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## ‘THANKS TO HYDERABAD; PEOPLE ARE NOW AWARE OF ART THERAPY’



**Raids will be conducted on cinema theatres. Cinema theatre owners are collecting the money by enhancing the ticket rates as per their wishes. Cinematography Department teams have kept a vigil on the cinema halls. If there is a difference, the errant theaters will be sealed. After making big-budget movies, if they want us to raise tickets, it is not possible. Because of this, small films are suffering tremendous losses**

**- Komatireddy Venkatredy, Minister, Telangana**

A portrait of Komatireddy Venkatredy, a man with short dark hair, wearing a light blue shirt, speaking into a microphone. He is gesturing with his right hand.

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**-SPORTS**

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

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here on Friday, much better than a cloth gathering at the part of the Praja. After the NDA government will take all measures.

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.





# Amarnath lauds CM's welfare schemes for poor

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Industries Minister and YSRCP candidate for Gajuwaka Assembly Constituency, Gudivada Amarnath, lauded Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy's tireless efforts in providing financial support and housing to the underprivileged segments of society over the past five years. Addressing an election campaign rally on Friday in the Appanna colony, Ram Nagar in the Gajuwaka assembly constituency, Amarnath highlighted the significant strides made by the Chief Minister in uplifting the marginalised communities and ensuring their dignified inclusion in society. A wave of enthusiasm swept through the gathering, particularly among women and youth, as they joined Amarnath in his pledge to advocate for their rights and interests.

Accompanied by fervent supporters, Amarnath traversed through the neighbourhoods, engaging with resi-



dents and elucidating on the various welfare schemes instituted by Jaganmohan Reddy's government. Amidst chants of encouragement and displays of solidarity, the women symbolically welcomed Amarnath into their homes, symbolising their endorsement of his candidacy. Expressing his gratitude to the electorate, Amarnath appealed to their sense of responsibility in ensuring the continuity of Jaganmohan Reddy's visionary

governance. He reiterated the commitment of the incumbent Chief Minister towards allocating substantial funds for the further development of the Gajuwaka constituency, citing the allocation of over 500 crore rupees for developmental projects in the region during the past five years.

Amarnath underscored Jaganmohan Reddy's pivotal role in revolutionizing sectors such as education and health-care, emphasizing the provi-

sion of free medicines and education to the economically disadvantaged sections of society. Pledging accessibility and accountability, he vowed to address local issues promptly and transform Gajuwaka into a beacon of progress within Visakhapatnam.

The rally witnessed the presence of notable figures including 68th corporator Gudivada Anusha Latesh, former MLAs Tippala Gurumurthy Reddy and Chintalapudi Venkataramaiah, among others, signifying widespread support for Amarnath's candidacy. Their collective endorsement reflected the unwavering faith in the YSRCP's agenda of inclusive growth and equitable development. Amarnath reiterated his resolve to serve the constituents diligently, urging voters to rally behind him in the upcoming elections and ensure the continuation of Jaganmohan Reddy's transformative leadership for the betterment of Gajuwaka and its residents.

## Dissent over TDP seat allotment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following Chandrababu Naidu's announcement of the remaining nine Assembly and four Lok Sabha seats on Friday, dissent over the allotment of tickets has surfaced in several areas within the TDP camp. The decision to allocate the Anantapur urban ticket to Daggubati Prasad was met with resistance from TDP senior leader and former MLA Vaikuntham Prabhakar Choudhary. Prabhakar Choudhary's supporters protested against Chandrababu's decision, resulting in the tearing and burning of Chandrababu's banners. TDP leaders also voiced their discontent, alleging that Chandrababu had accepted significant sums of money in exchange for ticket allocations.

Leaders in the Agency areas have accused Chandrababu of neglecting and mistreating them. Despite initially announcing D Dora's candidature in the 'Raa Kadalira' public meeting, Chandrababu ultimately allocated the seat to the BJP at the last minute. Dora, who serves as the president of the TDP ST cell, is now contesting as a rebel candidate.

## Dedicated follower's decade-long wait fulfilled upon meeting Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After a decade-long vow, an ardent follower of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan has finally reunited with his footwear, marking the fulfilment of his pledge to meet Jagan as the CM.

Dudekula Kasim, a resident of Kanala village in Nandyal district, had refrained from wearing slippers for a decade, holding steadfast to his promise until the moment he could meet Jagan.

Kasim's devotion to Jagan, stemming from his profound respect for the late chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy, has been unwavering for years. His journey began with attending CM Jagan's Odaru Yatra after the demise of YS Rajasekhara Reddy, where he witnessed the injustices faced by his admired leader.

In 2010, Kasim made a solemn vow that he would not wear slippers until he met Jagan as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. Despite the challenges of his occupation as an agricultural labourer, Kasim remained resolute in his com-



mitment, traversing barefoot as he awaited Jagan's ascension to power. Even after Jagan assumed office in 2019, Kasim continued his vigil, patiently anticipating the moment of their meeting.

Finally, during CM Jagan's visit to Nandyal as part of the Mamantha Siddham Yatra, Kasim's dream came to fruition. Jagan personally met him and graciously presented him with a fresh pair of slippers, bringing an end to Kasim's self-imposed hardship.

The poignant encounter between Jagan and Kasim resonated with echoes of the legendary bond between Lord Krishna and Sudhama.

Just as Lord Krishna bestowed kindness upon Sudhama, CM Jagan's gesture towards Kasim exemplified compassion and generosity, symbolizing a profound connection between a leader and his devoted follower. Overwhelmed with gratitude, Kasim expressed his heartfelt thanks to CM Jagan for the cherished gift.

## '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.

Besides Lok Sabha polls, assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim are going for elections.

Separately, bye-election to 25 assembly constituencies in 12 states are also being held in this period.

## RESHAPING AP POLITICS

# Sharmila plans to woo dissident Dalit leaders in YSRCP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

APCC chief YS Sharmila is working on a smart plan to gain support. Instead of just aiming to win elections, she wants to build a strong group of supporters. She knows it's crucial to get backing from Dalit and Minority communities in the State.

Sharmila, who now heads the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), is focusing on bringing together Dalit leaders from the YSRCP who didn't get tickets, along with former Congress leaders who are popular among Dalit groups. This way, she hopes to not only compete in the elections but also to get a lot of votes.

Recently, when the YSR Telangana Party merged with Congress, Sharmila became even more important in the AP Congress. Since then, she has been openly criticising YS Jagan's government, trying to show she's a strong leader. Sharmila is visiting different areas like North Andhra and Rayalaseema to build support all over the State.

But Sharmila's main goal



Sharmila's political moves go beyond just trying to win elections. She's carefully planning to reshape Andhra Pradesh's politics, and this could have long-lasting effects even after the upcoming elections.

isn't just winning seats; she wants to gain influence by getting lots of votes from all areas. This means she's not only focusing on winning seats but also on getting support from many different places, even if it means taking votes from other parties. Bringing in Dalit leaders to Congress shows how she's targeting specific groups, aiming to win back voters who used to support Congress but switched to YSRCP recently. Sharmila is also getting help from her husband to connect with Christian communities.

Sharmila hasn't announced all the candidates yet, which has made some people won-

der if the party is ready. But behind the scenes, Sharmila is working hard to weaken her opponents and gain more support, not just win elections. The split in Dalit and minority votes could be a big challenge for YSRCP, possibly changing the political scene in Andhra Pradesh. If Sharmila succeeds, it could shake up the current power balance and change how politics works in the state.

Sharmila's political moves go beyond just trying to win elections. She's carefully planning to reshape Andhra Pradesh's politics, and this could have long-lasting effects even after the upcoming elections.

## YSRCP leader Mallela Rajesh Naidu joins TDP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

YSRCP Chilakaluripet former coordinator Mallela Rajesh Naidu quit the YSRCP and joined the Telugu Desam party.

Rajesh Naidu, along with his followers including ZPTC and councillors, joined the TDP in the presence of TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh in the party office. Nara Lokesh admitted them into the TDP by

wrapping scarves. Former Minister Prathipati Pulla Rao was also present. It may be mentioned here that Mallela Rajesh Naidu made a sensational allegation that Health Minister Vidadala Rajini had taken crores of rupees from him and did not return the money.

Later talking to the media Mallela Rajesh Naidu said that he would strive for the victory of Prathipati Pulla Rao in the Chilakaluripet constituency.



## Court seeks Tihar...

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.

## Alleged use of SHGs for poll campaign kicks up a row

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The recent controversy surrounding the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) in Andhra Pradesh has sparked a debate on the ethics of political campaigning. Accusations against YSRCP leaders for allegedly manipulating women's self-help groups (SHGs) for electoral advantage have raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral process.

Critics argue that by enticing members of these groups to support their candidates, YSRCP may compromise the groups' autonomy and intended purpose of empowering women.

The collaboration between

the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) and Urban Community Development (UCD) staff in organizing meetings adds complexity to the issue. Critics suggest that such initiatives could be exploited for political gains under the guise of community engagement. With over 33,000 societies and approximately 3.4 lakh members, the substantial size of women's self-help groups highlights their potential electoral influence.

Reports of alleged clandestine efforts by the YSRCP to secure support from these groups, including cash handouts and promises of future

benefits, raise concerns about the fairness of the electoral process. Despite calls for action from rival parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the apparent lack of proactive measures from monitoring authorities raises doubts about the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms.

As the election approaches, attention remains on the YSR Congress Party and its campaign tactics. The controversy not only highlights concerns about exploiting vulnerable demographics for political gain but also prompts broader questions about the fairness of the democratic process in Andhra Pradesh.

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

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny  
Temp: 40°  
Humidity: 48%  
Sunrise: 6:04 AM  
Sunset: 6:20 PM

Updated: March 29, 2024 5:00 PM

## Naidu's remark...

Continued from Page 1

He contrasted Naidu's attitude with Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's inclusive approach, citing instances where Reddy offered political opportunities to individuals from marginalised backgrounds.

Highlighting Reddy's commitment to social upliftment, Suresh praised Reddy's efforts to empower youth from SC, ST, BC, and minority communities through education and employment opportunities. He emphasised Reddy's non-discriminatory stance and lauded his initiatives that have earned him widespread support among marginalised communities.

Suresh predicted a bleak electoral future for Naidu and the TDP in the upcoming 2024 elections, urging Dalit leaders within the TDP to recognise Naidu's disregard for the poor and marginalised.

## Will develop R'seema...

Continued from Page 1

The former chief minister told the people that CM Jagan had damaged every village and town.

The TDP chief clarified that the party's alliance with the Jana Sena and the BJP is kept in view only for the future of the State but not out of any personal interests. "I will take the responsibility to ensure that injustice is not done to any minority community as is being campaigned," he said.

The TDP's main goal is to create assets and distribute them to the people, particularly the poor. Chandrababu assured the people of Rayalaseema that the coming NDA government will initiate steps to supply Godavari waters for this region. Regretting that CM Jagan has damaged the State by playing the game of three capitals, he felt that this is the basic reason why people have lost faith in him and thus no one is attending his meetings. "While our meetings are glittering, the meetings being addressed by CM Jagan are fading," Chandrababu remarked.

Fondly recalling how Rs 30 monthly pension was paid for the poor and the old, the TDP national president said that NTR founded the party to provide food, shelter, and clothes to the poor. Later, the TDP formed the National Front and the United Front; he said now the party has become a partner of the NDA.

Observing that he has now come here in the name of Praja Galam to bring awareness among all sections on the need to send the YSRCP home, Chandrababu said that he is also the son of this soil. Reiterating how Hyderabad has been developed, Chandrababu said that he will personally take the responsibility to do justice to all sections, including the Madigas and Muslim minorities.

Regretting that the State now has a whopping Rs 12 lakh crore debt burden, the former chief minister said that CM Jagan has destroyed all the sectors and filed false police cases against several innocent persons. "I will not remain silent and will pay back with interest," he said.



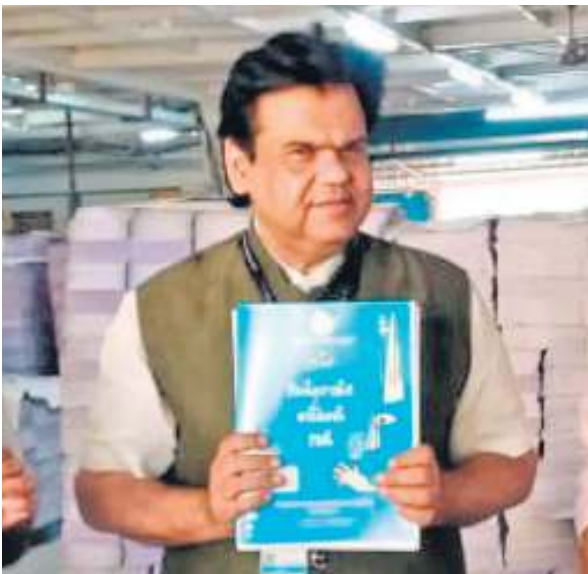
# Textbook printing underway, to be distributed on June 12

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Education Department Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash stated on Friday through a release that the printing of textbooks for the academic year 2024-2025 has started with a mission to distribute them on June 12, when the schools reopen.

A total of 4.42 crore textbooks will be printed and available for distribution on the 12th of June( the day of the re-opening of schools). The following are the highlights of this year's free textbook distribution project:

The textbooks for the 10th Class in Mathematics, Social Science, Physical Science, and Biology are being printed biligually (one side in Telugu, and the other in English). With this, bilingual textbooks for science, social science, and mathematics from grades one to ten are available, making the AP board perhaps the only board in the world to have bilingual textbooks from Classes 1 to 10.



**PDF copies of all textbooks for grades 1 to 10 for the new academic year (2024-25) will be available for free download on the website CSE.AP.GOV.IN starting April 23, the last day of the 2023-2024 Academic Year. However, these downloads are intended for personal use only and not for commercial purposes.**

The paper used for the 10th grade's Physical Science book will be different so that students can use the science book as a reference book even after passing grade ten for a longer time. For the first time in the academic year 2024-2025, the future skill subject will be

introduced, and textbooks will be provided to students in grade 8. Workbooks for the TOEFL for grades 3 to 9 will also be provided so that students can better prepare for the TOEFL exam.

The PDF copy of the new version (Academic year 2024-

25) of all textbooks from grade 1 to grade 10 will be available on the website: CSE.AP.GOV.IN from the 23rd of April (last day of Academic Year 2023-2024). These will be available for free download but not for commercial purposes.

## Sri Rama Pattabishekam at Tirumala on April 18

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD is organising a grand Asthana fete at Srivari temple on the occasion of the Sri Rama Navami festival on April 17.

As part of the festivities, Lord Rama will ride Hanumantha Vahana on Mada streets and bless devotees. Similarly, an impressive Sri Rama Pattabisekam fete will be observed on April 18.

The utsava idols of Sri Sitarama Lakshmana Samata Hanumanta will be given snap and thirumanjanam at the Ranganayakula Mandapam in the morning of Wednesday. There will be Hanumanta Vahana Seva in the evening on Mada streets. Thereafter at night, the Sri Rama Navami Asthanam will be held at the Bangaru Vakili inside the Srivari temple.

In view of day-long festivities, TTD has cancelled the Sahasra Dipalankara Seva in the evening.



# YSRCP faces setback in social mobilization in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) is encountering hurdles in social mobilization within the Visakhapatnam district, especially among the Yadav community, which forms the majority in this region. Despite their numerical strength, the Yadavs have been neglected by the YSRCP, failing to clinch a single seat in the Visakhapatnam Parliament. This deviation from historical norms has left key social groups, including the Yadavs and Gavaras, unrepresented in Anakapalle and Visakhapatnam, amplifying the complexity of electoral dynamics.

The Visakhapatnam district is renowned for its diverse social fabric, with the Kapu, Turpu Kapu, Koppula Velama, Yadava, and Gawara communities wielding significant influence. While Turpu Kapus predominantly fall under the Backward Classes (BC) category, the others also hold sway in the political realm. However, the YSRCP's prioritisation of the Turpu Kapu/Kapu and Koppula communities has sparked discontent among the Yadav and Gawara groups.

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In a strategic move, the YSRCP has selectively nominated candidates from certain communities, marginalizing others. For instance, Adari Anand, a Gawara candidate, has been nominated from the Visakhapatnam West Constituency, while Dr Satyavathy, the incumbent MP representing Anakapalli Lok Sabha constituency, was denied a ticket, leaving the Gavaras without representation. The absence of Gawara representation in Anakapalli has elicited a response from the community, with Konatala Ramakrishna contesting from Jana Sena as the alliance candidate. Additionally, Boddeda Prasad, representing the Gawara community, faced disappointment after being denied a ticket in Anakapalli. The ripple effects of these decisions on the electoral landscape are yet to unfold.

The YSRCP's failure in social mobilization within the joint Visakhapatnam district highlights the intricate interplay of electoral dynamics and community representation. As the election progresses, the reaction of marginalized communities, particularly the Yadavs and Gavaras, will shape the political contours of the region, underscoring the necessity for inclusive and strategic electoral approaches by parties vying for power.

The challenges faced by the YSRCP in social mobilization within the Visakhapatnam district underscore the significance of community representation in electoral politics. With marginalized groups expressing discontent, the upcoming election will be pivotal in determining the political trajectory of the region, emphasising the imperative for inclusive electoral strategies by political parties.

## New voter enrolment till Apr 14

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector A Mallikarjuna has extended the window for new voter enrolment until April 14, providing an opportunity for eligible citizens to register for the upcoming elections. Addressing a meeting with representatives of political parties here on Friday, Mallikarjuna emphasized the significance of this extension, highlighting the accessibility of Form 6 for new enrolment and Form 8 for change of address submissions.

The electoral process has been diligently managed, with steps taken to address electoral rolls received until March 16. As of March 27, the total number of applications stood at 19,80,194, with 4,67,049 EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) cards delivered to voters via postal courier. To facilitate the enrolment of new voters, Booth-level officers (BLOs) are required to upload selfies during field visits, ensuring transparency and accountability in the process. Moreover, stringent measures are in place



to monitor Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations, with 89 teams deployed for oversight. Notably, nearly 15 FIRs have been filed in various cases, demonstrating the commitment to upholding electoral integrity.

Utilizing technology to streamline the process, the C Vigil app has proven instrumental in addressing complaints, with 130 out of 173 complaints resolved within the stipulated time frame. Additionally, swift action has been taken against instances of cash seizure, amounting to ₹53 lakh, and volunteers found in violation of guidelines have faced repercussions.

Mallikarjuna reiterated the importance of maintaining impartiality, emphasizing that volunteers should refrain from participating in election campaigns. To bolster awareness, polling booth awareness programmes will be conducted district-wide. Furthermore, he emphasised the necessity of obtaining permission for any campaign activities, with District Election Officers and ROs entrusted with granting approvals. As the electoral process unfolds, the administration remains committed to ensuring a fair and transparent election, fostering civic engagement and upholding democratic principles.

## Christians observe Good Friday solemnly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Christian believers across the State observed Good Friday, commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Also known as Holy Friday, this solemn day was marked by fasting and mourning among Christian communities.

Good Friday holds significant reverence for Christians, marked by fasting, prayer, and attendance at church services. Many congregations conduct special services, such as the Stations of the Cross, reflecting on Jesus' journey to the crucifixion. It's a time for introspection on Jesus' sacrifice for humanity and the profound meaning of his death and resurrection.

Throughout the day, Christians engage in special services, prayers, and devotions. Some churches hold processions, reenactments of the crucifixion, and veneration of the cross. Good Friday stands as a solemn reminder of Jesus' sacrifice and the immense price he paid for humanity's salvation.



In Vijayawada, members of RCM depicted the crucifixion of Jesus Christ during the 'Way of the Cross' procession. A wooden cross, placed on a specially decorated vehicle, journeyed from St. Paul's Cathedral, Patamata, through various routes including Nirmala Convent Road, Panta Kaluva Road, Mary Stella Indoor Stadium Road, and back to St. Paul's Cathedral. The procession, led by Monsignor Muvvala Prasad,

symbolized the events of Good Friday.

At Gunadala Mary Matha Temple, devotees undertook a procession to the summit of Gunadala Hill to commemorate Good Friday. Led by Gundadla For Eliti William Jayaraj and Diocese Education Society Fr Kolakani Mariyanna, the procession honoured the significance of the day.

Similarly, CSI All Saints Church in Vijayawada orga-

nized a special service led by Bishop Cornelius. Speakers reflected on Jesus' seven last sayings in Scripture, concluding with a service at 3:30 pm, followed by breaking the fast with food provided by the church. The service marked the culmination of Lent, a 40-day period observed by Christians leading up to Easter.

Across Vijayawada Central Constituency and NTR district, various churches held special prayers on Good Friday. YSRCP candidate Velampalli Srinivasa Rao participated in these activities, emphasizing Good Friday's symbolism of Jesus' sacrifice and its messages of love, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and sacrifice for humanity.

Additionally, YSRCP East MLA candidate Devineni Avinash joined the Good Friday procession in the East constituency, carrying the cross alongside Christian followers. He spoke about the significance of Good Friday and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, underscoring its importance in the Christian faith.

## South Central Rly commissions new rail line

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The new railway line between Gundlakamma and Darsi for a distance of 27 km has been completed and commissioned for train operations. This new railway line is a part of the new Nadikudi-Srikalahasti railway line project in Andhra Pradesh. To begin with, the trains in this non-electrified rail section have been permitted to be operated at a maximum permissible speed of 75 kmph.

The South Central Railway Officials said that the Nadikudi-Srikalahasti railway line project is one of the important and prestigious projects taken up in the State of Andhra Pradesh by the South Central Railway.



## Row over ticket sales for CSK Vs DC match

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) match between the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and the Delhi Capitals (DC) scheduled for March 31 at the ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam is embroiled in controversy surrounding ticket sales. Concerns regarding a lack of transparency have emerged, prompting public scrutiny. Online ticket sales commenced on Paytm Insider at 10 AM on Wednesday. However, discrepancies have been reported. Tickets priced at Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500 were allegedly sold out within a mere 15 minutes. Similarly, higher-priced categories (Rs 3,000 and Rs 4,000) reportedly vanished within ninety minutes.

However, a crucial information gap surrounds the status of Rs 2,000 and Rs 3,500 tickets. This has fueled speculation that these categories may have been withheld from public sale



due to anticipated high demand. Further compounding the issue is the lack of clarity regarding the total number of tickets made available online for the match. The A C A - V D C A Stadium boasts a seating capacity of 25,000, yet organisers have not disclosed the precise number of tickets released. Additionally, the online platform conspicuously omits any mention of the 'sold-out' categories (Rs 1,000, Rs 1,500, Rs 3,000, and Rs 4,000) as of

Wednesday afternoon. Criticism has also been directed towards the DC management, designated as the home team for this encounter. Concerns have been raised regarding their seemingly opaque approach to ticket sales. The Andhra Cricket Association (ACA), whose role in IPL affairs is limited, maintains that their responsibilities are confined to providing necessary facilities for the DC team and do not encompass ticket sales.

However, sources within cricket circles reveal that the ACA has explicitly communicated via email and other channels that tickets or complimentary passes for IPL matches will not be distributed to club cricketers, umpires, or individuals associated with ACA and VDCA activities. Interestingly, despite this stance, the DC management, as the primary organisers, is yet to issue any official statements regarding match management.

Sources within the ACA have indicated that the upcoming CSK versus DC match is generating significant excitement, especially due to the possible involvement of MS Dhoni. It's been reported that increased demand for tickets from government officials and VIPs might have led to a limited online ticket release. Consequently, numerous regular fans are finding it challenging to obtain tickets for the event.

## BZA Div closes 12 manned LC gates

Closure is a big relief to road users as it eases travel time

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Aiming to enhance passenger safety and improve operational convenience, the Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, has successfully achieved the annual target of eliminating 12 manned Level Crossing (LC) Gates. The closure of these gates will come as a big relief to road users as it eases their travel time and the need to wait for long periods.

Narendra A Patil, Divisional Railway Manager, said that Vijayawada Division currently has no unmanned Level Crossing Gates and is continually making giant strides towards eliminating manned LC Gates to ensure safety across its length and breadth. For the current financial year 2023-24, the Division was entrusted with the task of eliminating 12 manned LC Gates at critical locations to



increase operational feasibility and improve sectional speed.

Out of these 12 manned LC Gates, Road Under Bridges (RUBs) were constructed at 11 and one Road Over Bridge was constructed between the Telaprolu-Nuzvid section; with this, all the 12 manned LC Gates are declared permanently closed by the Division. Giving top priority to passenger safety, RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) Boxes were inserted instead of all the 11 manned LC Gates by utilising the traffic blocks in the section. Not only

the insertion of RCC Boxes, earthwork, tamping, deep excavation and de-watering activity were carried out with necessary safety measures to accomplish the task on time. The Engineering Department of Vijayawada Division has taken up the challenge of eliminating manned LC Gates on mission mode through meticulous planning and execution by proper deployment of staff and completing the works within the stipulated time.

The 11 RUBs are constructed instead of the following

manned LC Gates over Vijayawada Division: LC No.466 between Narsipatnam-Regupalem, LC No.362 between Denduluru-Bhimadolu, LC No.352 between Eluru-Denduluru, LC No.329 between Telaprolu-Nuzvid, LC No.174 Tettu-Ulavapadu, LC No.169 between Kavalisri Venkateswarapalem, LC No.127 Padugupadu-Kodavaluru, LC No.169 between Denduluru-Bhimadolu, LC No.261 between Appikatla - Nidubrolu, LC No.191 between Tanguturu-Singarayakonda, and LC No.185 between Ulavapadu - Singarayakonda.

Narendra also said that the manned LC Gates are being eliminated by emphasising the safety of passengers while maintaining the sectional speed of the trains and improving operational feasibility by minimising train detentions.

## Joint Indo-US Naval exercise in Kakinada begins

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a display of collaboration and commitment to maritime security, the Indian Navy and the US Navy have commenced joint operations in Kakinada as part of Exercise Tiger Triumph 2024. This strategic exercise marks a pivotal moment in the enduring partnership between the two nations, highlighting their interoperability and shared objectives. Amidst the azure waters of the Bay of Bengal, the amphibious warships of the Indian and US navies have embarked on a mission to enhance their operational capabilities. Setting sail for Kakinada, these vessels have become the focal point of inten-



sive exercises aimed at honing their readiness and coordination.

Equipped with a diverse array of integral craft, ranging from small boats to specialized landing crafts, the naval forces have initiated a series of tasks encompassing amphibious assaults,

reconnaissance missions, and logistical support operations. The seamless execution of these manoeuvres underscores the versatility and preparedness of both navies to address a spectrum of maritime challenges. A notable highlight of the joint operations has been the success-

ful conduct of cross-deck helicopter operations between Indian and US Navy vessels. This collaborative effort not only showcases the technical prowess of the naval aviation units but also exemplifies the mutual trust and cooperation between the participating forces.

Such exchanges serve to strengthen interoperability and deepen strategic ties between the two navies.

Behind the scenes, meticulous joint planning and execution have laid the foundation for the harmonious conduct of multifaceted operations. Through rigorous training and continuous engagement, both armed forces have achieved a high degree of interoperability, enabling them to seamlessly integrate their capabilities and resources. Exercise Tiger Triumph 2024 symbolizes more than just a military exercise; it embodies the enduring partnership and shared values between the Indian and US navies.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the Visakhapatnam International Airport gears up to kickstart the new financial year, it's set to elevate its status with the commencement of international flights to Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, alongside additional flights to Hyderabad and Delhi. Round-the-clock operations, a pivotal move, are also poised to resume effective April 1, marking a significant milestone for the airport.

The airport achieved a remarkable feat in the current financial year as passenger footfall surpassed pre-COVID-19 levels, reaching an unprece-

**Round-the-clock operations are also poised to resume from April 1**

dented 29 lakh. This achievement is particularly noteworthy considering the challenging backdrop of the pandemic. Reflecting on the past decade, the airport witnessed a steady trajectory in passenger numbers until the pandemic-induced disruptions in 2019-20. The subsequent years saw a gradual recovery, with passenger volumes steadily climbing.

In 2022-23, despite notable strides towards recovery, passenger footfall remained below pre-pandemic levels, signalling ongoing challenges. However, with the reintroduction of flights in a phased manner, the airport registered a respectable figure of 25,00,789 passengers. The introduction of two new international flights, slated to operate thrice a week, adds another dimension to the airport's expanding connectivity. Commencing on April 9 and April 26, respectively, flights to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur are poised to enhance regional connectivity and facilitate greater ease of travel for passengers.



# 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'être - 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-



PIN POINT

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'être. Kalvakuntla Chandrasekhar 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.**

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 Chandrasekhar 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 Chandrasekhar 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, Chandrasekhar 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 Chandrasekhar 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'être. 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)

## CEO inspects EVM strongroom



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena inspected the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) strong room located on the premises of FCI godown near here on Friday.

CEO Mukesh Kumar Meena, accompanied by East Godavari district Collector K Madhavilatha, SP P Jagadish and representatives of various political parties, inspected the godown where the EVMs were preserved.

Collector Madhavilatha told the CEO that EVMs, V V PATs and control units of seven Assembly constituencies were preserved in the godown.

She explained to the CEO the measures taken to preserve the EVMs, VV PATs and control units and their safety.

The CEO reviewed the steps taken to shift the EVM, VV PATs and control units to the strong rooms of the respective Assembly constituencies. The CEO spoke to the representatives of political parties on the occasion. Later the CEO signed on the register.

Sub-collector Ashutosh Srivatsava, RDO Chaitra Varshani, Congress leader Nalabati Ramesh, BJP leader Borra Ramachandra Rao, YSRCP leader K Rajasekhar and TDP Saladi Anand were among those who were present.

## CEO visits Media Control Room, reviews poll preparedness

PNS ■ ELURU

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena visited the media room, the cVIGIL wing and reviewed the preparedness of officials to conduct elections here on Friday.

The CEO, accompanied by District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh, SP D Mary Prasanthi and Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, visited the media control room set up in the Collectorate. He inquired with the officials about the steps taken to enforce the election code of conduct and arrangements being made for polling.

District Collector Prasanna Venkatesh explained to the CEO that the negative news and complaints in the media would be forwarded from the control room to the district election officer and the relevant



returning officers who take necessary action on the same.

DD Rammohan of the Department of Horticulture, who is monitoring the social media, told the CEO that the necessary measures are being taken by examining the political announcements and related items on Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and other media and sending them to the returning officers concerned.

The CEO also inspected the c-Vigil wing and inspected the vehicles which were fit-

ted with GPS. The location of statistical surveillance teams flying surveillance teams would be monitored as they move on the GPS-fitted vehicles.

Collector Prasanna Venkatesh and SP Mary Prasanthi explained to the CEO the preparedness for conducting elections in the district. ITDA Project Officer M Surya Teja, Assistant Collector Sripuja, DRO D Pushpamani, ZP CEO K Subba Rao and c-Vigil nodal officer NS Krupavaram were among those who were present.

## Nivas assumes charge as Kakinada Collector

PNS ■ KAKINADA



J Nivas here on Friday took charge as Kakinada district Collector. Talking to the media on the occasion, he said that he would strive to conduct elections in a peaceful atmosphere and all required steps would be taken for the same. He said that he would ensure that the Model Code of Conduct would be enforced stringently in the district. The officials in the district should work in a coordinated manner to conduct elections and enforce the code of conduct.

J Nivas assured of being accessible to the people, stating that he would take the district forward in all sectors. He said that he would also focus on providing amenities to the people. A host of officials including Joint Collector S Ram Sundar Reddy, DRO Dr Thippa Swamy, ZP CEO A Sriramachandra Murthy, municipal commissioner J Venkata Rao, RDO E Kishore and I&PR DD D Nagarajuna called on the Collector and congratulated him.



## PEACE RALLY MARKS GOOD FRIDAY

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

A peace rally was organised on the occasion of Good Friday organized by Dahinchuagni Ministries in Rajahmundry, hundreds of the Christian community and other people participated in the rally on Friday.

On the occasion, ministry founder Dr Thomas in his message praised the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for his great salvation to mankind. He prayed that all people should be free from sin and live a life of righteousness

and peace. Dr Thomas said if any believers believe that Jesus died for them, they will have an eternal life. The Christian brothers at various centres in the city prayed for the upcoming elections and that people should choose a good Prime Minister and Chief Minister who would give good administration to the state.

They also prayed for the welfare and peace of Rajahmundry City. After the sermon, Bishop Dr Thomas and pastors offered blessings to the gathering.

## TDP sends senior leader to mollify Nallamilli

PNS ■ RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) senior leaders, stewarded by MLA Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary, went to Ramavaram in the Anaparthi constituency on Friday to mollify TDP leader and former MLA Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy.

TDP leader Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy wanted to contest from the Anaparthi constituency but the seat was allocated to the BJP under the alliance. The irate followers of Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy have been registering their protest for the last three days.

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu deputed a group of TDP leaders including MLAs Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary, Nimmakayala Chinaraajappa, Vegulla Jogeswara Rao, Gani Krishna and Zone II coordinator Sujay Krishna Ranga Rao to explain the situation to Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy and pacify him and his followers.

The TDP leaders were prevented at Ramavaram when they reached the residence of Nallamilli by the followers of Ramakrishna Reddy. The fol-

lowers of Nallamilli were angered at seeing the TDP leaders and started raising slogans.

Ramakrishna Reddy's mother Satyavati and wife Mahalakshmi were emotional at seeing the TDP leaders. They told them that their family has been serving the TDP for the last 42 years. Allocating Anaparthi's seat to the BJP is unjust. The wife and mother of Nallamilli broke down before the TDP leaders.

Speaking on the occasion, the TDP leaders said that they would take the emotions of the Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy's family and the TDP activists to the notice of Chandrababu Naidu. They assured justice to the Nallamilli family.

Butchaiah Chowdary said that the BJP initially expressed willingness to give up Anaparthi's seat but in the list, they mentioned the name of the candidate. However justice would be done to Nallamilli, he said.

Sajay Krishna made it clear that Chandrababu Naidu wanted to give the seat to Nallamilli but due to the alliance he was compelled to give up the seat.



## TDP ACTIVISTS BURN PARTY FLAGS OPPOSING TICKET TO JAYARAM

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) activists continue to register their protest by burning party flags, flex banners and furniture for denying tickets to their leaders in various districts.

The followers of TDP leader and ex-MLA R Jithendra Goud burnt the TDP flags, pamphlets, posters, flex banners and furniture in front of the office in Guntakal for allocating the ticket to Gummunuri Jayaram, who quit the ruling YSRCP and joined the TDP recently.

Ex-MLA and senior TDP



leader Jithendra Goud aspired to the ticket to contest from the Guntakal Assembly constituency. But shutting his hopes, the TDP has given a ticket to

Gummanuri Jayaram, who was the minister in Jagan Mohan Reddy's Cabinet previously.

Rate over this, the followers of Jithendra Goud dumped the

TDP party flags, pamphlets, flexi banners and chairs in front of the office and burnt them amid slogans against the TDP leadership's decision. They also staged a dharna on the highway.

They raised slogans denouncing TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu also. The followers of Jithendra Goud told the media that Jithendra Goud has been serving the party for the last five years and earned goodwill among the people of the Guntakal constituency. But at the last minute, the TDP leadership denied him a ticket, they lamented.

## Hot weather in R'seema on April 1 & 2

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Heatwave conditions are expected to persist in Rayalaseema on April 1 and 2, according to the Meteorological Centre.

Their daily weather report released on Friday stated that hot, humid, and uncomfortable conditions are anticipated at isolated locations in Rayalaseema over the next three days, and in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh from March 30 to April 2.

Dry weather is forecasted for Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next seven days.

On Thursday, the highest maximum temperature of 42 degrees Celsius was recorded at Nandyal in Rayalaseema, as per the report.

## Komatireddy says raids soon on errant theaters

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Roads & Buildings and Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has warned that raids will be conducted in errant cinema theatres. The Minister slammed owners of cinema theatres for collecting the money by enhancing ticket rates "as they wished".

In a chit-chat with scribes at the Ministers Quarters on Friday, Venkat Reddy said that the Department's teams had kept a vigil on cinema halls. "If there is a difference, the errant theaters will be sealed," the Minister warned.

Venkat Reddy said that he had told people in the cinema industry that he would not come to movie promotions and clappings. Minister said that it was difficult to raise ticket prices after making movies with big budgets. He said that because of this, those who believed in small films were suffering tremendous losses.



The Minister said that he had not received any complaints regarding tapping of phones of film personalities under the BRS regime.

The Minister said that BRS working president KT Rama Rao had agreed that phone tapping took place. The police have to file a case, taking into account KTRs comment "one or two persons' phones were tapped". The Minister said that KTR could be jailed for 10 years if the phone tapping case was proved. Komatireddy said that the persons who tapped the phones were greater than Qasim Rizvi.

Venkat Reddy maintained

**The Minister said that he had not received any complaints regarding tapping of phones of film personalities under the BRS regime.**

that KCR's sins had visited him. The first mistake that KCR did was to change Yadagirigutta's name as Yadadri. He said, "We will change it as Yadagirigutta again. In fact, corruption took place in Yadagirigutta. We will order a probe in this regard after the elections. Drought hit now due to the sins committed by the KCR. Rain means Congress and Congress means rains. KCR destroyed everything by constructing Kaleshwaram in the name of God".

Venkat Reddy said that leaders from other political parties were joining the Congress party even before opening of the gates.

## TG Police invoke Indian Telegraph Act to the phone-tapping case

- 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

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 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 Shrawan Rao Arukula. 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.





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 this manufacturing monopoly, expecting ~40GWp of PV manufacturing facilities to be set up by 2025. The approach towards propelling the nation's solar implementation agenda has been rather comprehensive and market-driven. Multiple factors seem to have been

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](mailto: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.

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.

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.

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.



Archana Puran Singh admits ‘fake-laughing’ on TKSS: ‘MAKERS THOUGHT ARCHANA’S LAUGH WILL MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH’

Archana Puran Singh is looking forward to her next comedy show, *The Great Indian Kapil Show*, featuring Kapil Sharma, Sunil Grover, and others, which will be available on Netflix. The actor, who primarily sits in the judge's chair on the comedy show, recently opened up about having the "best job in the world" and "laughing her way to the bank" all the time. Archana also discussed how she used to get chastised for "fake-laughing" at lousy jokes on the show.

Archana recently spoke with the media about her work, which is to make people laugh. She said, "I had no idea one day I'd be more famous for my laughs. As an actress, I always believed that my performances would be known, but see where destiny takes you."

"It is the best job in the world, I am laughing all the way to the bank. I am having the best time, can you imagine, to watch one episode, one show, people crave to catch the event, to watch the live *Kapil Sharma show*, and I am there watching it like a guest, every time, so it's a great opportunity," she added.

Archana was asked why she laughs at bad jokes also, to which she responded by saying, "It doesn't happen anymore!"

"Now you'll see, in the last three years, since we are doing the show, and especially now when we are on Netflix... Earlier people used to say that I laughed at bad jokes as well, I was not happy with it. What used to happen then is that if a particular joke didn't have the punch, they (the makers) thought that if we use Archana's laughter then *woh punch uth jaayega* (it'll make people laugh), but it didn't work that way, *woh punch nahi utha*, but *main hi baith gayi* (it didn't become funnier, and I was criticised instead). People started to think, 'this woman is mad, she is laughing for nothing. The integrity of my laughter took the beating,' she explained.

Archana then said how through the years her laughter is like a feedback and she only laughs if she really felt it was funny. She said, "I genuinely laugh at the good jokes!"

Awasthi family is back with Yeh Meri Family Season 3

Set in the spring of 1995, the third season of *Yeh Meri Family*, promises to take audiences down a heart-warming memory lane with the Awasthi family as they bring to life the story of a typical Indian household. Looking at the world through the eyes of Rishi, (portrayed by Anngad Raaj), an 11-year-old mischievous boy with a heart as big as his dreams, this season will feature Juhi Parmar, Rajesh Kumar and Hetal Gada in pivotal roles.

As the Awasthi family navigates the intricacies of life, the trailer takes you back in time to the spring of the 90s. It evokes nostalgia for the good old days and unbreakable friendships, with every moment beautifully blending warmth, humor, and nostalgia. When waking up to the loud alarm clocks and winning over a fun banter with your sibling was your biggest flex. The trailer demonstrates how idyllic and simple life was in the era, with a close-knit family unit. It offers a preview of the show's plot, from the playful banter between Rishi and Ritika to the persistent nagging of their parents. Focusing on realistic scenes and emotions, the trailer of *Yeh Meri Family* is a heartfelt journey for viewers, brimming with bittersweet memories of *kuch khatti-kuch meethi*.

Juhi Parmar, who plays the character of Neerja shared her thoughts on the series, "I believe that people nowadays are looking for relatable story-lines and characters, and *Yeh Meri Family* is one such show that evokes a variety of emotions. Blending a compelling plot with 90s nostalgia, the show is heavy on emotions and circumstances that we have all experienced. Considering the overwhelming support, we received from viewers for the past seasons, we are thrilled to announce the third season. This season's point of view differs from the previous seasons as it is narrated by the family's youngest member, a 10-year-old. We hope the audience likes the show as much as we did while creating it."

Olivia Colman won't be part of Heartstopper season three

Oscar winner Olivia Colman has announced that she won't be returning for the third season of Netflix's comedy drama show *Heartstopper*.

Featuring Kit Connor and Joe Locke in lead roles, the British series is written and created by Alice Oseman, and based on her webcomic and graphic novel of the same name.

The series mainly focuses on the story of Charlie Spring (Locke), a schoolboy who falls in love with classmate Nick Nelson (Connor).

Colman, who portrayed the role of Nick's mother Sarah Nelson, shared the news of her absence from the third season in an interview with Forbes.

"I couldn't do number three. I couldn't fit it in. I feel awful about that. I feel like I was part of one of the most beautiful things I've ever been part of" the 50-year-old actor said.

Show creator Oseman also addressed the actor's exit for the upcoming season three in a post on her Instagram Stories.

"As many of you have heard today, the wonderful Olivia Colman will not be returning to the show for season three. We tried absolutely everything we could, but it wasn't meant to be, and that's just the way the TV world works sometimes. We are so deeply grateful to Olivia for the stunning performance she gave to the show and wish her the absolute best," Oseman posted. The creator-writer made it clear that the role of Sarah will not be recast, leaving the door open for Colman to appear in season four.

*Heartstopper* began on Netflix with its first season in April 2022, followed by the sophomore chapter that was released in August 2023. The third season will premiere in October this year.

Farida Jalal in Akshay Kumar's Welcome To The Jungle

Farida Jalal, 75, will next appear in Akshay Kumar's next film *Welcome To The Jungle*. The legendary actor has already joined the cast of the comedy for its Mumbai shoot. The film is the third entry in the *Welcome* franchise.

"Farida ji takes up fewer projects nowadays due of her age and because she's selective about the work she does," says a source, adding, "However, she was on board when she heard the script and found it to be a family entertainer. She has maintained one thing all these years - she always stars in films that a family can sit and watch together, right from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) to *Batti Gul Meter Chalu* (2018)."

The film, directed by Ahmed Khan, stars comic legends such as Paresh Rawal, Rajpal Yadav, Tusshar Kapoor, Shreyas Talpade, and Johnny Lever, as well as actors Raveena Tandon, Jacqueline Fernandez, and Disha Patani.


Christopher Nolan, wife Emma Thomas to be honoured with British knighthood and damehood

The Oscar-winning director of *Oppenheimer*, Christopher Nolan, and his wife and producer Emma Thomas, will receive a knighthood and damehood for their services to film, according to a statement on Thursday from the U.K. government. Their recognition comes after their biopic about J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," swept the awards season, notably at the Academy Awards earlier this month, where the movie won seven Oscars, including best film and best director.


News of their honours was a bit of a surprise, because they are usually handed out twice in the year, once to mark the new year and then on the birthday of King Charles III, who confers the honours. They are sometimes awarded after special achievements, often related to sports and the arts.

The honours are formally awarded at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, often by the U.K. monarch in person. However, the king is currently not undertaking any royal duties, because he is undergoing treatment for cancer. Born in London to a British father and American mother, Nolan met his future wife, Thomas, 53, while they both attended University College London. They have four children and run a production company, Syncopy, which has been behind many of their blockbusters.


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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17				18	
19					

SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

ACROSS

1 Not sure

6 Grape plants

7 Get to

9 Utters

10 Choose

12 A passenger's document

14 Accompanying

17 Less wet

18 Finished

19 A big, important church

6 Called in on

8 Emerged from an egg

11 Look everywhere for

13 Porcelain

15 New Delhi is the capital of this country

16 No longer alive

DOWN

2 A nursemaid for children

3 A compass direction

4 This has a bull's-eye

5 Mirror reflection

SOLUTION

C	G	M	O	N	I
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O	I	T	L	E	M
C	A	N	A	D	A
K	V	E	O		
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## ‘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 wapaa 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 want to 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. Somashekar 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.

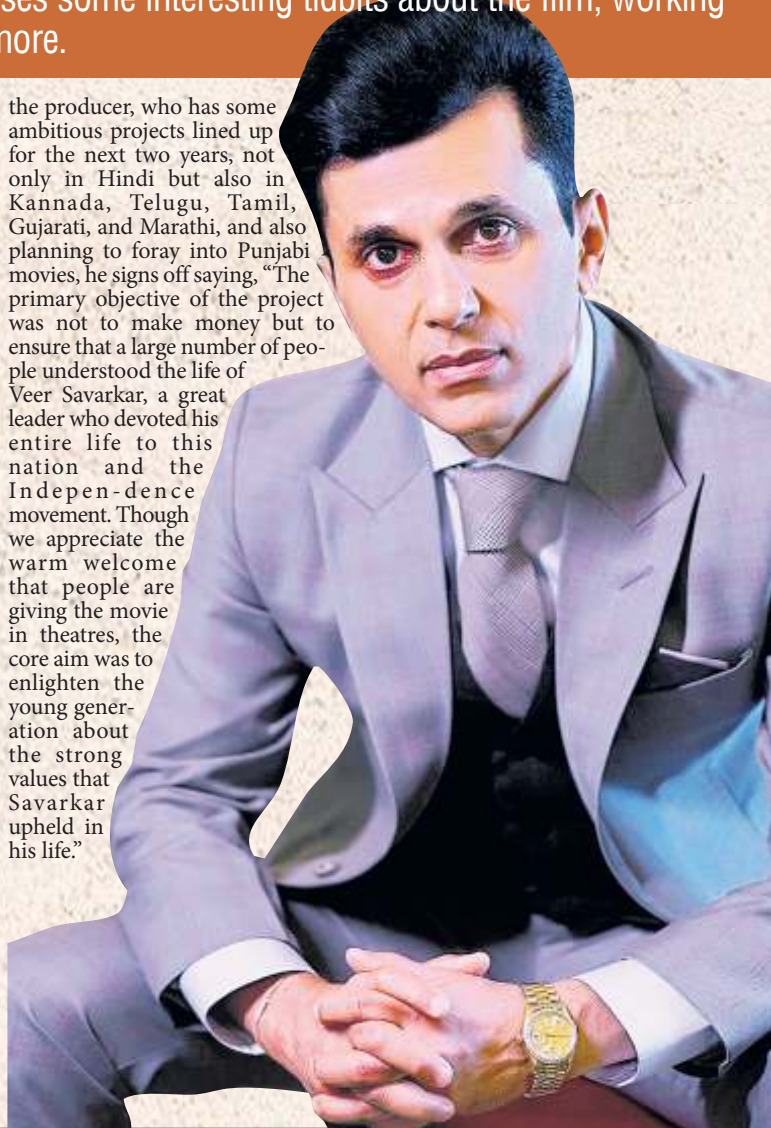
challenge in India, with a high chance of facing resistance from individuals who do not subscribe to the particular theory or ideology depicted in the movie. Seconding to this, he also shared, "Opponents may try to create roadblocks, and certain sections of the bureaucracy with vested interests may also 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 Savarkarji'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."

During the initial interaction with Randeep regarding this project, they reached a consensus that the film on Veer Savarkar should portray the freedom struggle in its full glory. Through this film, the *Doctor G* producer drew a bead on today's generation to feel the essence of that period, the sacrifices made, and the greatness of unsung heroes like Savarkar, who bravely fought against the British to realise the dream of freedom for the country.

As we head towards the end of the chat,

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."



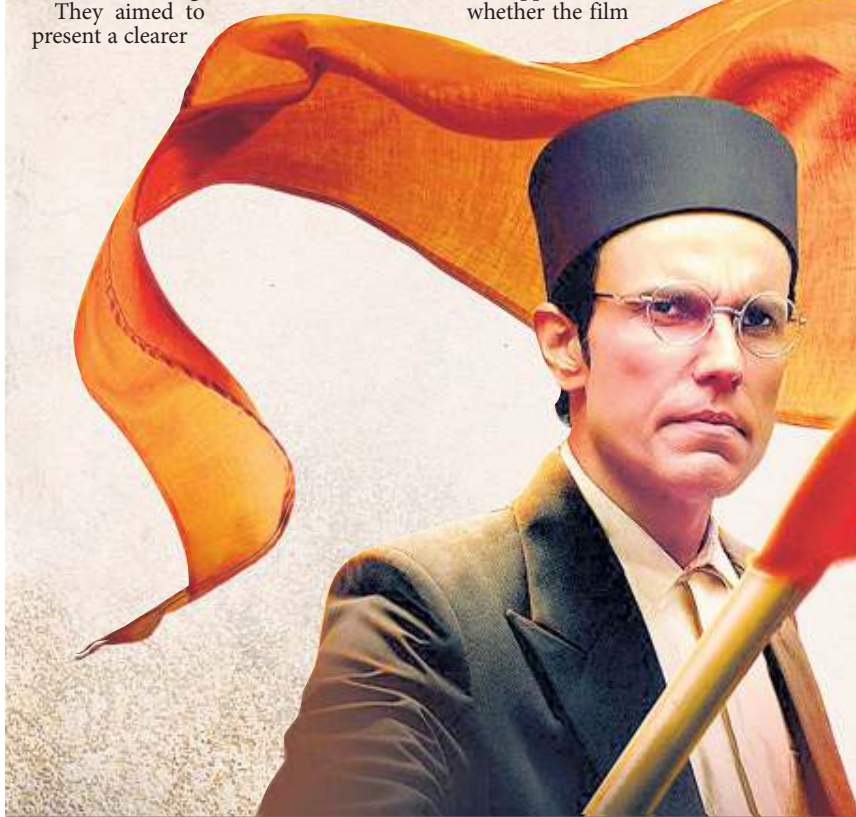
picture of Savarkar's legacy and his contributions to the country by showcasing the accurate side of history, thereby enlightening the younger generation about the truth. Right from his childhood, he recalled during his school days in Gujarat, "I read a lot about Savarkar. Through my learning, I realised 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

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

breath 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







# 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 Royman, 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.

## OTHER SPORTS

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

the tournament's oldest winner. She became the second-oldest semifinalist; 36-year-old Venus Williams made the semis in 2017. Bopanna, Ebdn sail into men doubles final of Miami Open Miami, March 29 (PTI) Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebdn sailed into the men's doubles final of the Miami Open with a straight-set win over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos here. Bopanna and Ebdn, the Australian Open winners, hardly broke a sweat to get the better of Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos 6-1 6-4 in the semifinals on Thursday night. Bopanna had slipped to second spot in the doubles rankings after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters, but the semifinal win here will help the Indian regain the top spot when they are updated on Monday. Following the Australian Open triumph, the 44-year-old Bopanna had climbed to the world No.1 spot in the ATP rankings, becoming the oldest player to do so. In the final, Bopanna and Ebdn will take on Ivan Dodig of Croatia and American Austin Krajicek, who beat the German duo of Kevin Krawietz and Tim Putz 6-4 6-7(7) 10-7 in the other semifinal. For Bopanna, this will be his 14th ATP Masters 1000 final and the first in Miami. Overall, this will be his 63rd ATP Tour level final. He has so far won 25 doubles titles. This will also be the 10th appearance in an ATP Masters 1000 final for the Bopanna and Ebdn pairing. Bopanna also achieved a rare feat as he became the second Indian after Leander Paes to reach the final of all 9 ATP Masters events.

# 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. Cigand 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.



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



## Annappurna 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 Annappurna 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, Thalaviasal Vijay, Geetha Kailasam and Nandini, the film has cinematography by Jagadeesh Sundaramurthy.



## 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.