





# Victory of BJP in LS polls a foregone conclusion

The last Lok Sabha session of the 17th Lok Sabha concluded. The general elections are round the corner. The time has come again for the people to decide the nation's future. They saw several governments run by various parties in independent India. Since 1947, they observed the style of working of at least 14 prime ministers.

Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure as the PM was the longest of all the PMs that ruled India so far.

Even when the British was in power, Jawaharlal Nehru was in power for nearly about a year from September 2, 1946 to August 14, 1947. Then he was not the democratically elected PM.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his book titled "India Wins Freedom" mentioned that against the wishes of the majority Congress leaders who supported Sardar Patel for the PM post, Gandhi was inclined towards Nehru for the PM post.

Because of this, Nehru con-

tinued as the PM for 17 years since 1947 till he breathed his last in 1964. During his lifetime, he appointed Indira Gandhi as the Congress president and ensured that the party as well as the government were under her control. That was why she was elected PM in 1966 after the death of Lal Bahadur Sastry, who was in the PM's chair for only 19 months.

This way, Nehru kicked off the practice of the politics of heredity. Indira Gandhi was the PM for 15 years and her son, Rajiv Gandhi, held the post for five years. In fact, Nehru-Gandhi family ruled the nation for 38 years.

Though Manmohan Singh was the PM from 2004 to 2014 during the UPA regime, it is everyone's knowledge that he ran the government under the thumb of Sonia Gandhi and even Rahul Gandhi exercised authority on him.

Sonia Gandhi and her camp followers posed lot of trouble to former PM PV Narasimha Rao who did not belong to Nehru-

**Narendra Modi government honoured PV Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh and pioneer of Green Revolution in India and agricultural scientist Swamynathan. He proved that only non-Congress governments would be able to achieve such major tasks.**



**Y SATYA KUMAR**  
BJP National Secretary

such major tasks.

The Congress fielded its candidate twice against Dr BR Ambedkar to ensure his electoral defeat and insulted him by not declaring Bharat Ratna to him. With the support of the BJP, Bharat Ratna was given to Ambedkar by the BJP-supported government at the Centre.

Earlier, non-Congress PMs led coalition governments, but Narendra Modi is the one and only non-Congress PM who enjoyed complete majority in the House.

In 1952, the first-ever general elections were held. After the elections, PM Jawaharlal Nehru continued in the post for 12 years. To break the record, Narendra Modi is going to get elected PM for the third time.

In the first general elections, the Congress got 364 Lok Sabha seats. Now, the BJP is raring to break the record. Therefore, the Congress securing huge majority was not a big deal. But the opposition parties have been

firing on all cylinders and coming with various agenda to ensure defeat of BJP for the past 10 years. The real victory goes to Narendra Modi who frustrated their designs.

The main reason for the victory of Modi is the people seeing through the difference in the administration between Gandhi-Nehru family and that of Modi.

Today, the way the government is approaching the people to explain the development and its welfare schemes under the title Vikasi Bharat Sankalp Yatra stands as a testimony to the confidence of the government. It is not an ordinary thing to make the economically weak nation one of the five top economies of world in just 10 years in spite of Covid-19 rocking the country. The nation emerged as a real independent nation under Modi's regime.

No other government took the unprecedented measures

initiated by Modi government to strengthen the four main pillars to the country – women power, youth power, the poor and the farmers. The opposition parties criticise that the PSUs were dealt a blow during Modi's regime. But, why did not they reveal it to the people that the number of PSUs increased from 234 in 2014 to 254 currently and their gross profits multiplied to Rs 2.5 lakh crore now as against Rs 1.25 lakh crore earlier and their total worth increased to Rs 17 lakh crore from the previous Rs 9.5-lakh crore?

Even the people of Jammu and Kashmir enjoy the same rights as the rest of the people of the country and also benefit from the same laws. The Indian Constitution is applicable to them also.

The people realised that the Opposition parties would not speak truth but spread falsehoods. That is why the victory of the BJP in the LS elections is going to be a foregone conclusion.

# Concerns over complex TET, DSC syllabus mount

Candidates say it's practically impossible to cover the extensive syllabus

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Aspiring teachers preparing for the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) and the District Selection Committee (DSC) exams are expressing growing frustration and concern over the complexity of the syllabus, which they claim has reached unprecedented levels. They argue that the syllabus has been deliberately inflated, potentially to undermine the aspirations of unemployed individuals vying for DSC positions.

Typically, the syllabus for TET and DSC exams aligns closely with the content and methodology taught in schools. Candidates preparing for the TET exam usually refer to syllabi ranging from third to 10th standard for

Diploma in Education (DD) candidates and sixth to Intermediate for Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) candidates. However, candidates argue that the Education Department has introduced a significant challenge by implementing syllabi from previous academic years, particularly from 2019 to 2023, under the administration of the YSRCP. Furthermore, changes to the syllabus for Classes VI, VII, and VIII in the academic year 2023-24 have added to the burden.

Candidates contend that it is practically impossible to cover the extensive syllabus, which has undergone multiple revisions over the years. For instance, the syllabus for the ninth class alone requires at least two months of dedicated study time. The methodology

section, crucial for Secondary Grade Teacher (SGT) candidates, has also seen significant changes. While previously there were five methods, the government expanded this to nine. Candidates now face the daunting task of studying each methodology book, which spans a hefty 300 pages. Completing the nine methods alone is estimated to take two months. Moreover, the addition of perspective education in the DSC syllabus further complicates matters. Candidates highlight that the syllabus demands attention to all subjects alongside methodology, increasing the workload substantially.

Adding to the candidates' woes are the compressed timelines between the TET and DSC exams. Historically, there

has been a gap of at least two months, allowing candidates to transition smoothly. However, the recent schedule has left only a week between the two exams, leaving little time for adequate preparation. Additionally, candidates lament the recent fee hikes for both exams.

While the TET fee has increased from Rs. 250 to Rs. 750, and the DSC fee has risen from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,200, candidates feel burdened by the financial strain.

As the TET is scheduled from March 27 to April 9, with results expected on March 14, followed by the DSC exams from March 17 to March 30, candidates are urging authorities to address their concerns and ensure a fair and manageable examination process.

## Botsa unveils...

Continued from Page 1

He outlined the government's "zero vacancies" policy, ensuring annual recruitment to maintain staff levels. The Minister also disclosed GOs 11 and 12, which provide comprehensive guidance on DSC management. Additionally, he inaugurated the website <http://cse.gov.in> for DSC 2024.

Furthermore, Minister Botsa Satyanarayana announced the establishment of a dedicated help desk at the Commissioner School Education Department's office to address DSC 2024-related complaints. Helpline numbers 9505619127 and 9705655349 are available for assistance.

Principal Secretary of State Education, Praveena Prakash, elaborated on the details contained in GO No. 11, focusing on teacher appointments, and GO No. 12, which outlines various qualifications. State Commissioner of School Education, Suresh Kumar, assured the availability of adequate facilities across the state to accommodate 35,000 to 40,000 candidates daily.

# Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra launched for development goals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Solomon Arokiaaraj, Joint Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs, urged citizens, officials, public representatives, and volunteers to engage in the Vikasit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, aligning with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The yatra aims to propel India towards development goals, with the government implementing various welfare schemes designed to elevate the nation to developed status by 2047. Inaugurating the Vikasit Bharat Sankalp Yatra at the in Malkapuram, Solomon Arokiaaraj, emphasized the central government's commitment to design and implement various welfare schemes. These initiatives strive to propel India into the ranks of developed nations by 2047 while ensuring financial benefits for all eligible individuals.

Highlighting the ambitious goals, Arokiaaraj explained that India, currently the world's 5th largest economy, aspires to become the 3rd largest economy in the near future. The Sankalp Yatra aims to create two crore women millionaires and extends numerous welfare



programs for women and youth. The government has already provided houses and infrastructure facilities to meet basic needs. Arokiaaraj outlined the objectives of several schemes, including Ayushman Bharat Yojana, PM Awas Yojana, PM Poshan Abhiyan, Deenadayal Antyodaya Yojana, PM Ujjwal Yojana, PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, PM Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana, and more.

He stressed the importance of water for welfare and economic benefits and noted the significant allocations made in the central budget for the development of roads, railway lines, and ports. The ongoing Vikasit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programs in Visakhapatnam aim to create awareness about the various benefits and welfare schemes offered, encouraging eligible

beneficiaries to register their names for government attention.

Later in the program, Arokiaaraj visited stalls, provided gas connections to beneficiaries, distributed gifts to students, and took the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra pledge with attendees. State Secretary Surendra Mohan urged India to strive for development, highlighting that 11 crore people have already received free gas connections worth Rs. 7 thousand under the Ujjwala scheme. GVMC Additional Commissioner S.S. Verma emphasized the importance of registering names installed for various schemes, facilitating the delivery of welfare benefits. The program also showcased the Eco Vizag initiative to develop Visakhapatnam as an eco-friendly city for the health protection of its residents.

## Hearing in plea against Naidu bail ...

Continued from Page 1

He was arrested on September 10 and was granted conditional bail on October 31 by Andhra Pradesh High Court. The court granted regular bail on November 20.

The CID appealed to the Supreme Court seeking cancellation of the bail. When the apex court took up the hearing on Monday, February 12, Naidu's advocate Harish Salve was not available to present the arguments. Advocate on behalf of the AP Government Ranjith Kumar urged the court to dispose of the case as early as possible.

# Steps to improve skills of AP youth explained

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) successfully hosted an Industry & Academia meeting on the Engineering & IT Skills Workshop on Monday. The meeting provided a vital platform for key stakeholders from the Government, industry, and academia to convene and deliberate on strategies aimed at enhancing skill development initiatives in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Vinod Kumar V. MD&CEO, APSSDC, delved into the opportunities for upskilling & reskilling in Andhra Pradesh, shedding light on various initiatives undertaken by the AP State Government to bolster



skill development activities. Dr Vinod Kumar also shared insights from his recent visit to Korea, underlining the growing demand for skilled manpower from Andhra Pradesh.

Prof Hemachandra Reddy, Chairman, APSCHIE, emphasized the crucial need for convergence among skill development activities through collaboration between industry, academia, and the government to

enhance the efficiency of the Skill Development ecosystem. He encouraged greater industry collaboration and the adoption of relevant courses by engineering colleges to drive transformative change in the skilling landscape.

Dr G Pardha Saradhi Varma, Vice Chancellor, KL University, commended APSSDC's efforts in precision

skill development programs, highlighting KLU's commitment to deploying such initiatives effectively.

During the event, APSSDC inked Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with ExcelR Ed Tech Pvt. Ltd., HERE Technologies, GUVI, Wadhawani Foundation, NASSCOM, ORACLE Academy, CTE, 360DiviTM and ICT Academy, furthering the commitment to enhancing skill development opportunities for students.

Dr Sriath Den Skill Development KL University Dr Ravi Gujjula, Chief General Manager - Technical, APSSDC, Seepan Srinivas DRDO, Pranay DSDO, Naresh DSDO along with prominent industry leaders, representatives from universities were present.

# CM Jagan to take part in...

Continued from Page 1

The CM said, "The government has launched the mega tournament 'Aadudam Andhra' with twin objectives of creating awareness at the grassroots level about the importance of physical activity and health, sharpening the talent of young sportspersons in rural and urban areas, and producing sporting heroes for the nation. To instil sportsmen spirit, to encourage healthy lifestyle through sports, to unearth hidden sporting gems and make them shine in National and International arena, the Government has conducted massive sports endeavours spanning from Village/ Ward secretariat level to state level." Minister for Tourism and Sports, RK Roja said that Jagananna Government will identify talented sportspersons through the Andhra Cricket Association, associations of various sports disciplines and franchises like

Pro Kabaddi, Black Hawks Volleyball, Chennai Super Kings (CSK), and will provide them with quality training and prepare them to participate in national and international competitions. She explained that a total of 25,40,972 sportspersons participated in this sports extravaganza across the State. Of these, 17,59,263 were male and 7,81,709 were female.

A total of 80 lakh spectators watched the competitions. Minister Roja mentioned that the Jagananna Government provided sports kits worth about Rs 37 Crores, cash prizes of over Rs. 12 Crores, and many other attractive prizes to the sportspersons. The officials said that a 50-day sporting extravaganza that spanned the entire State from village/ward secretariat level to the state level and from now on, every year, The Aadudam Andhra will be held with the concept of Idi Andhari Aata (sports of all). Under the "Aadudam Andhra" initia-

tive, the Jagan Government has organised a total of 3.30 lakh matches at the Village/Ward secretariat level, 1.24 lakh matches at the Mandal level, 7,346 matches at the constituency level, 1,731 matches at the district level, and 260 matches at the state level and to make our sportspersons shine at national and international levels.

Andhra Pradesh's cricket sensation KS Bharat emphasised, "Just like how education is important, we understand that sports also build courage and confidence in our youth. Aadudam Andhra, therefore, stands as a beacon of opportunity for the state's youngsters, bridging the gap between ambition and achievement." Bharat expressed his conviction, stating, "Aadudam Andhra is like a bridge for our youngsters to chase their dreams, and I truly believe they'll see those dreams come true someday."

## Govt-staff...

Continued from Page 1

Following the conclusion of the meeting, Botsa Satyanarayana addressed the media, stating that discussions revolved around addressing the Rs 5,600 crore arrears issue. The Minister emphasised that they have instructed the chief secretary and finance department officials to expedite the resolution of pending employee matters.

Additionally, he announced an ex gratia payment of Rs 50 lakh and assured a job for one family member of the murdered MRO in Visakhapatnam.

# Rozgar Mela: Minister distributes appointment letters to youth

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Union Minister of State Rajeev Chandrasekhar attended the 12th Rozgar Mela organised by the Visakhapatnam Port Authority on Monday. The minister personally distributed appointment letters to 194 newly recruited Central government personnel.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Chandrasekhar reiterated the government's unwavering dedication to fostering ample employment avenues, echoing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for bolstering job opportunities. He highlighted the government's steadfast focus on this objective, citing the distribution of nearly one lakh appointment letters across various Rozgar Melas held under the Prime Minister's leadership. Chandrasekhar hailed the Rozgar Mela as a pivotal step towards realising this mission, providing avenues for skilled professionals across diverse sectors.

Reflecting the nationwide reach of the Rozgar Melas, Minister Chandrasekhar revealed that 46 locations across the country hosted similar

events, offering employment opportunities in various sectors including the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and more.

The successful candidates from this recruitment drive were offered positions in diverse departments such as Revenue, Higher Education, Home Affairs, Defense, Health and Welfare, Financial Services, and Tribal Affairs, signifying a wide range of employment prospects within critical government functions.

Moreover, Chandrasekhar engaged in discussions with representatives from Visakhapatnam's burgeoning IT sector, reaffirming the government's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to economic growth and innovation.

Dignitaries present at the event included BJP MP GVL Narasimha Rao, CISF DIG Mateti Nandan, CISF Senior Commandant Praneet Chandra, CISF Commandant Satish Kumar Bajpai, and Visakhapatnam Port Secretary T. Venugopal, among others.



GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

PANCHAYATI RAJ DEPARTMENT

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

No. T.Q.98 to 65/2023-24

Date: 08-02-2024

Online tenders are being invited for development of 28 roads, divided into six packages, with an estimated cost of Rs. 1687.00 lakh. Availability of tender documents: From 14-02-2024 till 3.00 pm on 28-02-2024. The last date for submission of tenders: Till 4.00 pm on 28-02-2024. For details, contact the below said office.

Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj Circle,

R.O. No: 12928/CLAD/VI/19/2021-22 Dt. 12.02.2024

Nellore, Sri Potti Srinamulu Nellore Dist.

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# Mayor and MLA highlight efforts to modernise parks

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Acknowledging the importance of green spaces in enhancing the quality of life for residents, State Planning Board Vice Chairman and Central MLA Malladi Vishnu highlighted ongoing efforts to beautify parks within the constituency, aiming to create serene environments for visitors. Utilizing funds allocated by the 15th Finance Commission, a significant transformation has been initiated at Alluri Sitarama Raju Park in the 32nd Division of Ayodhyanagar.

In a collaborative effort, MLA Malladi Vishnu and City Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi ceremonially commenced the modernization endeavours for Alluri Sitaramaraju Park, funded by the 15th Finance Commission, situated in the 32nd Division of Ayodhyanagar. Additionally, they inaugurated the Andhra Ratna Park in the 33rd Division of Satyanarayanapuram, developed with a budget of Rs 20 lakh.

Vishnu emphasized the systematic development of parks



as integral to the city's progress. He critiqued the neglect suffered by these spaces under the previous administration, noting that substantial strides have been made since the current government assumed office, with approximately Rs 28 crore allocated for modernizing 95% of the parks in the constituency.

Notable among these developments are Raghavaiah Park, Lenin Center Park, Telugu Thalli Park, GV Shastri Park, Raghavachari Park, Muttavarapu Nagar

Rajakumari Park, Prakash Nagar Park, and Veerla Balaraju Park on AVS Reddy Road.

Furthermore, Vishnu highlighted the restoration of Payakapuram Pond, which had faced encroachment during the previous regime, now renovated for Rs 3.71 crore. He detailed the enhancements at Andhra Ratna Park, including a broad walking track, open gym, shuttle court, compound wall, and freshwater facility. Similar upgrades are underway at Alluri Sitaramaraju Park,

with plans for a walking track, open gym, water fountain, water supply, and fencing nearing completion.

Mayor Bhagyalakshmi commended the current administration's commitment to providing essential infrastructure for residents. She questioned the previous regime's inability to utilize allocated funds effectively, alleging misappropriation of public funds. Under the present government, significant investments are being made to propel the city's development, she added.

## We will support diarrhoea in all ways: Rajini

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Health Minister Vidadala Rajini and Special Chief Secretary MT Krishnababu said that the victims suffering from vomiting and diarrhoea who are undergoing treatment in Guntur Government Hospital are stable.

On Monday, Minister Rajani and Special CS Krishnababu visited the victims who were being treated at the hospital. They inquired about the health condition of the victims with the doctors and later asked the victims how their health was. They said that the government will help in all ways so that no one faces any difficulties. Patients expressed their satisfaction with the medical services provided in the hospital.

Later, Krishnababu reviewed diarrhoea cases with DME Dr Narasimham and hospital superintendent Dr Kiran Kumar.

Speaking to the media persons, Krishnababu said that health camps are being organized for every thousand families. He said that there are about 23,000 families in the affected areas and every family has been surveyed and given instructions to take appropriate precautions. He said that measures are being taken to go to the urban health centres within the city as soon as anyone suffers from vomit-



ing and diarrhoea. He said that doctors and medical staff have been appointed at urban health centres. He said that arrangements are being made so that those who suffer from vomiting should immediately go to

the local health centres and get treatment.

The special CS said that 75 cases have been registered in the last three days, out of which 15 people have been discharged. He explained in the

last 24 hours, 60 people are being treated in the hospital.

He said that most of the cases have come from three areas of the city. He said that the water samples were collected from the reservoirs and those areas and were sent to the laboratory. He said that according to reports, fluorine in the water is good. He said that the health condition of those currently undergoing treatment in the hospital is stable. He said that there is no need for people to panic.

DME Dr Narasimham, Superintendent Dr Kiran Kumar, Civil Surgeon RMO Dr Satish Kumar, Nursing Superintendent Asha Sajani, and Administrator Praveen Kumar were present.

## Commissioner inspects quality of drinking water

PNS ■ GUNTUR

In the wake of the outbreak of diarrhoea in some localities in the city, Municipal Commissioner Keerthi Chekuri, along with officials, inspected the quality of drinking water being supplied to the people. The Commissioner visited Bharahima, Panja and Phakir Gudem localities on Monday along with ward corporators and engineering officials. She tested the water being supplied to the locality to find whether chlorine was blending properly. She also visited the houses where some people suffered



diarrhoea. She inquired about the inmates and whether purified drinking water is being supplied to their households. During the visit, the SE was ordered to issue a show cause notice to the concerned ward amenity secretary Kiranmayi due to a lack of complete information or negligence in the survey. Keerthi

Chekuri said that the survey conducted by the municipal corporation should be transparent, and otherwise, actions would be taken. She went to the house of Murtanj and tested the drinking water there to find the chlorine level. The municipal Commissioner advised the denizens to boil the water before drinking as a precautionary measure. She said that the amenity secretaries are conducting door-to-door checking to find out the water quality. She directed the amenity secretaries to submit their reports to AE in their area.

## Chaladi Satish wins two silver medals in kickboxing

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Chaladi Satish won two silver medals in the open International Kickboxing Competitions held in New Delhi from February 7 to 11 in the KD Jadav indoor stadium on the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex premises.

The World Association of Kick Boxing Organisation (WAKO) India organised the third open kickboxing competition. Chaladi Satish, who won two silver medals belonging to Machilipatnam town.

Chaladi Satish fought in the 84 KGs category and defeated Digirev Sukharat of Uzbekistan. He won the second medal by defeating Ranganathan Mohan of Puducherry in the light contact fight. Another player Dasari Manoj also won a silver medal in the tournament.

Earlier, Satish won a gold medal in the national kickboxing competition held in Goa in the 74 category. Satish is the son



of senior journalist Chaladi Purnachandra Rao. Chaladi Satish is at present working for an American-based company "Centric Consultancy" as a senior consultant in Gurgaon.

Dasari Manoj fought in the 94 kg category and won the medal by defeating Rajendran Rajkumar. The Union Sports and Youth Services and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Olympic, Khel India recognised the World Association of Kickboxing Organisation, Senior journalist Chaladi Purnachandra Rao said.

## Intensive training prog for civil servants

Aims to equip officials with knowledge and skills to navigate digital landscape

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move to strengthen digital governance capabilities across the Indian bureaucracy, a cohort of senior officers from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), and other all-India services began a five-day intensive training programme at the Indian Institute of Management Visakhapatnam (IIMV) on Monday. Organised under the aegis of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), the programme equips these civil servants with the knowledge and skills to navigate the dynamic digital landscape and drive impactful governance initiatives.

In the keynote address during the inaugural session, Ajay Prakash Sawhney, former Secretary to the Government



of India, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, highlighted the potential of technology, and cited the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as a prime example of streamlining citizen engagement through digital platforms. He encouraged participants to leverage emerging tools like Bhashini (AI-powered language translation) and ONDC (Open Network for Digital

Commerce) to further enhance citizen-centric service delivery.

Understanding India's growing stature in the global digital arena, Sawhney acknowledged the nation's ability to foster innovative solutions with far-reaching impact. He commended India's leadership in producing unicorns and its commitment to simplifying business and living through digital platforms, emphasising the importance of plat-

forms like Bhashini and ONDC.

Prof. M. Chandrasekar, Director of IIM Visakhapatnam, shed light on the institute's unwavering commitment to nurturing digital governance expertise through programmes like the PG in Digital Governance and Management. He reiterated IIMV's dedication to supporting the government's vision of a digitally empowered nation.

The programme welcomed 20 senior civil servants representing diverse ministries, departments, and States, reflecting the government's wider commitment to upskilling its workforce for the digital age. Programme directors Prof. Bhavya P S and Prof. Abhishek Srivastava outlined the intensive training modules and anticipated outcomes.

## Training session empowers officials for general elections

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena stressed the imperative need for election officials to possess a profound understanding of the electoral process. Addressing a training session at the AU Chemical Engineering Block, Meena underscored the importance of election officials' familiarity with the intricacies of general elections. The training session aimed to equip Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) for both Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly constituencies. National Level Master Trainee Sameer Ahmed John, alongside District Collector Dr. A. Mallikarjuna, inaugurated the programme.

Meena reiterated the pivotal roles played by Electronic Voting Machines, voter lists, and election officials in ensuring the integrity of the electoral

process. He emphasised strict adherence to newly issued guidelines by the Central Election Commission. Meena disclosed plans to train 1,000 individuals across the State in three phases, with Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, and Tirupati hosting the initial phase of training sessions, scheduled to conclude by month-end.

Dr Mallikarjuna lauded the transparent voter list preparation in the district, in accordance with directives from the Central Election Commission and the State Chief Electoral Officer. He expressed optimism regarding the training programme's potential to facilitate smooth elections in the district.

The training programme witnessed the participation of Dist R O K. Mohan Kumar, Joint Collectors, and AROs from various districts including Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram.

## Dy CM inaugurates road works worth Rs 22 crore in tribal areas

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Deputy Chief Minister Rajanna Dora reiterated the government's dedication to linking tribal villages by launching road construction projects worth Rs 22 crore. The ceremony, held today, symbolised a crucial milestone in enhancing accessibility and communication infrastructure in remote regions. During the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the road construction from Vetaganivalasa to Tanglam in Pachipenta mandal, along with the inauguration of the Araku road from Vetaganivalasa via Shatabdi, Deputy Chief Minister Rajanna Dora underscored the government's emphasis on developing road infrastructure connecting tribal communities.

He emphasised the indispensable role of roads in facilitating emergency response and improving connectivity for tribal populations. Rajanna Dora highlighted the personal commitment of the Chief Minister towards the welfare of tribal communities, stressing the implementation of various developmental schemes designed for their uplift. Acknowledging the collaborative efforts of public representatives and officials, Rajanna Dora expressed gratitude and encouraged tribal residents to leverage the newly constructed roads for



Highlights developing road infrastructure connecting tribal communities

their advancement and prosperity. Dr. MVR Krishnaji, District Panchayat Raj Engineering Officer, commended the Deputy Chief Minister's efforts towards realising road construction initiatives in tribal regions, emphasising the significance of enhanced accessibility in fostering socio-economic development. The event, graced by public representatives from Pachipenta mandal and other dignitaries, showcased a collective commitment towards inclusive progress and empowerment of tribal communities.

## SELF-RESPECT OF BCs Chelluboina refutes Janga's charges against CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Information and Public Relations Minister Chelluboina Venugopala Krishna has strongly criticised Janga Krishnamurthy for what he perceives as falling into the trap of Chandrababu Naidu.

Addressing media persons on Monday, the Minister expressed firm opposition to Krishnamurthy's comments, accusing him of blaming CM Jagan Mohan Reddy for purportedly not upholding the self-respect of BCs.

Minister Chelluboina emphasised that it would be prudent for Krishnamurthy to retract his statements. He advised Krishnamurthy not to tarnish his reputation by attributing blame to the CM, suggesting that if offered a ticket by the TDP, he should consider taking it without engaging

in such criticism. The minister asserted that under CM Jagan's leadership, BCs are held in high regard by the people.

Highlighting the significant representation of BCs in the state government, Minister Chelluboina pointed out that 11 BC Ministers are holding key positions across various departments. He underscored the administration's commitment to the welfare of BCs, contrasting it with past instances of oppression by Chandrababu.

The Minister noted the appointment of four BCs to the Rajya Sabha, with another SC member set to join them. Despite these advancements, Minister Chelluboina criticised Krishnamurthy for purportedly harbouring unfounded grievances against the CM, asserting that such allegations are unwarranted.

## ‘Poly education best way to get job at early age’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP State Technical Education Commissioner Chadalavada Nagarani said that the best way to get a bright future and job opportunities at an early age is polytechnic education. Polycet-2024 entrance exam for admission in public and private polytechnics of the State will be conducted across the State on April 27. The Commissioner released the information booklet, pamphlets and wall posters prepared by the AP State Technical Education and Training Council in the central office of the Technical Education Department on Monday, in order to create more awareness about polytechnic among the students studying in the 10th standard.



The Commissioner explained that in this campaign, the benefits of polytechnic education, the employment opportunities available to the students and the salary allowances will be explained comprehensively. She further explained that awareness conferences will be organised in all government and private schools to provide better awareness to the students about the entrance exam. "As soon as the 10th class exams are

over, all 87 government polytechnic colleges in AP State will conduct free coaching in English and Telugu medium for the Polycet-2024 entrance exam. The study materials designed for the entrance exam will also be distributed free of cost," she added. Commissioner Nagarani explained that all government polytechnic laboratories across the State have been modernised and accommodation has also been improved.

## Best Enterprise Award: WIPS at RINL clinches 3<sup>rd</sup> place

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Forum of Women in Public Sector (WIPS) at RINL clinched third place at the national level for the Best Enterprise award here on Monday, for recognising its commitment to excellence in public enterprise management and the development of women within the organisation. Presented during the 34th National Meet of the Forum of Women in Public Sector (WIPS) at HAL Management Academy, Bengaluru, the award ceremony witnessed the presence of Her Highness Promoda Devi Wadayar, Maharani, as the chief guest, recognising the outstanding contributions of various enterprises under the Navratna

Category. G Gandhi, CGM (HR) and president WIPS, RINL, along with N Bhanu, GM (Training), RINL, and K Sarala, DGM (Telecom), RINL, accepted the award on behalf of the organisation. They represented the Executive Committee of Southern Region WIPS, alongside other women delegates from WIPS - RINL. Jajula Durga, Senior Technician, Telecom Department, RINL, received the Best Women Employee Award (third place) in the non-execu-



Award was presented during 34<sup>th</sup> National Meet of the Forum of Women in Public Sector

tive category at the national level.

Established on February 12, 1990, under the directives of the Cabinet Secretariat, WIPS serves as a unified platform for profession-

al women in the organised sector. Over the past three decades, it has expanded its influence, boasting 91 Central PSUs and nationalised banks as Corporate Life Members and approximately 15,000 women employees as Individual Members.

The 34th National Meet of the Forum, themed 'Women: The Future of Sustainable Growth', emphasised the pivotal role of women in driving sustainable development. WIPS at RINL has been actively engaged in various activities and initiatives to sup-

port the welfare and development of women employees since its inception in 1997. Under the leadership of K S Chandrawati, coordinator RINL-WIPS, the committee has organised training programmes, sports events, CSR activities, and cultural functions, fostering the holistic development of women employees.

Atul Bhatt, CMD, and SC Pandey, Director (Personnel) & additional charge Director (Finance) RINL, extended their congratulations to WIPS and all women employees, recognising their remarkable achievement in securing the third place at the national level for the Best Enterprise award under the Navratna category.

## PM urged to honour Dr NTR with Bharat Ratna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Padma Bhushan Acharya Yarlagadda Lakshmi Prasad has said that Prime Minister Modi should take the initiative to award the Bharat Ratna to Dr Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, founder of Telugu Desam Party, who paved the way for alternative politics at the national level.

In the context of posthumous awarding of Bharat Ratna to PV Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh and Dr MS Swaminathan, Yarlagadda requested that Dr NT Rama Rao should also be honoured with the highest civilian award. He has written a letter to the Prime Minister in this regard. "As an

actor and chief minister, Dr NTR played a vital role in the preservation of Indian culture. NTR's efforts in welfare State, administrative reforms, women's empowerment, national politics, public life etc. are invaluable.

"By defeating the Congress party within nine months of founding the Telugu Desam Party in 1983, NT Rama Rao gave a major boost to alternative politics in the country. Nandamuri played a major role in the formation of the second non-Congress government at the Centre in 1989, and as an actor, he carved a permanent place in the minds of the Telugu people as well as the people of India by donning many mythological roles.



## Newborn baby girl abandoned

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM



In a shocking incident, a newborn baby girl was abandoned by some unidentified persons near a church in Avanigadda on Sunday night.

The pastor of the church noticed the cries of the newborn and informed the police and officials concerned.

The officials shifted the newborn to the GGH in Avanigadda. Later the newborn baby girl was shifted to the GGH in Machilipatnam for better treatment.

The officials told the media that Anganwadi workers in four mandals were asked to inquire about the pregnant women who gave birth during the last two days but not having the newborn with them.

The Women and child welfare department officials were informed about the newborn baby girl. The Child care centre in Machilipatnam would take care of the abandoned baby girl, sources said.

# UTF wants apprentice system for teachers scrapped

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Activists of the United Teachers Federation (UTF) have demanded that the government scrap the apprentice system in appointing teachers under DSC 2024.

The activists burnt the copies of the GO here on Monday at Ambedkar statue. UTF state treasurer Gopi Murthy said that the state government issued a GO for the recruitment of teachers under the DSC 2024.

However, the teacher's recruitment under the DSC 2024 is being taken up on an apprenticeship basis. The apprenticeship system was revoked after 18 years of struggle by the organizations. But the same apprenticeship is being implemented now in the DSC 2024 recruitment, he lamented. He recalled that agitations were held from 1994 to 2012 for the revocation of apprenticeship and the then government revoked it.



**'The apprenticeship system was revoked after 18 years of struggle by the organisations. But the same apprenticeship is being implemented now in the DSC 2024 recruitment'**

But now the YSRCP government is planning to recruit teachers under DSC 2024 using

the apprentice system, he slammed. He demanded the government revoke GO 117

## Certification programme held on conduct of elections

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A five-day national-level certification programme was organised here on the preparedness for conducting elections in the Saveri Seminar hall on the Padmavati Mahila University campus on Monday.

Andhra Pradesh's additional CEO inaugurated the programme. The national-level certification programme is being organized on the directions of the Election Commission of India. AP Training is being imparted on conducting elections to the Returning Officers, AROs of the Assembly constituencies.

National master trainers Aswin Malik, Bijit Kumar Dhar, Jnanavelu, Seshi Sekhar Reddy and Achintya Kumar Hijra imparted training on conducting elections to the officials. Addressing the programme, Andhra Pradesh CEO Harindra Prasad directed the RO and MROs to take all steps to conduct the ensuing elections peacefully.

The Additional CEO said



that as part of the ensuing general elections, the ROs and AROs should have a full understanding of the election process and take responsibility for the smooth conduct of the elections as per the provisions of the Election Commission.

He said that the new guidelines and instructions issued by the Election Commission must be followed. The first round of training programs would be conducted from February 12 to 16th, he said, adding that at the time of polling, the polling officials should pay special attention to the regulations, control, ballot units, VVPAT and voting compartment arrangements.

He instructed the officials that on the day of polling, everyone should be careful about the duties to be performed by the officials at the polling centres. He said that the RO and ARO should be very careful and vigilant in the entire election process and should work to conduct the elections peacefully and impartially.

He asked to ensure that no repolling would be held anywhere in the district. Joint Collector Subham Bansal, DRO Panchal Kishore municipal commissioner Aditi Singh, RDOs, and other officials were present.



## 'Be prepared to hold elections peacefully'

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari Collector P Prasanthi has directed the election nodal officers to work in coordination with other department officials to conduct elections peacefully in the district.

The Collector held a meeting with the Nodal officer here and reviewed the responsibilities being given to them to conduct elections.

Speaking on this occasion, the Collector directed the DDOs to complete the online data entry process of details of PO, APO and support staff within a week. No one would be exempted in the performance of election duties, she told them.

She said that a workshop on the polling process would be held soon for the polling officers

and staff who conduct the polling duties.

She stated that the first meeting would be with ARs, the second meeting would be with the EARs and the third meeting will be with AER. She asked them to be careful about strong rooms and transit strong rooms.

The officials concerned should be ready to provide the information sought by the election observers. The nodal officers should perform the duties assigned to them efficiently and work to conduct elections smoothly. In-charge DRO B Shivanarayana Reddy, DPPO T Nageswara Rao, district agriculture office Z Venkateswara Rao, district transport officer T Umamaheswar Rao and a host of other officials were among those who attended the meeting.

## Malika Garg given a grand farewell

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Superintendent of Police Malika Garg, who was transferred to Tirupati, was given a rousing farewell by the police officers and police personnel of various departments here on Monday.

Malika Garg served as Superintendent of Police in Prakasam district for two years and seven months. She won accolades from the police staff for taking steps for their welfare. She also earned a reputation for providing the best policing in the district during



her tenure. She was garlanded with a giant garland by the police personnel and felicitated at a programme held on the police parade grounds.

Speaking on the occasion, Malika Garg thanked the

police officials and police personnel of various departments for their cooperation.

She said that the police staff worked well during the cyclone and avoided loss of life. They had also striven hard to maintain the

law and order in the district.

It ensured that the accused were punished by the courts by implementing a good trial monitoring system, she recalled. Many steps were taken to curb road accidents and track the stolen and missing mobile phones, the outgoing SP added.

Additional SP (Admin) K Nageswara Rao, Additional SP (Crimes) SC Sridhar Rao and AR Additional SP Ahok Babu, a host of DSPs, CLs and SIs were among those who took part in the programme.

## Denied access to essential govt schemes: Tribals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Tribals and community leaders residing on Simhachalam hill in Visakhapatnam district submitted a formal petition to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) Commission Chairman, Dr. DVG Shankara Rao, on Monday, outlining their long-standing grievances with the Simhachalam Devasthanam, a prominent religious institution in the region. The petition, presented during a meeting at the ST Commission's camp office in Vizianagaram, highlighted several alleged challenges faced by the community.

### Seek assistance from ST Commission Chairman



The tribals claim they are being denied access to essential government schemes, including basic utilities such as electricity. Community leaders

expressed frustration over alleged interference from the Devasthanam authorities in conducting necessary repairs to their residences, despite their

long-standing presence in the area.

Receiving the petition with empathy, Dr DVG Shankara Rao reportedly assured the aggrieved individuals of his commitment to addressing their concerns. He pledged to elevate the matter to the government for further consideration. This development offers a potential avenue for resolving the long-standing dispute between the tribal community and the Simhachalam Devasthanam. The community awaits a positive response and swift action from the government to address their grievances.



## Collector urges swift implementation of Govt priorities

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Collector Dr Manazir Jilani Samoon emphasised the importance of unwavering commitment to government priorities during a comprehensive review session conducted with district officials on Monday afternoon. The review encompassed various crucial aspects, including the distribution of Aarogyasri cards, registrations for houses for poor people, allocation of assigned lands, and ongoing court cases.

Expressing concern over the pace of Aarogyasri and Ayushman card distribution, Collector Samoon stressed the need for expeditious completion across the district. With only 1.84 lakh cards distributed thus far, he underscored the urgency of organising a special drive to ensure prompt distribution of the remaining cards. Furthermore, he directed officials to expedite house registrations for impoverished

families, revealing that only 22,081 registrations had been completed thus far.

Addressing technical glitches and administrative hurdles, Collector Samoon urged coordination with the district registrar to resolve server errors and discrepancies promptly, ensuring beneficiaries encounter minimal obstacles. Highlighting the importance of land ownership rights, the Collector mandated the completion of surveys for assigned lands by July 31, 2023.

Tahsildars were instructed to prioritise the survey of government-allocated land for residential and agricultural purposes, emphasising the need for swift action among officials who had yet to complete the task. The review also delved into issues such as re-surveys, digital signatures, ongoing court cases, and the preparation of rationing data for Gram Secretariat employees.

## Chevella police seize 64 kg of dry ganja

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Chevelle Police and Special Operation Team (SOT) Rajend Nagar busted the trafficking of 64 kgs of banned narcotic drug (dry ganja) at Shankarpally X Roads on Sunday. The police have seized 64 Kg of dry ganja and two mobile phones, all worth of Rs 16,10,000. On specific information, police nabbed them while they were travelling from Brammapur in Odisha State to Maharashtra.

According to the plan, on February 7, accused, 35-year-old Chitra Kailash Mohite, 38-year-old Madan Balasaheb Bayas, 70-year-old Navnath Ganpat Chavhan, and 15-year-old Rajesh Subhash Mohite took ganja from Brammapur, Odisha, with the intention of selling it in Maharashtra. They travelled by lorries and came to Chevella via Hyderabad and waited at Shankarpally X-Roads to go to Maharashtra via Sangareddy. At the same



time, based on reliable information, Chevella Police and SOT personnel caught them and recovered 64 kg of ganja. Cyberabad CP Avinash Mohanty appreciated Rajendranagar Zone Additional DCP P Narayana, Chevella ACP Prashanth Reddy, Chevella Inspector M Laxma Reddy and staff of Rajendranagar Special Operations Team (SOT).

## Govt considering land issues at Panchagrama, Simhachalam: Kottu

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Deputy Chief Minister and Endowments Minister Kottu Satyanarayana has assured the public that the government is actively addressing the long-standing land issues concerning Panchagramalu issue (five villages Venkatapuram, Purushothapuram, Vepagunta, Adavivaram and Cheemalapalli) and Simhachalam Devasthanam. The Deputy Chief Minister conveyed this commitment during a review meeting held on Monday evening in the video meeting hall of the collector's office.

The meeting, attended by



public representatives, district collectors, officials concerned, and land experts, focused on finding resolutions to the land disputes. Deputy Chief Minister Kottu Satyanarayana acknowledged the concerns brought forward by the people's representatives on behalf of the affected landowners. While clarifying that the matter is currently sub judice, he assured that the government is actively seeking a solution and is in consultation

with the Advocate General to file an affidavit for a prompt court hearing.

Furthermore, the Deputy Chief Minister expressed gratitude for the constructive suggestions put forth by local representatives. These suggestions, he emphasised, would be incorporated into the ongoing efforts to address the issue and ensure that owners of the affected buildings can undertake necessary repairs. The Deputy Chief minister reiterated

the government's commitment to resolving the matter through legal channels.

Bheemili MLAs, former ministers Muttamshetty Srinivasa Rao, and Pendurthi MLAs Adeep Raju also highlighted the prolonged nature of the land issues related to Simhachalam Devasthanam. They urged the Deputy Chief Minister to bring the matter to the attention of the state chief minister for a comprehensive and permanent solution. District Collector Dr A. Mallikarjuna assured that steps would be taken promptly to resolve the land issues of Panchagrams and Simhachalam Devasthanam through the appropriate authorities.



## Parameswar Reddy takes charge as SP

PNS ■ ONGOLE

P Parameswar Reddy here on Monday took charge as Prakasam district Superintendent of police.

Talking to the media on the occasion, the SP said that there would be no compromise in maintaining law and order. Priority would be given to the security of women, he added.

He said that they would strive hard to provide the best policing and discuss in depth with the police officials on the pattern of crimes. He said that he would lay special focus on taking steps to curb crimes and road accidents. Focus would also be laid on regulating traffic, he added.

"I will take all steps to conduct the ensuing elections in a peaceful atmosphere in the district. Steps will also be taken to resolve the grievances of police personnel," SP Parameswar Reddy made it clear. ASP (Admin) K Nageswar Rao, ASP (Crime) SV Sridhar Rao, AR Additional SP Ashok Babu called the new SP and congratulated him.

## Why KCR didn't give Minister post to Vidyasagar?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao revealed a secret of former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday in the Assembly.

He said that the KCR asked Prof. Jayashankar whom to make a Minister when the BRS had an alliance with the then Congress government. Prof. Jayashankar asked KCR to make CWC Member Vidyasagar Rao who was an expert on irrigation projects. Prof. Haragopal and others came with bouquets to greet Vidyasagar Rao. However, KCR picked his nephew T. Harish Rao shocking Prof. Jayashankar and others, Jupally said.

Participating in the debate

### Excise Minister Jupally reveals the secret



on irrigation projects on Monday in Assembly, Jupally said that corruption did not take place during BRS rule. Jupally challenged Harish Rao and said that he will prove his allegations with clear evidence.

Alleging that BRS leaders are trying to escape without

accepting their mistakes, Jupally said that KCR worked against N. Chandrababu Naidu to ensure that Chandrababu did not become the CM.

KCR extended cooperation to Andhra Pradesh CM Jagan Mohan Reddy regarding the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation project benefiting Jagan politically.

Jupally asked the BRS government to reveal why it kept mum on river waters. Why did the BRS government support the Centre without solving water problems, Jupally asked.

"Why didn't KCR question the Centre when it gave seven mandals of Khammam district

to AP? Why did the BRS government surrender before the Centre? Why has the BRS government failed to get Telangana's share of Krishna River waters in the last 10 years? Instead of accepting mistakes, BRS leaders are trying to counter the Congress. Can Harish say that there was no corruption in irrigation projects? Thousands of crores were swindled through irrigation projects. I will show the evidence.

This would not have happened if former CWC member Vidyasagar Rao had become the Irrigation Minister," Jupally said.

## 3,000 litres jaggery wash destroyed

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The police conducted a raid and destroyed 3,000 litres of jaggery wash hoarded to brew illicit liquor at Gatturu village in Ramakuppam mandal on Monday. Police said that a police team conducted searches at Gatturu tanda, Chukkappalli tanda and Balaji Kunta in the forest area.

The police found a huge quantity of jittery wash of 3000 litres hoarded in the bushes. The jaggery wash was used to distill illicit liquor. The police personnel destroyed the jaggery wash and the illicit liquor brewing units.

## One killed as mini-truck hits motorcycle

PNS ■ ELURU

One person was killed and two others were injured when a mini-truck hit a motorcycle and later rammed a stationary auto rickshaw, two cars and an electric pole on the highway at Akividu on Monday.

Police said that a mini-truck hit a motorcycle killing Madda Yesuratnam instantaneously. Later the mini-truck collided with a stationary auto rickshaw, and two cars and came to a halt after hitting an electric pole. The mini-truck driver surrounded himself before the police.





INDIA CORNER

## Five dead in car-bus collision on Yamuna Expressway in Mathura

Five people were charred to death on Monday as their car caught fire after a collision with a bus on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura, police said. The incident took place near the 117th milestone on the Agra-Noida carriageway of the expressway under the Mahavan police station limits in the morning, a senior officer said, adding the car was going to Delhi. None of the passengers of the bus received injuries and all of them have been sent to their destination by different vehicles, police said. "There was a collision between the bus and the Swift car. So far it has come to light that a tyre of the bus burst, after which it went out of control and turned on the road. The Swift car coming from behind hit the bus and both vehicles caught fire," Mathura Senior Superintendent of Police Shailesh Pandey said. The occupants of the bus managed to evacuate, but those in the car could not and all five were charred to death, Pandey said.



## Odisha CM launches affordable bus service to remote areas

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Monday launched affordable bus service to remote areas in five more districts of the state. The chief minister has launched the bus service under LAccMI (Location Accessible Multi-modal Initiative) in Bolangir, Bargarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundergarh districts through video conferencing from Bhubaneswar. Speaking on the occasion, Patnaik said "his government is the people's government and it launches schemes keeping the public's aspirations in mind". After the visit of the 51 chairman and officials of the chief minister's office to various districts, the government felt the problems of the people and as per the suggestions of the people, the LAccMI Bus service scheme was prepared to provide communication facilities to the people of the rural area, he said. The affordable bus service was first rolled out in Malkangiri.



## Suspected master trainer of banned PFI arrested in Kerala: NIA

The National Investigation Agency on Monday said a suspected master trainer of banned Popular Front of India (PFI) was arrested from his house in Kerala. The arrested accused, Jafar Bheemantavida, was wanted in a case registered in 2022 related to a conspiracy by the proscribed organisation to establish an Islamic rule in the country by 2047, an NIA spokesperson said. Bheemantavida was eventually tracked down to his Kannur house by the federal agency's fugitive tracking team and the Anti-Terror Squad (ATS), Kerala, the official said, adding he is the 59th accused to be arrested in the case in which the NIA has so far charge-sheeted 60 persons. The NIA said its investigations have revealed that Bheemantavida was part of the PFI machinery that had been operating clandestinely to establish an Islamic rule in the country by 2047.



# 'No timeline for removal of encroachment on railway land'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It is not possible to give a specific timeline for the removal of encroachments on railway land given the complex nature of individual cases which often requires dealing with the state and local administrations to maintain law and order, the government has informed Parliament.

In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the national transporter makes continuous efforts to remove encroachments and a total of 33.67 hectares of land has been retrieved in the five years between 2018-19 and 2022-23.

Congress MP Rajani Ashokrao Patil asked the minister about the measures which have been taken to address the



encroachment of approximately 782.81 hectares of railway land and if the government is collaborating with local bodies and authorities to combat such encroachment, especially in metropolitan cities.

Patil also wanted to know if the government has established a timeline for the removal of all encroachments, excluding those pending in courts.

In his reply, Vaishnaw said, "Railways carry out regular surveys for identifying encroachments and take continuous action for their removal.

If the encroachments are of temporary nature (soft encroachments) in the shape of jhuggis, jhopris and squatters, the same are removed in consultation and with the assistance of Railway Protection

Force and local civil authorities."

"For old encroachments, where party is not amenable to persuasion, action is taken under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1971 (PPE Act, 1971), as amended from time to time. Actual eviction of unauthorized occupants is carried out with the assistance of the state government and police," he said.

According to the minister, the railways aims to eventually remove all encroachments on its land and properties following due process of law.

"However, given the complex nature of the individual cases of encroachment which often requires dealing with state and local administration to maintain law and order, it is not possible to give a specific timeline for the same," he said.

## Over 1.59 lakh declared as 'foreigners' in Assam: CM

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

More than 1.59 lakh people have been declared as 'foreigners' in Assam so far, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

He said that another 96,000 have been marked as 'Doubtful' (D) voters.

Sarma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said 100 Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs), which deal with the citizenship issue of D-voters in the state, are currently functional in the state. He was responding to a question by opposition AIUDF legislator Aminul Islam in the assembly. The chief minister said that 1,59,353 people have been declared as foreigners by these tribunals till December 31, 2023. The FTs have disposed of 3,37,186 cases till the end of last year and 96,149 cases are pending before various FTs, he added.

## HIS 'PERSONAL' REMARKS 'EXPUNGED' SAYS SPEAKER

# TN Governor ends address to Assembly in minutes

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu governor R N Ravi on Monday refused to read out the complete text of the customary address to the state Assembly, claiming it has 'misleading facts', and lambasted the ruling DMK over the national anthem issue, remarks that were 'expunged' in yet another showdown between the Raj Bhavan and the state government.

The expunged remarks were Ravi's 'personal' comments and only the approved text would be in the records, Speaker M Appavu said.

The Governor also walked out of the House before the national anthem was played.

Ravi reading out from such a text would be a "Constitutional travesty," the Raj Bhavan later said, explaining the sequence of events.



This was the Governor's inaugural address for the year to the House.

The national anthem was also at the centre of controversy as Ravi demanded it be played before and after the address while the government maintained it was not in lines with the House tradition and rules.

For the second year in a row, the state Assembly witnessed controversy during the Governor's Address. Last year,

on January 9, Ravi omitted some portions of the government-prepared address and also included few points on his own before the a resolution was adopted to restore the original draft in the records.

Ravi only read out from the first of the 46-page speech on Monday.

The Raj Bhavan charged Appavu with launching a tirade on Ravi and insisted he walked out to uphold the dignity of the office of the Governor.

The draft Governor's address was received on February 9 and it had 'numerous passages' with 'misleading claims far from truth,' Ravi, therefore, returned the file and also advised the government to show due respect to the national anthem by playing it at the beginning and end of the Governor's address.



## TAHAKWADA ATTACK CASE

# Four Naxalites sentenced to life imprisonment

PNS ■ JAGDALPUR

A special court in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district on Monday sentenced four Naxalites to life imprisonment for the deadly attack in which 15 security personnel and a civilian were killed in Tahakwada village in 2014.

Special judge D R Dewangan convicted Mahadev Nag, Kawasi Joga, Mani Ram Madiya and Dayaram Baghel of charges under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Explosives Act, and the Arms Act and sentenced them to life imprisonment, special public prosecutor Dinesh Panigrahi told PTI.

Nag, Joga and Madiya were residents of Bastar, while Baghel was from neighbouring

Sukma district, he said.

The case was probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Armed Naxalites attacked a joint team of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and state police near Tahakwada village under Tongpal police station limits in Sukma district on March 11, 2014.

Fifteen security personnel, 11 from the CRPF and four from the state police, and a civilian were killed in the incident.

The Tongpal police had registered a first information report (FIR) against senior leaders Sonadhar, Shankar, Ganesh Uike, Vinod, Sumitra, and 150-200 other active cadres of CPI (Maoist).

The NIA later took over the probe, the lawyer said.

## Responses sought on Lyngdoh panel recommendation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought responses from the Centre and others on a plea challenging a recommendation by the Lyngdoh Committee which stipulates that a student cannot contest more than once for the post of an office bearer of a student union.

Following a Supreme Court order, the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development had constituted the panel under J M Lyngdoh, a former Chief Election Commissioner, to give recommendations on issues related to student bodies and student union elections conducted in universities, colleges and other higher education institutions across India.

The committee had submitted its report on May 26, 2006.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan issued notice to the Union of India, the University Grants Commission and others on the plea.

The matter has been posted for next hearing on April 10.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Uttarakhand resident Naveen Prakash Nautiyal and others against recommendation 6.5.6 of the Lyngdoh Committee.

# Kejriwal, Mann offer prayers at Ram temple in Ayodhya

PNS ■ AYODHYA (UP)

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann along with their family members offered prayers at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Monday.

"Today I had the good fortune to have the darshan of Ram Lalla. I felt immense peace after offering prayers at the shrine that cannot be described in words," Kejriwal later told reporters.

The AAP leaders, their spouses and other family members spent around one hour and 15 minutes at the Ram temple.

"It is a matter of good fortune for the entire world that a beautiful and grand temple has been constructed in Ayodhya and lakhs of Ram devotees are coming every day to offer worship," Kejriwal said.

Both the chief ministers arrived in the city by air this afternoon.

Though Kejriwal, who is the national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was invited for the January 22 Pran Pratishtha (consecration) ceremony of the idol of Ram Lalla, he had said he wanted to visit it later with his family.

Kejriwal and Mann were hosted over lunch by Champat

Rai, General Secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, AAP UP president Sabhajeet Singh said.

Speaking to media persons at Ayodhya airport before returning to Delhi, Kejriwal said, "We have prayed at the temple for happiness, peace and health of everyone."

Mann said India is a country of multiple religious faiths where all festivals are celebrated together.

"At the Ram temple, we prayed for peace and brotherhood in the country. India is a bouquet of flowers of different hues each with its own unique fragrance," the Punjab chief minister said.

# PMLA court extends ED remand of Hemant Soren by 3 days

PNS ■ RANCHI

A special PMLA court on Monday extended the ED remand of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren by three days in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam, lawyers said.

The Enforcement Directorate prayed for four days of remand of the JMM

leader.

"They (ED) were asking for a four-day remand...They have no ground left for any further remand. They (ED) just want to buy time...They didn't have any new ground. They just want the case to be alive and stretch the remand period," Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan, Soren's counsel, told reporters.

Soren, the Jharkhand Mukti

Morcha executive president, was on February 7 remanded to five days of ED custody by the special PMLA (the Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court.

On February 2, the court granted 5 days of ED custody to Soren.

Rajan, Soren's counsel, said, "We objected to the ED's request because no further remand is required".

# Govt resources being diverted for few industrialists: Rahul

PNS ■ KORBA

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday attacked the central government claiming that resources are being diverted for select few industrialists as the majority of the population especially the impoverished were being neglected.

Speaking at a public gathering in Sitamadi, Chhattisgarh, as part of his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Gandhi urged citizens to awaken to what he described as their dwindling financial resources, claiming that they were being deceived and robbed.

Emphasising the necessity of a caste census, Gandhi highlighted the absence of representation from marginalised communities such as backward classes, Dalits, and Adivasis in the upper echelons of India's top 200 companies, which he claimed were monopolising the country's wealth.

Critiquing the BJP's vision of a "Hindu Rashtra," Gandhi asserted that the majority of the population, especially the

impoverished, was being neglected, with resources mainly benefiting a select few industrialists.

He pointed out the disparity between the elite figures present at events like the Ram Mandir inauguration and the everyday struggles faced by the common people.

"Tell me, have you seen any poor, labourer, unemployed person or small businessmen at the Ram Mandir inauguration (last month)? I only saw (Gautam) Adani ji, (Mukesh) Ambani ji, Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai and other big businessmen. Adani ji, robbed. Ambani ji and their families were giving big statements," Gandhi said.

Accusing corporate giants like Adani and Ambani of profiting from the sale of Chinese goods at the expense of the citizens' welfare, the Congress leader labelled this as economic injustice.

Gandhi lamented the media's focus on certain prominent individuals asserting that his messages addressing pertinent issues were often sidelined.



# 1 in 5 migratory species faces extinction: UN

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

One in five migratory species is threatened with extinction and 44 per cent have a decreasing population trend, according to the United Nations' first 'State of the World's Migratory Species' report released on Monday.

The situation is far worse in aquatic ecosystems, with 97 per cent of the migratory fish listed for protection under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) at risk of extinction.

Established in 1979, the CMS focuses on bringing countries and stakeholders together to agree on the actions needed to ensure that migratory species survive and thrive.

According to the report, 82 per cent of the species listed under Appendix I of the convention are threatened with extinction and 76 per cent have a declining population trend.

Eighteen per cent of Appendix II species are globally threatened, with almost half (42 per cent) showing decreasing population trends. The convention's Appendix I lists migratory species which are endangered.

Appendix II lists migratory species "which have an unfavourable conservation status and require international agreements for their conservation and management".

The report also identifies 399 globally threatened and



near-threatened migratory species (mainly birds and fish) that are not yet listed in the CMS Appendices that may benefit from international protection.

According to CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel, over-exploitation (hunting and fishing, both targeted and incidental) emerges as the greatest threat for many migratory

species, surpassing habitat loss and fragmentation.

The report said the habitat fragmentation resulting from dams is currently greatest in East Asia, Europe, the Indian sub-continent, North America and Southern Africa.

By-catch of non-target species in fisheries is a leading cause of mortality of many CMS-listed marine species.

Other key threats to migratory species include pollution (including light and noise pollution), climate change and invasive species.

Inger Anderson, the Executive Director of the United Nations' Environment Programme, said the report is a significant step forward in the development of a conservation

roadmap for migratory species.

"Given the precarious situation of many of these animals, and their critical role for healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, we must not miss this chance to act starting now by urgently implementing the recommendations set out in this report," she said.

Action under the Convention is crucial for achieving the global commitments set out in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including commitments to restore and establish well-connected networks of protected areas, halt human-induced extinctions and to ensure that any taking of wild species is sustainable, safe and legal.

# Congress veteran Ashok Chavan quits party

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In a setback to Congress ahead of Lok Sabha polls, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan resigned from the grand old party on Monday, amid speculation that he may join the BJP.

Chavan's exit from Congress came days after senior Maharashtra Congress leaders Baba Siddique and Milind Deora quit the party.

There was no confirmation either from Chavan or the BJP of reports that the 65-year-old leader will be fielded for

the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections. Amid the buzz that Chavan will join the BJP, Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters, Aagey aagey dekho hota hai kya (wait and watch what happens).

Chavan said the decision to quit the Congress was a personal one, adding he will announce his next course of action in a day or two. "I have not yet made any decision to join BJP," he added.

In a letter to state Congress president Nana Patole, Chavan said he was resigning as a pri-

mary member of the party. He also submitted his resignation as an MLA to assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar.

Speaking to reporters, Chavan said, "I am not going to discuss anything happening in the Congress party on a public forum."

Asked if he would join the BJP, Chavan said, "I haven't taken any decision yet on joining the BJP and don't know BJP's working system."

He also said his decision to quit the Congress is a personal one and he does not want to ascribe any reason to it.



## Reaping discontent

Both the Cong and BJP accuse each other of remembering farmers only for votes; who is true?

The electoral war cry between the BJP and the Congress is getting only shriller: The latest point of contention is which party has done more for the welfare of villagers, farmers and the poor. With the last sitting of the 17th Lok Sabha behind us and the announcement of election dates likely anytime soon, both the sides are sharpening their attack on each other and portraying themselves as the real benefactor of the marginalised classes. It all started with the Congress making a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Government, accusing them of neglecting the welfare of rural communities, the impoverished and farmers, except during election season. In his counterattack, the Prime Minister touted the Congress' record on rural development and agricultural reforms. The party remembers farmers only at the time of elections, was Modi's charge. The Congress, one of the principal Opposition forces, has a long history of championing the cause of marginalised sections of society. However, the BJP



has made inroads into its territory and the Congress' grip on its core support base has loosened. To support its stand, the BJP argues that initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, which provides direct income support to farmers, demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of rural communities. However, to regain lost ground, the Congress has been vocal in criticising the BJP's farm policies, including the three Bills which were later withdrawn amid huge protests.

With a massive farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' rally scheduled today, the Congress is again accusing Modi of paying lip service to these constituencies while failing to deliver meaningful change. Though the latest salvo seems timed with the poll dates announcement, the Congress' criticism of the Modi Government's approach to rural and agrarian issues is not new. It has long accused the BJP of pursuing a development agenda that prioritises the urban elite and big business interests over the needs of the rural poor. However, with elections on the horizon, the rhetoric has reached fever pitch. Amid mounting agrarian distress, farmers across the country are protesting against contentious reforms introduced by the Modi Government. The protesters are demanding a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP), implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases and justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence. The Congress leaders have seized upon this discontent to launch a blistering attack on the Government, alleging that the BJP's pro-corporate policies have exacerbated inequality and widened the gap between the rich and the poor; thousands of farmers still commit suicide every year. The parties may accuse each other of ignoring farmer welfare but the fact is that no one has done enough for the farmers. Their demands may again go unheard today; the bitter truth is everyone remembers farmers only for their votes.

### PICTALK



Visitors pose for photos with a model of rhinoceros at the 37th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, in Faridabad PTI

## Develop skills with experimental learning

Embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the changing world

In an ever-evolving world, the ability to acquire and adapt skills is crucial for success. While traditional learning methods hold value, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development. By immersing individuals in real-world scenarios, it fosters deeper understanding, boosts knowledge retention, and cultivates essential soft skills.

**Experiential Learning?** Experiential learning, rooted in the work of David Kolb, emphasises learning through active engagement and reflection on experiences. It's a hands-on approach, contrasting with passive knowledge absorption. Individuals "learn by doing," applying theoretical concepts to practical situations, whether through simulations, projects, internships, or real-world challenges.

**Key Components:** Engagement: Experiential learning places a strong emphasis on engagement. Students are actively involved in the learning process, whether through experiments, projects, field trips, or interactive activities. This engagement helps capture



their attention and encourages a sense of curiosity.

**Reflection:** A crucial aspect of experiential learning is the reflective process. After engaging in an activity, students are prompted to reflect on their experiences, analyse the outcomes, and connect the practical knowledge gained to theoretical concepts. This reflective phase enhances their critical thinking skills.

**Application:** Experiential learning encourages the immediate application of knowledge. By directly applying what they have learned in real-world scenarios, students can see the practical relevance of their education, leading to a deeper understanding and retention of information.

**Experiential Learning in Skill Development:**

**Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Experiential learning challenges students to think crit-

ically and solve problems on their own. Through hands-on experiences, they learn to analyse situations, make decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances - essential skills for success in both academic and real-world settings.

**Teamwork and Communication:** Collaborative projects and group activities inherent in experiential learning help students develop strong teamwork and communication skills. They learn to express their ideas, listen to others, and work cohesively towards common goals, mirroring the dynamics of the professional world.

**Creativity and Innovation:** Hands-on experiences stimulate creativity and innovation by encouraging students to think outside the box. When faced with real-world challenges, students are prompted to generate unique solutions, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and adaptability.

**Emotional Intelligence:** Experiential learning enhances emotional intelligence by exposing students to diverse situations. They learn to understand and manage

their emotions, as well as empathise with others, preparing them for a more emotionally intelligent and socially aware future.

**Long-term Retention:** The active involvement and application of knowledge in experiential learning contribute to better retention. Students are more likely to remember and understand concepts that they have personally experienced, as opposed to those learned through passive methods. In the 21st century, where adaptability and a diverse skill set are crucial for success, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development in schools. By integrating this pedagogical approach, educators can foster not only a deep understanding of academic concepts but also the critical skills needed for future success. As schools continue to evolve, embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the rapidly changing world.

(The writer is an educator and expert on education policies; views are personal)



KIRANJIT SINGH PANNU

ships traversed the African tip to reach their destinations, but the recent turmoil has complicated maritime navigation. With a substantial portion of goods bound for Israel passing through the Suez Canal, disruptions in this route have reverberated across global supply chains. The increased travel distance and associated costs pose significant challenges for shipping companies and commodity markets alike. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal has historical roots, dating back to its inception in the 19th century. However, its relevance has endured through numerous conflicts, including both World Wars, underscoring its status as a linchpin of global maritime trade.

The economic ramifications of disruptions in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait are far-reaching, affecting industries reliant on the timely delivery of goods and materials. Major shipping companies, such as the Mediterranean Shipping Company and Merck and Hapag Lloyd, have suspended operations in the region, exacerbating supply chain disruptions and logistical challenges. Amidst these geopolitical tensions, the concept of the blue economy emerges as a beacon of sustainable maritime development. Championed by advocates of ocean conservation, the blue economy emphasizes the responsible utilization of marine resources for economic growth while

ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests. However, divergent perspectives on maritime sovereignty and strategic alliances complicate the geopolitical landscape. While India and the United States share a strategic partnership, differences in maritime policies and military operations underscore the complexities of navigating international waters.

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## Tensions escalate in Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

With recent attacks by Houthis rebels on vessels passing through the strait, the region faces heightened security risks which could disrupt world economy

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a narrow passage linking the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden, has thrust itself into the international spotlight. Situated on the northern side of the Red Sea lies the renowned Suez Canal, a monumental feat of engineering connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This vital waterway, spanning approximately 193 kilometres in length and nearly 200 meters in width, serves as a lifeline for global trade and maritime transportation.

However, recent events have cast a shadow over the tranquillity of these waters. The Houthis, a rebel group from Yemen, have launched a series of attacks targeting vessels passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. These assaults, primarily aimed at ships with ties to Israel, have sparked concerns over maritime security and the free movement of goods through this crucial chokepoint. In response to these escalating tensions, Operation Prosperity Guardian, spearheaded by the United States, was initiated to safeguard the Bab-el-Mandeb and ensure the unimpeded flow of maritime traffic. Over 20 nations have expressed their support for this initiative, underscoring the collective effort to protect this strategic waterway.

The motives behind the Houthi attacks are rooted in geopolitical complexities, with their actions perceived as retaliation against Israel's military operations in Gaza. Houthi leaders have explicitly stated their intent to target any ship associated with Israel, leading to a spate of attacks on vessels carrying goods to or from the region. The Houthis contend that peace in Gaza is intrinsically linked to stability in the Red Sea, warning of further conflict if hostilities persist.

The significance of the Red Sea extends beyond its immediate vicinity, serving as a conduit for maritime trade connecting Europe to the rest of the world. The Mediterranean Sea, accessed through the Suez Canal, plays a pivotal role in global shipping routes, facilitating trade between continents and enabling vital economic exchange. Traditionally,



ships traversed the African tip to reach their destinations, but the recent turmoil has complicated maritime navigation. With a substantial portion of goods bound for Israel passing through the Suez Canal, disruptions in this route have reverberated across global supply chains. The increased travel distance and associated costs pose significant challenges for shipping companies and commodity markets alike. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal has historical roots, dating back to its inception in the 19th century. However, its relevance has endured through numerous conflicts, including both World Wars, underscoring its status as a linchpin of global maritime trade.

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ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests.

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WHILE INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES SHARE A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, DIFFERENCES IN MARITIME POLICIES AND MILITARY OPERATIONS UNDERSCORE THE COMPLEXITIES OF NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL WATERS

ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests.

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Russia's stance on maritime cooperation underscores the need for inclusive approaches to ocean governance, emphasizing collaboration over competition. As global leaders grapple with the challenges of maritime security and sustainable development, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of oceanic ecosystems and geopolitical dynamics. In conclusion, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait stands at the intersection of geopolitical rivalries and maritime commerce, symbolizing the challenges and opportunities inherent in our interconnected world. As nations navigate these turbulent waters, cooperation and dialogue remain

essential to ensuring the security and prosperity of maritime nations and the preservation of our oceans for future generations.

**The Future of Maritime Security and Sustainable Development** Looking ahead, addressing the complex issues surrounding maritime security and sustainable development requires concerted international efforts and innovative solutions. The Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a wake-up call for global leaders to prioritise ocean conservation and cooperative strategies to mitigate geopolitical tensions. Investments in technology, such as satellite surveillance and unmanned maritime vehicles, hold promise for enhancing maritime surveillance and response capabilities. Additionally, strengthening legal frameworks and multilateral agreements can foster greater cooperation among nations and promote sustainable ocean governance.

Ultimately, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis underscores the interconnected nature of global maritime challenges and the urgent need for collective action. By working together to address the complex issues facing our oceans, we can build a more resilient and sustainable future for generations to come.

(The author is associate professor at Pondicherry Central University; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Crafting the Olympic medals



It's really astounding and delightful to know that the medals made for the upcoming Paris Summer Olympics are simply remarkable and fantastic. In addition to the customary gold, silver and bronze, each winner's medal will feature a small piece of iron straight from the Eiffel Tower! Small chunks of the iconic tower — the symbol of Paris and France and one of the wonders of the world — have been included in the medals to mark the 100 years since last hosted the Olympic Games. Each and every medal

has at its centre a hexagon of iron from the tower. They all come from pieces removed from the structure during different renovations over the last so many decades. The pieces of metal were carefully preserved, and the organisation in charge of the Eiffel Tower's preservation donated them to the Paris Olympic Committee to create the unique medal designs.

Definitely, it would be joy unlimited as medalists will get an unforgettable souvenir of Paris made from this unique metal. The "puzzle iron" which has been used to make the tower is a special pure material, which is extremely strong. These special Olympic and Paralympic medals were designed by craftworkers at the famous Chaumet House of Jewellery and it is for the first time in the history of the Games that a jeweller has designed the medals. An out-of-the-box idea by the organisers these medals are definitely a symbol of excellence, a source of motivation, a symbol of ultimate achievement and historically precious.

M Pradyu | Kamru

mental health issues and even suicides among students.

To address this, a comprehensive reform of the education system is crucial, emphasizing holistic development and emotional well-being alongside academic performance. Implementing mentoring programs, stress relief initiatives and mental health awareness campaigns can provide vital support to students, fostering a healthier and more conducive learning environment. By prioritizing student well-being and nurturing individual growth, India can mitigate the underlying causes of cheating and cultivate a generation equipped to thrive in the real world.

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

### FOOD WASTAGE

Sir — The issue of food waste intersects with the stark reality of hunger and malnutrition, particularly evident in the

context of those struggling to afford even two meals a day. With millions worldwide facing food insecurity, the recent suggestion by the Central Government to integrate lessons on food wastage into school curriculums aims to foster awareness among students.

Shocking statistics from the United Nations, revealing that approximately 931 million tons of food were wasted globally in 2019, underscore the urgency of addressing this issue. Despite ample resources, food wastage persists in our country, exacerbating the plight of the hungry and malnourished. This paradox highlights the need for a shift in mindset towards valuing food and combating wasteful practices, especially among those blinded by material wealth.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

STRIVE FOR ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT


Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of the inner being



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us dream of a world without poverty, that is equitable, that respects the dignity of all living beings, and the sacredness of the natural world. There is no doubt that it is an achievable dream, but we all must collectively pave a new way to make it into reality. Over the past two millennia, man has made great strides in almost every field of development as a result of which, today we have achieved a standard of living and scientific development unimaginable even half a century ago. But, if development concerns the betterment of the human being and his relationship with other humans and beings, then one would find that we have come down the wrong path in our quest for material fulfillment. Right? When we discuss development, we usually talk of economic development to meet material needs, measured perhaps through growth in the GNP or GDP. So, is this all that there is to development?

Does economics measure everything? The answer to this is NO, because if we are aiming at all-round development, then it must include not only material progress but social and cultural dimensions as well. It's a fact that cannot be denied that the ideal of development as a continuing process of growth, creation, improvement and positive change has yielded to a reality more frequently marked by destruction, degradation and negativity. In his quest for improving his lot, man first turned to religion, which not only provided an anchor for his life but also answered some of the questions about his existence in this world and his place vis a vis the universal scheme of things. However, with time, religion itself got corrupted by ritualism and the greed for power, thereby making men disillusioned, who then turned to politics, to make their lives better. They sought succour and salvation from political ideologies but to no avail, resulting in their pinning hopes on science. With the aid of



science, much development happened in several fields. Today as we stand on the threshold of both hope and fear of losing everything, we realise that materialistic progress is a transient solution and hence the effort to establish lasting peace and prosperity for all has to come from an imperishable source. The seed of lasting peace and happiness lies in human values and wisdom, which are both eternal and universal. The need of the hour is that we have to look at our development from a broader perspective than the one we have been adopting so far. Our narrow concept of development can find its roots in a narrow concept of the self that neglects the larger reality of the soul and overlooks the essential unity of the human family. Hence we need to move from an overly materialistic approach to one that includes the broader and deeper realities of human life and experience i.e. the inner world of our thoughts and values and the innate spirituality on which our worth and dignity are based.

Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of our inner being. From this awareness may follow steps to develop or change the self in ways that are conducive to the kind of world we want. Values and spirituality are at the heart of not just who we are but also of the political, social, economic and environmental issues we are facing. Remember! A development that sustains all people depends at least as much on spiritual empowerment as on material progress and prosperity. So let us inject values into our society by effective education in self-awareness, and spiritual principles and realize our dream of a world that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

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

# Advancing the maxim of ‘One Earth, One Health’

## Modi’s vision of ‘One Earth, One Health’ rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, reflects India’s enduring commitment to universal health

India raising the slogan of 'One Earth One Health' in itself tells how India wants to develop health infrastructure. This philosophy includes holistic health protection and care for all beings - humans, animals and even plants. Apart from this, making medical treatment affordable has also been a top priority of the Government of India. This may surprise many people, but the fact is - only two welfare health schemes - 'Ayushman Bharat' and 'Jan Aushadhi Yojana' have provided more than Rs 1 lakh crore to patients mainly coming from the poor and middle class. Have saved. Ayushman Bharat has not only increased the demand for new hospitals but is also increasing the opportunity to open new hospitals and medical



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

proper coordination with the state governments had taken care of the primary health centres also. Which perhaps the present ministry has failed to do. Whereas at smaller village health centers the testing facility could be linked to the district hospital.

The focus on technology in healthcare is a huge opportunity for healthcare entrepreneurs, investors and professionals. The allocation of Rs 89,155 crore in the Union Budget 2023-24 has also given new impetus to the sector. There is a clear difference in focus between pre- and post-Covid situations. Springing into action, India focuses not just on treatment but also on wellness. Putting aside the absence of an integrated long-term approach to

health for several decades after independence, it is now better to pursue a whole-of-government approach under PM Modi, rather than confining the subject of health to the health ministry alone. Points towards the future. Keeping in mind the problems of common people, the government has given top priority to affordable treatment. More than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras provide affordable medicines to the needy. The PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission is not only giving birth to new hospitals but also creating a new and complete health ecosystem.

There has been a revolution of sorts in the medical education sector in the last 10 years. More than 260 new medical

colleges have been opened, doubling the medical seats in undergraduate and postgraduate medical courses as compared to 2014. However there is a need to change the policy decisions regarding the establishment of medical colleges, and more work needs to be done on how to make India's doors easier for Indian medical students studying abroad. However, in the latest budget, a lot of emphasis has also been given to the nursing sector. 157 nursing colleges around the medical colleges, a major step towards medical human resources. Technologies like 5G are creating new opportunities for startups. Drones are revolutionizing drug delivery and testing services. The medical device sector has seen a growth of 12-14% due to initiatives like Bulk Drug Park, and Medical Device Park, over Rs 30 thousand crore on PLI schemes.

Apart from this, starting courses like biomedical engineering, industry-academia and government collaboration in IITs also has a lot to offer for the sector. However, instead of increasing the infrastructure of primary health centres, we added more to patient care OPD in institutions like AIIMS, while AIIMS remained identified as a research institute and their old contribution to the research sector.

The government's efforts on preventive health care and awareness such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for cleanliness, Ujjwala Yojana for smoking-related diseases, Jal Jeevan

Mission to tackle waterborne diseases, National Nutrition Mission to address anaemia and malnutrition, obesity Focus on grains - Shri Anna, PM Matru Vandana Yojana, Mission Indradhanush, Yoga, Fit India Movement and increasing focus on naturopathy, alternative medicine system including Ayurveda have saved people from diseases. All these measures of the government are the beginning of a new era for the people and also a vision of India regarding health in front of the world. Which can be understood in an earlier address of the Prime Minister.

In which the Prime Minister warmly welcomed health ministers from across the world and representatives from West Asia, SAARC, ASEAN and

African regions. Quoting an Indian scripture which translates to 'Let everyone be happy, let everyone be free from diseases, let good things happen to everyone, and let no one suffer from sorrow', the Prime Minister expressed his vision of an inclusive country. Highlighted and mentioned that India's vision of health was universal even when there were no global pandemics thousands of years ago. He underlined that One Earth One Health follows the same beliefs and is an example of the same idea in action. "Our vision is not limited to humans only. But also a beautiful earth for every living being. That is the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

*(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)*



# Delink disinvestment from the Budget



UTTAM GUPTA

There is a need for a paradigm shift in the approach to disinvestment; the Government must detach it from budgetary constraints and tackle legacy issues



In a briefing following the presentation of the interim Budget for the financial year (FY) 2024-25 by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2024, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan stated that the 'government no longer views disinvestment - fancy nomenclature for sale of Union government shareholding in central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) - from the perspective of balancing the budget'. The statement is out of sync with Sitharaman setting a target of Rs 50,000 crore as proceeds from disinvestment for the FY 2024-25 though it wasn't mentioned in her speech.

If, the government's intent was not to view it as an exercise in balancing the budget - as stated by the finance secretary - then, it made no sense to fix a target. Yet, setting a target for boosting non-tax revenue receipts means that it hasn't shed its age-old stance of linking this exercise with the budget.

To plan for garnering resources from the sale of government shares in CPSUs is inherently flawed. This is because unlike tax revenue, which can be projected with a degree of certainty based on the existing tax rate and a reasonable assessment of the growth in nominal GDP, the same cannot be said about proceeds from disinvestment. In this case, a lot depends on the market scenario and, in particular, the perception of investors about the company in which share-sale is contemplated.

In cases where the strategic sale (it reduces the government's holding in the CPSU to below 50 per cent or privatization) is mooted, the Government faces a bigger challenge as apart from a favourable market, it needs bidders with deep pockets. The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape further undermines the chances of its kicking the ball rolling just around the time when the strategic investors are ready to put in their bets.

The Niti Aayog identifies companies for disinvestment which are then considered by the Core Group of Secretaries on Divestment (CGD), a long-drawn process by itself, which takes it to the Alternative Mechanism (AM) - a group of ministers, including finance, road transport & highways, administrative reforms, etc., - for approval. After AM's approval, the Department of Investment and Public



THE MAJORITY OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR SEVERAL DECADES HAS INGRAINED IN THE BUREAUCRAT A FEELING OF EXERCISING COMMAND OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PSU

Asset Management (DIPAM) moves a proposal for in-principal approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). It is therefore not surprising that the Modi - government has missed its disinvestment targets ever since it started the process in 2015-16 with a particular focus on 'strategic' sales. Only during two years viz. 2017-18 and 2018-19, it achieved the target. That was primarily because, in those years, it had conducted two big-ticket sales of its shares from one CPSU to another. During 2017-18, the government sold 51.11 per cent of its shareholding in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) yielding Rs 37,000 crore. In the following year, it undertook the sale of its 52.63 per cent stake in the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) yielding Rs 13,000 crore. But, those sales can't be termed as strategic as the purchaser being another CPSU namely ONGC/PFC, the Government continues to have effective ownership over the divested entity viz. HPCL/REC.

For the current FY, while presenting the budget on February 1, 2023, Sitharaman had set a target of Rs 51,000 crore for proceeds of disinvestment. This has since been revised downwards to Rs 30,000 crore. Against this, as of February 1, 2024, the government has raised only about Rs 12,500 crore, and it is unlikely that even the revised divestment target will be met.

At a fundamental level, disinvestment of the government's shareholding in a PSU is in effect sale of its assets. Therefore, receipts arising therefrom can only be treated as 'capital receipts' (CRs). While preparing the budget, it won't be logical to plan for receipts from this source in the same manner as it is done for revenue receipts (RRs) which are receipts generated from

the day-to-day business activities e.g. dividends on shares held by the government. The government should change the track. It should unequivocally fall in line with what the finance secretary has indicated. It should pursue share sales 'independent' of the budget exercise.

The government's tax revenue is buoyant (for three years in a row since 2021-22, these have exceeded the BE) and it is getting higher dividends from CPSUs as also higher dividends from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and state-run banks. These positive trends should be good enough for managing fiscal deficits. Hence, its budget need not have to depend on proceeds from disinvestment.

The FM has referred to the approach to share sales outlined in her Budget speech for 2021-22. Under it, CPSUs are divided into two broad categories i.e. strategic and non-strategic. The strategic group covers atomic energy, space and defense; transport and telecommunications; power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and banking, insurance and financial services. The non-strategic category includes all other sectors such as industrial and consumer goods, hotel and tourist services, trading, and marketing.

While, the government wants to sell CPSUs in the strategic sector with the caveat that at least one (and a maximum of four) will be retained in the public sector, it will privatize 'all' undertakings in non-strategic sectors. All loss-making undertakings in the latter category will be closed. However, it needs to unshackle the process from a host of legacy issues.

Foremost, the majority ownership and control by the Government for several decades has ingrained in the bureaucrat a feeling of exercising command over the management of the PSU. Although things have improved under the Modi - dispensation (courtesy of its focus on a

'policy-driven state', and increase in 'transparency'), the basic ingredients remain intact. This mindset has to go.

Second, even after strategic sales, the government wants to remain in the driver's seat. This is amply reflected in a statement in Sitharaman's budget speech for FY 2019-20. She had stated the intent was to change the existing policy from "directly" holding 51 per cent or above in a CPSU, to one whereby its total holding, "direct" plus "indirect", is maintained at 51 per cent. This stance remains intact.

Third, it remains inclined to use CPSUs for achieving other unrelated objectives. For instance, it uses fertilizer PSUs to ensure adequate availability of this politically sensitive agri-input in every nook and corner of the country. This has come in the way of taking up the strategic sale of nine CPSUs in the fertilizer sector (it falls in the non-strategic category) recommended for sale by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and Niti Aayog. Despite, the deregulation of petrol and diesel prices way back in 2010/2014, the government continues to regulate their prices.

For this purpose, it rides piggyback on oil PSUs which control over 90 percent of the total sales. For this reason, the strategic sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) hasn't happened nearly four years after it was initially mooted in 2019-20.

Fourth, the government wants to use CPSUs to build infrastructure and invest in green transition to meet climate mitigation goals. While the argument is tenable, this doesn't undermine a case for vigorously pursuing strategic sales to maximize asset value besides involving the private sector in achieving climate goals. Modi should remove all legacy obstacles and de-bureaucratize the process of share sale.

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



MONEY MATTERS

## Fulcrum Digital plans to hire 700 people

Fulcrum Digital, a digital engineering and business platform company, plans to hire 700 people across multiple technology domains such as artificial intelligence (AI) this year, according to its chairman Rajesh Sinha. The company has also launched Ryze, a generative AI platform, which aims to simplify operations for businesses handling big databases. Positioned as a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution, Ryze aims to enable businesses to drive content generation, covering textual and visual mediums with precision and efficiency. Its integration of components including large language models, neuro readers, AI computing, and intelligent chatbots ushers a new era in AI-driven productivity and operational excellence, the company said. Sinha, Founder and Chairman of Fulcrum Digital, said, the company "aims to hire 700 employees in the calendar year 2024, across technology domains such as artificial intelligence (AI), data scientists, software developers, and more".



## Tata Motors ties up with LeadIT for greener future

Tata Motors on Monday said it has tied up with the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), a global alliance launched by governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019. As a member of LeadIT, the auto major will be able to harness the power of global best practices, influence policy-making, and together with other members strengthen climate action plans, thereby accelerating transition towards net-zero emissions. "Our pledge to attain net-zero emissions across our Passenger Vehicles (PV) business by 2040, and our Commercial Vehicles (CV) business by 2045, is a testament to our commitment to a greener future," Tata Motors Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer SJR Kutty said in a statement. Joining forces with LeadIT propels the automaker closer to these ambitious goals, facilitating a journey towards sustainable transformation, he added.



## India's vegetable oil imports fall 28 pc

The country's vegetable oil imports declined by 28 per cent to 12 lakh tonnes in January from a year-ago period, industry body SEA said on Monday. Vegetable oil imports stood at 16.61 lakh tonnes in January 2023. India is a leading vegetable oil buyer in the world. In the first quarter (November-January) of the current oil year, total imports dropped 23 per cent to 36.73 lakh tonnes as against 47.73 lakh tonnes in the same quarter of previous year. According to the Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA), about 7,82,983 tonnes of palm oil and 4,08,938 tonnes of soft oil were imported in January this year out of total vegetables oils. As on February 1, total edible oils stock stood at 26.49 lakh tonnes, down 7.64 per cent from that of the year-ago period, it said in a statement. SEA said prices of edible oils, which are currently low, may go up this year on lower production, global economic issues and supply constraints.



# RBI rules out review of action against Paytm Payments Bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), saying the decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the lender.

In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29.

"At the moment let me say very clearly there is no review of this (PPBL) decision. If you are expecting a review of the decision, let me very clearly say there is (going to be) no review of the decision," Das said at a press conference after the 606th meeting of the



Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India.

The meeting was addressed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The governor said any decision against entities regulated by the RBI is taken after a comprehensive assessment.

While emphasising that RBI is supportive of the fintech sector, Das said it is also committed to protect the interest of customers as well as ensure financial stability.



The central bank is expected to soon issue a set of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the Paytm matter this week.

While announcing the action against PPBL, the RBI had said the direction follows persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns.

Earlier on March 11, 2022, the RBI had barred PPBL from onboarding new customers with immediate effect.

In its latest action, RBI has asked the Paytm Payments Bank not to take deposits/credit transactions/top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets,

FASTags, and NCMC cards, among others after February 29, 2024.

However, the central bank has allowed credit of interest, cashbacks, or refunds even beyond February 29.

Further, withdrawal or utilisation of balances by PPBL customers from their accounts, including savings bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards are permitted without any restrictions, up to their available balance.

RBI also directed termination of the 'nodal accounts' of One97 Communications Ltd.

One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake in Paytm Payments Bank Limited but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary.

## Sensex tanks 523 pts on profit taking in banking, metal shares

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex plunged by 523 points on Monday due to profit taking in metal and banking shares amid mixed trends in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 as 22 of its components closed in the red and eight in the green. The barometer opened higher and touched a high of 71,756.58 in early trade.

However, profit taking in Reliance Industries, metal giants and banking shares dragged the index to a low of 70,922.57 during intra-day trade.

The broader NSE Nifty also closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent lower at 21,616.05 with 34 of its constituents ending in the red.

Metal, banking and select oil shares succumbed to selling while pharma and IT



shares bucked the trend.

"An uptick in exchange margin requirements caused a decrease in positions, primarily in mid and small caps. Aside from the pharma and IT sectors, selling was widespread, with notable struggles seen in PSU banks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

In the Sensex pack, Tata Steel fell the most by 2.76 per cent, followed by NTPC (2.72 per cent) and SBI (2.26 per cent). Private banks IndusInd, Kotak Bank, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank also declined.

In contrast, Wipro, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Nestle were among the nine Sensex stocks that defied the trend.

## Retail inflation eases to 3-month low of 5.1 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 5.1 per cent in January mainly on account of lower food prices, according to official data released on Monday.

Inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was at 5.69 per cent in December 2023 and 6.52 per cent in January 2024.

In August 2023, inflation touched a high of 6.83 per cent.

According to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), retail inflation in the food basket was at 8.3 per cent in January 2024, down from 9.53 per cent in the preceding month.

The Reserve Bank of India has been tasked by the government to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

## Apple leads India tablet PC market with 25 pc share

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Apple led the India tablet PC market in 2023 as well as in the December quarter with a 25 per cent share notwithstanding a decline in its shipments, according to a report.

Samsung was at the second spot with a 23 per cent market share in 2023, market research firm CyberMedia Research said on Monday.

"In CY (in calendar year) 2023, Apple led the tablet market with a 25 per cent market share, followed by Samsung at 23 per cent in CY 2023," CyberMedia Research (CMR) India Quarterly Tablet PC Market Review report said.

Apple tablet PC shipments declined by 17 per cent on a year-over-year (YoY) basis.



Lenovo occupied the second slot in the December quarter with a 24 per cent market share even as its shipments declined by 3 per cent. Samsung tablet PC shipments grew by 36 per cent on YoY basis, the report stated.

"There is a rising consumer demand for diverse tablet options in India, including premium, 5G and value-for-money tablet offerings. This growth is particularly noticeable in the B2B sector and online purchases," CMR, Analyst Industry Intelligence Group (IIG), Menka Kumari said.

## Indian tourists can now make UPI payments in Sri Lanka

PNS ■ COLOMBO

Indian tourists in Sri Lanka will be able to make digital payments through UPI with the launch of the facility in the island nation on Monday.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) services were rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing it as linking historic ties with modern digital technology.

India's RuPay card services were also launched in Mauritius at a virtual ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi, his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

India's NPCI International Payments Limited (NPCI) and Central Bank of Sri Lanka-owned LankaPay joined hands to provide a seamless payment solution to tourists with the launch of UPI services.

"This interface facilitates inter-bank and person-to-person transactions as well as person-to-merchant transactions, using mobile phones,"

Wasantha Alwis, Director (Payments and Settlements) of the Central Bank, told



reporters.

"It provides the facility to transfer funds between bank accounts in India and also has a feature to use a QR code and make a payment to a merchant," Alwis added.

He said Indian tourists are the biggest inbound market to Sri Lanka with nearly 300,000 arrivals in 2023. "This is a very good seamless digital payment mechanism. When they are here, they don't need to worry about conversion rates. It is a great convenience to Indian tourists," he added.

Alwis said businesses can easily obtain QR codes by contacting their respective financial institutions and

reaching a trade agreement. He emphasised that all banks and financial institutions registered with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka are mandated to issue these codes.

Conrad Dias, another senior official, said Sri Lanka's small and medium-scale businesses should see this as a huge opportunity as they would be gaining new customers with this initiative.

The scheme aims to rapidly expand its reach, with an estimated 10,000 merchants expected to accommodate UPI payments for Indian nationals within weeks of its launch. By the end of March 2024, this number is projected to reach 65,000, officials said.

## Tourism, hospitality sector to create 50 mn jobs in 5-7 yrs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hotels' Association of India (HAI) on Monday said the hospitality and tourism sector expects to create 50 million direct and indirect jobs in the next 5-7 years but government support is required for getting the full industry and infrastructure status in states to tap the employment potential.

The infrastructure status for the hospitality sector can push up investments not only to create accommodation, but also in the process boost income and employment generation, HAI President Puneet Chhatwal said while speaking here at the 6th HAI Hoteliers' Conclave. Chhatwal, who is also the



Managing Director and CEO of Indian Hotels Company Ltd, said while tourism is a pillar of development creating about 10 per cent of the total employment and contributing 8 per cent to GDP with a huge multiplier effect that can help inclusive growth, "there is often a gap between this real-

isation and the actual policy implementation".

Addressing a press conference, HAI Vice-President K B Kachru said in the last two years there has been "a rise of 271 per cent in hirings".

"That is how business is moving. Now we need to focus a lot on developing tourism, not only at higher levels but also at entry levels... This focus has to remain and if we don't do that we will not be able to service..."

"We are focussing to create over 50 million jobs in the next 5-7 years," Kachru, who is also the Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, said.

## Procurement from GeM portal to cross Rs 4 lakh cr this fiscal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The procurement of goods and services from the government portal GeM will cross Rs 4 lakh crore by the end of this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said on Monday.

The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries and departments.

"As of today, the procurement has crossed Rs 3 lakh crore and going by the trend, the procurement this fiscal will reach Rs 4 lakh crore," GeM CEO P K Singh told reporters here.

In 2021-22, the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore and it crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last year.

Singh said the share of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) such as Coal India in the total buying of goods and services is increasing at a healthy rate.

More than 245 CPSEs, including Coal India, SAIL,



NTPC, and SBI, are participating in the process.

GeM has over 63,000 government buyer organisations and over 62 lakh sellers and service providers offering a wide range of products and services.

Currently, government departments, ministries, public sector units, state governments, and central armed police forces are allowed to carry out transactions through this portal.

The portal provides a wide range of products from office stationery to vehicles.

Automobiles, computers and office furniture are some of the major product categories.

Services, including transportation, logistics, waste man-

agement, webcasting and analytical, are listed on the portal.

South Korea's KONEPS is the largest such platform in the world. GeM stands at the third position after Singapore's GeBiz.

States/Union Territories such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant procurement orders in the current fiscal.

"GeM's expansion into the services sector has played a pivotal role in driving its accelerated adoption. Services sector contribution in the total procurement has increased from 23 per cent in 2021-22 to 50 per cent this fiscal," Singh said.

## MFIs seek more penetration in terms of household coverage

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Micro-finance Institutions (MFIs) have sought more penetration in terms of household coverage to increase their portfolio of disbursements, an official said on Monday.

CEO and director of Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) Alok Misra said there are 7.3 crore low-income borrowers in the coun-

try at present with an outstanding portfolio of Rs four lakh crore.

Misra told reporters here that the potential for the MFI sector is to have an outstanding of Rs 13 lakh crore, adding that there is a huge scope for growth.

In West Bengal, the total outstanding of the MFIs is around Rs 35,000 crore covering 65 lakh borrowers.

Nine per cent of the overall

outstanding portfolio is from West Bengal, he said.

MD of Arohan Financial Services Manoj Nambiar said that there is under-penetration of MFI coverage in the country at present. This penetration needs to grow, he said.

Kuldip Maity, MD of VFS Capital, said that historically the average levels of NPAs in the MFI sector is less than one per cent.

## India Inc backs 'One Nation One Election'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Inc has come in full support of the idea of 'One Nation One Election' as it would synchronize electoral cycles at the central and state levels, thus enhancing governance efficiency and fostering economic development.

Representatives from industry bodies FICCI and CII recently met a high-level committee on One Nation One Election chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind and briefed the panel on their benefits.

The panel has been constit-

ed to study the feasibility of holding simultaneous state and national elections.

Ficci President Anish Shah said there are over 2,50,000 Ficci members across the country, who feel that multiple elections at various levels impact ease of doing business, slow down decision-making in government and lead to avoidable costs, both for employees and employers.

Secretary General S K Pathak proposed one election every 5 years for central, state and local governments; brief code of conduct period, so that government decision-making is not



slowed; and all eligible voters to be in universal electoral rolls, using India Stack technology.

Ficci said that at a time when India is on its way to becoming the third largest economy in the world, it is important that the electoral process is reassessed that will result in better outcome for the people and enhance econom-

ic activity. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) also presented its views to the committee in a separate meeting held earlier. "CII's view was based on the economic benefits of streamlining the electoral process, that would enhance governance efficiency, and foster economic development," the industry body stated.

It argued that asynchronous multiple elections lead to frequent disruption in policy making and administration, leading to uncertainty about the government's policies.

"It also affects the working of

the governments due to officials being roped in for election duties. Investment decisions by the private sector tend to slow down prior to elections," said CII.

"Further, it leads to delays in project implementation, as the model code of conduct gets imposed."

CII emphasised that simultaneous elections offer a propitious solution by effectively reducing the project implementation delays and a likely cost saving of half the total expenses incurred by the central and state governments in administering elections.



## Aditya Dhar on his debut production as a producer

Aditya Dhar, who previously directed the hugely popular movie *URI: The Surgical Strike*, is currently producing and writing *Article 370*. The fast-paced, action-packed political drama, which stars Yami Gautam and Priyamani, is reportedly inspired by actual events. *Article 370*, Aditya's first production, has been a thrilling experience for Dhar.

Aditya discussed the distinctions between directing and producing, saying, "I think directing is something where you are continuously seeking for ideas and suggestions from your crew. A great team player is a terrific director. However, I am one of those team members who offers suggestions because I am a producer. I am offering

those recommendations rather than asking for them. It somewhat modifies your role and increases your focus on finding solutions. You also know how to simplify things for your director. That was one of my primary goals as a producer."

"As a director, you seek guidance; as a producer, you guide," he continued. "It's about doing the best you can for your team within the limitations you have. You've got their back. The project is led by a director, although a producer provides support."

"*Article 370* helped me grow as a human being," Aditya stated, reflecting



on his experience with his debut. "It made the issue easier for me to understand, since directors are not allowed to see it."

## During her masters in London, Twinkle Khanna remembers that nobody in the class recognised her

After completing her master's program in fiction writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, actor-turned-author Twinkle Khanna has confessed that not a single person in her class knew who she was. Twinkle stated that she 'had to develop a bio, stand up and introduce myself'.

"I don't think anyone in my class did," Twinkle stated. "The fact that there were no other Indians present, save from a single girl from Chicago who was of Kashmiri descent, made it favourable. I had to make a bio, get up, and introduce myself, just like everyone else. I needed to think of a literary joke with my name. Thankfully, The Interpreter of *Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri features a character named Twinkle. That turned into the ideal punchline."

She added, "I was concerned about who I would have lunch with and who I would walk around the corridors with. Three of us were given presentations by the professor, so we all agreed to go to lunch together. We hit it off

right away, and I never ate lunch by myself again. I got to know a lot of wonderful new people." In 2022, Twinkle enrolled at the college in the UK. She used to be an actor and was in movies like *Mela*, *Jodi No. 1*, *Baadshah*, *Barsaat*. Her book *Welcome To Paradise* has just released!



### The first look of Wicked, a musical adaption starring Ariana Grande

The iconic musical *Wicked's* trailer debuted on Sunday during the *Super Bowl*. Jon M. Chu is directing the two-part epic musical, which has a script by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman. Ariana Grande, Cynthia Erivo, and Michelle Yeoh play the key parts in the movie, which is based on Gregory Maguire's 1995 book *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. The two appear to get closer as Ariana's *Glinda the Good* overcomes Cynthia's *Elphaba*, also known as the *Wicked Witch of the West*, because of her green complexion. Elphaba says, "Something just takes over me and when it does, bad things happen," and Michelle's Madame Morrible encourages her to realize that the sky is the limit if she learns to control her feelings.

The narrative of *Wicked* is just as well-known as the musical selections from the Broadway production. *Wicked's* first installment will release later this year, and the second installment is scheduled for release the following year.

## Deadpool & Wolverine Teaser Out

The teaser for *Deadpool 3* finally surfaced, and it has us eagerly awaiting its theatrical release. The title of the movie is *Deadpool & Wolverine*, as it has been announced. A few glimpses into Wade Wilson's life following the events of the second film were shown to us, along with a few familiar faces. Hugh Jackman is back as Logan, so the fun is doubled when Ryan Reynolds returns with his sass.

Ryan directed two Marvel movies to record-breaking box office results, and this one will establish Wade as canonical in the *MCU*. People are

concerned that it would be harmed due of Disney's tight regulations because the first two movies were rated R and the third was produced by the company. However, the teaser trailer is attractive, and fans have been anticipating it for a while.

Additionally, Hugh Jackman's *Wolverine* can be seen in the shadow of another sequence in *Deadpool & Wolverine*, which is probably the Void from the television series *Loki*. It's a good thing that Marvel hasn't revealed Hugh's position in this teaser since it will keep fans excited for the major trailer.



## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



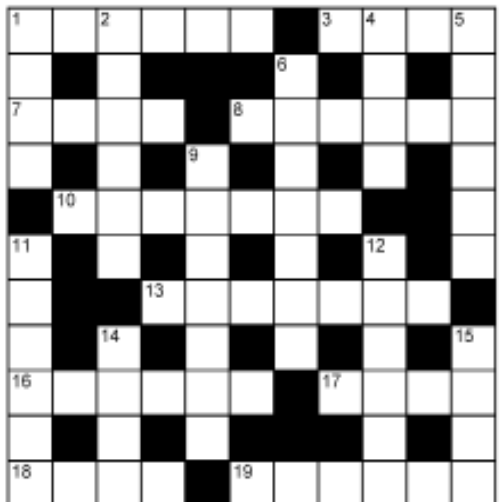
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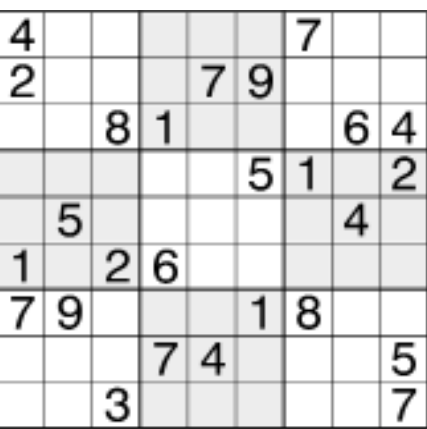
### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU



**Yesterday's solution**

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

**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

- A written communication
- Bathe
- Touch lips with someone
- Concealed
- A sale where people make bids for things
- Rocks in space that burn up when close to the Earth
- An animal with a shell
- Mix up with a spoon
- Very impolite
- A university award

### DOWN

- Enjoy
- Very thin, soft paper
- Broad
- Repaired
- Refuse to follow an order
- Pointy part of a church roof
- A restaurant employee
- Author
- Poke with a finger
- Factual





## ‘People didn’t take me seriously, and I really had to do the hard yards’

TEJAL SINHA

Well, one might have first seen her in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* as Preeti Singh, or playing the titular character in *Shanti*, Chandni in *Ghar Jamai*, Dr. Mandira Kapadia in *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, Cookie Sharma in *Sarabhai vs. Sarabhai*, or hosting shows like *Joh Jeeta Wohi Super Star* and *Indian Idol Junior*, to name a few. Mandira Bedi has been one of the most influential and inspiring ladies we have grown up looking up to.

Today, so many years down the lane, she donnes multiple hats, including that of a fashion designer and also India’s most popular female sports presenter.

Just like we do, she too looks back at her journey as a long one. But also something that she’s been really grateful for—getting to do varied things that are different in their own way. Apart from films, OTT, short films, and anchoring, in this exclusive chat she recalls, “There have been engagements as a motivational speaker that I have been to. Then, I have also driven a truck in the Himalayas on eight of the highest motorable passes in the world! It has been a long, very interesting, and varied journey indeed, and I look back on it with a huge amount of gratitude. The reason I have a positive outlook and a happy demeanour is because I love what I do; I love my job, and when you love your job, it doesn’t feel like work.”

True that! Her love for her job has always been very translucent. As much as she’s been loved for her films, so has she been equally for being an anchor. But, “The thing about being an actor is that you get to play many different roles. As an anchor, you get to be yourself, and that is the role you play, and people get to know you for the kind of person you are and the personality you have. That’s the primary difference! Another thing with being an actor is that you get lots of retakes too. While, on the other hand, with being an anchor is that, in general, 50% of the stuff

is live and 50% is recorded. When you get to do live stuff, there is a different kind of adrenaline flowing, and I enjoy the live stuff, and that’s the primary difference between being an actor and an anchor! The fact is, you have to think on your feet, you have to improvise on the job, you have to keep it going regardless of how you are feeling personally, and you have to put on your game face and just show up. And if it’s an off day, you still have to show up and perform, while you always have the luxury of a retake when it comes to being an actor.”

Anchoring, she shares, has given her a lot more in terms of people getting to know her for the person she was when she did cricket 20 years ago!

“People knew me by name after anchoring, and before that, people just knew me as the characters I played. So, which do I enjoy more? That would be an unfair question because both have different angles to it. You can live vicariously through the roles you play. I played so many gangsters and cops on the film, and it shows that it’s very nice that one gets to play different characters. So, both of them come with their own sets of great points, and I enjoy them both, and I want to try and be able to successfully balance and manage to do both,” shares the *Saaho* actress.

Having transitioned into multiple industries, today, people invite her to be a motivational speaker talking about fitness and mental health. “I never thought that a stage in my life would arrive where I would be talking about my mental and physical health and people would care to listen. I think it’s also got to do with the fact that I wrote a book, so yes, I am an author as well. I think I enjoy what I do, and because I get to do so many different things, that’s the reason why I feel I have managed to last out. It has been 29 years in the business, and I am so grateful that it’s not just one kind of thing that I do. I do many differ-



“AS AN ANCHOR, YOU GET TO BE YOURSELF AND THAT IS THE ROLE YOU PLAY AND PEOPLE GET TO KNOW YOU FOR THE KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE. THE PERSONALITY YOU ARE. THAT’S THE PRIMARY DIFFERENCE. THE THING WITH BEING AN ACTOR IS YOU GET LOTS OF RETAKES

things, and that’s what I think keeps me going; that’s what makes me tick.”

Talking of her recent onboarding project, it was hosting the Royal Stag Barrel Select Large Short Films—Select Films, Select Conversations’. And during our chat, she reveals that this marks her second association with the platform. From being an actor herself to hosting some amazingly talented artists and with the initiative, she feels privileged to be a part of the association. “The people who were on this panel and I got to interview them are all exemplary actors. I have to say that I enjoy hearing from them and learning about their process. I really take in a lot when they talk about their passion for their work and what makes them go. Be it Jim, who I have worked with, I think, twice, and Kalki, who I have worked with as well, it’s really a lovely experience talking to them and getting to know how they function, what their processes are, and what their thoughts are about their craft and the art of filmmaking.”

In addition, cricket has been something she has really enjoyed over her 12-year stint. Even now, with things changing, “I have done it for a couple of apps as well. I go on now like a guest, which I find very unusual, because I am a presenter first, and that is my connection with the sport, but it feels nice to be connected with sport and connected with the game of cricket.”

As we head towards the end of this informative chat, our interviewee went on to also highlight the challenges she faced while being one of India’s most popular woman sports presenters and hosts: “There were many challenges when I first became a cricket presenter, but that’s a story from a very long time ago, 20 years ago. People didn’t take me seriously, and I really had to do the hard yards; I really had to prove myself. I had to take a lot of pressure off myself because when you are doing something with the World Cup—and with cricket being the country’s national passion and the World Cup being one of the most important tournaments of all—there is bound to be pressure. I had a lot of pressure that I took with me when I went to South Africa, and it took me a long time to change people’s minds because some people did not believe I belonged there, and I had a long enough time to change their perception. I am grateful. I loved it. I loved the process of becoming a sports presenter. That went on for a few weeks—the first World Cup I was a part of—and then after that, it was many, many tournaments one after another, and it was a wonderful experience overall. And now, when I look at any channel, be it a news channel or a host broadcaster that is actually telecasting the matches, there is always a place for a woman there, and I feel very, very grateful that this shift has happened.”

Mandira Bedi has been one of the most influential and inspiring ladies to look up to. However, her journey to where she is today is not an easy one. Conversing with *The Pioneer*, this powerful lady looks back at her journey while also spilling the beans about her latest project, among others.

## From Kapoor & Sons to The Crew, Panchami Ghavri has changed the casting

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Panchami Ghavri, who carved out a space for herself, has cast for some well-known films, solidifying her status as one of the top casting directors in Hindi cinema. The most recent role Ghavri held was that of casting director for the popular series *Karmma Calling*!

She insists that anyone can approach her for an audition and that they will be given an equal opportunity. Every day, she is searching for fresh talent. She can’t keep mentioning the same individuals, as she remarked. Here is our exclusive interview with the casting director, and she starts by saying, “I think we have shifted to being a bit more curated casting house, but casting has evolved in general. Casting in the past was more messy. There was insufficient method to the madness—an infinite number of tests and hundreds of auditions for an advertisement in a single day. We operate extremely differently now. It is much better curated and organized. We create a list of candidates we believe would be a good fit for the role as soon as we learn we are auditioning for it, making sure to include a few unconventional choices as well. We routinely conduct our initial rounds of self-tests, and if we are satisfied, we invite them back to the office for additional testing. This is like working more intelligently—it saves a tonne of time.”

She even remembered, “The procedure is pretty much the same for everyone, even if it is a Kareena Kapoor Khan starrer. Usually, I would have a jam session with the director to see what ideas they have in mind, where names should be connected, and where we should do auditions to locate the talent. Naturally, difficulties vary from project to project. There are a tonne of possibilities, such as missing deadlines, having trouble with some castings, having schedule modifications, delays, etc. if we talk of movies like *The Crew* or a *Murder Mubarak*.”

She goes on to say, “My director, Sharan Sharma,

took the decision to cast Jhanvi Kapoor for the upcoming film titled *Mr. and Mrs. Mahi* because he had previously collaborated with Jhanvi on *Gunjan Saxena*. Rajkumar was a perfect fit for the role; everyone is aware of his talent and diligence. We will have to wait until you guys watch the trailer before revealing Kumudji, Zarina, ma’am, and the rest of the group. I am really pleased with *Mr. and Mrs. Mahi*; their tale is so endearing, and the performers did an amazing job. This is, in my opinion, Jhanvi’s best performance.”

Her ability to recognise faces and her knowledge are also beneficial. “Usually, if we are aware of them, we will get in touch with them directly or through their organisation and send them some reading material,” she stated. “Alternatively, we choose a scenario for an audition, compile a list of candidates, and then head straight to the audition. Naturally, I believe that the cornerstone is every role that we are casting for talent. We enjoy casting with the type occasionally. If, for example, we are searching for an urban city girl, we will audition girls who are naturally urban and from cities. Occasionally, we cast performers who may be exceptionally gifted but do not quite fit the description, going against the type. The latter has largely surprised me with amazing things. So, when casting, we never really choose a single direction.”

“We only and only put actors on a playlist who have given a good test,” he went on. “For me and the majority of my directors, it’s never based on following. Platforms may

occasionally request that since it makes it simpler to promote an actor who has a following but not us. We don’t prioritise following; instead, we are a talent-focused house.”

For further information, Panchami’s statement was, “It has been amazing working on the Class movie in particular. I was stuck inside my residence throughout the lockdown. It was therefore an interesting experience to find these special ten from all around India and also get used to working remotely. As a creator, I took a lot of inspiration from Ashim. We ended up with this diverse, incredibly skilled, and gorgeous ensemble because he offered me a lot of creative flexibility! On the other hand, *Karmma Calling* claimed that it’s a thriller and that it’s a completely new universe. I clicked with Ruchi right away when we first met. I have been fortunate enough to collaborate with a few female directors, so I was extremely eager to work with another one. I adore Ruchi’s energy. She expresses her desires quite clearly!”

Occasionally, she and her team encounter difficulties when attempting to mentor younger members. She said, “Last year, when the business felt incredibly slow in terms of the quantity of work we were doing—a sort of diversion—was actually the turning moment; as a freelancer, I realised I needed to be more than just one thing. Last year, I took a chance and did something other than casting.”

For her crew and any incoming actors, she wants her space to be a secure one. She is rather proud of the way they operate. They are a fairly small team. But she is very approachable, so anyone may come talk to her about anything. “A few fundamentals I have implemented are no sexist remarks, no messaging actors for purposes other than business unless they are your pals, and availability to come see me as soon as possible if someone is uncomfortable. Sincerely, I am glad to say that none of the actors on my team have ever complained; we operate in a very safe and orderly manner. When someone makes a mistake in whatever way, it’s discussed and handled properly.”

When a debutant makes it to the top of entertainment, the role of casting director plays an important role because it was they who first saw the potential in the respective actor. In this regard, *The Pioneer* conversed with **Panchami Ghavri**, who is solidifying her status as one of the top casting directors in Hindi cinema, to learn more about her profession, cinema, and others.



## ENDLESS COMFORT WITH TOP-NOTCH MATERIAL

PNS| HYDERABAD

An under-performing bra is a terrible thing. It can be hard on your psyche, your silhouette, your posture—the list goes on. Any bra you wear should be comfortable and well-constructed; it should make you feel confident and supported, in every sense of the word.

But isn’t it a big task to find the right one? Well, not anymore! Here we bring to you an awareness of the Non-Padded Wired Full Coverage Full Support Plus Size Bra.

Wacoal Best-Selling Comfort Bra is a top-tier choice that combines unparalleled comfort with essential support for full-figured women. Immerse yourself in the luxurious feel of this non-padded, wired bra, featuring full coverage and an array of features designed to enhance your everyday experience.

The seamless, two-ply fabric cups are equipped with a hidden inner sling, ensuring natural shaping and steadfast support. Crafted from a beautiful, smooth jacquard Calla Lily fabric, this bra not only delivers on functionality but also exudes elegance.

The hidden underwire is delicately encased between fabric layers, providing an extra layer of comfort. Experience a seamless blend of style and functionality as the band and wide sides work together to smoothen and minimise bulges, creating a streamlined silhouette.

Cushioned comfort straps, with convenient back adjustment, stay in place for a customised fit. The leotard (U) back design is a thoughtful addition, preventing straps from slipping off and ensuring a hassle-free experience throughout the day.

As we got our hands on the product, here’s our review of the product, and we must say the bra was pretty comfortable and

uplifting too.

The material is soft and breathable and doesn’t irritate you. The straps hold the weight well and are not harsh on your skin. In fact, they don’t give you any rash even after wearing them for 20 hours on a go.

If you are concerned about the back hooks and are uncomfortable with them, you do not need to worry. These hooks are designed and placed in such a way that they are smooth on your skin and not irritating.

The design and coverage are top-notch, and for all the ladies who feel a bit conscious because of their big breasts, this is a must-try as it holds them well.

However, one disappointment we had was the underwire, which, while we sat, poked the tummy a little bit. Especially for those with healthy weight and big breasts, when they sit, you can feel the weight of the underwire.

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# ENGLAND TEAM LANDS IN RAJKOT

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Fresh from a one-week break in their pre-series base Abu Dhabi, the England cricket team on Monday returned to India for the remainder of the five-match rubber against the hosts, which is locked at 1-1 after two games. The England team landed in the city — venue for the third Test — on Monday evening. After their 106-run loss in Visakhapatnam, the England players opted to utilise the 10-day break between the second and third Test by relaxing and playing golf in Abu Dhabi. The third Test is scheduled to be held here from February 15. The visiting team will begin training at SCA Stadium from Tuesday mornings, while the India players will practice in the afternoon. A day before their return to India, England were dealt a blow with their frontline spinner Jack Leach ruled out of the remaining three Tests with a knee injury. However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Basheer for the rest of the tour. Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three



regular spinners. England prepared for the highly anticipated Test series against India with an extensive conditioning camp in Abu Dhabi instead of arriving in the subcontinent early for practice matches.

The second match ended with a day to spare as hosts India, having lost the series opener, staged a remarkable comeback to level the series 1-1. During the Abu Dhabi camp prior to the series, the England team spent a lot of time

working on ways to tackle the Indian spinners. While they rallied to emerge winners in the opener, the English batters were blown away by Jasprit Bumrah's brilliant exhibition of reverse swing bowling in the first

innings of the second Test before succumbing in a record 399-run chase to a disciplined Indian bowling unit in their second innings. The fourth and fifth Tests will be held in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

# In Virat absence, great chance for England to win series: Broad

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Former pacer Stuart Broad says the ongoing India-England Test series is the most evenly-matched contest that he has seen between the two sides but the visitors have a strong chance of emerging triumphant as the "fire, passion and competitiveness" of Virat Kohli is missing from the home team's arsenal. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the just-concluded SA20, where he was a commentator, Broad said the absence of Kohli due to personal reasons is a downer but the matches so far have been engrossing. The five-match series is locked 1-1 and the two teams will now square off in the third game in Rajkot, beginning February 15. "(The) first two matches were very competitive and it is one of the most exciting India-England Test series that I have seen. It is the most level series," he said. "India won the last Test but England's playing style ('Bazball') is quite effective in India. With Virat not in the team, it is a great opportunity for the England team," he added. Broad feels Kohli's break has also opened a window of opportunity for the youngsters in the Indian team to make a name for themselves. "The battle between Virat and England bowlers had been great in the past. (James) Anderson and Kohli's battles are quite famous. It's a shame for the series and the sport that he will be missing," he observed. "...Virat adds to the quality of any contest because he is such a wonderful player who brings fire, passion, competitiveness and great fan following to the sport. But personal matters always take preference over cricketing matters," he said. "We saw in the last match when Yashasvi Jaiswal scored a brilliant double century," pointed out the bowler who snared 604 wickets in 167 Tests. Broad said he is also very happy with the performance of his former new-ball partner James Anderson on



India's unresponsive tracks. Anderson replaced Mark Wood in the second Test at Visakhapatnam and picked up five wickets. "We saw in the second Test, seamers played an important role with Jasprit Bumrah giving a match-winning performance and Jimmy bowling like that on those pitches. "Everyone expected that the pitch might spin a little bit more but seamers had a lot more success. Maybe with the moisture in the morning," he said. "Jimmy is nearing 700 wickets and I know he is someone who always takes wickets in a winning cause," he added about the 41-year-old Anderson, who has claimed 179 Test wickets against India in 68 tests. Broad and Anderson formed an intimidating pace partnership at the peak of their prowess but he does not believe that they were the last great Test fast bowling pair in the era of T20 cricket. But he did agree that to take more than 1200 wickets together will be difficult for another set of two pacers. "I don't think we are the last of the great bowing partnership in Test cricket. I think Jasprit Bumrah is an outstanding Test bowler. I don't think our partnership, in terms of wickets we have taken, will get overtaken because of the longevity of our career," he said. "I certainly think that there will be bowling partnerships that will light up world cricket

in the next few years," he added. "I grew up watching fast bowling partnerships like Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose, Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram, Darren Gaugh and Andy Caddick to name a few. I am sure there will be another partnership coming soon." Describing Test cricket as the pinnacle of the game, the former England captain said a window for the format should be created in which all nations can play at the same time. "I think the charm of Test Cricket is unmatched. It is a wonderful spectacle. There are many T20 leagues now and a number of World Cups coming around so scheduling is difficult to fit. "I can certainly see a period where we have a window for Test Cricket where all the nations are playing at the same time, kids watching highlights, talking about the performances of different teams," he said. He also advised young fast bowlers to balance their training to increase their career span. "Every bowler should find out what works for him for longevity. I liked running which I found crucial for my injury prevention. Jimmy and I did a lot of heavy weight lifting as well that really helped us. "It's quite different in Test cricket with 25 overs a day while in T20 it's only four. You don't need much power, just balanced training," he said.

# KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, fails to recover

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Senior India batter KL Rahul was on Monday ruled out of the third Test against England after failing to fully recover from his quadriceps strain that forced him to miss the second match in Visakhapatnam. It is understood that Devdutt Padikkal, the talented Karnataka left-hander who is enjoying a great first class season, will replace Rahul in the squad. "KL Rahul hasn't yet reported in Rajkot. Ravindra Jadeja, the local boy has linked up with the team. It was always a case of subject to fitness and BCCI medical team is still not confident that he is match fit," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. The selectors had earlier



named both Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja in the squad subject to clearance from the BCCI's medical team. In his most recent Ranji Trophy match, the 23-year-old Padikkal scored 151 with the chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar watching his knock from the stands. Padikkal has been in excellent form this season. Having

started with a 193 against Punjab in the opening game, he struck 103 against Goa. Besides his exploits in Ranji, Padikkal also scored 105, 65 and 21 in his three innings for India A in the two unofficial Tests against England Lions. As far as Rahul is concerned, the 31-year-old batter's extended break raises a serious question about

whether the senior India players and the BCCI's medical team are giving proper picture about the injury status of certain players. "If the BCCI's medical team knew in first place that Rahul's quad injury is as serious as it looks, why in the first place was he kept in provisional squad. And why is the player sending videos of his batting on Instagram stories," a senior BCCI official asked. Another senior player, who was recently told that he would be dropped for his poor form, pulled out on pretext of multiple injuries, something that the board hasn't even mentioned. The case of Ishan Kishan is even more curious as he hasn't even spoken to his

home state unit on whether he would play a Ranji Trophy match or not. With Rahul ruled out of the third Test and possibly fourth, the doors could open for Sarfaraz Khan in the middle-order now that Shreyas Iyer has also been dropped. However, there will be more selection conundrum if Jadeja takes his rightful place in the XI. Axar Patel has batted well in the two Tests so far and Kuldeep Yadav was the second best Indian bowler in Visakhapatnam after Jasprit Bumrah. As far as the keeper's slot is concerned, time is running out for KS Bharath with Dhruv Jurel breathing down his neck, but the former could still get one last chance in Rajkot.

## RANJI TROPHY

# Akash scalps 9 wickets to help Railways beat Goa

PTI ■ SURAT

Railways left-arm spinner Akash Pandey achieved a rare feat as he took nine wickets for 71 runs in Goa's second innings in a stunning bowling show to single-handedly power his side to a 63-run win in their Ranji Trophy Group C match here on Monday. Pandey dismissed eight Goa batters on the final day, while taking the wicket of opener Amogh Sunil Desai on Sunday. He bowled 26.2 overs in total in Goa's second innings. Only two players — Premangsu Chatterjee of Bengal and Pradeep Sunderam of Rajasthan — have picked all 10 wickets in one innings of a Ranji Trophy match. Chatterjee achieved the feat in a Ranji match against Assam in 1957, while Sunderam did the same in a match against Vidarbha in 1985. Chasing 306 for a win, Goa were all out for 242 in 65.2 overs. Railways walked away with six points while Goa got none. With the win, Railways now occupy fourth spot with 18 points. With just one round of matches left in the group league, Karnataka, who got three points on the basis of first innings lead in the drawn match against Tamil Nadu in Chennai, are in top spot with 24 points. Tamil Nadu are in second with 22 points and Gujarat in third with 19. In Chennai, chasing a target of 355, TN could only manage 338 for 8 in 105 overs. The match ended in a draw and Karnataka got three points for their first innings lead, while TN had to be satisfied with one point. Baba Indrajith was run out just two runs short of century, while Pradosh Ranjan Paul and Vijay Shankar chipped in



with 74 and 60 respectively. They lost three quick wickets towards the end to fall short of target after beginning the day at 36 for 1. In Mohali, Gujarat crushed Punjab by 299 runs to walk away with six points on the final day. Pacer Priyajitsing Jadeja scalped two more wickets on Monday to complete a fine five-wicket haul for 39 runs as Gujarat shot hosts Punjab for just 111 in 39.4 overs in their second innings. Chasing a tall target of 411 runs, Punjab produced an insipid batting display as none of them could reach 20 runs with the highest being 18 by captain Mandeep Singh. Seven of their batters were dismissed without reaching double-digit figures.

Priyajitsing's pace colleagues Chintan Gaja and Arzan Nagwaswalla took two wickets apiece, while spinner Siddharth Desai got one as the home side batters surrendered meekly. Punjab were staring at defeat after beginning the day at 40 for 4 and Gujarat completed the formalities in 25.4 overs on Monday.

**BRIEF SCORES:** In Surat: Railways 297 & 208 beat Goa 200 & 242 in 65.2 overs (Suyash Prabhudessai 67; Akash Pandey 9/71) by 63 runs. Railways 6 points; Goa 0 point. In Chandigarh: Chandigarh 356 & 359 for 3 declared in 74 overs (Arslan Khan 98, Shivam Bhambri 98, Manav Vohra 74; Sridam Paul 1/39) drew with Tripura 438 & 121 for 3 in 34.4 overs (Bikramkumar Das 58; Arpit Pannu 1/15). Tripura 3 points (on basis of first innings lead), Chandigarh 1.

Ranjan Paul 74, Vijay Shankar 60; Vijaykumar Vyshak 3/71). Karnataka 3 points (for 1st innings lead); Tamil Nadu 1 point. In Mohali: Gujarat 339 & 290 for 8 declared beat Punjab 219 & 111 in 39.4 overs (Mandeep Singh 18; Priyajitsing Jadeja 5/39) by 299 runs. Gujarat 6 points, Punjab 0 point. In Chandigarh: Chandigarh 356 & 359 for 3 declared in 74 overs (Arslan Khan 98, Shivam Bhambri 98, Manav Vohra 74; Sridam Paul 1/39) drew with Tripura 438 & 121 for 3 in 34.4 overs (Bikramkumar Das 58; Arpit Pannu 1/15). Tripura 3 points (on basis of first innings lead), Chandigarh 1.

# Kerala crush Bengal, jump to third spot

PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)

Veteran all-rounder Jalaj Saxena grabbed a match haul of 13 wickets on a rank-turner as Kerala crushed Bengal by 109 runs to taste their first win of the ongoing Ranji Trophy season here on Monday. The win propelled Kerala (14) to third in the Group B table behind leaders Mumbai (30) and Andhra (25). This was Bengal's second successive defeat of the season as the last edition's runners-up slipped to sixth spot and their knockout qualification hopes are as good as over. Bengal had endured an innings defeat to Mumbai at home in their previous outing. The spin-bowling all-rounder Saxena followed up his 9/68 in the first innings to pocket 4/104 as Bengal were bowled out for 339 in their tough chase of 449 runs. Opener Abhimanyu Easwaran completed his second fifty of the match after Bengal resumed the day on 77/2. But Saxena gave the breakthrough first dismissing Anustup Majumdar (16) and then halted Abhimanyu's patient innings for 65 (119b). Playing his penultimate match of his career, veteran Manoj Tiwary also became Saxena's victim falling cheaply for 35. Tiwary has announced that he will finally call it a day after Bengal's last league match against Bihar at Eden Gardens from February 16. Returning to action after a two-month injury layoff, Bengal premier all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed was the lone warrior for as he chipped in with an entertaining 100-ball 80 (8x4, 2x6). Karan Lal gave him support with a 78-ball 40 in an 83-run alliance for the seventh wicket. But it was just a formality for the visitors with Basil Thampi (2/8 from 2.4 overs) wiping out the tail, first by effecting the run-out of India Test-bound Akash Deep and then dismissing Shahbaz. **RAHANE SLAMS FIFTY, MUMBAI LOG 3 PTS:** In Raipur, veteran India batter Ajinkya Rahane struck his first fifty of Ranji Trophy season, as his 56 not out helped Mumbai bag three points by virtue of their first innings lead over hosts Chhattisgarh. Resuming the day on 97/1 with an overall 98 run lead, Mumbai declared their second essay on 253/6 as both the skippers, Rahane and Amandeep Khare,



agreed for a draw before the tea break. For the home side, left-arm spinner Ajay Mandal returned with 5/63 but that was not enough to bowl Mumbai out. The sidelined India batter, Rahane's previous scores in this year Ranji Trophy has been 0, 0, 16, 8, 9 and 1. This was his first fifty in nine innings as the Mumbai skipper scored a 78 against Tripura in the Vijay Hazare Trophy in December last year. **ASSAM SECURE FIRST WIN OF SEASON:** In Guwahati, Assam also secured their first win of the season, defeating Bihar by nine wickets. Assam now have eight points from six matches, three ahead of bottom-rung Bihar in the eight-team Group B standings. The day's hero was left-arm spinner Rahul Singh who claimed 5/49 as Bihar were bowled out for 292 following on. It gave Assam an easy target of 95 as the home side cantered home in 14.2 overs with opener Parvej Musaraf remaining unbeaten on 52, his second fifty of the match.

## BRIEF SCORES

In Thumba: Kerala 363 and 265/6 declared. Bengal 180 and 339; 87.4 overs (Shahbaz Ahmed 80, Abhimanyu Easwaran 65, Karan Lal 40). Kerala won by 109 runs. Points: Kerala 6, Bengal 0. In Raipur: Mumbai 351 and 253/6 declared (Bhupen Lalwani 59, Ajinkya Rahane 56 not out, Prithvi Shaw 45, Shardul Thakur 31; Ajay Mandal 5/65). Chhattisgarh 350. Match drawn, Mumbai take first innings lead. Points: Mumbai 3, Chhattisgarh 1. In Guwahati: Assam 405 and 100/1; 14.2 overs (Parvej Musaraf 52 not out). Bihar 207 and following on 292; 121 overs (Piyush Singh 103, Bipin Saurabh 44; Rahul Singh 5/49). Assam won by nine wickets. Points: Assam 6, Bihar 0. In Vizianagaram: Andhra 261 and 429/9; 145 overs (Ricky Bhui 129, Shaik Rasheed 85, Nitish Kumar Reddy 53 not out, Hanuma Vihari 48; Saurabh Kumar 5/116). Match drawn, Andhra take first innings lead. Points: Andhra 3, UP 1.



# Director Mahi V. Raghav dispels baseless rumours


A narrative from Andhraiyoth is making waves in the political community. To assist Jagan Mohan Reddy in the elections of 2014 and 2019, Mahi V Raghav produced the movies *Yatra* and *Yatra 2*! These are propaganda movies meant to sway the public in the run-up to the elections, it seems. It has been revealed that Mahi V Raghav sought for two acres in Horsley Hills to build a rural mini studio and amusement park. The application was expedited by the government last month.Following all of these unfounded rumours, the director made it clear, saying, "I would have asked for a place to build a studio in Hyderabad or Vizag if my intention was not to develop and contribute to my region." Filmmaker Mahi V. Raghav also asks media in return, "Why would I want to build a studio at Madanapalle, which is considered a backward area." Mahi V.

Raghav addressed these claims and provided more clarification. As he put it... "I have sixteen years of experience in the film industry as a writer, producer, and director. In 2008, I made my cinematic debut. I have founded the production companies Moon Water Pictures and Three Autumn Leaves. As a producer and director in the field, I am highly experienced. Moreover, Rayalaseema includes Madanapalle, where I was born and raised. My studies were finished in my hometown as well. Yet, Rayalaseema is not very significant in the movie business. Nobody expresses interest in using this location to shoot movies. *Save the Tigers* and *Anando Brahma* are two of my projects that weren't shot in Rayalaseema. In the Rayalaseema area, I shot *Paathasala*, *Yatra 2*, *Siddha*

*Lokamela Undi*, and *Shaitaan*. Between 20 and 25 crores have been sent to these three projects. I wish to make a contribution to the community where I was born and raised, which is the reason for this. I have used my hard-earned money at my birthplace because of this. Locals will profit from the filming because lodging, hotels, food, and juniors are required for the shoot. I have

made the decision to construct a little studio in Rayalaseema during my journey. With my studio, I hope to benefit the community." Horsley Hills is a well-liked tourist destination with cool summer-time temperatures. Large swarms of tourists from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Telangana come here. Thus, the land is extremely valuable commercially. "Anyone with a common sense can consider and comprehend this. I have not

requested fifty or one hundred acres for the purpose of building a studio. On just two acres, I intended to construct a small studio. In addition to helping people who wish to film a movie or web series, these shoots also assist the local community. There will be basic facilities here so that shootings can take place. What is the issue with this? Nobody will ever do anything if they don't want to. For the benefit of Rayalaseema, no one from the industry has ever come forward in all these years. Nobody raised their hand. You don't want anyone to come forward and you don't intend to do it either. Some media outlets don't even consider this. Their people were given land anywhere they requested for by their kind government. Nobody queries this. However, they are creating a stir when I wish to develop a small studio on two acres in my neighborhood to benefit the locals."





## 'After Razakar's release, we are already prepared for hate comments and threats'

**R**azakar is a film directed by Yata Satyanarayana, starring Bobby Simha, Vedika, Anushya Tripathi, Prema, Indraj and Makarand Desh Pandey under the banner of Samarveer creations and produced by Guduru Narayana Reddy. The song *Bharti Bharti Uyyalo* and the teaser which released recently created a sensation. The trailer of this film has been released and there was the film unit who spoke at the theatrical trailer launch event!

Director K. Raghavendra Rao said, "This film was made to educate the youth about history. We are at peace today because of many sacrifices. If history is shown in visual form like this, it will be more understandable. Watching my own trailer gave me goosebumps. My disciple, Yata Satyanarayana, who worked with me for ten years, has done very well. It seems like he write songs with chalk blood! Without Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, we would not be where we are today. Indianness still exists because of people like Radha Manohar Das. This film should be released all over the world."

Radha Manohar Das said, "When I saw the trailer, I felt very emotional and sad. If history is ignored, it will not be forgotten. If we forget history, we are doomed. It has not even been a hundred years since these events took place. Movies like this should come with the intention of preventing such atrocities from happening again. Why did *The Kashmir Files* and *Kerala Files* come? History has come. It was made to prevent such things from happening again. Sardar Vallabhbhai is like a hero for our country. We are not against any

person or religion; we are against the mentality of Rajakars. It takes a gutsy producer to make history like this. Guduru Narayana Reddy has that courage," he said.

Co-director Yata Satyanarayana said, "I entered the industry with admiration for Raghavendra Rao. He recognized me within three months of my arrival. I started serials like *Manoyagnam* and Rajamouli's *Shanti Nivasam*. They recognized my talent and molded me into a sculptor. Without him, I would not exist. My marriage was also arranged by him. I am happy that my Guru came and blessed our film. After Raghavendra Rao, Guduru Narayana Reddy holds that place in my heart. When a film like *Razakar* is released, there are threat calls and negative comments. I made this film to tell about our history, our pain, the sufferings, and sacrifices of our ancestors, those who fought for this land. This film is dedicated not only to Hyderabad but to India and to everyone who has been oppressed in the world. The media should take this picture to the people. Don't rate history. Give a zero rating for my next movie. We made this film to expose the injustices done by Razakars."

The leading lady of the movie Anasuya said, "Everyone should know what happened in our Nizam region. Not the French Revolution, not about Alexander – let's know ourselves first! Everyone will be shocked to see this movie. I have already seen this movie. Indraj, Prema, Vedika, Simha, Makarand have also acted wonderfully. You know what? Cinema is a great medium. I am very happy to have acted in this film."

## JAYAM RAVI'S SIREN LOCKS RELEASE DATE IN TELUGU



Actor Jayam Ravi, who starred in *Ponniyin Selvan*, is getting ready for the February 23 release of the pakka action commercial film *Siren*. Anthony Bhagyaraj, a rookie director, has wielded the megaphone. It's Maheswara Reddy Mooli of Ganga Entertainments who has bagged the Telugu release rights. The leading ladies are Anupama Parameswaran and Keerthy Suresh. The teaser for the movie dropped and is making waves!

*Siren* has been made as a mega-budget action thriller with family themes, according to producer Sujatha Vijayakumar, who spoke on the occasion. In a part that has never been seen before, actor Jayam Ravi sports two distinct looks. For the first time, the actor has paired up with Anupama and star actress Keerthy Suresh.

"Jayam Ravi has a bigger space awaiting his talent," actor Samuthirakani, who has starred in numerous Telugu films, stated. "He has 100 more movies to act in. I know this because we had already shared screen space in past."

Director Anthony Bhagyaraj said, "This movie is like a dream for me. A new director's film with a big hero must become a hit. Who wouldn't imagine it? Jayam Ravi took the responsibility of making this film a hit. I love GV anna's melodies on the film too. He is the only musician I know who always inspires me. He has given 20 tunes for this film."

"Emotion is very important in this film and it is important to bring it to the screen too," actor Jayam Ravi stated. "It's what we wanted GV to do. He is among the best music directors in India currently. In this movie, the female lead is excellent as well. Keerthy demonstrated that she was the correct choice, just as we had suspected. They claim that I produce movies for upcoming directors. But I am merely an instrument. The success of the movie is a result of the director's diligence; I had little trouble juggling two parts in this one."

## MRUNAL THAKUR TIES UP WITH TWO MAJOR TAMIL BANNERS

**M**runal Thakur just won hearts with her role in *Hi Nanna*, and she's now ready to establish herself in Kollywood. According to recent rumours, Mrunal has committed to two major Tamil projects. She will first appear on screen alongside Sivakarthekeyan in an AR Murugadoss film provisionally named as *SK 23*, which seems to be an exciting mass entertainment.

Second, she is slated to play the romantic lead opposite Simbu, aka STR, in his 48th film, which is produced and directed by Kamal Haasan and Desingh Periyasamy. Fans are getting excited as both projects are getting ready for production!

She is now balancing her commitments while she films *Family Star*, her upcoming Telugu film, co-starring Vijay Deverakonda. The movie, which is helmed by Parasuram Petla, is scheduled to be released in Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi on April 5, 2024.



## After a 25-year absence, BOLLYWOOD WELCOMES BACK COMEDY KING BRAHMANANDAM

**T**he Tollywood favourite, Brahamandam is expected to make his Bollywood comeback with the movie *Kuch Khattha Kuch Meetha Ho Jaye*, according to reports.

For those who don't know, *Sooryavansham*, starring Amitabh Bachchan, was his debut Hindi film. Alongside debutante hero Guru Randhava and actress Saiee Manjrekar, known for her roles in *Major* and *Skanda*, Brahmi is scheduled to star in the scheduled movie..

There are still unknowns surrounding his role in this G Ashok-directed movie. The film is slated for release in theaters on February 16, 2024, and fans are excited about his comeback to wow Bollywood lovers once more.

### LYF shows the love of a father and son

**L**YF 'Love Your Father' is a new age film jointly produced by Manisha Arts and Media Pvt.Ltd and Annapareddy Studios. The movie *LYF Love Your Father* is coming in the direction of Pawan Ketaraju and produced by Kishore and Mahesh Rathni with Sri Harsha and Kashika Kapoor as the lead cast. Mallareddy Institute of Medical Sciences, Mallareddy Hospital Chairman Dr. Bhadra Reddy, Mallareddy Health City Managing Director C. H. Preeti Reddy, Mallareddy College Principal A. Ramaswamy Reddy Garu, Hero Sriharsha, Rhea, Director Pawan Ketaraju, Producers Kishore Rathni, Mahesh Rathni, S. P. Charan, Manindra Kumar and other college principals were also present.

On this occasion, producer Mahesh Rathni said, "Manisha Arts and Media Private Limited has been running successfully since 1983. This movie shows the emotions and bonding between a good father and son. We have been sitting on the script for eight months and developed it very well. Mani Sharma has given music for this movie! This life is given to us by God, then Father is God to all of us. And, I love my father. My father's blessings are always with me. Also, I sincerely wish for all your blessings too for the success of my upcoming venture."

