

India needs to go a long way to reduce road accidents

The death of Avatar Saini, the former head of Intel India and the man behind Intel's Pentium processor, in a road accident in Navi Mumbai, is once again a grim reminder of the fact that our roads are unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheeler drivers.

As per a recent report of the Union Ministry of Surface Transport (MoST), 1,54,905 people lost their lives in road accidents in 2023 in India. This figure does not include those who are injured in road accidents which is nearly four times the number of deaths.

If you consider five per-

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sons in a dependent family, nearly a million people are impacted every year by road incidents.

The table given below provides the breakup of casualties under different categories and comparisons with similar categories for the year 2022.

This data could be broadly considered into two categories.

First, the loss of the lives of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and pillion riders of two-wheelers. The second category is people losing lives while driving or travelling on four-wheelers and



DR SHAILENDRA KUMAR JOSHI,
Former chief secretary,
Telangana

other heavy vehicles namely buses, trucks, tractors

etc. Tractors, yes you read it right. In many places in India, tractors with or without trolleys can be seen freely moving on roads. No license is required to drive a tractor in India.

This two-fold broad classification of casualties in road accidents provides us with insights about victims, causes and the perpetrators of accidents.

Most of the time, pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheeler riders are the worst victims of four-wheel vehicle drivers and heavy vehicles.

On the other hand, the loss of lives in categories involving four-wheelers and

heavy vehicles is due to rash driving, mechanical failures, poor road design and the absence of signals or poor signalling.

Corrective steps are required in all such areas. But if you ask me the single most important reason for road accidents is scant regard for even basic rules.

Road safety authorities have to be reinvigorated in all states.

To sum up, we have to give equal importance to safety as has been given to infrastructure.

India has to go a long way to minimise the loss of human lives in road accidents.

Siva Reddy elected APNGO president

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In a unanimous decision, KV Siva Reddy and Chowdary Purushotham Naidu have been elected as president and general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted Officers Association (AP NGO). The election took place during the executive committee meeting held at the AP NGO Home in Gandhinagar, Vijayawada on Thursday.

The outgoing President of the AP NGO Association, Bandi Srinivasa Rao, retired from his position and subsequently resigned. Consequently, an election was

conducted to select new leadership.

Following the conclusion of the election, Bandi Srinivasa Rao and 26 district unit leaders extended their congratulations to the newly elected officials. Alongside the President and General Secretary, V Dastagiri Reddy was elected as Associate President, and B Venkateswarlu as Vice President.

Caption: Bandi Srinivasa Rao and others felicitated the newly elected AP NGO Association State president Siva Reddy and general secretary Purushotham Naidu in Vijayawada on Thursday

V'wada rail division surpasses previous year's freight record

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The South Central Railway (SCR) of Vijayawada Division has achieved a notable milestone by exceeding its previous year's (2022-23) total freight loading of 33.54 million tonnes (MT) in the current fiscal year (2023-24).

Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager, announced that the division reached this milestone 33 days ahead of the financial year-end. Last year, the division logged freight loading of 33.54 million tonnes and earnings of Rs. 3912 crore. As of February 27, 2024, earnings for the current year stand at Rs 3675.28 crore.

Patil anticipates that the division will surpass its highest-ever freight earnings of Rs 3,968 crore, recorded in 2018-19. With a monthly average freight earnings of Rs 340 crore and a strong loading trend, the division is on track to exceed the Rs 4,000 crore mark in freight earnings. There's also a push towards achieving a landmark of con-



secutively registering Rs 5,000 crore in earnings for the first time in the division's history. Patil attributes this success to the collective efforts of the division's team, improved wagon turnaround times, and enhanced coordination among departments.

Adani Krishnapatnam Port continues to be the top revenue generator, followed by Kakinada Sea Port. Coal remains the primary com-

modity transported, accounting for 18 MT, along with 6.4 MT of fertilisers.

The division has seen growth in shorter lead traffic and an increase in the number of rakes handled at various locations, attributed to the efforts of Local Business Development Unit teams and effective negotiations with freight customers. Additionally, the transportation of new commodities like timber waste and

laterite has gained momentum due to competitive pricing and increased rake capacity. The division is also focused on modernizing Good Sheds at multiple locations, enhancing amenities for freight customers, and developing a World-Class Goods Shed Terminal at Kakinada, which is expected to be a significant advancement for the division upon completion.

Prathipati's son arrested for evading tax

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Former Minister and TDP leader Prathipati Pulla Rao's son Sarath was arrested for evading tax and a case has been registered against Sarath at Machavaram police station in Vijayawada city. A case has been registered as per the complaint of AP Directorate of Revenue Intelligence officials. The police registered a case against Sarath and all seven people on the charges of diverting funds and evading tax. In the FIR, the police claimed that Alexa Corporation Pvt Ltd had evaded tax. Police are currently recording the statement of Pulla Rao's son Sarath at the Vijayawada Task Force police station.

Prattipati Pulla Rao reacted to the arrest of his son alleging that fearing defeat, Jagan Reddy is indulging in degenerate politics day by day. He said that they are harassing their opponents with false cases which they are used to because they are not able to face them directly in the political field. "My son is not even a director in the company, at least not a shareholder. What does such a person have to do with GST evasion?" he asked.

YSRCP Narasaraopet MP Lavu to join TDP tomorrow

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Narasaraopet YSR Congress rebel MP Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayulu to shift his loyalty to Telugu Desam on March 2 by joining TD in the presence of Chandrababu Naidu at Gurazala.

He resigned from YSRC and now decided to join TD to stand as a candidate for the same Narasaraopet constituency in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. It may be recalled that YSRC president and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy asked Krishna Devarayalu to contest from the



Guntur MP seat but the MP refused the same adhering to the recontest from the Narasaraopet MP segment. Interestingly CM Jagan this

time gave a ticket to BC leader and former minister Anil Kumar Yadav for the Narasaraopet Parliament seat hence Lavu decided to contest the election on a TD ticket from the same segment.

MP Krishna Devarayalu affirmed his candidacy for the Narasaraopet seat under the TD banner. He underscored that this decision was made with the paramount aim of advancing the welfare and development of the Palnadu region. He will formally join the TD during an upcoming public Raa Kadali Raa on March 2 in Gurazala in Palnadu.

INS Dega...

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The versatile C295, known for its tactical airlift and logistics capabilities, was inducted into the IAF to augment medium-lift operations. Its arrival at INS Dega underscores the growing synergy between the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force in conducting joint exercises and humanitarian relief missions.

A spokesperson for INS Dega stated, "We are delighted to host the C295 and its crew. This visit strengthens the foundation for effective collaboration between our two services, enabling us to operate seamlessly in a range of scenarios." The Airbus Defence and Space C295 is a twin-turboprop tactical military transport aircraft. Its multifaceted capabilities support troop and cargo transport, paradropping, and other specialized missions.

The C295's integration with naval operations will enhance India's overall power projection capabilities within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond. This visit is expected to pave the way for joint exercises and training opportunities, further consolidating the nation's defence preparedness.

Cabinet okays...

Continued from Page 1

The National Portal will assist the households in their decision-making process by providing relevant information such as appropriate system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating etc.

Households will be able to access collateral-free low-interest loan products of around 7 per cent at present for installation of residential RTS (rooftop solar) systems up to 3 kW.

Other Features of the scheme include a Model Solar Village to be developed in each district to act as a role model for adoption of rooftop solar in rural areas.

Besides, Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions shall also benefit from incentives for promoting rooftop solar (RTS) installations in their areas.

The scheme provides a component for payment security for renewable energy service company (RESCO) based models as well as a fund for innovative projects in RTS.

Retired IAS officer Imtiaz joins YSRCP

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Senior IAS officer A. Md. Imtiaz, who has opted for voluntary retirement, joined YSRCP in the presence of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Camp Office here on Thursday.

Before seeking voluntary retirement, Imtiaz worked as CEO of SERP (Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty) and Minority Welfare Department Secretary, Y S R C P

regional coordinator Ramasubba Reddy, Kurnool MLA Hafeez Khan, Kurnool Mayor BY Ramaiah and former MLA SV Mohan Reddy were also present.



'Bharat Tex 2024' concludes

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The curtains were drawn on Bharat Tex 2024, the four-day extravaganza not only captivated local audiences but also drew attention from across the globe, with a surge in enquiries, particularly from overseas buyers. The AP Pavilion, a crowning jewel of Bharat Tex 2024, witnessed unprecedented success stories. One such standout was ABC Fashion, a retailer showcasing in the Pavilion, revealing that they had never ventured into exports before. However, the event sparked a transformation

as they now find themselves with many enquiries from international buyers, signifying the global appeal of Andhra Pradesh's textile offerings says Suneetha, Principal Secretary (Handloom & Textiles) to the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

She said that APCO handlooms and Lepakshi Handicrafts emerged as favourites, attracting a substantial number of inquiries. The intricate Pen Kalamkari and the opulent Dupion fabrics garnered significant attention. Enquiries for handlooms, in general, soared, underlining

the global demand for the traditional craftsmanship embedded in Andhra Pradesh's textiles. The mesmerising Lamp Shades from Lepakshi became a focal point of interest, drawing numerous enquiries and admiration for their craftsmanship. A remarkable highlight of Bharat Tex 2024 was the launch of a new variety of handloom saree featuring Narsapur lace, which instantly became a sought-after product. This unique product received an overwhelming response, with an abundance of enquiries pouring in from enthralled visitors.

Will YSRCP pick...

Continued from Page 1

Reports suggest discussions within the YSRCP leadership involving former MLA and TDP leader Vangaveeti Radhakrishna, known for his influence among the Kapu community, to join the ruling party.

Vangaveeti did not secure a spot in the initial list of candidates released by the TDP-Jana Sena Party coalition this week. He had anticipated a ticket from either Vijayawada (Central) or Vijayawada (East), constituencies he previously represented. However, these seats were allocated to Bonda Uma and Gadde Rammohan Rao, respectively, by TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu. Vijayawada Central is likely to be assigned to the Jana Sena Party, although ex-MLA Jaleel Khan poses a significant challenge.

Feeling overlooked by the TDP leadership and disheartened by the lack of communication regarding his political future, Vangaveeti is reportedly considering rejoining the YSRCP.

Close associates from the YSRCP, including Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao (Nani) and Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), have engaged in discussions with Vangaveeti, extending an invitation to join the party. However, they cannot guarantee him a ticket from Vijayawada, as candidates have already been selected for all three constituencies.

In light of this, YSRCP leaders have proposed Vangaveeti's name for the Machilipatnam Lok Sabha seat. Whether Vangaveeti will accept this proposal remains unclear. Sources suggest that if he does, his defection to the YSRCP is imminent.

AP govt waives interest...

Continued from Page 1

Various individuals, offices and associations like CREDAI sought to waive the interest on late payment of property tax this year also and in the previous financial year, the benefit of interest waiver was given only for 14 days with a condition to pay the total arrears in one lump sum, due to which most of the assesses were unable to avail of the benefit of interest waiver in a short time.

The orders said that after careful examination and in the exercise of the powers conferred under Section 387-A of the AP Municipalities Act 1965 under Section 679-E of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1955 and in the interest of improvement of revenues to the ULBs, Government orders to waive-off the interest accumulated on arrears of property tax (Buildings & Vacant Lands) dues upto the year 2023-24 as One Time Measure in all the ULBs provided the assessee pays the total arrears and current year tax in one lump sum or in installments on or before 31.03.2024 and the interest amount already paid by the taxpayers on arrears and on current year property tax demand during the year 2023-24 be adjusted towards the future property tax payments and no cash refund shall be made, subject to clearance of all dues by 31.03.2024.

ANDHRA PRADESH CAPITAL REGION DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Lamin Centre, Governmentpet, Vijayawada - 520002
File No: MAUS-PLGSO104/2024

NOTICE
In exercise of the powers conferred under section 41(3) of APCORDA Act, 2014 the APCORDA, Vijayawada hereby proposes to modify Nidamaru Zonal Development Plan notified vide G.O.Ms No. 244/Dt: 27/04/2000, falling in R.S.No. 28(F), 29(F), 23, 4, 5, 56(F), 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 3A, 3B, 57(F), 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F, 56(F), 18, 1C, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 2, 4, 5A, 65(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 1A, 1, 2, 18, 182, 183, 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 7, 67(F), 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 4A, 4B, 4C, 68(F), 1B, 2, 3A, 3B, 4, 5, 6, 68(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 62(F), 2, 3, 4, 5A, 65(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F, 56(F), 18, 1C, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 2, 4, 5A, 65(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 1A, 1, 2, 18, 182, 183, 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 7, 67(F), 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 4A, 4B, 4C, 68(F), 1B, 2, 3A, 3B, 4, 5, 6, 68(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 62(F), 2, 3, 4, 5A, 65(F), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 61(F), 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F, 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Endowments Minister Kottu unveils temple tourism package

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Endowments, Kottu Satyanarayana, has unveiled groundbreaking initiatives aimed at fostering spiritual tourism in the State.

Highlighting the government's commitment to spiritual tourism, he emphasised the provision of darshan to devotees at all major temples across the State.

During the Temple Tourism Package and Vehicles inaugural event organised by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) at the Vijayawada tourism divisional office, Deputy Chief Minister Kottu Satyanarayana participated actively. Commencing the proceedings, he conducted a special Pooja for the vehicles, marking the launch of spiritual tourism buses.

Subsequently, Kottu



Deputy Chief Minister Kottu Satyanarayana and MLA Malladi Vishnu performing a special 'pooja' for the newly-inaugurated tourism package bus at the Tourism Divisional Office in Vijayawada on Thursday.

Satyanarayana revealed that the state government, in collaboration with AP Tourism Corporation Limited and Pilgrim Pathways Private Limited, is dedicated to streamlining darshan experiences for

devotees at renowned temples statewide. This partnership has introduced one-day and two-day tour packages covering 18 circuits encompassing major temples.

In a significant shift, the gov-

ernment now offers daily tour packages inclusive of meals, accommodation, special poojas, and Abhishekam ceremonies for devotees, departing from earlier seasonal offerings.

The initial phase of these tour packages interconnects temples such as Tirumala, Srisailem, Mananandi, Ahobilam, Yaganti, Srikalahasti, Annaram, Simhachalam, Arasavalli, Sree Kurmam, Bhimavaram, Draksharamam, Samrakot, Pithapuram, and other prominent spiritual destinations.

Present at the event were Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu, APTDC Executive Director Padmavathi, General Manager (Transport) R Sasidhar, Divisional Manager PN Krishna Chaitanya, Assistant Manager K Sridhar, Central Reservation Manager M Suresh, and other dignitaries.

Aegis Graham Bell Award to city student

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

D Ramu studying 4th year B Tech in Andhra Loyola Institute of Engineering and Technology (ALIET) Vijayawada received the Aegis Graham Bell Award. Ramu received the award from Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and National Highways at New Delhi.

Expressing happiness Ramu said that it was a great moment receiving the award from the union minister. He said that after winning the award he will be facilitated with a 100% scholarship to enroll in the Post Graduate Programme. He expressed hope that he will pursue Data Science which has good demand and can get a good job after completing the programme.



YSRCP Muslim MLA candidate inaugurates Ram temple in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a heart-warming display of communal harmony, Shaik Asif, YSRCP MLA candidate hailing from Vijayawada West, has won hearts by inaugurating a Ram Temple in the Vinchipeta area of Vijayawada. The event, captured on video, showcased a touching moment of unity as both common people and

priests extended a warm welcome to Asif, expressing gratitude for his presence at the auspicious occasion.

"Under the TDP government they destroyed the temples, after CM Jagan and YSRCP came to power, they renovated temples. With the help of the corporator, we started working on building this temple," said Shaik Asif.

The gesture not only underscored the significance

of the newly inaugurated temple but also served as a powerful testament to the spirit of brotherhood prevailing in the state. Embracing the value of "Hindu-Muslim brotherhood," Asif's participation exemplified mutual respect for both religions, resonating deeply with the community. First time in the country a Muslim candidate has inaugurated a Ram Temple.



Principals advise parents to minimise exam stress on students

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Amidst the ongoing ICSE Class X board examinations and AP Inter first-year exams, the principals of renowned schools across the city have come forward with a piece of valuable advice for parents. With the pressure of exams mounting on young students, parents must play a supportive role and reduce stress levels during this critical time. The principal's advice couldn't have come at a better time, as parents often tend to become anxious and overwhelmed when their children are facing important exams.

The principals, upon over-hearing parental instructions to their children, convened a meeting here on Thursday and urged parents to refrain from burdening their children with last-minute advice and to allow them to approach the exams with a relaxed mindset.

According to school principals, parental involvement during board exams often leads to increased tension and stress among students.

"Our observations suggest that excessive parental involvement during exams can inadvertently contribute to increased student stress," shared Dr. Soma Basu, Principal of Keystone High School. She further emphasised the importance of allowing students to approach exams independently, avoiding the temptation to dictate specific exam strategies as noted by Saraswati, Principal of Oxford Talent School. Echoing these sentiments, Dr. Ananda Rao, a renowned psychiatrist, underscored the significance of a calm and composed parental presence during this crucial time.

The principals, upon over-hearing parental instructions to their children, convened a meeting here on Thursday and urged parents to refrain from burdening their children with last-minute advice and to allow them to approach the exams with a relaxed mindset.

Mayor inaugurates tailoring training for women

VMC aims at women's empowerment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi has stated that the council is planning to conduct tailoring classes aiming at women empowerment.

The Mayor inaugurated a tailoring training programme at the VMC Community Hall under the 120th Ward Sachivalayam at Bhavanipuram in the city on Thursday. The training will start on Friday. The VMC officials have selected 60 interested women from the 40th and 41st divisions for the three-month training programme.

While inaugurating the training programme, Mayor Bhagyalakshmi said that women should improve their



Vijayawada City Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi inaugurating the tailoring training for the women at the VMC Community Hall at Bhavanipuram in the city on Thursday.

skills and get self-employed. It would help them to get additional income. Many women are earning additional income by choosing the tailoring pro-

fession, she added.

Further, she said that under the leadership of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, women have been empowered in all sectors of the State.

Aiming at women's empowerment, the government has been implementing Jagananna Cheyutha, Amma Vodi, and other welfare schemes. Also, especially for women, various training programmes are being conducted, she explained.

VMC 40th division corporator Y Anjaneya Reddy, 41st division corporator Md Irfan and others were present.

Udgam 2024 unfolds at SRM Univ-AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP's annual sports fest, Udgam-2024 was inaugurated with grandeur and an unwavering commitment to athletic excellence on Thursday. The event was graced by dignitaries and sports aficionados, including the esteemed Chief Guest Nagapuri Ramesh, the renowned Dr. Manoj K Arora, Vice-Chancellor, along with other distinguished university officials.

Prof Manoj K Arora, in his inspiring address, articulated the university's vision of elevating its sports facilities to international standards. "We are not just building facilities; we are nurturing the champions of tomorrow," he remarked, emphasizing the university's



plans to enhance its infrastructure, fostering a thriving environment for budding athletes.

The Chief Guest, Nagapuri Ramesh, echoed the sentiment, highlighting the vital role of educational institutions in shaping the future of sports in India. His words, "India's tryst

with sports excellence begins in our universities," resonated with the audience, underscoring the transformative power of sports in building discipline, resilience, and teamwork.

The event saw participation from over 800 students across 20 colleges, embodying the fest's ethos of unity and com-

petitive spirit. The Torch Bearing Ceremony, a symbolic tradition, ignited the flame of sportsmanship, passing the torch of legacy and determination from seasoned athletes to the emerging generation.

Dr R Premkumar, Registrar, Suman N Chief Finance and Accounts Officer (CFAO), Prof Vishnupad, Dean - Easwari School of Liberal Arts, Prof Bharadhwaj Sivakumaran, Dean - Paari School of Business, Anil Kumar Nigam, Director - Student Affairs, Dr Sushmita Kumari, Assistant Director-Sports, Manish Kumar Anand, Director - Human Resources, Pankaj Belwariar, Director - Communications, graced the event with their presence. Around 800 students from 20 colleges and universities have participated in the fest.

Bike racing roars back in Visakhapatnam; residents seek action

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Bike races have re-emerged in Visakhapatnam, morphing into a growing concern for both authorities and residents. These illicit races, often fuelled by betting, take place late at night on coastal roads and suburban streets, raising safety fears. Once confined to major cities like Hyderabad and Vijayawada, the bike racing culture has gained traction in Visakhapatnam, attracting both experienced riders and thrill-seeking youngsters. Despite police efforts, these "batches" continue to violate traffic laws, especially on weekends.

Participants, primarily teenagers and college students, gather near bars and wine shops along the national highway before heading to suburban areas for their races. However, these races come at a cost, involving dangerous stunts, high-stakes betting, and endangering not only the racers but

also bystanders. Law enforcement efforts to curb this trend have yielded mixed results. While some racers have been penalised, many remain at large, fostering a sense of inadequate surveillance. Sporadic interventions haven't deterred the participants, who continue to use once-peaceful areas like RK Beach and the IT SEZ for their activities.

The perceived lack of robust surveillance has sparked public outcry. Residents are demanding stricter measures, including the reinstatement of well-staffed checkpoints, highlighting the perceived shortcomings of current policing tactics. "Strict vigil is being maintained on bike racing gangs," said Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) G. Srinivasa Rao. He emphasised collaboration between traffic and law-and-order police to control the issue by increasing patrols in areas frequented by these groups.



Minister Roja inaugurates revamped Haritha Resort

Situated on 9.88 acres, resort now features seven contemporary blocks with international-standard amenities

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Tourism and Culture RK Roja, along with Swarupananda Saraswati, president of Sri Sarada Peetham, unveiled the seven-block Haritha Resort rebuilt at a cost of Rs 450 crore by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC).

Situated on a 9.88-acre site, the resort now features seven contemporary blocks with international-standard amenities, extensive landscaping, and modern infrastructure. The redevelopment project unfolded in three phases,

encompassing site development, structural work, architectural design, interior furnishing, and essential infrastructure installation. APTDC officials confirmed the acquisition of all necessary statutory approvals, including CRZ clearance, local body approval, and a fire safety NOC. The revamped resort offers a diverse range of facilities, including reception areas, restaurants, banquet halls, guest rooms, spa services, indoor recreational areas, a fitness center, and back-of-house support infrastructure.

Addressing previous concerns raised by Opposition

parties, Minister Amarnath emphasised that the project received all requisite permissions.

He further revealed that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's office is currently evaluating the potential use of the buildings for either tourism purposes or as the Chief Minister's office, in light of the planned relocation of the State capital to Visakhapatnam. A final decision on the matter is expected in the near future. This significant redevelopment project is anticipated to serve as a catalyst for the revitalisation of Andhra Pradesh's tourism industry.



One District One Product: DC promotes handloom items

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

To strengthen the "One District One Product" campaign, District Collector Dr. Manazir Jeelani Samoon has unveiled a dual approach to boost the production and promotion of handloom items within the district. The Andhra Pradesh Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (AAPCO) is actively introducing

fresh designs for their products, along with value-added items and ready-to-wear clothing. This strategic approach aims to meet the changing preferences of consumers and maintain the significance of Srikakulam's handloom industry in today's market.

To broaden their market presence and appeal to younger demographics, AAPCO is providing a 30-per cent discount on



all their offerings. This initiative aims to encourage a wider acceptance of handloom fabrics and

foster a renewed admiration for their exceptional quality and skilled artistry. In acknowledgement of the significant importance of community involvement, the district administration has put into action a distinctive policy. With immediate effect, all district officers, divisional officers, mandal-level officers, and their subordinates must wear handcrafted garments made in

Srikakulam district every Monday.

This initiative serves the dual purpose of bolstering the livelihoods of local artisans specialising in handloom products and fostering a strong sense of pride and belonging within the community by actively highlighting the district's vibrant cultural heritage, as exemplified by its handloom tradition.

Ensure all Aarogyasri cards are distributed: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao has instructed the officials concerned to distribute all the Dr YSR Aarogyasri cards without fail. The State government considers health security as a right for the poor and middle-class people by providing medical treatment up to Rs.25 lakh, he said.

Dilli Rao, along with Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, convened a video conference with all MPDOs, municipal commissioners, and district coordinators to discuss distribution of Aarogyasri cards and

Biometric App download (E-KYC), from his office in Vijayawada on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that 100 per cent distribution of Dr YSR Aarogyasri cards should be ensured. The card distribution should be conducted with transparency and accountability through gram/ward volunteers based on E-KYC, he added.

Further, he asked the officials to collect photos of the heads of the families. However, photos have not been printed on the Aarogyasri card due to various reasons. There would be a chance to make changes in

Aarogyasri cards and if necessary, new persons would be included in the cards, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, the Collector said officials should create awareness of the Aarogyasri scheme and people should utilise these cards. He urged people to download the Aarogyasri app.

NTR District Aarogyasri Coordinator J Suman said that as many as 4.11 lakh Aarogyasri cards have been distributed so far as against the target of 5.82 lakh.

Out of the remaining 32,160 cards, 20,000 people migrated to other areas or died, he said.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
PUBLIC HEALTH & MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. 2478/2365/2370/2371/AMRUT-2.2/2023-24 Date: 26-02-2024
Online tenders are invited for 4 works of Providing Infrastructure facilities for weaker section Colonies in Ichapuram, Nellimarla, Narasipatnam & Yelamanchili Municipalities under AMRUT 2.0. Estimate Value: Rs. 15,62,64,300/- for 4 works. Download start date: 01.03.2024 from 3.00 PM. Further details visit: www.approcurement.gov.in, Ph.No.: 9849905738. Sd/- Superintending Engineer, R.O.No. 13273/CLD/AMRUT/2021-22, Dt. 26.02.2024 (P.H.) Visakhapatnam.

ANDHRA PRADESH CAPITAL REGION DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Lenin Centre, Governorpet, Vijayawada-520002
NOTICE
File No.: MAU61-PLG00TH/5/2024
In exercise of the powers conferred under section 41(3) of APCRDA Act, 2014 the APCRDA, Vijayawada hereby proposes to modify Nidamare Zonal Development Plan notified vide G.O.Ms No.244 Dt. 27/04/2000, falling in R.S.No.13/3,4,5: 14/1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E, 1F; 14/1G, 1H, 14/1I, 1J, 1K, 1L, 2A, 2B, 2C; 15/1, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 3H, 3I, 3J, 3K, 3L, 3M, 3N, 3O, 3P, 3Q, 3R, 3S, 3T, 3U, 3V, 3W, 3X, 3Y, 3Z, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 4F, 4G, 4H, 4I, 4J, 4K, 4L, 4M, 4N, 4O, 4P, 4Q, 4R, 4S, 4T, 4U, 4V, 4W, 4X, 4Y, 4Z, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F, 5G, 5H, 5I, 5J, 5K, 5L, 5M, 5N, 5O, 5P, 5Q, 5R, 5S, 5T, 5U, 5V, 5W, 5X, 5Y, 5Z, 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, 6H, 6I, 6J, 6K, 6L, 6M, 6N, 6O, 6P, 6Q, 6R, 6S, 6T, 6U, 6V, 6W, 6X, 6Y, 6Z, 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E, 7F, 7G, 7H, 7I, 7J, 7K, 7L, 7M, 7N, 7O, 7P, 7Q, 7R, 7S, 7T, 7U, 7V, 7W, 7X, 7Y, 7Z, 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, 8E, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8I, 8J, 8K, 8L, 8M, 8N, 8O, 8P, 8Q, 8R, 8S, 8T, 8U, 8V, 8W, 8X, 8Y, 8Z, 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, 9H, 9I, 9J, 9K, 9L, 9M, 9N, 9O, 9P, 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Collector, MLA inaugurate govt hospital building

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh, along with MLA Meka Venkata Pratap Appa Rao, inaugurated the newly constructed government hospital building in Nuzvid on Thursday.

The hospital building was constructed at a cost of Rs 21.15 crore NABARD funds. Speaking on the occasion, MLA Appa Rao said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is giving priority to the medical and education sectors. He has brought many reforms.

"A modern government area hospital was constructed in Nuzvid by spending Rs 21.15 crore. The government hospital is being modernized at par with the corporate hospitals," the MLA asserted.

The MLA said that the process of performing knee surgery has been started in Nuzvid Government Hospital and about 30 surgeries are done every month. Also, 250 deliveries and operations per month are performed in the hospital, he underlined.

Appa Rao said that 23 young



doctors extend medical services to patients in the area hospital. Unlike anywhere else in the district, Nuzvid Area Hospital has received KAK certification and Kayakalp awards three times for the best medical services.

"The patients are getting medical services such as Orthopedics, ENT, Dental, Physiotherapy, Obstetrics, General Medicine, General Surgery and pediatric medical services. More importantly, there are arrangements to provide dialysis services to 20 beds of kidney patients in this

hospital and missionaries related to dialysis have been provided by Apollo and Lines Club," MLA Appa Rao stated.

The old hospital had three operation theatres while the new hospital has 6 operation theaters, he informed, adding that proposals have been sent to the government to upgrade Nuzvid Area Hospital from 100 beds to 200 beds in the coming days.

Moreover, in the new area hospital, the injection costing Rs 40,000, would be administered at free of cost to the heart attack victims to save their

lives.

The MLA said that 8 Kendriya Vidyalayas were sanctioned to AP and the State Cabinet approved to set up one of them in Nuzvid. An IIT was established here when YS Rajasekhara Reddy was the Chief Minister, he recalled and disclosed that the foundation stone will be laid for the construction of a sports stadium here soon.

The Construction of Outer Ring Road, at a cost of Rs 25 crore, and the construction of a PG centre building, at a cost of Rs 6 crore, are in the final stages and they will be inaugurated soon. The Chief Minister sanctioned Rs 16 crore to carry out various development works in the 16 secretariat limits in Nuzvid maal, Appa Rao stated.

Krishna district ZP chairperson Uppala Harika, Area hospital superintendent Dr AVR Mohan and a host of officials and leaders were among those who were present. Earlier, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh inaugurated the ICU and RDO Y Bhavani Shank inaugurated the general ward of the hospital.

'Welfare & development two eyes of govt'

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Government Whip and MLA Grandhi Srinivas has reiterated that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is working to implement welfare schemes and carry out development equally.

The newly-appointed YSRCP committee members called on the Whip on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Grandhi Srinivas recalled that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has fulfilled almost all the assurances



he gave to the people in the manifesto.

With the patronage of Jagan

Mohan Reddy, the Bhimavaram constituency is being developed, he asserted

and exuded confidence that Jagan Mohan Reddy would come to power once again.

"Many development works have been carried out in the constituency permanently. Many issues that had been pending for several years have been resolved during the last five years," he said and exhorted the YSRCP activists to work as soldiers for the election victory of the party. A host of leaders, including Motupalli Gangadhar Rao and city president Thota Bogaiah, were among those present."

Man stabs wife to death

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a gruesome incident, a man stabbed to death his wife after an argument in a trivial family dispute at Jagannadapuram colony here on Thursday.

Police said that the accused Botala Nukaraju was doing minor contract work. He quarrelled with his wife, the deceased, B Divya (26) over a family dispute. A heated argument took place between the couple in their house. In a fit of rage, he stabbed her in the neck with a knife.

She ran out of the home screaming for help. She collapsed on the road in a pool of blood and died. CI Suresh Babu visited the scene of the office, registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH for postmortem. The couple had two children below four years of age who became orphaned now, the locals lamented. The brutal murder in broad daylight sent shock waves in the locality.



Complete steps for election before notification: Collector

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector Sumit Kumar has directed the sector officials to complete arrangements for the elections before the notification is issued by the Election of India.

A training programme was conducted for the sector officers of Bhimavaram and Undi constituencies here on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Sumit Kumar said that all pre-poll arrangements should be completed before the notification was issued; adding that the sector officials will have to take full responsibility from the time the notification is released till the EVMs are brought to the strong rooms.

Along with the sector officers, there would be sector officers from the police department and coordination between the two should ensure that the elections are held peacefully, he told them stating that each sector officer will have a range of 10 to 12 polling stations and the polling stations under their jurisdiction should be checked in advance



with the police officers.

"The sector officers will have magisterial powers and every programme should be conducted under their control. Dos and don'ts, checklist and handbook have been given in the training. Everyone should read and follow all the rules and should not make their own decisions," the Collector instructed them.

The sector officials should visit the polling stations and check the minimum requirements. They should make arrangements for ramps, furniture, toilets and drinking water at the polling stations, he

told the official, adding that booth numbers should be posted, and BLO's name and phone numbers should be written at the polling stations.

The Collector also ordered the sector officials to arrange shade, queue management and first aid arrangements for the voters at the polling stations. "In order to inform the poll percentage and other details, it is necessary to find out where the internet connection is, and to inform about the connectivity in advance, if not, the internet connection should be arranged," he told them.

The Collector said that they should have information about how many voters there are polling station-wise, expected turnout, and disabled and elderly voters, stating that the sector officials should make vehicle arrangements for the disabled and those who are beyond 80 years of age and cannot come to vote.

Joint Collector S Ram Sundar Reddy, RDO K Srinivasulu Raju and election training nodal officer KCH Appa Rao were among those who were present.

Collector, SP review arrangements for Sivaratri

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Collector G Lakshmisha and SP Malika Garg reviewed the police bandobast arrangements on Thursday at the famous shrine Srikalahasti for the Sivaratri festival on March 8.

The Collector and SP inspected the entry and exit points, queue lines and emergency exit at the temple. They made suggestions to the officials on the arrangements to be made to regulate devotees and make need-arrangements at the temple.



Collector Lakshmisha instructed the officials of various departments to make arrangements to provide drinking water,

maintain hygienic conditions in the temple and around the temple, and carry out fagging to eradicate mosquito menace.

He directed the police officials to take all steps to provide elaborate bandobust, provide parking places for vehicles and regulate traffic.

SP Malika Garg said that an elaborate bandobast was being made at Srikalahasti temple, deploying over 1000 police personnel. She also directed the officials to install CC cameras on the premises of the temple and at vulnerable places in the town.

Tadepalligudem meet created panic in Tadepalli palace: Kanna

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader Kanna Lakshminarayana has said that the Tadepalligudem public meeting of the TDP-JSP alliance has created panic in the Tadepalli palace.

Talking to the media here on Thursday, Kanna Lakshminarayana made it clear that the TDP aligned with the JSP keeping in view the prospects of the state but not for political mileage. It is felt that the TDP-JSP alliance is imperative for the progress of the state, he stated.

"The people of the state should come together to redevelop the state. All the TDP and JSP workers should strive hard in a coordinated manner for the election victory. The TDP-JSP's win is imperative for



the progress of the state. Strive hard to make the state get rid of YSRCP anarchic rule", Kanna Satyanarayana called upon the cadres.

During the TDP regime, a meal was provided at a nominal price of Rs 5 in Anna canteens, he recalled and slammed that the YSRCP regime had done away with the Anna canteens.

"Unable to endure the harassment and humiliation of the YSRCP leaders, international cricket player Hanuma Vihari quit the captaincy of the Ranji trophy," Kanna Lakshminarayana lamented.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is saying 'Why Not 175' and the TDP is questioning Why People Should Vote for the YSRCP.

"Where is the job calendar and where is the mega DCS," Kanna questioned the YSRCP government. He also predicted that Jagan Mohan Reddy would be defeated in Pulivendula. "The TDP has evolved the blueprint for the development of the state. The TDP will help the farmers by providing water and create employment opportunities for the youths, if voted to power," he assured.

Officials told to take stringent steps to check ganja menace

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh and SP D Mary Prasanthi directed the officials concerned to take stringent steps to curb the ganja menace in the district.

The District-level Narcotics Coordination Apex Committee was held here on Thursday. The Collector, along with SP Mary Prasanthi, reviewed the steps being taken to prevent the ganja's illegal transportation and consumption.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh asked the officials to take steps to widely publicize that there would be a minimum jail term of 6 months and other legal actions against those who supply and consume ganja. The vigilance on illegal transpira-



tion and consumption should be enhanced and awareness should be created on the ill effects of ganja consumption, he told them.

The Collector also ordered the committee members and the officials to educate the public as well as the students in schools and colleges about the harm caused by the use of ganja and ensure that the youth does not fall into bad habits.

Collector Venkatesh directed

the SEB officials to organize an awareness programme for high school teachers and PDs. For those arrested in suspected cases of ganja, awareness and counselling should be conducted for one day at the Drug Addiction Central. Similarly, they should focus on the movements of those who have added sheets to the suspect.

In the backdrop of the forthcoming elections, the officials should keep a full vigil on the

illicit traffic of ganja and drugs. Private and RTC courier transport routes should also be closely monitored, he told them. At the time of sending any parcel, like giving OTP to the delivery phone number, the same procedure should be observed at the time of booking, he instructed them.

SP Mary Prashanthi said that 145 ganja-related cases have been registered since 2019 of which 516 have been arrested out of them 99 were ganja suppliers and 171 were consumers. She said that awareness programmes on the ill effects of cannabis were conducted in educational institutions for the students. RDO D Pushmani, Dy. RTO S Santhakumari and DEO S Abraham were among those who were present.

Three held for fake franchise of ITC company

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad cyber crime police arrested three persons on charges of cheating people on the pretext of a fake franchise of ITC Company. Following a complaint from a city-based businessman, the police took up investigation and identified that the franchise fraud was being operated from Patna.

Cyber crime police arrested the main organiser Dheeraj Kumar and his associates Ankit Kumar and Gaurav Kumar. According to the police, the suspects created a fake website of the company and posted it on social media to attract people. "Whenever a person looking to venture into franchise business searches on Google, this website will be thrown up first on ads. When the person visits the website, he is asked to fill in some details via registration form.



Police urge removal of window films following SC ruling

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As per a recent Supreme Court judgment aimed at improving public safety, the Visakhapatnam City Police Commissionerate is urging all citizens to voluntarily remove aftermarket window films from their vehicles within the next week. This follows the court's directive to ban such films on motor vehicles.

The Supreme Court's decision stems from a public interest litigation filed to address the growing concern over crimes like rape, sexual harassment, and human trafficking. Upholding the Indian Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, the court mandated a minimum visual light transmission (VLT) of 70 per cent for front and rear windshields and 50 per cent

for side windows. This standard applies to vehicle manufacturers, and the application of any additional film is strictly prohibited.

During a press conference today, the Visakhapatnam Police Commissionerate urged citizens to voluntarily remove aftermarket window films from their vehicles within the next week. This follows a recent Supreme Court judgment mandating clear vehicle windows nationwide for enhanced public safety.

The Deputy Commissioner Police (Traffic) emphasised a one-week grace period for voluntary compliance. Following this, traffic police will strictly enforce the ruling, issuing fines and removing non-compliant films on the spot.

CPI: BJP trying to get votes by dividing people

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State secretary and former MLA K Ramakrishna has alleged that the BJP-led Central government has neglected the people's problems, however, the saffron party is trying to get votes from the public by splitting them. Also, the right-wing party leaders are planning to remain the rule after getting the votes, he commented.

The Left leader addressed the media people at the party State office Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada on Thursday and said that the BJP is trying to get the rule by provoking Hindus against Muslims. As



CPI State K Ramakrishna speaking to the media, along with secretariat members Wilson and Vanaja in Vijayawada on Thursday.

general elections draw near, Union Home Minister Amith Shah is speaking about the CAA and NRC again and again.

He made serious allegations against the

ruling YSRCP and the Opposition TDP for failing to get the Special Category Status for the State. These two political parties assured people during the 2019 elections of striving to get SCS if they were voted to power.

However, both parties failed, he criticised.

Later, Ramakrishna extended his party's support for the Congress party's announcement regarding the Special Category Status at a public meeting in Tirupati on Friday.

CPI State secretariat members Jalli Wilson and Akkineni Vanaja were present.

Sharmila scrutinising ticket aspirants' applications

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

For the last two days, Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila Reddy has been involved in the process of selecting party candidates to contest in the coming general elections, at the party State office Andhra Ratna Bhavan in Vijayawada.

She started the scrutiny of candidates' applications on February 28. She has been staying at the party office for the past two days.

On the first day, she verified applications of candidates for 49 Assembly constituencies under the seven parliamentary constituencies.

Sharmila is considering eli-



gibility, conduct, and loyalty of the aspirants. On the first day, she verified the applications until midnight.

The scrutiny continued on Thursday also. On the second day, she verified applications

for Srikakulam, Araku, Vizianagaram, Ongole, Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli, Rajamahendravaram, and Kakinada parliamentary constituencies.

Applications for 67

Assembly constituencies were also checked. After the scrutiny of all applications, the Congress would finalise the candidates, said Sharmila Reddy.

As part of the scrutiny, Sharmila conducted face-to-face interaction with the Assembly ticket aspirants. Many aspirants are waiting for the call of Sharmila Reddy.

According to party sources, Sharmila will announce the candidates' list soon. The party plans to ally with CPI and CPM in the coming elections. So, the party leadership is thinking of releasing the candidates' list after seat-sharing discussions with the Left parties.

We have to win the war against Modi: Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy termed the Lok Sabha elections as a "war against Modi."

Addressing a crowd he said, "This is not just an election but a war against Modi. By hook or by crook we have to win this war. We need to get 20 seats for the Congress from Kerala. In Telangana out of 17, we will get 14 seats."

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy spoke at the Kerala Samaragni Sabha in English and Hindi.

"The Lok Sabha elections is between the INDIA and NDA alliances. NDA means break country, people and families. If we have to stop Modi and Amit Shah, we need Kerala MPs," he said.

"Your Communist government is like the BRS government, that is, a corrupt government. I don't find any difference between the BRS government and the Kerala government. When he visited Telangana, he was with the KCR. I am asking simply, when the Kerala CM is clean and transpar-

ent government is giving, how come he met Chandrashekar Rao, the former CM. This means, Kerala CM learnt from KCR how to loot money, file cases against party karyakartas etc."

"Our fight against Modi is upcoming. The India alliance output is needed. What happened in Manipur, they killed hundreds of people, and burnt churches. They don't have any care for other communities. How come they are ruling this country? They don't have the eligibility to rule this country even for a minute. In Kerala, it is the Congress versus the Communists. In the whole of India is there a Congress versus BJP atmosphere.

Revanth said that Rahul Gandhi is an MP from Kerala who did padayatra across the country.


He said that Rahul is fighting Modi like anything due to the support of the Kerala people. He need not worry about winning or losing. He is trying his best to stop Modi and the NDA. That is his commitment.



INDIA CORNER

Implement decisions without fear or favour: J-K LG to officials

Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday directed the officers to implement decisions without fear or favour, as he interacted with citizens during live public grievance hearing here. Sinha also asked the officials to assess the public outreach programmes and take corrective measures for efficient redressal of grievances. The LG interacted with the people and listened to their grievances during LG's Mulaqaat, a live public grievance hearing programme at Civil Secretariat. He sought details of the complaints received on Jammu and Kashmir Integrated Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (JKIGRAMS) portal and action taken report on public outreach programmes from the concerned administrative secretaries, deputy commissioners and senior officials. "All the initiatives must serve the common good and decisions must be implemented without fear or favour," the Lt Governor said.



Customs hands over rare East India Company telescope to ASI

The Customs Department on Thursday handed over a 206-year-old tracker telescope of the British East India Company to the Archaeological Survey of India. The rare telescope was seized in 2018 near Rangia in Assam's Kamrup district by the Customs sleuths when it was being smuggled from West Bengal to Bhutan, Central Excise and Customs Chief Commissioner (Guwahati Zone) Bandhana Deori told reporters here. "After its seizure by the Guwahati Customs Division, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was requested to verify its genuineness," she added. The expert committee of ASI, Kolkata examined the telescope and confirmed the seized tracker telescope with the inscription 'UK EAST INDIA COMPANY, 1818, SINO LEO103' and engraved with a logo of a crown, a spider and a scorpion, Deori said. "Declaring it as an antique ite,



Agra jail inmates offer 'taste of prison' to outsiders

District jail authorities here have decided to open a restaurant just outside their premises to give outsiders a taste of prison. The restaurant named Jail Chowpati' will serve 'jail ki roti', poori bhaji, chai, samosa, kachori, and thaali among others, all prepared by inmates of the Agra district jail. Inaugurated by state prison minister Dharamveer Prajapati on Wednesday, the restaurant is being managed by people who have been released from the jail. The jail administration is also planning to set up a selfie point at the restaurant and make the premises air-conditioned. Launching a tiffin service for students and office goers will be the next move. Talking to PTI, Hariom Sharma, Superintendent of District Jail, Agra said, "In Jail Chowpati opened outside the district jail premises, inmates will prepare food while those who have been released will manage the distribution." The restaurant will help rehabilitate former inmates.



Modi, Jugnauth launch 6 India-assisted projects in Mauritius

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Mauritius are natural partners in the maritime domain to combat traditional and non-traditional challenges in the Indian Ocean region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday after virtually inaugurating a new airstrip, a jetty and six community development projects in the island nation.

The India-assisted projects in Agalega island of Mauritius are seen as significant as they are expected to boost connectivity as well as maritime security and surveillance in the strategic waters in the region.

After inaugurating the projects along with Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, Modi announced that Mauritius will be the first coun-



The India-assisted projects in Agalega island of Mauritius are seen as significant as they are expected to boost connectivity as well as maritime security and surveillance in the strategic waters in the region

try to join India's Jan Aushadhi scheme, which is an initiative aimed at providing quality medicines at affordable prices.

In his remarks, Modi flagged concerns over challenges in the Indian Ocean region and said India and Mauritius are "natural partners" in the maritime domain to deal with them.

"Many traditional and non-traditional challenges are emerging in the Indian Ocean Region. All these challenges affect our economy. India and Mauritius are natural partners in the field of maritime security to deal with the challenges," he said at the virtual ceremony.

"We are actively working to ensure security, prosperity and

stability in the Indian Ocean Region. We are cooperating together in all areas like monitoring of exclusive economic zone, joint patrolling, hydrography, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," he said.

Modi's comments came amid increasing concerns in New Delhi over China's growing military forays into the Indian Ocean region which is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy.

He said the inauguration of the airstrip and jetty at Agalega island will further advance the cooperation.

The prime minister described Mauritius as an important partner under India's 'Neighborhood First' policy and that the bilateral development partnership has been an important pillar of the strategic relations.

'Centre afraid of INDIA, abusing probe agencies'

PNS ■ MAINPURI

Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Dimple Yadav slammed the BJP-led Centre over CBI summons to her husband Akhilesh Yadav, and accused it of abusing the central probe agencies for personal gains.

The Mainpuri MP said the Bharatiya Janata Party is realising the strength of opposition bloc INDIA.

Speaking to reporters at the SP office here, Dimple said, "He (Akhilesh) is not the first opposition leader to have received CBI summons. Efforts are being made to suppress every section of the society. To create this pressure, government investigating agencies CBI and ED (Enforcement Directorate) are being misused."

90 lakh new beneficiaries added to PM-KISAN scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 90 lakh new beneficiaries have been added under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme through the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra in the last three-and-a-half-months, according to the agriculture ministry.

Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) launched on November 15, 2023 is the Centre's flagship initiative to raise awareness on its schemes. VBSY aims to achieve beneficiary saturation under government schemes.

"Recently, as part of VBSY, undertaken to ensure saturation of the government's welfare schemes across more than 2.60 lakh gram panchayats, 90 lakh eligible farmers were added to PM-KISAN scheme,"



the ministry said in a statement.

Under PM-KISAN, launched on February 2, 2019, eligible farmer families are provided a benefit of Rs 6,000 per year in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000 every four months.

The benefit is transferred directly to bank accounts of eligible beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer mode,

using modern digital technology.

Since the launch, Rs 3 lakh crore has been disbursed, out of which Rs 1.75 lakh crore was transferred to eligible farmers during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued the latest 16th installment to more than 11 crore beneficiaries on Wednesday.

Concern over 5 states not signing PM SHRI School MoU



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has expressed strong concerns about five states not signing MoUs with the education ministry for PM SHRI schools and Punjab not implementing it despite continuing to take funds under the Samagra Shiksha scheme, sources said on Thursday.

Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Delhi have not yet signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Union Ministry of Education, while 30 states and union territories (UTs) have done so.

The scheme targets to upgrade 14,500 schools and is expected to benefit 1.8 million students. It also aims to ensure these schools serve as model institutes and encapsulate the spirit of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The government has already selected 6,448 schools from 28

states and UTs for the upgrade in the first round.

"Despite taking funds from Centre for Samagra Shiksha Scheme, the refusal of five States/UTs, namely Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Delhi to sign MOUs for PM SHRI schools reflects a troubling pattern. Punjab, after initially signing the MoU, stopped the implementation of PM SHRI," a source said.

"It is a clear politicization by the States/UTs, where they accept funds under Samagra Shiksha but resist signing an MoU for PM SHRI," the source added.

Asked about if the Centre can halt funding under Samgra Shiksha scheme for these states, the source said "nothing can be ruled out".

The Samagra Shiksha Scheme is the largest Central government scheme for school education for universalisation of education.

Enough with 'jumlas', time to answer people now

CONG SLAMS GOVT OVER FARMERS' ISSUES

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday accused the BJP government of not fulfilling its promises to farmers such as doubling their income and said "enough with the jumlas", it is time to answer the people now.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said 16 years ago, the Congress-UPA government had waived Rs 72,000 crore farm loans and interest of 3.73 crore farmers.

"This was the guarantee of Congress which was fulfilled. Modi ji made two big promises to the farmers -- first, cost+50 per cent of MSP and second, to double the income



of farmers by 2022. Both 'Modi's guarantees' turned out to be fake, and the condition of farmers became worse," the Congress president said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Now Congress has again promised the farmers -- We will give legal guarantee of MSP to 15 crore farmer families. Only Congress fulfils its guarantee," he asserted.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh referred to Modi's virtual address the people of Madhya Pradesh and said that amidst the inevitable wave of "lies and propaganda" that will unfold, the people of Madhya Pradesh have questions for him.

"In 2014, the BJP manifesto had promised that it would ensure a minimum 50% profit over the cost of production' for farmers. In the Madhya Pradesh assembly elections 2023, the BJP had promised the farmers that MSP for wheat would be fixed at Rs 2,700 and paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal," Ramesh said.

SC upholds Rajasthan's 2-child norm for govt jobs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has upheld the two-child eligibility criterion of the Rajasthan government for seeking public employment, ruling that it is not discriminatory and does not violate the Constitution.

The Rajasthan Various Service (Amendment) Rules, 2001 bar candidates who have more than two children from seeking government jobs.

While upholding the two-child norm, the top court dismissed the appeal filed by ex-serviceman Ramji Lal Jat, who had applied for a constable's job in the Rajasthan Police on May 25,

2018 after his retirement from military in 2017.

A bench headed by Justice Surya Kant held that Rule 24(4) of the Rajasthan Police Subordinate Service Rules, 1989, which says "no candidate shall be eligible for appointment to the service who has more than two children on or after June 1, 2002" is non-discriminatory and does not violate the Constitution.

"This court held that the classification, which disqualifies candidates for having more than two living children, was non-discriminatory and intra-vires the Constitution, since the objective behind the provision was to promote family planning."

'In CBI, work needs to be done anonymously'



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI is a place where work needs to be done anonymously and silently while staying away from seeking recognition through external platforms, its Director Praveen Sood said on Thursday.

Addressing investiture ceremony of sub-inspectors at the agency's academy in Ghaziabad, Sood said young officers must strive to do their work by employing out-of-the-box thinking and looking for achieving better results through approaching their tasks differently.

"This will do away with the mundane work by replacing the same with smart work which will yield better results," he said.

The officers have been inducted after a 38-week training in different disciplines and specialisations.

Among the 30 pass-outs, Sood awarded medals and trophies as well.

Jumrani Prince Omprakash was awarded 'DP Kohli Award for Best All-Round SI Trainee', Vicky Raj got 'DCBI Trophy for Indoor Studies' and 'Trophy for Cyber Crime Investigation. while Sudhanshu was selected for the 'John Lobo Trophy for Best Outdoor' and Ankit Tanwar received the 'CBI Academy Trophy for Dedication and Exemplary Conduct'.

The CBI chief told the new recruits that the agency offers multiple specialisations in investigations of various crimes like anti-corruption, cyber crime, economic offences, special crime and they should work in a manner that they are equipped with specialization of their choice in the next four-five years.

"Noting that most of the officers are from technical background, he underlined that the knowledge and learning acquired during academics and during the training, will come handy as the officers embark on real part of their learning process when they assume charge," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The director said that as CBI officers, the new inductees are going to be the brand ambassadors of the organization as their conduct and work will always be up for scrutiny by the court and public which will reflect upon the agency.

'What Central projects have we stalled'



PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should spell out what central schemes the state government has "blocked", and said those it opposed include NEET and the CAA, keeping public welfare in mind.

The chief minister was responding to Modi's claim that there was lack of cooperation from the DMK-led TN government in implementing central projects in the state. The PM made these claims during his public address on Wednesday in Tirunelveli, in the southern part of the state.

Stalin, on his part, referred to Modi's frequent visits to Tamil Nadu, saying "the fear of defeat on his face is evident and it manifests as anger."

The PM is "slandering" the DMK and its government, the chief minister alleged.

WITH MH 60R HELICOPTER INDUCTION

Navy to bolster anti-submarine warfare acumen

PNS ■ KOCHI

The coast of Kochi is all set to witness the pinnacle of airborne supremacy of the Indian Navy next week when it inducts the aerial marvel, the MH 60R helicopter into its fleet, bolstering the Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will commission the newly inducted MH 60R Seahawk multi-role helicopter at the INS Garuda here on March 6, Navy officials said.

The squadron will be commissioned in the Indian Navy as INAS 334, under the Command of Captain M Abhishek Ram.

The Indian government signed a deal with the United States of America in February 2020, to acquire 24 fourth-generation MH 60R helicopters.



Six of them have been delivered to the Indian Navy so far.

Speaking to PTI, Ram said the induction of these helicopters into the Indian Navy will bring about a significant surge in its maritime prowess and capabilities.

Detailing the capabilities of the new chopper, he said that apart from the ASW, it is designed for anti-surface warfare, search and rescue opera-

tions during the day and night, medical evacuation and vertical replenishment, among others.

"With this MH 60R, we have filled a major gap in our anti-submarine warfare capability. The anti-submarine capability and the sustenance of the chopper will change the way we are doing our surveillance and it will give us a larger surveillance bubble," Ram said.

He added that the newly

inducted choppers have been integrated with almost all the ships under the Indian Navy and ready for operational deployments.

The MH 60R is also capable of firing torpedoes, missiles and advanced precision kill weapon system rockets.

The self-protection suite on the helicopter comprises Chaff and Infrared Flares, which can be deployed automatically upon detection of a threat, Lieutenant Commandant Aneesh Ayarotil, one of the trained pilots of MH 60R said.

This is the only chopper in the Indian Navy with a self-defence capability from incoming gunfire or missiles.

"We can deploy flares against the incoming heat-seeking missiles, while chaffs that contain high radar-reflecting materials can be deployed to confuse the radar-homing missiles," Ayarotil

told PTI.

Ayarotil, who was earlier a Chetak pilot, said the MH 60R is one of the most advanced choppers and the systems are pilot-friendly.

"We can engage autopilot to hover and reduce the workload of the pilots," he added.

The first five batches of pilots and observers, who handle the detection and weapon systems and make the necessary tactical and navigational decisions, were trained in the US.

Ram said the rest of the training was held at INS Garuda in Kochi where a simulator is also coming up.

"This training here is more realistic because when you embark on an Indian ship, we are giving them a realistic sense of tactics. Because most of the training in the US was on the simulator and they do not let us expose ourselves much.

Manipur govt seeks Assam Rifles' help to maintain peace

PNS ■ IMPHAL

The Manipur government has sought Assam Rifles' assistance to maintain peace and restore public confidence in six violence-hit districts.

An order issued by the Imphal West district magistrate on Thursday highlighted reports of significant breaches of law and order, notably instances of mob violence.

"The situation has gone beyond the control of the district administration and police," the order said, adding that the services of Assam Rifles has been requisitioned in different parts of the district from February 29 till March 5.

This follows recent events, including a torchlight rally on Wednesday night by thousands of women in Imphal West demanding the termina-



tion of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement between the central government and Kuki militant groups.

On February 27, around 200 armed men vandalised and fired upon the residence of additional ASP M Amit Singh in Wangkhei, Imphal East district, leading to Singh's

abduction and subsequent rescue by security forces.

In response to the escalating situation, other districts such as Bishnupur, Thoubal, Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, and Tengnoupal have also requisitioned the deployment of Assam Rifles to maintain peace and security, officials said.

Upmanship

Both TMC and BJP rush forth to claim credit for fugitive Sheikh Shahjahan's arrest after 55 days

The arrest of Trinamool Congress strongman Sheikh Shahjahan, who was wanted for the Sandeshkhali infamy involving the charges of gang rape and landgrab, is likely to further muddy political waters in West Bengal and intensify the bitter war of words between the Mamata Banerjee-led State Government and the BJP. On the run for 55 days following a mob attack on Enforcement Directorate officers during a raid at his house on January 5 in a ration scam case, Sheikh was finally taken into custody within 24 hours of the Calcutta High Court stating that the CBI, ED or State police could arrest him. However, the delayed development has opened a can of worms in political circles. While the ruling TMC maintains that Sheikh was apprehended now since the High Court had cleared the ambiguity on a stay on his arrest, the Opposition BJP claims that the accused was being shielded by the police and his arrest was "scripted" because of the "intense pressure brought on the Government by us". As the drama



unfolds in West Bengal, one thing remains clear: Sheikh's arrest has ignited a firestorm, with both the main players vying for supremacy in the State's ever-evolving political milieu. While the development has sent shockwaves across the State, the political manoeuvrings have understandably quickened as both the TMC and BJP seek to capitalise on the situation, especially since the Lok Sabha elections are very much in sight, and Sandeshkhali and its aftermath could be a game changer for both parties. For the TMC, it presents an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to combating corruption and upholding the rule of law. The party has wasted no time in touting the arrest as

a testament to its dedication to clean governance and accountability. On the other hand, the BJP has seized upon the arrest as evidence of its growing influence in West Bengal's political arena. The party sees it as vindication of its anti-corruption stance and validation of its claims of rampant corruption within the TMC-led Government. However, under the surface lies a deeper struggle for supremacy in the State's tumultuous political arena. The fierce battle for electoral dominance has only intensified with Sheikh's arrest, with each party seeking to leverage the situation to bolster its poll prospects. However, amid the political grandstanding, it is important not to lose sight of the broader implications of the fugitive strongman's arrest. Beyond being a mere pawn in the State's political underbelly, Sheikh's case underscores the pervasive issue of corruption that continues to plague governance in West Bengal. His arrest serves as a stark reminder of the challenges facing the State in its quest for clean and transparent governance, irrespective of political affiliations. Amid the cacophony of competing claims and counterclaims, the true test lies in the ability of Bengal's political class to address the underlying issues of corruption and criminalisation of politics, which continue to undermine the State's progress and development.

PICTALK



A local artiste with long mustache poses for photos, in Bikaner

PTI

Empowering grassroots innovation for progress

Science and technology stand as the twin engines propelling our nation towards progress, but they must address the needs of society

Science and technology serve as the driving force propelling our nation forward, akin to the wheels of progress. However, the efficacy of these wheels determines the speed of our journey. Since independence, Bharat has experienced significant advancement, largely attributable to strides in scientific innovation undertaken by our scientific community. This progress is evident across various sectors crucial to human life, including agriculture, food, healthcare, infrastructure, and communication. Yet, the translation of scientific innovations into societal benefits often encounters challenges, primarily due to a disconnect between scientific research and grassroots needs. While many innovations originate from peer-reviewed publications, often authored by Western scientists, they may lack relevance to local contexts. Consequently, solutions to everyday challenges remain elusive, despite remarkable achievements in space and technology. This reliance on external sources creates a bottleneck in developing disruptive discoveries



tailored to local needs. Historically, groundbreaking innovations were not solely the domain of trained scientists but also arose from the keen observations and creativity of untrained naturalists. Preceding the advent of modern science, human civilizations thrived for millennia, leveraging state-of-the-art technologies of their time. Many contemporary innovations find their roots in ancient technologies, underscoring the contributions of our forebears. However, the contemporary scientific community often falls short in generating truly novel ideas, frequently resorting to replicating concepts from Western literature. This approach results in innovations primarily catering to

industrial needs rather than addressing societal issues. The critical distinction between invention and utility underscores the necessity for originality and societal relevance in innovation. Grassroots innovators emerge as pivotal agents in bridging this gap, offering solutions rooted in local contexts and addressing specific community needs. These individuals possess an intimate understanding of their environment, enabling them to develop tailored interventions that resonate with the realities of daily life. Their localized approach ensures solutions are not only relevant but also sustainable, addressing root causes rather than superficial symptoms. By empowering grassroots innovators, communities can leverage their inherent knowledge, creativity, and resourcefulness to solve their challenges. This bottom-up approach fosters ownership and collective responsibility, driving more effective and sustainable solutions. Initiatives such as those facilitated by the National Innovation Foundation-India exemplify the government's

commitment to promoting grassroots innovation and integrating it into the mainstream. While India has made significant strides in fields like space science, vaccine development, and agriculture, persisting societal challenges necessitate a collaborative approach between scientific institutions and grassroots innovators. Celebrating National Science Day under the theme 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat' provides an opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of grassroots innovators. Their selfless dedication to improving their communities exemplifies the spirit of innovation and underscores the potential for transformative change when science aligns with grassroots needs. In conclusion, the journey of progress propelled by science and technology requires not only scientific excellence but also a deep-rooted connection to societal needs. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

LK Advani: A Ratna of Bharat



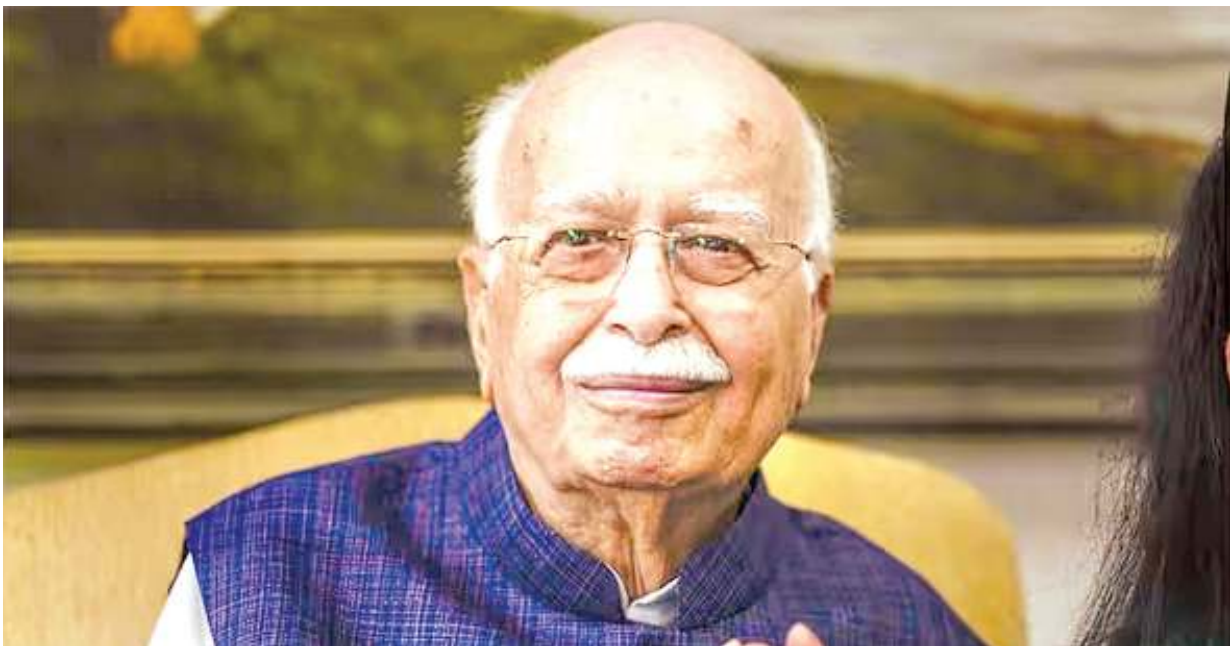
PRAFULL GORADIA

From attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow

The biggest sacrifice Lal Krishna Advani made was to distance himself from the culmination of the Babri edifice at Ayodhya. Understandably, the Hindu public was disappointed; Advani's followers were heartbroken. Many of them went to the extent of alleging that he had let down the cause. For a conscientious leader, this was like cutting his nose and throwing it away. During the spring of 1991, Advani told me that it was Ayodhya that had made him a national figure. Until his leading the Rathayatra from Somnath to hopefully reach the birthplace of Shri Ramchandra—which was intercepted by Lalu Prasad Yadav at Samastipur in 1990—Advani was merely a senior party apparatchik.

It was his taking up the cause of the Ramjanmabhoomi that catapulted him to the gallery of national figures. When, therefore, Advani spoke to the press saying that December 6, 1992, was the darkest day of his life, he knew what he was throwing away. Soon thereafter, accompanied by friends, I called on him at the Irrigation Department's guest house near Jhansi, where he along with a few other senior BJP leaders had been kept under house arrest, following the demolition of the Babri edifice on that fateful day of December 6 that year. Advani told me that after seeing my letter published in the Pioneer, wherein I had rejoined to his remark that "There have been darker days", he knew I had come to protest against his statement. It took him quite a while before he came around to believing my denial. He was right to the extent that I continued to hold the view (which I of course, still do) that the Babri edifice was a baggage of dacoity and had to be confiscated.

Advani then went on to explain: Whatever my explanation, I had to realise that party unity, regardless of anything else, was our uppermost duty. Atalji (Vajpayee) was our seniormost leader, and no party member should differ with him publicly on such a matter of policy. Should party members flagrantly violate their party's



commitment made to the Supreme Court, that the edifice would be safe? Its future was for the court to decide. First, who then would ever again have faith in the word of a BJP leader?

Secondly, the opposing parties would go to town saying that the BJP was a party ridden with factions. Its top leader does not believe in masjid-hunting while one of its chief ministers practices the exact opposite. Thirdly, an upright party is a united party, and we are known as a party with a difference. Becoming a faction-ridden party is not the difference between our aspirations. Fourthly, discipline has been our hallmark. Did the karsevaks at Ayodhya behave in a disciplined way, by going against the leadership and demolishing a place of worship of another community?

In April 1998, I became the party's Member of the Rajya Sabha through a bye-election. Among members generally, it seemed that interest in Ayodhya had waned. The case lay in court without active hearings. When I thought of the vanished edifice, I did wonder whether at that rate

“IF THERE IS TO BE ANOTHER LEADER IN THE FUTURE, HE SHOULD HAVE THE WIDE ACCEPTANCE AND LOYALTY THAT ATALJI COMMANDED. THAT IS WHAT A DIVERSE COUNTRY LIKE OURS NEEDS”, ADVANI OPINED

the Congress with a clever leader might just snatch the issue out of the BJP's hands and use it for electoral benefit. How popular the issue was kept becoming clear over and over again.

Meanwhile, many more pilgrims continued to visit the holy city. One day in July 1999, Advani called me to his room in Parliament House for a chat over toast and coffee. He opened up by showering praise on Vajpayee's tactful leadership of a coalition of so many parties with so many different political ideologies ranging from the Shiv Sena on the one hand to the DMK on the other.

There was no doubt that Vajpayee was running a complex government very successfully. Advani was full of praise for his leadership. If there is to be another leader in the future, he should have the wide acceptance and loyalty that Atalji commanded. That is what a diverse country like ours needs, Advani opined. All of us in our party should give up small differences and think of large policy issues. Automatically, such a leader and his party would attract votes as well as an ongoing following.

He went on to say that India's future lies in the integrity of politics. Rather than recommending any shift towards moderation or 'soft secularism', Advani stressed the unity of thought, policy and leadership. By implication, he was asking for a united party under a broadminded leader. He was repeatedly emphatic about parties rather than the party.

Even dynastic parties are not free of factions and breakups, and it is the BJP alone that has admirably avoided going that way. It seemed as though he wanted to give up all he had stood for earlier and espouse a new cause, not only for the BJP but for the sake of the country.

As I knew him, I can state that this was no mere shift but a sacrifice. From his eloquence of attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow. It could not have been easy for him, but that is what he is.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

14 BANK HOLIDAYS IN MARCH

Sir — People who are planning to visit banks in the first week of March and thereafter will have to plan very well in advance. Locker operation for the marriage will have to gear up early. The banks across the country will remain closed for 14 days on various counts due to holidays and the end of the financial year at the fag end of March. According to the bank calendar released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the coming weeks of March and April will witness over seven days of holidays.

These include all Sundays, the second and fourth Saturdays, public holidays, and regional holidays. In the state of Maharashtra, the bank is closed on March 8 as well for Mahasivarathri, March 25, Monday for Holi second day, and March 29 for Friday. People with pending work related to the banks also need to note that there will be only two days when the banks will continue their services between March 27 and April 4 will remain shut as it will be the last day of the financial year (FY 24). In April, the banks will be shut down to close their yearly accounts. April 2 will be a holiday on account of Good Friday while the services will be affected further.

Jayanthy Subramaniam | Mumbai

RARE DISEASES

Sir — Autoimmune disorders, inherited cancers and congenital conditions are not uncommon. Across the globe, some three fifty million people live with about seven thousand of what are called "rare diseases". A disease is "rare" when it affects fewer than one in two thousand people. More than seventy per cent of these diseases begin in childhood. Insufficient knowledge on the part of the doctor and lack of awareness among the patients render these rare diseases challenging. That more than seventy-five per cent of rare diseases are of genetic origin, and fifty per cent are present from birth further complicates things. Besides misdiagnosis leading to inadequate treatment, crippling pain and discomfort are unpleasant companions of the patients with rare diseases. 'Rare Diseases Day' on

Reservations rendered ineffective



The struggle for reservation is carried forward by many castes. A few individuals whip the sentiments of the concerned people and involve them in a struggle by which the individuals gain fame and benefits. Reservations are sought to get admission to educational institutions and to gain jobs in government institutions. But everyone talking about reservations should, first of all, analyse how many vacancies

in government institutions are filled and how many have been recruited permanently on reservations in the last 10 years. The recruitment in government offices is filled on casual, contingent, daily wage, contract or outsourced basis. Under these systems, reservations have no relevance. Recruitment is carried on only for the top layer posts where reservations have their place. PSUs were recruiting employees under the rules of reservation. Now they are either closed or facing closure. Moreover among the unemployed lot, more than 40% are educated youth. In this background fighting for employment opportunities is all the more important. The present struggles resemble searching for fuel sticks in a desert land. Leaders and followers should think before embarking upon a struggle. Struggling for reservations is struggling for non-existing jobs.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

February 29 aims at achieving "true equity" for those afflicted by rare conditions. Equity in health access, treatment, and social opportunities is crucial for patients with rare diseases. In India, one in twenty suffers from rare diseases. All this said, the biggest difficulty that arises in the management of rare diseases is their treatment, which takes a heavy financial toll on the patients as well as their relatives. Moreover, treatment is long and tiring, so patience and equanimity among all stakeholders can go a long way.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

THE HUMAN COST OF UKRAINE WAR

Sir — Ukrainian President Zelensky told reporters on February 22, in the second year of the Russian invasion, that Ukraine had lost more than 31 thousand soldiers in the war. The lives of civilians would have been even greater than this. On Monday evening, French President Emmanuel Macron indicated that he was willing to send his troops to Ukraine. But immediately after his statement, almost all EU and NATO member countries distanced them-

selves from Macron's suggestion. All refused to deploy their troops in Ukraine. Whereas just two days ago, US President Joe Biden's views were being read on his social media platform 'X' in which he wrote, "When Putin ordered his tanks to enter Ukraine, he thought the world would bow down. To provide "so that the Ukrainian troops have the necessary weapons and ammunition to defend themselves". The Second World War also ended only when all the Allies entered the field together, otherwise before that the German victory campaign was uninterrupted. Was moving forward. According to the latest data, Ukraine is losing more and more of its territory to Russia. Kyiv is facing a shortage of military equipment as well as trained combat soldiers. In such a situation, if Ukraine has to save its existence, then NATO's soldiers will have to be fielded in the region to fight Russian invaders.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

DOMESTIC POLITICS

AMID GLOBAL AGENDA

India advocates for a balanced voice in shaping a multilateral world order



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

As elections draw closer, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been frequenting India's south more than championing the causes of the global south across available diplomatic platforms. One reason is that his party seems to have a weaker presence down south. Earlier, as a strategic choice, PM Modi chose to inaugurate a Hindu temple in a Muslim country during his last foreign trip in the current tenure. Even as he did so, statements regarding continuity of policies and outlook were subtly delivered when PM Modi confidently told his audience that he already has invitations from several foreign governments for the middle and latter part of 2024, indicating confidence in his potential third term. A third term for Modi would have wider ramifications for a whole bunch of issues, not to mention foreign policy, given India's rising economic clout and confidence, making it a significant player in global affairs. India is expected to be the third-largest economy after the US and China in PM Modi's next term, which, besides putting a couple of stars on the shoulder, will also mean a heavy lift of responsibilities. One of the significant achievements for Mr. Modi, particularly during his second term, has been uplifting the India-US relationship and situating it in the Indo-Pacific context. While the India-US bilateral is by far at its strongest ever in history, the two nations have managed to work through several plurilateral platforms, the most important being the QUAD (a grouping of the US, India, Australia, and Japan), each having significant stakes and interests in the Indo-Pacific, while also wary of the dragon in the region, never stopping short of using any overt or covert means to push its assertive agenda.



While some of the world's finest diplomats, policymakers, and think tanks were deliberating on global issues last week, EAM Jaishankar found some time to speak to a whole bunch of policy strategists on the relevance of QUAD and the way forward. EAM highlighted the changing nature of India's foreign policy outlook over the last decade when he mentioned "remarkable changes in India's bilateral relationships with its three Quad partners. With the US, we put behind ideological hesitations of history. With Japan, we gave longstanding goodwill much more practical shape. And with Australia, we actually made a real beginning in seriousness." Even though there hasn't been a QUAD leaders summit since May last year, backroom meetings between foreign ministers from the member countries to discuss issues of regional and global importance haven't taken a backseat. Given the political compulsions, it might be difficult for India to host the QUAD leaders summit this year, as it will be too close to the US elections by the time the new Indian government is in place. However, the significant targets India aims to achieve through the QUAD group, as highlighted by EAM, namely, "it reflects the growth of a multipolar order. Two, it is a post-alliance and post-Cold War thinking. Three, it is against spheres of influence. Four, it expresses the democratizing of the global space and a collaborative, not unilateral, approach. And five, it is a statement that in this day and age, others cannot have a veto on our choices," shall remain in focus. It is this message of continuity of policies that the Indian government is highlighting to the domestic and international audience at a time when instability is the norm for most, including powerful nations in the world. India has effectively managed the QUAD as a non-military arrangement, unlike NATO, with shared interests of all members in the region. Mr. Jaishankar highlighted in his address, "Among Quad countries, there is a growing comfort in working with each other given the strong consensus we have in our strategic outlooks. India's bilateral partnerships with each of these three Quad countries have also transformed in recent years." The message is clear: India will continue to push for a multilateral world order with a fair share of voice on international forums.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Protests stress need for climate-smart agriculture



KOTA SRIRAJ

There is a pressing need for proactive measures aimed at protecting both farmer livelihoods and national food security



The ongoing farmer protests that began on February 13th have already claimed five lives and resulted in Delhi bearing the brunt of economic losses to the tune of 300 crores as nearly five lakh traders who did regular business in Delhi from adjoining states suspended their businesses given the unrest. Since 2020, farmer protests have unfortunately assumed a regular frequency not only in Delhi and Punjab but across India. According to consultancy firm Verisk Maplecroft estimates, India has accounted for the biggest global share of farmer protests in the past three years. The farmer protests 2.0 again highlight the fault lines in India's agricultural viability and this time the farmers are demanding conclusive government action. The protesting farmers want a firm minimum support price (MSP) that is backed by a legal guarantee for all crops. Another demand is to implement the recommendations of the MS Swaminathan committee on agriculture which will enable increasing MSP to 50 per cent above the weighted average cost of production. Other demands include better sugar cane prices and a pension of Rs 10,000 a month for every farmer above the age of 60. The government is engaged in feverish negotiations with the farmer unions to break the impasse. However, a breakthrough achieved may be short-lived, as the government would have only successfully attended to the symptoms and not to the problem itself. India's agri sector contributes only 15 per cent to the GDP but engages 58 per cent workforce. This lopsided proportion is made worse by the fact that 85 per cent of the farmers operate in less than five acres of land half of which in many parts of India may be dry and barren. This translates to low yields, low earnings and high debt and when combined with increasing challenges of climate change on agriculture, the problem assumes a much larger and ominous proportion. Climate change whether it is unseasonal rain, hailstorms, floods, or drought, India's agri-sector has seen it all. The lingering uncertainty due to environmental issues



BEST FARMING PRACTICES NEED TO BE PROMOTED ACROSS THE SECTOR TO ENSURE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

keeps the farmers on their toes leading to income insecurity and mounting debt. An example is the casualty in the current protests of a marginal farmer whose 8-acre agricultural land had 8 lacs of debt on it, making it virtually impossible for the farmer to pay it off and continue with another crop. Climate change-driven issues such as these have made the farmers demand an MSP law to act as a safety net for the time, effort and risk they invest in farming. The perennial shortage of water resources is the first symptom of climate change's impact on the agri sector. According to Rainfed Atlas, it is estimated that between 52% and 55% of the farming community have no means of irrigation and are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. But due to climate change temperatures are spiralling and rainfall has become more erratic, with longer dry spells resulting in droughts and shorter periods of more intense rainfall causing floods. This results in a domino effect whereby crop yield is adversely impacted while high Co2 levels cause low nutritional value of crops. This translates to low marketability of the produce therefore causing financial distress and rising debt for the farmers. The impact of climate change on the agri-sector and the sluggish government response in managing its fallout has come as a double whammy for the farmer community. The lack of robust insulation measures that seek to protect the sector from the vagaries of climate extremes is now having a telling impact on productivity. The cereal crop productivity of most cereals is slated to decrease due to an increase in temperature and CO2 levels, and the decrease in water availability. According to estimates, there will be a projected loss of 10-40% in crop production by 2100 if no climate change adaptation measures are

taken. A one-degree Celsius increase in temperature may reduce yields of major food crops by 3-7%. Given these troubling projections, the government must extricate the agri-sector from the clutches of climate change. This alone can ensure the best interests of farmers, safeguard national food security and protect livelihoods. An audit of the agri-sector at the micro-level is essential to identify and remove processes that are detrimental to natural resources. This will ensure weeding out of inefficient water-intensive practices and allow optimal use of the precious resource. Similarly, best farming practices need to be promoted across the sector to ensure climate change adaptation and mitigation in the sector. For example, the raised-bed planting of wheat in the Indo-Gangetic plains enables 20-25% savings in irrigation water and also helps in reduced herbicide use. Measures such as these combined with water accounting methodologies can build long-term sustainability, efficiency and resilience of the agri-sector besides immensely benefiting the marginal farmers. The government must also initiate climate-smart agriculture strategies which aim at adapting agriculture to climate change. This can be done by implementing technologies that help farmers plan crops by considering the climate specifics of their area through easy-to-use apps on their smartphones. This can be done by prioritising botanical research to develop crop species that are more tolerant to water deficiencies and extreme temperatures. Additionally, ecologists can evolve effective soil management methods that reduce the depletion of topsoil, promote carbon sequestration, and reduce chemical application. Advanced farm irrigation technologies can also help proper water saturation levels in the soil, prevent water flooding,

and help avoid top-soil runoff. The government must focus on specially developed software solutions for agriculture that can help in real-time monitoring of the crops and allow farmers to accurately calculate the required inputs, which reduces costs in the short term and protects nature in the long term. Technology-assisted cover crops for instance can not only help prevent soil erosion, and promote water retention and nitrogen fixation but also serve as organic manure for fodder. Smart agri-software can help farmers implement differentiated applications of fertilisers which can help decrease soil pollution and increase crop nutrient levels. The software can also have in-built weather-related tools that provide timely alerts of extremities, elaborate weather forecasts to schedule farming events and enable prediction of general climate change tendencies by analysing historical weather data. Currently, the agri-sector problems and farmer grievances are dealt with on a reactive basis; this is evident in the form of chronic farmer agitations that come back every year. The government must realise that a lasting solution is only possible if actual problems, including the impact of climate change on agriculture, are addressed with the participation of all stakeholders of the sector. The collaboration of farmers, policymakers, environmentalists, botanical scientists and technology experts can help chalk out long-term strategies and solutions and ensure a robust agri-sector that is resilient against climate change onslaughts. Farmer protests are a symptom of climate change's impact on agriculture. Protecting the sector from adverse impacts will automatically ensure farmer well-being and prosperity.

(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

New India: Roti, kapda, makaan, vigyan and aatmasamman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development, empowering every section of society

The Modi government's comprehensive strategy for tackling fundamental aspects of development such as food security (Roti), clothing (Kapda), housing (Makaan), science and technology (Vigyan), and self-respect (Aatmasamman) stands as a remarkable example of effective policymaking. These initiatives have not only brought about socio-economic transformation but have also significantly contributed to the nation's advancement. The Modi government has aimed to uplift and empower every section of society. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development. Through numerous flagship



ANIL AGRAWAL

schemes, significant strides have been made towards building a stronger, more resilient India. As we reflect on the journey of India's transformation over the past decade, it becomes evident that the Roti, Kapda, Makaan, Vigyan, and Aatmasamman initiatives have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape. Moving forward, it is imperative to build

upon these foundations and continue striving towards a more prosperous and equitable future for all. Through revolutionary initiatives, the government has aimed to enhance agricultural productivity and bolster the textile industry, thereby encouraging research in science and technology, stimulating economic growth, and creating employment opportunities for Aatmanirbhar Bharat. A pivotal aspect of the Modi government's initiatives has been the empowerment of Bharat, ensuring self-reliance and dignity for every citizen. This vision extends to promoting social justice, gender equality, and skill development, encapsulating the ethos of "Aatmanirbhar Bharat." Initiatives aimed at uplifting

marginalised communities exemplify the government's commitment to fostering an inclusive society. **Roti: Transforming Food Security in India** The Modi government has taken a multifaceted approach to food security, encompassing macro and micro levels. Initiatives like PMGKY and ONORC have bolstered vulnerable groups' food access, provided relief during crises, and built resilience. Prioritising nutrition through POSHAN Abhiyaan demonstrates a commitment to tackling deficiencies. **Kapda: Enhancing Textiles and Khadi** The remarkable growth in Khadi's turnover, from Rs. 31,154 crores in 2013-14 to Rs. 1,34,630 crores in 2022-23,

underscores its economic revitalization. This surge in demand has propelled production and employment opportunities, reflecting the government's commitment to nurturing indigenous industries. India's textile exports have increased from \$12 billion in 2010-11 to \$39.2 billion in 2017-18. The textile industry in India is currently a \$75 billion industry and is expected to grow to \$300 billion by 2025-26. **Makaan: Revolutionising Housing** In a nation as vast and diverse as India, characterized by historical socioeconomic disparities, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has emerged as a transformative force. This initiative transcends mere housing provision; it catalyses

profound change. Through Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), expansive coverage underscores the unwavering dedication of the Modi government and the vision of converting mere structures into cherished homes and dreams into tangible realities, marking a testament to the government's commitment to the well-being and prosperity of its citizens nationwide. The "Housing for All" scheme represents a multifaceted approach to address the critical issue of housing in India. The Light House Projects (LHPs) stand as a pioneering initiative under the visionary Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India), spearheaded by the Government of India since its launch in 2019.

Vigyan: Advancing the Space Sector India has emerged as a prominent space power in the world, with significant global implications. Chandrayaan-3 hailed as India's lunar triumph, reaffirms India's technological prowess and solidifies its position as a leader in space exploration, paving the way for future lunar endeavours, including human exploration. Aditya-L1, a state-of-the-art coronagraphy spacecraft meticulously crafted by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), embarked on a pioneering mission to explore the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, particularly focusing on the corona and chromosphere.

Aatmasamman: Empowering Bharat Once an individual has secured all the necessities for a comfortable life, the concept of "Aatmasamman," or self-respect. Beyond material needs, self-respect becomes the cornerstone of emotional and psychological well-being, encompassing a profound sense of dignity, worth, and integrity. Stand Up India Scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme, Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have been supportive of empowering numerous sections of society. (The author is a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rupee settles flat at 82.91 against US dollar

The rupee on Thursday settled flat at 82.91 (provisional) against the US dollar, as the support from lower crude oil prices and a weak greenback against major crosses overseas was offset by sustained foreign capital outflows. Besides, a positive trend in equity markets provided a cushion to the domestic unit, forex traders said. Market participants were also cautious ahead of the domestic GDP data to be released later in the day, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.88 and touched the intra-day low of 82.94 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at its previous day's closing level of 82.91 (provisional) against the dollar. On Wednesday, the rupee settled 2 paise lower at 82.91 against the US dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.19 per cent to 103.78. Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee was under pressure due to selling by foreign institutional investors and dollar demand from importers.



Swan Energy raises Rs 3,000 cr via QIP

Swan Energy on Thursday said it has raised Rs 3,000 crore from qualified institutional placement of shares which were priced at Rs 670 apiece. The issue got interest from qualified institutional investors including Quant Mutual Fund, SBI Life, LIC, LIC Mutual Fund, Tata Mutual Fund, Infiniti Mutual Funds, SBI General Insurance, BNP Paribas Mutual Fund, Nomura, Goldman Sachs, Future Generali, Anand Rathii, and other domestic and foreign institutions and family offices, the company said. The fund will be deployed to modernise the recently acquired Reliance Naval and Engineering's shipyard at Pipavav. Additionally, a portion of the fund will be allocated for project expansion and debt reduction. Paresh Merchant, an executive director of Swan said taking management control of Reliance Naval – the largest defence shipyard in the country – aligns with their vision to emerge as a leading private player in the manufacture of defence, commercial, and oil and gas vessels.



Key infra sectors' growth slows to 15-month low

The growth of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed to a 15-month low of 3.6 per cent in January, on account of poor performance of sectors like refinery products, fertiliser, steel and electricity, according to the official data released on Thursday. The growth of eight core sectors -- coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity -- was 4.9 per cent in December. It was 9.7 per cent in January 2023. The previous low level of growth rate was recorded at 0.9 per cent in October 2022. Cumulatively also, the growth rate in the output of these sectors slowed down to 7.7 per cent as against 8.3 per cent in April-January 2022-23. The output growth of refinery products and fertiliser was in the negative zone. And the pace of increase in the output of coal, steel, and electricity decelerated during the month under review. However, crude oil, natural gas, and cement production recorded positive growth in January.



Cabinet nod to Rs 1.26L cr chip-making units

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved setting up three semiconductor-making units by firms, including Tata Group and Japan's Renesas, at an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet requirements of chips.

The units which will make chips for sectors including defence, automobiles and telecommunications, will begin construction within the next 100 days, Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The three units will be set up under the 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem' programme that provides government support of up to Rs 76,000 crore.

Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor



Manufacturing Corp at Dholera in Gujarat. The plant will have a capacity to produce 50,000 wafers per month and will involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore.

Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt Ltd (TSAT) will set up a semiconductor unit in Morigaon, Assam, at an investment of Rs 27,000 crore. CG Power in partnership with Renesas Electronics Corp and Stars Microelectronics of Thailand will set up a unit in Sanand in

Gujarat at an investment of Rs 7,600 crore.

In June last year, the Cabinet approved a proposal of Micron for setting up a semiconductor unit in Sanand, Gujarat.

The approvals are part of the Modi government's ambitions to make India a chipmaker for the world and cutting reliance on countries like Taiwan.

Vaishnaw said the Tata plant at Dholera will produce high-performance compute chips with 28 nm technology for electric vehicles (EV), tele-

com, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display and power electronics.

The unit in Assam will have a capacity of 48 million per day for automotive, electric vehicles, consumer electronics, telecom, and mobile phones. The CG power semiconductor unit will manufacture 15 million chips for consumer, industrial, automotive and power applications.

"Within a very short time, India's semiconductor mission has achieved four big successes. With these units, the semiconductor ecosystem will get established in India. India already has deep capabilities in chip design. With these units, our country will develop capabilities in chip fabrication. Advanced packaging technologies will be indigenously developed in India with today's announcement," he said adding the three units will generate direct employment of 20,000 advanced technology jobs and about 60,000 indirect jobs.

India's GDP grows at 8.4% in Q3; economy to expand at 7.6% in FY24: Govt data

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth accelerated to 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2023-24, mainly due to good performance by the manufacturing, mining & quarrying and construction sectors.

The Indian economy recorded a growth of 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of this fiscal (October-December 2023), according to data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

The NSO, in its second advance estimate of national accounts, pegged the country's growth at 7.6 per cent for 2023-24.

It had projected a growth of 7.3 per cent for the current fiscal in its first advance estimates released earlier in January 2024.

The NSO also revised the GDP growth for 2022-23 to 7 per cent against the earlier estimate of 7.2 per cent.

Protect investors in small, midcap schemes amid surging inflow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has asked mutual fund houses to put in place a framework to safeguard investors, who invested in smallcap and midcap schemes, amid a "froth building up" in these categories.

Also, the regulator has suggested steps such as restrictions on inflows in these segments, portfolio rebalancing, and laying guidelines to safeguard investors from the first-mover advantage of redeeming investors.

This came in the backdrop of strong flow in the small and midcap schemes of mutual funds over the last few quarters.

In a communication to Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Tuesday, Sebi asked the industry body to inform trustees of all the mutual fund houses to frame a policy to protect the interest of investors of smallcap and midcap schemes.

"In the context of the froth building up in the small and mid-cap segments of the mar-

Sebi asks mutual fund houses



should not be restricted to moderating inflows and rebalancing of portfolios.

Additionally, the new framework should protect investors from the first-mover advantage of redeeming investors.

Further, fund houses are required to disclose the new policy on their website within 21 days, the letter mentioned.

During the three months ended December 2023, the mid-cap category garnered net inflows of Rs 6,468 crore, marking it the 12th-consecutive quarter of inflow.

Besides, the small-cap category experienced a net inflow of Rs 12,052 crore in the third quarter of fiscal 2023-24, which was the highest the category has witnessed ever over a quarter. This was also the 11th-consecutive quarter in which the category witnessed net inflows.

Strong, consistent net inflows and favourable market conditions propped up the assets under management for these segments.

Exicom Tele-Systems IPO subscribed 129.52 times

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of EV charger maker Exicom Tele-Systems Ltd got subscribed a whopping 129.52 times on the last day of subscription on Thursday.

The Rs 429 crore-initial share sale received bids for 2,36,03,94,900 shares against 1,82,23,540 shares on offer, as per NSE data.

The portion for non-institutional investors got subscribed 153.20 times, while the category for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) received 121.80 times subscription.

The Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) part attracted 119.51 times subscription.

The IPO got fully subscribed within hours of opening for bidding on Tuesday. It had a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 329 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) component of up to 70.42 lakh equity shares worth Rs 100 crore, at the upper end of the price band, by promoter NextWave Communications.

Fiscal deficit touches 63.6% of full year target

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 11 lakh crore at January end touched 63.6 per cent of the revised annual target, according to the official data released on Thursday.

In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit or gap between the expenditure and revenue was 67.8 per cent of Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23.

For 2023-24, the government's fiscal deficit is estimated at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of the GDP.

The government's total receipts stood at Rs 22.52 lakh crore (81.7 per cent of corresponding RE 2023-24 of total receipts) as of January 2024, according to the data released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

This comprised Rs 18.8 lakh crore tax revenue (net), Rs 3.38 lakh crore of non-tax revenue and Rs 34,219 crore of non-debt capital receipts. Non-debt capital receipts consist of the recovery of loans and miscellaneous capital receipts.

The total expenditure incurred by the Centre was Rs 33.54 lakh crore (74.7 per cent of corresponding RE



2023-24), out of which Rs 26.33 lakh crore is on revenue account and Rs 7.2 lakh crore on capital account.

As per the CGA data, Rs 8,20,250 crore has been transferred to state governments as devolution of share of taxes by the central government up to this period, which is Rs 1,52,480 crore higher than the previous year. Out of the total revenue expenditure, Rs 8,21,731 crore was on account of interest payments and Rs 3,15,559 crore on major subsidies.

Commenting on the data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA, said: "While there may be some slippage in the disinvestment target and capex may trail the FY2024 RE, ICRA does not expect the revised fiscal deficit target of Rs 17.3 lakh crore for FY2024 to be breached."

Coal Minister launches coal logistics policy for infra development

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Coal and Mines Minister Pralhad Joshi on Thursday launched the Coal Logistics Plan & Policy for the development of logistics infrastructure for dry fuel in the country.

The minister said that there is a need to expand coal mining and scale up evacuation infrastructure as the demand for coal in electricity generation in India will continue to grow.

India built around 92,000 km of national highways in last 9.5 years: Anurag Jain

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road and Transport Highways (MoRTH) has built around 92,000 km of national highways in the last nine and a half years and by the end of the next month, it will touch 95,000 km, said Secretary Anurag Jain said on Thursday.

Addressing an event organised by the International Road Federation (IRF), Jain said the use of latest technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, has helped the ministry revolutionise plan-

Sebi bans 12 entities from securities mkt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Thursday barred 12 entities, including promoter of V Marc India Ltd, listed on NSE's SME segment, prima facie orchestrated by the promoter and company management, along with connected parties.

In its order, Sebi, prima facie, found that V Marc's promoter and MD Vikas Garg and Sandeep Kumar Srivastava, former Whole Time Director of the company-- engaged the services of Priyesh Kurani to 'operate the market'.

It further noted that Kurani, in

MANIPULATIVE TRADES IN V MARC INDIA

fraudulent and manipulative trading in the scrip of V Marc India Ltd, listed on NSE's SME segment, prima facie orchestrated by the promoter and company management, along with connected parties.

In its order, Sebi, prima facie, found that V Marc's promoter and MD Vikas Garg and Sandeep Kumar Srivastava, former Whole Time Director of the company-- engaged the services of Priyesh Kurani to 'operate the market'.

It further noted that Kurani, in

turn, in addition to using his own and his connected entities' trading accounts, engaged accounts of persons connected to Garg to manipulate the scrip.

Further, Garg and the company management channelled funds through their connected entities to Kurani for executing the fraudulent scheme.

The alleged fraudulent scheme was set in motion as soon as the scrip was listed on April 8, 2021.

"The impact of this alleged fraudulent scheme is evident in the manner volumes surged and

prices increased after which most of the entities -- PV Manipulators-- as well as the IPO subscribers -- exited fully. The shares offloaded were purchased by public shareholders leading to the increase in their numbers as well," Sebi said.

Accordingly, Sebi has restrained 12 entities 'from buying, selling or dealing in the securities market or associating themselves with the securities market, either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders'.



Sensex, Nifty close higher in volatile trade

RIL gains after mega-merger deal

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed with gains on Thursday in a highly volatile trade amid the scheduled monthly expiry of derivative contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30. During the day, the benchmark oscillated between a high of 72,730.00 and a low of 72,099.32.

The broader Nifty of NSE gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to close at 21,982.80.

"Domestic benchmark traded near a flat-line trend throughout the session, but some buoyancy emerged by the end of the day. Investors adopted a cautious wait & watch approach on the verge of a heavy economic data week," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Among Sensex shares,

IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Reliance Industries climbed nearly 2 per cent intra-day before closing more than half-a per cent higher after the company and Walt Disney announced the signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore behemoth. Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, ITC, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

"Markets traded volatile on the monthly expiry day but managed to end marginally higher," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.84 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.50 per cent.

Need a review of customs duties moratorium: India

PNS ■ ABU DHABI

India on Thursday pitched for re-examination of the implications of the customs duties moratorium on e-commerce trade for developing and least developed member nations of the WTO.

India is not in favour of further continuation of the moratorium of customs duties on e-commerce trade as it is impacting developing countries.

The issue came up for discussion during a session of a work programme on e-commerce at the World Trade Organization's 13th Ministerial Conference, which entered its last day on Thursday.

The e-commerce medium is a fast-growing segment for cross-border and domestic trade.

India said that this emerging segment of the global economy holds the promise for economic development and prosperity for developing countries, including the least developed countries (LDCs).

Due to this, New Delhi has stressed that all policy options, including the imposition of customs duties on e-commerce trade, should be available for the WTO members to promote digital industrialisation.

"With the digital revolution still unfolding and with increasing diffusion of technologies such as additive man-

ufacturing and 3D printing, data analytics, artificial intelligence, Internet-of-Things etc., there was a need for re-examination of the implications of the moratorium on

customs duties on electronic transmissions, particularly for the developing countries and the LDCs," the commerce ministry said.

Currently, a few firms based

in developed countries dominate the global landscape of e-commerce.

"India explained that there was a huge digital chasm between the developed and the developing countries, which makes it challenging to increase the participation of developing countries in global e-commerce," the ministry said. The country also argued that developing countries need to focus on improving their domestic physical and digital infrastructure, creating supportive policy and regulatory frameworks, and developing digital capabilities.

India and certain other developing nations are pushing to discuss the scope of the moratorium, as there are rev-

enue implications due to this.

As per estimates, the potential tariff revenue losses to the developing countries are about USD 10 billion every year. For India, it could be over USD 500 million every year.

The World Trade Organization members have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions since 1998, and the moratorium has been periodically extended at successive ministerial conferences (MC), the highest decision-making body of the 166-member body.

India is witnessing a rise in imports of electronic transmissions, mainly of items like movies, music, video games and printed matter, some of which could fall within the scope of the moratorium.





Bollywood's biggest announcement is that Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh are expecting their first child. The due date is September 2024, and the pair made a straightforward post with baby-related icons. Other than a series of emojis, no caption was required. Deepika's post immediately caused an explosion in the comments section.

The news ends weeks of conjecture about Deepika's pregnancy, which was sparked in part by her recent BAFTAs participation. Presenting at the award presentation, Deepika was dressed in a saree and seemed to be trying to disguise her stomach. After dating for a few years, Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh tied

the knot in 2018. Following their destination wedding in Italy, it was followed by receptions in Mumbai and Deepika's hometown Bengaluru.

B'wood power couple Deepika Padukone & Ranveer Singh are all set to welcome their first baby



Masti 4 to go on floors soon

In a world where laughter is scarce, the

iconic *Masti* franchise is all set to tickle your funny bones again with *Masti 4*. Returning to its roots, after 20 years, *Masti 4* promises to infuse the screen with the same timeless humour and mischievous charm that endeared fans to the franchise from the beginning when it first released in 2004.

Riteish Deshmukh, Vivek Oberoi, and Aftab Shivdasani reunite as the incorrigible trio, ready to reignite the flames of mischief and revelry.

Directed by Milap Zaveri, *Masti 4* promises to recapture the essence of OG film while embarking on a new adventure filled with laughter, love, and

uproarious escapades. Producers Indra Kumar, A. Jhunjhunwala, Ashok Thakuria and S. K. Ahluwalia are confident that *Masti 4* will surpass all expectations and emerge as a testament to the enduring legacy of the franchise.

"At its core, *Masti 4* is a celebration of friendship, marriage, mischief, and the undying spirit of laughter. We want to go back to the OG for its essence and bring back laughter with a new story that will resonate and while delivering a fresh dose of hilarity and heart," said Milap. The film is all set to go on floors.

Sony is planning to make a new Spider-Woman movie?

The much awaited Madame Web proved to be a complete bust, something the filmmakers would like wish to forget. The film was supposed to tie in with *Spider-Man* from the MCU because it was a part of the Sony Spideverse Universe, however it was a complete failure. Sony, meanwhile, is reportedly developing a second animated *Spider-Woman* film with a female lead protagonist.

Insider Daniel Richtman claims that Sony

Studios is working on at least two more animated *Spider-Man* films. One will center on the Wall-Crawler's rogues gallery, while the other will include a female lead following Madame Web's demise.

The animated female *Spider-Man* film is reportedly set apart from the previously announced *Spider-Woman* project, which was first revealed by Sony back in 2018. Not many further facts about the project are known at this time.



Andrew Haigh's All of Us Strangers, to release in India on March 8

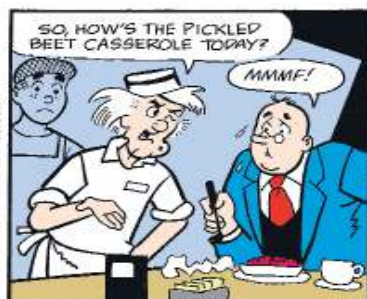
Searchlight Pictures' *All of us sStrangers*, the multiple award-winning poignant and hypnotic story of loss and love is all set to release theatrically across the country on 8th March 2024, following immense critical acclaim across the globe.

One night in his near-empty tower block in contemporary London, Adam (Andrew Scott) has a chance encounter with a mysterious neighbor Harry (Paul Mescal), which punctures the rhythm of his everyday life. As a relationship develops between them, Adam is preoccupied with memories of the past and finds himself drawn back to the suburban town where he grew up, and the childhood home where his parents (Claire Foy and Jamie Bell),

appear to be living, just as they were on the day they died, 30 years before. Searchlight Pictures presents, in Association with Film4 and TSG Entertainment, a Blueprint Pictures Production, *All of us Strangers*, produced by Graham Broadbent, Pete Czernin, Sarah Harvey. Written and Directed by Andrew Haigh, based on the novel *Strangers* by Taichi Yamada, the film stars Andrew Scott, Paul Mescal, with Jamie Bell and Claire Foy. Cinematography is by Jamie D. Ramsay, SASC, with production design by Sarah Finlay, costume design by Sarah Blenkinsop, hair and make-up by Zoe Clare Brown. The editor is Jonathan Alberts, ACE, with the music by Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



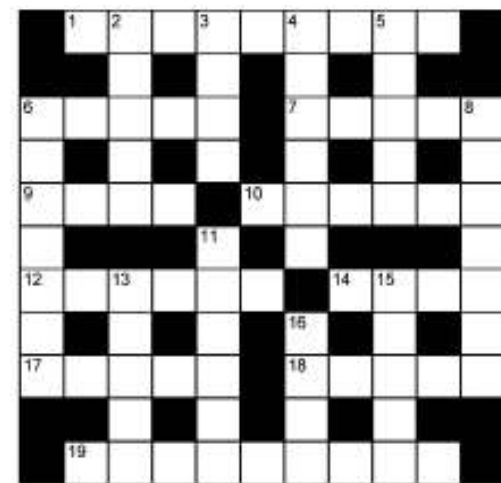
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- A large group of musicians
- The steps of a ladder
- Do this when you are thirsty
- Knotted
- Opposite of newest
- Mend
- A holder for cut flowers
- A slow-moving creature
- Jewellery for fingers
- People who hide on ships to avoid paying a fare

DOWN

- Wash the soap out of
- A snake noise
- A seat on a horse
- Lift up
- Goes back to a place
- Baby cats
- Rest your head on this
- Pigtail
- Pester
- The people working on a ship or aircraft



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution								
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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.

‘Mecca offered a breathtaking cultural spectacle’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Following her iconic performance as Srishti in *Kundali Bhagya*, Anjum Fakih has become one of the most beloved actresses on television. She is currently winning people over on *Dabangii: Mulgii Aayi Re Aayi*. Recently, the TV actress shared photos of her spiritual journey to perform Umrah with her mother on social media, announcing an exciting new chapter in her life.

“After two years of previous obligations, the trip to Mecca was a truly rewarding experience, a promise kept to my mom,” which led to an exclusive travel tales segment with her. “The most delightful aspect was seeing millions of believers come together as one, serving as a potent reminder of our common religion and goals.”

Anjum has been sharing lovely photos on her official Instagram account ever since she returned from her pilgrimage to Mecca. “Mecca offered a breathtaking cultural display as people from all walks of life joined together in prayer. The spiritual

atmosphere, long-standing customs, and ceremonies were humble and emphasised the value of harmony and tolerance.”

She has been constantly reminded of His love and blessings along the way, and she couldn’t help but be struck by how beautiful this spiritual trip has been. She is still filled with great gratitude and happiness as she gives God her sincere gratitude for leading her on this holy journey. Amen! “May he accept our Umrah.

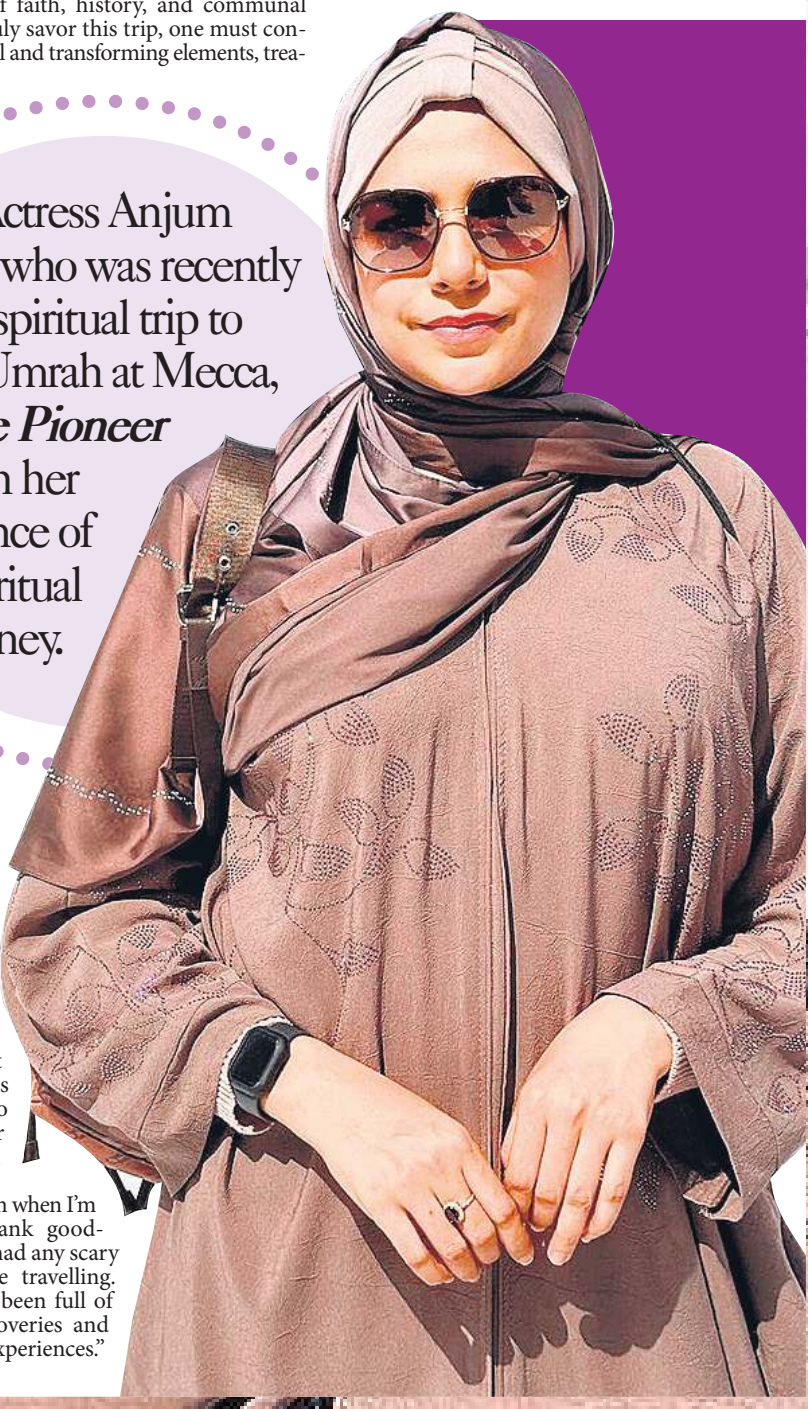
May he richly reward us, Amen. We are celebrating our first Umrah, and you have made it even more spectacular! Shukran, Shukran. Witnessing the

actress.

Anjum’s journey embodies grace, resiliency, and a deep sense of purpose as it comes to an end, encouraging others to cherish spiritually significant moments in their own lives. The actress tells us in the exclusive interview, “The trip was spiritually fulfilling, despite the difficulties of navigating busy places and linguistic

to millennia of faith, history, and communal prayers.” To truly savor this trip, one must consider its spiritual and transforming elements, treasure the unity

Actress Anjum Fakih, who was recently on a spiritual trip to perform Umrah at Mecca, takes *The Pioneer* through her experience of the spiritual journey.



hurdles. There was a long-lasting impression from seeing the people’s generosity and my mother’s unselfish charitable deeds, such as giving out dates in Medina.”

She continues, “In addition, the weather in Mecca was extreme, necessitating physical preparedness. Despite the difficult circumstances, conducting Umrah with fervor and excitement required staying physically hydrated! The muted colors of the hotels in Mecca offered a tranquil haven following the day’s spiritually enlightening encounters. Selecting the ideal hotel is essential for a relaxing getaway on such a holy voyage.”

We kept asking questions because we couldn’t stop hearing her. “Going to Mecca was freeing because it helped me fulfill a promise I made to my mother and strengthened my faith,” she said. “It was incredibly inspiring to feel the communal spirituality, make sincere prayers, and observe the heavenly presence surrounding the Kaaba. Seeing the Kaaba with one’s own eyes was unquestionably the most magnificent pleasure one could have in Mecca. It was an event that had me crying and left me feeling deeply connected

believers, and express gratitude for its deep link to both faith and history, felt Anjum.

In a general way, she remembered, “I usually find peace in quiet environments and retreat into nature’s lap for renewal. I can refuel and discover inner calm when I’m in nature. Thank goodness, I haven’t had any scary incidents while travelling. Every trip has been full of insightful discoveries and life-changing experiences.”

Review:

Sunflower season 2 : A disappointing blend of stale characters and forced comedy

TANISHA SAXENA

Continuing from Season 1, police inspectors DG and Tambe, played by Ranvir Shorey and Girish Kulkarni, persist in their pursuit of Kapoor’s killer. The prime suspect, Sonu Singh who had flown off the scene is back to the Sunflower society.

For the uninitiated, Set in Mumbai, *Sunflower* unfolds the story of a murder within a middle-class housing society bearing the same name. Mumbai police detectives, Digendra (played by Ranvir Shorey) and Chetan Tambe (portrayed by Girish Kulkarni), launch an investigation that casts suspicion on nearly every resident. Amidst the intrigue, Sonu Singh (characterized by Sunil Grover), a seemingly uncomplicated individual residing in the society, finds himself entangled in the murder mystery, emerging as the primary suspect.

In the initial episode of the second season, there’s a noticeable attempt to reconnect viewers with the plot through the introduction of the Sunflower Society members. However, the lack of evolution in these characters over the past two years becomes glaring. Dilip Iyer, portrayed by Ashish Vidyarthi, persists as the unchanging embodiment of the neighborhood



uncle—insistent on imposing his narrow worldview. His disapproval of women in revealing clothing and aversion to profanity, particularly from women, remain as outdated as ever.

This season introduces us to Rosie (played by Adah Sharma), a bar dancer and heir to Mr Kapoor’s penthouse. Right from word go, Rosie carries this charm and mystique about her. Rosie emanates an air of mystery and sharp intellect, her enigmatic presence veiling her true motives. Beyond her charming exterior lies a figure that embodies the fears of any man. Rosie gradually unveils her prowess in manipulation, deftly maneuvering through the lives of those around her under the guise of innocence. Whether dealing with authorities, Iyer, or Sonu, she establishes herself as a skilled manipulator, effortlessly outsmarting anyone who dares to cross her path.

This exhausting 8-episode series relentlessly tests your patience with a single-line plot dragged out to the point where you find yourself questioning the purpose.

Ranvir Shorey, portraying the detective, disappoints in an ill-conceived role. Sporting thick glasses, he radiates a restrained and

unenthusiastic aura. Inspector Tambe, portrayed by Girish Kulkarni, exudes liveliness with a penchant for pursuing romantic interests. However, his character seems to lack depth, as he is often ready to demean others without contributing significantly to either the comic or serious aspects of the narrative.

Regrettably, Ashish Vidyarthi’s role appears confined to a singular dimension, offering him limited opportunities to showcase the diverse facets of his acting prowess. Mukul Chadda’s portrayal of the vengeful angel falls flat and proves irritating. The female cast members are confined to stereotypical roles.

Sunil Grover’s performance (played by Sonu) in the series, is all about rehashing his character from *Kapil Sharma’s show* with a lackluster and repetitive approach. The entire season and in fact both the seasons revolve around this man. His slapstick antics fell disappointingly flat. The execution of his scenes in particular lacked the usual finesse, with poorly timed pitfalls and predictable slapstick clichés. The audience, expecting uproarious laughter, instead witnessed awkward and forced moments that failed to elicit the usual comedic response. It became evident that the writing didn’t align with the charm that usually makes slapstick routines enjoyable, leaving viewers longing for the moments of laughter.

Touted to be a suspense-comedy, *Sunflower* unfortunately doesn’t quite hit the mark. In an age that values a refined sense of humor, it’s a bit perplexing to identify the comedic elements within the show. Moreover, the suspense seems elusive, prompting one to question the rationale behind its classification as a suspense-comedy.

In a nutshell, *Sunflower* Season 2 falls short of expectations, with characters that remain stagnant and a plot stretched to the point of tedium.



Creator: Vikas Bahl, Rahul Sengupta
Production: Good Co, Reliance Entertainment
Director: Vikas Bahl, Rahul Sengupta
Cast: Sunil Grover, Ashish Vidyarthi, Adah Sharma, Ranvir Shorey, Girish Kulkarni, Radha Bhatt, Sonal Jha, Sameer Kakkar, Annapurna Soni, Pallavi Das and Simran Nerurkar
Streaming on: Zee 5
Rating: 1.5

Effectiveness and potential risks of men’s health supplements

To achieve optimal health and well-being, men opt for dietary supplements as a shortcut to increase energy, muscle growth, and overall health. These supplements can boost energy levels, promote muscle growth, and support overall health. However, before adding supplements to one’s regimen, it’s essential to consider the below-mentioned key aspects to make an informed decision

Understanding Ingredients and Formulas: Not all supplements are made equal, men’s health supplements often contain a mix of natural and synthetic ingredients ranging from vitamins, herbs, and minerals to amino acids. While some ingredients may be genuine, others may pose risks, especially when taken in more than recommended doses or combination with certain medications. Thus, one should do thorough research on the product, understand the ingredients and its purpose, and consult a healthcare professional before including any supplements in the diet.

Potential Risks and Side Effects: Understand the risks associated with health supplements, though they claim to offer various benefits, there are potential side effects that could include allergic reactions, gastrointestinal discomfort, interactions with medications, and adverse effects on specific health conditions. It’s essential to read labels carefully, follow recommended dosages, and monitor for any adverse reactions when starting a new supplement. Research potential side effects, listen to your body, and stop immediately if anything feels off.

Individual Health Needs and Goals: Each person’s health profile is unique, and influenced by factors such as age, genetics, lifestyle, diet, and underlying health conditions. Before adding

rich in essential nutrients, engage in physical activity that suits one’s fitness level and preferences, prioritize restorative sleep, and adopt strategies to manage stress effectively.

Monitoring and Adjustments: It’s important to monitor one’s progress and make adjustments as needed. Keep track of how you feel both physically and mentally while on supplements, and be open to reassessing the regimen based on changes in your health status, lifestyle, or goals. Regular check-ins with a healthcare provider can provide valuable insights and guidance.

Dosage and Safety: Pay attention to the recommended dosage of supplements and avoid exceeding the recommended intake unless advised by a healthcare provider. Some vitamins and minerals can accumulate to harmful levels in the body if taken in excess, leading to adverse effects. Additionally, certain supplements may interact with medications or underlying health conditions, so it’s crucial to consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new supplement regimen, especially if you have existing health issues or are taking medications.

Long-Term Effects and Sustainability: Consider the long-term implications of supplement use on your health and well-being. While certain supplements may offer short-term benefits, it’s essential to assess their sustainability and potential effects on overall health in the long run. Focus on adopting a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and other lifestyle factors that promote holistic health and well-being alongside supplement use.

While men’s health supplements can offer potential benefits, it is crucial to approach them with caution, skepticism, and a discerning eye. Prioritising safety, quality, and individualised considerations, and always seeking guidance from qualified healthcare professionals when in doubt, can help make empowered choices that support overall health and well-being.



(The author, Dr. Sanjeev S Tonshal, is a Consultant – Urology, at Aster CMI Hospital, Bangalore.)

All the way from Sri Lanka to South India

Producer Sanjay Gulati, who has been one of the co-producers of the remake of the Tallinn-winning dark comedy *Tentigo* in Tamil, speaks to *The Pioneer* about how the film happened, *Tentigo* being a game changer, and more.

K. RAMYA SREE

Modern times have witnessed a growing trend of remakes and reboots. However, remaking an award-winning film comes with great challenges. One needs to be extremely dedicated and sincere to bring to the audience the authentic self of the movie without losing its credibility during the remake. Maybe this is why many producers often do not risk taking on this task.

But these Indian producers—Sanjay Gulati and Neeraj Pandey of Crawling Angel Films and Kaarthekeyen Santhanam of Stone Bench Films—decided to take the risk because, why not?

The film they chose is so interesting that the trio, along with Silent Frames Productions in Sri Lanka, has

decided to remake the Tallinn-winning dark comedy Sri Lankan film *Tentigo* in Tamil.

Of all the Indian languages, are you wondering why they chose Tamil? And of many award-winning films, why did they choose *Tentigo*? We have one of the producers of the movie, Sanjay Gulati, answer everything about the film in this interaction with *The Pioneer*.

But first, let us begin with how he stumbled upon *Tentigo*. As he begins, “There is a co-production market that happens every year in Goa, so in the 2018 IFFI market, this project was pitched to me under a different name. I felt this was an out-of-the-box project, and I wanted to be a part of this project at any cost. From the beginning, I felt this film was a universal subject. There is no particular reason for us to choose the Tamil language. One of our producers is a Tamil native, and it was his idea to remake this movie in Tamil.”

The Tallinn-winning film is a dark comedy about a family dealing with a deceased father's throbbing boner by debutant direc-

tor Ilango Ram from Sri Lanka, which originally featured in Sinhala and earned accolades.

Sanjay believes this movie would be a game changer because: “Even if I recall old films, we do not have a proper dark comedy film. We only had adult comedy movies. I can hardly recall authentic dark comedy films except for a few. *Tentigo* is an effort from us to give the audience a real dark comedy experience and treat them as intellectuals. The reviews for the international version have been exceptional so far.”

The team has, of course, decided to Indianise a bit of the concept; however, he says they have ensured the quality of the movie is not going down. “Since the same director is helming the film, I have more hopes that this will be made in a better way,” says the independent producer, for whom this is his first film in South Cinema. He looks forward to it, as he feels south cinema is one of the biggest industries in Indian cinema.

As an independent producer, passion is what drove him to take up the project, and

their actors are also the ones for whom cinema comes over money. He shared, “As far as the actors' pay packet side is concerned, I'm working with actors who speak with the subject from the heart. It is a big thing to work in a film like this; it is not like we want to pay them less, but we are making the movie with full sincerity, so if we generate profits, my actors will be the first to enjoy them.”

Furthermore, he also spoke about the perks that established banners have over independent producers, and he explains, “If a film is being produced by renowned banners, then there are high chances that the film will be taken over by some good OTT platforms because of the long-term relationships the production house has with them and the confidence the OTT platforms have in banners because they have proven their worth in the past. But when it comes to independent producers like us, they have their apprehensions.” Moreover, he feels co-production is a more successful model, as he has collaborated with many films outside India where his experiences have been successful.

Trailer for *Gaami* released by Sandeep Reddy Vanga



Director Sandeep Reddy Vanga, who is riding high on the success of *Animal*, launched the trailer for Vishwak Sen starrer *Gaami*, a highly anticipated movie of the actor. *Gaami* is a one-of-a-kind film and Vishwak Sen's most ambitious project. Moreover, for the first time, a trailer has been released in PCX format.

The trailer opens with Vishwak Sen, who questions himself, ‘No matter how hard I try, I can't remember who I am, where I came from, and how long I have had this problem?’ He is rescued by some Aghoras, but they ask him to leave the place for their own good. However, the master gives him details on where he can find a cure for his disease. He needs to travel a long way to a particular place in the Himalayas within a deadline, or else he needs to wait for another 36 years. On the other hand, simultaneously, two other stories of a Devadasi and a scientist making his clinical trials are also shown.

The trailer shows the journey of the main characters, and every story is prodigious in its own way.

With Chandini Chowdary in the female lead role, the film, directed by Vidyadhar Kagita and produced by UV Creations, is set against a backdrop of mysticism and drama, and tells the story of Shankar, played by Vishwak, an Aghora who is searching for a cure for his inability to feel human touch.

Heading for a grand theatrical release on March 9, the film has gripping music by Naresh Kumaran and cinematography by Vishwanath Reddy and Rampy Nandigam

Tussle between Jr. NTR and Koratala Siva



Actor Jr. NTR and director Koratala Siva have collaborated for the fourth time for *Devara*, and it's become one of the most anticipated films of the actor.

The release of the film has been postponed, and the shooting is going on at a brisk pace. Earlier, slated for a grand release in April 2024, the movie's release has been postponed to October 2024. Recent updates indicate that the final schedule for filming the project has finally taken off, and it is most probably because Jr. NTR is pressing Koratala Siva to complete this project soon.

Sources close to the unit say that Jr. NTR is exerting pressure on Koratala Siva to complete the film fast, as he has to shoot for *War 2*. However, it seems Koratala is not ready to wrap up the film in a hurry, as he feels he can give his best only when he is at ease.

The tussle between the actor and director is going on, it is



said. Interestingly, Jahnvi Kapoor is making her Tollywood debut with this film alongside Jr. NTR. The director plans to shoot his songs after filming major scenes of the movie with Jr. NTR and other renowned stars of the film, in the next few weeks.

— KRS

Mrunal Thakur, VD's *Family Star* moves to Chennai

Actress Mrunal Thakur, after bagging back-to-back hits, is being regarded as the Queen of Romance. Her adorable performance and lively looks is making her grab some of the interesting films in Tollywood, one of which is the Rowdy of Tollywood Vijay Deverakonda. The latest update about the movie titled *Family Star*, directed by Parasuram, is that it is in its final leg of shooting.

Slated for release on April 5, the movie will film its final schedule in Chennai.

Sources say that Mrunal has already departed for Chennai to team up with Vijay and commence filming the final schedule of *Family Star*. “The entire week-long filming would be done in Chennai.

As they get closer to the end of this amazing trip, the entire cast and crew are excited and a little emotional. But this is the beginning of an engrossing movie with the gifted pair of Vijay and Mrunal, who will appear on screen together for the first time,” the insider continued.

Sree Vishnu welcomes audience to his *Swag* world

Hasith Goli for a bigger and better project. TG Vishwa Prasad of People Media Factory is mounting this project on a grand scale along with Vivek Kuchibhotla.

A concept video was released along with the announcement of the movie's title. The film, titled *Swag*, opens with some animals in the forest debating who should become the next leader after the lion steps down, generating some humour. Gangavva provided the voiceover for the monkey's character, while

Sunil did it for the lion's.

Sree Vishnu is seen as a king in the glimpse, welcoming the audience to his *Swag* world.

The movie seems to be an out-and-out entertainer with a unique concept.

On the technical front, the team that worked for *Raja Raja Chora* has come on board for *Swag* as well. Vedaraman Sankaran cranks the camera, whereas Vivek Sagar provides the music, and Viplav Nyshadham is the editor.

Sree Vishnu ties up with Allu Arvind

On the other hand, as the actor celebrated his birthday, Geetha Arts, one of the most renowned production houses of Tollywood announced its collaboration with Sree Vishnu for his next film to be directed by Caarthick Raju of *Ninu Veedani Needanu Nene* fame. In association with Geetha Arts, Kalya Films will bankroll the project. Mega Producer Allu Aravind presents the movie produced by Vidya Koppineedi, Bhanu Pratapa, and Riyaz

Chowdary.

This announcement comes in a video form of gift to Vishnu where he's asked to solve a puzzle and the answer to it is the announcement of his new film with Geetha Arts banner. Tentatively titled #SV18, the film is billed to be a fun rollercoaster ride coupled with a good love story. Ace technicians will be joining hands for this craziest combination, promising to blend their expertise.

Ananya Nagalla: *Tantra* will be the best movie of my career

Ananya Nagalla and Dhanush Raghunadri-starrer *Tantra* had its trailer launch event held in the city on Thursday. While the teaser is already being appreciated by the audience, the team says that viewers will equally enjoy the trailer. Directed by Srinivas Gopishetty and produced by Naresh Babu P and Ravi Chaitanya under the banners of First Copy Movies, B The Way Films, and Vizag Film Factory, this film will release on March 15.

Speaking at the trailer launch event, Ananya Nagalla said, “*Tantra* is a very different movie. I am confident that it will be the best movie of my career. Hope *Vakeel Saab* Ananya and *Malleshham* Ananya are called *Tantra* Ananya (she laughed) The film turned out very well. We are coming with very good content, and the movie will make a big sound after release. The whole movie is very gripping.”



Actor Sree Vishnu celebrated his birthday on Thursday. Celebrating his birthday, an interesting update about his film has been made official. The actor is reuniting with his *Raja Raja Chora* director