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POPE APPEALS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE IN ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Pope Francis in his Easter message said his thoughts went particularly to the people in Ukraine and Gaza, and all those facing war

SPEECH SYMPATHETIC TO ROHINGYA MUSLIMS

He called for 'prompt' release of prisoners taken from Israel on October 7 so that humanitarian access can reach Palestinians. "Let us not allow the current hostilities to continue to have grave repercussions on the civil population, by now at the limit of its endurance and above all on the children," he said. His speech was sympathetic towards Haitians, Rohingya

POPE SKIPS GOOD FRIDAY, ATTENDS EASTER

Francis presided over Easter mass on Sunday in a flower-decked St. Peter's Square. Earlier on Saturday night, he participated in the Easter Vigil service delivering a homily and baptising eight persons
The Pope has no major foreign trip scheduled for the next several months, giving him time to recover from respiratory problems | P11

30,000
PEOPLE ATTENDED THE EASTER MASS IN VATICAN

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURGI



Opposition leaders at the Loktantra Bachao (save democracy) joint rally at Ramlika Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday | PARVEEN NEGI

INDIA bloc leaders flex muscles, rally behind Kejriwal and Soren

Cong asks Election Commission to ensure level-playing field in Lok Sabha polls

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

IN the first joint rally held nearly a year after its formation in Patna, several prominent leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc came together at Delhi's Ramlika grounds on Sunday to protest against the arrest of Opposition chief ministers and the BJP government's targeting of political rivals using central agencies.

The show of strength ahead of the Lok Sabha elections saw the presence of Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi, along with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, and Left leaders Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, among others.

While the arrest of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has brought parties such as Trinamool Congress and Congress on the same platform despite seat-sharing hiccups, the leaders said the Loktantra Bachao Rally is a mark of INDIA bloc's commitment to saving democracy.

Addressing the gathering, former Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray said it is time for a change. "We are not here for the election campaign; we are here to protect democracy. BJP 'washed' the people who they once called corrupt. How can a party full of corrupt people run government?" he said.

In a searing attack on the government, Rahul Gandhi said it is a clarion call for people to help save democracy. Accusing the Modi government of

Sunita Kejriwal debuts



Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita struck an emotional chord by reading out a letter by the CM from jail. In her maiden speech at a political rally, she asked people whether Kejriwal should resign as CM. "BJP is demanding the resignation of CM Kejriwal. Should he resign? Is his arrest justified? He is a lion so they won't be able to keep him behind bars for long," she said

'fixing' elections, he said. "This is not an ordinary election. This election is to save the country and protect our constitution. If the BJP wins this election and changes the Constitution, it will light the country on fire," said Rahul.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav said there is an "undeclared emergency" in the country. Echoing similar views, Akhilesh said Kejriwal's arrest has been questioned even by foreign countries.

TMC leaders Derek O'Brien and Sagarika Ghose reaffirmed their party's support to INDIA bloc and asserted it's a fight between BJP and democracy.

Listing out the demands of the INDIA bloc, Priyanka Gandhi said the ECI should ensure a level-playing field in the Lok Sabha polls and Hemant Soren and Arvind Kejriwal be released with immediate effect.

Not intimidated by Oppn barbs, will continue fight against corruption: Modi

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

HOURS after the INDIA bloc leaders held a mega rally in Delhi pledging support to jailed Opposition leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his 'fight against corruption' will continue unabated. "Modi will not be stopped. Action will be taken against every corrupt person," he said while addressing an election rally in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut on Sunday.

Modi said 'corrupt' politicians have come on a single platform thinking they can intimidate him. "They thought Modi will be scared. But it only strengthened my resolve to go against the corrupt more than before," he said.

In a veiled reference to Delhi CM and AAP leader Kejriwal, currently under the custody of the Enforcement Directorate for his alleged role in the Delhi excise policy scam, Modi said the corruption charges against some are so serious that they are not even getting bail from courts.

Launching a direct attack on the Congress, he said during the grand old party's regime, thousands of crores of rupees belonging to the poor, small investors, and banks were wrongfully confiscated. In contrast, the BJP government targeted corrupt people and attached their ill-gotten properties worth ₹17,000 crore, he claimed.

He said his government has been relentlessly waging a war on corruption and has removed as many as 10 crore illegal beneficiaries of various government welfare schemes, in the process saving ₹2.45 lakh crore. He alleged that non-BJP governments in the past were swindling public money using these illegal beneficiaries.

HIGH COSTS

State govt not to sign PPA with NTPC to cushion consumers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

THE state government has reportedly decided against signing the power purchase agreement (PPA) for NTPC-Ramagundam Phase-2 (3X800MW), citing projected power costs of ₹8 to ₹9 per unit, which could burden the consumers. Instead, the government is planning to develop green energy sources such as solar, hydel and wind, which are expected to offer more cost-effective alternatives to the power from NTPC-Ramagundam. The Congress-led state government has blamed the previous BRS government for not signing the PPA for the second phase of NTPC in the last 10 years, which could lead to a rise in construction costs.

Recently, the NTPC wrote to the state government asking it to sign the PPA for NTPC Phase-2 by February 10. Failure to do so may result in the allocation of NTPC Phase-2 power to other southern states, it had said. Government sources, however, have pointed fingers at the previous BRS government for its failure to ink the PPA with NTPC. However, former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, in a press conference in Suryapet on Sunday, contended that it was the responsibility of the Congress government to sign the PPA. "We fought with the Union government

GREEN FOCUS

- The government is planning to use solar power from 10 am to 5 pm to reduce spending on power.
- Solar units would be set up in the government buildings such as schools, colleges and offices.
- The state government is also planning to construct hydroelectric plants in Himachal Pradesh and divert the power to Telangana.



and achieved the Phase-1 of NTPC," he said.

The 4,000 MW NTPC-Ramagundam thermal power plant was an assurance under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014. The first phase (2X800MW) of the project was recently dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The state is slated to get 85% of the total 4,000 MW power capacity. The government sources said that due to the BRS government's discord with the Union government, it neglected NTPC Phase-2. As a result, the Discoms invested heavily in purchasing the power from exchanges, they added.

Even if the construction of NTPC Ramagundam Phase-2 commenced now, it would take another five years to complete the project, the sources said.

CONTINUED ON P4

PHONE-TAPPING CASE

Ex-intel chief may return to city today

SWETHAVIMALA M @ Hyderabad

FORMER chief of the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) T Prabhakar Rao, named accused number 1 in the phone-tapping and extortion case, will arrive in Hyderabad on Monday, said sources.

The prime accused in the case, Prabhakar was earlier reported as absconding and the police had issued lookout notices against him. Recently, he is said to have contacted some senior officials to say he was in the US for medical treatment. Additionally, he had informed them that he would be in touch with the investigating officer.

When the probe team interrogates Prabhakar, there is a possibility that more details about the case will be revealed. After interrogating him, it is possible that the police might serve notices to BRS leaders, the sources said.

Another bizman files plaint

Another businessman Sandhya Sridhar Rao lodged a complaint against former Task Force OSD Radha Kishan Rao claiming that the latter had tapped his phone and extorted crores of rupees.

CONTINUED ON P5

KATCHATHEEVU

BJP targets Congress over island

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday blamed the Congress for giving away Katchatheevu, an island near India, to Sri Lanka. This 'callous' decision by the grand old party "has angered every Indian" and convinced people that Congress is not a party that can be trusted, Modi wrote on X. Sharpening his attack further, he said, "Weakening India's unity, integrity and interest has been Congress' way of working for 75 years and counting."

In response, AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "You have suddenly woken up to the issues of territorial integrity and national security in your 10th year of misrule. Perhaps, elections are the trigger. Your desperation is palpable."

He also reminded Modi that his own government had transferred 111 enclaves to Bangladesh, while 55 enclaves came to India.

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Tribals attack cops over podu land dispute

While tribals assert that it is govt land, forest dept claims ownership

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Khammam

TENSION prevailed at Chandrayapalem village in Sattupalli Mandal of Khammam district when two tribal groups attacked the police for obstructing them from cultivating podu lands. During the confrontation, a circle inspector (CI) and four constables sustained injuries and were shifted to a hospital. Their condition is said to be stable.



Two tribal groups attack police in Chandrayanapalem in Khammam on Sunday

Khammam police commissioner Sunil Dutt stated that tribals from two villages have been vying for land rights.

Following the incident, police forces reached Chandrayapalem village and detained 21 tribal members by Sunday evening.

According to sources, there are disputes going on over S.No 360, 361 and 362 pertaining to 70 acres of land. While the tribals assert that it is government land, the forest department claims ownership. Despite the tribals' legal efforts to have the land identified as government land, neither the revenue nor the forest department has taken steps to identify borders.

Officials attempted activity in the area, the tribals obstructed them, resulting in a confrontation. Later, the forest officials lodged a complaint in the Sattupalli police station against the tribals for obstructing their duties.

Sattupalli CI S Kiran called on the tribals to report to the PS. However, a large group of 500 to 600 tribal members gathered at the station, staging a protest. Despite police warnings against illegal entry onto the land, the tribal returned to the village and resumed their activities.

When TNIE visited Dhara-wath tanda, Chintabai tanda, Dharamapur and Seetharam-puram village, ryots lamented the absence of water supply from the Ghanpur and Nawab-pet reservoirs to agricultural fields in Devaruppala Mandal. They stated that 800 to 1000 acres of paddy and maize crops were dried due to lack of water supply from reservoirs in the Devurupala Mandal.

Speaking to TNIE, J Bhima Naik, a farmer of Dhara-wath Tanda in the Devurupala Mandal of Jangaon district said: "We had borrowed lakhs

Ryots concerned as acres of crop wither

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Jangaon

THIS Rabi season, hundreds of acres of paddy and maize crops have withered due to water scarcity. Farmers allege that the negligence of the state government has left them in dire straits, leading to the loss in capital, which was invested by them.

Another farmer, Md Yakub, from Seetharampuram village in Devurupala Mandal crop for cattle to feed, incurring a loss of about ₹10 lakh.

Yakub requested the authorities to release water and save crops.

of rupees from private financiers to cultivate crops, and when the crops withered, the financiers forced us to repay the amounts. I cultivated paddy on four acres, investing ₹7 lakh, and due to water scarcity the entire crop perished in the fields."

Accusing the officials of failing to release water from the Nawapet and Station Ghanpur reservoirs, Bhima said: "Despite raising the issue with the irrigation officials and the local Congress MLA about the crop damage, no action was taken to deal with the situation." "The state government's negligence resulted in heavy losses to the farmers in the Rabi season," he lamented.



Farmers stage a protest demanding the release of water into the Flood Flow Canal for irrigation in Karimnagar district on Sunday

FARMERS STAGE PROTEST, DEMAND RELEASE OF WATER INTO FFC

Karimnagar: Farmers staged a protest at Kurikyala Karimnagar- Jagtial (NH-563), demanding the release of water into the Flood Flow Canal for irrigation. Former Choppandi MLA Sunke Ravishankar, along with farmers, participated in the protest on Sunday. He alleged that under the leadership of former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, Telangana developed like a coastal area, but during Congress rule, it turned into a desert due to drought. He demanded immediate water release into the if they affection on farmers FFC to protect the standing crop. The former MLA demanded that the government provide ₹25,000 in compensation per acre for damaged crops.

Heatwave continues in Telangana, Nalgonda records 42.4°C temperature

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

THE state continues to witness heatwave conditions, with Nalgonda recording the highest maximum temperature at 42.4°C on Sunday, followed by KPHB in Hyderabad at 40.8°C.

According to IMD, temperatures are expected to rise by 2-3 degree in the state over the next three days in isolated areas, with dry weather continuing to prevail across the state.

As per the Telangana State Development and Planning Society (TSDPS) report, the state's average temperature was 39.5°C against the normal temperature of 38.8°C with a departure of 0.8°C. While the maximum average temperature in GHMC was 39.5°C against 38.8°C normal temperature.

A yellow warning continued for heatwave conditions and warmer nights in Adilabad, Kumurambheem Asifabad, Mancherial, Nirmal, Nizama-



Retailers gather as a vendor auctions lemons at a wholesale market near Darul Shifa Circle in Hyderabad on Sunday. The onset of summer has led to a spike in the price of lemons in the state | SRI LAGANANTHAN VELMURUGAN

bad, Rajanna Sircilla, Karimnagar, Mulug, Peddapally, Jayashankar Bhupalapally and Jagtial districts.

Meanwhile, most areas are expected to see maximum temperatures ranging from 41-44°C,

prompting an orange warning for the state. In the city, partly cloudy skies are forecasted with temperatures reaching around 40°C during the day and around 25°C at night, along with light winds.

Unlicensed medical shop raided, ₹20K meds seized

ENS @ Hyderabad

An unlicensed medical shop operating in Medchal-Malkajgiri was raided by the Drugs Control Administration (DCA) officials on Sunday and medicines worth ₹20,000 were seized.

As per the officials, a total of 21 varieties of medicines were confiscated from the shop associated with Bhavani Medical Clinic in Nizampet, Bachupally Mandal.

Another quack was arrested from Serilingampally Mandal, on the outskirts of Hyderabad, by the authorities and drugs worth ₹18,000 were seized from the possessions of both quacks.

According to the officials, wholesalers who supply these drugs to the quacks are also punishable under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

OU signs MoU with Abode Biotec

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

OSMANIA University has signed an MoU with Abode Biotec India Pvt Ltd to collaborate on joint research, academic programmes, faculty exchange, student internships, training, infrastructure usage, research proposals and other collaborative efforts. This collaboration Biotec will facilitate the scaling up of research activities, aimed at benefiting PhD students, enabling collaborative research studies at both the lab and industry levels. Additionally, both organisations will undertake national skill development programs for PG and PhD students. The initial term of the MoU is for three years and Dr Hameeda Bee from the university's Department of Microbiology will be the nodal officer for the collaboration. Vice Chancellor Prof D Ravinder, M Sreenadh and Shalini from Abode Biotec Pvt Ltd as well as other faculty members were present during the signing of the MoU.

Goibibo told to pay ₹72K to Mahbubnagar man

AJAY TOMAR @ Hyderabad

THE Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Mahbubnagar, has imposed a fine of ₹72,399 on Goibibo, a Gurugram-based travel booking website, for failing to confirm a flight ticket and not refunding the amount.

As per the complaint, Pradeep Sunkari, said he booked a ticket on the Goibibo for a Jet Airways flight from Hyderabad to London via Mumbai for ₹47,399 in March 2019. However, even though the receipt was generated, the ticket could not be confirmed.

To claim a refund, the complainant approached Goibibo and the third party (Jet Airways) multiple times. However, when it didn't bear fruit, Sunkari lodged a complaint. A legal notice was issued to the respondents in July 2020. However, neither Goibibo nor Jet Airways responded to the notice.

In its defence, Goibibo termed Sunkari's allegations baseless and told the Commission that it is only a service provider that transfers money to the third party, adding that it is, in no way, concerned regarding the cancellation of a flight ticket.

Claiming that the aforementioned terms and conditions were well known to the customer, Goibibo added that once a booking is confirmed, it is discharged from its obligations and liabilities. However, the Commission, in its order, noted that Goibibo failed to furnish any evidence of the said amount transferred into the account of Jet Airways, as a result of which it dismissed the complaint against the latter.

Goibibo has now been asked to refund the ticket amount along with ₹25,000 compensation within 45 days from March 13.

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EXPRESS READ

Conference of Society of Labour Economics concludes

Hyderabad: The 3-day 64th Annual Conference of the Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) at the University of Hyderabad (UoH) concluded on Sunday. Soumyakanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser, State Bank of India and a member of the 16th Finance Commission, delivered a keynote lecture on "Growth and Employment in India" on the concluding day. Dr Ghosh addressed a few myths surrounding the growth-employment nexus, spotlighting the rise in female labour force participation and the effects of government welfare measures and credit access schemes.

Daily Starscope

PETER VIDAL

01st April: My sign of the day is Aries, the fiery, furious, first section of the zodiac. Whatever our individual signs, this therefore looks like a time which is more volatile and emotional than usual. We can all respond in different ways, but my advice, as always, is to avoid unnecessary confrontations.

ARIES
(Mar 21 - Apr 20)

This is one of those rare weeks when a number of planets form a series of very particular alignments. It will be worth your while making an enormous effort to finalise plans and make important arrangements. But, then, I'm sure that you know that already!

TAURUS
(Apr. 21 - May 21)

The wise person, it is said, rules their stars. The best way to do this now is to anticipate future developments and, for you, this means looking ahead and taking evasive action to head off an approaching personal confrontation. Pick and choose with great care in affairs of the heart.

GEMINI
(May 22 - June 21)

According to tradition this is a strange time of year for you, yet even in adverse circumstances you have much to learn. Indeed, you may even gain from being forced to abandon or modify your normal routine. There is a great deal to be said for keeping your plans to yourself, just for now.

CANCER
(June 22 - July 23)

Overall, the planets will maintain a balance of friendly and stressful aspects to your sign this week. Just as Mercury removes itself, making it harder for you to reach agreement, magnificent Venus will step in and implement improvements in your social life.

LEO
(July 24 - Aug. 23)

Domestic tensions look set to ease, possibly because you have now made, or are about to make, an important choice. You will be happy just as long as friends and relatives concur with your decision. On the other hand, an employer or colleague now needs your trust and understanding.

VIRGO
(Aug. 24 - Sept. 23)

Over the next few days you may be faced with your last chance to settle a business arrangement or finalise joint spending plans. Circumstances will change very soon, perhaps after a friend moves the goal posts. Just how you react will be very much a matter for you, and partners should keep quiet.

LIBRA
(Sept. 24 - Oct. 23)

Take a careful look at your business arrangements and financial commitments. Friends or partners will soon be asking you to account for your actions and it is essential that you have all the figures straight. Even your romantic desires will be dominated by what you can and can't afford.

SCORPIO
(Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)

You've been thinking long and hard about what the next move should be. Until now, it has seemed like you would have to go it alone, but all that will change when a new and willing partner arrives on the scene. The chance of a cash bonus will excite your hopes.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov. 23 - Dec. 22)

Whatever you feel about life, your mood will have completely altered by the end of the week. In the meantime, pay detailed attention to your financial affairs. You are not alone in feeling the squeeze, so never imagine that you have to face such questions by yourself.

CAPRICORN
(Dec. 23 - Jan. 20)

You pride yourself on your honesty, but over the next few days it will become increasingly clear that you had better keep certain items of information to yourself. Discretion may be the best course, but then that always comes naturally to a true Capricorn.

AQUARIUS
(Jan. 21 - Feb. 19)

This may be an increasingly sociable time, largely because of the movement of planets through those angles of your chart denoting public success and acclaim. Do not be afraid to acknowledge those wonderful achievements for which you are responsible.

PISCES
(Feb. 20 - Mar 20)

This could be an important time professionally, even though your life may be bedevilled by the need to make decisions. The trouble is that each alternative has its own attractions, yet there is no way you can have your cake and eat it. You'll have to make a hard choice. Pick!

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

CROSS WORD

ACROSS

- Boring though keen (11)
- Drivers seen in crash-full of drink (7)
- Like a primate coming from a ship (5)
- Six ways to watch television? (4)
- Floating red spots to improve soil fertility (3-5)
- Request from a confident operator or an eager heir? (5,2,2,2)
- He checks the last move when he wins (5,6)
- Is he in no hurry to act? (8)
- He leads on in a military procession (7)
- Colour of one doing badly (6)
- See Sue is going out with a heel (5)
- A spot of trouble over a pupil? (4)

SATURDAY'S SOLUTIONS

Across: 1 Sherpa, 4 Odundra, 9 Lash-up, 10 Leverage, 12 Cash, 13 Allie, 14 Dome, 17 Sudden squall, 20 A little extra, 23 Iaid, 24 Ambos, 25 Mock, 28 Nutshell, 29 Finite, 30 Creature, 31 Advent.

JUMBLE UNSCRAMBLE THESE JUMBLES, ONE LETTER TO EACH SQUARE, TO FORM FOUR ORDINARY WORDS.

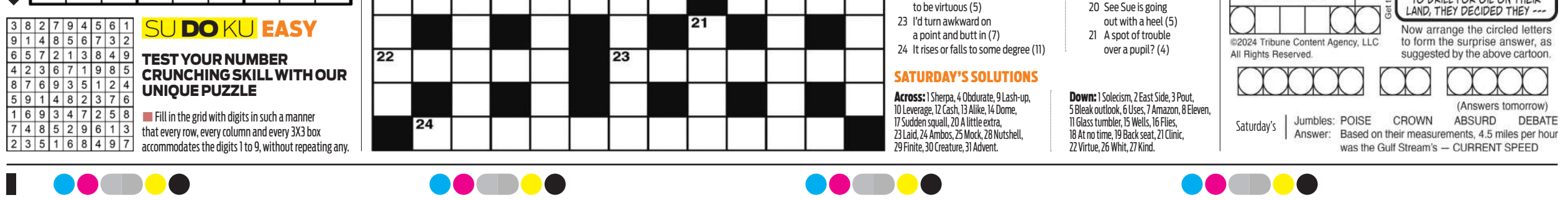
BY DAVID L. HOYT AND JEFF KNUREK

LIGTU
SOEGO
RAOMWR
POHOAL

DOWN

- Bird that is below par (5)
- A mishapen nose ages (4)
- Don's best port? (6)
- It has effected some actors' rise and fall (4,4)
- I have innate artlessness (7)
- Request from a confident operator or an eager heir? (5,2,2,2)
- He checks the last move when he wins (5,6)
- Is he in no hurry to act? (8)
- He leads on in a military procession (7)
- Colour of one doing badly (6)
- See Sue is going out with a heel (5)
- A spot of trouble over a pupil? (4)

ANSWERS tomorrow
 Jumbles: POISE CROWN ABSURD DEBATE
 Answer: Based on their measurements, 4.5 miles per hour was the Gulf Stream's — CURRENT SPEED





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“BRS government transformed TG from a surplus state into a debt-ridden one with a burden of ₹6L crore — Danasari Anasuya, minister

Cong brought drought to Telangana: KCR

‘Crops withered away in 15 L acres across TG due to water shortage, govt should pay ₹25K compensation per acre’

KCR blaming Cong govt for drought is ‘evil’, says agri min

Outage at KCR's press conference

A power outage was reported during Chandrasekar Rao's press conference in Suryapet. While Rao immediately blamed the state government, the Suryapet district TSSPDCL officials reported that the allegation of power interruption during the press conference was absolutely false. The press conference was conducted at the BRS party office in Suryapet town, which was powered by private generators and was not connected to the TSSPDCL electricity grid. Furthermore, the interruption was due to a disruption caused inside the party office only, the TSSPDCL said.



BRS chief K Chandrasekar Rao interacts with Angoth Satyamma and her husband at Dharawath thanda in Jangaon district

KCR promises ₹5L assistance to Jangaon woman farmer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Jangaon

BRS president and former chief minister K Chandrasekar Rao on Sunday promised to provide ₹5 lakh assistance to a woman farmer whose crops were withered due to drought-like situation prevailing in the state.

The former CM visited Dharawath thanda in Devaruppala mandal of Jangaon district and inspected the withered paddy and maize crops.

During his interaction with the affected farmers, KCR inquired about the supply of water and electricity.

When he asked Angoth Satyamma, a woman farmer, about the crops cultivated in her land, she said that six borewells were drilled in six acres of her farm land but all the investment went waste as crops withered due to unavailability of water.

Stating that she was unable to perform her daughter's marriage as planned as she suffered losses due to the drought-like situation and sought financial help, KCR responded positively and promised to provide ₹5 lakh assistance to Satyamma.

Later, KCR left for Suryapet district.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

In a strong rebuttal to BRS president K Chandrasekar Rao, Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao said that it was nothing but an evil instinct to say that the crop losses were due to the failure of the government. The crop losses occurred due to vagaries of nature and dry spells and playing a blame game was not correct, he said.

The minister said that even a wretched person would not use the drought-like situation to derive political mileage.

In a statement released on Sunday after KCR inspected damaged crops, the agriculture minister said that the Congress came to power on December 7, 2023. By that time the monsoon season was over and there was no water in Nagarjunasagar Project (NSP). Due to lack of water in the NSP, the then BRS government did not provide water for the Kharif crop.

But, the BRS is now demanding water for the second crop. Their demand is irrational,” Tummala said. He alleged that the BRS was trying to put the blame on the 100-day Congress

government.

Even as the neighbouring states diverted waters from the projects, the then BRS government closed its eyes and emptied the projects and reservoirs, the agriculture minister alleged. Now, the situation was such that the state government was requesting other states to release water for meeting drinking water needs, Tummala said.

He also pointed out that the BRS government had assured ₹1,000 crore aid to farmers, who lost everything during the Godavari floods. But, failed to give a meagre ₹10 to them. The BRS government never provided succour to the farmers, who lost crops during ten-year rule of BRS, he said.

The BRS government did not even provide ₹10,000 compensation to the farmers, who lost their crops. Tummala Nageswara Rao alleged that the state government did not release the matching grants to centrally-sponsored schemes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and Soil Health Management and rendered injustice to the farmers. Who was responsible for the damages caused to Medigadda barrage, he asked.



Tummala Nageswara Rao, agriculture minister

When neighbouring states diverted waters, the BRS govt closed its eyes. Now, the situation was such that the govt was requesting other states to release water for our meeting drinking water needs

A SESHACHARYULU @Suryapet

BRS president and former chief minister K Chandrasekar Rao said that the state government was responsible for the drought-like situation in the state. “Idi vacchina karuvu kaadu. Congress techina karuvu.” (It is not a drought due to the vagaries of nature. It is a drought brought on by the Congress, due to its failure)

KCR thundered after visiting the dried-up crops, including paddy and others, in Jangaon and Suryapet districts on Sunday. Speaking to reporters after

the field visit, KCR demanded that the state government should immediately enumerate the damaged and dried-up crops and pay ₹25,000 compensation per acre, as the cost of cultivation has increased.

He said that the crops had withered away due to lack of water in 15 lakh acres across the state. The crops dried up in the erstwhile Nalgonda district alone would be four lakh acres.

Around 14 tmcft of water was available in the Nagarjunasagar Project at present. Despite this, the crops dried up in Nalgonda district, he said, holding the state government responsible for mismanagement.

KCR alleged that the power sector had failed in the state under the Congress government in just 100 days.

Stating that the BRS would fight on behalf of farmers, he called on party leaders to protest across all districts, demanding ₹25,000 per acre compensation, ₹500 bonus for paddy, and crop loan waiver.

Meanwhile, BRS leaders would submit memoranda to the respective collectors demanding ₹500 bonus for paddy on April 2. The BRS would organise protests on April 6 demanding compensation for crops. They would also protest at all the paddy purchasing centres.

It is not a drought due to the vagaries of nature. It is a drought brought on by the Congress, due to its failure.

The Congress assured waiver of crop loans up to ₹2 lakh by December 9, 2023. We are in April today. Where are you sleeping, Revanth Reddy?

I have been silent for these past four months. Because, I wanted to give some time to the new government to settle down and start working. But, it is too late. That is why I am voicing for the welfare of farmers

K Chandrasekar Rao, BRS supremo

CPM urges CM to ensure BJP defeat

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

COMMUNIST Party of India (Marxist) politburo member BV Raghavulu urged Chief Minister and TPCC president A Revanth Reddy to ensure that the BRS does not win a single Lok Sabha seat in Telangana. Expressing concern over the BJP making inroads in Telangana, he said attempts were made to create a fanatical atmosphere.

CPM central committee member Cherupalli Sitaramulu chaired the party's state committee meeting on Sunday. Raghavulu said their main aim was to protect democracy, secularism, justice and integrity in the Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP government at the Centre, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was destroying the foundations of the Constitution, he alleged. He opined that if the BJP was not defeated in the upcoming polls, the future of the country would be under threat. He said the Opposition parties have come together to form the INDIA bloc only to protect the country.

Revanth might withdraw Rythu Bandhu: Harish

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kamareddy

BRS leader and former minister T Harish Rao said that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy might attempt to withdraw the Rythu Bandhu scheme and reduce the number of districts through reorganisation.

Stating that the chief minister may attempt to buy BRS leaders, but he cannot buy BRS activists, he said that whoever leaves the pink party will find the doors permanently closed to them.

Mentioning that the BRS had supported BB Patil, who was elected twice as MP from Zaheerabad constituency, but later joined the BJP, he said that only a few committed leaders are necessary for the party to win the hearts of the people. The former minister was speaking at a party meeting in Kamareddy and Yellareddy Assembly constituencies on Sunday.

Harish said during the 100 days of the Congress government, groundwater levels declined significantly and 280 farmers died by suicide across the state.

Harish urged the public to deliver a fitting lesson to Chief



Harish Rao speaks at a BRS meeting in Yellareddy

Minister A Revanth Reddy's government in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

He said that the Congress cheated the public by not fulfilling the assurances made to the people during the Assembly elections campaign. He warned that if people do not hold Revanth accountable, it would signify acceptance of his deceitful practices.

The BRS leader emphasised that defeating the Congress in the parliamentary elections would compel the government to promptly implement all promised reforms.

He criticised the BJP for failing to implement promised assurances to the people and for exploiting the Ayodhya Ram temple issue for political gain.

Cong came to power by deceiving people: Vinod

ENS @Karimnagar

BRS candidate and former MP B Vinod Kumar alleged that the Congress has come to power based on false promises and deceiving gullible people.

The BRS student wing — Chaitanya Sadassu — had organised an event at a private function hall in Alugunur of Manakondur assembly constituency on Sunday. Speaking at the event, he said that for the development of Telangana, the BRS government had recruited about 1.61 lakh people for gov-

ernment jobs within 10 years. Additionally, exams for another 30,000 government jobs were also conducted. On the other hand, power cuts started within three months of the Congress coming to power, he alleged. He recalled that in the united Andhra Pradesh, coal production was primarily based in the region that is now Telangana, while power generation companies were situated in the region that became Andhra Pradesh after the division. After Telangana was carved out, approximately 26,000 MW



Vinod addresses at an event in Alugunur

of power generation capacity was established, ensuring 24-hour power supply for the agriculture sector, he noted.

He mentioned that when he was in office, IIIT was sanctioned for Karimnagar, and

later, 50 acres of land were allocated. However, the present MP, Bandi Sanjay, neglected the project, resulting in its relocation to other states, he said.

He condemned Sanjay for not taking any steps for the development of Karimnagar. Vinod Kumar pointed out that due to the lack of skill development opportunities in Karimnagar, youth migrated to other states, securing approximately 30 lakh jobs in Hyderabad. He asserted that Sanjay has no right to seek votes from the people of Karimnagar.

Signing PPA could increase burden on Discoms

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, power costs stand at ₹5.90 per unit, but upon Phase-2 completion, it could soar to ₹8 to ₹9 per unit, surpassing open market rates of ₹2 to ₹4 per unit, they added. In such a scenario, purchasing power at a higher rate from NTPC would push the Discoms into further losses, the sources opined.

If a PPA is signed with NTPC for 25 years, it could increase the burden on people living in the state, the sources mentioned, adding that it was the reason why the government has decided against signing the PPA. Instead, the government is exploring other options, including sources where power would be available at a lower price, the sources mentioned.

The state government, according to the sources, is also contemplating against constructing thermal power plants in the future, citing high costs and part of plans to encourage

hydel, solar and wind power.

New energy policy

The state government is also planning to implement a new policy on energy generation and power purchase. The policy would be prepared while taking the state's requirements till 2032 into consideration.

The peak power load in Telangana stands at 15,623 MW. Meanwhile, the state is estimating that the peak demand may touch 27,059 MW by 2031-32. The state government may also invite private companies, which can supply power at reasonable costs.

The new power policy of the government would see that there would be no burden on consumers, the sources said. It would focus on renewable energy, as such plants would come into operation within two years, they added.

The government is planning

to use solar power for the state's needs from 10 am to 5 pm in a bid to drastically reduce spending on power. The solar plants would be set up at all 33/11 kv substations and on available government lands. Self-help groups would be encouraged to set up solar plants as well.

The solar plants would also be set up with the partnership of private companies and persons. Solar units would also be set up on the buildings of all government schools, colleges, universities, hostels and offices. The government is also studying how to generate pumped storage power for major and medium projects. There is a possibility of generating 6,732 MW of power at the existing reservoirs, according to estimates.

Talks with Himachal Pradesh

The state government has also noticed that there is a huge po-

tential for hydel generation in Himachal Pradesh. The government would invest money and construct huge hydroelectric plants in Himachal Pradesh and divert the power to the state.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy recently held discussions with his Himachal Pradesh counterpart Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on setting up hydel power plants, the sources said.

Including all these points, the draft new energy policy for the state would be prepared shortly and it would be introduced in the Legislative Assembly after the Lok Sabha polls. The government would also take the views of the stakeholders on the draft policy.

The main reason for the state government to focus on renewable energy was due to the cost escalation of the Yadadri thermal power plant. The cost increased from ₹6 crore per unit to ₹10 crore per unit.

EXPRESS READ

Case filed against BJP Mahabubabad candidate

Khammam: The executive officer of the Sri Sita Ramachandra Swamy temple in Bhadrachalam, L Ramadevi, filed a complaint against Mahabubabad BJP Lok Sabha candidate Seetaram Naik at the Bhadrachalam town police station. This action followed allegations that Naik's associates took photos inside the temple during a visit on Saturday. It is reported that while Seetaram Naik was offering prayers, some of his associates took photos, an act that is prohibited. Police have registered a case and are investigating the incident.



BRS working president KT Rama Rao interacts with a woman street vendor during his padayatra in Amberpet on Sunday

KTR predicts BRS candidate's win, Kishan Reddy's defeat in Sec'bad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

BRS working president and former IT and MAUD minister KT Rama Rao on Sunday exuded confidence that the party candidate would win easily from the Secunderabad Lok Sabha segment and predicted the defeat of Union minister G Kishan Reddy, who is seeking reelection from the constituency.

Citing a lack of tangible progress and development initiatives in the Secunderabad segment in the last five years, the BRS working president accused Kishan Reddy of failing

“No tangible progress in Sec'bad for 5 years”
Citing a lack of tangible progress and development initiatives in the Secunderabad segment in the last five years, BRS working president KT Rama Rao accused Union Minister G Kishan Reddy of failing to get sufficient funds either for development of the segment or Telangana.



to get sufficient funds either for development of the segment or Telangana state.

The former IT minister took out a padayatra in Amberpet

and interacted with people urging them to vote for BRS candidate T Padma Rao Goud.

Rama Rao also recalled Kishan Reddy's previous electoral defeat in the Amberpet Assembly segment.

He dared Kishan Reddy to provide a comprehensive report on his achievements and contributions to the Secunderabad Lok Sabha segment.

He highlighted Padma Rao Goud's pivotal role as a senior Telangana agitator and his significant contributions to the statehood movement in the city.

Kochi village gets NGT's attention after TNIE report

Most families in Ayyankuzhi village left owing to pollution, says report

MAHIMA ANNA JACOB @Kochi

TAKING cognisance suo motu on the report published by TNIE (Begg for Breath: Trapped between industries Kochi residents gasp for fresh air), the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to submit reports on April 4.

The order, issued on March 13, said the matter will be listed before the NGT at Faridkot House in New Delhi on the said date.

The TNIE report highlighted the plight of residents of Ayyankuzhi village in Ambalamgal, a strip of land sandwiched between the walls of the Kochi refinery of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Organic Chemicals Ltd (HOCL). Of the 41 families that inhabited the village, only 29 remain while the rest have left mainly owing to pollution. The residents also claim the industrial units encroached on 9.5 acres of land in the village, Deepesh V, CPCB coordinator



(Kerala & Lakshwadeep) said they have submitted a report before the NGT based on the cases filed by residents against BPCL in 2022.

"We have submitted a preliminary report. The board will be able to take any action once it is passed to the southern bench of NGT," he said. In 2022, the NGT, while hearing the complaint filed by Vipin Nath A V and Sinu C Jacob of Kakkad Kara, N G Soman and K J Mani, directed BPCL to pay compensation.

"The NGT judgment of April 19, 2022, directed BPCL to pay a compensation of ₹2 crore. The complaints were raised on the grounds of facing difficulties due to the operation of BPCL's PDPP project, which is due to the lack of Green Belt or

2023 camp's findings

In 2023, the Ernakulam district medical office organised a medical camp in Ayyankuzhi following the Kerala High Court's intervention. As per its data, 85 persons (44 females and 41 males) were screened at the camp. Dyspnea on exertion, cough, nasal allergy, recurrent respiratory infections, chest heaviness and fatigue were the common ailments detected. At least seven people were found to be suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Buffer Zone between the Industrial Zone and Residential Zone. However, BPCL managed to secure a stay from the SC," said Deepesh.

"We cannot disclose more about the report. We haven't conducted any surveys following the issuance of the notice. The report to be filed will mention details of our previous inspections. Any further action will be taken only after NGT's directive," he said.

Pensions: Sajjala raps Naidu for ECI bar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Vijayawada

A day after the Election Commission of India (ECI) barred the state from engaging volunteers in disbursing social welfare pensions, Advisor to Government (Public Affairs) and YSRC general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy squarely blamed the TDP for the election panel fiat. He said the government would disburse pension on April 3 and the beneficiaries can collect it at their nearest secretariat as volunteers would not come to their doorstep.

He alleged that the Citizens for Democracy, based on who's complaint the ECI took the decision, had the support of the TDP and the credentials of its leaders like former CEO Nim-magadda Ramesh was known to all.

Naidu wanted to cover up for his 'misdeed': Sajjala

Sajjala alleged that Naidu to coverup his 'misdeed' wrote a letter to the chief secretary urging that the state government should utilise the services of the village/ward employees at the gram/ward secretariats to ensure timely disbursement of pension to the beneficiaries. Sajjala further said that the TDP chief fearing wrath of the people for his stand against the volunteer system, used his B-Team, the Citizens For Democracy, to lodge a complaint with the ECI. "Citizens for Democracy was formed in Sept last year and, after 15 days, it approached SC against the volunteer system," he said.



Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Sajjala alleged that

Naidu to coverup his 'misdeed' wrote a letter to the chief secretary urging that the state government should utilise the services of the village/ward employees at the gram/ward secretariats to

ensure timely disbursement of pension to the beneficiaries.

Sajjala further said that the TDP chief fearing wrath of the people for his stand against the volunteer system, used his B-Team, the Citizens For Democracy, to lodge a complaint with the ECI. "Citizens for Democracy was formed in September last year and, after 15 days, it approached the Supreme Court against the volunteer system. The forum maintained that the volunteers were collecting sensitive data and providing the same to the ruling party," he said.

Sajjala said there were allegations that Ramesh acted at the behest of the TDP during the elections to local bodies.

Cong activist attacks BRS leaders in Mulugu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mulugu

A Congress activist allegedly attacked a couple, who are also BRS leaders, with a sickle in Incherla village in Mulugu district late on Saturday night.



According to Mulugu Sub-Inspector (SI) A Venkateshwar, Congress activist - Sanaboinya Ashok - had recently left the BRS and joined the Congress. Knowing of the incident, the villagers tried to take the sickle away from Ashok, during which, the sickle hit BRS leader Mamidi Ashok's wife Vasantha's head. She was rushed to a local hospital for treatment.

The police rushed to the spot and registered a case against S Ashok under Section 307 (attempt to murder) of the IPC, said Venkateshwar.

Bhujanga Rao named in bizman's complaint

FROM PAGE 1

Following his complaint, the investigation team called Sridhar Rao for an interrogation at the Banjara Hills police station on Sunday. The businessman alleged that Additional SP Bhujanga Rao was also involved in threatening and extorting money from him.

"Prabhakar order surveillance on Revanth" The former intelligence chief is also suspected of ordering former DSP D Praneeth Rao and other officers to conduct full surveillance on the then opposition leader A Revanth Reddy, his family members, followers and associates. Subsequently, Praneeth allegedly relayed all the information gathered through eavesdropping back to him.

The case, which has been under investigation for more than 15 days, is based on a complaint filed by an additional superintendent of police of the SIB on March 10. According to the complainant, Praneeth and others were accused of developing profiles of some un-

known persons and illegally monitoring their movements without authorisation. The former DSP and his team allegedly copied the intelligence information into their personal hard drives and destroyed certain computer systems and official data of the SIB.

As police started investigating the case, it came to light that Praneeth allegedly worked under the directions of Prabhakar. It was also learnt that the team had bought special tapping devices from Israel without the permission of the Union government. Using the recorded conversation, they allegedly extorted hundreds of crores from politicians and businesspersons. The probe team has invited potential extortion victims to file complaints.

So far, the police have arrested Praneeth, Radha Kishan Rao, Bhujanga Rao and Thirupattana. The investigation team has also been interrogating several other persons, including officers of the Task Force and SIB, in relation to the case.



HOLY ACT After completing the Easter Sunday special prayers, Christian devotees take the holy communion from a priest at the St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hyderabad on Sunday | SRI LOGANATHAN VELMURUGAN

GNITS collaborates with Berlin startup

ENS @Hyderabad

A dinner was organised by the G Narayana Institute of Technology and Science (GNITS) in Shaikhpur for the Berlin Startup delegation financed by Expansion Lab, Bethesda, and a part of Asia Berlin on March 28.

The purpose of this delegation is to facilitate an Asian market gateway for startups based in Germany as part of Indo-German collaboration. At the dinner, an informal pitch was delivered by people from two startups in the Berlin ecosystem.

Sri Vidya Reddy, Vice-Chairperson of GNITS and MD AIC GNITS Foundation, shared MoUs with Katka Nagyova from Bethesda, Berlin, and Alisha Davis from Carve Startup Labs for fostering the culture of ecosystem support for the early traction and scaling stages of startups and promising pilot enablement and R&D.

25 MCC violation complaints from K'taka BJP in 12 days

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

MEMBERS of the Karnataka BJP have registered about 25 complaints with the Chief Electoral Officer of the state, as well as the ECI, over the last 12 days, accusing the Congress of violating the Model Code of Conduct. On Sunday, the BJP members, led by former minister Suresh Kumar, lodged a complaint against Deputy CM DK Shivakumar for misusing his office in Vidhana Soudha for political purposes. A few leaders joined Congress at Shivakumar's office on Saturday.

BJP Legal Cell convenor Vasanth Kumar said an FIR has been registered in Karatagi police station against Shivraj Tangadagi recently, after he made certain objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also informed that a complaint has been lodged against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's son Yathindra, who spoke offensively against Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Meanwhile, the BJP leaders on Sunday complained against Shivakumar for allowing some people to join the Congress at his office in Vidhana Soudha. This is a clear case of MCC violation, they said.

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Three AP-based drug peddlers arrested, 2.2 litre hashish oil seized

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

THE Balanagar SOT, along with the Medchal police late on Saturday night, apprehended three AP-based peddlers for procuring hashish oil from Tuni in AP and selling it here in Hyderabad. The police seized a polythene cover containing 2.2 litres of hashish oil from their possession.

The accused — Gollu Kumara Swamy, Kodu Ajay Kumar and Lokavarapu Swamy Ganesh — are all natives of Visakhapatnam.

According to the police, Gollu Kumara Swamy migrated to

In case you have information related to ganja/weed oil suppliers, inform the police by dialling 100 or contact the Cyberabad NDPS Enforcement Cell on 7901105423 or reach out to Cyberabad Whatsapp number 9490617444.

Hyderabad and started working as a mechanic at Gandimaisamma area. However, as he could not manage his expenses, he hatched a plan to peddle drugs to make easy money.

Kumara Swamy then got in touch with AP-based supplier

Nageswara Rao (currently absconding). He then lured his friend Ajay Kumar and asked him to purchase the drugs from Nageswara Rao and deliver it to him in Hyderabad.

Following Kumara Swamy's instructions, Ajay Kumar along with his friend Swamy Ganesh met Nageswara on Friday and purchased the contraband. Later, the duo travelled to Hyderabad on a bike and met with Kumara Swamy and the trio then went to Medchal.

Meanwhile, the police, who were conducting a regular vehicle check in the area apprehended the peddlers and seized the drugs from them.

Heatwave: 20 kids hospitalised in K'taka

KIRAN BALANNANAVAR @Ballari

INTENSE heatwave conditions have led to over 20 children below 10 years of age being admitted to hospitals in Ballari district in the last two days. Ballari district has been experiencing temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius for the last one week.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has warned that the maximum temperature could touch 45 degrees Celsius this year.

Last week, it had issued a heatwave alert across North

Karnataka, including Ballari district, which is experiencing intense heat because of drought.

The admitted children are found to be suffering from dehydration, fever and vomiting. The Ballari district administration has issued a set of guidelines, requesting citizens, especially children and the elderly, not to come out in direct sunlight without protection from 1 pm to 4 pm.

District Health Officer Dr Ramesh Babu Y said because of the high temperature, the children have been admitted to

district and private hospitals.

He advised citizens, "Children, Pregnant women, elderly who are over 65 years old and those suffering from health issues should not come out from 1 pm to 4 pm, except for an emergency. If you have to come out, carry an umbrella or wear a hat. Drink more water, consume tender coconut water and eat seasonal fruits like watermelon. Avoid alcohol and oily foods. Children suffering from dehydration, vomiting, headache and other symptoms should immediately visit the hospital."

INNOVATIVE IDEA

KU comes up with fuel cell using seawater

SOVI VIDYADHARAN @TPuram

RESEARCHERS at the University of Kerala have developed an eco-friendly fuel cell that generates power mainly using air and seawater.

Details of the 'Air-breathing Magnesium - Copper / Cupric Oxide Fuel Cell' have appeared in the international publication 'Journal of Engineering and Applied Science', recently.

The research was carried out by R Jayakrishnan, associate professor, department of Phys-

ics, and his students. The technology used is expected to be disruptive as lithium-ion batteries, the present market leaders, are set to be overtaken by magnesium-based fuel cells that deliver higher power output.

The KU researchers' fuel cell is billed as environmentally clean as it breathes air and uses saline water as the fuel. The cell produces only electricity and heat during its operation and emits water.

At present, researchers all over the world are focused on developing fuel cells that use

the chemical energy of hydrogen to produce electricity cleanly and efficiently.

"A semiconducting layer of cupric oxide grown over copper substrate was used in magnesium-sodium chloride-based fuel cell. We used a commercial toy car to test a prototype fuel cell and the results were encouraging," said Jayakrishnan, who has been working on the idea of using salt water as fuel since 2020.

The world over, the expensive element platinum is used for air cathode systems, whereas in the

work led by Jayakrishnan, semiconductor material has been used for the purpose, thereby making the cell cost-effective.

"A fuel cell of size 3cm x 1.5cm x 1cm was prototyped delivered a voltage of 0.7V and a current of 0.35A for 10 minutes. We know that we have a long way to go before we can commercialise the technology," Jayakrishnan said. However, if the research receives adequate funding, Jayakrishnan believes his team could come up with a competitive technology within a short period.



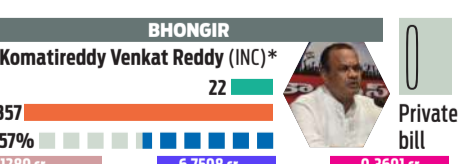
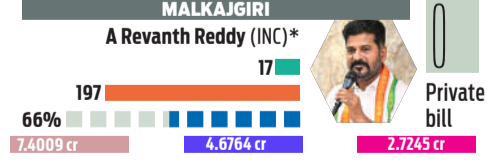
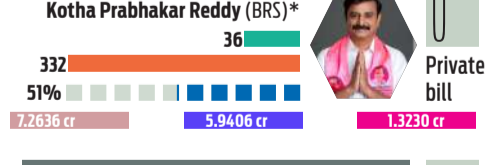
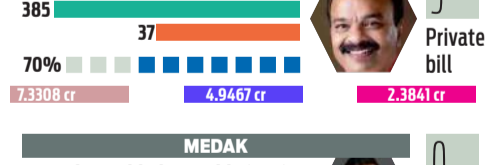
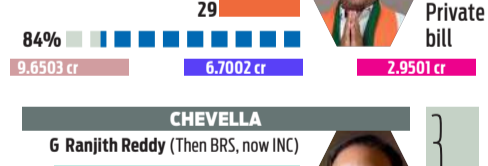
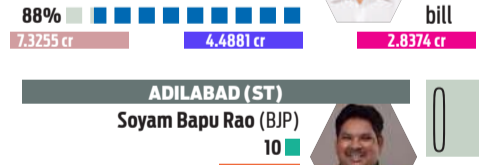
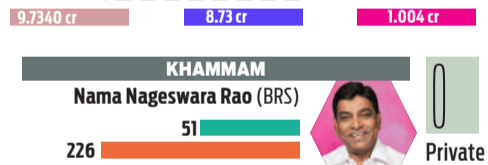
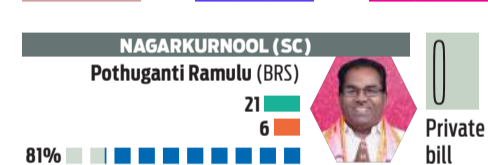
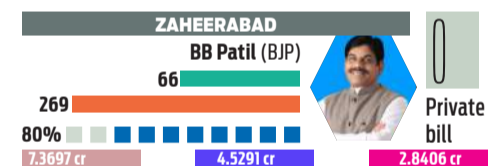
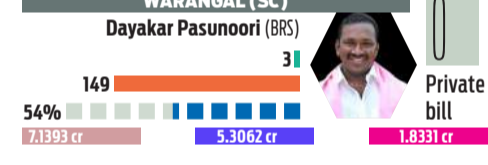
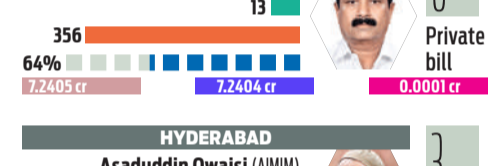
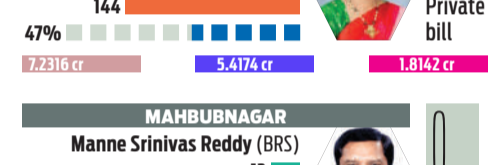
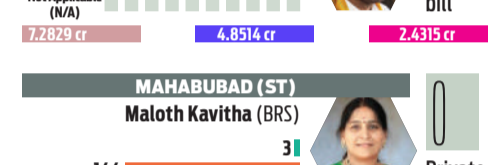
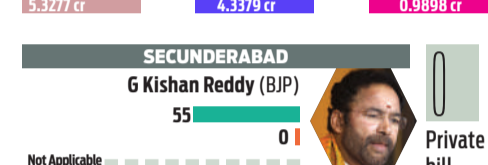
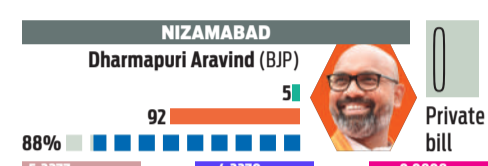
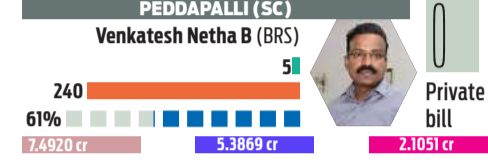
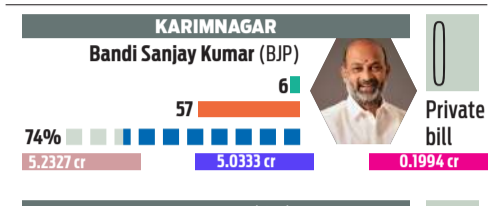
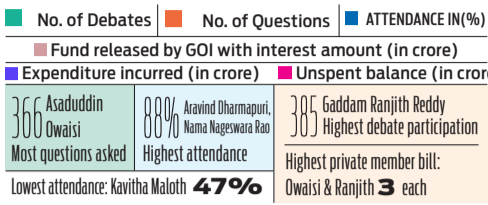
WHEN MEDAK MP BECAME PM

The trend of Lok Sabha segments sending the winners to the Cabinet was also witnessed in Medak constituency. In fact, Medak has the distinction of its winner leading the country. In the 1980 elections, Indira Gandhi won this seat and became the prime minister for the third time.

COMPILED BY AJAY TOMAR

HOW YOUR MPs FARED

*Data corresponds to the period from 01-06-2019 to 10-02-2024, 17th Lok Sabha had 272 sittings over its five-year tenure from 2019-2024



Source - Sansad.in, PRS Legislative Research, and Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)



Ex-MLC Mohan Reddy too changes loyalties
BRS leader and former MLC B Mohan Reddy also joined the Congress in the presence of Deepa Dasmunshi, AICC secretary Rohit Choudhary, advisor to chief minister Vem Narender Reddy and Khairatabad DCC chief Rohin Reddy were present.

KADIYAM, KAVYA JOIN CONG

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad
FORMER deputy chief minister Kadiyam Srihari along with his daughter Kavya formally joined the Congress in the presence of Chief Minister and TPCC president A Revanth Reddy and AICC Telangana in-charge Deepa Dasmunshi on Sunday.

Warangal constituency in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. A few days earlier, Kavya announced her reluctance to contest on a BRS ticket and tendered her resignation claiming that she didn't get any support from ground-level leaders and predicted that the party would not secure many seats in the General Elections.

Pradesh, he has held the portfolios of irrigation, education, social welfare and marketing in TDP-led governments. In 2013, he joined the BRS (then TRS) and won the Warangal Lok Sabha seat. However, he resigned as MP after the pink party won the first Assembly elections in Telangana and was appointed the deputy chief minister. Meanwhile, BRS leader and former MLC B Mohan Reddy also joined the Congress in the presence of Deepa Dasmunshi.

Started with TDP
Four-time legislator Srihari began his career with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). He was elected to the Assembly from Station Ghanpur. In undivided Andhra

Pradesh, he has held the portfolios of irrigation, education, social welfare and marketing in TDP-led governments. In 2013, he joined the BRS (then TRS) and won the Warangal Lok Sabha seat. However, he resigned as MP after the pink party won the first Assembly elections in Telangana and was appointed the deputy chief minister.



CODE CHECK

As the model code of conduct is in force in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, officials check the bus in which BRS president and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and other pink party leaders were travelling at a checkpoint in Suryapet on Sunday. Rao was on his way to meet farmers at several agricultural lands where the crops were affected by the drought-like situation prevailing in the state.



People want to see Modi taking oath as PM for third time, says Kishan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

BJP state president and Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy on Sunday said that there is a strong Modi wave across the country and the people have decided to ensure that he takes oath as prime minister for the third consecutive time.



Kishan toured several areas, including Balavantpur and Brahminwada, in Begumpet as part of his election campaign in Secunderabad Lok Sabha constituency. Kishan, who is seeking re-election, visited several apartment complexes and interacted with the people. Claiming that there have been no bomb blasts or communal

clashes in the country since Modi took over as the prime minister, he said that there used to be power cuts during the Congress regime. The industrialists used to suffer due to lack of power. But in the last 10 years, there were no power

cuts and every section of society is happy, he said. He alleged that there were ₹12 lakh crore worth scams when Manmohan Singh was the PM. There were no such scam under Modi's rule. The economy improved and the poverty reduced considerably under Modi's rule, he claimed. "Now, the entire nation is supporting Modi," he averred. Kishan recalled that the BJP government developed Begumpet and Secunderabad railway stations and Cherlapally railway terminal. The second phase of MMTS too was launched recently. "Compare the Congress rule right from the Independence with that of the BJP's 10-year rule and vote for the BJP," he said.

'6Gs will ensure Cong's success in Telangana'

FORMER MP and Congress candidate in Nagarkurnool Lok Sabha segment Mallu Ravi is confident that the six guarantees that his party is committed to implementing in Telangana will ensure its success in the Lok Sabha elections. In an exclusive interview with TINE's Manda Ravinder Reddy, he also says that he has no competition in his segment.

Telangana. It will not get even a single seat here. It doesn't have cadre at the ground level. It may come with any agenda but no one can stop the Congress from winning maximum number of seats. People don't trust the saffron party.

Sabha elections. He also criticised the BRS when he was in the BSP. Because of that no BRS leader or activist is working for his victory. Even the BSP leaders are against him. After he joined the BRS, everyone thinks that Praveen Kumar has bid adieu to "Bahujanism".



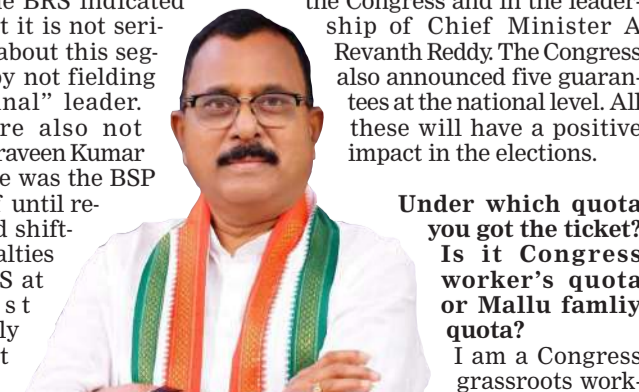
Excerpts from the interview
Who is your main rival in your constituency -- BRS candidate or BJP's? Are you confident of winning the seat?
There is no competition for me in Nagarkurnool. The candidates of BRS and BJP stand no chance at all. People are saying that I will win with a two lakh majority. It's like a love marriage — people are loving me and I am loving them.

Former IPS officer RS Praveen Kumar, who is considered strong 'Bahujanvadi', is contesting against you on a BRS ticket? Will his candidature have an impact?
The BRS indicated that it is not serious about this segment by not fielding its "original" leader. People are also not trusting Praveen Kumar because he was the BSP state chief until recently and shifted his loyalties to the BRS at the last minute only to contest the Lok

What is the Congress' agenda for this elections?
Congress is successfully implementing the six guarantees, which we announced before the Assembly elections. People are happy and expressing their confidence in the Congress and in the leadership of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. The Congress also announced five guarantees at the national level. All these will have a positive impact in the elections.

er. I have been in the Congress for the last 40 years. I served as an MP a couple of times. I held several posts in the party. I also have a good rapport with the people. The party high command recognised my services and gave me the ticket to contest again. My family, including brother Bhatti Vikramarka (present deputy chief minister) and (former MP) Anantha Ramulu, have been serving the Congress for a long time.

Under which quota you got the ticket? Is it Congress worker's quota or Mallu family quota?
I am a Congress grassroots work-



In the undivided Andhra Pradesh, you worked closely with the then chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy. Now you are working with Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy. What difference have you seen between them vis-a-vis administration?
YSR's rule is being replicated by Revanth Reddy. He is playing a key role in implementation of the six guarantees. In working style, though there is slight difference, but in governance both are same. Like Rajasekhara Reddy, Revanth too won people's trust and confidence in a very short time.

*The four MPs designated after being elected MLAs in Telangana Assembly elections in December, 2023

Will these 'lucky' segments propel growth of winners?

I REDDY SRINIVAS REDDY @Hyderabad

POLITICIANS attach significant sentiment to the constituencies they contest from. They believe that if they contest from certain "lucky" segments, they are most likely to swiftly climb the ladder of political success and secure plum ministerial and other posts. There are quiet a few such "lucky" Lok Sabha segments in Telangana where candidates of all parties are hoping to find success and to see their political graph go "north" because these constituencies have a history of sending the MPs to the Union Cabinet.

Malkajgiri
A Revanth Reddy became the TPCC chief after securing this seat in 2019. He went on to make history by leading the Congress to power in the state in 2023 Assembly polls

Secunderabad
In the 2019 polls, G Kishan Reddy secured the seat and was given an import portfolio in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet

Karimnagar
BRS president and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao won this seat in 2004 and went on to serve as a Union minister

Take for instance Secunderabad constituency. BJP leader Bandaru Dattatreya won this seat in the 2014 elections. He went on to serve as Union minister twice. He is now the governor for Haryana. In the 2019 polls, his party colleague G Kishan Reddy secured the seat and was given an important portfolio in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet. If he remains this seat, he is once again likely to be inducted into the Union Cabinet.

Malkajgiri too is one such "lucky" segment where the incumbent MP, A Revanth Reddy became the TPCC chief after securing this seat in the 2019 elections. He went on to make history by leading the Congress to power in the state and by taking oath as the chief minister. Ch Malla Reddy also served as Malkajgiri MP after winning the 2014 elections on a TDP ticket. Later, he joined the BRS and went on to serve as an MLA and a minister. Before that in 2009 polls, Sarve Sathanarayanan secured the seat on a Congress ticket and he was given the opportunity to serve as a minister of state in the Union government. In the upcoming elections, if the BJP candidate Eatala Rajender wins the seat, he has a bright chance of making it to the Union Cabinet.

Will Bandi make it this time?
Similarly, Karimnagar too has the tradition of sending its MPs to the Union Cabinet. They include BJP's Ch Vidyasagar Rao Ch Vidhya Sagar Rao who won the seat in 1994 and 1999 and went on to serve as the Minister of State for Home Affairs. He also served as the governor of Maharashtra. BRS president and former chief minister also K Chandrasekhar Rao also got the opportunity to serve as a Union minister after being elected from this segment in 2004. Now, there is speculation in the political circles that if Bandi Sanjay retains the seat, he is likely to be given a berth in the Union Cabinet. This trend is also being wit-

nessed in Mahabubnagar segment. KCR had won this seat in 2009. Later, he became the first chief minister of Telangana. Earlier, senior Congress leader S Jaipal Reddy won this seat in 1984 and 1998. He went on to serve as a Union minister multiple times. Dr Mallikarjuna Goud, who was elected six times, served as a Union minister during the Congress regime.

In the upcoming elections, BJP's DK Aruna is focussing all her energies in clinching this seat. She is expected to find a berth in the Union Cabinet if the saffron party again forms the government at the Centre. Congress candidate Ch Vamsi Chand Reddy is likely to make it to the Cabinet if he wins the seat and his party forms the government.

Medak segment, in fact, has the record of its winner leading the country. In the 1980 elections, Indira Gandhi won this seat and went on to serve as the prime minister. In 2004, Ale Narendra of the TRS (now BRS) retained the seat and became the Minister of State for Rural Development. Now, the BJP candidate and former MLA M Raghunandan Rao is focusing on the securing this segment. If he succeeds, he is most likely to be given a national role by the BJP.

Khammam has always been a key constituency where some high-profile leaders contested and went on to serve as Union ministers. They include Renuka Chowdhury, a two-time MP who served as a Union minister, and Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, who also served as a minister in the Congress government. Two former CMs of undivided Andhra Pradesh — Jalagam Vengal Rao and Nandendra Bhaskara Rao — were also elected as MPs from the Khammam segment.

CRUNCHY DEETS



Different vibes in grand old party

LEADERS in the Telangana Congress seem to have different opinion concerning their rival parties in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. While Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy says that the main fight would be between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party, his cabinet colleague and R&B Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy is of the view that the saffron party has hardly any presence in Telangana and dismissed the theory that Congress MLAs could switch loyalty to the BJP.

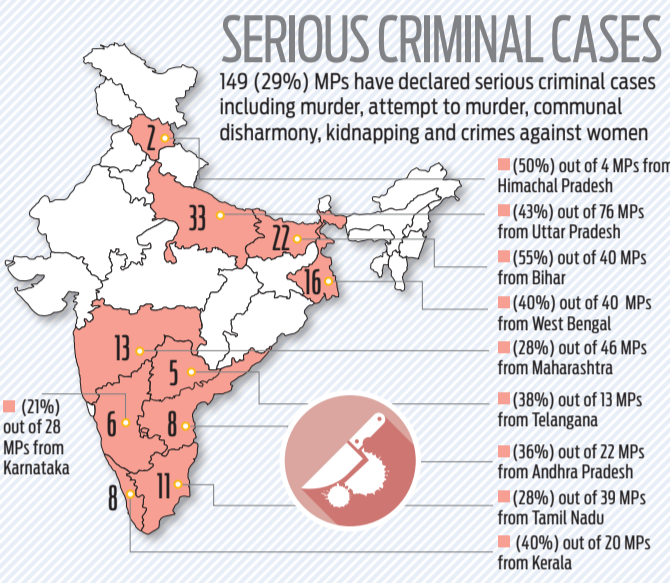
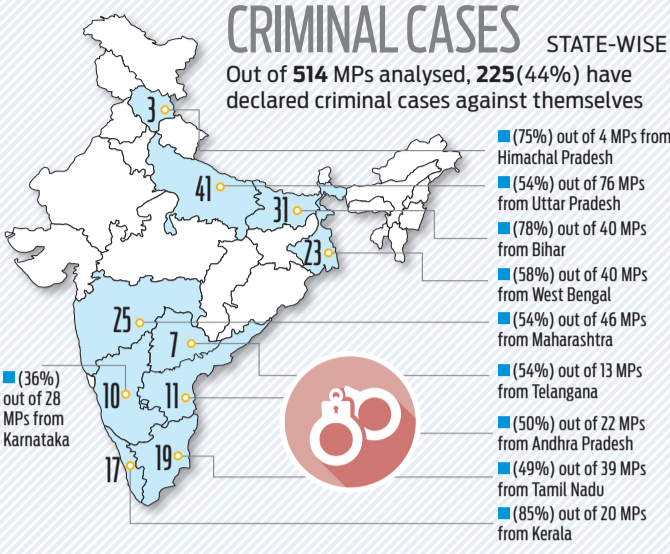
Two BRS leaders pin hopes on BJP

With one leader after another joining the ruling party, two BRS MLAs, who were ministers in the KCR cabinet, are wondering about their future in the event of BRS/MLP merging with the Congress as Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is said to have slammed the Congress door shut on the duo. The only hope of the two leaders who have considerable business interests is the BJP.

Inputs: Ireddy Srinivas Reddy

BACKGROUND CHECK

In an analysis of the self-sworn affidavits of MPs of the 17th Lok Sabha, the latest report of ADR found that 40% of them had criminal cases against them. Moreover, about 29% had serious criminal cases registered against them, as per the data



MURDER CASES

Nine MPs have declared cases related to murder. Out of these, 5 MPs are from BJP, 1 from INC, BSP, YSRCP each and 1 MP an independent

ATTEMPT TO MURDER

28 MPs have declared cases of attempt to murder. Out of these, 21 are from BJP and one MP each from INC, AITC, BSP, NCP (Sharad Pawar), YSRCP, Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party and Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi

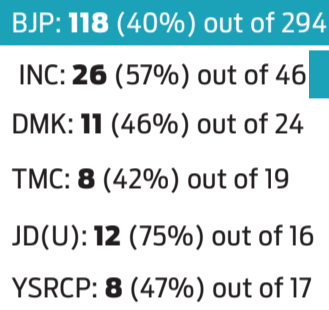
CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

16 MPs have declared cases related to crimes against women. Of them, 3 have declared cases related to rape (IPC Section 376)

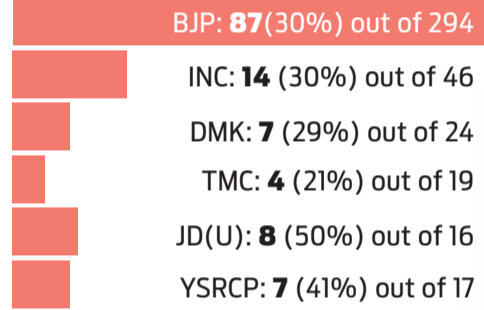
'NO IMMUNITY FROM ARREST'

According to former Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu, an MP does not have immunity from being arrested in criminal cases — when the House is in session or otherwise. Naidu said that MPs could not avoid summons from law enforcement agencies

CRIMINAL CASES



SERIOUS CRIMINAL CASES



(Source: Association of Democratic Reforms)

PARVEZ SULTAN @ New Delhi

THE highlight of the first set of Lok Sabha candidates for West Bengal announced by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) is that the party has reposed confidence in its youth leadership to take on political heavyweights. The party has so far announced names for 17 seats and at least 12 of them are young and fresh faces.

The youngest of the lot is Dipsita Dhar (30), joint secretary of the Student Federation of India (SFI). She has been fielded from Sreerampur against the three-time MP of Trinamool Congress Kalyan Banerjee. The student leader is the granddaughter of noted CPM leader Padma Nidhi Dhar. The BJP has nominated Kabir Shankar Bose, a Supreme Court lawyer, from the seat.

Dipsita has been at the forefront of various student-led protests and has been vocal on issues related to gender, sexual harassment and Indian higher education. She was also actively involved in the 'Justice for Rohit Vemula' movement and the anti-CAA protests.

Srijan Bhattacharya (31), former SFI secretary of the state, has been pitted against actor Saayoni Ghosh of TMC in the prestigious Jadavpur parliamentary seat. Bhattacharya's parents were also leftist student activists and his grandfather Achintya Bhattacharya was a communist leader of Assam. A scholar-turned-politician Anirban Ganguly is the BJP candidate for the seat.

Saira Shah Halim (46), a CPM nominee from Kolkata Dakshin, also comes from an illustrious family of Left leaders of West Bengal. His husband Dr Fuad Halim is the son of the veteran Leftist leader Hasim Abdul Halim, who served as the speaker of the Bengal assembly for almost three decades. Saira is the daughter of retired Lieutenant General Zameer Uddin Shah and niece of actor Naseeruddin Shah.

She actively participated in the campaign against the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act in Bengal and Delhi. She has been speaking on the rights of religious minorities and LG-BTQ+ community. On her candidature from the seat, Saira said, "People here are looking for an alternative that is not corrupt and communalist. So I hope the public will like my candidature and give me their blessings."



DIPSITA DHAR
The JNU scholar and SFI joint secretary has been fielded from Sreerampur against 3-time TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee. The granddaughter of CPM leader Padma Nidhi Dhar has been at the forefront of student protests and has been vocal on issues related to gender, sexual harassment and higher education



SRIJAN BHATTACHARYA
A former SFI secretary in Bengal, Srijan has been pitted against actor Saayoni Ghosh of TMC and Dr Anirban Ganguly of BJP in the prestigious Jadavpur constituency. Bhattacharya's parents were also leftist student leaders and his grandfather Achintya Bhattacharya was a Communist leader of Assam



SAIRA SHAH HALIM
Nominee from Kolkata Dakshin, Halim comes from an illustrious family of Left leaders of West Bengal. Her husband Dr Fuad Halim is the son of the veteran CPM leader Hasim Abdul Halim, who served as the Speaker of the Bengal assembly for almost three decades. Saira is the niece of actor Naseeruddin Shah



SAYAN BANERJEE
Although a fresher in politics, Banerjee is quite popular in the civil society because of his arguments at the Calcutta High Court in teachers recruitment scam cases. He is pitted against former judge of Calcutta High Court Abhijit Gangopadhyay. TMC has named its youth leader Debangshu Bhattacharya from the seat

Young faces in 'Old' Marxist order

12 of 17 candidates announced so far by CPM in Bengal are young and fresh faces

The party has nominated two young lawyers: Sayan Banerjee (31) from Tamulak and Sabayashi Chatterjee (39) from Howrah. Banerjee, a fresher in politics but quite popular in the civil society because of his arguments at the Calcutta High Court in the school-job case, is challenging former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay. The TMC has named its youth leader Debangshu Bhattacharya from the seat.

"The thought behind the entire plan of nominating young candidates is to attract the youth, because the majority of the electorate belong to the 18-40 year age group. The party has nominated young candidates; it is a hope for the new generation and we believe that if young educated youth don't come forward, then the entire political vacuum will be taken over by hoodlums," he said. Chatterjee, also a practising lawyer in the Calcutta High Court, has been given ticket to face incumbent TMC MP Prasun Banerjee, a former pro-

fessional footballer, and Arjuna awardee and BJP's Rathin Chakraborty.

Chatterjee says his priority would be redevelopment and revival of industry in Howrah and stopping illegal construction. "Howrah is a mix of rural and urban areas. Congestion and unauthorised constructions are two big issues in the constituency. If I am elected, my priority will be to make proper planning for restoration and revival of industry; to find possibilities and work on them. I am basically planning for the unplanned city," he said.

The other new faces of the CPM in these elections are Debajit Burman (Jalpaiguri), Nilanjana Dasgupta (Bankura), Shital Kaibarta (Bishnupur), Monodip Ghosh (Hooghly) and Nirab Khan (Burdwan Purba). The Left Front has a seat-sharing arrangement with the Congress in West Bengal as part of the INDIA coalition. It also has a separate seat-sharing agreement with the Indian Secular Front that has continued since the 2021 Assembly polls, when the ISF was launched.

TMC, CPM trade barbs

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Sunday accused CPM and Congress of "joining hands with the BJP" in the state and asserted that the INDIA bloc has "ceased to exist" there. "I had played a key role in the formation of INDIA bloc. Even its name was given by me. But, the CPM and Congress are working for the BJP in Bengal," she said. Reacting sharply, CPM leader Sujan Chakraborty accused the TMC of having a "covert understanding" with the saffron camp.

Dhar for good governance

Debasish Dhar, the BJP candidate for Birbhum Lok Sabha seat, said his main campaign plank would be good governance and improvement in law and order. Dhar who recently resigned from the Indian Police Service, said that his focus will also be on the development of the famous Tarapith temple area to international standards. Dhar, who was Cooch Behar SP, was suspended after 2021 assembly polls, during which four people were killed in Sitalkuchi area by alleged firing by Central forces.

EC rule: Star campaigners can carry up to ₹1L cash

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

STAR campaigners can carry with them not more than ₹1 lakh and candidates accompanying them during the campaign cannot have more than ₹50,000 in their possession, the Election Commission has said, putting the cap on expenditure during the Lok Sabha polls.

Officials said that the EC has been monitoring the expenditure of star campaigners in addition to that of the candidates. "Star campaigners are allowed to carry a maximum of ₹1 lakh cash, while candidates cannot hold more than ₹50,000. Any excess amount found will be confiscated, and appropriate action will be taken against the individual," a senior official said, wishing anonymity.

The EC has also announced spending limits for candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections. Candidates in smaller states are permitted to spend a maximum of ₹75 lakh, while in larger states this can go up to ₹95 lakh, officials said.

The expenditure for candidates in assembly elections has been capped at ₹40 lakh and all their expenses, with regard to meetings, rallies, advertisements and vehicle costs, must be within this limit.

The poll panel has directed that candidates are required to maintain a detailed note of their daily expenses, starting from the filing of nomination to the end of the election. These records must be submitted to the EC for scrutiny with-



in 30 days of completion of an election, the officials said.

Candidates are also instructed to maintain a separate register for daily expenses and provide detailed reports to the local election authority every day. The register should include expenses for rallies, meetings, and other campaign activities, along with video recordings as evidence.

EC has also fixed a rate in case a candidate hosts a celebrity for campaigning, as they can pay only ₹2 lakh to such invitees and any overpayment may result in penalties. The rates for petty expenses like flower garlands, food and transportation have been fixed by the poll panel.

Expenses incurred during campaign events featuring star campaigners may be divided between the candidate and the campaigner. For example, if a candidate travels with a star campaigner or features their name and image in cam-

aign materials, a portion of the expenses will be attributed to the candidate's expenditure.

These regulations are based on the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1951, that aim to maintain transparency and accountability in election spending and ensure a level playing field for all candidates, officials said.

In the first general election in 1951-52, Lok Sabha candidates were allowed to spend a maximum of ₹25,000, and just ₹10,000 in some northeastern states. In 1971, the spending cap was raised to ₹35,000 for most states. In 1980, the cap was again raised to ₹1 lakh per candidate. In 1984, it was raised again to ₹1.5 lakh in some states and ₹1.3 lakh in some smaller states.

Voting for the 543 Lok Sabha seats will be held in seven phases beginning April 19 and the results will be declared on June 4.



U'khand Cong leader joins BJP

Senior Uttarakhand Congress leader Mahesh Sharma on Sunday made a switch to the BJP. Sharma, who has been associated with Congress for over two decades and contested twice from Kaladhungi seat, is close to Harish Rawat. Sharma had sought a ticket for the Nainital Lok Sabha seat, but the party opted to nominate Prakash Joshi.

Former Manipur speaker quits Cong

Senior Manipur Congress leader Hemochandra Singh tendered his resignation from the party on Sunday. Singh, a former minister and former Assembly speaker, told media that he had taken the decision "with a heavy heart" as he felt that the Congress has no relevance in the state. The five-time MLA also said that the Congress is a sinking ship.

3 rly officers accused of breaching MCC

The ruling BJP in Odisha has approached the Election Commission, alleging that three railway officials violated the model code of conduct by attending a BJP poll meeting on March 29. A BJD delegation led by Rajya Sabha member Sasmit Patra submitted a memorandum to the Chief Electoral Officer, Odisha, in this regard on Sunday.



Would it not be better if the government dissolved the people and elected another?

Bertolt Brecht

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.
— Rammath Goenka

AFTER RESILIENT FY24, CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM FOR MARKETS IN NEW FISCAL

Y24 was a milestone year for the Indian stock market. Notwithstanding intermittent volatilities, most indices touched record highs, even outperforming some of its global peers. If the benchmark BSE Sensex and Nifty jumped a jaunty 25 percent and 28 percent, respectively, during the year, the Nifty Smallcap 100, Nifty Smallcap 250, and the Nifty Midcap 100 each gained more than 60 percent, attracting the regulator's attention. In fact, despite suffering a whiplash in recent weeks, the mid and smallcap segments fared well to close as star performers, surpassing even benchmark indices by a wide margin. India even overtook Hong Kong to emerge as the world's fourth-largest market, while the overall market capitalisation inched closer to the magical \$5-trillion mark at \$4.7 trillion.

Clearly, the Indian equities market remained an outlier, having weathered a series of setbacks such as global uncertainties, stringent monetary tightening, a US banking crisis, rising bond yields, and geopolitical conflicts. But driven by strong macroeconomic fundamentals, Indian equities showed remarkable resilience that was further bolstered by strong inflows from both mutual funds and foreign portfolio investors, who bought shares worth ₹1.9 lakh crore and ₹2 lakh crore, respectively. Going forward, markets will be driven by a sustained growth in corporate earnings, policy continuity and a favourable geopolitical landscape. The biggest positive among all factors includes robust domestic economic growth forecasts, which suggest a positive outlook for the stock markets in FY25. A resilient banking sector and lean corporate balance sheets will provide additional heft to the private investment cycle and spur growth.

That said, market participants should remain vigilant given the upcoming elections both in India and the US. Some of the other triggers to watch out for include protectionist trade policies, geopolitical conflicts, the volatile nature for global oil prices and finally the soft landing of the US economy. As for easing of monetary policy, markets have already tempered expectations of rate cuts from the initial 6-7 cuts in 2024 to three. Any further deviation from this will upset the ongoing relief rally. On balance, FY25 could be a year when investors may have to stand on guard to handle unforeseen circumstances which can swing sentiment from optimism to pessimism in no time.

PARCHED SUMMER A WAKE-UP CALL FOR KERALA

SEVERE rain deficit coupled with a harsh summer has Kerala staring at a drought-like situation. It's now obvious that if there's no rainfall till mid-April, a crisis is imminent as water bodies have started drying up, reservoir levels are down, and groundwater is becoming scarce. It did look like the state may be headed for a serious situation when rains played truant, recording a 24 percent deficit in 2023. There was a 34 percent deficit in rainfall during the last southwest monsoon season, which accounts for 70 percent of Kerala's annual rainfall. When the summer, too, set in early and day temperatures started touching new peaks as early as February itself, it became clear a long hot and parched season is truly here. What has contributed to the present crisis is the sharp decline in groundwater levels after the 2018 floods. The changes in riverbed terrain due to the flood have adversely affected both the percolation of water—necessary for recharging of groundwater resources—and the carrying capacity of the rivers.

Weather experts have blamed the scant rainfall and unusually hot summer on the El Nino effect, but Kerala's climate has changed dramatically in the past few years, with the monsoon season being marked by long dry periods interrupted by short spells of heavy rainfall and summer days getting hotter. While the effects of climate change have made their presence felt across the globe, Kerala, or for that matter India, cannot be an exception. Kerala's situation calls for particular consideration because it's one of the prime beneficiaries of the monsoon rain and has as many as 81 dams built across its rivers to store and utilise water. Yet, it is facing a water shortage.

Kerala is paying the price for the destruction of nature, particularly water bodies and wetlands. Quarrying, deforestation, rampant construction activities, and encroachment of water bodies have reduced the land's capacity to absorb water and destroyed the natural draining systems that once ensured that Kerala didn't get flooded and its groundwater was recharged. While the floods exposed its decreasing ability to handle rain, this summer has bared its inability to make use of whatever rain it gets. What's hurting Kerala is its failure to adapt to climatic changes. Water management and conservation assume greater significance in the new scenario. The sagging efforts to restore and conserve water bodies need a new push. Rainwater harvesting, construction of small check dams, and restoration of ponds can go a long way in dealing with water shortages.

QUICK TAKE

NIP JOB SCAMS IN THE BUD

IT'S the other side of the job crisis at home. After spending diplomatic currency in repatriating Indians duped into fighting Russia's war in Ukraine, the foreign ministry has confirmed it has worked with Cambodian authorities to bring back about 250 Indians trapped into working at cyber fraud schemes on people back home. Reports claim they are a fraction of about 5,000 Indians stuck in the East Asian country. Rather than reacting in a crisis mode when these scams bloom, India needs to focus its intelligence prowess on nipping them at the bud. It would save on costs and avoid anxiety.

governance system that lets former civil aviation minister Praful Patel off the hook but incarcerates Arvind Kejriwal has much to answer for itself. The BJP had for years accused Patel of wrongdoing in the leasing of aircraft for Air India and Indian Airlines. Once Patel entered what the opposition political parties have termed as the 'BJP laundry' he has come out clean. While an over-zealous vice president may go ballistic questioning the democratic credentials of the US when its government raises concerns about Indian democracy, the fact is that many friends of India around the world are concerned about what is happening in this country.

The last time the democratic world was so concerned about political developments in India was when Indira Gandhi used the emergency powers granted by the Constitution to curb individual freedoms. As sociologist Gyan Prakash noted in his book, *The Emergency Chronicles*, that episode constituted the 'lawful suspension of law'. What we witness today is the adoption of unlawful means in the name of law. How else can one term the manner in which the popularly elected chief minister of Delhi has been jailed based on statements extracted from individuals in an almost mafia-like operation? In his nine-minute statement to the court, Kejriwal has pulled the rug from under the feet of the Union government, the political party in power, and the investigative agencies. He has exposed beneath that carpet of deception the ugly events that preceded his arrest.

Individuals whose statements are used to make the case against the chief minister are not only shown to have acted under duress, but Kejriwal points to the manner in which these individuals "bought protection" from the Union government. Some enterprising journalists have exposed the links between party political donations made through electoral bonds to the BJP and the relief given to specific business leaders and firms from the provisions of law. This information by itself indicts the electoral bonds scheme that writer Parakala Prabhakar has dubbed the 'biggest scam in the world'. What the arrest of Kejriwal has done is expose the politics behind the actions of investigative agencies.

There is a history to Narendra Modi's pursuit of Kejriwal. In the summer of 2014, Modi led his party back to power in Delhi and declared that he would

The Delhi chief minister has been a thorn on the prime minister's side. The AAP challenges the BJP in a way that the saffron party hasn't been able to effectively counter

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ARVIND KEJRIWAL

SANJAYA BARU
Former newspaper editor & writer. His latest book is *India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution*



SOURAV ROY

establish a 'Congress-mukt Bharat'. Eight months later, Kejriwal led the Aam Aadmi Party to an impressive victory in Delhi, worsening the BJP. Modi governs India from New Delhi, but Delhi is not yet in his grasp. It was easy for the BJP to go after the Congress and it did so facing little resistance, till Rahul Gandhi launched his Bharat Jodo Yatra and reclaimed power in Karnataka and Telangana. But Kejriwal has remained a thorn in Modi's flesh.

It is not just that AAP challenges BJP, but that it does so in a manner that the BJP has been unable to counter. Kejriwal has used all the Hindu platforms of the BJP even as he retained minority sup-

port. It was widely rumoured in 2015 that large sections of the Delhi BJP and even the RSS resented the manner in which Modi was securing his dominance and sidelining an earlier generation of leaders, and had quietly lent their support to Kejriwal. The AAP leader, some believed, had even been an RSS loyalist.

Delhi was a government city till the 1980s. Over the past three decades, Delhi and its neighbourhood have become home to many millionaires and billionaires. The wealthy, upper-caste Delhi quickly deserted a Congress in retreat and hitched its bandwagon to the BJP. While Modi and his acolytes kept mocking "Lutyens ki duniya" and the "Khan

THE LEGEND OF THE FIRST FEMALE SUFI SAINT

WITH the ongoing austerities of Ramadan being faithfully observed by many Indians, one may sometimes wonder what it is about religiously-driven self-denial that attracts many men and also some women as a way of life. The periodic fasts prescribed for the laity in several religions are one thing. They are meant to be both a physical detox and a time of introspection and mental cleansing, be it the Vasant and Sharad Navratras and Ekadashi, Lent or Ramadan. But what makes some believers choose extreme austerity as a way of life, especially women? Besides Buddhist, Jain and Christian nuns, the lone Islamic example of Rabia al-Basri from eighth century Iraq springs to mind.

Basra may be better known to Indians for clusters of small, fine, Basra seed pearls that were popular as a part of North Indian jewellery until a generation ago. And Rabia al Basri is more legend than history because there are apparently no songs or poems written by her available, only a few sayings attributed to her. She won my interest with this saying, "Since no one really knows anything about God, those who say they do are just troublemakers." The Sufi writer Farid-ud-din Attar was the first to mention her, four centuries later, based on local folklore. Yet, she is greatly respected in the Islamic world as the first woman Sufi saint and an extremely pious one at that.

Rabia, says folklore, chose to be celibate all her life. She died in her 80s, denying herself any creature comforts throughout her life. So, in passing, it strikes me as ironic that Aurangzeb awarded his first and chief wife, Dilras Banu Begum, the title 'Rabia al-Durrani' or 'Rabia of the Age' when she died following the delivery of her fifth child. A Safavid Persian princess who became a Mughal emperor's chief queen, living all her life in luxury, was named after the homeless, frequently fasting, ascetic Rabia al-Basri. Dilras is also documented as being highly autocratic, imperious and quick to anger, and Aurangzeb himself wrote that he took care to never upset her. So, it boggles the mind.

But many things are highly ironic about Aurangzeb, including his homely taste in food, so we had best leave it at that for now. In case the matter teases, his favourite food included some dishes that many of us enjoy eating even today like paneer parathas and qubuli—a khichri of chana dal, rice, onions, dried apricots and dried plums.

RENUKA NARAYANAN
FAITHLINE

That astonishing Mughal echo duly noted, we are told the original Rabia was born in Basra to a poor but free family, meaning not enslaved. Slavery was normal in Arabic society, hence that clarification by Attar. She was the fourth daughter and hence named Rabia, meaning 'the fourth' in Arabic. As to which, Rabi-al Thani is the fourth month in the Islamic calendar and means 'second spring'. Rabi-ah or Four Friends is a term for the first



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Rabia al Basri chose to be celibate all her life. Her only possessions were said to be a broken jug, a rush mat and a brick that she used as a pillow. She spent every night in prayer and contemplation, reproaching herself if she slept since it took her away from thinking about God

four Caliphs of Sunni Islam. This Rabia is also called Rabia al-Adaviyya after her father's Arabic clan or tribe name.

According to folklore, Rabia's first calamity was her father died young. Soon after that, there was a famine in Basra and her family was forced to leave town in search of food. It is said she was separated from her family during that migration. She was part of a caravan attacked by robbers. Young Rabia was captured by the robbers and sold into slavery back in Basra. Her master extracted long hours of hard work from her. But at night, when she was supposed to be sleeping, the young orphan girl turned to her only

source of consolation, God. She would meditate on God, pray and praise God. Additionally, she often fasted during the day.

There is a story that while in the market on an errand for her master, she was chased by a beggar and ran away to save herself. But in doing so, she fell and broke her arm. She then reportedly prayed to God, "I am a poor orphan and a slave. Now, my arm, too, is broken. But I do not mind these things if You are pleased with me," and felt a voice replying, "Never mind all these sufferings. On the Day of Judgment, you will be accorded a status that shall be the envy of even the angels."

The story further goes that one night, the master of the house woke up and saw Rabia at her devotions. No lamp was lit but there was a divine light around her as she prayed on her knees, arms uplifted and eyes closed. The master was deeply upset that he had unknowingly kept such a pious person as a slave. Reproaching himself, he set her free.

Rabia went away into the desert to pray and turned totally into an ascetic. Unlike many Sufi saints, she did not learn from a master but turned directly to God. How did she survive, what did she eat, did she have shelter? It is said her only possessions were a broken jug, a rush mat and a brick, which she used as a pillow. She spent every night in prayer and contemplation, reproaching herself if she slept since it took her away from thinking about God. As her fame grew, she attracted disciples and had discussions with Sufi mystics of the age.

Rabia was reportedly the first Muslim to introduce the idea that God should be loved for God's own sake and not out of fear, as earlier Sufis had taught. She is said to have prayed, "O Allah! If I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship You in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise. But if I worship You for Your Own sake, grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty." This, to my mind, connects with the Indian tradition of praising God's unparalleled beauty and makes one relate warmly to Rabia. (Views are personal) (shebaba09@gmail.com)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Budding entrepreneurs

Ref: *The truth pills needed to digest the job crisis* (Mar 31). PM Narendra Modi has been constantly exhorting the youth to be 'job givers' and not 'job seekers'. This is indeed one of the best ways to solve the looming unemployment crisis, though it demands a great deal of courage to become entrepreneurs. That said, parents must understand that their children will pursue courses of their choice to fit into the job market. S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Regional alliances

Ref: *Room for saffron's lateral thinking* (Mar 31). The BJP that dreams of an undivided Bharat is weak in some states, though it has substantial presence in several areas. This may be why they are concentrating in their weak areas, forming alliances with regional parties. The apparent binary of BJP versus the rest is illusory. Dharmarajan A K, Thalassery

Proof unnecessary

Ref: *The delicate balance of gender roles* (Mar 31). A female always brings males to this earth; it could never be vice-versa. Our scriptures have always depicted women as a source of energy. Hence, there may not be any need to prove their equality to men. The very observance of women-specific events serves little to enhance the cause of women. Sachidananda Satpathy, Sambalpur

Disparaging comments

The obnoxious remarks of Karnataka MLA Dr Shananur Shivashankarappa about the capabilities of women should be condemned. While questioning the role of women in politics, he has also downgraded the importance of domestic cooking. These gender-insensitive remarks are neither factual nor in good taste. Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Land's laws

The hue and cry over the functioning of the Enforcement Directorate and other central agencies is unwarranted and politically motivated. If one commits money laundering he must face punishment. It is the law of our land. G Purushothaman, Tirunelveli

Hate campaign

Election campaigns used as a tool for politicians to voice out their hatred against their opponents is nothing new. But this year's Lok Sabha polls are already seeing vitriolic comments being the order of the day from one party or the other. These things have to be dealt with a firm hand, with nothing short of an apology in public to the wronged person. CM Umanath, Kozhikode



Rahul Gandhi @RahulGandhi
PM wants to change the Constitution by winning elections through 'match fixing'. By raising slogans of crossing 400 on the basis of EVM.



K C Venugopal @kcvenugopalmp
Indian democracy is in grave danger. The 2024 elections will decide whether we remain a democracy or dive into authoritarian rule.



Anurag Thakur @anuragthakur
In the last 10 years, instead of scams, India's achievements now make headlines.

South will help PM reach target of 370 seats, says Gadkari

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

EXPRESSING confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of securing 370 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, BJP leader Nitin Gadkari predicted that the party will augment its current 288-seat strength with gains in southern India.

In an interview with a news agency, Gadkari asserted his conviction that the BJP-led NDA alliance will surpass 400 seats, citing the government's performance over the past decade under Modi's leadership as the driving force behind this projected success.

"There is no need to make a state-wise analysis. This time we will taste success in the South. The work we have done in the south and the north-east in 10 years under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, we have started getting results of the same," he said.

"We have worked hard in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. We had very little presence in these states. This time we will do well in Telangana

and Andhra Pradesh. We have been performing well in north India. So, I feel the BJP will alone get 370 seats and the NDA will cross 400," Gadkari added.

Gadkari outlined the BJP's strategic focus on making inroads in southern states, particularly Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, highlighting the groundwork laid over the past decade as yielding promising results.

He maintained that the BJP's proactive efforts in these regions, coupled with its strong performance in northern India, will culminate in the achievement of 370 seats for the BJP alone

and over 400 seats for the NDA. Addressing allegations of the government's alleged use of central probe agencies to undermine the opposition, Gadkari challenged detractors to bolster their standing through public trust rather than relying on sympathy. Gadkari refuted speculations of the BJP falling short of a majority and dismissed any notion of interference in the prime ministerial race.



Hasina lashes out at Oppn over 'India Out' campaign

BNP has been asking people to boycott Indian products like saris

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

BA NGLADESH Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has lashed out at the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for propagating an 'India Out' campaign under which it has been asking people to boycott Indian products.

Challenging the BNP, Hasina sarcastically said, "Why don't they (BNP leaders) burn their wives' Indian saris?" She also asked BNP leaders whether they will not "use Indian spices in the kitchen."

The campaign against India surfaced on social media in January after the general elections in Bangladesh. "How many Indian saris do their (BNP leaders) wives have?" PM Hasina asked at an event organised on their Independence Day on March 26.

"When they burn their wives' Indian saris in front of their party office, only then they will prove that they are truly committed to the campaign," she said. After the Maldives, Bangladesh is the second country where the 'India Out' campaign was taken up by the opposition.

Meanwhile, taking Sheikh Hasina's stance of lashing out at the 'India Out' campaigners, Bangladesh Foreign Minister



Hasan Mahmud spoke about the usage of Indian products.

"They (BNP leaders) eat food made with Indian onions, Sehri with Indian beef at night and their wives wear Indian saris when they go out, which contradicts the call of Indian products' boycott," Mahmud said.

The minister criticised the BNP's political stance, saying that their actions do not benefit the country. He also said that the country's image gets reflected badly overseas when such campaigns are run.

India is the biggest trading partner of Bangladesh in numerous industries. The relationship between both countries is marked by shared interdependence, as Bangladesh depends on India for essential imports including raw materials, machinery and agri-

culture, while India gains from Bangladesh's exports of garments, textiles and medicines, Mahmud said, hitting out at the 'India Out' campaign.

During his visit to Delhi in February, Mahmud emphasised the historical ties between India and Bangladesh. He highlighted India's pivotal role in Bangladesh's Independence war, underscoring their enduring bond. Mahmud had also addressed the burgeoning anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh, dismissing the "India Out" campaign.

Meanwhile, according to sources, PM Hasina is expected to visit New Delhi in June after the conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections. Hasina has been sent an official communique to make it convenient to visit India, sources said.

BJP shows pro-OBC face, firms up strategy to get over 70% of votes

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE BJP is strategizing to get more than 70 per cent of total OBCs votes in the Lok Sabha elections. With a higher representation of the section in the Union cabinet and other sectors of government, the party is projecting itself as a champion of the OBCs.

Dr K Laxman, president of the party's OBC Morcha said the Modi government has delivered on fulfilling the aspirations of the backward classes. "We are making the people aware about the government's initiative on 27 per cent OBC reservation in NEET (UG) and NEET (PG) entrance exams under the all-India quotas," Laxman said. The OBC Morcha has organised around 8,000 'Samaajik Sammelan' (conferences) of OBCs across the country. "We have set a target of organising more than 10,000 such meets ahead of the LS polls," Laxman told this newspaper on Sunday.

Such Sammelans, at least 20 of them, will be organised in constituencies dominated by OBCs in the country. The party has covered 1 lakh villages, including more than 20,000 in UP alone, in its drive called 'Gaon



Gaon Chalo Ghar Ghar Chalo' to woo the OBC voters.

"The OBCs play a deciding role in results across 350-400 LS seats. The works done by our government over the last 10 years have helped us awaken the OBCs. The party is set to gain 80-90 per cent of these votes this time thanks to our government's goodwill among them," he said.

Nikhil Anand, national general secretary of the OBC Morcha, told this newspaper that the BJP has given around 50% of total nominations to OBCs this time. Citing figures, he said the party has 29 per cent of total LS MPs, 27% of 1,358 MLAs and 40% of total MLCs from the OBCs. "In each Lok Sabha constituency, at least 25 OBC units functioning in the

Decisive voice in 350 LS seats

Dr K Laxman, president of the party's OBC Morcha says the OBCs play a deciding role in results across 350-400 LS seats. The works done by our government over the last 10 years have helped us awaken the OBCs. The party is set to gain 80-90 per cent of these votes this time thanks to our government's goodwill among them.

country are taking the works of government to the people of this section," said Anand.

A senior BJP functionary said the castes coming under the OBCs are being approached continuously by the Morcha workers in many South Indian states such as Karnataka and Telangana. "With as many as 27 OBC ministers in the Modi cabinet, we have established the party's credibility amongst the OBCs. States like Bihar, UP, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Odisha, besides others, have a significant population of OBCs," he said, adding the party has reached out to them through a sustained campaign in the last one year.

Pannun case: US envoy steps in, says 'Red Line' should never be crossed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

ERIC Garcetti, the US Ambassador to India, has emphasised the collaborative effort between India and the United States in investigating the alleged assassination plot against Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. He stressed the importance of not crossing a 'red line' in bilateral relations.

"I think that's absolutely critical. For any of us, just abstractly, that has to be a red line. No government or government employee can be involved in the alleged assassination of one of your own citizens. That's just an unacceptable red line," Garcetti said.

"Any country, having an active member of their government involved in a second country trying to assassinate one of their citizens. That's, I think, usually a red line for any country. That's a basic issue of sovereignty. That's a basic issue of rights," he added.

Stating that religious freedom is an important part of any democracy, he said that sometimes New Delhi and Washington can "agree to disagree" on certain things and it should not be



viewed negatively.

In a podcast interview with ANI, Garcetti highlighted the protection of free speech in the American system, even when it involves controversial statements like those made by Pannun. He reiterated that while freedom of speech is upheld, any criminal accusation must meet the threshold for a successful outcome in accordance with the law.

Regarding Pannun's threats against India, including targeting Air India operations and the Indian Parliament, Garcetti condemned such actions. He noted Pannun's status as an India-designated terrorist holding American and Canadian citizenship and emphasized the need for due process in addressing criminal accusations.

CRPF 'Y+' security for Bhim Army chief Azad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to accord Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)'Y+' category security to Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad in Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

A decision to this effect was taken after reviewing the security threat to Azad, following an intelligence input on him, the sources said. Being a prominent figure, he would be availing the security cover in Uttar Pradesh only, they added.

Azad has been an outspoken advocate for the rights of marginalised communities, particularly Dalits, in UP and beyond. The decision to upgrade Azad's security has been taken amid concerns for his safety, escalating tensions in various parts of the state as well as considering the upcoming elections.

The move also underscores the government's commitment to safeguarding individuals, who are at risk due to their stands on issues concerning



people at large, the sources said, adding that it also reflected the growing importance of Azad's role in championing social justice causes and advocating for the rights of marginalised communities.

With the campaign for the polls kick-started amid socio-political tensions in the politically sensitive Uttar Pradesh, the sources said, the decision to accord enhanced security to Azad is also indicative of a proactive approach by the authorities to maintain law and order, while addressing concerns for the safety of individuals engaged in public discourse.

No action on Patanjali by U'khand govt in 2 years over misleading ads

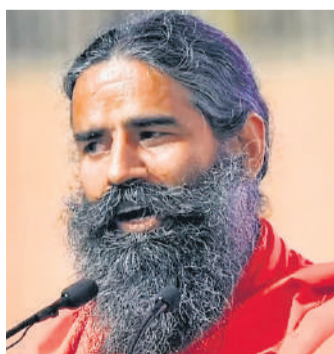
KAVITA BAJELI-DATT @ New Delhi

NO action was taken, and only letters and notices were served to yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved by the Uttarakhand authorities in the last two years for repeatedly violating an Act that deals with misleading advertisements of Ayush products.

A warning was issued but only after the severe drubbing by the top court on February 27 when it said that the "entire country was taken for a ride" and had asked Ramdev and managing director Acharya Balkrishna to appear personally before the court.

This was revealed in an affidavit filed by the Union Ayush Ministry in the Supreme Court on March 19. The affidavit clearly showed that no action was taken despite several Supreme Court orders, RTIs, and even directives from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

"The ministry's response to the apex court clearly shows that the Uttarakhand authori-



ties failed to prosecute Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved in the last two years," said RTI activist Dr K V Babu, who has been relentlessly pursuing the matter and has filed several RTIs with the Centre as well as the state for action against Ramdev's Patanjali for violating the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954.

He said it was only after the apex court's stern warning that Balkrishna gave an unconditional apology to the SC and promised to "ensure that such ads are not issued in the fu-

Unconditional apology

RTI activist Dr K V Babu said it was only after the apex court's stern warning that Balkrishna gave an unconditional apology to the SC and promised to "ensure that such ads are not issued in the future" on March 21. "This situation would not have happened had both the Centre and the state taken a firm stand and prosecuted Patanjali Ayurved in these two years."

"This situation would not have happened had both the Centre and the state taken a firm stand and prosecuted Patanjali Ayurved in these two years." Attaching a March 12 letter in the affidavit on the action taken report concerning the misleading advertisement of Ayush product manufactured by Divya Pharmacy, the ministry said they had directed the Ayurveda and Unani Services, Licensing Authority, Uttarakhand, to inform them of the action taken against company.



POWER GAMES

SHAHID FARIDI

The writer is Resident Editor TNIE, New Delhi. Follow him on X @Shahid_Faridi

Party Hoppers

'VOTE FOR LOTUS TO ELECT TRUSTED CONG LEADER'

The most popular joke in Haryana in the current election season goes as follows: Vote for lotus to send your tried and tested Congress leader to Parliament. The joke has gone viral in the state because the ruling BJP has fielded more leaders from the Congress than those from its fold. Six out of the total ten Lok Sabha candidates of the BJP in the state are former Congressmen. The party had plans to field two more former Congressmen which would have taken the tally to eight. But Ramesh Kaushik, a former Congressman turned BJP MP from Sonapat, was dropped at the last stage due to a sex scandal involving him. The other was Brijendra Singh, who quit BJP to join the Congress. Brijendra is the son of veteran Congress leader Birender Singh, who was the state's deputy chief minister. Ranjit Singh, who has now been fielded in place of Brijendra from Hissar, was also in Congress for over fifteen years and had made failed attempts to enter the Parliament and state assembly on the ticket of the party. He was later made chairman of a state corporation by the Congress. The other five former Congress leaders who are contesting the Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket are former state Congress president Ashok Tanwar from Sirsa, former Union minister Rao Inderjit Singh from Gurugram, Arvind Sharma from Rohtak, Naveen Jindal from Kurukshetra and Dharambir Singh from Bhiwani-Mahendragarh. All these leaders have had a long association with the Congress and joined the BJP around 2014. Dharambir has the unique distinction of joining three different parties to defeat three generations of the powerful Bansilal family which was part of Haryana's famous Lal trio of Devi Lal, Bhajan Lal and Bansilal that ruled the state for decades. He defeated Bansilal in the Toshi assembly elections as a Lok Dal candidate. Then he defeated Bansilal's son Surinder Singh from the same assembly constituency as a Congress candidate. In the last two Lok Sabha elections, he defeated Surinder's daughter Shruti Chowdhary from the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh constituency by fighting on a BJP ticket.



Bihar Blues

PAPPU YADAV VOLTE FACE DELAYS INDIA LIST

Former MP Pappu Yadav tried to pull a fast one on ex-Bihar chief minister Lalu Yadav. But Lalu proved more than a match for him. Pappu, who had floated the Jan Adhikar Party, wanted to fight the current Lok Sabha election as part of the RJD-Congress-Left alliance in Bihar. He approached Lalu and asked for the Purnea Lok Sabha seat for himself. Lalu told him he had already allotted the seat to a woman candidate Bima Bharti. Lalu offered him the Madhepura seat which was earlier represented by him in the Lok Sabha. Pappu insisted on Purnea, but Lalu refused. The meeting ended with Pappu asking for some time to think about the Madhepura offer. But instead of responding to Lalu's offer, Pappu came to Delhi and merged his party with the Congress. He is now putting pressure on Congress leadership to persuade Lalu to part with the Purnea seat. Lalu dispatched his son Tejashwi Yadav to Delhi to meet the top Congress leadership and explain the RJD position. Sources in the Congress said that the RJD has given them a good deal in Bihar by allotting it nine out of the 40 seats, and it did not wish to upset the alliance leader for one seat. Congress leadership is now trying to get Pappu to fight from Madhepura. But he is still insisting on contesting from Purnea. The RJD-Congress-Left alliance, meanwhile, went ahead and announced the seat-sharing among them. Purnea has gone to the RJD and Congress has got Madhepura. The option before Pappu Yadav, therefore, is to either fight as a Congress candidate from Madhepura or contest as an independent from Purnea.



CJI to deliver lecture on tech and criminal justice

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

CHIEF Justice of India DY Chandrachud will deliver the 20th DP Kohli Memorial Lecture here on Monday, marking the commemoration of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raising day celebrations.

Themed 'Adopting Technology to Advance Criminal Justice,' this year's lecture promises to delve into the critical role of technology in shaping the landscape of criminal justice, according to officials in the agency.

The event holds particular significance as it not only honors the memory of the CBI's founding Director, late Dharamthak Prasad Kohli, but also underscores the agency's commitment to innovation and excellence in law enforcement.

In addition to the keynote address, the occasion will witness the presentation of President's Police Medals (PPM) for Distin-

guished Service and Police Medals (PM) for Meritorious Service to deserving CBI officers, recognizing their outstanding contributions to the field of law enforcement, the CBI said in a statement.

Established in 1963, the CBI has evolved into a premier investigative and prosecuting agency, tackling cases ranging from corruption to serious

crimes and international cooperation through its role as the National Central Bureau for INTERPOL in India.

The DP Kohli Memorial Lecture series, initiated in 2000, has become a platform for eminent speakers to share insights and experiences, contributing to the discourse on law enforcement, criminal justice, and investigation.

It also serves as a tribute to DP Kohli's visionary leadership and emphasises the agency's unwavering commitment to integrity, accountability, and excellence, the CBI said.





An NDA election in Northeast this time

BJP-led coalition has clear advantage over Oppn in battle for 25 seats across 7 states in the region & Sikkim

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @ Guwahati

THE Lok Sabha election in the Northeast will be an NDA election rather than a BNP election with the saffron party clearly way ahead of the Congress and other opposition parties.

The Northeast has altogether 25 seats, 14 of them in Assam. Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh have two seats each while Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim have one seat each.

The BJP rules Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal and is a component of the ruling coalitions in Nagaland and Meghalaya.

Barring Assam, the BJP and its allies did not have any seat-sharing arrangement in the 2019 elections, yet the NDA bagged 19 of the 25 seats. This election however, they are con-

testing as team NDA.

Mizoram and Sikkim are the aberrations. Despite being allies, BJP and Mizo National Front are contesting separately in Mizoram. Similarly, BJP is pitted against Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in Sikkim.

The BJP has entered into seat-sharing arrangements with National People's Party (NPP), Naga People's Front (NPF) and Nationalist Democratic Progressive Front (NDPP) and continued its understanding with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in Assam.

The stakes are high for the BJP in Assam. It is contesting 11 seats and allowed AGP and UPPL to contest from two and one seats respectively.

When the NPP, which Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma heads, decided to not contest the two

seats in Arunachal and instead, support the BJP, the latter returned the favour by opting out of the poll race in Meghalaya. The BJP is supporting the NPP in the state.

The BJP is also not contesting the Outer Manipur seat in Manipur and decided to support the NPP. Similarly, it stayed away from Nagaland where the NDPP is contesting in the lone seat. The bonhomie among the NDA constituents is conspicuous. The BJP's face in the Northeast and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hailed the NPP when it decided to support the BJP in Arunachal.

"This unparalleled commitment among our partners will ensure the NDA secures over 400 seats," Sarma had stated.

The BJP's contest in the region will be mostly with the Congress, except for some seats where it has other op-

position parties as rivals.

Fifteen seats are going to election in the first phase on April 19 — five in Assam, two each in Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal and one seat each in Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura.

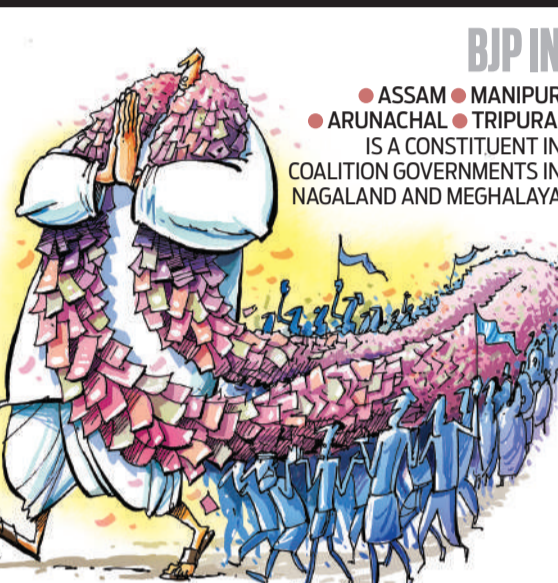
The opposition INDIA bloc could manage to field consensus candidates only in Manipur and Tripura. The Congress is contesting both Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur seats and one seat in Tripura (Tripura West). The CPM is contesting the other seat (Tripura East).

The Congress, which ruled the Northeast for most part but got reduced to a shadow of its past self, is hoping to retain the two seats of Nagaland in Assam and Shillong in Meghalaya. The party is also optimistic about Jorhat and Dhubri (both Assam) and Inner Manipur seats.

LAND OF 7 SISTERS AND SIKKIM

BJP will contest 18 seats with 7 allies. The party opted out of Meghalaya and Nagaland, supporting NDA partners NPP and NDPP respectively. Congress will contest 23 seats. Allies Assam Jatiya Parishad will contest 1 and CPM too 1.

2019 RESULTS	
NDA 19: BJP	14, allies 5
Congress:	4
AIUDF:	1
Independent:	1
2014 RESULTS	
BJP:	8
Congress:	8
AIUDF:	3
CPI-M:	2
NPP:	1
NPF:	1
Sikkim Democratic Front:	1
Independent:	1
(Only NPF was NDA component then)	



STATE-WISE WIN	
Assam (14 seats):	BJP 9, Congress 3, AIUDF 1, Independent 1
Manipur (2 seats):	BJP 1, NPF 1
Arunachal (2 seats):	BJP 2
Tripura (2 seats):	BJP 2
Meghalaya (2 seats):	NPP 1, Congress 1
Mizoram (1 seat):	MNPF 1
Nagaland (1 seat):	NDPP 1
Sikkim (1 seat):	SKMT 1

GUJARAT

Cracks in BJP as factions battle it out over Amreli candidate pick

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA @ Ahmedabad

EVEN before the dust could settle on the final candidatures of BJP in six Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, the party appeared beset with dissensions over the nomination of Bharat Sutariya for the Amreli Lok Sabha seat. Besides, the party is facing internal discord in six seats including Vadodara and Sabarkantha over the candidatures.

The latest occurrence unfolded on Saturday night after a meeting convened here by former state cabinet minister and BJP's cluster in-charge for Amreli, Bhupendra Chudasama, according to sources.

After the meeting, two factions within the party reportedly engaged in a heated argument regarding Sutariya's nomination which led to physical altercations.

No police complaint has been lodged in relation to the incident. As per reports, the faction led by three-time MP Naran Kachchadiya seems discontented with the BJP's decision to nominate district panchayat president Sutariya for the Amreli seat.

According to local sources, Viradiya, a supporter of Kachchadiya, was allegedly assaulted for expressing dissent against Sutariya during the meeting. In a viral video capturing the incident, a group can be seen engaging in a heated verbal exchange, including expletives. BJP worker Hiren Viradiya alleged "Four individuals approached me and asked as to why I raised complaints against Vekariya, then they assaulted me.

INDIA allies lock horns in 'friendly' battle in 3 Valley seats



FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

THE National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party, both part of the INDIA bloc, are set for a friendly contest in three Lok Sabha seats of Kashmir Valley, even as their leaders Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti shared the stage during the Opposition rally held in Delhi on Sunday in protest against CM and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's arrest.

Of the five LS seats in Jam-

mu & Kashmir, the Congress will contest Udhampur and Jammu, and both NC and PDP will support the grand old party. In the Valley's three seats — Anantnag-Rajouri, Srinagar (central Kashmir) and Baramulla (North Kashmir) — the NC has decided to contest all of them, declining seat sharing with its INDIA and Gupkar Alliance ally PDP.

The NC, which won all the three Valley seats in 2019 polls,

says there is no logic in leaving any seat for PDP.

Mehbooba's party has been insisting that NC leave it one of the seats, preferably Anantnag-Rajouri.

The Congress tried in vain to persuade NC to leave the Anantnag seat for PDP.

The Congress then urged PDP leadership not to field candidates for the Valley seats to prevent division of votes. PDP turned down the Congress plea. "The PDP will

be contesting all three LS seats from Kashmir," PDP's general secretary Ghulam Nabi Lone told this newspaper.

Asked whether PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti would contest the LS polls, he said, "Yes, she will definitely contest the polls". He, however, said it was yet to be decided from which seat she will contest.

However, party insiders said Mehbooba may either contest from Anantnag or Srinagar. In the 2019 LS polls, Mehbooba unsuccessfully contested from

Anantnag seat and secured third position. NC's Hasnain Masoodi won the seat. "We are on a strong position and have got public support in both the seats," a PDP leader said.

If Mehbooba contests from Srinagar, it may pit her in a direct fight with former CM Omar Abdullah, who is set to contest from there.

The entry of PDP in the poll battle in Valley will make the election for three seats in Kashmir more interesting and surprising.

JHARKHAND

Dhanbad candidate has 49 cases, faces backlash

MUKESH RANJAN @ Ranchi

THE traders' community in Dhanbad has written a letter to the state BJP President, Babul Marandi, seeking reconsideration of the BJP candidate Dhulu Mahto's candidature from Dhanbad. Mahto has 49 criminal cases against him and is notorious for coal smuggling, extortion, and other crimes in the Dhanbad region. He is also convicted in four cases.

Copies of the letter have also been sent to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Prime Minister's Office, and party national President JP Nadda.

The selection of Dhulu Mahto as a Lok Sabha candidate has raised questions among BJP ranks and locals. On behalf of the business community in Dhanbad, President of the Dhanbad District Marwari Sammelan, Krishna Agrawal, has written a letter to Jharkhand BJP president and former CM Babul Marandi opposing the move. He alleged that the decision has gripped

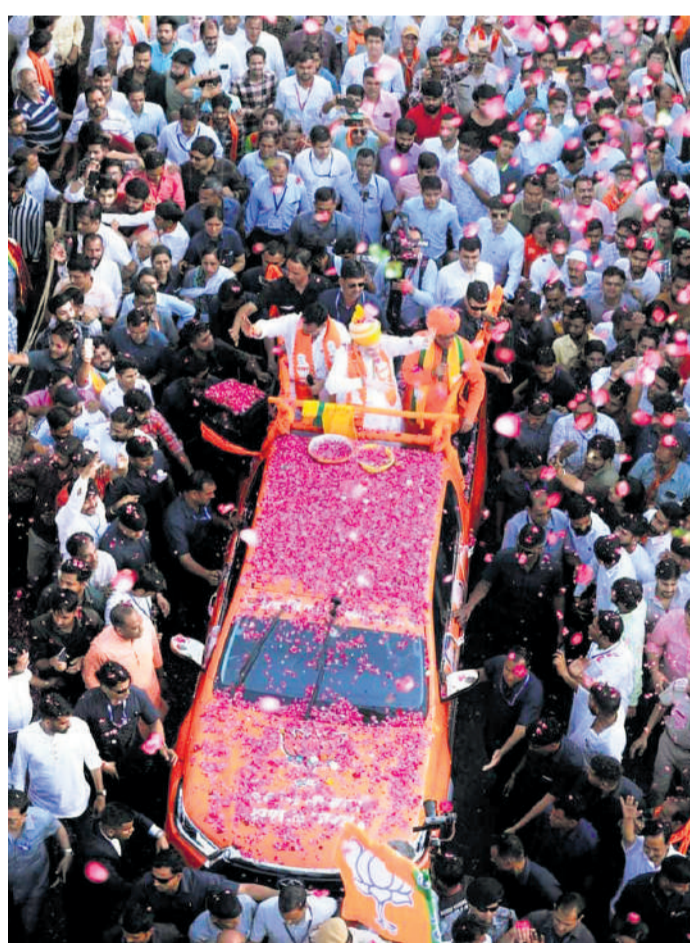
'Coal mafia'

Candidate Dhulu Mahto has 49 criminal cases against him and is notorious for coal smuggling, extortion, and other crimes in the Dhanbad. Traders' community believe over three dozen cases of land grab, extortion, smuggling are still pending against Mahto.

the business community in panic after Dhulu Mahto's name was announced to contest from Dhanbad.

"I have written a letter to the senior party leaders requesting them to reconsider the decision taken by the party as it has led the business community into panic," said Krishna Agrawal. According to Agrawal, businessmen of the Marwari community and traders of Dhanbad, in general, are in a panic as over three dozen cases of land grab, extortion, and coal smuggling among others are still pending against Mahto.

Moreover, Mahto has been convicted for up to 18 months in four cases.



SHAHI RAJ
Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in Sikar, kicking off the BJP poll campaign in Rajasthan on Sunday. Shah is on a 2-day trip to the state | EXPRESS

BIHAR

Tariq Anwar from Katihar in Cong list of 3 candidates

RAMASHANKAR @ Patna

THE Congress has announced the names of its three candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, fielding former Union Minister Tariq Anwar from Katihar. The party has given a ticket to senior party leader and former Congress Legislative Party leader Ajit Sharma from Bhagalpur.

Earlier, there was speculation that the party might field Sharma's daughter and film actor Neha Sharma from Bhagalpur.

Tariq had previously won the Katihar Lok Sabha seat in 1980, 1984, and subsequently in 1996 and 1998. Tariq Anwar, along with Sharad Pawar and P A Sangma, were expelled from the Congress in 1999 when they raised objections to the ascendancy of the foreign national Sonia Gandhi as party president. Later, they formed the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

Tariq became a Rajya Sabha MP in 2004. In 2014, he won the Lok Sabha election from Kati-

Senior leader quits

Congress suffered a jolt when former Bihar unit chief Anil Kumar Sharma resigned from the primary membership of the party, alleging that its alliance with the RJD was disastrous for the state. Sharma also objected to the induction of Pappu Yadav into the party.

har despite the Modi wave in the country. In October 2018, Tariq Anwar returned to the Congress. Tariq is pitted against JD (U) candidate Dulalchand Goswami from the Katihar Lok Sabha seat, which comes under Seemanchal, which has a sizable Muslim population.

Similarly, the party has fielded Mohammad Jawed from Kishanganj. Jawed had won the seat for the party in the 2019 Lok Sabha election as he was the only candidate from the grand alliance to emerge victorious. In the last Lok Sabha election, RJD could not open its account as NDA won 39 out of the total 40 seats in the state.



5,000 weavers involved in gruelling work

Around 5,000 weavers are engaged in manufacturing 'gamchhas' and 'topis' for political party leaders and workers. Despite adverse weather conditions, these weavers remain committed to delivering high-quality 'gamchhas' and 'topis', which undergo meticulous preparation involving dyeing and sun-drying processes.

RAMASHANKAR @ Patna

COME elections, and Bihar's weavers are hard-pressed to meet the demand for the supply of specially designed Bhagalpuri 'gamchhas' (towels) and 'topis' (caps) to political parties and party workers across the country.

Bihar's 'gamchhas-topis' are likely to turn out to be important dressing accessories for leaders and workers hitting the

campaign trail in various states in scorching summer during upcoming Lok Sabha election due next month.

State's weavers, particularly from Bhagalpur (known as Silk City of Bihar), are enthusiastic over the growing demands for 'gamchhas' and 'topis' following the announcement of elections. They are working overnight to meet the demand.

Former Bihar Weavers Welfare Committee member Aleem

Ansari said more than 3,000 weaves were engaged in weaving 'gamchhas' in Bhagalpur as a single weaver was weaving 24 gamchhas on a single day, earning Rs 200-300 per day.

With other family members also involved in weaving gamchhas, a single family is earning more than Rs 1,000 a day. Weavers are getting orders from various states, including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West

Bengal and Bihar. Orders have been received from various states to weave 20 lakh saffron 'gamchhas', he said, adding that maximum orders are being received from West Bengal. From Bhagalpur, four lakh 'gamchhas' will be supplied to Bengal while 2.5 lakh 'gamchhas' to Jharkhand.

There is already 30% more demand for 'Bhagalpur gamchha' in comparison with the last year. For women, Bhagalpur suits

and dupattas are also being woven in huge numbers in view of election. "There are female workers and party leaders who prefer to wear 'suits' and 'dupattas' during electioneering," said Mukhtar Ansari, a weaver.

Similarly, Bhagalpur-based weavers have orders to supply 10 lakh each green 'gamchhas' and 'topis' to leaders and workers in Bihar. A 'gamchha' costs ₹100-120, and 'topi' is around ₹80-₹120, said a shopkeeper.



7 persons, including five children, killed as their houses collapsed due to torrential rains and hailstorms in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



Beijing	17	7	SNY	Los Angeles	17	9	LR
Colombo	32	25	TDS	Melbourne	28	15	LR
Dhaka	37	22	SNY	Moscow	18	8	SNY
Dubai	30	18	SNY	New York	11	7	HR
Houston	29	22	SNY	Singapore	33	25	TDS
Istanbul	21	11	SNY	Toronto	8	4	SNY
London	14	8	LR	Washington	18	11	LR

HYDERABAD

MONDAY 01.04.2024

newindianexpress.com

Strikes hit Gaza as Egyptian media says truce talks to resume

New round of ceasefire talks between Israel-Hamas to take place in Doha, Cairo | Foreign powers ramp up aid airdrop, UN agencies warn this falls far short of requirement

GAZA STRIP

DEADLY airstrikes pounded the Gaza Strip as talks towards a truce between Israel and Hamas were set to resume in Cairo on Sunday, according to Egyptian state television.

Heavy fighting raged on in the besieged Palestinian territory, including in or around several hospitals, in the nearly six-month-old war sparked by Hamas' October 7 attack.

As an Israel siege has deepened the humanitarian crisis, an aid delivery inside Gaza descended into deadly chaos with shots fired and a stampede before dawn on Saturday.

At least five people were killed and dozens wounded, according to a Red Crescent paramedic, while the Israeli army said it had "no record of the incident described".

Witnesses said gunshots were fired, both by Gazans overseeing the delivery and Israeli troops nearby, and that lorries hit people.

To help alleviate the suffering of Gaza's 2.4 million people, another aid ship was sailing from the Mediterranean island-nation of Cyprus to bring 400



GAZA TOLL SO FAR

32,782

Israeli airstrike on Gaza hosp kills four, injures 17

Geneva: An Israeli airstrike on Al-Aqsa hospital in Gaza killed four people and wounded another 17, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post on X. The strike was witnessed by a World Health Organization team at the hospital to assess needs and to collect incubators for the north of Gaza. Several journalists camping on the hospital grounds were also injured.

tonnes of food relief, as part of a small flotilla.

Foreign powers have ramped up aid airdrops, alt. Several people have died in stampedes or drowned trying to retrieve packages from the sea. At least 75 people were killed overnight in new Israeli bombardment and ground combat, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory.

The fighting has raged on unabated despite a UN Security Council resolution last Monday that demanded an "immediate ceasefire" and the release of all hostages held by militants.

Tensions have risen over the spiralling civilian death toll between Israel and its chief backer the United States, especially over Israeli threats to send ground forces into Gaza's crowded far-southern city of



Israeli troops operating in the Gaza Strip amid continuing battles between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas | AFP

Rafah. Washington has nonetheless approved billions of dollars worth of bombs and fighter jets for Israel in recent days.

Under intense pressure to bring the captives home, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday approved a new round of ceasefire talks to take place in Doha and Cairo.

He is also under pressure

from the captives' relatives and supporters, including at mass rallies taken out on Saturday night in Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu told a press conference on Sunday that Hamas was hardening its positions in the talks for a Gaza truce and hostage exchange. "While Israel has shown flexibility on its positions in the negotiations, Hamas is hardening its positions," he said. AFP

GRIM EASTER IN GAZA

GAZA CITY/JERUSALEM

CHRISTIANS celebrated a grim Easter in Gaza and Jerusalem on Sunday, with the tiny Catholic community in the war-torn Palestinian territory holding their vigil service as fighting raged on outside.

Around 100 people gathered by candlelight on Saturday night at the Holy Family Church in Gaza City in the famine-threatened north to mark the resurrection, when Christians believe Christ rose from the dead.

The church is a short drive from Al-Shifa hospital where heavy combat has been raging for two weeks between Israeli troops and Hamas fighters. The atmosphere in Jerusalem was equally heavy, with few people at the sacred sites which are usually crowded at Easter.

Even the main Catholic Easter Sunday service at the Holy Sepulchre Church - built on what is said to be the tomb of Jesus - was not full.

“We were so few. It breaks my heart. But we are like the first Christians, they were few too. Pilgrims are staying away because of the suffering and death (in Gaza)”

Sister Angelica, Italian nun from Perugia

Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, led worshippers who bowed down and kissed the marble slab where Christians believe Christ's body was anointed after he was taken down from the cross.

Sister Angelica, an Italian nun from Perugia, said she was heartbroken to see so few people at the ancient church, regarded as Christianity's holiest shrine. "We were so few. It breaks my heart. But we are like the first Christians, they were few too. Pilgrims are staying away because of the suffering and death (in Gaza)". Shopkeeper George Habib in the Old City said Easter - usually his busiest period - "is a disaster".

Mega pre-poll survey indicates even Sunak's seat is at risk

LONDON

A NEW so-called mega poll released by a civil society campaign organisation indicates that the governing Conservative Party is in for a major drubbing in the general election expected later this year, with even British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's seat in North Yorkshire hanging in the balance.

The 15,029-person MRP poll conducted by Survation on behalf of Best for Britain puts the Opposition Labour Party on 45 per cent of the vote share with a 19-point lead over the Conservatives, up three points from the group's previous poll at the end of last year.

"Our MRP forecast shows that, if the election were held tomorrow, Sunak's Conservatives would lose 250 MPs across the country and the Labour Party would win with 468 seats. This would be the worst ever result for the Conservatives at a General Election," claims the Best for Britain analysis.

Sunak's aides fear he could face a leadership challenge after the local elections if, as predicted, the Tories face humiliating defeats in the May 2 local council and mayoral polls.

It will revive talk of rebellion in his party ranks, which have never fully quietened down with Tory MPs fearful of losing their seats when the general election comes. PTI



Pope Francis waves from the central loggia of St Peter's basilica during the Easter message as part of the Holy Week celebrations in the Vatican | AFP

Pope Francis pleads for peace in Easter message

VATICAN CITY

POPE Francis urged the world to resist "the logic of weapons" in his Easter message at the Vatican on Sunday, easing growing health fears as he greeted thousands of Catholics.

The 87-year-old's "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) blessing came after he led Easter Mass in front of 60,000 worshippers at Saint Peter's Square while appearing in good spirits. In his traditional speech broadcast worldwide, Francis condemned war as "always an absurdity and a defeat", raising conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar and beyond.

He renewed appeals for a ceasefire in Gaza, calling for greater aid deliveries to the devastated territory and the release of hostages taken by Hamas during its unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

"The civilian population is 'now at the limit of its endurance', he said, lamenting the

“Let us not allow the strengthening winds of war to blow on Europe and the Mediterranean. Let us not yield to the logic of weapons and rearming. Peace is never made with weapons, but with outstretched hands and open hearts”

Pope Francis

impact on children especially. "Let us not allow the strengthening winds of war to blow on Europe and the Mediterranean. Let us not yield to the logic of weapons and rearming," he added.

The pope proposed a "general exchange of all prisoners between Russia and Ukraine" as the war between the two countries grinds through its third year. "Peace is never made with weapons, but with outstretched hands and open hearts," Francis said, to applause from the wind-swept crowd below.

Moments before the blessing, Francis passed through the adoring crowd on his "popemobile" as pilgrims shouted "Long live the pope!", waved flags and strained to take pictures.

France to deliver armoured vehicles to Ukraine

PARIS

FRENCH Defence Minister S'bastien Lecornu said France is to deliver 'hundreds' of armoured vehicles by the beginning of next year to Ukraine as part of a new package of military aid for the country that just entered its third year since the Russian invasion.

In an interview with the French newspaper La Tribune's Sunday edition, Lecornu said that "to hold such an extensive front line, the Ukrainian army needs, for example, our

Russia attacks Ukraine's energy infra, 2 dead

Kyiv: A Russian cruise missile strike on infrastructure in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed one man, while another man died in an attack in the northeast officials said on Sunday. In the Kharkiv region, Gov Oleh Syniehubov said that an air attack killed a 19-year-old man Sunday after a projectile hit a gas station. Meanwhile, thousands in Ukraine's Odesa region were left without power on Sunday after debris from a downed Russian drone caused a blaze at an energy facility, Gov Oleh Kiper said.

armoured personnel carriers. It's absolutely key for troop mobility".

The French military is currently replacing its old VAB ar-

moured personnel carriers that started being used in 1979 by a new generation of armoured vehicles. "This old equipment, still operational, is going di-

rectly to Ukraine in large quantities. We're talking about hundreds (of vehicles) in 2024 and early 2025," Lecornu said.

Lecornu also said France will provide Ukraine with more anti-aircraft missiles. The move comes as France's government is pushing its military industry to boost its production to meet Kyiv's urgent needs for ammunition.

Lecornu on Tuesday said France will soon be able to deliver 78 Caesar howitzers to Ukraine and will increase its supply of shells. AP



Lighting rays of hope. Faithful lighting candles in a Catholic church after the Easter service at Podgoricaw in Montenegro | AFP

Car explosion at busy Syria market kills 8

AZAZ

A BOMB exploded in a shopping area in a northern Syrian city held by pro-Turkish forces Sunday, killing eight people and wounding 23, a war monitor said. The blast in Azaz, Aleppo province, occurred not long after midnight as crowds were out shopping late during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blast caused "significant damage" and sparked a fire.

Thaer Hafar, 34, who works at a store in Azaz, said he and his family were on their way to the market when the explosion hit. "All we heard was the blast," he said, adding that people were terrified there could be a second car bomb. "There's no security or safety," he said, adding that "even if we're at home, we're afraid". A local military police official, requesting anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media, said it was unclear who was behind the blast, with Kurdish forces, IS or other armed groups among the potential suspects. AFP

THAILAND

WORLD WAR II TUNNEL FOUND IN KANCHABURI

A 35 metre-long man-made escape tunnel built during the Second World War has been discovered in Sangkhla Buri district of this western province. The tunnel was discovered about 100m from Highway 323 (Sangkha Buri-Three Pagoda Pass) earlier this week by Marnchai Wattanakaran and Srawut Saisungsirpong, local researchers of the infamous Death Railway route in the Sangkhla Buri area. Mr Srawut believes the tunnel was used as a refuge from airstrikes when Japanese troops were building a railway track from Ban Songaria to the Three Pagodas Pass border crossing into Myanmar.

ASIA MATTERS

INDONESIA

POPE TO VISIT COUNTRY IN SEPTEMBER

Pope Francis will visit Indonesia in September, the country's religious affairs minister has said, as concerns mounted over the 87-year-old pontiff's health. Outgoing President Joko Widodo invited the pope to visit Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, in June 2022 as part of an effort to promote religious tolerance. "After waiting for two years, Pope Francis finally will come to Indonesia. I believe this will be a special gift for the Catholics," religious affairs minister Yaqut Cholil Qoumas said at an event in Central Java on Saturday. "This will be an honour for Indonesia," he added. PTI

MALAYSIA

STRAY DOG HUNT BY LOCAL COUNCIL DRAWS FLAK

A dog hunt scheduled to take place on April 22, 23 and 24 by the Shah Alam City Hall (MBSA) is drawing a lot of flak from dog lovers and members of the public. An estimated 500 dogs have been targeted and will be euthanised. Following the public outburst, MBSA issued a statement saying that the dogs caught would all be sent to Paws.

Chinese workers may leave Pak over security concerns

ISLAMABAD

THE recent deadly attack on Chinese workers in Pakistan has shaken their confidence and some of them are planning to leave the country, said a security analyst.

Muhammad Amir Rana in an article published in Dawn newspaper on Sunday wrote that the terrorist attack on the Chinese engineers' vehicle on Tuesday, which killed five Chinese, is having consequences and Chinese companies have suspended work on at least three critical hydropower projects: the Dasu dam, the Diamer-Basha dam, and the Tarbela 5th Extension.

"The attack has caused significant alarm. Apart from disrupting these vital infrastructure projects, it has shaken the confidence of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. Reports indicate some are considering leaving the country due to safety concerns," he wrote. PTI

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No.: IISc/UG/Admission/2024/ Date: 19.03.2024

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Mandatory Educational Qualifications. (Qualifying exam)	National Entrance Exam (i.e., Mode of entry) Requirements
(a) Candidates who have completed their 10+2 (or equivalent) examination in 2023 and also those who are expecting to complete their 10+2 (or equivalent) examination in 2024.	Selection will be based on the merit list of one of the following national examinations.
(b) The candidates must have studied Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics as main subjects in their qualifying exam along with any other subjects.	1. JEE Main -2024 2. JEE Advanced- 2024 3. NEET (UG)-2024 4. IISER Aptitude Test 2024
(c) The candidates must have secured a first-class or 60% or equivalent grade (relaxed to pass class for SC/ST candidates) in the qualifying examination (i.e., 10+2 or equivalent)	Note: Candidate must be qualified in any one of the exams mentioned above, and the exam result must be valid as of 01 August 2024.

The admissions portal for filing applications online will be open from **01 April 2024** and will close on **07 May 2024 (23:59 hrs.)**. For additional details about eligibility, selection procedure, application fee, and any other information, please visit our website: <https://bs-ug.iisc.ac.in/>
Sd/-, REGISTRAR

Tax evasion warning: Implications of false HRA declaration

Employers are responsible for conducting reasonable due diligence, and in case if an employee claims fake deductions, he/she will face severe penal actions

MONIKA YADAV @ New Delhi

GONE are the days when taxpayers could claim house rent allowance falsely with illegal use of a Permanent Account Number (PAN). Now with technological advancement, it has become easy for the tax department to flag such fake claims.

The Tax Administration has noted cases where employees use PANs of individuals other than the actual income-earners to make inflated tax exemption claims, citing reluctance from landlords to provide their PANs. Instead, employees use PANs of family, friends, or low-income individuals to avoid accurate income reporting. Such actions can lead to tax evasion and penalties, emphasising the importance of truthful tax filings to avoid legal consequences.

The tax administration has uncovered about 8,000-10,000 high-value cases involving amounts exceeding ₹10 lakh each of fraudulent HRA tax exemption claims where the PAN

provided by the income-earner was found to be illegitimate after verification. Consequently, employees making such false claims faced tax liabilities, along with interest and penalties. The tax administration warns that inaccurate tax exemption claims could result in prosecution, underscoring the importance of employees refraining from making artificial claims to avoid legal repercussions.

HRA Exemption

Salaried employees who stay in rented housing are allowed to avail tax exemption for HRA. This exemption is granted by the employer while calculating the tax deducted at source (TDS) on salaries. Employees staying in metro cities and other large cities are able to save significant taxes by claiming the exemption for HRA.

The claim of HRA exemption requires the employee to submit, among other things, the

HOUSE RENT ALLOWANCE

Cases have emerged where employees use PANs of individuals unrelated to the income-earner to make inflated HRA tax exemption claims



Individuals who made false claims in AY 21-22, AY 22-23, and AY 2023-24 should file updated returns

PAN of the individual to whom rent is paid is used as a cross-check mechanism to ensure accurate income reporting and taxation

Employers are expected to conduct reasonable due diligence to verify the authenticity of documentation provided by employees for tax exemptions

Deductions claimed for arranged donations to non-existent political parties will lead to severe penalties

Anyone who has claimed fake deductions, rebates etc. will face severe penal actions
Ved Jain, former president ICAI

PAN of the person to whom rent is paid. This is a cross-check mechanism deployed by the tax administration to ensure that the relevant rent income is reported to the PAN of the income-earner, and is eventually subjected to income-tax. The employer and the employee, in their respective tax filings, are also required to quote the PAN of the landlord, as submitted by the employee.

Employers are responsible for conducting reasonable due diligence on the documentation provided by employees but are not expected to verify the factual accuracy of every detail. Courts have clarified that employers' role primarily involves ensuring appropriate checks and balances rather than conducting extensive investigations. In cases of false claims, employers may face inquiries from the tax administration regarding the verification procedures for legitimate tax exemptions. Therefore, it is essential for employers to enhance their

verification processes related to TDS on salaries and tax exemptions to maintain compliance and avoid potential issues.

Documents required

There is often a debate between employers and employees regarding the required documentation for claiming HRA exemption and the extent of verification needed. While some employers request house rent agreements, rent receipts, landlord's PAN, and additional documents, others may only ask for rent receipts. The key question is what legal requirements are needed for claiming HRA exemption, leading to differing approaches among employers.

For claiming HRA exemption, an employee needs to submit, among other things, the PAN of the person to whom rent is paid. This is a cross-check mechanism deployed by the Tax Administration to ensure that the relevant rent income is reported to the PAN of the income-earner, and is eventually

subjected to income-tax.

The employer and the employee, in their respective tax filings, are also required to quote the PAN of the landlord, as submitted by the employee.

"The challenge comes from the generic and overall requirement of the law for the employer to ensure that the employer collects appropriate and sufficient evidence in support of tax exemptions granted to the employee. The requirement itself is generic but it is clear that the employers are expected to undertake reasonable verification that excessive exemption is not granted to the employees," says Chetan Daga, a chartered accountant (CA) and founder of AdvantEdge consulting.

According to CA Ved Jain, former President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), in many cases deduction has been claimed for arranged donation to political parties - many of such political parties being almost non-existent.

MONEY MATTERS

WHAT TO DO IN THE NEW FINANCIAL YEAR



FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

RAJAS KELKAR
(The author is editor-in-chief at www.moneyminute.in)

THE new financial year brings us back to the same old things. You realise that you struggled to meet your tax-saving objectives. You promised yourself that you would do better in the new year. It is a vicious cycle that needs brute force to disrupt. You need to shake things up and force changes. Just like many of us discovered some valuable things when pushed into confinement during the pandemic, you need to push yourself to take a new approach towards your financial habits.

Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate, passed away last week in the US. He was a psychologist whose work brought facets of our financial behaviour to light. He won the Nobel Prize for explaining human judgement and decision-making under uncertainty.

This column touched upon his 2011 book 'Thinking: Fast and Slow' while discussing the issue of investment behaviour. The book explains how impulsive decisions are driven by intuition and emotions. A slow-thinking approach is more logical than a fast-thinking

one. His work can inspire you to organise your finances.

The last-minute rush to meet the taxation deadline is an impulsive decision. You end up listening to insufficient advice. There is a good chance that you could put all your money into an equity-linked tax-saving scheme at the peak of the stock market valuation. You could buy a guaranteed return fixed deposit or a post-office scheme that barely covers the inflation. Your lump sum investment at the last minute could turn into a dud in the long term.

The hype around tax planning is exaggerated primarily in the last quarter of the year. There are about eight crore people in India who file tax returns. That is just over 5% of the population. The government has made it amply clear with the following tax regime. India is not a tax-haven country where you can save significantly on taxes.

If you have an income, you will have to pay tax. The government will likely strengthen the tax collection mechanism over the next few years. If you are following the new tax regime for your income tax, you are not interested in the exemptions offered by the old tax regime.

You may want to think and act differently as you plan for the new financial year. Investing in an equity-linked tax saving scheme, the National Pension Scheme, or NPS, makes sense, as you get an upfront tax benefit. At the same time, these market-linked return schemes could help you beat inflation consistently if you hold on to those investments for 15 years or more. The long-term benefits of investing in equity assets are well-established. If you are serious about creating wealth, a systematic investment in ELSS or NPS is a way to go. You can take your first step in the first month of the financial year rather than scrambling towards the end of it. An essential step in the new year would be to seek profession-

al help. You can pay a small fee to a registered financial advisor for advice on goal planning and asset allocation during the year. Your ability to earn more income will determine the future of your wealth. However, proper asset allocation will ensure you automate investments monthly and create long-term wealth without worrying about short-term returns.

To maximise your engagement with your financial advisor, you must resolve the new fiscal to invest in knowledge. Reading regularly about personal finance macro and micro events could make your meeting with your advisor meaningful. You can ask pertinent questions and generate more out of your financial advisor. The agenda in the new financial year should be to build a team. Your advisor would be your coach. However, your performance on the field will matter the most. You may want to make your family members your teammates. You need to engage with them regularly about personal finance matters. Your spouse and children can help you stay on course to achieve your financial goals.



MANDAR PARDIKAR

MONEY-WISE

ATOP THE GIANT WHEEL - RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE



FINANCIAL ADVICE

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(Views expressed here are personal)



A few years ago, I had commenced with a column titled 'Right Now', which was the title of a popular rock song released three decades ago by the music group, Van Halen.

The lyrics of this song proposed living for the moment and not being afraid of making a change.

So, in this fortnight's column, I propose to take you, my valued readers, on a Giant-Wheel ride.... 'Right Now' across our financial markets.

Right now, the dust seems to be settling on the just ended financial year, which promised a lot of volatility and amidst the high din, was debated threadbare by 'talking heads'.

For the record, the financial year gone by actually ended up accentuating the bull run at the Indian bourses. Does this mean the current financial year will be

the one marked by volatility? As far as I am concerned, even if it does, what matters is how well prepared an investor is to ride the storm.

Right now, SEBI seems to be on over-drive and even ready to transform from Regulator to Advisor, where it deems fit.

From talking down retail investment in Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) to talking up REITs and Invits, it also publicly instructed Mutual Fund Houses to conduct Stress Tests for their Small Cap Funds and topped that by promising to hunt down FinFluencers.

As Bill Lawry, the Australian cricketing and commentary legend might have put it, 'It's all happening at the SEBI!!!!' Many in the market now await the final results of its probe into Hindenberg's allegations about the Adani group.

Right now, the above mentioned Stress Test on Small

Cap Funds whose results have been widely disseminated does not seem to have shut the overflowing inflows into these funds.

In any case, some Mutual Funds had already restricted inflows into their Small Cap Funds to only Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), well before the Stress Tests were initiated.

Right now, there are seasoned market participants doing more than hedging their equity bets with gold. The price of the precious yellow metal continues to surge. And, if the equity markets were to slip at any time, can there be a further uptick in gold prices? Depending on one's answer to this question, one could either top up the yellow metal or simply sit back and let the growth in value happen on its own sans the deployment of further capital.

Right now, the markets and for that matter, the nation too, is bracing for the upcoming general election.

While the market mood seems to suggest a comfortable electoral win for the ruling party and its allies, I for one believe that the only task as, if not more hazardous than predicting the markets, is predicting election results. I prefer to avoid the media fuelled electoral din and instead, to try and insulate my investments to the extent possible and quietly cast my vote.

Infosys expects ₹6,329 cr tax refund from I-T dept

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Bengaluru

INFOSYS is expecting a refund of ₹6,329 crore from the Income Tax Department. The company also informed the stock exchanges about tax demand of ₹2,763 crore, citing various assessment orders.

Infosys said it has received orders from the Income Tax Department for assessment years 07-08 to 15-16, 17-18, and 18-19 during the quarter.

"As per the orders, the company expects a refund of ₹6,329 crore (including interest). The company is in the process of evaluating the implications of these orders on the financial statements for the quarter and year ending March 31, 2024," Infosys said in its filings.

The IT company also said it has received an order for assessment year 22-23 with a tax demand of ₹2,763 crore, including interest, and for assessment year 11-12 with a tax demand of ₹4 crore, interest included. Infosys has received assessment orders for subsidi-

aries as well, totalling ₹277 crore. These include assessment orders for assessment years 21-22 and 18-19, respectively, with total tax demand of ₹145 crore; order for assessment year 22-23 with a tax demand of ₹127 crore; and for assessment year 22-23 entailing tax demand of ₹5 crore -- all of them inclusive of interest.

"The company is in the process of evaluating the implications of these orders on the financial statements for the quarter and year ending March 31, 2024 and also evaluating filing appeals against these orders," the IT company Infosys said.

A subsidiary of the company has received refund orders under Section 254 for assessment years 07-08 and 08-09 and under Section 154 for assessment year 16-17, it said, adding that the refund amount as per these orders is ₹14 crore. Infosys is scheduled to declare its financial results for the March quarter and full FY24, on April 18.

GST dept instructs field officers against issuing frivolous summons

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

AMID rising concern over high-handedness of the GST field officers, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has issued a comprehensive set of instructions to its field officers to ensure a more cooperative and less adversarial approach by the tax department.

The instructions call for better coordination among state and central GST officers so as not to harass the taxpayer over the same issue.

The CBIC has directed the field officers that in cases involving investigations into listed companies, PSUs, Corporations, Government Departments/Agencies, or legally established Authorities, they must commence proceedings with official letters rather than summons to ensure a more cooperative and less adversarial approach.

A directive has been issued to refrain from requesting information already available in digital or online formats on the GST portal, under a letter or



summons, to streamline processes and avoid unnecessary burdens on taxpayers.

According to the new directions, each investigation must be initiated only after the approval of the principal commissioner, except in matters of interpretation seeking to levy tax/ duty on any sector/ commodity/ service for the first time; big industrial house and major multinational corporations; sensitive matters or matters with national implications; matters which are already before GST Council. In all such matters prior written approval of the zonal Principal Chief Commissioner will be

required. "These instructions are a significant step towards fostering a tax environment that is conducive to business growth while ensuring compliance and fairness in the taxation system," says Rajat Mohan, executive director at MOORE Singh, an accounting and tax advisory firm.

The instructions also detail the content of the GST summons sent to the taxpayers. "The summons in conduct of investigation must not convey requests outside the scope defined for a summons... Addressing letter/summons with context or content akin to a fishing inquiry is not acceptable," says the instructions by CBIC.

The indirect tax regulator further says that before summoning any information or documents from a regular taxpayer, the relevancy and propriety of what is being sought must be recorded (on e-file), ensuring that it is holistic and result of preparation, so as not to have repeated issuance of summons seeking piecemeal information.

Equity markets in FY25: Long-term growth intact

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

FINANCIAL year FY23-24 was a remarkable year for India's equity market with the benchmarks - the Sensex and the Nifty 50 - surging 29% and 25% respectively. The broader market indices outshone the benchmarks with the BSE Midcap index advancing 63% while the BSE Smallcap index gaining 60%.

Most market experts believe that it will be very difficult for the local equities to repeat the bull run of FY24 as the start of calendar year 2024 hasn't been very energetic with the benchmarks - Nifty50 and Sensex - trading with a little gain of about 2% each. They have attributed this performance to various volatility global as well as local equities have been facing which may prevail in the coming months as well.

Shrikant Chouhan, the head of equity research at Kotak Securities said there are tailwinds, but there are equal headwinds too, which can keep

the market balanced in FY25. "In terms of valuations, the market is currently trading at 18 times to FY26E, we are looking at an EPS (earnings per share) of 1,220 (FY26), the market valuations are fairly valued at present. If events start to unfold positively and global macros start to ease then we can see the market reaching the 24,400 mark, which is 20 times of FY26E earnings," said Chouhan. He added, "If we consider the other side of the coin with negative outcomes, the market may go down to 19,500, which is 16 times from FY26E. We believe the market should do well in the long term, however, it is expensive in the medium to short term. In this type of scenario, it is advisable to buy on dips with a cautiously optimistic approach. The Sensex closed the last trading session of FY24 at 73,651.35 while the Nifty50 settled at 22,326.90. The year belonged to realty, auto and PSU stocks with many stocks in these packs gaining more than 100% in FY24.





Shooting ace Abhinav Bindra answered queries and shared his Olympic experiences in a motivational session with the national shooting squad in New Delhi.

Prithvi, Pant provide Capital boost

Shaw impresses in first outing of season; Rishabh & Warner slam fifties as DC beat CSK

GOMESH S @Chennai

WHEN Delhi Capitals began their 2024 IPL campaign, all eyes were on Rishabh Pant, and understandably so.



DC's Prithvi Shaw cracked 27-ball 43 against CSK on Sunday | © SATYANARAYANA

After a forgettable season last year, they did not start with Prithvi Shaw in the playing XI. In eight games, Shaw only managed 106 runs.

Cut to Sunday, Nortje was back and Delhi went back to Shaw and Warner at the top against Chennai Super Kings at the ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, Visakhapatnam.

opener. He once again smashed Jadeja for a six before eventually getting out to the left-arm spinner for 43 runs from 27 balls.

191/5 in 20 overs. In reply, CSK managed 171/6, falling short by 20 runs.

Although one could say that Shaw had done his job, the frustration was visible on his face. In what was his first chance after a long layoff, he had missed out on a big score.

Trophy and played a part in Mumbai's Ranji title victory, but the frustration associated with Shaw is not just about his injury or lack of runs.

Full story: newindianexpress.com

MI LOOK TO OPEN ACCOUNT

Searching for their first win, Mumbai Indians take on Rajasthan Royals in their first home game of the season. A look...

Bumrah vs Jaiswal

If Jasprit Bumrah is the best pacer in the country, Yashasvi Jaiswal has been the best batter across formats in recent times.

The crowd factor

Everywhere Mumbai Indians went, the crowd has been hostile due to the off-field transfer of Hardik Pandya.

Turn of tide for Buttler?

While Jos Buttler has struggled to get going, the one place he has hardly put a foot wrong is Mumbai.

Rohit Sharma has gotten out to left-arm pacers nine times (IPL) in the powerplay. He will be up against Trent Boult and Nandre Burger



Miller, Sai Sudharsan shine as Titans cruise to 7-wicket victory

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

B SAI SUDHARSAN (45) and David Miller (44 n.o from 27 balls) stepped up with the bat as Gujarat Titans beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Chasing 163, Shubman Gill and Wriddhiman Saha provided what was needed by the Titans. The duo hit at least one boundary every over as GT cruised to 36/0 in four overs.

That is when, Shahbaz Ahmed, having changed ends, struck to get the big wicket of Saha.

While Gill tried to keep the momentum going by hitting Shahbaz into the stands, it was not easy. Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Sai Sudharsan kept it tight and with pressure building, Gill tried to take on Mayank Markande, only to find a fielder.

the partnership. Between overs 9-13, they added only 26 runs.

It was only after 15 overs, GT needed 49 runs in five at that point, they started showing more intensity. Miller hit Markande for consecutive fours before he and Sai Sudharsan hit a six each in the same over.

Shankar kept their cool to take Titans home.

Opting to bat first, Travis Head and Mayank Agarwal took on the bowlers. First, Head hit Azmatullah Omarzai for two fours before picking up a four off Umesh Yadav.

Rashid Khan with back-to-back sixes. However, Noor Ahmed cleaned up Head with a googly. Noor, along with Rashid, put the brakes on SRH. Mohit Sharma reaped the rewards by dismissing Abhishek (29).

Brief scores: SRH 162/8 in 20 overs (Abhishek 29, Samad 29; Mohit 3/25) lost to GT 168/3 in 19.1 overs (Sai Sudharsan 45, Miller 44 n.o.)



Gujarat Titans' B Sai Sudharsan hit 36-ball 45 against SRH on Sunday | AFP



Matt Ebden and Rohan Bopanna (R) celebrate their victory | AFP

Bopanna-Ebden win, return to World No 1

AGENCIES @Miami

ACE Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna rewrote his own record to continue to be the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion as he and his Australian partner Matt Ebden clinched the men's doubles crown at the Miami Open here.

Continuing their fine run this year, the 44-year-old Bopanna and Ebden fought back from a set down to pull off an exhilarating 6-7 (3), 6-3, 10-6 win over Croatia's Ivan Dodig and American Austin Krajicek at the Hard Rock Stadium on Saturday.

With the win, Bopanna surpassed his record created last year when he won the Indian Wells title at the age of 43, and also reclaimed the top spot in the doubles ranking.

"It's amazing. As long as you are doing well in these big events, it's what we play for," Bopanna said after the win.

"I want to do well in the Masters 1000s and the Grand Slams. It's good to keep that record going and keep giving everyone else a run for their money," added Bopanna, who won his maiden doubles Grand Slam title at the Australian Open earlier this year.

Collins beats Rybakina to clinch top prize

American Danielle Collins upset the odds to win the Miami Open title on Saturday, beating Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan 7-5, 6-3 to claim her first WTA 1000 title in her final season on the tour.

Chennaiyin FC win five-goal thriller

AGENCIES @Chennai

CHENNAIYIN FC scored thrice in the second-half to come from behind and secure a 3-2 victory against the Mohun Bagan Super Giant (MBSG) at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata in the Indian Super League (ISL) on Sunday.

Chennaiyin moved to the ninth spot in the table with 20 points from 19 games, and the team is in the race to qualify for the playoffs. Contrastingly, the Mariners (39) trail table-toppers Mumbai City FC (41). Joni Kauko opened the scoring for the Mohun Bagan by hammering



FC's Ryan Edward (C) celebrates his goal on Sunday | ISI

home a low cross by Liston Colaco in the 29th minute. Colaco had come across a terrific chance to draw the first blood 10 minutes prior to this move.

What followed was a frenetic passage of play late into the second-half, with four goals being

scored by both teams in the eventual 30-odd minutes. Jordan Murray secured the equaliser for Chennaiyin with a stunning solo effort in the 72nd minute of the match. Eight minutes later, Rafael Crivellaro delivered a pinpoint corner into the box that was headed into the back of the net by Ryan Edwards.

Armando Sadiku drew a foul for Mohun Bagan inside the penalty box in the 90th minute, and Petros stepped up to convert it by slotting it into the bottom right corner. Just a few minutes later, Ayush Adhikari delivered a through ball that was met by Irfan Yadwad, who slotted the ball into the centre of the goal to score the winner for Chennaiyin.

EXPRESS READ

AIFF member released on bail in assault case

PANAJI: The All India Football Federation executive committee member Deepak Sharma, who was arrested by Goa police for allegedly physically assaulting two women players, was released on bail on Sunday, an official said.

Babar named Pak's white-ball captain

LAHORE: Former Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was on Sunday reappointed as the white-ball captain, two months ahead of the T20 World Cup. The decision was taken after a unanimous recommendation from the PCB's selection committee.

Hardik and Salima bag top awards

NEW DELHI: Hardik Singh and Salima Tete were conferred with the Player of the Year awards (named after Balbir Singh Sr) in men's and women's categories, respectively, during the Hockey India Annual Awards.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Liverpool go top as City & Arsenal play out goalless draw

AGENCIES @Manchester

MANCHESTER City failed to break down Arsenal as a highly-anticipated clash at the top of the Premier League failed to live up to the hype in a 0-0 draw at the Etihad on Sunday.

Liverpool were the big winners of the day in the title race as they beat Brighton 2-1 to go top, two points ahead of Arsenal and three clear of City with nine games to play.

A share of the spoils preserves City's unbeaten home run stretching back to November 2022 and ends Arsenal's eight-match winning run in the Premier League. But it is the Gunners who will be happier with a point as they prevented Pep Guardiola's men from scoring at the Etihad for the first

time in two years.

City dominated possession but struggled to make anything of it against a defence that has conceded the fewest number of goals in the Premier League this season. Arsenal have also been in free-scoring form at the other end, netting 33 times during their eight-match winning streak. However, the visitors had lost on their last eight trips to the Etihad, including a 4-1 thrashing as the title race swung decisively in City's favour last season, and opted for a counter-attacking approach.

City's failure to find a winner means they are still yet to beat any of the top five in the Premier League this season.

Results: Man City 0-0 Arsenal; Liverpool 2-1 Brighton. Saturday: Brentford 1-1 Man United; Aston Villa 2-0 Wolves.



Man City's Kevin De Bruyne (R) duels for the ball with Arsenal's Declan Rice | AP

Bayern lose to Dortmund

LEVERKUSEN: Bayern Munich lost 2-0 to Borussia Dortmund late on Saturday, their

first home "Der Klassiker" loss in a decade, allowing Bayer Leverkusen, who came back to win 2-1 over Hoffenheim earlier, to go 13 points clear with

seven games remaining.

Harry Kane had the ball in the net in the dying stages to give Bayern hope of a comeback, but the England captain's goal was struck off for offside.

Raphinha fires Barcelona

BARCELONA: Spanish champions Barcelona posted a 1-0 win over 10-man Las Palmas late on Saturday. Raphinha headed home in the second half to clinch Barcelona's victory after the visitors had goalkeeper Alvaro Valles dismissed after 24 minutes for a rash foul.

Xavi Hernandez's side are unbeaten in 11 games since the coach said he would leave at the end of the season and their recent form has given them some faint hope of retaining their title.



What does being a civil servant really look like? Here, civil servants across ranks and seniority address the myths, misconceptions and reality of life as a bureaucrat, in conversation with **Karthikeya S**

THE CIVIL SERVICES

A MATTER OF PERCEPTIONS

IT IS neither news nor an understatement that the Civil Services in India garner much respect, clout and admiration from every section of society. In this regard, there also come a plethora of misconceptions and pre-conceived notions about the nature of Civil Services and the lives that civil servants lead. As a result, *Edex-Live* presents an insider's perspective from civil servants of various levels of seniority — ranging from retired officers to officers-in-training — in an attempt to understand how close to reality these notions are.

Civil servants and elitism — hand-in-glove?

Possibly due to its Colonial origins and history, the Civil Services have been criticised as being an elite space. The *creme de la creme* image of civil servants, the respect they garner in society and a notoriously difficult selection process add to this perception. "People consider civil servants to be a class above all," says MG Devasahayam, a retired IAS officer from the 1968 batch and one of the senior-most retired civil servants in the country. He says that even after serving as the Secretary of a State Government,

the people of his hometown address him as "Collector" as a sign of respect.

However, many civil servants opine that the power, perks and privileges that civil servants enjoy are just a small part of the picture. Manuj Jindal, Joint Managing Director of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Limited, says, "The perks are not always present and depend on where one is posted. People just fixate on the perks," he adds. According to him, most civil servants, even senior officers, come from modest backgrounds and lead humble lives. "What matters, at the end of the day, is your work," he says. Former IPS Officer JD Lakshmi Narayana believes that a civil servant must be elite in their service, not their attitude.

see, unsee



Furthermore, Kasturi Panda notes that new efforts to make the Civil Services more inclusive and diverse in terms of entry and career progression are challenging the notion of elitism.

INACCESSIBILITY AND ASPIRATION — THE CONTRAST

MANY civil servants believe that the perception of elitism exists because the Civil Service exam is one of the most competitive exams in the world. However, the fact remains that lakhs of aspirants attempt the CSE despite its apparent inaccessibility. Explaining the reason behind this aspiration, Devasahayam says, "If you clear the CSE at a young age, you get posted as a District Magistrate or District Collector in five years. You achieve job security earlier than private employees of the same age." This paradox of extreme ambition in the face of perceived inaccessibility is not unique to the Civil Services, says Amod Kumar, Deputy Director General of UIDAI.

EXPRESS ILLUSTRATION



To promote inclusivity, efforts to streamline the exam process, provide accessible study materials, and support mechanisms for aspirants from marginalised backgrounds are underway

— Kasturi Panda, AIR 67, UPSC CSE 2022, Odisha

TACKLING CORRUPTION — THE COST OF RESISTANCE?

WHILE the Civil Services are a force of public welfare, the Indian bureaucracy is a victim of the scourge of corruption. In 2023, it was reported that over 300 civil servants have been named in corruption cases, and await sanction since 2016. JD Lakshmi Narayana believes that most civil servants turn corrupt as they go further into their careers. "We civil servants like to say that you join the service with your spine erect. As years go by, you lose each bone in your spine until you can only bend," he states. Devasahayam shares that he saw corruption being rewarded at times. Despite the prevalence of corruption, civil servants today, especially the younger ones keep their integrity upright, says Manuj Jindal. Kasturi Panda stresses the need for measures to curb corruption, such as whistleblower protection policies and so on.



THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE "BABU"

THE most popular image of a civil servant is that of a "Babu" — an unapproachable and indifferent government employee who enjoys a life of luxury at the government's expense. But many profess that the "Babu" archetype is a rarity. "Not all civil servants live in government-issued bungalows, as their living arrangements are much more modest," says Devasahayam. He adds that field visits take up much time, and this makes them cognizant of the public's problems. "Only after reaching a level of seniority can civil servants enjoy these perks," he adds. As per JD Lakshmi Narayana, while a civil servant does enjoy a higher status, it depends on how they wield it.



Civil servants who want to be remembered for their work must be approachable to the public — Manuj Jindal, Joint MD, MSRDC

THE PRESSURE OF THE STEEL FRAME

AS THE Executive Pillar of our democracy, civil servants have the responsibility of being the "Steel Frame" of India. This places a great deal of responsibility and pressure on their shoulders. Civil servants are trained to handle this pressure and discharge their duties effectively, says Manuj Jindal. However, this steel frame is not always sturdy, JD Lakshmi Narayana says. "Due to political interference and corruption, the steel frame is crumbling," he says. However, he adds that the weight this tag carries is necessary to prevent civil servants from compromising. Amod Kumar presents a different perspective. He says, "If the Civil Services is a steel frame, it protects civil servants from pressure."



Being called the Steel Frame of India must serve as a reminder to civil servants of their responsibility. The pressure of living up to the tag tells them; don't bend — JD Lakshmi Narayana, Retired IPS Officer

As long as civil servants fulfil their duties — which are safeguarding democracy, furthering development, and ensuring free and fair governance — they can truly make a transformative change

— MG Devasahayam, Retired IAS Officer

BRINGING REAL CHANGE — IS IT POSSIBLE?

CIVIL servants have the power to challenge decisions made by higher political authorities and improve existing legislature. For instance, JD Lakshmi Narayana, who led the investigation in several high-profile corruption cases in his career, says that the police's findings in the Satyam Computer Systems scam helped them recommend amendments to the Companies Act. But a few civil servants do acknowledge that bringing change in a system is not easy. Kasturi Panda says, "Reforms and policy interventions often unfold over extended timeframes," adding that "systemic inertia" can pose a challenge to reform.

Whether someone should join the Civil Services depends on their aptitude and interests. Don't choose Civil Services as a career option without looking at other career options available

— Amod Kumar, Deputy Director General, UIDAI

WORD OF ADVICE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

CIVIL servants advise aspirants to have realistic perceptions. Wanting to become a civil servant for the perks is not the right approach, says Manuj Jindal and opines that one must grasp the true nature of the job. Kasturi Panda opines that imbibing a service-oriented mindset is vital while being prepared to navigate bureaucratic hurdles, administrative constraints, and political dynamics. To those wondering if they can make a difference, Devasahayam says that a lot of authority is vested in civil servants. "Without the District Commissioner's approval, nothing happens in the district. As you rise in ranks, your power grows," he explains.

Acing the Interview Round

10 things to keep in mind

The Interview Round is the final, and most crucial stage of the Civil Services Examination. Here is how you can put your best foot forward in this round

THE most important round of the Union Public Service Commission Civil Services Exam (UPSC CSE) is possibly the Personality Test, more commonly known as the Interview Round. Candidates who cleared the Preliminary and Main exams of the CSE will be eligible for the Interview Round, wherein, they will be tested for their mental fortitude and balance, critical thinking, social skills and leadership, intellectual rigour, and moral integrity. The Interview Round carries 275 marks and is conducted by 7-8 Interview Boards — each chaired by a UPSC officer.



Here are a few tried and tested tips to keep in mind, to pass the interview round with flying colours

KNOW YOUR DAF INSIDE OUT

Before entering the interview room, thoroughly understand your Detailed Application Form (DAF). Be ready to articulate your education, work experience, hobbies, and achievements. Anticipate questions based on your DAF to showcase a well-rounded personality.

CURRENT AFFAIRS MASTERY

Stay updated on current events, especially issues related to national and international importance. Read newspapers and online sources to demonstrate your awareness.

IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OPTIONAL SUBJECT

Expect questions related to your chosen optional subject. Revise key concepts, and recent developments, and be prepared to discuss their relevance in the present context.

CLARITY IN THOUGHTS AND EXPRESSION

Practice expressing your thoughts clearly and concisely. The interview panel looks for candidates who can communicate effectively.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Work hard on enhancing your overall personality. Develop good communication skills, maintain positive body language, and remember to practice active listening.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS & INTEGRITY

Be prepared to discuss ethical dilemmas and questions related to integrity. The Civil Services Examination places a high value on moral character. Showcase instances from your life that reflect your commitment to ethical conduct.

UNDERSTANDING ROLE OF A CIVIL SERVANT

Demonstrate a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of a civil servant. Showcase your commitment to public service and your awareness of the challenges too

REVISION OF GRADUATION SUBJECTS

Brush up on key concepts from your graduation subjects, especially if you have a non-specialised degree. The interview panel may delve into your academic background to assess your analytical and problem-solving skills.

CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY

Strike a balance between confidence and humility. While confidence is essential, avoid coming across as arrogant. Be open to learning, acknowledge your limitations, and show a willingness to adapt

BODY LANGUAGE, PRESENTATION, & ETIQUETTE

Your body language must communicate confidence. Avoid fidgeting and moving your hands too much while you speak. Maintain the right sitting posture, with your back straight to the chair. Ask for permission before entering the interview room and sitting. When your interview is done, thank each panel member individually. It is also important to follow the dress code

HERE are a few prominent civil servants of India, and their most notable work

A few first thoughts that come to people's mind when they think of civil servants is the honour, respect, and adulation they receive, the elite status and employment perks they enjoy, the power that they command, and the hard work, dedication, and effort they put in to earn all those. However, many overlook one crucial aspect of a civil servant's life — their contributions to our society and country at large. Civil servants are duty-bound to run the administration of India and serve the people.

They enact policies framed by the elected government and make a great deal of difference in the lives of people through the powers vested in them, or through Civil Service activism. Here are a few prominent civil servants who made a difference to our nation and society through extraordinary initiatives



TN Seshan

STARTING his career as a civil servant as an assistant collector, TN Seshan rose through the ranks and became the 18th Cabinet Secretary of India in 1989. However, he is most known for his work as the 10th Election Commissioner of India. During this tenure, Seshan earned a reputation for his strict enforcement of the election code of conduct and for taking bold steps to curb electoral malpractices — he allegedly reviewed more than 40,000 expenditure accounts and disqualified 14,000 candidates for false information during the 1999 General Elections. Further, he introduced several measures to enhance the integrity of the electoral process, including the use of voter identification cards, the deployment of central paramilitary forces during elections, and the strict regulation of election expenses.



CIVIL SERVICES

Fateh Singh Rathore

FATEH Singh Rathore was a prominent Indian wildlife conservationist and a key figure in the field of tiger conservation. Rathore started his career in the Indian Forest Service and played a pivotal role in the establishment of Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan under Indira Gandhi's Project Tiger initiative (1973), which later became one of the most successful tiger conservation projects in India. Under his guidance, Ranthambore became a model for tiger conservation efforts across the country. He was also known for his deep understanding of tiger behaviour, as well as his efforts to curb poaching as the Vice-Chairman of Tiger Watch. Under his leadership, Tiger Watch rehabilitated several poachers and their families, who belonged to the Mogya Tribe, by providing them with dignified employment and clothing, food, and education education to their children.



A VEHICLE FOR PROGRESS

Anna Rajam Malhotra

ANNA Rajam Malhotra was the first woman to hold the position of an IAS officer in independent India. She secured the first rank in the Civil Services Examination in 1951, which paved the way for other women to pursue careers in the Indian Administrative Service. Anna Rajam Malhotra served as the Chief Secretary of West Bengal, making her the first woman to hold the highest bureaucratic post in a state. Her career spanned over three decades, during which she earned respect for her administrative and leadership skills. Further, she also played an instrumental role in setting up the country's modern port, that is, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust near Mumbai.

Dr RS Praveen Kumar

DR RS PRAVEEN Kumar is an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer from the 1995 batch of the Telangana cadre. A Dalit himself, he is known for his contributions to the upliftment of marginalised communities, particularly through his involvement in social welfare and educational initiatives. Dr Praveen Kumar served as the Secretary of the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TSWREIS) and the Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TTWREIS) till 2021. Under his leadership, these organisations helped provide quality education, mentorship, and a conducive environment for students from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other marginalised communities.

Aruna Sundararajan

RETIREE 1982 batch IAS officer, Aruna Sundararajan served as the Secretary of the Department of Telecommunications in the Government of India. Her tenure in this role was notable for overseeing initiatives and policies related to the telecommunications sector, including the rollout of 4G services and the planning for the introduction of 5G technology in India. Sundararajan was also Kerala's founding IT Secretary and played a key role in developing e-governance. She spearheaded the Akshaya Project, which was the largest e-literacy project of its kind. She was also instrumental in the establishment of Digital University Kerala (IIITMK) and InfoPark, Kochi.



big names