

Trisha will join *Vishwambhara* sets
IN APRIL

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja had then passed an order directing the concerned superintendent of Tihar Jail to permit Kavitha to have



It is daughters' time in TG

Kavitha, Vijayalaxmi and Kavya keep their fathers on their toes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

It seems it is the time of daughters now as they are influencing their fathers in politics. BRS MLC Kalyakuntla Kavitha, GHMC Mayor Gadwala Vijayalaxmi and Dr Kadiam Kavya are keeping their fathers on their toes in Telangana politics.

Kavitha is in Tihar jail on remand in connection with the Delhi liquor scam and it is making her father and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao to think twice to take decisions these days. Chandrasekhar Rao became dull with his daughter's episode and is not acting dynamically even as Lok Sabha elections are fast approaching. Moreover, the party leaders quitting the BRS party are



making allegations against Kavitha in regard to the Delhi liquor scam. It has become an embarrassment to Kavitha's father KCR at the time of Lok Sabha elections.

On the other hand, GHMC Mayor Gadwala Vijaya Laxmi made her father and BRS Secretary General K Keshava Rao to take a decision to quit the BRS party and join the Congress party. It is said none other than her brother K Viplav Kumar said that his father

took a decision to change the party with the pressure from his sister Vijayalaxmi. He demanded his sister Vijayalaxmi to join the Congress by tendering resignation to the Mayor's post. He alleged that CM Revanth Reddy has been trying to split their family. He made it clear that he will continue in the BRS party only.

Former Minister and Station Ghanpur MLA Kadiam Srihari's daughter Kadiam

Kavya, who got Warangal Lok Sabha ticket from the BRS party, addressed a letter to the BRS party on Thursday stating that she was withdrawing from contesting the election from the BRS party. She also decided to quit the BRS party to join the Congress. However, she is not only quitting the BRS party but also made her father take a decision to quit the BRS.

AICC incharge general secretary Deepa Das Munshi and party leaders went to Kadiam Srihari's residence and invited Srihari and his daughter Kavya to join the Congress. It is learnt that Srihari would contest MP elections from Warangal and Kavya will contest from Station Ghanpur after Kadiam Srihari tenders resignation to his Station Ghanpur MLA position.

'No exit poll from 7 am of Apr 19 to 6.30 pm of June 1'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission has issued a notification banning the conduct, publication or publicising of exit polls between 7.00 am of April 19 and 6.30 pm of June 1 when votes will be cast for the Lok Sabha and four state assembly polls.

The notification issued on Thursday also made it clear that under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, displaying any election matter including results of any opinion poll or any other poll survey, in any electronic media, would be prohibited during the 48-hour period ending with the time fixed for the conclusion of the poll.



KK is second leader to say he wants to die in Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS party's secretary general K Keshava Rao aka KK made it clear to the BRS party chief and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao that he would join the Congress party as he wants to die while staying in the Congress. However, KK is yet to join the Congress. KK said that he will reveal the date of his joining the Congress soon. He said that he worked for the Congress for 53 years but he worked only for 13 years for the BRS. KK met Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Friday by going to the latter's residence along with DCC president Rohin Reddy.

However, former PCC president Dharmapuri Srinivas aka DS also stated that he would die as a Congressman a couple



In fact, both DS and KK joined the BRS party, quitting the Congress and becoming Rajya Sabha members in the BRS. However, DS did not continue the camaraderie with BRS Chief KCR and remained silent while staying in the party. A couple of years ago, DS seriously tried to join the Congress, but things did not work in his favour.

of years ago. However, the Congress did not give a green signal to DS though DS tried seriously to join the Congress party then. Now, DS remains silent as his health is not cooperating to be in politics.

In fact, both DS and KK joined the BRS party, quitting the Congress and becoming Rajya Sabha members in the BRS. However, DS did not con-

tinue the camaraderie with BRS Chief KCR and remained silent while staying in the party. A couple of years ago, DS seriously tried to join the Congress, but things did not work in his favour.

But KK succeeded in this regard unlike DS as he got a green signal from the Congress party. KK may join the Congress party soon.

Make use of social media extensively

Deepa Das Munshi tells Cong leaders

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC incharge general secretary Deepa Das Munshi appealed to the party leaders and cadre to use social media extensively and publicise the works done in the Congress' Praja Palana. She also appealed to the party leaders and cadre to take the anti-people works of PM Modi and former CM KCR to the people. While participating in TPCC Campaign Committee's meeting held at Gandhi Bhavan on Friday, Deepa said that the party leaders and cadre have to take the campaign programmes up to booth level. An action plan should be prepared in a manner that the campaign issues are discussed in the social media, she said.



Deepa said that the AICC manifesto would be announced on April 6 in Tukkuguda public meeting in which Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjuna Kharge would participate. She said that the AICC will prepare the campaign programmes in the name of Paanch Nyay. The party leaders and cadre have to take the Paanch Nyay issues to ground level by translating them into Tellaugu.

FOR 'BHOOMI PUTRA' KHARGE

Winning LS poll battle prestigious in Karnataka

PNS ■ BENGALURU

For Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge, who calls himself "Bhoomi Putra" of Karnataka, the coming Lok Sabha elections in the state is another prestigious battle of sorts in less than a year.

With the Congress winning only one seat in the 2019 general elections in Karnataka, his task is now cut out.

A strong show by the Congress in his home state is bound to boost the veteran leader's stock not just in his party but in the opposition INDIA bloc as well, according to a political analyst.

Days before the Assembly elections in Karnataka in May last year, the octogenarian



leader had sought to strike an emotional chord with voters, exhorting them to take pride in the fact that he, as a "Bhoomi Putra" of Karnataka, had been made the AICC president.

Kharge was credited in part with playing a key role in keeping factional feuds in the party at bay back then and saw to it that the outfit faced the

polls unitedly.

The Congress went on to score a landslide victory, winning 135 seats in the 224-member Assembly, ousting the BJP from power, strengthening Kharge's hands at the national level in no small measure.

According to political observers, Kharge is sure to put his might behind the party campaign for Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka, one of the three states where it is in power.

Congress in the state is mainly banking on the implementation of five guarantee schemes to woo the voters, and also leverage the 'Kharge factor' to widen its reach, particularly with Dalits and oppressed classes.

Velchela is most favoured among Cong Karimnagar cadre

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress is scouting for the potential candidate to contest in Karimnagar. Names of three persons Velchela Rajender Rao, Algi Praveen Reddy and Teenmaar Mallanna alias Chintapandu Naveen are doing rounds.

Of these three, Velchela Rajender Rao has an edge not only due to local status but also due to his bon homie with all communities. Rajender Rao is son of late Velchela Jagapathi Rao, one of the most influential persons in Karimnagar. Even to this day, Karimnagar people are aware that former CM KCR used to give importance to Velchela family.

Algi Praveen Reddy was promised a ticket but the Congress is being called out for social injustice in Telangana.

Sources said that even Congress high command was angry over all Reddy names being listed among the candidates.

Moreover, Algi is hardly known outside Husnabad. It is almost like pitching a non-local. On the other hand, giving ticket to Teenmaar Mallanna is serving as a win to Bandi Sanjay on the platter. First of all, he is an outsider and is known to not be in the good books of ecosystem players, be it builders or business and are worried about being blackmailed. Secondly, BJP candidate Bandi Sanjay has helped Mallanna and his family when he was jailed by the KCR regime. Sources close to Sanjay said, if Mallanna is given the ticket, it is almost like making the election unanimous and the Congress might as well not

field a candidate. "Both BRS candidate B Vinod Kumar and Mallanna are outsiders. It is going to be a local and non-local competition. What happened in Kamareddy where two non-locals KCR and Revanth Reddy, will be repeated in Karimnagar," sources said. On the other hand, BJP is sort of worried about Velchela Rajender Rao getting the ticket due to the influence he has on Karimnagar. Velchela, has support of Congress MLAs of Mankoduru, Vemulawada, Husnabad and Choppadandi. Velamas of Karimnagar are bored with Vinod Kumar and they might look beyond their community to vote. Until Ponnamm Prabhakar or Gangula Kamalakara came in, only Velamas used to win the elections.

Devising a Winning Strategy in TN

PM Modi interacts with BJP workers

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday interacted with BJP workers through the NaMo app and discussed field-work at the booth level for the Lok Sabha polls with them, encouraging them to devise a strategy for the party to win the elections.

Discussing ways to win the election at the Enathu Booth Valimaiyana Booth (My booth is the strongest) programme, he encouraged the party workers to strive towards ensuring victory for the BJP and NDA candidates.

"I understand you are facing a paucity of time owing to the general election scheduled for

April 19 in Tamil Nadu. You hardly have 15-16 days left (since election campaigning ends 48 hours before polling day). Organise yourselves well, connect with the voters, highlight our achievements and hold tiffin or lunch meetings amongst you to discuss the next step," the prime minister said.

Rs 5,575 crore Yasagani Rythu...

Continued from page 1

As announced by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the new government has made Rythu Bandhu payments to nearly 80 per cent of the farmers within the first hundred days.

The government, which made payments starting from one acre to two or three acres, gave this assistance to all farmers with up to five acres of land in March.

Government sources said that Yasangi Rythu Bandhu payments were made as per the previous government

details. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has clarified on several occasions that there would be no Rythu Bandhu for mounds, hills, roads and ventured lands as given by the previous government.

The Chief Minister has already directed the Agriculture Department to prepare a plan to benefit all the deserving farmers without extravagance and misappropriation of government funds. Sources said that the state government was determined to implement the Rythu Bharosa scheme soon.

Suitable..

Continued from page 1

He asked the PEC to include the pending works with the Centre in the manifesto while giving good campaign to Paanch Nyay which were mentioned in the AICC manifesto. He asked the PEC to give advice to the manifesto committee which is working under the leadership of D Sridhar Babu. He asked the PEC to appoint Assembly and Parliament incharges to take up campaign programmes.

"It is proud moment for us that the national leadership praised the Telangana model saying that it is good for the nation.

We have to win majority seats in the State.

Rs 3-4 cr per constituency set aside to address drinking water crisis

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, while speaking to the media after the PEC meeting at Gandhi Bhavan here on Friday, said: "We have sanctioned funds amounting to three to four crore rupees for each constituency for the prevention of water crisis."

He said: "To provide drinking water, for every constituency Rs 1 crore; if needed, Rs 3-4 crore funds are being sanctioned to get drinking water, to dig borewells through the planning department".

Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswarao said that 10-15 tmc would be drawn from Karnataka for meeting drinking water needs, after the Chief Minister's talks with his

counterpart.

Bhatti condemned KTR's language. He said, "We have given Rythu Bandhu money to all the farmers who have less than five acres. In all, 5,575 crore rupees have been deposited into the accounts of 65 lakh farmers in 100 days of rule. We are disbursing Rythu Bandhu money to farmers much faster than under your regime". Bhatti challenged KTR to discuss it with BRS. "Due to the mistakes made by the previous BRS rulers, even nature did not cooperate. There was no rain during the BRS government. Projects ponds are not full. If the previous BRS rulers had used the water in the project carefully, there would not have been a situation of water crisis now", Bhatti remarked.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Panchami: Mar 29 08:21 PM to Mar 30 09:14 PM

Shashthi: Mar 30 09:14 PM to Mar 31 09:31 PM

Nakshatram: Anuradha: Mar 29 08:36 PM to Mar 30 10:03 PM

Jyeshtha: Mar 30 10:03 PM to Mar 31 10:56 PM

Rahukalam: 9:18 AM to 10:49 AM

Yamagandam: 1:51 PM to 3:23 PM

Varjyam: 03:52 AM to 05:31 AM

Gulika: 6:15 AM to 7:46 AM

Amritakalam: 11:01 AM to 12:43 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:56 AM to 12:44 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Sunny

Temp: 38°

Humidity: 31%

Sunrise: 6:12 AM

Sunset: 6:29 PM

Updated: March 29, 2024 5:00 PM

It is 'tax terrorism'...

Continued from page 1

Gandhi's post came on a day when the Congress said it has received fresh notices from the income-tax department, asking it to pay Rs

1,823.08 crore, and alleged that the BJP is in "serious violation" of income-tax laws for which authorities should raise a demand for more than Rs 4,600 crore from the saffron party.

'Snoopers will...

Continued from page 1

The BJP and the BRS have become one to hit Revanth Reddy. What did DK Aruna do to Mahabubnagar district? She should have brought national status to the Palamuru project. But she got a national post in the party. With what face the BJP leaders would ask votes? Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP leaders will not stay here;

there is no use if people vote for them."

Revanth Reddy said that SA Sampath Kumar would get a good position after the Lok Sabha elections. "I will take the responsibility of helping the Valmikis and Boyas". He then appealed to the Valmikis and Boyas to ensure huge victories of Ch Vamschander Reddy and Mallu Ravi from the Mahabubnagar and Nagarkurnool seats respectively.

'Time will answer...

Continued from page 1

"Our party workers need to take revenge on Ranjith Reddy, Patnam Mahender Reddy who joined the Congress laughing on the day KCR's daughter was arrested. When Mahender Reddy and Ranjith Reddy come again, we will not take them. Even if they touch our feet, we will not." KTR said that Revanth Reddy did not respond to his challenge to contest from Malkajigiri. "Revanth Reddy, who has turned his back on the competition in his own sitting MP seat, is talking that he will win the parliament seats in the state. Revanth Reddy has become

a leaker. These dramas are to prevent people from questioning the election promises: loan waiver for farmers, Rs 4,000 pensions, Rs 2,500 for women, free electricity for all, all these promises are ignored", KTR remarked. "Which section of the state is happy under the Congress rule today? If Revanth Reddy is sincere, he should give notifications for two lakh jobs. Revanth, stay in government for 5 years... fulfill your 420 promises... Nalgonda and Khammam leaders are not human bombs for you." BRS called BJP B-team in the last Assembly elections. But after the election, Revanth Reddy became

BJP's B-Team. Are you working for Rahul Gandhi? Or, should I say, 'for Modi'? There is no possibility of the Congress getting more than 40 seats in the country. If you vote for the Congress, it will benefit BJP", KTR said. "The party's ranks should work with commitment as they say that it is not Ganeswar who is standing in Chevella but KCR. Telangana's only voice KCR should be strengthened. BRS is the party that has given maximum number of seats to BCs in this election. Everyone should attend the Chevella Parliament meeting on 13th April in the presence of KCR".

Home-cooked...

Continued from page 1

"Further, the applicant has not been even allowed to carry spectacles and her 'jap mala' to the jail," it said.

The plea underlined that the court's directions allowing her access to these items were passed because she was suffering from various health ailments.

On Thursday, the judge sought a response from the Tihar prison authorities and posted the matter for further hearing on Saturday.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged

that Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was a key member of the 'South Group' that has been accused of paying the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences in the national capital.

After being arrested by the central probe agency from Hyderabad, Kavitha was sent to seven-day ED custody on March 16 and it was extended by three days last Saturday.

On March 26, she was remanded in judicial custody till April 9.

64TH INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS MEET

Youth workforce opens market to new business avenues

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 64th Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) conference was held on Friday at the University of Hyderabad, marking a significant milestone for the institute.

The session commenced with the introductory remarks by Professor Alakh N. Sharma and Prof Alok Kumar Mishra, Organising Secretary respectively. Following this, Ritu Dewan (Conference President) outlined the conference's key themes, objectives and achievements in her address and set the agenda for the upcoming discussions and presentation.

Satoshi Sasaki, Deputy Director of ILO Decent Work Team for South Asia and Country Office for India, highlighted the importance of advancing labour economics in India and women's labour force participation and their flexible work care arrangement. He also talked about the informal sector and the potential of India's large youth workforce, which has opened the market to new business avenues.

The event progressed with an inaugural address by Dr



Professor Deepak Nayyar, Dr Deba Prasad Rath, Ritu Dewan, Satoshi Sasaki and others at the 64th Indian Society of Labour Economics Conference

Deba Prasad Rath, Principal Adviser, DEPR, RBI on 'Post COVID Fiscal Policy - The Indian Experience.' He highlighted the need for fiscal policy and research and its significant impact on India's potential growth and sustainability. In his presentation, he emphasised the significance of episodal counter-cyclical interventions.

Prof BJ Rao, Vice Chancellor, UoH, welcomed the delegates and spoke about the complexity of an economy compared with the physical systems in science disciplines. He encouraged ISLE to hold their meet-

ings in UoH in future.

Professor Deepak Nayyar, President, ISLE, provided a brief overview of the ISLE's history and its commitment and dedication to improving the lives of workers in India. He also shed light on the conference, which involved perspectives from scholars worldwide. He was confident that ISLE will continue to bring a platform for stimulating discussions, knowledge sharing and collaboration to achieve a more equitable and prosperous future for Indian workers.

Ritu Dewan took up the topic of self-employment and

delivered a presentation on "Towards Demystifying Self-Employment in India: Delineation, Dimensionality, Differentia." Her presentation highlighted the issue of unpaid workers, gender inequality in the workforce and their wages. She spoke on the patriarchal dominance perpetuated by the fiscal functioning of the government. She also emphasised regarding the discrimination of rural-urban workforce in terms of type of employment and wage distribution.

Professor Badri Narayan Rath from IIT Hyderabad proposed a vote of thanks.

THREE-DAY MUSIC AND DANCE FEST BEGINS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A three-day music and dance extravaganza, 'Ramayana Kalpavrksham', began on Friday at the CCRT Campus, Hyderabad. Chief guest Tridandi Srimannarayana Ramanuja Chinnna Jeeyar Swami inaugurated the festival. Celebrated classical dancer, scholar, speaker and writer Ananda Shankar Jayant, in association with the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Shankarananda Kalakshetra Natyarambha and Brhat; is hosting the festival.

It presents a visual treat with a stellar line up of events that include a galaxy of renowned artistes and speakers from across the country, with something for all ages. It includes scintillating performances, ranging from the classical to the popular; thought provoking talks and discussions, immersive arts workshops in dance ideation, Sanskrit and digital arts, book release, artisans corner, meet the legend and plethora of other special features.

Chinnna Jeeyar Swami said, "This year is really unique, as Lord Rama after several centuries came back to his abode, the whole world is celebrating this divine event. In Tretha yuga when Rama came back to his kingdom, people celebrated it. But his return this time is unique because no person had the courage to invite him to his own place. Therefore this year is historic as its rejuvenating the Bharat atma and Bharat culture."

French envoy all praise for Hyderabad Metro Rail

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India, along with the French delegation, visited the Metro Rail Operations Control Centre (OCC) and interacted with Managing Director of Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL) NVS Reddy, L& TMRHL Managing Director, KVB Reddy and other senior Metro officials on Thursday evening.

A power-point presentation was made to the delegation on the diverse facets of Hyderabad Metro, including the network's state-of-the-art technology, operational excellence, and commitment to sustainable urban mobility.

At the OCC, the delegation witnessed first-hand the advanced technologies employed by the Hyderabad Metro Rail, including Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) - a pioneering system in India. This visit provided a unique opportunity for the delegation to understand the intricate details of how Hyderabad Metro Rail ensures smooth and efficient operations.

Ambassador Dr Thierry Mathou expressed admiration for the Hyderabad Metro Rail, stating, "I am highly impressed by the Hyderabad Metro Rail system. It is a shining example of innovation and technological advancement in urban transportation."

NVS Reddy highlighted the potential for future partnerships. "We are delighted to welcome Ambassador Mathou and his delegation to the



MD, Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL) NVS Reddy and L& TMRHL Managing Director KVB Reddy taking the French Ambassador Dr Thierry Mathou round the Metro Rail

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Hyderabad Metro Rail's OCC. This visit ignites a spark for future collaboration, aiming to exchange knowledge and develop innovative solutions for sustainable urban mobility."

KVB Reddy stated, "It was L&TMRHL's pleasure to host Dr Thierry Mathou and his senior colleagues at the Hyderabad Metro Rail facility. This visit emphasises the growing international recognition of the Hyderabad Metro Rail's control centre as a testament to its technological prowess. Such

visits always encourage valued cooperation and association. This visit is a milestone visit for Hyderabad Metro Rail."

The French delegation included Thierry Berthelot, Consul General of France, Pascal Loreau, Dy Consul General and Bertrand de La Forest Divonne, Regional Economic Counsellor.

Sudhir Chiplunkar, Chief Operations Officer, L&TMRHL, SC Mishra, MD, Hyderabad Metro Rail and others were present during the visit.

Digitalisation changed outlook of life: Sutanu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Neo Science Hub organised an interactive session with Sutanu Guru on his journey from 'India to Bharat' at the Press Club, Somajiguda, on Friday.

The session opened with Sutanu Guru, who has travelled across the country from North to South in 53 days, sharing his insights on observations in different states across India. He said, "With the times changing, there is a tremendous change among people viewing things in the society, especially in regards to upcoming elections. With the aid of digitalisation, people can easily access information on any event happening across the country. They need not wait or sit and watch the same footage telecast in electronic media, especially TVs. People are now easily accessing updates via various social media platforms such as WhatsApp and X. Earlier, journalists used to decide the news but now people or the audience is deciding news. We are living in a polarised world and in countries like India, youth are larger in number and have higher aspirational levels. Everyone wants to achieve something in their lives."



Sutanu Guru speaking about his journey from India to Bharat

He also said that people in Northern and North-eastern states are confidently asserting or speaking in their mother tongue and English compared to previous years. Earlier, if they didn't speak English properly, they were looked down upon or felt shy to communicate in the regional language or mother tongue. But now, it is not the case. People are valuing their culture, local traditions including their regional language and are no longer succumbing to humiliation. Also, in the north and north-eastern states, development is a bit backwards compared to southern states.

While interacting with people in Delhi, Bihar and other places, Sutanu said, "Many people have openly vocalised that unemployment is the key issue. No matter there are government jobs, youths are still focusing on private jobs because of a lot of issues in government related exams and jobs. Moreover, in regards to elections, despite everyone knowing all the political parties are corrupt, they still vote for a particular party or government because that party has fulfilled the basic requirements needed by the public, especially in northern India."

The session covered various

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angles on how people, especially those belonging to minority communities, perceive upcoming elections and political parties and people's opinion on government actions.

The chief facilitator and discussant of the session was Raka Sudhakar Rao, a senior journalist. Satyaprasad, Publisher and Editor of Neo Science Hub and Naresh Nunna, Managing Editor participated in the event.

40 vehicles burnt in a fire at police station

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Around 40 seized vehicles belonging to the police department in the Asif Nagar police station limits in Hyderabad. An adjacent building also caught fire.

Asif Nagar police Station House Inspector G Venkateshwarlu said, "About 40 vehicles have burnt. As no one claimed the vehicles after the accident, we placed them in the parking area. These vehicle have been lying there for more than three years. No casualties have been reported."

GOOD FRIDAY



Crucifixion of Jesus Christ being enacted at St Marys Church in Secunderabad on Friday

Police invoke Indian Telegraph Act to the phone-tapping case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police have invoked the Indian Telegraph Act in the phone-tapping case along with the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Information Technology Act (IT), and PDPP Act. When the case has been filed, the Panjagutta police have not included it in the FIR but have submitted a memo to the Nampally court to include this Act along with other Acts and Sections.

In the FIR, police have mentioned 409, 427, 201, 120b, r/w 34 IPC, 3 PDPPA, 65, 66, 70 ITA-2000-2008 Sections.

Praneeth Rao destroyed 17 systems' hard disks which allegedly contained phone-tapping data on the next day of the Assembly elections. Head constable Krishna was also reportedly with Praneeth Rao, when he was dismantling the hard disks on December 4, 2023. So the police have reportedly named him as a witness to this case. Also,

- 4 people arrested since case filed on March 10
- 2 accused in the police custody, 2 accused in Chanchal Guda jail
- Victims of phone-tapping reaching the police



police reportedly named former SIB CI Gattu Mallu as another witness to this case.

So far, four people have been taken into custody since the case has been registered on March 10. As the number of accused is increasing in the case, the victims of phone-tapping are also filing complaints to the police and the government.

On March 22, the police conducted searches at houses of former Task Force DCP

Radhakishan Rao, former Telangana intelligence chief T Prabhakar Rao and Chairman of 'I News' and Shravan Rao Aruvela. On Thursday, Radhakishan Rao reached the police on allegations against him. The police produced him before a Magistrate at his residence in Kompally on Friday and the magistrate granted 14 days remand. Later, the police sent him to the Chanchalguda jail. The allegations of phone-tapping started when TRS was ruling the State. In 2021, then TPCC chief A Revanth Reddy and other politicians alleged that the government had been tapping their phones. Later, after the 2023 general elections the allegations went to the police and to the court.

Two years RI to officer in 2006 DA case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Special Judge for CBI cases, Hyderabad, has sentenced then assistant labour commissioner Thodi Ramesh to undergo rigorous imprisonment (RI) of two years with fine of Rs 1 lakh in a case related to disproportionate assets. The court also ordered confiscation of an amount of Rs 27,73,033 to the State after expiry of appeal time. The CBI had registered the instant case on November 1, 2006 against Thodi Ramesh, while working as assistant labour commissioner at Commissioner of Labour office in Hyderabad on the allegations that, during the check period between 2000 and 2006, the accused was found in possession of assets and pecuniary resources to the tune of Rs 59,41,026 which were disproportionate to his known sources of income.

After completion of investigation, a charge-sheet was filed on March 31, 2009. The court, after trial, found the accused guilty and sentenced him.

Hunar Mahotsav launched

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The eagerly awaited Hunar Mahotsav Expo made its grand launch in Hyderabad, in association with Gandhi Smriti Darshan Samiti (GSDS), New Delhi offering a vibrant showcase of India's rich heritage of crafts, cuisine, and culture. From March 28 to April 8, visitors can immerse themselves in a 12-day extravaganza at the Gymkhana Ground, Secunderabad. The event was inaugurated by D Madhukar Naik, CEO, Secunderabad Cantonment Board.

Featuring over 350 artisans and craftsmen from more than 25 states and union territories, the Hunar Mahotsav Expo promises a diverse array of handcrafted goods, ranging from applique work to jute-cane crafts and brass products to wooden toys. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore the exquisite craftsmanship and unique cultural traditions of India's skilled artisans.



In addition to the captivating crafts on display, the expo will also tantalise the taste buds with a delectable selection of cuisine from across the country. From traditional delicacies to contemporary flavours, the food stalls at the festival will offer a culinary journey like none other.

Speaking on occasion, Vijay Goel, Vice-Chairman, Gandhi Smriti Darshan Samiti, said, "This exhibition is not just a showcase; it's a celebration of diversity, resilience and the

enduring spirit of Indian crafts and culture. Whether you are an aficionado of traditional arts, a food enthusiast, or a music lover, there's something for everyone to discover and appreciate. Entry is free for the visitors during the event."

As visitors peruse the stalls and indulge in the flavors of India, they can also enjoy live music performances throughout the day and into the evening, adding to the festive atmosphere of the event.

Accused arrested for selling two-wheelers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Commissioner's Task Force, East Zone team, Hyderabad, along with Abids police, has arrested an individual involved in dismantling old two-wheelers, assembling them into new ones, and illegally engraving engine and chassis numbers for illegal profit. Seven tampered two-wheelers and incriminating material worth Rs 3,00,000 were seized in the operation.

The Task Force seized seven two-wheelers, cutting machine, around 40 alphabetical iron bits/dyes and nine numerical iron bits/dyes.

Mohammed Akbaruddin, residing in Shergate, King Koti, Hyderabad, was working in a business styled as Niyamath Engineering Works at the second hand two-wheeler market in King Koti. Dissatisfied with his earnings

from light machine work, he turned to illegal activities.

The police said, Akbaruddin purchased old two-wheelers from scrap dealers and non-financed sources without valid documents. He dismantled these vehicles, reassembled them using parts, and engraved engine and chassis numbers using alphabetic and numerical bits and dyes.

He then sold these altered two-wheelers with fake registration plates and fabricated documents.

Following a tip-off, Akbaruddin was arrested along with tampered two-wheelers, dismantled parts, and other materials at his workshop.

Buyers of second-hand two-wheelers are advised to verify proper ownership while purchasing and transfer the ownership immediately.

110 people arrested in prohibition cases for violating model code

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As part of the code of conduct implementation during the parliamentary elections, District Election Officer and GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose announced that a total of Rs 2,86,98,700 in cash has been seized by various groups in the two parliamentary constituencies of Hyderabad district.

Additional items worth Rs 51,76,835 were seized in connection with these operations along with 109 cases registered for violating MCC, leading to the arrest of 110 individuals in prohibition cases, and a total of 1517.47 liters of liquor has been seized.

Over the past 24 hours, Rs 6,00,700 in cash and other items worth Rs 4,000 were seized by the police department. One FIR has been reg-



istered regarding four complaints concerning cash and other items, all of which have been resolved.

In accordance to Election Commission regulations, Rs 80,03,590 of unaccounted cash exceeding Rs 50,000 has been seized in 11 cases in the district. Of this amount, Rs 20,74,590 has been released in connection with nine cases, following proper verification by the District Grievance

Committee. Two cases involving seized cash exceeding Rs 10 lakh have been referred to the Income Tax Department.

In relation to Hyderabad parliament constituency, Rs 77,03,590 was seized in 10 cases, with Rs 17,74,590 released in eight cases, and two cases totaling Rs 59,29,000 were forwarded to the Income Tax Department.

In a case concerning the Secunderabad parliament constituency, Rs 3,00,000 was seized and was later released upon submission of appropriate evidence. Emergency cases, particularly involving tourists, will be facilitated for immediate cash release.

For further inquiries or assistance, individuals can contact the District Grievance Committee Chairman at 9618888110 or the Committee Convener at 9177872240.

A lesson from spectacular implosions of BRS and AAP

Can a political party implode into oblivion in a mere hundred days? What if it is a party that has been in power for almost a decade? It is hard to believe, but the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) example proves that it is possible and a given when a party is seen as betraying its raison d'etre - reason for existence. BRS leaders never tire of claiming to be a 'udyama party' - a party that came out of a movement for a cause. The party's original name, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), embodied that cause - the achievement of a separate state of Telangana ostensibly to gain control over its rightful share of water, funds and jobs to build a better, equitable and developed Telangana. Imagine the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) abandon-



ing their core ideology and becoming promoters of free market economic policies. Imagine the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen abandoning its core tenet of Muslim appeasement and adopting a Sabka Saath approach. Imagine Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) or the Samajwadi Party (SP) abandoning their core Muslim-Yadav (MY) constituencies. One can easily visualise what would happen to these parties at the hustings when voters see them as abandoning their raison d'etre. Kalvakuntla Chandrasekhara Rao, the chief of BRS, did precisely this. The basis for a separate Telangana campaign was that the political power was monopolised by Andhra leaders who had denied a fair share in resources and neglected Telangana's development. In a separate Telangana, the

The basis for a separate Telangana campaign was that the political power was monopolised by Andhra leaders who had denied a fair share in resources and neglected Telangana's development. In a separate Telangana, the political power would reside in the Chief Minister, who would be from Telangana. Hence, they would work for the benefit of Telangana and nobody else.

But alas! By the end of almost 10 years after Telangana's formation, the voters realised that they had replaced rulers who worked for Andhra's interests, not with those who worked for

Telangana and its people's interests but for a single family's interests: that of Chandrasekhara Rao's who ruled the state since the state's formation till a few months back. It all started with the BRS chief sidelining leaders from the separate statehood movement and taking total control over the movement party by appointing his family mem-



KISHORE POREDDY

bers to key positions. He followed this by filling his cabinet and other influential positions in government with members from his family or close relatives. To this mix, he inducted leaders who opposed the separate Telangana movement into his party and government, thus filling them with leaders dependent solely on his grace for their prospects. He was open about

transforming the 'movement' party into what he called a 'faktu rajakeeya party' (pure political party) whose sole aim was to gain and retain political power. People of Telangana, who were afraid of the Andhra leaders still controlling Telangana politics one way or another, as evidenced by the 'note for vote' episode, believed the transformation was indeed a step taken by Chandrasekhara Rao to safeguard the interests of Telangana. Voters returned the BRS to power for a second term with a resounding majority, eliminating all possible threats of external interference. Yet, Chandrasekhara Rao continued in his ways. That is when people realised the state was hijacked for a single family's interests. In addition, allegations of hefty corruption by members of the first family in irrigation and drinking water projects, the sinking of the

piers of the Medigadda barrage calling into question the Kaleswaram project itself, the arrest of the Chief Minister's daughter, Kavitha, by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on bribery charges in the Delhi Excise policy scam, the allegations of illegal phone tapping on a massive scale - especially of women unrelated to politics - which could not have been possible without support from members of the first family, have all convinced the voters that Chandrasekhara Rao indeed hijacked the newly formed state to serve his and his family's interests alone. The BRS' Warangal Lok Sabha candidate relinquishing her ticket yesterday was the latest in a series of desertions during the past few weeks. No wonder, the BRS leaders outside the first family have concluded that neither Telangana sentiment nor the first family can save their political

careers and are leaving it in droves. It is only a matter of time before the party empties and is left with only family members. When a 'faktu' political party cannot ensure power, no 'faktu' politician will remain in it. A similar fate awaits another party that rose to power based on a movement and betrayed the very cause that was their raison d'etre. The Aam Admi Party (AAP) came to power quickly, riding an anti-corruption movement. Now that many founding members have left the party, accusing Delhi Chief Minister and party chief Arvind Kejriwal of hijacking the party to serve his interests, and that three Delhi cabinet ministers, including the Chief Minister, have been arrested on charges of corruption, AAP too is destined to implode like the BRS. (The author is BJP TS spokesperson)

Drought-like situation leaves farmers in tears: Jagadish

The former minister is visiting villages in the undivided Nalgonda district and interacting with farmers to assess the crop loss

PNS ■ SURYAPET

Former minister and Suryapet MLA G Jagadish Reddy on Thursday said that the drought-like situation in the State has left the farmers in tears. The crises that have engulfed the farming sector are unprecedented and the situation is grim, he said. Jagadish Reddy, along with former MLA from Thungathurthi G Kishore, visited Velugupally and Singaram villages under Thungathurthi mandal district. He interacted with farmers and assessed the crop damage due to lack of water for irrigation.

Speaking to the media, the former minister said that the lush green fields were conspicuous by their absence. During



the BRS regime, the farmers were happy that water for irrigation was provided to them. He alleged that negligence

on the part of the Congress government towards the farm sector led to the present grim situation. The ayacut of the

SRSP canal turned into a desert due to the policies of the state government. He accused the state government of intentionally turning the Kaleswaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIPS) into a dysfunctional project because of the fear that credit would go to the former Chief Minister and BRS chief K Chandrashekar Rao, who was the architect of the largest lift irrigation scheme in the country.

Jagadish Reddy flayed the Congress Ministers and leaders for not visiting the villages and interacting with farmers who lost their crops due to a lack of water for irrigation. He dared the Ministers to interact with farmers to understand the grim situation prevailing in the undivided Nalgonda district.

BRS Party is losing ground: Kadiyam



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MLA Kadiyam Srihari said that BRS party is losing ground. He said, "For various reasons BRS party is losing ground, For various reasons people are moving away from BRS. "To serve the people and to do something for constituency we have to take a decision", he said.

AICC in-charge for Telangana Deepa Das Munshi invited him to join the Congress to strengthen the party in the state.

Deepa Das Munshi said, "We are inviting them to join our party. They said they will speak to their followers and party workers and respond," she said. Kadiyam said that he will speak to his followers and inform.

Defections from BRS: KCR is paid back in his coin, says Niranjan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) Senior Vice-President and Election Commission Coordination Committee Chairman G. Niranjan said that the former Chief Minister K Chandra shekhar Rao is responsible for the current political developments in the State.

He said that after coming to power KCR had encouraged defections and corrupted politics without any ethical values, now people would not sympathise with him irrespective of his hue and cry. People think that this is the appropriate



G Niranjan

punishment for KCR.

By claiming that he had brought the statehood for Telangana, KCR grabbed the power and resorted to taking several unilateral decisions and throwing the State into disarray. KCR was a myth and considered that his position was

permanent. KCR's misdeeds are coming out one by one. KCR must be punished. Niranjan said. Niranjan said that on Friday's BRS meetings, BRS working president KT Rama Rao, and former minister T Harish Rao were making false claims that KCR brought statehood for Telangana. People would not believe it anymore. Now the People of Telangana consider KCR and his family as traitors of Telangana, he said. In the past KCR encouraged the leaders of other parties to betray their parties and to join BRS, now they have no right to criticise those who have left the party as traitors, Niranjan said.

Vishweshwar urges people to support Modi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP candidate for Chevella Lok Sabha constituency Konda Vishweshwar Reddy, while speaking on the second day of the Praja Ashirwada yatra in the Chevella constituency, said that he embarked on the yatra

to seek the blessings of the people, hear their problems and address them.

Vishweshwar Reddy appealed to the people to vote for the lotus symbol to ensure that ensure continuation of the commendable work Prime Minister Modi started. Modi's adminis-

tration has also given priority to the welfare of farmers. The present Congress government's approach of making promises without providing financial backing is nothing but deceiving people, he said. The promise of free bus rides for women was not being implemented fully.

Kishan alleges CM Revanth threatening MLAs to join Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Tourism Minister and Telangana BJP president G Kishan Reddy alleged that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was threatening the MLAs of other political parties to join the Congress party.

Kishan Reddy said that the Congress is also walking on the path of the BRS party. The Congress leaders were harassing the realtors, builders and businessmen in Hyderabad for 'Rahul Gandhi tax'. He said that the Congress has no



strength to implement the six guarantees.

Speaking to the media on Friday at Mahabubnagar along with party's Mahabubnagar candidate DK Aruna, Kishan Reddy said that the

Kaleswaram project investigation is in cold storage and the Congress government has no sincerity in regard to phone-tapping. He alleged that thieves (under the BRS rule) have gone and burglars (under Congress rule) have come to Telangana.

Kishan Reddy said that the power cuts started and drinking water scarcity prevailed but there was no response from the government. He said that Rs 12 lakh crore corruption took place in the nation during the previous Congress government.

'Power brokers are leaving BRS for greener pastures'

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Former minister and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader T Harish Rao on Friday came down heavily on the leaders who are deserting the party for greener pastures. He described the leaders, who are deserting the party as "power brokers." Their departure from the party will in no way dent the party's popularity.

In the backdrop of massive defections from the BRS to the Congress and the BJP in recent times, Harish Rao remarked that while the Congress can "purchase" its party leaders, it cannot entice the loyalty of the party's activists and the voters.

Individuals who are leaving the party during tough times are betraying the party. They would not be allowed to return to the party fold under any circumstances. These "power brokers" would always be on the move in search of greener pastures, he pointed out.

He was speaking at a meeting held as a preparatory exercise for Lok Sabha polls. He likened the phase of defections from the BRS to autumn when deciduous trees shed leaves.

The BRS brought water for irrigation and drinking to Dubbaka. The Congress and BJP made no contributions here, he said, further asking party cadres to take the "lies



Former minister T Harish Rao speaking at a meeting in Dubbaka on Friday

of the Congress party to the people.

The Congress government had failed to deliver on its promises. He ridiculed Chief

Minister A Revanth Reddy for describing the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as a referendum for the Congress government's 100-day rule. "Has he

delivered on Rs 4,000 pension, Rythu Bandhu, one Tola gold, bonus on paddy promises? The Congress should be shown its place for not keeping its promises. We will exert pressure on the Congress until it fulfils its promises," he added.

Targeting BJP Medak Lok Sabha candidate M Raghunandan Rao, he said that the saffron party's senior leader is back again to "cheat" people with "deceptive promises."

Obviously referring to the arrest of BRS MLC K Kavitha, Harish wondered as why there was not even one case against the BJP leaders in the country.

NEWS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

I stand with the poor: Jagan

KURNOOL CHOKES WITH THROGS OF YSRCP CHIEF'S SUPPORTERS



PNS ■ YEMMIGANUR

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's visit to Kurnool brought the city to a standstill as throngs of people poured onto the streets to greet him during his road show. Speaking at a massive public gathering in Yemmiganur village as part of his 'Memantha Siddham'

yatra, Chief Minister Jagan expressed his readiness to stand with the poor in the electoral battle against the affluent on May 13.

Addressing the assembled multitude, he highlighted the transformative strides made in the education sector during his tenure, emphasising efforts to

- CM Jagan emphasised the reforms made in the education sector over the past 58 months, particularly focusing on reforms aimed at enhancing job opportunities for graduates.
- Jagan outlined various pro-poor schemes, including 'Amma Vodi' and the provision of tablets and bilingual textbooks, aimed at improving the

provide job opportunities to graduates through curriculum reforms.

Chief Minister Jagan elucidated various schemes aimed at benefiting schoolchildren, including 'Amma Vodi' and the provision of tablets and bilingual textbooks, underscoring the goal of elevating government schools to the standards of private institutions.

He underscored the government's commitment to providing equitable education to all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, and lauded initiatives such as the allocation of house titles to 31 lakh women beneficiaries.

Chief Minister Jagan criticized his predecessor's unfulfilled

quality of education and bridging the gap between government and private schools.

- CM Jagan emphasised the importance of the upcoming elections, stating that they would determine the fate of millions in Andhra Pradesh, beyond just selecting representatives.

promises and pledged to secure victory against such "fraudsters," asserting that the upcoming elections would shape the future of millions in Andhra Pradesh."

Encouraging supporters to disseminate the government's achievements door-to-door, he outlined ambitious electoral targets while highlighting the party's commitment to uplifting the marginalized.

Furthermore, Chief Minister Jagan highlighted the party's endorsement of candidates from humble backgrounds, citing the example of Veeranjanyulu, a YSRCP MLA candidate whose educational qualifications surpass those of his opponent, Chandrababu Naidu.

Illicit liquor manufacturing remains unchecked

PNS ■ BHUPALAPALLI

In spite of the Excise Department imposing restrictions on the sale of black jaggery and alum, the illicit distillation of arrack is continuing unchecked in Agency villages of the district. The provisional stores in the Agency areas are stocking up on sugar bags.

With the increased prices of liquor, the tipplers have been clamouring for illicitly-distilled arrack.

During the recently concluded Medaram festival, the illicit distillers sent lakhs of litres of illicitly-distilled arrack.

However, sugar can be bought at Rs 35-40 a kg. None will suspect the customer if one buys quintals of sugar. The illicit distillers of arrack instead of using black jaggery and alum in the preparation of ID arrack, they have been using sugar and cake powder which are easily available in bakeries. Therefore, the demand for sugar and cake powder has increased enormously. The traders have been maintaining the stocks of these



In the open market, jaggery can be bought between Rs 70 and Rs 100 a kg. the traders are prohibited from selling large quantity of the jaggery. The Excise restrictions indicate that if anyone buys more than 10 kg of jaggery, the customers are required to show their Aadhaar card.

commodities on a large scale. Quintals of sugar was found stocked with the traders in agency areas.


The brewing of ID arrack

has been increasing daily in the Agency villages of Mahamuttaram, Kataram, Mahadevpur, Palimela and Malharmandals.

INDIA CORNER


Odisha man tortures wife, killed by brother-in-law

A man was killed by his brother-in-law for assaulting the latter's sister in Odisha's Sundergarh district, police said on Friday. The incident occurred in Tungritoli village of the district on Thursday, a police officer said. The deceased man, identified as Jayram Satnami, was the accused Markosh Toppo's brother-in-law, the police officer said. Satnami had visited his wife at her brother's place on Thursday afternoon but his irate wife advised him not to meet her again, the police officer said. When Satnami was returning home, he met Toppo. Both of them had a heated argument, and an infuriated Toppo allegedly stabbed his brother-in-law with a knife. Satnami was taken to a local hospital where the doctors declared him dead. "We have arrested Markosh and seized the knife. Further investigation is on," Rajgangpur SDPO Abhishek Panigrahi said. Satnami had married his lover Latika four years ago.




Rs 20.85 cr cash, alcohol worth over Rs 27 cr seized

The Election Commission on Friday said Rs 20.85 crore cash and alcohol worth over Rs 27 crore has been seized since the model code of conduct came into effect on March 16. The Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka will be held in two phases on April 26 and May seven for 28 constituencies. The value of seizures till date stood at Rs 62.42 crore, it said. According to a statement issued by the office of Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer, since the Model Code of Conduct came into force, flying squads, static surveillance teams and police authorities have seized Rs 20.85 crore cash, Rs 70.86 lakh freebies, 8.63 lakh litres of liquor worth over Rs 27 crore, 211.23 kg narcotic substances worth over Rs 1.47 crore, more than 15 kg gold worth over Rs 9 crore, 59.04 kg silver worth over Rs 27 lakh and 21.17 carat diamonds worth Rs 9 lakh among others.



NIA summons 8 TMC leaders in 2022 blast case; party sees plot

The NIA on Friday again summoned eight Trinamool Congress leaders for questioning in connection with a blast that occurred at Bhupatinagar in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district in 2022, an official said on Friday. The TMC accused the BJP of engineering the NIA's move. The central probe agency asked the eight to appear before its officers at 11 am on Saturday, after they skipped the earlier summons that directed them to visit the NIA office at New Town near here on March 28. On December 3, 2022, an explosion ripped apart a kutchha house with a thatched roof in Bhupatinagar, killing three persons. TMC leader Kunal Ghosh on Friday alleged that the opposition BJP is behind the NIA move. The BJP has provided a list of TMC leaders of Purba Medinipur district to the central agency and the NIA is planning to raid their houses and arrest them on Saturday, Ghosh claimed.



PM flags 'significant risk of misuse' of AI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday cautioned that a powerful technology like AI in unskilled, untrained hands holds significant risk of misuse, as he advocated the need for clear 'dos and don'ts' and use of watermarks on AI-generated content to curb misinformation and deepfake-related harms in the society. In a candid, free-wheeling chat with Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates, Modi spoke at length on how India has democratised technology for the benefit of its citizens, embracing the power of digital for improving lives, and exuded confidence that the country will take remarkable strides in the fourth industrial revolution, that has digital in its core.



During the discussion that touched on a slew of topics, from AI to Digital Public Infrastructure, the PM said in the case of deepfakes, it is crucial to acknowledge and identify that a particular deepfake content is AI-generated, along with appropriate disclosures about its

source. Citing dangers of AI harms and deepfakes in a society, he said, misuse of his voice, for instance, can initially deceive and misguide people leading to widespread uproar. "It is crucial to acknowledge that deepfake content is AI-gen-

erated and mention its source. These measures are important in early days. We need to establish dos and don'ts...we will need to think about it seriously," Modi said. The PM talked of "significant risk of misuse" when a powerful technology like AI is placed in unskilled and untrained hands. "I suggest that we should start with clear watermarks on AI-generated content to prevent misinformation," he said, adding the idea is not to devalue AI creations but to recognise them for what they are. Acknowledging the importance of AI, the PM outlined how India extensively leveraged the new-age innovations during the G20 Summit. AI also helped to translate his speeches in different languages, he mentioned.

BJP misusing agencies to subvert democracy, belittle Constitution: Kharge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP-led Centre on Friday of misusing institutions like the income-tax department, ED and CBI to subvert democracy and belittle the Constitution, and asked why is the I-T department being used as a weapon to harass the principal opposition party. He asserted that such actions would not deter the Congress from contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and vowed that his party will free the country's institutions from the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "dictatorship". Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also hit out at the BJP, accusing it of indulging in "tax terrorism". "When the government changes, action will definitely be taken against those who have 'disrobed democracy'. And such



exemplary action will be taken that no one will dare to do all this again. This is my guarantee," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X. He also tagged a previous video of his and used the hashtag "#BJPTaxTerrorism" with his post. Kharge said a penalty of Rs 4,600 crore has been "overlooked" for the BJP's Rs 42-crore unaccounted deposits, while a

penalty of Rs 135 crore is being demanded for the Congress's Rs 14-lakh cash deposits by MLAs and MPs. "Who is pressurising the Income Tax department to act in this unjustified manner only against the opposition? Why is the IT department being allowed to be used as a weapon to harass the principal opposition party - Congress! They are misusing institutions like IT, ED, CBI to

subvert democracy and belittle the Constitution," he alleged in a post on X. Citing examples, Kharge said the I-T department has now given a notice to the Congress for a total amount of Rs 1,823 crore and already withdrawn Rs 135 crore from the party's accounts, which were funds collected by the party through crowdsourcing. "But IT did not give any notice to BJP. Despite the fact that public information of the Election Commission clearly shows that 1,297 people have deposited Rs 42 crore to BJP in 2017-18 without mentioning their names and addresses," Kharge claimed. The Congress chief said his party was fined Rs 135 crore for Rs 14 lakh deposits and its account was frozen. "But in the last 7 years, this penalty to BJP amounts to a whopping Rs 4,600 crore," he claimed.

Govt to boost Coast Guard capability: Defence Secretary

PNS ■ OKHA (GUJARAT)

The government is committed to increasing the Coast Guard's strengths and capabilities so that it can protect the Indian coastline without any trouble, Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane said on Friday. The maritime force is also acquiring new capabilities to keep watch on faraway areas in the sea, including the Pakistan coast, he said. The Centre is trying its best to provide all the required equipment to the Indian Coast Guard, he said, adding the ICG now has several patrol vessels, fast boats and aircraft. Aramane was speaking after inaugurating a hovercraft maintenance unit of ICG at Okha in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka



district. Director General Rakesh Pal and senior officials were present at the inaugural ceremony, ICG said in a release. The hovercraft maintenance infrastructure shall provide a fillip to the operational readiness in forward areas, the release said. Hovercrafts are used in amphibious operations. With the help of hovercraft, one can reach difficult terrains easily, such as small marshy islands near the coast, Aramane said.

Empowering women through technology

PM Modi and Bill Gates discuss collaborative initiatives

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a recent conversation with philanthropist and businessman Bill Gates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated his commitment to bridging the digital gap in rural areas, particularly emphasising the importance of empowering women through innovative programmes like "Nam0 Drone Didi". The conversation underscored the pivotal role of digital inclusion in fostering gender equality and economic empowerment across India. Modi outlined his vision to transform the lives of rural women by providing them with an access to technology and training, thereby challenging the



traditional gender roles and fostering economic independence. The prime minister reiterated his commitment to bridging the digital gap in rural areas, especially emphasising the importance of empowering women through innovative programmes like "Nam0 Drone Didi". "I want to give them technology in their hands and

bring a psychological change. Everyone in the villages should feel that they are transforming their village," he said. Gates, in response, lauded India's proactive efforts to promote technology inclusion and empower women. He highlighted successful collaborative initiatives between the government and organisations like his foundation in revitalising traditional practices and promoting women's participation in sectors such as agriculture. Gates said India brings out technology that can be made available for everyone and that helps uplift those who need it the most. The conversation delved into the significance of revitalising traditional practices to promote sustainable livelihood

opportunities for women. Gates shared insights from his visit to Odisha, where efforts to reintroduce nutritious crops like millets are underway, showcasing the potential for innovation and economic empowerment within rural communities. Looking ahead, Modi and Gates discussed upcoming engagements focused on women's empowerment and technological innovation. Gates expressed anticipation for visiting the Statue of Equality in Hyderabad, where he plans to engage with women's groups and witness first-hand their contributions to various sectors. "I am very much looking forward to that. And also to meet some of the women's groups there," he said.



Jaishankar, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba hold talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Ukraine on Friday held "open and wide-ranging" talks here as part of a bilateral engagement between its foreign ministers, with discussions focussing on the "ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications". Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba's two-day visit to India comes amid efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the more than two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict. He arrived here on Thursday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Kuleba at the Hyderabad House.

After the meeting, Jaishankar in a post on X said, "An open and wide-ranging conversation with Ukraine FM @DmytroKuleba this afternoon." "Our discussions focused on the ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications. Exchanged views on various initiatives in that context. Spoke as well on global and regional issues of interest to both of us. Reiterated our commitment to strengthen the overall relationship, including bilateral cooperation," he said. Jaishankar also shared some photographs of him shaking hands with his Ukrainian counterpart and the bilateral meeting.

Rahul, Kharge, Pawar among INDIA bloc leaders to join AAP rally tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top INDIA bloc leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav among others will attend a 'maharally' to be held by the AAP at the Ramlila Maidan on March 31, senior party leader Gopal Rai said on Friday. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has received the permission of the authorities concerned to hold the rally for an attendance of more than 20,000 people. It is being held in the backdrop of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, he said. The call on whether Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal



will address the 'Maharally' will be taken later, Rai said. Other prominent political leaders and members of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) like TMC's Derek O'Brien, DMK's Tiruchi Siva, NC's Farooq Abdullah and Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren of

JMM will also attend the rally, he said. Kalpana Soren, the wife of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, who is currently in jail, will also attend the rally, he said. The party leaders said they are also in touch with PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti, who

may join the rally. According to the party's senior leadership, they are planning a show of strength at the Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, from where they may launch a massive campaign against the ruling BJP government for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Rai said after Kejriwal's arrest, the party has held multiple protests across Delhi. They noticed two kinds of law and order on road -- the Delhi police easily gives permissions to hold protests to the BJP but the opposition is not allowed for that, he said, and added that all this is happening when the model code of conduct of the Election Commission is in force.

When law is set in motion, some take to streets: V-P Dhankhar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking an apparent swipe at the opposition, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar asserted on Friday that those who thought they were beyond the system are now being held accountable, saying some people hit the streets when the law is set in motion. He also wondered as to how one engaging in transgression of law plays the victim card. "People are playing," he said. His remarks come against the backdrop of the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) rally here on Sunday being held to protest the alleged misuse of the central agencies by the ruling BJP and the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy "scam". Several INDIA bloc leaders



are expected to attend the rally. Separately, the Congress has accused the BJP-led central government of misusing institutions like the income-tax department, the ED and the CBI to subvert democracy. It has said the party has received fresh notices from the income-tax department asking it to pay Rs 1,823.08 crore. "Some people thought we are above law, immune from law. That has been demolished... those who thought are beyond law, the law is after them," Dhankhar said here without naming any person or case.

UPSC TELLS DELHI HC

UPSC aspirants with Imphal as exam centre can change it

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The UPSC has told the Delhi High Court that it will permit candidates from the hill districts of Manipur who have opted for Imphal as their examination centre to change it and that the state government will facilitate their travel. The commission said such



aspirants can choose any of the centres in Aizawl, Mizoram; Kohima, Nagaland; Shillong, Meghalaya; Dispur, Assam; Jorhat, Assam; Kolkata, West Bengal; and Delhi by making a request for change of examination centre between April 8 and 19 through an e-mail. The statement came on a petition by Zomi Students

Federation seeking setting up of examination centres in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi in the hill districts of Manipur for Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, 2024 and Indian Forest Service (Preliminary) Examination, 2024. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) said that since the Manipur government

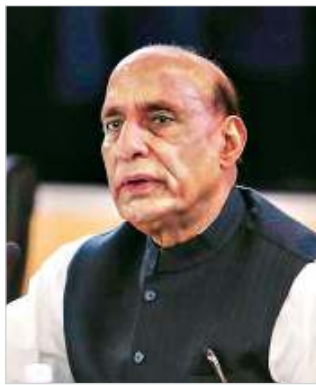
has expressed its inability to open examination centres in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, it was not feasible to open and operate examination venues there for the UPSC examination. "He (UPSC's counsel) assures that the Commission will permit the candidates from the hill districts of Manipur who have opted for Imphal as their

examination centre to change their examination centre during the period 8th April, 2024 to 19th April, 2024 by making a request for change of examination centre at e-mail ID: uscsp-ups@nic.in," recorded a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora in an order passed on Thursday.

Responsive Govt

Rajnath defends Agnipath scheme but, ahead of polls, says it is not carved in stone

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while defending the Agnipath scheme for recruitment of young defence personnel, has also expressed the Government's openness to alterations "if deemed necessary". The implications of the scheme stretch beyond national security, particularly concerning India's relations with its neighbour, Nepal. In June 2022, the Centre rolled out the Agnipath scheme for short-term induction of personnel into the armed forces to bring down the age profile of the three services. Under this scheme, all military recruitment transitions to an 'All India All Class' basis, wherein the selected youth, termed Agniveers, commit to four years of service, including a six-month training period. Following this tenure, 25 per cent of Agniveers transition to permanent service, while the remainder pursues alternative employment opportunities outside of the armed forces. Agniveers receive a starting monthly salary of Rs 30,000, escalating to Rs 40,000 in the fourth year, with a portion allocated to the Agniveer Corpus



Fund, matched by Government contributions, resulting in a substantial payout of Rs 11.71 lakh at the end of four years. Additionally, each Agniveer receives non-contributory life insurance cover of Rs 48 lakh for the duration of the engagement. However, there are no gratuity or pension benefits for Agniveers, with those opting for permanent service committed to a minimum additional 15-year tenure. The scheme aims to address military restructuring and modernisation needs while infusing technology-savvy youth into the armed forces. By selecting only 25 per cent of Agniveers for permanent service, the military seeks to ensure a high-quality pool for Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) while curbing rising pay and pension expenses.

Despite the offered benefits, concerns have arisen regarding its potential impact on military ethos, professionalism and operational efficiency. Questions linger regarding the maintenance of unit cohesion, the readiness of inexperienced Agniveers for live operational scenarios and the long-term attractiveness of military service. Critics question the scheme's impact on the regimental system of the Indian Infantry and advocate for rigorous testing before full implementation. While some argue for gradual induction to mitigate adverse effects, others emphasise the need for empirical evaluation to safeguard military standards. Broadly speaking, the scheme has not gone down well with the aspiring youth. They feel that most of them would be left without a job in their prime. Moreover, the Gurkhas of Nepal have summarily rejected this scheme and are now looking for options in other countries. This seriously jeopardises India's defence muscle. It has been almost four years since the scheme was launched, and it is the first time the Government has shown its openness to make amendments. The Congress has already termed it an election gimmick. Whatever the reasons, it would be good if the Govt returns to the drawing board and reconsiders the various issues in national interest.

PICTALK



Christian devotees during a play on crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the occasion of Good Friday, in Hyderabad

PTI

India's green energy comes of age

India emerges as a frontrunner in the global shift towards green energy, with solar power leading the charge

Steadfast in its pursuit of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25, India continues to ascend to the position of a frontrunner in the global shift towards green energy. Solar power spearheads this transformative journey having contributed 53.2 per cent of the overall capacity addition to India's cumulative power generation capacity, which soared to 428.3 GW by the close of December 2023.



The solar industry statistics above do not just paint a bright picture; they aren't just a testament to its environmental stewardship, but rather one to its self-sufficiency and its contribution to the transformation of the global energy environment. What a remarkable journey this continues to be!

Of all RE sources, the versatility of solar energy renders it scalable and inclusive as a solution for implementing the green agenda. A plethora of other factors have, however, significantly contributed to charting India's path towards a shining energy-efficient future. The green pivot against the larger climate change battle and more particularly directed at plateauing power sector emissions has been driven by the synergy between Government initiatives, technological advancements, and increasing awareness of the benefits that accrue from RE, more particularly from the solar energy potential that India holds.

When the goals were surpassed (the National Solar Mission that targeted 100 GW of solar power capacity by 2022), more ambitious targets (achieving 280 GW of solar capacity by 2030) were set. The goals were not just spelled out, but guided through a clear roadmap for RE integration vide the declaration of trajectory for Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) until 2029-30.

On one hand, utility projects were prioritised through

increased tendering and the implementation of the "Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects Scheme" which accorded approval to 50 solar parks across 12 states. On the other hand, decentralised generation was not left behind- the Rooftop Solar Programme launched in 2014 that aimed to install 40 GW by 2022 was extended to 2026 and has now been complemented by The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana. To democratise solar energy access, such decentralised sustainable energy solutions are being actively recognised as complementary means to achieving India's green energy goals. From one of the largest importers to now one of those witnessing the highest dip in solar-related imports from China, India is well on its trajectory of breaking given India's compelling solar potential and the aforementioned factors. However, tackling challenges that crop up in its energy goals' implementation shall be rendered easy with the adoption of a holistic approach involving collaboration across diverse stakeholders, objectives, policies, and solutions.

(The author is an investment professional and specialises in green financing; views are personal)

converging in the market including the emergence of credit-worthy commercial and industrial customers as demand drivers for RE, enhanced financial incentives, tax benefits and subsidies. Standards have been established for the manufacturing of solar PV systems and inputs, India is strategically aligning itself with global efforts to attain the SDGs, and very deftly so by nudging investments to their right use and their right IRRs. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of up to 100 per cent has been allowed through the automatic route, encouraging international investment. The solar sector remains at the forefront given India's compelling solar potential and the aforementioned factors. However, tackling challenges that crop up in its energy goals' implementation shall be rendered easy with the adoption of a holistic approach involving collaboration across diverse stakeholders, objectives, policies, and solutions.

(The author is an investment professional and specialises in green financing; views are personal)



HIMANI SABHARWAL

India's inflation story through time

From the humble beginnings of the *pai* to the modern era of the rupee, the narrative of inflation paints a vivid picture of economic transformation



PRAFULL GORADIA

One way of knowing about inflation in India is to place a series of old coins on a table, and compare those coins with today's currency. Today, few would believe that well into the twentieth century, there was a *pai* which was 1/92nd of a rupee. 16 annas made a rupee; one anna was divided into four *pice*; one *pice* comprised three *pais*. One could, for example, buy puffed rice, gram or chana or peanuts for one *pie*. When that became impossible, the Government stopped minting the coin. The *pice* or three *pais* together continued to be minted until well after World War II. Today, a rupee is about the least required to buy anything; effectively ten rupees are required to acquire anything worthwhile, no matter how poor the buyer is. As a child of ten years, I ate my first chocobar made by a British company called Magnolias, delivered at one's doorstep by a dry ice-filled cart at 25 *paise*. Today, its minimum price is Rs.10, which makes inflation look benign, 40 times between say and 2024, i.e., 77 years.

The price of the cheapest variety of rice against a Government-issued ration card in 1945 was three annas per seer or say nineteen *paise* per 800 grams. Today in 2024, similar rice would cost say forty rupees per kilogramme, or 1,000 grammes, say twenty-five rupees per seer or 132 times. Food grains have become much more expensive than ice-cream! Tea, which was at the first point of wholesale, was two rupees for the equivalent of one kilogramme, which is Rs. 150 today or 75 times higher. Commenting on inflation, a small shopkeeper or a hawk, would say no matter the inflation, we people are much better off than our parents and grandparents. Inflation in the Western as well as other centuries is actually much higher than in India. This phenomenon does not show up because the exchange rates are adverse to the Indian rupee. The British pound is about Rs. 100 when exchanged, but its purchasing power in Britain is not



much better than Rs. 10. This is primarily because India imports more than exports. The message is eloquent; must times our economy to be able to export more even if the payment is in rupees as well as in the importers currency which is viable.

There seems to be a systematic policy by Government to meet its purpose of meeting the economy's money supply needs. Some more money has been provided for moderate growth so the path of prosperity and growth is steady. This is like a corporate house increasing its profit every year and an unemployed welcoming an increment annually.

To put it another way, the money or currency supply is increased moderately every year to enable the economy to grow and not shrink. The national or central bank of every country should manage its money. Another way of looking of inflation is creating money in advance of production is order to expand the economy.

It is like a loan without having to pay interest by the country's economy. But with it, the duty of the central bank to watch the production of

“THE PRINTING MONEY IS JUSTIFIED, BUT IF THERE ARE DELAYS IN EXPANDING THE FACILITIES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS AND SERVICES, INFLATION WOULD TAKE PLACE. THIS MEANS THAT PRICES WOULD GROW AND PEOPLE WOULD BEGIN TO DEMAND AN INCREASE IN THEIR INCOME

goods and service is increased commensurately, with the extra money printed every year. It is like an interest-free loan strictly in order for the economy to be able to invest in the productivity of goods and services. This must be done efficiently, and in reasonable time.

The printing money is justified, but if there are delays in expanding the facilities for production of goods and services, inflation would take place. This means that prices would grow and people would begin to demand increase in their income. Since increasing taxation would bring further hardship on people's pocket, the Government would have no alternative but to print more money in order to satisfy people's legitimate demands.

This privilege of Governments of printing money at their discretion, is a luxury, but has cost quite a few countries, making them go virtually bankrupt. What else can one expect of an economy that is hit by inflation of say 80 per cent, year after year? Zimbabwe eventually grew tired of printing money, after doing it wantonly for a long time. It gave up the chase and declared the US

dollar to be the only legal tender in the country.

Pakistan at present is in the grip of an inflationary spiral. Even a much better organised country like Sri Lanka nearly went to the brink of being trapped in this spiral. Many others haven't fared any better; a large country like Turkey is in the grip of such a spiral. Not many years ago, Brazil found itself in a situation of having to reduce the value of its currency almost every morning. Hotels in Rio de Janeiro would quote their room rents in US dollars for the day, pasting the same on the room doors.

Contrast this financial jugglery with what William Pitt the Younger, who was Prime Minister of Britain at the turn of the 18th into the 19th century, did. He intended to make his tax collection exceed the national expenditure year after year, for a long enough time, so that Britain could be governed without raising taxes and the nation could run solely on the interest generated on treasury surpluses over the years.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWERING THE ELECTORATE

Madam — Apropos news article "One vote can change country's fate: UP CM Adityanath," published on March 28, this is my response. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the transformative power of a single vote during a conference organised by the BJP in Muzaffarnagar. Adityanath's remarks underscored the pivotal role citizens play in shaping the nation's destiny. He highlighted instances where one vote influenced the region's trajectory, emphasising the need for responsible voting to combat anarchy and safeguard faith.

Furthermore, Adityanath juxtaposed the BJP's commitment to national welfare against the opposition's alleged focus on familial interests. He credited the BJP-led Government for achievements such as the construction of the Ram temple and the cessation of extortion, contrasting it with the previous administrations' failures. Adityanath's call to prioritise the nation's interests resonates in a political landscape often clouded by divisive agendas. His message reinforces the significance of informed and conscientious voting for a brighter collective future.

Sneha Gupta | Delhi

BREAKTHROUGH IN BLAST CASE

Madam — Apropos news article "NIA arrests key conspirator in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case," published on March 28, this is my response. The arrest of Muzammil Shareef marks a significant stride in the investigation into the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. The coordinated effort by the NIA across multiple states underscores the gravity of the situation. Shareef's alleged involvement in providing logistical support to the main accused sheds light on the intricate web of this nefarious plot. The blast's aftermath, causing injuries and property damage, underscores the threat posed by such incidents. The ongoing raids and seizures of dig-

Political fallout of Kejriwal's arrest



Apropos Editorial "Truth travels freely," published on March 29, this is my response. The arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has not only stirred domestic uproar but has also garnered international attention. Kejriwal alleges political conspiracy behind his arrest, linking it to his anti-corruption stance and the ruling party's electoral bond donations. His wife's hint at crucial re-

lations adds intrigue to the unfolding drama. Amid accusations of being the mastermind of a multi-crore liquor scam, Kejriwal's arrest has ignited debates on political vendetta versus accountability. The international community's scrutiny, particularly the US State Department's remarks on India's internal affairs, underscores the global interest in this case.

However, the essence of justice lies in due process. While authorities assert a strong case, the lack of transparency raises concerns. Hastily orchestrated actions risk backlash, especially with elections looming. This saga underscores the perpetual struggle for transparency and justice in governance. Regardless of political affiliations, the public demands accountability. As events unfold, the nation awaits the resolution of Kejriwal's legal battle, cognizant of its broader implications on democracy and governance.

Khirabdi | Noida

ital devices signify a comprehensive approach to unravelling the truth. However, the fact that key suspects remain at large indicates the challenges ahead. As a concerned citizen, one hopes for swift justice and a thorough uncovering of the broader conspiracy. Such incidents remind us of the constant vigilance required to safeguard our communities against extremist threats.

Lavanya Dubey | Jind

WOMEN BREAKING THE STEREOTYPE

Madam — Beauty should not have any bars of religion or orthodox mentality, today women are no longer subjects of particular control and limits. Saudi Arabia's made a breakthrough while announcing their first Miss Universe Pageant. So far, Saudi Arabia has been caught in a gender divide debate, as their women are not been granted liberty and equal status like what they mentioned. But now Ms Romy Alqahtani will become the representative face of mil-

lions of Saudi women who are not only equivalent and capable like their male counterparts but also among the best. Her representation had been a historic moment as she is the face whose front run was made possible with the struggle of the struggle of thousands such women.

The era belongs to the women-led development and with Ms Romy Alqahtani's breakthrough from a society mostly targeted at the gender-divided country, hope that more such women representation like her will write new stories, and initiate more women's growth stories. Middle East in particular is facing a renaissance for women's participation and women's success, let's congratulate the women of the 21st century for breaking the stereotype and writing their success stories.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

MONEY MATTERS

Kia India looks to expand sales, service network

Kia India on Friday said it is planning to have around 700 sales and service touchpoints in 300 cities by the end of the year. The automaker, which sells models like Seltos and Sonet, has 522 such touchpoints across 236 cities. The company said it is focussed on strengthening its presence in Tier-1 and Tier-2 markets, contributing 40 per cent to its total network strength. Kia India is also focused on expanding its touchpoints in the Tier-4 and upcountry markets, it added. "We have expanded our touchpoints network from 285 to 522 since starting our operations in India. As part of Kia's 2.0 strategy, we are aiming to close the year with over 700 touchpoints, thereby making Kia more accessible to our esteemed customers," Kia India National Head Sales & Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said. The automaker is also committed to sustainability by introducing the green workshop concept and encouraging all its dealer partners to transition to eco-friendly workshops, he added. Kia India also intends to increase its certified pre-owned network to 100 outlets by the end of 2024. It currently has 59 such outlets across the country.



Shakti Pumps raises Rs 200 cr through Qualified Institutional Placement

Shakti Pumps (India) on Friday said that it has raised an amount of Rs 200 crore through qualified institutional placement route. The Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) issue garnered significant interest from qualified domestic institutional investors and was fully subscribed by two large Mutual Funds - LIC Mutual Fund and SBI Mutual Fund, the solar pumps manufacturer said in a statement. "Shakti Pumps (India) announces closure of Rs 200 crore QIP. With this fundraise, our balance sheet is placed well and will give us the opportunity to improve our market presence and consistently deliver strong results in the times ahead," the company's Chairman Dinesh Patidar said. As on December 31, the company had an order book of Rs 2,050 crore to be executed in the next two years, he said. The solar pump industry has huge opportunities ahead as the government's PM-KUSUM scheme aims to install lakhs of solar pumps across the country, Patidar said.



ICICI Securities' retail distribution head quits

ICICI Securities on Friday said Kedar Deshpande, head of retail distribution, has resigned from the brokerage firm to pursue alternate career opportunities. The resignation will take effect from the close of business hours on April 12, 2024. "Kedar Deshpande, Head - Retail Distribution (within the category of senior management in the Company), vide letter dated March 28, 2024, has tendered his resignation from the services of the company," ICICI Securities said in a regulatory filing. In his letter to ICICI Securities Managing Director and CEO Vijay Chandok, Deshpande said: "I wish to resign from the company to pursue alternate career opportunities outside the ICICI Group". ICICI Securities is currently in the process of delisting itself from the stock exchanges. The brokerage firm would be merged with its promoter ICICI Bank after successful delisting. ICICI Bank currently holds a 74.77 per cent stake in ICICI Securities. ICICI Securities had on Thursday informed the stock exchanges that about 72 per cent of its shareholders voted in favour of delisting, even though a majority of retail shareholders opposed the move.



Aye Finance secures EUR 15 mn debt funding

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

MSME-focused NBFC Aye Finance on Friday said it has secured EUR 15 million (approximately Rs 137 crore) in debt funding, proceeds of which will be used for on-lending purposes. The funding has come from IIV Mikrofinaanzfonds and another private fund managed by Invest in Visions, a leading German impact investment and portfolio management entity, with execution support from Agents For Impact (AFI). "This fresh infusion of capital will further strengthen Aye Finance's ability to provide crucial financial support to underserved MSMEs (medium, small and micro enterprises)



across India," the company said in a release. The funds will be used for on-lending to these businesses, enabling them to grow and

contribute to the nation's economic development, it added. "This new funding will allow us to reach out to a larger population of micro-enterprises

and offer them innovative financial products designed to meet the diverse needs of MSMEs," Aye Finance CFO Krishan Gopal said. The company recently closed its Series F equity round of Rs 310 crore, which was led by British International Investment. Aye has announced to disbursement of over Rs 10,000 crore in loans to grassroots businesses. It has an active client base of over 4.5 lakh micro-enterprises and an AUM of over Rs 4,000 crore. Currently, more than EUR 873 million are managed by Invest in Visions in the core areas of microfinance and Impact Investing (as of February 29, 2024).

Demand growth for non-ferrous metal to remain 10%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic demand growth for non-ferrous metals such as aluminium and copper is likely to remain at 10 per cent in the next financial year, Icara said on Friday. The apparent consumption growth for non-ferrous metals in the domestic market remained at 10-13 per cent in the first nine months of the ongoing fiscal supported by the government's push on infrastructure development and encouraging demand from renewables sectors and electric vehicles. "While the demand is expected to remain soft over the next two quarters as government spending moderates around the general elections, the overall demand growth is expected to remain comfortable at 10 per cent in FY24 and FY25," Icara said in a statement.

VC firm Accel selects 8 startups focused on AI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Venture capital major Accel has selected eight startups with specialised solutions in AI and Industry 5.0 for Atoms 3.0, its six-month accelerator programme that hand-holds and nurtures ventures to give them more firepower to unlock growth and collaboration opportunities. Atoms 3.0 offers up to USD 500,000 in funding, access to more than USD 5 million in perks, personalised mentorship, and a vibrant founder community network, the global venture fund that counts Flipkart, Cure.fit, Ninjacart, Swiggy and BookMyShow among its portfolio companies said. Atoms 3.0 mentors exceptional pre-seed startups dedicated to advances in cutting-edge domains such as Artificial Intelligence and Industry 5.0



(new-age model that refers to humans working alongside smart machines). "The shift to a thematic programme design for Atoms 3.0 has enabled us to provide deeper, sector-focused mentorship for the startups. Atoms has always restricted itself to smaller cohort sizes to stay hyper-focused on the needs of a smaller group of exceptional founders," said Prayank Swaroop, a partner at Accel. The eight startups in the third cohort represent the "next wave of disruptors in AI and Industry 5.0," he said. Of Accel's line up of eight

startups, four are pushing new frontiers in AI. The list includes Tune AI, which offers a GenAI stack for enterprises; Skoob, a generative AI platform for enhancing reading experiences; Meritic, a financial storytelling co-pilot; and Arivihan, India's first fully automated AI-based learning platform. In the Industry 5.0 space, Spintly provides an IoT (Internet of Things) platform for smarter building management, while Assets brings in a multidisciplinary CAD (computer aided design), simulation, and engineering design platform. The other two startups are currently in "stealth mode". "The six-month Atoms 3.0 journey is giving founders insight into critical areas like hiring, getting your first 10 customers, or tuning your pitch for investors," said Barath Shankar Subramanian, another partner at Accel.

TCS trained 3.5 lakh in generative AI skills

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Country's largest IT services company TCS on Friday said it has trained 3.5 lakh employees in generative AI skills. The company, which had in January announced that 1.5 lakh staffers are trained in the skill sets of what is said to be the biggest opportunity for IT services firm in the future, has now taken the number up to over half its employee base. "With over 350,000 employees trained on foundational skills in GenAI, TCS is well-poised to build one of the largest AI-ready workforces in the world," an official statement said.



In 2023, it had become the first technology company to create a dedicated business unit for AI and cloud to address the growing needs of customers for cloud and AI adoption. TCS' work till now includes application of GenAI to enhance customer experience for airlines featuring natural conversations with customers when their flight is delayed or cancelled, and alternative routing options.

IIM Mumbai, Starburst collaborate to boost startups

PNS ■ MUMBAI

European accelerator Starburst has formed a strategic collaboration with the Indian Institute of Management-Mumbai for promoting aerospace, new space, and defence (ASD) startups in India. Aimed at cultivating an ASD ecosystem centred around the prestigious B-School in India's financial capital, the alliance would provide vital support and resources to ASD startups across the nation, a statement said on Friday. The partnership comes amid India seeing growth and transformation within the aerospace, new space, and defence sectors, it added. "This strategic collaboration

signifies a crucial step towards nurturing and empowering the burgeoning ASD startup ecosystem in India," IIM Mumbai Director Manoj K Tiwari said. Starburst founder and CEO Francois Chopard said the partnership aims to catalyse



the growth of ASD startups by providing them with access to mentorship, funding opportunities, and international networks. Starburst is a leading European Aerospace, new Space, and Defence (ASD) accelerator.

No objection to resolution in Byju's EGM, claim sources

Miffed investors await scrutiniser's report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shareholders of edtech major Think and Learn, owner of Byju's brand, on Friday, did not object to the firm's resolution to increase its authorised share capital at its extraordinary general meeting to pave the way to absorb the recently raised USD 200 million through rights issue, as per the company sources. None of the miffed investors, who proposed to oust Byju's founder and family from the management seat, took part in the meeting, they added. However, sources from the investors' side said their authorised representatives participated in the meeting,



and the voting option is still open through postal ballot till April 6, after which the final result will be known through the scrutinisers' report. "The meeting started at 10 am with approximately 20 investors' representatives in attendance, along with Think and Learn management. The requisite quorum required for EGM was there. A few questions regarding the postal ballot were asked and answered by the chairman and CS (company secretary).

Banks' GNPA's set to improve further: Report



PNS ■ MUMBAI

The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) of the Indian banking system are set to improve further to up to 2.1 per cent by the end of FY25, a report said on Friday. GNPA's are likely to come at 2.5-2.7 per cent in FY24 and will improve further to 2.1-2.4 per cent by the end of FY25, domestic rating agency Care Ratings said in the report. It can be noted that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) began the comprehensive exercise in the middle of the last decade by instructing banks to classify certain stressed assets as NPAs so that the balance sheets represent a true picture. The rating agency also flagged a list of downside risks, which may result in its estimate not coming true, including a material weakening in asset quality due to the elevated interest rates, the impact of regulatory changes, a tighter liquidity environment and global issues. It said GNPA's surged to 11.2 per cent in FY18 from 3.8 per cent in FY14 due to the AQR process of 2015-16, which pushed banks to recognise NPAs and reduce unnecessary restructuring and added that the stress was emanating from the exposure to big-ticket wholesale advances.

GeM procurement crosses Rs 4 L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The procurement of goods and services through government's portal GeM has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore so far this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said on Friday. The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries and departments. "As of March 28, the procurement has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore. It is historic," GeM CEO P K Singh told reporters here. He said that defence sector buyers are buying several



goods and services from the platform. "Assembly of BrahMos missile is being done through GeM as a service contract. In defence, right from supplying eggs up to the missile parts is being done through the portal," Singh said. In 2021-22 the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore and it crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last financial year. He said that procurement of services from the portal has jumped from Rs 66,000 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 2.05 lakh crore so far this fiscal. Similarly, goods worth Rs 1.95 lakh crore have been bought

from the platform till March 28 this fiscal. About the possibility of opening up the portal for consumer at large, Singh said that is a very different ecosystem altogether. "Yes we will be mulling over, we are preparing for that, we should be prepared for that if the government so desires. If feasible, if practical, we will do a small pilot in this area as well in the coming years, if the approvals are in place," he said. He informed that several countries from Africa and South East Asia are showing keen interest in GeM. "We can provide consultancy services also and can also set up similar platform for them. We have queries from several quarters. They have seen and studied our systems," Singh added. He added that they want to develop GeM as a unified procurement portal of the country. Currently, only goods and services are allowed on the platform and "we want to include works contract also and if it will come, it will be a big hit", he said. Further, he said that a dedicated page for election related goods and services like catering and webcasting services are there on the portal. About engagement with states, he said states/Union Territories such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant procurement orders in the current fiscal.

FPIs make remarkable comeback; infuse Rs 2 lakh crore in equities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors made a strong return by injecting more than Rs 2 lakh crore into Indian equities in 2023-24, driven by optimism surrounding the country's robust economic fundamentals amidst a challenging global environment. Looking forward to 2025, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazars in India, said that the outlook is cautiously optimistic and anticipates sustained FPI inflows supported by progressive policy reforms, economic stability, and attractive investment avenues. "However, we remain mindful of global geopolitical influ-



ences that may introduce intermittent volatility, emphasising the importance of strategic planning and agility in navigating market fluctuations," he added. The outlook for FY25 from an FPI perspective, continues to remain strong. Naveen KR, smallcase Manager and Senior Director at Windmill Capital, said. In the current fiscal 2023-24, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of around Rs 2.08 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.2 lakh crore in the debt market. Collectively, they pumped Rs 3.4 lakh crore into the capital market, as per data available with the depositories. The dazzling resurgence came following an outflow from equities in the preceding two financial years. In 2022-23, Indian equities witnessed a net outflow of Rs 37,632 crore by FPIs on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before this, they pulled out a massive Rs 1.4 lakh crore. However, in 2020-2021, FPIs made a record investment of Rs 2.74 lakh crore.

Ipca Laboratories shareholders reject employees stock option

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shareholders of Ipca Laboratories have rejected a special resolution to grant stock options to eligible employees, key managerial personnel (KMP) and its whole-time directors, according to a regulatory filing by the company. The company through a notice of postal ballot dated February 14, 2024 had sought approval for three special resolutions, including consideration and approval of Ipca Laboratories Ltd Employees Stock Option Scheme 2024 for



grant of stock options to eligible employees, KMPs and whole-time directors of the company. Except the resolution pertaining to approval of Ipca - Employee Stock Option Scheme - 2024, all the other resolutions placed before the shareholders as per the notice of the postal ballot dated February 14, 2024 have been passed by the requisite majority, Ipca Laboratories said in a filing on BSE.

Dalal Street minnows steal the show in FY24

■ Give hefty returns to investors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BSE mid-cap and small-cap stocks have outperformed the benchmark Sensex in 2023-24 with about 62 per cent returns, reflecting buoyant investors' sentiment amid robust macroeconomic conditions in the country and impressive quarterly earnings reported by various firms. As per an analysis, the BSE mid-cap gauge jumped 15,013.95 points or 62.38 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal,

while the small-cap index climbed 16,068.99 points or 59.60 per cent. In comparison, the 30-share BSE Sensex raked in a gain of 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent during the fiscal under review. "The recent surge in interest towards mid and small-cap stocks among retail investors can be attributed to their remarkable earnings growth and the pursuit of high-growth opportunities. Highlighting this trend, investors have shown a clear preference for



mid and small-cap schemes over large-cap ones, as evi-

denced by the net inflows in equity mutual funds.

"This shift in investor sentiment is bolstered by the robust macroeconomic conditions in India, which traditionally foster accelerated growth in mid and small-cap stocks during periods of economic expansion. Moreover, the impressive quarterly earnings reported by numerous mid and small-cap companies further validate their substantial growth potential, enticing retail investors in search of profitable ventures," said Suman Bannerjee, CIO of hedge fund Hedonova.

The broader market put up an impressive performance in the 2023-24 fiscal. The BSE midcap gauge reached its record peak of 40,282.49 on February 8 after slipping to its 52-week low of 23,881.79 on March 31, 2023. The BSE small-cap index jumped to its all-time high of 46,821.39 on February 7 after hitting its 52-week low of 26,692.09 on March 31 last year. The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its all-time high of 74,245.17 on March 7 this year.

'THANKS TO HYDERABAD; PEOPLE ARE NOW AWARE OF ART THERAPY'

Saher Ali, a certified holistic psychological counsellor, who has been one of the few(s) to start the concept of art therapy in the city, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing her association, and love for the city, in an exclusive chat for our exclusive Hyderabad column.

TEJAL SINHA

Home is where your heart is, and for many, Hyderabad has been that place. Well, that's also for our interviewee Saher Ali, who shares about it in our special segment of Hyderabad, this week. Saher is a certified holistic psychological counsellor, who uses art as a technique for her therapy. Born in New Delhi, she has travelled to many cities, reason; her father's Army posting. But with her dad, hailing from Hyderabad, she kept travelling to the 'City of Nizams' at times for her holiday. After his retirement, they'd shifted here to Hyderabad. However, Saher was doing her studies at a boarding school in Ooty, and thereafter, completed her graduation from Hyderabad. But again, had to go to Bangalore for her post-graduation.

Her association with the city, she playfully says, feels like '100 years'. "Hyderabad has been the best city I've been to," begins the founder of Totums Art Studio. "I love the culture of the city, politeness, peace and the city is so much more accepting. More than the word tolerant, I would say the city is more accepting, and an inclusive kind of place. People are so good and have been very polite and nice here. Fortunately, to date, I haven't had any unpleasant experiences here. It may defer to the rest, but for me luckily, that's how it has been. People have never been rude to me, be it the cab or auto driver. I might have been rude but people have been kind."

She has purely practiced as a psychotherapist for a really long time. However, she introduced art into her practice around 2017 as a tool for self-reflection. She started doing workshops to use the art for mental well-being, creativity, and distress, which in fact broke the stigma of counselling.



For the unaware, art therapy is a creative process in psychotherapy that uses a holistic approach toward wellness and healing. Saher has conducted individual, family, and group therapy sessions with children, adolescents, and adults experiencing emotional difficulties in different settings. "I've been using art as a medium in my therapy. When I started it, initially people were a bit hesitant like they might be judged. However, I worked on that, focusing on the process rather than the product. That has helped people become more open to it," she shares adding that now there's a lot openness towards it "I started it as a therapy and then saw in cafes that they had started with this painting and all. So somewhere I kind of kickstarted the movement in my thought process because when I started there was no one doing the art therapy. But now I'm happy that there are many who have provided this therapy."

One thing that reminds her of the city, when she thinks of it—space and humour. "The city has a good sense of humour. There is always a general attitude here that no matter from where you come, you become a Hyderabadi someday. *Hyderabad ka paani peeya hai toh wapas aate hi hai*. Post my art movement there has been a lot of openness. People are open to it and they have a changing attitude. I don't know if it has to do something world as a whole or particularly Hyderabad, they have been open to it. There is always a flow of clients, which means, it works. I got a lot of references. Most of my clients are through references; word of mouth. And that, people are now aware of the art therapy. The city has been good for me professionally."

However, she feels that the youths of the city have to be more motivated. She feels their attitude is more towards attendance and making quick money, rather than planning for their career. "Honestly, it is the GHMC, police, and RTO," she says as we ask her about what makes the city different from the rest of the cities, she's been in. "They've always been supportive and help you find the right place to go to. The police here are not at all intimidating like in Bangalore. For example, I borrowed a friend's car and drove out. I was stopped 5-6 times in a day, which feels so pestering and they keep asking things like your name or if you're Muslim. But in Hyderabad, the police officials are very supportive and are always calm," she further signs off adding, "Hyderabad to me is a home it brings a lot of peace and you can do what you wanna do without being judged and very friendly. I feel very accepted and a homely feeling in the city."



Colon cancer: No longer an elderly disease!

At what age can one possibly get colon cancer? If the answer is 50's or 60's, then you are mistaken. Colorectal cancer, commonly known as colon cancer, has been increasing in young adults. According to studies, young adults aged between 31-40 are at more risk than individuals above the age of 50. Colon cancer affects the colon; the large intestine or the rectum. Changes in lifestyle, environmental conditions, and food habits are usually the common culprits that lead to colon cancer.

The rise in colon cancer among young adults is influenced by various factors, prompting the need for comprehensive research. Of the factors- habits like smoking and excessive alcohol consumption have been identified as contributors of growth of cancer cells in the intestine. Other factors like lack of exercise and physical activities which lead to obesity and fat deposits near the stomach can also lead to this deadly disease. Dietary habits also play a vital role. Frequent consumption of food like red meat and processed food with high levels of sugar increases the risk of colon cancer. Having chronic constipation or diarrhoea can cause damage to the lining of the colon as the colon has an increased exposure to stool for a longer duration causing colon cancer. Environmental factors like pollution could be a leading cause as well, as noticeable in the atmosphere. The young adults have been exposed to more harmful chemicals than the older generation. Genetic factors also play a role as individuals could get it due to family history.

The symptoms can vary from one individual to another, but there is a chance that young adults do not necessarily experience typical symptoms indicating colon cancer posing a challenge. Some symptoms that can be found in young adults are abdominal pains that are concentrated more in the lower abdomen. Change in the bowel habits like constipation or diarrhoea that happened recently could be one of the major indicators as well. Sudden weight loss that was unintentional and didn't result from a lifestyle change may also point to a possibility of colon cancer. Another symptom that shows up is anaemia which results in fatigue and weakness. Additionally, the presence of blood in stool is a symptom that shouldn't be overlooked. Even

the presence of blood in small amounts shouldn't be taken lightly.

A colonoscopy is a recognised diagnostic method in which colon cancer can be detected. Biopsy is another option where the cell growth or tumours are tested to understand whether they are cancerous. Using Faecal Occult Blood Tests (FOBT) or DNA tests of stool can be an initial screening option. These tests check for hidden blood in the stool or analyse stool for genetic abnormalities that might indicate colon cancer.

One of the primary concerns for young adults is the risk of delayed diagnosis of colon cancer. This is due to symptoms that may be dismissed or attributed to other causes due to the misconception that colon cancer primarily affects older individuals. As a result, young adults may not receive timely screening or diagnostic evaluations, leading to delays in detecting the disease. Additionally, symptoms of colon cancer can be nonspecific and easily overlooked, further contributing to delays in diagnosis among this age group.

Starting at a young age, individuals can engage in specific behaviors to decrease their susceptibility to colon cancer. If a healthy lifestyle is followed, there is an increased chance of not being at risk. Healthy and balanced diet rich in fibre and limiting the intake of red meat and processed food can ensure better health. Involving in physical activities like walking, exercising, or aerobics regularly can regulate better well-being and prevent you from diseases. Limiting alcohol intake and cutting down on smoking can not only help you prevent cancer but also limit the risk of inducing lifestyle diseases.

In essence, the rise in colon cancer incidents in young adults is a rising concern. The misconception that only the elderly demographic is affected is misunderstood and requires a re-evaluation. Understanding the factors, not overlooking the symptoms and timely identification is important from not allowing it to snowball into a severe stage.

(The author, Prof. Dr. Somashekhar S P, is the Chairman - Medical Advisory Board, Aster DM Healthcare - GCC and India.)

TEJAL SINHA

Randeep Hooda is currently basking on the success of his recent film, *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*, a historical biographical film, based on the life of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Not only has the adroit actor played the titular role, but it also marked his directorial debut, and has also co-written, and co-produced the film.

Now that the film has been opened to critical acclaim, *The Pioneer* interacts with the producer Anand Pandit, who has been pretty satisfied with the responses the film has been receiving. *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar* has sparked discussion across the country since its announcement. Following its release, "We are pleased with the positive reception the movie has garnered. It is an anti-propaganda film in every sense, as we aimed to do justice to the real-life contributions of Savarkar in India's freedom struggle. Certain political parties have consistently attempted to tarnish the image of this freedom fighter."

They aimed to present a clearer

'WE HAD TO SHOWCASE THE REAL SAVARKAR, SWATANTRYA VEER SAVARKAR IS NOT FICTIONALISED'

Producer Anand Pandit is currently enjoying the response that he has been receiving for his recent project *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, he discusses some interesting tidbits about the film, working with Randeep Hooda, and more.

challenge in India, with a high chance of facing resistance from individuals who do not subscribe to the particular theory or ideology depicted in the movie. Seconding to this, he also shared, "Opponents may try to create roadblocks, and certain sections of the bureaucracy with vested interests may also oppose the film. Naturally, filmmakers will encounter various troubles and obstacles throughout the process. I believe there was a lobby working against him, which resulted in some of his major contributions to the country going unnoticed. We have also seen that certain sections of society have always deviated from the truth and tend to believe only what aligns with their political outlook. That is why many real and inspiring figures were neglected in our history books."

The makers, he says, tried their best to stay true to history. Extensive research was conducted for the film. "The team referred to hundreds of books that depicted the true side of India's struggle for independence. They also interacted with Savarkar's family and acquaintances. Randeep also visited the Andaman jail and engaged with individuals there to gather insights into Savarkar's life during his time in jail. Hence, it is not a fictionalised version at all."

As we head towards the end of the chat,

would see the light of the day or not. "Savarkar faced a lot of issues in his life and encountered numerous obstacles. Considering the hardships he endured, ours were only minor concerns, which we successfully overcame. We are happy that the film was released on a grand scale as per our plans," shared the *Drishyam 2* producer, who was all praises for Randeep Hooda as he further added, "Randeep, as we know, is one of the finest actors in our industry. He possesses immense talent to

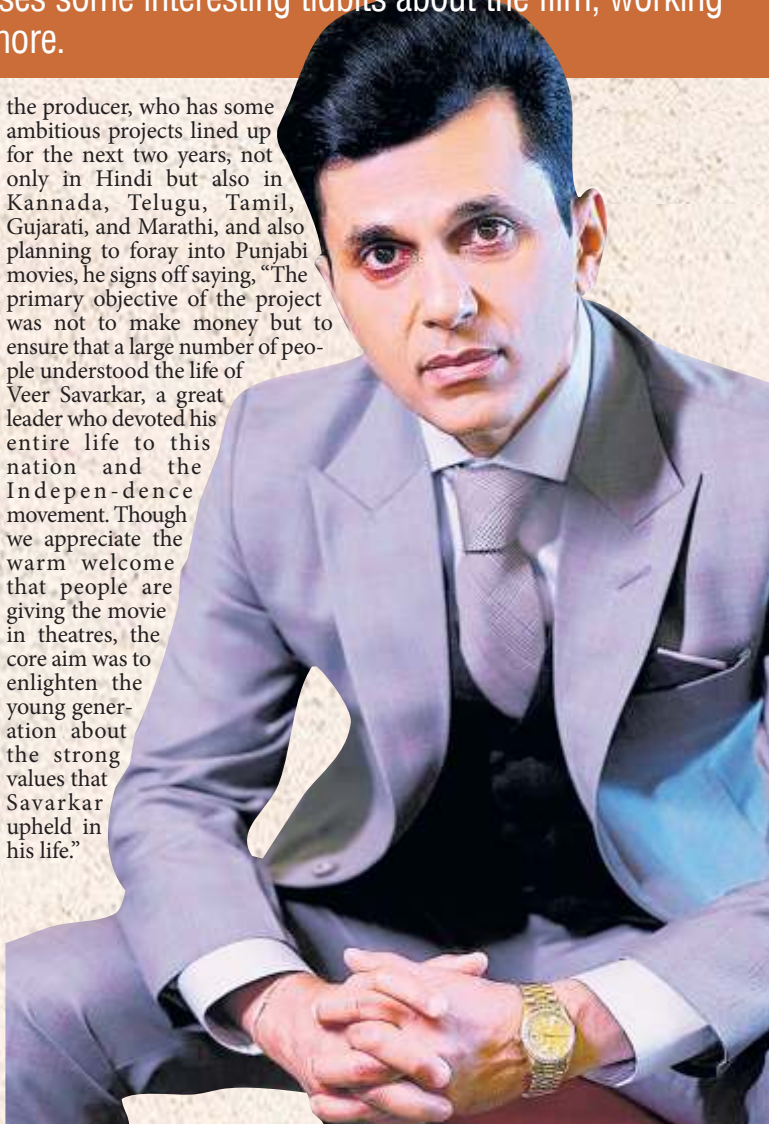
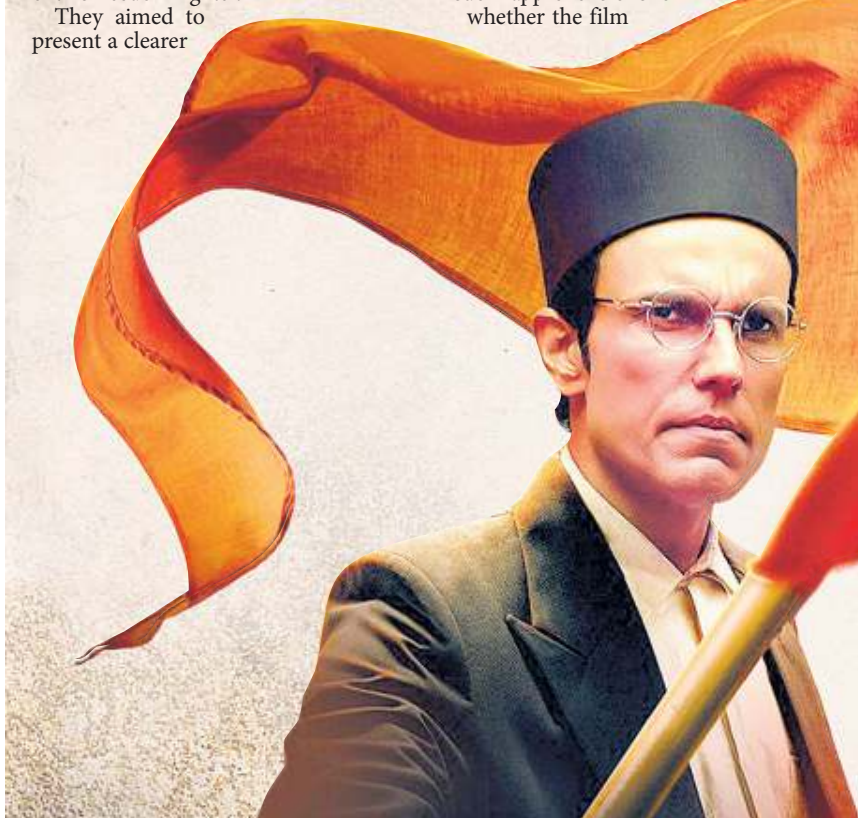
picture of Savarkar's legacy and his contributions to the country by showcasing the accurate side of history, thereby enlightening the younger generation about the truth. Right from his childhood, he recalled during his school days in Gujarat, "I read a lot about Savarkar. Through my learning, I realised that he is one of those unsung heroes who never received justice from our historians. Later, I decided that I wanted to make a film based on his real life. It wasn't the commercial aspects that drove my desire to make the film, but rather my conviction that I should showcase the real Savarkar to today's youth."

As we went ahead with the chat, he revealed that there were no such apprehensions of whether the film

breathes life into whichever character he portrays. Being an excellent method actor, he easily immerses himself in the character and gives his one hundred percent for the totality of his role. So, without Randeep, I could not even imagine making this film. When Randeep approached me with this proposal, I knew that this was the right opportunity for me to realise the dream of making a movie based on Savarkar."

Political films have undeniably been a big

the producer, who has some ambitious projects lined up for the next two years, not only in Hindi but also in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Gujarati, and Marathi, and also planning to foray into Punjabi movies, he signs off saying, "The primary objective of the project was not to make money but to ensure that a large number of people understood the life of Veer Savarkar, a great leader who devoted his entire life to this nation and the Independence movement. Though we appreciate the warm welcome that people are giving the movie in theatres, the core aim was to enlighten the young generation about the strong values that Savarkar upheld in his life."



what's brewing?

Phoenix Marketcity launched the third edition of 'Big Break' in collaboration with Bollywood icon and entrepreneur Sunny Leone, founder of the beauty brand StarStruck. This initiative is dedicated to empowering budding women entrepreneurs by offering them an unparalleled platform to pitch their innovative business ideas to leading venture capital firms, including Kae Capital and Equanimity. Now in its third year, 'Big Break' seeks to amplify its impact by extending its reach to more aspiring women entrepreneurs across the country.

SOLUTION									
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REVIEW

Kaliyugam Pattanamlo: Informative and engaging

PNS/HYDERABAD

PLOT:

Mohan (played by Devi Prasad) and Kalpana (played by Roopa Lakshmi) are blessed with two sons, Vijay (played by Vishva Karthikeya) and Sagar (also played by Vishva Karthikeya), and live in Nandyala. Both the sons are poles apart. While Vijay is scared of blood, Sagar on the other side, enjoys it. Scared of the repercussions that one might have to face because of Sagar, he gets admitted to a mental hospital at a young age by his parents. Shravani (played by Aayushi Patel) meets Vijay in college, and she falls in love with him

at first sight. She hunts and kills the wild beasts who commits the assault. A police officer (played by Chitra Shukla) comes to stop the atrocities in Nandyala. What were her discoveries? Who is the good Vijay, or Sagar? And whether the problem is solved or not is the remaining story.

PERFORMANCES:

Vishva gets to play two different roles in the film, and for an actor with his experience, an opportunity like this to display his talent in different shades is an added benefit, and he did a good job in portraying the emotions of Vijay and Sagar. Apart from displaying emotions, he was good with his dance moves too. On

Cast: Vishva Karthikeya, Ayushi Patel, Devi Prasad, Roopa Lakshmi, and others

Story, dialogues, screenplay, direction: Ramakharth Reddy

Producers: Dr. K. Chandra Obul Reddy, G. Maheswara Reddy, and Kattam Ramesh

Cinematography: Charan Madhavaneni

Music: Ajay Arasada

Editor: Gary BH



the other hand, Ayushi Patel impresses in the first half. Her performance will be dominated by Chitra Shukla in the second half. Ayushi made a good debut; however, a little length to her character would've been better.

ANALYSIS:

The film has a good message to convey. The film takes off on a good note, and it goes on in an interesting way in the first half. But as the narrative goes on, the pace slows down in the second half. The same momentum is not seen post-interval; however, the peeling of twists in the second half engages the audience. The climax saves the second half.

The director, despite being a debutant, narrated the story well. The concept he has chosen for the film is impressive. It educates and informs the audience about certain events. The screenplay is clean and interesting. The first half was full of questions and riddles. The answers will be found in the second half.

On the technical front, the music was racy. The production values, too, were made felt.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, this is an informative and engaging film with a few hits and misses. But the story and the narration make it to the list of must-watch films at least once.

RATING: 2.75/5

Trisha will join Vishwambhara sets in April

We had recently reported that Megastar Chiranjeevi and Trisha Krishnan wrapped up their Hyderabad schedule for *Vishwambhara* this month.

The latest update exclusively from *The Pioneer* is that Trisha is set to join the next schedule of *Vishwambhara* in the month of April, and that the schedule is said to take place in Hyderabad.

Vishwambhara marks Chiranjeevi's 156th film, and it is a fantasy drama getting ready to wow the audience for Sankranti, 2025.

The film, which went on floors late last year, shot some key scenes in Maredumilli, Andhra Pradesh, where it did not require Chiranjeevi to shoot. Megastar's schedules have begun now, and it is said that the makers are trying to wrap up the shoot at the earliest.

Sources close to the unit revealed that the film will have some crazy action scenes in which Chiranjeevi fights in the real mud. Those action sequences are said to have come out quite well.

Written and directed by Vassishtha, the film is being produced grandly by UV Creations banner, with Chota K Naidu being the cinematographer.

– KRS



Chiranjeevi launches teaser of Nara Rohith's political drama

After almost 10 years, a sequel is being made to the political drama *Prathinidhi*. Starring Nara Rohith as the male lead in *Prathinidhi 2*, the film is being directed by popular journalist Murthy Devaguthapu, who is making his directorial debut. As the film is getting ready for a grand release, the makers of the film released its teaser on Friday.

Interestingly, ahead of elections, Megastar Chiranjeevi has come in support of the film by launching the teaser himself.

The protagonist is an honest news reporter working with a TV channel.

In his interview with a top politician, he inquires about the debts of the state, to which the latter replies, 5 lakh crores. The politician suggests the debts will be cleared if development is done in the state. Then, the protagonist quizzes whether there are really developments happening in the state. The last episode shows the protagonist cautioning people to cast their votes or else leave the country. The teaser also introduced other prominent characters, such as Sachin Khedekar, Raghu Babu, Jishu Sengupta, Udaya Bhanu, Ajay Gosh, Shree, etc.

Produced by KumarRaza Bathula, Anjaneyulu Sri Thota, and Surendranath Bollineni, *Prathinidhi 2* is said to grace cinemas in April, this year.



TWO BIG UPDATES FROM VISHWAK SEN ARE HERE!

Actor Vishwak Sen celebrated his birthday on March 29 and some crazy updates were revealed on his birthday. He has three films lined up now.

Beginning with his milestone 10th film, the makers of this film revealed the title and first look poster of the actor from the film on Friday. Directed by debutant Ravi Teja Mullapudi, the film has been titled *Mechanic Rocky*.

The first look poster introduced Vishwak as Rocky. The actor is seen in a mass and powerful avatar as he is seen smoking a cigarette with a big wrench in his hand, having a mischievous expression on his face. We can see a mechanic shed in the background. Produced by Ram Talluri of SRT Entertainments banner, Meenakshi Chaudhary is said to play the female lead in the film, which is billed to be a comedy and action entertainer.

On the other hand, the title of his 12th film was also revealed on the occasion.

For his 12th movie, the actor has joined hands with director Ram Narayan. Produced by Sahu Garapati



PIC TALK

Actress Samyuktha Menon has become a hit heroine in the South film industry, with all her films performing extremely well at the box office. Be it Dhanush's *SI/R* or Sai Durgha Tej's *Virupaksha*, her films were major superhits. She has now signed a pan-India project with Nikhil Siddhartha. While it is official that the actress is learning horse riding to play her part in this magnum opus film *Swayambhu*, the actress shared on her social media handles an update about it. She shared a picture where she is seen almost perfecting herself with the skills of horse riding. Meanwhile, Nikhil Siddhartha is taking martial arts training for this film.



SREERANGANEETHULU TRAILER OUT NOW

Suhas, Karthik Ratnam, Ruhani Sharma, and Viraj Ashwin starrer *Sreeranganeethulu*, directed by Praveen Kumar, is heading for a theatrical release in April.

While the initial plan was to release the film on April 12, the makers of the film have preponed it to April 11.

Meanwhile, the trailer for the film was released on Friday in the presence of the entire cast and crew. The movie is produced by Venkateswara Rao Balmuri under the banner of Radhavi Entertainments banner.

Speaking on the occasion, Ruhani Sharma said that she has been eagerly waiting for this film for many days. "I am happy that I acted in such a good movie. This is a fairy tale. Everyone connects with all the characters. While watching this movie, people will feel like they are looking at themselves in a mirror. Praveen is a very talented director. If you support such movies, more good movies will come," she said.

On the other hand, Baby fame Viraj Ashwin said, "The story is the hero of this movie. Praveen is a good director as well as a good writer. He has a very good story. I am happy to act in this. All the different characters in the movie are going to be seen through this movie. This is a story that connects everyone from Basti to Bengal."



PUSHPA: THE RULE TEASER LIKELY ON APRIL 8



Actor Allu Arjun is having a blast in Dubai, celebrating his new achievement with his family members. He is adding many firsts to his feathers – becoming the first Telugu actor to win a National Award, becoming the first South actor to get 25 million followers on Instagram, and now being the first Telugu actor to have his wax statue at Madame Tussauds Dubai. That being said, an update about his most ambitious project, *Pushpa: The Rule*, is long awaited. After a glimpse video released on his birthday in 2023, no update from the film was officially announced except for shooting schedules.

As the actor is soon to celebrate his birthday on April 8, sources say that the teaser from *Pushpa: the Rule* is likely to be unveiled on the day.

The film is heading for a grand theatrical release worldwide in August, and a teaser four months before the release is the least expected by his fans and audience.

Busy shooting the final parts of the film, it is most likely that a teaser will be released on his birthday.

Directed by Sukumar, Rashmika Mandanna, Fahadh Fasil will reprise their roles in the second part.

It is said that *Pushpa 2* will be bigger and better and Sukumar is told to have written a brilliant story where Allu Arjun and Fahadh will have tug of war and their combination scene will blow away peoples minds—well, not literally.

Annapurna Studios, Asian Cinemas to release Dear in Telugu states

Actor-singer-composer-producer GV Prakash has joined hands with actress Aishwarya Rajesh for a quirky family comedy-drama film *Dear*, directed by Anand Ravichandran.

Originally made in Tamil, the film is also being released in Telugu speaking states in April.

While it will head to theatres in Tamil on April 11, the film will be released in Telugu on April 12.

While the Andhra theatrical rights of the movie are bagged by Annapurna Studios, Asian Cinemas acquired the Telangana theatrical rights. Surely, the production and distribution houses with huge theatrical chain businesses will give the movie a bigger release in Telugu states.

The actor of the film himself scored the music for this film, whose songs are ruling the charts.

Also starring Kaali Venkat, Ilavarasu, Rohini, Thalavasa Vijay, Geetha Kailasam and Nandini, the film has cinematography by Jagadeesh Sundaramurthy.





Rahul led LSG eye all round effort against PBKS

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants will aim for an improved all-round effort when they take on Punjab Kings in their second Indian Premier League match here on Saturday. K L Rahul-led LSG faltered in the opening game against Rajasthan Royals, losing by 20 runs in Chandigarh. Barring Krunal Pandya, all the LSG bowlers leaked runs and also looked ineffective. In the absence of Mark Wood and David Willey, LSG's pace battery looks thin with the likes of Mohsin Khan, Naveen-ul-Haq, and Yash Thakur expected to do the heavy lifting. Fighting for a place in the upcoming T20 World Cup squad, Ravi Bishnoi too looked ordinary in the team's tournament opener. Skipper Rahul, who has decided to play the wicketkeeper-batter's role keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, made 58 in his comeback game and would be looking to build on that. He would be hoping his opening partner Quinton de Kock returns to his belligerent best against Punjab after missing out against Royals. The team is also banking on the likes of Devdutt Padikkal Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, and Krunal to deliver



down the order. LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who was the leading run-getter for the team last year with 408 runs. PBKS, on the other hand, have a 50-50 record so far, winning one and losing one.

The Shikhar Dhawan-led side needs more fluency in the powerplay and that is bound to come if Jonny Bairstow gets going after failing in the first two games. Dhawan, who only plays IPL to IPL, needs to up his strike rate going forward. He himself admitted to batting a bit "slowly" against RCB.

Prabhsimran Singh, who came of age last season, has not been able to capitalise on his starts yet. While all-rounder Sam Curran has shown his prowess with the bat in the two matches, the left-arm seamer has been wayward with the ball. Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma, who is in the running for a World Cup berth,

needs to have a stellar season to convince the national selectors. In the pace bowling department, Kagiso Rabada will look for more support from Curran, Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel. Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar has been impressive while leg-spinner Rahul Chahar needs to up his game.

TEAMS(FROM):

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvraj Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M Siddharth, Ashton Turner, David Willey, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (captain), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.



Last 3 days I was in bed, I was on painkillers: Parag

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Architect of Rajasthan Royals' win over Delhi Capitals, young batter Rryan Parag on Thursday revealed that he was not well for the last three days and had to take painkillers to recover in time for their IPL match here. Considered a precocious talent, the 22-year-old from Assam finally came off age as he slammed a blistering 84 not out off 45 balls to set up a 12-run win for Rajasthan Royals against Delhi Capitals.

"I have worked very hard, the last 3 days I was in bed, I was on painkillers. I just got up today and I'm very happy," said Parag, who was adjudged the Player of the Match, during the post-match presentation. Despite his talent, Parag struggled to live up to the expectations and had underwhelming numbers to show in the last few seasons but his hard work paid off as he hit his highest IPL score to lift RR to 185 for 5 here.

"(Emotions) They are settled, mom is here, she has seen the struggle, the last 3-4 years," he said.

"I know what my opinion is about myself. That does not change regardless of whether I get a zero or not." He played as a finisher in the earlier editions but this time, the team management gave him an extended role at No. 4. Parag was also coming into the season after scoring loads of runs at the Deodhar trophy and Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s. "That's a lot to do with the type of season as well, I had a great domestic season and that helps," he said.

"Someone in the top four has to play the 20 overs, the wicket was keeping low and stopping, in the first game Sanju bhayya did it." Parag's performance also impressed his captain Sanju Samson.

"Rryan Parag has been a big name in the last few years.

Wherever I go, people ask me about him. There is something very special he can give to Indian cricket," Samson said. RR had a disastrous start as they were 36 for 3 in the eighth over but Parag slowly constructed his innings before accelerating in the end to lift them to a good total.

"The way we started, the first ten overs, we were like Rowman, be ready you might have to bat! The IPL is changing and we all have to be flexible," Samson said.

RR's decision to bring in Nandre Burger as an impact player, replacing Shimron Hetmyer also reaped dividends as the South African pacer struck twice in the fourth over. "Earlier it was about 11 players, now it is about all 15 players. Me and Sanga had a lot of chat between 15th and 17th over before deciding the Impact Player. It's all about gauging in which zone they are. You have to look at that and take your decision."

"I saw Sandy (Sandeep Sharma) was calm and Avesh (Khan) was also looking good, so I went with that," he added referring to the brilliant death bowling by the two pacers."

Talking about his strategy going into the final over, Avesh, who defended 17 runs in the final over, said: "My plan is always clear. One side was longer, so my plan was to bowl wide yorkers."

"I was giving myself five seconds and only thought about executing them. My focus is always on the execution and back my yorkers."

"Enjoying myself here because we have Sandeep, Boult, Burger, all of whom have different skills. Samson gives me freedom to execute and only steps in if he sees I am struggling."

"I try to improve myself everytime. In T20s I try to reinvent myself. I never think about selection and only practice what I want to bowl."

Nortje will take time to get better after injury layoff: Hopes

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Delhi Capitals bowling coach James Hopes feels that the team's under-fire pace spearhead Anrich Nortje will get better with time having recently made a comeback to competitive cricket after six months.

Nortje was taken to the cleaners by Rajasthan Royals' Rryan Parag at the death as he went for 48 in his four overs on Thursday night.

RR won the IPL match by 12 runs while defending 185 for 5. Nortje had been out of cricket since September and came into IPL having played just three domestic T20 games earlier this month and failed to nail the yorkers or bowl the hard lengths that he is known for.

"I won't say too much bad about the bowlers. They just tried to execute. It was a good first half with the ball but got away from us a little bit in the last five overs," Hopes said after his team's 12-run loss to RR, where the complexion changed during the last part of their bowling innings.



"It's the first time that Nortje has been at this level in a while. He had a fair time out of the game, but if you look at all the numbers, he is one of the premier death bowlers in the game. We trust that he is going to keep getting better," Hopes, a former Australia medium pacer said defending the

Proteas pacer. Hopes also felt that just like bowling, the team's batting also came apart in the back-10 after a positive start.

"With the bat, we started really well, we were in front of the game, and then fell away a little bit in the middle. They bowled 10 overs of death bowling

pretty much at us, and executed it well."

Hopes assessed that the end game is a problem in both departments after the first two defeats.

"We need to tidy at what we do at the end of the game. It's one game, I don't even count the first game because we had to take a bowler out to get an extra batter in and then Ishant (Sharma) went down, so I'm not going to judge us too harshly on one game."

The batting in the middle overs will largely depend on how comeback man Rishabh Pant fares.

"We need to tidy up our middle over batting too. We tend to get stuck a little bit in phases there. We know the fix for that is Rishabh Pant," Hopes said.

"He has played two games after a long lay-off and I think you're going to see some pretty special things from him in the next few weeks," he concluded. DC will take on Chennai Super Kings in their next game at the ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

Execution wise, it was probably my best last over: Avesh

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Royals pacer Avesh Khan feels the last over he bowled against Delhi Capitals in the ongoing IPL was probably his best effort in the death overs. The India pacer had to defend 17 runs in the last over on Thursday night and he was able to do that rather comfortably, landing one yorker after the other. Delhi could only get four runs from that over, ensuring a 12-run win for the home team. Going into the season, Lucknow Super Giants had traded Avesh to Royals.

"It is not the first time I bowled the last over. Last year I defended against Rajasthan. When I played for Delhi (bowled the last over there also), execution wise this was my best over. All the balls were in the same spot, wide yorkers," said Avesh, who has played eight ODIs and 20 T20s. The 27-year-old also spoke about how his role has changed compared to last season when he turned up for LSG.

"In Lucknow and DC, I used to bowl one over upfront or two overs in the powerplay. Here I



bowl two overs after powerplay and in the death as well I get to bowl. Team management and Sanju (Samson) give gull freedom to execute plans and that is helping. Sanju is a bowlers captain. "There was also no dew factor tonight and that helped me being accurate. Dew may impact your execution at times," Avesh said. He gave due credit to Royals' new number four Rryan Parag, who singlehandedly kept his team in the game after an ordinary start, smashing an unbeaten 84 off 45 balls. "It was a match changing innings considering we had lost wickets early and run rate was on the lower side. He helped us post a fighting total. He is in good touch and showed that in this and the last game," Avesh added.

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (US)

Eleventh-seeded Grigor Dimitrov came out strong against top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz and went on to win 6-2, 6-4 in the Miami Open quarterfinals, his first victory over a top-five player in nearly five years.

Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev, who beat unseeded Fabian Marozsan 6-3 7-5 on Thursday night will play Dimitrov in the semifinals on Friday. Second-seeded Jannik Sinner will face No. 3 Daniil Medvedev in the other semifinal, a rematch of last year's final that Medvedev won.

Dimitrov said he didn't want to evaluate the quality of his play against Alcaraz "since I have to play again tomorrow. I'm trying to stay on point. This is how our sport is. You appreciate it, of course. You're very happy with the current win. Then you have to quickly move on and start focusing on the next match."

Alcaraz, the 2022 champion, entered this tournament off a victory over Medvedev at Indian Wells. But the world's second-ranked player had trouble finding his game against Dimitrov and became visibly frustrated numerous times in the first set.

But Alcaraz didn't go away even after falling behind a break at 4-2 in the second set. He broke Dimitrov at love and then held serve to even the set at 4-4. Dimitrov, though, won the final two games, breaking Alcaraz in the clincher. Alcaraz said Dimitrov played "almost perfect."

"I have a lot of frustrations right now because he made me feel like I'm 13 years old," the 20-year-old Alcaraz said.

"It was crazy. I was talking to my team saying that I don't know what I have to do. I don't know his weakness. I don't know anything." This was Dimitrov's first victory over a top-five player since he beat then-No. 3 Roger Federer in the quarterfinals of the 2019 U.S. Open.

On the women's side, fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina once again had to go three sets, pushed to the edge before beating No. 27 Victoria Azarenka 6-4 0-6 7-(6/2) in the semifinals. Rybakina, ranked fourth on the WTA

Grigor ousts top seeded Carlos in Miami Open quarterfinals



Tour, will on Saturday face unseeded Danielle Collins, who defeated No. 14 Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3 6-2. Rybakina also made last year's final, losing in straight sets to Petra Kvitová. "This year, it's much different," Rybakina said.

"I was not expecting, honestly, to be in the final because I was not prepared that well for this tournament, but really happy that I managed to battle through all these matches and be in the final again."

A day off will likely be welcome for Rybakina, who has been pushed to three sets in all but one match this tournament. Thursday's match lasted 2 hours, 33 minutes, and she told the Tennis Channel that for the first time in her career, she has rested on the days between matches during a tournament.

"In the beginning, these long matches were helping me to get back in shape," Rybakina said.

"Now I'm not in shape just because I'm tired of all these long matches, but over-

all, it was really successful tournament no matter how I do in the final."

Rybakina appeared to take control when she broke Azarenka's serve to take a 3-2 lead in the third set. Azarenka fought off four break points before hitting a two-handed backhand into the net to give Rybakina the game.

It was quite a response from the second set when Azarenka lost only two points on her serve, and one came on a double fault.

But Azarenka wasn't done. With Rybakina serving for the match, Azarenka broke back to even the final set at 5-5. Both players then held serve to send the match to a tiebreaker, which belonged to Rybakina, who went up 6-1. She wrapped up the victory with a cross-court forehand.

Rybakina is seeking her third title this year. She is 4-0 in her career against Azarenka, including two victories this year.

Azarenka, 34, was attempting to become

OTHER SPORTS

Nelly fights to win in Southern California

AP ■ GILBERT (US)

Nelly Korda fought through brutal conditions to win in Southern California last week. A solid opening round on a soft course in perfect weather has the world's No. 1 player in position to win her third straight start.

Korda shot a 6-under 66 in the first round of the Ford Championship on Thursday, leaving her three shots back in a bid to become the first LPGA Tour player to win three straight starts in eight years.

"Completely different today compared to last weekend," Korda said. "The greens are quite soft. I know Arizona has been getting a good bit of rain throughout the winter. I knew there would be low scores out there, so needed to be aggressive."

A week after brutal wind outside Los Angeles in the Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship, ideal scoring conditions greeted the players in the inaugural event at Seville Golf and Country Club.

Pajaree Anannarukan took advantage with a bogey-free, 9-under 63 after starting on the back nine at the 6,734-yard course in suburban Phoenix. She had a one-shot lead over Lilia Vu, Gabriela Ruffels, Isa Gabsa and former Arizona State players Azahara Munoz and Carlota Ciganda.

The top-ranked Korda opened with four birdies in five holes and closed with a two-putt birdie on the par-5 18th as she tries to become the first LPGA Tour player to win three straight starts since Ariya Jutanugarn in 2016. Korda won the Drive On



Championship in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, before sitting out all of the LPGA Tour's Asian swing. She showed no rust after the long break, winning last week to move back atop the world ranking and is in contention again.

"(I) kept it pretty light at the beginning of the week knowing I needed rest and that was the most important," Korda said. Anannarukan has won twice on the LPGA Tour, including last year's Bank of Hope Match Play at Shadow Creek in Las Vegas. The 24-year-old from Thailand missed the cut last week, but closed with five straight birdies to shoot 6-under 30 on Seville's front nine.

"The condition's really similar to Las Vegas," she said. "I feel like if you can get the good number into most of the shots going into the green, that's just really helpful. I think I got a really good number today, just really helped me with the putts as well."

Vu fell out of the top spot in the world when Korda won in a

playoff last week at Palos Verdes Golf Club. The two-time major champion sandwiched four birdies around a bogey on the par-3 eighth and had four birdies on the back nine. Ciganda rolled in eight birdies in a bogey-free round that started on the back nine.

"I love being here. I feel the support - it just feels very comfortable," she said.

"I'm staying at home so that's really nice this week. Sleeping in my own bed. Yeah, eating my own dinners and doing my thing. So that's always very comfortable."

Munoz had a wild round that included eight birdies, an eagle and two bogeys in her bid to win for the first time since the 2012 Sybase Match Play Championship.

Ruffels had seven birdies and an eagle with a bogey, a week after missing a birdie putt that would have put her in a playoff with Korda and Ryann O'Toole. Gabsa had three birdies on the front nine, then reeled off four straight to shoot 5-under 31 on the back to finish off her bogey-free round.