

## India's Russian oil imports hit record high in Feb; more than Iraq, Saudi

Chennai, March 06 2023: India's imports of crude oil from Russia soared to a record 1.6 million barrels per day in February and is now higher than combined imports from traditional suppliers Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Russia continued to be the single largest supplier of crude oil, which is converted into petrol and diesel at refineries, for a fifth straight month by supplying more than one-third of all oil India imported, according to energy cargo tracker Vortexa.

Refiners continue to snap up plentiful Russian cargoes available at a discount to other grades.

From a market share

of less than 1 per cent in India's import basket before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022, Russia's share of India's imports rose to 1.62 million barrels per day in February, taking a 35 per cent share.

India, the world's third-largest crude importer after China and the United States, has been snapping Russian oil that was available at a discount after some in the West shunned it as a means of punishing Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine.

The rise in Russian imports have been at the expense of Saudi Arabia and United States. Oil import from Saudi fell 16 per cent month-on-month and that from the



US declined 38 per cent.

According to Vortexa, Russia now accounts for more than the combined oil bought from Iraq and Saudi

Arabia -- India's mainstay oil suppliers for decades.

Iraq, whom Russia has toppled to become the largest oil source for

India, supplied 9,39,921 barrels per day (bpd) oil in February while Saudi supplied 6,47,813 bpd oil.

UAE overtook US to

become the fourth largest supplier at 4,04,570 bpd. The US supplied 2,48,430 bpd, down from 3,99,914 bpd in January.

Iraq and Saudi supplies are the lowest in 16 months.

"Indian refiners are enjoying a boost in refining margins from processing discounted Russian crude," said Vortexa's head of Asia-Pacific analysis, Serena Huang.

"Refiners' import appetite for Russian barrels are likely to remain robust as long as the economics are favourable, and financial and logistical services to support the trade are available."

Russia is selling record amounts of crude oil to India to plug the gap in its energy exports after the European Union banned imports in December.

In December, the EU banned Russian seaborne oil and imposed a USD 60-per-barrel price cap, which prevents other countries from using EU shipping and insurance services, unless oil is sold below the cap.

Industry officials said Indian refiners are using UAE's dirham to pay for oil that is imported at a price lower than USD 60.

"Almost a quarter of the Russian imports are now paid in dirham," an official said.

From a market share of just 0.2 per cent in India's import basket before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia's share in India's imports rose to 35 per cent in February 2023.

## Earthquake of 3.9 magnitude hits Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar district

Chennai, March 06 2023: An earthquake of magnitude 3.9 on the Richter scale hit 38 Kk North of Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar district on Sunday.

The National Center for Seismology (NCS) said an earthquake of magnitude 3.9 occurred in Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar, around 6.57 am on Sunday.

"The depth of the earthquake was 10 km



below the ground," it said.

"Earthquake of Magnitude: 3.9, Occurred on 05-03-2023, 06:57:12 IST, Lat: 34.42 & Long:

74.88, Depth: 10 Km, Location: 38km N of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India," it tweeted.

Earlier on February 28, an earthquake of

magnitude 3.2 struck the Noney district of Manipur, the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said.

The quake struck around 2.46 am, at a depth of 25 km.

"Earthquake of Magnitude: 3.2, Occurred on 28-02-2023, 02:46:39 IST, Lat: 24.67 & Long: 93.66, Depth: 25 Km, Location: Noney, Manipur, India," the NCS said in a tweet.

## FY23 fiscal deficit: FinMin starts daily monitoring of receipts, expenses

Chennai, March 06 2023: The finance ministry has started daily monitoring of the revenue receipts, including tax collections, as well as expenditure beginning March 1, with an aim to keep fiscal deficit in check during the current fiscal.

Although the government is expected to meet the revised tax revenue estimates, meeting the Rs 50,000 crore target from disinvestment receipts could be a challenge.

According to officials, the daily monitoring of tax and non-tax revenue collections will help the

government in taking timely corrective actions, wherever needed.

"In order to keep a close track of receipts, expenditure and involving fiscal position of the central government in the month of March, 2023, it is necessary to have updated information on a day-to-day basis," the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) under the finance ministry said in an office memorandum dated March 1.

The Ministry has also asked the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs

(CBIC) to report flash figures. Besides, other non-tax and disinvestment receipts too would have to be reported on a daily basis, as per the memorandum.

CBDT and CBIC are the apex bodies responsible for collecting direct and indirect taxes, respectively.

Non-civil ministries like Railways, Defence and Posts would also be required to upload their accounting data on a daily basis on the e-Lekha portal, it added.

The Centre has set a target of 6.4 per cent for

fiscal deficit, which is the difference between government revenues and spending, in the current financial year ending March 31.

Till January, the fiscal deficit has touched 68 per cent of the Budget estimates at Rs 11.91 lakh crore.

Net tax receipts rose to Rs 16.89 lakh crore while total expenditure was Rs 31.68 lakh crore.

Mop up from disinvestment stood at Rs 31,106 crore so far this fiscal, as against the full year estimates of Rs 50,000 crore.

## Labourers attack: Police book TN BJP chief Annamalai for inciting violence

Chennai, March 06 2023: A day after Tamil Nadu Bharatiya Janata Party chief K Annamalai held the ruling DMK party responsible for the ongoing stir over alleged attacks on migrant labourers in the state, the police have booked him on charges of inciting violence and promoting enmity between groups.

The Cyber Crime Division have booked the BJP state unit chief under sections of inciting violence and promoting enmity between groups among others.

As per officials, a case is also registered against the BJP Bihar Twitter account holder over the incident.

Annamalai yesterday released a statement on the migrant labourers' issue saying they are

safe in Tamil Nadu but the Chief Minister Stalin led-Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and its alliance party leaders are the reason for the hate against them.

He also opposed the spread of false news on the attack on the people from Bihar in the state, saying that Tamils don't support "separatism" and "vile hatred" against north Indians.

"It is disheartening to see fake news spread in social media about attacks on Migrant workers in Tamil Nadu. We, the Tamil people, believe in the concept of 'The World is One' and do not endorse the separatism and vile hatred against our North Indian friends," Annamalai said in a series of tweets.

Hitting out at the state government, he

said, "DMK's MPs' vile comments on North Indians, DMK minister calling them Panipuri Wala, and their alliance partners demanding their exodus has triggered what we see today."

He further said that the people, the Government and the police, do not endorse the views of DMK and their alliance partners.

Besides, Annamalai, the Tamil Nadu police have also booked four persons including a BJP spokesperson Prashant Umrao and two journalists.

Prashant Umrao, an Editor with Dainik Bhaskar, a Patna-based journalist, owner of 'Tanvir Post' Twitter handle Mohammad Tanvir, and Shubam Shukla were booked at different police stations



on the charges of spreading "false" news regarding attacks on migrant labourers in Tamil Nadu.

A statewide panic was created among migrant workers, working in Tamil Nadu, after several purported videos, showing attacks on migrant workers, circulated on social media.

The panic was triggered after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday,

raised concerns and took note of the purported videos of "attacks".

The panic affected the industries in Tamil Nadu, which rely on migrant workers, badly as many workers stayed off work.

Taking cognizance of the panic, Tamil Nadu's Director General of Police Sylendra Babu released a statement,

saying that the video doing rounds of social media was "false" and "mischievous".

"Somebody in Bihar posted false and mischievous videos saying that migrant workers were attacked in Tamil Nadu. Two videos were posted. Both are false as these incidents happened at an earlier date in Tiruppur and

Coimbatore. One was a clash between two groups of migrant workers from Bihar while another was from a clash between two local residents in Coimbatore," the top cop said.

The DGP also said that the persons behind this rumour-driven panic will not be spared.

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## India is making a mark in the global sporting world under PM Modi's Leadership : Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports

Chennai, March 06 2023: Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Singh Thakur attended the closing ceremony of the World Table Tennis Star (WTT) Contender Goa 2023 Tournament in Panaji. WTT Goa is the first World Table Tennis to be conducted in India and boasts of participation from an array of elite athletes, including world number 1 in Men's rankings, Fan Zhendong. International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) President Petra Sorling was also in attendance.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said this was a proud moment for both Goa and India as a World Table Tennis event was being organized for the



very first time in the country. He described how this was yet another milestone in the progress India has made in the world of sports under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Union Minister Anurag Thakur noted how the budget for Sports infrastructure and training had increased greatly under

PM Modi's leadership. He concluded his speech by encouraging parents to send their children out to play more and not limit them to the world of textbooks.

The Minister also presented the award for the Women's Singles Champion to Wang Yidi. Hailing from China and ranked number 4 in global rankings, Wang

Yidi defeated Cheng I-Ching in the finals by a score of 4-0. The tournament saw many twists and turns including Men's World Number 1 Fan Zhendong losing to 193 ranked Cho Daeseong in the round of 32. The tournament also marked the first time a serving ITTF President has visited India.

## India, Sri Lanka mulling over using Indian Rupee for economic transactions

Chennai, March 06 2023: India and Sri Lanka are exploring the possibility of using the Indian Rupee for economic transactions and have discussed the initiative that will help in building a stronger and closer partnership through trade and investment-led measures between the two countries.

The High Commission of India here organised a discussion on the use of the Indian Rupee (INR) for transactions between India and Sri Lanka on Thursday.

"Representatives from the Bank of Ceylon, State Bank of India and the Indian Bank shared their experiences and informed the audience that they had started carrying out INR-denominated trade transactions through respective Vostro/Nostro accounts after the creation of enabling framework by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) in 2022," the High Commission said in a statement.

The participating banks also outlined the benefits of settlements denominated in INR which includes shorter timelines, lower exchange costs and easier availability of trade credits.

The beneficial impact of this initiative on the tourism and



hospitality industry was also highlighted including its role in helping increase collections which could be utilised by other sectors.

High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay highlighted the positive impact that the initiative will have in the joint efforts for building a stronger and closer economic partnership between the two countries through trade and investment-led measures.

Sri Lanka's finance minister Shehan Semasinghe appreciated the close economic relationship between the two countries and the financial and humanitarian support extended by India over the past year, including the strong financing assurances provided by New Delhi, in the context of the IMF support programme for Sri Lanka.

India extended assistance worth over

USD 3.8 billion to Sri Lanka last year to help it deal with the economic crisis.

Governor of the CBSL, Dr. P Nandalal Weerasinghe, highlighted the strong desire among Indian and Sri Lankan business communities for enabling trade settlements in INR.

He called for expanding this facility, over a period of time, to utilise it for the full range of capital and current account transactions. He also appreciated the wide-ranging participation from stakeholders in Sri Lanka and India which included more than 300 attendees in the physical format, apart from those that joined online, according to a report in The Island newspaper.

A team from RBI joined the discussion in the online format and indicated the possibility of settlement of current account transactions in goods, as well as services, in INR, apart

from the option of undertaking permitted capital account transactions. The RBI team referred to the close cooperation with CBSL and RBI's commitment to further facilitate this process, it said.

Sri Lanka was hit by an unprecedented financial crisis in 2022, the worst since its independence from Britain in 1948, due to a severe paucity of foreign exchange reserves, sparking political turmoil in the country which led to the ouster of the all-powerful Rajapaksa family.

The IMF in September last year approved Sri Lanka a USD 2.9 billion bailout package over 4 years pending Sri Lanka's ability to restructure its debt with creditors - both bilateral and sovereign bondholders. With assurances from creditors, the USD 2.9 billion facilities could get the IMF board approval in March.

## Rajnath to address Naval Commanders conference onboard INS Vikrant today

Chennai, March 06 2023: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the first edition of the Naval Commanders' conference onboard INS Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, scheduled to commence on March 6, an official release said.

According to the government, Naval Commanders' conference has its own significance and relevance, due to the prevailing geostrategic situation in the region.

It added that the conference serves as a platform for Naval Commanders to discuss important security issues at the military-strategic level as well as interact with Senior Government functionaries through an institutionalised forum.

"The novelty of this year's conference lies in the fact that the first phase of the Naval Commanders' Conference is being held at sea, and for the first-time, onboard India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant," the release said.



The release said: "Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the Naval Commanders onboard INS Vikrant on the conference's opening day. The Chief of Defence Staff and the Chiefs of the Indian Army and Indian Air Force would also interact with the Naval Commanders on subsequent days to address the convergence of the three Services vis-a-vis common operational environment, and avenues of augmenting Tri-Service synergy and readiness towards the defence of the nation and India's national interests. An operational demonstration at sea is also planned as part of the activities on Day 1".

The Chief of the Naval Staff, along with other Naval Commanders will review major Operational, Materiel, Logistics, Human Resource Development, Training and Administrative activities undertaken by the Indian Navy in the last six months and further deliberate upon future plans for important activities and initiatives, it informed.

During the conference, the release said that the Naval Commanders would also be provided with an update on the 'Agnipath Scheme' executed in the Indian Navy on November 22.

It noted that due to the prevailing

geostrategic situation in the region, the conference has its own significance and relevance.

"The Navy has witnessed significant growth in its operational tasking over the years in consonance with India's growing maritime interests. The Commanders would also deliberate the Navy's readiness to address the challenges to our Maritime interests. The Indian Navy remains focused on being a combat-ready, credible, cohesive and future-proof force and continues to assiduously execute its mandate as the maritime security guarantor of the country," the release stated.

## Samsung Galaxy S23+ outperforms competitors with top features, technology

Chennai, March 06 2023: The competition in the premium smartphone market in India has intensified and Samsung, which leads the premium segment in the country, has brought the Galaxy S23 series to up the ante with top-of-the-game technology and features.

Demand for the locally-produced Galaxy S23 series has increased two times from the previous year, according to the company.

We used the Galaxy S23+ for a week and here is what we think about the smartphone.

The S23+, like previous Samsung flagship models, offers an impressive display and plenty of RAM for smooth performance.

It comes with a slightly larger 4,700mAh battery as compared to the previous S22+ smartphone which offers a 4,500mAh battery.

By eliminating the unnecessary framing around the lenses and allowing them to stand out on the back of the smartphone, the company has made some smart adjustments



to the camera design.

As a result, the Galaxy S23+ looks and feels more premium.

The smartphone features a 6.6-inch Dynamic AMOLED 2X screen with 120 Hz of display rate and houses a triple rear camera setup (15MP+10MP+12MP).

With the most powerful and effective platform yet, the Snapdragon 8 Gen 2 Mobile Platform for Galaxy, Samsung and Qualcomm enhanced the experience for creators and gamers.

The smartphone comes with Corning Gorilla Glass Victus 2, offering durability for long-term use.

The company has also updated its S23+ front camera with a 12MP sensor compared to the 10MP sensor from the previous generation.

It also comes with the Expert RAW application which enables DSLR-style image shooting and editing in RAW and JPEG.

The S23+ comes equipped with Dual Pixel autofocus technology along with Nightography, which allows shooting from the front camera even in low lighting conditions.

The Dual-Pixel autofocus technology also ensures 60 per cent faster focus from the front camera.

Moreover, the device's doubled optical image stabiliser (OIS) angles ensure that videos are stable in low light or other circumstances where there would typically be a blur.

Conclusion: The Galaxy S23+ is a great device for everyone who wants a premium experience. Overall, the smartphone is well-designed, smooth-running and capable of taking high-quality pictures.

## Sales of consumer products pick up marginally as inflation cools

Chennai, March 06 2023: Private consumption in India picked up marginally in the first two months of 2023 compared to the same period last year, taking into account sales of various consumer product companies. CEOs say the outlook for the coming quarters is positive as commodity prices cool and rural income picks up pace. With the government leading a major capital expenditure drive announced in the Budget, CEOs are optimistic that consumer spending would pick up in the coming months.



Data for the first two months shows higher auto sales, electricity consumption and other consumer goods sales (see chart). Falling rural and urban unemployment rate, improving consumer confidence, and falling inflation expectations should support consumption, say analysts at Care Ratings.

CEOs said in the December quarter, everything moved in the right direction by about 200 bps. Value growth moved from 6 to 8 per cent, urban growth moved from 8 to 10 per cent and rural growth moved from 3 to 5 per cent with a commensurate reduction in the negative volume across urban and rural. Although rising prices hit consumer spending, they are now showing signs of cooling, CEOs said. "Going forward,

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certainly in the first half (of calendar 2023), there is going to be a price growth albeit at lower levels, which will essentially be the carryover from last year. Therefore, the rate of inflation will be lower, but we have still not reached the stage where we can say that the commodity prices have started deflating," said Sanjiv Mehta, MD and CEO of HUL.

Mehta said that during the next two years, there will be a period of flux where the price growth will become lower, but volume growth will start kicking in only when a company passes on the benefit of lower commodity prices to the consumers. "We would need a trigger for the commodity prices to start deflating. One of the big triggers could be if the Ukraine-Russia crisis gets solved, we will certainly find

commodity prices going down. However, if they remain at an inflated level, there would be some level of stress from a consumer perspective," he said.

"I believe volume growth should be better in the second half of the calendar year assuming nothing new and extraordinary comes up, and when the commodity prices remain either tamed, or start declining, we should start seeing volume growth coming back," he added.

In the December quarter, growth in private consumption growth had moderated to 2.1 per cent, a notable deceleration from 9.7 per cent reported in the Q2FY23 -- largely on the back of an unfavourable base effect. "Though the ratio of private consumption to GDP has improved to 61.6 per cent from 59.5 per cent in the previous quarter, tapering-off of pent-up demand and high inflation affecting non-essential consumption could be the reason behind lower consumption growth," Care Ratings said.

## Maruti Suzuki expects chip shortage to continue for few more quarters

Chennai, March 06 2023: Maruti Suzuki India expects semiconductor shortage to continue for the next few quarters leading to further increase in order backlog of certain models, according to a senior company official.



The country's largest carmaker has seen its pending bookings stretch to 3.69 lakh units with Ertiga leading the pack with close to 94,000 bookings.

Other models like Grand Vitara and Brezza have an order backlog of around 37,000 and 61,500 units, respectively.

Further, the company has received around 22,000 and 12,000 bookings, respectively, for Jimny and Fronx.

Due to the chip shortage, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) has already witnessed a production loss of close to 46,000 units in October-December period and is expecting some impact on the production in the ongoing quarter as well.

"The semiconductor shortage still continues. Last quarter we lost 46,000 units due to this issue and this quarter also the problem continues for a few

models," Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer (Marketing and Sales) Shashank Srivastava told in an interaction.

The company expects the shortage to continue for a few more quarters, he noted.

"It is difficult to predict exact timelines when it will become normal because the visibility is not there," Srivastava said.

Commenting on the overall PV industry, he noted that the sports utility vehicle continues to lead with a share of 42.6 per cent and hatchbacks accounting for 35 per cent.

"So far the passenger vehicle industry this fiscal year has witnessed sales of 35.5 lakh units. It seems the industry will end the year with 38.8 lakh units mark, the highest ever number till date," he said.

Last fiscal, the number stood at 30.7 lakh units, so the sales are expected to go up by around 26 per cent this financial year.

He noted that the PV segment is expected to post a growth of 5-7 per cent in the next fiscal year over 2022-23.

"Next year our projections are between 40.5-41 lakh units which is roughly a growth of 5-7 per cent," Srivastava noted.

MSI is expected to perform better than the industry, he said adding that the market is witnessing some impact on demand with increase in vehicle loan rates.

"Post the repo rate hike many banks have increased the loan rates...the rates are clearly going up and that obviously has an impact on the overall demand," he stated.

Srivastava noted that

there were also certain positive factors helping mitigate the negative factors in the market.

"If the economy continues to grow, the impact may not be that severe...government spending on infrastructure has an overall positive impact on the demand scenario," he said.

On Jimny and Fronx, Srivastava noted that the production of the models would commence later this month in Gurugram and Gujarat respectively.

The overall passenger vehicle wholesales crossed the 3.35 lakh unit mark in February. It was also the highest ever overall dispatches by companies to dealers in the month of February.

MSI's domestic wholesales rose 11 per cent to 1,55,114 units in February as compared with 1,40,035 units in the same month last year.

The auto major has already dispatched 15.08 lakh units in the current fiscal so far, a growth of 23 per cent from 12.27 lakh units in April-February period of last financial year.

## After North East sweep, BJP looks south to boost tally before 2024 polls

Chennai, March 06 2023: The five southern states have a total of 129 Lok Sabha seats on offer and the BJP has a mere 29 of them in the current Parliament.

But bolstered by its excellent electoral show in the north-east in the just concluded polls and a changed scenario in some of the southern states between 2019 and 2024, the saffron party is looking at more voters from the south to give thumbs up in its bid to form the third NDA government in a row in 2024.

The elections scheduled in the party-ruled Karnataka and BRS-dominated Telangana later this year might just indicate if the political weather is conducive for the Lotus to bloom in the south, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has exuded confidence of the party emerging victorious in Kerala, from where the BJP has neither an elected MP nor an MLA.

The party has rose as a challenger to the ruling Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS), led by K

Chandrasekhar Rao in Telangana, as demonstrated in a couple of Assembly bypolls where it emerged victorious and an impressive performance in the Hyderabad civic polls in 2020 has given it the much needed impetus to take on the might of the ruling BRS in 2024.

Incidentally, KCR, as Rao is known, has thrown his hat into the ring in the efforts to dislodge the BJP government at the Centre next year, even as DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin is also being projected as a leader who could galvanise the anti-BJP forces to challenge the incumbent.

In the current LS scenario, all of the 29 seats BJP has are from its-ruled Karnataka and Telangana. In a sweeping victory, the saffron party won 25 of the 28 LS seats from Karnataka in 2019, while its backed independent from Mandya, Sumalatha, also made the cut.

Telangana returned four BJP MPs but the

saffron party has nil representation from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, dominated by the DMK, Congress and YSCRP, respectively in the Lok Sabha.

However, things have started looking up for the BJP in Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian heartland, party workers believe.

For instance, they point out, BJP won 4 Assembly seats in the state in the elections held in 2021, overcoming the DMK wave in constituencies, including one in Erode district, the birthplace of Dravidian stalwart and rationalist leader EV Ramasamy Periyar.

The party's state unit has now set its eyes on winning 15 LS seats from Tamil Nadu in 2024 and insists it even has a strategy to take on the Dravidian major DMK, whose led alliance won the just concluded Erode East bypoll. NDA constituent AIADMK was defeated by Congress by a massive margin of over 66,000 votes.

The BJP feels that the 2024 Lok Sabha election



in Tamil Nadu will be different from what it was in the past.

"This time we may contest 15 seats on the Lotus symbol after apportioning the remaining 24 Lok Sabha constituencies to our allies. We have already identified the winnable seats and selected those constituencies where we finished second in the previous elections," said M Chakravarthy, BJP state vice president.

In the months to come several central ministers would visit the State to gear up the party for the poll.

They would help in strengthening the BJP at the booth level, he said.

Asked if the infighting in the AIADMK would affect the NDA's prospects at the hustings, Chakravarthy replied "the outcome of the

Erode East Assembly by-poll is a lesson for the AIADMK to ponder if the party symbol (Two Leaves) alone is sufficient to win the election."

"We already have a strategy in place to take on the DMK. We are waiting for the nod from the party high command to launch the campaign," another senior leader in the party said.

The party won 1 seat in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

The fundamental shift in political dynamics in Tamil Nadu will prove advantageous to the BJP and on its own performance the BJP has made itself relevant, says K Annamalai, IPS turned politician who has been mandated by the party high command to send more MPs from the State this time.

"There is no social justice in the DMK. People have realised that the BJP alone can accommodate all sections and as a result, we have been gaining ground. We are going everywhere, as it is our duty to embrace all," the state BJP chief said.

"I boldly tell my party men to perform...all those parties which accept Modi's leadership are welcome to join our alliance," Annamalai added.

Elsewhere, BJP sees Telangana as the next state in the south, after Karnataka, where it stands a chance of coming to power.

Though the party could win only a single seat out of the total 119 in the last Assembly elections in 2018, its strength grew to three subsequently following morale-boosting win in two bypolls.

It had also pulled off a stunning performance in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) election held in 2020.

With Congress, the original main opposition to BRS, failing to hold

ground amid allegations of disunity in the party, the BJP has been making a determined effort since the last couple of years to emerge as the alternative to BRS in the Assembly elections scheduled to be held later this year.

However, dislodging the BRS is easier said than done in view of the ruling party's vast network across the state and other strengths.

KCR has made an ambitious foray into national politics after changing the name of his Telangana Rashtra Samiti as Bharat Rashtra Samiti.

In the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, also a Telugu-speaking state, the BJP is aspiring to put up a good show, but has its task cutout as the political space is dominated by two regional players--CM Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP and N Chandrababu Naidu's TDP.

Observers point out at the recent high profile ship-jumping from the BJP, with former state chief Kanna Lakshminarayan joining the Telugu Desam Party.

The saffron party is in alliance with actor-politician Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena who has also floated the idea of tying up with TDP, an idea the BJP is not favourably disposed to.

BJP may not have it easy in Kerala. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said people in the state are politically enlightened and due to this reason it would be difficult for the BJP to fulfill the Prime Minister's dream of capturing power in the southern state.

When pointed out that the BJP has managed to form governments in many states including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Goa and Arunachal Pradesh where the Congress or its allies had been major political players, the AICC general secretary said it is difficult to say if such tactics would help BJP to make changes in Kerala's political landscape too.

CPI(M) state secretariat member M Swaraj said the BJP's politics is based on the communal agenda of the RSS.

## RIL, First Solar, Shirdi Sai bid for 15.5 Gw end-to-end solar manufacturing

Chennai, March 06 2023: Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), US-based First Solar and Shirdi Sai have bid for end-to-end polysilicon wafer cells modules (PWCM) manufacturing totalling 15.4 gigawatt (Gw) For the second tranche of the 'production linked incentive' (PLI) scheme for solar equipment manufacturing.

Under the PLI guidelines for the second phase, of the total corpus of Rs 19,000 crore, the highest tranche of Rs 12,000 crore has been allotted to end-to-end PWCM manufacturing (raw material to finished product). Unlike the first round, this phase of solar PLI has three schemes - PWCM and 'wafer cells modules', with allocation of Rs 4,500 crore and 'cells-



modules' with Rs 3,500 crore.

RIL and Shirdi Sai have each placed bids for 6 Gw of PWCM capacity while First Solar has bid for 3.4 Gw. No firm in India currently makes polysilicon, the raw material for the entire supply chain of solar equipment manufacturing.

First Solar is a Nasdaq-listed, US-based solar module manufacturer that has been operating in India as a module supplier for nearly a decade. This would be its first manufacturing unit in India. Andhra Pradesh-

based Shirdi Sai, an incumbent from phase-I, manufactures power transmission and distribution equipment.

The second phase has 11 bidders in all - Tata Power Solar, Vikram Solar, Waaree Energies, ReNew Solar, Avaada Ventures, JSW Renewable, Ampin Solar and Green Energy Pvt Ltd are among the others. Tata Power is learnt to have placed a bid for 3 Gw of solar cell and module capacity.

A major absentee from the bids is Adani Enterprises which was one of the winners in

the first phase for 4 Gw of solar module. Other winners were RIL and Shirdi Sai for a similar capacity.

In the first tranche of tendering, the Centre received close to 50 Gw of bids against a PLI sanction of Rs 4,500 crore and RfP of 10 Gw. It received close to 18 bids from a range of companies - Coal India, L&T, Vikram Solar, Megha Engineering and several new companies.

The corpus was increased to Rs 19,500 crore under the Union Budget 2022-23 to accommodate the large number of bids. The nodal agency for the second tranche of bidding has also been changed to Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) from Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (Ireda) earlier.

## FMCG, dairy firms betting on strong double-digit sales growth in summer

Chennai, March 06 2023: Demand for ice creams and cold beverages like Cola have surged because of the onset of early summer and sales are likely to grow in strong double-digits this season, according to top executives of FMCG and dairy firms.

The summer season will also get a tailwind in the form of an abatement of the pandemic with increased consumer mobility. This will also help the out-of-home (OOH) segment, where the companies expect a sharp rise in sales after a slump of two years.

Companies are ready with new and innovative offerings anticipating strong demand for their products this season and have started building inventory.

Mother Dairy, one of the leading sellers of milk, dairy beverage products and Ice creams, said it is already "witnessing a surge in demand" with rising temperature and expects the trend to continue in the coming days.

"In line with the same, we have already beefed up our value-chain to cater to any surge in demand across channels.



"For a category like ice creams, which is a highly infrastructure-led business, we have ramped up our production, cold-chain infrastructure, refer vehicles and have invested in asset deployment at our consumer touch points to ensure shelf strength," said Mother Dairy Managing Director Manish Bhandlish.

In addition, Mother Dairy is also geared up to entice consumption with the launch of about 15 new variants and flavours this season and excite consumers to explore for more, he said.

"We expect our ice cream category to grow by about 25 per cent in the upcoming season," Bhandlish added.

Expecting a good season, companies have also increased their marketing spends on endorsements, brand

campaigns etc targeting the consumers.

Beverage maker PepsiCo said it is "excited" about an early onset of summer and this could signify for the beverage sector in 2023.

The company is "optimistic" that its portfolio of beverage brands will be able to meet consumer demand and to help them beat the heat, said PepsiCo India Senior Vice President, Beverages George Kovoov.

"Most of our high-octane, brand summer campaigns are being launched in February itself, and they feature celebrities with mass appeal to further strengthen the connect with consumers and ensure brand love.

"We look forward to a great summer while remaining committed to providing consumers the right products at the

right occasions across the beverage portfolio," said Kovoov.

Similarly, home-grown FMCG major Dabur India said a warmer and longer summer would be good for its summer-centric products, particularly its beverages and glucose portfolio.

"We are already witnessing good demand for these products and have started building inventory for the same, both at the retail and stockist end," said Dabur India Chief Operating Officer Adarsh Sharma.

According to Nuvama Group Executive Director, Institutional Equities Abneesh Roy this year, summer would be positive for summer categories like ice cream, cola, fruit juices, beer, cooling hair oil. He expects "strong double-digit sales growth" in these categories.

"Both urban and rural markets will see good demand for these categories but urban will be faster," Roy added.

However, he also added that last time also summer was harsh, so the base is not soft.

## Yora Fitness, the Master Franchise of Fitness Factory for South India first outlet inaugurated at KK Nagar

Chennai, March 06 2023: Fitness Factory is one of the fastest growing fitness chain in Europe having 32 fitness centers in Portugal and opening 4 outlets in Spain and 5 outlets in Italy this and coming quarter. Fitness Factory is a smart cost gym and serving customers from all walks of life. It has products and services to suit different pockets. It's our neighbourhood gym with world class service & Infrastructure at affordable price. The main business objective of this European brand is to touch every lives around to make them healthier physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.



This first outlet was opened by Mr. Pedro Simão, the founder of the brand and Mr. Hugo Pedrosa, the brand manager in the presence of Mr. Mohammed Shahul Hameed, the Managing Director of Yora Fitness Private Limited, the Master Franchisee of Fitness Factory for South India.

When he addresses

the press meet he announced that this Fitness Factory business model is the concept designed for less investment and quick return with an international best practices part of the process being edge over competitors. It is a neighbourhood gym concept with a motto "Democratizing the

Fitness" Which literally translates to Fitness for Everyone.

This outlet introduced lot of weight reduction programs, transformation packages, Diet consultation, Group Classes such as Yoga, Zumba, HIIT, Aerobics, Virtual Classes, etc.. At a very affordable price.

For more information please do visit

**Fitness Factory No. 893, First & Second Floor, Munusami Salai, KK Nagar West, Chennai - 600078. (Near Pondicherry Guest House) Ph. 9981998183 & 9981998184.**

## KURKURE ONBOARDS SARA ALI KHAN AS ITS NEW BRAND AMBASSADOR

Chennai, March 06 2023: Kurkure, one of India's most loved snack brands, has made a new addition to the brand family. Popular actress and Bollywood star, Sara Ali Khan, has been onboarded as the new brand ambassador. She made the announcement with an entertaining Instagram reel that shows her in her natural element. The reel received over 50K views in just 10 minutes of her reveal!

In true Sara style, she addresses the chatter around the masaledaar collaboration with a chatpati rhyme that has everyone smiling, "Toh kal maine share ki thi ek chatpati news. Fun, masala, masti, those are your clues. It'll take away all your blues, no matter what flavour you

choose... It's time to tell you happily, Sara is now a part of the Kurkure family."

As a brand, Kurkure has always been the family-entertainer with light-hearted humour and fun-filled moments. With its wide array of delicious products and innovative storytelling in the past 20+ years, the brand has transformed the simplest, most mundane moments into quirky, over-the-top ones. Synonymous to the brand, Sara Ali Khan is known for her fun and playful persona that adds a bit of masti in the daily lives of her fans.

Speaking on the unveil, Neha Prasad, Associate Director and Brand Lead, Kurkure said, "Bringing her expressive and

entertaining persona, Sara makes for a great addition to Kurkure's masaledaar family! Her exuberance and cheerfulness personify the Kurkure personality, and we are sure that audiences will love her as a brand ambassador. We believe that our partnership will not only increase brand reach, but also amplify our quirky messaging."

Commenting on her association, Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan said, "I am beyond excited to be a part of the Kurkure family! While I was growing up, I became a fan of the brand and loved watching their entertaining TVCs that kept all of us tickled. I cannot wait to be a part of the masti-filled campaigns that the



brand has in store and look forward to bringing in my chatpata-pun to my darshaks and audience."

Sara Ali Khan will be an active part of upcoming Kurkure campaigns and will promote the brand and products across all traditional and digital platforms in the country.

## Urination incident on American Airline NY-Delhi flight, action being taken

Chennai, March 06 2023: An inebriated Indian student in an American Airlines flight from New York to Delhi allegedly urinated and soiled a male co-passenger on Saturday, with Delhi Police saying necessary legal action is being taken on the basis of a complaint from the airline.

The airline has submitted a report about the incident to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The airline seems to have handled the situation professionally and have taken all appropriate action, a senior official at the regulator told PTI.

The incident happened in flight AA292 which landed at the Delhi airport at 9.50

pm on Saturday.

When contacted, American Airlines in a statement on Sunday said the flight was "met by local enforcement upon arrival in Delhi due to a disruptive customer" but did not provide specific details about the incident.

Delhi airport DCP Devesh Kumar Mahla on Sunday said a complaint of urination on co-passenger has been received from American Airlines against one person, who is a student in the US. The person is a resident of Defence colony in the national capital.

"We are taking necessary legal action," he said.

"The accused is a student in a US

university. He was in a state of inebriation and urinated while he was asleep. It somehow leaked and fell on a fellow passenger who complained to the crew," a source at the airport said.

According to the source, the male victim was not keen on reporting the matter to the police after the student apologised as it might put his career in jeopardy.

However, the airline took it seriously and reported it to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) at the airport.

After the crew came to know about the incident on board, they informed the pilot who reported the matter to the ATC, which further alerted the CISF

personnel who handed over the accused passenger to the Delhi police.

The passenger Shankar Mishra, in an inebriated state, had allegedly urinated on an elderly woman co-passenger. Mishra was arrested and later released on bail.

Following the incident, Air India had imposed a flying ban on the passenger concerned while aviation regulator DGCA had taken enforcement action against the airline in relation to the incident.

As per civil aviation rules, if a passenger is found guilty of unruly behaviour, enforcement action, including imposing a flying ban, can be taken depending on the level of offence.