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The BRS and the BJP are hatching a conspiracy against the Congress by striking a deal to share Lok Sabha seats with the BJP taking 10 LS seats and the BRS 7. KCR did more harm to Telangana in the last 10 years than former AP rulers. Modi didn't even stop KCR. They have the CBI, the ED and the IT Department. Did the Centre file even a single case against KCR

- Revanth Reddy, CM TS

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-SPORTS

(Capital Region Development Authority) area, due to legal actions instigated by Chandrababu and his associates, citing demographic concerns.

2



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Addressing a huge public meeting before handing over the conveyance deeds to the women here on Friday, the Chief Minister said

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PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The agenda encompassed discussions on forthcoming strategies, including opposition to policies formulated by the BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the YSRCP administration led by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Moreover, there were talks of fortifying the camaraderie within the INDIA alliance group, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming General and Andhra Pradesh State Assembly Elections in 2024. The Congress is inclined towards allying with the Left parties and other like-minded entities.

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PNS **VIJAYAWADA**

Addressing the media after the meeting, Minister Satyanarayanan highlighted the government's rationale for not providing IR, citing the inability to announce the PRC earlier due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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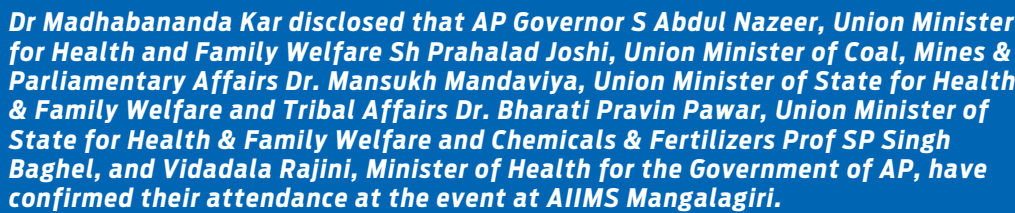
is being considered to uplift the morale and vigour of the party members," according to a TDP leader who pleaded anonymity.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

their chosen candidates for the upcoming elections. Insiders revealed that Chandrababu Naidu has reached out to key figures, including K Atchannaidu and Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, summoning them to his residence for crucial discussions. A call to convene at Naidu's residence at 9 am on Saturday has been issued, with personal phone

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Speaking to the press on Friday, Dr Madhabananda Kar disclosed that AP Governor S Abdul Nazeer, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Sh Prahalad Joshi, Union Minister of Coal, Mines & Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare and



The project is now fully completed, featuring an Academic Complex (Medical College, Medical Lab & Nursing College), a hospital with OPD, IPD, and Emergency facilities, Residential blocks, Hostel blocks, a

The Outpatient Department has been operational since March 2019, with an average footfall of around 2500 patients per day. As of February 20, AIMS Mangalagiri has conducted over 15,00,000 outpatient consultations, including treatments for 20,000 inpatients and 12,000 emergency cases. Currently, eight MOTs and five Minor OTs are operational, and over 7,200 major and minor surgeries have been performed across various surgical departments, including Neurosurgery, Pediatric Surgery, and Urology.

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For systems of capacity higher than 10 kW, the timeline for completing the feasibility study has been reduced from 20 days to 15 days.

NEW CRIMINAL DEFAMATION

Where trial itself becomes the real punishment

The current government of Bharat has made changes to the country's criminal laws, aiming to update and improve them. These changes are not entirely new but mostly familiar. The goal is to make the laws simpler, more modern, and better suited to today's society. The new laws propose to replace old ones, introduce new crimes, and increase penalties for some offences.

These Criminal Acts aim to replace outdated laws with more modern and comprehensive pieces of legislation that reflects the evolving needs and values of society. The Central government seeks to streamline and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in India.

The three new Criminal Acts 2023 were introduced in the Lok Sabha to overhaul the country's criminal justice system, but immediately amended: The Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2023, the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2023 and the Indian Evidence Act (Amendment) Act, 2023. These changes were suggested

by a committee formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 2020, which reviewed the existing laws to ensure safety and justice for everyone.

However, there has been some controversy surrounding these changes. While the government claims they are necessary improvements, some opposition members argue that the new laws are rushed and largely similar to the old ones. They also raise concerns about potential misuse, especially regarding the offence of criminal defamation.

In 2020, the MHA formed a committee led by Dr. Ranbir Singh, a former Vice Chancellor of the National Law University (NLU) in Delhi. This committee was tasked with reviewing the three main criminal law codes in the country. Its purpose was to suggest changes to these laws to ensure the safety of individuals, communities, and the nation, while also emphasizing principles like justice and dignity.

BJP MP Brij Lal headed a 31-member Parliamentary

Innocent individuals, including journalists, could face imprisonment if they cannot afford to pay such hefty fines. This highlights the importance of thorough examination and analysis of each section dealing with penalties or definitions of criminal behaviour, especially regarding fines and other conditions outlined in the rules.

Standing Committee that has reviewed the laws after their introduction in August. Most of the opposition MPs pointed out several errors and recommended more than 50 changes. In their dissent notes, the opposition MPs flagged the lack of diversity in the experts consulted and some questioned the haste with which the new laws are being introduced. They also highlighted that they are 'largely a copy-paste' of the existing laws. The new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023 aims to replace and update the The Indian Penal Code (established in 1834 and which became effective in 1860). This new Bill propos-

es various changes, including those related to defamation, crimes against women, and attempted suicide. While the current IPC consists of 511 sections, the BNS Bill has 356 sections. It largely retains sections from the old Indian Penal Code. Specifically, 175 sections have been amended, eight new sections have been added, and 22 sections have been repealed. Home Minister Shah, in his speech in Lok Sabha, said: "Grammatical and language errors have been corrected. The Bills were examined at length by the Standing Committee and it was necessary to include the suggestions. There are no major changes. Had we con-



PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU
Dean, Mahindra University, Hyderabad

tinued with the old Bills, several official amendments would have had to be made, so we decided to introduce new Bills instead. Adequate time, 48 hours, has been given to members to study the Bills...We do not want to pass such important pieces of legislation in a hurry." According to him, there are 313 changes in the new Bill...The entire criminal justice system will be completely overhauled and everyone will get justice in a

minimum of three years... The bill will introduce that police do not misuse their power. Offences like sedition have been repealed.

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, 2023 has defined community service. The original Bill introduced the concept of 'community service' as a form of punishment for petty offences such as an attempt to commit suicide, public servants unlawfully engaged in trade, theft of property less than Rs 5,000, public intoxication, and defamation. Accordingly, as per the panel's recommendations, this punishment has now been defined under Section 23 of the revised Bill. Community service is 'work which the Court may order a convict to perform as a form of punishment that benefits the community, for which he shall not be entitled to any remuneration.' Moreover, a Magistrate of the First or Second Class has been specifically empowered to impose this punishment, to encourage a more reparative approach to minor crimes.

Criminal defamation

One contentious issue is the retention of criminal defamation, which could potentially affect journalists and critics. The punishment for defamation may include imprisonment, fines, or community service, raising concerns about freedom of expression.

Many countries have repealed criminal defamation, but the new Government has retained it which is mostly used or abused to drag the opposition leaders. Earlier Section 500 of the IPC dealt with the punishment for defamation, but it is no longer present. Instead, the offence of defamation is now addressed under Section 354(1) of the Sanhita. Additionally, Section 354(2) of the proposed Sanhita outlines the punishment for defamation, which includes the option of "community service."

Serious concern

There is a raise a valid concern. While the new law may seem innocuous on the surface, the implementation of rules under these criminal acts is crucial. For example, in the

case of criminal defamation, heavy fines imposed through rules could potentially make it challenging for journalists to freely criticize or comment on politicians, MLAs, or Ministers. Regarding the amount of fine, it is essential to consider the context and the specific provisions laid out in the law.

Innocent individuals, including journalists, could face imprisonment if they cannot afford to pay such hefty fines. This highlights the importance of thorough examination and analysis of each section dealing with penalties or definitions of criminal behaviour, especially regarding fines and other conditions outlined in the rules. Ultimately, the impact of these laws heavily relies on how they are interpreted and enforced through the accompanying rules and regulations. It is crucial to ensure that the rights of individuals, including journalists, are protected and that punitive measures are fair and proportionate to the offense committed, especially when at present, each trial itself becomes the real punishment.

AMRIT BHARAT STATION SCHEME

PM to lay foundation for 13 railway stations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to mark a significant milestone by laying the foundation stone for the redevelopment of 13 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme and the dedication of 10 RuBs (Road Under Bridges) over the Guntur Railway division on February 26.

During a press briefing held in Guntur on Friday, M. Ramakrishna, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of the Guntur railway division, emphasised the rapid strides Indian Railways is taking towards modernisation, in tune with the vision of a New India set forth by the Government of India. He highlighted that in the initial phase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stone for the development of 508 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat Station

Scheme nationwide on August 6, 2023, including three stations in Andhra Pradesh: Piduguralla, Repalle, and Donakonda in the Guntur Division. Ramakrishna detailed the upcoming second phase, where PM Modi is slated to lay the foundation stone for the redevelopment of 554 railway stations under the Amrit Station Scheme and dedicate or lay foundation stones for approximately 1,500 Road Under Bridges/Road Over Bridges across Indian Railways on February 26, 2024, via video conference. This year's budget has allocated a record amount of Rs. 9,138 crores for Andhra Pradesh, with plans to develop 40 stations into world-class railway stations. Within the Guntur Division, encompassing areas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, 13 stations (11 in Andhra Pradesh and 2 in Telangana) are earmarked for foundation laying.

Modi govt successful in tackling Naxalism: Shah

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Ministry of Home Affairs released videos on Friday showcasing the significant strides made by the Modi government in tackling left-wing extremism (LWE) or Naxalism. These videos were shared by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on his social media platform.

Shah expressed, "PM @narendramodi's administration has dealt a decisive blow to Naxalism through a comprehensive approach focusing on development and security in affected regions. By working closely with state governments, the Modi government has earned the trust of the people, fostering overall development."

Highlighting the government's efforts, Shah stated, "The Modi government has prioritised the well-being of the underprivileged residing in



The Modi government has prioritised the well-being of the underprivileged residing in Naxalism-affected areas by enhancing healthcare and educational infrastructure. Thanks to PM @narendramodi's forward-thinking policies, the breeding ground for Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has been dismantled

Naxalism-affected areas by enhancing healthcare and educational infrastructure. Thanks to PM @narendramodi's forward-thinking policies, the breeding ground for Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has been dismantled." Shah emphasized that under PM @narendramodi's leadership, an aggressive strategy has been adopted to combat Naxalism effectively. This strategic approach has significantly weakened the grip of left-wing extremism.

According to records from the Home Ministry, there has been a notable 52% reduction in Naxal-related violence between 2014 and 2023 compared to the preceding decade (2004-2014). The incidents decreased from 14,862 to 7,128 during these periods.

Fatalities resulting from left-wing extremism have decreased by 69%, with casualties dropping from 6,035 to 1,868. Similarly, the number of security personnel martyred

decreased by 72%, from 1,750 to 485 during the Modi government's tenure.

Civilian casualties due to Naxal violence decreased by 68%, from 4,285 to 1,383. Additionally, the number of districts witnessing violence decreased from 96 in 2010 to 45 in 2022, marking a 53% reduction.

Finally, the number of police stations reporting violent incidents decreased from 465 in 2010 to 176 in 2022.



Work on long-awaited RoB begins in Autonagar

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Residents of Tungalam, Chukkavanipalem, Kapu Tungalam, Golla Jaggarajupeta, and areas surrounding Autonagar are set to breathe a sigh of relief as the foundation stone for a much-awaited rail over bridge (RoB) was laid on Friday, marking a significant step towards easing longstanding traffic woes caused by the Tungalam Railway Gate.

State Industries Minister Gudivada Amarnath, alongside local dignitaries, officiated the ceremony, heralding the commencement of the construction

phase. The project, anticipated for years, is being initiated under the auspices of the Setu Bandhan Scheme, with an allocated budget of approximately Rs 16 crore.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Amarnath emphasised with the residents, acknowledging their enduring struggle with traffic congestion exacerbated by the railway gate. He recounted an aerial observation with the Chief Minister, during which the severity of the issue became starkly apparent. Following the Chief Minister's directive, concerted efforts were mobilised to promptly address the pressing concern.

2 new choppers for CM's poll ...

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In line with recommendations from a committee tasked with assessing Jagan's security needs, the proposal outlines the acquisition of two new twin-engine helicopters, both less than two years old, to fulfil the flying commitments of the Chief Minister and other VIPs.

After issuing an e-tender notification and conducting a thorough evaluation of technical bids, the government has selected Global Vectra Helicopters. Their bid of Rs 1,91,75,000 per month on lease has been approved, with one helicopter to be stationed in Vijayawada and the other in Visakhapatnam.

PM to ...

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Dr. Kar highlighted the functional facilities including Dialysis, Advanced Blood Bank, State-level VRDL facility, Trace element & molecular biology lab, Advanced robotic physiotherapy facility, endoscopy, 2D-ECHO, Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulator (RTMS), intrauterine I n s e r t i o n , Audiometry and vestibular function Lab, EEG, nerve conduction studies, Spirometry, and Uroflowmetry services. Col Shashikanth Thumma, Deputy D i r e c t o r (Administration), Dr Vineet Thomas Abraham, Medical Superintendent, Dr K Vamsi Krishna Reddy, Spokesperson of the Media Cell, were present.

TDP-JSP likely to unveil first list of candidates ...

Continued from Page 1

Sources further revealed that while awaiting official confirmation from the BJP to cement their alliance, both TDP and JSP have opted to disclose some candidates to bolster confidence among supporters.

Govt keen on ...

Continued from Page 1

He questioned the necessity for IR when the government is actively pursuing PRC implementation and mentioned plans to regularize contract employees, albeit delayed by ongoing legal proceedings. He reassured a democratic approach in all government actions.

Sharmila explores ...

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Following the meeting, YS Sharmila addressed the media at the Congress office, revealing that the party has extended an invitation to the CPI and the CPM for a forthcoming public gathering scheduled in Anantapur, with the possible participation of AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge.

"We are currently in negotiations with the Left parties regarding electoral alliances and seat sharing, among other pertinent matters," remarked Sharmila.

Expressing his stance, CPM State Secretary

Srinivasa Rao underscored the necessity of unity among the Congress, Left parties, and allied groups to counteract the apparent alignment of the YSRCP, TDP, and JSP with the BJP, which he criticized for overlooking the state's interests. Rao emphasized the imperative nature of forming a joint front to contest the dominance of these parties in the state. He also criticized the BJP's indirect governance in the state, despite its meager vote share. On the same note, CPI State Secretary Ramakrishna lamented the apprehension displayed by regional parties towards the BJP.

CM kicks off ...

Continued from Page 1

The government has been implementing reforms in education, medicine health, and other sectors to narrow down disparities between the poor and rich sections of society so that the children from the weaker sections pursue English medium education on par with the children from the privileged sections.

He said the government has also enhanced the free medical treatment limit to Rs. 25 lakh under the YSR Aarogyasri scheme so that the poor would also be able to get medical treatment on par with the rich.

Disbursal of Rs 2,55,000 crore through DBT welfare schemes, out of which 70 per cent of the benefit has gone to the SC, ST, BC, and minority communities, resulted in their economic empowerment, he said, adding that the provision of 50 per cent reservation in the nominated posts has also resulted in their social and political empowerment.

Govt tweaks rules for speedy ...

Continued from Page 1

Further, in case the study is not completed within the stipulated time, the approval will be deemed to have been given.

Additionally, it has now been mandated that the distribution system strengthening necessary for rooftop solar PV systems up to 5 kW capacity will be done by the distribution company at its own cost.

Also, the timeline for the distribution licensee to com-

Architect of free farm power scheme Jannath Hussain dead

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jannath Hussain, a retired IAS officer celebrated for his pivotal role in establishing free power distribution to the agricultural sector in Andhra Pradesh, passed away at his son's residence in Sullurpet town, Nellore district, on Friday morning. He was 74. He is survived by wife, two sons, and a daughter.

According to his family, Jannath Hussain breathed his last at approximately 6 am after battling Alzheimer's disease and other age-related ailments for the past six years.

"His body will be brought to his residence in Kundanbag, and the final rites will be conducted at Panjagutta graveyard on Saturday evening," stated his family members.

Jannath Hussain, a 1977-batch IAS officer hailing from a farmer's household in Siddharth Nagar, Uttar



Pradesh, served in various capacities within the state for 33 years. His illustrious career culminated in his retirement as the Special Chief Secretary to the Government on December 31, 2010.

Upon assuming office as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in May 2004, Congress leader YS Rajasekhara Reddy appointed Jannath Hussain as the Principal Secretary in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), citing his impeccable character and integrity.

Naidu hindering justice to poor

Continued from Page 1

Jagan emphasized that, unlike Naidu's reliance on friendly media and familial connections, YSRCP's foundation lies in the support of the divine and the people, urging voters to reinstate the party if they have benefited from its array of welfare schemes.

District election officers across the state, additional CEOs P Koteswara Rao, MN Harendhira Prasad, Joint CEO A Venkateswara Rao, Deputy CEO K Visweswara Rao and others participated.

Bhuvaneswari likens upcoming polls to 'Kurukshetra'

ers Mohan Naidu, Anjaneya Naidu, and Kumaru Munivelu. Over the past four days, she toured Kuppam, Palamaneru, Punganur, Puthalapattu, Chittoor, GD Nellore, and Satyavedu constituencies, meeting with the families of 15 activists.

Biological control laboratory inaugurated to boost farming

affordable rates. The deployment of parasite-based control methods developed within these laboratories aims to empower farmers with sustainable and crop-friendly solutions, ultimately fostering the production of high-quality crops and bolstering agricultural incomes.

NTPC Simhadri sets up flue gas desulphurisation units

Recognising the imperative for diversification, Sinha outlined groundbreaking plans for renewable energy integration. These include the establishment of a 2.1 MW rooftop solar power plant within the facility's premises, paving the way for self-generated clean energy.

Hall tickets for AP TET-2004 exam uploaded

A Help Desk for TET and DSC is operational from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm to assist candidates. For queries, candidates can reach out via the following contact numbers: 95056 19127, 97056 55349, 81219 47387, and 81250 46997.

Where was Sharmila for four-and-a-half years? Roja

Guidelines to be issued for transfers in SC Gurukuls

Social Welfare Department
Principal Secretary K
Harshavardhan, Gurukulam
Secretary Ravirala Mahesh
Kumar, officials of various
departments participated.

Blood donation camp organised

Format C-1
(For Candidate to publish in newspapers, TV)
Declaration about criminal cases

(As per the judgment dated 25th September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) no.536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundations & ORS. Vs. Union of India &Anr.)
Name and address of Candidate:YERRAM VENKATA SUBBA REDDY.
Name of Political Party:YUVAJANA SRAMIKA RYTHU CONGRESS PARTY.
(Independent candidates should write "Independent" here)
Name of Election:RAJYA SABHA (PARLIAMENT)
*Name of Constituency: ANDHRA PRADESH I YERRAM VENKATA SUBBA REDDY, a candidate for the above mentioned election; declare for public information the following details about my criminal antecedents:

(A) Pending Criminal Cases				
Sl. No	Name of Court	Case No. and dated	Status of Case(s)	Section(s) of Acts concerned and brief description of offence(s)
1	THE PRINCIPAL SPL JUDGE FOR CBI CASES CUM SPECIAL COURT UNDER PREVENTION OF MONEY LAUNDERING ACT, HYDERABAD.	SC. No. 1 OF 2021	PENDING	SECTION 4 R/W SECTION 3 OF PMLA ACT, SECTION 4 of PMLA, 2002 - PUNISHMENT FOR MONEY-LAUNDERING SECTION 3 of PMLA, 2002 - OFFENCE OF MONEY-LAUNDERING.
2	THE HON'BLE PJ CJ COURT, ONGOLE, PRAKASAM DISTRICT.	CC.NO.04 OF 2016	PENDING	SECTION 188,283, 143, 149 OF INDIAN PENAL CODE AND SECTION 32 OF POLICE ACT. SECTION 188 OF IPC, 1860 - DISOBEDIENCE TO ORDER DULY PROMULGATED BY PUBLIC SERVANT. SECTION 283 OF IPC, 1860 - DANGER OR OBSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC WAY OR LINE OF NAVIGATION. SECTION 143 OF IPC, 1860 - PUNISHMENT FOR UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY SECTION 149 OF IPC, 1860 - EVERY MEMBER OF UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY GUILTY OF OFFENCE COMMITTED IN PROSECUTION OF COMMON OBJECT.SECTION 32 OF POLICE ACT, 1861 - PENALTY FOR DISOBEYING ORDERS ISSUED UNDER LAST THREE SECTIONS, ETC.
3	IN THE COURT OF PRINCIPAL SPL JUDGE FOR CBI CASES, HYDERABAD.	C.C. NO. 26 OF 2014.	PENDING	SECTION 9 OF POLICE ACT, SECTION 120-B OF INDIAN PENAL CODE SECTION 9 OF PC ACT, 1988 - OFFENCE RELATING TO BRIBING A PUBLIC SERVANT BY A COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATION. SECTION 120-B OF IPC, 1860- PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMINAL CONSPIRACY.

(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences				
Sl. No.	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offences(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment Imposed	
NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL

*In the case of election to Council of States or election to Legislative Council by MLA's, mention the election concerned in place of name of constituency.

Sd
YERRAM VENKATA SUBBA REDDY

INDIA CORNER

Over 100 kg charas worth Rs 75 cr seized on Nepal border

Five women and two men were arrested in two separate incidents near the India-Nepal border in this Uttar Pradesh district and 110 kilograms of charas worth around Rs 75 crore in the international market seized from them, police said on Friday. Superintendent of Police (SP) Soumendra Meena said the drug seizures took place in the Sonauli area on Thursday. He said Bihar residents Navi Hasan Mian, Guddu Yadav, Rani Devi and Seema Devi were arrested after 71 kilograms of charas was found in their car during a routine check near the border. A case has been registered under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Meena said. He added that a few hours later, police arrested three Nepalese women at the same border with 39 kgs of charas. The women were on their way to Delhi, police said.



Five held for creating ruckus on Delhi flyover

Five people have been apprehended for creating a ruckus on a flyover and blocking it with their vehicles in west Delhi's Vikaspuri area, police said on Friday. The accused, identified as Subeer Singh (42), Naam Singh (41), Gurmeet Singh (29), Harmeet Singh (32) and Manmeet Singh (36), blocked the flyover on Thursday by bursting colour bombs and driving in a zigzag manner, they said. The accused were also accompanied by other people who also indulged in hooliganism on the road, according to police. The matter came to light after some of the commuters who faced problems due to the conduct of the accused recorded videos and posted them on social media. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Vichitra Veer said after the videos of the incident came to light, a case was registered under sections 279 (rash driving) and 188 (punishment for disobedience to an order duly promulgated by a public servant) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and teams were formed to identify the accused.



Alipur fire: NHRC asks Delhi govt to survey all illegal units

The NHRC has issued notices to the Delhi government and the police commissioner in the wake of the Alipur fire incident here in which 11 people died, officials said on Friday. The rights panel has also directed the Delhi government to conduct a survey of all industrial units manufacturing hazardous chemicals and other inflammable substances, and running illegally without following the safety guidelines as per the Factories Act and submit a report within six weeks, they said. Issuing the notices, the commission further observed that this is not an isolated incident of fire where innocent workers have died "due to negligence by the employers and the authorities in the national capital in the recent past". "The public servants appear to have not taken any lessons from the previous tragedies," the officials said. At least 11 people were killed and several injured in the fire that had broken out in the paint on February 15, according to the police.



Those not in 'hosh' are calling youth 'nasheri': PM Modi

PNS ■ VARANASI

In an apparent attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his "drunk men" on Varanasi roads remarks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said those who are not in "hosh" (senses) themselves are calling the youth "nasheri" (intoxicated). Addressing a public meeting after inaugurating and laying the foundation of development projects worth Rs 13,000 crore in his parliamentary constituency of Varanasi, Modi said Uttar Pradesh had been left behind in development for decades due to the politics of 'parivarvaad', corruption and appeasement. "Member of Congress 'shahi-parivar' is calling the youth of Varanasi 'nasheri' (intoxicated)," Modi said, without naming Gandhi. "Those who are not in 'hosh' themselves are calling the youth 'nasheri'," he added.



Gandhi had recently said that in Varanasi he observed some youths inebriated, lying on the streets, and dancing at night. The future of the youth of Uttar Pradesh is intoxicated, he had added. In his address, Modi said the speed of development of Varanasi has increased in the last 10 years. Noting that in the 10 years as the MP, Varanasi has made him a 'Banarasi', Modi said

he was committed to improving the lives of the people of Kashi. Highlighting his government's work for farmers and the poor, he said animal husbandry is a medium to make women self-reliant and a support for small and landless farmers. "I remain vocal for locals to advertise small artisans. Modi is the ambassador of small farmers and entrepreneurs," the prime minister added.

CBI to arrest Kejriwal in few days: AAP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Friday claimed the CBI is planning to arrest Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the next few days and will serve him a notice by the evening. While the party did not say in which case Kejriwal is likely to be arrested, it said that this was being done to prevent the AAP from stitching an alliance with the Congress for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as the BJP is scared of the two parties coming together. While there was no immediate response from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to the AAP's claims, the BJP said AAP leaders are trying to create confusion and generate sympathy for Kejriwal.

PM Modi's efforts led to establishment of Hindu temple in UAE: Adityanath

PNS ■ VARANASI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary leadership and efforts led to the establishment of the first Hindu temple in the UAE. Modi inaugurated the temple in Abu Dhabi on February 14 and described it as a symbol of the shared heritage of humanity. "After inaugurating it (temple) just over a week ago, the PM has arrived in Kashi. Kashi is known for its temples and culture across the globe," Adityanath said. The establishment of the Abu Dhabi temple was possible due to the visionary

leadership and efforts of the prime minister, he added. The prime minister reached his parliamentary constituency on Thursday night. He launched several development projects and addressed public meetings on Friday. According to a statement issued by the state government, "The chief minister emphasised how Kashi has upheld its spiritual and cultural essence over the past decade while showcasing itself to the world in a renewed light." By ensuring development, the prime minister has given Kashi a new identity, Adityanath said.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday cautioned against Beijing's "mind game" to restrict India-China issues under the bilateral framework and said New Delhi must not forgo its rights to harness other factors in the world to get better terms on an "equilibrium" in the relations. In an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue, Jaishankar also said that arriving at an equilibrium and maintaining it is going to be one of the "biggest challenges" for the two countries even as he asserted that the immediate issue at hand was Beijing's departure from laid down norms triggering the border row in eastern Ladakh. On the economic front, the external affairs minister said there would be a period when the Chinese economy will be flattening out and India will be growing and referred to projections by Goldman Sachs that suggested that by 2075, both countries could end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies.

Jaishankar said India should be confident enough to "leverage" the international system to create the "best possible outcome". His remarks came when asked whether there would be a settling point between China and India and would the two countries finally find an equilibrium or a balance in their frosty relations. "Here is the immediate issue which is: From the late 1980s, we had an understanding on the border precisely because it suited both of us. Now there was a departure after almost 30 years. A departure on their side in terms of how they behaved on the border. And there was a pushback from our side," he said. "I think arriving at equilibrium, then maintaining those and refreshing those is going to be one of the biggest challenges for both countries. It is not going to be easy," he noted. The external affairs minister said "mind games" will be played which would be that it is 'just between the two of us'.



"The other 190 odd countries do not exist in our relationship. That will be the mind game which will be played. I do not think we should play it," he said. "Because if there are other factors out there in the world which can be harnessed by me to get better terms on an equilibrium, then why should I forgo that right," he said. "Today, when I say think

through your own solution, do not give another country, which is clearly a competitive country, a veto over our policy choices. Unfortunately, in the past that has happened from time-to-time, he said. Talking about the two economies, Jaishankar said the Chinese started off "earlier and much more intensively and robustly" than India did.

"But it is in the nature of things that at some stage everybody flattens out. So there will be a period when they will be flattening out and we will be growing," he said. "I am not in denial of what the numbers today suggest. But if one looks for an example in Goldman Sachs predictions which is that we will both really by around 2075 end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies and will be the two closest to each other," he said. "The international version of that issue will be -- if both of us are moving vis-a-vis each other and vis-a-vis the world, how do we construct an equilibrium; that There will be occasions when one or the other would want to do something to press home a particular advantage and the other would resist it," he said. On various global challenges that he flagged in his new book 'Why Bharat Matter', Jaishankar said the really serious problems are stemming from the economic vulnerabilities of the world.

Chhattisgarh Assembly hails PM on Ram temple

PNS ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh legislative assembly on Friday passed a resolution expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP-led Centre for the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya last month. State Dharmik Nyas (religious trust) and Dharmswa department Minister Brijmohan Agrawal presented the resolution in the House. "Chhattisgarh is Lord Ram's 'nanihal' (home of maternal grandparents). It had been Ram Van Gaman Marg, the route taken him during his

exile. Lord Ram is worshipped by three crore people of the state," the resolution stated. On behalf of every citizen of Chhattisgarh, the House expresses its gratitude for the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya by the prime minister, which the people had waited for nearly 500 years, it said. The minister pointed out that the Opposition Congress MLAs were absent during a discussion on the resolution in the House. Earlier in the day, Congress MLAs boycotted the proceedings of the House after the chair refused to allow their

demand for a discussion on the murder of three members of a Baiga tribe family in Kabirdham district last month. The consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya was a historic event, and several countries had admired it, Agrawal said. "It is unfortunate for the Congress that it is not present for this discussion. If the Congress members had opposed the resolution in the House, people would have taught them a lesson, and if they had supported it, their party would have taught them a lesson," he said.

Baba Saheb Ambedkar great admirer of Gadge Maharaj, says PM Modi in tribute to saint

PNS ■ VARANASI (UP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday paid tributes to saint and social reformer Gadge Maharaj on his birth anniversary. Addressing a public function in Varanasi to commemorate the 647th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas, Modi said, "Today is also the birth anniversary of great saint and social reformer Gadge Baba. Like Sant Ravidas, Gadge Baba had done a lot of work to free the society from stereotypes and for the welfare of the Dalits and the deprived.

"Baba Saheb Ambedkar was himself a great admirer of him. Gadge Baba too was also greatly influenced by Baba Saheb. Today, on this occasion, I also pay my respects at the feet of Gadge Baba," he said. Gadge Maharaj (February 23, 1876 to December 20, 1956), also known as Sant Gadge Maharaj or Sant Gadge Baba - was a social reformer from Maharashtra. His original name was Debuji Zhingraji Janorkar. He was born in Shendgaon village in the present day Anjangaon Surji Taluka in Amravati district.

Man enters air force station posing as IAF wing commander, arrested

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 39-year-old man was arrested for allegedly entering the Palam Air Force Station in the Delhi Cantonment area posing as a wing commander of the IAF, police said on Friday. A senior police officer said that the accused, identified as Vinayak Chadha, wanted to get his father treated at the dental hospital of the air force station. Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said police were informed about the incident on Wednesday. The accused was held by the

air force staff while he was trying to enter the restricted area, the DCP said. He said the man entered the air force dental hospital on Thimmaya Road by posing as a wing commander. He breached the first layer of security using a forged identity document but was caught later by air force security staff, Meena said. Chadha was then handed over to the police, he said, adding that a forged identity card and a few other liquor cards in the names of several defence personnel were found on him.

Five women injured in leopard attacks

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Five women were injured in three separate leopard attacks in Kirtinagar forest range of Tehri district on Thursday prompting Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to direct the forest department to prepare an effective action plan to prevent such incidents. Expressing serious concern over the rising frequency of human-wildlife conflicts in the state, the chief minister said the department should remain on alert mode round-the-clock in the affected areas.



A quick response team (QRT) of trained forest personnel should be formed and sent to the spot immediately in such cases, he added. Wired fences should be erected on the borders of villages and forests where the big cats are reported to be on the prowl to prevent wild animals

from foraging into populated areas, he said. "It has been seen for a long time that the forest department is becoming helpless in stopping the attacks of wild animals in different parts of the state," the chief minister said. A group of 11 women was attacked by a leopard in Naithana Choras village of Tehri district on Thursday in which three of them were injured and admitted to a hospital for treatment while the rest were escorted to safety by a QRT of the department.

BJP leader, others held on charge of running sex racket in hotel

PNS ■ HOWRAH

A BJP leader was arrested along with 10 others on the charge of running a sex racket in a hotel in Howrah district, a senior police officer said Friday. Sabyasachi Ghosh, a local BJP leader, and his 10 associates were arrested after the police raided a hotel in

Sankrail area on Thursday evening. The ruling Trinamool Congress, which has been facing opposition flak over alleged sexual abuse by some of its leaders in Sandeshkhali, slammed the saffron camp over the arrest of its leader for his alleged involvement in flesh trade. The Bengal BJP is yet to react to the incident.



5 students injured as school bus falls down gorge in Himachal's Kullu

PNS ■ SHIMLA/BILASPUR

Five students were injured when their school bus fell down a gorge after hitting a parked car in the Banjar area of Himachal's Kullu district on Friday morning, officials said. Two students, Diksha and Yuvall, were seriously injured and taken to a regional hospital in Kullu while the other three are under treatment at Banjar, they said. The Minerva Public School bus was on its way from Ghyiagi to Banjar, the officials said. In another incident, a biker died and another was injured when their vehicle collided with a truck parked on the roadside in Gwalthai, an industrial area adjacent to the Punjab border in Bilaspur district on Thursday morning, police said.

File case before cremation of Shubhkaran

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Farmer leaders participating in the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation on Friday said the cremation of Shubhkaran Singh, who died amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers, will not take place till the Punjab government registers a case against those responsible it. The development came hours after Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann announced a compensation of Rs 1 crore and a government job for Shubhkaran's sister.



Subhkaran Singh, 21, a native of Bathinda, died on Wednesday at Khanauri border

point on the Punjab-Haryana border amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab

farmers. The incident took place when the farmers rushed to the barricades, several layers of which had been erected by Haryana authorities to prevent farmers from proceeding with their march, and clashed with police. According to the medical superintendent of Patiala-based Rajindra Hospital, Subhkaran had an injury to his head. The post-mortem was delayed as the farmers pressed for acceptance of their demands. Speaking to reporters in Patiala, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Punjab

chief minister had asserted that stringent action would be taken against those responsible for Shubhkaran's death. But now the officials are saying that it was possible, the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader said. "We have told the (Shubhkaran) family that it may take two days or 10 days. For us money is not important. We are demanding that an FIR be lodged and then cremation will take place," he said and accused Punjab government officials of "pressuring" Shubhkaran's family into agreeing to the cremation.

Rajasthan: Over 400 retirees yet to get OPS benefits after nearly a year of paying dues

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Around 450 employees of the state-run Rajasthan Financial Corporation are yet to start getting money under the Old Pension Scheme even after 7-8 months of depositing the required money. According to a departmental order, most of the retired employees had deposited a lump sum amount each by September first week - the last deadline given by the government for inclusion in the OPS that allowed one to get a retrospective pension from April 2023. The first deadline for depositing the money was



July 2023. "Even after seven months, most of the files are stuck due to the lackadaisical approach of officials involved in processing the applications. Forget about arrears, so far, only 60 pension payment orders have been issued," RFC Pensioners Association President Narsi Lal Meena said.

Religious apartheid

Karnataka's proposal to tax several Hindu temples smacks of discrimination

In a move reminiscent of the historically partisan practice of jizya, the Congress Government in Karnataka has proposed a plan to collect funds from Hindu temples as a form of tax. Understandably, the move has sparked a controversy and reignited debates over the treatment of Hindu places of worship and whether these are being unfairly targeted. While some argue that the move is a necessary step to ensure the upkeep of Hindu religious institutions and support the livelihoods of the priests involved, others see it as discriminatory and belonging to a regressive era when non-Muslims were subjected to jizya, a special tax. While the proposed tax is not explicitly religious in nature, its resemblance to jizya has not gone unnoticed and critics view it as a form of economic discrimination. One of the primary concerns raised by the move's opponents is the selective targeting of Hindu places of worship as similar demands are not being made of other religious institutions, such as mosques or churches. This asymmetry has led



to accusations of bias and favouritism on the part of the Government. If the aim is to genuinely improve facilities at religious places, it should be even-handed and not selective. Our Constitution is clear about religious freedom and equality and all Governments across the country must comply with that. Arguing that it is a matter of fiscal responsibility, however, the tax proponents point to the vast wealth accumulated by some temples. They reason that it is only fair for these temples to contribute to the broader welfare of society. Additionally, they contend that the funds collected will be used for the benefit of the community, including the preservation of cultural heritage and the support of religious practitioners. The proposal has sparked widespread outrage among certain segments of the Hindu population, which sees it as an encroachment on their religious freedoms and an attempt to undermine their heritage.

For many Hindus, temples are not just places of worship but symbols of their cultural identity. Any attempt to impose financial burdens on these institutions is viewed as an attack on their way of life. Moreover, the Government's involvement in the financial affairs of temples raises broader questions about the separation of religion and State. By exerting control over the finances of Hindu religious institutions, the Govt risks overstepping its boundaries. In this light, it is essential for the policymakers to tread carefully and consider the implications of their actions. While temple maintenance and priest welfare are undoubtedly important issues, these must be addressed in a manner that respects the rights and sensitivities of all citizens. Ultimately, the debate over the temple tax in Karnataka raises fundamental questions about religious freedom and the role of the State in religious affairs. Meanwhile, it is crucial for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and seek solutions upholding the principles of fairness; only then can we ensure that our society remains true to its values of pluralism and tolerance.

PICTALK



The Maitreya Buddha statue, coming up at Buri, in Itanagar.

The boycott at Doha

The Taliban's obscurantist mindset and their harbouring of terrorist organisations pose a serious threat to Muslim countries

Given the obscurantist and misogynistic mindset of the Taliban, it is hardly surprising that they boycotted the conference, hosted by the United Nations, to discuss the humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan, and cooperation on the human rights issue. They spurned the UN's invitation saying that they would attend only if they alone were officially representing Afghanistan, as inclusion of other groups would jeopardise progress. This exclusivist mindset, which reflects their intolerance of the existence of any organisation that does not share their obscurantist Islamist worldview, and does not owe allegiance to them, is at the core of their rejection of democracy, and advocacy of an Islamist theocracy manifest in their designation of Afghanistan as an Islamic Emirate, run according to the dik-tats of mullahs.

The Taliban are unlikely to have realised that they have shot themselves in the foot by boycotting the conference held in Doha on February 18 and 19 under the chairmanship of the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres. Besides the special envoys of 25 countries, members of Afghanistan's civil society and women's groups, it was attended by representatives of the European Union (EU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

By not attending the conference, the Taliban have only perpetuated their isolation in the world. They obviously do not seem to mind that since humanitarian assistance continues to come in for the sake of the country's people suffering from natural disasters like floods and earthquakes as well as the violence stalking the country. The OIC's role was outlined by Ambassador Tarig Ali Bakheet, special envoy of organisation's secretary-general. During his interventions, Bakheet recalled his organisation's commitment to support Afghanistan and engage in a constructive dialogue with the country's de facto authorities [Taliban] "on issues and topics included in the relevant resolutions of the [OIC's]



Council of Foreign Ministers. In this regard, he reviewed OIC efforts in providing humanitarian assistance, sending scholars delegations, and holding a conference on women's rights in Islam hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

Ambassador Bakheet was referring to the international conference on "Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment" (November 6 to 8, 2023), organised by the OIC's general secretariat and hosted by Saudi Arabia. It included in its Final Declaration 20 recommendations highlighting the rights that Islam gave to women and the status of women in Islam. These also addressed the challenges and opportunities pertaining to the realisation of women's rights and enhancement of their role across all fields and at all levels of society.

The conference also produced "The Jeddah Document on Women's Rights in Islam" which, as stated by OIC's secretary-general, Hissein Ibrahim Taha, in his address at the conference's closing session, would serve as an intellectual and practical reference document that could be adopted by legislative bodies and human rights organizations in member states and all Muslim societies when considering the

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IF THE OIC AND THE MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE SERIOUS ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS, THEY MUST WORK OUT TOUGH ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SANCTIONS THAT WOULD COMPEL THE TALIBAN TO CHANGE THEIR POLICIES IN THIS REGARD

rights of Muslim women. It will be submitted for adoption at the forthcoming Islamic Summit, scheduled to be held in Gambia at the end of this year, and subsequently presented to all relevant international fora. He hoped that those doubting Islam's fairness toward women would consider women's rights as set out in this document, and not on the basis some isolated social practices in some Muslim societies that in no way reflect the sublime vision and universality of Islam and its teachings.

Taha's not-so-veiled rejection of the Taliban's views on women's rights in the last sentence above, will not please the mullahs running Afghanistan. Nor will they be amused by his affirmation that women's empowerment issues would remain high among the OIC's priorities, and that the OIC would launch and support numerous efforts and initiatives to elevate the status of women in Muslim societies. Taha's words carry a special significance as he spoke in Saudi Arabia where, under the leadership of the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, significant steps have been taken to improve women's position. Women can now attend sporting events, need not wear the abayah, a long, loose-fitting, garment covering the entire body,

except the face, hands and feet, in public, and can get driving licenses and can go to work, study or run errands without male escorts. While women demanding more freedom are treated harshly and much more remains to be done, the gains have been considerable compared to the situation earlier.

One can be certain that the Taliban would not change their views. Bigots dig their heels deeper and deeper the more people reject their creed. If the OIC and the Muslim countries are serious about women's rights, they must work out tough economic and political sanctions that would compel the Taliban to change their policies in this regard. They must also take measures to compel the Taliban to act against terrorist outfits like a Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) active in Afghanistan. The former is targeting Pakistan and the latter Iran. Given, however, their obscurantist creed, and determination to impose their version of sharia law globally, there is no reason why they will not strike other countries in future, particularly the Muslim ones they consider as apostatic.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Two legendary figures depart



India has lost two of its most illustrious and influential personalities, Fali S Nariman and Ameen Sayani, who left behind a legacy of excellence and innovation in their respective fields of law and radio. Fali S Nariman was a renowned jurist and senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India. He was involved in several landmark cases that shaped India's constitutional law and judicial system. He was a champion of civil liberties and the independence of the judiciary. He resigned as Additional Solicitor General to protest against the Emergency in 1975, the only law officer to do so.

He received several awards and honours, including the Padma Vibhushan, the Gruber Prize for Justice, and a nomination to the Rajya Sabha. He was also an avid reader, writer and speaker on various topics of law, politics and culture. Ameen Sayani was the iconic radio presenter and host of the popular radio show Binaca Geetmala, which ran from 1952 to 1994 on Radio Ceylon. He revolutionised Indian broadcasting with his signature greeting, "Behno aur Bhaiyo", and his warm and friendly style of hosting. Nariman and Sayani were both Parsis who belonged to Mumbai and made their mark on the national and international stage. They were both respected and admired by their peers and fans for their passion, integrity and innovation. They were both involved in the mission of nation-building and inspiring generations to fight for a just society. They will be dearly missed by their family, friends and fans. May their souls rest in peace.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

office should provide the same facility i.e. open day at all passport offices of Hyderabad to solve the aroused problems instead of a single door at Secunderabad. Thus the applicants can reach their nearest office and the rush at a single door will also be diluted. The concerned area traffic police should also provide sufficient parking places instead of lifting and imposing huge penalties on applicants. Hope the area Corporator, MLA, Concern Minister and the authorities of passport offices and traffic police will take necessary action soon and will provide mental and physical relaxation to the applicants.

Arif Hussain | Secunderabad

ODISHA TO IMPROVE SPORTS INFRA

Sir — The Odisha government has decided to renovate Barabati Stadium in Cuttack. The Barabati stadium is one of the oldest stadiums in the state. This stadium has witnessed many national and international sporting events in the past. Barabati Stadium is also known to be the

hub of cricket in Odisha. To revive Odisha's cricketing history and groom young cricket aspirants in the state, it was necessary to redevelop it. A Sports complex having world-class facilities for other sports will also be built along with the new stadium. A few days back a cricket stadium in Sambalpur was also decided for renovation.

After Hockey and Football, Odisha is now investing in the cricketing ecosystem and infrastructure. This move will assist youths in the state who want to make a career in sports. The developed sports infrastructure will make Odisha a hub for many national and international sporting events. The development of sports in the state will boost the economy as well. Odisha has already hosted the Hockey World Cup and FIFA World Cup and in its way to becoming the sports capital of India.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Youth employment: From seekers to innovators

Active participation in Govt schemes and emphasis on entrepreneurship offer promising avenues towards a brighter future for India's rural youth

In 2023, India experienced a notable surge in unemployment rates, impacting both rural and urban areas. Particularly concerning was the rise in urban unemployment, escalating from 8.5% in October to 9.3% in November and further climbing to 10.1% in December, mirroring levels from a year prior. This surge has undeniably heightened stress among the younger generation, actively seeking job opportunities, with thousands applying for each available position. In the age of technology, however, a paradigm shift is encouraged—from job seekers to job providers.

The youth grappling with unemployment challenges are urged to redefine their goals and leverage their potential and skills. Sayyed Toiba Kousar, a 22-year-old resident of the border district Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir, emphasises the transformative role technology can play in the employment landscape. Through the strategic use of technology, the younger generation can not only secure employment but also venture into



becoming job providers. Azhar Ali, a 24-year-old cricket enthusiast, underscores the importance of effective facilities for skill enhancement. He believes that with the provision of adequate facilities, the youth can excel in their respective fields, significantly contributing to societal and national development. Azhar contends that timely access to essential facilities is crucial for the younger generation to play a more impactful role in the country's progress.

Muhammad Waqar, a 22-year-old, advocates for a focus on sports activities at the school level to divert youth from addictive behaviours and guide them towards establishing self-employment opportunities. Ajaz Hussain, aged 27, emphasises creating opportunities aligned with children's interests to inspire

self-reliance, benefiting both the individual and the country. Rashid highlights the importance of parental involvement in identifying and nurturing their children's interests, guiding them towards the numerous opportunities available today in areas such as sports, the internet, singing, dancing, art, painting, photography, and sculpture.

In the current scenario, various skill-related schemes are being implemented by both central and state governments across India. Notably, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), operated by the Ministry of Rural Development, stands out as one of the most effective projects. This initiative focuses on promoting self-employment and supporting rural individuals, especially economically disadvantaged young men and women. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihood Mission (JKSRLM) oversees the implementation of NRLM, aiming to integrate the poor into self-help groups and connect them with self-employment opportunities.

The primary goal of JKSRLM is to reach 66% of the rural population in 125 blocks of Jammu and Kashmir, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to uplift them from poverty and enhance their standard of living. The Indian government has initiated various poverty alleviation schemes to improve the quality of life for the poor. It is crucial for the youth to actively engage with and benefit from these government schemes, fostering self-reliance in employment matters and contributing to societal development.

To ensure the success of these schemes, relevant departments should actively provide information and guidance, encouraging their 100% implementation and timely achievement of goals. By embracing the shift from job seekers to job providers, youth can play a vital role in shaping a more prosperous and self-sufficient future for themselves and the nation.

(The writer is from the Poonch district of J&K. He writes on socio-economic development challenges of his community; views are personal. Charkha features)



SOHAIL ALI

FIRST COLUMN

THE STRESS BEHIND THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Teachers have alarming rates of burnout and attrition worldwide



SAKSHI SETHI

College degrees, good education and satisfying jobs are all things that people generally strive for. Teaching is one of the most visceral jobs most people will ever experience. Teachers since ages have proven to be vital because they shape the lives of students and help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the world.

It is interesting to note that many people today believe the stereotype that teaching is a stress-free job. It is the only profession that gets summers and weekends off. Moreover, it is typically a job that people only do because they cannot do anything else. The adage those who can, do; those who can't, teach is widely believed. However, the reality is that there is a great amount of stress associated with this type of profession.

There is no denying the fact that the teaching profession is emotionally, physically and mentally exhausting. Many teachers across the world are experiencing teacher shortages. As per the latest survey, it was found that almost 50% of the new teachers who join with super excitement, passion and a dream to take on the world quit within the first five years of teaching, which begs the question: why do so many of them leave after going through years of college for this profession? Without enough teacher, one cannot successfully educate their children. Moreover, the most disturbing part is that the education system relies on massive amounts of unpaid labour. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the average teacher works for 52.5 hours a week, over 30% more than they are contracted for. Multiple surveys declare uncertainty, workload, negative perception about the job, concern for others' well-being, health struggles and playing multiple roles have hampered school teachers' mental health and well-being.



Not only this, research also indicates that burnout contributes to high attrition rates among educators. Making teachers work beyond their contracted hours and not paying for it; giving them five hours or less per week to plan for 30 hours of instructions, grading and providing feedback on assignments for almost 200 students on an average, analysing data, contacting parents, attending meetings, preparing teaching materials, expecting teachers to implement new initiatives, programs and practices without proper training, completing administrative tasks, expecting teachers to differentiate and individualise instructions for a class with 30+ students and above all blaming teachers for all education-related issues despite not including teachers in decision making of education-related issues prove out to be a few reasons for teacher burnout. The constant turnover rate of teachers, lack of interest in teaching and lack of commitment to the profession continue to be a major concern for school systems all over the nation. Stress has become a common characteristic of teachers and with the increased amount of accountability, teachers play a significant role in students and schools resulting in poor classroom engagement and ultimately low student achievement.

To be an effective educator, all teachers need to maintain their psychological well-being. For an ordinary human being not related to this profession, a teacher is a person who is working around 1800 hours a year, whereas in reality, they are the ones who are working around 2300 hours a year on average which shows that approximately 550 hours are unpaid working.

Remember, the teachers cannot effectively accomplish all necessary tasks only during their contract hours. The growing concern is the psychological well-being of teachers not only at the school level but also at the college level.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

The enduring legacy of Ameen Sayani, the radio icon

Sayani's influence extended far beyond the confines of the studio, earning him a place in the hearts and minds of millions

In the melodic realm of post-independence, India emerged a captivating voice that transcended mere broadcasting to become a cherished companion for countless listeners for almost four decades. With the resounding greetings, "Namaskar bhaiyon aur behno, main apka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon," Ameen Sayani forged an indelible connection through the airwaves, beckoning listeners to join him on a journey of music and camaraderie. This golden voice of radio passed into eternity on February 21, 2024, in Mumbai. He was 91.

His voice, emanating from vintage radio sets, possessed a captivating charm, diverging from the seriousness of his



RAJDEEP PATHAK

peers. Ameen Sayani's pioneering radio show, starting as a modest segment on Radio Ceylon, swiftly became a cultural sensation in the 1950s. From Binaca Geetmala to Hit Parade and Cibaca Geetmala, his presentation remained timeless, bridging simplicity and connection, resonating with ordinary hearts. Geetmala transcended borders, captivating audiences across Asia and East Africa

and fostering unity through Hindi film melodies. With 90 million listeners, it has evolved into a cherished tradition, binding families over enchanting tunes.

They were not merely a fleeting waltz through the sonic realms; it was a timeless symphony, a melody that lingered in the hearts of generations. With the gentle caress of nostalgia, it continued its melodious journey, spanning the years from 1952 to 1994, a testament to its enduring charm and universal appeal. And like a phoenix rising from the ashes of bygone eras, it experienced resurgences in the dawn of new millennia, revivals in 2000-2001 and 2001-2003, each breathing new life into its hallowed name.

Beyond the airwaves, Ameen Sayani's unparalleled contribution as a voiceover artist echoes through the annals of time, with over 54,000 radio programmes and approximately 19,000 jingles to his credit — a testament to his lasting impact on the hearts and minds of a nation. Bhajan Samrat, Anup Jalota while sharing his thoughts with me on hearing the news of Ameen Sahab's demise said that he was one of the pioneers in the field of entertainment in broadcasting media and the texture of his voice captivated many people. "Today many of the anchors try to copy his texture and finesse," he said, adding, "It was almost a miracle that any song that Ameen Sahab would announce in his Binaca Geetmala, would go on

to become a hit. Phrases like "Aawaz ke duniya ke doston", and "Bhaiyon aur Beheno" were introduced by him which people are using today and trying to establish themselves. He was very mild in his behaviour and very gentle."

"Listening to Ameen Sayani's iconic radio show, 'Binaca Geet Mala', with my siblings was a cherished ritual in our household," reminisces Dr Sumitra Guha, a renowned classical vocalist and recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademy award. "The mesmerising voice of Ameen Sayani filled our hearts with joy, as we eagerly awaited the melodious tunes of legendary playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar. His captivating narration and the golden era of Bollywood music left an indelible mark

on my soul. It was truly a magical time, enhanced by the charm of our beloved host."

Writer, social activist and President of the Guild of Services, Meera Khanna shares her memories of growing up listening to Ameen Sayani. She says, "With the passing away of Ameen Sayani it is as if a precious memory of childhood has slipped away. The 'Binaca Geetmala' which he hosted in his amazing voice was an integral part of a childhood when television had not invaded homes. Gathered around the radio or with the transistor stuck to the ear Ameen Sayani invited you to float on the melody or foot tap to the rhythm of the most popular Hindi film songs. Thus, every week Ameen Sayani was the friend who vis-

ited with a bouquet of melody rhythm and poetry. Millions in this country will remember with the nostalgia of the times when pleasures were simple and radio hosts made you feel good about our world".

Smita Vats, Founder and President of ITIHAAS (Indian Traditions Heritage and Society) kept it simple when she said, "My memories are just of his voice... diction, and metre while reading and talking. All lost now, as no one speaks well these days." Throughout his illustrious career spanning decades, Sayani epitomised innovation and authenticity. Amidst evolving media landscapes, he championed radio's timeless ability to unite communities. Beyond the airwaves, Sayani's magnetic charisma

made him a sought-after emcee, infusing every event he hosted with enchantment. Veteran journalist and author, Khushwant Singh eloquently captured Sayani's significance, saying, "Ameen Sayani wasn't just a radio presenter; he was a storyteller whose voice painted vivid images in the minds of his listeners." In the words of the man himself, "This is Ameen Sayani, signing off with the hope that you'll join me again next week, same time, same station." As we bid farewell to this titan of the airwaves, his voice and legacy will long be cherished. Farewell Ameen Sahab!

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



Farmers demand MSP protection

The imperative need for a legislation-backed MSP grows ever more urgent, promising stability and prosperity for the backbone of India's economy



AS MITTAL

The resurgence of protests by farmers has brought attention to their longstanding struggle for sustainable profitability in the agricultural sector. Although their demands are diverse, their primary request is for a legal guarantee for MSP (Minimum Support Prices). Farmers believe that the government has not shown genuine interest in effectively implementing MSP, which has led to distrust, frustration, and the need for a legal guarantee. These issues have forced them to leave their homes and farms and take to the highways in protest, resulting in the death of three farmers a couple of injuries, and disruption of normalcy that has affected the commuters and business activities.

In September 2020, the government introduced three controversial farm laws that were met with widespread protests and demands for their repeal. While the laws were eventually repealed in November 2021, there has been no interim report from the Committee on MSP formed to address farmers' concerns. This delay in decision-making perpetuates uncertainties in the agricultural sector and undermines the effectiveness of the present MSP as a stabilizing force.

MSP was introduced in 1966-67 to ensure food security amid food scarcity. Despite broad political support for a legal guarantee for MSP, successive governments have failed to formalize this issue, leaving the agricultural sector in a state of uncertainty. However, it is high time to address the weakening of the decades-old MSP policy, remove the complexities surrounding its legislation, and recognise the potential benefits of legalising MSP to fuel the wholesome growth of the agriculture sector, which is the country's lifeline. The Modi government has demonstrated its commendable ability to revamp decades-old mechanisms with various robust reforms such as the amendments to Indian Penal Codes and the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and now they must take bold steps to address this pressing issue.

Why farmers asking for legal guarantee? The MSP is an administered advisory price for 23 crops and is determined annually by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) as a key government intervention to insulate farmers from price volatility when the market prices fall below the MSP as well as of consumers against corrupt manipulative market inflation and maintains food security. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Only 6% of farmers benefit from MSP, and it procures just 11% of total agricultural output in the country, according to the latest available NITI Aayog data.

Over 90 % of crops are sold at prices that are 20-30% lower than the declared MSP, leading to average losses of Rs 20,000 per acre and about Rs 10 lakh crore annually for farmers. A study by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that Indian farmers have been suffering losses since 2000 due to ineffective policies. The report revealed that Indian farmers lost Rs 45 lakh crore during 2000-2017 due to low prices.

Misconceptions in legalising: The legalisation of MSP has been hindered by exag-



LEGALISING MSP FOR A WIDER VARIETY OF CROPS ENSURES THAT THE BENEFITS OF PRICE STABILITY ARE NOT LIMITED TO SPECIFIC SEGMENTS OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY

gerated claims about its fiscal costs. These claims have misled successive governments, and it is essential to clarify that legalising MSP does not entail the government procuring all agricultural produce. The apprehensions over excessive fiscal requirements are unfounded and should not prevent the legalisation of MSP.

To make MSP a legal guarantee, necessary amendments are needed in the Agricultural Produce & Livestock Market Committee (APMC) Act by incorporating a clause that auction of farm produce in APMC's markets is legally not permitted below the declared MSP prices'. The apprehensions on the operation of MSP legal guarantee are that most of the sales of farm produce are not in APMCs, and traders may boycott the purchases of farm produce. The government does not have physical and economic resources to purchase, store, and market the procured farm produce, which is an irrational argument. Government intervention is necessary only when market prices fall below MSP, and it does not require the procurement of the entire marketable surplus.

The potential boycott of farm produce in places MSP legal regimes by the traders is an irrational argument because the commodity's supply is tight against the demand for farm produce. First, this was also evident from the fact that the government could manage to procure only 26 million tonnes of wheat at MSP against the target of 44.4 million tonnes fixed for the 2023 season. Second, the government's expenditure on procurement and imports of farm produce like edible oil and pulses, and on procurement of food grains on MSP in 2022-23, has already surpassed Rs 5 lakh crore and Rs 2.28 lakh crore, respectively.

Claims that the MSP legal guaran-

tee will create fiscal disasters for India are baseless. According to government estimates, the MSP values of the total production of the 23 crops worked out to be around Rs 17 lakh crore, and some studies worked out to be around Rs 10 lakh crore. Furthermore, only 70% of the farm produce comes to markets as a marketable surplus, and farmers' families consume the rest for household purposes. The MSP legal guarantee will cost the government about Rs 5 lakh crore if traders or big corporations engaged in processing boycott the APMC's markets, which is an unlikely scenario. It is time to dismiss the misconceptions surrounding the legalisation of MSP and focus on the merits of providing a legal guarantee for MSP. Merits of legalising MSP: Farming is inherently risky, influenced by factors such as weather conditions, pest attacks, and market dynamics. By establishing a legally binding framework for minimum floor prices across all crops, will mitigate the current challenges and safeguard farmers from unpredictable fluctuations in the prices of their produce. However, the government has proposed buying cotton, maize, tur, urad and Masur for five years directly from the farmers at the MSP without any quantitative limit. Notably, these crops are grown outside Punjab and Haryana, the home states of the protesting farmers. From this, can it infer that small pulses growing farmers all over the country stand to benefit? Legalising MSP for a wider variety of crops ensures that the benefits of price stability are not limited to specific segments of the farming community.

Small and marginal farmers cultivating diverse crops can access the protective shield of MSP, contributing to inclusive agricultural growth, and playing a pivotal role in ensuring food security for the

nation by maintaining a stable production environment for key staples, contributing to the overall food security of the country.

A legal framework enables the government to conduct strategic operations in domestic and international markets. By selling procured produce at minimal markups during times of higher market prices, the government can manage inflation surges, ensuring price stability for consumers.

MSP reduces the vulnerability of farmers to market fluctuations, ensuring a minimum income for their produce. Farmers can navigate uncertainties more confidently, knowing that the government is legally bound to intervene when market prices fall below the MSP. A guaranteed MSP leads to increased rural income. This, in turn, stimulates the rural economy by boosting demand for goods and services, creating a positive ripple effect in various sectors.

The way forward: Policymakers can pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future for farmers by dispelling misconceptions and addressing concerns. Replacing the decades-old and inefficient MSP policy with a legislatively guaranteed MSP offers a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. It not only ensures consistent implementation but also promotes diversification, inclusivity, and economic resilience, contributing to the wholesome well-being of farmers and the prosperity of the rural economy. This will help to fuel the dream of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Servotech Power Systems bags order worth Rs 102 crore

Electric vehicles charger maker Servotech Power Systems on Friday said it has bagged an order worth Rs 102 crore for providing around 1,500 DC fast chargers. The order was received from Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and other original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). It is valued at Rs 102 crore and involves two charger variants of 60 kW and 120 kW, the company said in a statement. According to the statement, Servotech Power Systems has bagged an order for nearly 1,500 DC fast EV chargers from Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and other EV charger OEMs. The order secured by HPCL involves Servotech's manufacturing, supplying and installing DC EV chargers nationwide, prioritising deployment at HPCL's retail outlets. Additionally, Servotech will manufacture and supply the rest of the chargers to EV charger OEMs.



DEOCHA PACHAMI COAL BLOCK DEVELOPMENT

Bengal to float global tender

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal government will float a global tender seeking Expression of Interest for a Mine Developer and Operator (MDO) for the Deocha Pachami coal block, Power Minister Aroop Biswas said on Friday.

The coal block in Birbhum district could see a peak investment of Rs 35,000 crore. This block is considered the world's second-largest and holds immense potential for the state's economy.

Biswas met a delegation from Poland, a country with expertise in underground mining, to discuss the Deocha Pachami project. The block faces the challenge of a thick layer of basalt rock before reaching the coal reserves.

The minister discussed sustainable extraction methods with the Polish delegates led by



Jakub Chelstowski, Marshal (equivalent to chief minister) of Silesia province, and urged them to participate in the upcoming tender.

The minister was accompanied by senior officials including West Bengal Power Development Corporation Ltd (WBPDCL) Managing Director P B Salim.

Salim said the tender is likely to be floated within 3-4

months after the Lok Sabha elections.

West Bengal has been allotted the Deocha Pachami Harinsingha Dewanganj coal block, which is India's largest and the world's second-largest coal block, by the Centre in 2018.

Basalt, a major hurdle in accessing the coal, is valuable for construction purposes. Estimates suggest extracting around 140 million tonnes of

basalt will be necessary.

The Deocha Pachami block boasts an indicative coal reserve of 1,198 million tonnes spread over 12.31 sq km. However, the area has houses of tribal people, forests, religious sites, and stone quarries.

While the government has offered Rs 10,000 crore in compensation and rehabilitation, some tribal communities remain hesitant to relocate.

Salim said that the state government already has 90 per cent of the required 3500 acres, while owners of 2000-2200 acres of private land already expressed interest in the project.

Central Mine and Planning Design Institute (CMPDI), a subsidiary of Coal India, has completed exploratory drilling and submitted its report to WBPDCL, the government agency responsible for implementing the project.



Technopark invites co-developer for new IT building

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

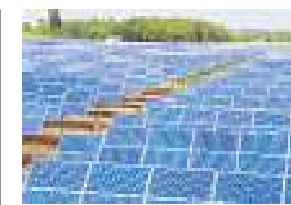
The Kerala government-owned Technopark has invited Request for Proposal (RFP) for an 800,000-sq ft IT building at Phase IV (Technocity) in the state's premier information technology hub.

The building to accommodate 6,000 professionals is part of its prestigious Quad project - an integrated mini township with work, live, and leisure spaces - coming up on 30 acres, an official release said here on Friday.

The technical and financial bid to build and operate is to be submitted before 4 pm on March 12, 2024, as per the terms and conditions specified in this RFP, it said.

"The successful bidder should complete the building in 30 months from the date of LoA (Letter of Acceptance).

An extension of another period of maximum 6 months can be permitted, on any valid reasons of delay that are not directly attributed to the bidder/Co-developer or Developer", the release said. It is permitted to complete the project in two phases, in which the first phase shall be of minimum 60 per cent of the total proposed built-up area and shall be commissioned



SJVN begins commercial power supply

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-run SJVN on Friday began commercial supply of electricity from its 50 MW Gujrai solar power station in Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh.

With this, the total installed power capacity of SJVN stands at 2,277 MW, with 10 power stations currently operational, a power ministry statement said.

According to the statement, SJVN, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power, has begun the successful commercial operation of its 50 MW.

CASAGRANT launches 360-degree Dome Theatre near Chennai

Chennai-based residential property developer CASAGRANT has launched its first 360-degree Dome Theatre "Sun Dance" offering an unparalleled visual experience and entertainment to kids and families, the company said on Friday. Sun Dance Dome Theatre, claimed to be the first-of-its-kind in the country, would showcase flicks like Aladdin, Peter Pan, Saving Tinkerbell, and Moby Dick among others at the theatre which is located on the Vandalur-Kelambakkam Road near the city. "CASAGRANT believes in bringing the best practices that the world has to offer, be it in construction or amenities in our projects, and in line with that philosophy, we are delighted to bring in India's first ever fully immersive visual experience - the Sun Dance 360-degree Super Immersive Dome Theatre to Chennai," said company Vice-President Marketing, K Ravichandran.



CEIB LAUNCHES PORTAL

Antecedent verification of prospective borrowers, NPAs soon

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Economic Intelligence Bureau (CEIB) on Friday launched a portal for antecedent verification of prospective borrowers and bad loans to streamline intelligence clearance process for banks for loan disbursement.

The portal was launched earlier this week by CEIB Director General Amit Mohan Govil and SBI Chairman Dinesh Khara in a meeting with all public sector banks in Mumbai.

It aims at equipping banks with quick access to information for taking timely decisions with regard to credit sanction, Indian Banks' Association said in a statement.

As per 'Framework for timely detection, reporting, investigation etc. relating to large value bank frauds' dated May



13, 2015 and November 6, 2019 issued by the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, all Public Sector Banks (PSBs) seeks report from CEIB before the sanction of loan exceeding Rs 50 crore and above in case of new borrowers and if the existing borrower's accounts turn into a NPA.

In August-2022, at the request of IBA, CEIB devised a uniform format for seeking reports and also advised all the PSBs to appoint nodal officers as a designated Single Point of

Contact (SPOC) to communicate with banks, the statement said.

Banks, on their part, have since appointed nodal officers and the list of nodal officers has been shared by IBA with CEIB and a dedicated email id was created to communicate with lenders, it said.

For the digitalization part, CEIB in collaboration with SBI now has developed a digital platform that would help all public sector banks to obtain mandatory intelligence clearance from the agency in a prompt manner, which will facilitate timely disbursement of funds.

CEIB was set up in 1985. It is the nodal agency for economic intelligence mandated to ensure effective interaction and coordination among all the concerned agencies in the area of economic offences.

GSTN to share data with RBI's frictionless credit platform



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has permitted GST Network to share data about GST-registered businesses, based on their consent, with the Reserve Bank's 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit'.

The move will help entities get loans faster on the basis of shared Goods and Services Tax (GST)-related information.

The platform, created by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) subsidiary Reserve Bank Innovation Hub, is intended to enable seamless flow of necessary information to lenders to help in disbursing credit.

In a notification, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has said "the Central Government, on the recommendation of the Council, notifies 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit' as the system with which information may be shared by the common portal based on consent...".

The platform has been developed for the operation of a large ecosystem of credit, to ensure access of information from various data sources digitally.

The financial service

providers and multiple data service providers can converge on the platform using standard and protocol driven architecture, the notification said.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said with appropriate consent from the supplier/recipient, GSTN is empowered to disclose specific details submitted in the GST registration application, along with data from outward tax returns, monthly and annual tax returns, and invoice preparations.

"This arrangement ensures that borrowers cannot withhold any transactional information provided to lenders or the government portal. It enhances credit efficiency by minimising costs and the time required for processing.

"Moreover, lenders gain access to authenticated monthly sales and purchase data directly from government-sanctioned sources, allowing for a more accurate and timely assessment of credit risk," Mohan said.

GST filings will become a crucial factor for businesses seeking to obtain credit and leverage government-sponsored credit programmes in future, Mohan added.

Banks can issue PPIs for payments across public transport systems

PNS ■ MUMBAI

besides cash mode.

Reserve Bank on Friday permitted banks and non-banking institutions to issue pre-paid instruments (PPIs) for making payments across various public transport systems.

With the introduction of these instruments, commuters will have more options to pay for tickets

The instrument will provide convenience, speed, affordability, and safety of digital modes of payment to commuters for transit services, RBI said in a notification.

Public transport systems across the country cater to a multitude of commuters on a daily basis, it said.



Byju's shareholders vote to remove CEO, family; company calls vote invalid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 60 per cent of shareholders of edutech Byju's on Friday voted for removal of founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup, but the company dug in its heels, calling the voting done in the absence of founders as "invalid".

Prorus - one of the six investors who had called the extraordinary



general meeting (EGM) - in a statement said "shareholders unanimously passed all resolutions put forward for vote.

"These included a request for the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial misman-

agement and compliance issues at Byju's; the reconstitution of the board of directors, so that it is no longer controlled by the founder of T&L; and a change of leadership of the company."

Raveendran and his family stayed away from the EGM, calling it "procedurally invalid."

However, the outcome of the vote at the EGM will not be applicable until March 13, when the Karnataka High Court will next hear Raveendran's plea challenging.



Rupee falls 8 paise against US \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and depreciated by 8 paise to close at 82.93 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a strong American currency and muted trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said the Indian currency depreciated as foreign fund outflows weighed on the rupee.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.87 and finally settled at 82.93 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 8 paise from its previous close.

During the day, the rupee witnessed a range-bound movement. It saw an intra-day high of 82.84 and a low of 82.96 against the American currency.

On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 82.85 against the US dollar.

The Indian rupee depreciated on Friday on dollar demand from importers. Elevated crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on positive global equities and soft US dollar.

NOKIA, IISc TEAM UP

6G use cases focused on needs of Indian society under study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nokia on Friday said it is partnering with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) to jointly research 6G technologies and 6G use cases that will have a direct societal impact in India.

According to a release, Nokia and IISc will work together in Nokia's newly opened 6G Lab in Bengaluru, where they will pursue three key areas of research. These are 6G radio technologies, 6G architecture, and the application of machine learning into the 6G air interface.

"Nokia announced today it is expanding its 6G commitment to India by partnering with the



Indian Institute of Science (IISc) to jointly research 6G technologies and 6G use cases that will have a direct societal impact in India," the release said.

The collaboration will develop reference architectures, software frameworks and algo-

gorithms, with the aim of contributing their joint research to the 6G technology and standards ecosystem.

The nature of the research is global, but Nokia and IISc will place special focus on 6G use cases that address areas of par-

ticular importance to India.

These include creating more sustainable and energy-efficient communications systems, improving resiliency and reliability of networks for critical communications, and using AI and developing 'Network as Sensor' technologies to improve transportation safety, augment healthcare and increase access to education.

By focusing on these use cases, Nokia and IISc will help shape the evolution of cellular infrastructure to meet the societal needs of large and developing countries like India, while contributing to the global 6G ecosystem as a whole.

"India has become a global

powerhouse in communications innovation and is playing a key role in the development of 6G," it said.

In October 2023, Nokia opened the 6G Lab at its global research and development centre in Bengaluru. The facility aims to accelerate the development of fundamental technologies and innovative use cases underpinned by 6G technology as well as foster collaboration between Nokia and India's academic community.

The collaboration with IISc is the first such partnership to emerge from the lab.

It combines the academic strength of the prominent research institution in India.

PM Modi to inaugurate 3 South Eastern Coalfields' projects

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually inaugurate three first mile connectivity projects of South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL) in Chhattisgarh on Saturday.

The First Mile Connectivity (FMC) projects are valued at Rs 600 crore. SECL is a subsidiary of Coal India.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to virtually inaugurate three key First Mile Connectivity projects of South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL), a Coal India Subsidiary under Ministry of

Coal, in Chhattisgarh tomorrow," the coal ministry said in a statement.

One project is the Dipka Open Cast Project (OCP) coal handling plant that has been constructed at a cost of over Rs 211 crore. With an annual coal handling capacity of 25 Million Tonne (MT), the project has an overground bunker with a capacity of 20,000 tonne and a 2.1 kilometre-long conveyor belt.

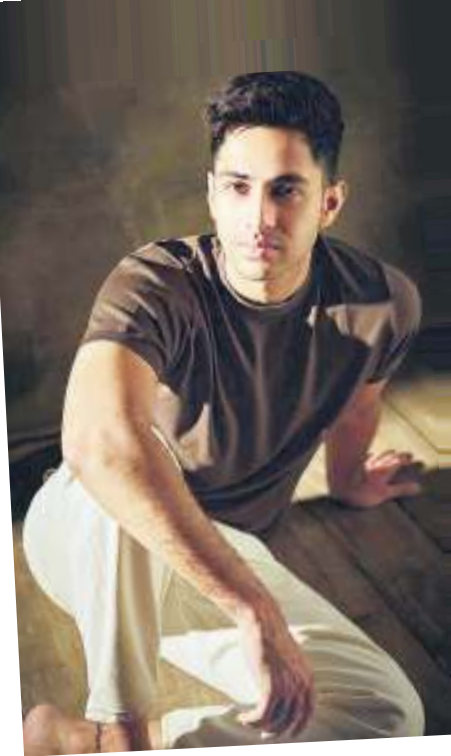
This will facilitate the rapid loading of 4,500-8,500 tonne of coal per hour, the statement said.

The second project is the

Chhal OCP coal handling plant, built at a cost of more than Rs 173 crore.

With a capacity to handle 6 MT of coal annually, it includes an overground bunker, a conveyor belt spanning 1.7 km, and a silo with a capacity of 3,000 tonne.

Besides, the prime minister will inaugurate the Baroud OCP coal handling plant at that is designed to handle 10 MT of coal annually. The project has been constructed at a cost of Rs 216 crore. Equipped with an overground bunker with a capacity of 20,000 tonne and a 1.7 km conveyor belt.



WHEN AGASTYA SOUGHT SOLACE IN RELIGION TO EASE THE PRESSURES OF HIS DEBUT FILM

Along with frequent guests Jaya Bachchan and Shweta Bachchan, Navya Nanda welcomed her brother Agastya Nanda to join her on the most recent episode of her podcast, *What the Hell Navya*, where they talked about topics including toxic masculinity and masculine vulnerability. Agastya talked candidly about his predisposition to anxiety and how religion enabled him to manage it.

Agastya also talked about the worries he had before his critically panned acting debut in *The Archies*. He claimed that eventually, he “left it to God” and no longer worried about the reaction of the crowd to his performance.

Agastya responded, “I was a really anxious person, and I say ‘was’, because I went through a really bad phase of it,” when asked about mental health and whether the younger generation is more willing to talk about it. “I had a lot of anxiety once.”

Agastya claimed that meditation helped him improve. “When you’re living in a world where there’s so much going on, you do one thing that grounds you. And I think our generation are very anxious people. Because we’re so used to getting things in an instant. We’ve lost patience and we’ve lost faith. We’ve lost faith that things will work out, or things will be okay. I know you guys laugh at me, but I became very religious and spiritual. And it came naturally. It just gives you something to believe in that’s beyond your control.”

Opening up about the anxiety that he went through because of his debut film, he said that turning to religion helped him immensely. He said, “When I started acting, doing my first film, I was like, ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do, if I’m going to do well, if people are going to like me, if they’ll think I’m bad.’ There are so many things. I did my best, and I was like, ‘God, I leave it up to you.’ I have to keep faith in something beyond me. Whoever you believe in, whether it’s God, or energy. If you just pass on that burden, it relieves you.”




Eva Longoria collabs with Selena Gomez for *Only Murders in the Building*

Following the enormous success of her film *Flamin’ Hot*, Eva Longoria is getting ready to face the camera. The Hollywood celebrity is the most recent addition to *Only Murders in the Building*, Season 4 on Hulu’s ensemble cast. The Hollywood Reporter reported that the plot around Eva’s character has been kept secret. The multihyphenate would, according to the report, play a recurring character that finally plays a crucial part in the investigation’s turns in the fourth season. It should be mentioned that, following Molly Shannon, Eva Longoria is the second new celebrity who will be joining the Arconian crew in the upcoming installment.

Although more information regarding Eva Longoria’s character is still pending, the report verified Molly Shannon’s casting as a formidable businesswoman. According to the source, which described her role in detail, the Los Angeles businesswoman will be involved in the murder inquiry of Jane Lynch’s character, Sazz Pataki. In the upcoming season, legendary Hollywood actress Meryl Streep will also reprise her renowned role as Loretta Durkin. In *Only Murders in the Building*’s third season, Meryl Streep made her debut.

Alongside Selena Gomez, Steve Martin, and Martin Short, the original cast of the sitcom will be joined on screen by Eva Longoria, Molly Shannon, and Meryl Streep. In case you were wondering, the comedy series will pick up where the last chapter left off in the future season. The third season ended with the murder of Jane Lynch’s character Sazz Pataki, who served as essentially a stunt double for Steve Martin’s character Charles. The finale aired in October of last year.

Steve Martin and John Hoffman, in addition to Selena Gomez and Martin Short, serve as executive producers of the comedy series that has been nominated for an Emmy. 20th Television is supporting *Only Murders in The Building*. August 2021 saw the debut of the first episode of the show. Regarding Eva Longoria, the actress is presently occupied with the marketing campaign for her recently launched Apple TV+ series, *Land of Women*. In addition to serving as executive producer, Eva Longoria co-stars with Carmen Maura on screen. The best-selling book of the same name by Sandra Barneda served as the idea for the six-episode television series. There will be simultaneous Spanish and English premieres of *Land of Women*.



Tom Cruise and Alejandro G. Iñárritu team up for a much-anticipated Warner Bros. and Legendary Pictures project

Tom Cruise, a Hollywood legend, will be the star of the next film directed by critically acclaimed Alejandro G. Iñárritu, a significant partnership between two formidable figures in the business. Movie buffs and industry insiders alike have been talking a lot about the much awaited film, which is apparently being developed under the banner of Warner Bros. and Legendary Pictures. This will mark Alejandro’s first English 2015 smash *The Revenant*.

The future movie’s precise narrative is yet unknown, but according to Deadline, there are internet rumours that Warner Bros. and Legendary are in talks to acquire the project. This is Iñárritu’s first English-language film since the critically acclaimed *The Revenant* (2015), which starred Leonardo DiCaprio and came out over ten years ago. Dinelaris and Giacobone, who previously worked together on the script for Iñárritu’s critically acclaimed 2014 film *Birdman*, would reunite if the movie is made. The Academy Award for Best Picture was previously won by the Michael Keaton-starring picture.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, according to reports, Tom Cruise, and Russian socialite Elsiná Khayrova’s relationship is over! Even though it appeared like they were still going strong—especially following their appearance in London earlier this month—it is rumoured that they have chosen to split.

The relationship “ran its course,” a source told The Sun US, adding that it would have been unpleasant to break up with each other in the lift. Their relationship simply ended for Tom, and there are no bitter feelings between them.” The 36-year-old Russian socialite Khayrova and the 61-year-old *Mission Impossible* star Cruise shared a London flat block.

The socialite is said to have introduced her son and daughter from her former marriage to Russian oligarch Dmitry Tsvetkov a few days prior to the breakup, according to reports. Page Six published an article at the time that stated, “Tom has been spending the night in Elsiná’s flat, which is a very gorgeous location, as you might imagine. Despite their riches, they love spending time together and engage in many of the same activities as other couples.”



VIKAS BAHL REVEALS COMPLETING THE SCRIPT OF *QUEEN 2*

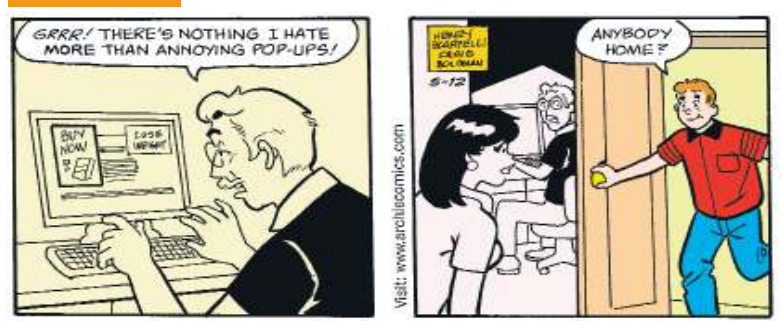
It was ten years ago, Vikas Bahl’s *Queen* was released and quickly became an unexpected hit. Starring Kangana Ranaut, the movie received excellent reviews at its premiere and has since developed a cult following. A decade later, Bahl gave an enthusiastic update, saying that the *Queen 2* script is “locked and ready.”

Regarding his next supernatural movie *Shaitaan*, Vikas Bahl revealed the long-awaited *Queen* update that fans have been waiting for years during an interview. After a number of rumours surfaced over time, Bahl eventually declared last year that a sequel was in development, starring Kangana as Rani again. “Yessss (sic),” he said.


“It is going to be ten years of *Queen*’s release but the number of people who keep asking me about *Queen 2* makes me feel like the film released just yesterday! However, I am happy to say that we have actually finished writing our story. So, yes, the sequel should happen”, he added. Speaking more about the delay in making the sequel, Vikas said, “Na shohrat, na paisa, bas pyaar mein hi chal raha hai mera (laughs). So yes, I knew that it would have given me the money, as *Queen* is a money spinner of sorts. But we were very sure that we wouldn’t do it until we get a story that delivers as much as *Queen* did. It wasn’t an easy task, so we waited.” In the meantime, *Queen* centres on a girl who travels to Europe on her own for her honeymoon after learning that her fiancé has left her just a day before their wedding. Rajkumar Rao and Lisa Haydon also make appearances in the movie with Kangana Ranaut.

However, Vikas Bahl is preparing for the premiere of his next movie, *Shaitaan*. Key parts in the film are played by R Madhavan, Ajay Devgn, and Jyotika. On March 8, 2024, it will be released in theatres.


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	
6			7		8
9			10		
12	13			14	15
17				18	
19					

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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 weekday
- Donates
- Smell
- Opposite of difficult
- Defeated
- Extreme fear
- Costing nothing
- Does a sketch
- Raises
- Spoke very quietly

DOWN

- Pixies
- Smell with this
- Taken away illegally
- Approximately

SOLUTION

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Producer-director Vipul Shah, who is yet again enjoying the favourable reviews of ***The Kerala Story***'s OTT release, speaks about the positive responses the film has been receiving to date.

Making a mark for herself in the city is our interviewee of the day, Pratishtha Patny, a psychology graduate and a rapper. This week for our special weekly column of Hyderabad, she shares her association with Hyderabad, her journey in the city as a rapper, and more.

**'IT'S MORE SAFE TO BE A
LADY RAPPER RIGHT NOW
THAN IT WAS 4 YRS AGO'**

TEJAL SINHA

Over the years, Indian female rappers have become increasingly independent in their artistic expression. Well, one amongst them is Hyderabad's very own, Prastitha Patny, who goes by the gender-neutral name "Storme" to express herself more authentically. A psychology graduate and a rapper, she dreams of becoming a famous personality with a positive influence on culture and currently working towards showcasing her creativity while raising awareness on mental health concerns.

Born in Pune, Maharashtra, she shares her association with Hyderabad, "Since my father was serving in the army, we've never stayed in the same city for more than 2 years. I've

lived in around 10+ cities throughout my life and he wanted us to settle in Hyderabad once he retires. We've been here since 2011"

Since 2011, Basically, her first encounter with rap was in 4th grade, when Rihanna and Eminem released *Love The Way You Lie*. She learnt Eminem's part within days (and took weeks to perfect it), and that was so fun, she recalls. "I never knew it'd come to mean as much to me as it does right now, but here we are! When I rap, I feel relaxed and comfortable. It feels like "my thing," you know?"

From trying out raps and doing covers, to making her own rap that went viral, *Ghanta Na Hoga*, calling the song a “feminist anthem” and rightly so because it speaks of the trials and tribulations of being a woman, menstruation and the taboos associated with it. The constant trouble that people have with women’s clothes and lifestyles, and a lot more! “You know honestly,” ecstatically gushes the lady rapper adding, “I was never expecting that song to go viral or have any response at all. But interestingly, it was pushed entirely by all the guys around me. It was the male rappers who helped me finalize the lyrics of the song, who taught me how to show aggression in my voice, who cheered and sang along with me whenever I performed it, and who pushed the song forward and with all their friends. It was a really memorable experience of my life.”

On the rapping front, the city, she says, has been real fun, but it is mostly still treated like a hobby. "It's more comfortable and safe to be a woman rapper right now than it was 4 years ago when I started showing my talent at cyphers and events, but it's definitely a long way from being taken seriously as a profession."

There are very few professional recording studios that allow us to record in our own style and professional labels are virtually non-existent in Hyderabad.”

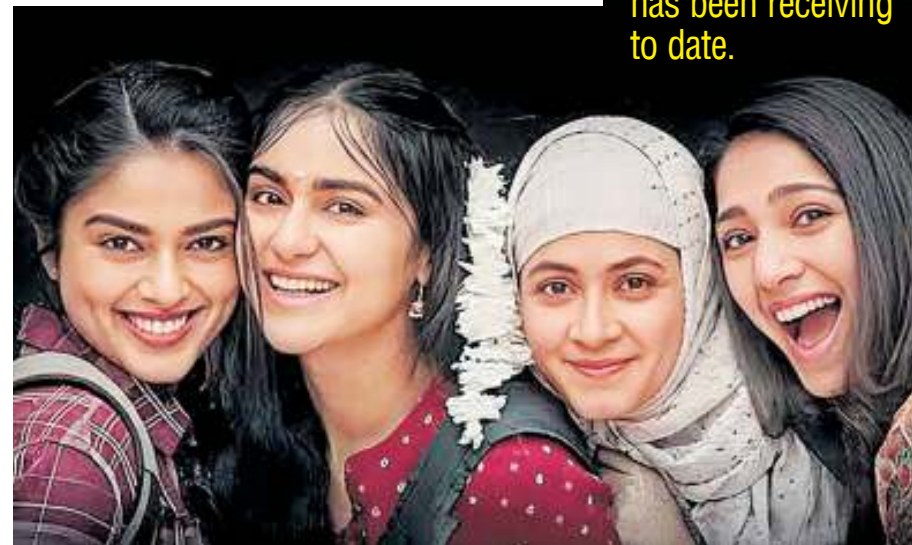
The artist is currently working on a few collaborations that push her out of her comfort zone and allow her to say things she's never said before. But what exactly is it gonna be? Let's hear what she says: "I am contributing to an anthem for the hip-hop community in Hyderabad and working on 2 songs for other artists. It's also really exciting to be chosen for another artist's album. It's really flattering to know that somebody would want my voice on their album."

"I like that you have a little bit of everything here," she says about what according to her makes Hyderabad different from other cities. "Hyderabad can be peaceful if you want it to be, a perfect place to party, culturally relevant, and have a lot of people traveling to perform here, but if you want to zone out completely you can isolate yourself and live in a resort with a pool for 2 days too. You can get sloshed out in a fancy club while listening to a really good live band, or you can go to meditation and yoga classes if that is what you enjoy. It's crazy and I love it. I can be any version of myself here that I like, and that's important to me. Just by going to a few events related to the topic of my interest, I can climb the social ladder very quickly and gain confidence here in Hyderabad. There is a lot of potential here to be anything you want to be, especially among the younger crowds."

But again, she wishes there were more labels and professional opportunities in Hyderabad, maybe it is just her who has not found the right people yet. Aside from that, it is calming to not have pressure or cameras or responsibilities to answer to anyone, here in the city, and also helps her take her own time to build herself from scratch! "The city has been more than open for rappers, especially women rappers," she shares adding, "Even if I perform at a random cafe where no one knows me, they still respond really well the moment they know it's a different voice (basically recognise that it's a girl), you can get a lot of good attention really quickly and become popular if you really grab the opportunity."

Yet there was a time in Hyderabad when she felt really uncomfortable walking into a club to perform as the only girl when she started in 2019! “I literally had to run away as fast as possible because of how uncomfortable I was with the boys. They were really narrow-minded and unwilling to take any other opinion apart from their own. It feels a lot safer and cooler to be a lady rapper now. I can now finally focus on my performance rather than trying to constantly protect myself in Hyderabad.”

The city she says has a lot of potential but something that she dislikes is that they are nowhere close to achieving it or getting the kind of attention that they deserve as rappers. "It sucks to see some of your talented friends get completely ignored because no one is looking out for them at all," she says as we head towards the end of the chat adding, "Hyderabad is my breeding ground. If I do achieve something tomorrow, I will always have this city to thank and to keep coming back to. It has been largely nice and supportive. For the most part, I have had really fulfilling and confidence-building experiences so I would never let go of this city no matter where I go."



‘Thanks to excellent word-of-mouth, ***The Kerala Story* went on to become the top grossing movie**’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

After its OTT release, Vipul Shah's film *The Kerala Story* is presently receiving favourable reviews. When the film debuted in theaters last year, it also did quite well. *The Kerala Story*, directed by Sudipto Sen, created a stir for its story even though it was produced on a shoestring budget of about Rs 15-20 crore. Worldwide receipts for the movie exceeded Rs 300 crore all over the nation. Adah Sharma's outstanding performance in pivotal roles, bolstered by Yogita Bihani, Sonia Balani, Siddhi Idnani, and Devadarshini, added to the film's critical acclaim.

"The Kedaara Story became the highest grossing female centric film in the history of Indian cinema and this is only possible when the word of mouth is absolutely brilliant for the film," said producer Vipul Amrutlal Shah, expressing his significant interest in the film's success now that the contentious movie is breaking records online. "Therefore, if you look at the ratio, 99 out of 100 people thought it was great, and the remaining 1 percent thought it was bad. That's okay, we should respect their perspective. However, the moviegoer base across the country has transformed it into a movement; it is no longer only a movie, and the unparalleled box office success proves that this type of love can only come from the audience. And no one could have imagined the level of love the audience showed for this movie."

In just three days, the film broke records on the ZEE5 platform by accumulating an astounding 150 million streaming minutes, which is a noteworthy accomplishment. "The box office performance speaks for itself because, as I have mentioned, it's the greatest grossing picture in movie history when it comes to female-centric films. The number of people who have seen the movie and purchased tickets has always been my yardstick for success, and it's incredibly high for a movie this large. It has never occurred before. Therefore, I believe that the success metric is evidently large when a large number of people notice it. Regardless of how we interpret the numbers, they are astounding. I just

think it makes you feel much more satisfied when we only consider how many people have viewed it," added the renowned film producer.

The producer also mentioned, “The ban affected the film’s performance because it stopped the film from collecting massive amounts from these two states Bengal and Tamil Nadu, otherwise the numbers would have been even more historical than they already are.” *The Kerala Story* has received a mix of positive and negative feedback, reminiscent of its theatrical release. “The ban had only political motivations. That doesn’t work because it’s appealing a certain vote bank or group. In fact, I believe these politicians lack the intelligence to believe that the audiences or community they are attempting to win over are pleased with the symbolic ban. If they were, they wouldn’t be doing anything for them. However, I believe that the prohibition was solely motivated by political reasons, and you observed the kind of reception we received in these two states when the OTT film released. Naturally, only if Zee5 releases the information to observe the level of frenzy these two states produced.”

Hyderabad is my breeding ground. For the most part, I have had really confidence-building experiences so I would never let go of this city no matter where I go.

Understanding age-related macular degeneration and the role of nutrition

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a progressive eye condition that affects millions of people worldwide, particularly those aged 50 and older. It is a leading cause of vision loss in older adults. AMD primarily impacts the macula, a small area near the center of the retina responsible for sharp, central vision necessary for activities like reading, driving, and recognising faces. As the macula deteriorates, it can lead to significant vision impairment and, in severe cases, blindness.

TYPES OF AMD

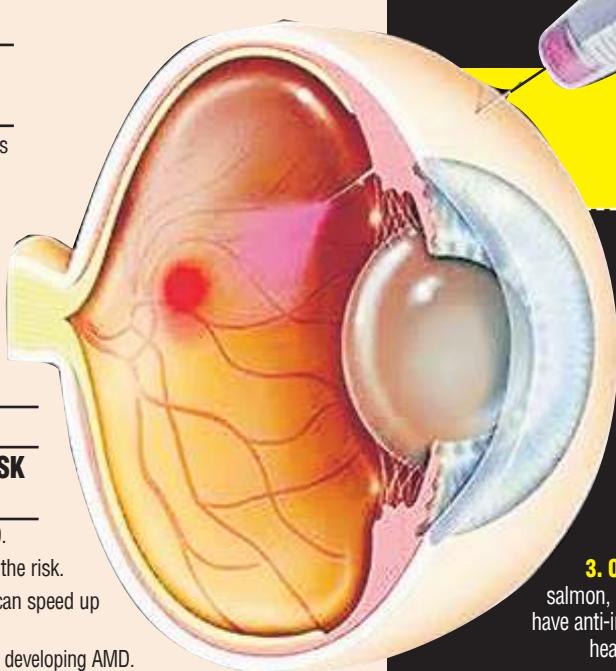
THERE ARE TWO MAIN TYPES OF AMD: DRY AMD AND WET AMD.

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| <p>1. Dry AMD: Dry AMD is the more common form, accounting for about 90% of AMD cases. It occurs when the macula thins and breaks down over time, leading to gradual central vision loss. Tiny yellow deposits called drusen may accumulate in the macula, interfering with its function.</p> | <p>2. Wet AMD: Wet AMD is less common but more severe. It involves the growth of abnormal blood vessels beneath the macula, which can leak blood and fluid, causing rapid and severe vision loss if left untreated.</p> |
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RISK FACTORS FOR AMD

SEVERAL FACTORS CAN INCREASE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING AMD, INCLUDING:

- **Age:** The risk of AMD increases with age, especially after 50.
- **Family History:** Having a family history of AMD can elevate the risk.
- **Smoking:** Smoking is a significant risk factor for AMD and can speed up its progression.
- **Obesity:** Being overweight or obese increases the likelihood of developing AMD.
- **Race:** Caucasians are more likely to develop AMD compared to other racial groups.
- **Sun Exposure:** Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light may contribute to the development of AMD.



THE IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION

While there is no cure for AMD, certain lifestyle factors, including nutrition, can play a crucial role in reducing the risk of developing the condition and slowing its progression. A growing body of research suggests that consuming a diet rich in specific nutrients can help protect the eyes and maintain healthy vision. Some key nutrients that have been linked to eye health include:

- 1. Antioxidants:** Antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, zinc, and beta-carotene can help neutralize harmful free radicals in the eyes and reduce oxidative stress, which is implicated in AMD development.
- 2. Lutein and Zeaxanthin:** These carotenoids are found in high concentrations in the macula and are believed to help filter harmful blue light and protect against oxidative damage.
- 3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Found in fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, and sardines, omega-3 fatty acids have anti-inflammatory properties that may benefit eye health and reduce the risk of AMD progression.

levels of vitamin D may be associated with a reduced risk of AMD.

5. Green Leafy Vegetables: Foods like spinach, kale, and collard greens are rich in lutein and zeaxanthin, as well as other vitamins and minerals essential for eye health.

Age-related macular degeneration is a prevalent and potentially devastating eye condition that primarily affects older adults. While certain risk factors like age and genetics cannot be modified, adopting a healthy lifestyle, including a nutritious diet rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, can help support eye health and reduce the risk of AMD development and progression. Consulting with an eye care professional and a registered dietitian can provide personalized recommendations for optimizing nutrition and maintaining healthy vision throughout life.

(The author, Dr. Santosh, is a Vitreo Retinal Surgeon, at the Maxivision Group of Eye Hospitals.)

INDIA DISCOVERS NEW PACE OPTION IN AKASH

PTI ■ RANCHI

India unearthed a fresh pace talent in debutant Akash Deep but veteran Joe Root single-handedly kept England afloat with a tenacious hundred that shunned 'Bazball' for a more conservative approach as the visitors hobbled to 302 for 7 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Friday.

At stumps, the 33-year-old Root was unbeaten on 106 and had used up 226 deliveries during his classical Test knock. Giving him company at the other end was Ollie Robinson (26) as England staged a decent recovery from the early jolts given by Akash Deep.

The 27-year-old Bengal pacer, who hails from Bihar, picked up three wickets in his 17 overs, marking yet another confident debut for the home side in the ongoing series.

He made life miserable for England's top-order with the new ball, grabbing the top-three in 10 balls as the visitors lost half of their side in the first session. But Root decided to drop anchor after that, reverting to his natural style of playing the waiting game. The move got him and England the desired results as he struck his first century in 15 innings.

With the sun playing hide and seek during the fog end of the day, the Yorkshire man hit the



ENGLAND REACH 302/7 AT STUMPS

three-figure mark for the 31st time in his Test career, striking a classy cover-drive off Akash Deep. It took him 219 balls to get there and the former skipper did not show much emotion, fully aware that his job was not yet done. A record 10 of his 31 Test centuries are against India and the latest one came at just the right juncture. England are reeling from back-to-back losses in Visakhapatnam and Rajkot to trail the five-match series 1-2. He hit nine fours in his innings and was a picture of determination, noticeably

avoiding the sweep shot due to the variable bounce of the pitch. The absence of rested pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who had dismissed Root thrice in this series, also gave the Englishman some breathing space. He was happy to play the spinners on the back-foot and slice the field.

His biggest ally in England's splendid recovery was wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes (47 off 126 balls). The visiting side went through the second session without losing a wicket for the first time in the

series. The duo took their time and frustrated India by adding 86 runs in the post-lunch session when the wicket flattened out. Post tea, Mohammed Siraj (2/60) gave the much-needed breakthrough dismissing Foakes three runs short of his half-century, caught by Ravindra Jadeja at short mid-wicket. The dismissal ended a 113-run sixth wicket partnership.

Siraj also dismissed Tom Hartley (13 off 26 balls) with a brilliant delivery that exhibited late movement off the pitch,

crashing into the off stump. Hartley had earlier narrowly avoided a catch by the second slip following an edge that didn't carry. Instead, it went past Yashasvi Jaiswal and reached the boundary rope. He departed after scoring 13, which included a powerful six off Ravichandran Ashwin over long-on. Ashwin got the scalp of Jonny Bairstow, who made a quick-fire 38 off 35 balls.

STUNNING DEBUT FOR AKASH DEEP: Earlier, India's good run with debutants continued as pacer Akash Deep, the fourth newcomer for the hosts in this series, showed promise for this level. Bowling one of the finest maiden spells in a Test debut — 7-0-24-3 — Akash Deep dismissed Ben Duckett (11), Ollie Pope (0) and Zak Crawley (42) in 10 deliveries while bowling from the dressing room end.

The pacer, who came through the ranks playing domestic cricket in Bengal, hit the deck hard in a sensational display during the first hour's play after Ben Stokes opted to bat. He, however, had to wait a bit for his maiden Test wicket.

In his second over of the day, he uprooted Crawley's off-stump that cartwheeled a couple of metres but the celebration was short-lived as he was found guilty of overstepping.

Root century was due: Crawley

PTI ■ RANCHI

England opener Zak Crawley on Friday said that a century from Joe Root was long due and the veteran batter's unbeaten 106 on Day 1 of the fourth Test against India was a "phenomenal" knock under the circumstances.

After losing half of the side at lunch for 112, England rode on Root's determined 106 not out to end day one on 302 for 7 in the fourth Test against India here.

"He (Root) is unbelievable. We fully expected him to get a good score at some point in this series; he was due, he's the best player we've ever had and he played phenomenally today," said Crawley after the day's play.

"He deserves everything he gets, he works so hard at his game and he always comes good."

Root was in the middle of a lean patch and his highest score before Friday's knock in this series was 37.

"He's probably the only bloke in our team who could have done that knock; he's that good, he's our best player and he's stepped up when we needed him to.

"We needed him to get a score and he got a score like he's done for so many years now, he's a phenomenal player," said Crawley who made run-a-ball 42 at the top of the order. Root first got a fine ally in



wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes who contributed a valuable 47 runs in a century-plus stand.

"It was tricky with the fields they were setting but we just always talk about the present, and the situation required a bit more caution with that kind of pitch and the variable bounce and that's what they delivered.

"At other times, we counter-punched but they played it perfectly and read it well," he said.

Regarding the pitch, Crawley said, "It was nipping a lot and nipping quickly. It felt like you

had to throw a counter-punch, you couldn't really sit there like those boys did later on in the day. "I expected variable bounce from the look of those cracks. It certainly did less and less as that opening spell went on. I got out still fairly early but it looked like it wasn't bouncing anywhere near as much or as quickly as earlier on against seam.

"It got harder against the spin, it will continue to break up. It might be a new-ball wicket, hopefully it is when we bowl but the I think the spin's only going to get harder," he added.



India women eye victory against Hong Kong in Turkish Cup

PTI ■ ALANYA (TURKEY)

Having played determined football to get the better of Estonia in their opening match, India would be looking forward to another successful outing when they face Hong Kong in the Turkish Women's Cup here on Saturday.

The 4-3 victory against Estonia was the first-ever for a senior Indian women's national team against an European side, and it would have raised the morale of the Chaoba Devi-coached side in the four-team round-robin tournament.

This will be India's fifth encounter against Hong Kong, ranked 79th in the FIFA rankings, and India would be buoyed by the fact that they have won all four previous games, netting 11 goals, while the opponents have managed just two. In their most recent clash, a friendly in 2019, India won by a solitary goal courtesy Pyari Xaxa, who also found the net in India's victory against Estonia in the ongoing tournament.

India currently lead the table

with three points and a goal difference of plus one, while Hong Kong are at the bottom having yet to open their account and a goal difference of -1 after losing 0-1 to Kosovo. Coach Chaoba Devi said Hong Kong had made a marked improvement since they last played in 2019 and her team would not underestimate the opponents.

"We played against Hong Kong a while ago, but they have shown significant improvement since then. We watched their recent match against Kosovo, where they put up a good fight despite losing by only one goal," said Chaoba Devi on the eve of the match. "So, we can't underestimate them. We need to focus on our finishing, as we could have scored more goals in our first match against Estonia if our finishing was better. Today, we will do some finishing drills in our training to prepare for the Hong Kong match and ensure the girls are ready to perform well. It's our time to win this tournament," added Chaoba Devi.

Australia beat New Zealand in 2nd T20, win series

AP ■ AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)

Adam Zampa took four for 34 as Australia rolled New Zealand for 102 in 17 overs to win the second Twenty20 International by 72 runs Friday and take an insurmountable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The Australians will head towards the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in June with more confidence after a comprehensive series win over New Zealand which is the world's second-ranked team.

Australia won the first match by six wickets with a four off the last ball and the third match between the teams is at Eden Park on Sunday.

"It was a great win for Australia," captain Mitch Marsh said. "Our backs were against the wall and we thought we were probably 50 runs short. "But, the way our bowlers came out and performed was outstanding. All of our teams over the last 12 months have been backed into a lot of corners and we've managed to find a way to get out



of them. Tonight was another example of that."

Australia looked to have fallen short of a competitive total when it was bowled out for 174 in 19.5 overs after being 72 for one at the end of the six-over power

play. Opener Travis Head blasted 45 from 22 balls including five sixes to give Australia a fast start as it batted after losing the toss. But, Lockie Ferguson took four for 12 and Ben Sears two for

29 as the New Zealand seamers turned things around and provoked a sustained collapse of the Australian innings.

Australia lost six wickets for 59 runs in the last 9.5 overs.

New Zealand's batting was depleted by the loss of Rachin Ravindra just before the start of play with a slight knee injury and Devon Conway suffered a thumb injury keeping wicket and was taken to hospital for X-rays. He returned to the ground when it was found there was no fracture.

Conway still was unable to bat and his opening partner Finn Allen had to take the gloves for the first time in his international career.

Regardless of injuries, New Zealand collapsed in the face of outstanding Australian fast bowling on a fast and bouncy wicket.

Allen hit a six from the third ball of the first over and was out to the last ball, walking down to a good-length ball from Josh Hazlewood which he edged onto his stumps.



Bhagat, Kadam reach Para Badminton World Championship semifinals

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam on Friday reached the semifinals of the Para Badminton World Championship to assure themselves of at least a medal here.

Bhagat defeated France's Mathieu Thomas 21-15, 21-17 to set up a semifinal clash with compatriot Manoj Sarkar.

Kadam got the better of Nigeria's Chigozie Jeremiah Nnanna 21-13, 21-11. He will take on Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the semifinal.

In mixed doubles, the Indian pair of Bhagat and Manisha Ramdass defeated Japan's Taiyo Imai and Noriko Ito 21-11, 16-21, 21-18 to seal their place in the semifinal.

They will take on the Indonesian pair of Fredy Setiawan and Khalimatus Sadiyah in the last-four.

In the men's doubles quarterfinals, Bhagat and Kadam will take on the French pair of Guillaume Gailly and Mathieu Thomas.

In other matches, Kumar Nitesh defeated Thailand's Mongkhon Bunsun in the quarterfinals to set up a last-four clash against Daniel Bethell of England.

Smriti in confident space with her cricket, leadership: RCB coach

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Smriti Mandhana finding a Seamless sync with her twin duty of being the captain and premier batter of the side is intertwined with the fortunes of Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League Season 2, reckoned their head coach Luke Williams.

In the first WPL season, Mandhana struggled under the weight of this two-fold role, and her batting suffered a considerable dip.

The elegant left-hander could only manage 149 runs from eight matches, averaging a feeble 18 and at a strike-rate of 119. "She's practising really well.

She's in a really confident and happy space with her cricket and the leadership. Obviously, there's responsibility with captaining and opening the batting.

"But she's got plenty of support from the team with lots of experienced seniors to help her and trying to really separate the two roles," said Williams on Friday, a day ahead of RCB's opening WPL 2024 match against UP Warriorz.

The RCB had finished fourth in the five-team league last season, and Williams said under the leadership of Mandhana the team looked much more settled this time.

"I've been fortunate to have spent a fair bit of time with Smriti through my



involvement at the Southern Brave (the Hundred team) as an assistant coach and we've

had lots of conversations around the learnings and experiences from last (WPL) season both as a team and individual. I "think we've really taken on board some of those learnings (from previous year)," he said.

Williams said Mandhana and other senior players in the side have been working with young cricketers in the RCB fold to create a confident atmosphere.

"This time Smriti and others have invested time with our players, and our senior players have been fantastic working with our young players and getting to know them and everyone is really starting to feel really comfortable and confident in the environment. We're looking forward to

taking those learnings into this year," said Williams.

Williams, an experienced T20 coach who has a Women's Big Bash title under his belt with Adelaide Strikers, said this time the RCB has good options in pace and spin departments.

"That was a large part of our auction strategy and around retention. We were trying to get some real variety across all different aspects of the game but bowling certainly was a large part of that. So, we feel like we've got more variety with our pace and spin.

"Hopefully, we will ask some questions to the batters and we have given ourselves some great opportunities with our bowling this tournament," he said.

AC Milan, Roma, Marseille, Benfica advance to Europa League round of 16

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan advanced to the round of 16 in the Europa League despite a 3-2 loss at Rennes in the second leg of their playoff.

Milan, which won 3-0 at the San Siro last week, eliminated its French opponent on a 5-3 aggregate score on Thursday.

The Italian powerhouse, a seven-time European champion, has never won the second-tier Europa League or its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

Midfielder Benjamin Bourigeaud's hat trick put the hosts up three times with Milan quickly answering twice. Bourigeaud netted the opener in the 11th minute with a fierce right-footed shot from over 20 meters to beat goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Forward Luka Jovic canceled it out 10 minutes later with a header off a cross by captain Theo Hernandez.

Bourigeaud made it 2-1 early in the second from the penalty spot but Rafael Leao equalised

after four minutes on a fine solo effort.

Bourigeaud sent Maignan the wrong way with another spot kick to make it 3-2.

The eight runners-up in the Europa League group stage played the eight third-place teams from the Champions League group stage in the playoffs.

The eight winners will take on the Europa League's group winners, who qualified directly for the round of 16. They are Liverpool, West Ham and Brighton from the Premier League, as well Leverkusen, Atalanta, Villarreal, Rangers and Slavia Prague.

The draw is scheduled for Friday.

Nicola Zalewski converted the decisive spot kick for Roma to prevail 4-2 in a penalty shootout over Feyenoord to qualify for the next round.

Early in the game, captain Lorenzo Pellegrini found the net from the edge of the area to tie it a 1-1 after Santiago Gimenez's fifth-minute header



gave the Dutch team a 1-0 lead and silenced more than 67,000 fans at Stadio Olimpico. The teams also drew 1-1 in the opening leg in Rotterdam.

Marseille's new coach Jean-Louis Gasset made a victorious debut after he was appointed Tuesday to replace Gennaro Gattuso.

Geoffrey Kondogbia and

substitute Ismaila Sarr sealed a 3-1 win for Marseille over Shakhtar Donetsk with a goal each in the second half. Marseille advanced on a 5-3 aggregate score.

Earlier, Marseille striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang netted his 31st career goal in the Europa League to break the competition record and level

the tie after Georgiy Sudakov converted from the spot.

Sporting was held 1-1 at home by Young Boys but advanced 4-2 overall.

Two-time European champion Benfica held host Toulouse 0-0 to progress 2-1 on aggregate.

Michael Gregoritsch completed a 3-2 comeback victory for Freiburg over Lens nine minutes into extra time to send the Bundesliga team to the next round.

Indrit Tuci and forwards Lukáš Haraslin and Jan Kuchta scored in the second half as Sparta upset 10-man Galatasaray 4-1 in Prague and qualified for the next phase 6-4 on aggregate.

Their goals came after Kaan Ayhan received a straight red card in the 68th minute.

At Baku, Nariman Akhunnadzade scored in stoppage time of the three-goal extra time to give 10-man Qarabag a spot in the round of 16 in a European competition for the first time at the expense of Braga with a 6-5 aggregate victory.

Diksha, Pranavi in top five after first round in Morocco

PTI ■ RABAT (MOROCCO)

Diksha Dagar and Pranavi Urs got off to a great start, carding a fine two-under 71 each to lie tied fifth after the opening round of Lalla Meryem Cup on the Ladies European Tour here.

The two Indian golfers, who had Top-25 finishes in the Magical Kenya Ladies Open, suffered a double bogey each, but did well to birdie three of the five Par-5s that this course has. Starting from the 10th, Diksha birdied the 12th and the 16th, but also dropped shots on the 13th and 18th for an even par stretch.

On the second nine, the front side of Royal Golf Dar es Salam, Diksha was in full flow with birdies on the second, third, fifth and eight, before a double bogey set her back on the closing ninth.

Pranavi was off to a flier with four birdies in first six holes but a bogey on 17th and a double on 18th meant she was just 1-under after her first nine.



She had one bogey on first and two birdies on the fifth and the eighth for a 71.

Mexico's Maria Fassi showed off her explosive power and fine form during the opening round, firing a flawless eight-under 65 to lead by three shots on the Par-73 golf course.

The 25-year-old, who represented Mexico at the Tokyo Olympics, started on the 10th and picked up three birdies within the first five holes. At the turn, the LPGA player fired up her flatstick to roll in three consecutive birdies before rolling in another two on holes five and eight.

Home favourite Ines Laklalech got the crowds fired up with a phenomenal first round of five-under-par. Spain's Teresa Toscano, who earned her LET card through Q School in December, sits one shot behind Laklalech on four-under-par.

Fellow Spaniard Marta Martin, winner of the 2023 Amundi Czech Ladies Challenge on the LET Access Series (LETAS) sits in fourth on three-under-par.

There is a nine-way tie for fifth place and that includes the two Indians — Diksha and Pranavi, and the 2023 LET Order of Merit winner Trichat Cheenglab.

Sundaram Master: The thought-provoking comedy-drama

STORY

The theatrical release of *Sundaram Master* marks the acting debut of Harsha Chemudu, better known by his stage name Viva Harsha. Sundar Rao (Harsha Chemudu) shows up as an English teacher in the isolated village of Miryalametta, but he has a secret objective that goes beyond teaching language. How do the villagers who speak English regard him? Is he going to complete his mission? What ultimately takes place? To solve these mysteries, one would need to see the film.

PLUS POINTS

In his first leading role, Harsha Chemudu excels, giving a performance full of clever repartee and emotive acting that is evocative of his earlier work. The villagers' amusing exchanges with Harsha are skillfully performed, especially in the second half, which highlights the peasants' innocence. Balakrishna Neelakantapu and the other members of the cast captivate the audience with their excellent performances.

MINUS POINTS

Although the simplicity of the plot makes sense, the director might have kept the audience interested by narrating the story at a faster, more compelling clip, particularly in the second half. The film's humorous charm captures the



Starring: Harsha Chemudu, Harsha Vardhan, Divya Sripada, Balakrishna Neelakantapu, Bhadrans and others
Director: Kalyan Santosh
Producers: Ravi Teja and Sudheer Kumar Kurru
Music Director: Srircharan Pakala
Cinematographer: Deepak Yeragera
Editor: Karthik Vunnava

audience in its first half, but the second half moves slowly and fails to maintain the same degree of humour. Sadly, there are some poor acting moments in the later, more sentimental sections.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Although it is clear that writer and direc-

tor Kalyan Santhosh wanted to entertain the audience, the overall appeal of the picture improved with a deeper plot and screenplay. The editing by Karthik Vunnava is flawless. The production qualities are respectable, and the art department has produced some excellent work that should be acknowledged.

VERDICT

With the help of several humorous moments and a respectable performance from Harsha Chemudu, *Sundaram Master* is nevertheless a good comic drama overall. Significant challenges are presented by the film's flimsy premise, an inspired screenplay, and some emotional depth in the second part. It could be a good idea to watch this movie as an entertainment option this coming weekend.

RATING : 3/5

Bramayugam: A socially conscious horror film with a psychological twist

STORY

The manor where the story is set is haunted. Thevan (Arjun Ashokan in a court singer role) is an unexpected guest of Kodumon Potti (Mammooty) and his cook (Sidharth Bharathan). He is there after fleeing away from a potentially fatal incident with a female ghost. Potti, who has an enigmatic past, connives to deceive Thevan into rolling dice. Thevan will have to spend the rest of his life in the manor if he loses the game. Is Potti a wizard of the dark? Does he have more strength than he seems to have? What will happen to Thevan? What happened to the cook? What drives the various characters' actions, and what becomes of them? That's the main focus of the movie.

ANALYSIS

Bramayugam, according to writer-director Rahul Sadasivan, is a darker era than Kaliyugam. There are no scruples and ideals, no gods and morals. Potti is a metaphor for the villainous boss who demands subservience from his workers. The film's premise has inspired film critics and cinephiles to argue that it is an allegory that shows the terrible reality of ultimate power destroying the human soul.

The end that meets Thevan's friend Koran (Manikandan R. Achari) appears to have a more profound, all-encompassing significance. As the movie goes on, it

Cast: Mammooty, Arjun Ashokan, Sidharth Bharathan, Amalda Liz, Manikandan R. Achari, and Aluva Sheeba Sebastian
Cinematography: Shehnad Jalal
Editing: Shafique Mohamed Ali
Production Design: Jotish Shankar
Music Director: Christo Xavier
Producer: S. Sashikanth
Director: Rahul Sadasivan
Banner: Y Not Studios

RATING: 2/5

Produced by S. Sashikanth and Chakravarthy Ramachandra, "Bramayugam" hit the cinemas on Friday.



becomes clear that this is a psychological horror movie with a societal undertone rather than an exciting horror movie.

What, then, is the social undertone? It is about rich vs. poor, as many have previously noted. In the grand scheme of things, the idea of outcasts and inferior castes continues to resurface. The dialogue is sparse and lethal.

The cinematography by Shehnad Jalal is brilliant. There's no music that builds the tempo like that of Christo Xavier! It fills the void left by the absence of popular discourse. Mammooty is remarkable in every single scene. There is a certain feeling of dread that is shown by Arjun Ashokan. The performance of Sidharth Bharathan is excellent too. The horror thriller Bramayugam offers a social critique of caste and class structures. Don't expect jump scares. This film is cerebral, not visceral!

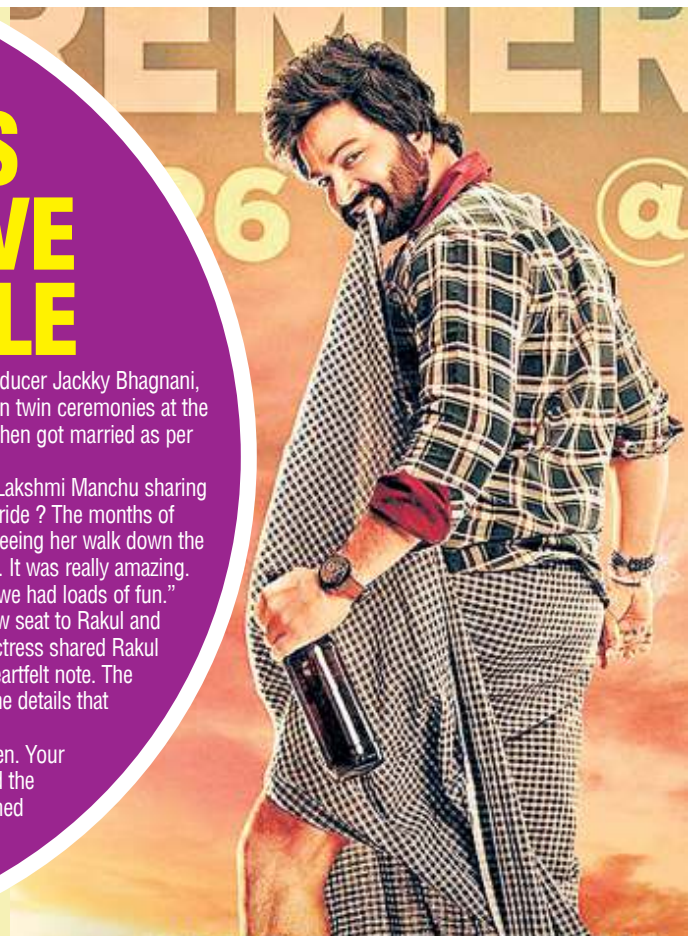


RAKUL'S BRIDESMAIDS HEARTFELT LOVE FOR THE COUPLE

The year started on a happy note for actress Rakul Preet Singh and actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani, as the love birds entered the wedlock recently. The soulmates got married in twin ceremonies at the ITC Grand South Goa hotel, having the Anand Karaj ceremony first, and then got married as per Sindhi traditions.

Rakul's BFFs couldn't keep calm as they pour in their love for the couple. Actress Lakshmi Manchu sharing her best wishes, exclusively said, "What can you say when your bestie is the bride? The months of planning and building up! We have all been waiting for the D day. It was magical seeing her walk down the long aisle. The music, the food, the weather, and the sky everything was perfect. It was really amazing. Jacky and Rakul looked ethereal at every event. It was a happy wedding, and we had loads of fun." Meanwhile, her second bridesmaid and BFF, Seerat Kapoor caught a front-row seat to Rakul and Jacky's wedding. Unable to contain her happiness, the *Bhramakalapa* 2 actress shared Rakul and Jacky's wedding video on her social media story penning down a heartfelt note. The shared moments showcase the beauty of the ceremony, highlighting the details that contributed to the magical wedding.

Sharing the story the actress wrote, "A match truly made in heaven. Your marriage was nothing less than poetry! All my love to you and the powerful union of both your warm families. This track is etched in my heart for life! God bless. Congratulations, *Nazar na lage!*"



Bootcut Balaraju to premiere on Aha

Sohel, the film's protagonist, ventured into production, investing his father's hard-earned savings, but unfortunately, the film failed to resonate with audiences, resulting in losses for distributors. Soheli's emotional speeches during pre-release events kept the film in the spotlight, culminating in tearful expressions of disappointment when screenings were canceled due to poor turnout.

Even after its release, Soheli remained vocal, publicly criticizing a reviewer who awarded the film a mere one-star rating. Despite his efforts, the film struggled to gain traction. In 2023, Soheli had two other releases: the light-hearted entertainer *Organic Mama Hybrid Alludu* by SV Krishna Reddy, now available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video, and the critically acclaimed drama *Mr. Pregnant*, accessible on Aha. Pandu and Mamidishetty Srinivas co-produced *Bootcut Balaraju*, with Shyam K Naidu handling cinematography, Bheems Ceciroleo composing music, and Vijay Vardhan editing. The film, written by Jabardasth Ramprasad, revolves around a fiery village youth who challenges the village head and enters the Sarpanch elections. Critics noted Soheli's performance as exaggerated, contributing to the film's swift exit from theaters within two days of its release. Despite the setback, Soheli remains resilient, expressing determination to bounce back stronger. With two more releases slated for this year, he promises to showcase versatility through diverse roles, signaling a comeback with a bang.

Bhimaa's trailer will be out today

The official trailer for Gopichand's upcoming action comedy *Bhimaa* will debut at 4 PM today, according to the makers. Popular Kannada director and writer A Harsha is behind the camera for *Bhimaa*. It is the first Telugu feature! The movie is slated to open in theaters on March 8. Rama Banam is where Gopichand was last seen.

Malavika Sharma and Priya Bhavani Shankar play the female lead parts in the film *Bhimaa*. The supporting cast of the movie includes Nassar, Naresh, Poonna, Vennela Kishore, Raghu Babu, and Mukesh Tiwari.

Sri Sathya Sai Arts is the banner under which KK Radhamohan is producing *Bhimaa*. *Bhimaa* has music by Ravi Basrur, who previously composed the score for the Prabhas film *Salaar*. Other contributors to the film include Tammiraju, who handled editing, Swamy J Gowda, Ramana Vanka, and Ram-Lakshman, who performed action choreography.

Horror thriller Tantra will release on Mar 15

On March 15, *Tantra* will be released in theaters. Ananya Nagalla, known for *Malleshham* and *Vaakeel Saab*, plays a villager who is possessed by a malevolent spirit in this supernatural horror film.

The filmmakers teased us with the release date by ironically declaring that it is not appropriate for "pilla bacchas" (small children). Why? *Tantra* has received a stringent 'A' classification from the CBFC, signifying that its themes, acting, visuals, and scares are appropriate for older viewers that value strong and unvarnished content. The trailer for the movie is expected to drop soon.

Produced by Naresh Babu P and Ravi Chaitanya, *Tantra* has Dhanush Raghunadri in the lead role. With a background in Walt Disney, director Srinivas Gopiseti appears to have paired unusual characters with well-known actors such as Temper Vamsi and Laxman Meesala of *RX 100*, with the latter portraying a weakened Tantric practitioner.

Manoj Muthyam and Kushalini are among the cast members. The editor is SB Uddhav, and the cinematographers are Sai Ram Uday and Vijay Bhaskar Saddala. Guru Murali Krishna is the art director of the movie, which has music composed by RR Dhruvan.

