



-SPORTS

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The Secretary concerned should hand over the draft resolution and the press note (two copies) to the Deputy Director, I&PR, in the waiting hall immediately after the discussion is completed on the subject.

Lokesh planning radical reforms in academic sector

He is actively taking part in Praja Darbar and holding review meetings with senior officers of Education Department

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT and Electronics Nara Lokesh has inherited the philosophy of perseverance to complete the tasks from his grandfather and TDP founder NT Rama Rao, and his father and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. He began implementing his action plan much before he took charge as the Cabinet Minister.

Nara Lokesh, who won the elections with a historic margin, without relaxing, began discharging his duties from day one as the people of Mangalagiri have reposed immense faith in him. He is actively taking part in the Praja Darbar on a daily basis to have first-hand information on the problems that the people are facing. Meanwhile, as the Minister for Human Resources Development (HRD), he is holding review meetings with senior officers of the Education Department to bring in radical changes in the academic sector.

Very soon, the minister will be meeting the leaders of various student unions and parent organisations to know the issues plaguing the education sector for a long time and also find solutions to these problems. The Minister has already formulated an action plan with a rare ideology to successfully



complete this exercise. Lokesh is very keen that the teachers should not be assigned any other task except supplying quality food during the mid-day meal and extending quality education to their students.

The main goal of Lokesh is to provide all the basic amenities in the schools in the State, resolving all the issues pending for the past several years in higher education sector, recruitment of faculty by finding solutions to the issues pending before the courts for the past many years and supplying quality school-kits to the students. On top of it all, Lokesh has formulated a 100-day action plan to bring the past glory to the IT and Electronics sectors, which lost its very existence during the previous five-year YSRCP rule in the State.

Though Lokesh was the

Minister for Rural Development, IT and Electronics only for a couple of years, from 2017 to 2019, he undertook various developmental projects in all the wings. In fact, he has created a record of sorts by taking steps to construct 25,000-km-long CC roads in the rural areas.

Lokesh won the most prestigious SKOCH Person of the Year Award in 2018 for the revolutionary changes that he brought in rural development and the Digital Leader of the Year award for introducing the latest technology in administration. For the successful implementation of various schemes in panchayat raj and rural development the State was presented with the Innovation Award by the Centre and the department also won another prestigious award of Kalam Innovation in

Governance.

On behalf of India, Lokesh got the special invitation to 2018 for the Annual Summit of the Entrepreneurship of the World Economic Forum held in China to represent the country. This apart, Lokesh is the lone Indian leader who has been nominated for the Network of Global Future Councils of the World Economic Forum. With the progressive ideas, Lokesh has invited globally renowned IT and electronics companies like HCL, TCS, Celcon and many others to set up their units in the State thus providing employment to thousands of youth.

With all his experience Lokesh, now as the Minister for HRD, IT and Electronics is expected to bring in radical reforms in all these sectors to take the State much forward.

Govt raises paddy MSP by Rs 117 to Rs 2,300 per quintal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday raised the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy by 5.35 per cent to Rs 2,300 per quintal for the 2024-25 kharif marketing season.

The hike in paddy support price comes despite the government sitting on surplus rice stocks, but it is significant ahead of elections in states like Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi.

Announcing the MSP increase, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the cabinet has approved the minimum support prices for 14 kharif (summer) crops based on recommendations from the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). The MSP for 'common' grade paddy has been raised Rs 117 to Rs 2,300 per quintal, while for the 'A' grade variety it has been hiked to Rs 2,320 per quintal for the upcoming kharif season, Vaishnaw told reporters.

Minister Payyavula appeals to Jagan to attend Assembly session

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After taking charge as the Minister for Finance and Legislative Affairs, Payyavula Keshav said that they wanted meaningful discussions regarding the development of the State and public welfare in the upcoming Assembly sessions.

Earlier, he paid tributes to the portrait of late Chief Minister Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. After assuming charge, Minister Keshav put his first signature on the files related to the Legislative Assembly. He reviewed the management of meetings and other issues with the officials.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy should come to the Legislative Assembly session that is scheduled to begin on June 21. The minister said that they are ready to play any role for the people either in the ruling party or the Opposition. Minister Keshav said that



under the leadership of Chandrababu, efforts will be made to provide transparent governance ensuring accountability to the people of the State.

Legislative Assembly

Secretary PPK Ramacharyulu, Joint Secretary Vijayaraju, Deputy Secretary K Rajakumar, other officers, staff, PAO K Padmaja, and State Audit Officers congratulated the minister.

TD govt likely to change names of housing colonies

20.60 lakh houses were sanctioned during 2019-2024 and only 6.8L were completed: Minister Kolusu Pardhasaradhi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Housing Minister Kolusu Pardhasaradhi has alleged that the previous YSRCP government had done injustice to the poor with its disorganised policies in housing construction schemes.

The minister said that 20.60 lakh houses were sanctioned for the State during 2019-2024 and only 6.8 lakh houses were completed. Addressing media persons at the secretariat on Wednesday, the minister said that during the previous government's tenure, out of 20.60 lakh houses, 13.8 lakh are yet to be completed. The construction of about five lakh houses did not even begin.

He said that the government will discuss retaining the names YSR and Jagananna for the housing colonies. The names are likely to be changed.

Minister Pardhasaradhi stated that during 2014-19, the unit

value cost of the house was Rs 2.50 lakh, but it was reduced to Rs 1.80 lakh by the previous government. He clarified that the unit value of SCs and STs would have been Rs. 3 lakh, but as the previous government reduced the unit value, not only did the beneficiaries lose a lot of money, but the house construction projects were crippled.

Pardhasaradhi said that in the last five years in the country, the State of West Bengal has built 45 lakh houses, followed by Madhya Pradesh which built 37 lakh houses and Bihar with 33 lakh houses and Uttar Pradesh with 31 lakh houses. He alleged that during 2014-19, when Chandrababu was in power, the previous government did not pay the bills of Rs. 933 crore for the construction of 4.43 houses with the funds of the State government. He said that under PM Awas Yojana (urban), the Central government gave Rs



18,173 crore as its contribution to the housing scheme, but the previous YSRCP government diverted Rs 2,913 crore from those funds, which stalled the housing programme.

Minister Pardhasaradhi has made it clear that the previous government collected land unsuitable for construction of houses i.e. places like graveyards, ponds and hill slopes and misused crores of rupees. The NDA government is going to conduct an investigation into this and punish the violators. He

said that the basic facilities like levelling, gravel roads and water supply were taken up with Rs 897 crore in 7,500 layouts. Bills worth only Rs 246 crore were paid and the rest of the works were not completed. The Minister said that the works will be completed by linking the funds of the Employment Guarantee and Amrit Schemes to provide minimum infrastructure in the housing colonies and layouts.

Pardhasaradhi complained that the previous government neglected the handover of more than 90 percent of the TIDCO houses built during 2014-19 to the beneficiaries of the urban areas.

However, he clarified that as the houses were built with shear wall technology, they will be intact for five years. They will complete the rest of the works and hand them over to the beneficiaries as soon as possible, he added.

'Measures to eliminate sickle cell disease by 2047'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tribal Welfare Department Principal Secretary Kantilal Dande has said that there is widespread prevalence of sickle cell disease among the tribal population in the State. He was speaking at the World Sickle Cell Day observance held at AIIMS, Mangalagiri.



He pointed out that approximately one in every 86 births among Scheduled Tribes (STs) results in a child with the disease and the government aims to eliminate sickle cell anemia by 2047. This genetic disorder affects hemoglobin in red blood cells, leading to chronic anaemia, acute painful episodes, organ infarction, chronic organ damage, and a significant reduction in quality of life and life expectancy. Both men and women are at risk, with the disease manifesting as a carrier trait, sickle cell disease, or sickle cell anemia. Posters and pamphlets prepared on the Sickle Cell Anemia Eradication Mission were unveiled by the Principal Secretary of the Tribal Welfare Department Kantilal Dande.

The Principal Secretary called upon medical students from AIIMS Mangalagiri to actively participate in the eradication of sickle cell Disease. He emphasised the importance of educating patients and carriers, ensuring regular follow-up care, and maintaining a positive outlook on life.

Tribal Welfare Department Director J Venkata Murali said that in response to this critical health issue, the Government of India has embarked on a Mission for the Elimination of Sickle Cell Disease by 2047. This mission involves creating awareness, universally screening seven crore people aged 0-40 in affected tribal areas, and providing counseling through collaborative efforts of Central Ministries. Andhra Pradesh, one of the 10 States with a significant tribal population under the fifth schedule, has set ambitious screening targets to combat SCD. For the year 2023-24, the State aims to screen 5,39,443 individuals, of which 17,141 traits and 1,579 cases of the disease have already been identified. The targets for the subsequent years are equally significant, reflecting the State's commitment to addressing this health challenge. The Government of Andhra Pradesh provides Rs 10,000 per month as a social security pension to patients and offers free lifelong medication.

Currently, 943 SCD patients are benefiting from this social security pension, he added.

'Climate change poses challenges for farm professionals'

56th Convocation of Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University held



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Chancellor of Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University S Abdul Nazeer presided over the 56th Convocation of the university at a programme held at Dr BV Nath Auditorium in Bapatla on Wednesday.

Delivering the Convocation address, Governor Abdul Nazeer said that the world we live in is undergoing a period of unprecedented transformation as the climate change threatens global food security and poses challenges for agriculture professionals. The Governor further said that earning a degree from this prestigious institution is a significant milestone for the graduating students

as it signifies not just an academic accomplishment, but a commitment to a noble cause of ensuring food security of our nation and the world.

Earlier, the Governor presented degrees, medals and merit certificates to graduate, post-graduate students and research scholars and congratulated them on their academic achievement.

Dr Himanshu Pathak, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) & Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), was the chief guest and he delivered the keynote address. Vice-Chancellor Dr R Sarada Jayalakshmi Devi read that the annual report of the university.

CM to participate in yagnam for development of AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Brahma yagnam will be performed at Bhuvanewari Peetham at Gannavaram on June 23 for the overwhelming victory of the NDA coalition in Andhra Pradesh and continuation of the democratic administration for the next five years for the all-round development of AP.

Coordinator Satyavada Durgaprasad said that Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu will attend the Poornahuti ritual along with his wife Bhuvanewari. He further said that the penance is held with the cooperation of all Brahmin associations and organisations seeking flawless implementation of the Brahmin welfare schemes in the NDA government. He added that the penance will be held from 8 am to 12 noon on June 23 with the blessings of Kamalananda Bharati Mahaswami, Seer of Bhuvanewari Peetham. Durgaprasad asked all



Brahmins to participate in the penance. Education, healthcare and employment should be provided to all the people. The government should provide smooth administration without any financial deficit and the Amaravati capital and Polavaram project should be completed as soon as possible, he said.

Brahmins to participate in the penance. Education, healthcare and employment should be provided to all the people. The government should provide smooth administration without any financial deficit and the Amaravati capital and Polavaram project should be completed as soon as possible, he said.

'Special Task...

Continued from Page 1

"The Disha police stations will be converted as 'Mahila' police stations," the Home Minister announced. The police department itself is facing many problems and steps would be taken to resolve them, she assured, regretting that many police stations in the state lacked basic amenities.

The Home Minister warned the police personnel to work sincerely with diligence or quit the jobs. She also warned of stringent action against those who upload posts indulging in character assassinations and making baseless accusations. Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha thanked Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for allocating her the vital Home portfolio.

Major administrative....

Continued from Page 1

Gaur is also placed in full additional charge of Principal Secretary to the Government, Skills Development Department, relieving S. Suresh Kumar, IAS (2000). Kona Sasidhar, IAS (2003), Secretary to the Government, ITE & C Department, was transferred and posted as Secretary to the Government, School Education Department. He is also placed in full additional charge of the Secretary to the Government, ITE&C Department and RTGS until further orders.

A Babu, IAS (2003), Secretary to the Government (Cooperation & Marketing), was posted as Secretary to the Government (Horticulture, Aquaculture, Fisheries), Agriculture & Cooperation Department. Bhaskar Katamneni, IAS (2004), Commissioner, School Infrastructure, was transferred to the MA&UD Department for post-

ing as Commissioner, APCRDA, replacing Vivek Yadav, IAS (2008).

Pradyumna PS, IAS (2004), Secretary to the Government, TR&B Department, was transferred and posted as Secretary to the Chief Minister. He is relieved from full additional charge of Principal Secretary to the Government (YS&S), YAT & Department, and Joint Director General, APHRDI. M Janaki, IAS (2005), awaiting a posting, is now Secretary to the Government (Expenditure), Finance Department.

MM Nayak, IAS (2005), Commissioner, Handlooms & Textiles, was transferred and posted as Secretary to the Government, Animal Husbandry & Dairy Development Department.

Pravin Kumar, IAS (2006), Collector & District Magistrate, Tirupati, was transferred and posted as Commissioner & Director, Mines & Geology. He is also placed in full additional charge of the post

of MD, A.P. State Mineral Development Corporation, relieving N. Yuvraj, IAS (2005).

The Joint Collector & Additional District Magistrate, Tirupati, is placed in full additional charge of the post of Collector & District Magistrate, Tirupati, until further orders.

D Muralidhar Reddy, IAS (2006), VC & MD, AP Medical Services & Infrastructure Development Corporation (APM-SIDC), was transferred and directed to report to the General Administration Department for further posting. He is relieved from full additional charge of CEO, SERP, and MD, Medical Education and Research Corporation (MERC). Vadarevu Vinay Chand, IAS (2008), awaiting a posting, is now Secretary to the Government (FP), Finance Department, relieving Saurabh Gaur, IAS (2002), from full additional charge.

Chandrababu's....

Continued from Page 1

According to sources, the CM is likely to discuss with the ministers the Super Six poll assurance and its implementation. He has already signed five poll assurances after assuming charge as Chief Minister. He put his first signature on the Mega DSC file, the second on the repeal of the Land Titling Act, third on the order to increase social security pension to Rs 4,000, fourth on the restart of Anna canteens and the fifth signature on the process of skill censuses. These files will be put in the cabinet meeting to get approval. Further, Chandrababu is likely to discuss the volunteer system, Polavaram project, restoration of Amaravati capital works and other key issues.

Massive response to...

Continued from Page 1

Sheikh Sultan Vali of Tadepalli said that the previous YSRCP government had stopped pension for his daughter, who is mentally challenged, and requested that the pension be issued.

V Vijay Kumar, a farmer from Navulur said that the previous government stopped the pension given to the farmers of the capital and

wanted it again. Sheikh Rehman from Mangalagiri requested for a job as he has completed degree. B Shantharaju of Duggirala requested the minister to provide medical aid to his ailing daughter. N Madhavi of Mangalagiri requested to grant a house and help her. Those working as part-time staff in Mahatma Jyotiba Pole BC WR School and Colleges should be upgraded

as contract staff. They said that the previous YSRCP government had sacked 1800 Bina Mitras and should be reinstated. The representatives of APACTPL

Association requested to implement the minimum scale for the teaching and non-teaching staff working in the aided colleges across the State. Minister Lokesh promised to look into the possibilities and solve the problems.

tees and assess the damage done in the capital. "Since the deadline for tenders has expired, fresh tenders should be invited. New estimates should be made and tenders should be called. Tenders will take at least

three to four months' time. After discussion in the cabinet, we will take a decision on when to start the work. Action will be taken against those who stole the materials. The matter of houses in the capital is still in the Supreme Court. We will seek legal advice and move ahead," said Narayana.

Collector vows to eradicate sickle cell anemia by 2047

Calls for informed decision-making to prevent spread of the disease

PNS ■ PADERU

District Collector M Vijaya Sunitha has affirmed a steadfast commitment to creating a society free from sickle cell anemia by 2047, in alignment with directives from both the Central and State governments. Speaking as the chief guest at the World Sickle Cell Anemia Day awareness conference, held on Wednesday, she emphasised the importance of health and wellness.

During her address, Collector Sunitha highlighted the genetic nature of sickle cell anemia, often transmitted through consanguineous marriages. She advocated for informed decision-making to prevent the spread of the disease. Sunitha revealed that globally, an estimated 70 million people suffer from sickle cell anemia, a genetic disorder that compromises the immune system, reduces oxygen levels, and leads to anaemia. She underscored the urgent need for widespread awareness, particularly among women in tribal communities. Sunitha recommended implementing village and mandal-level education programs to effectively disseminate information about the illness.



MP Gumma Tanuja Rani echoed Sunitha's sentiment, emphasising that heightened awareness is critical for eradicating sickle cell anemia. She noted that the district has the second-highest prevalence of the condition and recommended mandatory screening for individuals aged 0-40.

V Abhishek, the Integrated Tribal Development Officer (ITDA) Paderu Project Officer, presented details of ongoing efforts to raise awareness. The ITDA has already screened 1.76 lakh individuals out of a total population of 6.76 lakh. Among those screened, 2,300 people were

diagnosed and are currently receiving medication and a monthly pension of Rs. 10,000. Mr. Abhishek announced a goal of achieving 100 per cent screening coverage by 2026, with an additional 30,000 individuals targeted for testing.

Regam Matyalingam, the Araku Assembly Constituency Legislator, stressed the importance of a collective approach in combating sickle cell anemia. He advised against arranged marriages and urged strict adherence to established guidelines. Matyalingam called for comprehensive measures to ensure an adequate

blood supply for patients, who require a significant portion of available blood resources.

The event boasted a distinguished list of attendees, including ITDA Relief Project Officer M. Venkateswara Rao, Deputy Director of Tribal Welfare Department I. Kondala Rao, ICD SPD Suryalakshmi, DRDA PD Murali, MPDO Sai Naveen, Tahsildar Kalyana Chakraborty, Tribal Welfare Department DE Anudeep, Durga Prasad, CDPO Jhansi, ATWO L Rajani, HM Rimali John, ZPTC Giddi Vijaya Lakshmi, and various medical and support staff.

YSRCP failed to prevent Vizag from becoming 'ganja capital': Palla Srinivasa

Unveils comprehensive strategy aimed at purging the State of cannabis

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Palla Srinivasa Rao, the newly appointed president of the Andhra Pradesh TDP, has unveiled an audacious plan to transform Visakhapatnam into a vibrant economic hub, pledging to eradicate its dubious distinction as the 'ganja capital'.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Srinivas Rao strongly criticised the current YSRCP administration for what he described as their failure to prevent Visakhapatnam from becoming a centre of illegal drug trade. "Visakhapatnam, under the YSRCP regime, has unfortunately become associated with unlawful activities," Rao stated. "Nevertheless, our coalition government aims to usher in a new era focused on promoting strong economic growth and revitalising the city's reputation."

Promising swift and decisive action, Rao unveiled a comprehensive strategy aimed at purging the State of cannabis and rectifying what he termed as unjust legal prosecutions against thousands of individuals. "Within the first 100 days of our tenure, we will quash these false cases, ensuring justice and rebuilding community



trust," he affirmed. Rao further outlined ambitious economic initiatives, including the transformation of Anna canteens into sustainable trust models to ensure their enduring impact. He also set an aggressive timeline for the comprehensive development of Amaravathi, projecting substantial progress within the coming year.

Underlining his commitment to correcting past governmental oversights, Rao criticised the handling of the Polavaram project and

pledged accelerated efforts under TDP's stewardship. "We take full accountability for expediting this critical project to completion," he assured, signaling a proactive approach to governance. In an internal rallying call, Rao championed the cultivation of dynamic leadership within the TDP ranks and pledged enhanced collaboration with allied parties such as BJP and Jana Sena. "Empowering young leaders and making decisive, timely decisions are pivotal to our vision for transformative

governance," he emphasised. Addressing local grievances head-on, Rao promised a focused campaign against corruption and vowed to resolve lingering land disputes plaguing Visakhapatnam. He also staunchly opposed the proposed privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, pledging to exert substantial pressure on the Central government to reconsider. Rao outlined an ambitious agenda that positioned the TDP as architects of Visakhapatnam's rejuvenation.

City police unveil 100-day action plan against drug trafficking



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In response to a directive from Home Minister Vangalapudi Anita, the Visakhapatnam Police Department has formulated a meticulous 100-day action plan to combat drug trafficking, with a particular focus on cannabis (ganja) eradication within the district. The plan was unveiled during a crucial meeting convened by Police Commissioner Dr. A Ravi Shankar.

Officials from the Collector's Office, Customs Department, District Educational Officer, and various law enforcement agencies participated in the session, including the Narcotics Control Bureau, Indian Coast Guard, and Railway Protection Force.

Commissioner Ravi Shankar underscored the importance of deploying state-of-the-art technology for dismantling cannabis cultivation and trafficking networks. The plan entails meticulous monitoring of transportation routes encompassing road, rail, air, and maritime channels. The initiative places significant emphasis on extensive public awareness campaigns targeting young people. Educational institutions and public spaces will be strategically targeted through informative materials such as short films, posters, and pamphlets elucidating the perils of drug abuse. A dedicated toll-free helpline number (14500)

will also be established to facilitate public reporting and assistance.

Law enforcement agencies will implement enhanced measures to intensify surveillance of individuals suspected of drug trafficking activities.

This will involve in-depth analysis of communication records, financial transactions, and electronic devices belonging to offenders. Specialised investigation teams will be formed to ensure effective handling of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) cases. The plan acknowledges the crucial role of collaboration with NGOs like the Green Valley Foundation and SEED Foundation. These partnerships will be instrumental in rehabilitation programmes and raising public awareness.

Joint Commissioner of Police Dr K. Phakirappa reiterated the importance of a unified effort. "Our primary objective is to establish a drug-free environment through proactive policing strategies and fostering community engagement," he remarked.

Following the comprehensive deliberations, the district administration sanctioned funds for the procurement and training of sniffer dogs specifically trained to detect narcotics. Regular inspections utilising these canines will be conducted throughout the city to bolster vigilance.

Villagers of Masahebpet plead for causeway

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The lives of 6,000 residents in Masahebpet village in Payakaraopeta Mandal are significantly impacted by the lack of a safe and permanent causeway over the Tandava River. Their dependence on the river for daily activities necessitates traversing a precarious makeshift bridge con-

structed with cement pillars, posing a constant threat to their safety, particularly during the monsoon season when the river overflows.

Villagers, including farmers and individuals requiring access to essential services located across the river, are forced to utilise this hazardous bridge for daily commutes on vehicles and two-

wheelers. This situation is further exacerbated by the presence of the village crematorium on the opposite bank, making even honouring deceased loved ones a perilous task. The receding seawater from the nearby Pentakota coast adds to the problem, causing waterlogging in the area even during dry periods.

BS VEHICLES SELLING CASE JC Diwakar Reddy warns of fast by family



PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Telugu Desam party leader and former Minister JC Diwakar Reddy has warned of embarking fast with his family members, if justice is not done in 10 days to him in the BS vehicles selling case.

Talking to the media he alleged that false cases were foisted against him regarding the BS vehicle selling and he was arrested and sent to jail.

"Justice should be done to me in 10 days. Otherwise, my wife and I will embark fast in front of DTC's office. My son and daughter-in-law will observe fast in front of the SP's office here," he warned.

This issue is not related to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu but the issue is his personnel issue, he clarified. "If the TDP fears my acts damage the reputation of TDP, I will resign from the party," he dared.

'Public awareness key to disaster preparedness'

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

District Revenue Officer (DRO) Anitha stressed the urgency of raising public awareness on disaster preparedness during a strategic meeting with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) on Wednesday. The effort aims to equip residents across Vizianagaram district with essential knowledge to mitigate risks associated with natural disasters and health emergencies.

Under the ambit of the FAMEX (Familiarisation Exercise and Community Awareness Preparedness

Program) 2024-25, a specialised 16-member NDRF team led by Inspector General Duty SK Behara is set to operate in Vizianagaram from June 19 to July 4. This initiative underscores a concerted effort to empower villagers with practical skills and awareness needed to manage crises arising from floods, typhoons, fires, earthquakes, and health emergencies like heart attacks.

Speaking at the event, DRO Anitha emphasised, "Our goal is to ensure every individual in our district understands the importance of preparedness. Through targeted awareness

initiatives and proactive measures, we aim to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience against potential disasters." The comprehensive programme will span across Gantayada, Gajapathinagar, Nellimarla, Vizianagaram, Pusapatirega, Bhogapuram, Santhakaviti, Wangara, and Bobbili mandals, ensuring every community within the district is adequately informed and prepared.

The crucial meeting saw the participation of key officials including PD Taraka Rama Rao, Tehsildar Ratnam, and Superintendent Suresh.



AU rocked by transfer controversy

Allegations of nepotism and financial malpractices

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra University (AU) is embroiled in a controversy surrounding the transfer of 114 additional faculty members from State colleges and other universities. The decision, spearheaded by N. Hemachandra Reddy, Chairman of the State Council of Higher Education, and AU Vice Chancellor PVGD Reddy, has triggered an investigation into potential nepotism and financial malpractice. Critics allege the transfers, reportedly orchestrated in private discussions between Reddy and influential YCP leader V Vijayasai Reddy, were motivated by improper financial considerations. The sudden move has significantly disrupted academic operations in degree colleges, raising concerns about student welfare.

Furthermore, the decision is under scrutiny for potentially violating University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations. Critics argue that the transfers prioritised a select few over the broader student body. College Commissioner Pola Bhaskar's initial disapproval, followed by a swift reversal seemingly aligned with the AU VC and backed by the Chief Minister has further fuelled the controversy. The appointment of transferred faculty members to critical administrative positions, including

department heads and deans, has also drawn criticism. This move is seen as potentially contravening UGC guidelines. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the planned recruitment of over 150 external faculty members, including visiting professors and assistant professors, amidst allegations of financial impropriety. The university's decision to hire four dedicated placement officers, a role previously managed by professors, has also raised questions about efficient resource allocation.

In light of the controversy, the State government is reportedly considering the return of allegedly underperforming faculty members from Andhra University to their original institutions. College Commissioner Pola Bhaskar's past association with Visakhapatnam adds another layer of complexity to the issue.

Telugu Desam Party president Palla Srinivas Rao publicly criticised AU VC Reddy, suggesting a lack of effective leadership. His comments reflect widespread dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the situation. As the investigation progresses, stakeholders anxiously await potential revelations that could further erode public trust in Andhra University's academic integrity and administrative transparency.

IGZP, Stantec launch plantation drive at Butterfly Park

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Indira Gandhi Zoological Park (IGZP) conducted a successful plantation drive at its Butterfly Park. This initiative aligns with the Life Mission Programme and Stantec's annual "Stantec in the Community" programme, fostering a collaborative effort for environmental betterment. Stantec, a global design and engineering firm (formerly known as Morrison Hershfield), played a key role by donating essential host and nectar plants specifically selected to enhance the Butterfly Park. The drive, led by Stantec Country Manager Tyler Julliard, saw the active participation of over 40 dedicated volunteers alongside IGZP

Over 40 volunteers, Zoological Park staff participate



"These plants are crucial for creating a sustainable habitat for butterflies," stated Mangamma, Curator of the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park. "This initiative fosters a biodiverse environment rich in natural beauty, benefiting the park's butterfly population." This project aims to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, introducing new plant varieties will greatly enhance the diversity and health of the park's flora. Secondly, the carefully selected nectar plants will offer a crucial food source for butterflies and other vital pollinators. Lastly, the initiative seeks to educate the public on the

importance of conserving butterfly species and their ecological significance.

Expressing his pride in the collaboration, Tyler Julliard of Stantec stated: "We are honoured to partner with the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park, a renowned institution with a deep commitment to wildlife conservation. This project aligns perfectly with Stantec's dedication to fostering sustainable communities." The presence of key IGZP officials at the plantation drive further underscores the institution's dedication to environmental sustainability. This successful event marks a significant step towards creating a thriving habitat for butterflies within the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park.

Reconstructing Telangana by fulfilling people's aspirations

Against all odds and after overcoming numerous challenges, the Congress-led 'Praja Prabhutvam' has begun taking corrective steps in a state beleaguered by detrimental policies of its predecessor. Upon assuming office, the Congress confronted a landscape where administrative and grassroots conditions had deteriorated, much to the dismay of the populace.

The previous regime in Telangana had veered significantly from its constitutional obligations and political responsibilities. Allegations of widespread corruption across various sectors had engendered profound disillusionment among people of the state --- a fact underscored by preliminary investigations into several government initiatives.

The previous era was characterized by the unabashed use of police and intelligence apparatus to surveil political opponents, officials, and prominent figures, infringing upon fundamental privacy rights. State resources and administrative efforts were disproportionately channelled to benefit a select cadre of MLAs, ministers, and their associates.

In the face of these challenges, the Congress leadership in Telangana, led by A Revanth Reddy, consolidated its position and unseated the repressive regime through democratic means.

Upon assuming power, the Congress government pledged to rebuild the state and restore dignity to its residents. Despite its predecessor's ostentatious promises upon taking office, it had failed to fulfill its basic obligations to people, thereby losing their trust.

Guided by principles of social justice and equitable development, the Congress government committed itself to rectifying past mistakes and amending the failures of the previous administration. It immediately dismantled barriers---both tangible and intangible---that had hindered citizen-

Upon assuming power, the Congress government pledged to rebuild the state and restore dignity to its residents. Despite its predecessor's ostentatious promises upon taking office, it had failed to fulfill its basic obligations to people, thereby losing their trust.

government interactions, thereby enhancing accessibility to governance.

One of the most significant benefits bestowed upon the people of the state was the sense of freedom they rightfully deserved. This freedom had been yearned for by the people of Telangana over the past decade. Under the leadership of Revanth Reddy, the Congress government ushered in this breeze of liberation by ousting the previous BRS administration.

Staying true to its electoral promises, the new government swiftly implemented the Maha Lakshmi Scheme and



BOREDDY AYODHYA REDDY

steadfast in its commitment to fulfill all campaign promises and continue advancing the welfare of its citizens.

To add few more, the government issued appointment orders to approximately 30,000 educated youth, announced multiple new job opportunities through notifications, ensured integrity in competitive examinations with no instances of paper leaks and enhanced transparency. The state gov-

ernment swiftly resolved thousands of public grievances within a short timeframe, established a dedicated panel to address issues related to the 'Dharani' portal, and delegated government projects such as stitching school uniforms to women self-help groups, thus promoting local empowerment.

This administration's proactive stance in fulfilling electoral pledges and promoting public welfare underscores its dedication to rebuilding trust and fostering inclusive growth throughout the state.

Meanwhile, the administration, under Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, has undertaken a comprehensive overhaul, meticulously assessing every facet across all departments. Significant changes in personnel have been implemented through new appointments and strategic reassignments. In tandem with these administrative reforms, many ambitious projects have been announced, with some of

them already underway. Notable among these are the Metro Rail expansion, Musi Riverfront Development, Elevated Corridors on the outskirts of Hyderabad, redefinition of ORR boundaries, construction of the Regional Ring Road, as well as extensive new tar roads and railway routes.

On the investment front, Telangana made a strong impact at the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, securing a record-breaking Rs 40,000 crore in investments.

Concurrently, the government has actively addressed allegations of widespread corruption during the previous administration's tenure, particularly in major projects such as Kaleshwaram and the Telangana Secretariat, alongside other infrastructure ventures. Investigations have also brought to light irregularities in power procurement from Chhattisgarh, as well as scams related to the distribution of double bedroom units and

sheep distribution schemes. Inquiries have been initiated, resulting in arrests in some cases and further investigations into others.

The administration has prioritized bolstering law and order, refining the competitive examination process, and enhancing transparency measures to safeguard the future prospects of the state's educated youth. A steadfast commitment to combat communal discord underscores the government's policy framework, with decisive measures being taken to ensure communal harmony.

Under the leadership of Revanth Reddy, the Congress government is steadfastly working to reconstruct the state methodically, laying a foundation for sustainable development in phases. The government is working on fulfilling the promises made to farmers, youth, women, and other sections of society.

(The writer is CPRO to Telangana Chief Minister)

Collector: Prepare expenditure accounts of contestants pending audit



PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh directed the Returning Officers to prepare the details of election expenditure of contestants as election expenditure auditors are coming to the district. The Collector held a meeting with the Returning Officers and other officials here on Wednesday and reviewed various issues regarding expenditure of contestants. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that the final accounts of the election expenditure of each candidate, who contested in the elections, should be submitted to the Expenditure auditors accurately. "The expenditure auditors will come to the district this month and they examine the final accounts of the candidates of their election expenditure. In view of the fact that the candi-

dates have to complete the accounts on their election expenditure and accurate information should be provided to auditors," the Collector told them.

Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, ITDA PO M Suryateja, DRO D Pushmani and ROs NSK Khajavali, Y Bhavani Shankari, K Bhaskar and AO K Kashivisweswar Rao were among those who attended the meeting.

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KCR GOVT WORKED FOR 'ACCOUNT' Cong rule is about 'accountability': R&B Min

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Roads & Buildings (R&B) Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has remarked that the previous BRS government had worked for 'account', but the Congress has been governing the state with 'accountability'.

Venkat Reddy alleged that former chief minister K Chandrababhan Naidu had wasted valuable time. He said that the Centre did not remove RRR from the BharatMala scheme. The R & B Minister alleged that the BRS government did not pay utility charges totaling Rs.300 crore and 50 per cent of land acquisition expenditure for the sake of the Regional Ring Road (RRR). The KCR government behaved negligently towards RRR.

However, the Congress government was focused on RRR. The government would construct radial roads in between RRR and ORR. Thereafter, RRR would become a game



Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy addressing the media at Secretariat on Wednesday

changer and a 'super investment hub' in the world, he claimed.

The Minister addressed media persons at the Secretariat on Wednesday, after a departmental review. Venkat Reddy said that the previous Congress government (in combined AP) had made Hyderabad as the investment hub.

The Minister said expansion works on the Hyderabad-Vijayawada national highway would begin soon. The state government would conduct an all-party meeting for the construction of a new building for

Osmania General Hospital soon. Referring to a legal hurdle for the laying of a 6-lane road, Venkat Reddy said that he would get letters from the Chief Ministers of the Telugu states to launch the 6-lane works before December.

The Minister said that Uppal flyover works would be started within one month with help from Union Minister G Kishan Reddy help and that the project would be completed within three months. He said that roads in Telangana would stand out as models.

Venkat Reddy said that the government was preparing Delhi Telangana Bhavan DPR and that tenders would be called within two months. The Minister said that the Hyderabad-Bangalore road modernisation works would be taken up with an outlay of Rs.5,600 crore. If necessary, the state government would set up a Road Corporation to mobilize funds, he added.

DC: Provide better services to pregnant, postnatal women



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Sumit Kumar directed the officials concerned to take steps to provide better services to the pregnant and postnatal women and children.

The Collector held a meeting with the Women and Child Welfare department officers, CDPOs, Supervisors and other officials and reviewed the services being provided to the women and children.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Sumit Kumar said that there should be no quality deficiency in the services being provided to children, pregnant women, postnatal women and infants. He told them that special attention should be given to the children of Anganwadi who are short in height and weight.

The Collector also directed the officials to pay special attention to the subjects taught to children in Anganwadi centres. Children have a high level of quick understanding and learning and appropriate ways of teaching should be adopted for this, he told them.

"Anemic pregnant women should be given extensive knowledge about the tablets and food to be taken. Regular intake of iron tablets, milk and eggs should be encouraged," the Collector told the officials. The CDPOs should prepare briefings and provide information along with organizing training classes and the information will be beneficial only when it goes down to the lower level," the Collector observed, asking to think how to train helpers and Anganwadi workers.

Collector Sumit Kumar ordered the officials to create complete awareness to the mothers on how to take care of the newborn baby, how to take care of the children in what season and how to take care of fever after vaccination.

Pregnant women should be regularly examined to find whether they are taking nutritious food and grains, the Collector told them and ordered to take steps to ensure that no infant mortality and maternal mortality take place in the district. District Women and Child welfare officer B Sujata Rani and other officials were present.

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1.2 kg ganja seized; one arrested

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police seized 1.2 KGs of ganja while being sold at Paturu village in Tadepalli mandal on Wednesday.

Circle Inspector Kalyan Raju that on a tip off that ganja was being sold by a person at

Paturu village, a police team conducted a raid and seized 1.2 KGs of ganja. The police arrested Prashant, who was selling ganja in retail. The accused was produced before the court. The CI warned of stringent action if anyone indulged in the sale of ganja.

Youth killed, another injured as car hits bike

PNS ■ ELURU

One youth was killed and another was injured when the motorcycle on which they were going was hit by a speeding car near Goenka College at Pentapadu village on Wednesday.

Police said that the deceased Kishore (20) and the injured Manikanta Reddy were going

on a motorcycle towards Tadepalligudem. A speeding car hit their bike killing Kishore instantaneously.

The injured Manikanta Reddy was admitted to the GGH Rajahmundry where his condition was said to be critical. The Pentapadu police registered a case and shifted the body of Kishore to the GGH for postmortem.



Steps will be taken to mitigate drinking water scarcity: Minister

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy assured of taking all steps to tackle the drinking water scarcity which prevailed in some areas in Prakasam district.

The Minister addressed a district level meeting here on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that several areas in the district are facing acute drinking water scarcity and directed the officials to submit proposals to take up works.

He alleged that irregularities took place in the erstwhile YSRCP led government in disbursement of bills to the drinking water tankers, which supplied water to the areas, despite drinking water not properly supplied to the affected areas.

The Minister said that a Central team is visiting the district on Thursday and asked the agriculture department officials to explain the drought situation and ensure that farmers are disbursed crop loss compensation. He directed the officials to submit proposals for the Veligonda right canal construction works.

RWSS SE Mardhar Ali said that the damaged crest gates of Gundlakamma project would be replaced by July 15. The needed repairs of all the crest

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works of the tunnel are being carried out now. The SE said that Rs 4 crore is required to complete the works of Paleru project.


Minister Veeranjanya Swamy reiterated that the government is committed to complete the Veligonda project as early as possible.

Collector AS Dinesh Kumar said that an online tracking app is being used to identify drinking water scarcity and supply drinking water to the areas. He said that every 15 days, they review the drinking water supply. MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, SP Garu Sumit Sunil and MLAs were among those who attended the meeting.

INDIA CORNER


Dead frog ‘found’ in wafer packet; probe ordered in Jamnagar civic body

The civic authority here ordered an inquiry on Wednesday after a dead frog was allegedly found in a packet of potato wafers. The complaint came days after a Mumbai resident claimed to have found a piece of human finger in the ice cream he had ordered online. Samples of the production batch of the wafer packet will be collected as part of the probe, said an official of the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation. “One Jasmin Patel informed us that a dead frog was found in a packet of Crunchex, manufactured by Balaji Wafers. We visited the shop from where it had been purchased last night. Preliminary probe suggested it was indeed a frog in a decomposed state,” food safety officer D B Parmar told reporters. “As directed by the municipal commissioner, we will collect samples of this batch of wafer packets to conduct an inquiry,” he added. Patel, a resident of Pushkar Dham society, claimed that his four-year-old niece bought the packet from a nearby shop on Tuesday evening.




Bengal govt orders probe into blaze at iconic ‘Hollong Bungalow’

The West Bengal government on Wednesday ordered a probe into the blaze that erupted at the famed ‘Hollong Bungalow’ in Alipurduar district, Forest Minister Birbaha Hansda said. A team of experts will soon visit the popular tourist lodge, which was gutted in the fire that broke out around 9 pm on Tuesday, to ascertain the cause of the blaze, she said. “As the bungalow had been closed since June 15, we have to make an on-the-spot inspection to know the factors behind the incident,” Hansda said. “There are preliminary reports of a short circuit,” she said. Hansda said the wooden bungalow was an asset for the state, and people have a lot of emotion and nostalgia associated with it. Asked if the state government would restore the iconic structure, the minister said “we will act as guided by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee”.



Mizoram government to review decision to upgrade 340 schools

The Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) government, led by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, will review the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government’s decision to upgrade 340 schools, Education Minister Vanlalhlana said on Wednesday. Speaking at a press conference, Vanlalhlana said the council of ministers on Tuesday decided to reassess the decision made in September last year by the MNF government to grant provisional ad hoc grants-in-aid and lump-sum grants-in-aid to 340 schools across the state, as many of them failed to meet the required criteria. The previous MNF government had decided to take the liabilities for payment of salaries including dearness and medical allowances of 180 schools, provide provisional grants-in-aid to 52 schools, and lump-sum grants-in-aid to 108 schools before the assembly polls last year.



Govt working towards more advanced higher edn: Modi

PNS ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted that he wanted India to re-emerge as the world’s “most prominent knowledge centre” with an “advanced and research-oriented” higher education system.

Modi, while inaugurating the new Nalanda University campus here, called upon students to always remain curious and courageous.

The varsity is named after the world-renowned ancient seat of higher learning, which was razed by invading armies in the 12th century.

The PM said Nalanda bore testimony to the fact that “knowledge cannot be destroyed by fire”, and that India was looking forward to playing its role in the 21st century, “which belongs to Asia”, by becoming a developed



country by 2047.

He underscored that history was proof that all developed countries became economic and cultural leaders only after they made a mark in the field of education.

“Our country, too, enjoyed such a status in the ancient times when seats of learning like Nalanda and Vikramshila were flourishing,” said Modi, who also made a mention of the International Yoga Day

celebrations, due in a couple of days, to stress that India was continuing with cultural exchanges on a global scale.

“It is my mission that India re-emerges as the world’s most prominent knowledge centre. To this end, the spirit of innovation is being inculcated into our children from a very early age. More than one crore children are getting exposed to latest technology at ‘Atal Tinkering’ labs. The

Chandrayaan and Gaganyaan missions are also boosting their interest in science,” he said.

Modi also pointed out “till about a decade ago, we had only 100 startups. The number has swollen to more than 1.30 lakh. We are also filing a record number of patents and publishing research papers. Our government has announced a special fund of Rs 1 lakh crore to give a fillip to research and innovation.”

“It is our endeavour to build, in India, the world’s most comprehensive and complete skilling system, and advanced research-oriented higher education system. The efforts have started showing results. Our universities’ global rankings have improved. Till a decade ago, only nine educational institutions had QS rankings. Now, the number has reached 46,” the PM asserted.

Dhankhar calls for all-round efforts for eradication of sickle cell anaemia

PNS ■ DINDORI (MP)

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday urged everyone to make efforts to eradicate sickle cell disease for which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched a national programme.

“The nation will be developed by 2047 and eradication of sickle cell disease from the country will mark its identity. The PM had already launched the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission from the neighbouring district of Shahdol in 2023. The ‘havan’ (effort) has already begun and everyone has to take part in it,” Dhankhar said.

The vice president was speaking at a programme in Dindori town of Madhya Pradesh on the ‘World Sickle Cell Day’.

Sickle-cell anaemia is caused by a defective gene, Haemoglobin S, which causes flexible red blood cells to



become stiff sickle-shaped cells, obstructing blood flow and increasing the risk of organ damage.

“The marathon march of nationality is going on and everyone is walking along. Nobody will be able to restrict India’s development. But it will be completed only when sickle cell disease is eradicated from the country by 2047, and for achieving this goal

active participation of all is necessary,” the vice president said.

He also said it is a matter of pride for everyone that a tribal woman, Droupadi Murmu, became the country’s President for the first time and administered the oath to PM Modi.

“The day Droupadi Murmu took the oath and she later administered the same (oath) to Prime Minister Narendra

Modi for his third term, the country’s history was written in golden letters that day,” he said.

Dhankhar also said that when he became a member of Parliament in 1989, the country’s economy was even smaller than London and Paris and its gold was mortgaged in two banks in Switzerland.

“But today where we have reached. We have left behind countries like Brazil, Canada, England, and France (in terms of economy) and now we will overtake Germany and Japan,” he said.

Dhankhar praised Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav for taking “bold decisions like restricting the use of loudspeakers on religious and other places in the state.”

“In the first meeting itself, the chief minister decides where loudspeakers will be played and where they will not. What one can say about such a CM?



‘UP ke do ladke’ will make India’s politics all about love’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

UP’s two sons would make India’s politics all about love, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Wednesday to signal his camaraderie with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Gandhi’s witty take, recalling the “mohabbat ki dukaan” tagline from his pan-India yatra and the Lok Sabha election campaign, came in response to Yadav’s greeting on his 54th birthday.

In response to Yadav’s wish, Gandhi said, “UP ke do ladke Hindustan ki rajneeti ko mohabbat ki dukaan banayenge -- khata-khat, khata-khat (loosely translating to two boys of UP will make India’s politics all about love)”.

“UP ke do ladke” was a tagline used to underline the coming together of Yadav and Gandhi in the 2017 Uttar Pradesh assembly polls when the two parties had joined hands. However, in those elections, the alliance failed miserably and the BJP came

to power in the state.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also taken a dig at Gandhi and Yadav during the Lok Sabha election campaign.

Without naming Gandhi and Yadav, the prime minister had said, “You might remember here in Uttar Pradesh that the film featuring two boys (‘do ladke’), which had flopped last time, the film of the two boys has been re-released by these people.”

Gandhi’s remarks came amid talk of the Congress and the Samajwadi Party contemplating continuing the alliance in the bypolls and even later. With 37 out of 80, the Samajwadi Party won the highest numbers of seats in Uttar Pradesh in the recently-concluded Lok Sabha elections, giving a record performance since its inception.

Its ally the Congress won six seats while the BJP won 33. The saffron party’s allies the Rashtriya Lok Dal won two seats and Apna Dal (S) one.

Five-term CM Naveen to be Odisha’s new leader of opposition

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJD president Naveen Patnaik, the five-term chief minister of Odisha, will be the leader of the opposition in the new Odisha assembly after his party lost power to the BJP.

Speaking to reporters, Patnaik said the decision was taken at the BJD’s legislature party meeting held on Wednesday.

“We had a meeting of the MLAs of the BJD. I congratulated and thanked them. They have elected me as the leader of the opposition and leader of the BJD legislature party,” he said.

At the meeting, different matters, including recent elections, were discussed, he added.

Later, Patnaik told reporters, “My party and I will continue working hard for the people of Odisha.”

Rairakhol MLA Prasanna Acharya, a former state minister, was named the deputy leader of the opposition, while former speaker Pramila Mallik, the MLA of Aul, as the deputy chief whip of the opposition in the assembly.

Patnaik named former minister Pratap Keshari Deb, the MLA of Aul, as the deputy chief whip of the opposition in the assembly.

Acharya said, “We are now the strongest opposition in the history of Odisha.

RENUKASWAMY MURDER CASE

No pressure on me to shield actor Darshan, says Siddaramaiah

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said he was not under pressure from any minister or MLA to shield leading Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa in a murder case.

The CM also said that he will never entertain such requests.

“There is a rumour doing rounds that there was pressure on me, which is not true. There is no pressure. Neither from a minister nor any MLA (to favour Darshan). These are all far from the truth,” Siddaramaiah told reporters



here

He said, “Even if someone puts pressure on me, I will not entertain their requests. We have given free hand to the police and I have told them to take action as per law.”

On changing the Special Public Prosecutor appointed

by the government for the trial in the case, the Chief Minister said he has no such information. “There is no proposal in the first place (to change the SPP).”

Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor Darshan, was abducted from his hometown of Chitradurga by a key fan club member and his associates and brought to Bengaluru where he was tortured and killed. His body was found on June nine. According to police sources, Renukaswamy had sent obscene messages to Gowda, which enraged the actor, allegedly leading to his murder.

Rain triggers landslides, flood-like situation in several Arunachal districts

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Incessant rain over the past few days had triggered landslides and flood-like situations in various parts of Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Wednesday.

The state capital witnessed landslides at several locations, with water-logging reported along the Doimuk-Potin Road and several stretches of the Itanagar-Yupia Road.

A portion of NH-415 and a culvert were washed away at Karsingsa sink- ing zone on Tuesday morning, severing connectivity between Nirjuli and Bander dewa. Vehicular traffic between these areas has been

diverted via Gumto Road.

With the IMD forecasting heavy rains in the state capital over the next few days, the district administration has urged residents in vulnerable areas to move to safer locations or designated relief camps. Eight relief camps have been established in the state capital to aid those affected by landslides and flooding, officials said.

Landslides also damaged a few vehicles and a newly constructed house in Banderdewa. Fortunately, no loss of human lives has been reported. Similar reports of landslides have emerged from other districts.



DELHI WATER CRISIS

‘Will go on indefinite hunger strike from June 21 if situation not resolved’

Atishi writes to PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Water Minister Atishi on Wednesday said that she has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the water crisis in the national capital and threatened to go on an indefinite hunger strike from June 21 if the issue is not resolved within a couple of days.

The BJP’s Atishi, with its Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva accusing her of indulging in “theatrics” to distract attention from theft and black marketeering of water, and demanded that the AAP government be sacked for its “inaction”.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi said Delhi is grappling with a water crisis since Haryana is not releasing the capital’s share of water and claimed that over 28 lakh people are affected.

“We have to understand that the total water supply in Delhi is 1,050 MGD. Out of this 1,050 MGD, 613 MGD

comes to the Yamuna from Haryana.

“The amount of water that was supposed to come from Haryana yesterday, that is, on June 18, which was 613 MGD, has come down to 513 MGD. This means that Delhi is facing a water shortage of 100 MGD today,” she said.

Elaborating on what the 100 MGD water shortage means, she said one MGD water meets the daily water demand of nearly 28,500 people.

“If Delhi is getting 100 MGD less water from Haryana, it means more than 28 lakh people are getting less water. This is the situation of Delhi today,” she added.

The minister rued that at a time when Delhiites need more water due to this extreme heat, there is a shortage of water in the national capital.

“Today, I have written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji and I have requested him that now the suffering of the people of Delhi is crossing all limits.



Scientists develop blood test to detect Parkinson’s

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A “simple” blood test could detect Parkinson’s disease up to seven years before symptoms begin to show, according to research published in the journal Nature Communications.

Parkinson’s disease is a neurodegenerative disorder, the symptoms of which include tremors, slowness of movement and gait, and memory problems.

Using machine learning, researchers analysed blood samples of 72 patients having Rapid Eye Movement Behaviour Disorder (RBD), in which they physically act out their dreams without knowing it.

Machine learning is a type of artificial intelligence which learns from past data to make

future predictions.

The team of researchers, led by those at the University College London, UK, said that it is known that about 75-80 per cent of people having iRBD go on to develop an abnormal build-up of alpha-synuclein protein in their brains - also seen in people with Parkinson’s disease.

Upon analysing the blood samples, the machine learning tool, developed by the researchers, found that almost 80 per cent of the 72 iRBD patients had the same profile as an individual having ageing-related neurodegenerative disease.

The researchers also tested the tool if it could predict the chances of the patient developing Parkinson’s. For this, the



iRBD patients were followed up for ten years. The researchers found that the tool correctly predicted 16 patients to develop the neurodegenerative condition and could do this up to seven years before the onset of

any symptoms.

“By determining eight proteins in the blood, we can identify potential Parkinson’s patients several years in advance. This means that drug therapies could potentially be

given at an earlier stage, which could possibly slow down disease progression or even prevent it from occurring,” said first author Michael Bartl, University Medical Center Goettingen, Germany.

Using machine learning, researchers analysed blood samples of 72 patients having Rapid Eye Movement Behaviour Disorder (RBD), in which they physically act out their dreams without knowing it

NEET ROW

NSUI demands ban on NTA, CBI probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National Students’ Union of India (NSUI) president Varun Choudhary on Wednesday demanded the Centre to ban the National Testing Agency (NTA) and conduct a CBI inquiry into the alleged paper leak and corruption in the NEET UG 2024 examination.

Addressing a press conference here, Choudhary said the students union will ‘gherao’ the Parliament on June 24 if their demands are not met.

He said he will approach the INDIA block leaders to write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over irregularities in the NEET exam and raise the concern in the Parliament.

“We are giving an ultimatum to the Centre to take action against the NTA and ban it by June 24. Our demand is that a high-level inquiry of the NEET scam should be conducted by the CBI under the supervision of retired Supreme Court judges,” he said while also announcing another nationwide protest by the Congress on June 21 against the irregularities.

Citing media reports, Choudhary said that cases of corruption and paper leak in the MBBS qualifying examination were reported in Bihar and Gujarat but Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has refuted the claims.

“While there are reports coming from Bihar and Gujarat

about paper leak and corruption in the NTA exams and arrests have been made regarding the same, our education minister clearly seems to be trying to safeguard the NTA by outrightly refuting the claims. This shows how serious Pradhan is about the future of the 24 lakh NEET students,” he said alleging complicity of the minister in the said scam.

Choudhary also demanded that strict action should be taken against NTA officers found complicit in the case.

He added that an FIR was registered against NSUI All India Secretary Honey Bagga for protesting against the irregularities at Pradhan’s residence recently.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Not so neat

The Supreme Court demands a comprehensive investigation into administrative negligence surrounding the NEET fiasco

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), serving as a critical gateway for students aspiring to enter undergraduate medical and dental programs in India, is at the centre of controversy. The Supreme Court of India has raised concerns about potential negligence in the administration of the exam, calling for an exhaustive investigation. Since the results were announced on June 4, the NEET exam has faced intense scrutiny due to various issues, including errors in the question paper, improper allocation of grace marks and allegations of paper leaks and fraud. In response, students and parents have called for a re-test, leading to numerous petitions being filed in courts. Despite National Testing Agency (NTA) officials denying any paper leaks, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan acknowledged that "some irregularities" had been detected at certain exam centers. NEET was introduced to standardize medical admissions across India, aiming to create a uniform criterion for entry into medical courses. However, since its



inception, the exam has faced a multitude of challenges, including allegations of fraud, question paper leaks and complaints of unequal access, which have sparked widespread debate and protests. In a pivotal decision, the Supreme Court of India has brought attention to serious concerns regarding the administration of the NEET exam, highlighting potential negligence and calling for a thorough investigation. Over the years, NEET has been marred by several instances of question paper leaks and cheating, which not only undermine the fairness of the examination but also cast a shadow over the credibility of the authorities responsible for conducting it. Such issues have been a recurrent problem, eroding trust in the system and fueling public discontent.

Additionally, there have been persistent concerns about accessibility and equity. It has been alleged that NEET inherently favors well-to-do students from urban areas who have better access to high-quality coaching and educational resources, thereby disadvantaging those from rural or economically weaker backgrounds. This perceived inequity has led to protests from various States and communities who feel marginalized by the current system. The Supreme Court's call for an investigation into possible negligence underscores the gravity of administrative lapses within the NEET examination process. There are allegations of corruption involving insiders within examination boards or associated entities who might be leaking papers or enabling cheating in exchange for bribes. Such internal corruption severely compromises the examination's integrity. Some States have expressed opposition to NEET, citing disadvantages for their students due to regional and linguistic differences. This opposition could reflect broader political dynamics, where certain political interests align against the centralization of medical entrance examinations. Indeed, a probe is crucial for restoring faith in the NEET process and ensuring that all aspiring medical students have a fair opportunity.

PICTALK



Devotees gather to take a holy dip in the Ganga river on the occasion of Ganga Dussehra, in Haridwar

PTI

Attain happiness by living in the moment

Embracing small moments and choosing to smile can transform not just our day, but the lives of those around us, making the world a happier place

I have often wondered if happiness is a choice or an effort. As I have aged, I realise that it is a choice for which one needs to make an effort. I understand that happiness derived out of immersing oneself in the moment is also meditative. A few years back, I was standing in the airport security queue with a grumpy face. It was an early morning flight for which I had to wake up in the dead of the night. I was also stressed as I had to make a presentation to my Board of Directors in a few hours. In short I had no reasons to be happy. In this self-made gloom surrounding me, my eyes fell on an old gentleman, standing patiently in front of me. His cheerful disposition even at that early hour, despite the struggle to navigate the slow moving long queue and the broad smile on his face as he walked jauntily for the mandatory check, was enough to light up the faces of everyone around him. He smiled at the security personnel, asked his name, introduced himself and still laughing, picked up his cabin baggage and moved on with



a spring in his steps. The usually taciturn security staff kept looking at the retreating back — with a smile on his face! We had a laughter club in my condominium complex. These sexagenarians to octogenarians burst into laughter at the drop of a hat, oblivious to the smirks of the other walkers. The laughter is forced, but the young at heart are immersed in the act. They have chosen to work for happiness, unmindful of the worry of the moment. Children do not need a reason to be happy — they do not even have to fake it. Each moment is a miracle for them. It would not be wrong to say that they live in the moment. The purity and

the sheer joy of their happiness is a sight to behold. I was a young boy of 9. My brother was 8. We were having annual sports in our school. The winter days were gloriously sunny. It was a pleasure to sit on the boundary wall to watch the young athletes. It was an equally satisfying act to clap for the winning heroes. We lost sense of time, so absorbed were we in the pleasure of the moment. This led my worried and irate father to march to the school and drag us back home. The lasting memory is that of our sitting on the boundary wall lost in the joy that it afforded us and not the subsequent thrashing. As we grew into adulthood, with accompanying respon-

sibilities of the daily grind, lines of frown started appearing on our foreheads. We forgot to even smile. We also forgot to make friends. We thought that the professionals that we spent time with could at best be acquaintances. We could not have been farther from truth. Friends are forever a source of joy.

Now that we are in the winter of our lives, we realise that there is so much to be happy about. The act of waking up in the morning, or going about our routine with our hands and feet and many other such acts that we considered mundane in our younger days, are now sources of happiness. Everyone loves to spend time with a smiling person, avoiding a grumpy face. The world would be happier if all of us chose to be the lighted candle of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "When a happy person comes into the room, it is as if another candle has been lit."

(The writer conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. Views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

sibilities of the daily grind, lines of frown started appearing on our foreheads. We forgot to even smile. We also forgot to make friends. We thought that the professionals that we spent time with could at best be acquaintances. We could not have been farther from truth. Friends are forever a source of joy.

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India's foreign policy under Modi 3.0



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Amid geopolitical tensions, Modi's engagements at the G7 reflect India's commitment to democratic principles and its positioning on the world stage



In less than a week of assuming office as the Prime Minister for the largest democracy in the world, Mr Modi, is back where he excels. He was in Italy this week, meeting the leaders from the powerful group of nations also known as the G7. On the sidelines were several bilateral meetings with leaders of African, Arab nations, besides several clear messages to the primarily American and European groups leaders. This was PM Modi's first trip abroad, after assuming office for a third time (a remarkable feat in itself), where nearly 670 million voters, patiently waited in queues, under an extremely harsh summer sun, over a period of nearly two months, to choose the leader of the largest democracy. PM Modi and his party, despite, setting really ambitious expectations, could not manage a majority by itself and is now dependent on a bunch of pre poll alliance political parties, to lead the National Democratic Alliance Government. This assumes significance at a time when several parts of Europe, not to mention US are going their own set of democratic churns. The US goes to poll end of the year and voices on either side of the aisle

, are getting harsher and louder. Similarly the elections to the European Parliament, has thrown a resurgence of far right parties, which is likely to have an impact on the geo political dynamics for a long time. What Mr Modi may be comforted by, is the fact that he may not need to look around for carefully worded diplomatic Statements, while explaining the State of Indian democracy to the western nations. In the past few years, several questions have been raised across western nations and in US regarding the health of the Indian democracy, its report card on minority rights, religious freedom, existence of press etc.

The near majority verdict, by the Indian electorate, with ample scope of checks and balances to keep the party with highest seats under leash, a robust opposition presence in the parliament would be clear talk point for PM and his set of diplomats to set out a gold standard for democracy, when engaging with several nations. This becomes even more robust, given India's unblemished record of being a largely



IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, SEVERAL QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN RAISED ACROSS WESTERN NATIONS AND IN THE US REGARDING THE HEALTH OF THE INDIAN DEMOCRACY, ITS REPORT CARD ON MINORITY RIGHTS, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, THE EXISTENCE OF THE PRESS, ETC

democratic nation, with a huge diverse population, in a neighbourhood, where there are several non democratic regimes, not to forget the second largest economy in the world China.

Mr Modi, with his nearly three decades of experience as head of the State and nation, is not new to diplomacy and in several interviews, leading up to the general elections, has articulated his target of enhancing India's global image. The grand spectacle around G20 (not to forget back room diplomatic negotiations to arrive at a joint Statement), several high level State visits, a bunch of rescue operations carried out for citizens and neighbours from war torn areas, supply of emergency medicines during Covid, are all pointers towards the focus the Prime Minister's Office attaches on global reputational management. PM's first visit in his third term to meet the G7 leaders, is a reassurance of continuity, as well as scoping out newer engagement roadmaps with existing and potential new allies.

Mr Modis' visit to Italy

comes at a time when the Ukraine war is unrelenting and despite severe reluctance, there seems to be chinks in the united European approach towards the aggressor Russia. Many of them, would have, similar concerns regarding Israel's war on terror, which has refused to die down in months. It may be recalled that both Israel and Russia are close allies of India and India has so far walked a tightrope when commenting both of these volatile situations.

The dynamics of the past relationship, while building deeper relations with recent allies such as US are likely to be a sensitive diplomatic trope. It is no wonder, that PM Modi has picked up S Jaishankar, a seasoned diplomat as the External Affairs minister for a second term, to retain the continuity and foreign policy focus achieved during his last term. The evolving geo political landscape and India's role in global affairs would continue to be tested and chiselled in days to come.

(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BATTLING THE HEAT

Madam — Apropos the news story "Battling the heat with tribal ammunition," published on June 19, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, I am struck by the diverse range of topics covered in these articles. From the historical significance of May Day to the ongoing challenges of terrorism and global security, each piece provides valuable insights into the complexities of modern society.

The essay on the Kutia-Kondh tribes of Odisha, highlighting their traditional methods for coping with heat waves, is particularly noteworthy. It showcases the resilience and resourcefulness of indigenous communities in adapting to harsh environmental conditions. The article on China's two-front problem, discussing its growing confidence in its defence capabilities, is also thought-provoking. Overall, these articles demonstrate the breadth and depth of the newspaper's coverage, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the world around us.

Preeti Arya | Jind

INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Madam — Apropos the news story "Child Development and National Progress," published on June 19, this is my response. The article rightly highlights the critical importance of investing in early childhood care and education (ECCE) to achieve the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India). With over 50 per cent of India's population below 25 years old, nurturing this demographic dividend through quality ECCE is paramount. The benefits of ECCE are multifaceted — it enhances learning outcomes, positively impacts personality development and bridges social equity gaps. Yet, India's current ECCE spending is a mere 0.1 per cent of GDP, far below the recommended 1.5-2.2 per cent.

To make ECCE universally accessible, the article rightly suggests incorporat-

Nurturing India's Startup Potential



Apropos the news story "Startups must innovate and execute for commercial success," published on June 19, this is my response. The article highlights the significant progress made by India's startup ecosystem in the past decade while acknowledging the challenges that young entrepreneurs face. The author rightly points out that the growth potential is vast, bolstered by supportive Government initiatives and the commitment of funders to nurture India's youth. The primary challenge lies in the dearth

of operational and financial management skills among young entrepreneurs, who often struggle with executing their innovative ideas. The author's emphasis on the need for comprehensive mentoring alongside financial support is well-founded. Funders like YEA play a crucial role in guiding startups in enhancing operational efficiency, managing finances and leveraging Governmental incentives.

The author's emphasis on the importance of genuine innovation, meticulous planning, resilience and patience in entrepreneurship is commendable. Startups often aim for rapid multi-million-dollar or billion-dollar success, but true success hinges on sustained commitment, focus and perseverance. The article serves as a valuable reminder that building a thriving enterprise demands continual effort to benefit entrepreneurs, investors, clients and stakeholders alike. Overall, the article provides a balanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing India's startup ecosystem and the critical role of funders and mentors in nurturing the entrepreneurial potential of the country's youth.

Kularani Kapoor | Ranchik

ing it into the RTE Act, increasing public spending and enhancing social infrastructure. These steps will lay a strong foundation for India's future and help realise the dream of a developed nation. Investing in ECCE is a strategic imperative that cannot be overlooked if India aspires to become a global leader by 2047.

Roshan Naik | Kolkata

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS

Madam — Apropos the news story "Elder abuse remains an underreported crisis," published on June 19, this is my response. As a daily reader of the newspaper, I am deeply disturbed by the alarming statistics on elder abuse. The fact that 1 in 6 older adults experiences abuse in community settings is a stark reminder of the urgent need for concert-

ed action. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is a crucial step in raising awareness about this issue and empowering communities to identify and address it effectively.

I believe that a multifaceted approach involving awareness, education, legal measures and societal change is necessary to address elder abuse. It is essential to educate both the elderly and the younger generations about the importance of respecting and caring for the elderly. The Government, NGOs and the private sector must collaborate to bridge the gap between policy and implementation, ensuring proper care for India's elderly population.

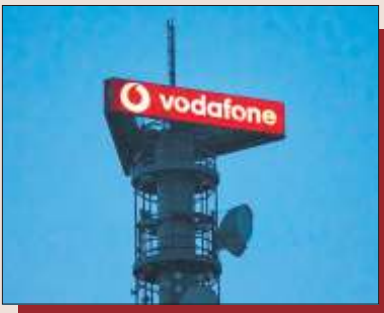
Pradeep Kumar | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

MONEY MATTERS

Vodafone sells 18 % stake in Indus Towers for Rs 15,300 cr

British telecom player Vodafone on Wednesday said it has sold an 18 per cent stake in Indus Towers for 1.7 billion euro (about Rs 15,300 crore). The company will use the major portion of the proceeds to pay 1.8 billion euro outstanding bank borrowings secured against Vodafone's assets in India. "Vodafone Group Plc...sold 484.7 million shares in Indus Towers Limited, representing 18 per cent of Indus' share capital through an accelerated book-build offering. The placing raised Rs 153.0 billion (1.7 billion euro) in gross proceeds which will be used to substantially repay Vodafone's existing lenders in relation to the outstanding bank borrowings of 1.8 billion euro secured against Vodafone's Indian assets," Vodafone said in a note. Following the transaction, Vodafone now holds 82.5 million shares or 3.1 per cent in Indus Towers



NHAI plans to offer projects worth Rs 44,000 cr under BOT

State-owned NHAI is looking to offer 15 road projects worth Rs 44,000 crore covering 937 km during the current financial year under the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) mode. Earlier this year, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) came out with a modified BOT project document to attract private companies for investments in the highways sector. These stretches include Guwahati Ring road including Brahmaputra Bridge in Assam (project cost Rs 5,500 crore), Kasarwadi-Rajgurunagar in Maharashtra (Rs 5,954 crore), Pune-Shirur road project in Maharashtra (Rs 6,170 crore) and Armoor-Mancherial road project in Telangana (Rs 3,175 crore), among others. In BOT projects, private investors take the financing, building and operating a highway project over a concession period of 20-30 years.



Container Port Performance Index 2023 lists 4 APSEZ ports

Four ports from Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ) portfolio have figured in Container Port Performance Index 2023, the company said in a statement on Wednesday. Developed by the World Bank and S&P Global Market Intelligence, the global Container Port Performance Index is a benchmark that assesses the performance of ports on parameters such as productivity, efficiency, and reliability. "While Mundra port was ranked 27, Kattupalli came in at number 57, Hazira at 68 and Krishnapatnam at 71," the company statement said. Nine ports from India made it to the top 100 list, including four from the Adani portfolio. APSEZ Chief Executive Officer and Whole Time Director Ashwani Gupta said.



Retail inflation gradually easing, food prices still a concern: RBI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Retail inflation is gradually easing, but volatile and elevated food prices are interrupting the path of disinflation, the RBI Bulletin said on Wednesday.

An article on the "State of the Economy", published in the June 2024 Bulletin, said global growth was resilient in the first quarter of 2024, and many central banks have pivoted towards a less restrictive monetary policy stance in response to the fall in inflation in their economies.

In India, high-frequency indicators suggest the real GDP growth in Q1 FY2024-25 is broadly maintaining the pace it achieved in the preceding quarter.

Also, the prospects for agriculture are brightening with the early landfall of the southwest monsoon, said the article



authored by a team led by Reserve Bank deputy governor Michael Debabrata Patra.

"Headline inflation is gradually easing, driven by sustained softening of its core component, although the path of disinflation is interrupted by volatile and elevated food prices," the authors said.

The RBI has been mandat-

In India, high-frequency indicators suggest the real GDP growth in Q1 FY2024-25 is broadly maintaining the pace it achieved in the preceding quarter.

ed by the government to ensure retail or headline inflation remains at 4 per cent with a

margin of 2 per cent on either side.

Earlier this month, the RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC) voted to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent and reiterated its stance of remaining focused on the withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns with the target while supporting growth.

The central bank has projected the inflation to ease from 5.4 per cent in 2023-24 to 4.5 per cent in 2024-25, with evenly balanced risks from the rising incidence of adverse climate events, pressures from input costs and volatility in crude prices, among others.

The RBI said the views expressed in the Bulletin article are of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank.



ESIC adds 16.47 lakh new workers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) added 16.47 lakh new members in April as per payroll data released on Wednesday.

"Through the data, it is noticeable that more jobs have been generated for the youth of the nation as out of the total 16.47 lakh employees added during the month, 7.84 lakh employees amounting to around 47.60 per cent of the total registrations belong to the age group of up to 25 years," a labour ministry statement said.

TO AID 'STRUGGLING' JUTE INDUSTRY

Industry body calls for policy intervention



PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA), in a representation to the government, has called for policy intervention to help the "struggling" sector tide over challenges, including declining demand for jute bags and its detrimental impact on workers and

farmers, a senior official said.

The industry body has written to Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Minister Pralhad Joshi in this regard.

"In the letter sent on Tuesday, the IJMA highlighted the critical role the jute industry plays in providing packaging materials for food

grains procured by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State Procuring Agencies (SPAs).

"Despite the industry's readiness to meet the 100 per cent requirements for jute bags during the kharif and rabi seasons, the demand has sharply declined from 38-39 lakh bales annually in 2021-22 to an expected 30 lakh bales in 2024-25," former IJMA chairman Sanjay Kajaria told PTI.

The drop in demand has led to surplus capacity, forcing mills to cut shifts and shut down operations, resulting in massive job losses, he said.

The ripple effect has also impacted jute farmers, who are struggling to sell their produce at the minimum support price, Kajaria said.



IOC, GPS Renewables form JV for sustainable energy solutions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) on Wednesday said it has entered into a joint venture with bio-fuels company GPS Renewables Pvt Ltd to foster sustainable energy solutions in India.

"This association will pave the way for the formation of a 50:50 joint venture company dedicated to advancing biofuel adoption across the country," the firm said in a statement.

The agreement was signed by Mainak Chakraborty, CEO & co-founder of GPS Renewables and Santanu Gupta, ED (Alternative Energy) at IOC.

"The joint venture will focus on integrating advanced bio-gas technologies to convert organic waste into compressed biogas (CBG), a cleaner and renewable energy source. This

will significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions while providing a sustainable alternative to traditional fossil fuels," it said.

By leveraging their combined expertise, IOC and GPS Renewables aim to accelerate the deployment of Compressed Bio Gas (CBG) plants nationwide.

These initiatives complement IOC's long-term low-carbon development strategy and will help the firm achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2046.

CBG will help cut dependence on imported fossil fuels and support the rural economy by creating local employment opportunities.

While IOC is India's largest oil refining and fuel marketing company, GPS Renewables is a full-stack biofuels firm offering technology and project solutions for climate-positive

Sensex extends gain for fifth day to scale fresh peak

NIFTY RETREATS FROM RECORD HIGH

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity index Sensex on Wednesday ticked higher to scale yet another lifetime closing peak of 77,337, while the broader Nifty retreated from the record high level amid a lack of immediate triggers.

In a volatile trading session, the emergence of profit booking in consumer durables, capital goods and energy shares negated strong gains in banking and financial stocks.

Rallying for the fifth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 36.45 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 77,337.59. During the day, it soared 550.49 points or 0.71 per cent to hit the fresh lifetime peak of 77,851.63.



The NSE Nifty ended at 23,516, down 41.90 points or 0.18 per cent. Intra-day, it rose 106.1 points or 0.45 per cent to hit a new record of 23,664.

"Strong buying in banking stocks helped Sensex sail through in a highly volatile trading session, while Nifty ended weak as investors

booked profit in auto, metals, oil & gas, telecom and realty shares after the recent upsurge.

"Ahead of the Budget, markets may see stock & sector-specific activities on hopes the government may increase the outlay for sectors to push growth," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Hospitality industry faces huge talent crunch

TO ADD 1 MILLION JOBS IN NEXT FEW YEARS: EXPERTS

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The hospitality industry is likely to add around 1 million jobs in the next few years as the sector is grappling with a huge talent shortage amid rapid expansion after the COVID-19 pandemic, say experts.

The current demand-supply gap of talent in the industry stands at around 55-60 per cent, indicating a substantial mismatch between the needs and the available talent pool, Randstad

India Director, Professional Talent Solutions, Sanjay Shetty told PTI.

Talent shortage was triggered by the post-pandemic boom in demand, Shetty said, adding that the momentum is expected to continue in the next few years with at least a million jobs being created.

According to industry leaders, the overall hiring has more than quadrupled post-Covid with entry-level positions emerging as the most sought-after in the past two years.

Plan to double market share in country: Volvo CE India MD

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Volvo CE India, a subsidiary of the Swedish Volvo group, aims to double market share in the segments it operates in the country, a top company official said on Wednesday.

"We are present in 40 per cent of the earth moving and construction equipment (CE) segment in India. The company has a market share of 6.5 per cent and we plan to double this in the coming years," Managing Director Dimitrov Krishnan said here.

Krishnan was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the launch of its 20-tonne class hydraulic excavator.

He said the CE sector in India is growing fast with the development of infrastructure.

Quoting figures compiled by the Indian Construction Equipment Manufacturers' Association (ICEMA), Krishnan said in 2023-24, the size of the CE industry in India in volume terms was 1,36,000 units with a value of around Rs 85,000 crore.

"This, according to ICEMA, is going to double by 2030," he said.

Krishnan said India's CE market is the most competitive with the presence of several international and domestic players. To a question, he said Volvo CE India is currently exporting products to Africa, the Middle East.



JAGRAN PRAKASHAN

GST authorities withdraw demands of Rs 202.8 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has withdrawn a GST demand of Rs 2,02.83 crore from Jagran Prakashan, publisher of the Hindi daily Dainik Jagran said in a regulatory filing.

The company has received an "order for dropping the proceedings" on June 18, 2024, with regard to the alleged GST Demand of Rs 2,02,82,60,875 (including penalty of Rs 18,43,87,351 on June 18, 2024, the company said.

Show cause notice (SCN) was issued by the joint commissioner, state GST, Kanpur, to the company in this regard.

The remaining one SCN alleging GST demand of Rs 13.50 crore (including a penalty of Rs 1.22 crore) is

under pursuance and the company, based on legal advice, believes that it has a strong case on merit, the filing said.

Jagran Prakashan has interests spanning across printing and publication of newspapers and magazines, FM Radio, digital, outdoor advertising and promotional marketing, event management and activation businesses.

The group brings out eight publications from 13 states/Union Territories in five different languages.

Besides, the group's radio business has operations at 39 FM stations, besides web stations. For the financial year ended March 31, 2024, Jagran Prakashan's consolidated revenue from operations.

NEW ROLES IN INDIA

Flexibility, salary key jobseeker parameters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian workers persist in expecting higher salaries to offset escalating living expenses and to feel valued for their contributions and flexibility remains a pressing concern for most employees, says a report.

According to recruitment firm Michael Page India's Talent Trends 2024 report, flexibility has become a major point of contention in most parts of India as employers grapple with implementing hybrid working models and policies that meet both business needs and employee preferences.

At a time when a whopping 94 per cent of respondents



(India) are open to exploring different roles in 2024, employers must look beyond competitive salaries and address broader aspects such as flexibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), and positive workplace culture to effectively

attract and retain top talent, the report said.

"A successful recruitment strategy needs to go beyond merely offering competitive salaries. It should prioritise cultivating a robust company culture, providing flexibility,

and addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives to effectively attract and retain top talent," Ankit Agarwala, Managing Director of Michael Page India, said.

The report titled "The Expectation Gap" covered responses from approximately 50,000 skilled white-collar professionals across 37 countries, including over 3,000 individuals from India.

According to the report, India leads APAC in reporting workplace discrimination, with 47 per cent of employees reporting workplace discrimination, higher than the APAC average of 31 per cent. However, 45 per cent of the workforce still faces barriers in formally reporting

such incidents.

Globally, 28 per cent of organisations report similar retention challenges, indicating a heightened pressure on Indian companies.

To maintain high levels of job satisfaction among all age groups, organisations must understand and address the distinct priorities of each generation, from Baby Boomers to Gen Z, the report said.

Among various sectors, 26 per cent of Indian employers report recruitment challenges, while 25 per cent face difficulties in retention. Meanwhile, 31 per cent of organisations in the Indian healthcare sector experience recruitment challenges, and 30 per cent struggle.

Food Minister Pralhad Joshi makes surprise visit to FCI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Food Minister Pralhad Joshi made a surprise visit to the headquarters of Food Corporation of India (FCI) on Wednesday, urging officials to prioritise food security and reduce subsidies, an official statement said.

Joshi, accompanied by Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra, held detailed discussions with senior FCI officials on improving the efficiency of the country's food distribution system.

During the visit, his first engagement with FCI since taking charge, Joshi stressed the need for "greater efficiency and thrust on reducing the



cost and burden on subsidy," it said. Touring the FCI office building, the minister suggested improvements in infrastructure. In a meeting with FCI's Chairman and other top officials, Joshi was given a

presentation on the agency's operations, achievements and key initiatives aimed at ensuring food security.

FCI, the central nodal agency for procurement of foodgrains directly.

Raghav's character in *Kill* blends humour with chilling sense of danger

Sikhya Entertainment and Karan Johar's upcoming film *Kill* is already generating significant buzz, thanks in large part to the standout performance of Raghav Juyal. The film, directed by Nikhil Nagesh Bhat, features Juyal in a role that combines humour and menace in a way that promises to captivate audiences.

"We took 100 auditions and Raghav stood out to us," says Oscar-winning producer Guneet Monga Kapoor. She elaborates on the casting decision, stating, "We were searching for someone who could bring an unusual blend of menace and humour to the role, a character who could truly captivate and terrify the audience at the same time. Raghav Juyal's audition was extraordinary; he not only embraced the complexity of the character but also added his own unique flair. He is the best fit for this role in *Kill*, and we can't wait for the audience to see his performance."

Raghav's portrayal in *Kill* has drawn comparisons to iconic characters like *Batman's* Joker, due to the unique way he infuses comedy into his menacing role. His performance is both captivating and chilling, showcasing his ability to bring depth and nuance to a complex character.

Kill is set to be a milestone in Raghav's career, highlighting his range as an actor and his ability to tackle challenging roles with finesse. The film is anticipated to make waves upon its release, with Raghav Juyal's performance being one of the most talked-about aspects.





PRIYANKA CHOPRA INJURES HER THROAT WHILE FILMING *THE BLUFF*

Priyanka Chopra frequently uses social media to update her followers on her daily activities as a mother and an actor. Now, when filming her next movie, *The Bluff*, the actor hurt herself. The actor shared an update on the shoot and a photo of her throat injury on her Instagram Stories on Wednesday morning.

Priyanka revealed in the latest photo that she had a cut that formed a red wound right below her throat. It didn't appear to be a deep cut, but it certainly appeared painful. Priyanka added, "Oh, the professional hazards in my jobs," in the caption. She also included the newest additions to the hashtags, bluffs and stunts. Priyanka posted a photo of her daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas having fun with her coloured pencils and sketchbook in her most recent Instagram Stories update. She captioned the photo, "Reunited".



SHEHNAZ & AMRITA DIDN'T REALLY HIT OFF DURING *ISHQ VISHQ*

The public is getting ready for *Ishq Vishk Rebound* after 21 years since the release of *Ishq Vishk*. Actor Shehnaz Treasury, who made her feature debut in *Ishq Vishk*, has shared her thoughts about the filming process ahead of its release. She also disclosed that she didn't "really hit it off" with co-star Amrita Rao, thus she didn't "have fond memories" of her.

In an interview, Shehnaz Treasury spoke about *Ishq Vishk* and said, "I can't believe that I did *Ishq Vishk*. It just happened. It became a big hit and achieved a cult status. Now everywhere I go and whoever I meet, they all talk to me about *Ishq Vishk*. They tell me that they've watched it 50-55 times whereas I've just watched it twice (laughs)." Speaking about her camaraderie with Amrita Rao, she shared, "With Amrita, I don't really have any fond memory. But I do have some funny ones. I guess we didn't really hit it off."

She continued, "When we went to Cape Town to shoot a song, the dance director kept telling us what to do. I was trying hard to get the step right, and she went like, 'I can do it! Let me do it!' I remember that very clearly. I had a lot of fun shooting for that one scene with her where I walk up to her and tell her, 'What are you doing? Why are you with my boyfriend?' That scene was really fun! I guess that tension between us was great because it worked for the movie."



Ben Affleck and Matt Damon reunite for *RIP*




Ben Affleck and Matt Damon have been working together for more than 27 years, having made their breakthrough in Hollywood together. According to sources, the stars are reuniting for the murder thriller *RIP*.

The crime thriller is slated to be directed by Joe Carnahan, who is most renowned for directing *Smokin' Aces* (2006) and *The Grey* (2011). The plot elements are still unknown. This fall is when it's supposed to go on floors. Ben and Matt's banner company, Artists Equity, will produce *RIP*.




Ben and Matt first met in Cambridge when they were eight and ten years old, respectively. They formed a joint bank account and utilised the funds from early roles they had earned for themselves to apply for auditions. They appeared as extras in *Field of Dreams*, a 1989 sports fantasy film directed by Phil Alden Robinson and starring Kevin Costner. Later, they appeared in supporting roles in the 1992 film *School Ties*, directed by Robert Mandel, which starred Brendan Fraser in the title role.

FUN




ARCHIE





CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD






REALITY CHECK



CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5
6		7		8
9	10	11		
12		13	14	
		15		
16	17		18	
		19		

NANCY



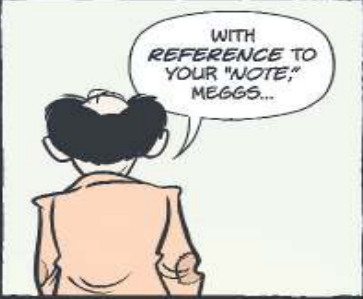


SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS

- Errors
- Repulsive to look at
- Baby cows
- Bite with these
- Find this in a swimming pool
- A topping for cakes
- Put water in this for washing your hands and face
- Least dangerous
- Enormous
- Without any bends

DOWN

- Alps
- Work out the answer to
- Strike with the foot

SOLUTION

S	S	R	S	E			
C	H	I	C	K	N	E	X
C	O	A	S	I	H		
U	T	I	N	G			
P	A	N	D	I	U		
B	U	T	T	E	R	F	L
O	E	V	E	R	T		
A	P	A	R	T	A	D	D
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Thursday
June 20, 2024

Vijayawada

Championing athletes with disabilities

SHRADDHA NEWARE

The Aditya Mehta Foundation, with its headquarters in Hyderabad, is dedicated to promoting community welfare and enabling those with physical disabilities to realise their aspirations.

Irrespective of the several obstacles that came his way, the founder Aditya Mehta brought in the foundation in 2013, making his goal to assist others in realising their potential despite having little to no resources.

In an exclusive interaction with *The Pioneer*, the founder of the first para-sports academy and rehabilitation centre in Asia shares that they evaluate, coach and guide athletes. "Being an athlete with physical limitations, I am aware of how difficult it is since, in most situations, the parents of the athletes we strive to find are hesitant. We must counsel them first. Second, the youngster or athlete who is with us does not have a greater aim after receiving counselling," the founder stated.

For those destined for greater things, this is where the trainers and the team offer to counsel. The para-athletes begin to exercise starting at 5:30 in the morning to improve their abilities and achieve greater objectives.

The former para cyclist further shares, "As a team, we are capable of elevating an individual to Olympic caliber. And without any help from the government or Paralympic authorities, we made history by getting both para cyclists to the Olympics. We did this from the beginning." An ecstatic Aditya feels it to be a great



accomplishment to be acknowledged by the Paralympic committees after obtaining the necessary criteria independently. Thanks to the AMF team's tireless efforts and the exceptional para-athletes. This is a challenging task that requires significant financial assistance and does not come easily. The majority of prostheses and equipment are custom-made; therefore, it will take some time for the para-athletes to have access to them."

While the silver medallist in the Asian Cycling Championship was cycling from Kashmir to Kanyakumari for a fundrais-

ing event, he along with the help of his parents and a close friend saw the value of starting an organisation.

"We have one challenge from day one," shares the double silver medalist and he says, it's the difficulties with money. "Due to the large number of participants, we are still having financial difficulties. People are starting to come forward, but we still need a lot of CSR help. We receive this help ten to fifteen days before the closure of March, and it becomes difficult to spend before March 31st."

He emphasised that they will be able to give back to the community and secure a prominent position in the Paralympics if the funds are provided quarterly.

The organisation has conducted several talent hunt projects across the country in collaboration with organisations that have shown willingness and assistance. They started with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police in Panchkula eight years ago, and they recently held a National Para-Sports Talent Identification Hunt and Training Camp in association with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti in Hyderabad.

With the support of veteran para-athlete coaches, the committed staff of AMF sustains world-class training standards despite their challenges. "Every coach we have employed has competed at the international level and is a former para-athlete working odd jobs. They are employed by us in our capacity." The businessman-turned-activist further continued that they are working for passion and not money.

"They teach various people based on their strengths and attempt to determine

which sports are more appropriate for each person's particular skill level. We list every one of the 28 parasports. Since each kid or person with a disability has a unique set of abilities, we identify them and begin training them in that specific sport. A whole team is working on it. Everyone has contributed their blood, sweat, time and everything else to make our foundation better. My crew and I travel for 300 days out of 365."

While the organisation works hard to be visible and raise awareness, they also have the support of actress Regina Cassandra, being one of the organisation's notable and significant trustees.

The organisation has a lot of goals for the future, and it took them nearly ten years to compete at the world level in the Paralympic Games. Speaking about their organisation's future plans, the passionate para-athlete stated, "I can't speak on it because it's our first Paralympics. However, we want to win 100 medals at the Youth Asian Games in 2025. Every day, the participants exercise with diligence and efficiency, optimising their time and honing their talents. As I often remark, we use athletics to help our physically challenged extended family members earn their dignity. Try leveraging the disadvantages of others."

The foundation has shown a strong desire to achieve in parasports via their dedication, and they continue to set records in the para athletic community. Their passion has contributed to the development and bolstering of Hyderabad's community.

In addition to providing training and support to para-athletes, the Aditya Mehta Foundation also seeks to increase public awareness of and funding for parasports. This week, *The Pioneer* converses with the founder as we go into great depth about their goals and projects.



MALISHKA CHANNELLED HER 'ANXIETY' INTO HER MIC FOR *INSIDE OUT 2*

RIYA KOMMINENI

Mumbai Ki Rani," with her hit show *Morning No. 1* with Malishka, RJ Malishka Mendonsa, has been a well-known voice that brightens residents' mornings. Not only that, but she has provided the Hindi voice of characters in films like *The Incredibles* and *Thor: Ragnarok*.

The radio host attended multiple auditions early in her career because she always thought she had what it took to be in show business. "I was accepted at the first radio station I applied to," she declares. Her first radio station, Win 94.6 FM, shut down after two years because she was so devoted to it. She then joined Red FM, where she has been for a number of years.

Mendonsa believed she had a lot of promise, even though she faced tough competition. The host has been able to combine her personal interests with a variety of themes through her show.

The *Tumhari Sulu* fame always loved to sing and dance and saw herself as a performer when she was little. She was able to assume this job and integrate this element of entertainment with journalism through her radio show. She claims that the show is a collection of important topics. "It's love, it's emotion. It's all of it. Because we've been so well-known over the years for doing these things, our listeners and guests inevitably like having them on the show."

Her first animation performance was in *The Incredibles*, when she provided the voice of the seductive villain Mirage (known as Mona in the Hindi version). Having gone through that, she was asked to try out for the role of 'Anxiety' in the Hindi adaptation of *Inside Out 2*.

Riley, a recently promoted teenager, is reminded of *Inside Out 2* by Disney and Pixar. Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger and Disgust play the same parts as they did in the first movie. But as Riley enters high school and progresses through puberty, feelings of embarrassment, envy, anxiety and ennui surface and he battles with the first feelings. For Riley's welfare, they must put aside their differences and cooperate. She relied on her person-



Inside Out 2 features RJ Malishka as 'Anxiety'. Malishka is a well-known voice, not only from her morning broadcast but also from a few Hindi-dubbed movies. She talks about her new series and provides some fascinating anecdotes about being the voice of 'Anxiety' in an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*.

al experiences during her exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*, saying, "At least once a day, you feel a little bit too anxious about something, whether that be your future or something unknown. I therefore directed that energy onto the microphone, simulating the sensation of being highly apprehensive and stuttering somewhat."

She says that they worked with the dubbing directors to make the necessary changes so that portions of the movie didn't get lost in translation from English to Hindi. But dubbing isn't just about literal translation. The voice of 'Anxiety' claims, "The directors and voiceover performers must also take into account Indian context and customs and incorporate two cultures in a way that the audience can understand." The interviewee goes on, "She believes that *Inside Out 2* is a motion movie that depicts the reality of growing up and navigating unfamiliar and novel emotions."

Malishka also says, "When you're first born, your parents are your safe haven. Everyone loves you and you're the focus of attention. But as you get older and attend school, you have to adjust and grow up a little bit. You have to gain social skills and develop a mild obsession with getting along with people—if I don't, something bad will happen. Riley's experience with trying out for the hockey team, moving to a new school and having to make new friends is covered in the film similarly to this. I think most people who suffer from anxiety would agree that it's not fun. But according to *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 7* fame, 'Anxiety' is a necessary feeling that aids in mental regulation, rather than being portrayed as a villain in the film. 'Joy' is a good emotion to convey the sense that everything is alright. Although anxiety might make you feel bad, it can also serve as a shield. We all eventually discover how to control our feelings and integrate them all under this roof so that we never feel out of balance."

The radio host has acted in a few live-action films in addition to dubbing. She is scheduled to star in Nikhil Advani's next series, *Freedom At Midnight*, as poet and independence warrior Sarojini Naidu. She exclaims that she is thrilled for its release and has enjoyed every step of the process, without giving away too many specifics.

"It's a different thing to shoot for a regular project," she says as our fascinating conversation draws to a close. "Due to the use of prosthetics, the *Freedom At Midnight* look test is very unique. Sarojini Naidu is one of my favourite liberation fighters and I've learned so much from her poems, so this is really wonderful."

Tummy tuck vs. liposuction

In India there are two most popular abdominal contouring procedures - tummy tuck and liposuction. However, the question on everyone's mind is - which one is right for me? So here we bring to answer this question for you.

Aren't those same?

Both tummy tuck and liposuction are excellent procedures designed to address different concerns. Tummy tuck, also known as abdominoplasty, is ideal for individuals who struggle with excess skin and loose muscles in the abdominal area, usually due to pregnancy or significant weight loss. On the other hand, liposuction is perfect for removing stubborn pockets of fat that resist all efforts of diet and exercise.

Neither of these procedures is a substitute for a healthy lifestyle. However, they can help you achieve a toned and contoured abdomen if performed by a skilled and experienced surgeon.

What is done in these body contouring surgeries?

A tummy tuck involves removing excess skin, tightening abdominal muscles, and repositioning the belly button for a flatter and smoother appearance. It can also eliminate stretch marks below the belly button. On

the other hand, liposuction removes localized fat deposits through small incisions and specialised tools. It can be performed on multiple areas of the body, including the abdomen.

So which one is right for you?

The answer lies in your individual goals and concerns. If you have excess skin and stretched abdominal muscles, a tummy tuck can provide dramatic and long-lasting results. However, if you are close to your ideal weight and want to get rid of stubborn fat pockets, liposuction may be a better option.

In my practice, it's always advisable to combine tummy tuck with liposuction, also known as Lipoabdominoplasty.

It has advantages of both procedures and gives a contoured body especially in males or females suffering from belly fat along with saggy skin post weight loss, aging, genetic or post pregnancy.

Each individual is unique, and so are their concerns and goals.

It is essential to understand that both tummy tuck and liposuction are surgical procedures that carry certain risks and require a recovery period. It is crucial to have realistic expectations and follow the post-operative instructions provided by your plastic surgeon for optimal results.



(The author, Dr. Anmol Chugh, is a Consultant, Plastics and Aesthetics Centre, at CK Birla Hospital.)

Kohli expected to shine on big stage as India ponder over Kuldeep question

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

Virat Kohli will be expected to hit his straps after a lean run while left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav will anxiously wait for his chance when title-favourites India face a sprightly Afghanistan in their opening Super 8 fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday. The big talking point ahead of the game is the Indian team combination. Will India go in with the same line-up that worked for them in their group league stage or bring in their best spinner over the last 12 months, Kuldeep, at the expense of a specialist pacer now? At the start of the tournament, skipper Rohit Sharma had expressed his keenness to include all four all-rounders -- Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, and Ravindra Jadeja -- in the playing eleven. That strategy suited the Indian team in the bowler-friendly conditions in New York and the captain is expected to retain the winning combination that stretches their batting till number 8. The only way to fit Kuldeep into the

team is to either drop Mohammed Siraj or Arshdeep Singh for the wily spinner. If that does happen, Siraj is most likely to be benched. If the two practice sessions of the Indian team are an indication, the pitch could offer plenty to the spinners making Kuldeep's case stronger. With the gentle breeze blowing across the Kensington Oval, the pacers should get the ball to swing in the powerplay. As is often the case, all eyes will be on Kohli, who is yet to log a double digit score in the tournament. His strategy to go for his strokes did not yield the desired results in New York but he is expected to be at his imperious best on the better wickets in the Caribbean. The 35-year-old is always operating at 100 per cent and the intensity he showed during the training sessions was a testament to his exemplary work ethic. Shivam Dube, who was brought into the side to hammer sixes in the middle and death overs, has sent the ball out of the park only once in this competition. The pitches in USA did not allow him to go after the spinners. He would be expected to change that in



the Super 8s and beyond. India's premier T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav too was back among runs against USA, albeit not

in his usual swashbuckling style. But the effort was enough to boost his confidence. Besides Kohli, runs are pending

from the bat of Hardik Pandya, who has been exceptional with the ball. On the bowling front, Arshdeep Singh has grown in confidence with

each passing game, playing perfect wingman to Jasprit Bumrah in both the powerplay and death overs. With the surface likely to aid the slower bowlers, Axar and Jadeja would be backing themselves to make a decisive impact in the game. Afghanistan, on the other hand, head into the Super 8 fixtures after a humbling loss to the West Indies in St Lucia. Their bowling attack, which allowed them to boss their first three games, was put to sword by the hard-hitting West Indies batters. Captain Rashid Khan saw the defeat as a blip in an otherwise impressive campaign, insisting that his team remains a worthy contender for a semifinal berth. "As a bowler, you need to come up with plans to keep the scoring to under 10. The morale is still pretty high and this loss does not affect us. We have achieved our first goal of reaching the Super 8s and now it is about taking the next step," Rashid had said. He will be heavily banking on left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi, who provided them with wickets in the powerplay and is currently the leading wicket-taker in the

tournament with 12 scalps. If he can the swing the ball back in like he has thus far, Rohit and Kohli will need to be on high alert. Rashid himself will be looking for wickets at a frugal economy rate in the middle overs. On the batting front, in-form openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran would be once again be crucial to the team's chances.

SQUADS:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Siraj. **Afghanistan:** Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wicketkeeper), Ibrahim Zadran, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Najibullah Zadran, Karim Janat, Rashid Khan (c), Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Hazratullah Zazai, Fareed Ahmad Malik, Mohammad Ishaq, Nangeyalia Kharote.



Kettleborough, Illingworth to officiate blockbuster India, Australia Super 8 match

PTI ■ DUBAI

English duo of Richard Kettleborough and Richard Illingworth will officiate the blockbuster Group 1 Super Eight clash between India and Australia in the ongoing T20 World Cup in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia on June 24. India's opening Super Eight match against Afghanistan on Thursday will be officiated by the Australian pair of Rodney Tucker and Paul Reiffel, while David Boon will be the match referee. England's Michael Gough and South African Adrian Holdstock will officiate India's match against Bangladesh in Antigua on June 22. In other matches, Chris Gaffaney and Kettleborough, both members of the Emirates Elite Panel of ICC Umpires, will be the on-field umpires for USA's historic first-ever knockout match at the T20 World Cup, against South Africa on Wednesday. The co-hosts qualified in second place from Group A, in part thanks to a magnificent Super Over victory against Pakistan and will now take on the Proteas as well as England and fellow co-hosts West Indies in Group 2 of the Super

8s. Joel Wilson will be the TV Umpire for USA versus South Africa match, while he will also stand as on-field umpire alongside Gaffaney when the American team takes on England in Barbados on June 23. Allahudien Paleker, who is making his senior men's tournament debut in this competition, will be the fourth umpire. Illingworth and Michael Gough will oversee Australia's Super 8s opener against Bangladesh, while Nitin Menon and Ahsan Raza are the on-field umpires for England's meeting with the West Indies. Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid, making history in this competition as the first Bangladeshi official at the T20 World Cup, is the TV Umpire for the England versus West Indies match, and will be the on-field umpire alongside Chris Brown for England's second Group 2 game against South Africa. Jeff Crowe, who has overseen more T20Is than anyone else, will be in the match referee for England's clashes against the West Indies and South Africa as well as Australia against India.

Hosts West Indies primed for Super 8 clash against defending champions England

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

An in-form West Indies will be keen to carry the winning momentum but won't underestimate familiar foes England in their opening Super Eight clash of the T20 World Cup which promises to be a run fest here. Both England and West Indies are each competing for an unprecedented third T20 World Cup title. While the hosts are undefeated in the tournament so far, England had a rather anxious group stage and needed arch-rivals Australia's help to keep alive their title defence. Having played catch up after a loss against Australia in the league stage, Jos Buttler and his men now have the opportunity to start afresh. On the other hand, West

Indies, who head to the fixture on the back of an eight-match winning streak, put up a sensational display against Afghanistan, notching a huge 104-run win at the Darren Sammy National Cricket Stadium. They once again head to the stadium that holds the name of their head coach and two-time T20 World Cup-winning captain in search of a similar result. "It's not necessarily to send them (England) a message (the huge win against Afghanistan). It's just to show them that as much as they are playing good cricket, we're playing good cricket - so come Wednesday night it should be a very good game," skipper Rowman Powell said at the pre-match press conference. West Indies are performing as



a cohesive unit. Their batters have taken responsibility and stood up every time the team needed someone -- be it Shane Rutherford or Nicholas Pooran. Their bowlers too have done their job. The flat pitches and relatively short square boundaries here

are a paradise for batters with all matches played here so far being a high-scoring affairs. But the batters will have to be carefully negotiate the cross winds that sends some balls flying unexpectedly for six and others swirling. Pooran targeted them ruthlessly

against Afghanistan. West Indies will bank on their left-arm spin duo of Akeal Hosein and Gudakesh Moti against England's predominantly right-handed batting lineup. While the pitch favours batters, the extra bounce still offers incentive for the quicks and left-arm medium pacer Obed McCoy's role will also become important. England pacers Jofra Archer and Mark Wood would also be keen to make most of the conditions. The two teams have clashed rather regularly in the past and are well aware of each other's strength and weaknesses. "When we play the English guys so often, we play them actually every year, so they know a lot about us, we know a lot about them," Powell said.

"It's just that when you're playing the game on the day, whoever gets on top has to stay on top for as long as possible."

TEAMS (FROM)

West Indies Squad: Rowman Powell (c), Brandon King, Johnson Charles, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Sherfane Rutherford, Andre Russell, Romario Shepherd, Roston Chase, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Gudakesh Motie, Obed McCoy, Shamar Joseph, Shimron Hetmyer and Shai Hope. **England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley and Mark Wood.

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

Mitchell Marsh is not just a captain but a true leader, Marcus Stoinis said eulogising his teammate but added that the current Australia group is easy to lead with everyone aware of their roles in specific situations. Marsh has been tasked with leading Australia to their second T20 World Cup title. "Mitchie is not a captain but a leader. The way he gets the groups together inspires it," fellow all-rounder Stoinis said on the "Unplayable" podcast. "He's been a leader for a longtime in this group. He has captained in the past at a younger age as well." It is not just Stoinis that has lavished praise on the all-rounder, the rest of the team also speaks highly of the 'Bison'. Marsh has had a love hate relationship with the fans, who booed him when his performance dropped leading the all-rounder to claim "most of Australia hates me". But Marsh witnessed a resurgence last year and has now become a fan favourite. He made his way back into the Test team and starred in Australia's stunning World Cup win in India. He also performed well in

Marsh not just a captain but a leader: Stoinis



T20s. He was awarded with the prestigious Allan Border medal earlier this year. But Marsh was perhaps destined for big things given his father, Geoff Marsh was a former Australian ODI captain and World Cup winning coach. Growing up, he was surrounded by the likes of legendary captains Allan Border, Mark Taylor and Steve Waugh and that seems to have rubbed off on him. The 32-year-old had captained the Australian Under-19 team to the World Cup trophy, back in 2010. He also led Perth Scorchers in 31 matches in the Big

Bash League and was captain of the 2017-18 Marsh Cup-winning Western Australian team before graduating to become Australian T20 captain. Under his captaincy, Australia have entered the Super Eight stage at the ongoing T20 World Cup on the back of an unbeaten run in the group stage. Stoinis feels Marsh has it easy with the group in the West Indies with everyone knowing their roles and functioning like clockwork but the all-rounder is more then capable of being "creative" when required. "Not taking anything away (from Marsh), I think this group particularly is quite an easy group to lead. We have four best quicks, best spinner in the world and all-rounders. It's pretty much like clock work, most of us know when to bowl, where to field," Stoinis said. Australia have played all their group games in the Caribbean where the pitches can play slow and low, and may turn more as the World Cup wears on.



Mandhana, Harmanpreet hundreds carry India to imposing 325/3 against SA

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Smriti Mandhana's stylish Seventh one-day hundred, her second in as many matches, and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's belligerent century lifted India to a formidable 325 for three against South Africa in the second women's ODI here on Wednesday. Mandhana 136 (120b, 18x4, 2x6) and Harmanpreet 103 not out (88b, 9x4, 3x6), her sixth ODI ton, milked 171 runs for the third wicket, and ran roughshod over the Proteas bowlers after being asked to bat first. South African skipper Laura Wolvaardt's decision to have a bowl seemed vindicated as new-ball bowlers, Ayabonga Khaka and Masabata Klaas, found appreciable bounce and movement under overcast skies. In fact, Khaka started with two maidens in a row as Mandhana, whom she later dropped on 69 off left-arm spinner Nondumiso Shangase, and Shafali Verma struggled for a move-on. India's first boundary came only in the sixth over, a pull by Shafali off Klaas, but the opener departed soon after being ousted by left-arm spinner Noku Mlaba. A period of consolidation followed as Mandhana and Dayalan Hemalatha added 62 runs for the second wicket in which the latter was the more

dominant presence. Hemalatha (24), who clubbed Shangase for two sixes, looked good for more but her attempt to slog-sweep Klaas ended in the hands of Anneke Bosch. However, the arrival of skipper Harmanpreet changed the complexion of the innings as run-rate of India, which was hovering around 4 till then, first soared past five and then six runs an over. Mandhana hammered Shangase for three fours in a row, a period which included a total of five fours across six balls, took her to the 90s. Harmanpreet, who was grassed on 41 by Klaas off her own bowling, straightaway slipped into rhythm and pulled Sune Luus to start her scoring. The right-hander's aggressive intentions only grew with the innings as she punished Klaas for a four and six in successive balls. The SA bowlers tried to curtail the free-flowing Smriti, bowling wide off her off-stump. While the strategy was worth giving a go, they erred in line so much as the India vice-captain garnered a clutch of boundaries without much effort. She reached her hundred off 103 balls with a single off Luus, and later Harmanpreet joined her deputy with a boundary off Klaas in the final over. India plundered 118 runs in the last 10 overs, feeding on some shoddy bowling and fielding by the visitors.

Williamson steps down as NZ's white ball captain, declines national contract

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson decided to forego his national contract for the 2024-25 season and also stepped down from white-ball captaincy to extend his international career, following the Black Caps' shock early exit from the T20 World Cup. "Helping push the team forward across the formats is something I'm very passionate about and something I want to keep contributing towards," the 33-year-old said in a New Zealand Cricket (NZC) release on Wednesday. "However, pursuing an overseas opportunity during the New Zealand summer means I'm unable to accept a central contract offer." The Black Caps have very little international cricket scheduled during the January window and Williamson, who had stepped down from Test captaincy in December 2022, will be available to play all three formats outside that month. "Playing for New Zealand is

something I treasure, and my desire to give back to the team remains undiminished," he said. "My life outside cricket has changed, however. Spending more time with my family and enjoying experiences with them at home or abroad is something that's even more important to me." The Black Caps are scheduled to compete in eight Tests, including a tour of India and then a three-match home series against England in November-December, before Christmas. There are a number of T20 leagues such as UAE's ILT20, South Africa's SA20, Australia's BBL and Bangladesh's BPL which are set to clash in January. New Zealand's Super Smash could also be scheduled during the same time period. The leagues will be followed by the ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan in February-March. Players accepting the NZC central contracts must be available for both international and the domestic Super Smash



competition. NZC CEO Scott Weenink said Williamson has earned the right to take some time off to pursue other goals, including family-oriented priorities.

"This is a good way to help keep Kane in the international game so that he continues to play a major role for the BLACKCAPS - both now and in the years to come," said

Weenink. "We have very little international cricket in New Zealand through January and outside that period he's still the

For *Nindha* director, the film is a fusion of mystery & realism

K. RAMYA SREE

As the release of *Nindha* draws near, anticipation mounts among Telugu cinema enthusiasts eager to experience a narrative that promises to blur the lines between reality and mystery. Directed and produced by Rajesh Jagannatham under The Fervent Indie Productions banner, *Nindha* stars Varun Sandesh in a pivotal role and is slated to hit theatres on June 21. In an exclusive interview, Rajesh Jagannatham offered insights into the genesis of the project, its thematic elements, and the creative process behind bringing it to life.

"Many have speculated about *Nindha* since the unveiling of its intriguing poster captioned 'Kandrakota Mystery'," Rajesh Jagannatham begins, addressing the film's origins. "While

the title may evoke supernatural connotations, the essence of *Nindha* lies in its depiction of real events intertwined with fictional narrative elements. It's a deliberate choice aimed at engaging our audience right from the outset," he adds.

Casting Varun Sandesh, the director says, was a perfect fit for the role in the film. Explaining his choice of Varun Sandesh for the lead role, Rajesh Jagannatham shares, "Varun's portrayal in *Nindha* marks a significant comeback for him. I believed he possessed the ideal blend of charisma and depth required to breathe life into the character. His involvement added a layer of authenticity to the storytelling process."

Transitioning from discussing casting choices to production challenges, Rajesh Jagannatham reflects on his decision to take on the dual roles of director and producer: "Initially seeking external producers, I eventually took the reins

With the upcoming release *Nindha* nearing its release, director Rajesh Jagannatham offered insights into the genesis of the project and its thematic elements.

myself out of sheer belief in the narrative's potential. It was a learning curve, balancing creative vision with logistical realities, but one that ultimately strengthened my commitment to the project."

When asked about his expectations for audience reception, Rajesh Jagannatham exudes confidence asserting, "Drawing inspiration from impactful Malayalam cinema, *Nindha* aims to resonate with viewers on an emotional and intellectual level. I believe it will be a film that everyone can appreciate for its narrative depth and cinematic craftsmanship."

Looking ahead, Rajesh Jagannatham hints at future projects. "While *Nindha* remains my immediate focus, I have scripts ready for exploration. My passion lies in directing meaningful stories that resonate with audiences, and I look forward to continuing this journey," he revealed.



SAKSHI VAIDYA INTRODUCED AS 'NITYA' IN SHARWANAND'S NEXT

Sharwanand, known for his charismatic presence on screen, is currently on a spree with a series of exciting projects lined up. Following the recent release of *Manamey*, the actor is now immersed in the shooting of his 37th film under the direction of Ram Abbaraju, the talent behind the sensational hit *Samajavaragamana*. Produced by Ramabrahmam Sunkara of AK Entertainments in association with Adventures International Pvt Ltd, this film promises to be an engaging family entertainer.

On Wednesday, on the occasion of her birthday, the makers announced the introduction of Sakshi Vaidya as Nitya in the film. Sakshi will portray the role of an architect and will be seen opposite Sharwanand, marking her debut alongside the charming star.

Excited about the project, Sakshi Vaidya joins the ensemble cast as film-ing progresses swiftly in Hyderabad. The production boasts music by Vishal Chandra Shekar, cinematography by Gnana Shekhar VS, and a compelling storyline crafted by Bhanu Bogavarapu, with Nandu Savirigana penning the dialogues. Art direction is helmed by Brahma Kadali, while Ajay Sunkara serves as the co-producer alongside Kishore Garikipati as the ex-producer.

FIRST SINGLE FROM DULQUER SALMAAN'S *LUCKY BASKHAR* OUT NOW

Dulquer Salmaan, celebrated for his versatile roles in Telugu cinema with hits like *Mahanati* and *Sita Ramam*, is set to mesmerise audiences once again in the character-driven drama *Lucky Baskhar*. Directed by the acclaimed Venky Atluri and produced on a grand scale by Sithara Entertainments, the film has already garnered immense anticipation following its captivating teaser release. The latest treat for fans comes in the form of the film's first single, *Srimathi Garu*, composed by the national award-winning maestro GV Prakash Kumar. Released on Wednesday (June 19), the song introduces a musical journey that promises to tug at heartstrings.

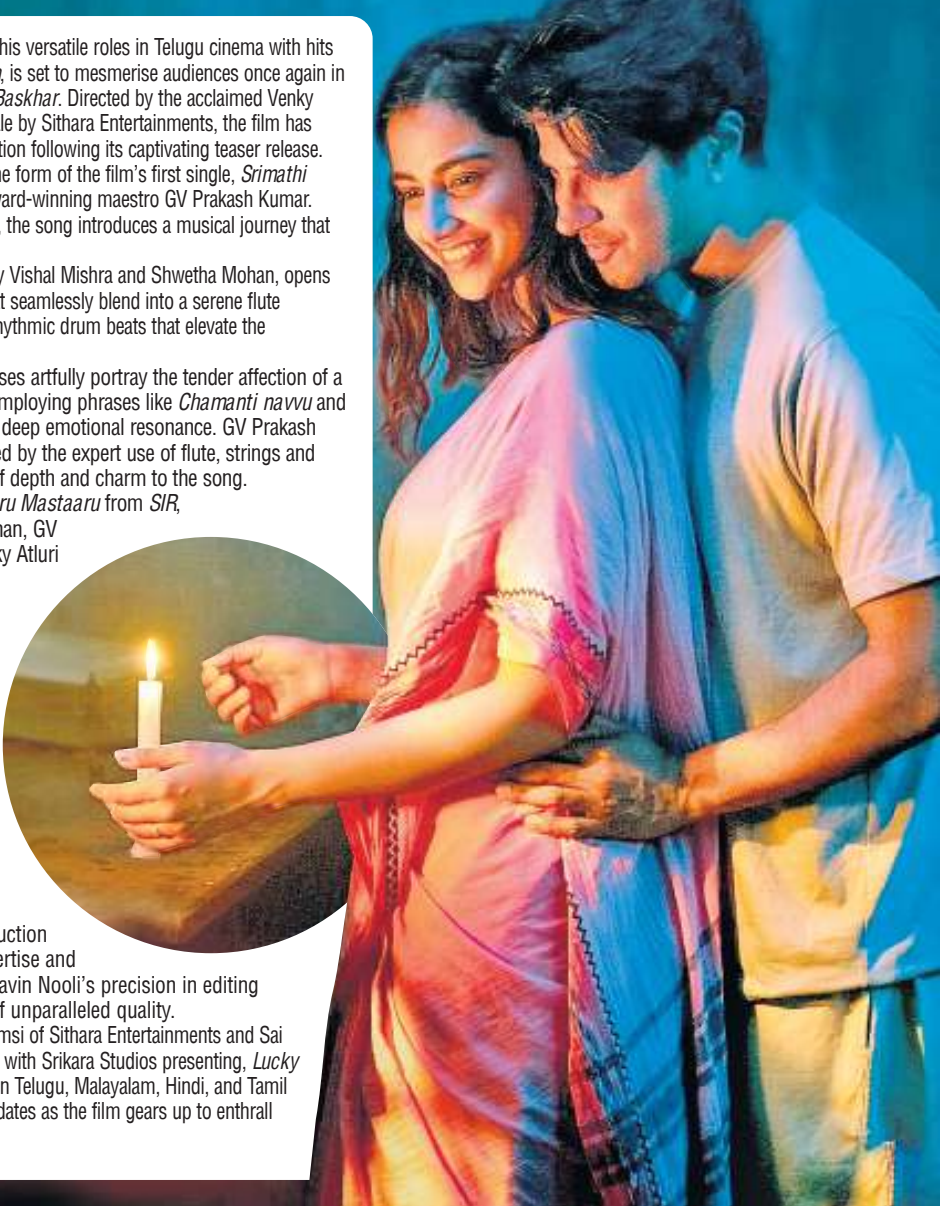
Srimathi Garu, voiced beautifully by Vishal Mishra and Shwetha Mohan, opens with enchanting violin melodies that seamlessly blend into a serene flute arrangement, enriched further by rhythmic drum beats that elevate the composition to grandeur.

Lyricist Shreemani's poignant verses artfully portray the tender affection of a husband towards his irate wife, employing phrases like *Chamanti navvu* and *Paluke oo Vennapoosa* to evoke deep emotional resonance. GV Prakash Kumar's live orchestration, marked by the expert use of flute, strings and subtle percussions, adds layers of depth and charm to the song.

Following the success of *Mastaru Mastaru* from *SIR*, the collaboration of Shwetha Mohan, GV Prakash Kumar and director Venky Atluri promises another heart-touching melody that is sure to linger in listeners' hearts.

In *Lucky Baskhar*, Meenakshi Chaudhary stars opposite Dulquer Salmaan, portraying pivotal roles in a narrative set against the backdrop of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The film chronicles the journey of an ordinary bank cashier who achieves extraordinary success, captured with visual finesse by ace cinematographer Nimish Ravi.

Adding to the film's allure, production designer Banglan's creative expertise and national award-winning editor Navin Nooli's precision in editing ensure a cinematic experience of unparalleled quality. Produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi of Sithara Entertainments and Sai Soujanya of Fortune Four Cinemas, with Sri Kara Studios presenting, *Lucky Baskhar* is set for a global release in Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, and Tamil languages. Stay tuned for more updates as the film gears up to enthrall audiences worldwide.



Shraddha Kapoor confirms relationship with Rahul Mody

Shraddha Kapoor, known for maintaining a private stance on her personal life, has finally put an end to speculation surrounding her relationship status. Despite keeping mum about her romantic life in the past, Kapoor recently took to her social media to share a telling moment with Rahul Mody, confirming their relationship.

In a heartfelt Instagram Story, Kapoor posted a sun-kissed selfie featuring herself and Mody. She was adorned in a stylish white top complemented by delicate gold jewellery, while Mody sported a crisp white shirt. The couple leaned in close, posing affectionately for the camera. Alongside the picture, Kapoor playfully wrote, "*Dil rakh le, neend to vaapis de de yaar*." (Translation: Keep my heart but give me my sleep back), accompanied by several emojis, including a heart.

This declaration comes after months of speculation fueled by sightings of the duo together, including notable appearances at events like Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's pre-wedding celebrations in Jamnagar. Prior to this public acknowledgment, Kapoor had subtly hinted at her bond with Mody through social media, notably wearing a pendant engraved with the letter 'R' in one of her posts, sparking curiosity among eagle-eyed fans.



Director Teja unveils *Police Vari Heccharika* title logo

Director Teja, a revered figure among youth audiences, inaugurated the title logo of the upcoming film *Police Vari Heccharika* on Tuesday. The film, helmed by Abhyudaya director Babji under the banner of Tulika Tanishk Creations and produced by Belli Janardhan, promises to deliver a powerful mass appeal.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony, director Teja expressed his confidence in the film's title, emphasising its potential to draw audiences to theaters. "The title *Police Vari Heccharika* is unique and has the strength to attract viewers. It's a powerful mass title that I believe will contribute to the film's success," Teja remarked.

Producer Belli Janardhan expressed his delight at commencing the film's publicity under the guidance of Director Teja, considering it an auspicious start for their project. Director Babji added, "We have completed shooting in picturesque locations across both Telugu states and currently, the post-production work is underway."

With the momentum building around *Police Vari Heccharika*, anticipation grows for this upcoming film that promises to make a strong impact in Telugu cinema.



Kamal Haasan shares heartwarming moment with Prabhas

The excitement surrounding the upcoming release of *Kalki 2898 AD* has reached high since the unveiling of its teaser, particularly among fans and industry insiders eager to witness Prabhas in a groundbreaking new role. The film, a visual spectacle set to feature legendary actors including Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan and Deepika Padukone, promises to redefine cinematic boundaries.

In a recent revelation, veteran actor Kamal Haasan, known for his illustrious career spanning both southern and northern cinema, shared a touching anecdote about his experience working with Prabhas on the set of *Kalki 2898 AD*. Reflecting on his involvement in the project, Kamal Haasan humorously recalled, "About my participation, nobody believed I was a part of *Project K* (laughs)." He went on to recount a heartfelt moment with Prabhas, the film's protagonist, saying, "The funny thing is, yesterday, Prabhas just held my hand and said thank you. He said, 'I couldn't believe till today that you're a part of this.'"

The mutual respect and admiration between the two acclaimed actors highlight the camaraderie on set, underscoring Prabhas' humility and appreciation for his co-stars. Aside from *Kalki 2898 AD*, Kamal Haasan continues to forge ahead with an exciting lineup of projects, including the highly anticipated *Indian 2* alongside Rakul Preet Singh, cementing his status as a stalwart of Indian cinema.

Sundeep Kishan begins shooting for his next with Trinadha Rao Nakkina

Actor Sundeep Kishan embarks on a significant milestone with his 30th film, titled *#SK30*, under the direction of the acclaimed filmmaker Trinadha Rao Nakkina, known for his blockbuster entertainers. Jointly produced by AK Entertainments, Hasya Movies and Zee Studios, the film is set to be a wholesome family entertainer, promising a blend of love and emotions. The project, which was recently launched with much fanfare, has now commenced its regular shooting schedule from Wednesday in Hyderabad. With a focus on grandeur and heartfelt storytelling, *#SK30* aims to captivate audiences with its unique narrative and refreshing characterisations.

Director Trinadha Rao Nakkina is set to present Sundeep Kishan in a completely new light, showcasing the actor in a role that promises to be both distinctive and engaging. Renowned writer Prasanna Kumar Bezawada, known for his successful collaborations with Trinadha Rao Nakkina, has crafted the story, screenplay, and dialogues, ensuring a signature blend of entertainment and emotional depth.

The film's crew includes a talented lineup of young technicians, with Leon James composing the music, Nizar Shafi handling cinematography, Chota K Prasad editing and Brahma Kadali overseeing art direction, all contributing to elevating the cinematic experience.

Produced by Rajesh Danda with Balaji Gutta as the co-producer, *#SK30* is poised to be a noteworthy addition to Sundeep Kishan's filmography, promising audiences an unforgettable cinematic journey.

