



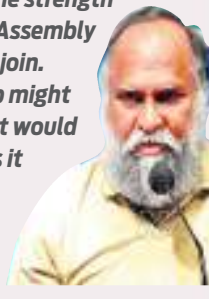
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer

Merger is different from MLAs belonging to other parties joining the Congress. Laxman's statement regarding this is wrong. However, 20 MLAs from the BRS and five MLAs from the BJP are in touch with the Congress. These MLAs are ready to join the Congress. The strength of the Congress in the Assembly will become 90 if they join. Laxman's political chip might have been destroyed. It would be better if he replaces it with a new one. The Congress will give the money for changing Laxman's chip



T. Jagga Reddy, TPCC working president P4

**Mamata can't stop CAA implementation: Shah**

**'PIND KI PUNJABI PUSHED ME OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE'**

**'It was quite challenging to emote only through EXPRESSIONS'**

**DON'T MISS...**

**84.45% polling in Machilipatnam**

Polling continued until midnight on Monday, and long queue lines were seen at various polling stations in Krishna and NTR districts. As per the directive of the Election Commission (ECI), the Presiding Officers (PO) allowed those who were in the queue lines at 6 pm to cast their votes. Machilipatnam Lok Sabha constituency witnessed the highest voter turnout of 84.45 per cent. Out of a total of 15,39,460 voters, 12,93,603 exercised their franchise. In the 2019 general elections, Machilipatnam registered an 83.85 per cent

-PAGE: 3

**Novel molecules identified to ...**

Researchers have identified three molecules that offer a promising solution that can prevent cancer relapse during treatment, according to a new study. In cancer treatment, DNA-damaging agents are commonly used to target cancer cells thereby killing them and causing cancer remission. However, over time, the effectiveness of these agents can diminish as cancer cells develop mechanisms to repair the damaged DNA, leading to a process commonly called chemoresistance ...

-PAGE: 5

**Food inflation likely to remain a cause ...**

The wholesale food inflation, which is at a four-month high, will continue to be a cause for concern in May and June as the heatwave is likely to jack up prices of perishable commodities. ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said on Tuesday. Although the impact of the high base of last year will play out in July and August, the effect of the monsoon will determine the price conditions in the subsequent months. As per data released on Tuesday, the wholesale price index (WPI)-based food inflation was ...

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**Rajasthan aim to clinch play off ...**

Riyen Parag, the hottest cricketer to emerge from India's north-east, is expected to get a grand welcome from his home fans when Rajasthan Royals try to ensure a safe passage into the IPL play-offs against the ousted Punjab Kings in their penultimate league game on Wednesday. Placed second in the 10-team table with 16 points, Royals need to ensure one win in their next two 'home' games in Guwahati. That will be enough to seal a last four berth. For the past few years, Guwahati has been Royals' second

-SPORTS

**Palnadu remains tense as violence continues**

TDP workers target homes of YSRCP supporters belonging to weaker sections

- YSRCP MLA Mahesh Reddy calls on victims
- ADGP Bagchi confirms incidents in Palnadu
- Kasu criticises police for 'inadequate response'
- Arrest of TDP leaders demanded to restore peace.



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A day after violence broke out, Palnadu continued to be tense on Tuesday following incidents of post-poll violence allegedly perpetrated by TDP workers. The unrest unfolded in Kothaganeshunipadu village, where the homes of people supporting the ruling YSRCP were targeted. According to police reports, TDP activists stormed the village on Monday night, launching attacks on residents.

In response to the violence, YSRCP Gurazala MLA K. Mahesh Reddy visited the affected village on Tuesday to express solidarity with the victims.

Despite efforts to maintain control by Shankha Brata Bagchi, ADGP of Law & Order, isolated incidents continue to emerge in the Palnadu district.

Bagchi, while acknowledging the situation, assured that measures are being taken to restore normalcy. He remained stationed in the district until the early hours of the morning, overseeing the situation in areas like Macherla, Rentichintala, and Narasaraopeta, which witnessed disturbances.

The turmoil stemmed from political tensions post-elections, with violent outbursts reported across various parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Continued on Page 2

**Taneti calls DGP, expresses concern over surge in violence**



Home Minister Taneti Vanitha spoke to State DGP Harish Kumar Gupta on Tuesday and expressed grave concern over the surge in violence across various regions during the elections and subsequent days.

Vanitha highlighted several incidents where TDP members were allegedly

Continued on Page 2

**AP records historic 81% polling**  
86.97% votes polled in Pithapuram constituency

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena hinted on Tuesday that Andhra Pradesh is poised to reach a remarkable 81% turnout in the just-concluded polls.

According to Meena, polling extended until 2 am at a few polling stations across the State, underlining the fervour with which voters engaged in the democratic process. He revealed that the provisional figures show a turnout of approximately 81%, surpassing the previous 2019 record. By midnight, the polling percentage stood at 79.4%, with an additional 1.2% contributed through postal ballots, culminating in the impressive 81%.

Comparatively, the 2019 elections saw a turnout of 79.20%, with 0.60% through postal ballots, totalling 79.80%. Meena assured that comprehensive details will be available by late evening, reaffirming the current estimate of around 81%.

To accommodate the extended polling hours, new Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were deployed in centres where voting persisted past midnight, with mock polling conducted in approximately 20 centres.

Instances of polling till midnight were observed in various locations, including Chintala Colony in Tiruvuru (SC) Assembly segment, Gotivada Agraharam in Madugula Mandal of Anakapalli district, and Bheemunipatnam in Padmanbham Mandal of Visakhapatnam district.



Over 4.14 crore eligible voters participated in the elections, which covered 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in a single-phase polling. A staggering 46,389 polling centres were set up across the state to facilitate the voting process, with 2,841 candidates vying for political representation.

Polling extended till 2 am at a few polling stations, with provisional figures showing 79.4% turnout and 1.2% through postal ballots, totalling 81%.

- Previous 2019 elections recorded a turnout of 79.20%, with 0.60% through postal ballots, totalling 79.80%.
- Over 4.14 crore voters participated in the elections covering 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats.
- Pithapuram constituency records an impressive 86.97% turnout, with notable participation from voters.

Key contenders include Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan.

The electoral fervour was palpable across the southern state, with voters displaying remarkable enthusiasm. Thousands travelled from neighbouring states of Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and even from abroad to exercise their franchise.

Over 4.14 crore eligible voters participated in the elections, which covered 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in a single-phase polling. A staggering 46,389 polling centres were set up across the state to facilitate the voting process, with 2,841 candidates vying for political representation.

Key contenders in the Assembly elections include Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Telugu Desam Party chief N Chandrababu Naidu, and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan, among others.

For the 25 Lok Sabha seats, 454 contestants contested, including prominent figures like former Union Minister and state BJP chief D Purandeswari, state Congress President YS Sharmila Reddy, and former Chief Minister N Kiran Kumar Reddy.

Continued on Page 2

**ALLEGED MCC, FIFO, CFMS VIOLATIONS**

**Naidu writes to Governor for action**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu wrote a letter to AP Governor S Abdul Nazeer, expressing concerns over the suspected violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and potential irregularities in fund allocation, particularly regarding the adherence to the First In First Out (FIFO) principle under the Centralised Funds Management System (CFMS).

Naidu highlighted that alarming indications are suggesting that the Andhra Pradesh government might be gearing up to allocate substantial

funds to a select group of contractors without following the FIFO clearance procedure. He pointed out a similar instance preceding the announcement of the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections when significant funds were disbursed to various contractors, while funds earmarked for essential welfare programs remained pending. The ECI has already sanctioned the transfer of funds under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) from May 14, 2024, onwards, necessitating the fulfilment of pending commitments.

Continued on Page 2

**Quash plea rejected by Bombay HC bench**

VIJAYAWADA: In a setback to TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu regarding an assault case involving Maharashtra police, Naidu had filed two petitions seeking to dismiss the case against him, stemming from an incident dating back to 2010 when he was the Chief Minister of combined Andhra Pradesh. The Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court delivered a verdict dismissing Naidu's petition and refusing to nullify the First Information

Report (FIR) lodged against him at the Dharmabad police station in Maharashtra's Nanded district. Justices Mangesh Patil and Shailesh Brahmeh presided over the hearing, considering arguments from both the defence and prosecution. In 2010, Naidu, along with his party colleague and former minister Nakka Ananda Babu, faced arrest by Maharashtra police for their involvement in protests and agitation.

Continued on Page 2

**Ambati demands re-polling in 6 stations**

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Minister for Irrigation Ambati Rambabu has lodged a formal complaint with the Election Commission of India (ECI), alleging lapses in law enforcement during polling. He demanded re-polling in six stations across three villages within the Sattenapalli constituency, situated in Palnadu district.

Speaking at a press briefing on Tuesday, Rambabu criticised the Police department for its failure to maintain order during the voting



process, even after the replacement of key officials including the DGP, IGP, and SPs.

Continued on Page 2

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu and JSP chief Pawan Kalyan on Tuesday visited Varanasi where they participated in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nomination filing programme.

Later, speaking to the media persons at Varanasi, Chandrababu said that in the ongoing elections, the NDA alliance will win more than 400 Lok Sabha seats and the NDA alliance in Andhra Pradesh will sweep the elections in the State. He further said that PM Modi has been working towards the target of Vikas Bharat 2047 and opined that the country will play a pivotal role in the world in days to come.

**Naidu, PK take part in Modi nomination filing programme**



**CBI court grants permission for Jagan's overseas trip**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court has granted permission for Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy to travel abroad. This decision allows CM Jagan to embark on a trip to the UK from May 17 to June 1. Accompanied by his family, CM Jagan will be on vacation during this period, while planning visits to London, Switzerland, and Jerusalem. His return is anticipated

by May 30 or June 1. In light of pending CBI and ED cases, Chief Minister YS Jagan required clearance from the CBI court to leave the country. The court, after considering CM Jagan's plea on May 14, 2024, approved his request to travel overseas.

CM Jagan submitted a petition to the CBI court in Nampally, seeking permission for his family trip to London on May 17.

Continued on Page 2

**4 killed as bus hits tractor**

PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

Four persons were killed and four others were injured when an APSRTC bus collided with a tractor at Udimudi village in P Gannavaram mandal of Konaseema district on Tuesday night.

Police said that the RTC bus which was going to Rajamahendravaram from Razole collided with a paddy-laden tractor. Two persons died instantaneously while two others succumbed while being taken to hospital. The deceased were identified as Siva, Surya Prakash, Katlayya and Pandu. The injured were admitted to the GGH in Amalapuram. The condition of one of the injured is said to be critical.

**Delhi court extends Kavitha's judicial custody till May 20**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of BRS leader K Kavitha, who has been arrested in a money laundering case related to alleged excise policy scam also involving Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, till May 20.

Special Judge for ED and CBI cases, Kaveri Baweja, passed the order after Kavitha was produced before the court on expiry of her judicial custody granted in



the case earlier.

The judge, meanwhile, also reserved for May 20 the order on whether to take cognisance of a fresh charge sheet filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the case.

During the hearing on Tuesday, the central probe agency told the judge that there was sufficient evidence in the prosecution complaint, ED's equivalent to a charge sheet, against Kavitha to put her on trial.

Continued on Page 2

**Lawyers cannot be sued for 'deficiency in service': SC**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Tuesday held the lawyers do not come within the purview of Consumer Protection Act and cannot be sued for 'deficiency in service' before the consumer courts.

The top court said a considerable amount of direct control is exercised by the client over the manner in which an advocate renders his services during the course of his employment. The services hired or availed of an advocate would be that of a contract 'of personal service' and would, therefore, stand excluded from the definition of 'service', it said. A bench of justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the legal profession is sui generis (unique) and the nature of work is specialised and cannot be compared with other professions.

The top court said the very purpose and object of the Consumer Protection Act 1986 as re-enacted in 2019 was to provide protection to the consumers from unfair trade practices and unethical business practices, and the legislature never intended to include either the professions or the services rendered by the professionals within the purview of the said Act.

"A service hired or availed of an advocate is a service under a contract of personal service", and therefore would fall within the exclusionary part of the definition of 'Service' contained in Section 2 (42) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. A complaint alleging 'deficiency in service' against Advocates practising legal profession would not be maintainable under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019," the bench said.



"A service hired or availed of an advocate is a service under a contract of personal service", and therefore would fall within the exclusionary part of the definition of 'Service' contained in Section 2 (42) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. A complaint alleging 'deficiency in service' against Advocates practising legal profession would not be maintainable under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019," the bench said.

The judgment came on a plea filed by the bar bodies and other individuals challenging a 2007 verdict of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), which has ruled that advocates and their services come under the purview of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

The top court said the object of the Consumer Protection Act was to provide to the consumers timely and effective administration and settlement of their disputes.

"If the services provided by all the professionals are also brought within the purview of the Act, there would be flood-gate of litigations in

the commissions/forums established under the Act, particularly because the remedy provided under the Act is inexpensive and summary in nature," the bench said.

Observing that the legal profession cannot be equated with any other traditional professions, the bench said it is not commercial in nature but is essentially a service-oriented and noble profession.

"It cannot be gainsaid that the role of Advocates is indispensable in the Justice Delivery System. An evolution of jurisprudence to keep our Constitution vibrant is possible only with the positive contribution of the Advocates. The Advocates are expected to be fearless and independent for protecting the rights of citizens, for upholding the Rule of law and also for protecting the Independence of Judiciary."

Continued on Page 2

# 'Support of women and elderly people will decide poll outcome'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana acknowledged the notable presence of women voters and the enthusiastic participation of senior citizens in exercising their democratic rights. Speaking to the media on Tuesday, Satyanarayana highlighted the overwhelming support received by the YSRCP, symbolised by what he described as "The wind of the fan blew heavily." Satyanarayana underscored the substantial turnout of elders, attributing it to their perception of enhanced dignity under the governance of Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. He accused the opposition, particularly the TDP, of employing disruptive tactics to obstruct the welfare schemes



initiated by the YSRCP government.

A key focus of Satyanarayana's discourse was

the alleged misinformation surrounding the AP Land Titling Act, with alliance parties implicated in propagating

falsehoods. Expressing confidence in Jagan Mohan Reddy's imminent victory, Sathyanarayana emphasised the YSRCP's steadfast commitment to fulfilling its electoral promises. Dispelling rumours of his resignation within the party as a fake, Sathyanarayana criticized the opposition, especially Chandrababu Naidu's TDP, for resorting to deceitful tactics in their pursuit of power. He lauded the legacy of late leader YS Rajasekhara Reddy and the current leadership of CM Jagan Mohan Reddy for their steadfast commitment to their commitments, resonating with the electorate.

In a separate address, Botsa Jhansi Lakshmi, expressed gratitude to the electorate, particularly women voters, for their significant contribution to

the party's success. Lakshmi, confident in her victory as an MP from Visakhapatnam, praised CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's governance, asserting that he had fulfilled every promise made to the people. Commending the dedication of party activists, Lakshmi extended appreciation to all those who tirelessly campaigned on behalf of the YSRCP. Her remarks reflected unity and determination within the party ranks, despite challenges posed by the opposition.

As the political landscape in Andhra Pradesh continues to evolve, the affirmations made by Botsa Satyanarayana and Botsa Jhansi Lakshmi signal the YSRCP's firm confidence in its leadership and vision for the state's future.

# Analysts decode factors shaping people's verdict in AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



The elections for 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in Andhra Pradesh have concluded, marked by an unparalleled increase in voter engagement, which has laid the groundwork for a closely watched electoral contest. Political analysts are scrutinising the State's political terrain in anticipation of the verdict, scheduled to be revealed on the evening of June 4. A significant catalyst fuelling this surge has been the active engagement of first-time voters, numbering nearly 2 million and aged between 18 to 21. Driven by a fervent desire to shape their future and influence state politics, these youthful constituents have displayed remarkable enthusiasm and confidence in the electoral process.

Furthermore, the traditionally less engaged middle class emerged as a pivotal player in this election cycle. Economic anxieties, policy implications, and heightened political awareness propelled this demographic into action, with issues such as job creation, inflation, and infrastructure development striking a deep chord. The electoral narrative of the 2024 Andhra Pradesh elections revolves around a central dichotomy: welfare versus development. The ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has staunchly advocated for the continuation and expansion of its welfare programmes, garnering significant support from economically disadvantaged sectors. Initiatives like

the Amma Vodi scheme for mothers of school-going children and Rythu Bharosa for farmers have delivered immediate relief to numerous households.

In contrast, the opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and other minor parties have championed a platform centred on economic progress, infrastructural enhancement, and employment generation. They argue that while welfare measures are beneficial, they should not overshadow broader economic policies aimed at ensuring sustainable growth and opportunities for the youth and middle class.

While both parties claim it's a sign of their respective victories, Senior YSRCP leader Vijayasa Reddy stated that the increased voter turnout is "not an indication of anti-incumbency but a sign of positive support for the policies of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy." On the other hand, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu and JS President Pawan Kalyan described the polling as a reflection of voter awareness and strong support for the Opposition Front.

The surge in voter turnout has injected an element of unpredictability into the election outcome. Senior political analysts suggest that this heightened participation may signify either an anti-incumbency sentiment, signalling a desire for change, or a resounding endorsement of the YSRCP's welfare initiatives. However, drawing definitive conclusions regarding the results remains premature.

As voters from diverse backgrounds articulate their preferences, it becomes evident that this election holds immense personal significance for many. While some prioritise economic growth and infrastructure, others underscore the indispensable role of welfare schemes in their daily lives. The 2024 elections in Andhra Pradesh transcend mere political competition, serving as a reflection of the evolving aspirations of its populace. With a substantial voter turnout driven by multifaceted demographics, the election's outcome will profoundly influence the state's future trajectory, navigating the delicate equilibrium between welfare and development.

## Police failed to protect Oppn leaders: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leaders of the ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP levelled allegations against each other for the post-poll violence reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday.

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu said people who are afraid of losing the elections are responsible for the attack on party leader P Venkata Mani Prasad (Pulivarthi Nani) in Tirupati.

"I seriously condemn YSRCP hoodlums attack on alliance's (NDA) Chandragiri constituency candidate Pulivarthi Nani," said Naidu in a post on X. The opposition leader accused the police of 'failing' to protect people and opposition parties after polling and called on the poll panel to take immediate action.

## Lawyers cannot be sued ...

Continued from Page 1

"People repose immense faith in the Judiciary, and the Bar being an integral part of the Judicial System has been assigned a very crucial role for preserving the independence of the Judiciary, and in turn the very democratic set up of the Nation. The advocates are perceived to be the intellectuals amongst the elites and social activists amongst the downtrodden," it said.

That is the reason they are expected to act according to the principles of "uberrima fides" -- the utmost good faith, integrity, fairness and loyalty while handling the legal proceedings of his client, it added.

The top court said being a responsible officer of the court and an important adjunct of the administration of justice, an advocate owes his duty not only to his client but also to the court as well as to the opposite side.

"The legal profession is different from the other professions also for the reason that what the Advocates do, affects not only an individual but the entire administration of justice, which is the foundation of the civilised society. It must be remembered that the legal profession is a solemn and serious profession," it said.

## Delhi court extends Kavitha's...



Continued from Page 1

The ED on Friday filed the nearly 200-page prosecution complaint along with annexures under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Kavitha, an MLC of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) party, three employees of a company that handled AAP's assembly election campaign in Goa (Chariot Productions Media Pvt Ltd) -- Damodar Sharma, Prince Kumar and Chanpreet Singh -- and a former employee of India Ahead news channel Arvind Singh have been named as accused in the latest charge sheet, sources said.

The federal agency had arrested 46-year-old Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad on March 15. Chanpreet was arrested on April 15 and it was alleged by the agency that he "managed" cash funds for AAP's Goa poll campaign in 2022.

The three Chariot Productions employees too were allegedly involved in the movement and handling of "bribe" funds paid by the 'South Group' through 'Angadiyas' and hawala route for the party's Goa campaign, according to the agency. Arvind Singh, the com-

mercial head and production controller of India Ahead, was arrested by the CBI in this case in May last year for alleged transfer of funds considered "kickbacks" of this "scam".

This is the seventh charge sheet filed by the ED in this case in which it has arrested 18 people so far, including Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was given interim bail by the Supreme Court on Friday.

The ED has alleged that Kavitha was a key member of the 'South Group' that has been accused of paying the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleged kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences in the national capital, as part of the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy for 2021-22.

The agency earlier said Kavitha was "one of the kingpins, a key conspirator and beneficiary of the Delhi excise policy scam". The excise case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22. Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities. Subsequently, the ED filed its money laundering case on August 22, 2022, taking cognisance of the CBI FIR that was lodged on August 17, 2022.

## CBI court grants permission for Jagan's...

Continued from Page 1

The advocate representing CM Jagan highlighted the Chief Minister's compliance with previous court orders during his foreign travels and invoked the constitutional right to travel abroad in support of the plea. Finally, on Tuesday, the judge granted permission for the overseas trip.

## Quash plea rejected by Bombay HC...

Continued from Page 1

Subsequently, they were placed in judicial custody in Dharmabad.

However, tensions escalated when the State Prison's DIG ordered their transfer to Aurangabad Central Prison. Naidu and Babu refused to comply, instead resorting to verbal abuse against the police officers and issuing threats of potential inter-state conflict.

## Ambati demands re-polling ...

Continued from Page 1

He voiced concerns about potential collusion between certain officers and opposition figures.

The minister highlighted irregularities at polling booths 253 and 254 in Dammalapur village, 236 and 247 in Narnepadu village, and 297 and 295 in Cheemalamarri village, calling attention to instances of electoral malpractice.

Rambabu recounted an encounter with CI Nagaraju, who advised him to stay indoors.

Subsequently, he learned from SP Bindumadhav that the ECI had issued a directive

for his house arrest, which he complied with.

Expressing further grievances, Rambabu noted the alleged disparity in treatment between himself and his political rival, Kanna Lakshminarayan, claiming the latter had unhindered access to polling stations.

Despite lodging complaints with senior police officials, including the SP, DSP, and CI, he felt his concerns were inadequately addressed. In a separate assertion, Rambabu asserted a significant wave of support for the ruling party, particularly among women voters. Citing anecdotal evidence

from his own polling station visit, he claimed a substantial turnout of women who, he believes, favoured the YSRCP as a vote of confidence in Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's governance.

Rambabu attributed this sentiment to the government's welfare initiatives, particularly those aimed at empowering women economically through financial aid and housing schemes.

He concluded by predicting a resounding victory for the YSRCP in the upcoming elections, buoyed by the enthusiastic participation of female voters across the State.

## Palnadu remains...

Continued from Page 1

In Kota Ganesunipadu, Palnadu District, TDP leaders allegedly incited violence by vandalizing homes and causing injuries. The incident, which occurred overnight, particularly targeted the residences of BCs, whom they accused of supporting the YSR Congress party.

Women and children bore the brunt of the assault, with some seeking refuge in a nearby temple to evade the aggression of TDP leaders.

YSRCP leaders, including MP candidate Anil Kumar Yadav and MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy, visited the affected village to interact with residents and condemn the

attacks. Addressing the media, Mahesh Reddy highlighted the failure of law enforcement to prevent the violence despite prior warnings. He emphasized the need for increased police presence and swift action against the perpetrators. Questions were raised regarding the adequacy of police response and their failure to intervene during the attacks.

Mahesh Reddy called for immediate action, urging the authorities to arrest the TDP leaders responsible within 24 hours. The incident underscores the ongoing tensions in Palnadu and the imperative for effective measures to ensure peace and security in the region.

## Naidu writes to Governor for ...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, there are outstanding obligations, such as the sanctioning of retirement benefits, provident fund refunds, medical reimbursements for government employees, and pending wages for contract workers due to insufficient funds in the government treasury. The situation has escalated to the extent that hospitals operating under the Aarogyasri scheme have threatened to halt services to disadvantaged individuals due to unsettled bills.

Meanwhile, representatives from the Chamber of Panchayat Raj

have staged protests over the diversion of approximately Rs 8000 crores earmarked for finance commission grants. Naidu further raised concerns about unauthorized disbursements totalling Rs 4,000 crore in fresh borrowings and an additional Rs 7,000 crore raised through bonds by APMDC, allegedly intended for payments to favoured contractors and political associates.

In his plea to the Governor, Naidu urged immediate intervention to halt the proposed irregular disbursement of funds to select contractors during the Model Code of Conduct period.

## AP records historic 81%...

Continued from Page 1

Polling commenced at 7 a.m. on Monday and concluded at 6 p.m. in most segments, except for the Left-Wing Extremist (LWE)-affected areas, where polling ended earlier. Despite the long queues observed at several polling stations, CEO Meena assured voters that they would be allowed to cast their votes, with necessary arrangements made for extended hours. On Tuesday morning, the revised polling figures indicated a 78.36% turnout for

Assembly elections, with Dharmavaram constituency recording the highest at 88.61% and Paderu the lowest at 55.45%. For the Lok Sabha polls, the turnout stood at 78.25%, with Amalapuram constituency recording the highest polling percentage of 83.19% and Visakhapatnam the lowest at 68%. Sources report an impressive 86.97% turnout at Pithapuram constituency, where Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan contested, with a total of 2,05,369 votes polled out of 2,36,406.

## Taneti calls...

Continued from Page 1

involved in acts of violence in places like Chandragiri, Gurjala, Tadipatri, Gopalapuram, and elsewhere. She underscored the alleged bias displayed by local law enforcement towards the attackers, particularly noting assaults on YSRCP MLAs. Of particular concern to Vanitha were reports of TDP members targeting women from marginalised communities, such as BCs, SCs, and STs, purportedly for not supporting their party. She warned of potential backlash from these communities if swift action wasn't taken to curb the violence, demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible and a comprehensive report on the actions taken by police.

Vanitha also raised suspicions regarding the impartiality of the Security Observer appointed by the Election Commission of India, suggesting a possible bias favouring the TDP. She lamented similar issues occurring elsewhere in the state due to the conduct of election police observers.

Attributing the situation to what she described as irresponsible transfers influenced by complaints from TDP leaders, Vanitha urged DGP Harish Kumar Gupta to take decisive action against the perpetrators.

# 'Cong plotting to send Ram Lala to tent again'

PNS ■ GIRIDIH (JHARKHAND)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday attacked the Congress, accusing it of indulging in "shameful" politics and plotting to send "Ram Lala to tent" again.

Alleging that the JMM, Congress and INDIA bloc have become the biggest model of corruption, appeasement and dynastic politics, Modi said he has resolved to free India from these vices.

Addressing a public meeting at Jharkhand's Giridih, the prime minister said, "Shameful statements are being issued by Congress leaders over Ram temple. Their leaders are plotting to

send Ram Lala to the tent once again, and talk against the Supreme Court judgement."

The old idol of Ram Lala was kept in a tent-like structure after the Babri Masjid was demolished.

They want to lock the premises again, he claimed and urged people to oust such "corrupt" forces.

Modi said, "Congress forced the nation to Naxalism, whereas BJP contained Naxal violence in the country."

He also promised that during his third term as the prime minister, he would wipe out "Naxalism and terrorism" from the face of the country.

## PM Modi files nomination papers in Varanasi

PNS ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi filed his nomination here on Tuesday, an event attended by several NDA leaders, including Union ministers and chief ministers, in a show of strength as he seeks a third term from the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency.

Sporting a white kurta-pajama and a blue sadi, Modi reached the district collectorate after a busy morning, which included an aarti on the banks of the Ganga at the Dashashwamedh ghat and



prayers at the city's Kaal Bhairav temple.

Immediately after filing his papers, the prime minister

headed for the Rudraksha Convention Centre to address local party leaders and workers.

**TODAY ALMANAC**

Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha  
Tithi: Ashtami: May 15 04:19 AM to May 16 06:23 AM

Nakshatram: Ashlesha: May 14 01:05 PM to May 15 03:25 PM

Rahukalam: 12:12 PM to 1:48 PM

Yamagandam: 7:24 AM to 9:00 AM

Varjyam: 04:49 AM to 06:37 AM

Gulika: 10:36 PM to 12:12 PM

Amritakalam: 01:40 PM to 03:25 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: Nil

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

Forecast: Partly Cloudy  
Temp: 38°  
Humidity: 54%  
Sunrise: 5:47 AM  
Sunset: 6:37 PM

Updated: May 14, 2024 5:00 PM

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# 84.45% polling in Masula

79.36% turnout in Vijayawada parliamentary constituency

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Polling continued until midnight on Monday, and long queue lines were seen at various polling stations in Krishna and NTR districts. As per the directive of the Election Commission (ECI), the Presiding Officers (PO) allowed those who were in the queue lines at 6 pm to cast their votes.

Machilipatnam Lok Sabha constituency witnessed the highest voter turnout of 84.45 per cent. Out of a total of 15,39,460 voters, 12,93,603 exercised their franchise. In the 2019 general elections, Machilipatnam registered an 83.85 per cent turnout.

Among all Assembly constituencies in the Machilipatnam Lok Sabha segment, Pedana registered the highest voter turnout of 88.57 per cent. In this segment, 1,48,413 votes were polled out of a total of 1,67,564. Also, the Pamarru (SC) segment registered 88.11 per cent polling. As many as 1,62,683 voters cast their votes out of a total of 1,84,632.

Meanwhile, the Avanigadda Assembly constituency regis-



tered 86 per cent turnout. In this constituency, 1,82,600 votes were polled as against a total of 2,12,331. In Gannavaram, 2,36,848 voters cast their votes out of a total of 2,79,054 (84.88 pc); in Gudivada segment, 1,68,537 voters used their voting right out of a total of 2,04,271 (82.51 pc).

In the Machilipatnam Assembly constituency, voter turnout was 81.91 per cent, as 1,61,109 votes were polled out of a total of 1,96,680. Meanwhile, the Penamaluru Assembly constituency, which has the highest number of vot-

ers in the erstwhile Krishna district, registered the lowest poll percentage of 79.14 per cent. In this constituency, out of a total of 2,94,928 voters, 2,33,413 votes were cast.

Meanwhile, the NTR district registered a 79.36 per cent turnout. Out of a total of 17,04,077 votes in the Vijayawada Lok Sabha segment, 13,52,355 voters polled their votes.

The district administration had aimed to achieve around 85 per cent polling. However, due to poor polling in some booths, the target was not achieved. In

the previous election, the poll percentage was 78.48.

The highest polling percentage was registered in Jaggayyapet Assembly constituency. Out of a total of 2,05,364 votes, 1,84,581 were polled. Also, in the Tiruvuru (SC) Assembly constituency, 1,81,669 votes were polled out of a total of 2,07,190 votes (87.68 pc).

However, Nandigama (SC) constituency registered an 87.56 per cent polling. A total of 1,79,915 electors cast their votes out of 2,05,480.

Mylavaram constituency registered an 85.42 per cent turnout. In this constituency, as many as 2,40,660 voters utilised their voting right out of 2,81,732. In Vijayawada West, the polling percentage was 66.45. A total of 1,70,104 votes were polled out of 2,55,963.

In Vijayawada Central, out of a total of 2,77,724 votes, 2,02,635 were polled. The polling percentage was 72.96. Vijayawada East registered a poll percentage of 71.30. Out of a total of 2,70,624 votes, as many as 1,93,031 were polled in this constituency.

# YSRCP files complaint with CEO against TDP over violence

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leaders have formally complained with Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena, highlighting various incidents of violence reported across the state following the recent elections. Minister Ambati Rambabu, accompanied by YSRCP Legal Cell State President Manohar Reddy and Party Grievance Cell President Narayana Murthy, filed the complaint urging thorough scrutiny of web camera footage in specific booths—253, 254 in Narnepadu, and 236, 237 in Chimalamarri, advocating for possible repolling in those areas.

Addressing the media after the filing, Minister Ambati expressed concern over the surge in violent episodes post-election, attributing them to opposition factions. Notably, unrest flared in the Palnadu region with reported incidents of vandalism targeting residences of YSRC supporters in Kota Ganesunipadu allegedly by Telugu Desam supporters. Additionally, there were reports of TD leaders purportedly assaulting and vandalizing



the homes of BC community voters who supported the ruling party in Kotha Ganesunipadu, Piduguralla mandal. In response, affected families sought refuge in nearby temples for safety.

Further tensions arose in

Velpur, Achampeta mandal of Palnadu district, where a dispute between opposing factions escalated into a confrontation during the night. The situation prompted police intervention to restore order amid clashes.

In Anantapur district's Tadipatri, clashes erupted with reports of stone pelting between TDP and YSRC leaders, resulting in injuries to CI Muralikrishna. In a retaliatory act, YSRC members allegedly targeted the residence of TDP leader Surya, prompting Municipal Chairman JC Prabhakar Reddy to stage a protest at the police station.

Similar clashes were reported in Nandyal district, where tensions flared between TD and YSRC ranks following an altercation initiated by YSRC leader Ramesh Naidu at the residence of TD leader Hari.

In a separate incident, heightened tensions were reported near Ravichettu centre of Atreyapuram mandal in Konaseema district. A clash between YSRC and TD workers escalated after provocative exchanges on WhatsApp groups, intensifying further with the involvement of local MLA Chirla Jaggireddy and alliance candidate Bandaru Satyananda Rao. To prevent further escalation, police have initiated heightened surveillance and are closely monitoring the situation.

# BCG vaccination for adults from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To completely eradicate Tuberculosis (TB) cases in Andhra Pradesh by 2025 and to reduce the number of cases, the BCG vaccination programme for adults will be conducted in 12 districts of the State from May 16. This is the mission's first phase, according to a release issued by the Health department on Tuesday.

The Health officials stated that the BCG vaccine will be provided to people belonging to six categories in Alluri Sitaramapuram, Visakhapatnam, Vijayanagara, Krishna, Guntur, Palnadu, Nellore, Chittoor, Nandyala, YSR Kadapa, Annamayya and Sri Sathyasai districts within three months.



This programme will be jointly organised by the District Tuberculosis Prevention and District Immunisation Officers.

They said that ANM, ASHA, CHO, and

TB champions at the field level will participate in the vaccination programme. Nodal officers have already been appointed for 12 districts as per the instructions of the Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare. BCG vaccine will be given to those who have reduced their disease by using TB drugs five years ago, contacts of TB patients who have used TB drugs in the year 2021, diabetics, smokers and people above 60 years of age.

The Health officials pointed out that the BCG vaccine is safe for adults and this vaccine should be taken as a preventive measure against TB disease. The nodal officers assigned to 12 districts will monitor the vaccination process.

# 2,379 future skills experts for 7,094 govt schools by June 12

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The School Education Department Principal Secretary, Praveen Prakash, has informed that the department has announced a significant initiative to equip students in government high schools with future-ready skills. As many as 2,379 Future Skills Experts will be deployed to 7,094 government schools by June 12 in the 2024-25 academic year, he said.

In a press release here on Tuesday, Praveen Prakash said

that these Future Skills Experts are fourth-year engineering students. They would get training in digital teaching methods and support to improve the learning outcomes for students. The initiative aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing students to compete in the globalised job market, he added.

Briefing the selection

process of future experts, Praveen said that Regional Joint Directors (RJDs) and District Educational Officers (DEOs) are collaborating with engineering college principals to select the Future Skills Experts. Based on the performance reports, they should submit the top three candidates identified at the State and district-levels and

added that he would hold a virtual interaction with the top 26 candidates (one per district) on May 27.

He further informed that by June 12, one Future Skills Expert will be assigned to every three government high schools across the State's 26 districts. Talking about the training materials, he said the selected experts would receive an e-textbook containing foundational concepts from a three-year engineering programme to prepare them for teaching eighth graders.

# Summer camp at Vizag Zoo from May 21

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Indira Gandhi Zoological Park (IGZP) in Visakhapatnam is set to host its eagerly awaited Summer Camp-2024, starting from May 21. Dr. Nandani Salaria, the Curator of IGZP, announced the event, inviting participants aged 5 to 18 years.

The summer camp will be organised in two separate batches. The first batch, for children aged 5 to 11 years, will run from May 21 to May 25. The second batch, for those aged 12 to 18 years, will take place from May 28 to June 1. The camp is designed to provide both educational and entertaining experiences through a variety of engaging programmes.

Participants will have the opportunity to take part in activities such as bird watching, where they will learn about rare bird species in collaboration with Wildlife Conservation through Research & Education



(WCTRE). Other activities include a guided zoo tour to explore the diverse animal species at the Visakhapatnam Zoo, and a visit to the Zoo Veterinary Hospital to understand the medical treatment and facilities available for wild animals.

The registration fee for the camp is Rs 500 per participant, which includes a special registration kit. Dr. Salaria encouraged parents and school management to motivate students to take part in the summer camp, highlighting its value in providing both knowledge and entertainment. Interested participants can register by calling 94408 10213.

# NTPC Simhadri clinches 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive Green Leaf Platinum Award

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

NTPC Simhadri has been bestowed with the prestigious Green Leaf Platinum Award-2023 for Environmental Excellence by the esteemed APEX India Foundation. This accolade, comprising a shield and a merit certificate, lauds NTPC Simhadri's substantial contributions to environmental preservation through the adoption of exemplary practices.

This marks the third consecutive year that NTPC Simhadri has been honored with this esteemed award. The repeated acknowledgment underscores NTPC Simhadri's enduring dedication to environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Sanjay Kumar Sinha, Project Head of NTPC Simhadri, shed light on the extensive measures undertaken by the company to mitigate pollution and safeguard the environment. "We have allocated nearly Rs. 1,000 crore towards various equip-



ment and systems for pollution mitigation." Sinha remarked, "NTPC Simhadri's initiative to plant over seven lakh trees for environmental protection is a testament to our commitment. Additionally, as a proud partner of the 'Green

Visakha' Project, we have planted 3.5 lakh trees and distributed 1.25 lakh fruit-bearing plants." NTPC Simhadri has contributed Rs. 6 crore towards the conservation of Olive Ridley turtles, solidifying its commitment to wildlife

preservation. Sinha also highlighted the designation of the power station and township premises as plastic-free zones, reflecting the company's efforts to minimise environmental impact.

Highlighting the scale of NTPC Simhadri's afforestation efforts, Sinha stated, "To date, we have planted 13.80 lakh trees with a survival rate of more than 90 per cent. Every year, an additional 40,000 trees are planted through collaboration with the Social Forestry Department of Andhra Pradesh."

The Green Leaf Platinum Award is designed to honour organisations that exhibit a passionate commitment to environmental preservation while actively participating in initiatives with a long-term positive impact on environmental health. NTPC Simhadri's consistent actions and contributions have established a benchmark for clean and green production, earning it this distinguished accolade once again.

# Nagababu raps Varma, Allu Arjun ahead of poll results

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the wake of impending election results, JSP general secretary Nagababu stirred controversy with a tweet on June 4 that resonated with many. He wrote, "Maatho untou prarthulaki pani chese vaadu maa vaadainaa paraayi vaade. maatho nilabade vaadu paraayi-vaadainaa maa vaade.!" (The one who stays with us but works for our opponents is not our own person; the one who stands with us is our own, even if he is from the opponents' side.!) This tweet carries nuanced implications.

Initially, it appears aimed at TDP leader Varma of Pithapuram, who faces allegations of aligning with YSRCP to undermine Pawan Kalyan's candidacy, poten-

tially to secure his constituency stronghold. However, upon deeper scrutiny, it also seems directed at Allu Arjun, a member of the mega family, who openly supported his friend Ravi of YSRCP in Nandyal. There's widespread speculation suggesting both Varma and Allu Arjun may not be wholeheartedly committed to Pawan's political ambitions but rather offered superficial support.

Nagababu's tweet seemingly casts doubt on the allegiance of Varma and Allu Arjun. While his intentions may target one or both individuals, many view his propensity to amplify contentious issues and sow discord within Jana Sena and towards his brother Pawan Kalyan as counterproductive.

# Online applications invited for admissions ITI

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Online applications are invited for admission into various engineering and non-engineering trades in government and private ITIs in the state for the next academic year. Dr B Navya, Director State Government Employment and Training Institute, said that online applications are invited for admission into various engineering and non-engineering trades in government and private ITIs in the state for the next academic year.

Interested and eligible students should utilise this opportunity. For online registration, please visit the portal iti.ap.gov.in and apply. The last date for online registration has been fixed as June 10th.

Dr B Navya, Director of the State Govt Employment and Training Institute, said that while filling out the online application, one should make sure to check for any mistakes before submitting it online. For other details, contact the Principal of the nearest government ITI.

# Heavy rain forecast in parts of Andhra

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Heavy rain is expected at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next 24 hours due to a cyclonic circulation in the Southeast Arabian Sea.

In Tuesday's weather forecast, it has been indicated that the Southwest Monsoon is likely to advance into the South Andaman Sea, certain parts of the Southeast Bay of Bengal, and the Nicobar Islands around May 19.

Thunderstorms, accompanied by lightning and gusty winds (reaching speeds of 40-50 Kmph), are anticipated at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema over the next five days. Light to moderate rain or thunder-showers may occur at one or two locations in these regions over the next seven days.

During the last 24 hours,

Udayagiri in the SPSR Nellore district experienced very heavy rainfall, while Addanki in the Bapatla district and Thamballapalle in the Annamayya District witnessed heavy rainfall. Rainfall was observed in a few areas over Coastal Andhra Pradesh, isolated spots in Rayalaseema, while dry weather prevailed elsewhere during the same period.

The highest maximum temperature, reaching 40.6 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Tirupati of Rayalaseema. The Meteorological Centre reported that the cyclonic circulation over South Interior Karnataka & its vicinity has merged with the trough extending from the cyclonic circulation over the southeast Arabian Sea & adjoining Kerala to Marathwada across Karnataka at 0.9 km above mean sea level. Lower troposphere South Easterly/South-westerly winds continue to prevail over Andhra Pradesh.

# 'Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam' held at Padmavati temple

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The 'Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam' was held with religious fervour at Sri Padmavathi Ammavari temple in Tiruchanoor near here on Tuesday. As the annual 'Vasanthotsavam' was scheduled from May 22 to 24 with 'Ankurarpanam' on May 21, this feast was observed. Devotees will pay Rs 150 per ticket per person to participate in this festival.

On May 23, a procession of 'Swarna Ratham' will be observed at 7.45 am. Every day from 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm the spring festival is observed in Friday Gardens to the Utsava Murty of Ammavaru. TTD has cancelled Arjita Kalyanotsavam, Sahasra Deepalankara Seva from May 21 to 24, Tiruppavada Seva on May 23 and Lakshmi Puja and May 24. Temple Deputy Executive Officer Govindarajan, Archakas Babu Swamy, Superintendent Madhu, and temple inspector Subhaskar participated.

# Catering licencees, vendors asked to adhere to norms

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Officials of the Vijayawada Railway Division, SCR, counselled vendors and catering licencees at VIP Lounge, Station Director's Office, at Vijayawada Railway Station on Tuesday. The objective of this counselling session is to prevent overcharging and other malpractices duly creating awareness among the catering fraternity, with focus on customer satisfaction by ensuring quality, quantity and fair business practices.

Md Ali Khan, Divisional Commercial Manager, Vijayawada Division, advised the catering licencees and vendors to strictly adhere to the quantity and quality norms prescribed by the administration. He stated that senior officials are frequently conducting surprise checks at frequent intervals and a maximum penalty is being imposed on cases of overcharging, sale of packaged food items,



expired food items, if detected. The DCM instructed the RPF and ticket-checking staff to take stern action against unauthorised hawkers and apprehend them immediately. He also advised the water vending machine operators to dispose of the exact quantity of the water. The DCM directed the inspectors to frequently conduct surprise inspections and check the credentials of all the vendor permits of vendors

on the platforms. Rahmatullah, Food Safety Officer, Vijayawada Division, advised the vendors to wear all the necessary gear during vending and refrain from unhygienic practices. M Sailaja, Station Director, Vijayawada; MSP Srinivas, CCI, Vijayawada; Sk Subhani, CCI Catering; other inspectors, and IRCTC Officials were present during the counselling session.

# PK under fire for entering polling booth with non-voter wife

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party Legal Cell State President M Manohar Reddy has strongly criticised Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan's actions during the AP Elections in the Mangalagiri constituency.

Reddy highlighted that Kalyan's arrival at the polling booth with his wife, Konidala Anna (formerly known as Anna Lezhneva), and a large entourage disrupted the voting process and violated Election Commission guidelines. He said that Pawan Kalyan's decision to bring his non-voter wife into the polling booth was illegal and a clear breach of election norms.

Reddy called for appropriate action to be taken against Pawan Kalyan for his disregard of the established protocols.

# Task cut out for the next govt in AP: Balancing welfare & progress

Regardless of which party or combine wins in the just-concluded Assembly (and Lok Sabha) elections in Andhra Pradesh, the task is cut out for the next government: balancing costly welfare measures with non-negotiable development of the state. Otherwise, from the standpoint of this crucial balance, it will take some time for people to feel the victory.

As things stand, every citizen in AP has to bear his or her share of the state's financial burden to the tune of Rs.2 lakhs, as per estimates. Further borrowings for funding welfare schemes, whether new or expanded ones, without there being any parallel asset creation, will only complicate

matters. The promises concerning welfare measures made by various parties to woo marginalized sections for retaining or attaining power do not portend a robust fiscal system in the years ahead.

Most of the beneficiaries of welfare schemes have no idea of the larger implications of the substantial (borrowed) money credited to their accounts, impairing the state's fiscal health. As Andhra Pradesh has already gotten neck-deep into a debt trap due to indiscriminate borrowings, there is dire need for taking a serious look at the debt position on a point-to-point basis. Given the scale of borrowings by AP, it is just impossible to clear them over five years for any government.

**Most of the beneficiaries of welfare schemes have no idea of the larger implications of the substantial (borrowed) money credited to their accounts, impairing the state's fiscal health. As Andhra Pradesh has already gotten neck-deep into a debt trap due to indiscriminate borrowings, there is dire need for taking a serious look at the debt position on a point-to-point basis. Given the scale of borrowings by AP, it is just impossible to clear them over five years for any government.**

So, fiscal prudence should be the mantra for the new government.

On many occasions, Andhra Pradesh has been accommodated by the Reserve Bank of India through the ways and means account even for paying salaries to government staff. Today, it has become

almost a custom for the government to borrow for meeting even its day-to-day needs, with government employees receiving their monthly salaries once in about 40 days. Fifteen chief ministers have ruled the combined Andhra Pradesh state since 1952. Unlike in the past, in residual



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

AP, government employees are getting their salary normally on the 10th of every month. No wonder, one political party included an assurance in its election manifesto that, should it come to power, salaries

would be paid before the 5th of every month.

Nowadays governments have almost forgotten their duty to create public assets in the state that would benefit succeeding generations. They think it is enough if they distribute funds to the beneficiaries of welfare schemes. The present government headed by YSR Congress Party has poured Rs.2.80 lakh crore into welfare schemes, with the money being credited directly to the bank accounts of beneficiaries. In other words, not a rupee from this huge amount would come back to the exchequer in any form. At a time when the state is reeling under drought conditions without proper irrigation facilities for the farm sector, the construction of the Polavaram multi-

purpose project has taken a back seat reportedly for want of funds. This project alone is capable of catering to the needs of the entire state, including irrigation and drinking water supply.

Being a lower riparian state of River Godavari, Andhra Pradesh can utilise nearly 1,000 tmc of water and earn hundreds of crores of rupees in the form of agricultural cess from the farm sector through an organized irrigation system. Just 20% of the huge amount of Rs.2.80 lakh crore spent on welfare schemes is needed for completion of the Polavaram project. Had successive governments been mindful of the need to complete the project on priority, it would have served as a big asset for the state, assuring better life for

future generations.

No doubt, welfare measures are essential for marginalized sections. At the same time, the state government should not be blind to the long-term needs of the state. Community development is incomplete without creation of public assets that meet common needs. Roads, community buildings, water tanks etc., cannot be dispensed with for accommodating populist schemes.

The state may take another 30 years to clear the existing debt burden if future governments work sincerely! In this backdrop, there is dire need to balance welfare measures with a proper development agenda. The next government in Andhra Pradesh would do well to keep this in mind.

## Collector, SP monitor security for EVMs

**PNS ■ ELURU**

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh and SP D Prashanthi here on Tuesday monitored the preservation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

The EVMs were brought to the Sir CR Reddy Engineering College campus and preserved in the strongroom. The Collector said that EVMs of all the seven Assembly constituencies were preserved in the strongroom.

The Collector and SP personally monitored the process of sealing the strongroom. The Collector said that due to elaborate arrangements, made by

the district machinery, the elections were held in a peaceful atmosphere without major incidents in Eluru district.

The Collector made it clear that 83.4% of polling was recorded in the district. In some polling stations, those who were in the queue at 6 pm were allowed to cast their vote. The polling process in some polling stations continued till late night. Later after completing the due process, the EVMs were brought to the strongroom amid strong security and preserved in the strongroom which was sealed in the presence of representatives of political parties. A three-tier security has been provided to the

EVM strong room by deploying central paramilitary forces.

Collector Prasanna Venkatesh stated that the election officials regularly monitor the security of EVMs and the seals of strong rooms. Similarly, representatives of various parties can also examine the same.

The counting of votes will be held at CR Reddy Engineering College in Eluru on June 4. State Election General Observers Krishnakant Pathak, S A Raman, Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, ITDA PO Y. Surya Teja and returning officers of the respective constituencies were present.



## EVMs preserved in strongroom

**PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY**

The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were preserved in the strongroom after the completion of polling here on Tuesday. The EVMs and VVPATs were brought to the strongroom, located on the campus of Nannaya University, after completing the formalities and the conclusion of polling at various polling stations across the district.

The EVMs were placed in the strongroom and the doors of the strongroom closed and sealed in the presence of Election Observer K Balasubramanyam and District Collector K Madhavilatha. The



representatives of various political parties were also present when the sealing process was conducted.

The scrutiny was held following the Form 7A, PO diary. The Collector and Election Observer expressed satisfaction over the tallying of polled votes and records.

## TDP candidate attacked

**PNS ■ TIRUPATI**

Violence continued for a second consecutive day in Tirupati and Palnadu districts, as tensions escalated following the initial outbreak on polling day. Pulavarti Nani, a candidate for the TDP, fell victim to an attack during the unrest.

In Tirupati, Pulavarti Nani, the TDP's candidate for the Chandragiri Assembly, was allegedly assaulted by a group of YSRCP activists. The incident occurred as he was leaving the Padmavathi Women's University campus after inspecting a strong room on Tuesday. Nani sustained injuries in the attack and was subsequently hospitalised.

Upon learning of the attack, a swarm of TDP supporters descended on the scene, where they discovered a vehicle adorned with YSRCP insignia.



The presence of liquor bottles in the vehicle further incited their anger, resulting in its destruction. Police intervention escalated tensions as officers resorted to lathi charges, even reportedly targeting journalists.

Tirupati SP Krishnakant Patel visited the scene to assess the situation, confirming Nani's condition was stable and announcing the imposition of Section 144 in the University vicinity.

## Woman killed, 3 others hurt as car rams tree

**PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM**

A woman was killed and three others were injured when the car in which they were travelling ramed a tree at Kattupalli village in Chittoor mandal on Tuesday on NH 30.

Police said that five people were going to Maredumilli in the Innova car from Gampalagudem village. The car ramed a roadside tree killing Lakshmi (46). Two women and a boy were injured in the mishap and they were admitted to the GGH at Yeduguri Allapalli. The deceased and the injured belong to Gampalagudem village in Krishna district.

## RTC MD, Endowments Commissioner visit Durga temple

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) Managing Director (MD) Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao had a darshan of goddess Durga Devi at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

Temple Executive Officer KS Rama Rao welcomed Tirumala Rao. Later, the temple Vedic scholars gave blessings to him at the Veda Ashirvachanam Mandapam. EO Rama Rao presented him with Sesham Vastram, Laddu Prasadam and the goddess Durga Devi's portrait.

Meanwhile, Endowment



Department Commissioner S Satyanarayana visited the Durga temple. Temple EO KS Rama Rao welcomed Satyanarayana according to temple etiquette.

## Vizag CP reviews security at strongrooms in Andhra University

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Police Commissioner Dr A Ravi Shankar conducted a thorough inspection of the security measures at the strong rooms set up at Andhra University (AU) here on Tuesday. Following the completion of the polling process, which was overseen by senior officials under the orders of the Commissioner of Police, ballot boxes were securely transported from polling booths to the AU strong rooms with a police escort last night. The city police have implemented a comprehensive three-tiered security system to ensure the safety of the ballot



boxes.

Dr Ravi Shankar personally inspected the security arrangements at Andhra University.

His review included an assessment of the personnel deployed, the infrastructure facilities in place, and the secu-

urity of the surrounding areas. He provided specific instructions to police officers to enhance the security measures for the ballot boxes. The officers were directed to conduct surprise checks, maintain constant vigilance, and ensure their duties are performed without any lapses, thereby preventing any untoward incidents until the completion of the counting process.

The Commissioner's proactive approach and the stringent security measures put in place reflect the commitment of the city police to uphold the sanctity of the electoral process and prevent any untoward incidents.

## Five-month-old baby mauled to death by dog

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

A five-month-old baby boy was mauled to death by a dog at a village in Vikarabad district of Telangana on Tuesday.

Police said the mother of the infant went out of their single room house this morning as part of her household chores. The dog entered inside the house and attacked the baby which was sleeping. The child died instantly.

The child's parents work at a stone polishing unit.

The dog is often fed by the residents of the locality. Angry over the incident, they killed the dog, police said.

## Passengers from AP facing tough return journey to Hyd

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Passengers have been facing lot of problems on their return journey to Hyderabad from various parts of Andhra Pradesh. A large number of people went to Andhra Pradesh to exercise their franchise at their respective native places.

Private operators deployed hundreds of buses to ferry the passengers from Hyderabad and other places in Telangana to Andhra Pradesh.

A passenger Mahesh said, "I have to reach my office on Tuesday morning, so I was compelled to travel in a pri-

**AFTER VOTING...**

Monday people went from Hyderabad to their native places and since Monday evening people started returning to Hyderabad. On Monday, the TSRTC said that more than 1.50 crore passengers travelled in two days.

Y Raghuvaran said, "I went to my home in Jadcherla on Friday in my friend's vehicle. But when I returned to the city I had to choose a bus. From Gachibowli to Gachibowli, the distance is around 160 KM and I was standing all the way till I stepped down from the bus."

They have charged Rs 400 from me. As I had no choice other than to go by private cab." To take the passenger rush as an advantage private cab drivers hiked the charges and collected from them. From Suryapet to LB Nagar, the TSRTC is charging Rs 240 for an express service. But the taxicabs are charging Rs 400.

The TSRTC deployed more than 600 buses to ferry passengers to Andhra Pradesh and around 1,500 special buses had been arranged to meet the passengers rush in view of elections. However, till

## 'There won't be any crisis as 20 BRS MLAs and 5 BJP MLAs are in touch with Congress'

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Declaring that BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Dr K. Laxman is spreading lies against the Congress, TPCC Working President T. Jagga Reddy said that there will be no crisis next August as 20 MLAs of the BRS and five MLAs of the BJP are in touch with the Congress.

He said that then the total number of Congress MLAs would become 90 and there would not be any danger to the Congress government. He made it clear that the Congress

government would rule comfortably for five years.

"Merger is different from MLAs from other parties joining the Congress. Laxman's statement regarding this is wrong. However, 20 MLAs from the BRS and five MLAs from the BJP are in touch with the Congress. These MLAs are ready to join the Congress. The number of Congress MLAs will become 90 if they join. Laxman's political chip might have been destroyed. It would be better if Laxman replaced it with a new



one. The Congress will give the money for changing Laxman's chip," Jagga Reddy said.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan on Tuesday, Jagga said that Laxman was engaging in fortune-telling like a pandit.

"How can Laxman say that the Congress government would face a crisis in August? What is the meaning of merging the BRS with the Congress? How can the Congress government fall when it has 65 MLAs?" he asked.

Jagga said that people are happy with the Congress government's schemes. He asked BJP leaders why they were

confusing the public and that no one could beat BJP leaders in deceiving the people.

He criticised the BJP leaders for bringing in God in all matters and added that the Congress knows only to implement its assurances.

Jagga said that the Congress government will definitely waive farm loans up to Rs 2 lakh and give Rs 2,500 per month to BPL women.

He said that Congress will not turn away from its word and that Laxman is speaking without proper awareness.



Buses carrying passengers from AP to Hyderabad jammed the Hyderabad-Vijayawada national highway on Tuesday

INDIA CORNER

### Restaurants in Mumbai to give 20 pc 'Democracy Discount'

A section of restaurants in Mumbai on Tuesday announced a 20 per cent discount on the total dine-in bill value on May 20 & 21 to the local voters. The Democracy Discount initiative is the hospitality fraternity's way of encouraging citizens to go out and cast their votes, the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) Mumbai Chapter said in a statement. "Mumbai as a city has always had such a great sense of community and I am thrilled that we have so many fabulous brands on board as part of the NRAI Mumbai Chapter," NRAI Mumbai Chapter Head Rachel Goenka said in the statement. As part of this initiative, all participating restaurants will offer a 20 per cent discount on the total bill value to those dine-in customers who are residents as per their voter ID and have cast their vote with an inked finger. Mumbai will go to polls in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 20, 2024.



### GANHRI postpones reaccreditation of National Human Rights Institutions again

The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) has deferred the reaccreditation of NHRC, India for the second year in a row. Geneva-based GANHRI, through its Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA), is responsible for reviewing and accrediting NHRI's (National Human Rights Institutions) in compliance with the Paris Principles. It is a "rigorous, peer-based process, undertaken by representatives of NHRI's from each of the four regions: Africa, Americas, Asia Pacific and Europe", according to the website of GANHRI. GANHRI has deferred the reaccreditation of NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) during its review meeting recently, sources said. Last year, the review of the NHRC, India, which was due in March 2023 for its reaccreditation, had been deferred for a year, they said. The deferral means no final decision has been taken as yet, a source said.



### Hit-and-run case turns out to be murder in Goa, two held

Police on Tuesday arrested two persons hailing from Uttar Pradesh for allegedly murdering a man in the guise of a hit-and-run accident in North Goa district, an official said. Superintendent of Police (North) Akshat Kaushal told reporters here that the accused, Rohit Singh and Abhishek Singh, allegedly killed one Devidas Konadkar at Pernem in the district on Monday night over a petty dispute and tried to pass it off as a hit-and-run case. Kaushal said the duo chased the victim who was on a two-wheeler, hit him from behind and ran their pick-up van over him before fleeing the spot. The two men ran into a nearby forest, but local residents who saw the incident caught them and handed them over to the police who placed them under arrest, he said. During investigation it turned out to be a case of murder, the police said. The SP said the murder was a fallout of a petty quarrel between the victim and the accused near the Mopa International Airport.



## 1995 verdict bringing doctors under CPA requires reconsideration: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said its 1995 judgement which brought the medical profession within the ambit of Consumer Protection Act needs to be reconsidered.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the decision of the three-judge bench deserves to be revisited and considered by a larger bench.

"In our humble opinion, the said decision deserves to be revisited having regard to the history, object, purpose and the scheme of the Consumer Protection Act and in view of the opinion expressed by us hereinabove to the effect that neither the 'Profession' could be treated as 'business' or 'trade' nor the services provided by the 'Professionals' could be treated at par with the services provided by the Businessmen or the Traders, so as to bring them within the purview of the CP Act," the bench said.

The bench referred the



matter to the Chief Justice of India for his consideration.

In 1995, the Supreme Court delivered a decision in Indian Medical Association Vs VP Shantha case which brought the medical profession within the ambit of a service as defined in Section 2(1)(o) of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

Section 2(1)(o) of the Act defines the word "service" to mean a "service of any description, which is made

available to potential users and includes, but not limited to, the provision of facilities in connection with banking, financing, insurance, transport, processing, supply of electrical or other energy, boarding or lodging or both, housing construction, entertainment, amusement or the purveying of news or other information, but does not include the rendering of any service free of charge or under a contract of personal ser-

vice".

The apex court's observation came while pronouncing a judgement which held that the lawyers do not come within the purview of Consumer Protection Act and cannot be sued for "deficiency in service" before the consumer courts.

The bench clarified that this does mean that the professionals could not be sued or held liable for their alleged misconduct or tortious or criminal acts.

"In the process of overall depletion and erosion of ethical values and degradation of the professional ethics, the instances of professional misconduct are also on the rise. Undoubtedly, no professional either legal, medical or any other professional enjoys any immunity from being sued or from being held liable for his professional or otherwise misconduct or other misdeeds causing legal, monetary or other injuries to his clients or the persons hiring or availing his services.

### Four newborn tiger cubs die under weight of mother tigress

PNS ■ RANCHI

Four newborn tiger cubs were killed due to 'suffocation' under the weight of mother tigress in Ranchi's Bhagwan Birsa Biological Park, a zoo official said on Tuesday.

The tigress Gauri gave birth to four cubs on May 10 but it turned over the newborn cubs and under the weight of the mother all four cubs died, the zoo veterinarian OP Sahu said.

"The mother did not have child-caring experience. Gauri could not understand that she turned over her newborn cubs. The cubs died of suffocation under the weight of the mother on May 11," he said.

Dr MK Gupta of Ranchi Veterinary College, who carried out the postmortem on Monday, said, "It was evident that all four cubs died due to suffocation under mother's weight. We found pressure marks on skin of the cubs."

## 'No unauthorised operation by Indian military pilots in Maldives'

PNS ■ MALE

India on Tuesday dismissed the claim made by Maldivian Defence Minister Ghassan Maumoon, alleging that Indian military helicopter pilots stationed in the Maldives carried out an unauthorised operation in 2019.

In a statement, the High Commission of India in the Maldives asserted that Indian aviation platforms in the Maldives have always operated according to the "agreed procedures and with due authorisation."

The clarification came days after India completed the withdrawal of 76 military personnel from the Maldives following a demand by President Mohamed Muizzu. Relations between India and Maldives deteriorated since Muizzu, a pro-China leader, came to power in November last year.

Muizzu had set May 10 as the deadline for the withdrawal of the Indian military troops from his country.

Addressing a press confer-



ence here on Saturday, Defence Minister Ghassan said he knew of one of the aviation platforms undertaking an unauthorised sortie.

He narrated an incident where one of the two helicopters operated by Indian military personnel in the Maldives landed in Thimarafushi, allegedly without permission - a case, which he said, was reviewed by the Parliament's Committee on National Security Services (241 Committee), when he was a lawmaker.

However, the Indian mis-

sion dismissed the allegation. "Indian aviation platforms in the Maldives have always operated as per agreed procedures and with due authorisation from the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDFF)," the High Commission of India said.

Referring to the remarks by the Maldivian Defence Minister, the High Commission said the particular incident which saw an emergency landing at Thimarafushi on October 9, 2019, was "necessitated due to an unforeseen exigency."

## No internal rift, ruling Cong is united in K'taka, asserts CM

PNS ■ MYSURU (KARNATAKA)

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah denied any internal rift within the ruling Congress and asserted that the party was united.

"Where is the rift within us? Is there a fight among us? They (BJP) saying it is different, they say it for politics...where is the internal rift?" Siddaramaiah asked reporters, responding to a question on state BJP leaders' statements that the Congress government will fall because of its internal rifts.

He said, "There is no internal rift among us. If there was internal rift, could we have done (faced) Parliament elections unitedly? There is no rift, neither inside, nor outside."

Reacting to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's reported statements regarding efforts to replicate the 'Maharashtra model' to topple the Congress government in Karnataka, the CM said, "They (BJP leaders) have been making such claims for a year now."

"He (Shinde) is Maharashtra Chief Minister, instead of speaking about our government, let him save his government first," he added.

BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Monday said his party will not make any attempt to pull down this government, but he cannot now itself predict the kind of unrest that will get created within the ruling Congress, after the Lok Sabha poll results are declared.

"As the party's state President I'm saying -- BJP is successfully functioning as a responsible opposition and we will continue to do so," he said, adding that "there is no question of any operation, but we will not be responsible for the impact that the poll results will have on the ruling party."

BJP and JD(S) leaders in the state have several times predicted the collapse of the government, hinting at a possible power tussle within the Congress, amid persistent rumours about leadership change in the ruling party in the state after Lok Sabha polls or mid-way of the current Assembly's tenure.

### BJP losing ground everywhere, says Kejriwal

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

BJP is losing ground across the country and will not win more than 230 seats all told, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal claimed on Tuesday, as he called on the people of Haryana to start the "revolution" to unseat the saffron party-led alliance from the Centre.

Kejriwal made the remarks in a roadshow for party candidate Sushil Gupta in Kurukshetra's Pehowa, where he attacked the BJP-led Centre for his jailing, claiming it is scared of him.

This was Kejriwal's first visit to Haryana after being released on bail.

Gupta, the AAP's Kurukshetra Lok Sabha candidate, accompanied Kejriwal during the roadshow.

The Aam Aadmi Party national convener was granted interim bail till June 1 by the Supreme Court on May 10 in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

Addressing a gathering during his roadshow, Kejriwal said, "On March 16, elections were announced. On March 21, they sent me to jail. This means they wanted Kejriwal to not campaign. They are scared of Kejriwal."

## If Modi becomes PM again, polls won't be held: Kharge

PNS ■ MAHARAJGANJ (UP)

Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi as 'jhoonthon ka sardar', Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday said that if he becomes the PM again, elections will not be held in the country.

Addressing a rally here in support of Congress candidate Virendra Chaudhary, Kharge claimed that Modi had not fulfilled many of his promises.

Speaking in the presence of several INDIA bloc leaders, including Samajwadi Party (SP) national general secretary

Shivpal Yadav, the Congress president said, "The prime minister lies. Modi is a liar and I am saying it again and again that Modi is the chief of liars ('jhoonthon ka sardar')."

"If this man (Modi) comes again (as PM), there will be no elections. There will be no candidates of Dalits, tribals, backward classes or women."

Terming the elections an ideological battle, Kharge said, "We are not fighting against any individual person be it Modi or Yogi. This is not a personal fight."

"They ask what we have done in 70 years. If we did not



do anything, you could not become the PM of a democracy. You became PM as we (Congress) made the Constitution and saved democracy.

"You are trying to finish that democracy, break the Constitution. This will not happen. Dalits, tribals, back-

ward classes, farmers and intellectuals of the country will not let you break the constitution," he said.

Targeting Union Minister of Finance for state, Pankaj Chaudhary, who is also the MP from Maharajganj, Kharge said, "The person who you elected as your representative has not done any work."

"The district shares a border with Nepal and is politically important, still the district headquarter has not been connected to a railway line. In Modi's regime, a number of sugar mills vanished from here. Why is the chief minister sit-

ting silent?"

"They talk of double engines, one of which has failed and another has derailed," he said.

These double engines could do nothing as compared to the work done by former Congress prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, he said.

"Their (BJP) work is only to abuse Congress which built dams, bridges and completed big projects," he said.

The Congress president hit out at the BJP government over the bullet train project. "Rs 1 lakh crore loan was taken from Japan.

## Mamata can't stop CAA implementation: Amit Shah

PNS ■ BONGAON (WB)

In a bid to address concerns of the Matuas over citizenship, Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured the community that its members would get citizenship under the CAA and accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of spreading falsehood about it.

Addressing a rally in Bongaon, a stronghold of the Matua community, in North 24 Parganas district, Shah asserted that Banerjee can "never stop the implementation of the CAA in the state as it is a law by the central gov-



ernment". "No power in the world can stop my refugee brothers from becoming citizens of India. This is the promise of Modi Ji. Mamata Banerjee must

remember that citizenship falls under the exclusive authority of the central government, not the state governments," he said.

Shah accused Banerjee of "lying" and spreading "falsehood" about the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

"Mamata Banerjee is lying that anyone who applies for citizenship under the CAA will face problems. I have come to assure the people of the Matua community that no one will face any trouble. You will get citizenship and will be able to live with respect in the country," he said.



## Only guarantee is Modi not returning to power: Mamata

PNS ■ KALYANI (WB)

Asserting that the INDIA bloc would form the next government at the Centre by winning over 300 Lok Sabha seats, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday asserted that the "only guarantee is that Narendra Modi will not get a third term as the prime minister".

Addressing an election rally at Kalyani in Nadia district, the West Bengal chief minister accused the BJP of spreading falsehood on the Sandesh khali issue and tarnishing the image of women of the state.

"The only guarantee in the Lok Sabha polls is that Modi is not returning to power. The INDIA bloc would secure between 295 and 315 seats while the BJP would be restricted to a maximum of 200," she asserted.

Attacking Modi on the Sandeshkhali issue, Banerjee said, "The BJP and the PM are spreading falsehood on the

issue. "The 'guarantee babu' (swipe at Modi's guarantee) is maligning West Bengal. Now, when the truth is emerging (referring to purported videos), they are asking TV channels not to show those. They are trying to hide the truth. The BJP hatched a conspiracy to tarnish the image of women of the state."

Modi, in election rallies on Sunday, had alleged that the TMC was "attempting to conceal its past misdeeds" in Sandeshkhali, where ruling party leaders have been accused of sexual assault and land-grabbing. Multiple purported videos recently surfaced on social media that claimed that a local BJP party leader made several women of Sandeshkhali sign blank papers, which were later filled up as complaints of sexual assault against TMC leaders, and that women were paid money to participate in the protests.

## Novel molecules identified to combat cancer relapse: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers have identified three molecules that offer a promising solution that can prevent cancer relapse during treatment, according to a new study.

In cancer treatment, DNA-damaging agents are commonly used to target cancer cells thereby killing them and causing cancer remission.

However, over time, the effectiveness of these agents can diminish as cancer cells develop mechanisms to repair the damaged DNA, leading to a process commonly called chemoresistance to drugs, leading to cancer recurrence and

metastasis.

This poses a challenge to cancer therapy. The new study by researchers in two Department of Biotechnology, Government of India institutes, namely the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG) and the National Institute of Immunology (NII), have tackled this issue by investigating the repair mechanisms specific to cancer cells.

The study highlighted the roles of two proteins, RAD54 and BLM, in this process. RAD54 can loosen the genome aiding in gene activation, while BLM assists RAD54 in this function.



Dr. Sagar Sengupta, Director of the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), explained how their research addresses why cancer cells become resistant to

chemotherapy at the genomic level.

"We focused on two proteins, RAD54 and BLM, which are involved in the process of the development of chemoresis-

tance. RAD54 helps activate genes by remodelling chromatin, and BLM assists RAD54 in this role. The RAD54-BLM complex was found to activate a group of genes (called efflux pump genes) responsible for removing anti-cancer drugs from cancer cells, a key factor in developing chemoresistance. The team also screened a large library of approved small molecules and discovered three drugs that disrupt RAD54-BLM interaction, reducing DNA repair in cancer cells and thereby making the cancer cells more sensitive to chemotherapy," he said.

The study focused on colon cancer as a model system and

involved physically screening a large library of approved drugs or small molecules to identify these promising compounds. Tests on animal models, particularly mice, treated with these molecules alongside standard chemotherapy drugs for colon cancer, showed minimal to no tumor progression.

Hence these drugs have the potential to be taken forward as adjunct therapy for colon cancer when given in addition to the known chemotherapeutic drugs to patients.

Additionally, researchers would also like to determine whether the drugs can be utilized to treat chemoresistance in other types of cancers.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Bitter ballot battle

Poll rivals are rarely known for praising one another, but the current discourse has hit rock bottom

If the choice were for selecting the more entertaining option between the ongoing IPL or Lok Sabha elections, the latter — with its innovative taunts, snide remarks, branding family members with dirty accusations, obnoxious campaigning and mudslinging — would win hands down. With this election turning out to be more brutal and bloody than normal, social media is agog with videos of politicians that would put streetside rowdies to shame. A case in point: BJP's Mandi candidate, Kangana Ranaut, took a barrage of abuses, some too explicit to be printed. Disturbingly, even star campaigners are merrily throwing decency to the winds. The recent exchange between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders of the Opposition, particularly the Congress, encapsulates the bitter nature of debate. Modi accused the Opposition leaders of being "cowards, scared of Pakistan", and the Congress shamed him by calling a corporate stooge, besides warning ominously that if he won this time too, India will see no more elections. This



exchange not only underscores the intense political polarisation, but also highlights the alarming decline in campaign standards. Modi's accusation resonates with the BJP's narrative to project itself as the sole guardian of national security. Such remarks, while appealing to a certain segment of the electorate, contribute to toxic polarisation of the polity. By insinuating that the Opposition is soft on Pakistan, Modi attempts to discredit his rivals and consolidate support by tapping into jingoistic sentiments. On the other hand, the Congress response reflects the prevalent perception of the BJP Government's policies favouring big business owners. The Opposition's strategy of portraying Modi as a representative of corporate interests seeks to appeal to the concerns of the common man. However, such charges, without substantial evidence, contribute to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions and further polarise the electorate. Besides, the Opposition has time and again accused him of being autocratic without any basis. What is particularly disconcerting is the way these accusations are delivered: Personal attack, character assassination and inflammatory rhetoric have become commonplace. Instead of engaging in substantive debates on policy issues and governance, the parties resort to sensationalism and vitriol. The falling standards of campaigning are symptomatic of deeper structural issues plaguing the democratic process. The influence of money power, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation, and the erosion of institutional checks and balances have created an environment conducive to negative campaigning and polarisation. Moreover, the advent of social media has amplified the reach and impact of divisive rhetoric. Unfortunately, the Election Commission has been rather ineffective in controlling these foul-mouthed leaders. That said, it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the leaders do not cross the 'Laxman Rekha'. We all can ensure that by pressing the blue button on voting day.

According to recent opinion polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is predicted to secure an unprecedented third-term win in these elections. There is a debate about whether the BJP tally will increase or decrease its tally. BJP leaders, including Narendra Modi, claim the NDA, led by the BJP, will win over 400 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. Home Minister Amit Shah says NDA will secure 200 of the 283 seats in the first three phases. The Congress party won over 400 seats only once in 1984. Political players need a game-changing strategy as there is no apparent wave of support. To gain an advantage, the BJP has implemented five key strategies: Celebrity Candidates Fighting Polls, strengthening the Hindu base, appealing to minority groups, exploiting redrawn boundaries to maintain the Hindu vote in areas controlled by the opposition and projecting Modi magic. The Congress and its allies are making a strategic move, attempting to consolidate the Hindu subaltern. The ongoing election witnessed a decline in voter turnout and it is still being determined whether it will recover or continue to decline. The Election Commission of India (ECI) expressed disappointment with the turnout in some metropolitan

# This election is wide open

Amidst predictions of a third-term triumph for Prime Minister Modi, internal rifts, defections and dwindling voter turnout inject an element of unpredictability

Like many other countries, political parties in India often claim victory during elections even before official results are announced. It is part of their politics. The ongoing polls are not just another political event; they are of paramount importance, as well as the fate of several political party leaders. They have profound and far-reaching implications. In the current scenario, the ruling BJP has declared victory that the results will meet its expectations. However, the actual outcome remains uncertain, adding a layer of suspense to the political landscape. Four of the seven-phase polling have already occurred and the remaining three will occur on May 20, 25 and June 1. The outcome of these could significantly impact the election results, which will be revealed on June 4.



KALYANI SHANKAR

cities, highlighting the rigid voter apathy in high-tech cities. This underscores the significance of each voter in shaping the election results. CP Joshi, former Chief Minister of Rajasthan, lost an election by one vote. His wife and daughter missed voting while praying for his victory. This shows how even one vote can significantly impact election results. This anecdote emphasises the potential impact of even one vote on the election results. High temperatures in some parts of India may reduce election turnout. However, low turnout can sometimes harm the ruling party, as local issues can sway the outcome. BJP aims to improve in six Indian States: West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. However, it could face challenges from regional parties, which have the potential to sway State elections and impact overall results. During a recent rally, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi spoke about the uncertainties in predicting election results. Congress President Mallikharjun Kharge posted a message in Hindi on

X, saying the Prime Minister attacked his friends, indicating that Modi's chair is shaking. SP leader Akhilesh Yadav tweeted that the BJP's condition will worsen after the first two voting phases. The Congress party's strategy primarily concerns social welfare and economic empowerment. This all-encompassing approach aims to address the primary concerns of the voters and has the potential to connect with a vast section of the electorate. It could significantly impact the election results if it garners the voters' support. The Congress Party's challenge is to keep its members united. Since Modi's rise, many politicians, including State leaders, have defected to the BJP. The BJP has given tickets to some of them. How voters treat these turncoats remains to be seen. Internal disputes within Congress are currently a significant concern. Allegations of connections with rival parties raise questions about loyalty. They could affect the party's unity, which could, in turn, impact their performance in the upcoming elections. Therefore, it is crucial to closely



THE BJP AIMS TO IMPROVE IN SIX INDIAN STATES: WEST BENGAL, ODISHA, TELANGANA, ANDHRA PRADESH, TAMIL NADU AND KERALA. HOWEVER, IT COULD FACE CHALLENGES FROM REGIONAL PARTIES, WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SWAY STATE ELECTIONS AND IMPACT OVERALL RESULTS

monitor any developments within the party to gain a more accurate understanding of their prospects in the polls. Political leaders' connections with rival parties have raised concerns about their loyalty. Between 2016 and 2020, 170 Congress MLAs and 7 Rajya Sabha members switched parties, causing an impact on Indian politics. It has created confusion and doubts about their loyalty. The allegations could influence voters' perception of these leaders and their parties. India's Satta Bazaar predicts the BJP will win between 330 and 335 seats at Rs. 1, 350 seats at Rs. 3 and 400 seats at Rs. 12-15. The odds for the NDA to win 400 seats are Rs. 4-5. The predictions reflect the market perception of election outcomes that could impact politics. India's stock benchmarks fell by 1.5% on Tuesday as investors cut their bets, expressing concern that the BJP may not get as many seats as projected. The voters will decide the winner of the election on June 4. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

### PICTALK



Smoke rises from a forest fire, in Shimla

PTI

## Fostering innovation from schools to startups

Early education is essential for shaping future innovators and entrepreneurs so that they can drive the nation towards a bright future

The boundary between science and engineering is so narrow that it is hard to differentiate them. They are two sides of the same coin and they go hand-in-hand. Whereas science explores the fundamental principles governing the universe, engineering focuses on applying scientific knowledge to design and develop solutions that meet specific requirements. So, engineers gather more respect in front of the public, as their output is tangible. Every year, the Govt. of India celebrates National Technology Day on 11th May to commemorate the contributions of Indian scientists, engineers and innovators who act as catalysts for the country's development. This year's National Technology Day was celebrated on the theme "From School to Startups: Igniting Young Minds to Innovate", giving thrust to nurture innovation from the school period onwards. One would doubt the need to promote a startup culture in schools. As the common adage goes, the seeds of character and attitude are sown during one's school life.



When we look at the life histories of great entrepreneurs and scientists, we can see that the spark for doing something special was initiated during their school years. Elon Musk, the founder of companies like SpaceX, Tesla and Neuralink, reportedly sold a video game he created at the age of 12 and later started a web software company while attending the University of Pennsylvania. Mark Zuckerberg, the co-founder of Facebook, started coding in middle school, where he developed a messaging programme called "Zucknet" for his father's dental office. Schoolchildren possess the ability to think freely and come up with crazy ideas. The limitations of reality do not shackle their minds. They are unfettered by the comments made by others

and don't have any preconceived notions about an idea. School students also have an inherent curiosity. The insatiable curiosity drives them to seek new knowledge and experience, fueling their creativity and innovation. The quality of innovation observed in the exhibits at various school science fairs, children's science congresses and IISF's students' science village provides ample proof of this. Some of the innovations displayed by the students in these exhibitions are at par or better than what our adult scientists have achieved in their lifetime. The Department of Science and Technology has instituted INSPIRE - MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge) Awards to support student innovators. MANAK, implemented through the National Innovation Foundation - India (NIF), seeks to inspire students in grades 6 to 10 to pursue their studies. The initiative aims to focus on one million unique ideas/innovations based on scientific principles and have practical applications in soci-

ety. Its goal is to promote a culture of creativity and encourage inventive thinking among schoolchildren. Another premier scientific organisation, the CSIR, has instituted the CIASC (CSIR Innovation Award for Schoolchildren) to harness schoolchildren's creative and innovative spirit. Though initiatives like Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) by the Government of India foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds, most of our schools still put more stress on the traditional mode of rote learning. Rote memorisation and standardised testing prioritise conformity over creativity, relegating innovation to the sidelines. Furthermore, the fear of failure and the pressure to excel academically discourage risk-taking and experimentation. As a result, many children are discouraged from pursuing their innovative impulses, losing their untapped potential. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### MALIWAL'S ALLEGATIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article "Kissa Kursi Ka: Why Maliwal was thrashed," published on 14 May, this is my response. The unfolding drama surrounding Swati Maliwal's allegations against Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant paints a troubling picture for the AAP. As a daily reader, it's concerning to witness such internal strife within a political party. The lack of formal complaints and the delayed response from all parties involved only adds to the murkiness of the situation. The fact that senior AAP leaders are already entangled in legal troubles exacerbates the issue, hinting at deeper rifts within the party. The swift condemnation from opposition leaders underscores the gravity of the accusations. Additionally, the involvement of the National Commission for Women (NCW) signifies the broader societal implications of such incidents. It's crucial for authorities to conduct a thorough investigation to ensure justice is served and perpetrators are held accountable. Overall, this episode serves as a stark reminder of the complexities and challenges inherent in the realm of politics and the importance of transparency and accountability in governance.

Avani Chawla | Pune

#### EMPOWERING MOTHERS

Madam — Apropos the news article "Empowering working mothers financially," published on 13 May, this is my response. Mother's Day is a poignant reminder of the extraordinary women who shape our lives. Yet, amid their selfless dedication, the need for securing their financial future often goes unaddressed. Despite the strides in insurance awareness, women remain underrepresented in safeguarding their loved ones. Whether as working professionals or homemakers, mothers are the backbone of many households, balancing myriad responsibilities with grace. However,

#### Legal pillars of democracy



of India's electoral democracy. Judicial interventions, such as those seen in Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India, ensure transparency while balancing individual privacy rights. Inclusive representation, as highlighted in the Indra Sawhney v. Union of India case, underscores the importance of equitable participation, especially for marginalised communities. Concurrently, efficient resolution of electoral disputes, as emphasised in various judgements, safeguards the credibility of the electoral process. Moreover, cases like Mohd. Sattar v. State of Rajasthan reaffirm the principle of universal suffrage, ensuring every citizen's voice resonates in the democratic chorus. These legal pillars not only shape India's electoral landscape but also serve as guiding lights, illuminating the path towards a more robust and inclusive democracy.

Arjun Banerjee | Chandigarh

amidst the daily chaos, ensuring financial protection can be overlooked. Term insurance emerges as a vital tool in providing comprehensive coverage against life's uncertainties. For working mothers, it acts as a safety net, guaranteeing their family's well-being in their absence. Its flexibility allows customisation to meet specific needs, offering peace of mind amidst life's unpredictability. With retirement planning gaining importance, term insurance with maturity benefits becomes crucial. As women embrace diverse roles, securing their financial future becomes imperative. It's time for mothers to prioritise their financial security, ensuring a stable tomorrow for their loved ones. Sanvi Reddy | Hyderabad

#### THE SONGSAREK HERITAGE

Madam — Apropos the news article "Vibing to the dance of a 100 drums," published on 12 May, this is my response. Exploring the lesser-known West Garo Hills of Meghalaya unveils a cultural tapestry woven with the

ancient traditions of the Songsarek people. In the face of modernity and religious conversions, their practices stand as guardians of a fading era. The partnership between Royal Enfield and UNESCO emerges as a beacon, spotlighting these intangible treasures. Wangala dances, Chubitchi rituals and matrilineal societal norms narrate stories of resilience and identity. The meticulous documentation not only honours these customs but also amplifies their significance, ensuring their legacy transcends generations. As custodians of heritage, it's our collective duty to cherish and safeguard these cultural jewels nestled amidst the Himalayan foothills. Through respectful engagement and awareness initiatives, we pave the path towards a future where diversity thrives and ancient wisdom finds its rightful place in the modern world.

Vihaan Singh | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE ROLE OF MEDITATION IN SLEEP

Meditate every night for a relaxed mind and better sleep



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

A recent newspaper article caught everyone's attention, featuring an elderly woman who initiated a 'Sleep Service Center' for those struggling to find restful sleep. This compassionate woman would just engage in conversation with the person and sing a lullaby offering comfort akin to a mother lulling her child to sleep. The result? Clients emerged refreshed and rejuvenated after just half an hour of her soothing sessions. Isn't it astonishing that we now seek sleep therapists for what should come naturally? What does this say about our society? If animals and birds can sleep peacefully, why can't humans enjoy this innate gift of carefree slumber?

Sleep is the best form of relaxation, akin to meditation, that's why those who sleep well always keep well & feel well. It's a fact that if we get sound sleep during the night, we get up fresh being more active & feeling more energetic. However, in today's world getting sound sleep has become a rare occasion because today millions of people suffer from sleep disorders like sleep apnea, insomnia, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy etc. In addition, the number of those who get a very broken, fitful sleep would be many times more. Sadly, many of these individuals resort to sleeping pills and drugs which ultimately make the problem worse. Knowing that tranquilisers are usually prescribed for insomnia and such other disorders as are due to anxiety and mental depression etc., one would say: 'Where are we heading?'



Medical science has acknowledged several causes that lead to sleep disorders. The biggest hindrance of all that contributes to sleeplessness is bad mental health. We must understand that not being able to have restful sleep is not only in itself an unhealthy condition but also causes or aggravates many other diseases. For example, it is now recognised that sleep disturbance is one of the factors that lead to coronary heart disease. But most of us would agree subconsciously that tranquilisers are not the answer to the question of sleep disturbance.

They now know well that these drugs represent a purely symptomatic approach, ignoring the underlying problems that cause these conditions. A British medical journal recently published a report about experiments that have shown that sympathy can work well in cases of sleep disorders. It further said that in one trial, the doctors, instead of giving tranquilisers as they would have normally given, spent some time with the patients and talked with them in an open atmosphere. They just had a brief chat with them, with sympathy and also gave them a few words of advice and explained to them why they had those conditions. The results of these informal chats were astounding and the follow-up assessment showed that with this replacement of allopathy by sympathy, depression in those patients dropped from a level of 80 per cent to 40 per cent. The other fact being realised is that mental depression, anxiety, etc. are mainly due to certain lifestyles, behavioural patterns and personality traits. It was also felt that the pattern of behaviour, designated as type 'A' which is characterised by competitiveness, impatience, etc., predisposes a person to coronary diseases, hypertension, etc. As a result of these new findings, doctors all over the world are now increasingly advising such patients to practise meditation and to have proper dietary patterns. It's a medically proven fact that mental ill health adversely affects one's eating habits, which in turn, drastically influences our sleep and health. Under such a medical condition, proper meditation techniques can be of great help if practised regularly. In the hustle and bustle of living a modern life, we tend to forget that it is the quality of life that matters the most & not the quantity. Hence if we jeopardise our sleep for silly reasons, we are knowingly undermining our health.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

# Stopping thieving through DBT

A lot of pilfering from fertiliser subsidies is happening due to policy flaws. This can be curbed if only the subsidy is given under Direct Benefit Transfer



UTTAM GUPTA



On January 22, 2019, addressing NRIs and Indian-origin people at the inauguration of the 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled what Rajiv Gandhi had Stated "Of the funds the Central Government sends, only 15 per cent of that reaches the people. If one rupee is sent from Delhi, only 15 paise reaches the villages, 85 paise disappear. Even as the country's middle class kept giving tax honestly, this "loot" of 85 per cent also continued". Modi added "I also want to tell you today's truth as well. We used technology to end this loot of 85 per cent completely." Elaborating on this theme, he explained: "In the last four-and-a-half years, about Rs 580,000 crore, our Government, through various schemes viz. for a home, for education, for scholarship, for gas cylinder and to other such ends etc directly gives to the people, transferring it in their bank accounts. Now, just consider that if the country was being run through the old system, then even today from this Rs 580,000 crore, about Rs 450,000 crore would have disappeared or leaked. If we would not have brought a change in the system then this amount would have been looted like the former Prime Minister had accepted..." Modi said.

That was before the 2019 General Elections. Today, when the 2024 General Elections are underway, the same discourse reverberates in the air even as the PM cites a figure that is nearly seven times. The amount spent on welfare schemes during the last ten years under the Modi - regime has gone up to a gargantuan of around Rs 4000,000 crore. Had the old system (read: before 2014) continued, the amount disappearing from the distribution pipe would have been Rs 3400,000 crore (4000,000x0.85).

**What do the facts say?**  
The Union Government executes a plethora of welfare programs aimed at providing basic and necessary amenities and upliftment of the most disadvantaged members of society. It does so mainly through "Central Schemes" (CS) which are fully funded and implemented by it. A total of 740 CS schemes are currently under implementation. During FY2022-23, the CS



UNDER ITS FLAGSHIP DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME, THE MODI GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTING WHAT IS POPULARLY KNOWN AS DIRECT BENEFIT TRANSFER FOR TRANSFERRING CASH BENEFITS AND SUBSIDIES 'DIRECTLY' TO THE AADHAAR-LINKED BANK ACCOUNTS OF INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBLE BENEFICIARIES

spending was Rs 1208,000 crore. In addition, there are "Centrally Sponsored Schemes" (CSS) designed to supplement the efforts of the States in achieving various socioeconomic goals and implementing national priorities. These are funded by the central Government and the States in varying proportions viz. 90:10, 60:40, 50:50 and so on depending on the scheme. These schemes are implemented by the States. During FY2022-23, the spending on a total of 50 CSSs was Rs 412,000 crore. Put together, the total expenditure of the Central Government on CS and CSS schemes during the year was Rs 1620,000 crore.

Now, if we were to apply the 85 per cent magic formula dished out by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the amount pilfered while on the way to the beneficiaries would have been Rs 1377,000 crore. Only Rs 243,000 crore would have reached. Under the Modi - model, the entire Rs 1620,000 crore has been reached; courtesy of, the use of technology to transfer the money to their bank accounts.

**How does it work?**  
Under its flagship Digital India program, the Modi - Government has been implementing what is popularly known as DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) for transferring the cash benefits and subsidies 'directly' to the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of individual eligible beneficiaries. Launched by the erstwhile UPA - Government on January 1, 2013, its use has picked up pace under Modi since January 2015. As of date, DBT is used in 314 CS schemes.

The JAM trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhar, Mobile) is a DBT enabler the 'mover and shaker' behind its successful implementation. Today, there are around 520 million Jan Dhan Accounts, more than 1.39 billion Aadhaar cards and 1.15 billion mobile connections. With this, the money can be 'instantaneously'

transferred at the click of a mouse to tens of millions of beneficiaries spread all over the country. The DBT is free from the delays corruption and associated pilferage that was germane to the earlier arrangements under which there was human intervention, a host of intermediaries/mediators and the money was flowing through multiple layers in administrative offices.

To improve transparency, the Government has put in place the Central Plan Scheme Monitoring System (CPSMS) which ensures that all transfers to bank accounts are made strictly as per the list of eligible beneficiaries. The persons included in the list are authenticated with the use of an Aadhaar card that contains their biometric details thus removing any scope for fictitious claimants. The provision for such checks and balances has helped hugely in preventing bogus claims. As per the latest update on the DBT portal, the total savings by way of plugging leakages in the schemes due to the implementation of DBT during FY2022-23 was Rs 63,000 crore.

However, if we look at the food subsidy (the excess of the cost of procurement, handling and distribution of food over the price paid by the beneficiary/consumer), during FY2022-23, the Government was able to save over Rs 50,000 crore which works out to around 18 per cent in the total food subsidy bill of Rs 272,000 crore. This was made possible because of the "deletion of over 50 million duplicate and fake/non-existent Ration Cards".

Like-wise, under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi or PM-KISAN (, the Union Government provides income support of Rs 6,000 a year to farmers with a valid enrolment, paid in three equal cash transfers of Rs 2,000 every four months; the money is credited to their account via the DBT mode),

it was able to save over Rs 10,000 crore during FY2022-23. This is about 17 per cent of the total payment of Rs. 58,000 crores during the year. The savings were due to the deletion of over 21 million ineligible beneficiaries.

According to the DBT portal, the Government has been able to generate a cumulative saving of Rs 348,000 crore by plugging leakages since the inception of the DBT. Of this, more than half or Rs 185,000 crore are savings in the distribution of food subsidies alone.

Notwithstanding the above, there remains a huge untapped potential for garnering more savings. This is because in the initial years, neither States used Aadhaar for validation nor the Centre made it compulsory even as the latter's efforts in this regard were hamstrung due to protracted litigation in the top court. In such circumstances, a large number of 'ineligible' persons making their way to the beneficiary list was inevitable. While the Government has got rid of them in some schemes like PM-KISAN, it has a long way to go.

Meanwhile, Modi also needs to focus on areas where technology intervention alone won't help. For instance, in fertilisers, the Government asks manufacturers to sell fertiliser at a low price to farmers. The excess of the cost of supply over it is claimed by the latter from the former as a subsidy. Since the subsidy is embodied in the MRP (albeit low), the subsidised fertiliser product must reach the farmer and be used only for growing the crop. If it doesn't reach, then the benefit of subsidy is enjoyed by the person who grabs it. A lot of pilferage from fertiliser subsidies is happening due to this flaw in policy. This can be curbed if only the subsidy is given 'directly' to the farmers under DBT.

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

# Filmmakers must calibrate branding of film festivals

In the ever-evolving world of branding, where impressions and connections are paramount, film festivals emerge as vibrant stages

The success of any branding exercise is the impact & impression it creates on the target audience, visibility of products, recall value and deep connection with the audiences cutting across campaigns, launches, events and the wide array of trends and styles. In a similar vein, it is important to understand the impact of the branding idea or strategy on a visible platform, where eyeballs determine the yardstick of success.



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

artistry intertwines with industry and communities bond around a shared love for the silver screen. Beyond the showcases of cinematic aptitude, these festivals have evolved into powerful brands, each with its own distinct identity and allure. From the glitz of Cannes to the heritage of the Venice Film Festival and from the cosmopolitan charm of Berlinale to the intellectual

intricacies of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the grandeur of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), the branding strategies of these festivals offer a fascinating glimpse into the intersection of culture, economics and politics. Film festivals portray glamour, charisma, fashion and celebrity quotient that creates a unique buzz with audiences Cannes, Berlin, IFFI and Toronto, over the years have developed a unique brand identity that has crafted and shaped the storytelling and visibility narrative in the branding space. Festivals are known for their innovative burst disruptive proclivities that lead to unique "out of the box Branding". The hustle and bustle of any film festival cre-

ate a unique integral link and the relationship between arc lights that define cinema and colours, shades and images that constitute branding. A study of the branding quotient across film festivals portrays a reflection of the shifting strands of ideas, concepts & evaluation of branding across the festival space. The 4Cs = Creativity, Culture, Content and Consistency outline the integral link between branding and the festival circuit. It is a perfect convergence of creative minds, storytellers, narrators and inspirational Talking heads. Every festival has defining branding moments, which leave an imprint on the minds of audiences and a lasting impression on prospective consumers and supporters of cinematic excel-

lence. Opportunities at festivals are limitless. Cannes, Berlin, IFFI & Toronto integrate branding platforms and ideas, with their filming culture leanings, narrator's values and storytelling nuggets. At these festivals branding as a medium has reinforced the soft power dynamics & equitations leading to better visibility, product value, loaded positive perception and enhanced outreach and networking opportunities. An idea by technology brands brings out another level of product display. Interactive experience and marketing outreach. Each of the prominent festivals in their editions has reinforced the image, identity, influence, interaction and interface of brands with tech tools cross-

cutting themes thereby positioning a unique product identity & space at the venues. Each major film festival, whether it's Cannes, TIFF, Venice, Berlinale, or IFFI, meticulously builds a blueprint for its branding elements to convey its individuality and values. Cannes, renowned for its glamour, incorporates the illustration of the Palme d'Or trophy and celebrities on the red carpet, alongside a sophisticated logo design often featuring the Cannes coastline. The festival's colour palette of black, gold and red represents poise, prestige and excitement. Meanwhile, TIFF embraces diversity with dynamic iconography displaying film reels, diverse viewers and Toronto landmarks, complemented by

vibrant shades like red, blue and yellow that reflect energy, creativity and inclusivity. Venice Film Festival, with its rich heritage, opts for classical depictions of Venetian landmarks such as the Rialto Bridge or St. Mark's Square, accompanied by a refined logo design that captures the essence of Venice's timeless beauty. IFFI celebrates Indian cinema with displays of aesthetic motifs and sceneries, traditional logo design and vivid hues of orange, red and gold, beside serene blues and greens that capture India's cultural richness. Through these branding elements, each festival communicates its beliefs, attracts audiences worldwide and reinforces its significance within the global film industry.

For filmmakers, the choice of which festival to submit their work to often depends not only on the esteem and reputation of the event but also on its alignment with their artistic vision and career goals. A filmmaker seeking international recognition may gravitate towards Cannes or Berlinale, while those championing a wide and diverse range of filmography might find a home at Venice or TIFF. In this way, the branding of film festivals becomes a crucial factor in shaping the trajectory of filmmakers' careers and the cultural nuances of movies as a whole.

(The writer was addl. DG, DFF & director IFFI. Views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmed & Vaishnavie Srinivasan)

MONEY MATTERS

### PVR INOX posts net loss of Rs 129.7 cr in Q4

Cinema exhibitor PVR INOX Ltd on Tuesday reported a consolidated loss after tax of Rs 129.7 crore in the March quarter. The company, which had posted a consolidated loss after tax of Rs 334 crore in the same quarter a year ago, said it will consider reducing overhead costs, having a leaner organisational structure and monetisation of real estate assets, among other steps as part of four key strategic priorities that have been identified for its growth strategy from a medium- to long-term perspective. Consolidated revenue from operations in the March quarter stood at Rs 1,256.4 crore. It was at Rs 1,143.2 crore in the year-ago period, PVR-INOX said in a regulatory filing. Total expenses for PVR-INOX in the quarter was Rs 1,480.7 crore. The total expenses for PVR last year was Rs 1,364.1 crore a year ago. For the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024, the consolidated loss after tax was at Rs 32.7 crore. It was Rs 336.4 crore in the year ended March 31, 2023.



### Innov8 opens 271-seater co-working centre in Delhi

Co-working firm Innov8 on Tuesday said it has opened a new centre, comprising 9,500 square feet of office space and 217 desks, at Aerocity in the national capital. In a statement, Innov8 said it has invested Rs 4 crore towards the development of this co-working centre. "Aerocity's central location and thriving business community made it a perfect fit for us as we expand across Central Business Districts and transit hubs in the city," Ritesh Malik, Founder of Innov8, said. Founded in 2015, Innov8 is currently spread across nine cities - Delhi, Gurugram, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Indore, with 30-plus centres. According to real estate consultant Colliers India, the leasing of office space by flexible space operators declined 14 per cent in January-March to 1.8 million square feet from 2.1 million square feet in the year-ago period across Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune.



### Gold declines Rs 200; silver surges Rs 800

Extending the losses for the second day in a row, gold price declined Rs 200 to Rs 72,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid a fall in precious metal rates globally, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous session, the yellow metal had closed at Rs 73,150 per 10 grams. However, silver surged Rs 800 to reach Rs 86,000 mark. It had ended at Rs 85,200 per kg in the previous trade. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,950 per 10 grams, down by Rs 200 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at US\$ 2,339 per ounce, down by US\$ 8 from the previous close. Gold price fell further on Tuesday as traders weighed a probable downturn in the US economy against continued inflationary pressures that might hamper the US Federal Reserve's plans to reduce interest rates this year, Gandhi added.



### Rupee settles on flat note at 83.51 against US dollar

The rupee settled on a flat note at 83.51 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from positive domestic markets and favourable inflation data was negated by strong US Dollar and foreign fund outflows. Forex traders said the rupee remains under pressure due to ongoing elections as well as foreign fund outflows and the same shall subside once the results are out. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.51, and touched an intraday low of 83.52 during the day. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.51 (provisional), unchanged from its previous close.

## Israel-India to deepen ties for greater prosperity: Israel FM

Israel and India will continue to deepen their bilateral ties and lead to greater prosperity, Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on Tuesday. Katz was responding to India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's message on the occasion of Israel's 76th Independence Day. "Thank you for the warm wishes, FM @DrSJaishankar. In celebration of our Independence Day, Israel and India will continue to deepen our ties and lead to greater prosperity," Katz said in a post on X. Earlier in the morning, Jaishankar posted on X a 2:03-minute video showcasing the India-Israel relationship through photos of various bilateral meetings between



"Thank you for the warm wishes, FM @DrSJaishankar. In celebration of our Independence Day, Israel and India will continue to deepen our ties and lead to greater prosperity," Katz said in a post on X.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, himself, and other Indian ministers with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other ministers. "Congratulate FM @Israel\_katz and the people of

Israel on the occasion of the 76th anniversary of Israel's Independence. Mazel Tov!" Jaishankar posted along with the video and repeated the same message in another post in Hebrew. Meanwhile, President Droupadi Murmu wished her Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog as she said on X, "I join the people of India in conveying our best wishes to President @Isaac\_Herzog, and the people of Israel on the 76th anniversary of Israel's independence." Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla too took to X to post his greetings to his counterpart Amir Ohana, the Speaker of The Knesset: "On the occasion of Israel's 76th anniversary of independence, I congratulate Speaker of the Knesset @AmirOhana and the people of Israel."

## Chabahar Port to help India expand trade routes: GTRI

The development of Chabahar Port will help India enhance its logistical capabilities and expand its trade routes to Central Asia and for that there is a need to ensure necessary infrastructure, and processes to effectively manage the cargo flow at the port, economic think tank GTRI said on Tuesday. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggested that the government stick to the fact that the Chabahar Port is not under international sanctions despite being Iran's only ocean port as despite the strategic advantages, the project's success is intricately tied to the complex geopolitical environment it operates within. India on Monday signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar. The long-term agreement was signed by



Indian Ports Global Ltd (IPGL) and the Port & Maritime Organisation of Iran. IPGL will invest about US\$ 120 million while another US\$ 250 million will be raised as debt. The Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman, which New Delhi had proposed to develop back in 2003, will provide Indian goods a gateway to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia using a road and rail project called International North-South Transport Corridor, bypassing Pakistan. US sanctions on Iran over its suspected nuclear programme had slowed the development of the port. "India should ensure that Chabahar has the necessary infrastructure, processes, and staffing to effectively manage the cargo flow. Yet the overarching stability required for such grand-scale projects remains a significant challenge due to external political pressures and regional instabilities," GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

## Stock markets rise for 3rd day on buying in auto, metal shares

Benchmark Sensex climbed 328 points while Nifty closed above the 22,200 level on Tuesday as stock markets continued the winning march for the third straight day on the back of gains in index major Reliance Industries and positive inflation data. Rising for the third day, BSE Sensex rose by 328.48 points, or 0.45 per cent, to settle at 73,104.61. The 30-share index rallied 510.13 points, or 0.70 per cent, to touch a high of 73,286.26 in day trade. As many as 20 Sensex stocks ended with gains while 10 declined. The broader Nifty of NSE rose by 113.80 points, or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 22,217.85 with 36 of its constituents ending in the green and 14 in the red. Gains were led by metal and auto shares while FMCG and pharma shares declined due to

profit taking, analysts said. From the Sensex basket, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, JSW Steel, NTPC, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, ITC, and Asian Paints were among the laggards.

Shares of Ambuja Cements went up by 3.90 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions advanced by 3.07 per cent, Adani Wilmar (2.20 per cent), Adani Ports (1.89 per cent) and NDTV (1.87 per cent).

IndusInd Bank, Sun Pharma, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, and Maruti were the major gainers. Shares of Ambuja Cements went up by 3.90 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions advanced by 3.07 per cent, Adani Wilmar (2.20 per cent), Adani Ports (1.89 per cent) and NDTV (1.87 per cent).

## 'Ratings on eComm sites to be positively biased'

Nearly 56 per cent of online shoppers surveyed by community social media platform LocalCircles said they found ratings on the e-commerce sites and apps to be positively biased over the last 12 months, according to survey findings. Only nine per cent of e-commerce or online users said platforms have enabled an interface to easily spot sponsored or influencer reviews and ratings, while just 16 per cent of consumers felt their negative reviews were always published in the last year. The survey assumes significance given that the government is considering making it mandatory for e-commerce companies to comply with quality norms for consumer reviews after a voluntary push failed to effectively curb fake reviews. "...56 per cent of online

shoppers surveyed by LocalCircles...say they have found ratings on the e-commerce sites/ apps to be positively biased in the last 12 months," according to a release by LocalCircles. LocalCircles said it conducted a comprehensive national survey to find out how effective voluntary standards for online reviews and ratings have been, given persistent complaints. "The survey received over 54,000 responses from users of e-commerce sites and apps located in over 344 districts of the country," it disclosed. Despite the standards that prohibit deletion of negative ratings and reviews, the percentage of e-commerce users who found that their negative ratings and reviews were not always published has risen from 45 per cent to 52 per cent in the last 12 months, the survey revealed. "Despite the controversy, 46 per cent of e-commerce users surveyed say they always referred to rating and reviews when buying while 44 per cent referred to them occasionally," it said. Further, it said, only nine per cent of e-commerce users surveyed say that all e-commerce sites/ apps have enabled an interface so they can easily identify sponsored, incentivised or influencer reviews while 46 per cent say no e-commerce sites/apps have enabled such an interface.



## CBI probing MMTC coal import 'scam'

The CBI is investigating alleged corruption in MMTC's coal import from an Australian company at inflated prices, which the PSU's former CMD kept under wraps for more than 11 years, officials said on Tuesday. The probe started only after the MMTC suffered a jolt in the Supreme Court, which had ordered an arbitration case in favour of the Australian company. The MMTC had to deposit Rs 1,088 crore in the Delhi High Court. The MMTC ordered an internal vigilance enquiry into the allegations that certain officials of the PSU earned

pecuniary benefits by allowing the Brisbane-based company to charge US\$ 300 per metric tonne (valued at about Rs 615 crore) when the global commodity prices had nosedived as a cascading effect of Lehman Brothers' collapse in 2008. The glaring irregularities flagged in the vigilance report were enough for the MMTC top brass to recommend a CBI investigation. On a reference from the Commerce Ministry, the CBI registered a preliminary enquiry last year in which the role of two former senior officials was under scrutiny. The agency did not give any comments on the developments.



## Moody's pegs India's FY25 GDP growth at 6.6%

Moody's Ratings on Tuesday said the Indian economy is projected to expand 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal year and said strong credit demand fuelled by robust economic growth will support the NBFC sector's profitability. "We expect India's economy to expand 6.6 per cent in the year ended March 2025 (FY25) and 6.2 per cent the following year, and this will lead to robust loan growth at NBFCs, mitigating the impact of rising funding costs on their profitability," Moody's Ratings said. The Indian economy is estimated to have expanded 8 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal year. In a commentary on the non-banking finance companies, Moody's said robust economic conditions will help them preserve their asset quality even as rise in interest rates increase the debt burdens of their customers. "Funding costs for non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) in India are rising, but strong credit demand

fuelled by country's robust economic growth will support the sector's profitability. "Also, robust economic conditions will help them preserve their asset quality even as rises in interest rates increase the debt burdens of their customers," Moody's said. Aggregate year-on-year loan growth at NBFCs accelerated to 20.8 per cent in September 2023 from 10.8 per cent a year earlier, driven by demand for retail loans, including financing for housing and automobiles. Moody's Ratings expects loans at NBFCs to grow about 15 per cent in the next 12-18 months, driven by various types of lending, including infrastructure financing by large government-owned NBFCs and loans to small and medium-sized enterprises. "Growth in unsecured retail loans will slow after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) raised the risk weight of such credit assets for both banks and NBFCs by 25 percentage points in December 2023," Moody's Ratings said.

## Bajaj Electricals Q4 net down 43.4 pc to Rs 29 cr

Bajaj Electricals Ltd on Tuesday reported a 43.47 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 29.31 crore in the March quarter with revenue impacted by weakness in appliances and general trade. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 51.85 crore in the year-ago period, Bajaj Electricals said in

a regulatory filing. Consolidated total revenue from operations in the quarter under review was Rs 1,188.08 crore as compared to Rs 1,291.97 crore in the same period a year ago, it added. Total expenses in the fourth quarter were lower at Rs 1,186.09 crore as compared to Rs 1,231.69 crore in the corresponding period a year ago. In the fourth quarter revenue

dropped on account of weakness in appliances and general trade. Growth in fans and 'Morphy Richards' brand was offset by drop in appliances, the company said. The lighting solutions segment also witnessed a drop in revenue on account of LED price erosion in consumer lighting and higher base effect in professional lighting, it added. For the fiscal ended March



31, 2024, consolidated net profit was lower at Rs 131.08 crore as compared to Rs 216.19 crore in the previous year.

In FY24, the total revenue from operations was Rs 4,641.27 crore as against Rs 4,889.24 crore in FY23. Bajaj Electricals said its board of directors has recommended a dividend at the rate Rs 3 per share of face value of Rs 2 each for the financial year ended March 31, 2024 subject to shareholder's approval at the forthcoming annual general meeting.

## Food inflation likely to remain a cause for concern due to heatwave: ICRA

The wholesale food inflation, which is at a four-month high, will continue to be a cause for concern in May and June as the heatwave is likely to jack up prices of perishable commodities, ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said on Tuesday. Although the impact of the high base of last year will play out in July and August, the effect of the monsoon will determine the price conditions in the subsequent months. As per data released on Tuesday, the wholesale



price index (WPI)-based food inflation was at a four-month high of 7.74 per cent in April. Retail food inflation also remained stubbornly high at 8.70 per cent in April 2024, as against 3.84 per cent in April 2023. Nayar said weather is an important factor in determining the food inflation trajectory. Monsoon was not very favorable last year and this year there are heatwaves in parts of the country, she said. "With the onset of summer, prices of perishable items are charting upwards. For the next two months, we expect the food inflation to climb further and then as the base effect turns very supportive, we will end up with temporarily plunging readings in July-August this year," Nayar said.

## Jindal Stainless supplies 'high-strength' steel to Vande Metro trains

Leading stainless steel manufacturer Jindal Stainless has supplied high strength stainless steel for the Vande Metro train expected to operate from July, the company said on Tuesday. The Railways had recently rolled out the Vande Metro train from the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai. The "201LN" stainless steel supplied by Jindal Stainless, makes coaches lighter and energy efficient, Jindal Stainless claimed in a statement, here, today. Vande Metro Trains are shorter distance versions of the



'Vande Bharat' express trains. Vande Metro Trains aim to serve passengers traveling distances of up to 250 kms. Vande Metro Trains are expected to connect more than 120 cities and likely to be launched in July. Some of the preliminary routes planned are Bhubaneswar-Balasoer, Agra-Mathura, Chennai-Tirupati, Delhi-Rewari, and Lucknow-Kanpur, the company statement said.



# Arissa Khan returns to Cannes

Arissa Khan, the renowned luxury fashion aficionado, is preparing for her second appearance at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. This highly anticipated return solidifies Khan's status as an influential figure in fashion and entertainment. "I am absolutely elated to be returning to the Cannes Film Festival," expressed Khan. "It is an incredible privilege to be a part of such a prestigious event, and I anticipate the glamour and excitement that awaits."

The Cannes Film Festival, however, isn't the sole reason for Khan's travel to France. As an avid tennis and Rafael Nadal fan, she will also be attending the first round of the Roland Garros from May 26th onwards.

With her second appearance at Cannes, Khan is poised to enthral audiences worldwide, further solidifying her impact on the international stage. This milestone event promises to be a captivating showcase of her continued rise as a respected influencer in the luxury lifestyle domain, leaving fans and followers eagerly anticipating her next move.



# PASHMINA ROSHAN AS SANYA IN ISHQ VISHK REBOUND

The makers of *Ishq Vishk Rebound* unveiled a sizzling character poster featuring the film's leading lady, Pashmina Roshan. Slated for release on June 21st, 2024, the poster introduces us to Pashmina's character, Sanya. The poster oozes youthful charm and charisma with Pashmina looking radiant as she embodies the essence of her character with a blend of contemporary style and timeless grace. Clad in a trendy outfit, she looks at the camera as she holds a golf club. The caption simply reads, "The only shot she misses is the one she doesn't shoot". This tagline piques the audience's curiosity, leaving them wanting to know more about Sanya's journey in the film.

*Ishq Vishk Rebound* marks Pashmina Roshan's much-awaited Bollywood debut. Directed by Nipun Dharmadhikari, the film is a successor to the 2003 rom-com *Ishq Vishk*, and audiences are eager to see how this new generation navigates love in the age of dating apps and instant connections.



With the release of this character poster, the excitement for *Ishq Vishk Rebound* has certainly peaked. Fans are eagerly waiting to see Pashmina bring Sanya to life on the big screen and witness the sizzling chemistry between her and her co-star, Rohit Saraf. As the excitement builds, *Ishq Vishk Rebound* is poised to be one of the standout films of the year.

# what's brewing?

## TABU TO BE SEEN IN A BIG GLOBAL PROJECT!

Fresh from the success of heist comedy *Crew*, actor Tabu has joined the cast of *Dune: Prophecy*, a prequel series to director Denis Villeneuve's blockbuster film franchise. Tabu will star in the recurring role of Sister Francesca, described as a "strong, intelligent, and alluring" character, according to a report in entertainment outlet Variety.

"Sister Francesca leaves a lasting

impression in her wake. Once a great love of the Emperor, her return to the palace strains the balance of power in the capital," the makers said. In Villeneuve's 2021 and 2024 feature adaptations of Frank Herbert's *Dune* novels, Charlotte Rampling played Reverend Mother Mohiam, the Emperor's Bene Gesserit Truthsayer. Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) was the Bene Gesserit mother of the protagonist Paul Atreides, played by Timothee Chalamet. *Dune: Prophecy*, an HBO Max series hailing from Legendary Television, is set 10,000 years before the events of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and is based on the novel *Sisterhood of Dune* by Brian Herbert and Kevin J Anderson. It was previously titled *Dune: The Sisterhood*. As per official logline, "Set within the expansive universe of *Dune*, created by acclaimed author Frank Herbert, and 10,000 years before the ascension of Paul Atreides, *Dune: Prophecy* follows two Harkonnen sisters as they combat forces that threaten the future of humankind, and establish the fabled sect that will become known as the Bene Gesserit."



# Ali Fazal-Fatima wraps up two schedules together from Metro In Dino

Excitement mounts as the first look of Ali Fazal and Fatima Sana Shaikh from the sets of Anurag Basu's highly anticipated film *Metro In Dino* has been leaked. Directed by the acclaimed maverick Anurag Basu, known for his masterful storytelling, *Metro In Dino* is poised to be one of the most eagerly awaited films in Bollywood in 2024. The film is currently almost at the end of its shooting schedule and is slated for a November 29th release. A source revealed, "Ali and Fatima are being paired for the first time together. They have a great friendship both on and off sets. They have wrapped up two schedules together and will be shooting for another schedule soon in Mumbai."

Inspired by Basu's previous hit *Life in a... Metro*, *Metro In Dino* boasts an ensemble cast, including Sara Ali Khan, Aditya Roy Kapur, Konkana Sen, Pankaj Tripathi, Neena Gupta, and Anupam Kher. The film promises to be a captivating romantic drama, reminiscent of its predecessor. In the photograph, actors Ali Fazal and Fatima Sana Shaikh are captured alongside director Anurag Basu, appearing soaked in water, indicating they may be filming a scene in the rain. The glimpse offers a tantalising peek into the world being crafted by Basu and his team. The two actors have become great friends since the shoot began and share a great camaraderie on sets and are being paired opposite each other for the first time in a project.



# RJ Malishka onboard for Freedom At Midnight

Sony LIV and Emmy Entertainment have announced new cast additions to the highly anticipated show *Freedom At Midnight*. Malishka Mendonsa will portray Sarojini Naidu. Rajesh Kumar as Liaquat Ali Khan, and KC Shankar as V.P. Menon in this political thriller. Speaking about her role as Sarojini Naidu, Malishka shares, "I am truly humbled to portray Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, in *Freedom At Midnight*. Playing her is a challenge and honour, as my only reference point is what I've read about her and the discussions I've had about her with our director. I think she was a true representation of the modern women of India who were not boxed by any limitations. She was not only a celebrated poetess and a freedom fighter but also a trailblazer for women in politics. It's fascinating to take a deeper look into the complexities of her character and understand her journey during such a transformative period in our nation's history. Being a part of this series is like stepping back in time and experiencing history in its rawest form."

The story is penned by Abhinandan Gupta, Adwitiya Kareng Das, Gundeeep Kaur, Divya Nidhi Sharma, Revanta Sarabhai, and Ethan Taylor.

# Tom expresses his desire to portray archenemy in Batman

Tom Hanks, known for his versatility across genres such as comedy, romance, science fiction, and military dramas, previously expressed a desire to join the cast of a *Batman* movie. Given the vast scope of the DC world, the prospect of Hanks attaining this desire has grown, implying an intriguing shift in his professional trajectory. During an interview a decade ago to promote *Captain Phillips*, Tom Hanks explored his absence from major superhero pictures and whether it was deliberate. Hanks revealed that, while he had not been contacted for such roles, he was very interested in the genre, particularly in playing a villain, preferably a Batman foe, as he liked not to play characters who guided the heroes. With the coexistence of two *Batman* franchises—Matt Reeves' *The Batman Universe* and the DC Universe's *Brave and the Bold*—now is an excellent time to fulfill Hanks' ambition and cast him as a foe of the *Dark Knight*. Hanks, who is not normally associated with hostile parts, presents an intriguing opportunity to inject freshness into the portrayal of a villain, particularly inside *Batman's* gloomy and intricate universe, which is defined by a gallery of enemies distinct from the narrative landscape of superhero genres. It is unclear whether a *Batman* film starring Tom Hanks will be made, but the possibility is absolutely viable.



# Anupam Kher introduces Sunil Rodrigues, action director of Tanvi The Great

National award winner Anupam Kher is currently shooting for his directorial film *Tanvi The Great*. The actor has been posting pictures from the set to give his fans first-hand information. He took to social media to share the image with action director Sunil Rodrigues. He wrote, "Announcement: Delighted and Proud to introduce the #ActionDirector of my directorial film #TanviTheGreat Mr. #SunilRodrigues. Rod, as he is popularly known is one of the most dynamic, scientific and charismatic action man in our industry. He may look tough and overpowering but he is the gentlest person on the set. He also is a great storyteller! Thank you dearest #Rod for your love, brilliance and craftsmanship! Jai Ho! #Singham #Jawan #Pathaan #Mukkebaaz #Tiger3 #Simmba #Suryavanshi #TanviTheGreat."

Sunil Rodrigues shared, "As an action director working with Anupam Khar was totally a different experience for me. Your ability to embrace everyone's ideas and treat everyone with equal respect creates a positive and inspiring environment for every technician. Your dedication to fairness and your hard-working nature set a remarkable example for all of us to follow." Produced under Anupam Kher Studios, *Tanvi The Great* promises to be a cinematic treat!



## FUN

### ARCHIE



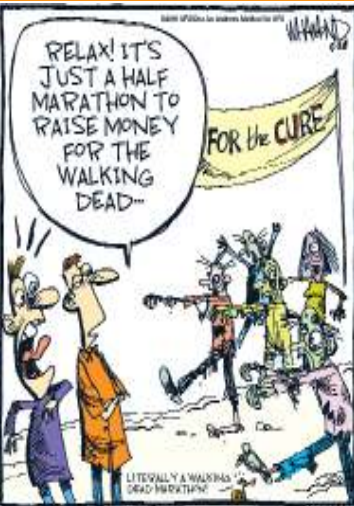
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



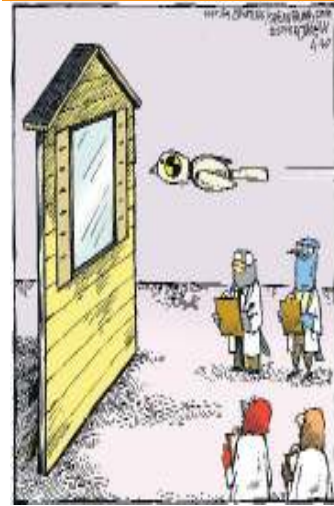
### GARFIELD



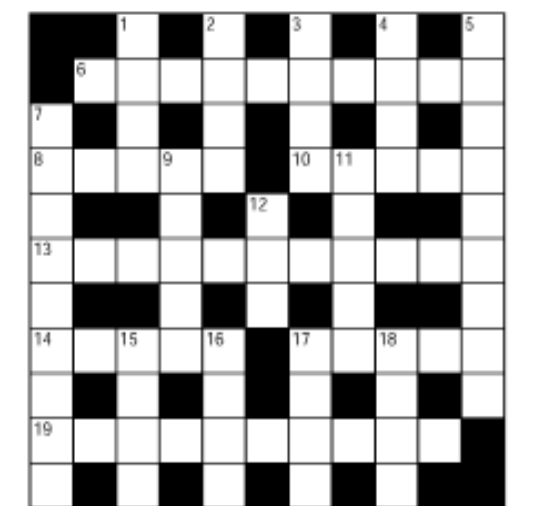
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



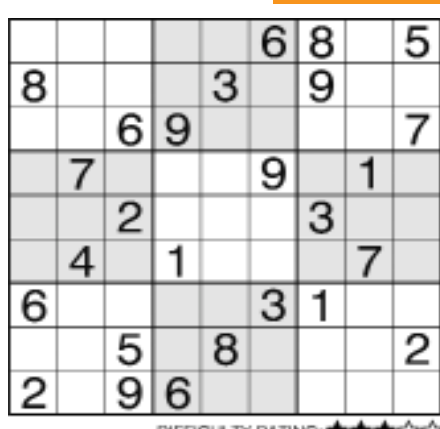
### CROSSWORD



### NANCY



### SUDOKU



**Yesterday's solution**

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

**Rules**

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

### ACROSS

- 6 Words that ask you politely to come
- 8 Arm joint
- 10 The head of a city council
- 13 Very tall city buildings
- 14 From Ireland
- 17 These birds honk
- 19 A person who has seen something happen and can give evidence in court
- 7 Sweated
- 9 A desert green place
- 11 This fruit has pips
- 12 Rub with a towel
- 15 A thought
- 16 This grows on heads
- 17 Firearms
- 18 The direction opposite west

### DOWN

- 1 A round handle
- 2 The scene from a window
- 3 Do damage to
- 4 Very small
- 5 Took clothes off



### GINGER MEGGS



## 'PIND KI PUNJABI pushed me out of my comfort zone'

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Actress Delbar Arya is reaching new heights with her spectacular performances in the 'Pollywood' industry. Do you not believe us? Oh, come on! The actress recently surpassed all records by finishing her forthcoming Punjabi film, *Damdaa*, in just 23 days. This is, of course, wonderful news for all Delbar fans who have been waiting to see her in film for a long time. A tiny birdie from the industry has informed us of this.

Not only that, but after achieving enormous recognition for her role with Guru Randhawa in *Downtown*, the amazing actress is going to star in Punjabi ace artist Singga's new forthcoming single, *Shadow 2*, too. Oops, we have more for you. The actress is believed to be in talks with the producers of *Bigg Boss OTT* for the forthcoming season as well. How could we pass up an exclusive interview with the actress, who is buzzing like a bee around town?

In our chat with her, she continues to disclose, "I can easily relate to my character in the movie and my own real-life experiences. I mean, she's compassionate, naive, and responsible, but what a difficulty it was for me to portray a rural girl who is, you know, playing a character from 1980. And since I have never lived in a village, it was quite interesting for me to play that role and experience it. It was a unique experience that kept me grounded. So all of these minor details, living as a village girl, have taught me that one can be happy with the smallest things in life."

So that was an interesting component for her while doing *Damdaa*, but also tough, so that she could understand the body language and feel like she was playing a country girl. That was both tough and amazing!

She continues, "My director never gets impatient. He continues to explain whenever I or my character require additional clarification in a scene. And I'm extremely pleased to have worked with him. He's a very kind person. I had rehearsals with the writer one day before the shoot, and he explained the character to me well. He also assisted me with the pronunciation of my dialogue. That provided me with a lot more clarity when I started shooting on set. And that gave me a sense of confidence." So, how has it impacted others to represent the character? "I guess they were impressed with my acting and performance (she giggles)."

Working with an ensemble cast, how cheerful was the atmosphere? The actress spills the beans: "I mean, the cast was so supportive and at the same time so much pleasure to work with. We've laughed every day on set. We haven't gone a day without laughing. *Bohot maza aaya* (Had a lot of fun). And the most unforgettable: there were many recollections, but there was one scene where Babar was playing another character in the family. He is the eldest son in the family. So he's seated in a wheelchair, and when he wants to depart, his wife, who plays Dilraj, has to push him away. And the wheelchair became trapped. So it was simply not moving. And while we tried not to laugh, it was simply too amusing. We all burst out laughing. It was an extremely humorous and memorable experience. I also have that video, and I keep viewing it since it was so amusing."

As previously stated, the character has presented a positive challenge. Also, it was her first time playing a country girl. And especially those who are married and care for their families are in charge of the household. And of course, "What pushed me out of my comfort zone was the language, because it's not even casual Punjabi; it's *Pind ki Punjabi*. So it seemed like I had to push myself, get out of my comfort zone, and learn the accent. The intonation and pronunciation! So it was quiet, and I used to be quite stressed on set, but everyone was so supportive of me that they all made me feel comfortable. And in the end, I succeeded, which makes me extremely happy." They had an extremely tight schedule. They had to finish the shooting in one go. But, despite the tight, demanding schedule, they had a lot of fun. As a result, it has developed into a family environment. At the same time, they are editing on set, and they keep showing the actress the edits, which look just wonderful. That's how the dynamics evolved on the sets of her most recent film!

She prefers to work on projects where she has an influence, an impacting role, or a character because she comes from a theater background, and she always ensures that whatever project she works on has a high level of performance! And, as she already stated, it must make an impact on the audience. She continues, "So I'm excited to discover more diverse characters. I enjoy playing different characters because, in real life, we are not our true selves, so movies, of course, allow us to play different roles and characters and immerse ourselves in those people and personalities that we are not in real life. That is really essential to me."

In reality, she enjoys Indian movies, whether it is Bollywood, Punjabi, or South Indian cinema. According to her, "All of them are *ek jaise and challenging toh nahi bolungi* (Similar, I wouldn't say challenging). However, each regional cinema has its own distinct culture. So, learning and experiencing these many cultures is quite interesting to me, and I enjoy it. So, yes, I face challenges, but I also find delight almost everywhere."

Meanwhile, on the work front, she says, "Yes, there are multiple projects planned for this year, as well as numerous other projects. So the following would be two music videos. One has Pratik Sehajpal and vocals by Stebin Ben, and the song is titled *Kaabil*. And my other, second, music video is for *Shadow 2*, which features singer Singga. He had recorded a song called *Shadow*, and we shot *Shadow* part two. That is also set to be released. And yes, I am looking forward to more Punjabi ventures, mainly, movies. You will find out about it as soon as everything is finalised and we can share it."

Actress Delbar Arya, who is currently enjoying much-celebrated recognition for her performances, gets candid with *The Pioneer*, sharing some interesting deets about her character, working with an ensemble cast, and more.



## Understanding lupus & its devastating effects

Pop singer Selena Gomez was diagnosed with lupus in 2015. After receiving a kidney transplant from a friend, she candidly talked about her struggle with anxiety and panic attacks, which are frequent lupus side effects. Gomez provided an insight into that journey by candidly sharing her everyday problems on her social media platform. Her ability to bounce back from setbacks is a testament to her dedication to spreading awareness and encouraging empathy among her large internet following. And in order to raise awareness of the same, we're doing the same here with a comparable piece. Lupus is a complex condition where the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissues, leading to inflammation and damage to various organs of the body. It can manifest in a myriad of symptoms, including joint pain, fatigue, skin rashes, fever, and organ damage. The unpredictability of lupus flares and the chronic nature of the disease significantly impact the quality of life for patients. Furthermore, lupus disproportionately affects women, particularly those of childbearing age, adding another layer of complexity to its management.

Lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease, affects millions worldwide, yet its impact often goes unnoticed in mainstream health discussions.

However, for those living with lupus, its effects are profound, spanning physical, emotional, and social dimensions. Understanding the significance of lupus and exploring potential treatments like stem cell therapy is crucial in offering hope and improving outcomes for those affected.

Despite its prevalence and impact, lupus remains relatively misunderstood, both by the general public and within the medical community. This lack of understanding contributes to delayed diagnosis, inadequate treatment, and stigma surrounding the disease. Moreover, there is currently no cure for lupus, and treatment mainly focuses on managing symptoms and preventing flare-ups, often through immunosuppressive medications. While these treatments can be effective for some, they come with significant side effects and may not work for everyone.

In light of these challenges, the exploration of alternative treatments, such as stem cell therapy, holds promise for revolutionising lupus management. Stem cells have the remarkable ability to develop into different cell types in the body, offering the potential to repair damaged tissues and modulate the immune system. In the context of lupus, stem cell therapy involves harvesting a patient's own stem cells, manipulating them in a laboratory setting, and then reintroducing them into the body to promote healing and immune regulation.

Research into stem cell therapy for lupus is still in its early stages, but preliminary studies have shown encouraging results. Some clinical trials have reported improvements in disease activity, reduced reliance on immunosuppressive medications, and enhanced quality of life for patients who underwent stem cell transplantation. While more extensive research is needed to establish the long-term safety and efficacy of this approach, the initial findings offer hope for a potential breakthrough in lupus treatment.

However, the translation of stem cell therapies from bench to bedside presents unique challenges for pharmaceutical companies. Regulatory considerations loom large, with stringent requirements governing the development, manufacturing, and clinical testing of stem cell-based products. Navigating the complex regulatory landscape demands robust preclinical data, well-designed clinical trials, and close collaboration with regulatory authorities to ensure compliance and patient safety. In conclusion, lupus is undeniably a big deal, impacting millions of individuals worldwide with its complex symptoms and unpredictable course. While current treatments provide some relief, they are far from perfect, highlighting the urgent need for innovative approaches like stem cell therapy. Moving forward, continued research, collaboration, and advocacy will be essential in unlocking the full potential of stem cell therapy and improving outcomes for those living with lupus.



(The author, Dr. Aravind Badiger, is a Technical Director of BDR Pharmaceuticals.)

## IGNITING SELF-HEALING WITH SOUL PURPOSE

PNS|HYDERABAD

In the sacred foothills of the Himalayas, where the Ganges flow like a silver ribbon, there exists a yogic luminary—Yogrishi Vishvketu, affectionately called Vishva-Ji—who embodies the essence of yoga—a varieties woven from threads of devotion, discipline, and delight. His laughter, like a thousand temple bells, echoes through the corridors of time, inviting seekers from distant lands to step onto the sacred mat.

Born into the lineage of yogis and Ayurvedic healers, he weaves his holistic teachings like a blooming lotus in the Ganges. He has spread his wisdom across continents; his story unfolds like a *mandala*, each chapter revealing a new layer of enlightenment. He is a world-renowned yoga teacher trainer who has studied and practiced yoga for over 40 years and trained over 7,000 yoga teachers worldwide.

He started his journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth that would shape his path for years to come, embodying the words the body achieves and what the mind believes. He begins, "My journey with yoga began in childhood, when, at the tender age of three, I found myself drawn to the practice. It seemed as though I carried whispers of yogic wisdom from lifetimes past. Surrounded by the

Himalayan foothills, and with three yogi uncles as mentors, my fascination with yoga was sparked."

Unlocking the transformative potential of yoga, also ignites inner peace. Yoga's core essence, he says, lies in fostering liberation, encouraging belief, trust, and practice, while guiding individuals to embrace their innate qualities of fearlessness, bliss, joy, and playfulness.

Yoga's journey to the West has been transformative, evolving from its ancient roots to a widespread practice embraced by millions worldwide. As it permeates Western culture, yoga has under-

gone various interpretations, adaptations, and approaches. Enunciating his observations, he shares, "Upon arriving in the West, I observed that yoga practices predominantly focused on either *asana* or meditation, rather than holistically integrating both. However, in my understanding, *asana* and meditation are inseparable elements of yoga. To truly experience wholeness, or *akhandata*, in each yoga session, we must seamlessly combine knowledge, *asana*, *pranayama*, chanting, and meditation. *Asana* enhances meditation and vice versa, fostering mindfulness in both practices.

Additionally, in Akhanda Yoga, we prioritise mindfulness in our dietary choices, recognising that optimal nutrition is integral to our overall well-being."

Yoga's practice varies significantly between the West and India, reflecting diverse cultural interpretations in his understanding of these distinctions, offering insight into the multifaceted nature of yoga globally. In Western contexts, he shares, "Yoga predominantly emphasises the physical dimension, while in India, it is revered as a spiritual journey towards internal liberation.

In introducing Akhanda Yoga to the West, my aspiration is to encourage a holistic approach to yoga practice, inspiring Westerners to delve deeper into the spiritual aspects alongside the physical postures."

From the tranquil shores of Rishikesh to the majestic landscapes of British Columbia, his teaching time spans continents, offering seekers experiences through his teaching. "I divide my teaching time between India and Canada. In India, I lead Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) at Anand Prakash Yoga Ashram in Rishikesh, where I also conduct classes, workshops, and retreats. In Canada, I'm based in British Columbia, offering classes at various locations and hosting retreats and trainings globally. Additionally, I'll be traveling to promote my book, *Yogasana: The Encyclopedia of Yoga Poses*."

The profound wisdom embedded within yoga and its myriad *asanas* defies encapsulation within the pages of a single book, and so the need for an authentic yoga book emerges. "Upon my arrival in the West, I observed a multitude of yoga *asanas* being practiced, often with incorrect names that didn't align with ancient yogic wisdom or Sanskrit. Recognising this gap, I saw the need for a comprehensive resource that not only provided accurate names but also delved into the energetic dimensions of yoga poses. This drove me to publish *The Encyclopedia Of Yoga Poses*. Drawing upon my lifelong dedication to yoga, complemented by a PhD in Yoga Philosophy and a deep-rooted understanding of Sanskrit, I recognised the significance of offering a comprehensive resource. It was imperative to provide practitioners and teachers alike with accurate names, variations, and pronunciations of yoga *asanas*. Collaborating with scholars and experts in the realms of yoga and Sanskrit ensured that the book encompassed a wealth of authoritative knowledge and expertise."



Dr. Yogrishi Vishvketu, a world-renowned yoga guru, has been committed to self-healing and development with a soul purpose. *The Pioneer* got a chance to interact with him as he shared his inclination toward yoga practices in the West and more.



# RAJASTHAN AIM TO CLINCH PLAY OFF BERTH IN PARAG'S 'ROYAL' HOMECOMING

**PTI ■ GUWAHATI**  
 R Ryan Parag, the hottest cricketing property to emerge from India's north-east, is expected to get a grand welcome from his home fans when Rajasthan Royals try to ensure a safe passage into the IPL play-offs against the ousted Punjab Kings in their penultimate league game on Wednesday. Placed second in the 10-team table with 16 points, Royals need to ensure one win in their next two 'home' games in Guwahati. That will be enough to seal a last four berth. For the past few years, Guwahati has been Royals' second home base and it was a strategic move by the franchise having invested a good six years in tapping Parag's potential. Panned for being inconsistent on social media platforms, Parag's homecoming this year

is special as his performance of 483 runs at a strike-rate of 153 despite not being an opener is simply outstanding. A stable core and improvisation as per match situations have already made Parag an India contender for the next T20 series where he is expected to make his international debut. As and when it happens, Parag will become the first cricketer hailing from the north-eastern part of the country to wear the senior team's iconic blue jersey. Parag's emergence as the cricketing face from the region makes this and the RR's next match against KKR more significant. The support for the 22-year-old will be organic and that will also help Sanju Samson and his men against Punjab Kings, which unearthed two T20 gems in Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma but once again failed to fire as a



better part of the season made matters worse as his stand-in Sam Curran didn't exactly look the part. Skipper Shikhar Dhawan's absence due to injury for the

leader in what is expected to be his best season as a batter. He already is his team's top-scorer with 486 runs. The dynamic opening duo of Yashasvi Jaiswal (344 runs) and Jos Buttler (359 runs) have had an average season by their standards but Parag and Samson have ensured that batting remained solid and consistent with he low-scoring game against CSK being an aberration. RR's strongest aspect is their bowling unit that has never been taken to the task as such during the whole season. Sandeep Sharma (Economy Rate 8.07) at the death and Trent Boult (ER 8.38) at the start have executed plans to the 'T'. Ravichandran Ashwin has only become sharper as the tournament has progressed and Yuzvendra Chahal can always produce that magic ball against the run of play.



## Shastri, Ashwin back Impact Player rule

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
 The "Impact Player" rule might have come in for sharp criticism in the ongoing IPL, but former India coach Ravi Shastri and senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin have backed it, stating that it leads to more close finishes. The rule, implemented in the competition last season, has been a topic of debate this edition, with some experts and current players saying that it will make all-rounders redundant. "When any new rule comes in, there will be people who will try to justify why that's not right," Shastri said. "But with time, when you see the scores — 200 and 190 — and then, individuals grabbing that opportunity and making the most of it, people will start re-looking at how they think about it." Shastri vouched for the rule, saying that the game has to evolve with time. "The Impact Player (rule) is good. You have to evolve with the times. It happens in other sports as well. It's got tighter finishes," he said on Ashwin's YouTube channel. "I think it's a good rule. You saw the number of tight finishes we had in last year's IPL. So, it has made a big difference." BCCI Secretary Jay Shah had recently said that the rule is not permanent. "Impact Player is like a test case. We have implemented it slowly. The biggest advantage of it is that two Indian players are getting a chance (in each game), which is the most important," he told the media in Mumbai last week. "We will consult with the players, franchises, broadcasters (and take a call). This is not permanent, (but) I am not saying that it will go. (We'll see) if it's making the game more competitive or not. Even then, if a player feels that this is not right, then we will talk to them. But no one has told us anything yet. So, it will be decided after the World Cup." India skipper Rohit Sharma and Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel and Mukesh Kumar, also expressed their displeasure with the rule. "I genuinely feel it is going to hold back the development of all-rounders because eventually cricket is played by 11 players, not 12," Rohit had said a couple of weeks back. "So, I am not a big fan of the Impact Player rule because you are taking so much from the game just to make it a little more entertaining for the people around you."

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Former India cricketer Ambati Rayudu has no doubts that IPL teams that empower their players to take "ownership" are the ones likely to be more successful compared to those who leave decision-making in the hands of coaches. In a discussion on what goes into keeping the team environment healthy, the former India and Chennai Super Kings player cited Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Gautam Gambhir's example. He loves the manner in which Gambhir gives his players the freedom to perform and according to him, it has been the key to the two-time IPL champions' run of success so far this season. "If the coaches take a back-seat and work behind the scenes, and let the players take the ownership, and let the players have the freedom in order to perform on the ground, those are the sort of teams that excel, and that is what KKR has been doing," Rayudu, a veteran of 55 ODIs and six T20Is told Star Sports on Tuesday. KKR, the IPL winners in 2012 and

## Teams where coaches work behind scenes and give players freedom do better: Rayudu

2014 under Gambhir's captaincy, became the first team to enter the playoffs this season and are currently on 19 points after nine wins. Gambhir returned as KKR mentor this season and his presence is being attributed to the team's resurgence after nearly a decade. "Gautam Gambhir is just facilitating them and guiding them in the right direction... If you keep it simple, it is easy," added Rayudu, who has been part of six IPL-winning teams. Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh applauded ex-KKR coach Brendon McCullum for bringing positivity into the dressing room irrespective of whether the team won or lost. "When I was part of KKR, Brendon was there. Brilliant coach. One of the top guys I have ever worked with. He was so positive in that dressing room.



Whether you win or lose, he remained the same. "We lost about 6-7 games at the start of that season, and we ended up

qualifying for the final. I have not seen even a single change in Brendon McCullum when we were not winning and when we were winning," said Harbhajan about the former New Zealand cricketer, who left KKR in 2022 to become England Test coach. He added that it was the duty of mentors and coaches to keep the players in a positive frame of mind. "He (McCullum) was just very humble, straightforward, and for him, everybody was equal. So that is what is very important to make sure the team is important. It is about those players going there and doing what they have to do to make sure they lift the cup. "It is our duty as mentors or coaches to give them the best we can and keep them in good shape. Not just physically but also mentally because that plays a very big role."

### OTHER SPORTS



## Three young squash players included in TOPS scheme

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
 With eyes firmly set on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, young squash players Anahat Singh, Abhay Singh and Velavan Senthilkumar were on Tuesday included in the TOPS Development Group. Squash, which was inducted in the 2028 Olympics programme in October, is popular in India, with exponents doing well in the Asian and Commonwealth Games. For years, Saurav Ghosal, Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinappa have kept the flame burning and are now passing the baton to the next generation of players like Anahat, Abhay and Velavan. "The inclusion of squash in the TOPS programme marks a pivotal moment for the sport in India. Beyond immediate benefits like increased participation and enhanced training opportunities, this recognition signifies a broader endorsement of squash as a significant sporting discipline within the country," Squash Racquets Federation of India (SRFI) secretary general Cyrus Poncha said in a SAI release. "Including squash in TOPS opens doors to international exposure and collaboration, fostering exchange programs and partnerships with leading squash nations. This is bound to enhance the overall standard of squash in India." Anahat, 16, is already a

national champion, with over 46 titles in the national circuit so far. On the international front, she has started making waves as the current Asian U-17 champion and winner of two PSA World Tour titles. She also has two Asian Games medals. "I am really honoured SAI and SRFI considered me to be added to TOPS and I believe it will be a big support for me in improving my game and getting ready for international competition. I am sure when other Indian squash players hear about this, they will be encouraged to pick up squash professionally as they will know the government is supporting them if they perform well and represent India," she said. Among men, Abhay and Velavan were inducted in TOPS. At 25, Abhay is the current National Games gold medallist and national championship silver medallist. He has won nine PSA World Tour titles and was part of the Indian men's team that won the Asian Games gold in Hangzhou in 2023. "I've been working hard to climb up the PSA rankings and have been funding all my expenses to travel abroad and train under some of the best coaches. I'm happy that TOPS will now take care of me, and I really hope we keep producing results on the world tour especially the 2026 Asian Games and the again the Olympics," Abhay said.

**PTI ■ BENGALURU**  
 India will put to test its best strategies and combinations during the European leg of the FIH Pro League as it would be the last opportunity to shortlist the final squad for the Paris Olympics, said men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh on Tuesday. The team left for Antwerp, Belgium on Tuesday for the challenging league, where the winner of this season will be determined. India, currently third in the points table, behind the Netherlands and Australia, will play Belgium and Argentina in Antwerp between May 22 and 26. It will be followed by matches against Germany and Great Britain from June 1-9 in London. "We are trying out the best combinations before the final squad is selected for the Olympics. Hence, the Pro League outing is crucial in our preparations for Paris as well as for players to make it to the 16-member squad for Paris," said drag-flicker Harmanpreet in a Hockey India

## We will try out best combinations before final squad for Olympics is selected: Harmanpreet

release before the team left for Europe. Last month, India, the Tokyo Olympics bronze medallists, lost all their five matches in Australia, raising doubts about their preparations for the Paris Games. Harmanpreet said the team will focus on eliminating any chinks in its armour ahead of Paris. "The team is quite excited to get back on the road again for yet another challenging outing where we will take on world's best teams in the Pro League. We will be travelling on the back of a very intense training camp over the past few weeks where we focused on our conditioning and played intra-squad matches regularly. "The team is shaping well and the Pro League is an important event for us to



iron out the flaws in our execution ahead of the Olympics," said Harmanpreet. The skipper said the Pro League will

not just help him assess his team's preparations but also provide cues into the rivals' strategies. "We have Belgium and Argentina in our pool at the Olympics along with Australia, Ireland and New Zealand. We play Belgium and Argentina both in Antwerp. Harmanpreet hoped that after finishing third in the last few seasons of the Pro League, his team would stake claim to the title this time around. "In the past few seasons of the Pro League, we have finished at third position. It will be great to finish on top this time and we are quite optimistic about it," Harmanpreet said. India will play Argentina on May 22 in Antwerp.

## Paddler Manika Batra reaches career high ranking of world number 24

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
 A ace women's table tennis player Manika Batra rose to a career-best singles ranking of 24 following her success in the Saudi Smash, becoming the first Indian woman paddler to break into the top-25 in world rankings. The 28-year-old Khel Ratna awardee, who was in 39th spot before the tournament, jumped 15 spots following her run in Jeddah, where she reached the quarterfinals. Manika, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold medallist in individual and team categories, had shocked multiple-time world champion and Olympic gold medallist China's Wang Manyu (seeded second) on her way to the last-eight in the Saudi Smash. It was also the first time an Indian women player advanced that far in the tournament. Manika's rise through the draw finally earned her 350 points. In an Instagram post, Manika,



who had made history by becoming the first Indian paddler to reach the women's singles quarterfinals at the Hangzhou last year, wrote that the ranking boost had come at the right time as she aims to secure a Paris Olympics berth. "An extreme confidence boost on the road to Paris 2024. Breaking into the Top-25 and achieving the best rank ever achieved by an Indian in women's singles of the ITTF Ranking," wrote Manika. Manika also thanked her coach Aman Balgu and sparring partner Kirill Barabanov of Belarus for her success. "Thank you, everyone, for your blessings and support. Especially my coach @amanbalgu, my sparring partner @kirill\_barabanov and my family for the constant support. Onward and upward towards Paris 2024," she added.

## Manu, Vijayveer win final 25m pistol Olympic Selection Trials

**PTI ■ BHOPAL**  
 Olympian Manu Bhaker and Paris quota winner Vijayveer Sidhu won the fourth and final Olympic Selection Trial (OST) in 25m pistol events here on Tuesday. At the M P State Shooting Academy, Manu, coached by the legendary pistol shooter Jaspal Rana, shot a world record-equalling 42 in the women's 25m Pistol OST T4 final, while Vijayveer shot 34 in the decider of the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol OST T4 to emerge triumphant. Manu displayed complete dominance in the trials, winning two and coming second in the other two. She was also the only shooter among the selected five to not score below 580 in the qualification round even once. Abhidnya Patil (35) was second, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar (30) took home the final podium point. Esha Singh and Rhythm Sangwan were



fourth and fifth respectively. In men's rapid fire, Vijayveer took the lead after the second five-shot series and held on to it till the eighth and final series to register his first outright victory in the trials. Anish Bhanwala was second with 30 while Adarsh Singh was third with 25. Ankur Goel (20) and Bhavesh Shekawat (18) took the minor places. Anish, however, was the most successful of the five in the event, having won two trials and coming second in the other two. Bhavesh had won the second trial. Vijayveer, on the other hand, had come second twice in the three earlier trials. Wednesday will see the qualification rounds in men's and women's 50m Rifle 3 Positions event with local hopes Aishwarya Tomar and Ashi Chouksey set to participate.



## Shruti Haasan, Adivi Sesh's film shooting kicked off

Amidst rumours that actor Adivi Sesh and Shruti Haasan are uniting for a project, Shruti Haasan posted a photo of her alongside Adivi Sesh and director Shaneil Deo, adding fuel to the ongoing buzz. Fan pages and netizens posted several messages and posts across social media, hoping for an update on the trio's upcoming film, *Dacoit*. *Dacoit*, which was announced a few months ago, was lauded for its impressive teaser, and the latest image posted by Shruti has only piqued interest further.

A source confirming that the trio are coming together for the film shared, "What works for the film apart from its story and performances is that Shruti, Adivi, and Shaneil are very good friends, and that reflects in their work. They recently met in Chennai, and just as Shruti posted a picture, the anticipation and excitement among fans rose manifold." The trio will begin shooting for the film's next schedule soon, and barring *Dacoit*, Shruti also has her international film *The Eye* and her musical projects to look forward to.

Actress Archana Iyer, who was recently seen in the film *Krishnamma*, gets candid with *The Pioneer* as she discusses her character Padma, emoting through her expressions, and more.

## 'IT WAS QUITE CHALLENGING TO EMOTE ONLY THROUGH EXPRESSIONS'

SHIKHA DUGGAL

The bleak season at the box office persisted, but when Archana Iyer's *Krishnamma* arrived in Telugu theaters, critics were forced to reconsider. It had a better response and grossed two and a half crores globally. At the same time, one of the film's main actresses was thrilled that the movie received better reviews and generated more buzz than the majority of past releases. That's how we landed our next exclusive interview for the Tollywood segment!

Now known as "Padma" everywhere, she coughs up, admitting that at some point, it became impossible for her to portray the part she was given. "It was quite challenging, as I had to emote only with expressions that were opposite to Satyadev! It's just that I learned about Padma and how she behaves and reacts to events, so I went in as Padma to become her and get more deep. I did it without makeup throughout the film to connect with the audience," she shares, adding, "It's a very honest subject with strong emotions that connects

with everyone. When I heard the entire script, it haunted me, and I knew it would do the same for the audience after they finished watching the film. As for Padma, it was a difficult role for me because she had no dialogue, but the way the director wrote Padma and Bhadra's love story impressed me enough to accept the project."

More fascinating details are on their way. Read on! Particularly when she says, "I learned so much as an actor and as a person. We used to film in 42-degree heat, and to be honest, I had never been to such a hot place before. The Durga Maa temple will always be significant to me, as will many other memories from Vijayawada."

She believes that what is destined for you will eventually come to you. She never expected to become an actress, but she got more than what she expected as an actress!

She cannot imagine her life without the film industry; she is blessed to be in it. Didn't that strike you hard?

She had some more great inputs to share with us, such as, "I feel very happy to be representing all the women who have worked so hard for their families and society, and doing so through films is even more satisfying." At the same time, she stated that as an actor, you have to be able to manage both success and failure, and when it comes to

*Krishnamma*, people may have various perspectives, but honesty is welcomed, so she is delighted.



## 'WENT TO SUPPORT MY FRIEND': ALLU ARJUN, ON SUPPORTING YSRCP LEADER

Days after he was booked for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct in the run-up to Lok Sabha polls, popular Telugu actor Allu Arjun said on Tuesday that he went to the Nandyal district to support his friend and YSRCP constituency candidate S Ravi Chandra Kishore Reddy but isn't affiliated with any political party. On Saturday, the *Pushpa* star waved to a large crowd from a balcony with the YSRCP candidate and also posted a message on X in his favour. The Andhra Pradesh Police booked a case against the *Pushpa: The Rise* star on Saturday under IPC Section 188 the same day. Arjun said he remains neutral and supports "my people," including Janasena Party founder and actor-uncle Pawan Kalyan, regardless of their political affiliations.

"Firstly, I want to clarify that I'm not affiliated with any political party. I remain neutral and support my people, regardless of their political affiliations. This includes my uncle Pawan Kalyan, whom I'll always stand by, along with my friend Ravi and my father-in-law, Mr. Reddy," the actor said in a statement. The National Award winner, who cast his vote in Hyderabad on Monday, said he went to Nandyal district to support his friend Ravi. "I made a promise to my friend, Mr. Ravi, to support him, but I couldn't fulfill it last time. To keep my word, this time I went to Nandyal to support him," he further said. In a post on X on Saturday, Arjun thanked the people of Nandyal for a "warm reception." "Thank you, Silpa Ravi Reddy (YSRCP candidate) garu, for the hospitality. Wishing you the very best in the elections and beyond. You have my unwavering love and support," he had posted. Janasena, TDP, and BJP are NDA alliance partners who are taking on the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP in the elections. Andhra Pradesh went to the polls on Monday.



## Unleash the spine-tingling scares with Miral on May 17

When *Miral*, a Tamil movie featuring Bharath and Vani Bhojan in the key parts, was first released in 2022, it had a mixed reception. But with the recent release of the Telugu trailer, the excitement surrounding the film has been rekindled as it gets ready for its Telugu premiere. A preview of the spine-tingling story that is full of exciting and unsettling scenes that are sure to enthrall viewers is provided by the trailer. A family finds themselves stuck on a barren road, and the trailer shows a sequence of frightening incidents that are made more terrifying by the appearance of an enigmatic stranger wearing a mask. As the leading couple, Bharath Srinivasan and Vani Bhojan excel and promise an exciting performance that will have audiences on the edge of their seats.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, the makers shared a new update about the film. *Miral* is now going to hit cinemas on May 17. While Suresh Bala's cinematography captures the essence of the exciting adventure taking place on screen, Prasad S. N's excellent background score sets the tone for the intense narrative. The skillful editing of Kalaivanan R guarantees a smooth transition between drama and tension, amplifying the overall effect of the movie.



## SKN plans to gift an auto to Pawan Kalyan fan

Blockbuster producer S.K.N., who is a big mega fan, continues to delight mega fans. Active on social media, S.K.N. wholeheartedly supports anyone backing mega heroes. He has also earned a good reputation for his charitable activities. Recently, he announced on social media that he would gift an auto to a woman who expressed her support for the Janasena Party.

A woman shared on a YouTube channel that if Pawan Kalyan wins, she will host a party for her village with the money earned from her husband's rickshaw driving. This video went viral on Twitter. Responding to the tweet, S.K.N. promised to buy her an auto if Janasena wins, as the female fan desired. Many people, including director Maruti, responded to the tweet and praised S.K.N. for his generous heart.



## Nikhil Vijayendra turns actor

Lahari Films and RB Studios announced the commencement of production for their much-anticipated film *Sangeet* with a puja ceremony held in the city on Tuesday. While Niharika Konidela, who happens to be a very close friend of Nikhil, handed over the script, Shourya switched on the camera, and SS Karthikeya clapped the board for the muhurtam shot. The event marked the beginning of what promises to be an emotional rollercoaster as the team gathers to bring to life the captivating narrative penned by writer and director Saad Khan of *Humble Politician Nograj* fame. According to the makers, *Sangeet* is a tale of love, family, and the melodies of life that revolves around Samarth, portrayed by Nikhil Vijayendra Simha, whose life takes an unexpected yet entertaining turn during his brother's wedding festivities. Teju Aswini has meanwhile joined the cast as Nikhil's love interest. Speaking on the occasion, Nikhil shared, "Embarking on this journey feels surreal. *Sangeet* is a story close to my heart, and I am eager to delve into the intricacies of the protagonist's emotions. I believe this film will resonate

deeply with audiences, and I am honored to be a part of it, especially the team and the director, Saad Khan." Teju Aswini, who essays the role of Swara, expressed her excitement, saying, "*Sangeet* delves into the essence of relationships and celebrates the beauty of life's melodies. I am thrilled to collaborate with such a talented team and excited to bring the character to life." Director Saad Khan, known for his distinct storytelling, shared his vision for *Sangeet*, stating, "With *Sangeet*, we aim to capture the behind-the-scenes madness a family goes through during a wedding. It's wonderful to see producers trust artists to freely express their creativity." Bankrolled by Naveen Manoharan, Chandru Manoharan, and Shrawanthi Naveen in association with Firststation, a Rainshine company, the film also stars NSD teacher and actor Vikram Shiva, Surya Ganapathy, and comedian Harsha Chemudu in key roles.

# RAJINIKANTH WRAPS UP SHOOTING FOR VETTAIYAN

Superstar Rajinikanth, fondly known as Thalaivar by his legion of fans, has completed shooting his portions for the highly anticipated film *Vettaiyan*. The announcement made on Tuesday comes as a moment of celebration for Rajinikanth enthusiasts eagerly awaiting his next on-screen appearance.

In a post shared on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), Lyca Productions declared, "And it is a wrap for our Thalaivar! Superstar @rajinikanth completes filming his portion for *Vettaiyan*."

Accompanying the announcement was a heartening image where Rajinikanth, donned in a stylish grey shirt and beige pants, is seen graciously accepting flowers from the crew, a gesture acknowledging his stellar performance.

Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Siva, *Vettaiyan* marks yet another collaboration between the director



and the legendary actor, promising an exhilarating cinematic experience for audiences.

Recently, Megastar Amitabh Bachchan posted a photo of him along with Rajinikanth, announcing that he is reuniting with the actor for this film. He also finished filming for this film recently, and he made it official on his social media handles. As filming for Rajinikanth's portions wraps up, anticipation mounts for the release of *Vettaiyan*, slated to hit theaters this October. The news has sent waves of excitement among fans, who eagerly await the opportunity to witness Rajinikanth's charismatic presence on the big screen once again.

*Vettaiyan* boasts an ensemble cast featuring acclaimed actors such as Fahadh Faasil, Rana Daggubati, Manju Warrier, Ritika Singh, and Dushara Vijayan.