

'Tillu is expressive, but Siddhu holds his emotions, rest we ***ARE SAME***'

The findings suggested a possible problem for computer network timing, and thus, changes in the policy of aligning UTC to the Earth's rotation may need to be made earlier than currently planned, Agnew said.



BRS losing ground fast, likely to collapse: Nirnanjan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After nine and a half years in power the BRS is now losing ground rapidly and is almost collapsing, TPCC Senior Vice-President G. Nirnanjan said.

He said that BRS leaders and cadres have no confidence in KCR as he is not in a position to revive the party.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, Nirnanjan said that crown prince (yuvaraj) KTR, who had dreamt of becoming the king is now shattered and is speaking without any sense.

“At the time the Medigadda Barrage was damaged, KTR had said what would happen if two pillars of the Medigadda Barrage of the Kaleshwaram Project collapse which was built for Rs 1.25 lakh crore. Now KTR is saying that tapping 10 lakh phones is a lie. It could have been done on one or two people who were likely to break



“At the time the Medigadda Barrage was damaged, KTR had said what would happen if two pillars of the Medigadda Barrage of the Kaleshwaram Project collapse which was built for Rs 1.25 lakh crore. Now KTR is saying that tapping 10 lakh phones is a lie.

the law. It is learnt that illegal transactions amounting to Rs 600 crore were done through phone tapping. Can it be easy? Did KTR have a role in it or not? KTR should be honest. How many scandals will come out after the Lok Sabha elections? Only God knows. The passports of KCR's family should be seized so that they do not flee abroad,” he said.

Nirnanjan said that there should be a comprehensive investigation into the CMRF scam from Harish Rao's office. Harish cannot shirk responsibility on the plea that the

accused Naresh Kumar was a temporary computer operator in his office, he said.

He asked why around 250 CMRF cheques were kept in Harish's office without giving them to beneficiaries by the time the code came. It is astonishing that Harish told to send back CMRF cheques to the CMRF office without giving it to beneficiaries, he said.

Why were 200 CMRF cheques burnt? Were CMRF cheques sanctioned to fake beneficiaries? “Why was computer operator Naresh Kumar allowed to draw 19 CMRF

cheques? It must be investigated how much fraud took place in the past before this incident came to light,” he said.

Nirnanjan said that currently one of the accused is an employee of Harish Rao's office, one is a personal assistant of a former MLA, one is an Assembly attender and another is a resident of Godavari Khani. Considering all this indicates a big scam by people at all levels. Police should investigate Harish too in this matter, he said.

Nirnanjan said that even now the CMRF office in the Secretariat is in disarray. Applicants are not getting acknowledgements after submitting applications. It is also difficult for them to find whether the application is in the office or not, he said and added that comprehensive changes should be made in CMRF procedures in the Secretariat.

KCR told me BRS is going to join hands with BJP: Danam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

“BRS President K. Chandrasekhar Rao told him that the BRS is going to join hands with the BJP. Danam said that he did not like the KCR's statement and asked KCR to explain how the BRS would join hands with the BJP. However, KCR informed him that a decision has been taken on joining hands with the BJP, Danam Nagender said. It is one of the reasons for quitting the BRS, Khairatabad MLA Danam Nagender said,” Khairatabad MLA and Secunderabad Lok Sabha constituency Congress candidate Danam Nagender said.

Speaking to the media on Thursday, Danam Nagender said that he thought that the BRS was a secular party. He also said that everyone knows as to who raised the curtains to defections. No doubt KCR is a great leader and we will be indebted to KCR for a lifetime for providing us with opportunities politically.

Cong-led govt will change country's condition: Jairam

Says people ready to ‘uproot’ Modi govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday alleged that the 10 years of the Modi government have proven to be a "maut kaal" rather than "amrit kaal", and claimed that the people are ready to "uproot" this regime.

Congress general secretary, in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, said a government led by his party will change the condition of the country and the people through its 'Paanch NYAY Pachees Guarantee'.

"Prime Minister Modi talks about 'amrit kaal' but in reality his reign has proved to be 'maut kaal' (period of death and destruction)," Ramesh alleged.

Citing NCRB figures for 2023, he said in the last one year, 1.71 lakh people of the country have committed suicide. Every day 500 people are being forced to commit suicide. Thirty farmers are committing suicide every day, he claimed.

"Three housewives, who take care of the house, are ending their lives every hour after



getting fed up and a total of 25,309 housewives have committed suicide," Ramesh said. A maximum 35 per cent of those who commit suicide are

youth and in 2022 alone, 15,783 people committed suicide due to unemployment, he claimed. "Seeing their future going into darkness, 5,588 girl students have ended their lives in one year. The reasons for this frustration and disappointment spread among the people are quite clear," the Congress leader said.

Unemployment has broken the record of 45 years during the reign of Prime Minister Modi, he said.

Rahul boon for BJP: Anurag Thakur

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi saying the Congress leader was a "boon" for the BJP as his contribution was immense in ensuring the saffron party's victory. "There cannot be a bigger boon for the BJP than Rahul Gandhi," Thakur said at the TimesNow Summit here. The senior BJP leader said he had lots of respect for Rahul Gandhi as he was a "big leader". "He spends equal amount of energy in

ensuring BJP's victory as much as we do," Thakur said. In a dig at Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, Thakur said he was happy that the Congress leader was touring the country instead of travelling to foreign locations. "But, what did he achieve? The yatra passed through Madhya Pradesh, they lost there. The yatra passed through Chhattisgarh, they lost there. The yatra passed through Rajasthan, they lost there," Thakur said.

Cong complains to EC against ‘misleading’ ads by BJP, seeks action

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has complained to the Election Commission against the BJP's "misleading" advertisements and posters promoting various government schemes and sought their removal.

The opposition party also sought action against the alleged violation of poll code by senior BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying no action was taken by the EC on issues raised by them earlier.



A delegation of Congress leaders, including Mukul Wasnik, Salman Khurshid, Supriya Shrinate and Gurdeep Sappal, had met the EC and raised nine issues before the poll panel.

Khurshid had said the party complained to the EC on the manner in which campaigning is being done by the BJP during the Lok Sabha polls.

"People are pained at the manner in which the BJP is issuing advertisements and posters. We have objected to

the manner in which the government schemes are being promoted with the prime minister's photograph and such a campaign during polls cannot take place. The EC has already taken note of such things and has assured us to take up our complaints," Khurshid said.

He hoped that the EC will come forward and use its powers to act against the complaints to ensure a level playing field during the polls.

Shrinat had said, "We have raised nine such issues before the EC and we hope that it will take action on such fake news and misleading advertisements to ensure a level playing field."

Electoral Bond: Future Gaming biggest donor to TMC, DMK, YSRCP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited was the biggest donor through electoral bonds to three parties - TMC, DMK, and YSRCP, according to the poll rights body ADR.

The company donated Rs 542 crore to TMC, Rs 503 crore to DMK and Rs 154 crore to YSRCP, according to it.Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited was the top donor for BJP at Rs 584 crore and BRS at Rs 195 crore. The company also emerged as the second highest donor to three parties DMK (Rs 85 crore), YSRCP (Rs 37 crore) and TDP (Rs 28 crore).

The Association of Democratic Reforms on Thursday shared on

X the list of top five donors through electoral bonds to BJP, Congress, TMC, BRS, BJD, DMK, YSRCP, TDP, Shiv Sena, and RJDMegha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited was the top donor for BJP, followed by Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited, which donated Rs 375 crore.

Vedanta Limited donated BJP Rs 230 crore, Bharti Airtel Limited Rs 197.4 crore, and Madanlal Limited Rs 175 crore. For TMC, Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited was the highest donor, followed by Haldia Energy Limited (Rs 281 crore), Dhariwal Infrastructure Limited (Rs 90 crore), MKJ Enterprises Limited (Rs 45.9 crore), and Aves Trading & Finance Private Limited.

Kiran seeks Venkat's help to win Bhongir LS seat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress candidate in Bhongir LS constituency, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, met Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy on Thursday and requested his help to win the election. He also thanked Venkat for taking the initiative to get him a Congress ticket.

Speaking on the occasion, Kiran expressed confidence that he will succeed with the

help of the Komatireddy family and that the Komatireddy family has a long political experience in the erstwhile Nalgonda district.

He said that the Congress is going to come to power in the country like it won power in the state. He said that he is thankful to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, AICC in-charge Deepa Das Munshi and AICC elders who took the initiative to give him a ticket.

Revanth doing...

Continued from page 1

He said the KCR government had set apart Rs 7,000 crore for Rythu Bandhu, but the Congress complained to the Election Commission and stopped the distribution.

He said that the Congress gave the money that the BRS kept for farmers to contractors. KTR said that KCR will be visiting farmers soon. He said that the Congress had said that they would waive farm loans up to Rs 2 lakh on December 9, but that has not been done so far.

Kadiyam, KK desert...

Continued from page 1

There is no coordination in districts among BRS leaders. In such a situation, I have decided to withdraw from the contest."

It may be mentioned here that BRS MLA Kadiyam Srihari wanted the BRS Lok Sabha ticket from Warangal to be allotted to his daughter Kadiyam Kavya.

K. Keshav Rao announced that he will be leaving the BRS

to join the Congress. His daughter Hyderabad Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi too will be joining the Congress on March 30.

With Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan joining the Congress, Vijayalakshmi was reportedly worried about a potential no-confidence motion against her.

Moreover, KK wanted to retire in the Congress. So the duo decided to join the Congress.

Will tell my joining date soon: KK

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a big shock to the BRS and its chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao, the party's Secretary General and Rajya Sabha Member Dr K. Keshava Rao aka KK and his daughter GHMC Mayor Gadwala Vijayalakshmi decided to join the Congress party. She said that she is joining Congress on March 30.

GHMC Mayor Vijayalakshmi

and her father KK confirmed it on Thursday night saying that she and her father K. Keshava Rao are joining the Congress. Vijayalakshmi said that works would be done only if she stays in the ruling party. However, KK said, "I am thinking of joining the Congress. I stayed in the Congress for a long time in the past. KCR gave full respect to me. I too have full respect for KCR. I discussed with KCR

about Kavitha's arrest and party issues. The ED arrested Kavitha illegally," BRS MP Keshava Rao said.

KK said that he will tell his joining date soon.

Meanwhile, KK's son Viplav Kumar said, "I am hereby clarifying that I have nothing to do with the news in the media regarding the decisions of K.K. garu or Vijayalakshmi on thinking about changing the party.. I am very clear that I am

not changing the party. I am a strong supporter of the BRS and have great faith in the leadership of our leader KCR garu, ...I will be able to talk more only after their confirmation of joining the Congress..." Earlier in the day, Keshava Rao met BRS President K. Chandrasekhar Rao at KCR's farmhouse. KK informed KCR that he was going to quit the BRS and join the Congress.

‘Not EC, but ED...

Continued from page 1

Manne Krishank flagged down Modi with opposition parties with ED and CBI. AAP leader and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal arrested. This is the same discussion in Delhi and Punjab. AAP is unable to participate in Lok Sabha election campaign. ED issued notices to Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter. He said that ED is calling them to Delhi and Modi wants to waste time.

"From Kashmir to Kerala, ED notices are the same. There are ED cases and investigations in more than a dozen. If Lok Sabha elections

are going on there is no discussion on Modi's rule except for discussion of ED and CBI," Manne Krishank said that Modi did not care about farmers and the poor in these ten years.

He alleged that ED is conducting attacks to prevent issues from being discussed in elections. "They are destroying democracy. They are trying to prevent our leader from campaigning. We will explain everything to the people in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," he said. Manne Krishank said that the BJP is going to lose and that is why the leaders in the states are attacking them.

Rythu Bandhu funds...

Continued from page 1

The obvious suspicion is that the money of Telangana farmers has been diverted to Congress leaders who in turn are paying "tributes" to the Congress high command," the BRS said.

"The numerous visits of the CM and ministers to New Delhi while the farmers of Telangana are suffering drought confirm the suspicions," the BRS said.

"The CM announced in December that it would be disbursed by December-end and then again in February. He once said March 15 and

later changed the deadline to March 31. The Congress Government has taken loans worth Rs 18,118 crore by selling state government securities and through HUDCO," the BRS said.

"Other than this, they have also sold paddy that the BRS Government had procured worth Rs 8,000 crore to other states. In spite of raising huge amounts through loans, selling paddy and having money set aside by the BRS government, the Congress has not been able to disburse Rythu Bandhu funds completely," the BRS statement said.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

IIIT-H, Plaksha sign MoU to set up centre for sustainability

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Hyderabad and Plaksha University signed an MoU on campus on Thursday to establish a Sustainability Centre based on smart and sustainable communities.

The MoU was jointly signed by Prof PJ Narayanan, Director, IIIT Hyderabad and Prof Rudra Pratap, Founding Vice-Chancellor of Plaksha University.

The sustainability centre will primarily focus on research for bottom-of-the-pyramid use cases around villages and towns. Both varisities will jointly work on technologies applicable to sustainable communities including sensors, ML models, communication/5g, digital twins, economics, and social/human sciences.

It will also take up problems in functional domains like air/pollution, water (networks, wtp, stp, rain), energy (smart meters, distribution, grids, storage), waste manage-



ment (solid water and otherwise), food/agriculture (sustainably produce, process, consume), health (preventive and public health and mental health).

The immediate short-term plan is to seed projects in Hyderabad and Chandigarh around water, pollution and agri-economics.

Prof PJ Narayanan, Director of IIITH said, "IIITH is excited to partner with Plaksha University on joint

research initiatives spanning sustainability and the development of sustainable communities.

Since our institutions largely share institutional frameworks and social goals, this collaborative centre will work on impactful research, educational programmes and community involvement, leveraging our combined strengths."

Prof. Rudra Pratap, Founding Vice-Chancellor of Plaksha University said, "In

The sustainability centre will primarily focus on research for bottom-of-the-pyramid use cases around villages and towns. Both varisities will jointly work on technologies applicable to sustainable communities

this era of rapid technological advancement, our collaboration with IIIT Hyderabad marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards fostering sustainable communities. Through the joint efforts of Plaksha University and IIITH, we aspire to harness cutting-edge technologies to address the pressing challenges faced by communities at the bottom of the pyramid, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all."

20 more water filling stations will be arranged for the city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MAUD Principal Secretary Dana Kishore said that 20 more water filling stations will be arranged from the first week of April for the people of the city. Six stations in the GHMC limits and 14 new filling stations are being set up in 7 divisions, two for each division, for future water needs.

At the HMWSSB head office in Khairatabad, Dana Kishore reviewed the summer operation and water supply through tankers with the senior officials of the Water Board on Thursday.

Where, he said that arrangements would be made for the purchase of more tankers if necessary to meet the demand. This would enable the water board to provide more services to the users.

The officials were directed to supply water within 24 hours of booking the tanker. In case of delay officials should provide information through SMS. "We will supply water through tankers for 24 hours from the first week of next month", Dana Kishore said.

He said that compared to last year, this time the demand



Arrangements would be made for the purchase of more tankers if necessary to meet the demand. This would enable the water board to provide more services to the water users in the city

for tankers has increased by 50 per cent.

An action plan has been prepared to supply 9,000 trips of water per day. In all, 300 additional trips for commercial users would be provided from each filling station. For this, 250 new tankers are being

arranged.

In this review, MD Sudarshan Reddy, Executive Director Dr M Satyanarayana, Revenue Director VL Praveen Kumar, Technical Director Ravikumar and Director Operations-2 Swamy were among those who participated.

DCA seizes Ayurvedic tablet with false medical claim

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

An Ayurvedic tablet with a misleading or false claim of treating rheumatism was seized from a store in Gandipet by officials from the Drugs

Control Administration (DCA). The 'medicine', called 'Panion tablets', was detected by DCA officials during a raid.

The Ayurvedic medicine was found to be circulating in the market with a misleading claim on its label that it treats rheumatism, which is a contravention of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, said DCA director general VB Kamalasan Reddy. The 'medicine' was detected by DCA officials at Puppalguda, Gandipet. Stocks were seized during the raid

During special raids conducted on March 27, DCA officials from the Serilingampally zone detected the Ayurvedic 'medicine'. It was found to be manufactured by Win Trust Pharmaceuticals Ltd., in Ludhiana, Punjab.

UoH signs MoU with NMDC for knowledge exchange

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The University of Hyderabad (UoH), through the School of Engineering Sciences and Technology (SEST), has forged a significant partnership with the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Limited, Hyderabad - India's largest iron ore producer, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on March 26 for the period of five years.

Dr Devesh Nigam, Registrar, signed the MoU on behalf of the UoH and SK Jain, Chief General Manager, R&D Centre on behalf of the NMDC Limited, in the presence of Prof. BJ Rao, Vice-Chancellor, UoH; Dilip Kumar Mohanty, Director (Production); Prof. Jaiprakash Gautam, Dean SEST and other faculty members - Prof. VVSS Srikanth, Prof. KV Rajulapati and Dr VG Kotnur from SEST, and Dr Vibhuti Roshan from R&D Centre, NMDC Limited.



The activities under the MoU would focus on collaborative research, student and faculty exchange in the development of technology for green steel making, technology development for the direct utilisation of low-grade iron ore fines in the iron-making process, technology development for the mine waste utilisation and exploration of any other technical areas of mutual interests.

Prof. BJ Rao, Vice-Chancellor, UoH and Dilip Kumar Mohanty Director (Productions) at NMDC Ltd, deliberated that

this is the first step to work together effectively and make it a successful model for Industry-Academia collaboration.

This MoU is expected to foster innovation, facilitate knowledge exchange and contribute to the advancement of sustainable practices in the mining, iron and steel making industries.

Dr VG Kotnur will serve as coordinator from the UoH side and Dr Vibhuti Roshan will serve as coordinator from the R&D Centre of the NMDC Limited.

OU seeks government aid to offset deficit

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Academic Senate of Osmania University convened a crucial meeting on Thursday at the Senate Hall to discuss and approve the budget for the financial year 2024-25.

Dignitaries including Prof. D Ravinder, Vice-Chancellor, Prof. P Laxminarayana, Registrar and Prof. B Reddiya Naik, OSD to VC, along with Deans of various faculties, EC members, principals, directors, Senate members and non-teaching unions attended.

Prof. Ravinder commended the achievements of Osmania University during the past academic year and highlighted the initiatives and accomplishments undertaken by the university from December 2023.

The budget was presented by Prof. V Appa Rao from the Department of Commerce. He announced that the Block Grant from the State government for the upcoming financial year was set at Rs 487.03 crore, marking a significant

increase of Rs 30 crore compared to the previous year's allocation. He thanked the Chief Minister and his administration for this enhancement. Prof. Appa Rao outlined the estimated receipts of Rs 718.86 crore and the estimated expenditure of Rs 796.45 crore, indicating a deficit of Rs 44.68 crore. He urged the government to consider providing an additional grant to bridge this deficit and ensure smooth operations.

Prof. Reddiya Naik, as the OSD to VC and Chairman of the Annual Report Committee, presented the highlights of the annual report, showcasing the university's progress and achievements across various domains.

The meeting concluded with a formal vote of thanks delivered by Prof. Laxminarayana acknowledging the contributions of all participants and stakeholders in the successful conduct of the Academic Senate meeting and budget deliberations for the fiscal year 2024-25.

Iron-calcium deficiency causes illness in women, says expert

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Narmada H, a renowned medical Doctor, ret'd Professor, Gandhi Hospital, stated that about 70 per cent of women across the country, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, are suffering from iron and calcium deficiency. She spoke during the International Women's Day event at Nizam College on Thursday under the Women Empowerment Cell of Nizam College. The programme was presided over by Professor B Bhima, Principal of Nizam College.

Dr Narmada said that according to a recent study conducted in villages, women in their forties look like they are 80 years old. The main reason for this is iron deficiency on the one hand and calcium vitamin deficiency on the other hand, women are affected by anemia, bone weakness and other diseases.

Therefore, she suggested that



Dr Narmada H delivering a speech to the audience

women can stay healthy by consuming foods rich in iron and calcium. The families of girls aged 12 to 22 years are advised to be careful about their health. She said that girls need to be provided with all kinds of vitamins in abundance. Every woman above the age of 40 is advised to get the vaccine in three stages to prevent cervical cancer. It is also advised to do breast cancer tests. Taking junk and bakery food increases the fat percentage in the body tremendously and causes diseases like thyroid, hormones out of balance, diabetes etc. Therefore it is advised to stay

away from these.

Hyderabad District Court retired principal judge Udaya Gauri, who was the guest of honour, asked the students and women to notice the power in you and find opportunities in your desired field. She said that it becomes easier to achieve what you want when you work hard towards the goal. If necessary, take the advice of the experienced and move forward.

Telangana High Court government pleader Shazia Parveen said that there is a lot of power hidden in women and urged them to fight and grow.

Stick to core value of integrity, Vietnam mediapersons told

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The two-week training programme on Journalism and Public Relations for media professionals from Vietnam came to an end on Thursday. The participants will visit Delhi and Agra on March 29 and 30 and leave for Vietnam on March 31. The training programme was sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, under ITEC Programme, and was conducted by Dr MCR HRD Institute, Government of Telangana.

Dr Shashank Goel, Spl Chief Secretary to Government of Telangana, said that in an era characterised by rapid technological advancements and evolving communication landscapes, media professionals play an important role in pursuing truth, disseminating accurate information, strengthening the foundations of democracy and fostering global understanding. He said that in the ever-changing media

scenario, training should not be a one-shot affair and advised the media professionals to keep their skill sets current and up-to-date by attending training programmes at different stages of their career.

Dr Shashank Goel called upon the media professionals to stay true to their core values of honesty, integrity, and accountability and serve different sections of society, especially the weak and the underprivileged. He also said that India is blessed with several strengths, including a diverse and dynamic print media landscape, huge technological advancements in the digital media, massive presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, etc. "Senior journalists, academicians and industry experts from print, electronic and social media shared their expertise, insights, and best practices with the media professionals from Vietnam", he stated.

Niloufer Hospital gets neonatal ICU worth Rs 48 lakh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) has been set up at the Niloufer Hospital by the Rotary Club of Hyderabad Mavericks, in collaboration with Rotary Club of Global Wizards.

The project marks a significant milestone in advancing healthcare facilities for neonates in our community. This project was initiated by Rotary District Chairman Service Projects Suren Poruri of the Rotary Club of Global Wizards.

This project was aimed to enhance neonates' treatment facilities at Niloufer Hospital, a revered institution established in 1953. This advanced equipment includes high-quality imaging scanning machines, pulse oximeters with neonatal probes, multi-channel monitors, T-Piece Resuscitators, phototherapy units, syringe pumps and refrigerators, all aimed at enhancing the capacity to pro-



vide faster and more accurate diagnoses of critical cases of pre- and post-birth complications.

The purpose of donating this equipment was to provide faster turnaround time in high-risk deliveries, better monitoring of pre- and post-delivery neonatal care and better assessment of neonatal conditions.

By this upgrade, the hospital's capacity is enhanced to treat high-risk babies effectively. This means that a greater number of babies can now receive the critical care they need, increasing their chances of survival and improving their overall health outcomes.

On average over 300 high-risk babies will benefit from this project every month and 2500+ in a year. This goes a long way in dedication to saving lives and providing essential healthcare services in their time of need.

The Neonatal ICU upgrade project is not just about providing medical equipment; it is about making a tangible difference in the lives of vulnerable newborns and their families. The project which was completed recently is the culmination of efforts under the Rotary Global Grant project, wherein the Rotary Club of Hyderabad Mavericks and Global Wizards, in collaboration with Rotary Clubs Simsby-Granby, Livermore & Westwood Village, all from the USA, donated equipment for the NICU worth Rs 48 lakh. This generous contribution will greatly enhance the capacity of the NICU, ensuring optimal care for newborn babies.

8 cars burnt in a fire accident at Gandipet

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In all, 8 cars were burnt in a massive fire accident in a warehouse in Gandipet on Thursday.

After receiving information about the fire, officials of the fire department reached the spot and were firefighting to douse the fire.

The fire accident occurred at Vattinagulapally village in Gandipet mandal of Ranga Reddy district. Gachibowli police said that 8 cars were burnt.

The fire started around 4 pm and fire engines rushed to the spot and firefighting continued till 6 pm.

Around nine fire engines were deployed to completely douse the fire.

The fire officials suspected that the fire started due to a short circuit. The reason for the fire mishap is being investigated.

People can register for vote till April 15: DEO Ronald Rose

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad District Election Officer Ronald Rose said that those who are not registered as voters can register till April 15. Also, voters should check their name in the voter list or not for the confirmation.

A meeting was held with TLF, SLF leaders, senior citizens, representatives of disabled associations, representatives of third gender and women representatives of self-help groups in GHMC head office on Thursday in view of the parliamentary elections.

At that meeting, SVEEP nodal officer Ronald Rose explained about the facilities provided to senior citizens and disabled voters in the elections. Regarding them, steps should be taken to ensure that all the polling centres are on the ground floor, ramp facility and minimum infrastructure should be provided, they should be given a separate queue line and they should be

taken directly to cast their vote without any difficulty, and sufficient number of wheelchairs should be made available at each location.

DEO said that PWD voters above 85 years of age can vote from home if they apply under Form-12D. He spoke on the issues of conducting election duties, polling, handing over postal ballots to other staff, postal ballot process, regulations, establishment of voter facilitation centres, etc.

District Election Officer Ronald Rose said that a total of Rs 23,92,610 and Rs 14,66,994 worth of materials were seized during the inspection by enforcement teams on Thursday. Ronald Rose said that five FIRs have been filed on Thursday. So far 129 FIRs have been registered and 110 people have been arrested. Since the MCC came into force, Rs 2,80,980 has been seized. Besides, other material items worth Rs 51,72,283 were seized.

Summer vacation from March 31 to May 31

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Board of Intermediate Education (TSBIE) on Thursday issued a notice stating that the last working day for the academic year 2023-24 is on March 30. According to TSBIE, summer vacation will commence from March 31 to May 31 and any deviation will be viewed seriously.

Admissions should be made only in accordance with the admission schedule which will be announced by the TSBIE.

Hyd to witness three-day music, dance fest

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Classical dancer, scholar, Ananda Shankar Jayant, in association with the Ministry of Culture, Shankarananda Kalakshetra Natyarambha and Brhat, is hosting a three-day music and dance event, 'Ramayana Kalpavrksham', from March 29 to 31 at the CCRT campus.

The festival presents a visual treat with a stellar line up of events that include a galaxy of renowned artists and speakers from across the country, thought provoking talks and discus-

sions, immersive arts workshops in dance ideation, Sanskrit and digital arts, artisans corner and other features.

On March 29, the festival has a dance choreographed by Ananda Shankar Jayant, Sri Rama Namam - Entha Ruchi Ra and A Civilisation rises again - Ayodhya, a ground report talk by Swati Goel Sharma.

March 30 will have Ramayana in warp and weft - Ramayana on textiles, painting, weaving and embroidery, talk by Shefali Vaidya, Swayambodha and Shatrubodha - Twin Wheels of a Civilisation, Nupur Sharma

The festival presents a visual treat with a stellar line up of events that include a galaxy of renowned artists and speakers from across the country

in conversation with Pankaj Saxena, Sri Rama Raksha, storytelling and music by Vinay Varanasi and Vivek Sadasivam

and Dhruva, songs in praise of Hanuman and dance by Aayana and choreography by Krishna Manognya Balaraju.

March 31 session has a book release, Babur-The chessboard king by author Aabhas Maldahiyaar, A Sacred awakening talk by Dushyanth Sridhar and musical evening - Rejoicing in Raghu, IndoSoul by Karthick Iyer.

The festival also has immersive arts workshops on March 30 and 31 - Ramayana mantra mala, potent Life mantras within Valmiki's verses; Sanskrit chanting and learning.

Panel discussion on 'Partition: was it good or bad for India?'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A panel discussion on 'Partition: was it good or bad for India?' was held at Guruswamy Centre, Secunderabad on Thursday by experts Mohan Guruswamy, a policy expert and Dr Ishfaq Ahmed, Prof of Political Science at the Stockholm University.

The panel discussion opened with a direct question on the topic by Mohan Guruswamy, as the partition happened, what do you think India has to do and learn? Replying to the question, Dr Ishfaq Ahmed said, "If exclu-

sion has followed, it leads to one becoming alone. Despite India tied together or tried to stay united, the west Pakistan elite (current Pakistan) had pushed for partition. Moreover, if India hasn't partitioned, it would have led to more disputes or conflicts. Hence, India will not take that road again. Faith needs to be reposed in the Constitution and the vision of our founding fathers."

Dr Ishfaq also said that if the partition wouldn't have happened, it would have been the best of all. However, it wouldn't

be a smooth sailing, if we were together. Communal issues persisted. In India, narrow mindedness still remains among the people. But then the people accept rulers' decisions as it is. Pakistan was able to get away with its impunity because of foreign donors. The tensions between India and China are mostly on the borders.

"If that is not there, Pakistan has no interest to China as well. So, why should not Pakistan trade? Why can't the million-year-old civilisations of India and China show some wisdom," he added.

ED attaches Rs 32 cr lying in bank accounts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Hyderabad has provisionally attached Rs 32.34 crore lying as balance in 580 bank accounts under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 in a case relating to a part-time job scam in the guise of review and ratings of websites, hotels, resorts, etc.

The ED initiated investigation on the basis of FIR registered by the PS Cyber Crime, Hyderabad under various sections of Information Technology Act and IPC, 1860 against unknown persons. During investigation, it was revealed that more than 50 related FIRs have been registered at various police stations spread across the country in relation to the part-time job scam.

ED investigation revealed that cyber scammers would approach gullible persons on Whatsapp and Telegram apps and lure them by offering part-time jobs by performing simple



tasks of giving 5-star ratings to tourist websites, hotels, resorts, tourist destinations, etc. with daily income ranging between

Rs 1000-1500. The scammers used to collect basic details and ask the victims to join certain Whatsapp and Telegram

groups using links provided by them, where the associates of scammers would speak highly of the jobs and post thanks messages showing high income for gaining trust of the victims.

The victims would then be asked to register on bogus websites/ android apps using their basic details including bank account numbers. For further luring them, the scammers would even offer e-money/tokens worth Rs. 10,000 on the e-wallets on the bogus websites and apps. The victims were asked to deposit money to

various different bank accounts to top-up their online wallet and start working. The wallet balance would get exhausted with every task set. The commission/ earnings were initially allowed to be withdrawn to the bank accounts to gain trust.

Later, the agents on Whatsapp/Telegram would coerce the victims to deposit additional money to work more and earn more. During the tasks of providing ratings, random pop-ups would appear with premium tasks carrying higher commission/ rewards but requiring more deposit leading to the wallet balances turning negative. Victims were then asked to top up their wallets to continue the ratings tasks. In case of non-payment, the wallet balances were frozen and could not be withdrawn. The premium tasks would pop-up more often requiring additional deposits from victims and the ones who could not pay would be coerced to anyhow deposit the money failing which their entire wallet balance would be forfeited.

ED ATTACHED RS 70 LAKH PROPERTY OF JASLEEN ENTERPRISES

Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Hyderabad has attached an immovable property to the extent of Rs 70 lakh under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 in a bank fraud case of M/s Jasleen Enterprises, Hyderabad.

The ED initiated investigation on the basis of FIR registered by CBI, Economic Offence

Wing, Chennai, under various Sections of IPC, 1860 and Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988 against M/s Jasleen Enterprises & others on the basis of complaint filed by Union Bank of India for diversion of loan amount to the tune of Rs 12 crore. The ED investigation revealed that M/s Jasleen Enterprises obtained loan in the form of cash credit facilities by

submitting forged/fabricated documents to Union Bank of India and then diverted the said loan amount to their sister concerns / related entities and in the personal bank accounts of the partners in contravention to the conditions of the lender bank. Due to such act of diversion of loan amount on the part of M/s Jasleen Enterprises, the said loan account turned NPA.



BJP MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar and party activists arguing and jostling with the police at Chengicherla on Wednesday

Bandi Sanjay booked for obstructing police

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Medipally Police under Rachakonda Police Commissionerate booked cases against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar and others for obstructing police deployed for security duty at Chengicherla on Wednesday. The police filed the cases after Inspector of Police A. Nandishwar Reddy sustained injuries in the commotion.

The police said, "A case has been registered against BJP national general secretary and Bandi Sanjay Kumar. A case has been registered against 9 others also based on a complaint by Nacharam Inspector of Police Nandeeshwar Reddy for allegedly obstructing the

police duties in the Chengicherla incident on Wednesday."

It may be recalled that on Wednesday, Bandi Sanjay went to Pittlabasti at Chengicherla to visit the victim woman who was injured in the Muslim attack.

When Sanjay Kumar arrived at the place, a large number of BJP activists gathered there. A heated argument ensued between Sanjaaya Kumar and the police when he was not allowed to enter the Chengicherla. In the pushing and jostling, the police said that the Inspector of Police suffered injuries, it is said.

Sanjay Kumar was later allowed to visit the place and meet the women who were reported to have been injured

in a skirmish between two groups of people on March 24.

Sanjay Kumar, who visited Chengicherla where the clash occurred between members of two groups belonging to different communities on the eve of Holi, alleged police high-handedness against the women and others.

He alleged an attempt by police and government to portray as if the residents of the locality were at fault. He demanded action against police officers who behaved in a high-handed manner.

The police deployed special forces at Chengicherla to maintain peace. Union Minister for Tourism G Kishan Reddy, who is also BJP Telangana State unit president, too visited the place.

'If BJP retains power, people will be deprived of fundamental rights'

PNS ■ GODAVARIKHANI

BRS Lok Sabha candidate from Nagarkarnool constituency RS Praveen Kumar has alleged that the BJP would deprive people of fundamental rights if it is reelected to power.

Addressing the media, along with BRS leaders Balka Suman and Koppula Eswar at the BRS party office here on Thursday, Praveen Kumar alleged that the people would be deprived of their fundamental rights.

He pointed out that the BJP has been trying to do away with the reservations for various categories. In the event of the BJP coming to power once again, there is the danger of the Bahujans losing their rights, he alleged.

The Enforcement Directorate officials have been on the rampage in the country, he felt. The farmers have



RS Praveen Kumar

been facing crisis for want of assured irrigation facility, he said, expressing concern over the plight of the farmers. The job calendar declared by the Congress government would be a farce, he alleged. He appealed to the people to defeat the BJP and the Congress and give their support to the BRS candidates who have been working to safeguard interests of the Telangana. He appealed to the people to ensure electoral victory of Koppula Eswar with a huge margin of votes.

Cong leaders request DGP to search KCR's farmhouse

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two Congress leaders filed a complaint with Director General of Police (DGP) Ravi Gupta requesting him to search former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's farmhouse in Erravalli village.

The Congress leaders said that phone tapping is still going on from KCR's farmhouse and that phone tapping from KCR's farmhouse has been going on from the time

of the Huzurabad by-poll held in 2021. They demanded that the police should search the farmhouse and collect evidence.

Congress leaders Bandi Sudhakar and Thummeti Sammi Reddy filed the complaint on Thursday. They said in their complaint that there is a war room in KCR's farmhouse and that money was collected in a big way from the businessmen after tapping their phones.

The Congress leaders said

that former BRS Minister T. Harish Rao forced officials belonging to a particular community to tap phones and that BRS leaders threatened celebrities and extorted money from them.

They urged the DGP to reveal details of the money collected through phone tapping and asked the state government to order an Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe into the phone tapping.

Maoist, 'courier' held in Bhadradri Kothagudem district

PNS ■ BHADRADRI KOTHAGUDEM

An area committee member (ACM) of the banned CPI-Maoist, carrying a reward of Rs 5 lakh on his head in neighbouring Chhattisgarh, was arrested along with a party courier in Bhadradri Kothagudem district, police said on Thursday.

P Munna (35) was arrested along with J Peddabai, Maoist courier, during a joint combing operation carried out by police, CRPF person-

P Munna (35) was arrested along with J Peddabai, Maoist courier, during a joint combing operation carried out by police, CRPF personnel and CRPF's jungle warfare unit CoBRA, in Mulakanapalli forest area of Dummugudem mandal of the district on Wednesday, a release from Bhadradri Kothagudem District police said

nel and CRPF's jungle warfare unit CoBRA, in Mulakanapalli forest area of Dummugudem mandal of the district on Wednesday, a

release from Bhadradri Kothagudem District police said.

Munna, who carried an SLR weapon, was involved in sever-

al attacks on CRPF jawans, they said. Munna, who has been working with the banned CPI-Maoist party since 2004, was elevated to the position of ACM in 2022 and was working as Kishtaram Local Organising Squad deputy commander. Peddabai, has been working as a courier for the first Battalion Maoists of Chhattisgarh state for the past three years. A bag, 10 gelatin sticks, two electric detonators and Maoist leaflets were seized from the possession of the two accused, they added.

Man dies after wife throws boiling water

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

In a shocking incident, a woman after a heated argument with her husband on Wednesday allegedly threw boiling water on him. The husband suffered severe burns. He later succumbed to his burns on Thursday while undergoing treatment in a government hospital. The incident took place in Subash Nagar area of the city. The deceased was identified as Hemanth, an

employee in a private company. His wife Rohini works in children's department of the government hospital here.

For the past several days, petty egoistic fights broke out between the duo. On Wednesday, the husband and wife abused each other. Rohini, who lost her sense of discrimination between good and bad, brought boiling water and threw it on the stove causing severe burns to him, the police said.

Celestial wedding at Vemulawada Rajanna celebrated with traditional fervour

PNS ■ VEMULAWADA

The celestial wedding of Lord Rajarajeswara Swamy was performed with his Consort Goddess Parvati on a grand scale on Wednesday at the Rajarajeswara Swamy temple at a specially erected dais. The deities were brought to the venue, amidst chanting of Vedic hymns, near the office of the temple chairman.

The temple EO represented the bride groom's party while the temple priest represented the bride's party. The bride groom was offered



a dowry of Rs 551 crore. Appala Bhima Sankar Sarma and Indira performed

the kanyadaanam. Earlier, a dwajarahana ritual was conducted.

The celestial wedding was performed between 10.55 am and 12.05 noon in Abhijit

Lagna. Vemulawada MLA and Government whip Adi Srinivas graced the event as the chief guest.

Municipal Commissioner Anvesh and other officials presented silk clothes to the deities. Thousands of devotees visited the temple to witness the celestial wedding.

The temple and its surrounding areas were full with devotees, who witnessed the celestial wedding with rapt attention for about two hours.

EC strips ACP of poll duties, attaches him to DGP office

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The Election Commission has stripped Assistant Commissioner of Police Damodar Reddy of his poll duties and attached him to the office of Director General of Police on charges of violation of Lok Sabha elections code of conduct. The EC issued orders in this regard.

The ACP took part in the inauguration of a drinking water booth at Pembarti bypass road along with

Congress leader Kommuri Prashant Reddy on March 23. Local MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy complained about the violation to the EC guidelines and sought action against the ACP.

The EC conducted an inquiry into the incident and ordered the transfer of the police officer. It immediately stripped him of his poll duties and attached him to the DGP office as per the rules.

In fact, Damodar Reddy took charge as Janagoan ACP

only a month ago. He was posted in place of the previous incumbent Devender Reddy who was transferred out to Hanamkonda in the same rank.

Palla Rajeshwar Reddy accused him of protecting interests of the ruling Congress.

He complained to the EC for taking part in a party programme when election code of conduct is in force. Therefore, the EC placed the services of the ACP with the office of the DGP.

'Take forward success story'

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Reddy has called upon the people to take forward the success story of YSRCP by giving it a clean sweep of 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats and rejecting the anti-people combine of TDP, Jana Sena and BJP in the forthcoming elections.

Addressing a huge public meeting here on Thursday on the second day of the 'Memanta Siddham' poll campaign, the Chief Minister urged people to take forward the winning streak of YSRCP while showing the exit door to the opposition from politics.

For the first time in the country, the poor in Andhra Pradesh experienced due respect in the past 58 months, he said, adding that the government spent Rs. 2.7 lakh crore implementing various welfare schemes for ushering in their social and economic empowerment while TDP pursued the policy of plunder, stash and devour and is hatching conspiracies hand in glove with Jana Sena and BJP to exploit the people again.

Describing the sea of humanity that



thronged the public meeting as the YSRCP people's army, he said that people across the State are ready to teach a fitting lesson to the TDP-led alliance to ensure that an anti-people government doesn't come to power again. Listing out various welfare schemes like Amma Vodi, YSR Cheyutha, Aasara, Jagananna Vidya Deevena, Vasathi Deevena, Rythu Bharosa, Kapu Nestham, delivery of monthly social pensions at door-step and EBC Nestham, he asked the people to think why Chandrababu Naidu failed to implement similar schemes during his rule. Telling the people that revolutionary changes took place in the past 58 months in educational, medical and health and agricultural sectors to improve educational standards of stu-

dents, provide preventive health care with village clinics and family doctors and handhold the farmers at every step through RBKs, the Chief Minister asked the people to assess why Chandrababu failed to carry out similar reforms.

Recalling how TDP defaulted and cheated people on promises of waiver of farm and self-help group loans, Maha Lakshmi and Kuteera Lakshmi schemes, jobs for the youth and stipend for the unemployed and three-cents of house sites for the poor after winning 2014 polls in alliance with Jana Sena and BJP and distributing signed election manifestos, he said they have ganged up again to take people for a ride once again.

Chandrababu Naidu promises Godavari water for Rayalaseema

Assures 20 lakh jobs in five years

PNS ■ RAPTADU

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), if it comes to power in the State, will take measures to supply the Godavari water for Rayalaseema, promised TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday. Addressing a public gathering as part of Praja Galam campaign at Raptadu, Chandrababu assured the youth of providing 20 lakh jobs in five years and said his first signature will be on the Meda District Selection Committee (DSC). To instil confidence among the Backward Classes (BCs) in the State, the TDP chief promised to bring in legislation for the safety and security of the community, besides formulating a sub-plan.

The farmers are the backbone

of the State. The NDA will make the farming community monarchs by providing them with drip irrigation and subsidies, Chandrababu said. At the same time, he told the people to shoulder the responsibility to save the State from this destructive rule. "Since only 46 days are left, you all should come forward to shoulder this responsibility to save the State from this anarchic regime," Chandrababu said.

Since these elections are crucial for the future of the State, the alliance parties jointly entered the fray, he said. Fondly recalling the services of late Paritala Ravindra as the TDP leader for the people of this region, Chandrababu made a fervent appeal to the people to extend their support to rebuild the State which was destroyed



in these five years.

"We will encourage the farmers to generate power in their own lands to meet their needs and if necessary supply to others," he said. Maintaining that the people's weakness is the strength of CM Jagan, he said that this is the reason as to why he has been raising the prices of liquor quite frequently. What happened to the promise made by CM Jagan that he would impose total prohibition in the State, Chandrababu asked.

Expressing concern that the

prices of petrol and diesel, too, are skyrocketing now, Chandrababu said that once the NDA forms the government, jobs will be provided to the youth and industries will be invited to set up their units here to create more employment. "My promise to you all is that 20 lakh jobs will be provided in the next five years," he added.

It is the TDP that has categorised the Madigas as A, B, C and D, Chandrababu said and promised to take up their district-wise categorisation too.

INDIA CORNER

Guava ‘scam’: ED seizes over Rs 3 crore in cash in Punjab

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said it seized Rs 3.89 crore in cash and “incriminating” documents during raids in several premises in Punjab, including that of two IAS officers, as part of a money laundering case linked to an alleged guava orchard compensation scam. The central agency, however, did not clarify what was recovered from where. The searches were launched on Wednesday and a total of 26 residential and business premises in Ferozepur, Mohali (SAS Nagar), Bathinda, Barnala, Patiala and Chandigarh were raided. The premises of two IAS officers -- Punjab Excise Commissioner Varun Roojam and Ferozepur Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Dhiman -- were also searched apart from some revenue and horticulture department officials and private persons. The money laundering case stems from an FIR of the Punjab Vigilance Bureau against alleged main accused Bhupinder Singh, Jasmine Kaur and others.



BORDER ROW

India, China interact on complete disengagement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a lingering border row in eastern Ladakh, top diplomats of India and China held a fresh round of talks and both sides agreed to “maintain regular contact” through diplomatic and military channels, with no indication of any breakthrough.

Both sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve “complete disengagement” and resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control during the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

The key meeting was held in Beijing on March 27, it said in a statement.



Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the MEA led the Indian delegation. The Chinese delegation was headed by the Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the statement said.

“In the interim, both sides

agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels and on the need to uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols,” it said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese

Govinda joins Shinde-led Shiv Sena

Bollywood actor Govinda, a mass entertainer of the 1990s who is known for his excellent comic timing and epic dance steps, on Thursday joined the ruling Shiv Sena in Mumbai, making a comeback in politics after a 14-year hiatus. The former Congress Lok Sabha MP joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the time of election season. Govinda, who gave multiple superhit films in his decades-long career, made a blockbuster entry in electoral politics in 2004. That year, the “Hero No. 1” actor emerged as a “giant killer” when, as the Congress candidate, he defeated BJP stalwart Ram Naik in the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat. Shinde welcomed the 60-year-old actor into his party, saying he was a popular figure in all sections of society. Speaking on the occasion, an emotional Govinda, who started his acting career in the 1980s and whose films were massy family entertainers, said after his first stint in politics from 2004 to 2009, he never felt he would again come back to the same field.



Will never come out of ‘Basanti’ shadow: Hema

PNS ■ VRINDAVAN (UP)

The shadow of Basanti still looms large and Hema Malini, who references her role as the feisty tonga puller from the 1975 classic “Sholay” in many of her rallies, says candidly she may never come out of it.

The cinema icon and BJP MP is currently seeking a third Lok Sabha term from Mathura. “I will never come out of the Basanti shadow. It will always be there. I was born with that. I have done 200 films and people still remember me as ‘Sholay ki Basanti’ or from ‘Seeta Aur Geeta’ and ‘Baghban,’” she said. “I tell everyone that I am three in one -- a film artiste, a dancer and a politician,” Malini told PTI in an exclusive interview here.

Forty-nine years after it was released, Ramesh Sippy’s “Sholay” continues to be a massive draw with its ensemble cast and characters living on in celluloid memory.

Over 44 % respondents of survey say they paid extra for flight seats

As much as 44 per cent respondents in a survey complained that they had to pay extra charges to get a seat at the time of purchase of a flight ticket. Many of the respondents also reported paying between Rs 200 and Rs 2,000 as seat allocation fee, which can amount to 5-40 per cent of the air fare, LocalCircles, which carried out the survey, said in a statement. It also said there has been a very marginal improvement in the last 12 months in the ability of consumers to get a free seat when booking their flight. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs and consumer regulator CCPA late last year convened a meeting of the airlines on the issue and questioned them about the alleged unfair trade practices and misleading claims of “free” web check-in, it said. The new survey, which received over 41,000 responses from consumers across 339 districts of the country, has focused on fliers’ problems when booking for travel with family members.



PM MODI ON LAWYERS’ LETTER TO CJI

To browbeat, bully others is vintage Congress culture

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said it is a “vintage Congress culture” to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India, alleging that a “vested interest group” is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

“To browbeat and bully others is vintage Congress culture. 5 decades ago itself they had called for a ‘committed judiciary’ - they shamelessly want commitment from others for their selfish interests but desist from any commitment towards the nation,” Modi said on X.

“No wonder 140 crore Indians are rejecting them,” the prime minister said and tagged a post that carried the letter written by the lawyers.

More than 600 lawyers,



including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, wrote to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a “vested interest group” is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians.

“These tactics are damaging to our courts and threaten our democratic fabric,” the lawyers drawn from across the country said in the latter dated March 26.

Height of hypocrisy: Cong hits back

The Congress on Thursday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his criticism of the party over a lawyers’ letter to the chief justice of India against a “vested interest group,” saying the PM’s brazenness in orchestrating an attack on the judiciary, in the name of defending it, is the “height of hypocrisy.” Earlier in the day, Modi said it is a “vintage Congress culture” to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a “vested interest group” is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

‘People will have to pay for their wrongdoings’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday dismissed the allegation that the government is targeting opposition leaders and stressed that those who have done wrong will have to pay for their wrongdoings.

He said investigative agencies -- CBI and the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) -- will do their work and there is no question of any pardon for anybody who has done wrong.

The minister was replying to questions about the government using central agencies against opposition leaders and sparing those who had joined the BJP.

“We have to make a corruption-free India. They (opposition) want to save their corruption, and we have to eradicate that... They will have to pay for whatever wrongs they have committed and the law catches up with you and the law is catching up with people who have done irregularities,” Goyal said, at the Times Now Summit 2024 here.

A delegation of leaders of the INDIA bloc parties has recently approached the Election Commission of India alleging unrelenting, blatant and illegal deployment of

central agencies by the ruling BJP to stifle opposition parties.

The INDIA bloc leaders have submitted a list of recent instances of central agencies targeting opposition parties and alleged an absence of a level playing field for the opposition.

Further on the opposition party’s allegation that the BJP is a washing machine, he said: “this charge is irresponsible and uncalled for.”

All cases on anybody are going through their due course and there will nobody who will be spared from due process of law, Goyal added.

“The courts will decide, investigative agencies will do their work. There is no question of any pardon for anybody who has done wrong,” he said.

On a question whether BJP would welcome Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the party, Goyal said, “we are looking for people of substance, who add value to the party.”

Speaking on the BJP’s target of 370 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, he said the target is achievable as “Modi has toh mumkin hai (Everything is possible as Modi is there).”



Remarks on Kejriwal by US State Dept unwarranted: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said the US State Department’s recent remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is “unwarranted” and asserted the country is “proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions” and committed to protect them from any form of undue external influences.

MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said this in response to a query during his weekly press briefing on New Delhi’s stand on the remarks made by Washington on the arrest.

“Yesterday India lodged its strong objection and protest with the senior official from the US embassy with regard to the comments made by the US State Department,” he said.

The recent remarks by the State Department are “unwarranted,” the MEA Spokesperson said.

Any such external imputation on “our electoral and legal processes is completely unacceptable,” he said.

“India is proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions. We are committed to protect them from any forms of undue external influences,” he added.

ASKS HER TO PUT FORWARD 10-YEAR ‘REPORT CARD’

Cong slams Irani for ‘silence’ on women’s issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday accused Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani of maintaining a silence on key issues related to women and said she should put forward her ministry’s 10-year report card before people.

Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba said AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh had recently posed several questions to Irani, but the minister did not give detailed answers to any of those.

“We had expected that the country’s women and child development minister, Smriti Irani, would hold a press conference and present the report card of her department. She kept avoiding this, but now we



are determined to hold her accountable,” Lamba told a press conference at the Congress headquarters here.

“It is expected that she should hold a press conference and not give answers on Twitter,” she said.

Lamba repeated the questions asked by Ramesh.

“Has there been an increase in crimes against women and children in the country? Why was (former Wrestling Federation of India chief) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh not arrested after an FIR was lodged against him? Six months have passed since the gang-rape of tribal daughters of Manipur, which fast-track court has heard the case and have the accused been punished? In Haryana, does Sandeep Singh remain a minister even after serious allegations of sexual harassment and an FIR against him?” she asked.

The Mahila Congress chief also asked Irani why did she remain silent when the convicts in the Bilkees Bano case were released by the BJP-led government.

UGC mulling JEE-like common counselling for undergraduate admissions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is exploring the idea of conducting a common counselling for undergraduate admissions based on CUET scores on the lines of medical and engineering courses, according to sources.

The UGC has formed a committee with officials from different universities to discuss the idea and five renowned universities have been roped in for a pilot run, they added.

However, there is no clarity on when the idea

will be implemented if the committee finds it feasible. “A panel has been formed to study the idea and the pilot will be conducted internally to study the pros and cons. Such a system will provide a single window for admissions and students can give their choices on a single portal instead of applying separately to universities,” a source said.

“Whether or not the idea will take off is not certain right now. It depends on the panel’s findings and then we will have stakeholder consultations,” the source said.

NET scores to be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25: UGC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Eligibility Test (NET) scores will be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25 eliminating the need for separate entrance tests conducted by universities and higher education institutions, according to the University Grants Commission.

The NET is conducted twice a year -- June and December. Its scores are currently used to award Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and as eligibility for appointment as an assistant professor for those with a Master’s degree.

According to University Grants Commission (UGC) officials, the commission had constituted an expert committee to review the provisions of the exam and based on the panel’s recommendations, it has decided that from the academic session 2024-25, the score can be used for admission to PhD programmes.

“Starting from the academic session 2024-2025, universities nationwide will have the opportunity to utilise NET scores for admissions to PhD programmes, replacing the need for separate entrance tests conducted by individual universities and higher education institutions (HEIs). This marks an important step in streamlining the admission process and enhancing accessibility for aspiring doctoral candidates.

“By leveraging the NET, which is conducted biannually, universities can offer greater flexibility to students, allowing them to utilise their scores from either session to apply for PhD programmes across various institutions,” UGC Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar said.

Kumar explained that the initiative is poised to benefit students in numerous ways.

“Firstly, it eliminates the need for students to prepare and appear for multiple entrance tests conducted by different universities, thereby reducing the burden of exam logistics and expenses.

“We strongly encourage all universities to adopt NET exam scores for PhD admissions starting from the 2024-2025 academic session. This will undoubtedly contribute to fostering a more conducive environment for academic pursuit and scholarly advancement in our nation,” he said.

In an official notification, the UGC said that from June 2024 onwards, the NET candidates will be declared eligible in three categories -- for admission to PhD with JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD without JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD programme only and not for the award of JRF or appointment as assistant professor.



Species in 17 mountains face extinction risk

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Species living in 17 mountains around the world may be facing the risk of extinction due to the rapid rate at which the planet is warming, new research published in the journal Nature has found.

Researchers said that the mountains at significant risk due to global warming included those in the Iran-Pakistan region, Northeast Asia, Brazilian highlands, Western America and Mexico, and the Mediterranean basin.

The international team of researchers, led by Academia Sinica in Taiwan, called for setting up more meteorological monitoring stations in mountainous areas globally, essential for developing a deeper understanding

of the extent of such risks.

In their study, the researchers found these mountain regions to have the highest climate velocity, or the rate at which “species must move to stay within their survivable habitats”.

They explained a new approach they developed to estimate climate velocities in mountainous regions that considers two important influencing factors -- surface warming and humidity -- whilst incorporating the theories of atmospheric science.

Setting up meteorological observation stations in mountainous areas is challenging, leading to a global shortfall in long-term climate data for these regions, the team said.

This knowledge gap, com-



pounded by the complex topography, has limited the understanding of warming trends, they said. The team’s newly developed approach compensates for the lack of station data and assess shifts in temperature isotherms -- locations having the same temperature -- in mountain regions under climate change, they said.

In humid climates, climate

velocity can be high, even as warming is less pronounced, according to lead author Wei-Ping Chan from the Biodiversity Research Center, Academia Sinica, and a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard University, US.

“The mountainous regions of Taiwan, like Japan, are more affected by humidity-induced high velocities than continental regions. Our study suggests that accounting for humidity is critical to fully understanding the variability of temperature isothermal shifts in mountainous areas worldwide,” said Chan.

Lead researcher Sheng-Feng Shen, also from the Biodiversity Research Center of Academia Sinica, said, “The lack of meteorological observation data from mountains is both the most

valuable and the biggest challenge of our study.”

In the absence of such data, he said they have to rely on models for making estimates, which could vary significantly depending on the model and method used. Further, global data isn’t suitable for making local predictions due to differences in scale, Shen added.

“The unique characteristics of various mountain regions and the absence of local data mean that just because an area isn’t highlighted, doesn’t mean it’s unaffected,” he said.

Therefore, the researchers emphasised the need to set up more weather stations in mountains to better understand the real situation and tackle the effects of climate change on species.

CUSTODIAL DEATH CASE

Stricter approach required to decide on bail for cops

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that a police officer may wield more influence than an ordinary person, the Supreme Court has set aside the bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

A bench of justices Aniruddha Bose and Sanjay Kumar said a stricter approach is required to decide on the question of bail of a police official who is accused in a custodial death case.

“In cases of this nature, having regard to the overall influence a member of a police force

may wield in connection with a case against them pertaining to custodial death, a stricter view is to be taken on the question of granting bail,” the court said.

The top court said in ordinary circumstances, it would not have invoked the jurisdiction under Article 136 of the Constitution to invalidate an order granting bail to an accused.

“But this criteria, while dealing with the question of granting bail, would not apply in a case of custodial death, where police officials are arraigned as

accused. Such alleged offences are of grave and serious nature,” it said.

The apex court said so far as the present appeal is concerned, it ought to make an exception from the general approach on the question of granting bail and adopt a stricter approach.

The top court was hearing an appeal against bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

The deceased was arrested in connection with a case involving robbery and he was taken into custody on February 11, 2021.

www.dailypioneer.com
facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/
PAPER WITH PASSION

Truth travels freely

Kejriwal’s arrest gets international attention; vendetta politics may boomerang on ED

Brought to the Rouse Avenue Court amid high drama, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has described his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case as a “political conspiracy.” Himself making submissions in the court after taking the special judge’s permission, he expressed confidence that the public will give a “fitting reply to this injustice”. Seeking to establish a link between the Electoral Bond donations received by the ruling party and his arrest, the Delhi Chief Minister said that people were being turned ‘approver’ in the case and being forced to change their statements. “My arrest by the ED is a political conspiracy ... the approver gave the BJP Rs 55 crore,” he said. As a precursor to this setting, Kejriwal’s wife, Sunita, broke her silence and hinted at the impending revelation of this crucial piece of information. Kejriwal, known for his anti-corruption stance and vocal criticism of the Centre, was arrested last week on charges of being embroiled in a multi-crore liquor scam. The arrest sparked widespread outcry and protests, with supporters of Kejriwal alleging political vendetta and the BJP’s bid to settle political scores with the AAP upon losing the MCD elections after 15 years. Apart from being charged with soliciting kickbacks from liquor traders in exchange for favours, the Delhi Chief Minister is also accused of being the “kingpin and key conspirator” in the now-scrapped policy. The agency has already arrested at least 14 top AAP leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Minister Sanjay Singh, in connection with the case.



Meanwhile, the international community has also been drawn into the fray, with the US making remarks regarding Kejriwal’s arrest that have drawn the ire of Indian officials. The US State Department expressed concern over what it termed as “the apparent suppression of dissent” in India, calling for due process and respect for human rights. However, Indian authorities swiftly responded, asserting that the comments were unwarranted interference in the country’s internal affairs. Germany was the first country to speak against Kejriwal’s arrest. Whenever a politician is put behind bars, there are consequences to it. The Union Government should be doubly sure that it has a watertight case against the accused person, else there are high chances that it will boomerang. Due to the lack of information on the case in public domain, we shall assume that the authorities have a strong case against the Delhi CM and that due process of law would be followed. But if it is an exercise in haste, Kejriwal’s words might prove prophetic as elections are just around the corner. The citizens are discerning enough to read any signs of political vendetta. The outcome of this legal battle and its broader implications remain uncertain, but one thing is clear – the events unfolding around Kejriwal have captured the attention of the nation and the world, highlighting the enduring struggle for transparency, accountability and justice in the corridors of power.

PICTALK



A shepherd with his sheep near a mustard field on the outskirts of Srinagar

PTI

Dandi March: Salt, soul and satyagraha

The Dandi March serves as a reminder that peaceful protest can be a potent weapon against injustice and oppression

The 1980s film ‘Mard’ immortalised a poignant scene that encapsulates the essence of patriotism, rebellion, and sacrifice in Indian cinematic history. In this scene, the protagonist, amidst relentless flogging by the heroine armed with chains, whispers with unyielding spirit, “For this salt, our Mahatma led a revolution.” This homage vividly captures the spirit of the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, a pivotal moment in India’s quest for independence, led by Mahatma Gandhi. The Salt Satyagraha, which took place from March 12 to April 6, 1930, galvanised a nation against British colonial rule. Gandhi’s symbolic act of picking up salt at Dandi defiantly challenged the salt taxes imposed by the British, symbolising defiance and resilience in India’s freedom struggle. Over 90,000 brave souls willingly embraced brutality in their pledge for non-violence, standing as a beacon of hope against tyranny. The genesis of the Dandi March was rooted in the momentum established by the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, led by Sardar



Vallabhbhai Patel. This successful movement unified farmers and nationalists against oppressive British taxation, revitalising the spirit of the freedom struggle. By 1930, the Indian National Congress boldly articulated its aspiration for independence, setting the stage for Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi’s letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, articulated the grievances of millions and announced his intention to lead a nonviolent protest against British atrocities. Despite Gandhi’s emphasis on dialogue and peaceful resolution, the Viceroy’s inadequate response led to the commencement of the Dandi March on March 12, 1930. Accompanied by 78 dedicated followers, Gandhi embarked on a significant march covering nearly 241 miles from Sabarmati

Ashram to Dandi. This symbolic journey aimed at challenging the oppressive salt tax and British monopolistic control over salt production. The disciplined resolve of the satyagrahis exemplified unity amidst diversity, embodying the nation’s aspirations for liberation. On April 6, 1930, Gandhi’s defiance of the Salt Laws at Dandi marked a pivotal moment in India’s struggle for independence. His call to civil disobedience catalysed a mass boycott of British goods, prompting a harsh crackdown from British authorities. Despite brutal repression, the spirit of nonviolent resistance persisted, revealing the resilience of the Indian populace. The Salt Satyagraha showcased resolute collective action, with over 60,000 willingly imprisoned and thou-

sands more participating in peaceful protests. Despite Government reprisals, the ‘satyagrahis’ maintained remarkable restraint and non-violent discipline. This non-violent resistance ultimately led to negotiations with Congress leadership and Gandhi’s release after a year of imprisonment. The Dandi March culminated in the historic breaking of the salt laws, a symbolic act of defiance that reverberated globally. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. drew inspiration from Gandhi’s example, recognising the power of nonviolent resistance in confronting injustice. The Dandi March was not just a chapter in history but a transformative moment in India’s fight for independence, marking Gandhi’s emergence as a spiritual force. Through unwavering dedication to love and nonviolence, Gandhi wielded a potent weapon against oppression, demonstrating the profound impact of spirituality in challenging times. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

A tribute to the two great saints of India

The lives of Swami Atmasthananda ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission ‘Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha’



NARENDRA MODI

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the grand festival of Lok Sabha elections, the news of the demise of Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj brought my mind to a standstill for a few moments. Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj was a pioneer of India’s spiritual consciousness and his demise is like a personal loss. A few years ago, the demise of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and now the departure of Swami Smaranananda Ji on his eternal journey has left many people bereaved. My heart, like that of crores of devotees, saints and followers of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, is deeply saddened. During my visit to Kolkata earlier this month, I had gone to the hospital to enquire about Swami Smaranananda Ji’s health. Just like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji too dedicated his entire life for spreading the ideas of Acharya Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mata Sharada Devi and Swami Vivekananda across the world. While writing this article, the memories of meetings and conversations with him are getting refreshed in my mind. In January 2020, during my stay at Belur Math, I meditated in the room of Swami

Vivekananda. During that visit, I had a long conversation about Swami Atmasthananda Ji with Swami Smaranananda Ji. It is widely known that I had a close relationship with Ramakrishna Mission and Belur Math. As a seeker of spirituality, I have met different saints and mahatmas and been to many places over the period of more than five decades. Even in Ramakrishna Math, I got to know about the saints who dedicated their lives to spirituality, among whom personalities like Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji were prominent. Their sacred thoughts and knowledge provided contentment to my mind. In the most important period of my life, such saints taught me the true principle of Jan Seva hi Prabhu Seva. The lives of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission ‘Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha’. We all are inspired by the work being done by Ramakrishna Mission for the promotion of education and

THEIR SACRED THOUGHTS AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED CONTENTMENT TO MY MIND. IN THE MOST IMPORTANT PERIOD OF MY LIFE, SUCH SAINTS TAUGHT ME THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF JAN SEVA HI PRABHU SEVA

rural development. Ramakrishna Mission is working on India’s spiritual enlightenment, educational empowerment and humanitarian service. In 1978, when the disastrous flood struck Bengal, Ramakrishna Mission won the hearts of everyone with its selfless service. I remember, when an earthquake ravaged Kutch in 2001, Swami Atmasthananda Ji was among the first people to call me and offer all possible assistance for disaster management on behalf of the Ramakrishna Mission. Under his direction, Ramakrishna Mission helped many people who were affected by the earthquake. Over the past years, while holding various positions, Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji laid great emphasis on social empowerment. Those who know the lives of these great personalities will definitely remember how serious these saints were towards modern education, skilling and women empowerment. Among his many inspiring traits, one thing that impressed me the most was Swami Atmasthananda Ji’s love and respect for every culture and every tradition.

The reason for this was that he used to travel continuously and had spent a long time in different parts of India. He learned to speak Gujarati while living in Gujarat. He used to even speak with me in the language and I loved listening to his Gujarati! At different points in India’s development journey, our motherland has been blessed by many saints and seers like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji who have ignited the spark of societal change. They have motivated us to work with a collective spirit and address all the challenges our society faces. These principles are eternal and will act as our source of strength as we embark on developing a Viksit Bharat during the Amrit Kaal. Once again, on behalf of the entire nation, I pay homage to such saintly souls. I am confident that all the people associated with the Ramakrishna Mission will further move ahead on the path shown by them. Om Shanti.

(This is a tribute to Smaranananda ji Maharaj and Swami Atmasthananda Ji by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICIANS HITTING BELOW THE BELT

Madam — Apropos editorial “Political zealotry,” published on March 28, this is my response. It pains one to note that exchanges amongst political rivals are getting too personal and downright abusive. Recent examples are Supriya Srinate of the GOP and Dilip Ghose of the BJP. Wish our “netas,” spokespersons and candidates were more accommodating and tolerant, instead of hissing at one another like venomous snakes. I cite here a witty remark by MP Piloo Mody that turned the tables on his opponent. Mody, a big roly-poly man, showed his back to a minister because he felt outraged at some point. The minister took strong objection to Mody’s gesture and interpreted it to be an insult to the House itself. Piloo Mody replied - “Mr. Speaker Sir, I have no front, no back, no flanks. I am round all over. So how could I have shown my back to the minister?” The House exploded in loud laughter. Our (generally) ill-tempered politicians should take a leave from the above incident and shun vituperative language while attacking their political opponents.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

INEQUALITY RISES IN INDIA

Madam — Apropos news article “Mumbai surpasses Beijing as billionaire hub,” published on March 27, this is my response. Paris-based World Inequality Lab has recently published a report titled, ‘Income and Wealth Inequality in India 1992 - 2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj’. As per the report, inequality in India declined till the early 1980s. Thereafter, it started rising sharply. The rise of top-end inequality gained tremendous momentum during the last 10 years. The top 1 per cent of Indians earn 22.6 per cent of the national income and their wealth share has risen to 40.1 per cent. The income share of the top 1 per cent of Indians is among the very highest in the world. The report says that India is now more unequal than during the time of the British Raj. Thanks to rising inequality, the tentacles

Mechanisation is needed



Apropos news article “Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues,” published on March 28, this is my response. Recurring drought, and scarcity of water for irrigation, combined with a lack of modern farming equipment, have all contributed to a steep fall in productivity and income, forcing our farmers to take huge loans, without being able to repay them. Farmers’ income has not been able to keep pace, such as to cater to increasing production costs, including rising labour wages. Hence, agricultural machinery

becomes the need of the hour to alleviate farmers’ problems. It is also important to note that in farming several activities are highly time-bound and unless executed as per schedule, a farmer will suffer financial loss. Agriculture mechanisation, is, therefore, an appropriate answer to such challenges faced by farmers. Farm mechanisation and crop productivity have a direct correlation as they save time and labour, reduce drudgery, cut down production costs in the long run, reduce post-harvest losses, and boost crop output and farm income. Mechanisation is crucial in the agriculture sector, as it contributes towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the inputs used in crop production. Increasing the rate of farm mechanisation is critical for India to sustainably meet production demand and develop value chains and modernised food systems.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

of VIP culture are spreading rapidly with each passing day. My local SBI branch has opened a special counter where customers can withdraw or deposit money with ease avoiding long queues at the general counter. Standing at the end of a serpentine queue at the general counter, an old man leaning on his stick asked if the special counter was for differently-abled persons and senior citizens. Immediately, he was provided enlightenment with the information that the counter was only for the VIPs who would transact a minimum amount of Rs 50 thousand!

Sujit De | Kolkata

INDIA-SINGAPORE TIES

Madam — Apropos news article “India-Singapore to further deepen bilateral ties,” published on March 26, this is my response. The friendship between India and Singapore has stood the test of time for five decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had rightly emphasised the fact that Singapore was India’s “gateway” to the east. The phenomenal rise of Singapore from a small nation to a dream country for oth-

ers to emulate is in itself an achievement of sorts. Both India and Singapore have mutually beneficial cultural exchanges, defence relations, economic cooperation and skill building. Defence, sea and space, commerce and infrastructure, too, are areas of bilateral interest. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s recent Singapore visit saw him discussing wide-ranging issues with that country’s ministers including his counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan. Singapore is a destination much sought after by tourists. Besides, terror and security — very significant considering the deadlock over the South China Sea — could not escape the attention of the two leaders. India-Singapore have had a long relationship without a tinge of bitterness. That Modi himself has visited Singapore four times after he took over in 2014, underscores the importance attached by New Delhi to the bilateral relations.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

IMPACT AND DUALITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media often promotes formation of echo chambers and spread of false news



SHAINY SHARMA

Social media, a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society, has revolutionised the way people communicate, share information and interact with one another. From its humble beginnings as online forums to the expansive platforms of today like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, Snapchat and many more, the term ‘social media’ has reshaped human interaction and societal norms to a large extent. Today, it has become an integral part of everyone’s life, especially Generation Z and the impact is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Social media has fundamentally transformed communication dynamics, making it easier for individuals to connect with others globally. It has transcended geographical barriers, enabled real-time interaction and fostered virtual communities based on shared interests, identities and ideologies. Moreover, social media platforms have become instrumental in political discourse, activism and social movements, empowering voices that were previously marginalised and amplifying diverse perspectives. Millennials and Generation Z rely heavily on social media as a primary source of news and information which at times can lead to issues such as the spread of misinformation, echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are only exposed to viewpoints that align with their own beliefs. Various studies have also shown that spending too much time on social media, especially before bedtime, disrupts the sleep pattern. Blue light suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep, making it more difficult to fall asleep and reducing the overall quality of sleep. Studies also reveal that constant exposure to short-form content and distractions on social media platforms can lead to a decrease in attention span and difficulty concentrating on tasks that require sustained focus. Another major role of social media platforms which is responsible for various disruptions is promoting of unrealistic beauty standards through the use of filters, photo editing tools and the prevalence of influencers with idealised appearances, leading to body dissatisfaction and negative body image among Generation Z.



Such platforms are designed to be addictive, with features such as likes, comments, and notifications triggering dopamine release in the brain and can lead to compulsive use and dependency which is no less like other forms of addiction. Moreover, the constant exposure to carefully curated images and posts can create unrealistic expectations and foster feelings of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) among users. To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO irrespective of the generation gap, it becomes important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences such as practicing mindfulness, setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can also help alleviate feelings by emphasising authenticity, empathy and acceptance. There is no denying the fact that social media has brought about numerous benefits for Millennials and Generation Z in terms of connectivity, self-expression, and access to information, but at the same time it also poses challenges and risks that require careful consideration and management. Despite its transformative potential, social media presents a myriad of challenges that warrant attention. The addictive nature of social media and its impact on mental health, particularly among young people, raise concerns about excessive screen time, cyberbullying, and negative self-comparison. Balancing the advantages and drawbacks of social media usage is essential to harness its potential while mitigating its negative impacts on their well-being and society as a whole.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Quantifying happiness is perplexing



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

The World Happiness Report places India at 126th rank, raising legitimate concerns about the methodology and biases inherent in such assessments



Happiness is complex and difficult to define, but this in no way implies that we do not know when we are happy. Happiness cannot be a permanent state of euphoria as the mind constantly changes its contours and shades and, by and large, remains an individual experience. Hence any exercise that seeks to generalise the impressions of a large number of individuals like those living within a country and brand them as happy or unhappy people is bound to be fraught with controversies. It will also inevitably reflect the biases of the measurers. When the definition of a variable cannot be agreed upon, its measurement will raise more controversies, but when such rankings are internationally publicised for branding countries and peoples which may influence the decisions of investors and donors, it is no longer a benign exercise without any accountability. On March 20 every year for the last seven years, which date has been marked by the UN as the International Day of Happiness, a New York-based agency called Sustainable Development Solutions Network has been bringing out an annual World Happiness Report, whose 2024 edition has placed India at 126th rank among 143 countries, much below countries like Saudi Arabia (28), China (60), Russia (72), Venezuela (79), Senegal (99), Iran (100), Palestine (103), Ukraine (105), Pakistan (108) even Myanmar (118). These countries are either strife-torn or war-ravaged, where the basic security of human life is not guaranteed, or ruled by autocrats and dictators who ruthlessly suppress the civil liberties of their people, especially of women, countries which are reeling under relentless crises in their democracy, polity and economy. This raises legitimate questions about the methodology used in the exercise that can produce such weird results. Finland has topped the ranking in each year so far, and the top 10 countries have also remained more or less the same, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Australia. A common thread runs through all of them - high per capita income. Other higher-capita income countries also rank high in the list, like New Zealand (21), UK



WE DO NOT NEED TO FEEL DEPRESSED AT OUR 126TH RANKING. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD IGNORE SUCH A PHONEY INDEX AND GO ABOUT OUR LIVES AND BUSINESS AS USUAL

(20), USA (23), Germany (24), or France (27). This is no surprise, because to the materialistic West hung on a culture of conspicuous overconsumption, money remains the primary and often the only source of happiness, unlike in Asian and other continental cultures. The only Asian country to feature in the list is Kuwait at 13th position, and the next one is Saudi Arabia at 28th. While Singapore features in 30th position, Japan, which has the largest concentration of longest-living people in the world, at 51st position, below Uzbekistan (47) and Kazakhstan (49). This raises natural questions about whether the index also reflects the inherent civilizational bias of the West against Asia, most of which used to be their colonies once—to treat them as superior or even equal would be an anathema to the West. Bhutan which reckons happiness as a core responsibility of Government and has adopted its Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index as a development indicator in its 2008 Constitution, was ranked 95th in 2019 and has not been ranked this year. GNH was the first such index and is far broader - having nine parameters, all non-income. Trying to measure the immeasurable will have its inherent contradictions. Happiness is a state of being, rather than a fixed state like a goal to be achieved that can be quantified and measured. Such measures therefore confuse happiness with “well-being” which is produced by the interplay of numerous extraneous factors like income, health, education, liberties, choices, relationships, physical and social security, etc. But even then, it is a subjective sense of well-being, which is neither measurable nor quantifiable. The rankings used in the World Happiness Report are based on six parameters of ‘subjective well-being’: (1) per capita income, (2) healthy life expectancy at birth, (3) social support, (4) freedom to make

life choices, (5) generosity, and (6) perceptions of corruption. The happiness rankings are based on what the authors say are “life evaluations”, on which Gallup World Poll (GWP) provides the data by asking respondents to evaluate their current life on a scale of 0 to 10 (happiest), using a typical sample size of 1000 for each country regardless of its population, and using a three-year average. The sample size is too small for a country like India to represent all its diversity and complexity. Data for per capita GDP on purchasing power parity (PPP) are taken from the World Development Indicators (WDI) of the World Bank, and then a natural log that fits the observations better. Data for healthy life expectancy at birth is provided by the WHO Global Health Observatory data repository. Social support is the national average of the binary responses (0=no, 1=yes) to the GWP question: “If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?” Freedom to make life choices is again the national average of binary responses to the GWP question: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?” Generosity is the residual of regressing the national average of GWP responses to the question: “Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?” on log GDP per capita, while perceptions of corruption are the average of binary answers to two GWP questions: “Is corruption widespread throughout the Government or not?” and “Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?” It does not require superlative intelligence to divine that all these parameters are derivatives of a single parameter, i.e., income or wealth of a nation, and hence will always favour rich nations over the poorer ones.

So, the richer you are, the happier you are; in other words, income is synonymous with happiness, an assumption not validated by facts, just as happiness cannot be equated with success in material terms. The mind is influenced by social and cultural factors; hence how we perceive happiness also depends on these factors. It also depends on the questions asked and the way they have been framed: Just ask “How much time you spend with your parents every week”, or “For how long you have been married to your present spouse”, and see how the scales turn against the rich western nations. In collectivist societies in Asia, people reckon happiness more as a shared experience rather than individual satisfaction with life, whereas in individualistic societies, people perceive happiness more in terms of individual satisfaction. Happy people increase the happiness of others around them; hence bonding within social groups and families contributes positively to happiness. Individualistic Western nations would score higher given the way the GWP questions have been framed. As every Indian knows from experience, we are not unhappy people, having been brought up to regard values and relationships as more important than wealth and to be content to live a simple life with few material possessions, with strong bonds with our extended families and the community. Even though perceptions are changing in a growing economy, these basic values have remained intact. We do not need to feel depressed at our 126th ranking. Instead, we should ignore such a phoney index and go about our lives and business as usual.

(The author, an ex-bureaucrat, is currently a Professor at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management; views are personal)

Navigating the legal and ethical implications of AI

In a world increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence, the discourse shifts from its capabilities to the imperative question of its ethical boundaries

In an era increasingly defined by Artificial Intelligence (AI), the pivotal question shifts from what AI is capable of to what it should be allowed to do. This reflection critically examines AI’s potential to reshape our lives within ethical and legal frameworks. As we explore the vast landscapes carved by AI, we must ensure that our technological advancements are matched with an equally profound commitment to ethical responsibility. The advent of AI is a testament to human ingenuity, offering transformative possibilities in virtually every aspect of our existence. Yet, alongside its potential, AI introduces a spectrum of legal complexities that require careful consideration. The evolution of legal



MANEESHA DHIR

jurisprudence in the face of AI’s rapid development is a topic of paramount importance, dealing with issues ranging from privacy and data protection to intellectual property and employment. The Indian Government’s embrace of AI through initiatives like “Digital India” and a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence reflects a visionary stance on harnessing technology for societal benefit. However, the journey toward realising AI’s full promise is fraught with challenges that demand vigilant oversight and a principled approach to regulation and ethics. On a global scale, AI raises questions that transcend national boundaries, presenting legal and ethical dilemmas that must be addressed comprehensively. The capacity of AI to analyse and utilise vast amounts of personal data has challenged existing privacy laws, sparking a worldwide reassessment of how we protect individual rights in the digital age. Countries are adopting comprehensive data protection regulations, such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation and India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, to

safeguard personal information while fostering digital innovation. The implications of AI on the job market also warrant serious consideration. The potential for automation to displace jobs creates a pressing need for legal frameworks that can mitigate adverse effects and prepare the workforce for an AI-driven future. Similarly, the intersection of AI with intellectual property rights challenges



conventional notions of creativity and authorship, calling for legal innovations that recognise and protect the contributions of all stakeholders, including those of AI. The issues of bias and discrimination in AI highlight the critical need for our technological systems to be as impartial and inclusive as possible. The development and deployment of AI must be guided by anti-discrimination laws adapted to

the digital age, ensuring fairness and equity in the application of AI. Internationally, the regulatory approach to AI varies significantly, with entities like the European Union adopting comprehensive frameworks while others pursue more sector-specific guidelines. This diversity reflects the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and societal factors that influence AI governance, emphasising the need for a globally coordinated dialogue on AI ethics and regulation. Integrating AI into the legal profession offers a glimpse into the future, showcasing AI’s potential to enhance legal analysis, predict outcomes, and even assist in judicial decision-making. However, these advancements under-

score the imperative for stringent ethical standards to uphold the integrity of the legal system. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, it becomes crucial for societies, especially within the diverse context of India, to engage in proactive discourse. We must anticipate future developments and craft legal frameworks that are flexible enough to adapt to the unpredictable technological landscape. This includes ensuring that the benefits of AI extend to all and democratising access to services like healthcare and education. In conclusion, as we chart the course of AI within the legal domain, our focus must steadfastly remain on enacting and refining laws that protect human rights and dignity. Achieving harmony between

emerging technology and legal norms requires a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, where laws are designed not just to respond to the challenges posed by AI but to foresee and embrace its vast possibilities. With India at the forefront of AI innovation, buoyed by progressive policies and a wealth of intellectual capital, we stand on the brink of leading the global conversation on ethical AI. As we venture deeper into this new frontier, our collective aim should be a future where technology amplifies the noblest goals of law and justice, and in return, legal frameworks foster the responsible growth of Artificial Intelligence.

(The author is a legal expert. Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday due to a strengthening greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices in the international markets. However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets and recent foreign fund inflows supported the domestic currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.32 and oscillated between the intra-day peak of 83.30 and the lowest level of 83.40 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.39 (provisional), registering a loss of 6 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee declined 4 paise to close at 83.33 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.34 per cent higher at 104.42. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee depreciated on Thursday on strong US dollar and dollar demand from oil marketing companies (OMCs).



Ambani, Adani join hands

Reliance picks 26% stake in Adani power project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the first collaboration between rival billionaires, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has picked up a 26 per cent stake in a Madhya Pradesh power project of Gautam Adani, and signed a pact to use the plants' 500 MW of electricity for captive use. Reliance will pick up 5 crore equity shares in Mahan Energen Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Adani Power Ltd, of face value Rs 10 at par (Rs 50 crore) and will use 500 MW of generation capacity for captive use, the two firms said in separate stock exchange filings.

The two businessmen, hailing from Gujarat have often been pitted by media and commentators against each other but they have for years tiptoed around each other to reach the top two rungs of Asia's wealth ladder.

With Ambani's interests spanning oil and gas to retail and telecom and Adani's focus on infrastructure spanning sea ports to airports, coal and mining, they rarely crossed each other's path except in the clean energy business

where the two have announced multi-billion investments.

Adani aspires to be the world's largest renewable energy producer by 2030 while Reliance is building four gigafactories at Jamnagar in Gujarat -- one each for solar panels, batteries, green hydrogen, and fuel cells.

Adani is also building three giga factories for manufacturing solar modules, wind turbines and hydrogen electrolyzers.

A clash was also forecast when Adani group applied to participate in an auction of spectrum or airwaves capable of carrying fifth generation (5G) data and voice services. However, unlike Ambani, Adani bought 400 MHz spectrum in the 26 GHz band, which is not for public networks.

On the contrary, the two have been far from rivals. In 2022, a firm with erstwhile links to Ambani sold its stake in news broadcaster NDTV to Adani, paving the way for the takeover.

Adani was also present at pre-wedding celebrations of Ambani's youngest son, Anant, at Jamnagar earlier this month.



Adani group infuses Rs 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements

The Adani group has infused Rs 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements by converting 21.20 crore warrants into shares, raising its stake in the country's second-largest cement company by 3.6 per cent to 66.7 per cent. The board of Ambuja Cements has approved the conversion of 21.20 crore warrants into shares of promoter entity Harmonia Trade and Investment at the rate of Rs 314.15 per share. The fund's infusion will be instrumental for the cement business of the Adani group, which has plans to enhance its capacity to 140 million tonnes per annum by 2028, according to a statement from billionaire Gautam Adani-owned Ambuja Cements. This investment

follows an infusion of Rs 5,000 crore by the promoter into the company for exercising the warrants issuance approved by the board in October 2022. "With this, the Adani family have increased their stake in the company by 3.6 per cent to attain 66.7 per cent holding," said Ambuja Cements which also owns a controlling stake in another cement firm ACC Ltd. On October 18, 2022, Ambuja Cements allotted 47.74 crore convertible warrants to Harmonia, a member of the promoter group of the Company, at an initial subscription amount of Rs 104.72 per warrant, which was 25 per cent of the issue price of Rs 418.87.

Chennai refinery expansion cost goes up over Rs 3,600 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) on Thursday said it will raise its stake in the joint venture building a 9 million tonnes refinery at Chennai to 75 per cent after the cost to the project escalated by over 12 per cent.

Originally, IOC and its subsidiary Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd (CPCL) were to hold a 25 per cent stake in the joint venture that was to build a new unit adjacent to the existing refinery of CPCL. The remaining 50 per cent equity was to come from financial investors.

In a stock exchange filing, IOC said its board at its meeting on Thursday "accorded approval for the revision in cost of the project from Rs 29,361 crore to Rs 33,023 crore".

The cost increased Rs 3,662 crore or 12.5 per cent.



"The Board has also accorded approval for revision in the capital structure of the joint venture with 75 per cent equity from IndianOil and 25 per cent equity from CPCL," it said.

The company however did not give reasons for the cost escalation.

IOC said its board had on January 29, 2021 approved the implementation of a 9 million tonnes a year refinery at Cauvery Basin, Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu by CPCL at an estimated cost of Rs 29,361 crore, to meet the demand of petroleum products in southern India.

Domestic drug firms to witness 8-10% revenue growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Revenue growth of leading 25 domestic drug firms is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent in the next fiscal year, rating agency Icria said on Thursday.

The revenue of the companies, which account for 60 per cent of the overall Indian pharmaceutical industry, witnessed an increase of 13-14 per cent in the current fiscal year.

Following the high base of 2023-24, the revenue growth momentum from the US and

Europe markets is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent and 7-9 per cent, respectively, Icria said.

The markets are expected to witness a year-on-year expansion of 18-20 per cent and 16-18 per cent, respectively, in the current fiscal year, it added.

The domestic market, on the other hand, is expected to see a stable growth of 6-8 per cent, while the emerging markets may log an 8-10 per cent rise in FY25, against 16-18 per cent in FY24, the rating agency said.

The revenue growth of the



sample set companies in the US market in FY24 has been supported by increased new product launches, product shortages in select therapeutic

segments, and healthy performance of complex generics (first to file), it stated.

"However, as the base effect plays out, growth is expected

to taper in FY25. While low-single digit pricing pressure in the US market is likely to sustain, Indian pharmaceutical companies remain focused on enhancing their revenue contribution from the complex generics in the US market," it stated.

Commenting on key risks being faced by the industry, Icria Assistant Vice President and Sector Head Mythri Macherla said the number of warning letters and import alerts issued by the USFDA to Indian drug firms have increased in the past year.

Less than 5% companies in India prepared to tackle cybersecurity risks: Cisco

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Less than 5 per cent of companies in India are ready to deal with cybersecurity risks even though an overwhelming number of them said their businesses are likely to be impacted by such threats in the next 12-24 months, according to a study.

The 2024 Cisco Cybersecurity Readiness Index, which was released on Thursday, found that only 4 per

cent of companies in India are ready to tackle today's threats, with 59 per cent of organisations falling into the "beginner or formative stages of readiness".

Globally, 3 per cent of companies are at a "mature stage", meaning they are prepared to handle cybersecurity risks, it said.

Cisco said while companies are building defences against these attacks, they are slowed down by their own overly com-



plex security postures that are dominated by multiple-point solutions.

The study is based on a survey of 8,136 private sector business leaders -- over 1,000 of them from India -- who have cybersecurity responsibilities in their organisations.

The study revealed that 82 per cent of the participants surveyed expect a cybersecurity incident to disrupt their business in the next 12-24 months.

"The cost of being unprepared can be substantial, as 74 per cent of respondents said

they experienced a cybersecurity incident in the last 12 months, and 55 per cent of those affected said it cost them at least USD 300,000," it said.

It further said the traditional approach of adopting multiple cybersecurity point solutions has not delivered effective results, as 88 per cent of respondents admitted that having multiple point solutions slowed down their team's ability to detect, respond, and recover

from incidents.

While companies are aware of cybersecurity risks, talent gap further intensifies the issue, it said. "Progress is being further hampered by critical talent shortages, with 91 per cent of companies highlighting it as an issue. In fact, 59 per cent of companies said they had more than 10 roles related to cybersecurity unfilled in their organisation at the time of the survey," the study noted.

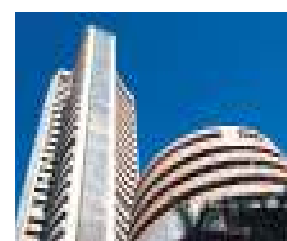
Markets end FY24 on buoyant note amid positive global cues

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended the last day of trade of the 2023-24 fiscal on a bullish note on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in power, auto and banking stocks amid a positive trend in global markets.

Extending its previous day's rally, the 30-share index jumped 655.04 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 73,651.35. During the day, it zoomed 1,194 points or 1.63 per cent to 74,190.31.

The NSE Nifty climbed 203.25 points or 0.92 per cent to end at 22,326.90.



In the 2023-24 financial year, the BSE benchmark jumped 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent, and the Nifty soared 4,967.15 points or 28.61 per cent.

From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 4 per

cent, and Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 3 per cent.

Shares of Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv jumped amid media reports that subsidiary Bajaj Housing Finance was planning to go public.

Nestle, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra were the other major gainers.

In contrast, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

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

Ayodhya, Varanasi attracting retail brands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With rising spiritual tourism, retail brands are expanding their presence in cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Amritsar, Puri, Tirupati, and Ajmer, and also offering products to cater to the needs of pilgrims, according to CBRE. Real estate consultant CBRE on Thursday released a report 'Decoding Real Estate through the Spiritual Tourism Lens', highlighting that retail chains are capitalising on the surge in spiritual tourism across 14 key cities in India.

The report identifies Amritsar, Ajmer, Varanasi, Katra, Somnath, Shirdi, Ayodhya, Puri, Tirupati, Mathura, Dwarka, Bodh Gaya, Guruvayur, and Madurai as key cities witnessing this retail boom.

The consultant noted that retail brands are strategically adapting their offerings in both established mall clusters and high-street locations to cater to the growing tourist population.

In Ayodhya, Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Raymonds, Market99, Pantaloons, Domino's, Pizza Hut, and Reliance Smart have opened their retail stores, the report said. Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Zudio, Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Burger King, Domino's, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Spencer's, Reliance smart, Croma and Reliance Digital are present in Varanasi.



Anshuman Magazine Chairman & CEO, India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, said, "The rapid expansion of spiritual tourism in India is driving the growth of the country's faith-based tourism market."

The government initiatives to promote tourism and improve

connectivity between pilgrimage sites are further boosting this growth, he added.

"The rise of online retail platforms offering easy access to faith-based products and services is also a key factor," Magazine said.

Retail brands across segments, including fashion &

apparel, food & beverage, hypermarkets, homeware & department stores, and consumer electronics brands, are expanding by tailoring the offerings to the pilgrim's needs.

Ram Chandnani, Managing Director, Advisory & Transaction Services, CBRE India, said, "Driven by the growing popularity of spiritual tourism, investors are flocking to capitalise on the market's potential. Guided by a commitment to cater to the unique needs of spiritual travellers, these investments aim to deliver high-quality accommodations, bolster infrastructure, safeguard heritage sites, and ultimately drive regional economic growth."



Actress Shriya Pilgaonkar, who has forever been a travel freak, gets candid with *The Pioneer* exclusively for our Travelogue segment, sharing her love for travelling, her travel partner, a recent trip, and more.

Shriya Pilgaonkar finds her travel inspiration in her ‘Ajoba’

TEJAL SINHA

The first thing that comes to mind when we say travelling? Excitement? Enjoyment? Happiness? There are numerous such pleasant emotions. The excitement of packing your bags and visiting a new area can give a person shivers while also making them forget their issues. Similarly, for Shriya Pilgaonkar, travelling is not a luxury but a necessity and something that makes her happy and rejuvenates her.

“Travelling to me is something that brings me closer to myself,” shares the *Crackdown* actress over an exclusive chat for our special weekly column of **Travelogue**. “It puts things into perspective, and I think as an actor, so much about acting is about life, experiences, and the rush. The sense of adventure that I experience when I travel is something that really keeps me going. I’m absolutely passionate about it, and I make sure to take time to travel whenever I can between work.” It seems like her grandfather has been her travel partner. And as we go on to ask her about it, she says he has always been her travel inspiration.

“He’s 85, and all of these years, he has managed to fulfill his dreams in more than 100 countries. What I love about him is that for him, it’s just not about checking off what’s on his bucket list; he is truly a curious person who has that sense of wonder. He knows so much, and he loves people and cultures. I’ve been fortunate to travel with him, not just as a child. As a child, we travelled to Rajasthan, Mussoorie, and several other places in India, and growing up, we went to Iceland together, which was beautiful, and we had also done a Mediterranean cruise together; it was a role reversal. When I grew up, I was the one who used to manage and organise everything. So I really like to travel with my grandfather because I think there’s such perspective, so many stories to share, and that’s

also something I really love about travelling: that I also love people, and there’s a sense of curiosity that even I have about human beings and their lives, and there’s so much you learn. It’s not just about other people but also about yourself when you are travelling.

Travelling with her grandfather is all about experiencing something new, and the duo always has a story to tell. Basically, her last long trip that she took was to Australia, and she feels fortunate to have visited Australia a number of times.

“It’s such a beautiful place, especially if you enjoy nature, adventure, and good food. Then it’s fantastic. I’ve done skydiving and scuba diving at the Great Barrier Reef, and I met some wonderful people there. It’s such an eclectic mix of art, culture, and fantastic food that I really enjoy. I especially love koala bears, so this time when I went, I also got to hold one of them, which was really cute.” But again, she really enjoys road trips, and in the future, she would love to go on a road trip as well. The best way that she likes to experience a place is by spending time with the locals through their food. For her, exploring local cuisine and street food makes her very excited, and of course, road trips are the best way to experience the energy of a place. *The Guilty Minds* actress is someone who enjoys wearing colourful clothes while she’s on vacation; of course, it depends on when she’s on a work trip. Well, that also makes for great pictures, but to her, more than pictures, “I really love to document my videos.

When I’m making videos, they are not generally for other people to see as much as they are for my digital scrapbook. I just like to make it because it’s fun to look back at it. But when I’m travelling my priority is to be in the moment, be present, and experience a place, not just be obsessed with what content I really want.” She feels there is no place like India when it comes to diversity in experiences while travelling. One place that she keeps running to every now and then is Landour, which is above Mussoorie. “I think mountains are healing for me, and they put so much into perspective. I just love mountain air, and I’m just a happier person up in

the hills (she laughs).

I love beaches as well, but mountains are so special that I keep going on solo trips. In fact, my first solo backpacking trip was in Japan, where I used all the money that I made on my first project and went on a very budget-friendly solo backpacking trip to see the cherry blossoms, and it was beautiful. Then, talking of India, I also love Kerala. I feel each and every part of the country is so unique and so diverse. I haven’t explored the north-east enough, so that is what I really want to do.” Recently, celebrating her grandpa’s travels to 100 countries, she and her whole family travelled to Borneo for a family trip. Every year, she makes sure that she and her family go on at least one or two trips. With having to cut off some time from work, she says Goa has always been that rejuvenation place for her. An adventure freak and a foodie that she is, she likes to explore local food and eat a lot of food, but at the same time, she wonders if there are any adventure activities that she can do. “I’ve always had some wonderful spiritual experiences while travelling especially when I am underwater or right up in the air.

I feel just like Shriya, not Shriya the actor, daughter, or friend. I feel that being close to nature is like being close to God. I don’t really think of travelling as ticking off my bucket list. It really depends on what I want to do, and sometimes I think a place calls out to me. I’ve been to Berlin, Prague, on the most impromptu travel plan, or recently, I went to Bikaner for Holi. It can sometimes be an impromptu thing, and my grandfather said to me that travelling is not really about money. Yes, money is important when you travel, but there’s so much that you can do and so many options, even today, to go on a budget-friendly trip. You just need to have that will,” shares the *Murder in Agonda* star, who believes in being in the present moment and experiencing life to the fullest when travelling. On a concluding note, she shares that over the years she’s enjoyed going with the flow when it comes to travelling, and leaving that space for magic. She also credits her mom, who is also an adventurous person, with pushing Shriya to travel, even on solo trips.



Travelouge

‘I wasn’t traumatised in *Shaitaan*, having experienced it already in *Vash*’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Shaitaan has proven to be Janki Bodiwala’s big hit recently. *Shaitaan* is a supernatural thriller that further demonstrates this Gujarati actress’s versatility in handling a variety of film genres. In a candid interview, the actress shares her knowledge on perfecting the art of remake, which we have exclusive access to the candid bytes and more!

“The script was written in a really balanced manner; my graph was improved much more in the remake. I swear to God, it ended up being a blessing for me! This time, I wasn’t traumatised because I had previously experienced the first one. Even though the movie had some really intense parts, the atmosphere was still really great. Everything felt normal to me, even if I was peeing in my trousers for a scene or hitting someone’s head on the wall. I wasn’t going overboard. Since the viewers were more affected by the

trauma, I was successful.”

She continues with some more thought-provoking observations, saying things like, “Post cut—we all start to giggle. The mood on the *Shaitaan* sets was like that. After such horrific events, it was a much-needed environment; otherwise, I would have gone into a trance. It was a first for me too.”

Most significant, adding to the same graph, is working with actors who have expertise. She could clearly remember, for instance, when she said, “These three seasoned actors were never late—not even a few minutes here or there. Such lengthy monologues would often be completed by R. Madhavan in two attempts, occasionally even on the first try. I was taken aback! I saw that he dislikes squandering the time of his team. However, Jyothika handled Angad and myself as if we were her own

children. She placed our pastry order! She would even bring candies for us.” She continues, “I don’t want to damage Ajay Devgn’s *Singham* persona, so don’t even get me started on him. The fact that Ajay sir was incredibly endearing to the children on the *Shaitaan* sets would surprise readers. Laughing and making jokes with our little boy on the sets was more his style than having thoughtful conversations! He doesn’t seem to be one of those actors in the business who likes to brag, as I also noticed. No, that isn’t his mannerism.”

The actress also recalled, “While doing the film in Hindi, it taught me a little more,” after pursuing commercial longevity after the film’s release. “For instance, you must not overemphasise dramatic moments! Subsequently, I had heard tales of Bollywood directors being extremely irrational while on set. My director, Vikas Bahl, exposed this fraud! On the *Shaitaan* sets, he never yelled or attempted to force someone to acknowledge him as the director. He didn’t even let us worry about it!”

The actress continues, revealing a few more behind-the-scenes details: “I won’t lie, there were times when I was afraid of certain situations. It was terrifying as hell to smash my younger brother’s skull against the wall in the movie! As a working actor, I could still feel the hurt. As a little boy, my co-actor simply asked me to go for it since he was so fluid. Incredible. In fact, I found it too hard to play the same character in a different genre again.”

Finally, she states, “Big names have come to my film’s screening, but I went crazy as soon as I saw Kartik Aaryan. I was genuinely touched when he approached me and said how well I had performed. Thank God, I have a video to save the memories for all time.”



Actress Janki Bodiwala, who was recently seen in *Shaitaan*, starring alongside Ajay Devgn, R. Madhavan, and Jyothika, speaks to *The Pioneer*, sharing some candid bytes and more in this exclusive chat.

Revitalise your beauty routine with neem tulsi in ayurvedic treatments

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in ancient holistic practices for skincare, with Ayurveda taking center stage. Ayurveda, a traditional Indian approach to medicine, emphasises the use of natural ingredients to promote overall well-being, including skincare. Among the plethora of herbs cherished in Ayurveda, Neem, and Tulsi stand out for their remarkable benefits in skincare.

The use of Neem, or Indian lilac, for treating common skincare issues such as inflammation and acne has been practised for thousands of years in India. This medicinal plant offers diverse skincare benefits, making its dark green leaves a valuable resource. Additionally, opting for toxin-free skincare products can further enhance the benefits of harnessing nature’s goodness for healthier skin.

Some of the skincare benefits of Neem are:

Exfoliating: Neem is renowned for its efficacy in addressing blackheads and whiteheads by eliminating impurities, dust, bacteria, and dead skin cells from pores. Moreover, its exfoliating properties aid in minimising enlarged pores. Utilising a scrub or cleanser infused with neem for facial cleansing, or applying a neem-based face mask, can effectively leverage these benefits.

Moisturising: The essential fatty acids and Vitamin E derived from neem leaves are swiftly absorbed by the skin, effectively moisturising dry and cracked areas. Incorporating Neem into your daily skincare routine creates a protective shield against environmental stressors, safeguarding the skin from moisture depletion.

Reducing Scars: Neem is reputed for its ability to expedite wound healing and diminish the visibility of scars. Its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory attributes not only help deter infections but also play a crucial role in mitigating scar development. By fostering a healing environment, Neem aids in reducing scar formation, promoting skin regeneration, and restoring skin health.

Toner: Neem acts as a natural skin toner, helping to tighten pores and improve skin texture. It can be used to balance oil production and reduce the occurrence of acne and blackheads.

Another marquee ingredient, Tulsi, also recognized as Holy Basil, holds an esteemed place in Ayurvedic medicine with a history spanning thousands of years, renowned for its multifaceted health advantages. Embedded

deeply in Hindu culture, it’s frequently cultivated in households for its spiritual significance and medicinal uses. Over time, Tulsi has garnered attention for offering an array of benefits for enhancing skin beauty and health, leading to its widespread incorporation into various skincare formulations.

Some of the skincare benefits of Tulsi are listed below:

Anti-Inflammatory and Antioxidant: Tulsi contains eugenol, which is known for its anti-inflammatory properties. Applying Tulsi-infused products to the skin can help reduce redness and irritation, making it beneficial for individuals with sensitive or inflamed skin conditions such as acne or eczema.

Anti-Bacterial: Tulsi is advantageous for managing acne owing to its antibacterial characteristics. Acne occurs when hair follicles in the skin become obstructed and become infected with bacteria. Utilizing antibacterial elements such as tulsi could be beneficial for individuals with acne-prone skin, aiding in the prevention of breakouts.

Anti-aging: Using Tulsi can help prevent wrinkles, fine lines, and sagging skin. Moreover, certain properties of tulsi, like its ethanolic and rosmarinic components, help maintain the skin’s moisture and suppleness by protecting hyaluronic acid from breaking down. They also prevent collagen fibers from degrading, which keeps the skin looking bright and reduces the chance of scarring.

Promotion of Collagen Production: Antioxidants in Tulsi stimulate collagen production in the skin. Collagen is a protein that provides structure and elasticity to the skin. By promoting collagen synthesis, Tulsi can help maintain skin firmness and reduce the appearance of wrinkles and sagging. Together, these Ayurvedic herbs present a harmonious synergy, offering a gentle yet effective approach to achieving radiant and balanced skin, echoing the timeless wisdom of Ayurvedic skincare practices.

(The author, Dr. Ushakiran, is the Head Doctor at Sadayush Ayurvedic Center.)



what's brewing?



Bollywood actress Raveena Tandon, inaugurated this year's biggest Ramzan expo, Daawat-e-Ramzan, hosted by entrepreneur Anam Mirza and her husband Asaduddin Mohd. Daawat-e-Ramzan, a festival of fashion, food and family time during Ramzan, is being held at Kings Palace, Mehdiapatnam, and will end on April 10, 2024.

● Raveena Tandon



Actress Amiksha Pawar, along with many other fashion lovers, graced the launch of the Desire designer exhibition at the Hotel Taj Krishna in Banjara Hills. The designer exhibition will end on March 30

● Amiksha Pawar

● Preethi

● Vasanth

● Punith and Pavan

● Aparna

● Rohitha Reddy



Television presenter Anasuya and singer Revanth grace the relaunch ceremony of Page 3 Luxury Salon and Makeover Studio, which aims to provide a journey of self-discovery, confidence, and pure indulgence

● Anasuya

● Lakshmi

● Shan

● Atina Jukkula



Virasat Art Publication presented a bulletin on the occasion of the Hindustan Files: 1757-1950. The event will end on April 7, 2024, at the Chitramoyee Gallery of State Art. The event is being jointly organised by the Government of Telangana.

Max Fashion for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Anand Ram Peddiraju, launched the brand's 70th store in the Telugu states.



FUN













REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

	1		2		3		4		
5									6
7					8				
9						10			
							11		
12	13			14				15	
					16				
17							18		
19									

SUDOKU

		3	4		5			
2				4		8		
6	8			7				4
		1		6			8	
		6	9		4	7		
	9			8		4		
5				9			2	8
	2		3					9
		6			5	4		

Yesterday's solution

6	7	5	8	3	2	4	1	9
3	1	2	4	7	9	8	6	5
9	8	4	5	6	1	3	2	7
8	2	3	1	5	7	6	9	4
1	6	7	2	9	4	5	3	8
5	4	9	6	8	3	2	7	1
7	5	8	3	1	6	9	4	2
4	3	1	9	2	5	7	8	6
2	9	6	7	4	8	1	5	3

Rules

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

ACROSS

1 Fish tank

7 Fewest

8 Narrow shelf

9 Ottawa is the capital of this country

10 Journey

12 Slightly hot

14 Thief

17 Sweeten a drink with this

18 A feeling of rage

19 Obstinate

4 Beneath

5 A watch's hands move in this direction

6 Not permanent

11 A red fruit used in salads

13 Correct

15 Start

16 A creature with nippers

DOWN

1 Once more

2 Messy, disorganised

3 Tumble over and over

SOLUTION

P	L	E	A	S	A	N	T	I
U	N	I	G	O	I	L	E	
R	O	I	S	T	U	R	T	L
C	E	S	N					X
H	U	R	I	S				
A	H							H
S	H	O	E	S				
D	O	C	T	R				
E	A							
D	O	C	T	R				
U	R	E						
T	E	X	A	M	I	N	E	D

'Tillu is expressive, but Siddhu holds his emotions, rest we are same'

K. RAMYA SREE

After cult success of 2022 film *DJ Tillu*, actor Siddu Jonnalagadda is back with its sequel to entertain the audience once again with his quirky dialogues and fun comedy.

While Radhika from *DJ Tillu* has become very popular, this time Lilly is said to take over Radhika in this installment directed by Mallik Ram.

With Anupama Parameswaran playing the female lead, the movie is making loud noise everywhere as the songs and videos released from the film have gone viral already.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the lead actor of the film, who is super excited and nervous about *Tillu Square*, spoke to the media persons here and

expressed confidence that *Tillu Square* will be fresh in terms of characterisation and story.

The second part too is a crime comedy. Both, Siddhu and Anupama are said to have equal screen presence in the film.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Siddhu expressed that, in real life, he thinks very similarly to Tillu.

"Tillu is a confused person who expresses himself freely while I hold my emotions inside. Playing such a role, keeping my spirits up, and sharing my perspective on the world was freeing. His confusions provide amusement for others," he shared.

Before going ahead with the interview, he expressed that he doesn't want the audience to compare *Tillu Square* with *DJ Tillu* while watching in theatres for a better movie experience.

To keep his character very authentic, the actor has not shot any other film since the first part was released, as they wanted to maintain the same looks of Tillu in both parts. He is not just a dedicated actor but also a dedicated writer too. For all his films, he is involved in the writing process, and for *Tillu Square*, he played a major role in writing. Siddhu feels writing his characters in the movie helps him understand the philosophy of a character better enhancing his

overall performance. He continued, "You can easily comprehend the beats, rhythms, and pauses, especially in a movie like *Tillu Square* where a talkative character plays a crucial role. Being a writer also helps one better comprehend the arc of a tale while editing. I got along well with our editor, Naveen Nooli. Right now, I want to develop stories that will advance my acting career."

Writing genius Trivikram has shared his piece of advice too for this film, as he is also one of the producers of *Tillu Square*, and Siddhu is thankful to Trivikram for his involvement, as his insights were very useful whenever he went in with the drafts of the scripts. Furthermore, he also expressed: "Though nothing is official yet, there are plans to turn Tillu into a franchise. Fortunately, I found a special point when I chose to create *Tillu Square*, and we proceeded. We'll have to wait and see how our ideas develop, but we have a few." However, he stressed that he will not jump into writing *Tillu 3* immediately and that he wants to work on a couple of projects first, where he is just the actor. "I want to showcase a gritty side to myself and write a serious story. The screenplay for Nandini Reddy's film is being written. It'll go on floors after Bommarillu Bhaskar's film. I want to wait and try genres," he concluded.

Actor Siddu Jonnalagadda, who has gained some mass traction with his stint in *DJ Tillu*, is back with the sequel to this superhit film. The star, speaks to *The Pioneer* ahead of the release, sharing some interesting tidbits about the film.

Sharwa looks his stylish best in *Manamey* first single

The first single from actor Sharwanand's 35th film *Manamey* was released on Thursday. Helmed by director Sriram Aditya and produced by People Media Factory, the film stars Krithi Shetty playing the female lead. The first single, *Ika Na Maate*, has Hesham Abdul Wahab do wonders not only with his music but also with his voice. It's entertaining to see Sharwanand perform with such

style and elegance. The hook step, in particular, gets young people excited. Sharwa looks stylish like never before in this song. The director introduced Sharwanand in a sleek avatar through this song. Tipped to be a unique family entertainer, the movie also stars the child artist Vikram Aditya in a pivotal role. Popular technician Prawin Pudi is the editor and Jonny Shaik is the art director. The dialogues for the movie are provided by Arjun Carthyk, Tagore, and Venky.

Allu Arjun's wax figure at Madame Tussauds Dubai was unveiled

Actor Allu Arjun is setting new benchmarks in the Indian cinema. Be it in films or in his personal life, he always sets inspiring goals for his fans and others. Recently, it was made official that his wax figure at Madame Tussauds Dubai is being made.

The actor took to his social media to announce that his statue is finally being unveiled on Thursday. The actor, who left Dubai with his wife and kids three days ago, shared a picture on his social media where he expressed how excited he was about the launch. He

called this a "milestone moment for every actor." Recently, the actor has won National Award for his performance in *Pushpa The Rise*, becoming the first Telugu actor to bag this award, apart from touching 25 million followers on Instagram and becoming the first Telugu actor to achieve that feat. With this wax statue of his, now the actor has only added more feathers to his cap. Allu Arjun is now busy with the shooting of *Pushpa: The Rule*, which will be released this year.

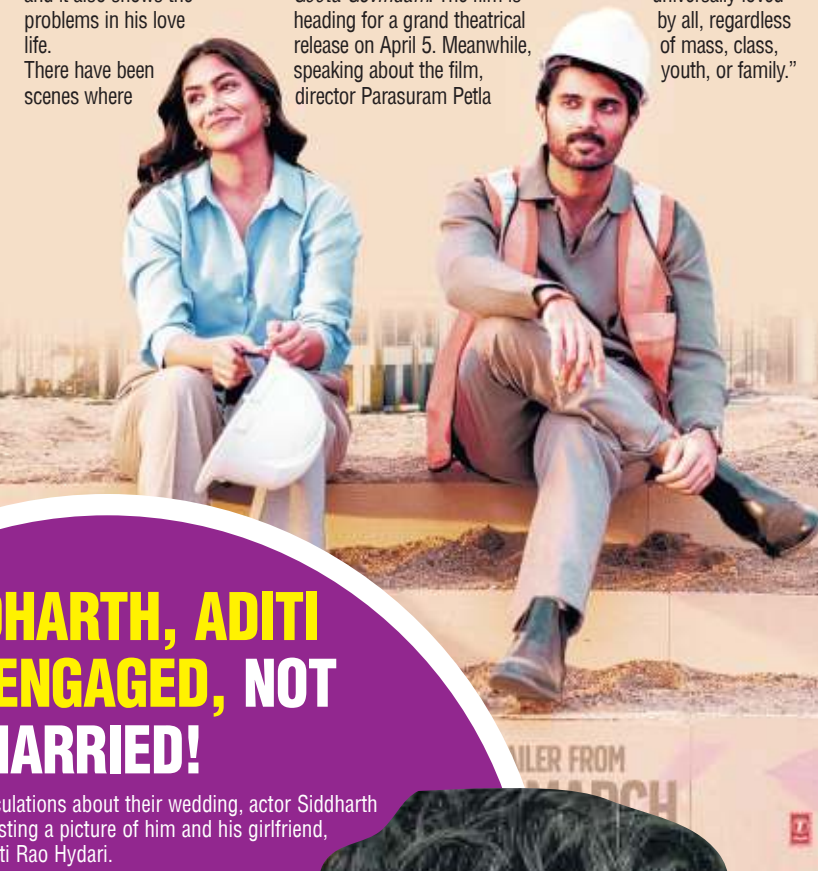


Family Star trailer hints at a wholesome entertainer

Actor Vijay Deverakonda and Mrunal Thakur starrer *Family Star* had its theatrical trailer launched in Hyderabad and Tirupati on Thursday. Directed by Parasuram Petla, the film is backed by Dil Raju. The trailer shows Vijay and Mrunal in two different roles. Vijay impresses the audience with his massy and classy looks. The trailer hints that Vijay is a thorough family man and it also shows the problems in his love life. There have been scenes where

the duo worked in a foreign country, all dressed up in formals, and in India, donning a massy lungi look. The chemistry between Vijay and Mrunal was impressive in the trailer, and so were the dialogues. It seems like this Summer the film will impress the audience as a wholesome entertainer and it was nice to watch Vijay play simple boy from a middle class family without much hullabaloo after *Geeta Govindam*. The film is heading for a grand theatrical release on April 5. Meanwhile, speaking about the film, director Parasuram Petla

said, "Every Telugu audience and family will remember this movie, Vijay and Mrunal for years. This movie is like an eye feast." Dil Raju shared, "Parasuram designed Vijay's character very carefully imbibing class, mass, youthful, entertainment, and emotion. Vijay's character is very special. The lighter vein comedy in Parasuram's films is impressive. *Family Star* has a story that is universally loved by all, regardless of mass, class, youth, or family."



SIDDHARTH, ADITI RAO ENGAGED, NOT MARRIED!

Putting an end to all the speculations about their wedding, actor Siddharth took to his social media posting a picture of him and his girlfriend, Aditi Rao Hydari.

However, the speculations were somewhat true. Although the couple didn't get married at a temple in Wanaparthy, they got engaged at that temple.

Siddharth posted a picture of them flaunting their engagement rings. He captioned: "She said yes. ENGAGED." This post has now gone viral, with people from all corners congratulating them for their new beginnings in life. As the couple always kept their relationship a private affair, this announcement made netizens very happy.

No further details about the wedding is made official at the time of writing this article.



Sasivadane all set for its grand release on April 19

Following his acclaimed performance in *Palasa 1978*, Rakshit Atturi returns to the screen in *Sasivadane*, a charming romantic entertainer co-starring Komalee. This delightful collaboration is helmed by writer-director Saimohan Ubbana and produced by Ahiteja Bellamkonda, marking a significant partnership between AG Film Company and SVS Studios Pvt. Ltd. Mark your calendars for April 19th, 2024, as *Sasivadane* prepares for a grand worldwide release. The film's captivating teaser, trailer, and songs have already piqued the interest of moviegoers, and the makers are planning exciting promotional activities to further heighten anticipation. Adding to the excitement, the latest song, *Godavari Atu Vaipo*, has just been released. Kittu Vissapragada's beautiful lyrics blend seamlessly with Saravana Vasudevan's heartfelt and youthful music, creating a melody that resonates with the audience. Anudeep Dev's enchanting vocals, complemented by the chorus of Vasa Pavani, Lakshmi Meghana, Maneesha Padranki, and Rachita, bring the song to life. The picturesque backdrop of the Godavari River adds visual splendor to the musical experience.

Anudeep Dev's captivating background score immerses viewers in the story, while Saravana Vasudevan's soulful tunes evoke a range of emotions. Cinematographer Shrie SaiKumar Daara's stunning visuals capture the scenic locations, enhancing the film's aesthetic appeal. Rangasthalam Mahesh, Sriraman, Jabardasth Bobby, Praveen Yandamuri, and Deepak Prince play pivotal roles in the film, which is enriched with youthful and romantic dialogues.

TOLLYWOOD WELCOMES SIVAM MEDIA: A NEW ERA IN FILM PRODUCTION



March 28 marks the auspicious launch of Tollywood's newest production company, 'Sivam Media', owned by senior journalist Siva Mallala. The grand inauguration took place on Thursday, graced by the presence of renowned figures including actor Ali, producer-director Praveena, and Anil Kadiyala, who unveiled the logo and banner of 'Sivam Media'. Expressing his delight, Ali remarked, "Siva has been like a brother to me for the past 20 years. Witnessing his journey from humble beginnings to establishing his own production banner fills me with immense joy."

Good films matter over number of films for Aayushi Patell

PNS | HYDERABAD

We recently wrote about *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo* director Ramakhanth Reddy and actor Vishva Karthikeya and their reasons for making the film, which is all set hit big screens on March 29. Produced by Nani Movie Works and Raamaa Creations, the film stars Aayushi Patell as the female lead and speaking about her role in the film, she expressed, "My role will be very new. There are multiple shades in my character. It is not like a regular heroine role. Each scene will give the audience a new experience. My character gets one opinion in the interval and another in the climax." The actress is making her debut into

films with *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo*. Despite getting opportunities for three other projects before this film, she didn't accept them because she didn't want to perform any adult scenes like kissing and exposing. "I got opportunities in three projects before *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo* was released. I don't like lip-lock scenes and exposing on screen. That's why I didn't accept many movies. I am choosing movies where acting is important. I did not enter the industry to make money. It doesn't matter if I do only a few films. All I want is to do good films."

The movie was majorly shot in Kadapa, and interestingly, no set was erected for this film, and all the shooting was done in live locations. Having shot there for many days, Aayushi finds the people of Kadapa very supportive. She further added, "The story was narrated to me for more than two hours. Ramakanth has great clarity. Our director never says cut. It's because if he says cut, the expressions at the end will be missed. Our director used to be very jovial on the sets. RR took the movie to another level."



CAPTAIN PANDYA: IN SEARCH OF A SOUNDING BOARD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's just two games into the tournament but Hardik Pandya already seems to have loads to worry about in his second stint with Mumbai Indians, the leadership part not quite falling in place thus far. The exuberant all-rounder, arguably one of the biggest match-winners in the current national set-up, has been, to put it mildly, struggling in the IPL despite being back in the team that shaped him, the one he considers his home. It's been anything but homely ever since Pandya was named captain, replacing the much-loved Rohit Sharma. The results have only made matters worse. Two matches, two losses, some baffling tactics, his own form not being the brightest spot and Pandya has his back against the wall within the first week of the tournament.

There is no imminent threat to the 30-year-old's captaincy as the MI owners, after bringing him on board in IPL's biggest one way transfer, would not want to take any decision in haste. After all, MI have always been slow starters, who take a while to find their rhythm, and it would be a bit presumptive to dismiss Pandya this early in the tournament given that he is, after all, leading a five-time champion side. But a team that is so desperate for success after three barren seasons perhaps cannot also look away from the fact that Pandya is making mistakes and he doesn't seem to have a sounding board for course correction. He had a solid one during his time as Gujarat Titans skipper when Ashish Nehra would always be in his ears. "I didn't try to convince Hardik to stay back," Nehra had said



with a dead pan expression in Ahmedabad in the pre-season press conference when Shubman Gill formally took charge as captain. Nehra is widely seen as the back-room strategist, the one who actually calls the shot

through the captain. He is often seen pacing along the boundary line like an overzealous football manager, trying to grab the attention of his captain and players, and shouting down instructions when he gets it.

"It was an open secret in Gujarat Titans camp that Ashu (that's how old teammates address Nehra) was the strategist and Hardik was the executor," a former India teammate, who has played with Nehra, tried to dissect one of

the most interesting characters in Indian cricket. "Hardik was good at implementing Ashu's vision. Ashu is more of a football manager in the garb of a cricket coach. He is constantly hovering around the boundary line with some advice. He believes, if a skipper is willing to commit, he can prepare the recipe for success. "Now, the same Ashu worked for RCB with Virat Kohli but it didn't work. Shubman Gill is also a new skipper, who like Hardik, needs a mentor at the start of his leadership journey and who better than Ashu," the notable player of yesteryears said. So, leading Gujarat to the title was a relatively less complicated task for Pandya but MI is a different beast where there are multiple points of leadership. For Pandya, return to Mumbai has been like coming from a nuclear family to a joint set-up,

where one needs to adjust with queries, demands and suggestions of a number of people. While a big think-tank helps to close ranks off the field when the campaign is going haywire but on field, no one quite knows who to make eye contact with in the dug-out. It would have helped when Pandya made some rather baffling calls like the one to let Tim David, who finds it difficult to hit when pace is taken off deliveries, to go ahead of him in the match against GT. And then none can decipher just why he delayed Jasprit Bumrah's introduction for three overs when SRH batters went on a rampage on Wednesday night. The argument can be that Pandya wanted to save Bumrah for Heinrich Klaasen but but the South African was already set by the time Bumrah was brought into the attack.

To be fair to Pandya, not having an enforcer like Suryakumar Yadav, who is injured, at number three and missing two international bowlers in Dilshan Madushanka and Jason Behrendorff have affected the team's balance. But what has baffled everyone is Pandya's own batting approach. In the years 2015, 17, 19 and 20, the four editions when he won the IPL with MI, Pandya's strike rates were 180.64, 156.25, 191.42 and 178.98 respectively. He would come at the back-end and traumatised bowlers with his aggressive strokes. But moment he became Gujarat Titans skipper, his strike-rate dropped to 131.27 and 136.76 in two seasons. During the first season (2022), when his team won, David Miller and Rahul Tewatia were finishing games and last season, Gill alone did the heavy lifting with 890 runs in 2023.



Foreign players were frustrated by KKR coach style of functioning: Wiese

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several foreign cricketers in Kolkata Knight Riders were frustrated by head coach Chandrakant Pandit's "militant" style of functioning during the previous edition of the IPL, former South Africa and Namibia all-rounder David Wiese, who played for the franchise last year, has claimed. The 38-year-old all-rounder, who played three IPL games for KKR in 2023, said foreign cricketers weren't happy at being tutored on how to behave or what to wear by the coach. "He (Pandit) is known in India as a very militant type of coach. He is very strict, very disciplinarian that type of stuff. Sometimes in franchise cricket, when you have overseas guys, who've played all over the world, they don't need anyone coming and telling them how they need to behave, what they need to wear and what they need to do the whole time. So, that was tough," said Wiese on the podcast 'Hitman for Hire: A year in the life of a franchise cricketer' recently. Pandit took charge as KKR's head coach after New Zealander Brendon McCullum quit the job in 2022. The much-admired coach, who played five Tests for India, coached Vidarbha to successive Ranji Trophy titles in 2018 and 2019. He later guided Madhya Pradesh to its maiden Ranji title in 2022. Wiese, who was part of the Namibia side that played the 2022 T20 World Cup, said he saw players unhappy with

Pandit's style of coaching. "...He liked to do things a certain way and that didn't sit well with certain players. It caused a little bit of tension in the changing room. "Guys were frustrated, there was a lot that changed over the last couple of years (when McCullum was around) and the new coach brought in some new things that he thought would bring success to us," Wiese, who first played the IPL in 2015, said. Wiese added he wasn't too bothered about the environment around him. "I'm like 'listen it's your circus, you run the show. End of the day, I am here just to play. If you tell me to do this, I'll do it. I'm not the guy who's going to bump heads or anything. But there are certain players who are a bit more stubborn than me," he said. Two-time champions KKR had a disappointing season last year finishing seventh and Wiese said he felt frustrated because he didn't get more opportunities to showcase his talent. "...That frustration was more because of the fact that I played those games. I didn't really get the opportunity to do much. "I did hit a couple of sixes but didn't really get the opportunity to showcase my skills there, and never got picked again in the team that was struggling with players," he added. "I think if I hadn't played a single game it would've been fine but the fact that I played three games, had a taste, did relatively well and then didn't get another chance in a team that is struggling, that was the more frustrating part."

IPL 17 opening day registers record breaking viewership: Broadcaster

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The 17th edition of the Indian Premier League opened to blockbuster viewership numbers with 16.8 crore viewers tuning in to watch the season's first game between Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru on March 22, the tournament's official broadcaster said on Thursday. Disney Star said the opening day also registered a watch-

time of 1276 crore minutes -- the highest-ever for the first day of any season. The watch-time minutes are a compilation of the time spent by each viewer in watching the game. The 17th season of IPL also witnessed the highest-ever peak TV concurrency for an opening day, with 6.1 crore viewers watching the broadcast simultaneously on the Disney Star network. "Disney Star had recorded 870

crore minutes on the IPL's opening day in 2023. In comparison to the previous edition, there is a growth of 16 per cent in TV consumption," the company stated. Defending champions Chennai Super Kings defeated Royal Challengers Bengaluru by six wickets in the season-opener in Chennai. "This growth is a reaffirmation of the incomparable capacity of Live Cricket to aggregate audiences

on TV and provides a blockbuster start to the tournament. We will continue to enrich the magic of one of the world's biggest sporting events to take forward the launch momentum and deliver unprecedented viewership," a Star Sports spokesperson said in a press release. The channel said that the record-breaking TV viewership on the opening day comes on the back of an

array of programmes in the lead-up to the 17th season which attracted more than 24.5 crore viewers till a week prior to the start of the tournament. In the digital space, JioCinema clocked 11.3 crore viewers on the first day of the IPL. The streamer claimed that it registered a 51 per cent jump over day one of IPL 2023. The total watch time on JioCinema on day 1 was 660 crore minutes.

Surya might take a few more days to get match fit: BCCI source

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World's number one T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav will skip a few more IPL matches as he continues to recover from a sports hernia surgery with the National Cricket Academy (NCA) keeping a watch on his progress. Yadav, who plays for Mumbai Indians, has been missing in action in the league and his team has lost both its matches so far. "Surya is making very good progress and very soon he will be back playing for MI. However, he might have to sit out for a few more games, having missed the first two," a BCCI source said. While MI is missing Yadav, the BCCI doesn't want to take any chances with the big-hitter's fitness as he is expected to play a huge role in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the USA and the West Indies in June. "For BCCI, the main concern is if he is on course for World T20 which he is. Obviously he will play for MI but after a sports hernia surgery, he can't be rushed," the source said. The 33-year-old often draws comparisons with retired South African superstar A B de Villiers for his range of shots. He has a superb strike rate of 171.55 in the format. Yadav has appeared in 60 T20 Internationals for India and has 2141 runs, including four hundreds.

Perplexed by Bumrah getting just one over till 13th over: Smith

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Left perplexed by Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya's tactics in the record-breaking IPL loss to Sunrisers Hyderabad, former Australia captain Steve Smith has said he cannot fathom why premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah bowled just six deliveries up until the 13th over of the match. In a stunning display of power-hitting, Sunrisers Hyderabad posted the highest ever IPL total of 277/3 before clinching a 31-run victory over an equally aggressive Mumbai Indians on Wednesday night. Bumrah was the second-most economical bowler in the match, after SRH captain Pat Cummins (2/35), conceding 36 runs in his four overs which did not yield any



wicket. "I was perplexed with some of their bowling changes in the first innings for Mumbai. Bumrah bowled in the fourth over, he went for 5 and then we didn't see him again till the 13th over when they were on 173," Smith told host broadcaster 'Star Sports'. "All the damage had been

done, you needed your best bowler to be coming back and take some wickets in that period and I think they missed a trick there bringing him back only in the 13th over," he pointed out. "I think he got a few things wrong, and that was the main one for me. I mean you can't have one of the best bowlers in the world bowling one over." Smith said Bumrah's late reintroduction into the attack rendered him ineffective. "When the ball is going around like that, you've just got to bring your best bowler back earlier than you would have liked. It's just about adapting on the go and I'd have almost bowled Bumrah out by the 15th, 16th over, try to get some wickets, if he gets wickets, you slow the rate down anyway.

Never thought of becoming a cricketer: Burger

PTI ■ JAIPUR

South African left-arm fast bowler Nandre Burger never aspired to be a cricketer but chose to take up the sport as "it was a free way to study". In 2014, it was through a cricket trial that Burger got admission to University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) with a full scholarship to pursue a psychology major. He has never looked back since. Burger, 28, now is an all-format pacer for South Africa, having made his national team debut in December last year. His performances for South Africa earned him a Rs 50 lakh contract with Rajasthan Royals. He also played for Joburg Super Kings in SA20 last month.

"Sounds strange, right. WITS offered a scholarship for those who played cricket. I thought it was cool. I didn't want to be a cricketer, but I was getting a free way to study, so I thought, why not? Cricket was actually my back-up to academics (laughs)," Burger told ESPNcricinfo. He made his IPL debut in RR's 20-run win over Lucknow Super Giants here on March 24. But the journey wasn't easy for the lanky left-arm pacer. He tried his hand at tennis and squash before turning to cricket because of a back injury. Burger has since recovered from the injury. It was his university coach Neil Levenson who saw a potential fast bowler in him for the national team.

Team management message to go out and express yourself worked wonders: Abhishek

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Being given the freedom to "go out and express" was the key factor in Sunrisers Hyderabad's record-shattering batting performance against Mumbai Indians, said the home side's batter Abhishek Sharma. Records tumbled as SRH batters went on the rampage against Mumbai Indians to post the highest IPL total of 277 for 3 and then winning the match by 31 runs on

Wednesday night. It was scintillating exhibition of power-hitting from SRH opener Travis Head (62 off 24) and number three Sharma (63 off 23) with the latter registering his team's record for the fastest fifty in IPL. Heinrich Klaasen (80 not out off 34 balls) provided the fireworks towards the end to help SRH break an 11-year-old record. The previous highest total in IPL was 263 for 5 scored by Royal Challengers Bangalore in



2013. "To be honest I didn't realise that it was the fastest fifty for SRH and for this year. I just wanted to go and express myself and after getting out I realised that it was the quickest. I enjoyed it," said 'Man of the Match' Sharma. "I think the message was pretty much simple for all the batters in the meeting we had before this match. 'Everyone just go and express yourself'. That's a very positive message if you get it from your captain

and coach. That's really supportive for all the batters." Sharma and Head stitched 68 runs off just 22 balls for the second wicket for SRH. "I was batting with Travis and he is one of my favourite batters. I really enjoyed batting with him," Sharma said. Sharma said despite putting a mammoth total on the board, it wasn't a cakewalk for SRH as MI came pretty close. Tilak Varma (64 off 34 balls) took the game deep with a

high-quality knock, comprising half-a-dozen sixes and, towards the end, Tim David (42 not out off 22) tried his best but it was not enough. "When Tilak Varma, Hardik bhai and even Tim David were batting, we were still a bit, I won't say worried but concerned. The way they were playing it was very good but we knew our bowlers were very much prepared for this kind of situation and they executed really well," Sharma said.

RCB, KKR eye course correction to add momentum to campaign

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Victory in their respective previous games might have eased the initial nerves but imperfections remain, hence Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders will eye a quick course correction to add steam to their campaign in an IPL 2024 match here on Friday. The Royal Challengers defeated Punjab Kings by four wickets, while the Knight Riders elbowed out Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs to garner some early points. But entering the points table has not really eased some of the worries -- particularly pertaining to the top and middle-order batting. The Bengaluru dugout might be a happy space after star

batter Virat Kohli made a classy fifty on an unusually gripping Chinnaswamy pitch while chasing 177 against Punjab the other night, but that's only one part of the story. Skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar are yet to hit the overdrive, and for the win against PBKS they had to rely on the last-minute cameos of Dinesh Karthik and 'Impact Player' Mahipal Lomror. The Kolkatans have a much more capable bowling unit, at least on paper, and such a collectively underwhelming effort by frontline batters might push RCB into deep troubles against them. Once they iron out that rough edges, RCB can look at their bowling unit that still needs to fill a couple of unticked boxes



despite good outings by pacers Mohammed Siraj and Yash Dayal against Punjab. Pacer Alzarri Joseph continues to be profligate and his figures

-- 0/38, 1/43 -- might prompt the RCB think-tank to bring in England left-arm quick Reece Topley, who has impressive white-ball skills, in place of the

West Indian for this match. The Knight Riders offer a strikingly similar plot. Their top and middle-order consisting of captain Shreyas

Iyer, Venkatesh Iyer, Sunil Narine and Nitish Rana malfunctioned against SRH at the Eden Gardens. It required a combined effort from impact sub Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell -- the 6, 7, 8 -- for them to post a competitive total. Shreyas, who is central to their batting plans, was dismissed for a two-ball duck, but the return to Chinnaswamy might give him a sense of relief as he had fruitful outings here in white-ball cricket in his last two innings. The elegant right-hander made an unbeaten 128 against the Netherlands in last year's World Cup before making a 53 against Australia in the fifth T20I in December. In bowling, Narine redeemed himself with a frugal spell (1/19) after a modest effort

with the bat, but pacer Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravarthy failed to impress, leaking over 50 runs in their four overs. The KKR think-tank might not be unduly worried as their campaign is still at a nascent stage, but they would like to see the first-choice pacer and spinner finding their range at the earliest. But it is unlikely that the Knights will make changes to their eleven for this match, unless they want to give a go to promising leg-spinner Suyash Sharma, who showed fine form during KKR's pre-season matches. Squads: Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai,

Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan. Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mubeen Ur Rahman.

