

100 DAYS OF CONGRESS GOVERNMENT

Multi-tasking Revanth Reddy keeps Opposition on tenterhooks

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who is also the TPCC President, has kept opposition parties, particularly the BRS, on tenterhooks during his 100 days in the saddle.

Revanth Reddy has been performing dual roles (CM and TPCC President) successfully forcing opposition leaders to stop thinking of toppling his government.

But still, BRS leaders like KCR, KTR and Harish Rao and Dr K. Laxman of the BJP have been issuing statements that the Revanth Reddy government will fall within six months.

Laxman said that one has to wait until the Lok Sabha elections are over to find out who will be TG's Eknath Shinde.

However, the CM has been making opposition leaders summon their leaders to their residences to convince them to continue in their parties.

Giving a strong reply to oppo-

sition parties regarding their statement that "the Congress government will fall within six months," the Chief Minister told the opposition, particularly the BRS, that "no one will remain in the BRS if the Congress opens its gates" giving jitters to the opposition.

The Chief Minister did not confine himself to mere words but has been showing it in action resulting in seven BRS MLAs meeting Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and many former MLAs, MLCs and MPs of the BRS and the BJP joining the Congress. Many BRS leaders too are now in the queue to join the Congress. Revanth made BRS hardliner former Labour Minister Ch. Malla Reddy to meet Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Siva Kumar to discuss joining the Congress. He also made the sitting BRS Khammam MP Nama Nageswara Rao to meet him on Thursday.

Revanth also visited the residence of senior BJP leader AP

Congress government not immune to criticism

NAVEENA GHANATE
■ HYDERABAD

A promise was made to implement the six guarantees within 100 days of coming to power. The Congress government implemented five of the 11 promises it mentioned in the six guarantees.

The Cheyutha, Yuva Vikasam, Rythu Bharosa, loan waiver and MSP have not been implemented so far. Official sources cite the dearth of funds and the precarious financial situation for that.

The Chief Minister attended the Praja Darbar only once. The CM didn't want traffic to be stopped for his convoy. A top

CMO official clarified, "The CM reduced his fleet to nine cars which was almost double during KCR's regime. He said that the wait time for traffic should be less as the convoy is smaller. It was miscommunicated." The secretariat is not yet accessible to the media and continues to be like it was during the BRS tenure. Government Orders have not been uploaded to websites. The government drew criticism over power cuts during public functions attended by people's representatives. Protocol issues were also noticed.

Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka's photo was missing in government advertise-

ments and it was later rectified. Likewise, Bhatti sitting on a smaller stool at the Yadadri Temple while the CM and Ministers of elite communities sitting on a higher seat didn't go down well with the masses. The EO of Yadadri was transferred and a new EO has been appointed.

The CM's trips to New Delhi are being criticised. The deal with Adani which the Congress was opposing at the national level came under scrutiny.

Although he was hailed for visiting KCR in hospital, later Revanth clarified that it was not voluntary but Rahul had asked him to visit. This statement later came under scrutiny.

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After taking oath as the Chief Minister of Telangana on December 7, Anumula Revanth Reddy completes 100 days on Friday. He came to power with ex-CM KCR in the opposition and a slim victory margin. However, within 100 days, governance has changed.

Demystifying initial perceptions that the Congress government will be toppled soon, now it is the BRS which is emptying. Revanth has been able to provide stable governance from the moment they selected Akbaruddin as the pro-tem Speaker. A senior BRS leader commented, "We thought it was a bouncer but he is turning it out into a sixer." The opposition called him as Gumpu Mestri. He turned it into Muta Mestri (a popular Chiranjeevi movie) and countered it.

When we said, the government would fall, he took it to the people and talked about the insecurity regarding toppling



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the government created by the opposition and asked them to take care of such people. Wherever the CM goes, he ensures to highlight the importance of Bhatti Vikramarka at every public meeting. Bhatti was a potential contender for the CM's post. Political analysts said that as all of them came to power after a long wait, no one is in a hurry to jump the gun or

create a mess within the government. When the handing over of irrigation projects on the Krishna River came up, Revanth came out with documents exposing how Telangana lost its rightful share of the water. He didn't mince words while commenting against Chandrababu Naidu and YS Rajasekar Reddy about how TG was cheated.

BRS picks Ragidi Laxma Reddy as Malkajgiri candidate

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BRS has announced two more candidates for LS elections. BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao finalised the names of Atram Sakku as the BRS candidate for Adilabad and Ragidi Laxma Reddy as the BRS candidate for Malkajgiri.

BRS chief KCR met with chief leaders of the Adilabad Parliament Constituency on Thursday.

Laxma Reddy joined the BRS just before the Assembly

polls due to disappointment over the Congress picking M. Parameswar Reddy for the Uppal ticket. Sakku started his political journey with the Congress and in 2019 he joined the BRS.

The BRS has so far announced 11 candidates for 17 seats in the state. Keeping social equations in mind and opinions at the field level KCR unanimously announced his party's candidates.

Party leader KCR announced former MLC

Kasani Gyaneshwar Mudiraj from Chevela, former MLA Bajireddy Govardhan from Nizamabad, Gali Anilkumar from Zaheerabad and Dr Kadiyam Kayya (daughter of former Deputy CM Kadiyam Srihari) from Warangal. Khammam (Nama Nageswara Rao), Mahbubabad (Malot Kavitha), Mahbubnagar (Manne Srinivas Reddy), Karimnagar (Boinapalli Vinodkumar) and Peddapalli (Koppula Ishwar) seats have already been announced.

Yadadri gets new EO after Bhatti fiasco

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government acted on the Yadagirigutta protocol issue during which Deputy CM Bhatti was seated on a stool a little lower than the other ministers and Vedic scholars.

Ramakrishna Rao, the EO of the temple, has been transferred by the government. EO Ramakrishna was transferred by the Endowments Department for allegedly not following protocol.

A. Bhaskara Rao was appointed as Yadadri Temple EO. "The services of Bhaskara Rao, Special Grade Deputy Collector, who has

been waiting for posting are hereby placed at the disposal of the Endowment Department for being posted as Executive Officer, Yadadri Laxmi Narsimha Swamy Temple, Yadagirigutta on deputation as per the usual foreign service terms and conditions," read the orders.

Meanwhile, Yadagirigutta temple officials have been alerted to prevent similar incidents again. Immediately, 10 peeths were purchased by temple staffers. The temple authorities have taken steps to give vedic blessing to 14 VVIPs at a time, including four old and 10 new peetas.

PM's roadshow from Mirjalaguda to Malkajgiri Square today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is conducting a roadshow from Mirjalaguda in Malkajgiri to Malkajgiri Square on March 15 at 3 pm. On March 16, 10 am, Modi will attend a public meeting in Nagarkurnool as chief guest. On March 18, at 9 am, Modi will be the chief guest at a public meeting in Jagtial.

Telangana BJP General Secretary Gujjula Premender Reddy and Central BJP leaders will attend these meetings.

BJP State Presidents and

Govt extends Loan Bhima cover to SHGs' loans

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has approved extending risk coverage (Loan Bhima) for loans taken by Self Help Groups from banks under the SHG linkage programme (both in urban and rural areas). The insurance cover is given to members with an outstanding loan of up to Rs 2 lakh.

Sanction was also given to release Rs 50.41 crore in four instalments for implementing Loan Bhima from the first year.

The operational guidelines for implementing the scheme will be issued by the Stree Nidhi Credit Cooperative Federation Limited immediately. The government accorded approval for implementing a group accident insurance scheme to provide coverage for a sum of up to Rs 10 lakh to each SHG member in the event of accidental death.

EC releases electoral bonds data Billionaire tycoons to lesser-known entities among buyers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal to billionaire Sunil Bharti Mittal's Airtel, Anil Agarwal's Vedanta, ITC, Mahindra and Mahindra, and a lesser-known Future Gaming and Hotel Services were among the prominent buyers of the now-scrapped electoral bonds for making political donations. The Election Commission put up on its website the data on electoral bonds on Thursday, a day ahead of the Supreme Court-fixed deadline.

Future Gaming, which was probed by the Enforcement Directorate in March 2022, bought electoral bonds worth over Rs 1,350 crore under two different sets of companies. Among the known corporates, Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd bought Rs 398 crore worth of bonds, while Sunil Mittal's three companies together purchased a total of Rs 246 crore worth of bonds.

Steel magnate Lakshmi Niwas Mittal bought Rs 35 crore worth of bonds in his individual capacity. Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering, which has bagged contracts of several large infrastructure projects, bought bonds worth Rs 966 crore.

While most of the bonds have been issued in the name of political parties, the donations made to the Congress and the Samajwadi Party were made in the name of 'President, All India Congress Committee' and 'Adyaksha Samajwadi Party'.

Following a Supreme Court directive, the State Bank of India, which was the authorised seller of electoral bonds, had shared the data with the poll panel on March 12. The top court had given the Election Commission time till 5 pm of March 15 to upload the data on its website. The EC has put the details on 'Disclosure of Electoral Bonds Submitted by SBI' in two parts -

- one listing the buyers and the other listing the beneficiary parties. In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the State Bank of India (SBI) said a total of 22,217 electoral bonds of varying denominations were purchased by donors between April 1, 2019 and February 15 this year, out of which 22,030 were redeemed by political parties. According to the data uploaded by the poll panel, the buyers of electoral bonds included Spicejet, IndiGo, Grasim Industries, Megha Engineering, Piramal Enterprises, Torrent Power, Bharti Airtel, DLF Commercial Developers, Vedanta Ltd., Apollo Tyres, Edelweiss, PVR, Kevenster, Sula Wines, Welspun, Sun Pharma, Vardhman Textiles, Jindal Group, Phillips Carbon Black Limited, CEAT tyres, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, ITC, Kaypee Enterprises, Cipla, and Ultratech Cement.

Panel recommends three-tier ...

Continued from page 3

However, the panel has made 321 pages public.

The committee noted that B R Ambedkar had envisioned the necessity of uniformity in the electoral process and further advocated for the Union to be responsible for conducting elections in India.

Separately, the Law Commission is also likely to come up soon with its own report on simultaneous polls, of which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a strong votary.

Sources said that the Law Commission is likely to recommend holding simultaneous polls for all three tiers of government -- Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies like municipalities and panchayats -- starting with 2029 and a provision for unity government in cases like hung house or no-confidence motion.

The 2024 general elections for Lok Sabha, along with four

state assemblies, are expected in April-May amid indications that the Election Commission may announce these polls as early as this Friday.

The Kovind panel, which has not specified any period for rolling out simultaneous polls, said that in the first stage, elections for the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies can be held together.

In the second step, the elections to municipalities and panchayats will be synchronised with the Lok Sabha and state assemblies in such a way that elections to municipalities and panchayats are held within 100 days of the holding of parliamentary and assembly polls.

For the purpose of synchronising Lok Sabha and assembly elections, the committee recommended that the President notifies the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election as the "appointed date".

CM takes charge of admn

Continued from page 3

In one month, the CMO was put in place with seven officers. The CM has been following community equations in every appointment. Aware of the lack of minority representation in his party, the CM appointed Shah Nawaz Qasim, IPS, as his secretary, which he proudly talks about apart from appointments in the Energy Department.

In almost all his speeches, the CM says that he didn't take even one day's leave after assuming power.

"The Chief Minister has been working round the clock and making us work. He holds meetings almost every day. The secretariat is buzzing. This was not the case during BRS rule. Unless he is in New Delhi or touring districts, there are always meetings. Not only the CM, but other ministers too are very seriously taking up their jobs.

The media can notice the amount of reviews every day," a top official said. Apart from understanding things, decisions are being made quickly.

The TSPSC Board which became a major issue was made operational again and again social justice prevailed. He maintained cordial relations with the Centre and the Governor unlike the BRS government and got files moving quickly. Things which were pending for years under the BRS admin were cleared after the Congress government came to power like giving offer letters to job applicants, issuing job notifications, getting permissions for skywalks and skyways from the Centre etc.

The Congress government not only took MLAs to the Medigadda Barrage to expose its flaws, it said on Tuesday that former Supreme Court judge and ex-Lokpal, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose, would head the judicial inquiry into the

irregularities in the Kaleshwaram Project.

When it comes to law and order, vigilance, ACB and drug control the authorities have been roaring. The pace is such that it has become the best time to complain against corrupt officials, frauds, drug smugglers, quacks and food adulterers. It is almost like the 'Red Book' that Revanth Reddy had mentioned before the elections. As the opposition complained of witch-hunting, the expose of Shiva Balakrishna, the former HMDA Secretary, threw light on the magnitude of corruption in the municipal department.

Former Intelligence Officer D. Praneet Rao was sent to Chanchalguda prison for monitoring the phone calls of private citizens without authorisation. Sources said that Revanth knew that he would come to power. So he had made plans for everything and it was just about the timing.

Pragathi Bhavan turns into ...

Continued from page 3

Praja Vani is being conducted twice every week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, even if it is a government holiday. Now around 1,000 complaints are being received each day. Around 4.9 lakh complaints have been received during the Praja Vanis conducted so far. Around 1.25 crore Praja Palana complaints were received. This itself indicates the confidence the public has in the government, the authorities said.

Within 48 hours of coming to power, the Arogyasri cover of Rs 10 lakh and the free bus travel scheme for women were rolled out.

The Congress had announced six guarantees containing 11 promises in toto. Five of the promises have been implemented. Under Cheyutha, the Rs 10 lakh medical assistance available under Rajiv Arogyasri has been implemented. Through the Mahalakshmi scheme, two of the three promises have been imple-

mented. Every day 28 lakh women passengers are utilising the free bus travel scheme. Around 25 crore women have used the service now. Based on data received from praja Palana applications, 40 lakh women will get LPG cylinders for Rs 500. The Mahalakshmi scheme which gives Rs 2,500 per month to women has not been implemented so far.

One of the major guarantees, the Gruha Jyothi scheme, has been implemented. The 200 units of free power scheme was rolled out and it benefitted around 40 lakh people. As Praja Palana is continuous, nearly 45,000 zero bills of Gruha Jyothi have been issued after revision.

The Indiramma Indlu scheme was also launched for which the government sanctioned 4.50 lakh Indiramma houses valued at Rs 22,500 crore.

The Congress government cleared the minor hurdles in giving jobs and within three months issued 28,942 offer letters. About 13,571 women got jobs under various categories. The

government issued a notification for filling up 11,062 teacher posts through a Mega DSC and 563 Group-1 posts.

The Telangana government re-joined the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) scheme in the interests of farmers.

The government agreed to 21 per cent fitment for TSRTC employees. This costs Rs 418 crore every year for the government. A Caste Census Bill has been tabled in the Assembly. The Indiramma Housing Scheme has also been launched. All three promises under the Rythu Bharosa Guarantee scheme have not been implemented. The government is however releasing Rythu Bandhu funds to farmers.

Another guarantee of Yuva Vikasam remains to be implemented. Chief Minister Revanth had earlier said that these guarantees would be implemented phase-wise. One major achievement that the Congress government claims is crediting the salaries of government employees on the first of every month.

MITIGATING CARBON FOOTPRINT IS PARAMOUNT

‘Sustainability is no longer a choice but a necessity’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Environment Committee of the Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) organised a programme on the carbon footprint and reporting in the city on Thursday at Federation House in Red Hills.

Meela Jayadev, President of FTCCI said, "Sustainability is no longer a choice but a necessity, understanding and mitigating our carbon footprint has become paramount. Today's programme aims to delve into the intricacies of carbon footprint measurement, reporting and the pivotal role it plays in shaping our environmental responsibilities. The importance of reducing carbon emissions and adopting sustainable practices cannot be overstated. This programme serves as a platform for us to learn from experts, share insights, contribute to a greener and more sustainable future."

G Bala Subramanyam, chair of the Environment Committee of FTCCI said, "Carbon footprint reporting holds importance in the sustainability journey of the industry for several reasons. The first step in the journey is measurement and reporting. It helps the organisation to measure



Meela Jayadev seen presenting a memento to Priyanka Pothana

and capture the data accurately of the greenhouse gas emissions."

This data also helps the industry to accurately report public disclosures being required such as sustainability reporting based on GRI principles, BRSR reporting as mandated by SEBI, CDP or SBTi as insisted by some customers, added Bala Subramanyam.

Priyanka Pothana, CEO of General Carbon, an ESG, sustainability, climate,

and carbon consulting organisation and prime speaker at the programme, explained what emissions are, the effects of emissions, what are fossil fuels, the types of greenhouse gases and statistics on emitters. She also highlighted some of the actions driven by companies. Many Indian Inc. majors may be net zero by 2050. "The challenges we face require immediate action and it is our responsibility to lead the way.

Our organisation is dedicated to empowering businesses to embrace ESG principles, integrate sustainability into their core strategies and uphold responsible practices," she added.

Dr Reddy's says it aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent by 2023; Vedanta Aluminium expediting efforts to achieve net zero by 2025, sporting goods retailer Decathlon aims to become net zero by 2050 and Infosys to turn carbon neutral 30 years ahead of 2050, the timeline set by the Paris Agreement.

Over 100 participants such as Industry Managers in EHS, Engineering, Sustainability, Supply Chain Management, Production & HR and EHS Professionals participated.

State govt permits to conduct TET

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State government decided to conduct a Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) before the DSC examination to fill the teacher posts.

Around 3 lakh aspirants will be benefitted by this decision. The government has already issued notification for the recruitment of 11,062 teacher posts on February 29. The government responded positively to the requests from the candidates to conduct the TET once again as teachers eligibility exam is mandatory to appear for the DSC exam. The Commissioner of School Education has been asked to conduct the TET at the earliest. The government's fresh decision brought a big relief to more than 3 lakh candidates.



Cyberabad Commissioner of Police Avinash Mohanty holds a meeting regarding Lok Sabha elections-2024 at Cyberabad Police Commissionerate on Thursday

LS polls: Check posts on borders of all constituencies, says CP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In view of forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, Cyberabad Commissioner of Police Avinash Mohanty instructed the police officials to place check posts in all the borders of their respective police jurisdiction as well as parliamentary constituencies. On Thursday, Avinash Mohanty had reviewed with all officials of Cyberabad of Vikarabad district at Cyberabad Police Commissionerate.

The Commissioner ordered the police personnel to maintain impartiality irrespective of parties and any mistake or laxity noticed would be punished. Illegal transportation of money, liquor, drugs, freebies and precious metals would be curbed.

He directed to focus more at the critical polling locations and utilise the services of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) effectively to build the confidence among the general public to cast their vote freely. All

the Non-Bailable Warrants (NBW) to be executed without any fail.

Traffic Joint Commissioner of Police D Joel Davis, Madhapur DCP Dr Vineeth G, Balanagar DCP T Srinivasa Rao, Medchal DCP Nitika Pant, Shamshabad DCP K Narayana Reddy, Rajendranagar DCP Ch Srinivas, Special Branch DCP Sai Sri, Crimes DCP K Narasimha, Police Nodal Officers for Assembly constituencies attended the meeting.



An ambulance transporting a live organ from Global Hospital, LB Nagar to Apollo Hospital, Jubilee Hills

Green Channel to transport live organ to Jubilee Hills

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Rachakonda Traffic Police arranged a Green Channel for transportation of a live organ (heart) from Global Hospital in LB Nagar to Apollo Hospital, Jubilee Hills on Thursday.

The ambulance started from Global Hospital, LB Nagar to Apollo Hospital, Jubilee Hills at 9:19 am and reached Apollo Hospital, Jubilee Hills at 9:56 am, covering a distance of 29.1 kms within 37 minutes without any traffic obstructions. The route is Global

Hospital - Sagar Ring Road - LB Nagar X Road - Kamineni Flyover- Alkapuri - Nagole - Uppal X Road - Habsiguda - Tarnaka - Rail Nilayam - Begumpet - Panjagutta - Apollo Hospital, Jubilee Hills. Rachakonda Traffic Police completed the task successfully with the close coordination of Hyderabad Traffic Police.

Both the hospital managements appreciated the services rendered by Rachakonda Traffic Police. Rachakonda CP has commended the services of the Traffic Police for the noble cause.

DyCM directs banks to focus on priority sector lending

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State-Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Telangana convened its 40th quarterly review meeting on Thursday to review the performance of the banks for the quarter ended December 2023.

Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Chief Minister, while applauding the efforts of banks in achieving various targets, sought their support in focusing more on Self-Help Groups also, as the NPAs are very little in these accounts. Further, he said that more and more micro enterprises are to be credit linked, which will bring in significant change in scenario. From the view point of priority sector lending, he advised the banks to have more exposure in priority sector lending with a special focus on agriculture, housing and education loans to weaker sections. He further assured the banks of all needed support from the State government,



in partnering with social development of the State.

Speaking on the occasion, Tummala Nageswara Rao, Minister for Agriculture, emphasised the need to focus more on agriculture and allied activities. He further sought the support of banks in achieving priorities and aims of the government.

Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, SBI, presented the performance of the banks in Telangana during the first three quarters of the current financial year, by saying that total deposits of the banks grew by Rs 72,795 crores so far and the total

deposits were at Rs 7,55,800.60 crore. Total advances with banks grew by Rs 1,40,293 crore and the advances of all banks were at Rs 9,54,189.83 crore. CD ratio continues to be above 100 per cent and it has gone up from 124.22% to 126.25 % during the quarter.

K Ramakrishna Rao, Special Chief Secretary (Finance), Govt. Of Telangana, Rajesh Kumar, CGM, SBI, Hyderabad Circle, Jagdeesh Kumar T, DGM, FIDD, Reserve Bank of India, PT Usha, GM, NABARD and Debashish Mitra, GM, SBI and Convenor of SLBC were among those present.

Rs 478 cr spent for minorities in last 3 months, says Mallu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said that the Congress government has spent Rs 478.56 crore for the welfare of minorities in the last three months. On Thursday, he inspected the arrangements for the Ifaar dinner to be organised by the State government at the LB Stadium on Friday.

He ordered the Minority Welfare Department, Police, Information Department, GHMC, R&B, Electricity, Water Board, Fire Department and other departments to make arrangements according to the plan.

Vikramarka said, "Giving Ifaar dinner to Muslim brothers on the first Friday of the holy month of Ramadan shows the State government's priority towards minorities. The government has allocated Rs 2,263 crore in the budget for the minority welfare department. The minority residential schools running in rented buildings have been ordered to procure land to construct their own buildings."

Meanwhile, in view of the Ifaar dinner to be hosted by

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy at LB Stadium on March 15, traffic restrictions are to be implemented from 4 pm to 8 pm.

Traffic coming from AR Petrol Pump Junction towards the BJR Statue will not be allowed and will be diverted at AR Petrol Pump towards Nampally. Traffic coming from Basheerbagh towards AR Petrol Pump via BJR Statue will not be allowed and will be diverted at BJR Statue towards, SBH, Abids- Nampally station road. Traffic coming from Sujatha School lane towards Khan Lateef Khan building will not be allowed and will be diverted at Sujatha School junction towards Nampally.

The RTC Buses plying from Ravindra Bharati towards BJR Statue should avoid LB Stadium main gate, in front of Khan Lateef Khan Building and take diversion at AR Petrol bunk towards Nampally.

Commuters are appealed to follow traffic updates on Hyderabad police social media platform @ Hyderabad Traffic Police, Facebook page (facebook.com/HYDTP) and @ HYDTP (twitter handle).



TSRTC starts home delivery and pickup cargo services

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) has started its first last-mile connectivity of courier and parcel services on Thursday at Dilsukhnagar. TSRTC MD VC Sajjanar inaugurated a model logistics counter and flagged off a vehicle, where the parcels will be picked up and delivered at the doorstep in Dilsukhnagar area. He said that these services would be made available across the State soon.

Sajjanar said, "TSRTC delivers an average of 15,000 parcels every day. In all, 60 lakh parcels have been transported in TSRTC buses in this financial year. The corporation got about Rs 120 crore revenue due to the transportation of those parcels." "While the corporation is getting 97 per cent of revenue



TSRTC MD VC Sajjanar inaugurating the logistics centre at Dilsukhnagar on Thursday

from tickets, and the non-ticket income is only 3 per cent. The corporation has decided to increase alternative income and has to strengthen the logistics department to compete with the private managements."

For suggestions and complaints regarding logistics services people can contact 040-69440069 or official website

www.tsrtclogistics.

At the inauguration, TSRTC Chief Operating Officer V Ravinder, Executive Directors Purushottam, Krishnakanth, Venkateshwarlu, CTM (Commercial) Sridhar, Hyderabad Regional Manager Varaprasad and Deputy Regional Manager (Logistics) Santosh Kumar participated.

CM inspects Shilparamam stalls to be given to SHGs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy inspected the unused stalls near Shilparamam on Thursday.

As part of the Mahila Shakti scheme, the authorities were instructed to make arrangements for providing marketing facilities to the products of Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs).



The government decided to utilise 119 stalls at the Night Bazaar, which have been lying neglected since 2017. Authorities have been asked to set up stalls for the marketing of the products manufactured by Self-Help Women's Groups.

CM Revanth wants to allot stalls only for women. The CM ordered the officials to prepare an action plan with full details in this regard. He asked the officials to issue orders at the earliest.

Officials of the concerned departments were directed to coordinate with other wings and move fast. He suggested to the authorities to study the exclusive women markets in Manipur, if required.

The government is aiming to promote one crore women as millionaires under Mahila Shakti scheme.

Spurious cosmetics seller held, booty of Rs 4.17 lakh seized

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Commissioner's Task Force, East Zone team, along with the Shahinayathgunj Police have apprehended a spurious cosmetic seller in Begum Bazaar on Thursday. He had been purchasing the products from Mumbai and selling them in the city.

The police have conducted a raid on '07 stars Cosmetics', located in RK Plaza, Begum Bazaar and apprehended its owner, Tabir Ahmed Lasker who was found selling duplicate cosmetics by pretending them to be original. Police said that accused Tabir, is a resident of Yakutpura. He was purchasing duplicate cosmetics products like lips balm, Kajal, Fit me Powder, Fit me Lipstick and Fit me Foundation from Mumbai and selling them by portraying them as originals.



Chief Secretary Shanti Kumari holds a video conference with officials regarding Amma Adarsh School committees

structure and made it clear that there should be a qualitative change in the schools. For this, the tasks should be assigned to the committees of model schools. An engineering department has been set up for each mandal for the management of works and under their supervision, steps have been taken to ensure that the works are completed with quality and on time.

She also said that the procedures for the formation of

ideal school committees have already been announced and the presidents of the village organisation or area level federation will act as chairpersons and the principals of the respective schools will act as member conveners for these committees. It is estimated that 63,44,985 pairs of school uniforms will have to be stitched and special measures should be taken to distribute these before the opening of the schools next academic year.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
NITS/DB/DS/MRDC/LYLRDY/TUFIDC/2024 Dt: 14.03.2024
04 Nos. works costing Rs. 700.00 Lakhs: Construction of CC/IBT Roads & CC Drains at various localities in Yellareddy Municipality under TUFIDC Loan Assistance: Closing on 22.03.2024. @ 04:30 PM; For details visit https://tender.telangana.gov.in. Contact: 9154299724. Sd/- Superintending Engineer (PH) West Circle, Hyderabad
R.O. No.: 508-CPCL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2023-24

SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF TELANGANA STATE LIMITED
SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. 04/2023-24
Sealed tenders are invited for various works in Huzurnagar Division. Note: The detailed Information of tender can be obtained on Web site Of TSSPDCL www.tssouthernpower.com, Last Date: 22.03.2024. Phone No.: 9000212877. Sd/- Divisional Engineer, Operation Division, Huzurnagar.
R.O. No.: 11166-PPVCL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2023-24 Dt: 14.03.2024

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
URBAN FORESTRY HSCCL Office Building, Nanaknagar, Hyderabad-500 032
Rc: No.349/UF/HMDA/2024 Dt: 14.03.2024
TENDER NOTIFICATION
Sub: HMDA - Urban Forestry - Maintenance of plantations and Greenery in different locations in HMDA jurisdiction - Reg.
The HMDA is inviting tenders for maintenance of plantations and greenery in different locations in HMDA jurisdiction from the registered contractors in any State or Central Government Departments / Organizations who have previous experience of executing similar nature of works on e-procurement platform. The last date for tender filing is 28.03.2024. For further details please visit e-procurement website http://tender.telangana.gov.in.
R.O. No.: 1090-PPVCL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2023-24 Sd/- Director, Urban Forestry



State govt committed to welfare of poor: Speaker Gaddam Prasad

PNS ■ HUZURNAGAR

Telangana State Legislative Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar has said that the State government is committed to the welfare of people. The State government, he said, has been consistently taking all steps to fulfil its objective to ensuring the welfare of the people.

The Speaker, along with Minister for Irrigation N Uttam Kumar Reddy and Minister for Revenue Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, laid the foundation stone at the local Sitaramagutta in Huzurnagar for the revival of the Indiramma Housing Scheme for the homeless poor.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, the Speaker said that the previous Congress regime in combined Andhra Pradesh developed the region as per the aspirations of the people and the credit for the same should go to Minister

NM Uttam Kumar. The Indiramma housing colony which is in the last leg of the execution would be completed in six months and the houses would be handed over to the beneficiaries.

Uttam Kumar Reddy, addressing the gathering, described people as his strength and development is his goal. He reminded the gathering that the previous Congress regime implemented several Lift Irrigation schemes, highway development projects, built hospitals and brought industries to the region.

The Congress government allocated Rs 74.80 crore for completion of the houses. In all, 2,160 single bedroom houses would be completed and handed over to the homeless poor, he said adding that there should be none in Huzurnagar without a roof of their own on their head. All the eligible persons would receive white ration



Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar speaking at a meeting

cards soon.

Revenue Minister P Srinivas Reddy said that the previous Congress regime built 17 lakh houses for the homeless poor but the BRS government during the past 10 years built

only 1.12 lakh houses.

The moment Congress came to power it sanctioned Rs 74.80 crore to the housing colony in Huzurabad which is in the last phase of construction. The houses would be ready in seven

months, he added.

The state government has decided to build 3,500 Indiramma houses in each Assembly constituency. The candidates of 2008 DSC would be given jobs soon. He said that the government gave jobs to 31,000 within 90 days of coming to power. The government would place the facts of land encroachment done through Dharani portal before the people. The previous regime more focused on earning kick-backs than development of the state. The six guarantees promised by the government would be extended to the eligible.

Earlier, Dakshata Foundation extended insurance scheme to the autorickshaw drivers of Huzurnagar and Kodad.

Collector S Venkat Rao, SP Rahul Hegde, Housing SE Ravindra Rao and others were present.

ACB unearths crores of assets of 'tainted' tahsildar

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

There were large-scale allegations of corruption against Markala Rajini, Tahsildar and joint Sub-Registrar of Jammikunta, in Karimnagar district but no action was taken against her because of political support she had in the past, it is said.

It may be recalled that the Anti-Corruption Bureau officials on Wednesday arrested Markala Rajini on charges of amassing assets disproportionate to her known sources of income and unearthed properties worth Rs 3.20 crore and seized documents related to her seven acres of agricultural lands registered in her name and also in the names of her family members. She also had 22 open plots worth Rs 21 lakh.

When she was the MRO of Dharmasagar mandal, there were allegations of her involvement in irregularities. The locals in Warangal



When she was the MRO of Dharmasagar mandal, there were allegations of her involvement in irregularities

Ring Road area, most part of it comes under Dharmasagar mandal, allege that they have to bribe her to get their properties registered and to get NALA conversion done. It became evident that she used the services of her sub-ordinate staff to get the irregularities done to protect her identity. Further, she is accused of acquiring lands in the name of her family members near the Ring Road here.

The Tahsildar Rajini worked in Shayampet mandal from 2015 to 2017. Within a few days of her transfer, a VRO

committed suicide.

Golkonda Mahender was employed as VRO of Mandaripeta village in Shayampeta mandal. He collected huge amount of money from farmers to regularise lands. After a few days, Rajini was transferred out from Shayampeta. The spree of illegal regularisation of land under litigation came to a halt. The VRO allegedly ended his life unable to bear the pressure exerted by those who paid bribes to him.

It is to be seen whether the ACB will focus its attention on this aspect too.

Renuka backs demand for Kamma corporation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Stating that Kammass are known for perseverance, Rajya Sabha Member Renuka Choudhary said that perseverance is very important nowadays. She said that a Kamma Corporation is very much needed for Kammass in times of drought like the one now.

Renuka had a meeting with representatives of the State Kamma Sangham on Thursday at her residence.

She said that she strongly believes that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will do justice to Kammass and that the Kammass are a community that will take other communities along with them.



She said that former Chief Minister NTR brought recognition to Telugus and that many had thought that she was a daughter of NTR. Even BRS leader KCR named his son as Taraka Rama Rao, she added.

The Rajya Sabha MP said that there are many farmhands in the Kamma community and so there is a need to set up a Kamma Corporation. Putting up statues after death will not help anyone, but helping people is permanent, she said.

She asked Kamma Sangham representatives to explain to the people of AP how an anti-Kamma leader who is ruling AP is targeting Kammass.

Harish demands Rs10lakh ex gratia to auto driver's family

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao reacted to the suicide of auto driver couple in Nizamabad. Swamy (45) allegedly strangled his wife Devalakshmi (40) and later hanged himself due to financial crisis.

He regretted that the Congress government was not moved by the heartbreaking incident of auto driver who ended his life along with his wife as he was upset that the auto was not running.

"Who is responsible for the future of that child who has lost his parents and become an orphan?", Harish said. He asked who would give assurance. They demanded that the state government should immediately respond and announce an ex gratia of Rs.10 lakh.

In an audio message reportedly left by him on his phone, he stated that he was under great stress as he was not able



to earn much due to the introduction of free bus rides for women.

Harish Rao expressed anger that the government is not responding at least to auto workers committing suicide in the state. He urged the government to solve the problem of life of auto divers without neglect. 12,000 salary should be announced. He appealed to the auto brothers to be brave and not to take hasty actions.

Centre will buy every grain of paddy in Telangana: BJP

PNS ■ NALGONDA

BJP nominee for Bhongir Lok Sabha seat Boora Narsaiah Goud has categorically stated that Narendra Modi government would procure every grain of paddy produced by the farmers.

He was taking part as chief guest at a meeting of important functionaries of the party in Munugode on Thursday.

Speaking to the media, Narsaiah Goud said that there was no light at the end of the tunnel for the BRS. The BRS, which changed its original name and severed its relations with Telangana, has emerged as the family party.

In an indirect reference to KCR family, he said that his family alone became a golden family. That is why, the people gave VRS to KCR, he said.

Maintaining that the Congress came to power by making more than 400 promises which are not feasible to implement, he sought to know from the State government what happened to the imple-



BJP Bhongir Lok Sabha candidate Borra Narsaiah speaking at a meeting in Munugode on Thursday

mentation of the Rs 2 lakh loan waiver for the farmers promised to be effective from December 9.

Input subsidy under Rythu Bandhu was given to 50 farmers who own three acres and less per village, but what about the fate of the tenant farmers, he questioned. What happened to the promised money to the agricultural workers, he questioned?

Further, what happened to payment of Rs 2500 every

month to each woman under Gruha Lakshmi scheme, he pointed out.

He appealed to the people to vote for the lotus symbol since Modi granted national highways to Bhongir constituency, AIIMS at Bibinagar, MMTS, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Mudra loans, released funds to gram panchayats under 14th and 15th Finance commission funds, implementing Mission Indra Dhanush, implementing Swachh Bharat and so on.

Mandava wants CM to set up corporation for Kammass

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Minister Mandava Venkateswar Rao of the Kamma community wrote a letter to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday requesting him to set up a corporation for Kammass.

Mandava praised the decision of the government to set up corporations to ensure the welfare of all economically and socially backward castes. Even though Kammass are legally upper caste, most people of that caste are poor, he said.

He said that there are many Kammass who are economically backward and are not able to meet even their daily needs. He said that the children of Kammass are not able

to pay fees and they give up their studies midway due to financial difficulties.

He said that there are people who have undergone higher education but they do not have jobs and are struggling as they do not have capital for self-employment.

In this context, Mandava asked the CM to establish a Kamma Welfare Corporation to help poor Kammass. He said that CM Revanth Reddy's name will be remembered as the first Chief Minister to set up a corporation for Kammass.

Mandava Venkateswar Rao said in his letter that he is appealing to the CM to establish a Kamma Corporation immediately.

Turmeric, red gram command record prices in Nizamabad, Tandur markets

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

The farmers of turmeric and red gram hit a jackpot as their produce is fetching a record price.

Setting an all-time high record, a quintal of turmeric fetched Rs 18,299 as against the Monday's highest price of Rs 14,500 a quintal. Turmeric farmers were able to secure only Rs 12,500 a quintal in the first week of March.

When a turmeric farmer belonging to Perkit village of Armoormandal fetched 18 quintals of turmeric, the farmer got the maximum price of Rs 18,299.

The red gram farmers are lucky to get the highest price for red gram for the year Rs

11007 a quintal. The traders purchased red gram at this price on Tuesday. Of all the markets, the Tandur market is described as the most promising market for the farmers.

On Tuesday, the farmers brought 752 quintals of red gram to the Tandur market. The traders paid Rs 11007 a quintal for the high quality red gram and paid Rs 10,125 a quintal for medium variety and Rs 8811 a quintal for normal variety.

Regarding the turmeric, four days ago the Metpalli market in Jagityal helped turmeric get record price of Rs 15,111 per quintal four days ago. The market officials remarked that for the first time during the past 15 days a quintal of

turmeric fetched Rs 15,111 in Metpalli market. In spite of Sangli market offering better price than this, the farmers inclined to take the turmeric to Metpalli market recently weighing various pros and cons of taking turmeric to sangli market.

The market officials say that daily the farmers have been fetching 2000-3000 quintals of turmeric to Metpalli market. The farmers have been demanding fixing MSP of Rs 15,000 a quintal of turmeric for the past several days.

Regarding the red gram, the Center announced an MSP of Rs 7000 a quintal. It is pertinent to note that the traders have been paying anything between Rs 1811 and Rs 4007

quintal over and above the MSP.

The Janagoan market quoted the minimum price of Rs 6813 a quintal for red gram on Tuesday.

The Suryapeta market quoted the price of Rs 4259 a quintal and Warangal market quoted Rs 3659 a quintal for the commodity.

Tandur market is renowned for red gram procurement. Tandur brand red gram sells like the proverbial hot cake in any part of the country. The red gram, cultivated in red soil, will give good yield. The farmers say that the red gram yield per acre would be three quintals if the soil is red soil and varies between 4 and 5 quintals if the soil is black.

SBI ATM looted in Rudrur

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

In a true filmi-style operation, an inter-state gang of robbers looted SBI ATM near the bus stand at Rudrur and looted Rs 25 lakh from the ATM.

The police were astonished at the modus operandi of the gang, which apparently left no clues at the crime scene.

Four assailants reached the ATM in Rudru in a Bolero vehicle and smashed the ATM. Prior to it, they sprinkled colour on the CCTV cameras present there to prevent the cameras recording their footage. Later, they smashed the ATM and decamped with Rs 25 lakh in it. They threw out the damaged ATM parts.



On a tip off, the police rushed to the ATM center and gathered clues with the help of the CLUES team. The police describe it as a handiwork by professional gangsters.

TDP 2nd list sparks protests

Naidu says public opinion given prominence before selection of 34 MLA candidates

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday announced the second list of party candidates for 34 more Assembly seats for the forthcoming polls.

With the new set of names, TDP has announced the names of candidates for 128 seats so far with another 16 remaining to be named as the party will be contesting from 144 seats as part of the NDA in the southern state.

"We have already kept the first list of candidates in front of people who will contest the forthcoming 2024 polls. Now, we have brought forward another list of 34 names," said Naidu in a post on X.

According to the TDP supremo, public opinion has been accorded prominence in selecting the candidates for the 34 seats.

The opposition leader called on the people to bless TDP candidates and ensure their victory in the elections.

Recently, the NDA partners in Andhra Pradesh finalised their seat-sharing formula for the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, under which the BJP will contest six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats while the TDP will fight 17 parliamentary and 144 assembly seats.

Under the deal, Pawan Kalyan's JanaSena will contest two Lok Sabha and 21 assembly seats.

A wave of discontent sweeps across TDP in 10 segments

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following the release of the second list comprising 34 candidates by TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, a wave of dissatisfaction has swept through the ranks of TDP ticket aspirants and their supporters. In approximately 10 of the 34 constituencies, aspiring candidates express discontent, attributing their exclusion to factors such as alliance seat-sharing agreements and other considerations.

Protests erupted in Pithapuram shortly after JSP chief Pawan Kalyan declared his candidacy for the Pithapuram constituency, prompting TDP senior leader Varma and his followers to register their objection by setting fire to party election materials and other items. Notably absent from the second list are senior party members, including Kala Venkata Rao and Somireddy, further fueling anger and dissatisfaction among prospective candidates.

Will contest from Pithapuram: Pawan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan revealed his intention to vie for the Assembly elections from Pithapuram constituency.

Speaking at the State office in Mangalagiri near Vijayawada on Thursday during the 10th Formation Day celebrations of JSP, Pawan Kalyan announced amidst fervent applause from party supporters. He also clarified that a decision regarding contesting for a Lok Sabha seat is yet to be made.

Acknowledging certain unavoidable circumstances, Pawan Kalyan mentioned the



allocation of some Assembly seats to the BJP. He conceded the inability to assign seats to certain senior JSP leaders. "I empathise with the discontent among some JSP leaders and supporters regarding seat allocation. We have relinquished

the seat designated for my brother Naga Babu," he remarked. However, he pledged to ensure fairness to all party members who have diligently contributed.

Reflecting on JSP's setback in the 2019 elections, Pawan Kalyan expressed anticipation of defeat in both the Bhimavaram and Gajuwaka constituencies.

"We will exert utmost effort to secure victory in all 21 Assembly seats. Over the past decade, JSP has surmounted numerous obstacles," he asserted. "We shall hold accountable those responsible for perpetrating injustices against JSP leaders.

INDIA CORNER

Child mauled to death by stray dogs: Delhi HC asks police to investigate

The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the Delhi Police to investigate the "nature" of pets kept by residents in Dhobi Ghat area of Tughlaq Lane area where a one-and-a-half-year-old girl was allegedly mauled to death by a pack of dogs last month. Justice Subramonium Prasad asked the police to file a status report before March 19 giving the details. The court was hearing a petition by the infant's father seeking a Rs 50 lakh compensation for the death of the child. "Police are directed to investigate regarding the nature of pets that are kept in the area. It is also stated that there was a pitbull in the area. Investigate this. Status report be filed by Tuesday," the court said. During the hearing, the court asked the police to also find out if there was any pet dog in the nearby houses where the incident took place. The court said it was seeking the information just to rule out the apprehension of a ferocious dog kept in a nearby house which could have attacked the child.



Naxalite wanted in over 100 cases held in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district

A Naxalite wanted in more than 100 cases, including murder and abduction, and carrying a reward of Rs 8 lakh was arrested in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Thursday. Sudhakar alias Undam (55), who was active as a divisional committee member of Maoists, was apprehended in a forest between Gundam and Puvarti villages during an operation by security personnel on Tuesday, an official said. The operation involving personnel from the District Reserve Guard (DRG), 210th battalion of CoBRA, an elite unit of CRPF, and local police, was launched from Basaguda police station, he said. A native of Gaganpalli village in Basaguda area, Sudhakar had joined the outlawed CPI (Maoist) as a PLGA (People's Liberation Guerilla Army) member in 1996 and then served in various capacities. He led the supply team of the West Bastar Division of Maoists between 2006 and 2008, he said.



Govt designates I4C as agency of MHA to notify unlawful activities

The Centre has designated the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) as an agency of the MHA to notify, under the Information Technology Act-2000, law-enforcement agencies about unlawful activities in cyberspace. The I4C was set up by the MHA to provide a framework and eco-system for law-enforcement agencies (LEAs) in dealing with cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. "In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (b) of sub-section (3) of section 79 of the Information Technology Act 2000, Central Government being the appropriate government hereby designate the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), to be the agency of the Ministry of Home Affairs to perform the functions under clause (b) of sub-section (3) of section 79 of Information Technology Act, 2000 and to notify the instances of information, data or communication link.



'Graft, anti-national agenda are INDIA bloc's ideology'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday accused the opposition INDIA bloc of being guided by corruption, mis-governance and fuelling anti-national agenda, asserting he stands for rooting out corruption and appeasement. His ideology is ensuring the country's welfare through people's welfare, he said at a programme here attended by the beneficiaries of PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi scheme, under which loan is given to street vendors. Targeting the opposition alliance which has united in the national capital to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, he said they have come together on the agenda of "abusing" him day and night. The Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress have joined hands in Delhi where all seven Lok Sabha seats are held by the BJP. Modi said the PM SVANidhi scheme has been a big boost to



Targeting the opposition alliance which has united in the national capital to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, he said they have come together on the agenda of "abusing" him day and night

the lakhs of families of street vendors who were never paid any "attention" by previous governments. They used to suffer insults and ran from pillar to post as they hardly got loans from banks and had to obtain capital at exorbitant interest rates, he said. "Modi ki guarantee" has ensured that they can get loans from banks at simple rates," he

said. Over 62 lakh persons have been given loans of about Rs 11,000 crore, he said. The BJP government at the Centre has been working to improve the lives of the poor and middle class in the national capital, he said, adding that it has been making honest efforts to ease traffic and curb pollution in Indian cities.

Over 1,000 electric buses have been deployed in Delhi, he said, and highlighted the expansion of expressways around the city's periphery and increase in its Metro network. The prime minister also laid the foundation stone of two additional corridors of Delhi Metro's Phase 4 during the programme.

Class X girls asked to remove hijab in Gujarat

PNS ■ BHARUCH

The principal of a private school was removed as an exam administrator by the Gujarat Education Department on Thursday after an outrage erupted among parents who alleged that she had compelled Muslim girl students to remove their hijabs before a Class X examination. The incident took place at Lions School in Ankleshwar town, Bharuch district, just before the mathematics paper on Wednesday of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB). Following complaints from the parents, the state education department swiftly removed the exam centre administrator, Ilaben Suratija, who is also the principal of the school. District Education Officer Swati Raol took action after meeting with the concerned parents.

CAA; Nobody's citizenship will be snatched: Rajnath

PNS ■ BARPETA (ASSAM)

Union Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said people are being misled over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, asserting that the legislation would not take away the citizenship of anyone living in India. Addressing a rally in Assam's Barpeta, he said the CAA will grant citizenship to religiously persecuted people who came to India till 2014 from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Singh was campaigning for BJP ally Asom Gana Parishad's candidate Phani Bhusan Choudhury, who is contesting the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency, currently being represented by Congress MP Abdul Khaleque. "The people are being misled over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act... I assure you that this Act will not take away the citizenship of any people. It would only grant citizenship," the defence minister said.



The Centre on Monday implemented the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who came to India before December 31, 2014. Singh also said with the consecration of the Ayodhya temple, "nobody can stop the establishment of 'Ram Rajya' in India".

NDA will retain power by winning over 400 LS seats

PNS ■ KOKRAJHAR (ASSAM)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday claimed that it is a surety that the NDA government will return to power winning over 400 seats during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Addressing party workers of three NDA allies in Assam -- BJP, AGP and UPPL, Singh said there will be no kutchra houses in the state and assured people that everyone will get pucca dwelling units if the Narendra Modi-led government returns to power for the third consecutive term. "There is no doubt that our government will be formed at the Centre. I believe the NDA will win more than 400 seats," he said, asking the party workers to campaign for this target.

If voted to power, INDIA bloc will be farmers' voice: Rahul

Says Rahul; repeats caste census demand

PNS ■ NASHIK

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the opposition INDIA alliance, if voted to power, will be the "voice of farmers" and frame policies to protect them, promising to exclude cultivators from GST and restructure crop insurance scheme. He was addressing a farmers' rally at Chandwad in Maharashtra's Nashik district along with NCP (SP) head Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, as part of the Congress' ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'. Later in the day, Gandhi held a roadshow and a street-corner meeting in Nashik where he repeated his demand for a caste census in the country. "The INDIA alliance government will be the voice of farmers and work to protect their interests. Mine and our (INDIA bloc) government's doors would always be open for farmers," he said at Chandwad. The Congress leader promised loan waiver for farmers, restructuring of crop insurance scheme to benefit cultivators, to protect crop



prices in formulation of export import policies and to make efforts to exclude agriculture from GST and work on only one tax. The Lok Sabha member from Wayanad also reiterated the Congress' promise of a legal guarantee to minimum support price (MSP) as per the Swaminathan committee report. The former Congress president claimed 20 to 25 people in the country have wealth equivalent to 70 crore of the country's population. The Narendra Modi government waived Rs 16 lakh crore debt of industrialists, he further claimed. "This amount is equivalent to 24 years of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) under which Rs 35,000 crore is spent every year to give employment to the poor people," Gandhi said. He said the previous Congress-led UPA government had waived Rs 70,000 crore debt of farmers. "If the loans of rich people can be written off, farmers also should get the benefit," he said.



CAA a challenge to idea of India, says Kerala CM

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said that the Citizenship Amendment Act is unconstitutional, against human rights, and poses a challenge to the idea of India. Vijayan, at a press conference here, alleged that the contentious legislation grants legal validity to religious discrimination. The CM also accused the Congress of withdrawing from a united front against the CAA. The CAA was passed in December 2019 and subsequently got the President's assent, but there were protests in several parts of the country against it, with many opposition parties speaking out against the law, calling it "discriminatory". This act grants citizenship to undocumented migrants of all religions -- except Muslims -- from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who arrived in India before December 31, 2014.

JUDICIAL INQUIRY INTO FARMER'S DEATH Haryana moves SC against HC order

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Haryana government has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court order setting up a panel to probe farmer Shubhkar Singh's death during a clash between protesting farmers and the state security personnel. The state government filed the special leave petition in the top court on March 11 against the high court's decision. The high court March 7

formed a panel headed by a former high court judge to inquire into the death of Shubhkar Singh during a clash between protesting farmers and Haryana security personnel. The high court had also expressed anguish that youngsters were seen with weapons and women and children were "paraded in the front" during the protest. A division bench of Acting Chief Justice G S Sandhawalia and Justice Lapita Banerji, which was hearing petitions on the farmers' agitation, had said

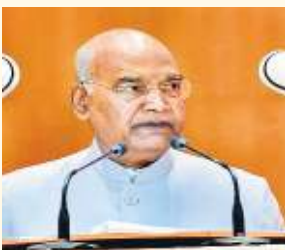


that "it was a sad state of affairs" that youngsters were "armed with lathis and at certain places with swords and

28 no-confidence motions moved in LS till now: Kovind panel report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 28 no-confidence motions have been moved in the Lok Sabha till now, as disclosed by a high-level panel deliberating on the prospect of 'one nation, one election'. The panel's findings also shed light on the occurrence of seven instances where Lok Sabha found itself in a state of deadlock. Proposing a solution to these challenges, the high-level panel led by former president Ram Nath Kovind suggested that in scenarios of a hung House or



a vote of no confidence, fresh elections should be conducted to constitute a new Lok Sabha. Historical data highlighted in the report indicates that the highest number of no-confidence motions in Lok Sabha were moved during 1961-70,

totalling 12, followed by six such motions during 1971-1980. In stark contrast, from 2000 to 2023, merely three no-confidence motions were recorded. To tackle these issues, the panel has put forth a comprehensive mechanism. This proposed framework entails a constitutional amendment fixing Lok Sabha's tenure at five years from its inaugural meeting. Should dissolution occur before the term's completion, fresh elections will be held, and new Lok Sabha will serve out the remainder of the previous term.

LS Polls: Discontent brews in BJP Karnataka unit after announcement of first list

PNS ■ BENGALURU

A day after the BJP announced its first list of candidates for 20 Lok Sabha constituencies in Karnataka for the upcoming Parliament elections, discontent has started brewing among the ticket aspirants who were denied a ticket. Former chief minister Jagadish Shettar, who was expecting a ticket from Haveri or Dharwad Lok Sabha constituency, said he will arrive at a decision on Thursday evening. According to him, he is still in talks with the seniors in the BJP regarding the Belgaum seat. Shettar had returned to the BJP in January after quitting the Congress, which gave him a ticket for the 2023 assembly polls. Though he had lost that election, Congress nominated him as a Member of the Legislative Council. Incidentally Shettar had quit the BJP before the elections as he had been denied a ticket. Shettar's supporters claim that he was offered a Lok Sabha ticket in the 2024 elections by the BJP. When asked whether he

was made a scapegoat as his name did not figure in the first list of candidates, Shettar said, "Don't put words in my mouth. Everyone knows what's going on. Hence, I am not going to comment on it. People will say and those who should say will speak up." Reacting to it, Union Minister for Coal and Mines, Pralhad Joshi said, "Shettar has said that his name is there for Belagavi constituency. I too know this. I will be happy if he gets the ticket from Belagavi or any other place because he is our very senior leader." Another BJP leader left disappointed after the first list was former Deputy Chief Minister K S Eshwarappa, who is in the BJP's apex body parliamentary board member, of chucking out his son from the Lok Sabha election. "There is a pressure on me to contest the election independently," Eshwarappa told reporters in Shivamogga, yesterday.



India ranks 134th out of 193 countries in 2022 HDI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's was ranked 134 out of 193 countries in the 2022 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), a notch higher than 135 out of 191 countries in 2021. On the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022, India has been ranked at 108 out of 193 countries with a score of 0.437. Its rank was 122 out of 191 countries with a score of 0.490 in the GI-2021. This shows a significant jump of 14 ranks on the GI-2022 vis-a-vis the GI-2021, the women and child development ministry said. However, the country also

has one of the largest gender gaps in its labour force participation rate -- a 47.8 per cent difference between women (28.3 per cent) and men (76.1 per cent). After a drop in its HDI value in 2021 and following a flat trend over the past few years, India's HDI value has increased to 0.644 in 2022, placing the country at 134 out of 193 countries and territories in the just released 2023/24 Human Development Report (HDR). India ranked 135 out of 191 countries in 2021 on the back of a marginal increase in its HDI value to 0.644 compared to 0.633 in 2021.



The data was published in the United Nations Development Programme's report titled "Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World". It builds on the 2021

2022 Human Development Report findings that saw the global HDI value fall for the first time -- two years in a row. The report revealed that while rich countries attained record human development,

half of the poorest remain below their pre-crisis level of progress. In 2022, India saw improvements across all HDI indicators -- life expectancy, education, and gross national income (GNI) per capita and life expectancy rose from 67.2 to 67.7 years, expected years of schooling reached 12.6, mean years of schooling increased to 6.57 and GNI per capita saw an increase from USD 6,542 to USD 6,951. Moreover, India demonstrated progress in reducing gender inequality. The country's GI value increase by 48.4 per cent, from 0.434 in 1990 to 0.644 in 2022.

the report. "India has shown remarkable progress in human development over the years. Since 1990, life expectancy at birth has risen by 9.1 years, expected years of schooling have increased by 4.6 years and mean years of schooling have grown by 3.8 years. India's GNI per capita has grown by approximately 287 per cent," it said. With an HDI value of 0.644, the latest HDR places India in the medium human development category. Between 1990 and 2022, the country saw its HDI value increase by 48.4 per cent, from 0.434 in 1990 to 0.644 in 2022.

Synchronising polls

The Kovind panel report will spur governance and deepen the democratic rubric

The submission of a much-awaited report on the feasibility and practicality of simultaneous elections across the nation has reignited discussions across the political spectrum. The 18,626-page report, finalised by a committee under the chairpersonship of former President Ram Nath Kovind, has recommended simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, followed within 100 days by concurrent local body elections. To this end, at least five Articles of the Constitution would need amendment. While simultaneous elections offer potential benefits, several considerations and challenges merit attention. The main proposals make it clear that in cases of a hung House or no-confidence motion sailing through, fresh polls may be held for the remainder of the five-year term. The first simultaneous polls would entail Assembly tenures aligning with the Lok Sabha elections, and the Election Commission would create a unified electoral roll and voter ID cards in collaboration with State Election Commissions



for all polls. The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' has been a subject of debate for quite some time now. Its backers feel it is necessary to reduce the frequency of polls, and that it will spawn several other advantages, including enhanced and continued governance, decreased expenditure, minimal life disruptions and social cohesion, besides providing stability. By aligning the electoral cycles, the Governments can focus more on policymaking and implementation rather than perpetually being in campaign mode. However, the opponents are concerned about logistical challenges, constitutional implications and potential dilution of regional issues in electoral discourse.

Addressing concerns related to federalism and democratic principles while ensuring the synchronisation of electoral cycles poses a formidable challenge. Even if the recommendations are accepted, it would be a long road to actualisation of 'One Nation, One Election.' Besides, simultaneous elections might dilute the regional narrative, leading to a focus primarily on national issues. The Kovind panel's report provides insights into mitigating this risk and preserving the essence of federalism within the framework of simultaneous elections. Also, elections incur substantial costs for the exchequer; simultaneous elections could potentially reduce this financial burden. However, the initial investment required for synchronisation, including infrastructure development and voter education, needs careful consideration. The analysis of financial implications will influence the decision regarding the feasibility of this reform. It would indeed be a good idea to reach a political consensus as every party is a stakeholder. The implications of this report extend beyond administrative efficiency to encompass constitutional, political and financial dimensions. As stakeholders await the findings and recommendations, it is imperative to engage in constructive dialogue to address concerns and chart a path forward that upholds the democratic ethos while enhancing the effectiveness of governance.

PICTALK



Members of Toda tribal community during the celebrations of temple festival at Mallikorai Mund, in Ooty

PTI

Scientists play key role in a nation's progress

In times of crisis, society instinctively turns its gaze towards the scientific community, seeking solace and solutions amid turmoil

The public always looks at the scientific community whenever they are in dire straits. Farmers seek help from agriculture scientists when serious pests affect their crops, or there is a drastic decline in productivity. Similarly, the public looks to medical scientists for help whenever a pathogen attacks humans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how, every day, the ordinary person eagerly looked at research work from various labs. Covid-19 reinstated the common man's confidence in scientists. The current generation that has overcome the COVID-19 catastrophe is deeply indebted to scientists for their lives. Even though there are hundreds of scientific fields, agriculture and health care are close to the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people, and hence, scientists working in these areas need to communicate directly to the public. Scientists working in other fields like communication engineering, space research, civil engineering etc, though highly relevant to the day-to-day life of commoners, never come in direct contact with



them. Whenever humanity is in disarray, scientists bring glee and a ray of hope through their discoveries. In many parts of the world, scientists also create confusion because of conflicts of interest and interference from policymakers. It's an open secret that most of the food products available in our market are adulterated, and in some cases, they contain toxic substances. Even scientists working in industries will secretly admit it, but they are not allowed to publish the results or speak publicly. Most of the scientific work related to pesticides, drugs etc is linked with industry, and none of the industries will support a genuine scientist. Industries may influence the design of research studies to ensure outcomes align with their objectives. There is always a conflict between proponents of mod-

ern medicine and traditional systems of medicine. Many scientists blatantly state that Ayurvedic or Homeopathic drugs have side effects, forgetting the fact that all modern medicines have severe side effects. Scientists should strive to be impartial in pursuing knowledge and understanding of the natural world. This dedication to objectivity is fundamental to the scientific method, which relies on systematic observation, experimentation, and analysis to uncover truths about the universe. However, scientists, like all humans, are susceptible to personal beliefs and biases that may subtly influence their work. These biases can affect everything from the questions scientists choose to investigate to the interpretation of their findings. Furthermore, external factors such as funding sources, societal pressures, and political climates can also influence scientific research. Research funding, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping the scientific agenda, as scientists often rely on grants from government agencies, private foundations, or industry sponsors

to support their work. The priorities of these funding sources may align with particular agendas or interests, potentially influencing the direction and focus of research. Societal pressures and political influence can also distort scientific results. Despite these challenges, the scientific community is committed to upholding certain principles of objectivity, transparency, and peer review to ensure the integrity of scientific research. While scientists may not always be entirely free from bias, these principles help to minimise the impact of personal beliefs and external influences on the scientific process. The scientific community can maintain public trust and credibility by upholding these standards. Moreover, scientists should proactively engage with societal concerns, prioritising research that tackles urgent issues like public health, and social inequality. If scientists lose public trust, society will be in disarray.

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



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Presidential choices make veterans rueful

The United States finds itself in a peculiar predicament where the choice between Biden and Trump feels more like picking the 'less bad' option

The United States of America has a strange conundrum of choosing the 'less bad' Presidential option amongst geriatrics in Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump. One concerned set of constituents is the fraternity of retired service personnel (from US Armed Forces) or simply, Veterans. Given the size and scale of the standing US Armed Forces and the accompanying global deployments, it is unsurprising that the Veterans community is over 18 million strong. As the US has had a consistent history of ongoing combat duties, Veterans evoke an emotional and hallowed position in the American consciousness. The longstanding American norm of walking up and shaking the hands of a Veteran by saying, "Thank you for your services" is a sacred culture that exemplifies the hallowed position afforded to Veterans, across the partisan and societal divide.

Of the 46 US Presidents to date, an unprecedented 31 had done military service testifying to the image of the 'Uniform', in public reverence. At one time, 'Uniform' was considered a political millstone for prospective Presidency. Sadly, it is a normalcy on the decline. Today neither of the two Presidential candidates i.e., Trump or Biden, fit the bill on this score. On the contrary, Biden does himself no good by defending his five-student draft deferments, whereas Donald Trump is infamous for his five conscription deferments, during the Vietnam War. In recent times, even the likes of Bill Clinton and George W Bush (with his specious service with the Air National Guard) were criticised for lack of experience. The implicit fear was that as the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, a President bereft of Military Service would be unversed and unempathetic to the institutional realities and Veteran concerns. George H.W. Bush was the last US President to serve in combat. While the campaign spiel and competitive claims by both the contesting candidates towards Veterans in the 2024 Presidential Elections will bear prominence,



the fact is that neither of the two is seen as genuine representative of the realm. While Biden has routinely invoked the Military Service of his late son, Beau Biden, to burnish his militaristic association, it remains an artful contextualization as Beau's service was that of Judge Advocate General in Iraq for a year – later, Beau had died owing to brain cancer. Many Veterans have questioned Biden's sincerity like the incident of the Air Force Veteran accusing Biden at an event, "I'm an Air Force veteran. I'm here with an Army veteran. We are just wondering why we should vote for someone who voted for a war and enabled a war that killed thousands of our brothers and sisters, countless Iraqi civilians." However, even though Republicans always enjoyed a historical bias in terms of Veteran traction, given its conservative and overtly 'nationalistic' moorings, Trump is not exactly in the mould of Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, George HW Bush etc., Trump's Republicanism is more anchored in the commercial sensibilities of its affluent elites, as opposed to martial traditions of Military families that breed reserves of selfless character. Therefore, Trump has had to appropriate the apolitical institution of the Armed Forces with his misplaced

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AMERICA'S FUTURE AS A SUPERPOWER IS PREDICATED ON ITS COMMITMENT TO THE 'ARMED FORCES' AND THEIR ASSOCIATED DOMAIN OF VETERAN AFFAIRS, YET NEITHER OF THE CONTESTANTS DEMONSTRATES A FAMILIAL OR TOPICAL URGENCY TOWARDS THE VETERANS

commentary of 'My Generals, walk at Lafayette Square etc., and suchlike unwarranted usurpations. Ironically, he has even poooh-pooohed the Veterans with utter disdain whenever his instincts have taken over. Trump's former Chief of Staff, John Kelley, has confirmed Trump's apathy, "A person that thinks those who defend their country in uniform, or are shot down or seriously wounded in combat, or spend years being tortured as POWs are all suckers" because 'there is nothing in it for them.' A person who did not want to be seen in the presence of military amputees because 'It doesn't look good for me'. Even Trump's contempt for 'Gold Star' Military families owing to their faith or dislike for rivals like the revered Senator John McCain (distinguished Veteran) or even his purported query about a wounded Army Captain at an event with a query, "Why do you bring people like that here?" and added for the measure, "No one wants to see that, the wounded," reflects the real amorality of Trump. Even Trump's Defence Secretary and legendary warrior, General James Mattis who was eventually, 'the last adult in the room', testified to the inadvertent bluster that was postured as faux 'muscularity' in Trump's drumming

and demeanour. Mattis the proud and apolitical Veteran had mustered all the correctness that he could manage in his resignation note when he suggested that Trump needed a Defense Secretary 'whose views are better aligned to yours' – suggesting that no professional, balanced or self-respecting individual could align with an unhinged Trump. Veterans who served partisan governments, couldn't possibly see individual leaders as bigger entities, than the Constitutional morality of the land. Today both Biden and Trump attempt to profess more sensitivity, care, and concern for the Veterans, and like the choice generally, it is yet another case of a 'less bad', rather than 'good' choice. America's future as a Superpower is predicated on its commitment to the 'Armed Forces' and their associated domain of Veteran Affairs, yet neither of the contestants demonstrates a familial or topical urgency towards the Veterans. Therefore, partisanship aside, many Veterans feel that their service has been taken for granted and they have no better choice. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BIDEN AND TRUMP FACE OFF

Sir — This is concerning the article "The US presidential race intensifies" (March 13, 2024). The process of presidential elections in America in November has progressed to the point where it is almost clear that President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will face off again. The Super Tuesday results showed them to be far ahead of their opponents, and the next day, Nikki Haley eliminated all questions by stating that he was postponing the campaign to become the Republican nominee. The US presidential elections will feature only the same candidates for the second time in a row, a first since 1956. Second, both candidates are elderly. Two-thirds of those polled in February believed Biden was no longer old enough to work for the government. Nearly half of the respondents expressed the same way about Trump. The serious allegations against former President Trump are also making these elections unique. It is unclear when the court will rule on these charges. Everyone's attention is focused on what will happen if the court rules against Trump before the election. These claims are also fueling intense resentment on both sides during a presidential race. While Biden has branded Trump as a threat to America's very survival, Trump continues to claim victory in the 2020 elections. Leaving aside these internal challenges, neither candidate's victory would result in a significant shift in America's foreign policy. Aside from modest efforts to balance the Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, America now has few options. On the other hand, America's future posture will be heavily influenced by the desire to contain China's growing aggression.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

PROTECTING RIVERS

Sir — Though rivers are national assets, there is little awareness among the people about ways to preserve their purity and utility. Besides being indispensable for day-to-day use, including agricultural purposes, they serve as a great inland mode of trans-

China's hollow claims



China's protest against PM Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh is a continuation of its desperate attempts to lay illegal claim on Arunachal Pradesh, the integral and inalienable part of India. China can't stomach Modi's inauguration of strategically significant Sela Tunnel

which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in India's territory. The world's longest twin-lane tunnel will ease pressure on the existing infrastructure, specifically the Balipara-Chariduar-Tawang road, which faces issues from landslides, snow, and heavy rainfall. The road link is expected to help India shore up defence along the nuclear-armed neighbours' 3,500-kilometer Line of Actual Control (LAC). India and China have also been locked in a border stand-off in the eastern Ladakh region since 2020 when a deadly hand-to-hand clash broke out. China's tactic of laying illegal claims on the territories of its neighbours is a well-known fact. Thus, objections raised by it are hollow as long as India develops the regions well within its boundaries.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

ENFORCE LAWS ON PLASTIC MISUSE

Sir — Despite knowing the harmful effects of plastic, the government is not serious about enforcing laws against its rampant use. People also turn a blind eye to the plastic menace. They have become accustomed to the use-and-throw culture, and don't bother to carry shopping bags. Users don't even think twice before throwing a plastic bag perhaps because it comes cheap. Do we ever think about how thick the plastic bag given to us in shopping malls is? About 15 per cent of all garbage is plastic; only 50 per cent of it is recycled. Despite being long-lasting, plastic bags are thrown away after a single use. Plastic remains in the earth for a long time, cutting air and water supply to the soil, and tremendously affecting the growth of plants. It reduces the water-retaining capacity of the soil. In the monsoon, plastic gets collected in drains and blocks the passage of water which causes waterlogging and floods, which in turn give rise to water-borne diseases.

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

MONEY MATTERS

Gold rises Rs 250; silver jumps Rs 1,700 per kg

Gold prices rose Rs 250 to Rs 66,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a rally in precious metal prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 65,950 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver also surged Rs 1,700 to Rs 77,000 per kg. In the previous trade, it had ended at Rs 75,300 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,200 per 10 grams, up by Rs 250 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at US\$ 2,169 per ounce, up by US\$ 9 from the previous close. Gold prices recovered from a recent low and moved higher during the European trading session on Thursday due to a pullback in the US dollar and safe-haven buying, Gandhi added. Silver also quoted higher at US\$ 24.92 per ounce, and it had settled at USD 24.22 per ounce in the previous trade.



CESL floats rate contract for 1,000 e-cars

Convergence Energy Services (CESL) on Thursday said it has floated a rate contract for procuring 1,000 electric cars on a five-year lease on a pan-India basis. The rate contract is under the 'EV as a Service' model developed by CESL and will target to deploy 1,000 e-cars across India in the first phase, the company said in a statement. According to the statement, such deployment will include the provision of fleet management services, including repair and maintenance, vehicle insurance, roadside assistance, and drivers (optional). CESL, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL), which is under the Ministry of Power has placed a rate contract for a five-year lease of 1,000 e-cars, on a pan-India basis. Since 2018, EESL and CESL have jointly deployed approximately 2,000 e-cars on a lease basis with different departments under the central and state governments and CPSUs.



India, US, South Korea explore cooperation in tech sector

Ways to bolster cooperation in areas of semiconductor supply chains, digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, critical minerals and production of military hardware figured prominently at a trilateral dialogue among India, the US and South Korea. According to a readout by the US, the meeting in Seoul was the first such trilateral dialogue among the three nations. The meeting committed to coordinate measures to protect sensitive technologies and build trusted technology ecosystems in the region and globally, the US embassy said on the meeting held this week. "In this first trilateral technology meeting, the United States, Republic of Korea, and India discussed opportunities to cooperate on semiconductor supply chains, telecommunications and digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence, quantum, space, advanced materials, clean energy and critical minerals," it said.



‘Completion of projects hallmark of Modi’s model’

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Completion of projects after laying foundation is the hallmark of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development model, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Thursday. Sitharaman claimed that prior to 2014, when the Modi government came to power at the Centre, foundations were laid but projects were not completed on time. "The delay in completing projects adversely impacted the country's image, giving the impression that India does not finish its projects," Sitharaman said at the 'Viksit Bharat Ambassador Campus Dialogue' organised at IIT-Guwahati. "The PM believes that the government will not only lay foundations, but also complete the projects... Northeast has also benefited from this thumb rule," she said. "The Northeast is an important part in the government's development model, which is

‘The region’s achievements in the last ten years are remarkable and have contributed immensely to India’s growth aspiration.’



evident from the number of times the prime minister and other central ministers have visited the region in the last decade, she said. "The PM has visited the region 65 times, while other Union ministers have visited 850 times. This shows the government's priority on the region's development," Sitharaman said. She highlighted various initiatives taken by the BJP in the

last decade to make the Northeast an 'engine of growth and development'. The initiatives taken during the last ten years for the Northeast is not just to ensure that the region 'catches up with the other states, but to make sure that it marches fast and ahead in the development process,' she said. "The region's achievements in the last ten years are remark-

able and have contributed immensely to India's growth aspiration', the Union minister said. It is not about just making investments, but understanding and giving priority to what the youth wants, she added. Referring to the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Rs 27,000-crore semiconductor assembly and test facility in Assam's Morigaon district by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, Sitharaman said this was very different from any other investments made earlier. 'Money and investments will come, but yesterday was history for the NE and particularly for Assam', she said. Assam and the region became a part of the semiconductor value chain with the Tata group of industries coming forward to set up the most advanced technological facility which will help the youth not only to gain employment, but also get skilled in the latest technology, the minister said.

IIFT completes summer placements; average stipend at Rs 2.67 lakh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) on Thursday completed summer placements for the MBA (international business) 2023-25 batch with an average stipend of Rs 2.67 lakh. Summer placement has witnessed participation from a large number of companies from diverse sectors and industries, the IIFT, which is under the commerce ministry, said in a statement. "The placement cycle saw participation from 102 reputed recruiters across diverse domains and industries. In spite of testing times due to unfavourable market conditions, IIFT emerged victorious with an average stipend of Rs 2.67 lakh," it said. Among the companies that visited the institute this year includes Accenture Strategy, Amazon, Capgemini, Deloitte, EY, JP Morgan Chase & Co, Wipro, Amazon, Apollo Tyres, Bayer, Cargill, DCM Shriram, Flipkart, L&T, Maersk, Shell, Tata Steel, TVS Motors and Vikram Solar.

‘India set to become exporter of forged wheels used in railways’

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Sixty to seventy years after being an importer of forged wheels used in the railways, India is all set to become an exporter of the train component, Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw said here on Thursday. The minister, who also holds the portfolio of Electronics and Information Technology, was here to inaugurate the Chennai Design Centre of US-based semiconductor manufacturer Qualcomm, when he said that construction activities for setting up a plant to produce forged wheels for the railways has commenced in Tamil Nadu. The railways has entered into a joint venture with Ramakrishna Forgings Ltd to set up the manufacturing facility at Gummidipoondi near Chennai, at an outlay of Rs 650 crore in the first phase. "As you are aware, Vande Bharat trains have been very successful. The wheels that are used in Vande Bharat trains are of special quality. They



undergo a special manufacturing process. The wheels that we use in the wagons undergo a casting process," he told reporters. "The factory to produce the forged wheels is now being set up. Construction has started. The plant will have the capacity to produce 2.5 lakh wheels, of which 80,000 will be used in India and the remaining 1.70 lakh will be exported," he said. "For 60-70 years, India was an importer of forged wheels. India will now emerge as a major exporter of forged wheels. I am very happy that this plant is being set up in Tamil Nadu, and in another 16-18 months, the production

will start," he said. Similarly, Vaishnaw said, the Integral Coach Factory here would also develop standard gauge Vande Bharat trains. "Standard gauge rakes are used all over the world. So, when we are thinking of exporting Vande Bharat trains few years down the line, we must have the development of standard gauge Vande Bharat trains today," he said. Designing and testing of standard gauge Vande Bharat trains need to be done, after which national and international approvals need to be obtained before they can be formally launched, he added, saying it will take some time.

Govt, ADB pact to strengthen fintech India’s ecosystem

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Thursday signed a USD 23 billion loan agreement to enhance access to quality fintech education, research, and innovation at the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City. GIFT City is an initiative of the Centre and the Gujarat government to foster India's financial services and fintech ecosystem, the finance ministry said in a statement. As per the loan agreement, a fintech institute will be set up at GIFT City. The pact was signed by Finance Ministry Joint Secretary Juhi Mukherjee and Officer-in-Charge of ADB's India Resident Mission Rajesh Vasudevan. After signing the agreement, Mukherjee said the project will establish International Fintech Institute (IFI) to strengthen fintech education, boost start-up success rates, and drive fintech research and innovation. "The project's emphasis on market-driven fintech skills programmes, creating enabling environment for private sector investment and enhancing collaboration between industry, skills development institutes and development partners will promote holistic growth of fintech ecosystem in India," Vasudevan said.

Sensex recovers 335 pts, Nifty closes above 22100

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rebounded 335 points while Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Thursday as buying in IT and capital goods shares helped broader markets recover from the previous day's sharp losses. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 335.39 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 73,097.28 with 20 of its constituents ending in the green and 10 in the red. During the day, it jumped 602.41 points or 0.82 per cent to 73,364.30. The broader Nifty gained 148.95 points or 0.68 per cent to close at 22,146.65 as 37 of its components settled higher and 13 with losses. Sensex 906.07 points, or 1.23 per cent while Nifty plunged by 338 points, or 1.51 per cent, to close below the 22,000 level on Wednesday due to heavy selling pressure. "The market was able to recover half of last trading day's sell-off as leverage-based square-off neutralised it, while institutional buying sustained the buoyancy," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. "Wholesale Price Inflation (WPI) eased to a four-month



low at 0.2 per cent in February, bringing ease to upcoming CPI trajectory, a relief for future rate cuts," Nair added. From the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies rose the most by 2.96 per cent. Gains in Larsen & Toubro, Infosys, Wipro, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Asian Paints helped key indices to recover losses. Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, JSW Steel, State Bank of India and Tata Steel were among the major laggards. The broader markets also staged a smart recovery, with the BSE Smallcap gauge jumping 3.11 per cent and midcap index climbing 2.28 per cent. The broader market is outperforming the headline indices, taking advantage of mid and smallcap as a bargaining strategy, analysts said.

SC reserves verdict on whether royalty on minerals is tax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on the hugely contentious issue of whether the royalty payable on minerals is a tax under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, and if only the Centre is vested with the power to levy such exaction or states also have the authority to impose levies on mineral bearing land in their territory. In January last year, Hindenburg published a report alleging malfeasance by the Adani Group. The allegations included cooking books of accounts, over-

‘Hindenburg attack was to politically defame India’s governance practices’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

US short-seller Hindenburg Research's damning report against the Adani group was not just to destabilise the apples-to-airport conglomerate but to also politically defame India's governance practices, said Gautam Adani, chairman of Adani Group. In January last year, Hindenburg published a report alleging malfeasance by the Adani Group. The allegations included cooking books of accounts, over-



invoicing of import costs and round-tripping of own money to push up share prices. Adani Group denied all allegations and won relief from the Supreme Court this year when judges ruled that it does not need to face additional inves-

tigation. The report set off an over USD 150 billion selloff in the conglomerate's stocks and led Gautam Adani - who was listed as the world's second richest at the start of 2023 - to slip out of the top 20. The stocks have since recovered most of the losses. At a private event here, Adani reflected on his life journey, recalling the opportunities he got and the challenges he faced. "Last year on January 24, we were subject to a massive attack by a US short seller.



Hyatt Hotels to open 8 new properties in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global hospitality major Hyatt Hotels Corporation on Thursday said it plans to open eight new hotels in India and Southwest Asia across various leisure and city destinations in 2024. Announcing its plans for an aggressive expansion of Hyatt's brand portfolio in India and Southwest Asia, the company said, "This growth is timed to coincide with the expected rebound of leisure and business travel in the country and the sub-continent." The opening of eight new hotels will lead to addition of 1,200 new keys (rooms) across leisure and city locations. Hyatt has 49 hotels in the region with over 10,000 keys. The company said the brand expansion in India and Southwest Asia this year will continue with its 'Hyatt Regency', 'Hyatt Place' and 'Hyatt Centric' brands.

Air India building with ‘numerous firsts’ gets new owner

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Standing on the land reclaimed from sea for more than five decades now, Air India building in the country's commercial capital in the 1970s had people queuing up just to have the experience of using an elevator. Designed by New York-based architect John Burgee matching the aspirations of J R D Tata, the 23-storey building was among the first in those days to have elevators, neon signage on top and two levels of basement parking to name a few facilities. The building had "numerous firsts" is how a retired senior official of erstwhile Air India put it on Thursday as he recalled his more than two decade-long stint there. And the neon signage on top

of the building that displayed Centaur, the logo of Air India which was later replaced after the merger of Indian Airlines, was also a key attraction in the 1970s as not many structures boasted of such an element. The building, constructed on the state government's land, is among the many commercial high-rises to come up on the Southern tip of the land reclaimed from sea that was developed as the city's business district Nariman Point. With its central location, the iconic building, which completed 50 years in June 2020, also provides an expansive view of the Marine Drive from Nariman Point up to Malabar Hill. On Thursday, the central government announced approving the transfer of the Air India building in Mumbai



to the Maharashtra government for a consideration of Rs 1,601 crore. Former executive director of erstwhile Air India Jitender Bhargava, who had worked out of the building for over 20 years, on Thursday told PTI

that the building had "numerous firsts" and added that the board room was on the 23rd floor. Centralised air conditioning facilities and elevators with piped music were among the other attractions. When Burgee designed the

building, it was one of its kind at that time in 1970. Bhargava, whose office was on the 20th floor of the building during the period from 1989 to 2010, said that when the building was opened, people used to come to have the experience of taking the elevator from the ground floor to the first floor, which housed the airline's booking office at that time. There is also an auditorium and cafeteria, among other facilities at the building, where around eight floors were occupied by Air India, he recalled. During the Gulf boom in the 80s, job seekers used to flock to the Air India booking counter. As many as 400 people would be visiting the place to book flight tickets to various Gulf countries, a retired airline official said. According to Godrej archives,

the Air India building was among the first few high-rises to be constructed on the new stretch of the reclaimed land. The building had its share of cinematic moments as many Bollywood movies have featured it in various scenes. During its more than five-decade-long existence, the building, also earthquake-resistant, was rocked by a bomb blast in 1993. The iconic building in many aspects also reflects the development journey of Mumbai and even as a link between the past and the present. In its archive Volume 2, Issue 1 dated April-May 2014, Godrej said that back in the 1920s, when the post-war boom put great stress on land, the Development Directorate proposed the Backbay Reclamation Scheme.

‘Rs 500 cr electric-mobility scheme reflects thrust on EV’

NEW DELHI: The Rs 500 crore Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme 2024 shows the government's continued thrust on vehicle electrification as it is indispensable on a long-term basis to fortify the case for an EV ecosystem, industry experts said on Thursday. Ministry of Heavy Industries has announced the new scheme to promote e-mobility in the country with an outlay of Rs 500 crore for four months beginning April 2024.

Industry experts said on Thursday, Ministry of Heavy Industries has announced the new scheme to promote e-mobility in the country with an outlay of Rs 500 crore for four months beginning April 2024.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION TENDER NOTICE

NIT No. 07/SEIP-W2/GHMC/2023-24/3rd call Date: 14-03-2024

Name of the Work: Balance works in Construction of Animal Care Centre in West Zone (SC Reserved). Estimate Amount: Rs. 52.00 Lakhs. Start Date & Time: 15-03-2024 @ 02.00 PM. Last Date & Time for receipt of Bids: 22-03-2024 @ 03.00 PM. Name & Address Officer: Call No: D/o Superintending Engineer (P-W2), GHMC, 9989030468. Further details can be seen at e-procurement @ <https://tender.telangana.gov.in>. Or can be contact Office of the Superintending Engineer (P-W2), GHMC in office working hours. Sd/- Superintending Engineer (P-W2), GHMC R.O No: 11775-PWCL/MOVT/10204-25, Dt: 14.03.2024

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION TENDER NOTICE

NIT No. 20/SEIP/UPP/GHMC/2023-24 Date: 15-03-2024

Name of the Work: For 2 Work Procurement of Furniture and Computers to MLA Camp Office at Street No.8 in Ward No.8, Hobsguda, Uppal Circle 2, GHMC. Repairs and Construction Community Hall at SS Nagar, beside Kodhara Ramayana Temple, Street No. 8, Hobsguda Division-8, Uppal Constituency. Estimate Amount: Rs.14.00 Lakhs. Last Date & Time for Receipts of Bids: 19-03-2024 @ 03.00 PM. Name & Address Officer: Sd/- N. Nageshwar, EE-Executive Engineer, Uppal Div. No.2, GHMC. For further details can be seen at e-procurement @ <http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in> Sd/- Executive Engineer Uppal Circle-2, GHMC R.O No: 11775-PWCL/MOVT/10204-25, Dt: 14.03.2024

‘Despite the challenges, the breathtaking beauty of Ladakh often outweighs the fears’

TEJAL SINHA

Ladakh is a paradise not only because of its stunning mountains and environment but also because of its people. Ladakh is attractive not only for its breathtaking scenery but also for its incredible people and culture. The way everyone gets together, as well as the distinctive traditions, add to Ladakh's fascinating beauty. And renowned television actress Samiksha Batnagar recently got to experience the beauty of serenity.

“Ladakh's culture is rich with Tibetan Buddhist influences, evident in its monasteries, prayer flags, and stupas,” begins the *Baal Veer* actress. “The people are known for their warm hospitality, unique festivals like Losar and Hemis, and traditional attire. I really enjoyed the Ladakhi cuisine, with dishes like Thukpa and momos, which reflect the region's heritage and climate.”

Samiksha observed that the Buddhist culture in Ladakh is deeply rooted in Tibetan Buddhism, with monasteries serving as spiritual centers. The people, she says, follow Buddhist teachings, evident in their daily rituals, festivals, and reverence for the Dalai Lama. “Monastic life plays a significant role, with monks and nuns practicing meditation, chanting, and preserving ancient texts. Art, architecture, and rituals reflect a blend of Tibetan and local Ladakhi traditions, creating a unique cultural landscape,” she says, adding, “I had a great time interacting with Ladakh's locals; they offer a glimpse into their vibrant culture through shared meals, conversations, and participation in cultural activities like traditional dance or attending festivals. Their warmth and openness created a memorable experience that fostered deeper connections and understanding of their way of life.”

Engaging with Indo-Aryan locals, she says, offers a deeper appreciation for their authenticity and contributes to a richer understanding of Ladakh's multicultural identity.

Apart from Ladakh, for the *Kumkum Bhagya* actress, one of the best and most unique places in India is the backwaters of Kerala. “This network of interconnected rivers, lakes, and canals, especially in areas like Alleppey and Kumarakom, offers a serene and picturesque setting unlike anywhere else in the world. Visitors can experience the beauty of the backwaters by cruising on traditional houseboats, known as “kettuvallams,” which glide through the calm waters while providing a glimpse into the traditional lifestyle of the region. The lush greenery, serene waters, and peaceful ambiance make the backwaters of Kerala a truly unforgettable

Actress Samiksha Batnagar, who recently got to witness the beautiful serenity of Ladakh, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing her travel tales for our exclusive weekly column in Trave - logue.

Travelouge

destination.”

Her hotel experience in Ladakh was likely characterised by stunning views of the Himalayas, comfortable accommodations, and warm hospitality. Many hotels in Ladakh she shares offer a blend of traditional Ladakhi architecture with modern amenities, ensuring a comfortable stay amidst the rugged terrain. Additionally, “the staff often goes above and beyond to cater to guests' needs, providing insights into local attractions and offering delicious Ladakhi cuisine. Overall, my Ladakh hotel experience likely added to the memorable moments of your trip, providing a comfortable retreat after adventurous days exploring the region. I have experienced the low oxygen levels in Ladakh, and it was frightening to a certain point due to the potential risks of altitude sickness. Symptoms such as dizziness, shortness of breath, and headaches were quite alarming, especially if you are unaccustomed to high altitudes. It's crucial to take precautions, such as acclimatising slowly, staying hydrated, and seeking medical assistance if symptoms worsen. Despite the challenges, the breathtaking beauty of Ladakh often outweighs the fears, making it a memorable and ultimately rewarding adventure.”

She further goes on to share, “For me, travelling to Ladakh was liberating due to its remote and untouched beauty, providing a sense of escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The wide-open spaces, majestic mountains, and serene atmosphere create an environment where one can disconnect from the stresses of the modern world and reconnect with nature and oneself. Additionally, the region's rich cultural heritage and welcoming locals contribute to a feeling of freedom and exploration, making the trip to Ladakh a truly transformative experience.”

The primary religion in Ladakh is Tibetan Buddhism, which permeates every aspect of life in the region. Monasteries, adorned with colorful prayer flags and intricate murals, serve as spiritual centers where monks and nuns engage in prayer, meditation, and rituals. Buddhism in Ladakh, she says, is deeply intertwined with the culture, traditions, and daily practices of the people, emphasising principles of compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence. Additionally, there are small Muslim and Hindu communities, contributing to the religious diversity of Ladakh.

“Experiencing Ladakh's high mountain passes is thrilling. Amidst breathtaking scenery, you'll conquer some of the world's highest motorable roads, like Khardung La and Chang La, encountering local nomads and colorful prayer flags along the way,” says the *Anthology End* actress, signing off the chat, saying, “Travelling with close friends is a fantastic way to strengthen bonds, create unforgettable memories, and add an extra layer of fun and support to the journey.”



Unseen effects of sleepless nights on pregnant woman

Here are some tips on how to solve sleep disturbances during pregnancy:

Sleep disturbances affect most of the pregnant women. About 79% of pregnant women experience sleep disorders. It can pose risks like gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, convulsions, premature birth, and prolonged labor. Various factors contribute to these disturbances, including hormonal changes, anxiety, acid reflux, increased bladder activity, snoring, sleep apnea, leg cramps, back pain, heightened baby movements, and the expanding belly.

Apart from all this, stress and anxiety can also impact your ability to fall asleep. Lack of sleep can also increase your postpartum depression. Untreated sleep disturbances during pregnancy can have long-term effects on maternal health and may increase the risk of chronic sleep problems even after childbirth.

- 1 Stick to a consistent sleep schedule to regulate your body's clock.
- 2 Reserve your bed for sleep to avoid confusing your body.
- 3 Limit caffeine and chocolate, especially in the afternoon.
- 4 Manage anxiety through meditation and exercise.
- 5 Enjoy warm baths and massages to relax, and more.
- 6 Remember, sleep is crucial during pregnancy. If these tips don't work, consult your obstetrician for further advice or supplements.

(The author, Dr. Rajeev Agarwal, is the IVF specialist at Renew Healthcare.)

Nitanshi Goel, the fresh face, makes a splash on the silver screen with *Laapataa Ladies*

SHIKHA DUGGAL

One of the leading actresses in Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies*, a film that is currently making waves around the nation and in which the filmmaker has discovered a hidden gem, says, “We have our grounds for considering Nitanshi Goel, the newcomer, to be a gem.”

The sixteen-year-old already exudes such self-assurance! Her surroundings have been providing her with so much love and encouragement that her self-esteem has grown to such an extent that we were astounded by how professionally she conducted an exclusive interview with us regarding the success of her debut film. Amazing! “The day I auditioned is the same day I got selected for the part,” a confident Nitanshi says, churning out as much as we could from the encounter with this young woman. “I had no idea whether the script was being produced by Aamir Khan or directed by Kiran Rao when I first held it. I started preparing by watching every old 2001 film as well as the television series *Balika Vadhu*.”

What followed, however, wiped the *Laapataa Ladies* notoriety off the ground. “I become crazy when the team informs me that Aamir Khan wants to meet me. I kept asking myself, Is this a joke or what? I will always remember our first meeting. He told my mother, “You have given birth to a diamond, trust me on this,” for that reason. “She doesn't need to seek roles right now; they will find her,”

Nitanshi said with emotion.

“After that, I made the decision to work three times as much as I could,” she said. “I first got tanned in preparation for my part! We filmed in Nashik, where the heat was unbearable. I chose to perform my scenes without using sunscreen because I wanted them to look rusty. At that time, I discovered how Madhya Pradesh

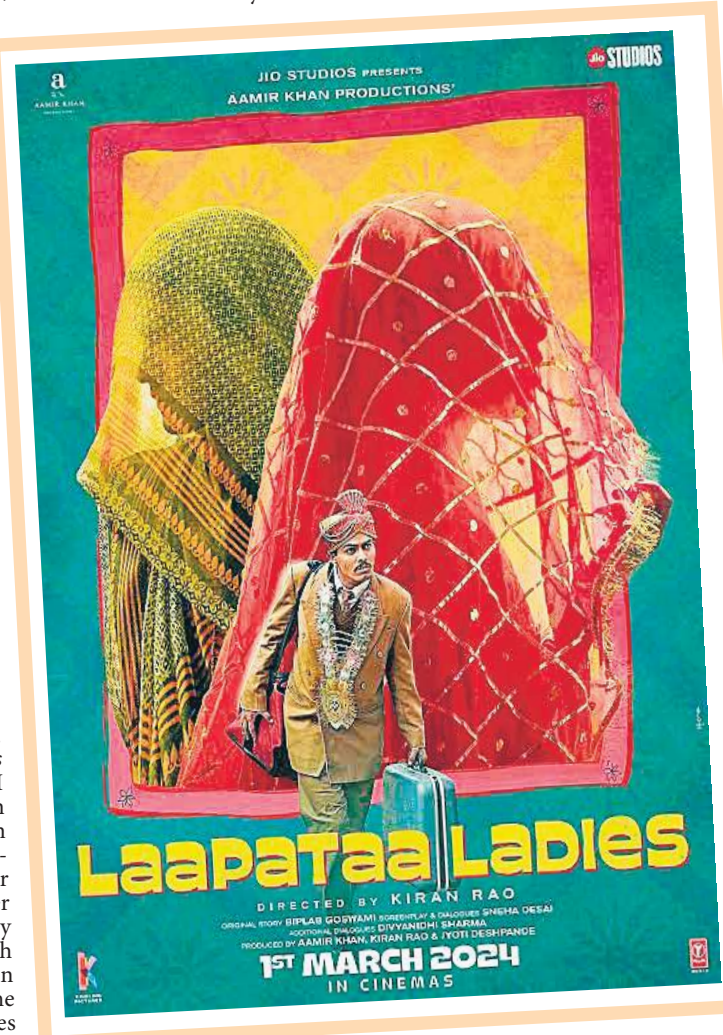
people talk. I never missed an opportunity to watch the women in ‘ghoongat’ surrounding me on my daily commute to shoot because it was intended for every woman to have a bashful, sly appearance in the movie. My eyes and body language were meant to speak for themselves, even though I didn't have an excessive number of

lines in the movie. The remainder was pure Kiran Rao genius.”

She goes on to elaborate a little more about the transformation: “When I was first approached, I was this era's Gen Z girl; as soon as I read the script, my mind said, ‘Transformation, Nitanshi, it's time’. I felt good about it because I was meant to be channelling my intense feminist energy at such a young age. When I realised that even my character comes from a protective family, I was able to relate to her even more.”

Are promotions stressful or enjoyable? Here's what the debutante has to say: “I was excited to attend the screenings in nearly every state. Women were applauding for us as soon as we began marketing the movie. That's when I realised I had what it takes to win folks over! I felt more excited than anxious. Even at this age, I could comprehend the film's themes, therefore, I wasn't averting my eyes from them. I knew a lot of stuff. For instance, I learned a lot about the value of a girl having her own finances when we were filming.”

“She was like a mother figure to me on the sets, she didn't even mind me calling her ‘mumma,’” she says, expressing her deep affection for her director, Kiran Rao. “She was aware that I was a novice, but she nevertheless allowed me complete latitude to investigate the plot. I'm overjoyed that my debut movie focussed mostly on women and was excellent.”



The award-winning teen actress Nitanshi Goel, who is also a much-loved social media influencer, speaks to *The Pioneer* over an exclusive chat and discusses being a part of *Laapataa Ladies*, preparations, and more.



Nitanshi Goel



Lalitha



Alina



Aadya Sharma



Rathika



Ankita and Iba Khan



Deepshika



Riya



Sowmya

Singhania's has kickstarted its highly anticipated 2nd Anniversary Jubilee Hills store's Annual Sale. This year's event is expected to grow spectacular, with Rathika, the beloved reality TV star from *Bigg Boss Telugu*, as the special guest. The saree collection includes Kanjivaram, Banarasi, Paithani, Chanderi, Bandhani, Venkatgiri, Gadwal, Kalamkari, Kani Kashmiri, Patan Patola, Ikat, Organza, designer sarees along with fabrics, lehengas, dupattas, ready-made blouses, cut-pieces and many more crafts and apparels.

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary



St. Francis College for Women celebrated farewell for its outgoing UG & PG batches on 13th March 2024. The event acknowledged the students through prestigious accolades, including the Miss Francis competition and a captivating cultural extravaganza. Keeping up with the college tradition, the celebration commenced with a prayer, Bible reading and a prayer song by the college choir, The Nightingales.

LISTINGS

Delightful sensory experience

Indulge in radiant self-care with Nyveda's Boost My Glow Radiance Activating Sugar Scrub—an Ayurvedic sanctuary for relaxation and rejuvenation. Crafted with Ayurvedic ingredients and a blend of 6 oils, this exquisite scrub transforms your bathing routine into a sensorial experience, revealing a radiant complexion. The infusion of Virgin Coconut Oil, Sugar, Lakadong Turmeric, and Kesar gently buffs away impurities, leaving your skin supple, radiant, and free from any greasy residue. Experience the transformative power of Boost My Glow Radiance Activating Sugar Scrub and elevate your bathing ritual into a transcendent experience, embarking on a journey to radiant and revitalised skin.

Empowering students through gamified experience

Mind Wars announced a ground-breaking step toward providing accessibility to all schools and students to carefully curated national and international level co-curricular events and enriching academic knowledge across the country. It aims to empower students by providing a one-stop solution for skill enhancement and overall personality development. Through these comprehensive packages, which comprise a variety of engaging competitions, students get trained to ace competitive exams and develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in the real world. Mind Wars offers Mind Wars Olympiad, Mind Wars Spell Bee India, and Mind Wars Knowledge Championship.

Glaucoma Awareness Week Campaign at Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, Hyderabad

Hyderabad - Matanand Foundation, in collaboration with ENTOD Pharmaceuticals, announced the launch of the Glaucoma Awareness Week Campaign #GlaucomaMuktBharat in Hyderabad. As part of the Glaucoma Awareness Week, Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital in Hyderabad is conducting the various initiatives include Public awareness campaigns, Rallies, Seminars, Essay writing competition, slogans and poster competition, Media publicity, Patient education programs, Glaucoma screening program for all till March 16th, 2024, between 9 am to 2 pm.

Jiraaf launches online bond platform

Leading fixed-income platform Jiraaf has secured an Online Bond Platform Provider (OBPP) license from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) enabling it to offer broad range of listed products including listed Corporate bonds, Securitized Debt Instruments (SDI), Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs), T-Bills, G-secs, and State Development Loans (SDL) to retail investors. Jiraaf curates and offers select listed fixed income investment opportunities through a customer friendly digital platform. The platform offers diverse opportunities which allows an investor to build a fixed income portfolio between 6% to 18% annual returns with a tenure starting from 3 months to 3 years with minimum ticket size of INR 10,000.

HIL to acquire topline for Rs 265 crore

HIL Ltd, a part of the USD 2.9 billion CK Birla Group, has signed an agreement with Crestia Polytch for the acquisition of Topline, a popular brand of pipes and fittings in Eastern India along with Crestia's four wholly owned subsidiaries Topline Industries, Aditya Polytechnic, Aditya Industries and Sainath Polymers for Rs 265 crore. Crestia and its subsidiaries, with an estimated turnover of Rs 330 crore in FY 24, are strong players in the pipes, fittings and water tank sector with three flagship brands: Topline, Rockwell, and Soniplast. This acquisition is a significant step towards HIL's commitment to further accelerate its fast-growing Pipes & Fittings business in the estimated Rs 55,000 crore Indian PVC Pipes and Fittings market.


Samsung launches new range of 11 Kg AI Ecobubble

Samsung unveiled a new range of AI Ecobubble™ fully automatic front load washing machines. This new range of washing machines is the first in the 11 kg segment to come with advanced features like AI Wash, Q-Drive™ and Auto Dispense that let you do your laundry 50% faster, offer 45.5% better fabric care and are up to 70% more energy-efficient. AI Ecobubble™ is a perfect blend of Samsung's Q-Bubble™ and QuickDrive™ technologies that make washing more intuitive and less time consuming. While Q-Bubble™ technology combines dynamic drum rotation with additional water shots to create more abundant and powerful bubbles for faster detergent penetration, QuickDrive™ reduces wash time by up to 50%. These features make the performance of AI Ecobubble™ improved and sustainable since it contributes significantly to water and energy conservation. The new range will be available at a starting price of INR 67,990 going up to INR 71,990 from March 7, 2024.


iQOO launches #FullyLoaded Z9 with segment leading performance and Sony IMX882 camera

iQOO, the high-performance smartphone brand, has unveiled the #FullyLoaded smartphone - iQOO Z9, from its Z series portfolio in India. Powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 7200 5G 4nm processor, iQOO Z9 promises unmatched performance with an AnTuTu score of 730K+, making it the fastest in the segment. It also boasts the segment's first Sony IMX 882 rear camera system, 4K video recording with OIS capability, and the brightest 120 Hz AMOLED display with 1800 nits peak local brightness. The Dual Stereo Speakers provide surround sound for music, OTT videos, and games. The bold rear camera module and a brushed textured design add a touch of elegance to the device while measuring just 7.83mm thick. The smartphone will have Funtouch OS 14 based on Android 14 out of the box. The iQOO Z9 will be available at an effective price of INR 17,999 (MOP INR 19,999) for 8GB+128GB and INR 19,999 (MOP INR 21,999) for 8+256GB on both the iQOO e-store and Amazon.in.


ARCHIE




GARFIELD



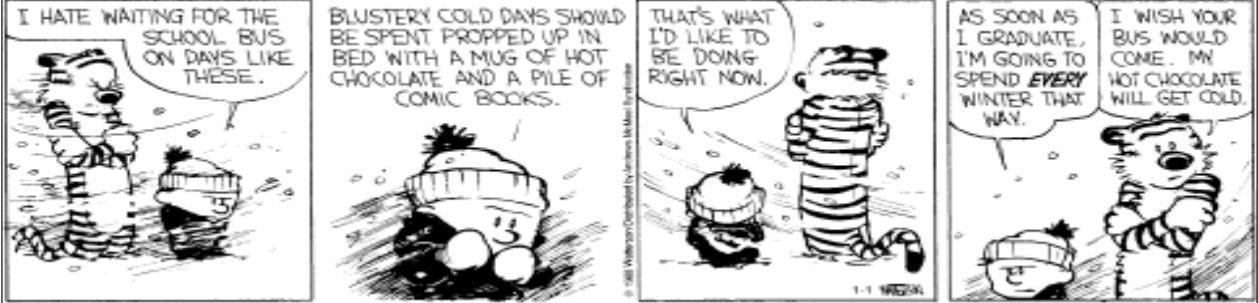
NANCY




GINGER MEGGS




CALVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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



Bandook director returns after 8 years

Director Laxman Murari, who won the praise of not only the people of Telangana but also critics and intellectuals with the film *Bandook*, is getting ready to make another experimental film in the background of social drama. Laxman is getting ready to don the director's hat after almost 8 years of break. Ahead of beginning the film, the director met Superstar Rajinikanth, whom he idolises in his career, to seek his blessings. Rajinikanth, who has a fan following not only in India but across the world, extended his best wishes to the director for his new beginning. Meanwhile, director Laxman expressed how happy and powerful he felt after meeting Rajinikanth ahead of his film's new beginnings.

RGV declares his entry into politics

On Thursday, filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma said something "suddenly" on X, formerly Twitter. He said that he would run in the Andhra Pradesh Lok Sabha 2024 elections. Ram Gopal said that he would run for the Lok Sabha from the state's Pithapuram seat. "Sudden decision," tweeted Ram Gopal Varma. "I'm pleased to announce that Pithapuram will be my contest area." The director withheld further information. The Telugu Desam Party-Bharatiya Janata Party-Jana Sena Party (JSP) alliance had recently announced that Tollywood actor and JSP chairman Pawan Kalyan would be fielded from the Pithapuram constituency. This announcement preceded Ram Gopal Varma's.



Naveen Chandra's *Inspector Rishi* heads for OTT release

Actor Naveen Chandra, who is known to excel in any role given to him, be it as a hero, a villain, or any supporting character, is back with an interesting project titled *Inspector Rishi*. Having gained significant recognition in Telugu cinema, Naveen Chandra recently introduced himself to the Tamil audience with the movie *Jigarthanda Double XL*. As a result, movies and web series in Kollywood are being made with him in the lead. It was announced on Thursday that *Inspector Rishi* will be streaming

on March 29 as an Amazon Tamil Original. *Inspector Rishi* is a web series centered around a horror crime story, directed by Nandini J.S. and produced by Sukh Dev Lahiri under Make Believe Productions. Naveen Chandra stars in the title role as a formidable police officer who investigates clueless murders. The suspense and horror elements of who is behind these relentless murders are intriguingly captured in *Inspector Rishi*. The web series features Sunaina, Kanna Ravi, Malini Jeevaratnam, Srikanth Dayal, and Kumar Vale in key roles. Currently, Naveen Chandra is working on interesting projects like *Eleven* and *Satyabhama* in Telugu.



'Going to Hollywood is my ultimate dream'

Actress Divi Vadthya is one of those performers, who is trying to experiment with roles and is succeeding each time. The actress, who is busy with the release of *Lambasinghi*, spoke to us exclusively about her role in *Pushpa 2*, working for *Lambasinghi*, her desire to play strong characters, and more.

K. RAMYA SREE

With an intoxicating beauty and performance with naturalism, actress Divi Vadthya, although she rose to fame with *Bigg Boss*, has been one of those very few Telugu actresses who is always bringing something very natural and unique to the audience with every single project of hers. Divi is now playing the lead role in the film *Lambasinghi* that hit theatres today (March 15), and if you happen to watch the trailer of the film, she was looking divinely with little to no make-up in those simple churidars playing a village girl. Speaking exclusively with *The Pioneer* ahead of the film's release, Divi confessed, "When I heard about *Lambasinghi*, I felt it was written for me. It was very beautiful, and there was nothing in the project to say NO to. I took it up as soon as the script was narrated to me." From *Maharshi* to *ATM* to Chiranjeevi's *Godfather*, Divi has done a handful of projects in Tollywood, yet she still gives auditions, and she is okay to give them. We asked her about her character-choosing process, and given her history of doing varied roles, she informed us, "Initially, when I started my career, I got rejected 80-100 times, but now, when I give an audition, I almost get selected. The second thing is that I am ensuring that the roles I'm taking suit my personality and physique. Because I'm tall and strong, those kinds of roles make an

impact. In big films, I'm choosing roles; in small films, I'm playing the main lead." Coming back to *Lambasinghi*, the film was completely shot in the jungles and tribal areas of *Lambasinghi*. Was it difficult for her to shoot there? Of course, it was very difficult, so much so that she was even hospitalised for three days. But it looks like her hard work is going to pay off, as the film so far has been receiving great responses from all corners. The *Bigg Boss* fame shared with us, "Shooting for *Lambasinghi* is the most beautiful thing I loved. We shot for 45 days, and it was a beautiful experience in itself. Every shooting will leave a lot of memories. I am carrying so many memories of *Lambasinghi* with me. This is the movie I have been waiting for. However, during the shooting, caravans were not available. The whole team was made up of men. We were shooting in the jungle, and there were no caravans, so if I had to pee, I had to go to the jungle; if I had to poop, I had to go to the jungle while shooting. Suddenly, I fell sick. I had diarrhea. It was difficult for me to cope in the end, as I fell sick. On my 38th or 40th day, I was admitted to the hospital for three days. And we came back and finished the song shoot, and we closed the schedule." The actress who started her career in Tollywood is looking forward to doing many things here. She is so passionate about acting that she even learned Tamil so that she can deliver a more organic performance if, at all, she happens to make her debut in Tamil. She is also learning Kannada, for that matter. However, she is happy with how things are going with her in Tollywood, as she mentioned, "A lot of opportunities are coming my way now, and I am hoping that *Lambasinghi* will give me more opportunities as a main lead. I also think that in big films, I am not getting the main lead roles. I am looking for a lead role in a big film. I am waiting for that day. Moreover, I have learned Tamil just because I wanted to get into the Tamil industry. I also learned a little Kannada. In acting, if you know the language, it's an added benefit. As actors, performance matters. I am more of a performer, so for me, I need more performance-oriented films."

She spilled the beans, saying that she signed two to three projects in

Telugu and is also trying to get her career started in other languages as well. However, she doesn't want to confine herself to just this; she is dreaming of even bigger things in life, and that is: "I am waiting for the day to shoot in other languages, but in Telugu I am doing well with good projects, but one day I hope to go to Hollywood. It is my dream to go to Hollywood. It may take 10 years or 15 years, whatever, but my ultimate dream is Hollywood." Well, going by how passionate she is about acting, we hope one day she gets to Hollywood and makes Indians even prouder of her work. Having played many roles, she is wondering what kind of roles she is looking forward to playing personally. Here is what she said: "In all the films I played, one was naïve, one was village belle. But personally, I want to do a rebellious kind of role that will suit me more. A village girl is strong, rude, and arrogant. I want to have that kind of personality. I want to experiment with different kinds of characters and try all kinds of roles." But her role in Chiranjeevi's *Godfather* remains her all-time favourite character because: "All these days, I performed in songs and different characters, but the one with Chiranjeevi Garu is my personal favourite. I did a de-glam role, and people just saw my performance, then my glamour, and then my beauty. Performance plays the main role. Chiranjeevi Garu gave me a key role in the film. He is a humble person, and I am so glad that I was able to work with him." And here comes an important update about *Pushpa 2*, the most eagerly awaited film of Allu Arjun after the humongous success of *Pushpa 1*. "In *Pushpa 2*, I'm playing a journalist, which is going to be a very good role for me because I play a positive journalist role. I am also waiting to watch the film. I still have 20 days of shooting left for the film. We just started the shoot; so many days to go," concluded the beauty.



Yamadheera teaser out now

Kannada actor Komal Kumar starrer *Yamadheera*, in which we get to see Indian cricketer Sreesanth play the villain playing a negative role, is gaining attention for the cricketer's negative role in the film produced by Vedala Srinivas. Also starring Nagababu, Ali, Satya Prakash, and Madhu Sudhan in key roles, the teaser of the film was launched by popular veteran actor and producer Ashok Kumar on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Ashok Kumar said he was confident that *Yamadheera*, which is the first film of Sri Mandiram Productions, would do very well. Meanwhile, actor Komal Kumar, who has acted in more than 90

Kannada films, said that he feels privileged to act in this film. Moreover, the film is being shot in countries like Azerbaijan and Sri Lanka, as well as in Mysore, Chennai, Bangalore, and other parts of our country. With these many locations on the movie's list, expectations for the movie are increasing among Kannadigas and Telugu audiences. The release of the film will soon be announced, according to the makers.



Venkaiah Naidu introduces RK Sagar as Vikranth IPS

Mogali Rekulu fame RK Sagar has signed a new film titled *THE 100*, written and directed by Raghav Omkar Sasidhar and jointly produced under the banners of KRIA Film Corp. and Dhamma Productions. The film got major backing, with former Vice President of India Venkaiah Naidu launching the film's first look and motion poster. In the poster, RK Sagar is introduced as Vikranth IPS in a 'khaki' outfit with a gun in his hand. Sporting shades, we can see the intensity on his face. The motion poster describes the prominence of number 100. "It's not just a number; it's a weapon," reads the statement in the clip. While Misha Narang will play the female lead, Dhanya Balakrishna will be seen in a crucial role. The movie has some well-known technicians handling different crafts. Shyam K. Naidu cranks the camera, while Harshavardhan Rameshwar provides the music. Amar Reddy Kudumula is the editor.



Ajith Kumar's first English film title in 22 yrs

The movie that Thala Ajith was set to star in with Vignesh Shivan has been cancelled for a number of reasons. However, the most recent information is that Ajith will collaborate with Adhik Ravichandran. The new title for Ajith Kumar's #AK63, which Adhik Ravichandran is directing, is *Good Bad Ugly*. It's interesting that after 22 years, Ajith decided to give his movie an English title! The actor starred in two English-titled films in 2002, *Villain* and *Red*, but since then, he has solely done Tamil-language films. Devi Sri Prasad will also be writing music for an Ajith-starring movie for the first time in ten years with this

movie. "Adhik Ravichandran was roped in for the project even before the release of his 2023 blockbuster Mark Antony," says Ajith's publicist. "The makers of this movie, Y Ravi Shankar and Naveen Yerneni, plan to premiere it on Pongal in 2025. Production is set to begin in the first week of June." Ajith apparently enjoyed the idea that Adhik pitched, but he did listen to scripts from other directors. It was requested that the director develop it right now. According to the sources, the team has finished writing the script and will now begin pre-production. The movie is receiving a substantial budget. Adhik is hoping to score a big hit after witnessing Mark Anthony's success.



Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy for 42nd time

BEAT VIDARBHA BY 169 RUNS IN FINAL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic heavyweights Mumbai ended their eight-year barren run to lift a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title here on Thursday, beating a resolute Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of a thoroughly engrossing summit clash.

The fate of the final — Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history — here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

Wadkar led the fight for his side with his first century of the year which also helped him cross the 600-run mark this season. Dubey brought up only the second fifty of his



first-class career. Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings, consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of

the second session on the final day. Wadkar fell shortly after play resumed — leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) — and once the pair was broken, it all

ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final for a third time after winning two titles. Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to

dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the majority of the game owing to a back spasm. While Kotian cleaned up Yash

Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending.

Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised Vidarbha for their gritty display before lifting the trophy and rightly so. For a team which paid a heavy price for a poor first-innings score — 105 to concede a 119-run lead in response to Mumbai's 224 — Vidarbha showed resilience to gave a fine account of themselves in the second innings.

Mumbai began the final day hoping to break the sixth-wicket stand between Wadkar and Dubey early but their wait only extended since the batters overcame all challenges that the hosts threw at them.

With the pace bowlers not being able to trouble the batters, Mumbai hopes were pinned on their spinners but their own error cost Rahane's side early on.

Kotian appealed for a bat-pad catch at silly point against Dubey in the 101st over of the innings but the appeal was turned down.

In a show of desperation, Mumbai went for the DRS intervention which confirmed the ball had not grazed the bat and was also going to miss the leg stump.

Kotian then found an outside

edge off Wadkar's bat which fell close to Rahane.

Mumbai's frustration was evident when Kulkarni held his ground at the end of his follow through after being declined a leg-before appeal against Dubey.

Kulkarni made some gestures and even exchanged a few words with the umpire but replays confirmed that the ball had pitched outside the leg-stump.

Dubey was also lucky when Kotian pinned him in front of the wickets but Mumbai could not get it overturned since they had no reviews left.

The Vidarbha batter continued to ride his luck, getting another decision in his favour when replays showed the ball had missed his bat and gloves off Shams Mulani.

Wadkar completed his century shortly after lunch but once he was dismissed, the rest of the batting collapsed soon after.

Brief scores
Mumbai: 224 & 418
Vidarbha: 105 & 368 in 134.4 overs (Atharva Taide 32, Aman Mokhade 32, Karun Nair 74, Akshay Wadkar 102; Tanush Kotian 4/95) by 169 runs.

Pant resilience, mental strength was quite something: Medical staff that worked with

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The medical staff that nursed Rishabh Pant back to full fitness after the horrifying car crash in 2022 has raved about the resilience and mental strength shown by the cricketer, saying he persevered through a "frustrating" recovery process.

Pant is set for his cricketing return in the IPL on March 23 when he will captain Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings in Mohali.

"I feel very close to normal," Pant told 'bcci.tv' with a radiant smile.

It seemed far fetched 15 months ago when he suffered multiple injuries in the crash. However, it has come true thanks to the expert care he got from the likes of Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, Director, Centre for Sports Medicine, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai, and some dedicated staff at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

Pardiwala remembered how arduous Pant's recovery journey was.

"As surgeons and as doctors, it's very important for us to inform our patients, their family and all the stakeholders of the actual status of the injury. Rishabh's mother was with him. She was very concerned whether he would ever be able to walk again," Pardiwala said.

"I told her that 'this is such a critical injury and we will definitely aim for him to get back to competitive cricket. But that's going to be a long-drawn process'.

However, Pardiwala was left astonished when he saw Pant's confidence as he



entered the recovery phase.

"When I told Rishabh 18 months, he said 'okay, I am going to show you I can do it in 12 months'," he said.

Pant stayed true to his words as he put in the hard yards at the NCA during his recuperation.

"When I started walking without crutches, that was a high point. Then started jogging a little bit, that was a high for me, then started batting, then started keeping as I took joy in everything," said the 26-year-old.

But each of those baby steps had to be taken with utmost care because of multi-level complexities.

Pardiwala said the complex knee injury, the trauma following the accident and Pant's own frustration at being away from the cricket field had to be dealt with in an effective manner.

"For any surgeon, knee dislocation is one of the worst injuries because everything breaks. You need to get back the stability, you need to get back the shock absorption capability," he said.

MCA DOUBLES PRIZE MONEY

Mumbai team to receive additional ₹5 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The triumphant Mumbai team will receive an additional Rs 5 crore for its unprecedented 42nd Ranji Trophy title after the state cricket association doubled the prize purse on Thursday.

Mumbai won a record-extending 42nd Ranji title after beating Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of the summit showdown at the Wankhede Stadium.

"MCA President Amol Kale and Apex Council has decided to double the Ranji Trophy prize money. The MCA will pay additional sum of Rs 5 crore to the winning Mumbai Ranji Trophy team," a statement from MCA secretary Ajinkya Naik read.

"It has been a great year for the MCA as the association has won 7 titles and we have made it to knockout stage in all age groups in BCCI tournaments."

Mumbai ended an eight-year wait to lift a record-extending title here, getting the better of a resolute Vidarbha.

The fate of the final -- Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history -- here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Mumbai head coach Omkar Salvi, who was appointed to the post last year, lauded MCA's move to double the prize money considering that lot of players don't have full-time jobs these days.

"For all the players, nowadays, there



are very less institutions which provide jobs. For youngsters, there is also a lot of lure towards franchise cricket (where) there is also a lot of

money," Salvi said.

"The BCCI is taking that step and raising that money along with that, the MCA taking that step forward

to equal that amount is a great help for the players who don't have some jobs or some earnings.

"It is definitely an inspiration (and) it should be intrinsic -- the monetary help will give them that security and it will definitely stabilise them mentally and financially so that they can give more to the game," he added.

On the final day, Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

RCB kick starts pre tournament camp, Kohli expected to join in next few days

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore began their pre-tournament camp without their numero uno Virat Kohli, who might take a few more days to join before the team starts its IPL campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on March 22.

Most of the domestic players joined the camp under the guidance of new head coach Andy Flower and Director of Cricket Mo Bobat and they went through the paces on the opening day of the camp on Wednesday.

While skipper Faf du Plessis was in attendance along with West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, Kohli, easily



the biggest 'Box Office' in Indian cricket, is yet to hit the straps after a paternity break that ruled him out of the marquee five-Test series

against England.

"Kohli is expected to join in the next few days," a BCCI source, who is tracking developments within IPL

teams, told PTI.

Kohli might make his first appearance for the franchise during 'RCB Unbox', a high-profile annual event held at the Garden City in which fans get a glimpse of their favourite stars.

As RCB started their training session, skipper Du Plessis told the team it was lucky to have Flower as its coach.

"I think he's an incredible coach. So I feel team is very lucky to have him, kind and big hearted man," Du Plessis was quoted as saying on RCB 'Bold Diaries'.

Flower, on his part, said: "New chapter to write in RCB story, we have been given the chance to write and it is a privilege, something to be very excited about."

Former Lankan cricketer Lahiru injured in accident

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former Sri Lanka cricketer Lahiru Thirimanne sustained minor injuries after a road accident, leading to his hospitalisation in Thruppene, Anuradapura, local media reported on Thursday.

According to a report in 'Ada Derana', the 34-year-old Thirimanne was admitted to Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital "with minor injuries sustained in the accident".

Anuradapura is a major city, located about 205km from national capital Colombo.

"Police mentioned that the car in which Thirimanne was travelling had collided with a

lorry arriving from the opposite direction at around 07.45 a.m. This morning," it stated.

"Three other individuals travelling in the car, the driver of the lorry and another person have been injured and hospitalised."

Thirimanne appeared in 44 Tests for Sri Lanka, scoring 2088 runs, including three hundreds.

He played 127 ODI for the island nation, scoring 3164 runs in all. He also played 26 T20 Internationals for Sri Lanka.

Thirimanne last played for Sri Lanka in 2022 before announcing his retirement the next year.

Domestic umpiring standards under scanner after CK Nayudu Trophy howler

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The dubious dismissal of Karnataka opener Prakhar Chaturvedi in the recent Col. CK Nayudu Trophy U23 final against Uttar Pradesh has raised concerns about the standards of umpiring in domestic matches.

The unsavoury incident happened in Karnataka's first innings after Chaturvedi played a pull against UP pacer Kunal Tyagi well away from his body.

The ball, which took a rather healthy edge off Chaturvedi's bat, moved further away from stumper Aaradhya Yadav who had to make a full-length dive to his left to make the collection.

But the ball rolled out of Yadav's gloves before he could complete the catch even as the wicketkeeper thudded on to the ground.

However, the on-field umpire upheld the appeal for caught behind much to the dismay of batter Chaturvedi, who made 33

and 86 in Karnataka's maiden victory in the tournament which came by virtue of their first innings lead here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"Yes, it was a clear case of not out as I later saw the clippings. The ball came out of UP wicketkeeper's hands before he completed the catch. The umpire should not have given it out," a former First-Class umpire told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"It is important to maintain top standards because these junior tournaments are stepping stones for several budding cricketers. Imagine how bad that boy (Chaturvedi) would have felt after spending close to an hour at the crease, only to get out like that."

"Also, umpiring standards have a direct relation with the overall quality of a match," he said.

So, how can one ensure consistency and high level of accuracy in domestic umpiring? "The BCCI has laid out some



strict parameters in the umpires' selection process and many state associations themselves have umpires associations working hard to ensure a good level of officiating.

"But I feel former cricketers should be encouraged to take up umpiring as they know the game closer than anyone else. We have had S Venkataraghavan, Peter Willey, David Shepherd and Dickie Bird who were excellent umpires as they leaned on their experience from their playing days," he added.

Recently, former India batter Manoj Tiwary had lashed out at poor standards of umpiring in domestic cricket.

Another former First-Class batter said instances of umpires making childish mistakes were quite common in domestic circuit.

"It is quite common, especially in junior cricket. But in one Ranji (Trophy) match, I was hit on my hips and the umpire gave that out leg before. I was 48 then. I

brushed it aside, thinking that mistakes can happen to anyone.

"But in the next innings, when I was batting on 45, the same umpire gave me out caught behind off a left-arm spinner when my bat was tucked safely behind my pads while leaving the ball. Even the silly point fielder could not hide his surprise," he noted.

There have been initiatives like the umpiring academy in Nagpur to better the standards but the lack of continuity has been the bane.

"Those were good ideas but somehow did not take off as expected. There is an ICC online course too for the umpires.

"But beyond all these, the board should increase remuneration for umpires and should also ensure that First-Class umpires officiate at state level or even some local matches so that there is no gap between the assignments and they remain sharp," the umpire detailed.