credit should go to the concerted effort of the security forces. A combination of a humanitarian touch and taking the fight into the Maoist camps has paid rich dividends. According to Home Ministry data, in the last nine years, there has been a significant decline in left-wing extremism-related violence and deaths. Fatalities among both security forces and civilians have drastically reduced, by 72 and 68 per cent respectively, and these are exceptional numbers that we can see and it shows a positive figure.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

#### CRUELTY ON ANIMALS

Sir — The circus, often seen as a place of amusement and wonder, hides a darker truth behind its colourful curtains. Behind the spectacle, lies a world of suffering, as animals endure brutal

training methods including deprivation and beatings, to perform unnatural tricks. Tigers forced to jump through fiery hoops and elephants forced to balance on small platforms are emblematic of this exploitation.

The mental and physical well-being of the animal worsens as a result of this wrongdoing. Many suffer from injuries while others endure psychological distress from social deprivation and incarceration. Despite increased cognisance, the circus industry continues to prioritise profit over animal welfare. It's time to acknowledge the pain and suffering foisted upon circus animals in the name of entertainment. By boycotting animal-centric circuses and supporting cruelty-free entertainment, we can help end the exploitation of circus animals and create a world where laughter does not come at the expense of sentient beings.

Tanisha Gupta | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

BUILDING BRIDGES WITH EMPATHY

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that every student receives vital lessons in empathy



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

After being constantly taunted for her height, skin colour and academic performance by her fellow students for months, a 12-year-old girl cut her wrists in an attempt to end her mental agony. Fortunately, she was saved. But a 16-year-old student of Class 10, who jumped off the top floor of the apartment building he was living in, did not survive. It was his letter to his mother in which he wrote that the school had killed him, that revealed the shocking details of bullying he was subjected to and the school's failure to stop it. While several steps have been taken to put an end to bullying, penal action can only be a temporary deterrent and not a long-term solution especially in the present milieu of hyped social media, freely available toxic content and, peer pressure.

If children are taught to engage empathetically, can it inculcate feelings of respect, dignity and compassion for all? Project Empathy, an endeavour to bring empathy education into school curricula, believes being empathetic can nurture emotionally and mentally strong human beings. When young students understand the importance of living in harmony with one another, the 'walls of division' between them transform into 'walls of friendship'. Contrary to popular belief, empathy can be taught. While 50% of our empathic capacities are genetically inherited, research shows that the rest can be learnt. This is the biggest reason why empathy must be taught at a young age. Over the last five years, Project Empathy led by educationist Vibha Lakhera, introduced this concept and developed activities and stories that acknowledge, recognize and identify emotions and broaden the discussion around emotional health and well-being of every student.



Empathy education helps to enrich the emotional vocabulary of students and build their emotional and mental resilience. Introduced in about six schools mainly army schools like the Army Rifles Public Schools in North India and Kashmir and Alok Bharati Public School in Delhi, the project has been able to reach out to over 1500 students. Importantly, teachers, who lay the foundation for their values, have been recognized as critical to the success of teaching empathy.

This resource book for teachers draws from the education system and best practices in schools in Denmark and Finland, two countries among the top three happiest countries in the world according to the United Nations Happiness Report. Put together by Lakhera and veteran development journalist Usha Rai, the interesting manual explains the neuroscience of empathy with the help of psychologists and brain scientists sans any jargon. The mirror neurons, which light up when a person feels an emotion like sadness or joy, respond in the same way when this person sees another person also demonstrating the same kind of feelings or actions. This empathic reaction helps to understand and share experiences.


The manual also explains the types of empathy-cognitive, emotional and compassionate while differentiating between sympathy and empathy. Stories centred on children and their emotions have been innovatively used to provide practical guidelines on how to diffuse tensions, reduce stress, and strengthen understanding of each other's differences. At present, empathy is not included in teacher training programmes. Only a handful of schools have taken the initiative to introduce the concept of empathy education. There is a need to encourage all students to consider different perspectives and viewpoints. Only by being empathetic, can they understand and acknowledge differences of opinion and resolve conflict situations.

*(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)*

# A roadmap for comprehensive socio-economic inclusion

## The interim Budget for 2024 emerges as a crucial instrument for steering the nation towards inclusive development

As is the case with multiple developing economies across the world, India is faced with wealth inequality, unemployment, existing and persisting gaps in healthcare infrastructure and delivery, and environmental concerns. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index based on data from 2021/22 finds that 16.4 % of India's population lives in poverty with 4.2% facing severe poverty. The Regional Human Development Report 2024 by UNDP finds that the top 10% of the population controls 65% of the nation's total wealth, underlining stark wealth inequality. The consequences are multi-dimensional – it negatively impacts upward intergenerational mobility and



NAGHMA MULLA

lowers the rate of economic growth. Lack of jobs has been an area of concern for the country for decades now. While the current unemployment rate for January 2024 is 6.8, unemployment amongst educated youth is concerning. The State of Working India 2023 by Azim Premji University reveals that over 42% of India's graduates under 25 were unemployed in 2021-22.


Marked by a distinct urban-rural divide, gaps in healthcare services and infrastructure are a major obstacle for people in small towns and rural areas. A large part of India's population suffers from inaccessibility to quality healthcare – leading to delayed treatments and high out-of-pocket expenditure. A United Nations report emphasises that approximately 75% of healthcare infrastructure, medical personnel, and other health resources are predominantly located in urban regions, home to merely 27% of the overall population. The impact of climate change and disasters on both people and the economy has been devastating. India experienced uninsured losses of \$32.94 billion from natural disasters between 2018 and 2022. The

ramifications of human loss are even more grave and are evident in the 55.9 million displacements from 237 disasters mapped between 2018 – 2022. The interim budget addresses these issues in a big way. It presents a comprehensive roadmap for national progress, meticulously designed to touch upon critical facets of development such as women empowerment, job creation, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation. It aims to address the needs and aspirations of diverse social groups—'Garib' (the poor), 'Mahilayen' (women), 'Yuva' (youth), and 'Annadata' (farmers). This inclusion is notable as it envisages the significance of marginalised social groups in achieving a Viksit Bharat – a developed India by 2047 –

marking a century of India's independence. The budget prioritises support for the 'Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises' (MSME) sector with necessary finances, technologies, and training to enhance global competitiveness. The rooftop solarization policy is set to offer employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in technical and supply sectors. Additionally, the establishment of a separate Department for Fisheries and the expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) underscore efforts to double production and exports in the fisheries sector, aiming to create 55 lakh new jobs and drive inclusive economic progress. A significant step is the focus on provisions for the inclusion of low-income groups and women. Initiatives like the disbursement of 30 crore Mudra Yojana loans to women entrepreneurs and financial support to 78 lakh street vendors under PM-SVANidhi emphasise the government's focus on enhancing workforce participation and providing earning avenues that drive upward mobility. The SHG model of development has also proved to be successful – enabling nearly 10 million women to achieve annual incomes of over INR 1 lakh. Capitalising on this success, the goal has been expanded to elevate the target from 2 crore to 3 crore lakhpati didis, showcasing a commitment to women's economic empowerment. The budget made notable health announcements. The focus on preventive healthcare through the provision of cervical cancer vaccinations for young girls and the integration of various maternal and child health schemes indicate a push towards addressing the specific health needs of vulnerable groups. The expansion of the Ayushman Bharat scheme to extend healthcare benefits to approximately 1.5 million ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers acknowledges the crucial contribution of these frontline health workers to primary healthcare services. Leverage existing hospital structures for the establishment of more medical colleges, addresses both – the healthcare professional shortage and the surging demand for medical education. This builds on the initiative from April 2023, when the government approved the establishment of 157 nursing colleges, allocating INR 1,570 crore, with the central government contributing INR 1,016 crore. The budget also provides a concrete pathway to achieving a net-zero economy by 2070. Key measures include funding for offshore wind energy, coal gasification projects to lessen reliance on fossil fuels, support for the electric vehicle ecosystem, and incentives for bio-mass collection. The budget also promotes bio-manufacturing for eco-friendly materials and climate resilience in the blue economy.

*(The author is a prominent voice on social issues; views are personal)*

# Nawaz Sharif's strategic move or military script?



KS TOMAR

## Nawaz's decision to step aside from the race for premiership in Pakistan and nominate his brother Shehbaz instead has sparked intense debate

Actively and geo-political issue is being debated worldwide, especially in Pakistan which pertains to the 'mysterious' decision of three-time prime minister, Nawaz Sharif to Suo moto opt out of the race for premiership and subsequently nominate his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif for the top slot though he was a favourite of powerful military, obviously current army chief, Asim Munir, who had scripted the entire episode to enthrone him. Foreign policy experts say that it was on the analogy of former PM, Imran Khan who was saddled in the chair due to the open patronage of Ex-Army chief, Qamar Javed Bajwa but both fell apart owing to fighting for supremacy. It was a paradox and a typical case of a "servant" challenging the authority of the "Master" which may happen in this dispensation also but Nawaz as a "shadow PM" may not permit it as he has had the bitter experience of being ousted by the army from the post in 2018. Analysts are convinced that owing to compelling circumstances, Ex PM, Nawaz played his cards well hence the choice fell on his brother which will also ensure the continuity of "Family Rule" in Pakistan. Yet, another addition will be Maryam Nawaz who is poised to become chief minister of the most important province of Punjab. 2nd, the army had meticulously planned to keep Imran Khan out of the political process hence more than 150 cases were registered against him by the previous regime and courts handed him the punishment in three cases which exceeded 24 years. 3rd, due to Imran's tirade against the army, Nawaz was brought to Pakistan last year from self-exile in London which preceded the Supreme Court's decision in 2018 to sentence him to ten -years

imprisonment and a fine of \$10.6 million in a corruption case related to Panama papers of illegal properties abroad. He was disqualified and hence fled to London to fight his battle. Nawaz's brother Shehbaz headed the government in Pakistan which ensured the adoption of a bill in parliament on June 25, 2023, which limited the lifetime disqualification of lawmakers to 5 years. It was meant to pave the way for the return of his elder brother to resume his political activities in Pakistan. 4th, Nawaz's critics allege that the stage was set for "mass scale rigging" to help him to become PM but the game plan went haywire as independents supported by Imran from jail won a majority of the seats and Nawaz's party PML-N could not get even a simple majority, which shattered the dream of Nawaz

of the Shehbaz government to implement the harsh preconditions of IMF which had released USD 710 million second tranche of a USD 3 billion loan to the cash-strapped country to stabilize its debt-ridden economy. Shehbaz's previous government had successfully negotiated with the IMF to procure the "bailout Package" which needs to be clinched. The IMF had saved Pakistan from economic collapse as Pakistan's reserves stood at \$7.8 billion as of Nov. 18, 2023, barely enough to cover imports for a month. The people are reeling under inflation which has touched to the level of 30% and prices of essential commodities are beyond the capacity of consumers. The floods had caused losses of billions and thousands of lives were lost hence the new PM will have to take care of rehabilitation tasks which are in disarray. The floods had caused tremendous losses of USD 3.3 trillion in June-October, 2022 besides killing 1839 people which must be uppermost in the priorities of the new government as victims are still craving relief and rehabilitation tasks which seem to be in disarray. China has treaded cautiously and did not touch the sensitive issue of rigging whereas the United States and EU demanded an investigation into the allegations. China has come to the rescue of Pakistan several times but the cost has been beyond the imagination of this poor country. China's debt policy has entrapped Pakistan which has procured a heavy loan and the Chinese

investment has risen \$65 billion in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by 2022. China has already acquired control of Gwadar Port on 16 May 2013 which may be retained instead of a lease guarantee in future. Originally valued at \$46 billion, the value of China Pakistan Economic Corridor had been worth \$62 billion as of 2020. India and the US are opposed to BRI hence Nawaz will have to tread cautiously to keep China in check to save his country from the debt trap policy. China will be looking for the security protection of its projects in Pakistan hence it may develop cordial relations with the Shehbaz government. Experts say that the United States wanted to see the back of Imran who had accused it of conspiring with the army to oust him from power. It has got history of having direct ties with army generals hence it may find it easy to deal with the new government. India can expect Nawaz to influence Shehbaz to take the initiative to start dialogue with India which has already created its space in the world arena and economic ties can help the beleaguered people of this poor country. The new coalition government is bound to be weak hence delivery expectations on domestic and international fronts must be based on logical conclusions and limitations of new dispensation in Pakistan.

*(The writer is a journalist and political analyst, views are personal)*



MONEY MATTERS

## Gold prices decline Rs 50; Silver falls Rs 300

Gold prices declined Rs 50 to Rs 62,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak trends in international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 62,950 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Silver prices also fell Rs 300 to Rs 73,900 per kilogram. In the previous trade, silver had ended at Rs 74,200 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,900 per 10 grams, down by Rs 50 from the previous close," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities, HDFC Securities. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading down at US\$ 2,029 per ounce from US\$ 2,034 per ounce in the previous trade. Going forward, traders now keep an eye on today's US GDP data, which may provide further direction for gold prices, he said. "In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at US\$ 2,029 per ounce, down by US\$ 5 from the previous close," Gandhi added.



## Joshi to launch Coal Logistics Plan & Policy today

Union Coal and Mines Minister Pralhad Joshi will on Thursday launch the 'Coal Logistics Plan & Policy', which focusses on technologically advanced, cost-effective and integrated logistics ecosystem for coal evacuation. The Indian National Committee World Mining Congress under the Ministry of Coal is organising the event at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, the coal ministry said in a statement. "Union Coal and Mines, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi will grace the occasion as the chief guest and unveil the Coal Logistics Plan & Policy. "Senior officials from NITI Aayog and various Ministries, including Coal, Railways, Power, Steel, Mines, Shipping Port & Waterways along with industry representatives of Coal, Steel, Power and other sectors will participate in the event," it said. The Ministry of Coal is aiming to produce 1.5 Billion Tonne (BT) of coal by the 2029-30 financial year, as per the statement.



## 'Elderly bizman loses Rs 3.61 cr in cyber investment fraud; 1 held'

A garment unit owner has been arrested after a 73-year-old businessman from Mumbai fell prey to an online investment fraud and ended up losing Rs 3.61 crore, police said on Wednesday. The Cyber Police have so far frozen an amount of Rs 2.20 crore and 330 bank accounts, an official said. The alleged transactions took place between May 20 and October 7 last year after the businessman was contacted by three persons, including two women, online who lured him into investing in a scheme by promising hefty returns, the official said. "They also created a WhatsApp group, made an online agreement with the businessman, and sent it to his email ID. The agreement mentioning the returns on the investments was shared in the group to gain the trust of the businessman," he said. The victim invested Rs 3.61 crore. As he didn't get any returns on his investment, he approached the West Region Cyber Police Station in Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) and lodged a complaint.



# Restoration of WTO dispute settlement system priority

PNS ■ ABU DHABI

India on Wednesday said that restoration of the fully functional dispute settlement system of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the "top-most" priority. The appellate body of the system had been non-functional since December 2019 due to the blocking of the appointment of its members or judges by the US and this had called into question the WTO's overall credibility and the rules-based trade order it upholds.

This was flagged by India during the working session on Dispute Settlement (DS) Reforms, at the World Trade Organization's (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference here.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal along with a high-level official team is attending the four-day conference which started on February 26.

"India emphatically called for the restoration of the appel-

**"India reiterated its long-standing position that a credible and reliable WTO DS system is the bedrock of an equitable, effective, secure and predictable multilateral trading system. As a way forward, India sought the immediate and effective formalization and multilateralization of the informal DS reform process by rectifying the procedural and substantive defects."**



late body as the top-most priority of any reform process, along for effective formalisation of the ongoing informal dispute settlement reform discussions among some members at the WTO," an official statement said. The WTO is discussing to undertake reforms in the dispute settlement system, which is described as a "Crown jewel" of the Geneva-based 166-member global trade watchdog. India also wants formalisa-

tion of the ongoing "informal" dispute settlement reform discussions.

The informal deliberations are creating hindrance for several nations to participate in the talks and such discussions made it extremely difficult for developing countries to participate effectively.

"India reiterated its long-standing position that a credible and reliable WTO DS system is the bedrock of an equitable, effective, secure and pre-

dictable multilateral trading system," it said.

India emphasized that the outcome of any reform process should provide for the restoration of the appellate body, which remains a "top-most" priority for India.

"As a way forward, India sought the immediate and effective formalization and multilateralization of the informal DS reform process by rectifying the procedural and substantive defects," it added.

## Torrent Power raises Rs 700 cr via NCDs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Torrent Power on Wednesday said it has raised Rs 700 crore through Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs) issued on a private placement basis.

The NCDs are proposed to be listed on wholesale debt market segment of the NSE, a regulatory filing said.

According to the statement, the company has issued and allotted Series 13 -- 70,000 secured, rated, listed, taxable, non-cumulative, redeemable NCDs of Rs 700 crore at a coupon rate of 8.32 per cent per annum on a private placement basis.

The first coupon will be paid on February 28, 2025 and subsequent coupon payments will be made on an annual basis, the statement added.

## Q3 GDP may slide to 6.7-6.9% on poor farm sector show

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.7-6.9 per cent in December quarter FY24 as compared to 7.6 per cent growth in the second quarter on poor performance in the farm sector, a report by SBI Research said on Wednesday.

The report comes a day ahead of the release of official GDP data for the third quarter of 2023-24 financial year. India retained the tag of the world's fastest-growing major economy, with its GDP expanding by a faster-than-expected rate of 7.6 per cent in September quarter on booster shots from government spending and manufacturing.

The 6.7-6.9 per cent growth forecast by SBI Research is lower than the Reserve Bank's 7 per cent growth projection for the quarter. SBI Research has projected Q4 GDP at 6.8 per cent.

SBI Research said the biggest reason for the lower



growth forecast is the very poor show by the farm sector as, barring fisheries, the whole sector is badly affected.

As per the first advance estimates, the production of major kharif crops in 2023-24 is pegged at 148.5 million tonne, which is 4.6 per cent lower than that in the year-ago period.

While the sowing season for rabi crops indicates a slight increase in overall acreage compared to the previous year, there are concerns over the sown area under cereals, which saw a decline of 6.5 per cent from the previous year, the report said.

## Sebi refuses to lift ban on Brightcom Group's Reddy, others

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Wednesday refused to lift the securities market restriction imposed on Suresh Kumar Reddy, promoter of Brightcom Group Ltd, in a case concerning irregularities in preferential allotments of shares made by the company.

Besides, he would continue to be restrained from holding the position of a director or a Key Managerial Personnel in any listed company or its subsidiaries, Sebi said in its confirmatory order.

In its order, Sebi noted that the prima facie findings that Brightcom Group Ltd (BGL) had funded its own preferential allotments and had indulged in round tripping of funds continue to sustain.

"It has clearly emerged that in case of certain notices, personal loans advances by them abroad to Suresh Reddy and his private companies / entities were being repaid in India through the mechanism of allotment of shares of BGL, a listed company, in preferential issues for free or at partial consideration, at the cost of public shareholders of BGL," Sebi said in its 40-page order.

## FACING A LOW BIRTH RATE AND MANPOWER SHORTAGE

# Singapore to stay open to foreign talent

PNS ■ SINGAPORE

Manpower-short Singapore has to stay open to foreign talent due to slower population growth and resident workforce growth slowing and insufficient to meet the demands of the economy, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said on Wednesday.

At the upper end, this means

workers can take on jobs in new growth areas such as the digital economy, where there is a global shortage of skilled talent, said Wong.

Speaking in parliament on Wednesday, he said the manpower includes work-permit holders, which comprise about two-thirds of the total foreign workforce, mostly doing jobs that Singaporeans do not want

to do. Prosperous Singapore needs to keep its economy growing so that it can make a living and take care of its people, at a time when the world is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable, he told parliament on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Indraneel Rajah told Parliament that Singapore has

seen its resident total fertility rate (TFR) drop to an estimated 0.97 per cent in 2023, the first time it has dropped below one per cent in the country's history.

Wong also said Singapore has a comprehensive system of controls to regulate the quality and number of work-pass holders across every level of the workforce.

As he laid out the Government's plans to achieve between 2 and 3 per cent growth annually over the next decade, Wong said, "The reality is that Singapore will always be a little red dot (a teaser for being small) we have no hinterland, we have no natural resources, unlike resource-rich countries like Qatar or the UAE.

# 'Domestic manufacturing of semiconductors next big space'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Domestic manufacturing of semiconductors is the next big space and many companies are expected to venture into this segment, a senior MeitY official said on Wednesday adding that a USD 2 billion digital economy is what India seriously needs.

S Krishnan, Secretary of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), while speaking virtually at the India Digital Summit (IDS) 2024 said the digital economy is expected to grow at a faster pace in the next few years.

"Semiconductors is the other big space. More compa-



nies are likely to come into the space...Our interest in semiconductors is open," he said adding that in the next 5-10 years semiconductor manufacturing in the country is expected to come up in a big way.

About 20 lakh people are employed in the electronics manufacturing sector in the country and the government

would like these jobs to go up to about 45 lakh, he added.

"We expect the digital economy to really grow at an increasing pace in the next few years. A USD 2 billion digital economy is what India seriously needs," Krishnan said.

When asked about governance, hygiene and compliance with law for digital economies, Krishnan pointed out that regulators, much like the public, recognized the necessity of regulation.

While balancing consumer protection and diverse requirements, regulations are thoroughly examined to ensure safeguarding of user information, he said.

## India's retail sector to more than double in next decade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's retail sector is expected to grow at 9-10 per cent to reach USD 2 trillion in the next decade with the country's consumption story continuing to remain strong with steady growth, according to a report.

Yet, organised retailers would need to sustain performance and continue to grow shares as the sector is going through key shifts impacting the pace and shape of growth, said the report by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Retailers Association of India (RAI).

While income growth remains steady, and consumers are optimistic about personal income outlook, consumers are increasingly look-



ing to spend on "experiences" or save more through newer or nascent vehicles, it said.

"The Indian retail sector will more than double in size to USD 2 trillion in the next decade - across categories and formats - and the successful retailers are the ones who continue to challenge the perceived growth profitability trade-off," BCG Managing Director and Senior Partner Abheek Singh said.

# 32% of India's super rich wealth in housing properties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's super rich have allocated 32 per cent of their wealth in residential properties in the country and overseas, Knight Frank said in a report on Wednesday.

As per real estate consultant Knight Frank's The Wealth Report 2024, 32 per cent of India's Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals' (UHNWIs) wealth is allocated towards residential real estate asset class. Nearly 14 per cent of their residential portfolio is allocated outside India. UHNWIs are individuals with a net worth of USD 30 million and above.

On an average, an Indian

UHNWI owns 2.57 homes while a sizable 28 per cent have rented out their second homes during 2023, the report said.

According to Knight Frank, about 12 per cent of the country's UHNWIs plan to buy a new home in 2024. A similar percentage of wealthy individuals in India purchased a new home last year.

Globally, 22 per cent of the ultra-wealthy are expected to purchase a home in 2024. Knight Frank India Chairman and Managing Director Shishir Bajjal said, "The prime residential assets continue to be the mainstream investment avenue for ultra-wealthy individuals in the



country."

Separately, the report noted that Mumbai ranked 8th on Knight Frank's Prime International Residential Index

(PIRI) index in 2023 as compared to the 37th rank in 2022, driven by 10 per cent year-on-year growth in terms of annual luxury residential price rise.

This jump has marked a place for Mumbai in the top 10 leading luxury residential markets.

Manila (26 per cent growth) leads the rankings while last year's frontrunner Dubai (16 per cent) slipped one spot.

The Bahamas (15 per cent) comes in the third place with Algarve and Cape Town (both 12.3 per cent) completing the top five. Among other Indian cities, Delhi ranked 37th and showcased a rise of 4.2 per cent year-on-year in 2023 as compared to the 77th rank in 2022.

Bengaluru stands at the 59th rank compared to 63rd in 2022 recording a 2.2 per cent year-on-year increase in 2023.

"The outlook for 2024 remains bright as Mumbai with a 5.5 per cent prime price growth forecast, ranks second among the 25 cities globally. As we navigate the complexities of the global market, India's emergence as a prime destination for luxury real estate investment is undeniable," Bajjal said. Of the 100 luxury residential markets tracked, 80 recorded positive to neutral annual price growth.

Asia-Pacific (3.8 per cent) pipped the Americas (3.6 per cent) to the title of the strongest-performing world region, with Europe, the Middle East, and Africa trailing (2.6 per cent).

## Platinum Industries IPO subscribed 22.19 times

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The initial public offering of Platinum Industries got subscribed 22.19 times on the second day of offer on Wednesday. The Rs 235 crore-initial share sale received bids for 21,37,42,644 shares against 96,32,988 shares on offer, as per NSE data. The portion for non-institutional investors fetched 42.85 times subscription while the Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) part got subscribed 25.50 times.



## Equity investors become poorer by Rs 6L cr as markets crash

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth eroded by Rs 6 lakh crore in a single day on Wednesday as the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled over 790 points.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88. During the day, it slumped 872.93 points or 1.19 per cent to 72,222.29.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 6,02,338.56 crore to Rs 3,85,97,298.49 crore (USD 4.71 trillion).

"Investors resorted to heavy selling ahead of Thursday's F&O expiry. Weak Asian market cues and Dow Futures indicating a negative start also led to a massive round of profit-taking across the board as

benchmark Sensex closed below the crucial 73k mark.

The pessimism can also be attributed to lack of direction ahead of Thursday's release of the January US Personal Consumption and Expenditures (PCE) index, the Fed's preferred measure of inflation that tracks consumer spending," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid fell the most by 4.43 per cent.

Reliance Industries fell by 2 per cent, contributing 185.59 points to the markets slide. Maruti, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Wipro, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Tata Steel, Reliance and Titan were the other major laggards.





*Tera Kya Hoga Lovely*, which is produced by Sony Pictures in collaboration with Zee Music and directed by Balwinder Singh Janjua, marks Ileana's comeback to the big screen following childbirth. The movie will be released on March 8, International Women's Day.



**Pragya Jaiswal joins cast of *Khel Khel Mein* alongside Akshay Kumar**

As the final schedule unfolds in the city of Udaipur, fans can't wait to witness Pragya Jaiswal's talent on the big screen in *Khel Khel Mein*.



He continued, "And then the studio took it over, and every time that's happened, it has only gotten worse in my experience." He declared that the movie was a financial and artistic failure.

The ED questioned Tajikistani singer Abdu Rozik, because of his connection to Aliasgar Shirazi

According to reports, Abdu claimed in his statement that he had never seen Shirazi and that, once the restaurant opened, he had signed the contract on a profit-sharing basis. In the same statement, Rozik guaranteed that he never heard from anyone else again because the restaurant was eventually closed and the agreement did not work out.



FUN

ARE YOU GOING TO TELL HIM WE LEFT THE CAR LIGHTS ON BACK WHERE WE GOT THE CANDY?

I THINK YOU SHOULD TELL HIM.

©1990 HOLT

THAT'S THE WHOLE PROBLEM

*Dave Coverly* 6-16-18

HUH... Y'KNOW, THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT, THE MORE THEY SEEM LIKE A PERFECT MATCH!  
 MIN, YOU'RE A GENIUS!  
 AHEM!

GUNDEME66.COM

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

1 Quiet and calm  
7 A large bird of prey  
8 A narrow shelf  
9 Thin soft paper  
10 Opposite of false  
12 Look after for someone  
14 Captured  
17 Foe  
18 This travels on rails  
19 Checked the size of

- 1 Sheets in a book
- 2 A road with trees along both sides
- 3 Long slippery fishes

5 A month  
6 Saying again  
11 Quicker  
13 A female relation  
15 Someone who works  
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# Dared to be a bold 'water baby'

**DIRECTOR SAMEL JOHNSON HAS A LOVE FOR HIS REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS. HERE'S WHY HE'S GOT SOME INTEREST**

# Making the right choice between **NATURAL BIRTH** vs **C-SECTION**

*(The author, Dr. Chandana Galidevara, is a Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, of High-risk Pregnancy, Foetal Medicine Specialist and Laparoscopic Surgeon, at Ankura Hospital for Women and Children.)*





# RAHUL STILL FEELING SORE WHILE BATTING IN NETS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior India batter K L Rahul is unlikely to feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala as he continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps. Rahul became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January but as per BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month. Rahul has now travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury and with the series in the bag, the Indian team management will not take the risk of playing him in the Dharamsala Test beginning March 7. He needs to be fully fit before the IPL where he will lead Lucknow Super Giants and is expected to bat in the middle order to bolster his chances of making the India squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean. "It is more to get an expert opinion (travel to London). He experiences a bit of pain (right quadriceps) while batting. It is to ensure that he recovers fully as he is a player that team needs long-term. "There is so much competition coming his way -- IPL, he could also be in the T20 World Cup mix. Then we have some important Test series against New Zealand, and Australia later in the year.



UNLIKELY FOR DHARAMSALA TEST

So, it is better to give him time to recover properly than rushing him," an IPL source told PTI. It is the same quadriceps injury that had sidelined Rahul for almost four months last year. Having got injured during the IPL, Rahul returned to action with the Asia Cup in September and made instant impact. In the more recent Test tour of South Africa, Rahul was the only century maker from India in the drawn series. His absence from the final Test means Rajat Patidar will remain with the squad but the MP batter can't be sure of his place in the playing eleven, having aggregated only 63 runs in six innings. There is a possibility that Patidar will make away for Devdutt Padikkal in Dharamsala. **BUMRAH SET TO RETURN:** India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested for the Ranchi Test, is expected to lead the attack at the HPCA Stadium. The series is sealed but every Test match offers crucial World Test Championship points and Bumrah can play a big part in the cooler climes of Dharamsala. India are second in the standings with five wins, two losses and a draw. New Zealand lead the table with a winning percentage of 75 but they have only played four Tests.



## Jaiswal rises to 12th in ICC Test rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's latest batting sensation Yashasvi Jaiswal advanced towards a top-10 spot in the ICC rankings for Test batters by climbing three spots to 12th while his compatriot Dhruv Jurel leapfrogged 31 places to 69th on Wednesday. Jaiswal, who started the series in 69th position, continues his ascent to the top after scores of 73 and 37 in the fourth match of India's ICC World Test Championship series against England in Ranchi. Player of the Match Jurel's scores of 90 and 39 has jumped a whopping 31 places while former England captain Joe Root is back in the top three. Root, a formerly top-ranked batter, struck an unbeaten 122 in the first innings in Ranchi to move up two places to third position. He also moved up three spots to fourth among all-rounders. Senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's five-wicket haul in the second innings has helped him narrow the gap with top-ranked Jasprit Bumrah to 21 rating points at 846 after the fast bowler was rested for the Ranchi Test. Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up 10 places to the 32nd spot and England's

Shoaib Bashir, who climbed 38 places to 80th, have also attained career bests. Opener Zak Crawley entered the top 20 for the first time after scores of 42 and 60, while a bunch of spinners have also prospered in the latest weekly update. The T20I Rankings see Australia batter Travis Head move into the top 20 for the first time after scores of 24, 45 and 33 in the series against New Zealand. Tim David's quickfire 31 off just 10 balls in the first match see him move up six places to 22nd and past the 600-point barrier for the first time in his career. The top six bowlers are unchanged, with Josh Hazlewood the only new one in the top 10 after finishing with figures of 4-1-12-1 in Auckland. In the ODI rankings, the biggest mover has been Namibia's Bernard Scholtz, whose hauls of four for 31 against Nepal and two for 15 against the Netherlands in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 Tri-Series in Kirtipur have lifted him to 11th position and 642 ratings points, the highest position and points tally ever achieved by a Namibia player in ODI cricket.

## Muzumdar looks to create fast bowlers pool from WPL

PTI ■ BENGALURU

With just seven months left for the Women's T20 World Cup to begin in Bangladesh, India head coach Amol Muzumdar is keen to identify and build a pool of fast bowlers from the on-going Women's Premier League. The Indian pace unit looks a bit thin after the retirement of legendary Jhulan Goswami and moving on from veteran Shikha Pandey. Currently, the Indian pace bowling is marshalled by Renuka Singh, Pooja Vastrakar, Titas Sadhu and Amanjot Kaur. "Four fast bowlers played the last series (against Australia). I want to create a pool of fast bowlers (from the WPL). It makes a lot of difference if you strengthen the bowling attack," Muzumdar was quoted as saying ESPNcricinfo. "I would want another pool of 20-25 players to create a bench



strength for the Indian team," he added. The ninth edition of the Women's T20 World Cup will be held in September-October in Bangladesh.

Muzumdar had taken over as India coach last year ahead of home series against England and Australia. While India won the Tests against the visitors, they lost the T20I and ODI series. Muzumdar was also delighted to see front-line Indian batters such as Shafali Verma, S Meghana and Richa Ghosh among runs ahead of the marquee event later this year. "There is an upscale movement in India's batters. The confidence from those two series against England and Australia is on display (here) because of how they performed there." The former Mumbai batsman was also chuffed to see the presence of mind Sajana Sajeevan showed while carrying Mumbai Indians to a victory over Delhi Capitals with a last-ball six. "Sajana's six gives you an idea of the depth in Indian cricket," said Muzumdar.



## Renuka set tone for RCB by controlling Powerplay: Molineux

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Renuka Singh has managed Rto control the Powerplay period by providing early breakthroughs and stopping run-flow with her swing bowling which played a significant role in RCB winning both its games, says team spin all-rounder Sophie Molineux. Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) are sitting on top of the table with four points. Mumbai Indians (+0.488) also have four points but they are placed second behind RCB who have better NRR of +1.665. RCB had restricted Gujarat Giants to 107 for seven on Tuesday night with Renuka returning impressive figures of 4-0-14-2. RCB then overhauled the target in 12.3 overs to log their second win on the trot. "Renuka has been incredible in both games and playing against her for India, she's just so reliable and it's great to be on the same team as her. She swings the ball beautifully at the front and I think she's really set the tone for us in both games," Molineux said. In their opening game against UP Warriorz, Renuka did not dismiss any batter but conceded only 14 runs in her 3 overs. RCB had edged UPW by just two runs to begin the tournament with a thrilling win.

"To be able to control the powerplay is a big thing in T20 cricket and she's done that twice now and I can see her continuing to do that," the Australian cricketer said. Role clarity for every player and adaptability is part of the RCB approach under coach Luke Williams. In their opening match against UPW, the RCB opted for swing from one end and spin from the other, while against GG, Renuka Singh and her pace colleague Sophie Devine bowled in tandem up front. Molineux, who took three wickets herself after Renuka's new-ball burst, said her team has flexibility. "In T20 cricket as a bowler you need to be really clear on what your strengths are and what you can bring to the team. And I think Luke and all the staff have been really clear with each bowler with what their roles are going to be and also at the same time be willing to adapt like we did today. "We had a completely different look to our powerplay where we were really pace-heavy. So yeah, I think that's all a part of T20 cricket, especially just being really clear on your own individual plans and where that fits in with the team and being able to change on the fly," Molineux said. RCB will take on third-placed Delhi Capitals in their next match on Thursday.

## Conway out, Ravindra in for New Zealand ahead of 1st test against Australia

AP ■ WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND)

Devon Conway has been ruled out but Rachin Ravindra has been cleared to play for New Zealand in the first cricket test against Australia starting at the Basin Reserve on Thursday. Conway suffered a thumb injury while keeping wicket in the second Twenty20 international between the teams on Friday last week. While initial scans suggested there was no fracture, additional tests in Wellington in recent days have found there is damage to Conway's left thumb. Conway will have further tests later in the week. Meantime, Will Young open the batting with Tom Latham in Conway's place. Henry Nicholls, who was dropped from the New Zealand team ahead of its two recent tests against South Africa - both victories - has been recalled to provide reinforcement for the batting lineup. "It's disappointing for Devon to be ruled out on the eve of an important match," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said. "He's a class player batting at the top of the order for us and I know he was really looking forward to this series."



Ravindra missed the second and third Twenty20s against Australia with a slight knee injury but is fit to play from Thursday. He scored a maiden double century in the first innings of the first test against South Africa. Daryl Mitchell is also available after missing the South Africa series with a foot injury. Captain Tim Southee said New Zealand will settle on its match lineup after assessing conditions at the Basin Reserve where the pitch usually is green at first but good for batting. New Zealand will decide whether to go into the match with four

seamers or to include spin-bowling allrounder Mitchell Santner. New Zealand left Santner out of its lineup for the second test against South Africa at Hamilton, using four seamers. "I think in hindsight, we probably got that wrong the way that the pitch did behave," Stead said. "We've certainly got Mitch Santner here as that option and we'll certainly consider him as well." Australia captain Pat Cummins has named an unchanged starting XI for the test. Cummins confirmed Wednesday there would be "no surprises" in the starting XI, with Australia picking the same team that lost to the West Indies in the second test in Brisbane last month. "It's always nice to have a full contingent to pick from," Cummins said. "I doesn't feel like we need to reinvent the wheel." The two-test series against Australia will be one of the few occasions New Zealand has faced a full-strength Australia lineup. New Zealand and Australia only rarely meet in test series and Australia at times has not fielded its best team. New Zealand currently is first and Australia third in World Test Championship standings.

# Zaheer was someone I used to watch a lot: Anderson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

James Anderson, England's greatest fast bowler with an unparalleled longevity and nearly 1000 international wickets, says he has learned a few elements of pace bowling, including reverse swing, from Indian great Zaheer Khan. At 41, Anderson continues to lead the England attack and is two short of becoming the first fast bowler in the history of the sport to breach the 700-wicket mark. Spin legends Muttiah Muralitharan and the late Shane Warne are the only bowlers with 700 plus wickets in Test cricket. "For me, Zaheer Khan was someone I used to watch a lot to try and learn from. How he used the reverse swing, how he covered the ball when he ran into bowl, that's something I tried to sort of develop on the back of playing against him quite a few times here," Anderson told JioCinema. Zaheer, one of India's finest seamers, played his last Test

in 2014 when Anderson was at the top of his game. Among the current lot of Indian pacers, Anderson is most impressed by Jasprit Bumrah's ability, calling him a "great exponent" of reverse swing. Asked about Bumrah's match-winning performance in the second Test against England, Anderson said, "With someone of his quality you expect that standard from him. You know that reverse swing can play a big part in India and he's a great exponent of it. He's got good pace and is very accurate, very consistent. "That yorker we saw to Ollie Pope, he's got that up his sleeve as well. It's not a fluke that he's got to number one in the world. He's a world-class bowler and from our point of view we weren't surprised that he put up a performance like that." The seasoned Englishman added, "There are not many better bowlers than Bumrah, Shami and Siraj. They're world-class bowlers. You put Ishant Sharma in there as



well, and that's a really strong bowling attack." Anderson's longevity in the game can be ascertained by the fact that his current England teammates such as Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed were not even born when he made his Test debut way back in 2002. Having played 186 Tests and 194 ODIs over the last 22 years, Anderson's desire to be competitive remains intact. On comparing his longevity to other sporting legends, Anderson said, "Yeah, I guess you do look at things like that, but to be honest, I just go with the feel of me and my body. I don't feel like I'm 41 years and 200 days old. You know, I still feel young. "I can keep up with the young guys in training. I can still bowl the speeds that I want to, I can still deliver the skills that I want to. So, for me that's the most important thing. Age is just a number and it's pretty irrelevant from my thought process." When the discussion turned to reverse swing, Anderson said the art remains relevant

even in an age dominated by T20 cricket. "I don't think it's dying. Because of the growth of white-ball cricket in recent times, the focus has moved to change of pace and different deliveries like yorkers, and things like that. "But for me, in Test cricket, we've seen throughout this series already that swing can play a big part. "The way Bumrah's bowled, I think, has been amazing to watch. That reverse swing spell in the second Test was one of the best you'll see. For me, I think there's still people out there wanting to learn the skills and it's not easy to do." With star batter Virat Kohli skipping the ongoing Test series due to personal reasons, Anderson said he missed bowling to the Indian maestro with he had had some fascinating duels. "You always want to play against the best players. And it's been a shame that he's not been a part of the series. We have had some great battles over the years."



# ‘AIR FORCE OFFICERS WANTED US TO SHOW THE CHARACTERS THE RIGHT WAY & NOT COMMERCIALISE’

K. RAMYA SREE

Just yesterday, we informed you that *Operation Valentine* is a return gift to India and that ‘Valentine’ in this movie is the love for our country, as mentioned by the lead actor of the movie, Varun Tej. Today we have the producers of the movie, Siddhu Mudda and Nandkumar Abbineni, talk about the finances and other aspects of the movie.

What makes this interview special is that *Operation Valentine* was made on a budget of about Rs 47 crore, including VFX, which is an extremely tight budget for a movie like this, and we were curious how the producers made it.

Beginning with how this movie has started, Siddhu said, “We saw a short film by the director, and I told him that we will take things forward if he has a good story. At the same time, I met Varun, who also watched this short film and liked it. I told him that he was planning a full-length movie on this story and asked if we should listen to it. Since we decided to make it in Hindi and Telugu, we partnered with Sony, which was already planning to make a film with Varun. They liked the script, too. That’s how it all started.”

The producer says he and Nandkumar want to make good films that are rich in content. And for them, this is a very good film, and their confidence in the director’s VFX background

Ahead of the much-anticipated film’s release, *Operation Valentine*, producers Siddhu Mudda and Nandkumar Abbineni talk about the finances and other aspects of the movie.

made them feel even more confident about the movie’s output. He shared, “The director has a VFX background. This movie has a lot of aerial sequences, which need a lot of VFX to be done. Given the director’s background, we felt like he would do it. The rest we got were all senior technicians.”

Finally speaking about the budget and how they were able to

make the movie within the said amount, Siddhu informed, “Our movie’s budget was Rs 42 crore and the VFX’s budget was Rs 5 crore. As we said, we got a lot of support from the Air Force. They have given us a lot of freehand in using their airbase. We shot for 25–40 days in Gwalior. Because of the Airbase help they gave me, I could save a lot of money. Since the director was technically sound.”



“When the Air Force officers watched the movie, they were very happy. They had only one request from us: to bring the script to light as it is and show their characters in the right way, not cinematise or commercialise them. They apparently had a bad experience previously with a Hindi movie, so they put in this request of theirs,” he added.

While this movie is made in both Hindi and Telugu, the producers say that there is just a half-minute scene difference between Hindi and Telugu, except that everything has been the same.

They feel that this genre has national appeal; hence, they decided to make it in Hindi as well.

On the other hand, Nandkumar shared, “It was tough shooting in the airbase where the temperatures were very high. On top of that, every crew had to be background cleared. All the crew members must get in and out at the same time. It was a tedious process.”

## Wedding bells ringing for Taapsee Pannu

Actress Taapsee Pannu’s wedding news has always been a hot topic both in Bollywood and the south film industry given her extensive career in cinema across many languages. The actress has always kept her personal life very private.

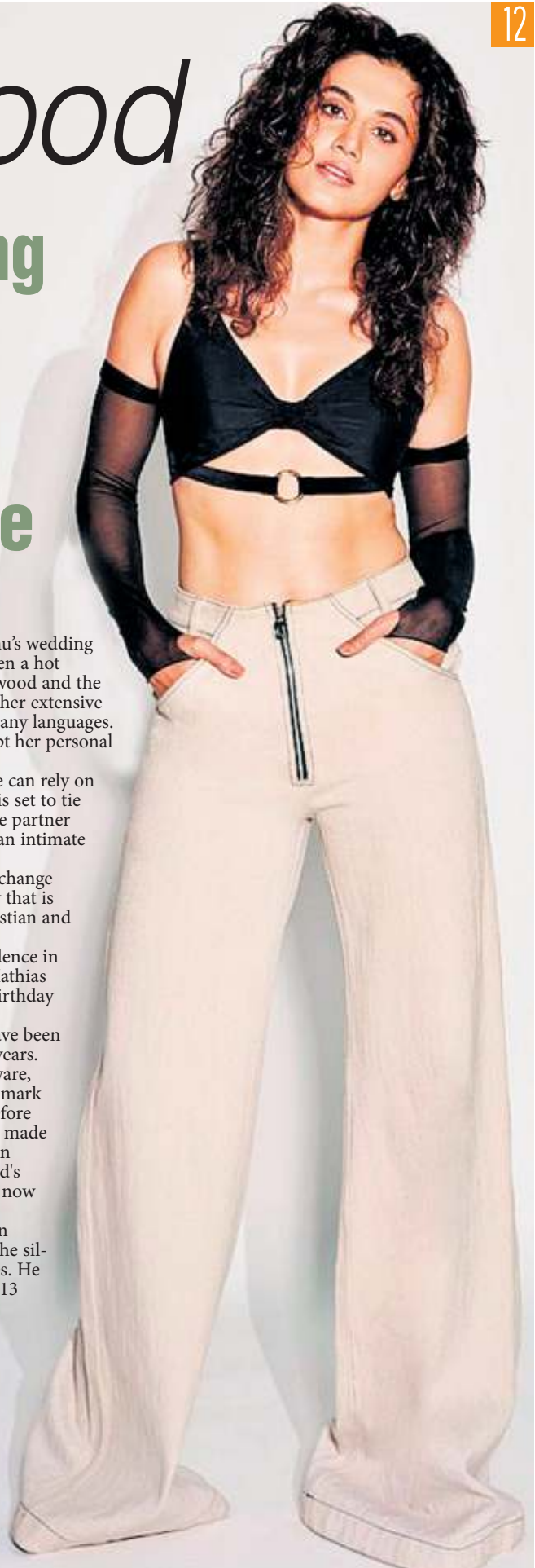
But now reports that we can rely on suggest that the *Pink* star is set to tie the knot with her longtime partner Mathias Boe in March in an intimate ceremony.

The couple is said to exchange vows in a lavish ceremony that is expected to combine Christian and Sikhism customs.

People expressed confidence in their relationship when Mathias showed up for Taapsee’s birthday roast the previous year.

Mathias and Taapsee have been dating for more than ten years.

For those who are unaware, Mathias is a native of Denmark who played badminton before switching to coaching. He made his debut for his country in 1998. He became the world’s best doubles player and is now the Indian team’s doubles coach. At the 2012 London Olympics, he took home the silver medal in men’s doubles. He also won a silver in the 2013 World Championship.



## Raju Gari Ammayi Naidu Gari Abbayi trailer has all mirchi masala

*Raju Gari Ammayi Naidu Gari Abbayi*, a rural entertainer, directed by Satya Raj is all set to hit big screens on March 9. Starring debutante Ravi Teja Nunna as the hero alongside Neha Jurel, the movie has its trailer released on Wednesday.

Based on the trailer, *Raju Gari Ammayi Naidu Gari Abbayi* revolves around a carefree, optimistic young man who falls in love with a strong woman in a picturesque village. But rivalries in the countryside threaten their future together. All hands seem to be pointing at the protagonist suddenly for the woman’s murder. The movie looks to be a vibrant mash-up of humour, action, romance, and thrills. The crew promised that the *Raju Gari Ammayi Naidu Gari Abbayi* would serve audiences nothing less than a hearty dinner with enough ingredients to satisfy both young and family audiences.



## Dr Gangadhara Shastri wins India’s prestigious ‘KENDRA SANGEET NATAK ACADEMY’ AWARD

Renowned Bhagavad Gita singer, prophet, propagandist, and founder of ‘Bhagavadgita Foundation’ Dr. LV Gangadhara Shastri has been conferred with India’s prestigious ‘Kendra Sangeet Natak Academy’ award for the year 2023 in other major traditional music category.

Along with the classical Carnatic music, he studied 108 of the 700 shlokas of the Bhagavad Gita, the spiritual essence of India, composed and sung by

Ghantasala in his honor; the remaining 594 shlokas were sung in his own music, accompanied by Telugu interpretation, and recorded with the highest technical values and created the ‘Bharita Sampurna Bhagavad Gita’ which was released by Viswesha Tirtha Swamy, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. For his selfless efforts, he was given the award for dedicating his life to the Gita Pracharan.

## RGV’s Vyuham to be hit screens on March 2

Director Ram Gopal Verma has helmed two films *Vyuham* and *Sapadham*, based on some events that happened in the political life of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan. These movies are produced by Dasari Kiran Kumar under the banner of Ramadootha Creations.

The movie *Vyuham* has completed its censor formalities and is heading for a theatrical release on March 2, announced its makers on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the producer of the film Dasari Kiran Kumar said, “God has made everything come together for us regarding the release of the movies *Vyuham* and *Sapadham*. These two movies are going to be released in around 500 theaters in Telugu states. We believe that these movies will become hits. The Censor Board has given permission for the release of *Vyuham* despite the hurdles created by many.”



## Vishnu Manchu’s Kannappa 2nd schedule commences in New Zealand

Actor Vishnu Manchu has commenced the second schedule of his dream project *Kannappa*.

After arriving in New Zealand, Vishnu Manchu posted a video of himself and Mohan Babu together. It appears that this second schedule will have some absolutely stunning scenes. With its captivating first look poster, the film that promises a never-before-seen experience is generating a lot of attention not only nationally but internationally as well.

This movie is directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh, who created the Maha Bharatham television series. Sheldon Chau, a Hollywood cinematographer, is directing this film. This movie is being produced nationwide by Mohan Babu under the auspices of 24 Frames Factory and AVA Entertainment.



## THE FIRST LOOK OF VINOD VARMA’S CHARACTER FROM ARI UNVEILED

Presented by RV Reddy, the film *Ari* is produced by Srinivas Ramireddy, Thimmappa Naidu Purimetla, and Seshu Maram Reddy under the banner of ARVY Cinemas.

The taglines is *My Name is No Buddy*. Vinod Varma, Surya Purimetla, Anasuya Bharadwaj, Sai Kumar, and Srikanth Iyengar are playing key roles in the movie, helmed by Jaya Shankar, recognised for the film *Paper Boy*. On Wednesday, the first look poster of Vinod Varma’s character from the movie was unveiled.

