



-SPORTS

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These three special observers are attending the meeting at the office of the Election Commission of India on Friday. They will visit the State from next week and will examine the advance arrangements being made for conducting the elections. He said that they will focus on strict implementation of EC guidelines, border areas of the State, problematic areas as well as control of political parties to attract and motivate voters. Similarly, they will participate in the meetings organised by the Election Commission with District Election Officers, SPs and law enforcement agencies and give their valuable experiences, suggestions and advice, said Meena.

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The compensatory effect comes from the fact that for a closed system such as the Earth, angular momentum -- the rate at which rotating speed changes -- is a conserved



Control transportation of intoxicants in State: CS

90% of cannabis being transported from Malkangiri district of Odisha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy has said that illicit liquor, cultivation of ganja, and transportation of other intoxicants in the State should be controlled. The CS said that in coordination with the DGPs of the neighbouring States, they were ordered to identify the kingpins associated with these and arrest them under the PD Act.

On Thursday, a review was conducted with the officers of Excise, Special Enforcement Bureau and the Police Department. The CS said that surveillance should be strengthened in the check-posts of the border States. Surveillance should not be limited to the check-posts. Focus on other routes and sources in the villages, too. Identify those involved and take strict action, CS Jawahar Reddy ordered the officials.

He asked them to encourage the cultivation of other crops as an alternative to cannabis, especially among the tribals. The measures to control the transportation and consumption of illegal liquor and drugs should be limited to the election period.

State Special Enforcement



Bureau Commissioner Y Ravi Prakash said that Andhra Pradesh shares a border with six States. He explained that 90 per cent of cannabis is being transported from Malkangiri district of Odisha State and 10 per cent from Koraput district. The Odisha DGP is taking appropriate measures to control the transportation of cannabis with their coordination. As many as 35 kingpins have been identified in the State in connection with the transportation of ganja and 25 of them have been arrested. The rest are absconding and steps are being taken to catch them with the cooperation of the police of border States.

He also said that appropriate measures are being taken to control the transportation of ganja and other intoxicating substances with the cooperation of the Narcotics Bureau. He



added that since the implementation of the Election Code of Conduct, illegal liquor, drugs and other goods worth Rs. 4.38 crore have been seized in the State, while this year, various liquor, drugs and other goods worth Rs. 57.80 crore have been seized so far.

Commissioner of Excise Department Vivek Yadav said that there are 17 primary distilleries, 20 IMFLs and four other distilleries in the State and an assistant commissioner-level officer has been appointed as in-charge for each distillery. Also, there will be CCTV cameras and monitoring of transport vehicles through GPS. He said that appropriate measures are being taken to ensure that liquor

reaches the respective depots properly. He explained that strict measures are being taken to control illegal liquor.

Excise Department Additional Commissioner Deva Kumar and AP Beverages Corporation MD Vasudeva Rao attended the meeting, besides Excise Department Special Chief Secretary Rajit Bhargava, Visakhapatnam District Collector Dr. Mallikarjuna, Vijayawada Collector S. Dilli Rao, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada Police Commissioners Ravi Shankar Ayyannar and Kanti Rana Tata, Collectors of ASR and Anakapalli districts Vijaya Sunitha and Ravi Subhash, SPs and other officials.

TDP leaders join YSRCP

PNS ■ ALLAGADDA

Former TDP State secretary and former president of the All India Brahmin Association Kasibhatla Sainath Sarma of Kamalapuram constituency in YSR district joined YSRCP in the presence of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohana Reddy at his night half camp here on Thursday.

TDP former organising secretary and former RTC Chairman R. Venkatasubba Reddy and Koilakuntla major panchayat former Sarpanch VS Krishna Murthy (Lawyer Babu) also joined YSRCP.

Kamalapuram MLA Ravindranath Reddy was present.

Several YSRCP leaders of the erstwhile Kurnool district called on the Chief Minister.

Vizag LS constituency set for clash of political titans

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha constituency is gearing up for a riveting electoral showdown as the general elections approach. The spotlight falls on Dr Botcha Jhansi Lakshmi of YSRCP, wife of incumbent State Education Minister Botcha Satyanarayana, and Sribharat Mathukumilli, representing the BJP-TDP-Jana Sena alliance, and grandson of the late MVVS Murthi, a prominent TDP figure.

For decades, the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha constituency has been a battleground for non-local politicians, a trend that both parties seek to challenge this election cycle. Jhansi, a two-term parliamentarian with an extensive academic



Spotlight on Dr Botcha Jhansi Lakshmi of YSRCP, wife of Botcha Satyanarayana, and Sribharat Mathukumilli of BJP-TDP-Jana Sena alliance, grandson of late MVVS Murthi

background, steps into the fray, backed by her political prowess and experience. Meanwhile, Sribharat, propelled into politics by family legacy and tragedy, brings with him a blend of familial heritage and educational prestige, coupled with an active role in public life.

Jhansi, with her dual PhDs and political lineage, aims to leverage her past parliamentary experience to advocate for Vizag's development. Her husband, a political heavyweight in the region, adds weight to her candidacy. Conversely, Sribharat, a Stanford alumnus and president of GITAM Deemed to be University, pledges to harness Vizag's potential for comprehensive growth, vowing to represent the city's interests robustly in Parliament.

Both candidates articulate ambitious visions for Vizag's future. Sribharat emphasises the city's potential for multifaceted development, promising to tap into its demographic dividend to propel it towards metropolitan status.

Tough battle ahead in Anakapalli LS constituency

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The emergence of Anakapalli Lok Sabha constituency as a focal point of political attention underscores the significance of the upcoming elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has made a strategic move by nominating Chintakunta Munuswamy Ramesh, also known as C.M. Ramesh, as its candidate, while the Yuvaana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) has countered with Deputy Chief Minister Budi Mutyala Naidu. A key dynamic in this electoral battle is the contrast between the local candidate,



Muthyala Naidu, and the non-local contender, Ramesh. Naidu's roots in Devarapalli, Anakapalli district, stand in contrast to Ramesh's origins in Kadapa district, with his current base in Hyderabad. Both candidates share membership in the Velama community, adding another layer to the contest. Ramesh's successful business background as the founder-chairman of Ritwik

Projects Pvt. Ltd. adds weight to his candidacy, with the company achieving a turnover of over Rs 1,000 crore within a span of 14 years. Ramesh's campaign strategy is evident in the proactive engagement of his family with Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Jana Sena Party (JSP) cadre. The recent internal meeting in Anakapalli signals a concerted effort to strategise and mobilise support. Notable endorsements from TDP leaders such as Ch. Ayyanna Patradu and Dadi Veerabhadra Rao, under the guidance of BJP's State secretary Kethineni Surendra Mohan, further bolster Ramesh's position.

Political turmoil unfolds in Visakhapatnam North

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The announcement of former MLA and State vice-president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), P. Vishnu Kumar Raju, and YSR Congress Party MLA candidate K.K. Raju going head-to-head for the Visakhapatnam North Assembly constituency sets the stage for a gripping electoral battle.

However, this contest is just one facet of the intricate political dynamics unfolding in the region.

BJP surprises with candidate announcement in Visakhapatnam; Paderu remains undecided

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a twist to the political landscape of Andhra Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has thrown a curveball with its recent candidate announcements for the upcoming Assembly elections. The party revealed its choices for two constituencies within the combined Visakhapatnam district, sending shockwaves through the

Agency area. However, the spotlight now falls on Paderu, the sole Assembly constituency from the Alluri Sitharama Raju district, where the alliance parties are yet to finalise any candidate. Speculation was rife that the BJP would nominate a contender from Paderu, but the party has instead named Pangri Rajababu as its candidate for the Araku Valley (ST) Assembly constituency.

Stage set for riveting ...

Continued from Page 1

Previously slated for the Madugula Assembly seat, Mutyala Naidu's elevation to the Lok Sabha constituency underscores the party's aggressive response to the evolving political landscape, with Eerla Anuradha now taking the reins in Madugula.

The YSRCP's candidate selec-

tion process reflects its commitment to social justice and inclusivity. With 77 per cent of candidates boasting graduate or higher degrees, the party emphasises competence and expertise in its lineup. Moreover, over 50 per cent of tickets allocated to BC/SC/ST/minority communities underscore the party's dedication to equitable representation.

‘Didn’t I change your...

Continued from Page 1

As per the details available, 1,391 households (93.60 per cent) out of 1,486 houses in the first secretariat and 1,448 (95.32 per cent) out of 1,519 households in the second secretariat of Yerraguntla village have received benefits worth Rs 48.74 crore under various DBT welfare schemes in the last 58 months and this is unprecedented.

While 468 persons in the village received house site pattas, construction of 144 houses is over, he said, adding that students and others also benefited under non-DBT welfare schemes.

YSRCP leaders Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Vasireddy Padma, MLA Gangula Brijendra Reddy and several party functionaries also participated in the programme.

Beneficiaries heap praise on CM

Beneficiaries of various welfare schemes heaped praise and got emotional while expressing gratitude to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy here on Thursday, during the interactive session.

K Pushpa Latha extended a warm welcome to the Chief Minister saying she considers him as own brother.

"As a brother to women, as a maternal uncle to children, as a son to several people and as a grandson to many aged, you have done immense good to all

of us. You should continue as Chief Minister to help us," she wished.

Swathi, a private school teacher and an MPTC member, said that she has entered politics drawing courage from the Chief Minister's inspirational speeches. She said that most of the women in Andhra Pradesh have become very courageous and 50 per cent reservations have given them social and political empowerment.

Private employee Hussain Basha, another beneficiary, told the Chief Minister that his bedridden son is now able to stand up after two of the three surgeries were performed and doctors are ready to perform the third surgery thanks to the upping of treatment limit up to Rs 25 lakh under YSR Aarogyasri.

Aparna, a specially-abled person, told the Chief Minister that her husband Savitri Prasad is also handicapped and they got a house under the housing scheme. She said her husband is an artist and has worked hard on drawing a portrait of the Chief Minister. They presented the portrait to him. Santi Prasad thanked the Chief Minister saying they were qualified in the TET exam too. They said they are receiving Rs 3,000 monthly pension each and have received Rs 3.5 lakh in the last five years.

Earlier, on the way to Yerraguntla, the Chief Minister blessed the newly-wed couple Venkataswamy and Kaveri.

Kejriwal's ED custody ...

Continued from Page 1

The ED had produced him before Rouse Avenue court Special Judge Kaveri Baweja as his current six-day custody was ending on Thursday. The ED said in its fresh remand plea that during Kejriwal's custodial interrogation, his statements were recorded over five days but he was "giving evasive replies".

It said statements of three other persons relevant to the case have also been recorded during the remand period.

It said that during the ED cus-

tody, Kejriwal was confronted with C Arvind, the then personal secretary to deputy CM Manish Sisodia who was handed over the Draft Group of Ministers (GoM) report for the 2021-22 excise policy at the residence of the chief minister.

It said the statement of one of the AAP candidates in the 2022 Goa elections was also recorded during Kejriwal's ED custody. It revealed that the candidate did not have any money and his election expenditure was "taken care of by the AAP Office Delhi only through their associates".

Take forward ...

Continued from Page 1

For the first time in the country, the poor in Andhra Pradesh experienced due respect in the past 58 months, he said, adding that the government spent Rs. 2.7 lakh crore implementing various welfare schemes for ushering in their social and economic empowerment while TDP pursued the policy of plunder, stash and devour and is hatching conspiracies hand in glove with Jana Sena and BJP to exploit the people again.

Describing the sea of humanity that thronged the public meeting as the YSRCP people's army, he said that people across the State are ready to teach a fitting lesson to the TDP-led alliance to ensure that an anti-people government doesn't come to power again.

Listing out various welfare schemes like Amma Vodi, YSR Cheyutha, Aasara, Jagananna Vidya Deevena, Vasathi Deevena, Rythu Bharosa, Kapu Nestham, delivery of monthly social pensions at door-step and EBC Nestham, he asked the people to think why Chandrababu Naidu failed to implement similar schemes during his rule. Telling the people that revolutionary changes took place in the past 58 months in educational, medical and health and agricultural sectors to improve educational standards of students, provide preventive health care with village clinics and family doctors and handhold the farmers at every step through RBKs, the Chief Minister asked the people to assess why Chandrababu failed to carry out similar reforms.

Recalling how TDP defaulted and cheated people on promises of waiver of farm and self-help group loans, Maha Lakshmi and Kuteera Lakshmi schemes, jobs for the youth and stipend for the unemployed

and three-cents of house sites for the poor after winning 2014 polls in alliance with Jana Sena and BJP and distributing signed election manifestos, he said they have ganged up again to take people for a ride once again.

Besides implementing a slew of welfare schemes and reforms in several sectors, the government is also building 17 new medical colleges, four sea ports and 10 fishing harbors and bringing in investments to put the State on path of development, he said, adding that new districts have been carved out and three capitals were proposed for decentralised growth.

He told the people that, despite ruling the State for 14 years, Chandrababu Naidu did not work even to bring about a meagre five percent change of what he did in the last 58 months. It is in the hands of people to decide whether they want the door-to-door welfare and development saga to continue for the next five years by electing YSRCP back to power or take the State backwards by 10 years by electing the TDP and its allies.

The Chief Minister said that the ensuing polls are a battle between justice led by YSRCP and injustice led by TDP and its allies and called upon the people not to fall prey to the conspiracies being hatched by TDP in cahoots with Jana Sena and BJP to deprive the poor of their welfare benefits. It is only after YSRCP came to power that election manifestos gained credibility, the Chief Minister said, adding that Chandrababu brand stands for cheating all sections of people.

There is nothing great about TDP or its political allies except for taking people for a ride, he said and urged them to vote back the YSRCP to power in the ensuing elections to continue the welfare and development saga.

Chandrababu is...

Continued from Page 1

Sajjala said that YSRCP is always popular among people before 2019 and at present. People believe that their lives will improve if Jagan comes to power again which clearly reflects the YSRCP government delivering more than expected. Lakhs of people are seen on the roads where the bus yatra is taking place attending meetings. He said that CM Jagan believes that if he does good to the people, they will remember him and bless him and the party in the coming elections.

Speaking to the media persons on Thursday, Sajjala came down heavily on Opposition Leader Chandrababu Naidu, terming him as a 'fake currency note'. He said the people of

Andhra Pradesh have dumped Chandrababu and TDP to waste din. Chandrababu has become invalid among the people of AP.

Sajjala strongly condemned the 'false propaganda' by TDP that a container came to CM's office when a pantry car was officially taken from the RTC. He said that all permissions were obtained from the Election Commission. TDP is making baseless allegations despite Chandrababu was the CM earlier. Commenting on Lokesh's tweeting, Sajjala criticised that no one has misused the X platform as both the father and son misused it. Only because they have pro-TDP media to support them, they have been spreading false information misleading the people.

Naidu promises Godavari ...

Continued from Page 1

Since these elections are crucial for the future of the State, the alliance parties jointly entered the fray, he said. Fondly recalling the services of late Paritala Ravindra as the TDP leader for the people of this region, Chandrababu made a fervent appeal to the people to extend their support to rebuild the State which was destroyed in these five years.

"We will encourage the farmers to generate power in their own lands to meet their needs and if necessary supply to others," he said. Maintaining that the people's weakness is the strength of CM Jagan, he said that this is the reason as to why he has been raising the prices of liquor quite frequently. What happened to the promise

made by CM Jagan that he would impose total prohibition in the State, Chandrababu asked.

Expressing concern that the prices of petrol and diesel, too, are skyrocketing now, Chandrababu said that once the NDA forms the government, jobs will be provided to the youth and industries will be invited to set up their units here to create more employment. "My promise to you all is that 20 lakh jobs will be provided in the next five years," he added. It is the TDP that has categorised the Madigas as A, B, C and D, Chandrababu said and promised to take up their district-wise categorisation too. "Support our alliance and I will work for the welfare of all sections. People should emerge victorious in these elections and the State should move forward."

YSRC urges people to support local leader in Vijayawada W

Slams BJP for selecting Sujana Chowdary as candidate

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRC Congress leaders have objected to the announcement of BJP ticket for Sujana Chowdary Vijayawada West Assembly, who had cheated banks of Rs 5,700 crore through shell companies.

Dr Mehboob Shaikh, YSRC Medical Wing State vice-president, said here on Thursday that BJP, which is making political benefits by creating discord among the people in the name of religion, is now giving tickets to the people who have committed scams by stealing the hard-earned money of the people in the banks. It is a shame that BJP selected Sujana Chowdary as the candidate for Vijayawada West constituency, who has been registered by the ED for cheating by taking loans of Rs 5,700 crore from banks.

Dr Mehboob stated that similarly, giving the Vijayawada West Assembly seat to Sujana Chowdary is proof that Chandrababu is contesting the election against the poor with



He cautioned that if Vijayawada West public votes for a non-local Sujana Chowdary, then people will have to go to Hyderabad or Delhi to meet him.

his gang of bigots in the name of alliance, to achieve power. He further stated that giving the Vijayawada West seat to a non-local financial criminal



is proof that Telugu Desam, Jana Sena and BJP are against locals, supporting fraudsters and Pawan Kalyan, who always preaches morals, now showed

his selfish personal and political interests by denying ticket to JS local leader giving preference to Sujana. He pointed out that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has given the YSRC ticket to a local common worker, former corporator and minority leader Sk Asif which is a proof of top priority to commoners in YSRC. He stated that there will be a contest in this election between an ordinary ex-corporator who is a local in the Vijayawada West constituency and a non-local corporate financial criminal who has been declared by the ED to have cheated banks and looted crores.

Dr Mehboob termed the 2024 elections between the poor and the rich and felt that it is the responsibility of the people to make Asif the winner, a local person who is always accessible to everyone. He cautioned that if Vijayawada West public votes for a non-local Sujana Chowdary, then people will have to go to Hyderabad or Delhi to meet him.

District Media Centre opened

NTR dist administration has seized properties worth around Rs 3.68 cr ahead of polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In view of the elections, NTR District Collector Dr S. Dilli Rao and Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata inaugurated the District Media Centre at the District Information and Public Relations (DIPRO) office on the State Guest House compound in Vijayawada on Thursday.

The media centre intends to provide all information regarding elections, previous election results, voters etc. to the media. The officials commended the District Information and Public Relations Department officials for arranging the media centre.

Addressing the media on the occasion, the Collector stated that their aim is to facilitate peaceful elections with cooperation from the police and other departments. Rao also emphasised that the district administration is striving to ensure 80 to 85 per cent polling on May 13. Further, he said that the media centre staff would give the print and electronic media day-to-day updates. They are taking steps to resolve all complaints received by C-Vigil, helpline, besides the print and electronic media, he added.

As of now, cash, ornaments, liquor and other valuable goods



NTR District Collector Dilli Rao and Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata inaugurating the District Media Centre at the DIPRO office on the premises of the State Guest House in Vijayawada on Thursday

worth around Rs.3.68 crore have been seized. The media centre would also provide information on inspections and seized goods, he said.

Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata assured that they would provide daily updates on seized things to the media, so they can publish reports based on accurate information. So far, the police have seized Rs.1.5 crore cash, he added.

He said that the police and other election-related departments are conducting round-the-clock checking at all checkpoints in the district. He expressed concern over news reports on social media. People are confused which news is fact

and which is fake. He urged people to circulate only facts.

Later, Information & Public Relations Department Commissioner T Vijay Kumar Reddy said that as the election campaigning has started, political parties may circulate fake news. The media should check facts before publishing them, he said.

NTR District Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar, DIPRO U Surendra Nath, DPRO SV Mohana Rao, Divisional APRO K Ravi Kumar, Publicity Assistant VVS Prasad, AVS Sai Baba and others were present.



Krishna District Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma

Paddy grains worth Rs.1,070.07 crore procured in Krishna district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma has stated that during the 2023-24 Kharif year, the Civil Supplies Department procured around 4,88,590 Metric Tons of paddy grains worth Rs.1,070.07 crore. These paddy yields were procured from 55,562 farmers, she said.

In a press release at Machilipatnam, the Krishna district headquarters, Joint Collector Sharma said that farmers can sell their paddy grains by March 31. Later, the Paddy Procurement Centres (PPC) will be closed after the due date, she said.

Further, she requested the farmers to utilise the services of the PPC centres in the district to sell their products. As per the Minimum Support Price (MSP), the district administration has been procuring the paddy grains from farmers, she explained.



Vijayawada East MLA and TDP candidate Gadde Rama Mohana Rao interacting with morning walkers at the Chennupati Ramakotaiah Municipal Corporation Indoor Stadium at Patamata in Vijayawada on Thursday

Will develop playgrounds if TDP comes to power: Gadde Rama Mohana Rao

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

If TDP comes to power in the State, the government will set up facilities for walking and playing games on the premises of the Chennupati Ramakotaiah Municipal Corporation Indoor Stadium, which is located at Patamata in Vijayawada, said Vijayawada East MLA and TDP candidate Gadde Rama Mohana Rao. For better health, everyone should develop habits of playing sports and games besides morning walks, he said.

As part of the election campaigning, Gadde Rama Mohana Rao interacted with walkers at a tea stall. Later, the walkers felicitated the sitting MLA.

Later, he said that the TDP

announced his name as Vijayawada East candidate and Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni's name as Vijayawada Lok Sabha candidate. He urged them to cast their votes for the TDP symbol cycle in the upcoming elections. If people voted for the TDP, party chief N Chandrababu Naidu would become Chief Minister, and again Vijayawada City would be developed in future, he said.

Further, he said that the government must provide walking tracks and sports facilities for the people to improve their health. As there are no such places in the city, as per the request by the walkers, he would strive to develop the government and VMC school playgrounds. However, people should use those facilities without creating inconvenience to the students, he added. VMC Corporator Mummaneni Prasad, party leaders K Rajesh, P Ajay and others were present.

AP Police win silver medals at AIP Badminton Championship

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SBV Sudhakar (DSP CID) and PV Maruti Rao (DSP CO) have won silver medals at the 16th All India Police Badminton Championship 2023-2024 held in Hyderabad. State DGP KV Rajendranath Reddy congratulated the Andhra Pradesh police officers who won the medals.



Police Organisations of the country participated in the tournament. The team led by DIG Rahul Dev Sharma represented the State.



Amarnath mobilises unprecedented female support in Gajuwaka campaign

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The political arena in the bustling port city is electrified with anticipation as the YSRC's campaign in Gajuwaka gains unprecedented momentum. Spearheaded by Gudivada Amarnath, candidate for the Gajuwaka Assembly Constituency and the incumbent State Industries Minister, the campaign has witnessed a remarkable surge in female participation, reshaping traditional election dynamics.

In a surprising turn of events on Thursday evening, the Vadlapudi Tirumala Nagar in Pedagantula mandal, 87th Ward of GVMC limits, witnessed an overwhelming turnout of women, showcasing the growing influence and strength of YSRC's female supporters. The campaign extravaganza, lasting three hours, saw women rallying alongside Minister Amarnath, signaling a new era of gender inclusivity in political engagement. Amidst the palpable enthusiasm, Amarnath embarked on a door-to-door outreach, distributing YSRC leaflets and passionately appealing for support.

Capturing the hearts of sup-



porters, Amarnath personally engaged with women, cementing bonds of solidarity and trust through selfies and heartfelt conversations. The fervor peaked as Amarnath led a ceremonial puja at Gawara Veedhi Ram Temple, followed by traversing through key localities including Appikonda Velam Veedi and Ambedkar Colony, resonating with the hopes and aspirations of the electorate.

In a stirring address, Minister Amarnath highlighted Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's transformative initiatives, particularly in uplifting the underprivileged and empowering

women. Urging voters to endorse the YSRC, Amarnath pledged unwavering accessibility and commitment to addressing constituents' concerns, promising swift resolution to longstanding issues plaguing Gajuwaka. As the electoral saga unfolds, the YSRC's campaign in Vadlapudi Tumor Colony stands as a testament to their unwavering commitment to inclusive governance, poised to shape the political landscape with a resounding mandate. Stay tuned for more updates as the community's verdict on Jaganmohan Reddy as the next Chief Minister looms large.

Check-posts, polling booths inspected

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata and Deputy Police Commissioner (DCP) Adhiraj Singh Rana, along with Krishna District Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma, who is a Returning Officer (RO) for the Gannavaram Assembly constituency, inspected various polling booths and check posts within the jurisdiction of the Police Commissionerate and Vijayawada Rural Mandal on Thursday.

As many as nine gram panchayats of Vijayawada Rural Mandal fall under the Gannavaram Assembly constituency in Krishna district, though these are in the purview of the NTR District. In this connection, these officials visited Gudavalli, Gunadala Inner Ring Road and Ramachandrapalem Check



NTR District Police Commissioner Kanthi Rana Tata, DCP Adhiraj Singh Rana and Krishna District Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma inspecting the check-post in front of the Power Grid Corporation of India at Nunna on Thursday

Post (which is arranged in front of Nunna Power Grid Corporation).

Also, they inspected many polling stations at Nidamanuru, Enikepadu, P r a s a d a m p a d u ,

Ramavarappadu, Nunna, Pathapadu and villages under the purview of Patamata and Nunna Rural Police Station limits. During these inspections, they gave suggestions regarding the model code of

conduct, vehicle checking etc.

Also, they spoke with security personnel and other government department officers and staff. They should be alerted around the clock as the election code of conduct is under implementation. At the check posts, staff members who were deployed from the CISF and other departments should check every vehicle without fail, Rana said.

People should not carry cash without any proper documents, he said. Illegal transportation of liquor, ganja, gifts and other valuable goods is not encouraged, he said.

Police Commissionerate Special Branch ADCP T Kanaka Raju, ACP B Pardha Saradhi, Vijayawada Tahsildar Jahnavi, EO RD&PR BLV Seshagiri Rao, Nunna Panchayat Secretary GTV Ramana and other officials were present.

Ration depot dealers, MDU operators cannot participate in poll campaigning

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ration Depot Dealers and Mobile Dispensary Unit (MDU) operators who are working under the Public Distribution System (PDS) come under the Election Code of Conduct. If they participate in election campaigning, stringent actions will be taken, NTR District Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar warned.

In view of the general elections, Sampath Kumar convened a meeting with Ration Depot Dealers and MDU Operators at the Dr BR Ambedkar Bhavan at Governorpet in Vijayawada on Thursday. A large number of ration dealers and MDU operators attended the meeting.

Addressing the gathering, JC Sampath Kumar explained the election code of conduct. Also, he spoke about do's and

don'ts to them. He said that apart from dealers, MDU Operators and their nominees who were registered in the e-pass machine should not participate in the political party candidates' campaigning. Such publicity was banned and if anyone publicizes in favour of any candidate, they should be punished, he warned.

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Also, he spoke about do's and



TDP Chief Chandrababu Naidu's wife Bhuvaneswari consoling family members of those who died when Chandrababu Naidu was arrested, at Thotapalli of Nuzvid constituency on Thursday

Bhuvaneswari holds 'Nijam Gelavali' in Nuzvid, Gudivada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of a programme called 'Nijam Gelavali', TDP supremo and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's wife, Nara Bhuvaneswari made serious allegations against the ruling YSRC. The YSRC government destroyed the capital Amaravati, and Anna Canteens soon after it came to power, she alleged.

On the second day, i.e., Thursday, Bhuvaneswari toured the combined Krishna district and consoled the kin of people who died when the government arrested Chandrababu Naidu. She visited the victims' families at Agiripalli, Thotapalli, and Gollapalli in the Nuzvid Assembly constituency and Moturu and Gudivada under the Gudivada Assembly constituency.

During her 'Nijam Gelavali', she visited Bezawada Rama Rao's house at Thotapalli and Venigalla Purnachandra's house at Gollapalli village in the Nuzvid constituency. Also, he visited Yarlagadda Srinivasa Rao's and Adusumilli Sasi Kala's family members at Moturu.

Speaking on the occasion, she recalled that people of the Gudivada constituency voted for her father Dr NTR and as a result, he formed the government in the combined Andhra Pradesh. Along the lines of Dr NTR, TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu is working for the development of the State

and wants to serve the people, she added.

TDP MLC Panchumarti Anuradha, Nuzvid TDP candidate and Penamaluru MLA Koluus Pardha Saradhi, Gudivada candidate Venigandla Ramu, former MP Konakalla Narayana Rao and others accompanied Bhuvaneswari.

VPA sets new cargo handling record; surpasses 80 MMT

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA) has set a new benchmark for cargo handling, surpassing 80 million metric tonnes (MMT) (80.05 MMT) as of March 27, 2024 with four days remaining in the current fiscal year. This achievement shatters all previous records for the port. Dr M Angamuthu, Chairman of VPA, commended the port's workforce for their dedication and instrumental

role in achieving this milestone, particularly highlighting the Traffic Manager and his team's crucial contributions. Dr. Angamuthu further emphasised the importance of continued hard work from all employees to achieve even greater success in the future.

The surge in cargo handling reflects a rise across various categories, particularly bulk freight. Crude oil shipments witnessed a remarkable 27 per cent increase, while iron ore and fer-

tilisers saw growth of 12 per cent and six per cent, respectively. Notably, port activity has intensified with a 35 per cent increase in the number of ships entering the harbor, including 43 Baby Cape vessels with BHIM operating in the Inner Harbour - exceeding last year's figures.

Visakha Container Terminal also exhibited significant improvement, experiencing a 28 per cent uptick in container handling, reaching 6.65 lakh TEUs. Key performance indicators



have seen substantial enhancements as well, with a 68 per cent reduction in pre-berthing detention, a 10 per cent improvement in turnaround time, and an eight per cent decrease in idle time berthing. 2023 witnessed record-breaking cargo traffic in several months, including May, June, October, and most recently, January 2024. In January, the port achieved a historic feat by handling 4,03,978 million tonnes of cargo in a single day, surpassing the previous record

set on June 17, 2023.

VPA's commitment extends beyond cargo handling. At the 2023 Global Maritime India Summit in Mumbai, the port signed 19 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) aimed at elevating port management standards and fostering trade development. Furthermore, VPA actively contributes to the well-being of the local community through initiatives like road maintenance, park construction, and greening efforts.

Vijaysai Reddy offers to resolve water crisis

PNS ■ NELLORE

YSRCP Nellore Lok Sabha candidate V Vijaysai Reddy has assured of resolving on a permanent basis the water crisis in Udayagiri Assembly constituency.

Addressing a public meeting, after holding a roadshow at Srirampuram on Thursday, Vijaysai Reddy assured of resolving the drinking water and irrigation water shortage in the Udayagiri constituency on a permanent basis, if the YSRCP was voted to power again. He recalled that a nine kilometer road was constructed from Polamgaripalli to Gandamvaripalli and a 10 kilometer road was constructed from Bedusupalli to Krishnampalle.

He also promised to complete the Somasila project works expeditiously. The Veligonda project works would



be completed soon and water would be released from the project to fill irrigation tanks, he said, and appealed to the people to play a vital role in deciding the future of the state by electing the YSRCP in the next elections. He also appealed to the voters not to extend support to the leaders who betrayed the YSRCP by

quitting the party and asked to teach the lesson.

"Jagan Mohan Reddy carried out a marathon padayatra before the 2019 elections and knew the problem of people. After coming to power, he resolved many issues and implemented various welfare schemes for the poor," Vijaysai Reddy claimed. Jagan Reddy

has given a welfare government successfully for five years, he said.

"The Opposition parties have launched malicious campaigns against the YSRCP and Jagan Mohan Reddy and made baseless allegations," he lashed out, adding that the Opposition parties were shivering at seeing the overwhelming support to Jagan Mohan Reddy from the people, Vijaysai Reddy observed.

Vijaysai Reddy promised to the people of Nellore Lok Sabha constituency and accessible to them and resolve their grievances. YSRCP MLA candidate Mekapati Rajagopal Reddy said that a new manifesto would be unveiled soon. He dismissed the allegations being made by the Opposition party leaders against volunteers. Earlier a huge rally was taken out from LVR College to the bus station.

Ex-minister Akhilapriya held when going to meet CM

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Telugu Desam party leader and former Minister Bhuma Akhilapriya was held by police when she was leading a group of farmers to submit a memorandum to Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy at Yerraguntla on Thursday.

The Chief Minister is carrying out 'Memanta Siddham' programme in the district and as part of it he held an interaction session with farmers in Allagadda.

Former Minister Akhilapriya led a group of farmers to the programme to submit a memorandum to the Chief Minister.



Officials asked to prepare plans to raise horticulture crops

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector Sumit Kumar directed the officials concerned to evolve plans to raise horticulture crops in 2000 acres for small and medium farmers under the National Employment Guarantee Act scheme.

The Collector held a meeting with the horticulture, agriculture and forest officials here on Thursday and reviewed the raising of horticulture crops in the district.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that all measures should be taken to grow horticultural crops and mangroves in 2000 acres by small and medium farmers through the National Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Around 1.50 lakh plants of mango, lemon, custard apple, coconut, oil farm, guava, drumstick, floriculture and cattle fodder and also mangroves should be brought from East Godavari district and



raised in 2000 acres in WG district, the Collector told the officials.

Collector Sumit Kumar said that till the horticulture crops are harvested, the government would take the responsibility of fertilizers, maintenance and protection of plants for about three years. The government would also extend help to the farmers for their irrigated dry crops. The district Collector said that it is the responsibility of all to grow mangrove

plants in the coastal catchment areas of the sea, to prevent sea erosion and to protect the coastal area.

District Articulation Officer R Devananda Kumar, District Forest Department Officer DA Kiran, Plantation Manager K Venkataalakshmi, DWAMA PD M Prabhakara Rao, District Animal Husbandry Department Officer Dr. K Murali Krishna and DRDA PD YS Venugopal were among those who were present.



Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy's followers burn flags, posters

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The followers of Telugu Desam party leader and former MLA Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy burnt the TDP flags, posters, a cycle and flexi banners in protest against denial of ticket to Nallamilli on Thursday at Ramavaram.

Former MLA and TDP vice-president Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy expected the ticket to contest from Anaparthi but the TDP has given the seat to the BJP as part of alliance.

The BJP announced M Shiva Krishnam Raju as its candidate for Anaparthi Assembly constituency. Irate over this, a large number of followers of Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy burnt flexi banners, posters, TDP flags and a cycle which is the symbol of TDP.

Ramakrishna Reddy's son Mano Reddy made a vain bid

to pacify the irate activists. One of the ardent activists went to the top floor a building and threatened to commit suicide by jumping from the building. However some activists rushed there and brought him down.

At a meeting with his followers, Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy felt emotional at the denial of ticket to him to contest in the elections from Anaparthi constituency. He told his followers that the TDP had betrayed him by denying tickets. He said that he had faced harassment from the ruling party during the last five years and endured the pain.

"How the Anaparthi seat was allocated to the BJP which has no strength. No question of extending support to the BJP candidate in Anaparthi" he told his supporters. Nallamilli said: "I will go to the people and explain to them the injustice meted to me.

Collector orders to deposit licensed weapons in police stations

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Collector AS Dinesh Kumar directed the licensed licensees to deposit their weapons in the police stations.

District Collector Dinesh Kumar flanked by SP P Parameswar Reddy, DRO R Srilatha and district prison superintendent Varuna Reddy held a meeting here on Thursday and reviewed various issues pertaining to elections.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector A S Dinesh Kumar ordered that the weapons with licenses should be deposited



back as the Election Code is enforced in the district. The Collector asked the officials concerned not to issue new licenses to possess guns.

The Collector made it clear that everyone should ensure

that the personal licensed weapons are re-deposited. He ordered that the registers containing the details related to the issue of licenses and types of weapons should be maintained properly. He told the officials

that there should be common data between police and revenue authorities.

The Collector directed the officials to pay special attention to the details of the weapons, status of the licensees in case of death and the call data of the political prisoners.

SP Parameswar Reddy made it clear that steps were taken to enforce model code of conduct and licensees to deposit their guns in the police stations. Special focus was laid on every licensed weapon in the district and steps were taken to check and seize unlicensed weapons.

Farmers hold novel protest by riding bikes in paddy field

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In protest against the lackadaisical attitude of the officials in providing water to their paddy crops, a group of farmers held a novel protest by riding motorcycles in their paddy fields at P Mallavaram village in Tallarevu mandal on Thursday.

The farmers cultivated the paddy crop in the rabi season. However their paddy crop is withering due to lack of water. The farmers said that they had approached District Collector Krithika Shukla and submitted a memorandum urging her to take steps to supply water to their withering paddy crop but the officials did not respond and water has not been supplied to



their withering paddy crop.

In order to register their protest, the farmers rode motorcycles on the paddy field. The farmers lamented that the standing paddy crop in over 200 acres is withering due to lack of water. The farmers alleged that the officials have made arrangements to supply plenty of water to the Reliance and the ONGC companies and ignored

their appeal for water.

The farmers expressed concern that they would not get even their investment as their paddy crop is getting withered. The farmers said that they tried to draw water from the nearby irrigation canal but the canal dried up. The farmers warned to lay siege to the irrigation office, if water was not provided to their crops.

KK, his daughter to join Cong

Will tell my joining date soon, says BRS RS member

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a big shock to the BRS and its chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao, the party's Secretary General and Rajya Sabha Member Dr K. Keshava Rao aka KK and his daughter GHMC Mayor Gadwala Vijayalaxmi decided to join the Congress party. She said that she is joining Congress on March 30.

GHMC Mayor Vijayalaxmi and her father KK confirmed it on Thursday night saying that she and her father K. Keshava Rao are joining the Congress. Vijayalaxmi said that works would be done only if she stays in the ruling party.

However, KK said, "I am thinking of joining the Congress. I stayed in the Congress for a long time in the past. KCR gave full respect to me. I too have full respect for KCR. I discussed with KCR amount Kavitha's arrest and party issues. The ED arrested Kavitha illegally." BJP MP Keshava Rao said.

KK said that he will tell his joining date soon.

Meanwhile, KK's son Viprav Kumar said, "I am hereby clarifying that I have nothing to do with the news in the media regarding the decisions of K.K. garu or Vijayalaxmi on thinking



about changing the party. I am very clear that I am not changing the party. I am a strong supporter of the BRS and have great faith in the leadership of our leader KCR garu. ...I will be able to talk more only after their confirmation of joining the Congress."

Earlier in the day, Keshava Rao met BRS President K. Chandrasekhar Rao at KCR's farmhouse. KK informed KCR that he was going to quit the BRS and join the Congress.

It is learnt that KK informed KCR that he took this decision in an inevitable situation after discussing several issues. However, KCR expressed impatience with KK. KCR asked KK to think again before quitting the party. It is also learnt that KCR asked KK to tell why he is quitting the BRS.

However, KK informed KCR that he was born in the Congress and wants to die in the Congress. It is learnt that KCR asked KK to tell how is it correct to quit the party now after enjoying power for 10 years. People would observe everything. KCR also asked KK to tell what less the party did to KK and KK's family. KK too expressed his intolerance, however, not on KCR but on media persons when they tried to take the visuals of KK at his residence after KK returned from KCR's farmhouse.

It may be recalled that AICC in-charge General Secretary Deepa Das Munshi and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's advisor Vem Narender Reddy and several others went to KK's residence on March 22 and invited KK, his daughter and GHMC

Central forces to tackle problematic areas

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Superintendent of Police S Sathish Kumar has made it clear that critical polling stations have already been identified and the Central forces security will be deployed to the stations to ensure peaceful polling.

The SP convened a meeting

with the representatives of various recognized political parties on Thursday and discussed various issues including special surveillance and deploying of three special parties in each of the seven assembly segments.

The SP said: "The security has been strengthened at all the check posts. Intensive

searches are being carried out round the clock for checking the flow of liquor and also for other prohibited things. The details of cases registered against the political leaders are being submitted regularly in a report to the election commission."

Collector Kritika Sukla said that the C-Vigil app, police, fly-

ing squads, and statistical surveillance teams constantly monitor the implementation of the model code of conduct and asked the political parties to strictly abide by the model code of conduct. She advised them to apply for permissions for election campaigns through the Suvidha app.

DRP D Tippe Naik, DSP K

Hanumantha Rao, representatives of political parties including Ravuri Venkateswara Rao (YSRCP), Gadula Saibaba (TDP), K. Gangadhar (BJP), Sabbarapu Appa Rao (BSP), NVV Satyanarayana (INC), K Veerababu (CPM), and election cell officer M Jagannadham were among those attended.

RAMAYANA KALPAVRUKSHAM

Hyd to witness three-day music, dance festival

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Classical dancer, scholar, Ananda Shankar Jayant, in association with the Ministry of Culture, Shankarananda Kalakshetra Natyarambha and Brhat, is hosting a three-day music and dance event, 'Ramayana Kalpavrksham', from March 29 to 31 at the CCRT campus.

The festival presents a visual treat with a stellar line up of events that include a galaxy of renowned artistes and speakers from across the country, thought provoking talks and discussions, immersive arts workshops in dance ideation, Sanskrit and digital arts, artisans corner and other features.

On March 29, the festival has

The festival presents a visual treat with a stellar line up of events that include a galaxy of renowned artistes and speakers from across the country

a dance choreographed by Ananda Shankar Jayant, Sri Rama Namam - Entha Ruchi Ra and A Civilisation rises again - Ayodhya, a ground report talk by Swati Goel Sharma.

March 30 will have Ramayana in warp and weft - Ramayana on textiles, painting, weaving and embroidery, talk by Shefali Vaidya, Svayambodha and Shatrubodha - Twin Wheels of a Civilisation, Nupur

Sharma in conversation with Pankaj Saxena, Sri Rama Raksha, storytelling and music by Vinay Varanasi and Vivek Sadasivam and Dhruva, songs in praise of Hanuman and dance by Aayana and choreography by Krishna Manognya Balaraju.

March 31 session has a book release, Babur-The chessboard king by author Aabhas Maldahiyar, A Sacred awakening talk by Dushyanth Sridhar and musical evening - Rejoicing in Raghu, IndoSoul by Karthick Iyer.

The festival also has immersive arts workshops on March 30 and 31 - Ramayana mantra mala, potent life mantras with in Valmiki's verses; Sanskrit chanting and learning.

ACCIDENT-AP-CAR

Three women killed as car overturned

PNS ■ ONGOLE

In a ghastly road accident, three young women were killed and two others were injured critically, as the car in which they were travelling, overturned at Surareddypalem village on Chennai-Kolkata national highway in Tangutur mandal in Prakasam district on Thursday.

Police said that five persons, who belonged to Kandukur town, went to Palvancha in Telangana State to attend a marriage. When they were going back to Kandukur, the car mounted the road divider plunged into the other lane and overturned killing Gullapalli Srevani, Kalapaneni Divya and Rayuni Aruna. All the women killed instantaneously. The



injured were admitted to the RIMS hospital.

The car driver lost control of the vehicle due to drowsy state while driving resulting in the car overturned. The car driver was critically injured in the mishap, police said. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for post-mortem.

J. Nivas posted as new Collector

PNS ■ KAKINADA



J. Nivas has been posted as Collector of Kakinada district in place of Krithika Shukla, who has been granted 180 days maternity leave. Chief Secretary K.S. Jawahar Reddy issued orders to this effect on Thursday.

J Nivas is currently working as the Director of the Medical, Health, and Family Welfare Department. Kritika Shukla has been serving as the district Collector since the formation of the new



18 poker gamblers held, Rs 2.21 lakh seized

PNS ■ BAPATLA

The police arrested 18 poker gamblers and seized Rs 2.21 lakh from them at Ramannapalem village near Nallakunta area.

Police here on Thursday said that on a tip off that a large number of gamblers were playing poker, a police team led by CI Y Srihari conducted a raid and arrested 18 gamblers and seized Rs 2,21,400, nine motorcycles and 18 mobile phones.

On the directions of SP Vakul Jindal, the police are conducting raids across the district in the wake of the forthcoming elections. The SP warned of stringent action, if anybody indulged in anti-social activities.

He said that an elaborate vigil had been laid across the district to check unlawful activities. The SP asked people to inform 83338 13228 about unlawful activities.

INDIA CORNER

Guava 'scam': ED seizes over Rs 3 crore in cash in Punjab

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said it seized Rs 3.89 crore in cash and "incriminating" documents during raids in several premises in Punjab, including that of two IAS officers, as part of a money laundering case linked to an alleged guava orchard compensation scam. The central agency, however, did not clarify what was recovered from where. The searches were launched on Wednesday and a total of 26 residential and business premises in Ferozepur, Mohali (SAS Nagar), Bathinda, Barnala, Pathala and Chandigarh were raided. The premises of two IAS officers -- Punjab Excise Commissioner Varun Roojam and Ferozepur Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Dhiman -- were also searched apart from some revenue and horticulture department officials and private persons. The money laundering case stems from an FIR of the Punjab Vigilance Bureau against alleged main accused Bhupinder Singh, Jasmine Kaur and others.



BORDER ROW

India, China interact on complete disengagement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a lingering border row in eastern Ladakh, top diplomats of India and China held a fresh round of talks and both sides agreed to "maintain regular contact" through diplomatic and military channels, with no indication of any breakthrough. Both sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve "complete disengagement" and resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control during the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

The key meeting was held in Beijing on March 27, it said in a statement.



Joint Secretary (East Asia) from the MEA led the Indian delegation. The Chinese delegation was headed by the Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the statement said.

"In the interim, both sides

agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels and on the need to uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols," it said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese

Govinda joins Shinde-led Shiv Sena

Bollywood actor Govinda, a mass entertainer of the 1990s who is known for his excellent comic timing and epic dance steps, on Thursday joined the ruling Shiv Sena in Mumbai, making a comeback in politics after a 14-year hiatus. The former Congress Lok Sabha MP joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the time of election season. Govinda, who gave multiple superhit films in his decades-long career, made a blockbuster entry in electoral politics in 2004. That year, the "Hero No. 1" actor emerged as a "giant killer" when, as the Congress candidate, he defeated BJP stalwart Ram Naik in the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat. Shinde welcomed the 60-year-old actor into his party, saying he was a popular figure in all sections of society. Speaking on the occasion, an emotional Govinda, who started his acting career in the 1980s and whose films were massy family entertainers, said after his first stint in politics from 2004 to 2009, he never felt he would again come back to the same field.



Will never come out of 'Basanti' shadow: Hema

PNS ■ VRINDAVAN (UP)

The shadow of Basanti still looms large and Hema Malini, who references her role as the feisty tonga puller from the 1975 classic "Sholay" in many of her rallies, says candidly she may never come out of it.

The cinema icon and BJP MP is currently seeking a third Lok Sabha term from Mathura. "I will never come out of the Basanti shadow. It will always be there. I was born with that. I have done 200 films and people still remember me as 'Sholay ki Basanti' or from 'Seeta Aur Geeta' and 'Baghban'," she said. "I tell everyone that I am three in one -- a film artiste, a dancer and a politician," Malini told PTI in an exclusive interview here.

Forty-nine years after it was released, Ramesh Sippy's "Sholay" continues to be a massive draw with its ensemble cast and characters living on in celluloid memory.

Over 44 % respondents of survey say they paid extra for flight seats

As much as 44 per cent respondents in a survey complained that they had to pay extra charges to get a seat at the time of purchase of a flight ticket. Many of the respondents also reported paying between Rs 200 and Rs 2,000 as seat allocation fee, which can amount to 5-40 per cent of the air fare, LocalCircles, which carried out the survey, said in a statement. It also said there has been a very marginal improvement in the last 12 months in the ability of consumers to get a free seat when booking their flight. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs and consumer regulator CCPA late last year convened a meeting of the airlines on the issue and questioned them about the alleged unfair trade practices and misleading claims of "free" web check-in, it said. The new survey, which received over 41,000 responses from consumers across 339 districts of the country, has focused on fliers' problems when booking for travel with family members.



PM MODI ON LAWYERS' LETTER TO CJI

To browbeat, bully others is vintage Congress culture

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said it is a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

"To browbeat and bully others is vintage Congress culture. 5 decades ago itself they had called for a 'committed judiciary' - they shamelessly want commitment from others for their selfish interests but desist from any commitment towards the nation," Modi said on X.

"No wonder 140 crore Indians are rejecting them," the prime minister said and tagged a post that carried the letter written by the lawyers.

More than 600 lawyers,



including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, wrote to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians.

"These tactics are damaging to our courts and threaten our democratic fabric," the lawyers drawn from across the country said in the latter dated March 26.

Height of hypocrisy: Cong hits back

The Congress on Thursday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi after his criticism of the party over a lawyers' letter to the chief justice of India against a "vested interest group", saying the PM's brazenness in orchestrating an attack on the judiciary, in the name of defending it, is the "height of hypocrisy". Earlier in the day, Modi said it is a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others, remarks that came in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts.

'People will have to pay for their wrongdoings'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday dismissed the allegation that the government is targeting opposition leaders and stressed that those who have done wrong will have to pay for their wrongdoings.

He said investigative agencies -- CBI and the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) -- will do their work and there is no question of any pardon for anybody who has done wrong.

The minister was replying to questions about the government using central agencies against opposition leaders and sparing those who had joined the BJP.

"We have to make a corruption-free India. They (opposition) want to save their corruption, and we have to eradicate that... They will have to pay for whatever wrongs they have committed and the law catches up with you and the law is catching up with people who have done irregularities," Goyal said, at the Times Now Summit 2024 here.

A delegation of leaders of the INDIA bloc parties has recently approached the Election Commission of India alleging unrelenting, blatant and illegal deployment of



central agencies by the ruling BJP to stifle opposition parties.

The INDIA bloc leaders have submitted a list of recent instances of central agencies targeting opposition parties and alleged an absence of a level playing field for the opposition.

Further on the opposition party's allegation that the BJP is a washing machine, he said: "this charge is irresponsible and uncalled for".

All cases on anybody are going through their due course and there will nobody who will be spared from due process of law, Goyal added.

"The courts will decide, investigative agencies will do their work. There is no question of any pardon for anybody who has done wrong," he said.

On a question whether BJP would welcome Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the party, Goyal said, "we are looking for people of substance, who add value to the party".

Speaking on the BJP's target of 370 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, he said the target is achievable as "Modi has toh mumkin hai (Everything is possible as Modi is there)".

Remarks on Kejriwal by US State Dept unwarranted: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said the US State Department's recent remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is "unwarranted" and asserted the country is "proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions" and committed to protect them from any form of undue external influences.

MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said this in response to a query during his weekly press briefing on New Delhi's stand on the remarks made by Washington on the arrest.

"Yesterday India lodged its strong objection and protest with the senior official from the US embassy with regard to the comments made by the US State Department," he said.

The recent remarks by the State Department are "unwarranted," the MEA Spokesperson said.

Any such external imputation on "our electoral and legal processes is completely unacceptable," he said.

"India is proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions. We are committed to protect them from any forms of undue external influences," he added.

ASKS HER TO PUT FORWARD 10-YEAR 'REPORT CARD' Cong slams Irani for 'silence' on women's issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday accused Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani of maintaining a silence on key issues related to women and said she should put forward her ministry's 10-year report card before people.

Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba said AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh had recently posed several questions to Irani, but the minister did not give detailed answers to any of those.

"We had expected that the country's women and child development minister, Smriti Irani, would hold a press conference and present the report card of her department. She kept avoiding this, but now we



are determined to hold her accountable," Lamba told a press conference at the Congress headquarters here.

"It is expected that she should hold a press conference and not give answers on Twitter," she said.

Lamba repeated the questions asked by Ramesh.

"Has there been an increase in crimes against women and children in the country? Why was (former Wrestling Federation of India chief) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh not arrested after an FIR was lodged against him? Six months have passed since the gang-rape of tribal daughters of Manipur, which fast-track court has heard the case and have the accused been punished? In Haryana, does Sandeep Singh remain a minister even after serious allegations of sexual harassment and an FIR against him?" she asked.

The Mahila Congress chief also asked Irani why did she remain silent when the convicts in the Bilkis Bano case were released by the BJP-led government.

UGC mulling JEE-like common counselling for undergraduate admissions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is exploring the idea of conducting a common counselling for undergraduate admissions based on CUET scores on the lines of medical and engineering courses, according to sources.

The UGC has formed a committee with officials from different universities to discuss the idea and five renowned universities have been roped in for a pilot run, they added.

However, there is no clarity on when the idea

will be implemented if the committee finds it feasible. "A panel has been formed to study the idea and the pilot will be conducted internally to study the pros and cons. Such a system will provide a single window for admissions and students can give their choices on a single portal instead of applying separately to universities," a source said.

"Whether or not the idea will take off is not certain right now. It depends on the panel's findings and then we will have stakeholder consultations," the source said.

NET scores to be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25: UGC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Eligibility Test (NET) scores will be used for PhD admissions from 2024-25 eliminating the need for separate entrance tests conducted by universities and higher education institutions, according to the University Grants Commission.

The NET is conducted twice a year -- June and December. Its scores are currently used to award Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and as eligibility for appointment as an assistant professor for those with a Master's degree.

According to University Grants Commission (UGC) officials, the commission had constituted an expert committee to review the provisions of the exam and based on the panel's recommendations, it has decided that from the academic session 2024-25, the score can be used for admission to PhD programmes.

"Starting from the academic session 2024-2025, universities nationwide will have the opportunity to utilise NET scores for admissions to PhD programmes, replacing the need for separate entrance tests conducted by individual universities and higher education institutions (HEIs). This marks an important step in streamlining the admission process and enhancing accessibility for aspiring doctoral candidates.

"By leveraging the NET, which is conducted biannually, universities can offer greater flexibility to students, allowing them to utilise their scores from either session to apply for PhD programmes across various institutions," UGC Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar said.

Kumar explained that the initiative is poised to benefit students in numerous ways.

"Firstly, it eliminates the need for students to prepare and appear for multiple entrance tests conducted by different universities, thereby reducing the burden of exam logistics and expenses.

"We strongly encourage all universities to adopt NET exam scores for PhD admissions starting from the 2024-2025 academic session. This will undoubtedly contribute to fostering a more conducive environment for academic pursuit and scholarly advancement in our nation," he said.

In an official notification, the UGC said that from June 2024 onwards, the NET candidates will be declared eligible in three categories -- for admission to PhD with JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD without JRF and appointment as assistant professor; for admission to PhD programme only and not for the award of JRF or appointment as assistant professor.



Species in 17 mountains face extinction risk

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Species living in 17 mountains around the world may be facing the risk of extinction due to the rapid rate at which the planet is warming, new research published in the journal Nature has found.

Researchers said that the mountains at significant risk due to global warming included those in the Iran-Pakistan region, Northeast Asia, Brazilian highlands, Western America and Mexico, and the Mediterranean basin.

The international team of researchers, led by Academia Sinica in Taiwan, called for setting up more meteorological monitoring stations in mountainous areas globally, essential for developing a deeper understanding of the extent of such risks.

In their study, the researchers found these mountain regions to have the highest climate velocity, or the rate at which "species must move to stay within their survivable habitats".

They explained a new approach they developed to estimate climate velocities in mountainous regions that considers two important influencing factors -- surface warming and humidity -- whilst incorporating the theories of atmospheric science.

Setting up meteorological observation stations in mountainous areas is challenging, leading to a global shortfall in long-term climate data for these regions, the team said.

This knowledge gap, com-

standing of the extent of such risks.

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pounded by the complex topography, has limited the understanding of warming trends, they said. The team's newly developed approach compensates for the lack of station data and assess shifts in temperature isotherms -- locations having the same temperature -- in mountain regions under climate change, they said.

In humid climates, climate

velocity can be high, even as warming is less pronounced, according to lead author Wei-Ping Chan from the Biodiversity Research Center, Academia Sinica, and a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard University, US.

"The mountainous regions of Taiwan, like Japan, are more affected by humidity-induced high velocities than continental regions. Our study suggests that accounting for humidity is critical to fully understanding the variability of temperature isothermal shifts in mountainous areas worldwide," said Chan.

Lead researcher Sheng-Feng Shen, also from the Biodiversity Research Center of Academia Sinica, said, "The lack of meteorological observation data from mountains is both the most

valuable and the biggest challenge of our study."

In the absence of such data, he said they have to rely on models for making estimates, which could vary significantly depending on the model and method used. Further, global data isn't suitable for making local predictions due to differences in scale, Shen added.

"The unique characteristics of various mountain regions and the absence of local data mean that just because an area isn't highlighted, doesn't mean it's unaffected," he said.

Therefore, the researchers emphasised the need to set up more weather stations in mountains to better understand the real situation and tackle the effects of climate change on species.

CUSTODIAL DEATH CASE

Stricter approach required to decide on bail for cops

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that a police officer may wield more influence than an ordinary person, the Supreme Court has set aside the bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

A bench of justices Aniruddha Bose and Sanjay Kumar said a stricter approach is required to decide on the question of bail of a police official who is accused in a custodial death case.

"In cases of this nature, having regard to the overall influence a member of a police force

may wield in connection with a case against them pertaining to custodial death, a stricter view is to be taken on the question of granting bail," the court said.

The top court said in ordinary circumstances, it would not have invoked the jurisdiction under Article 136 of the Constitution to invalidate an order granting bail to an accused.

"But this criteria, while dealing with the question of granting bail, would not apply in a case of custodial death, where police officials are arraigned as

accused. Such alleged offences are of grave and serious nature," it said.

The apex court said so far as the present appeal is concerned, it ought to make an exception from the general approach on the question of granting bail and adopt a stricter approach.

The top court was hearing an appeal against bail granted to a police constable in a case of custodial death.

The deceased was arrested in connection with a case involving robbery and he was taken into custody on February 11, 2021.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Truth travels freely

Kejriwal's arrest gets international attention; vendetta politics may boomerang on ED

Brought to the Rouse Avenue Court amid high drama, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has described his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case as a "political conspiracy." Himself making submissions in the court after taking the special judge's permission, he expressed confidence that the public will give a "fitting reply to this injustice". Seeking to establish a link between the Electoral Bond donations received by the ruling party and his arrest, the Delhi Chief Minister said that people were being turned 'approver' in the case and being forced to change their statements. "My arrest by the ED is a political conspiracy ... the approver gave the BJP Rs 55 crore," he said. As a precursor to this setting, Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, broke her silence and hinted at the impending revelation of this crucial piece of information. Kejriwal, known for his anti-corruption stance and vocal criticism of the Centre, was arrested last week on charges of being embroiled in a multi-crore liquor scam. The arrest sparked widespread outcry and protests, with supporters of Kejriwal alleging political vendetta and the BJP's bid to settle political scores with the AAP upon losing the MCD elections after 15 years. Apart from being charged with soliciting kickbacks from liquor traders in exchange for favours, the Delhi Chief Minister is also accused of being the "kingpin and key conspirator" in the now-scrapped policy. The agency has already arrested at least 14 top AAP leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Minister Sanjay Singh, in connection with the case.



Meanwhile, the international community has also been drawn into the fray, with the US making remarks regarding Kejriwal's arrest that have drawn the ire of Indian officials. The US State Department expressed concern over what it termed as "the apparent suppression of dissent" in India, calling for due process and respect for human rights. However, Indian authorities swiftly responded, asserting that the comments were unwarranted interference in the country's internal affairs. Germany was the first country to speak against Kejriwal's arrest. Whenever a politician is put behind bars, there are consequences to it. The Union Government should be doubly sure that it has a watertight case against the accused person, else there are high chances that it will boomerang. Due to the lack of information on the case in public domain, we shall assume that the authorities have a strong case against the Delhi CM and that due process of law would be followed. But if it is an exercise in haste, Kejriwal's words might prove prophetic as elections are just around the corner. The citizens are discerning enough to read any signs of political vendetta. The outcome of this legal battle and its broader implications remain uncertain, but one thing is clear – the events unfolding around Kejriwal have captured the attention of the nation and the world, highlighting the enduring struggle for transparency, accountability and justice in the corridors of power.

PICTALK



A shepherd with his sheep near a mustard field on the outskirts of Srinagar

PTI

Dandi March: Salt, soul and satyagraha

The Dandi March serves as a reminder that peaceful protest can be a potent weapon against injustice and oppression

The 1980s film 'Mard' immortalised a poignant scene that encapsulates the essence of patriotism, rebellion, and sacrifice in Indian cinematic history. In this scene, the protagonist, amidst relentless flogging by the heroine armed with chains, whispers with unyielding spirit, "For this salt, our Mahatma led a revolution." This homage vividly captures the spirit of the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, a pivotal moment in India's quest for independence, led by Mahatma Gandhi. The Salt Satyagraha, which took place from March 12 to April 6, 1930, galvanised a nation against British colonial rule. Gandhi's symbolic act of picking up salt at Dandi defiantly challenged the salt taxes imposed by the British, symbolising defiance and resilience in India's freedom struggle. Over 90,000 brave souls willingly embraced brutality in their pledge for non-violence, standing as a beacon of hope against tyranny. The genesis of the Dandi March was rooted in the momentum established by the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, led by Sardar



Vallabhbhai Patel. This successful movement unified farmers and nationalists against oppressive British taxation, revitalising the spirit of the freedom struggle. By 1930, the Indian National Congress boldly articulated its aspiration for independence, setting the stage for Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi's letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, articulated the grievances of millions and announced his intention to lead a nonviolent protest against British atrocities. Despite Gandhi's emphasis on dialogue and peaceful resolution, the Viceroy's inadequate response led to the commencement of the Dandi March on March 12, 1930. Accompanied by 78 dedicated followers, Gandhi embarked on a significant march covering nearly 241 miles from Sabarmati

Ashram to Dandi. This symbolic journey aimed at challenging the oppressive salt tax and British monopolistic control over salt production. The disciplined resolve of the satyagrahis exemplified unity amidst diversity, embodying the nation's aspirations for liberation. On April 6, 1930, Gandhi's defiance of the Salt Laws at Dandi marked a pivotal moment in India's struggle for independence. His call to civil disobedience catalysed a mass boycott of British goods, prompting a harsh crackdown from British authorities. Despite brutal repression, the spirit of nonviolent resistance persisted, revealing the resilience of the Indian populace. The Salt Satyagraha showcased resolute collective action, with over 60,000 willingly imprisoned and thou-

sands more participating in peaceful protests. Despite Government reprisals, the 'satyagrahis' maintained remarkable restraint and non-violent discipline. This non-violent resistance ultimately led to negotiations with Congress leadership and Gandhi's release after a year of imprisonment. The Dandi March culminated in the historic breaking of the salt laws, a symbolic act of defiance that reverberated globally. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. drew inspiration from Gandhi's example, recognising the power of nonviolent resistance in confronting injustice. The Dandi March was not just a chapter in history but a transformative moment in India's fight for independence, marking Gandhi's emergence as a spiritual force. Through unwavering dedication to love and nonviolence, Gandhi wielded a potent weapon against oppression, demonstrating the profound impact of spirituality in challenging times. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

A tribute to the two great saints of India

The lives of Swami Atmasthananda ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission 'Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha'



NARENDRA MODI

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the grand festival of Lok Sabha elections, the news of the demise of Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj brought my mind to a standstill for a few moments. Srmat Swami Smaranananda Ji Maharaj was a pioneer of India's spiritual consciousness and his demise is like a personal loss. A few years ago, the demise of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and now the departure of Swami Smaranananda Ji on his eternal journey has left many people bereaved. My heart, like that of crores of devotees, saints and followers of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, is deeply saddened. During my visit to Kolkata earlier this month, I had gone to the hospital to enquire about Swami Smaranananda Ji's health. Just like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji too dedicated his entire life for spreading the ideas of Acharya Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mata Sharada Devi and Swami Vivekananda across the world. While writing this article, the memories of meetings and conversations with him are getting refreshed in my mind. In January 2020, during my stay at Belur Math, I meditated in the room of Swami

Vivekananda. During that visit, I had a long conversation about Swami Atmasthananda Ji with Swami Smaranananda Ji. It is widely known that I had a close relationship with Ramakrishna Mission and Belur Math. As a seeker of spirituality, I have met different saints and mahatmas and been to many places over the period of more than five decades. Even in Ramakrishna Math, I got to know about the saints who dedicated their lives to spirituality, among whom personalities like Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji were prominent. Their sacred thoughts and knowledge provided contentment to my mind. In the most important period of my life, such saints taught me the true principle of Jan Seva hi Prabhu Seva. The lives of Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji are an indelible example of the motto of Ramakrishna Mission 'Atmano Mokshaartham Jagaddhitaaya Cha'. We all are inspired by the work being done by Ramakrishna Mission for the promotion of education and

THEIR SACRED THOUGHTS AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED CONTENTMENT TO MY MIND. IN THE MOST IMPORTANT PERIOD OF MY LIFE, SUCH SAINTS TAUGHT ME THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF JAN SEVA HI PRABHU SEVA

rural development. Ramakrishna Mission is working on India's spiritual enlightenment, educational empowerment and humanitarian service. In 1978, when the disastrous flood struck Bengal, Ramakrishna Mission won the hearts of everyone with its selfless service. I remember, when an earthquake ravaged Kutch in 2001, Swami Atmasthananda Ji was among the first people to call me and offer all possible assistance for disaster management on behalf of the Ramakrishna Mission. Under his direction, Ramakrishna Mission helped many people who were affected by the earthquake. Over the past years, while holding various positions, Swami Atmasthananda Ji and Swami Smaranananda Ji laid great emphasis on social empowerment. Those who know the lives of these great personalities will definitely remember how serious these saints were towards modern education, skilling and women empowerment. Among his many inspiring traits, one thing that impressed me the most was Swami Atmasthananda Ji's love and respect for every culture and every tradition.

The reason for this was that he used to travel continuously and had spent a long time in different parts of India. He learned to speak Gujarati while living in Gujarat. He used to even speak with me in the language and I loved listening to his Gujarati! At different points in India's development journey, our motherland has been blessed by many saints and seers like Swami Atmasthananda Ji, Swami Smaranananda Ji who have ignited the spark of societal change. They have motivated us to work with a collective spirit and address all the challenges our society faces. These principles are eternal and will act as our source of strength as we embark on developing a Viksit Bharat during the Amrit Kaal. Once again, on behalf of the entire nation, I pay homage to such saintly souls. I am confident that all the people associated with the Ramakrishna Mission will further move ahead on the path shown by them. Om Shanti.

(This is a tribute to Smaranananda ji Maharaj and Swami Atmasthananda Ji by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICIANS HITTING BELOW THE BELT

Madam — Apropos editorial "Political zealotry," published on March 28, this is my response. It pains one to note that exchanges amongst political rivals are getting too personal and downright abusive. Recent examples are Supriya Srinate of the GOP and Dilip Ghose of the BJP. Wish our "netas," spokespersons and candidates were more accommodating and tolerant, instead of hissing at one another like venomous snakes. I cite here a witty remark by MP Piloo Mody that turned the tables on his opponent. Mody, a big roly-poly man, showed his back to a minister because he felt outraged at some point. The minister took strong objection to Mody's gesture and interpreted it to be an insult to the House itself. Piloo Mody replied - "Mr. Speaker Sir, I have no front, no back, no flanks. I am round all over. So how could I have shown my back to the minister?" The House exploded in loud laughter. Our (generally) ill-tempered politicians should take a leave from the above incident and shun vituperative language while attacking their political opponents.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

INEQUALITY RISES IN INDIA

Madam — Apropos news article "Mumbai surpasses Beijing as billionaire hub," published on March 27, this is my response. Paris-based World Inequality Lab has recently published a report titled, 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India 1992 - 2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj'. As per the report, inequality in India declined till the early 1980s. Thereafter, it started rising sharply. The rise of top-end inequality gained tremendous momentum during the last 10 years. The top 1 per cent of Indians earn 22.6 per cent of the national income and their wealth share has risen to 40.1 per cent. The income share of the top 1 per cent of Indians is among the very highest in the world. The report says that India is now more unequal than during the time of the British Raj. Thanks to rising inequality, the tentacles

Mechanisation is needed



Apropos news article "Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues," published on March 28, this is my response. Recurring drought, and scarcity of water for irrigation, combined with a lack of modern farming equipment, have all contributed to a steep fall in productivity and income, forcing our farmers to take huge loans, without being able to repay them. Farmers' income has not been able to keep pace, such as to cater to increasing production costs, including rising labour wages. Hence, agricultural machinery

becomes the need of the hour to alleviate farmers' problems. It is also important to note that in farming several activities are highly time-bound and unless executed as per schedule, a farmer will suffer financial loss. Agriculture mechanisation, is, therefore, an appropriate answer to such challenges faced by farmers. Farm mechanisation and crop productivity have a direct correlation as they save time and labour, reduce drudgery, cut down production costs in the long run, reduce post-harvest losses, and boost crop output and farm income. Mechanisation is crucial in the agriculture sector, as it contributes towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the inputs used in crop production. Increasing the rate of farm mechanisation is critical for India to sustainably meet production demand and develop value chains and modernised food systems.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

of VIP culture are spreading rapidly with each passing day. My local SBI branch has opened a special counter where customers can withdraw or deposit money with ease avoiding long queues at the general counter. Standing at the end of a serpentine queue at the general counter, an old man leaning on his stick asked if the special counter was for differently-abled persons and senior citizens. Immediately, he was provided enlightenment with the information that the counter was only for the VIPs who would transact a minimum amount of Rs 50 thousand!

Sujit De | Kolkata

INDIA-SINGAPORE TIES

Madam — Apropos news article "India-Singapore to further deepen bilateral ties," published on March 26, this is my response. The friendship between India and Singapore has stood the test of time for five decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had rightly emphasised the fact that Singapore was India's "gateway" to the east. The phenomenal rise of Singapore from a small nation to a dream country for oth-

ers to emulate is in itself an achievement of sorts. Both India and Singapore have mutually beneficial cultural exchanges, defence relations, economic cooperation and skill building. Defence, sea and space, commerce and infrastructure, too, are areas of bilateral interest. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's recent Singapore visit saw him discussing wide-ranging issues with that country's ministers including his counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan. Singapore is a destination much sought after by tourists. Besides, terror and security — very significant considering the deadlock over the South China Sea — could not escape the attention of the two leaders. India-Singapore have had a long relationship without a tinge of bitterness. That Modi himself has visited Singapore four times after he took over in 2014, underscores the importance attached by New Delhi to the bilateral relations.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

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FIRST COLUMN

IMPACT AND DUALITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media often promotes formation of echo chambers and spread of false news



SHAINY SHARMA

Social media, a ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society, has revolutionised the way people communicate, share information and interact with one another. From its humble beginnings as online forums to the expansive platforms of today like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram, Snapchat and many more, the term ‘social media’ has reshaped human interaction and societal norms to a large extent. Today, it has become an integral part of everyone’s life, especially Generation Z and the impact is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Social media has fundamentally transformed communication dynamics, making it easier for individuals to connect with others globally. It has transcended geographical barriers, enabled real-time interaction and fostered virtual communities based on shared interests, identities and ideologies. Moreover, social media platforms have become instrumental in political discourse, activism and social movements, empowering voices that were previously marginalised and amplifying diverse perspectives. Millennials and Generation Z rely heavily on social media as a primary source of news and information which at times can lead to issues such as the spread of misinformation, echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are only exposed to viewpoints that align with their own beliefs. Various studies have also shown that spending too much time on social media, especially before bedtime, disrupts the sleep pattern. Blue light suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep, making it more difficult to fall asleep and reducing the overall quality of sleep. Studies also reveal that constant exposure to short-form content and distractions on social media platforms can lead to a decrease in attention span and difficulty concentrating on tasks that require sustained focus. Another major role of social media platforms which is responsible for various disruptions is promoting of unrealistic beauty standards through the use of filters, photo editing tools and the prevalence of influencers with idealised appearances, leading to body dissatisfaction and negative body image among Generation Z.



Such platforms are designed to be addictive, with features such as likes, comments, and notifications triggering dopamine release in the brain and can lead to compulsive use and dependency which is no less like other forms of addiction. Moreover, the constant exposure to carefully curated images and posts can create unrealistic expectations and foster feelings of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) among users. To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO irrespective of the generation gap, it becomes important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences such as practicing mindfulness, setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can also help alleviate feelings by emphasising authenticity, empathy and acceptance. There is no denying the fact that social media has brought about numerous benefits for Millennials and Generation Z in terms of connectivity, self-expression, and access to information, but at the same time it also poses challenges and risks that require careful consideration and management. Despite its transformative potential, social media presents a myriad of challenges that warrant attention. The addictive nature of social media and its impact on mental health, particularly among young people, raise concerns about excessive screen time, cyberbullying, and negative self-comparison. Balancing the advantages and drawbacks of social media usage is essential to harness its potential while mitigating its negative impacts on their well-being and society as a whole. (The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Quantifying happiness is perplexing



The World Happiness Report places India at 126th rank, raising legitimate concerns about the methodology and biases inherent in such assessments



Happiness is complex and difficult to define, but this in no way implies that we do not know when we are happy. Happiness cannot be a permanent state of euphoria as the mind constantly changes its contours and shades and, by and large, remains an individual experience. Hence any exercise that seeks to generalise the impressions of a large number of individuals like those living within a country and brand them as happy or unhappy people is bound to be fraught with controversies. It will also inevitably reflect the biases of the measurers. When the definition of a variable cannot be agreed upon, its measurement will raise more controversies, but when such rankings are internationally publicised for branding countries and peoples which may influence the decisions of investors and donors, it is no longer a benign exercise without any accountability. On March 20 every year for the last seven years, which date has been marked by the UN as the International Day of Happiness, a New York-based agency called Sustainable Development Solutions Network has been bringing out an annual World Happiness Report, whose 2024 edition has placed India at 126th rank among 143 countries, much below countries like Saudi Arabia (28), China (60), Russia (72), Venezuela (79), Senegal (99), Iran (100), Palestine (103), Ukraine (105), Pakistan (108) even Myanmar (118). These countries are either strife-torn or war-ravaged, where the basic security of human life is not guaranteed, or ruled by autocrats and dictators who ruthlessly suppress the civil liberties of their people, especially of women, countries which are reeling under relentless crises in their democracy, polity and economy. This raises legitimate questions about the methodology used in the exercise that can produce such weird results. Finland has topped the ranking in each year so far, and the top 10 countries have also remained more or less the same, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Australia. A common thread runs through all of them - high per capita income. Other higher-capita income countries also rank higher in the list, like New Zealand (21), UK



WE DO NOT NEED TO FEEL DEPRESSED AT OUR 126TH RANKING. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD IGNORE SUCH A PHONEY INDEX AND GO ABOUT OUR LIVES AND BUSINESS AS USUAL

(20), USA (23), Germany (24), or France (27). This is no surprise, because to the materialistic West hung on a culture of conspicuous overconsumption, money remains the primary and often the only source of happiness, unlike in Asian and other continental cultures. The only Asian country to feature in the list is Kuwait at 13th position, and the next one is Saudi Arabia at 28th. While Singapore features in 30th position, Japan, which has the largest concentration of longest-living people in the world, at 51st position, below Uzbekistan (47) and Kazakhstan (49). This raises natural questions about whether the index also reflects the inherent civilizational bias of the West against Asia, most of which used to be their colonies once—to treat them as superior or even equal would be an anathema to the West. Bhutan which reckons happiness as a core responsibility of Government and has adopted its Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index as a development indicator in its 2008 Constitution, was ranked 95th in 2019 and has not been ranked this year. GNH was the first such index and is far broader - having nine parameters, all non-income. Trying to measure the immeasurable will have its inherent contradictions. Happiness is a state of being, rather than a fixed state like a goal to be achieved that can be quantified and measured. Such measures therefore confuse happiness with “well-being” which is produced by the interplay of numerous extraneous factors like income, health, education, liberties, choices, relationships, physical and social security, etc. But even then, it is a subjective sense of well-being, which is neither measurable nor quantifiable. The rankings used in the World Happiness Report are based on six parameters of ‘subjective well-being’: (1) per capita income, (2) healthy life expectancy at birth, (3) social support, (4) freedom to make

life choices, (5) generosity, and (6) perceptions of corruption. The happiness rankings are based on what the authors say are “life evaluations”, on which Gallup World Poll (GWP) provides the data by asking respondents to evaluate their current life on a scale of 0 to 10 (happiest), using a typical sample size of 1000 for each country regardless of its population, and using a three-year average. The sample size is too small for a country like India to represent all its diversity and complexity. Data for per capita GDP on purchasing power parity (PPP) are taken from the World Development Indicators (WDI) of the World Bank, and then a natural log that fits the observations better. Data for healthy life expectancy at birth is provided by the WHO Global Health Observatory data repository. Social support is the national average of the binary responses (0=no, 1=yes) to the GWP question: “If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?” Freedom to make life choices is again the national average of binary responses to the GWP question: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?” Generosity is the residual of regressing the national average of GWP responses to the question: “Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?” on log GDP per capita, while perceptions of corruption are the average of binary answers to two GWP questions: “Is corruption widespread throughout the Government or not?” and “Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?” It does not require superlative intelligence to divine that all these parameters are derivatives of a single parameter, i.e., income or wealth of a nation, and hence will always favour rich nations over the poorer ones.

So, the richer you are, the happier you are; in other words, income is synonymous with happiness, an assumption not validated by facts, just as happiness cannot be equated with success in material terms. The mind is influenced by social and cultural factors; hence how we perceive happiness also depends on these factors. It also depends on the questions asked and the way they have been framed: Just ask “How much time you spend with your parents every week”, or “For how long you have been married to your present spouse”, and see how the scales turn against the rich western nations. In collectivist societies in Asia, people reckon happiness more as a shared experience rather than individual satisfaction with life, whereas in individualistic societies, people perceive happiness more in terms of individual satisfaction. Happy people increase the happiness of others around them; hence bonding within social groups and families contributes positively to happiness. Individualistic Western nations would score higher given the way the GWP questions have been framed. As every Indian knows from experience, we are not unhappy people, having been brought up to regard values and relationships as more important than wealth and to be content to live a simple life with few material possessions, with strong bonds with our extended families and the community. Even though perceptions are changing in a growing economy, these basic values have remained intact. We do not need to feel depressed at our 126th ranking. Instead, we should ignore such a phoney index and go about our lives and business as usual. (The author, an ex-bureaucrat, is currently a Professor at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management; views are personal)

Navigating the legal and ethical implications of AI

In a world increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence, the discourse shifts from its capabilities to the imperative question of its ethical boundaries

In an era increasingly defined by Artificial Intelligence (AI), the pivotal question shifts from what AI is capable of to what it should be allowed to do. This reflection critically examines AI’s potential to reshape our lives within ethical and legal frameworks. As we explore the vast landscapes carved by AI, we must ensure that our technological advancements are matched with an equally profound commitment to ethical responsibility. The advent of AI is a testament to human ingenuity, offering transformative possibilities in virtually every aspect of our existence. Yet, alongside its potential, AI introduces a spectrum of legal complexities that require careful consideration. The evolution of legal



jurisprudence in the face of AI’s rapid development is a topic of paramount importance, dealing with issues ranging from privacy and data protection to intellectual property and employment. The Indian Government’s embrace of AI through initiatives like “Digital India” and a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence reflects a visionary stance on harnessing technology for societal benefit.

However, the journey toward realising AI’s full promise is fraught with challenges that demand vigilant oversight and a principled approach to regulation and ethics. On a global scale, AI raises questions that transcend national boundaries, presenting legal and ethical dilemmas that must be addressed comprehensively. The capacity of AI to analyse and utilise vast amounts of personal data has challenged existing privacy laws, sparking a worldwide reassessment of how we protect individual rights in the digital age. Countries are adopting comprehensive data protection regulations, such as the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation and India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, to



safeguard personal information while fostering digital innovation. The implications of AI on the job market also warrant serious consideration. The potential for automation to displace jobs creates a pressing need for legal frameworks that can mitigate adverse effects and prepare the workforce for an AI-driven future. Similarly, the intersection of AI with intellectual property rights challenges

conventional notions of creativity and authorship, calling for legal innovations that recognise and protect the contributions of all stakeholders, including those of AI. The issues of bias and discrimination in AI highlight the critical need for our technological systems to be as impartial and inclusive as possible. The development and deployment of AI must be guided by anti-discrimination laws adapted to

the digital age, ensuring fairness and equity in the application of AI. Internationally, the regulatory approach to AI varies significantly, with entities like the European Union adopting comprehensive frameworks while others pursue more sector-specific guidelines. This diversity reflects the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and societal factors that influence AI governance, emphasising the need for a globally coordinated dialogue on AI ethics and regulation. Integrating AI into the legal profession offers a glimpse into the future, showcasing AI’s potential to enhance legal analysis, predict outcomes, and even assist in judicial decision-making. However, these advancements under-

score the imperative for stringent ethical standards to uphold the integrity of the legal system. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, it becomes crucial for societies, especially within the diverse context of India, to engage in proactive discourse. We must anticipate future developments and craft legal frameworks that are flexible enough to adapt to the unpredictable technological landscape. This includes ensuring that the benefits of AI extend to all and democratising access to services like healthcare and education. In conclusion, as we chart the course of AI within the legal domain, our focus must steadfastly remain on enacting and refining laws that protect human rights and dignity. Achieving harmony between

emerging technology and legal norms requires a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, where laws are designed not just to respond to the challenges posed by AI but to foresee and embrace its vast possibilities. With India at the forefront of AI innovation, buoyed by progressive policies and a wealth of intellectual capital, we stand on the brink of leading the global conversation on ethical AI. As we venture deeper into this new frontier, our collective aim should be a future where technology amplifies the noblest goals of law and justice, and in return, legal frameworks foster the responsible growth of Artificial Intelligence. (The author is a legal expert. Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday due to a strengthening greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices in the international markets. However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets and recent foreign fund inflows supported the domestic currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.32 and oscillated between the intra-day peak of 83.30 and the lowest level of 83.40 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.39 (provisional), registering a loss of 6 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee declined 4 paise to close at 83.33 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.34 per cent higher at 104.42. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the Indian rupee depreciated on Thursday on strong US dollar and dollar demand from oil marketing companies (OMCs).



SRM Contractors IPO subscribed 86.57 times on last day of bidding

The initial public offer of SRM Contractors got subscribed 86.57 times on the last day of bidding on Thursday. The Rs 130.20 crore IPO received bids for 37,57,05,680 shares against 43,40,100 shares on offer, as per NSE data. The quota for non-institutional investors received 214.93 times subscription while the portion meant for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) got subscribed 59.59 times. The category for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) fetched 46.97 times subscription. The Initial Public Offer (IPO) of fresh issue of up to 62,00,000 equity shares had a price range of Rs 200-210 a share. SRM Contractors mopped up Rs 39 crore from anchor investors on Friday. The company's IPO received 3.56 times subscription on the first day of bidding on Tuesday. It is an engineering construction and development company engaged primarily in the construction of roads (including bridges), tunnels, slope stabilization works and other miscellaneous civil construction activities in the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, as per its website.



Coal India achieves 610.8-MT supply to power sector, tops annual target

Coal India Ltd (CIL) has surpassed its annual supply target of 610 million tonnes to the thermal power sector, achieving 610.8 MT till March 27, a company official said. "This marks the highest coal supply till date to the power sector," he said. CIL's coal supply to the sector rose by 29.3 million tonnes in absolute volume terms compared to the corresponding period last fiscal, he said. The miner's current average daily supply to coal-fired plants stands at 1.76 million tonnes, reflecting the growing demand from the power sector, according to a company statement. CIL is aiming at boosting production in the wake of the estimated peak demand for electricity of 250 GW this summer. In 2022-23, offtake to power plants reached 586.6 million tonnes, surpassing the commitment of 565 million tonnes, the official said. As per data, coal stock at domestic coal-based power plants stood at 47.1 million tonnes as of March 26, an increase of 13.7 million tonnes as against the corresponding period last year.



Ambani, Adani join hands

Reliance picks 26% stake in Adani power project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the first collaboration between rival billionaires, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has picked up a 26 per cent stake in a Madhya Pradesh power project of Gautam Adani, and signed a pact to use the plants' 500 MW of electricity for captive use. Reliance will pick up 5 crore equity shares in Mahan Energen Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Adani Power Ltd, of face value Rs 10 at par (Rs 50 crore) and will use 500 MW of generation capacity for captive use, the two firms said in separate stock exchange filings. The two businessmen hailing from Gujarat have often been pitted by media and commentators against each other but they have for years tiptoed around each other to reach the top two rungs of Asia's wealth ladder. With Ambani's interests spanning oil and gas to retail and telecom and Adani's focus on infrastructure spanning sea ports to airports, coal and mining, they rarely crossed each other's path except in the clean energy business

where the two have announced multi-billion investments. Adani aspires to be the world's largest renewable energy producer by 2030 while Reliance is building four gigafactories at Jamnagar in Gujarat -- one each for solar panels, batteries, green hydrogen, and fuel cells. Adani is also building three giga factories for manufacturing solar modules, wind turbines and hydrogen electrolyzers. A clash was also forecast when Adani group applied to participate in an auction of spectrum or airwaves capable of carrying fifth generation (5G) data and voice services. However, unlike Ambani, Adani bought 400 MHz spectrum in the 26 GHz band, which is not for public networks. On the contrary, the two have been far from rivals. In 2022, a firm with erstwhile links to Ambani sold its stake in news broadcaster NDTV to Adani, paving the way for the takeover. Adani was also present at pre-wedding celebrations of Ambani's youngest son, Anant, at Jamnagar earlier this month.



Adani group infuses Rs 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements

The Adani group has infused Rs 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements by converting 21.20 crore warrants into shares, raising its stake in the country's second-largest cement company by 3.6 per cent to 66.7 per cent. The board of Ambuja Cements has approved the conversion of 21.20 crore warrants into shares of promoter entity Harmonia Trade and Investment at the rate of Rs 314.15 per share. The fund's infusion will be instrumental for the cement business of the Adani group, which has plans to enhance its capacity to 140 million tonnes per annum by 2028, according to a statement from billionaire Gautam Adani-owned Ambuja Cements. This investment

follows an infusion of Rs 5,000 crore by the promoter into the company for exercising the warrants issuance approved by the board in October 2022. "With this, the Adani family have increased their stake in the company by 3.6 per cent to attain 66.7 per cent holding," said Ambuja Cements which also owns a controlling stake in another cement firm ACC Ltd. On October 18, 2022, Ambuja Cements allotted 47.74 crore convertible warrants to Harmonia, a member of the promoter group of the Company, at an initial subscription amount of Rs 104.72 per warrant, which was 25 per cent of the issue price of Rs 418.87.

Gold climbs Rs 350; silver jumps Rs 200

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price climbed Rs 350 to Rs 67,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. Extending its gains for the second straight session, the price of the precious metal had settled at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also jumped Rs 200 to Rs 77,450 per kg. In the previous close, it had ended at Rs 77,250 per kg. "Gold prices advanced on Thursday before the outcome of crucial US macro data.

India can achieve 10 % growth rate in next decade: RBI Dy Guv

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



India can achieve a growth rate of 10 per cent in the next decade and become the second-largest economy by 2032 and the largest by 2050, given the energies and transformation driving the nation to overcome its challenges, said RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra. He was delivering a keynote address on The Indian Economy: Opportunities and Challenges at Nomura's 40th Central Bankers Seminar in Kyoto, Japan on March 25. India's growth trend is on the cusp of a post-pandemic upshift, with early signs of it rising above 7 per cent record-

ed during the 2000s before COVID-19 struck, he said. "India's recent growth performance has surprised many, triggering a flurry of upgrades. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cumulatively revised its forecast for 2023 upwards by 80 basis points between April 2023 and January 2024," Patra said.

In its latest update, IMF expects India to contribute 16 per cent of global growth, the second largest share in the world in terms of market exchange rates. By this metric, India is the fifth largest economy in the world and positioned to overtake Germany and Japan within the ensuing decade. In purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, the Indian economy is already the third largest in the world. The tailwinds driving the growth, the deputy governor said, include favourable demography, the rupee being among the least volatile currencies in 2023 and transformative change leveraged on technology.

Centre's fiscal deficit at 86.5% of full-year target at Feb-end: CGA data

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 15 lakh crore at February-end touched 86.5 per cent of the revised annual target, according to official data released on Thursday. In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit -- or gap between the expenditure and revenue -- was 82.8 per cent of Revised Estimates (RE)

(81.5 per cent of RE 2023-24 of total receipts) up to February comprising Rs 18.49 lakh crore tax revenue (net), Rs 3.6 lakh crore of non-tax revenue and Rs 36,140 crore of non-debt capital receipts, showed data released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA). Non-debt capital receipts consists of recovery of loans Rs 23,480 crore and miscellaneous capital receipts of Rs 12,660 crore.

Chennai refinery expansion cost goes up over Rs 3,600 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) on Thursday said it will raise its stake in the joint venture building a 9 million tonnes refinery at Chennai to 75 per cent after the cost to the project escalated by over 12 per cent. Originally, IOC and its subsidiary Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd (CPCL) were to hold a 25 per cent stake in the joint venture that was to build a new unit adjacent to the existing refinery of CPCL. The remaining 50 per cent equity was to come from financial investors. In a stock exchange filing, IOC said its board at its meeting on Thursday "accorded approval for the revision in cost of the project from Rs 29,361 crore to Rs 33,023 crore". The cost increased Rs 3,662 crore or 12.5 per cent.



"The Board has also accorded approval for revision in the capital structure of the joint venture with 75 per cent equity from IndianOil and 25 per cent equity from CPCL," it said. The company however did not give reasons for the cost escalation. IOC said its board had on January 29, 2021 approved the implementation of a 9 million tonnes a year refinery at Cauvery Basin, Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu by CPCL at an estimated cost of Rs 29,361 crore, to meet the demand of petroleum products in southern India.

Domestic drug firms to witness 8-10% revenue growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Revenue growth of leading 25 domestic drug firms is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent in the next fiscal year, rating agency Icria said on Thursday. The revenue of the companies, which account for 60 per cent of the overall Indian pharmaceutical industry, witnessed an increase of 13-14 per cent in the current fiscal year. Following the high base of 2023-24, the revenue growth momentum from the US and

Europe markets is expected to moderate to 8-10 per cent and 7-9 per cent, respectively, Icria said. The markets are expected to witness a year-on-year expansion of 18-20 per cent and 16-18 per cent, respectively, in the current fiscal year, it added. The domestic market, on the other hand, is expected to see a stable growth of 6-8 per cent, while the emerging markets may log an 8-10 per cent rise in FY25, against 16-18 per cent in FY24, the rating agency said. The revenue growth of the



sample set companies in the US market in FY24 has been supported by increased new product launches, product shortages in select therapeutic

segments, and healthy performance of complex generics (first to file), it stated. "However, as the base effect plays out, growth is expected

to taper in FY25. While low-single digit pricing pressure in the US market is likely to sustain, Indian pharmaceutical companies remain focused on enhancing their revenue contribution from the complex generics in the US market," it stated. Commenting on key risks being faced by the industry, Icria Assistant Vice President and Sector Head Mythri Macherla said the number of warning letters and import alerts issued by the USFDA to Indian drug firms have increased in the past year.

Less than 5% companies in India prepared to tackle cybersecurity risks: Cisco

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Less than 5 per cent of companies in India are ready to deal with cybersecurity risks even though an overwhelming number of them said their businesses are likely to be impacted by such threats in the next 12-24 months, according to a study. The 2024 Cisco Cybersecurity Readiness Index, which was released on Thursday, found that only 4 per

cent of companies in India are ready to tackle today's threats, with 59 per cent of organisations falling into the "beginner or formative stages of readiness". Globally, 3 per cent of companies are at a "mature stage", meaning they are prepared to handle cybersecurity risks, it said. Cisco said while companies are building defences against these attacks, they are slowed down by their own overly com-



plex security postures that are dominated by multiple-point solutions.

The study is based on a survey of 8,136 private sector business leaders -- over 1,000 of them from India -- who have cybersecurity responsibilities in their organisations. The study revealed that 82 per cent of the participants surveyed expect a cybersecurity incident to disrupt their business in the next 12-24 months. "The cost of being unprepared can be substantial, as 74 per cent of respondents said

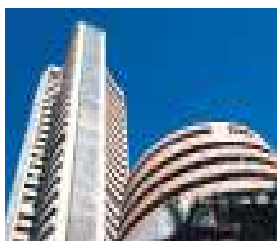
they experienced a cybersecurity incident in the last 12 months, and 55 per cent of those affected said it cost them at least USD 300,000," it said. It further said the traditional approach of adopting multiple cybersecurity point solutions has not delivered effective results, as 88 per cent of respondents admitted that having multiple point solutions slowed down their team's ability to detect, respond, and recover

from incidents. While companies are aware of cybersecurity risks, talent gap further intensifies the issue, it said. "Progress is being further hampered by critical talent shortages, with 91 per cent of companies highlighting it as an issue. In fact, 59 per cent of companies said they had more than 10 roles related to cybersecurity unfilled in their organisation at the time of the survey," the study noted.

Markets end FY24 on buoyant note amid positive global cues

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended the last day of trade of the 2023-24 fiscal on a bullish note on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in power, auto and banking stocks amid a positive trend in global markets. Extending its previous day's rally, the 30-share index jumped 655.04 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at 73,651.35. During the day, it zoomed 1,194 points or 1.63 per cent to 74,190.31. The NSE Nifty climbed 203.25 points or 0.92 per cent to end at 22,326.90.



In the 2023-24 financial year, the BSE benchmark jumped 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent, and the Nifty soared 4,967.15 points or 28.61 per cent. From the Sensex basket, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 4 per

cent, and Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 3 per cent. Shares of Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv jumped amid media reports that subsidiary Bajaj Housing Finance was planning to go public. Nestle, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra were the other major gainers. In contrast, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank and Reliance Industries were the laggards. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Tokyo and Seoul ended lower.

Ayodhya, Varanasi attracting retail brands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With rising spiritual tourism, retail brands are expanding their presence in cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Amritsar, Puri, Tirupati, and Ajmer, and also offering products to cater to the needs of pilgrims, according to CBRE. Real estate consultant CBRE on Thursday released a report 'Decoding Real Estate through the Spiritual Tourism Lens', highlighting that retail chains are capitalising on the surge in spiritual tourism across 14 key cities in India. The report identifies Amritsar, Ajmer, Varanasi, Katra, Somnath, Shirdi, Ayodhya, Puri, Tirupati, Mathura, Dwarka, Bodh Gaya,

Guruvayur, and Madurai as key cities witnessing this retail boom. The consultant noted that retail brands are strategically adapting their offerings in both established mall clusters and high-street locations to cater to the growing tourist population. In Ayodhya, Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Raymonds, Market99, Pantaloons, Domino's, Pizza Hut, and Reliance Smart have opened their retail stores, the report said. Manyavar, Reliance Trends, Zudio, Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Burger King, Domino's, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Spencer's, Reliance smart, Croma and Reliance Digital are present in Varanasi.



Anshuman Magazine Chairman & CEO, India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, said, "The rapid expansion of spiritual tourism in India is driving the growth of the country's faith-based tourism market." The government initiatives to promote tourism and improve

connectivity between pilgrimage sites are further boosting this growth, he added. "The rise of online retail platforms offering easy access to faith-based products and services is also a key factor," Magazine said. Retail brands across segments, including fashion &

apparel, food & beverage, hypermarkets, homeware & department stores, and consumer electronics brands, are expanding by tailoring the offerings to the pilgrim's needs. Ram Chandnani, Managing Director, Advisory & Transaction Services, CBRE India, said, "Driven by the growing popularity of spiritual tourism, investors are flocking to capitalise on the market's potential. Guided by a commitment to cater to the unique needs of spiritual travellers, these investments aim to deliver high-quality accommodations, bolster infrastructure, safeguard heritage sites, and ultimately drive regional economic growth."



things with the world, we should equally share beautiful things. I believe that what is good should also be visible. Nawaz was also present, so we celebrated the anniversary along with the children." She further stated, "I believe the troubles we had in our relationship were always caused by a third individual. However, that misunderstanding has been resolved. Because of our children, we have entirely yielded.

Aaliyah Siddiquie confirms 'misunderstanding resolved' with Nawazuddin

There are no options for being separated in life today since the children are growing up."

She also went on to mention that their daughter shares a close bond with her father and the separation left a massive impact on her. "Nawaz is very close to Shora and she was very disturbed after whatever happened. She couldn't tolerate it. So we decided that we are not going to fight and will live together, peacefully," she shared.

A couple of days ago, Aaliyah Siddiqui took to Instagram to share a frame-

Eva Mendes reveals it was 'no-brainer' for her to quit acting after having daughters

Ryan Gosling may be Ken, but his Barbie opted to take a back seat when they had kids. On the *Today* show, actor and Ryan's wife Eva Mendes explained why she stopped acting after their daughters were born. "It was almost just like a non-verbal agreement that it was like, 'Ok, he's going to work and I'm going to work. I'm just going to work here. He went and he did his job. He just happens to be really good at his job. And he did it and he came home," said Eva. She said it was a "no-brainer" for her to quit acting after the birth of their daughters because the job takes her on locations away from her family.

Eva Mendes has been in awe of Ryan the actor ever since they shared the screen space in Derek Cianfrance's 2012 epic crime drama *The Place Beyond the Pines*. "I have never experienced anything like that. The way he works, his commitment to his craft, how he wants to make everything as best as it can be, and that means making his co-stars as best as they can be. But unfortunately — or fortunately — there is only one Ryan," she added. Ryan, 43, and Eva, 50, started dating in 2011. While they remain unmarried, they had two daughters in 2016 and 2018 respectively.



Sakshi Tanwar to reportedly play Mandodari in Nitesh Tiwari's Ramayana

Despite the lack of an official announcement, acclaimed director Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana* remains one of Indian cinema's most anticipated projects. Over the past few months, various speculations have shed light on the film's probable cast, with Ranbir Kapoor rumored to play Lord Rama, Sai Pallavi as Sita, Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman, and Kannada actor Yash as Raavan. A recent report says that another talented actor will join the ensemble cast.

According to Filmibeat, prominent actress Sakshi Tanwar is being considered to play Raavan's wife, Mandodari. A source close to the production claimed, "Nitesh Tiwari already has a perfect cast in place for *Ramayana*, and Sakshi Tanwar has been cast as Raavan's wife Mandodari. She has been attending script reading sessions with the team and is excited to share screen space with *KGF* actor Yash." The source went on to say, "Not only her, but Lara Dutta and Rakul Preet Singh also participated in reading sessions." For those unfamiliar, Lara Dutta and Rakul Preet Singh are rumored to be circling the roles of Kaikeyi and Shurpanakha, respectively. Interestingly, this would not be Sakshi's first collaboration with filmmaker Nitesh Tiwari. They previously collaborated on the critically and commercially successful 2016 film *Dangal*, in which she played Aamir Khan's wife.

Anna Kendrick, Blake Lively all set to return for A Simple Favor 2

Anna Kendrick, Blake Lively, Henry Golding, Andrew Rannells, Bashir Salahuddin, Joshua Satine, Ian Ho, and Kelly McCormack will return for *A Simple Favor 2*, directed by Paul Feig.


The sequel is a co-production with Lionsgate and follows the studio's 2018 movie, *A Simple Favor*, which was a critical and commercial triumph, grossing more than \$97 million worldwide. Jessica Sharzer, who wrote the original film, penned the script, which is based on characters created by Darcy Bell. Laeta Kalogridis and Paul Feig revised it. *A Simple Favor 2* is produced by Paul Feig and Laura Fischer of Feigco Entertainment, with Jessica Sharzer serving as an executive producer.

Stephanie Smothers (Anna Kendrick) and Emily Nelson (Blake Lively) return in the film as they go to the stunning island of Capri, Italy, for Emily's lavish wedding to a wealthy Italian businessman. Expect murder and betrayal along with the gorgeous guests at a wedding with more twists and turns than the road from the Marina Grande to the Capri town square.

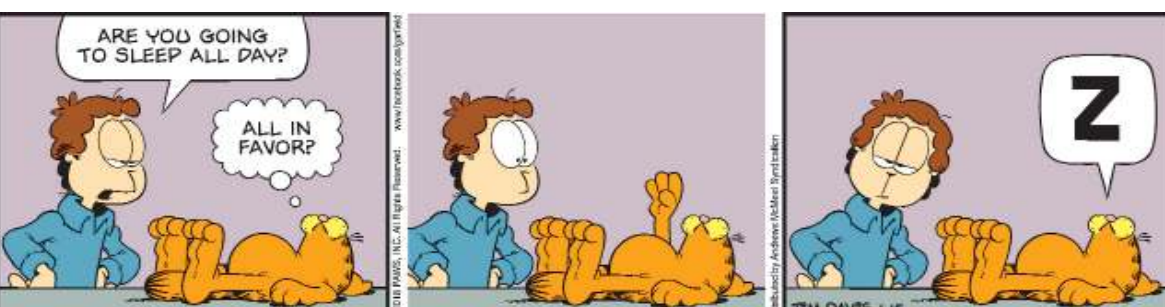
The film is scheduled to begin production in the spring and will be accessible for streaming on Prime Video.




ARCHIE




GARFIELD




NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



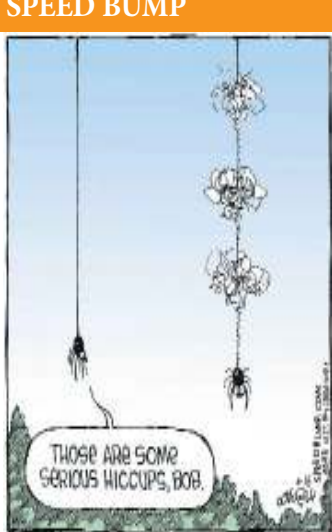
CALVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



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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.



Actress Shriya Pilgaonkar, who has for-ever been a travel freak, gets candid with *The Pioneer* exclusively for our Travelogue segment, sharing her love for travelling, her travel partner, a recent trip, and more.

Shriya Pilgaonkar finds her travel inspiration in her ‘Ajoba’

TEJAL SINHA

The first thing that comes to mind when we say travelling? Excitement? Enjoyment? Happiness? There are numerous such pleasant emotions. The excitement of packing your bags and visiting a new area can give a person shivers while also making them forget their issues. Similarly, for Shriya Pilgaonkar, travelling is not a luxury but a necessity and something that makes her happy and rejuvenates her.

“Travelling to me is something that brings me closer to myself,” shares the *Crackdown* actress over an exclusive chat for our special weekly column of **Travelogue**. “It puts things into perspective, and I think as an actor, so much about acting is about life, experiences, and the rush. The sense of adventure that I experience when I travel is something that really keeps me going. I’m absolutely passionate about it, and I make sure to take time to travel whenever I can between work.” It seems like her grandfather has been her travel partner. And as we go on to ask her about it, she says he has always been her travel inspiration.

“He’s 85, and all of these years, he has managed to fulfill his dreams in more than 100 countries. What I love about him is that for him, it’s just not about checking off what’s on his bucket list; he is truly a curious person who has that sense of wonder. He knows so much, and he loves people and cultures. I’ve been fortunate to travel with him, not just as a child. As a child, we travelled to Rajasthan, Mussorie, and several other places in India, and growing up, we went to Iceland together, which was beautiful, and we had also done a Mediterranean cruise together; it was a role reversal. When I grew up, I was the one who used to manage and organise everything. So I really like to travel with my grandfather because I think there’s such perspective, so many stories to share, and that’s

also something I really love about travelling: that I also love people, and there’s a sense of curiosity that even I have about human beings and their lives, and there’s so much you learn. It’s not just about other people but also about yourself when you are travelling.

Travelling with her grandfather is all about experiencing something new, and the duo always has a story to tell. Basically, her last long trip that she took was to Australia, and she feels fortunate to have visited Australia a number of times.

“It’s such a beautiful place, especially if you enjoy nature, adventure, and good food. Then it’s fantastic. I’ve done skydiving and scuba diving at the Great Barrier Reef, and I met some wonderful people there. It’s such an eclectic mix of art, culture, and fantastic food that I really enjoy. I especially love koala bears, so this time when I went, I also got to hold one of them, which was really cute.” But again, she really enjoys road trips, and in the future, she would love to go on a road trip as well. The best way that she likes to experience a place is by spending time with the locals through their food. For her, exploring local cuisine and street food makes her very excited, and of course, road trips are the best way to experience the energy of a place. *The Guilty Minds* actress is someone who enjoys wearing colourful clothes while she’s on vacation; of course, it depends on when she’s on a work trip. Well, that also makes for great pictures, but to her, more than pictures, “I really love to document my videos.

When I’m making videos, they are not generally for other people to see as much as they are for my digital scrapbook. I just like to make it because it’s fun to look back at it. But when I’m travelling my priority is to be in the moment, be present, and experience a place, not just be obsessed with what content I really want.” She feels there is no place like India when it comes to diversity in experiences while travelling. One place that she keeps running to every now and then is Landour, which is above Mussorie. “I think mountains are healing for me, and they put so much into perspective. I just love mountain air, and I’m just a happier person up in

the hills (she laughs).

I love beaches as well, but mountains are so special that I keep going on solo trips. In fact, my first solo backpacking trip was in Japan, where I used all the money that I made on my first project and went on a very budget-friendly solo backpacking trip to see the cherry blossoms, and it was beautiful. Then, talking of India, I also love Kerala. I feel each and every part of the country is so unique and so diverse. I haven’t explored the north-east enough, so that is what I really want to do.” Recently, celebrating her grandpa’s travels to 100 countries, she and her whole family travelled to Borneo for a family trip. Every year, she makes sure that she and her family go on at least one or two trips. With having to cut off some time from work, she says Goa has always been that rejuvenation place for her. An adventure freak and a foodie that she is, she likes to explore local food and eat a lot of food, but at the same time, she wonders if there are any adventure activities that she can do. “I’ve always had some wonderful spiritual experiences while travelling especially when I am underwater or right up in the air.

I feel just like Shriya, not Shriya the actor, daughter, or friend. I feel that being close to nature is like being close to God. I don’t really think of travelling as ticking off my bucket list. It really depends on what I want to do, and sometimes I think a place calls out to me. I’ve been to Berlin, Prague, on the most impromptu travel plan, or recently, I went to Bikaner for Holi. It can sometimes be an impromptu thing, and my grandfather said to me that travelling is not really about money. Yes, money is important when you travel, but there’s so much that you can do and so many options, even today, to go on a budget-friendly trip. You just need to have that will,” shares the *Murder in Agonda* star, who believes in being in the present moment and experiencing life to the fullest when travelling. On a concluding note, she shares that over the years she’s enjoyed going with the flow when it comes to travelling, and leaving that space for magic. She also credits her mom, who is also an adventurous person, with pushing Shriya to travel, even on solo trips.



Travelouge

‘I wasn’t traumatised in *Shaitaan*, having experienced it already in *Vash*’

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Shaitaan has proven to be Janki Bodiwala’s big hit recently. *Shaitaan* is a supernatural thriller that further demonstrates this Gujarati actress’s versatility in handling a variety of film genres. In a candid interview, the actress shares her knowledge on perfecting the art of remake, which we have exclusive access to the candid bytes and more!

“The script was written in a really balanced manner; my graph was improved much more in the remake. I swear to God, it ended up being a blessing for me! This time, I wasn’t traumatised because I had previously experienced the first one. Even though the movie had some really intense parts, the atmosphere was still really great. Everything felt normal to me, even if I was peeing in my trousers for a scene or hitting someone’s head on the wall. I wasn’t going overboard. Since the viewers were more affected by the

trauma, I was successful.”

She continues with some more thought-provoking observations, saying things like, “Post cut—we all start to giggle. The mood on the *Shaitaan* sets was like that. After such horrific events, it was a much-needed environment; otherwise, I would have gone into a trance. It was a first for me too.”

Most significant, adding to the same graph, is working with actors who have expertise. She could clearly remember, for instance, when she said, “These three seasoned actors were never late—not even a few minutes here or there. Such lengthy monologues would often be completed by R. Madhavan in two attempts, occasionally even on the first try. I was taken aback! I saw that he dislikes squandering the time of his team. However, Jyothika handled Angad and myself as if we were her own

children. She placed our pastry order! She would even bring candies for us.” She continues, “I don’t want to damage Ajay Devgn’s *Singham* persona, so don’t even get me started on him. The fact that Ajay sir was incredibly endearing to the children on the *Shaitaan* sets would surprise readers. Laughing and making jokes with our little boy on the sets was more his style than having thoughtful conversations! He doesn’t seem to be one of those actors in the business who likes to brag, as I also noticed. No, that isn’t his mannerism.”

The actress also recalled, “While doing the film in Hindi, it taught me a little more,” after pursuing commercial longevity after the film’s release. “For instance, you must not overemphasise dramatic moments! Subsequently, I had heard tales of Bollywood directors being extremely irrational while on set. My director, Vikas Bahl, exposed this fraud! On the *Shaitaan* sets, he never yelled or attempted to force someone to acknowledge him as the director. He didn’t even let us worry about it!”

The actress continues, revealing a few more behind-the-scenes details: “I won’t lie, there were times when I was afraid of certain situations. It was terrifying as hell to smash my younger brother’s skull against the wall in the movie! As a working actor, I could still feel the hurt. As a little boy, my co-actor simply asked me to go for it since he was so fluid. Incredible. In fact, I found it too hard to play the same character in a different genre again.”

Finally, she states, “Big names have come to my film’s screening, but I went crazy as soon as I saw Kartik Aaryan. I was genuinely touched when he approached me and said how well I had performed. Thank God, I have a video to save the memories for all time.”



Actress Janki Bodiwala, who was recently seen in *Shaitaan*, starring alongside Ajay Devgn, R. Madhavan, and Jyothika, speaks to *The Pioneer*, sharing some candid bytes and more in this exclusive chat.

Revitalise your beauty routine with neem tulsi in ayurvedic treatments

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in ancient holistic practices for skincare, with Ayurveda taking center stage. Ayurveda, a traditional Indian approach to medicine, emphasises the use of natural ingredients to promote overall well-being, including skincare. Among the plethora of herbs cherished in Ayurveda, Neem, and Tulsi stand out for their remarkable benefits in skincare.

The use of Neem, or Indian lilac, for treating common skincare issues such as inflammation and acne has been practised for thousands of years in India. This medicinal plant offers diverse skincare benefits, making its dark green leaves a valuable resource. Additionally, opting for toxin-free skincare products can further enhance the benefits of harnessing nature’s goodness for healthier skin.

Some of the skincare benefits of Neem are:

Exfoliating: Neem is renowned for its efficacy in addressing blackheads and whiteheads by eliminating impurities, dust, bacteria, and dead skin cells from pores. Moreover, its exfoliating properties aid in minimising enlarged pores. Utilising a scrub or cleanser infused with neem for facial cleansing, or applying a neem-based face mask, can effectively leverage these benefits.

Moisturising: The essential fatty acids and Vitamin E derived from neem leaves are swiftly absorbed by the skin, effectively moisturising dry and cracked areas. Incorporating Neem into your daily skincare routine creates a protective shield against environmental stressors, safeguarding the skin from moisture depletion.

Reducing Scars: Neem is reputed for its ability to expedite wound healing and diminish the visibility of scars. Its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory attributes not only help deter infections but also play a crucial role in mitigating scar development. By fostering a healing environment, Neem aids in reducing scar formation, promoting skin regeneration, and restoring skin health.

Toner: Neem acts as a natural skin toner, helping to tighten pores and improve skin texture. It can be used to balance oil production and reduce the occurrence of acne and blackheads.

Another marquee ingredient, Tulsi, also recognized as Holy Basil, holds an esteemed place in Ayurvedic medicine with a history spanning thousands of years, renowned for its multifaceted health advantages. Embedded

deeply in Hindu culture, it’s frequently cultivated in households for its spiritual significance and medicinal uses. Over time, Tulsi has garnered attention for offering an array of benefits for enhancing skin beauty and health, leading to its widespread incorporation into various skincare formulations.

Some of the skincare benefits of Tulsi are listed below:

Anti-Inflammatory and Antioxidant: Tulsi contains eugenol, which is known for its anti-inflammatory properties. Applying Tulsi-infused products to the skin can help reduce redness and irritation, making it beneficial for individuals with sensitive or inflamed skin conditions such as acne or eczema.

Anti-Bacterial: Tulsi is advantageous for managing acne owing to its antibacterial characteristics. Acne occurs when hair follicles in the skin become obstructed and become infected with bacteria. Utilizing antibacterial elements such as tulsi could be beneficial for individuals with acne-prone skin, aiding in the prevention of breakouts.

Anti-aging: Using Tulsi can help prevent wrinkles, fine lines, and sagging skin. Moreover, certain properties of tulsi, like its ethanolic and rosmarinic components, help maintain the skin’s moisture and suppleness by protecting hyaluronic acid from breaking down. They also prevent collagen fibers from degrading, which keeps the skin looking bright and reduces the chance of scarring.

Promotion of Collagen Production: Antioxidants in Tulsi stimulate collagen production in the skin. Collagen is a protein that provides structure and elasticity to the skin. By promoting collagen synthesis, Tulsi can help maintain skin firmness and reduce the appearance of wrinkles and sagging. Together, these Ayurvedic herbs present a harmonious synergy, offering a gentle yet effective approach to achieving radiant and balanced skin, echoing the timeless wisdom of Ayurvedic skincare practices.

(The author, Dr. Ushakiran, is the Head Doctor at Sadayush Ayurvedic Center.)



'Tillu is expressive, but Siddhu holds his emotions, rest we are same'

K. RAMYA SREE

After cult success of 2022 film *DJ Tillu*, actor Siddu Jonnalagadda is back with its sequel to entertain the audience once again with his quirky dialogues and fun comedy.

While Radhika from *DJ Tillu* has become very popular, this time Lilly is said to take over Radhika in this installment directed by Mallik Ram.

With Anupama Parameswaran playing the female lead, the movie is making loud noise everywhere as the songs and videos released from the film have gone viral already.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the lead actor of the film, who is super excited and nervous about *Tillu Square*, spoke to the media persons here and

expressed confidence that *Tillu Square* will be fresh in terms of characterisation and story.

The second part too is a crime comedy. Both, Siddhu and Anupama are said to have equal screen presence in the film.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Siddhu expressed that, in real life, he thinks very similarly to Tillu.

"Tillu is a confused person who expresses himself freely while I hold my emotions inside. Playing such a role, keeping my spirits up, and sharing my perspective on the world was freeing. His confusions provide amusement for others," he shared.

Before going ahead with the interview, he expressed that he doesn't want the audience to compare *Tillu Square* with *DJ Tillu* while watching in theatres for a better movie experience.

To keep his character very authentic, the actor has not shot any other film since the first part was released, as they wanted to maintain the same looks of Tillu in both parts. He is not just a dedicated actor but also a dedicated writer too. For all his films, he is involved in the writing process, and for *Tillu Square*, he played a major role in writing. Siddhu feels writing his characters in the movie helps him understand the philosophy of a character better enhancing his

overall performance. He continued, "You can easily comprehend the beats, rhythms, and pauses, especially in a movie like *Tillu Square* where a talkative character plays a crucial role. Being a writer also helps one better comprehend the arc of a tale while editing. I got along well with our editor, Naveen Nooli. Right now, I want to develop stories that will advance my acting career."

Writing genius Trivikram has shared his piece of advice too for this film, as he is also one of the producers of *Tillu Square*, and Siddhu is thankful to Trivikram for his involvement, as his insights were very useful whenever he went in with the drafts of the scripts. Furthermore, he also expressed: "Though nothing is official yet, there are plans to turn Tillu into a franchise. Fortunately, I found a special point when I chose to create *Tillu Square*, and we proceeded. We'll have to wait and see how our ideas develop, but we have a few." However, he stressed that he will not jump into writing *Tillu 3* immediately and that he wants to work on a couple of projects first, where he is just the actor. "I want to showcase a gritty side to myself and write a serious story. The screenplay for Nandini Reddy's film is being written. It'll go on floors after Bommarillu Bhaskar's film. I want to wait and try genres," he concluded.

Actor Siddu Jonnalagadda, who has gained some mass traction with his stint in *DJ Tillu*, is back with the sequel to this superhit film. The star, speaks to *The Pioneer* ahead of the release, sharing some interesting tidbits about the film.

Sharwa looks his stylish best in *Manamey* first single

The first single from actor Sharwanand's 35th film *Manamey* was released on Thursday. Helmed by director Sriram Aditya and produced by People Media Factory, the film stars Krithi Shetty playing the female lead. The first single, *Ika Na Maate*, has Hesham Abdul Wahab do wonders not only with his music but also with his voice. It's entertaining to see Sharwanand perform with such

style and elegance. The hook step, in particular, gets young people excited. Sharwa looks stylish like never before in this song. The director introduced Sharwanand in a sleek avatar through this song. Tipped to be a unique family entertainer, the movie also stars the child artist Vikram Aditya in a pivotal role. Popular technician Prawn Pudi is the editor and Jonny Shaik is the art director. The dialogues for the movie are provided by Arjun Carthyk, Tagore, and Venky.

Allu Arjun's wax figure at Madame Tussauds Dubai was unveiled

Actor Allu Arjun is setting new benchmarks in the Indian cinema. Be it in films or in his personal life, he always sets inspiring goals for his fans and others. Recently, it was made official that his wax figure at Madame Tussauds Dubai is being made.

The actor took to his social media to announce that his statue is finally being unveiled on Thursday. The actor, who left for Dubai with his wife and kids three days ago, shared a picture on his social media where he expressed how excited he was about the launch. He

called this a "milestone moment for every actor."

Recently, the actor has won National Award for his performance in *Pushpa The Rise*, becoming the first Telugu actor to bag this award, apart from touching 25 million followers on Instagram and becoming the first Telugu actor to achieve that feat. With this wax statue of his, now the actor has only added more feathers to his cap. Allu Arjun is now busy with the shooting of *Pushpa: The Rule*, which will be released this year.



Family Star trailer hints at a wholesome entertainer

Actor Vijay Deverakonda and Mrunal Thakur starrer *Family Star* had its theatrical trailer launched in Hyderabad and Tirupati on Thursday. Directed by Parasuram Petla, the film is backed by Dil Raju. The trailer shows Vijay and Mrunal in two different roles. Vijay impresses the audience with his massy and classy looks. The trailer hints that Vijay is a thorough family man and it also shows the problems in his love life. There have been scenes where

the duo worked in a foreign country, all dressed up in formals, and in India, donning a massy lungi look. The chemistry between Vijay and Mrunal was impressive in the trailer, and so were the dialogues. It seems like this Summer the film will impress the audience as a wholesome entertainer and it was nice to watch Vijay play simple boy from a middle class family without much hullabaloo after *Geeta Govindam*. The film is heading for a grand theatrical release on April 5. Meanwhile, speaking about the film, director Parasuram Petla

said, "Every Telugu audience and family will remember this movie, Vijay and Mrunal for years. This movie is like an eye feast." Dil Raju shared, "Parasuram designed Vijay's character very carefully imbibing class, mass, youthful, entertainment, and emotion. Vijay's character is very special. The lighter vein comedy in Parasuram's films is impressive. *Family Star* has a story that is universally loved by all, regardless of mass, class, youth, or family."



Sasivadane all set for its grand release on April 19

Following his acclaimed performance in *Palasa 1978*, Rakshit Atluri returns to the screen in *Sasivadane*, a charming romantic entertainer co-starring Komalee. This delightful collaboration is helmed by writer-director Saimohan Ubbana and produced by Ahiteja Bellamkonda, marking a significant partnership between AG Film Company and SVS Studios Pvt. Ltd. Mark your calendars for April 19th, 2024, as *Sasivadane* prepares for a grand worldwide release. The film's captivating teaser, trailer, and songs have already piqued the interest of moviegoers, and the makers are planning exciting promotional activities to further heighten anticipation. Adding to the excitement, the latest song, *Godavari Atu Vaipo*, has just been released. Kittu Vissapragada's beautiful lyrics blend seamlessly with Saravana Vasudevan's heartfelt and youthful music, creating a melody that resonates with the audience. Anudeep Dev's enchanting vocals, complemented by the chorus of Vasa Pavani, Lakshmi Meghana, Maneesha Padranki, and Rachita, bring the song to life. The picturesque backdrop of the Godavari River adds visual splendor to the musical experience.

Anudeep Dev's captivating background score immerses viewers in the story, while Saravana Vasudevan's soulful tunes evoke a range of emotions. Cinematographer Shrie SaiKumar Daara's stunning visuals capture the scenic locations, enhancing the film's aesthetic appeal. Rangasthalam Mahesh, Sriraman, Jabardasth Bobby, Praveen Yandamuri, and Deepak Prince play pivotal roles in the film, which is enriched with youthful and romantic dialogues.

TOLLYWOOD WELCOMES SIVAM MEDIA: A NEW ERA IN FILM PRODUCTION



March 28 marks the auspicious launch of Tollywood's newest production company, 'Sivam Media', owned by senior journalist Siva Mallala. The grand inauguration took place on Thursday, graced by the presence of renowned figures including actor Ali, producer-director Praveena, and Anil Kadiyala, who unveiled the logo and banner of 'Sivam Media'. Expressing his delight, Ali remarked, "Siva has been like a brother to me for the past 20 years. Witnessing his journey from humble beginnings to establishing his own production banner fills me with immense joy."

Good films matter over number of films for Aayushi Patell

PNS | HYDERABAD

We recently wrote about *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo* director Ramakhanth Reddy and actor Vishva Karthikeya and their reasons for making the film, which is all set hit big screens on March 29. Produced by Nani Movie Works and Raamaa Creations, the film stars Aayushi Patell as the female lead and speaking about her role in the film, she expressed, "My role will be very new. There are multiple shades in my character. It is not like a regular heroine role. Each scene will give the audience a new experience. My character gets one opinion in the interval and another in the climax." The actress is making her debut into

films with *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo*. Despite getting opportunities for three other projects before this film, she didn't accept them because she didn't want to perform any adult scenes like kissing and exposing. "I got opportunities in three projects before *Kaliyugam Pattanamlo* was released. I don't like lip-lock scenes and exposing on screen. That's why I didn't accept many movies. I am choosing movies where acting is important. I did not enter the industry to make money. It doesn't matter if I do only a few films. All I want is to do good films."

The movie was majorly shot in Kadapa, and interestingly, no set was erected for this film, and all the shooting was done in live locations. Having shot there for many days, Aayushi finds the people of Kadapa very supportive. She further added, "The story was narrated to me for more than two hours. Ramakanth has great clarity. Our director never says cut. It's because if he says cut, the expressions at the end will be missed. Our director used to be very jovial on the sets. RR took the movie to another level."

SIDDHARTH, ADITI RAO ENGAGED, NOT MARRIED!

Putting an end to all the speculations about their wedding, actor Siddharth took to his social media posting a picture of him and his girlfriend, Aditi Rao Hydari.

However, the speculations were somewhat true. Although the couple didn't get married at a temple in Wanaparthy, they got engaged at that temple.

Siddharth posted a picture of them flaunting their engagement rings. He captioned: "She said yes. ENGAGED." This post has now gone viral, with people from all corners congratulating them for their new beginnings in life. As the couple always kept their relationship a private affair, this announcement made netizens very happy.

No further details about the wedding is made official at the time of writing this article.

