



sunday pioneer

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వాలంటీర్లు

దేశంలోనే తొలిసారిగా 2.66 లక్షల వాలంటీర్లను నియమించి పాలన సంస్కరణలను కొత్త పుంతలు తొక్కించిన చరిత్ర జగనన్నది.

గ్రామ, వార్డు సచివాలయాలు

15,004 గ్రామ, వార్డు సచివాలయాలు ఏర్పాటు చేసి ప్రతి ఊరిలో సగటున రెండు వేల జనాభాకు 10 ప్రభుత్వ ఉద్యోగాలు సృష్టించి, పాలనను వికేంద్రీకరించిన ఘన చరిత్ర జగనన్న సొంతం.

విద్య

నాడు-నేడుతో ప్రభుత్వ విద్యావ్యవస్థలో నవశకం లిఖించి, 38వేలకుపైగా పాఠశాలలను ఆధునికీకరించి, పేద పిల్లలకు ఇంగ్లీషు చదువులు అందించి, అంతర్జాతీయ ప్రమాణాలతో కూడిన ఐబీ సిలబస్ ను వారికి చేరువ చేసి, డిజిటల్ విద్యకు బాటలు పరచి, కార్పొరేట్లకు దీటుగా పేద విద్యార్థులకు యూనిఫాం మొదలు పుస్తకాల వరకు విద్యాకానుక ద్వారా అందించిన దార్శనికుడు జగనన్న.

వైద్యం

ప్రభుత్వ ఆసుపతులను, మెడికల్ కాలేజీలను తీర్చిదిద్ది 'ఫ్యామిలీ డాక్టర్' కార్యక్రమంతో ఇంటింటికీ వైద్యాన్ని చేరువ చేసిన సంస్కరణ శీలి జగనన్న.

నేరుగా నగదు బదిలీ (డీబీటీ)

దేశానికే దిక్పాచిగా అయిదేళ్ల కాలంలో అవినీతికి ఆస్కారం లేకుండా రూ.2.74 లక్షల కోట్ల సంక్షేమ ఫలాలను పేదల ఖాతాల్లో జమ చేసిన చరిత్ర జగనన్నది.

పంచన్ను

దేశంలో మరే రాష్ట్రంలోనూ లేని విధంగా 66.34 లక్షలకుపైగా అవ్యాతాతలకు ప్రతి నెలా ఒకటో తేదినే తలుపుతట్టి, వాలంటీర్ల ద్వారా పంచన్ను అందించిన ఆదర్శ చరిత్ర జగనన్నది.

సామాజిక న్యాయం

కేబినెట్ లోనూ, పార్టీ పదవుల్లోనూ, అసెంబ్లీ పార్లమెంటు సీట్లలోనూ సగానికీపైగా... ఎస్సీ, ఎస్టీ, బీసీ, మైనార్టీలకు కేటాయించి, సామాజిక న్యాయ చరిత్రలో సరికొత్త అధ్యాయం లిఖించిన సామ్యవాది జగన్.

మహిళా సాధికారత

కోటి మందికిపైగా మహిళలకు ఆసరాగా, చేయూతగా-1 కాపు నేస్తం, ఈబీసీ నేస్తంగా మారి, అమ్మ ఒడి పట్టి వారి వికాస అధ్యాయానికి శ్రీకారం చుట్టిన పురోగమనవాది జగనన్న.

ఇళ్ల స్థలాలు

ఎప్పుడూ కనీవినీ ఎరుగని విధంగా 31 లక్షల ఇళ్ల పట్టాలు అక్క చల్లెమ్మల పేరుతో ఇచ్చి, వాటిలో 22 లక్షల ఇళ్లు కట్టుకోవడానికి తోడ్పాటు అందించి వారి సొంతింటి కల నెరవేర్చిన మానవీయ మూర్తి మన జగనన్న.

పోర్టులు/ఫిషింగ్ హార్బర్లు

స్వాతంత్ర్యానంతరం మరెవరూ చేయలేని స్థాయిలో ఏకంగా 4 ఓడరేవులు, 10 ఫిషింగ్ హార్బర్లు నిర్మిస్తూ ఆధునిక ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ నిర్మాతగా నిలిచిన చరిత్ర జగనన్నది.

17 మెడికల్ కాలేజీలు

స్వాతంత్ర్యం వచ్చాక ఏడున్నర దశాబ్దాల కాలంలో ఎన్నడూ లేనివిధంగా రాష్ట్రంలో 17 మెడికల్ కళాశాలలు నిర్మిస్తూ... ఆరోగ్య ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ నిర్మాణానికి కట్టుబాటు చాటిన ఆధునిక చరకుడు మన జగనన్న.



జగన్... సంస్కరణల సునామీ!

ADVT ISSUED BY YSR CONGRESS PARTY

సంస్కరణల సారథి... సామాన్యుల పెన్నిధి
మన జగనన్నను గెలిపించుకుందాం...



ఫ్యాన్ గుర్తుకే మన ఓటు



No.1712/Elec. A/A2/2024-76



Chief Minister's evening with veteran journalists

A journalist's basic job is to be the people's eyes and ears. The executive head of a state, who believes in keeping his ear to the ground, would love to take time out for newshounds, especially veterans in the profession who might have seen many CMs come and go. Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy willingly attended a 'Meet the Press' event organised recently by the Press Club. What did not go unnoticed at the highly anticipated event was that veteran journalists got special treatment, going by the many chances given to them to shoot questions. This table of 'grey eminence' had a mix of journalists, including K Ramchandra Murthy, Allam Narayana, Somashekar, Nagesh, and Gowrishankar, among others. All told, the message from Revanth Reddy is clear that, he, unlike his immediate predecessor, is open to feedback from all sections of journalists and that he has a high regard for scribes who know the pulse of people. The event was supposed to begin at 8:30 pm. However, it started at 9:49 pm and had to be concluded around 11:20 pm in view of the closing time of newspapers' city/late city edition. Later, the Chief Minister joined the table occupied by veteran journalists for dinner, which ended around 12:10 am with the seasoned guys prepared to sit through the 'revved-up' conversation.

CHOPPER CHODO, BUS NIKALO

Election campaigning style differs from neta to neta and is often also a reflection of their experience. First-time Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy must have realized it belatedly. The Chief Minister recently shared with scribes how campaigning in this hot summer was difficult even for star campaigners like him. "People think it is easy travelling by helicopter. But it is even more difficult in this hot summer -- very difficult", he exclaimed. The Chief Minister had used a chopper during the Assembly poll campaign too, but was comfortable then because of winter. Realising

the summer heat, Revanth's bête noire and former CM K Chandrasekhar Rao neither used a chopper nor campaigned in the open. He simply sat in an AC bus for campaigning stops during his Bus Yatra. He did more than 97 meetings in the Assembly elections using helicopter. Call it the consequence of the outcome of Assembly polls or whatever; his feet are literally on the ground now.

REPORTERS' DIARY

DAKHNI RULES IN CAMPAIGN

It pays for leaders, whether local or national, to connect with people in their language and, more importantly, dialect. With Dakhni ruling the election campaign in Telangana, even Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his Hyderabad public meeting, used Dakhni to strike a chord with voters. He said "BRS, BJP, AIMIM nakko, BJP ko ich vote dhenge". AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, throughout his poll campaign, has been using biting satire in Dakhni to corner Prime Minister. A journalist from a media house in north India, who was here to cover the election campaign, opined that their audience liked Dakhni so much so that they prefer a spokesperson who could speak the dialect, which sounds like an amalgamation of Hindustani, Telugu and Marathi.

MEDIA'S BLINKERED APPROACH

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do", goes a proverb. It underlines the importance of adapting oneself to the customs of the people who are in a certain place or situation and behave like they do. Curiously, journalists do not follow this basic etiquette even when they are in other states on campaign trails during polls. At pressers conducted by national leaders, such media representatives adopt a blinkered attitude and deliberately raise queries relating to non-local issues. Telangana has just hosted many such national media rep-

resentatives who are both blind and deaf to local issues, but ask questions about all other corners of the nation - Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow, Kolkata or whatever. Another problem with them is that they compete with one another in asking questions, virtually mistaking local reporters' decency for diffidence. During Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent press conference in Hyderabad, a senior reporter from a Telugu media house vented his anger at some national media representatives, observing: "What can Delhi reporters ask if Hyderabad reporters ask about Kejriwal's issue?"

THERE IS MANY A SLIP BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE LIP

At times, the outcome may be certain; but a slip of the tongue could prove costly; more so, during election campaigns. During public meetings, netas can ill-afford to shoot themselves in their foot. Unfortunately, in both Telugu states, prominent netas did precisely this. In Telangana, BRS trouble shooter T Harish Rao, while campaigning in the Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency in support of BRS candidate G Vinod Kumar, mistakenly appealed to people to 'vote for the Congress' in the Lok Sabha elections scheduled for 13th May. It took shocked BRS candidate Vinod Kumar some time to correct Harish, who then sheepishly reworded his appeal to 'favour BRS'. Of course, Congress leaders who had fond hopes that Harish will join them winked at the mistake. Likewise, in Andhra Pradesh, Telugu Desam Party supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, while addressing a public meeting in the Rayachoti Assembly constituency, urged people to vote for Srikanth Reddy who is the YSR Congress' candidate for the seat in the Assembly elections. After 'Ayyo Rama' cries from Ramprasad Reddy, the TDP candidate for the seat, Chandrababu corrected himself. The affected candidates know that such mistakes are no laughing matter during high-stakes poll.

(With inputs from Naveena Ghanate, K Venkateshwarlu and SNCN Acharyulu)

Botsa Jhansi firm on protecting steel plant from privatisation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Botsa Jhansi Lakshmi, the YSRCP candidate for the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha seat, reiterated her resolute opposition to any privatisation efforts concerning the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. Emphasising its crucial role in regional development and employment, she denounced alliances that could potentially lead to privatization, asserting the necessity of keeping the plant under public ownership.

During a press conference on Saturday, Botsa Jhansi Lakshmi defended her track record of advocating for the preservation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant in Parliament. She insisted that the plant's future must remain in the public sector to bolster the region's growth and job opportunities. Furthermore, she underscored Visakhapatnam's significance



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as an administrative hub, asserting that its prosperity would catalyze overall progress for Uttar Andhra. Pledging to

prioritize the development of the IT sector in Visakhapatnam, she appealed for the opportunity to maxi-

mize the city's potential.

Botsa Satyanarayana adopted a combative stance, directing pointed criticism at political opponents, particularly Chandrababu Naidu and his Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Satyanarayana accused Naidu of obstructing government schemes through alleged manipulation of the Election Commission and neglecting the welfare of the underprivileged. In a blistering rebuke, Satyanarayana portrayed Naidu's pursuit of victory as myopic, alleging that he prioritized personal gains over public welfare. He further disparaged Naidu's leadership, likening his party to a "family enterprise" and questioning the credentials of his son, Lokesh Naidu, to critique the current Chief Minister, Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The exchange of barbs between these political figures underscores the intense polar-

High-decibel election campaign ends in AP

Continued on Page 3

YSRCP chief Reddy and TDP supremo Naidu held several poll rallies across the state.

Other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several union ministers including Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah, and Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi undertook poll campaigns for their respective party candidates. For the smooth conduct of the polls, the Election Commission has deployed 1.06 lakh security personnel, who included 3,500 Karnataka police, 4,500 Tamil Nadu police, 1,614 ex-servicemen and 246 retired police personnel, among others.

Meanwhile, exuding confidence in winning the polls, the YSRCP chief asserted that he is no 'Abhimanyu' to succumb to the alleged political conspiracies plotted by the opposition parties. In a post on 'X', Reddy called himself 'Arjun', who is accompanied by Lord Krishna-like people to emerge triumphant. Opposition leader Naidu in a post on 'X' appealed to the people of the state to exercise their franchise on May 13 as it is crucial for the future direction of Andhra Pradesh. Requesting every individual to mobilise four more voters, he called on Andhra Pradesh people living in other states also to come and vote, adding that the NDA alliance has a clear-cut blueprint to herald development.

Section 144 in force as 'silent period' begins

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In Araku, Paderu, and Rampachodavaram ACs, polling will be conducted from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., while in Palakonda, Kurupam, and Salur, polling hours are from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

During the silent period, a Dry Day has been declared, with a ban on the sale of liquor. Additionally, orders under Section 144 of CrPC will be enforced, prohibiting unlawful assemblies and public meetings.

Meena emphasised that no loudspeakers will be permitted during the 48-hour silence period. Political functionaries and party workers not registered as voters in the constituency must leave immediately after the campaign period ends. Exceptions will be made for temple cities and tourist places, which require careful consideration. Office bearers of political parties can remain at state head-

quarters but are restricted from leaving except for essential party-related activities. Measures will be taken to monitor hotels, lodges, and community halls to prevent outsiders from taking advantage of the situation for voting purposes. Bulk SMS campaigns by political parties are also prohibited during this period.

Regarding public transportation, services like buses, taxis, three-wheelers, and rickshaws will operate normally to facilitate travel to essential places such as railway stations, bus stands, and hospitals. However, only designated election and police officials are permitted to use mobile or wireless sets within a 100-meter perimeter of polling stations. Meena provided an update on seized items, including cash amounting to Rs 7,103.22 lakh, liquor valued at Rs 3,545.31 lakh.

YSRCP, TDP, ...

Continued on Page 3

He further said these leaders were under Modi's control as the latter has ED, CBI and other enforcement agencies at his disposal.

The Gandhi scion said Rajasekhara Reddy was like a brother to his father Rajiv Gandhi and both leaders shared a personal relationship also.

As and when the INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre after the Lok Sabha elections, he claimed it will accord a 10-year special category status to Andhra Pradesh and fulfil other promises.

Vijayamma..

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people to bless her (Sharmila) and send her to the Parliament," said Vijayamma in the video message shared by the Congress party.

Reminding of the love and affection showered on YSR, she asked for similar support to Sharmila in the forthcoming elections. Sharmila has come before the electorate seeking support like her late father, Vijayamma said, and appealed to supporters to allow her daughter to serve them like YSR.

EC not responding to complaints..

Continued on Page 3

Reddy criticised the Election Commission's silence in the face of what he described as malicious articles and false propaganda circulated by media outlets sympathetic to the TDP (Telugu Desam Party). He further alleged that inflammatory remarks made by figures such as Pawan Kalyan and Lokesh, which purportedly instigated violence against Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, had been overlooked by the Election Commission. Expressing doubts about the impartiality of the electoral process, Reddy asserted that the Election Commission's apparent bias towards the opposition bloc raised concerns about the peaceful conduct of elections. He highlighted instances where officials complained against alliance leaders were swiftly transferred, which, according to Reddy, undermined the morale of the administrative apparatus.

YSRCP well poised for second straight landslide victory: Sajjala

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He emphasized the government's fulfilment of pre-poll promises and the delivery of quality services to scheme beneficiaries over the past five years. Reddy affirmed the continuation of these efforts once YSRCP assumes power for the second consecutive term.

Reddy commended the government's focus on sustainable growth, noting an increase in the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) even during the COVID-19 pandemic. He credited Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership for prioritizing the welfare and development of the state. The YSRCP's comprehensive welfare-oriented develop-

ment model, according to Reddy, has been successfully implemented in Andhra Pradesh. He cited economic growth, reflected in the GSDP increase from 2.9% to 4%, and significant investments in industries as evidence of the government's success.

Reddy highlighted the establishment of 17 new medical colleges and improvements in the education sector, positioning Andhra Pradesh at the forefront nationally. He underscored ongoing efforts to enhance economic growth through the construction of new ports, fishing harbours, and fish landing centres, as well as investments in solar power to reduce financial burdens. Critiquing the

opposition, Reddy accused Naidu of prioritizing alliances over advocating for the people's welfare during elections. He dismissed opposition attempts to spread false propaganda, such as the Land Titling Act, as signs of their failure. Reddy also pointed out contradictions within the opposition alliance, particularly regarding job and educational reservations for Muslims.

Regarding potential alliances at the national level, Reddy stated that YSRCP would support whoever serves the state's interests best. He noted a shift in urban loyalties towards YSRCP, attributing it to changing mindsets and the impact of social media.

JAGAN TO PITHAPURAM PEOPLE...

Continued on Page 3

fearing it would enhance the reputation of the Jagan government." "While the government's tenure spans 60 months, the opposition's conspiracy-laden tactics have stifled governance for only 57 months. To impede aid delivery to beneficiaries, the opposition colluded with Delhi to postpone benefits until elections," CM Jagan added.

CM Jagan noted the Opposition's dissemination of misinformation regarding the Land Titling Act and registrations. He pointed out, "Chandrababu's brother-in-law, Nandamuri Balakrishna, acquired lands in Rushikonda, Visakhapatnam, while Pawan Kalyan bought land in Mangalagiri. Were original registered deeds provided, or just photocopies? Nine lakh people registered their lands in

the State, all receiving authentic deeds."

"The Opposition's flashy manifestos during elections are swiftly forgotten afterwards. In contrast, we've honoured 99% of our manifesto pledges, treating it akin to a sacred text, unlike previous administrations," CM Jagan asserted.

"We've revolutionized government schools by introducing English medium education, digital teaching aids, free tablets for 8th graders, TOEFL classes from 3rd grade, an IB curriculum with specialized subject teachers, and bilingual textbooks. Additionally, we've initiated schemes for fee reimbursement, partnered with international universities for online certified courses, and mandated internships," CM Jagan elaborated.

In a bid to empower women, the government has launched

failed to diminish CM Jagan's standing among the electorate.

He refuted allegations made by the opposition regarding property acquisitions, pointing out that people like Balakrishna and

Pawan Kalyan had legally obtained the necessary documentation for their purchases. Nani condemned these falsehoods as politically motivated attempts to discredit the YSRCP and CM Jagan ahead of the elections.

As voters rush...

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The Chillakallu toll plaza in the Jaggiyapeta mandal of the NTR district witnessed a notable increase in vehicular traffic on Saturday, primarily due to voters travelling from Telangana to Andhra Pradesh to participate in the elections. In anticipation of the surge in vehicles, authorities have augmented the toll counters to expedite the process.

Meanwhile, bus and railway stations are bustling with passengers, reminiscent of the rush observed during festivals like Sankranti and Dasara. Many individuals are opting for bus travel to reach their destinations, as trains are operating at full capacity despite having open tickets available.



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4% Muslim quota
YSRCP calls
for clarity on from TDP & JSP

Jaipur-based
entrepreneur
figures on Fortune's

Balancing thrills of
ACTING
with joys of motherhood

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

KCR did not learn lessons even after people defeated him. He has struck a secret deal with the BJP to protect his daughter Kavitha, who was allegedly involved in the Delhi liquor scam and to protect his hundreds of acres around Hyderabad. KCR is criticising the BJP during the day and holding talks with them at night.

- Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Minister

DON'T MISS...

All steps in place for elections..

The District Election Officer and Collector, Dr A Mallikarjuna has announced the successful completion of all requisite preparations for the forthcoming elections in Visakhapatnam district. With an unwavering commitment to upholding democratic principles, Dr Mallikarjuna assures the 20,12,373 eligible voters of the district of a conducive environment to exercise their fundamental right to vote. In a detailed briefing during a press conference on...

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Elaborate arrangements..

District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar has said that all arrangements have been made for polling in the Prakasam district peacefully on May 13. Addressing a press conference along with SP Garud Sumit here on Saturday, the Collector called on the voters not to yield to temptations and exercise franchise. The Collector said that model polling stations were set up in a bid to enhance the polling percentage. Six polling ...

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IMF doubts cash-strapped...

The IMF has said that Pakistan faces major debt-repayment challenges and expressed serious doubts over the cash-strapped country's capacity to repay the global lender, according to a media report on Saturday. The Washington-based bank's assessment of Pakistan's economy came as an IMF support team reached the country on Friday to hold talks with officials here after Islamabad requested a fresh bailout package under the Extended Fund Facility ...

-MONEY

Strong solar storm hits Earth...

An unusually strong solar storm hitting Earth could produce northern lights in the US this weekend and potentially disrupt power and communications. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued a rare severe geomagnetic storm warning when a solar outburst reached Earth on Friday afternoon, hours sooner than anticipated. The effects were due to last through the weekend and possibly into next week. NOAA alerted operators of power plants and spacecraft in orbit to take precautions, as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "For most people here on planet Earth, they won't have to do anything," said Rob Steenburgh, a scientist with NOAA's Space ...

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OBTUSE ANGLE



JAGAN TO PITHAPURAM PEOPLE

Elect Vanga, I'll make her Dy CM

CM flays Oppn's manifesto, alleging it would burden the State with Rs 1.65 lakh cr annually

- Warns against electing Pawan Kalyan, stating it would benefit Naidu and questions Kalyan's reliability
- Accuses Oppn, particularly Naidu, of conspiring to hinder govt schemes and aid delivery
- Highlights govt's achievements, including education reforms, women's empowerment, and farmer welfare schemes
- Exposes Naidu's unfulfilled promises, questioning his credibility
- Urges voters to support YSRCP and dismiss Naidu's 'Super Six' promises

PNS ■ PITHAPURAM

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy assured the residents of the Pithapuram Assembly constituency that YSRCP MLA candidate Vanga

Geetha would be appointed as Deputy Chief Minister once the party regains power. Addressing the final campaign rally in Pithapuram on Saturday before the commencement of the silence

period, Jagan Mohan Reddy said, "The Opposition coalition's newly presented manifesto boasts an estimated cost to the government of Rs 1.65 lakh crore annually. However, the people can discern their deceit and betrayal." CM Jagan remarked, "If Pawan Kalyan is elected, it will only serve Chandrababu Naidu's interests, leading to further disillusionment among women, farmers, and children.

Kalyan, given his tumultuous personal life? Moreover, will he remain committed to Pithapuram if elected, or retreat to Hyderabad at the slightest inconvenience?"

In his address during the campaign in Chilakaluripet, CM Jagan urged everyone to understand the machinations of Chandrababu. He emphasized, "Today, we're witnessing a clash of ideologies, not castes—between the impoverished and the capitalists. Just two months ago, the elderly received their pensions at their doorsteps. Yet, the Opposition conspired to obstruct volunteers from delivering these pensions,

Can women place their trust in Pawan

'Did Balakrishna and Pawan Kalyan receive original deeds or photocopies for their recent land purchases in Vizag and Mangalagiri?' asks CM Jagan referring to 'misinformation' campaign by Oppn on Land Titling Act in recent times

YSRCP, TDP, JSP are 'B' team of BJP: Rahul

Promises Special Category Status to AP



PNS ■ KADAPA

Hitting out at Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and other opposition parties in the State, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said BJP stands for Babu (TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu), Jagan and Pawan (Jana Sena founder Pawan Kalyan).

Addressing a poll rally here, the Congress leader alleged the remote control of the three leaders is with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Invoking the name of former Chief Minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR), Rahul Gandhi said the former's marathon political walkathon (padayatra) across Andhra Pradesh was the inspiration for his nationwide Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"Today, Andhra Pradesh is run by the 'B' team of BJP. The BJP's 'B' team means B for Babu, J for Jagan and P for Pawan. Remote control of these three people is with Narendra Modi," Gandhi said, taking a dig at the three parties (TDP, YSRCP and Janasena).

Vijayamma appeals to supporters to vote for Sharmila

Y S Vijayamma, wife of late Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, on Saturday appealed to the Kadapa Lok Sabha constituency people to vote for her daughter and Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president Y S Sharmila.

Sharmila is pitted against Avinash Reddy, the incumbent MP and YSRCP candidate from the Kadapa constituency, and also an accused in the unresolved Y S Vivekananda Reddy murder case. Vivekananda Reddy was a former Kadapa MP and the younger brother of former Andhra Pradesh CM Y S Rajasekhara Reddy. He was murdered on March 15, 2019, in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

Vijayamma, in a video message, urged the supporters of YSR to vote for her daughter Sharmila, who is campaigning against her son and YSRCP supreme and Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy.

"I am your Vijayamma and I am appealing to all the people who love Y S Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR), his fans and all the Kadapa Lok Sabha constituency

YSRCP well poised for second straight landslide victory: Sajjala

Asserts Jagan will take oath for his second term in Vizag, designating it as Executive Capital

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

With just hours remaining before the crucial General Elections - 2024 in Andhra Pradesh, YSRCP State General Secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy expressed confidence in the party's ability to secure a second consecutive landslide victory. He stated that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will be sworn in for his second term in the port city of Visakhapatnam in the first week of June. Reddy outlined the capital arrangement, with Visakhapatnam designated as the Executive Capital, and Amaravati and Kurnool serving as Legislative and Judicial capitals respectively. He also announced plans to reinstate



the volunteer system promptly after government formation.

In an interview with The Pioneer, Reddy highlighted that 87% of the State's population has benefited from welfare schemes, leading to the development of numerous families.

- Sajjala highlighted that 87% of the State's population has benefited from welfare schemes over the past five years, emphasising the government's commitment to fulfilling pre-poll promises and providing quality services.
- The YSRCP government's focus on sustainable growth, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, has contributed to an increase in the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), reflecting its commitment to economic development.
- Reddy outlined the YSRCP's comprehensive welfare-oriented development model, which includes initiatives such as establishing new medical colleges and prioritising the education sector.
- The government's initiatives include the construction of new ports, fishing harbours, and fish landing centres, aimed at boosting economic growth along the coastline.
- Reddy criticised the Opposition, particularly N Chandrababu Naidu, for prioritising alliances over advocating for the people's welfare during elections. He highlighted contradictions within the opposition alliance's views and accused them of resorting to false propaganda.
- On potential alliances at the national level, Reddy stated that YSRCP would support whoever serves the State's interests best.

Naidu-PK duo creating confusion over Land Titling Act

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Machilipatnam MLA, Purni Venkataramaiah (Nani) has strongly criticised Naidu and Pawan for disseminating false information about the Land Titling Act.

Speaking at the party central office on Saturday, Nani said that the YSRCP government is entering the 2024 elections on the strength of its five-year performance, while the Opposition is resorting to deceitful tactics to sow confusion among the electorate.

Nani highlighted the paradox of Chandrababu Naidu, touting 14



years as CM and 40 years of political experience, yet observing questionable trends in the current election cycle. He reiterated CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's confidence in his administration's fulfilment of prom-

ises made over the past five years.

However, Nani accused Ramoji Rao, Radhakrishna, Chandrababu, and Pawan Kalyan of orchestrating a campaign to divert attention from the YSRCP government's accomplishments. He noted their persistent attacks on CM Jagan over the last four years, citing instances such as their criticism of the volunteer system.

Nani condemned the opposition's misrepresentation of the volunteer system as a nefarious operation, citing baseless claims made by Pawan Kalyan regarding the alleged involvement of volunteers in illegal activities.

Continued on Page 2

As voters rush back to their hometowns...

V'wada-Hyd NH sees a surge in vehicular traffic

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A surge in vehicular traffic has been observed on the highways as people hailing from Andhra Pradesh but settled in Telangana are rushing back to their hometowns to cast their votes in the upcoming AP Assembly and Lok Sabha elections on Monday. Simultaneously, residents of Andhra Pradesh who have relocated to Hyderabad are returning to exercise their voting rights in the Telangana



Lok Sabha elections scheduled for May 13. Employees who had moved to Hyderabad from Andhra Pradesh

are also heading back to their native places to participate in the electoral process. The Chillakallu toll plaza in the Jaggayapeta mandal of the NTR district has particularly experienced a surge in vehicular traffic. Since Saturday morning, roads have become congested as individuals employed in Hyderabad have started their journey back to their hometowns. With three consecutive days of holidays (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday polling day), toll gates

have witnessed traffic jams due to the significant movement of people returning to their roots.

Heavy traffic congestion has been reported on the Hyderabad-Vijayawada highway, especially as a large number of vehicles are traversing from Hyderabad via Vijayawada towards Rajamahendravaram and Visakhapatnam. This influx has resulted in slower traffic flow, particularly in suburban areas.

2

High-decibel election campaign ends in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A high-decibel campaign by political parties for the May 13 simultaneous polls for Lok Sabha and Assembly ended at 6 PM on Saturday.

As many as 503 candidates are in the fray for Lok Sabha and 2,705 for Assembly polls, according to Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer MK Meena.

The total number of voters in the southern state is 4.41 crore, which includes 2.02 crore male, 2.1 crore female, 3,421 third-gender voters and 68,185 service electors.

YSRCP president and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy (Pulivendula), TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu (Kuppam) and Janasena chief and actor Pawan Kalyan (Pithapuram), among others, are in the Assembly poll race.

Andhra Pradesh Congress president and Jagan's sister YS Sharmila (Kadapa) and BJP state chief Purandeswari (Rajamahendra varam), among others, are in the Lok Sabha poll fray.

The YSR Congress campaign centred around the welfare measures that it implemented during the past five years while the NDA highlighted the "failures" of the state government and the doles it would provide, if voted to power in the state and the job creation it would do.

1,06,145 police personnel deployed



Section 144 in force as 'silent period' begins

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena has announced the commencement of the silent period starting from 6 p.m. on Saturday until the evening of May 13, coinciding with the completion of the polling process.

Meena outlined the polling timings for the 169 constituencies, scheduled from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., except for six constituencies where polling will conclude earlier.

2



EC not responding to complaints against Naidu: YSRCP Legal Cell

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State president of the YSR Congress Party Legal Cell, Manohar Reddy, has expressed disappointment over the Election Commission's purported lack of response to complaints lodged against Chandrababu Naidu's party for alleged violations of election regulations.

Speaking at a press conference held at the party's central office on Saturday, Reddy highlighted that despite repeated complaints, the Election Commission had failed to take action against instances such as Bhubaneswar's alleged distribution of Rs 3 lakh in cash.

2

4% MUSLIM QUOTA

YSRCP calls for clarity from TDP & JSP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kurnool MLA Hafeez Khan has urged TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan to seek a definitive assurance from the BJP regarding the continuation of the 4% reservations for Muslims in Andhra Pradesh if they wish to court minority votes in the upcoming election.



Hafeez Khan underscored that while political parties have been canvassing extensively, only the YSRCP has consistently championed the cause of maintaining these reservations for Muslims.

Speaking at a press conference in Vijayawada on Saturday, he underscored that while political parties have been canvassing extensively, only the YSRCP has consistently championed the cause of maintaining these reservations for Muslims.

Khan highlighted the lack of clarity from other parties, particularly the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Jana Sena, and the BJP, regarding their stance on this crucial issue. He criticized Chandrababu Naidu's track record, alleging that the former chief minister had not taken substantial steps towards the development and welfare of minorities during his tenure.

Khan accused Naidu of neglecting the holistic advancement of Muslim communities across various sectors, including education, healthcare, economic opportunities, social welfare, political representation, and women's empowerment.

Contrary to Naidu's pur-

ported indifference, Khan asserted that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has provided reassurance regarding the continuation of the 4% reservation for Muslims. He clarified that these reservations are not solely based on religious affiliation but rather on addressing the socio-economic disparities prevalent among various segments within the Muslim community. Khan reiterated Jagan's commitment to sustaining these

reservations through a logical, legal, and constitutional framework aimed at uplifting the most marginalised Muslims in the State.

Regarding the NDA alliance's stance, Khan referenced statements made by Rajnath Singh in Visakhapatnam, indicating a potential removal of the 4% reservation for Muslims. He criticized Pawan Kalyan for his apparent lack of awareness regarding the recommendations of the Ranganath Mishra Commission and the Sachar Commission, which underscore the necessity of affirmative action for Muslims. Khan challenged Kalyan's allegiance to the BJP, asserting that blindly echoing the party's rhetoric against Muslim reservations disregards the socio-economic realities faced by the community.

Highlighting the disparities in representation and resource allocation under previous administrations, Khan lauded Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's proactive measures in addressing the needs of Muslim communities.

He cited significant budget allocations and key appointments, including the appointment of a Deputy Chief Minister, as evidence of the YSRCP's commitment to inclusive governance. Khan challenged Naidu and Kalyan to provide assurances regarding the preservation of the 4% reservations, emphasising the improbability of such guarantees given their political affiliations.



YSRC lodges fresh complaint against Naidu with EC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP leaders lodged a fresh complaint against Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu for verbally abusing Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and sought the Election Commission to take action against Naidu's demeaning criticism.

The YSRC leaders, MLA Malladi Vishnu along with Navratnalu programme Executive Vice Chairman Ankanreddy, Naga Narayanamurthy, YSRC Legal Cell president Manohar Reddy, and YSRC Legal Cell members Srinivasa Reddy, submitted their complaint to CEO Mukesh Kumar Meena at the Velagapudi secretariat on Saturday. Malladi Vishnu stated that the language used by Chandrababu from the time the election code came into force in the state till its end was despicable. He said that everyone hates the words he spoke in public meetings.

MLA Vishnu stated that Naidu used objectionable words and foul language against CM Jagan to mislead people in public meetings in Visakhapatnam, Ongole, Undi, and Eluru. He said that he had submitted a complaint to the Chief Electoral Officer.

All steps in place for elections in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The District Election Officer and Collector, Dr A Mallikarjuna has announced the successful completion of all requisite preparations for the forthcoming elections in Visakhapatnam district. With an unwavering commitment to upholding democratic principles, Dr Mallikarjuna assures the 20,12,373 eligible voters of the district of a conducive environment to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

In a detailed briefing during a press conference on Saturday, Dr. Mallikarjuna outlined the comprehensive arrangements made to facilitate a smooth and efficient electoral process. To ensure voter comfort and accessibility, essential amenities such as drinking water and shamanas have been installed at each of the 1991 polling stations across the district. Special queues have been designated for women, men, the elderly, and the disabled, ensuring convenient access to the polling centers for all eligible voters.

A robust workforce comprising 13,069 officers and staff, including Presiding Officers (POs), Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs), and Other Polling Officers (OPOs), has been deployed to oversee the electoral proceedings. Additionally, 22 Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) and 21 Nodal Officers have been appointed to supervise the process in each Parliamentary Constituency, ensuring meticulous oversight at every stage.

Noteworthy is the proactive distribution of 94.36 percent of voter slips and the facilitation of postal ballots for 20,998 individuals, ensuring maximum participation in the electoral process. To streamline logistics, seven distribution centers and seven

reception centers have been established, with polling materials being dispatched to polling staff from AU Engineering College on May 12th. Transportation arrangements, with approximately 700 vehicles allocated, aim to facilitate the movement of personnel and materials efficiently. Furthermore, advanced technological measures such as web-casting in 1,457 polling stations and establishment of 11 model polling centers exemplify the commitment to transparency and accountability.

Special provisions have been made to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, with a thousand



wheelchairs provided at polling centers and assistance from various organizations for the elderly and disabled. Dr. Mallikarjuna declared May 13th as an earned holiday, emphasizing the signif-

icance of citizen participation in the electoral process. Stringent measures have been implemented to maintain peace and security, including the declaration of a dry day preceding the end of polling and the establishment of a dedicated control room for monitoring purposes.

Dr. Mallikarjuna reiterated the collective efforts of the district administration and law enforcement agencies to ensure a fair, transparent, and peaceful electoral process in Visakhapatnam. Citizens are encouraged to actively engage in the democratic process and utilize the provided channels for any assistance or queries.

CP promises transparent and peaceful polls in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Police Commissioner Dr A Ravi Shankar assured the public of the city's steadfast commitment to oversee the forthcoming elections with transparency and tranquillity, pledging to uphold the sanctity of democracy. Dr Shankar's declaration comes amidst heightened anticipation for the upcoming electoral process, as he emphasised the meticulous planning and proactive measures undertaken by the city's police force to ensure a smooth and secure voting environment.



3000 police personnel have been deployed to maintain peace and security. Tight security has been implemented at 476 critical polling centres, with bind over cases filed against 5,290 individuals to prevent disturbances.

Speaking with the media, Dr Ravi Shankar underscored the importance placed on safeguarding the rights of voters. Extensive measures, including the imposition of Section 144 and the strategic deployment of armed personnel, have been implemented to create a conducive atmosphere for exercising the fundamental right to vote.

Dr Ravi Shankar said about

Dr Ravi Shankar articulated a series of reminders and guidelines for voters to adhere to. These guidelines include familiarising oneself with the assigned polling station, carrying prescribed identity cards for verification, adhering to designated voting hours, and refraining from carrying prohibited items within the polling premises.

The City Police Department sternly warned of swift and stringent legal action against any violation of the electoral code of conduct or attempts to disrupt the electoral process. Citizens were encouraged to promptly report any illegal activities or election-related grievances through designated channels while ensuring the confidentiality of their identity. With a collective commitment to upholding democratic values, the City Police Department called upon every citizen to exercise their franchise responsibly and contribute to the smooth conduct of the electoral process.

Over 1 crore YSRCP campaigners 'Siddham' for Jagan's victory in State

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As election campaigning came to a draw in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday, the YSRCP emerged as the undisputed leader in voter outreach. With an astounding support of over 1 crore individuals rallying behind the party as 'Star Campaigners' under the Jagan Kosam Siddham campaign, the final door-to-door was executed with much fervour. Executed on the ground predominantly by a spirited cadre of over 2.5 lakh members across 47,000 booths, these foot soldiers sent shockwaves through the Opposition camp. Along the way, they roped in commoners as 'Star Campaigners' who joined leaders, candidates, and party members in canvassing door-to-door for nearly two weeks, championing CM Jagan's 2024 manifesto promises (Navaratnalu Plus).



The campaign was a superhit from the day it was launched (May 2) because it was for the first time in the history of this country, that a political party vowed to make commoners its 'Star Campaigners'. Names of 12 such people were registered with the Election Commission along with names like the Chief Minister himself Jagan Mohan Reddy, and other political heavyweights like Botcha Satyanarayana, VY Subba Reddy, Vijaya Sai Reddy and

Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy amongst others. Remember, CM Jagan, in his Siddham public meetings, had sought the support of common public/beneficiaries and had asked them to be his 'Star Campaigners' if they had benefited from YSRCP welfare schemes and if they believed that YSRCP had delivered good governance on the ground. He had said, 'No film stars, no big names, no influencers, my star campaigners are my people!'. As these ordi-

nary citizens stepped up to support the YSRCP as 'Star Campaigners', the message on the ground started to reverberate as all of them spoke at length about Jagan's welfare schemes and how their lives transformed thereafter.

As part of the campaign, the YSRCP cadre diligently visited every household with a 'Star Campaigner Booklet', aiming to garner genuine public approval for CM Jagan's five years of governance and to share his vision for the state. Additionally, the cadre carried a 'Siddham pen' and a 'Siddham Badge'. Each household received YSRCP's 2024 Manifesto Table Calendar, designed to fit into a photo frame, along with mobile and door stickers.

Despite the scorching sun or lashing rain, the outreach penetrated to the remotest villages across the state, with particularly women supporters rallying behind CM Jagan.

Traffic congestion takes centre-stage in Vizag election campaigns

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the bustling city of Visakhapatnam, traffic congestion has emerged as a central concern during the ongoing election campaigns. Candidates vying for positions ranging from the Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha Constituency to various Assembly seats have made pledges to address this pressing issue, capturing the attention of voters across the region.



The rapid growth experienced by Visakhapatnam in recent years has exacerbated traffic congestion, turning it into a major problem that demands urgent solutions. Despite promises made by the State government several years ago to construct 12 flyovers in different parts of the city, including Gajuwaka, Maddilapalem, Hanumanthawaka Junction, and Car Shed Junction, construction has yet to commence, leaving residents frustrated with the lack of progress.

In response to public outcry expressed during pre-election campaigns and political events prior to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), candidates have been actively addressing traffic con-

cerns, offering assurances to alleviate the situation. Notable pledges include commitments by TDP candidate Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and YSRCP candidate M.V.V. Satyanarayana to complete the flyovers at Hanumanthawaka Junction and Maddilapalem, respectively.

Furthermore, promises to undertake the completion of the 60-foot road extension from Lepakshij junction to Old Head Post Office in One Town to mitigate traffic congestion have been made by candidates Vasupalli Ganesh Kumar of the YSRCP and Vamsikrishna Srinivasa Yadav of the JSP,

representing the South Constituency. Addressing concerns specific to the Car Shed Junction, both Ganta Srinivasa Rao (TDP) and Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (YSRCP) have assured voters of their commitment to initiating flyover construction and implementing measures to alleviate traffic issues affecting residents of PM Palem and Madhurawada.

Meanwhile, in the West Constituency, candidates have acknowledged complaints regarding traffic congestion between NAD Junction and Pendurthi and NAD Junction and Gnanapuram due to encroachments on footpaths and service roads. Promises to take necessary actions to address these concerns have been put forth. Additionally, candidates in Gajuwaka have pledged to tackle traffic congestion between Akkireddipalem and Kurmannapalem Junction, an area plagued by numerous road accident cases, further emphasizing the critical need for effective traffic management strategies. As the election campaign progresses, voters eagerly await tangible actions to fulfil these promises and alleviate the burden of traffic congestion plaguing Visakhapatnam's streets.

Naidu labels Jagan as 'Rayalaseema drohi'

PNS ■ NANDYALA

In a fervent appeal to the public in Nandyal, TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu has made bold declarations, asserting his dedication to the welfare of Telugu people amidst tumultuous circumstances. During his impassioned speech at Nandyala on Saturday, Naidu showcased his administration's accomplishments, boasting of attracting investments amounting to a staggering Rs 16 lakh crore, generating 10 lakh employment opportunities, fostering developmental initiatives, augmenting income levels, and implementing over 100 welfare programmes.

Branding Jagan Mohan Reddy as a 'Rayalaseema Drohi' (traitor to Rayalaseema region), Naidu lambasted the incumbent CM for failing to initiate any significant projects aimed at the region's betterment. In a bid to sway public sentiment, Naidu pledged a slew of populist measures, including an annual subsidy of Rs 15,000 for school-going children, monthly financial assistance of Rs 1,500 for women, in addition to promises of three complimentary gas cylinders and free RTC bus rides.

As political tensions escalate, Naidu's scathing criticism of Jagan Reddy underscores the intensifying rivalry between the TDP and YSRCP, setting the stage for a contentious electoral battle in Andhra Pradesh.



Contrasting sentiments in AP as polls near

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the Andhra Pradesh elections draw near, contrasting sentiments and political allegiances dominate conversations across the State. From the outskirts to urban areas, citizens are vocal about their preferences and concerns, setting the stage for a closely contested electoral battle. In the rural outskirts of the port city, a scene unfolds where vendors eke out their livelihoods under the scorching sun. A palm fruit vendor, alongside sellers of mangoes, shares his abiding support for Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSRCP. For

him, the government's financial assistance during trying times cements his allegiance, dismissing Chandrababu Naidu's TDP promises with a frown.

However, a drive further into town reveals a different narrative. Farmers, worried about the potential impact of another YSRCP term, express their discontent, emphasising concerns about development, employment, and land rights. They find solace in Naidu's promises and vision for the state. The socio-economic divide becomes apparent, with the poor and minorities gravitating towards YSRCP, while the middle and upper classes

align with TDP. Interestingly, TDP's message of development and jobs resonates even in urban areas, appealing to sections of the lower middle class.

YSRCP banks on its welfare schemes, particularly targeting women and the elderly, offering English medium education

in government schools, pensions, healthcare, and a volunteer system. Despite modest promises, Jagan's sincerity strikes a chord with his supporters. In response, TDP unveils its 'Super Six' guarantees, borrowing a page from the Congress playbook in Telangana, focusing on devel-

opment and welfare initiatives. However, critics question the feasibility of these promises, considering the strain they may put on the state's finances.

The political landscape is further complicated by the presence of Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena, expected to sway Kapu votes, and the saffron party's internal dissent, dampening its influence. As election day approaches, trust emerges as the decisive factor, with voters weighing Jagan's welfare agenda against Naidu's forward-looking image. Both leaders leverage their strengths, leaving the outcome uncertain until the final ballots are cast.

'Bhashyakarula Sattumora' in Tirumala today

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

'Bhashyakarula Sattumora' will be observed in Tirumala temple on May 12.

The fete is observed in connection with the advent of Arudra star in Vaisakha month which happens to be the birth star of Sri Ramanujacharya.

In the evening Bhashyakarula Sattumora will be observed in the Bhashyakara Sannidhi inside Tirumala temple.

Amadalavalasa: Tales of triumphs and unfulfilled promises

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Amadalavalasa, nestled in Srikakulam district, stands as a testament to the ebb and flow of political fortunes. Over the years, it has witnessed a fierce contest between the political titans, with the TDP, Congress, and YSRCP leaving their mark on its electoral landscape. The TDP, with a stronghold of five terms, shares the political arena with the Congress, boasting four victories, while the YSRC holds the seat once. The present YSRCP candidate, Thammineni Seetharam, a seasoned politician, has clinched victory five times, including four under the TDP banner and once under the YSRCP flag. Notably, his nephew, Kuna Ravi Kumar, secured the seat in 2014 on a TDP ticket, challenging his uncle's dominance. Intriguingly, the TDP leadership nominated



Ravi Kumar in 2009, stepping in as Thammineni ventured into the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP). Despite a setback in his debut electoral race, Ravi Kumar bounced back triumphantly in 2014, defeating his uncle, who had aligned with the YSRCP. However, his reign was short-lived, losing the seat in 2019. Undeterred, Ravi Kumar is

now resolute in reclaiming the constituency, vowing to expose the state government's developmental failures.

Adding to the electoral mix is Suvvari Gandhi, a senior leader from Ponduru mandal, entering the fray as a rebel YSRCP candidate, injecting further dynamism into the electoral narrative. The demographic tapestry of Amadalavalasa paints a diverse picture, with the Kalinga and Kapu communities wielding significant influence, alongside the SC, Velama, and Yadava communities, pivotal in shaping the constituency's political destiny.

Amidst electoral promises, the revival of the Amadalavalasa cooperative sugar factory stands out as a poignant issue. Closed in 2003 due to mounting losses, its revival remains an unfulfilled electoral pledge, emblematic of political rhetoric overshadowing tangible action. The saga contin-

ues with the stalled construction of the Srikakulam-Amadalavalasa Road, a lifeline for commuters grappling with hazardous conditions and tragic accidents. Despite governmental assurances and allocations, bureaucratic hurdles impede progress, amplifying public discontent.

Ponduru village, renowned for its handspun Khadi and handloom, embodies a fading legacy, with weavers grappling with economic hardships and dwindling patronage. Despite calls for rejuvenation, political inertia mars efforts, leaving artisans in limbo. As the electoral battle intensifies, promises collide with realities, underscoring the imperative for tangible action over political rhetoric. In this crucible of democracy, the fate of Amadalavalasa hangs in the balance, awaiting a champion to navigate its journey towards progress and prosperity.

Elaborate arrangements made for polls: Prakasam Collector

PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar has said that all arrangements have been made for polling in the Prakasam district peacefully on May 13.

Addressing a press conference along with SP Garud Sumit here on Saturday, the Collector called on the voters not to yield to temptations and exercise franchise.

The Collector said that model polling stations were set up in a bid to enhance the polling percentage. Six polling stations for young voters, four polling stations for women voters and two polling stations for differently-abled voters were set up in the district, he added.

Drinking water facilities have been provided at the polling stations besides tents were installed to create shade, he said, adding that steps were taken to provide uninterrupted power supply to the polling stations and ramps were constructed for disabled voters and elderly voters.



"Required steps have been taken to regulate voters in the queue lines with NCC, NSS and ex-military employees and arrangements have been made to provide toilets, water facilities and food accommodation to the staff on polling duties without any difficulties," he said.

The contestants must stop their campaign at 6 pm on Saturday and strict action will be taken against those who conduct the campaign after 6 pm, he warned. The sale of liquor would be stopped on May 12 and 13 and permission

should be taken from the MCMC committee 48 hours before the publication of advertisements of political parties in newspapers, he made it clear.

The Collector said that on the day of polling, a temporary office can be set up only within 200 meters from the entrance of the polling centres, but campaign activities should not be held in that vicinity. No one from outside the constituencies is allowed to stay in the respective constituencies in lodges and private guest houses and the Collector instructed them to

leave the premises immediately. Complaints can be made by dialing 08592 288599.

"As many as 14,000 staff have been deployed to conduct elections in the district and the APSRTC has arranged buses especially to take them to respective polling stations," the Collector added.

Out of the total 2,183 polling stations, 486 polling stations were identified as problematic and central security forces are being deployed to the polling stations to conduct polling without any untoward incident, he said adding that a webcasting facility has been provided to 1589 polling stations.

SP Garud Sumit Sunil extensive security has been provided to conduct polling following the election commissioner guidelines. He asked all non-local members to leave the constituency after 6 pm on Saturday. The SP said that Rs 5 crore worth of cash and other materials have been seized in the district so far.

Time to dethrone Jagan: Pawan

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan has emphasised the need to oust the incumbent government led by Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Addressing his final election rally here on Saturday, Pawan Kalyan urged voters to carefully consider their choices and prioritise the future of their children before heading to the polls.

"This is a critical juncture demanding wise decisions to safeguard the state's interests. Let's bear in mind the prospects for our children's future as we cast our votes. I appeal to elect alliance candidates for the prosperity of our state," urged Pawan Kalyan.

Highlighting the perceived failures of the current administration, Kalyan asserted that Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure has been marked by mismanagement across various sectors. He cautioned against placing blind trust in promises made by the incumbent and advocated for allowing the TDP-JSP-BJP alliance to govern the state.

Kalyan lamented the squandered opportunities and asserted that Andhra Pradesh has



This is a critical juncture demanding wise decisions to safeguard the state's interests. Let's bear in mind the prospects for our children's future as we cast our votes. I appeal to elect alliance candidates for the prosperity of our State.

regrettably regressed across all domains under Jagan Reddy's leadership. He criticized the state of law and order and pointedly commented on Chief

Minister Jagan Reddy's application seeking court permission to travel abroad, deeming it a reflection of the state's deteriorating governance.

Expressing concerns over the implications of the Land Titling Act, Kalyan warned of potential adverse effects once it is enacted. He urged voters to remember the alleged wrongdoings of YSRCP leaders while exercising their franchise.

Taking aim at MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhar Reddy, Kalyan accused him of environmental destruction and association with illicit activities. He vowed to pursue the matter personally, emphasizing the need to hold such individuals accountable.

Reaffirming his commitment to the welfare of the state, Kalyan asserted his continued presence in politics despite previous electoral setbacks. He credited the unwavering support of the people for his persistence.

"For the past decade, I have remained steadfast in my political journey, driven solely by the support and affection of the people, despite electoral defeats," claimed the JSP chief.

Kalyan introduced Kakinada MP Candidate Tangella Uday Srinivas, city MLA Candidate Vanamadi Kondababu, and rural candidate Pantam Nanaji, urging voters to elect them with a resounding mandate.

1 ITBP, 5 BSF, 3 TSSP battalions deployed in Bapatla district

PNS ■ BAPATLA

District Superintendent of Police Vakul Jindal has said that elaborate security arrangements have been made by deploying five BSF, three TSSP and one ITBP battalions to conduct polling in the district.

Addressing the newsmen, flanked by Collector P Ranjit Basha, here on Saturday, the SP said that required steps were taken to conduct polling without any untoward incident across the district. Besides the 5 BSF, 3 TSSP and 1 ITBP battalions, as many as 250 police personnel from Tamil Nadu have also been deployed on election duty elsewhere in the district, the SP added.

SP Vakul Jindal said that so far Rs 5.30 crore worth of cash, liquor and other valuables have been seized in the district and 10,000 people have been bound over. The SP said that 26,751 litres of liquor worth Rs 50 lakh was also seized. The SP said that Section 144 is



enforced around the polling stations where more than five people should not be assembled.

The SP warned of taking stringent action against those indulging in violent incidents and trying to disturb the polling process. The election campaign must be stopped at 6 pm on Saturday and if anybody is found conducting a campaign would be held.

"Out of the 913 polling stations in the district, 269 polling

stations have been identified as problematic and critical polling stations were also identified. Heavy security has been provided to such polling stations," SP Vakul Jindal stated.

The election staff that are going to the polling stations with polling material are being provided police escort, he added. Stringent action would be taken against those who try to create problems in the polling stations or try to attack polling staff, the SP warned.

Centre greenlights prosecution of AB Venkateswara Rao

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A startling development has emerged in the case involving senior IPS officer and former Intelligence chief AB Venkateswara Rao. The Union Home Ministry has approved the Andhra Pradesh government to proceed with legal actions against the former Intelligence chief and senior IPS officer AB Venkateswara Rao.

Sanjeev Kumar, Under Secretary of the Government of India, conveyed this decision to the Andhra Pradesh government through a letter. He stated, "The Central government hereby accords sanction for prosecution under Section 19 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988 against AB Venkateswara Rao, IPS (KN 1989), for the



offence punishable under Section 13 (1) (c) & (d) read with Section 15 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1989, Section 13 (1) (9) read with 7 (a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988 (As amended in 2018)."



'Tirumanjanam' on May 14

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In connection with annual Vasanthotsavams, 'Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam' will be observed in Sri Padmavati Ammavari temple in Tiruchanoor on May 14.

The spring festival will be observed for three days from May 22 to 24.

In view of the temple cleansing ritual, TTD has cancelled Kalyanotsavam, Sahasra Deepalankara Seva on May 14.

BJP chief Nadda holds roadshow in Tirupati

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

BJP national president JP Nadda along with TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh and Janasena leader K Naga Babu held a roadshow here on Saturday.

Addressing the gathering, the BJP chief said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is progressing and the common man, Dalits, youth and farmers, among others, were empowered.

He further said as many as 1.50 lakh panchayats in the country are being connected through an optical fibre network. Two lakh villages were connected through common service centres.

He further said under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, four crore houses were constructed, and the BJP, if voted to power again, will construct three crore houses. He exuded confidence that



the NDA candidates in the state will win with a huge majority in the upcoming polls.

As part of a seat-sharing deal among NDA partners, TDP was allocated 144 Assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while BJP will contest from six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats. Janasena will contest two Lok Sabha and 21 Assembly seats.

Elections to the 175-member Assembly and for 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh will be held on May 13.

Road accident leads to seizure of Rs 7 crore

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

A road accident led to the unearthing of Rs 7 crore currency notes at Ananthapalli village in Nallajerla mandal in the wee hours on Saturday in EG district.

DSP K Chenchu Ramaiah told the media that a van which was carrying chemicals from Hyderabad to Mandapeta. An Itcher van rammed the chemical-laden van from the rear end resulting in the chemical van overturned on the road.

There were seven carton boxes in the overturned van of which two carton boxes which contained currency of 500 denominations, were found.

The DSP said that currency notes of Rs 5 crore were packed in one carton box and Rs two crore in another cartoon box and the police seized Rs 7 crore. The seized money was handed over to the income tax officials, the DSP said. The police registered a case and are investigating, the DSP added.

It is learnt that the money was being transported from Hyderabad to Mandapeta in the van. The van was driven by a driver from Hyderabad to Vijayawada. Another driver took the steering wheel at Vijayawada.



KCR struck secret deal with BJP to save Kavitha: Ponguleti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao did not learn any lesson even after the people defeated him, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said here on Saturday.

He said that KCR entered into a secret pact with the BJP to protect his daughter Kavitha who was allegedly involved in the Delhi liquor scam.

The Revenue Minister also said that KCR has a secret pact to protect his hundreds of acres around Hyderabad City and the thousands of crores that were looted through projects.

Addressing the media at Khammam on Saturday, Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that KCR did not respond even after Medigadda's piers sagged. Moreover, KCR has been criticising the Congress stating that

drought came due to the Congress, he pointed out.

He said that KCR had said that he had read 80,000 books but he never used to come to the Assembly. However, the same KCR launched the Bus Yatra, he said. Ponguleti made it clear that KCR will not be even able to touch the praja government.

He said KCR was criticising BJP during the day and holding talks with BJP leaders at night. He never bothered about the unemployed, farmers and women, Ponguleti added.



POLL TIME RUSH



Passenger rush at Pandit Nehru Bus Station (PNBS) in Vijayawada on Saturday as voters head for their hometowns to exercise their franchise on May 13. Pic by CH. VIJAYA BHASKAR

Political parties arrange buses for Telugu states' voters living in other states

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

A single vote may make all the difference in the LS elections and it can change the fate of candidates. So candidates who are contesting in the Telangana Lok Sabha elections and the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections are not hesitating to spend money to bring in voters.

Many Telugus hailing from both the Telugu states are living in neighbouring states. Some people are working for private companies while some have gone to other states in search of livelihood. Candidates are inquiring with their relatives in their hometowns about who all are working in other states. In Telangana, particularly in GHMC areas, there are a sizeable number of voters belonging to Andhra Pradesh. In Maharashtra, particularly in Mumbai, many Telangana people are working in private firms.

Candidates are now arranging special buses to bring them to their native places so that they can vote. Polling is scheduled for Monday and Saturday and Sunday are holidays. The government has declared Monday a holiday.

So Telugus who are working in other states have three days continuous holidays. This enables them to spend three days in their native places. In addition to this, political parties are arranging free transport for them to go to their native places and to return to their workplaces. Some candidates are even booking flight tickets to bring voters.

Telugus are working in states like Gujarat and West Bengal too. Except for a few most Telugus who are working in other states have not transferred their votes and they continue to be voters in Telugu states.

A senior political leader said that there is nothing new in this. During every election political parties are doing the same. He said some political parties are also offering money to daily wage workers who are working in far-off places to come and vote.

YSRCP way ahead in Narsapuram LS segment, say analysts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Political analysts foresee a smooth victory for the ruling YSRCP in the Narsapuram Parliamentary constituency and its seven Assembly segments. Rebel MP from Narsapuram, K Raghurama Krishnamraju, has thrown his hat into the ring as an MLA candidate from the Undi Assembly constituency. Guduru Umabala, an advocate representing the YSRCP, hails from the Settibalija community, which holds significant sway in the region. With a strategic focus on fielding candidates from diverse backgrounds, including a BC woman for the Settibalija constituency, the

YSRCP aims to clinch not only this seat but also all remaining MLA and MP positions.

In the 2019 elections, the YSRCP secured victory in five MLA and MP seats within this parliamentary constituency, while TDP claimed the Palakollu and Undi segments. Presently, Ramanaidu, the incumbent TDP MLA, is vying for reelection in Palakollu on a TDP ticket, while Raghurama Krishnamraju contests from Undi.

The contest gains momentum as TDP's former MLA, Narasimha Raju, enters the fray as a rebel candidate. The potential splitting of the Kshatriya (Raju) community vote bank could tilt the odds in favour of the YSRCP.

With a strategic focus on fielding candidates from diverse backgrounds, including a BC woman for the Settibalija constituency, the YSRCP aims to clinch not only this seat but also all remaining MLA and MP positions.

In Palakollu, YSRCP's Gudala Hari Gopi, representing the BC community, poses a formidable challenge to TDP. This constituency has become a battleground of prestige for both ruling and opposition parties, particularly the YSRCP, which aims to secure victory across all seven assembly segments, including

Palakollu and Undi. Notably, prominent figures such as a Deputy Chief Minister, a Cabinet Minister, a Government Chief Whip, and a former minister are contesting as YSRCP MLA candidates, alongside a rebel MP vying for an MLA seat under the TDP alliance.

Former Minister Ch Ranganadha Raju is contesting from the Achanta assembly segment, locking horns with another former minister, Pithana Satyanaryana, the TDP alliance candidate. Ranganadha Raju, known for his focus on public issues and developmental projects, has spearheaded initiatives such as road and culvert construction in Godavari Lanka villages, as well as providing ambulances during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Tadepalligudem, Kottu Satyanarayana, Deputy CM, and Minister for Civil Supplies K Nageswarao from Tanuku are contesting as YSRCP candidates. In the Narsapuram Assembly

constituency, M Prasada Raju, the government chief whip, is representing the YSRCP.

Peddiraju, Director of the Andhra Pradesh State Housing Corporation, underscores the Chief Minister's commitment to providing opportunities for backward candidates. He believes that fielding BC candidates in key constituencies like Narsapuram, Palakollu, and Tanuku will bolster the YSRCP's prospects across all assembly segments.

Rajesh, General Secretary of the YSRCP district, is optimistic about the support from BC and SC communities, which he anticipates will bolster the YSRCP's electoral fortunes.

Hinduja group firm gets IRDAI nod on RCAP acquisition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance sector regulator IRDAI has given conditional approval to Hinduja Group firm IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IIHL) for the takeover of debt-ridden Reliance Capital.

"We are happy to acknowledge the receipt of approval from IRDAI yesterday (May 10, 2024) on the auspicious occasion of Akshay Tritiya. The approval is subject to certain regulatory, statutory, and judicial clearances/compliances," an IIHL spokesperson said in a statement.

IIHL stands committed to working towards obtaining the same as soon as possible and aims to close this transaction by the NCLT's stipulated date of May 27, 2024, the spokesperson said.

"We take this opportunity to thank all stakeholders includ-

ing regulators and the administrator for their timely support," it said.

IRDAI approval is crucial for the transfer of insurance businesses of Reliance Capital i.e. Reliance General



Insurance and Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, to the IIHL. Reliance Capital is one of the promoters of Reliance General Insurance and Reliance Nippon Life Insurance.

The National Company Law Tribunal on February 27, 2024,

approved Hinduja Group firm IndusInd International Holdings Ltd's Rs 9,650-crore resolution plan for Reliance Capital.

In November 2021, the Reserve Bank superseded the

board of Reliance Capital on governance issues and payment defaults by the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group company. The central bank had appointed Nageswara Rao Y as the administrator, who invited bids in February 2022 to take over the company.

The deal to acquire the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group's financial services arm for Rs 9,650-crore has already received all the other statutory approvals including from the banking and capital markets regulators and also fair play watchdog CCI.

Reliance Capital had a debt of over Rs 40,000 crore, and four applicants had initially bid with resolution plans. However, the committee of creditors rejected all four plans for lower bid values and a challenge mechanism was initiated in which IIHL and Torrent Investments participated.

In June 2023, the Hinduja Group firm was selected by the committee for its bid of Rs 9,661 crore upfront cash. Reliance Capital's cash balance of an additional Rs 500 crore would also go to the lenders.

The deal to acquire the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group's financial services arm for Rs 9,650-crore has already received all the other statutory approvals including from the banking and capital markets regulators and also fair play watchdog CCI.

Union Bank of India net profit rises 18% on lower provisions

PNS ■ MUMBAI

State-owned Union Bank of India on Saturday reported an 18.36 per cent growth in its consolidated net profit for the March quarter to Rs 3,328 crore, helped by lower provisions.

For the fiscal 2023-24, the lender reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 13,797 crore against Rs 8,512 crore in the year-ago period.

In the quarter under review, its standalone net profit increased to Rs 3,311 crore from Rs 2,782 crore a year ago. The core net interest income grew 14.38 per cent to Rs 9,437 crore on an 11.7 per cent growth in advances and widening of net interest margin to 3.10 per cent from 2.97 per cent in the year-ago period. Its managing director and chief executive A



Manimekhalai told reporters that for FY25, it is aiming for a credit growth of 11-13 per cent and deposit growth to be between 9-11 per cent compared to 9.3 per cent in FY24.

It, however, expects a fall in NIMs to 2.8-3 per cent, she said, adding that the targets will be reviewed midway through the year. The non-interest income declined by over 10 per cent to Rs 4,707 crore, primarily due to halving of recoveries from written off accounts.

For FY25, the bank is targeting the overall recoveries to come at Rs 16,000 crore against over Rs 18,000 crore in FY24.

MONEY MATTERS

Jaipur-based entrepreneur figures on Fortune's '40 Under 40' list



Jaipur-based entrepreneur Yogesh Chaudhary, the director of Jaipur Rugs, has been included in the list of emerging leaders from India by Fortune, a statement said. Chaudhary has been included in the '40 Under 40' list, an annual list of influential young individuals under the age of 40 who changed the course of business and economy in

India. Isha Ambani, Director, Reliance Retail, Harshad Reddy, Director, Apollo Hospitals, and Akash Ambani, Chairman, Reliance Jio Infocomm, are the other young entrepreneurs who have featured on the list. Chaudhary joined the family business at 19 to assist his father, Nand Kishore Chaudhary. He said that in 2016, Jaipur Rugs forayed into retail and now sells in more than 90 countries. "The company collaborates with designers such as Shantanu Garg and Gauri Khan. The artisanal rugs are a result of 40,000 artisans in 600 villages, out of which 80 per cent are females," he said in a release here

Khanij Bidesh India may acquire lithium asset in Australia



Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) hopes to acquire a lithium block in Australia this year, a top official said on Saturday. KABIL, a joint venture of three PSUs to scout for mineral assets overseas, has been working in Australia for the last year, Mines secretary V.L. Kantha Rao said. "KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd) has the responsibility to look at

other countries. We have to increase our efforts in Australia. We will have to ensure that during this financial year, we target one more asset," Rao said at the inauguration of the registered office of KABIL here. KABIL is owned by three public sector undertakings -- National Aluminium Company Ltd (Nalco), Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL) and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd (MECL). "I am hoping that it should be Australia because we have been working (there) for the last year," he explained. But unlike Argentina, Australia would be a bit costly so the paid-up capital of KABIL will have to be increased. KABIL has a paid-up capital of Rs 100 crore at present. "We are authorised to go up to Rs 500 crore and I think we have the approval of up to Rs 200 crore," he explained. Rao further said that the target has been set to begin mining in the lithium blocks in Argentina in another two to three years.

India's cotton exports may rise to 28 lakh bales : CAI



The Cotton Association of India (CAI) on Saturday estimated cotton exports to rise about 27 per cent to 28 lakh bales during 2023-24 crop year ending September. In 2022-23 crop season (October-September), cotton exports were at 22 lakh bales, CAI said. One bale is equal to 170 kilogram. "The demand for Indian cotton

went up as the prices ruled 8-10 per cent lower than the international prices during December 2023 till March 2024. Our cotton is mainly exported to countries like Bangladesh, China and Vietnam," CAI President Atul Ganatra said. Meanwhile, CAI pegged the cotton production for 2023-24 at 309.70 lakh bales, same as estimated in the previous month. The production is however expected to be lower than the previous season's 318.90 lakh bales. The total cotton supply till end of April 2024 is estimated at 315.86 lakh bales, which consists of pressing at 281.96 lakh bales, import of 5 lakh bales and the opening stock of 28.90 lakh bales. The estimated cotton consumption till April 2024 is 192.50 lakh bales while export is pegged at 21.50 lakh bales. The stock at the end of April is estimated at 101.86 lakh bales.

Sebi bans Varanium Cloud, its promoter from securities markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has prohibited Varanium Cloud, its promoter and managing director Harshwardhan Hanmant Sabale from the securities market till further orders for mis-utilising the IPO proceeds and manipulating the company's financial statements by recording fictitious sales and purchases.

Also, the regulator restrained Sabale from acting as a director or key managerial personnel of any listed company, any Sebi-registered intermediary or any company which intends to raise money from the public, until further orders.

In its interim order passed on Friday, Sebi said, "The genesis of the prima facie viola-



tions observed in the matter has its roots in the SME IPO of Varanium, which continued through the bonus issue and stock split followed by the rights issue.

It has prima facie emerged that the money raised through the IPO and subsequent rights issue was not used for the intended purpose mentioned in the offer documents. Instead, the promoter shifted part of the IPO funds to an

entity, BM Traders, and the end use of such funds is not known. In addition, Sabale spun an intricate web of dubious transactions and tried to paint a picture that did not represent the fundamentals of the company.

Further, Sebi noted that the company made public announcements meant to give an impression to the investors that Varanium was a top-notch IT service provider that was entering greenfield areas.

In its effort to present such a picture, Varanium and its promoter entered into transactions that appeared only on paper and nothing was happening on ground as claimed by the company.

NCLAT asks Google, CCI, others to file replies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The appellate tribunal NCLAT on Friday directed tech giant Google and fair trade regulator CCI, among other respondents, to file their responses over the petitions filed against the Play Store billing policy.

A two-member NCLAT bench, after a brief hearing on Friday directed the respondents to file a reply within a week and counter reply, if any, and directed to list the matter on May 24 for the next hearing.

The appellate tribunal's direction came over petitions filed by the Indian Broadcasting and Digital

PLAY STORE BILLING POLICY



Foundation (IBDF), Indian Digital Media Industry Foundation, People Interactive India, which operates the marriage portal Shaadi.com, and Kuku FM operator Mebigo Labs.

They have challenged the order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), which on March

20, 2024, declined to grant interim relief against the Play Store billing policy and restrain Google from collecting fees.

On March 20, CCI dismissed four petitions of Indian app companies filed against Google's new Play Store billing policy to levy an 11 to 26 per cent charge on in-app payments.

Eicher Motors PAT rises to Rs 1,070 cr



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Eicher Motors on Saturday reported an 18 per cent increase in consolidated profit after tax to Rs 1,070 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024, driven by higher sales.

The company posted a profit after tax of Rs 906 crore in the same period last year.

Its total revenue rose 12 per cent to Rs 4,256 crore in the January-March quarter of FY24 compared to Rs 3,804 crore in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23, Eicher Motors said in a statement.

Royal Enfield, the two-wheeler division of the company, recorded sales of

2,27,925 motorcycles in the fourth quarter, up 6 per cent from 2,14,685 units in the year-ago period. For fiscal 2024, the company reported a 37 per cent rise in PAT to Rs 4,001 crore against Rs 2,914 crore for FY23.

The company's revenue from operations grew 14.5 per cent to Rs 16,536 crore from Rs 14,442 crore recorded in FY23.

During the last fiscal, Royal Enfield's registered sales rose 9 per cent to 9,12,732 units from 8,34,895 units in 2022-23.

The company said its board recommended a final dividend aggregating to Rs 1,396.41 crore at Rs 51 per share for the financial year ended March 31, 2024

Air India appoints SIA Engineering as strategic partner to develop maintenance facilities

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Air India on Saturday announced it has appointed SIA Engineering Company Limited as its strategic partner for the development of its base maintenance facilities here.

As part of the partnership, Air India will work closely with SIA Engineering Company Limited (SIAEC) on the planning, construction, development and operationalisation of its base maintenance facilities here, they said.

In a statement, Air India said, "Projected to be ready in



2026, the facilities will comprise both wide-body and narrow-body hangars, including associated repair shops, to support the growing Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) needs of the aircraft fleet in Air India Group."

"The collaboration with SIA Engineering Company will not only help Air India become more self-reliant for the maintenance of its own fleet but it also reiterates our commitment to strengthen India's aviation infrastructure

by boosting the growth of the country's MRO industry," Campbell Wilson, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Air India, said.

Air India had earlier announced setting up a state-of-the-art Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities at Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru (operated by Bangalore International Airport Ltd) starting with airframe maintenance through the development of wide-body and narrow-body aircraft hangars for all checks.

'China willing to help Indian firms to cater to its market demand'

PNS ■ BEIJING

The Chinese market is open to all countries, including India, China's new envoy to India, Xu Feihong, has said, maintaining that Beijing understands New Delhi's concerns over its burgeoning trade deficit and is willing to address this issue by facilitating more Indian companies to tap the Chinese market.

The trade deficit, a major concern of India for years, stood at US\$ 99.2 billion in 2023 in the overall bilateral trade of US\$ 136.2 billion. In 2022, the trade deficit

crossed the US\$ 100 billion mark by touching US\$ 101 billion for the first time. India has been periodically flagging concerns and pressing China to open its IT and pharma sectors besides grains, its major export potential sectors.

In an interaction and China's CGTN-TV here before he headed to New Delhi to take up his posting, Xu reiterated Beijing's often repeated assertions that it is not China's intention to seek a trade surplus. "There are multiple factors behind India's trade deficit. China understands India's concern. It is



"The Chinese market is open to all countries, including India. We have sent many trade promotion delegations to India to buy Indian products, and we would like to see more marketable Indian products enter the Chinese market."

never our intention to seek a trade surplus." "The Chinese market is open to all countries, including India. We have sent many

trade promotion delegations to India to buy Indian products, and we would like to see more marketable Indian products enter the Chinese market.

We are ready to provide greater facilitation for India's participation at the China International Import Expo, the China-South Asia Expo, the

Canton Fair and other platforms", he said. "China is also willing to help Indian companies cater to China's market demands and tap into the potential for commercial and trade cooperation."

"Last year, the Chinese diplomatic missions in India issued nearly 190,000 visas; over 80 per cent were business visas. Business travels in both ways is good for bilateral trade. We hope that India can also provide more convenience to Chinese businesspeople travelling to India for business opportunities," Xu said.

IMF doubts cash-strapped Pak's repayment capacity

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

The IMF has said that Pakistan faces major debt-repayment challenges and expressed serious doubts over the cash-strapped country's capacity to repay the global lender, according to a media report on Saturday.

The Washington-based bank's assessment of Pakistan's economy came as an IMF support team reached the country on Friday to hold talks with officials here after Islamabad requested a fresh bailout package under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

"Pakistan's capacity to repay the fund is subject to significant risks and remains critically dependent on policy implementation and timely external financing," Geo News cited the Washington-based lender as saying in its staff report issued earlier this month on Pakistan.

"Exceptionally high risks — notably from delayed adoption of reforms, high public debt and gross financing needs, low gross reserves and the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) net FX derivative position, a decline in inflows, and sociopolitical factors — could



jeopardise policy implementation and erode repayment capacity and debt sustainability," read the report.

It further said that restoring external viability was critical to ensure Pakistan's capacity to repay the fund, and hinges

on strong policy implementation, including, but not limited to, external asset accumulation and exchange rate flexibility.

Geopolitical instability is an additional source of risk even as uncertainty surrounding global financial conditions has declined somewhat since the last review, it added.

The global lender noted that the country needed gross financing worth US\$ 123 billion during the next five years, adding that Pakistan was expected to seek US\$ 21 billion in fiscal year 2024-25 and US\$ 23 billion in 2025-26.

Property brokerage firm InvestoXpert revenue up 56%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Real estate brokerage firm InvestoXpert's revenue rose 56 per cent in the last fiscal to Rs 56 crore as it facilitated sales of properties valued more than Rs 2,000 crore on strong housing demand.

Its revenue stood at Rs 36 crore in 2022-23. In a statement, Noida-based InvestoXpert said the company facilitated sales amounting to Rs 2,050 crore during the last fiscal, up 95 per



cent year-on-year. "The better performance in sales translated into robust revenue growth, it added.

Vishal Raheja, Founder & MD of InvestoXpert said, "This achievement underscores our

commitment to excellence and innovation in the real estate sector. As we look ahead, we are confident in our ability to continue this upward trajectory, with ambitious targets set for the upcoming financial year". He said the demand for luxury homes has risen significantly.

Raheja said the second and fourth quarters collectively accounted for almost 70 per cent of the business, underscoring the seasonal variations in the real estate market

ENCALM'S WARM EMBRACE OF ATITHI DAIVO BHAVA



In an informative tête-à-tête with **SHOBORI GANGULI**, Encalm Hospitality CEO **VIKAS SHARMA** outlines his vision of revolutionising the world of airport hospitality

Possibly never before in history has the global hospitality industry and its ecosystem been as severely hit as it was during the 2021 Pandemic. Not even the two World Wars in the last century left nations gasping for breath as Covid did, with its lethal tentacles paralysing MSMEs, travel and tourism businesses, and their subsidiary industries. Unannounced lockdowns and travel restrictions drilled unparalleled fear into the human psyche, with no end in sight. But, as Charles Dickens put it in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Clawing back for survival under such adversity, the hospitality industry was quick to innovate. Mr Vikas Sharma, the Chief Executive Officer of Encalm Hospitality, entered this volatile world as a beacon of hope in the year 2021, in a territory unexplored and uncharted and at a time when fear of human contact reigned supreme.

Armed with the vision to infuse fresh life into the business of hospitality, and, of course, with an enviable arsenal of 25 years of experience in the trade, Sharma went about restructuring the landscape of airport hospitality through an unparalleled experience — much like the American Pioneer who wanted "to go where no man has gone before." Air travel, even for those going business class, has its attendant share of anxiety and restlessness. Seeking to ease this, Mr Sharma, through Encalm, concretised a novel definition of airport services. "Hospitality" is the key word in this endeavour, says a proud Sharma.

In a short span of three years, Sharma today heads a 200 plus team which, according to him, is crucial in taking the organisation's long term objectives forward through "strategic thinking and effective communication." At a time when most airlines provide their Business Class passengers with state of the art lounges and customized relaxation plans without overheads, what does



VIKAS sharma, CEO, ENCALM HOSPITALITY PVT LTD

Encalm bring to the table, especially if the passenger has to pay for it? Sharma is quick to enumerate that, "Encalm Hospitality has become synonymous with exceptional hospitality and top-of-the-line services right from Atithya to the

Encalm Lounges and Spa." Available in all three terminals of the Delhi Airport, Encalm Lounges are also available in Hyderabad and Goa. To ensure an "elevated airport experience" Sharma lists out the services the company has on offer.

Penetrating into the luxury realm of a regular lounge and Spa, Encalm's services and hospitality combine a range of assisted services, incorporating basic non-aviation chores such as assistance service, buggy services, and porter assistance. The company's offerings go beyond the aesthetics of bespoke carved lounges and Spas with a personalised "Atithya Meet and Greet" — constructed on the foundation of *Atithi Daivo Bhava* (Guests are equivalent to the Almighty), taking airport experience to another level altogether.

As the Encalm CEO proudly asserts, his knowledge and experiences help synergise the operational and management foundations of the Encalm brand. Needless to add, he has an impressive portfolio having served as the General Manager of Sheraton Hotel and Resorts, Director of Operations at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and the Director of F&B at Four Seasons Hotel and Resorts. Operations, sales and marketing, finance and revenue management are his core competence. He was felicitated as the General Manager of the Year 2019 award by HOSI in association with Sheraton Hotel and Resorts, and Leadership Excellence Award by Marriott Hotel, again in 2019. An MBA graduate from INSEAD, Sharma has a bachelor's degree from IHM, Gwalior.

Interestingly, Sharma is also an avid cricket follower of cricket and badminton, the former fruitifying into reality when Encalm became the Hospitality partner with the Delhi Capitals for IPL 2024. Talking about the partnership Sharma says, "As a lifelong cricket enthusiast, the sport embodies more than mere competition — it's a fervent passion fostering camaraderie and excitement. Partnering with Delhi Capitals underscores my enduring dedication to cricket and its profound community impact. Through Encalm Hospitality's alliance with this dynamic IPL team, we embrace cricket's essence, engaging with fans authentically and enriching the sport's vibrant legacy."

PAWAN SONI pens down his personal experience at the airport with Encalm's services to provide a 360 degree view of what this innovation brings to the table

The hustle and bustle of travel can often leave one weary and longing for a moment of respite. Gone are the days when travelling was mundane. We are at a time when journeys in fact can be as exhilarating as the destination themselves.

During my recent trip to Italy, while passing through Terminal 3 (T3) International Airport in New Delhi, I stumbled upon the Encalm Prive Lounge — a sanctuary of luxury and comfort that undoubtedly ranks among the world's finest.

With a staggering capacity of over 550 guests, the Encalm Prive Lounge caters exclusively to business travelers, accessible either through business class tickets or higher with various airlines, or by paying an entry fee. Unlike other lounges, complimentary card benefits do not apply here; however, cardholders can access another Encalm lounge, albeit not as lavish as the Prive lounge.

Culinary delights await at the extensive buffet which is rivalling with the leading star hotels selection and offers separate selections for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. I loved the watermelon cheese as a canape, prawns and garlic cream kebabs, Chicken biryani and even the simple but tasty beetroot halwa. The lounge's leaf-shaped bar is a visual delight, offering a range of complimentary and paid options that cater to every palate. Given current Delhi's excise policy issue, there were many brands including Prosecco that weren't available at the time of my visit.

The lounge boasts of four sleeping pods, providing weary travellers with a private sanctuary to rest and rejuvenate before their next journey. Of course this is a paid facility at ₹1000 plus taxes per hour.

One of the standout features of the Encalm Prive Lounge is its expansive conference room, which doubles as a personal dining room, perfect for business travelers or senior bureaucrats and VIPs looking to conduct meetings or enjoy a meal in a private setting. For those looking for entertainment, the lounge offers a small gaming zone and a dedicated kids area, ensuring that travellers of all ages have something to enjoy during their visit. The virtual gaming zone and Xbox games comes as a chargeable feature separate from the lounge charge though it can be availed by only the lounge users. A small fitness centre and kids play area comes complimentary along with the lounge facility.

In addition to its luxurious amenities, the Encalm Prive Lounge also offers



excellent spa services. I had the pleasure of trying their 30-minute foot massage, which left me feeling relaxed and rejuvenated, ready to embark on the next leg of my journey. Currently this 30-minute spa came complimentary by using my DreamFolks card; else one will have to shell out ₹1500 for using this facility. Had there been a provision of complimentary foot massage machines and the massage chairs like at Singapore airport, I would have rated Encalm Prive lounge the best in the world without even blinking an eye.

While the lounge service came complimentary with my flight tickets, Encalm has another facility called Atithya Meet and Greet Service. So if you are a first time traveller or just worried about your parents or kids traveling alone, just avail this service from their portal that comes in various options — Silver, Gold and Elite. This service provides you with a guest manager who will escort you from the entrance without having to wait in the queue, help you through check-in and immigration services. They try to help you go through business class immigration service but it depends upon the government official to allow it. And then they help you get the buggy till your boarding gate. If you have a business class ticket or are planning to use the lounge through credit cards, in my opinion, Silver tier option gives you the best value for money.

Overall, my experience at the Encalm Prive Lounge and Atithya Meet and Greet service was nothing short of exceptional. From its elegant ambiance to its impeccable service, the lounge sets a new standard for airport hospitality. Next time you travel, consider experiencing the luxury and comfort of Atithya Meet and Greet Service and Encalm Prive Lounge apart from the usual shopping.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

Splendid Expedition Across Switzerland

Switzerland calls out to travelers with a taste for stunning mountain views, picturesque landmarks, and unique adventures. Step onto the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland for an incredible voyage through the country's rich culture and breathtaking landscapes. This train journey guarantees an unforgettable encounter with Switzerland's captivating charm

BY AKANKSHA DEAN

As travelers, we set off to find new horizons, discover new cultures, savor delicious foods, and create lasting memories. Switzerland is a great choice for explorers, with stunning mountain views and charming villages that become part of every traveler's dream vacation. While Switzerland offers many ways to explore, taking a train journey is a truly magical experience. The Grand Train Tour of Switzerland is an adventure not to be missed. This remarkable trip reveals the beauty of Switzerland's mountains and its rich history. You can start and end your journey wherever you please, with destinations like Zermatt, St. Moritz, Lucerne, and Lugano awaiting your exploration. For those eager to visit every stop on the journey, the Swiss Travel Pass is the perfect solution. This ticket gives you access to all the destinations along the route. Covering 1,280 kilometers, passing by 11 serene lakes, and revealing five UNESCO World Heritage Sites set against the stunning alpine backdrop, this train journey ensures an engaging and unforgettable experience.



MOST POPULAR TRAIN JOURNEYS THAT ARE A PART OF THE GRAND ROUTE
Hop on the Glacier Express, a legendary trip winding through the breathtaking Swiss Alps from Zermatt to St. Moritz. Take a journey on the Bernina Express to discover the Bernina Pass, Bernina Range, and the UNESCO World Heritage Rhaetian Railway. Travel along the Golden Pass Line, linking Lucerne to Montreux through stunning scenery. Enjoy the

Gotthard Panorama Express as it traverses the famous Gotthard Pass. Lastly, ride the Lucerne-Interlaken Express for captivating views of the Jungfrau region.

MUST KNOW
Switzerland presents a rich array of experiences, from enchanting urban centers to tranquil mountain hamlets, crystal-clear lakes to towering peaks, and from ancient vineyards to fine dining destinations. The Swiss Travel

System offers a smooth, comfortable, and upscale way for tourists to discover this enchanting nation. With the Swiss Travel Pass, visitors gain access to Switzerland's comprehensive public transportation network, enabling them to seamlessly traverse the country by train, bus, boat, or mountain railway.

Akanksha Dean is an independent food & travel writer

LET'S GOA...

BY PAWAN SONI

Goa remains an ever-popular destination, with its property prices soaring post-COVID and a surge in demand for new eateries and nightspots. Each visit to Goa reveals new experiences, making it a perennial favorite. During a brief 3-day break from work, my wife and I opted for a villa stay over a traditional hotel, choosing the relatively new Villa Heliconia in Siolim.

LOCATION

Villa Heliconia is conveniently located near the MOPA airport, making it easily accessible from most places in North Goa. Situated close to the buzzing spots in North Goa, it even shares a wall with the popular restaurant Hosa, known for its innovative take on traditional South Indian cuisine. I recommend trying Hosa for its exquisite interiors, great cocktails, and inventive dishes. However, ensure you have a reservation to avoid disappointment, as we found ourselves seated at an inconvenient high bar table for the last minute booking.

AMENITIES

The villa is spacious, boasting two large living areas and six rooms, along with a swimming pool and lifts. Ideal for groups of friends or extended families, the private



pool is definitely a highlight. Decent-sized rooms, with at least two rooms featuring personal balconies ensures accommodation for kids and elderly as well.

HOUSEKEEPING

We were impressed by the attentive housekeeper, Shuvendu Kashyap, whose knowledge extended beyond housekeeping to include coffee and a variety of subjects. The entire team was polite and eager to please.

FOOD

One of the highlights was the option to have the staff

FACT SHEET

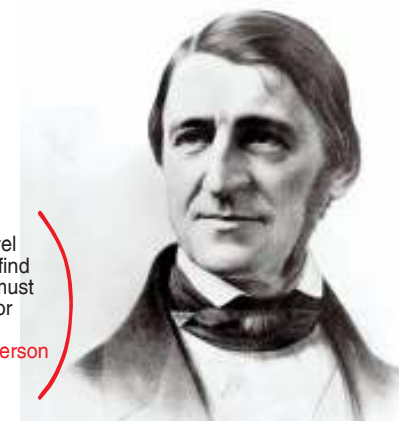
Villa Heliconia, 9 Ground Floor, Landmark, Plot No Syno.329, Vaddy, near the church, Siolim, Goa
Phone Number: 9350009000

prepare food of your choice, perfect for when you want a break from outside meals. I particularly enjoyed their dal, paneer, and tawa roti. Breakfast offered a variety of options, including eggs,

paranths, cut fruits, poori-aloo, and poha apart from beverages like fresh juice, tea and coffee. During my visit, I discovered that the owner, Abhishek Aggarwal, and I are both from Gurgaon. I reached out to him to share my pleasant experience with the villa. Abhishek, an excellent hospitality professional turned real estate entrepreneur, shared his journey of success. His hard work and good fortune not only led to the opening of Villa Heliconia but also to several upcoming luxury projects in Goa, including a 4-bedroom villa in Morjim, a 5-bedroom super luxury Bali-themed villa in Siolim, and a 10-bedroom boutique property in Calangute, which will be rented out as individual rooms rather than a villa. Villa Heliconia, a dream fulfilled for Abhishek, is a testament to the fact that some dreams do come true.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

“Though we travel
the world over to find
the beautiful, we must
carry it with us or
we find it not”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson



Of the 150 villages that exist in West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, only 13 to 15 are Songsarek villages. In these, only five or six houses continue to uphold the ancient Garo traditions and follow the rituals related to the animist society. Wangala dance, brewing of Chubitchi being a few, writes **NAVNEET MENDIRATTA**

VIBING TO THE DANCE OF A 100 DRUMS

It is clearly the road less travelled. The West Garo Hills of Meghalaya in Northeast India may not have attracted the fancy of the tourists as their Khasi hills counterparts (yet), but that could well be a blessing in disguise for a region that is holding on to the last bit of ancient Garo traditions — the Songsarek practices. Songsarek is a pre-Christian animist religion that is fast losing out to conversions to Christianity, that spread in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century and intensified throughout the twentieth century. Currently, of the 150 villages that exist in the region, only 13 to 15 are Songsarek villages. In these, only five or six houses continue to actively practise the rituals related to the ancient Garo society.

A narrow hill road leads us to the Songsarek village of Gondenggre. Located in the Rongram subdivision of West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya, the village is located 18 kms from sub-district headquarter Rongram and some 36 kms from district headquarter of Tura. Our entourage comprises a group of nine Royal Enfield bikers and content crew who are here to document the living heritage of the communities in these regions as part of a unique partnership between Royal Enfield and UNESCO.

The project titled, The Great Himalayan Exploration, involves engaging with Royal Enfield's motorcycling community and inspiring them to come forward to not just explore the landscape but to help preserve and promote the living heritage of the communities in these regions. Documentation is the first step in this direction.

These practices range from performing arts (dance forms, songs, etc) to tangible crafts (handmade paper from tree bark, specific types of hats, etc), food practices (preservation techniques, culinary cultures), agricultural practices, local medicinal practices, body art and even indigenous spiritual and social systems.

KEEPERS OF THE TRADITION

Upon reaching the village, we are greeted by the Nokma or the village headman with a generous serving of *Chubitchi* or

the traditionally fermented (but weak) alcoholic rice beverage that is poured right into our mouths from an *abet* or a hollowed dried bottle gourd. It is the locals' way of welcoming the guests and must be accepted by them as a mark of honour. *Chubitchi* flows freely in Garo villages. There is no age or stigma attached to its consumption. It is an important part of every Garo celebration — be it religious rituals, meetings, social gatherings, birth, marriage, during *Wangala* (harvest festival) or even a house warming ceremony. It is said that in pre-modern era, the Garos would serve the drink before taking off for a hunt or to fight enemies. The traditional ways of making *Chubitchi* are said to have been passed down orally among the Garos until the arrival of Baptist American Missionaries. In the present day, though the knowledge of brewing *Chubitchi* continues to be shared in the interiors of Garo Hills, it is no longer a preferred practice in urban areas. Songsareks of Gondenggre are friendly albeit private people. Curiously is writ large on their faces as language holds them back from communicating freely with the outsiders. Rakkan M Sangma, Joint Secretary of the 100 Drums Wangala Festival Committee and Secretary of Garo Heritage Village plays interpreter and takes us through the rituals and practices of the villagers.

“*Song* in the local language means village or a native place and *Warek* means houses built in a line. By that definition, *Gondenggre* is a spread out village with houses that are built in a single line,” says Sangma. “About 5-7 kms from the village, there exists a strong sacred grove called *A Song Kosi*. It is a special place where outsiders are forbidden from entering. No one is allowed to speak in that forest let alone pluck a single leaf. No one, not even a member of our tribe, can cause any harm to the trees, flowers, or animals there,” he shared. Cleanliness is a buzzword in most parts of Meghalaya. Made from bamboo, Garo houses typically last for about four to five years. The kitchen is usually located outside the house. A complete set up comprising kitchen and dining space at the entrance of the village is meant



to be used by the community for celebrations and meetings. The rooms are usually spread out. According to Sangma, a lot of taboos including “untouchability” *vis-a-vis* the outsiders are practiced even today. The outsiders are not allowed to enter or touch anything inside the Garo spaces. Sacrifice remains an inherent part of Songsarek practices. There is a sacrifice to mark everything that is considered important — it could be a wedding or any celebration, a big announcement, to appease the Gods, to ward off evil or even to fight a disease. The blood marks are like trophies in the village. The Songsareks believe in keeping their Gods happy.

DANCING TO A HUNDRED DRUMS

Wangala, the Garo traditional dance dedicated to their main Deity and the God of Sun, crops and fertility, *Misti-Saaljong*, features as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) practice. Inspired by the wagtail bird, the dance imitates the bird's behaviour, using musical instruments such as a flute made from buffalo horn and drums. It is a group dance where pairs of men and women wearing wagtail feathers in their headgear line up and move along a circle in short, slow but forceful steps. The dance is led by the Nokma who sings the traditional songs in a high pitch while the rest of the men play the drums. The Garo women folk make traditional dance gestures imitating the bird or even animals and clap. The women wear skirts made from handwoven cloth woven on looms. The typical pattern is that of the eye of the Goddess of wealth, *Susime*, resembling a diamond. Wagtail bird holds a special meaning in the Songsarek beliefs. The villagers closely observe the flight of the bird

“SONG IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE MEANS VILLAGE OR A NATIVE PLACE AND WAREK MEANS HOUSES BUILT IN A LINE. BY THAT DEFINITION, GONDENGGRE IS A SPREAD OUT VILLAGE WITH HOUSES THAT ARE BUILT IN A SINGLE LINE”



to predict the waterfall for the season. Every *Wangala* or the harvest festival, the Songsareks put handprints on their doors (using three fingers) with rice flour indicating the water level and for good harvest. These imprints are usually made by the male members of the community outside the house of the Nokma, where most rituals are conducted. The Garos are a matrilineal, matrilineal and matrifocal society. They continue to carry forward the surname of the women of the family. The boys live with their parents till they reach puberty and then shift into a dormitory style bachelor home in the village till they get married into a girl's family. While the matrilineal aspect remains strong, the rules surrounding bachelor homes are somewhat easing out, shares Sangma.

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN EXPLORATION PROJECT

Royal Enfield's partnership project with UNESCO, The Great Himalayan Exploration, draws rider-researchers to document the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas.

“The aim is to document and safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas and thereby, raise awareness about the living treasures that make up the beating heart of India,” says Bidisha Dey, Executive Director, Eicher Group Foundation — the CSR and Sustainability arm of Royal Enfield.

According to her, over two editions and 16 curated rides, 119 rider-researchers have already documented 66 practices across the Eastern Himalayan states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, North Bengal, Sikkim and Tripura. “We are now set to extend our exploration to the Western Himalayas in 2024,” says Dey.

“We conduct a detailed on-ground reece before rolling out the riders to ensure the assent of the locals and as respect for their privacy. We are especially careful to follow the community protocols on how to approach the community and then conduct capacity building programmes to educate the rider researchers before they set out on their journeys,” she shares.

Among the practices recorded are: The black pottery of Tyr Shang village in the West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, *Muga* silk threads of Assam, *Mon Shuga*, the ancient art of making paper of Arunachal Pradesh, living roots bridges of Meghalaya, handmade mask art of Majuli island, Assam.

“For us, the partnership is not just about the documentation. It's also about creating awareness about the intangible cultural heritage practices,” concludes Dey.

SAVING THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

The Great Indian Bustard critically endangered and integral to India's wildlife heritage, faces multifaceted threats including habitat loss, collisions with infrastructure, and poaching. As efforts to safeguard the species intensify, the imperative to reconcile competing interests between development and conservation grows more urgent



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA

The WII had already identified ten potential locations for GIB breeding centres in 2017, setting the stage for proactive conservation measures. Drawing on expertise beyond borders, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) from Abu Dhabi was enlisted as a technical partner due to its successful track record in breeding other bustard species. The collective efforts resulted in the establishment of two breeding centres in Rajasthan, housing a total of 29 GIBs, bolstering hopes for the species' survival

The Supreme Court of India in *MK Ranjitsinh and Ors vs. Union of India* has constituted a seven-member committee and tasked it with addressing the delicate balance between conservation initiatives for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and the installation of renewable energy projects in its habitat. This decision follows the Court's acknowledgement of the challenges posed by its April 2021 directive mandating the burial of all power lines within the GIB habitat, a measure claimed to be expensive and impractical over extensive distances by Power companies and the Central Government. With the complex interplay between development and conservation at the forefront, the committee has to assess primarily the viability of reducing the area banned for overhead powerlines from 80,000 to 13,663 square kilometres. The GIB figures in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in Appendix I of CITES and is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Included in the National Wildlife Action Plan, it has been earmarked for a recovery program under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India. During the Mughal and British periods, the GIB was one of the top game birds. Historical accounts suggest that tribal Bhils used to set fire to the bushes surrounding their nests to trap females. The species has been facing numerous threats to its survival including occasional poaching, collisions with high-tension electric wires, fast-moving vehicles, and free-ranging dogs in villages. Additionally, habitat loss and alteration due to the diversion of grasslands and scrublands, extensive agricultural expansion, mechanized farming practices, and infrastructural developments such as irrigation systems, roads, and windmills pose significant challenges.

Weighing approximately 15 kilograms each, their bulk poses a challenge when navigating around electricity lines or windmills, often resulting in fatalities or injuries. The dry semi-desert regions where the bustard once thrived, particularly in parts of Rajasthan, have also undergone significant transformation due to irrigation canals, converting the landscape into highly cultivated areas. Present-day threats include further expansion of linear infrastructure such as roads and electric power transmission lines leading to collision-related mortality. The proposed expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, including large-scale deployment of solar panels across desert and grassland areas, further jeopardizes the bird's habitat.

In its historical range, the great Indian bustard once existed across Western India, spanning 11 states, including parts of Pakistan, with strongholds in the Thar desert and the Deccan plateau. Known for its preference for flat, open landscapes with minimal disturbance, it thrives in grasslands. Their numbers, however, have dwindled dramatically, with only around 150 individuals estimated to survive as of 2018, down from around 250 in 2011. Most of the population, estimated at around 120, is concentrated in the arid grasslands of Thar, Rajasthan, particularly in the Desert National Park and the Pokhran Field Firing Range, with smaller populations reportedly scattered elsewhere in the country. In Maharashtra, two individuals had been reported in Nanaj, Solapur district, where the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is actively involved in conservation efforts. Concerningly, however, the absence of the great Indian bustard in Nanaj in Maharashtra as well as in the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh for the past few years suggests a looming risk of local-level extinctions.

Known for their slow reproductive rate, GIBs lay only a few eggs and invest nearly a year in caring for their chicks. Establishing a founder population requires a minimum of 20 breeding females and 5 to 10 breeding males. In the relatively better populated Thar region, specifically focused upon in the



Supreme Court case, the looming risks of the maze of infrastructural development, food insecurity, conflicts, and climate change-induced impacts exacerbate the challenges faced by them. As regards actions taken to safeguard the dwindling population of the GIB, the MoEFCC, Rajasthan Forest Department, and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), came together in 2018 to initiate conservation breeding programs and conduct scientific research for GIB's conservation. Notably, the WII had already identified ten potential locations for GIB breeding centres in 2017, setting the stage for proactive conservation measures. Drawing on expertise beyond borders, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) from Abu Dhabi was enlisted as a technical partner due to its successful track record in breeding other bustard species. The collective efforts resulted in the establishment of two breeding centres in Rajasthan, housing a total of 29 GIBs, bolstering hopes for the species' survival. Further support poured in from WWF-India, which helped in crafting guidelines for a comprehensive State Action Plan for Resident Bustard Recovery Programme and backed future expansion plans in Gujarat. In Karnataka's Siruguppa taluka, the Ballari Forest division proposed a Detailed Project Report with an

investment of INR 24 crores for a research centre dedicated to the GIB cause. In Maharashtra, with GIB sighted in recent years neither in Nanaj of Solapur nor in Warora of Vidarbha region, a proposed collaboration with Rajasthan aims to exchange tigers for GIBs, with plans to establish a breeding centre in Nanaj. Assessment of the overall strength, budgetary outlay, and position of the MoEFCC and forest departments in decision-making in the Government reflects that the effectiveness of efforts to secure the future of the GIB is just inadequate. The weakening of statutory instruments and establishments related to forest and wildlife conservation in the recent past is quite revealing in this regard. In the case of GIB also, on an uneven field, stakeholders grapple with the urgent need to balance developmental agendas with conservation imperatives, claiming to be providing a sustainable coexistence for this emblematic avian species. However, amidst endeavours by some professional foresters, a pressing challenge looms large today. About 66,337 sq. km of land for overhead transmission lines are considered despite WII's recommendation that mitigation of powerline-linked mortality required a ban on high tension wires,

undergrounding of <66 kv wires, and retrofitting of existing wires with bird diverters. WII's findings also underscored the perilous predicament, with an estimated 16 GIB fatalities annually due to collisions with high-tension lines in the Thar region alone. Such alarming mortality rates, validated by tagging efforts by WII, are in sharp contrast to the indication of the number of recorded mortality cases as insignificant before the highest court. Using a lower number of collision deaths as a basis for allowing a network of overhead powerlines in GIB habitats will be akin to advocating the discontinuance of medicines in a pandemic situation where due to a reduced number of survivors, deaths per day may be lowered. An approach of balancing conservation and development by permitting power projects, in a critically endangered species' habitat with just about 140 survivors, currently less polluting than non-renewable resources deserves perhaps a second look. The idea of development and its impact created and sold by the most selfish species on earth pitted against the right to life of a species at the brink of extinction needs to adopt a much wider and multi-sectoral perspective. India's insolation data in many areas, not natural habitats of GIB, presents

similar ranges as in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Annual Mean Daily Global Solar Radiation (AMDGSR) map indicates 6.8 to 5.6 kWh/ m²/ day in different parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat; 6.0 to 5.8 in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Ladakh; and 5.8 to 5.6 in states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu. India's solar power generation capacity having reached about 76 GW in FY24, is concentrated in Rajasthan and Gujarat with 17.8 GW and 10.1 GW. Large states like MP and UR are major disappointments. Authorities should consider the country-wide spread and benefits, site-specific costs on infrastructure, and the capacity utilization factor (CUF) figures reported to be 20 for Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh; 19 for Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh; and 18 for Gujarat. Considering this scenario, any honest concern for balancing conservation and development must, instead of compromising GIB's future, explore and exploit the potential spread out in the country for solar projects. That would be true climate justice! (The writers are Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)



SKY-HIGH VANITY

Constructing the world's tallest buildings creates high emissions

Since ancient times, people have built structures that reach for the skies – from the steep spires of medieval towers to the grand domes of ancient cathedrals and mosques.

Today the quest is to build the world's tallest skyscrapers, such as Burj Khalifa in Dubai. Soaring above the rest, its decorative spire accounts for 29 per cent of its total height – 4,000 tonnes of structural steel just for aesthetics.

Burj Khalifa isn't unique in this respect. "Vanity height" – the extra height from a skyscraper's highest occupied floor to its architectural top – shapes city skylines around the globe.

In a world where environmental concerns are paramount, is such architectural vanity justifiable?

The pursuit of "vanity height" makes this a pressing issue. Even a modest spire increases the carbon emissions from the production of materials for a skyscraper's structure by about 15 per cent.

Building tall is not just about architecture; it's big business. Being ranked among the world's tallest buildings can transform an otherwise ordinary skyscraper into a globally recognised icon. This creates an

incentive to add vanity height. Our proposed solution is to rethink the global standard for ranking the world's tallest buildings.

A matter of measurement The way we measure the height of skyscrapers is at the heart of this issue. The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) is the ultimate authority on skyscraper heights. It bestows the coveted title of "world's tallest building".

Historically, there wasn't much debate over skyscraper heights as early buildings typically had flat roofs. The first significant issue arose in 1929 when the Chrysler Building in New York City installed a last-minute spire, securing the self-proclaimed title of the "world's tallest building" over the Bank of Manhattan.

The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, founded in 1969, established criteria in the early 1970s that included decorative spires. This formalised a practice that would be contentious time and again.

A landmark moment in the council's history was the 1998 showdown between Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur and Sears Tower in Chicago, now known as Willis Tower.

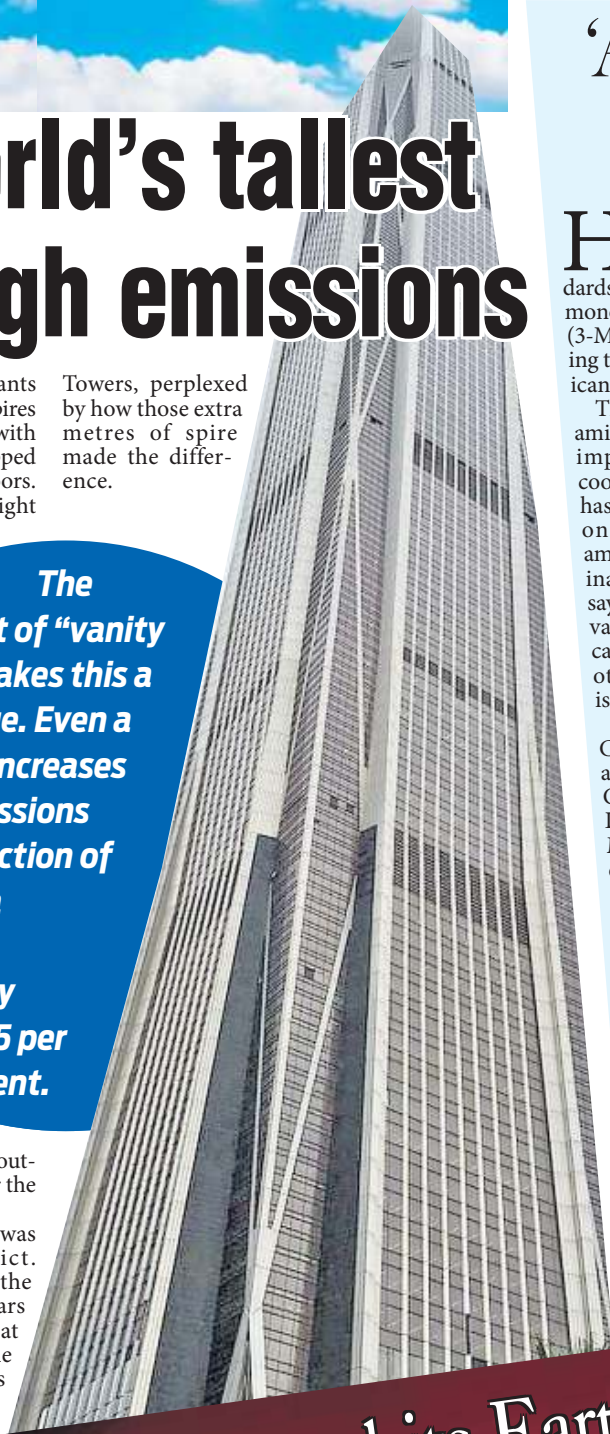
Imagine these two giants side by side: the pointy spires of the Petronas Towers, with 88 floors, and the flat-topped Sears Tower, with 108 floors. But the council uses "height to architectural top", which includes decorative spires.

As a result, it declared Petronas Towers the tallest building in the world, outstripping Sears Tower for the title.

Back in Chicago, this was not a popular verdict. Picture the folks on the 108th floor of the Sears Tower looking down at the celebrations on the 88th floor of the Petronas

Towers, perplexed by how those extra metres of spire made the difference.

The pursuit of "vanity height" makes this a pressing issue. Even a modest spire increases the carbon emissions from the production of materials for a skyscraper's structure by about 15 per cent.



'Adherence to European Standards in cooking oils critical for health'

Health experts have emphasised the need for conformity to European safety standards for glycidyl esters (GE) and 3-monochloropropane-1,2-diol esters (3-MCPD) in cooking oils, contending that their presence poses significant health risks.

The GE and 3-MCPD are contaminants that can be found in improperly processed cooking oils, and Europe has recently set limits on the permissible amount of such contaminants which, experts say, are linked to cardiovascular diseases and can cause cancer and other serious health issues.

Dr Praveen Chandra, Chairman and Head of the Cardiology Department at Medanta, stressed that ensuring the safety of cooking oils is paramount.

"The presence of GE and 3-MCPD poses significant health risks, particularly for heart health. These contaminants have been linked to cardiovascular diseases and other serious health issues.

The recent EU regulation, which sets maximum levels for these contaminants in food, is a crucial step toward protecting consumers."

Consumers should choose cooking

oils that comply with these regulations to safeguard their heart health and overall well-being, Dr Chandra said.

As Codex classifies these contaminants as potentially carcinogenic, India's oncologists are also urging government bodies and manufacturers to ensure compliance with European safety standards for GE and

the long run. "With the rising cancer rates in India and the widespread use of cooking oils, relevant government bodies and FSSAI should take steps to implement these regulations in our country. Mandatory display of compliance with GE and 3-MCPD limits according to European regulations on labels is essential," Dr Bhargava said.

Dr AR Sharma, Founder and Chairman of AP Organics Ltd, Dhuri, stated, "While Europe has been at the forefront of implementing stringent regulations on GE and 3-MCPD, Indian regulatory bodies are also working to establish limits for these contaminants which could be present in improperly processed oils.

"Due to our stringent processing conditions, our processed and packed brands of rice bran oil are trans-fat-free and also fully compliant with the new EU Food Safety Regulations regarding GE and 3-MCPD contaminants. This shows our dedication to consumer health and safety," he said. In collaboration with A P Organics Limited, Dhuri said, other industry leaders, including Vestige, a direct-selling company, have updated their labels to show compliance with European safety standards for GE and 3-MCPD on their brands



compliance on the label itself.

Dr Rahul Bhargava, Principal Director of the Department of Oncology at Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram, emphasised that with increasing cancer rates in the country, there is an urgent need to address carcinogenic contaminants like GE and 3-MCPD in cooking oils.

These contaminants, present in all types of cooking oils, can lead to cancer in

Lack of sleep in children linked to risk of psychosis in adulthood

Children experiencing a chronic lack of sleep since infancy could be at an increased risk of having psychosis in early adulthood, a new study has found.

Analysing the sleep durations of nearly 12,400 children from when they were aged 6 months to 7 years, researchers found that those persistently sleeping fewer hours were more than twice as likely to develop a psychotic disorder in early adulthood.

These children were also found to be nearly four times as likely to have a psychotic episode, in which one loses touch with reality and can experience hallucinations.

While a persistent or chronic lack of sleep as a child may not directly cause psychosis when they become an adult, it could be a contributing factor and parents can help address it, according to lead author Isabel Morales-Muñoz from the University of Birmingham, UK.

The researchers also said that while previous studies have linked sleep problems with psychosis, this is the first study to show that

chronic lack of sleep can be a strong predictor for an individual to experience psychosis. The findings are published in The Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) Psychiatry.

"It's entirely normal for children to suffer from sleep problems at different points in their childhood, but it's also important to know when it might be time to seek help. Sometimes sleep can become a persistent and chronic problem, and this is where we see links with psychiatric illness in adulthood," said Morales-Muñoz.

The researchers also analysed data of about 4,000 adults when they were 24 years old.

While the team found a robust link between persistent lack of sleep as a child and experiencing psychosis as an adult, they said they have not proven a causal relationship and that other associated factors need to be examined.



Strong solar storm hits Earth, could disrupt communications and produce northern lights

An unusual strong solar storm hitting Earth could produce northern lights in the US this weekend and potentially disrupt power and communications.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued a rare severe geomagnetic storm warning when a solar outburst reached Earth on Friday afternoon, hours sooner than anticipated. The effects were due to last through the weekend and possibly into next week.

NOAA alerted operators of power plants and spacecraft in orbit to take precautions, as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "For most people here on planet Earth, they won't have to do any-

thing," said Rob Steenburgh, a scientist with NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Centre.

The storm could produce northern lights as far south in the US as Alabama and Northern California, according to NOAA. But it was hard to predict and experts stressed it would not be the dramatic curtains of colour normally associated with northern lights, but more like splashes of greenish hues.

"That's really the gift from space weather – the aurora," said Steenburgh. He and his colleagues said the best aurora views may come from the best cameras, which are better at capturing light than the naked eye.

Snap a picture of the sky and "there might be actually a nice little treat here for you," said Mike Bettwy, operations chief for the prediction centre.

The most intense solar storm in recorded history, in 1859, prompted auroras in central America and possibly even Hawaii. "We are

not anticipating that" but it could come close, said NOAA space weather forecaster Shawn Dahl.

This storm poses a risk for high-voltage transmission lines for power grids, not the electrical lines ordinarily found in people's homes, Dahl told reporters. Satellites also could be affected, which in turn could disrupt navigation and communication services here on Earth.

An extreme geomagnetic storm in 2003, for example, took out power in Sweden and damaged power transformers in South Africa.

Even when the storm is over, signals between GPS satellites and ground receivers could be scrambled or lost, according to NOAA. But there are so many navigation satellites that any outages should not last long, Steenburgh noted.

The sun has produced strong solar flares since Wednesday, resulting in at least seven outbursts of plasma. Each eruption – known as a coronal mass ejection – can contain billions of tons of plasma and magnetic field from the sun's outer atmosphere, or corona.

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'Sea surface temperatures of Indian Ocean could help predict dengue outbreaks globally'

Abnormal trends in sea surface temperatures of the Indian Ocean could help predict trends in global dengue epidemics, including case numbers and how they might change with time, according to new research.

Scientists said that these observed abnormal temperatures, which are a 'climate indicator', could help enhance the forecasting and planning for outbreak responses.

Currently, precipitation and temperature are some of the climate indicators that are being used as early warning systems to forecast disease trends such

as dengue, they said. The team, including researchers from Beijing Normal University, China, explained that, for example, events associated with warmer sea surface temperatures, driven by El Nino, are known to influence how dengue is transmitted around the world by affecting mosquito breeding.

Being able to predict the risk of outbreaks and prepare for them can be crucial for many regions, especially those where the mosqui-

to-borne disease is endemic, or constantly present.

However, the authors said there



were gaps in our understanding of long-distance climate drivers of dengue outbreaks. Their findings are published in the journal Science. In this study, the researchers used data on yearly dengue cases reported from across each of the 46 Southeast Asian and American countries from 1990-2019. Data of monthly cases from 24 of these countries reported from 2014-19 was also used for analysis.

Through modelling, the team drew associations between changes in climate

patterns around the world and those in seasonal and yearly case numbers during dengue epidemics. They found that dengue epidemics around the world were "closely" linked with abnormalities in sea surface temperatures of the tropical Indian Ocean.

"We identify a distinct indicator, the Indian Ocean basin-wide (IOBW) index, as representing the regional average of sea surface temperature anomalies in the tropical Indian Ocean. IOBW is closely associated with dengue epidemics for both the Northern and Southern hemispheres," the authors wrote.

WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Citizens hold protest to save Navi Mumbai's DPS flamingo lake



Nature lovers and environmentalists in Navi Mumbai marked World Migratory Bird Day on Saturday by holding a human chain protest to get authorities to increase efforts to protect wetlands used by flamingos.

Holding huge banners with #SaveDPSFlamingoLake emblazoned on them, participants in the protest said the 30-acre waterbody in Nerul, which attracts thousands of migratory flamingos every year, was getting "killed" due to blocking of tidal water by vested interests in violation of a Bombay High Court judgment.

The main channel on the south side of the lake has been buried due to the construction of the Nerul jetty as part of the state government's water transport project, alleged NatConnect Foundation's director BN Kumar.

"Over a period of time 10 flamingos died and five were injured after getting disorient-

ed due to such developments. We have been raising this issue for the past one month. The government must restore the lake," he said.

In response to a letter sent by NatConnect Foundation, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC) and the Maharashtra CMO had ordered a probe into the blocking of water to the lake but no action is being seen on the ground, Kumar claimed.

Officials from Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation, CIDCO and state forest department have visited the area and it is hoped rectifica-

tion measures will be taken quickly, said Anjali Agrawal of Save Flamingos and Mangroves Forum.

Sandip Sareen from Navi Mumbai Environment Preservation Society (NMEPS) said his organisation was consulting legal teams since the developments related to the lake are "a clear cut case of contempt of court".

Activists Vishnu Joshi and Hemant Katkar also condemned the authorities for their attitude on the issue and said they are duty bound to protect the area, which is part of Navi Mumbai's environmental heritage.

