

YSRC ‘Siddham’ for polls

PNS ■ BHEEMILI

Amid heightened political activity in the State, the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has launched a dynamic campaign, titled 'Siddham', led by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. The campaign, which means 'Ready to take on challenges,' aims to captivate the public's interest.

Minister Botsa Satyanarayana and senior party leader YV Subba Reddy unveiled the 'Siddham' poster and 'Jai Ho Jagan' promo song during a media briefing. Botsa Satyanarayana and YV Subba Reddy disclosed that the 'Siddham' campaign would catalyse to instil energy and a fighting spirit within the party cadre. They announced that four extensive cadre meetings are scheduled across the state, commencing with the first meeting in Bheemili on January 27.



Speaking at ANITS College on Thursday, Botsa Satyanarayana revealed that the inaugural cadre meeting, featuring Chief Minister Jagan, would take place in Bheemili on January 27. He highlighted that during this significant gathering, CM Jagan would guide the cadre to confront unholy alliances and political opportunists with unwavering determination. Emphasising the purpose of

these meetings, the Minister stated, "The Chief Minister will discuss strategies to address challenges in the state and prepare party supporters for the future." Additionally, he conveyed that CM Jagan would brief the cadre on the developmental and welfare initiatives undertaken by the YSRCP government in the last 56 months.

Quoting Chief Minister Jagan, Minister Botsa reiterated, "People

should vote for us only if they have received any benefits under our government." He highlighted the unique confidence of CM Jagan in the accomplishments of his administration.

YV Subba Reddy added, "Party supporters and activists from 34 constituencies of 6 Uttar Andhra districts will participate in the mega meeting." He expressed confidence that the enthusiasm and energy of the upcoming campaign would surpass that of 2019, proclaiming, "We are proud to be the first ones to launch such a dynamic campaign."

Subba Reddy clarified that the January 27 meeting aims to inform the cadre about the corruption-free governance implemented over the past four and a half years. He also pledged to debunk conspiracies originating from neighbouring states against CM Jagan, YSRCP, and the government.

VPA takes up sand nourishment project at Ramakrishna Beach Beach

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move to combat beach erosion and ensure the long-term preservation of the picturesque Ramakrishna Beach in Visakhapatnam, the Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA) has initiated a Shore Pumping & Beach Nourishment Dredging project. The project is fully funded by VPA.,

With an estimated Rs 57.26 crore, the three-year project aims to dredge approximately 2.1 lakh cubic metres of sand from the outer harbour's sand trap this year. The dredged sand will be pumped ashore using state-of-the-art technology to replenish and fortify



Ramakrishna Beach. This process is scheduled to span over 30 days.

Expressing his commitment to the cause, Dr. Madhaiyaan Angamuthu, Chairman of VPA & DCIL, stated, "This project underscores our commitment to preserving the pristine beau-

ty of Visakhapatnam's beaches. By consistently replenishing Ramakrishna Beach with sand, we are not only combating erosion but also ensuring the longevity of this coastal treasure."

For the successful execution of the initiative, VPA has collaborated with the

Dredging Corporation of India Limited (DCIL). The sand extraction and pumping process will be efficiently carried out by leveraging DCIL's expertise and advanced dredgers, including DCI Dredge 21. The extracted sand will be transported through a 0.50 KM self-floating pipeline using the "rain-bowing" technique, ensuring effective beach nourishment.

The inauguration ceremony of the project on Thursday was attended by prominent dignitaries, including Durgesh Kumar Dubey, Deputy Chairman of VPA, P.S. Lingewara Swami CVO of VPA/DCIL, Captain K.M. Choudhary (GM BD & CHOD), and others.

Vote for right candidates, students told



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister of State, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar emphasised the importance of voting for the right candidates for vibrant democracy and development of the country.

AIIMS Mangalagiri observed National Voter Day on Friday in which Union Minister Dr. Bharati addressed MBBS and B.Sc (Hons) Nursing students who are first-time voters. She also

interacted with the students on the better use of digital technology for self-development and motivated the students to become healthcare warriors of the country. She also issued voter identity cards to a few MBBS students.

Dr TS Ravi Kumar, President, AIIMS Mangalagiri, Director & CEO, AIIMS Mangalagiri, Dr Madhabananda Kar, Dr Sreemanth Kumar Dash, Dean Academics, Dr Desu Rama Mohan, Dean Exams, Dr Deepthi Vepakomma, Dean Research,

Dr Vineet Thomas Abraham Medical Superintendent, Col Shashikanth Thumma, Deputy Director (Administration) were present.

Union Minister Dr Bharati planted saplings on the AIIMS premises. Later she reviewed the progress of the AIIMS Mangalagiri project and expressed happiness over the progress and suggested taking this institute to the next level of healthcare destination not only for the region and country but also for abroad.

Eight Padmas...

Continued from Page 1

Dasari Kondappa, the Burra Veena player from Narayanpet, Gaddam Sammaiah, the Yakshaganam Yajman from Janagaon, A. Velu Ananda Chari (art), Kethavath Somlal (Literature & Education) and Kurella Vittalacharya (Literature & Education) of Telangana were conferred the Padma Shri. Dasari Kondappa, one of the last Burra Veena players, dedicated his life to the indigenous art. The 63-year-old, who is a third generation Burra Veena player from the Damaragidda village of Narayanpet, dedicated his life to preserving the art form. He holds the distinction of being the last exponent of Burra Veena and has kept the art from extinction. Kondappa sings 'Tatvalu' socio-religious moral compositions and spiritual-philosophical renditions in Telugu and Kannada. Even though as per custom Burra Veena is played only within their community, Dasari went beyond that to attract wider audiences. Gaddam Sammaiah was selected

for the Padma Shri for highlighting social issues through Chindu Yakshaganam performances for over five decades. The 67-year-old is an eminent Chindu Yakshaganam artiste from Jangaon. He has performed this art form for over five decades at over 19,000 shows. He addresses social issues like total literacy and environment protection. He founded the Chindu Yaksha Kalakarula Sangham and the Gaddam Sammaiah Yuva Kala Skethram to promote this art. He hails from a humble background and has worked as a farmhand. He learnt the art from his parents who were both Chindu Yakshaganam artistes. Hailing from Andhra Pradesh, Padma Shri winner Uma Maheshwari D. is the first female Harikatha exponent who has performed globally in different ragas. The 63-year-old Harikatha exponent has showcased her skill in Sanskrit recitation and recites Kathas in multiple ragas like Savitri, Bhairavi, Subhapanitavurali, Kedaram and Kalyani.

Vote is invaluable right of citizens, say Guv

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer has participated as Chief Guest at the 14th National Voters Day celebrations held at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram here on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Abdul Nazeer said that the vote is a powerful tool and an invaluable right of a citizen to participate in the process of governance and National Voters Day, underscores the significance of our democratic ethos and the pivotal role each one of us plays in shaping the destiny of our nation.

He said that our collective decisions shape the composition of our legislature, the policies that govern us, and the very character of our nation and stressed on the importance of the power of a vote to usher in participatory



Governor S Abdul Nazeer presented an award for Excellence in Electoral Roll Management to NTR District Collector S Dilli Rao on the occasion of National Voters Day in Vijayawada on Thursday. -Pic: Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar

democracy. Earlier, the Governor released Special Postal covers on National Voters Day, administered the pledge to participate in every election, handed over Electoral Photo ID cards to young electors, and presented State-level awards to officials for

meritorious work related to election duties. Dr KS Jawahar Reddy, Chief Secretary, Mukesh Kumar Meena, Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer, and representatives of various political parties, have attended the programme.



YSRCP leader Dutta...

Continued from Page 1

As part of her district tours, Sharmila visited Dr. Ramachandra Rao at his residence, where she informed the media about his imminent inclusion in the Congress party.

Speculations are rife that Dr. Ramachandra Rao will be a potential candidate for the Assembly elections representing the Gannavaram segment on behalf of the Congress party. Known for his significant contributions to social service, particularly in healthcare for the underprivileged, Dr. Ramachandra Rao previ-

ously contested in the 2014 elections but lost to TDP candidate Vallabhaneni Vamsi. Vamsi secured victory with 99,163 votes, defeating Ramachandra Rao by a margin of 9,548 votes, as he garnered 89,615 votes.

Following the meeting, Sharmila addressed the media alongside Dr. Dutta and his family members and supporters. She emphasized Dr. Dutta's close association with the YSR family, stating that he is a well-wisher. In response to a question, she confirmed that Dutta Ramachandra Rao will soon join the Congress party.

10 NSS volunteers from Andhra to take part in R-Day parade today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr P Ashok Reddy, the State NSS Officer, announced that as a significant part of the 75th Republic Day Parade scheduled for Friday in New Delhi, 10 volunteers from the State of Andhra Pradesh will be actively participating in the RD Parade at Karthavyapath.

Dr Reddy revealed that 10 volunteers from the State universities, namely Sayyed Hina, Kedra Sri, Rajani, Anitha, Chandana, Yamini, Kalyani, Geethika, Joshiha, Harshini, and Dr. K. Swathi, NSS Programme Officer from Padmavathi Mahila University, Tirupati, have been selected to represent the state at the one-month NSS Republic Day Parade camp in New Delhi.

Highlighting the significance of the NSS platform, Dr Ashok Reddy emphasised the excellent opportunity it provides for volunteers from across India to showcase their



dedication, commitment, and courage during the Republic Day Parade Camp, 2024. This year, following the directives of the Government of India, only female NSS Volunteers from all States/UTs are participating, breaking the tradition of both male and female volunteers participating.

Dr Reddy mentioned that on January 24, 2024 (Wednesday), all NSS volunteers and officials of the RD Parade program visited the residence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a cultural performance. NSS volunteers

from various States/UTs presented cultural performances themed around "Nari Shakti, Jhansi Lakshmbai." Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the NSS Volunteers, appreciating their efforts with inspiring words.

After the Republic Day Camp on January 26, 2024, NSS Volunteers and officials are scheduled to meet the President of India, Vice-President, Ministers, and other officials as part of courtesy visits. They will then return to their hometowns on February 1, 2024.

Jagan's...

Continued from Page 1

Responding to allegations about corruption cases involving YSRCP leaders, she disclosed that Congress leaders had clarified to her that YS Rajasekhra Reddy's name being mentioned in the FIR happened without their knowledge, and she trusted their explanation.

Sharmila joined the Congress party with a commitment to the people of Andhra Pradesh and the state's development. She highlighted Rahul Gandhi's assurance of granting Special Category Status (SCS) and repealing the proposal to privatize the Visakha steel plant as key factors in her decision. Lamenting the state of farming during Jagan Reddy's regime, she emphasized that her father, the late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhra Reddy, had celebrated farming as a festival.

In a scathing critique, Sharmila accused both the YSRCP and TDP of aligning with the BJP's interests. She lambasted Jagan Mohan Reddy, claiming he had become subservient to the BJP, neglecting the interests of Andhra Pradesh.

Prominent Congress leaders, including former Union Minister JD Seelam, Pallam Raju, former APCC president N Raghuveera Reddy, Gidugu Rudraraju, and Sunkara Padmasri, were present.

Jagan exploiting...

Continued from Page 1

Highlighting Jagan Mohan Reddy's symbolic gestures, Pawan Kalyan criticized the presentation of a statuette of Lord Venkateswara to BJP leaders, arguing that it exposed the Chief Minister's exploitation of religion for personal gain. "I commit to refraining from exploiting religion for electoral gains. A committee will be established to address the concerns of Christians. While I have achieved some of my objectives for the state, there is much more to be done, such as our efforts to temporarily halt the privatization of the Visakha steel plant and Dredging Corporation," affirmed Pawan Kalyan.

CM launches 300 4G cell towers...

Continued from Page 1

These new towers were set up with an expenditure of Rs 400 crore. The government plans to extend communication facilities to people living in 5,459 remote habitations by erecting 2,900 mobile towers, he said, adding that the dispensation has convinced the Centre to be part of the Rs 3,119 crore plan for which lands have already been handed over. The chief minister said that the government aims to complete the construction of all the towers in the next one year and that the connectivity would help

people get TV and mobile connections and aid them in registering for the welfare schemes online.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Kapaganty Vasantha Lakshmi W/o K.R. Prasad,
D. No.: 2-351, SKS Township, Ganganapalli, Kovvada, Kakinada, AP - 533006 have changing my Name from Kapaganty Vasantha Lakshmi to Vasantha Kapaganty for all purposes.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH PANCHAYAT RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. 118 to 123/TO/2023-24 Date: 22-01-2024
Online tenders are invited for 5 Bridge works & 1 Road work with an Estimated Cost of Rs.4399.52 Lakhs under PMGSY grant in Krishna District. Bid upload & download starting date: 27.01.2024 onwards. Further details visit: www.tender.appeprocurement.gov.in. Ph.No.: 63056 93265.
Self-Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj, Machilipatnam, Krishna Dist.

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All set for R-Day fete

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium is all set for the 75th Republic Day celebrations. March-past troops conducted a full dress rehearsal on Thursday. Governor SA Nazeer will be hoisting the national flag on Friday and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and other dignitaries will grace the occasion.

Chief Minister's Programmes Coordinator and MLC Talasila Raghu Ram, Special Chief Secretary Ajay Jain, Protocol Director M Bala Subrahmanyam Reddy, APSP Battalion Additional Director General B Shankabratna Bagchi, NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao, Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata, and Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar inspected the arrangements at the IGMC stadium on Thursday. The Collector gave instructions to the officials for the smooth conduct of the celebrations.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Kanthi Rana supervised the security arrangements. He said that around 1,600 police officers and staff would be using them for security and bandobast. He instructed them to take the necessary steps for the successful conduct of the celebrations.



VIJAYAWADA: In view of the 75th Republic Day celebrations being organised at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada, NTR District Police Commissionerate officials imposed traffic restrictions in the city on Friday from 7 am to 12 noon. For the convenience of the public, traffic will be diverted to various routes in the city. Governor SA Nazeer, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, ministers and other VIPs will be participating in the celebrations. In this connection, Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata issued a press release here on Thursday, in which he requested the public to cooperate with the police. According to Kanthi Rana, on Friday, all vehicles will be diverted from the Police Control Room to

Traffic curbs in city

Benz Circle. Vehicles will be diverted at the RTC Y Junction and pass via Eluru Road, Swarna Palace, Deepthi Centre, Pushpa Hotel, Jammichettu Centre, Siddhartha Junction and then proceed towards the Benz Circle. Also, vehicles will be diverted at the RTC Y Junction and pass via Bandar Locks, Raghavaiah Park, Old Fire Station, American Hospital, Masjid Road, Nethaji Bridge, Geethanagar, and Screw Bridge and towards the Benz Circle. Similarly, vehicles coming from Benz Circle to the bus stand via Bandar Road will be diverted at the Pakeer Gudem, Screw Bridge, Nethaji Bridge and towards the bus stand. No vehicle will be allowed from Red

Circle to RTA Junction and Sikhamani Centre to Veterinary Junction. The Commissioner made it clear that only invitees' vehicles would be allowed on the MG Road between Benz Circle and DCP Bungalow from 7 am to 12 noon. Further, Kanthi Rana said that RTC buses are not allowed from the RTC Y Junction to Benz Circle on MG Road from 7 am to 12 noon. RTC city bus services are scheduled from RTC Y Junction to MG Road and Route Non.5 will be diverted via Eluru Road, Ramavarappadu Ring and Benz Circle, he added. Also, he gave instructions to the private colleges and school managements regarding bus routes.



Candidate changes only for victory: Sajjala

The YSRCP's state gen secy opens Velampalli's office in Vij-Central segment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Advisor to the Government (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has said that the change of candidates is being done only to ensure victory in the elections and appealed to all party leaders to cooperate.

Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy inaugurated the new office in the Vijayawada central constituency. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the YSRCP has aimed at winning all 175 constituencies. To win all seats, the party is making changes to candidates in some constituencies after discussing with the leaders. Responding to YS Sharmila's

accusations, he said that Sharmila does not have political understanding on the issues. There is no meaning to what she is saying, he criticized.

"There is no need for the YSRCP to answer whatever she says. Sharmila suddenly entered AP politics. She does not have a proper grasp on the AP politics. People know Sharmila only as the daughter of Rajasekhar Reddy and sister of Jagan Mohan Reddy," Saggala asserted.

He demanded Sharmila to make it clear what injustice Jagan Reddy meted to her and questioned how far it is right to give power of positions to the members of a family.

Reposing confidence of coming to power second time in succession, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy reiterated that all the assurance had been implemented and all the eligible beneficiaries irrespective of caste and religion are getting the welfare scheme benefits. As many as 1.47 crore families are getting the benefits of welfare schemes, he stated.

"Jagan Mohan Reddy will blow poll bugle on January 27 in Bheemili constituency. He will highlight the welfare schemes being implemented by the government," he announced. He also announced that the DSC notification would be issued

soon to fill up vacant posts.

"In the YSRCP, MLA does not mean power but it is a responsibility. The MPs and MLAs are also party activists. Jagan Mohan Reddy is the only leader of the party," he observed.

Assuring the political future of MLA Malladi Vishnu, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that Malladi Vishu would assume higher position in the future. Sajjala questioned Chandrababu Naidu why he failed to develop the Karakatta road as a double lane road.

Malladi Vishunu, Vellampalli Srinivas and MP Kesheneni Nani were among those who were present.



National meet of radiologists gets under way in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 4-day 76th national conference of the Indian Radiological and Imaging Association (IRIA) was inaugurated by Dr K Babji, VC, Dr YSR UHS and Dr K Mohan Reddy, ministers and other dignitaries on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion Dr Babji congratulated the organizers for hosting a nationwide conference in AP and emphasised on the importance of Radiology in the diagnosis. He said the field of Radiology in India has been on an impressive trajectory, and a significant part of this success can be attributed to the Indian Radiological and Imaging Association (IRIA). As we

embark on hosting the 76th annual IRIA event, it is imperative to acknowledge the historical significance of this occasion. IRIA's legacy dates back to the pre-independence era, and organizing such a monumental event in a non-metropolitan setting has been an enlightening journey for our team over the past one and a half years.

Dr K Mohan Reddy congratulated the organizers for organizing the national conference on a grand note and personally appreciated organizing chairman Dr Mohan Prasad and organizing secretary Dr Varaprasad.

Dr Mohan Prasad said that the theme of the conference was, "Imaging Beyond Imagination," which underscores the belief that imagination precedes knowledge, and this principle is no different in the field of Radiology. To illus-

trate the evolving landscape, we introduced a ground-breaking session on artificial intelligence, featuring the participation of the innovative Google research team. California. This initiative reflects our commitment to showcasing the immense potential of AI in Radiology, pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve.

He said that in the modern landscape of Radiology, we are confronted with the concept of the "Invisible Radiologist." Radiologists should be visible to patients and the general public. In our efforts to achieve this, we have focused on initiating the use of social media to generate interest in the conference. To achieve this, we have established a dedicated social media booth, where we actively share updates and messages from the event with the academic community and the wider public.

Lecture on scientific progress & market paradigms held

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP on Thursday hosted the 17th edition of its Distinguished Lecture series, focusing on the theme "Scientific Progress to Grand Progression: Opportunities and Challenges in Science-to-Technology-to-Market Paradigms."

Dr. Girish Sahni, Former Director General CSIR and former secretary of GoI, captivated the audience with insights into the dynamic relationship between scientific progress and its translation into marketable technologies. His discourse illuminated the



vast opportunities and challenges inherent in transforming scientific breakthroughs into tangible solutions for society. Dr. Sahni underscored the pivotal role of imagination and concentration in fostering innovation, leading to groundbreaking inventions. His thought-provoking address resonated with attendees, urging them to embrace curiosity and innovation in their pursuit of scientific excellence.

Following the lecture, an engaging Q&A session provided attendees with the opportunity to delve deeper into the intricacies of the topic and seek clarification on various aspects

of science-to-technology-to-market paradigms. The interactive session fostered an environment of intellectual exchange, offering valuable opportunities for audience engagement.

Reflecting on the lecture, Prof. Manoj K Arora, VC SRM University, remarked, "Dr. Girish Sahni's presentation illuminated the critical role of scientific progress in driving grand progression. It highlighted the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead in translating scientific advancements into meaningful technological solutions for the benefit of society at large."

GCWA to host meet on Maths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Government College for Women (Autonomous) in Guntur, in collaboration with the Consortium of Autonomous Colleges, is set to host a five-day residential workshop on 'Interactive Instructional Methodologies in Mathematics' at the Government College for Women (A), Guntur, scheduled to take place from January 30 to February 3.

Dr VR Jyotsna Kumar, Principal of Government College for Women (Autonomous), released a press statement in Guntur on Thursday, announcing the workshop. The event, endorsed by the Andhra Pradesh College Education Commissionerate, aims to provide orientation to

Undergraduate (UG) Mathematics Faculty from across the country, focusing on innovative teaching methods and assessment strategies.

The workshop intends to shed light on AI-driven educational tools and modern teaching styles in Mathematics. Dr VR Jyotsna Kumar, the Commissioner of Collegiate Education and Principal of GCWA, Guntur, will serve as the chief patron, while P. Nirmal Kumari, Head of the Department of Mathematics, will act as the patron and convenor for the workshop.

Interested participants can get in touch at 9866805421, 7989467545, and 9000905551 for more details on registration and participation.



Vizianagaram Collector receives best district poll officer award

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

District Collector S Nagalakshmi has been chosen as the best district election officer at the State-level National Voters Day celebrations held at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Thursday. This recognition underscores her exemplary leadership and commitment to ensuring a seamless and transparent electoral process in Vizianagaram.

The award was presented by Governor S Abdul Nazeer during the grand ceremony. The Governor acknowledged and applauded the outstanding efforts of District Collector Nagalakshmi in effectively managing and overseeing electoral activities, particularly in the context of the amended list of voters.

Among the many collectors across the State, only three were selected for their exceptional performance, and Nagalakshmi's inclusion in this prestigious list speaks volumes about her unwavering commitment to public service.

Furthermore, the event witnessed another moment of pride for the region as P. Hemalatha from Gajularega was also honoured at the same venue, receiving an award in the Block Level Officer (BLO) category. This dual recognition reaffirms the district's commitment to excellence in electoral administration.

The State-level National Voters Day celebration was graced by the presence of State Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena and Chief Secretary to the Government Jawahar Reddy.

Visakhapatnam RPO issues record number of passports



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Regional Passport Office (RPO) in Visakhapatnam issued a staggering 1,98,577 passports and 24,410 Police Clearance Certificates (PCC) in 2023. This remarkable feat surpasses the previous year's record by a significant margin and marks the highest number of passports ever issued by the RPO since its inception. The Vizag RPO efficiently caters to 13 districts through a well-spread network of two Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) and seven Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSKs). To meet the surging demand for pas-

ports, the RPO releases a daily quota of 1,290 appointments for both passports and PCCs.

Regional Passport Officer Vishwanjali Gaikwad attributed this surge to several factors. The waning impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has rekindled the desire for international travel, work, and education among Vizag residents. A growing number of young people are securing lucrative overseas jobs and pursuing international studies, further propelling the demand. The RPO, under the guidance of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), has implemented proactive mea-

sures to tackle the post-pandemic passport rush. These include boosting daily appointment slots, organising special application camps, and conducting weekend drives.

The RPO's swift actions have dramatically reduced the appointment cycle. From exceeding 25 days in January 2023, the wait time has shrunk to a mere one working day at most PSKs and POPSKs by December 2023. Processing times have also witnessed significant improvement, with PSK applications granted on the same day and POPSK applications cleared within seven working days.

Complementing this efficiency, the Vizag City Police, led by Dr. A Ravi Shankar, has streamlined the verification process, achieving an average turnaround time of three to five days. Their commitment to swift passport facilitation is evident in their disposal of 54,853 out of 55,313 verification applications received in 2023. Dr. Shankar assured ongoing efforts to further optimise processes and minimise verification time.

'JAL PRAHAR'



The Indian Navy and Indian Army began their biannual joint exercise 'Jal Prahar' in Visakhapatnam on January 22. The sea phase of the exercise will be organised off the Kakina coast from January 27 to 31. The exercise aims to consolidate synergy among Armed Forces and validate Standard Operating Procedures to undertake complex amphibious operations.

Tenders invited for approach roads to 3 bridges: Grandhi

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

YSRCP MLA and Whip Grandhi Srinivas has said that the government has sanctioned Rs 36 crore for the construction of approach roads to three bridges, constructed across the Yanamaduru drain and tenders were invited for the works.

Whip Srinivas here on Thursday formally inaugurated the drains and CC roads constructed for Rs 5.47 crore at Rayalam village. Later he also laid the foundation stone for some development works at the village.

Talking to the media, Grandhi Srinivas said that development works had been carried out on a large scale in the Bhimavaram constituency while some development works were in progress.

He laid the foundation stone for the construction of a CC road at Anjaneyaswamy temple. The road will be constructed at



a cost of Rs 51.20 lakh. He also laid the stone for the construction of a CC road at Saibaba temple. The road will be constructed at a cost of Rs 1.11 crore. Later he laid the stone for

the Komarada road being constructed at a cost of Rs 93.70 lakh.

"When Y S Jajasekhara Reddy was the Chief Minister, 126 acres of land were acquired in

which a summer storage tank was constructed at a cost of Rs 9 crore. At Taderu village, 700 houses were constructed in Indiramma colony on 11 acres of land while 82 acres of land

was distributed to the poor," he stated.

The then YS Rajasekhara Reddy-led government had sanctioned four bridges to be constructed across the Yanamaduru drain of which the TDP government constructed three bridges and left them without constructing the approach roads. The Jagan Mohan Reddy-headed government has sanctioned Rs 36 crore for the construction of approach roads for the three bridges, Whip Srinivas said, adding that the tender process has already begun for the works.

In the Bhimavaram constituency alone, 200 acres of land was purchased for the distribution of house sites to the poor, he added. MPDO Vijaya Lakshmi, Panchayat Raj DE Swamy Naidu, YSRCP leaders including K Narasimha Rao, P Vijaya Narasimha Raju, T Yedukondalu and were among those who were present.



Good governance is possible if all voters exercise franchise: DC

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi has said that good governance is possible when all voters exercise their franchise during the elections.

A programme was organized at BV Raju College on the occasion of the 14 National Voters Day here on Thursday. A huge rally was held on the occasion in which a large number of students, Collector Prashanthi and RDO K Srinivasulu Raju participated.

On the occasion, Collector Prashanthi underlined the need of all voters to exercise their right to vote, adding that NVDA programs were being conducted across the district, but the main reason for setting up the district programme in the educational institution is to convey a good message of values through the youth.

The Indian constitution is designed to provide freedom and fraternity to everyone; she said adding that everyone who turns 18 should exercise

their right to vote. By exercising the right to vote according to the rules and regulations of the constitution, all can get good administration.

Before criticizing the system, all should choose the right administration through the right to vote, the Collector observed. The Collector appealed to all to exercise the right of vote. The Collector administered a pledge on the occasion. RDO K Srinivasulu Raju asked all those who are eligible to enroll their names in the electoral roll.

'Cast vote, participate in nation-building'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Narendra A Patil, Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada, South Central Railway, said that as the citizens of the great nation, everyone must exercise their votes and participate in nation-building. The DRM administered the National Voters' Day Pledge to the officers and staff at the Divisional Headquarters at Vijayawada on Thursday. He urged the staff to ensure that all newly eligible voters from their families and friends are also enrolled and they cast their first vote responsibly.

Narendra Patil explained that since 2011, National Voters' Day has been cele-



brated on January 25 every year, across the country to mark the foundation day of the Election Commission of India, i.e., January 25, 1950. He explained that the main purpose of the NVD celebration is to create electoral awareness amongst citizens and encourage them to participate in the

electoral process. The DRM added that dedicated to the voters, the NVD 2024 theme - 'Nothing Like Voting, I Vote For Sure' is a continuation of last year's theme. National Voters' Day is also used to facilitate the enrolment of voters, especially the newly eligible young voters.

982 posts sanctioned for district election offices

105 inter-state checkpoints to be established

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has sanctioned 982 posts for the District Election Offices, as well as the Returning Offices in Assembly and Parliament constituencies. District collectors have been directed to fill these posts as early as possible.

This was discussed in an election preparative meeting conducted by Chief Secretary Jawahar Reddy and AP Chief Electoral Officer Mukhesh Kumar Meena via video-conferencing.

CS Jawahar Reddy mentioned that transfers of officers related to the election-concerned departments were almost completed, except for the Police and Revenue departments.



He instructed them to complete the remaining transfers as soon as possible. The Municipal and Urban Development Department was directed to complete the transfers within two days.

To ensure strict vigilance at the inter-State boards, the State government has arranged 105 check posts and 20 integrated

check posts, while the Police department has arranged 62 check posts, the Enforcement Bureau has arranged nine, and the Forest department has arranged 14.

In the past month, authorities seized Rs.2.35 crore, 51,143 litres of illicit liquor, and 1,323 kg of drugs and other valuable goods at the checkpoints.

Officials have been instructed to provide all facilities at the polling booths, such as drinking water, furniture, electricity, toilets, and ramps for the booths for the benefit of Divyangas.

Additional CEO Koteswara Rao, PR and RD Commissioner Surya Kumari, Medical, Health and Family Welfare Commissioner J Nivas, and others were present at the meeting.

14th National Voters' Day observed in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a spirited celebration of the 14th National Voters Day, District Collector Dr A Mallikarjuna rallied citizens at the VUDA Children's Arena, urging them to exercise their voting rights with courage and conviction. The event, held under his chairmanship on Thursday morning, marked a significant step towards enhancing democratic participation in the region.

Dr Mallikarjuna, in his address, underscored the paramount importance of voting. He announced ambitious plans to exceed the previous 67.8 per cent voter turnout, setting a lofty target of over 80 per cent this time. Commending the success of the voter registration programme, the Collector disclosed that the district has

19,42,593 voters distributed across 1,941 polling stations in seven Assembly constituencies.

Efforts under the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) initiative yielded remarkable results, as the number of youth voters aged 18-19 surged from 16,321 to an impressive 38,266. Dr. Mallikarjuna emphasised the pivotal role of voter participation in fortifying democracy and called upon every eligible citizen to exercise their voting rights. The exemplary services of AEROs were acknowledged with certificates and a reward of Rs.10,000. Election DT and BLO received Rs.5,000, while BLO supervisors were granted Rs.3,000, accompanied by certificates jointly presented by the District Collector, Joint Collector, and DCP.

Subba Reddy asks Sharmila to reconsider allegations

Says Naidu has selfish interests

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In response to the recent criticisms levelled by Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief YS Sharmila, YSRCP regional coordinator YV Subbareddy has urged Sharmila to reconsider her accusations against the party.

Subbareddy also took a swipe at Opposition Leader Chandrababu Naidu, accusing him of sowing discord between families for his personal gains. Addressing the media on Thursday, Subbareddy reiterated the YSRCP's decision to not form alliances with any political party, emphasising their commitment to contesting elections independently.

He criticised Chandrababu Naidu's alleged association with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), cautioning against aligning with the BJP as Chandrababu did. Subbareddy asserted that the people would not forgive the Congress party for the historical division of the State and accused them of reneging on promises related to special status.

Taking a dig at Chandrababu Naidu's role in Amaravati, Subbareddy claimed that the TDP chief engaged in real estate business under the guise of the capital project. He accused Chandrababu of creating divisions among families, citing examples from NTR's family and suggesting a similar fate for Sharmila, who has recently joined Congress. Continuing his critique, Subbareddy accused the Congress party of

causing trouble for YSR's family in various ways and urged Sharmila to reconsider her stance before blaming the YSRCP.

While Minister Botla Satyanarayana vehemently criticised Sharmila's statements and described her words as nothing new, Satyanarayana highlighted her alignment with TDP Chief Chandrababu Naidu's rhetoric. Satyanarayana accused Chandrababu Naidu of making unfulfilled promises, particularly on the issue of special status. He asserted that Chandrababu Naidu's support to the Centre was conditional and based on a point-by-point agenda. He said Opposition parties prioritise power over welfare. He confidently asserted that the people would not forget recent events, promising that their response would be evident in the next seventy days.

Simultaneously, YV Subbareddy issued directives to YSRCP ranks, urging them to prepare for upcoming elections. He set ambitious goals for Uttarandhra, expressing the party's aim to secure 34 assembly and five MP seats in the region. Subbareddy called for active involvement from leaders and activists in their respective positions, emphasising the importance of a successful YSRCP meeting near Tagarapavalasa to send a strong signal across the State. The YSRCP is gearing up for an intense electoral battle as they focus on their objectives for the upcoming polls.

8-year-old girl raped by grandfather

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

In a heinous incident, an eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her grandfather at a village in Kotabommali mandal.

Sub-inspector Sheik Meer Mohammad said that though the incident took place on January 19 it came to light on January 25.

According to Sub-inspector Mohammad, the father of the victim left her at the house of his father on January 19. In the afternoon, the accused allegedly raped the girl.

The girl started crying with pain in the night but her grandmother threatened to beat her and

warned her not to cry. On the next day, the mother of the victim removed the clothes of the girl to have her bath.

She noticed stains of blood on her clothes. When the mother questioned the victim, she revealed to her that her grandfather had sexually assaulted her. On January 22, the victim suffered severe pain and was taken to a hospital where the doctors noticed the molestation and informed the police.

Tekkali DSP Balachandra Reddy said the statement of the mother of the victim was recorded and a case under section of POCSO was registered.

People urged to exercise their franchise

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Aam Aadmi Party State vice-president and Guntur West constituency in charge Dr T Seva Kumar said that the proper exercise of the right to vote is the responsibility of every voter and sought the public to shun negligence towards voting. A voter awareness meeting was organised by the Aam Aadmi Party at Guntur on Thursday.

He said that there is a great need to choose honest people hence all voters must exercise their right to vote properly. Pointing out that the Election Commission is working hard to increase the voting percentage in the elections, he said that the people should also cooperate and make an effort.

Dr Kumar stated that AAP aimed to sensitise the people to exercise the right to vote by every voter and they should think and vote with good and bad judgement. He said that the future will be bleak if they fall into the temptations of caste, religion, party, money, alcohol and free schemes and abuse the vote. Other speakers stressed the need for young and first voters to recognise the importance of voting. The elderly and the disabled should take advantage of the facilities provided by the government to exercise the right to vote.

'Will dig grave big enough to bury BRS'

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

Lashing out at BRS leaders for criticising him using the word 'Mestri' (mason), Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that he is the Meshri who will rebuild Telangana which was destroyed by the BRS.

Revanth said that he is the Mestri who is building the future of unemployed youth by giving them jobs.

He said that he is the Mestri who is building a grave for bury-

- I am Mestri of reconstructing Telangana
- We have to win 14 seats
- We will chase BRS upto borders
- We have to kill our enemy even if we die



ing the BRS 100 meters deep and that as a Mestri he is setting right the BRS-destroyed Telangana.

He said that Congress activists are ready to kill the BRS by crushing its throat. "I am a person who will kill an enemy if I am facing

death," he said.

Addressing a meeting of Congress Both Level Agents at the LB Stadium on Thursday, Revanth said that the BJP is blocking Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and that the Congress will teach the BJP a lesson. He said that the Congress was fighting the BJP across the nation, however, Billa (KTR) and Ranga (T. Harish Rao) are roaming the streets. Moreover, they are also criticising the Congress government questioning its assurances even before the

government is 50 days old.

He said that the Congress will chase Billa-Rangas away from TS borders and that the Congress government will implement all its 6-guarantees within 100 days.

Revanth said that he concentrating on governance as he is the CM and therefore not speaking about politics. However, BRS leaders are speaking lies as they like. The CM said that he is starting district tours from next week onwards and that he will spend three days a week among the people.

635 bottles of liquor seized, one arrested

PNS ■ ELURU

The police seized 635 liquor bottles at Katkuru village in Velerupadu mandal on Thursday.

CI Srinivasa Rao said that on the direction of SP Mary Prashanthi, a police team conducted a raid on a grocery shop and found 635 liquor bottles worth Rs 1 lakh hoarded.

The accused Muttaboina

Rambabu purchased the liquor bottles at Ootla village in Aswaraopet mandal in Telangana state and brought them illegally to AP and hoarded them in his grocery shop. He was selling locally at a higher price.

The CI said that Mansion House quarter bottles 144, Old Admiral bottles 120 and beer bottles 371 were found in the road and they were worth about Rs 1 lakh.

'Face Painting Competition' marks R-Day eve celebrations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ahead of the 75th Republic Day, a vibrant 'Face Painting Competition' was organised at Andhra Loyola College (Autonomous) in Vijayawada, by the Department of Visual Communication and Electronic Media. A total of 14 teams, each consisting of three members, enthusiastically participated in the event.

The chosen theme for the competition was 'Unity of Colours: Social Harmony', encouraging participants to

express the essence of social unity through their facial paintings. The event aimed to showcase the artistic talents of the students as well as promote the spirit of togetherness and harmony.

The distinguished panel of judges for the competition included Dr L Subha from the Department of English and Dr Sri Lakshmi from the Department of Biotechnology. Their expertise ensured a fair evaluation of the creative interpretations presented by the participating teams.



The competition commenced with the teams skillfully translating the theme onto the faces of their models, creating beautiful and meaningful paintings that reflected the spirit of social harmony.

The Republic Day celebrations concluded with a sense of pride, unity, and a renewed commitment to the values that define the nation. The diverse themes showcased by each team reflected the multifaceted nature of India, celebrating its unity in diversity.

INDIA CORNER

3-year-old boy mowed down by cluster bus in Delhi

A three-year-old child was mowed down allegedly by a cluster bus in southwest Delhi Najafgarh area, police said on Thursday. The bus driver has been arrested, they added. The incident took place on Wednesday evening when Priyanshu and his three-year-old son Gopal were returning from a market to their home in the Roshanpura area on an e-rickshaw, the police said. "The father and his son were returning home after refilling gas cylinder. The driver of the e-rickshaw pressed brakes, due to which Gopal slipped from his seat and fell on the road and a cluster bus from behind mowed him down," a senior police officer said. The officer said the child was taken to a hospital with help of a police team, but he was declared brought dead. After the incident, several locals gathered at the spot and allegedly pelted stones on the bus, the police said. The bus driver, identified as Sunil, tried to flee but was overpowered by the police, they added.



Goa's 'beach vigil app' now open to public to report illegalities

The Goa tourism department on Thursday threw open its 'beach vigil app' to citizens to allow them to complain about illegalities along the coast. State tourism minister Rohan Khaunte said the app, which has been developed by Goa Electronic Limited, will allow people to complain about unattended garbage as well as illegalities related to vending, hawking, massages, deck beds, touting etc. "If the complaint is not addressed within a specified time, the app has a mechanism to forward it to a higher authority," Khaunte said. Since its 'soft launch' in July last, the app has been downloaded by 1,300 persons, who reported 1,240 violations, 1091 of which were addressed, he claimed. "It was earlier only available for officials of various government agencies. Now it is open to the general public. A recent amendment to the law has empowered police to act under section 188 of IPC against illegalities.



Cast your vote for right candidate: Jharkhand Governor

Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan on Thursday urged the people of the state to cast their votes for the right candidate in the upcoming elections. He was speaking at a function organised on the occasion of National Voters' Day in Ranchi's Aryabhata Auditorium. "If you want to eradicate the evils from society, you must cast your vote for the right person, irrespective of anything and everything. If all our votes go to the right man, then all the candidates will become the right men," he told the gathering. He said that vote is a powerful weapon in a democracy. "People should rise above caste, religion, sect and temptation, and exercise their right to vote. This will strengthen the democracy," he added. Radhakrishnan, who hails from Tamil Nadu, said that his name has also been included in the voters' list of Jharkhand and he will definitely exercise his franchise here.



'66% decline in terrorism in J-K after removal of Article 370'

PNS ■ JAMMU

Asserting that a new era of peace has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the union territory has witnessed a 66 per cent decline in terrorist incidents and an 81 per cent drop in the civilian killings since the scrapping of Article 370. Addressing a function in Jammu via videoconferencing, Shah credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for transforming Jammu and Kashmir, which was "known for terrorism", into a tourism hub. Shah virtually flagged off 100 e-buses in Jammu and distributed more than 1,000 appointment letters to Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) and police officers, and compassionate appointees. "I want to tell you that there has been a fall of 66 per



cent in terrorism-related incidents. There has been a decline of 81 per cent in civilian killings and 48 per cent in killings of security forces after the scrapping of Article 370," he told the gathering. "This shows that a new era of happiness, peace and normalcy has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, he said. The Centre revoked Article 370, which accorded a special status to the erstwhile state of

Jammu and Kashmir, on August 5, 2019. The government also divided Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Shah said 2,654 organised stone-pelting incidents took place in Jammu and Kashmir in 2000 but no such incident took place in 2023. "As many as 132 organised shutdowns took place in 2010 but there was none in 2023. As

many as 112 civilians lost their lives in stone pelting in 2010 but no civilian life was lost in stone pelting in 2023. As many as 6,235 civilians were injured during the period (2010)," he added. The minister said terror financing has also been curbed in Jammu and Kashmir. "Properties are being sealed and attached. A lot of terror organisations have been banned to curb their activities," he said. Praising Modi, Shah said the prime minister has transformed Jammu and Kashmir, which was "known for terrorism", into a tourism hub. When Article 370 was scrapped, several leaders who had been taking advantage of it and had made democracy a joke said it would not have any effect on Jammu and Kashmir. But there has been a huge change, the home minister said.

R-Day: LG Saxena remits sentence of convicts in Delhi jails up to 90 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi LG VK Saxena has granted special remission of 20-90 days to convicts undergoing varying periods of sentences on the occasion of Republic Day, Raj Niwas officials said on Thursday. Special provision has been made in case of prisoners aged 65 years and above lodged in Delhi jails, they said. Remission by the government may be granted on the occasion of days of national importance and public rejoicing. The remission is not applicable for convicts sentenced under charges of crimes against women, the National Security Act (NSA), Official Secrets Act (OSA) among others. All prisoners above the age of 65 years will be eligible to get a remission of 90 days, in cases where sentences are more than 10 years. A remission of 60 days will be applicable for other inmates, they said.

OVER 70,000 PERSONNEL DEPLOYED ACROSS CITY Delhi under a thick security blanket for R-Day fete

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital will be placed under a blanket of security for the Republic Day celebrations, with more than 70,000 personnel being deployed across the city for the purpose, Delhi Police officials said. Out of over 70,000 personnel, 14,000 will be deployed at and around Kartavya Path for the security of the Republic Day parade, they said. Police have also issued advisory on traffic arrangements and restrictions put in place for the smooth conduct of traffic on Friday in the city. Extensive arrangements have been made for the safety and security of the 77,000 invitees expected at Kartavya Path to watch this year's parade, the officials said. During a press conference on Wednesday, Special Commissioner of Police (Security) Dependra Pathak said that robust and flawless



security arrangements have been put in place all around Delhi for the Republic Day. Pathak said the security, traffic and district units together are working at the real time coordination with the central security agencies for January 26 celebrations. He said about 14,000 security personnel with focussed roles and responsibilities will be deployed at the main operational area of Kartavya Path. Commandoes, quick reaction teams, PCR vans, anti-otage check and SWAT teams will be deployed at the specif-

ic strategic locations at Kartavya Path and all around the city, Pathak said, adding that the Delhi Police has prepared to tackle the aerial threats also. Police have ensured that peace prevails in Delhi's "vulnerable" areas following Monday's consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, Pathak said. Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order, Zone II) Madhup Tiwari said at least 77,000 invitees are expected at the parade. "We have divided the New Delhi district, where the parade will take place, into 28 zones to ensure security. Each zone is headed by the DCP or additional DCP level officers," Tiwari said. Booths for missing persons, helpdesks, first-aid kiosks and separate facilitation booths where the visitors can deposit their vehicle keys before the parade have been set up, he stated.

Tamil TV scribe brutally attacked by anti-social elements

PNS ■ CHENNAI

A Tirupur-based journalist working for a Tamil television channel was brutally attacked by unidentified persons in his hometown, and Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday assured stern action against the perpetrators of the crime. The journalist was assaulted near his house at Palladam in Tirupur district on the night of January 24 and he was hospitalised. He sustained severe injuries. Expressing anguish, Stalin condemned the attack and promised tough legal action against the perpetrators, 'whoever they may be.' Leader of the opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami expressed shock over the attack, slammed police for 'slackness' and underlined that the journalist, Nesa Prabhu, had approached police four



hours before the attack. Palaniswami demanded that the culprits be arrested immediately. Blaming the government over law and order situation and hitting out at Chief Minister Stalin as a 'doll CM,' Palaniswami, the AIADMK chief said action must be taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. CPI (M) State Secretary K Balakrishnan said the journalist sustained grievous injuries

in the attack carried out by anti-social elements for his reportage. The 'murderous attack' could have been averted had the local police acted on his complaint. The jurisdictional police abetted anti-socials by not acting on his complaint, the Marxist party alleged. The culprits should be brought to book and action must be taken against errant police personnel, Balakrishnan said. PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam chief TTV Dhinakaran, Manithaneya Makkal Katchi leader M H Jawahirullah condemned the attack and sought tough action. Journalists from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry also condemned the assault on Nesa Prabhu and sought stern action.

High-voltage drama, attacks, FIRs mark Nyay Yatra

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

As the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' completed its run in Assam on Thursday, the eight-day journey remained very eventful with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi locking horns with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Although the 'Nyay Yatra' or justice march got its high decibel publicity after Gandhi termed Sarma "the most corrupt CM of India", it faced hurdles even before the actual programme began when permissions for two public grounds for night halts in Jorhat and Dhemaji were cancelled. The Congress utilised this fully and levelled allegations of



"undemocratic attitude" of the BJP-led Assam government, and arranged private grounds for the purposes. The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' was marked with high drama when Gandhi was prohibited to

proceed towards the birthplace of iconic Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva in Assam's Nagaon district on the day when the consecration ceremony of Ram temple took place.

Rahul leaves for Delhi as Nyay Yatra takes two-day break

PNS ■ COOCHBEHAR (WB)

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for New Delhi on Thursday afternoon as the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' took a two-day break after entering West Bengal. The Yatra led by Gandhi, which began on January 14 from Manipur, entered the Coochbehar district of West Bengal from Assam in the morning. After leading a roadshow in Coochbehar, Gandhi went to New Delhi as the Yatra took a two-day break. In the meanwhile, the

Yatra proceeded to Falakata in Alipurduar for a halt. "Gandhi left for New Delhi from the Hasimara air base in Alipurduar on a special flight. He had some urgent work," state Congress leader Subhankar Sarkar said. "After the recess, the Yatra will resume on January 28. Gandhi will come back by then and join it," he said. After the break, the Yatra will navigate through Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Uttar Dinajpur and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal before entering Bihar on January 29.

'Concerns of data security, digital divide need to be addressed'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As India has made great progress in adopting digital technology, data security and privacy are some of the concern areas that need to be addressed for better integration of technology in health, observed public healthcare experts at the third IHW Digital Health Summit and Awards. The Digital Health Summit and Awards organised last week by the think tank IHW Council brought major stakeholders together for meaningful conversations around digital health ecosystem trans-



formation, in a two-day summit. Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale who attended the event said that initiatives like the digital health awards inspire everyone to prioritise their health and build the health of families and communities. Discussions around

themes pertaining to digital health, including the ambitious Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and health equity, startup ecosystem in the country, futuristic healthcare technologies like AI and drones, smart hospitals and big data were witnessed in the summit along with sharing of best practices and innovations in the digital health space. Speaking on the role of strategic collaborations to ensure universal health coverage in the country, Dr Urvashi Prasad, Director - Vice Chairman Office, NITI Aayog said, "India has made great progress in digital health, we

Guv gives 1.24 mins' policy address in Assembly; UDF terms it 'mockery'

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Amidst a running feud between the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Kerala government and the Raj Bhavan, state Governor Arif Mohammed Khan in an unusual move on Thursday read out only the concluding paragraph of the government's customary policy address in the Assembly. The Governor's action drew sharp criticism from the Opposition Congress-led UDF, which termed it a "mockery" and an "insult to the Assembly". The state BJP chief defended Khan, saying he did so in response to the Left front's attempt to shift blame to the Centre. Reading out the last paragraph of the 136-para and 61-page text, the Governor said, "Let us remember that our greatest legacy lies not in buildings or monuments, but in the respect and regard we show to the priceless legacy of the Constitution of India and the timeless values of democracy, secularism, federalism and social justice. "The essence of cooperative federalism is what has kept our country united and strong all these years. It is our bounden duty to ensure that this essence is not diluted." "Together as part of this varied and beautiful nation we will weave the tapestry of inclusive growth and responsible resilience, overcom-

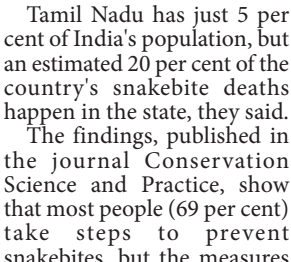


ing all the challenges that are thrown our way," he said, concluding his address, and sat down in the seat marked for him on the dais. The Governor, who reached the assembly at around 9 am, concluded the policy address before 9.02 am and left the House by 9.04 am. Upon his arrival, Khan was greeted outside the House by Speaker A N Shamseer, Chief Minister Vijayan and Parliamentary Affairs Minister K Radhakrishnan with bouquets. Khan began the customary policy address by greeting everyone in the House and then said, "I will now read the last para." His speech lasted only for one minute and twenty-four seconds, according to the state assembly officials. Thereafter, the national anthem was played and after it ended, Khan walked out of the Assembly. The entire exercise ended in less than 5 minutes. The ruling Left downplayed the situation, asserting that the Governor fulfilled his Constitutional duty. Although it is not clear what prompted Khan to skip major parts of the policy address, the state BJP, which has no representatives in the Assembly, claimed that the governor indicated his displeasure towards the state's stand. "No government in the history of Kerala has suffered such an embarrassment," it said.

'Practical methods help check snakebite deaths'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Promoting locally practical methods -- with the support and understanding of people -- may reduce the number of individuals bitten by venomous snakes and save many lives, according to a study conducted in Tamil Nadu. The researchers surveyed 535 people in rural agricultural communities in Tamil Nadu, asking what anti-snakebite measures they take, and what stops them doing more to protect themselves.



Of the people who took steps to prevent snakebites, more than half (59 per cent) exclusively used measures sup-



ported by evidence and government guidelines. These include keeping homes and surroundings clean and tidy, and using torches at

night, the researchers, including those from Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, said. However, 41 per cent relied fully or partially on measures not recognised by research or official advice such as sprinkling salt, garlic, turmeric or bleach as deterrents, they said. "The really important point is to find solutions that work in a certain location, and that people find practical and easy to use," said Harrison Carter, who led the study as part of a master's at the University of Exeter, UK.

"For example, some farmers in Tamil Nadu have previously been given boots for protection but many work in paddy fields, where boots immediately get stuck in the wet ground. The most obvious and yet easily overlooked option is to talk to people and ask them what they need," said Carter, now at the University of Oxford. Of the people in the survey who took no protective measures, almost half said that on reflection, they felt they should.

To each their own

Two major players in INDIA bloc plan to go it alone in LS polls. Where does it leave the Oppn grouping?

Despite the constituents' best efforts to paper over their differences and present a united facade, the worst apprehensions about the INDIA bloc are coming true. Its seat-sharing formula is just not taking shape. The much-hyped bloc, an alliance of 28 Opposition parties aiming to counter the BJP's dominance, seems to be unravelling. Recent announcements by key constituents indicate a shift in strategy, with prominent leaders opting for independent paths in the Lok Sabha elections. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's rejection of sharing seats with the Congress and AAP's decision to go it alone in Punjab are enough to upset the bloc's apple cart even before it could start its electoral journey. Mamata, the TMC chief and a key architect of the INDIA bloc, has signalled a fracture in the purported unity. She has emphasised the need for regional parties to assert themselves and prioritise State-centric issues over national alliances. This stance has added an element of unpredictability



to the bloc's future, as it challenges the idea of a united front against the BJP. As if Mamata's stance were not enough, AAP has also decided to go it solo. In Punjab, the party has declared its intent to contest the elections independently. It comes as a major blow to the INDIA bloc: In retaliation, the Congress could go it alone in Delhi and Haryana, effectively making it a three-cornered contest in Delhi, Punjab and Haryana.

The challenge for the INDIA bloc now lies in reconciling the divergent aspirations of its constituent parties and finding common ground to build a cohesive narrative on. It is, however, essential to acknowledge

that the dynamics of Indian politics are fluid and alliances can evolve swiftly. The INDIA bloc could potentially reassess its strategy and work towards a more unified front as the general elections approach. The posturing by the TMC and AAP should make the INDIA bloc leaders go back to the basics and rework their strategy. It may find renewed purpose in addressing shared concerns while respecting the autonomy of individual parties. The success of the INDIA bloc at the hustings hinges on its ability to navigate internal differences. The bloc's initial promise lay in consolidating regional strength; for this, it must overcome fissures and present a coherent vision for governance at the national level. It needs to convince voters that a coalition of regional parties can provide stable and effective leadership, addressing both local and national concerns. Its success will depend on its capability to forge a common agenda, communicate it effectively to the electorate and demonstrate a united front against the ruling party. While the bloc's future appears uncertain at the moment, political landscapes are known for rapid transformations. The road to general elections will test the resilience and adaptability of the INDIA bloc, determining whether it can emerge as a potent force capable of shaping the national narrative and challenging the status quo.

PICTALK



Devotees take part in a religious procession to celebrate Thaipusam festival, in Chennai

PTI

Managing diversity in small and remote teams

Small companies managing multi-location teams thrive through clear communication, inclusivity and technological leverage

In the modern era of remote work and globalisation, small companies are increasingly embracing multi-location teams to tap into diverse talent pools and expand their reach. Effectively managing teams spread across different locations presents unique challenges and opportunities. Small companies can mitigate these challenges by exploring strategies that help to successfully navigate the complexities of managing multi-location teams. First and foremost, since technology has made remote working possible, it should be further leveraged for seamless communication. It is the cornerstone of managing multi-location teams. Small companies should invest in reliable communication tools that facilitate seamless collaboration. Platforms like video conferencing, project management software, and instant messaging can bridge the geographical gap. Having established a connection with the team, it is vital to ascertain clear communication protocols that are essential to avoid misunderstandings and ensure everyone stays informed. Establish guide-



lines for virtual meetings, project updates, and team communication channels. Consistency in communication practices helps maintain a sense of unity among team members, regardless of their physical locations. While written communication is valuable, face-to-face interactions build stronger connections. It is beyond doubt that distance can create a sense of isolation, making team building crucial for multi-location teams. It is therefore important to include virtual team-building activities, such as online games, virtual happy hours, or collaborative projects. These initiatives promote camaraderie and create a positive team culture. In a long-distance, multi-location work environment, clarity is the king. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities for each team member to avoid confusion and ensure accountability is a must. Small

companies should establish a transparent framework that outlines expectations and deliverables. This clarity minimizes the risk of duplication of efforts and promotes efficiency within the multi-location team. Utilizing the requisite project management tools play a pivotal role in coordinating tasks and projects across different locations. Small companies can benefit from using tools that enable real-time collaboration, document sharing, and task tracking. These tools enhance productivity and streamline workflows within the multi-location team. In addition, inclusivity is vital for the success of multi-location teams. Small companies should actively cultivate a culture that values diverse perspectives and contributions. Provide opportunities for skill-building, training, and career advancement for all team members, regardless of their location. This investment enhances individual capabilities. Another important aspect that helps to manage a small multi-location team is regular check-ins and feedback sessions to assess the well-being and

progress of each team member. Small companies should create an open and supportive environment where team members feel comfortable sharing concerns or ideas. Constructive feedback sessions help in addressing challenges and fostering continuous improvement. To enhance transparency in the multi-location teams, a centralized knowledge repository accessible to all team members is a vital requirement. This repository can contain important documents, project updates, and resources, ensuring that everyone has access to the information they need. This type of centralised hub enhances transparency and minimises the risk of information silos within the multi-location team. Last but not least, being a multi-location team, embrace and celebrate the diversity within the multi-location team. Small Companies should promote cultural awareness, acknowledging the unique backgrounds, customs, and perspectives of team members. *(The writer is assistant professor at Amity University; views are personal)*



HIMA BINDU KOTA

Taiwanese conundrum for mainland China

The best bet for the Chinese is to seek organic support for 'reunification' with the main land from the Taiwanese themselves. A coercive posture and rough language would not help

Contrary to Chinese assertions, insistences, and sensitivities to what it unilaterally calls 'Chinese Taiwan' or 'Taiwan, China', the Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwan has its own functional democracy, constitution and approximately 3,00,000 combatants protecting its territorial sovereignty. With mainland China claiming to represent One-China as the legitimate power, the battle of wits tilted in favour of mainland China in 1971, when the United Nations switched diplomatic recognition onto mainland China. Since then, mainland China has flexed its patent admixture of financial, military, industrial and diplomatic power to bludgeon support in its favour. Today, the fast-receding number of countries that recognize Taiwan has fallen to a meagre 12 countries. Even this list includes relatively 'lightweight' nations like St Vincent and the Grenadines, Eswatini and Tuvalu, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Palau, Nauru, Holy See, Marshall Islands etc. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly warned against "Taiwanese independence separatism" and promised that Taiwan would "surely be unified". Xi's rhetoric is deeply suggestive and intimidatory. However, audio-visuals of choreographed brinkmanship aside, such a belligerent move would be anything but a cakewalk in terms of consequences for the Chinese. Practically, Chinese sabre-rattling is part of deliberately postured nationalism that is vital to buttress the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime, as the main lever of legitimacy i.e., socio-economic upliftment of the Chinese, is now under extreme stress. In the absence of economic prosperity, muscle-flexing against Taiwan distracts and galvanises the Chinese masses. The disproportionate Chinese military strength to Taiwan's militaristic preparedness on paper notwithstanding, the near-certain international reactions of sanctions and embargoes onto the Chinese if they were to attack Taiwan, would break the proverbial camel's back, in terms of fur-



ther economic sufferings for the Chinese masses. It could lead to unsustainable economic regression and societal discontent. It is a price that Xi Jinping simply cannot afford, especially as the economic upside of a forcible integration, would pale in comparison to the downsides of a plausible invasion. Besides, Taiwan is extremely well-fortified with missiles, early warning systems, precision-strike weapons, underwater mines, and other counter-attack capabilities that could inflict significant damage on any invasion attempt, irrespective of the ultimate result. In any case, the Chinese would have to mount a significant fleet and accompanying wherewithal which could easily alert of an impending invasion – a discreet and sudden Chinese attack, is next to impossible. Even the fact that a potential Chinese invasion would involve breaking through large urban squallors and cities, it would entail deadly urban warfare that has tested the skills of even hardened Israelis and Russians in recent times, let alone the untested Chinese PLA soldier. Urban warfare and associated 'costs' could lead to the undoing of any residual support the Chinese may have amongst the Taiwanese. The famed Taiwanese 'porcupine'



XI JINPING HAS REPEATEDLY WARNED AGAINST 'TAIWANESE INDEPENDENCE SEPARATISM' AND PROMISED THAT TAIWAN WOULD 'SURELY BE UNIFIED'. XI'S RHETORIC IS DEEPLY SUGGESTIVE AND INTIMIDATORY

strategy is predicated on making a heavily laden Chinese invasion fleet face a prickly proposition and based on defensive survivability. The fact that such an invasion could draw the committed US forces would have its own resultant algorithms. So realistically the best bet for the Chinese is for organic support for 'reunification' with the mainland Chinese, by the Taiwanese themselves. This is not an unfathomable situation, given the existence of 'pro' China and 'anti' China sentiment amongst Taiwanese political parties. While the recent Taiwanese Presidential elections have brought back the decidedly 'anti-China' forces of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) with 40.05% of the popular vote (third successive victory), the fact that the other two parties have varied shades of 'pro-China' anchorage i.e., Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan's People Party (TPP), garnered 33.49% and 26.46% respectively, shows faultlines. It could be credibly argued that while the Taiwanese were aligned with DPP's nationalistic stand, there must have been anti-incumbency on local issues like low wages, unaffordable housing etc., that led to significant support for KMT and TPP. However, the competitive race

of identities in Taiwan has led to a steady assertion of locals identifying themselves as just 'Taiwanese' as opposed to 'Both Taiwanese and Chinese' or plain 'Chinese'. Yet, post the electoral results the Chinese foreign ministry reiterated, "Whatever changes take place in Taiwan, the basic fact that there is only one China", clearly signalling the continuation of stalemate and tensions. If the Chinese were to overdo the further sanctioning against provisions of an existing free trade agreement with Taiwan (or even suspend it altogether), it would lead to painful hardships for the Taiwanese, but also to further anti-Chinese sentiment that clearly cannot be countered by military superiority or plausible invasions. The best bet for the Chinese is to have the local Taiwanese perceive more socio-economic merit in 'unification' as opposed to 'independence', a battle that puts Beijing on the backfoot given stories coming out of Hong Kong or Tibet. So, the Chinese battle-rattle-tattle for crossing the straits in a purported invasion will continue, however, the costs to walk the talk will remain prohibitive. *(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FIR AGAINST RAHUL GANDHI

Sir — The under-pressure Assam police on Tuesday registered an FIR against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and other leaders for "wanton acts of violence" on Tuesday, Frustrated Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Jatra is currently in Assam and the alleged acts of violence took place while the party supporters and leaders allegedly clashed with police personnel in their bid to enter Guwahati. Four police personnel were injured in the scuffle, Guwahati Police Commissioner Diganta Bora said. Under fear, Sarma had earlier in the day instructed the Director General of Police G P Singh to register a case against Rahul Gandhi for provoking the crowd to break the barricades. Gandhi said the chief minister directing the DGP to file a case against him shows "that they have fear in their hearts... They are afraid as the people of Assam are standing up as 'Tufan' and 'Andhi' (storm) against them". The barricades were erected along a highway to prevent Congress leaders and supporters taking part in the Yatra from entering the main thoroughfares of Guwahati, the largest city of the north-eastern state. As Congress supporters removed the barricades, a scuffle with the police personnel ensued leading to injuries suffered by state Congress president Bhupen Borah and leader of the opposition in the state assembly Debabrata Saikia. Gandhi alleged that while BJP president J P Nadda was allowed to take the same route earlier, Congress was not permitted.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

CONTRIBUTION OF NETAJI

Sir — The country can always remember the contribution of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose to the freedom movement. His slogan 'Give me blood, I will give you freedom' sparked a new revolution in the country. The army 'Azad Hind Fauj' formed by him forced the British to leave India. The British had first handed over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Azad

Yemen crisis



The US and Britain are carrying out joint air strikes on the positions of Iran-backed Houthis separatists active in Yemen, in retaliation for blocking and attacking fleets in the Red Sea. Not only this, America has once again declared Houthis as a terrorist group. But instead of solving the area's problems, they are becoming more complicated day by day. First of all, poor countries like Yemen, where today every area has fallen into the hands of fighters. The group of Arab countries, which includes Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, tried to control all the forces

opposing each other by entering that country but failed. Now an in-depth investigation has revealed that the UAE, while fighting there, has carried out many targeted killings with the help of money. American mercenaries were given a contract by the Emirati government to kill members of a specific group. Most of those killed by these mercenaries were members of 'Islah', the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is a popular international Sunni Islamist movement that no one has ever classified as a terrorist organization but is banned in many Arab countries. They are included in the United Arab Emirates where its political activism and support for elections is seen by the country's royal family as a threat to their rule. Had gone to Yemen to restore peace but started killing Islah members. This should be investigated by the United Nations. The dark deeds of the UAE should be exposed.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Hind Fauj and Netaji hoisted the tricolour there on 30 December 1943. Netaji had become synonymous with courage, bravery and patriotism. Netaji's death remains a mystery. The present Central Government has expressed gratitude to Netaji by celebrating his birthday as Parakram Diwas (23 January), making public all the files related to him and installing the statue of Netaji at India Gate. Netaji's life will always continue to inspire patriotism among the youth.

N Mateeni | Pune

BHARAT RATNA FOR THE JAN NAYAK

Sir — The centre has posthumously fulfilled a long-standing demand by announcing the Bharat Ratna award for the Former Chief Minister of Bihar, Karpooi Thakur, a dedicated leader committed to uplifting the poor and marginalized. As a notable figure in Bihar politics, Thakur's lasting impact on India's socio-political landscape is evident, offering hope and positivity to Dalits and backward classes. Hailing from

a backward class and affectionately known as the 'Jannayak' or people's hero, Thakur embodied the ideals of Subhas Chandra Bose and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His commitment to breaking caste boundaries was represented during his 28-day fast unto death in support of Telco labourers, showcasing his dedication to social justice and workers' rights. As Bihar's Education Minister, Thakur promoted Hindi, removed English as a compulsory subject, and became the first Chief Minister to enforce total alcohol prohibition, addressing crucial social issues and challenging established norms. His legacy is evident in the transformed India where individuals from backward classes now hold prominent positions. Karpooi Thakur's Bharat Ratna is not merely an award; it's a recognition of his unwavering pursuit of justice and equality, shaping a more inclusive and equitable India.

Preetiynkta | Bhubaneswar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

MONEY MATTERS

Air India to take delivery of 5 more A350s by June

Air India will add five more wide-body A350 aircraft to its fleet by June, and the process of upgrading 40 of its legacy Boeing 787 and 777 planes will begin in July, its chief Campbell Wilson said on Thursday. As Tata Group's takeover of loss-making Air India completes two years on January 27, Wilson also said that on average, one aircraft will arrive every six days throughout 2024. There will be an addition of 5 more A350s, which will progressively take to India's skies between January and June 2024, the Air India CEO and Managing Director said in a message to the staff. Air India will also induct 17 A320s and 46 B737s. The airline started the commercial operations of its first A350 aircraft on January 22, with a flight from Mumbai to Chennai. Currently, Air India has 117 operational aircraft and together with Air India Express, the total number of operational planes is 180. Last year, Air India placed an order for 470 planes with Airbus and Boeing.



HPCL net profit treble to Rs 529 crore in Q3

Industan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday reported trebling of profit in the December quarter as robust marketing margin negated inventory losses. Standalone net profit of Rs 529.02 crore, or Rs 3.73 per share, in the December quarter, as compared to Rs 172.43 crore, or Rs 1.22 a share, in last year, the company said in a statement. The 21-month record freeze in retail fuel prices despite fall in input raw material (crude oil) prices helped raise marketing margins but refining margins were lower and the firm also suffered inventory losses because of the lag in buying and processing oil during which time rates fell. HPCL earned USD 8.49 on turning every barrel of crude oil into fuel like petrol and diesel during October-December as compared to USD 9.14 per barrel gross refining margin last year. However, the firm booked Rs 700-750 crore inventory loss in the period under review.



TCS looks to double staff in France over next three years

TCS is aiming to double staff in France over the next three years as it sees handsome business growth in the European country, a senior official said on Thursday. At present, the largest Indian IT services company employs 1,600 people in France across four major centres in the country. France is among the fastest growing markets in Europe for TCS, growing much faster than the numbers it reports for the continent, its head of European business, Sapthagiri Chapalapalli, told PTI. Chapalapalli said TCS has been present in France for over three decades now and right now, it feels that the bulk of the groundwork is ready for a faster growth of the business going ahead. The business in France will 'multiply' from here on by growing at an accelerated pace courtesy building blocks which have been put in place, he said.



Agriculture Minister urges farmers to learn new methods of farming

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda on Thursday said the country's progress lies in the progress of farmers and urged them to learn new methods of farming.

Addressing 1,500 farmers and their spouses invited as special guests for the 75th Republic Day, the minister asserted that the government's aim is to empower farmers and improve their livelihoods.

Munda said, "The progress of the country lies in the progress of the farmers. In the changing times, learning new methods of farming will prove beneficial for the farmers," an official statement said. Farmers have come to the national capital to attend Republic Day, which is not just an event but is going to open a door to enter 'Amrit Kaal' (The Era of Elixir), he added.

In the conference, agriculture ministry officials and farm scientists shared with the farmers and members of Farmer Producers Organisations (FPOs) about modern farming methods and innovations. They also shared about various agriculture schemes.

Govt, RBI actively engaged on digital currency: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the government and the Reserve Bank are actively engaged in improving the central bank digital currency (CBDC) so that it can be used for cross-border payments.

RBI began the pilot project wholesale CBDC and picked up nine banks -- State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, YES Bank, IDFC First Bank, and HSBC.

Besides, RBI has already rolled out a pilot in the retail version of CBDC or e-rupee on December 1, 2022. The e-rupee is in the form of a digital token that represents legal tender.

It is being issued in the same denominations as the paper currency and coins. It is being distributed through financial intermediaries, i.e. banks. Users are able to transact with e-rupee through a digital wallet offered by the participating banks.

"We strongly believe it helps



We strongly believe it helps in cross-border payments. It will bring in greater transparency and traceability... Both the regulator and the government are working on it. We are actively engaged in it. Agriculture retains its primacy and we are looking at strengthening agriculture by modernizing some of the practices, post-harvest practices and so on.

in cross-border payments. It will bring in greater transparency and traceability..." Sitharaman said while speaking at an event to mark 125 years of Hindu College.

It helps in speeding up payments with less cost, she said, adding it brings down costs for inward and outward remittance.

"Both the regulator and the government are working on it. We are actively engaged in it," she said.

Asked about priority sectors

to make India 'Viksit Bharat', she said, the focus areas would be manufacturing and agriculture.

"Agriculture retains its primacy and we are looking at strengthening agriculture by modernizing some of the practices, post-harvest practices and so on," she said.

In manufacturing, she said, the government had identified 13 sunrise sectors including renewable energy, semiconductor, machine learning, earth sciences and space.

4 companies get Sebi's nod to launch IPOs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Entero Healthcare Solutions, JNK India, Exicom Tele-Systems and Akme Fintrade (India) have received markets regulator Sebi's approval to raise funds through initial public offerings.

However, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has returned the IPO papers of Stallion India Fluorochemicals.

As per the processing status of draft offer documents till January 19, the watchdog has approved the initial public offering (IPO) of the four companies. These four firms, which had filed their preliminary papers with the markets watchdog between June and October, obtained observation letters on January 16-19, an update with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed on Thursday.

In Sebi's parlance, obtaining observation letters means its go-ahead to launch an IPO. Going by the draft papers of Entero Healthcare Solutions, the IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 1,000 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) component of up to 85.57 lakh equity shares.

3 infra projects worth Rs 9,600 cr recommended for approval

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three infrastructure projects of roads and railways worth Rs 9,600 crore have been recommended for approval under the PM Gati Shakti initiative, an official statement said on Thursday.

These projects were assessed in the 64th Network Planning Group (NPG) meeting on October 17.

"During the meeting, the NPG discussed three proposed greenfield projects of Ministry of Railways (1) and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (2), with an aggregate project cost worth about Rs 9,600 crore," the commerce and industry ministry said.

The meeting was chaired by Special Secretary (Logistics), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Sumita Dawra.

The inter-ministerial NPG meets every fortnight and appraises infra projects to ensure multi-modality, synchronisation of efforts, and comprehensive development

PM GATI SHAKTI



The NPG discussed three proposed greenfield projects of Ministry of Railways (1) and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (2), with an aggregate project cost worth about Rs 9,600 crore

to develop an integrated infrastructure to reduce logistics costs. All logistics and connectivity infrastructure projects, entailing investments of over Rs 500 crore are routed through the NPG.

The NPG's approval is required before clearance of the project by the Public Investment Board (PIB) or Department of Expenditure under the finance ministry.

The maximum projects recommended so far by the group are related to roads, railways and urban development.



Sensex declines 359 pts on selling in IT shares

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex declined by 359 points while Nifty closed below the 21,400 level on Thursday due to selling in IT shares and continuous foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 359.64 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,700.67. The index opened lower and plunged further 741.27 points or 1.04 per cent to hit a low of 70,319.04 in day trade. As many as 19 Sensex shares dropped while 11 advanced.

The broader Nifty fell by 101.35 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 21,352.60 with 34 of its constituents closing in the red.

A rise in US bond yields and mixed financial results by corporates triggered FII selling, analysts said. IT, pharma and

FMCG shares declined while realty and energy stocks bucked the trend.

Among Sensex shares, Tech Mahindra fell by over 6 per cent after the company reported a 60 per cent decline in net profit to Rs 510.4 crore in the December quarter.

Bharti Airtel, ITC, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, Nestle, Tata Steel, and Maruti were among the other major laggards. IT shares declined as third-quarter results have failed to impress investors. Wipro dropped 1.68 per cent, HCL Tech by 1.54 per cent, TCS by 1.03 per cent and Infosys by 0.22 per cent.

NTPC, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the gainers.

Nova Agritech IPO subscribed 109.36 times on last day of offer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Initial Public Offer (IPO) of Nova Agritech got subscribed a whopping 109.36 times on the last day of subscription on Thursday, with heavy participation coming in from institutional investors.

The Rs 143.81 crore-IPO received bids for 2,77,94,75,730 shares against 2,54,14,746 shares on offer, according to data available with the NSE.

The portion for non institutional investors fetched 224.06 times subscription and Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) quota got subscribed 79.31 times. The category for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) received 77.10 times subscription.

The IPO of the manufacturer of agricultural inputs had a fresh issue of up to Rs 112 crore and an offer-for-sale of up to 77,58,620 equity shares.

Price range for the offer was Rs 39-41 a share.

On Friday, Nova Agritech had raised a little over Rs 43 crore from anchor investors.

India Inc awaiting Feb 1 Budget for growth boosting measures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Inc wants Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to announce more measures in her interim Budget to boost manufacturing, earmark larger funds for infrastructure development, and accord more focus on social sector schemes, while giving relief on taxation front.

Sitharaman, who has already presented five annual Budgets, will be unveiling an interim Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. It will be the last major economic document before the next general elections.

Industry says that it is imper-



ative for the government to take measures to boost economic growth in the country as India marches towards becoming the third largest economy in the coming years.

Industry body CII has suggested launch of 'National Mission for Advanced Manufacturing' to enhance quality and productivity in manufacturing. "The mission

Competition Comm to soon float tender for market study on AI's impact on businesses

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Competition Commission will soon float a tender for conducting a study on the impact of artificial intelligence on businesses and services. Its chief Ravneet Kaur said on Thursday.

The Chairperson of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) also emphasised that the regulator cannot take "one-size fits all" interventions in technological markets, which require nuanced assessments.

She was interacting with reporters on the sidelines of a conference here.

"Shortly, we will be coming out with a tender seeking inputs from companies to carry out a market research for us so that we understand better how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can impact businesses as it offers services and also act as a platform," Kaur said.

She said that hopefully, the tender should open in about two weeks though the terms of ref-

erence of the proposed study are yet to be framed. According to her, a management consultancy, an accountancy firm or a legal firm can take up the study.

In recent times, there has been an increasing use of AI applications in several sectors.

About data protection, Kaur said the CCI is looking at it from two angles, one is about personal data and the administrative ministry concerned has already come out with the required norms.



Indian firms sign pacts at POWERGEN expo in US

PNS ■ HOUSTON

Indian companies are looking for business as well as collaboration opportunities in the power generation sector, with some of them signing pacts with global entities at an ongoing expo in the US.

The POWERGEN International Expo (January 23-25), is being organized by the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in support with Ministry of Commerce and Industries. There are about 18 participants from power generation, distribution and utilities sector.

The Indian pavilion was inaugurated by D C Manjunath, Consul General of India in Houston, along with Sandipan Aich, Senior Executive Officer ICC.

Many Indian companies have signed pacts with American firms during the expo.

"IOW Group and Reverso Pumps LLC in the US collaborated with CBS Technologies

from India. Danefoam Technologies from Miami, US will source firefighting foam and equipment from Integrated Fire Protection Pvt Ltd from Kolkata," Sandipan said.

Steam Equipments from Pune also signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Texas-based EPC Industries Inc and Chicago-based Tek-trol Technology Solutions.

Manjunath had an engaging discussion with industry leaders and a glimpse into the sustainable future and cutting-edge technology.

"Delighted to visit the India Pavilion at the POWERGEN International Expo where major powergen players are participating and showcasing their product line, along with top international companies from around the world. The expo provides immense potential for Indian companies to participate in the power generation industry in the US," Manjunath said.

Thermal power plants' capacity utilisation to rise to 69%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The capacity utilisation of thermal power plants will increase by a percentage point to 69 per cent in 2024-25, led by the growth in electricity demand and limited thermal capacity addition, says rating agency ICRA.

ICRA's outlook for the thermal power segment is 'Stable', supported by the healthy improvement in the thermal plant load factor (PLF), coupled with the reduction in dues from state distribution utilities (discoms) following the implementation of the Late Payment Surcharge (LPS) scheme since August 2022, a statement said.

"The current under-construction thermal capacity is

about 30 GW, which is predominantly in the Central and the state-owned generation segment and is expected to be commissioned over the next two to four-year period," Girishkumar Kadam, Senior Vice President & Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said in the statement.

In our view, there is a clear need for incremental capacity beyond this pipeline if the annual electricity demand growth continues to exceed 6.0 per cent till 2030, after factoring in the renewable capacity addition, he added.

He stated that if annual demand growth is stronger at 7.5 per cent till 2030, to meet the same, the incremental thermal capacity requirement will need to be as large as 70



GW. Coal has remained a dominant fuel source to meet the base load power demand in the country, and its share in the overall energy generation mix is estimated to decline from 73 per cent in FY2023 to about 58-60 per cent in FY2030, assuming the renewable capacity addition scenario

of 200 GW between FY2024 and FY2030, as per ICRA estimates.

Nonetheless, the share of coal in the generation mix is expected to remain significant till 2030, it stated.

The average spot power tariffs in the day-ahead market (DAM) of the Indian Energy

Exchange remained high at Rs 5.4 per unit in YTD FY2024, owing to the sharp demand growth.

The spot tariffs are likely to remain elevated at around Rs 4.5-5.0/unit in the near-term against a long-term average of Rs 3.0-3.5/unit. Further, the coal stock level for the domestic power plants remained modest at around 12 days as of December 2023, lower than the normative requirement.

Nonetheless, this remains similar to the corresponding period of the previous year, it stated.

For the renewable energy segment, ICRA's outlook remains 'Stable', led by strong policy support, healthy demand prospects, and superior tariff competitiveness.

Further, the realisation of

past dues and regular payment of ongoing bills by discoms following the LPS scheme remain positives for the sector.

Kadam said in the statement, "the sharp decline in solar PV cell and module prices, abeyance of the order on Approved List of Models and Module Manufacturers (ALMM) till March 2024, and the timeline extension approved for solar and hybrid projects, are expected to lead to an improvement in RE capacity addition to 18-20 GW in FY2024 from 15 GW in FY2023."

This, he said, along with the growing project pipeline, is likely to support the scale-up in capacity addition to about 25 GW in FY2025, mainly driven by the solar power segment

Chris Evans, Margaret Qualley and Aubrey Plaza board Ethan Coen's *Honey Don't!*

Actors Chris Evans, Margaret Qualley and Aubrey Plaza are teaming for Academy Award winner Ethan Coen's upcoming comedy *Honey Don't!* The 'Focus Features' film marks the second collaboration for Coen and Qualley, who are awaiting the release of *Drive-Away Dolls*, also with the same studio. Details of the film's plot are currently

under wraps, but according to 'Deadline', *Honey Don't!* is a comedy in the same vein as *Drive-Away Dolls*. Coen is directing the movie from his script which he co-wrote with his wife Tricia Cooke, the veteran editor behind Coen Brothers classics such as *The Big Lebowski* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Coen, Cooke and Robert Graf are credited as

producers on *Honey Don't!*. Coen first began pursuing solo projects in 2022, with Jerry Lee Lewis: *Trouble in Mind*, as brother Joel went off to direct *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. While Evans was last seen in the 'Netflix' crime drama *Pain Hustlers*, Plaza was recently at the Sundance Film Festival to support of her well-reviewed comedy *My Old Ass*.



Barun Sobti feels 'truly honoured' to portray Naib Subedar Sombir Singh in *Rakshak Chapter 2*

Rakshak- India's *Braves Chapter 2*, a tribute to the martyrs of the nation and their sacrifices, is all set for Chapter 2. Based on true events from declassified army missions, the streaming service today unveiled the first look of the second part of the franchise, featuring Barun Sobti engraving the patriotic saga of Naib Subedar Sombir Singh. Produced by Juggernaut Studios, this exemplary tale of inspiration, pride, and valor will stream soon exclusively on Amazon miniTV for free.

Exploring patriotic sentiments, the story intricately unfolds the account of Junior Commissioned Officer Naib Subedar Sombir Singh. He collaborated with DYSP Aman Kumar Thakur in a joint operation in Kulgam district, successfully neutralizing terrorists and safeguarding both the lives of citizens and the nation's integrity.



Delving into the story of the Kulgam operation, *Rakshak-India's Braves: Chapter 2* unfolds the gallantry and passion of Naib Subedar Sombir Singh and DYSP Aman Kumar Thakur, driven by a deep conviction to safeguard the nation from the threats of militants. It is notable to mention that Naib Subedar Sombir Singh was awarded with 'The Shaurya Chakra' and DYSP Aman Kumar Thakur with

'Sher-E-Kashmir' Medal for Gallantry, in recognition for their bravery and courage in anti-militancy operations. With riveting war scenes and a strong emotional impact, the series pays a powerful homage to the two honorary heroes, who laid down their lives in the line of their duty.

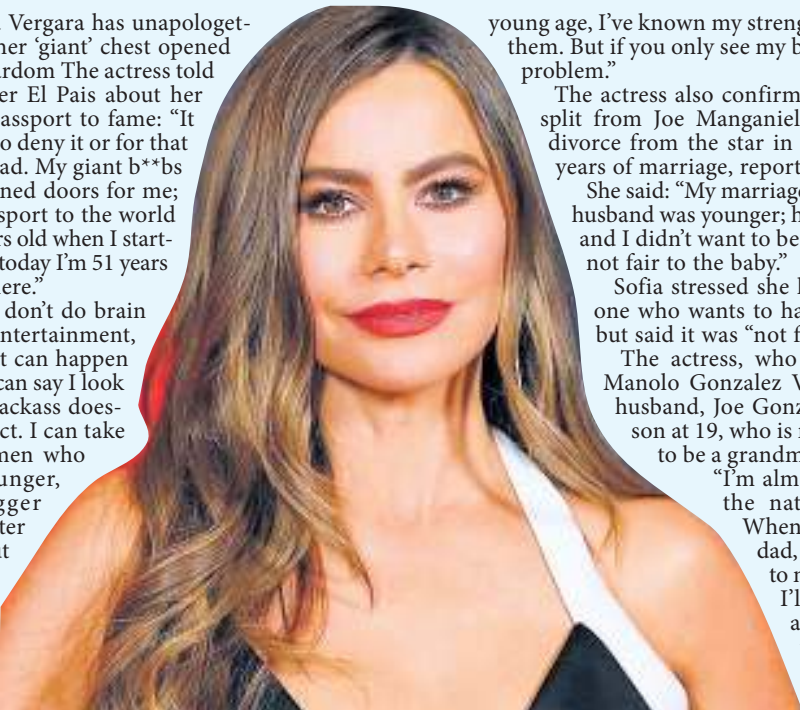
Barun Sobti, who is portraying the role of brave Naib Subedar Sombir Singh, shared,

"*Rakshak-India's Braves: Chapter 2* has been an incredible experience for me. I am filled with a profound sense of accomplishment and gratitude. It's a great responsibility to play the role of an individual who sacrificed his life for the nation. It is truly an honor to portray the role of Naib Subedar Sombir Singh and share his brave story through *Rakshak - India's Braves* on Amazon miniTV."

Sofia Vergara: My 'giant' body opened doors to me

Actress Sofia Vergara has unapologetically said her 'giant' chest opened doors to stardom. The actress told Spanish newspaper El Pais about her looks being the passport to fame: "It would be absurd to deny it or for that to make me feel bad. My giant b**bs and my body opened doors for me; they were my passport to the world when I was 20 years old when I started as a model, but today I'm 51 years old and I'm still here."

Sofia added: "I don't do brain surgery, it's just entertainment, and the worst that can happen to me is that they can say I look ugly or that this jackass doesn't know how to act. I can take it. There are women who are prettier, younger, who have bigger breasts and a better body than me, but I'm still around because I have demonstrated that I can stay. From a very



young age, I've known my strengths and I've played to them. But if you only see my boobs, then that's your problem."

The actress also confirmed the reason for her split from Joe Manganiello, 47, who filed for divorce from the star in July 2023 after seven years of marriage, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "My marriage broke up because my husband was younger; he wanted to have kids, and I didn't want to be an old mom. I feel it's not fair to the baby."

Sofia stressed she has "respect" for anyone who wants to have babies later in life but said it was "not for (her) anymore".

The actress, who has 32-year-old son Manolo Gonzalez Vergara with her first husband, Joe Gonzalez, added: "I had a son at 19, who is now 32, and I'm ready to be a grandmother, not a mother."

"I'm almost in menopause; it's the natural way of things.

When my son becomes a dad, let him bring the baby to me for a while and then I'll give it back to him and go on with my life; that's what I have to do."

Parineeti Chopra starts her musical journey, says, 'I will have two careers'

Actress Parineeti Chopra has embarked on a whole new chapter as she announced her singing debut, saying that this journey gives her the opportunity to have two careers at once.

Taking to social media on Thursday, Parineeti shared a video wherein she has shared clips of behind the scenes of her singing in a studio.

The video ends with the *Ishaqzaade* fame crooning *Maana Ke Ham Yaar Nahi*. This song, sung by Parineeti is from the 2017 romantic movie *Meri Pyaari Bindu*, starring her alongside Ayushmann Khurrana.

Sharing the video, the actress known for her work in *Hassee Toh Phasee* penned a heartfelt note, sharing how music has always been her happy place.

The post read: "Music, to me, has always been my happy place. I've watched countless musicians all over the world performing on the stage and now it's finally my time to be a part of that world. I feel so lucky, blessed and stressed about starting off a whole new chapter in my life and I honestly can't describe how excited I am to embark on this musical journey."

"A journey that gives me the opportunity to have two careers at once! How fun (and chaotic) So here's to embracing the unknown and facing all my fears and kicking off my singing debut! I'm joining hands with the best@entertainmentconsultant and we've got some amazing things in store for you all this year," she shared.

Parineeti added: "I hope you're as excited for this as I am! [New Announcement, Singers Live, Performance]"



She has earlier sung the female version of the patriotic song *Teri Mitti*, which is written by Manoj Muntashir and composed by Arko. It featured in 2019 war movie *Kesari*, starring Akshay Kumar and herself.

The 35-year-old actress also has the unplugged track *Matlabi Yariyan* in her discography. This song is from the mystery thriller film *The Girl on the Train*. It stars Parineeti, Avinash Tiwary, and Aditi Rao Hydari.

The actress, who married AAP MP Raghav Chadha in September 2023, also sang her wedding song *O Piya*.

Meanwhile, on the film front, she was last seen in *Mission Raniganj*. She next has *Amar Singh Chamkila* in the pipeline.

FUN

ARCHIE



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



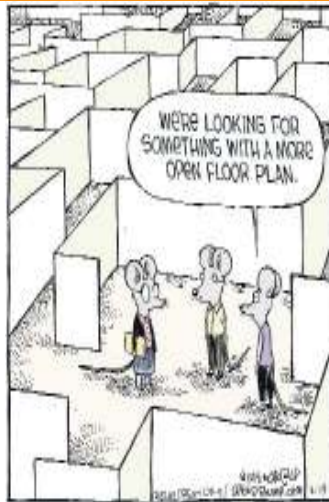
CALVIN AND HOBBS



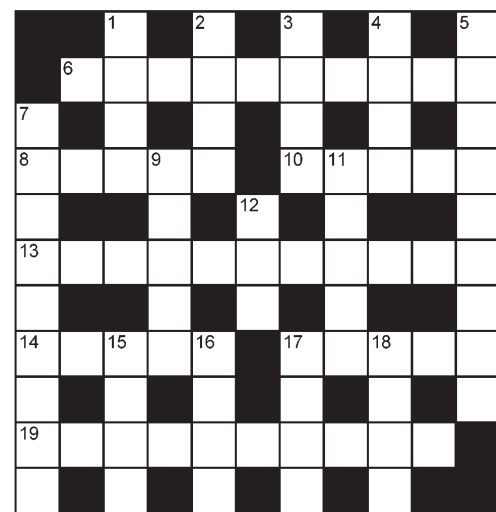
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 6 Job
- 8 A sung musical drama
- 10 A short part of a play
- 13 Refusing to obey orders
- 14 To cook vegetables or meat in an oven using fat
- 17 Listen to music and news on this
- 19 Somewhere students go

DOWN

- 1 Painful throb
- 2 Hawaiian dance
- 3 Overtake
- 4 Pleasant
- 5 A jab with a syringe
- 7 Marvellous
- 9 A plant's anchors in the soil

- 11 Porcelain
- 12 Fast aeroplane
- 15 This chemical liquid burns
- 16 Held by ropes
- 17 Take a break
- 18 A fruit from a palm tree

SOLUTION



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution								
5	3	8	9	4	7	6	2	1
1	9	6	2	3	8	5	4	7
7	2	4	6	5	1	3	9	8
2	6	3	8	1	4	7	5	9
4	7	1	5	9	3	8	6	2
8	5	9	7	6	2	1	3	4
6	1	5	4	8	9	2	7	3
9	8	2	3	7	5	4	1	6
3	4	7	1	2	6	9	8	5

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

‘The cobblestone streets in Galle were a lot of fun to stroll through’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Kritika Kamra recently travelled to Galle, a Portuguese town situated on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka. It doesn't hide its past from view. Its colonial-era focal point is surrounded by windswept beaches and nodding palms, while the remainder of the city is lined with Dutch-style homes, eccentric stores, whitewashed mansions, and historical museums.

The Pioneer hears about her “rejuvenating” travel and trekking experiences, which allowed her to experience a breath of fresh air in this ancient city. For instance, the well-known *Mitron* fame divulges, “My vacation to Galle was the ideal escape. The cobblestone streets were a lot of fun to stroll through while taking in the culture and architecture. I was also quite impressed by Sri Lanka’s warmth.”

The Portuguese constructed the Galle Fort, which the Dutch subsequently strengthened, and it is now recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Archaeologically, historically, and architecturally, it is significant. The way the old and modern worlds converge in Galle is something she found really intriguing. Although its appearance could take you back in time, the people and culture there now are cutting-edge and dynamic.

“I also visited Ahangama, which is a beach popular among surfers south of Galle,” says the Bareilly girl, and she continues. “The beaches are lovely and well-kept. Gorgeous blue skies and seas, smooth beaches, with palm trees along the roadways. Sri Lanka has individuality and is naturally lovely. There are some great surfing locations in the south of the nation that are appropriate for both novice and expert surfers.”

She thinks local cuisine tells you a lot about a place. “A Sri Lankan thali or plate of regional cuisine can educate you about the geography and history of the area. An understanding of Sri Lanka’s colonial past can



Actress Kritika Kamra, who recently travelled to Galle, gets candid with *The Pioneer* for our weekly segment of Travel Tales, sharing her travel diaries and more from the trip.

also be gained from the native ingredients, which include the spices for which the country is renowned, and the culinary methods, which combine traditional European methods with indigenous ones. A local chef taught me an extremely interesting and educational culinary class,” added the fashion graduate.

The Galle Fort is heavily influenced by its colonial past. Things from the past that have been preserved include the architecture, the marine museum, and even geographical names, such as Ceylon, which was Sri Lanka’s previous name. You may stroll to two famous buildings: the lighthouse and the clock tower. Everything in the fort town is easily accessible by foot, which is its best feature. You can walk there in a matter of minutes, whether your goal is to have a gelato or a stroll along the beach, informed *Tandav* fame!

She continued, “India’s geog-

raphy, history, and culture are all astounding. We have everything from beaches to mountains, rivers to deserts, rainforests to well-known landmarks. There are a plethora of languages, cuisines, and art forms to discover in our nation. Even if popular tourist destinations like Rajasthan, Goa, and Pondicherry exist, I have a special place in my heart for Kashmir. Kashmir is absolutely unlike any other location. While I have seen the Swiss Alps, nothing compares to Kashmir’s untainted beauty and unique character. An experience unlike any other can be had by taking a Shikara ride on the Dal Lake, going for a stroll through Nishat Bagh in Srinagar, lodging by the Lidder River, skiing in Gulmarg, and spending evenings by the Bukhari. Kashmir is the most enchanting and romantic location on earth.”

The experience stays and boutique hotels are her favorites. “I would rather stay in thoughtfully luxurious accommodations with a consistent buffet than generic five-star chain hotels. For me, the details are crucial. The features I search for in the ideal hotel include customizable itineraries, flexible scheduling, seclusion, food that is based on ingredients, lots of outdoor space, and an excellent pool,” the *Bambai Meri Jaan* fame gave her thoughts.

Goa due to its convenience and closeness to Mumbai, it has been ideal for a brief getaway or a change of scenery for her with just enough activities to keep one busy if desired, whether it’s for a weekend or a week off. She said, “The blend of urban and rural life is excellent. I can spend my days lounging on the beach, sipping coffee from a shack, selecting an excellent yoga class, receiving an ayurvedic massage, sipping negronis in a classy bar, and enjoying the best sushi for supper. I’m fond of the opportunities that Goa presents.”

She has never taken a solo trip. She admits openly it’s not for her. However, her best friend and she once thought they were being followed while on a girls’ trip. She recalled, “We were pretty scared, and it was in Paris. Our hotel was a little walk from the train station. That evening, we returned safely, but the following day, we misplaced our camera. In a restaurant, it was taken from our table. We received CCTV footage, went to the police, and nearly pursued the man, but we were unable to retrieve the camera. This was a long time ago. I now take great care of my goods and safety.”

She enjoyed trying a variety of local foods guilt-free, including curries, baked goods, and coconut sweets when in Galle. Despite the

heat, they managed to locate a delicious gelato shop, where she enjoyed a scoop every day. The coconut water was quite delicious and fresh as well! To be precise, “I went surfing in Ahangama. Though I’m far from perfect, it was a start. I’m going back to do more of it. In order to see the views, I also climbed the Galle lighthouse. Climbing and descending the historic spiral staircase was a lot of fun. We took a lovely journey from Galle to the southern beaches, passing through little villages and seeing the scenery change every few minutes. Whale viewing was one thing I did not get to do on my vacation. When I visit Sri Lanka later, I intend to carry it out.”

She would adore taking a trip with Soha Ali Khan, Cyrus, Lara Dutta, Naseer Sahab, or Dino. They shot in Rajasthan for a new series, and it was almost like a holiday. They were all in one resort and in a bio-bubble because it was during the lockdown. They spent a lot of time together, lived there, and shot there. The whole group got along pretty well, and it was a lot of fun. She would adore doing it again. “One benefit of being an actor is getting to shoot in beautiful places. It’s honestly a very ideal situation to be able to do what I love you in a beautiful environment with the people I love,” the actress concluded.



‘If I’ve mastered my craft, I’m ready for more performances’

Actress Komal Sachdeva, who was recently seen in Shah Rukh Khan’s *Dunki*, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing her feelings about being a part of a Shah Rukh Khan-starrer, being appreciated by Rajkumar Hirani, and more.



TEJAL SINHA

Every film aficionado, especially the 90s ones, says that Shah Rukh Khan was, for once in our lives, the dream boy whom we could never stop crushing over. And to have that one glimpse of his, to date, has been a dream to many. Getting to stand alongside him and making that eye-to-eye contact could be no less than a drop-dead heart-stirring moment.

Well, the same feeling, or in fact substantially more, was it for the budding actress Komal Sachdeva with her recent stint in the recent blockbuster *Dunki*, playing the character of Chameli.

Though she has worked on some great projects, be it her first commercial project, *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*, *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*, Amazon Prime’s *Tandav*, Disney Plus Hotstar’s *Criminal Justice*, or an ad with Rajkumar Rao for Glance Live, the turning point for her was the *Dunki*. The role, exposure, and amazing team, including Shahrukh Khan, Rajkumar Hirani, Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, and Boman Irani, made it an incredible experience for her.

An elated Komal begins, “I’m short of words! It feels amazing and thrilling. I’m filled with gratitude to be part of this project. You know, what comes on screen is

just a small portion of what actually happens behind the scenes. My shoot days were around 20 to 25 days, and there were rehearsals, look tests, and other things. The whole journey—starting with this team, rehearsing, developing the character, being part of the scenes—took about one and a half years. Overall, it has been an amazing experience, and it feels out of this world to be part of this project.”

Initially, since the day she arrived in Bombay, just like an outsider, she too had a routine to check for audition updates and look through various sources like Instagram and WhatsApp groups. And sometimes even visiting casting offices in Aram Nagar to see what’s happening. And then one day, “I came across a post from Mukesh Chhabra. They were looking for a Punjabi-speaking actor, and there was an email address in the post. I shared my profile with them through that email, and they sent me the script on WhatsApp. During those days, auditions were mostly done at home. You had to record your own audition and then send it to the casting people. It was right after the COVID-19 period, so I went through the script and the character brief and interpreted it my way. I recorded the audition and sent it back to the casting associate, who approached me. In a very short time, I got confirmation that I was locked for the project.”

Working with the OG SRK was no less than an incredible experience. “There’s so much to learn from him, not just as an actor but also as a human being,” gleefully enthuses the *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* actress. “The way he behaves with his team and people around him, especially with women, is outstanding. He’s so courteous and gentle when interacting with you. What’s remarkable is his humility; he is so humble and grounded. He has no air around him, and he makes you feel very comfortable. It gives you the space to perform your part. Shah Rukh sir’s work ethic is out of this world. I’ve learned a lot from him in terms of work ethic. Even when he’s not in the frame and the focus is on another person, he gives his best cues so that you can perform accordingly and get those reactions. He doesn’t need to do that, of course, but I think he’s amazing. He’s not only an incredible actor but also an amazing human being.”

So, what actually happened was that filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani had seen her audition and had very much appreciated her work too. Her first meeting with

him was on the rehearsal day for the classroom scene. For that scene, she recalls, “We were sitting there in the classroom setup when he entered the room. I said, ‘Hi sir, I’m Komal,’ and he recognised me. He said, ‘I know; I’ve seen your audition, and we loved it.’ Those two or three seconds felt like they were moving so slowly, and it felt magical. For someone like him, who has seen so many auditions, to remember mine meant a lot to me. When you’re in the field of acting, there are days when you feel low and doubt yourself. Getting feedback or validation from someone at the top of their game in the industry is motivating and inspiring. It encourages you to keep going.”

Apart from Shahrukh Khan, an ensemble cast includes Boman Irani, Vicky Kaushal, and Taapsee Pannu. Initially, before that, she could begin her shooting; she did feel very nervous, and why not? She recalls, “I thought it wouldn’t be easy for me to keep up with the kind of energy and performance they put forward. But it turned out to be the other way around. It was much easier with them because they made me feel very comfortable. They gave me space and made me feel like I was part of the team, an important part of our project. We were all one team working towards the same goal, and they created a safe environment that made it easy for me to fit in. I think it was amazing, and I learned so much from them.”

Looking at her filmography, she shares that every time she picks up a project, she aims for substantial roles. Though she has played good cameos in some great movies, she feels the projects she’s been a part of are significant because, she says, “of the good teams I worked with, whether it’s *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* or *Tandav*. They had a good team and a very good script. The second thing is, even if my character has just one or two scenes, those are my scenes. I mean, in those scenes, I have the scope for performance, and I believe I have to get my foot inside the door. When I came to Bombay, I knew nobody, so my intention in starting to act was to do whatever I could. I wanted to show my work and give a small performance, hoping that people would support me based on that. I wanted them to wonder whether I was an actor. If I’ve mastered my craft and if I’m ready for more performances, I want to work on projects that have meaning, where I can portray the character well, and it helps me explore myself as an actor.”

A CULINARY TRIBUTE THIS REPUBLIC DAY

APRICOT DELIGHT RECIPE



INGREDIENTS:

- Sponge cake - 300g
- Apricots - 100g
- Sugar - 200g
- Strawberry crush - 10ml
- Kiwi crush - 10ml
- Cream - 10ml

METHOD:

- Step 1. First, prepare the apricot delight by combining apricots and sugar. Cook the mixture until it forms a thick consistency. Set it aside to cool.
- Step 2. Cut the sponge cake into three layers. Step 3. Spread a layer of the prepared apricot delight on the first layer of the sponge cake.
- Step 4. Place the second layer of sponge cake on top of the apricot delight.
- Step 5. Apply another layer of apricot delight on the second layer of the sponge cake.
- Step 6. Finally, place the third layer of sponge cake on top.
- Step 7. Garnish the top layer with strawberry crush and kiwi crush, creating a design resembling a flag.
- Step 8. Whip the cream until it forms soft peaks and use it to decorate the edges or any other desired areas of the cake.
- Step 9. Allow the cake to set in the refrigerator for a few hours before serving.
- Step 10. Slice and serve your Apricot Delight with the delightful flavors of apricots and the colorful presentation resembling a flag.



COURTESY:
CHEF VH SURESH-
CORPORATE
EXECUTIVE CHEF
PLATFORM 65

TIRANGA PANEER TIKKA RECIPE

INGREDIENTS:

- Paneer - 500g
- Curd - 300g
- Ginger garlic paste - 50g
- Palak (Spinach) - 10 leaves
- Cheese - 15g
- Salt - As per taste
- Mango Chilly - 10g
- Garam Masala - 5g
- Black Salt - As per taste
- Butter - 15ml
- Tomato - 1
- Capsicum - 1
- Onion - 1

METHOD:

- Step 1. Cut the paneer into square pieces.
- Step 2. Make a paste of palak separately.
- Step 3. Melt cheese in a separate bowl.
- Step 4. Prepare a masala mixture in another bowl with mango chilly, garam masala, and black salt.
- Step 5. Take three bowls and marinate paneer separately with palak paste, melted cheese, and the masala mixture prepared in step 4.
- Step 6. Cut the tomato, capsicum, and onion into circular slices.
- Step 7. Skewer the marinated paneer and the vegetable slices onto three separate sticks, creating a tricolor effect.
- Step 8. Cook the skewers on a clay oven or grill until the paneer is cooked and has a nice char.
- Step 9. Arrange the cooked skewers in the order of the Indian flag’s colors - saffron (mango chilly-marinated), white (cheese-marinated), and green (palak-marinated).
- Step 10. Before serving, you can brush the tikka with a mixture of melted butter and a pinch of garam masala for added flavor.
- Step 11. Serve the Tiranga Paneer Tikka as a delicious and patriotic appetizer.



SPINNERS PUT INDIA IN STRONG POSITION ON DAY ONE

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

After spinners put England batters through a harsh scrutiny, Yashasvi Jaiswal rolled out his own version of 'Bazball' en route to a crushing fifty as India posted 119 for one to take the upper hand on day one of the opening Test here on Thursday.

At close, Jaiswal (76 batting, 70 balls, 9x4, 3x6) and Shubman Gill (14 batting) were at the crease and the hosts are 127 runs in arrears of England's anaemic first innings total of 246, which was built around skipper Ben Stokes' hardheaded 88-ball 70. India were comfortably placed at 119 for one at stumps after bowling out England for 246 on the opening day of the first Test here on Thursday.

Around Stokes, England batsmen crumbled as the spin trika of Ravichandran Ashwin (3/68), Ravindra Jadeja (3/88) and Axar Patel (2/33) rudely nudged them back to reality of batting on an Indian pitch that offers barrowful of turn and grip even from day one.

But when the Indian openers came out bat the RGI Stadium,

pitch appeared to have lost its bite and the England tweekers looked like a defanged lot. Jaiswal wrapped himself with the leader's cape despite the presence of his captain Rohit Sharma (24, 27 balls) at the other end, tearing into England bowlers with gusto.

The gap between runs and balls could give the left-hander's innings a hue of carelessness but it was anything but that. Jaiswal started his and the team's innings with a clipped boundary to square leg off pacer Mark Wood, but that was just the appetizer as the left-hander offered a harsh welcome to Tom Hartley to international cricket. The 22-year-old smashed the England left-arm spinner for two sixes in his first over, one over long-on and the other in front of the square.

His twinkling feet and fast hands made it tough for the England spinners to settle into a rhythm against him.

Jaiswal and Rohit added 80 runs in just 12.1 overs to give their side a wonderful launching pad.

It came to an end when Rohit gave a catch to Stokes off left-

INDIA 119/1 AFTER BOWLING OUT ENGLAND FOR 246



arm spinner Jack Leach while trying to clear him over the long-on.

But for the rest of the innings, it was a futile toil for the English bowlers as this could be the beginning of a long and tiring tour for them.

To make it even more exasperating for them, they have already exhausted all the three reviews for this innings as well.

However, the whole atmosphere was different when the Indian spinners were operating - the ball bounced, turned and

gripped to leave the English batters an edgy group except a few small passages.

One of them came in the post-lunch session when Joe Root (29, 60 balls) and Jonny Bairstow (37, 58 balls) added 61 runs for the fourth-wicket as England

attempted to stay above the fast-rising water.

Root and Bairstow, generally, relied on sweep and the reverse avatar of that shot occasionally to gather runs. However, Root was culpable of being too pre-meditative and it eventually led

to his downfall.

Jadeja hit a fuller length which resulted in a top-edge off Root's bat that flew to short fine leg where Jasprit Bumrah did not have to strain himself much to complete the catch.

Bairstow too did not last long as Axar delivered a peach from wide of the crease to take out the batter's off-stump.

Ben Foakes has this reputation of being a fine player of spin but on this day only struggle was visible as he departed with a 24-ball four, offering a simple catch to stumper KS Bharat off Axar as England lost five wickets in that session for 107 runs.

It was left to captain Stokes, who employed conventional and non-conventional sweeps to counter spin, to wage a lonely battle in the company of tailenders and even looked solid during his stay in the middle.

But then on dire occasions like the one England encountered here, even a lion-hearted warrior like Stokes could only add a modicum of respectability to the total.

After a sedate beginning, Stokes slipped into his own and played some dazzling shots before

Bumrah disturbed his stumps. His innings contained six fours and three sixes.

In the morning session, England might have daydreamed of another buccaneering effort after openers Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley made 25 runs in the first four overs which later swelled to 55 in 11.5 overs.

But Ashwin underlined his mastery over left-handers for a zillionth time while dismissing Duckett.

The 37-year-old managed to skid one on to beat Duckett's defence to hit his pads as the latter played for non-existent turn.

Umpire Chris Gaffaney did not have to think twice before raising his finger, and even a review could not save Duckett.

The Indian spinners rushed through that creek to dismantle the England innings as India tightened the grip over the proceedings.

BRIEF SCORES:

England 1st innings: 246 all out in 64.3 overs (Ben Stokes 70; Ravindra Jadeja 3/88, R Ashwin 3/68).

India 1st innings: 119/1 in 23 overs (Yashasvi Jaiswal batting 76).



Jaiswal has taken to Test cricket like a fish to water: Ashwin

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Veteran India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is in awe of Yashasvi Jaiswal's batting in only his fifth Test, saying the youngster has not put a foot wrong in his 76-run knock against England and has taken to the five-day format "like a fish to water."

Jaiswal remained unbeaten after playing 70 balls, hitting nine boundaries and three sixes on the opening day of the first Test.

"He (Jaiswal) had a great time in the IPL, had a wonderful start in first-class cricket. I am quite enjoying it. I am seeing Rishabh Pant there. His fearless cricket is

serving him well," Ashwin said after the end of the opening day's play.

"Yashasvi has not put a foot wrong, he has taken to Test cricket like a fish to water," the senior spinner added.

"It was pretty interesting in the first session, maybe there was a bit of moisture. Because of the early moisture, there was enough speed. Then it slowed down. Not enough speed to carry through to the slips," Ashwin said.

"240 was a very very good competitive total. Thought 30-40 runs more than what we would have liked. Someone making a hundred tomorrow will put us in the driver's seat."

Rohit remains optimistic despite decade long ICC Trophy drought

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

India skipper Rohit Sharma firmly believes that their "time will come" to win an elusive ICC trophy, a milestone they have been chasing for the past decade.

The recent World Cup 2023 final loss to Australia saw India's quest for an ICC title stretch to 10 years with their last victory dating back to the Champions Trophy in 2013 under the leadership of MS Dhoni.

"The last three years have been great. Except winning the finals of ICC trophies, we have won everything," Rohit said while talking to JioCinema on the sidelines of their opening Test against England here.

"That's one thing we've not been able to accomplish, but I think time will come. All we need to do is stay in a good mindset, not worry too much about the past, because you can't change the past.

"What you can change is what is going to come next, so all of us are quite focussed on that. We are playing our hearts out."

After being runners-up in the T201 World Cup in 2014, the team faced semi-final exits in the 2015 ODI World Cup, the 2016 T20 World Cup, and the 2019 ODI World Cup.

The agony continued with defeats in the finals of the 2017 Champions Trophy along with



a semi-final loss in the 2022 T20 World Cup.

They also lost the finals of the first two World Test Championship cycles.

NO NUMBER-GAME: Sharma, known for his aggressive style of strokemaking, further spoke about his approach to captaincy.

"I wanted to bring about certain change, players going out there and playing with a lot of freedom. I wanted to take the statistical side of cricket out of this team.

"Numbers are overrated. In India, we do talk a lot about numbers and all of that. I got five hundreds in the 2019 World Cup, but we still lost. The hundreds don't matter.

"I may think about them maybe 20 years later after I retire, but what did we get? I wanted the trophy.

"If you don't win trophies, I don't think those 5-6 hundreds make too much sense. Team sport is all about winning trophies, not about individual accomplishments," he added.



Kohli wins ICC Men ODI Cricketer of the Year Award for fourth time

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli was on Thursday crowned the ICC men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023 for his excellent run in the format last year headlined by a phenomenal outing in the World Cup at home.

This is the fourth such award for Kohli, who was the second most prolific run-scorer in ODIs last year behind compatriot Shubman Gill.

The former India skipper finished the year with 1,377 runs which included six centuries and eight half-centuries.

The year will forever be remembered as the one in which Kohli surpassed the great Sachin Tendulkar's longstanding record of ODI centuries, and the award caps a memorable 12 months for the India batter, who guided the country to the World Cup final, winning the Player of the Tournament prize along the way for scoring a record 765 runs in 11 matches.

This is the seventh individual ICC award won by Kohli during his glittering career, and his fourth in the ODI category after previous wins in 2012, 2017 and 2018.

He also won the Test award in 2018 while the years 2017 and 2018 saw him also win the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year.

Kohli claimed the silverware from a shortlist that included countrymen Gill and

Mohammed Shami, plus New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell.

Kohli lost out on the race for the Cricketer of the Year Award to Australian captain Pat Cummins, who won it ahead of compatriot Travis Head and Indian duo Ravindra Jadeja and Kohli.

Cummins won the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for men's Cricketer of the Year and England all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt bagged her second successive Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for women's Cricketer of the Year.

Australia batter Usman Khawaja was named the men's Test Cricketer of the Year, holding off competition from fellow Australian run-scorer Travis Head, India spinner R Ashwin and England batter Joe Root.

Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu won her maiden women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award, becoming the first female cricketer from the country to win an ICC award.

A landmark year has not only seen Athapaththu clinch the individual award, but also saw her being named captain of both the ICC women's ODI and T201 Teams of the Year, announced earlier in the week.

England umpire Richard Illingworth won the David Shepherd Trophy for Umpire of the Year for the third time, after previously winning in 2019 and 2022.

Zimbabwe were revealed as the winners of the Spirit of Cricket

Award for their sporting conduct immediately following the thrilling victory over West Indies in the men's World Cup Qualifier match in Harare in June.

Cummins received the trophy after a phenomenal year which saw him produce outstanding individual performances while also leading his side to the World Test Championship and World Cup titles.

Cummins is the fifth Australian to win the trophy, following Ricky Ponting (2006 and 2007), Mitchell Johnson (2009 and 2014), Michael Clarke (2013) and Steve Smith (2015).

Cummins grabbed 42 wickets in 11 Tests during the year at an average of 27.50 with a best match haul of 10 for 47 in the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan. These notable contributions came as Australia claimed their maiden World Test Championship mace and retained the Ashes on English soil.

In ODIs, he grabbed 17 wickets in 13 matches at an economy rate of 5.74. His best figures of three for 51 against South Africa in the World Cup semi-final was followed by a crucial spell of two for 34 against India in the blockbuster final in Ahmedabad.

"It's a huge honour. It has been a big year, lots of wonderful team success. To get this individual honour is huge and I am pretty amazed. In terms of individual accolades, it is right up there," Cummins said in an ICC press release.

Sarfraz serves reminder with 161 for India A

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Barely 48 hours after receiving his umpteenth snub from the selectors, Mumbai's 'run-machine' Sarfraz Khan served a stern reminder to the national selection committee with a majestic 161 that put India A in complete command over England Lions on day two of the second 'unofficial Test' here.

Having bowled out England for 152 on the opening day, India A, starting the day at 150 for no loss, ended on 489 with a massive 337-run first innings lead which will give them a good shot of gunning for an innings victory.

While seasoned Abhimanyu Easwaran (58) and left-handed Devdutt Padikkal (105) set the

platform with a 162-run opening stand, Sarfraz took full advantage of good batting conditions looting runs off the Lions spinners, who didn't have answers to his repeated onslaught.

Sarfraz, expectedly hurt after being pipped by Rajat Patidar as Virat Kohli's replacement in the two Tests against England, did the best possible thing — let his bat do all the talking.

The conditions were featherbed at the Narendra Modi Stadium 'Ground A' but no one can take the credit away from the burly Mumbaier, who gave a masterclass on how to tackle spinners.

All his five sixes came off specialist spinners — three he hit off left-arm spinner Callum



Parkinson, all down the ground while a couple of maximums came off off-spinner Oliver Price, one of which was hit into the cow corner.

He took a special liking for Parkinson, who was also hit for nine of his 18 boundaries. He repeatedly used his feet and also

played a lot of inside out drives.

Sarfraz was also severe on opposition's best bowler Matthew Potts (6/125), the right arm seamer who has already played for England. He was creamed for half dozen boundaries as he repeatedly peppered the cover and extra cover

boundary region.

He added 169 for the sixth wicket with Washington Sundar (57) and 96 for the seventh wicket with spinner Saurabh Kumar (77), who was also in rollicking form with the willow, helping himself with 16 fours.

The innings would keep Sarfraz firmly in contention for a Test berth as no one knows when someone gets injured as he would certainly be the next in line if Shreyas Iyer fails to get going in the current series.

BRIEF SCORES:

England Lions 152. **India A** 489 (Sarfraz Khan 161, Devdutt Padikkal 105, Abhimanyu Easwaran 58, Washington Sundar 57, Saurabh Kumar 77, Matthew Potts 6/125).

Silva, Hodge lead West Indies to 266-8 against Australia

AP ■ BRISBANE

Joshua Da Silva and Kavem Hodge rallied West Indies to 266-8 against Australia with resolute half-centuries on day one of the day-night test at the Gabba on Thursday.

Da Silva (79) and Hodge (71) shared a 149-run stand in almost two sessions in a rare frustrating day for the Australians in a home season that's seen them whitewash Pakistan 3-0 and win the first test against the West Indies at Adelaide by 10 wickets.

Off-spinning allrounder Kevin Sinclair, who made his test debut in place of Gudakesh Motie, was unbeaten on 16 while Alzarri Joseph counter-punched with seven boundaries among 32 runs before he edged Josh Hazlewood in the slips in the last over.

Nathan Lyon broke up Da Silva and Hodge two overs before the second new ball became available. Lyon trapped Da Silva lbw on the back foot while bowling round the wicket. The batter went for an unsuccessful referral.

The second pink ball netted Hodge and Joseph.

Hodge was caught at second slip off Mitchell Starc, who took 4-68.

Da Silva's patient 157-ball knock included seven boundaries. He braved a brief spell of short balls from the Australian quicks in the second session during which captain Pat Cummins used seven bowlers without any success.

Hodge, in his second test, pulled Starc for six over fine leg after dinner and hit eight boundaries in his 194-ball innings, playing some impressive drives to over-



pitched deliveries on the off side.

Australia could have broken the West Indies' first century stand in the series early in the last session, but Hodge's nick flew through vacant second slip, then Cameroon Green couldn't hold on to a tough left-handed catch at gully off Starc.

Hodge and Da Silva showed plenty of patience against the Australia pace trio and Lyon's spin threat as they grinded out a brilliant partnership against a softened pink ball. The pitch also got better for batting in the twilight.

Starc earlier became the fifth Australian bowler to take 350 test wickets when he claimed three in the first session.

Starc got opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul caught at slip by Steve Smith on 21 and Alick Athanaze was caught behind by Alex Carey on 8 as the West

Indies top order struggled with the bounce of the pitch. Starc removed Justin Greaves on 6 with the last ball before tea.

Australia has a perfect record in day-night tests, winning all 11 it has played with the pink ball. As expected, Australia opener Usman Khawaja was passed fit to play. Travis Head is set to play despite a recent positive COVID-19 test.

After a match-winning century in Adelaide, Head contracted COVID-19 but Cummins said he was recovering well.

On Wednesday, Cricket Australia said allrounder Green and coach Andrew McDonald were the latest members of the squad to catch COVID-19. They were isolated until testing negative. In line with Cricket Australia protocols, Green and McDonald were able to take their place in the test.

SIVA KARTHIKEYA



‘The exchange between the extraterrestrial and human in *Ayalaan* will resonate with viewers’

PNS| HYDERABAD

Starring Siva Karthikeya in the fantasy sci-fi movie *Ayalaan*. The protagonist is Rakul Preet Singh. J. Rajesh produces this R. Ravikumar-directed movie under the KJR Studios label. A.R. Rahman, the renowned music director and Oscar winner, wrote the soundtrack. For Sankranti, it was launched in Tamil Nadu on January 12. Ganga Entertainments is releasing Maheshwar Reddy in Telugu states on the January 26. During the film's premiere, Sivakarthekeyan spoke with the Telugu press.

He says, “The movie *Ayalaan* contains 4500 visual effects shots. Compared to the movies *2.0* and *Robo*, this one features more special effects. We have a tight budget. One could seem to dream bigger if the movie could be produced on a tight budget. That's the reason I chose to take so long to complete this film.” The newest sensation in Tamil cinema, *Ayalaan*, has garnered a lot of interest. The film, has earned more than Rs. 50 crore in Tamil Nadu already.

The well-known actor who traveled to Hyderabad for a promotion stated, “There are some reservations, though. I won't reveal the title of the Hollywood production, but the scene we recorded was included in a later release. Since it's a fantasy superhero movie, some of the scenes we shot may

appear in other movies that are released later. However, *Ayalaan*'s central narrative—the encounters and scenes between the alien and human—has not yet been adapted into a motion picture. We haven't finished our script yet. Although our director Kanaka may make screenplay adjustments if he writes the script, Tamil Nadu moviegoers did not voice any complaints regarding the plot. They stated as much and they liked it.”

On January 26, 2024, the Telugu version will be released in theaters. According to the most recent rumors, *Ayalaan* will debut on Sun NXT, an over-the-top platform, on February 16, 2024. This story has gone viral in Tamil circles, despite the fact that it has not been verified. “There is a global notion in this movie. The exchange between the extraterrestrial and human will resonate with viewers worldwide. In Tamil Nadu, our film was a big hit. It will also be a huge smash in Telugu, I'm sure of it. I'm confident that everyone who has viewed the movie will value our work.”

This esteemed endeavor was produced by Kotapadi J. Rajesh under the auspices of KJR Studios. The lead actress was played by Rakul Preet Singh. Other important players were Yogi Babu, Bhanu Priya, Isha Koppikar, and Sharad Kelkar. Checking for further developments, we get to know, “We decided not to release our film because Sankranti already has a lot of Telugu films out. I was confident that it would succeed, even if it arrived two weeks later than expected. Three Telugu songs—*Love Today*, *Vidudalai*, and Vishal's *Abhimanyudu*—became successful after being released in Tamil. It will function if the content is strong. I held out for the movie for five years. A fortnight is not too much to ask.”

Ayalaan will definitely have a sequel. A formal update regarding the film's sequel has now been released by the producers. After its release, *Ayalaan* garnered favorable reviews and performed well at the box office. Furthermore, “It's been said that a 200–300 crore budget is necessary to make a movie of this caliber. It is possible to complete a project on a tight budget if you have the appropriate team and idea. In the event that it becomes successful, the producers will pitch in extra money. Then we have even greater dreams.

Actor Siva Karthikeya, who is all set to enrapture hearts now even in the Telugu states with *Ayalaan*, speaks to the Hyderabad media sharing more insights about the film, a global notion in the film, and more.

That was our driving force.” Ninety percent of the scenes feature graphics. Alien content makes up 70% of the film. The bulk of the film, then, features special effects!

Moreover, “We shot the film prior to COVID. Visual effects could not be completed since due to corona studios were closed. A.R. Rahman was fixed, indeed. My first movie with him is this one. I think Rahman is fantastic. I've always wanted Rehman to write the soundtrack for my movie. Rahman worked till the very end because of Ravikumar's idea and the inspiration he provided. Some musical improvisations were made because the Telugu release was only two weeks away.”

However, the main actor believes that *Ayalaan* is more like a theme park than a film. A fun ride has begun. After two and a half hours of comfortable viewing, you can get to work. “To produce Alien, we invested extra time and conducted a great deal of research. The concept of a sequel has long been around. We intend to produce the sequel much more extensively. We were inspired by Tamil Nadu's success.”



Vishal-starrer *Rathnam* will hit the cinemas on April 26

Action hero Vishal who had a considerable market in Telugu too has been struggling recently to draw decent openings in Telugu. His last solid hit was *Ahimayudu*. His last release *Mark Antony* became a success in Tamil but ended up as below average in Telugu. Vishal is currently doing a powerful action film, *Rathnam* under the direction of Hari. The makers of the movie recently announced the film's title, besides unveiling a teaser called *First Shot* which is shot as a single shot which created buzz. This is the third movie in the combination of Vishal and Hari, after the success of *Bharani* and

Pooja. On Thursday, the makers announced the film's release date. The film will be released worldwide on April 26th in Tamil and Telugu. Priya Bhavani Shankar is the leading lady in the movie, where Samuthirakani, Yogibabu and Gautham Vasudev Menon will be seen in crucial roles. Rockstar Devi Sri Prasad will score the music, while the cinematography is handled by M. Sukumar. Along with Karthik Subbaraj, Kaarthikeyan Santhanam and Zee Studios together are producing *Rathnam*, while Kalyan Subramaniam, Alankar Pandian are the co-producers.

Mohanlal's *Malaikottai Vaaliban* sequel is on the cards



Following the resounding success of *Neru*, the highly anticipated Mollywood film *Malaikottai Vaaliban*, starring the renowned actor Mohanlal, has hit the big screens today to positive acclaim. Lijo Jose Pellissery is the helmer of this biggie. It has been officially confirmed that a sequel to *Malaikottai Vaaliban* is in the works. The announcement was made at the film's end, generating excitement among fans. However, details regarding the sequel's release date in cinemas are yet to be revealed.

The movie features stellar performances by Manikanda Rajan, Sonalee Kulkarni, Andrea Ravera, Hareesh Peradi, and Danish Sait in significant roles. Produced by John and Mary Creative in collaboration with Max Labs and Century Films, this period action drama boasts the musical talent of Prashant Pillai. Stay tuned for more updates.



Homable films to produce Akhil's next

Akhil Akkineni will be doing a film directed by newcomer Anil Kumar. It will be primarily produced by UV Creations. The latest speculation in Tinseltown is that the big-ticket extravaganza will also be produced by Homable Films, known for the magnum opus *KGF* franchise, the staggering hit *Kantara* and last year's biggest pan-Indian Tollywood movie *Salaar*. If the rumour is true, the *Most Eligible*

Bachelor actor can't ask for more.

After the calamitous failure of *Surender Reddy*-directed *Agent* last year, he couldn't have expected a big-scale project immediately. Not only is he doing such a project but the same is backed by two cash-rich banners.

The untitled film of Akhil will go on the floors soon. It will be released in the first half of 2025. It will involve VFX and mega action set pieces.

Mani Ratnam and Kamal Haasan begin filming *Thug Life*



The makers of *Thug Life* recently announced that filming has officially begun, which heightened anticipation to unprecedented levels.

The movie *Thug Life*, starring Ulaganayagan Kamal Haasan and directed by Mani Ratnam, which was first revealed earlier this year, has begun production. Trisha, Gautham Karthik, Dulquer Salmaan, Aishwarya Lekshmi, Jayam Ravi, and Joju George are among the film's many well-known stars.

The film's production, which is being produced by Mani Ratnam's Madras Talkies and Kamal Haasan's Raaj Kamal Films International, commenced on Wednesday. The production company shared a video showing the actors and crew and wrote, “Today's shooting is off to a good start.” *Malaganayagan*, *#ThugLifeShootBegins*.



Producer Ravi Kasturi is confident on *Game On*

Geetanand and Neha Solanki will be seen in meaty roles in the upcoming action thriller *Game On*, produced by Ravi Kasturi under the banner of Kasturi Creations and Golden Wings Productions, Presented by Sakshi Ravi (Sai Lakshmi Talari). Dayanandh has wielded the megaphone. The film is all set for a grand release on February 2nd. The film created solid buzz with the promotional content.

On Thursday, producer Ravi Kasturi interacted with media about the film, and shared, “I've been interested in films since my college days, and the idea to make a film with Geetanand as the hero and myself as the producer was always there. Now that we have a compelling story, we've embarked on this project, allocating ample time for pre-production to ensure perfection. This psychological thriller incorporates real-time game with added commercial elements, encompassing action, emotion, and family drama. The film explores how a person striving to live his life tackles challenges.”

As a producer, he shared that he has learnt about having patience through his journey. He further shares, “Geetanand, being my friend, has always impressed me

with his performance. I gave Dayanandh, his brother, a free hand as the director. Subhalekha Sudhakar is a gem of a person, and we had a lot of fun on set. Aditya Menon is a stellar performer, and Madhubala's second innings in her career is anticipated to start with this movie.”

He further adds, “Our faith lies in the content, and this movie experience will undoubtedly guide me for future productions. I've already heard two promising stories, and we plan to announce them after the release of this film.”



press conference for *RRR*, mentioned that Ram Charan was reserved and kept to himself, while Ram Charan, in response, acknowledged being awestruck by Alia's beauty. Their off-screen partnership was further highlighted by a successful ad commercial for the popular drink Frooti, showcasing their appealing and energetic on-screen presence.

Although B-town diva Jhanvi Kapoor is also in contention for the well-defined female role in this rural sports drama, the prevailing sentiment is that Alia Bhatt may secure the role, given her escalating popularity nationwide. The source emphasizes that Alia, with

Alia Bhatt to reportedly star alongside Ram Charan in *RC16*

Mumbai, and the actress has shown a positive inclination towards the role.

According to sources, the camaraderie between Ram Charan and Alia Bhatt, established during their collaboration in *RRR*, has played a pivotal role in this decision. Their on-screen chemistry as Alluri and Sita garnered immense appreciation, and the duo shares a deep understanding of each other's acting prowess and professionalism.

Recalling their previous collaboration, Alia Bhatt, in a

her blend of beauty and talent, offers a safer bet for a high-profile entertainer, and the prospect of reuniting a successful on-screen duo is seen as a strategic move.

The role of Bollywood divas is becoming increasingly significant in Tollywood, given the industry's expanding reach beyond regional boundaries. As of now, Alia appears to have an edge over other contenders. If this dynamic pairing materialises, it would undoubtedly be a casting coup of considerable magnitude in Tollywood, promising an exciting cinematic experience for fans.

