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'BJP will neither remove reservations nor allow anyone to do so'



5

'STARTUPS IN INDIA GREW OVER 300 TIMES IN TEN YEARS'



8

Faria Abdullah discusses laughter-packed journey in Aa Okkati

ADAKKU



P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy assured that he will implement the six guarantees of his party on December 9, 2023. The CM should tell us where the six guarantees are now. Speaking lies is the only Congress guarantee. The Model Election Code will go on June 6 but the CM is asking people to wait till August. Why? People are unhappy about the Congress as Revanth Reddy is an expert in speaking lies



— G. Kishan Reddy, TG BJP president P4

DON'T MISS...

Will campaign if Purandeswari...

Film actress turned politician and former MP Jaya Prada has made it clear that she will campaign if BJP state President D Purandeswari invites her. Jaya Prada worshipped at the hill shrine Tirumala Venkateswara temple on Sunday. Talking to the media, after coming out of the temple at Tirumala, she said that she is ready to carry out whatever responsibility is handed over to her by the BJP high command. "If BJP state president D Purandeswari asks me to take part in the election campaign, I will campaign for the BJP in the state," she made it clear...

—PAGE: 4

Traffic noise can increase risk of...

Spike in traffic noise can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attack, researchers have found. Having found evidence linking traffic noise and the risk of developing heart and related conditions, researchers are calling for this type of noise pollution to be recognised as a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. The researchers found evidence that for every 10 decibel increase in noise coming from road traffic, the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, including heart attack, stroke and...

—PAGE: 5

Musk in China amid efforts to...

Billionaire Elon Musk arrived in Beijing on Sunday amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China. The SpaceX and Tesla chief travelled to China at the invitation of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, meeting with CCPIT president Ren Hongbin to discuss further cooperation with the country, according to Chinese state-run broadcaster CTGN. Musk is expected to meet...

—PAGE: 8

KKR wary of resurgent DC...

A resurgent Delhi Capitals will look to exploit Kolkata Knight Riders' bowling vulnerabilities and ascend to top-four in the table during their Indian Premier League match here on Monday. With four wins in their last five matches, the Rishabh Pant-led side is gradually assembling their pieces and starting to look like a force to be reckoned with. On the other hand, the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side has endured three defeats in their last five matches with their proficiency in bowling hurting them badly. Signed up...

—SPORTS

'99% of promises fulfilled'

CM SAYS NAIDU IS MAKING UNACHIEVABLE PROMISES

- Jagan warns of discontinuation of welfare schemes if TDP is voted in.
- Highlights govt achievements including welfare schemes and educational reforms during campaign events in Venkatagiri and Kandukur.
- Challenges Naidu's accomplishments during his 14-year tenure compared to Jagan's 58 months.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has asserted that his government has honoured the promises mentioned in the 2019 manifesto, equating it to a holy book during his impassioned campaign in Tadipatri, Anantapur district, on Sunday. In his address to the public, Chief Minister Jagan pledged the establishment of an Agriculture College in the Tadipatri Constituency post-elections. "We have remained steadfast in fulfilling the commitments laid out in our manifesto, treating it with reverence akin to a holy book. History will bear witness to the fact that we've disbursed over Rs 2.70 lakh directly into the accounts of beneficiaries, with your child (Jagan) personally overseeing the process,"



remarked the Chief Minister amidst the enthusiastic crowd.

In a critique aimed at TDP Chief Chandrababu Naidu, CM Jagan accused him of peddling unattainable schemes and false promises designed to exploit the impoverished masses. "Chandrababu's return with his fabrications and deceitful assurances is akin to a recurring nightmare, preying on the vulnerabilities of the poor," he emphasized.

Emphasizing the importance of the upcoming elections, Chief Minister Jagan reiterated that the choice isn't merely about selecting MPs and

MLAs but ensuring the continuity of transformative welfare schemes for the next five years. "A vote for YSRCP ensures the uninterrupted progress of these schemes, whereas a vote for TDP threatens their very existence," he asserted firmly.

During a campaign event near YSR Circle in Venkatagiri on Sunday afternoon, CM Jagan Mohan Reddy lambasted TDP President Chandrababu Naidu for his failure to deliver a single substantial achievement despite holding power for 14 years.

"In stark contrast to

Chandrababu's empty promises, we have implemented a slew of welfare schemes transparently, including YSR Cheyutha, Asara, Jagananna Chedodu, financial aid to farmers, Jagananna Thodu, Kapu Nestam, and EBC Nestam, aimed at uplifting the masses," he declared, daring Chandrababu to challenge the efficacy of any of these initiatives.

The Chief Minister also questioned Chandrababu Naidu's stance on reinstating the Janmabhoomi committees, challenging the TDP's commitment to public welfare.

Continued on Page 2

75% of pensions to be disbursed via DBT

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Seventy-five per cent of pensions will be distributed through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), while the remaining 25% will be disbursed door-to-door from May 1st to May 5th, according to Sasi Bhushan Kumar, Principal Secretary. Out of the total 65,49,864 pensioners, 48,92,503 (74.70%) will receive their pensions via DBT using the Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS), as confirmed by NPCI. The remaining 16,57,361 pensioners (25.30%) will benefit from the door-to-door distribution, as per directives from the Election Commission of India.

The Government of India has instructed the state government to ensure the smooth distribution of ongoing scheme pensions to selected beneficiaries through DBT or other means during the Model Code of Conduct period. In compliance with the Election Commission's directives, alternative arrangements have been made to ensure timely and hassle-free disbursement of pensions for May and June 2024.

DBT beneficiaries, whose



Aadhaar is linked to their bank accounts, will receive their pensions via AePS.

Payments will be transferred on May 1st, 2024, with pensioners receiving SMS notifications confirming the credit to their accounts.

Door-to-door distribution will cater to beneficiaries such as the differently-abled, those with serious ailments, the infirm, bedridden, wheelchair-bound individuals, and elderly widows of war veterans drawing Sainik welfare pensions, as well as pensioners without Aadhaar-linked bank accounts.

Distribution will commence on May 1st, 2024, and continue until May 5th, 2024. District Collectors and banks have been instructed to make necessary arrangements to ensure pensioners receive their entitlements without difficulty or delay.



Naidu promises Rs1L for Muslims on Haj pilgrimage

PNS ■ NELLORE/MANTRALAYAM

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu has said that if his party is voted to power, it will extend financial support of Rs 1 lakh to Muslims embarking on the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. "Our alliance will ensure that minorities face no hardships, and justice will be served to all," he said. Naidu acknowledged the trust, courage, and hard work of the Muslim community, highlighting their priority in various sectors. He noted the community's significant contribution, particularly in urban areas where many depend on auto repair works for livelihood.

Addressing the criticism from the YSRCP, Naidu refuted claims of injustice and highlighted his track record of supporting the construction of mosques during his tenure as chief minister. He criticized the current CM Jagan for neglecting

such initiatives over the past five years.

Moving to Mantralayam for another public meeting, Naidu promised to address issues concerning migrations from the temple town. He criticized CM Jagan, labelling him as a "Rayalaseema traitor" and held him responsible for the recent tragic deaths of 33 pensioners. Naidu underscored the TDP's commitment to uplifting the Boya and Kuruba communities, promising to prioritize pending projects in the region.

Expressing optimism for positive change in Mantralayam, Naidu invoked blessings from Swamy Guru Raghavendra for the state's progress. He urged the people to support the TDP in the upcoming elections, citing the overwhelming response to their meetings compared to those of CM Jagan.

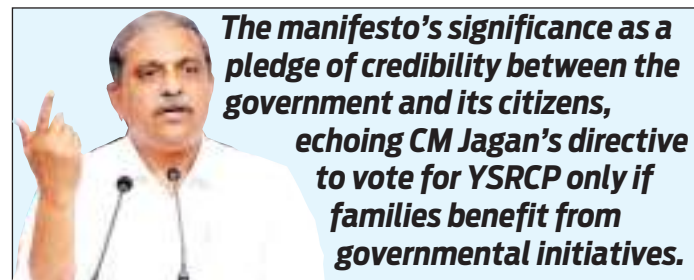
Continued on Page 2

Oppn promises impractical: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP State general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has said that his party is committed to honesty in governance, asserting that their manifesto outlines genuine plans for the people, avoiding the trap of false assurances. Speaking at a press conference held at the YSRCP central office in Tadepalli on Sunday, Sajjala criticised Chandrababu Naidu's tenure, characterising it as detrimental to the state's progress over his 14-year tenure as CM.

Highlighting Naidu's divisive tactics during his previous term (2014-19), Sajjala condemned his propensity for inciting hostility among the people. He referred to an instance where Naidu allegedly encouraged party members



The manifesto's significance as a pledge of credibility between the government and its citizens, echoing CM Jagan's directive to vote for YSRCP only if families benefit from governmental initiatives.

to hurl stones, resulting in an attack on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy during a public gathering.

Sajjala underscored the manifesto's significance as a pledge of credibility between the government and its citizens, echoing CM Jagan's directive to vote for YSRCP only if families benefit

from governmental initiatives. He challenged Naidu's silence on his administration's accomplishments, juxtaposing it against YSRCP's successful implementation of welfare schemes benefiting numerous households in Andhra Pradesh.

Continued on Page 2

AP ready to meet rising power demand

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Despite facing the challenges of scorching temperatures and soaring summer heat, Andhra Pradesh power utilities are tirelessly working to meet the escalating energy demand. With expectations that it will surpass 250 Million Units per day in the upcoming months, the primary focus of the AP power sector remains unwavering - ensuring round-the-clock, high-quality, and dependable power supply to consumers across the state. This was highlighted by the Special Chief Secretary of Energy & CMD AP Transco, K Vijayanand.



Continued on Page 2

ROW OVER RESERVATIONS

'Sangh always supports quota'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday asserted the organisation has always been supportive of reservation, and advocated for its implementation as long as "discrimination exists." comments that came in the wake of a viral video claiming the Sangh was against the quota system. The remarks also assume significance as the Opposition, especially the Congress has



mounted an attack against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the ruling BJP at the Centre, accusing them of being opposed to the reservation. Speaking at the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra here, Bhagwat referred to the video in circulation and said it falsely claims the RSS was opposed to the reservation. The video shows him as holding a meeting, he said but claimed it never happened.

'RSS opposed reservations in past'

PNS ■ DAMAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday targeted Mohan Bhagwat over his "Sangh always supported reservations" remark, saying it was the RSS chief who had expressed his opposition to quotas in the past. Addressing a campaign rally at Daman in the Union Territory of Daman, Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gandhi also claimed that those persons who have



opposed reservations are joining their (RSS) party (read BJP) and being welcomed into the party fold. Gandhi alleged the RSS and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are trying to abolish the Constitution and various institutions to make their leaders "kings" of the country and help "20-22 billionaires". "Narendra Modiji and RSS want to rule the country like the erstwhile kingdom," he said.

Hyd'bad will be made UT after June 2: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS working president KT Rama Rao said that Hyderabad will remain the joint capital of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh till June 2 and after that, it will be made a Union Territory. KTR said that an agreement has been made regarding this between the Congress and the BJP.

He said that the BRS is the only party opposing making Hyderabad a Union Territory and that Modi has been saying that he will link rivers denying the state water.

Modi is also saying that he will do injustice to South India in the matter of LS seats. The BJP has been conspiring to abolish the Constitution. The BRS would oppose all these and so people must ensure the victory of the BRS, KTR said.

Says a pact has been reached between Cong and BJP.

BRS is the only party opposing making Hyderabad a Union Territory.



Indian Navy rescues Panama-flagged oil tanker crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy swiftly assisted a Panama-flagged crude oil tanker with 30 crew members including 22 Indians after the vessel came under missile attack from Houthis militants.

Indian Navy's destroyer INS Kochi responded following the attack on the vessel, MV Andromeda Star, on April 26, officials said, adding all the crew members are safe.

The US Central Command said Iranian-backed Houthis militants launched three anti-ship ballistic missiles from Yemen into the Red Sea in the vicinity of merchant vessel Maisha and MV Andromeda Star.

MV Andromeda Star is a Panaman-flagged and Seychelles-



operated vessel. The vessel reported minor damage, the US Central Command said.

"A mission deployed Indian Naval destroyer INS Kochi responded to a maritime security incident involving the attack on

A mission deployed Indian Naval destroyer INS Kochi responded to a maritime security incident involving the attack on Panama-flagged crude oil tanker MV Andromeda Star on April 26

Panama-flagged crude oil tanker MV Andromeda Star on April 26," the Indian Navy said.

The vessel was intercepted by the Indian Navy ship and an aerial recon involving a helicopter operation was undertaken to assess the situation, it said.

An Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team of the Navy

was also deployed to carry out "residual risk assessment", the Navy said in a statement.

"A total of 30 crew including 22 Indian nationals are reported to be safe and the vessel is continuing its scheduled transit to the next port," it said. "The swift action of the Indian Navy ship reiterates the commitment and resolve of the Indian Navy in safeguarding the seafarers plying through the region," it added.

The fresh incident comes amid growing global concerns over attacks on various commercial vessels in the Red Sea by the Houthis militants.

In the last few weeks, the Indian Navy extended assistance to a number of merchant vessels in the Western Indian Ocean following attacks on them.



Monday Mirchi

SINGARENI MD'S NEW HANGOUT

When it comes to a corporate set-up, the person designated as Managing Director must not only strike a chord with all sections of employees, but also know which way the wind blows so as to keep the organization in perfect alignment with outside forces. Otherwise, he could end up being derided as a 'damaging director'. Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) Managing Director N Balaram seems to have opened a camp office in Jyoti Rao Phule Bhavan -- the official residence of Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Chief Minister and Energy Minister -- perhaps to keep himself always charged. A little bird told us that Balaram has been frequenting the Minister's residence like there is no tomorrow. This has prompted bureaucratic circles to talk about this new-found association. Otherwise, Balaram comes across endearingly as an "employees' MD".

CMD POWERS TSSPDCL

"Authority flows downwards; and responsibility, upwards" is one of the cardinal principles in management. Few take it seriously in letter and spirit. With both the ruling and opposition parties plugging into the power sector to trade shocking charges amid a slew of probes, Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited Chairman and Managing Director Musharraf Faruqi himself is handling any complaint related to 'power cuts', especially those made by high-profile individuals. With the Opposition making allegations after allegations of power cut (ex-CM K Chandrasekhar Rao in fact joined 'X' on Saturday with a bang by posting on 'power cut'); no wonder, there is always a response within a couple of hours. To ensure that the department does not get a bad name due to mud-slinging or even minor instance of mismanagement, Musharraf is literally on top of the issues. He keeps tabs even at the level of DTRs with appropriate staff. Whispers in the corridors of power are that he is literally battling the Opposition more than the Minister heading the energy department.

KCR STILL UNDER SPELL OF SMITA SABHARWAL

Officials with consummate skills cast their spell in several departments and their grip over complex administrative matters often tends to become the subject of discussions over chai, paani in office canteens. In this context, it is indeed rare for an official to fascinate a chief minister so much that he remembers and cites her acumen even after being dislodged from power. Former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao continues to draw from his memories of working with former CMO secretary Smita Sabharwal. He recently dropped her name again while making his point about how she had given him budget estimates in the initial days following bifurcation without really understanding the in and outs of fiscal management. Previously, at a press conference, he had mentioned that Smita used to helm Mission Bhagiratha very competently, unlike present-day officials. Interestingly, the opposition party continues to invoke her name for having written a significant letter to the Krishna River Management Board during her last posting in the BRS regime. Reflecting unusual prowess, the bureaucrat, despite holding a post in the loop line, continues to be in the news.

IS AP UNDER DE FACTO PRESIDENT'S RULE?

Is Andhra Pradesh now under *de facto* President's Rule? This is what babus in Andhra Pradesh are discussing in hushed voices. For, under President's Rule in a state, every direction to the state administration invariably comes from Delhi. The situation now in Andhra Pradesh is similar, with almost every direction coming from Delhi, with the only difference that the directives are coming, not from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, but the office of the Election Commission of India. Of late, the involvement of the ECI in the administrative matters of states going to polls has increased manifold. In the past, the ECI used to get involved in one or two, and that too important, issues. However, bureaucrats in AP today feel that the ECI has taken the entire administration into its hands. The ECI can be expected to give directions related to conduct of elections and related issues, but not on day-to-day matters relating to administration. If any officer violates the Model Code of Conduct, the ECI has a right to take action against him or her. In AP, the bureaucrats are right now confused over the propriety of the distribution of pensions in view of the directions of ECI. They aver that never in the past has ECI changed as many bureaucrats as this time.

A SMALL STEP, BUT A GIANT LEAP TOWARDS FAIR POLLS

Change need not come with hungama for people to feel the difference. Any official with initiative can bring a small change with far-reaching consequences in his own sphere of influence. The SAMARTH app, launched by Bapatla SP Vakul Jindal, is a case in point. SAMARTH (security arrangement mapping analysis response tracking hub) is so designed that, should there be any untoward incident at any of the polling centers or at other places on the day of polling, the police officers in the vicinity will be alerted so that they can immediately reach the spot and maintain law and order. As its name suggests, it is a powerful tool with multi-tasking abilities. The SAMARTH mobile app serves as a real-time application for the authorities to track location of personnel, maintain vigil on problematic polling stations, call the control room directly from the app, and immediately reach police forces in troubled areas. It has the numbers and all essential details relating to all the police officers in the district.

PEN LAUNCHED TO EASE MIGRATION WOES

Soon after AP's School Education Department made the use of Permanent Education Number (PEN) mandatory from the academic year 2024-25, Commissioner School Education S Suresh Kumar got going and has already released PEN for the first time in the state. Launched during the release of Class 10 results, PEN is a unique identification number provided by the Union Ministry of Education and assigned to every student through the UDISE+ (Unified District Information System for Education Plus) portal that covers more than 14.89 lakh schools, 95 lakh teachers, and 26.5 crore children. It is designed for streamlining and simplifying the process of the students' transition from one school to the other in the new academic year. Students' class 10 pass certificate will henceforth have PEN, which can be used during further education.

-- Yours truly

Sribharat vows to restore 5% Kapu quota

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Opposition alliance candidate for Visakhapatnam parliamentary seat, M Sribharat vowed to reinstate the crucial 5 per cent reservation for Kapus, affirming his commitment to uplift the community and ensure their equitable access to opportunities. Standing alongside BJP candidate Vishnu Kumar Raju of North Assembly Constituency during Atmiya Samavesam of the Kapula community, Sribharat condemned what he deemed as the YCP government's exploitation of caste tensions for political mileage.

Highlighting the adverse effects of the YCP government's decision to rescind the previously assured 5 per cent reservation, Sribharat emphasized its detrimental impact on the education-



al prospects of Kapu youth, including opportunities for overseas education. He stressed the pressing need to acknowledge the challenges confronting the Kapu community, particularly concerning cuts in the fee reimbursement scheme.

Further criticising the Visakhapatnam YSRCP parliamentary candidate for indulging in caste-based poli-

tics, Sribharat said such tactics reflect the declining moral standards within the YSRCP. He questioned the strides made by the Kapu community in tackling economic hurdles over the past five years, advocating for a coalition government committed to the educational and economic empowerment of Kapu youth. Drawing attention to the dearth of developmental ini-

tiatives in Visakhapatnam under the YSRCP administration, Sribharat underscored the imperative of generating employment opportunities and fostering economic growth in the region. He accused the YSRCP of deceiving the people of Visakhapatnam with empty promises of development, despite their track record of neglecting the city's progress.

Moreover, Sribharat criticized the appointment of Kapu community ministers by the YCP government, alleging their roles were confined to attacking opposition leader Pawan Kalyan, with no tangible benefits accruing to the community. He lauded Pawan Kalyan's endeavours to forge an alliance aimed at ending the tumultuous reign of the YSP, stressing the urgency for a government dedicated to addressing the state's economic challenges.

The gathering witnessed the presence of prominent Kapu community leaders, with Usha Kiran overseeing Janasena's North Constituency and BJP leader Nagaraju also in attendance, symbolizing a unified front to address the concerns of the Kapu community and champion their socio-economic welfare.

CM faces backlash for omitting special status to AP in manifesto

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The decision by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy to exclude the longstanding promise of special status for the State from the 2024 election manifesto has triggered widespread criticism and backlash. Despite Jagan's previous vocal commitments and impassioned campaigning for special status ahead of the 2019 elections, the latest manifesto unveiled by the ruling YSR Congress Party fails to address this critical issue. This significant departure from past assurances has sparked controversy and raised doubts about Jagan's consistency and dedication to key electoral pledges.

Social media platforms are abuzz with netizens expressing disappointment and frustration, noting the conspicuous absence of the special status agenda. Instead, the manifesto emphasizes increased funding for Navratna Welfare Schemes, a move that has left citizens disenchanted and questioning the government's priorities.

The issue of special status carries immense historical and political weight for Andhra Pradesh, with previous administrations and oppo-

sition parties vehemently advocating for its attainment. However, Jagan's apparent reversal of this promise has cast uncertainty on the future course of the state's development and welfare efforts. Critics argue that Jagan's failure to address the special status issue in the manifesto constitutes a breach of trust and a disregard for the aspirations of the people of Andhra Pradesh. Many reference Jagan's earlier assurances and campaign rhetoric, which positioned special status as a cornerstone of his administration's agenda.

With the state elections looming on May 13, the conspicuous absence of the special status promise has become a focal point of debate and scrutiny. As voters weigh their options, Jagan's handling of this crucial issue is poised to shape public opinion and influence electoral outcomes. As campaigning heats up, all eyes are on Jagan Mohan Reddy and the YSRCP to confront the mounting concerns and provide clarity on their stance regarding the special status of Andhra Pradesh. Failure to do so may further diminish public confidence and impact the ruling party's electoral prospects.

Shift in political landscape favours YSRCP in State

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Recent reports have unveiled a seismic shift in the political dynamics of the state, with the YSR Congress Party (YCP) surging ahead in momentum. What was once dominated by the coalition's rhetoric has now seen a remarkable turn, as the ground reality increasingly favours the YSRCP, signalling a key development as the elections loom closer.

This transformation can be attributed to several key factors. Foremost among them is the strategic alignment orchestrated by Chandrababu Naidu, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), who has forged ties with the Jana Sena Party (JSP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This alignment has blurred the lines between parties, with many perceiving candidates aligned with TDP as *de facto* representatives of the party, regardless of their banners or symbols.

Another significant factor shaping this shift is the evolving perception of the BJP. Initially hailed for its support of the Kapu community, the party is now viewed as favouring the Kammas under the influence of Daggubati Purandeswari. This recalibration of support has swayed certain demographics towards the YCP, altering the political calculus of the region. Moreover, the intricate dynamics of fan bases, each with its own set of preferences and allegiances, have further complicated the political landscape. While some factions gravitate towards the coalition's candidate, others remain disengaged, providing fertile ground for the YCP to actively court and sway these groups to their side.

As this narrative unfolds, questions have emerged regarding the future of welfare schemes under Chandrababu's leadership. Concerns about potential obstacles in the allocation and construction of

houses under a TDP administration have contributed to a growing sense of skepticism towards the alliance. However, the imminent release of manifestos by both the coalition and the YSRCP could potentially alter the prevailing mood. Despite lingering doubts among alliance supporters about the feasibility of forming a government, the narrative continues to tilt in favour of the YSRCP, with lower-level leaders realigning their strategies to align with the prevailing sentiments on the ground.

With the first week of May fast approaching, political observers anticipate further clarity on the evolving landscape.

Indications suggest that the narrative may solidify even further towards the YSRCP, as inclinations and 'waves' of support become increasingly influential factors in shaping the outcome of the impending elections.

Oppn promises...

Continued from Page 1

Questioning Naidu's sudden promises of additional schemes, Sajjala cast doubt on their feasibility, suggesting that alliances resort to such tactics merely to regain power. He contrasted this with CM Jagan's steadfast commitment to empowering the marginalised, exemplified by the comprehensive 'Navaratna' welfare programme, which has been allocated Rs 70,000 crore.

Accusing Naidu of attempting to deceive the electorate with impractical promises that could potentially strain the state's budget, Sajjala cautioned against reverting to Naidu's governance, predicting a regression to outdated bureaucratic structures.

AP ready to meet rising...

Continued from Page 1

In a statement released on Sunday, the Special CS noted that the AP Power utilities have been effectively catering to the energy demand in April 2024, ranging between 235 to 245 Million Units per day, with projections indicating a further increase shortly. As of April 26th, 2024, the energy demand met for the month has reached 6345 MU, with the peak demand hitting 253 MU on April 19th, 2024. Out of the total energy demand met in April, 45.7 per cent was fulfilled by APGENCO (Thermal, Hydel), 15.27 per cent from Non-Conventional energy (wind & solar) sources, 15.16 per cent from CGS, and the remaining 23.87 per cent from IPPs, Market purchases, Gas, etc.

The Special CS emphasized that alongside MD APGENCO & JMD APTRANSCO KVN Chakradhar Babu and CMDs of DISCOMS I Prudhvi Tej and K Santosha Rao, continuous monitoring of the power supply status is being carried out round the clock. Necessary measures are being promptly implemented to address the abnormal surge in energy demand. Furthermore, transmission network issues such as overloading, under voltage, thermal limits, contingencies, sag, reactive power management, etc., are under the vigilant scrutiny of the authorities to ensure the secure operation of the grid and equipment safety, thus enabling uninterrupted power supply.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Panchami:	Apr 28 08:22 AM to Apr 29 07:57 AM
Shashthi:	Apr 29 07:57 AM to Apr 30 07:05 AM
Nakshatram:	
Purva Ashadha:	Apr 29 04:49 AM to Apr 30 04:42 AM
Uttara Ashadha:	Apr 30 04:42 AM to May 01 04:09 AM
Rahukalam:	7:29 AM to 9:04 AM
Yamagandam:	10:38 AM to 12:13 PM
Variyam:	12:31 PM to 02:05 PM
Gulika:	1:48 PM to 3:22 PM
Amritakalam:	11:55 PM to 01:31 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:48 AM to 12:38 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 41°C
Humidity: 48%
Sunrise: 5:44 AM
Sunset: 6:46 PM
Updated: April 28, 2024 5:00 PM

Srikakulam: A political powerhouse with a legacy of Speakers

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Nestled in the heart of Andhra Pradesh, Srikakulam district stands as a testament to political dynamism and enduring legacies. Renowned for its fervent political spirit, this district has consistently shaped the political landscape of the region, wielding influence both in the unified state and post-bifurcation Andhra Pradesh. From its corridors emerged formidable leaders, whose contributions have etched an indelible mark on the state's politics. Notable among them are Rokkam Narasimham Dora, Tangi Satyanarayana, Kavali Pratibha Bharati, and Tammineni Sitaram, individuals who have not only occupied key cabinet portfolios but also served as legislative chairpersons, shaping legislative discourse and policy decisions.

Rokkam Lakshmi Narasimham Dora, a stalwart of the Congress party and a first-generation leader, ascended to the position of the second Speaker of the Andhra State Legislature. His journey, which commenced in 1955 with a victorious contest from the Tekkali constituency, bore witness to his pivotal role during the tenure of Chief Minister



Bezwada Gopala Reddy, serving from April 23, 1955, to Dec 3, 1956.

Tangi Satyanarayana, representing Srikakulam, held the prestigious position of the seventh Speaker of the AP Legislative Assembly. Elected twice as an MLA in 1967 and 1983, his tenure ushered in significant legislative reforms, including increased accessibility of assembly debates to the public and the promotion of impartial reporting by newspapers.

Breaking barriers, Kavali Pratibha Bharati made history by becoming the first woman Speaker of the AP Assembly. Her exemplary leadership, spanning from November 11, 1999, to May 30, 2004, showcased her dedication to public service as she represented Etcherla constituency for five consecutive terms. Notably, her

tenure saw marathon assembly sessions, including a gruelling 13-hour discussion on the development of backward areas in September 2000.

Tammineni Sitaram, an immigrant turned politician, assumed the mantle of the second Speaker of New Andhra Pradesh on May 30, 2019. Despite harbouring aspirations of a ministerial role, Chief Minister Jagan's decision to appoint him as Speaker underscores the shifting political dynamics in the region. As he presides over the assembly sessions, Sitaram's transition from TDP to YCP reflects the evolving political landscape.

However, amidst these political triumphs, a shadow looms over the promises made to the agricultural community. Despite assurances from the ruling YCP regarding farmer welfare and irrigation projects, discontent brews among farmers, with projects like Gangasagaram in Kanchili mandal remaining unfulfilled. Chief Minister Jagan's pledge to convert Gangasagaram into a reservoir, reiterated during the 2019 elections, has yet to materialize, leaving farmers disillusioned and questioning the veracity of political promises.

99% promises fulfilled..

Continued from Page 1

"Your tenure spans 14 years compared to my 58 months in office. Yet, your strategy appears to be centred solely around mimicking my efforts and amplifying them for electoral gain," CM Jagan remarked pointedly.

He also underscored the government's initiatives such as the revamp of government schools through Nadu-Nedu and the introduction of English medium instruction.

CM Jagan concluded his first day of campaigning by soliciting support for the continuation of welfare schemes and denouncing the TDP-JSP-BJP coalition as a coalition of outsiders who vanish after elections, akin to migratory birds returning to their nests. Speaking at a public gathering in Kandukur on Sunday, CM Jagan criticized Chandrababu Naidu, Pawan Kalyan, and Purandeswari as outsiders who would

retreat to their neighbouring state once elections conclude. He accused them of peddling hollow promises they never intended to fulfil.

Warning the public against falling for false assurances, the Chief Minister cautioned against the TDP and its allies' renewed efforts to deceive the electorate with their "Super 6 and Super 7" pledges, echoing past electoral tactics.

In contrast, CM Jagan sought a second term based on the substantial progress achieved during his tenure of 58 months, urging voters to prioritise welfare over political alliances.

The tangible accomplishments of the government, including the establishment of village and ward secretariats, RBKS, English medium schools, and an efficient volunteer system facilitating doorstep delivery of monthly social pensions, serve as a testament to the administration's commitment to uplifting the lives of citizens.

Sivaji dares YSRCP leaders to ask for votes on 3 capitals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji has challenged the YSRCP leaders to ask for votes on the issue of the establishment of three capitals.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is opposing all the decisions taken by former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. "Jagan Mohan Reddy has grown a grudge against the capital city Amaravati and brought three capital issues. When grave injustice was meted out to the farmers who parted their lands for the establishment of the capital city, the YSRCP leaders did not respond," he lamented and asked whether the YSRCP leaders have humanity.

The Congress senior leader vehemently objected to mentioning the three capital issues in the YSRCP manifesto. Though the high court admonished the government, it did not learn a lesson nor mend its ways,



he alleged. "The Chief Minister is trying to shift the Capital city to Visakhapatnam in improper ways. Earlier, Jagan Mohan Reddy backed the establishment of the capital city in Amaravati region when he was in Opposition, but after being voted to power, he brought the 3 capitals concept, stating Amaravati will remain the legislative capital," Shivaji lashed out. The government severely harassed the

farmers, who had given thousands of acres of their land for the construction of the capital city. "The governments have already spent thousands of crores of rupees for the development capital city Amaravati. If the development in the capital city had continued, the state would have benefited a lot," he opined.

"The five crore people of AP wish that Amaravati should be the capital of AP. I question the YSRCP candidates, who are contesting in the election in combined Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore districts, with what face they ask votes from the voters," the APCC Vice-president maintained.

"APCC President YS Sharmila is going to people with a clear message and explaining to them why they should vote for the INDIA bloc. Sharmila is replying suitably to the absurd comments of YSRCP leaders. Sharmila is receiving overwhelming response from the people wherever she goes in the state," Kolanukonda Shivaji stated.

YSRCP, NDA should spell out financial implications of freebies promised: CPM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State secretary of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), V Srinivasa Rao, has urged both the ruling YSRCP and the opposition TDP-JSP-BJP alliance to be transparent about the tax implications and price adjustments accompanying their proposed welfare schemes.

Rao emphasized that while both the YSRCP and the NDA alliance are busy promising extensive welfare measures in anticipation of the upcoming elections, they owe the public an honest account of the additional financial burdens citizens might face post-election.

Speaking to the press alongside Y Venkateswara Rao, a member of the party's state secretariat, at Balotsav Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday, Rao questioned how these welfare schemes could truly benefit the populace without exacerbating the cost of living. He criticized the trend of political parties, including the YSRCP and TDP-JSP-BJP alliance, for touting their manifestos filled with promises of welfare initiatives while fail-



ing to address the inevitable tax hikes and additional financial pressures these schemes might bring.

Rao went on to demand three specific assurances from the leadership of major political parties. Firstly, he urged the YSRCP and TDP alliance to commit to not increasing property taxes, garbage taxes, GST, or prices of essential commodities like sand, petrol, and gas. Secondly, he called for assurances that no further

financial burdens would be imposed on the public, nor would the assets of the people be surrendered to corporate entities. Lastly, he emphasized the importance of securing land rights for farmers regarding irrigation water.

Highlighting concerns regarding tribal rights, Rao stressed the need for indigenous communities to have rightful access to forest lands and advocated for fair wages through schemes like Upadhi for agricultural labourers. He expressed disappointment over the silence of the YSRCP and TDP-JSP-BJP alliance on critical issues such as reservations, the fate of the Visakha Steel Plant, the Polavaram Project, and the welfare of displaced individuals.

In particular, Rao criticized the BJP's stance on reservations, noting its potential impact on marginalised communities, and questioned the stance of BJP-aligned parties like the YSRCP and TDP on this matter. Additionally, he lamented the absence of discussions surrounding crucial projects like the Visakha Steel Plant and the Polavaram Project, as well as the welfare of displaced populations.



Spl festivals in Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The special festivals in Tirumala in May are on May 3 - Sri Bhashyakara Utsavarambha, May 4 - Sarva Ekadashi, May 10 - Akshayatriya, May 12 - Sri Bhashyakara Sattumora, Sri Ramanuja Jayanti, Sri Shankara Jayanti, May 17 to 19 - Sri Padmavati Parinayotsavam, May 22 - Nrisimha Jayanti and Tarigonda Vengamamba Jayanti and on May 23 - Sri Annamacharya Jayanti, Kurma Jayanti.

'LABOUR EXPLOITATION AND WAGE DISCREPANCIES' Adani's Gangavaram Port in deep crisis

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Adani Gangavaram Port is embroiled in a crisis as allegations of labour exploitation and wage discrepancies reverberate throughout the region. What began as murmurs of discontent among expatriate workers have erupted into a full-blown confrontation, with workers from diverse backgrounds uniting to demand fair treatment and just compensation from port management. The escalating protests have led to a complete cessation of port operations, sending shockwaves through industries reliant on its services.

The unrest was ignited when expatriate workers, predominantly engaged in menial tasks, initiated a lightning strike demanding better pay. However, the localized outcry swiftly gained momentum, drawing support from an additional 1,500 workers who echoed sim-



ilar grievances. Despite intervention from the labour department and attempts at negotiation, the situation deteriorated as the port management opted to abruptly exit discussions, deepening mistrust and exacerbating tensions.

Discontent among the workforce, especially expatriate workers, is profound, with claims of enduring meagre salaries despite

labour force and law enforcement.

The standoff has had severe consequences, halted the port's operations and disrupted crucial supply chains, impacting industries like the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, which now faces raw material shortages. Urgent calls for government intervention have been sounded by the Visakhapatnam Steel Officers Association, emphasizing the need for swift action to address workers' grievances and restore stability to the region.

As the Adani Gangavaram Port grapples with a burgeoning labour crisis, the urgent need for resolution becomes increasingly apparent. With negotiations faltering and tensions escalating, the impasse threatens to deepen, highlighting the imperative of restoring normalcy and ensuring justice for the workers caught in the crossfire of this tumultuous saga.

WATER CONSERVATION INITIATIVE GVMC urges residents to take 'One Bucket Challenge'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is calling on citizens to participate in the One Bucket Challenge, an initiative designed to promote water conservation and raise awareness about the importance of every drop. Emphasizing the importance of responsible water use, GVMC Commissioner CM Saikanth Varma stated, "Water conservation requires a collective effort. By taking simple yet impactful steps like the One Bucket Challenge, we can significantly contribute to preserving this vital resource for future generations."

The One Bucket Challenge encourages residents to criti-



cally assess their daily water consumption and adopt more sustainable practices. Participants will be challenged to limit their water usage for tasks like bathing, cleaning, and plant care to a single bucket. This seemingly small change, when adopted by a large portion of the population, can lead to substantial water savings and a lasting shift towards a culture of conservation.

Commissioner Varma further underscored the importance of fostering a sense of community and collective action. By sharing their experiences and encouraging others to participate, individuals can create a ripple effect, leading to the widespread adoption of water-saving practices across Visakhapatnam's diverse communities. With water scarcity posing a growing challenge in many regions, the One Bucket Challenge serves as a timely reminder of our responsibility towards water conservation. Through collective action and individual commitment, the GVMC and Visakhapatnam residents can make a tangible difference in safeguarding this vital resource for the future.



Durga Temple EO Rama Rao presenting the Goddess Durga Devi portrait to Justice Srinivas atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Sunday.

Heavy rush of devotees at Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A large number of devotees flocked to the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam situated atop the majestic Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Sunday to take part in special poojas. The temple administration, cognizant of the influx, ensured all necessary arrangements were in place to accommodate the devotees.

Overseeing the preparations, the Executive Officer of the Durga Temple, KS Rama Rao, personally supervised the facilities provided to the worshippers, engaging with them to ensure their comfort and satisfaction.

Subsequently, he conducted an impromptu inspection of various departments within the temple premises, paying

particular attention to the announcements made via the public address system situated atop the hill. Additionally, he meticulously scrutinised the operations of the Prasadam counters, ensuring their adherence to stock records and quality standards.

In a notable visit, Justice V Srinivas of the Andhra Pradesh High Court graced the temple to seek the divine blessings of Goddess Durga. The Executive Officer, Rama Rao, extended a warm welcome to the esteemed guest, facilitating his darshan of the deity. Following the spiritual encounter, the temple priests bestowed their blessings upon Justice Srinivas, while Rama Rao presented him with sacred offerings including Sessa Vastram, Laddu Prasadam, and a portrait of Goddess Durga.

PM likely to inaugurate food lab in Vizag

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Salijamala Venkateswar, Commissioner of Food Safety for the Government of Andhra Pradesh, announced that the food safety department has recently solidified a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in New Delhi, securing Rs 80 crore in funds. These funds will bolster the establishment of food labs, and mobile food testing units, and overall enhance the food safety infrastructure throughout the state.

Venkateswar revealed that a

comprehensive review of the enforcement staff's performance and the operational efficiency of food and water labs has been conducted. Additionally, directives have been issued to water labs for consistent sampling and testing protocols across the entire State.

The Commissioner disclosed plans for three food labs to be operational in Visakhapatnam, Guntur, and Tirupati by December 2024. He further elaborated that the foundational food lab in Visakhapatnam is slated to commence operations by June/July, with the microbiology laboratory to follow suit,

inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Moreover, the introduction of Mobile Food Testing Labs is imminent.

In light of public health concerns, Venkateswar emphasized the necessity of taking stringent measures against the use of banned food colours, synthetic food additives, and the recycling of cooking oil, which are known to pose significant health risks, including cancer. He underscored the commitment to regular review meetings to ensure the effective enforcement of the Food Safety Act 2006 across the state, with a particular focus on curbing the reuse of cooking oil and enforcing stringent food safety standards.

The Commissioner outlined various ongoing and forthcoming initiatives, including hygiene ratings, the implementation of the "Eat Right Schools" and "Eat Right Campus" programmes, and the establishment of clean food and vegetable hubs. He also highlighted upcoming drives to promote the repurposing of used Cooking Oil (RUCO) and the phase-out of synthetic food additives. Notably, over 300 cases have been registered statewide against the improper use of repeatedly heated cooking oil.

1L AP students get edX certifications free of cost

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Over the past month, a remarkable milestone has been achieved as more than 100,000 students hailing from Andhra Pradesh have attained complimentary certifications from the esteemed e-learning platform, edX, across a spectrum of courses. This invaluable opportunity, generously provided free of charge, has empowered students with globally recognized skills, collectively valued at over Rs 115 crore. This initiative comes as a result of a recent collaboration between edX and the Andhra Pradesh government, formalized on February 16.



edX certification.

This achievement stands as a testament to the vision of the ruling YSRCP government, which, in its manifesto, articulated a commitment to enhance the global competitiveness of the state's youth through upskilling initiatives. As part of this com-

mitment, plans are underway to establish a cutting-edge Skill University in Tirupati, along with skill colleges in all 26 districts and Integrated Skill Hubs across 175 constituencies, aimed at fostering job-ready individuals.

Furthermore, the government is set to introduce paid internships, offering Rs 2500 per month for boys and Rs 3000 per month for girls during their skill training at these institutions. Additionally, initiatives such as the creation of a Startup Hub and an International VC Mentorship Cell in Visakhapatnam are aimed at nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit among the state's youth.

Pensions to be credited to bank accounts of beneficiaries on May 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector, DK Balaji, has announced a streamlined process for distributing pension funds for April, ensuring convenience for beneficiaries. The pension amounts will be directly credited to the bank accounts of recipients on May 1, eliminating the need for them to visit the Gram/Ward Sachivalayam. For those without bank accounts, arrangements have been made for doorstep delivery of pensions, Balaji assured.

A total of 2,43,400 pensioners across 16 different categories stand to benefit, with the government disbursing a sum of Rs.71.75 crore to support them, he confirmed.

Principal Secretary of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, Sashibhushan Kumar, convened a video conference with all district collectors to coordinate the pension distribution process. Collector

Balaji of Krishna district participated in this conference, outlining the logistical details of the distribution efforts.

Subsequently, Collector Balaji emphasized that over 75% of pensioners possess bank accounts, and their pension amounts will be seamlessly deposited on May 1.

However, for individuals lacking bank access and those facing health challenges such as Divyangjan and bedridden individuals, the district administration will arrange for special doorstep deliveries of their pension funds.

Collector Balaji also outlined the timeframe for the doorstep delivery, scheduled between May 1 and 5. Sachivalayam staff will be mobilised to facilitate the pension distribution process, he added, urging pensioners not to worry about their funds and advising them against visiting Sachivalayam premises unnecessarily.

NDA leaders urged to clarify position on cancellation of Muslim quota

VIJAYAWADA: The Muslim United Front (MUF) and Muslim Joint Action Committee (MJAC) have called upon the coalition partners of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), namely the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Jana Sena, to collectively address concerns regarding the cancellation of the 4 per cent reservation for Muslim minorities. President of MUF and MJAC, Md Kaleem, has urged the top leadership of these parties, currently contesting in the ongoing elections, to present a unified stance on Muslim reservation rather than issuing separate statements. Kaleem highlighted that the BJP's national leadership has been publicly announcing intentions to abolish Muslim reservations in Andhra Pradesh during numerous election rallies nationwide. He noted the apparent contradiction wherein the TDP, the principal party in the alliance, advises the Muslim community to disregard social media propaganda on reservations while failing to directly counter the statements made by BJP's national leaders. Consequently, there is a pressing need for clarity regarding the stance on Muslim reservations. Furthermore, Kaleem pointed out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and Union Minister Piyush Goyal have openly articulated the BJP's position on Muslim reservations in various states, whereas TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu seems to be attempting to mislead the Muslim community by asserting their commitment to safeguarding these reservations without explicitly addressing the statements made by BJP leaders.

International cruise ship 'The World' makes historic port call

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a momentous occasion for Visakhapatnam, the world's largest privately owned residential mega yacht, "The World," made its inaugural docking at the Visakhapatnam International Cruise Terminal, marking the terminal's emergence as a premier destination for international cruise liners on the east coast. Visakhapatnam Port Authority Chairman Dr M Angamuthu along with other port officials adorned with smiles and bouquets, extended a warm welcome as the vessel glided into the harbour, marking a significant milestone for tourism in the region. He highlighted the VICT's state-of-the-art facilities and strategic positioning, designed to cater to the most

luxurious cruise ships globally while ensuring exceptional comfort for tourists. Constructed at an investment of 96 crore rupees, the terminal aims to serve as a gateway, showcasing Visakhapatnam's rich cultural heritage and captivating scenic beauty to international travellers.

Carrying approximately 80 passengers, "The World" brings a diverse group eager to explore the city's cultural and historical treasures. Passengers can expect to experience pristine beaches, iconic landmarks, and a deep dive into the region's vibrant culinary scene. A specially curated cultural program featuring Bharatnatyam and Kuchipudi performances will further enrich their immersive experience, celebrating the city's vibrant local culture.



"The World," renowned for its unparalleled luxury and adventurous spirit since its maiden voyage in 2002, boasts 167 lavish residences and a distinguished history of visiting over 1,000 ports of call across more than 120 countries. Owned by a diverse consortium representing 20 nations, the vessel's residents share a

common passion for global cultures, history, and the thrill of discovery.

K. Vijay Mohan, President of the Tours and Travel Association of Andhra (TTAA), emphasized the significance of "The World's" arrival. He views it as a strong testament to Visakhapatnam's growing appeal for international



al cruise companies, paving the way for significant growth in tourism and economic opportunities. Local businesses and tour operators are fully prepared to showcase the city's rich cultural tapestry and scenic splendour to the visiting guests.

Following its brief sojourn in Visakhapatnam, "The World"

will set sail for Port Blair before embarking on a Southeast Asian adventure, including stops in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. While the ship's stay is short-lived, its presence serves as a powerful symbol of Visakhapatnam's burgeoning reputation as a major player on the global tourism stage.

'Take steps to ensure voters are not lured by candidates'

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Rajahmundry Parliamentary Constituency Election Observer K Balasubramanyam has directed the election officials to take steps to ensure that voters would not be lured by candidates of political parties.

The Parliamentary Constituency Election Observer held a meeting with the election officials here on Sunday and reviewed various issues and steps being taken to conduct polling in a peaceful atmosphere which district Collector K Madhavilatha and other officials attended.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Madhavilatha said that there are 1577 polling stations in the seven Assembly constituencies in the district and there are 16,23,149 voters. She said that she had directed the ROs and AROs to provide basic amenities in the polling stations, adding that 21 model polling stations, two youth polling stations and seven women polling stations are being set up while two polling stations are being set up especially for differently-abled voters.

The Collector said that 23 teams were set up to monitor the



implementation of the model code of conduct. "As many as 600 app calls have been received through c VIGIL of which 457 have been resolved. As many as 968 Applications have been received through Suvridha of which permissions have been approved for 820 while 116 were rejected. As many as 32 applications seeking permission for election progress are under consideration," Collector Madhavilatha stated. The nodal officers have given a compre-

hensive report to the Election Observer.

Speaking on the occasion, Parliamentary Constituency Election Observer Balasubramanyam directed the officials to take the required steps to ensure that the election would be held without any violent incident. Strive hard to ensure that the voting percentage is enhanced. Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programmes should be organized to create awareness among vot-

ers to exercise their franchise.

He directed the BLOs to monitor the handing over of voter slips to the voters. Election General Observer Kamalkanth Saroch directed the officials to enforce the election code of conduct efficiently and sensitize voters on exercising the right of vote. "Lay focus on distribution of freebies, and cash to lure and temp voters by political parties. Provide elaborate security to the EVM strong rooms and the counting centres," he told the officials.

Girl student allegedly ends life

PNS ■ KADAPA



An engineering girl student allegedly committed suicide by jumping into an irrigation tank at Angalla village in Kurabalakota mandal in Annamaya district on Sunday.

Police said that the deceased girl Ruchita (19) was studying B.Tech first year at an engineering college. She picked up a quarrel with her parents on the night of Saturday and left the house.

Her parents searched for her in vain. They complained to the Mudivedu police station. The police received information that the body of a girl was floating in the irrigation tank.

The police rushed there and got the body fished out of the tank. The parents identified that she was their daughter. Poignant scenes were witnessed with the wailing parents inconsolably. A dispute on a trivial issue led her to take the extreme step, the family members of the deceased girl said. The police registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH for postmortem.



Will campaign if Purandeswari invites: Jaya Prada

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Film actress turned politician and former MP Jaya Prada has made it clear that she will campaign if BJP state President D Purandeswari invites her.

Jaya Prada worshiped at the hill shrine Tirumala Venkateswara temple on Sunday. Talking to the media, after coming out of the temple at Tirumala, she said that she is ready to carry out whatever responsibility is handed over to her by the BJP high command. "If BJP state president D

Purandeswari asks me to take part in the election campaign, I will campaign for the BJP in the state," she made it clear. She said that she invoked the god to bless the state so that it would be accorded the SCS and the Swarnandhra Pradesh dream would be realised.

Jaya Prada joined the Telugu Desam party at the invitation of TDP founder and former Chief Minister N T Rama Rao. However, later she shifted to Uttar Pradesh and joined the Samajwadi party and was elected to Lok Sabha. Later she joined the BJP in 2019.

Rs 13.96 cr worth of cash, gold, liquor seized: DC

PNS ■ ELURU

The police and election officials have so far seized cash, gold and liquor worth Rs 13.96 crore in the district.

Disclosing this media here on Sunday, Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh said that since the election code of conduct came into effect, cash, gold, liquor and other valuables worth Rs 13.96 crore have been seized.

He said that the officials have seized Rs 210.30 lakh cash, Rs 10.17 crore worth of gold jewellery and silver ornaments and Rs 169.20 lakh worth of liquor. The officials have so far received 2255 applications through the Suvridha portal seeking permissions to organise election programmes of which 2162 permission have been given and 93 applications are under consideration.

The Collector said that 439 c-VIGIL complaints have been resolved so far. Since the election code of conduct is being enforced, people should not carry cash of more than Rs 50,000 or other valuables without proper documents, the Collector appealed to the people.

People want 'welfare' govt: Buggana

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy has opined that people want a government which gives priority for the welfare.

The Minister conducted election campaigns at S Racharla, Boinacheruvupalle, Kommemarri, Hussainapuram and Vengalappalle villages in Pyapili mandal in Dhone constituency on Sunday. He received an overwhelming response from the people in the villages.

Addressing an election meeting, the Finance Minister said that people want a government which gives priority to their welfare. If people trust him and give him one more chance, there would be tremendous development, at the same time, all welfare schemes would be implemented, he told them.

"Two rival groups joined hands only for election mileage, setting aside three generations of enmity. The people of the constituency are keenly observing the joining of two groups. Several families have lost their breadwinners

due to their rivalry and faction politics. If they join hands today, can they bring back their lives?" he questioned and asked the people to be cautious while electing their MLA.

"The YSRCP government has protected the constituency from faction politics and violence and implemented many welfare schemes for their uplift. We will continue to protect the area from faction politics," the Finance Minister assured.

Buggana Rajendranath Reddy claimed that the YSRCP had carried out a lot of development during the last four years which had not taken place since independence. The progress of the state continued even during the coronavirus pandemic time, he stated.

The Finance Minister asked the voters to be wise while electing their legislature and woe them to vote for the YSRCP.

He also appealed to the people not to trust the promises being made by former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu.



Kshatriya body offers support to Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Kshatriya Hakkula Sadhana Samithi (APKHSS) has pledged its support to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, citing the YSRCP government's commitment to development and welfare initiatives.

President of APKHSS, Krishnam Raju, lauded CM Jagan's tireless efforts over the past five years in prioritizing the welfare and advancement of all segments of society. The announcement came during an interactive session with YSRCP's central candidate, Velampalli Srinivasa Rao, held in

Vijayawada on Sunday. Velampalli Srinivas, MLA and central constituency candidate for YSRCP emphasized the party's dedication to the welfare of Kshatriyas in the state, noting the government's focused initiatives aimed at their political and socio-economic empowerment.

He highlighted the administration's commitment to temple development, citing plans to elevate the Vijayawada Kanakadurga temple to the stature of Tirumala. Srinivas also rebuked attempts by the opposition, particularly the Telugu Desam Party, to sow discord on religious lines, asserting that



such tactics had been resoundingly rejected by the populace.

Assuring Kshatriyas of equitable representation in both party and government appointments, Srinivas reiterated CM Jagan's stance on Amaravati's development while advocating for cost-effective alternatives for regional growth, particularly in Visakhapatnam. He emphasized the government's vision to foster balanced development across all regions of the state.

Highlighting the socio-economic diversity within the Kshatriya community, Samithi President VVR Krishnamraju emphasized that a vast majority, comprising the poor and

middle class, have significantly benefited from the government's welfare schemes. This, he asserted, underscores their steadfast support for the return of Jagan Mohan Reddy's government. Krishnamraju further touted Andhra Pradesh as a national benchmark for development and welfare, citing a robust GDP growth rate of approximately 17 per cent.

The gathering also witnessed addresses from Kshatriya leaders Sunita Lakhmaraju, Venkateswara Raju, and others, solidifying the community's endorsement of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership.

Stick to EC guidelines, micro observers told

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

General Observers for NTR district, Manju Raj Paul and Narinder Singh Bali, advised micro observers to strictly adhere to the guidelines laid out by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure peaceful election polling. They emphasised the critical role of Micro Observers, particularly in managing problematic polling booths.

The training programme for Micro Observers in the NTR district took place at the Tummalalappi Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Sunday, with District Election Officer and Collector Dr S Dilli Rao presiding over the event. The session included comprehensive guidance on the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) provided by ECI general observers and Collector Dilli Rao.

Addressing the gathering, observers Manju Raj Paul and Bali stressed the importance of

conducting the polling process peacefully, urging Micro Observers to leverage the training provided to them. They underscored the need for Micro Observers to remain vigilant on all fronts, ensuring they are well informed and attentive to potential issues.

Moreover, they highlighted the significance of promptly reporting any identified problems or violations of ECI rules. They urged Micro Observers to focus on a predefined list of 18 points and submit detailed observation reports accordingly. Additionally, they reiterated the importance of security measures, the presence of polling agents, conducting mock polls, and strict adherence to ECI guidelines.

Assistant Collector Shubham Nokhwal, District Revenue Officer V Srinivasa Rao, District Legal Metrology Officer K Priyanka, and Training Nodal Officer NV Siva Prasad were among the participants.

Edu, biz opportunities in Australia explored

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The CII Young Indians - Amaravati Chapter orchestrated an enlightening session aimed at delving into the vast expanse of business and educational prospects available in Australia. The event took place yesterday in Vijayawada.

Dr. Gjoko Muratovski, the Chief Academic Officer of the Australian Institute of Advanced

Technologies, took the stage to address the eager participants. Dr Muratovski provided valuable insights into the evolving landscape of Australia's work culture, highlighting notable advancements in technology, with a particular emphasis on generative AI. Furthermore, he elucidated on the diverse range of flexible certifications offered by their esteemed institute, aimed at facilitating the academic



endeavours of students aspiring to pursue education in Australia. Engaging with the audience, he exchanged

thought-provoking perspectives on these pivotal topics.

Dr. Y Bhavan Chand, Chair of the Yi Amaravati Chapter, extended a warm welcome to all attendees. Joining in, D. Rajesh Kumar, Chair of Entrepreneurship, and Ch. Balakrishna, Chair of Yuva, also shared their insights during the event, enriching the discourse with their expertise and experiences.



Speaking lies is the Congress' guarantee, says Kishan Reddy

'The CM should implement the Six guarantees or quit'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's government is giving the message that "Speaking lies is the Congress guarantee," Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy said.

"Revanth assured that he will implement his party's six guarantees on December 9, 2023. The CM should tell where the six guarantees are now. Speaking lies is the only Congress guarantee. The Model Election Code will go on June 6 but the CM is asking people to wait till August. Why? People are unhappy with the Congress as Revanth is an expert in speaking lies," Kishan Reddy said.

He said Union Home Minister Amit Shah's speech in Siddipet on reservations was morphed and that the BJP has filed a police complaint and a complaint with the Election Commission regarding that. Kishan said that the case was



not an easy one and warned the CM that the BJP would not remain silent if he kept on telling lies. He said that the Congress is the party that wants to scrap reservations and that the BJP will win double-digit seats in TG in the Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing the media on Sunday at the State BJP office, Kishan asked Revanth to implement his party's assurances if he can or else quit. But do not tell lies, he added. The Congress is trying to

blame the BJP regarding reservations. Revanth is deluding himself by imagining things that are not there, Kishan said.

He said that the Congress is playing the wrong game. "The Congress is saying that it will provide reservations to all. But the Congress is doing injustice to BCs. The BJP can provide reservations to BCs. The CM has no point to criticise the BJP during his campaign and so he is speaking lies. The Congress' lie that the BJP will scrap reservations is the biggest lie of the decade," Kishan said.

He said that the Congress is engaging in a venomous campaign filled with lies. The Congress is engaging in a Goebbalian campaign stating that the BJP will abolish reservations if it comes to power again. However, the Congress has not shown any evidence to prove its false campaign, he said.

Kishan said that the Congress is the party that

weakened BC reservations in Telangana. He said that BCs are being denied access to education by implementing reservations based on religion in Telangana.

"The Congress has been telling cock and bull stories fearing that the BJP is going to come to power a third time. Congress leaders are not in a position to seek votes telling that they are implementing their six guarantees in Telangana," he said.

Kishan demanded that the CM should implement the assurances given to the people. There is no public response to the Congress campaign. The people are disappointed with the Congress and are thinking whether they had voted in haste for the Congress, he said.

He said that the Congress which has been away from power for the last 10 years is trying to grab power by hook or crook.

Jagan creating rift between Kapus and Dalits: Pawan Kalyan

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan has alleged that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is creating animosities between the Kapu community and Dalit communities by encouraging YSRCP MLC Ananta Babu, who allegedly killed a Dalit man and door delivered his body.

"When I am trying to unite all the castes and working for the welfare of all people, Jagan Reddy is trying to divide them. Jagan Reddy is intentionally supporting YSRCP MLC Ananta Babu as he wanted to create a rift between Kapu community and the Dalits," Pawan Kalyan slammed while addressing a massive election meeting in Yeswararam in Prathipadu constituency on Sunday.

Because of YSRCP MLC Ananta Babu, the entire Kapu community has suffered a great loss and spoiled the reputation of Kapus.

Stating that he could discuss any issues of the state with



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pawan Kalyan said that Jagan Mohan Reddy could only appeal to the Prime Minister to rescue him from the 39 corruption cases. The Prime Minister does not give importance to leaders like Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Jana Sena chief claimed.

Continuing his blistering attack on Jagan Reddy, Pawan

opined. Many villages are facing acute drinking water scarcity but ganja is available plenty at every place, he lambasted.

Jagan Reddy has done away with 76 aided colleges and people demand to reinstate them. If the alliance is voted to power, the aided college and schools would reopen, the Polavaram canal and lift irrigation would be modernized, the Jana Sena chief assured. Meanwhile, Pawan Kalyan announced that the JSP-TDP-BJP alliance would unveil their election manifesto on April 30.

"The manifesto assures three gas cylinders at free of cost to eligible poor, Rs 20,000 to the farmers every year, free bus travel to women, Rs 1500 to eligible women per month, reopening of Anna canteens and setting up of Dokka Seethamma canteens," he announced. Pawan Kalyan introduced Lok Sabha candidate T Uday Srinivas and MLA candidate Varupula Satyaprabha and wooed voters to elect them with a huge majority.

INDIA CORNER

3 held for tampering with ATM to dupe people

Three men have been arrested for allegedly tampering with ATMs for duping people, police said on Saturday. Vishal Negi (30), Amit Mehra (37), and Vijay Kumar (26) used to damage card reader slots in ATMs so that when someone puts their card in, it gets stuck there, Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Ankit Chauhan said. "Later, they would secretly see the PIN number and ask the customer to raise a complaint with the bank. If the customer leaves the ATM without removing the card, the accused used to remove it later and make the transactions," the DCP said. On April 19, at around 7 pm a PCR call regarding an attempt to break into an ATM and gunfire in the area was received at Hauz Khas police station, he said. Police team was sent to the spot and investigation suggested that two people were attempting to tamper with the ATM and some people tried to nab them, one of them fired a shot in the air and fled.



Controversy erupts over mayor blocking bus in traffic dispute

A controversy erupted on Sunday over Thiruvananthapuram city Mayor Arya Rajendran allegedly blocking a state-run passenger bus here for not giving way to her private car. Video footage aired by news channels showed the mayor and her co-passengers in the car engaging in heated arguments with the bus driver after blocking the bus at Palayam junction on Saturday. Police arrested the driver based on the mayor's complaint that he misbehaved with her. The driver was released as the case was registered for a bailable offence, police said. The driver has also lodged a complaint with the police against the mayor. Later, speaking to reporters, the driver alleged that the mayor's vehicle attempted to overtake the KSRTC bus on the wrong side. He also alleged that the mayor's husband MLA K M Sachin Dev forced passengers to get down from the bus after blocking it on the road.



Child trafficking racket busted in Mumbai

The Mumbai police have busted a child trafficking racket and arrested a doctor and six others involved in selling an infant and a toddler, an official said on Sunday. The crime branch on Saturday arrested the accused, Dr Sopanrao Khandare, Vanadana Armit Pawar (28), Sheetal Ganesh Vate (41), Sneha Suryavanshi (24), Naseema Haneef Khan (28), Lata Survaade (36) and Sharad Maruti Devar (45), the official said. The police had received a tip-off that Vate, a resident of Vikhroli, had allegedly sold a five-month-old baby for Rs 2 lakh, he said. Vate was apprehended from Govandi, following which the police arrested Dr Khandare, who allegedly helped her sell the infant, the official said. The baby was later rescued from Guhagar in Ratnagiri, he said. Investigations revealed that the accused had also sold a two-year-old girl, and she has also been rescued, the official said.



BJP will neither remove reservations nor allow anyone to do so: Amit Shah

PNS ■ KASGANJ/MAINPURI/ETAWAH (UP)

The BJP will neither remove reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday, calling it a "Modi guarantee".

Opposition parties have repeatedly claimed that the BJP's call for "abki baar 400 paar" is aimed at winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections to have the numbers in Parliament to scrap quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Speaking at a rally in support of Rajveer Singh, the BJP candidate from Etah-Kasganj,

Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets 400 seats, it will remove reservation. I want to say that we had a full majority for two terms but Narendra Modi is a supporter of reservation." "I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither will the BJP remove reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah said.



Shah alleged that the opposition parties ignored people from backward communities, who were granted their rights by Narendra Modi after he became prime minister.

Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets

400 seats, it will remove reservation. I want to say that we had a full majority for two terms but Narendra Modi is a supporter of reservation."

"I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither will the BJP remove reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs

nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah said.

The home minister also hit out at the opposition for keeping the Ram temple issue hanging for more than 70 years. You made Modi ji the prime minister for a second time and he did 'Jai Shri Ram' by doing the consecration ceremony on January 22," Shah said.

temple." Attacking opposition party leaders for not attending the Ram temple consecration ceremony, Shah said in Kasganj, "The people who did not go to the consecration ceremony, they know that they are the people who shot at karsevaks."

He asserted that there are two groups to choose from -- "one that fired shots at Ram bhakts and one that built the Ram temple".

"The Congress, Rahul 'baba' and the party of Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) kept the Ram temple issue hanging for more than 70 years. You made Modi ji the prime minister for a second time and he did 'Jai Shri Ram' by doing the consecration ceremony on January 22," Shah said.

Health secretary urges states, UTs to link ABHA IDs with health portals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Health Secretary has urged states and union territories to take necessary action to link Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) with various health portals, such as Reproductive Child Health (RCH), National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NIKSHAY), among others.

As per the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) dashboard, total ABHA IDs created in the country as on April 3, 2024 is 5,894.60 lakhs, Health Secretary Apurva Chandra said. However, total beneficiaries linked with ABHA under Non-communicable diseases (NCD), Sickle cell, RCH, NIKSHAY, National Viral Hepatitis Control Program (NVHCP) and Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP) are only 827.99 lakhs, 0.89 lakhs, 15.78 lakhs, 2.46 lakhs, 0.056 lakhs and 0.17 lakhs, respectively, he said.

"This shows that though the states have taken huge interest in creation of the IDs but non-linking of health records with these IDs is not allowing the stakeholders, including the patients, from reaping the benefits of digital health records," the health secretary said.

"You are, therefore, requested to kindly take necessary action for linkage of existing beneficiaries with ABHA in the various portals and do regular review of the progress at your level," he stated in a letter to all the state and UT governments.

Chandra said the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi



As per the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) dashboard, total ABHA IDs created in the country as on April 3, 2024 is 5,894.60 lakhs, Health Secretary Apurva Chandra said.

on September 27, 2021 and all the health facilities in the country are to take part in this mission.

Further, via Health Facility Registry and Health Professional Registry, the ABDM platform has to be utilised to the optimum extent, he said in the letter.

"In this regard, all states and UTs have been requested in the past through a letter on June 13, 2023 for the 100 per cent compliance in ABHA seeding on various portals. Some states and UTs have shown impressive progress in the creation of ABHA IDs," he said.

Chandra said currently, beneficiaries are being linked with ABHA under various health portals like NCD, Sickle Cell,

Reproductive and Child Health (RCH), NIKSHAY, NVHCP and PMNDP, etc.

Additionally, states and UTs have to link the beneficiaries under the IDSP-IHIP (Integrated Health Information Platform) portal, the health secretary said in the letter.

Under the ABDM, citizens can create their ABHA numbers, to which their digital health records can be linked. This will allow patients to hassle-free access and digitally share their health records.

This will enable creation of longitudinal health records for individuals across various healthcare providers, and improve clinical decision making by healthcare providers, officials said.



Stalin awards chess champion Gukesh Rs 75 L cash incentive

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday gave away a cash incentive of Rs 75 lakh to star D Gukesh, days after he won the prestigious Candidates Tournament in Toronto.

As a mark of honour, Stalin also presented Gukesh with a shield and shawl in the presence of Sports Development Minister Udhyanidhi Stalin, top officials and the champion's parents. The CM congratulated Gukesh for his accomplishment. The Candidates Tournament, organised by chess's international governing body FIDE since 1950, is an eight-player chess tournament held to determine the challenger for the World Chess Championship. The winner of the Candidates earns the right to a match for the World Championship against the incumbent world champion.

Chennai-based Gukesh drew with American Hikaru Nakamura in the final round to not only win the prestigious tournament but also become the youngest ever challenger to the world title at 17.

Mamata wants govt at Centre that is soft on terrorism: Nadda

PNS ■ BAHARAMPUR/RANAGHAT

BJP president J P Nadda on Sunday alleged that Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee desires a central government that is "soft on terrorism" and believes in appeasement.

Addressing back-to-back rallies in Baharampur in Murshidabad district and

Ranaghat in Nadia district of West Bengal, Nadda claimed that the TMC government in the state helmed by Banerjee is known for corruption, extortion, appeasement, and discrimination.

"We want a 'Majboot Sarkar' (strong government), but Mamata Banerjee desires a 'Majboor Sarkar' (weak government). She aims for a government in Delhi that con-

done appeasement, corruption, discrimination, and sympathises with terrorists," he alleged.

"On the contrary, Modi ji's 'Majboot Sarkar' believes in development, prosperity, national security, and responds to terrorism with surgical strikes," Nadda asserted.

Further criticising the TMC government, Nadda

said, "Mamata Banerjee's administration fosters appeasement, discrimination, and a lenient approach toward terrorists, extending sympathy to them."

He slammed the TMC for allegedly spreading misinformation about the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), emphasising that the Act aims to grant citizenship, not revoke it.

K'taka CM holds dharna protesting Centre's 'injustice' over drought relief

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar along with several ministers and legislators on Sunday staged a dharna here alleging injustice to the state by the union government while releasing drought relief funds.

The state government has declared 226 out of the total 236 Taluks in Karnataka as drought-hit and said there was a crop loss in 48 lakh hectares of land.

According to Siddaramaiah, against the demand for Rs 18,171 crore for drought relief, the union government ordered release of only Rs 3,454 crore,

that too after the state was driven to the Supreme Court to get its rights enforced.

The sanction is "woefully inadequate" and just a quarter of the state's demand, he noted.

Displaying 'Chombu', a water pot symbolising emptiness and deception, the leaders charged the Centre with "cheating" Karnataka by not releasing adequate relief to face acute drought, the kind of which was not witnessed in the past several decades. They held the symbolic dharna in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue on the premises of Vidhana Soudha, which houses the Legislature and Secretariat.

Congress, CPI(M) helping BJP in Bengal: Mamata

PNS ■ KALIACHAK (WB)

Asserting that the Trinamool Congress is contesting the Lok Sabha elections alone in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday alleged that the Congress and CPI(M) are helping the BJP in the state.

Addressing an election rally here at Malda Dakshin Lok Sabha seat, Banerjee claimed that the TMC will put up a spirited fight against the Narendra Modi-led dispensation at the Centre and will play a major role in installing an INDIA bloc government after the Lok Sabha polls.

"We don't have any alliance in Bengal with Congress. Here the



CPI(M) is having an alliance with Congress. Both are hand-in-gloves with BJP and if you (voters) cast vote for Congress or CPI(M) that tantamounts to cutting the anti-BJP vote share and helping Narendra Modi. Congress and CPI(M) are the two eyes of BJP in this state," she said.

Banerjee claimed that the TMC had wanted to discuss seat sharing with Congress with the condition that they should not have any deal with CPI(M) in Bengal but they didn't listen.

"The Congress and CPI(M) leaders in West Bengal have been speaking in the same voice of BJP and plotting against pro-people policies of the TMC-run government in the state," she said.

Asserting that the INDIA alliance is alive outside Bengal, Banerjee said "I gave INDIA alliance its name, but the alliance does not exist in Bengal, it will be functioning outside this state because of the pro-BJP stance of its state leaders."

BJP won't win any seat in 3rd phase: Akhilesh

PNS ■ SAMBHAL (UP)

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday claimed the BJP will not win any seat in the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls and that the ruling party misunderstood the "direction of the wind" when it made its slogan of "400 paar".

Addressing a rally in Sambhal, Yadav also said the Samajwadi Party had an advantage in the third phase, saying that elections on May 7 will be held between Sambhal and "his home" in Etawah and Mainpuri. "BJP people did not know the direction of the wind, so they kept saying '400 paar' (winning over 400 seats) and when they realised the public sentiment after the two phases of the election, BJP forgot its slogan," the former UP chief minister said.

"The wind from the west (western UP) in the first phase will change the BJP government. A similar trend was seen in the second phase also. People are not accepting the BJP," the SP chief said.

"It is now your responsibility in the third phase," he added to those gathered for the rally in support of party candidate Zia ur Rahman Barq.

"These elections are being held from this part till our home. Netaji (SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav) has also been an MP from this area (Sambhal). Voting is going to take place from here to Mainpuri. I can say that the BJP is not going to open its account in any Lok Sabha seat here," Yadav said.

"When the seats where BJP lost with the highest number of votes are counted, the name of Sambhal Lok Sabha should be included in that count also," he



"BJP people did not know the direction of the wind, so they kept saying '400 paar' (winning over 400 seats) and when they realised the public sentiment after the two phases of the election, BJP forgot its slogan," the former UP chief minister said.

further urged the voters. Yadav also said the election in Sambhal is an opportunity to pay tribute to party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq, who was declared as the SP candidate but died earlier this year. After his death, his grandson, Zia ur Rahman Barq got the party ticket.

"We gave the ticket to the very popular Shafiqur Rahman Barq Saheb but he is no longer with us. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to him... He always stood for the rights of his people," he said.

The SP chief also said that the Lok Sabha polls are a fight between those who want to "abolish the Constitution" and the INDIA bloc and the socialists who want to protect the Constitution.

BJP govt politicising probe agencies just like Cong earlier :Mayawati

PNS ■ MORENA (MP)

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday claimed the BJP was politicising probe agencies just like the Congress earlier and asserted poverty and unemployment had increased in the country in the last two years.

Addressing a Lok Sabha poll rally here, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister claimed it would not be easy for the Bharatiya Janata Party to win if "free and fair" elections are held and there is no "tampering" of EVMs.

"It seems the BJP has politicised investigation agencies just like the Congress earlier. The BJP government has also failed to check poverty, unemployment, and prices, all of which have risen in the past two years. The Centre is giving rations to the extremely poor but the solu-



tion is creating employment," she said.

"Corruption has not gone down and the borders of the country are not completely safe till now. This is a matter of concern. You must take every effort to stop the BJP and Congress from coming to power," she said. The BJP's promise of "achhe din" (good days) for the poor and weaker sections as well as the middle class and labourers has not been fulfilled and people now know the ruling party's "guarantees" are hollow, Mayawati said.

Traffic noise can increase risk of cardiovascular disease: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Spike in traffic noise can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attack, researchers have found.

Having found evidence linking traffic noise and the risk of developing heart and related conditions, researchers are calling for this type of noise pollution to be recognised as a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases.

The researchers found evidence that for every 10 decibel increase in noise coming from road traffic, the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, including heart attack, stroke and diabetes, heightened by 3.2 per cent.

In particular, they said,



night-time traffic noise that disrupts and shortens sleep time can increase levels of stress hormones in the blood vessels, thereby promoting inflammation, high blood pressure and vascular diseases.

"It is also important for us that traffic noise is now finally recognised as a risk factor for cardiovascular disease due to the strong evidence," Thomas Münzel, senior Professor at the University

Medical Centre Mainz, Germany, and lead author of the study published in the journal Circulation Research, said.

The researchers also suggested strategies for local authorities to mitigate noise from road, rail, and air traffic. Erecting noise barriers along busy roads in densely populated areas can significantly reduce noise levels by up to 10 decibels, they said.

Constructing roads using noise-reducing asphalt has been shown to reduce levels by 3-6 decibels, the authors said.

Other strategies they suggested included limiting driving speed and developing and promoting the use of low-noise tyres.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Orange hills

Nainital is just one example of ongoing forest fires damaging the fragile ecosystem in Uttarakhand

Historically, Uttarakhand is somehow a little more prone than other hill States in India to the scourge of frequent forest fires, especially in summers. Otherwise famous for its breathtaking beauty and lush greenery, the State has of late again experienced a series of jungle blazes: To give an idea of the seriousness of the situation, more than 500 have been reported since January and one almost every hour in the past 24 hours. The latest incident has struck perilously close to the inhabited areas in Nainital, gutting 108 ha of forest land and sounding alarm bells for the residents and authorities alike. With the situation worsening, the Army and IAF have been pressed into action to aid containment efforts. These fires, often man-made to clear dead vegetation or fuelled by natural friction amid dry vegetation and exacerbated by strong winds, pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. Despite concerted containment efforts, the inferno has spread its tendrils closer to human population. The IAF helicopters equipped



with water-spraying capabilities are deployed to douse the flames, offering a crucial advantage in reaching inaccessible terrain. Additionally, Army personnel are working on ground to create firebreaks and prevent further spread. As for the bright side of this challenge, the wildfires have brought out the best in humans — cooperating with authorities and fighting it together. Amid the suffocating chaos and burning uncertainty, the spirit of community resilience has shone brightly. Local residents, alongside volunteers and NGOs, have rallied together to support firefighting efforts and offer assistance to those affected.

From food and shelter to lending a helping hand in evacuation efforts, the collective response has underscored the strength of solidarity in the face of adversity. However, these forest fires carry grave environmental implications. The loss of precious flora and fauna, coupled with the release of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate future fire outbreaks. Strengthening forest management practices, implementing early warning systems and fostering community awareness are paramount in safeguarding the region's biodiversity and mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires. It is about time that a comprehensive policy was framed to fight the wildfire menace. The Uttarakhand Government must draw from the US experiences in California, where such fires are frequent but they manage them rather well and swiftly with an early warning system, besides a mechanism for controlled burns. As the battle against the Nainital forest fire rages on, it serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural ecosystems as also the resilience of the human spirit. With the combined efforts of authorities, armed forces and local communities, there is hope that the flames will soon be extinguished. However, the aftermath of this crisis should serve as a catalyst for concerted action towards building a more resilient and sustainable future for Uttarakhand and beyond.

Pakistan paying for its misplaced priorities



BHOPINDER SINGH

Ambassador Asif Durrani acknowledges the Pak Government's shortcomings in handling the Afghanistan situation and underscores a reality check for Islamabad's foreign policy

Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Durrani, conceded the grave reality of the Pakistani Government's abject failure in Afghanistan. Speaking at a conference titled, "Pakistan in the Emerging Geopolitical Landscape", the diplomat accepted that the ensuing price of the flared tensions along the Durand Line far exceeded the human and financial cost of all the wars with India, put together! Cold and frightening statistics like the loss of over 80,000 lives in the so-called 'War on Terror' which Islamabad joined in 2001 (including 8000 security personnel) and an estimated economic loss of \$150 billion—the reality check of what ought to worry Pakistan, i.e., between its traditional enemy across the Line-of-Control, or the one across the Durand Line—couldn't have been clearer. To make matters worse for Islamabad, it isn't even close to the end of its miseries as the deadly attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have shot up by 65% and the accompanying suicide attacks by 500%! In such a scenario to persist with India as the 'enemy number 1' is not only to suffer from an acute sense of Ostrich syndrome, but also to refuse the hard lessons of Karma i.e., what goes around, comes around.



The fixation with India owes itself to the wounds of the partition and the desperate need of various institutions to have an 'enemy' to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the citizenry e.g., clergy, military, politicians etc., as also, as to defend the flawed 'two-nation theory' that ostensibly rationalises Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 exposed the hollowness and amorality of a nation created in the name of religion - the current equation with Afghanistan further exposes the untenability of a relationship based on co-religionism. That religion can never be the basis of nationhood or indeed ensure a 'brotherly relation' (as insincerely claimed with a neighbour, is further proved. At the end of the day, what matters is, 'intent' or neat. Over time, intent has an inevitable way of revealing itself that cannot be suppressed by homilies of co-religiosity. As the speech by Ambassador Durrani accepted, "After the withdrawal of NATO forces, it was hoped that peace in Afghanistan would bring peace to the region. However, such expectations were short-lived". Anyone with a modicum of understanding about history (especially about Afghanistan, the home to many 'Great Games') ought to have known that to 'control' the narrative in Afghanistan was not just impossible and impractical, but also counter-productive. The worst-kept secret of nurturing a desire to have 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan could not be hidden even from its creation, the Afghan Taliban. While the Afghans had accepted the support and infrastructure afforded by Pakistani regimes of all hues and shades since the late 1970s — to expect the proud Afghan (even a Pak-created Taliban) to toe Islamabad's line blindly was an affront to the cultural-civilisational identity of an Afghan. Not only did the Taliban Government bolt out from the shackles of controls, 'advisories' and condescending platitudes from Islamabad, but it knowingly harboured and supported its ideological offshoot i.e., the Pak-facing Tehreek-e-Taliban



THE PROJECT OF DEMONISING INDIA BY THE PAKISTANIS HAS FAILED SPECTACULARLY AMONGST THE CONSERVATIVE AFGHANS, AS EVEN THEY HARBOUR A RATHER WARM PERCEPTION OF THE INDIANS, AS OPPOSED TO THAT OF THE PAKISTANIS

Pakistan (TTP) fighters, who attack Pakistan with impunity and deadly consequences. A grim observation of the situation suggests that the attacks on Pakistan are not just a phenomenon afflicting disaffected Pakistani folks across the Afghan side, but that the "worrying aspect is the participation of Afghan nationals in these attacks". Basically, either as genuinely motivated or even as trained mercenaries, Afghan nationals are attacking Pakistan! The project of demonising India by the Pakistanis has failed spectacularly amongst the conservative Afghans, as even they harbour a rather warm perception of the Indians, as opposed to that of the Pakistanis. At the end of the day, the difference in sovereign intent emanating from Islamabad, versus those emanating from Delhi, has surfaced. Beyond certain constraints mandated by their self-invented image, ideology and inert conservatism, the language used by the Taliban Government officials bears a stark contrast, from the one that was imagined when the US/NATO forces abandoned Kabul and the Taliban stormed into Kabul. Today, given the 'dark' investments made by the Pakistani State it finds itself in an awkward and inextricable position. Try hard as it might, the Pakistanis are struggling to undo and trace back the steps that it took to create the prevailing environment, infrastructure and instinct in the region. As Ambassador Durrani lamented, "Afghanistan has become a permanent fixture in Pakistan's regional paradigm for over four decades". Therefore, all support or otherwise to Pakistan is seen from the lens of Afghanistan. Ironically, Pakistani complaints about the situation with Afghanistan fall on deaf ears as the global community attributes much of what went wrong with the Afghan storyline, to the Pakistanis themselves. In some sense, it is a cry wolf situation for the Pakistanis and there simply aren't too many takers or sympathisers of the Pakistani woes. A deeper introspection would reveal the rot in the thinking of the Pakistani system set in 1947 when it thought that religion was to be its trump card. History is instructive, that religion can never be a basis of Statehood for any moral and sustainable nation. Both Bangladesh and Afghanistan discredit the 'two-nation theory' (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

PICTALK



'Veerakumars' gather to participate in the the Karaga festival at Sri Dharmarajana Swamy Temple, in Bengaluru PTI

Political parties must prioritise environmental preservation

Political leadership must prioritise sustainability and combating plastic pollution to safeguard ecosystems and human health



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

It's election time in India and various political parties vie for their space in the hearts of the public. Even when political parties give multiple offers, including providing sustainable living in their manifestos, there is no concrete measure to tackle issues affecting our planet. Even for the few who speak about the environment, the vision is for the future, not immediate. What we want is a manifesto that speaks about protecting our planet the moment it comes to power. Every political party stresses developmental politics. But what is the use of development if our planet's status is in a dilemma? The climate is changing; glaciers and the water table are receding and water scarcity is severe in parts of the country. We haven't devised a concrete step in managing our garbage, even in our capital city. Is it a lack of scientific knowledge? We have one CSIR lab exclusively working on the environment and many other research institutions working on similar lines. Still, we fail in this? Is it a lack of political will? Nobody knows the actual reason behind this. Every



part of the planet suffers from anthropogenic activities during this Anthropocene period. In the electioneering process, political parties also create lots of garbage containing lots of plastic materials. During elections, political parties often use a variety of promotional materials such as banners, posters, flyers and flags, many of which are made of plastic or contain plastic components. Political rallies, public events and gatherings organised by political parties often generate significant amounts of waste, including plastic cups, plates and other disposable items. Improper waste management practices at these events can result in plastic litter ending up in the environment. Why can't the Government ban plastic from its production source? After manufacturing and selling to the vendors, for namesake, the official makes some peri-

odic visits and fines poor vendors. It's like keeping sweets near a diabetic patient and telling him not to touch them. Plastic pollution has significantly threatened ecosystems, wildlife and human health worldwide. Plastic pollution in oceans is a well-documented problem with devastating effects on marine life. Sea turtles, whales, seabirds and fish often mistake plastic debris for food or become entangled in plastic waste, leading to injury or death. Additionally, plastic fragments, known as microplastics, are ingested by smaller organisms and can bioaccumulate up the food chain, posing risks to human health. Coral reefs, often called the "rainforests of the sea," are highly sensitive ecosystems that provide habitat for numerous marine species. Plastic pollution can smother coral reefs, blocking sunlight and inhibiting coral growth. Chemicals released by plastic degradation can also harm coral health, contributing to reef degradation and loss. Political parties can influence public opinion and behaviour through messaging

and advocacy efforts. Parties that prioritise environmental issues and promote sustainable practices can help raise awareness about the harms of plastic pollution and encourage individuals and communities to take action. They should teach their followers to follow clean environmental practices in their party functions and their daily lives. In India, political parties have the power to shape policies and promote initiatives that influence people's attitudes and behaviours toward plastics. So, they should take responsibility. We don't have decades to wait for the results. Already, the global temperature has reached its threshold. Any further increase may cause unforeseen consequences on the life on this planet. We need a political mindset to change our attitude towards plastics and the environment immediately. It will be good if we always remember that we don't have a 'planet B' to sustain humanity. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC UPHOLDS EVMS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea", published on April 27, this is my response. The Supreme Court has rightly reaffirmed its faith in the working of EVMs and refused the return of ballot papers. They seem to be satisfied with several safeguards and stringent checks which have been an integral part of EVM functioning. It is also a welcome move by the court that they have now given number 2 and 3 placed candidates an option to check and verify 5 per cent microchips per assembly segment so that they remain fully satisfied. One additional burden the Election Commission has to make is to also store symbol loading units for 45 days in addition to EVMs. Now hopefully this EVM issue should be closed for good and the opposition must create a narrative which resonates with the voters. The ruling party has given a lot of opportunities to the opposition where the former could have been put on the mat but the latter failed to do so. There are still 5 phases to go in the current elections and the opposition would do better to channel their energy in the right direction and highlight BJP's negative points than keep crying over EVMs. Bal Govind | Noida

JAMMU ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Stage set for phase II LS Polls", published on April 25, this is my response. The second phase of the Lok Sabha elections is completed now. The EVMs had made it captured the fate of Jammu as well. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are specifically annoyed with the governance of J&K as a Union Territory. The bigger mandate of J&K so disclosed appears to be extremely annoying with the BJP the people want to topple the UT administration to put in place proper Statehood. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

No moral high ground for India or the US



Apropos the editorial, "All is well", published on April 27, this is my response. Neither the US nor India can claim to be on the moral high ground to point an accusing finger at each other. The regularly occurring deaths of Indian students in the US are as much a blot on that nation as are the deaths of hundreds of innocent Manipuris in the State of Manipur. India's response to the allegations made by the USA has been rather dismissive because we all know the truth about Manipur. The US apart, even the Opposition parties of India had raised a quarrel over the situation in Manipur and rightly so. Therefore, for India to say that the US report is "deeply biased" and reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities" is to turn a blind eye to the facts. Both countries need to introspect and take measures to set their own house in order instead of indulging in a provocative blame game. Avinash Godbole | Dewas

The hope of Congress restoration is high along with the National Conference & PDP party compared to the Bhartiya Janta Party. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are anxiously waiting for this very moment. Hope the design will be fulfilled soon and very soon Jammu and Kashmir will enjoy complete Statehood like other Indian States. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Madam — In every domain, women are enchanting their presence. The inclusion of women in the decision-making process is their fundamental right and it is also pivotal for sustainable development. If women have significant representation, we will attain legal parity in economic opportunities and also unleash the benefits and economic progressions linked with this assortment. Also, they will influence voter's opinions, mobilise support and actively participate in the electoral process. A Apurva Garg | Ujjain

paradigm shift of the Government's strong focus on women-led development, going beyond women-centric, represents a key pillar of India's progress. The Government is promoting women's empowerment by implementing a host of schemes, like, Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana, Women Scientists Scheme, PM Mudra Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and many more. On top of that The Women's Reservation Bill passed by the parliament, gave women a significant voice in the Lok Sabha and State assemblies. In 2024, the launch of the Alliance for Global Good-Equity and Equality, focus on investing in women with the theme for International Women's Day 2024 - "Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress," shows that Indian leadership is now gaining global recognition for women's empowerment. Apurva Garg | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE CRISIS OF SELF-IDENTITY

Discovering the self brings change, peace and liberation



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, almost every country in the world has been putting in hard efforts to make a Better World that is free from all kinds of fear and insecurities and is safe for all. However, in this whole exercise, we must not forget the fact that the breakthrough in man's efforts to bring change comes only when he knows his real identity. The present world crisis, which is generally known as the crisis of values, is in fact, a deep crisis of self-identity. This crisis of values also has resulted from the loss of the knowledge of the real identity of the self. While man has discovered many 'lost continents' or land masses on the globe, this continent of the self has yet to be discovered or rediscovered by all of us. Thus man has first to be made aware of the truth that he has, in him, a certain potential of divine qualities or a core of human values and that these qualities or values, within him, have gone deep down in the sea of the Subconscious and the Unconscious Mind and have now to be brought again to the surface, into the light and have to be used as the keyboard for actions. Man has also to be given a realisation of the truth that, with the cremation or burial of the dead body, man's all deeds good or bad done by him during his lifetime, or the abilities and qualities acquired by him over some time, are not all lost.

Neither does man's good actions go unrewarded forever nor does he go unpunished for his bad actions. Unless and until man realises that, in truth, he is an eternal being, a soul or a being-of-light and that so are other beings, his outlook and his attitude towards all others does not undergo a total change. When, however, he realises his real identity, he takes a new 'mental and spiritual birth' so to say and then an improvement in his self and his relationships with others takes place automat-



ically and naturally even as day follows night. So, we may adopt whatever strategy we think is suitable for a particular country or a group of people but let us keep in mind that, sooner or later, we have to give to all those who come in touch with us the knowledge of the real identity of self, for without this knowledge, there is no going nearer to our goal of a better world.

Today we all identify ourselves with the body that we have acquired because we are unaware of the immortal entity called 'soul' which resides within us and functions through our body. This ignorance about the existence of the soul thus results in 'body-consciousness' or a worldly approach towards life, as a result of which throughout our life we struggle to improve our condition of life without understanding the fact as to why the physical and mental conditions and environments of two individuals differ widely right from the time of their birth. We get baffled by human sufferings & untimely deaths on a mass scale caused by natural calamities, terrorism, violence and wars due to which we constantly fear for our death all the time.

In this whole merry-go-round, we fail to realise that unless these basic aspects of life are rightly understood, the body-conscious approach is bound to be there. Considering one's physical existence as the 'be all and end all' of everything results in man's adopting wrong values in life which in turn leads to his committing wrong acts and consequently causes suffering to him. No wonder, despite striving hard, he is unable to avoid sorrow and suffering in life. Hence to live a peaceful, contented, happy and liberated life, proper knowledge of one's real self i.e. the soul, its functioning and its role in the world drama is a 'must'.

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

Market-oriented gig skill sets under focus



DINESH SOOD

As the job landscape evolves, the focus is now on fostering market-driven skill sets to meet the demands of a changing workforce



In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving job market, employers are not just interested in hiring candidates with degrees from prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), they now prioritise hiring candidates with specific skill sets.

Despite the widespread recognition of IITs for academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities, recent worrisome reports have revealed that they are not delivering as per their ranking and perception.

Every year among thousands of students who dream to get admission in IITs, only 20-25 per cent of them remain lucky charm to clear the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam) advanced process to get admission while pursuing their academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities every year they look forward to the placement season with an eye on big-ticket jobs.

However, The 2024 placement season is described as "lacklustre" by IIT students. This is a worrying situation in IIT-Bombay, which is ranked third among engineering institutes in India by NIRF. According to the Global IIT Alumni Support Group, nearly 36% of students were unable to secure jobs for the 2024 placements. Although IIT-Bombay contested this report, stating that only 6.1% of students remained unplaced, the situation is still concerning.

The Global IIT Alumni Support Group data shows that nearly 30-40% of IIT students are still unplaced in the top-ranked 8 older IITs like Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur and others, while around 50-60% of students are still unplaced in the 15 newer IITs like BHU (Varanasi), Ropar and others.

The unemployment crisis in India is par-



NEARLY 83 PER CENT OF THOSE UNEMPLOYED IN INDIA ARE YOUNG AND AMONG THESE UNEMPLOYED YOUNG INDIANS, NEARLY 66 PER CENT ARE EDUCATED

ticularly acute among educated youth. The cost of an engineering degree remains at Rs 8-10 lakh, yet the placement rate remains around 30%. Furthermore, there is an influx of MBA degree holders entering the market, even though the demand has dropped by 55% this year. This raises the question of the value of a college/university degree.

Being highly educated is no guarantee of employment in India, as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) report reveals. Nearly 83% of those unemployed in India are young and among these unemployed young Indians, nearly 66% are educated. According to the ILO report, the "youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher." On the other hand, those without university degrees or even school dropouts have a higher employment rate.

Several highly educated youths set an example by adopting odd entrepreneurship and proudly titled it MBAs Chaiwalas and Chatwalas.

Despite the promise of creating 100 million jobs through the flagship "Make in India" initiative, the expected job creation did not materialise in the last 10 years. Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, has emphasised the need to make the workforce more employable and create jobs. Every year, around 7-8 million young

Indians enter the workforce, but many remain unemployed.

It is a proven fact that our youth with higher education degrees are not well-skilled. One of the main reasons why skills are more important than higher degrees is because they are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills needed to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. On the other hand, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, may be able to hit the ground running.

It is essential to note that having relevant skills is more crucial than having higher degrees since skills are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills required to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. Conversely, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, can hit the ground running and perform exceptionally well. For example, gig skill courses like digital marketing and beauty-wellness are available for around Rs 30 to 50 thousand and have a placement scope of over 90 per cent.

A gig economy offers a shot: The gig economy in India is vibrant, skill-driven and bucking the unemployed youths. According to a report by gig work platform Taskmo (which has over 7,50,000 gig workers registered) youth participation in the gig economy

has increased an astounding eightfold between 2019 and 2022, with most of the young people coming from Tier-I and Tier-II cities. In 2022, a projection report by Niti Aayog on the gig economy predicted a higher demand for skilled gig workers in the future. Areas such as digital marketing, social media management, logistics, healthcare and beauty-wellness will be in high demand, reflecting the diverse needs of employers and the evolution of the job market. The gig workforce is expected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2021-22.

It's fascinating to see that a professionally trained gig worker, such as a hairdresser, can earn more than an MBA or IITan's. Jawed Habib, a hair stylist expert entrepreneur, is an excellent example of this. With his global exposure, he's inspiring young people to envision beauty wellness as a profession of the future. It's important to note that having a higher degree is no longer the only way to get hired or advance in a career. Employers are increasingly looking for candidates with specific skills that are directly applicable to the job and can help the company succeed. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on market-driven gig skill sets.

The writer is a co-founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), network member of India International Skill Centres; views expressed are personal.

Taiwan urges for stronger global health governance

Taiwan advocates for global health governance, urging inclusion and collaboration to ensure human rights

Despite not being a WHO member State, Taiwan emphasises the importance of contributing insights into pandemic management and learning from international best practices. Taiwan's proactive approach to pandemic response underscores its commitment to global health. Advocating for amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and inclusion in the pandemic agreement, Taiwan seeks to collaborate on monitoring, reporting and exchanging vital health data to enhance global health security. Additionally, Taiwan champions universal health coverage and humanitarian efforts to uphold the fundamental human right to health worldwide. The three years of



HSUEH JUI-YUAN

the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a terrible loss of life and exacerbated health inequalities. The global economy slumped and, worldwide, people's lives were affected. This experience demonstrated that the present global health governance framework is not effective in responding to threats to global health. Although COVID-19 is no longer labelled a public health emergency of international

concern (PHEIC) and trade and economic activity globally have returned to normal, the World Health Organisation (WHO) cautions against the threat of a Disease X pandemic. Therefore, countries across the globe must unite to bolster health governance.

WHO and many countries began reviewing response strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Weaknesses in the International Health Regulations (2005) as concerns managing this crisis were revealed. As a result, changes are afoot. Proposed revisions include enhanced surveillance, reporting and information sharing; improved response readiness; and revised criteria for declaring PHEICs. At the same time, there is vigorous debate around a new

pandemic agreement, which aims to craft a robust global pandemic governance framework grounded in accountability, transparency and equity. It may be approved at the 77th World Health Assembly. As Taiwan is not a WHO member State, it cannot directly influence revisions to the International Health Regulations (2005) or the drafting of the pandemic agreement. Nevertheless, we remain greatly concerned about the content of and developments regarding these central documents.

We are eager to contribute our insights into pandemic management and learn from international best practices. Taiwan was the nation that initially identified the epidemic risk and promptly executed adap-

tive measures. Taiwan also proactively shared vital information with global partners and garnered public trust through a commitment to openness. We strongly endorse the passage and implementation of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and the pandemic agreement. We call on WHO to include Taiwan as a signatory to these documents.

We urge WHO to support Taiwan's inclusion in overseeing global health. Taiwan remains committed to participating based on the principles of professionalism, pragmatism and making contributions. Taiwan seeks to cooperate with WHO to remedy geographic gaps in global health security and to con-

struct a comprehensive global health framework.

The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All has found that at least 140 countries recognise health as a fundamental human right in their constitutions. Despite this, many nations have not passed and implemented laws to ensure that their citizens have access to healthcare services. Taiwan has worked hard to reach universal health coverage and has consistently improved the quality of health care over the past few decades in line with WHO recommendations.

Taiwan has effectively integrated and allocated social welfare resources to enhance primary and oral health care for all, implement mental health programs and

strengthen the social safety net. Taiwan has put in place an agile and resilient healthcare system able to combat both communicable and non-communicable diseases. We are improving health for all individuals throughout their entire lives.

The theme for World Health Day 2024 is "My health, my right." This is a way to advocate for every individual, everywhere, to have access to quality health services, education and information, as well as enjoy safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working and environmental conditions and freedom from discrimination. Through a public-private partnership, Taiwan has been contributing to global efforts to realise the

right to health in collaboration with partner countries and international organisations.

Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement. This would better empower Taiwan to collaborate with global partners to uphold the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The author is Minister of Health and Welfare Republic of China (Taiwan); views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Two-day summit on critical minerals from today

The government will hold a two-day summit on critical minerals beginning Monday to foster collaboration, share knowledge and drive innovation in the field of critical mineral beneficiation and processing. The Ministry of Mines, in collaboration with the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation (Shakti), Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), and Indian Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD), will hold 'Critical Minerals Summit: Enhancing Beneficiation and Processing Capabilities' from April 29 to 30th, 2024 here. The summit will bring together a diverse array of Indian and international stakeholders, including industry leaders, startups, government officials, scientists, academics, and policy experts, the mines ministry said in a statement. Participants will engage in active dialogue and interactive workshops focused on critical issues such as mineral auction progress, policy incentives for CRM ecosystem development, and the advancement of commercially viable and environmentally sustainable solutions.



Need to be watchful about steel imports: T V Narendran

As steel imports continue to surge, Tata Steel CEO T V Narendran has said there is a need to be watchful about the situation. The comment comes at a time when India has reported a 38 per cent surge in steel imports to 8.319 million tonnes, becoming a net importer of the commodity during the 2023-24 financial year. Speaking to PTI, the industry executive said, "It would be a pity if the situation continues in the long run. We have to be watchful about imports." As long as it is unfair imports, the government needs to deal with it, Narendran said without elaborating further. Steel consumption is expected to grow 8-10 per cent in the ongoing 2024-25 fiscal year, he said in reply to a separate question on demand. Steelmakers have been raising concerns on increasing imports from certain countries, including China and seeking the government's intervention on the issue. Domestic players have also been demanding a curb on imports and review of free trade agreements (FTAs) with several countries.



Former Tech M India biz head to set up AI startup

Former Tech Mahindra India business head Jagdish Mitra has set up an AI startup with a proposed initial investment of Rs 65-80 crore. The startup is likely to commence operations in the next three months. "We will start going to customers in 8-12 months. Initially, we will invest USD 8-10 million," Mitra -- one of the contenders for the post of Tech Mahindra CEO position after CP Gurnani resigned -- said. "Cost arbitrage factor, driven by manpower, is going to be seriously impacted. It will be driven by values. We need to move from a cost-driven proposition to a value-driven proposition. We are going to focus on value proposition. Our firm will start operations within a quarter," Mitra, who moved out of Tech Mahindra earlier this month, said. Without disclosing the name of the company, Mitra said the firm will focus on manufacturing, retail, and sportstech and operate both from the US as well as India. Everyone will not develop chatGPT models. It will cost a huge amount of money.



AdaniConneX raises \$1.44bn from global banks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AdaniConneX, a joint venture equally owned by Adani Enterprises and EdgeConneX that is building data centres, secured India's largest sustainability-linked financing arrangement, raising up to US\$ 1.44 billion (around Rs 11,520 crore), the company said on Sunday. Adani Enterprises Ltd, the flagship of billionaire Gautam Adani-run conglomerate, is investing around US\$ 1.5 billion on its fledgling data centre business in the next three years. Its joint venture with EdgeConneX plans to build nine data centres with a total capacity of 1 gigawatt by 2030 to provide infrastructure for the booming digital services demand. In a statement, the firm said the "financing has an initial commitment of US\$ 875 million, with an accordion feature to extend commitment up to US\$ 1.44 billion."

'Startups in India grew over 300 times in ten years'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From just about 350 startups in 2014, their number in India grew over 300 times in the past ten years after Narendra Modi took over as the Prime Minister, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday. He said the country today has the 3rd largest startup ecosystem globally and is home to the fastest-growing unicorns. "For the first time in the history of independent India, Modi as PM made a painstaking and conscious effort to educate the youth of this country that employment is not confined only to a government job and he has promoted new avenues of livelihood which may be more lucrative than a government job," Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, told PTI here. From just about 350 startups



in the year 2014, startups in India grew over 300 times in ten years after Narendra Modi took over as the Prime Minister, he said. Singh further said PM Modi unleashed India's space research by opening up the hitherto conservative and secluded sector. "India has reached for the moon and beyond with the twin feats of Chandrayaan-3 and Aditya L1 solar mission in the last year alone," he added. Singh said the number of space startups has gone up from a single digit to three dig-

it s in just about four years since the space sector was opened up to the private sector. PM Modi's out-of-the-box decisions have given a push to different sectors including space, railways, roads, infrastructure, and electronics-communication, and which has posted India's economy from 11th rank to 5th largest economy and is now on the verge of occupying third rank, the Union minister said. Singh said, in 2014, when PM Modi took over, India stood as the world's tenth-largest economy. "In less than ten years, we jumped to 5th position. Hopefully this year it will emerge as the 4th largest economy and during PM Modi's 3rd term, India will be the world's 3rd largest economy, marching on to become the no 1 economy by 2047," he added.

Banks may have to slowdown loan growth: S&P

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian banks' credit growth, profitability and asset quality would remain robust in current fiscal reflecting strong economic growth, but they may be compelled to slow down their loan growth as deposits are not growing at a similar pace, S&P Global Ratings has said. In the Asia-Pacific 2Q 2024 Banking Update, S&P Global Ratings Director SSEA Nikita Anand said the agency expects the sector's strong credit growth to moderate to 14 per cent in FY25, from 16 per cent in FY24, if deposit growth, especially retail deposits, remain tepid. Anand said there is a deterioration in loan-to-deposit ratio in every bank, with loan growth being 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth. "We expect banks to bring down their loan growth in FY25 and bring it in line with



deposit growth. If banks do not do that, they would be paying higher to get wholesale funding, which will impact profitability," she said at a recent webinar of S&P Global Ratings. Generally, loan growth has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18 per cent growth, public sector banks on the other hand see loan growth in the range of 12-14 per cent. Anand said Indian banks can support loan growth of as high as 15-20 per cent over three years without need for raising capital. The loan growth is 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth of the banking sector. "For India, we expect credit growth, profitability and asset quality to remain robust reflecting strong economic growth. Loan growth is 1.5 times of nominal GDP growth, while deposit growth is in line with nominal GDP growth. "Loan growth should come in line with deposits rather than outpacing deposits.

Market valuation of 6 firms rises Rs 1.30 L cr

SBI, ICICI Bank top gainers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most valued firms increased Rs 1,30,734.57 crore last week, with State Bank of India and ICICI Bank emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall positive trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark advanced 641.83 points or 0.87 per cent. The valuation of the State Bank of India rallied Rs 45,158.54 crore to Rs 7,15,218.40 crore. ICICI Bank's market valuation rose Rs 28,726.33 crore to Rs 7,77,750.22 crore.



Bharti Airtel added Rs 20,747.99 crore to Rs 7,51,406.35 crore, and that of ITC jumped Rs 18,914.35 crore to Rs 5,49,265.32 crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) advanced by Rs 9,487.5 crore to Rs 6,24,941.40 crore, and that of Infosys went up by Rs 7,699.86 crore to Rs 5,93,636.31 crore. However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 26,115.56 crore to Rs 19,64,079.96 crore. The valuation of HDFC Bank dipped by Rs 16,371.34 cr to Rs 11,46,943.59 cr.

China's share in India's goods imports jump to 30%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With increasing India's dependence on Chinese industrial goods like telecom, machinery and electronics, Beijing's share in New Delhi's imports of such goods rose to 30 per cent from 21 per cent in the last 15 years, a report said. According to the report by the economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), the growing trade deficit with China is a cause of concern, and the strategic implications of this dependency are profound, affecting not only economic but also national security dimensions. From 2019 to 2024, India's exports to China have stagnated at around US\$ 16 billion annually, while imports from China have surged from US\$ 70.3 billion in 2018-19 to over



US\$ 101 billion in 2023-24, resulting in a cumulative trade deficit exceeding US\$ 387 billion over five years. The Indian government and industries must evaluate and potentially recalibrate their import strategies, fostering more diversified and resilient supply chains, GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said. This is imperative not only to mitigate economic risks but also to bolster domestic industries and reduce dependency on single-country imports, especially from a geopolitical competitor like China, he added. "Over the last 15 years, China's share in India's industrial product imports has increased significantly, from 21 per cent to 30 per cent. "This growth in imports from China has been much faster than India's overall import growth, with China's exports to India growing 2.3



The Indian government and industries must evaluate and potentially recalibrate their import strategies, fostering more diversified and resilient supply chains, GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Corporate earnings, US Fed interest rate decision to drive mkts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Quarterly earnings from corporates, the US Fed interest rate decision and other global trends will be the major driving factors for determining movement in the domestic equity market in a holiday-shortened week ahead, analysts said. Besides, factors like trading activity of foreign investors, global oil benchmark Brent crude and rupee-dollar trend would also influence trading. Domestic equity markets would remain closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day.

"Domestically, the next batch of Q4 earnings reports will drive stock-specific movements," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd. Monthly auto sales figures will be announced at the beginning of May, and the next phase of voting will be significant, he said. "On the global front, the outcome of the US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting on May 1st will be important. Economic data releases from China and the US, along with movement in the global currency market, will also be the factors to consider," Meena added.



CII launches corporate governance charter for startups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII on Sunday announced it has launched a charter for startups that enlist voluntary recommendations on corporate governance keeping in view unique nuances to govern startups. The Corporate Governance Charter also prescribes guidelines appropriate for startups based on the specific stages of their life cycle.



"This charter is designed for entities incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013 only, and therefore the term 'Startup'. However, entities which are in the nature of sole proprietorship, limited liability

partnership, partnerships may adopt similar structures/guidelines for corporate governance within their organization," the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated. The purpose of this charter is to help startups become responsible corporate citizens and also enable them to share it with their stakeholders to establish themselves as being well-governed, it said.

Vedanta best-placed to ride rising commodity prices, say analysts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mining conglomerate Vedanta Ltd is likely to see less pressure on cash flows after liability management at the holding company level and is now best placed to ride rising commodity prices, analysts said. Improved performance in aluminium, power and zinc enabled the company to turn in EBITDA of Rs 87,600 crore in the January-March quarter, up by 4 per cent quarter-on-

quarter. The improved performance was attributable to lower cost of production in aluminium and zinc and higher sales volume, partially offset by softer zinc prices. Despite marginal delays, Vedanta is set to complete its alumina/aluminium/intermediate zinc expansion during the current fiscal year (FY25), which will provide visibility around volume growth and cost reduction FY26 onwards.

Sebi bars Growpatal, other entities from securities markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi said that Farm Tech Silo LLP, also known as Growpatal, and other related entities and their directors will remain barred from securities markets till the outcome of a probe into collection of money through unauthorised investment schemes. However, the regulator modified its earlier order and unfroze the bank accounts of agricultural investment platform Growpatal's directors Rituraj Sharma, Gayatri Rinwa and Krishna Sharma. A detailed investigation in the matter is in progress, which may bring out additional acts of omission or commission of the entities, if any, Sebi said, adding that the findings in the extant order are prima facie. "I, under sections of Collective Investment Schemes (CIS) Regulations, hereby confirm the directions issued vide the interim order, till further orders, subject to the modification that the bank accounts of the individuals namely, Rituraj Sharma, Gayatri Rinwa and Krishna Sharma shall be unfrozen," Sebi's whole-time member Amarjeet Singh said



in the latest order on Friday. Singh said the ban will continue as the "proceedings seek to ensure that the funds that are available to the entities are not misused". "Given the lack of clarity around revenues, the apparently exaggerated claims on the land under cultivation and the deficiencies in submission on fund utilisation and financial projections, the balance of convenience lies in favour of continuance of the restraint against the entities till the time the proceedings in the present matter are complete." In an interim order passed in January this year, Sebi had barred Farm Tech Silo LLP (Growpatal), related entities and their directors from collecting money from investors and prohibited them from the securities market till further directions. Also, they were directed to "cease and desist" from floating any collective investment scheme (CIS) directly or indirectly in any manner. Additionally, they have been stopped from collecting money from partners or investors through existing schemes. In its probe, Sebi found that Growpatal offered various investment plans to the public in the agricultural sector. It also claimed to offer fixed tax-free profits in the range of 11 to 14 per cent through investments in the agriculture sector.

Musk in China amid efforts to promote Tesla's tech

PNS ■ BEIJING

Billionaire Elon Musk arrived in Beijing on Sunday amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China. The SpaceX and Tesla chief travelled to China at the invitation of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, meeting with CCPIT president Ren Hongbin to discuss further cooperation with the country, according to Chinese state-run broadcaster CTGN.

Musk is expected to meet senior Chinese officials at the State Council and "old friends" in Beijing, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. His Tesla has become a popular EV in China after he set up a USD seven billion factory in Shanghai which went into production in 2020. Musk, who recently skipped a scheduled visit to India to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to firm up plans to open a Tesla factory in the country, is visiting Beijing when his Tesla market in China is threatened by the local EVs' increasing sales.



The Austin-based (Texas) Tesla has faced fierce competition from Chinese EV makers in the past few years. It has cut the prices of its Shanghai-

made vehicles by up to six per cent to maintain its leading position in China's premium EV segment. Grace Tao, Tesla's vice-president of external relations in China, wrote a commentary piece in China's official newspaper People's Daily on Friday, saying autonomous driving is a key growth driver for the country's new energy vehicle sector, arguing that the technology will hatch new business models such as robotaxis, a vision that Musk has embraced, the Post reported. Musk's latest visit to China coincides with the 2024 Beijing

Auto Show, which kicked off on Thursday. As a stronger backer of Beijing in the US despite concerns over China's rise across the political divide in Washington, Musk enjoys red carpet treatment in China. In 2019, Tesla was allowed to drive cars into the Zhongnanhai compound, the living and working area of Chinese leaders, when former Premier Li Keqiang hosted the CEO, and during Musk's three-day visit to Beijing last June he was received by then foreign minister Qin Gang, according to the Post report.

what's brewing?

'I believe in judiciary,' says Sahil Khan

Sahil Khan, an actor and influencer, was detained by the Mumbai Police on suspicion of being involved in the Mahadev betting app case. The Special Investigating Team (SIT) of the Mumbai cyber cell captured him in Chhattisgarh after the Bombay High Court denied his request for pre-arrest bail. He is being held by the police until May 1. Sahil had already been summoned by the SIT and three other people for questioning in December 2023, but he had failed to appear. Denying any direct affiliation with the betting site, he stated that he was only a brand promoter for The Lion Book brand under a contract with M/s. Sports247. He was a co-owner of the app, according to the police, though. He was transported from Raipur to Mumbai.

In spite of this, the court rejected his bail request, noting that he was personally involved in the unlawful activity. Sahil, who gained notoriety for his parts in *Style* and *Excuse Me*, is now more focused on fitness. He started Divine Nutrition, a company that sells fitness supplements. Authorities reportedly stated that Sahil Khan, a YouTuber and fitness instructor, organised celebrity get-togethers to advertise the app and encourage more people to use it, according to reports in IANS. Several other Bollywood actors were investigated in connection with the issue, which is being investigated concurrently by the Enforcement Directorate after multiple agencies launched a campaign against betting and gambling apps.



PARINEETI CHOPRA WAS ASKED TO LEAVE PROFESSION FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO AFFORD A NUTRITIONIST!



Parineeti Chopra, who costarred with Diljit Dosanjh in the Netflix drama *Amar Singh Chamkila*, is receiving appreciation for her performance. During a recent episode of the podcast *Figuring Out With Raj Shamani*, the actor opened up about her early financial difficulties in the business. She claimed to have a low income and that she had even been told to reconsider pursuing a career in Bollywood if she couldn't afford the costs of staying in shape. Parineeti said that she doesn't come from a wealthy family and mentioned that she was told to pay 2 lakh a month for a personal fitness trainer and a nutritionist in order to lose weight. The actor said, "I don't come from a very rich background. I'm actually a very simple, middle-class girl. I genuinely don't understand Bollywood. I genuinely don't know how people in Mumbai operate. I don't have these high-flying friends. I don't have a trainer or stylist; everything is already ready for me. And people who were already from here and already knew this world judged me a lot." Parineeti added, "I was like, 'I don't have 24 lakh a month to pay. I don't make that money. This is my third film. And I remember going up to a co-actor of mine who has definitely grown up in Bombay, in this world. He's like, 'Why aren't you hiring these people? It's important for your job. I said, 'Listen, but I really can't afford it.' I was paid 5 lakh for my first film (*Ladies vs. Ricky Bahh*). That won't even cover even one month of everything. He was like, 'If you can't afford it, then you shouldn't be in this profession.' And I felt like that's so wrong on so many levels." She also remembered a period of time when she would get fashion advice, but she couldn't afford it and felt guilty about it. Parineeti also mentioned how she didn't have the opportunity to travel first class or business class until much later in life. Parineeti didn't realise she could finally afford to buy the items she wanted, such as purses and shoes, until she had finished her sixth movie and checked her bank account.

Priyanka Chopra recalls how New York turned out to be a 'scary place' for her

Even though Priyanka Chopra Jonas is well-known in Bollywood, she had to overcome adversity and rejection in order to establish her place in Hollywood and embark on a career-defining journey. PeeCee began her career in singles before winning *Quantico*.

However, like any struggling artist, Priyanka's first Hollywood experience was terrifying. Despite being a previous Miss World and one of India's brightest stars, she received no advantage.

Even with her worldwide best-selling album *Exotic*, Priyanka Chopra Jonas found it challenging to make a name for herself in Hollywood, as she discussed on a recent episode of Cavanaugh James's podcast, "Read the Room."

During this professional change, PeeCee reflected on some of her worst days, saying, "It was the industry that I didn't know, the people that I didn't know; I didn't have friends who would call at two in the morning. That is crucial. It was terrifying, and I felt quite alone. In any case, New York City, where I was, is a scary place. That was a difficult time in my life."

Priyanka Chopra did acknowledge, nevertheless, that rejection did make her humble. People did not even get the chance to meet her in the US, despite the fact that she had appeared on some of the largest magazine covers in India. However, she accepted everything with a smile on her face, which is what made her a global star.

Priyanka continued by saying that whereas her family, an Indian family, would "speak over each other's sentences," this was not the situation with Nick's family. She said that she found learning topics like these "really hard." "I know what you are saying, so I'm just going to tell you before you finish," she said. "That's just our cultural makeup."

"We are just like, 'let's just go!'" Priyanka continued. We all talk over each other and are quite noisy. As a result, Nick had to learn how to interrupt others and talk over them.

"Aye, I am saying this," she exclaims. "I have to learn to be patient and give them time to complete their thoughts. I say to myself, 'I understand your point, but I'll wait until you're done.'"



KAJOL MIGHT NOT WATCH HER UPCOMING FILM MAJ; HERE'S WHY!

In her more than thirty years in the industry, Kajol has accomplished a great deal. She has starred in box office hits, taken on challenging roles, and most recently, dabbled with digital entertainment. It's interesting to note, nevertheless, that her filmography lacked a horror film. Not any longer. With Vishal Furia's upcoming *Maa*, the actor is attempting the genre.

The director of the horror film, Saiwyn Quadras, claims that *Madaan* is where the idea for the film first came from. As it happens, the topic of talk started abruptly on the sports drama set when lead actor Ajay Devgn asked about Quadras's upcoming projects. "Ajay sir and I started discussing a few ideas, which we could develop for his banner," the *Madaan* writer says. "He wanted to know whether I had a paranormal story for Kajol. *Maa* is a wholly unique horror movie that surprises you by having a lot of strong feelings in it. Once he was sold on the idea, I was requested to get Kajol, ma'am, to listen to it. She liked it. This is Kajol ma'am's first time working on an emotional, supernatural drama. She keeps stating that she is afraid of horror movies and might not watch *Maa*."

With a plot and screenplay by Saiwyn, *Maa* debuted in Mumbai at the end of February. In March, it was scheduled to appear in Kolkata and several other West Bengal cities. Furia is conducting the third part in Mumbai, and Quadras says he can't fathom anyone else playing a Bengali mother after seeing Kajol in action. "We are making a supernatural movie, but with her around, we are always laughing. Kajol ma'am is a natural in front of the camera. If there is an emotionally intense scene, she is fully in that moment, and as soon as she hears the cut, she is back to cracking jokes and singing songs. The gravitas she brings to the mother's role is fantastic," he shares.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



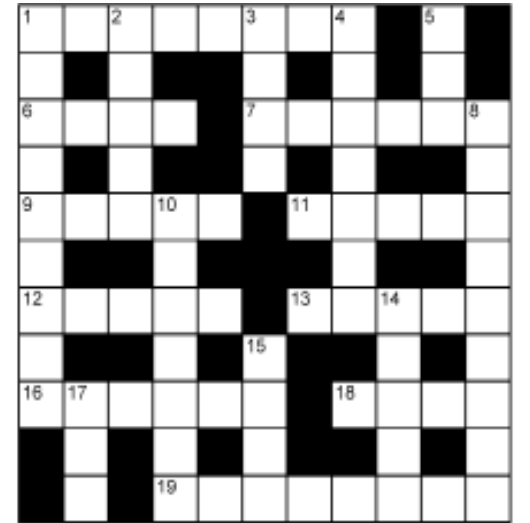
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

- Nice, enjoyable
- Decays
- An animal with a shell
- Causes pain to
- A witch's power
- Footwear
- A hot drink
- A medical professional
- Lengthy
- Inspected closely
- A violent storm with twisting winds
- Unwell
- Swapped
- Go to see shows here
- A king or queen wears this
- Length x width =
- Not at home

DOWN

- Bought
- Go in
- Takes part in a play



GINGER MEGGS



The musical duo, Priyansh Srivastava and Garvit Soni, had embarked on an interesting path of unrelenting dedication to music. The duo, who recently unveiled their debut EP, gets candid with *The Pioneer* about the four tracks of the EP, their strong foundation towards Indian classical music, and more.

Vijayawada



'Dealing with hate is never easy; protecting peace is my priority'

Unnati Malharkar, quite a loveable name in the content creation world, saw the potential of the internet and skillfully used it to carve out a noteworthy position for her in the entertainment industry. The digital star, in an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, discusses her journey, keeping up with the uniqueness, and more.

TEJAL SINHA

Beauty, fashion, and most of all, dance! You think of it, and one of the influencers who is certainly going to pop up in your mind is Unnati Malharkar. The ones who have been following her since the days of Musically would remember her dance videos, which would make us all give her choreography a shot, for sure. Among the many gifted people known for her *Dame Tu Cosita* dance, she is among the most talented artists who recognised the potential of the internet and used it to carve out a prominent position for herself in the entertainment industry. Unnati's dream has always been to teach dance! At the tender age of seven, she began to dance. Determined to pursue her interest in dance, she finished her diploma program at the age of 15, and by the time she was

16 years old, she was teaching dance at the Shiamak Davar Institute of Performing Arts. Her passion and propensity for dancing have always been rather evident. She has consistently given it her all while.

In fact, today, as you go through her posts on the gram, you cannot stop adoring them for more than one reason. Apart from her dance videos, one could just not stop setting great standards with her trips and fashion posts!

Well, from her aesthetic fashion posts to her walking the ramps—a journey that has been no less than a humbling ride. Connecting with the star for an exclusive chat, Unnati gleefully begins, "It's been an incredible ride from the early days of Musically to where I am today. Each step has been filled with learning, growth, and the love of my amazing supporters. It's truly humbling to see how far we've come together. Grateful doesn't even begin to describe it."

Basically, she too was initially one of those who'd post videos of what fans liked. But her skills and passion, got her the attention of the audience! And since then, there has been no looking back and a natural progression into creating more short-format content, and the rest, as they say, is history.

"It was truly the joy of connection and creativity that ignited the spark that ultimately propelled me to dive into creating these videos, and it's been an amazing journey ever since," enthuses the diva.

But would you believe if we said YouTube was never on her radar professionally? Well, that's what she reveals. However, "As I delved deeper into

content creation, I realised the incredible potential it offered to share stories, connect with people, and make a positive impact. So, it became more than just a platform—it became a dream job, allowing me to pursue my passion while reaching out to a wider audience. In my journey, my biggest inspiration has been the unwavering support of my family and the incredible love from my fans. Their belief in me, encouragement, and endless positivity have been my guiding light through every step."

Opinions—everyone is in possession of them. Additionally, some individuals appear to believe that it is their responsibility to ensure that their opinions—about your life, your profession, your hair, and your voice—are heard when you produce anything online.

It wears you out. And it can seriously affect your mental health if you're not careful. So, agreeing to this, she shares, "Dealing with hate is never easy, but I've learned to focus on the positive. I also remind myself that hate often stems from insecurities or misunderstandings. So, I choose to respond with kindness and understanding, knowing that spreading love is always more powerful than spreading hate."

And so, protecting her peace is a top priority. "I'm selective about what I share online, ensuring it aligns with my values and doesn't compromise my peace of mind. I also surround myself with a supportive team that helps me filter content and navigate the online world responsibly. At the end of the day, staying true to myself while maintaining boundaries is key to safeguarding my peace." "Finding a balance between my private and public life is crucial," she says, adding, "While I love sharing snippets of my life with my amazing fans, I also prioritise my personal time and boundaries. Setting clear limits and being mindful of what I share helps me maintain that balance. Ultimately, it's about preserving my authenticity while also protecting my privacy."

In a sea of content creators, staying unique is a challenge for many. In order to keep herself distinctive, Unnati, who was also one of the creators to be felicitated by the Ministry of Culture at Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, shares, "I focus on authenticity, sharing my genuine experiences and perspectives.

Whether it's through humour, storytelling, or creativity, I strive to offer something fresh and relatable. It's about staying true to myself and letting my unique voice shine through in everything I create."

On the work front, there's so much more cooking! "I'm constantly exploring new avenues to connect with my audience and share meaningful content. Whether it's diving into new collaborations, exploring different formats, or simply pushing the boundaries of creativity, there's always something exciting brewing on my plate. The best is yet to come, and I can't wait to share it all with you," she says on a signing note.

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Priyansh Srivastava and Garvit Soni's artistic path is a monument to their unrelenting dedication and unlimited inventiveness, from the seamless integration of Indian classical and contemporary elements to intense live performances that truly connect with audiences. Discover their most recent endeavours, impending partnerships, and the touching backstories of their most well-known songs in this unique look into their musical career!

Each song showcases a combination of passion and the ability of words to arouse feelings, with tunes composed in a matter of days. Garvit reveals that *Jiya Mera*, *Keh Do Na*, *Rasta*, and *Baaton Hi Baaton* are the four tracks of the EP *Lafz*. "*Jiya Mera* was created in September or October, while *Keh Do Na* was created more than a year earlier. The song *Baaton Hi Baaton* featured voices and compositions added to it by songwriters Shikar and Dhairya, who provided a track they immediately identified with. The fourth track, *Rasta*, was written a few months ago. The fact that each song took no more than five or six days to compose is what sets them apart from other tunes. We purposefully chose the name *Lafz* because it means "words," which we feel are a potent means of conveying love and feelings. This title matches the EP's atmosphere, which is why the title is appropriate."

"Priyansh and I have a strong foundation in Indian classical music, with him having completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees in the field," Garvit says, discussing their journey through both modern and Indian classical music. "We both have a strong passion for Indian classical music and take great pleasure in writing and performing ragas. To increase the variety of our musical expression, we are naturally curious to investigate various genres, including pop music. Our most recent project combines modern beats with melodies from traditional Indian music. Previously, we would usually compose something before we would produce it. However, as of late, we have been experimenting with the opposite order—that is, producing before composing. It's been a thrilling exploration voyage. Our fusion style is a representation of our individuality, free from strict formulas that let us explore other genres while maintaining a connection to our cultural heritage. When writing a song, we just go with the flow and feel a strong connection to the music as it develops."

Every song in their repertoire—which ranges from intimate tales to joint ventures—embodies a distinct story and demonstrates the flawless blending of their creative views. Garvit says, "Writing is what we do best, and it's a passion that comes naturally to us. Because we have a natural tendency to write songs, we find that even 30 minutes can result in three or four songs. It all comes down to connecting creatively with one another. We wrote *Keh Do Na* from a personal perspective, with me writing the lyrics and Priyansh expressing his experiences." The outcome, the duo says, was a lovely composition in which the lyrics were more important than the music. Garvit, further continues, "With *Jiya Mera*, on the other hand, we went in a different direction. We wrote the song first and then asked Yashasvi, who is a wonderful writer, to participate. In a day or two, she produced an amazing draft, adding her lyrics to the music. Regarding *Baaton Hi Baaton*, Shikar and Dhairya gave us the first verse of the song, which inspired us to work together and finish the song with our own touch. Encouraged to explore the song further, we took on the task

'LAFZ IS A POTENT MEANS OF CONVEYING LOVE AND FEELINGS'

of writing on a solid basis to add our own touch and broaden the song's possibilities. We met them at a Lucknow event, and in fifteen minutes, they composed a piece of music. I quickly wrote the lyrics after listening to their music, and we produced a demo. We immediately added a tabla group to improve the sound as we semi-produced it. The procedure was simply amazing. We tried to add an Afro flavour to the song *Rasta*, hoping to create a catchy, energetic vibe that would appeal to listeners right away."

As we went on ahead in this interview, Garvit further shared that a challenge they encountered is navigating through the myriad of individuals who may offer misguided advice, claiming expertise they lack and lacking respect for the craft of music. However, "With my partner's help, we added a variety of viewpoints to our songs, which makes it simpler to sort through and stay loyal to our vision. Sometimes our minds work together perfectly since we both love to combine Western, Indian classical, and modern music

styles. We are directed toward a shared creative destiny by our shared vision. We may have different opinions at times; when Priyansh writes, I make recommendations for enhancements, and vice versa. Working together as a pair comes naturally to us, and we both strengthen the composition by balancing each other out. We follow our gut feelings and share our works with people we love, highlighting the significance of having faith in one's music and being true to one's artistic vision."

According to the musicians, working with T-Series was no less than a dream come true. "T-Series contribution was invaluable, particularly with their assistance on our track, *Mere Ranjehna*," gleefully shares Priyansh. "Our EP has received an enormous amount of great feedback, and we are excited to see what kind of reception it receives when it is released. We had an excellent experience working with T-Series. We used their platform to release *Mere Ranjehna* while we were working on a few more tracks. It was easy to work together with their marketing team to plan magazine features, Instagram promotions, and video shoots. It can be difficult for independent musicians to navigate the marketing landscape, but with T-Series' wide network and artist management assistance, we can be sure that our music reaches the right people. It was pleasant and easy to work with them, as they took on some of the marketing responsibilities that independent artists usually bear."

"We're currently immersed in crafting tracks for two upcoming EPs, with numerous songs in our catalog awaiting independent release," said Garvit and Priyansh, regarding their upcoming music. "We are excited to be working on an incredible collaboration, although the identity of the artist is still being withheld for the time being. You'll quickly get into the vibes of this collaboration, don't worry. We're also excited to share the news of our partnership with the artist."

So, you have to keep an eye out for soon-to-be-released details.



Soniya Dembla Balwani's journey into photography began as her father's favourite model, immersed in his passion for capturing moments. Growing up surrounded by his dedication, she unknowingly cultivated her skills in compositions and frames, fostering a genuine love for photography. Inspired by her father's legacy, she embarked on a mission to elevate the art form to new heights, seamlessly transitioning into the profession with her inherent familiarity with the industry. In 2017, Soniya was drawn to the enchanting world of wedding photography, where she discovered a canvas for creative expression and artistic freedom. Entranced by the privilege of immortalising the most precious moments of a couple's journey, she embarked on a journey fuelled by love—love for her father, love for the art of capturing weddings, and passion for the profound impact of photography itself.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FROM HER FOR CREATING A FANTASTIC WEDDING ALBUM:

Immerse yourself in the moment: When distractions are removed, good images can be created that will allow you to focus entirely on what is happening right now. Don't lose yourself on platforms like Pinterest and Instagram; focus on capturing real emotions and interactions instead.

Establish a connection: Before you shoot, take the time to get to know the couple. More accurate and personalised photographs will be possible with insight into their personalities, preferences, or dynamics.

Look for unique perspectives: By exploring creative angles, you can push the boundaries of conventional photography. Try to capture a fresh and inventive image by experimenting with various points of view.

Master lighting techniques: In photography, lighting is of the utmost importance. Develop the ability to use light to enhance mood and atmos-

A GUIDE TO CREATING STUNNING WEDDING ALBUMS

phere in a scene by creating beautiful, ambient compositions.

Plan: The key to a successful shoot is getting ready. In order to guarantee a pleasant and seamless experience, anticipate potential challenges and opportunities while carefully planning the whole session.

Think of the colour palette: Select colours and tones complementary to a shoot's visual style. Harmonising the colour scheme can add depth and cohesion to photographs.

Be discreet: When you're a photographer, try to blend seamlessly into the surroundings so the couple feels comfortable and accessible. A more relaxed and natural posture can be achieved by building rapport and establishing friendly relationships.

Anticipate candid moments: Be aware of the dynamics of the environment and anticipate when genuine, spontaneous moments are likely to occur. Be ready to catch these fleeting moments in a hurry and in a decisive manner.



Use telephoto lenses: To capture candid moments without intruding on the scene, use a telephoto lens when shooting from a distance. This makes it possible to take more intimate and authentic photographs.

Patience is the key to this: Spontaneous moments can happen, and patience may be required when trying to catch them. Do not rush this process; instead, wait patiently and carefully for the perfect moment to arrive.

Optimize the aperture settings: To ensure sharpness and focus throughout the frame, adjust the apertures when taking a group picture. Do not shoot at low ISOs, as this may make subjects out of focus.

Take advantage of natural light: Use natural light to illuminate your subjects whenever possible. The natural light provides a soft and flattering glow, which enhances the mood and atmosphere of photographs, leading to more vivid and atmospheric pictures.

The wedding photographer's ultimate goal is to transport couples back to cherished memories through her films and photographs, allowing them to relive the magic of their wedding day as if it were unfolding before their eyes once again. By forging genuine connections with them and blending seamlessly into the background, she creates an environment where couples feel at ease, enabling her to capture candid moments of genuine emotion and spontaneity. Her photography philosophy is centered on embracing the beauty of authenticity, harnessing the power of natural light, and weaving together narratives that resonate deeply with each couple's unique love story. Through every click of the shutter, she aims to create timeless memories that will be cherished for a lifetime—a testament to the enduring power of love and the art of storytelling through photography.



KKR wary of resurgent DC, marauding McGurk

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Resurgent Delhi Capitals will look to exploit Kolkata Knight Riders' bowling vulnerabilities and ascend to top-four in the table during their Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

With four wins in their last five matches, the Rishabh Pant-led side is gradually assembling their pieces and starting to look like a force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side has endured three defeats in their last five matches with their profligacy in bowling hurting them badly. Signed up as Lungi Ngidi's replacement, Aussie Jake Fraser-McGurk has proved to be their X-factor with his ferocious batting display at the top.

A natural power-hitter with superb hand-eye coordination, the 22-year-old has taken the IPL by storm scoring 247 runs

in five matches at a strike-rate of 237.50.

His brutal treatment of the otherwise sensational Jasprit Bumrah stands as a testimony of his skill-level. McGurk slammed a slower ball from the Mumbai Indians pacer for a six and it was the first time a batter lofted Bumrah for a first-ball six.

The pacer conceded 18 runs in his first over, the most by him in this season in a single over as DC overcame MI by 10 runs on Saturday.

He made a 27-ball 84 against MI, and McGurk will relish the batting-friendly conditions at Eden Gardens where 523 runs, including a record 42 sixes, were scored between Punjab Kings and KKR.

The PBKS on that occasion had scaled down a world record 262.

But DC's batting is not only about McGurk, the South African Tristan Stubbs also left everyone in awe with his astonishing power-hitting, smashing a 25-ball 48 not out



against Mumbai. Pant is also making rapid progress with every match as the DC top-five in Fraser-McGurk, Abhishek Porel, Shai Hope, Pant and Stubbs will be

a cause of concern for KKR bowlers. The KKR replaced injured Mitchell Starc with Sri Lankan pacer Dushmantha Chameera but the latter gave away 16 runs

per over in his debut for KKR and failed to inspire any confidence. Barring spinner Sunil Narine, who returned with 1/24 from his four overs, none of the KKR

bowlers made any impact. IPL's costliest buy Starc has been their biggest letdown and KKR would hope that the Aussie hits his stride soon after overcoming the thumb injury.

In bowling, Kuldeep Yadav who was sidelined under Dinesh Karthik while he was with KKR, will look to prove a point against the Kolkataans as he along with left-arm spinner Axar Patel has formed a formidable spin pair.

However, the home side has some positives to look up to. Narine's sensational form with the bat -- 357 runs from eight matches with two fifties and one century -- has given a thrust to their batting up the order this season.

Narine and Phil Salt have scored bulk of their runs at the top, but the likes of Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Shreyas Iyer, Rinku Singh, Andre Russell and Ramandeep Singh will have to chip in with a bit more runs.

After this match, KKR will be on the road to face Mumbai and Lucknow, hence they will be eager to register a win before those tougher assignments and keep themselves in the play-off race.

TEAMS (FROM)

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Gulbadin Naib, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

India should pick two wrist spinners for T20 WC: Irfan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former all-rounder Irfan Pathan said India must pick five specialist bowlers along with two wrist-spinners in their squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup to be played in the Caribbean and the USA.

With the May 1 deadline for the squad announcement approaching fast, discussions have intensified around the combination of India's squad for the showpiece event starting on June 2.

"You need five good bowlers - that's a must. What are your wicket-taking options? When you're talking about Ravindra Jadeja at No. 8 and playing as a spin (all-rounder), I would rather have two wrist-spinners playing," Pathan told Star Sports.

"I would rather have two proper wrist-spinners playing, (Ravi) Bishnoi and Kuldeep (Yadav), in my playing XI. If you look at Bishnoi's numbers, you know, when he played, he was pretty good." Pathan, however, is not in favour of calling up Rajasthan Royals' Yuzvendra Chahal for the World Cup.



"Yes, we're talking about Chahal right now because of the IPL performances but don't forget the fielding part of it as well. If you have to balance the fielding, you have to balance where a bowler can bowl at the particular area," he said. Pathan conceded that Jasprit Bumrah is the only automatic selection among the bowlers. "There's only one player who you can blindly say (certain for selection) is Bumrah. But apart from Bumrah, you need at least two fast bowlers who can be part of the regular XI," the former India cricketer said. "The biggest problem the Indian team has is the

combination of fast bowling. It's very important to fix that combination, so go towards experience. "With Bumrah, you can see (Mohammed) Siraj and Arshdeep (Singh) there, which I don't think is ideal, but this is the only option you have now," he said. Former India batter K Srikanth, meanwhile, is not in favour of Siraj being selected for the World Cup. "Bumrah is in the squad. Arshdeep as well. But the third pacer can't be Siraj. He'll bowl well in one game and then not perform in 10 games. He's an erratic bowler, you saw it in the World Cup," he

said. "That's why I'm saying we should look at who's bowling well in the death overs, and that is Avesh Khan. He's been performing well and he's done well on the international front, he has a little experience as well. He's mastered the wide yorkers also," Srikanth added.

However, former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody backed Siraj. "He looks mentally and physically fatigued. He has come into this IPL having played a lot of all format cricket for India for a long period of time," he said.

"He plays his cricket in the IPL at probably the hardest venue (Bengaluru) whether you bowl quick or you bowl spin - that needs to be taken into consideration. The third thing is he's playing in a poor side. RCB have been a poor side this year and it's very hard to rise with what's happening around you."

"I would back him 100 per cent to step up in the World Cup, purely because if you look at historically what he's done for India and even what he did in the IPL last year," Moody added.

Samson, Rahul put their hands up for WC selection: Smith

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The classy fifties made by Sanju Samson and KL Rahul in the IPL has intensified the race for the second wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup, reckoned former South African captain Graeme Smith.

The Indian squad for the marquee event in June is set to

be announced soon and Rishabh Pant is set to be drafted in as the first-choice wicketkeeper-batter.

"They (Rahul and Samson) needed to build a partnership. Rahul did it with (Deepak) Hooda and Sanju did it beautifully with Dhruv Jurel. The difference was that Sanju finished the game, while KL got out at a key phase. But it was brilliant to see both excellent players put their

hands up for World Cup selection," said Smith in JioCinema.

Rahul made a 48-ball 76 for Lucknow Super Giants, but Samson trumped that effort with an unbeaten 71 off 33 balls as Rajasthan Royals cruised to a seven-wicket victory.

Former Australian pacer Brett Lee lauded Jurel for supporting Samson with a fine 52 not out off 34 balls

during their unbroken fourth wicket stand that was worth 121 runs.

"He's a quality batter. He's got proper cricket shots. He can play all formats of the game and knows when to go through the gears as needed."

"His shots are classy and have the power to go towards the cow corner. He shows his class and continues to grow in stature," said the New South Welshman.

Batters have evolved quicker than bowlers in IPL: Klusener

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants Assistant coach Lance Klusener placed the quicker evolution of batters as reason behind the frequent tall team totals in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The teams have been going past 200 and even 250 quite effortlessly in this IPL, and the former South African all-rounder opined that the modest performance by bowlers at death overs too has helped batters to add quick runs. "Just looking at the bowling

performances throughout the competition, for me, they have been quite disappointing. There hasn't been a lot of good bowling," Klusener told the media after LSG's seven-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals here on Saturday.

"There's been a lot of ordinary bowling and batsmen are just so good these days, they're taking advantage. Maybe the batsmen have evolved a lot quicker than the bowlers in this competition."

"I haven't seen a lot of good death bowling in the competition and that's why



teams have been able to take advantage. Sure, surfaces have

been flat. I haven't seen a lot of swing either," he added. Klusener observed that the bowlers are opting for several variations at death but they have not been using the wide yorkers enough.

"It's easy to overcomplicate. If you run in and execute even four out of six yorkers... We don't see that anymore. We don't see that skill," he said.

"We're going to slower balls and a whole lot of other variations. That pure death bowling of yorkers, whether it's wide or straight, that's a skill that we don't see very often these days," he added.

OTHER SPORTS

Archery WC: India men team shocks Olympic champions Korea to bag historic gold

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Indian men's recurve team of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav shocked reigning Olympic champions South Korea in a historic win to land an Archery World Cup gold medal after 14 years, here on Sunday.

This triumph over the archery powerhouse in well over a decade also comes as a boost to their chances of securing a berth in the upcoming Paris Olympics. The trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep and Pravin showed ice-cool composure to get the better of mighty Koreans without dropping a set.

The 40-year-old Army man Tarundeep was also a part of



the gold medal-winning team in Shanghai World Cup Stage 4 in August 2010. Then the recurve team comprising Rahul Banerjee, Tarundeep and Jayanta defeated Japan. In a battle between the top two seeds of the competition, India won 5-1 (57-57, 57-55, 55-53), taking their gold medal count to five in the season-opening Stage 1 World Cup.

The success also rubbed on

the recurve mixed team of Ankit Bhakart and Dhiraj who trounced Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande of Mexico 6-0 (35-31, 38-35, 39-37) to win bronze.

On a comeback trail after missing the whole 2023 after becoming mother in December 2022, Deepika Kumari faltered in the final hurdle to settle for a silver in the women's recurve individual section.

Messi gets two goals in front of record New England crowd

AP ■ MASSACHUSETTS (US)

Lionel Messi scored two goals to excite a New England Revolution-record crowd, leading Inter Miami CF to a 4-1 victory on Saturday night.

Messi didn't disappoint the crowd of 65,612 that filled Gillette Stadium, scoring on a left-footed kick from deep inside the box for his ninth goal of the season, breaking a 1-all tie in the 68th minute. In fact, he made a little history, too. Miami posted on the social platform X that he was the first player in MLS history to record 16 goal contributions in his first seven games of a season.

"Obviously, he's done it his whole life. We expect it from him," said teammate

Benjamin Cremaschi, who scored the third goal after Messi's shot was stopped. "He makes it look so easy. We're just happy that we have him by our side. When he has the opportunity, he takes it."

The attendance beat the previous record of 61,316, when the Revolution lost to the LA Galaxy in the 2002 MLS final.

In the opening half, he was a few feet inside the box, scoring on a left-foot kick to tie it at 1-1 in the 32nd minute.

"I thought in the first half, after (our) goal, we had them locked up pretty good," New England coach Caleb Porter said. "They weren't getting many chances, they weren't getting a lot of time and space to operate," he said.

Indian women team seals Uber Cup quarterfinal spot

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Isharani Baruah and Anmol Kharb shone bright as the Indian women's team entered the quarterfinals of the Uber Cup badminton tournament with a lopsided 4-1 win over Singapore in the second tie of group A, here on Sunday.

Asian champions India, who had defeated Canada 4-1 in the opening tie, produced another fine show as they recovered from the opening match loss of Ashmita Chaliha and went on to win the rest of the contests with ease to come up trumps.

It turned out to be a fine weekend for the young and inexperienced Indian side who were missing the big guns, but they displayed their skill and temperament at the big stage to win two out of two ties.

China blanked Canada 3-0 in another group A match and



the result was enough for both India and their Asian neighbours to seal the quarterfinal spot.

With the twin victories, India are now placed in the second position behind China in Group A. The two teams will clash on Tuesday in their final group match to decide the top spot.

The 53rd-ranked Chaliha, who had outwitted Canada's Michelle Li on Saturday, found the going tough

against world No. 18 Yeo Jia Min on Sunday, going down 15-21, 18-21.

National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, then brought India back with a 21-15, 21-16 win over Xiao En Heng and Jin Yu Jia in the final women's doubles.

Isharani, ranked 83rd, went on to double India's lead by claiming a 21-13, 21-16 win over Insyirah Khan in the second singles.

2012 Olympic champion Gabby competes for first time in eight years at American Classic

AP ■ TEXAS

Whether the gymnastics star's return to the sport carries all the way to the Paris Olympics remains to be seen.

Douglas, who became the first Black woman to win the Olympic all-around title when she triumphed in London in 2012, competed for the first time in eight years on Saturday at the American Classic.

The 28-year-old looked rusty in spots and promising in others while posting a score of 50.65 in the all-around. Douglas qualified in multiple events for the U.S. Championships in Fort Worth, Texas, next month. She will get another chance to qualify for the all-

around competition at nationals when she takes the floor at the U.S. Classic in Hartford, Connecticut, on May 18.

Douglas last competed at the 2016 Rio Olympics, where she helped the Americans claim a second straight gold in the team competition. She took an extended break from the sport but never officially retired. The itch to come back returned while watching the 2022 U.S. Championships, and she's spent the better part of the last two years training in the Dallas area with an eye toward trying to make the five-woman U.S. Team that will be heavily favored to win gold in Paris this summer.

Her comeback, however, has been shrouded in mystery. She was



supposed to compete at Winter Cup in February but she pulled out of the competition just days before after testing positive for COVID-19. She has limited press exposure and unlike 2020 Olympic gold medalist Sunisa Lee and Jade Carey - both of whom competed at American Classic - she opted not to participate in podium training on Friday.

Douglas walked out onto the floor about an hour before competition and showed flashes of what turned her into a star in London. Her double-twisting Yurchenko on vault had plenty of amplitude and on bars - her best event - she had the pieces of a routine that would certainly be competitive at the elite level.

consistently.

Douglas came off bars twice and her floor routine lacked the crispness and endurance to stack up with what will be required for anyone hoping to make a serious bid for the Olympic team. There is time for Douglas, but not much. The U.S. Classic is in three weeks. The U.S. Championships are in five and the Olympic Trials await in Minneapolis in late June.

Carey, who won gold on floor exercise in Tokyo, captured the all-around with a score of 55.000 while also recording the top scores on vault and floor. Lee, who has dealt with kidney-related health issues the last two years, put together a dazzling beam routine to win easily with a score of 14.

Faria Abdullah discusses laughter-packed journey in *Aa Okkati Adakku*

PNS | HYDERABAD

In the bustling world of Indian cinema, where every release is eagerly awaited, a new film is sparking a buzz: *Aa Okkati Adakku*. This forthcoming comedy venture, set to hit screens on May 3, is poised to be a refreshing addition to the genre, helmed by the stalwart Allari Naresh and a stellar team of creatives.

Under the visionary direction of Malli Ankam and the production prowess of Rajiv Chilaka, Chilaka Productions proudly presents a film that promises not just laughs but also a glimpse into the complexities of modern relationships.

Faria Abdullah, the leading lady of the film, offered an exclusive sneak peek into the heart and soul of *Aa Okkati Adakku*.

According to Faria, her character in the film is very dynamic. "My character's name in this is Siddhi. She's someone who relishes freedom and detests living by the rules. The dynamic between my character and the hero, who is quite the opposite, creates an engaging conflict laced with a hint of attraction. What drew me to this story was its beautiful portrayal of the complexities surrounding marriage, a theme that resonates universally," Faria begins, her eyes lighting up with enthusiasm.

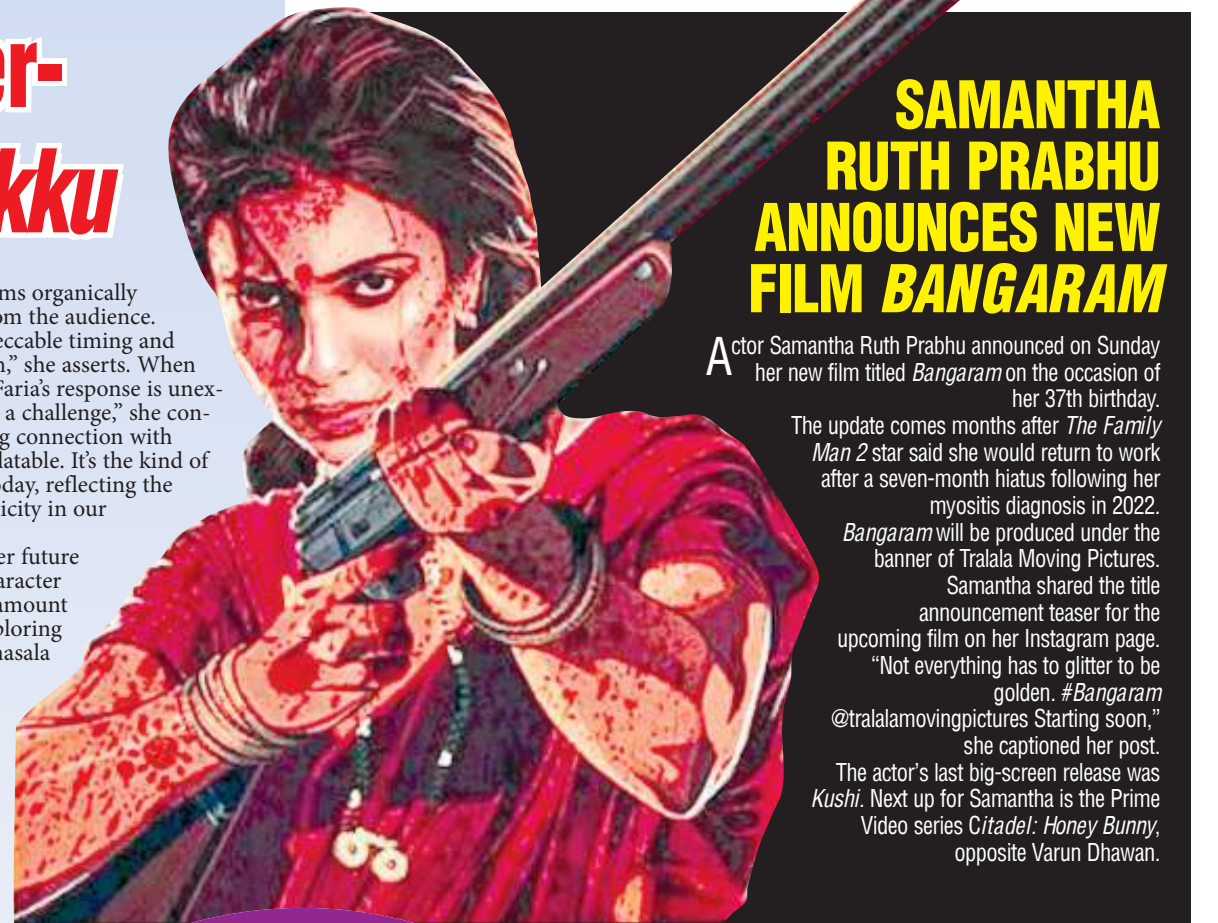
Delving into the film's thematic depth, Faria elaborates, "We delve into various facets of marriage, moving beyond the conventional notions of the perfect wife or husband. The narrative reflects the evolving dynamics of modern marriages, incorporating elements like matrimonial sites and familial relationships, making it a captivating watch for audiences."

The actress's admiration extends to director Malli Ankam, as she expressed that he is the man who brought a bound script to the table, brimming with excitement and creativity.

Faria was also part of the biggest blockbuster comedy hits of Telugu cinema, which is *Jathi Rathmalu*. This film again belongs to the same genre and is not new to the actress, however, she reflects that the comedy in

Aa Okkati Adakku is refreshingly different. "It stems organically from the situations, ensuring genuine laughter from the audience. Working alongside Naresh was a delight; his impeccable timing and comedic genius added layers of hilarity to the film," she asserts. When asked about the challenges of portraying Siddhi, Faria's response is unexpectedly serene. "Surprisingly, it didn't feel like a challenge," she confesses with a smile, adding, "I found a strong connection with Siddhi, and the narrative felt incredibly relatable. It's the kind of content that resonates with audiences today, reflecting the yearning for spontaneity and authenticity in our lives."

As the conversation shifts to her future aspirations, Faria shares that character depth and significance are paramount for her, and she is keen on exploring a spectrum of genres, from masala entertainers to horror thrillers. "Additionally, I aspire to venture into action-packed roles, bridging the gap in the industry for actresses in the action genre," she shared, adding, "I'm thrilled to be a part of *Mathu Vadalaru 2*, along with other exciting ventures like *Bhagavanthudu* and a Tamil film awaiting release."



SAMANTHA RUTH PRABHU ANNOUNCES NEW FILM BANGARAM

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu announced on Sunday her new film titled *Bangaram* on the occasion of her 37th birthday. The update comes months after *The Family Man 2* star said she would return to work after a seven-month hiatus following her myositis diagnosis in 2022. *Bangaram* will be produced under the banner of Tralala Moving Pictures. Samantha shared the title announcement teaser for the upcoming film on her Instagram page. "Not everything has to glitter to be golden. #Bangaram @tralalalovingpictures Starting soon," she captioned her post. The actor's last big-screen release was *Kushi*. Next up for Samantha is the Prime Video series *Citadel: Honey Bunny*, opposite Varun Dhawan.

Jhanvi Narang enters production with Priyadarshi

With the blessings of Narayan Das Narang, Production No. 9 of Sree Venkateswara Cinemas LLP (SVCLLP) was announced. Rana Daggubati's Spirit Media presents the movie starring the in-form Priyadarshi, who is enjoying the best phase of his career. Navneeth Sriram is making his directorial debut with the movie, which marks the maiden production venture for Jhanvi Narang. Priyadarshi, who attained big success with *Balagam*, scored a blockbuster this year with *Om Bheem Bushi*. While the *Save The Tigers* franchise is one of the biggest hit Telugu originals of all time, Priyadarshi has a wonderful line-up of films.

This new movie is a quirky romantic tale with a fresh concept, where Priyadarshi will be seen in a different yet hilarious role. The movie gets a catchy tagline, "Thrill-u Praptirasthu," which indicates the kind of experience it is going to give in cinemas. Jhanvi Narang, under the guidance of Suniel and Bharat Narang, is planning to make some content-rich movies, and this out-and-out-entertainer that will appeal to all sections will be a first attempt.

She is fortunate to have the patronage of a star like Rana Daggubati, who has vast experience in production and is a virtuoso at selecting scripts.

The script work for the movie is complete, and pre-production will kick off soon. The movie is set to go on floors in January, 2025. The film's title will be revealed soon, along with cast and crew details.



Anand Deverakonda teases release date for *Gam Gam Ganesha*

Excitement is building among cinephiles as actor Anand Deverakonda tantalisingly hints at the upcoming release date for his much-anticipated film, *Gam Gam Ganesha*. The actor took to social media to share a sneak peek into the project, a crime comedy drama that has been in the works for a couple of years. Deverakonda remains optimistic, asserting that "all's well that ends well." With its unique blend of comedy and drama, *Gam Gam Ganesha* promises to offer audiences a fresh take on the genre, presenting humour and intrigue in a new and innovative manner. Accompanying the announcement was an image of Lord Ganesha, symbolising auspicious beginnings and blessings for the film's journey ahead. As Deverakonda aptly describes it, *Gam Gam Ganesha* is not just a movie but "a small film with a big heart," suggesting a narrative brimming with emotion and sincerity. The actor wrote on his X handle on Sunday: "#GamGamGanesha release date announcement soon. A crime comedy drama that we've been working on for a couple of years. I faced a few hurdles in the making, but like they say, 'All's well that ends well.' I hope you all love it. The comedy and drama are handled in a new and different way. Definitely 'a small film with a big heart.'"

Directed by debutant Uday Bommisetty, the film stars Pragati Srivastava as the female lead, while Nayan Sarika plays a crucial role. Kedar Selagamsetty and Vamsi Karumanchi are producing the movie under the banner of Hylife Entertainment, with Chaitan Bharadwaj rendering the tunes. On the other hand, sources inform us that the film may release on May 31.



Mrunal Thakur opens up about her discomfort with intimate scenes

Renowned for her compelling performances and magnetic screen presence, Mrunal recently opened up about her discomfort with intimate scenes on screen, shedding light on the complex interplay between personal values, career aspirations, and industry demands.

In a candid interview with iDivya, Mrunal bared her soul, revealing how her reluctance to engage in intimate scenes had cost her several film opportunities. Recounting her journey, she shared, "I was not really comfortable doing scenes that were intimate, like romantic. I would just get scared; I'd just say no to a film, but how long could I say no?"

The actress's candid admission highlights the delicate balance between personal comfort and professional aspirations that many Bollywood stars grapple with behind the scenes. "As much as I wanted to do a film, I had to drop because there was a kissing scene involved," she explained, adding, "As an actor, you need to be ready because sometimes that's the demand of the scene. If you are not comfortable, you can tell; you can talk about it, but I kept missing out on films because of that."

Touching upon a topic rarely discussed in the limelight, Mrunal also shared her thoughts on considering the option

of freezing her eggs, mirroring the choices made by fellow actress Mona Singh. "Freezing eggs, yes, I'm also considering that," she revealed, offering a glimpse into the multifaceted realities faced by modern Bollywood stars.

In her recent outings on the silver screen, Mrunal has captivated audiences with her performances in films like *Family Star* alongside Vijay Deverakonda and *Hi Nanna* opposite Nani. As she gears up for her upcoming project, *Pooja Meri Jaan*, fans eagerly anticipate witnessing her versatile talent and unwavering commitment to her craft unfold once again on the big screen.



EXCLUSIVE UPDATES ABOUT KARTHI'S UPCOMING FILMS

Karthi is a versatile actor renowned for his compelling performances and diverse roles. With fans eagerly awaiting updates on his upcoming ventures, a slew of exciting projects have been revealed by sources, promising an enthralling cinematic experience in the days to come.

Amidst fervent speculation and eager anticipation, it has been revealed that Karthi's much-awaited project, *#Sardar2*, is gearing up to commence shooting soon. While an official announcement is slated for next month, insiders hint that filming is scheduled to kick off in June, igniting excitement among fans who have long awaited the sequel's arrival.

In a collaboration that promises to captivate audiences, Karthi is also immersed in the filming of '96 Prem Kumar's



#Meiyazhagan. The shooting of this project is now complete, and post-production efforts are underway.

On the other hand, adding to the excitement, Karthi is set to mesmerise audiences in Nalan Kumaraswamy's *#VaVathiyare*. As the filming progresses in full swing in Chennai, reports suggest that the project is slated for completion next month, hinting at an imminent release that is sure to set hearts racing.

Amidst the flurry of activity surrounding these projects, fans find themselves on the edge of their seats, eagerly anticipating the unveiling of posters, teasers, and trailers that promise to offer a sneak peek into the cinematic brilliance that lies in store. With Karthi at the helm, each project is poised to redefine storytelling, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of audiences worldwide.

Sreeleela set to make her Tamil debut with Ajith's *Good Bad Ugly*

Poised to make her mark in Tamil cinema is actress Sreeleela, whose mesmerising performances have already won over Telugu audiences. Amidst much anticipation and excitement, it has been confirmed that Sreeleela is set to make her Tamil debut, adding a new dimension to her burgeoning career.

Sources reveal that she has been finalised to star in Ajith's highly anticipated film, *Good Bad Ugly*, marking a significant milestone in her cinematic journey.

The first phase of filming for *Good Bad Ugly* is slated to commence on May 10 in Hyderabad, setting the stage for a captivating tale that promises to enthrall audiences with its riveting narrative and stellar performances.

However, she will share screen space with actress Trisha in this film. This isn't the first time that Sreeleela has shared screen space with another heroine. In the recently released *Bhagavath Kesari*, too, the actress was seen alongside Kajal, and the film won her accolades all over.



17 different sets made for *Vishwambhara*

High-on-VFX socio-fantasy, *Vishwambhara*, the next big film from megastar Chiranjeevi, is directed by Vassistha Mallidi of *Bimbisara* fame. The 26-day schedule's high-voltage interval block was just wrapped up by the squad.

According to the most recent information, nine of the seventeen sets that art director AS Prakash built for the movie have had filming finished. The majority of these sets were constructed in Hyderabad's Annapurna Studios. The remaining eight sets will soon be shot.

Leading lady Trisha Krishnan has also joined the team. The other important cast members of the film include Ashrita Vemuganti Nanduri, Esha Chawla, and Ramya Pasupaleti. UV Creations is totally behind this big endeavor, which features music by the Grammy-winning MM Keeravaani. The movie is scheduled to debut in theaters on January 10, 2025.

