

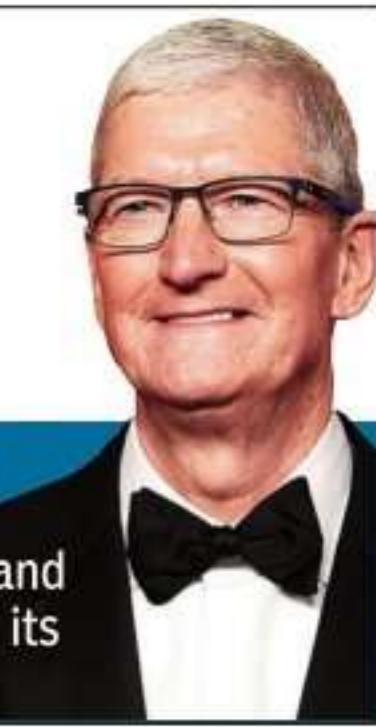


Legendary CSK skipper M S Dhoni, 42, hands over reins to opener Ruturaj Gaikwad on the eve of the IPL opener in Chennai. 'It is a privilege. More than that, it is a huge responsibility....,' says Gaikwad

Doctors in Boston announce that they have transplanted a genetically-modified pig kidney into a 62-yr-old patient. Massachusetts General Hospital says it's the first time a pig kidney has been transplanted into a living person

Elon Musk's Neuralink Corp livestreams an update with its first brain implant patient, showing a quadriplegic man who is able to play video games and online chess using his mind

INDIA'S LARGEST ENGLISH NEWSPAPER



US Dept of Justice and 15 states sue Tim Cook-led Apple, alleging it used the powerful demand for its iPhone and other products to drive up prices for its services and hurt smaller rivals

Budaun murders: Second accused surrenders, held

The brother of Mohd Sajid, who was killed in an "encounter" soon after he had brutally killed two sons of his neighbour in Budaun, was arrested in Bareilly. The accused, Javed, surrendered at a police station, and said he was innocent and fled out of fear. The children's postmortem revealed that one of them was stabbed 13 times, and his sibling 11 times. **P19**

Shah, Geelani's kin vow loyalty to India

Jailed separatist Shabir Shah's daughter and deceased Pro-Palestinian patriarch Syed Ali Shah Geelani's granddaughter distanced themselves from "anti-India" narrative. Indian passports of both had been impounded for undisclosed reasons. **P13**

Cash-for-query: CBI FIR against Moitra

The CBI on Thursday registered an FIR against former Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in connection with the cash-for-query case investigation. The move comes in the wake of directions from the anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal. **P13**

Massager can't be termed sex toy: HC

A body massager cannot be categorised as an adult sex toy and cannot be included in list of items prohibited for import, Bombay HC said. The court on Wednesday quashed an order passed by the Customs confiscating consignments containing body massagers. **TNN**

After daylong drama and HC's refusal to give him relief, ED arrests Kejriwal

2nd Sitting CM To Be Arrested After TN's Jayalalithaa In 2014

Pradeep.Thakur
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Photo: ANI
MLK K Kavitha have been arrested.

Kejriwal is the second CM to be arrested while still in office, the first being Jayalalithaa. His arrest comes less than two months after Hemant Soren was arrested, shortly after stepping down as Jharkhand CM. AAP rushed to Supreme Court challenging the arrest but was denied a late-night hearing.

Soon after the setback for Kejriwal in HC, an ED team reached his official residence to question him. Flagstaff Road, where the CM's residence is located, witnessed dramatic scenes as AAP supporters and senior party functionaries rushed there, amidst a lot of slogan shouting, and police barricaded the road.

► Continued on P13

SC MAY HEAR PLEA TODAY

- In action-packed day, Kejriwal skips ninth ED summons for questioning in excise policy case
- Delhi HC refuses to grant protection from any coercive action by ED
- An ED team reaches CM's residence and carries out searches. He is questioned for 2 hours
- Addl Delhi Police personnel and RAF & CRPF teams deployed around CM's house
- Police detain several AAP workers, including MLAs, trying to block road near CM's house
- ED arrests Kejriwal, will produce him before a court Friday to seek his custody for interrogation
- AAP moves Supreme Court to quash arrest

AAP says CM will run govt from jail, but has options

The arrest of Kejriwal poses two dilemmas for AAP — how and who will run govt and who will lead the party's election campaign.

Delhi minister Atishi said, "Kejriwal is ... and will remain CM of Delhi. There is no law that prohibits him



Kejriwal being taken to ED HQ from his residence. He'll be produced in court today

— AAP

Today, finally, truth triumphed... Every citizen of Delhi is satisfied... Kejriwal must resign

— VIRENDRA SACHDEVA | BJP

Bharadwaj were two names who could take up the position if the need arises.

Constitution expert SK Sharma confirmed there was nospecific provision in the law that the CM of a state has to pass on the baton to somebody else if s/he gets arrested. **P13**

TN guv defying us, concerned by his conduct: SC

Gives Him 24 Hrs To Swear In DMK's Ponnudiy As Min

New Delhi: In an unprecedentedly stringent censure of a governor, Supreme Court on Thursday said Tamil Nadu governor R N Ravi is defying SC by refusing to swear in K Ponnudiy as minister despite CM M K Stalin's advice and gave Ravi 24 hours to administer oath to DMK leader to

► EDIT: Chennai Super King

set right a wrong constitutional situation created by him, reports Dhananjay Mahapatra.

"We are seriously concerned by the governor's conduct. He is defying the Supreme Court. When a two-judge bench of SC has stayed the conviction and sentence of Ponnudiy, he has no business to say

else if s/he gets arrested. **P13**

and it would be constitutionally immoral to swear him in as a minister," said a bench of CJI D Y Chandrababu, and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. Ponnudiy was convicted & sentenced by Madras HC last Dec in a graft case, which led to his immediate disqualification as MLA.

► Continued on P8

Fate of two MLAs picked by BRS, Cong govts under guv quota now in the hands of new guv

Roushan.Ali@timesgroup.com

BALL IN NEW GUV'S COURT

Telangana HC set aside then guv Soundararajan's order rejecting two BRS nominees – Dasoju Sravan and K Satyanarayana

governor of Jharkhand, has been given the additional charge of Telangana.

As the new governor has

HC also quashed subsequent decision of new Congress govt to instead nominate M Kodandaram & Amer Ali Khan. Then governor approved the new names and the Congress govt had issued appointment order. But both these decisions were quashed by HC

to briefed afresh, the decision on the two MLAs under the governor's quota is likely to take some time.

It may be recalled that the Telangana HC had earlier set aside Soundararajan's order last year rejecting two BRS nominees for the MLC posts (governor's quota) while pointing out that a governor's role had to be within the framework of state cabinet's aid and advice. The previous BRS govt had nominated Dasoju Sravan and K Satyanarayana.

► Continued on P2

Karti took ₹50L bribe to get visas for Chinese: ED

The ED on Thursday alleged that Congress's Lok Sabha MP Karti Chidambaram had taken bribes of Rs 50 lakh through his close aide S Bhaskaraman to get approvals for visas to Chinese nationals working in a power plant in Punjab, when his father P Chidambaram was home minister. The agency has filed a chargesheet in the case which was taken cognizance by a special PMLA court in Delhi on March 19. **P8**

We are not on the credentials of those selected... Our concern is the way the selection was carried out... Govt knew the matter was sub judice. It could have deferred selection for some time

— SC bench

was overtly critical of the speed with which the appointments were carried out.

► Continued on P8



PROUD TO BE THE OFFICIAL BANKING PARTNER TO TEAM INDIA For Paris Olympics 2024



Mr. Prashant Kumar,
Managing Director & CEO, YES BANK



Ms. Mary Kom,
Chairperson, Athletes Commission

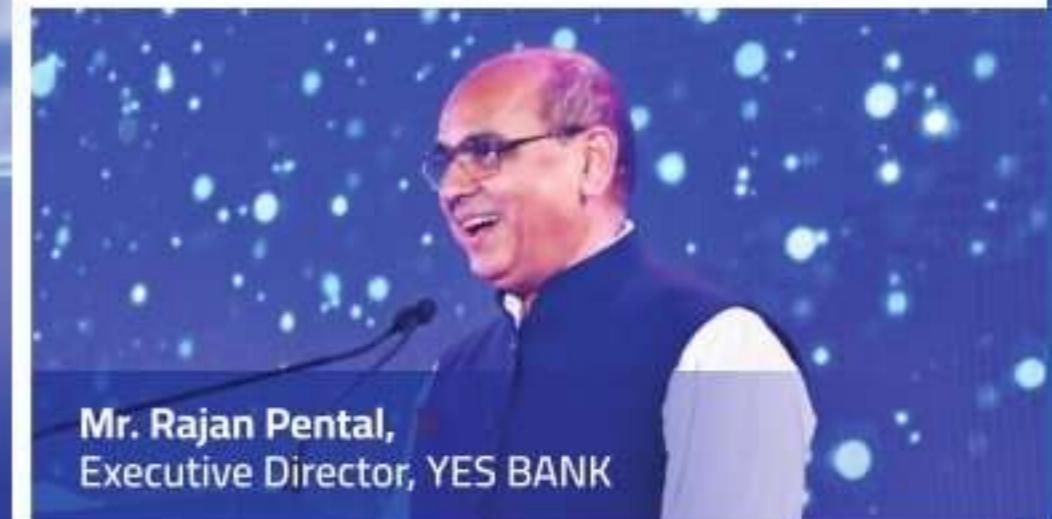


YES BANK unveiled the partnership with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) & Team India in the esteemed presence of Dr. P. T. Usha, President, IOA & Hon'ble MP of Rajya Sabha, Ms. Mary Kom, Chairperson, Athletes Commission, Mr. Raghu Ram Iyer, CEO, IOA, and Mr. Prashant Kumar, Managing Director & CEO, Mr. Rajan Pental, ED, Mr. Manish Jain, Country Head, Wholesale Banking, Ms. Archana Shiroor, CHRO and Mr. Nipun Kaushal, CMO & Head, CSR from YES BANK.

Indian contingent athletes, Ms. Manu Bhaker, Pistol Shooter, Mrs. Rajeshwari Ria Kumari, Trap Shooter, Mr. Dhiraj Bomma Deva, Archer, and Ms. Parveen Hooda, Amateur Boxer also graced the prestigious event at YES BANK HOUSE in Mumbai.



Dr. P. T. Usha,
President, Indian Olympic
Association & Hon'ble MP, Rajya Sabha



Mr. Rajan Pental,
Executive Director, YES BANK



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DANCE of DEMOCRACY



2 BATTLEGROUND TELANGANA

THE TIMES OF INDIA | HYDERABAD, FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

TPCC president and chief minister **A Revanth Reddy** tells **Robin David** and **Roushan Ali** in an exclusive interview that the upcoming Parliament elections would be a referendum on the Congress party's governance in Telangana. With a slender majority of four MLAs in the assembly, he has opened the gates of the Congress for leaders from other parties. When BRS and BJP are trying to topple his govt, it is his responsibility to not only protect the govt but also to strengthen it, he says

'LIKE ANY MED, MODI HAS REACHED EXPIRY DATE & HE KNOWS IT'

■ Is the Lok Sabha election a bigger fight for the Congress than the assembly polls? Is it a bigger challenge for you personally?

Definitely. The electoral contest against a regional party on regional issues is one aspect and an electoral battle with national parties in a Lok Sabha election is a different contest.

■ There was resentment against the then chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's government which you (Congress) exploited. How different is the May 13 election going to be?

There is no difference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and KCR. Both made empty promises and ensured they were heard through the media. While Modi campaigned in Hindi at the national level, KCR did the same in Telugu in Telangana. Both did not implement many promises made in election manifestos of 2014 and 2019. There should be a discussion on it. Modi and KCR got two terms but what did they do? People realised this and defeated KCR. Every medicine has an expiry date.

■ Do you mean to say PM Narendra Modi has reached that expiry date?

Definitely. And Modi knows it. That is the reason for him changing his natural political approach. He is stitching up alliances with every party. If the BJP is confident of winning 400 seats, why is he stitching up al-



Pics: Suman Reddy D

I was trying to set good political standards by focusing on development as chief minister. I gave room to so many opposition MLAs to come and meet me and discuss issues... I never encouraged them to defect in the 100 days of Congress govt... KCR, KTR and BJP MP K Laxman were repeatedly saying the Congress govt will collapse

liances with Naveen Patnaik, Nitish Kumar, N Chandrababu Naidu, Pawan Kalyan and many others? Modi is taking the help of other parties as he is not confident of getting a sufficient number of MPs to form the govt.

■ Who is the biggest challenge in Telangana, is it the BJP or BRS?

National parties and national issues will be at the forefront of discussion in Parliament elections. But there is no difference between BRS and BJP in Telangana. People of Telangana also know it. They are two sides of the same coin. Modi said they will double the income of farmers, deposit Rs 15 lakh into bank accounts of the poor, promised to give two crore jobs every year, housing to all and MSP to farmers but did not implement any of these. People of Telangana keenly observe everything and give their verdict.

■ But you called Modi 'badha bhai'?

Yes, I said it openly in a public meeting and did not whisper it in his ear. He is the Prime Minister of the country and whoever sits in that top seat, must play the role of giving a level playing field to all states.

**TALKING TO
TOI**

■ Do you think Modi is playing the big brother's role?

I am hoping he will play the role. The Congress govt in Telangana has just completed 100 days in office. For now, I don't have any issues with the Centre. BJP versus Congress on the electoral front is a different story. When I function as chief minister, my focus is on administration, state and welfare of the people. When I put on the TPCC chief's hat, I take the party line. Government and political parties are different.

I know the difference. But KCR and Modi think "sarkar, party aur Parivar" (govt, party and family) is one unit. I don't think like that and do not practice it. For me, sarkar, party and parivar are different units. If there is a confrontation between the CM and PM, people suffer. Who has given the right to either CM or a PM to thrust suffering on the people? Our egos and personal approach should not cause hardship to the people.

■ You are hinting at former KCR and his style of functioning.

Yes, because of KCR we lost so many things, including irrigation project funding, rural health mission funds, financial support

for housing schemes and other developmental projects. Whatever I got from the Centre, including defence land for skyways, is because of maintaining cordial relations with the Centre.

■ Why did you open the gates of the Congress for leaders of other parties? Two weeks earlier, you had said not now.

I did not open the gates for 100 days after coming to power. But we realised that both BRS and BJP were talking about the same agenda — toppling the new Congress govt. It is the people of Telangana who voted us to power. If they try to topple my govt, I have every right to protect the mandate given by the people. Neither the BRS nor BJP have the numbers to form a govt in Telangana. They were trying to engineer defections. If they try to topple the govt, I will protect it.

■ How many MLAs are you expecting to join the Congress? The talk is 30 legislators.

You will see. I cannot quote any number. I have not made the rules of this game. They started it. I was trying to set good political standards by focusing on development as chief minister. I gave room to so many opposition MLAs to come and meet me and discuss issues of their constituencies. I never encouraged them to defect in the 100 days of Congress govt.

We realised that both BRS and BJP were talking about the same agenda — toppling the new Congress govt. It is the people of Telangana who voted us to power. If they try to topple my govt, I have every right to protect the mandate given by the people.



■ Have the Congress' old guard — the senior leaders — accepted your leadership?

That is how I became the TPCC chief and CM. Without their support this would not have been possible. In politics, there is a level playing field to some extent. The old guard is made of seniors, and they are experienced than I am. There is nothing wrong with them having expectations.

in Congress elected representatives from other parties as the BRS and BJP are talking about toppling our govt, which is possible by taking our legislators. In other states, the BJP has already toppled opposition govt. Being the captain, it is my responsibility to protect my govt by taking elected representatives to protect my team and making the govt stronger.

■ Do you expect AIMIM to support the Congress during crunch time? Will your newfound friendship survive tough situations?

AIMIM cannot support the BJP. So, they have two options, either to support the Congress govt in Telangana or to not support it. When the situation arises, we will know whether they will support us or not. On my part, I am expecting they will support us. In fact, everyone who is anti-Modi or anti-KCR, should support us.

■ There is a talk that the Congress and AIMIM relationship may extend beyond Telangana.

The All India Congress Committee leadership must decide on this. I am trying to build a consensus with everyone at the state-level.

■ Do you see Telangana turning into a BJP versus Congress in future?

I don't think so. They had won a good number of Lok Sabha seats once in the undivided state, but could not become a force to reckon with. I don't think the BJP can become an alternative force (in Telangana) in the near future.

■ Is there a possibility of one of the Nehru-Gandhi family members contesting from Telangana?

We requested one of them to contest from Telangana. It is up to them to decide.

'HC verdict clear, we have eligibility & there's no ground to reject names'

Court Quashed Decision Of New Congress Govt

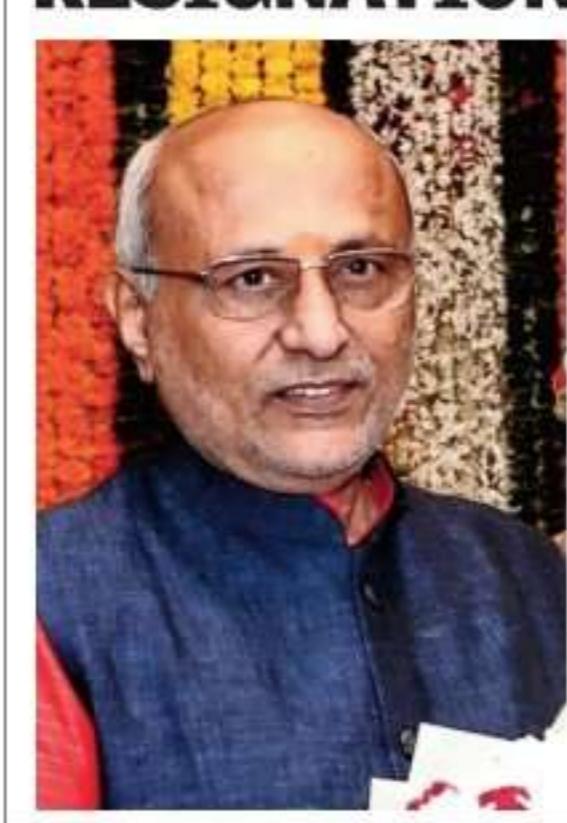
► From P1

The HC had also quashed the subsequent decision of the new Congress govt to withdraw the two BRS nominees and instead nominate M Kodandaram and Amer Ali Khan.

The then governor had approved the names of Kodandaram and Khan and the new Congress govt had also issued a gazette notification on Jan 27, 2024, appointing them as MLAs, but both these decisions were also quashed by the HC.

The Cong govt had sent the file to Tamilisai. She sent it for legal opinion as the court had already found fault with her for rejecting the names of two BRS names. Had she resent the file to the govt

RESIGNATION LEAVES NETAS IN LIMBO



• Tamilisai Soundararajan left the fate of four MLC candidates pending before resigning

• High court set aside Tamilisai's rejection of two BRS nominees for MLC posts

• Governor CP Radhakrishnan now holds responsibility of deciding on MLC candidates

• Previous BRS govt nominated Dasoju Sravan & K Satyanarayana for MLC posts

• Tamilisai sent the file for legal opinion after the High Court's ruling

• File on MLC candidates has not been returned to govt by governor's office

• The new governor needs to be briefed on the case before making a decision

other than him and K Satyanarayana were nominated as MLCs under the governor's quota.

"The high court verdict is clear. Both of us from backward communities fulfil the eligibility criteria and there is no ground to reject our names," he claimed.

Seeking reconsideration, the incumbent govt would have had the powers to send two names, which could be new names or again Kodandaram and Khan for approval as MLCs under the governor's quota. But the govt has not received back the file from the high court if candidates

Follow '19 campaign model, Malkajgiri LS seat crucial to me as CM: Revanth

Sribala Vadlapatla
@timesgroup.com

Hyderabad: Chief minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday urged Congress cadre and leaders to follow the campaign model used in the 2019 Malkajgiri MP seat election, where he won, across all parliament segments.

He emphasized that winning the seat is not only about the candidate but also about him as CM, as he went on to become the chief minister after winning the seat in the previous election.

Interacting with the Malkajgiri parliament constituency leaders on Lok Sabha election preparation, he said all Congress tickets will be declared by Holi.

The CM asked the cadre to start the outreach programmes on daily basis as early as 7am, telling them that they have a strong presence of committed leaders and support for Congress. He pointed



CM Revanth Reddy and minister Seethakka welcome BRS former MLA Vithal Reddy as he joins the Congress party, in Hyderabad on Thursday

Agencies

BRS Adilabad former MLA joins Cong

Hyderabad: The stream of BRS leaders from erstwhile Adilabad joining Congress continued with BRS former MLA Vithal Reddy joining the party in the presence of CM A Revanth Reddy on Thursday.

Earlier, former MLA Konappa and MLC P Sathish quit BRS and joined Congress. Though there is talk of BRS former minister Indrakaran Reddy joining the party, it is on hold as many Congress leaders objected to his joining. Meanwhile, govt teacher and human rights & women's rights activist A Suguna joined Congress in the presence of Revanth Reddy. She would most likely be the candidate for Congress from the Adilabad Lok Sabha seat. TNN

out that though there was a Congress wave across the state, the assembly results were not impressive in the Parliament seat in 2023. "People should vote for Congress to get the funding required for the development of the segment," he said.

Former minister P Mahender Reddy's wife Patnam Sunita Mahender Reddy was also present at the event, hinting at her possible candidature from the seat. The CM said that winning the Secunderabad Cantonment bye-election was very important.



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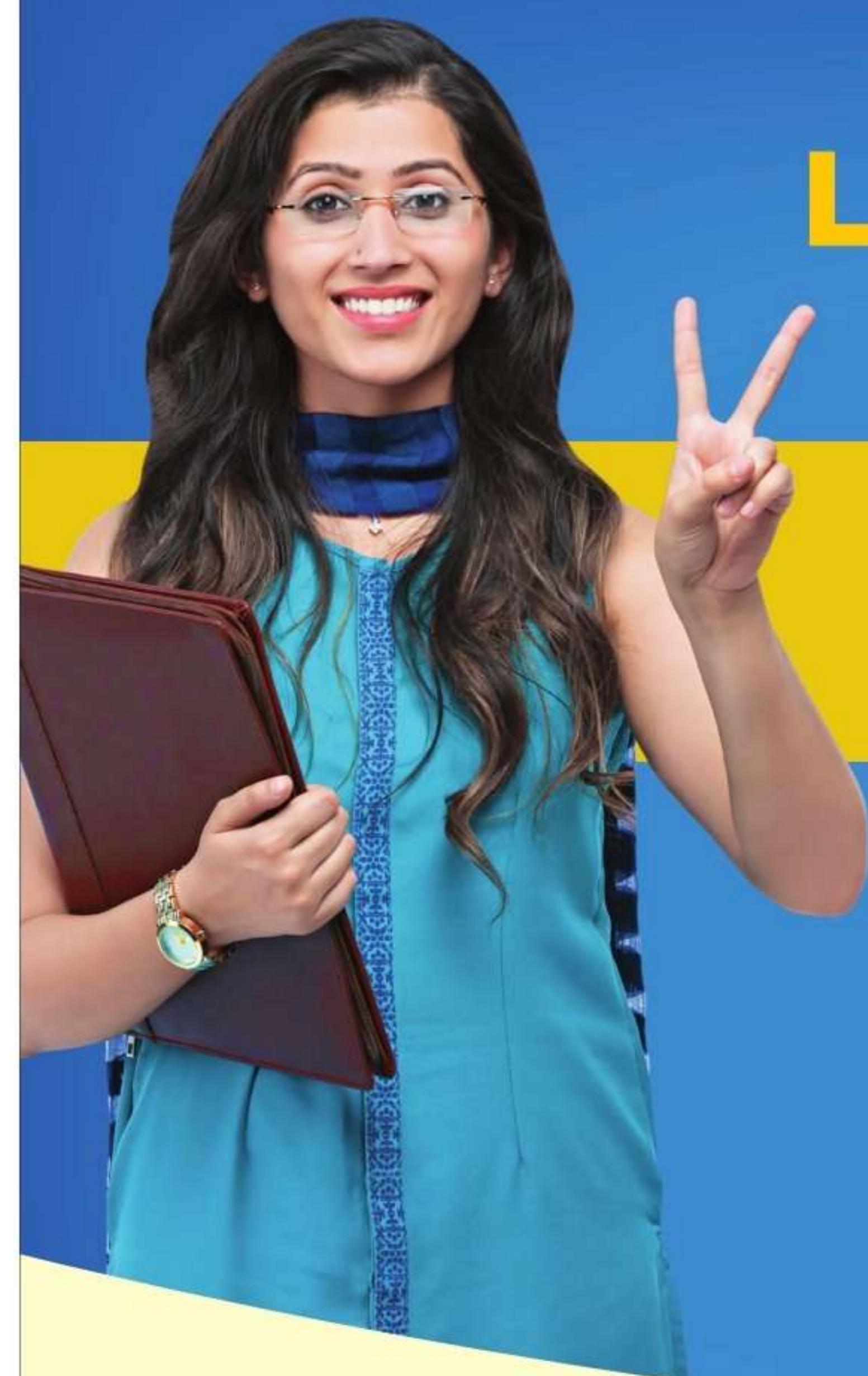
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Mom-daughter duo thwart robbery bid

Hyderabad: A 45-year-old woman and her teen daughter foiled a robbery bid at gunpoint at their residence in Paigah Colony of Begumpet on Thursday. When the suspect barged into their residence and tried to rob them, they resisted and tried to nab him, raising an alarm. He, however, overpowered them and fled with his weapon. Begumpet police rushed to the spot and started a probe.

Assistant commissioner of police (ACP), Begumpet, P Gopala Krishna Murthy said that they have formed special teams to nab the suspect. "We are also verifying CCTVs in the area for clues of the suspect," he said.

Police also confirmed that there was no firing and the mother and daughter escaped unhurt in the incident. TNN

HC dismisses Praneeth's custody plea

Hyderabad: Justice G Radha Rani of the Telangana high court on Thursday dismissed the petition filed by suspended intelligence DSP D Praneeth Kumar who challenged his police custody granted by a trial court. He was arrested and sent to jail in a phone tapping case. Upon a request by police, the trial court allowed them to take him into custody and question him to know the details of the case from him.

Praneeth approached court saying that his quizzing is going on in an irregular manner. The state refuted his allegations and said that they are acting as per norms. The judge agreed with the contentions of the state counsel and dismissed the plea. TNN

RAMZAN TIMINGS
Iftar (Friday) 6.33 pm
Sehri (Saturday) 4.56 am

HC converts schoolgirl's letter into PIL

Issues Notices To State, Excise & Home depts

SagarKumar.Mutha @timesgroup.com

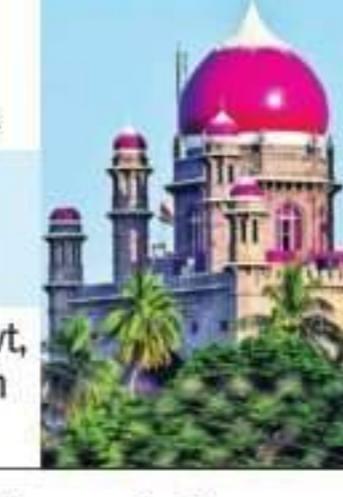
Hyderabad: Telangana high court on Thursday converted a letter written by a class VI girl student, who questioned the decision of the govt for allowing a bar and restaurant to run in a residential colony in Vanasthalipuram, into a PIL.

A bench of Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice J Anil Kumar converted the

BAR CAUSING TRAUMA TO OLD & YOUNG: LETTER

- Class VI girl student R Vaishnavi had questioned govt decision allowing a bar & restaurant to run in Vanasthalipuram residential colony
- Student said residential area is populated by schools, colleges & other facilities
- Vaishnavi in her letter urged CJ to use his power to get the bar & restaurant removed from the area
- Chief Justice Alok Aradhe & Justice J Anil Kumar converted letter into PIL
- Court issues notices to state govt, principal secretaries of prohibition & excise and home departments

letter from St Joseph Public School student R Vaishnavi into a PIL. The bench responded to the plea of Vaishnavi, who urged the CJ to use his power to get the bar and restaurant removed from Sama Nagar.



The bench issued notices to the state govt, principal secretaries of prohibition and excise and home departments. Notices were also sent to collector of Ranga Reddy district, Rachakonda police commissioner,

GHMC commissioner, excise commissioner and Haynagar excise station house officer, asking them to explain why they had permitted setting up of a bar and restaurant in the residential area," the student said.

Faulting the action of the govt, Vaishnavi said the huge residential area is populated by schools and colleges and other facilities. "A temple is under construction and an old age home is located in the area. Allowing a bar and restaurant in the area is causing trauma to old and young," she pointed out.

She further complained in her letter that parents were wary about sending their children to tuition classes during night because of the nuisance created by drunks. "Senior citizens used to take evening stroll and now, they have stopped walking in the area," the student said.

L&T & irrigation officials blame design of barrages

'Green Light By Central Govt Agencies'

Koride.Mahesh @timesgroup.com

Hyderabad: With the National Dam Safety Authority and Comptroller and Auditor General reports pointing to a 'design fault' along with planning and execution for the sinking of piers at Medigadda barrage and leakages in Annaram and Sundilla barrages, the special NDSA team is focusing on the design approvals, model studies and other mandatory tests given for Kaleshwaram project.

The NDSA team, which arrived in Hyderabad on Wednesday, questioned officers of Central Designs Organisation (CDO) and other officials for the second day on Thursday. The team interacted with chief engineer and irrigation officials of various wings as part of investigation.

The irrigation department officials reportedly admitted that the cause of sinking and other problems in the barrages were due to de-

DAY 2 OF QUESTIONING

- Special NDSA team focusing on design approvals, model studies & other mandatory tests given for Kaleshwaram project
- Officers of Central Designs Organisation and operation & maintenance wing questioned for second day on Thursday
- NDSA team interacts with chief engineer & irrigation officials of various wings as part of investigation
- Team also questions project construction authorities & operation & maintenance wing officials
- Contractors which constructed Medigadda barrage also questioned



ration and maintenance wing officials.

The NDSA team also questioned contractor L&T, which constructed Medigadda barrage, and two other contractors, investigation agencies and quality control wings officials separately.

The irrigation department officials reportedly admitted that the cause of sinking and other problems in the barrages were due to de-

signs issues, but reportedly claimed that they had taken approvals from the govt and the designs were approved by various central govt agencies, including the Central Water Commission. On Wednesday, former engineers-in-chief C Muralidhar and N Venkateswarlu were believed to have told the team that they have taken all the requisite permissions before going ahead with the project.

During the investigation, it came to the notice of NDSA that before the piers of Medigadda sunk, doubts were expressed on the design issues by L&T. Then, the irrigation department officials sought the help of Central Water and Power Research Station to study the water discharge velocities, which also confirmed the design problems at the barrages.

Subsequently, Mahesh, along with the other accused, abducted Mallikarjun from his residence, transported him to the Musi riverbank, and stabbed him in retaliation.

Based on clues, North Zone Task force sleuths in a joint operation with the Karkhana police nabbed him.

While police detected two such cases, they also found numerous suspicious payments in his account. Deputy commissioner of police (DCP), Task Force, S Rashmi Perumal said that his mobile phone, ₹20,000 cash and bike used in the offence have been seized.

"Sharon was earlier working for a private firm, but lost job due to his alcohol addiction. To make easy money, he used to target individuals driving in secluded areas. Feigning an accident, he intercepts

the victim and accuses them of rash driving causing the accident. Pretending to have sustained injuries in the accident, he demanded compensation from the victim. If they refuse to give money, he would forcefully take money from them or force them to transfer the amounts through GPay or PhonePe," the DCP said.

In the past too, he had committed similar offences at Begumpet, Raniganj, Bowenpally, Patny and Tadband by targeting small amounts to avoid drawing attention, the DCP said, adding that he was handed over to the Karkhana police for further action.

3 arrested for killing friend over petty issue

Hyderabad: Nagole police arrested three persons on Thursday for their involvement in the murder of their friend near Musi river on March 19.

The arrested persons, identified as Koppula Arjun Yadav (41), Kunchala Omkar (30), and Mallela Mahesh (34), have a long-standing friendship with the victim, D Mallikarjun (28), and have previous criminal records.

According to police, Mallikarjun, who was employed as a driver, developed an alcohol addiction and began pressuring his friends for money. On March 18, when Mahesh and Mallikarjun were consuming alcohol, a dispute arose over petty issues, resulting in Mallikarjun assaulting Mahesh with knife, causing severe injury to his right hand.

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Youth nabbed for faking accidents & extorting bikers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

'FOR EASY MONEY'

- Yenuka Ezra Sharon Vineeth nabbed for faking injuries & extortion from bikers
- 25-year-old was unemployed, had lost job due to alcohol addiction
- Feigning an accident, intercepts victims & accuses them of rash driving
- Targeted individuals in secluded areas for easy money

the victim and accuses them of rash driving causing the accident. Pretending to have sustained injuries in the accident, he demanded compensation from the victim. If they refuse to give money, he would forcefully take money from them or force them to transfer the amounts through GPay or PhonePe," the DCP said.

In the past too, he had committed similar offences at Begumpet, Raniganj, Bowenpally, Patny and Tadband by targeting small amounts to avoid drawing attention, the DCP said, adding that he was handed over to the Karkhana police for further action.

5 held for robbing cab driver and fleeing with car

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: Miyapur police arrested five persons on Thursday for robbing a cab driver and absconding with his vehicle near RGI Airport in Shamshabad.

The arrested persons, identified as Balagani Nanchariah, Pittu Nagireddy, Singoti Sivanagaraju, Kesan Shiva, and Bodu Subba Raju, all hailing from erstwhile Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, approached the cab driver on March 14 while he was waiting in Miyapur for a fare, police said.

Pretending to be passengers needing a ride to the airport, they subsequently assaulted and kidnapped the driver near the airport and drove till Choutuppal.

After reaching Choutuppal, they forcibly threw the driver from the vehicle and fled with the car. With the help of Choutuppal police, the victim reported the incident to Miyapur police, who registered a case and started investigation. Based on the CCTV camera footage and

ASSAULTED & KIDNAPPED

- Accused approached cab driver on March 14 while he was waiting in Miyapur for a fare
- They pretended to be passengers needing a ride to airport
- Accused assaulted & kidnapped driver near airport
- They drove till Choutuppal, where they threw him out & fled with car

technical evidence, Miyapur police arrested the culprits and recovered the stolen vehicle.

Their accomplice, Jupudi Bepeshwar Rao, remains at large. Police revealed that Nanchariah, Nagireddy, Sivanagaraju, and Shiva had prior involvement in murder cases in Andhra Pradesh and committed the offence to make quick buck. They were remanded to judicial custody.

Bridge school to reduce Muslim dropout rate

Hyderabad: To reduce the dropout rate among school-going Muslim students, the Helping Hand Foundation (HHF) in collaboration with a local mosque in Jallapalli, has set up a free bridge school for primary and middle school dropouts.

The school will run from the premises of Masjid-e-Rehmat-e-Alam and comprise 110 students — from primary to secondary level — in its first batch.

All the students are from nearby slum areas, HHF stated in a release.

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Abdul last seen near a retail store

From P1

On March 19, Abdul's family in the city had received a ransom call from an unidentified person in the US who demanded \$1,200 to get the student released. The caller claimed that the drug mafia was behind Abdul's abduction. Family and friends tried to call back on the number but they did not get any response.

On the day Abdul was reported missing, local authorities checked CCTV footage and noticed that he was near a retail store.

An Indian-origin group of people with roots in Hyderabad are also searching for the missing student. Social worker and MBT leader Amjad Ullah Khan told TOI that he had informed the group in Chicago about Abdul. "They spoke to his roommates," he said.

Nampally court dismisses ED's plea to cancel Nowhera's bail

Srinath.Vudali@timesgroup.com

Hyderabad: The Enforcement Directorate's (ED) plea before a local court to cancel the bail of Heera Group managing director, Nowhera Shaik, was dismissed on March 19.

In its petition before the court, the Hyderabadi ED officials had claimed that Nowhera violated bail conditions by not appearing before agency despite multiple summonses being served.

Its petition before the court, the Hyderabadi ED officials had claimed that Nowhera violated bail conditions by not appearing before agency despite multiple summonses being served.

As there was no response to the notices, officials approached the Nampally court seeking cancellation of her bail, which was earlier granted to her. The ED wanted to question Nowhera after it gathered information about some more properties, which they suspected were bought with her allegedly ill-gotten money.

Nampally court, meanwhi-

MALAFIDE INTENTION: NOWHERA

- Hyderabad ED officials claim Nowhera violated bail conditions by not appearing before agency despite multiple summonses being served
- Hyderabad ED officials say summon dated Oct 20, 2023 was issued to the accused to appear on Nov 6, 2023

le, observed that absence alone cannot be a sufficient ground for cancellation of bail.

"In order to record her evidence and to submit some relevant documents, a summon dated Oct 20, 2023 was issued to the accused to appear on Nov 6, 2023," the ED Hyderabad, told the court. After a few more summonses, the agency sought cancellation of her bail.

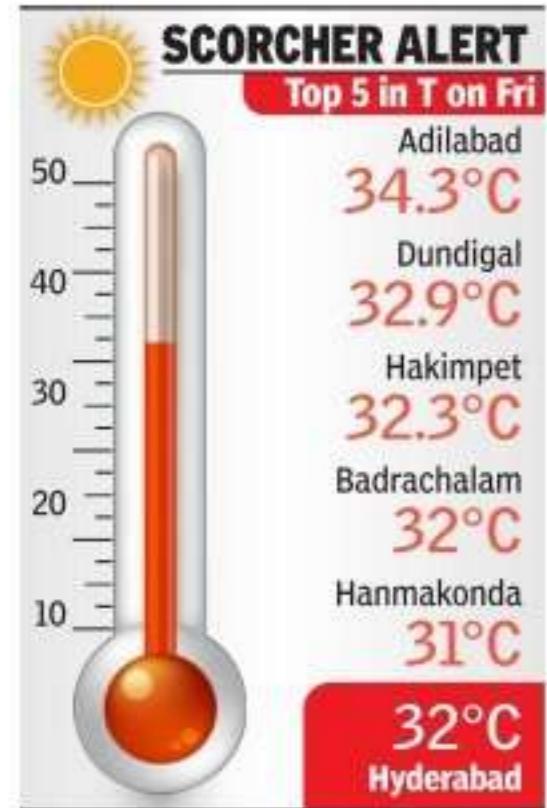
"She again did not appear in response to the said summons, nor did she send any correspondence to the Directorate of Enforcement seeking time to appear. Therefore, the bail granted to the accused is required to be cancelled as she violated the bail conditions," ED said in its plea.

Nowhera in response said that she could not appear before the ED-Hyderabad since the date coincided with hearing of one of her other cases pending before the Supreme Court, where ED is also a respondent. She accused ED-Hyderabad, of malafide intention to fix date of appearance as Nov 6.

Man steals bike, dies in accident

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: A 27-year-old P Gopikrishna, riding a stolen bike,



Woman, son arrested for killing mobile technician

Hyderabad: Police on Thursday arrested a real estate agent and his mother for the murder of a mobile technician from Peerzadiguda at their residence in Mirchowk, on March 18. Police said the 25-year-old victim, Shaik Wajeed was honey-trapped by accused Afzar Begum (45), with whom he had an affair, and her son Shaik Nisar Ahmed (27), a real estate agent.

Wajeed had borrowed money from Afzar, a healthcare worker, on multiple occasions, amounting to Rs4 lakh, and was harassing her without paying. Nursing a grudge, the duo decided to kill him. Afzar called Wajeed to her home. When he arrived, she took him to the bedroom, where Ahmed had been hiding.

Ahmed stabbed Wajeed repeatedly with a billhook knife, killing him on the spot. After making sure he was dead, they changed their clothes and fled," said P Sai Chaithanya, DCP, South Zone. Ahmed and Wajeed were friends for a long time. Wajeed used to visit Ahmed's home frequently, and developed a physical relationship with Afzar five years ago.

Wajeed had begun suspecting Afzar of having an affair with someone else. He was keeping a tab on her movements, and harassed her for not answering his calls. Meanwhile, Ahmed got to know about Wajeed and Afzar's affair. Police nabbed them at MG Bus Station. They were sent to judicial remand, the DCP said.

New-born found dead at agri farm in Mancherial

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: A new-born baby girl was found dead at an agricultural field in Bheemini in Mancherial district on Thursday. Her mother is being questioned.

Local police said that the infant, who was born a few days ago, was made to sleep at a location in the farm, where her parents were working.

By the time her parents returned to the infant, she was found dead. After the locals came to know about it, they alerted police. Though there were reports of a dog attack on the infant, police clarified that they did not find any external injuries on the baby.

The infant's body was shifted for post-mortem examination (PME) to know the cause of death. "We are yet to ascertain what led to the death. We suspect starvation or heat stroke may have led to the incident," Mancherial police said.

"If PME indicates any foul play, we have to probe her family members and others who were near the field. The newborn's mother has been taken into custody," police said. A case was registered under Section 174 (suspicious death) of the IPC.

Action against two constables over extortion attempt

Hyderabad: Mahabubabad police are expected to take action against two constables - Sambaiyah and Veeranna - who allegedly attempted to extort money from a lorry driver by stripping him.

The incident took place a week ago. An unknown person had captured the constables stripping the lorry driver demanding bribe.

When the issue came to the notice of district higher ups an investigation was ordered and the prima facie allegations against constables turned out to be true. "Action will be taken soon," said a police official. TN

AP HC interim relief to Group-I employees

Srikanth.Aluri
@timesgroup.com

Vijayawada: In a temporary relief to the employees who joined Group-I service pursuant to 2018 notification, the AP high court on Wednesday directed the state govt not to oust them from service till next date of hearing of the petitions, challenging the single judge order setting aside the eligible list of candidates declaring the Group-I main examination as illegal.

The HC on March 13 passed judgment declaring the Group-I main evaluation was done in violation of rules and directed the APPSC to conduct the examination again. APPSC senior counsel SS Prasad said successful candidates are facing the threat of losing jobs pursuant single judge order that was given ba-

- AP HC directs govt not to oust staff till next hearing on March 27
- HC on March 13 passed judgment declaring Group-I main exam was done in violation of rules
- Directed APPSC to conduct examination again
- HC had set aside eligible list of candidates declared



of the petitioners who challenged second manual evaluation and some of the successful candidates whose appointment was set to naught by the single judge order also filed appeal petitions.

APPSC senior counsel SS Prasad said successful candidates are facing the threat of losing jobs pursuant single judge order that was given ba-

sed on an erroneous perception of facts. Senior counsel Jandhyala Ravi Shankar said as no successful candidate is ousted from job yet and the petitioners are not pressing for contempt, he objected to grant of stay.

Justice Ravinath Tilhari and Justice N Harinath posited all the matters together to be heard on March 27.

NAVROZ CHEER



Members of Parsi community during Navroz celebrations at Fire Temple at MG road on Thursday

2 groups of priests spar at Siddipet temple

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: Priests of Mallikarjuna Swamy temple split into two groups and sparred amongst themselves in Dubbaka of Siddipet district over ID cards being issued to 10 members.

The incident took place on Wednesday late in the eve-

ning, leaving three priests injured in the scuffle. Police registered a criminal case on both the warring groups.

The members of two different castes were employed as priests in a local temple. According to officials, 60 members were employed in the temple as priests, but 10 among them did not get the ID

cards issued by the government. However, few days ago, these 10 members managed to secure the ID cards through the endowment department.

This was opposed by the other 50 members, said officials. Following this, a fight broke out between two groups, wherein members from both the groups were injured.

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New seed health lab in Hyd by Syngenta

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: Syngenta Vegetable Seeds unveiled its new seed health lab at Nuthankal on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Thursday as part of its commitment towards quality control.

The lab will also be seeking export certification and local accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL).

Erik Postma, global head of quality management, Syngenta Vegetable Seeds and Flowers, said India has emerged among the top three markets for Syngenta's vegetable seeds business globally.

Syngenta Vegetable Seeds head of Asia Pacific, Nishchini Bhatia, the new investment highlights the company's commitment to ensuring a reliable supply of healthy, disease-free seed to growers.

SCR launches QR code payment to buy tickets

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: To encourage cashless transactions and increase digital payments at general booking counters, South Central Railway (SCR) has introduced QR code payment for purchasing tickets.

Passengers can now conveniently pay their fare using their mobile phones. Initially launched as a pilot project,

'International nexus involved'

From PTI

Officials said that the operation indicated involvement of an international criminal network engaged in importing narcotics by mixing it with other substances.

"The whole consignment has been seized and an FIR has been registered against the consignee and unknown others," CBI spokesperson said. "In the past too, on the basis of Interpol inputs, CBI has conducted operations," he said.

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The Director, NCPOR invites eligible and prospective Indian Nationals for filling up the positions of Junior Research Fellow at NCPOR on temporary contract basis under project mode through walk-in-interview on 25th April, 2024 (Thursday) at 08:30 AM (onwards) at NCPOR. For detailed advertisement, terms and conditions and instructions visit our website www.ncpor.res.in

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In pursuance to the cancellation of the advertisement vide no. AIIMS/DEOGHAR/DR/NON-FACULTY/01/2023/01 dated: 27.10.2023 regarding recruitment to various non-faculty posts (Group B & C) on direct recruitment basis at AIIMS Deoghar, the application fees is being refunded to the applicants. Hence, it is hereby directed to the applicants to fill the enclosed prescribed format (also available at official website of AIIMS Deoghar) and send it along with payment receipt in pdf format (proper visible copy) to the email id: dr@aiimsdeoghar.edu.in within 10 days issuance of this notice.

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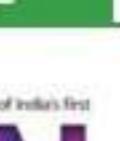
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Ex-guv Tamilisai, Annamalai in BJP's LS list for Tamil Nadu

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Aiming to breach the southern bastion of Tamil Nadu, which has remained an impregnable fortress for BJP, barring the sole exception of Kanyakumari in 2014, the party unleashed its heavy artillery in Lok Sabha this time.

Among heavyweights who have been fielded are BJP state chief K Annamalai, former Telangana governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, Union minister L Murugan, BJP legislative party leader Nairam Nagendran and former Union

RJD may field Lalu's daughter from Saran

Rohini Acharya, RJD patriarch Lalu Prasad's Singapore-based daughter, is tipped to be the party's candidate for Saran LS seat, report Sheezan Nezami and Manoj Chaurasia. The second of Lalu's seven daughters donated a kidney to her then ailing father in Dec 2022. If she makes her electoral debut, she will be the fourth Yadav sibling to dabble in politics after elder sister Misa Bharti, who is a RS member, and brothers Tejaswi Prasad Yadav and Tej Pratap Yadav. RJD, meanwhile, allotted symbols to its nominees for Gaya, Aurangabad, Nawada & Jamui, which will go to polls in the first phase on April 19.

minister Pon Radhakrishnan. BJP is contesting 19 seats in the state and released a list of seven candidates Thursday. Later, BJP named the remaining 12 seats where it will be contesting, but didn't announce the nominees.

Annamalai will contest

from Coimbatore, which is an influential belt of Gounders, backward caste group to which he belongs, while Soundararajan has been fielded from south Chennai. Radhakrishnan will contest from Kanyakumari, the seat he had won for BJP in 2014.

Adhir to contest from Berhampore, Kharge's son-in-law from Gulbarga

UP Congress told the party's top poll panel that Gandhi family should contest from Amethi and Rae Bareli, even as the two seats did not come up for discussion in the meeting on Thursday, report Subodh Ghildiyal and Shailvee Sharda.

In the fresh list of 57 candidates, Radhakrishna, son-in-law of Mallikarjun Kharge, has been named the candidate from Gulbarga. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will again contest from Berhampore in West Bengal. Praniti Shinde, daughter of Congress veteran Sushin Kumar Shinde, will contest from Solapur; Shahu Shahji Chatrapat, a descendant of Shivaji, from Kolhapur. Ajay Rai to contest from PM's seat of Varanasi and BSP turncoat Danish Ali from Amroha. Digvijaya Singh is the likely face from Rajgarh in MP.

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
L. No.: JHS-ELG-W-T-35-2023-24-RT Date: 18.03.2024
TENDER NOTICE
For and on behalf of President of India, the Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (Gen) North Central Railway, Jhansi invites open tenders through online (E-Tendering) for the following work:-
Description of work: JHS ELG - Improvement of reliability of electrical power system in divisional Railway hospital Jhansi.

Tender Value: ₹ 71,40,155/- only. Bid Security: ₹ 1,42,800/- only. Completion Period: 06 Months. Closing Date of Tender: 11.04.2024 (upto 15:00 Hrs.).

Tender will submit the tender online upto 11.04.2024 (upto 15:00 Hrs.). Complete details & for submission of tenders can be seen in Indian Railway website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER
RFPNo. SBI/TB-S&S/PBA/2023-24/006 Dated: 21.03.2024

Bids are invited by State Bank of India from eligible bidders for SELECTION OF VENDOR FOR PROCUREMENT OF RFID TAGS FOR SBI FASTag. For details, please visit procurement news at <https://bank.sbi/>, <https://www.sbi.co.in>, <https://tender.sbi/>.

Commencement of download of RFP: From 21.03.2024 at 11:00 hrs Last date and time for submission of bids: 15.04.2024 upto 15:00 hrs

Place: Mumbai Deputy General Manager (Projects)

Date: 22.03.2024 TB – Solutions & Special Projects Department

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-Tendering Notice No.: 2024-March-04 Date: 19.03.2024

E-TENDER NOTICE

Divisional Railway Manager (Engineering), N.C. Rly Agra for and on behalf of the President of India invites "Open Tender" through on-line (E-Tendering) for the following works. The details of the tender are as under:-

S.No.: 1 Tender No.: 2024-March-04-01 Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 267871640.90

Description of work : Construction of boundary wall at vulnerable locations & on approaches of major cities to prevent encroachment in IDH-BXN section.

S.No.: 2 Tender No.: 2024-March-04-02 Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 282343150.04

Description of work : Agra Cantt-Dhaulpur. Construction of RCC boundary wall at various remaining locations to prevent trespassing & encroachment under the jurisdiction of ADEN/DHO.

S.No.: 3 Tender No.: 2024-March-04-03 Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 22516488.32

Description of work : Provision of bore well and Over OHT for PFS with pipeline arrangements PTI (50KL), MIQ (50KL), KLB (50KL), BH (50KL), & BIQ (50KL) stations in provision of 04 nos. hand pumps at platform of AED, NGLT, BAMA & SNPR Hall stations in IDH-BXN section.

S.No.: 4 Tender No.: 2024-March-04-04 Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 28062096.43

Description of work : Provision of bore well and Over OHT for PFS with pipeline

arrangements MURD (110KL), IK (50KL), PPEA (50KL) & HK (50KL) stations in IDH-BKI section & FAB (100KL), UDMR (50KL) in BHA-ETW section and provision of 03 nos. hand pumps at platform of NHB, TBL & BUDA Hall stations in IDH-BKI section.

For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. Tender can only be submitted through web portal <http://www.ireps.gov.in> up to 15.00 hrs on 08.04.2024.

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ED: Karti took ₹50L visa bribe when father headed MHA

'Money Taken Through Aide To Get Nod For Reuse Of Chinese Visas'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Enforcement Directorate Thursday alleged that Congress's Lok Sabha MP Karti Chidambaram had taken bribes of Rs 50 lakh through his close aide S Bhaskararaman to get approvals for visas to Chinese nationals working in a power plant in Punjab, when his father P Chidambaram was home minister.

"Investigation revealed that Karti P Chidambaram took illegal gratification of Rs 50 lakh through his close aide S Bhaskararaman for getting approval for reuse of Chinese visas by Talwandi Sabo Power Ltd, which was establishing a power project at Mansa, Punjab. Officials of the firm approached Karti for getting the approval for reuse of visas from MHA



Karti and his father P Chidambaram are on bail in multiple cases

wherein his father was home minister," ED said.

ED has filed a chargesheet in the case which was taken cognizance by a PMLA court on March 19. ED has made Karti, his company Advantage Strategic Consulting Pvt Ltd, and Bhaskararaman as accused, besides Talwandi Sabo Power Ltd, in its

laundering case.

"Modus operandi adopted in the case was that the company paid Rs 50 lakh through cheque to an entry operator in the garb of fictitious services. The entry operator in turn paid Rs 50 lakh cash to S Bhaskararaman, a close associate of Karti. Subsequently, Bhaskararaman

invested cash of Rs 50 lakh in Advantage Strategic Consulting Private Limited, a company controlled by Karti," ED said.

The ED probe further revealed that the value of Rs 50 lakh so invested increased to Rs. 1.59 crore over a period of time which is 'proceeds of crime' as per provisions of PMLA, the agency said.

Earlier, both father and son had denied having any knowledge of visas issued to Chinese nationals in violation of rules. Karti and his father P Chidambaram are currently on bail facing multiple laundering cases. They were earlier booked under PMLA in two money laundering cases: INX-Media and Aircel-Maxis payoffs. The ED has filed chargesheets against them and a trial is pending in both these cases.

SC: TN guv is breaching constitutional provisions

► From P1

Ponnudiy was convicted and sentenced by Madras HC last Dec in a corruption case. However, on March 11, SC suspended the conviction and sentence. The CM wrote to the governor on March 13 to swear in Ponnudiy anew as a minister on March 14 and to allot the higher education portfolio to him.

The governor in his March 17 letter cited his own interpretation of the SC order and said that conviction has only been "suspended and not set aside" and hence, Ponnudiy cannot be appointed as a minister.

Senior advocates A M Singhvi and P Wilson, who appeared for Tamil Nadu, pointed out to the court that in the Cabinet form of govt in India, the governor is bound by the aid and advice of the chief minister heading the council of ministers. "Here the SC has cleared, for the time being, the taint of conviction and sentence in a corruption case, but the governor as a super SC says his taint has not been erased. This kind of approach will destroy the democratic system of governance in our country," Singhvi said.

The bench breathed fire throughout the proceedings against the conduct of Ravi, who had earlier been criticised by the SC for withholding of assent/returning the bills duly passed by assembly and later on masses referring these bills, when passed again by assembly, to President for his assent.

"The governor is breaching constitutional provisions. Once conviction and sentence are stayed, he cannot say the taint continues and cite constitutional morality to refuse swearing in a person recommended by the CM," the court said.

"If we do not hear in a positive manner from the governor by Friday, we will pass a formal order recording whatever we are saying during the proceedings. We are giving an opportunity to the governor to set right a situation that is entirely his creation," it said.

"How can he cite his personal perception about a person to refuse administering an oath to him as mandated by the Constitution? His personal perception about taint (on Ponnudiy) loses relevance and meaning constitutionally once the SC stays the conviction and sentence to wipe out the taint, albeit for the time being," the bench said.

MEIL largest donor to BRS, 2nd largest to TDP & YSRCP

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) group is biggest electoral bond donor to two largest national parties, BJP and Congress, as well as Telangana's BRS.

MEIL and its group company, Western UP Transmission Co. Ltd (WUPTL), together gave Rs 664 crore to BJP. WUPTL

Related Reports: P9,10,11

gave Rs 110 crore to Congress. MEIL gave Rs 195 crore to BRS. It's also the second largest donor to TDP (Rs 28 cr) and YSRCP (Rs 37 cr) due to systemic limitations.

The message was sent to citizens by the "government of India under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi". It stated: "In the last 10 years, 140 crore Indians have benefited from various schemes and policies of the government, and will continue to do so in the future as well. Your participation is critical as we, together as one family, work towards fulfilling our aspiration of a Vicksit Bharat. You are therefore requested to kindly share suggestions on your vision of Vicksit Bharat".

In a clarification, MeitY said EC that although the letters were sent out via WhatsApp before MCC kicked in, some of them were possibly delivered late due to systemic limitations.

The message was sent to citizens by the "government of India under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi". It stated: "In the last 10 years, 140 crore Indians have benefited from various schemes and policies of the government, and will continue to do so in the future as well. Your participation is critical as we, together as one family, work towards fulfilling our aspiration of a Vicksit Bharat. You are therefore requested to kindly share suggestions on your vision of Vicksit Bharat".

MEGA started small in 1989. Pamidireddy Pitchi Reddy, a farmer's son from Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, founded the company, and his nephew, Puripati Venkata Krishna Reddy, made it one of India's largest construction and engineering companies.

It took Megha a decade to hit a turnover of Rs 100 cr. But now it's a Rs 40,000 cr turnover company, an Indian MNC with footprints in over 20 countries. When it started, it had less than 10 employees. Now, it employs over 2 lakh people in 25 group companies. Its businesses range from irrigation, drinking water, oil and

gas, EV manufacturing, defence, telecom, railway infrastructure, solar and thermal power, and transport.

The sole publicly listed entity in the Megha Group is EV manufacturer Electra Greentech, which makes electric buses in technological collaboration with China's BYD.

Megha, say those who track it, has built a reputation for executing mega projects ahead of deadlines.

Among its projects are the world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project — Kaleshwaram — in Telangana and Andhra's Polavaram project, which boasts of the world's largest spillway.

P9,10,11

SC asked the Centre to file its response to the petitions challenging the validity of the new law on appointment of CEC and ECs in six weeks

seeking more time, you cannot say that all members of the selection committee got the names simultaneously. Even if all the 200 names were given earlier, it would take time to consider their credentials. Govt knew the matter was sub-judge. It could have deferred the selection for some time," the bench said.

It said the search committee, which shortlisted six out of around 200 names, could have completed the task 10 days before the selection committee met. "Members of the selection committee should have had the opportunity to be apprised fully about credentials of those in the zone of consideration. Views of every member is important when appointment is made to important constitutional posts having a bearing on elections and democracy," Justice Datta said.

Except for these critical observations, the bench was fully with solicitor general Tushar Mehta that any interference by the court at this juncture would be unwarranted. The bench rebuffed lead counsel Prashant Bhushan's argument that to maintain EC's independence and for free and fair polls, the selection panel should have included CJI as a member as mandated by the SC in its Baranwal judgment last year.

The bench said for the last 73 years, "ECs have been appointed by govt alone and we have had excellent ECs and free and fair elections. SC in Baranwal judgment had filled a legislative vac-

uum. Once Parliament enacted the law and provided the mechanism and composition of the selection committee, we can direct Parliament to change the composition to include CJI in it? The SC cannot insist on the CJI's inclusion in the selection panel."

It said it will later examine the validity of the 'CEC & other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Terms of Office) Act', which came into force from Jan 2. Bhushan said SC had quashed the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, unanimously passed by Parliament, as it found that inclusion of executive in the judge selection process would undermine judiciary's independence. The same scrutiny must be applied to the new law on appointment of CEC and ECs, he said.

Bench rejected it saying the procedures for appointment of constitutional court judges and ECs are different, even though it is undeniable that both are vital for democracy. When Bhushan said the decision of the selection committee be made valid only when it is unanimous. The bench said, "Even if we include CJI as a member, can we ensure that the decision would be unanimous?"

SC asked the Centre to file response to the petitions challenging the validity of the new law on appointment of CEC and ECs in six weeks and posted the matter for hearing on Aug 5, much after the general elections.



SC asked the Centre to file its response to the petitions challenging the validity of the new law on appointment of CEC and ECs in six weeks

कोचीन शिप्यार्ड लिमिटेड (भारत सरकार का उम्मीदवाही)	

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SC stays govt notification activating fact-check unit

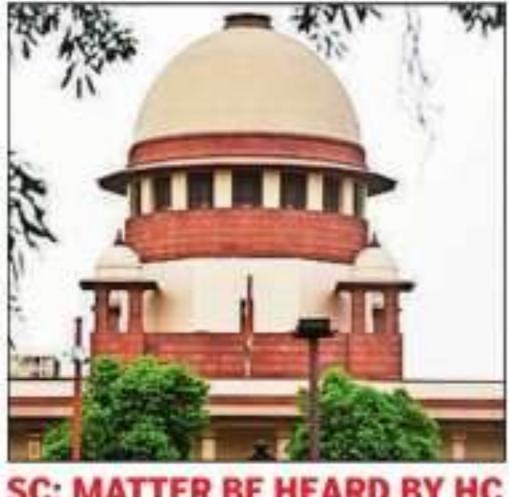
'Impact On Right To Speech Calls For HC Analysis'

Dhananjay.Mahapatra
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Putting a premium on freedom of speech and expression on internet, a three-judge Supreme Court bench on Thursday stayed the Centre's March 20 notification operationalising PIB's fact check unit (FCU), which is intended to stop fake posts and distortions of actions of Union govt. The SC said the matter involves serious constitutional issues related to Article 19 freedoms.

Setting aside Bombay HC's order that had refused to grant an interim stay on setting up a fact check unit to identify fake and false content on digital media about the Centre, the Supreme Court on Thursday said, "The impact of the rule on fundamental right of speech and expression would call for an analysis by HC."

HC's third judge, to whom



SC: MATTER BE HEARD BY HC

petitions have been assigned after a split verdict from division bench, is scheduled to commence hearing on FCU's validity from April 15.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta repeatedly pleaded for at least a day's time to respond to appeals filed by Kunal Kamra and Editors Guild on the ground that he has not been provided copies of the petitions and that he would like to give a proper response based on official documents about FCU.

Before brushing aside SG's plea about being handicapped to respond in the absence of papers, SC bench of CJI D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra gave a detailed hearing to senior advocate

Darius Khambata and lawyer Shadan Farasat who dug in with their argument that FCU would erode freedom of speech.

It is the most inappropriate time, given that the elections are round the corner, to notify the FCU under PIB, which is the mouthpiece of Union govt, they said. Khambata said that intermediaries are not ready to challenge the draconian rules for the fear of losing "safe harbour" status under the Information and Technology Rules.

The SG kept repeating his plea for a day's time to enable him to prepare a formal response instead of talking from memory of what he had argued before the Bombay HC, where a division bench had given a split verdict.

The matter has now been assigned to a third judge to determine which opinion of the two judges in the division bench was correct—one striking down Rule 3(1)(b)(v) and the other upholding it. CJ said, "At one stage we were of the view to bring the entire matter here. But since the third judge is hearing it from April 15, we decided that the

matter be heard by the HC."

In its order, the bench said, "We are of the considered view that the challenge which is pending before Bombay HC implicates core values impinging on the freedom of speech which is protected by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution."

Since all the issues await adjudication of the HC, we are desisting from expressing an opinion on the merits which may ultimately have the impact of foreclosing a full and fair consideration by the third judge of the HC."

Referring to the assurance given by the SG to the HC in April last year that FCU would not be notified till the division bench gave its verdict, the CJ-led bench said, "we are clearly of the view that the notification of Mar 20, 2024, which has been issued by Union govt after the rejection of interim relief by the HC, would need to be stayed. Quite apart from the statement of the Union of India during the pendency of proceedings before the HC, the challenges to the validity of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) involve serious constitutional questions."

Second accused arrested; kids stabbed 11 and 13 times

Sandeep.Rai@timesgroup.com

Meerut: The brother of Mohd Sajid, who was killed in an "encounter" soon after he brutally killed two sons of his neighbour in Budaun, was arrested in Bareilly on Thursday.

Javed surrendered at Baradari PS on Thursday. "During interrogation, Javed, the second accused in the double murder case, said on the day of crime, he and Sajid visited the children's house when their fa-

BUDAUN KILLING

ther was not at home. Sajid, who recently bought a knife, went upstairs while Javed remained outside. When Javed realised his brother had killed the kids, he fled, fearing he might be killed by agitated locals," said an officer.

Javed, in a purported video, could be heard saying that "he was innocent" and his elder brother "was the murderer" and he had fled to Delhi "only out of fear", said SSP.

Meanwhile, the slain children's autopsy revealed that Sajid had stabbed the elder of the two children, Ayush, 13 times, and his sibling Aahaan 11 times.

After SC notice, Patanjali MD apologises over 'misleading' ads

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

In violation of its Nov undertaking, Patanjali continued with its misleading advertisements and the court decided to initiate contempt proceedings

targeting of allopathy treatment. Patanjali had in Nov given undertaking that the company won't publish such misleading advertisements. In violation of its undertaking, the company continued with its misleading advertisements and the court thereafter decided to initiate contempt proceedings.

The apex court on last hearing on Tuesday initiated proceedings against Baba Ramdev also for endorsing the misleading advertisements and summoned him to appear before it along with Balkrishna on April 2.

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KARNATAKA AT BENGALURU (ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)

IN THE MATTER OF M/s UNITED BREWERIES (HOLDINGS) LIMITED (IN LIQN.)

E-AUCTION NOTICE FOR LEASE

Online competitive bids are hereby invited as per the orders of the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka vide order dated 08.11.2023 passed in OLR No.91/2023 for "LEASE" of the below mentioned vacant spaces owned by United Breweries (Holdings) Limited (in liquidation) (for commercial office use on monthly lease rental basis) at UB City, 24, Vittal Mallya Road, Bengaluru-560 001, India. "On as is, where is and whatever there is basis" through e-auction platform (<https://olauction.enividia.com/>) to be conducted by M/s. RailTel Corporation of India Limited. Date and time of Inspection of premises will be on 01.04.2024 & 02.04.2024 from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

Details of vacant premises proposed for leasing, i.e., Reserve price, EMD, Date of E-auction are as under:-

CANBERRA BLOCK

Lot No.	Floor Number	Super Built Area in Sq.Ft	No. of Car Parkings (*)	EMD	Opening Bid/ Start price	Date & time of e-auction
1	Vacant Premises at 3rd floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	on 17.04.2024 from 11.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs
2	Vacant Premises at 4th floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
3	Vacant Premises at 5th floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
4	Vacant Premises at 6th floor	26,919	27	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
5	Vacant Premises at 7th floor	26,919	21	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
6	Vacant Premises at 8th floor	26,919	20	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
7	Vacant Premises at 10th floor	26,919	27	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
8	Vacant Premises at 11th floor east portion	9,360	9	Rs.1,70,000/-	Rs.17,00,000/-	
9	Vacant Premises at 14th floor	21,819	22	Rs.4,00,000/-	Rs.40,00,000/-	
10	Vacant Premises at 15th floor south portion	12,689	17	Rs.2,30,000/-	Rs.23,00,000/-	

UB TOWER

Lot No.	Floor Number	Super Built Area in Sq.Ft	No. of Car Parkings	EMD	Opening Bid/ Start price	Date & time of e-auction
11	Vacant Premises at 12th floor	8,414	41	Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	on 19.04.2024 from 11.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs
12	Vacant Premises at 14th floor	8,414		Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	
13	Vacant Premises at 15th floor	8,414		Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	

*Rent for Car Parkings (per month/car) extra as prevailing/market rate.

The entire e-Auction catalogue containing Terms & Conditions of Lease for the schedules for giving full particulars of events of e-auction, guidelines for online registration and full details of Vacant Spaces of the subject matter for "Lease" are available on website of M/s. RailTel Corporation of India Limited website: <https://olauction.enividia.com/> and can be viewed by clicking on the following URL of <https://olauction.enividia.com/> and the Official Liquidator's website: www.okarnataka.kar.nic.in, Ministry's Website at www.mca.gov.in. The intending bidders may contact Ms. Sujatha, Sr. Manager, Mobile No. 8448288989/ Sri. Gagan, Mobile No. 8448288987 of M/s. RailTel Corporation of India, Bengaluru for doubts / clarifications if any on the e-auction procedure. For details about the Vacant Spaces contact Sri M Venkatarama Reddy, Assistant working in the office of the Official Liquidator on his Mobile. No.9845415102 or to contact the officials of the Official Liquidator, Karnataka during working hours.

Sd/- (C V SAJEEVAN)

OFFICIAL LIQUIDATOR,

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US recognises Arunachal as Indian territory; China repeats its stance

Washington/Beijing: The US recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and strongly opposes any "unilateral attempts" by China to advance its territorial claims across the Line of Actual Control.



US Department of State Principal deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel at a press conference in Washington on Wednesday

Tawang and is expected to ensure better movement of troops along the frontier region.

Speaking at his daily press conference in Washington on Wednesday, State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said, "The United States recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and we strongly oppose

any unilateral attempts to advance territorial claims by incursions or encroachments, military or civilian, across the Line of Actual Control."

India has repeatedly rejected China's territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state is an integral part of the country. New Delhi has also dismissed Beijing's move to assign "invented" names to the area.

India's Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday said it has noted the latest comments made by the spokesperson of the Chinese Defence Ministry "advancing absurd claims" over the territory of Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that the state "was, is and will always be" an integral and inseparable part of India.

Earlier this week, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang said that the southern

part of Xizang is an inherent part of China's territory, and Beijing "never acknowledges and firmly opposes" the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally established by India".

In Beijing, in response to a question by a state-run media outlet on the US backing India on the issue of Arunachal Pradesh, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said, "The China-India boundary has never been delimited. Xizang is China's territory, a basic fact that is undeniable," spokesperson Lin Jian said on Thursday.

"The China-India boundary question is a matter between the two countries and has nothing to do with the US. It is known to all that the US has consistently spared no efforts to provoke and take advantage of other countries' conflicts to serve its selfish geopolitical interests," he said. *PTI*

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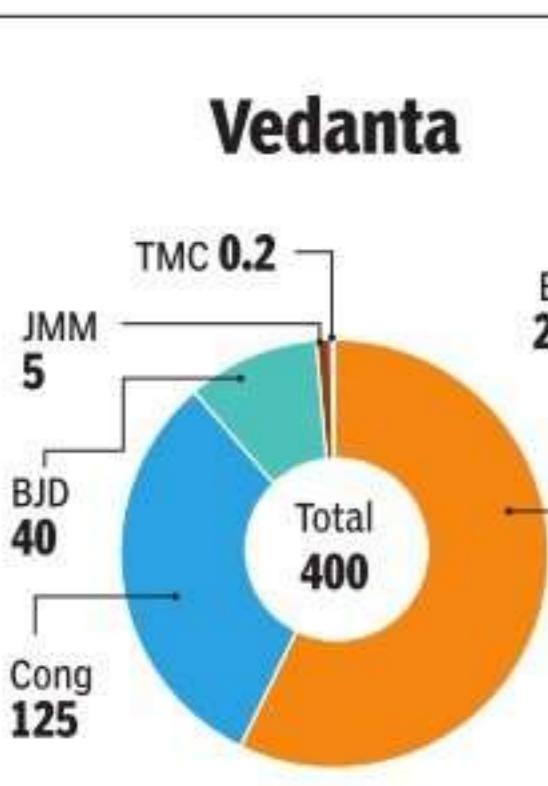
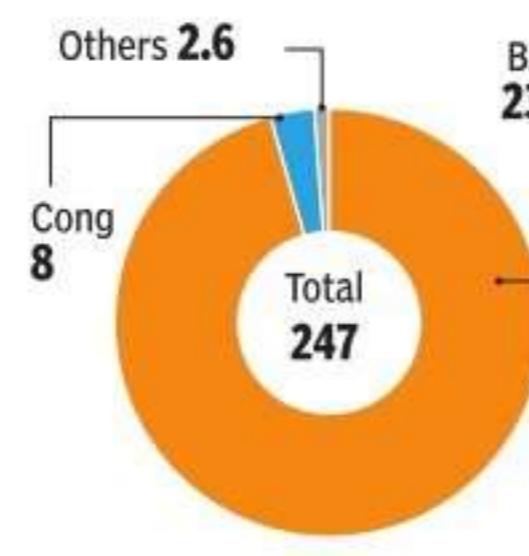
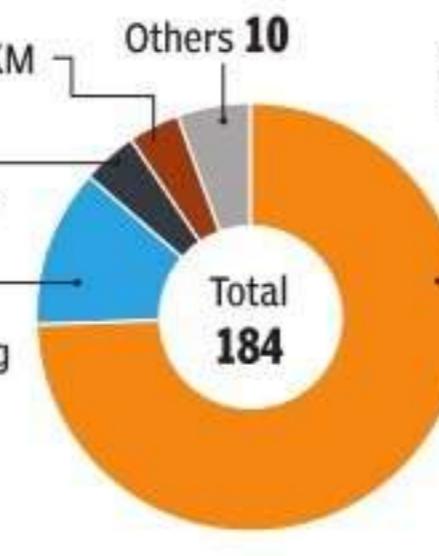
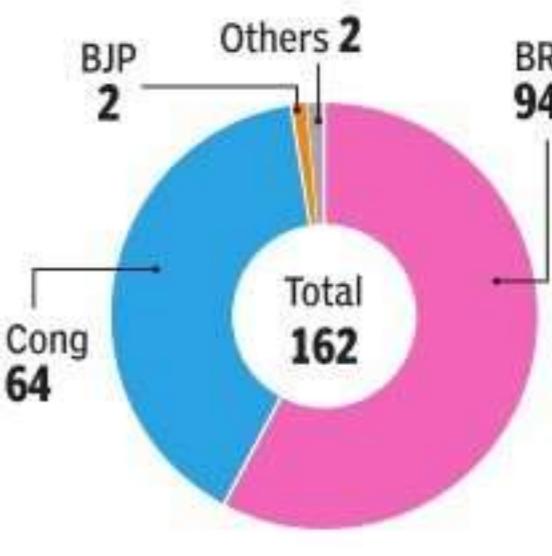
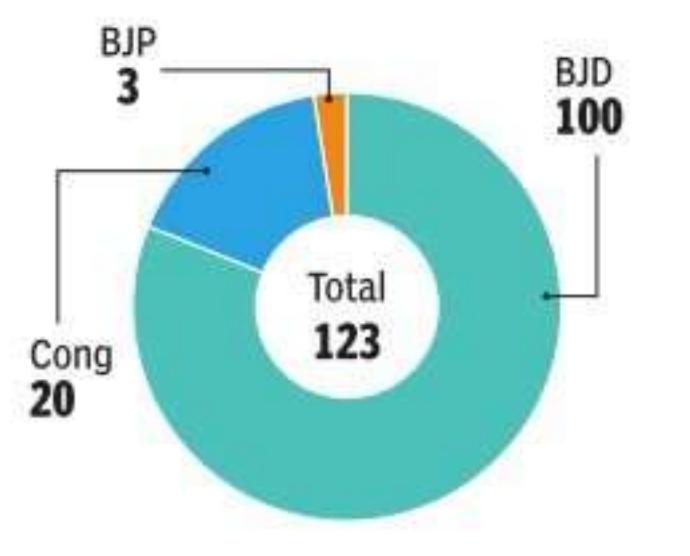
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**HOW BIG
DONORS
BONDED
WITH
PARTIES**

All figures in ₹ Cr

**Bharti Airtel Group****Torrent Group****DLF Group****Yashoda Hospital****Jindal Steel & Power**

Megha-league: Hyd group is top BJP donor with ₹664cr, Qwik Supply next

Construction, Infra, Realty Cos Dominate

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Hyderabad-based construction and infrastructure company Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd emerged as the top donor to BJP, followed by Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited and mining and metals group Vedanta Ltd.

Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited donated electoral bonds worth Rs 584 crore while its group company Western UP Power Transmission Company Ltd chipped in with Rs 80 crore, taking the total from the group to Rs 664 crore.

Qwik Supply Chain Private Ltd gave Rs 375 crore to the party. The little known Mumbai-based firm which, with contributions totalling Rs 410 crore has emerged as the third largest buyer of electoral bonds, appears to be linked to Reliance Industries Limited (RIL). However, RIL has denied any connection.

Among the three directors of Qwik Supply Chain, Tapas Mitra holds directorships in 26



other companies, while Vipul Mehta is associated with eight additional entities. Mitra's directorships include partnership firms like Reliance Eros Productions LLP and corporations such as Jamnagar Kandia Pipeline Company Private Limited, which shares an address with several other Reliance entities in Ahmedabad. Mitra, who identifies himself as the head of accounts at RIL on LinkedIn, oversees accounts and commercial operations across various companies within the group.

Delhi-based telecom company Bharti Airtel Ltd donat-

ed bonds worth Rs 183 crore, while Kolkata-headquartered Madan Lal Ltd gave Rs 175.5 crore and another group firm Keventer Food Park Infra Ltd donated bonds worth Rs 144.5 crore, taking the total from the two companies to Rs 320 crore. Real estate and construction firm DLF Commercial Developers Ltd gave Rs 130 crore, emerging as one of the top donors to the party, while 'Lottery King' Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Ltd donated bonds worth Rs 100 crore. The total amount BJP received from the electoral

bonds according to the details submitted by State Bank of India to the Election Commission totalled Rs 5,594.3 crore. Infina Finance Private Ltd, a company associated with the promoters of Kotak Mahindra Bank, paid Rs 60 crore through electoral bonds. RP Sanjiv Goenka Group and Aditya Birla Group also donated significant amounts.

The list of bond donors was dominated by infrastructure, construction, real estate and telecom, pharmaceuticals and finance companies. Individuals also contributed smaller amounts to the party.

BJP
Top 5 Donors ₹ crore

Megha Engineering	584.0
Qwik Supply Chain	375.0
Vedanta	230.2
Bharti Airtel	183.0
Madanlal	175.5

Infra, mining firms top donors to BJP, and others too

BJP may be the top beneficiary of electoral bond funding from infrastructure and mining companies, but the sector ensured donations across party lines as several decisions affecting these sectors are taken by states. Given the spread of projects across states, regional parties seem to have been major recipients too.

Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering Ltd helped seven parties, led by BJP, which encashed bonds of Rs 579 cr, followed by BRs (Rs 195 cr), DMK (Rs 85 cr), YSRCP (Rs 37 cr), TDP (Rs 28 cr), Congress (Rs 18 cr), and JDS (Rs 5 cr). Interestingly, Congress emerges a bigger beneficiary once Megha's related entity, Western UP Power Transmission Co, is added, having got donations of Rs 110 cr. TNN

Vedanta top Cong funder, at least 3 donors put in ₹100cr+

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Congress received Rs 1,351 crore through electoral bonds from about 350 donors, showed the latest data shared by SBI to EC.

There were at least three donors — Western UP Power Transmission, Vedanta and MKJ Group — who had donated more than Rs 100 crore each to Congress, while another 25 had donated in double-digit crore rupees.

Western UP Power Transmission had donated Rs 110 crore, while its sister concern Megha Engineering, one of the biggest electoral bond donors, had paid another Rs 18 crore to Congress. Mining and minerals major Vedanta had paid Rs 125 crore, the data showed.

Kolkata-based MKJ Group, which runs one of the biggest FMCG chains in eastern India under the 'Keventer' brand name, had donated nearly Rs 120 crore to Congress through several companies and in multiple tranches.

Future Gaming & Hotel Services, a leading lottery operator, which had emerged as the largest bond buyer, paid Rs 50 crore to the party.

Other notable large donors to Congress were Hyderabad-based Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital that had paid Rs 64 crore, Avese Trading Fi-



Vedanta, a mining and minerals major, paid Congress Rs 125cr. Western UP Power Transmission paid Congress Rs 110cr, while its sister concern Megha paid another Rs 18cr. MKJ Group donated nearly Rs 120cr via several firms and in multiple tranches

Cong

Top 5 Donors	₹ crore
Vedanta Ltd	125
MKJ Enterprises +	120
Western UP Power Transmission	110
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	64
Avese Trading Finance	53

Gujarat-headquartered Nirma Group paid Rs 17 crore to Congress through Nirma and Nuovo Vistas.

Other top donors included BK Properties and Jindal Steel & Power, each of which had paid Rs 20 crore.

Torrent Power, another Gujarat-based business house, paid Rs 17 crore while Dr Reddy's Lab, the Hyderabad-based pharma major, had paid Rs 15 crore. Divis Labs, another south-based pharma major, paid Rs 5 crore.

Bharti Infratel, belonging to telecoms major Bharti Group, paid Rs 8 crore, while IFB Agro and Interglobe Aviation (that runs Indigo Airlines) each paid Rs 5 crore to Congress.

Cos gave across the board, no clear link to enforcement cases

Pradeep.Thakur@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Is there a link between companies donating to parties in office in states or the Centre with any enforcement cases initiated by the govt concerned? Well, going by donations received through electoral bonds by leading political parties, business houses were donating across the political spectrum, irrespective of cases against them.

For instance, Pawan Munjal's Hero Motocorp's P K Munjal and his company under Prevention of Money Laundering Act on Aug 1, 2023 at 12 locations in Delhi and Gurugram. The case pertained to Munjal, his company and his employees for allegedly smuggling Rs 54 crore in foreign currency out of the country between 2014 and 2019 which "was ultimately used for personal expenses of P K Munjal".

ED's investigation is still in progress although Munjal has taken a stay from court on the predicate offence booked earlier by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence. Predicate offence is the basis for ED to register its money laundering case.

Top electoral bond donor Future Gaming and Hotel Services of lottery king Santia-

55% of TDP's EB earnings of 5 years came this Jan alone

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Visakhapatnam: Telugu Desam, the main opposition party in Andhra, received Rs 80 crore during April 2019-Sept 2023. But from Oct 2023 to Feb this year, the party received about Rs 130 crore in the form of electoral bonds.

As 2024 dawned, the political funding landscape via the bonds' route shifted dramatically with TDP receiving Rs 118 crore in Jan alone, amounting to 55% of its total funding of Rs 212 crore between April 2019-Feb 2024. The highest contributor was Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd, which purchased EBs worth Rs 40 crore. Megha Engineering was second highest with Rs 28 crore.

Western UP Power Transmission Company Ltd (Rs 20 crore), Natco Pharma Ltd (Rs 14 crore), Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd (Rs 13 crore) and Bharat Biotech International Limited (Rs 10 crore) are the other top purchasers. Sri Chaitanya Students' Facility Management, an educational institution, donated Rs 5 crore.

Loss-making Kolkata co Avees bought ₹112 crore EBs

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: It's a company with no website. Its registered office is in a city street — Waterloo Street — known for hosting hundreds of companies who share the same registered office address. But Avees Trading and Finance Pvt Ltd bought EBs worth Rs 112.5 crore, with Congress (Rs 53 crore) and Trinamool (Rs 45.5 crore) being the main beneficiaries. Avees gave Rs 1 crore to BJP but Rs 10 crore to AAP BJD, which got Rs 3 crore, is the other recipient.

Avees Trading had a financial loss of Rs 51.7 crore in 2019-20, however, that year it bought EBs worth Rs 24 crore. In 2022-23, Avees bought EBs worth Rs 13 crore, and made a loss of Rs 21.9 crore. Avees has three directors, Bhal Chandra Khaitan, Ramesh Kumar Saroogi and Mahesh Kumar Dhankar. Khaitan was on the board of several steel companies. Saroogi was closely associated with a leading chamber in the city.

DEEP POCKETS
electoral bonds to three parties. She donated Rs 4 crore to BJP and Rs 1 crore each to Congress and Janata Dal (Secular).

Several individual donors also bought electoral bonds and gave them to a wide spectrum of political parties.

Megha, Yashoda hosp, pharma cos kept BRS in good health

U.Sudhakarreddy
@timesgroup.com

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtri Samiti (BRS), which was in govt in Telangana till Dec 2023, received a majority of electoral bond donations from irrigation contractors involved in the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project, pharmaceutical companies facing pollution notices, and real estate companies and textile companies that were allotted large land parcels.

Out of the Rs 1,322 crore that it received, Kaleshwaram contractor Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL) donated Rs 195 crore. Kaleshwaram is touted to be the world's biggest lift irrigation project with investments of over Rs 1 lakh crore. It is also mired in controversy with the new Congress govt finding numerous defects in its construction.

The second-biggest donor to BRS via electoral bonds is Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital, with Rs 94 crore. Yashoda made the most donations in Oct 2023, just before the assembly elections in Telangana.

Interestingly, of the Rs 162 crore donated via electoral bonds, it gave Rs 65 crore to Congress as well.

Chennai Green Woods Company of Ramky Group is the third-biggest donor to BRS. Ramky Group is in-

volved in real estate and handles the waste management project at Jawaharnagar, Hyderabad. Chennai Green Woods has donated Rs 50 crore to BRS.

Dr Reddy's Lab and Hetero Drugs donated Rs 32 crore and Rs 30 crore each. Hetero is owned by BRS Rajya Sabha MP B Pardhasaradhi Reddy. Most pharmaceutical companies come

BRS

Top 5 Donors	₹ crore
Megha Engineering	195.0
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	94.0
Chennai Green Woods	50.0
Dr Reddy's Laboratories	32.0
Hetero Drugs	30.0

under the regulatory framework of drug control administration and pollution control boards at both state and central levels.

IRB MP Expressway Ltd, a sister concern of IRB Golconda Expressway Ltd, donated Rs 25 crore to BRS. Interestingly, IRB Golconda Expressway Ltd has come under scrutiny for its contract tolling, operation, maintenance and transfer (TOT) contract to manage the Outer Ring Road around Hyderabad. Chief minister A Revanth Reddy, when he was opposition leader, had alleged that the BRS govt

had given IRB the contract for a mere Rs 7,388 crore for a project worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore.

Among others, Mumbai-based company L7 HiTech Pvt Ltd donated electoral bonds worth Rs 22 crore to BRS while HES Infra Ltd, another irrigation contractor, donated Rs 20 crore.

Kitek Group (Kitek Childrenswear and Kitek Garments) donated Rs 25 crore to BRS. The company was allotted 187 acres in Warangal Kakinada Apparel Park by BRS when it was in government.

Pharmaceutical companies like Natco Pharma, MSNLab and Aurobindo, facing notices from the pollution control board, also made significant donations to BRS.

Other pharmaceutical companies facing cases in the National Green Tribunal and under scrutiny of the state pollution control board, such as Hindys Lab Pvt Ltd, Honour Lab Ltd, and Hazelab Lab, also donated to BRS.

Real estate and construction companies such as Rajapushpa, Tellapur Techno City, My Home, Raheja Corporation, Aparna Farms and Estates, NSL Group, Sandhya Constructors and Estates, Vasavi Avenues, and Vertex Developers donated to BRS. All these companies have constructed apartments, villas and commercial buildings in Hyderabad.

The second-biggest donor to BRS via electoral bonds is Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital, with Rs 94 crore. Yashoda made the most donations in Oct 2023, just before the assembly elections in Telangana.

Interestingly, of the Rs 162 crore donated via electoral bonds, it gave Rs 65 crore to Congress as well.

Chennai Green Woods Company of Ramky Group is the third-biggest donor to BRS. Ramky Group is in-

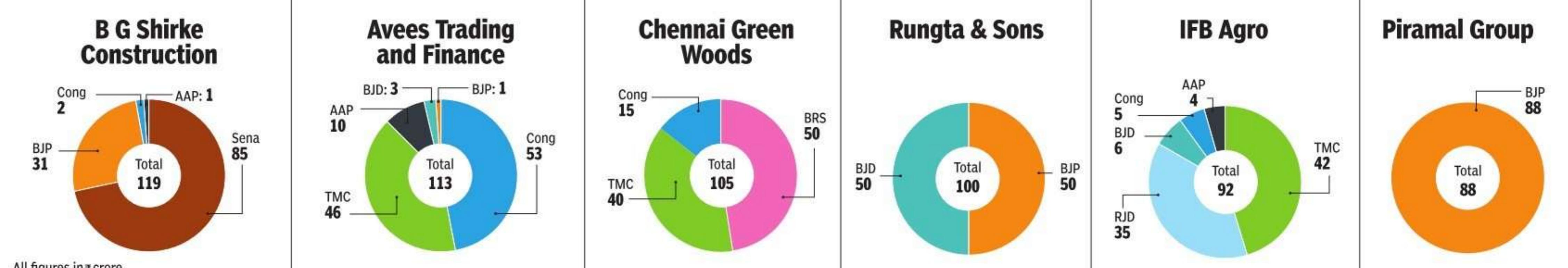
Lottery banned in AP but lottery king made YSRCP rich

UmaMaheswara.Rao
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Visakhapatnam: The company Future Gaming and Hotel Services has emerged as the key figure in electoral bond financing in Andhra Pradesh with its purchase of electoral bonds worth Rs 154 crore in favour of YSRCP between April 2019 and Feb 2024. Future Gaming, with a total contribution of Rs 1,368 crore, is also the biggest purchaser of bonds in the country.

BUMPER DRAW

On BOND Street



Cos with hand in mining, thermal power are major donors to JMM

Dhritiman Ray &
ASRP Mukesh | TNN

Ranchi: The main donors to governing Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) are companies with mining interests and thermal power plants in the state between 2021 and 2023, the latest EC data shows.

Data published by EC earlier, on March 14, had revealed JMM had got Rs 13.5 crore in donations through EBs between 2021 and 2023. JMM also voluntarily disclosed in its contribution report to EC in 2021 that it had received Rs 1 crore from Hindalco Ltd in FY 2019-20. However, data uploaded by EC based on EB information shared by SBI has no bond being bought by Hindalco Ltd; this could be because the bond may have been bought prior to April 12, 2019, a period for which SC didn't seek details.

According to the latest EC revelation, Vedanta Ltd, which operates an electro-steel plant in Bokaro, donated Rs 5 crore through five bonds of Rs 1 crore each to the party last July.

Thriveni Sainik Mining Pvt Ltd, a private mines developer and operator working with NTPC's coal projects in Hazaribag's Barkagaon block, donated Rs 3 crore to JMM in Oct last year through three bonds of Rs 1 crore each which were redeemed by the party days later. Bihar-based Puja Coal Pvt Ltd donated Rs 2 crore, also in Oct 2023, through two bonds.

Businessman Shree Chand Sarangi donated Rs 75 lakh. So far, the total amount JMM got via EBs is Rs 10.75 crore from donors who could be matched.

WUPPTCL
powered AP
outfit Jana Sena
with ₹9crore

Srikanth.Aluri@timesgroup.com

Vijayawada: Jana Sena, led by actor-turned-politician Pawan Kalyan, received Rs 24.3 crore from electoral bonds. Most of the funding to Jana Sena was done in recent months.

Jana Sena is the youngest among prominent political parties in Andhra Pradesh. Founded just before the 2014 elections, Jana Sena contested polls five years later in 2019. It managed to win just one assembly seat and is now in alliance with TDP and BJP.

Western UP Power Transmission Company Ltd (WUPPTCL) is the top donor to Jana Sena. It purchased bonds worth Rs 9 crore. Pharma major Natco Pharma and Transways Exim Pvt Ltd, a Kolkata-based distillery which has operations in Hyderabad too, donated Rs 5 crore each. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL), the Hyderabad-based engineering company which figures among the top donors.

MEIL was the second biggest donor to parties through EBs from April 2019 to Feb 2024 after Future Gaming.

Besides Rs 10 crore from MEIL, JD(U) had earlier received 1 crore from Shree Cement Limited, Ajmer (Rajasthan) on April 16, 2019, and Rs 1 crore from Bharti Infratel Ltd on April 26, 2019.

In March 2022, the company got the contract to construct the 230-km Darbhanga Expressway of the NHAI by virtue of being the lowest bidder. This four-

TMC	
Top 5 Donors	₹ crore
Future Gaming And Hotel Services	542.0
Haldia Energy	281.0
Dhariwal Infrastructure	90.0
MKJ Enterprises	45.9
Avees Trading & Finance	45.5

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: Nearly 60% of the Rs 1,592 Cr kitty between April 2019 and Jan 2024 by way of electoral bonds (EBs) was contributed by 'lottery king' Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services and Kolkata-based RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group (RPSG) companies.

According to EB data submitted by SBI and uploaded by EC on Thursday, Trinamool received 224 contributions. A bulk of these came after the party won the 2021 assembly elections. Trinamool Congress did not immediate-

ly react to the developments. Future Gaming gave Rs 524 crore while four RPSG companies — Haldia Energy, Dhariwal Infrastructure, Crescent Power and PCBL — together contributed Rs 392 crore to Trinamool coffers. The third highest contribution as a group came from Kolkata-based Keventer — Rs 65 crore through group companies Keventer Food Parks and

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Besides Trinamool, Future Gaming also made hefty contributions to DMK (Rs 502 crore) and BJP (Rs 100 crore). Haldia Energy also donated Rs 81 crore to BJP and Rs 15 crore to Congress.

Barring Future Gaming and Haldia Energy, individual contributions to Trinamool did not cross the Rs 100-crore mark. The third highest contributor was Dhariwal Infrastructure Limited with Rs 90 crore while Kolkata-based IFB Agro Industries donated Rs 42 crore, Chennai Green Woods Private Limited and PCBL contributed Rs 40 crore each.

Four of the party's top 10 contributors belong to the RPSG stable. The highest contributor, Santiago Martin, holds significant sway over the lottery scene in Bengal and is the sole distributor of Dear Lottery in the state.

Martin, according to sources, is under the radar of income tax officials in Bengal. He did not appear before I-T officials when summoned but sent his representative to meet them. In 2017, I-T officials conducted searches at his residences in New Alipore and Deshapriya Park.

There are also companies with registered offices in Bengal that have not made contributions to Trinamool. These include Essel Mining and Runtha Sons. As a group, Runtha Sons has bought EBs worth Rs 100 crore, but none of these were deposited in Trinamool's account.

Lottery king's firm was TMC's jackpot, RPSG Grp helped too

The Two Made Up 60% Of ₹1,592Cr Kitty

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BJD mined ₹340 crore from Aditya Birla Group, Jindal co

Ashok Pradhan | TNN

BJD	
Top 5 Donors	₹ crore
Essel Mining And Industries	174.5
Jindal Steel And Power	100.0
Utkal Alumina International	70.0
Rungta Sons	50.0
SN Mohanty	45.0

of Rs 8,000 crore, the foundation stone of which was laid by the Odisha CM last Dec.

Grasim Industries and Ultra Tech together donated more than Rs 20 crore.

Naveen Jindal-led Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL), which has purchased Rs 123 crore worth of EBs for various parties, donated around Rs 100 crore to BJD alone.

40% of bond funds came to JD(S) when it was in office

Sandeep.Moudgal

@timesgroup.com

Bhubaneswar: Four Aditya Birla Group companies donated Rs 240 crore through EBs to Naveen Patnaik-led BJD in Odisha, data revealed. BJD received a total of Rs 944 crore in donations via bonds, which was revealed earlier this month.

While the Mumbai-headquartered group's Essel Mining and Industries Ltd donated more than Rs 170 crore to BJD, Utkal Alumina International Ltd (UALI) gave close to Rs 70 crore, among the top donors. UALI has a 2.12 MTPA alumina refinery in Rayagada district and captive bauxite mines of 8 MTPA and a 90MW captive power plant. It is planning a second refinery in Rayagada district with an investment

of Rs 8,000 crore, the foundation stone of which was laid by the Odisha CM last Dec.

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2 mths before it bagged project in Bihar, Megha gave JD(U) ₹10cr

Vishwa.Mohan

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JD(U)	
Top 3 Donors	₹ crore
Megha Engineering	10
Bharti Infratil	1
Shree Cement	1

lane access-controlled highway will be the first expressway in the state.

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Besides Rs 10 crore from MEIL, JD(U) had earlier received 1 crore from Shree Cement Limited, Ajmer (Rajasthan) on April 16, 2019, and Rs 1 crore from Bharti Infratil Ltd on April 26, 2019.

In its submission to EC in May 2019, JD(U) disclosed getting Rs 2 crore from two

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However, there is a mismatch in what the party claimed in its submission to Election Commission of India in May 2019 and the redemption/purchase information released on Thursday. There are no details of the 'anonymous' donors in Thursday's data and, besides, it turns out that MEIL had, in fact, purchased the bonds only in Jan 2022.

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Housing major contributed over half of Sena's ₹152cr EB receipts

VijayV.Singh@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: BG Shirke Construction Technology Pvt Ltd (BGPTCL) is the top donor to Shiv Sena, having contributed more than half the amount of Rs 152.4 crore received by the party through electoral bonds between April 2019 and Jan 2024. The bulk of the company's donations were made in the last two years following the split in Sena, according to data from EC.

The company, a major player in the housing sector, had bought bonds of Rs 118.5 crore, of which Rs 85 crore was donated to Shiv Sena and Rs 30 crore to BJP in 2023-24. By this time, the account was being handled by the Sena under Eknath Shinde. Most of the bonds were

encashed by the party within a short period after the company purchased them. For instance, on Jan 10, 2024, the firm purchased bonds worth Rs 25 crore and donated it to the party. Sena had encashed the bonds on Jan 15, 2024. Last year, BG Shirke Construction Technology had received a govt contract worth

Rs 4,652 crore to build 20,448 flats under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in the state.

Another big donor to Sena is Qwik Supply Chain, which had purchased bonds worth Rs 25 crore for the party in Jan 2022. Among other companies who purchased electoral bonds and donated to Sena are PRL Developers (Rs 5 crore), Dineshchandra R Agrawal Infracon (Rs 3 crore), Genext Hardware Parks (Rs 3 crore), and Ultra Tech Cement (Rs 3 crore) and Sula Vineyards (Rs 0.3 crore).

In all, Sena had received Rs 227 crore through electoral bonds since the inception of the scheme. Bonds worth approximately Rs 70 crore were donated in 2018 and up to April 2019 while the party was undivided and under the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray. State NCP (S) president

Pravallika Marpaikwar & Vijay V Singh | TNN

Qwik Supply top donor to NCP of Pawar Sr

Jayant Patil on Thursday said his party received donations worth Rs 50.51 crore from bonds. However, EC has pegged the total at Rs 65.6 crore. Patil said all transactions took place when NCP was united, and he would raise the discrepancy in funds with EC. State NCP president Sunil Tatwade said his party has no EB funds.

You know who got what. Here's the chronology



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If facts are inconvenient, well, damn those who live and work with facts

-DAVID BRIN

Chennai Super King

That SC has to remind Ravi to follow the Constitution, underlines how much the guv's office needs reining in

PL 2024 is here and for cricket fans there's just one CSK. For others, it's possible that TN guv RN Ravi is the alternate Chennai Super King. It's unusual for Supreme Court to express its frustration at the conduct of a titular head of a state. But that's exactly what happened yesterday. India's attorney-general was told that Ravi is defying SC.

Backstory | K Ponnudiy, a minister in DMK govt, had been convicted by HC in a disproportionate assets case and sentenced to three years in jail. It disqualified him from being a member of the state assembly. Later SC suspended both his conviction and sentence. This was followed by TN CM Stalin recommending that Ponnudiy be reinstated as minister.

What's a suspension? | Ravi declined to act on the CM's recommendation. He claimed that SC's suspension of the conviction was not the same as setting it aside.

Therefore, reinstating the minister was against "constitutional morality".

Inexplicable interpretations | This interpretation led to a sharp response at SC. One of the features of Ravi's tenure as TN's guv has been his left-field interpretations of the Constitution. One of which was that if a guv withholds assent to a bill passed by the legislature, it means the bill is dead. It's another way of saying that the legislature's will is subordinate to that of the titular head of the state. That may have been the case during the British Raj. But, as SC has emphasised repeatedly, the guv in the Constitution's scheme of things is just a titular head. Yesterday, SC observed that the guv can only counsel.

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Consultations wanted | Sarkaria Commission, which examined the balance of power in a federal setup, recommended that guvs be appointed in consultation with CMs. On Mar 15, 2023, GOI informed Rajya Sabha that it's of the view that the practice of consultation with a CM may be followed "as a matter of convention". A wise view that needs to be acted upon.

Do A Logic Check

SC's right to stay the rollout of Centre's fact-check unit.

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Within a day of GOI notifying its fact-check unit under PIB, Supreme Court has stayed its rollout. Court said, "challenges to the rule involve serious constitutional questions." It asked Centre to wait till the case in Bombay HC – against GOI's move to set up such a fact-check unit – is concluded. Operational guidelines for the fact-check unit, enabled by amendments to rules for intermediaries, are to identify fake and false content, and misinformation.

The case | End Jan, a two-judge bench of Bombay HC delivered a split verdict, necessitating a referee judge, who's likely to hear the matter by mid-April. Earlier in March, in a 2:1 order, HC gave its go-ahead to GOI to notify the rules, which SC has now stayed.

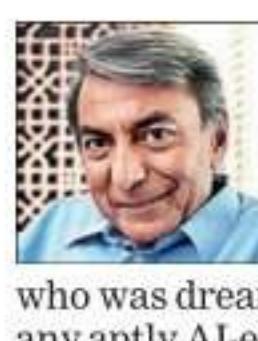
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Robots 'R' Us

Thanks to AI, the distinction between man and machine is becoming increasingly blurred

Jug Suraiya

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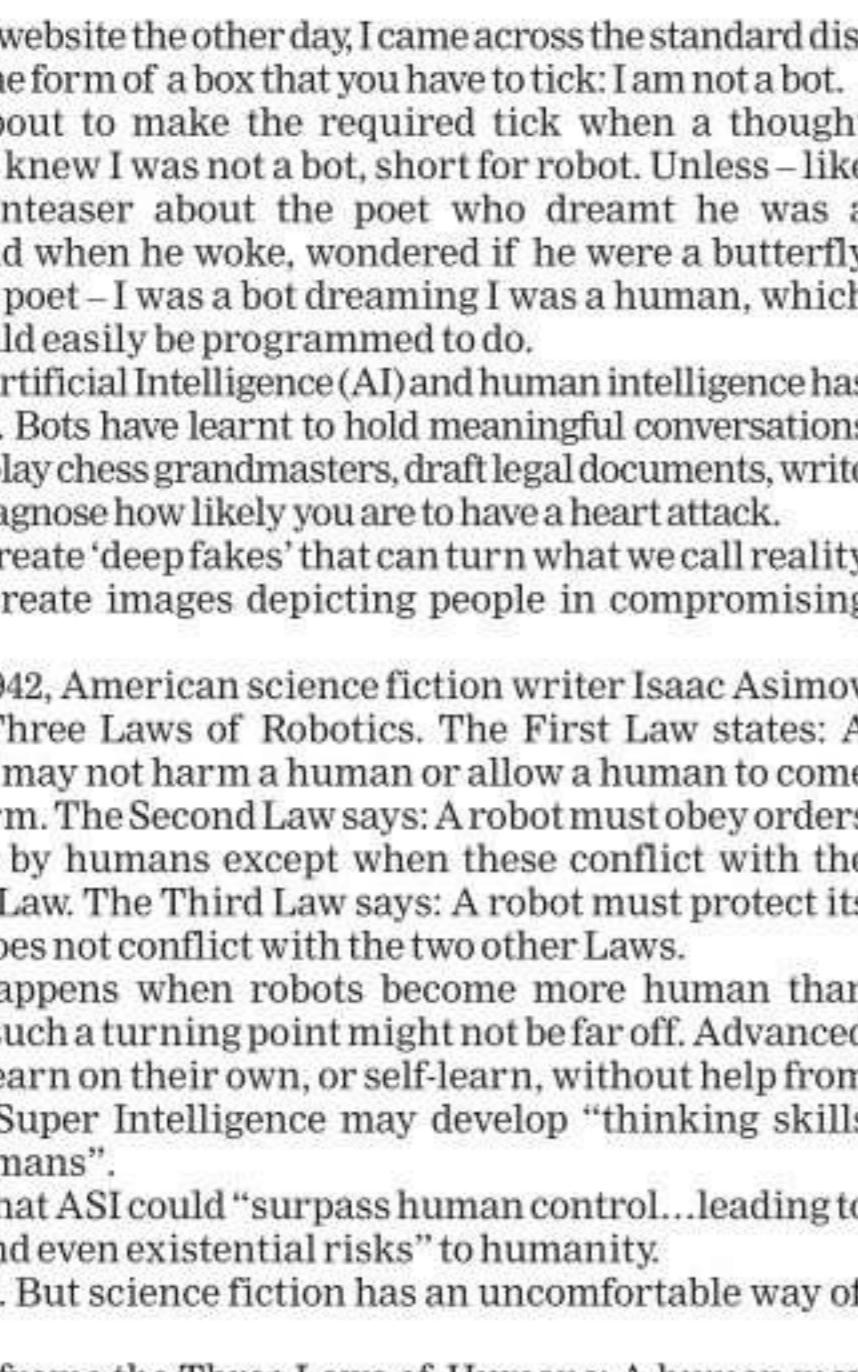
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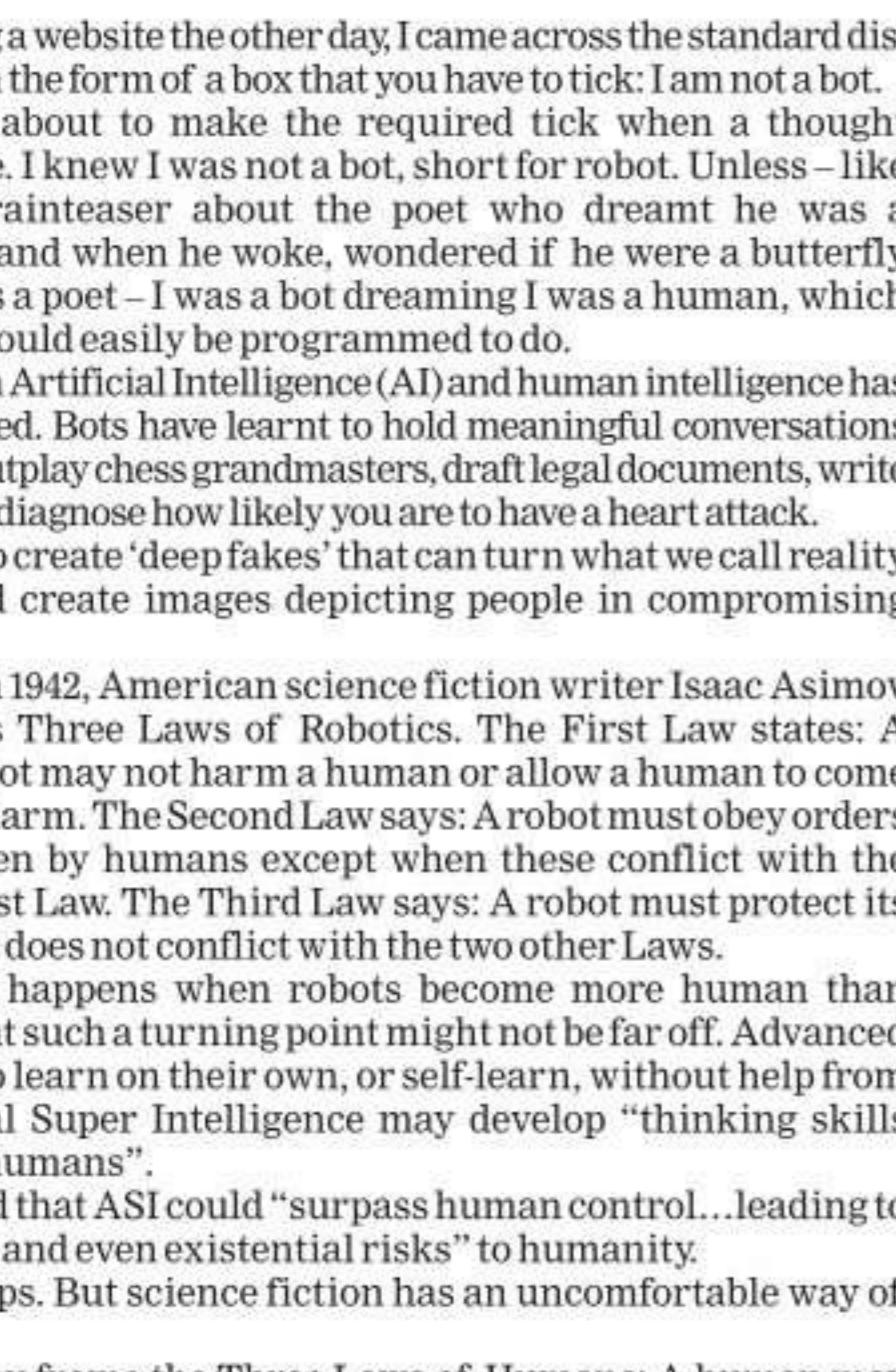
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Electoral Or Marital, A Bond Is A Bond

Businesses depend on govt not only for clearances but also to build targeted infra that can help them be globally competitive. When businesses seek an alpha male provider, they have to cough up the dowry

Narendar Pani



The stories that electoral bonds tell us are reminders that liberalisation has not altered the financial relationship between political parties and the corporate sector as much as was expected.

In the licensing era, it was taken for granted that corporate houses had to fund parties that might come to power if they hoped to remain in business. It was assumed that once the licence raj was over, this compulsion would disappear. Then, corporate support for political parties would be primarily a matter of ideology and personal preference.

More than three decades after liberalisation, there is little to suggest that this has happened.

A knee-jerk reaction to this reality is to assume that the controls have not really disappeared. Industries still require several clearances from govt, which could be weaponised. Even policies as well-intentioned as environmental clearances could reflect favour when they are given to projects that clearly destroy the environment, or disfavour when they are deliberately delayed.

But this is not the entire story. There are aspects of the liberalised economy that require a favourable govt.

Liberalisation in India has largely taken place in an environment of globalisation. The stock market has been boosted by foreign institutional investment. This investment has also played a role in the market value of individual companies, and hence their ability to raise capital. At the same time, companies have sought foreign direct investment. Govt and companies have sought to benefit from the hypermobility of capital that drives globalisation.

This ability of corporate houses to attract capital is enhanced when they are a part of global supply chains. These supply chains operate within circuits that link command-and-control centres with resource-generating centres.

While there is the odd circuit where India can be the location of a command-and-control centre, notably the cricket circuit, most Indian industries are in the position of resource providers. The resources that are provided can range from basic raw materials to highly skilled technical manpower.

Providing resources to global supply chains, especially technical services, can be a very competitive business. Many of these companies need to present an image of functioning at the higher end of the global

business environment. This requires infra that is comparable to what is available in the West.

In a situation of resource constraints, the focus of most corporates is on infra that is relevant to them, especially when they woo foreign investors. Emphasis is thus on all that a foreign visitor would see, from airports to expressways to the campuses of individual firms.

Creating this infra requires govt initiatives in multiple areas. While there has been an increase in private investment in infra projects after liberalisation, govt remains a major investor in this domain.



More than financial investment, it is govt alone that can take over land for infra development.

Industries would like to influence which infra projects are prioritised. Individual houses would like infra that benefits their operations, whether it is in the midst of an economically established area in a city or a relatively remote production centre. They may even hope to get some direct benefit from govt ability to acquire land.

The influence that corporate houses seek extends beyond direct material benefits. Global investment decisions have a prominent place for cities in which economic activities are to be located. Cities can gain an economic image of their own. The term Bangalore was once used to describe a worker's job being exported out of the West. Corporate houses would like to develop positive images of the cities they are associated with.

This is a task that cannot be done without govt resources. Corporate houses have tried, with varying degrees of success, to use public-private partnerships to influence how Indian cities come to be seen globally.

In their search for tangible, and less tangible, benefits from govt, corporate houses would prefer political parties that they believe are strong enough to take the decisions they would like. Some of these decisions, like creating global infra in a country that is still not doing very well on social indicators, would require highly centralised govt that would brook little dissidence. This lends itself to a preference for govt led by strongmen or similarly inclined women.

Corporate preference for parties that promise strong centralised govt is a double-edged sword. While it works very well for corporate houses when it is used in their favour, the danger remains that it can quite easily be turned against them. An all-powerful govt that cannot be questioned would be tempted to intervene in competition between firms. It may also seek to curtail the autonomy of firms, maybe going so far as to influence how companies carry out their corporate social responsibility.

The nature of the post-liberalisation economy has thus thrown corporate houses and political parties into a traditional Indian marriage where divorce is not an option even when there is considerable pain. As in these marriages there is a corporate preference for an alpha male political leadership even if that means paying out regular tranches of dowry whenever an election comes along.

Bengaluru Water Is Fetched From Far, Crisis Isn't Far-Fetched

It's a stark World Water Day warning. A city that drinks water from distant districts while killing its own water sources. Authorities have been asleep at the wheel and citizenry hasn't jolted them awake

Chethan.Kumar@timesgroup.com



Be it Moon or Mars, a key finding exploring humans always hope to make is evidence that water exists there. For water could tell if life is possible! But given that humans aren't mass-migrating to another celestial body anytime soon, we should mark World Water Day by starting to credibly conserve what water is the only planet known to sustain life in our solar system has. Lest we want to go the Bengaluru way.

For a city that fetches most of its drinking water from faraway districts, Bengaluru should be more protective of its life-drink. Instead, it's busy killing its lakes, letting rainwater into drains, and polluting-depleting its groundwater.

Cape Town, recalled | As a result, India's Silicon Valley, a rapidly growing metropolis, home to nearly 14



TIMES GLOBAL

THE TIMES OF INDIA, HYDERABAD | FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

THE DEBT WE OWE
TO THE PLAY OF
IMAGINATION IS
INCALCULABLE
— CARL JUNG



MEGAN FOX REVEALS ALL HER PLASTIC SURGERIES: 'I GOT BIGGEST BOOBS I COULD AND NOW I WANT A BUM LIKE A CIRCUS FREAK'

ITALY PM GIORGIA MELONI IS SEEKING \$100K IN DAMAGES FROM A FATHER-SON DUO FOR CREATING DEEPFAKE PORN VIDEOS OF HER

US sues Apple, accusing it of maintaining iPhone monopoly

Tech Co Joins Rivals Sued By US Regulators, Including Google, Meta & Amazon

Washington: The US department of justice and 15 states on Thursday sued Apple as the government cracks down on Big Tech, alleging the iPhone maker monopolised the smartphone market, hurt smaller rivals and drove up prices. Apple joins competitors sued by regulators, including Alphabet's Google, Meta Platforms and Amazon.com across the administrations of both former President Trump and President Biden. "Consumers should not have to pay higher prices because companies violate the antitrust laws," attorney general Merrick Garland said. "If left unchallenged, Apple will only continue to strengthen its smartphone monopoly."

The justice department said that Apple charges as much as \$1,599 for an iPhone and makes larger profits than any others in the industry. Officials also said that Apple charges various business partners — from software developers to credit card companies and even its rivals such as Google — behind the scenes in ways that ultimately raise prices for consumers and drive up Apple's profits.

Dating back to its time as a



Apple on Tuesday opened a new retail store in Shanghai

Apple, Meta, Google to face probes under EU digital law, says report

Antitrust regulators are expected to investigate Apple, Meta Platforms and Alphabet's Google, using powers under the Digital Markets Act, people with direct knowledge of the matter said. The European Commission will likely announce the investigations in coming days and issue decisions before EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager's term ends in Nov, they said. REUTERS

marginal player in the personal computer market, Apple's business model has long been based on charging users a premium for technology products where Apple dictates nearly all of the details of how the device works and can be used. The justice department seeks to unwind that business model by forcing Apple, which has a market value of \$2.7 trillion, to offer users more choices around how apps can tap into the hardware that Apple designs. Apple shares were trading 3.6% lower.

Apple denied the allega-

some form of break-up or reduction of the size of Apple was a possibility when they noted "structural relief is also a form of equitable relief".

The 88-page lawsuit, filed in US federal court in Newark, New Jersey, said it was focused on "freeing smartphone markets from Apple's anticompetitive and exclusionary conduct and restoring competition to lower smartphone prices for consumers, reducing fees for developers, and preserving innovation for the future."

In the lawsuit, the US accused Apple of making its products worse for consumers to block competitors and cited five examples where Apple used mechanisms to suppress technologies that would have increased competition among smartphones: so-called "super apps", cloud stream game apps, messaging apps, smartwatches and digital wallets. For example, the US alleges Apple made it more difficult for competing messaging apps and smartwatches to work smoothly on its phones. They also allege that Apple's app store policies around streaming services for games have hurt competition. REUTERS

tions made by the government. "This lawsuit threatens who we are and the principles that set Apple products apart in fiercely competitive markets. If successful, it would hinder our ability to create the kind of technology people expect from Apple — where hardware, software, and services intersect."

The justice department, which was also joined by the District of Columbia in the lawsuit, is seeking changes at Apple. An official said "the remedy has to be tailored to the harm that we are required to prove at trial" and suggested

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CAREER LADDER FOR WOMEN

I spent years reading books on leadership, but practice is key

Padma Sundaram

True leadership goes beyond titles and emphasises how one responds to situations, demonstrating empathy towards both the team and the situation itself. To navigate the complex times we live in, we need to be open-minded, acknowledge our mistakes and move forward intentionally as a leader.

Speaking from my journey, I've spent years reading books on leadership, all in the pursuit of becoming a better version of myself and I firmly believe that it's all in the practice. I want to share a few traits that have helped me thrive in this dynamic world.

► **Being present in the moment** | Grounding myself in the present and practising mindfulness has helped me unlock clarity and calmness, which leads to effective decision-making.

► **Being curious and deliberate** | Cultivating a curious mindset and my commitment to continuous learning unfold the foresight I need as a leader to drive innovation and growth.

► **Non-judgmental acceptance** | I have observed that once I calmly acknowledge and accept a situation and empathise with my team, it helps me respond better.

► **Being self-aware is key to authentic leadership** | When I started getting more in touch with myself, I began connecting with people around me better, fostering trust and authenticity within my team.

By adopting these traits, I gained better control over my emotions, leading to more clarity in my thoughts, which helped me act more intentionally as a leader.

FOSTERING AN AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENT

To drive success within a team, I believe in fostering an environment where individuals have the freedom to be themselves. Contrary to the popular belief that freedom inhibits accountability, it actually encourages value creation. I trust and empower my team members with all the opportunities they need to set them up for success. I always keep in mind the strengths and weaknesses of my team members while assigning them tasks. This helps them be more productive by utilising their strengths, while also giving them the opportunity to learn and grow by working on their weaknesses. As a result, they are able to enjoy their work and add more value, ultimately benefiting the organisation as a whole.

Fostering a conducive environment that promotes authenticity and collaborative growth is a collective responsibility of both the leaders as well as the team members, keeping in mind that each individual brings unique skills to the table.

Padma Sundaram is VP of engineering and R&D services (ERS) at HCLTech



PATENT PATHFINDERS

Turning Work into Wonders

In the ever-changing world of innovation, many see the journey to becoming an ideator, inventor as a challenging goal. At SAP Labs India, innovation is an integral part of our everyday work.

How to think of patents | I've been with SAP since 2000, dedicated to shaping the next generation of businesses through innovation. It wasn't until 2018 I embarked on the journey of filing my first patent. Reflecting on my tenure predominantly on the engineering side, the realisation dawned upon me: Why hadn't I taken this step earlier? The tendency to become absorbed in day-to-day tasks often leads us to overlook the patent-worthiness of our efforts. However, I've come to recognise that even routine problem-solving can yield novel ideas deserving of protection. Currently, my name is associated with an impressive count of 22 filed patents.

Recent effort | One of the recent patenting journeys emerged from a common organisational challenge – efficiently managing an extensive volume of content and accessing it with precision, timing, and context. Collaborating with my team and leveraging generative AI

Our focus is on nurturing a collaborative approach to innovation, fostering an environment where every individual's contribution is valued. We envision a future where the exchange of ideas is seamless, and the process of turning these ideas into patented innovations becomes an integral part of our organisational ethos...I believe that the first patent is like breaking through a glass ceiling, challenging yet transformative. My aim is to make patenting contagious within our organisation.

Kavitha Krishnan |
HEAD, SAP INNOVATION CENTER NETWORK

capabilities, we conceived an intriguing idea – enabling individuals to engage in conversations with their documents, internal portals, Workzone, SharePoint, or any other private and confidential repository. This means converting the documents into chatbots, allowing users to interact with the document store securely and reliably. It could be company policies, PDFs, work documents, project repositories, or anything else. What if we could pass along the user context to get more relevant and reliable responses (eg, employee profile, location, org chart); this would give the power to the users to create their chatbots and share them with others.

AI-powered chatbot | The result is a groundbreaking service featuring the AI-powered chatbot Sarah, streamlining

the onboarding process and delivering hyper-personalised, contextual information based on different employee profiles. Sarah can answer questions related to HR, finance, transport, admin, etc, and is helpful to make the onboarding process more seamless and engaging for new joinees. Moreover, based on the different employee profiles, the avatar can offer hyper-personalised, contextual information.

Many involved | The journey towards this patent was a collective effort, involving my entire team. Sindhu Gangadharan, SVP and MD of SAP Labs India, Kalpana Karunamurthy, engineering head for Success Factors, and HR Head Shweta Mohanty, were integral contributors for this innovation to come alive. For a few of the team members, this venture

marked their initiation into the world of patenting – an experience that broadened their perspectives and added a significant feather to their professional caps.

Making it part of org culture | In my role, I actively collaborate with colleagues on projects, guiding them through the patent journey. It's a personal aspiration of mine to cultivate a culture where innovation and patenting become second nature – a part of our organisational DNA. I believe that the first patent is like breaking through a glass ceiling, challenging yet transformative. My aim is to make patenting contagious within our organisation. This commitment has yielded tangible results, creating a culture where employees naturally embody the spirit of innovation, propelling the continuous evolution of SAP's technological landscape.

Two-year programme | There is a need for a collaborative approach to innovation that emphasises teamwork, and collective brainstorming transforming ideas into unique concepts. To instil a patent-focused mindset, we initiated a two-year programme, cultivating a community of enthusiastic employees eager to share their patenting experiences. Through initiatives like Patenting@SAP, we give individuals the tools to cultivate and develop their ideas, offering guidance through the patenting process. It's a practical approach to innovation that empowers our team members to turn their ideas into reality.



Generative AI has excited the technology industry in a way that no other tech has in a long time. A number of use cases have already emerged, and many more are in the works. Here we look at some of the initiatives underway.

Where & how to use GEN AI, THE MS WAY

Akhil George & Sujit John | TNN

How do you build unique, industry-specific AI solutions that are practical, useful, and coveted by companies operating in vastly different domains? This was the question the Industry AI team at Microsoft asked themselves right after the world was exposed to the amazing capabilities of ChatGPT and generative AI systems.

The first step they took to find answers was to start talking to their network of partner companies in so-called 'ideation workshops.'

"It was our way to share what we know about AI, what we've learned, and what we've experienced in terms of what's working. But also, what we've seen as challenges; and it was a chance to learn from top industry partners on what they're seeing and what it means for their world," Merav Davidson, VP of Industry AI at Microsoft, told us on a visit to India.

During these workshops, Merav, and the rest of the Industry AI team, noticed that companies with advanced AI and natural language processing (NLP) capabilities found it easy to adopt and implement generative AI solutions into their work processes, but that the situation was vastly different in less tech centric companies.

AIDING INDUSTRY

"What we saw was a lot of excitement. The CEO would tell the employees they had to do something with this thing (Gen AI) that everyone was using, but nobody was sure what to do with it and how to do it," says Merav.

After extensive talks during the workshop, Merav says her team would then come up with a list of use cases on how and where generative AI systems could be deployed for that customer. "We would end up with some prioritised use cases that would make a difference in their specific industry and would actually allow them to create a new experience, significantly improve an existing experience, differentiate, and maybe even to some extent disrupt the specific industries that they have been playing in."

After talking to numerous companies over the past year, Merav says they now have a wealth of useful information related to how to best deploy Gen AI systems safely – taking into account hallucinations, data privacy worries, and responsible AI concerns. "We've collected a lot of great requirements and information in terms of what we can do to remove friction for companies who are adopting this technology. We've also started building components and tools and solutions to help close gaps and remove those friction points."



Microsoft executives Michael Glaros, Principal Program Manager, Microsoft Cloud for Industry AI, Merav Davidson, VP, Industry AI, Nishant Chandra, Site Lead Azure Industry AI, and Oren Elisha, Applied Science Group Manager

We are part of a team called Industry AI, which is part of the Microsoft cloud for industry. What we've been doing in the past year, since the revolution of generative AI started, was engaged with literally a couple of hundreds of partners and customers in a very high touch way in what we call ideation workshops. We just got together and started dreaming together; where we shared what we know in terms of the capabilities of gen AI. We are now providing all kinds of templates to companies to leverage gen AI, so when they get started in their industry, they have a better start.

Merav Davidson | VP, INDUSTRY AI

We spent time thinking about what makes a really good generative AI use case versus what are some things that maybe are better suited to either more traditional AI/ML approaches or perhaps even just data analytics. In the course of our own journey to find out, we found this formula that we started to apply to partners and customers that worked very well in terms of helping them think through their business goals and then helping them think through the associated technologies (like generative AI) rather than the other way around. This formula is what is now Industry AI

Michael Glaros | PRINCIPAL PROGRAM MANAGER, MICROSOFT CLOUD FOR INDUSTRY AI

Creating templates

One organisation that Microsoft's Industry AI team has been helping out is the London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG). Large organisations in the financial sector generate a lot of data, and meetings related to such financial service activities are inherently complex and heavy with numbers and graphs. The solution the Industry AI team came up with, called Meeting Prep, automatically generates meeting preparation summaries combining insights from LSEG's financial data with news, documents, emails, chats, and other relevant content from Microsoft Graph in Microsoft 365.

The team has worked with Siemens to introduce Industrial Copilot, an AI-powered assistant that will enable users to rapidly generate, optimise, and debug complex automation code, and significantly shorten simulation times. It has worked with Bay-

er on an agricultural Copilot, looking to add value through the ability to interact with agronomic data using natural language. It has worked with edtech company Anthology to create AI Design Assistant, enabling instructors to spend more time with students and less time creating courses and assessments.

Merav says an analysis of a customer service Copilot found that it enabled 14% more cases to be resolved in an hour. "We also have stats that show information workers are saving more than an hour a week using Copilot. Developers can code 55% faster with it too," she says.

The Industry AI team has released multiple templates that different industries can easily follow to launch generative AI solutions in their respective organisations. More templates are planned to be released in the coming months.

GLOSSARY OF IN-GROUP TERMS USED ON THIS PAGE

API

An API, or application programming interface, is a set of rules and protocols that allows one software application to interact with another. It defines the methods and data formats that applications can use to communicate with each other. APIs enable the integration of different software systems, allowing them to work together and share data seamlessly. APIs also provide an abstraction layer that hides the underlying complexity of how specific functionalities are implemented. This allows developers to use the API without needing to understand the internal workings of the software being accessed.

Data science

Data science is an interdisciplinary field that combines mathematics, statistics, specialised programming, advanced analytics, AI and machine learning. Its purpose is to uncover actionable insights hidden within an organisation's data. These insights guide decision-making and strategic planning. The key components of data science include data collection (ingestion), data storage and processing, data analysis, and communication of data insights through reports and visualisations. The role of a data scientist has become very important because organisations increasingly rely on data scientists to interpret data and provide actionable recommendations for improving business outcomes.

DEVELOPING FUTURE TALENT



Over 300 government school students in Hyderabad (photo) and Mumbai participated in a challenge – organised by JPMorgan Chase – to design tech solutions to tackle social issues. The students were given topics such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality, gender equality, clean water and sanitation. Every team had six to seven students. All teams presented their solutions to a panel of senior leaders of the firm who helped determine the winning ideas. The winning teams won laptops and certificates.

The programme was part of JPMorgan Chase's GenerationTech initiative, which has the objective of developing future talent. In India, the focus is on underserved populations. The Mumbai event was in partnership with non-profit Agastya Foundation. The company says it was the largest GenerationTech in-person event held globally so far. In Hyderabad, it was a partnership with non-profit Navam Innovation Foundation.

Shradh Kohli | TNN

Putting travel in context

Sanjay Mohan and Ankit Khanna, chief product officer-hotel, growth & emerging businesses (standing fourth from left), and Sanjay Mohan, chief technology officer (standing fifth from left), with members of MakeMyTrip's tech team

Ankit Khanna | CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER - HOTEL, GROWTH & EMERGING BUSINESSES

All the capabilities we

are developing –

whether it's our hotel

rankings, or doing

contextualisation and/or

personalisation – are built on

the layer of data science. And

every model depends on the

needs of the consumer, and

also the outcome we want

to generate.

Ankit Khanna | CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER - HOTEL, GROWTH & EMERGING BUSINESSES

To fully integrate Gen AI into

our product, we have

partnered with Microsoft.

Everything is within our app,

which means nothing is going

out into the cloud. This

ensures that the user data is

completely within our firewall.

Sanjay Mohan | CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER

the hotel fares in terms of location, amenities offered, food. "The summary changes, depending on the nature of the search," says Sanjay, who came to MMT in 2015 after stints at Yahoo and Infosys.

GenAI also synthesises the content – it creates a paragraph around the key themes that are of relevance to the traveller. And this is applied to sub-categories, too. For instance, what is distinct about a particular hotel in a locality? "For this, we use data-science models, again created by Gen AI, to ask, among all the similar hotels in a particular neighbourhood – clubbed with star rating, price point, etc – what is about the hotel that makes it stand out," says Sanjay.

For every hotel, he says, Gen AI will tell the traveller three things – it could be the children's area, food, wheelchair accessibility – that make it stand out. This helps make better decisions.

According to data based on S&P Global Broad Market Index's methodology, three largest stock markets after the US are located in Asia. While m-cap of companies listed on Indian bourses has grown by \$1tn in less than three years, stock markets in China and Hong Kong have seen nearly \$6tn erosion in valuations since 2021 peak



Stop accepting inflows in overseas ETFs: Sebi to MFs

These ETFs Are Set To Exhaust \$1Bn Cap On Investment

Partha.Sinha@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Markets regulator Sebi has asked fund houses not to accept any more contribution in schemes which invest in exchange traded funds listed on foreign bourses from April 1. The Sebi direction comes as these ETFs are set to exhaust the RBI-imposed aggregate upper limit of \$1 billion worth of investments, fund industry officials told TOI.

Despite several representations to RBI over the years, the central bank is yet to increase this investment limit. Recently when the RBI governor was asked about a possible enhancement of the limit, he said that "when the rupee shows stability, the central bank will look into this issue". The Sebi move comes at a time when India's foreign exchange reserves are at about \$636 billion, near the all-time high of \$645 billion, which was recorded in Oct 2021.

In Jan 2022, MF investments in stock listed abroad were near the \$7-billion limit

► The genesis of the RBI-imposed curbs on overseas MF investments dates to Feb 2022
► MFs have a combined limit of \$7 billion for direct investments in stocks listed overseas

The genesis of the RBI-imposed restriction on overseas investments by MFs dates to Feb 2022. At the time, the combined MFs had a limit of \$7 billion for direct investments in stocks listed overseas. In addition, the fund houses had a limit of \$1 billion through ETFs listed on foreign bourses.

In Jan 2022, MFs' aggregate investments in stocks listed abroad were near the \$7-

billion limit. Sebi asked fund houses to not invest any more in those stocks. However, Sebi said that in case fund houses saw some redemptions from their portfolios that reduced their overseas exposure through investments in stocks, they could re-invest to fill that gap but should never exhaust the RBI-imposed limit.

An email from MF body Amfi to fund houses said:

► In addition, the fund houses have a limit of \$1 billion through ETFs listed on foreign bourses
► A senior fund industry executive said that each year, Indians use much more forex to buy gold, spend on foreign travel, etc, than what is allowed for investing abroad

"The investment in overseas securities (in other overseas scheme – other than overseas as ETFs) may continue till further communication from Sebi." Currently, MFs are at 84% of the \$7-billion limit and at 95% of the \$1-billion cap, a top executive at a fund house said.

While RBI has an annual limit of \$250,000 per person limit for Indian individuals to spend foreign exchange through its liberalised remittance scheme, the limit for investing through domestic MFs is cumulative in nature.

"At a time when we are talking about promoting India at the global stage, if we consider the total overseas investment limit for MFs, for 14 billion people, it's just \$5.7-per-Indian citizen," said a top fund industry executive.

"Each year, Indians spend much more foreign exchange to buy gold, on foreign travel, etc, than what's allowed for investing abroad."

Stock block deals at 14-year high ITC, TCS, IndiGo Stake Sales Boost Qtrly Proceeds To \$7.1Bn

Block trades in India are close to capping their best quarter in 14 years as the country's booming stock market encourages shareholders to monetise stakes.

Shareholders have raised \$7.1 billion selling their holdings in India so far this year, with the quarter on track to have raised the most from block trades since the Jan-March period in 2010, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

India's equity capital markets have been running hot for the past year as its stocks climb to record highs and foreign investors pile in amid a rotation away from China.

"With elections over, there could be another round of block trades or sell-downs. Domestic liquidity and foreign appetite remain very strong for Indian assets," said Rahul Saraf, Citigroup's India head of investment banking.

Flipkart turns hikes to two lump sum payments a yr

Asmita.Dey@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: All of e-commerce major Flipkart's employees will not receive annual compensation increases the regular way this appraisal season.

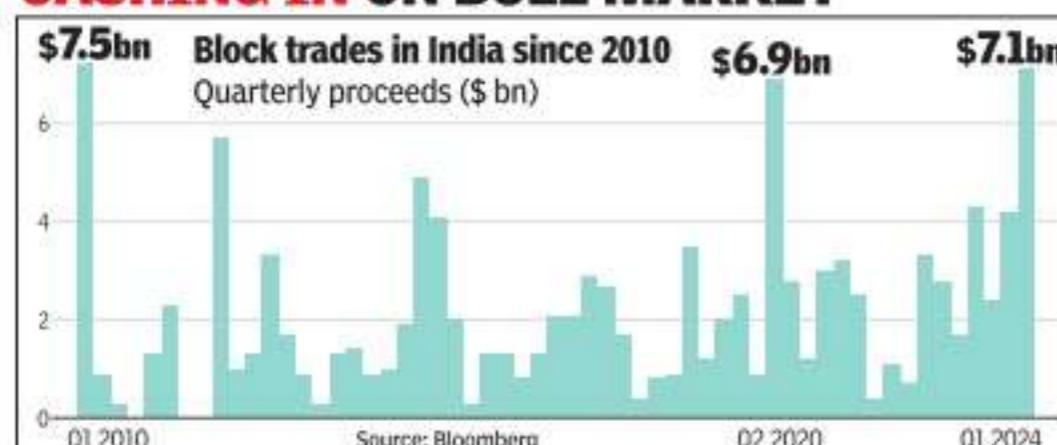
The company will instead offer merit-linked payouts to eligible employees, where employees will get their increments in two tranches — one in April and the other in Oct. Simply put, if an employee gets a 10% raise, the increase will not be reflected in their monthly salary as is usually the case. The salary hike will be paid in two lump sum instalments. The merit-linked payouts will be handed out to employees in the mid-management category and below.

"Employees who are being promoted will receive increments as usual, across grades... for the rest of the grades, we have enabled wider spread of ESOP (employee stock ownership plan) allocation," CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy said in an email to employees on Thursday. TOI has reviewed a copy of the email. A source aware of the company's thought process said the firm sees more value in paying out hikes in bulk tranches. Flipkart has decided to let go of some 1,000 employees or 5% of the workforce as part of its annual performance review process, TOI had reported in Jan.

The Walmart-owned company, which claims to have had robust growth in 2023, will however roll out 100% bonus to employees.

Krishnamurthy said that 2023 has been a strong year for the firm. In the current year, the company will identify and take on new opportunities he said, without disclosing any details.

CASHING IN ON BULL MARKET



Minority shareholders of Jindal Poly move NCLT

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Minority shareholders of Jindal Poly Films, which has a market cap of Rs 2,256 crore.

The petition, perhaps a rare class action suit in India, is filed by a group of

The company had transferred certain assets to entities related to the promoters at lower valuations, which caused substantial losses to the petitioners

minority shareholders led by Ankit Jain. The group owns about 5% in Jindal Poly. According to rules, a class action suit can be filed by a group of shareholders holding at least 2% in

a company.

Jain claimed in the NCLT that around 45,000 shareholders were impacted by the class action suit. Jindal Poly defended that the deals referred by Jain and others were past transactions and were approved by shareholders. The matter will be heard on April 9.

Seven years ago, minority shareholders of some Tata Group's listed entities filed a case against the promoters over the erosion of investor wealth following the illegal removal of Cyrus Mistry from the chairman's position. While the Bombay high court permitted the shareholders to file the case as a class action suit, it later revoked that order.

In the first auction of the week on Tuesday, cut-off prices had spiked a bit during the auction with the 10-year state papers rising to about 7.47% — a rise of about 6.8 basis points (100 basis points = 1 percentage point), over the previous auction on March 12.

Bond players, however,

said that although the amounts are huge, this is unlikely to disrupt the yields in any major way. This is because central govt has not borrowed through gilts since mid-Feb and RBI has also been managing the auctions in a non-disruptive manner. Also, states have together borrowed lesser than expected at the start of the quarter. Including the next week's state loan auction, the total borrowing this fiscal would be Rs 10.1 crore, compared to a revised estimate of Rs 10.3 crore, a bond dealer said.

FMCG giants bet big on digital ads

Asmita.Dey@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: India's fast moving consumer goods companies are increasingly betting on digital advertising to reach customers, many of whom now thrive on consumption of online content.

With the pandemic bringing about this behavioural shift, Indians today are fast taking to online services like quick commerce. Besides, if companies want to target the Gen Z and Gen Alpha cohorts, online is the only way to reach these digital natives. It is time legacy companies re-jigged their marketing strategy to tap into this change.

The FMCG industry has been quick to adopt — in 2023, about 47% of the FMCG sector's total ad spends flowed to digital media,

ADAPTING TO BEHAVIOURAL SHIFT

- The pandemic brought about a shift in customers who now consume more online content
- Legacy companies rejigged their marketing strategy to tap into this behavioural change
- Cos are using e-platforms, social media and influencer marketing to amplify their reach
- In 2023, about 47% of the FMCG sector's total ad spends flowed to digital media

analysts at Dentsu said. "The digital landscape offers unparalleled opportunities for personalised targeting, real-time interaction and measurable outcomes. With consumers increasingly turning to online content consumption, in-

FMCG & e-commerce make up 55% of all digital ad spends

Category	Contribution (%)
FMCG	36
E-commerce	19
Others	35
Auto	5
Others	5

Source: Dentsu

vesting in digital advertising is imperative to maintain relevance and accessibility to our target demographic," said Somasree Bose Awasthi, chief marketing officer at Marico. The company uses a mix of digital platforms, social media and influencer mar-

keting to amplify its reach. Adani Wilmar's digital strategy varies depending on the kind of platform it chooses. On Meta, for instance, the company focuses on a content-driven engagement strategy. Digital medium allows companies to curate targeted communications for specific audiences and minimise spillover. "We primarily use Meta ads, Google ads, programmatic partners and content partners... it is safe to say that we are quite bullish in terms of digital spends as part of our overall media mix," said Jignesh Shah, head (media and digital marketing) at Adani Wilmar.

Parle Products today allot

over 25% of its advertising budget to digital compared to 10% before the pandemic. Parle Products today allot

view of business, but also because of stability here, including political," Sachin Mehta, country director (India & India subcontinent) for William Grants & Sons told TOI.

The demand is coming

not only from metros and large cities but also from smaller towns, he said. Between 2021 and 2023, India's business — which focuses broadly on the Bottled In Origin (BIO) route — has doubled in terms of revenue. "If you compare from 2019, which

was pre-Covid period, we have grown three times when it comes to value of our sales." In terms of volumes, the numbers have grown by three times between 2019 and 2023. "We finished 2023 with sales of roughly three lakh cases. The same was less than one lakh cases in 2019," Mehta claimed but did not disclose numbers to back it up.

Asked whether the recent success of local brands such as Amrit, Paul John, Rampur, and Indri poses a threat to the grip of Scottish makers on the Indian market, he said on the contrary, the trend is helping expand demand for premium spirits. "It is a positive. A lot of new consumers are getting a taste of malts and would thereafter move into Scottish malts. Look at what happened in the car industry where consumers upgraded from local brands to multinational ones."



NO MS IN THE OFFICE

Long-Time Chennai Super Kings Skipper Dhoni Steps Down From Captaincy At 42 But Has Not Retired Yet; Ruturaj Gaikwad To Take Over

Dwaipayan.Datta@timesgroup.com

When MS Dhoni said in a recent tweet before heading into the Chennai Super Kings pre-season camp that he would be seen in a different role, one wondered what that would be. He kept most of us guessing, probably his teammates too, before dropping the bombshell on Thursday.

No, he isn't retiring this year, but Dhoni won't lead CSK in what will probably be his last season. As he prepares for his probable last dance, MSD has passed on the captaincy baton for the second time in three years, this time to Ruturaj Gaikwad, a quiet Maharashtra boy who has been a perfect fit in the CSK ethos.

When Dhoni gave the captaincy to Ravindra Jadeja a couple of years ago, it didn't exactly work out the way he expected it to. And once Dhoni saw it wasn't working, he didn't hesitate to take the leadership back from one of the most high-profile Indian players. Had it been any other franchise, a hurt Jadeja might have left, in fact he was very close to it, but here again Dhoni intervened.

There were no bruised egos on Dhoni's part. He simply made it clear that Jadeja would not be released. Jadeja stayed on, had an up-and-down season but when it mattered most — the last two balls of the season — he hit 10 runs to win the title for CSK.

But did that prompt Dhoni to rethink his decision to take the captaincy away from Jadeja? No. He had made up his mind it had to be Ruturaj last year itself, and kept at it. "Jadeja will be very much a part of the leadership group and everyone will try to contribute to Ruturaj settling in," coach Stephen Fleming said, in-

dicating how well Dhoni handles the egos in the dressing-room.

While Ruturaj will be officially in charge of CSK, Dhoni will handle the transition himself, being in the thick of things. "There will be (mentoring), without interfering. In the middle there will be a bit of trial and error but that's fine," Fleming said.

While Dhoni gets down to the business of making Ruturaj comfortable in the hot seat, there's also the lingering query whether this IPL will be his last.

If the fans are to select the team, Dhoni will probably keep leading the team forever. But the 42-year-old is a realist. He understands the emotions of fans and is ready to stretch his body to the limit to honour their expectations, but deep down he knows it has to end one day. His knees are creaking, his running between the wickets isn't even close to where it was, his ability to effortlessly clear the fence at the crunch is on the wane. "His knees are in better shape than it was last year. And hopefully he will play. He is batting quite well at the nets though," Fleming said.

The beauty of IPL is that it provides the option of an 'impact switch', which allows the team the extra batter while chasing.

While Dhoni has never substituted himself, it's a rule that has allowed him to be in charge while fielding and take a back-seat when the team is batting. The idea "next comes Dhoni" still invokes fear in the opposition. He also brings a sense of calm in the dressing room.

Dhoni knows that in two months' time at Chepauk, he has the chance to present his legion of fans all over the world the ultimate parting gift — an IPL title at home. On Friday, the countdown begins.

Gerald Coetzee (SA; MI)
Took 20 wickets in 8 games (SR 19.05) in the ODI WC. A pacer who can hit the 150kph mark, he can also give the ball a whack with bat in hand.



GERALD COETZEE

Azmatullah Omarzai (Afg; GT)
Could be an ideal replacement for Hardik Pandya with his allround skills. His swing bowling in the ODI WC match against Australia was remarkable to watch.



RACHIN RAVINDRA

Shamar Joseph (WI; LSG)
An out-and-out fast bowler, Joseph made a name for himself during the Test series against Australia. His seven-wicket haul in the second Test gave West Indies a Test victory on Australian soil after 27 long years. The sensational show has earned him an LSG contract.

Nuwan Thushara (SL; MI)
His action resembles the legendary Lasith Malinga's. A recent hat-trick on his way to a five-wicket haul against Bangladesh in Sylhet just raised his stock. Thushara will have bowling coach Malinga in the Mumbai Indians dugout to guide him.

Spencer Johnson (Aus; GT)
Johnson is 6 feet 4 inches tall and generates pace upwards of 140kph. The left-arm quick is already highly sought after in the world of T20 leagues, plying his trade in the Big Bash, The Hundred, Major League Cricket and Global T20 Canada. He will turn up for Gujarat Titans hoping to make a big impact this season.

Reuters

Jake Fraser-McGurk (Aus; DC)
One of the most talented young batters in Australia, he was roped in by Delhi Capitals as replacement for the injured Lungi Ngidi. In October last year, the 21-year-old broke AB de Villiers' record for the fastest century in a List A game, getting to his hundred off just 29 balls against a strong Tasmanian team at the Marsh One Day Cup.

Kumar Kushagra (India; DC)
The Jharkhand wicketkeeper-batsman, 19, is known for hitting big sixes and was bought by Capitals for Rs 7.20 cr at the IPL auction. DC's director of cricket Sourav Ganguly was impressed with Kushagra's ball-striking ability during one of the trials conducted by the franchise.

Sameer Rizvi (India; CSK)
Known as the right-handed Suresh Raina in UP, Rizvi can dominate spin. CSK spent Rs 8.4 cr for the 20-year-old at the IPL auction. During the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy last year, he smashed 75 off 46 balls, including 5 maximums, against Tamil Nadu.

—Hindol.Basu@timesgroup.com

IPL DEBUTANTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

These new entrants will seek to enhance their budding reputations...

Rachin Ravindra (Country: NZ, IPL franchise: CSK)

Had a fabulous ODI World Cup, going on to tie the record with Kane Williamson for highest runs by a New Zealander in a WC. Has continued the good form in Tests and T20Is. CSK signed him for Rs 1.8 cr and Devon Conway's thumb injury means he will open with new captain Gaikwad.

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GALLERY

Blow for Royals as Zampa withdraws from IPL

New Delhi: Rajasthan Royals were on Thursday dealt a big blow when leg-spinner Adam Zampa pulled out of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) citing personal reasons. Zampa, who was retained by Rajasthan Royals ahead of last year's auction for Rs 1.5 crore, has withdrawn his name following a busy season for Australia. The right-arm spinner was a part of Rajasthan's troika of spinners including India's R Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal.

Smriti, Richa only Indians in Hundred draft: Women's Premier League-winning captain Smriti Mandhana and wicket-keeper batter Richa Ghosh were the only Indian players who found takers during the Hundred Draft here. Mandhana, who led the Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a WPL title last Sunday, was drafted in by Southern Brave Women's while her teammate Richa went to Birmingham Phoenix.

Manhas, Chopra, jr selector Mohan in race to become BCCI selector: Nikhil Chopra, Delhi veteran Mithun Manhas and current junior selector Krishan Mohan are in the race to become a BCCI selector for the senior national team.

Former Pakistan captain Saeed Ahmed passes away: Saeed Ahmed, the former Pakistan Test captain and a dashing batsman of his time, passed away here after leading a largely reclusive life away from cricket since his retirement. He was 86. Ahmed played 41 Test matches, scoring 2,991 runs with five centuries and 16 half-centuries. He also took 22 wickets with his off-spin bowling. AGENCIES

ACTION TODAY

BASKETBALL: NBA, 6.30 am (Jiocinema); **CRICKET:** IPL, Chennai vs Bangalore, 8 pm (Star Sports, Jiocinema); Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka, 1st T20, 9.30 am (FanCode); **HOCKEY:** Women's Nationals, Semis, 6 pm & 8 pm (FanCode); **FOOTBALL:** Euro 2024 Qualifying, Armenia vs Kosovo; Norway vs Czechia, 11.30 pm; Netherlands vs Scotland 1.15 am Saturday (Sony Sports); Friendly, Spain vs Colombia, 2 am Saturday (Sony Sports)

There's 'life in old dog' Murray yet

Miami: Two-time Miami Open champion Andy Murray fought back for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over struggling Italian Matteo Berrettini in the first round at Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday. Berrettini needed medical attention near the end of the second set after appearing to almost faint on court but he battled on.

"There is life in the old dog yet," wrote Murray on the television camera lens at the end of the game and he was pleased with the manner of his win.

In the WTA event, four-time grand slam-winner Naomi Osaka had little trouble in defeating Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-3, 6-4 in one hour, 18 minutes to move into the second round.

Osaka is ranked 229th in the world after taking a break after having a child. Osaka will face another mother in the second round when she takes on Elina Svitolina of Ukraine who in 12 months back on the circuit is



ANDY MURRAY

already back inside the top 20 - a return which Osaka says has inspired her. American Sloane Stephens beat Angelique Kerber 6-2, 6-3.

Sabalenka says her 'heart is broken' by Koltsov's death, asks for privacy

Miami Gardens: Aryna Sabalenka said her "heart is broken" by the death of Konstantin Koltsov, asking for privacy for herself and the family of the former Belarusian hockey player she had dated. "Konstantin's death is an unthinkable tragedy, and while we were no longer together, my heart is broken," Sabalenka said in a statement. "Please respect my privacy and his family's privacy." AGENCIES

Sharath to be flagbearer, Mary Kom chef de mission

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Indian table tennis' old warhorse, Sharath Kamal, was on Thursday named as the country's flag-bearer for the upcoming Paris Olympics in July-August. Sharath was India's flag bearer at the closing ceremony of the Birmingham CWG in 2022 as well, where he created history by securing three gold medals.

Legendary boxer and six-time world champion, M C Mary Kom, has been appointed as the chef de mission of the Indian contingent. The London Olympics bronze medalist will be assisted by Winter Games veteran and luger Shiva Keshavan, who has been appointed as the chief medical officer. G Rajaraman will be the IOA's press attaché for the Games.

PARIS OLYMPICS

contingent as they compete on the Olympic stage," Indian Olympic Association (IOA) said in a release. "Mary Kom's unparalleled dedication to sports and inspiring journey makes her a natural choice to guide and mentor our athletes at the Olympics. Keshavan, a former Olympian in luge, brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to support the team's management and coordination efforts," the release added.

London Games bronze winner in rifle shooting, Gagan Narang, will oversee India's operations at the shooting range. Dr Dinshaw Pardiwalla has been appointed as the chief medical officer. G Rajaraman will be the IOA's press attaché for the Games.

DURANT PASSES SHAQ FOR EIGHTH PLACE IN NBA SCORING LIST

Phoenix: Kevin Durant continued to climb the NBA's list of career scoring leaders, passing big man Shaquille O'Neal for No. 8 with 22 points in the Phoenix Suns' 115-102 win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Wednesday night.

The 35-year-old Durant now has 28,610 career points. He's passed multiple greats on the scoring list this season, including Hakeem Olajuwon, Elvin Hayes, Moses Malone and Carmelo Anthony. Durant, a 14-time All-Star, is scoring nearly 20 points per game in his 17th season. Meanwhile, Jayson Tatum scored 31 points as the Boston Celtics beat 122-119 in their top-of-table Eastern Conference clash. AP

SHUBHANKAR SHOOTS 68 TO BE PLACED T-21

Singapore: India's Shubhankar Sharma overcame an early double bogey to card 4-under 68 and was placed tied 21 on a tight leader board after the first round of the Singapore Classic here on Thursday. Kiradech Aphibarnrat started the DP World Tour's Asian Swing in brilliant fashion as an eight under par round of 64 earned him a share of the first round lead.

Mane, Ahlawat lead in Kolkata on European Challenge Tour

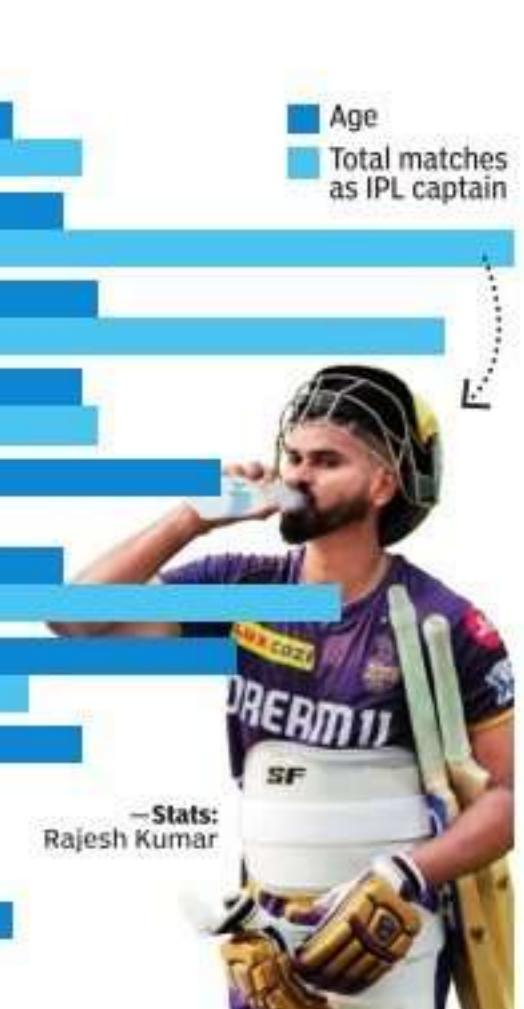
Kolkata: India's Udayan Mane and Veer Ahlawat shared a one-stroke lead after the opening round of the Kolkata Challenge at RCGC.

India drop to ninth at Queen Sirikit Cup

Christchurch: Zara Anand, Vidhatri Urs and Heena Kang endured a tough day, dropping three places to be ninth in the team competition at the Queen Sirikit Cup. First round co-leader in the individual event, Zara (73-77) fell to 11th; Vidhatri dropped to T-26. Heena Kang is 30th. PTI

IYER NOW THE MOST EXPERIENCED IPL CAPTAIN

With MS Dhoni stepping down, KKR captain Shreyas Iyer, who has earlier also led DC, is the most experienced IPL captain this season...



HOW THE TEAMS LOOK—PART III

GUJARAT TITANS

Under new captain Shubman Gill, will GT be able to overcome the absence of Hardik Pandya and Mohammed Shami? This season could be the biggest test for the franchise yet...

STRENGTH: Gill has had a breakaway 2023 in all formats. Perhaps the added responsibility of captaincy will turn him into an even better player. He will receive able guidance from head coach Ashish Nehra and New Zealand captain Kane Williamson. Gill will also have leggie Rashid Khan and the explosive David Miller as two other match-winners in the side.

WEAKNESS: The absence of Hardik Pandya is hard to fill. Pandya led them to the title in their inaugural season in 2022 and to the final last year. Champion pacer Shami's absence due to an ankle injury will also hurt.

OPPORTUNITY: After splurging Rs 10 cr on him in the IPL auction, GT will hope Australian quick Spencer Johnson lives up to his billing. They also have left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmad and seamer Mohit Sharma.

THREAT: The batting looks thin. Talented domestic players like Shahrukh Khan, Rahul Tewatia, Sai Kishore and Sai Sudharsan have to be more consistent. Many were left surprised after they picked up veteran pacer Umesh Yadav who had a poor IPL

ONIDA

THE KING OF
POWERFUL COOLING

IT'S TIME FOR INSTANT THRILL

World's Top T20 League Starts Today
With Hosts CSK Taking On RCBDwaiyan Datta
@timesgroup.com

Chennai: If summer comes, can IPL be far behind? As the temperatures soar in Chennai, the buzz around the MA Chidambaram Stadium increases. It's that time of the year when Chennaiites start believing that anything is possible. On Thursday, there was a dash of extra spice added to the sense of anticipation around the venue with MS Dhoni deciding to hand on the leadership duties to Rituraj Gaikwad.

No other team has owned the IPL — not even Mumbai Indians — the way Chennai Super Kings have over the years. Five titles in 14 years of participation and 12 last-four entries — they are truly the kings of this competition. And when you've Royal Challengers Bengaluru as your first opponent in your own den, there are even more reasons to feel supremely confident about a good start. Against RCB, CSK have an almost lopsided (20-10) head-to-head record. Given the balance of the two sides, it will need a huge effort from the visitors to turn the tables on Dhoni's devils.

It's not that RCB are pushovers. On paper, they have a power-packed batting line-up in skipper Faf du Plessis, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Glen Maxwell, Cameron Green and Dinesh Karthik. But can they live up to the challenge that CSK

bowlers will present on a track where the ball is bound to stop, and occasionally turn, a bit?

Faf and Patidar are probably their best bet against a canny CSK attack, given the fact that Virat can be slightly undercooked following his return to competitive cricket after a break of more than two months. Maxwell's destructive abilities are well-known, but against the spin-trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Mahesh Theekshana and Moeen Ali, things won't be easy for the Aussie. Karthik — more a commentator than a player these days — is playing his last season of IPL and can be handy. But he had a nightmare with the bat last season. At this stage of his career, it may not be easy to turn things around just like that. As for Green, Chepauk's track and Dhoni's (and Gaikwad's) manoeuvrings may just prove a little too much.

While the RCB bats can still make a fight of it if they have a good day, the CSK bowling attack could be a little too superior. Their No. 1 pacer Matheesha Pathirana isn't available due to a hamstring injury, but the roster consisting of Deepak Chahar, Shardul Thakur, Mustafizur Rahaman and the three experienced spinners has immense depth, especially at Chepauk.

RCB have India's premier pacer Mohammed Siraj, who can be destructive on his day, and new Test debutant Akash



FULL SWING OF THE BAT: MS Dhoni at the nets on Thursday



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90 Virat Kohli's match-winning knock of 90 from 52 balls at Dubai on October 10, 2020 is the highest by a RCB batter against CSK in the IPL.
Stats: Rajesh Kumar

Deep, among others. But the spin department is too thin. When Dhoni can choose not to bat more than 12 balls, you can well imagine how strong the defending champion

are. Rachin Ravindra will probably make his IPL debut as an opener, courtesy injury to Devon Conway, and the Kiwi all-rounder provides the extra spin option as well. New

captain Ruturaj, Daryl Mitchell and the designated spin-hitter Shivam Dubey should enjoy the comfort cushion of having the likes of Jadeja, Ajinkya Rahane, Moeen and

Dhoni around. Hunting in a pack, they should make Friday the perfect launching pad to have another title run which ends at Chepauk in two months' time.

FACE-OFF		TV TIME: 8 PM
CSK	VS	STAR SPORTS JIOCINEMA
20	10	
LAST FIVE MATCHES		

CSK	W	W	W	L	W
RCB	L	W	W	L	L

7 CSK have won seven and lost one out of eight matches played against RCB at Chepauk, Chennai. RCB's only win was in the very first fixture — by 14 runs on May 21, 2008.

20 Matches CSK have won off the 31 played against RCB — the most by them against any opponent in the IPL.

95 Shivam Dubey's unbeaten knock off 46 balls at D Y Patil, Navi Mumbai, on April 12, 2022 is the joint-highest for CSK against RCB in the IPL. Murali Vijay had scored 95 in Chennai on May 28, 2011.

CSK hope to check 'refreshed' Virat

Neha.Surana@timesgroup.com

This Friday, as the curtains rise on IPL, the spotlight will be on two former Indian captains, MS Dhoni and Virat Kohli, at the grand opening act at MA Chidambaram Stadium. While Dhoni has retired from international cricket, for Kohli, this IPL will be an audition for the 2024 World Cup scheduled immediately after the league ends.

The 35-year-old premier batsman, who was on paternity leave, has been out of action for over two months. His last outing was in the T20I series against Afghanistan. After that, he pulled out of the five-match Test series against England.

Kohli joined the Royal Challengers Bengaluru camp here in the early hours of Monday and has been working hard at the nets. However, on the eve of their opener against Chennai Super Kings, the former RCB captain chose to skip the training session on Thursday.

Kohli, who is still gunning for the elusive IPL trophy, will be heading into the tournament without much training or match practice behind him. However, CSK's head coach Stephen Fleming expects Kohli to be 'very dangerous'.

"His (Kohli) mental strength is something that I admire and others around the world admire. And whatever the challenges in front of him, he will always find a way. It might have been a refreshing thing to get away from the game, refresh men-



VIRAT KOHLI

tally and physically and come back. He's had a life celebration as well. We're expecting him to be at his very best. And if we can restrict that, that would be great," said Fleming.

Mo Bobat, RCB's director of cricket operations, said Kohli is 'fresh' with energy and has had a few practice sessions in the past few days. "Virat is in a good place. He is a champion cricketer. He is coming in fresh...with energy. He is in a great frame of mind. He's looking forward to getting involved. He has had a few hits with us over the last few days and he is hitting the ball brilliantly."

Former Australia cricketer Matthew Hayden feels the Chepauk surface could be a tricky challenge for Kohli. The India great has amassed 362 runs in 12 IPL matches at Chepauk with 58 being his highest score.

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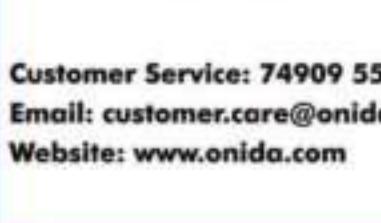
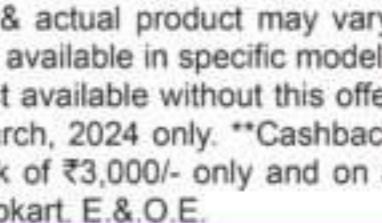
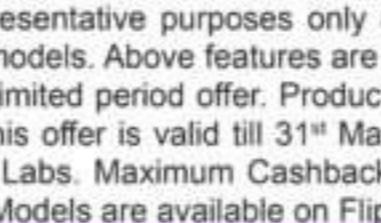
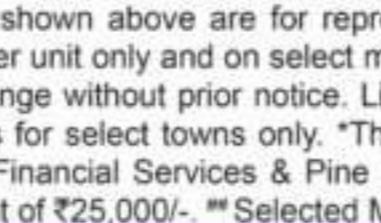
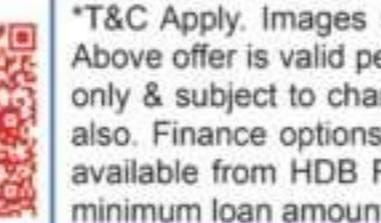
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SNAP SHOTS**IBA accuses IOC of political agenda after Olympic exclusion**

The International Boxing Association has accused International Olympic Committee leaders of political bias after the IOC's sports director asked national federations to create a body it can work with so boxing can be included in the 2028 Games. The IBA said in a statement on Thursday that the IOC leadership was interfering in the IBA's internal affairs and "violating the principles of its own Olympic charter". The IOC stripped the Russian-led IBA of recognition last June, saying it had failed to complete reforms on governance, finance and ethical issues.

Ashok, Parmjeet qualify for Paris Paralympics: Asian Games bronze medalist Ashok and Parmjeet Kumar qualified for the Paris Paralympics by winning a silver medal each at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt on Thursday. Competing in the 41kg category, Manpreet Kaur earned a bronze medal after lifting 86kg. Ashok lifted an impressive 192kg and 196kg respectively, which gave him the silver medal. After his second attempt was declared a 'no lift', he cleared 196kg in his third.

Argentine footballers under house arrest in rape case: Three professional footballers in Argentina linked to the alleged rape of a sports journalist in a hotel room were placed under house arrest Thursday. A judge ordered a 90-day house arrest for three of the four defendants, who all play for first-division club Velez Sarsfield. The fourth player was released on bail. All four were also suspended from their team.

Woods officially entered into next month's Masters: Tiger Woods is officially entered into the Masters Tournament field, setting himself up to compete in the April 11-14 major at Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Georgia. A five-time Masters winner, Woods last won what is traditionally the first major of the calendar year in 2019. A car crash in February of 2021 has limited Woods' participation in tournaments after sustaining major damage to his right leg.

Secunderabad YMCA defeat G9: Secunderabad YMCA rode on a 34-point show from Vivek to defeat G9 91-75 in the 5th Samuel Vasanth Kumar memorial basketball tournament in Hyderabad. Samuel and Sudarshan chipped in with 19 and 17 points each. For G9, Sravan top-scored with 22.

Results: Secunderabad YMCA 91 (Vivek 34, Samuel 19, Sudarshan 17) bt G9 75 (Sravan 22, Sameer 12, Chandrasekhar 11). On Wednesday: YMG 67 (Salman 29, Nandith 11, Chris 10) bt WE 58 (Hari 22). TNN & AGE NCIES

Treesa-Gayatri enter last eight

Basel (Switzerland): The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the quarter-finals of the Swiss Open with a straight-game win over compatriots Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra on Thursday.

The eighth-seeded Commonwealth Games bronze medallists hardly broke sweat as they brushed aside fellow Indians Priya and Shruti, ranked 75th in the world, 21-10, 21-12 in 36 minutes.

World No. 26 Treesa and Gayatri, who are sharing the 14th place in the Olympic Games qualification ranking, will face Australia's Setiana Mapasa and Angela Yu in



MAKING PROGRESS: Treesa Jolly (background) and Gayatri Gopichand

the next round.

Later, world No. 20 Tannishtha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who are 6,296 points ahead of Treesa and Gayatri in the Paris qualification race at 12th spot, lost 17-21, 16-21 to Japan's world No. 30 Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato. The race for Olympic qualification thus spiced

up in women's doubles as only the highest-ranked Indian pair inside top 16 by April end will make the cut for Paris.

The biggest face-off will be between PV Sindhu and 17-year-old Tomoka Miyazaki, who had claimed the gold medal at the 2022 World junior championships, and is coming into the tournament after winning her maiden Super 300 title at Orleans Masters in France last week. Lakshya Sen will take on Chia Hao Lee of Chinese Taipei, while Srikanth will face top seed Lee Zii Jia. PTI

Hamilton backs Wolff's legal action, slams FIA

Lewis Hamilton slammed "a real lack of accountability" in motorsport on Thursday and threw his support behind Susie Wolff, who has taken legal action against governing body the FIA. Wolff, director of Formula One's academy series for aspiring female drivers, revealed on Wednesday she lodged a criminal complaint in the French courts over a controversial inquiry into her conduct last year.

Wolff and her husband, Mercedes Formula One team principal Toto Wolff,

FORMULA ONE WRAP

were the subject of an investigation into an alleged conflict of interest. The probe arose in December after a magazine report claimed that other team principals were concerned Toto Wolff was benefiting from information shared by his wife. But the FIA ended its investigation just two days after announcing its compliance department was looking into the matter. Both Formula One and Mercedes strongly rejected the accusations and made clear their frustration with the FIA's handling of the matter. "I'm incredibly proud of Susie, she is so brave and stands for such great values, she is such a leader," said Mercedes seven-time world champion Hamilton ahead of the Australian Grand Prix.

"In a world where often people are silent, for her to be standing up sends such a great message and I love that she is taking it out of this (F1) world, because there is a real lack of accountability within the sport and the FIA. "Things happen behind closed doors, there is no transparency, there really is no accountability."

Verstappen to see out Red Bull deal

Three-time world champion Max Verstappen said on Thursday he intends to see out his contract with Red Bull, insisting he was happy despite weeks of off-track turbulence. The Dutchman is signed until 2028 but suggested at the last race in Saudi Arabia he would consider leaving if Red Bull parted company with long-time mentor Helmut Marko in a power struggle threatening to envelop the team. It followed his father Jos claiming earlier this month that Red Bull faced being "torn apart" if team boss Christian Horner remained in his position. Horner was accused of inappropriate conduct involving a woman colleague but he was subsequently cleared of any wrongdoing. AGENCIES

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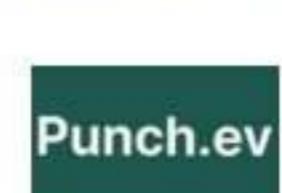
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Cong claims funds squeeze post I-T action, taxmen deny freezing a/cs

Campaign Crippled, It's 'A Freeze On India's Democracy', Says Party

Subodh Ghildiyal
@timesgroup.com



'Even under these challenging circumstances, we are doing our very best to maintain the effectiveness of our election campaign,' said Sonia Gandhi

New Delhi: Calling the freezing of Congress's bank accounts as PM Narendra Modi's ploy to cripple it for the Lok Sabha elections, the party leadership Thursday said it does not have a rupee to spend and has not been able to start its poll campaign during the crucial month ahead of voting while BJP is splurging money across the country like never before. It demanded that Congress be allowed to use its bank accounts.

Congress revealed it has just received an I-T notice dating back to its accounts of 1994 when late Sitaram Kesari was party's treasurer; underlining that it exposes the "insidious conspiracy" against the party.

Pleading that opposition party cannot fight the polls without finances, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge mocked Modi that there are leaders around the world who are getting 99% votes, and it should not happen in India.

In an unprecedented step, Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi held a joint press conference at Congress headquarters to sound alarm over the party's pernicious position. "This is not the freezing of our accounts, it is the freezing of India's democracy... It is a lie that there is democracy in India. It is a complete lie. There is no democracy in today's India," Rahul said.

He regretted that while the main opposition has been crippled financially before the polls, the institutions mandated to safeguard democracy like courts, Election Commission, media, have been completely silent about it.

In an echo of the ongoing row over his remarks triggered by PM, Rahul said, "The hate-filled 'Asura Shakti' has frozen our bank accounts to murder Indian democracy. We are fighting against that 'Asura Shakti'."

He expressed surprise that

punishment for an alleged financial question of Rs 14 lakh is "Congress's entire financial identity". He said 20% of India votes for Congress which is not even able to pay Rs 2 for anything. "This is a criminal action on Congress done by PM and the home minister. It does not happen without them in today's India," Rahul said.

"All our bank accounts have been frozen. We can do no campaign work, we cannot support our workers, we cannot support our candidates, our leaders cannot fly from one part of the country to another... they can't take a railway train and this has been literally two months before the election campaign," he added.

Eight of the 11 accounts of the party are frozen, sources said. Party treasurer Ajay Maken said a month delay in submission of 2017-18 accounts, as per the I-T Act, can at best be a fine of Rs 10,000, but a lien of Rs 210 crore has been marked to Congress. He said if an I-T notice from 30 years ago during Kesari's tenure can be issued, then govt can even go back to Mahatma Gandhi's era when Jamnalal Bajaj was Congress treasurer.

Talking about a "systematic attempt" to cripple Congress financially, Sonia Gandhi said, "Even under these challenging circumstances, we are doing our very best to maintain the effectiveness of our election campaign."

Kharge said there is no level-playing field now as BJP

Cong disclosed ₹1,000cr corpus at end of last financial year: Tax dept

Akhilesh Singh & Sidhartha

seek a stay on the demand within the stipulated period, resulting in the action.

The case dates back to financial year 2017-18, when the party did not file its return by the extended deadline of Dec 2018, a precondition to claim tax deduction available to registered political parties. It also failed to meet another requirement related to acceptance of cash donations above Rs 20,000. The department said the party accepted cash donations of over Rs 14 lakh, resulting in a loss of its 'exempt' status. It is now being treated as an 'association of persons' and faces normal tax liability.

In July 2021, a demand of Rs 105 crore was raised following assessment of the party's returns and it paid only Rs 2.5 crore. It had to pay Rs 21 crore, that is 20% of the original demand of Rs 105 crore before the commissioner (appeals) to keep the case in abeyance. The demand, including interest, has now swelled to Rs 135 crore and the interest component will keep rising till the final payment is made or the case is dismissed. The party has challenged the demand.

Sources alleged Congress has been dragging the case, something that ITAT also pointed to in its order as the party's lawyers, led by Vivek Tankha, did not opt for an "expeditious disposal" of the appeal.

cannot have direct or indirect control over ED, I-T, EC and other autonomous bodies," he said.

He said while SC order on electoral bonds has exposed how BJP has amassed crores in its bank accounts, there is no account of the cash they receive, saying "there are question marks" over India's image as a healthy democracy established over 70 years.

has established a monopoly on media advertisements and air transport, while Congress is not able to even send its leaders to different cities and has not yet got its campaign off the ground with rallies or media advertisements.

"All the parties should have resources equally, and not that those in power have monopoly on resources, on media, and the ruling party

the financial year 1993-94, where a demand of Rs 11-12 crore has now risen to Rs 53 crore, including interest. The case was flagged by senior Congress leaders on Thursday, claiming that the tax department was seeking to raise bogus demands.

Sources in govt, however, countered it and said Delhi High Court had dismissed Congress' appeal, which has been pending before SC for seven-eight years and the next hearing is scheduled on April 1. The case has been bunched with at least two others related to withdrawal of tax exemptions for Janata Party and BSP.

They said the demand on Congress had not been raised, but a notice was issued earlier this month.

The investigations into the party's tax affairs have also shown that there were multiple permanent account numbers (PANs), sources claimed.

Cong moves EC against 'Modi Parivaar' & 'Guarantee' ads

New Delhi: Alleging misuse of state resources for the poll campaign of PM Narendra Modi, Congress on Thursday complained to EC against "Modi Parivaar" and "Modi ki Guarantee" advertisements and sought their removal and action against those behind it.

A delegation of Congress leaders met EC and handed over a set of complaints about alleged violations of the model code of conduct by BJP and demanded immediate action.

Congress delegation lodged a complaint against BJP's "false advertisements" invoking the 2G allocation issue and alleged that party was pursuing a decade-old narrative that had been discredited through a comprehensive judicial process.

The party prayed for removal of the advertisement and action against its authors and publishers. In another complaint, Congress sought removal of "Modi Parivaar" advertisement, alleging that it highlights how state resources are being misused for a veiled campaign advertisement. PTI

Armed with cash donation info, I-T to reassess Cong liability for 7 years

Lens On Megha Engg, Firms Tied To DKS, Men Linked To MP Ex-CM

Akhilesh Singh & Sidhartha



Tax authorities are checking data collected during raids in Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh & MP

New Delhi: Income tax authorities are poring over data collected during raids in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, allegedly pointing to large cash payments to Congress, as they seek to complete the reassessment proceedings for financial years 2013-14 to 2019-20 by March 31.

The move — based on information collected during raids on Megha Engineering, entities linked to D K Shivakumar and some individuals who were allegedly linked to a former Madhya Pradesh CM — has been challenged by Congress in Delhi HC, which heard the matter on Tuesday but reserved its order for three of the seven years.

The party risks losing tax exemption available to political parties for seven years in case the reassessment concludes it received individual contributions exceeding Rs

"We have told the court that we are in advanced stages of completing the assessment and we are awaiting the order, which is expected any day," a source said. Some of the searches had allegedly thrown up data suggesting cash payments in excess of Rs 100 crore.

While tax authorities refused to give any assessment of the scale of demand that may be raised, they said the department was looking into the accounts of state units and other wings as they were all under the Indian National Congress umbrella.

The party risks losing tax exemption available to political parties for seven years in case the reassessment concludes it received individual contributions exceeding Rs

These are in addition to another one dating back to

Cong conveniently blaming its irrelevance on 'fin trouble': BJP

TIMES NEWS NETWORK



'MORAL BANKRUPTCY': BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad claimed that Congress did not file I-T returns in time, leading to the freezing of its accounts

New Delhi: BJP on Thursday made a point-wise rebuttal of Congress' claim that its accounts have been frozen by the income tax department out of political vendetta saying the opposition party fearing defeat is ranting against Indian democracy and institutions as the governing party also justified the move to recover taxes due from Congress.

"Congress is going to be totally rejected by the people and fearing a historic defeat, their top leadership addressed a press conference and ranted against Indian democracy and institutions. They are conveniently blaming their irrelevance on 'financial troubles'. In reality, their bankruptcy is moral and intellectual, not financial," said BJP president J P Nadda.

Senior BJP leader and MP Ravi Shankar Prasad said the press conference of Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi

playing the victim card.

Nadda said instead of correcting their own errors, Congress is blaming authorities for their troubles. "Be it the ITAT or the Delhi HC, they have asked Congress to comply with the rules, pay the taxes due but the party never did so," he said.

BJP president said that for a party which has looted from every sector in every state and at every moment of history, to talk of financial helplessness is comical. "Congress can use the money accumulated from all their scams starting from jeep to chopper scam via Bofors for their electioneering," Nadda said.

He said Congress' "part time leaders" say India being a democracy is a lie. "May I humbly remind them that India was not a democracy only for a few months between 1975 and 1977 and that time PM was none other than Mrs. Indira Gandhi," Nadda said.

Prasad claimed that Congress did not file income tax returns in time, leading to the freezing of its account with a purpose to extract political mileage by



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BJP Got ₹100cr+ From 9 Entities; Cong From 3, Max From Vedanta

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

The Election Commission on Thursday released data that cleared the air on which party for Rs 12,146 crore worth of electoral bonds, or about 74% of the total issued, based on information provided to it by SBI following a Supreme Court order.

The data showed that the biggest donors to BJP, which got about half of the amounts raised through EBs, were Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering & Infrastructure (Rs 584 crore), Qwik Supply Chain (Rs

Only a/c details, KYC not made public: SBI

SBI told Supreme Court that it has given EC all details of electoral bonds, including the unique numbers that help link the donor and recipient political party. In a compliance affidavit filed ahead of the Thursday 5pm deadline, SBI chairman said only complete bank account numbers of parties and KYC details of both sides have not been made public for security reasons. TN

► EDIT PAGE: Electoral or marital bond is bond

375cr), mining and metals giant Vedanta Ltd (Rs 230cr) and Bharti Airtel (Rs 183cr). For Congress, the biggest chunks came from Vedanta (Rs 125cr), MKJ Enterprises and associated firms (Rs 120cr) and Western UP Power Transmission Co (Rs 110cr), part of Megha group.

While nine separate entities contributed more than Rs 100cr to BJP and another 11 gave between Rs 50cr and Rs 100cr, Congress had just three

BJP: EBs in line with no. of MPs; how did Cong get ₹1,400cr?

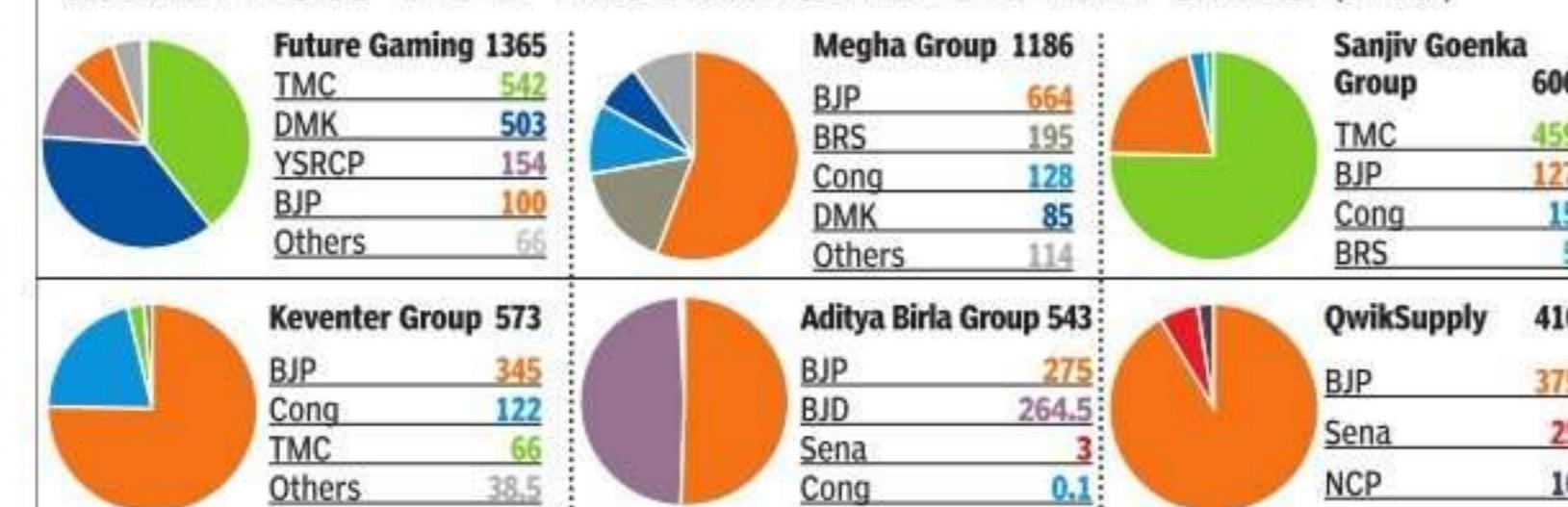
BJP reiterated that the donations it had received via electoral bonds were proportionate to its strength in Parliament, while Congress had received a hugely disproportionate sum.

"There are 303 BJP MPs in LS, which constitutes 55% of total strength. In all, 48 MPs belong to Congress, meaning 9%. There are 24 MPs from DMK and 22 from TMC... Congress received more than Rs 1,400 crore. This raises question how a party with only 9% MPs received Rs 1,400 crore worth of bonds," BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said. P9

TOP DONORS TO MAJOR PARTIES...

BJP Megha Engg (₹584 crore); Qwik Supply (375); Vedanta (230); Bharti Airtel (183); Madanlal (175.5); Keventer Foodpark (144.5); DLF Commercial (130); Birla Carbon (105); Future Gaming (100); Haldia Energy (81); Others (3486.1)	DMK Future Gaming (503); Megha Engg (85); Others (44)
Cong Vedanta (125); MKJ Enterprises (120); Western UP Power Transco (110); Yashoda Hospital (64); Avees Trading (53); Future Gaming (50.0); Sasnal Infra (39); Rithwik Projects (30); SEPC Power (30); Siddhi Trading (22); Others (736.5)	YSRCP Future Gaming (154); Megha Engg (37); Ramco Cements (24); Ostro Jaisalmer (17); Ostro Madhya Wind (17); Sneha Kinetic Power Projects (10); Others (69.8)
TMC Future Gaming (542); Haldia Energy (281); Dharialal Infra (90); MKJ Enterprises (45.9); Avees Trading (45.5); IFB Agro (42); Chennai Green Woods (40); PCBL (40); Prarambh Securities (38.8); Crescent Power (33); Others (394.1)	TDP Shirdi Sai Electricals (40); Megha Engg (28); Western UP Power Transco (20); Natco Pharma (14); Dr Reddy's Labs (13); Bharat Biotech (10); Others (86.6)
BJD Essel Mining (174.5); Jindal Steel & Power (100); Utkal Alumina (70); Rungta Sons (50); SN Mohanty (45); Rashmi Cement (45); Vedanta (40); Penguin Trading (30.5); Jindal Stainless (30); Rashmi Metaliks (27); Others (163.5)	Shiv Sena BG Shirke Construction (85); Qwik Supply (25); Others (42.5)
BRS Megha Engg (195); Yashoda Hospital (94); Chennai Green Woods (50); Dr Reddy's Labs (32); Hetero Drugs (30); IRB MP Expressway (25); Honour Lab (25); NSL SEZ (Hyd) (24.5); L7 Hitch (22); Others (693.7)	JD(S) Nara Constructions (10); Rithwik Projects (10); Others (21)
	RJD IFB Agro (35); Others (37.5)
	NCP Qwik Supply Chain; Others (18.5)
	AAP Avees Trading (10); Others (55.3)
	JD(U) Megha Engg (10); Others (2)

...AND HOW THEY DISTRIBUTED THEIR FUNDS (in ₹ cr)



that donated over Rs 100cr and another three in the Rs 50-100cr range. Trinamool, the third largest recipient of EB funds, had lottery major Future Gaming and Hotel Services as its biggest benefactor (Rs 542cr) and Haldia Energy of the RPG Sanjeev Goenka group as the next biggest with Rs 28cr. The biggest donor, Future Gaming gave the biggest portion of its largesse to regional parties like Trinamool (Rs 542cr), DMK (Rs 503cr) and Ja-

gan Mohan Reddy's YSRCP (Rs 154cr), but also gave BJP Rs 100cr and Congress Rs 50cr.

The second biggest donor, Megha Engineering, gave BPL (Rs 584cr); followed by BRS (Rs 195cr) and DMK (Rs 85cr). Qwik Supply was third biggest donor and has been linked to Reliance with one of its directors identifying himself as head of accounts (consolidation) at RIL and another holding directorships in a number of group companies. Reliance, however, has sta-

ted that Qwik is not a subsidiary. The firm gave Rs 235cr of its total of Rs 410 crore to BJP, with the rest going to Shiv Sena (Rs 25cr) and NCP (Rs 10cr).

The data for which donor and recipient could be matched was for bonds that had been bought on or after April 12, 2019. SC had ordered SBI to put out donor and recipient details only for the period starting from this date.

► SEE P8, 9, 10 & 11

CONG, TAXMEN TRADE WORDS ON PARTY'S FINANCES

'No money to campaign, buy train tickets': Cong seeks access to bank a/cs



Party returns show ₹1kcr+ in cash & corpus, ₹340cr fixed assets: Tax dept

I-T department told ITAT earlier in March that Congress had disclosed a corpus and cash of over Rs 1,000 crore at the end of last financial year, in addition to fixed assets of Rs 340 crore, report Akhilesh Singh & Sidhartha. Hence action by tax authorities didn't cause it hardship, I-T department told ITAT. Congress had multiple accounts across India and

► Armed with cash donation info, I-T to reassess Cong liability for 7 yrs, FLAP OPP
► Cong blaming its irrelevance on 'financial trouble', says BJP, FLAP OPP

taxmen recovered Rs 135 crore from accounts and FDs in five bank branches in Delhi, a tax department source said Thursday, adding, "We categorically deny freezing accounts."

Congress had been dragging the case, something ITAT pointed to in its order as the party's lawyers didn't opt for an "expeditious disposal" of the appeal, sources alleged. FLAP OPP

Indian consulate says it's working with US to locate missing city youth

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Hyderabad: About two weeks after Mohammed Abdul from the city went missing in the US, the Consulate General of India (CGI), New York, has said it has taken up the case with the authorities.

"The CGI is in touch with the family of Mohammad Abdul Arfath (25) and authorities in the US. We are working with local law enforcement agencies to find him at the earliest," CGI New York informed on X on Thursday.

Abdul has reportedly been reported missing from Cleveland since March 7. A resident of Nacharam in Hyderabad, the youngster had gone to the US in May 2023 to pursue his masters in IT from Cleveland University.

► Continued on P5

Cocaine mixed in 25k kg dried yeast? CBI seizes container at Vizag port

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

INTERPOL ALERT

► Container booked from Santos Port in Brazil for delivery at Visakhapatnam in the name of a private company
► The shipper had declared that the container had 1,000 bags of inactive dried yeast of 25 kg each
► The quantity of narcotics is being ascertained

The container was booked from Santos Port in Brazil for delivery at Visakhapatnam in the name of a private firm. The shipper had declared the container had 1,000 bags of inactive dried yeast of 25 kg each. An FIR has been booked against the consignee and unknown others.

► Continued on P7

SC cites freedom of speech issues to stay Centre's 'fact check unit'

New Delhi: Putting premium on freedom of speech and expression on internet, Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the central notification operationalising the Press Information Bureau's fact check unit (FCU), that was intended to stop fake posts and distortions of actions of Union govt, saying the issue involved serious constitutional issues related to Article 19 freedoms, reports Dhananjay Mahapatra.

"The impact of the rule on the fundamental right of speech and expression would call for an analysis by the HC. We accordingly set aside the interim order of third judge and the Division bench declining interim relief (stay on FCU) and pending the proceedings before the HC," the SC said. P9

► Continued on P5

TOP DONORS GAVE MONEY TO...

Of over 1,200 companies and individuals who bought electoral bonds, here is the list of those who contributed Rs 20 cr and above

Donor	Total Donated (Rs cr)	...To (top 5 parties)
Rs 100 crore or more		
Future Gaming	1,365	AITC-542, DMK-503, YSRCP-154, BJP-100, INC-50, others - 16
Megha Engg	966	BJP-584, BRS-195, DMK-85, YSRCP-37, TDP-28, others - 33
Qwiksupply Chain	410	BJP-375, Sena -25, NCP-10
Vedanta	400	BJP-230, INC-125, BJD - 40, JMM-5, AITC-0.2
Haldia Energy	377	AITC - 281, BJP 81, INC -15
Essel Mining & Inds	225	BJD-175, BJP-50
Western Up Power Transco	220	INC- 110, BJP -80, TDP-20, Jansena- 10
Bharti Airtel Limited	198	BJP - 197, JKNC - 0.5, RJD- 0.1
Keventer Foodpark Infra	195	BJP-145, AITC-20, INC-20, SP -10, SAD-0.5
MKJ Enterprises	192	INC-92, AITC-46, BJP-27, BJD-10, BRS-10, Others -8
Madanlal Ltd.	186	BJP-176, INC-10
Yashoda Hospital	162	BRS-94, INC-64, BJP-2, YSRCP-1, AAP-1
Utkal Alumina	145	BJP-75, BJD-70, INC-0.1
DLF Commercial Developers	130	BJP-130
Jindal Steel And Power	123	BJD-100, INC-20, BJP-3
B G Shirke Construction	119	Sena -85, BJP- 30.5, INC-2, AAP-1
Dhariwal Infra	115	AITC-90, BJP-25
Avees Trading & Fin	113	INC-53, AITC-46, AAP-10, BJD-3, BJP-1
Torrent Power	107	BJP-76, INC-17, AAP-7, NCP-3.5, Sena-3
Birla Carbon India	105	BJP-105
Chennai Green Woods	105	BRS-50, AITC-40, INC-15
Rungta Sons	100	BJP-50, BJD-50
Rs 50cr-99cr		
IFB Agro Industries	92	AITC-42, RJD-35, BJD-6, INC-5, AAP-4
Dr Reddys Lab	84	BRS-32, BJP-25, INC-14, TDP-13
Prarambh Securities	79	AITC-39, BJP-33, INC-5, Sena-2
Torrent Pharma	78	BJP-61, SKM-7, INC-5, SP-3, AAP-1, SDF- 0.5
Natco Pharma	69	BRS-20, BJP-15, TDP-14, INC-12, Jansena-5, YSRCP-3
Rashmi Cement	64	BJD-45, AITC-19
Sri Siddharth Infra	61	BJP-50, INC-10, TDP-1
Infina Finance	60	BJP-60
NCC	60	BJP-60
Divi'S Labs	55	BJP-30, BRS-20, INC-5
Navayuga Engg	55	BJP-55
Ramco Cements	54	BJP-25, YSRCP-24, TDP-5
Modern Road Makers	53	BJP-40, INC-6, BRS-5, DMK-2
Aurobindo Pharma	52	BJP-33, BRS-15, TDP-3
United Phosphorus	50	BJP-50
Rs 40cr-49cr		
Transways Exim	47	AITC-21, INC-18, AAP-7, YSRCP-0.6, BJP- 0.1
M/S S N Mohanty	45	BJD-45
PCBL	45	AITC-40, BRS-5
Rithwik Projects	45	INC-30, JDS-10, TDP-5
Sasmal Infra	44	INC-39, BJP-5
Laxmi Civil Engg	40	BJP-40
Phl Fininvest Pvt Ltd	40	BJP-40
SEPC Power	40	INC-30, TDP-5, BJP-5
Shirdi Sai Electricals	40	TDP-40
Rs 30cr-39cr		
Cipla	39	BJP-37, INC-2
Genus Power Infra	39	BJP-26, INC-13
Bharti Telemedia	37	BJP-37
Lakshmi Niwas Mittal	35	BJP-35
Nexg Devices	35	BJP-35
Phillips Carbon Black	35	BJP-20, AITC-15
Piramal Enterprises	35	BJP-35
Safal Goyal Realty Lip	35	BJP-35
Swal Corporation	35	BJP-35
Ultra Tech Cement	35	BJP-22, BJD-10, Sena-3
Crescent Power	34	AITC-33, BJP-1
Grasim Industries	33	BJP-23, BJD-10
LCC Projects	32	BJP-32
Sun Pharma Labs	32	BJP-32
Kamma Credits & Promotors	31	INC-12, BRS-7, AITC-6, BJD-5, BJP-1
Penguin Trading	31	BJD-31
Aparna Farms & Estates	30	INC-15, BRS-15
Apco Infratech Private	30	BJP-30
Hetero Drugs	30	BRS-30
Honeywell Properties	30	BJP-30
Jindal Stainless	30	BJD-30
Rs 20cr-29cr		
Jindal Saw	29	BJP-27, INC-2
Zydus Healthcare	29	BJP-18, SKM-8, INC-3
Westwell Gases	29	AITC-15, DMK-8, RJD-5
Kaypee Enterprises	27	BJP-14, BJD-10, INC-3
Rashmi Metaliks	27	BJD-27
Welspun Corp	27	BJP-22, INC-5
MSN Pharmachem	26	BRS-20, BJP-6
Kalpataru Projects	26	BJP-25
Authum Investment & Infra	25	BJP-25
DLF Luxury Homes	25	BJP-25
Hetero Labs	25	BRS-20, BJP-5
Honour Lab	25	BJP-25
IRB MP Expressway	25	BRS-25
K R Raja Jt	25	BJP-25
Laxmidas Vallabhdas Asmita	25	BJP-25
Maatha Projects	25	BJP-20, TDP-5
Mahindra & Mahindra	25	BJP-25
Prathmesh Construction	25	BJP-25
NSL SEZ (Hyd)	25	BRS-25
Mankind Pharma	24	BJP-24
Vardhaman Textiles	22	BJP-20, INC-1, SAD-0.75, AAP-0.5
HES Infra	22	BRS-20, INC-2
L7 Hitech	22	BRS-22
Siddhi Trading	22	INC-22
WPIL	22	BJP-15, AITC-7
K Raheja Corp	21	BRS-18, BJP-2, Sena-1
Bajaj Finance	20	BJP-20
Balu Iron & Steel	20	BJP-14, BJD-6
BKC Properties	20	INC-20
Chander Commercials	20	BJP-20
Finolex Cables	20	BJP-18, INC-2
Hero Motocorp	20	BJP-20
Hh Iron & Steel	20	BJP-15, BJD-5
Intas Pharmaceuticals	20	BJP-20
Interglobe Real Estate	20	BJP-20
J K Cement	20	BJP-15, INC-5
Koya & Co	20	BRS-20
Lucina Land Development	20	BJP-20
Maruti Suzuki India	20	BJP-20
PRL Developers	20	BJP-10, Sena-5, INC-5
Rahul Bhatia	20	AITC-16, NCP-4
Rajapushpa Properties	20	BRS-20
Tellapur Technocity	20	BRS-20
Wonder Cement	20	BJP-10, INC-10

Big-ticket donors included not just Future Gaming and Megha Engg but also better known names like Vedanta, Bharti Airtel, Jindal, DLF

Infra companies funded regional parties generously, but BJP was the biggest gainer

BJP was the favourite of firms handing over their entire EB purchase to one party with BRS, BJD also in the race

BRS stands out among the regional parties that received smaller donations. Though BJP picked up substantial funds