



# sunday pioneer

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**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**The pioneer**

**Prime Minister Modi is unable to digest the free bus travel facility for women. Some states are providing free bus travel facilities to women to facilitate economic growth. Travelling in RTC buses has nothing to do with the Metro. The Metro is a different kind of entity. We are still appealing to increase the number of Metro coaches**

**-Ponnamb Prabhakar, TG Minister** P4

**'INDIA bloc will win LS polls, BJP will not even cross 200 seats'**

5

**'FDI norms in certain sectors LIKELY TO BE eased under new government'**

6

**Oozing charm and grace**

Dil se

### DON'T MISS...

#### Jagan's declaration takes Oppn...

The YSRCP, under Jagan's leadership, has demonstrated a knack for obtaining precise information on electoral outcomes. According to Kommineni, the battle between the marginalised and the elite has resonated deeply with the electorate, with many expressing their support for the YSRCP in a subtle yet resolute manner. In a surprising move, Jagan Mohan Reddy, before his departure abroad, visited the IPAC office to assert the party's confidence in securing a landslide victory in the...

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#### Of strawberry shakes, drives...

Old writers never die, they simply go out of print, says India's storyteller through the decades Ruskin Bond as he turns 90 on Sunday, adding with his famed self-deprecating wit that 99 per cent of his tribe are forgotten in the long run. The companionship of his adopted family, drives on the serpentine Landour-Mussoorie route, frothy strawberry milk shakes, shelves filled with books to read and a handy notepad to write down his daily musings... they were and are just a few of his favourite things. Spending most of his days at his...

**-PAGE: 5**

#### Need to reconsider sachetisation of...

Cautioning against household savings getting invested in futures and options trade, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran on Saturday said there is a need to reconsider sachetisation of F&O trade because it requires different financial literacy. Speaking at the CII's Annual Business Summit, 2024, Nageswaran said whenever financial sector development precedes national development the story hasn't ended well for other countries as well. "Asian crisis 1997-98 is a very important example," he said. "When we take pride in the fact..."

**-PAGE: 6**

#### Global life expectancy...

Life expectancy around the world is projected to improve by almost five years in men and by over four years in women between 2022 and 2050, according to a global study published in The Lancet journal. Researchers said that the improvements are expected to be the highest in countries where life expectancy is lower, thereby contributing to an overall enhancement of life expectancy across geographies. Public health measures preventing and nutritional health measures improving survival rates from cardiovascular diseases, COVID-19, and a range of communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases, are largely driving the trend of increasing life expectancy globally, the authors said. "In addition to an increase in life expectancy overall..."

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### OBTUSE ANGLE



## POST-POLL VIOLENCE IMPACT EC changes one DC, 3 SPs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In response to law and order issues during the election day and subsequent post-poll violence, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has appointed new officials for Palnadu and three other districts. Latkar Sriyesh Balaji has been named the new District Collector for Palnadu. The new Superintendents of Police are Malika Garg for Palnadu, Harshavardhan Raju for Tirupati, and Gautami Sali for Anantapur. Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy and Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta provided an explanation to the Election Commission of India (ECI) regarding the violence that occurred during and after polling on Monday. They were summoned to the ECI headquarters in New Delhi to explain the failures in preventing the violence. Despite intelligence reports warning of potential violence, several incidents occurred in constituencies such as Macherla, Narasaraopet, Chandragiri, and Tadipatri. The ECI expressed dissatisfaction with the top officials' failure to take adequate preventive measures. The Chief Secretary and DGP have been asked to outline the steps taken to prevent further incidents, as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for the General Election is still in effect. The ECI emphasised the

**Despite intelligence reports warning of potential violence, several incidents occurred in constituencies such as Macherla, Narasaraopet, Chandragiri, and Tadipatri.**

**ECI DIRECTIVES**  
Book cases and arrest those who damaged EVMs.  
Action against police and election staff for dereliction of duty.  
Ensure measures to prevent further violence as the Model Code of Conduct is still in force.

**NEW APPOINTMENTS**

 Latkar Sriyesh Balaji appointed as DC for Palnadu	 Malika Garg named Palnadu SP
 Harshavardhan Raju named Tirupati SP	 Gautami Sali named Anantapur SP

**Reasons for action:** Law and order issues during Election Day and post-poll violence. Incidents occurred in Macherla, Narasaraopet, Chandragiri, and Tadipatri constituencies.

need for stringent measures to ensure such violence does not recur. Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena announced that the ECI has directed the booking of cases and arrests of individuals who damaged Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) during polling. Additionally, actions will be taken against police

#### Efforts on to nab culprits: SIT chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Special Investigation Team (SIT) chief IG Vineet Brijlal has said that police personnel have already been sent to areas affected by post-election attacks in the State. At a meeting with DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, lasting approximately 30 minutes, Vineet briefed on the SIT teams' deployment to the riot-affected areas. They are reviewing existing FIRs and determining whether amendments are needed or new filings are warranted. Any delays in filing cases will be addressed promptly through the registration of new FIRs, followed by a rigorous review of investigative progress and subsequent arrests. The DGP will be regularly apprised of the SIT's advancements.

**2**

## AP govt releases funds for DBT schemes as per poll panel's orders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In compliance with directives from the Election Commission of India, the State government has initiated the release of funds for DBT schemes to beneficiaries affected during the election period due to MCC. In a statement released on Saturday, AP Finance Department officials reiterated their commitment to adhering strictly to the Model Code of Conduct guidelines and directives issued by the Election Commission of India, ensuring transparency in all financial activities, including bill clearances. Addressing misconceptions, officials clarified that accusations of preferential treatment towards unnamed contractors at the expense of welfare schemes are unfounded. Providing a breakdown of disbursements from May 14 to 18, the Finance Department reported a total release of Rs 7,546.34 crore, with Rs 5,868.26 crore allocated to DBT funds. This allocation encompassed funds for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (Rs 600.44 crore), Samagra Siksha (Rs 338.36 crore), NHM (Rs 124.02 crore), PM POSHAN (Rs 71.06 crore), other CSS (Rs 67.00 crore),



**Addressing misconceptions, officials clarified that accusations of preferential treatment towards unnamed contractors at the expense of welfare schemes are unfounded.**

Loan Servicing (Rs 458.84 crore), Salaries and Pensions (Rs 289.23 crore), Administrative Expenses (Rs 161.82 crore), Power Subsidy (Rs 100.00 crore), Diet Charges (Rs 26.27 crore), Materials and Supplies, Drugs & Medicines (Rs 12.73 crore), Local Bodies (Rs 14.11 crore), Victim Compensation (Rs 7.31 crore), Works Expenditure (Rs 7.01 crore), and other expenditures (Rs 0.32 crore).

**2**

## Bridegroom among 6 dead in car-lorry collision

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Six persons including a bridegroom died in an accident in the district on Saturday, police said. Guntakallu sub-divisional police officer Siva Bhakar Reddy said seven people from Anantapur went to Hyderabad for wedding shopping in a hatchback and were returning home when the accident took place at Bachupally near Gooty in the district. "The driver of the car dozed off which led to the hatchback going on the divider and then subsequently onto the opposite road to be hit by an oncoming truck,"



Reddy said. Among the dead were two minor children, an equal number of women and men, including the bridegroom, Feroz Basha (30). Incidentally, all the deceased were relatives. The person who drove the car survived, the official said. The police have registered a case under relevant sections

## Rainwater seeps into EVM strongroom



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The ongoing rains have caused water to seep into the first floor of Nimra College at Jupudi in Ibrahimpatnam mandal of NTR district, affecting a wall of the strongroom where Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are stored. Upon discovering the issue, security and revenue authorities promptly informed District Collector and Election Officer (DEO) Dr S Dilli Rao. The strongroom houses EVMs from the Mylavaram Assembly con-

stituency under the Vijayawada Parliamentary segment. NTR District Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar and Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna immediately inspected the site. Officials assessed that the EVMs were not yet damaged but too preventive measures to safeguard them against further rain. Dilli Rao instructed officials to take necessary actions to prevent damage to the EVMs. Following his directives, revenue and other officials have worked to ensure rainwater does not penetrate the building's first floor and to protect the strongroom. Speaking to "The Pioneer", Joint Collector Dr Sampath Kumar confirmed that no rainwater had entered the strongroom. However, he cautioned that heavy rains could pose a future risk, and thus, preventive measures are being taken.

**Continued on Page 2**



## 9 dead, 15 hurt as bus catches fire in Haryana

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

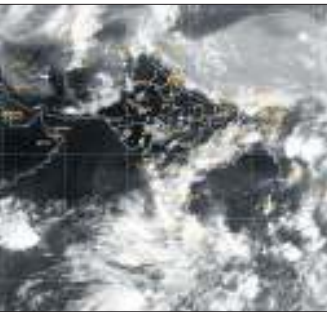
At least nine people were burnt alive and 15 injured when a moving bus caught fire near Tauru in Haryana's Nuh district in the early hours of Saturday, police said. The incident occurred around 2 am on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway. The bus was carrying around 60 people, all residents of Punjab's Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana, who were returning from pilgrim towns of Mathura and Vrindavan.

**Continued on Page 2**

## Heavy rains forecast in AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Heavy rain is likely to occur across North Coastal AP, South Coastal AP, and the Rayalaseema region over the next 24 hours. The previously observed cyclonic circulation over Rayalaseema, extending up to 5.8 km above mean sea level, has diminished in intensity. However, its influence may still trigger heavy rainfall in isolated areas of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema within the next day. According to a meteorological report released on Saturday, a low-pressure area is anticipated to develop over the southwest Bay of Bengal around May 22. This system is projected to track northeastward initially and intensify into a depression over central parts of the Bay of Bengal around May 24. Additionally, the southwest monsoon is expected to progress into the



South Andaman Sea, certain parts of the Southeast Bay of Bengal, and the Nicobar Islands by around May 19. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and strong gusty winds (with speeds ranging from 40-50 kmph or 30-40 kmph) are forecasted to occur at isolated locations in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema over the next five days.

## AP-origin US citizen detained at Gannavaram airport

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The police on Saturday apprehended a person moving suspiciously at Gannavaram airport as Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy was preparing to board a flight to London. The detained person, Dr Vyuyuru Lokesh, a US citizen from Washington, was found to have communicated details of the CM's trip to his associates and issued a protest call, which went unheeded. Gannavaram CI disclosed that Lokesh, whose behaviour was found to be suspicious, was taken into custody and later claimed to have suffered a heart attack, prompting his hospitalisation.

**Continued on Page 2**

## Fans accord CM a grand welcome in UK

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy received a grand welcome upon his arrival in Luton, England, on Saturday. The YSRCP chief was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of party supporters and Non-Resident Telugus in Luton. Chants of 'Jagan Anna' filled the air as supporters shook hands and interacted with the Chief Minister, who graciously posed for selfies with them. After a rigorous election campaign in scorching heat and a series of 'Siddham' meetings, CM Jagan, along with his family, departed for a tour of the United Kingdom on Friday night. The YSRCP chief is visiting the UK from May 17 to June 1 with his family members, ahead of the Assembly and Parliament election results scheduled to be declared on June 4.

The Chief Minister is accompanied by his wife YS Bharathi and daughters Harsha and Varsha. Their first stop is London, followed by visits to France and Switzerland. Jagan Mohan Reddy had been the YSRCP's star campaigner during the months-long campaign. YS Bharathi also campaigned in the Pulivendula Assembly constituency, where the Chief Minister contested. Incidentally, a day before leaving on his foreign tour, Jagan interacted with a team from IPAC, which advised YSRCP on its political strategy for the 2024 elections. CM Jagan was seen off at Gannavaram airport by Ministers Jogi Ramesh and Kottu Satyanarayana, MP Nandigama Suresh, Government Whips Ch Bhaskar Reddy, S Udayabhanu, MLA Malladi Vishnu, and MLCs T Raghuram and M Arun Kumar.

### LOK SABHA POLLS

## Inducements worth Rs 8,889 crore seized

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Authorities have seized cash, drugs and inducements worth Rs 8,889 crore that aimed to influence voters in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission said on Saturday. At 45 per cent, drugs formed the biggest chunk of the total seizures. Narcotics worth around Rs 3,959 crore were seized, it said. Drugs,

**DRUGS ACCOUNT FOR 45% OF TOTAL SEIZURES**

**Analysis of data found that states and Union Territories that used to be transit zones are increasingly becoming consumption territories of drugs, it said.**

liquor, precious metals, freebies and cash influence elections in varying

degrees, some flowing directly as inducements while others through

reduced levels of circulation of money, the poll authority said. The commission said it has laid special emphasis on the seizure of narcotics and psychotropic substances. Analysis of data found that states and Union Territories that used to be transit zones are increasingly becoming consumption territories of drugs, it said. The Gujarat Anti-Terrorism

Squad, Narcotics Control Bureau and the Indian Coast Guard in joint operations have made three high-value seizures of drugs in just three days, amounting to Rs 892 crore, the poll panel noted. Rs 849.15 crore in cash, Rs 814.85 crore worth of liquor, drugs worth Rs 3,958.85 crore and precious metals worth Rs 1,260.33 crore have been seized, it added.

# 'Double dhamaka' for Pithapuram voters

Going by reports that cannot be proved or verified, it was 'double dhamaka' for voters, but an instance of double-crossing among the opposition combine in Pithapuram during the just-concluded elections in Andhra Pradesh. It seems initially voters were given cash as inducement by the Jana Sena Party, which had ensured it was their show out and out. However, the alliance partners, sensing that they had been left out in the crucial distribution process, chose to quietly get back at JSP. So, money was distributed again in another round. Thus, many voters were paid twice. There were also a few who took money, but did not vote. Overall, the sheer amount spent in Pithapuram seat has raised a credible question: Will Pawan Kalyan contest again in elections?

## Revanth's footwork a barometer of his fitness

Some talk about their chappan-inch chest to assert their credentials as a leader, while others let their feet do the talking. When Chief Minister Revanth Reddy impulsively played football with students of the University of Hyderabad the other day, few would have imagined that the sport would go on to mirror the Chief Minister's remarkable fitness levels. He played on and on, for three hours to be precise, and not just for photo-ops. His footwork at play has since become a talk in political circles about his health and fitness. For, only in the first round the Congress leaders who had tagged along with the CM played. But in terms of footwork, they were pathetic. For the next two hours, it was only the Chief Minister and the enthusiastic and energetic students who were at play in all seriousness. Surprisingly, the students had no qualms about competing in the sport with none other than the CM of the state. They treated him as any regular player. But for the leaders who had accompanied Revanth to the university, it was indeed

a reality check on their fitness levels. Some like Balmoor Venkat, not well-versed with the sport, did self goals, lending rare spectacular moments that day.

### Was it improper invitation or lack of coordination?

When a chief minister is conducting a review, it does not mean that the chief of the department concerned can be taken

## REPORTERS' DIARY

for granted. The department head must get his due, apart from proper invitation; otherwise, the CM concerned will invite trouble! Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, who conducted a review on Agriculture and related issues on Wednesday, must have understood this the hard way. For, Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageshwara Rao did not attend the review, sparking rumours that he chose to abstain as he had not been properly invited for the meeting. Hot discussions and speculations among media persons followed. Some of the scribes got wind of the 'fact' that the Minister did not attend 'due to lack of proper invitation', while others presumed he was 'not informed in time'. Whatever it is, the Minister conducted reviews of his department on Thursday and Friday, letting everyone know who the boss of the agriculture department is, regardless of the view from the CMO.

### Trouble-maker becomes trouble-shooter

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee leader T Jagga Reddy, as a legislator, was better known as a trouble-maker for the party. Now, as TPCC working president, Jagga Reddy, who is also in the race for TPC president position, is holding court at Gandhi Bhavan these days, focused on resolving intra-party issues. Previously, when he was an MLA,

he was seen at his aggressive best at the CLP office. Having shifted his adda upon losing in the Assembly elections, Jagga Reddy has been participating in party activities to mend matters. Some of the party leaders, while crediting him for sorting out certain internal issues, now treat him as their political 'guru'. In his new avatar, he has been advising some party leaders to not give any chance whatsoever to opposition parties to tarnish the image of the Congress. Otherwise, both the grand old party and its 'careless' leaders would suffer, he warns those listening to him.

### Confidence, overconfidence and piety

What stood out after the Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh is that both ruling YSRCP and the opposition TDP-JSP-BJP combine claimed victory soon after polling ended. What did not go unnoticed was that Chief Minister and YSR Congress president YS Jagga Mohan Reddy took some time to assess polling trends and then declare that his party would come to power with far more seats than its tally in the 2019 elections. He then went abroad on a vacation with his wife. In contrast, TDP supreme N Chandrababu Naidu declared immediately after polling that the alliance would come to power in the state. To lend weight to his claim, Chandrababu said that the party's annual meeting, Mahanadu, scheduled to be held during May 27-29, had been postponed since the party was busy "with the Assembly results and the formation of the government". People then compared the 'confidence' of Jagga who coolly went on a vacation and the 'overconfidence' of Chandrababu, who nevertheless has been visiting various temples with his wife. It is a different matter that both treated voters as God before the polls.

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

# Jagan's declaration takes Oppn, analysts by surprise

**C PRADEEP KUMAR**  
■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP, under Jagan's leadership, has demonstrated a knack for obtaining precise information on electoral outcomes.

According to Kommineni, the battle between the marginalised and the elite has resonated deeply with the electorate, with many expressing their support for the YSRCP in a subtle yet resolute manner.

In a surprising move, Jagan Mohan Reddy, before his departure abroad, visited the IPAC office to assert the party's confidence in securing a landslide victory in the recently concluded elections. He boldly proclaimed that the YSRCP would clinch over 150 seats, a statement reportedly substantiated by robust statistical analysis.

Insiders reveal that Jagan's optimism stems from the success of an app utilised during the 2023 Telangana elections, which accurately predicted



FILE PHOTO

The findings of an app managed by YSRCP's central office in collaboration with I-PAC suggest a significant surge in support for the YSRCP, with an average vote share of 56% observed throughout the polling period, potentially translating to a victory in up to 156 seats.

Congress's performance. This app, managed by the YSRCP's central office in collaboration with the I-PAC team, conducted surveys of 1,700 individuals across diverse geographical locations on polling day, ensuring the authenticity of the data collected.

The app's findings suggest a significant surge in support for the YSRCP, with an average vote share of 56% observed throughout the polling period, potentially translating to a vic-

tory in up to 156 seats.

Furthermore, while the app did not explicitly project outcomes for individual candidates, a senior YSRCP leader hinted at potential defeats for Chandrababu Naidu and Balakrishna in Kuppam and Hindupur, respectively, while predicting victories for Pawan Kalyan and Nara Lokesh in their respective constituencies.

Political analyst Kommineni Srinivas noted the audacity of Jagan's assertion, citing his

past success in accurately predicting electoral outcomes. He emphasised the silent yet decisive support for the YSRCP among voters, attributing it to Jagan's populist narrative of empowering the marginalised against entrenched interests.

Srinivas suggested that Jagan's confidence may stem from insider information and serves as a rebuttal to the TDP's propaganda and speculative betting surrounding the election.

## Efforts on to...

Continued from Page 1

Collaborating closely with forensic experts and examining filed FIRs, the SIT vows to file additional reports where necessary. Stressing the urgency of the matter, Brijlal said that every effort is being made to expedite the investigation process and bring the culprits to justice. Regular updates are being dispatched to the Election Commission, and the thorough examination of all available evidence, including CCTV footage, is underway, with significant progress expected within two days.

Headed by IG Vineet Brijlal, a 13-member SIT has been operational since Friday night. Tasked with investigating disturbances in three districts—Palnadu, Anantapur, and Tirupati—the teams are concentrating on hotspots such as Tadipatri, Macharla, Gurjala, Narasaraopeta, Sattenapalli, and Tirupati. Furthermore, the involvement of police officials in the violence is under scrutiny, with prompt disposal of related FIRs being prioritised.

In parallel, the suspended SP Bindu Madhav is undergoing interrogation, having met with SIT Chief Vineet Brijlal. An inquiry is underway into the disturbances and violence involving TDP leaders in the Palnadu district, focusing on incidents in Gurazala, Macherla, Narasaraopet, and Sattenapalli.

## AP-origin US...

Continued from Page 1

Lokesh was released after being held preventively due to potential protest activities.

Following his release, Lokesh accused the police and YSRCP leaders of anarchy and claimed he was targeted for criticizing the CM's policies. He asserted that he was kidnapped and mistreated by security officers at the airport.

# Women hold key to electoral fortunes in Visakhapatnam

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Women voters have emerged as the driving force in the electoral landscape of Visakhapatnam, not only outnumbering men but also displaying a substantial turnout across various constituencies. With their burgeoning presence, they hold the potential to sway the fate of candidates vying for power in the region.

The Visakhapatnam parliamentary constituency witnessed a remarkable turnout, with women comprising a notable majority of the electorate. Of the total 19.27 lakh registered voters, 9.79 lakh were women, showcasing their significant presence in the democratic process. Segments including Srungavarapu Kota (S.Kota), Bheemunipatnam, Gajuwaka, and the different zones of Visakhapatnam city exhibited a strong participation from women voters, underlining their growing influence in electoral affairs.

While traditionally male voters have dominated the polling booths, the recent trend indicates a shift, with



women turning out in larger numbers. This shift reflects evolving societal dynamics, marked by rising literacy rates, heightened awareness, and increased media coverage on political matters.

Political parties have taken notice of this trend and intensified their efforts to appeal to women voters. The ruling YSRCP has emphasized its women-centric welfare schemes, highlighting the benefits received by a significant portion of women in Andhra Pradesh. In contrast, the TDP-BJP alliance has presented its 'super six' manifesto, featuring promises aimed at addressing key concerns of women, such as free travel services and financial

assistance for education.

The contest between these competing narratives poses a crucial question: Will women voters align with the incumbent party, swayed by its welfare initiatives, or opt for the alliance promising a new vision for their future? The answer to this question remains uncertain, as voters weigh their options based on the perceived impact of policies on their lives. As Visakhapatnam gears up for electoral outcomes, the decisive role of women voters underscores the evolving dynamics of political participation and the imperative for parties to prioritize their concerns and aspirations in their agendas.

# CEO inspects strongrooms in Vizag & Srikakulam dists

## Directs district officials to be vigilant to avoid untoward incidents

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena has emphasised the importance of adhering to stringent security standards in the strongrooms where the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are secured. He directed district officials to remain vigilant and prevent any untoward incidents.

CEO Meena, District Election Officer and Collector Dr A Mallikarjuna, and Police Commissioner Dr A. Ravi Shankar inspected the strongrooms on Saturday.

The inspection included the Visakhapatnam Parliament strongrooms and those of seven Assembly constituencies. Officials examined the locks and seals on the doors and confirmed the presence of CCTV cameras



and other security measures. After the inspection, CEO Meena signed the log book and instructed the Collector to maintain three-layer security and continuously monitor the situation. Unauthorised persons must be strictly prohibited from entering the strong room

area, and all precautions must align with Election Commission regulations. Accompanying CEO Meena were District Election Officer Dr. Mallikarjuna, Police Commissioner A. Ravi Shankar, Joint Collector K. Mayur Ashok, and the AROs of the respective constituen-

ties, along with other officials. Later, CEO Meena, along with District Election Officer and Collector Dr Manazir Jeelani Samoon and District SP GR Radhika, inspected the strong rooms at Sri Shivani Engineering College in Srikakulam. He reiterated the need for vigilance to the staff. The inspection covered the Srikakulam Parliament and the strong rooms of eight legislative constituencies.

Municipal Corporation Commissioner Tamim Ansari, Tekkali Returning Officer, Sub Collector Nurul Qamar, Zilla Parishad CEO Venkateswara Rao, DPO Venkateswara Rao, Returning Officers Dr. Bharat Naik, Ch. Rangaiah, Apparao, Lakshmana Murthy, Sudarshan Dora, Rammohana Rao, Tehsilidars, and other officials were also present.

# Vizag's Nitish most expensive player in APL auction

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Nitish Kumar Reddy, a young cricketing talent from the city, has every reason to celebrate. As a formidable all-rounder for Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in this IPL season, the 20-year-old has achieved a new milestone by becoming the most expensive player of the APL's third season. The Godavari Titans secured Nitish for a staggering Rs 15.6 lakh during the auction held on May 16.

Nitish's performance in the IPL has been nothing short of remarkable, delivering several match-winning innings, including two fifties, maintaining an average of 47, and boasting a strike rate of 153. However, his journey to success has been anything but smooth. Nitish credits his achievements to the sacrifices made by his parents, particularly his father, Mutyala Reddy, an employee of a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU), and his mother, Manasa.

Hailing from Tunglam near Gajuwaka, Nitish's passion for cricket ignited at the age of six. He began his training at summer coaching camps and quickly pro-



gressed to secure positions in district and higher-level teams. The real challenge began eight years ago when the PSU where his father worked shut down, leading to his transfer to Rajasthan. "My father quit his job, even though he had 25 years left until retirement, to support my cricket training in Vizag. He faced a lot of criticism for this decision, but he always encouraged me to follow my dream," Nitish recalls. The family moved to

Madhurawada from Tunglam, and Nitish continued his training with unwavering support from his parents. Nitish, who now plays for the Andhra team in Ranji Trophy, also acknowledges the significant support he received from the Andhra Cricket Association (ACA). When asked about his role models, Nitish enthusiastically mentions, "Bhuvneshwar Kumar and AB de Villiers inspired me a lot, but Virat Kohli is my idol."

Reflecting on the family's journey, Mutyala Reddy says, "Nitish spent many sleepless nights honing his skills. His belief in himself has truly paid off. I hope to see him play for Team India soon." Explaining his decision to leave his job, he adds, "I dreamt of being a kabaddi player when I was young, but couldn't pursue it. I see my success in Nitish every time he makes his team proud." Nitish Kumar Reddy's story is a testament to perseverance, family support, and the relentless pursuit of dreams, marking a new chapter in his promising crick-

# Will go to BJP office with AAP leaders today: Kejriwal dares PM to arrest them

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Saturday that he and other AAP leaders would go to the BJP headquarters on May 19 "so that the prime minister can send anyone he wishes to jail".

The BJP is saying they will send AAP MP Raghav Chadha, who had just returned from the UK, and Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj to jail too, he claimed at a press briefing hours after his aide Bibhav Kumar was arrested in connection with the alleged assault on his party's parliamentarian Swati Maliwal.

Kejriwal, who is also the AAP national convener, however, asserted that his party could not be crushed by sending its leaders to jail.

Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "playing the game" of sending AAP leaders such as Manish Sisodia,



Satyendar Jain, and Sanjay Singh to jail, he said, "I am coming to BJP headquarters with all my big leaders, MLAs, MPs, everyone, at 12 noon tomorrow. Whoever you want to put in jail, do so all at once." "You think that you will crush the Aam Aadmi Party by putting its leaders in jail, the AAP is not going to be crushed like this. You try it once and see."

Kejriwal said the AAP is an idea that has struck a chord with people across the country. "This country will produce 100 times more leaders than the number of AAP leaders you put in jail.

## Rainwater seeps into EVM...

Continued from Page 1

Later, Police Commissioner Ramakrishna and Joint Collector Sampath Kumar reviewed the security arrangements at the strong rooms, instructing security personnel to remain vigilant until the vote count concludes. DCP S. Harikrishna and other officials accompanied the inspection team, ensuring comprehensive measures were in place to protect the EVMs.

## AP govt...

Continued from Page 1

Furthermore, officials confirmed the completion of payments for schemes such as YSR Aasara, input subsidy scheme, ECB Nestham scheme, and Jagananna Deevana by crediting the respective amounts directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts. Notably, the majority of disbursements were allocated to Cheyutha beneficiaries, with the remaining payments soon to follow.

Rejecting claims of favouritism towards contractors, officials clarified that allegations of Rs. 4,000 crore payments to select unnamed contractors were baseless. In reality, a nominal sum of Rs 7.01 crore was disbursed for works related to Courts and others.

## 9 dead, 15 hurt...

Continued from Page 1

All of them are relatives, police said. "Nine people -- six women and three men -- were killed in the accident. Fifteen people were injured and have been hospitalised. All the injured are stable," said Inspector Jitendra Kumar, Station House Officer, Sadar Tauru. "The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. A probe is underway," he said.

A local resident said that after noticing the fire, some people chased the bus on a motorcycle and asked the driver to stop. The locals also informed the police and fire department

**IMD EXPECTS EARLY ONSET OF MONSOON**

# NTR DISTRICT GEARS UP FOR KHARIF OPERATIONS

**2,43,350 acres to come under cultivation of paddy & other crops**

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

The NTR district Agriculture Department is gearing up for Kharif 2024, as the Indian Meteorological Department anticipates an earlier advancement of the Southwest Monsoon this year. The district is set to commence the Kharif season in June.



NTR District Agriculture Officer  
S Naga Manemma

Due to the low-pressure system over the Southwest Bay of Bengal, normal to heavy rains are occurring across the State. Farmers have already ploughed their fields in preparation for the upcoming Kharif season.

The department plans to cultivate various crops, including paddy, pulses, and others, across approximately 2,43,350 acres (97,340 hectares) during the upcoming Kharif season. Farmers are focusing on seedbeds to ensure an early start for paddy planting in the district.

Agriculture Department officials report that paddy will be cultivated on 1,21,515 acres (48,606 hectares) out of the total cultivating area. Additionally, cotton will be grown on around 98,420 acres (39,368 hectares), and pulses

such as black gram, green gram, and red gram on 13,442 acres (5,377 hectares).

Furthermore, maize will be cultivated on 8,585 acres (3,434 hectares), sugarcane on 1,219 acres (484 hectares), and other crops on 177 acres (71 hectares).

Paddy is the main crop in the district, and the agriculture department is ensuring a

steady supply of paddy seeds to farmers starting from the first week of June. Farmers typically cultivate BPT 5204, MTU 1061, MTU 1224, and MTU 1318 paddy varieties in this district.

For the 1,21,515 acres of Kharif paddy, the department is preparing 1,250 quintals of BPT 5204 seeds for distribution. Additionally, around 4,500 quintals of MTU 1061, 1,250 quintals of MTU 1224, and 800 quintals of MTU 1318 paddy seeds are ready for supply.

The department is also ready to provide paddy seeds for seedbed preparation, with a general subsidy of Rs.5 per kg. After obtaining certification from the Andhra Pradesh State Seed Certification Authority, these seeds will be available at Rythu Bharosa Centres for farmers.

### Fertiliser supply

Approximately 46,251 metric tons of fertilisers are currently available in the district, though the requirement for the Kharif season is around 74,823 metric tons. The department will distribute these fertilisers to Rythu

Bharosa Centres, Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS), and private dealers according to a monthly plan.

The department is also supplying green manure seeds to farmers at a 50% subsidy. Around 5,192 quintals of green manure seeds, including 3,710 quintals of 'Jeeluga' and 1,333 quintals of 'Pilli Pesara', have been allocated for distribution before the Kharif paddy season begins.

### DAO statement

NTR District Agriculture Officer (DAO) S Naga Manemma told 'The Pioneer' that the department is fully prepared for Kharif 2024.

Green manure seeds, paddy seeds, and fertilisers are ready to be distributed to farmers through Rythu Bharosa Centres and PACS. Adequate supplies have been allocated to the district, she added.

She advised farmers to complete soil testing and follow recommendations for fertilizer use. The department is also organising awareness programs on crop management across the district.

## Criminal case registered against Chintamaneni

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

A criminal case has been registered against Chintamaneni Prabhakar, a former TDP MLA from Denduluru, at the Pedavegi police station. This is in addition to the existing number of 93 criminal cases he faces across various police stations in Andhra Pradesh.

The Pedavegi police on Friday charged Prabhakar for causing a disturbance at the police station the previous day. He, along with his followers, forcibly removed his supporter, Talluru Rajasekhara, from police custody despite resistance from the authorities. Rajasekhara had been arrested for allegedly assaulting a YSRC agent at a polling booth in Koppulavari Gudem on May 13 and was remanded in custody by a court.

As a result of Prabhakar's actions, the police have charged him under several sections of the Indian Penal Code, including Section 224 (Obstruction by a person to lawful apprehension), Section 225 (Resisting lawful arrest of another person), and Section 353 (Obstruction of public servants).

Eluru Superintendent of Police, Dasari Mary Prashanti, announced that two special teams led by circle inspector-level officers have been formed to apprehend Prabhakar and other involved parties.

This latest incident marks the 94th criminal case against the former TDP MLA.

## Rythu Bazars turn into hotbed of corruption

- Role of estate officers and attendants under scanner
- Groundnuts sold at prices higher than those in the open market



**JAVVADI LAKSHMANA RAO ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Rythu bazaars, once hailed as centres of fair trade benefiting both farmers and consumers, have now turned into hotbeds of exploitation, with high-ranking officials allegedly reaping significant profits at the expense of the common people. The Rythu bazaars, renowned for providing a platform for farmers and DWCRA communities to sell their produce directly to consumers, are now being manipulated by top officials who view them solely as lucrative ventures.

Reports indicate that these officials are leveraging their positions to procure agricultural products at wholesale prices, only to retail them at inflated rates, pocketing substantial profits in the process.

Recent investigations have shed light on the dubious practices rampant in these markets. It has come to light that certain officials, particularly in Vijayawada and Guntur, have been orchestrating schemes aimed at maximising profits, often at the detriment of farmers and consumers. One such

scheme involved the sale of groundnuts, previously facilitated through Markfed, (a federation of Marketing Co-operative Societies in Andhra Pradesh with the main objective of helping the farmers to secure better prices for their produce) at prices significantly higher than prevailing market rates. Groundnuts, which were sold at Rs 65 per kg through Markfed, were being retailed at Rs.82 per kg outside the Rythu bazaars. Additionally, other essentials like ragi flour, sorghum flour, and sorghum were also subject to similar exploitative practices.

The role of Rythu Bazar estate officers and attendants has come under scrutiny, with allegations of negligence and malpractice surfacing. Concerns have been raised regarding improper pricing and inadequate record-keeping, leading to calls for a comprehensive review of the entire management structure of the Rythu Bazar.

Furthermore, the recent introduction of a centralised scheme to sell goods from various districts has aggravated existing tensions. Under this scheme, groundnuts from Anantapur,

chillies from Guntur, turmeric from Duggirala, and cashew nuts from Palasa are being consolidated and distributed to Rythu bazaars across the region. However, the burden of transportation and packing costs falls squarely on the shoulders of Rythu Bazar staff, who receive no compensation for their efforts.

In addition to concerns over pricing and exploitation, local traders are facing a crisis of their own. With Rythu bazaars now directly competing with traditional traders, many fear the loss of their businesses.

The influx of government-subsidised products, including Vijaya brand oil, groundnuts, cashews, chillies, and turmeric, has left traders grappling with uncertainty about their future. As the controversy surrounding Rythu bazaars continues to unfold, calls for transparency and accountability within the agricultural marketing sector are growing louder.

The need for stringent oversight and measures to safeguard the interests of farmers, consumers, and small-scale traders has never been more pressing.

## No untoward incident during polling: Collector

**PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM**

West Godavari District Collector Sumit Kumar has made it clear that no untoward incident took place during the polling on May 13 in the WG district.

In a statement here on Saturday, the Collector said that a good voter turnout was recorded in the WG district as the elections were held in a peaceful environment and the voters exercised their right to vote without any fear.

He said that the revenue, the police officials and other officials of relevant departments had worked continuously to complete the elections in a peaceful environment, praising that the Returning Officers worked from dawn to night to conduct polling peacefully and they became an inspiration to the rest of the officials and staff. They also completed the process of preserving the EVMs in the strong room, he lauded.

Sumit Kumar said that the EVMs of four constituencies have been preserved on the Vishnu College campus while the EVMs of three constituencies have been preserved at SRKR College. The postal ballots and home voting ballots

were also preserved in strong rooms. A three-tier security has been provided to the strong rooms, the Collector stated.

The contesting candidates and their agents have been provided an opportunity to inspect the strong rooms at any time, the Collector said, adding that till today the election process is going on in the district in a peaceful atmosphere.

The police and revenue officials of the district were alerted in the wake of the backdrop of the clashes and untoward incidents which took place in some districts after polling, the Collector said, adding that despite there being no scope for such violence incidents in the WG district, the police and revenue officials have been put on high alert time

to time. The Collector warned of taking stringent action if anyone tries to create law and order problems and indulge in violent incidents. Efficient steps have been taken to respond immediately if any violent incident takes place anywhere in the district. He directed the officials to mingle with the villagers gather information about the situation and bolster the checking process at check-posts.



## Polls over, VMC shifts focus to sanitation

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

With the conclusion of the general election polling, Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner (VMC) Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar is now focusing on improving the city's sanitation and addressing other civic issues. On Saturday, Commissioner Swapnil conducted a comprehensive inspection of key areas, including the KL Rao outfall drain, CVR Flyover Anjaneya Vaagu Centre, Bandar Road, and other parts of the city.

Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar's inspection aimed to enhance Vijayawada's cleanliness and address public health concerns. During the visits, he issued several instructions to officials to improve sanitation throughout the city. At the KL Rao outfall drain



VMC Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar inspecting the KL Rao Outfall Drain in Vijayawada on Saturday.

and the CVR Flyover, Commissioner Swapnil directed the relevant authorities to ensure these areas are cleaned regularly to maintain high aesthetic and hygienic standards.

The inspection continued in the 46th division, specifically at the Anjaneya Vaagu Centre and Bandar Road. Here, sani-

intensive anti-larvae activities immediately. He requested an action plan detailing measures such as ML oil spraying, distribution of oil balls, anti-larvae spraying, the use of hand fogging machines, and thorough cleaning of water stagnation points to prevent mosquito breeding.

The Commissioner stressed the importance of maintaining a clean and healthy environment for all residents of Vijayawada and emphasised the timely execution of these directives to significantly improve sanitary conditions and prevent the spread of diseases.

Trainee Assistant Collector Subham Nokhwal and AMOH-1 Dr. Suresh accompanied Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar during the inspection.

## APSRTC MD's complaint over fake WhatsApp calls

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

APSRTC Managing Director (MD) Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao on Saturday complained to Vijayawada Cyber Crime Police regarding using his photo as a WhatsApp DP and making phone calls by WhatsApp number 7033400216.

He asked all officials and people to be alert to these fake WhatsApp calls.

Further, he said that no one could respond to the fake WhatsApp calls or messages from the above number. Also, he requested to block the number 7033400216.

## WORLD BIODIVERSITY DAY ON MAY 22. NGOs launch terrace gardening

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

In connection with the World Biodiversity Day on May 22, Dr Sasiprabha, CEO of the Centre for Humanitarian Assistance Trust (CeFHA), underscored the significance of celebrating this occasion and embracing the responsibility for biodiversity conservation. In collaboration with the Green Climate Team, the two NGOs have initiated a terrace gardening campaign aimed at highlighting the importance of biodiversity preservation and promoting the Eco Vizag initiative.

Dr Sasiprabha called on the public to engage in the movement by cultivating sugarcane gardens and adopting healthier lifestyles, drawing attention to the adverse impacts of biodiver-



sity loss on ecosystems and human health. "Biodiversity is the cornerstone of our ecosystems and essential for our well-being. By participating in this campaign, we can make a tangible difference," she stated.

JV Ratnam, founder and secretary of the Green Climate Team, emphasised the necessity for inclusive participation in biodiversity conservation efforts. "Effective biodiversity preservation strategies require the collective effort of governments, local communities, NGOs, legislators, businesses,

and individuals," Ratnam remarked.

Echoing these sentiments, Krishnakumari, a representative from Action Aid Fellowship, highlighted the crucial role of cross-sector collaboration in safeguarding biodiversity for future generations. Ramalakshmi, another key speaker, stressed the fundamental importance of biodiversity in sustaining human civilisations. The terrace gardening campaign is part of a broader effort to engage the community in sustainable practices and raise awareness about the critical role of biodiversity. As World Biodiversity Day approaches, these NGOs are calling on all sectors of society to join in the fight to preserve the planet's natural heritage.

## 27 centres to be set up for Inter supplementary exams in Krishna dist

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has instructed the officials concerned to make all arrangements for conducting the Intermediate Supplementary and Betterment exams from May 24 to June 1. He stated that 27 examination centres are being arranged to conduct the supplementary exams in the district.

Given the Intermediate Supplementary exams, collector Balaji convened a Google meeting with officials concerned from his camp office in Machilipatnam on Saturday.

He said that around 8,968 students are going to write first-year exams while the number of second-year students is 1,373. The exams would be conducted from 9 am to 12 noon for first years, however, 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm

for the second year students, he said.

Further, he instructed that strict security arrangements should be provided at the examination centres. He advised the invigilators to conduct the exams without any irregularities and mass copying. He directed the Intermediate Regional Inspector to deploy adequate invigilators to conduct the exams smoothly. Also, he ordered that Section 144 be imposed at all exam centres.

Subsequently, he said that adequate facilities such as drinking water, uninterrupted power supply, health and others should be provided at all examination centres. Additionally, he said they are making efforts to provide free transportation facilities by running the RTC free services for the students to reach their exam centres.



Krishna District Collector Balaji speaking at a Google meeting with officials concerned about conducting Intermediate Supplementary exams from his camp office in Machilipatnam on Saturday.

## Water crisis grips villages amid soaring mercury

**PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM**

As summer temperatures soar, several villages are grappling with a severe shortage of drinking water, aggravating concerns among residents. With wells drying up and inadequate water supply through taps, locals are facing unprecedented challenges in meeting their basic needs. Women in affected villages have voiced grievances over the insufficient water supply, noting that the current provisions fall short of meeting minimum requirements. Many tap pipes are dysfunctional, further fueling the crisis. Despite initiatives like the Jal Jeevan Mission, which aims to provide piped water to every household, more than half of the villages remain with-



ing repairs to be carried out swiftly on the malfunctioning drinking water schemes to ensure sustained access to clean water. Responding to the outcry, Satish, Junior Engineer of Rural Water Supply (RWS), has assured swift action to address the crisis. Promising remedial measures within two days, he vows to prevent any further scarcity of drinking water in the affected villages. As the water crisis deepens amidst scorching temperatures, the plight of villagers underscores the pressing need for concerted efforts to mitigate the situation. With assurances from authorities, hopes remain high for prompt resolution and relief for the affected communities.

## Police bust human trafficking ring, 3 arrested

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

The city police arrested three individuals involved in a human trafficking racket targeting unemployed youth by using deceptive tactics under the pretence of offering lucrative job opportunities as data entry operators in South-East Asian countries, only to subject them to exploitation and abuse. The scheme unravelled when a victim managed to escape and file a formal complaint with the Visakhapatnam Cyber Crime Police. Prompt action by the police led to a comprehensive investigation and the subsequent arrest of kingpin Chukka Rajesh and his associates. Efforts are currently underway to apprehend any remaining members of this exploitative operation. Addressing the media, Police



Commissioner Dr. A Ravi Shankar revealed that the modus operandi of the traffickers involved transporting victims to Bangkok and subsequently to Chinese companies in Cambodia. Once there, the victims were forced to operate in various online scams including job scams, FedEx courier scams, cryptocurrency-related scams, and task games scams in India. Shockingly, the victims were deprived of necessities such as proper food,

shelter, and fair wages, essentially being treated as bonded labourers. Passports were confiscated and visas manipulated to restrict movement and prevent escape.

Interrogations with the arrested individuals shed light on the grim reality of approximately 1500 victims currently under their custody. Further investigations uncovered that over 5000 individuals from various districts of Andhra Pradesh, including

Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli, Srikanakulam, Rajamahendravaram, Anantapur, Tuni, Amalapuram, Palasa, and Kolkata, have fallen prey to this nefarious scheme. The perpetrators reportedly charged prospective victims a sum of Rs 1.5 lakhs, of which Rs 80,000 was handed over to agents in Cambodia, while the remaining Rs 70,000 was pocketed as profit.

Ravi Shankar stated that the arrested individuals have been charged under various sections of the Human Trafficking Act, encompassing offences such as extortion, wrongful confinement, and criminal conspiracy. In response to these disturbing revelations, authorities have initiated communication with the Indian embassy in Cambodia to ensure the safety and well-being of the victims and facilitate their repatriation. Police Commissioner, Dr. A Ravishankar, emphasised the importance of exercising caution regarding seemingly lucrative job offers, particularly those promising exorbitant salaries abroad. He highlighted the prevalence of cyber-crimes perpetrated by unwitting Indian citizens, including fake loan apps, task games, and cryptocurrency scams. Dr. Ravishankar urged victims to report such crimes promptly by contacting the National Cyber Crime Helpline (1930) or the Visakhapatnam City Cyber Crime Inspector (Ph: 9490617917). The crackdown on this human trafficking ring underscores the need for greater vigilance and concerted efforts to combat such heinous crimes.

How Supreme Court rescued NewsClick

It was saga of a journalist and online journalism. The Supreme Court has rescued NewsClick by ordering the release of the news website's founder and Editor-in-Chief Prabir Purkayastha.

The sequence was explained by Kapil Sibal, while arguing in favour of Purkayastha. Sibal said he was 'arrested on October 3 and produced before the magistrate at 6:00 am the next day.'

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PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU Dean, Mahindra University, Hyderabad

India(2023 SCC OnLine SC 1244, (2023 INSC 866), the Supreme Court emphasized that the ED must provide written grounds for arrest.

The Supreme Court said that the ED is not following Chapter XII of the Cr.P.C., which outlines principles for investigations. This lack of adherence means there are no clear legal criteria or guiding principles, potentially violating Article 14 of the Indian Constitution.

aware of the charges against them, unlike the clear provisions in the Cr.P.C. (Criminal Procedure Code) for summoning accused persons (Section 41A) and witnesses (Section 160).

The SC mentioned that safeguards initially provided by Section 173 of the Cr.P.C. in the original 2002 PMLA have been weakened by amendments. Notably, amendments in 2009 and 2019 reduced protections.

The SC pointed out that filing a chargesheet for a predicate offence is essential under Section 19 of the PMLA, which requires reasons to believe someone is guilty.

Cr.P.C. is crucial as it ensures procedures established by law. Investigations must adhere to Sections 154 or 155 of the Cr.P.C. to maintain constitutional safeguards of reasonableness and fairness.

The Supreme Court's judgment on May 15, 2024, in the case of Prabir Purkayastha v. State (2024 INSC 414), highlighted significant issues with the way the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the police handled arrests under PMLA and the UAPA.

INTER, SSC & OPEN SCHOOLS

Take steps for smooth conduct of supplementary exams: DC

PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar has directed the officials to complete arrangements at the earliest to conduct supplementary examinations for Intermediate, SSC and AP Open Schools.

The Collector held a meeting with the officials and reviewed the arrangements being made to conduct Intermediate, SSC and AP Open School supplementary examinations.

Speaking on the occasion, the District Collector said that Intermediate Supplementary Examinations would be held from May 24 to June 1. The Intermediate First Year Examinations would be held from 9 am to 12 noon and the Intermediate Second Year examinations from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm.



Regarding the AP Open School Intermediate and 10th class examination, the Collector stated that the examination would begin at 2:30 pm and end at 5:30 pm. The examinations would begin on June 1 and conclude on June 8th.

Dinesh Kumar explained that a control room has also been set up with a telephone number of 08592-281275 to conduct the examinations, adding that the 10th class supplementary examinations would begin at 9:30 am and conclude at 12:45 pm on June 24 and the examinations would end on June 24.

provide strict security to the question papers of the relevant examinations and to deploy policemen for security. Section 144 should be enforced at the examination centres during the exams and Xerox centres should be closed, he told them.

Collector Dinesh Kumar asked the officials to ensure that there is no power interruption and to make drinking water available in the examination rooms. The RTC officials should run the RTC buses on time according to the examination time, he directed the RTC officials.

He ordered the officials to ensure that electronic devices like mobile phones are not allowed in the examination centres and also ensure that the flying squad is active on the day of the examination. Additional SP Sridhar Rao, DEO Subhadra, RIO Symon Victor DMHO Dr Suresh Kumar and other officials were among those who were present.

ATTACK BY STALKER

APWC chief calls on victims at hospital

PNS ■ NELLORE

Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission (APWC) Chairperson Gajjala Venkata Lakshmi visited the woman and her daughter, who suffered injuries in an attack on them by a stalker.

After visiting the victims, Venkata Lakshmi told the media that she had spoken to the SP and directed him to arrest the offender at the earliest.

She said that the accused Nagaraju had harassed the victim in the name of love and assured the victims of all help. She directed the officials concerned to shift the victims to the government care centre after they recovered from the injuries.



DC, SP inspect EVM strongrooms in Bapatla

PNS ■ BAPATLA

District Collector P Ranjit Basha and SP Vakul Jindal inspected the EVM strong rooms on the campus of Engineering College here on Saturday.

The Collector and SP inspected the security arrangements in the strongroom and gave needed advice to the officials. The EVMs were preserved in the strong room, located on the campus of Engineering College here.

The Collector reviewed the arrangements with the election officials being made for the counting of votes to be held on June 4. The Central security force is providing security in the first tier, the Armed Reserve Forces are providing security in the second tier and local civil police are providing security to the EVM strong rooms in the third tier.

The Collector made suggestions to the ROs of the constituencies on the procedure of checking and sending the candidates to the counting agents



on the day of the counting of votes, the method of issuing identity cards to them and the arrangement of barricading.

The arrangement of mobile deposit counters, how the media should be allowed in stages and how to ensure that the traffic is not disrupted were also reviewed by the Collector.

"Everyone should be checked thoroughly before being allowed into the counting centre on the counting day.

After verifying the identity card, they should be allowed into the counting hall. Vehicles should not be allowed toward the counting centres," the Collector told the officials.

Only Returning Officers would be allowed to carry mobile phones on the counting day, he made it clear. Additional SP TP Vithaleswar, DRO Sattibabu and DSP T Muralikrishna were among those who accompanied the Collector and SP.



Call to check hypertension with healthy habits

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Awareness of healthy lifestyle and habits is key to preventing hypertension (high blood pressure), said MT Krishna Babu, Special Chief Secretary (Health, Medical and Family Welfare). Krishna Babu, along with the heads, officers, and medical experts of the Medical Health Family Welfare Department unveiled a poster and took a pledge to create awareness among people on hypertension.

Participating in a programme at the Mangalagiri office on Friday, Krishna Babu emphasised that hypertension can be managed with healthy habits. "We will use every platform available to promote healthy habits and raise awareness among people to prevent hypertension. We will educate

them on the importance of regular physical exercise, and the consumption of fruits, vegetables, raw grains, and foods that are low in salt. Through this pledge, we will refocus our efforts to prevent high blood pressure and improve living standards," he pledged.

Later, he unveiled flip charts designed on non-communicable diseases. Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Department Dr S Venkateshwar, Director of Medical Education Dr Narasimham, Director of Health Dr Padmavathy, AD Dr Anil Kumar, National Health Mission State Project Manager Dr Dumpala Venkataravikiran, Non-Communicable Diseases State Nodal Officer Shyamala, and many other officials were present.

NAGABABU ASKS JSP CADRE TO BE ALERT TILL END OF COUNTING

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Jana Sena Party (JSP) general Secretary K Nagababu has asked the party cadres to be on alert till the end of counting as the YSRCP activists might resort to violence.

In a video message here on Saturday, Nagababu said over 82% of the polling turnout recorded in AP is a victory for



democracy. At the same time, all should be on high alert since the YSRCP might resort to violence since it is going to be defeated.

"We have seen the anarchy which the YSRCP leaders creat-

ed in Palnadu district, in Tadipatri and Tirupati. The activists should be on high alert at the EVM strong rooms," he said.

Pawan Kalyan appealed to the JSP cadres to pay extra focus on the security of EVM strong rooms especially on the constituencies where the Jana Sena candidates contested. The ECI has given the opportunity of

providing security to the EVM strong rooms to the political parties also, he recalled.

He also asked the JSP cadres not to take the YSRCP leaders lightly and they can go to any extent during the counting. Nagababu ridiculed the YSRCP's announcement that Jagan Mohan Reddy would be sworn in as Chief Minister in Visakhapatnam.



Three youths drowned in River Gowthami

PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

In a tragic incident, three youths, including two teenage boys, were drowned in the river Gowthami on the outskirts of Ravulapalem on Saturday.

Police said that the deceased entered the river for a bath and drowned. The bodies were retrieved from the river. The deceased were identified as Sabelle Eeshwar Reddy (20), Satti Sampath Reddy (16) and Penta Jayakumar (17).

Sampath Reddy was studying 10th class while Jayakumar was studying for graduation in the first year. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem. Poignant scenes were witnessed at the GGH with the wailing parents and family members.

No connection between free bus travel scheme & Metro: TG Min Ponnam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said that there is no connection between the free bus travel scheme for women and Metro operations.

Ponnam was reacting to Prime Minister Modi's comments about the free bus travel facility affecting Metro.

He said, "The Prime Minister is unable to digest the free bus travel facility for women. Some states are providing free bus travel to women to facilitate growth due to conditions there.



Travelling in an RTC has nothing to do with the Metro. The Metro is separate. We are still appealing to increase the number of coaches in the Metro."

Ponnam asked whether the Prime Minister is thinking about

political gains. "Why did the Prime Minister say that about free bus travel? The Congress government in Telangana will not have any problem regarding free bus facilities for women. We will increase routes and increase the number of buses," he said.

"The PM should stop playing games on free bus facility for women. It is not right to say that there is a loss because of the free bus travel facility. Don't lower the image of the Prime Minister's post by talking about small issues like this," Ponnam said.

LIGHTNING KILLS FARMER

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

A farmer was killed when lightning struck him at Arepalli Muppalla village in Eepuru mandal on Saturday.

Police said that the deceased farmer Karri Hanumantha Rao (40) went to his field this evening. A rain accompanied by lightning occurred suddenly. The deceased farmer ran



towards Narasimha Swamy temple to take shelter but by the time he was struck by lightning. He was killed instantaneously.

Onamaalu community celebrates 'Amma avakai adhbutaha'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As a community initiative dedicated to preserving, promoting, and celebrating Telugu Culinary Heritage, Onamaalu conducted culinary documentation.

Onamaalu, in line with its ongoing community initiatives, presented a unique culinary theatre experience titled "Amma Avakai Adhbutaha," based on this cherished tradition. The event commenced with rural

women from Siddipet performing the Nattu Bappu for the guests, followed by the Culinary Theatre.

The annual ritual of making Avakaya involves the entire family's participation, considerable effort, and being close to traditional processes upheld in Telugu households. Much like every dish that varies in flavor and preparation method every 100 km, Avakaya comes in many varieties, with differences



in the choice of raw mango, ingredients, and pickling method.

An actor, educationist, and avid food enthusiast, Geetha Bhascker Dhaassyam said, she

learned the art of making Avakaya after her marriage when she moved to Hyderabad.

For her, Avakaya symbolises life experiences and memories of countless occasions she prepared it for friends and relatives, bringing her joy when they relish her creation. Her method of making Avakaya, distinct to Telangana, involves minimal use of mustard powder and the addition of ginger-garlic paste.

She carefully demonstrated

the step-by-step process at The Culinary Studio, sharing tips, explaining the variations, and recounting stories.

The Guests recollected about their Avakaya memories from childhood while involving in typical Telugu snacks, including Gunta Ponganaalu with Thurimina Mamidikaya Pachadi, Kobbari Mutti, Rajahmundry Style Tomato Bhajji, and Bezawada Mirapakaya Bhajji.

# Violence in Bishkek: Indian mission asks Indian students to stay indoors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday asked its students in Bishkek to stay indoors after the Kyrgyz capital city reported mob violence targeting international students, especially from South Asia. The Indian embassy in the Central Asian country said it is in touch with the Indian students and the situation is "calm" now. The mission asked Indian students in the city to stay indoors.



Jaishankar advised the Indian students to stay in regular touch with the Indian Embassy. "Monitoring the welfare of Indian students in Bishkek. The situation is reportedly calm now. Strongly advise students to stay in regular touch with the Embassy," he said in a post on X.

The Indian embassy said, "We are in touch with our students. The situation is presently calm but students are advised to stay indoors for the moment and get in touch with the Embassy in case of any issue." Police in riot gear were deployed in part of Kyrgyzstan's capital overnight as large

crowds gathered in anger over an alleged fight between local and foreign people, The Times of Central Asia reported. The incident appeared to reflect tension over the presence of migrants, many from South Asia, in Kyrgyzstan, it said.

The number of Indian students in Kyrgyzstan is estimated to be around 15,000. It is not immediately known how many of them are in Bishkek. The Kyrgyz foreign ministry said destructive forces are deliberately disseminating untrue and false information about the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic in foreign mass media and social networks, especially in the territory of Pakistan.

It said the situation in the city of Bishkek is calm and under full control. All necessary measures have been taken to ensure security, and maintain peace and stability, it said.

"Therefore, the ministry asks the representatives of mass media, blogger community, as well as foreign colleagues to be guided only by the official and confirmed information of the competent bodies," the Kyrgyz foreign ministry added.

# Rae Bareilly should once again show UP, country path to progress: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said Rae Bareilly should once again show the path to progress and development to Uttar Pradesh and the country as it has been the ideological and political centre of the state in the past.

Sharing a video with his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in a post on X, he recollected memories of their childhood while passing through Rae Bareilly, from where he is contesting on the Lok Sabha seat vacated by his mother Sonia Gandhi.

"Rae Bareilly has an important role in India's progress, in giving direction to the country. Rae Bareilly has for years been Uttar Pradesh's political and ideological centre, and it was Rae Bareilly that showed the path in the freedom struggle," he said in the over four-minute video.

"Today, the role of Rae Bareilly should be one that first shows the path to Uttar Pradesh's progress and development and then Uttar Pradesh should once again show the path of progress and development to India," he also said.



In the last Lok Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi had contested from Amethi but lost to BJP's Smriti Irani. After representing Amethi from 2004 to 2019, he has shifted to Rae Bareilly this time.

Taking a swipe at top BJP leaders, he said he has respected his family and shared good ties with all family members and does not allow politics to come in.

"When you do politics, if you do not respect your family and cannot maintain your relations in the family, you cannot keep ties outside (the family) too," he said.

"If you lie in your daily life, you will lie in politics," Gandhi said.

# INDIA bloc will win LS polls, BJP will not even cross 200 seats: Mamata

PNS ■ GOGHAT (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Saturday claimed that the INDIA bloc will come to power in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and BJP will "not cross the 200 mark" in the polls.

She accused Congress, and CPI(M) of having entered into a nexus with BJP in the state to discredit the state government and asked the electorate not to vote for any non-TMC parties which will benefit the saffron camp.

Addressing an election rally at Goghat under the Arambagh Lok Sabha constituency, Banerjee said "I had coined the name INDIA and at the national level we the coalition partners are all working together to resist the autocratic, demonic Narendra Modi government. TMC will play its role in installing the INDIA bloc to power."

"See what Modi is telling now - he is no more making tall '400 paar' seats by BJP. He can read the writing on the wall already. BJP will not cross even 200 tally, BJP will bite the dust," she said. Banerjee alleged that CPI(M), Congress and other Left partners in West Bengal have entered into a 'mahaghat' (unprincipled nexus) with communal, undemocratic, autocrat BJP just to

discredit the ruling TMC which is only waging the war against Narendra Modi and Amit Shah in the state.

The TMC supremo also slammed CPI(M) for allegedly committing mass murders at places like Goghat and Sihar during its rule and claimed only she as then opposition leader had dared to face the "Marxist terror at that time braving her life."

"I know the true face of CPI(M) in Bengal," she added.



Describing Modi and Shah as "anti-Bengal", she said, "his issuing advertisements in media to profess his love for the state won't cut much ice with the residents of the state who know these BJP heavyweight leaders will never understand our ethos and sentiments."

Reiterating her allegations about BJP concocting the charges of atrocities against TMC leaders on women of Sandeshkhali, she said "they made some of the poor, unsuspecting women sign on blank papers and incorporated charges of sexual misconduct in the complaint later."

"Be alert about BJP's sinister plan to remove some of the idols from temples (in Sandeshkhali and elsewhere) and engineer riots to get votes on polarization plank," she cautioned the voters and the security personnel.

# BJP is planning to ban RSS: Uddhav

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party was planning to ban its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), after winning a third term in power.

Speaking at his last rally

here before the campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections ended in Maharashtra, Thackeray also said that the Election Commissioner who was "acting like Modi's servant" will be removed after the INDIA alliance government comes to power.

"The way they tried to use and throw the Shiv Sena, a similar game will be played by

Narendra Modi in future (with the RSS), and that has been stated by (BJP president J P) Nadda," he said.

Thackeray was referring to Nadda's comments to a newspaper that when the BJP was a small party and less capable, it needed the RSS, but now the saffron party has grown, become more capable, and "runs itself".

"Nadda said there was a need of the RSS until now, (but) we are capable now and we don't need the RSS. If they (BJP) come to power, it is a bigger danger for RSS workers because they will ban the RSS," Thackeray claimed.

In the past, (then Union home minister) Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had banned the RSS, he noted.

## ODISHA ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

### 126 'crorepati' candidates in third phase polls

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

One hundred and twenty-six candidates in fray for the third phase of Assembly elections in Odisha are 'crorepati', with BJD candidate from Champua segment Sanatan Mahakud the richest with Rs 227.67 crore assets.

Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Puri and Sambalpur Lok Sabha constituencies along with 42 assembly seats under these Lok Sabha segments will go to polls in the third phase polls in Odisha on May 25.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Odisha Election Watch have analysed the self-sworn affidavits of 381 out of 383 candidates, who are contesting for 42 MLA seats in Odisha.

# UP progressed under Modi, says Shah

PNS ■ LALITPUR/BANDA (UP)

Union Home minister Amit Shah on Saturday highlighted Uttar Pradesh's transformation from a state known for producing country-made pistols to one now manufacturing cannon balls.

Addressing an election rally in Lalitpur in favour of BJP's Jhansi candidate Anurag Sharma, who is eyeing a second term, the Union home minister said the state started developing only after Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister and Yogi Adityanath the Chief Minister.

"There was a time when country-made pistols were produced in Uttar Pradesh. But PM Modi built a defence corridor in Bundelkhand, and now cannon balls are made here," Shah said.

He added that "if Pakistan makes any mistake", the shells made in Bundelkhand will be used to "destroy" it.

Shah also slammed Congress leader Mani Shankar



Aiyar's atom bomb remark that has sparked a political row.

"Mani Shankar Aiyar has said Pakistan should be respected as it has an atom bomb and not ask for PoK (Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir) from the country. But this is Narendra Modi's government. We are not afraid of the atom bomb. PoK belongs to India and will remain so. We will take it."

In a purported video clip that has gone viral on social media, Aiyar is heard saying India should give respect to Pakistan as it is a sovereign nation and engage with it as it also possesses the atom bomb.

He indicated in the video that if a "mad person" comes to power there and uses the atomic bomb, it will have its effect in India too.

While Aiyar has said the video was old and dredged up now as the BJP's election campaign is faltering, the Congress said it totally disagreed with the remarks made by Aiyar some months ago.

During the rally in Lalitpur, Shah said that with the completion of four phases of polling, Modi has "moved towards a triple century" by winning 270 seats in 4 phases and Rahul Gandhi's INDI Alliance has been wiped out.

"This land fought against the Mughals and the British. Now Bundelkhand also has to fight against the 'desi Angrez' present in our country," he said without naming anyone.

Urging people to vote in favour of the BJP, the home minister said, "This election is for the development of the country, for securing the country."

## MALIWAL ASSAULT CASE

# Bibhav Kumar arrested, anticipatory bail plea infructuous, says court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The anticipatory bail plea of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, has become infructuous as he has been arrested, a Delhi court observed on Saturday.

Kumar was arrested on Saturday, two days after an FIR was registered against him at the Civil Lines police station.

Additional Sessions Judge Sushil Anuj Tyagi, while dictating the order to the court staff on the anticipatory bail plea, noted



that Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Kumar Srivastava appeared through videoconferencing around 4.45 pm and informed

the court that Kumar has already been arrested in the case.

"On court query, the additional public prosecutor for the state

submitted that the applicant was arrested at about 4:15 pm," the judge said. The judge noted Srivastava's submissions that Kumar's wife had been duly informed about his arrest.

"Since, the applicant (Kumar) has already been arrested, the present application is disposed of being infructuous," the court said. "Copy of this order is also sent to the investigating officer or station house officer concerned for information and necessary action," it said.

Earlier in the day, the court had reserved its order on the plea filed before it on Saturday.

# 'Savarkar is not election issue, Modi tried to polarise voters'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday said Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was not an election issue, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried to polarise people by talking about him during his campaign rally here.

Modi, in his speech here on Friday, dared Pawar to make Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promise that he would not criticise the late freedom fighter and Hindutva ideologue ever again.

"Savarkar is not an election issue, and Rahul has not spo-

ken about him (lately). But Modi's speech was divisive and meant to instigate, polarise. I have never seen such a prime minister," Pawar said at a joint press conference with Congress



chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on the last day of campaigning for the final phase of the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra.

Rahul Gandhi has often targeted Savarkar, claiming that he helped the British rulers and wrote mercy petitions when he was incarcerated on the Andaman islands

## INDIA CORNER

# NEET paper solver gang busted in Delhi, four held



Four people including two MBBS students were arrested for allegedly running a paper solver gang for NEET exams here, police said on Saturday. The matter came to the fore on May 5 when a student's biometric data was mismatched during the NEET exam at Bhartiya

Vidya Bhavan Mehta Vidyalaya located in Tilak Marg area, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devsh Kumar Mahla said the two proxy students Sumit Mandoliya and Krishan Kesarwani, were caught from the centre. Given the seriousness of the offence, the case was transferred to the Special Staff of New Delhi District and a dedicated team led by Inspector Sanjay Kumar Gupta was formed to conduct the investigations, the DCP said. During sustained interrogation, Sumit Mandoliya and Krishan Kesarwani, both MBBS students, revealed the names of their handlers -- Prabhat Kumar, 27, and Kishor Lal, 37 -- who were nabbed from a hotel in Noida on Friday. The officer said Kumar and Lal are residents of Rajasthan and Bihar, respectively. The duo, who works as medical school admissions consultants, would charge the amount of Rs 20 to 25 Rs lakhs from the aspirants to provide them proxy students for the NEET exams.

# Teen girl kills 2 sisters over father's 'worry' about many kids



A 13-year-old girl allegedly strangled her two younger sisters to death as her father was worried about having five children, police said on Friday. Late on Thursday night around 12:30 am, an information was received at Noorpur police station about

bodies of two girls found in a house in village Gauthwar Jait, Superintendent of Police Neeraj Kumar Jadaun said. When the police reached the house, they found Ritu (7) and Pavitra (5) lying on the floor, he said, adding that spot investigation did not reveal any signs of forced entry. Sahdev and Savita lived in the house with their five children. Savita's two eldest daughters, the 13-year-old and a 9-year-old, were from her first husband, Pukhrai. The two deceased girls and their 1.5-year-old brother were from her second husband, Sahdev. SP Jadaun said that during initial questioning, the 13-year-old said that two unknown people entered their house and strangled her sisters. However, she later confessed to strangling them to death with a scarf as her father was worried because of the size of the family, he said. The bodies of the victims have been sent for post-mortem and the minor accused girl is being interrogated, the police said.

# Of strawberry shakes, drives and four newspapers a day

PNS ■ LANDOUR (UTTARAKHAND)

Old writers never die, they simply go out of print, says India's storyteller through the decades Ruskin Bond as he turns 90 on Sunday, adding with his famed self-deprecating wit that 99 per cent of his tribe are forgotten in the long run.

The companionship of his adopted family, drives on the serpentine Landour-Mussoorie route, frothy strawberry milk shakes, shelves filled with books to read and a handy notepad to write down his

daily musings... they were and are just a few of his favourite things. Spending most of his days at his picturesque home Ivy Cottage in the quiet cantonment town of Landour, a short drive from the noisier Mussoorie, the twin towns' most famous resident shows little signs of ageing. High blood pressure and dwindling eyesight aside, his childlike enthusiasm is intact as he discusses life, old age, writing, food and everything in between.

"Ninety-nine per cent of writers are forgotten in the long run. We are writing for poster-

## Ruskin Bond turns 90



ity but nobody remembers us afterwards... I am happy if my

family remembers me and a few readers get some pleasure out of my writing but it is very easy for a writer to disappear, to go out of print," Bond told PTI in a rare interview at his home, often breaking into laughter at his own answers.

The ace raconteur makes light of his celebrity status and of being India's favourite child-er's author with more than 500 titles, including short stories, essays and novellas, since his debut novel 'The Room on the Roof' in 1956.

"They say 'old soldiers never die, they simply fade away'.

Even old writers never die, they simply go out of print," Bond laughed.

His latest 'Hold on To Your Dreams', published by Penguin Random House India (PRHI), offers a unique glimpse into Bond's personal space and everyday life -- memories of his boyhood, his friends, lost love, moments of joy, anguish, triumphs and tragedies. He became a writer almost by accident.

Bond said didn't aspire to become one, at least initially. His first two ambitions, and he failed miserably at both, were

to become an actor or a tap dancer.

"I wanted to be an actor, that never happened. I wanted to be a tap dancer, never had the figure for it. Then I realised I could write. I was a great bookworm. I grew up on books. Then I thought this is the best thing to do. Nothing better than a book, then why not write a few. Join the brigade of authors, so I did."

At 90, Bond continues to be a voracious reader with his nose either in the books or newspapers -- quite literally -- due to his poor eyesight.

# 'FDI norms in certain sectors likely to be eased under new government'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has recently relaxed foreign direct investment norms in the space sector and there is a possibility of further FDI liberalisation in certain other areas when the new government will come to power, a top official said on Saturday.

Secretary in Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that in the last few years, India has liberalised FDI policy in many segments.

India has one of the most liberal foreign direct investment (FDI) policies in the world and in fact more liberal than many Southeast Asian countries that the country is often compared with, he said.

Recently FDI norms were eased in the space sector and "it is quite possible that under a new government, we can attempt some further liberalisation of any pockets that are left and where some liberalisation is possible," Singh said here at CII's annual business summit. The Lok Sabha elections are underway in the country and the counting is scheduled for June 4.

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The government has eased FDI norms in the space sector by allowing 100 per cent overseas investment in making components for satellites, as part of efforts to attract overseas players and private companies into the segment.

FDI in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharmaceuticals, according to the government data.

Talking about the success of the production-linked incentive schemes (PLI), the secretary



Recently FDI norms were eased in the space sector and "it is quite possible that under a new government, we can attempt some further liberalisation of any pockets that are left and where some liberalisation is possible," Singh said here at CII's annual business summit. The Lok Sabha elections are underway in the country and the counting is scheduled for June 4.

said so far Rs 1.13 lakh crore of investments have come in and the beneficiary companies have

recorded over Rs 9 lakh crore of sales, exports of Rs 3.45 lakh crore and created jobs for over

8 lakh people. The scheme was announced in 2021 for 14 sectors, including telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharmaceuticals with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

Singh said some people criticize the scheme stating that it has not led to increase in domestic value addition but they should know that it takes time.

People have raised issues with regard to India attracting players in the semi-conductor segment stating that it is too capital intensive and not suitable for India. "The target is not labour intensity, it is mainly strategic and to ensure that we do not become over dependent on unsecured supply chains," he said.

## FSSAI TO FRUIT TRADERS, FOOD BIZ

### Don't use banned product 'calcium carbide' for fruit ripening

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Food regulator FSSAI has asked traders and food business operators not to use the banned product 'calcium carbide' for ripening of fruits.

In an official statement, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said it has "alerted traders/fruits handlers/Food Business Operators (FBOs) operating ripening chambers to strictly ensure compliance with the prohibition on calcium carbide for artificial ripening of fruits, particularly during the mango season."

FSSAI has also advised Food Safety Departments of states/UTs to remain vigilant and take serious action and deal stringently against person(s) indulging in such unlawful practices as per the

provisions of the FSS Act, 2006, and rules/regulations made thereunder.

"Calcium carbide, commonly used for ripening fruits like mangoes, releases acetylene gas, which contains harmful traces of arsenic and phosphorus."

"These substances, also known as 'Masala', can cause serious health issues such as dizziness, frequent thirst, irritation, weakness, difficulty in swallowing, vomiting and skin ulcers, etc," FSSAI said.

Additionally, acetylene gas is equally hazardous to those handling it.

"There are chances that calcium carbide may come in direct contact with fruits during application and leave residues of arsenic and phosphorus on fruits," the regulator said.

Due to these dangers, the use of calcium carbide for ripening fruits has been banned under the Regulation of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011.

This regulation explicitly states, "No person shall sell or offer or expose for sale or have in his premises for the purpose of sale under any description, fruits which have been artificially ripened by use of acetylene gas, commonly known as carbide gas".



## STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

### India, UK reaffirm FTA

PNS ■ LONDON

India and Britain have reaffirmed their commitment to conclude a mutually beneficial free trade agreement (FTA) at the annual UK-India Strategic Dialogue here, as the two sides reflected the "good progress" on the 2030 Roadmap since the last review.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, who is on a visit to the UK, held discussions with his counterpart, Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) on Friday. After their meeting, the FCDO said the two leaders reviewed the

progress made on the UK-India 2030 Roadmap since the last strategic dialogue in January last year and looked



ahead to the next phase of bilateral cooperation.

"The two reflected on good progress on the 2030 Roadmap since the last review, noting key areas where the UK and India

have worked together to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges," the FCDO said in a statement.

"This included collaborating on the world's first malaria vaccine, working closely on India's successful G20 Presidency and increasing opportunities for students and entrepreneurs under the Migration and Mobility Partnership. Alongside celebrating the milestones since the last review, this year's dialogue included the ongoing commitment to negotiate a mutually beneficial free trade agreement (FTA), and enhance defence cooperation," the statement added.

## MERGER OF IDFC WITH IDFC FIRST BANK

### Debt, equity holders approve proposal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shareholders and non-convertible debenture (NCD) holders of IDFC First Bank have approved a proposal to merge parent IDFC Ltd with the lender.

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) convened a meeting on May 17 through video conferencing and other audio-visual means to consider and approve the composite scheme of amalgamation for IDFC First Bank, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

The board of the bank presented the result of voting on the proposal for amalgamation before the NCLT.



## Markets end special trading session with gains

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices closed the special trading session on a firm note on Saturday, extending their rally to the third day running amid fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 88.91 points or 0.12 per cent to end at 74,005.94. During the session, it jumped 245.73 points or 0.33 per cent to 74,162.76.

The NSE Nifty advanced 35.90 points or 0.16 per cent to 22,502.

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) and BSE on May 7 said they will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on May 18 to check their preparedness for handling major disruptions or failures at the primary site.

The special live trading session will have an intra-day switchover from the Primary Site (PR) to the Disaster Recovery (DR) site.

In separate circulars, the two exchanges said there will be two sessions -- the first from 9:15 am to 10 am from the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm from the DR site. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies reached an all-time peak of Rs 4,12,36,791.05 crore in the special trading session.

Among the Sensex components, Nestle, Power Grid, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Hindustan Unilever and State Bank of India were the major gainers. JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards.

Wall Street ended mostly higher on Friday.

"The Dow Jones Industrial Average has hit 40,000 for the first time, buoyed by optimism from a softer-than-expected April inflation report, which has increased bets on a September rate cut by the Federal Reserve.

## 'India on mission to become world's leading producer of critical minerals'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is on a mission to become the world's leading and the most sustainable producer of critical minerals, Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc's Chairperson Priya Agarwal Hebbbar said.

Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play a crucial role in the production of clean energy technologies, from wind turbines to electric cars. Critical minerals are particularly in demand for the production of batteries for electric cars.



Speaking at Bank of America Securities Global Metals, Mining and Steel Conference 2024 in Miami recently, Hebbbar said the mining and metals sector will

play a crucial role in helping the world meet the net-zero goals.

"We take our role as champions of India's natural resources very seriously and we are well positioned to capitalize on this economic growth," Hebbbar, who is also Vedanta Director, was quoted as saying in a statement on Saturday.

The mining and metals sector holds the key to unlock the future. The transition to net-zero goals globally will be mineral intensive and meeting this demand will be not easy, she said.

## 'Expecting good response from many companies on EV policy'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday said India is expecting good response from many automobile companies on its electric vehicle (EV) policy, which was released in March to attract global players like Tesla.

Secretary in Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that in the policy, the government has used tariff tweaks without actually spending any money to seek commitments from manufacturers to set up base in India.

"Everybody talks about one company (US-based EV major Tesla), but we are expecting responses from many companies to that policy," Singh said here at CII's annual business summit.

On March 15, the government approved an electric-vehicle policy, under which duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of US\$ 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla. As per the policy, a company will get three years to set up manufacturing facilities in India, and start commercial production of e-vehicles, and reach 50 per cent domestic value addition (DVA) within five years at the maximum.

The companies that would set up manufacturing facilities for EV passenger cars will be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs/import duty of 15 per cent on vehicles costing US\$ 35,000 and above for five years from the date of issuance of the approval letter by the government.

At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty of 70-100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value less or above US\$ 40,000. The policy seeks to promote India as a manufacturing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global EV manufacturers.

According to the scheme, the company will be allowed to import CBUs of e-4W manufactured by them at a reduced customs duty of 15%, subject to the conditions.

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## Can't comment on merger or privatisation of PSBs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It will not be appropriate to comment on the merger or privatisation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) since the Lok Sabha Elections are underway, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi said on Friday.

The clarification was sought after media reports suggesting the government could plan merger of PSBs instead of privatisation.

"Elections are going on, it is not appropriate to comment on such issues," Joshi said. The

government in the past had done consolidation of PSBs in two tranches.

The mega consolidation, which took effect from April 1, 2020, saw 10 PSBs consolidate into four -- Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India merged with Punjab National Bank; Syndicate Bank merged with Canara Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank merged with Union Bank of India; and Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank.

## Need to reconsider sachetisation of F&O trade to safeguard household savings: CEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cautioning against household savings getting invested in futures and options trade, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran on Saturday said there is a need to reconsider sachetisation of F&O trade because it requires different financial literacy.

Speaking at the CII's Annual Business Summit, 2024, Nageswaran said whenever financial sector development precedes national development the story hasn't ended well for

other countries as well. "Asian crisis 1997-98 is a very important example," he said.

"When we take pride in the fact that we have the world's largest trading volume in futures and options (F&O), we need to ask ourselves is that a sign of progress or a sign of concern," the CEA said.

He said the financial sector has a responsibility to ensure that capital market grows in those areas where we can actually harness Indian household savings for productive purposes. "Many of the people currently engaged in the market do not understand them... The sachetisa-

tion of futures and options is something that we need to reconsider because financial literacy that is required for trading stocks is very different for trading futures and options," Nageswaran said.

Sachetisation refers to process of making financial products and services available in smaller, more manageable packets.

As per government data, the net household savings declined sharply by Rs 9 lakh crore in three years to Rs 14.16 lakh crore at the end of 2022-23 fiscal.

The data showed that the investment in mutual funds almost tripled to Rs 1.79 lakh crore in 2022-23 in three years from Rs 64,084 crore in 2020-21. The household investment in shares and debentures almost doubled to Rs 2.06 lakh crore in 2022-23 from Rs 1.07 lakh crore in three years from 2020-21.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had earlier this week cautioned against an "unchecked explosion" in retail F&O trading saying it may potentially create problems in household finances.

## 'OYO withdraws DRHP, to refile IPO post refinancing'



Softbank-backed OYO is set to refile its much-awaited IPO as the global travel tech player is close to finalising its refinancing plans to raise up to US\$ 450 million via sale of dollar bonds, sources said. JP Morgan is the likely lead banker for the refinancing through the sale of dollar bonds at an estimated interest rate of 9 to 10 per cent per annum, a

source said. In preparation for the refinancing, OYO has already moved its application with markets regulator SEBI to withdraw its current draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company intends to refile an updated version of the DRHP, after the bond issuance. Oravel Stays Ltd, OYO's parent company, had in November repaid a significant chunk of its debt amounting to Rs 1,620 crore through a buyback process. The buyback involved repurchasing 30 per cent of its outstanding Term Loan B of US\$ 660 million. The move brought down its outstanding loan amount to around US\$ 450 million. A source closely involved in the company's IPO plans told PTI, "The refinancing will result in material changes to OYO's financial statements. Hence as per existing regulations, it will need to revise its filings with the regulator." "Since the decision for refinancing is at an advanced stage, it doesn't make sense to continue pursuing IPO approval with the current financials. So it's prudent to withdraw the current application," he added.

## Nepal bans sale of Indian spice-mix products



After Singapore and Hong Kong, Nepal has also banned the sale and import of certain spice-mix products manufactured by Indian brands over alleged quality concerns. Four spice-mix products by MDH and Everest were banned in the Himalayan nation from Friday due to suspected ethylene oxide or ETO contamination, according to the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control here.

Under this, Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Mixed Masala Powder, Mixed Masala Curry Powder of MDH and Fish Curry Masala of Everest have been banned in Nepal. "As residue contents of ethylene oxide are found to be exceeding the prescribed limit in these four products, the import and sale of these products are banned within the country as per Article 19 of the Food Regulation 2027 B.S.," the department said in a notice issued on Friday. "Our serious attention has been drawn towards media reports about the sale of these sub-standard products in the market, and they are harmful for consumption," it said. The food quality control watchdog has also urged importers and traders to recall these products from the market. Last month, Singapore and Hong Kong halted sales of some spices produced by MDH and Everest over suspected elevated levels of ETO linked with some cancers. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has since initiated steps to examine the quality of powdered spices from various brands in the country.



# TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF PRINTMAKING

An exhibition showcasing the past five decades of printmaking through the works of works of five acclaimed artists, highlights the profound impact and continued relevance of the medium in today's art world, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The art world is a vast canvas, painted with vibrant strokes of creativity and innovation. Within this canvas, printmaking stands as a unique art form offering artists a medium to express their thoughts, emotions and perspectives in a distinct and appealing manner. Unlike painting or sculpture, where the final image is visible throughout the creative process, printmaking is a journey of revelation. The true image remains unseen until the very last stages adding an element of anticipation and surprise that makes printmaking so captivating.

The exhibition, *Rupantar Panch Dashak: Five Decades of Printmaking*, delves into this alluring world of inked narratives. The preview of the exhibition was held at the Visual Art Gallery. Curated by Alka Pande, this exhibition is not merely a showcase of exquisite artwork; it is a celebration of printmaking's enduring legacy and its transformative power. Organised by Members of Multiple Encounters, the exhibition brings together the talents of five renowned printmakers: Anandamoy Banerjee, Kavita Nayar, Moti Zharotia, Dattatreya Apte, and Sushanta Guha. Each artist, a master in his or her own right, explores the art of printmaking as a tool of personal expression, transforming the medium into a canvas for their unique visions. The show promises to be a celebration of exceptional talent, presenting various printmaking styles and expressions.

The exhibition's title, 'Rupantar', perfectly encapsulates the essence of printmaking signifying the transformative journey of an artist's work over five decades, highlighting the evolution and innovation inherent in their creations. Beyond the individual narratives, 'Rupantar' also offers a glimpse into the broader landscape of printmaking in India, showcasing its diversity, depth, and enduring relevance in the contemporary art scene.

Anandamoy Banerjee, a recipient of prestigious awards like the AIFACS annual

best exhibition award, views printmaking as a reflection of his life experiences, dreams and artistic journey. His work, a blend of drawing, painting, prints and experimental pieces tells a story with each creation. Abstract and introspective, his works often present a colourful combination of human forms intertwined with abstraction.

Dattatreya Apte, a founding member of the Indian Printmakers Guild draws inspiration from the world around him, the "reflections" and "impressions" that linger on surfaces. His prints whether painted, printed or physically cast, are a testament to his fascination with the art form's complex nature. Each piece showcases the evolution of his concept from an idea to the final artwork.

Kavita Nayar's art reflects a deep personal journey, likened to the process of giving birth. Her focus on nature, particularly flowers symbolises life's cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Nayar's prints span five decades with works in oil pastels on paper and board. She also creates an installation with prints showcasing her diverse artistic expression.

Moti Zharotia, an artist with a visionary approach, uses printmaking to delve into the essence of life. His silkscreen prints beautifully blend masculine and feminine energies, as seen in his theme *Purusha & Prakriti*. In his wider collection, 'Impressions on Impression'; Zharotia symbolises the harmonious interplay of life's core forces. His work not only showcases the harmony between humans and nature but also highlights their interconnectedness creating a profound sense of balance and unity.

Sushanta Guha, known for his socially conscious art uses printmaking as a tool to address pressing issues affecting humanity. His work vividly contrasts the rapid urbanisation seen in modern development with the simultaneous decline of human values, leading to increased individual suffering and identity crises. Through his impactful woodblock prints and



lithographs, Guha urges viewers to contemplate the complexities of the contemporary world. His art serves as a poignant reflection of societal challenges particularly highlighting issues like violence and religious extremism.

Alka Pande, the curator, describes *Rupantar* as an enlightening experience. Witnessing the development and transformation in the artist's practices over five decades offers invaluable insights for aspiring artists. Beyond showcasing finished works the exhibition sheds light on the "art of making" itself from the technical aspects of printmaking to the final artistic expression. *Rupantar* also bridges the gap between traditional printmaking and contemporary artistic practices. It

highlights how younger artists who may not specialise solely in printmaking, incorporate various printmaking styles into their mixed media creations.

The art world is a diverse and dynamic realm offering a medium through which artists can express their creativity. Among these, printmaking stands out as a unique and fascinating art form with a rich history and enduring appeal. Printmaking is the art of creating images by transferring them from a matrix or plate onto paper or another surface. This process allows for the production of multiple copies of an artwork making it an accessible and versatile medium for artists to explore and experiment with.

Ultimately, *Rupantar Panch Dashak: Five Decades of Printmaking*, is a multifaceted celebration. It celebrates the artistry and dedication of five master printmakers while also elevating the art form itself. It highlights the intricate techniques and rich history of printmaking while acknowledging its contemporary relevance. *Rupantar* invites viewers to delve deeper into the world of art and appreciate the story's work into every mark on the paper. This exhibition serves as a powerful reminder that printmaking is not merely a means of reproducing images; it's a dynamic and versatile art form capable of sparking introspection, igniting social commentary and revealing the intricate beauty of the artistic process itself.

The exhibition leaves behind a legacy of artistic excellence and imaginative exploration. It is not only a celebration of the talent but also highlights the importance of printmaking in the art world. It has shown us that printmaking is not just a technique; it is a form of expression that can convey deep emotions, tell compelling stories and provoke thought and reflection. Let us recognise the significance of printmaking in preserving cultural heritage, promoting artistic innovation and enriching our lives with beauty and meaning.

## Laapataa Ladies Shines Bright

This Kiran Rao directed film is a must-watch for its engaging storyline, brilliant performances, and important social message, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

*Laapataa Ladies*, is a perfect blend of humour, social commentary and a heartwarming storytelling. Marking Kiran Rao's return to the director's chair after several years, the film is a delightful surprise that resonates with the audiences. The original story by Biplab Goswami, screenplay and dialogues by Sneha Desai, along with additional dialogues by Divyanshi Sharma contribute to the film's cohesive and engaging narrative.

The film boasts a talented cast with Pratibha Ranta (Jaya), Nitanshi Goel (Phool Kumari), Sparsh Shrivastav (Deepak Kumar), Satendra Soni (Chhotu) and Chhaya Kadam (Manju Maai) along with the charismatic Ravi Kishan (Shyam Manohar). Each actor delivers a stellar performance, bringing their characters to life with finesse and authenticity.

The story unfolds with two young brides, Phool Kumari and Jaya, accidentally swapped during a train journey due to a veiled misunderstanding. As Phool's helpless husband, Deepak Kumar seeks help from a cop Shyam Manohar, a point when the journey of the perfect story begins.

Kiran Rao's storytelling is exceptional, seamlessly weaving together elements of amusement, emotion and social commentary. The film's storyline is compelling, offering a message about the importance of women's empowerment and identity in society. Rao adeptly employs humour and the motif of veiled identity (*ghunghat*) to illuminate the pervasive influence of patriarchy within society. The dialogue is witty and the humorous scenes are executed with finesse, keeping the audience entertained throughout.

One of the film's standout aspects is its emphasis on the importance of self-realisation and self-identity. Through the character's journeys, the audience is reminded that true happiness comes from within and that women are their own heroines. The film delivers this message with subtlety and grace, making it relatable to a wide audience.

The performances in *Laapataa Ladies* are superb, with Ravi Kishan stealing the show with his impeccable comic timing. His portrayal of Shyam Manohar adds depth to the film with his acting leaving a lasting impression. Chhaya Kadam's portrayal of Manju Maai is undeniably impressive. She delivers her dialogues with a powerful mix of conviction, truth and humour. Particularly noteworthy is her line, "A man who loves you has the right to hit you and one day I exercised my



right as well." This powerful statement serves as a slap in the face of patriarchal norms, forcing viewers to confront the harsh reality of domestic violence disguised as love. Manju Maai doesn't stop there. Her wisdom shines through another impactful line: "Being happy on your own is the toughest thing, Phool, but once you've mastered it, no one can bother you." This resonates deeply, highlighting the importance of self-respect and the empowering freedom found in self-sufficiency.

Pratibha Ranta and Nitanshi Goel shine in their roles, bringing depth and authenticity to their characters. Their fresh faces coupled with immense talent create magic on screen. Even actors with smaller screen time such as Satendra Soni as Chhotu, Durgesh Kumar as Dubeyji or Rachna Gupta as Deepak's sister-in-law deliver impactful performances showcasing the depth and richness of the film's ensemble cast.

The film explores themes of identity, self-discovery and empowerment. It highlights the strength and resilience of women showcasing how they navigate societal expectations and find their voice in a male-dominated world.

*Laapataa Ladies* is a must-watch for its engaging storyline, brilliant performances, and important social message. Kiran Rao has once again proved her directorial prowess, creating a film that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. While viewers need to exercise patience as the film unfolds at a somewhat slow pace, this deliberate pacing contributes to the movie's beauty and its ability to make a significant impact on the audience. Despite its leisurely pace, the film's narrative depth and emotional resonance make it a worthwhile and memorable cinematic experience.

## Brett Lee bats for Australian Avocados

BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Avocados Australia recently launched in the Indian market with Cricket Legend Brett Lee as its brand ambassador. Soon Australian avocados would be available in India. The Australian exporters are upbeat about the Indian market as they feel it is the place where they would have first mover advantage and would be able to appeal to Indian consumers with their superior quality. Avocados are to the West what mangoes are to Indians. Avocados, often hailed as a superfood, are not just delicious but also incredibly nutritious. Native to Central America, these green fruits are packed with healthy fats, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. They're particularly rich in monounsaturated fats, which are beneficial for heart health. Avocados are incredibly versatile and can be enjoyed in various forms: sliced on toast, mashed into guacamole, blended into smoothies, or even used as a substitute for butter in baking. In fact, Brett Lee was seen making a few of avocado recipes by himself. As he put it "for an athlete nothing better than having avocados for energy and



nutrition, just slice it and with a dash of lemon and salt and you have an excellent healthy snack." Their creamy texture adds depth to dishes while providing a host of health benefits. Beyond their nutritional value, avocados are also environmentally friendly. They require less water to grow compared to other fruits and can thrive in diverse climates. Avocados Australia Limited, representing the Australian avocado industry, has officially entered the Indian market, unveiling cricket icon Brett Lee as their esteemed brand ambassador. This collaboration signals a significant milestone for both Australian avocados and the burgeoning Indian fresh fruit market. Renowned for their

superior quality and health benefits, Australian avocados promise to tantalise Indian taste buds with a fusion of flavour, texture, and nutrition. With Brett Lee lending his endorsement, this launch aims to introduce a premium and healthy option to Indian households, advocating for the incorporation of avocados into daily meals and snacks. The avocado market in India is experiencing a notable uptick, mirroring a global trend of increased demand over the past decade. Avocados are hailed as a nutritious addition to all diets, particularly suiting vegetarian preferences. Australia's avocado industry is also on the rise, with production forecasted to surge from over 115,385 tonnes in 2022-23 to approximately 170,000 tonnes by 2026. Aligned with this growth trajectory, Australian growers are actively pursuing new overseas markets, including India, with increased exports crucial for the industry's long-term sustainability. So the next time you're craving something tasty and nutritious, consider reaching for an avocado - it's not just a delicious fruit but also a powerhouse of nutrients!

## The real face of BBC's news coverage

*BBC's True Lies* is a signboard cautioning the common man about the dangerous acts perpetrated by the British Government owned media network, writes **KUMAR CHELLPPAN**.

There are enough laws in the Indian Penal Code to punish those involved in impersonation and cheating. Reports about fake physicians, engineers and lawyers getting caught and sent to prison are routine affairs in India. There are rules in the statute books to punish those engaged in food adulteration and marketing. There was an incident involving the Chennai Police arresting a Class VIII dropout by the name 'Professor Ravi Kumar Reddy' in 2015 who has been teaching advanced power systems at Saveetha College of Engineering for nearly three years. His colleagues and students never got a chance to doubt his credibility till one of the professors came across the real Prof Ravi Reddy who had been teaching at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. The Chennai 'Professor' turned out to be Ashok Kumar Choudhury from Guntur who was blessed with a photographic memory. We have legislations and provisions in the IPC to book such impersonators. Unfortunately, we do not have laws to prosecute fake journalists, the driving force behind media which is being flouted as the Fourth Estate of democracy. As on date most of the media and journalists act as propagandists while the line demarcating news and views have almost disappeared. There was a time when the English-speaking population

of Chennai woke up to their bed *Kaappee* and the morning newspaper which was known by the name *Mount Road Mahavishnu*. Not anymore. The moment readers understood that this *Mahavishnu* is feeding them fake and distorted news, they dumped the daily once and for ever. But the paper still survives because the minority community and Marxists believe only what is published in this newspaper. The story of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC World) is no different. The media house launched to disseminate to the world His Majesty's Voice (HMV) and counter the media blitzkrieg by Germany during the Second World War has degenerated into a fake news manufacturing plant. The last few decades of BBC's coverage of Asia and Africa speak volumes about its real intentions. The BBC is no more disseminating truths but specialises in spreading falsehood. There is a phrase which we regularly use; '*Suppressio Veri, Suggestio Falsi*' which means that suppression of truth is equivalent to suggestion of what is false. One need not elaborate on this as the term is self-explanatory. It may have a lot to do with the kind of statecraft and diplomacy being followed by the BBC. Author Binay Kumar Singh and columnist and Prashant Pandey, a seasoned journalist,



have come out with BBC's True Lies, a book which deals with the purpose for which the radio channel was launched, and its modus operandi. While in college, our teachers used to tell us to listen to BBC Radio news so that it would help us improve our English pronunciation. But I found the All India Radio's English news bulletins immortalised by the legendary Surjit Sen, always stand out. The day I started listening to the bulletins aired by the BBC, I could make out the distinct discrimination the channel had towards India. For the BBC editors, India was an uncivilized country of people believing in superstition and sorcery.

Although the Government of Britain claimed that they do not have any prejudice against India, the reality is quite the opposite. The authors explain how the BBC portrayed India taking over Goa as an armed attack on Portugal, a blatant case of misinterpretation of facts by the news channel. During 2023, student unions in Kerala were vying with each other in exhibiting the documentary film on Gujarat produced and aired by the BBC. The SFI students who always shunned the BJP were in the forefront of this campaign and made arrangements in campuses so that the gullible students could be fooled. Most of the viewers who sat throughout the documentary were in the dark about the facts that led to the riots. They were also ignorant about the Supreme Court verdict or the findings of the Special Investigation Team that interrogated Narendra Modi, the then chief minister of Gujarat for 19 hours. The BBC was reshaping and churning out charges levelled against Modi by TV journalists who had personal scores to settle with him. The most important thing to be borne in mind is that for the BBC, *jihadis* become terrorists only when they hurt British interests. All other *jihadis* are mere gunmen or liberators fighting against countries which Britain does not like. During the Cold War, Britain and the US had similar

criteria in identifying heads of nations. Those heading Communist/socialist/dictatorial regimes opposed to the then Soviet Union were friends of the US and UK. The best example was General Zia-ul-Haq, the Pakistani despot who perpetrated terrorist acts against India. There were many Latin American heads of nations for whom democracy was an alien word and who always were considered as friends of US and UK. The real face of BBC's news coverage came out in the open during the last 1970s when OP Tyagi introduced in Parliament a legislation named the Freedom of Religion Bill. The BBC started sounding alarm bells in its bulletins claiming that all religions other than Hinduism were in danger in India! Of late, there were allegations from various Hindutva forces that BBC was into religious conversion in a big way. It is for the BBC to prove that their hands are clean. Authors Binay Kumar and Prashant need to be appreciated for bringing out this book packed with explosive information. Since public memory is short, they are likely to forget what the media airs/publishes once they listen or read the contents. *BBC's True Lies* is a signboard cautioning the common man about the dangerous acts perpetrated by the British Government owned media network.

"We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far"  
— Swami Vivekananda



The future of education in India isn't just about doing well academically, it's about empowering kids to follow their passions and create their own paths to success. And that journey is definitely worth talking about, ADITI SHARMA



**CANVAS OF CHANGE**

**TRANSFORMING  
EDUCATION  
WITH CREATIVITY**

When I was a child, for me the world was a blank canvas, ready to be filled with colors. Each brushstroke was like a step towards understanding everything around me. Art was just more than a hobby for me, it was a way of expressing myself and finding escape in midst of chaos. But as I grew older, societal expectations started weighing me down. My parents and teachers believed that success only came from excelling in traditional subjects like math and science, leaving no room for the creativity that fueled my soul. Elders often believe that stress and pressure are exclusively their burdens to bear, yet who acknowledges that even toddlers struggle to take their first steps and teenagers face immense pressure to prove their worth to the world. This is where schools step in, recognizing the importance of nurturing not just academic growth but also the social and emotional well-being of children. Through socio-emotive learning, students develop vital skills such as problem solving, effective communication, conflict management, and self-care. These abilities enable them to understand and manage their emotions, build supportive and cooperative communities, and ultimately help both themselves and others thrive. One particular innovation that has impressed me is the use of Emotion Charts in schools. These charts have pictures of faces showing different emotions such as sadness, anger, surprise, silliness, fear, excitement, and embarrassment. Children can use these charts to express how they feel each day. The efforts made by schools to incorporate emotional learning are not only effective but also incredibly beautiful! This new approach to education is producing adults who are better at handling stress, managing their emotions, and controlling themselves.

When I was in 3rd grade, my mother always stressed about my exams and expected me to score a perfect 20 out of 20. This pressure pushed me into an exhausting race for marks. I believe children should be exempted from exams during their primary years so they can enjoy a stress-free childhood and focus on developing their creativity and skills. The new education system has introduced a change many of us wished for as children, which is no exams until 3rd grade. This shift creates a less pressured environment, allowing children to learn at their own pace without worrying about marks or grades. By eliminating early testing, we can cultivate a love of learning in a calm, supportive atmosphere, free from the anxiety of exams.

When my parents were in school, the main focus was on academics. When I was a student, we had academics as well as co-curricular activities and sports. But now, education has evolved even further. It includes subjects and activities like yoga, meditation, journal writing, and mindful coloring. This shift in education has had a significant positive impact on children. It has helped them in several ways with, aggression management, emotions regulation, making thoughtful decisions and better communication in relationships.

Back in my teenage years, the school syllabus was synonymous with exams. Schools viewed exams as a method of assessment, but to me, they were more like photographs. Students needed to memorize information and reproduce it exactly in their answers. It felt as though we were being asked to take a screenshot of our textbooks and paste it directly onto our exam sheets.

Traditionally, assessments focused purely on memory recall. However, today's educational landscape has evolved significantly. Modern assessments extend beyond paper and pencil, embracing practical, hands-on experiences and field experiments. These contemporary methods provide a more comprehensive evaluation of a student's understanding and skills, offering a richer, more meaningful approach to learning and assessment.

Back in my 10th-grade days, I vividly remember yearning to choose subjects like English, Biology, and Fine Arts.

**BOARDS! THE WORD ITSELF FEELS HEAVY WITH PRESSURE, EVEN THOUGH I NAVIGATED THEM LONG AGO. THE PRESSURE OF BOARD RESULTS WAS SUCH THAT, THOSE TIMES WERE SO STRESSFUL THAT EVEN A PEACEFUL BREATH FELT IMPOSSIBLE, AND MY ANXIETY WAS AT ITS PEAK**

Unlike some education systems abroad, Indian education didn't grant us the freedom to pick our own set of subjects. But now, with the advent of the new education policy, the landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. It's surreal to think that students today have the liberty to tailor their education according to their interests and passions. Imagine a science student delving into the world of music or arts and it's truly an evolution!

When I chose humanities, people often asked me what my future profession would be and if I could earn well with it. The rise in humanities enrollments has validated the importance of creative and critical thinking skills, fostering an environment that values artistic expression and cultural understanding.

BOARDS! The word itself feels heavy with pressure, even though I navigated them long ago. The pressure of board results was such that, those times were so stressful that even a peaceful breath felt impossible, and my anxiety was at its peak. My parents often reminisced about facing board exams in 5th and 8th grades, but as a child of the 2000s, I thankfully escaped that additional stress. For me, board exams were a daunting once-a-year event in 10th and 12th grades. It was a struggle to cover entire textbooks, and while I managed above-average marks, the pressure was intense. However, the upcoming change to split exams into two sessions seems promising. This approach will distribute the workload more evenly, reduce stress and give students more time to prepare for the next session. This division will allow timely feedback on performance, identifying areas for improvement and providing support before the next session, ultimately enhancing student learning and performance. My personal favourite change that has ever been happened in the

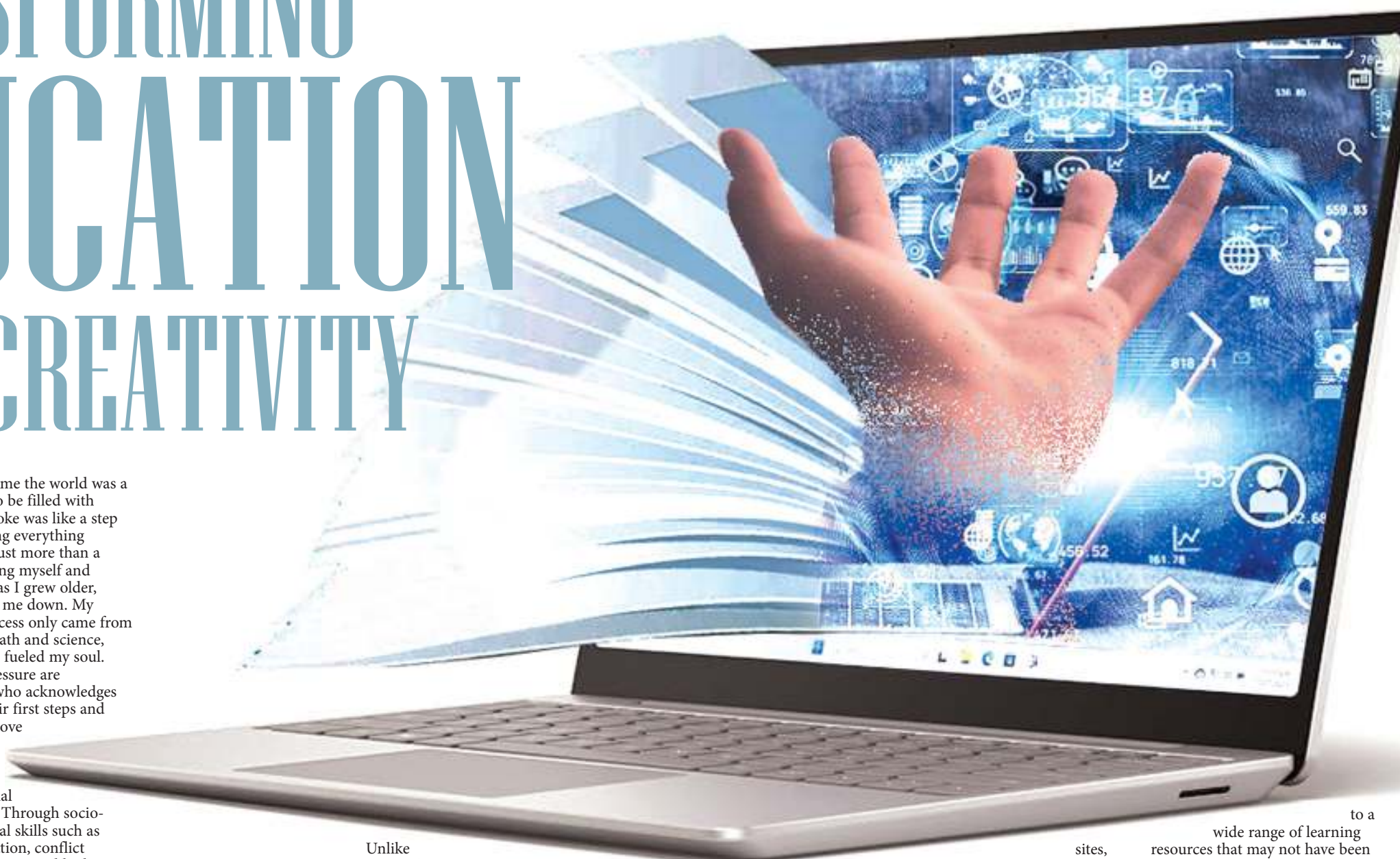
Indian education system has been the thoughtful replacement of the word "fail" with "essential repeat" and "back" with "supplementary." This shift was crucial, as the harsh terms "fail" and "back" often demotivate students and heighten the fear of judgment. The new supportive terminology boosts self-esteem and encourages students to persevere, fostering a more positive and resilient mindset.

Cross culture learning is also a major revolution which is crucial as it fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, promoting empathy, respect, and global awareness among students. This inclusive approach not only enriches students' educational experiences but also equips them with the social and emotional skills necessary to navigate and contribute positively to a multicultural society. One of such is National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). NIOS offers flexible learning opportunities to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those from rural areas, tribal communities, and marginalized groups. Through its inclusive curriculum and open learning approach, NIOS promotes cross-cultural understanding by catering to the needs and realities of various communities across the country.

In cultural exchange programs at my school not only exposed me to diverse perspectives but also highlighted the varied approaches to education around the world. Witnessing how children from different international cultures learn and left a profound impact, opens eyes to new possibilities in learning. My school had students from France and they spent a week immersed in the school's community. They also had the opportunity to explore Delhi's landmarks, museums, and cultural

sites, accompanied by local students who act as guides and ambassadors. In return, they organized reciprocal visits, sending groups of students to partner schools abroad to experience different culture. It is an enlightening experience that underscored the importance of fostering international and global understanding through education, revealing that cultural exchange is not just a leisure activity but an essential aspect of comprehensive learning. With years these programmes have lifted students with gain of first-hand exposure to diverse perspectives, traditions, and ways of life. This experience not only broadens their worldview but also cultivates tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and intercultural communication skills. In the past, they often overlooked the importance of sports and physical education, especially during the crucial 11th and 12th grades. Previously, schools often overlooked this aspect of holistic development. However, there has been a shift in perspective, with educational institutions now recognizing the importance of nurturing not only academic excellence but also mental and emotional well-being through sports and physical activities. Speaking of mental health, it's heartening to see prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs taking proactive steps to address the issue of student suicides. Programs focused on mental wellness and weekly counselling sessions are now becoming the norm, with institutions like IIT Guwahati leading the way. Well on discussing mental health, pandemic has affected our minds and changed the way we view things around us. Were you a quarantine student too? Well I was. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ed-Tech was the only way we could learn. With the introduction of EdTech, students now have access

to a wide range of learning resources that may not have been available to them before. Online platforms offer educational materials such as e-books, videos, and interactive tutorials, making it easier for students to explore different subjects at their own pace. Who would have imagined that tools like ChatGPT could handle assignments, develop content, and become indispensable aids? AI, VR, and AR have transformed education, especially in the arts, by creating exciting opportunities for creative expression and discovery. AI personalizes learning and provides intelligent creative tools, VR immerses students in virtual environments for hands-on artistic experiences, and AR overlays digital information onto the real world for enhanced visualization. Together, these technologies make art education more engaging, interactive, and innovative, fostering deeper creativity and understanding among students. **The education system is changing, and it's not just about academic freedom. It's also about unlocking creativity and supporting overall growth.** As someone who truly believes in the power of art, I'm excited to see more recognition of artistic and creative careers. It's no longer just about commerce and science. With the increasing popularity of vocational courses in fields like culinary arts, design, and interior decoration, India is on track to become a center of creativity and innovation. My passion for improving education comes from wanting to see every child bloom with their innovative and extraordinary minds. I wish to advocate for a system that not only keeps up with the times but also nurtures each person's unique talents and dreams. **The future of education in India isn't just about doing well academically, it's about empowering kids to follow their passions, express themselves freely, and create their own paths to success. And that journey is definitely worth talking about.**





# THE ENIGMATIC WORLD OF LEOPARDS

Leopards are the only large cat species with a widespread presence across the country, its conservation status and population dynamics serve as a barometer for the health of India's ecosystems



H S SINGH

**As per the report on the Status of the Leopard in India (2022), the overall leopard population in the tiger range landscape in 18 states of India was estimated at 13,870 subadult and adult leopards. In the tiger states also, the leopard-dominated area in Uttarakhand, major parts of North-East India and some other minor leopard habitats in those states were not covered in the survey**

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*), a sub-species of leopard out of nine sub-species of leopard in the world, is found throughout India from Jammu & Kashmir in the North-West Himalayas to Cape Comorin in the south and, from the Gir forest (Saurashtra) and thorn forest in the arid zone (Kachchh) in the extreme west to the moist forest of Myanmar in the east. Although the majority of them, about 95 per cent are confined to India, its small populations, about 5%, are also found in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, east of the Indus River in Pakistan and a small area of southern China adjoining Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Out of eight subspecies of leopards in Asia, except the Indian leopard, none of the other subspecies of leopards in Asia, have a population above a thousand, and few of them such as the Amur leopard, and Arabian leopards are Critically Endangered. Only two sub-species, the African leopard and the Indian leopard still have viable populations and distribution ranges.

#### POPULATION STATUS

Hunting records and British Gazetteers reveal that India had a large population of leopards before the Second World War. It is stated in the publications that about 150,000 leopards were hunted during a span of 50 years (1875-1925). Perhaps, the leopard population was in the range of nearly one lakh hundred years ago. The population drastically declined and reached to lowest level in the 1960s when about 6000 to 7000 individual leopards were estimated in the Indian jungle by the famous naturalist E P Gee (1964).

Protection and conservation measures by creating a network of Protected Areas and enacting laws have contributed to the leopard's recovery but the scale of poaching two decades ago slowed the recovery rate. When the scale of poaching declined, the population consistently increased in all leopard habitats, except Naxalite-affected states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Telangana, Odisha and part of Maharashtra, and states in the North East of India. As per the report on the Status of the Leopard in India (2022), the overall leopard population in the tiger range landscape in 18 states of India was estimated at 13,870 subadult and adult leopards. In the tiger states also, the leopard-dominated area in Uttarakhand, major parts of North-East India and some other minor leopard habitats in those states were not covered in the survey. The Indian leopard occurs in 30 states and Union Territories whereas the population estimate in 2022 was only for major parts of 18 states.

Thus, the population declared in the leopard's report is only for two-thirds of the leopard distribution range, not for the entire India. Using data, as mentioned in the status report of leopard for leopard population in India by media and scientific communities is not correct. Major leopard states such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana and major parts of Uttarakhand and North-East states are not covered in this report.

After accounting for all habitats, the leopard population was over 8,650 in the Central India Landscape covering eight states. The second major population block supporting over 4,600 leopards in northern India: the Himalayas-Shivalik (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand, terai belt of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the northern plains). The third major population block supporting about 3,600 leopards is the Western Ghats (Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala).

The North-East and Brahmaputra plains have extensive forests but moderate to poor wildlife, including the Indian leopard and a total number of smart cats may be in the range of about 1,000-1,100 leopards. Gujarat Forest Department counted 2,274 leopards in the state in 2023. Arid and semi-arid zones comprising Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat State, Dadara-Nagar Haveli and the Western Aravallis in Rajasthan support about 2,500-2,600 leopards. Additionally, leopards are also found in small patches of forests, tea gardens, sugarcane fields, ravine areas and other such lands that are not surveyed.



## Man-eater leopards

Stories of man-eating leopards and shunting of innocent ones in search of punishing the culprit have been repeated over centuries. During Jim Corbett's time also, hunters killed several innocent leopards while targeting a man-eater. Like criminals in human society, the man-eating leopard always harmed innocent leopards. When two man-eaters killed one and a half dozen people in Dhanpur taluka in Dahod district in Gujarat in 2003, the authority punished innocent leopards by eliminating 14 of them from the area. When three children were killed between Talala and Veraval in Junagadh in February 2003, a total of 11 leopards were punished by removing them from the wild.

When one or two leopards killed five people in Mandavi taluka in Surat districts in the post-monsoon and early winter in 2010, the situation compelled the Forest Department to engage several trap cages in the area. While hunting and trapping the man-eater, about two dozen leopards, including cubs were eliminated from the six villages in three months. When a leopard killed five people in Veraval in Junagadh in March 2012, a total of nine leopards were trapped and removed from the area. Similarly, when a leopard killed eight people in Visavadar and the surrounding area, about one and a half dozen leopards were captured and removed from the area in the year 2019. When leopards caused the death of human beings in the sugarcane belt in the fringe of Gir forests, over two dozen leopards were caged in 2023.

The situation in Uttarakhand was not different. There were cases when people retaliated and eliminated a large number of leopards in Uttarakhand, unnoticed by the department when the leopards killed human beings. When people were killed in Borivali National Park near Mumbai by one or two man-eaters, a total of 37 leopards were removed from the park in three years. In Ahmednagar division in Maharashtra, a total of 57 leopards were captured during 2001-05

and 24 of them were released in the adjacent forests. A similar story was repeated in Gunnar and Nashik Forest divisions. Every year leopards are captured from the Indian forests and locked in zoos where they are already crowded. Unofficial cases of leopard elimination due to human retaliation are equally high. A large number of the leopards were eliminated or captured from high-concentration zones of the animals when one or two problem animals created an emergency. One hunter, who has been hired to kill leopards on many occasions in Uttarakhand, killed 56 leopards over seven years and has been given awards for "bravery" for doing so. The Uttarakhand Wildlife Department keeps a list of authorized hunters. These kills appear to be "legal," though the shooters admit that for every man-eater killed, at least three innocents are slaughtered. It seems that public pressure forces authorities to "officially" declare a leopard as a man-eater in many cases.

The association of the leopard with man has both advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage to the leopard in its proximity to man is its propensity for man-eating which was observed in many cases. The leopard, if once taken to man-eating, becomes a burden to the rest of the leopards and is often a deadly menace to children and is, therefore, eliminated immediately. But science and technology are yet to be developed to capture or eliminate man-eaters without harming innocents. The leopards have lived in close association with human beings for centuries and the man-eating has been a problem always. Modern society is now more arrogant and has no tolerance for such acts of wild animals. As a result, the people punish innocent leopards till the elimination of the man-eater is confirmed beyond doubt. These incidents prove that man-eating reduces the survival chances of other leopards and hence administration has to be alert to track the animal when it starts attacking intentionally.

#### RANGE OF LEOPARD'S HABITAT

The occupancy area of leopards in the forests is over 320,000 sq. km. Leopards also occupy sugar-cane fields, tea gardens and other such vegetation cover. About one-fourth of the leopard's habitat overlaps with habitats of super cats - tiger and lion where leopards manage to survive under the persecution of the

km. in India. Of this, 684,000 sq. km. is in the states and Union Territories which support leopards. One-third of the forest cover in the leopard's states may not be suitable for leopards.

Thus, potential leopard habitats may range over 450,000 sq. km. of forest cover to accommodate the growing population in the present occupancy areas of the leopards. How many leopards or tigers or Asiatic lions can be managed in the Indian forests is a million-dollar question. The big cats are on the path of recovery (about 700 lions, 3,680 tigers and over 20,600 leopards at present) in India but the dispersing big cats do not find proper habitats due to their fragmentations and absence of prey base. There is scope to accommodate the growing population of leopards in the forests which are devoid of leopards and wild ungulates, if herbivores are restored by taking up long-term habitat restoration works.

#### HUMAN-LEOPARD CONFLICTS

Only about 35 per cent of the leopard population is found within national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and the rest were counted beyond the Protected Areas' boundaries. Leopards are also found in good numbers in extended habitats such as sugarcane fields, tea gardens, ravines, Prosopis thickets and other such non-forest areas. There are about three dozen Protected Areas or sites in the country where leopard density is high, over 10 adult and subadult leopards per 100 sq. km. and a few of them have very high concentrations, about 20 leopards or more per 100 sq. km. Dhanpur forests in Dahod district, Jambughoda forest in Godhra, sugar-cane belt in Mandvi taluka in Surat, some fringe areas around the forests of Gir and Girnar in Gujarat; Sanjay Gandhi National Park near Mumbai, some sites in the districts of Nashik, Ahmednagar and Gunnar in Maharashtra; Rajaji National Park, some areas in Pauri Garhwal, Teri Garhwal and Almora districts in Uttarakhand; Katernighat forests in Uttar Pradesh and Kuno and Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh, Sariska Tiger Reserve and a forest block adjoining Jaipur in Rajasthan; the Western Dooars in West Bengal and some open forest mosaics of central Karnataka have such high leopard concentration and human-leopard conflicts.

Population management in the conflict areas is one of the key management strategies to avoid human casualties and, if it is not done, public unrest may start in a big way against conservation. High leopard density normally results in the depletion of prey and frequent leopard attacks in the villages, leading to the eruption of anger and public agitation. Since the leopard population has doubled in India during the last two and half decades and it is now no longer Endangered or Vulnerable, there should

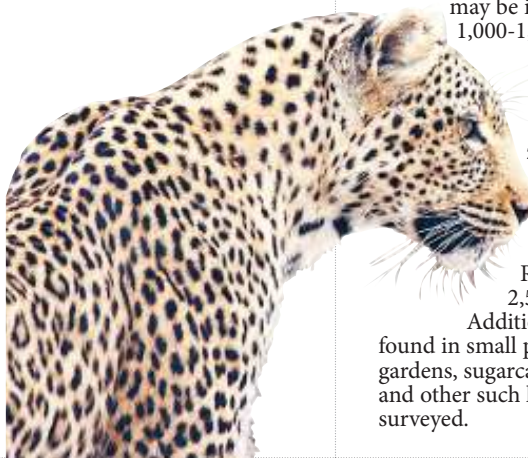
not be any hesitation to remove problem animals from such areas, if the attack on human beings persists. In no case, density should be allowed to exceed 25 adult leopards per 100 sq. km., as serious conflict is unavoidable in such high-concentration sites.

The human death rate in India due to leopard attacks was 400-410 people/year during the first decade of the 20th century (The Indian Forester Jan 1907). It declined drastically after the Independence of the country. Annually, about 95 to 100 human beings were killed by leopards during the first decade of the 21st century. Subsequently, human casualties increased consistently during the last decade due to the leopard's recovery and its dispersion in new areas, including villages and towns. In Uttarakhand, 565 human - beings were killed at an average rate of 22 human deaths/year by leopards since the creation of the state.

During the last few years, the average human death rate was 18 human deaths/year in Maharashtra. Annual death rate was 13 human deaths/year in Gujarat during the last five years. The scale of human deaths in Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal, Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka is also close to the same range. Thus, annually, over a hundred people are killed and thousands injured by leopard attacks. If population management policy is not placed into operation, the human death rate due to leopard attacks may reach to the level that prevailed a hundred years ago. Since human-leopard conflicts are scaling up with the increase of the leopard population in many states, the management of dispersing leopards in villages and cities and increasing human-leopard conflicts are major management challenges.

The frequency of occurrence of leopard attacks on humans over a specific period should be mapped for the identification of conflict hot spots. The management should establish a Rapid Response Task Team with equipment and infrastructure to attend to cases without delay. A Rapid Response Team with the necessary equipment should be placed into operation in high man-leopard conflict sites. Tranquilizer gun, flashlights (to each member); first-aid Kits (one large kit to each team); mobile phones (to each member); reflector jackets (to each member) baffle shields and batons (to each member); public announcement system (one to each team); pamphlets and posters on 'Do's and Don'ts During Conflict Situations' (one set to each team) along with equipment as mentioned for RRT should be provided. Police Force should be integrated with the Task Force in high-conflict situations.

(Dr H S Singh is a Member of the National Board for Wild Life, Gandhinagar; views are personal)





## 'Manthan' breathes anew in Cannes

PNS ■ CANNES

A significant slice of New Indian Cinema history was under the spotlight at the 77th Cannes Film Festival on Friday night. A restored 4K version of "Manthan" (The Churning), Shyam Benegal's 1976 film about the creation of India's first dairy cooperative in a Gujarat village, lit up the screen at Salle Buneau. Naseeruddin Shah, a key member of the film's cast, spoke ahead of the screening. "First and foremost, this show of Manthan is dedicated to Dr. Verghese Kurien," the veteran actor said. "It is also an occasion to recall Smita Patil, Girish Karnad, Amrish Puri and music composer Vanraj Bhatia." "It was my second film as a screen actor," Shah said. "I was extremely nervous about how it would do at the box office. Nobody gave the film a ghost of chance but it turned out to be a sleeper hit that generated more work for all of us." The actor said that at a time when Hindi filmmakers

would make only what they felt that the audience wanted to see, Shyam Benegal "found ways to speak about the truth of the times." "Manthan", funded with a contribution of Rs 2 each from half a million milk farmers, was a follow-up to Benegal's first two films, "Ankur" (1974) and "Nishant" (1976), which was in Competition at the Cannes Film Festival. It completed a timely and powerful trilogy on rural distress. "Manthan" was restored using a 35mm camera negative preserved at the National Film Archive of India. The sound was digitised from the 35mm release print in the possession of Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), which undertook the restoration project a year and a half ago. It was funded by the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. The film was restored under the aegis of FHF at Prasad Corporation's post-studios and the Bologna-based L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory in association.

# After 180 years, new clues are revealing how anaesthesia works in the brain

PNS ■ BRISBANE

Over 350 million surgeries are performed globally each year. For most of us, it's likely at some point in our lives we'll have to undergo a procedure that needs general anaesthesia. Even though it is one of the safest medical practices, we still don't have a complete, thorough understanding of precisely how anaesthetic drugs work in the brain. In fact, it has largely remained a mystery since general anaesthesia was introduced into medicine over 180 years ago. Our study published in The Journal of Neuroscience today provides new clues on the intricacies of the process. General anaesthetic drugs seem to only affect specific parts of the brain responsible for keeping us alert and awake.

### Brain cells striking a balance

In a study using fruit flies, we found a potential way that allows anaesthetic drugs to interact with specific types of neurons (brain cells),

and it's all to do with proteins. Your brain has around 86 billion neurons and not all of them are the same - it's these differences that allow general anaesthesia to be effective. To be clear, we're not completely in the dark on how anaesthetic drugs affect us. We know why general anaesthetics are able to make us lose consciousness so quickly, thanks to a landmark discovery made in 1994. But to better understand the fine details, we first have to look to the minute differences between the cells in our brains. Broadly speaking, there are two main categories of neurons in the brain.

The first are what we call "excitatory" neurons, generally responsible for keeping us alert and awake. The second are "inhibitory" neurons - their job is to regulate and control the excitatory ones. In our day-to-day lives, excitatory

and inhibitory neurons are constantly working and balancing one another. When we fall asleep, there are inhibitory

neurons that tell you that they'll "put you to sleep" for the procedure: it's essentially the same process.

### A special kind of sleep

While we know why anaesthetics put us to sleep, the question then becomes: "why do we stay asleep during surgery?" If you went to bed tonight, fell asleep and somebody tried to do surgery on you, you'd wake up with quite a shock. To date, there is no strong consensus in the field as to why general anaesthesia causes people to remain unconscious during surgery.

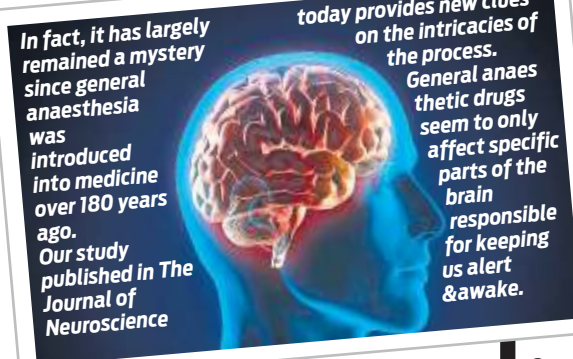
Over the last couple of decades, researchers have proposed several potential explanations, but they all seem to point to one root cause. Neurons stop talking to each other when exposed to general anaesthetics. While the idea of "cells talking to each other" may sound a little strange, it's a fundamental concept in neuroscience. Without this communication, our brains wouldn't be

able to function at all. And it allows the brain to know what's happening throughout the body.

### What did we discover?

Our new study shows that general anaesthetics appear to stop excitatory neurons from communicating, but not inhibitory ones. This concept isn't new, but we found some compelling evidence as to why only excitatory neurons are affected.

For neurons to communicate, proteins have to get involved. One of the jobs these proteins have is to get neurons to release molecules called neurotransmitters. These chemical messengers are what gets signals across from one neuron to another: dopamine, adrenaline and serotonin are all neurotransmitters, for example. We found that general anaesthetics impair the ability of these proteins to release neurotransmitters, but only in excitatory neurons. To test this, we used *Drosophila melanogaster* fruit flies and super-resolution microscopy to directly see what effects a general anaesthetic was having on these proteins at a molecular scale.



## Man shoots his 6-month-old baby multiple times at home near Phoenix



PNS ■ SURPRISE

A man shot his 6-month-old baby multiple times Friday at a home northwest of Phoenix after taking the infant and its mother captive, but the mother escaped with minor injuries and the child was expected to survive, authorities said.

They said the status of the suspect remained unknown after a fire broke out during a standoff with police. Officers went to the home in the city of Surprise in response to an emergency call around 11:30 a.m. from a woman who said she and her baby had been held captive there since 3 a.m.

by the child's father, police said. The woman managed to escape and borrowed a cellphone from a nearby construction crew, Sgt. Rick Hernandez said during a news conference Friday. He said she told the dispatcher the infant was still inside the home and could be in danger. Officers heard gunfire from inside the house as they arrived, Hernandez said. They entered and found the baby with multiple gunshot wounds but did not see the father. They retrieved the child and retreated. "The infant victim was airlifted to a nearby hospital in serious condition, but injuries are believed to be non-life threatening," Surprise police said in a statement Friday night. "The female victim was treated at the

scene for minor injuries and was transported to the hospital to be with the child." SWAT officers surrounded the home in the afternoon, and Hernandez said investigators believed the man was still there. A fire broke out during the standoff with police, police said in their statement Friday night. The suspect was believed to still be in the home but his status was unknown, they said. Aerial videos and photos from the afternoon showed a thick plume of smoke rising from the severely damaged house. Hernandez said the man did not live at the home with the woman and the baby. "The condition of the suspect will be unknown until it is safe for investigators to enter the residence," police said in the statement Friday night.

## 'More than 50 lakh large farmland trees vanished in India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 50 lakh large farmland trees vanished between 2018 and 2022 in India, partly due to altered cultivation practices, revealing a "concerning trajectory," new research published in the journal Nature Sustainability has found. Researchers said that "an observable trend was emerging" wherein agroforestry systems are being replaced with paddy rice fields, even as a certain loss rate could be found to be natural. "Large and mature trees within these agroforestry fields

are removed, and trees are now being cultivated within separate block plantations typically with lower ecological value, they said.



Block plantations, usually involving fewer species of trees, were found to have increased in numbers which some villagers from Telangana, Haryana, Maharashtra and other states confirmed via interviews. The team, including researchers from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, explained that the decision to remove trees is often driven by perceived low benefits of the trees, coupled with concerns that their shading effect.

## Sri Lankan Tamils observe 15th anniversary of armed conflict end

PNS ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Saturday marked the 15th anniversary of the end of the armed separatist campaign with Tamils holding a series of events throughout the former conflict zone in the north and east regions to remember their dear ones killed in the clashes. However, in many areas, police and the government troops were accused of attempting to disrupt the memorial events. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE) had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the



north and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in

2009. On May 18, 2009, Sri Lankan army declared victory with the discovery of the body of the dreaded LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Agnes Callamard, the Secretary General of the Amnesty International, visited the final battle site at Mullaivaikkal in the north-eastern Mullaithivu district to attend the commemoration. "Today's anniversary is a grim reminder of the collective failure of the Sri Lankan authorities and the international.



## Climate change likely to impact people with brain conditions, study finds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change is likely to negatively affect the health of people suffering from brain conditions such as migraine and Alzheimer's, new research published in The Lancet Neurology journal has found. Extreme temperatures, both low and high, and greater changes over the course of the day -- driven by climate change -- were shown to have an impact on brain diseases, explained lead researcher Sanjay Sisodiya from the University of College London's Institute of Neurology, UK. "Night-time temperatures may be particularly important as higher temperatures through the night can disrupt sleep. Poor sleep is known to aggravate a number of brain conditions," he said. The study, reviewing 332 papers published from around the world between 1968 and 2023, looked at 19 different nervous system conditions, including stroke,

migraine, Alzheimer's, meningitis, epilepsy and multiple sclerosis. The researchers found an increased number of admissions, disabilities or deaths resulting from a stroke due to higher temperatures or heatwaves. They also said that people having dementia are vulnerable to damage from extreme temperatures and extreme weather events such as floods and wildfires as cognitive impairment can limit their ability to adapt to environmental changes. The team also examined how climate change impacted several serious yet common psychiatric disorders, including anxiety, depression and schizophrenia. Sisodiya said that climate anxiety was "an added, potentially weighty influence". "Many brain conditions are associated with a higher risk of psychiatric disorders, including anxiety, and such multimorbidities can further complicate impacts of climate change and the adaptations necessary to preserve health," he said. With extreme weather events becoming more severe and global temperatures rising, the researchers acknowledged that people are being exposed to worsening environmental factors that may not have been severe enough to affect brain conditions in some of the earlier studies they reviewed as part of the analysis. Therefore, they said, it was important to ensure that research is up to date, and looks at not only the present state of climate change but also the future.

**Extreme temperatures, both low and high, and greater changes over the course of the day -- driven by climate change -- were shown to have an impact on brain diseases, explained lead researcher Sanjay Sisodiya from the University of College London's Institute of Neurology, UK.**

## Aishwarya walks in blue-silver gown in second appearance

PNS ■ CANNES

In her second appearance at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan once again opted for a gown by designer duo Falguni Shane Peacock. Aishwarya wore a shimmering blue and silver gown as she walked the red carpet on Friday for the screening of acclaimed filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos' latest feature "Kinds of Kindness", starring two-time Oscar winner Emma Stone. The outfit boasted a sweeping trail and bold, dramatic shoulders, featuring metallic fringe. The actor had a cast on her right hand that she has been wearing for an unspecified injury. A regular at the Cannes Film Festival for the past two decades, Aishwarya debuted at the 2024 edition on Thursday with a gown by Falguni Shane Peacock, who are also attending the film gala. The actor struck a pose in the monochrome gown adorned with 3D metallic elements and golden accents while



walking the red carpet. She was attending the premiere of Hollywood legend Francis Ford Coppola's latest movie "Megalopolis", starring Adam Driver. Besides Aishwarya, actor Kiara Advani made her first appearance at the French Riviera in a draped ivory crepe back satin dress from designer Prabal Gurung.

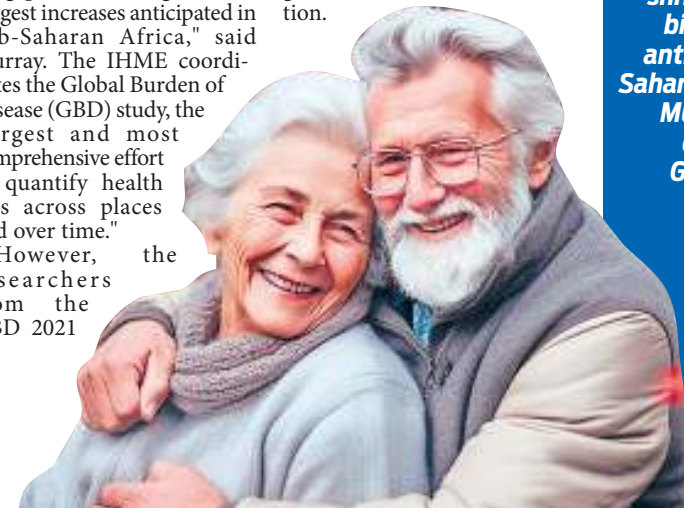
## Global life expectancy projected to improve by 5 years in men, over 4 in women by 2050: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Life expectancy around the world is projected to improve by almost five years in men and by over four years in women between 2022 and 2050, according to a global study published in The Lancet journal. Researchers said that the improvements are expected to be the highest in countries where life expectancy is lower, thereby contributing to an overall enhancement of life expectancy across geographies. Public health measures preventing and improving survival rates from cardiovascular diseases, COVID-19, and a range of communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases, are largely driving the trend of increasing life expectancy globally, the authors said. "In addition to an increase in life expectancy overall, we have found that the disparity in life expectancy across geographies

will lessen," said Chris Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), University of Washington, US. "This is an indicator that while health inequalities between the highest and lowest income regions will remain, the gaps are shrinking, with the biggest increases anticipated in Sub-Saharan Africa," said Murray. The IHME coordinates the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study, the "largest and most comprehensive effort to quantify health loss across places and over time." However, the researchers from the GBD 2021

Forecasting Collaborators said that the ongoing shift in disease burden to non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular ones, cancer and diabetes, and exposure to associated risk factors including obesity and high blood pressure, will have the most impact on the next generation.



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This shift was analysed to increase an individual's years lived with disability or YLDs. Disease burden is the impact of a health problem on a given population, measured through varied indicators such as deaths, disability, or financial costs. Therefore, as the disease burden shifts from that of communicable ones to non-communicable health problems, people are expected to live longer, but with more years spent in poor health, the researchers said. They said that healthy life expectancy around the world, referring to the number of years one could expect to live in good health, will increase by 2.6 years in the coming years - from 64.8 years in 2022 to 67.4 years in 2050. For India, the study has projected that by 2050, on average, men could have a life expectancy of over 75 years, while that for women could be almost 80 years.