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CENTRE WANTED TO DEVELOP TAJPUR AS REVENUE GENERATING: THAKUR



Kiccha Sudeep unveils first look of WORLD OF UI



QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

There is a need for the Civil Supplies Corporation to supply 7.83 lakh tonnes of rice during the Kharif season by January 31 and 35 lakh tonnes of rice for the Rabi season. This requires Telangana millers to deliver around 42 lakh tonnes of rice in the coming weeks, a commitment in which there is a significant gap.

— N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, Civil Supplies Minister

P4

DON'T MISS...

Will not enter politics again...

Former MP Lagadapati Rajagopal has made it clear that he will not enter politics again. Lagadapati Rajagopal attended a private function here on Monday. Talking to the media, he predicted the political situation in AP would take an interesting turn in three months. He said that YS Sharmila joining the Congress party is a good sign. People would decide who would come to power in the next elections. When asked about Sharmila leading the Congress in AP, he said that there might be differences in family but it is limited to their family...

—PAGE: 4

Indians top Maldives' tourist...

Data shows Indians top the Maldives' tourist arrival figures, with more than two lakh of them visiting the island nation every year after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Maldives tourism ministry statistics, more than 2.09 lakh Indians visited the country in 2023. The number was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited the...

—PAGE: 5

DGCA revises duty time norms for...

Aviation safety regulator DGCA on Monday came out with revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDLT) norms for flight crew, entailing increased weekly rest periods to 48 hours, extension of night hours, and limiting the number of night landings to only two as against six earlier. These regulations have been instrumental in managing fatigue-related aviation safety risks for more than a decade now, an official statement said. Airlines are required to comply with the revised norms latest by June 1, it...

—PAGE: 8

Rohit, Kohli get final shot at T20...

The selectors have clearly gone for the status quo rather than addressing the elephant in the room by picking Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for their first T20 series in 14 months. Will it have a bearing on India's chances in another T20 World Cup? Only time can tell. Having endured a heartbreak in the previous two editions of the T20 World Cup, the two greats of the game can't be faulted for wanting a final shot at glory in the format. But the same can't be said about the selectors, who picked a fresh...

—SPORTS

Unrest in YSRCP over denial of tickets, constituency shifts

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
VIJAYAWADA

The recent decisions by the YSRCP leadership to deny tickets to certain incumbent MLAs and relocate others to neighbouring constituencies have triggered unrest within the ruling party. Some MLAs express strong dissent, challenging the rationale behind these moves.

A YSRCP leader posed a critical question, "With a satisfaction level of 86% and confidence in winning all 175 seats, why deny tickets and shift MLAs to different constituencies?" The appointment of former Karnataka MP Santha as in-charge of the Hindupur Lok Sabha constituency was labelled as 'ridiculous' by another YSRCP leader.

Speaking anonymously, a senior YSRCP leader deplored the trend of making MLAs scapegoats for mistakes they did not commit. "Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has not granted appointments even to ministers. The departure of senior leaders like Kapu Ramachandra Reddy raises questions about the political acumen of others like

Vijayasai Reddy, Sajjala, and YS Subba Reddy," the senior leader remarked.

Dissenting YSRCP MLAs questioned whether Jagan Reddy's public image had suffered to the extent that denial of tickets and shifts were necessary for damage control. Criticism was directed at Jagan Mohan Reddy for centralising decision-making over the last four and a half years without consulting senior leaders. Some accused him of shifting blame onto sitting MLAs while sidelining their role.

A Guntur district YSRCP MLA pointed out that MLAs felt sidelined as most work was undertaken by volunteers. Expressing frustration, the MLA highlighted the challenge of voicing concerns to the Chief Minister's Office officials due to the lack of appointments.

"We are compelled to stand before coordinators with folded hands, as the Chief Minister does not pay heed to our concerns. This reflects Jagan Mohan Reddy's failure, yet he seeks to make us scapegoats," the YSRCP leader stated.



Dissenting YSRCP MLAs questioned whether Jagan Mohan Reddy's public image had suffered to the extent that denial of tickets and shifts were necessary for damage control.

YSRCP takes action against 4 MLAs, 2 MLCs

PNS VIJAYAWADA

In a decisive move, the YSRCP leadership has taken stringent measures against party members who have defied party directives. The party has officially disqualified four MLAs and two MLCs for their actions. A formal complaint has been lodged with the respective offices of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the Chairman of the Legislative Council, seeking the disqualification of the dissenting MLAs and MLCs.

Chief Whip Prasad Raju and former minister Vellampalli Srinivas have jointly submitted a complaint, urging the cancellation of legislative memberships for the four MLAs who have departed from the YSRCP ranks. The individuals facing disqualification are MLAs Vundavalli Sridevi, Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Kotam Reddy Sridhar Reddy, and Mekapati Chandrasekhara Reddy. Additionally, MLCs Vamsi Krishna and C Ramachandraiah are included in the disqualification proceedings.

It's noteworthy that MLC Vamsi Krishna recently aligned with the Jana Sena, while C Ramachandraiah joined the TDP. Simultaneously, the party took action against four MLAs who went against party lines during the MLC elections last year, suspending them from the party.

Anganwadi strike politicised: Sajjala

Agitators urged not to fall into trap of vested interests and resume duties



PNS VIJAYAWADA

Advisor to the Government (Public Affairs), Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, has raised concerns over the politicisation of the Anganwadi workers' strike, accusing certain political parties of exacerbating the situation.

Addressing the media on Monday in Vijayawada, Sajjala urged Anganwadi workers to end their strike and resume their duties. He cautioned them against falling victim to the political agendas of certain parties, stating, "The government has engaged in negotiations with Anganwadi unions at various levels. Despite our efforts, they have not responded positively."

Highlighting the alleged involvement of political parties in support-

“The government has engaged in negotiations with Anganwadi unions at various levels. Despite our efforts, they have not responded positively. We have evidence, including audio recordings shared on WhatsApp groups, proving that some political leaders are inciting the Anganwadi workers.”

Expressing concern for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children affected by the strike, Sajjala remarked, "Due to the Anganwadi workers' strike, essential services such as providing nutritious food are disrupted."

Continued on Page 2

Now, '108', '104' staff serve strike notice

VIJAYAWADA: The employee unions representing '108' and '104' service workers issued a strike notice to Aarogyasri CEO, DK Balaji, on Monday. Following a meeting with the CEO, both unions outlined their demands, warning of an indefinite strike if the government fails to address their concerns. Their primary request is to merge their services with the Andhra Pradesh Corporation for Outsourced Services (APCOS). B Kiran Kumar, State president of the '108' Employees' Union, emphasised their key demand to fulfil the Chief Minister's promise of merging them into the outsourcing corporation. Additional CEO of Aarogyasri, R Madhusudhan Reddy responding to the strike notice, stated that discussions with the union leaders are scheduled for Tuesday, expressing optimism about convincing them.

Satya Kumar takes a dig at AP govt



PNS VIJAYAWADA

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national secretary, Satya Kumar, has accused the government of failing to fulfil its election promises. He expressed his support for Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) State president, Vamsi Krishna, who commenced a hunger strike at Gymkhana Grounds in Vijayawada

demanding the release of the State's job calendar.

Vamsi Krishna's hunger strike, under the banner of 'Jagananna Maa Job Calendar Ekkada?' comes ahead of the upcoming election notification.

Kumar lauded the BJYM's initiative, highlighting the ruling YSRCP's commitment to releasing the job calendar on the first of January every

year. Addressing the media, Satya Kumar accused Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy of failing to fulfil his election promises and asserted that the YSRCP deceived the youth with promises of creating 2.30 lakh jobs in the State. He criticised the State government's suggestion that the youth should engage in the fish business instead.

Furthermore, Kumar criticised the government's approach to the 'Aadudam Andhra' sports festival, claiming that when the youth requested job notifications, they were redirected to participate in the festival.

He expressed concern over the rising suicide rates among unemployed youth in the state, citing 1,345 cases in the past four years.

Applications from voters will be resolved by January 12: CEO

PNS VIJAYAWADA

AP Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena said that the final voter list will be prepared based on the applications received till December 9, 2023, and applications received after that will be resolved by January 12, he said. He said that action has been taken to revise the voter list without confusion.



Anganwadi workers stop Botsa's convoy

PNS VIZIANAGARAM

Tension prevailed in Vizianagaram district on Tuesday when Anganwadi workers obstructed the convoy of Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana, for the government's neglect of their demands. The Minister, engaged in a district tour, found himself in a nearly half-hour standoff with the impassioned workers who were adamant about having their concerns regarding improved pay and working conditions addressed. Despite the workers' resistance to video recording the confrontational scene, police intervention eventually facilitated the Minister's passage. However, the workers remained steadfast in their commitment to sustaining the

ongoing strike. While Minister Botsa pledged to consider the issue of raising their salary within three months, the workers, unswayed by the assurance, said that their aspirations extended beyond mere salary adjustments. They are advocating for comprehensive enhancements in their working environment and benefits.

Nevertheless, the government is adopting a resolute stance. Minister Botsa, citing the challenges of frequent salary hikes, justified the invocation of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) against the Anganwadi workers, imposing a six-month prohibition on strikes. He proposed a more sustainable approach, suggesting salary increments every five years.

Govt committed to social justice: YSRCP

PNS BADVEL

On the 43rd day of the transformative 'Samajika Sadhikara' yatra, the YSRCP continued its impressive bus tour, demonstrating significant strength in the Badvel assembly constituency in the Kadapa district. As the yatra progresses, it becomes apparent that YSRCP leaders are not only traversing geographical boundaries but also strengthening connections with marginalised communities to uplift and empower them.

Prominent party leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister K.



Narayana Swamy, Badvel MLA Dasari Sudha, MLC DC Govind Reddy, and others, actively participated in the social empowerment

yatra. They underscored the YSRCP government's commitment to social justice for BC, SC, ST, and Minority communities, emphasising its dedication to achieving inclusive development through investments in human capital. Addressing the substantial gathering, Local MLA D. Sudha announced that the YSRCP government has disbursed Rs 1,268 crore in welfare benefits through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system to 1.38 lakh families in the constituency since 2019.

Continued on Page 2

STATE HOUSING CORP

Tenure of directors extended

PNS VIJAYAWADA

The State government has extended the tenure of 14 Board of Directors of the State Housing Corporation until further notice, as announced by Corporation Chairman Davuluri Dorababu.

During the 35th board meeting held on Monday, Chairman Dorababu emphasised the need for concerted efforts to expedite the construction of houses in Jagannanna colonies throughout the state.

He urged all stakeholders to actively contribute to the completion of these housing projects.

The State government's decision to extend the tenure of the 14 directors reflects a commitment to ensuring the success of these initiatives.



In his address at the meeting, Chairman Dorababu conveyed the Chief Minister's strong desire to complete the construction of houses in Jagannanna colonies, ensuring that they are equipped with all necessary facilities.

He encouraged each director to visit the ongoing construction sites and collaborate with the beneficiaries to expedite the construction process.

BILKIS BANO CASE

SC quashes Gujarat govt's remission order

PNS NEW DELHI

In a massive setback to the Gujarat government, the Supreme Court on Monday quashed the remission it had granted to 11 convicts in the high-profile gang-rapist case of Bilkis Bano and the killing of her seven family members, while slamming the state for being "complicit" with an accused and abusing its discretion. It ordered all the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, to be sent back to jail within two weeks.

Excoriating the Gujarat government, the apex court said it "usurped" the power of the

11 CONVICTS TO RETURN TO JAIL

Excoriating the Gujarat government, the apex court said it 'usurped' the power of the Maharashtra government to grant remission to the convicts.



Maharashtra government to grant remission to the convicts.

It held as nullity the May 13, 2022 judgement of another bench of the apex court, which had directed the Gujarat government

to consider the remission applications of the 11 convicts in the case, saying it was obtained by "playing fraud on court". "This is a classic case where the order of this court dated May 13,

2022, has been used for violating the rule of law while passing orders of remission in favour of respondent nos 3 to 13 (convicts) in the absence of any jurisdiction by the State of Gujarat. Therefore, without going into the manner in which the power of remission has been exercised, we strike down the orders of remission on the ground of usurpation of powers by the State of Gujarat not vested in it. The orders of remission are hence quashed," a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said.

It asked whether "heinous crimes against women permit remission" irrespective of the faith she may follow or creed she

may belong to. Bilkis Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing the horror of the communal riots that broke out after the Godhra train burning incident in February 2002. Her three-year-old daughter was among the seven family members killed.

In its 251-page judgment, the Supreme Court said the Gujarat government had no jurisdiction to entertain the applications for remission of sentences and only the government of the state where the offenders were sentenced was competent to consider an application for remission and pass an order.

Congress hoodwinking people with promises

Objective of the Congress in hoodwinking the people with promises, raising new slogans is to ensure that the Gandhi-Nehru family grabs power anyhow. The Congress has been making futile efforts to benefit a family.

As part of the efforts, the Congress declared Rahul is going to embark on Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from January 14. In 2022, Rahul undertook Bharat Jodo Yatra. Now, before the elections he changed the yatra's name and decided to tour some more states.

Objective of the jodo yatra is to unite various sections of society in the nation, while the Jodo Nyay Yatra's objective is to fight for the political, economic and social justice of various cross-sections of society, according to the Congress. Surprisingly, experimenting with Rahul Gandhi in any manner would have no result at all no matter how many times the Congress

experiments with him.

Since taking a plunge into politics in 2004, Rahul did not leave any impact either on the party or on the people of the nation. He could not notch up success as party general secretary, in-charge of Youth Congress and other allied organisations. When Congress went to polls in 2014 with Rahul at the helms of affairs, it miserably failed. The strength of the Congress dipped to 44 in 2014 from 206 in 2009.

He took responsibility of the party campaign in 2019 polls, but failed to help win at least 10% of the seats in the House. He resigned from the party president's post blaming the seniors for the failure.

Rahul's Jodo Yatra failed to show any impact on people. The Congress suffered miserable defeat in the recently Assembly elections. Rahul campaigned along with sister Priyanka Wadhwa in 21 seats in MP, but the Congress managed to win only in 4

The Congress leaders boast of Rahul's Yatra benefiting the Congress to come to power in Telangana. But, Rahul toured in 29 Assembly constituencies, but the Congress managed to win only in 12. Rahul's yatra impact was zero in several regions, including Hyderabad.

seats. People in Rahul-toured areas of Burhanpur, Indore, Agar Malwa and Ujjaini regions rejected the Congress.

In Rajasthan, Rahul's yatra proceeded through 12 Assembly constituencies, but the Congress won only in 3. People of Jhalwar, Dausa, Sawai, Madhopore and Alwar districts taught a lesson to the Congress.

The Congress leaders boast of Rahul's Yatra benefiting

the Congress to come to power in Telangana. But, Rahul toured in 29 Assembly constituencies, but the Congress managed to win only in 12. Rahul's yatra impact was zero in several regions, including Hyderabad.

The failure of Rahul Yatra could be gauged in the first phase itself, but the Congress encouraged him to take part in the second phase. It stands as a classic example of the ideological deficiency of the



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

Congress regime on the basis of caste, religion, regionalism had not taken place under the regime of any other political party.

When questioned, the Opposition leaders were lodged in jails and democratic rights of people were trampled upon. The family rule, corruption, nepotism perpetrated during Congress regime alone. Rahul Gandhi should atone for the sins perpetrated by the Congress through his yatra. Therefore, he should declare that he is undertaking Prayaschitta Yatra.

When Modi-led BJP entered political arena in 2014, the people heaved a sigh of relief and helped BJP with a huge majority of votes. Under Modi's leadership, the people united strongly behind him forgetting their caste, colour, religion and creed. The significance of Indian culture has been made known to world. BJP got majority of SC and ST

seats only under Modi's leadership. Also, several BC groups took Modi under their wings. The Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra launched by Modi and his ministers, BJP representatives, activists on November 15 to meet the beneficiaries of government schemes was successful. BJP leaders reached 11 crore beneficiaries in 50 days.

Objective of Rahul's yatra was to urge the people to render justice to his family. Rendering justice to the party would mean rendering injustice to the nation.

The Congress was in a bad shape as such it is not able to think beyond the scope of the family. That is why Congress is banking on Sharmila, daughter of former CM YS Rajasekhara Reddy, in AP.

Congress that had once ruled the undivided AP almost extinct in divided Andhra Pradesh. Sharmila

joined the Congress out of anger for her brother as she did not get justice in the distribution of thousands of crores of booty looted by her brother Jagan in Congress regime.

Jesus Christ alone knows why she floated a party in Telangana and closed it down to join hands with the Congress. It seems Rahul Gandhi pinned hopes on her that Sharmila would be able to revive the Congress in AP. How can a leader who fled Telangana soil develop Congress in AP? May be the elections useful to Sharmila and her Evangelist husband to get some personal benefits. Sharmila declared to the AICC stating that she joined the Congress out of agony of torching of churches in Manipur.

When thousands of temples were destroyed in the nation, when Kashmiri Pandits were lynched in J and K, why did Sharmila not experience any agony?

TRULY SPEAKING

Dy CM Rajanna Dora reaffirms commitment to welfare schemes

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Deputy Chief Minister and Tribal Welfare Minister Pidika Rajanna Dora reiterated his commitment to implementing Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's directives at a public meeting in Vizianagaram on Monday. Commending the Chief Minister for consistently delivering on promises, Dora emphasised the government's dedication to the welfare of the people.

The launch of the pension distribution programme in Mentada mandal marked a milestone in fulfilling welfare promises. Beneficiaries witnessed the distribution of new pensions and increased pension amounts during the programme held at the Mandal Parishad office.

In addition to the pension programme, the Ministers inaugurated the Grama Secretariat building, constructed at a cost of Rs 40 lakh, and unveiled statues of Mahatma Gandhi (Bapuji) and Bharat Ratna BR Ambedkar on the premises. The event also included the inauguration of a



primary health centre in Challapat village, built at a cost of Rs 73 lakh, and laying the foundation stone for a laboratory building estimated at Rs.50 lakhs.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Chief Minister Rajanna Dora underscored the government's commitment to inclusivity, citing the increase in the number of pensioners from 6509 to 7797. He highlighted the reduction in the age threshold for pension eligibility from 65 to 60 years during Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure.

Notably, disability criteria were adjusted from 80 per cent to 40 per cent, benefiting

a significant population. Rajannadora pointed out the enhanced land and income limits, resulting in widespread benefits for many people.

Drawing a contrast with the previous TDP government, Rajannadora applauded Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy for disbursing pensions on the 1st of every month.

He criticized former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for unfulfilled promises, emphasizing the successful implementation of Jagan's commitments.

Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana echoed the praise for Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, noting the ful-

filment of promises, including the increase in the pension to Rs 3 thousand.

He emphasized the implementation of welfare schemes for women, aiming to uphold their self-esteem. Minister Satyanarayana challenged anyone to identify an assembly member who had not proposed at least one scheme.

Zilla Parishad Chairman Majji Srinivasa Rao lauded Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy as the leader who resonates most with the people since late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

He highlighted the state's distinction in providing the highest standard of pensions compared to other states.

Rao commended the government's simultaneous focus on large-scale development programs alongside welfare initiatives. Several dignitaries, including MLC Indukuri Raghuraj, Joint Collector Mayur Ashok, and Mentada MPP Reddy Sanyasinayudu, were present at the event, underscoring the significance of the welfare initiatives and development projects unveiled in Mentada mandal.



Revamped TTD website launched

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Chairman B Karunakar Reddy on Monday launched the revamped website tdevasthanams.ap.gov.in, which will offer information on TTD temples in Tirupati and also other locations across the country.

"The revamped website provides updates on local temple history, 'arjita sevās' (ritual), darshan (visit) hours, transport and other infrastructure available at over 60 TTD-managed temples and information centres across the country," a TTD press release said.

It will also showcase photographs, videos and other geographical details, along with technical support from service provider Jio and configurations made by TTD's IT department.

'Farmers' suicides increased

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Telugu Desam politburo member Kollu Ravindra has asserted that the public meetings led by TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu as part of the 'Raa Kadali Raa' campaign are deeply resonating with the people across the State. Speaking at a media briefing from the TDP national office in Mangalagiri, he disclosed that large numbers of people attended the "Raa Kadali Raa" meetings in Kanigiri, Tiruvuru, and Achanta. Ravindra expressed concern, stating that millions of people in the state are suffering due to having given YS Jagan Mohan Reddy a chance.

Ravindra alleged that owing to the inefficiency and incompetence of Jagan Reddy, farmer



suicides have surged in the State, with Andhra Pradesh ranking second in tenant farmer suicides and third in overall farmers' suicides. Additionally, the State leads in farmers' debts nationwide. He deplored the state of the Pattiseema Project, constructed during the TD regime,

which is now rendered ineffective under the Jagan Reddy administration. He also criticised the current Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for hindering the progress of the Polavaram project through reverse tendering.

Claiming that there have been no investments in the state in the past 4.9 years, resulting in widespread unemployment among the youth, Ravindra asserted that the Jagan Reddy government has exploited the state by providing Rs 10 through welfare schemes while collecting Rs 100 through heavy taxes, along with increased prices of petrol, diesel, and essential commodities. He revealed that six lakh students had to leave college due to the non-receipt of fee reimbursement from the State government.

2 jewellers robbed of 1.7 kg gold, Rs 10L cash

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

About 1.70 kg of gold worth Rs 1 crore and Rs 10 lakh cash were robbed by three unidentified men. The accused assaulted two gold shop owners and robbed the valuables from Balaji Nagar Nellore town on Sunday night.

Police said, P Hari Koteswara Rao and Chandrasekhar Rao brothers live in an apartment in Ramamurthy Nagar in

Nellore and have a jewellery shop. Apart from selling jewellery, they also supply jewellery to shops in the district on receipt of orders. Ramachari, a gold merchant from Nellore who is a friend of the duo, bought around two kilos of Gold jewellery. Hari and Ramachari sold some ornaments in Gudur on Sunday and received Rs 10 lakh cash.

They returned with around 1,758 grams of Gold jewellery and Rs 10 lakh to

Nellore by RTC bus from Gudur. While Hari and his brother Chandrasekhar Rao were returning home with the jewellery on a bike, at Ramalingapuram Railway under Bridge (RuB) three unidentified men wearing face masks intercepted them. The accused attacked the brothers, grabbed the jewellery bag, and fled on a bike.

Police registered a case and took up an investigation.

Anganwadi strike politicised...

Continued from Page 1

"If the strike persists, the government will explore alternative solutions," he added, emphasizing that those opposing Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy are fueling the agitation among Anganwadi workers.

Disapproving statements from some Anganwadi workers expressing willingness to go to prison and overthrow the government, Sajjala reminded them of the impropriety of such actions. He also took a swipe at former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, alleging that injustice was meted out to Anganwadi workers during his tenure.

Commenting on the political landscape, Sajjala stated that the TDP lacks candidates for all 175 constituencies, pointing out delays in the seat-sharing process between the TDP and JSP. In contrast, he claimed that the YSRCP is confidently finalizing candidate decisions for the upcoming elections.

Applications from...

Continued from Page 1

Mukesh Kumar said that dead voters, duplicate cases and vote transfer applications were resolved by conducting a house-to-house survey. He further said, "We disqualified 5,64,819 names from the complaints received from all political parties. In some constituencies, there have been complaints that a huge number of applications are being made online. We have registered an FIR against 13 people who are fraudulently reaching voters through Form 7 in Kakinada city and six people who have filed maliciously in Guntur West constituency." The CEO stated, "We have filed cases under the IPC and IT Acts in Chandragiri Constituency. We have taken action against 24 BLOs who committed violations there. We have registered 10 FIRs in Paruchur. In cases where there are zero door numbers and more than 10 voters in the same house, we have completed the checks in 97 per cent and revised the voter list. Incidents of voters of the same family shifting to different polling centres have been reported in Visakhapatnam and NTR districts," explained Mukesh Kumar Meena.

Students learn by themselves; Creating ideas and building innovations through digital literacy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

"Schools and universities must join hands for the future of our students," stated Prof. Manoj K Arora, Vice Chancellor, SRM University-AP, in his session on the Future Trends in Education at the National Educator's Leadership Summit 2024 organised by the SRMUAP. The two-day Educational Conclave, under the aegis of the Directorate of Admissions, hosted 45 school principals from across 26+ cities in India who participated in addressing the future of national education and the need for emphasising holistic development, skill enhancement and learner-centric approach to empower students and nurture the skills and knowledge essential for their professional growth.

Prof Y Siva Sankar, Director Admissions, SRMUAP stated that the Summit facilitated a dynamic



platform to exchange ideas, share practices and collectively chart strategies to implement reforms that will shape the education system of our nation. Insightful sessions, panel discussions, and interactive lectures were the highlights of the summit. "Students learn by themselves; Creating ideas and building innovations through digital literacy. It is time we adopt an experiential learning approach to disseminate them with skills for the global world", commented Surajit Sen, Principal - Jharkhand Public

School during an exchange of views on present Indian education.

The National Educator's Leadership Summit successfully concluded with Dr R Premkumar, Registrar; Prof. Y Siva Sankar, Director- Admissions; and Prof. Vishnupad, Dean - Easwari School of Liberal Arts honouring the participating principals with a memento as a token of gratitude for their dynamic participation in the conclave striving towards the collective cause of transforming the future of Indian education.

Tenure of... Govt committed...

Continued from Page 1

She highlighted, "Among the total 1.38 lakh families, 88,124 belong to BC, SC, ST, and Minority communities, receiving welfare benefits totalling Rs 787.72 crore exclusively for these disadvantaged groups."

Commending CM Jagan for implementing transformative reforms in the healthcare sector and ensuring the accessibility of top-notch medical treatment for the underprivileged, the MLA stated, "The increase in the Aarogya limit from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 25 lakh has made healthcare affordable for every economically disadvantaged household in

the state."

In a pointed critique of Chandrababu Naidu for his apparent disregard for the welfare of the poor, Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy remarked, "Chandrababu tends to mislead voters, whereas CM Jagan distinguishes himself through his steadfast dedication to serving the people. While Chandrababu's approach seems to confine children from underprivileged backgrounds to their family-based occupation, CM Jagan has consistently taken the lead in empowering the lives of these marginalised children through the power of education."

Unrest in YSRCP...

Continued from Page 1

A senior leader expressed dismay, saying, "Despite having over 40 years of political experience, we find ourselves standing before individuals like Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, Vemireddy Prabhakar Reddy, and Vijayasai Reddy, who tell us we were denied tickets."

"In light of YS Sharmila's entry into Congress and the emergence of other political parties, there is confidence that viable alternatives exist," asserted another senior leader.

Satya Kumar takes...

Continued from Page 1

He further alleged that the government lacked sincerity in addressing unemployment, accusing the YSRCP of appointing its party's political members to government positions and advisory roles for the unemployed. Despite a job notification in June 2021 to fill approximately 10,143 posts, Kumar claimed that these positions remained largely unfilled over the past four years.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
TRIBAL WELFARE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. 90 to 190/2023-24/5E/TWDS Date: 05-01-2024
Tenders have been issued for execution of 11 works in the limits of the Visakhapatnam Tribal Welfare Department Engineering Circle. The estimated cost of the works is Rs 1481.93 Lakh. Commencement of tender schedule: After 4.00 pm on 09-01-2024. For details, contact www.apesprocurement.gov.in or call 0891-2783210.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Tribal Welfare, Visakhapatnam
R.O.No: 12340/CLAD/11/12021-22, Dt: 08.01.2024



Govt keen to provide adequate housing for scribes: I & PR chief

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Commissioner of the Information and Public Relations Department Thumma Vijay Kumar Reddy has reassured journalists in the State about the government's commitment to ensuring suitable housing for them.

In a video conference with District Collectors on Monday, Reddy underscored the importance of incorporating the opinions of journalists into the land acquisition process for housing plots.

This reflects the government's dedication to fostering transparency and inclusivity in its housing initiative.

Expanding on the allotment process, Reddy highlighted GO No. 535, a dedicated scheme for accredited journalists across various media outlets. He reminded journalists that the online portal for housing applications was open from November 23, 2023, to January 6, 2024. By the deadline, a total of 10,017 applications were received. Following initial scrutiny, 7,651 were deemed eligible and forwarded to district collectors for further verification. Notably, 766 journalists with incomplete applications have been allowed to rectify their submissions.

Demonstrating sensitivity to the situation, Reddy acknowledged the 1,626 applications submitted in the final two days. He assured that only 1,600 applications are pending preliminary verification, which will be finalised by the next day.

Wrapping up the conference, Reddy reiterated the State government's commitment to allocating sufficient housing space for all deserving journalists.

Opposition parties seek withdrawal of ESMA Act

'Enhance wages of Anganwadi workers and helpers'



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A roundtable meeting organised by the Opposition parties has unanimously passed a resolution seeking withdrawal of the ESMA Act invoked by the government on Anganwadi workers. The meeting also demanded that the government enhance the wages of Anganwadi workers and helpers. Several political party leaders who participated in the meeting decided to extend support to the Municipal and Sarvasiksha Abhiyan employees.

TDP politburo member Varla Ramaiah, Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) working president Sunkara Padmasri, CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao, CPI State secretary K Ramakrishna, Jai Bharat national party chief VV Lakshminarayana and others attended the roundtable conference.

The leaders condemned the government which had threatened the Anganwadi workers and helpers to join duty by Monday. The Anganwadi workers serve around one lakh women, children and pregnant women in the State, they said.

Anganwadi workers and helpers have been staging the agitation for the past 27 days demanding pay gratuity as per the Supreme Court order. However, the government has refused to respond to the protest. In support, the municipal workers have been participating in the strike for the past 15 days. Besides, SSA employees have been on strike for the past 19 days.

The roundtable meeting urged the government to resolve all the issues before the Sankranti festival. If the government fails to resolve the issues, the Opposition parties would directly take part in the protests, they warned.

Mallu Ravi files case against AP Dy CM

Mallu Ravi files case against AP Dy CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



A case has been registered against Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Narayana Swamy at the Begum Bazar police station in Hyderabad.

TPCC senior vice-president Mallu Ravi filed a complaint in the wake of Swamy's comments against Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. He asked to register a case against Narayana Swamy for speaking untruths and take legal action.

Mallu Ravi said "Sonia Gandhi gave high priority to Dr YSR and made him the chief minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh. When the YS helicopter crashed, special planes were sent to search for the traces. He died in a helicopter crash due to bad weather. Narayana Swami should realize this. Even now he has to take back his comments. If not, he will have to face dire consequences".

Kodali Nani's daughter resigns as VMC corporator

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP has suffered a big blow in Vijayawada, as its young corporator and Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas (Nani)'s daughter Kesineni Swetha tendered resignation on Monday.

The recent developments in the party have led to the resignation of 11th division corporator Swetha. She submitted her resignation to Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi along with former Deputy Mayor Gogula Venkata Ramana Rao and other followers.

MP Nani was dissatisfied with the recent decision of party national president and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and the leadership in NTR district. The party wants to project Nani's brother Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) in Vijayawada constituency and instructed Nani to stay away from party activities. In this context, Nani and his followers are angry at the party leadership.

Subsequently, Kesineni Nani announced that he would tender his resignation as MP and party member. He said that he would announce his plan of action soon after talking with his followers. Following the direction of his father, Swetha resigned from the corporator post.

Prior to tendering her resignation, Swetha met with Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rama Mohan Rao and Krishna ZP former Chairperson Gadde Anuradha in Vijayawada. After the meeting, Swetha directly went to the VMC office and submitted her resignation to the Mayor.

Speaking to the media, Swetha said that his father Nani was facing troubles from three lead-



ers in Vijayawada. A future action plan will be announced later, she said.

"TDP is not willing to avail of our services. So, it is not correct to continue in the party further. After my father and MP Kesineni Nani tenders resignation from his MP post and holds discussions with the party leaders and cadres, we will take a further decision. We are not ready to work in a party where there is no respect. Kesineni Nani and I will fight on behalf of the people in Vijayawada," Swetha said.

Further, she stated that after the YSRCP government in the State, they contested the municipal elections as they knew there was a threat to their lives. However, the TDP has not recognised their courage and commitment towards the people. After the municipal elections, she and MP Nani faced humiliation, she added.

All set for 2-day ECI meet from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao has said that the district administration is all set to conduct the two-day meeting of the Election Commission of India (ECI) regarding the Special Summary Revision of Voters List - 2024 from January 9 to 10 in Vijayawada. The district administration has made all arrangements for the ECI team to successfully conduct the meeting with the state officers, he said.

Dilli Rao along with Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Mukhesh Kumar Meena, inspected the preparatory arrangements at the Novotel Hotel in Vijayawada on Monday. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar,



Election Commissioners Anup Chandra Pandey, Arun Goyal and other ECI officials visited Vijayawada to take part in a two-day meeting with the state officers regarding coming elec-

tions. Speaking on the occasion, Dilli Rao said that on the first day (January 9), the ECI officials would meet the recognised political party leaders from 10

am to 12 noon. Later, all District Collectors and SPs would give a PowerPoint presentation regarding the coming elections' preparatory arrangements, and SSR 2024 activities, he added.

Further, he said, the ECI team would conduct a meeting with the CEO, AP, State Police Nodal Officer, CAPF Nodal Officer and other enforcement agencies on January 10. Later, the team would meet Chief Secretary KS Jawahar Reddy, DGP KV Rajendranath Reddy and other officials and would discuss various issues relating to the conduct of elections, he added.

NTR district Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, Sub Collector Aditi Singh and others accompanied.

Elect Jagan as CM again: Vijayasai

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Rajya Sabha Member and Regional Coordinator of YSRC South Coast Districts V Vijayasai Reddy said that CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, who brought revolutionary reforms in four and a half years of rule, should be elected as the Chief Minister once again. A meeting was held with party leaders of Narasaraopet Constituency at Tadepalli party office on Monday.

He inquired about the opinions of second and third-level leaders in the constituency. He assured that he would work to solve the problems in the constituency by coordinating with the local MLA. He explained to them that if any problems are not resolved, they should bring them to his notice and resolve



them as much as possible, otherwise he will bring them to the notice of the Chief Minister's Office. He directed everyone to work together to bring YSRC to power once again. He called upon the leaders and activists to win the Narasaraopet assembly constituency with a bigger majority than before.

He said that YSRC should win again in the constituency and achieve a hat-trick like in 2014 and 2019. He said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is working for the devel-

opment of the state with the goal of public welfare and happiness of every family. He said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy brought many revolutionary reforms during his four-and-a-half-year rule and implemented welfare schemes without corruption. Despite the differences among the leaders in the party, whatever decision the Chief Minister takes in the matter of the party, everyone should be bound and move forward together.

He said that the party has come to power only because of Jagan's hard work and the Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has the credit of supporting the welfare of the people of the state. He said that the welfare schemes implemented in the state under his leadership are being provided to everyone.

Discord threatens YSRCP stronghold

Tension simmering between factions led by MLA K Srinivasa Rao and MLC Indokuri Raghuraju

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

The YSRCP faces a brewing internal conflict within its stronghold of Sringavarapukota, Vizianagaram district, as the 2024 elections draw closer. The simmering tension between factions led by MLA Kadubandi Srinivasa Rao and MLC Indokuri Raghuraju threatens to disrupt the party's unity as well as electoral prospects.

Discontent with MLA Kadubandi's leadership has reached a boiling point, with YCP ranks openly voicing their disapproval through protests and demands for an alternative candidate. Public representatives from Kothavalasa mandal expressed concerns over potential electoral losses if Kadubandi is renominated, urging the party to reconsider its stance. Grassroots leaders, including sarpanches and MPTCs, have threatened to withdraw their support if Kadubandi is chosen as the YSRCP nominee. The dissent is no longer confined to Sringavarapukota and



Vepada mandals, spilling over to L. Kota and Jami, indicating a broader dissatisfaction within the party's local ranks.

MLC Raghuraju has emerged as a vocal opponent of Kadubandi, actively campaigning against his re-election bid for over a year. Raghuraju, along with his wife Sudharaju, has expressed their willingness to contest the elections themselves, further complicating the internal dynamics. Despite Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's policy of replacing underperforming MLAs, the decision regarding S. Kota constituency remains shrouded in uncertainty. The prolonged delay in announcing the YSRCP candidate has fueled speculation and frustration within the party, potentially damaging

its electoral prospects. Several other individuals, including Nekkalanaidu Babu, Rongali Jagannatham, Vepada MP Dogga Satyavandu, and Dogga Sri Devi with her husband Srinivasa Rao, are vying for the YSRCP ticket, adding to the internal competition. The YSRCP leadership faces a critical juncture in Sringavarapukota. A swift and decisive resolution to the internal strife is crucial to maintain party unity and prevent potential electoral losses. Addressing the concerns of dissenting voices and carefully selecting a candidate who enjoys broad support will be key to ensuring the party's continued success in the region.

The dissent against MLA Kadubandi poses a challenge to the YCP leadership, and resolving the internal discord becomes crucial for the party's success in the upcoming elections. The leadership faces the dilemma of maintaining party unity while addressing the concerns raised by dissenting voices.

Srikakulam MP seat sought for Kalinaga community

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Rajya Sabha MP and National BC Welfare Association president R. Krishnaiah is pursuing the allocation of the YSR Congress Srikakulam MP ticket to the Kalinaga community. Engaging in discussions with various BC associations and caste groups, Krishnaiah held a meeting on Monday to address the matter.

During his interaction with YSRC Regional Coordinator YV Subba Reddy, Krishnaiah elaborated on the political landscape and dynamics of north Andhra. He urged Subba Reddy to consider allocating the Srikakulam MP ticket to a candidate from the Kalinaga community.



Additionally, he recommended Dr. Dumpala Venkata Ravi Kiran, a distinguished member of the Kalinaga community, for the candidature. Dr. Ravi Kiran has garnered support from SC, ST, BC, and minority groups in Uttar Andhra.

MP Krishnaiah highlighted Dr. Ravi Kiran's noteworthy contributions, emphasizing

his professional achievements as a doctor. He specifically pointed out Dr. Ravi Kiran's proactive role in addressing the issues of Uddanam, bringing them to the government's attention. Krishnaiah emphasized that Dr. Ravi Kiran has demonstrated a commitment to resolving critical problems and has earned recognition in the medical profession.

Lifer for murder

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

An accused in a murder case was found guilty by the Tirupati 10th Additional District Sessions court and Judge T Ramachandru on Monday sentenced the accused B Bhaskar from Tamil Nadu to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 1,000. As per the instructions of DGP, district SP P Parameswara Reddy has set up a court monitoring system to collect the basic, physical and technical evidence of such cases and present them to the magistrate in the court to prove the crime.

On 21-07-2022 Saravanan, was sleeping inside the WQ-4 gate, opposite Tirumala SV Museum in Tirumala One Town Police Station limits, at the old shed where tokens are given to senior citizens. The accused Bhaskar hit the victim with a big cement brick stone resulting in death. A case of murder (Cr No 32/2023 u/s 302 IPC) has been registered against the accused and the accused has been remanded as per the complaint lodged by Tirumala VRA B Suresh Babu with the Tirumala One Town Police. An investigation was conducted and a charge sheet was filed in the court.

The final trial has been completed and the accused B Bhaskar from Tamil Nadu has been found guilty of killing a senior citizen Saravanan resulting in his death.

Farmers take out rally for land rights

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Tribal communities residing in Komiri, Buddibandha Kovvugunta, and neighbouring villages organised a dharna on Monday, vehemently demanding the government's prompt attention to the early registration of their lands and safeguarding their vital cashew plantations from potential mining threats in the region.

The protest was spurred by the apparent indifference of authorities towards the concerns raised by over 150 tribal farmers from hilltop villages. Since last September, these farmers claim to have submitted numerous complaints asserting their rightful posses-

sion of D-pattas in Vooralova hill. However, their appeals have fallen on deaf ears, with no discernible response from the government. Additionally, the farmers allege that their names have not been duly mutated in the webland system.

V Madugula Tahsilidar took cognizance of the situation and submitted a comprehensive report to the District Collector. The report disclosed that four hills had been assigned village numbers, now being treated as distinct revenue villages in V Madugula mandal. The administration had previously issued D-pattas in Vooralova hill, manually prepared an I-B register, and distributed pattadar passbooks.



Naidu a copycat visionary: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Medical Wing said that Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu copied some of the elements of the Congress manifesto in Karnataka and Telangana states, and added some other promises that he had given in the manifesto of the last election, Naidu is trying to deceive the people

again. Dr. Mehboob Shaikh YSRC Wing State Vice President here on Sunday said that until yesterday Naidu boasted that he was a visionary and that he would realize what would happen in the future and implement it but now Chandrababu is copying other's welfare schemes hence is a visionary in copying. Dr Mehboob stated that Naidu also copied some of the

schemes that YSRC has been implementing for 56 months and explained that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is giving Rs.1,500 to a woman who sends her children to school in the name of Amma Vodi and Chandrababu says that the same by changing the name as Ammaku/Thaliki Vandanam. He further explained that

Jagan Mohan Reddy has directly deposited Rs 50,000 to one lakh rupees in the accounts of each sister (woman) in these four and a half years through schemes like Kapu Nestam, EBC Nestam, Interest waiver for Dwacra women and Chandrababu replaced it by promising to give 1,500 per month to women. Dr Mehboob pointed out

that the best of the copy promises made by this self-proclaimed visionary Naidu is the free bus travel given by the Congress in Karnataka and Telangana. He deplored that while in power, Chandrababu tried to sink the RTC vertically and after Jagan came to power, RTC was merged into the government and the organization and workers were provided security.

SEB cracks down on illicit country liquor production

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As election fever grips the district, the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) is making efforts to curb the thriving production and sale of natusara (country liquor) that's luring villagers with the promise of easy money. Gone are the days of makeshift furnaces concealed in distant gardens. Natusara is now being brewed within the confines of homes, using readily available cooking gas cylinders. This shift has made detection significantly more challenging for SEB officials, who traditionally relied on telltale signs like smoke trails and

water marks to unearth hidden production units.

The illicit natusara trade thrives on its attractive profit margins. With production costs at a mere Rs. 75 per liter and wholesale prices soaring to Rs. 150, the temptation to engage in this illegal activity is proving irresistible for many, particularly in villages like Pedaboddepalli, Vemulapudi, Appannadorapalem, and Paidipala. The SEB, acting on orders from higher authorities, is now actively zeroing in on manufacturing villages. Officers are meticulously gathering information and building cases against those involved in



the entire natusara chain, from production and transportation to sale.

The scale of the problem becomes evident when looking at past SEB interventions. In

Narsipatnam Excise Station alone, over 120 individuals were bound over last year, with 30 facing the opening of history sheets. The authorities apprehended 156 people across

264 cases, seizing and destroying staggering quantities of natusara and jaggery sour. The SEB is not only focusing on natusara, but also on controlling the transportation of ganja. Last year, the police dealt with 207 ganja cases involving 879 individuals, resulting in the arrest of 581 people and the seizure of 8,280 kg of ganja. Authorities urge residents to provide information about villages with chain liquor stores or natusara manufacturing.

In a recent operation, the town police destroyed 4,200 liters of jaggery pulp intended for sara production in Subbarayudu Palem cashew

plantations under Narsipatnam Municipal Corporation. Acting on the orders of the SP, police officials discovered 21 sacks and four drums of buried jaggery, equipped with stoves for sara production, which were subsequently destroyed by the authorities. In the ongoing fight against illegal liquor and drug trafficking in Visakhapatnam villages, SEB Circle Inspector Srinivas stressed the importance of community cooperation, assuring residents that information about chain liquor stores or Sara production in villages would be kept confidential.

'CM aims at providing best medical facilities to poor'

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for BC Welfare Ch Venugopal Krishna has said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy's objective is to provide the best medical services to the poor.

The minister attended as chief guest to a programme organized to launch the distribution of enhanced social security pensions here on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the then Chief Minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy launched the Arogyasri health scheme intending to provide corporate medical services to the poor.

Now, his son and present Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has enhanced the limit of the Arogyasri health scheme to Rs 25 lakh



from Rs 5 lakh and brought many diseases under the scheme, the Minister lauded.

Minister Venugopal Krishna said that as per the assurance given by the Chief Minister, the social security pension was

hiked to Rs 3000, adding that 4,313 eligible people are being paid Rs 1,30,36,000 under the 14th secretariat limit.

State Greening and Beautification Corporation chairman Chandana Nageswara Rao

said that the government has taken the welfare schemes to the doorsteps of the beneficiaries which is being done by any government in the country. The municipal additional commissioner and other leaders were present.

Will not enter politics again: Lagadapati

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Former MP Lagadapati Rajagopal has made it clear that he will not enter politics again.

Lagadapati Rajagopal attended a private function here on Monday. Talking to the media, he predicted the political situation in AP would take an interesting turn in three months.

He said that YS Sharmila joining the Congress party is a good sign. People would decide who would come to power in the next elections.

When asked about Sharmila leading the Congress in AP, he said that there might be differences in family but it is limited to their family. What is important is how the people of the state see the enmity between the brother and sister, he said.

SP warns of stringent action against cockfight organisers

PNS ■ ELURU

District Superintendent of Police D Mary Prashanti has warned of stringent action against cockfight organisers.

In a statement here on Monday, she said that in the name of traditional programmes during the Sankranti festival days, cockfights and poker gambling are organised in the district. "Stringent action will be initiated against those who organise cockfights and poker gambling in the district. If addicted, poker gambling spoils the lives of people," she said.

The SP stated that bind-over cases had already been registered against the manufacturers of knives, which are tied to one of the legs of roosters during the cockfight and poker gambling organisers across the



district and they would be kept under strict vigilance.

Only a few people earn money by organising cockfights and poker gambling but many people lose money due to gambling addiction, the SP lamented. Many families had been battered by poker gambling, she deplored.

Toughest steps were taken including registering bind-over

cases to prevent cockfights and other forms of gambling during the Sankranti festival days, SP Mary Prashanti said.

"Strict vigil has been laid on the places where cockfights and poker gambling were organised previously. Stringent action will also be taken against those who give their lands to organise cockfights," the SP warned.

Those who lost money in poker gambling are involved in petty thefts to earn money easily, she said, adding that the cases would be a hurdle to the youths who want to go abroad to pursue higher education or seek jobs as they face problems getting passports. She appealed to the people to inform the police about the cockfights and poker gambling by calling 83329 59175, SEB toll-free number 14500 or 07382623669.

MLA dares Naidu to prove his charges against him

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

MLA and Government Whip Grandhi Srinivas has dared TDP chief and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu to prove his allegation which he made against him.

Talking to the media here on Monday, he claimed that he did not own a house and he lives in the house of his younger brother.

Since he had no money to purchase a house site to build a house, he constructed a house on the site which was given to him by his grandfather after taking a bank loan.

Responding to Naidu's allegation that he grabbed lands, MLA Grandhi Srinivas challenged Naidu to prove it with survey numbers. Naidu had made the allegations with the jealousy of the YSRCP leaders as the YSRCP is strong in the district, he flayed. "People of the constituency do not trust Naidu's allegations as they knew about me," Whip Srinivas said.

Earlier, MLA and Whip Grandhi Srinivas for-



mally inaugurated the newly constructed CC roads and drain here on Monday. The MLA formally inaugurated the CC roads constructed at a cost of Rs 80 lakh. The new CC road was constructed from the 2 town police station to Juvvalapalem road at a cost of Rs 23 lakh, from the Railway station to Chekkavari Street at a cost of Rs 32.60 lakh and the CC drain was constructed at a cost of Rs 17.50 lakh.

Municipal Commissioner M Shyamala, municipal AE Trinath Rao and a host of officials and YSRCP leaders were present.

REMOVAL OF BOGUS VOTES DEMANDED Cops foil TDP leader's fast

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tension prevailed at the RDO office here on Monday as the police foiled the fast of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Chandragiri Assembly constituency in charge demanding the deletion of bogus votes.

TDP leader Pulivarti Nani embarked on a fast near the Tirupati Rural RDO office demanding the deletion of bogus votes in the Chandragiri Assembly constituency. At the same time, the YSRCP activists also organised a protest at the same place.

When the police went there in large numbers to foil the fast of TDP leader Pulivarti Nani poured petrol on himself. The TDP leader alleged that on the directions of



YSRCP MLA Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy, the officials registered a large number of bogus voters in the Chandragiri constituency. He had been complaining to the officials concerned regarding the enrollment of fake voters with evidence, but no official had responded so far, he slammed.

The YSRCP leaders with

the fear of defeat enrolled a large number of fake votes in the constituency, he charged. The TDP leader vowed to continue his protest till the officials took steps to remove the bogus votes in the constituency. Meanwhile, the police whisked Pulivarti Nani and other TDP leaders to the police station and arrested him.

TDP activist 'paraded naked' on police station premises

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In an inhuman act, a TDP activist was allegedly forced to walk around the Palturu police station naked.

The TDP activist walking naked on the police station premises went viral on social media. The victim, TDP activist Chandramohan allegedly pulled out the YSRCP flag and burnt it on the night of January 1.

The YSRCP activists complained to the Palturu police station against Chandramohan who belonged to Chikalaguri village in Vidapanakal mandal.

The police brought Chandramohan to the police station on January 2. The police allegedly beat him up severely and forced him to walk nude around the police station.



When he was walking naked on the police station premises that was video graphed and that went viral on social media. The family members admitted Chandramohan to a private hospital in Bellary.

DSP Narasingappa told the media in Uravakonda that a case was registered against the victim Chandramohan as he behaved excessively with the police.

12 red sanders logs seized, 7 woodcutters arrested

PNS ■ KADAPA

The forest flying squad seized 12 red sander logs and arrested 7 woodcutters at Peluru near MJR Engineering College in Annamayya district.

DFO JV Subba Reddy told the media here on Monday that on a tip-off, the forest flying squad personnel conducted a checking of vehicles.

They found 12 red sander logs were being transported in a car illegally. The forest staff seized the red sander logs, and the car and arrested 7 red sander woodcutters.

However, the red sander smugglers and the main accused Muruhesh managed to escape from the police. A massive search was launched to nab him, the forest official said.



Massive cleanliness drive at 'Meghala Konda'

PNS ■ ALLURI SITARAMA RAJU DISTRICT

In a bid to combat the escalating issue of plastic pollution, the district administration has initiated an extensive cleanliness drive at the tourist destination 'Meghala Konda' in Vanjangi Hill. Over the past three days, a staggering amount of plastic waste and garbage, predominantly comprising plastic bottles, has been removed from both the hilltop and its surroundings. The cleanup operation comes on the heels of the temporary closure of the tourist spot from January 2 to 9 for maintenance works ahead of the Sankranti festive season. The authorities have deployed 30 workers organised into five teams, each led by a panchayat secretary, to conduct the cleanup from the foothill to the hilltop.



The accumulated waste, amounting to over 10 trucks, includes plastic bottles, food covers, cigarette covers, paper plates, and a substantial number of liquor bottles found near the campsites at the foothill. Mandal Parishad Development Officer KS Naveen stated that the cleanup is progressing swiftly, and the tourist spot is expected to

reopen to the public on January 10. 'Meghala Konda,' also known as Vanjangi, gained popularity among tourists in 2019, particularly for its breathtaking sunrise view. However, the surge in visitor numbers, reaching around

2,500 during weekends this year, led to a concerning rise in pollution, particularly the irresponsible disposal of plastic waste by visitors.

Local tribespeople and concerned tourists are urging government intervention to preserve the pristine surroundings and increase awareness among visitors about responsible behavior. Previous issues, such as nighttime camping and partying with littering of liquor bottles, were addressed by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), which imposed entry timings and increased mon-

itoring. However, open dumping remains a significant challenge. Tourists cite a lack of dustbins, while tribespeople blame irresponsible behavior. ITDA Project Officer V Abhishek revealed plans to address the issue by installing metal boards with radium stickers, providing directions and urging tourists not to litter.

To improve waste management, authorities are considering consolidating temporary vendor stalls into one location, implementing proper waste disposal techniques. Additionally, volunteers will be stationed every 100 meters, encouraging tourists to refrain from littering and to pick up trash if needed. As the cleanup progresses, the hope is to strike a balance between promoting tourism and preserving the natural beauty of 'Meghala Konda.'

Collector Dilli Rao lauds shooting gold medal winner

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao congratulated S Tamanyu, who bagged gold medal in the 67th School Games Shooting Nationals held at Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, at the collectorate in Vijayawada on Monday. S Tamanyu represented the Andhra Pradesh under-14 girls team in the shooting nationals, organised by the School Games Federation of India (SGFI). Tamanyu is a Class 7 student



at Fittjee International in Vijayawada. Her father S Pradeep is working in the

Income Tax Department and was an international volleyball player.

Collector visits Sikkolu DWCR Bazaar

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

District Collector Srikanth Lathkar has urged residents to make the most of the ongoing Sikkolu DWCR Bazaar, emphasising its potential benefits for the district. The Collector visited the bustling market on Monday, which has been actively running from January 3 to 9 at the Municipal Grounds. Addressing the attendees, Collector Srikanth Lathkar engaged with members of self-help groups to gather insights into the exhibition's facilities and overall experience. Reassured by the positive feedback received, the Collector expressed satisfaction with the smooth functioning of the event.

Having meticulously inspected every stall and enquiring about their origins, Collector Lathkar interacted with members to under-



stand the current state of business. Responding to the Collector's inquiry, the self-help group members requested more exhibitions to be organized in the future. During the discussions, self-help group members also voiced their desire for district

stalls to be set up in various locations. They emphasised the need for increased demand for their products, indicating a willingness to expand their reach beyond the current boundaries.

Responding positively to the feedback, the Collector assured the members that efforts will be made to organise more exhibitions. Acknowledging the request for district stalls in other areas, he pledged to explore opportunities to showcase local products and promote the community's entrepreneurial spirit. The visit included the active participation of DRDA PD Vidyasagar and various other officials who contributed to the success of the Sikkolu DWCR Bazaar. The event not only served as a platform for local businesses but also highlighted the potential for further economic growth and community engagement.

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Civil Supplies Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy directed officials to speed up the delivery of rice to the Food Corporation of India to meet the January 31 deadline.

The Minister, along with Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Civil Supplies Commissioner DS Chauhan and other officials, addressed a video conference on Monday from his office in the Secretariat with Collectors, officials of the Civil Supplies Corporation and the FCI, focusing on expediting the milling of custom milled rice by rice millers and its delivery to the FCI.

Expressing serious concern over the pending delivery of custom milling rice from the Civil Supplies

Department to the FCI, Uttam said that during his recent visit to New Delhi, Central officials had complained about Telangana asking for large rice allocations but underperforming on deliveries.

He emphasised the need for the Civil Supplies Corporation to supply 7.83 lakh tonnes of rice during vanakalam by January 31 and 35 lakh tonnes of rice for Yasangi. This requires all Telangana millers to deliver around 42 lakh tonnes of rice in the coming weeks, a commitment currently facing a significant gap.

The Minister highlighted the fact that the Civil Supplies Corporation had taken substantial loans to procure paddy from farmers and deliver it to millers. Recovering this investment depends on millers delivering the required quantity of rice to

Speed up rice delivery to FCI

Uttam warns of action against PDS rice diversion

the FCI. Such delays, however, have caused significant losses for the corporation, now burdened with a debt of around Rs 58,000 crore and losses of Rs 11,000 crore in the last 9 to 10 years. It also has an annual interest burden of nearly Rs 3,000 crore. Uttam emphasised the futility of millers holding on to large stocks without timely delivery of rice.

He warned that frequent delays or inability to deliver the prescribed quantity of CMR rice to the FCI



could have serious consequences for future allocations to Telangana. He

stressed the need to improve the system and processes to streamline the

delivery of rice to the FCI.

Appealing to Collectors and other officials, Uttam called for prioritizing rice delivery due to its importance for farmers, state finances and the future of the Civil Supplies Corporation.

With only 21 days remaining to go before the deadline, he proposed setting daily targets to achieve the goal.

Uttam also expressed serious concern about the poor quality of PDS rice. He noted that the rice procured by the Centre and the State at Rs 39 per kg is being recycled or diverted for other purposes.

Terming PDS rice as 'sacred,' he stressed its importance to the poorest and preventing its commercialisation. He mentioned reports of millers polishing and recycling PDS

rice for export at higher prices and warned of strong action against such people. He directed officials to handle such cases with utmost seriousness.

He also addressed a complaint from ration shop owners regarding receiving 4 to 5 kg less rice per bag. He asked why ration shop owners should bear the losses due to the government's negligence and instructed authorities to investigate the matter.

Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Civil Supplies Commissioner DS Chauhan and other officials interacted with Collectors and enquired about their targets and achievements in each district. The Chief Secretary warned Collectors with low procurement of action if they fail to attain rice delivery targets to the FCI.

INDIA CORNER

10 people stuck in elevator rescued after three hours

Ten people, who were stuck in an elevator of a restaurant-cum-bar in Rajender Nagar area of central Delhi, were rescued following a three-hour operation on Monday, said an official. The Delhi Fire Service official said they received information around 2.57 am that a few people got stuck in an elevator and needed immediate help. "Soon three fire tenders were pressed into service. A rescue operation was immediately carried out, which took around three hours to rescue a total of 10 people after cutting the roof of the lift," said Delhi Fire Service (DFS) chief Atul Garg. The officials said that the matter was informed to the local police for further investigation. "All the people, who got stuck were safely rescued. No one had received any injury. Further investigation into the matter has begun," said a senior police officer. "We are also checking the CCTV of the elevator to see if there was any human error," he added.



Thieves steal SBI ATM with Rs 30 lakh in Uttar Pradesh

Unidentified thieves stole an ATM machine of the SBI containing about Rs 30 lakh in Uttar Pradesh's Agra district, police said on Monday. A complaint has been registered on the branch manager's request, police said, adding that teams have been formed to investigate the matter. The incident took place around 2:45 am on Monday near the Kagarol bus stand, they said. The owner of the house in which the SBI branch is running told the police that he suddenly heard a noise in the ATM and screamed to alert the neighbours. The house owner further told the police that the thieves uninstalled the ATM machine and ran away with it in a van as he shouted for help. The branch manager of the State Bank of India (SBI) in Kagarol claimed that the ATM has a cash of about Rs 30 lakh, police said.



Karanpur poll: Another election, another loss for Titar Singh

Titar Singh, 78, is used to losing elections. So the result of the Karanpur assembly poll on Monday wouldn't have surprised him. The habitual contestant who has fought about 30 elections so far got 1,223 votes in this election, in which Rajasthan minister Surendra Pal Singh, the BJP nominee, lost to Congress rival Rupinder Singh Koonar. This secured Titar Singh, a daily wage labourer, the fourth place, higher than the NOTA (None of the Above) option. Titar Singh has contested every election in Rajasthan, from sarpanch to Lok Sabha, since the 1970s and forfeited his deposit every time but that hasn't deterred the Dalit community leader from trying his luck. "Why should I not fight? The government should give land, facilities... this election is a fight for rights," Titar Singh had told PTI in an interview in November last year. According to Election Department data, Koonar won the Karanpur election with 94,950 votes.



Committed to development of citizens living in tribal areas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is committed to the development of citizens living in tribal areas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday as he lauded a tribal woman from Chhattisgarh for her knowledge of government schemes. The prime minister was interacting with thousands of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra beneficiaries from across the country via video conferencing with Union Ministers, MPs, MLAs and local-level representatives also joining the event. Bhumika Bhuaraya, who belongs to an agricultural family from Kanker, Chhattisgarh, informed the prime minister that she works as a secretary of one of the 29 'Van Dhan' groups in her vil-



lage and she has availed the benefits of various government schemes including Ujjwala Gas connections, Jal Jeevan, MNREGA Card, Ration Card and PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. Impressed with Bhumika's awareness about the various government schemes, the prime minister said that it provides strength to the government to work for the people. PM Modi also enquired about the availability of ration on time. When he asked about the source of her vast information about the government schemes, she responded by

saying that it was her parents and other family members. Modi also lauded the contributions of her parents in imparting education to both the children including her younger brother who is currently studying in a college and urged other residents of the village to invest in the education of the children. She also informed the prime minister about her self-help Van Dhan Group which produces Mahwa Ladoo and Amla pickles which are sold to the mart at Rs 700 kg per kg. Prime Minister Modi expressed satisfaction that all the benefits have been made available to the beneficiaries without any hassle and also appreciated her efforts in making appropriate use of Mahwa, which is generally used for intoxication. Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar will on January 10 deliver his verdict on the disqualification petitions against Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and several MLAs whose rebellion had split the Shiv Sena in June 2022, Vidhan Bhavan officials said on Monday. The deadline set by the Supreme Court for delivering the verdict was December 31, 2023 but some days before that, on December 15, the apex court gave a 10-day extension and set January 10 as the new date for a decision. In June 2022, Shinde and several MLAs had rebelled against then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, leading to a split in the Sena and fall of the Maha Vikas Aghadi, which also comprised the Nationalist Congress Party and the Congress.

Sena split: Speaker to announce verdict on Jan 10

PNS ■ MUMBAI

241 PACS operating Jan Aushadi Kendras: Shah

Says rural poor can get affordable medicines now

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Monday said around 241 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) have opened Jan Aushadi Kendras across the country that will ensure rural poor and farmers too avail the benefit of generic medicines at affordable rates. So far, the government's Jan Aushadi Kendras were largely opened in cities benefiting the urban poor. Now this benefit is being extended to the rural poor, he said addressing an event here. Shah, who also gave away the Jan Aushadi Kendra 'store code' certificates to five eligible PACS, said the PACS could expand their business activities to open Jan Aushadi Kendras due to changes made in their byelaws. Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya



Jan Aushadi Kendras (PMBJKs) provide quality generic medicines to general public, which cost 50-90 per cent less than the branded medicines available in the open market. More than 2,000 types of generic medicines and around 300 surgical items are made available through these kendras to citizens at affordable prices. "In the last six months, 4,470

applications from PACS were received. Out of these, in-principle approval has been given to 2,373 PACS. Around 241 of them have started operating Jan Aushadi Kendras," Shah said. With these outlets being opened in rural areas, people there can now buy generic medicines at affordable rates. For instance, cancer medicines which cost about Rs 2,250 in the open market are sold at Rs 250. Even rural girls can buy sanitary napkin at Re 1 from these kendras, he said. Shah further said irony was that despite being a top global supplier of medicines, India has about 60 crore poor people who could not afford it. However, the Modi government took steps to streamline Jan Aushadi Kendras to ensure the poor gets medicines at a lesser price.

VOTERS WON'T FALL FOR CONG PROMISES 'Modi Guarantee' will bag all 28 K'taka LS seats: BJP

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Monday said there is a pro-BJP wave in the country and the party will win all 28 seats from the state in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a BJP Lok Sabha poll planning meeting here, he said intelligent people of the country will not fall for the "gimmicky guarantees" of the Congress party as they know that Modi guarantee is the best. "Narendra Modi is set to become Prime Minister for the third time and under his leadership the country will rapidly move on the path of development, if the BJP wins the next election," Vijayendra said. Hitting out at the Congress government in Karnataka, he said the state's financial health has deteriorated "due to the incompetent Congress". "The government has completely failed to maintain law and order. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who has presented 14 budgets, has completely failed in the matter of resource mobilisation,"



Vijayendra claimed. Despite severe drought situation in many parts of the state and the suicide of 500 farmers in recent times, the state government has not given any compensation to the distressed, according to him. Vijayendra said voters of the state are all set to teach the Congress government a lesson in the next Lok Sabha elections, adding that his party would win all the 28 seats in the upcoming polls. In the last Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 25 seats in Karnataka, while an independent emerged victorious. The Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) had won in one constituency each. Former chief ministers B S Yediyurappa, Basavaraj Bommai and D V Sadananda Gowda and National General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Arun Singh, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka and Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Kota Srinivas Pujari were among those present.

Centre not giving due recognition to Gangasagar Mela: Mamata

PNS ■ SAGAR ISLAND (WB)

Expressing despair, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said that though Gangasagar Mela was "one of the best" religious congregations in the world, the Centre has not given it the due recognition. Speaking at an official programme at the Sagar Island in the South 24 Parganas district, she said that it was her government that was working for the annual event despite no help from the Centre. "Kumbh Mela is a big fair and it gets all help from the Centre. We also must remember that the site of Kumbh Mela is connected by road. Gangasagar Mela, which is held on an island, is one of the best such fairs in the world but I don't know why the Centre is yet to give it the due recognition," she said. She said that her government was working to build a bridge to connect the island to the mainland. "There is no help from the Centre. It's our government which is doing everything," she added. Banerjee reviewed the preparedness for the congregation in the afternoon, and also inaugurated a number of developmental projects. The Gangasagar Mela, which is held on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, will continue till January 17.

Will have to constitute bench to hear plea against collegium system: CJI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court said on Monday it will have to constitute a bench to hear a plea against the collegium system of appointment of judges to the apex court and high courts. "I will have to constitute a bench," Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud told advocate Mathews J Nedumpara terse-ly, after the latter mentioned an old plea filed by him for urgent listing. Nedumpara referred to the recent interviews of former apex court judge Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, who retired on December 25 last year. In an interview on December 29, Justice (ret'd) Kaul had said the National



Judicial Appointments Commission was never given a chance to work, leading to angst in political circles and friction in the working of the collegium system of judges appointing judges to higher judiciary. The Narendra Modi government, after coming to power in 2014, had got enacted the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act. The NJAC, tasked with the responsibility of making judicial appointments, comprised the Chief Justice of India, two senior Supreme Court judges, the union law minister and two other eminent persons nominated by the CJI, the prime minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. However, in October 2015, the Supreme Court had struck down the NJAC Act holding it unconstitutional. In the interview, Justice (ret'd) Kaul had said one has to accept there is a problem with the collegium system and it will be "unrealistic" to say that it is working smoothly.

directed the convicts to surrender in two weeks. "This is a path-breaking and encouraging judgment. It will provide a path of guidance in other cases," Justice Salvi said. The SC, in its ruling, has rightly noted that the Gujarat government had played a "fraud" and obtained the May 2022 order of the apex court asking the state government to decide on the convicts' remission plea based on an old policy existing in 1992, he said.

SC ruling cancelling remission granted to Bilkis case convicts path-breaking: Trial court Judge

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Supreme Court ruling cancelling the remission granted to the convicts in the 2002 Bilkis Bano case by the Gujarat government is "path-breaking and encouraging", said the Mumbai trial court judge, who had sentenced them to life imprisonment, here on Monday. Justice U D Salvi, now retired, had in 2008 convicted the 11 men in the gang-rape-murder case of Gujarat,

ACCUSES STATE POLICE OF PRESSING LIGHTER CHARGES IN FIR

ED says WB PDS 'scam' enormous

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The row over the attacks on ED teams in West Bengal escalated on Monday with the federal agency saying that the state police registered an FIR only under bailable sections in the January 5 Sandeshkhali incident, while no details were given to it in the Bongaon assault case. The ED also claimed that the magnitude of the PDS "scam" which it was investigating was "enormous" and proceeds of crime transferred by a suspect amount to Rs 9,000-10,000 crore, out of which Rs 2,000 crore are "suspected to be transferred to Dubai either directly or through Bangladesh". The money laundering investigation of the agency pertains to alleged irregularities in the public distribution system (PDS) including bogus procurement of paddy in West Bengal, where the ED last year arrested minister and Trinamool Congress leader Jyotipriya Mallick and his aide Bakibur Rahaman. Fresh raids were launched on January 5 in this case as part of which an ED team, along with an armed CRPF security escort, reached Sadeshkhali to search the premises of Shajahan Sheikh,

convenor of TMC's local unit. The other team raided the location of TMC leader Shankar Adhya in the Simultala area of Bongaon. Both locations are in the North 24 Parganas district. The agency said three of its officials were "grievously" injured and their mobile phones, laptop, cash, wallets, etc were looted in the first incident. It said in a statement that a complaint was given by the ED at Nazat police station for registration of FIR in the Sandeshkhali case under as many as 19 sections of the IPC. These included IPC sections like 307 (attempt to murder), 333 (voluntarily causing hurt on provocation), 326 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant), 392 (punishment for robbery) and 395 (punishment for dacoity). It had also registration of the case for offences under IPC sections 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon), 186 (voluntarily obstructing any public servant), 189 (threat of injury to public servant) and 149 (every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object).

Indians top Maldives' tourist arrival figures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Data shows Indians top the Maldives' tourist arrival figures, with more than two lakh of them visiting the island nation every year after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Maldives tourism ministry statistics, more than 2.09 lakh Indians visited the country in 2023. The number was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited the country in that period. In 2018, India was the fifth-

largest source of tourist arrivals in the Maldives with 90,474 visitors. In 2019, India reached the second spot with nearly double the number (1,66,030) of arrivals compared to the previous year. However, this travel hotspot for Indians is now facing a backlash after three ministers from the Maldives cabinet made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Narendra Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep. There were posts on social media claiming that some Indians are cancelling their scheduled trips to the Maldives in view of the row. Hashtag "Boycott Maldives" was also trending on social media. EaseMyTrip on Monday said



it has suspended all flight bookings to the island nation on its website "in solidarity" with India. The government of the Maldives suspended three of its deputy ministers on Sunday after they criticised Modi for his post on X following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that it was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives.

No new enquiries for travel to Maldives

Amid the India-Maldives diplomatic row, domestic tour operators' association IATO on Monday said no new enquiries are coming for travel to the island nation since the recent controversy over derogatory remarks on Indians and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) President Rajiv Mehra said, "We have not seen cancellations because people have invested money on bookings related to travel.

However, in 15-20 days, we may see some impact". He also said "no new enquiries are coming for Maldives from Indian tourists". India being the top tourist market for Maldives, a potential travel boycott by Indians, if it happens, may become a "pain point" for the island nation, according to Travel Agents' Association of India President Jyoti Mayal. "India is the number one source market for Maldives, and then to have such derogatory remarks is not going to hold good for them.

Oppn alliance members can't add to single vote outside their state

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The constituents of the opposition alliance INDIA bloc cannot garner a single vote outside their state and were struggling for their survival, Union Commerce and Industry, and Textiles Minister Piyush Goyal said here on Monday. On the political scenario ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu, he said "the air is pregnant with the possibility of an alliance." "The INDIA bloc is only a new avatar of the UPA. Its constituents including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar cannot



add a single vote to anybody's kitty," Goyal told reporters here. The same was the case with Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, TMC which is struggling in its own state, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray

whose party will not cross a double-digit mark, Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which is struggling for its own survival will not add to a single vote, he claimed. "Where will the DMK in Tamil Nadu add the votes? Which votes will add to the Congress anywhere in the country by the DMK," Goyal sought to know. Asked about the possibility of the saffron party allying with the regional parties in the state, he replied "the air is pregnant with the possibility of an alliance."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Facile victory

Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term as Bangladesh PM, Opposition gives poll a miss

The just-concluded election in neighbouring Bangladesh, notable for yet another boycott by the Opposition, saw the Awami League emerging victorious and Sheikh Hasina securing a landmark fourth term as the Prime Minister. The poll, however, remains embroiled in controversy over allegations of lack of fairness levelled by the Khaleda Zia-led main Opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The election was held against the backdrop of violence during the campaign. Though the Awami League secured 222 of the 300 seats, it is interesting to note that no party came second; the 'independents' --- Awami League's own candidates who were allowed to contest the poll to give it the semblance of a "competition" --- finished as runners-up. While 63 such 'independents' made it to the House, the third largest party in the country, the Jatiya Party, could win just 11 seats. It will be interesting to see who is anointed the official Opposition in Parliament. The fate of the poll was decided the day the BNP, the arch-rival of the Awami League, announced its decision to boycott the election. In her win, Hasina has defeated not only the Opposition but also democracy. However, it goes to her credit that Bangladesh has emerged as a strong economy and the abject poverty it once had has been considerably reduced. However, her Government has faced criticism for alleged human rights abuses and its crackdown on the Opposition. Hasina's career has been characterised by a mix of economic development initiatives and political dominance, and the Awami League has been in power since 2009.



A robust democratic system relies on a healthy Opposition to ensure checks and balances. The absence of a formidable Opposition can potentially impact the democratic fabric of Bangladesh, leading to concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of one political party. Hasina's supporters argue that her leadership has been pivotal in driving economic growth and social progress, justifying the measures taken to secure her victory. International observers and human rights organisations have, however, raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral proceedings. The Government's control over key institutions and the media has also been criticised for limiting the space for dissent. Back home, the victory of Hasina is good news as she is a known supporter of India and enjoys good rapport with the Indian Prime Minister. Bangladesh holds strategic importance for India due to shared historical, cultural and economic ties. The bilateral relationship has seen positive developments in recent years in areas such as trade, security and connectivity. Hasina's continued leadership is likely to maintain stability and foster cooperative endeavours between India and Bangladesh. For its part, India must convince her to allow space to the Opposition and let the democratic institutions run independently. It would be good for her and Bangladesh in the long run.

PICTALK



Devotees participate in a 'Ram Rath Yatra' ahead of the consecration ceremony of Ayodhya Ram temple, in Ranchi. PTI

Will Modi magic work in the south?

Can the enormous popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi help the Bharatiya Janata Party achieve electoral success in the southern states?



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Party is seeking to gain more voters in the challenging southern region. Its presence is limited in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Since it has already peaked in the northern states, the BJP needs to secure more seats in the South. Last week, Modi began his election campaign for the 2024 elections in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Lakshadweep. He also inaugurated several multi-crore projects. The BJP has access to unlimited funds and has well-organised party workers on the ground. To achieve the Party's objective, 40 central ministers had been fielded in the South. In Telangana, the Bharatiya Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) has been present since its establishment in 2014 but recently lost the State to Congress. Kerala is ruled by Congress or Left-led fronts, while Tamil Nadu alternates between Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Karnataka, Janata Dal (Secular), Congress, and BJP have all had a turn in power. Several factors influence voters in the region. They include caste, money, power, ideology, cinema, and liquor. In Tamil Nadu, political figures such as CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi, MGR, and Jayalalitha have significantly influenced voters. In the past, N.T. Rama Rao played a crucial role in united Andhra Pradesh. However, the B.J.P. currently lacks prominent leaders in the southern states. With the passing of influential leaders like M Karunanidhi and Jayalalitha, the BJP is trying to fill the political void.

The BJP won 29 of the 130 regional seats in the 2019 elections, including 25 in Karnataka and four in Telangana. However, the Party lost the state to the Congress in last year's assembly polls. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) was a significant ally of the BJP. However, they ended their alliance three months ago, and neither Party has attempted to reconcile since then. The southern states of India are known for their unique cultures. One noticeable difference is the language divide between the North and South. While Hindi is the preferred language in the North, the South predominantly uses English and local languages. Dravidian Parties in Tamil Nadu oppose the use of Hindi and follow an atheistic ideology. On the other hand, Kerala has a robust communist presence and alternates between Left Front and Congress-led coalitions. The method of using population as a measure for constituency delimitation has led to the South feeling mistreated. This is because the population control measures implemented by Southern states have resulted in a decline in population compared to the North, leading to a sense of unfairness. As a result, the North, which has yet to enforce any population control measures, will be allocated more parliamentary constituencies than the South. A possible solution to address the delimitation issue is to consider changing the composition of the Rajya Sabha.



RELIGION IS NOT A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE IN SOUTH INDIA. THE BJP'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSIONS OR HOSTILITY TOWARDS ISLAM HAVE YET TO GAIN ANY TRACTION IN THE REGION

This can be inspired by the US Senate's approach of guaranteeing equal representation of all states. However, this proposal could face resistance from bigger states in the US. Prime Minister Modi is attempting to change the perception that the BJP is not aligned with the culture of South India. The BJP must still reach a mutual understanding with Southern states. The opposition coalition, INDIA, controls most of the Southern States. They are determined to unseat Modi in 2024. The BJP has a strong focus on Hindutva, the construction of the Ayodhya Ram temple, and an anti-Muslim stance. However, these views may be less popular among voters in southern regions of India. The Opposition parties like DMK, AIADMK, TDP, and BRS hold dominant positions in their respective states. Specific communities such as Vanniyars, Thevars, and Gounders have influential roles in Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka, Vokkaligas and Lingayats have influence, while Reddys and Kammas are rivals in Andhra Pradesh. However, Brahmins have lost

power. In Kerala, Communists opposed the rival Congress in the state, which is also a member of the INDIA coalition. In Telangana, K. Chandra Shekhar Rao, a Velama leader, held sway, but in 2023, Congress snatched the state. Religion is not a major political issue in South India. The BJP's views on Christian conversions or hostility towards Islam have yet to gain any traction in the region. The southern states have not experienced any religious conflicts. This is because the minorities have assimilated themselves with the local population. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to gain success in South India, they need to adapt to the local cultural norms and political strategies. They must form alliances and regain the support of former partners. To achieve this, the BJP should revise its election strategy and develop a new narrative. Failing to do so will result in the opposition coalition INDIA becoming stronger and posing a significant threat to the BJP. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOVERNOR CANNOT DISMISS MINISTER

Sir — A Governor is the Head of the State, and a Chief Minister is the Head of the Government. The governor is bound by the advice of the council of ministers headed by the Chief Minister. The Supreme Court has correctly observed that a Governor is not vested with powers to dismiss a minister. When the law and order of a state break down, making it impossible to run the government by the provisions of the Constitution, the Governor can recommend the President's rule in the state. During President's rule, the Governor rules the state on behalf of the President. All authorities vested in the hands of a Chief Minister are transferred to the Governor during this period. Essentially, during President's rule, the Governor assumes the role of a Chief Minister. While the Governor administers the oath of office to the Chief Minister, they have no authority to dismiss the Chief Minister or their ministers. Governors, the Attorney General the Council of Ministers, and the Prime Minister hold office at the pleasure of the President, and the Chief Minister and their Ministers hold office at the pleasure of the Governor. In practice, the President acts at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, and the Governor acts at the pleasure of the Chief Minister. The President and the Governors of states cannot withhold assent to a Bill. The Constitution does not grant any powers to the President to act unilaterally, even when the interest of the nation demands. While a Prime Minister cannot sign a Bill into law, the President cannot refuse to sign. The President or Governor can return the Bill with observations for reconsideration. The Supreme Court, in the case of Senthil Balaji, has ruled that a Governor cannot dismiss a minister. This ruling aligns exactly with the provisions of the Constitution. However, prima facie, the term "pleasure" appears perplexing. Both the Prime Minister and Chief Minister function when they enjoy the pleasure of the majority of the MPs and MLAs. K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

WORLD DAY OF WAR ORPHANS 2024



Every year on January 6th, the World Day of War Orphans is commemorated. The purpose of the day is to raise public awareness concerning children who have become orphaned as a result of wars. The World Day of War Orphans spread information about their plight and emphasised the psychological, social, and physical obstacles that children experience as

they grow up it is clear that civilians in several nations around the globe have become victims of the war. Amongst them, the children are the silent victims. Millions of children have grown up in war zones, and ethnic strife with no families. The orphans are forced to not only look after themselves but their younger siblings too. Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 7, the government's media office says. Thousands more are missing under the rubble amid relentless bombardment and it is sad. Many children lost their parents and lived in relief camps for survival. In conclusion, World Day of War Orphans 2024 is a day of both reflection and action. It's a day to stand in solidarity with those who have lost their families to war and to work towards a future where no child has to bear the scars of conflict. C K Subramaniam | Chennai

SHORTEST TEST MATCH

Sir — India defeated South Africa by 7 wickets in the second and last Test match, leveling the series 1-1. The bowlers dominated the match, which concluded in just two days. Bumrah and Siraj each took six wickets. With this, a new record has been set in Test cricket history. This is the shortest Test match in cricket history in terms of total balls played. The Cape Town Test concluded in just 642 balls (107 overs in total). India became the first Asian team to win a Test match against South Africa in Cape Town. This is a promising start for Team India in the new year. We hope this momentum continues and India will triumph in the T20 World Cup. Players should continue practicing, as the more they practice, the better they will perform. Mohammad Taurik | Champaran

ALASKA EMERGENCY

Sir — The Alaska emergency is a new threat to the airline industry and poses imminent danger in mid-air. An Alaska Airlines flight traveling from Portland, Oregon, to

Ontario, California, had to make an emergency landing after a portion of the aircraft blew out mid-air. The aircraft reached approximately 16,000 feet about six minutes into the flight before beginning its descent. The jet had 174 passengers and six crew members aboard. In a statement provided to CBS News, Alaska Airlines said that Flight No. 1282 experienced an incident soon after departure and "landed safely back" in Portland, but it was a miraculous escape for the passengers on board. This type of aircraft comes equipped with a rear emergency exit door, mainly used by international airlines, and has a seat configuration that allows for more passengers on the plane. Most US airlines don't use that configuration and design the area to appear as a window from the inside of the aircraft. Somehow, the plane averted disaster, and the pilot deserves all credit. C K Ramani | Mumbai

Policy reforms crucial to make India a manufacturing hub



JAY SHAH

India requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the Government and industry players to become global manufacturing hub

With the swift expansion of India's manufacturing sector, the country is poised to become a leading global manufacturing force. Currently positioned among the top three preferred global manufacturing locations, India has the potential to boost its exports to an impressive \$1 trillion USD by 2030. [1] However, within the spectrum of various supply chains, the challenges and opportunities of Indian manufacturing are evident in the wooden pallet sector. To consolidate its position in the pallet industry, essential policy reforms are necessary for sustainable growth and global leadership. Infrastructure Development India needs to focus on developing robust infrastructure, including transportation, power, and telecommunications, to support the manufacturing sector. The government should invest in building modern industrial parks, logistics hubs, and efficient transportation networks to reduce manufacturing costs and improve competitiveness. Sustainable Manufacturing



In the era of increasing environmental awareness, sustainable and eco-friendly manufacturing practices are becoming imperative. The government should encourage manufacturers to adopt green technologies and sustainable processes by providing incentives and enforcing regulations that promote environmental responsibility. This not only aligns with global trends but also enhances the reputation of Indian products in international markets. Simplified Regulations: The regulatory environment in India is complex, and businesses face bureaucratic hurdles. Streamlining regulations and creating a more business-friendly environment will encourage investment and growth in the manufacturing

sector. Implementing a single-window system for approvals, clearances, and licenses can facilitate ease of doing business. Skilled Labour Development India's education system needs to adapt to the changing needs of the economy by providing relevant skills training. Addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector is crucial for its growth. The government should focus on creating appropriate skill sets among the workforce to meet the demands of modern manufacturing. Government schemes: The government has introduced Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing and increase India's share of global exports. These schemes encourage investments in manufacturing and provide incentives for various sectors, contributing to the growth of the manufacturing industry. Trade Policies and Foreign Investment: India's trade policies and foreign investment regulations play a significant role in attracting global manufacturers. The government should continue to

focus on policies that promote domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependence, and encourage foreign investment in the manufacturing sector. Tax Reforms A competitive and stable tax regime is essential for attracting investment. India needs to rationalise its tax structure, ensuring that it is transparent and predictable. Reducing corporate tax rates, providing incentives for research and development, and promoting innovation through tax breaks will encourage manufacturing companies to invest and operate in India. Conclusion: By implementing the suggested policy reforms, India can create an environment conducive to manufacturing growth, attract investments, and position itself as a key player in the global manufacturing landscape. The success of these reforms will not only boost the economy but also create employment opportunities and enhance India's standing in the world of international trade and commerce. (The writer is CEO of Jay Wood Industry; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN A JEALOUS AND POSSESSIVE MIND

Human minds have fallen prey to the traits of jealousy, envy and possessiveness



RAVI VALLURI

There were twenty theatre enthusiasts of a college who participated in the audition for staging the annual college day play. All six roles were up for grabs, which included one female and five male characters.

As a safety valve, the well-feted and cerebral director handpicked one additional female lead and two male characters. The first choice was a female lead who was attractive, vivacious and bubbling with talent. She felt wretched sharing stage space with another plucky woman. Her covetous and jealous mind, instead of concentrating on the character and performance, kept plotting strategies to run down her perceived opponent, much to the consternation of the director. At his wit's end, the director opted for the alternative and assigned her to the lead role. The tempestuous woman burning with envy was clearly responsible for the loss.

Companies, countries and communities have all become wary of the material success of their 'competitors' and in the process compromise with their goals and objectives. Consequently, they resort to shortcuts in order to emerge triumphant and victorious. "You can be the moon and still be jealous of the stars," writes the American musician Garry Allen. The attribute of jealousy arises in an individual when the mind is possessive of certain belongings. Interestingly, envy in many also arises out of shortages. There can be a lack of aptitude, talent, resources, connections, opportunities, or because of unfavourable outcomes. Individuals subsumed by jealousy build walls of possessiveness and false security walls around their personalities. Such minds feel cheery about their possessions.



As per the epic, The Mahabharata, Karna was extremely jealous of Arjuna, which eventually proved to be his nemesis. The jealous and possessive mind is acquisitive by nature, taking both animate and inanimate objects for granted and getting attached to things like an addiction to alcohol or marijuana. For instance, in the case of the college theatre mentioned earlier, the more talented actress became fearful and was gripped with hatred and greed. Jealous and envious minds have become laboratories of antagonism that spew hatred. How do we overcome attributes such as jealousy, envy and possessiveness? At one end of the spectrum are organizations and authorities which need to take up this responsibility. This includes proper parenting, where children are brought up on ideals of inherent goodness, an effective educational system that imparts values as part of their pedagogy, governments that take up the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to the citizens and make an attempt to carve out an egalitarian system, and a society that addresses the core issues of humaneness amongst its citizenry. Vasudeva Kutumbakam is the net result.

This may appear altruistic but is an effort to restore some semblance of sanity in society, which otherwise is plagued by avarice and jealousy. The spiritual touch is an important colour in the rainbow of goodness. One can practice any faith, but we need to be tolerant of other peoples' points of view. Spirituality succeeds where religions draw the fault lines and wave red flags. Globalisation has made the world flat, but has resulted in an exponential increase in crass commercialization and human minds have fallen prey to the traits of jealousy, envy and possessiveness. The vicious tendencies of jealousy and possessiveness can be tackled by following the two-fold approach highlighted so that the chasm between individuals diminishes.

Manifest plainness, Embrace simplicity, Reduce selfishness, Have few desires — Lao Tzu

(Ravi Valluri is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Hiring based on skills is now a standard practice



DINESH SOOD

As India enters this transformative phase in hiring practices, both employers and job seekers need to embrace the opportunities presented by skills-based hiring



The job market in India is constantly changing, and we are now witnessing a significant shift towards skills-based hiring. The old-fashioned approach to hiring, which relied on academic qualifications and work experience, is giving way to a more dynamic method that prioritizes specific skills. The new skills-first approach enables professionals to explore unconventional career pathways and places greater emphasis on their abilities rather than their educational background. This shift reflects a wider recognition that skills, rather than just degrees, are the key to success in today's highly competitive job market.

A skills-first hiring approach gives priority to a candidate's practical abilities over traditional qualifications. This trend is growing rapidly in India as employers realize the value of diverse skill sets. It is relevant today because it provides equal opportunities for all, allowing talent to shine beyond academic labels. The advantages of this approach include a more inclusive job market and the ability to tap into hidden talent. This approach values merit over formalities, enabling professionals from diverse backgrounds to contribute on a global scale. Every foreign job market has a specific skill shortage that they are looking to fill, and this approach helps to fill that gap. According to a report titled 'The State of Skills-Based Hiring 2023', 86 per cent of employees believe that they are more likely to secure their dream job when the hiring process includes skills-based hiring. The latest data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is alarming: a whopping 86% of individuals aged between 15 and 59 years have not received any form of vocational training. This is unacceptable! It is high time that we focus our efforts on converting this pool of individuals into skilled human capital.

The current trend in hiring prioritizes skills. Therefore, high schools and post-secondary education institutions must design their curriculum to focus on these skills. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rightly emphasizes the need for standardized vocational training courses in high schools, with a range of experiences aimed at developing a bundle of skill competencies.

To achieve the goal set by the NEP of

increasing the gross enrolment ratio in higher education, including vocational education, to 50% by 2035, further action is needed. This requires the addition of 3.5 crore new seats to higher education institutions (HEIs) and focusing on a flexible curriculum with creative combinations of subjects. We must integrate vocational education with mainstream education and allow for multiple entries and exits with appropriate certification. To provide our students with the best possible skills, it is imperative to establish Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) at par with the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

However, accurately assessing these skills may pose challenges. Nevertheless, the future outlook suggests continued growth, fostering innovation and adaptability in a workforce where skills, not just degrees, define success. This reflects a dynamic shift towards meritocracy in the evolving employment landscape. The growing integration of advanced technologies like generative AI, machine learning, cloud computing, and data science across these sectors drives the trend. As these technologies continue to propel business and alter business operations, the demand for upskilling in technology remains robust. Companies are increasingly seeking professionals with specific skills to fill key roles in areas such as valuation analysis, financial research, investor relations management, and risk analysis within this domain.

Skills-first hiring is a new approach that is dismantling traditional barriers to offer global work opportunities irrespective of educational background or regional certifications. For instance, a cyber security expert equipped with practical knowledge and certifications can now find doors opening abroad, as security needs transcend geographical

confines. IBM India has adopted a 'skill-first' approach where college degrees do not matter. In 2012, IBM implemented this approach in the US by removing the four-year college degree requirement from about 50% of its jobs. Ten years later, 29% of the present IBM US workforce in hardware, software, and consulting does not have a college degree. However, companies like Oracle had 100%, followed by Intel (94%), HP (92%), and Apple (90%).

A study conducted between 2017 and 2022 showed that US employers reduced degree requirements for 46% of middle-skill positions and 31% of high-skill positions. Various studies highlight that for the job of software quality-assurance engineer, only 26% of Accenture's postings for the position contained a degree requirement. The rise of skills-based hiring can be attributed to several factors, each contributing to a more comprehensive and efficient employment ecosystem. One of the key drivers is the fast-paced evolution of technology, which has made some skill sets obsolete while creating an insatiable demand for new ones. As industries digitize and automate, employers are looking for candidates who have the technical expertise required to navigate this new world.

Skills-based hiring is not only about technical prowess but also about fostering inclusivity in the workplace. By focusing on skills, employers can tap into a broader talent pool, breaking down barriers related to age, gender, or educational background. This approach enables individuals with non-traditional career trajectories to showcase their abilities, ultimately leading to a more diverse and innovative workforce. In a country as diverse as India, this inclusive hiring model is crucial for unlocking the full potential of the population. It allows for the recognition and utilisation of a rich tapestry of skills that may be over-

looked in a more rigid, qualification-centric system.

When individuals are hired based on their skills instead of solely on academic qualifications, there is a higher likelihood of job satisfaction and engagement. Employees who feel that their skills are valued are more likely to invest in their professional development, leading to a continuous improvement loop. This paradigm shift challenges the traditional notion that a candidate's potential is solely based on their educational background. It acknowledges that skills are dynamic, and the ability to learn and adapt is highly valued in today's fast-paced work environment.

As India transitions to this transformative phase in hiring practices, both employers and job seekers need to embrace the opportunities presented by skills-based hiring. Job seekers should focus on acquiring and showcasing relevant skills, whether through formal education, online courses, or on-the-job experience. Employers, on the other hand, should refine their recruitment processes to ensure that they identify and nurture the diverse talents that the Indian workforce has to offer.

In conclusion, skills-based hiring in India marks a pivotal moment in the country's employment landscape. It is a departure from traditional norms, a response to technological evolution, and a step toward a more inclusive and dynamic professional future. As India continues to embrace this shift, the workforce will be characterised not just by degrees but by a mosaic of skills that power innovation and drive success in an ever-changing global economy.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres. Views expressed are personal)



THE LATEST DATA FROM THE PERIODIC LABOUR FORCE SURVEY (PLFS) IS ALARMING: A WHOPPING 86% OF INDIVIDUALS AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 59 YEARS HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY FORM OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Confronting cancer: Are we winning the war against it?

With the growing incidents of cancer, it is crucial for health authorities to prioritise early detection, cost-effective treatment and preventive measures

Cancer, often referred to as the "emperor of maladies," continues to be a formidable challenge for medical researchers and scientists worldwide. Despite significant advancements in the field of medicine and biomedical science, cancer remains a relentless adversary, and its burden is escalating rapidly in India. India is facing a mounting crisis, with alarming statistics indicating a surge in cancer cases and mortality rates. As we delve into the current scenario, it becomes evident that immediate action is imperative to strengthen cancer care infrastructure, improve early detection and enhance preventive measures. The cancer burden in India is reaching unprecedented levels.



BISHAL KUMAR SAHA

According to a recent report presented in Parliament, there were 14.61 lakh cancer cases detected in 2022, an increase of 35,000 cases from the previous year. Even more concerning is the mortality rate, with 8.08 lakh patients succumbing to cancer in 2022 compared to 7.89 lakh in 2021. The projections estimate a staggering 29.8 million cancer patients in

India by 2025. These figures paint a bleak picture, sounding an alarm for both healthcare authorities and the general public. Despite improvements in cancer treatment, the incidence of cancer and mortality rates persistently rise in India. The country faces multiple challenges in combatting cancer effectively. The most prevalent types of cancer in India include breast, lung, colon, rectum and prostate cancer. Moreover, India has one of the highest mortality-to-incidence ratios for cancer globally, indicating a need for early detection and accessible treatment facilities. The actual incidence of cancer in India could be significantly higher than the official figures, as highlighted by a

2022 study conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young (FICCI-EY). This suggests that the situation is more dire than what the statistics portray, making it all the more urgent to address this issue promptly.

One of the central issues contributing to the cancer crisis in India is the lack of easy access to specialized hospitals equipped with experienced oncologists and state-of-the-art machinery. Timely detection of the disease and affordable treatment are critical factors that need immediate attention. The government must prioritize the establishment of cancer institutes and tertiary care centres to cater to the



growing demand for quality cancer care. While the public healthcare system is overburdened, private hospitals often provide treatments that are financially out of reach for many patients. Raising public

awareness about cancer detection and prevention is a key aspect of tackling this crisis effectively. Beyond the well-known risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol consumption, obesity and seden-

tary lifestyles, environmental factors also play a significant role in the rising disease burden. For instance, the consumption of processed and packaged foods with preservatives has been linked to cancer. Promoting healthy habits, including regular exercise, can be instrumental in reducing cancer risk.

Among women of reproductive age, breast and cervical cancers are the leading causes of cancer-related mortality. These cancers, however, are largely preventable through early screening and timely interventions. Public health campaigns aimed at encouraging regular screenings and educating women about the importance of early detection can save many lives. Cancer continues to cast a

dark shadow over India's healthcare landscape.

As the cancer burden increases, it becomes vital for health authorities to focus on early detection, affordable treatment and preventive measures. The establishment of specialized hospitals coupled with heightened public awareness campaigns, can significantly alleviate the challenges posed by cancer. The time for action is now, as India must stand united in its fight against the dreaded emperor of maladies. Only through collective efforts, we can hope to turn the tide and provide a brighter future for cancer patients in the country.

(The writer studies at Delhi University and is a freelance writer. Views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

TAFE Ltd to invest Rs 500 cr, inks pact with TN

Tractors and Farm Equipment manufacturer TAFE Ltd on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding with the Tamil Nadu government to invest Rs 500 crore in the state. The investments would be utilised for taking up expansion of the Chennai-headquartered company's farm equipment division besides enhancing its manufacturing facility for the assembly and exports of 'Silent Generators', the company said. During the second day of the Global Investors Meet organised by the ruling DMK government here, company officials exchanged documents with the government in the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin, Minister for Industries T R B Rajaa. Tractors and Farm Equipment Ltd proposes to expand its Farm Equipment division to produce an advanced range of farm equipment for a wide variety of crops ideally suited for both Indian and international markets, the company said in a statement.



India's coal import rises 11.7 pc to 21 MT

The country registered an 11.7 per cent rise in coal imports to 20.95 Million Tonnes (MT) in November as compared to the year-ago period. The country's coal imports in November 2022 was 18.75 MT, according to data compiled by B2B e-commerce company mjunction services. However, coal import in the April-November period of the current financial year dropped to 169.08 MT from 173.47 MT in the year-ago period. There was reduction in coal imports due to ample domestic supply and a slowdown in demand after the festive season in October, mjunction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said. The demand for imported coal, he said, is likely to remain subdued in the coming months. Of the total import in November 2023, non-coking coal import was at 14.37 MT, against 11.88 MT in the same month the previous year. Coking coal import was at 4.23 MT, against 3.90 MT imported in November 2022.



Ceva, boAt in partner to drive wireless audio experience

Ceva and boAt on Monday announced a strategic pact for technology innovation across the audio and wearables brand's lifestyle-focused consumer products like earbuds, headphones and smartwatches. The alliance spans a wide range of Ceva's research and development team, will leverage to develop products that offer a superior user experience at accessible price points, according to a release. "Ceva, Inc, the leading licensor of silicon and software IP that enables smart edge devices to connect, sense and infer data more reliably and efficiently, and ...audio and wearables brand, boAt (Imagine Marketing) today announced they have formed a strategic partnership to deliver technology innovation across boAt's next generation of lifestyle-focused consumer products, including TWS earbuds, neckbands, headphones, speakers and smartwatches," the release said.



Govt to invest Rs 60,000 cr in river cruise tourism: Sonowal

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday said the government would invest Rs 60,000 crore by 2047 in river cruise tourism and development of green vessels. "We are going to invest Rs 45,000 crore in river cruise, which will take the passenger capacity from 2 lakh to 15 lakh by 2047," he said on the sidelines of the first Inland Waterways Development Council meeting here. The ports, shipping and waterways minister also said the government aims at investing another Rs 15,000 crore in green transport over the next 10 years to develop 1,000 vessels and ferries. "In total, there will be a Rs 60,000-crore investment by 2047, and it will be through the public-private partnership (PPP) model. The projects will help generate thousands of jobs," he said.



Of the Rs 45,000 crore investment in cruise tourism, an estimated Rs 35,000 crore has been earmarked for cruise vessels while Rs 10,000 crore will be used for development of cruise terminal infrastructure. The council meeting, represented by officials of around 20 states and Union

territories, also saw the unveiling of Harit Nauka' guidelines for green transition of inland vessels and the River Cruise Tourism Roadmap 2047. The day-long meeting, held on a cruise vessel, was conducted by Sonowal to streamline and advance the development of waterways involving 20 states

and central government agencies. The sessions covered topics such as fairway development, private sector engagement and best practices, optimising cargo transport efficiency in Inland Water Transport (IWT), fostering the promotion and development of eco-friendly vessels for passenger trans-

portation, exploring the economic advantages of river cruise tourism, among others. The union minister shed light on the development works and achievements of the Narendra Modi government in the last nine years, focusing on the port and inland waterways sectors. He drew particular attention to the remarkable turnaround of Kolkata Port, now known as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port. Once a loss-making entity of around Rs 70 crore, it has now posted a net profit of Rs 550 crore in FY2022-23, Sonowal said. "This exemplifies the government's commitment and the effectiveness of its measures," he said. Sonowal also emphasised the tremendous boost given to the inland waterways sector, with government investments totalling Rs 5,200 crore since 2014, a 200 per cent increase in nine years.

MF industry assets crosses Rs 50 lakh crore mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a lacklustre performance in 2022, the mutual fund industry saw a substantial rebound in 2023 with its asset base surging by nearly Rs 11 lakh crore, reaching over Rs 50 lakh crore mark fuelled by an optimistic equity market, awareness about financial stability and a robust economic expansion. "This noteworthy achievement comes against the backdrop of India's growth story, highlighting the MF industry's ability to win investors' trust by providing low-cost, long-term-oriented wealth creation avenues," the Association of Mutual Fund Industry (Amfi) said on Monday. The year 2023 has seen a substantial increase in overall inflow reaching Rs 2.74 lakh crore. This was supported by the increasing popularity of Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), which drew in Rs 1.84 lakh crore. The inflow has pushed the assets under management



(AUM) of the mutual fund industry by 27 per cent, adding Rs 10.9 lakh crore in 2023. This was way higher than the 5.7 per cent growth and Rs 2.65 lakh crore increase in AUM observed throughout 2022, as well as the nearly 22 per cent growth and close to Rs 7 lakh crore addition to the asset base in 2021. According to the data, the asset base rose from Rs 39.88 lakh crore in 2022 to an all-

time high of Rs 50.78 lakh crore in 2023. The asset base stood at Rs 37.72 lakh crore at the end of December 2021 and Rs 31 lakh crore in December 2020. The year 2023 also marked the 11th consecutive yearly rise in the industry AUM after a drop in two preceding years. This year growth in the industry was supported by inflows in equity schemes, especially through SIPs.



K-shaped recovery narrative flawed and prejudiced: SBI report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The repeated argument that India witnessed a K-shaped recovery post-pandemic is "flawed, prejudiced, and ill-concocted," said a research report by SBI on Monday. According to the report, post-pandemic, households are reconfiguring their savings towards physical assets, including real estate, it said. "The oft-repeated conundrum debating a K-shaped recovery post-pandemic seems at best flawed, prejudiced, ill-concocted and fanning interests of select quarters to whom India's remarkable ascendance, signalling more the renaissance of the new global south, is quite unpalatable," the report said. K-shaped recovery reflects uneven recovery where certain sectors of the economy thrives while other sectors continue to decline or struggle to recover. It further said post-pandemic, there has been two-way shift between savings channelled into physical assets from finan-

cial assets in consonance with the global trend to take advantage of lower interest rates. However, it said, recent data shows that there is a shift towards financial assets since 2023 onwards. "Gini coefficient estimated using ITR data of taxable income of individuals shows that individual income inequality has significantly declined from 0.472 to 0.402 during FY14-FY22," it said. There is a change in income pattern of MSMEs, too, reflecting the changing contours of industry/services as formalisation drive brings more entities into the net. Around 19.5 per cent of majorly micro-sized firms have been able to shift their income upwards, to classify them into small, medium and large-sized firms, it said. Of these, it said, 4.8 per cent firms have transitioned themselves into small firms, around 6.1 per cent firms transitioned into medium-sized firms, and around 9.3 per cent firms are transitioned into large-sized firms.

Investors' wealth erodes by Rs 2.91 L cr as markets down

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors became poorer by Rs 2.91 lakh crore on Monday as the BSE benchmark Sensex fell sharply by nearly 1 per cent amid a weak trend in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 670.93 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 71,355.22. During the day, it tumbled 725.11 points or 1 per cent to 71,301.04. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 2,91,756.23 crore to Rs 3,66,40,965.08 crore. "Investors fretted across Asian and European markets, as US bond yields crossed 4 per cent again that spiralled into a large-scale correction in domestic equities. While rising valuations were beginning to raise concerns, investors resorted to profit-taking as weakness in banking, IT and oil & gas stocks saw the Sensex end below the 72,000 mark," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities Ltd, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Japan's Nikkei was closed for a holiday. European markets were trading lower. The US markets ended marginally up on Friday. Among the Sensex firms,



State Bank of India, ITC, Nestle, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Hindustan Unilever were the major laggards. In contrast, HCL Technologies, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance and Bharti Airtel were the gainers. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.87 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.36 per cent. Among the indices, FMCG fell 1.55 per cent, commodities declined 1.44 per cent, bankex

(1.42 per cent), metal (1.40 per cent), financial services (1.05 per cent), telecommunication (0.93 per cent), IT (0.90 per cent) and teck (0.77 per cent). Power, realty and services were the gainers. "Global stocks slipped on Monday ahead of a busy week of inflation and economic data and amid the diminishing prospect of a cut in US interest rates in the first quarter. Stocks fell ahead of a corporate reporting season where robust results are needed to justify high valuations," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities, said.

Center wanted to develop Tajpur as revenue generating : Thakur

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Union Minister Shantanu Thakur Monday lamented the uncertainty in the progress of the proposed Tajpur deep sea port and recalled an "unanswered call" from the Centre to the West Bengal government to collaborate on it as a revenue generating project. Thakur, the union minister of state for ports and shipping, said the Centre had sent a proposal to the effect. "The Centre had sent the proposal as it was interested but there was no response from the state," he said speaking at the sidelines of the first Inland Waterways Development



Council meeting here. The project went into a limbo following West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's surprise announcement at the November Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) inviting bids for the port several months after a private group was selected as the lowest bidder. At the BGBS Banerjee declared 12 "game changing

opportunities" in Bengal with the Tajpur deep sea port at the forefront and called for open tenders. Adani Ports was earlier selected as the developer for the port. The Adani Group's absence at the BGBS further fueled speculation about its involvement in the Tajpur project. Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd (APSEZ) had emerged as the L1 bidder in October 2022, out of two final contenders. JSW Group was the other participant in that round. Sources in the Adani group recently said the company did not receive any official communication on the change in plans about the port and was still awaiting the letter of award.

DGCA revises duty time norms for flight crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aviation safety regulator DGCA on Monday came out with revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms for flight crew, entailing increased weekly rest periods to 48 hours, extension of night hours, and limiting the number of night landings to only two as against six earlier. These regulations have been instrumental in managing fatigue-related aviation safety risks for more than a decade now, an official statement said. Airlines are required to comply with the revised norms latest by June 1, it said. With a view to address and mitigate concerns on pilot fatigue through a data-driven approach, Directorate General of

Raises weekly rest periods to 48 hrs



Civil Aviation (DGCA) collected and analysed extensive numbers of pilot rosters, along with pilot fatigue reports submitted by airline operators, it said. Based on the study and analysis, some of the key areas indicating fatigue, such as maximum flight duty period, night duty, weekly rest period, flight duty

period extension, among others, were identified, it said. The revised FDTL regulations have been formulated after extensive data analysis and feedback from various stakeholders, including airline operators, pilot associations and individuals, as per the statement. It also said the best practices

in the world -- FAA in the US, and EASA in the European Union -- have also been taken into consideration in amending the regulations, while keeping in mind the specific operating environment in India. The revised regulations mandate increased weekly rest periods from 36 hours to 48 hours for flight crew, thus ensuring sufficient time for recovery from cumulative fatigue, it said. Moreover, the definition of night has been amended and it now covers the period of 0000-0600 hours in the revised regulations vis-a-vis the period of 0000-0500 hours under the previous regulations. This enhancement of one hour during the early morning will ensure adequate rest and also align the night duty period,

which encompasses Window of Circadian Low (WOCL) from 0200-0600 hours, the time during which the circadian body clock cycle is at its lowest in terms of alertness, the statement said. Also, the revised regulations have taken into consideration different types of operations across time zones, the statement said, adding that the maximum flight time and maximum flight duty period for flight operations encroaching night have been restricted to eight hours flight time and 10 hours flight duty period, respectively. The number of landings has been limited to only two as against the maximum permissible six under previous regulations during night operations, thus enhancing flight safety, it added.

Agri exports likely to double to \$100 bn

PNS ■ GREATER NOIDA

India's agriculture exports, which stood at over USD 50 billion at present, are expected to double by 2030 and reach USD 100 billion, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Monday. He said that the country is targeting USD 2 trillion worth of exports of goods and services by 2030. "I am very sure that this USD 50 billion exports of India today

will see a doubling of our exports by 2030 to almost USD 100 billion," he said at the IndusFood Show 2024 here. This is the largest food and beverage show in South Asia. The secretary said that areas like the ready-to-eat food segment have huge potential to grow. He also urged the industry to focus on the technical standard requirements of importing countries.



Zee, Sony yet to agree on merger conditions as deadline nears

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The fate of the USD 10 billion merger between Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Culver Max Entertainment, formerly Sony Pictures Networks India, is hanging by a thread, with the two parties unable to finalise an agreement as the end of the one-month grace period looms. The two parties are yet to come to an agreement over Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) MD and CEO Punit Goenka leading the merged entity after Sony expressed concerns after market regulator Sebi barred him from holding managerial posts in Zee and any of the entities in a fund-diversion case. Through the Securities and Exchange Board of India order was stayed by the Securities Appellate Tribunal, Sony is not comfortable with Goenka leading the merged entity due to the stringent corporate governance policy in Japan.

Sensex, Nifty tumble nearly 1 pc on global weakness

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close with deep losses on Monday, snapping their two-day winning streak as investors pared exposure to banking, metal and FMCG stocks amid a weak trend in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 670.93 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 71,355.22. During the day, it fell 725.11 points or 1 per cent to 71,301.04. The Nifty declined 197.80 points or 0.91 per cent to 21,513. "Nifty snapped a two-session rally to end lower after

opening with marginal gains. Global stocks slipped on Monday ahead of a busy week of inflation and economic data and amid the diminishing prospect of a cut in US interest rates in the first quarter. Stocks fell ahead of a corporate reporting season where robust results are needed to justify high valuations," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities. Among the Sensex firms, State Bank of India, ITC, Nestle, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Hindustan Unilever were the major laggards.

'ROHIT AND I WERE SUPPOSED TO WORK 14 YRS AGO FOR GOLMAAL,' REVEALS SHILPA SHETTY

Actress Shilpa Shetty is all geared up to set our screens on fire. She recently opened up about the series and revealed how her association with Rohit began.

Talking about the same she shared, "My dad was crazy about movies and he assisted Rohit's dad in *Yaadon Ki Baaraat*. Shetty uncle and he were friends, my dad was a part of the action team in *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* and even *Raffoohakkar*."

She further added, "I keep telling Rohit that we were destined to work. We were supposed to work even 14 years ago, he had

approached me for *Golmaal*. But I had just won *Big Brother* and was travelling, he was doing his things. I was so gutted because when I see a brand becoming so big, you wish you were in the movie. But I am glad we are doing this amazing project together now."

Shilpa will be seen in an action-packed cop avatar in Rohit Shetty's *Indian Police Force* which releases on Amazon Prime Video on 19th January.



Lily Gladstone becomes first Indigenous woman to win Golden Globe for best actress drama

Actor Lily Gladstone created history as the first Indigenous woman to win the Golden Globe for best actress in a motion picture - drama for her performance in Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

This was the first nomination for the 37-year-old, who played the real-life Mollie Kyle, whose family and community in the Osage Nation of 1920s Oklahoma were the targets of serial killings.

Gladstone opened her award acceptance speech in the Blackfeet language, an Algonquian language spoken by the Blackfoot or Niitsitapi people in Montana, US.

The actor termed the win as "a historic one" that doesn't belong to only her.

"I love everyone in this room. I don't have words. I just spoke a bit of Blackfeet language, a beautiful community nation that raised me, that encouraged me to keep going, keep doing this here with my mom, who, even though she's not Blackfeet, worked tirelessly to get our language into our classroom so I had a Blackfeet language teacher growing up."

"This is for every little rez kid, every little urban kid, every little Native kid who has a dream and is seeing themselves represented in our stories told by ourselves, in our own words, with tremendous allies and tremendous trust from within, from each other," she said.

Gladstone thanked Scorsese and her co-star Leonardo DiCaprio, adding "You are all changing things. Thank you for being such allies."

She further said she is grateful to be able to speak even a little bit of Blackfeet, which she's not fluent in.

"In this business, Native actors used to

speak their lines in English and then the sound mixers would run them backwards to accomplish Native languages on camera... It (the award) doesn't belong to just me. I'm holding it right now. I'm holding it with all my beautiful sisters in the film," she added.



Sushmita is set for 'AntimVaar' as Aarya on February 9

Actress Sushmita Sen is all set for her "Antim Vaar" as Aarya Sareen as the makers have announced *Aarya Antim Vaar*. It is all set to stream on Disney+ Hotstar from February 9, 2024.

Sushmita Sen, who essays the titular role of Aarya Sareen, said: "Aarya holds a profound place in my heart, and as Season 3 continues, it's like watching two pieces of my soul come together. Each episode of Aarya on is a journey into a world that has become an important part of my existence."

She added that with the arrival of *Aarya Antim Vaar*, viewers will get to witness a side of Aarya that goes beyond anything seen before.

"The depth, intensity, the new wounds and the sadness that possibly prompts the conclusion to her story. Playing this character has given me more than I could have ever imagined."

"I'm thrilled for everyone to experience the profound evolution of this character and the story that has touched my heart so deeply," said Sushmita.

Created and co-directed by Ram Madhvani, *Aarya* Season 3 features a talented ensemble cast which includes Sushmita Sen, Ila Arun, Sikandar Kher, Indraneel Sengupta, Vikas Kumar, Maya Sarao, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Shweta Pasricha, Viren Zazirani, Pratyaksh Panwar, Aarushi Bajaj, Bhupendra Jadawat and Vishwajeet Pradhan amongst others.

Ram Madhvani added: "Aarya is more than a project, it's a heartfelt journey that holds a special place in my career. Creating and co-directing this series has been incredibly rewarding, pushing creative boundaries and storytelling depths. Season 3 is a testament to our team's dedication."

"As we unveil the next chapter, I feel proud and excited, looking forward to sharing this extraordinary story with the audience. In this part, Aarya is broken down to a point where she is almost reborn, and I believe every viewer will literally get chills witnessing her journey."

Cinematographically, *Aarya Antim Vaar* marks a new leaf for this genre. *Aarya* stands as a high point in my directorial journey, a story that has challenged and enriched me," he concluded.



Actor Anshuman Jha and wife Sierra announce pregnancy

Anshuman Jha who earlier this year seen in the animal lover vigilante action film *Lakadbagha-1* and has begun training for Part-2 of the franchise has an exciting 2024 to look forward to.

While he has his acting career's most ambitious film as a leading man in *Hari-Om* - with Raghuvir Yadav - scheduled for release in 2024, also his directorial debut *Lord Curzon Ki Haveli* also scheduled for release in 2024 - he will truly have his life's biggest release in 2024 with Anshuman and his athlete-writer-chef wife Sierra expecting their first baby in March 2024.

Much like their wedding, they threw a very private baby shower with their close friends before jetting off to New York for Christmas and New Year.

The baby will be born in America as Sierra's mother is

there. Anshuman lost his mother and father in 2020 and stresses on the importance of having grandparents around in childhood.

Anshuman Jha says, "Having your mom around is critical at this time - for the mother and the child. I wish my mom was around. And Sierra is blessed to have her mom and dad by her side."

While it is legal in America to know whether it's a boy or a girl - the couple have intentionally chosen to not find out. "We want to be surprised. Let nature take its course. The child is not coming from us, it is only coming through us and we will be grateful for whatever God blesses us with. We are very grateful. It felt the closest to the feeling of seeing God - when you see a dot on screen in the first sonography - I felt like that's it - I see God, the soul, life in essence," he adds.

FUN

ARCHIE



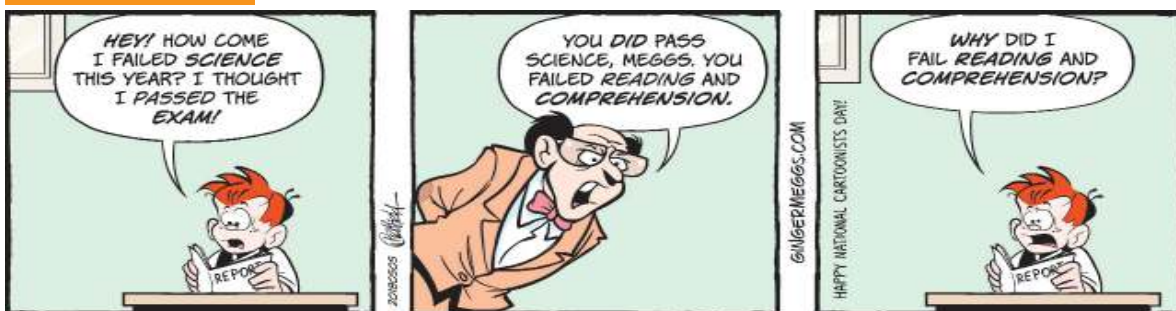
GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



CALVIN AND HOBBS



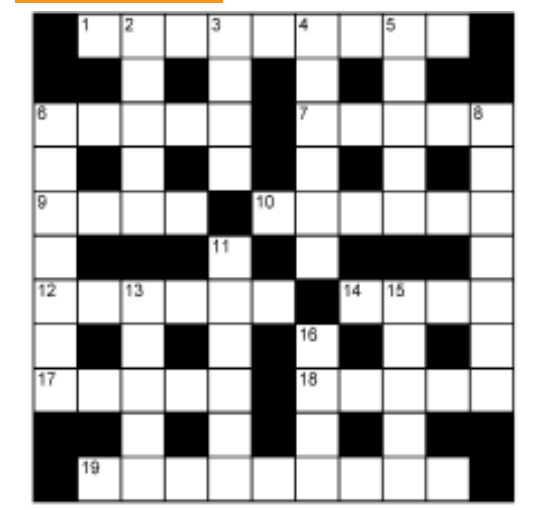
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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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

- Dirty and unhealthy air or water
- More than is needed
- Water covering land that is usually dry
- A female relation
- A symbol on playing cards
- A passenger needs this
- Famous singer or actor
- Run after trying to catch
- Sooner than expected
- Squashed
- Stretchy stuff in clothes
- Wreck completely
- Choose
- Move along on hands and knees
- The number in a trio
- At this place

DOWN

- Frequently
- Jump over
- A chewed sweet
- Bad smell



'Supporting young filmmakers is my way of giving back to the filmmaking community'



TEJAL SINHA

Think of Huma Qureshi, and one thought that would certainly strike your mind—'Wonder Woman'. With all the projects that she does, she has defined being a synonym of Wonder Woman. Apart from being an actor, producer, and model, now she's added another feather to her hat, which is being an author.

Recently, she launched her debut book, *Zeba: An Accidental Superhero*, which is a story of passion, wonder, and magic. Having always been fascinated by superhero narrative and fantasy fiction, in our exclusive chit-chat, the *Monica, O' My Darling* actress shares, "The protagonist is a symbol of resiliency and is both unique and relatable. She is a misfit as well, but she eventually learns how to get around. Zeba started off as a screenplay for a television show. But I soon realized that producing a superhero movie in a fantastical setting would cost a lot of money. I went back over the screenplay during COVID and made the decision to publish it as a book."

Basically, she goes on to reveal, "Every character in the book has a little bit of me and the people that I have observed and interacted with over the years. But it's a work of fiction, not autobiographical at all. As for more books, yes, but then again, I am waiting to see how many copies this one sells."

Well, going ahead, Ten years down the lane, and the *Gangs of Wasseypur* actress, who made

her debut with the Anurag Kashyap directorial film, has created a niche for herself in the industry, undeniably! And to mention all her projects and characters that she plays have been divergent from one another. We wondered if she gets emotionally affected by the roles that she plays. Well, no, she doesn't, because, "For me, it's a job, which I have to do."

She has always preferred to work on movies that she herself would want to watch. Not someone who'd prefer to repeat herself, she says, "I'm always trying to think of the next amazing thing I can accomplish."

Always keen on being associated with new and interesting initiatives, recently she was also one of the adroit actors associated with Royal Stag Barrel Stag Large Short Films for 'Select Films, Select Conversations'.

"I think it's always good to be associated with initiatives that support young voices and young filmmakers, and I think this is the perfect platform to do that. I love to support younger filmmakers. I love to watch their work. I love to engage with them. I feel like that's my way of also giving back to the filmmaking community. I just hope more and more budding artists end up telling their kind of stories," says the *Badlapur* actress, who has gotten her hands on multiple mediums, be it with films or web series. Now with short films too, the *Maharani* star enthuses, "I think it's a great format because it helps people without the burden of the avenue or the opportunity of working with a big studio or a big star, all of that, to just tell their stories in the most unadulterated way possible, and I think

that's what will always ensure the longevity of short films being around. It's a great way for makers to express themselves."

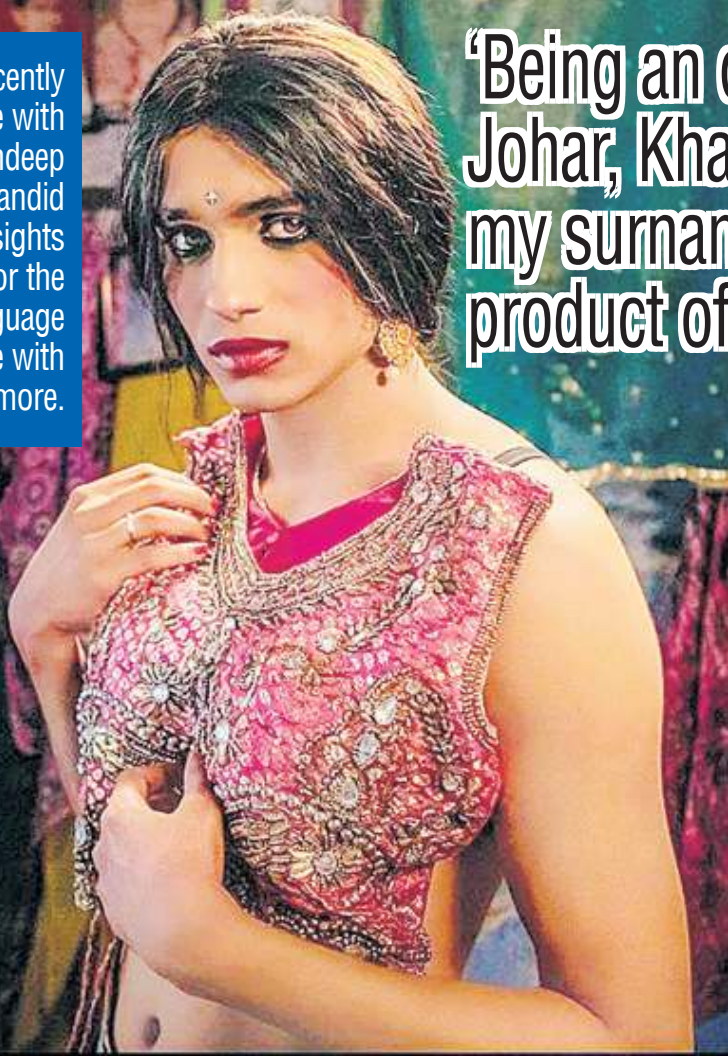
As we get to the end of this fun tête-à-tête, we ask her about what's more on her plate, and she hilariously responds, "Dinner, meeting my parents, and then going for a drive in Delhi (we laugh out loud). I can only tell you what I am going to do in the next couple of hours, but I'm looking forward to the future!"

ACTRESS HUMA QURESHI, WHO HAS CARVED OUT A NICHE FOR HERSELF IN THE FILM INDUSTRY IN JUST A LITTLE OVER A DECADE, OPENS UP TO THE PIONEER IN AN EXCLUSIVE CONVERSATION ON HER NEWLY PUBLISHED BOOK, HOW NO CHARACTER HAS EVER AFFECTED HER EMOTIONALLY, AND MORE.



FOR ME, IT'S A JOB TO PLAY THESE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS, WHICH I HAVE TO DO. I DON'T GET EMOTIONALLY AFFECTED WITH THEM IN ANY WAY.

Actor Abhay Verma, who recently gave a remarkable performance with his character Chandni in the Sandeep Singh directorial *Safed*, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing insights about getting onboard for the character, love knowing no language and boundaries, camaraderie with Meera Chopra, and more.



'Being an outsider with no Johar, Khan, or Kapoor to my surname, I'm a product of good content'

The recently released film *Safed*, starring Meera Chopra and Abhay Verma in the lead roles, not only marks Abhay's debut as a lead but also producer Sandeep Singh's debut as a director. The film has a quote that says, "The society we are growing up in is not growing up. And this is true! This is not just us who are telling it up, but Abhay, whose character Chandni, who is transgender, is being named as an unusual character, says, "The fact," he begins, "that we are calling 'Chandni' an unusual character tells us that we as a society are not yet that aware; this was one of the reasons that I really wanted to do *Safed*."

Initially, he did feel sceptical about playing the character, as it had scared him in a lot of ways, including the process that he had to go through and, above all, the responsibility of representing a community. But little did he know that it would become 'the most enriching and eye-opening experience of his life, in a way that it made him responsible towards society and eventually made him a better person.'

Basically, Abhay wasn't aware of Sandeep Singh's name ever before. But, as he goes on to share about getting onboard for *Safed*, he says, "When I was called to meet him for a few minutes, in which he made me wear a saree, I was like, 'What and where is it going?' But as soon as I walked a couple of steps and then read the one-pager, which I didn't know would change my life, I got the idea that this is something that is a story of a kind that hasn't been made ever. The pure thought of questioning society to let love be the

most important feeling, giving out a message of love and let live subtly through communities we so demean, is what intrigued me. And now I'd like to believe that *Safed* has given me things that are beyond many small things, like money." Respective of the mixed responses that the film has received, undeniably, what *Safed* intends to highlight is that one of the perfect examples of love has no language and goes beyond any physical dimensions.

And so Abhay, seconding to us, shares, "Love knows no language, and love shouldn't know any religion. It's the most beautiful emotion that has made people cross 'saat samundar' as we've seen in films. If anyone

says that they haven't felt great when they see such things on screen, they are liars, so if they can enjoy that feeling there, then we can create a better world in reality."

But looking at the concept and theme, the film would have brought in multiple challenges, wouldn't it? But "to achieve what you never have, you have to do something that you have never done." This is something that keeps me going. From *Safed*, I got the opportunity—or rather, a blessing—to dive into emotions that I would have never known were inside me. For instance, an inbuilt ignorance towards a sector in society. I would proudly say that I am all for challenging things. I do not want the path to be easy because that would put me in a comfortable space, and I really don't want to stop exploring myself. Comfortability gives ease in life, and the growth is stagnant, whereas I want my filmography to be like the waves of the ocean, some big, some small, and some giant."

"Sometimes the beauty of some things is in their uncommonness, and *Safed* is one such story," he shares, adding, "If a man can love a woman, a woman can love a man, and a man can love a man, and vice-versa. Then why not these two communities who are striving just for one thing, which is love at its purest form?"

The audience, or, let's say, a major portion of the audience, has been more keen to watch commercial cinema that has action, dance, and love scenes. And with *Safed* not being an easy film to work on and also make, he says, "From my experience, the audience has been craving only good content. Be it commercial, a magnum opus project, a serious,

intense project, or of any other genre, it has gone beyond limits since the barriers of languages have also blurred. It has given good-intentioned content a chance to flourish on its own, despite the need to have only big stars in it. Being an outsider with no Johar, Khan, or Kapoor in my surname, I'm a product of good content. I am proud to say that I was given the opportunity to do something that is uncommon but pure at the same time, which is not only what the audience is hungry for but also allows me to put a message out from my side for other actors to go beyond their comfort level and choose films that give them more than just fun."

Another reason for him to love the profession is that every film allows him to make a new family, and with *Safed*, Meera has thankfully become a family member who is brutally honest and truthful, which nowadays people lack. "Meera is to me what Kaali is to Chandni. There is an unconditional bond that lies between us as characters in the film and also in life, for which I will be forever grateful for *Safed*. I proudly want to say that this includes each and every person who has worked in *Safed* and all the other projects that I have done."

The film has seven romantic and heart-touching tracks, rendered by some of the most renowned names like Sonu Nigam, Rekha Bhardwaj, Shilpa Rao, Shail Hada, Shashi Suman, Jazim Sharma, and Suvarna Tiwari. Abhay thus believes that music is the biggest religion in the world because it allows people to connect with each other even if they don't know the name. "*Safed* is a musical love story, and considering the hurdles I went through in the film, I would call it a beautifully painful experience. The beautiful part comes from the legends singing in it, and the painful part comes from the challenges I faced during the shooting of the film. It has always been a dream to first meet such legendary artists in my lifetime, and I am even grateful that I am a part of their lives now. 'God lies in detailing' is something that I learned from my guru, who has also been a father figure to me, who is Sonu Nigam, and that has been something that I will put very close to my heart forever."

With *Safed* being a spiritual journey, there could not have been another place than Benaras in which we could have shot this film. "I remember Sandeep Sir and I chatting and talking about the people who will connect in *Safed* since everything in the film that has happened seemed to have a God-sent message. Out of all the beautiful things in Benaras, the fact that you experience life and death very closely at Manikarnika Ghat gave me a reality check when I was preparing for a scene at 4 AM because, in today's times, what we forget is that everything else is temporary and humanity is permanent."

While trends change with time, furniture is made to last a lifetime or even several lifetimes. No matter what the latest trends say, Grandma's inherited dining room table will never go out of style. Thus, while investing in new furniture or equipping a house almost entirely, it's crucial to avoid following fads that go out of style quickly. The secret is to pick furniture that is both classic enough to endure several trend cycles and stylish enough to conform to today's design preferences. Furthermore, furniture is simply too expensive to replace every time the wind shifts, unlike stylish throw pillows or accessories.

Interior décor trends for 2024

ECO-FRIENDLY FURNITURE SMART LIVING

It might seem repetitive, but it is the year of natural beauty once more. This trend takes into account the influence of furnishings both inside and outside the home in addition to its earthly inspiration. Sustainability is being considered for 2024, starting in 2022. Before furniture is placed in their homes, homeowners are becoming more interested in where it originates from and are drawn to eco-friendly materials like bamboo.

Smart technology is still transforming our way of life. The seamless integration of technology into our environment in the upcoming year will further improve comfort and convenience. These advancements, which range from AI-driven home management to voice-activated lighting design trends and smart glasses, make life easier, more productive, and unquestionably stylish.



THE HOME OFFICE GETS ESTABLISHMENT

Ashish Aggarwal, Director, Indo Innovations says, "Productivity is one of the interior design trends for 2024 that is certain to endure. The home office is becoming a necessary and permanent presence in homes, and it is not going anywhere. People are investing in ergonomic furniture, soundproofing, and chic design to make their workstations more exciting and useful now that remote work is here to stay."

CUSTOM FURNITURE

Tejpal Singh Shekhawat, Founder and CEO, Kalyanam Furniture says, "More people now view furniture as a long-term investment. In place of purchasing any old piece from the showroom floor and being disappointed a year or two later, people are placing a higher value on custom furniture that better suits their tastes, lifestyles, and home layouts."

EARTH TONES

Raghunandan Saraf, Founder and CEO, Saraf Furniture says, "In 2024, warm colours influenced by nature, such as browns, greens, greys, and subdued reds, will be at their height in appeal. Thankfully, this implies that the green furniture that has been popular in the country over the past several years will continue to be in trend. Even if vivid, vibrant colours were popular in 2023, the taste in colour is shifting towards something more earthy and grounded."



ROHIT, KOHLI GET FINAL SHOT AT T20 GLORY

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The selectors have clearly gone for the status quo rather than addressing the elephant in the room by picking Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for their first T20 series in 14 months. Will it have a bearing on India's chances in another T20 World Cup? Only time can tell. Having endured a heartbreak in the previous two editions of the T20 World Cup, the two greats of the game can't be faulted for wanting a final shot at glory in the format. But the same can't be said about the selectors, who picked a fresh bunch of players to take the team forward since the crushing semifinal loss to England in November 2022. Now that Rohit and Kohli have been picked for the home series against Afghanistan beginning on January 11, it is a given that the famed duo will be a part of India's squad for the ICC showpiece in the US and Caribbean in June. It also means that India, who have been guilty of playing conservative cricket at the top of the order, are also back to square one as far as their planning for the T20 mega event is

concerned. The two superstars played a massive role in taking India to the ODI World Cup final but can they step up to the demands of the shortest format where one needs to go after the bowlers from ball one? Rohit, who did not score tons of runs in the recently held ODI showpiece but yet managed to make a compelling impact with his high risk game, will most likely carry on in the same vein when the Afghanistan series begins in Mohali. On the other hand, Kohli's game is tailor-made for the 50-over format but he has also managed to maintain more than a decent strike rate of 137.96 over 148 T20s. Rohit strikes at almost 140 in T20s but he too will need to bat at a higher clip to keep up with the fast changing demands of the modern game. In contrast, their teammate and world's best T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav, bats at a 170 plus strike rate. The likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Ruturaj Gaikwad showed promise in the opportunities they got in the absence of senior players but there is no substitute to experience at an

BUT WILL SELECTORS' SAFE APPROACH COST INDIA ANOTHER WC?



ICC event. It's a sentiment that has been unanimously voiced by former players including Sunil Gavaskar and Sourav Ganguly, who have backed the inclusion of Rohit and Kohli in the T20 squad. Former India selector Sarandeep Singh too feels Rohit and Kohli are best suited for the job. "It is the right call. In ICC events, you need players who can handle pressure well. They both were great in the ODI World Cup and are in top form. However, this development means it would be very difficult to accommodate Jaiswal and Ruturaj," he told PTI. He also justified the celebrated pair not playing the shortest format since November 2022. "You have to prepare bench strength also. In all probability this will be their last T20 World Cup. If Rohit and Virat were not rested, you could not have tried the likes of Jaiswal, Ruturaj, Jitesh (Sharma) and others. "Having said that, these two greats don't need to play the shortest format to make a comeback. Eventually, the performance of all the World Cup probables in the IPL will make the picture clearer for the sub-

sequent World Cup," the former India spinner added. With Rohit and Kohli's inclusion, it is amply clear that selectors did not want to rock the boat. Former India opener Aakash Chopra feels the selectors had to pick both the greats as they could not have left one and included the other. "It seemed they won't play another T20 World Cup (after 2022) as they had not been playing since the previous edition. Both are in the same boat. Even if the selectors thought about leaving out one of the two, I don't think they would have been able to do that. It was always about picking both or otherwise," Chopra said on his YouTube channel. Hardik Pandya had led the T20 side in Rohit's absence and was expected to lead the team in the US and Caribbean but another injury setback seems to have cost him that chance. Rohit is back as captain and will have Kohli by his side to rely on when India take on the sprightly bunch of Afghans in the three-match series. But most significantly, will they finally be able to land an elusive ICC title? That question will be answered in five months' time.



India women eye maiden T20I series win over Australia

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

The culmination of a long and mixed home season brings the Indian women's cricket team one last opportunity to register a maiden T20I series triumph over Australia at home when the two sides square off in the series-decider here on Tuesday. With the three-match affair levelled 1-1, Harmanpreet Kaur's India have a chance to beat the reigning world champions Australia in their own den and kick off the 2024 T20I World Cup year in style. India have only one series win to show against Australia's four in their five-series bilateral T20I history. Their triumph in an away affair in 2015-16 sits atop in the list of achievements for this side. However, having registered historic wins in one-off Tests earlier this season against both Australia and England, India would want to make this one last opportunity count. India were on a roll in the first game and thrashed Australia by a record margin of nine wickets but their batters cut a sorry figure in the second. A tricky pitch here at the DY Patil Stadium on Sunday did not allow batters to flourish. While heavy dew in the first half of the game assisted India's charge with the bat, the absence of it in the second made the job of containing the Australian batters difficult.

But to their credit, the Indian bowlers did well to take the game as deep as possible with some tight lines and sharp fielding. However, the home team's fielding has only been sporadically good. Kaur's own form with the bat will remain a huge concern for the hosts, who were humbled by six wickets in the second game. The Indian captain has not made a fifty yet in 10 matches so far across formats in these games. She has seven single-digit scores now in 11 innings including the first T20I wherein her services were not required. "Every player cannot have a good day everyday, but suddenly anyone can have a very good day. It is not the case that we are (right away) aiming for big shots but we are trying to play (as per the) merit of the ball," all-rounder Deepti Sharma told the media after the match when asked if Kaur's form was a concern for the team. Deepti waged a lone battle of sorts with a combative all-round performance in the second game scoring a 27-ball 31 in a faltering Indian innings to give them some late impetus, and also fought hard with the ball to take the first two wickets of the four Australian wickets to fall. The pitches for the two T20Is so far have not allowed batters to go berserk especially in the first innings, allowing the bowlers to dominate the proceedings. "It has been a really good con-

test between bat and ball, there is something in it for both the batters and the bowlers," said Australia's player of the match on Sunday Kim Garth. "Especially, coming from the wicket that we played on the Test match, (it) was a lot more challenging for the batters, so it has been really pleasing that there has been a bit in it for the bowlers, particularly with the new ball," she added. Deepti also found the pitch for the second game a challenging one to bat on. "...It was not an easy wicket to bat on. The ball was turning as well as getting slow (off the surface). I think we were about 15 runs short..." she replied when asked what went wrong for India. **SQUADS:** **INDIA:** Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Kanika Ahuja, Minnu Mani. **AUSTRALIA:** Darcie Brown, Heather Graham, Ashleigh Gardner, Kim Garth, Grace Harris, Alyssa Healy (c&wk), Jess Jonassen, Alana King, Phoebe Litchfield, Tahlia McGrath (vc), Beth Mooney (wk), Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Wareham.

Heinrich announces Test retirement

PTI ■ PRETORIA (SOUTH AFRICA)

South African wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaassen has announced his retirement from red-ball cricket, bringing curtains to his brief stint in the format. Having made his debut against India in Ranchi in 2019, the 32-year-old played four matches in his brief Test career with his final outing against the West Indies in Johannesburg last year. He has scored 104 runs at an average of 13.00, while his top score was 35 against Australia in Sydney. Klaassen will continue to be available for the Proteas in white-ball cricket. "After a few sleepless nights wondering if I am making the right decision, I have decided to retire from red ball cricket," he said in a statement. "It's a difficult decision that I have made because it is by far my favourite format of the game." "The battles that I faced on and off the field has made me the cricketer I am today. "It has been a great journey and I am glad I could have represented my country. "My baggy Test cap is the most precious cap I have ever been handed.



"Thanks to everyone that has played a part in my red ball career and shaped me into the cricketer I am today. "But for now, a new challenge awaits and looking forward to it." It is understood that the explosive batter is keen on the T20 franchise leagues with his commitments in the IPL, Hundred, and MLC. He has become the second

South African player to retire from red-ball cricket within a week. Dean Elgar also hung up his boots following the conclusion of the two-Test series against India that ended in a 1-1 draw last week. Klaassen was dropped for the India series, as head coach Shukri Conrad went ahead with Kyle Verreynne.



England still comes first: Liam

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

He is an acclaimed T20 free-lancer but white ball commitments for England is still a priority for Liam Livingstone, one of the world's most destructive batters in the shortest format. Livingstone, who has played 25 ODIs and 38 T20Is for England, has already plied his trade in IPL (Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings), Birmingham Phoenix in The Hundred, Perth Scorchers in Big Bash League (BBL) of Australia and Peshawar Zalmi in Pakistan Super League (PSL) to name a few. In the second edition of SA20, Livingstone will play for MI Cape Town and he, along with Kagiso Rabada and skipper Kieron Pollard, will be the guiding light for the franchise. How does he balance his calendar in terms of playing for franchise leagues and English white ball commitments? "Yeah, I think England comes first. We see our calendar at the start of the year and see where we have gaps. If we feel like it's a good opportunity for us to go away and play franchise cricket, then we'll do that," Livingstone replied to a query from PTI. "If we feel like we need a rest and it's going to hinder our international cricket, then we'll probably have a rest. So I guess at the start of the year, you just try and

work out when you can play and where you can go and go from there," he added. Livingstone believes that a league like SA20 will help youngsters stake claim for national berth in their respective countries. "Yeah, international cricket is very different from franchise cricket. It is what it is. I think it's different for the young boys coming up compared to the older boys who are already playing international cricket. It's a great chance for young boys to make a name for themselves and showcase their talent. "I think it's a little bit different for the older ones of us, shall I say that? We've already played international cricket for a while now," the 30-year-old said. Playing for a legacy franchise like MI, what's his expectations? "Hopefully, lots of entertainment, win games of cricket. I guess that probably will be the two biggest things in a franchise tournament. You want to entertain people that pay money to come and watch and you want to win games of cricket for your franchise. "So yeah, hopefully we can do both. You've got to try and get everybody together, everybody on the same wavelength. Hopefully, we can do that over the next couple of days and start the season really strong," Livingstone concluded.

Dhull loses captaincy after defeat in Ranji Trophy opener

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Yash Dhull was on Monday removed as Delhi captain, hours after the team suffered a heavy defeat against Puducherry in their Ranji Trophy opening match. Senior batter Himmat Singh will now lead the side that takes on Jammu and Kashmir in an away game from January 12. In an attempt to revive Delhi's flagging fortunes, U-19 World Cup-winning captain Dhull was made the skipper of the side in December 2022. Since making his debut in February 2022, Dhull has made 1185 runs at an average of 43.88. Dhull made two and 23 in the nine-wicket loss to Puducherry at home. The 21-year-old had also led the side in the white-ball tournaments earlier in the season.

Himmat Singh is new skipper



"Yash is a talented player but is out of form. We wanted him to do well as a batter, that is why we have relieved him of captaincy duties. Himmat is our senior player and has done very well for us. He will captain the side," DDCA joint secretary Rajan Manchanda told PTI. Dhull has struggled against fast bowlers, of late and was reluc-

tant to open the innings. Himmat had led Delhi to a momentous win over Mumbai in the former's absence last season. The 27-year-old has played 22 first-class games, having made his debut back in 2017. The team manages to court unwanted attention season after season. Last year, senior players Nitish Rana and Dhruv Shorey left Delhi and moved to UP and Vidarbha respectively. Senior pacers Navdeep Saini, who was named in the India A squad to face visiting England Lions, and Ishant Sharma won't be travelling with the team to Jammu. It has been learnt that veteran pacer Ishant will only be available for Delhi's home games. Delhi, who have won Ranji Trophy seven times, last lifted the coveted trophy back in 2007-08.

Seamers set up Mumbai outright win over Bihar

PTI ■ PATNA

Seamers Shivam Dube (4/10) and Royston Dias (3/35) powered Mumbai's outright win over Bihar by an innings and 51 runs in their Ranji Trophy 2023-24 season opener here on Monday. Bihar's fate was decided on the third day evening itself when they were reduced to 91/6 following-on, having made 100 in their first innings in reply to Mumbai's 251, with Mohit Avasthi returning 6/27. Bihar could not manage a run more than that in their second attempt and lost heavily as Mumbai walked away with seven points. Dube, who was named in India's squad for three T20Is against Afghanistan, celebrated his call-up with a superb 11-4-10-7 after 6-3-

13-2 in the first innings. In another game, Chhattisgarh also clinched an outright win and seven points following a 10-wicket hammering of Assam, for whom Riyan Parag produced a record century. Parag cracked 12 sixes and 11 fours to make 155 from 87 balls for the second fastest century in the Ranji Trophy history, but his outstanding effort had no say in the outcome. Chhattisgarh, who made 327 in the first innings, bowled out Assam for 159 in reply and Parag's ton could only take his side to 254 in the second innings. Chhattisgarh remained unscathed in their 87-run chase. However, at Visakhapatnam, Ricky Bhuvi's marathon 347-ball 175 (23x4s, 1x6s) helped Andhra force a draw against Bengal who made

409 batting first. Bhuvi's ton, combined with fifties from Hanuma Vihari (51) and Shoaib Khan (56) took Andhra to 445 in reply with a slender 36-run first-innings lead, thus giving them three points from the tame draw in which Bengal reached 87/1 in their second essay. At Alappuzha, the visitors Uttar Pradesh team walked off with a draw and three points against hosts Kerala in a hard-fought contest. UP took a 59-run lead in the first innings, for they dismissed Kerala at 243 after posting 302. In the second innings, Priyam Garg (106) followed Aryan Juyal (115) in completing a three-figure mark as UP declared at 323/3, taking an overall lead of 382 runs. In reply, Kerala were 72/2.

RANJI TROPHY

BRIEF SCORES:

AT PATNA: Mumbai 251 beat Bihar 100 & 100 (Sharman Nigrodh 40; Shivam Dube 4/10, Royston Dias 3/35) by an innings and 51 runs. **AT RAIPUR:** Chhattisgarh 327 & 87/0 (Eknath Kerkar 31*, Rishabh 48*) beat Assam 159 & 254 (Riyan Parag 155; Vashudev Bareth 3/59, Jivesh Butte 3/37) by 10 wickets. **AT VISAKHAPATNAM:** Bengal 409 & 82/1 (Sourav Paul 30*; Shoaib Md Khan 1/16) drew with Andhra 445 (Hanuma Vihari 51, Ricky Bhuvi 175, Shoaib Khan 56; Mohammed Kaif 3/62). **AT ALAPPUZHA:** Uttar Pradesh 302 & 323/3d (Aryan Juyal 115, Priyam Garg 106; Basil Thampi 1/30) drew with Kerala 243 & 72/2 (Rohan Kunnummal 42; Kuldeep Yadav 1/19).

Matthew grabs maiden five wickets haul as Puducherry win easy against Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Medium-pacer Abin Matthew hogged the limelight with a maiden five-wicket haul as Puducherry bowlers came up with an exceptional show to orchestrate a commanding nine-wicket win over hosts Delhi in their Ranji Trophy opener here on Monday. Resuming on 126/8 in their second innings, Delhi managed to add 19 more runs before being bowled out for 145. Matthew claimed a career best 5/39 to dismantle the Delhi batting order. Gaurav Yadav (3/49) and Saurabh Yadav (2/43) also contributed to Delhi's downfall to give them an easy 51-run chase. In reply, Puducherry lost opener Akash Kargave (23) with seven runs shy from the target.

Jay Pandé (21 not out) and Marimuthu Vikneshwaran (7 not out) then sealed the chase in the very next over. **BARODA WIN EASY VERSUS ODISHA** Off-spinner Mahesh Pithiya's impressive five-wicket haul complemented Shashwat Rawat's stellar 102 in the second innings as hosts Baroda defeated Odisha by 147 runs in Vadodara. Set a tall chase of 432, Odisha were bundled out for 284. In only his fifth Ranji match, the budding 22-year-old Pithiya showcased immense skill and determination to return figures of 5/61. **Brief Scores** **AT DELHI:** Delhi 148 and 145; 46.4 overs (Abin Matthew 5/39, Gaurav Yadav 3/49, Saurabh Yadav 2/43).

Puducherry 244 and 51/1; 13.4 overs. Puducherry won by nine wickets. Points: Puducherry 6, Delhi 0. **AT VADODARA:** Baroda 351 and 258/4 declared. Odisha 178 and 284; 101.5 overs (Shantanu Mishra 78, Anurag Sarangi 56, Sandeep Pattnaik 51, Suryakant Pradhan 46; Mahesh Pithiya 5/61). Baroda won by 147 runs. Points: Baroda 6, Odisha 0. **AT JAMMU:** Jammu & Kashmir 100. **Himachal Pradesh** 120/1. Match drawn. Points: Himachal Pradesh 3, Jammu & Kashmir 1. **AT DEHRADUN:** Madhya Pradesh 323 and 243/3 declared. **Uttarakhand** 192 and 266/8; 95 overs (Pirayanshu Khanduri 62, Aditya Tare 51, Kunal Chandela 50; Kumar Kartikeya 4/73, Saransh Jain 3/77). Match drawn. Points: MP 3, Uttarakhand 1.

Kiccha Sudeep unveils first look of World of UI



Superstar Kiccha Sudeep recently unveiled the first look of the highly anticipated film, *World of UI* on his Twitter. Coinciding with a grand event held in Bangalore, the teaser was launched amongst eminent personalities including renowned producer Allu Arvind and the iconic Century Star Shiva Rajkumar. This big reveal was live-streamed on leading platforms, creating a global buzz.

Directed and conceived by the visionary Upendra, *World of UI* is an ambitious project that has been in the making since the mid-2000s. The storyline delves into a global subject promising a thought-provoking cinematic experience. Boasting a staggering budget of Rs 100 Crore, this period action film is set to redefine the standards of entertainment.

The teaser, which has left audiences eagerly anticipating the film's release, showcases an entirely different visual world built for *UI* built by Upendra's unimaginable Direction described by insiders as nothing short of surrealistic. Going with the intriguing tag line of the movie "This is not AI, this is UI", the teaser offers a glimpse into the immersive and captivating universe created by the talented team behind the movie. With top-of-the-line special effects, vibrant landscapes, haunting music, high-octane action sequences, great Art Direction and Upendra's signature heroic entry, the teaser speaks volumes about the large-scale entertainment that *World of UI* promises to deliver.

Joining Upendra in the cast are talented actors including Reeshma Nanaiah, Murali Sharma, Nidhi Subbaiah, Ravi Shankar, Sadhu Kokila and Cockroach Sudhi among others, in pivotal roles. Upendra, in addition to directing, has also penned the screenplay and takes on the lead role in this ambitious venture. The film's entire soundtrack and music are composed by the *Kantara* fame B Ajaneesh Loknath, adding another layer of brilliance to the project. *World of UI* promises to be a cinematic masterpiece, bringing together a stellar cast, a compelling storyline, and groundbreaking visuals.

Produced by G Manoharan, Sreekanth KP and Co-Produced by Naveen Manoharan under the Lahari Films and Venus Entertainers banners, This film has Art Direction from KGF Fame Shivakumar and VFX from Vikranth Rona Fame Nirmal Kumar, this groundbreaking film is set to captivate audiences worldwide.



HRITHIK ROSHAN GIVES AN ODE TO AIR FORCE PILOTS IN HEER AASMANI FROM FIGHTER

The third song from Hrithik Roshan's *Fighter*, titled *Heer Aasmani* has released to a bumper response. The song showcases the day in the life of Air Force Pilots, from their on duty routine to their off duty lifestyle.

Heer Aasmani showcases Hrithik Roshan in all his glory as he slips into the character of Squadron Leader Shamsher Pathania aka Patty, who is an ace Fighter Jet Pilot. Featuring Hrithik in the shower and locker room as he gets ready to go on the runway, to team briefings on the hangar and off duty fun and games, *Heer Aasmani* is a visual representation of the daily routine of Air force pilots. The soulful music of *Heer Aasmani* beautifully depicts the budding team spirit within the Air Dragon squad featuring Hrithik Roshan and actors Deepika Padukone, Karan Singh Grover, Akshay Oberoi to name a few. Combined with hard-hitting lyrics and vocals by B Praak, *Heer Aasmani* is a soothing melody that features the iconic *Fighter* theme music. *Fighter* is all set to release in cinemas on 25th January 2024, on the evening of India's 75th Republic Day. The film marks to be Hrithik Roshan's first movie to release in 3D.



Reports of VD and Rashmika's engagement are 'False'

Amid reports of Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna getting engaged in February, sources close to the actors on Monday termed it "false". A media report stated that the two are getting engaged. However, when IANS contacted their representatives, they denied.

"The report is false," sources told IANS. Reportedly, the actors are dating, however, they have not made their relationship official. The two have starred together in movies like *Geetha Govindam* and *Dear Comrade*. Meanwhile, on the work front, Rashmika is basking in the success of recently released action thriller *Animal*, in which she stars opposite Ranbir Kapoor. She next has *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, *Rainbow*, *The Girlfriend* and *Chaava*. Meanwhile, Vijay, who was last seen in *Kushi*, next has *Family Star* and *VD 12* in the pipeline.



'OG is ours, and will forever be,' says OG makers dismissing rumours

Jr. NTR at his best of the brutal in Devara

Blood fills the sea—it's his Red Sea! Hail to all! *Devara's* creators wrote, releasing the teaser for their largest-ever pan-Indian film. "All praise the tiger! (sic)." This season, Jr. NTR and Koratala Siva are working harder than each other to up the ante. On April 5, the action thriller-drama will open in theaters. The movie takes place in a made-up coastal town. *Devara's* battle against the enemies of the land is set against the horrific backdrop of the Red Sea, a sea that has seen many killings. We presume these adversaries are murderous weapon-wielding, avaricious men who are bloodthirsty, ferocious, and savage. Their enemy, *Devara*, embodies fortitude and endurance. The choreography of the actions has a gladiatorial quality. The production design of Sabu Cyril is a little bit derived. The color scheme strangely reminds of the latest *Kanguva* peek. The background score is the foundation of Anirudh. The teaser gives us a taste of a short tune, and haphazard songwriting is not his strong suit. Overall, considering Tarak and his director, the teaser is satisfying. Koratala Siva, having achieved a disastrous result with *Acharya*, is now actively pursuing revenge.



'Hanu-Man team to donate ₹5 from each ticket for the construction of Ram Mandir,' reveals Chiranjeevi

Director Prasanth Varma and hero Teja Sajja's superhero film *Hanu-Man* will be hitting the screens on the 12th of this month. The team hold the film's pre-release event majestically and it was attended by megastar Chiranjeevi as the chief guest. Chiranjeevi revealed his entire journey from his childhood and the influence of Lord Hanuman on him and his family. He then appreciated hero Teja and director Prasanth Varma. "Lord Hanu-Man is always there to support us in tough times. During a show with Samantha, I told her that I like Hanu-Man than any other superhero. I'm happy that I suggested that title to this movie. Undoubtedly, this movie is going to be a big hit, along with other movies releasing for Sankranti. In fact, the audience encourages any number of movies for Sankranti if the content is good. I came to know about this movie through get-up Greenu." With the request of team *Hanu-Man*, Chiranjeevi made an announcement. "The construction of Ram Mandir is a milestone in history. I was invited to the opening ceremony of Ram Mandir On the 22nd of this month. I will be attending it along with my family. Hanu-Man team makes a key announcement, on the occasion of the inauguration of Ram Mandir. They decided to donate Rs. 5 from each ticket of their movie sold for the construction of Ram Mandir. I'm announcing the news on behalf of the team. My heartfelt congratulations to the team of *Hanu-Man* for such a noble decision," said he.

Director Yeshasvi roped in by Sukumar Writings for a new film

Creative genius and filmmaker Sukumar has always been at the forefront of encouraging talented artists and technicians. While some directors who worked under him in the direction department went on to score blockbuster success with their first film, some others consider him as their 'guru', having learned a great deal watching his movies. They have been his indirect disciples.

Director Yeshasvi V is on the list of Sukumar's Eklavya-style disciples. Deepak Saroj, the child artist-turned-hero, has acted in a distinct love story titled *Siddharth Roy* as the hero. The film will hit the screens soon. Yeshasvi is its director. At this juncture, Sukumar has platformed Yeshasvi for a new film.

The maker of *Pushpa* and *Rangasthalam* is very impressed with the talent of Yeshasvi in *Siddharth Roy*. That's why Sukumar has roped him in to make his next film on his banner, Sukumar Writings.

It is known that many meaningful films have been produced on Sukumar Writings. Currently, the banner is producing pan-Indian films as well as a diverse set of content films in collaboration with many top production houses.



Geethanjali Malli Vachindi wraps up its shooting

Actress Anjali's *Geethanjali* was one of the big hits among small budget films way back in 2014. The film not only became a box-office success but also acted as a trendsetter for more films in the genre. One of the best horror-comedy films *Geethanjali* is all set to roll into its sequel.

The film titled *Geethanjali Malli Vachindi* will be produced by Kona Venkat under Kona films Corporation in association with MVV Cinemas. Heroine Anjali will be playing the lead role, and it's a milestone 50th film in her career. Needless to say, the sequel will follow in the same

horror-comedy genre. The makers on Monday revealed that the team has wrapped up shooting for the sequel. "Done filming, but the horror's just begun," the notice says. Soon, *Geethanjali Malli Vachindi* will arrive to make you laugh and raise your spirits." Anjali's 50th movie is called *Geethanjali Malli Vachindi*. The actor will perform the same character as she did in the 2014 movie in its direct sequel. Along with the announcement came a photo of the film crew posing from the hill station where the movie was filmed. In addition, Rahul Madhav, Brahmaji, Ali,

Shakalaka Shankar, Satyarn Rajesh, Satya, and Srinivas Reddy are featured in *Geethanjali Malli Vachindi*. *Geethanjali Malli Vachindi* is written by veteran screenwriter Kona Venkat and Bhanu Boggavarapu. The film is directed by debut filmmaker Shiva Turlapati. Kona Venkat has also produced the film under the banner Kona Films Corporation, in association with MVV Cinemas. Pravin Lakkaraju has composed the film's music, with cinematography by Suhatha Siddhartha, editing by Chota K Prasad and production design by Narni Srinivas.

TEAM SALAAR ARE ALL SMILES WITH THE SUCCESS OF PART-1

Hombale Films is undeniably one of the biggest content makers in Indian cinema. The leading production house has delivered a variety of content to mainstream audiences, including *KGF Chapters 1 and 2* and the global sensation *Kantara*. The production house has proved its mettle among the masses with the recently released *Salaar Part 1: Ceasefire*. The action drama helmed by KGF director Prashanth Neel and starring Prabhas got unanimous love and praise from fans and audiences across the globe and it continued to write history since its release on December 21st. The film has breached 650 crores at the worldwide box office. The film has collected 550 Cr. Gross in India, 153 Cr. Gross overseas and 703 Cr. Gross worldwide. (All India

Hindi 177 Cr. Nett and 208 Cr. Gross). Counting the massive success of the film, the makers recently organized an intimate celebration party which was attended by the producers, Pan India Superstar Prabhas, director Prashanth Neel, Prithviraj Sukumaran, music composer Ravi Basrur and distributor Anil Thadani.

Sharing a glimpse of the success bash, the makers wrote on social media, "The BLOCKBUSTER success calls for a BLOCKBUSTER CELEBRATION! #SalaarBoxOfficeStorm #RecordBreakingSalaar #SalaarRulingBoxOffice." Talking about the film, it gave the fans and the audiences a never before

seen visuals, once in a lifetime cinematic experience, and the action-packed drama that glued them to their seats. Everyone raved about the action-packed avatar of Prabhas, the storytelling of Prashanth Neel, and the intriguing world of Khansaar, which makes it an international standards film from the production house. The

film got massive love from the critics as well as the audiences and is one of the most successful films of the year 2023. Upon its release, the film became the biggest global blockbuster and has been getting appreciation from non-traditional international markets as well. After the victorious run in the worldwide market, the film is set to roar in Japan and Latin America with a grand release planned by makers soon.

Following the roaring success of the film the audiences are eager to know the next segment of the story in the much-awaited sequel *Salaar Part 2: Shouryanga Parvam*.

Hombale Films *Salaar Part 1: Ceasefire* starring Prabhas, Prithviraj Sukumaran, Jagapathi Babu, and Shruti Haasan is directed by Prashanth Neel and the film is enjoying its Blockbuster in worldwide cinemas.

