




# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From: VIJAYAWADA HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN

**Shah on why Rahul, Digvijay did not attend Ram temple event**



**'NAWAB KA SHEHAR, IT'S A REFLECTION OF EASYGOING PACE OF LIFE'**



**Digangana Suryavanshi reviving silver screen with four awaited RELEASES**



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**INC has become the 'Italian National Congress'. The country was ruled by the British for 200 years. Later the Congress party tried to make Sonia Gandhi from Italy as the British representative and the Prime Minister of the country. People of the country have not yet forgotten how the Congress made the evil conspiracy to make an Italian as the Prime Minister of the country**



- G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister

## DON'T MISS...

### Sharmila: Jagan failed to complete...

Continuing her criticism against Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, APCC president YS Sharmila has alleged that the completion of irrigation projects initiated under YS Rajasekhara Reddy's 'Jala Yagnam' mission remains unfulfilled under Jagan Reddy's administration. Speaking at an election rally in Chintalapudi on Friday, Sharmila highlighted the efforts made by local MLA VR Eliza to push forward the Chintalapudi project, only to face a lack of cooperation from the government. She pointed out the MLA's unsuccessful...

-PAGE: 4

### Board exams twice a year from...

The Ministry of Education has asked the CBSE to work out logistics for conducting board exams twice a year from the 2025-26 academic session, according to sources. The plan for introducing a semester system has been ruled out, they said. The ministry and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold consultations with school principals next month for conducting board exams twice a year, the sources said. The CBSE is currently in the process of working out the modalities...

-PAGE: 5

### Bank of Maharashtra stock climbs nearly...

Shares of Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Friday climbed nearly 4 per cent after the company reported a 45 per cent jump in net profit for the March quarter. The stock jumped 3.65 per cent to settle at Rs 67.62 per piece on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 6.37 per cent to Rs 65.24. On the NSE, it rallied 3.67 per cent to Rs 67.65 apiece. In volume terms, 41.88 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 942.89 lakh shares on the NSE during the day...

-PAGE: 8

### Upbeat Delhi Capitals take on...

Bolstered by Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on the inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday. The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats. But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win against MI will strengthen their...

-SPORTS

## Botsa raps Piyush's remarks on AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has emphasised the gravity of responsibility and precision in the statements issued by those holding ministerial positions, particularly concerning sensitive matters.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, he termed Union Minister Piyush Goyal's recent comments regarding Andhra Pradesh inaccurate and baseless.

Expressing disappointment at what he perceived as Goyal's propensity to speak without factual substantiation, Minister Botsa challenged the veracity of the Union Minister's assertions. He stressed the imperative of backing claims with evidence, particularly in educational matters, and condemned what he characterised as the dissemination of false nar-



atives by certain media outlets. In addition to addressing allegations of corruption within the education sector, Minister Botsa defended the government's educational initiatives and accomplishments, citing record-high pass rates in government schools and the efficient conduct of examinations as evidence of the administration's dedication to educational excellence.

## VOTES CAST USING EVMs

# SC disallows 100% cross-check

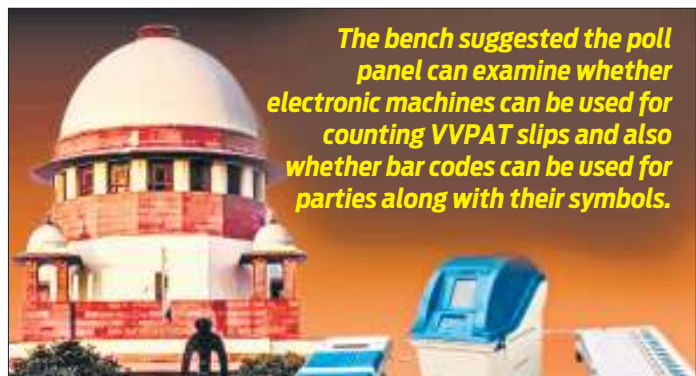
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the country voted in round two of Election 2024, the Supreme Court on Friday rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and said "blindly distrusting" any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism.

Weighing in on the intensely debated issue that has long divided parties, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts and dismissed all the pleas in the matter, including those seeking to go back to ballot papers in elections. It also maintained that "democracy is all about striving to build harmony and trust between all institutions".

The Supreme Court's long anticipated verdict quickly found echo in the political landscape with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying at a rally in Araria in Bihar that it was a "tight slap" on the Congress-led opposition which now must "apologise" for committing the "sin of creating distrust" against electronic voting machines. The Congress on its part said in a post on X that it will continue with its political campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust in the electoral process. The apex court issued two directives on the matter.

Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the Election



The bench suggested the poll panel can examine whether electronic machines can be used for counting VVPAT slips and also whether bar codes can be used for parties along with their symbols.

## Key directives of apex court

After completing loading of symbols into the machine, the SLU, or symbol loading unit, should be sealed and stored for a period of at least 45 days. The SLU storage containers must be sealed and the seal is to be signed by candidates.

The burnt memory in the EVM microcontroller EVM must be checked by a team of engineers - after results are declared - if candidates make such a request. This request - which can be made by candidates placed second and third in the election - must be made within seven days of declaration of results

The verification expenses will have to be borne by the candidate. The cost will, however, be refunded if the EVM is found to have been tampered with.

Commission to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days after the symbols have been loaded to electronic voting machines in strong rooms.

The apex court also allowed engi-

neers of the EVM manufacturers to verify the microcontroller of the machines after declaration of the results on the request of candidates who stood second and third.

Continued on Page 2

## Introduced to enhance transparency, VVPATs back in focus

The Supreme Court's decision on Friday rejecting pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) has brought the focus back on the paper trail machines. To enhance transparency and verifiability in the poll process, the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 were amended in 2013 to introduce the use of VVPAT machines. They were first used in the by-election to the Noksen assembly seat in Nagaland. At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT make up for an EVM. The tentative cost of an EVM comprised Rs 7,900 per ballot unit, Rs 9,800 per control unit and Rs 16,000 per VVPAT. Since 2019, VVPAT slips from five randomly selected polling stations per assembly constituency (or segment in the case of Lok Sabha seats) are matched with the EVM count for greater transparency. According to EC, so far there has hardly been a mismatch. As an elector votes for a candidate on the ballot unit, he or she can see a slip with the candidate's party symbol on a small window on the VVPAT unit for seven seconds. The slip then drops into a basket.

# YSRCP manifesto gets final touches

JAGAN MAY UNVEIL IT TODAY OR TOMORROW

**CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, focusing on securing a second term, is learnt to have been working on garnering support from farmers, women, and youth.**



■ The YSRCP plans to unveil schemes tailored to the aspirations of the youth, with CM Jagan Mohan Reddy expected to encourage youth participation in job creation initiatives.

■ The manifesto launch is strategically aligned with the announcement schedule of the opposition TDP

■ All eyes are on the camp office in Tadepalli, where the party is set to unveil its roadmap for the future of Andhra Pradesh amid a charged political atmosphere.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As the anticipation builds ahead of the upcoming general elections in the State, YSRCP president and Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is poised to release the party's election manifesto. The manifesto is scheduled for unveiling either on Saturday (April 27) or Sunday (April 28). CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, focusing on securing a second term, is learnt to have been working on garnering support from farmers, women, and youth.

Sources within the YSRCP have indicated that CM Jagan Mohan Reddy is gearing up to announce sig-

nificant policy measures targeting these crucial voter segments. Among the anticipated announcements are a loan waiver scheme for farmers and DWACRA women, as well as initiatives aimed at generating employment opportunities for the youth.

The electoral significance of these demographics cannot be understated, as evidenced by past elections where similar assurances played a pivotal role in securing victory for the YSRCP. By drawing inspiration from previous successful strategies, the party aims to replicate its previous electoral triumphs.

Continued on Page 2

## Dokka quits YSRCP, joins TDP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A prominent Dalit figure in YSRCP, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad, resigned from the party on Friday. Later, Manikya Vara Prasad joined the TDP.

His political journey includes successful stints as a representative in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly from the Tadikonda constituency, both in 2004 and 2009 during the era of undivided Andhra Pradesh. Following the state's bifurcation, he shifted to the TDP. However, after the TDP's disappointing performance in the 2019 elections, he shifted his allegiance to the YSRCP in 2020, where he secured a seat in the Legislative Council.

Accompanied by his supporters, Vara Prasad formally joined the TDP in a ceremony presided over by TDP Chief Chandrababu Naidu at his residence in Hyderabad.

Naidu symbolically welcomed them into the TDP fold by draping scarves around their necks. Vara Prasad's supporters expressed their disillusionment with the YSRCP, citing instances of perceived disrespect towards the senior leader. Despite attempts to communicate his perspective to Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, Vara Prasad was allegedly denied an audience.

Continued on Page 2

## Red sanders smugglers 'sent' to spoil my chances: Pawan

PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan has promised to ensure Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers' produce if his alliance secures victory in the upcoming elections. He also alleged that red sanders smugglers had been despatched to Pithapuram to sabotage his campaign.

Emphasising the commitment of his alliance to support farmers, Kalyan stated, "We stand firm on our promise to offer fair prices for agricultural goods, ensuring the welfare of our farming community."

Kalyan criticised the administration's handling of recent incidents, highlighting a disparity in treatment between cases. "While a minor incident led to a murder charge against an individual who threw a stone towards Jagan Mohan Reddy, no action has been taken against YSRCP leader Ananta Babu, accused of killing his Dalit car driver," Kalyan asserted.

Regarding the alleged deployment of red sander smugglers in Pithapuram, Kalyan remained resolute. "Despite these underhanded tactics, I am undeterred. Let it be known that this is not 2019; it's 2024," he declared, signalling a call for change in the state's leadership.

Responding to comments made by Jagan Reddy concerning the attire of his sister and APCC President YS Sharmila, Kalyan criticised the remarks as inappropriate. "Jagan Reddy's commentary on Sharmila's attire reflects poorly on him. Such behaviour threatens the security of women in our society," Kalyan expressed.

Kalyan condemned what he perceived as a pattern of disrespect towards women by the ruling party. "From insulting my wife to now denigrating his own sister, and even targeting Vivekananda Reddy's daughter, Suneetha, Jagan Reddy has consistently stooped to new lows," Kalyan remarked.

Continued on Page 2

## 3 drowned in Jalleru stream; bodies fished out

PNS ■ ELURU

In a tragic incident, three youngsters, including two women and a boy, were drowned in the Jalleru stream when they ventured into it for a bath at Jalleru village in Jangareddygudem mandal on Friday.

Police said that the deceased Reshma (24), Mohishat (23) and Hasad (14) entered the stream for both and were drowned. The deceased belonged to Utlapalli in Ashwaraopet mandal in Telangana state.

A group of people came here on a pleasure trip to enjoy the holiday and their trip ended on a tragic note. The bodies were fished out of the stream. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem. Poignant scenes were witnessed at the GGH with wailing family members.

**AAG Ponnaveedu denies Sharmila's accusations**



P3

## AS RESERVOIR LEVELS PLUNGE TO JUST 17% CAPACITY

# CWC flags worsening water scarcity in southern India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The southern region, encompassing states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has significantly reduced water storage compared to historical averages at just 17 per cent of reservoir capacity, according to the recent bulletin of the Central Water Commission.

In the bulletin released by the CWC late Thursday concerning reservoir storage levels across various regions of India, it was reported that 42 reservoirs under CWC monitoring in the southern region have a total live storage capacity of 53,334 BCM (billion cubic meters).

As per the latest report, the total live storage available in these reservoirs stands at 8,865 BCM, representing only 17 per cent of their total capac-



The reduced storage levels in the southern region are indicative of worsening water scarcity and potential challenges for irrigation, drinking water supply and hydroelectric power generation in these states.

ity. This figure is considerably lower compared to the storage levels during the same period last year (29 per cent) and the ten-year average for the corresponding period (23 per cent).

The reduced storage levels in the southern region are indicative of

worsening water scarcity and potential challenges for irrigation, drinking water supply and hydroelectric power generation in these states.

In contrast, the eastern region, comprising states like Assam, Odisha and West Bengal, has shown a positive improvement in water storage lev-

els compared to last year and the ten-year average.

The bulletin highlighted that in this region, 23 monitored reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 20,430 BCM currently hold 7,889 BCM of water, representing 39 per cent of their total capacity.

This marks an improvement over the storage levels from the same period last year (34 per cent) and the ten-year average (34 per cent).

The situation is less optimistic in other regions. The western region, consisting of Gujarat and Maharashtra, reports storage levels of 11,771 BCM, which is 31.7 per cent of the total capacity of 49 monitored reservoirs. This is notably lower compared to the storage levels of the previous year (38 per cent) and the ten-year average (32.1 per cent).

Similarly, the northern and central regions also show declines in water storage levels compared to historical averages. The broader analysis provided in the bulletin categorises reservoir storage across various river basins as "better than normal," "close to normal," "deficient," or "highly deficient".





# Are caste conflicts pushing AP to the brink of civil war?

With Andhra Pradesh getting polarised the people are debating what to do. On the other side of the fence, the rich, non-resident Indians, who can be described as Americans of Indian origin, have been adding fuel to the fire. This could be the first time that American NRIs are meddling in elections openly although they may not understand state politics fully.

The poor across Andhra Pradesh, particularly rural areas, are burning with rage after a prominent American of Indian origin, Komati Jayaram, called those not supporting the TDP "stupid fellows." He made the unsavoury statement at a secret conclave held to chalk out a strategy to influence at least 10 families opposing the TDP in each vil-

lage to vote for it. In this context, a video featured him saying, "These stupid fellows will not vote for the TDP. We must chalk out a strategy to bring them into our fold by spending Rs 2 to Rs 3 lakh. NRIs can afford to spend that much money."

The foul language used by Jayaram, who was once a son of the soil, triggered anger as he came from a decent family rooted in the Congress culture. His father Komati Bhaskar Rao was a Congress MLA from 1989 to 1994 and was a follower of Chanumolu Venkat Rao who was a minister in the cabinet of Jalagam Vengal Rao and Kotla Vijayabhaskara Reddy.

The Congress leaders of Krishna district like Pinnamaneni Koteswara Rao, Mandali Venkata

Krishna Rao and Chanumolu Venkata Rao, never thought of crossing over to the TDP during those heydays from 1983 to 1987 when the TDP was at the height of its power.

In fact, Pinnameneni Koteswara Rao, who had been the Zilla Parishad chairman for almost 25 years, had challenged TDP founder NT Rama Rao, contested from the Mudunepalli Assembly constituency and defeated the TDP nominee by a huge margin. NT Rama Rao, who contested from neighbouring Gudivada campaigned in Mudunepalli relentlessly but that was in vain.

This small battle is important in the context of Krishna district's history. A secular democratic fabric had been in place in the district till



SRIRAMULU K

1983. When Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy (former AP Chief Minister and President) contested against Prof. NG Ranga in the race for the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president post, Sanjeeva

Reddy won with a majority of one vote. The contest which happened in the Andhra Ratna Bhavan, the Congress headquarters in Vijayawada, witnessed a prominent Kamma politician, Kakani Venkata Ratnam, helping Sanjeeva Reddy to defeat Prof. NG Ranga with his single vote. Most old Congressmen were his followers and they never rubbed shoulders with TDP leaders.

It cannot be out of context to recall that Vijayawada, better known as Bezawada, had witnessed violence after the murder of Congress MLA Vangaveeti Ranga Rao, who was hailed as a champion of the poor. His murder in December 1988 led to riots breaking out.

A day after the silent, holy night of Christmas, Vijayawada resembled a war zone. On the morning

of December 26, 1988, the city woke up to the cries of murder and revenge and was convulsed by riots and 42 people were killed in police firing.

Fortunately, the Congress under the leadership of Dr M. Channa Reddy wrested power from the TDP headed by NT Rama Rao. It was during this time Jayaram's father Komati Bhaskara Rao was elected to the Assembly from Mylavaram on a Congress ticket. The Congress helped to heal the wounds. During these tumultuous times, Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy developed a bond with Krishna district and helped to ease the tension by persuading Vangaveeti Ranga Rao's wife Ratna Kumari to withdraw her indefinite fast.

Although the wounds inflicted

by the violence were healed, relations between communities remained strained till recently. Once again, caste politics played by a handful of American NRIs may create a climate of mistrust between communities in the district, particularly Vijayawada.

These developments made the public to label it as a "plot against the poor and the secular fabric of society." A prominent citizen, a veteran of many struggles on behalf of farmers, commented that "the underbelly of conspiracies being hatched by a clique has been laid bare now." It is to be seen now whether society will get stretched further to the point of pushing the State to the brink of a civil war.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

# TDP, YSRCP fight amid rising civic issues

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM /MANYAM

## Parvathipuram Assembly Segment

The Parvathipuram Assembly segment, historically contested between the TDP and Congress, is now witnessing a fierce electoral showdown as the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) candidate Alajangi Jogarao unseated TDP's Bobbili Chiranjeevulu in 2019, marking a significant turning point in the constituency's electoral history. With critical issues like road connectivity and pending irrigation projects dominating the discourse, the constituency finds itself at the forefront of political contention.



and electoral prospects. Parvathipuram, a Scheduled Caste reserved constituency, boasts a diverse demographic makeup, with Backward Classes (BCs) wielding substantial influence over the electoral outcome. Dominant communities such as Koppula Velama, Kapu, and SCs hold sway, alongside Vysyas and other BC communities, making every vote crucial in determining the constituency's fate.

Despite its political significance, Parvathipuram grapples with a host of pressing issues, including drinking water shortages, pending irrigation projects, and the fallout from the closure of the NCS Sugars Limited factory. Incumbent MLA Jogarao touts his achievements in housing schemes, healthcare infrastructure improvements, and road connectivity projects as evidence of his commitment to the constituency.

However, critics accuse him of neglecting critical issues like the relocation of the dumping yard and ensuring a stable drinking water supply. As tensions simmer and disillusionment with unmet promises grows, the battle for Parvathipuram Assembly segment becomes a litmus test of political will and leadership efficacy. With campaigning in full swing, both TDP and YSRCP leave no stone unturned to sway voters in their favor, cognizant of the pivotal role this fiercely contested constituency plays in shaping the region's political trajectory.

As voters prepare to cast their ballots, the outcome of the Parvathipuram Assembly segment hangs in the balance, with the electorate keenly observing how candidates address their concerns and deliver on their promises in the days leading up to the elections.

# Sribharat vows to develop Vizag a la Singapore

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Acknowledging the stagnation in attracting major IT companies to Visakhapatnam, Sribharat lambasted the incumbent government's inertia and vowed to prioritise efforts to lure leading firms to the city.



In a bid to propel Visakhapatnam into a global powerhouse of commerce and innovation, M Sribharat, the alliance candidate for the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha seat, has laid out an ambitious blueprint for the city's development, drawing parallels with the remarkable transformation of Singapore.

In an exclusive interview with The Pioneer, Sribharat articulated his commitment to serving the people of Visakhapatnam, emphasising the imperative of setting audacious goals for the region's progress. Inspired by Singapore's success story under the leadership of Lee Hsien Loong, Sribharat envisions mirroring a similar trajectory for Visakhapatnam, focusing on propelling the city into a global hub of commerce, tourism, and employment.

Addressing the challenges faced by the Visakhapatnam steel plant, Sribharat pledged to explore solutions to revive the struggling facility, drawing parallels with past interventions that rejuvenated the plant's operations. He advocated for strategic initiatives to bolster heavy industries, foster innovation, and expand employment avenues, particularly in sectors like pharmaceuticals and fisheries.

Acknowledging the stagnation in attracting major IT companies to Visakhapatnam, Sribharat lambasted the incumbent government's inertia and vowed to prioritise efforts to lure leading firms to the city. He emphasized the critical importance of nurturing local talent through collaborative partnerships with educational institutions, aiming to catalyse the growth of the IT sector and stem the brain drain plaguing the city.

## India's rise unstoppable...

Continued from Page 1

"It is the only language whose expression orientation does not lend to two meanings," he claimed, adding that it was an essential requirement for use in technology. According to the Vice President, Sanskrit is seen as the mother of many Indian languages. He observed that it occupies a unique position in India's linguistic evolution, contributing to the vast diversity of Indian languages. He noted that an inherent linguistic and literary unity exists in these richly profound languages, serving as a great unifying factor. Further, he underlined that the grammar, structure and vocabulary of Sanskrit have significantly enriched Hindi and numerous other languages spoken across South Asia, exemplifying its profound impact on the region's linguistic landscape.

# YSRCP grapples with concerns over fate of VSP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Amid the ongoing crisis gripping Gangavaram port, aggravating the scarcity of raw materials, YCP candidates face mounting concerns over the fate of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. The complexity of the situation has left them scrambling for strategies to address pressing questions.



Recent discussions between leaders of the Visakha Ukku Parirakshana Porata Committee and Chief Minister YS Jagan yielded no concrete assurances, leaving many anxious about the steel plant's future should the YCP secure victory in the upcoming elections. With over 18,000 individuals directly employed and another 30,000 indirectly reliant on the Visakhapatnam

Steel Factory, the issue carries significant socio-economic weight deeply entrenched in the sentiments of the region. However, unresolved licensing issues and governmental delays have burdened the plant, with pending licenses contributing to mounting financial strain, reaching up to 80 crores.

In an attempt to salvage the situation, leaders of the Visakha Ukku Parirakshana Porata Committee implored

workers, casting doubt on the viability of Visakhapatnam Steel under a YCP administration.

Amid this backdrop, political contenders have seized upon the issue, with BJP and Telugu Desam candidates pledging to block the Visakhapatnam steel plant's privatization, positioning themselves as champions of the plant's preservation. Conversely, YSRCP candidates find themselves embroiled in a balancing act, attempting to allay concerns while redirecting attention to broader political narratives. As the election season unfolds, the Visakhapatnam steel crisis looms ominously, emerging as a potential headache for the ruling party in the joint Visakha district, with the outcome poised to reverberate across the political landscape.

## YSRCP manifesto

Continued from Page 1

In addition to addressing the concerns of farmers and women, the YSRCP intends to unveil schemes tailored to the aspirations of the youth. CM Jagan Mohan Reddy is expected to deliver a message encouraging youth participation in job creation initiatives.

The manifesto launch is strategically aligned with the announcement schedule of the opposition TDP, indicating a keen awareness of the political landscape. Furthermore, the YSRCP plans to leverage its track record of fulfilling past promises, particularly through the Navaratnalu schemes, to instil confidence in voters regarding future commitments.

However, challenges loom regarding the state's financial position and resource avail-

ability, posing obstacles to the implementation of proposed schemes. Nevertheless, the party remains resolute in its determination to persuade voters and is committed to announcing the manifesto despite these hurdles. Meanwhile, CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's unwavering focus on the manifesto underscores the party's dedication to addressing the diverse concerns of the electorate. Positioned as a blueprint for inclusive progress and development, the manifesto aims to encapsulate the YSRCP's vision for governance and societal advancement.

As the electorate eagerly awaits the manifesto's release, all eyes are on the camp office in Tadepalli, where the party is set to unveil its roadmap for the future of Andhra Pradesh. Amidst a charged political atmosphere, CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's steadfast commitment to the manifesto reflects the party's pledge to prioritise the welfare of its citizens.

## SC disallows...

Continued from Page 1

Request for the verification of the microcontroller can be made within seven days of declaration of the results after payment of fees, the court said. "If EVM is found tampered during verification, fees paid by the candidates will be refunded," it said.

An EVM comprises three units -- ballot unit, control unit and the VVPAT. All three are embedded with microcontrollers which have a burnt memory from the manufacturer.

# Dokka quits YSRCP...

Continued from Page 1

Faced with repeated instances of what he perceived as disrespect, Vara Prasad opted to sever ties with the YSRCP and align himself with the TDP. He has pledged to actively engage in the TDP's election campaign alongside party leaders, with a shared commitment to securing victory for the TDP in upcoming elections. He has also stepped down from his position as the Guntur district YSRCP president.

Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad, a seasoned politician and respected Dalit leader, tendered his resignation letter to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday. With a history of service, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad previously served as an MLC.

His political journey includes successful stints as a representative in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly from the Tadikonda constituency, both in 2004 and 2009 during the era of undivided Andhra Pradesh. Following the state's bifurcation, he shifted to the TDP. However, after the TDP's disappointing performance in the 2019 elections, he shifted his allegiance to the YSRCP in 2020, where he secured a seat in the Legislative Council.

Despite earlier assurances from the YSRCP leadership regarding a candidature from the Tadikonda constituency and his recent appointment as its in-charge, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad was overlooked for the ticket. The YSRCP opted instead to field M Sucharitha, prompting Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad to voice his dissatisfaction over the past few weeks.

The exit of Manikya Vara Prasad from the YSRCP represents a significant loss for the ruling party, given his stature as a respected Dalit leader, acknowledged a YSRCP spokesperson. However, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad has yet to disclose his future political plans.

# Red sanders...

Continued from Page 1

Addressing his wealth, Kalyan clarified his motivations for entering politics. "My earnings over five years amount to Rs 70 crore, for which I have duly paid taxes. My pursuit in politics is driven by a desire to serve the people, not to amass wealth," he affirmed.

Highlighting issues of neglect in governance, Kalyan lamented the state's inadequate attention to irrigation projects, resulting in hardships for farmers. "Farmers have been forced to declare crop holidays due to water shortages, reflecting the government's failure to prioritise their needs," he stated.

Kalyan also criticized the defection of Razole MLA Rapaka Vara Prasad to the YSRCP, accusing him of betraying the trust of voters. "Despite acquiring vast properties, including a five-acre estate, Vara Prasad has neglected the plight of farmers affected by crop failures," Kalyan criticized.

In closing, Kalyan questioned the government's response to the burning of the sacred chariot at the Antarvedi temple, urging accountability for the perpetrators.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.



# All eyes on prestigious Gudivada MLA segment

DASARI SRINIVASA RAO  
■ VIJAYAWADA

Gudivada Assembly constituency holds a significant place not only in Andhra Pradesh but also in the nation's political arena. It served as the genesis for the non-Congress government formed in 1983 when the revered cine actor, Dr. Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, affectionately known as NTR, established the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

Dr. NTR himself contested and won from Gudivada in the initial election, driven by his roots in Nimmakuru of Pamarru mandal, which falls within the Gudivada Assembly constituency. His victory catapulted him to form the government, marking the inception of a new era. Dr. NTR went on to represent Gudivada twice, leaving an indelible mark on its political history.

In the current scenario, all eyes are on the prestigious Gudivada Assembly constituency, where the incumbent MLA and former minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao, known as Nani, is seeking re-election under the banner of the ruling YSRCP. Nani aims to secure his fifth consecutive victory from Gudivada, while the opposition TDP endeavours to unseat him.

The ongoing 2024 election assumes paramount importance for both the ruling YSRCP and the TDP. The TDP has nominated NRI Venigandla Ramu to challenge Kodali Nani and revive the party's erstwhile prominence in the Gudivada assembly segment. Nevertheless, both candidates exude confidence in their respective cam-



**Apart from legendary NT Rama Rao, the region boasts of luminaries such as Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao (Chowtapalli), Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdari (Angaluru), cine photographer VSR Swamy (Valivarthipadu), Kaikala Satyanarayana (Kowtharam), engineer Dr Narla Tata Rao, journalist Narla Venkateswara Rao, and more, who have left an indelible imprint on various fields**

paings.

Notably, the Gudivada constituency holds a rich legacy, having nurtured several illustrious personalities who have made their mark globally. Among them, the late Chief Minister Dr. N. T. Rama Rao, born in Nimmakuru of Pamarru Mandal, and the legendary cine actor Akkineni Nageswara Rao, hailing from Venkata Raghavapuram of Nandivada Mandal, stand out.

Additionally, the region boasts of other luminaries such as Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao (Chowtapalli), Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdari (Angaluru), cine photographer VSR Swamy (Valivarthipadu), Kaikala Satyanarayana (Kowtharam), engineer Dr. Narla Tata Rao, journalist Narla Venkateswara Rao, and more,

who have left an indelible imprint on various fields.

Both the YSRCP and TDP perceive the Gudivada segment as prestigious and have devised strategies to clinch victory. Despite former MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao's desire to contest, the TDP leadership has nominated Venigandla Ramu to challenge Kodali Nani.

Meanwhile, Nani remains focused on securing his fifth consecutive win, buoyed by his unchallenged dominance in the past four elections. However, the TDP's Ramu is determined to pose a formidable challenge with the backing of former minister Pinnamaneni Venkateswara Rao and former MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao.

Since its formation in 1983, the TDP has clinched victory in Gudivada seven times, under-

scoring its historical significance in the state's political landscape.

The Gudivada assembly constituency, established in 1952, has witnessed a diverse array of political contests over the decades. From the Communist Party of India's early victories to the subsequent dominance of various parties, including the TDP, the constituency's electoral history reflects the dynamic nature of Andhra Pradesh politics.

Since Dr. NTR's triumph in 1983, Gudivada has been witness to a series of electoral battles, each shaping the political narrative of the region. As the 2024 election unfolds, the fate of Gudivada hangs in the balance, with political stalwarts vying for supremacy in this historic constituency.

# Addl AG denies Sharmila's accusations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Additional Advocate General Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy has denied the accusations made by APCC president YS Sharmila and made it clear that YS Rajasekhara Reddy's name was included in the FIR because of Congress leader Shankar Rao.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy said that APCC President YS Sharmila made allegations against him stating that he was responsible for including YS Rajasekhara Reddy's name in the FIR sheet by the CBI.

Responding to Sharmila's comments, which she made while addressing an election meeting on Thursday, the AAG said: "Sharmila made false allegations which vitiated his prestige. Congress leader Shankar Rao wrote a letter to the high court urging to include the name of YS



Rajasekhara Reddy in the FIR. Then the high court ordered an inquiry. TDP leader K Yerrannaudu impeded in the case," he claimed.

Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy stated that the names of YS Rajasekhara Reddy and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy were mentioned in the FIR on August 17, 2011, by the CBI. YSR was made an accused in the corruption cases in the year 2011 itself, Ponnavolu claimed, adding that he had nothing to do in mentioning the name of YSR in the FIR in the corruption cases.

"I have argued that mentioning YSR's name in the FIR is unjust. I will send the copies in this regard to YS Sharmila," Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy said.

YS Sharmila is lying and she is speaking what Chandrababu Naidu has spoken, he said, asking her not to drag him into the issue. YS Sharmila alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy got YSR's name mentioned in the FIR through Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy and later Ponnavolu Sudhakar Reddy was given the Additional Advocate General post.

## ALLOCATION OF CAMPAIGN SPACES

# Poll panel faces charges of bias towards YSRCP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Despite the Election Commission's (EC) mandate for equitable allocation of campaign spaces, Visakhapatnam is awash with displays heavily favouring the YSRCP (Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party), leaving scant visibility for other political contenders. This lopsided landscape has prompted mounting concerns among opposition factions and their supporters, who argue that such dominance undermines the principles of fair competition in democratic elections.

In a striking display of perceived favouritism, posters featuring Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and YSRCP slogans adorn hoardings along the national highway and key thoroughfares within Visakhapatnam. This disproportionate presence has amplified calls for clarification on the



Election Commission's interpretation of equitable campaign allocation, as opposition voices decry the lack of equal opportunity in reaching out to the electorate.

The district election officer Dr. A. Mallikarjuna has emphasized the importance of impartiality in distributing campaign venues. However, on-the-ground reports paint a contrasting picture, with the dominance of YCP campaign materials leaving little room for other parties to make their mark. This stark reality has

spurred perturbed reactions from opposition supporters, who demand transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

Adding to the controversy is the proliferation of Navratna Welfare Schemes campaigns, prominently displayed at numerous bus stops along the national highway. This surge in promotional activities raises further questions about the effectiveness of election monitoring measures in ensuring impartiality and fair play. As the electoral landscape becomes increasingly polarized, the

**In a striking display of perceived favouritism, posters featuring Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and YSRCP slogans adorn hoardings along the national highway and key thoroughfares within Visakhapatnam.**

Election Commission faces heightened scrutiny over its response to allegations of bias and its ability to uphold the principles of free and fair elections. With tensions simmering and concerns mounting, all eyes are on the Election Commission to address the growing apprehensions and restore confidence in the democratic process.

## VIJAYAWADA LOK SABHA SEAT



# 19 nominations declared valid, 15 rejected

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the Vijayawada Lok Sabha constituency, 19 nominations have been deemed valid, while 15 have been rejected, according to NTR District Election Officer (DEO) and Collector Dr. S. Dilli Rao. A total of 50 sets of nominations were submitted for this constituency, with the scrutiny taking place at the collectorate in Vijayawada on Friday.

Dr. Dilli Rao emphasized that the scrutiny adhered strictly to the guidelines set forth by the Election Commission of India (ECI), with the entire process being recorded on video. The details of valid and rejected nominations have been publicly displayed on notice boards as per Form-4.

Among the valid candidates are Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni from TDP,

Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani from YSRCP, Valluru Bhargava from the Congress party, and Meka Venkateswara Rao from the BSP, alongside other registered and independent candidates. Additionally, 19 nominations from registered parties were deemed valid, with the remaining 15 being rejected.

Dr. Dilli Rao further stated that, per ECI guidelines, the list of valid nominations along with candidate photographs has been displayed on Form-4. Candidates have until April 29 at 3 pm to withdraw their nominations. Following this, the final list of contesting candidates will be notified via Form-7A.

Meanwhile, election general observers Manju Raj Paul and Narendra Sing Bali conducted an inspection of the nomination scrutiny process at the collectorate in Vijayawada.

# Ex-CBI JD alleges threat to his life

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former CBI Joint Director and Jai Bharat National Party (JBNP) president VV Lakshminarayana, popularly known as JD Lakshminarayana, has submitted a petition to Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner Dr. Ravi Shankar, expressing concerns over his safety. Lakshminarayana, who is currently contesting from the Visakhapatnam North Assembly constituency under the banner of the Jai Bharat National Party, outlined perceived threats to his life, citing suspicions against prominent political figure Gali Janardhan Reddy.

Allegedly, there exists a conspiracy in Visakhapatnam to eliminate Reddy due to his



**VV Lakshminarayana is contesting polls from Visakhapatnam North Assembly constituency**

past legal entanglements, including arrests related to mining cases and bribery allegations.

Having previously served as an investigating officer in cases involving Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, Lakshminarayana is no stranger to high-profile investigations. He notably arrested CM Jagan

Party in the past, but now represents his party, the Jai Bharat National Party. Campaigning for the Assembly seat from Visakhapatnam North, Lakshminarayana fears potential attacks and has provided relevant evidence to support his claims to the authorities.

After retiring from the Director General (DG) cadre in Maharashtra, Lakshminarayana redirected his focus to political endeavours in the Telugu States. Despite initial setbacks, he has been actively involved in grassroots efforts, particularly advocating for farmers' rights through voluntary organisations.

# Kodali's nomination accepted amid tension

PNS ■ GUDIVADA

Amid heightened tension following a complaint lodged by former TDP MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao and others against ex-minister and YSRCP candidate for the Gudivada Assembly constituency, Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (NANI), regarding alleged false information in his election affidavit, a sigh of relief was felt among ruling party members after the Returning Officer (RO) Padmavati approved Nani's nomination.



On Friday, former TDP MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao raised concerns about Kodali Nani's nomination, alleging that Nani had failed to disclose his use of the Municipal Office as his camp office in the filed election affidavit. Rao claimed that

despite a notice from the Municipal Commissioner on this matter, Nani deliberately omitted these details.

Rao further pointed out that Nani admitted in the affidavit that he hadn't utilized any government offices, suggesting a contradiction. He urged the Election Commission to take action against Nani by disqualifying his nomination. However, following scrutiny, RO Padmavati declared Nani's nomination valid, putting an end to the controversy.

Before the scrutiny process,

the TDP had raised objections to Nani's nomination, seeking its rejection. This led to a war of words between TDP and YSRCP leaders, with the former threatening to complain with the Election Commissioner. Amidst the tension, YSRCP leaders, including Nani, awaited the outcome for several hours.

Following a meticulous scrutiny process, RDO Padmavati confirmed the validity of Nani's nomination, paving the way for his participation in the upcoming elections.

# Vizag Police force strained by polls, VIP events & heatwave

Frontline officers, especially traffic police, have to bear the brunt of the heat and difficult traffic situations

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A confluence of upcoming elections, high-profile events, and a sweltering heatwave is placing immense strain on the city's police force. Officers are reportedly working extended shifts, with limited rest periods, as they manage both election-related responsibilities and security demands for VIP events. Internal reports detail a significant rise in workload due to a flurry of public meetings, nominations, rallies, and upcoming festivals like 'Chandanotsavam', the annual festival of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy at Simhachalam. These additional

demands exacerbate existing staff shortages, leading to concerns about their well-being and performance.

A junior level police official in the Commissionerate, who wished to remain anonymous, acknowledged that police supervisors might enjoy improved working conditions. However, the frontline officers, especially traffic police, have to bear the brunt of the heat and difficult traffic situations. These lower-ranking officers are also more likely to experience stress and harassment.

The demanding work schedules reportedly hinder officers' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance and prioritise

personal health. Chronic illnesses are a growing concern, further compounded by the lack of sufficient leave for medical treatment. Tragically, recent road fatalities involving town CIs highlight the potential safety risks associated with extreme fatigue.

The Police Department is facing a critical manpower shortage, and calls for new recruitment to fill vacant positions remain unanswered. This lack of additional support further strains an already stretched-thin force. As the city grapples with heightened security needs, the current situation serves as a stark reminder of the immense pressure placed on its police force.

# Film hero Varun Tej Pithapuram for Pawan

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Popular Telugu film hero Varun Tej will take part in the election campaign in Pithapuram on April 27. Varun Tej is the son of Jana Sena party (JSP0) general secretary Naga Babu.

Talking to the media on Friday, Jana Sena party national official spokesperson Vemulapati Ajay Kumar said that Varun Tej will campaign for Pawan Kalyan in Pithapuram.

He will participate in the election campaign at Tatiparti village at 3 pm and go via Vannepudi, Kodavali, Chandurti and reach Durgada in a rally.

# Ex-mayor Tadi Sakuntala joins TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tadi Sankuntala, the former Mayor of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation and leader of Bharat Rashtira Samiti (BRS), made a significant political move on Friday by joining the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). This transition took place at the residence of TDP's national general secretary, Nara Lokesh, in Undavalli. Accompanied by TDP's Vijayawada Lok Sabha candidate, Kesineni Sivanath, also known as Chinni, Tadi Sankuntala embraced the party fold. Welcoming her to the party, Nara Lokesh adorned her with a yellow scarf, symbolizing her new affiliation.

Tadi Sankuntala embarked on her political journey with the Communist Party of India (CPI) and secured a position as a Corporator in the 2005 elections. Subsequently, she held the



TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh welcomes former Mayor Tadi Sakuntala into the party at Undavalli on Friday.

office of Vijayawada Mayor for a term spanning from November 1, 2005, to November 1, 2006. Her political trajectory led her through Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam Party

(PRP) and the Congress party before aligning with the YSRCP under the leadership of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in 2010.

In February 2023, the former Mayor parted ways with the

YSRCP and affiliated herself with the BRS under the leadership of party state president T Chandrasekhar. With the onset of the general elections, she tendered her resignation from the BRS and joined the TDP in the presence of Nara Lokesh at Undavalli. Analysts suggest that Tadi Sankuntala's decision to join the TDP provides an added advantage to the Vijayawada Lok Sabha candidate, Kesineni Sivanath, alias Chinni.

In a parallel development, G. Amar Babu, grandson of former MLA Marupilla Chitti, along with several other leaders, also pledged their allegiance to the TDP. Among them were Rampilla Srinivasa Rao, E. Yella Rama Rao, Lingipalli Ramakrishna, Bevara Surya Narayana, K. Narasimha Rao, Tammina Surya Jayanarayana, and many others from the Nagaralu community.



# Modi exposes 'Robbing Hood' plans of the Congress

Referring to AICC leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks in recent public meetings and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statements during an address to the erstwhile National Development Council (NDC) meeting way back in 2006, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had warned people that the Congress, if voted to power, would take away their wealth, and distribute it among those who have more children, infiltrators and Muslims. Driven by 'Urban naxal' ideology, the Congress would not spare even the mangalsutras of women, he added.

Modi's statements visibly convulsed the Congress. Pawan Khera, the Congress spokesperson, accused Modi of lying and exploiting religion to drive a wedge among Indians, polarise the voters on communal lines, and benefit politically in the ongoing elections. Let us put in perspective the PM's illuminating state-

ment. Rahul Gandhi, while speaking at a public meeting in Hyderabad recently, vowed to survey and redistribute Indians' wealth. Rahul declared that the Congress, if elected to power, would first conduct a caste census to determine the exact population and status of Backward Castes, SCs, STs, minorities, and others; which would be followed by a financial and institutional survey. Subsequently, the Congress would take up the revolutionary assignment to distribute India's wealth, he promised.

Rahul Gandhi's vow to redistribute India's wealth, juxtaposed with Dr Manmohan Singh's statement, "We will have to devise innovative plans to ensure that minorities, particularly the Muslim minority, are empowered to share equitably in the fruits of development. They must have the first claim on resources," leaves no doubt as to the intentions of the

**Modi's statements visibly convulsed the Congress. Pawan Khera, the Congress spokesperson, accused Modi of lying and exploiting religion to drive a wedge among Indians, polarise the voters on communal lines, and benefit politically in the ongoing elections. Let us put in perspective the PM's illuminating statement.**

Congress. Logically, the two statements imply that the predominant beneficiaries of any redistribution of wealth done by the Congress would be the Muslims.

Over the past year, Rahul Gandhi has repeatedly proclaimed 'Jitna abadi, utna haq' - meaning rights should be proportional to population. Prime Minister Modi just translated this slogan to a family level and explained that those with more children (numbers or abadi) would get more in any wealth redistribution exercise by the Congress.

Neither can one find fault

with the Prime Minister's assertion that illegal immigrants or infiltrators would be the beneficiaries of the Congress' wealth redistribution effort. The Congress publicly and vehemently opposes the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which identifies who is a citizen of India and who is not. When non-citizens, especially those who have infiltrated the country for economic reasons, are not recognised, does it not follow that in a redistribution of Indians' wealth, they, too, will get a share proportional to their numbers?



KISHORE POREDDY

Additionally, the Congress opposes the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which gives accelerated citizenship to religious minorities: Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Christians from our neighbourhood who are persecuted based on their religion. The only logical conclusion from the Congress' opposition to NRC and CAA, taken together, is that it does not want the benefits of its

wealth redistribution to go to victims of our nation's partition but exclusively to those who infiltrated our country for economic reasons.

Regarding PM Modi's mangalsutra remark, it is well-known that Indians hold their wealth mostly in land and gold (and silver). Unlike the rest of the world, Indians, especially Hindus, who constitute the majority of Indians, acquire gold and silver as ornaments for cultural and religious reasons, not as commodities (bars, coins). For example, Hindus consider purchasing gold and silver auspicious during festivals like Dantheras, as they believe it brings prosperity and good luck. Mangalsutra is the first gold ornament any Hindu married woman acquires. So, when Modi had to explain what taking away one's wealth would entail, he used the example that most women (and men) in India would understand.

The Congress immediately

latched onto the PM's mangalsutra example. 'Does he not know that snatching a woman's mangalsutra symbolises making her a widow? Isn't it outrageous that he is using religious sentiments to score political points?' asked an outraged Congress. But, if the Congress valued Hindus' religious sentiments, especially about the mangalsutra, Indians never got a chance to know.

Only last year, authorities in Telangana forced Hindu women to remove their mangalsutra, bangles and even mettelu (toe rings) before entering exam halls to appear in competitive exams for government jobs. Can this happen if the administration had regard for the religious sentiments of Hindu women? No. Did the Congress outrage over the incident? No. Not only that, when the scion of one of its allies, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), called for the elimination of Sanatana Dharma, comparing

it to diseases like dengue and malaria, Congress never felt the need to condemn his remarks. Some Congress leaders even supported the comments.

The Congress has the gall to accuse the Prime Minister and the Bharatiya Janata Party of being communal, even though it is primarily the BJP and its allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that are calling for a Uniform Civil Code. It is the Congress which sees India through a communal prism and resorts to an insidious campaign of appeasement, particularly of Muslims, which is unfair to Muslims too. The Prime Minister has rightly called out the communal and appeasement agenda of the Congress. This election is a fight between Congress' agenda of appeasement and redistribution versus the BJP's and NDA's agenda of Sabka Saath and development.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

# Sharmila: Jagan failed to complete YSR's 'Jala Yagnam'

PNS ■ ELURU

Continuing her criticism against Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, APCC president YS Sharmila has alleged that the completion of irrigation projects initiated under YS Rajasekhara Reddy's 'Jala Yagnam' mission remains unfulfilled under Jagan Reddy's administration.



Speaking at an election rally in Chintalapudi on Friday, Sharmila highlighted the efforts made by local MLA VR Eliza to push forward the Chintalapudi project, only to face a lack of cooperation from the government. She pointed out the MLA's unsuccessful attempts to secure an appointment with the Chief Minister, leading Eliza to eventually join the Congress party out of frustration with the stalled project. Sharmila emphasised that construction on the Chintalapudi project stalled following YSR's demise, with Jagan Mohan Reddy promising

its completion upon assuming power. However, she lamented that the current administration subsequently neglected the project. "Completion of this project would enable irrigation across two lakh acres in the Chintalapudi constituency and an additional two lakh acres in neighbouring areas," she stressed.

Criticising the Chief Minister's lack of engagement with ministers and MLAs and his failure to address con-

stituency issues, Sharmila condemned the State's increasing debt under the YSRCP regime. She questioned the administration's inability to attract major industries and generate employment opportunities.

Sharmila accused former Chief Minister Naidu of misleading the public with promises of a Singapore-style capital city, while Jagan Reddy's proposal for three capitals also proved to be deceptive. She positioned herself as YSR's daughter and the rightful heir to his legacy, vowing to prioritise the State's welfare.

Reiterating her electoral promises, Sharmila pledged to grant Special Category Status for ten years, fill 2.5 lakh vacant posts, provide Rs 1 lakh financial assistance to eligible poor individuals, and ensure housing at an affordable cost of Rs 5 lakh in the name of women. She urged voters to support Congress candidate VR Eliza.

Earlier, speaking at an election rally in Tiruvuru, Sharmila criticised Jagan's unfulfilled promises of providing Nagarjuna Sagar water to the region and converting 300 tanks into balancing reservoirs. She also noted the failure to construct a dedicated reservoir for drinking water purposes despite assurances from the Chief Minister. Referring to YSRCP's financial proposals, she questioned the feasibility of borrowing an additional Rs 8 lakh crore.

# Liquor worth Rs 80 lakh seized in Pithapuram

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The SEB, police and election officials conducted joint raids at various places and seized liquor worth Rs 80 lakh in the Pithapuram constituency.

The police said here on Friday that on a tip-off that a huge quantity of liquor was hoarded, the officials led by SEB official SK Mohammad Ali and CI Srinivas conducted raids at Jaggayya Cheruvu, Salipet, YSR Garden and Kumarapuram colony areas.

The officials found liquor worth about Rs 80 lakh illegally concealed in the houses. The officials found 350 cases of liquor in one house itself. The officials seized



thousands of bottles of Royal Blue, Goa Kick and other such brands. The liquor was imported from Goa at a cheaper price to distribute here during elections.

According to information received,

SEB, police and election teams led by SEB officer Mohaboob Ali are still searching the areas in the colonies.

It may be mentioned here that the Pithapuram constituency is drawing the attention of not only AP but also the entire country as Pawan Kalyan is contesting to the Assembly. Significantly, Pawan Kalyan, addressing an election meeting in Pithapuram on Friday, alleged that 40 red sander smugglers were sent to Pithapuram to ensure his defeat.

In the backdrop of his allocations, seizure of huge quantities of liquor in Pithapuram hardly two weeks before the polling assumed significance.

# Guv visits TTD-run BIRRD in Tirupati

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Governor Abdul Nazeer visited the TTD-run BIRRD (Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled) hospital and Sri Padmavati Children's Heart Centre here on Friday.

Earlier at BIRRD hospital, the Governor went around the outpatient, ICU, operation theatres and artificial limbs making units for bone and kneecap replacements. Thereafter he visited the Children's Cardiac Hospital where infants with heart ailments were treated, cath labs, ICU and other wings besides interacting with patients, and their parents and lauded the TTD for providing free treatment to the poor patients.

He also expressed happiness at all the Medicare



services of TTD. TTD JEOs Ms Gautami and Veerabrahmam, BIRD OSD Dr Reddappa Reddy, Children's Hospital Director Dr Srinath Reddy and others were present.

# INC is 'Italian National Congress', says Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress is continuing the British legacy and the INC has become the Italian National

Congress. The Congress is trying to impose Sonia Gandhi on India, Telangana BJP chief Kishan Reddy said.

Reacting to Revanth Reddy's statement that "The BJP is British Janata Party," Kishan said that the Congress is acting in a degenerate manner.

He was speaking at a media conference organised at the BJP state office on Friday.

"The country was ruled by the British for 200 years. Later, the Congress tried to make Italian Sonia Gandhi the Prime Minister of the country. The people have not forgotten how the Congress conspired to make an Italian the Prime Minister of this country. The Congress announced Manmohan Singh as the remote-controlled Prime Minister after the BJP said that it will prevent this at any cost," Kishan said.

He said that the Italian National Congress has turned into the Italian National Congress and that such a party does not have the stature to criticise the BJP.

He said that the BJP was born for the sake of the country. "Our leaders have made it clear that they have been born for the country and will die for the country," he said. He said that Congressmen were born for Italy and would die for Italy.

"The Congress has become the Jinnah Congress. The Congress is the party that implemented Jinnah's Constitution for 73 years in Jammu and Kashmir. The Congress is the party that killed 42,000 people because of Article 370. The Constitution written by Dr BR Ambedkar was mocked by the Congress for 73 years. Such a party has no moral right to talk about the Constitution of India," he said.

He blamed the Congress for all the problems in this country and added that the Congress is the cause of all problems like increasing poverty, the rise of mafias and family rule.

# 'Permission mandatory for election campaign'

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector has made it clear that permission must be obtained from the election officials to carry out election campaigns and the political parties must follow the election code of conduct.

The Collector said here on Friday that the political parties and contesting candidates must get approval from the District Media Coordination Monitoring Committee (MCMC) while issuing advertisements and campaign videos. He stated that it had come to their notice that the candidates, who are contesting from respective constituencies, video graphed the filing of nominations and uploaded them on social media.

In this context, it has been clarified that following the rules and guidelines laid down by the Election Commission, they have to be publicized with prior permission. Collector Prasanna Venkatesh said that prior permission should be obtained for the video shown in the video vehicles and the details



of the programme and place should also be shown in the videos.

The Collector asserted that permissions are mandatory for issuing election-related advertisements in local channels, and satellite channels. "Moreover, campaigning without obtaining permission will be treated as a violation of the Elections' Code of Conduct," he stated.

"If prior permission is not obtained, the Returning Officers concerned will take action against such persons and issue violation notices. Special attention will be paid to the negative news being disseminated on social media and print media," he added.

# NRIs vow to create 1 lakh jobs for youth, if TDP is voted power

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Over 25 lakh Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) hailing from Andhra Pradesh on Friday extended their strong support to the TDP national president and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

As a gesture to thank Naidu, these NRIs spread over 120 countries with 76 regional operating bodies, have decided to participate directly and indirectly in large numbers in this election in his support, an NRI wing declared here on Friday.

The NRIs felt that the reputation of the State had taken a beating in the expatriate community due to the policies of the YSRCP Government. As part of their mission, the TDP NRI wing kicked off a campaign to gather the views of the people directly besides flagging off vehicles for campaigning.

They have decided to campaign in separate groups along with their respective MLA candidates. And as part of this, they took a pledge to create one lakh high-quality international jobs for the youth in the State, for which they need a favourable



government investment in world-class training facilities.

Dr Ravikumara Vemuru, a retired physician from the US, said that to reach the maximum number of beneficiaries, they will be opening an NRI cell in each Assembly segment. The TDP NRI wing has more than 4000 entrepreneurs and they can create over one lakh jobs provided they have a supporting government in place in the State, he felt.

Mr Raavi Radhakrishna, an entrepreneur from Saudi Arabia, emphasised the need to have the TDP government be back for the youth to get proper benefits. He mentioned that the NRI TDP wing has already been running an empowerment centre at the TDP central office through which they had facilitated international employment for 200 persons in the US, of whom the majority are from

hotel management and teaching professions.

One can easily make Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 lakh a month in Europe and the US with proper preparation, he said adding that in addition to these jobs, they will be helping people with their education as well.

Mallik Medarameta, another IT entrepreneur from Atlanta stated that the youth in Andhra Pradesh should get themselves upgraded in areas like artificial intelligence, large language models and prompt engineering as these areas have tremendous opportunities for properly trained personnel. Several other NRIs including Kanuri Seshu Babu and Venkat Koduri felt that Naidu's progressive initiatives have laid the foundation that created so many entrepreneurs abroad resulting in the initial building of the IT ecosystem in Hyderabad.

# Vizag Police save man's life after he falls unconscious

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a commendable display of prompt response and decisive action, city police officers from the Kancharapalem Police Station potentially prevented a serious incident early on Friday morning. The event unfolded at Verma Complex in Murali Nagar around 3 AM. Satya Prasad, the driver of a car, experienced a sudden loss of consciousness while operating the vehicle. This resulted in the car coming to a halt in the middle of the road.

Upon receiving an emergency call, Night Rounds Sub-Inspector M Ravi Kumar along with Night Beat Constables S Appala Naidu and GN Santhosh promptly reached the scene. They attempted to rouse the unconscious Prasad but were unsuccessful. The officers swiftly made the decision to break a car window to extract Prasad. They administered initial medical aid and ensured his immediate transfer to the nearest medical facility.

Medical examination revealed that Prasad's condition stemmed from exhaustion



brought on by a week-long business trip, leading to a sudden drop in blood pressure. Fortunately, his condition responded well to treatment, and he was later discharged into the care of his family.

The exemplary actions undertaken by the officers were acknowledged by Commissioner Dr. A. Ravi Shankar. The officers were invited to the Commissioner's office and commended for their exceptional service and life-saving intervention. They were also presented with certificates of appreciation in recognition of their dedication to public safety.

# Police observer emphasises preservation of democracy's spirit

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Deepak Mishra, EC State Police Observer, underscored the importance of upholding democratic principles during his tour of Parvathipuram-Manyampur district on Friday. Addressing officials including the District Collector and Superintendent of Police, Mishra emphasised the need for a concerted effort towards ensuring the peaceful and smooth conduct of elections, stressing that any deviation

from this path could have repercussions on one's career.

During his visit, Deepak Mishra reiterated the crucial role of operating within the democratic framework with integrity and sincerity. Emphasising the flawless execution of elections as the primary agenda, Mishra cautioned against any motives other than the democratic

process itself. He warned that even minor lapses during the electoral process could result in severe consequences, urging all officials to discharge their duties with utmost integrity and adherence to the law.

Highlighting the sanctity of democracy for the nation's welfare, Mishra called upon the district to serve as a beacon of

transparency and efficiency in electoral procedures. District Collector Nishant Kumar outlined an action plan aimed at ensuring free and fair polls in the region, including the strategic establishment of counting centres within Parvathipuram district to cater to the Araku Parliamentary constituency.

Superintendent of Police Vikrant Patil assured that all necessary measures had been taken to facilitate smooth elections, including the deployment of checkpoints at inter-

state and district borders and the initiation of bound-over cases to maintain order. The meeting was attended by several dignitaries, including Additional DGP Dr Shankar Bratha Bagchi, Parliament General Observer Pramod Kumar Meharda, Parliament Police Observer Naieem Mustafa, Mansuri, Visakhapatnam Range DIG Vishal Gunni, Joint Collector S. Shobika, Additional SP Dr O Dileep Kiran, and ASP Suneel Sharon, among others.



Warns that minor lapses during electoral process could result in severe consequences



INDIA CORNER

ATS arrests six with country-made weapons in Gujarat

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested an arms supplier from Madhya Pradesh and five others with 25 country-made pistols and 90 cartridges, an official said on Friday. The action has come weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha election in the state scheduled to take place on May 7. A preliminary probe has revealed the key accused, Shivam aka Shiva Damor (26), a native of Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, allegedly procured illegal firearms and sold them to his contacts in Gujarat on commission, the ATS stated in a release. The ATS recently received a tip-off that Damor would come to Narol bridge in Ahmedabad city on April 25 to deliver firearms and ammunition to one Manoj Chauhan, a resident of Chotilla town in Surendranagar district, it said. ATS teams laid a trap, apprehended the duo, and recovered five pistols and 20 cartridges from Damor, the release said.



Couple arrested with nearly 800 grams of heroin in Delhi's Tilak Nagar

A couple was arrested with nearly 800 grams of heroin, for allegedly selling it here, police said on Friday. The accused were identified as Rajesh Rana (44) and his wife Neelam Rana (43), residents of Tilak Nagar, they said. The police was searching for Neelam, a proclaimed offender, an official said. "On Wednesday, tip-off was received about the presence of Neelam in the Tilak Nagar area. A raid was conducted and Neelam and her husband were nabbed," Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Vichitra Veer said. "Rana has been found previously involved in 23 criminal cases while his wife had involvement in eight cases," the DCP said. The police recovered 798.30 grams of heroin worth over Rs 20 lakh from the possession of the accused, he said. A case under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act was registered at Tilak Nagar police station, the DCP added.



Naresh Sethi gang's sharpshooter arrested in Delhi's Rohini

The Delhi police has arrested a 24-year-old sharpshooter of the Naresh Sethi gang, officials said on Friday. According to police, the accused, identified as Mohit was wanted in connection with a firing incident at a property dealer's office in Rohini for extortion. "On February 27, an incident of firing occurred in a property dealer's office at Sector-24, Rohini. The complainant Yogesh Sharma also received a message from Gangster Naresh Sethi demanding Rs 2 crore," a senior police officer said. Acting on a tip-off, the police laid a trap and arrested Mohit, he said. Mohit is a close associate of Naresh Sethi and Akshay gang, police said. During the investigation, police found that Mohit is involved in several cases of robbery, murder and the Arms Act in Haryana, they said.



'IT'S VOTE-BANK POLITICS'

Shah on why Rahul, Digvijay did not attend Ram temple event

PNS ■ RAJGARH (MP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed senior Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Digvijaya Singh for declining invitation to attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol in Ayodhya, saying their move was guided purely by vote-bank politics. The BJP leader emphasised the Congress neglected the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya for nearly 70 years and it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who made it a reality and paved the way for consecration of Ram Lalla's idol on January 22. "Do you know that why shehjada Rahul Gandhi and Diggi Raja (Digvijaya Singh) did not attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol at Ayodhya? Because they are afraid of their vote-bank and therefore, they should never be pardoned," he noted.



Shah was addressing a campaign rally in Khilchipur town under the Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat where sitting BJP MP Rodmal Nagar is pitted against former chief minister Digvijaya Singh of the Congress. He asked voters never to pardon those who declined the invitation to attend the idol consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. Shah lashed out at the Congress for continuing with

high on the country's head (J&K). Shah maintained the Modi government ended terrorism and Naxalism by entering into their den ('ghar me ghuskar') and conducting a surgical strike inside Pakistan post-Pulwama terror attack. Rahul Gandhi, on advice of Singh, included in the Congress manifesto a promise that if a party-led government came to power at the Centre, it will "introduce personal law in the country," the BJP's star campaigner claimed. Shah asked people whether controversial practices like instant triple talaq, banned by the Modi government in 2019, should be reintroduced, and criticised Singh for linking "bhagwa" (saffron) colour with terrorism. Rajgarh along with eight other Lok Sabha seats will vote on May 7 in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections.

CM's son slams Aaditya for remarks against father

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde has hit out at rival Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray for disparaging remarks against his father and Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, saying it reflects the ex-minister's upbringing. Aaditya is a bitter critic of CM Shinde, whose revolt in 2022 had led to the toppling of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in the state and split the original Shiv Sena, then headed by his father Uddhav Thackeray. Referring to CM Shinde, Aaditya recently called him a "shameless and despicable" person. "He (Aaditya) has been brought up with these values - one who only curses, and badmouths (opponents). We have been taught to talk good. People will teach those who have been taught to talk ill," Shrikant Shinde told reporters in Kalyan on Thursday.

Envoy: US safe, cares deeply for well-being of Indian students

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

United States is a safe country and it "cares deeply" for the well-being of Indian students, its Ambassador Eric Garcetti said here on Friday and assured their parents that "their children are our children" when they are in the US. His comments during an interview at the American Center comes in the backdrop of reports of nearly half a dozen deaths of Indian and Indian-origin students in the US since January. While the US remains a preferred destination for higher studies among Indian students, the string of such cases has raised concern among the Indo-American community as well as the Indian population. "We care so deeply for the well-being of Indian students in the US. We want parents to know that their children are our children when they are in United States. And, there is a wealth of resources that can help students prepare...in the US, whether it is mental health...and resources for that



being far away from home, parents and families," he told PTI. While lamenting these tragic deaths in the past few months, the American ambassador to India asserted that "US is a safe country." Garcetti underlined that students studying abroad should familiarise themselves, have a network, trusted friends, and should know what to do if there is a dangerous situation, or if there is a mental health issue. He said in a new country it could just be an issue of common sense public safety, and students might not know which neighbourhood to go to and not to go to and at what time of night, as also what

resources are there. The US envoy underlined that students going to study in the US should know that there are campus securities, local law enforcements, and that "all these things sometimes students just don't know, since it is a new country." In the interview, Garcetti, a former mayor of Los Angeles, shared his own experience of personal safety when he was a student. "When I was a student, I went to NYC in the 1980s, which was a pretty dangerous city then. But I sat down and listened to campus security, 'don't walk down here at night, don't go there. Here is a way to stay safe' and this is before cell-phones. Now, in 2024, we have so many more resources, than when I was a student," he said. The envoy said American universities are "extraordinary places" to come to and offer overwhelming experience to students, including Indian students, and he wanted all students to have that rich experience.

Land sinks in J-K's Ramban; 50 houses, power infra damaged

PNS ■ BANIHAL/JAMMU

More than 50 houses, four electricity towers, a receiving station, and a main road were damaged in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district during sinking of a road, officials said on Friday. Ramban Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq Choudhary visited the Pernote village, five kms from the district headquarters, on Friday morning and assured assistance to the affected families and restoration of essential services, including electricity. Houses started developing cracks and the road connectivity between Gool and Ramban snapped Thursday evening following the sudden 'sinking of land' in Pernote village, prompting several families to move to safer places. "This is a natural disaster

and being the head of the district, I take full responsibility for providing food and shelter to the affected families," Choudhary, who was accompanied by district Development Council (DDC) chairperson Shamsad Shan, told reporters at the scene. He said the authorities have summoned geology experts to know the cause behind the sinking of the land, while a team of district officials has been deployed round-the-clock to supervise the rehabilitation of the affected population and restoration of essential services. "The land is still sinking and our effort is to restore essential services like the road and electricity as our first priority. We will provide tents and other items and also organise medical camps for the victims," the deputy commissioner said.



LS POLLS Ex-CM Baghel says his photos on EVMs unclear

PNS ■ RAJNANDGAON

Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, who is Congress' candidate in Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat in the state, on Friday said he has received complaints that his photos on the Electronic Voting Machines are smaller and unclear as compared to those of his rivals. Polling in Rajnandgaon is underway along with two other parliamentary seats - Kanker and Mahasamund - on Friday in the second phase of general elections. Baghel is pitted against BJP's sitting MP Santosh Pandey. In a post on his 'X' handle, Baghel said, "Voters have been calling and complaining that the photos of other candidates on the EVM are bigger in size and clear but my photo is small and relatively unclear. The photo was given as requested by the Election Commission." "This exposes @ECISVEEP's claims of impartiality. Has this been done under a conspiracy? But this is not going to change the result," he added.

CHURCHES TO PEOPLE 'Vote for those backing secularism, Constitution'

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/KOCHI

Various church factions in Kerala on Friday urged the people to go and vote for those supporting secularism and democracy in the general elections in the southern state. Voting commenced in all 20 Lok Sabha seats of the state at 7 am today. Archbishop Raphael Thattil of the influential Syro-Malabar Church, after casting his vote, said the church wants every-

one to live peacefully in the country. Malankara Orthodox Syrian church head Baselios Marthoma Mathews III said the elections will help elect a new government for the betterment of the country. Thrissur Archbishop and CBCI president Archbishop Andrews Thazhath said he was devastated after witnessing the situation in Manipur and said people will vote for those who support secularism and democracy. "We are hurt when we see



others get hurt. I saw the situation in Manipur. I saw the situation faced by the people there. I have personally asked

the government and the union home minister to intervene in the matter," Thazhath told the media. He urged the people to vote for those who support secularism and democracy in the country. The influential Latin church said people were excited to exercise their right to vote in Kerala. "Let every citizen exercise their right to vote and a good government come to power," Latin Archdiocese Vicar General Fr. Eugene Perera

told the media. All the political parties in the state were trying to cosy up to the church, which has a pretty much influential electorate in the state. "The speciality of our country is that people from various religions live together in a peaceful manner. We want everyone here to continue living peacefully, have equal rights and feel safe and secure," Thattil said. The voting will conclude at 6 pm and the results will be out on June 4.

Bullock carts, wheelchairs and more, people reach booths to vote in LS polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three generations of a family and groom and brides lining up at polling stations and people reaching in bullock carts and centenarians in wheelchairs to vote. These were some of the snapshots of the Lok Sabha polls' second phase in 88 constituencies in 13 states and Union Territories. "In Bengaluru, long queues were seen outside many restaurants after they offered dosas, laddus, coffee and other food items free of cost or at discounted rates to customers who cast their vote.



\*\* A polling booth at Sivni village in Chhattisgarh's Kanker parliamentary constituency was decorated like a 'mandap' and displayed traditional marriage rituals. Decked-up in traditional attire, many brides and grooms reached polling sta-

tions in Kanker, Rajnandgaon and Mahasamund Lok Sabha constituencies to cast their votes. \*\* Women voters reached a polling station in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr on a bullock cart and playing the 'dholak'. \*\* In Rajasthan's Kota-Bundi parliamentary constituency, 108-year-old Bhuri Bai, who was brought to the Gunjara polling booth in a wheelchair by her family members, cast her vote, while 102-year-old Haji Karamdin voted in Reasi in Jammu and Kashmir.

SC seeks EC reply on PIL for fresh poll in constituency IF NOTA GETS MAJORITY

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development amid the ongoing general elections, the Supreme Court on Friday asked for a response from the poll panel on a PIL seeking framing of rules to nullify an election and order fresh one if NOTA (none of the above) option gets majority over other candidates. The top court issued notice to the Election Commission on the PIL filed by author, activist and motivational speaker Shiv Khera. The NOTA option is provided to the voters in the elections

in pursuance of the 2013 apex court verdict. The top court, in its 2013 judgement, had held that "a provision of negative voting would be in the interest of promoting democracy as it would send clear signals to political parties and their candidates as to what the electorate thinks about them" and directed the Election Commission to provide the option of NOTA in all EVMs. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate



Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Khera, and issued the notice. Initially, the bench was reluctant to consider the PIL, saying

it was for the "executive to decide". "We will issue a notice. This is about the electoral process also. Let us see what the Election Commission has to say..." the CJ said. The senior advocate said that present plea was important keeping in mind the development at Surat in Gujarat where a BJP nominee was declared winner before polling as some nomination papers were rejected and few withdrew from the race. "It is most respectfully prayed that this Court may be pleased to issue a writ... direct-

ing the Election Commission to frame rules to the effect that if NOTA gets a majority, the election held in the particular constituency shall be declared null and void and a fresh election shall be conducted to the constituency," it said. The PIL also sought a direction to the poll panel to frame rules stating that the candidates who poll fewer votes than NOTA shall stand debarred from contesting all elections for a period of five years. It also sought a direction to ensure "proper and efficient reporting/publicity of NOTA as a 'fictional candidate'".

The plea referred to the apex court judgement and the report of the Law Commission on the issue in its support. Buttressing the plea for re-election if NOTA wins and barring the candidates from poll process if they poll less than NOTA, the PIL said, "since 2013, the implementation of NOTA has not fulfilled the very purpose that it was supposed to". On the contrary, it has not led to increased voter participation, the PIL said, adding it has also not compelled political parties to field good candidates.

Board exams twice a year from 2025: MoE asks CBSE to work out logistics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education has asked the CBSE to work out logistics for conducting board exams twice a year from the 2025-26 academic session, according to sources. The plan for introducing a semester system has been ruled out, they said. The ministry and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold consultations with school principals next month for conducting board exams twice a year, the sources said. The CBSE is currently in the process of working out the modalities of how will the academic calendar be structured to accommodate another set of board exams without impacting the undergraduate admission schedule, they said. "The ministry has asked the CBSE to work on the logistics of how will board exams be conducted twice a year. The board is working out the modalities and a consultation will be organised next month with school principals," a source said. "The idea being explored is to conduct two editions of the board exams at the end of the year from the 2025-26 academic session but the modalities still need to be worked out.

However, there is no plan to implement the semester system," the source added. The ministry's initial plan was to introduce biannual board exams from the 2024-25 academic session, however, it has been pushed back by a year. The new national curriculum framework (NCF), prepared by the Union government-appointed national steering company which was led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proposed a semester system for students of classes 11 and 12. The framework, which was released by the ministry in August last year, also proposed that the students be given the option to write their board exams twice a year. "The CBSE right now is brainstorming on the schedule so students can get maximum benefit and the goal of making board exams stress-free can be achieved. However, logistics is a challenge which needs to be addressed, conducting exams is tiresome so the plan has to be flawless," the source said. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had last October said in an interview that appearing for board exams twice a year won't be mandatory for students.







www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## All is well

India shows the mirror to the US, rejects its report on rights violations in Manipur as 'deeply biased'

Soon after the US pointed the finger at India for alleged incidents of human rights violations, particularly in Manipur, India has vehemently criticised the State Department report. The Indian Government has denounced the report as "deeply biased" and asserted that it reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities". Seeking to show the mirror to the US instead, it questioned the US administration's response to the recent killing of Indian students on its soil. The MEA emphasised the "deeply biased" nature of the report, saying the report misrepresents the situation in Manipur and demonstrates a "lack of comprehension" regarding India's efforts to address human rights issues within its borders. The report, which is not limited only to Manipur, talks about other issues too that have apparently undermined Indian democracy in the recent past. One of the key points raised in the State Department's report pertains to the raids conducted by the Indian Income Tax authorities on the offices of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), alleging that the raids extended to journalists not involved in the organisation's financial affairs. Furthermore, the US report claims that the Indian Government used emergency powers to ban the screening of a BBC-produced documentary. The report highlights the concerns of local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities regarding the Government's alleged "delayed response" to violence and its failure to provide adequate humanitarian assistance in Manipur.



It also cites instances of disinformation tactics being employed against civil society organisations, religious

minorities such as Sikhs and Muslims, and political opposition groups. The Indian reaction to the US report is laudable as it defends and protects the boundaries of Indian sovereignty and sends across the message that no country has any business to meddle in India's domestic affairs. The Government must also ensure that foreign powers do not get a chance to sermonise India on human rights. It is an established maxim that human rights issues transcend political boundaries. Besides, the Government should be mindful of criticism by the Indian civil society, which has been airing similar sentiments. They should not be summarily rejected and branded as anti-national and harassed, a routine thing in autocratic systems. Indeed, India's reaction to the State Department's report underscores its commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring that international assessments accurately reflect the country's efforts to uphold human rights. India has consistently maintained that it is committed to addressing any legitimate concerns regarding human rights violations through its robust legal framework and democratic processes. In light of these developments, it is imperative for the international stakeholders to engage with India in a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.

## PICTALK



A man bathes an elephant at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Botanical Udyan and Zoo, in Mumbai

## Role of AI in Lok Sabha elections

From personalised voter outreach to the menacing potential of deepfake videos, Artificial Intelligence's influence is palpable, promising both innovation and ethical dilemmas



KALYANI SHANKAR

Artificial Intelligence, a game-changer in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has revolutionised traditional campaign strategies. The era of candidates personally visiting voters' homes and engaging in conversations over tea, even after a five-year hiatus, has given way to a more technologically advanced approach. Social media played a pivotal role in the 2014 election. However, the advent of AI and the potential use of deepfake videos in India's 2024 elections could be game-changers. These videos, capable of blurring the lines between truth and falsehood, have the potential to significantly impact the trust and integrity of the electoral process.

Political parties and candidates have understood the power of AI in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They use AI to analyse voter data, enabling them to develop effective campaign strategies. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have been deployed to engage with voters on social media, providing real-time responses to their queries and concerns.

The use of AI technology can help with election processes in several ways: AI can predict election outcomes. AI chatbots and virtual assistants can communicate with virtual media.

AI can prevent election fraud and regulate political advertising campaign finance violations. Political parties can now customise their calls to individual voters, potentially harming their opponents' reputations. In India, more than 50% of the population uses the internet, which may increase to 900 million by 2025. The upcoming election in India is expected to generate a market worth Rs 500 crore.

Political parties are using AI to reach voters via social media. Congress and BJP used AI in last year's State elections, the first time false videos and parodies were used in political campaigning. Parties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP uses AI to translate PM Modi's speech-



es into eight regional languages. However, some campaigners misuse AI-generated videos, including deepfakes, to spread misinformation. These videos are targeted at the 18-25 age group and are being shared on platforms like WhatsApp.

Parties in India use various tools to influence voters. They share fake images and videos on social media platforms. For example, the Congress party shared a phony photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, the BJP posted a false video of Rahul Gandhi on Instagram. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK parties used recordings of their deceased leaders for voter support in this election. The Communist parties have also employed AI technology in their campaigns. One video shows Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the AIMIM party, singing Hindu devotional songs. Regional leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee also applied similar tools to influence voters.

The use of AI for malicious purposes is a significant concern. With advanced AI, it has become possible to impersonate anyone, including voters or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and manipulation of the electoral process. This underscores the



POLITICAL PARTIES ARE USING AI TO REACH VOTERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP USED AI IN LAST YEAR'S STATE ELECTIONS

need for clear regulations to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, making the audience more aware of the potential risks and the importance of addressing them, fostering a sense of vigilance.

The use of AI in political campaigns raises valid concerns about privacy and the potential for unfair competition and misinformation. Therefore, it's imperative that clear regulations are implemented to ensure a transparent electoral process. Governments must take the lead in regulating AI use to promote fairness.

The IT Minister has already issued warnings to social media companies, instilling confidence in the audience about the security and integrity of the electoral process. The Election Commission must issue clear guidelines to regulate AI-generated information for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. These guidelines should address ethical AI use in campaigns and voter data analysis. Strict rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the electoral process, protect voters' rights and ensure fairness and transparency. Without these regulations, there could be doubts about the legitimacy of the election results.

While there are valid concerns about AI, it's crucial to recog-

nise its potential for positive change. Certain AI-generated technologies have the power to revolutionise how we conduct free and fair elections. As these technologies gain wider acceptance, they could pave the way for e-elections, a future where elections are conducted online, ensuring a more transparent and accountable electoral process. This potential for positive change should inspire optimism and hope, reassuring the audience about the future of elections.

During the Bihar elections, the Election Commission used an AI-powered system to ensure transparency and prevent manipulation. The system detected and flagged misinformation and hate speech cases, expediting the counting process and curbing hate speech during the election. This demonstrates how AI can be used effectively and instils confidence in the electorate.

Presidents, prime ministers, or legislators could win or lose based mainly on the success or failure of their AI campaign. Gullible voters can be fooled easily. Technological advancements can bring about significant changes and AI is no exception.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## REVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN BIHAR

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players", published on April 26, this is my response. The narrative underscores Bihar's struggle with governance failures, notably in areas like liquor laws and rural migration. However, amidst this backdrop of challenges, the Government's focus on education emerges as a beacon of hope. In a landscape where education is increasingly commodified, Bihar's commitment to public education stands out as a bold counterforce to market forces.

By prioritising education, the Government aims to address deep-rooted social and economic inequalities. The recruitment of teachers and infrastructural improvements demonstrate tangible progress. Yet, sustaining these reforms remains a concern, particularly regarding the absence of a robust mechanism. Additionally, while efforts to combat corruption and enhance accountability are commendable, ensuring the continuity of initiatives like the Mid-Day Meal program is crucial. Ultimately, Bihar's journey towards educational reform signifies a vital step towards empowering marginalised communities and challenging the dominance of private institutions driven by profit motives.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

## PERSPECTIVES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The Essence of Consciousness", published on April 26, this is my response. The journey of understanding consciousness is a profound one, intricately woven with the fabric of human existence. In the hustle of modern life, terms like consciousness often float around without genuine comprehension. Yet, beneath this veneer lies a profound truth: consciousness is the essence of our being, the awareness that shapes our reality. In a world bombarded with information, it's easy to overlook the depth of our existence. From the wisdom of Buddha to the revelations of quantum physics, consciousness permeates every aspect of our lives. Like Arjuna on the bat-

## Ensure representation of the disabled



Apropos the news article, "The marginalisation of disabled in politics", published on April 26, this is my response. The stark absence of political representation for persons with disabilities in India's democratic landscape is a glaring issue. Despite a substantial population, their needs are sidelined, reflecting a systemic failure. Political parties overlook their demands, perpetuating exclusion and reinforcing stereotypes.

field or King Janaka in his kingdom, we grapple with doubts and fears until a moment of awakening shifts our perception.

True consciousness is not merely being awake but being truly alive, attuned to both internal thoughts and external surroundings. It's the clarity that arises when we shed the layers of ignorance and embrace the purity of our being. In this journey towards enlightenment, let us not merely skim the surface but dive deep into the ocean of consciousness, where every wave carries the promise of a profound revelation.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

## THE INDIAN PARADOX

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?", published on April 26, this is my response. India's global footprint shines brightly across diverse fields, yet a puzzling paradox persists: why do Indians thrive abroad while facing challenges at home? This conundrum demands urgent attention and a deep dive into the complexities

Physical barriers at polling stations compound their challenges, stripping away dignity and agency. Anita's experience exemplifies this neglect. Moreover, those with lesser-known disabilities face additional hurdles, such as a lack of sign language interpreters during campaigns. The dearth of accurate data further complicates policy formulation and budget allocations.

However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for transformation. A shift towards a rights-based approach is imperative, with persons with disabilities actively involved in policy development. Integration across governance facets is essential for true inclusivity. Respecting their fundamental rights and ensuring their participation in civil and political systems is crucial as India celebrates 75 years of independence. Only then can the nation progress towards its economic aspirations while truly embracing diversity in a democracy.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

at play. The link between India's international success and domestic hurdles lies largely in the shortcomings of the public education system. Insightful analyses pinpoint the dire State of education as the root cause, a truth echoed by credible sources. Education stands as the linchpin connecting governance, socio-economic stability and prosperity. The nation's future hinges on the quality of primary and secondary education, a reality starkly revealed by surveys.

Moreover, the disconnect between higher education and employability exacerbates the brain drain dilemma. To reverse this trend, India must foster an environment that retains talent and promotes innovation. Embracing change is paramount. Reimagining education to nurture creativity and entrepreneurship can steer India towards global competitiveness. It's time to forge a path towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

Nandini Rao | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Robotics: Predictable and optimal surgical success

Today, India is leading globally with advancements in robotic surgery and making a difference in critical surgical procedures

Robotic surgery, also known as robot-assisted surgery, has revolutionised the field of surgical procedures by offering increased precision, flexibility and control compared to conventional techniques. Typically associated with minimally invasive surgery, robotic surgery utilises a system consisting of a camera arm and mechanical arms with surgical instruments attached, all controlled by the surgeon seated at a computer console. This setup provides high-definition, magnified, 3D views of the surgical site, enhancing the surgeon's ability to perform delicate and complex procedures. Minimally invasive surgery is now the standard of care across various surgical specialties. Introduced four decades ago, Laparoscopy changed our approach and outcome in surgical patients. Robotic surgery introduced two decades ago, was the next step in the evolution of minimally invasive surgery. Now, the time has come when a surgeon avoids leaving anything on chance. Advanced, stable and predictable robotic surgery can ensure success



in each case. The primary motivation for opting for robotic surgery is the enhanced precision, flexibility and control it offers to surgeons during operations. The precision and minimally invasive nature of robotic procedures contribute to a lower risk of infection and other complications. In India, the Da Vinci system is commonly used for robotic surgery across various specialties, including urology, gynaecology, cardiothoracic and general surgery. In urology, robotic surgery has emerged as a significant advancement, offering several advantages over open or laparoscopic procedures. These advantages include reduced blood loss, decreased patient discomfort, minimised use of painkillers, shorter hospital stays and faster healing times. Urological surgeries com-

monly performed using robotic technology include robotic prostatectomy, robotic cystectomy, robotic partial nephrectomy, robotic pyeloplasty and other procedures such as nephroureterectomy, adrenalectomy, ureteric reimplantation and kidney transplantation. Even in the case of frequently performed non-cancerous gastrointestinal surgery like cholecystectomy gall bladder removal or hernia, innumerable challenges can be countered including some very serious injuries, which may result in longer hospital stays or life-threatening situations. Robotic surgery filters out the struggle happening at the surgeon's end while ensuring smooth outcomes with ultimate safety for the patients. Our understanding of robotic surgery benefits originated from cancer patients in uro-surgery and onco-surgery. Today non-cancerous surgeries deserve and demand equal precision and safety. Prevention of complications and quick recovery are the new points. Due to the sheer number, improvement of outcomes in benign surgeries would translate into a large

number of healthier and happier patients. While technology remains premium, the health insurance companies do understand and approve of such advanced technology. For instance, Narayana Health offers robotic-assisted procedures for various gastrointestinal conditions. The robotic surgery program has an experienced team specialising in using the da Vinci surgical system for minimally invasive general surgeries. With the surgeon controlling robotic arms from a console while watching the operative field through a video camera, patients experience shorter recovery times, with most returning to normal activities within two to three weeks instead of the six to eight weeks typically associated with standard open surgery. Indeed, constant innovation and development in the field of robotic surgery will result in lowering the cost with wider applications.

(The writer is a consultant-general, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)



FORQAN BABU SHAIKH





## FIRST COLUMN WORK WITH ALLIES FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

It is time to let go of the regulatory bottlenecks to make a mark



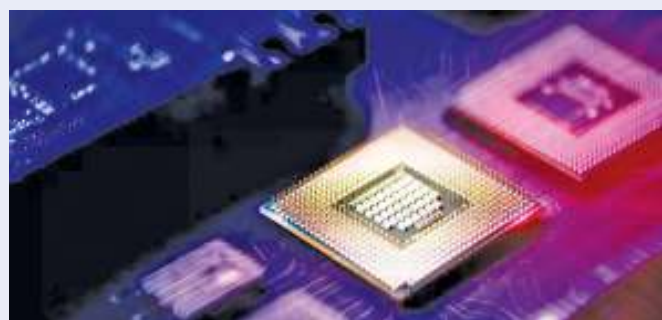
KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

One of the most common reasons cited by foreign investors, against investing in India is too complex regulatory processes and multiplicity of overlapping compliances. The latest to join the bandwagon is Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. The minister was responding to questions from a journalist on the reason for Taiwanese companies not warming up to India's constant welcome mat for attracting investments in the new age technology, building block and semiconductors space.

To be sure Taiwan is home to the largest chip manufacturing facilities in the world, a key component of the digital economy, ranging from mobile phones to satellites. Wu during his interaction with the journalist quoted "India is cumbersome in its administrative structure and it would require for Indian Government to look at that too, to streamline all kinds of laws and regulations to help semiconductor investors coming to the country". He has further in the same interview talked about the lack of skilled engineers to work in the chip-making factories, even though India doesn't fall short of chip-designing talent.

What Mr Wu highlighted, isn't something new, as it is a similar caution from many other potential investors interested in India. This author spoke with several high-ranking officials in several new and emerging technology manufacturing companies, who complained about complex time-consuming administrative processes in India and echoed that, when compared to competing economies such as Singapore, Vietnam etc.

A new department called Invest India (a public-private joint venture) was created, early on in the current Government's regime, to assist potential investors through the difficult, regulatory regime. Even for semiconductors, where, India is the preferred potential partner, a dedicated business division has been created in the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, in the form of India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).



The recent trade policy agenda 2024 released by the Biden administration highlighted "Since announcing the negotiating mandate in August 2022, the two sides have pursued an ambitious schedule of meetings to make progress as quickly as possible. In June 2023, AIT and TECRO signed the first agreement under the Initiative. This agreement includes high-standard commitments and economically meaningful outcomes in a number of trade areas, including customs administration and trade facilitation, good regulatory practices, services domestic regulation, anticorruption and small and medium-sized enterprises", underscoring the importance of the partnership between the two countries.

The US supports India's ambitions to develop into a significant player in semiconductor design and manufacturing space, as an alternative to China. India US trade relationship, which has been in limbo has been energised in the last two years after a formal Trade policy forum came into existence, which has had regular meetings on several bilateral issues. In the 2024 trade policy agenda document, US mentions, "We committed to pursue enhanced engagement leading to mutually beneficial outcomes in several areas, with a view to deepening the trade relationship for the benefit of working people. We identified certain areas, including critical minerals, customs and trade facilitation, supply chains and trade in high technology products, in which our Governments intend to develop an ambitious and forward-looking roadmap for enhanced cooperation in order to achieve economically meaningful outcomes."

Given the convergence of interests and the willingness of like-minded partners and allies to invest and support India in the race of semiconductors, the next Government could do well to include removing regulatory bottlenecks in its 100-day agenda. It would be a good start towards a Stated Vikist Bharat target.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

# Sri Lanka's Easter attack revisited

As the island nation grapples with the aftermath of the attack, the intricate web of extremism and intelligence failures continues to haunt it even five years later

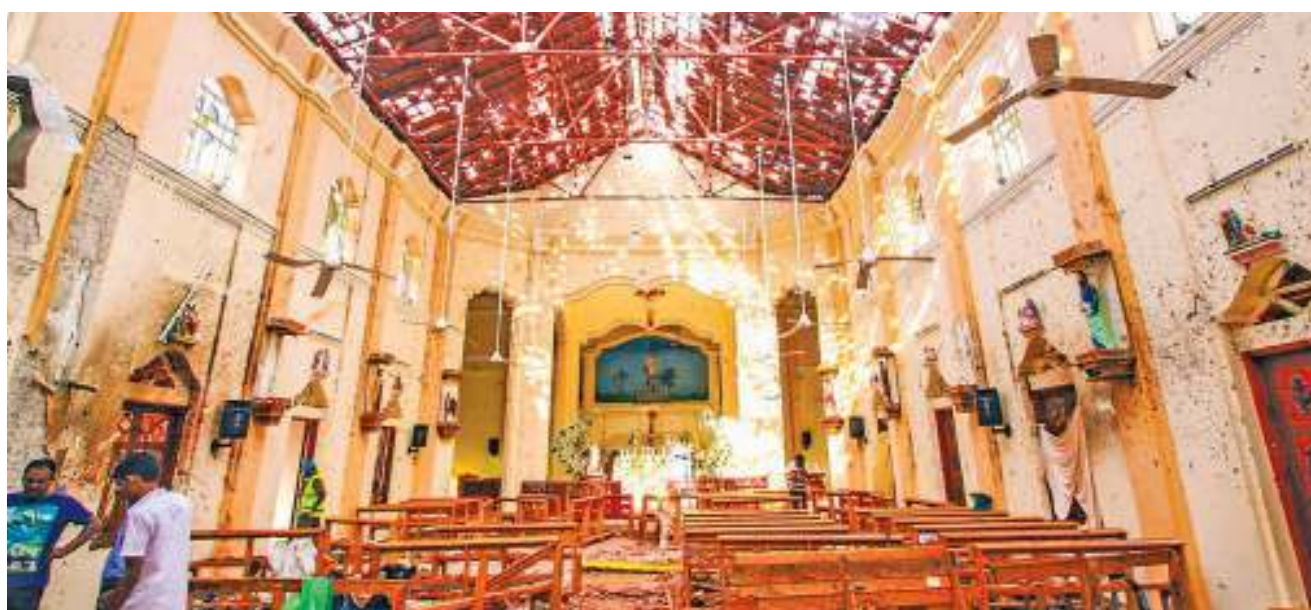


NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

When conspiracy theories gain traction and permeate the public consciousness, they inevitably taint the discourse surrounding the event in question. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in politically charged contexts. Five years ago, amidst the Easter attack on tourist hotels, two Catholic churches and a Zion church in Western and Eastern provinces, a plethora of conspiracy theories surfaced. Initially, speculation swirled suggesting the involvement of a powerful Western nation, followed by theories positing the attack as a ploy to consolidate political power. More recently, local politicians and various social groups have propagated the notion that India orchestrated the attack. Yet, none of these claims have been substantiated with credible evidence. Meanwhile, the culpability of the investigating officers' negligence, which played a role in the tragedy, has been overshadowed by these baseless allegations. Instead of being held accountable, those partially responsible have reshaped the narrative to deflect blame onto others.

However, in the aftermath of the attack, public media reports surfaced alleging that prominent politicians and Government officials were aware of the impending threat. Some even openly discussed this matter. Additionally, a leaked classified document from the police indicated forewarning of an imminent attack. What followed was not just the proliferation of various interpretations but also the dissemination of misconceptions. For instance, blame was swiftly pinned on the State Intelligence Service, the country's premier intelligence agency, extending to judicial indictments. However, a more rational examination, grounded in verifiable data, reveals a different societal reality. It uncovers a systemic failure across institutions tasked with national security and a disregard for prior warnings. Furthermore, it exposes concerted efforts to downplay this negligence for political gain. In a nation scarred by nearly four decades of internal conflict and widespread devastation, such institutional negligence sadly becomes almost unsurprising. It's crucial to highlight overlooked facts concerning the attack in question.

Leading up to the incident in question, there was a noticeable proliferation of extremist factions advocating violence across Sri Lanka. This surge wasn't limited to Muslim extremist groups but encompassed various ideological factions, each pursuing distinct political agendas. The emergence of the Islamic State in West Asia particularly bolstered the prospects of extremists across different nations, with Sri Lanka serving as a pivotal transit hub. Investigations have revealed a significant influx of extremists from regions like Kerala, as well as countries such as the Maldives, into Sri Lanka. It's evident that intelligence agencies within the region, including those of Sri Lanka and Western nations, amassed substantial intelligence on these activities and collaborated in information sharing. Testimony from the wife of Zahran Hashim, a ringleader of the carnage, attests to the financial backing he received from a Singaporean national to establish his initial mosque. She further detailed Zahran's extensive involvement in extremist endeavours, including recruiting adherents and garnering financial and logistical support throughout the country. This revelation sheds light on the proliferation of extremism in Sri Lanka, culminating



in the Easter attack and subsequent incidents like the suicidal blast at the Sainthamaruthu house, where Zahran's family last resided. Zahran and his cohorts have exhibited affiliations with extremist ideologies and have been inspired by the Islamic State. Moreover, Sri Lankan nationals who joined the organisation's ranks in Syria have been observed exerting influence on local activities. Between 2014 and 2018, a staggering 41,490 individuals from 91 nations travelled to Syria to support the Islamic State, including 32 Sri Lankans. Exploiting this influx, organisations espousing extremist ideologies, under various guises, began proliferating throughout Sri Lanka. Additionally, individuals of Sri Lankan origin who attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey but were unsuccessful have returned home and aligned themselves with figures like Zahran. Simultaneously, the ideological backing of Mohamed Naufar, known as the "second emir" and a close relative—specifically, the husband of Zahran's maternal aunt—played a pivotal role. Naufar, identified by the FBI as the mastermind behind the attack, exerted significant influence on the events.



SINCE MARCH 2017, THERE HAVE BEEN 11 SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS LEADING UP TO THE EASTER ATTACK, YET NONE HAS UNDERGONE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

Since March 2017, there have been eleven significant incidents leading up to the Easter attack, yet none have undergone thorough investigation. This failure on the part of investigative agencies, which were supposed to act on precious intelligence passed on to them, has been perceived as a deliberate effort to conceal the underlying truth of the entire episode from society, thereby impeding the crucial lessons to be gleaned from this tragedy.

The series of events began with a clash at Kattankudy Aliyar junction on March 10, 2017. Following this conflict, police attempted to arrest Zahran, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Subsequently, on May 17, 2017, a member of National Thowheeth Jamaath was shot. This was followed by a bomb thrown at the National Front for Good Governance (NFGG) Mohammad Farzan's house on February 06, 2018 and another bomb thrown at

the NFGG Kattankudy office on February 12, 2018.

Further escalations occurred with the shooting of Palani Bawa in Kattankudy on June 08, 2018 and the detonation of a bomb by Zahran's brother Rilwan in Arayampathy on August 26, 2018, resulting in injuries and fatalities at Wavnathiv police post on November 30, 2018. The incidents continued with the vandalism of religious statues in Mawanelle on December 23, 2018 and further vandalism on January 16, 2019, related to providing information about the destruction of statues and concealment of explosive materials in Vanathavilluwa of Puttalam District. The situation intensified with the discovery of material and the shooting of informant Raziq Mohammad Taslim on March 08, 2019, resulting in permanent disability. Finally, a motorcycle explosion in Thalankudah on April 16, 2019, just five days before the Easter attack, marked the culmination of these incidents. Numerous intelligence reports concerning these events have been received by the commissions tasked with investigating them, shedding light on the negligence of the officers responsible for the criminal investigation.

One of the most significant incidents out of these eleven took place in August 2018, involving Rilwan, who mishandled explosives, resulting in an accident. After the explosions in the Arayampathy area, Rilwan was taken to Colombo National Hospital and admitted under the name Zabeed on 26 August 2018. Investigations have confirmed that Zahran, conducting a training camp in the Hambantota area at the time, visited his brother in Colombo. The following day, 27 August 2018, Rilwan was admitted to the National Eye Hospital. Subsequently, he visited the clinics of the National Hospital on 27.09.2018, 04.10.2018, 11.18.26 and 15.03.2019. This incident occurred eight months prior to the attack, yet neither the training camps nor the incident itself were reported to any police or intelligence agencies.

Remarkably, the individual managed to conceal his identity from the National Hospital and Eye Hospital for several days. The doctor suspected of aiding in this matter has later fled the country.

Later, there was another incident identified as a dry run, which the State Intelligence Service formally reported to the Inspector General of Police as well as the head of CID, stating that the incident on 2019.04.18 was an explosive test. However, due to the lack of proper investigation into the incident until the Easter Sunday attack, a key opportunity to apprehend the perpetrators was missed.

Upon examination of the intelligence reports submitted to the investigative commissions regarding the attack, it becomes evident that not only did the local intelligence agency provide information, but also the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), India's internal security and counter-intelligence agency under the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, accurately foresaw the impending attacks. This information was disseminated not only to the then Inspector General of Police and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defense but also to the officers responsible for crime and investigation.

Their acknowledgment of receiving this crucial information is documented. Despite being forewarned, no preventive measures were taken to thwart the attack. This apparent failure to act raises serious questions about accountability and highlights a disturbing trend of negligence. That was a collective failure.

The balance sheet of five years since this tragedy is that there has been a concerted effort to obscure the truth by proliferating conspiracy theories, thereby masking this dereliction of duty. This deliberate attempt to deflect attention from institutional failures through the propagation of unfounded narratives not only undermines public trust but also obstructs the implementation of preventive mechanisms to ensure non-recurrence.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist. Views are personal)

# The U-turns and contradictions in Antony's political journey

From advocating communal harmony to his stance on Hindu-Muslim relations, Antony's journey reflects his love for courting controversies

The year was 1993. The Kerala Press Academy (since renamed as Kerala Media Academy) under the ownership of the Kerala Government was having the Mathai Manjooran Memorial Day. Mathai Manjooran was a socialist party leader and was a member of the EMS Namboodiripad-led coalition Government during the 1967-69. He was also a trade union leader who never hesitated to speak his mind. It is unfortunate that he passed away in 1970 at the age of 58.

A K Antony, the quintessential Congress leader was the speaker who delivered the Manjooran Memorial speech and as a journalist, I was there to cover the event. The country was yet to come out of the impact of the demolition of the



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

disputed structure at Ayodhya and the entire secularist forces were up in arms against the Hindus for the "barbaric" act. Not a single day passed in Kerala without communal harmony meetings and all speakers were vying with one another in blaming the Sanatanis for the heinous act and praising Islam as the religion of peace. But Antony chose a different approach in his 45 minutes. He warned the minority com-

munities (read Christians and Muslims) from attacking the Hindus and reminded the two communities that they should be grateful to the Sanatanis for their magnanimity in offering the minorities more than what the Hindus themselves enjoyed. "The minorities have been given more rights and privileges to run their own educational institutions and hospitals while the Hindus were denied the same. We should always bear in mind the truth that the minorities in India enjoy unique rights and privileges that the Hindus do not have and we should be grateful to them for their broad-mindedness," said Antony, which made the next day's headlines.

Antony became the chief minister of Kerala for the third

time in 2001 but he quit in 2004 for reasons best known to him, the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the then Muslim League boss Mohammed Shihab Ali Thangal. Eight Hindu fishermen were butchered by members of a Muslim extremist organisation at Maradu in Kozhikode district in May 2003 and there was a demand for a CBI probe into the massacre. A prominent Muslim League leader, who later on became a Union Minister in the Manmohan Singh Government played a significant role in offering shelter in a mosque to the assassins.

When the issue of the CBI probe came for consideration in the liaison committee meeting of the UDF, the Muslim League leaders warned Antony



who was the then Chief Minister against an investigation by the Central agency. The UDF had won 99 out of the 140 seats at stake and was in a comfortable position. The Muslim League ultimatum against the CBI probe angered Antony and he announced in a public meeting the next day

that political parties, especially the caste and community-based outfits, should not make the Government dance to their tunes with organised bargaining power. That turned out to be the nemesis for Antony as the Gods in Malappuram asked Sonia Gandhi to remove him from the post of chief minister. Despite Antony tendering an apology, the chiefs of the Muslim League, controlling Kerala politics from the Kudappanakkal castle in Panakkad, were not humoured and they insisted on the former's ouster. That was how Antony resigned as the Chief Minister and shifted camp to Delhi. The Sulthans of Malappuram had the last laugh.

Antony knows very well that his shirt and dhoti should be

more secular than that of the CPI(M) and other outfits to stay in the reckoning. That is why the person who wanted the minority communities to be grateful to the Hindus wants the Sanatan Dharma to be demolished. There is nothing surprising in Antony's stance as he was always against the Hindus even as the president of Kerala Students Union, the feeder organisation of the Congress party in Kerala. The group in the Congress party in Kerala has its roots in Antony's grievances over the status enjoyed by Hindu leaders like K Karunakaran and their clout in the High Command. The group in Congress has nothing to do with ideology and Antony's hatred towards Hindus is reflected in his cursing his son Anil Antony join-

ing the BJP. What Antony should have done is to give freedom to 38-year-old Anil to select the party of his choice and wish him all success. Instead of that what Antony has done is to demand the Nehru-Gandhi clan to field candidates for the Lok Saba election from Amethi and Rae Bareilly. He also declared that the Congress party cannot exist without the Nehru-Gandhi family. Isn't this another way of telling that India is Indira and Indira is India? Remember, this is the same Antony who ridiculed Indira Gandhi cast his lot with the CPI(M) in 1980 and formed a Government with the Marxists during 1980-1982.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)



**MONEY MATTERS**

**Mahindra Holidays & Resorts Q4 PAT jumps 47.7 pc to Rs 83.2 cr**

Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd on Friday reported a 47.7 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax of Rs 83.2 crore for the March 2024 quarter against Rs 56.3 crore a year ago. For the entire 2023-24, the company reported a consolidated profit after tax of Rs 116.05 crore against Rs 113.82 crore in the preceding fiscal, according to a regulatory filing. During the January-March quarter, Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd reported a total income of Rs 830.34 crore compared to Rs 735.26 crore a year ago. Its total expenses during the quarter under review rose to Rs 720.86 crore from Rs 658.23 crore in the January-March period of the previous year. The company said it has recorded robust member additions at 20,019 during 2023-24, up 15 per cent year-on-year. The company's shares closed at 434.10 apiece, up 1.99 per cent from their previous close on the BSE.



**'IndiGo's wide-body aircraft order augurs well for Indian aviation'**

Budget carrier IndiGo's decision to acquire wide-body planes augurs well for the Indian aviation industry as international long-haul routes are comparatively more profitable and will also help in creating an aviation hub in the country, according to rating agency CRISIL. Till January last year, IndiGo operated single-aisle Airbus aircraft fleet and in February 2023, it started operating wide-body Boeing 777 wet-leased from its codeshare partner Turkish Airlines. Currently, the airline has two wet-leased B777 operating flights to Istanbul from Delhi and Mumbai. On Thursday, the country's largest airline announced placing a firm order for 30 wide-body Airbus A350-900 planes, to be powered by Rolls-Royce's Trent XWB engines, and also has the option to purchase 70 more such aircraft. "The development (IndiGo's A350 aircraft order) augurs well for the industry as these (international long haul) routes are more profitable,



**Wendt India records Q4 consolidated PAT at Rs 13.38 cr**

Wendt (India) Ltd, an abrasive and precision component manufacturer, has registered a consolidated profit after tax for the January-March 2024 quarter at Rs 13.38 crore. The Murugappa Group company registered a consolidated profit at Rs 12.79 crore during the corresponding quarter of last year. For the year ending March 31, 2024, the consolidated profit after tax stood at Rs 54.21 crore, as against Rs 53.02 crore registered a year ago, Wendt (India) Ltd said in a statement on Friday. The total income on a consolidated basis grew to Rs 71.89 crore from Rs 60.66 crore registered in the same period of last year. For the year ending March 31, 2024, the consolidated total income went up to Rs 233.95 crore from Rs 215.23 crore registered last financial year. The Board of Directors has recommended a final dividend of Rs 20 per share (200 per cent on the face value of equity shares of Rs 10 each) out of the current year's profits, subject to the approval of shareholders.



**Airtel honoured for offering best voice experience**

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Telecom major Bharti-Airtel on Friday said it has been awarded for providing the best voice experience on the 5G network in Tamil Nadu circle, as per a report by OpenSignal. OpenSignal is a global standard for analyzing mobile experience and a guide in understanding customer experience. According to the report, Bharti-Airtel also leads in providing seamless connectivity to its telecom users and in using the over the top (OTT) services, a company statement said. The telecom major also remains the best in offering the best 5G upload speed by winning a score of 25.1 Mbps.

**RBI proposes new norms for LSPs to promote transparency**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday proposed that lending service providers (LSPs), acting as agents of banks, should give information on all the loan offers available with them to borrowers so that they can make an informed decision. Many of the LSPs offer aggregation services for loan products. LSP is an agent of a regulated entity (RE) who carries out one or more of lender's functions or part thereof in customer acquisition, underwriting support, pricing support, servicing, monitoring, recovery of specific loan or loan portfolio on behalf of REs in conformity with extant outsourcing guidelines. In December last year, the RBI announced to issue draft framework saying connected lending or lending to persons who are in a position to control or influence the decision of



"In such cases, particularly where an LSP has arrangements with multiple lenders, identity of the potential lender to the borrower may not be known upfront to the borrower," said the Reserve Bank's draft circular on 'Digital Lending - Transparency in Aggregation of Loan Products from Multiple Lenders'.

a lender can be of concern, if the lender does not maintain an arm's length relationship with such borrowers. Such lending can involve moral hazard issues, leading to a compromise in pricing and credit management, it had said.

"In such cases, particularly where an LSP has arrangements with multiple lenders, identity of the potential lender to the borrower may not be known upfront to the borrower," said the Reserve Bank's draft circular on 'Digital

Lending -- Transparency in Aggregation of Loan Products from Multiple Lenders'. The draft proposed that the LSP should provide a digital view of all the loan offers available to the borrower, as per his/her requirements, from all willing lenders with whom the LSP has arrangements with. "While the LSP may adopt any mechanism to ascertain the willingness of the lenders to offer a loan, it shall follow a consistent approach in this regard, which shall be disclosed suitably on their website," said the draft on which the RBI has sought comments from stakeholders by May 31. The digital view should include the name(s) of the RE(s) extending the loan offer, amount and tenor of loan, the annual percentage rate (APR) and other key terms and conditions in a way which enables the borrower to make a fair comparison between various offers, the draft said.

**FRONT-RUNNING CASE**

**Sebi bans eight entities from securities market Impounds 'unlawful gain' of Rs 1.3 crore**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Friday barred eight entities from the securities markets and impounded "unlawful gains" of Rs 1.3 crore earned by them from front-running activities. The eight entities are Ashok Maheshwari, Darshan Bakul Shah, Khusboo Darshan Shah, Darshan Bakul Shah (HUF), Benzer Department Stores Pvt Ltd, CHL Stock Concepts Pvt Ltd, Chirag Mahendra Shah, and Mihir Dhirajalal Savla. Front-running refers to an illegal practice in the stock market where an entity trades based on advance information from a broker or analyst before the information has been made available to its clients. Ashok Maheshwari was one of the dealers of stock broker ABC Securities Ltd, and was

responsible for placing trading orders for the Big Client, which was engaged in the business of portfolio management services.



In its 77-page order, Sebi found that Ashok Maheshwari was instrumental in supplying the information about the impending trades of the Big Client to Darshan Bakul Shah and such information was utilised to execute front running trades. Apart from trading in his own account, Darshan Bakul Shah used the accounts of his

family members -- Khusboo Darshan Shah, Darshan Bakul Shah (HUF), Benzer Department Stores Pvt Ltd, CHL Stock Concepts Pvt Ltd and Chirag Mahendra Shah. Mihir Dhirajalal Savla was the director of Benzer Department Stores. "When the Big Client, unaware of the conduct of the Noticee no. 1 (Ashok Maheshwari) was instructing him to execute trades on its behalf and such instructions were prima facie encashed by the Noticee no. 1 by sharing the same to the Noticee no. 2 (Darshan Bakul Shah). "When the information reached the Noticee no. 2, he acted in asystematic manner and trades were executed in different accounts which cumulatively generated unlawful profits (Rs 1.30 crore approx)," Sebi said.

**Markets snap five-day rally; Sensex tumbles**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on Friday after a five-day rally as investors pared exposure to banking, financial and consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global markets. Rising global crude prices, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Profit-taking also came into play as the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 609.28 points or 0.82 per cent to settle at 73,730.16. During the day, it lost 722.79 points or 0.97 per cent to 73,616.65. The NSE Nifty declined 150.40 points or 0.67 per cent to 22,419.95. Bajaj Finance was the biggest drag on the Sensex



chart, skidding nearly 8% after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finserv also declined over 3%. IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the other laggards. Meanwhile, Tech Mahindra jumped over 7 per cent after the IT services company's CEO outlined an ambitious three-year roadmap to accelerate revenue growth and lift margins.

**Macrotech Developers aims 21% growth in pre-sales in FY25**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Macrotech Developers has set a target to sell properties worth Rs 17,500 crore during the current fiscal, a 21 per cent growth from the previous year, as the company expects housing demand to remain strong, its MD and CEO Abhishek Lodha said. Macrotech Developers, which sells its properties under the Lodha brand, registered a 20 per cent growth in its sale bookings (also called pre-sales) to a record Rs 14,520 crore last fiscal from Rs 12,060 crore in the 2022-23 financial year. "We met our guidance of delivering consistent and predictable 20 per cent growth in the sale bookings during the last fiscal year. The guidance for the current fiscal has been kept at Rs 17,500 crore, again



three focus markets -- Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Pune and Bengaluru. Lodha said the company would continue to add land parcels, through outright acquisitions and also partnerships with landowners, for future development. Earlier this week, Macrotech Developers reported an 11 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit to Rs 665.5 crore in the March quarter from Rs 744.4 crore in the year-ago period. The company's total income grew to Rs 4,083.9 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 3,271.7 crore in the year-ago period. During the 2023-24 fiscal, Macrotech Developers registered a three-fold jump in profit to Rs 1,549.1 crore from Rs 486.7 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal.

20 per cent growth from the 2023-24 fiscal," Lodha said. He expects the housing demand to remain strong amid positive consumer sentiments and high economic growth. "Our best ever quarterly and annual performance showcases the buoyancy in demand for high quality homes in India from branded developers," Lodha said. To encash this consumer demand, Macrotech Developers would launch multiple housing projects across its



**Maruti Suzuki Q4 net profit rises 47.8% to Rs 3,877.8 cr**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest car maker Maruti Suzuki India on Friday reported a 47.8 per cent rise in net profit for the March quarter of FY24 to Rs 3,877.8 crore, on account of higher sales volume and favourable commodity prices. The auto major had reported a net profit of Rs 2,623.6 crore in the year-ago period, Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing. "For the first time, the company surpassed annual total sales milestone of 2 million units in FY24. The company continued to be the top exporter for the third consecutive year, now contributing 41.8 per cent of total passenger vehicle exports from India," the company stated. Maruti Suzuki shares were trading at Rs 12,687.05 apiece at the day's close, down 1.7 per cent from its previous close on the BSE.

**Book to offer overview of India's trade policy since liberalisation**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Economist and chairperson of the 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya has collected his writings from 1989 to the present day in his new book to provide an overview of the Indian economy from when liberalisation started in 1991 to where it has reached. Published by HarperCollins, "India's Trade Policy: The 1990s and Beyond" offers a window into the history of trade-policy changes in India, the factors driving them and their implications for the country's development and well-being. "This book brings to you more than two decades of advocacy for liberal trade policies in India by me. It provides the history of trade policy over the last two decades as it unfolded. The ups and downs of India's trade policy illustrate the challenges liberal trade policies face at the country level and globally," Panagariya said in a statement. Panagariya, who has advocated for liberalisation and free trade, has explained the ben-

efits of an open economy especially with respect to international trade. He presents a strong case against protectionism and recommends faster liberalisation. The book also looks at India-US and India-China trade relations, multilateral negotiations, free trade area agreements, and non-trade issues in trade agreement. "India's Trade Policy is a unique overview of the evolution of the Indian economy since liberalization was announced, by renowned economist Dr Arvind Panagariya.



**FPI investment limit in g-sec unchanged at 6% of outstanding stocks**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday said the limits for FPI investment in government securities, state development loans and corporate bonds will remain unchanged at 6 per cent, 2 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, of outstanding stocks of securities for the current fiscal. As of now, all investments by eligible investors in the 'speci-



ment securities (SGSs) and corporate bonds shall remain unchanged at 6 per cent, 2 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, of the outstanding stocks of securities for 2024-25," it said. The allocation of incremental changes in the g-sec limit (in absolute terms) over the two sub-categories -- 'General' and 'Long-term' -- will be retained at 50:50 for 2024-25, it added. The entire increase in limits

for SDLs (in absolute terms) has been added to the general sub-category of state development loans, it noted. The notification further said the aggregate limit of the notional amount of Credit Default Swaps (CDS) sold by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) will be 5% of the outstanding stock of corporate bonds. Accordingly, an additional limit of Rs 2,54,500 cr is set out for 24-25.

**Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at 83.35 against US\$**

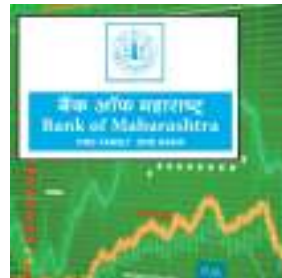
PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as a strengthening American currency overseas and a selloff in domestic equities weighed on the local unit. Besides, rising crude prices in the international market and risk-averse sentiment dragged the local unit down, forex traders said. At the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.30 and moved in the range of 83.30-83.36 during the session. The local currency finally settled at 83.35 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 7 paise from its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee closed at 83.28 against the US dollar. "Indian Rupee declined slightly on weak domestic markets and a surge in crude oil prices. We expect the rupee to trade slightly weak on renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and weakness in domestic equities. "Rising crude oil prices and FII outflows may further put pressure on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels.

**Bank of Maharashtra stock climbs nearly 4% after Q4 earnings**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Friday climbed nearly 4 per cent after the company reported a 45 per cent jump in net profit for the March quarter. The stock jumped 3.65 per cent to settle at Rs 67.62 per piece on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 6.37 per cent to Rs 65.24. On the NSE, it rallied 3.67 per cent to Rs 67.65 apiece. In volume terms, 41.88 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 942.89 lakh shares on the NSE during the day.



State-owned BoM on Friday reported a 45 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 1,218 crore for the March quarter, helped by a decline in bad loans and a rise in interest income. The Pune-based lender had

earned a net profit of Rs 840 crore in the year-ago period. During the quarter, the bank's total income increased to Rs 6,488 crore as against Rs 5,317 crore a year ago, BoM said in a regulatory filing. Interest income grew to Rs 5,467 crore during the period under review, from Rs 4,495 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago. On the asset quality side, the bank's Gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) were reduced to 1.88 per cent of gross advances as of March 31, 2024, from 2.47 per cent by the end of March 2023. Net NPAs also came down to 0.25 per cent of the advances from 0.25 per cent at the end of 2024. The fall in bad loans ratio helped cut the provisions towards NPAs for Q4FY24 to Rs 457 crore as compared with Rs 545 crore a year ago.

**Mphasis posts 3% decline in net profit to Rs 393 crore in Q4**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT company Mphasis posted a 2.98 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 393.2 crore in the March quarter of FY24. The company posted a net profit of Rs 405.3 crore in the same period a year ago. The consolidated revenue from operations of Mphasis Group, however, increased marginally to Rs 3,142 crore during the fourth quarter of the previous fiscal from Rs 3,361.2 crore a year ago, the company said in a regulatory filing. During the reporting quarter, Mphasis registered new TCV (total contract value)



wins of US\$ 177 million (about Rs 1,475 crore). "We are experiencing strong growth momentum in Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered deal archetypes, as we look to capture the enterprise demand for AI adoption. "Our ability to orchestrate the ecosystem by bringing technology and people together to solve for customer needs strongly positions us for

growth in FY25, while we continue to work around the uncertainties in the overall economic environment," Mphasis, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Nitin Rakesh said. For the year ended March 31, 2024, Mphasis recorded a 5 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,558.8 crore from Rs 1,637.9 crore in 2022-23. The annual revenue from operations dropped about 4 per cent to Rs 13,278.5 crore during FY24 from Rs 13,798.4 crore in FY23. Mphasis reported new TCV wins worth US\$ 1.38 billion in FY24.





## UNLEASH HORROR WITH TAROT ON MAY 3

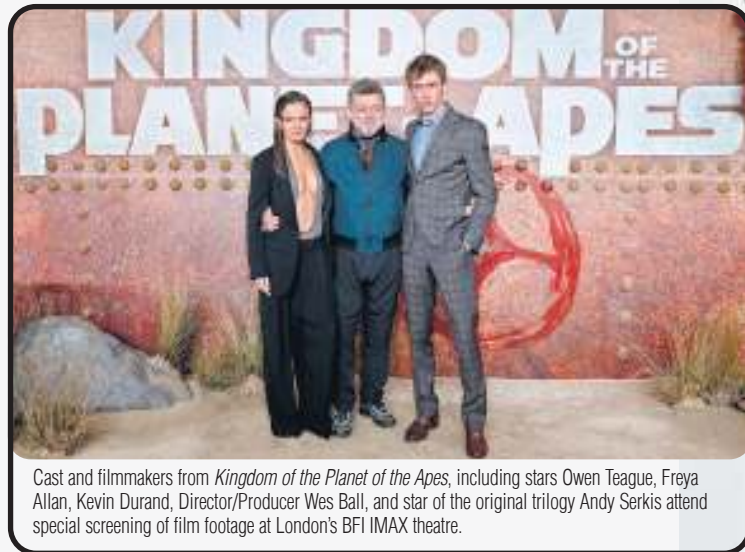
Written for the screen and directed by Spenser Cohen and Anna Halberg, *Tarot* takes you on a horror trip when a group of friends recklessly violates the sacred rule of *Tarot* readings—never use someone else's deck—and unknowingly unleash an unspeakable evil trapped within the cursed cards. One by one, they face fate and end up in a race against death to escape the future foretold in their readings. The film features Harriet Slater, Adam Bradley, Avantika, Wolfgang Novogratz, Humberly González, Larsen Thompson, and Jacob Batalon. Sony Pictures Entertainment India will exclusively release *Tarot* in Indian cinemas on May 3, 2024!

## King joins forces with Jason Derulo for summer anthem *Bumpa*

India's pop superstar, King, and international sensation Jason Derulo, known for his chart-topping hits, have teamed up to deliver this year's biggest party anthem, *Bumpa*. Now, Jason Derulo, celebrated for smash hits like *Jiggle*, *Swalla*, and *Take You Dancing*, joins forces with King. Together, they are set to release the year's most electrifying party anthem. *Bumpa* features infectious energy and Jason Derulo's dynamic dance moves, alongside King's signature swagger, all of which promise to turn it into the ultimate summer banger. Shot in Barcelona, the music video showcases both artists with a talented group of dancers, adding to the song's unmissable vibe. Choreographed by the French duo Les Twins, who have also worked with global superstars Beyoncé and Jason Derulo, this track will definitely have you grooving like there's no tomorrow. King shares his excitement about the collaboration: "Working with Jason on *Bumpa* was an incredible journey of creating a global dance anthem from India. I'm all set to dive into



uncharted territory with fresh sounds and music, and *Bumpa* is just the start. Collaborating with Jason was amazing, and I look forward to bringing the house down with this banger track." Meanwhile, Jason Derulo further adds, "*Bumpa* has been an incredible experience. King and I co-wrote the song, blending our languages and styles to ensure the vibe connects with listeners worldwide. I'm eager to see India and the rest of the world groove to our creation." With *Bumpa*, King and Jason Derulo aim to captivate audiences worldwide, promising an unforgettable dance experience. The song released yesterday under Warner Music India and will be available on all streaming platforms. Get ready to groove to the biggest summer party anthem of the year!



Cast and filmmakers from *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*, including stars Owen Teague, Freya Allan, Kevin Durand, Director/Producer Wes Ball, and star of the original trilogy Andy Serkis attend special screening of film footage at London's BFI IMAX theatre.

## VIDYA BALAN GOT 'ADDICTED' TO SMOKING AFTER THE DIRTY PICTURE

After acting in the critically acclaimed film *The Dirty Picture* in 2011, actor Vidya Balan developed a smoking addiction. The actor also likes the scent of smoke, but she wouldn't start smoking unless she was certain it wouldn't be harmful to her health. During a recent interview, Balan talked about her experience directing Milan Luthria, in which she played South Indian actor Silk Smitha from the 1980s. Balan said to YouTuber Samdishi, "After *The Dirty Picture*, I got addicted," in reference to the effects of smoking. After the movie, the actor acknowledged smoking two to three cigarettes a day. Vidya Balan emphasised that she was unable to depict Silk Smitha in a realistic manner by pretending to smoke. "I used to smoke before the movie was filmed. Although I was aware of how to smoke, I didn't actually do it—you know what it is. But you can't merely act the part like a character. I was unable to hesitate since there is a stereotype associated with women who smoke. Much less now than much more in the past," the actor said. The *Kahaani* star said, "No," in response to the interviewer's question about whether she still smokes. "It's not appropriate for me to admit this in public, but I like to smoke. I would smoke a cigarette if you told me it wouldn't hurt you. I adore how smoke smells. During my undergraduate years, I would even stand next to smokers at bus stops." A significant part of Vidya Balan's acting career has been *The Dirty Picture*. Even though she was nervous when the part was given, she felt "liberated" when the movie was over.



It seems like Zendaya and Tom Holland are getting married after four years of mostly keeping their relationship a secret. A recent story claims that the couple, who initially aroused dating rumours by sharing the screen in the *Spider-Man* movies, had been talking about getting married. Zendaya and Tom could very well say "I do" in the near future, according to a source close to the couple. People revealed exclusively that the celebrities might be anticipating a future together after successfully concealing their relationship while pursuing their prominent jobs. A source recently told the magazine, "There has been talk of marriage, and that is a reality." Dating rumours soon followed the pair, who first connected on the set of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* in 2016. But proof didn't come until 2021, when the pair was eventually seen in Holland's car packing on the PDA. "They are not the kind of stars who put their lives out there on social media for the most part," the insider said, elaborating on the couple's well-known position. With cunning and a low-key profile, the *Spider-Man* hero and the *Euphoria* actor have avoided public attention and rumours about their romance from the beginning.

## Arti Singh enters wedlock

On Thursday, April 25, actress Arti Singh wed businessman Dipak Chauhan. A number of images and videos from their wedding at the temple have been making the rounds online. Arti Singh may be seen wearing a stunning pink satin saree and walking down the aisle in one of the videos. A second video shows Arti Singh and Dipak Chauhan participating in *sindoor* ceremony and *gathbandhan*, two holy rites. During the rites, Arti Singh can be seen crying with joy. Arti Singh chose a pink saree and matching blouse for the temple wedding. She added gold kaleeras, a necklace

made of gold, and a large *matha patti* to complete her ensemble. In contrast, Dipak Chauhan was dressed in a white sherwani. The couple left the wedding to go for a picture. The recently married pair handed out candy and posed for the photographers. The photographers were also honoured for capturing their memorable moments. Family members and close friends of the couple were present for the wedding. Govinda, Kapil Sharma, Priyanka Chahar Choudhary, Tina Datta, Ankit Gupta, Mahira Sharma, Paras Chhabra, Vishal Aditya Singh, Bipasha Basu, Karan Singh Grover, Arbaaz Khan, and Devoleena Bhattacharjee were among the attendees.



## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



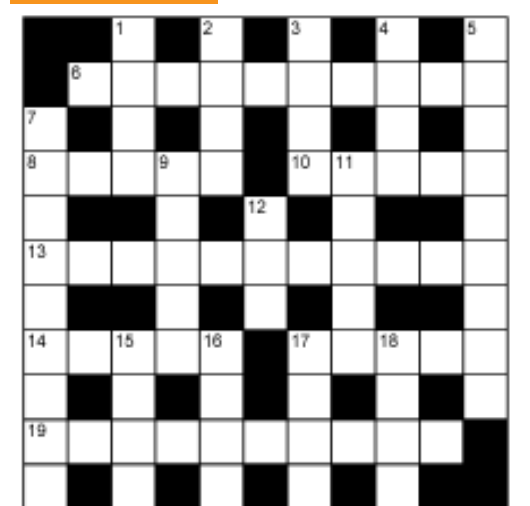
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



### SUDOKU



**Yesterday's solution**  
 6 2 9 3 7 8 1 4 5  
 7 1 8 6 5 4 3 2 9  
 3 4 5 9 2 1 6 7 8  
 9 8 3 7 4 6 2 5 1  
 1 5 7 2 9 3 4 8 6  
 2 6 4 1 8 5 7 9 3  
 5 3 2 8 6 7 9 1 4  
 8 7 6 4 1 9 5 3 2  
 4 9 1 5 3 2 8 6 7

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

### ACROSS

- Something chewed but usually not swallowed (7,3)
- With lots of sunshine
- A stand for an artist's painting
- Straight away
- Tossed
- Put words on paper
- Daily publications

### DOWN

- Part of your face
- Absent
- One time
- Hens lay these
- People who work for a business





## 'NAWAB KA SHEHAR, IT'S A REFELCTION OF EASYGOING PACE OF LIFE'



offer prospects for accumulating riches, and a bustling leisure environment. They may not be as good as places like Bombay, Delhi, or Bangalore, but they are unquestionably superior to many other locations!

Her ability to have a casual conversation in Hindi is one factor that helps her in this situation. Here in the twin cities, there is a balanced approach to language, unlike in other southern cities where Hindi may not be as extensively spoken! The greatest benefit of residing here is that.

On the other hand, it has been difficult to acclimate to Hyderabad's year-round hot weather and restricted options for dining, entertainment, and education after living in other Indian cities where she was exposed to a variety of vibrant cultures.

"The climate here is one thing that continues to bother me," she says. "As someone who grew up experiencing all four seasons, I find it difficult to get used to Hyderabad's never-ending heat. Additionally, there don't seem to be many notable eateries in the area, with the only options for cuisine being Biryani and Khubani-ka-Meetha." Then, after completing her undergraduate studies in Bangalore and moving to Hyderabad for her post-graduation education, she had studied all throughout India. At first, she noticed that everyone

fluid, given the frequent relocations. My roots trace back to Bangalore through my mother and Gudivada in Andhra Pradesh through my father, but Hyderabad holds a special place in my heart. After years of living here, it's become my chosen hometown. Shopping in Hyderabad offers a unique variety not found elsewhere. Laad Bazar stands out for its ethnic dresses and wedding shopping, though grooming schools are scarce."

Kanha Shanti Vanam, a meditation hall, has recently emerged as a significant spiritual destination for her. "The serene ambience of Taramati Baradari and the captivating sound and light show at Golconda Fort are personal favourites. While there are temples aplenty, options for family outings are somewhat limited, with Yadagirigutta Temple being a primary choice." She continues to shares, "Every place has its pros and cons, and what I appreciate about Hyderabad is its tranquil atmosphere. Unlike the frenetic pace of some cities, it embraces a sense of calmness. Engaging in simple activities like gardening feels fulfilling when there's no pressure to constantly be on the go. In essence, Hyderabad offers a haven for the nervous system, allowing one to embrace a more peaceful way of life."

She shares about her career here: "After completing my psychology education at the University of Arts and Social Sciences in Hyderabad, initially, therapy wasn't widely embraced, with many being hesitant and shy, even covering their faces when seeking help. However, the pandemic brought a significant shift, with a surge in people seeking therapy, even for minor issues. I've witnessed a transformation in attitudes towards therapy, with pre-marital counselling becoming less taboo. Hyderabad has emerged as a conducive environment for practising psychology, especially with the increasing acceptance and demand for counselling services."

The significance of Hyderabad in her life, she shares, "When I first began my practice in Hyderabad, I grappled with the challenge of not being proficient in Telugu, having been raised in northern cities where English and Hindi were my primary languages. However, two years ago, opportunities arose with media organisations, prompting me to participate in series and shows on examination stress, albeit in a mix of Telugu and English. Despite my initial hesitations due to my limited Telugu vocabulary, I soon realised that the essence of content creation and the desire to assist others transcended language barriers. As collaborations expanded, I discovered a sense of belonging within the city's warm embrace. Though not originally from Hyderabad, the community welcomed me wholeheartedly, providing me with opportunities to flourish as a therapist. Over time, I've come to embrace my Telugu Brahmin identity, finding fulfillment in serving the evolving needs of Hyderabad's diverse populace."



around here didn't have the same enthusiasm that she was used to. Therapists and healers seldom visit for workshops, and beyond engineering and medical fields! The college culture here also leaves much to be desired. "My younger son attends Loyola Academy, but I haven't seen the kind of college life I experienced in the 90s. It feels more like an extension of school than a place for holistic learning."

Despite its unique charm, the city's recreational landscape could benefit from further diversification to cater to varied interests. "In the military, the concept of a hometown can be

This week for our special weekly column of **Hyderabad**, *The Pioneer* connects with Kavita Panyam, a counselling psychologist progressing in Hyderabad, sharing her association, and insights from her life in Hyderabad.

### HYDERABOND

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Meet Hyderabad-based Kavita Panyam, a seasoned counselling psychologist who is making progress. She has found her professional purpose and a strong sense of belonging in Hyderabad's lively community, despite the difficulties she faced upon moving from her military background to Hyderabad.

In the lively backdrop of Hyderabad, she discusses her path of career achievement and personal growth through her perceptive insights! "Because of my father's military profession, I was born and reared in the vibrant North; I didn't start to settle into Hyderabad's calm atmosphere until after he retired in 1994. I always thought that people in the North were more gregarious, lively, open, and less reserved when I was a child. I also happen to be that kind of person. But since coming here, I've observed that Hyderabadis are generally laid back. But I've noticed a shift since the pandemic. People now appear more motivated to succeed in life. As they say, "Nawab ka Shehar," it's a reflection of the easygoing pace of life."

With regard to Secunderabad in particular, "it's even more laid-back." However, the twin cities are very different when taken into account. They are similar to big cities in that they

## 'Gia Manek was that hidden gem of TV industry that had not been recognised yet'

Music composer-filmmaker Palash Muchhal, who had recently collaborated with Rajpal Yadav yet again in *Kaam Chalu Hai*, speaks exclusively with *The Pioneer*, sharing some interesting anecdotes from the film.

PNS| HYDERABAD

All that has to be said is that *Kaam Chalu Hai*, starring Rajpal Yadav, has the proper heart. It narrates the tale of Manoj Patil, who loses his daughter in a pothole-related car accident. Motivated by an actual event, Patil decides to cover every gap on his own when the authorities decline to assist him. The story reveals the government's complacent behaviour and also brings out genuine emotions.

Having been much appreciated for the story, we have the man behind the project onboard, Palash Muchhal, director of *Kaam Chalu Hai*, sharing some exclusive insights on the film, streaming on Zee5.

*Kaam Chalu Hai* marks his second collaboration with the extremely talented Rajpal Yadav. Also a music composer, Palash was all praise for his lead cast, Rajpal Yadav and Gia Manek, as he shares, "Rajpal and Gia have played their parts



outstandingly. We have all been well aware of the versatility of Rajpal and Gia's natural acting was the icing on the cake. As I told you earlier, our film and TV industries have hidden gems that have not been recognised or used well. Even Kurangi (the child artist) and the rest of the cast have played their fair parts."

In *Kaam Chalu Hai*, predictability and the exploitation of pain take center stage in its fixation with telling the true tale. Palash is pretty sure that *Kaam Chalu Hai* will definitely put the audience on an emotional roller coaster. "It has all the elements to be family entertainment, and also adding to that is the social cause on which the film is based. I hope and pray that the audience will enjoy the movie as well as be aware of the threat something as small as a pothole can cause to someone's life. Just because it's not happening with us right now doesn't mean it can never happen to us." Cinema has always been one of the most impactful mediums to reach a greater mass. And so, "I believe if more filmmakers focus on such societal causes, the audience will be more aware of such trivial yet important issues."



## Managing blood pressure fluctuations to reduce ischemic stroke risk!

Blood pressure variability (BPV) refers to short-term or long-term fluctuations in blood pressure levels over time. These fluctuations can happen within short breaks (minute-to-minute variability), within 24 hours (daily variability), or over longer intervals (long-term variability). Various factors like autonomic nervous function, abnormal breathing, body position, behavior and body temperature can lead to short-term fluctuations. However, some degree of BPV is considered as normal but excessive variability has been linked with several cardiovascular conditions, including ischemic stroke. Moreover, repeated rise in blood pressure may cause hemorrhagic transformation whereas repeated fall in blood pressure may worsen ischemia.

### LINKAGE BETWEEN BLOOD PRESSURE VARIABILITY AND ISCHEMIC STROKE

An Ischemic stroke occurs when there is some kind of blockage that prevents blood from reaching all areas of your brain leading to reduced blood flow and oxygen deprivation. If not given proper medical attention, it can cause permanent brain damage or even death. Excessive fluctuations in blood pressure can damage the inner lining of blood vessels leading to the formation of plaques within the arteries which further increases the risk of ischemic stroke by blocking the blood vessels. Additionally, blood pressure variability can also affect small blood vessels in the brain, resulting in microvascular damage which increases the susceptibility of brain tissue to ischemia.

### SYMPTOMS OF ISCHEMIC STROKE

The symptoms of an ischemic stroke can vary

depending on the location and extent of the blockage. Few common symptoms include:

- **One-sided weakness:** A person suffering from ischemic stroke may face weakness or numbness on one side of the body, generally affecting the face, arm, or leg. This mostly occurs on the same side of the body as the affected part of the brain.
- **Aphasia:** It refers to the difficulty in speaking and understanding the speech. People with ischemic stroke sometimes find it difficult to find the right words to express themselves.
- **Vision problems:** Sudden vision changes, like: blurred or double vision, loss of vision in one or both eyes are quite common symptoms in ischemic stroke.
- **Headache:** Severe and unbearable headaches can occur if the person is suffering from subarachnoid hemorrhage.
- **Loss of balance:** Few people face dizziness and postural instability during a stroke which can make it difficult for them to walk or even balance the body.

Through lifestyle modifications, few medications and targeted interventions like endovascular mechanical thrombectomy (a surgical procedure to remove blood clots from brain), we can manage ischemic stroke and its symptoms.

(Dr. Apurva Sharma, is a Consultant - Neurology, at Manipal Hospital.)





# Upbeat Delhi Capitals take on struggling MI as playoff race intensifies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bolstered by Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday. The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats. But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win against MI will strengthen their claim to a play off spot. On the other hand, after a familiar poor start, MI bounced back with three wins in their next four matches but a

comprehensive nine-wicket thrashing by Rajasthan Royals put an end to their resurgence. They are tottering on the eighth place on the points table and can ill-afford to lose. DC's biggest positive has undoubtedly been skipper Rishabh Pant's form, which appears to be improving with each game. He has looked sharp behind the stumps and seems to be batting with freedom. He was at his belligerent best during a match-winning unbeaten knock against Gujarat Titans on Wednesday. It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson, Dinesh Karthik and Ishan Kishan.

In Jack Fraser-McGurk, DC have found an able top-order batter who can exploit the powerplay but more is expected of opener Prithvi Shaw, given that his only responsibility is to bat as he is used as an Impact Substitute. David Warner missed out the previous game, making way for Shai Hope, who couldn't capitalise on the opportunity, and the veteran Australian might be brought back in the playing XI. Tristan Stubbs has time and again proved he can be brutal with the bat while Axar Patel also showcased his batting prowess when he was elevated up the order in the four-run win against GT. While the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar have bowled economically, DC's fast



bowling unit needs to step up. Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje is having a forgettable season and has leaked runs at 13.36 which has been a major problem for Delhi. The likes of Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar and Ishant Sharma have been plagued by injuries leading to inconsistent runs. They were taken to the cleaners by MI batters, who piled on 234/5 earlier in the season. And DC would be wary of a similar performance. MI's resurgence this season began with a win against DC and the five-time champions would hope for an encore in the crucial clash. For Mumbai, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma have got runs but all of them have found form in

patches. It's time for the likes of Tim David, Ishan Kishan and skipper Hardik Pandya to contribute a big way and take some pressure off the top trio. While the batting department has occasionally looked good, the bowling remains a massive cause of concern. Jasprit Bumrah has expectedly been MI's standout bowler. He has led the attack with 13 wickets at an economy rate of 6.37. However, new addition Gerald Coetzee has been inconsistent in his maiden IPL. Though he has an economy of 10.10, the South African pacer has accounted for 12 wickets in eight games. But barring the two seamers, Mumbai's bowling has disappointed.

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori feels that after mastering the art of setting totals, it's time his team brushes up on its chasing abilities as the business end of the Indian Premier League approaches. SRH are currently third in the leaderboard with five wins from eight games. Of the five victories, four have come batting first. "We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," Vettori said after the 35-run loss against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Thursday night. RCB posted a challenging 206 for 7 after opting to bat and then restricted SRH to 171 for 8. For a team that has breached the 250-run mark thrice this season, the target was easily

## Now time to polish chasing abilities: SRH coach Vettori

gettable but a rare failure of the top and middle-order cost the hosts dearly. "Obviously, disappointing one where we have come from in the last four games; we played some really good cricket and even though we lost, you could see if we had some wickets at the back end, we could have still chased it down," Vettori said at the post-match press conference. "Those early wickets broke everything. We were confident for the scores we were being able to put up. We thought that 206 was a good score, we probably let a few runs in the field. But there was confidence in the group because of past performances. "We also knew it was being set up by the openers and how good they have played, and



today they had an off day and that's cricket," he said. The former New Zealand cricketer said there are no easy games in IPL. "Unfortunately, we didn't get the support through the middle stages. It's a tough loss but we understand every team

in the IPL can beat every team. There are no easy games at all," Vettori said. The coach was of the view that the role of an anchor has no significance in high-scoring matches. "I think the wicket was still pretty good. The guys who

came off said that it is a surface where you can score on. Anchor role when you are chasing 207 it is hard to come, you obviously need to be aggressive. For some to sit along and play anchor role is a little bit tricky." RCB all-rounder Swapnil Singh, meanwhile, was relieved after his side snapped its six-match losing streak. "Experience was good but we won the game that was more important. When you win a game, the tempo in the team changes. It feels good. Last two games we missed by small difference but still long way to go," he said. Swapnil said they felt the target was enough on this wicket despite SRH boasting of a super-aggressive batting order.

## RR look to maintain winning run

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

High-flying Rajasthan Royals will look to continue their winning momentum and consolidate their position at the top when they take on a resurgent Lucknow Super Giants, who would be gunning for revenge at home in an IPL match here on Saturday. Former champions RR have looked in ominous form this season with seven wins from eight games, and they could be a tough nut to crack for LSG. LSG, meanwhile, too have played some good cricket and are placed fourth with five wins from eight games. But going into Saturday's match, RR would certainly be the favourites as they have registered a hat-trick of victories after a rare blip against Gujarat Titans. Assam batter Rryan Parag has been the flavour of the season for RR in the batting department. The youngster reinvented himself and has been the team's highest scorer with 318 runs from eight games. The return to form of Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was struggling a bit this season, has further strengthened RR's batting. While chasing a 180-run target in the last game against Mumbai Indians, Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 104 off 60 balls to power his side to a comfortable nine-wicket win. Jaiswal's return to form is something RR's opponents should really be worried about given the devastation the youngster and Jos Buttler



can wreak at the top of the order. RR's batting typically revolves around skipper Sanju Samson, who has scored 314 runs so far, and with West Indian Shimron Hetmyer capable of hitting top gear, the 2008 IPL champions have a potent lineup. The likes of Rovman Powell and Dhruv Jurel, though, need to contribute more. RR also boast of a potent bowling attack comprising the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma, whose 5 for 18 against Mumbai Indians has really fired up the side. The team's spin department is also in the safe hands of the experienced duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and R. Ashwin, although the latter has struggled this season. Chahal, however, is RR's best bowler with 13 wickets from eight games. LSG, on the other hand, would be seeking revenge after having lost the first tie to RR by 20 runs this season.

Besides revenge, LSG would look to register a hat-trick of victories and scale up in the leaderboard. KL Rahul's side is also on a high after two successive wins, but the India player knows the shortcomings in the top order. When Rahul and his opening partner Quinton de Kock are on fire, LSG's batting looks ominous. The problem arises when the opening duo has an off day. That area was, however, covered by Marcus Stoinis in their last game against Chennai Super Kings, where the Australian scored an unbeaten century. Despite losing Rahul and de Kock early in the chase of 210/4, Stoinis played one of the best knocks in this IPL, remaining unbeaten on 124 off 63 balls to hand LSG a six-wicket win. Stoinis' return to form augurs well for LSG middle-order, where the likes of Devdutt Padikkal, Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda need to take up more responsibility.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India star Yuvraj Singh has identified the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav and pace ace Jasprit Bumrah as key to the team's prospects in the upcoming T20 World Cup owing to their ability to "change the complexion of a game" in a jiffy. Yuvraj, who was pivotal to India's title triumph in the inaugural edition of the tournament back in 2007, said Suryakumar will need to have a good outing for the team to win the cup for the second time while also suggesting that Bumrah needs to be at his best. "Suryakumar Yadav (is India's key player)," Yuvraj was

## Yuvraj identifies Surya, Bumrah as key to India's prospects in T20 World Cup



quoted as saying by ICC. He added, "Because the way he plays, he can change the complexion of a game in 15 balls. And he is definitely a surety... for India to win this T20 World Cup, Surya is going to be the key. "I think Jasprit Bumrah is also the key with the bowling and I would like to see a leg-spinner in the squad as well, like Yuzvendra Chahal as he has been bowling really well. "But being a batter, I would say Suryakumar Yadav (is the key player)."

While dissecting the options of who should be India's first-choice wicket-keeper, Yuvraj expressed satisfaction with veteran Dinesh Karthik's form in the IPL but said if he is not part of the playing XI, there is no point picking the 38-year-old in the squad as the younger Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson have been playing extremely well. "DK (Karthik) has been batting well, but the thing with DK is that the last time (2022) they picked him and the T20 WC was on and he didn't get to play," Yuvraj noted. "If DK is not in your XI I don't think there is any point in picking him. There is Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson and both guys are in great form and obviously they are younger."

### OTHER SPORTS

## Man City beats Brighton 4-0 to stay on course for another Premier League title. Phil Foden scores 2



AP ■ BRIGHTON (ENGLAND)

Manchester City chalked up another big win in its pursuit of an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, with Phil Foden continuing his career-best scoring season with two goals in a 4-0 thrashing of Brighton on Thursday. Foden's first-half double came between goals by Kevin De Bruyne and Julian Alvarez as City extended its unbeaten run in the league to 18 games and trimmed the gap to leader Arsenal to one point. Liverpool is two points further back in third after its title chances were damaged by a 2-0 loss at Everton on Wednesday. City has five games remaining - one more than Arsenal and Liverpool - and, on current form, is showing no sign of slipping up in the final stretch that still contains trips to Nottingham Forest, Fulham and Tottenham as well as home matches against Wolverhampton and West Ham. Win all five of those games and City is

the champion again. No team has ever won four successive top-flight titles in the history of English soccer. "I trust my team," De Bruyne said. "All respect to Arsenal and Liverpool, they are amazing... But we need to do our job. "We just need to keep going, not get ahead of ourselves, be humble and work hard." Since a 0-0 draw with Arsenal at home on March 31, City has won four straight league games and scored 17 goals in the process. Pep Guardiola's team kept up that hot streak without the injured Erling Haaland - the league's joint-top scorer with 20 goals - and that allowed Foden to potentially join the race for the Golden Boot. It's 16 goals for the campaign and 24 in 48 games in all club competitions this season for Foden, who delivered another clinical display in front of England coach Gareth Southgate at Amex Stadium - seven weeks out from the start of the European Championship.

## World Cup: Deepika ousts Korean rival to make semis; archers confirm four medals

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Continuing her spirited progress post motherhood, former world number one Deepika Kumari eliminated Korean Jeon Hunyoung to storm into the semifinal, while compound archers continued to shine to assure India a fourth medal in the World Cup Stage 1 here on Friday. Deepika, the three-time Olympian, who has slipped to world No. 142 and qualified as 30th seed in the rankings round, overcame a 1-3 deficit to defeat Jeon 6-4 (27-28, 27-27, 29-28, 29-27, 28-28) in the women's recurve individual quarterfinal. Having started off with an eight, Deepika lost the first set 27-28, but the 29-year-old continued to improve and levelled the second at 27-all, before taking the third (29-28) by dropping just one point. From three-all, there was no stopping Deepika who went on to drill in four 10s including two X (closer to centre) from six arrows to make the semis. Deepika, who embraced motherhood in December 2022 and returned to win the Asia Cup gold in Baghdad in February this year, may have to overcome two more Korean rivals in her bid to win a first World Cup individual gold medal since the Paris Stage 3 in June 2021. Korean teenager Nam Suhyeon, who qualified as



the seventh seed, stands in Deepika's way in the semifinal. The other half will feature top seed and 20-year-old world No. 2 Korean Lim Shiyeon taking on Li Jiannan of China. **JYOTHI, VERMA CONFIRM FOURTH MEDAL:** The day began with Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma advancing into the compound mixed team final. The world No. 2 Indians dropped just five points to prevail over their Mexican opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximo Mendez Ortiz 155-151. They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday. With Jyothi also securing a

semi-final spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World No. 3 and Asian Games gold medalist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes. Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events - where Jyothi and Priyansh have made the semifinals. The four events where Indian teams have made the gold-medal round are compound men's, women's, mixed categories and men's recurve. Having got an opening round bye, the second-seeded Indian pair of Jyothi and Verma started off by producing a flawless 160 out of 160 to knock out the lower-ranked Australian pair of Geogina Graham and Brandon Hawes by eight points.

Next up, 10th ranked Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna and Gilles Seywert were also no match for the Indian pair, which dropped just five points from 16 arrows to storm into the semi-finals with a 155-151 win. In the semi-final, the Indians started on a back-foot after Andrea and Mendez Ortiz capped three 10s and one nine to take the opening end 39-38. But the Mexicans slipped in the next set of arrows as Jyothi and Verma snatched the lead by dropping one point. The Indians then extended their lead by three points in the penultimate round after another slip-up by the Mexicans. Jyothi and Verma sealed the issue with a perfect 40 in the fourth end.



## Senthilkumar, Akanksha enter quarters of PSA events

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top-seeded Indian Velavan Senthilkumar teased past Frenchman Matteo Carrouget in straight games to move into the quarterfinals of the Batch Open squash, a USD 12,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Paris. National champion Senthilkumar, ranked 58th in the world, beat Carrouget 11-4 11-6 11-7 in 29 minutes in the second round on Thursday night after receiving a bye in the opening round. He will meet fifth seed Jakob Solnický of the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals. Elsewhere, National Games women's champion Akanksha Salunkhe advanced to the quarterfinals of the Expression St James Open, a USD 20,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Springfield, US. Fourth seed Salunkhe, ranked 70th in the world, beat Winifer Bonilla of Guatemala 11-8 11-2 11-9 in 25 minutes in the second round following a bye in the first. She will play fifth seed Alina Bushma of Ukraine next.



From captivating performances to meticulous style choices, Digangana Suryavanshi has left an indelible mark in Tollywood. Join us as we explore her diverse roles, upcoming releases, and creative pursuits in this exclusive interview.

## Digangana Suryavanshi reviving silver screen with FOUR AWAITED RELEASES

K. RAMYA SREE

Actress, singer and author Digangana Suryavanshi has carved a niche for herself in the Telugu film industry with her captivating performances in movies like *Hippi*, *Valayam*, *Seetimar* and *Crazy Fellow*. Now, the talented artist is all set to enthrall audiences once again with her upcoming projects.

In an exclusive revelation, it was disclosed that Digangana will reunite with her *Crazy Fellow* co-star Aadi Sai Kumar for the much-anticipated film *Krishna from Brindavanam*.

During the recent launch puja of *Krishna from Brindavanam*, the film's director, Veerabhadram Chowdary, emphasised the pivotal role of her character in the movie. Intrigued by this revelation, we reached out to Digangana, who has been absent from the limelight for the past two years, to delve deeper into her upcoming projects and her journey in Tollywood and to our surprise, we learned that she has been shooting four films in Telugu and Tamil over the past two years, which are all ready for release now. It looks like 2024 is going to be 'her' year, with a handful of projects lined up to grace theatres.

Speaking of *Krishna from Brindavanam* and how she onboarded the movie, the actress, who is multitasking now as she is finishing her MBA in finance apart from acting full-time, shared, "I worked with Aadi before for *Crazy Fellow* and both of us had in the back of our minds to do a film with a love story. I always wanted to do a very hard-core love story. Luckily, while I was shooting for my other film with Ashwin Babu,

our manager sent this idea to me. I love being part of films where, as a female lead, there is so much story around you and so much your character says. I think that is when the audience—women of my age—can resonate. If there is no emotion, you cannot resonate with the film. I heard the whole narrative and I knew it was a meaty role and I knew I could give my best, whether it was the language or emotion. This film is bound between two people: Aadi and I, and I felt this was going to be very good."

In this movie, Digangana gets to play a modern village role. She is a college-going girl, but she assures the audience that her role in the film is more rooted and authentic, where nativity plays a strong role. "Even in real life, we are a blend of where we come from, so for me, the backstory of the person is very important and this is a film that has it all."

If one has watched the work Digangana has done so far in Tollywood, her style game is always on point. Known for her impeccable style, she discussed her approach to selecting outfits and makeup for her roles. Emphasising the significance of aligning her appearance with her character's persona, she shared, "I do give a lot of attention to my outfits. I really think dressing isn't really about looking good; it is also about representing that person. You cannot see a certain person wearing a certain kind of outfit because it doesn't suit their personality. I have been very lucky with directors, cinematographers and stylists because it is a group vision when it comes to movies. People have been very considerate so far."

As mentioned, the actor was busy the past two

years with four films and gave some details about them. She mentioned, "I have shot four films and I think everything is now coming together. I shot a film with People Media Factory, and I am awaiting its release. We haven't, however, announced it yet. I am shooting a film with Ashwin Babu, which has Arbaaz sir as the villain. I have about a week of work left. *Krishna from Brindavanam* is my third. I also shot for a Tamil film, and that hasn't been released either. These two years have been much about filming and less about releases (she laughs). I am glad to be missed because you get to see more of me now (hahaha)."

When it comes to selecting story selections, she said, "Most of the decisions are my soul decisions; at least 90 percent are my own calls. When I look at the script, I see, 'If I am done with the film, do I want to go back and watch it?' I could have a 10-minute part or a full-fledged part; I need to like the film in totality. If I don't like the film in totality, I am not going to watch it, and how am I going to ask other people to watch it? So for me, it plays an important role."

All the roles she has played have been very close to each other, which were girl-next-door; however, the young actress believes she needs to put in extra effort to differentiate between the roles and keep in mind that she is repeating her characters and doing the same work.

Overall, in this conversation with Digangana, one thing we have learned and are sure about is that she is a dedicated actress in whatever she does and is one of those actors who would give her best in any role she picks. Despite coming from an affluent family, the actress likes to be grounded. "I am not ambitious at the stake of my



grace and dignity," tells the actress on how she maintains her values.

She is not a party person or a socialite and is more like a home bee when she is not working; however, now she is trying to be out there at premieres, as she was not somebody who used to do it previously. She shared, "I was not someone who attended premieres, although I know so many people. I was always like, 'Okay, I'll see you at the office, or I'll watch it at home.' But a couple of things have changed in the past few years. There is a shift

now as a person, and I am enjoying that shift too."

Furthermore, on the work front, Digangana has also shot for a series in Hindi, which is in its dubbing phase; however, an official announcement is awaited. She is also very excited about another Hindi project that is under wraps. Beyond her acting endeavours, Digangana is also engaged in various creative pursuits, including writing.

Her multifaceted talents and unwavering dedication underscore her status as a rising star to watch out for in the entertainment industry.



## ANUPAMA SETS TONE FOR WOMEN-ORIENTED INTRIGUING DRAMA

Following the success of his critically acclaimed debut film, *Cinema Bandi*, director Praveen Kandregula is all set to mesmerise audiences once again with his upcoming project, *Paradha*. Produced by Ananda Media, the film marks the production house's grand entry into the Telugu film industry, promising to deliver an enthralling cinematic experience.

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu and filmmakers Raj & DK unveiled the first look and concept video of *Paradha*, setting the stage for what promises to be an intriguing drama centered around female protagonists. The title itself, *Paradha*, meaning curtain, hints at the layered narrative awaiting audiences. The first look poster showcases Anupama Parmeswarani in a de-glam avatar, draped in traditional attire, standing alongside other women whose faces are covered with Yoni. Anupama's stern gaze captivates, setting the tone for a compelling storyline.

Accompanying the first look is a

concept video that beautifully encapsulates the essence of the film. Set in a village backdrop, the video resonates with the shloka from *Manusmruthi*, emphasising the importance of honoring women and the divine significance attached to their reverence.

Joining Anupama Parmeswarani in the cast are the versatile Darshana Rajendran, making her Telugu cinema debut, and veteran actress Sangitha, adding depth and richness to the ensemble.

*Paradha* has been a labor of love, with shooting schedules taking the crew across picturesque locations in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, and various villages.

As the final leg of shooting approaches in Hyderabad, anticipation continues to build for the film's release. With music scored by Gopi Sundar and cinematography by Mridul Sujit Sen, *Paradha* promises to captivate audiences with its engaging storyline, talented cast, and soul-stirring music.

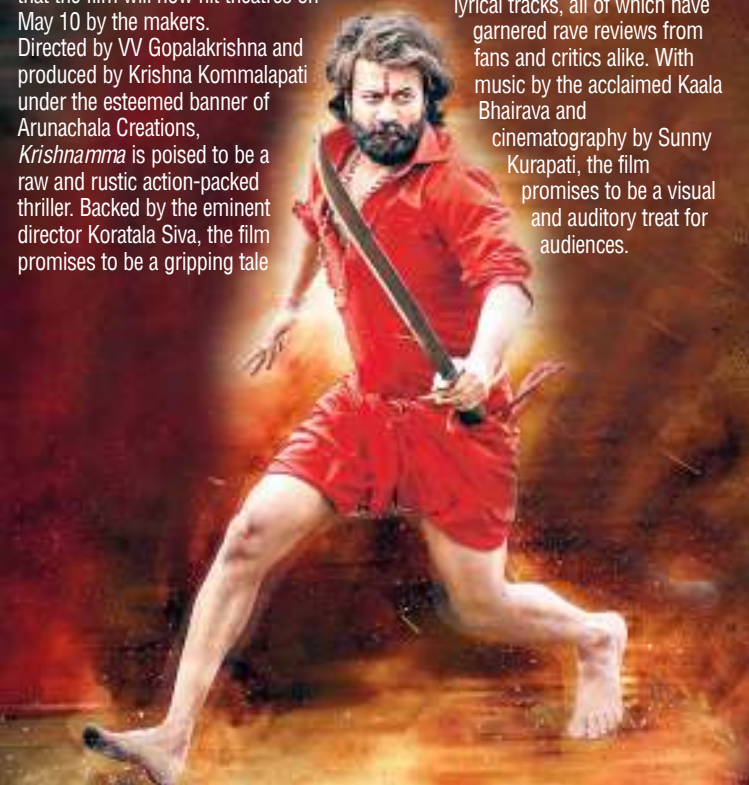
## Satyadev's Krishnamma release pushed to May 10

Satyadev stands out not only as a talented actor but also as a symbol of resilience and determination. From his humble beginnings to becoming a sought-after name in the industry, Satyadev has carved a niche for himself with his versatile performances. Now, he is gearing up for the release of his latest venture, *Krishnamma*. The film's release was initially scheduled for May 3; however, it was announced on Friday that the film will now hit theatres on May 10 by the makers. Directed by VV Gopalakrishna and produced by Krishna Kommalapati under the esteemed banner of Arunachala Creations, *Krishnamma* is poised to be a raw and rustic action-packed thriller. Backed by the eminent director Koratala Siva, the film promises to be a gripping tale

that will keep audiences on the edge of their seats.

In this cinematic journey, Satyadev is joined by the talented Athira Raj, who shares the screen as his leading lady. The ensemble cast also includes Laxman Meesala, Krishna, Archana, Raghukunche, and Nandagopal, each bringing their own unique essence to the narrative.

The buzz surrounding *Krishnamma* has been steadily building, fueled by the release of its teaser, title song, and lyrical tracks, all of which have garnered rave reviews from fans and critics alike. With music by the acclaimed Kaala Bhairava and cinematography by Sunny Kurapati, the film promises to be a visual and auditory treat for audiences.



## Varun Tej joins forces with Pawan Kalyan in the AP elections

Actor Varun Tej is gearing up to rally support for his uncle, Jana Sena Party Chief Pawan Kalyan, in the upcoming elections in Andhra Pradesh. The talented actor will embark on a campaign tour of Pithapuram today, aiming to bolster Pawan Kalyan's efforts and connect with voters across the region. As the political landscape in Andhra Pradesh heats up, Varun Tej's decision to throw his weight behind his *babai* (uncle) Pawan Kalyan underscores the family's commitment to



servicing the people. With his star power and influential presence, Varun Tej is poised to make a significant impact on the campaign trail, rallying support for the Jana Sena Party and its vision for the state.

As Varun Tej sets to hit the road, advocating for change and lending his voice to the political discourse in Andhra Pradesh, people are said to attend the rally in large numbers to get a glimpse of their favourite star.

## BLISSFUL MELODY FROM AA OKKATI ADAKKU OUT NOW



The promotional buzz surrounding Allari Naresh's upcoming family entertainer, *Aa Okkati Adakku*, is reaching a crescendo with each unveiling. Directed by debutant Malli Ankam and produced by Rajiv Chilaka under the banner of Chilaka Productions, the film promises to be a delightful treat for audiences of all ages.

Adding to the excitement, the team released the second single from the movie, titled *Hamnammo*. This blissful melody, infused with classical beats and electronic vibes, captures the essence of romance in a refreshing blend of musical styles. Bhaskarabhatla's poignant lyrics beautifully convey Allari Naresh's emotions, while Yasaswi Kondepudi's enchanting vocals add a special charm to the track. Allari Naresh and Faria Abdullah's on-screen chemistry is further enhanced through graceful choreography, adding to the song's appeal.

With a stellar cast including Vennela Kishore, Jamie Lever, Viva Harsha, and Ariyana Glory, *Aa Okkati Adakku* promises an unforgettable cinematic experience. Abburu Ravi's compelling screenplay, coupled with Surya's captivating cinematography and Gopi Sundar's melodious score, ensures a visual and auditory treat for audiences. As anticipation continues to build, fans can mark their calendars for May 3, when *Aa Okkati Adakku* is set to hit theaters nationwide.

## Mega mother Konidela Anjana Devi unveils teaser of RK Sagar's comeback film

After a hiatus from the silver screen, RK Sagar, renowned for his portrayal in the iconic series *Mogali Rekulu*, returns with a bang in the upcoming emotional action thriller, *THE 100*. Penned and directed by Raghav Omkar Sasidhar, the film is jointly produced by Ramesh Karutoori, Venki Pushadapu, and J Tharak Ram under the banners of KRIA Film Corp. and Dhamma Productions. Amidst much anticipation, the teaser of the film was launched on Friday by none other than Mega Mother Konidela Anjana Devi.

The teaser offers a glimpse into the intense narrative, revolving around IPS Officer Vikranth, portrayed by RK Sagar. As Vikranth

faces inquiries from the Human Rights Commission for his unconventional methods in combating crime, the teaser paints a picture of a fearless officer unyielding in his pursuit of justice. Despite facing scrutiny from various quarters, Vikranth remains undeterred, challenging conventions and pushing boundaries in his fight against crime.

Joining RK Sagar in the cast is Misha Narang, who plays a pivotal role opposite the protagonist, along with Dhanya Balakrishna. With Shyam K. Naidu behind the camera and Harshavardhan Rameshwar composing the music, *THE 100* boasts a talented crew set to deliver a captivating film.



## CHANDINI CHOWDARY TURNS POWERFUL COP FOR YEVAM

Renowned filmmaker Prakash Dantuluri is set to make waves with his latest directorial venture, *Yevam*, as he unveils the first poster, setting the stage for an impactful narrative. Featuring Chandini Chowdary in a commanding police uniform, the poster sends a powerful message, challenging societal norms with the intriguing tagline, "Aadapillane Ayithe Yentantaa?"

Produced by Navadeep and Pavan Goparaju in collaboration with C Space Productions and PDP, *Yevam* promises to be a cinematic milestone, shedding light on the strength and resilience of women. With music by Keertana Sesh and Neelesh Mandalapu, the film is poised to deliver an unforgettable cinematic experience, blending powerful storytelling with soul-stirring melodies. As Chandini Chowdary takes on the lead role, audiences can expect a gripping portrayal of empowerment, redefining the traditional expectations and limitations imposed on women. *Yevam* invites viewers to join the journey of self-discovery and courage, as it celebrates the indomitable spirit of womanhood.

