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Ties with BJP purely administrative; not political, says Gudivada

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Industries Minister Gudivada Amarnath has firmly asserted that the relationship between the ruling YSRCP and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is purely administrative, not political. Addressing the media here on Wednesday, Amarnath dismissed speculations of an alliance between the two parties, emphasising that their respective roles solely involve serving the interests of the State and the nation.

Minister Amarnath drew a distinct line between the YSRCP's governance at the state level and the BJP's leadership at the center. He clarified that their interactions and discussions would pertain solely to matters concerning Andhra Pradesh's development and progress. Addressing speculations about Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's political alignment, Amarnath reiterated Reddy's unwaver-

Reiterates focus on Andhra Pradesh's development

ing dedication to the State's welfare. He pointed to Reddy's public declaration during his meeting with Prime Minister Modi in Visakhapatnam, where he firmly outlined his priorities for the State, including preventing steel plant privatisation, securing special status, and establishing a railway zone.

Responding to criticism about skipping the Davos conference, Amarnath questioned the effectiveness of such events during former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's regime. He highlighted the Chief Minister's alternative approach of organising a dedicated investors' summit within the State to directly attract industrial leaders to Andhra Pradesh.

Accepting the challenge posed by AP PCC president Sharmila Reddy, Amarnath



confidently listed the YSRCP government's achievements under Chief Minister Jagan. He cited infrastructure projects like medical colleges, Bhogapuram Airport, Moolpet Port, Adani Data Centre, secretariats, Wellness Centres, and Rythu Bharosa Centers in rural areas as proof of the State's advancements.

Amarnath expressed his readiness to engage in both political battles and constructive discussions on develop-

ment. He dismissed TDP's criticism, stating that the people of Andhra Pradesh view the Congress party, which played a role in the state's division, as an adversary. Expressing complete trust in the Chief Minister's electoral strategies, Amarnath announced the virtual launch of 250 JIO towers on Thursday to improve network connectivity in remote areas. He also disclosed Jagan's planned public meeting in Bheemili constituency on January 27 to mobilise party cadres, discuss election plans, and communicate the government's development and welfare initiatives to the public.

Concluding his address, Amarnath expressed confidence in Jagan's ability to secure a significant majority in the upcoming elections, replicating the success of his 2019 campaign in Uttarandhra.

Foundation Day of UP, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu celebrated at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer was the chief guest at the Formation Day celebrations of Uttar Pradesh and the Union Territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, held at Raj Bhavan here on Wednesday, as part of 'Ek Bharat Sreshth Bharat' programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Abdul Nazeer said that Uttar Pradesh is one of the most ancient cradles of Indian culture, where the roots of the country's history and heritage can be traced. "It is home to Triveni Sangam of the holy rivers of Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, among other incredible places and the story of Ramayana and Mahabharata revolves around the dynasties that ruled the State over the centuries. Great thinkers like Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, Parshwanath, Asoka etc. have set their foot on this land," said the Governor. He also said that



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recently the whole nation witnessed the historic event of consecration of Sri Ram Lalla's idol at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The Governor said that the territory of Dadra Nagar Haveli was merged with the neighbouring UT of Daman and Diu to form the new Union

Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu on January 26, 2020, and both the regions have a vibrant heritage in the form of cuisine, customs and culture, arts and crafts, dances and rituals. He said that the Foundation Day of different States and UTs is celebrated to forge a strong relationship

and bonding among all the people of the country, and promote mutual understanding between different States and Union Territories, through the concept of 'One Nation-One People'.

Students hailing from Uttar Pradesh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, who are studying in various local educational institutions, attended the programme, spoke on the occasion and performed folk dances. Officers and staff members of Raj Bhavan also attended the programme.

Preparations hindered by lack of infrastructure in polling stations

Many schools face delays in progress due to shortage of funds

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the impending general elections draw near, the focus is on the preparedness of the 1,520 polling stations in the district. The State Election Commission has mandated that identified schools, serving as polling stations, must have essential infrastructure, including drinking water, electricity, toilets, ramps for the disabled, and kitchen sheds by January 31. However, half of these schools currently lack the necessary facilities, leading to a race against time to complete the mandated work.

Despite the urgency, many schools face delays in progress due to a shortage of funds. The lack of financial support has hindered the development of infrastructure in these centers, raising concerns about the convenience and accessibility of the voting process for the electorate.

The Education Department and the Election Commission have delegated the responsibility of creating infrastructure in polling centers to school prin-

cipals. This move has sparked discontent among educators who argue that election-related funds should be allocated for the development and maintenance of polling booths, especially since no funds were received in the form of composite grants this academic year.

The current focus on infrastructure development has unveiled the inadequate facilities for disabled voters in 500 out of 1,529 polling centres.

Despite recent inspections by the District Collector, concerns persist over the lack of ramps and railings for the elderly and disabled in 26 polling centers. The pressure from political parties and representatives for immediate attention to these issues has not resulted in visible improvements.

In response to the criticisms, District Revenue Officer B Dayanidhi reassured the public that all necessary facilities, including ramps, toilets, drinking water, lighting, and kitchen sheds, will be in place at the polling centers before the elections. The authorities are committed to completing the pending infrastructure work to ensure a smooth and accessible voting process for all citizens.

Workshop held to increase awareness on Intellectual Property Rights

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The National Intellectual Property (IP) Yatra has emphasised the need for enhancing the awareness on Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). AP Chambers, along with KL University, organised a two-day workshop at Vijayawada on the National IP Yatra, an initiative of the Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). The workshop aimed to bring awareness on patents, industrial designs, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, GI registration, etc. amongst the MSMEs and to encourage creative intellectual endeavor in the Indian economy with an objective to increase the number of IP filings both in India and abroad.

Satish Kumar, Additional Director, IPR Division, DC-MSME, Ministry of MSME, spoke on Intellectual Property Rights Vs MSME Schemes and Incentives. He brought awareness among MSME



entrepreneurs on the process of filing, acquiring and commercialisation of IP assets, the legal framework involved, the available government support, GI (Geographical Indication) Certification and GI products. The event also provided a platform for MSMEs to showcase their innovation and creativity.

M. Ajith, Joint Controller of Patents and Designs, Chennai Patent Office, Government of India, spoke on Building Awareness on Intellectual Property Rights for MSMEs in

India. Ashok Doppalapudi, founder & CEO, IP Bank, Hyderabad, explained how to identify innovation, convert research, project works and innovations into patents and other IPRs and designs, trademarks and copyrights.

Dr. R. Srinivasan, Member Secretary, Tamil Nadu State Council for Science and Technology, Department of Higher Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, elaborated on how to identify GI, filing procedure and commercialisation of GI. There

TDP, JSP should fight polls with Left parties: Kothagudem MLA

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kunamneni Sambasiva Rao, secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Telangana and MLA of Kothagudem, has suggested that the TDP and Jana Sena Party should join forces with the Left Parties in the upcoming elections to defeat the ruling YSRCP in the State. Sambasiva Rao also urged the TDP to lead the fight against the State government on the people's problems.

After winning his second MLA term from Kothagudem in Telangana, Kunamneni Sambasiva Rao made his first visit to the Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada on Wednesday, where he spoke at a media conference with CPI AP State secretary K Ramakrishna.

Rao expressed his opinion that a secular rule would only be possible with the INDIA Bloc, comprising secular, democratic, and other like-minded political parties in the country. He made serious allegations against Chief Minister



YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for their anarchic rule in the State and at the Centre, respectively.

The Left parties have been relentlessly fighting against the government on the people's problems, so Kunamneni urged the public to elect left representatives in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly.

Ramakrishna alleged that both the BJP and the YSRCP had failed to fulfil their promises to the public. He said that the state was now in elec-

tion mode following the release of the final publication of the electoral rolls.

Meanwhile, Ramakrishna announced that the CPI national council meetings would be held in Hyderabad from February 2 to 3, and attended by CPI general secretary D Raja, national secretary Dr K Narayana.

The meeting was attended by CPI State secretariat members G Obulesu, G Eswaraiah, leaders Ch Koteswara Rao, Y Chenchaiiah, G Koteswara Rao, and others.

IMA for observing Covid Martyrs Day on Jan 30

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Indian Medical Association wishes to celebrate Covid Martyrs Day on January 30. In a release, the IMA stated that the day recalled the services of doctors across the country who laid their lives fighting against a large-scale global pandemic, which was then an unknown entity, Covid-19, as Covid Martyrs Day on January 30.

So they want to celebrate it in memory of the services of doctors across the State during the pandemic.

Cong playing its old game...

Continued from Page 1

The battle will be between YSRCP and the combined TDP and Jana Sena in the next elections, he said, adding that the party has been changing candidates in some places based on social dynamics, surveys and perceptions. When asked about the confusion created by these changes, the Chief Minister said that he has decided to undertake the changes early for more clarity. On extending support to the present ruling party at the Centre, he said that YSRCP has extended issue based support to the BJP and maintained cordial relations with it keeping in mind the State's interests.

Delay in SCR Zone's establishment raises political tensions

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The establishment of the South Coast Railway Zone with Visakhapatnam at its core has been a longstanding aspiration for the people of Uttarandhra, with unfulfilled promises over the past three decades.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had pledged to establish the 'South Coast Railway Zone' in 2019, just before the last elections. However, despite being in office since then, the promise remains unfulfilled. With elections approaching once again, politicians are reviving the discussion around this unmet commitment.

During his visit to Visakhapatnam on December 10, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav blamed the State government for delaying the transfer of necessary land for constructing offices related to the railway zone. He declared that if the land was handed over promptly, he would lay the foundation stone for building structures the very next day.

Responsibility for transferring the land was delegated to the District Collector and GVMC by the State government.

The Collector and the Commissioner assured the Railway Minister that the Mudasarlova lands would be handed over within a week. According to GVMC officials, they have fulfilled this promise, offering 52 acres of land in Mudasarlova, with a letter to Divisional Railway Manager stating their readiness.

However, Railway sources expressed surprise at the communication from GVMC, highlighting encroachers on the Mudasarlova lands without specifying the matter. Additionally, they disputed the claim of water resources in 20 acres, stating that there is no current water source and the possibility of water entering during rainfall.

The lack of clarity on how the lands will be handed over, along with related documents, raises concerns among Railway officials.

Quality education key....

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister said that the government is also taking steps to make the required number of teachers available for capacity building in tune with the growing content and requirements.

When asked about the funding for the reforms in education, he said that the government has a roadmap for implementing the reforms.

"We have a budget of Rs.14,000 crore for Nadu-Nedu and around Rs. 8,300 crore has already been spent for its first phase and necessary funds would be allotted as and when necessary," he said, adding that the government has been spending a huge amount on the educational sector to ensure that quality education is available to the poor just as a matter of right.

It is not just Right to Education but Right to Quality Education is what we are focusing on," he said.

In response to a query on accountability, the Chief Minister said that school committees, responsible teachers and district-level officers are regularly monitoring the situation. "I am conducting period-

ical reviews on funds utilisation and provision of facilities so that there would be more accountability," he said.

To a question whether reforms in education can win elections, he said that students have no voting rights and the government has no political motives behind the reforms.

Politics is something else and students are not voters, he said, asserting that poverty cannot be eradicated unless and until their lives are improved with quality education.

"The government is only providing quality education to the poor so that they would be able to compete with others at the global level and get high paid jobs for a better livelihood," he said, adding it has introduced honours courses at the degree level, verticals like asset management and risk management in B.Com and related classes besides making internship mandatory like in western countries to make the education job-oriented.

The government wants to ensure and showcase to the world that the students of downtrodden families also can compete with the students of the rich families at the global level, he said.

A third World War is not...

Continued from Page 1

"Often this causes immense frustration in the general assembly but also beyond. The reform of the UN Security Council is absolutely necessary. I do not think there is any member of the United Nations that would deny that," he said.

Explaining the delay in rolling out the much needed reforms, he appeared to blame the five permanent members of the top global body.

"If you are in a privileged position, you are not in a

hurry to lose privileges. I think it is well appreciated that the existing formula is woefully inadequate," he said.

"The reform is inescapable. The question is what would be the formula for undertaking the reform," he added.

India has been pressing for reform of the United Nations, especially the UN Security Council. New Delhi has been particularly upset over lack of any meaningful movement forward in the International Negotiations (IGN) on Security Council reform. India is a strong contender for a permanent membership at the UN Security Council.

At present, the UNSC comprises five permanent members and 10 non-permanent member countries which are elected for a two-year term by the General Assembly of the UN.

Former MLA Kamalamma applied for Badvel constituency in Kadapa district. AP Congress Committee working president Sunkara Padmasri, and Vijayawada city president Naraharasetti Narasimha Rao, among others, handed over appli-

cations to Manickam Tagore willing to contest in the Assembly constituencies.

Candidates were charged a donation fee based on their category, following the Karnataka and Telangana model.

The Andhra Pradesh unit is charging Rs.15,000 as "donation" from the

Congress leaders submit...

Continued from Page 1

Aspirant candidates of the reserved category and Rs.25,000 for the rest, for Lok Sabha seats.

In the case of Assembly tickets, it is Rs.10,000 for candidates in unreserved category and Rs.5,000 for the reserved category.

While addressing the media at the Andhra Ratna Bhavan, Tagore said that

the Congress party would receive the applications from the candidature aspirants in the next two weeks.

He said all the applications would be processed through the Pradesh Election Committee and afterwards it would go through the screening committee of the AICC.



Society should encourage girls to achieve their goals: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A programme organised to observe the National Girl Child Day was inaugurated by NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao at the Bishop Azaraiah Girls' High School in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

The District Collector said that girl children should be encouraged to achieve their goals with determination and dedication. He added that everyone should support them to prevent gender discrimination in society and ensure that they successfully reach their targets.

Collector Dilli Rao also said that parents and voluntary organisations should encourage girls to have a strong will to reach higher positions independently. He also called upon society to utilise

National Girl Child Day observed



The District Collector said that girl children should be encouraged to achieve their goals with determination and dedication. He added that everyone should support them to prevent gender discrimination in society and ensure that they successfully reach their targets.

all opportunities provided through government schemes for girl children, so that they can be leaders in all fields besides education and employment. Similarly, society should extend

its support to them to overcome gender discrimination.

The Collector said parents should teach kids Indian culture, tradition and family system right from childhood. He emphasised

the need for conducting awareness programmes about discrimination and inequalities in all schools and colleges. He also stressed the importance of educating children about girls' rights,

regarding equality, education, health, and nutrition.

Dilli Rao presented prizes and mementoes to those who excelled in education, cultural activities, and sports with the support of Marpu Trust. He urged everyone to take an oath to eradicate violence against girls and resolve their problems. The State government is paying special attention to gender discrimination being faced by girl children, he explained.

NTR District Women and Child Welfare Project Director G Uma Devi, DRDA PD K Srinivasa Rao, Bishop Azaraiah College Principal Sandhya, HM Jaya Sri, CWC Chairperson Suvartha, Marpu Trust representative Sadhika, psychiatrist Dr Krishna Kumar, and others were present.

‘Learn Hindi for use in official work’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Town Official Language Implementation Committee (TOLIC), following a meeting, laid out the importance of Hindi plays as Rajbhasha and sought learning Hindi to use in official work.

The TOLIC meeting was held at Vijayawada on Wednesday in the Divisional Railway Auditorium and Narendra A. Patil, Chairman TOLIC and Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway addressed the gatherings. Narendra Patil said that today, it is very easy to learn and use Hindi for official work. The use of Hindi also gets impetus due to such programmes and competitions. The DRM appreciated the works undertaken by the various Central government organisations towards implementation and use of Hindi in day-to-day working.

Asha Mahesh Kumar,



Rajbhasha Adhikari, Vijayawada Division, presented the TOLIC report through PPT and requested all offices to continue active implementation of Rajbhasha. He gave necessary information regarding the various activities taken up by the committee organisations of TOLIC and presented their progress report.

A total of 276 employees and officers had participated in Hindi news reading, noting & drafting, essay writing, poetry recitation, elocution, quiz and antakshari from 40 Central Government Organisations based in Vijayawada. Narendra Patil presented certificates to 72 winners of the various competitions.

Girls should set life goals: Child rights panel chief

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a significant initiative aimed at promoting the well-being and safety of girls, the State Child Rights Commission Chairman, Kesali Apparao, underscored the importance of vigilance against strangers and urged girls to promptly inform their parents about any suspicious behavior.

Speaking at the National Girl Child Day observance organised here on Wednesday by the Women and Child Development Department, Kesali Apparao, chief guest for the event, emphasised the need for girls to establish life goals and diligently work towards achieving them. Alongside education, he



stressed the significance of adhering to moral values and showing respect to parents and teachers.

The Chairman underscored the detrimental effects of addictions, particularly emphasising the unnecessary nature of cell phone use during school years. He commended the government's efforts in providing quality education and urged all girls to leverage these opportunities. Appreciating the exceptional achievements of girls in diverse

fields, he also reminded them of the need for prioritising their own safety.

Dr. Hima Bindu, Chairperson of the Women and Child Protection Committee, vehemently campaigned against child marriages, stressing that discussions about marriage are inappropriate during the school age. Dr. Bindu emphasised the importance of self-control, urging girls to be mindful of their actions regardless of existing laws.

Preparations for seeking Vote-on-Account begins

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The process for preparing the Vote on Account budget has begun. The Finance department has asked the Head of Departments to send their proposals.

The Finance department officials asked the Head of the departments to send the budget assessments for the year 2024-25. The Head of Departments were also asked to send revised estimates for the implementation of new schemes and new works for the year 2023-24 and also asked them not to propose levying new taxes.

It has been clarified that fill-

ing up of vacant posts, up gradation of posts and creation of new posts should not be proposed in the revised estimates. The finance department has said that proposals related to contract and outsourcing jobs should not be included in the revised estimates for 2023-24.

It has also been made clear that these suggestions should be taken into consideration until further orders are issued. "The government is working to introduce the Vote on Account budget in the first week or second week in February. It may be mentioned here that the governments in election year table the Vote on Account budget in the Assembly.

GITAM varsity partners with IKS Health

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed to be University inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with US-based IKS Health on Wednesday. The MoU aims to provide a platform for medical, physiotherapy, and paramedical students to engage in continuous interactions with renowned physicians, exposing them to the latest and best-in-class clinical practices.

The formal exchange of MoU documents took place in the presence of GITAM Registrar Prof D Gunasekharan and IKS Health Associate Vice-President Dr Harpreet Kaur, witnessed by Vice-Chancellor Prof Dayananda Siddavattam.

Dr Harpreet Kaur, addressing the gathering, highlighted IKS Health's position as



one of the top healthcare employment providers for young doctors in India. She emphasised their commitment to assisting young medical professionals in pursuing careers in the healthcare domain, allowing them to leverage their clinical knowledge and transform into healthcare leaders. Additionally, Dr. Kaur expressed IKS Health's readiness to collaborate with GITAM on various initiatives, including faculty development programmes, curriculum enhancement,

internships, and recruitments.

Prof Dayananda Siddavattam shared insights into the university's commitment to biomedical science. He announced a significant investment of Rs.100 crore in biomedical science infrastructure to accelerate research initiatives.

This move underscores GITAM's dedication to providing state-of-the-art facilities for students pursuing careers in healthcare and related fields.

Body of a medico found at NTR beach

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The body of a medical college girl student washed ashore at the NTR beach here on Wednesday. Police said that the body was identified as V Swetha (24), studying medicine. She was studying MBBS at Rangaraya medical college here. Her body was found on the sea shore at NTR beach. The Thimmapuram police registered a case under suspicious death and shifted the body to the GGH.



76th national conference of IRIA from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The four-day 76th National Conference of Indian Radiological and Imaging Association will begin from January 25 to 28 at CK Convention centre, Mangalagiri with the theme, "Imaging Beyond Imagination". The inaugural function will be held at 5.30 pm at CK Convention Centre.

Speaking to the media persons on Wednesday, organising chairman Dr GV Mohan Prasad said that this is the first national conference of any medical specialty to be held in Vijayawada. Dr Mohan Prasad said that around 3,500 delegates

will be attending this national conference, in addition to this, there will be trade participation by world renowned companies with the display of the most modern and latest innovations in Radiology equipment, tools and software applications.

He said newer technologies like Artificial Intelligence and its application to the newer and advanced radiological and diagnostic equipment are being discussed in the conference. The conference witness around 330 faculty members from India and abroad as resource persons, around 1,200 e papers and scientific posters, display of rare and important films in the scientific

gallery with a special section for display of the lifetime collection rare films of late Prof Dr Kakarla Subbarao with rare radiological signs, a huge trade exhibition with participation of companies displaying their latest innovations and technologies, Ultrasound workshops with highly skilled and world renowned specialists in Radiology and many more.

Organising committee secretaries Dr VN Vara Prasad and Dr Kuldeep, Vice-Chairmen Dr V Suresh and Ch Kishore Kumar, Scientific Committee Chairman Dr Dandamudi Srinivas and treasurer Dr BSR Prasad Babu also spoke on the occasion.

Delay in Aganampudi Regional Hospital expansion projects: Patients, staff suffer

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Aganampudi Regional Hospital is facing severe delays in its expansion project, causing inconvenience and hardship for both patients and staff. Despite the foundation stone being laid four years ago, construction progress has been sluggish, hindering the much-needed increase in medical facilities.

The hospital was initially granted 100 additional beds through a Joint Implementation Order (JIO) under the previous TDP government. The current YSRCP administration announced further development under the Nadu-Nedu scheme, allocating a budget of



Rs. 16.05 crore and entrusting construction to a private corporation overseen by APMSIDC. Officials promised completion within nine months, but untimely fund releases from the government have led to a four-year standstill.

The ongoing construction, divided into two sections, comprises two new substantial buildings earmarked for the Executive Department and Maternal and Child Health Services (MCH). While progress has been made on the

main building's final phase, the MCH block on the eastern side is still under construction, leaving the hospital in a precarious state.

The consequences of this stagnation are evident, with patients and staff enduring inconveniences such as constant dust and dirt in the hospital premises. The absence of homeopathy and allopathy departments in the old building has forced services into narrow rooms. The removal of the medicine storage room and staff quarters for the new buildings has further compounded the issue, with these sections now operating in cramped spaces.

‘Entrepreneurs need to contribute to country’s growth’



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Parvathipuram got a boost of information and motivation during an awareness programme organised on the Prime Minister Vishwakarma scheme on Wednesday. C Vishnu Charan, programme director of the Integrated Tribal Development Corporation, stressed the significance of entrepreneurship for the country's development.

Charan, who was the chief guest, highlighted India's position as the fifth largest economy globally, driven primarily by agriculture. He underlined the need for entrepreneurs to contribute to the country's growth, noting the government's readiness to provide financial assistance. He urged aspiring entrepreneurs to embrace government schemes like the

Vishwakarma scheme for employment opportunities.

The ITDA PO encouraged individuals to explore entrepreneurship beyond agriculture, citing the crucial role of micro and medium enterprises in the nation's development. He cited examples of successful entrepreneurs who started with minimal investment and hard work, inspiring the audience to follow suit. Karunakar, General Manager of the Industries Department, explained the details of the Prime Minister's Vishwakarma Scheme under the District Collector's guidance. He mentioned the scheme's provision of free tools worth Rs 15,000 to eligible manual workers, across 18 categories.

Baliwada Satyanarayana, District Panchayat Officer, reaffirmed the government's commitment to providing technical

knowledge and financial support to deserving individuals. He urged eligible and financially backward applicants to apply promptly and emphasised the role of local enthusiasts in shaping the future of Manyam district. Satyam Naidu, Assistant Scheme Director of the Rural Development Organisation, highlighted the scheme's potential to encourage handicrafts.

Sai Kumar, District Officer of the Skill Development Institute, revealed the existence of four skill development training institutes and outlined the training programme for Vishwakarma scheme beneficiaries.

The programme's success was evident in the presence of CSC president P. Naga Kumar and a significant number of women, showcasing the community's interest and engagement in the entrepreneurial initiative.



Smart glasses distributed to visually-challenged persons

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited's Regional Manager, Prasas Rajwada, and Rotary Club of Madras East's Past Secretary, Rtn Nalluru Paparao, came together to distribute smart vision glasses to 24 visually-impaired individuals. The distribution was generously sponsored by their respective organisations.

The Smart Vision Glasses, intricately connected to a mobile phone, play a pivotal role in assisting blind individuals by detecting objects in front of them, describing scenes, identifying people, facilitating easy book reading, aiding in navigation, and providing crucial assistance in emergency situations.

Representatives from the device manufacturer, SHG Technologies Pvt Ltd, namely Ibrahim and Vijay, actively participated and provided compre-

hensive training to the recipients. They emphasised that this Braille-coded Artificial Intelligence smart device is proudly made in India, patented, and is priced at Rs. 31,500.

Prasas Rajwada from BPCL encouraged the beneficiaries to leverage the device to acquire new skills essential for life. He expressed optimism that the mobility of the beneficiaries would significantly improve, enabling them to lead independent lives.

Rtn Nalluru Paparao, former secretary of Rotary Club of Madras East, advised the beneficiaries to strive for independence and self-sufficiency. He emphasised that blindness should not be a hindrance in this technology-driven world.

The event witnessed the active participation of coordinator of HEPNS, Dr G Sahaya Baskaran, along with dedicated volunteers.



Police personnel during the rehearsal for the Republic Day parade at IGMC stadium in Vijayawada on Wednesday (Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar)

R-Day fete: Collector inspects arrangements at IGMC stadium

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The NTR district administration has been busy preparing the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium for organising the 75th Republic Day celebrations in Vijayawada on January 26. District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao supervised the arrangements in the stadium by coordinating with the departments concerned. Governor SA Nazeer will be hoisting the National Flag in the presence of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Ministers, Officials and others. The sports stadium has been transformed into a parade ground and will witness marches by Military, Paramilitary,

Police, NCC, Scouts and Guides and Social Welfare Residential School students. These teams have conducted rehearsals on Wednesday. For hosting the Republic Day celebrations, the district administration decorated the IGMC stadium gallery with tricolour flags. Also, the Protocol, Police and Revenue departments have made seating arrangements and entrance and exit gates for VVIPs VVIPs and others. During the celebrations, the State government is set to present the 'Adudam Andhra - Idi Manandari Ata' tableaux by the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh. Also, the Information Department is likely to set up the Election Commission

tableaux. Perhaps these two tableaux are participating in the Republic Day Parade for the first time. Besides Gram/Ward Sachivalayam, Agriculture, Education, Health and Family, Dr YSR Aarogyasri Healthcare Trust, AP State Housing Corporation Limited, Revenue, SERP, Women and Child Welfare, and Industries departments' tableaux will be participating.

Meanwhile, Collector Dilli Rao inspected the Republic Day arrangements at the stadium and gave instructions to the officials concerned. All departmental officers should coordinate with each other and follow the protocol for the VVIPs and VVIPs, he added.

YSRCP conspired to win elections with bogus votes: Purandeswari

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP state unit president Daggubati Purandeswari alleged that the YSRCP has conspired to win the ensuing elections with bogus votes.

Daggubati Purandeswari inaugurated Gav Chalo Abhiyan workshop on Wednesday. BJP national secretary Aravind Menon and state secretary Matta Prasad were among those who attended the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Purandeswari reiterated that the BJP high command would take a decision of alliance with other parties. The BJP activists in the state should strive hard to bolster the party without thinking about alliance, she told them.

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Speaking on the occasion, Purandeswari reiterated that the BJP high command would take a decision of alliance with other parties. The BJP activists in the state should strive hard to bolster the party without thinking about alliance, she told them.

there were many irregularities in the preparation of the voter list. There is a mala fide intention behind the 'Why Not 175' comment by the Chief

Minister, she lashed out. An IAS officer was suspended in AP in the voter's list irregularities in Tirupati by-election on the complaint of the BJP, she

asserted. "The BJP activists need not hesitate to go to people as the Central government is granting crores of rupees for the

development including for the construction of roads. The Centre is releasing funds for the establishment of medical colleges and Rythu Bharosa Kendras,' she told the cadres, adding that the AP government is taking up development works with the funds being granted by the BJP led Central government.

The state government has not carried out any major project without the Central government's help, she claimed. The AP government did not declare a holiday on January 22 for the consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, she blamed.

BJP state general secretary Bitra Shivannarayana, former MLA and state vice president Ayyaji Vema and other leaders were present on the occasion.

Officials told to focus on election seizure management system

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector P Prashanthi directed the enforcement officials to lay focus on Election Seizure Management System to conduct ensuing elections in fair manner.

The Collector here on Wednesday held a meeting with the enforcement officials and reviewed the preparations for the elections.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that in order to conduct elections in fair manner, the Election Commission of India Election had brought the Election Seizure Management System.

The Collector stated that the enforcement officers of various departments should be fully aware of this, adding that FIR related to seizures, seized items and cash should be registered in the app properly.



Collector Prashanthi directed the officials to prepare to conduct the upcoming general elections efficiently preventing the attempts to lure and tempt the voters, adding that the authorities should make plans to ensure that the upcoming elections are held in a fair and peaceful environment.

She said that the aim is to give every voter the opportu-

nity to exercise their right to vote freely; asking the officials to take measures to prevent the luring of voters by alcohol, cash and drugs. Surveillance should be increased as part of the process of early detection and prevention of such activities, she told the officials.

"There is a possibility of such things happening before the election schedule is released. Special attention should be paid to the check-posts and the flying squad should be alerted. They should keep a vigil on the areas affected by drugs and alcohol," Collector Prashanthi ordered the officials.

DRO B Shivannarayana Reddy, SEB Additional SP NTV Ravi Kumar, district audit officer KN Venkateswara Rao and income tax officer K Satyanarayana were among those who attended the meeting.

MP Mithun Reddy asks cadre to strive for election victory

PNS ■ ELURU

YSRCP MP and regional coordinator PV Mithun Reddy has exhorted the cadres to strive hard to win the ensuing election and bring back the leaders who are maintaining distance to the party due to various reasons.

Addressing a meeting of party here in a private function hall on Wednesday, Mithun Reddy said that since Polavaram MLA Tellam Balaraju was ill, Jagan Mohan Reddy is fielding Balaraju's wife Rajyalakshmi. Moreover, Karumuri Nageswara Rao's son would contest to Lok Sabha from Eluru constituency.

"Now the responsibility lies on the activists for their victory. We should give the victo-



ry in Polavaram constituency as a gift to Jagan Mohan Reddy," he told the cadres. MLA Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas predicted that no party could stop the YSRCP wave in the next elections. Referring to YS Sharmila's

comments, Alla Nani slammed that unable to face Jagan Mohan Reddy directly, some parties were trying to use family as shield and described it as an unethical act. MP Kotagiri Sridhar also spoke.

Bhuvaneshwari consoles bereaved families, extends financial aid

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Nara Bhuvaneshwari consoled the bereaved families and handed over Rs 3 lakh financial assistance on Wednesday in East Godavari and Kakinada districts.

Nara Bhuvaneshwari, the wife of former Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, consoled four families at Jaggampeta, Peddapuram, Tuni and Kakinada mandals in East Godavari and Kakinada district.

Some TDP activists and sympathizers died unable to digest the arrest of Chandrababu Naidu after suffering cardiac arrests and other problems. Nara Bhuvaneshwari is now consoling the bereaved family members across the state and handing over Rs 3 lakh as financial assistance. She consoled the family members of Padala Veerababu



(45) who died of heart attack at Gurrampalem village in Peddapuram mandal, the family members of Buddala Subba

Rao (70) who died of cardiac arrest at Kandrakota village in Peddapuram mandal, the family members of E Nukaraju

(63) at Tetagunta village in Tuni rural mandal and the family members of Chikkala Satyavati (55) in Kakinada.

Nara Bhuvaneshwari, the wife of former Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, consoled four families at Jaggampeta, Peddapuram, Tuni and Kakinada mandals in East Godavari and Kakinada district.

She handed over Rs 3 lakh financial assistance to the bereaved families. She also assured them of extending all needed help to the families in the future also.

Meanwhile, Nara Bhuvaneshwari received an overwhelming welcome from the people at various places during her visit.

Officials directed to resolve grievances efficiently



PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh directed the officials to take steps to resolve the grievances of people in such a manner that they would increase their satisfaction levels.

The Collector participated in the 'Jaganannaku Chebudam' programme held at Jeelugumilli on the premises of tribal welfare boy school on Wednesday.

The Collector, along with Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, ITDA PO M Surya Teja

and RDO Addayya received applications on the grievances from the people.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh said that applications were received during the Jaganannaku Chebudam programme and steps would be taken to resolve the grievances at the earliest.

In order to find a solution to the local problems at the mandal level, the concerned authorities should pay special attention to the applications received during the Jaganannaku Chebudam-

Spandana programme organized at the mandal level, he told the officials and ordered them to take appropriate steps to resolve the grievances efficiently and at the earliest.

The Collector said that they should be given quality endorsement to the applicant within the allotted time so that the issues can be resolved expeditiously. Housing PD K Ravikumar, District Agriculture JD Ramakrishna, MPDO KRS Krishna Prasad and other officials were among those present.

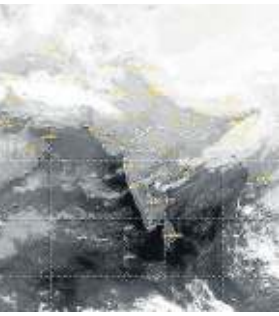
Cyclonic circulation lies over east Vidarbha

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Cyclonic circulation over Marathwada and adjoining Vidarbha & Telangana now lies over East Vidarbha & neighbourhood at 0.9 km above mean sea level, the Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

Weather report here said that a trough runs from South Interior Karnataka to interior Odisha across North Interior Karnataka, with cyclonic circulation over Vidarbha, south Chhattisgarh, at 0.9 km above mean sea level. Light rain is likely to occur at one or two places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 48 hours.

Dry weather is likely to prevail in South Coastal



Andhra Pradesh & Rayalaseema during the next seven days and in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh from Jan 26 to 30. The lowest minimum temperature of 17.5 degrees Celsius was recorded at Arogyavaram in Rayalaseema on the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday, the report added.

None can topple Cong govt: Sridhar Babu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Asserting that the Congress government will not fall even if someone tries to topple it, IT and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu has said that the government has 64 MLAs on board with total unity. He averred that the Congress party would be in power based on people's choice. He termed BRS leaders' comments on investments through Davos as 'meaningless'.

The Minister, while on his way from Hyderabad to Dharmapuri, halted at Karimnagar and spoke to media persons. He said: "We will continue the good work done by previous governments... BRS comments on investments in Davos are meaningless". Sridharbabu made it clear that the governments continue to carry out certain works for the welfare of people and the development of the state.

The Minister said that despite the construction of IT Towers in the district centers, software companies were not coming as expected. Hence, the



state government would take special measures to encourage them. He stated that the growth of IT would not happen just by building IT Towers. He said that they were trying to strengthen the infrastructure. He said that the IT sec-

tor should not be limited to the district centers. Along with Hyderabad, they will be expanded to three-tier towns as well. He stated that the aim of the Congress government was to provide employment opportunities to women there.

The Minister said that reviews were being done on the strategy to be followed in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The good things in the schemes implemented by the previous governments would definitely be considered.

Sridhar Babu said that people would get to know the facts about the quality standards of Madigadda barrage. The government would come out with a report on it. He said that big companies like HCL were being invited to strengthen IT in Karimnagar.

Earlier, the Minister was welcomed at the Bypass NTR statue under the leadership of City Congress president Komatireddy Narendar Reddy. Leaders, activists and fans felicitated Sridhar Babu with shawls and garlands.

Railway police seize Rs 30.50 lakh from two passengers during checking

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The railway police seized Rs 30.50 lakh from two passengers during checking of luggage in the Hyderabad-Chennai express train and on Ongole railway station platform.

Inspector of police N Srikanth Babu told the media here on Wednesday that on the directions of railway SP K Chowdeshwari and under the supervision of Nellore subdivision DSP Abdul Aji, a police team led by railway CI Srikanth Babu took up checking of passengers travelling in trains in view of ensuing elections.

The police team found Rs 26,50,000 in the bag of a pas-

senger Solasa Sai Kashiviswanath. Since he failed to produce relevant documents, the police seized the money. Kashiviswanath is working as a clerk at a gold jewelry shop in Narasaraopet and he was taking the money to Chennai to buy gold.

The police team conducted a check of luggage of passengers on the railway platform in Ongole railway station. The police team found a passenger, Sheikh Jafar was carrying Rs 4 lakh. When he failed to produce relevant documents pertaining to the cash, the police seized the cash. Sheikh Jafar is a cloth merchant in Chirala. The seized cash Rs 30.50 lakh is being handed over to the Income Tax department.



ASHA worker killed as auto rickshaw overturns

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

An Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) was killed and two others were injured when the auto rickshaw in which she was travelling overturned at Sugalmitt in Punganur mandal on the night of Tuesday.

Police here on Wednesday said that the deceased ASHA worker Jaya (36) went to Punganur to attend a family

function. When she was going back to her native village Netigutlapalli in an Auto rickshaw, the vehicle overturned while negotiating a curve.

The critically injured ASHA worker was shifted to the GGH in Madanapalli where she was declared dead. The injured were undergoing treatment in the GGH. The police registered a case and shifted the body for post-mortem.



JSP allocated 'Glass tumbler' as election symbol



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Jana Sena party has been allocated 'Glass Tumbler' as election symbol by the Election Commission of India.

The Election Commission of India issued orders on Wednesday allocating 'Glass Tumbler' as election symbol to the Jana Sena party. The AP state electoral officer has received orders from the ECI in this regard.

JSP Legal Cell chairman Evana Sambashiva Pratap handed over the copy

of the order to JSP chief K Pawan Kalyan.

The Jana Sena candidates contested in the last general elections and in the Telangana Assembly elections on the 'Glass Tumbler' election symbol. The Jana Sena candidates will also contest in the ensuing general and Assembly elections on the 'Glass Tumbler' symbol.

Meanwhile, noted Telugu film actor Prudviraj and Choreographer Johnny Master joined the JSP on Wednesday. Pawan Kalyan admitted them into the party by wrapping scarves.

Up, up and away!

The Indian stock exchange overtakes Hong Kong's, securing fourth place globally

In what must come as happy news for its economy, India's stock exchange has surpassed Hong Kong's to become the fourth largest global equity market. This accomplishment underscores India's economic resilience and its growing significance in financial arena. The surge of India's stock exchange to this reputable position is due to a confluence of factors. Foremost among these is the comprehensive economic reforms in recent years. Measures such as the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the establishment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) have created a business-friendly environment, fostering investor confidence. Simultaneously, India has witnessed a steady inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), driven by initiatives like 'Make in India' and liberalised FDI norms. These efforts have positioned India as an attractive destination for global investors. Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in transforming the Indian stock market into a more accessible and efficient platform.



The widespread adoption of online trading platforms, mobile applications and other technological innovations have democratised investment, expanding the investor base. India's stock market has exhibited resilience during global economic challenges, navigating the uncertainties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This ability to weather economic storms and rebound swiftly has reinforced investor confidence on both domestic and international fronts. The implications of India's stock exchange securing the fourth spot on the global stage are profound. This achievement is expected to attract increased foreign capital, stimulating economic growth, job creation and supporting infrastructure development. Furthermore, the higher global ranking enhances India's visibility and credibility as an investment destination. The thriving stock market has the potential to translate into capital appreciation for individuals and institutions, thereby potentially boosting consumer spending and overall economic activity. However, amid these positive developments, challenges such as market volatility, regulatory concerns and geopolitical factors must be accounted for. A responsive regulatory framework is crucial to ensuring the stability and integrity of financial markets. Unfortunately, many cases of insider trading and unscrupulous practices have come to light. The sad part is that SEBI, entrusted to safeguard investor interests and regulate the market, has often failed in controlling the frenzy which results in wiping away a sizeable amount of small investors' money. That is a concern to be addressed immediately and SEBI must be made more powerful to deal with unscrupulous brokers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, India's stock exchange securing the fourth position globally is a momentous achievement that reflects growing appeal for investors. As India continues to enact reforms, attract foreign investment, it is poised for sustained economic growth. Managing challenges proactively will be essential to ensuring the long-term stability and vibrancy of our markets.



Students in traditional Punjabi attire during the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade 2024, in Amritsar PTI

Policy reforms needed to boost manufacturing

By creating an environment conducive to manufacturing, India can attract investments and become key player in the 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 USD one trillion by 2030. 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. Indeed, critical policy changes are required for India to smoothly transition into a global manufacturing hub, ensuring enduring growth and competitiveness on the international stage. 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. **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. Becoming a global manufacturing hub requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the Indian government, industry players, and other stakeholders. 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 an Industry expert, views are personal)*



JAY SHAH

Bharat Ratna: Honouring the legacy of Jan Nayak

The Bharat Ratna, conferred posthumously to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, gives a fitting tribute to his work and ideals

The celebration of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur's birth centenary has been marked by a momentous announcement from the Indian government, bestowing upon him the prestigious Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award in the nation. Renowned for his relentless dedication to reshaping social justice, Karpoori Thakur has left an indelible mark on the lives of millions. His remarkable journey, from the marginalized barber community to the pinnacle of political leadership, is a testament to his unwavering commitment to social reform. In the dynamic tapestry of Bihar's socialist movement, Karpoori Thakur's name resonated alongside stalwarts such as Ram Vilas Paswan, Sharad Yadav, and Chandrashekhar. Emerging from a disadvantaged background, he surmounted numerous obstacles to not only enhance his social standing but also to champion the cause of those on society's periphery. His enduring influence on the underprivileged persists, symbolizing mental fortitude for the backward society. The government's decision to posthumously honor Karpoori Thakur with the Bharat Ratna underscores the extraordinary legacy of this Bihar-born socialist leader. A statement from Rashtrapati Bhavan lauds him as a trailblazer of social justice and an inspirational figure in Indian politics. The award serves as a fitting tribute to his lifelong dedication to uplifting the deprived sections of society and his relentless pursuit of social justice. Karpoori Thakur's life was a testament to simplicity and social justice, pillars that defined his persona as the people's hero. From his unassuming lifestyle to his humility, he endeared himself to the common folk. Anecdotes abound, such as the incident with Chaudhary Charan Singh, where he refused personal gains even when offered a plot of land during his tenure as Chief Minister. In 1977, another instance showcased his simplicity when he joined party leaders in a torn kurta for a celebration in Patna. Despite offers for a new kurta, he



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

chose to donate the money to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, embodying his selfless nature. The Bharat Ratna announcement, made a day before his centenary, elevates Narendra Modi's standing among the Bihar and socialist public. Karpoori Thakur, a champion of social justice, envisioned a society where resources were equitably distributed, and opportunities were accessible to all, irrespective of social status. His political journey, beginning in the 1950s, saw him win every election, reflecting the trust bestowed upon him by the people. Serving as Chief Minister from 1970 to 1971 and later from 1977 to 1979, he aligned himself with the working class, laborers, and small farmers. As the Education Minister, he championed the abolition of English in matriculation exams and focused on improving education facilities for the underprivileged. Participating in the Quit India Movement as a youth, Karpoori Thakur remained unwavering during the Emergency, earning praise from leaders like JP, Dr. Manohar Lohia, and Charan Singh. His pivotal role in strengthening affirmative action for backward classes, despite strong opposition, laid the foundation for a more inclusive society. Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, hailing from the most back-

THE POSTHUMOUS CONFERRAL OF THE BHARAT RATNA UPON JAN NAYAK KARPOORI THAKUR STANDS AS A POIGNANT RECOGNITION OF A LEADER WHOSE LIFE WAS DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF THE MARGINALISED AND THE UPLIFTMENT OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

ward section of society, stands as a beacon of inclusivity and a true people's hero, making the Bharat Ratna bestowed upon him a fitting tribute to his monumental contributions to Indian society. The recognition posthumously bestowed upon him not only honors his memory but also serves as an inspiration for future generations to continue the pursuit of social justice and equality. As India reflects on the life and legacy of this exceptional leader, it is a reminder that the struggle for a just society is an ongoing journey, and the ideals championed by Karpoori Thakur still remain relevant. The posthumous conferral of the Bharat Ratna upon Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur stands as a poignant recognition of a leader whose life was dedicated to the service of the marginalized and the upliftment of the downtrodden. As we commemorate his birth centenary, this prestigious award serves as more than a tribute; it is a testament to the enduring impact of his vision for a just and inclusive society. Karpoori Thakur's legacy is multifaceted, embodying simplicity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to social justice. His journey from a humble background to the echelons of political leadership serves as an inspiration, proving that resilience and dedication can break through societal barriers. The government's decision to bestow the Bharat

Ratna upon him is not merely a recognition of past achievements but a call to contemporary and future leaders to emulate his principles. In a time when the pursuit of social justice remains a critical imperative, Karpoori Thakur's life provides a roadmap for leaders to navigate the complexities of governance with integrity and compassion. As Narendra Modi's government makes this historic announcement, it resonates not only with the people of Bihar but with the entire nation. It underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating leaders who prioritize the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. The Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur is a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the ideals of a bygone era with the challenges and opportunities of today. In honouring Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, India acknowledges the pivotal role he played in shaping a more inclusive society and encourages a new generation of leaders to champion his ideals. As the nation pays tribute to this true people's hero, the Bharat Ratna becomes a symbol not only of recognition but also a call to action, urging us all to carry forward the torch of social justice and equality in our ongoing pursuit of a more just and compassionate India. *(The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAIL PROCESS DELAYS

Sir — Indian judiciary is known to move at a snail's pace. As much as bail is a matter of right it is equally important that the right is accorded expeditiously to individuals. In bail orders, there should not be undue delay in the orders of the court reaching the prison authorities. The Supreme Court has said that despite its repeated directives, High Courts are delaying adjudication of bail applications. With the exception of an intervening application, all bail matters have to be decided within two weeks of being filed and all anticipatory bail within six weeks, the top court has reiterated again recently. This order came after an anticipatory bail application was kept pending for judgment for one year by a High Court after it was initially heard. Though bail is a temporary privilege by definition, the nonuniformity in its interpretation has, sometimes, led to chaos. Despite the sheer number of bail applications filed before them, High Courts should evolve a mechanism for their speedy disposal because Section 436 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) defines bailable offences and the underlying principle behind granting of bails by courts, as "personal liberty". Freedom and personal liberty are fundamental rights of a citizen as laid down by Article 21 of the Constitution. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

POLITICAL ALLEGATIONS

Sir — Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said that the Union Home Minister once had termed the National People's Party (NPP) led Meghalaya government "the most corrupt" in the country but later allied with them. Addressing the public in Ri Bhoi district, Rahul Gandhi said, "Meghalaya is not ruled from here but from Delhi. This is not acceptable. The nation is facing the highest levels of unemployment in the last 40 years. Rahul Gandhi reiterated his attacks on Prime Minister Narendra

Coffee plantation in Odisha



Additionally, women's Self-help groups will be involved in raising coffee nurseries which will benefit more than fifty thousand farm families in the region. Recently, Coffee has emerged as one of the major production from Odisha due to its agro-friendly climate and support from the state machinery. The coffee produced in the state has already gained international recognition. Coffee is a profitable commercial crop because of its growing popularity in the market. Good quality coffee production on a large scale will make a scope for export to other countries. This scheme will encourage the tribal people of the area to engage in these activities and earn profits. This will boost the economy, tourism, and scientific education in these six districts. If distribution and marketing are done properly Odisha's coffee will spread more and get worldwide recognition through this initiative. **Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal**

The Odisha state cabinet has approved a coffee plantation for sustainable livelihood (CPSC) scheme with an outlay of 1,144 crore. Under this scheme, Coffee plantations in the state will be extended to one lakh from ten thousand acres. The scheme will be implemented in the six districts in the state. Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Keonjhar, and Gajapati will benefit from this scheme.

Modi for "not visiting Manipur" and said that the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party has destroyed the idea of Manipur. Politics of hatred and violence have torn the state apart. Prime Minister after so many months has not bothered to visit Manipur. Is Manipur, not an Indian state? Congress leader said. Earlier in February last year, the Union Home Minister had said that the Meghalaya government was filling its coffers with poor people's money and said that it is the most corrupt government in the country. BJP and NPP were partners in the outgoing government but fought the assembly polls separately. After the Assembly poll results, the BJP came into coalition with the NPP by extending support. With this, it is a double standard game which is unfortunate. **Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai**

(WEF) summit in Davos, fell short with elaborate discussions and superficial intentions. Conversations about war-inflicted economic crisis barely captured the scenes. The looming threats of Greenwashing, market volatility, erosion of the tax base through havens, and other critical economic issues were largely neglected. While the IMF anticipates a substantial economic downturn in 2024 alongside mounting debts, the Davos meeting appears devoid of any therapy. Furthermore, the persistent notion that 'Europe's problems are the world's problems' continues to resonate, disadvantaging the ailing Global South. Following a lacklustre COP28 and now the WEF, the desertification of multilateralism is paving the way for the return of Cold War-era bloc politics. **Abhisek Panil | Bhubaneswar**

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FIRST COLUMN

TO STAY BLESSED,
TAKE SHELTER IN GOD

Those who take shelter in God and have faith in him are under His protection



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let us examine in detail some of them. Money is most sought after by almost one and all. Is it a shelter? Yes, it provides material objects, comforts in life, etc. But are these sufficient for quality of life? If they were, rich people would be peaceful, happy and secure. Are they? Because money cannot buy these. One has to go to God for them. One has to do spiritual activities to please God. This is the way the System works. Let us agree that money has an important role in our lives, but it cannot be our shelter. By the way, God can provide what we lack and provide security for what we have, if we remain in His shelter. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.22)The next most sought-after shelter is a sense of enjoyment like eating tasty food, watching something exciting, etc. These are fine if they are appropriate for our needs. (6.17) Otherwise, as the verse tells us our troubles will not reduce. Troubles there must be in this world, an impermanent place of miseries. (8.15) Rather our sufferings will increase manifold if we seek shelter in sex, considered the highest sense of pleasure. It must always be within the limit of dharma to be acceptable. (7.11) Then, there are many, who take shelter in work. They are called workaholics. A new addiction has arrived. These are our cell phones. People are forever checking it for messages, and information, and what happens? The Internet takes charge of us through provocative ads and promises of easy money. One corrupts and the other fools. It has become a pandemic, far from being a shelter.



Everyone is looking for security, beginning with a toddler. He gets it from his parents, especially from his mother. One can understand this, as this is nature's arrangement. But as we grow, we need to make the right choices. We don't; some of us seek from influential persons, and now bogus gurus. Everything has a price, but people generally don't seek it from God, where it is best available. Why? They are not prepared to pay its price, which is to surrender to the Almighty. If one does, troubles will come and go, because God will help. (18.58) Otherwise, they will take their time, as destined. Yes, many turn to God in distress. (7.16) God appreciates it also. (7.18) But again one has to deserve such help by pleasing God by spiritual acts. (18.65)But the modern man chooses to sleep over proper action. Sleeping pills have become quite common. Eat them and everything will be fine. Does it become? Seeking shelter in greed is a common refuge, fueled by the prevailing materialism that drives the pursuit of quick wealth. However, success is not solely determined by greed or hard work; destiny plays a crucial role. Even the poorest work diligently, challenging the notion that wealth is solely a result of effort. The human psyche often grapples with negative emotions such as anger and revenge, leading to a loss of inner peace. The alternative proposed is seeking refuge in God. Amidst life's uncertainties, relying on God's protection is advocated to avoid potential misfortunes. Actively seeking shelter from God instills confidence and invites abundant grace into one's life. Surrendering to God's guidance in the spiritual journey attracts positive fortune, transcending the challenges posed by human nature. Although the decision may contradict inherent tendencies, spiritual intelligence can overcome such resistance. Associating with spiritually wise individuals in satsang proves beneficial in navigating this transformative journey. Once embarked upon, the spiritual path becomes irreversible, guided by the munificence of God.


(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Combating the deepfake menace necessitates stern legal measures

Securing truth in the age of synthetic realities is more difficult than ever before. It must be curbed before it becomes unmanageable



SIDDHARTH MISHRA



BHAWNA SHARMA

pening frequently, it can be easily predicted that deepfake technology may achieve an unprecedented level of realism

– blurring the lines between real and synthetic. These incidents also reflect a major concern about the misuse of deepfake technologies in the spread of disinformation and misinformation that is directly hitting the informational security of society at large. In layperson's language, deepfakes are images or videos of a person's likeness or other related things that have been digitally altered in a bid to misrepresent what happened in reality such as facial expression manipulation, face morphing, face swap, face generation and full body puppetry. The synthetic media not only inflict individual harm but have a profound impact on organisations, governments, and society at large. The deleterious effects of deepfakes transcend mere personal

consequences, encompassing psychological, financial, and societal realms; they erode the trust that underpins organizations, sow doubt in the halls of justice, and may even threaten the foundations of democracies. Imagine a world where your carefully crafted reputation can be shattered in an instant by a fabricated video. Where companies become pawns in blackmail schemes orchestrated through manipulated footage. Where legal proceedings lose their legitimacy as the authenticity of evidence becomes suspect. This dystopian reality is no longer fiction; it's the chilling consequences of deepfakes. The IT Rules 2021 provides a complete list of prohibited content under rule 3(1)(b). Intermediaries are already

bound to act in case of removals, blocking, or complaints regarding any deepfake content posted on their platform. There are speculations that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is soon to come up with new provisions under the IT Rules, 2021 to curb the prevalence of deepfakes. As per the author's understanding, to restrain the spread of deepfakes on the intermediary's platform, there are two ways in which IT Rules, 2021 may be amended. First, to define 'deepfake' and put it in the prohibited category of content under rule 3(1)(B) of the IT Rules, 2021. By doing this, automatically all the other due diligence requirements on intermediaries will apply in case of deepfakes as well. However, the

major consequences of deepfake, misinformation, and impersonation are already included in the prohibited category of the list. Deepfake is emerging as a service company. The increased demand for deepfakes has also led to the establishment of several companies that deliver deepfakes as a product or even online service. These services are intended for use by marketers to personalise videos, eliminating the need to record a video for each recipient. Essentially, these services make producing a deepfake video as easy as editing text. Hence, the most appropriate and effective way to restrain deepfake is to directly regulate these companies that provide such deepfake technology. Second, deepfake may be regulated under

the proposed Digital India Act by introducing a new class of online platforms, i.e., AI Synthesis Online Platforms (as the name may be called), and providing separate rules for their compliance. The proposed Digital India Act may include a few obligations for AI Synthesis Online Platforms. First, requiring them to ensure adherence to all the existing cyber and data protection legislation in India. Second, such online platforms, in order to ensure transparency, should provide information regarding the number of users of such platforms, their platform's management rules, adopted technologies, tools deployed, and any other relevant information. Third, they may be obliged to deploy technological tools for recognizing false and damaging information created using services of the platform, implement a real-identity information authentication system, and adopt a review mechanism of synthetic data. It should also be obligatory on such platforms to tag or label those contents that are generated by using deepfake technologies. In view of the rising deepfake incidents and the government's apparent concern for the same, it is probable that we may not have to wait long for the necessary regulations as well as the Digital India Act to come into existence.

(Siddhartha is Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi and Bhawna is a techno-legal policy professional; views are personal)



Has the Non-Aligned Movement lost its plot?



Acknowledging the paradoxical essence of the Non-Aligned Movement, let us openly recognise the recent assembly's inherent absurdity

Following the opulent Davos event, the World Economic Forum of Klaus Schwab, gathered by Western elites, scrutinized topics ranging from the implications of AI to the looming threat of mysterious Disease X, a surge of anti-Netanyahu sentiments emerged in Kampala. This sentiment was notably expressed by members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during their gathering. The choice of location held historical significance, situated around 53 kilometres from the site of Operation Entebbe, where Benjamin Netanyahu's brother tragically lost his life almost five decades ago. Over the years, Kampala and Entebbe have undergone transformative changes, witnessing the rise and fall of rulers. Yoweri Museveni, Africa's fourth-longest-serving head of state, now leads NAM, a leader with a complex history, having ousted the tyrannical regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote and faced serious accusations of crimes against humanity. The irony lies in Museveni now advocating for justice in Gaza and accountability against Israel, encapsulating the conflicting ideologies within NAM.

Addressing the paradoxical nature of NAM, let's candidly acknowledge the absurdity of its recent gathering, which diverted attention from pressing global issues. While many member states grapple with internal conflicts and political chaos, the organization indulges in verbose deliberations. Though we are passing a moment of need, it is crucial to refrain from romanticizing historical achievements and confront current failures. Instead of lamenting only the plight of Palestinians, perhaps NAM should focus on alleviating the tangible struggles of its member countries. If they genuinely wanted to help Palestinians, redirecting financial resources towards essentials such as drinking water and medicine could have a more meaningful impact. Providing victims with necessities rather than holding conferences to indulge in rhetoric would be a more effective use of public funds, emphasizing the organization's responsibility and accountability. Despite its historical significance, the NAM finds itself in a state of decline, resembling a fading relic. Decades have passed since the departure of its original leaders, leaving the organization with waning influence. The current members show little intent to breathe new life into this slowly deteriorating entity. It is essential to grasp the reality that the heyday of NAM is long gone. The organization, which once played a pivotal role, now struggles for relevance. The lack of a cohesive vision and commitment among member countries hastens NAM's natural demise. The time has come for a critical reassessment of its purpose and the genuine dedication of member nations to its survival. The architects of the NAM were visionary leaders from Europe, Asia, and Africa, including Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), and Sukarno (Indonesia). These eminent figures envisioned not only the destiny of the Third World and developing nations but also recognized the crucial role of international peace and security for humanity. Their collective insight emphasized that freedom from superpower rivalry, the cessation of colonialism and imperialism, and global peace required collaboration, not division. The founders aimed to shield newly inde-



DESPITE ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, THE NAM FINDS ITSELF IN A STATE OF DECLINE, RESEMBLING A FADING RELIC. DECADES HAVE PASSED SINCE THE DEPARTURE OF ITS ORIGINAL LEADERS, LEAVING THE ORGANISATION WITH WANING INFLUENCE

pendent countries from the pressures of bloc politics. However, what began as a utopian dream evolved into a stagnant organization, a consequence of strategic missteps rather than a natural progression. This year's NAM conference in Uganda, like its predecessors, appeared incapable of achieving substantive outcomes beyond consuming time and resources ostensibly devoted to addressing political crises. It is undeniable that this floundering organization lacks a viable future, and the persistent squandering of public funds yields no palpable benefits for human development. Despite being recognized as the largest multi-state organization after the United Nations, the NAM's discussions on global challenges have been confined to mere oratory, lacking the capacity to resolve crises. The platform, once rooted in the Bandung Principles, has devolved into a sanctuary for vacuous communication, funded by the hard-earned money of citizens in member countries. Since the inception of NAM, the so-called third-world and developing countries have witnessed numerous military conflicts, often initiated and sustained without hindrance by the West and the Soviet Union. The territories of NAM member countries became pawns in the geopolitical objectives of these power blocs, with ruling elites aligning with either the Soviet or Western camps for political survival. Noteworthy conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, the Soviet-Afghan War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, the Rwandan genocide, the Kosovo War, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Syrian civil war, and the Yemeni Civil War unfolded in the Global South. The NAM's failure to collectively and responsibly implement its principles contributed to this tragic legacy, as accountability and responsibility could have prevented

such widespread suffering. Sadly, attempting to resuscitate a moribund enterprise inevitably invites chaos, yielding neither renewed hope nor the impactful contributions promised at its inception. This is the predicament in which the NAM finds itself, failing to live up to its proclaimed principles while catering to the interests of a privileged few. No amount of picturesque portrayal can conceal the stark reality, as the structure of NAM stands as a façade masking inherent falsehood and decay. During this year's conference, leaders reiterated the narrative of member states breaking free from colonialism but grappling with new forms of inequality and hegemony, conveniently neglecting the role of their own hegemonic politics and corruption in fostering these disparities. As discussed at the conference, in the era of globalization, leaders perceive economic concentrations, while the rest of the world sees mere markets or resources. The pandemic underscored the detachment of the smallest needs of these countries from distant production centres. However, amidst politically correct and universalist narratives that neglect traditions, the conference amounted to little more than eloquent words in a spurious sermon, devoid of constructive significance and laden with political hypocrisy. While the dream of a multipolar world is commendable, its realization remains elusive without collective agreement. Proposals for economic decentralization and regional production lack substance if member states, lacking capital management, persist in dependence on Western financial markets and facilitate capital outflow to Western countries through money laundering, rendering the pursuit of economic independence a delusion. Changing the global order necessitates both practical and sincere measures, including the establishment of regional economic hubs, resilient

supply chains, predictable mobility, and reliable data flows. Person-centred policies promoting sustainable lifestyles and digital public infrastructure exemplify the potential benefits of technology. Prioritizing relationships while respecting sovereignty and ensuring viability, especially in addressing food, energy, and health security, as well as promoting women-led development, remains critical. However, since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the foundational principles of the Non-Aligned Nations were shattered. Attempts to recreate the movement faced a lack of consensus among member state leaders. Instead, these states formed selective ties to advance political goals, rendering the "non-aligned" policy a mere pseudo-vocabulary. Unfortunately, leaders within the movement engaged in arbitrary activities, using the platform to cover up abuses rather than addressing them. As the old world order gave way to a new multipolar reality post-Cold War, the NAM struggled to adapt to emerging dynamics. Instead of collectively facing the challenges, many leaders prioritized narrow political goals, hindering the movement's relevance in the changing world. Faced with the need to redefine its purpose and adapt to new challenges, the movement encountered various forms of sabotage and unrest. The failure to interpret challenges during this transitional period affected several organizations within the movement. Ironically, many leaders refuse to acknowledge the end of this history, preventing the birth of a redesigned and reinvented global order that could contribute to achieving a multipolar world. Consequently, the idea of a multipolar world remains but a daydream.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rupee settles 2 paise higher at 83.13 against US dollar

The rupee stayed range-bound and settled 2 paise (provisional) higher at 83.13 against the US dollar on Wednesday. Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar supported the rupee while rising crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows capped gains. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.15 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.16 and a high of 83.11 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.13 against the dollar, higher by 2 paise (provisional) from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee had settled at 83.15 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as the US Dollar has softened ahead of PMI data and gains in the Japanese Yen. Markets expect PMI data to be better than the previous month's reading. However, concerns over the Red Sea region and elevated crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside."



EPACK Durable IPO gets 16.37 times subscription on final day

The initial share sale of EPACK Durable was subscribed 16.37 times on the final day of subscription on Wednesday. EPACK Durable manufactures room air conditioners and small household appliances. The Initial Public Offering (IPO) received bids for 32,70,94,495 shares as against 1,99,77,615 shares on offer, as per NSE data. The category for Non-Institutional Investors (NIIs) got subscribed 28.10 times while the quota for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) received 25.50 times subscription. The portion meant for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) fetched 6.29 times subscription. The IPO has a fresh issue of Rs 400 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 1,04,37,047 equity shares. The price band was fixed at Rs 218-230 a share. EPACK Durable raised Rs 192 crore from anchor investors on January 18. At the upper end of the price band, the public issue is expected to mobilise Rs 640 crore. Founded in 2002.



Zee Entertainment moves NCLT against Sony for calling off merger

Zee Entertainment on Wednesday said it has approached the National Company Law Tribunal against Sony's decision to call off the proposed merger. Besides, it has also initiated appropriate legal action to contest Sony's claims of USD 90 million (around Rs 748.5 cr) as a termination fee, for which the Japanese firm has moved the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC). In a regulatory filing, Zee Entertainment Ltd (ZEEL) said it has asked Culver Max and Bangla Entertainment PVT Ltd (BEPL) to immediately withdraw the termination and confirm that they will perform their obligations to give effect to and implement the merger scheme, sanctioned by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). The company has approached the Mumbai bench of NCLT, seeking directions to implement the merger scheme, it added. Further, the company has initiated appropriate.



Govt allows direct listing of Indian firms on international exchanges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday permitted the direct listing of securities by Indian companies on international exchanges of GIFT IFSC to boost foreign investments.

The Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) in the Ministry of Finance has amended Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) Rules and notified the 'Direct Listing of Equity Shares of Companies Incorporated in India on International Exchanges Scheme'.

Also, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has issued Companies (Listing of Equity Shares in Permissible Jurisdictions) Rules, 2024.



On July 28 last year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made an announcement regarding the direct listing of Indian Companies at GIFT-IFSC exchanges in the first phase.

"These, together, provide an overarching regulatory

framework to enable public Indian companies to issue and list their shares in permitted international exchanges," the finance ministry said in a statement.

It further said the initiative will boost foreign investment flows, unlock growth opportu-

nities and broaden the investor base for Indian companies.

As of now, the framework allows unlisted public Indian companies to list their shares on an international exchange.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is in the process of issuing operational guidelines for listed public Indian companies.

International stock exchanges at GIFT-IFSC - India International Exchange and NSE International Exchange have been, currently, prescribed as permitted stock exchanges.

These exchanges are under the regulatory supervision of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA).

Govt clears coal-to-SNG project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved setting up of a coal-to-SNG (Synthetic Natural Gas) project through a joint venture between Coal India and GAIL, and a coal-to-ammonium nitrate project through a venture between CIL and BHEL. The decision was taken at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During a media briefing, Union Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said, "We have created a joint venture between Coal India and GAIL... and we have also created a joint venture between CIL and BHEL."

WTO'S MEET IN ABU DHABI

India to press for two-tier dispute resolution system

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will press for the two-tier dispute resolution system at the World Trade Organization (WTO) during the ministerial-level meeting in Abu Dhabi next month, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

The official said that the country would also reiterate that the automatic binding, rule-based and independent nature of the dispute settlement body should be restored. Developed countries like the US have been advocating for changes in the system, arguing that the present dispensation is rigid.

The US had earlier stated



that over time, despite settlement it has become synonymous with litigation, which is prolonged, expensive and contentious.

"The two-tier system should not be compromised. It is essential," the official said.

The issue will come up in the 13th ministerial conference (MC) of the WTO in Abu Dhabi on February 26-29. MC is the highest decision-making body of the WTO.

Besides monitoring global exports and imports.



'Firms must to submit bank details to GST officers within 30 days'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Businesses will be required to submit valid bank account details to GST authorities within 30 days of grant of GST registration to avoid suspension, the GST Network has said.

In an advisory to GST-registered businesses, GSTN said all registered taxpayers are required under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) law to furnish details of their bank account/s within 30 days of the grant of registration or before the due date of filing GSTR-1/IFF, whichever is earlier.

GSTR-1 filed by a company contains statement of outward supplies, while Invoice Furnishing Facility (IFF) can be availed by businesses opting for Quarterly Returns with Monthly Payment (QRMP) scheme under GST.

"Taxpayers are therefore advised to promptly furnish their bank account details, who have not provided it so far if 30 days period is shortly going to expire to avoid disruption in business activities

and the subsequent suspension of GSTIN," it said.

GSTN further said that a new functionality is being developed as per which taxpayers whose registration is suspended for non-submission of bank account details would be intimated through Form REG-31.

Such businesses would also be debarred from filing any further GSTR-1/IFF.

If taxpayers update their bank account details in response to the intimation in Form REG-31, the suspension will be automatically revoked.

If the bank account details are not updated even after 30 days of issuance of Form REG-31, the registration after suspension may also be taken up for cancellation process by the tax officer, GSTN said.

The GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising finance ministers from all states, had in July decided that businesses which do not furnish details of a valid bank account will be barred from filing GSTR-1 or using IFF.

Bilateral trade between India and Russia likely to increase

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Bilateral trade between India and Russia was at USD 50 billion in the last financial year and is expected to increase this year, said Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, here on Wednesday.

The Eastern Maritime Corridor between the ports on the east coast of India and the Far East region of Russia promises "immense potential" to unlock new trade opportunities, he said.

The minister was speaking at a conference on 'Operationalising Eastern Maritime Corridor' which was attended by a delegation from Moscow led by A Yu Bobrakov, Deputy Minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic of the Russian Federation, among others.

While welcoming the visiting delegates, Sonowal said the India-Russia partnership is "strong and steady" building upon strategic convergence, geo-political interests and mutually beneficial cooperation.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains engaged with President Putin through telephonic conversation. The latest discussion took place on January 15," he said.

India and Russia continue to interact at the Ministerial and official levels; most recently, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had a very successful visit to Russia in December 2023, he said.

"Our bilateral partnership



While welcoming the visiting delegates, Sonowal said the India-Russia partnership is "strong and steady" building upon strategic convergence, geo-political interests and mutually beneficial cooperation

has expanded to become truly multi-faceted and encompasses cooperation in military, security, science and technology. Our bilateral trade has registered rapid growth in the last financial year, where it amounted to USD 50 billion, and it is likely to be even more this year," he said.

However, the minister did not reveal any figures on how much trade is expected to grow between the two countries.

Observing that the 'Eastern Maritime Corridor' is an example of the 'special' and 'privileged' nature of the ties between the two countries, Sonowal recalled his visit to Vladivostok in 2023 to take

part in the 8th Eastern Economic Forum.

A big advantage of the Eastern Maritime Corridor is the significant reduction in the time to transport cargo between India and Far East Russia by up to 16 days and a significant reduction of the distance by up to 40 per cent, he said.

Elaborating, he said, "Presently, the distance between Mumbai Port and the Port of St Petersburg, Russia by the Western Sea Route via the Suez Canal is 8,675 nautical miles or 16,066 km whereas the distance from Chennai Port to Vladivostok Port via the Eastern Maritime Corridor is only 5,647 Nautical Miles or 10,458 km.



Leasing of retail space hit record 7.1 mn sq ft

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leasing of retail spaces in shopping malls and high street locations rose 48 per cent to 7.1 million square feet last year across eight major cities on higher demand from retailers, according to CBRE.

The leasing stood at 4.8 million square feet in the previous year.

"The retail sector recorded an all-time high leasing in 2023, touching a historic level of 7.1 million square feet across eight cities," CBRE said in a statement.

India has emerged as one of the most promising consumer markets, indicating heightened retailers' interest in new setup, expansion and upgradation of stores, the consultant said.

"Demand for retail spaces in recently completed malls played a significant role in shaping the overall retail space occupancy during the year, and nearly 30 per cent share in total absorption was led by primary leasing in these malls," it added.

BATTERY UNITS UNDER PLI SCHEME

Govt invites bids



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday announced re-bidding under a PLI scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC) to select bidders to set up mega battery manufacturing facilities of 10 GWh capacity with a budgetary outlay of Rs 3,620 crore.

Documents for the global tender are available online from Wednesday. The bid due date is April 22, 2024 and bids shall be opened on April 23, 2024.

PLI scheme 'National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage' promotes manufacturing of technology-agnostic ACC in India.

"With this bidding process, the prospective applicants can submit their bids to set up domestic manufacturing facility for ACC, which will help them qualify for incentives under PLI ACC scheme," the heavy industries ministry stated.

The ministry promotes the development and growth of three sectors namely capital goods, automobile and heavy electrical equipment in the country.

Documents for the global tender are available online from Wednesday. The bid due date is April 22

Union Minister of Heavy Industries Mahendra Nath Pandey said the ministry is supporting the growth of India's manufacturing capabilities and exports in the automobile and automobile component sector and is fully committed to taking forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of a self-reliant and developed India.

In May 2021, the Cabinet had approved the PLI ACC scheme for achieving manufacturing capacity of 50 Giga Watt hours (GWh) of ACC with an outlay of Rs 18,100 crore.

The first round of bidding was concluded in March 2022, and three companies were allocated a total capacity of 30 GWh, and the programme agreement with selected companies was signed in July 2022.

RELIGARE ENTERPRISES ON CCI NOD

Approval for stake buy does not give Burmans 'clean chit'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid ongoing feud with the Burman family, Religare Enterprises on Wednesday claimed fair trade regulator CCI's approval for additional stake purchase by the Burman family entities does not "give a clean chit to the acquirers" with respect to certain alleged competition law violations.

On Tuesday, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) approved the acquisition of 31.27 per cent of additional stake in Religare Enterprises by four entities of Dabur India promoter Burman family.

The approval came against the backdrop of the intense feud between Religare Enterprises and the Burman family over taking control of



the company.

The release issued by the CCI regarding the stake purchase clearly stipulates that the "approval is without prejudice to the proceedings that may be initiated under Section 43A, 44 and/or 45 of the Competition Act, 2002", a Religare Enterprises spokesper-

son said.

The spokesperson said it was in connection with the combination notice issued by the acquirers forming part of the Burman Group in relation to the open offer to the shareholders of Religare Enterprises.

These sections pertain to powers of CCI to impose

penalties for non-furnishing of information or submission of false information regarding combinations.

"The CCI continues to look into this violation and clearly the approval does not give a clean chit to the acquirers for the violations" under certain sections of the competition law, the spokesperson claimed.

Meanwhile, the Burman Family spokesperson said, "the approval from CCI is a reaffirmation of our commitment to Religare Enterprises Limited (REL) and its stakeholders. It also validates our vision for REL, which is aligned with the long-term interests of all the stakeholders."

The family remains committed to seamlessly completing the open offer and directing REL towards sustained success,

the spokesperson said.

"We take this opportunity to urge the Board to act in a neutral manner and not solely at the behest of certain members of the senior management," the Burman family spokesperson added.

According to Religare spokesperson, it is to be noted that the company had addressed a communication to CCI highlighting the apparent inter-connection of the previous acquisition of 7.56 per cent shareholding in REL made by Purn Associates Private Limited, VIC Enterprises Private Limited and MB Finmart Private Limited of the Acquirer Group on August 16, 2023. This transactions was notified by the acquiring group companies to the CCI pursuant to their notice dated October 19, 2023.

PROCUREMENT OF 14 FAST PATROL VESSELS

MoD seals Rs 1,070 cr deal with MDL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The defence ministry on Wednesday sealed a Rs 1,070 crore deal with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) for procurement of 14 fast patrol vessels for the Indian Coast Guard.

The multi-role fast patrol vessels will be indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by MDL and will be delivered in 63 months.

Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with MDL Mumbai on January 24 for acquisition of 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs) for the Indian Coast Guard. The value of the contract is Rs 1,070 crore," the ministry said.

"Along with several high-tech advanced features and equipment, these FPVs will be



equipped with multipurpose drones, wirelessly-controlled remote water rescue craft lifebuoy and AI capability," it said. It said the FPVs will play a critical role in surveillance and anti-smuggling operations.

"The acquisition of these FPVs is aimed to boost Indian Coast Guard's capability and reinforces the increased focus

of the government towards maritime security," the ministry said in a statement.

"In line with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', the contract will boost the nation's indigenous shipbuilding capability, bolstering maritime economic activities and foster growth of ancillary industries especially the MSME Sector," it said.

ARBAAZ KHAN JOINS FORCES WITH NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI IN CINEMAWALA PRODUCTIONS' *SECTION 108*

In a significant development for the Bollywood film industry, Actor Arbaaz Khan is set to grace the silver screen alongside Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Regina Cassandra in the upcoming cinematic offering, *Section 108*. Arbaaz Khan, renowned for his versatile acting prowess and impactful performances, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "This is a great script and also the first movie that has been offered to me post-marriage. It's a fantastic role. In fact, the team for *Section 108* is really energetic and amazing! Also, the best part is that we discussed it, and we started immediately shooting for the same. Really looking forward to this one."

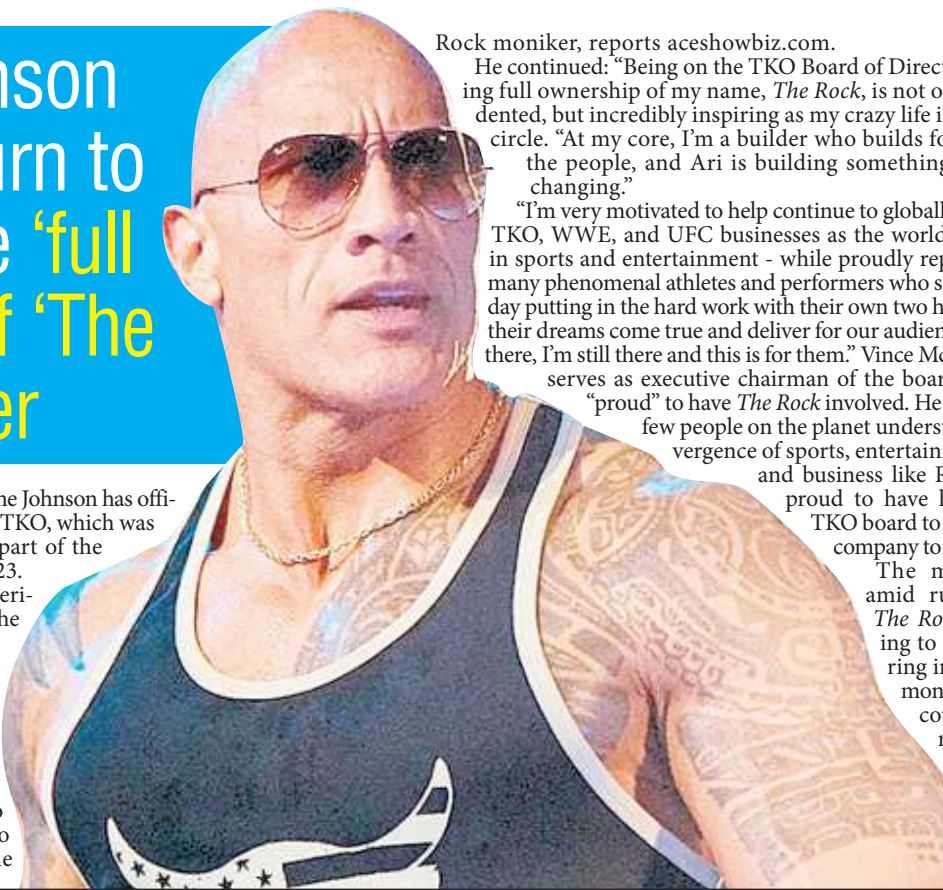
Taking on the role of a distinguished business tycoon, Arbaaz Khan will infuse the character with a blend of sophistication and charisma that is sure to captivate audiences. The film, currently in its second and final schedule, is already set shooting with Arbaaz Khan on January 22nd in Lonavala. The production team is thrilled to have him on board, recognising his ability to elevate the narrative with his on-screen presence. As *Section 108* progresses through its final schedule, the excitement surrounding this cinematic venture continues to build, promising audiences an engaging and star-studded experience. Produced by Cinemawala Productions and directed by Rasikh Khan, *Section 108* is poised to be a noteworthy addition to the cinematic landscape. Following this venture, the founders of Cinemawala Productions, Ankit Pandey and Mahvash, have lined up another project in the pipeline – *Gulaab Pandey*, directed by Seema Pahwah and penned by Afroz Alam.



Dwayne Johnson confirms return to WWE, to take 'full ownership' of 'The Rock' moniker

Hollywood star and wrestling icon Dwayne Johnson has officially joined the board of directors for TKO, which was formed by parent company Endeavor as part of the UFC and WWE merger in September, 2023. Johnson will now bring "decades of experience in live entertainment and sports to the board."

"My grandfather, High Chief Peter Maivia, and my dad, Rocky 'Soulman' Johnson, would've never thought this day would come. Which is why I'm very humbled to have a seat at the table that has decades of history and family legacy for me. A table that my family helped to build," he said in a statement. The deal also sees the star take "full ownership" of The



Rock moniker, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#). He continued: "Being on the TKO Board of Directors, and taking full ownership of my name, *The Rock*, is not only unprecedented, but incredibly inspiring as my crazy life is coming full circle. "At my core, I'm a builder who builds for and serves the people, and Ari is building something truly game changing."

"I'm very motivated to help continue to globally expand our TKO, WWE, and UFC businesses as the worldwide leaders in sports and entertainment - while proudly representing so many phenomenal athletes and performers who show up every day putting in the hard work with their own two hands to make their dreams come true and deliver for our audiences. I've been there, I'm still there and this is for them." Vince McMahon, who serves as executive chairman of the board at TKO, is "proud" to have *The Rock* involved. He added, "Very few people on the planet understand the convergence of sports, entertainment, media, and business like Rock. We are proud to have him join the TKO board to help take our company to new heights."

The move comes amid rumours that *The Rock* is preparing to return to the ring in the coming months to face his cousin and current world champion, Roman Reigns, in a dream match.

what's brewing?

Mark Ruffalo hid brain tumour diagnosis from wife until treatment

Hollywood star Mark Ruffalo's wife believed he was joking when he told her he had a brain tumour. The actor told the news of his potentially fatal condition to his partner Sunrise 'Sunny' Coigney a few days after she gave birth to their first child in 2001. "When I told Sunny about it, at first she thought I was joking, and then she just burst into tears and said, 'I always knew you were gonna die young,'" he told the *Smartless* podcast, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#). Ruffalo discovered he had a tumour 23 years ago when actress Sunrise, 51, was around nine-and-a-half months pregnant with her and actor's son Keen, who is now 22 and arrived in June 2001. Ruffalo added he made the decision to wait until after the boy's birth to break the news of his condition. He said, "I was just like, 'I can't,' she's already like, 'Oh God, him again, does everything gotta be about him?' And so I just couldn't." Ruffalo also said a week after his baby arrived he had to meet a neurologist and figure out a plan for his treatment, so he told Sunrise the night before his appointment. He found out he was suffering a benign vestibular schwannoma in 2001 after he



had an "intense" dream that he had a brain tumour. Ruffalo said, "I woke up probably around 3 am, and I just had this crazy dream, and it wasn't like any other dream I ever had. "It was just like, you have a brain tumour, and it wasn't even a voice it was just pure knowledge - you have a brain tumour, and you have to deal with it immediately." Ruffalo had no symptoms except for an ear infection before the tumour was diagnosed when he went to the doctor for a CT scan. He added, "The nurse calls the doctor up, I could hear them talking in the other room. She comes in, she's kinda like a zombie and she says, 'You have a mass behind your left ear the size of a golf ball, and we don't know what it is. We can't tell until it's biopsied.' " Even though the tumour was benign, Ruffalo had a surgery to remove the mass that left him deaf in his left ear. He said, "(I am) completely deaf in one ear, and when I woke up, the left side of my face was totally paralysed. I couldn't even close my eye. I was talking out the side of my mouth." Ruffalo's paralysis disappeared after around a year, but he still suffers hearing loss.

RAM JANMABHOOMI TEMPLE: The Return of A Splendid Sun to premiere on January 25 on JioCinema

JioCinema is all set to premiere the iconic documentary *Ram Janmabhoomi Temple: The Return of a Splendid Sun* on 25th January. Presented by Dilip Piramal and Amish Tripathi, written by Anirban Bhattacharya and Pranav Chaturvedi, the documentary takes the viewers through the history of the sacred land of Ayodhya and the events that marked the revolutionary phenomenon. The trailblazing documentary traverses through the nuances of the events unfolded in the unconquerable city that became the heart of the civilization, laced with the purest feeling of the devotion towards Maryada Purushottam Ram. Through the

eyes of Amish Tripathi, the documentary starts with throwing light on the life of Lord Ram and reveals the story of the demolition of the temple in the 16th Century. What follows are series of events that capture the conflicts and landmark decisions, along with insightful anecdotes from the locals, as well as from the prominent personalities from various fields. This momentous journey continues to live in the hearts of millions across the world. Tune in to JioCinema on 25th January to experience the impactful documentary on the construction of Ram Temple, titled *Ram Janmabhoomi Temple: The Return of A Splendid Sun*.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



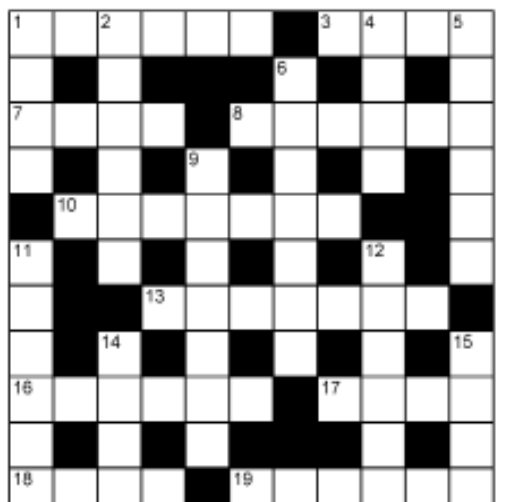
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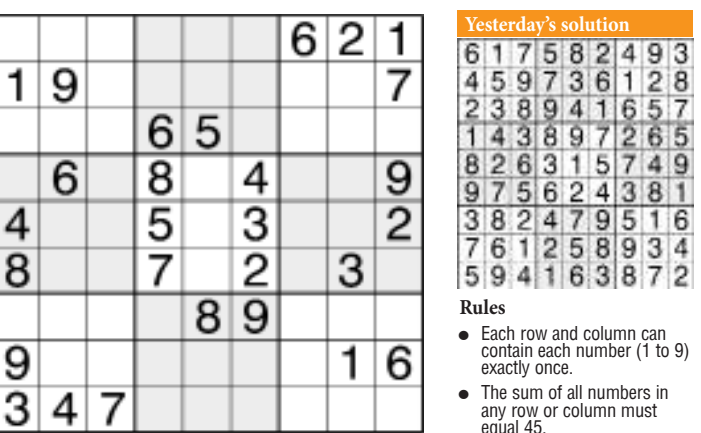
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



ACROSS

- Tired and yawning
- Join together
- Opposite of fast
- Complete quiet
- Assistant
- Frightens
- A fruit with a stone
- Unlock

DOWN

- Unwell
- Stretch outwards
- A large area of water surrounded by land



*(The author is Dr. Sushma Gopalan,
a Child Psychologist - Child Life
Specialist, Pediatrics & Neonatology at
Aster CMI, Hospital, Bangalore)*

INDIA SPINBALL VS ENGLAND BAZBALL

Rohit men bank on spin for first strike

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

India's unalloyed dominance at home over the last 12 years will be put through its most unique examination till date when Rohit Sharma's side faces a trend-defying England in the first match of what promises to be a stirring five-Test series from Thursday. No team has been as invincible as India at home since their 1-2 defeat against the Three Lions led by Alastair Cook in 2012, stitching together a bull run of 16 successive series wins, including seven series sweeps. If one further breaks down the stats, India have lost just three Tests out of 44 they played in their own backyard in this phase, and this is a power walk even beyond the all-conquering West Indies in the '80s or Australia of the turn of the century. Several factors have contributed to this astonishing run over the last decade, including favourable pitches,



bowlers who knew how to exploit those tracks and batters who churned out runs like popcorn from a vending machine. But two players have stood head and shoulders above the

rest in these conquests — off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja. From Thursday, the Ash-Jaddu duet will be on show here at the RGI Stadium,

where the pitch is expected to turn and grip as the match moves towards its conclusion. England already have a taste of what these two can do from their past visits here, and they will be worried, particularly

about Ashwin. The 37-year-old still retains the burning zest of a 17-year-old to keep improving his craft and since 2012, Ashwin has grabbed 283 wickets from 46 Tests averaging a shade

over 19. Jadeja might often get viewed as a supporting act to Ashwin, but in his own right, the Saurashtra man is a potent threat, and his deliveries that dart on straight could confuse the batters on a turner. Jadeja has taken 191 wickets from 39 Tests in the period where Ashwin kicked up a bedlam in opposition ranks to ensure that they don't get breathing space from both the ends. Together, they have bagged 500 wickets at an average of 21. In all likelihood, India will also include a third spinner to the combination in the form of either Axar Patel or Kuldeep Yadav, with the former having a better chance at the moment. England will be aware that no amount of preparation involving scruffing up pitches some 1600 miles away in Abu Dhabi will be enough to tackle this real menace, and in that sense, they will also need to tame the demons inside their own minds.



England frustration ends as rookie spinner Bashir gets visa

PTI ■ LONDON/HYDERABAD

England's Pakistan-origin off-spinner Shoaib Bashir was on Wednesday granted visa to play in the five-match Test series against India, ending a "frustrating" wait for the visiting side whose captain Ben Stokes felt "devastated" by the delay. "Shoaib Bashir has now received his visa, and is due to travel to join up with the team in India this weekend. We're glad the situation has now been resolved," the England and Wales Cricket Board posted on its X (formerly Twitter) page on the eve of the first Test in Hyderabad. The 20-year-old rookie, who plays for Somerset in the English county, was forced to head back to England from the team's Abu Dhabi training base after a prolonged wait for visa. His family is of Pakistani heritage but Bashir was born in Surrey. The delay snowballed into a major controversy with a British government spokesperson demanding "fair" treatment for the youngster and Stokes hardly mincing words in expressing his outrage. Bashir, who is a shock inclusion in the squad with a mediocre 10 wickets from just six first-

class games, was never in contention for a place in the squad for the opening Test. "When I first found the news out in Abu Dhabi, I did say we shouldn't fly until Bash gets his visa," Stokes said in the pre-match press conference on Wednesday. "But that was a little bit tongue in cheek. I know it's a way bigger thing than doing that. That was probably just emotions around the whole thing. I'm pretty devastated that Bash has had to go through this," he added. An unnamed British government spokesperson told "ESPNcricinfo" that it wasn't the first time that citizens of Pakistani heritage faced a delay in securing Indian visas. "The specifics of this case are a matter for Shoaib Bashir and the Indian Government. But we absolutely expect India to treat British citizens fairly at all times in its visa process. "We have previously raised the issues British citizens with Pakistani heritage experience applying for visas with the Indian High Commission in London," he said. India have, so far, not commented on the matter. Stokes hoped that Bashir would be able to join the squad by the end of this week.



It was a headache to decide between Axar and Kuldeep as third spinner: Rohit

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday admitted that the team management had a tough time making the third spinner choice between Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav for the opening Test against England but hinted that the former might just have made the final cut. Behind Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, India are primed to pick a third spinner for the first Test against England, starting here from Thursday. "If the wicket has bounce or if it doesn't have bounce, he (Kuldeep) still is a factor in those types of conditions because he's got superb variations. Obviously, he is a very mature bowler now from what he was a few years back," Rohit said in the pre-match press conference. "He's not played a lot of Test cricket in India because of Ashwin and Jadeja. We've seen it in the past as well. With our middle-order (batting), in the past, a lot of us (batters) got an opportunity pretty late. "But that's the reality of it, you can't hide away from it. But yes, he's a very tempting option," he added. Although Rohit did not give away his final team for the match, he indicated that Axar might just be the one on the final team sheet. He underlined the utility of

the left-arm spinner as an all-rounder, the strongest clue about the think tank's preference for this Test at least. He dispelled the notion that Axar packs similar abilities as Jadeja and, as such, he might slip down the pecking order. "Axar, you know, with his all-round ability, gives us that batting depth. The consistency that he's shown, playing in these conditions in Test cricket, also is an important factor for us. "But it was a headache to decide who it is going to be for us. But I am not going to say who it is," said Rohit. The 36-year-old also hoped that premier spinner Ashwin will deliver one more time in conditions familiar to him. "Ashwin, obviously, we know his class, we know his quality. Every time he plays the game for us, he tends to impress all of us by a notch (higher). We do appreciate that. "Every time he's gotten an opportunity, he's made sure to put the team ahead. He's shown it for a number of years now. So, yeah, I hope this series is no different for him, and he comes out and does what he does the best," said Rohit. Ashwin is on the cusp of achieving twin milestones in his storied career. The 37-year-old off-spinner is 10 wickets shy of the 500-wicket mark in Tests and he can also complete 100 career Test matches if he plays all the five Tests in the series.

Wood is an impact builder: Stokes

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday rated Mark Wood as an "impact builder" with high pace after they decided to enter the first Test against India, starting here from Thursday, with a solitary fast bowler and three spinners. Wood was preferred over veteran James Anderson for this match, and Stokes said the Durham man's ability to touch 150 clicks tilted the scales in his favour. "Obviously, what he brings

with his high pace...he is a real impact builder. Bowling the 90 mile an hour with a reversing ball is obviously going to be very difficult to play against. He's another weapon which you can use out here with short, sharp spells, wanting him to be bowling as fast as he can and short periods. There're no worries about these long spells because that's how we're going to use him this week," said Stokes during his pre-match press meet here. So, how did the team management handle the situation of



looking over a highly-experienced bowler like Anderson? Stokes said Anderson has taken the whole episode quite professionally.

"Jimmy's incredible professional. You never know how conditions might change and what you might feel as the best setup for your team. But now we're not looking at having to manage Jimmy or his workloads or anything like that. You know, we put him in the spot because we think he's one of the best performers," said Stokes. However, Stokes asserted that he will not bowl in the series. The premier all-rounder is still recuperating from a knee surgery.

More intent expected from Indian batters against Ireland

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

India's young turks would be aiming for a more proactive approach while batting when they take on Ireland in the second group league encounter of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Thursday. While India disposed off Bangladesh by 84 runs in what turned out to be an easier than expected opener, Ireland game will provide them with an opportunity to play differently before tougher opposition comes calling during the Super Six phase starting next week. Ireland are coming into the game with a defeat against Bangladesh after beating min-

U-19 World Cup

nnows USA in the opening game. For India, more than battling the opposition, it will be about raising the bar for themselves and playing the 50-over game, keeping the modern approach in mind, compared to the early 1990s style of play. The skipper Uday Saharan, who scored 64 and top scorer Adarsh Singh (76), had strike-rates of 79 and 68 respectively, which is slightly unacceptable in modern times. That India had two terrific but vastly different left-arm

spinners Saumy Kumar Pandey and Musheer Khan doing a fantastic job for them meant coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar didn't have much to worry about. One hopes that Saumy, easily the best bowler by a distance in the first game, doesn't have too much of a shoulder problem that forced him to take a temporary break in the first game in between his first and second spells. On a slowish Bloemfontein track, Indian batters would need to rotate the strike better and also find more gaps in the Powerplay overs.

Maxwell needs to hold up his end of bargain: McDonald

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Glenn Maxwell is a vital cog in Australia's white-ball set up but he must "hold up his end of the bargain" after his "less than ideal" incident in Adelaide, said head coach Andrew McDonald. Last week Maxwell was hospitalised in Adelaide after he got too drunk after attending a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian pacer Brett Lee and passed out. He wasn't kept in the hospital for long and was discharged soon after and is now back in training. "I've spoken to Glenn, had a



good chat with him yesterday around the incident. Him looking after himself needs to be a consideration moving forward," McDonald was quoted as saying to Sydney Evening News. "We've given him the opportunity to rest and rehab in that

period of time and I suppose the lessons for him around that would be to take up his end of the bargain in that space and take care of himself." Maxwell was rested for next month's three-match ODI series against the West Indies at home and he took the opportunity to attend a golf event in Adelaide before the incident took place. "We want to see Glenn Maxwell playing cricket for the next three to four years for Australia. Can he get to the next World Cup in 2027 in South Africa? Who knows. But, he's a key player in our white-ball formats," McDonald said.

SIRAJ WARNING

If England play Bazball, the match might get over within two days



"If England play Bazball in Indian conditions, the match might get over within a day-and-a-half or two. It's not easy to hit every time here as the ball turns sometimes and straightens on other occasions," Siraj told 'Jio Cinema' on the eve of the opening Test beginning here on Thursday.

"So, I think it'll be difficult to see Bazball here. But if they play it, it'll be good for us as the match may get over quickly." Talking about his preparations for the tour, Siraj said: "On their previous tour to India, the matches were getting over quickly. In that series (in 2021) I think I played two matches.

"In the first innings of one of these, I bowled five overs and took two wickets of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow. So, the aim will be to control runs in how many ever overs I bowl. If I get wickets fine, but I'll have to stay patient and continue building pressure on the batsmen."

England are set to play five Tests against India. The 29-year-old Siraj has taken 68 wickets so far in 23 Tests since making his debut a little three years back in Australia. He said focussing on consistently hitting the right spot irrespective of the format and conditions has helped him in his career. "I bowl with the new ball, so my line and length remain the same. I don't change things whether it's the white ball or the red ball. You have to bowl that length of five-six metres, because with the new ball, you have to pitch it up to get wickets," he said.

Roach sees plenty of promise in fellow fast bowler Shamar

AP ■ BRISBANE

West Indies veteran fast bowler Kumar Roach is predicting big things for the new guy on the team, 24-year-old fellow pacer Shamar Joseph. Ahead of the second Test — a day-night match — that begins Thursday at the Gabba in Brisbane, the 35-year-old Roach has 267 Tests wickets, placing him fifth on the all-time list for the West Indies. In 2009, on his first Test tour, Roach shattered Ricky Ponting's elbow with a blazing bouncer that forced Ponting to retire hurt from the match. Joseph took 5-94 on debut in the first Test in Adelaide last week, including the wicket of Steve Smith with his first deliv-

ery. Australia won the first Test by 10 wickets in 2 1-2 days. "The best advice I can give him is to build his own legacy and understand what you want from cricket," Roach said of Joseph. "That's up to him to determine ... If it's monetary, or if it's just stats and statistics or whatever. There's gonna be a lot of distractions and he's a hot commodity right now." "The (Twenty20) franchises are a big distraction but guys still want to relish red-ball cricket. Test cricket is still in the hearts of West Indian cricketers at home. It's just about us to provide support around it." Roach says the early signs from Joseph were all positive. "He is a very confident young



man and has shared a lot of information with me. We have a lot of conversations," Roach said. "He has a good energy I love. I am happy to be around him and to be a part of his career at the start of it. Let's see how long and how good he can be at the end of it. He is destined to be good if he puts the work in." Meanwhile, Australia opener Usman Khawaja has been passed fit by Cricket Australia's medical team to play in Brisbane. And Travis Head is likely to play despite a recent positive COVID-19 test. Khawaja was struck in the head by a West Indies bouncer during Friday's short run chase in Adelaide.

The 37-year-old completed concussion assessments earlier this week, and has been approved to partner Steve Smith in Khawaja's home Gabba test. "Khawaja was assessed again today and has no symptoms of delayed concussion," a Cricket Australia spokesperson said. After a match-winning century in Adelaide, Head subsequently contracted COVID-19 but Australia captain Pat Cummins said the 30-year-old was progressing well in his recovery. Head flew to Brisbane on Tuesday but decided to rest in the team hotel rather than join the Australian team for its late afternoon training session at the Gabba.

AKANSHA RANJAN KAPOOR'S 'DESIRE TO ENTER' THE SOUTH MARKET WAS WHAT DREW HER TO MAAYAONE

Actress Akansha Ranjan Kapoor, who is all set to make her debut down South, gets candid with *The Pioneer* sharing her excitement of the debut, not thinking of a pan-India tag, camaraderie with Sundeep Kishan, and more.

SHIKHA DUGGAL

With her tollywood debut in *MaayaOne*, actor Akansha Ranjan Kapoor is prepared to embark on her journey into South Indian cinema. She will be starring opposite Tollywood actor Sundeep Kishan in the film, which is helmed by renowned director C.V. Kumar.

Currently filming her theatrical debut in Hyderabad, the debutant says, "I believe what pulled me in was how eager I was to join the South Market. It seems to have given me additional opportunities and improved my professional development even further. There is a lot of room for me as an actor given the kind of exposure Tollywood is receiving, the issues they are selecting, and the dance sequences they do. I find the success of South films to be quite fascinating. I really viewed the original and it was very ahead of its time, and I have a really big part in my debut film. This new screenplay feels so much more awesome."

"I am not thinking about the pan-India tag so much right now, taking it one day at a time to absorb what happens down south," the actress said, expressing her pleasure about this new endeavor. The promotions are radically dissimilar from those in the Bollywood business. She is still not really sure what she has gotten herself into. As of right now, her entire emphasis is on Telugu; she has to start dubbing shortly. Hence, she hopes that soon there would be pressure!

It's the ideal time to make a South movie, in her opinion. All of a sudden, for a whole year, everyone wants to see a South movie. Thus, she believes it arrived at the ideal moment. It's so much fun and so different from bollywood that she is overjoyed. She is still learning and taking in everything as it's new. Indeed, she is ecstatic. "I choose my projects quite instinctively, although I've wanted to venture into the South for a while but wasn't sure how to go about doing it formally. South is generating huge profits at the box office. As an actor, I believe there is still a ceiling on visibility for anything said or done on an OTT platform, but these days, the impact is enormous when you choose a South film. Let me give you an example to help you understand. I was at this

chai ki tapri recently, having had a trip to the Himalayas, and I asked the small lads working there in passing who their favorite actor was. To my astonishment, Allu Arjun's name kept coming up. That is the Pushpa movie's indirect effect, and I want to receive the same acknowledgment. That statement—that "South" is the new buzzword sweeping the country—has resonated with me ever since," added the actress.



In the case of *MaayaOne*, it so occurred that she approved the movie before she had even heard the narration when she received a call from a Southern agent informing her about the setup. This will undoubtedly open up a whole new audience, new doors, and a plethora of other opportunities that a relatively fresh actor like me needs, she knew this just by instinct. Because of streaming, her awareness has been quite limited, but she is glad that this will lead to her first theatrical release! "The language is the obvious cultural difference for me right now," the lead actress says. "For an actor who enjoys improvisation on set and is spontaneous, not understanding the language can provide a barrier. Because of this, whenever something is spoken in Telugu while I'm on the filming locations, I try my best to understand it. I have to pick up the language quickly since I want to participate in all of the conversations taking place on the sets starting with my next movie."

She actually truly likes the fact that "everyone's very homely here." The shoot proceeds in a very methodical manner. It's appropriate to compare it to a workplace culture. A better term to use to describe it would be corporate. But the actress also asserts at the same time, "Actors that stream are merely performing for massive viewers. It's very hard to be the primary protagonist you always wanted to picture yourself as when you're continually taking advantage of OTT offers, unlike when a theatrical release comes along. Not to generalize, but at least for me, it's been a problem. Before *MaayaOne* arrived, I couldn't hold the title of leading lady for the entire movie."

For her, it was an easy choice to make. She seldom gets a second opinion and usually goes with her gut. This decision was made without any pressure, although there is always industry pressure to choose roles. Oddly enough, though, because she has been aiming for this for so long, she hasn't felt under pressure. Now that it's actually happening, she is just having fun, not worrying about anything, and living her dream. Adding to that, the *Guilty* fame told us, "Despite the craziness of the sequence, I could tell how committed the entire cast and crew was to it throughout the time I was there. They just dive right in! The makers gave me very clear instructions not to use any of the original work as a point of reference so that I could add something unique to the part. Nothing about it is like the original. I mostly follow my intuition while signing any role."

The actress shared experiences with her co-star Sundeep Kishan, saying, "Our writing enhances the connection between the leading duo, which is lacking in the original. The picture has a significant amount of romance. My fellow actor is often encouraging me to attempt different approaches to the scenes, such as using hand gestures. He truly is aware of the appropriate expressions for the various audiences! There will undoubtedly be a novel pairing that viewers won't soon forget." A direct sequel and remake of the 2017 Tamil-language science fiction thriller *Maayavan* is called *MaayaOne* in telugu, and it is helmed by CV Kumar.



Hansika Motwani starrer *105 Minutes* receives U/A certificate

Popular actress Hansika Motwani is set to captivate her fans with the upcoming film *105 Minutes*, a groundbreaking project as the first Indian film shot in a single take with a sole character. The film, written and directed by Raju Dussa, is produced by Bommak Shiva under the banners of Rudransh Celluloids and Monk Films.

Scheduled for release on January 26, 2024, the film has successfully completed its censor formalities, securing a U/A certificate from the cen-

sor board. This achievement adds to the anticipation surrounding the unique cinematic experience promised by *105 Minutes*.

The musical score for the film is composed by Sam CS, with cinematography by Kishore Boyidapu and editing by Syam Vadavali.

Hansika Motwani, last seen in the Telugu movie *My Name Is Shruthi*, directed by Srinivas Omkhar, is expected to deliver another noteworthy performance in this groundbreaking project.

Sonu Sood extends helping hand and paves way for establishing an old age residence

Actor and philanthropist Sonu Sood, through The Sood Foundation, has begun a meaningful project—a special old age home named after his mother, Saroj Sood. This project is more than just a building; it's a tribute to mothers and the strong bond between children and parents.

Sonu Sood, known for his charitable work, extends his dedication to the elderly through this caring initiative. The Saroj Serenity aims to provide a comfortable environment for senior citizens whose children cannot live with them for various reasons, where they can age gracefully and with dignity and love. This heartfelt effort mirrors his continuous commitment to serving humanity, reflecting the values his mother instilled in him. Under his guidance, the Sood Foundation continues to make a positive impact, creating spaces filled with compassion and care.

Well, on the cinema front, Sonu Sood is preparing for his first production and directorial venture, *Fateh*, a tribute to cybercrime victims, which will star him and Jacqueline Fernandez in the lead.



Divyah Khosla Kumar says her film '*Hero Heroine*' is a blend of glamour and substance

Actress Divyah Khosla Kumar, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film *Hero Heroine*, has shared that the film has a mix of glamour and substance. *Hero Heroine*, directed by Suresh Krishna, is a bilingual film. It explores the unscripted journey of on-screen romance turning into real-life love.

The poster of the film was unveiled on Wednesday, and it shows Divyah surrounded by the shutterbugs.

Talking about the film, the actress said: "Stepping into the world of *Hero Heroine* has been an enchanting experience. The script is a captivating blend of glamour and substance, and I am

thrilled to be part of a project that promises to be a visual and emotional spectacle."

She further mentioned: "The poster offers a sneak peek into the allure and intrigue that this film holds, and I can't wait for audiences to join us on this cinematic journey."

Producer Prerna Arora said: "In '*Hero Heroine*,' we are unravelling a tapestry of emotions, where love takes unexpected turns. The first poster is a visual tease, hinting at the captivating journey that awaits. This film is a celebration of modern love, and we can't wait to share the magic we've created."

The makers will soon announce the release date of the film.



Nithiin's *VN2* kickstarts new schedule in Kerala

Despite facing challenges with his film *Extra Ordinary Man*, Nithiin is now working on a new project with director Venky Kudumula, tentatively titled *VN 2*.

The latest update reveals that the film's new schedule has begun in Kerala, with Nithiin and the rest of the cast actively involved. The much-anticipated first look of the movie is scheduled to be out on January 26, 2024, at 11:07 AM.

It's worth noting that Rashmika Mandanna is no longer part of the cast, and a prominent actor has stepped in to play the female lead. Mythri Movie Makers bankrolled the project, and GV Prakash Kumar is in charge of the music composition. Fans are eagerly awaiting further developments in this exciting venture.



'Shruti Haasan to headline International film *Chennai Story*

Adapted from Timiri N. Murari's bestselling 2004 novel "The Arrangements of Love," *Chennai Story* is a coming-of-age romantic comedy set against the backdrop of Wales and India where Haasan takes on the pivotal role of Anu, a spunky private detective. Written and directed by BAFTA winner Philip John, co-written by Nimmi Harasgama, *Chennai Story* is an English film interspersed with Tamil and Welsh, exploring themes of love, self-expression, and acceptance.

Shruti Haasan shares, "Hailing from Chennai, a story showing the diversity and uniqueness of Chennai is so special to me — collaborating with Phil is something I'm so excited to experience, telling global and rooted stories through international collaboration is what making cinema is all about. I'm all up for Sunitha Tati's vision of taking a culturally rooted story to an international audience through *Chennai Story*."

2024 is really looking promising for the stunning diva. Apart from *Chennai Story*, Shruti will be seen alongside Adivi Sesh in *Dacoit* and if rumours are to be believed Shruti Haasan is a part of Rocking Star Yash's next *Toxic* which will go on floors soon. Her voice was heard in the announcement teaser of the film.



'Ambajipeta Marriage Band has all the content needed for a super hit film'

Suhas, the promising young actor of Telugu cinema, has been making waves with his performances in films like *Colour Photo* and *Writer Padmabhushan*. He is now ready to entertain the audience with his upcoming film *Ambajipeta Marriage Band*. The film produced jointly by GA2 Pictures and director Venkatesh Maha's Mahayana motion pictures, the film is coming also under the banner of Dheeraj Mogilineni Entertainment. Jagadeesh Pratap Bandari of Pushpa fame and Goparaju Ramana playing key roles. Music is scored by Sekhar Chandra. Wajid Baig and Kodati Pawan Kalyan are handling the cinematography and editing departments.

The film is directed by newcomer Dushyanth Katikineni,



and it is creating quite a buzz among movie lovers with the promotional content. Today makers unveiled the intense trailer in a grand launch event.

On this occasion, director

Dushyant Katikaneni said, "Seeing the response, it is clear that you liked the trailer of *Ambajipeta Marriage Band*. We made this movie based on some realistic incidents. There is

intense drama along with the love story. As the story takes place in a village, castes are mentioned. But the movie does not contain any offensive elements. We are putting in your hands the

movie *Ambajipeta Marriage Band* which will hit the theaters on February 2. You have to super hit yourself. I would like to thank all the cast and crew who supported me in the making of the film."

Actor Suhas, who was blessed with a baby on Tuesday, shares that he's on cloud nine with the responses and his little one. "We are waiting for the release of our movie. This is a very special movie in my career. Ever since I heard the story, my entire team along with myself have been dedicated to this project. I shaved my head twice. I also learned to play a band. We worked with the belief in the story. While watching the movie you often relate the events of your life. We hope that our film will be a success on February 2."