

Monday Mirchi

'JUSTICE' IN TSPSC APPOINTMENTS: IS IT POLITICAL OR SOCIAL?

The Telangana government, by reconstituting the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC) board in fulfillment of the Congress' election promise, seems to have just scratched the surface when it comes to doing 'social justice' in respect of the appointments. Discerning circles see it as more of 'political rehabilitation' of a few officials. Although former Director-General of Police Mahender Reddy's appointment as Chairman is not being questioned, the whispers in the corridors of power are centered on how caste particulars of the members were released to the media to put out the intended message. Not many knew that Anita Rajenderan hails from the BC-B (Goud) community. Yarrabadi Rammohan Rao, one of the members, is from Andhra. A native of Nandigama in Krishna district, he had been allocated to AP Rammohan Rao was one of the 214 people who had elected to serve Telangana State in the aftermath of bifurcation. Another member, Palavai Rajani Kumari, joined the Congress just before the elections. A government employee, she was handpicked by the Telugu Desam Party, a little bird told us. Bureaucratic circles are abuzz on how her appointment drew Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's 'special interest'.

LINE-UP OF OFFICIALS TO FIX KTR?

These days when officials are in the dock, the first question that arises in eager bureaucratic circles is: 'Will the mud stick on former minister KT Rama Rao?' Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) sleuths have reportedly exposed disproportionate assets amounting to over Rs 100 crore allegedly amassed by Shiva Balakrishna, Secretary of the Telangana State Real Estate Regulatory Authority and former director of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority. Almost everyone in the know believes that this was done to also throw mud at KTR. The state government has already questioned principal secretary Arvind Kumar for alleged violation of rules in releasing the initial outlay for the Formula E race. Bureaucratic circles are wondering who could be the other officers in line for making it easy for the government to get back at KTR.

ADMINISTRATION IS 'SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED'

The administration in Telangana, to use James Bond's celebrated phrase indicating

how prefers his cocktails, is 'shaken, not stirred'. Another rejig, which is likely post Lok Sabha polls, may see the administration stirred. For, several officers have been continuing in the posts for a long time. They, in particular, are on tenterhooks. An official from this once privileged lot shared that the new government and ministers are perhaps in the process of de-briefing, trying to know from the horse's mouth the untoward and juicy things that may have happened over the past 10 years. "Eventually everyone will be moved", a Minister had remarked quite revealingly some time back. So, ultimately there won't be any long-standing officer at all. Moreover, in the present dispensation, a lot depends on the ministers' individual preferences -- whom they want and who should leave -- and not just the CM alone like in the previous regime.

TALK, NO NEED TO RECOMMEND IN WRITING

In the Police Department, which is unobtrusively policed by political masters, transfers of inspectors typically happen at the behest of powerful politicians with accompanying letters of recommendation or follow-up phone calls to the higher authorities concerned. Things at the core are no different under the new Congress government. Like in the past, MLAs are still behind the movements of inspectors. The only difference now is that the MLAs are asked not to give letters, but to follow up only with oral instructions. Since supersensitive cops had sensed regime change much before the Assembly polls, let alone the announcement of final tally, some of the ambitious cops used their chance to go tough on then BRS MLAs. They are expecting rewarding posts now.

AT THE LORD'S DISPOSAL

One has to be a gem among officials to successfully implement the Andhra Pradesh government's Navaratnalu Pedalandariki illu scheme. They have to face adamant walls of difficulties to have their way, be it pooling lands or identifying beneficiaries. Still, Dr Lakshminsha, as MD of the AP State Housing Corporation Limited, managed to build in time around five lakh houses that were inaugurated by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy in Samarakota some time back. No wonder, in Sunday's reshuffle, Dr K Lakshminsha was elevated as the District Collector, Tirupati, putting him, so to speak, at the disposal of Lord Venkateswara.

-Yours truly



Lokesh vows to develop Mangalagiri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

General secretary of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Nara Lokesh on Sunday promised to develop Mangalagiri in such a way that it will capture the attention of the entire State.

Many YSRCP workers joined the TDP in the presence of Lokesh. He expressed confidence that the influence of the YSRCP is diminishing in every corner of Mangalagiri and predicted its complete disappearance within the next 72 days. Accompanying the shift in political allegiance, members from over 500 families also embraced the TDP. Welcoming these new members into the party, Lokesh acknowledged that he had not fully comprehended the challenges faced by Mangalagiri in 2019, as his electoral campaign had left him with limited time. Despite facing defeat in Mangalagiri in 2019, Lokesh highlighted his commitment to implementing 29 welfare and developmental initiatives in the constituency over the past five years.

In contrast, he claimed that the YSRCP had not taken any substantial measures to promote progress in the region.

Sheik Hassan, former MP/TC from Navluru, Rudru Srinivas, and numerous YSRCP activists, joined the TDP.

YSRC's 2nd 'Siddham' at Eluru

Expecting more than 2 lakh people, says MP Midhun Reddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After the massive success of the YSRCP regional meeting 'Siddham' at Sangivalasa Village in Visakhapatnam on Saturday evening, arrangements are in full swing for the second regional meeting in the coastal districts of East and West Godavari and Krishna that is scheduled on February 1 or 3. Incharge YSRCP leader and the Member of Lok Sabha PV Midhun Reddy is personally motoring the arrangements for the meeting that will be held in Eluru.

The YSRCP high command has entrusted the responsibility of the two crucial districts namely East and West Godavari districts to the Lok Sabha member and the MP has been playing a key role in getting a majority of seats in these two districts which has more Kapu community voters.

However, the opposition TDP-JanaSena is also banking on the Kapu voters in these two districts.

Interestingly the twin

The YSRCP high command has entrusted the responsibility of the two crucial districts namely East and West Godavari districts to the Lok Sabha member and the MP has been playing a key role in getting a majority of seats in these two districts which has more Kapu community voters.



Godavari districts that have 34 Assembly seats play a crucial role in deciding which political party wins in the elections. It can be recalled that the YSRCP lost in the 2014 elections due to poor show in these two districts, while in 2019 the party won 28 Assembly seats out of 34 giving the YSRC a landslide victory.

YSRCP president and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy aims to win all 34 seats in the upcoming 2024 elections in these two districts. The CM appointed MP Midhun Reddy around one and half years ago as the coordinator of these districts and he has a hilarious task for which he has been closely monitoring every aspect

during the recent announcement of candidates, the party leadership has changed a few sitting MLAs for various reasons. The coordinator has been in touch with those leaders who were denied seats and ensured that the party will take care of them with other suitable positions.

For the second regional meeting, an ideal location of 100 acres has been finalised which is about 5 km from Eluru town to accommodate the party leaders, cadre and others. Traffic and parking issues are also taken care of, according to the party leaders.

Speaking to The Pioneer, MP PV Midhun Reddy said

that as part of the elections campaign, the second regional meeting 'Siddham' will be organised at Eluru in a big way bigger than the meeting at Sangivalasa in Vizag. He said that they are expecting more than 2 lakh gathering for the meeting and he is personally monitoring the arrangements to ensure there are no traffic and parking problems. He said that he is closely coordinating with the party leaders from the grassroots level and the party MLAs and MPs for the success of the meeting.

Need to encourage scientific temper among kids stressed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Commissioner of School Education, S Suresh Kumar has underscored the need to ignite scientific curiosity in children from the school level and examine new trends, to invent a better new scientific society. He started the 'South India Science Fair' at Vijayawada on Sunday in which 210 projects from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala and Telangana participated. He said that Andhra Pradesh has hosted the South India Science Fair 'which is organised once in six years with projects from six states with the contribution of Visvesvaraya Industrial Technology Museum, Bangalore and this science fair will continue till February 1.

Suresh Kumar said that, along with the curriculum, the teachers should be respon-



sible for organising science clubs, science trips, etc., so that every student will have an opportunity to become a scientist. B Srinivasa Rao, State Project Director of Samagra Shiksha, said that science can be developed in children only when conducting experiments and projects in addition to lessons. He said that programmes like these will help students to understand our cultural traditions as well as the science behind them.

Visvesvaraya Industrial

Technology Museum Director K Saju Bhaskaran said that the science fair program reflects the cultural traditions of the South Indian states along with the different languages, which instils excitement and desire to achieve in the youth.

SCERT Director Dr B Pratap Reddy, Krishna District Education Officer Tahera Sultana, Science Fair Programme Coordinator Dr GR Bhagyashree, teachers, students of six states and others participated.

PM MODI AT SC EVENT

Laws framed today will further strengthen India of tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the government was modernising laws keeping in view the present context and asserted that these legislations will further strengthen tomorrow's India.

Addressing the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Supreme Court here, he said that with the enactment of three new criminal justice laws, India's legal, policing and investigative systems entered a new era.

"It is important to ensure that the transition to the new laws from the ones dating back to hundreds of years is smooth. In this regard, we have already started training and capacity building work for government employees," the prime minister said.

Modi urged the Supreme Court to come forward to work towards the capacity building of other stakeholders.

"An empowered judicial system is a part of 'Viksit Bharat'. The government



is working continuously and taking many decisions to form a trusted judicial system. The Jan Vishwas Bill is a step in this direction. In the future, this will reduce the unnecessary burden on the judicial system," the prime minister said.

He said that the law on mediation will lessen the burden on courts as the legislation will improve the alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

The prime minister said the Supreme

Court has strengthened India's vibrant democracy and given many important verdicts on individual rights and freedom of speech which have given new direction to the country's socio-political milieu.

"Today's economic policies of India will form the basis of tomorrow's bright India. The laws being made in India today will further strengthen tomorrow's bright India," the prime minister said.

"Laws made today will brighten the future of India. With changes happening globally, the world's eyes are set on India, as the world's faith is growing stronger in India. In such times, it is important for India to take advantage of every opportunity given to it," Modi said.

He also noted that last week the government had approved Rs 800 crore for the expansion of the Supreme Court building.

In a lighter vein, Modi hoped that no one moves a petition challenging the expansion of the top court's infrastructure.

He also hinted that the new Parliament building project was challenged in the courts.

Collection of tips for LPG cylinder delivery opposed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Muslim United Front and Muslim Welfare JAC sought Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardip Singh Puri, to initiate measures to curb the illegal collection of tips by the gas cylinder delivery boys. The MUF and MWJAC president Md Kaleem said that their organisation submitted a memorandum regarding the collection

of tips to the union minister. He lamented that it has become a usual practice for the delivery boys to collect exorbitant prices i.e. demanding an excess amount of Rs. 50 to 100 on the prescribed prices by the Central Government, when delivering gas cylinders. He further lamented that if any consumer questions about this swindling, they cut the delivery and trouble the customer

citing illogical reasons.

Kaleem pointed out that every day across the country, some lakhs of cylinders are delivered and the customers are forcibly paying additionally on the MRP.

He claimed that the gas agency must door deliver the refill but they overlook the extra amount collected by the delivery boys and expressed suspicion that gas agencies may also get share

in it. Kaleem stated that they requested the Union Minister to see that a note is printed on every receipt with an instruction in the regional language that "Pay only the Prescribed Net Payable Amount", a toll-free number must also be inscribed on the cash bill for lodging any complaints and to take steps to put an end to these illegal collections across the nation.

Man commits suicide at NIMS hospital

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A man died after falling from the Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) building at Panjagutta on Sunday.

According to the police, the deceased identified as Buchaiah had come to the hospital for treatment and after undergoing medical tests came to know that he was suffering from some life-threatening disease. He went into depression and police suspect he might have committed suicide by jumping from the hospital building. The body was shifted to Gandhi Hospital mortuary for post-mortem. A case has been registered.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Krishna Paksha

Tithi:

Chaturthi: Jan 29 06:11 AM to Jan 30 08:54 AM

Nakshatram:

Purva Phalguni: Jan 28 03:52 PM to Jan 29 06:57 PM

Uttara Phalguni:

Jan 29 06:57 PM to Jan 30 10:06 PM

Rahukalam:

8:16 AM to 9:40 AM

Yamagandam:

11:05 AM to 12:29 PM

Varjyam:

03:06 AM to 04:54 AM

Gulika:

1:53 PM to 3:17 PM

Amritakalam:

11:44 AM to 01:32 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham:

12:06 PM to 12:51 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 32°

Humidity: 60%

Sunrise: 6:39 AM

Sunset: 6:02 PM

Updated: January 28, 2024 5:00 PM

All hit by Jagan rule: Naidu

PNS ■ NELLORE

TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu criticised CM Jagan Mohan Reddy for his eagerness to return to power by convincing people with lies. He asserted that the entire population across Andhra Pradesh has become victims of the YSRCP rule.

Mocking the campaign undertaken by Jagan in the name of 'Siddham' (ready), Chandrababu questioned if Jagan is truly ready, and why YSRCP leaders are distancing themselves from him.

Chandrababu stated that Jagan had grossly misused the power bestowed upon him by the people and expressed astonishment at the lack of governance in the State.

Addressing a public gath-

ering as part of the 'Raa Kadali Raa' programme, Chandrababu remarked that prominent industrialists like Galla Jayadev are withdrawing from politics.

Highlighting his efforts after the State's bifurcation to build Amaravati and complete the Polavaram project, Chandrababu mentioned that he made every attempt to attract industrialists to set up businesses in the State. "Unfortunately, after Jagan came to power, he drove out all these industries, and I too

am a victim of Jagan," he noted.

Pointing out that not a single section of the population is content under Jagan's rule, he promised to take responsibility for the aquaculture sector. Recalling the successful implementation of the loan waiver scheme by the TDP, Chandrababu stated that the State ranks highest in farmer debts and second in tenant farmers' suicides. Chandrababu Naidu affirmed that the upcoming TDP government would give due respect to sarpachas and questioned the status of Jagan's promise of total prohibition. He criticized Jagan for allocating tickets only to those who use highly objectionable language against him and other TDP leaders, stating that such individuals are unfit for politics.

Nitish back in NDA

Continued from Page 1

His elder brother Tej Pratap Yadav, also a former minister, and Singapore-based elder sister Rohini Acharya came out with a flurry of posts on X, lampooning the JD(U) president, whom they likened to a "chameleon". The CPI(ML) Liberation, which supported the Mahagathabandhan government from the outside, launched a blistering attack on Kumar, accusing him of "betrayal". In an acerbic Facebook post, the party's general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya alleged that Kumar, "who has had the longest stint as CM", will be used by the RSS-BJP combine "as its pawn".

Political strategist turned politician Prashant Kishor also took a swipe at

Kumar, saying: "Switching sides has become part of his politics" and added that the BJP might end up paying "a huge price" for supporting the JD(U) chief who had ditched it in August 2020. Earlier, Kumar, after submitting his resignation, had told reporters "The government that was in place now comes to an end. I have let it go".

The 72-year-old leader indicated that he was not feeling happy with the way things were in the Mahagathabandhan in the state as well as the INDIA bloc that he helped take shape but which failed to adequately recognise his efforts. "You all know how I came to this alliance and also how I worked to bring together so many parties. But of late things were not working well.

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Jana Sena seeks evidence of development in Uttarandhra

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a calculated move aimed at holding the ruling YSRCP accountable, the Jana Sena Party, under the leadership of former MLA Panchkarla Rameshbabu, has launched a formidable challenge to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, demanding transparent evidence of development in the Uttarandhra region. Speaking at a press conference held in Chodavaram here on Sunday, Jana Sena leaders articulated a comprehensive critique of the YSRCP's governance, pointing to the extravagant three-day "Siddham" event organised by the ruling party as a potential instance of State resources being misappropriated for political purposes.

Expresses dismay over perceived sidelining of influential figures by YSRCP



Jana Sena highlighted the sluggish pace of development in Visakhapatnam, slated to be the administrative capital. The party demanded answers regarding the protracted delays plaguing the Polavaram irrigation project, a vital infrastructure initiative for the region. Jana Sena reiterated the unfulfilled assurance of securing special status for Uttarandhra, a pivotal pledge made by the YSRCP during previous electoral cam-

paings. The party also raised concerns about the reported exodus of industrial entities from the region, attributing it to apprehensions surrounding the policies of the current administration.

P.V.S.N. Raju, Jana Sena's Chodavaram in-charge, voiced specific dissatisfaction with the performance of IT Minister Gudivada, alleging a failure to create even ten new employment opportunities within the constituency. Drawing from the epic Mahabharata, Jana Sena leaders posed a poignant question to the electorate of Uttarandhra: "Will Chief Minister Jagan be perceived as Arjuna, the harbinger of growth and prosperity, or as a monster, emblematic of neglect and unmet promises?"

The challenge laid down by Jana Sena underscores a growing sentiment of accountability and scrutiny within the political landscape, signalling a critical juncture in the discourse surrounding development and governance in Uttarandhra.

'Caste census historic'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr N Maresh, a member of the AP State BC Commission, highlighted the unprecedented caste enumeration process taking place in the State.

Emphasising it as a historic moment initiated by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy after 92 years, Dr Maresh urged all 139 BC castes to view it as an opportunity to register their caste details. He commended CM Jagan for daringly conducting the process, aiming to ensure BCs have a fair share in the state's wealth.

Dr. Maresh praised the transparent and voluntary secretariat system, distinguishing Andhra Pradesh as the only state providing numerous welfare schemes for BCs in India.

Jagananna Colony symbol of inclusive progress: Dharmana

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

The inauguration of the Jagananna Layout Colony in Vappangi village on Sunday marked a significant chapter in the State's commitment to housing for all under the visionary 'Houses for All Poor' programme. The ceremony, led by Revenue Minister Dharmana Prasada Rao, resonated with a powerful message of inclusive welfare transcending political divides.

In his address, Minister Dharmana Prasada Rao clearly articulated the core principle of the welfare schemes – accessibility for all eligible individuals, regardless of their political leanings. He poignantly acknowledged the persistence of poverty in a nation celebrating 75 years of Independence, while highlighting the government's relentless pursuit of realising the dreams of countless homeless



citizens. His emphasis on the pro-poor stance and unwavering commitment to elevating living standards and fostering equitable opportunities for all segments of society resonated deeply with the gathering.

Minister Rao stated that the Jagananna Layout Colony is not merely a collection of dwellings; it symbolises a tangible step towards a more just and equitable society. It embodies the government's dedication to empowering its citizens and creating a future where everyone has a place to call home. The inauguration was further

complemented by the opening of the Rythu Bharosa Kendra and Village Secretariat buildings, constructed at a cost of Rs 62 lakh. These structures stand as testaments to the government's commitment to strengthening rural infrastructure and enhancing administrative accessibility for residents. Minister Rao's impassioned plea for continued public support underscored the crucial role citizens play in shaping the success of government initiatives. He urged the people to stand by policies designed to benefit them in the long run.

APSSDC job fair: 5,892 vacancies to be filled

87 MNCs will take part in the fair, slated for Jan 31

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

In a bid to alleviate unemployment concerns in Uttarandhra (North Andhra), the AP State Skill Development Corporation has announced a regional job fair slated to take place at Seetham Engineering College in Vizianagaram on January 31. Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana unveiled the official brochure here on Sunday, in the presence of Andhra University Vice-Chancellor Prof PVGD Prasad Reddy and Dr. Majji Sasibhushan Rao, Director of Seetham Engineering College, signaling a collaborative effort to combat unemployment in the region.

The fair boasts participation from 87 multinational companies representing diverse sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and more. With 5,892 vacancies across IT, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, automobiles, banking, finance, tourism, hospitality, retail, mar-



keting, logistics, and retail jewelry, the event caters to a wide range of skill sets and qualifications. From individuals who have completed their 10th standard to post-graduates, the fair welcomes all unemployed individuals seeking a fresh start. Spot registration allows convenient participation. Job offers, with salaries ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 60,000, can be expected across Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

This initiative goes beyond simply connecting job-seekers with employers. It aims to empower individuals through skill development opportunities

and bridge the gap between available talent and industry needs. Interviews starting at 9 am on Wednesday are expected to offer a platform for aspirants to showcase their abilities. Key stakeholders like Regional Skill Development Officer Rohini, Vijayanagaram District Skill Development Officer Govinda Rao, and others are actively involved in ensuring the fair's success. This collaborative approach highlights the commitment to driving economic growth and prosperity in Uttarandhra, paving the way for a brighter future for the region's youth.

COLLECTOR TAKES STOCK OF PROJECT TO BRING DOWN INFANT MORTALITY

Urges expectant mothers to register their names at the hospital immediately after pregnancy

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move to address the pressing issue of infant mortality, District Collector Nishanth Kumar personally inspected the Project for Reduction of Infant Mortality below 10 (PRISM 10) in Bagujola village of Makkuva mandal on Sunday. During his visit, the Collector engaged in face-to-face interactions with the villagers, emphasising the importance of preventive measures to curb maternal and child deaths. The inspection included a thorough examination of children, pregnant women, and infants, with noticeable positive changes observed.

The District Collector urged expectant mothers to register their names at the hospital immediately after pregnancy and emphasised the necessity of regular medical check-ups according to doctors' instruc-



tions. Kumar advised villagers to adhere to prescribed medications and maintain a diet rich in nutritious food. He highlighted the government's commitment to providing nutritious food kits to pregnant women under the YSR Nutrition initiative, stressing that these kits should be exclusively consumed by expectant mothers to ensure the health of

both the unborn and the newborn.

To combat the issue of anaemia among pregnant women, the District Collector announced the deployment of Anganwadi, ANM, and Women Police Teams at the Secretariat level. Anaemia Control Teams have also been established in each mandal under the supervision of the

Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO). These teams will identify anaemic individuals, distribute iron folic acid tablets regularly, and promote the intake of nutritious food.

Collector Kumar expressed gratitude for the cooperation received from the public, noting that maternal and child deaths have significantly reduced due to these strategic measures.

The success of the programme was echoed by Programme Officer Dr. M Vinod, who, along with Medical Officers, Tahsildar, Asha workers, and other stakeholders, actively participated in the initiative. As the administration continues its efforts to improve maternal and child health, the appeal was made to the community to enhance their cooperation, ensuring the sustained success of the ongoing initiatives.



'Suryopasana Seva' conducted at Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On Sunday, the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam on Indrakeeladri organised 'Suryopasana Seva'. Many devotees visited the temple on the occasion.

The temple also organised Nitya Arjitha Sevas such as Sri Ammavari Khadgamala Archanam, Laksha Kumkumarchana, Sri Chakranavavararchana, Chandri Homam, and Shanti Kalyanam. Temple Trust Board Chairman Karnati Rambabu personally supervised the devotees and ensured that they were comfortable.

He also made sure that the temple was not too crowded and that the devotees had darshan.

GVMC chief for using Sunday market to push reusable items

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a bid to promote sustainable living and combat plastic pollution, GVMC Commissioner CM Saikanth Varma has launched the Eco Zero Plastic initiative, advocating the use of reusable items at Visakhapatnam's Sunday market. Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Varma emphasised the critical need for collective action to mitigate the environmental impact of plastic waste. Under the Eco Zero Plastic campaign, residents and vendors are encouraged to prioritise reusable alternatives during their transactions and daily activities.

"The Sunday market serves as a vibrant hub of commerce and community engagement. By embracing reusable items, we not only reduce our ecological footprint but also foster a culture of environmental stewardship," the Commissioner remarked. The initiative aligns with broader efforts to transform Visakhapatnam into a sustainable and eco-friendly

city, in line with global environmental goals. Recognising the pervasive threat of single-use plastics to marine life and ecosystems, the Eco Zero Plastic campaign underscores the city's commitment to responsible waste management and conservation.

Commissioner Varma highlighted the importance of individual responsibility in driving meaningful change, urging citizens to adopt eco-conscious habits and support initiatives aimed at preserving the natural environment. "The success of the Eco Zero Plastic initiative hinges upon community participation and awareness. By choosing reusable items and reducing our reliance on disposable plastics, we can collectively safeguard our planet for future generations," the Commissioner said.

Residents, vendors, and stakeholders were encouraged to actively engage in the initiative, contributing to the collective efforts to build a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable Visakhapatnam.

Stress on need for collective action to reduce the environmental impact of plastic waste



Time to question YSRCP's accountability: Nettem

Chief Minister Jagan 'untrustworthy'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP NTR district president and former minister Nettem Raghu Ram has pointed out that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has only 74 days left in his term. He also stated that it's time to hold the YSRCP accountable in the public court. According to Ram, the Chief Minister was not visible to the public during his rule so far, but is now holding public meetings to deceive the people again, just for the elections.

While speaking at a press conference held at the party district office in Auto Nagar on Sunday, Raghu Ram called Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy 'untrustworthy'. He claimed that the YSRCP is using corrupt money



to arrange their banners and hoardings. The government has been preventing the Opposition party from displaying their banners and hoardings for the past five years.

He stated that the ruling YSRCP party is preparing for the upcoming elections, but the people are determined to defeat them. He claimed that farmers, youths, and government employees are against Jagan Reddy's rule, which they view as anarchic. He criticised the YSRCP, stating that

after the elections, their flag will no longer be seen in the State.

"The election battle has begun in the State, and TDP is prepared to face it. Our party and Jana Sena Party are confident that we'll win this election Kurukshetra," he declared. He pointed out that in the past five years of YSRCP's rule, not a single irrigation project was completed in the State. He also explained that if TDP had been in power, almost all the projects would have been completed by now."

He urged the youth to save the State from the anarchic rule of the YSRCP by defeating ruling party candidates in the elections. He requested the youth to visit every household and explain Jagan's five years of rule to the people.

ASSEMBLY SESSION IN FEB

Caste census Bill in Budget session

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Assembly's budget session is likely to begin in the second week of February. The government is planning to introduce the BC Caste Census Bill in the budget session.

The Adviser to the Telangana government on matters related to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Backward Classes (BCs) and minorities Shabbir Ali revealed. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is paying special attention to conducting a caste census in Telangana. As promised in the Congress manifesto, the CM is committed to conducting the caste census soon.



Revanth has entrusted BC Welfare Minister Ponnabha Prabhakar with the responsibility of drafting the Caste Census Bill. The Chief Minister has instructed officials to study the procedure in Bihar and other states which have already launched a caste census.

Officials were directed to adopt the best possible procedures for

the census after studying the methods that were followed to conduct the caste census in other states.

The CM wanted to conduct the caste census to extend benefits to all social groups. The Congress has already announced the conduct of a caste census as its national agenda before the election to help weaker

sections. The Bihar government conducted a two-phase caste census survey four months ago. It has already been announced that the census results indicate that 63 per cent of the population in the state comprised Backward Classes (BCs).

The Karnataka government conducted a caste census named Socio-Economic and Education Survey last year. The Andhra Pradesh government also has started the caste census process.

The British Government conducted a caste census as part of its population census in 1931. The governments of Independent India are still considering the 1931 census data as standard. No caste census has been carried out after India attained freedom.

Bought farmland as per rules, says ex-CS of TS Somesh Kumar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar clarified that he had purchased agricultural land in the Yacharam mandal of Rangareddy district in 2018 beginning as per government regulations.

He was responding to allegations published in some newspapers under the headline 'Somesh Bhudanda'.

He said that he had bought the agricultural land in Kothapalli village six years ago after selling the house

built on the residential land allotted to him by the government in Prashasan Nagar.

He clarified that he had obtained permission from the government regarding the purchase of the plot and had followed all the rules and regulations of the government.

He said that the government had also given permission through a letter and had allowed him to purchase the land.

Somesh said in a statement that he and his wife have been serving in high-ranking government posts for a long time.



I am being attacked personally: Sharmila

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

APCC president YS Sharmila has alleged that she is being attacked and abused personally by the ruling party leaders.

Addressing the extended meeting of the Congress here on Sunday, she reiterated that she carried out 3,200 km of padayatra to save the YSRCP when Jagan Reddy was in prison but without thankfulness, the YSRCP leaders were abusing her personally now.

“When YSR was the Chief Minister, the Handri Neeva project was completed 90%. However, the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime has failed to complete the 10% work of the project. The Jagan Reddy regime has also failed to complete the 50% works of Galeru-Nagari project,” she pointed out and questioned Jagan Reddy how could be the heir of Rajasekhara Reddy when he failed to complete the projects started by YSR.

She asserted that AP needs Special Category Status,



Capital city, completion of the Polavaram project, generation of employment and agriculture loan waiver and all those would be possible with the Congress only.

She recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Mohan assured of granting SCS to AP in Tirupati but the promise had not been fulfilled so far. The Modi-led government had

meted out injustice to AP, she slammed. “Had the SCS been granted to AP, many industries would have been established by now and they would have churned out huge employment,” she opined.

Chandrababu Naidu had shown Capital City in 3D graphics, she flayed, stating that AP has not been granted a metro project.

YS Rajasekhara Reddy planned to construct the Mannavaram project at a cost of Rs 6,000 crore and the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh laid the foundation stone for the same. But the project has not materialized so far, she flayed, regretting that the Jagan Reddy-headed government did not take steps to construct the project.

Former Union Ministers JD Seelam, Pallam Raju, Chintamani Mohan, former APCC president N. Raghunatha Reddy, Gidugu Rudra Raju and senior leader Koppula Raju were among those who attended the meeting.

‘Stadiums being developed as per intl standards’

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Lok Sabha member Vanga Geeta has said that stadiums are being developed with international standards in the city.

The MP laid the foundation stone for the construction of a synthetic track on the JNTUK sports ground here on Sunday. The 4-km synthetic track would be constructed for Rs 13.50 lakh. The synthetic track is being constructed with the funds being provided by the

Central and State governments, she stated.

Stadiums are being modernized for which the Centre has extended Rs 9.5 crore and the State Government has extended Rs 4 crore, she maintained.

MP Vanga Geeta said that a synthetic track and national-level skiing rings have already been set up in Kakinada. Development programmes are being undertaken with the cooperation of the Central and State Governments, he

said.

Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy assured of giving priority to sports, she said adding that the ‘Aadudam Andhra’ sports event is being organised across the State.

MLAs Kurasala Kannababu, Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy, MLC Karri Padmasri, JNTUK Registrar Sumalata, KUDA Chairman R Chandrakala Deepthi were among those who were present.



Ex-MLA calls upon people to defeat YSRCP

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) senior leader and former MLA GV Anjaneyulu has called upon people to defeat the YSRCP in the ensuing election by voting for the TDP.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, the TDP leader alleged that the people of the State are being fleeced with heavy unjust taxes by the government. To get rid of the anti-people YSRCP, people should elect the TDP this time, he appealed to the people.

He said that the people of



the state were fed up with the YSRCP regime and they were waiting for an opportunity to teach a lesson. The people of the state were disenchanted with the YSRCP regime, he claimed, stating that all sec-

tions of people were against the YSRCP government now.

Describing the ensuing elections as Kurukshetra Sangramam, GV Anjaneyulu reposed confidence that the TDP-JSP alliance would come to power. “AP is lagging in development due to inept governance and anti-people policies of the YSRCP. The government is fleecing the people by imposing heavy taxes. The state has been put in heavy debts,” he slammed.

The TDP senior leaders regretted that the electricity tariff had been hiked five

times. The RTC bus fares also hiked while the prices of essential commodities were spiralling, he lashed out, adding that sand has been made as a precious commodity which badly affected the construction sector.

GV Anjaneyulu recalled that Chandrababu Naidu announced free bus travel to all women if the TDP is voted to power. People are expressing fears at the land survey and the land title deed act, he observed. GV Anganeyulu claimed that six YSRCP MLAs and four MPs have quit the party.

Couple killed as mini-truck hits bike

PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

In a tragic road accident, a couple was killed when the bike on which they were travelling, was hit by a mini-truck at Rollapalem village on the outskirts on the night of Saturday.

Police said that the deceased Garapati Venkata Rao (55) and Mangatayaru (50) were going on a motorcycle. A speeding mini-truck hit their bike killing them instantaneously.

The couple recently held a housewarming ceremony in their new house. The couple has two daughters and they were making preparations for the marriage of their younger daughter.

The accident took place when the couple was going to their house in the Bodasakurru area after visiting their elder daughter. The police led by DSP Ambika Prasad cleared the traffic on the road and shifted the bodies to the GGH for post-mortem. A pall of gloom descended on the Bodasakurru locality with the death of a couple.

One killed, another injured in a hit-and-run incident

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

One person was killed and another was injured when an unknown vehicle hit the motorcycle at Bhairavunipadu village in Macherla constituency on Sunday.

Police said that the deceased who was yet to be identified and the injured were going to Macharla from Nagarajuna Sagar on the bike. An unknown vehicle hit their bike and fled the scene.

The deceased died instantaneously. The injured person was identified as Kalivela Mani. The police registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH in Macherla for postmortem.

Burmese refugee stabbed to death

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A Burmese refugee was stabbed to death by a crap dealer along with his friend within the Balapur police station limits on Sunday.

Mohd Ibrahim, (25), who is registered as a refugee with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was on way home from Wadi-e-Salaheen, Pahadishareef, when the accused Mohd Asif stopped him and demanded Rs 2,000.

Hunt for tiger that strayed into human habitation

PNS ■ ELURU

A team of forest officials led by chief forest conservator and Chief Wildlife warden AK Naik and Rajamahendravaram chief forest conservator Y Srinivasa Reddy visited some of the areas on Sunday where a tiger is reportedly roaming.

They interacted with the villagers and gathered information about the tiger. They gave directions to the officials on taking precautions to protect the people of the area and also cattle.

They examined the pug marks of the suspected tiger at Ramasingavaram beat limits in the Eluru section in Denduluru mandal. The forest officials have concluded that the pug marks belong to a tiger. The pug marks were 18 cm in length and 18 CM in width.

The farmers told the forest officials that they saw an animal which looked like a tiger on January 26 at a maize field in Perugugudem village.

The officials said that teams were formed led by forest officials

to trace the tiger. The officials cautioned the villagers not to go to fields alone and to leave the cattle for grazing.

DFO Ravindra said that as per the preliminary information, the tiger was roaming at Medina Vari Palem village in Denduluru mandal.

They also cautioned the villagers not to go to their fields during the night. They asked them to inform the toll-free number 1800-425-5909 about the movement of the tiger they noticed.



Two arrested for cyber fraud involving Rs 60L

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cybercrime unit of the Hyderabad Police on Sunday arrested two persons involved in an investment fraud worth Rs 60,00,000.

The accused were identified as Neshnor Sirish Kumar (38), a native of Andhra Pradesh; he provided bank details of the victims to Chinese fraudsters. The victim from Lower Tank Bund stated that Cyber fraudsters contacted her through Whatsapp and telegram applications and cheated her by assigning tasks to give rating and advertising to products online.

Kumar colluded with Cyber fraudsters and cheated the innocent people by assigning

tasks to rating and advertising products online to get commission. Initially the cyber fraudsters used to give smaller amount as commission to make them believe. Then, they insisted the victims to invest huge amounts and stopped responding to them. The accused provided bank accounts to the cyber fraudsters to cheat innocent people.

The accused committed fraud about Rs 1.5 crore in one account on one day which was seized from them and for which many cases were registered all over India. Sireesh used to visit China and operate with Chinese nationals. Kumar was arrested under Sections 66(C), (D) IT Act and 419,420 of the Indian Penal Code.

Two nabbed for insurance fraud worth Rs 1.88 L

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cybercrime unit of the Hyderabad Police on Sunday arrested two persons involved in insurance fraud worth Rs 1,88,599. The accused were identified as Bellary Pavan Kumar (27), a native of Tamil Nadu and Soudri Basavaraj (27), a native of Andhra Pradesh. They contacted the victims on the pretext of providing insurance through Chola MS Insurance General Insurance Co. Ltd and collected money from the customers to transfer the money into the bank accounts provided by them. Kumar and Basavaraj operated a fake customer care centre and gathered the information of insured persons associated with Cholamandalam company.

Kakani challenges Naidu for open debate on agri

PNS ■ NELLORE

Agriculture Minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy has dared Telugu Desam party chief and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for an open debate on agriculture.

Talking to the media here on Sunday, he asked Naidu to fix the time and venue so that he could come for an open debate on the development of the agriculture sector during the TDP regime and the YSRCP.

When the Sarvepalli reservoir was in bad condition, the then CM Chandrababu Naidu did not release funds. But he issued a GO before the 2019 elections and laid the foundation stone hurriedly, he criticised.

The YSRCP regime had started the Sarvepalli reservoir



works, he claimed, adding that the TDP regime did not release funds for Sangam and Nellore barrages.

Responding to the news reports on the closure of the Krishnapatnam port container terminal, the Agriculture minister made it clear that the

port container terminal would not be closed but would be expanded.

Kakani said that the Nellore public meeting, organised by the TDP, clearly indicated the plummeting graph of TDP in the state. The TDP organised the ‘Ra..Kadalira’ meeting

adjacent to the national highway where a thin audience was seen. The failure of the meeting here reflected the pathetic state of TDP, he slammed.

However, Naidu is trying to tell people that the TDP is gaining strength, he said. Targeting Nara Lokesh, the agriculture minister said that Lokesh was holding a red book and stating that names were written in the book.

“I advise Lokesh to write the name of Chandrababu Naidu on the first page,” he ridiculed. The TDP would disappear after the elections, he predicted. The TDP and JSP are at loggerheads on seat sharing, he said adding, “When there is no clarity among themselves in the alliance what would they do for the people?”

BRS govt removed VROs & VRAs to hide its misdeeds

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



The BRS government is actively taking steps to enhance the reach and quality of education in the state, Irrigation Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said.

This involves a substantial increase in budgetary allocations to upgrade infrastructure and simultaneously create new facilities.

Addressing the old boys' reunion of Huzurnagar Government High School on Sunday, Uttam emphasised that schools are not mere physical structures, but are intertwined with one's emotions and childhood memories.

Schools serve as breeding grounds where seeds develop into plants, ultimately growing into trees. The time spent in schools remains etched in our memories, shaping who we become in future, and leaving a lasting impact on our lives. This includes memories of school buildings, classrooms, playgrounds and most importantly, our teachers, he said.

Congratulating the organisers for successfully organising the old boys' reunion, he said that such gatherings offer a unique opportunity for everyone to come together and reminisce about the best moments of their childhood spent in school. Meeting schoolmates and

Will improve quality of education in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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recalling old days fosters a sense of nostalgia and camaraderie, he added.

Uttam said that the Congress Government recognises the emotional value attached to schools and does not view them as mere lifeless structures. He said steps are being taken to reopen government schools that were closed during the BRS regime and to equip them with modern infrastructure.

He emphasised that focusing on education is the key to the growth of any state. However, he pointed out that the education sector was neglected under the BRS, with a reduction in budgetary allocations year after year.

In 2014-15, the allocation was 10.89% of the budget. It decreased to 6.57% in 2023-24. Despite promises of KG to PG free education by the BRS Government, Telangana's spending on education remained the lowest among all

states, he said.

The Mana Ooru Mana Badi initiative was an utter failure, receiving just Rs 300 crore, he added.

Uttam said that the Congress Government plans to systematically change the face of the education system in Telangana in a phased manner. The Congress, in its manifesto for the Assembly elections, made several promises to improve the education sector, and he assured that all these promises would be fulfilled.

He said the budget allocation for the education sector would be increased substantially. All vacant staff positions in educational institutions will be filled, and in every mandal, an international school with modern facilities will be established and provided with free bus services.

A vast network of schools and colleges will be established from village to district levels to impart primary, secondary and higher education, Uttam said.

Take action against former BRS ministers

■ KTR dares CM Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao dared Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to take action against former BRS Ministers after conducting a probe if there was corruption during the BRS government's rule.

Addressing a BRS meeting at Sircilla on Sunday, KTR said that they will stall the Congress government's moves with their 39 MLAs. He said the BRS had lost only power but not its fighting spirit and that nothing would happen even if one or two leaders quit the BRS.

KTR asked Congress leaders to explain whether a car will not need servicing after continuous use for 24 years. He said that the defeat in the last Assembly elections was only a minor speedbreaker and that the BRS would come back to power again.

He made it clear that he would not give up the Sircilla constituency as it had given him political birth.

Stating that the BRS had lost the elections by a slight margin in 14 Assembly constituencies, KTR said that the difference between the vote percentages of

the BRS and the Congress was just 1.8 per cent.

“The Congress leader (Revanth Reddy) who is not even three feet in height is saying that he will bury the BRS 100 meters deep, however, bigger leaders could not harm KCR. Revanth became the TPCC President by paying Rs 50 crore to the then Telangana Congress in-charge Manickam Tagore and now he has become Chief Minister in the management quota,” he said.

KTR appealed to BRS leaders to compare the performance of former MP B. Vinod Kumar and current MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar. “Sanjay has done nothing for Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency except carrying the footwear of Union Home Minister Amit Shah,” he said.

KTR said that there are mandals where Sanjay had not gone so far in the Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency.

He advised Sanjay to start a ‘madom’ if he wanted to work for dharma and added that Sanjay had no right to seek votes as he never worked work for the people.



INDIA CORNER

Viksit Bharat possible through Viksit Jharkhand: Guv

Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday said the vision of Viksit Bharat could be realised through Viksit Jharkhand. The governor made these remarks at the University Industry Government (UIG) Summit-2024 here. The summit was organised by the Jharkhand University of Technology (JUT) in collaboration with Amity University, Jharkhand. Radhakrishnan said it was the first time he had witnessed a programme where universities, industries, and the state government worked together to shape the future of Jharkhand under the Viksit Jharkhand-Viksit Bharat initiative. He emphasised the importance of understanding the needs of the industry to produce students who industry-ready. Radhakrishnan termed the summit as a step in the right direction at the right time. The governor highlighted the need for an environment of innovation and creativity in educational and industrial institutions. He stressed the importance of effective government policies to promote such an environment.



Higher reaches of Himachal likely to witness heavy snowfall

Higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh are likely to witness heavy snowfall and rainfall from January 30 till February 3, according to the local meteorological department. The intensity of snowfall and rainfall are very likely to increase in the hill state from January end for two to three days due to two consecutive western disturbances, it said. As a result, Lahaul-Spiti, Kinnaur, Chamba, Kullu and higher reaches of Mandi, Sirmour and Shimla districts including Shimla city and adjoining areas are likely to witness one or two spells of heavy snowfall and rain, the weather department said in a statement issued on Sunday. The lower hills and plains in the state will also witness occasional thunderstorms and lightning while isolated areas of mid and higher hills will witness gusty winds during this period, it said. The average maximum temperatures are likely to be below normal, while minimum temperatures in low hills will be normal and below normal in mid and high hills during the period, the weather department said.



Sand artist praises sculptor Arun Yogiraj for Ram Lalla's idol

Renowned sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik has praised sculptor Arun Yogiraj, saying Ram Lalla's idol crafted by him was heart touching and that it would inspire millions of people. "Namaskar @yogiraj_arun ji. You are truly blessed by Lord Vishwakarma. Your sculpture of Bhagwan Ram Lalla is heart touching for me as an Artist. May (the) blessings of Prabhu Ram be always with you. Jai Shri Ram," Pattnaik said in a post on X. Later, talking to PTI, he said Mysuru-based Arun Yogiraj is a wonderful artist and that his work would inspire millions of people in and outside the country. "His idol is divine. The art form crafted by him is encouraging for all artists across the world. It will inspire millions of people in India and abroad," Pattnaik said. Responding to Pattnaik's post, Yogiraj on X said that his praise will motivate him to do more in the field of art. "Dear sir, receiving an appreciation from one of the renowned sand artists of the world means a lot to me. This will definitely motivate me to do more in my field of art," Yogiraj said.



Rule of Lord Ram inspired our Constitution makers: PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that the rule of Lord Ram was a source of inspiration for the Constitution makers, noting his, Sita's and Lakshman's pictures adorned the pages of the Constitution.

In the first Mann Ki Baat broadcast of this year, Modi said the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya brought people across the country together, making visible the collective strength of the country. "And that is why on January 22 in Ayodhya I had talked about 'Dev to Desh' and 'Ram to Rashtira'," he said. "Everyone's feeling is the same, everyone's devotion is the same. Ram is in everyone's words, Ram is in everyone's heart," Modi said.

During this period, many people sang Ram bhajans and dedicated them to Lord Ram, while on January 22 evening the whole country lit 'Ram Jyoti' and celebrated Diwali, he noted. "During this time, the



In the first Mann Ki Baat broadcast of this year, Modi said the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya brought people across the country together, making visible the collective strength of the country.

collective strength of the country was visible which also forms the basis of our pledge of a 'developed India,' the prime minister said. The collective power will take the country to new heights of progress, he added. In his broadcast, he urged young vot-

ers to register themselves so that they could exercise their franchise and lauded the growing participation of people in voting at a time when many countries in the world are seeing a downward trend.

Nearly 45 per cent votes were cast in the first national

elections in 1951-52, and the percentage has been going up while the number of electorate has surged to 96 cr, over three times the US population, he said. In the monthly broadcast, Modi noted that the absence of a common language for the terminology of diseases, treatments and medicines in alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha or Unani was a longstanding problem, and said a solution has been now found.

He said, "I am happy to share that the Ministry of AYUSH has categorised the data and terminology related to Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani medicine, with the help of the World Health Organisation as well. Through the efforts of both, the terminology related to disease and treatment in Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha medicine has been codified."

He added that an advantage of this would be that if patients go to another doctor with their slip, the doctor will get complete information.

"That slip will help one in knowing one's illness, treatment, what medicines one has been taking, for how long the treatment has been going on, what things one is allergic to," he said. In a reference to the recent Padma awards, Modi said many of those bestowed the honour were those who worked at grassroots and away from the limelight to make big changes in society.

"I am very happy that the system of Padma awards has transformed completely in the last decade. Now it has become people's Padma," he said.

The contribution of each one of the Padma awardees is an inspiration for the countrymen, he said and added that many of them were those who brought glory to the country in the world of classical dance, classical music, folk dance, theatre and bhajans. Many people from abroad have also been honoured with the Padma awards, as their work is rendering new heights to Indian culture and heritage, he said.

Disruptions, disturbances menace to democracy: Dhankhar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said debates in legislative bodies have been reduced to quarrels and likened disruptions and disturbances in legislatures to the COVID menace for democracy.

Addressing the valedictory session of the 84th All India Presiding Officers' Conference, he said presiding officers of legislative bodies should invoke their authority to ensure decorum.

"It is no secret that disturbances and disruptions are planned, at whose behest placards are printed and slogans coined. Political weaponry is counterproductive and had no place in our system," he said.

The erosion of public faith in representative bodies and representatives is "cancerous" for the society, he said.

The presiding officers should engage in stock-taking and invoke authority to ensure decorum. They must do correctional therapy to stop degeneration, he said.

The vice president also said the presiding officers should also ensure the blossoming



and nurturing of the first-time legislators.

"The presiding officers are guardians of the democratic pillars," he said.

"Be receptive to the other's point of view. Debates are the cornerstone of democracy. They have been reduced to quarrels and it is a painful scenario," Dhankhar said.

The incidences of indiscipline and unbecoming demeanour are on the rise and pride is taken in disruptions, he lamented.

"This is disturbing and calls for an introspection to find a way out," Dhankhar said, adding that it is essential for the presiding officers of both houses of a legislature to work in tandem.

Dhankhar said a strong democracy thrives not just on sound principles but also on

leaders committed to upholding them.

"As presiding officers, we bear the responsibility of being guardians of democratic pillars," he said. The presiding officers' duties include ensuring that the legislative process is meaningful, accountable, effective, and transparent, giving voice to the people, Dhankhar said.

Legislature is the most impactful platform for reflection of all shades of opinions. "People from all states of the country come, they bring to the table various points of view. There is a need to be receptive to the other point of view," he said.

He said the scenario at present is that debates have been reduced to quarrels and called it disgusting and painful for the public.

"Look at the people outside. They elect us, they have expectations from us. They want their aspiration to be realised through us. And look at how painful it is for them, the spectacle when someone engages in disruptions. And then it's all the more painful as they take pride in disruption," he said.

UPLIFTING DALITS, BACKWARDS AND TRIBALS

Modi govt only doing 'politics of symbolism'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that there is a "conspiracy" to end reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs for posts in higher education institutions, and claimed that the Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" with regard to Dalits, backward classes and tribals.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh shared a media report on X which said that the University Grants Commission



(UGC) has issued draft guidelines for de-reserving vacancies meant for the scheduled castes (SC), the scheduled tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) candidates for posts in higher education institutes

(HEIs) and open them up for the general category if enough reserved candidates are not available.

Ramesh demanded that such a proposal should be withdrawn immediately.

In his post in Hindi, Ramesh said, "A few years ago, RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) chief Mohan Bhagwat had talked about reviewing reservations. Now, there is a conspiracy to end the reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in higher education institutes."

"This proposal of the UGC is in line with the intentions of Mohan Bhagwat and is clearly injustice to Dalits, tribals and backward people," he said.

Recently, when Karpoori Thakur was given the Bharat Ratna, Rahul Gandhi had said that the country needs "real justice" and not "politics of symbolism", Ramesh noted.

Former Bihar chief minister and socialist leader Thakur was awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously. The Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" when it comes to Dalits, backward classes and tribals, Ramesh claimed.

"Their real intention is once again revealed through this proposal of the UGC," Ramesh said. He added that "our fight is against this injustice and the continuous attacks on Baba Saheb's Constitution."

This proposal to end reservation in colleges and universities is "completely unacceptable" and should be withdrawn immediately, Ramesh said.

The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders. The guidelines have been receiving backlash from several quarters. The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a protest against it.

Hatred, violence spreading across country: Rahul

PNS ■ SILIGURI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday accused the BJP government at the Centre of spreading hatred and violence across the country and working for big corporations by overlooking the interests of the poor and the youth.

Gandhi, who was addressing the "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" in Siliguri in North Bengal, said, "The Union government has made a mockery of the youths who wanted to join the armed forces by introducing the Agniveer scheme, a short-term recruitment scheme for the armed forces."

"Hatred and violence are being spread across the country. It will serve no purpose. Instead of spreading hatred, we have to work towards spreading love and justice for our youths. The Union government is working only for



big corporations and not for the poor and the youth," he said.

Expressing gratitude for the reception he has received in West Bengal, Gandhi said, "Bengal holds a special place. It had led the ideological fight during the Independence struggle. It is the duty of the Bengal and the Bengalis to show the way to fight against hatred and bind the nation together in present circumstances."

"If you don't rise to the occasion, people will never forgive you," he said.

No reserved posts can be de-reserved

Education Ministry clarifies on draft UGC guidelines

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved after draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available.

The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders.

The draft guidelines have been receiving backlash from several quarters. The Congress alleged there is a "conspiracy" to end reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in higher education institutions and that the Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" on



the issues of Dalits, backward classes and tribals.

The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) also staged a protest against it and burnt an effigy of UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar.

Kumar also clarified that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation.

"Reservation in Central Educational Institutions is provided for all posts in direct recruitment in Teacher's cadre as per the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in

Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

"After enactment of this Act, no reserved post is to be de-reserved. Ministry of Education has given directives to all the CEIs to fill up the vacancies strictly as per the 2019 ACT," the Ministry of Education wrote on X. The UGC chairman also posted: "This is to clarify that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation."

"It is important for all HEIs to ensure that all backlog positions in the reserved category are filled up through concerted efforts."

ENRICHING BRAIN CONNECTIONS

Writing by hand better than typing on keyboard

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Students learn more and remember better when taking handwritten notes than using a keyboard as brain connectivity patterns were found to be far more elaborate while writing than typing on a keyboard, a new research has found.

Researchers said the findings suggested that the precisely controlled hand movements when writing with a pen helped obtain visual and movement information that contributed extensively to the brain's connectivity patterns, known to be crucial for memory formation and learning. "There is some evidence that students learn more and remember better when taking handwritten lecture notes, while using a com-



puter with a keyboard may be more practical when writing a long text or essay," said Audrey van der Meer, a brain researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and co-author of the study published in the journal Frontiers in Psychology.

For the study, the researchers recorded the electrical activity of the brains of 36 university

students, who were repeatedly prompted to either write or type a word that appeared on a screen. When writing, they used a digital pen to write in cursive directly on a touchscreen. When typing they used a single finger to press keys on a keyboard. The researchers found that the connectivity between different brain regions increased when participants

wrote by hand, but not when they typed. On the contrary, the researchers found that repeating the simple movement of hitting a key with the same finger was less stimulating for the brain. "This also explains why children who have learned to write and read on a tablet, can have difficulty differentiating between letters that are mirror images of each other, such as 'b' and 'd'. They literally haven't felt with their bodies what it feels like to produce those letters," said van der Meer.

Even though the study participants used digital pens for handwriting, the researchers said the results are expected to be the same when using a real pen on paper.

"We have shown that the differences in brain activity are

related to the careful forming of the letters when writing by hand while making more use of the senses," explained van der Meer. The findings demonstrated the need to give students an opportunity to use pens, rather than having them type during class, they said.

Guidelines to ensure that students receive at least a minimum of handwriting instruction could be an adequate step, they said.

However, the team also cautioned that it was important to keep up with continuously developing technological advances, which they said included an awareness of which way of writing - handwriting or typing - was advantageous under what kind of circumstances.

Stree shakti

The rise and rise of women power in India across sectors calls for celebrating women and womanhood

In recent years, India has witnessed a remarkable and inspiring phenomenon — the meteoric rise of women across varied fields. From business, medicine, politics and education to science and technology, Indian women are breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes and taking giant strides in traditionally male-dominated fields. This surge of empowerment is aptly celebrated as 'Stree Shakti', highlighting the strength, resilience and capability of the nation's female force. One of the most noticeable trends in recent times is the increasing presence of women in leadership roles and entrepreneurship. Women-led businesses are flourishing, contributing not only to the nation's economic growth but also challenging the conventional gender roles. From tech startups to traditional enterprises, women entrepreneurs are carving a niche, proving that gender is not a hindrance to success. In the fields of science and technology, women are making groundbreaking contributions, redefining



the landscape of innovation. India has seen a rise in the number of women scientists, engineers and innovators who are actively involved in cutting-edge research and technological advancements. Their achievements not only propel India's progress in these domains but also inspire the next generation of women to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). It is indeed a matter of pride that many women contributed to the successful Chandrayaan-3, which speaks volumes about their determination. Moreover, the healthcare sector in India has been witnessing a significant transformation, thanks to the rise of

women in medicine. Women doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals are at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and advancements. Their contributions extend beyond traditional healthcare roles, influencing healthcare policies, research and the overall well-being of society. In the realm of education, women are excelling as educators, administrators and researchers. Female scholars are contributing to diverse fields of study, bringing fresh perspectives and insights to academia. While celebrating the rise of 'Stree Shakti', it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that women continue to face in their professional journeys. Gender bias, stereotypes and systemic hurdles persist, but the resilience and determination of women in India are breaking down these barriers. Organisations, both public and private, are recognising the importance of gender diversity and actively working towards creating more inclusive work environments. The Prime Minister's clarion call for 'Beti Bachao, Beti Pado' is indeed a laudable step but the real challenge is to change people's mindset. Rising women power in India is not only about today's achievements but also about paving the way for future generations. The celebration of 'Stree Shakti' is a celebration of diversity, equality and the collective strength of a nation on the path of progress.

PICTALK



Artists who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Delhi

PTI

Virtual reality and AI will transform real estate market

Artificial Intelligence and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics

The integration of technology into the real estate sector is ushering in a new era of innovation and efficiency. As digital transformation accelerates, emerging technologies are poised to reshape the property landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for stakeholders across the industry. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies are revolutionising the property viewing experience. By offering immersive virtual tours and interactive floor plans, these technologies enable prospective buyers and tenants to explore properties remotely, thereby expanding market reach and enhancing customer engagement. In 2024, VR and AR applications will become increasingly sophisticated, offering personalised experiences.

Blockchain and Smart Contracts: Blockchain technology and smart contracts are transforming property transactions by enhancing security, transparency, and efficiency. By creating immutable digital records and automating contract execution, these technologies



mitigate fraud risks and streamline the conveyancing process. In the coming years, the adoption of blockchain and smart contracts will become more widespread, enabling seamless, secure, and cost-effective real estate transactions. **AI and Data Analytics** Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics. By analyzing market trends, identifying investment opportunities, and optimizing property management processes, AI-driven solutions are enhancing decision-making capabilities and driving operational excellence. As AI algorithms become more advanced and data analytics tools more sophisticated, the integration of these technologies will continue to

redefine the real estate industry's competitive landscape. In conclusion, the fusion of technology and real estate in 2024 is not merely a trend but a seismic shift that promises to redefine the very essence of property transactions and experiences. This transformative journey unfolds across multiple dimensions, each offering a unique blend of innovation, efficiency, and opportunity.

At the forefront, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing property exploration, transcending the limitations of physical distance and enabling prospective buyers and tenants to embark on immersive journeys through properties from the comfort of their homes. The evolution of these technologies in 2024 is set to introduce personalized experiences that resonate with individual preferences, thereby amplifying market reach and fostering deeper connections between properties and potential occupants. Parallely, the emergence of Blockchain technology and smart contracts is ushering in an era of unprecedented security, transparency,

and efficiency in property transactions. These innovations are not only mitigating fraud risks but also reimagining the conveyancing process, paving the way for seamless, secure, and cost-effective transactions that resonate with the demands of the modern era. Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics is empowering real estate professionals with a treasure trove of actionable insights and predictive capabilities. These advancements are not only enhancing operational excellence but also shaping a future where data-driven strategies and insights drive growth, innovation, and success. Beyond the technological innovations, the real essence lies in the transformative impact these advancements are poised to create. In essence, as we venture further into 2024 and beyond, the confluence of technology and real estate is paving the way for a new era characterised by innovation, efficiency, and opportunity.

(The writer is an industry expert; views expressed are personal)



SANJEEV SRIVASTVA

Charting a path for Hindu-Muslim unity

The historic consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya signifies not just a momentous event but a call for reconciliation

Every battle must end, so must every dispute. Killings are more easily forgotten than the destruction of buildings. But when a residence of the divine is destroyed, it is unforgettable. For a Hindu, a mandir is a residence of God. The reason is that an elevated human soul either meets the divine or obtains a glimpse of Him as Ramakrishna Paramahansa did. This is very different from a synagogue, church or mosque, all of which are merely prayer halls. Their respective faiths and adherents do not consider them to be residences of the divine.

January 22, 2024 is now behind us. It has been an epoch-making day, led by the man who made it possible. The Prime Minister's consecration of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya marked the return of Lord Rama to his abode on earth after 500 years of not only waiting, but ceaseless struggle and sacrifices. Ever since Mughal invader Babar's henchman Mir Baqi destroyed the original temple at Ayodhya in 1528 AD, Hindus never gave up the struggle to reclaim the birthplace of Rama. The history of battles waged by the Hindu faithful is a long one, but December 6, 1992 was the day when the edifice known as Babri Masjid was sent to the dust. But, as our Prime Minister has said, now is perhaps the time for reconciliation.

The Somnath Temple at Prabhaspatan near Veraval (Gujarat) was destroyed by the Turkic marauder Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 A.D. Even after a thousand years later, the devilish crime has not faded from Hindu memory. Thereafter, of course, several thousand temples have been demolished or desecrated. By European traditions and the way they have conducted their politics, the dispute over these desecrations and loss caused should have been settled before New Delhi agreed to part with the share of pre-1947 India's assets to Pakistan at the time of Partition. Unfortunately, nothing was done. Instead, more temples were destroyed even in the Kashmir Valley, where India ruled.



Three-quarters of a century have since passed. Surely, it is beyond time that the issue should be settled and a reconciliation and a reconciliation achieved, if the two communities are expected to coexist cordially in the same country. The question is: what is the gesture required to bring about such a reconciliation?

Very broadly, the desecrated temples can be divided into two categories. Until the period of the Lodi Sultanate, which began from 1451 onwards, and the spread of its rule over certain regions of northern India, Islamic invaders intruding into the country were not accompanied or followed by their architects. The pre-Lodi Muslim sultans therefore, converted temples into mosques readily by smashing the edifice along with the moortis (idols) inside the sanctum sanctorum, and replacing them with mehrabs (a niche in a mosque, which indicates the qibla, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) to face Mecca and a minbar (pulpit) of steps, whereupon the imam stands every Friday to deliver his khutba (Islamic sermon).

Many temples were broken down and converted into such mosques. A prominent example of such a conversion



THERE WOULD BE ABOUT 200 TO 300 SUCH CONVERTED AND RE-CONVERTIBLE EDIFICES. THEY COULD BE RETURNED TO HINDU INSTITUTIONS, WHILE THE THOUSANDS OF RECYCLED ONES COULD BE LEFT ALONE

is the Dhai Din kabhira, which stands at about a full-length's distance from the popular Ajmer Sharif dargah. The odd name signifies that this particular conversion was effected within sixty hours of the desecration of the original Hindu place of worship, because ShahbuddinGhori was in a hurry to pray on his return journey via Ajmer. His slave QutbuddinAibak obediently had the conversion executed within two and a half days for his master and badshah to pray when he returned. The erstwhile temple had actually been a complex of three temples, which were promptly combined and converted into a mosque-like edifice. It is therefore, even now, in a condition to be reconverted into a temple, almost equally quickly.

There would be about 200 to 300 such converted and reconvertible edifices. They could be returned to Hindu institutions, while the thousands of recycled ones could be left alone, as a gesture for the process of reconciliation. These were the temples that were broken down almost to the plinth level and reconstructed with the debris being utilized in such reconstruction. The reconstruction using the same debris was done in Islamic style. These

are present in the country by the thousands, with 3,000 of them having been catalogued after being identified either with documentary evidence and/or epigraphs.

These latter structures could be left alone with an apology for having reduced them to such a state, along with an undertaking that such criminal acts shall not be repeated. An undertaking must also be given that the restored temples handed over to Hindu institutions and bodies will be given away irrevocably, and no claim on them whatsoever shall ever be made in the future.

Other issues too, will inevitably come up. As part of the process of reconciliation, issues such as the uniform civil code—which are part of the Constitution of India, but as a Directive Principle—should be dealt with suitably. So also should the issue of the outdated and debilitating waqf, called a "dead hand" by a former chancellor A.A.A. Fyzee. The intention must be to not keep pending any ongoing irritant between the two communities. Let peace and goodwill prevail.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Sir — Birthday, a joyous bell, tolls yearly, awakening us to life's transient journey, as articulated by Kannada litterateur Rayasam Bheemasena Rao, aka 'Beechi'. Each celebration veils the inexorable march from newness to oldness, a reminder of aging. The initial birthday elates parents, but with time, the sheen fades. Aging, though golden at times, heralds the onset of the end. Birth mirrors morning's welcome, while death echoes evening's farewell—a cyclical journey from vitality to fatigue in life's fleeting passage.

Demise carries inherent sadness, its intensity shaped by one's connection to the departed. The passing of those deemed anti-national or anti-social elicits little collective grief; their demise isn't labeled as such by society. While family may mourn, society often finds relief. Birth heralds joy, death, sorrow—yet in troubled families, each birth may sow discord, each death easing societal burdens. Happiness at birth prevails, sorrow in death is the norm, not the exception.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

SHETTAR'S 'GHAR WAPSI'

Sir — Opportunism and greed have overruled all values in politics. Days before the Karnataka assembly elections in May 2023, former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar had joined the Congress miffed over being denied a ticket. Unfortunately, though the party comfortably romped home, Shettar lost in his bastion. But despite the defeat, he was made a member of the state legislative council. Now, after nine months in Congress, Shettar is back in the BJP. Political circles are agog with reasons for Shettar's "ghar wapsi" but one cannot overlook the fact that he is the same person who had declared that he would never return to the BJP in his lifetime.

There is no doubt that Shettar, being a powerful member of the influential Lingayat community in Karnataka, has contributed to the rise of BJP in the state.

Dietary controversy



The move that has ignited widespread criticism, the Maharashtra government has decided to mark the food preferences of students on their identity cards, distinguishing between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The contentious decision aims to streamline the distribution of specific food items, namely bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians, under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti scheme. The state's school education department had previously announced the inclusion of additional items in midday meals to enhance nutritional value, introducing bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians.

A recent department circular recommends using visible red or green dots on students' ID cards to signify their dietary preferences, causing widespread criticism from educators who deem it unnecessary. Critics argue that the classification, indicating egg consumption consent, may not consider occasional exceptions, especially in diverse cultural backgrounds. Religious sentiments, particularly concerns about offending vegetarians, further complicate the implementation. The circular's practicality is also questioned, as objections highlight potential issues with this rigid system.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

The BJP is wary of the fact that his deserting the party could have resulted in some of its candidates losing the elections in the Kittur Karnataka region. With the all-important general elections a few months away, the BJP wants to leave nothing to chance. Shettar may also have struck a deal. That being said, the party would have sent a great message to all turncoat politicians had it declined to welcome Shettar back.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

WOMEN POWER AT KARTAVYA PATH

Sir — The 75th Republic Day celebration turns more glorious with the maximum participation of Women this time in the Republic Day parade. For the first time in history, a women tri-service contingent marches down the Kartavya Path, showcasing the Women's Power of New India. The 100 women artists heralded the parade invocation with their musical band. Later Monika Lakara commended

her team. CISF contingent is also led by Kashyap Monika, Megha Nayak commended Ambika Patil commended the ITBP marching band, Jaya Sharma commended the SSB band, and so on. Watching Indian women march proudly along the Kartavya Path on the 75th Republic Day is profoundly touching. Their gallantry embodies the fulfillment of their responsibility to the nation. The delightful spirit of Nari Shakti, evident in their jubilant participation, fills every Indian with a sense of triumphant pride. This inclusive celebration signals to the world our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Witnessing women leading development in a new India transforms every celebration into a true jubilation, an honor to behold.


Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TEACHERS ARE THE PIVOT OF EDUCATION

A satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of pupils



SAKSHI SETHI

The culture of work ethic rests on delayed gratification, hyper-competitiveness and the perpetual need to outperform what machines can do. The outcome is often disappointment and life dissatisfaction. Living in a so-called modern-day technological world, a workplace environment today has a direct impact on job satisfaction. Of course, money, work-life balance and diversity play a crucial part, but being fulfilled and happy at your job is a hard feeling to beat. A favourable work environment can boost morale, motivation, teamwork, performance and production whilst a poor work environment can contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. It is a well-established reality that organizations in the world today can no longer survive without focusing on their employees.

If they have to be at a competitive edge, they have to invest in their human resources and place them on top priority. Studies have even found that more than half of job seekers would reject a job offer if they found that the company to which they are looking forward had a bad workplace culture as it can negatively impact their mental and physical well-being and above all their career growth. The Indian Education System for instance is facing a continuing concern in terms of recruiting and retaining its quality teachers. It is widely acknowledged that teachers have a pivotal role in the development of an inclusive education system for it is believed that the teacher is the most vital single factor of influence in the system of education. Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly accountable for teaching outcomes to meet rigorous accreditation standards. It is the teacher who matters most as far as the quality of education is concerned. A well-adjusted and satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of his/her pupils. It is in the interests of educational institutions and the systems to ensure that levels of job satisfaction are held high so that the main focus of educational institutions, is not hindered. Job satisfaction in any field of work depends a lot on how conducive the work environment is.

Poor working conditions, low levels of pay, no scope for career advancements and lack of recognition will definitely result in increased rates of absenteeism, poor productivity, frustration and even high turnover rates resulting in a decline in target achievement and finally its closure. Employee turnover affects the productivity of the company.

An employee may serve in an organization for a long time provided that he/she is contented with his/her work. The behavior of an employee also depends on their satisfaction. When a worker is satisfied and contented, he tends to behave well for it has been often said, "A Happy Employee Is a Productive Employee." Remember, job satisfaction is like a high-wire balancing act, with multiple factors constantly in play. There is nothing more discouraging in the workplace than being insecure about the job.

Human resources are the most important resources in any organisation and in order to ensure that an organisation can compete with other firms, retaining efficient and experienced employees is the first and foremost step.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



Unsung heroes in Padma awards list to boost heritage preservation

Among the latest Padma Shri awardees, 34 were ordinary citizens, including tribals and those working for tribal welfare



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

celebrated people since 1954, it was only from 2014 onwards that it started focusing on the common man. Till then, it was a distant dream for a commoner to aim for the award. Even when we recognise a scientist working in the lab for their note-worthy contributions, we often forget the thousands of real 'scientists' who work on the field utilising the knowledge they gathered through the ages from their forefathers. There are great farmers who are developing new plant varieties and cultivation packages. There are great tribal healers who can cure diseases even without the least knowledge of modern science. There are great conservation biologists who know how to conserve nature without any understanding of ecology. There are excellent climatologists who can predict weather simply by looking at the changes happening in nature. There are exemplary people working in astronomy, metallurgy, engineering and other fields. These people work selflessly for the benefit of society without realising even the significance of their work for society. Behind every architectural marvel, every artistic work, there is the craftsmanship of our skilled labour force. Unfortunately, people recognise only the finished product, not the hand that made it happen.

There are thousands of such people who live amongst us without seeking any attention. They may not hold a PhD degree or a professional degree, but their knowledge and scientific skills are more than those of a trained scientist.



In the recent list of 110 Padma Shri awardees, it was announced that 34 were such ordinary people, of whom more than one-third are tribals or those who have worked for tribal welfare. The prominent unsung heroes include Parbati Baruah, fondly known as "Hathi ki Pari," a female elephant trainer from Goalparah, Assam. Defying

deep-rooted stereotypes, Baruah has devoted four decades to addressing human-elephant conflicts. Her scientific methodology has supported three state governments in effectively managing and capturing troublesome tuskers, illustrating the effectiveness of challenging conventional norms.

The farming community is doing yeoman service for the nation and humanity. It's appreciable that many farmers found a place on this year's Padma list. Sathyanarayana Beleri, the rice farmer from Kasaragod, conserves 650 traditional rice varieties on his farm without any sophisticated infrastructure, which even ICAR institutions don't do. Other farmers who were recognised include Sarbeswar Basumatary, the tribal farmer from Chirang, Assam; K Chellammal, an Organic farmer from Andaman; Yanung Jamoh Lego from Arunachal Pradesh and Sanjay Anant Patil of Goa. Many people who work in nature conservation, folk arts and craftsmanship have also been recognised.

The knowledge these exceptional people garnered was passed down through generations orally and is not documented properly. The knowledge is shared only among the close family members. In most cases, the second generation shifts away from the traditional workforce, moving toward more lucrative urban jobs. In the long run, if there are no takers for this traditional knowledge, it will become extinct, as happened to the Indian Knowledge system.

Modi government's initiative to recognise such people is a futuristic vision to preserve the remnants of still-prevailing Indian knowledge. This will revive interest in their community to carry forward the great work their forefathers have been doing. Recognition through a coveted award like Padma Shri will also provide them respect from other members of the society. The government has fostered a sense of self-confidence and admiration for one's work by making the Padma award accessible to the common man.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



Historical factors at play in Israel-Palestine conflict



This conflict finds its roots in history that spans over a century when the Zionist movement, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, gained momentum

The past 114 day-long Israel-Palestine war has an immediate as well as a long historical context: the immediate context of the war is the Hamas attack killing 1200 and taking 120 Israeli civilians as hostages on October 7 last year; while its long history begins with the proposal to establish the Jewish homeland, Israel, in this region after their dispersion from European countries. During the first world-war, the proposal gets impetus and the 'conflict' becomes intense with the British promising Jews to help them set up the Jewish homeland in Palestine after the collapse of Ottoman Empire for their influence on the US to support the post-war policies of the Britain. The conception and claim of homeland by the Jews dispersed from Europe on the same swatches of land where a mix of Muslim, Jew, and Christian population is already in place holding their identity as Arabs or Palestinians generates a 'conflict' of Jewish-Israeli nationalism pitted against the Palestinian-Arabic nationalism. The 'conflict' gains intensity at the revelation of the three self-contradictory agreements made by the British authorities during this time for their own imperialist interests treating the region as 'terra nullius' or 'booty of the war': these agreements are famous as the 'Hussein-McMahon Correspondence' (1915-1916), the 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' (1916) and the 'Balfour Declaration' (1917).

The 'Hussain-McMahon Correspondence' promised Arabs the independence of Palestine in exchange for their support for the British against the Ottoman (Uthman) Empire in the First World War, yet, on the other hand, in contradiction the 'Balfour Declaration', promised the Jews their 'homeland' in the Palestine. But after the war, using 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' between the British and the French, the British took Palestine region under their 'Authority' securing a safe access to India through the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf but deepening the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The Palestine region remained under the British Authority until 1948 and between 1917- 1948, emigration of Jews in Palestine and the Israel-Palestine conflict swelled in parallel. In 1930, the Arabs launched a revolt against the British colonial rule in Palestine and its policy of Jewish resettlement here, which resulted in a plan to partition Palestine into the Jewish and Arab states leaving Jerusalem under international administration. The Jewish leaders accepted but the Arab states and the Palestinians rejected the proposal.

On the other hand, during the Second World War, the Jewish Holocaust campaign in Germany and some other European countries left the Jews homeless. In August 1945, by the American President, Truman's appeal to the British Prime Minister, Attlee, to settle 100,000 Nazi Holocaust victims in Palestine, America also joined the powers that would determine the future of Palestine, though neither America nor Britain offered them refuge in America or Britain. The Arabs sympathized with the displaced Jews, but opposed the creation of Israel on the Palestinian territories. America and Britain continued to orient their policy on Palestine to their convenience.

Tired of the Second World War and directly dealing with the civil war in



DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST CAMPAIGN IN GERMANY AND SOME OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES LEFT THE JEWS HOMELESS

Palestine, the British government ended its Authority over Palestine at midnight on 14 May, 1948 leaving the Jewish-Arab factions fighting each other during the civil war. On the same day the Jewish leadership in Palestine announced the establishment of the State of Israel. The birth of Israel from a violent war caused the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinian-Arabs. It is called by the Jews the 'War of Independence' but by the Palestinians as the 'Nakba' meaning 'destruction and desolation'. Since then Palestine has been a land of 'conflicts', 'battles' and third party 'peace agreements'. The current 'Israel- Palestinian war' building on more than 100 years of conflict and internecine battles for their 'homelands' in the same geographical territories is guided by the right-wing nationalism on both sides, with the external third party players consistently present to fulfil their (neo)colonial interests. In the 2023-24 Israel-Palestine war, Israel and Hamas or Palestine are the parties directly in conflict, and much of the discussion about the war is usually focused on 'who of the immediate players in the war is more culpable' and 'who of the two has a stronger claim for its 'homeland' in the same region, while the role of third parties in the war remains elusive.

One breed of third party players is of those coerced into war and circumscribed by their regional geographical, cultural and historical existence; they are affected by what happens in the region. But there is another breed of third

party extra-regional powers in the war whose presence is guided by their geo-political and economic interests; they act as catalysts to turn the 'conflict' into a 'war' and choose between 'right' and 'left' to their convenience. To understand the multifaceted politics of the Israeli-Palestinian war, it is also important to describe the role of these catalyst forces at work behind the war.

By vetoing the UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' America and Britain have helped the war to inflame and by sanctioning the sale of weapons and ammunition twice, America has fuelled the war and encouraged the right-wing Israeli government passion for displacement of Palestinian population. In the name of eliminating Hamas and their bases, the indiscriminate heavy bombardment by Israel, with the unflinching support and encouragement by the US, has led to the mass destruction of ordinary Palestinian civilians. Israel's current war against Hamas is in reality a war against Palestinians. The Israel-Palestine war of 2023-24 is the worst not only because the majority of the dead are civilians but also because it is being fought like a genocide. The right-wing Israeli government, led by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, wants complete Israeli control in Palestine and does not recognize any role for the Palestinian Authority. Two Israeli ministers of the Israeli government have revealed their ideology by their advice to the Palestinians to leave for the country that permits them.

The American support has reinforced such an ideology. Facing challenges from within and without, pressure from the countries of West Asia and fear of Israel becoming more intransigent, America has reviewed its policy in Palestine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with the leaders of Turkey, Qatar and Jordan on his fourth diplomatic tour of West Asia to drum up support for the US post-war plan of 'two states' and reconstruction of Gaza. In a press conference he has said that the Palestinians should not be pressured to leave Gaza.

But the US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller's comments on a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice by South Africa against Israel for committing 'genocide' contradict its 'peace proposal' and exposes its position on displacement.

On the one hand, America's support for a 'two-state solution' and criticism of Israel's claim for Jewish state on the whole region, but on the other hand, billions of dollars annual US aid to Israel for years and sale of arms during the war and veto of UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' exposes its ambivalent policy on Gaza and cleverness of Britain during the First World War. After all, Israel is using the US aid and weapons to occupy Palestinian territories and disperse the Palestinian population.

(The writer is retired professor Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member, Governing Council, INTECH; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rana Talwar, first Indian to head a global bank, dies at 76

Veteran banker Rana Talwar, who was the first Indian to head a global bank -- Standard Chartered Plc, died at the age of 76 years. Talwar, son-in-law of DLF Group chairman emeritus K P Singh, breathed his last on Saturday, sources said. He is survived by his wife Renuka and son Rahul. Besides DLF, he served on the boards of various companies including Asahi India Glass Limited and Great Eastern Energy Corporation Limited. The company regrets to inform about the sad demise of Talwar, a non-executive director, on Saturday, January 27, 2024, which was intimated to the company by the family members, DLF said in a regulatory filing. Born in 1948, Talwar started his career as a banker in India with Citi Bank after passing out of the prestigious St Stephens College, Delhi. During his stint at Citi Bank, Gurvirendra Singh Talwar also known as Rana Talwar, was responsible for building the US-based bank's retail businesses across Asia Pacific and the Middle East.



PNB raises profit guidance to Rs 7,000 crore

Enthusiased by a stellar performance in the third quarter, state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) has raised its profit guidance to Rs 7,000-7,500 crore for the current financial year. Earlier, the second largest lender had set a profit estimate of Rs 6,000 crore for the ongoing fiscal. With a 253 per cent jump in the net profit in the third quarter, the bottom line of the bank in the three-quarters of FY24 crossed Rs 5,230 crore. The bank has revised the earlier profit target of Rs 6,000 crore to Rs 7,000-7,500 crore for the current financial year, PNB MD and CEO Atul Kumar Goel said. Going by revised guidance, the fourth quarter profit would be upwards of Rs 2,000 crore as well. In the third quarter ended December 2023, the bank earned a profit of Rs 2,223 crore, registering an over 253 per cent jump over the same quarter a year ago. Addressing shareholders last year, Goel had said FY24 would be 'a golden year' for Punjab National Bank due to its multi-pronged strategy and steady focus.



Macrotech Developers to launch 11 projects

Looking to tap rising housing demand, realty firm Macrotech Developers will launch 11 projects in Mumbai, Pune and Bengaluru this quarter with an estimated revenue potential of Rs 6,260 crore. Mumbai-based Macrotech Developers is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It has a major presence in Mumbai Metropolitan Region and Pune. The company markets its properties under the Lodha brand. In an investor presentation, the company said it has a strong launch pipeline in the fourth quarter of 2023-24. "Well placed to meet full-year pre-sales guidance with the launches planned in Q4," it said. Macrotech Developers said the company will launch a 4.4 million square feet area during the January-March quarter, of which 1 million square feet would be in Bengaluru and 0.8 million square feet in Pune. The remaining area will be in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).



Centre, industry & experts to discuss trade regime

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top central government officials, industry leaders and international experts will gather here on January 30 to deliberate on India's export control systems for sensitive goods and technologies and global best practices in the sector, an official said.

The official said that the 'National Conference on Strategic Trade Controls' seeks to showcase India's prowess in export control systems, facilitate a dialogue between government authorities and industry leaders on the sector, and address emerging risks associated with the export of sensitive goods and technologies.

There are specific laws and regulations with regard to strategic trade or export controls. These help manage the flow of dual-use goods, services and technologies across national borders.

These regulations primarily focus on controlling the export



of SCOMET items in order to balance the country's commercial and security considerations.

Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies (SCOMET) items are dual-use goods.

Dual Use implies the usage of these goods and technologies in military applications or its use in nuclear, chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD), along

with their civilian or industrial applications.

The conference would focus on issues like showcasing India's export control system; preventing the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems by strengthening the export control system; and facilitating dialogue between the government authorities and industry stakeholders.

Besides, it aims at assessing and mitigating emerging risks

associated with the export of sensitive technologies; increasing awareness and understanding of export controls; gathering feedback from the industry and learning best practices of other countries; and fostering international collaboration and showcase enforcement efforts, the official said.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs is organizing the conference.

"It is the first such national-level conference of its kind which will focus on India's strategic trade control (SCOMET/export control) system and International best practices, for the export of dual-use goods and technologies," the official added.

The primary objectives of strategic trade or export controls are to prevent the proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems, as well as the uncontrolled transfer of conventional arms / military items.

IRB Infrastructure Trust wins Rs 1,720 cr arbitration award

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Yedeshi Aurangabad Tollway Ltd (YATL), a special purpose vehicle of IRB Infrastructure Trust, has won an arbitration award of Rs 1,720 crore for a highway project, a statement said on Sunday.

The YATL had initiated arbitration proceedings against the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) after the authority disputed the company's claim for the extension of the concession period by 870 days and compensation of Rs 1,751 crore, the statement said.

IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd is the sponsor of IRB Infrastructure Trust. IRB was the EPC contractor for YATL and continues to be the project manager for YATL.

The arbitration was based on the compensation payable to the IRB towards time and cost overrun suffered during the construction period on account of delays attributable to the NHAI and certain Force Majeure events, it added.

India's gas demand to rise 6% in 2024: IEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's natural gas demand is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2024 with a rise in consumption in fertiliser units, power generation and industrial sectors, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Following the 7 per cent year-on-year decline observed in 2022, India's primary gas supply rose by 5 per cent in 2023, with growth primarily driven by the petrochemical, power generation, refinery and industrial sectors. "Natural gas demand in India is expected to increase by 6 per cent in 2024, mainly supported by higher gas use in industry (including in the fertiliser sector) and stronger gas burn in the power sector amid the development of its national pipeline grid and city gas infrastructure," IEA said Gas Market Report released last week.

India's natural gas demand had risen to 64 billion cubic meters in 2023.

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports rose by 7 per cent on



the year to 29 billion cubic meters last year, with import dependency at 44 per cent of the nation's natural gas consumption. Domestic production was up 6 per cent on the year to 35 billion cubic meters on the back of a rise in output from Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block.

"We expect India to increase its LNG imports in 2024 by 7 per cent, fuelled by demand from the power and fertiliser sectors, as the country plans to

stop importing urea by 2025," IEA said.

Natural gas extracted from below surface and seabeds is used to make fertiliser, generate electricity, convert into CNG to run automobiles, piped to households for cooking purposes and used as fuel and feedstock in industries.

India's domestic production is insufficient to meet demand and so the fuel is imported as LNG in cryogenic ships.

Educators call for govt monitoring of AI development, use cases

PNS ■ MUMBAI

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming education, around 87.85 per cent of educators interviewed believe that the development and application of AI technologies should be monitored and regulated by the government, a report said on Sunday.

"Over 87.85 per cent (educators) agree that the development and application of AI technologies should be monitored and regulated by the government, reflecting concerns about risks and ethical implications," TeamLease Edtech's report - Revolutionizing Classrooms: The Impact of Generative AI on the Future of Education, has revealed.

This strong consensus indicated a widespread recognition of the potential risks and ethical considerations associated with AI, noted the report.

Most educators believe that government oversight is necessary to ensure that AI technologies are developed and used responsibly, ethically, and in ways that benefit society as a whole, it added.

This TeamLease Edtech's report - Revolutionizing Classrooms: The Impact of



Generative AI on the Future of Education, is based on a survey of 6,313 educators, ranging from primary school and high school teachers, college professors and education professionals, across the country.

The report found that 61.60 per cent of the respondents are already using AI tools for teaching preparation and engagement and 63.61 per cent of educators believed that AI is crucial in preparing students for an AI-dominated future.

"This report underscores the fact that AI is no more just an emerging technology but a reality that is already reshaping classrooms across India.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the integration of technology has become a transformative force, reshaping traditional teaching methodologies, and opening new avenues for innovative approaches.," TeamLease Edtech founder and CEO Shantanu Roj said.

FPIs take out Rs 24,700 cr from equities on rising US bond yields

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have dumped Indian equities worth Rs 24,700 crore so far this month, owing to surging bond yield in the US.

On the other hand, they are bullish on the debt market and infused Rs 17,120 crore in the debt market during the period under review, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 24,734 crore from Indian equities this month (till January 25).

Before this, FPIs made a net



investment of Rs 66,134 crore in the entire December and Rs 9,000 crore in November.

"The rising bond yields in the US is a matter of concern, and this has triggered the recent bout of selling in the cash market," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

"The rally in global stock markets was triggered by the Fed pivot which saw the 10-year bond yield falling from 5 per cent to around 3.8 per cent. "Now the 10-year bond is back at 4.18 per cent, which indicates that the Fed rate cut will come only in H2 of 2024," he added.

FPIs started the new year with a cautious approach opting to book profits in the Indian equity markets as they touched all-time high levels.

Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for further

cues, before taking investment decisions with respect to investing in emerging markets like India, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

On a bullish stance in the debt markets, experts said that the announcement by JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024 influenced the inflow in the country's bond markets in the past few months.

'India leading top 25 countries in defence export'

PNS ■ NAGPUR

India is becoming self-reliant in defence production, and for the first time, leading the top 25 countries in defence exports, Union minister Ajay Bhatt said on Sunday. The Minister of State for Defence was speaking at the Advantage Vidarbha programme in Nagpur.

He said the government has issued four lists of 4,666 defence components whose import is banned, resulting in huge savings.

Budget: Auto firms seek continued push to green mobility, infra development

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government needs to continue with favourable policies to promote green mobility while also focussing on infrastructure development at a robust pace in the upcoming Budget, according to some leading firms in the automobile space. The Union government is all set to present the interim budget on February 1.

"We expect capex on infrastructural projects to continue, aiding the automotive sector. The policy



push for green mobility should remain a key focus for the government, encouraging faster adoption of electric vehicles," Mercedes-Benz India MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The luxury car industry has a significant value contribution to the GDP and the segment aspires for a rationalised duty structure and GST on priority, he added.

Overall, we expect consistency in various policies and no surprises in the upcoming budget," Iyer stated.

Luxury vehicles currently attract the top GST slab of 28 per cent with an additional cess of 20 per cent on sedans and 22 per cent on SUVs, taking the total tax incidence to up to 50 per cent.

Red Sea trade route woes may hurt manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Longer disruptions at the crucial Red Sea trade route may hurt manufacturing lines of some sectors like electronics, automobiles, chemicals, consumer goods and machinery, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said companies relying on just-in-time manufacturing processes can be particularly vulnerable as they maintain low inventory levels and depend on the timely arrival of components and finished products.

Few industries where production will be impacted due to disruptions in global value chains include electronics, automotive, machinery,

chemicals, pharmaceuticals, plastics, textiles, and consumer goods, it added.

Components and finished products are often shipped through the Suez Canal to reach different markets, and disruptions can lead to delays in manufacturing and increased costs, it said.

Due to the attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial ships, the movement of goods from the Red Sea, the world's busiest shipping route, has disrupted the global supply chains as vessels have to take long routes for exports and imports.

The immediate ripple effects are seen in increased freight costs, mandatory war risk insurance, and significant delays due to rerouting. "The adverse impact will



multiply if the disruption continues beyond a few more weeks as it will impact not only trade but local productions of many industries, which rely on just-in-time procurement/import of inputs through the global value chains spanning both Europe and Asia," GTRI co-

founder Ajay Srivastava said. He said that average container spot rates have more than doubled since early December 2023.

Basmati rice exporters face freight costs soaring to USD 2,000 per 20-tonne container for destinations around the Red Sea, marking a 233 per

cent increase, Srivastava added.

Similarly, he said, the other sectors which have faced issues include life-saving drugs, textiles, diesel, ATF, and steel.

Exporters have also expressed apprehensions that if the crisis continues, it will hurt the country's trade.

Mumbai-based exporter SK Saraf said the time is right for India to consider building a big domestic shipping company, as, at present, "we are completely dependent on foreign shippers".

Reports have linked the increased attack by Yemen-based Houthis on commercial ships with the Israel-Hamas war in October last year.

Houthi group has been

using drones and rockets on ships, which are transporting goods through the strait of Bab al-Mandab, which is a crucial shipping route connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean.

The strait, vital for 30 per cent of global container traffic, has seen increased tensions with various incidents in 2023, including attacks and military manoeuvres by regional and global powers.

India is heavily reliant on this route for trade and energy imports and due to the disruptions, exporters here have to diversify their trade routes.

Strikes have been continuing for many years but escalated this year sharply, with militants now using anti-ship ballistic missiles.

431 infra projects showed cost overrun of Rs 4.82L cr in Dec

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 431 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.82 lakh crore in December 2023, an official report stated.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,820 projects, 431 reported cost overrun and 848 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,820 projects was Rs 25,87,066.08 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 30,69,595.88 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,82,529.80 crore (18.65 per cent of original cost),"

the ministry's latest report for December 2023 said.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till December 2023 is Rs 16,26,813.80 crore, which is 53 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 638, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion. Further, it said that for 298 projects neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported.

Out of the 848 delayed projects, 202 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 200 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25-60 months, and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

Jeremy Renner had ‘a lot of callousness squashed out’ by accident

Hollywood star Jeremy Renner, who over a year ago was critically injured in a snow plow accident, says he's learned to embrace a softer side.

"I certainly got a lot of callousness squashed out of me by that machine," he tells People while discussing his new Super Bowl commercial for Silk.

"I've never been bitter, but always maybe a little more callous, a little bit more tough. And I just think those calluses are just scraped off me at this point. Literally, I feel pretty open and wonderfully sensitive and youthful."

The actor continues, "I've been blessed," reports people.com.

In January 2023, Jeremy, 53, spent more than two weeks in the hospital and underwent multiple surgeries after breaking more than 30 bones in the accident near his home in Nevada.

The *Hawkeye* star has since made a miraculous recovery, and was even able to return to the red carpet in April, where he walked alongside his 10-

year-old daughter Ava.

It was his young daughter and close family and friends who pushed him to heal, Jeremy says and helped him realise just how loved he really is.

"Everything kind of just went right," he said. "Obviously I had a lot of tenacity, I had a lot of support, a lot of reason to recover. That is really special. There's a lot of people that don't have as much, (don't have) those things to live for."

Jeremy continued: "It wasn't about me getting better. It was about healing them. That's how I got out of my own way... Geez, the love and support I got from people, man."

"I just didn't realise that many people gave a crap about me that much. Maybe Hawkeye, they did. (But) just me as a person, it's a different thing, you know what I mean?"

While the Oscar-nominated actor says he certainly wouldn't want to go through something like this again, he's grateful to have learned his limits, which were far greater than anyone ever expected.

"I know how far I can go. That's pretty useful information give you parameters of your life, and it's pretty hopeful," he says.

"I overcame a lot, and there's so many things that could have gone wrong. It all went right, every part of it. From my vision, to walking, that no one said I was going to walk again. I'm like, 'Well...'"

Jeremy is not only walking again, but is back to performing stunts, like he does in Silk's new Super Bowl spot.

"(Silk is) all about wellness, and I've gotten pretty into that because it's forced upon me as a part of a lifestyle, which is great," he says. "I've become so healthy now."

The ad is even more special to Jeremy as it co-stars Ava, whom he shares with ex-wife Sonni Pacheco.

"It's a beacon of hope for me and for my daughter as well, and this is a new part of our journey together in recovery and in life," he says.

"Getting back into life in a different way, out of a hospital bed, out of the house, being social, just doing normal things. It represents a lot to me, and I'm very thankful to be here to do this."



GWEN STEFANI HAD TO EXPLAIN HER ‘NO DOUBT’ DAYS TO 10-YEAR-OLD SON

Singer Gwen Stefani said that she is "completely overwhelmed" by the warm reception rock band No Doubt has received in the post-Coachella announcement.

"I definitely have that little thing in your stomach where you're like, 'Oh my gosh! What?'" she said in an interview to people.com.

"It's going to be amazing."

The Coachella Festival will see No Doubt reunite for the first time since 2015, which makes for some confusion among her youngest followers, reports deadline.com.

The Grammy winner is married to Blake Shelton and has three sons with her ex-husband Gavin Rossdale.

The singer revealed that she had to have a talk with her youngest, Apollo, age 10, about Coachella.

"I had to literally lay in bed with Apollo and he's like, 'But mom, what is Coachella? Everyone's saying it. What is this? It sounds like it's a big deal.' So we had to watch the Don't Speak video, and he's like, 'But wait, which one was your boyfriend?' It was so weird and so funny. I literally had to tell each band member," Stefani said.

"That's how much time's gone by because he's going to be 10! It's just another miracle and a blessing. And it was surreal for me. I feel like we're in the future and lightning just struck and (No Doubt) is like, 'Here we are!'"



Most of the actors today are copying Irrfan Khan, says Tigmanshu Dhulia

Director Tigmanshu Dhulia says most of the actors in the film industry today are imitating his long-time friend and collaborator Irrfan Khan's style of acting.

Tigmanshu crossed paths with Irrfan at Delhi's National School of Drama in the late 1980s. The filmmaker directed the actor in his 2003 directorial debut *Haasil* and later worked on "Paan Singh Tomar" (2012) and *Shahej, Biwi Aur Gangster Returns* (2013).

"He was from drama school, so the approach for a role, the skill and all that was there. Today, a lot of actors are acting by watching other actors. Most of them are copying Irrfan Khan, taking pauses and all. He gave a lot of importance to his work. That's why he was different and good," the writer-director said on Saturday.

He was speaking at a session on the first day of a retrospective on Irrfan, being held by not-for-profit organisation G5A here. Irrfan died at the age of 54 on April 29, 2020 following his battle with a rare form of cancer.

Tigmanshu said the late actor would often get stressed about how to approach his work.

"He would get troubled a lot about his roles, his name should have been 'Pareshan' Khan. He would keep smoking, thinking about the role, especially for the film which he thought was important for him. He would go beyond the script and think," he added.

Citing the examples of *Paan Singh Tomar* and Sanjay Gupta's *Jazbaa*, Tigmanshu said Irrfan gave his best irrespective of whether it was a niche or commercial film.

"He had that sense that this film (*Paan Singh Tomar*) is important. He went out of the way, spent time with villagers, interacted with cops, went to the Chambal river, and imbibed a lot of things.

"I heard Sanjay Gupta say that when he was making *Jazbaa*, Irrfan had told him to present him like Sanjay Dutt, give him one-liner dialogues, etc. When he (Irrfan) did commercial films, he wanted every parameter ticked," he added.



Rahat Fateh Ali Khan criticised for assaulting ‘protege’ in viral video, issues clarification

Rahat Fateh Ali Khan found himself at the centre of a controversy after a video of him allegedly slapping a person went viral on social media on Saturday, following which the renowned Pakistani singer said it was an attempt to tarnish his image.

In the purported video, Khan can be seen repeatedly hitting and slapping the man, whom he later identified as his protege Naveed Hasnain, with a slipper asking "Where is my bottle?" Khan's name started trending on X hours after the 1.03-minute clip went viral, with many users calling out the singer for his misbehaviour. It couldn't be ascertained when and where the said video was filmed. The singer, known for hit Hindi movie songs such as *Mann ki Lagan* and *Biya Dhadak Dhadak*, later shared a series of videos on Instagram as a clarification.

Khan, 49, termed the viral video an "internal matter" between a master and his disciple.

"Whatever you have seen in these videos is about an internal matter between an ustaad (master) and a shagird (protege). When a protege does a good job, we shower a lot of them and when they make a mistake, we punish them as well... I had apologised to him at the same

time..." the popular singer said in the video, which also featured Hasnain and his father.

In a separate video, Khan said the person who shot the video was trying to tarnish his image.

"These are attempts to defame me and paint me as a tyrant, but I ask them to take a look at themselves first," he added. Many X users slammed Khan and claimed that the brouhaha was over "a lost bottle of alcohol".

According to Hasnain, he had misplaced a bottle which contained "holy water".

"I had forgotten where I kept that bottle which had 'pir sahab ka dum ka paani' (holy water). God knows our ustaad loves us a lot too. Whoever has recorded that video is a blackmailer. This person is trying to defame my ustaad ji," he said. Hasnain also said his family and Khan's relationship transcends 40 years and whatever one saw in the viral clip was a "lie".

"He can hit me, scold me, he's my ustaad. That video is a lie and an attempt to malign my ustaad's reputation," he added in another video.

The criticism on social media didn't stop even after Khan tried to clear the air, with many terming his explanation about hitting his protege "lame" and "embarrassing".



FUN

ARCHIE

CAVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

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Rules

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

ACROSS

- Calm and quiet
- Sit on this
- Steam bath
- Oboe player
- Applaud
- An area of cut grass
- A box for a body
- Once more
- Heartbeat
- Practise something before doing it for an audience

DOWN

- A keyboard instrument
- From one side to the other
- Simple to do

SOLUTION

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Celebrating harmony beyond borders with music

TANISHA SAXENA

Renowned composer and Beatles bassist James Paul McCartney once remarked, “Music is like a psychiatrist. You can tell your guitar things you can’t tell people. And it will come back with things people can’t tell you!”

Years later, Pattie, a supergroup from Tel Aviv, Israel, echoes similar sentiments as they sit down with The Pioneer right before their performance in Delhi’s Premium Jazz Club, The Piano Man. “Music acts as a global conduit, intricately connecting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It serves as a unifying force, transcending geographical and societal distinctions to create a collective resonance, fostering a shared emotional and experiential narrative,” says Avner Tueg.

In the 1960s, psychedelic music became a major component of the counterculture movement. Inspired by the hallucinogenic experiences brought about by drugs such as LSD, musicians attempted to convert these altered states of awareness into melodic compositions. To create a unique sound, bands like The Beatles, The Doors, and Jefferson Airplane combined unusual structures, experimental noises, and hallucinogenic lyrics.

Characterised by intricate instrumentals, non-traditional song structures, and the use of novel recording techniques, psychedelic music evolved throughout the years. The late ‘60s saw the rise of psychedelic rock, blending rock and blues with mind-expanding elements. In the ‘70s, progressive rock carried psychedelic influences, while the ‘80s brought a resurgence with neo-psychedelia. Genres like shoegaze in the ‘90s and contemporary psych-rock continue to draw inspiration from their psychedelic roots, ensuring their enduring influence on music.

Gal Shnaider and Nadav Melman assert, “Psychedelic music has undergone significant evolution, influenced by spiritual encounters. A decade ago, its novelty initially jarred my ears, diverging from mainstream pop. Yet, this sonic departure led me on an enriching journey. The aesthetic essence of our psychedelic music lies in the spontaneity of its creation, where understanding precedes uncertain techni-



A supergroup from Tel Aviv in Israel, Pattie, gets candid with *The Pioneer* and discusses their music in this exclusive chat.

cality. Our aim is to craft a relatable journey for the audience, counteracting the prevailing brevity of contemporary songs.”

Modern music moves quickly, as evidenced by the short song lengths and quick changes in style. The music scene has changed as a result of the industry’s adoption of streaming services, which offer algorithm-driven playlists and instant access to a vast repertoire. People are accustomed to instant satisfaction, so musicians tend to shorten their pieces so that the listener is quickly enthralled. Because of the instantaneous nature of digital platforms such as Spotify, listeners have created a cul-

ture in which they make snap decisions about a song’s destiny. The usual build-up and extended instrumental breaks have been replaced in this fast-paced musical environment by succinct frameworks that emphasize immediate engagement over in-depth musical research.

Echoing similar thoughts, Avner Tueg explains, “In today’s fast-paced music scene, songs are brief with quick choruses. However, our compositions, though not 20-minute epics, still defy brevity. Visual elements in our clips aid in immersion, guiding listeners into a contemplative space and combating the impatience fostered by

instant song-skipping habits.”

Over the years, they have created masterpieces, including *Talk About Love*, *Love Me Tender*, and *I Only Want to Be with You*, among others. The result ranges from a magnetic pop sound to a hypnotic, psychedelic experience.

When asked about their inspiration in psychedelic music, they respond, “Certainly, The Beatles and Pink Floyd have undeniably influenced our musical style, though we don’t strictly adhere to mainstream pop. Our music is deeply rooted in the cultural landscape of Israel, drawing inspiration from the rich musical her-

itage of the region. Additionally, we find artistic inspiration in the works of renowned musicians like Jeff Buckley.”

Bands embarking on a global journey face a demanding yet rewarding path as they prepare to grace stages around the world. Beyond mastering their musical prowess, these dedicated artists must meticulously refine various facets of their performance. From perfecting stage presence to fine-tuning sound dynamics, every detail requires careful consideration. Navigating the challenges of different venues, cultures, and audiences demands adaptability and resilience. Hours of

rehearsal, strategic planning, and honing interpersonal dynamics within the group are essential steps. This arduous process, though, cultivates a sense of unity and expertise that transforms a band into a finely tuned live spectacle. As they transcend geographical boundaries, these musicians carry with them not just a melody but a harmonious fusion of passion, diligence, and a shared commitment to delivering an unforgettable experience on the global stage.

“Reflecting on a performance in Chennai, our first before an Indian audience highlighted the importance of adapting to diverse crowds. Unlike the challenging and cynical Israeli audience, the intimacy of the Chennai crowd required adjustments in song order and introductions. Each performance becomes a learning experience, emphasizing the paramount connection with the audience,” adds Avner Tueg.

They further accentuate, “In Israel, our concerted efforts to forge a culturally diverse musical landscape have borne fruit. A couple of years ago, our collaboration with a Yemeni singer manifested a fusion of musical elements inspired by Indian culture. Regularly immersing ourselves in the rich soundscape of Coke Studio, with its captivating introduction featuring sitar and tabla, has significantly influenced our musical direction.”

So, what is the creative process of Pattie? “Enduring as a collective for a substantial duration, our camaraderie bears a resemblance to a romantic relationship, albeit in the context of brotherhood. Crafting song lyrics demands a keen observation of our surroundings. In our earlier years, themes of love and friendship were predominant, typical of one’s 20s. Presently, we endeavor to infuse a layer of self-understanding and spirituality into our compositions, delving into the realms of inner reflection. The lyrical journey varies with each composition. Occasionally, what may seem like nonsensical musings during the creative process turned out to yield remarkable results. Ultimately, the reception from our audience plays a pivotal role. Their ability to resonate with the song and relate it to their own experiences adds a dynamic layer to our artistic endeavors,” the trio concludes.

CURATING B-TOWN WARDROBES

PNS| HYDERABAD

Amandeep Kaur has managed to carve a niche for herself in the fashion world with her acute perspective on aesthetics. She is a firm believer in analysing the unique personalities of the stars before deep-diving into curating their wardrobes. Currently, she is the go-to stylist for the Kaushal Brothers - Vicky and Sunny Kaushal. She has previously also styled other celebrities like Sonam Kapoor, Taapsee Pannu, Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, and Radhika Madan. In a candid conversation, the talented stylist talks about her big break into Bollywood styling, her dream about styling for a big Hindi feature film, and all the challenges that make this ride both a boon and a bane.

“It didn’t happen to me overnight. I styled a variety of celebrities while I worked as a stylist for publications, including A-list actors, TV actors, small-time stars, and novices. I ended up dressing Priyanka Chopra, Alia Bhatt, and Sonam Kapoor. The experience of dealing with performers of different temperaments and styles was enhanced by each shot,” she shared. Her association with Vicky has been cordial and lengthy. She now considers him

and his family to be her family. His whole faith in her is incredibly helpful, and it for sure makes her job simpler. They create styles that aim to strike a balance between the two characters. As you may have seen, his promotional attire for *Sardar Udham* was earthy chic, while that for *Uri: The Surgical Strike* was army-inspired and gruff.

When asked if she had also styled Taapsee, Yami Gautam, and Radhika Madan, and if they also collaborated on their looks, she explained, “I sometimes feel like a ‘fashion psychologist’ since, as a stylist, I strive to closely examine each person’s personality. When styling someone, I prefer to check through their Instagram profiles and interviews to get a sense of who they are psychologically by deciphering their appearance. Regarding which body parts do they feel secure and which do they not? How do they dress? Which silhouettes appeal to them? What sort of nonverbal cues do they use? In my research, all of this comes together.” Taapsee has consistently demonstrated a great deal of faith in her. They have collaborated on numerous photo shoots where they didn’t even try on the clothes beforehand. But for some shots, she makes it quite apparent when there’s a certain silhouette she doesn’t like. “In contrast, Radhika is quite clear about what she wants. To help me better understand what she wants in the bigger picture, she would look up references and convey the styles that speak to her. However, she has also shown a great deal of trust when it comes to actuals, and fortunately, her most recent appearances have been quite beneficial to both of us. We ended up having a terrific time together because we shot in and around my birthplace

of Delhi, where I styled Yami for one of my films. I dressed her with accessories and textiles that were distinctly Delhi-inspired. Undoubtedly, there were preliminary briefings and comments. Overall though, I recognized a lot of myself in that persona,” she added.

How was it collaborating with the renowned fashion innovator Sonam Kapoor? The stylist answered, “To be honest, I was a little anxious. She goes through the clothing quickly because she knows it all by heart. Her familiarity with the majority of Indian and foreign designers’ collections is apparent, and her passion for fashion is reflected in the images we were able to capture. She is the personification of the outfit’s personality. She would exhibit a ballerina’s elegance and feminine body language when modeling a long, sheer dress, and an explosive male energy when wearing a pantsuit. Sonam Kapoor’s individuality is what makes her look distinct with every change of clothes. She truly seems to have been made to appreciate fashion from birth.”

Then, she became genuinely enthralled with Zoya Akhtar’s perception and comprehension of urban fashion. She thinks Priyanka Chopra and Anushka Sharma have some of the greatest fashion senses seen in Bollywood to date in *Dil Dhadakne Do*. In fact, the stylist observed how the entire cast of the movie wore the most exotic nautical clothes, which were expertly tailored to fit each character in a unique way. In *Made in Heaven*, Shobhita’s character wore exquisite clothing that was distinctive and didn’t mimic Western or Hollywood styles, but rather an extremely hip Indian-urban look.

Creating a niche for herself in the fashion world with her creativity is Amandeep Kaur. The celeb go-to stylist for the Kaushal brothers at the moment, speaks of her journey, working with the biggies, and more.



Battling the chill of Anemia this winter

As winter approaches with short days and frigid temperatures, maintaining warmth often emerges as a key challenge for those living with anemia’s debilitating effects. When the very cells meant to oxygenate our body lack adequate numbers, cold sensitivity, and shivers often follow. Anemia as a condition is characterised by the body’s inability to produce healthy red blood cells, resulting in reduced oxygen supply to the tissues. Reasons for this range from nutritional deficits to chronic diseases destroying cell production capacity.

Regardless of the underlying cause, the ensuing symptoms, including fatigue, headaches, dizziness, pale skin, brittle nails, shortness of breath, and heart palpitations, frequently feature as discomforting hallmarks, alerting clinical attention toward diagnosis. However, the extreme sensitivity to cold is an often neglected aspect of the disease. Here are some ways that this can be managed at home.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES COUNT: LOW-RISK HABITS FOR HOMEOSTASIS

While doctors treat underlying causes through medical management, small proactive tweaks to daily living can greatly assist through anemia’s difficult phase. Protecting yourself starts with recognising key nutrients needed for enhanced response capacity in the body.

For example, iron forms the essence of hemoglobin, imparting the signature red hue that highlights healthy cells. Since anemia signals already inadequate cell counts, depleted iron undercuts production and aggravates symptoms. So anemia needs more iron-rich foods, like green leafy vegetables, sprouted pulses, nuts, and certain meats. Since bodies absorb only modest quantities via diet, physicians suggest supplements to replenish reserves quickly.

Furthermore, research reveals that vitamin C is essential for metabolising dietary iron into forms easily assimilated by blood cells and fortifying the hemoglobin supply. Many inexpensive citrus fruits and juices, like amla, orange, and lemon, high in vitamin C, can provide this vital nutritional edge for iron-deficient patients battling chronic anemia.

SUN EXPOSURE JUMPSTARTS CELL FACTORS

Experts believe that exposure to sunlight is key for vitamin D synthesis, which is needed to activate stem cells to produce new red blood cells. Since wintry weather curtails incidental exposure, one needs to consciously step out on sunny days to help the body produce the vitamin.

BEYOND NUTRIENTS: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SELF-CARE

A holistic healing paradigm also encompasses nurturing well-being across physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions—aligning medical care with healthy habits plus mental peace. Therefore, always prioritise adequate restorative rest, de-stressing me-time, positive social connections, and simple, home-cooked, warm comfort foods that nourish you wholesomely.

LAYER UP TO TRAP HEAT

For insulating against winter’s chill, trapping air between multiple loose, lightweight clothing layers forms the cornerstone for retaining body warmth when headed out. The enclosed air gets heated by the transfer of body warmth but cannot quickly dissipate outward. Technically, the distinct layers function together as insulators.

Step outdoors wearing leggings under pants, topped by a t-shirt, sweater, and jacket, to create sufficient barriers limiting warmth loss. The key lies in modulating layers based on planned activities and expected temperatures while out to prevent rapid heat depletion. So staying prepared to adjust backup layers as needed enables stability.

SHIELD EXTREMITIES FROM LOSING HEAT

Remember, mittens, mufflers, caps, and thermal socks are critical for safeguarding peripheral areas like the head, neck, hands, and feet from losing precious warmth. Choosing insulating materials like wool, fleece, or cashmere rather than conductors like silk also matters. This balances fashion and function while keeping toasty.

Employing simple home remedies harmoniously alongside clinical treatments empowers taking greater ownership of health. Monitor warning signs, nourish yourself wholesomely, and self-advocate for responsive care attuned to your lived experience. With an openness to learn and customise, you can discover the optimal recipe for keeping your inner fires burning despite the dipping mercury this winter.

(The author, Partha Pratim Das Mahapatra, is the Founder and CEO of EzeRx.)

Hseih, Elise win Australian Open women doubles

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Hseih Su-wei of Taiwan has become the second-oldest woman to win a Grand Slam doubles title after teaming with Elise Mertens of Belgium on Sunday to win the Australian Open women's doubles. The second-seeded pairing of Hseih and Mertens beat 11th seeded Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia and Lyudmyla Kichenok of Ukraine 6-1 7-5 in Sunday's final. It was Hseih's seventh Grand Slam women's doubles title and Mertens' fourth, their second together. Hsieh follows Rohan Bopanna of India who became the oldest men's champion when he won

the men's doubles title Saturday with Matthew Ebden of Australia. American Lisa Raymond was eight days older than Hsieh when she won the 2011 US Open women's doubles. Martina Navratilova was 49 when she won the mixed doubles at the 2006 U.S. Open with Bob Bryan. Hsieh has the benefit of being coached by Australian Paul McNamee who won six Grand Slam doubles titles, including two Australian Opens and was the Australian Open chief executive until 2006. She already had taken out the mixed doubles at the current tournament with Jan Zielinski



of Poland. Mertens won the Wimbledon title with Hsieh in 2021 and won the Australian Open title the same year with Aryna Sabalenka, who won her second straight singles title in Melbourne on Saturday. She also won the U.S. Open women's doubles in 2019. Mertens will return to the No. 1 WTA doubles ranking on Monday, a position she first held in May, 2021. She has spent 28 weeks in the top ranking spot. Hsieh and Mertens needed only 1 hour, 33 minutes on Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to pad their already impressive Grand Slam resumes. They

took the first set in just over half and hour. The second set was much tighter as Mertens lost her serve in the opening game. She recovered to serve for the championship at 5-3 but was broken again. Finally, Hseih and Mertens took the match when they broke Kichenok in the 12th game. Mertens leapt into the air in delight; Hsieh was more reserved. They make a formidable combination, Mertens with the stronger serve, Hsieh with skillful touches around the net and flat, strong groundstrokes. "It was a tough final," Mertens said. "The second set was

really close. "It was a really great match for us and we had to stay focused all the time." Ostapenko and Kichenok faced a tough road to the final, beating the US Open champions Gabriela Dabrowski and Erin Routliffe 7-5 7-5 in the semifinals. They lacked communication and teamwork in the first set but worked better together in the second in which Ostapenko's serve was dependable. Kichenok lost her serve in the fourth, eight and final games. Kichenok ended her comments at the presentation ceremony with the words Slava Ukraini, Glory to Ukraine."



Pavon is first Frenchman to win on PGA Tour since World War II

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Matthieu Pavon became the first player to win a PGA Tour event under the French flag since World War II when he made an 8-foot putt on No. 18 at Torrey Pines South on Saturday for a dramatic birdie and a one-shot victory in the Farmers Insurance Open. He raised his arms in celebration and shouted before hugging caddie Mark Sherwood after the putt rolled in as the municipal gem high above the Pacific Ocean glowed under the late-afternoon sun. Pavon glowed, too. He said he almost quit golf 10 years ago because of the yips. "It is big for our country," the 31-year-old PGA Tour rookie said. "I hope it will inspire a lot of people, because coming from an amateur player which is 800 in the world to a PGA Tour winner is pretty big. "I still can't believe it," said Pavon, who grew up playing soccer - his dad was a professional player - before switching to golf. "It feels like there is another round to play tomorrow because we're only Saturday." The Farmers ended Saturday to avoid going up against the NFL's conference championship games. Pavon's final-round 3-under 69 put him at 13 under, one stroke better than Nicolai Hojgaard. Pavon was two shots ahead of Stephan Jaeger, who led after the second and third rounds, and Nicolai Hojgaard and Nate Lashley. French-American Martin Trainer won his first PGA Tour event at the 2019 Puerto Rico Open, an

alternate event, while representing the United States. He later switched his nationality to France. Pavon took the lead on the 12th hole, built the advantage to two strokes and then missed a 3-foot putt on the par-4 17th for a bogey that cut his lead to one stroke. His only birdie on the back nine saved him from a playoff. He appeared to be in trouble on the par-5, 541-yard 18th when his drive landed in a sand trap, about 4 inches from the front lip. His second shot went 103 yards into the left rough, which was high because of heavy rain Monday, with 145 yards to the hole. He responded with a brilliant third shot within 8 feet. After watching Hojgaard's 300-yard drive down the middle of the fairway, "I was like, OK, it's going to be spicy now. I might have to do a birdie or something special," Pavon said. After ending up in the trap and then not getting back to the fairway, he and Sherwood discussed whether he should lay up or go for it. "I was like, Listen, like the lie doesn't look too bad, I feel like I can do it," He said "OK, but it's your call." "It's my call. And I was so pumped at that time, I know I had the energy to lift that ball up on the green. I kind of aimed to the middle of the green knowing the face would close a little bit because it's quite deep and thick. That ball came out like a butterfly and it really feed the slope on the green. That was the right time to prove I have the guts to finish that tournament and I did it so I'm so happy about that last hole."

International kayaking tournament in Tawang from February 5 to 10

PTI ■ TAWANG

A six-day international kayaking tournament will be organised next month near India's border with China in Arunachal Pradesh on the fast-flowing Tawangchu river, in which two rivers from Tibet converge before it flows through Tibet to finally reach the Brahmaputra. Beginning February 5, the 'Tawangchu Tides' tournament will see participants experience heart-pounding thrills as they navigate the river's Class V rapids, according to a statement issued by the organisers. The event is being organised under the patronage of



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Union minister Kiren Rijiju, who also belongs to the state, the organisers said, adding that the tournament will start from Lumla, near Tawang. Tawangchu is the main river of Tawang. Strategically significant Tawang is located at an altitude of above 10,000

feet and is close to the border with China. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 1,129-km-long LAC with the Tibet Autonomous Region. As many as 130 kayakers from across the world are expected to join the event, the statement said, adding, "It's not just a sport; it's a wild, unforgettable journey where

passion meets the untamed waters of Arunachal Pradesh." The event will be witness to the kayakers' incredible skills and precision as they navigate a course filled with gates and obstacles. The race is a single lap of the course, according to the organisers. "Experience the camaraderie of a global community, sharing a common love for adventure and conquering the Tawangchu river's thrilling rapids together," the statement read. It said there will be nine competition categories, catering to every kayaking skill and style. The entire Tawang district is known as the basin of the Tawangchu. Two fast-flowing

rivers from Tibet 'Tsona Chu' and 'Nyamjang Chu' join the Tawangchu in the district. The combined river then flows west into Bhutan, from where it enters Assam as river Manas and later, merges with the Brahmaputra river. The organisers said participants will be provided top-class tented accommodations equipped with electricity supply, warm food and hygienic toilets. Tawang is also a historic and picturesque town, known for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage. His Holiness the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was born here. The town is also home to one of Asia's oldest monasteries founded in 1680.



Korda takes 3 shot lead in LPGA Drive On Championship

AP ■ BRADENTON (US)

Hometown favourite Kelly Korda shot a 3-under 68 with an eagle-birdie finish Saturday to take a three-shot lead into the final round of the LPGA Drive On Championship. Trying to complete a wire-to-wire victory at Bradenton Country Club, Korda rebounded with the late flurry after making consecutive bogeys on Nos. 7 and 8 in 10-15 mph wind with the temperature in the upper 70s. "I'm actually kind of taken back with how much support I've been getting this week," Korda said. "Being in Florida I always get a lot of support, but hometown, it's crazy. I was born just in the hospital just down the road from here. It's been nice seeing friends and family come out ... Feeling the support." The eight-time LPGA Tour winner was 13 under. "It's a confidence boost knowing I can climb up the leaderboard and contend and stay in contention," Korda said. "Definitely didn't have the great start today." Coming off a victory in the Tournament of Champions, Lydia Ko was tied for second after a 69. Megan Khang (66) and Ayaka Furue (69) also were 9 under. "It was really windy," said Ko, a victory short of entering the LPGA Hall of Fame.

Hockey5s Women World Cup India lose to Netherlands, finish runners up

PTI ■ MUSCAT

India lost 2-7 to the Netherlands in the final to finish runners-up at the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup here. Jyoti Chhatr (20th minute) and Rutuja Dadaso Pisal (23rd) scored for India in the summit clash on Saturday. Janneke van de Venne (2nd, 14th), Bente van der Veldt (4th, 8th) and Lana Kalse (11th, 27th) struck a brace each for the Netherlands, while Sosha Benninga (13th) was the other goal-getter. For their exemplary performance in the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup, Hockey India has announced a cash award of Rs 3 lakh for each player and Rs 1.5 lakh each for the support staff. Both the teams probed for their chances after the



start and it wasn't long before the Netherlands found an opening. Janneke van de Venne took a long-range shot which deflected off the Indian goalkeeper Rajani Etimarpur into the goal to hand Netherlands the lead. Moments later, Bente van der

Veldt found herself open in front of the Indian goal and smashed the ball into the net to double the lead. A period of Netherlands dominance followed. Bente van der Veldt remained alert in front of the Indian goal as her quick overhead shot sailed past the Indian defence

into the goal. With four minutes to go in the first-half, Lana Kalse pounced on a loose ball and unleashed a powerful shot to make it 4-0 in Netherlands' favour. Soon after, Sosha Benninga used a deft touch to bypass Rajani in goal and further extended their lead.

As the Netherlands continued to put pressure on the Indian defence, Janneke van de Venne capitalised on an opening and scored to end the first half 6-0 in the Netherlands' favour. The Dutch dominance continued in the second-half, resulting in a challenge which was saved by Rajani. India opened their account five minutes into the second-half as Jyoti found some space and struck a shot from distance to beat Netherlands' goalkeeper Kiki Gunneman. Rutuja then received the ball under pressure, turned on a sixpence and breached Netherlands' goal to make it 6-2. As India started to pile on the pressure, a quick counter-attack goal from Netherlands' Lana Kalse restored their five-goal cushion.

Xavi will not continue at Barcelona after this season

AP ■ BARCELONA

Xavi Hernández won't continue as Barcelona's coach after this season, saying he can't get the team out of a slump. Xavi announced his decision on Saturday, minutes after Barcelona lost to Villarreal 5-3 in the Spanish league, leaving it 10 points adrift of leader Real Madrid. "I would like to announce that on June 30 I will cease being the coach of Barça," Xavi said. "As a Barcelona fan, I can't allow this situation to continue, we need a change of

course and of dynamics." Xavi said he made the decision "several days ago," and although the hard defeat to Villarreal set the scene for him to announce the decision, he "would have made" it soon enough. He said he hoped this decision will decrease the stress and tension his team is enduring. "The feeling of being the coach of Barcelona is cruel, it is unpleasant, you feel like you don't get the respect you deserve," Xavi said. "It wears you down, affects your mental health, your emotions, up to the point that



you say you can't go on. My loved ones know that." Xavi returned to Barcelona as the coach in November 2021 with his only experience a stint in Qatar. He has a contract through the end of next season. The 44-year-old Xavi led Barcelona to the Spanish Super Cup title and the Spanish league title last season, the club's first trophies since the exit of Lionel Messi. The club mortgaged its future to help him do that by signing players like Robert Lewandowski. But Barcelona has struggled

this season and has shown severe signs of suffering as collapse this month. Barcelona saw its best two chances of getting a title in this campaign evaporate recently. Xavi's side exited the Copa del Rey quarterfinals after losing in extra time at Athletic Bilbao 4-2 on Wednesday, a loss that came two weeks after Barcelona was dismantled by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup. After the Villarreal debacle Xavi said his players' lacked the "maturity" to know how to hold onto leads, and after

the Bilbao loss he also underscored that he was playing with several young players. But that seemed at odds with the fact that his starting side was led with veterans like Lewandowski, Ilkay Gundogan and players in their prime like Pedri González and Frenkie de Jong. Barcelona is set to play Napoli in the Champions League round of 16 next month. Xavi said he was still motivated to lead the team at what is no doubt a long-shot bid at ending his stint with a European Cup.

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona again showed it is not a championship-caliber team when it conceded twice in stoppage time to lose a 5-3 thriller with Villarreal in front of its stunned fans. In one of the wildest games of the season on Saturday, Villarreal was up 2-0 then Barcelona roared back with three goals in a 12-minute span to lead 3-2 in the 72nd minute. But Barcelona's defense again let it down and new Villarreal arrival Goncalo Guedes leveled on a counterattack in the 84th. Striker Alexander Sorloth, who also set up two goals, then found the winner in stoppage time and José Morales added to Barcelona's misery. Barcelona was trying to bounce back in La Liga from

its elimination from the Copa del Rey at Athletic Bilbao this week. Instead, its loss to an erratic Villarreal only added more pressure on beleaguered manager Xavi Hernandez to turn things around. Real Madrid rallied to win at Las Palmas 2-1 without top scorer Jude Bellingham and reclaim the league lead. It opened up a 10-point gap over Barcelona in third. "This is a huge blow," Xavi said. "We lost this game because of our mistakes. Today is difficult to digest for me as a coach but also for my players, who are all feeling really bad. "We did the hardest part



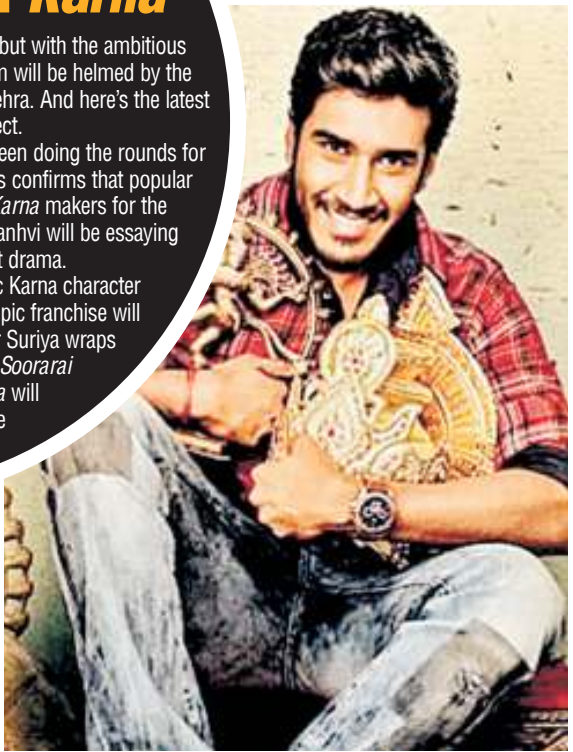
which was to turn it around, and we even had more chances to score, but that was when our problems started. We are paying a heavy price for our mistakes this season." **WHERE'S THE DEFENSE?** Gerard Moreno opened the scoring near halftime from a pass by Sorloth. Former Barcelona youth player Ilias Akhomach took full advantage of horrible control by João Cancelo, who came on at halftime, to double the advantage. Ilkay Gundogan pulled one back for Barcelona in the 60th. Substitute Pedri González took a second before an own goal by Eric Baily put the hosts

ahead. Barcelona then looked close to sealing it with a fourth goal before Sorloth launched Guedes on the flank to beat goalkeeper Iñaki Peña from an angle to make it 3-3. The Norway striker put Villarreal back in front after Barcelona failed to clear the ball from its area. "If you are losing 0-2 and then go up 3-2 you cannot give it away and lose like that," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong said. "This cannot happen to an elite team." Cancelo, like De Jong, backed Xavi and tried to take the blame as players. "It truly was a disaster,"

Cancelo said. "Those were the worst 45 minutes of my career." Barcelona's defense, which is missing injured goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is falling apart in January. Barcelona was crushed by Madrid 4-1 in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, and on Wednesday it conceded twice in extra time to lose at Bilbao 4-2. **MADRID RALLIES** Vinicius Junior and Aurélien Tchouaméni scored second-half goals for Madrid in the Canary Islands. After a first half stalemate between the league's top defenses, midfielder Javi Muñoz put Las Palmas ahead in the 53rd from a pass by Sandro Ramírez. "We played a good first half against a great rival," Muñoz said.

Janhvi Kapoor to reportedly star alongside Suriya in *Karna*

Tamil star Suriya will be making his big Bollywood debut with the ambitious mythological magnum opus, *Karna*. The 2-part film will be helmed by the National Award-winning director Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra. And here's the latest buzz on this highly anticipated project. Even though speculations on *Karna*'s leading lady have been doing the rounds for the past few months, the latest buzz in Bollywood circles confirms that popular young actress Janhvi Kapoor has been roped in by *Karna* makers for the leading lady's part. However, it remains to be seen if Janhvi will be essaying Draupadi's character in this mega-budget drama. As the title suggests, *Karna* is based on the iconic Karna character from the epic Mahabharata. The first part of this epic franchise will commence in the second half of this year, after Suriya wraps up *Kanguva* and another project with his *Soorai Pottu* director Sudha Kongara. *Karna* will have a massive pan-Indian release in 2025.



Utsavam unfolds the resurgence of theatre plays

Utsavam, billed to be an impactful drama, revealed its first look poster by the makers on the Republic Day, which features debutant Dilip Prakash is seen sitting on the floor with several drama objects around him. It indicated the film is about the forgotten culture of theatre arts. The caption- 'The Show Must Go On' hints at the plotline. On Sunday, the makers unveiled the teaser for *Utsavam*. It introduces a tale that unfolds the resurgence of theatre plays. With an impressive

ensemble cast, the film immerses viewers in the life of Krishna (Dilip), who is trying to resuscitating theaters. Accompanied by his ladylove Rama (Regina), he is driven by an unwavering love for his father, played by Prakash Raj (Abhimanyu Narayan). Terrific actors like Prakash Raj, L.B. Sriram, and Rajendra Prasad's presence offer an enigmatic cinematic experience. *Utsavam* is a complete family entertainer laced with emotions, love, and entertainment. Dilip Prakash and Regina Cassandra are playing

the lead roles. It has an ensemble cast comprising Nassar, Rajendra Prasad, Bramhanandam, Ali, Prema, L.B. Sriram, Anish Kuruvilla, Priyadarshi, Amani, and Sudha. *Utsavam* is written and directed by Arjun Sai, and Suresh Patil is producing the movie on Hornbill Pictures. The film has an accomplished technical team, with cinematography by the renowned Rasool Ellore and a music score by Anup Rubens. Kotagiri Venkateswara Rao is the editor.

Vishwak Sen amazes in the get-up of an Aghora in *Gaami*

Mass Ka Das Vishwak Sen is an ambitious star who has made a big impression on the audience in his short career. Besides being a regular commercial entertainer, he is also experimenting with unique concepts. His upcoming film, *Gaami*, directed by Vidyadhar Kagita and produced by Karthik Sabareesh at Karthik Kult Kreations, is one of his most ambitious projects. V Celluloid presents the movie, which is tipped to be an adventure drama. The movie is funded by the crowd. *Gaami* has been in the making for several years. Meanwhile, the makers kick-started the

promotions by unveiling the stunning first look poster at the Hyderabad Comic Con. Vishwak Sen amazes in the get-up of an Aghora. While his character is wrapped in a ragged desi black attire, he is surrounded by many Aghoras who try to touch him. The poster is a spine-chilling one and has a dark mysterious feel to it. It generates a lot of curiosity among the viewers. Makers also announced that in this film, Vishwak Sen plays an Aghora named 'shankar', who has very rare condition- 'an inability to experience any human touch'. The Tagline on the poster, "His biggest fear is human touch... His deepest desire, is also human touch"

emphasises the depth of that character's emotional conflict. Makers also revealed that the film- in addition to the Aghora setup, there are two different setups and other characters, and they would be unveiled down the line of promotions. Chandini Chowdary of *Colour Photo* fame is the leading lady, while M. G. Abhinaya, Harika Pedada, and Mohammad Samad are the prominent cast. The movie has cinematography by Vishwanath Reddy and Rampy Nandigam, music by Naresh Kumaran, and the screenplay was written by Vidyadhar Kagita and Pratyush Vatyam.



DIRECTOR DAYANANDH REVEALS THE SECOND HALF OF *GAME ON* OFFERS 'ENGAGING CHALLENGES'

In the upcoming action thriller *Game On*, which is produced by Ravi Kasturi under the auspices of Kasturi Creations and Golden Wings Productions and presented by Sakshi Ravi (Sai Lakshmi Talari), Geetanand and Neha Solanki will play substantial roles. The film has been used by Dayanandh. The movie is scheduled to have a wide release on February 2. The promotional material for the movie generated a lot of buzz. Director Dayanandh discussed the movie with the media today and offered some fascinating observations. "When I was in school, I became interested in movies, and my interest grew after seeing *Yem Maaya Chesave* and *Happy Days*. I wanted to be a director, inspired by Puri Jagannath. I made a few short films before enrolling in a six-month production and sound course at Annapurna Film School. Traveling among writers inspired me to compose a gripping narrative. Steering away from traditional commercial film, I wanted to stand out from my first feature. From a cinematic perspective, we show how the inclusion of a game changes a person's life. As the film progresses through nine activities, the second half offers engaging challenges. The main theme looks at how this game helps people who have experienced trauma." While exploring deep familial feelings, the movie stays authentic and honest, appealing to young audiences. Aditya Menon's portrayal of a psychologist and Madhubala's legendary character were among the many aspects of the film that were hidden in teasers and trailers. The film's richness is enhanced by the crucial part that Shubhalekha Sudhakar plays. A hint of masculinity is added by Neha Solanki's character, who has unanticipated surprises similar to a second hero.

"Producer Ravi Kasturi gave me creative freedom and enthusiastically embraced the script. After the original timeline, confidence improved and an additional budget was allocated for a better cinematic experience. Because of its underlying realism, *Game On* promises to be an unforgettable film for everyone. Although the film may have a restricted release at first, encouraging trailers suggest that theater attendance will gradually increase. According to early feedback, it appeals to a wide range of viewers and offers families an engaging viewing experience without any dull moments." For movie buffs, the film is a captivating viewing because of its distinct story and varied cast of characters. Don't miss the realistic and vivid sensation it offers on screen.



Kamal Haasan-Vinoth's *KH233* is 'not on cards' anymore

Kamal Haasan is currently in the midst of an impressive comeback, having signed up for numerous exciting projects. The seasoned actor, who took a substantial hiatus from cinema, marked his return to the silver screen with the resounding success of the action thriller *Vikram* in 2022. Now, the versatile artist is gearing up to collaborate with some of the finest filmmakers and technicians in the Indian film industry for his upcoming ventures. For those unfamiliar, Kamal Haasan had initially announced his first onscreen collaboration with the acclaimed filmmaker H Vinodh around mid-2023. This project, tentatively titled *KH 233* and expected to be the actor's 233rd cinematic venture, was highly anticipated as a political thriller. However, recent updates suggest that the project has been shelved, leaving fans disappointed. Originally slated to commence filming in early 2024, *KH 233* has gone silent

since its initial buzz-generating announcement. The absence of any updates or mentions of the project in Kamal Haasan's lineup has led to confirmation from the makers that the project has indeed been abandoned. Instead, Vinodh will be directing his efforts towards a new project with Dhanush, for which he is currently crafting a script. Sources reveal that Kamal Haasan made the decision to drop *KH 233* in favor of focusing on his collaboration with Lokesh Kanagaraj. This move aligns with their successful partnership in *Vikram*, a film that not only holds significance in Kamal's illustrious career but also stands out in the Tamil cinema landscape. *Vikram* is the second installment in the Lokesh Cinematic Universe, following *Kaithi*. The buzz around Kamal and Lokesh joining forces once again is gaining momentum, promising another noteworthy chapter in their cinematic journey together.



Rashmika wraps *Chhava* shooting, Vicky Kaushal calls her 'major inspiration'

Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal, who was recently seen in the biopic *Sam Bahadur*, has called his *Chhava* actress Rashmika Mandanna a "major inspiration." The actor recently took to the Stories section of his Instagram and reposted a Story by Rashmika where she expressed her gratitude to the cast and crew of the film after she wrapped up the film. Rashmika said in jest that Vicky has been very warm and kind to her during the filming except for the last day of the shoot. In her next story, the actress praised her co-star Vicky Kaushal and wrote: Calling him a "Maharaj", she wrote: "It's been such a pleasure working with you. You are just toooooo warm and kind (except for the last day where you were just taking my case) but most days you were amazing. I am kidding..you are such a gem. I will always wish the best for you man. Was such a pleasure. mom has told me to convey regards to you (sic)." Responding to the same, Vicky wrote: "@rashmika_mandanna... neen yennane ullia? The whole set is missing your warmth and energy immensely. People don't know that the smile you have on your worst days is bigger and better than the smile most have on their best days." He further mentioned: "Major inspiration! Thank you for being our Yesubai and my regards to Auntie as well. Oh and btw what are you thinking now?"



RGV 'not thrilled' with Padma Vibhushan Award, gets schooled by netizens

Chiranjeevi was bestowed with the prestigious Padma Vibhushan Award on Thursday, January 24, joining the distinguished list of five individuals recognized for their exceptional and distinguished service. The Padma Vibhushan stands as the second-highest civilian honor, highlighting Chiranjeevi's remarkable contributions. The announcement garnered positive reactions from many, including director Ram Gopal Varma, who, despite expressing joy for the veteran actor, introduced a note of complexity into the celebration. Taking to the microblogging site X (formerly Twitter), Varma remarked, "I never heard of Shri Padma Subrahmanyam or Shri Bindeshwar Pathak and so to put them in the same position as Mega star, I am not at all thrilled with the award, but if @chirutweets gaaru is happy I will also pretend to be happy."

This statement drew criticism from some netizens, urging Varma to broaden his knowledge and perspective. One user emphasized, "You should read more about Bindeshwar Pathak," while another suggested, "Because your knowledge is limited to a few states or regions and a few fields only." A third person commented, "If you have not heard about Bindeshwar Pathak, then it is your problem. He is not less than a superstar or what you say Mega Star." In contrast, Chiranjeevi responded to the honor with a heartfelt speech, expressing being "speechless" upon learning about the accolade. He conveyed feeling "overwhelmed, humbled, and grateful," reflecting the deep significance of this recognition in his illustrious career.



'VIJAY IS NOT MY COMPETITOR BUT WELL-WISHER,' SAYS RAJNIKANTH



During the audio launch event of *Jailer*, Superstar Rajinikanth shared a story about a crow and an eagle. It blew out of proportion and triggered fan wars between Rajini's and Vijay's fans. Now, Rajinikanth clarified that the story was not directed at Thalapathy Vijay. "He is not my competitor but a well-wisher," said Rajinikanth. At the *Jailer* audio launch, Rajinikanth's anecdote led to a social media frenzy, with fans speculating that it was aimed at Vijay. Despite disappointment over his speech's misinterpretation, Rajinikanth stated, "Vijay grew up in front of my eyes. During the shooting of *Dharmathin Thalaivan*, he was just 13 years old. After the shooting, SA Chandrasekar introduced Vijay to me, and he expressed his interest in acting. I advised him to concentrate on his studies first." Rajinikanth commended Vijay's discipline, hard work, and talent that led him to the top of the film industry. He mentioned Vijay's upcoming political entry, stating that hearing about their perceived competition is disheartening. Rajinikanth requested the fans not to compare and emphasized that he has huge respect on Vijay. On the work front, apart from *Lal Salam*, Rajinikanth is also working on *Vettaiyan* and *Thalaivar 171* with Lokesh Kanagaraj.