

Monday Mirchi

TG BABUS AFTER TWO UNION MINISTERS FROM STATE

Post elections, it is natural for babus who are not apolitical to send feelers to netas of the ruling party, be it at the Centre or in the states, for securing convenient posts to accelerate their bureaucratic career. In Telangana, this time, breaking norms, many bureaucrats have directly approached the two new Union Ministers picked from the state -- Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay. Several others are using their contacts to push their names for getting suitable postings with the two Ministers' blessings. Among those who have reached out to the Ministers are some very popular names seen as those who otherwise would not want to go to Delhi. With nearly 60 such applicants jockeying for positions, their peers, for who regime change does not make much of a difference, are wondering who all would make it.

CONGRESS WEAPONISES ARVIND KUMAR'S LETTER

Sufi mystic Jalal al-Din Mu'ammad Rumi once remarked: "Do a good deed and throw it in the river, one day it will come back to you in the desert". It has come true in the case of Special CS Arvind Kumar in Telangana. Seven years after he had written an exemplary letter to the state government under the previous dispensation questioning the wisdom of its Power Purchase Agreement with the Chhattisgarh government, it has now become the talk of the town and a solid piece of evidence. Six months ago, Arvind was targeted by the new government for his decisions relating to Formula E and ORR, among others. But over the past two weeks, his name has been doing the rounds in official circles because of the letter he wrote in 2017. The Revanth government wants that letter to be highlighted in the media. In fact, requests came in to republish it in the context of the ongoing probe. For newbies, in 2017, senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar was shunted out as secretary of the Industries Department and appointed as Resident Commissioner of Telangana Bhavan for sending the very same letter. Now, bureaucratic circles are discussing if eventually Arvind will make a comeback just like he did in BRS regime. Some say, the chances of his comeback are bleak.

HERE'S WHY DHARMA REDDY WAS SENT PACKING

What beat official circles in AP is that former Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Executive Officer Dharma Reddy got 7 days'

leave before being transferred. Yours truly detected the reasons behind the generous leave as a top-up, instead of a plain transfer. After being sworn in as Chief Minister of AP, Chandrababu Naidu wanted to go to Tirumala but he did not want to see Dharma Reddy's face. However, he could not immediately decide on the next EO. So, they sent Dharama Reddy packing.

THE AURA OF KRISHNA TEJA

Among Jana Senani, for some reasons, 2015 batch Kerala cadre IAS officer Krishna Teja had been quite popular ever since Pawan Kalyan took charge as the Deputy Chief Minister. Even as his name was doing the rounds, there were whispers in the corridors of power to make him OSD to Pawan Kalyan. Things moved fast, though many bureaucrats are still clueless as to what makes him so special and why he was cherry-picked. Yours truly is on the job. Watch this space for details.

LEGAL THEN, ILLEGAL NOW

Noticeably, only upon regime change babus choose to visibly nail the misdeeds of the previous government with 'concrete evidence'. When YSRCP was in power, bureaucrats were silent over the construction of YSR Congress party office at Tadepally, near Vijayawada. After the Telugu Desam Party-led combine came to power, the bureaucrats unabashedly acted post haste to raze the same office building, saying it was an illegal construction. When YSRCP had come to power in 2019, babus found several deeds of the previous TDP government to be illegal. Looks like babus determine the legality of structures or whatever only upon regime change.

THE CORE OF ADMINISTRATION CHANGES

One of the collateral damages of quinquennial elections is that the core of the administration, comprising seasoned officials, is changed by default. Upon regime change in Andhra Pradesh, many IAS/IPS officers across the state have been transferred. Last week, Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad issued orders transferring 37 IAS officers, with more than a dozen of them being asked to report to the General Administration Department. A little bird told us that those asked to report to the GAD were blatant supporters of the previous government, including Srialakshmi, Rajat Bhargava and Praveen Prakash.

-- Yours truly

Row over...

Continued from Page 1

The President has appointed Kodikunnil Suresh (Congress), T R Baalu (DMK), Radha Mohan Singh and Faggan Singh Kulaste (both BJP) and Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC) to assist Mahtab in administering the oath/affirmation to the newly elected members of the Lok Sabha.

After the panel of chairpersons, the pro-tem speaker will administer the oath/affirmation as Lok Sabha members to the Council of Ministers. The members from states, in alphabetical order, will take oath or make affirmation over the next two days.

The election to the post of Lok Sabha Speaker will take place on Wednesday and the prime minister will introduce his council of ministers to the House soon after.

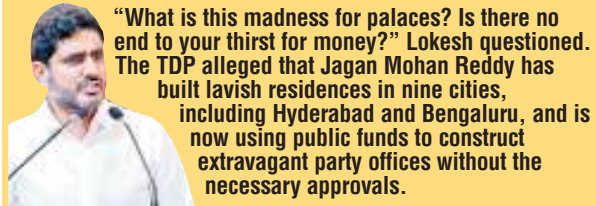
The President is scheduled to address the joint sit-

Lokesh slams allocation of govt land by Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

IT Minister Nara Lokesh has levelled serious accusations against former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on X (formerly Twitter) regarding the allocation of government land for party offices. Lokesh claimed that 42 acres of land across 26 districts were allocated to the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) at a nominal lease cost of Rs 1,000 for 33 years.

In his social media post, Lokesh wrote, "You allocated 42 acres of land in 26 districts for YSRCP at a meagre cost of Rs 1,000 lease for 33 years." He also shared over a dozen pic-



"What is this madness for palaces? Is there no end to your thirst for money?" Lokesh questioned. The TDP alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy has built lavish residences in nine cities, including Hyderabad and Bengaluru, and is now using public funds to construct extravagant party offices without the necessary approvals.

tures of the alleged YSRCP offices under construction in various parts of the state.

According to Lokesh, the land, valued at approximately Rs 600 crore, could have been used to provide one cent of land each for 4,200 poor families. He drew a parallel to another expenditure, stating

cities, including Hyderabad and Bengaluru, and is now using public funds to construct extravagant party offices without the necessary approvals.

Lokesh asserted that 42.24 acres of government land in 26 districts were allotted for YSRCP offices under a 33-year lease at Rs 1,000 per acre. "The value of the 42.24 acres land is Rs 688 crore while more than Rs 500 crore of public money is being spent to build these palaces," he claimed. The TDP also noted that permissions for YSRCP offices were obtained only in the Prakasam district.

Amarnath in centre of storm over illegal construction

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former minister Gudivada Amarnath is at the centre of a growing controversy over an unauthorized construction in Gajuwaka, raising serious questions about regulatory adherence and the misuse of political influence during his tenure with the YCP. A five-story shopping mall, prominently located adjacent to the National Highway, was erected without the necessary permissions from the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC). This incident has exposed potential favouritism and double standards within the municipal regulatory framework.

During the YCP regime, GVMC officials swiftly demolished

a building owned by the current TDP state president and Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivasa Rao for similar regulatory violations. In stark contrast, these same officials have ignored the unauthorized structure built by Amarnath, sparking accusations of biased enforcement and undue favouritism.

Amarnath's property, a 400-yard plot near the highway at Chattivanipalem, was under an online application for a commercial complex less than two years ago. Despite paying the required application fee, the approval process stalled due to the incomplete Road Development Plan (RDP). The proposed site is part of an 80-meter road expansion master plan, requiring a GVMC survey and potential compensation for landowners.



However, Amarnath proceeded with construction without the necessary approvals.

The building violates several regulations, including a mandatory 20-foot front setback and

complete side setbacks.

Additionally, it encroaches upon a proposed road expansion leading to Chattivanipalem village, which is set to widen to 30 feet. Town planning officials from the Gajuwaka zone issued notices to Amarnath for unauthorized construction, setback violations, and building additional floors without approval. Amarnath allegedly contacted a key GVMC official, instructing the town planning team to disregard these violations. This issue has resurfaced after YCP's loss of power and Amarnath's electoral defeat in Gajuwaka. The contrasting enforcement actions are stark. MLA Palla Srinivasa Rao complied with all regulatory requirements for his shopping complex, yet his building was demolished by GVMC officials during the

YCP government, citing the master plan for highway expansion.

Amarnath defends his actions, stating that he applied for a construction plan with GVMC for the inherited 400-yard plot, paid all necessary fees, and registered the land for road widening. He insists that the plan remains pending due to the incomplete RDP and asserts he has fulfilled all tax obligations to the government. As GVMC faces mounting pressure to act, the community is closely monitoring to see if the corporation will enforce regulations impartially or continue to exhibit double standards.

The outcome of this situation will be a crucial indicator of the current administration's commitment to fair governance and the rule of law.

CBI files FIR over...

Continued from Page 1

The Gujarat government, meanwhile, issued a notification on Sunday, handing over the probe to the CBI. Additional Chief Secretary A K Rakesh issued the notification handing over the case registered at the Godhra Taluka police station on May 8 under IPC sections related to criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal breach of trust among others. The central agency plans to take over the investigation of the cases registered by the police in Gujarat and Bihar, the officials said.

The CBI action came a day after the ministry announced it would hand over the probe into the alleged irregularities to the central agency, a demand raised by a section of protesting students. "The ministry of education has requested the CBI to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the entire gamut of alleged irregularities, including conspiracy, cheating, impersonation, breach of trust and destruction of evidence by candidates, institutes and middlemen," a CBI spokesperson said.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a decisive move to revive the Film Nagar Cultural Centre (FNCC), Bheemunipatnam MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao announced a series of rejuvenation measures on Sunday. Speaking at a press conference at FNCC in Rushikonda on Sunday, Srinivasa Rao decried the recent inclusion of non-film background members and called for their voluntary resignation.

Highlighting the FNCC's origins, Srinivasa Rao noted its establishment by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government during the 2014-19 period to boost film shootings and elevate Visakhapatnam as a premier movie industry location. "The FNCC was created to be a hub for filmmakers, a place where the industry could thrive in Visakhapatnam," he said. However, he alleged that since the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) took power in 2019,



the centre's reputation has suffered due to the actions of YSRCP supporters.

"The original purpose of the FNCC has been diluted," Srinivasa Rao asserted, criticizing the admission of numerous members without a film background. "This has led to a decline in the quality and focus of the centre. We need to bring back the original members who have a genuine interest and stake in the film industry." The MLA outlined a com-

prehensive plan to restore FNCC's status. "I have discussed the matter with Cinematography Minister Kandula Durgesh," Srinivasa Rao said, emphasizing that steps will be taken to address the grievances of original members and restore the centre's prominence. He encouraged founding members to rejoin FNCC, promising full support from the government. "We will ensure that the FNCC once again becomes a vibrant hub for film activities."

Renowned producer and FNCC core committee member KS Rama Rao, along with several others, attended the press conference, showing their support for the initiative. KS Rama Rao expressed optimism about the revival plans, stating, "This is a much-needed intervention to bring back the glory of FNCC. With the support of the government and the film community, we can make Visakhapatnam a key destina-

tion for filmmakers."

Srinivasa Rao also addressed the practical aspects of supporting film productions in the city. He pledged comprehensive support for film shootings in Visakhapatnam, including facilitating permissions and providing logistical assistance. "We are committed to making the process of shooting films in Visakhapatnam as smooth as possible," he said. "This city has the potential to become a central hub for the film industry, and we will do everything in our power to make that happen."

The MLA also assured that a dedicated committee would be formed to oversee the revitalization efforts and to ensure that the grievances of the original members are addressed promptly. "We have received a list of grievances, and we promise to address each one of them," he said. "Our goal is to create an environment where filmmakers feel welcomed and supported."

Free bus...

Continued from Page 1

In the sports sector, Reddy lamented that athletes in Andhra Pradesh are falling behind and stressed the importance of providing infrastructure and fostering enthusiasm and a sports spirit among players.

He urged athletes to maintain physical fitness to participate in various events.

Reddy criticised the Youth Services and Sports Department's condition during the YSRCP regime and revealed plans to organize events throughout the year across the state.

He also noted that the previous government, led by Jagan Mohan Reddy, failed to fully merge APSRTC into the state government, did not purchase new buses, and neglected repairs of existing buses.

He alleged that properties worth crores were given to private individuals on a BOT basis during the YSRCP regime. A committee will be formed to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into these actions.

Transport Department Additional Secretary Narasimha Reddy, APSRTC Executive Director K.S. Brahmananda Reddy, and Youth Services Deputy Director Rama Krishna were also present.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Krishna Paksha

Tithi:

Tritiya:

Jun 24 03:26 AM

to Jun 25 01:23 AM

Chaturthi:

Jun 25 01:23 AM

to Jun 25 11:11 PM

Nakshatram:

Uttara Ashadha:

Jun 23 05:03 PM

to Jun 24 03:54 PM

Shravana:

Jun 24 03:54 PM

to Jun 25 02:32 PM

Rahukalam:

7:25 AM to 9:03 AM

Yamagandam:

10:40 AM to 12:18 PM

Varjyam:

07:40 PM to 09:11 PM

Gulika:

1:56 PM to 3:34 PM

Amritakalam:

09:48 AM to 11:20 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham:

11:52 AM to 12:44 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 36°

Humidity: 64%

Sunrise: 5:37 AM

Sunset: 6:43 PM

Updated: June 23, 2024 5:00 PM

Drowning cases at Bapatla beach raise an alarm

Minister Gottipati reviews situation with officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Residents of Vetapalem mandal in Bapatla district are alarmed by a series of accidents at Ramapuram beach, resulting in eight deaths in June alone. Most recently, on Sunday afternoon, two individuals from Mangalagiri in Guntur district tragically drowned.

In response, Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar convened a review meeting to address these incidents and discuss necessary safety measures with relevant authorities. During the meeting, the Minister ques-

tioned the district SP and other senior officials about the lack of preventive actions despite the ongoing accidents and fatalities. He emphasised the urgent need to deploy expert swimmers and install warning indicators, suggesting collaboration with the Marine Police. Officials pointed out that the presence of nearby resorts contributes to the risk, as vacationing youths are more prone to accidents. The Minister urged resort owners to share the responsibility of accident prevention.

Anna Canteens to serve affordable meals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

After a hiatus of five years, Anna Canteens, revered as a lifeline for the underprivileged, are preparing to once again serve economical meals across Andhra Pradesh. Originally launched during the TDP regime, these canteens offered nutritious meals at a nominal cost of Rs 5 per plate, catering specifically to daily wage earners and the destitute.

The closure of Anna Canteens in 2019, following a change in government, left many of their premises abandoned or repurposed. However, with the recent electoral victory of the TDP-JSP-BJP alliance in the 2024 Andhra Pradesh elections, the revival of these canteens emerged as a top priority. On his first day in office, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu swiftly moved to reopen these facilities, underscoring their significance for the state's marginalized communities.

Preparations for the reopening are already underway, with Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) offi-

cials initiating cleanup operations at the canteen sites. This initiative aims to restore the buildings to their former role as hubs of sustenance and support for those in need. Originally established in 2018 across 25 locations in Visakhapatnam alone, including key areas such as hospitals, markets, and transport hubs, Anna Canteens quickly became integral to the daily lives of thousands. Offering meals that ranged from breakfast tiffins to wholesome lunches and dinners, these canteens served around 5,000 for breakfast and 7,000 for lunch and dinner combined during their peak operations.

The decision to reopen has been met with widespread enthusiasm from the local population, especially daily labourers and urban poor who relied on these affordable

meals. "I used to depend on Anna Canteen for my meals when I couldn't afford anything else," said Ramesh, a construction worker from Visakhapatnam. "I'm relieved they are reopening. It's a huge help for people like us."

With efforts to finalize logistics and ensure operational readiness underway, the reopening of Anna Canteens signifies not only a return to routine for many but also a reaffirmation of the state's commitment to social welfare.

As GVMC officials continue their efforts to prepare these facilities for the public once more, anticipation among the community grows for the day when Anna Canteens will once again open their doors, offering not just meals but a renewed sense of hope and support.

Kejriwal moves...

Continued from Page 1

The court had listed the plea for hearing on July 10.

In its bail order, the trial court had held that prima facie, Kejriwal's guilt was yet to be established and that the ED had failed to furnish direct evidence linking him to the proceeds of crime in the money-laundering case.

The excise policy was scrapped in 2022 after the Delhi lieutenant governor ordered a CBI probe into alleged irregularities and corruption involving its formulation and execution.

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The brutal incident was recorded on CCTV cameras at the supermarket. Local media reported that investigators say an unknown suspect entered the store, shot the victim, and took items. Police are working to identify the suspect. Srikanth, a close friend, is raising funds on GoFundMe for the repatriation of Gopikrishna's remains. "We are devastated by this shocking event and are doing everything we can to support his family," Srikanth stated. Gopikrishna is survived by his parents, wife, and child. His mortal remains are expected to reach his hometown on Wednesday.

Man from AP shot dead in...

CM promises help...

Continued from Page 1

Gopikrishna, 32, from Yajali village in Bapatla district, went to the US for work about a year ago and was reportedly shot at by a thief at the retail outlet where he was working, around 11.30 local time there on Friday. A video of the incident has gone viral in which a masked man wearing shorts and a cap is seen shooting multiple times at Gopikrishna and then stealing some items and cash from the retail outlet where the victim worked. Gopikrishna's parents D Srinivasa Rao and Dhanalakshmi are inconsolable over the news of their son's death in the faraway country and are awaiting the return of his body.

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Notification out for VMC Standing panel election

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar, on Sunday, released the election notification for VMC standing committee members. As per the Municipal Administration & Urban Development G.O.Ms.No.49, six members can be selected to the Standing Committee.

As per G.O.Ms.No.59 and APMC Act 1955, Section 93, Sub Section 1(a), the tenure of the current Standing Committee will expire on June 30. The Commissioner invited applications from corporators to contest for the Standing Committee members posts. Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi is the chairperson of the VMC Standing Committee.

The VMC has 64 corporators, and these members will elect six members to the Standing Committee. According to the election notification, the VMC will be publishing the voters' list on June 24 and the notification will be published on the same day. The corporators can file their nomination papers before the Additional Commissioner (General) from June 24 to July 1 on all working days between 11 am and 3 pm.

After the completion of the filing of nominations, the VMC will publish the list of nominations on July 1. The scrutiny will be conducted on July 2, and July 5 will be the last date for withdrawals of nominations. If necessary, the polling will be conducted at the VMC Council Hall on July 9 between 10.30 am and 3 pm.

Amaravati ryots walk from Tulluru for Durga darshan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Amaravathi farmers from all 29 villages organised a Padayatra on Sunday as their wish of a single capital Amaravati was realised, from Tulluru in the Guntur district to Durga temple in Vijayawada. Women participated in the Padayatra by carrying goddess Durga Devi's portraits and keeping Pongals on their heads. Later, they performed special pujas at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri.

The Padayatra started at Tulluru in the wee hours of Sunday. A large number of farmers including women participated in the Padayatra. They said they are happy that the NDA formed the government in the State. Soon after the previous YSRCP government announced three capitals, the villagers started an agitation which continued until the completion of the general elections.



tions. They called off their agitation after the NDA bagged majority.

Amaravati farmers had staged a Maha Padayatra from Tulluru to Durga Temple on January 10, 2020, but the police

prevented them at the petrol bunk at Rayapudi and baton-charged the protesters. The then Guntur SP Vijaya Rao led the baton charge.

After four years, their wish was fulfilled and they decided

to pay their pending 'Mokkulu' to Durga Devi. As part of this, they conducted a Padayatra from Tulluru to Durga temple in Vijayawada, raising the slogans 'Jai Amaravati and Jai Jai Amaravati'.

Funds released for development of Guntur misused: Pemmasani

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Development work in Guntur city has stalled due to the diversion and misuse of funds received from the Centre and World Bank by the previous government, alleged Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communication, Dr Pemmasani Chandrasekhar.

Dr Chandrasekhar held a review meeting at the Collectorate in Guntur with local MLAs Naseer Ahmed, Galla Madhavi, and Boorla Ramanjaneyulu regarding development projects under the Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) on Sunday. Guntur Municipal Corporation Commissioner Keerthi Chekuri, along with GMC Engineering, Public Health officials, and TIDCO officials, attended the review meeting.

The minister accused the previous government of diverting hundreds of crores of rupees allocated for essential services like drinking



water supply, underground drainage, and road construction. He stated that although central government and World Bank funds had been provided for these projects, the previous government diverted the funds, causing contractors to lose faith and halt many works at various stages. With the current lack of funds, he emphasised the urgency of finding alternative funding to prevent a two- or three-year delay in these critical projects.

The Union Minister mentioned that the stalled projects have been identified and that the GMC Commissioner will prepare new Detailed Project Reports (DPRs).

He also stressed the importance of cooperation from the mayor and councillors of Guntur municipality to facilitate the development work. He assured that steps would be taken to address the drinking water supply and underground drainage construction in Guntur city as soon as possible.

water supply, underground drainage, and road construction. He suggested focusing on alternative means of raising funds to complete the pending works.

The MLAs assured that the unfinished works would be resumed and that minimum facilities would be provided to the residents.

Dr Chandrasekhar highlighted significant issues within the Guntur Municipal Corporation, particularly concerning drinking water

Speaker Ayyanna visits Durga Temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu and his family visited the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri on Sunday. Ayyanna Patrudu assumed office on Saturday.

Durga Temple Executive Officer (EO) KS Rama Rao received Ayyanna as per the tradition of the temple. They offered special pujas to Durga Devi.

Vedic scholars gave blessings to Ayyanna Patrudu at the Veda Ashirvachana Mandapam on the premises of the temple. EO Rao presented him with Sessa Vastram, Laddu Prasadam and Durga Devi's portrait. Meanwhile, a large number of devotees thronged the temple.

Following the huge rush, he regulated the queue lines.

The rush continued from 8 am to 2 pm. For the welfare of society and people, the priests performed Suryopasana Seva at the temple.



Durga Temple EO KS Rama Rao presenting goddess Durga Devi's portrait to Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu and his family at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam in Vijayawada on Sunday



Devotees waiting in queue lines at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam in Vijayawada on Sunday

Diarrhoea outbreak: 168 cases registered in State

Jaggayyapet alone accounts for 58 cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A total of 168 diarrhoea cases have been reported across 23 villages in Andhra Pradesh, with 58 cases registered in Jaggayyapet alone. Health department officials are working to control the situation.

On Sunday, officials visited the Social Health Centre in Jaggayyapet, where diarrhoea victims are receiving treatment. They inspected the drinking water supply systems and discussed treatment protocols and water supply issues with the locals.

Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan conducted a comprehensive review of the diarrhoea outbreak, stating that immediate actions are being taken at the field level, alongside long-term planning



efforts. Since the onset of the monsoon season, 168 cases have been reported in 23 villages, including Kakinada, Guntur, and Jaggayyapet in the NTR district. Of the 58 cases in Jaggayyapet, 14 people have been discharged, while the rest are still undergoing treatment in hospitals.

Authorities assured that full treatment is being provided to the victims. They identified contaminated water as the primary cause, citing issues like unclear distributary channels, pipeline leaks due to

drainage water, and the diversion of 15th Finance Commission funds. Efforts to raise awareness about diarrhoea are underway, with ANM and ASHA workers educating people on the importance of personal and environmental cleanliness. Residents are advised to drink boiled and filtered water.

The government is conducting weekly water quality tests at sources. Of the over 30,000 water sources tested, 217 were found to be slightly contaminated.

'Brahmayagnam' solemnised for welfare of Andhra Pradesh



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'Brahmayagnam' was performed at Sri Bhuvaneswari Peeth at Gannavaram with the blessings of Sri Kamalananda Bharati Mahaswamiji.

The priests led by AP Puruhita Brahmin Samakya honorary president Yamijala Narasimha Murthy performed the Brahmayagnam invoking the deities to bestow good health and prosperity to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

They also invoked the deities that the government provides good governance. They performed Soura Homam and Poornahuti rituals as part of Brahmayagnam. TD Janardhan, P Ashok Babu and Butchi Ramprasad participated in the Brahmayagnam as the government representatives.

Speaking on the occasion, TDP leader TD Janardhan made it clear that the Chandrababu Naidu-headed government is committed to the people's welfare and all the welfare programs would be implemented as assured. He also assured to provide welfare schemes to the priests.

Vizag faces uncertainty as Smart City

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the Smart City Mission initiated in 2015 approaches its scheduled conclusion by the end of June this year, the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) finds itself grappling with uncertainties regarding the future management of key projects that have significantly enhanced the city's infrastructure and identity.

The Smart City Mission, a flagship initiative aimed at fostering sustainable urban development and improving quality of life, initially included Visakhapatnam among its first 20 cities nationwide. Over the past decade, substantial investments from both the central and state governments totalling Rs. 100 crores annually each, along with corresponding contributions from local bodies, have been directed towards transforming designated areas into 'smart' zones.

Under the oversight of the Greater Visakha Smart City Limited (GVSSL), jointly established by the central and state authorities, numerous



projects have been undertaken. These include the development of smart roads at Coastal Battery, Jagadamba Junction, Peda Waltair, and Park Hotel Junction as the focus for Area Based Development (ABD). This initiative includes the installation of smart roads, advanced lighting systems, continuous water supply, and the establishment of a City Operation Center (Command Control Room) at the GVMC

headquarters.

These measures aim to proactively detect and mitigate disasters, along with the deployment of smart poles, floating solar panels at Mudasarlova reservoir, intelligent traffic signals, CCTV surveillance, and smart amenities in 27 high schools.

In total, 51 projects have been initiated, including solar rooftops on 12 GVMC buildings, the restoration of the old

municipal office and town hall in One Town as heritage sites, and smart bus shelters. The estimated cost for these developments is approximately Rs 2000 crores, implemented across phases. While some projects are nearing completion, the government's ten-year timeline for these initiatives concludes at the end of this month.

Despite significant progress, concerns loom large as the

Smart City Mission draws to a close. There has been no clear directive from the central government regarding the transition and future management of ongoing projects post-June. Officials fear that the burden of continuing these initiatives may disproportionately fall on the GVMC, given the lack of clarity on financial support and operational guidelines.

GVSSL, responsible for project management throughout the mission's tenure, currently expends approximately Rs 10 crores annually, primarily towards the maintenance of heritage structures and operational costs of the City Operation Center.

With several projects still underway or awaiting completion, the absence of a clear roadmap for post-mission governance poses a pressing challenge. In response to these uncertainties, GVMC officials have sought clarification from the state government, urging prompt intervention to ensure sustainable management and funding mechanisms beyond the mission's stipulated timeline.

Visnupex-2024: Celebrating philately and numismatics

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The three-day exhibition of stamps, coins, and currency notes, aptly named 'Visnupex-2024', concluded on a positive note in the port city on Sunday. Organized by the Numismatic and Philatelic Society of Visakhapatnam, the event attracted enthusiasts and collectors from across the region. The exhibition was a haven for hobbyists and history buffs alike, showcasing a diverse collection of rare and unique items that chronicled the rich tapestry of global history through numismatics and philately. From ancient coins that told tales of bygone civilizations to stamps that depicted pivotal moments in history, the event offered a captivating journey through time.

NVN Durga Prasada Rao, a past district governor of Lions

district (316 A), distributed mementoes to all participants, acknowledging their contributions and enthusiasm in making the exhibition a resounding success.

One of the highlights of the event was the insightful speech delivered by R. Phalguna Rao, Assistant Director of Archaeology and Museums. His address emphasised the cultural and educational significance of such exhibitions. "Stamps, coins, and currency notes are not just collectables; they are fragments of history that offer us a glimpse into the socioeconomic and political landscapes of different eras. Exhibitions like Visnupex-2024 play a crucial role in preserving and promoting our heritage," he remarked.

The exhibition hall was a hive of activity, with visitors engaging in animated discussions,



exchanging knowledge, and marveling at the meticulous collections on display. Among the notable exhibits were rare coins from the

Gupta Empire, colonial-era currency notes, and stamps commemorating significant global events such as the Moon landing and

World War II.

Vishnu Priya, a passionate collector of post-independence coins now in her 60s, remarked that Visnupex-2024

was more than just an exhibition; it was a celebration of history, culture, and the timeless human fascination with the stories told by stamps and coins.

Participants also had the opportunity to attend various workshops and seminars conducted by experts in the field. These sessions provided valuable insights into the nuances of collecting, preserving, and valuing philatelic and numismatic items. Visnupex-2024 not only served as a platform for seasoned collectors to exhibit their prized possessions but also inspired new enthusiasts to delve into the fascinating world of stamps and coins. The event successfully highlighted the importance of preserving historical artefacts and fostering a deeper understanding of our past through numismatics and philately.

TDP calling govt buildings Jagan's assets: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party slammed the TDP on Sunday for portraying government property in Visakhapatnam as party chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's private residence. Targeting the ruling party, the YSRCP claimed that during the previous TDP administration, government land valued at billions of rupees was leased out for a mere Rs 1,000 per acre.

Taking to X, the YSRCP shared images depicting luxurious buildings owned by TDP. The party sarcastically called them 'huts' built by the ruling party. The opposition party claimed that the former TDP government had allocated huge chunks of land to itself in every district at nominal prices and secured the leasing for 99 years.

Recently, the TDP accused the YSRCP of spending crores of public money on a palatial residence in Visakhapatnam. Referring to the mansion built atop sea-facing Rushikonda hill in the port city, the ruling party leaders alleged the YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had built it for his use.

YSRCP strongly contested the claims of the TDP and said the ruling party is misleading the people by labelling the government property as Jagan's personal assets. Former minister Gudivada Amarnath termed the TDP's allegation as 'atrocious' and clarified that these are government buildings and the current government could use them for visits of the President, Governor or other important dignitaries to Andhra Pradesh.

National Emergency: No, never again!

We cannot forget the Emergency in India. It was a dark period when most newspapers went blank and there was no freedom of speech or expression. Nowadays draconian pieces of legislation like the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, of 1967 also remind one of the Emergency days.

Our country was in a black phase for 21 months -- from 1975 to 1977, when a state of emergency was declared for political purposes. Then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed had used his power under Article 352 of the Constitution claiming that there was a need for it because of the prevailing "internal disturbance". That Emergency was in effect from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977; i.e. 49 years back and it was the darkest time for the spirit of our Constitution. The clamp-

ing of Emergency was not done under a valid law, but as per the decree of then Prime Minister. It allowed elections to be cancelled and civil liberties to be suspended. Can anybody cancel Fundamental Rights? Imposition of Emergency amounts to arbitrary authority to kill, or imprison for an unreasonable time, as people witnessed during the days of Emergency. The dark theme of the Policy was to arrest political opponents, imprison media personnel, and censor newspapers. The censorship ended on 21st March 1977 but scores of journalists were detained while media voluntarily observed censorship. The authorities could exercise the 'right' to kill, despite Article 21.

The present generations should remember Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan for leading the mid-1970s' Opposition against the then PM and the Emergency in India. He was

The present generations should remember Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan for leading the mid-1970s' Opposition against the then PM and the Emergency in India. He was instrumental in restoring democracy and under his leadership people rebuilt the democratic edifice. JP called for a "total revolution" to overthrow the dictator and in effect, the masses responded effectively.

instrumental in restoring democracy and under his leadership people rebuilt the democratic edifice. JP called for a "total revolution" to overthrow the dictator and in effect, the masses responded effectively.

Indiscriminately many members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) were arrested; their houses were raided, including those of

popular leaders like the general secretary of the CPI (M) Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat, and others leading the Students Federation of India. Many others like Pinarayi Vijayan, present-day Chief Minister of Kerala, were arrested too. During the Emergency, the police used third-degree methods on innocent people and brave leaders. Some were tortured or



PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU
Dean, Mahindra University, Hyderabad

even killed as in the case of the Kerala student P. Rajan. It was the total manifestation of unfettered power and blatant violation of human rights.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh -- RSS was leading the people all over India. The police clamped down on RSS and thousands of its workers

were imprisoned. Besides RSS, many defied the 'draconian act' and participated in Satyagraha (peaceful protests) against the ban and fought against the curtailment of Fundamental Rights. The newspapers and literature were heavily censored while agitators clandestinely published and distributed material on a large scale and funds were collected for the movement.

Attack on the Constitution in the name of unity

There have been two attacks on the Constitution through the 42nd Amendment in 1976 and in 2014. The 42nd Amendment changed the description of India from a 'sovereign democratic republic' to a 'sovereign, socialist secular democratic republic'. The Act also changed the words 'unity of the nation' to 'unity and integrity of the nation'. They added some more words to the original

Preamble. It was called Mini-Constitution.

Most of the significant provisions of the Constitution were sought to be changed. It looked as if the entire Constitution was re-drafted, destroying the principles incorporated by the Constituent Assembly before 1950 under the leadership of B R Ambedkar.

The Forty-Second Amendment

Every provision was serious, whether it was done to remove or add something to change the Constitution. For instance, it sought to amend the Preamble and articles leading to Fundamental Rights, 31, 31C, 39 and significantly disturbed several articles including Emergency provisions. With these amendments, though called the 'Amendment Act' it almost redrafted Ambedkar's basic statute through the Forty Second Amendment besides signifi-

cant distortions as ratified by more than half of the State Legislatures, turned 'Mini' Constitution without basic structure.

Reaffirmed the Preamble with secularism

In the Keshavanada Bharti case in 1973, the apex court confirmed the secular nature of the Constitution. Among the 'basic features', as expounded by Justice Khanna, are the Fundamental Rights guaranteed to individuals by the Constitution. In 1983, the Supreme Court said that an official of the government should not join religious activities while on duty and not use public funds for that purpose. In 1994, SC emphatically reaffirmed the importance of secularism as explained in the Preamble, whether because of the 42nd Amendment or without that.

(to be continued)

Ensure Ramoji condolence meet a success: Kolusu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, Kolusu Pardha Saradhi, has directed officials to make necessary arrangements for the condolence meeting of Enadu Group Chairman, Ch Ramoji Rao. The event is scheduled for June 27 at an open area opposite Sri Chaitanya Women's Junior College, beside the Tadigadapa - Enikepadu 100-foot road. Minister Saradhi emphasised the need for all departmental officials to coordinate to ensure the success of the programme.

A preparatory meeting was held at the Minister's camp office in Tadigadapa on Sunday, attended by Krishna District Collector DK Balaji, SP Adnaan Nayeem Asmi, NTR District Collector Dr. S. Dilli Rao, CRDA Commissioner



Katamneni Bhaskar, and other officials. Speaking at the meeting, Minister Saradhi highlighted the significant contributions of Ch Ramoji Rao to the newspaper sector. He proposed organizing a photo exhibition and a short film show at the meeting venue.

The Minister also stressed the importance of providing adequate parking facilities for VVIPs, VIPs, and other attendees. Parking for Ministers and

VVIPs will be arranged at Sri Chaitanya College, while parking for others will be at VR Siddhartha Engineering College. He instructed the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation to ensure proper sanitation at the venue. The electricity department was tasked with arranging lighting and ensuring an uninterrupted power supply.

Minister Saradhi announced that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu would

attend the meeting as the chief guest. He reiterated the need for all departments to work together smoothly. The police department was instructed to implement necessary traffic diversions on June 27.

The meeting was also attended by CRDA Additional Commissioner Alim Bhasa, I & PR Additional Director L. Swarna Latha, Joint Director Kiran Kumar, and other officials.

Eluru DC Prasanna Venkatesh transferred

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh, who has won the goodwill and accolades of the people of the district, has been transferred.

Prasanna Venkatesh took charge as Eluru District Collector on January 26, 2022. Collector Prasanna Venkatesh proved his capabilities by providing flawless and corruption-free administration during his tenure.

Prasanna Venkatesh won the hearts of the poor by implementing welfare schemes efficiently. He left an indelible mark on the administration in the district as a Collector.

He used to accept representations from the people during the Spandana and strive hard to



Prasanna Venkatesh won the hearts of the poor by implementing welfare schemes efficiently. He left an indelible mark on the administration in the district as a Collector.

resolve them as early as possible. He acted in an unbiased manner and won appreciation from all sections of people.

Prasanna Venkatesh has also left his mark in the 2024 elections and he has earned appreciation from all for conducting the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections efficiently and peace-

fully. During the Godavari floods, he visited the flood-affected areas. He reached out to the flood victims by visiting the affected areas extensively and also ensured the government machinery reached out to the victims. He monitored the flood relief

programmes. As a Collector, Prasanna Venkatesh introduced a new scheme in the tribal areas to provide nutritious food to the tribal people. Under the CSR funds, Prasanna Venkatesh initiated the setting of five libraries in five schools and constructed a lecture hall for Rs 45 lakh at Kota Dibba Degree College. He also took stringent steps to protect the Kolleru Lake from grabbers.

Collector Prasanna Venkatesh has striven hard to put Eluru District at first place in Ayushman Bharat health cards and NCD-CD Survey. With the efforts of the Collector, four fountains were constructed and greenery was developed in the city under the NCAP funds of the Central government.

Don't lose heart: Jagan to cadre

PNS ■ PULIVENDULA

Former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who visited his home constituency on Sunday, engaged in extensive interactions with local residents, party leaders, activists, and supporters at the camp office in Bhakarapuram, Pulivendula. The former CM warmly greeted everyone and personally inquired about their challenges. He also held discussions with public representatives and former leaders of the YSR Congress Party.

Addressing the gathering, Jagan emphasised the importance of unity and resilience among activists and leaders. He reassured them that the party remains steadfast in its support and urged everyone to forge ahead together. "None of our activists or leaders should lose heart. The party stands committed to standing by each one of you," he affirmed. YS Jagan further pledged his commitment to the cause, ensuring that every activist will have the full backing of the YSR Congress Party in the days ahead.

Lands for YSRCP offices as per order issued by Naidu govt: TJR

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former MLA and YSRCP leader TJR Sudhakar Babu stated that as per the GOs issued during the TDP government by then CM Chandrababu Naidu, lands were allocated to YSRCP offices across the State.

Speaking to the media persons on Sunday, Sudhakar Babu made it clear that it is untrue that government lands have been transferred to YSRCP party offices. Chandrababu is said to be the pioneer of allotment of lands to political parties, pointed out TJR.

The YSRCP leader recalled that in 1997, the land was transferred to NTR Trust Bhawan, "TDP Hyderabad Office". The TDP took the land on the pretext of training classes and educating the poor and what kind of service



programmes are going on in NTR Trust Bhawan now? The cost of the NTR Trust Bhawan land is currently more than Rs 1,000 crores.

Sudhakar Babu asked if NTR Trust Bhawan was not a Palace. Is it not true that the TDP government issued a GO to the TDP office in Mangalagiri on July 21, 2016? It is not a fact that as per the GO 575 the lands in Mangalagiri were taken for lease for 99 years which were supposed to be for 33 years

lease only. If YSRCP offices are palaces then what are TDP offices called?, the YSRCP leader asked.

The TDP office constructed in Mangalagiri was on 3.65 acres of government land. Now, it is called a thatched house or a hut, he said adding lands were allotted to YSRCP offices according to Chandrababu's issued GO.

He pointed out that the TDP was intentionally attacking YS Jagan Mohan Reddy with vindictive politics. The TDP leaders are verbally attacking like no other state across the nation against YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. We strongly condemn Lokesh's comments on Jagan, said TJR.

Sudhakar Babu further said that between 2019 to 24 Chandrababu prevented the Legislative Assembly Sessions from going on smoothly.

Four red sanders logs seized; three smugglers arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The task force police seized four red sanders logs and arrested three smugglers at Panipai village in Annamayya district.

DSP Chenchubabu told here on Sunday that the task force police team conducted a combing operation during the night of Saturday.



The police team spotted some people loading red sander logs into a car. When the police team was approaching them, they tried to flee.

However, the police chased and apprehended three smugglers Vijay Kumar, Mohanvel and Sakthivel. All the three smugglers belong to Tamil Nadu. Task Force CI Srinivasulu registered a case.

Collector visits diarrhoea patients in Nellore hosp

PNS ■ NELLORE

District Collector M Hari Narayanan visited some of the children suffering from diarrhoea on Sunday in the Jaya Bharat hospital near the south railway station.

As many as 10 students, staying in the tribal welfare hostel, near Chaneru, fell ill with symptoms of diarrhoea. They were taken to the Government hospital in Guntur for treatment. Six were admitted to the Jaya Bharat Hospital in Nellore for better treatment.

The Collector personally visited the students, who were undergoing treatment for diarrhoea in the hospital.

The Collector inquired about their condition with the doctors.

The doctors told the



Collector that all the six students were recuperating.

The Collector was informed by DMHO Dr Penchalaiah and ITDA Project Director Manda Rani that required medical treatment was being provided to

the students, who were suffering from diarrhoea and they were monitoring them.

Tribal welfare office Baby Rani, deputy manager Manohor and other officials were among those who accompanied the Collector.

Induction of Pocharam into Cong sheer opportunism: Jeevan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The induction of Banswada BRS MLA Pocharam Srinivas Reddy into the Congress is sheer opportunism, Congress MLC T. Jeevan Reddy said on Sunday.

He said that he would not encourage such moves and that political parties should function as per their ideologies. He said the

Congress formed a stable government with just 65 MLAs.

"I do not think that there is a need to induct MLAs from other political parties," Jeevan said. Pocharam Srinivas Reddy joined the Congress on Friday in the presence of Chief Minister-cum-TPCC President Revanth Reddy and Revenue Minister Ponguloti Srinivas Reddy.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee remembered

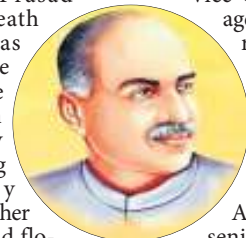
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's death anniversary was observed at the BJP State office in Vijayawada on Sunday. Party State organising secretary Madhukar and other party leaders paid floral tributes to the leader.

Speaking on the occasion, Madhukar said that after Independence, Shyama Prasad

Mukherjee sacrificed his life for India. Mukherjee assumed the post of Bengal University Vice-Chancellor at the age of 33, he said. He raised his voice to hoist the national flag in Jammu and Kashmir, he recalled.

BJP NTR district president Adduri Sri Ram, senior leaders Suresh Reddy, Shaik Baji, Sridhar, Kilaru Dilip, Narasa Raju, Ratna Kumari and others were present.



SFI slams Centre over NEET PG postponement

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Student Federation of India (SFI) State president K Prasanna Kumar and secretary A Ashok have condemned the postponement of the NEET post graduation exam just 12 hours before the scheduled time. They demanded that the Union government compensate the candidates for the inconvenience.

Speaking to the media in Vijayawada on Sunday, the SFI leaders said that the Union government was ridiculing the education system. Students are worried over the postponement of the exam. The recent developments show the inefficiency of the Central government and the National Board of Examinations in Medical Science (NBEMS).

Further, they severely condemned the anti-student moves implemented by the Union government and NBEMS. They expressed unhappiness over the temporary suspension of the National Testing Agency (NTA) Director and demanded resignation of Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan taking responsibility for the NEET paper leak.

INDIA CORNER

ISRO, Italian space agency heads to attend India Space Congress

Policy makers, administrators of space agencies from different countries, and entrepreneurs would gather here for the three-day India Space Congress that will begin from Wednesday. ISRO Chairman S Somanath, India's space regulator IN-SPACe head Pawan Kumar Goenka, space administrators from Italy and Australia, and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti are among the dignitaries scheduled to attend the event. The India Space Congress (ISC), organised by the Satcom Industry Association-India (SIA-India) will have the theme 'Bridging Boundaries and Transforming Tomorrow' and will seek to elevate India's space capabilities through international collaborations. The event offers exclusive networking opportunities, platforms for startups.



KANISHKA BOMBING

Kanishka bombing: 'One of worst acts of terrorism in history'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The 1985 bombing of 'Kanishka' flight is one of the "worst" acts of terrorism in history, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Sunday. His comments recalling the bombing on its 39th anniversary came amid strain in ties between India and Canada over increasing activities of Khalistani extremists from Canadian soil. The bombing of the Montreal-New Delhi Air India Flight 182 was blamed on Sikh militants in retaliation to the 'Operation Bluestar'.



The external affairs minister said the anniversary of the bombing is a reminder why terrorism should never be tolerated. "Today marks the 39th anniversary of one of the worst acts of terrorism in history," Jaishankar said on 'X'.

"Pay my homage to the memory of the 329 victims of AI 182 'Kanishka' who were killed this day in 1985. My thoughts are with their families," he said. "The anniversary is a reminder why terrorism should never be tolerated," he added. The 'Kanishka' flight exploded 45 minutes before it was to have landed at London's Heathrow Airport on June 23, 1985, killing all 329 people on board, most of them Canadians of Indian descent. Jaishankar's comments came two days after India strongly objected to Canadian parliament observing "one minute silence" in memory of Khalistan extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was gunned down in British Columbia in June last year.

In an unusual move, the Canadian parliament observed "one minute silence" to mark one year of the killing of Nijjar. Nijjar, who was declared a terrorist by India, was shot dead outside a gurdwara in British Columbia on June 18 last year. India has been insisting that the Canadian authorities must take action against those advocating violence. The relations between the two countries came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing.



PNS ■ CHENNAI

Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Sunday called for the need to understand the correct legal history of the nation as the country's legal system was established from the perspective of the colonial rulers. The Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Justice (Independent in-charge) said at a conference here that the laws in India made during colonial times ignored the Indian ethos and societal realities of the India of the time and were based on furthering the needs of the colonial rulers. The union minister made the comments at the conference 'India's Progressive Path

in the Administration of Criminal Justice System' at Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur, here. The seminar is the fourth in the series after being held in Delhi, Guwahati and Kolkata which was attended by judges of high courts, advocates, academics, representatives of law enforcement agencies and students.

"The Modi government has removed the old laws having a slave mentality and made three new laws incorporating the basic spirit of Indianness and justice, namely Indian Judicial Code, Indian Civil Defence Code and Indian Evidence Act, which will be implemented across the country from 1st July," he said. Meghwal said the evolution of the legal system, particularly criminal justice under the British from the Battle of Plassey in 1757, introduction of laws like Doctrine of Lapse, Codification of Laws etc, were to suit and perpetuate colonial rule in the country. The Irish Penal Code was mindlessly copied and introduced.

Buck stops at top echelons of Modi govt: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday hit out at the Modi government over the bureaucratic reshuffle in the National Testing Agency after alleged irregularities in NEET-UG, saying the buck stops at the doorstep of the top echelons of the regime. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the National Testing Agency (NTA) was projected to be an autonomous body, but in reality was made to serve the "devious interests" of the BJP/RSS. "In the NEET Scam, the buck stops at the doorstep of the top echelons of the Modi Government. Shuffling the

bureaucrats is no solution to the endemic problem in the Education system rotted by the BJP," he said in a post on X. For students to get justice, Modi government must be held accountable, he said. The Centre on Saturday had shunted out NTA's Director General Subodh Singh and handed over the probe into the irregularities in medical entrance exam NEET-UG to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The Education Ministry has also set up a seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to review the agency's functioning and recommend exam reforms.

'Need to understand the correct legal history of India'

Expose Congress 'falsehood' and 'misrule' Pradhan asks BJP workers ahead of Haryana polls

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asked the party workers to gear up for the upcoming Haryana Assembly elections and reach out to the people to expose the Congress' "falsehood" and "misrule". Pradhan, who was recently made the BJP's election in-charge for



Haryana, addressed a party event in Rohtak along with Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Union Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar and senior party leader Biplob Kumar Deb. Pradhan was honoured by the local unit while Khattar and Gurjar were also felicitated for being elected as MPs.

Cops seize fake currency notes printed by Naxals in Sukma

PNS ■ SUKMA

Security forces have for the first time recovered a huge cache of fake currency notes belonging to Naxalites and equipment used to print them in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, a senior police official said on Sunday. According to the police, Naxalites were allegedly using the fake currency notes in weekly

markets of interior areas of Bastar region for a long time and duping innocent tribals. Naxalites were also trying to destabilise the Indian economy with this move, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran G Chavan claimed. The recovery was made on Saturday evening on a forested hill near Korajguda village of the district when a joint team of security personnel from various forces was out on a search operation.



probe, they added. To nab the suspected killer, the police traced Phoolmati's mobile phone, which was found active about 600 kilometres away in Jhansi. Call records showed frequent communication between

Phoolmati and a number belonging to one Shubham from Sultanpur. When questioned, Shubham told the police that Phoolmati was alive and he had brought her to Jhansi. The police subsequently

Shah suggests creation of large ponds in northeast, use of ISRO data for flood control

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said at least 50 large ponds should be created in the northeast to divert water of the Brahmaputra to help tackle floods and develop agriculture, irrigation and tourism. Chairing a review meeting on preparedness for flood management during the monsoon, Shah also emphasised on optimum use of satellite



imagery provided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for flood

and water management. He also took stock of the preparations to deal with Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). Shah said efforts should be made to upgrade the forecast system of water level of rivers for better flood management. He said at least 50 large ponds should be created in the northeast so that the water of the Brahmaputra can be diverted and stored in these ponds.

West Bengal not consulted over Ganga water treaty with Bangladesh: TMC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal on Sunday criticised the Centre for not consulting the state before taking the decision to start negotiations with Bangladesh for the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Sharing Treaty. The criticism by the TMC comes a day after talks were held between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina on a range of issues including the treaty. TMC's Parliamentary Party Leader in Rajya Sabha, Derek O'Brien, said the state is a party to the treaty, but was not consulted.

Farakka-Ganga treaty is being renewed without consulting West Bengal, he said. "The state is a party to the treaty. Even our dues for the previous treaty have not been cleared," O'Brien told reporters here. "Dredging of the Ganga has been stopped. It is the primary reason for floods and erosion. This is a plan to sell off Bengal," he alleged. Prime Minister Modi on Saturday announced India and Bangladesh will begin technical-level talks for the renewal of the 1996 Ganga water treaty, and an Indian technical team will visit Bangladesh soon for the conservation and management of the Teesta river.

Man cremates 'wife' in Gorakhpur, finds her alive 600 km away

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR(UP)

A man who cremated his 40-year-old 'wife' four days ago in this Uttar Pradesh district was reunited with her after she was found alive about 600 kilometres away in Jhansi, police said on Sunday. Ram Sumer (60), a resident of Bansgaon in Gorakhpur, lodged a complaint that his wife Phoolmati had gone missing on June 15. Four days later, on June 19, a woman's body was found in the Uruva Bazaar area. Sumer identified the body as that of his wife and completed the last rites, the police said. However, the case took a mysterious turn after her post-mortem revealed that the woman had been strangled to death, prompting a further

located her at the address provided by Shubham. Sumer told the police that Phoolmati had left her paternal home on June 15 to return to his house but never arrived. After extensive searches, he reported her missing. Superintendent of Police (South) Jitendra Kumar Tomar said the woman was sent back to her husband on Saturday after her statement was recorded. An investigation is underway to determine the connection among Sumer, Phoolmati, Shubham, and the dead woman who was cremated. The police have also obtained CCTV camera footage showing a boy moving suspiciously and are re-investigating the case from a new angle, he said.



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president on Sunday declared nephew Akash Anand her successor and made him the party's national coordinator, reversing her own previous decision. In the middle of the Lok Sabha elections on May 7, she had termed Akash Anand immature and relieved him of the party post.

After a national level meeting at the BSP state office here on Sunday, the party in a statement said it was handing Akash Anand his former responsibilities back. "BSP's national president Mayawati has once again given Akash Anand a chance to work in the party with full maturity. He will continue to hold all his posts in the party as before.

Primary school teacher in Mandi held on POCSO charges

A primary school teacher has been arrested in this Himachal Pradesh district for offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, police said on Sunday. The accused was arrested on Saturday following a complaint from four girl students of the school located in the Ladbadol area of Jogindernagar subdivision. After the complaint was lodged on child helpline number 1098, a police team visited the area, met with the four 'victims' and subsequently, the case was registered at the Jogindernagar police station. The accused was arrested and produced in a court that remanded him in police custody for three days. He would be produced in the court again on Monday, Jogindernagar Station House Officer (SHO) Ashwani Kumar said.



'Gates of barrage releasing water to Delhi shut by Haryana'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi is not getting its share of water as Haryana has shut all the gates of the Hathnikund barrage, Water Minister Atishi alleged on Sunday and asserted she will continue her indefinite hunger strike over the issue. The closure of the gates of the barrage on the Yamuna river, she said, has led to the water shortage in the national capital. Her hunger strike seeking release of its share of water for Delhi, which is under the grip of a severe shortage amid a searing heat wave, entered its third day on Sunday. AAP has said doctors advised Atishi to end her fast. The minister claimed the Haryana government asked how it would release water for Delhi when it did not have



adequate supply. "But yesterday (Saturday), when many journalists went to the Hathnikund barrage, from where water is released for Delhi, everyone took photos and made videos in which it is clearly visible that there is water in the barrage. But the gates from which the water is

released for Delhi are closed," Atishi claimed. "I request the Haryana government with folded hands to open the gates of the Hathnikund barrage. Release the water of the people of Delhi. Delhiites should get the water they are entitled to. Until the Haryana government.

TN HOCH TRAGEDY Victims were 'careless', 'exceeded their limit'

PNS ■ KALLAKURICHI

Actor-politician Kamal Haasan on Sunday said the victims of the hooch tragedy here that has left about 53 persons dead were "careless" and "exceeded their limit." In Tamil Nadu, there is "enough" liquor available; liquor retail outlets of state-run TASMAC outnumber pharmacies, he said. The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder was talking to reporters after meeting the survivors of the tragedy at a hospital here. "I cannot say I have no sympathies for these victims. But these victims will have to understand they have exceeded their limit."

'Examination system has been handed over to copying mafia': Akhilesh Yadav targets BJP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Accusing the BJP of ruining the future of the youth, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said the country's examination system has been completely ruined and handed over to the copying mafia. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said the government does not have the ability to conduct even a single examination transparently. "The BJP government has



ruined the future of the youth. The education and examination system has been completely ruined and handed over to the copying mafia," he said in a statement issued by the Samajwadi Party. Yadav said the government is steeped in corruption. "It is in the grip of the corrupt. The BJP has hollowed the entire system in its 10 years of rule. This government is playing with the future of the students and the youth as well as the country."

Friend in need

Both India and Bangladesh stand to beneficially feed off each other with the new tranche of agreements

New Delhi and Dhaka have signed a comprehensive bunch of collaborations that includes pledging to begin negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), deciding to launch a medical e-visa facility for Bangladeshis and agreeing to send a technical team to discuss the Teesta river water-sharing, besides announcing the opening of an Assistant High Commission in Rangpur. Additional goodies in the bouquet include new train and bus services, export of 40 MW power to Bangladesh via the Indian grid, an inland container depot at Sirajganj and 350 training slots for Bangladeshi police officers. For India, four major imperatives have significantly driven the nation's increased strategic engagement with Bangladesh: Improving the country's economic standing, attending to the healthcare requirements of Bangladeshis, increasing India's presence in the region and attempting to counter China's increasing influence in Bangladesh. In office since 2008 and earlier heartily praised for



leading her country's economic and social development, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is now facing difficulties in post-pandemic recovery. Her plan to use the bilateral relationship to address these issues includes the outreach to New Delhi in a major way. It makes sense that New Delhi is responding to her advances with a bit more warmth than usual this time, in part because of Beijing's looming shadow in the background. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina deepened their partnership with a "futuristic vision" for transformative cooperation during the latter's two-day visit to India from June 21.

India holds a special place in Bangladesh's history, particularly owing to the 1971 Liberation War wherein India played a key role. However, relations between the nations became tense during military rule in the mid-1970s, marred by anti-India sentiment. But the shared history has helped forge a strong bond, with Modi's tenure since 2014 giving a new fillip to bilateral ties. Earlier, a significant shift occurred in 1996, when Hasina took over as the Prime Minister for the first time; since then, bilateral relations have steadily improved. Since 2019, the two leaders have met on 10 occasions, ushering in an era of remarkable transformation and strengthening bonds. Prime Minister Hasina, who began her fourth consecutive term in January 2024, joined six other world leaders at Modi's swearing-in ceremony on June 9, 2024. However, challenges persist, such as border management, illegal migration, the National Register of Citizens, Rohingya and river water sharing, necessitating ongoing dialogue. Bangladesh has established an island for the persecuted Rohingyas and seeks India's help in persuading Myanmar to repatriate the displaced minorities. The Modi-Hasina partnership has the potential to further cement India-Bangladesh relations, navigating these challenges and leveraging their shared vision for mutual prosperity.

PICTALK



A herd of wild elephants bathes in water to get respite from the heat, in Kamrup

PTI

Venture Capital and Private Equity drive growth globally

These financial engines reshape industries and foster entrepreneurship, marking a pragmatic shift in the global financial landscape

In recent years, venture capital (VC) and private equity (PE) have emerged as powerful catalysts for innovation and economic growth globally. This surge represents a pivotal shift in the financial landscape, reshaping industries and fostering entrepreneurship in unprecedented ways. Venture capital, known for financing early-stage startups with high growth potential, has experienced remarkable expansion due to technological advancements and evolving consumer demands. Startups leveraging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, fintech and sustainable energy have become prime targets. These funds not only provide crucial capital for research, development and market expansion but also enable entrepreneurs to scale their innovations rapidly and disrupt traditional industries. Simultaneously, private equity has broadened its scope beyond traditional domains to include sectors like healthcare, education, consumer goods and infrastructure. PE firms typically invest in established companies seeking growth opportunities or



undergoing strategic transformations. By injecting capital, implementing operational efficiencies and providing strategic guidance, PE firms play a pivotal role in enhancing competitiveness, expanding market reach and driving sustainable value creation. Several key factors have contributed to the robust growth of VC and PE investments: **Technical Advancements** Breakthroughs in technologies such as cloud computing, big data analytics and blockchain have revolutionised business models and accelerated innovation cycles. These advancements have lowered barriers to entry for startups and empowered established companies to adapt and thrive in a digital-first economy, making them attractive targets for PE investments seeking to optimise operations and enhance

profitability. **Globalisation and Market Access:** Increasing interconnectedness has facilitated cross-border investments, allowing VC and PE firms to diversify their portfolios and tap into emerging markets with untapped potential. This global expansion not only increases investment opportunities but also exposes companies to new markets, customers and strategic partnerships, driving growth and scalability. **Shift in Consumer Behavior:** Evolving consumer preferences towards sustainability, digital solutions and personalised experiences have driven demand for innovative products and services. VC-backed startups are at the forefront of meeting these evolving needs, disrupting traditional industries and creating new market opportunities. **Supportive Regulatory Environment:** Favorable regulatory frameworks and Government policies aimed at fostering innovation, entrepreneurship and capital formation have played a crucial role in facilitating VC and PE investments. These policies provide incentives for

investors, reduce regulatory barriers and create a conducive environment for startups and growth-stage companies to thrive. **Institutional Investor Participation:** Growing interest from institutional investors such as pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and endowments has significantly bolstered VC and PE markets. These investors seek diversification, higher returns and exposure to innovative sectors, driving substantial capital inflows into VC-backed startups and PE-funded enterprises. Despite the promising opportunities presented by the VC and PE boom, challenges persist. Market volatility, valuation pressures, regulatory complexities and geopolitical uncertainties pose risks that demand careful risk management strategies. Furthermore, maintaining ethical standards, sustainable practices and alignment with stakeholders are critical for long-term success and value creation in the VC and PE ecosystem. *(The writer is CEO of Cosmos Financial Group; views are personal)*



MAYANK SINGHAVIE

Naidu's comeback will redefine Andhra's future

After being sidelined for over two decades, Naidu's resurgence signals a major shift in the State's politics and sets the stage for a renewed focus on development

The recent swearing-in of Nara Chandrababu Naidu as Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister was a significant event for Naidu personally, his Party and Indian politics. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top BJP leaders witnessed the 74-year-old politician taking the oath for the fourth time, marking a significant political comeback.

Despite being marginalised in State and national politics for over two decades, Naidu is grateful for his new role. He has once again proven that one should never underestimate a politician until they are out of the game.

The triumphant return of Naidu as the Chief Minister, along with the emergence of his Party, Telugu Desam, as the second largest group in the current NDA Government, signifies a shift in power dynamics.

A year ago, Babu's predecessor, Jagan Mohan Reddy, was comfortably placed to win another term. Then, because the opposition was divided. Pawan Kalyan was not with the TDP and the BJP was still deciding whether to let the TDP join the NDA coalition again. Babu was accused of corruption and TDP workers felt disheartened.

Several factors contributed to Naidu's comeback. Apart from the anti-incumbency sentiment, the caste coalition of Pawan Kalyan's Janasena, the BJP and the TDP played a crucial role. Jagan's neglect of infrastructure and agriculture also negatively affected the people, further contributing to Naidu's resurgence.

Naidu has been a survivor. He started his political career as a junior minister in 1978 and has since held various positions in the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). He has served as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh multiple times, overseeing significant development projects and facing political controversies. Throughout it all, Naidu kept up his unwavering spirit. Naidu has announced that the 2024 election will be his last, a move intended to emotionally appeal to voters while grooming his son Lokesh as his successor. This strategic deci-



sion could significantly impact the Naidu dynasty's future in Andhra Pradesh politics.

At first, Babu stayed in the shadows of his father-in-law and Telugu Desam chief N.T. Rama Rao, but eventually became indispensable. He gained valuable experience and insights into national politics during the National Front and United Front Governments. His Party was part of the V.P. Singh, Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral and later Vajpayee Governments, signifying that no party was untouchable.

Naidu and his Party have had a fluctuating relationship with various central Governments. However, their current participation in the Modi Government is particularly notable. With TDP's support for the Modi Government, Naidu is in a position to negotiate and advocate for the interests of Andhra Pradesh. As for the State, Babu has become the State's CEO again. As chief Minister, Naidu rubbed shoulders with Tech Giants like Bill Gates in his earlier terms. He brought investment opportunities to Hyderabad and transformed it into Cyberabad. He secured funding for infrastructure from agencies like the World Bank and developed Hyderabad overall. However, the mistake was that he should have focused on developing

“DURING HIS FOUR DECADES OF POLITICAL CAREER, NAIDU, AGED 74, HAS PROVED HIMSELF A SURVIVOR. HE WAS MUCH AHEAD OF HIS TIME IN HIS FIRST AND SECOND TERMS

other parts of the State. In his fourth term, Naidu should avail the opportunity to bring back the importance of Andhra Pradesh, once the country's rice bowl. Naidu's top priority is securing additional funds for Andhra Pradesh, which is a crucial step towards the State's development. Naidu's vision for Andhra Pradesh's development includes reviving long pending irrigation projects like the Polavaram project to boost the State's agricultural sector. With his Party's support, Naidu is determined to maximise the State's resources and drive development.

“We are not negotiating on the composition of the Narendra Modi cabinet when it comes to State interests,” was his response to a question about the TDP securing only one cabinet minister and one Minister of State in the Modi cabinet. However, they still hope to secure more positions during the next expansion. The second important task is to build the Andhra Pradesh State capital, Amaravati. His predecessor, Jagan Mohan Reddy, suspended this ambitious project during his two terms. Now that Babu is back in charge, he aims to complete Amaravati. He will put pressure on the Centre to secure funds for building capital, various new projects and his six welfare schemes. Being a show-

man, he would like to project Amaravathi as a model capital. The State is facing a severe financial crisis. There is a significant shortage of funds, with a total debt of around Rs 14 lakh crores, including Rs 12 lakh crore borrowed from various sources and pending bills of Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

During his four decades of political career, Naidu, aged 74, has proved himself a survivor. He was much ahead of his time in his first and second terms. He projected himself as a forward-thinking, pro-technology and tech-savvy Chief Minister. The atmosphere is excellent, as Naidu has the comfort of a kingmaker. Being part of the Modi Government gives him a chance to share power. He has no opposition in the Assembly, with YSRC reduced to just 11 seats. The TDP needs to address the issue of reservations for Muslims. This topic could lead to conflicts with the BJP. Naidu's positive relationship with Modi is expected to last a year, after which they could pressure the Modi Government on this issue. Additionally, the TDP must resolve the corruption case as Naidu is currently out on bail. His conduct in his fourth term is crucial for his future and that of his son Lokesh.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IN BENGAL

Madam — This is my response to the news item “Bengal Gov. alleges snooping by State Police,” published on June 21. I am too dumbstruck to react to such news. If the governor of a State feels insecure in the Raj Bhawan, how safe and secure are ordinary citizens of the State of Bengal? Earlier, there were allegations that Governor C.V. Ananda Bose had molested a Raj Bhawan lady staffer. This implies that Bose is himself a threat to the security of lady staffers. His run-ins with the CM of Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, are well known. Bengal has become the theatre of the absurd, where everything imaginable as well as unimaginable is possible. If people holding high constitutional offices become the “torchbearers” of misconduct, it will be hard to find a place of refuge. Even this quote offers cold comfort to the people of Bengal. Life is tragic and absurd and none of it has any purpose at all, says T. C. Boyle, an American novelist. Or does absurdity have no upper limits at all?

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

HEAT TAKING TOLL OF HEALTH

Madam — Shocking observations have been revealed in a survey conducted by the network organisation World Weather Attribution (WWA). The temperature has increased by 35 times; the current year is the highest. In the Northern Hemisphere region of the Earth, it has been observed that there is a severe heat wave before the monsoon season. The current year or season is the one with the highest heat stress. There has been a huge increase in greenhouse gases all over the world. Similarly, the increasing use of fossil fuels generates huge amounts of heat. However, the risk of heat stroke caused by such heat is predicted to increase. In this case, the body's cooling system completely collapses and if not treated in time, there is a possibility of human death. These shocking observations have been

Paper leak rows



propos the news story “After NEET comes NET row,” published on June 21, this is my response. As if the NEET fiasco was not enough, we now have the NET exam being cancelled. With the alarming frequency of paper leaks happening in our country, it would not be an exaggeration to say that

it has become a norm rather than an exception. Merely rolling a few heads in the NTA will not serve the purpose until structural issues are addressed.

NTA, which conducts entrance tests like CUET, JEE, NEET and UGC-NET, has failed to live up to expectations and rather failed miserably. It cannot guarantee the cybersecurity at thousands of examination centres and the conduct of invigilators. With such a huge number of students competing for such a small number of seats, crooked operators have all the opportunities to exploit the parents. NTA can learn a thing or two from the GRE and TOEFL as to how to conduct online exams smoothly. The end objective should be that not a single student should face injustice and suffer.

Aarohi Sharma | Jammu

recorded in the survey conducted in South America, Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador. All in all, people's lives on this next earth will be difficult and unbearable due to heat.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

AIR POLLUTION MENACE

Madam — The Health Effects Institute recently released a report on air pollution. In the world, there has been a great deal of pollution due to air pollution and it has been reported that as many as 81 lakh deaths have occurred in the year 2021. India and China have the highest number of deaths and they account for 54 per cent of the total deaths. The year 2021 is set to have more deaths due to air pollution than any previous year. In 2021, around 169,000 children under the age of five died in India due to air pollution alone. India, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ethiopia are the countries. Air pollution is the fourth leading cause of death in many countries after high blood pressure, a poor diet and tobacco. Just read this news. Small particles in the air cause

death. How can this air pollution be eliminated or reduced? For this, vehicle smoke should be reduced. Along with that, trees should be planted and nurtured in large quantities. Clean water is also an important factor. It is advisable to reduce the use of gasoline and diesel vehicles and use battery-powered vehicles instead of that. Thinking should also be started on how to reduce plastic waste, or not at all. In this regard, it is necessary to make a lot of efforts at the Government level. Only then will there be a reduction in air pollution. Citizens should know the importance of polluted air. Today, there is a lot of air pollution in the cities of Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai. Many school-children have developed respiratory disorders and have to drive vehicles on the road for a day. When there was Corona and at that time all the traffic was closed, the air pollution was very low and the clear sky was its indicator.

Shantamur Wagh | Pune

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN


REDISCOVERING THE JOY OF READING

Reading habits offer countless benefits, from intellectual stimulation to overall wellbeing




SHAINY SHARMA

Reading is essential for those who seek to rise above the ordinary. Cultivating a habit of reading can have numerous positive effects on our life starting from intellectual stimulation to emotional well-being. Finding time to read regularly is a valuable investment in oneself, whether one prefers to use physical books or e-books. There is no warmer feeling than reading your favourite book on a rainy day, covered in a cozy blanket with a cup of coffee in hand. The smell of fresh books, hiding pieces of an old love such as dry flowers, old photographs and hazy letters as bookmarks for books as they say have and will always be eternal gifts. In a world hustling and bursting with technological advancements every now and then, the way everyone engages with literature has undergone a significant transformation. The traditional means of reading a book have found themselves in tug-of-war with their digital and audio counterparts. Today, carrying a book library in the pocket makes it easier for people to access a wide range as per their convenience thereby removing the biggest barrier of travelling to a bookstore or a library and then selecting for the favourite one. Moreover, e-books provide an environmentally friendly access when compared to physical books, as they reduce the demand for paper, which significantly reduces the demand for wood pulp from trees and transportation from printing facilities to distribution centres and then to bookstores or directly to consumers. Moreover, the production of physical books involves various materials and processes, including ink, chemicals and packaging materials, which can generate waste and pollution. E-books do not involve these manufacturing processes, thereby reducing the environmental footprint associated with production and waste disposal. While reading e-books requires electronic devices that consume energy, the environmental impact can be mitigated by using energy-efficient devices, renewable energy sources for charging and by considering the longer lifespan and potential reuse of electronic devices compared to physical books.



But what depresses the most is when these e-books are available on devices such as a tablet or a phone resulting in the biggest sources of distraction and thereby reducing the focused reading time. Moreover such devices also offer multimedia enhancements (like videos or interactive elements), which can either enhance or distract from the reading experience, depending on individual preferences. Some people prefer the tactile experience of physical books. Several research and studies reflect a complex interplay of factors influencing the preference for e-books versus physical books. Physical books tend to offer better comprehension, retention and a more comfortable reading experience, while e-books provide convenience, portability and cost efficiency. The choice between the two often depends on the specific needs and preferences of the reader. Instead of immersing oneself in a book, social media browsing encourages quick, fragmented reading of short posts or articles, which can ultimately diminish the habit of sustained, deep reading. The immediate gratification and constant novelty of social media can make reading books seem less appealing or rewarding by comparison. Even when attempting to read, the temptation to check social media notifications or browse feeds can interrupt concentration and disrupt the reading experience. It's important to note that the environmental impact of e-books versus physical books can vary depending on factors such as the energy efficiency of devices used, the source of electricity and how frequently devices are replaced but what matters is that the user also recognise the unique benefits of physical books, leading to a balanced approach where both formats coexist in their reading habits. There's no better way to learn, evolve and relax than reading books. *(The writer is an educator, views are personal)*

Centralised testing faces credibility crisis



SHIVAJI SARKAR

High costs, allegations of corruption and systemic inefficiencies underscore the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the ‘One Nation, One Test’ policy



The country needs to go back to drawing board on centralising entrance tests as the big ones - JEE, NEET, CUET and UGC-NET - are having far too many glitches and questions raised on the National Testing Agency (NTA). The NEET scam and NET cancellation have shocked the youth and raises questions on credibility of the testing agency. Let the country note that within 48 hours of NEET results, four students took their own lives. Should not the country rethink on the One Nation-One Test? The tests are designed to make coaching redundant. Few have an idea of the cost of one NEET — National Eligibility-cum-Entrance (Undergraduate) Test, previously called Pre-Medical Exam. It costs over Rs 400 crore borne by the parents of 2406079 candidates registered for the 2024 exam at the rate of Rs 1700 fee per applicant. The system does not say how much is the profit for NTA. It is common knowledge that no entrance fee is fully spent. Should it not be considered as a tax on the unemployed knowledge seekers! There are approximately 108,915 MBBS seats available across 706 medical colleges for NEET 2024. Around 55,000 of these seats are in Government medical colleges; the rest are in private medical colleges. One wonders why private colleges are included which have a devious fee structure backed by severe capitation fees. The quality of faculty is also questionable. Of course, even newly set-up many State medical colleges too have such issues. Many even do not have a cardiologist or neurologist. Add the cost of coaching, travelling and other expenses, together to cost quite a few hundred crores more, big drain on the economy plus parental and societal stress. The Kota coaching system has an estimated business of Rs 600 crore. There are reports that the UGC-NET having nine lakh aspirants was cancelled as there was paper leak. Each question paper was sold for Rs 5,000 for transfer

to the students' Telegram app. For NEET Rs 30-35 lakh per student was charged as alleged by a student witness, who got the paper with its answers a day before. It's possibly one of the biggest scams that spanned from Vadodara and Godhra to Patna and where not! It has sparked countrywide protests. No wonder the moves against generation of black money has not succeeded. Add to this the various recruitments stalled for scams, 13 in UP, many in West Bengal and the worst known VYAPAM in Madhya Pradesh. The irregularities are thriving with the highest jobless numbers. The NEET scam got exposed and how parents paid Rs 66 lakhs and more. Eight students from the same examination centre in Haryana who secured all-India rank (AIR) 62 to 69, had largely similar roll numbers. On 5 May 2024 at two NEET centres in Haryana, students received a wrong question-paper set, which was taken back after 25 minutes. A paper scam in Gujarat, featured a Vadodara-based coaching centre and at least 16 students who each paid Rs 10 lakh to pass the exam. Fresh accusations arose when news reports of a paper leak emerged only days after conclusion of the competitive exam. A Godhra school teacher is accused of the NEET exam cheating scandal. Rs 7 lakh were found in his car, while cheques worth 2.50 crore were found from the office of the director of the coaching centre. Reportedly, this money was given by the students. "There is a perception of mismanagement by the NTA", says ABVP general secretary Yagyawalkya Shukla. BJP MP Rakesh Sinha calls for severe criminal action

against any nexus found between paper setter and coaching institutes. It has rattled everyone. The reality is the NTA does not have competence to hold the examinations as many professional autonomous institutions have been doing for decades. None could raise a finger against any of them, including the All India Institute of Medical Science. They also selected students with proper aptitude. An issue that has cropped up now with many of the national institutions with CUET in particular. The only action against weeks after the NEET fiasco has been the cancellation of the examination for grace mark students. The NTA appears to be loosely controlled organisation. The tests are gateway to careers and future professional excellence. If it is mired with malpractices and money power, the future of the nation is at stake. Would those adapting devious methods could ever have ethical bindings! The implementation is shoddy. The NTA does not conduct the tests on its own. Implementers are largely burgeoning private sector 'service providers', IT companies and emerging outsourcing infra organisations for conducting such mammoth tests. The competence of NTA for ensuring cyber-security at thousands of centres is doubtful. Even invigilators and other staff are hired casually leaving the system vulnerable to attacks, pilferage and compromise. The suspicion over the countrywide coaching organisations calls for rethink on the composition of the tests. Are they giving instructions or have it emerged as the most corrupt money-minting machines? Should not the coun-

try do away with this organised malpractice? The examinations need to be tailored in a way that students do not need any coaching. National convenor of Sanskriti Utthan Nyas Devendra Singh has demanded cancellation of the NEET test. The Shiksha Bachao Andolan founded by Dinanath Batra and Atul Kothari also wants the test cancelled. Too much centralisation could be breeding irregularities. It is a diverse country with diverse State boards, languages and systems. Apart each genre of professional institutions has varied needs for selections. The previous systems of selections by many professional institutions, organised by themselves have rarely raised an eyebrow. The NTA needs structural reforms. Conducting professional examinations are challenge. Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan says, "We will take the final call". The entire university system cribs over CUET — Central University Entrance Test. It forces students to take a test even for subjects, which are not in demand. The huge numbers have put off academic calendars for the past few years. Let universities conduct their own admissions as before to rid the system of over centralisation, delays and trauma to the students and their families. The academics must put their heads together to have least of central admission examinations and more decentralised process not only to keep the process sanitised but also put India on the world map for its education, that such compromised systems sully. *(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*

Kallakurichi liquor tragedy shows how deep the rot runs

The nexus between local politicians, law enforcement and illicit brewers makes mockery of prohibition laws in the State

Even as this column is being written on Friday at 1 pm, the death toll in Kallakurichi hooch tragedy has risen to 49 with doctors saying that more persons are expected to leave earth to meet their maker. It is only because of the unprecedented increase in the number of persons succumbing to the spurious liquor that this incident has come to national limelight. The truth is that many people lose their lives on a daily basis after the consumption of spurious liquor in Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister M K Stalin has declared a solatium of Rs 10 lakh each to the families of the deceased and this would help him to buy peace with the people. A commission of inquiry has been set up with a retired judge of the Madras High Court as chairman to find out the reason behind the liquor tragedy with instructions to submit a report within three months. The relatives of the victims allege that the bootlegging is done with the patronage of the DMK MLAs and nobody can stand up to him. The MLAs representing Rishivandiyam and Sankarapuram constituencies (both belong to the DMK) are a law unto themselves. "Not even a flower shop will function here without the knowledge of the MLA. How can we accept that he did not know about illicit hooch being brewed here," according to K Ilavarasu (34), owner of a mobile phone repair shop in Karunapuram who has been quoted by a local newspaper. R Perumal (35), a resident of Madhavcheri who lost his brother, says, "Hooch will be brought in packets and sold at a common spot in the village. People from the Scheduled Caste community and Most Backward Class community buy them. When it comes to hooch,



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

there is no rich or poor or dominant or oppressed caste. Police will come for inspection, but will silently leave after taking bribe." Last year saw 17 persons getting killed in nearby Villupuram district after consuming spurious arrack brewed in the nearby hilly region. Resident "Not even a flower shop will function here without the knowledge of the MLA. How can we accept that he did not know about illicit hooch being brewed here," asks K Ilavarasu (34), owner of a mobile phone repair shop in Karunapuram. R Perumal (35), a resident of Madhavcheri who lost his brother, says, "Hooch will be brought in packets and sold at a common spot in the vil-

lage. People from the Scheduled Caste community and Most Backward Class community buy them. When it comes to hooch, there is no rich or poor or dominant or oppressed caste. Police will come for inspection, but will silently leave after taking a bribe." Residents of Karunapuram allege that a lethal cartel of police-DMK politicians-illegal brewers exist in the region. "Those daring to complain against them are silenced once and for ever. Jungle raj prevails in this region," said a relation of one of the victims. Prohibition has been found to be a total failure in Tamil Nadu. Dravidian politics thrived on the money generated by the sale of spurious

liquor and to generate more money the State Government banned the manufacture and sale of arrack (the poor man's scotch). The daily wage earners toiling in the fields from day break to dusk get some relief when they consume arrack which was available at reasonably low rates. With the Government's decision to ban the production and sale of arrack, thousands of jobs along with the tax revenue from sale of the stuff was lost to the Government. Toddy tapping too has been banned in the State, home to the founders of the Dravidian movement who were not averse to the idea of sundowners. By early 2000, the private retail outlets too downed the shutters and the public sector Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMC) took over the entire liquor trade in the State. The Government's was the last word on the brand to be consumed by the tipplers and this was a violation of fundamental right granted under the Constitution of India. Only the brands of liquor manufacturers who were willing to part with a fixed amount to the powers that be were allowed to be sold through the retail outlets. The result was that the market was flooded with poor quality brands which charged premium rates. The daily wage earners were left with no options other than the bootleggers. Had the Government not banned toddy tapping and brewing of country liquor, the mass murders of the kind which we saw in Kallakurichi would not have happened. Period. The objective of this writup is not to encourage people to take drinks. The illegal stuff that is brewed by bootleggers is made with toxic chemicals like ammonium sulfate and insects like centipedes. There was an instance in Kerala where arrack was made out of ethyl alcohol which was used for preserving dead bodies in medical colleges. Should we furnish more details? *(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)*

MONEY MATTERS

BoB aims to double tech team headcount to 3,000 by FY26-end

State-owned Bank of Baroda is aiming to double its in-house technology team headcount to 3,000 in the next two years, a top official has said. The new additions to the current team strength of 1,500 employees will be done both through the regular hiring processes and lateral hires of specialist talent, Debadatta Chand, its managing director and chief executive officer told PTI recently. "In the next two years, we will double the number of people in our IT team," Chand said after the announcement of its March quarter earnings. Recently, the Reserve Bank of India has taken stringent action on banks for shortfalls in technology architecture which impacted the ability to execute transactions. Apart from the 1,500 in-house workers, there are also contractual employees engaged by the bank in the IT function, Chand said. The bank is wanting to hire contemporary talent as part of the efforts to significantly up its strength of IT professionals, he said.



Armee Infotech files papers to garner Rs 250 cr via IPO

IT infrastructure solutions provider Armee Infotech Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 250 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The Gujarat-based company's initial share sale is completely a fresh issue of equity shares with no offer for sale (OFS) component, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Friday. Proceeds of the issue will be used to increase the working capital requirements of the company, payment of debt and general corporate purposes. Armee Infotech services a wide variety of projects for both government/public sector undertakings (PSUs) and private sector with a focus on government/PSU projects. The range of projects undertaken by the company includes supply and installation of IT hardware and software, setting up of smart classes, installing digital infrastructure for public distribution systems, and digitalisation of primary agriculture credit societies, among others.



Lupin, Eugia recall products from US market: USFDA

Drugmaker Lupin and a unit of Aurobindo Pharma are recalling products from the American market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US health regulator. As per the latest Enforcement Report issued by the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), a US-based unit of Lupin is recalling a medication used to treat bacterial infections. Baltimore-based Lupin Pharmaceuticals Inc is recalling 3,552 bottles of Cefixime for Oral Suspension (USP 200 mg/5 mL) due to "failed content uniformity specifications". The affected lot has been produced at the company's Mandideep-based manufacturing plant in Madhya Pradesh. The company commenced the Class II nationwide (US) recall on May 30 this year. The US health regulator stated that New Jersey-based Eugia US LLC, a subsidiary of Aurobindo Pharma, is recalling 70,125 vials of Dexamethasone Sodium Phosphate injection USP.



GST Council needs to reconstitute three GoMs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council will have to reconstitute three Group of Ministers (GoM) under it as new ministers from 11 states joined the body on Saturday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that in the 53rd GST Council meeting on Saturday, there were 11 new ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana and Tripura.

The 52nd GST Council meeting was held on October 7, 2023. With new ministers joining the council, the reconstitution of three GoMs on analysis of revenue from GST, boosting the real estate sector under GST, and GST system reforms are on the cards. While the GoM on GST rate rationalisation has already been reconstituted in February, making Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary its convener, the reconstitution of the other



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that in the 53rd GST Council meeting on Saturday, there were 11 new ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana and Tripura.

three is yet to be notified.

In the GoM on analysis of revenue from GST, the new finance minister from Odisha has to be inducted.

The BJP won the assembly polls in Odisha and formed the government earlier this month. The name of the new finance Minister from Haryana has also to be included in the panel. The GoM on

boosting the real estate sector, headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, has to be reconstituted as the finance minister from Bihar has changed.

The panel on GST on system reforms, under the convensorship of Pawar, has to be reconstituted with five new ministers from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha.

SBI plans to open 400 branches in FY25: Chairman Khara

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As part of the network expansion plan, State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to open 400 branches across the country in the current financial year.

The country's biggest lender opened 137 branches last fiscal. Of the total, 59 new rural branches were launched. "Somebody asked me if 89 per cent of digital and 98 per cent transactions were happening outside the branch, whether the branch is required anymore. My answer is yes. It is still required because there are newer areas which are emerging," SBI Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara told PTI in an interview. There are certain services like most of the advisory and wealth services that can be offered only from the branch, he said.

Taxpayers can amend sales return form before GST payment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GST taxpayers will now have the option to amend outward supply or sales return form GSTR-1 before payment of taxes for a month or quarter.

The GST Council in its meeting on Saturday had recommended providing a new optional facility by way of Form GSTR-1A to facilitate taxpayers to amend the details in Form GSTR-1 for a tax period and/or to declare additional details.

GSTR-1A will, however, have to be filed before filing of return in GSTR-3B for the said tax period.

This will facilitate the taxpayer to add any particulars of supply of the current tax period missed out in reporting in form GSTR-1 of the said tax period or to amend any particulars already declared in GSTR-1 of the current tax period (including those



declared in IFF, for the first and second months of a quarter, if any, for quarterly taxpayers), to ensure that correct liability is auto-populated in GSTR-3B.

Currently, GST taxpayers file outward supply return GSTR - 1 by the 11th day of the subsequent month. Taxpayers with an annual turnover of up to Rs 5 crore can file GSTR-1 quarterly within the 13th day of the end of the quarter.

Amarchand Mangaldas & Co Partner Rajat Bose said this is a positive change recommended by the council from a compliance perspective and will facilitate ease of doing business.

Abhishek Jain, Indirect Tax Head & Partner, KPMG, said allowing revision of filings made in GSTR-1 is a good move to rectify clerical and inadvertent errors before the payment of taxes and curtailing unwarranted notices for reconciliation of disclosures in GSTR-1 and payment of taxes vide GSTR-3B.

"It'll be interesting to see the mechanism for a population of GSTR-2B for the recipient and the time gap available to the recipient for reconciling credits," Jain added.

BDO India Indirect Tax Partner Maulik Manakiwala said the introduction of Form GSTR-1A to report particulars which were missed during the submission of GSTR 1 indicates that through proactive consultation with industry, the government's intention is to simplify GST law and ease compliances for the assessee.

DGFT, Revenue dept working on dedicated hubs to boost e-commerce exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to boost India's e-commerce exports, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) is working with the Department of Revenue to establish designated e-commerce hubs across the country to streamline the process for online export shipments.

The country's e-commerce exports currently stand at USD 2 billion as compared to China's staggering USD 350 billion, according to industry sources.

The government aims at bridging the gap by establishing a supportive e-commerce ecosystem, they said.

"A lot of streamlining is required in this regard. We are working with the Department of Revenue to have designated e-commerce hubs so that clearance of goods happens fast," Director General of Foreign Trade Santosh Kumar Sarangi told PTI.

He said these hubs will have facilities like dedicated customs and security checks, allowing cleared parcels to proceed through a green channel at airports, eliminating the need for further inspections.

This approach mirrors best practices observed in other countries, Sarangi said.



He also pointed out that the e-commerce hubs will be built and maintained by private entities, while the government will oversee security and customs clearances.

In addition to expediting clearances, the proposed hubs would offer warehousing facilities, returns processing, labelling, product testing, and repackaging services.

This public-private partnership aims at creating a robust infrastructure for efficient e-commerce exports, the official said.

These hubs could function similarly to bonded zones, facilitating e-commerce exports, said Ajay Sahai, Director General of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO).

A report estimated that with policy reorientation, India's e-commerce exports could reach USD 350 billion by 2030.

Streamlining the export process through dedicated hubs is a crucial step in this direction, experts mentioned.

Adani drew Rs 9.26 cr salary in FY24 - lower than his executives, industry peers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's second richest person Gautam Adani received a total remuneration of Rs 9.26 crore in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024, lower than most industry peers as well as his own key executives.

Adani, 61, drew salary from only two out of the 10 companies in his ports-to-energy conglomerate, annual reports of the 10 listed entities of the group showed.

His remuneration for 2023-24 from the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL) included Rs 2.19 crore salary and perquisites, allowances and other benefits worth Rs 27 lakh. The total remuneration of Rs 2.46 crore was 3 per cent more than the previous financial year, according to AEL's 2023-24



annual report.

Besides, he drew Rs 6.8 crore from Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd (APSEZ).

Adani's salary is lower than heads of almost all large family-owned conglomerates in India.

While the richest Indian, Mukesh Ambani has been foregoing his entire salary

since Covid-19 broke out prior to which he had capped his remuneration at Rs 15 crore, Adani's remuneration is much lower than telecom czar Sunil Bharti Mittal (Rs 16.7 crore in 2022-23), Rajiv Bajaj (Rs 53.7 crore), Pawan Munjal (Rs 80 crore), L&T Chairman S N Subrahmanyam and Infosys CEO Salil S Parekh.

Adani, who is worth USD 106 billion according to the Bloomberg Billionaire Index, has been jostling with Ambani for the spot of the richest person in Asia. He became the richest Asian in 2022 but lost that position after a damning report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research wiped out almost USD 150 billion of market value of his group stock at its lowest point last year.

'Global trends, trading activity of investors to guide movement in mkts'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets will take cues from trading activity of foreign investors and global trends this week with benchmark equity indices likely to face volatility amid the scheduled monthly derivatives expiry, analysts said. Moreover, factors such as the progress of monsoon and Brent crude oil would also dictate investors' sentiment during the

week. "This week, sector-specific movements are anticipated amid budget-related buzz. Key factors to watch include the progress of monsoon, which will be closely monitored for its near-term impact on investors' confidence."

"Investors will also keep a close eye on FII (Foreign Institutional Investors) and DII (Domestic Institutional Investors) fund flows, as well as



crude oil prices, to gauge overall sentiment," said Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst at Swastika Investment Ltd.

On the global front, economic data like the US GDP will be released on June 27, he added.

"Looking ahead, attention will remain on updates related to the budget and global market cues, particularly from the US," Ajit Mishra, Senior Vice-President,

Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said. Volatility may be heightened by the scheduled expiration of June month derivatives contracts, he added.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 217.13 points, or 0.28 per cent, while the Nifty went up 35.5 points, or 0.15 per cent. "Overall, the market is likely to remain steady and consolidate at higher levels in the near term. Budget-related sectors

are likely to remain in action," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Shrikant Chouhan, Head, Equity Research at Kotak Securities, said market participants will keep an eye on the further progress of monsoon.

"Going ahead, focus will gradually shift towards budget and Q1 FY25 earnings," Chouhan added.

As many as 458 infra projects hit by cost overrun of Rs 5.71 lakh crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 458 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or above, were hit by a cost overrun of more than Rs 5.71 lakh crore in May this year, according to an official report.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,817 projects, 458 reported cost overruns and 831 projects were delayed.

The total original cost of implementation of 1,817 projects was Rs 27,58,567.23 crore, and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 33,29,647.99 crore, which reflects an overall cost overrun of over Rs 5,71,080.76 (20.70



per cent of original cost), the ministry's latest report for May 2024 showed.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till May 2024 is Rs

1,707,190.15 crore, which is 51.3 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, the number of delayed projects decreased to 554, provided the delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion, it added.

Of the 831 delayed projects, 245 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 188 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 271 projects for 25-60 months, and 127 projects for more than 60 months.

The average time overrun in these 831 delayed projects is 35.1 months. Reasons for time overrun, as reported by various project implementing agencies, include land acquisition, environmental clearance, financial issues, contractual/internal issues, manpower shortage and litigation issues.

AI will eliminate certain roles, but will create more jobs than it eliminates: Deloitte AI exec

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AI will replace people with people, contrary to the common narrative, Deloitte's AI Executive Rohit Tandon said, emphasising that the future belongs to AI-human collaboration, not replacement, as he envisions a revolutionary era where technology empowers, rather than replaces, the workforce.

In an interview with PTI, Tandon, Managing Director, AI and Insights Practice Leader, Deloitte LLP, said AI will not snatch jobs, but will simply do away with some of the easier jobs, and create new roles.

"AI will, with people, replace people... It's not just AI replacing people. You still need humans in the loop," he said. Tandon said the same kind of fear of job roles getting



wiped out existed when IT, technology, and computers came into the scenario.

"But just look at how many more jobs have been created across the globe because of IT. The same thing is going to happen with AI. It's going to be all-pervasive, just like it is today, just like you have some of the biggest supercomputers that exist today available on your

phone, some of the most powerful AI algorithms will be at your disposal, in your purses, and in your wallets, in your pockets.

"It's going to be something that we talk about just like the way we talk about it or not talk about it, it just becomes a part of our lives," he said.

He said this is not the first time when a new technology

has come and threatened job losses.

"We've done this before with automation, call centres, etc. We've automated some of the easier stuff. What it leaves behind is tougher problems for humans to solve."

"It will lead to job changes. AI will be replaced by AI with humans. If you look at the pyramid of jobs, AI will start automating more of the easier jobs that are done," he noted.

People will use AI to supplement their knowledge and their ability to find information and share that back and serve the population, he said. "It will eliminate certain roles. But it will create more jobs than it will eliminate," Tandon said.

He said shared services -- that exist across all sectors -- are the first ones to be impacted by AI.

SONAKSHI-ZAHEER TO GET HITCHED UNDER SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT, FESTIVITIES BEGIN

Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal are officially tying the knot in a much-anticipated event. The day will start with a close-knit registered marriage ceremony, the specifics of which are still unknown. All eyes, though, will soon be focused on the much-anticipated evening event at Mumbai's well-known celebrity haunt, Bastian. A-list celebrities in the film business have reportedly received invitations to the star-studded reception. Salman Khan, who gave Sonakshi and Zaheer their big breaks, is probably going to be at the nighttime celebration. However, the list wouldn't be including her *Heeramandi* co-star Manisha Koirala due to her other commitments. According to reports, the couple are going to get married under the Special Marriage Act. Meanwhile,

at the Mumbai eatery, Bastian, Sonakshi and Zaheer Iqbal are reportedly expecting a thousand guests, including well-known Bollywood personalities. "Sonakshi is having a private welcome at Dadar's Bastian. I believe there will be a full-on Bollywood mix-off until four in the morning," said DJ Ganesh. There was a time when Shatrughan Sinha stated that he would rather have Sonakshi and her spouse live with him than send her to her in-laws' home. Images of Sonakshi's family performing different rituals at their home before the wedding have also surfaced. Sonakshi was spotted taking part in the puja and even acknowledged the photographers while wearing a stunning blue kurta suit. Any views of the bride and groom's wedding outfit will be keenly anticipated by fans.



Sequel to *St. Elmo's Fire* under wraps

Sony has revealed that they are looking into making a sequel to the 1985 film *St. Elmo's Fire*. This comes after the release of Andrew McCarthy's new documentary, *Brats*, which explores the lives and careers of the '80s *Brat Pack* actors who rose to fame in coming-of-age films like *The Breakfast Club*, *16 Candles* and *St. Elmo's Fire*. The success of the project will depend on getting McCarthy, Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, Demi Moore, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy and Mare Winningham back together with the original cast. The 1985 movie, which was co-written and directed by the late Joel Schumacher and Carl Kurlander, focused on the time between graduating from college and the demands of beginning a new life and obtaining employment. It was an unexpected summer hit, helped along by an incredibly popular soundtrack. It is anticipated that the sequel will follow the protagonists as they move past those early obstacles and navigate life. A few months after *The Breakfast Club* debuted in theaters in 1985, *St. Elmo's Fire* was released. In both movies, Ally Sheedy, Judd Nelson and Emilio Estevez starred. The name *Brat Pack* has a strong connection to the movie. It was first used in a 1985 New York magazine article about the group's ascent to stardom and featured performers like Nelson, Estevez, Lowe and more. The piece was published just a few days before the movie opened in theatres. Recently, while discussing his new documentary *Brats*, McCarthy told that the idea of creating a sequel to *St. Elmo's Fire* comes up "all the time." He said, "Actually, I was talking to Rob Lowe about that very topic about two months ago and we're like, sure, bring it. I think 30, 20, or even 10 years ago, people would probably have said no. But now I think again that, as you get older, you kind of look back on these things with a certain affection and there's nothing to prove to anyone. It was so nice when we met everybody, it's like, who cares [about the Brat Pack label/past]? It was 35 years ago, does it still matter?" McCarthy continued, "But it's interesting to look at and kind of go, you know what? It was kind of awesome, wasn't it? And I was like, Yeah, it was. And that's a nice feeling to have. So if somebody wanted to do a *St. Elmo's Fire* sequel, we're here. Talk to us. Because yeah, what happened to Mike? Where'd he go?"

Brad Pitt ready to propose his rumoured partnrl nes

Hollywood actor Brad Pitt might be getting married again, precisely for the third time! According to reports, Pitt is eager to start over with Ines De Ramon, his current girlfriend, with whom the A-list Hollywood star is reportedly "very happy." The couple appears to be enjoying each other and there are even rumours circulating that they are talking about having a family. This occurs after all of his children with Angelina began, one by one, to forgo his last name in favour of "Jolie." There are rumours that Pitt and Ines have been dating for more than a year and that they have even moved in together. The 60-year-old celebrity is reportedly considering getting married for the third time, and he may pop the question this summer, according to an insider. According to the insider, "rumours are circulating that Brad is planning to pop the question this summer; it could happen anytime. Brad has actually been prepared to pop the question for some time. He's very content with Ines." Rumours of a romance between Pitt and Ines surfaced in November 2022. The *Babylon* actor and Angelina Jolie were going through a highly publicised divorce at the time, which included a contentious argument over their expensive French vineyard known as the "war of Rose." In the meantime, earlier in the year, jewellery CEO Ines De Ramon and her ex-husband, *Vampire Diaries* star Paul Wesley, divorced. According to individuals involved in the infamous Brangelina rivalry, Brad "values the calm he finds with Ines."

Ramesh Taurani: *Race 4* is on cards with new cast

Veteran producer Ramesh Taurani says the script is ready for the fourth installment in the action crime franchise *Race* and his banner is also developing sequels to *Soldier* and *Bhoot Police*. The latest release from the filmmaker's stable is *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, starring Rohit Saraf, Pashmina Roshan, Jibraan Khan and Naila Grewal. The first two *Race* films were directed by Abbas-Mustan, featuring Saif Ali Khan in the lead. Akshaye Khanna and John Abraham played the roles of villains in the first and second chapters, respectively. The third part was directed by Remo D'Souza and was headlined by Salman Khan, with Bobby Deol essaying the antagonist. "The script is ready for the next *Race* installment, we will announce the casting of the film soon. The cast will be new. I can't comment on whether Salman Khan will be part of it or not. It will go on floors by the end of the year. It's not decided yet who will direct it," Taurani told PTI in an interview. Produced by Tips Films, *Race* was released in 2008 and its success spawned the 2013 sequel. The third part, which arrived in theatres in 2018, did well at the box office despite negative reviews. "We will also make a sequel to *Bhoot Police* and *Soldier*. The official announcement regarding the same will be made soon," Taurani added. Starring Deol and Preity Zinta, 1998's *Soldier* was one of the highest-grossing films of the year. The action thriller was directed by Abbas-Mustan. *Bhoot Police*, a 2021 adventure-horror comedy, featured Saif Ali Khan and Arjun Kapoor in the lead. Directed by Pavan Kirpalani of *Phobia* fame, the film got a direct-to-digital release on Disney Hotstar VIP. Taurani further said they are equally thrilled about their next release, an untitled film with actor Varun Dhawan and his director-father David Dhawan.


NANA PATEKAR REVEALS HE'S JUST NOT INTERESTED IN INDUSTRY'S ISSUES

On the sets of the Rakesh Sarang film *Horn Ok Pleassss* in 2008, actress Tanushree Dutta accused actor Nana Patekar of sexually harassing her. The actor replied. Patekar claimed that he was not concerned by Tanushree's charges because he was aware that nothing similar had occurred. In a recent conversation, Nana Patekar was questioned about whether Tanushree Dutta's claims of sexual harassment infuriated him in an interview, as he shares, "No, I knew whatever was being said didn't happen. I didn't get angry or bothered by it because nothing had happened. I am not bothered by it. Nothing happened. I don't know what it was about. If something had happened, I would have told you. Suddenly, someone says you did this. What do I say? I didn't do it. What else can I say?" Tanushree Dutta filed a complaint against Nana Patekar in October 2018, claiming that the actress had behaved inappropriately while filming a special song for *Horn Ok Pleassss*. Patekar, however, refuted any such event, pointing out that on that day in 2008, there were roughly fifty individuals on the sets. 2019 saw the Mumbai police clear Nana Patekar of any wrongdoing after they were unable to produce any proof to back up Tanushree Dutta's allegations. The *Welcome* actor also declared in the interview that he was unaffected by the problems in the film industry, saying, "I do not belong in this industry. I work there as a professional and then go home. I'm not interested in issues related to the industry or its activities."


Ranvir Shorey once said he'll go to *Bigg Boss* when he'd want to die!

Ranvir Shorey, a name well-known in the world of television and movies, has always been candid about his thoughts on reality shows. In 2015, he humorously quipped in an interview, saying, "I will go to *Bigg Boss* when I think I want to die. Every year they call me and every year I ask them to call me next year. Luckily, every year I get some work to sail through the year." Indeed, Ranvir had successfully dodged the persistent invitations to join the *Bigg Boss* house, but life, as they say, is full of surprises. This year, fans were astonished to see Ranvir Shorey enter the *Bigg Boss OTT 3* house as a contestant, a twist no one saw coming. The announcement, made by none other than the iconic Anil Kapoor, sent ripples of excitement through the entertainment industry. Anil Kapoor, hosting the season with his characteristic charm and energy, welcomed Ranvir with open arms. The veteran actor's entrance sparked a mix of curiosity and intrigue among viewers. In a recent episode, Ranvir addressed his long-standing joke. "I guess it's true what they say—never say never. Here I am, not because I have no work but because life has an interesting way of shaking things up. Sometimes, you just have to embrace the unexpected."


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK




SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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Rules

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

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS

1 Sour-lasting

3 A fruit with a stone

7 Hit with your hand open

8 Ran after trying to catch

10 Assistants

13 Went in

16 Having a doze

17 Very small

18 Scramble, boil or fry these

19 A light wind

DOWN

1 Finest

2 Go on a journey

4 Mislead

5 Noon

6 Reduce the length of

9 Loosen or tighten nuts with this tool

11 Store a car in here

12 Make up your mind

14 A slimy creature that eats lettuce leaves

15 A rubber cover on a wheel

SOLUTION

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‘For me, *Munjya*’s success is a huge victory. I grin at it’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Part of Maddock Films’ horror-verse, the horror comedy *Munjya* has caused quite a stir at the box office. Despite having a small cast of well-known actors, the film has done well during its two weeks on the weekend circuit. It’s noteworthy to note that, in addition to hurting Kartik Aaryan’s film *Chandu Champion*’s box office performance, it also managed to outpace its collection this week.

At that point, we managed to secure an exclusive interview with the main actor, Abhay Verma, who is getting positive reviews from both critics and the public! To start, the recently renowned actor states, “In *Munjya*, my character was incredibly honest and likewise generous! He lacked any filters as well. It was really challenging for me to play the role because of these three characteristics. Since I don’t believe we encounter individuals like this! I therefore unlearned all the filters I hold in my personal life in order to prepare for the part, rather than learning anything. I was instructed to make sure the audiences connected with every action I made in *Munjya*. It was truly becoming challenging for me.” The *Marzi* fame doesn’t end there: “Knowing the fascinating aspects of being a hairstylist in *Munjya* was something truly fascinating. I am quite capable in cutting hair! After that, I discovered Marathi, along with its cultures and customs, which I would have known otherwise.”

In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Abhay Verma—who is now slaying the internet with his charisma following his role in *Munjya*—shares his thoughts about playing the character and how the movie is a completely other ball-game.

Munjya’s co-producer is director Amar Kaushik, who started the horror comedy trend with the entertaining film *Stree*. He and Dinesh Vijan made the decision to support the movie because they were drawn in by the novel idea of the Marathi folktale. “The cast of *Munjya* was inseparable during filming. We have been filming this movie for a year and a half. We can all reach each other with simply a phone call! We are so close that we usually tell one other about anything that occurs in our individual lives first.” Furthermore, “The characters we see on screen and the ones that are produced through CGI are two separate characters because the movie is CGI driven. Even though I received payment for one (he laughed heartily), I was instructed to use extreme caution so that the audience wouldn’t perceive my role as implausible. However, it’s in a favourable light! For me, personally, *Munjya*’s accomplishment is a huge victory. I grin at it.”

Even if the movie’s concept is unusual in Bollywood, as we can see, it touched miraculous numbers! *Little Things* fame attested to this by saying, “I found the folklore it’s based on to be very interesting because I knew nothing about marathi! I now sense that the Maharashtrians are a little closer to me. Whatever else I discovered from the folklore was, aside from that, enlightening.” “Normally action sequences are more difficult to shoot for an actor, but working with *Munjya* was a whole different ballgame,” he continues. “I found it easier to shoot them! I had to make my CGI character appear really unnatural on television, which made it hard for me to



react to it. I went crazy as soon as I realised that I had to do every short three times with the CGI character! Consistency was incredibly hard to come by. The entire scene may have been completely different with just one motion.” Abhay Verma is overjoyed to hear that his film has become a true hit! He even told us, “I was blown away when people began to relate to me through Daniel Radcliffe. I thought I was a role model in the fantasy world. I was informed that the film business had never done anything like this. Undoubtedly, CGI characters have been created, but not to this extent! I am a trailblazer; I sparked a trend. Being likened to

Mowgli and Harry Potter makes me very happy.” In the end, the narrative favoured the lead character. Audiences discovered fresh voices and new stories! “We didn’t only violate the rules by using VFX but an ensemble cast devoid of A-list actors. My confidence was greatly boosted by the box office triumph! The notion that a successful movie at the box office requires superstars was defied by *Munjya*’s ensemble. Not that box office numbers are very important to me; rather, I care about the affection of the audience.” Since the story and the setting are similar to “home,” the intensely personal always finds resonance and becomes universal. “I was raised in a small town and have always aspired to be successful in the movie business. My accomplishment, in my opinion, will serve as a spur for those who are interested in entering this field.”

Bringing in multicultural melodies with new wave in EDM

SHRADDHA NEWARE

Mauritius-born and raised in Paris, DJ GREG is popular for creating his genre of music with different elements. The talented artist has now started his Indian debut tour and grabbed the attention of Hyderabad’s night scene!

Growing up in Mauritius, significantly influenced his musical style. The budding artist speaks to us about what shaped his musical journey, maximing, “As Mauritius is a multicultural island, I’ve always been listening to a lot of different genres of music. And in my DJ set or compositions, you can hear a lot of different elements that most artists and producers would not bring together.”

Navigating his identity as a Mauritian and playing a predominantly European music scene, the artist said, “I don’t really speak a lot about my identity as a Mauritian artist. I let the music do it. I think that’s why there is always Mauritians showing up at my gigs. They understand my message.”

Basically, when it comes to his music contributing to representing his roots, the Mauritian artist says that it’s not his music but the sounds from the island.

GREG, who finds his biggest musical influences in ‘djing dad’ Ben UFO, Jarreau Vandal and Teki Latex, shares, “Meeting the *Boukan* record crew, and later joining *La CREOLE Collective* has

definitely helped to shape my musical direction. Being part of the web radio *Rinse France* played a big role too.”

Having met such a diverse set of people, and incorporating that influence into his music, the DJ is keen on showing his heritage through his creations. The inspiring artist further speaks to us about the influence of *Boukan Records* and *La CREOLE*, “Both crews are about blending sounds that I love, from UK club to Afro or Caribbean music. They really defend this identity, which is the most important part of it. Before meeting them, I didn’t know anyone or any crew that was doing this. It’s also two rare parties where there is no limit for a DJ, you can almost play everything you want.”

The multicultural artist described his creative process as being mostly instinctive and not overthinking when blending different genres like Jungle, Kuduro, Shatta and GQOM in his productions. “It’s different for my sets because it needs to keep the transitions smooth to get the crowd’s attention and not break the vibe. I find a sort of link between different rhythms or melodies and sometimes it can also be a word or just a

specific sound,” the ingenious DJ said.

Being a DJ, he is someone who constantly experiments with a diverse range of genres to maintain a cohesive sound on the dance floor. Therefore when playing a set, the only thing he has on his mind is to keep the crowd dancing! Because if they are not, he feels that he is missing something.

Working in the field of music production, collaborations with other producers such as Le Dom, Krampf and King Doudou, is quite organic for him.

He shares that these collaborative experiences helped his workflow and achieve certain sounds, textures, arrangements and his vision of music production.

The musician emphasised that without community, he doesn’t exist. As a resident at the Rex Club in Paris, he now runs his own set. “I think people started to notice that I only booked my favourite DJs and friends, and not doing line up with a business way of thinking. They know that if they come to my parties, even if they don’t know all the DJs, they are going to have a good time. Globally, I use my *Rinse Show* to reach a worldwide audience.”

The active artist has reportedly played at some notable festivals and venues like Berghain, Dekmantel Selectors and Primavera Barcelona. He said that whenever he is playing, he never prepares his sets, but goes with the flow! One of these festivals had a lasting impact on him, called the *Horst Music and Arts Festival* of last May.

Technology, he further says, plays an important role in his music and he only produces music virtually on his laptop.

Talking about the advancements in his field, the tech enthusiast shares, “I’m always aiming for new plugins to enhance my creativity or achieve better sound quality! I’m seeing more and more plugins that work with AI, the revolution is not done yet.” He further shares his opinion on the future of electronic music, saying, “It is about breaking the frontier between music genres. It’s already happening, but I think more and more producers and DJs will follow this path. I will just keep working as hard as I can.”

His favourite tools and software for music production are *Max 4 Live*, *Random* and *Vital* as a synthetic.

He was the first ever Mauritian DJ to do a boiler room, was invited for a guest mix on legendary *Hessle Audio’s Rinse FM Show* and did b2bs with artists. And this is something that he’s been really proud of. He also desires to do his own events in Mauritius.

The *Eau Coulée Smart City* EP fame, on a concluding note shares, “I took a lot of time to work on my design, so the upcoming releases will sound way better than my two previous releases. More collaborations with friends will also come out!”

Well, as he’s working on new music, we certainly can look forward to more releases!

‘BACNE’ BEGONE WITH HOMEOPATHIC REMEDIES

Bacne, or acne that occurs on the upper back and shoulders, is a shared global skin condition that affects people regardless of age or gender. It starts forming when oil and dead skin cells clog hair follicles in the back area. The sebaceous glands, located beneath the skin, produce an oily substance called sebum. When overproduced, this sebum can mix with dead skin cells and clog pores on the back, forming pimples. While often associated with adolescence, bacne can persist well into adulthood, causing both physical discomfort and emotional distress.

A 2019 national survey states that approximately 12% of respondents aged 20 to 29 reported experiencing acne, including bacne. The survey revealed that factors such as excess oil production, clogged pores by sticky skin cells, bacteria and inflammation, directly contributed to bacne issues. As a chronic inflammatory condition, bacne requires a multifaceted approach to effectively manage its symptoms and prevent long-term scarring.

Causes for ‘bacne’

One of the common causes of bacne is dandruff when it falls on the shoulder and back. It’s better to treat dandruff first to address acne at the back. Stress is a significant factor that can aggravate dandruff, worsening the problem. Managing stress can help reduce dandruff and, consequently, improve bacne.

Role of homeopathy in ‘bacne’ treatment

Homeopathy, a complementary medical system, offers a holistic approach to treating bacne by addressing the underlying causes rather than just the symptoms. It uses highly diluted substances derived from plants, minerals and animal sources to stimulate the body’s innate healing mechanisms.

One of homeopathy’s key strengths is its individualised approach to treatment, which supports the body’s natural healing processes to maintain healthy skin. Homeopathic practitioners carefully consider factors such as the location of bacne lesions, potential triggers and the stage of bacne development to prescribe tailored remedies.

Lifestyle matters for clear back

Managing bacne effectively involves adopting a proper skincare routine and making certain lifestyle changes.

Diet and hydration for nourishment from with-

in: To manage bacne, we should consume a balanced diet comprising essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. This being said, it is ideal to incorporate plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean proteins to boost overall skin health. Additionally, one can flush out toxins and achieve clear skin by drinking an adequate amount of water.

Stress management for a calming mind and body: Stress is a leading factor for bacne breakouts, as it can disrupt hormone levels and compromise the skin’s natural healing process. Incorporating stress-management techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, etc., can help reduce inflammation and promote a sense of calm, ultimately benefitting the skin.

Quality skincare rituals: Establishing a consistent and gentle skincare routine is essential for managing bacne. You should opt for a gentle cleanser made with ingredients (like neem tulsi, orange peel extracts, saffron, vitamin E, etc.) twice a day. This way, you can remove excess oil and dirt without compromising the skin’s natural moisturising effects. Additionally, incorporating a gentle exfoliating product enriched with time-tested ingredients, such as echinacea, safflower, walnut and kaolin, once or twice a week can help unclog pores and promote cell turnover on the back.

Sun-safe practices for optimal protection: Extended exposure to sun is harmful for those living with bacne. Therefore, it is advisable to use a non-comedogenic (non-pore-clogging) and water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher and PA+++ on the back. Opting for such a cruelty-free formula helps create a protective layer against the harsh UVA and UVB rays and protects the skin from environmental damage.

Managing bacne requires a comprehensive approach that includes proper skincare, lifestyle adjustments, and exploring alternative treatments like Homeopathy. Every person has a different skin type, so what works for you may not be applicable to another. It is crucial to consult with a qualified homeopath who can provide a personalised treatment plan that addresses specific needs and causes of bacne.

(The author, Dr. Mukesh Batra, is the founder of Dr Batra’s group of companies.)



Renowned DJ GREG, who is recognised for his unique sound, talked about his musical path and how he uses his music to highlight his Mauritius roots.

Near perfect India could play party poopers to under pressure Australia

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (SAINT LUCIA)

India will be out to derail Australia's T20 World Cup campaign when they take on their shocked and under-pressure opponents in their final Super 8 game here on Monday. A third straight win for India will not only make them the group toppers and send them to the semifinals, it will also substantially threaten Australia's chances of progressing through to the semi-finals following the unexpected loss to Afghanistan in Saint Vincent on Saturday night. Following the reverse against Afghanistan, Australia don't have the destiny in their own hands and will be keenly tracking Rashid Khan's team final game against Bangladesh on Monday night. India, who have had to endure heartbreaking defeats at the

hands of Australia in major ICC events, would like to see a pre-mature exit of their strong rivals. On fine-tuning their game ahead of the knockouts, India don't need to do much having ticked all boxes in their back-to-back wins against Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Both Rohit and Virat Kohli played innings of substance against Afghanistan, while Shivam Dube, who had not been able to perform his role, answered his critics with a crucial knock. Number three Rishabh Pant has been getting dismissed off reverse hit often and it is something he would like to correct. The biggest positive for India in this tournament has been the all-round effort of Hardik Pandya, who has now come to the party with the bat to complement his incisive spells. Kuldeep Yadav has taken little

time to come up with match-winning contributions and he would be relied on for wickets in the middle overs. With the team playing three Super 8 games with as many days of travel in between, the management will be tempted to rotate players but is unlikely to do so. India, who arrived in Saint Lucia on Saturday night, chose not to train ahead of the Australia game considering the hectic travel involved. It will only be the second day game at the Darren Sammy Cricket Stadium. The day nighters have produced high-scores here but in the previous game at the venue, England were not able to chase 164 in a day game against South Africa. It has been the best batting strip of the competition but sun beating down on the pitch through the day is likely to aid the slower bowlers. Australia, on the other hand,



have plenty to worry about going into the game. It was a flop batting show against Afghanistan and unusually Mitchell Marsh's team had a forgettable night in the field as well. Having logged only 88 runs in six games at a strike rate of 111, Marsh needs to lead from the front against India. With the ball, offie Glenn Maxwell needs to check his economy rate of 8.58 runs per over. In terms of match ups, it will be interesting to see how Kohli fares against leg-spinner Adam Zampa, who has had the better of the Indian superstar on multiple occasions. Australia played the extra spinner in Ashton Agar instead of Mitchell Starc against Afghanistan but that could change against India. "It was an off-night for us in the field, and we own that. We'll be back next game. It

wasn't an easy wicket but both teams played on this surface. (India next...) First and foremost it becomes clear for us. We need to win and no better team to do it against (India)," said the skipper in a very matter of fact way after the Afghanistan game. **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. **Australia:** David Warner, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh (captain), Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis, Tim David, Matthew Wade (wk), Pat Cummins, Ashton Agar, Adam Zampa, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Josh Inglis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis.



Big hitting West Indies clash with rampaging SA in must win super 8 clash

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND

Hosts West Indies will need their all-round firepower for taming a rampaging South Africa in their must-win final Super Eight clash to seal the semi-final berth at the T20 World Cup here. After their only loss in six games to England in their opening Super 8 game, WI regrouped to smash co-hosts USA by nine wickets. For WI, a win will see them through to the last-four, while a loss will bring it down to net run-rate and that too only if USA beat England in the other group match. South Africa, who have won all their six games so far, are sitting at the top of the table but they too are not yet guaranteed a spot in the semifinal and will need a win to seal the position. A loss will again leave their fate on the other result and NRR. However, both teams will have the advantage of knowing the exact scenario before they head into the match. West Indies had failed to rotate strike against England but they quickly addressed the issue, producing a dominant show against USA led by Shai Hope's belligerent 39-ball 82. While Hope will be expected to produce the firepower in the powerplay, the Windies also possess some big power-hitters such as Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell to provide the charge in the death as well. They also have Kyle Mayers waiting in the wings and it needs to be seen if WI is tempted to open with him, given his stint in SA20 and his mountain of runs in the pre-World Cup series against South Africa last month. "I think most of the times when we control the power play, whether batting or bowling, that's when we come out on top," Roston Chase said in the pre-match press conference. "I think that's the main focus, because we know in the end we have the power at the end. So, it's just for us to control that power play with the batting and our bowling..." South Africa, on the other hand, haven't looked dominant so far despite an all-win

record. It has always been tight wins even against minnows like the US and Nepal. The positive thing is that Aiden Markram's team has always found a way to come out trumps. "If you look at previous World Cups, the small moments we haven't really won. And it's good to see that I think all the games have come really close and we found a way, so it's building the character within the team," Keshav Maharaj said. "And I think it prepares us for obviously certain opportunities that we could get and crossing over the line in those small moments are things that we've never done before. So, it's good to see us getting into that." For SA, Quinton de Kock and Reeza Hendricks have done the heavy lifting, while Anrich Nortje and Keshav Maharaj have been their standout bowler. De Kock's big-hitting in the powerplay made the difference in their last match against England and WI has to find a way to stop him. WI has some quality spinners in Akeal Hosein, Gudakesh Motie and Chase and a lot will depend on them as how they contain the middle-order, led by David Miller. WI will also take inspiration from their 3-0 sweep of South Africa ahead of the tournament although it came against a second-string side. South Africa, on the other hand, have an overwhelming 3-1 record against the West Indies in T20 World Cups.

SQUAD:

West Indies Squad: Rovman Powell (c), Kyle Mayers, 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. **South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Ott Niel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi and Tristan Stubbs.

Afghanistan shock Australia by 21 runs in Super 8s match of T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN

Afghanistan pulled off an upset of epic proportions with a shock 21-run win over mighty Australia in T20 World Cup with Gulbadin Naib's four-wicket haul upending Pat Cummins' hat-trick to produce one of most memorable days in Afghan cricket. Using the slower balls smartly on a difficult batting wicket, Afghanistan defended their total of 148 for six for their first-ever win over Australia in international cricket. Australia were all out for 127 in 19.2 overs in the Super Eight contest and they are now staring at early elimination from the World Cup. Australia now must win their match against India on Monday and also hope that Afghanistan lose to Bangladesh in their next match. Afghanistan opens Rahmanullah Gurbaz (60) and Ibrahim Zadran (51) forged a 118-run partnership setting up base for a challenging total but Pat Cummins registered his second successive hat-trick spread across two overs to restrict Afghanistan to a manageable total. Australia were reduced to 32 for 3

in the powerplay but Glenn Maxwell slammed a 41-ball 59 to somewhat resurrect the chase. However Naib's timely strikes proved crucial in topping the 2021 champions. Afghanistan exacted revenge for their defeat in Mumbai during the ODI World Cup. Maxwell had snatched victory from Aghans at that time and on Saturday too he threatened to deny them but Naib's brilliance ensured them the win. "It's massive win for us as a team and as a nation. Great feeling. It's something we missed in last two years. Really happy with the win and super proud of the guys," Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan said at the post-match presentation. "The way Gulbadin bowled today - the experience he has, it came good today. The way Nabi started - the wicket of Warner - was also pleasing to see. It's so important for us back home and around the world. I'm sure they're proud and would've enjoyed the game," he added. The result has opened up the Group 1 as both Australia and Afghanistan now have one win each with one match to go, while India sit atop the table with two



wins from as many games. Defending 149 on a spin-friendly wicket, Afghanistan had the perfect start as Naveen-ul-Haq picked up two early wickets with the new ball to peg Australia back. First Naveen cleaned up Travis Head for a duck with a fuller delivery and then he deceived the skipper Mitch Marsh with a slower delivery as he holed out to Nabi. Maxwell eased the pressure with two fours off Azmatullah but Nabi removed David Warner (3), who went for a slog sweep only to find Noor Ahmad as Australia scored the lowest Powerplay score of 33 for 3 this World Cup.

Maxwell, who had tormented Afghanistan during the ODI World Cup last year, continued to find the boundaries as he clattered spinner Nangeyalia Kharote for a four and a six. Naib then struck twice to give Afghanistan hope as he surprised Marcus Stoinis with a bouncer. The batter top-edged it to find Gurbaz. He next trapped Tim David as Australia slipped to 85 for 5 in the 13th over. Maxwell slammed a six off Rashid Khan and Naib in 12th and 13th overs to keep Australia's chase on track. Naib returned to pick his most

prized cap, dismissing the dangerous Maxwell in the 15th over and then Rashid removed Matthew Wade as their chase fell apart. Naib next knocked off the stumps of Cummins, while Naveen claimed his third victim by removing Ashton Agar. Azmatullah ended the proceedings by dismissing Josh Hazlewood. Earlier, Gurbaz and Ibrahim notched up their third century stand of this T20 World Cup with a 118-run partnership. The duo capitalised on their chances as Australia had to wait till the 16th over for their first breakthrough. Gurbaz slammed four maximums and as many fours in his 49-ball stay, while Zadran hit six boundaries during his 48-ball knock. Stoinis got rid of Gurbaz with an off-cutter, while in the next over, Adam Zampa cleaned up Azmatullah Omarzai with a slider. Looking for big hits, Afghanistan lost wickets there after with Cummins dismissing Rashid Khan, Karim Janat and Gulbadin Naib to become the first player to pick up two hat-tricks in T20 World Cups.

De Bruyne crowns Belgium's 2-0 win over Romania to get Euro 2024 campaign on track

AP ■ COLOGNE (GERMANY)

In front of Belgium's royal family, King Kev sealed the win. Belgium shook off the shock of losing to Slovakia in its opening game of the European Championship by beating Romania 2-0 on Saturday. Kevin De Bruyne's second-half goal completed the win after Youri Tielemans scored in the second minute at Cologne Stadium. Watching on were Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde. "We knew what we needed to do. We needed to win otherwise we were going home," De Bruyne said. "I will do everything I can to keep the lads on track." This was just what Belgium needed after the Slovakia stunner, which raised the prospect of another early exit from a major tournament after being eliminated at the group stage of the 2022 World Cup. Tielemans gave the No. 3-ranked team in the world a flying start with a goal from the edge of the area. De Bruyne converted direct from Belgium goalkeeper Koen Casteels' long kick in the 80th.



The result means all four teams in Group E have three points and there is all to play for in the final round of games on Wednesday, when Belgium plays Ukraine and Romania takes on Slovakia. "I'm very relieved we won the game. It was very important to get the three points," Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco said. While Belgium won, there was more frustration for Romelu

Lukaku, who had a third goal ruled out by VAR at these Euros. Still, he was at the center of his team's great start when laying the ball off for Tielemans to drive in low from the edge of the box. Belgium has been criticized for failing to live up to expectations in the past, and its opening defeat would not have helped the confidence among the squad going into Saturday's game.

Tielemans' goal seemed to lift the pressure, and Belgium ruled the rest of the half with 67% of possession. Lukaku thought he scored after the break, but VAR said he strayed offside before firing past Romania keeper Florin Nita. The longer the game went on without Belgium scoring a second, the more the tension rose. Dennis Man could have evened the score when running through on goal, but was denied by Casteels. The keeper then turned provider with a long punt upfield, which De Bruyne raced on to and fired home. Tedesco thought his team took too long to seal the win. "Scoring four or five goals tonight was possible," he said. "It is important to create chances, but you have to kill the game earlier for sure." Under former Belgium coach Roberto Martinez, Portugal advanced to the knockout phase after a 3-0 win against Turkey in Group F. Georgia picked up its first ever point at a major tournament after a drawing the Czech Republic 1-1 and still has hopes of advancing.

Indian recurve mixed team wins bronze medal in Archery World Cup

PTI ■ ANTALYA (TURKEY)

Indian recurve mixed team of Dhiraj Bommadevara and Bhajan Kaur produced an excellent performance to rally past Mexico and clinch a bronze medal in the Archery World Cup Stage 3 here on Sunday. Trailing 0-2 after conceding the opening set, the Indian team produced a flawless round to bring it level and seal a stunning 5-3 (35-38, 40-39, 38-37, 38-38) win over their Mexican opponents Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande. This was India's third medal from the meet and the archers will be in the hunt for two more medals when Dhiraj and Ankita Bhakat compete in their respective individual semifinals later in the day. Indian women's compound team of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Aditi Swami and Parneet Kaur bagged a gold medal, while Priyansh bagged a silver on Saturday.

Italy and Croatia clash with tournament survival at stake

AP ■ LEIPZIG (GERMANY)

Defending champion Italy needs to avoid defeat against neighboring Croatia in their final group game to ensure progress at the European Championship. Croatia can progress with a win, or by avoiding defeat as long as Albania does not beat group-winner Spain in the other Group B game at the same time. **HERE'S WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE MATCH:** **MATCH FACTS** □ Italy has three points after beating Albania 2-1 in its opening game before losing 1-0 to Spain, which is already assured of winning the group. Croatia lost to Spain 3-0 in its opening game, then drew with Albania 2-2 in their second game, leaving both Croatia and Albania with one point.

Albania has the better goal difference. □ Though a draw will be enough for Italy's progression, Luciano Spalletti's team will be keen to impress after being thoroughly outclassed by Spain in its previous game. Italy only lost by a goal, but the Italian players spent most of the game chasing Spanish shadows and were saved embarrassment by captain and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. □ Zlatko Dalic's Croatia team is once again led by Real Madrid star Luka Modric, who is yet to score in his fifth tournament appearance. □ Italy lost in its previous and only game in Leipzig, a 1-0 defeat to East Germany in a friendly in April 1982. □ Many of the Croatian players have played in Italy, while Italy coach Luciano Spalletti is



familiar with Marcelo Brozovic and Ivan Perisic from their time together at Inter Milan between 2017 and 2019. The now 35-year-old Perisic scored 55 goals in 254 games across stints with Inter, winning the Serie A title in 2021 and Coppa Italia the next season. **TEAM NEWS** □ Italy left-back Federico Dimarco is expected to miss the game with a right calf injury sustained in the loss against Spain. Dimarco featured in both of Italy's games so far. □ Croatia will be without midfielder Nikola Vlacic, who is no longer with the squad because of an injury, while veteran defender Domagoj Vida missed Saturday's training session with an ankle injury. **BY THE NUMBERS** □ Italy has a poor record

against Croatia, winning only one of their previous nine meetings. Croatia won three, while there were five draws. The last three games all finished 1-1. □ Italy's only win came in the first meeting between the countries, a friendly in Genoa in 1942 that yielded four goals for the home team. **WHAT THEY'RE SAYING** "I know the Italy coach. They will be well organized. It will be a tough match, but I believe we will rise to the challenge and come out victorious." - Croatia midfielder Mario Pasalic. "Croatia are strong. They have experience. In addition to Brozovic, they have many quality players and we will have to be careful. But we will have to play our game with our own strengths, and I'm sure we will cause them problems.

RELEASE DATE LOCKED FOR *INDIAN 2* TRAILER

Lyca Productions is all set to unveil the highly anticipated trailer of *Bharateeyudu 2 (Indian 2)* in a grand event on June 25th. Universal Hero Kamal Haasan returns to reprise his iconic role in this sequel to the 1996 blockbuster *Bharateeyudu*, known for revolutionising action cinema. Directed by visionary filmmaker Shankar S, renowned for his epic cinematic vision, the film promises a captivating experience for audiences worldwide.

Bharateeyudu 2 (Indian 2) is not just a sequel; it's a pan-India production that boasts a star-studded ensemble including S.J. Suryah, Kajal Aggarwal, Priya Bhavani Shankar, Rakul Preet Singh, Siddharth, Nedumudi Venu, Kalidas Jayaram, Gulshan Grover, Samuthirakani, Bobby Simha, Brahmanandam, Zakir Hussain, Piyush Mishra, Guru Somasundaram, Delhi Ganes, Shivaji Guruvayoor, Deepa Shankar, Anant Mahadevan, George Maryan, Vinod Sagar, Akhilendra Mishra and Benedict Garrett. The film pays homage to the late actors Vivek, G Marimuthu and Manobala, honouring their contributions to the project.

With music by the acclaimed Anirudh Ravichander, whose soundtrack has already garnered praise for its two

captivating songs, *Bharateeyudu 2 (Indian 2)* promises to be a visual spectacle. The trailer, scheduled to be 2 minutes and 36 seconds long, will be launched in Mumbai amidst much fan-fare.

Backed by Lyca Productions and Red Giant Movies and featuring cinematography by Ravi Varma and editing by A. Sreekar Prasad, the film is poised to be a cinematic masterpiece. Its grand-scale production ensures a visually stunning and impactful experience. The theatrical rights for Telugu states have been secured by Asian Suresh Entertainment LLP and Sri Lakshmi Movies, promising a spectacular release in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Get ready as 'Senapathy' (Old Kamal Haasan) returns to unleash the power-packed trailer on June 25th, 2024, setting the stage for the film's eagerly awaited theatrical release on July 12, 2024.



Ravi Teja's *Mr Bachchan* moves to Kashmir Valley

Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja and the team behind *Mr Bachchan*, directed by the acclaimed Harish Shankar and produced by TG Vishwa Prasad of People Media Factory, are currently filming a melodious duet amidst the picturesque Kashmir Valley. This highly anticipated project has already completed 90% of its shooting schedule. The latest segment focuses on capturing a captivating melody featuring Ravi Teja and Bhagyashree Borse, choreographed by the renowned Sekhar Master. Over the past four days, the crew has been immersed in filming against the backdrop of Kashmir's stunning landscapes, with today marking the final day of this particular shoot. The choice of location and the essence of the song are set to bring a visually striking and emotionally poignant dimension to the film. As the production nears completion, the excitement for *Mr Bachchan* continues to mount, buoyed by the successful collaboration between Ravi Teja, Harish Shankar and the skilled production team.



Samantha's Bollywood debut with SRK on a roll!

In a sensational development for Bollywood enthusiasts, renowned filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani and megastar Shah Rukh Khan are set to reunite for an exhilarating new project an untitled action-adventure patriotic film. Adding to the excitement, Samantha Ruth Prabhu has been confirmed to play the female lead opposite Shah Rukh Khan, marking her highly anticipated debut in Hindi cinema, sources revealed.

With a string of successful films to her credit, Samantha's addition to the cast adds an extra layer of intrigue and anticipation to the project.

While specific plot details remain under wraps, the film is expected to blend adrenaline-pumping action with a strong patriotic narrative, crafted to resonate deeply with Indian audiences. Rajkumar Hirani's direction, coupled with Shah Rukh Khan's on-screen charisma and Samantha Ruth Prabhu's talent, promises a compelling cinematic experience.

Preparations for the film are underway, with principal shooting slated to commence later this year. The production team is pulling out all the stops to deliver a visually spectacular and emotionally resonant film that will captivate audiences across the globe.



RGV reveals why he didn't cast SRK for Dawood

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma's 2002 film *Company* remains a beloved gangster drama, loosely inspired by the infamous underworld organisation, D-Company, led by Don Dawood Ibrahim. Surprisingly, Ajay Devgn and Vivek Oberoi were not Varma's initial choices for the pivotal roles. In fact, he initially approached Shah Rukh Khan to portray

Dawood Ibrahim and considered Abhishek Bachchan for the character of Chota Rajan.

In a video on his YouTube channel, Varma shared insights into his casting decisions. Regarding Shah Rukh Khan, Varma recounted, "At one point of time, I wanted Shah Rukh. I met Shah Rukh and he was excited. I wanted Shah Rukh for Dawood."

However, he ultimately decided against casting Khan due to concerns about his energetic persona. "I felt that he's very hyper; his energy, the way he is... That's what people like. I thought, to make him very subtle – not moving at all and very silent – I thought it would look very odd on screen," explained Varma. He acknowledged Khan as a "performer" but opted for Ajay Devgn's more subdued demeanour for the role of Malik, the character that eventually



went to him. Discussing Abhishek Bachchan, Varma mentioned that he couldn't cast him in *Company* due to the actor's busy schedule with other projects at the time.

Additionally, Varma disclosed that he initially approached Kamal Haasan for the role of the Mumbai police commissioner in the film, which eventually went to Mohanlal. *Company* continues to be celebrated for its gritty portrayal of Mumbai's underworld, with its casting choices adding to its enduring legacy in Indian cinema.



FIRST SINGLE FROM *PEKAMEDALU* OUT NOW

The first single, *Boom Boom Lacchanna*, from the upcoming movie *Pekamedalu* has been released, creating a buzz ahead of its scheduled release in July. Starring Vinod Kishan, known for his roles in hits like *Naa Peru Shiva* and *Andhagaram* alongside Anousha Krishna as the heroine, *Pekamedalu* marks another venture from Crazy Ants Productions, following the success of *Evariki Cheppoddu*. The teaser for *Pekamedalu*, previously launched by Vishwak Sen, received a positive response, building anticipation among fans.

The lively lyrics of *Boom Boom Lacchanna*, penned by Bhargav Karthik and sung by Mano, are complemented by the captivating music composed by Smaran Sai, promising an engaging and fresh appeal. With its focus on entertainment, the song sets an upbeat tone for the film.

Promising a compelling storyline and rich content, the *Pekamedalu* team is confident about its success as they gear up for the film's release in July.



Shiva Rajkumar's next Kannada-Telugu film announced

Shiva Rajkumar, the acclaimed "Hattrick Hero" of Kannada cinema, renowned for his versatile roles, including memorable appearances in films like *Jailer* and *Captain Miller*, has announced his next project. Celebrating the birthday of Mrs. Geetha Shiva Rajkumar, the team unveiled their upcoming Kannada-Telugu bilingual film.

Directed by Karthik Adwaith and produced by SN Reddy and Sudheer P under Bhuvaneshwari Pictures, presented by Padmaja Films India Pvt Ltd., the project was officially announced with a special poster release dedicated to Mrs. Geetha Shiva Rajkumar. This personal touch added to the excitement surrounding the film.

Described as a high-octane action thriller, the film marks Karthik Adwaith's debut in Sandalwood and Tollywood, following his Tamil directorial venture *Paayum Oli Nee Yenaku* with Vikram Prabhu. This project promises to showcase Shivaraj Kumar in a distinctive new role and appearance, generating considerable anticipation among his fans. The script is finalised, and music composition is already underway, with an official launch ceremony planned for August.

SN Reddy, a prominent Telugu producer known for successful ventures, teams up with Sudheer P. for this ambitious bilingual venture. The film is set to be a

high-budget production, featuring Sam CS for music, A.J. Shetty for cinematography, Deepu S Kumar for editing and Ravi Santhe Hackle as the art director.

Further details about the cast and additional updates on this Kannada-Telugu bilingual film will be revealed soon.

MB, NAMRATA CELEBRATE SON'S THEATRE DEBUT

Namrata Shirodkar and Mahesh Babu's son, Gautam Ghattamaneni, recently had his debut theatre stage performance in London, a milestone celebrated with joyous photos shared by Namrata on Instagram. The family, including Mahesh, Namrata, their daughter Sitara and Gautam, beamed with pride in the snapshots.

The Instagram post captured not only family moments but also included selfies with friends, showcasing the camaraderie of the evening. Namrata expressed her pride in Gautam's performance, describing it as a "special evening" and urging other children to explore their creativity through programs like the one offered by @joyofdrama.

In her heartfelt caption, Namrata wrote, "Such a special evening (red heart emojis) so so proud of @gautamghattamaneni his first theatre stage performance all the way in London... and what a show it was... loved it!! And loved you more my son (heart eyes emojis)."



NTR Film Awards Program is set to honour renowned film actors and actresses across all genres of cinema, named in honour of Tarakara Rao, the legendary Nata SarvaBhowma, Dr. Nandamuri. The awards ceremony will take place at Hotel Dasapalla in Hyderabad, amidst a gathering of distinguished celebrities. Organised by "Kalavedika" (R.V. Ramana Murthy) and Raghavi Media, this event promises grandeur and distinction.

They announced that Telangana State Panchayat Raj and Minister of Women and Child Welfare, Danasari Anasuya (Sitakka), as the special guest for the occasion. Her presence adds significant grace and prestige to the event.

They invited all film celebrities and fans of NTR to join them on June 29 to celebrate and contribute to the success of this auspicious event.