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'Over 200 girls had auditioned for the role in Usha Parinayam, and somehow the role landed UP TO ME'
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QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer

It has been decided to charge everyone constructing buildings in Hyderabad Rs 75 per sq. ft. It is like the Right Royal Tax. It seems that the decision was made to pay three people. Revanth has collected the most money in the shortest period. KCR also did the same and he lost power.

— Eatala Rajender, BJP leader

P4

DON'T MISS...

AP bags 13 medals in National Skill...

Andhra Pradesh clinched 13 medals, including one gold and one bronze, alongside 11 medallions of excellence at the India Skill Competitions held in Delhi from May 15 to 19, marking a commendable achievement on the road to the World Skill Competitions slated for Lyon, France in 2024. Engaging in a total of 37 skill trades, Andhra Pradesh fielded 42 members who showcased their prowess, resulting in a remarkable haul of 13 medals. The World Skills Competition, held biennially, stands as the pinnacle...

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Audio books can stimulate a...

Audio books can inculcate story listening habits in children and gradually attract them to reading books, says legendary author Ruskin Bond who turned 90 Sunday. To commemorate the day, audiobook platform Audible has brought out a keepsake edition with 25 of his popular stories. Titled 'All Time Favourites for Children', the stories have been curated and selected by the author himself. The narration is by Anuj Datta. Bond said audiobooks can be like oral storytelling and stimulate a child's...

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Govt recovers Rs 852 cr under...

The government has recovered about Rs 852 crore under the amnesty scheme for exporters for one-time settlement of default in export obligation by the holders of advance and EPCG authorisations, an official said. The figures are likely to increase further as the exercise is on for the compilation of the data, the official added. The government has fixed March 31 as the last date for payment of customs duty plus interest. Under the scheme, 6,705 applications were filed and as per the provisional figures...

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RCB's turnaround will inspire other...

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's remarkable turnaround to win six games on the trot and barge into the Indian Premier League playoffs this year will inspire other teams in future, believes wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik. RCB, who lost seven of their first eight games including six defeats in a row, came back roaring from the brink of elimination in the 17th edition of IPL to make the final four. The Faf du Plessis-led side on Friday got the better of defending champions Chennai Super Kings by 27 runs to seal the fourth...

—SPORTS

PROBE IN FAST LANE

SIT may submit report today

Violence before and after elections in Palnadu and Rayalaseema districts under investigation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) going into post-poll violence in the State has intensified its efforts. SIT chief Vineet Brijlal is expected to submit a report to the Election Commission (EC) on Monday.

A 13-member SIT has been formed to probe the violence in the Palnadu and Rayalaseema districts. The team has already begun its work in the affected areas, focusing on incidents in Macherla, Gurazala, Narasaraopet, Tadipatri, and Chandragiri constituencies. Some suspects have reportedly gone into hiding or fled to other locations, including Hyderabad.

The SIT is reviewing registered FIRs in the riot-affected areas and plans to file additional FIRs if necessary. The investigation has revealed attempts by some police personnel to alter several FIR sections. The SIT is also examining all available evidence, including CCTV footage. Following the violence during and after the polls, the EC summoned State Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy and DGP Harish Kumar Gupta to Delhi for an explanation regarding the law and order situation.

Continued on Page 2

- Some suspects have gone into hiding or fled to other places, including Hyderabad.
- SIT is reviewing FIRs and may file additional ones.
- Investigation includes examining CCTV footage.
- SIT teams are deployed to Palnadu, Anantapur, and Tirupati districts.
- Focus areas include Tadipatri, Macherla, Gurazala, Narasaraopet, Sattenapalli, and Tirupati.
- Suspended SP Bindu Madhav being questioned.
- Inquiry into the actions of TDP leaders in Palnadu district.



FILE PHOTO

YSRCP agent's father killed in TDP attack

SRIKAKULAM: The father of a YSRCP polling agent succumbed to injuries sustained in an attack allegedly orchestrated by TDP activists at Nimmada in Kotabommali mandal of the district on Sunday. According to reports, Thota Malleswara Rao fell victim to the violence while performing a religious ritual at a temple in the

village. He died undergoing treatment at KGH in Visakhapatnam after initially being treated at RIMS in Srikakulam. The grieving family has accused followers of TDP leader Kinjarapu Atchannaidu of perpetrating the attack. Demanding justice, the son of the deceased man, Madhavrao, demanded severe punishment for the culprits.

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Violence a conspiracy by Opposition: Ambati

PNS ■ SATTENAPALLI

Irrigation Minister Ambati Rambabu has alleged that the recent spate of violence was orchestrated by collusion between TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, BJP State president D Purandeswari, and complicit police.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Rambabu cited instances where transfers of IPS officers, requested by Purandeswari and allegedly sanctioned by the Election Commission, coincided with outbreaks of violence. He urged both the Election Commission and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to uncover the truth behind these incidents and hold those responsible accountable.

Rambabu outlined instances of violence aimed at disrupting the electoral process, including attacks on polling

booths and tampering with EVMs, particularly rampant in Palnadu, Anantapur, and Rayalaseema districts. He said that areas where Purandeswari sought officer transfers experienced heightened unrest. Rambabu implicated Chandrababu Naidu of Telugu Desam, Purandeswari of BJP, and Pawan Kalyan of Jana Sena in orchestrating these actions.

Regarding specific incidents, Minister Rambabu highlighted Narasaraopet constituency in Palnadu as a focal point, where he alleged attacks on MLA Srinivasa Reddy's residence and vandalism of property occurred amidst police inaction.

Minister Rambabu concluded by demanding thorough investigations by the SIT and the Election Commission to identify and penalize those responsible for the violence and negligence during the elections.

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Lengthy code under fire from political circles

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

The lengthy election code is attracting the criticism not only from political parties but also from the public. In Telangana the 'ruling' of the Election Commission is equalling the rule of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's government. After Congress winning in the recent Assembly elections, Revanth Reddy was sworn as the Chief Minister of Telangana on December 7, 2023. The Election Commission announced the election schedule on March 16, 2024. The election code came into immediate effect. That means after 99 days of Revanth Reddy's government the election code came into effect. The election code will be in force till the completion of election process, that means announcement of the results. The counting of votes will take place on June 4 and results will be declared the same day. So the election code will continue till June 5. Revanth Reddy's government rule began on December 7, 2023 and till March 15, 2024, that means 99 days. The election code came into effect from March 16, 2024 and it will continue till June 5, that means 82 days.

Continued on Page 2

SRH pips Punjab Kings

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad crushed Punjab Kings by four wickets to end the league phase of the Indian Premier League with 17 points here on Sunday. Chasing 215, SRH overhauled the target with five balls to spare after opener Abhishek Sharma hammered a 28-ball 66 (6x6, 5x4s).

SRH were also bolstered by contributions from Rahul Tripathi (33), Nitish Reddy (37) and Heinrich Klaasen (42) along the way.

Earlier in the contest, Punjab Kings were helped by Prabhsimran Singh's quick fire 71 as well as useful contributions from opener Atharva Taide (46) and Rilee Rossouw (49) to post 214/5 on board.

Prabhsimran and Taide added 97 runs from just 55 balls. While Taide



scored 46 from 27 balls with five fours and two sixes, Prabhsimran hit seven sixes and four fours for his 45-ball 71. Rossouw signed off with a 24-ball 49 with four sixes and three fours while stand-in skipper Jitesh Sharma produced late fireworks to make 32 not out.

BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 214/5 in 20 overs (Atharva Taide 46, Prabhsimran Singh 71, Rilee Rossouw 49; T Natarajan 2/33) lost to Sunrisers Hyderabad 215/6 in 19.1 overs (Abhishek Sharma 66, Rahul Tripathi 33, Nitish Reddy 37, Heinrich Klaasen 42; Arshdeep Singh 2/37) by 4 wickets

Iran President's chopper makes a 'hard landing'

RESCUE OPERATIONS UNDERWAY



PNS ■ DUBAI

A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi suffered a "hard landing" on Sunday, Iranian state media reported, without elaborating. Some began urging the public to pray for Raisi and the others on board as rescue crews sped through a misty, rural forest where his helicopter was believed to be.

The likely crash comes as Iran under Raisi and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel just last month and has enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels. Meanwhile, Iran has faced years of mass protests against its Shiite theocracy over an ailing economy and women's rights — making the moment that much more sensitive

The likely crash comes as Iran under Raisi and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel just last month and has enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels.

for Tehran and the future of the country as the Israel-Hamas war inflames the wider Middle East. Raisi was traveling in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. State TV said the incident happened near Jolfa, a city on the border with the nation of Azerbaijan, some 600 kilometers (375 miles) northwest of the Iranian capital, Tehran.

2

Unrelenting heat disrupts daily life in swathes of India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The unrelenting heat turned daily activities into an arduous task in large parts of India on Sunday, with Najafgarh in southwest Delhi reaching a sweltering 47.8 degrees Celsius — the highest in the country so far this season.

The crippling heat strained low-income households, which often have poor access to water and cooling, and tested the endurance of outdoor workers toiling in the searing sun, forcing them to take frequent breaks. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) reported a severe heat wave in parts of Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Even the hill stations in Himachal Pradesh, safe havens for people escaping the punishing heat in the plains, reeled from the scorching conditions.

Maximum temperatures reached 36 degrees Celsius in Dharamshala, 44.4 degrees in Una, 42.4 degrees in Bilaspur, 36.6 degrees in Solan and 40 degrees in Kangra.

The Met office has issued a red warning for Delhi, Chandigarh, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan, stressing the need for "extreme care for vulnerable people". An orange alert was issued for Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat, emphasising "high health concern" for vulnerable people, including infants, the elderly, and those with chronic diseases.

The mercury reached or surpassed 47 degrees Celsius in at least eight places across India, with Najafgarh logging a searing 47.8 degrees, making it the warmest place in the country for the second time in the last three days.

In the national capital, Pitampura recorded 47 degrees Celsius and Mungeshpur 47.7 degrees, at least

seven notches above the usual temperature for these areas at this time of the year.

According to a new analysis of airport site weather data, Delhi reached or surpassed 40 degrees Celsius on 1,557 days (around 43 per cent) in the last 10 years.

The densely packed city recorded temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius on 1,254 days (around 34 per cent) during 2004-2013 and 1,180 days (around 32 per cent) dur-



"Low-income households have limited capacity to adapt to extreme heat because of poor access to water and electricity. In addition, the design and construction of informal houses often mean there is poor ventilation and little shelter from extreme heat."

ing 1994-2003, according to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The mercury soared to 46.7 degrees Celsius in Rajasthan's Ganganagar, 47.5 degrees in Madhya Pradesh's Datia, 47 degrees in Sirsa and 47.2 degrees in Nuh of Haryana, 46.4 degrees in Punjab's Bathinda, 47.7 degrees in Agra and 47.2 degrees in Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh.

High heat and humidity also troubled residents in coastal areas of Gujarat. Anna Walnycki, a principal researcher on IIED's human settlements team, said the alarming rise in extreme heat events in India due to climate change is significantly impacting the health, wellbeing and productivity of everyone, especially those living in low-income and informal communities. "Low-income households have limited capacity to adapt to extreme heat because of poor access to water and electricity. In addition, the design and construction of informal houses often mean there is poor ventilation and little shelter from extreme heat," she said.

Chandni Singh, senior researcher at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements and IPCC lead author, said state and city-level heat action plans are proving "insufficient to deal with the heat we are now experiencing."

Monday Mirchi

BUREAUCRAT SET TO BECOME CM IN ONSCREEN DEBUT

Bureaucrats dreaming of making a successful political plunge are dime a dozen. In Telangana, however, a seasoned bureaucrat, who had ruled the roost during the previous Bharat Rashtira Samithi regime, is likely to make onscreen debut and that too playing a chief minister in the movie. A famous Hindi filmmaker is going to direct the film. The producer of the film is reportedly being backed politically. As we await some BTS shots, we will also get to know answers to questions doing the rounds in informed circles like: Is the babu in question taking VRS or sorts? Will the flick, predictably with political overtones, be backed by BRS? Or, will the film itself be ultimately shelved before it hits the screen? People in the know, who are awaiting the determination of political fortunes on June 4, say: "Please remember that Sabar ka phal meeta hotha hai."

HEIGHTENED ANXIETY IN EAST GODAVARI

In the aftermath of the fiercely fought electoral battle in Andhra Pradesh, there is heightened anxiety among official circles in East Godavari. All eyes are on how the impending transfers will affect East Godavari and Konaseema Collectors. If there is a regime change, a bureaucratic reshuffle is inevitable. East Godavari Collector K Madhavi Lata was given this plum posting by the YSRCP regime, notwithstanding objections from the standpoint of community equations. The larger question now is: Will those equations come into play if the TDP-led combine comes to power? The buzz is that if East Godavari District Collector is moved, then there will be a change in the posting of Konaseema Collector too.

TWEAKING THE 80-20 RULE

With polling completed, at least some of the bureaucrats are getting time to pen their thoughts. Deputy DEO Hyderabad Anudeep Durisetty, who had topped the 2017 UPSC Civil Services Examination, has highlighted the importance of consistency in a blog post. Anudeep Durisetty shared that the idea he has been incorporating in his life is to evaluate consistency over months and years, not days. A realistic metric for being consistent is to give 80% effort on 80% of the days. The rest 20% is the buffer to account for life's improbabilities. His caveat is that this bit of advice is not a prescription for laziness or procrastination. Anudeep Durisetty's idea is an interesting tweak of the Pareto Principle, according to which 80% of our output comes from 20% of our efforts.

EC ACTS VISIBLY

One disturbing finding of the Lokniti-CSDS Pre Poll survey 2024, which involved 10,019 respondents across 19 States, was that the trust of the voter in the Election Commission has declined compared with the situation five years ago. While there is a marginal increase in those who have some trust in the EC, the percentage of those who don't have much trust or have no trust at all has doubled compared to 2019 data. This being so, the widespread violence

and riots across various places in Andhra Pradesh during and after the recent elections seem to have nudged the Election Commission of India to take drastic and visible corrective steps. The EC has suspended/transferred many officials and appointed new officers in trouble spots. The EC has issued orders appointing Latkar Sriresh Balaji as Palnadu District Collector. Besides, Mallika Garg has been appointed as Palnadu SP, Harshvardhan Raju as Tirupati SP, and Gautami Sali as Anantapur SP. More importantly, the EC summoned Chief Secretary KS Jawahar Reddy and Director General of Police Harish Kumar Gupta to its headquarters in Delhi and sought an explanation from them on the unabated violence. The EC is apparently dismayed by the failure of officials to act decisively despite prior intelligence tips about probable violence in Macherla, Narasaraopet, Chandragiri, and Tadipatri constituencies.

EVEN IPS OFFICIAL A SITTING DUCK FOR CYBER CRIMINALS

Cyber criminals seem to be a law unto themselves. In AP, they have just targeted APSRTC Managing Director Ch D Tirumala Rao, an IPS officer. Tirumala Rao has lodged a complaint with the Vijayawada Cyber Crime Police regarding the fraudulent use of his photo as a WhatsApp DP and phone calls made from a WhatsApp number. He alerted people in his circles about fake WhatsApp calls from that number and urged them to block the caller.

SIT'S TASK CUT OUT

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), formed at the behest of the Election Commission of India to thoroughly probe the violence and riots in Anantapur, Palnadu and Tirupati districts of Andhra Pradesh during and after the recent elections, seems to have its task cut out. The 13-member team, headed by Inspector General of Police rank officer Vineet Brijlal, has fanned out as four wings to comb the places rocked by violence. The probe report is expected to be submitted to the Election Commission soon, given the shake-up of the entire administration in AP.

IS AN ELECTION 'OBSERVER' NOT RESPONSIBLE TO STOP VIOLENCE?

"Is an election 'observer' not responsible to stop violence during or after polling?" This is the million-dollar question that is doing the rounds in Andhra Pradesh, where the EC has incensed civil servants by targeting some of them for violence and riots during and after the elections, while letting off the hook the poll panel's 'election observers' meant for overseeing elections. The EC has transferred/suspended several IAS and IPS officers, holding them responsible for the untoward incidents. The grouse of the IAS and IPS officers in the dock is how come election observers remain blameless. The IAS and IPS officers feel that even the election observers concerned should be held responsible, since they were appointed by the Election Commission.

-- Yours truly

US citizen Dr Lokesh detained again

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Gannavaram police detained Dr Vyuyuru Lokesh Babu again on Sunday after airport authorities found a satellite phone in his possession during a security check as he was about to board a flight to Delhi.

Two days ago, Dr Lokesh, a TDP sympathiser, was taken into custody at Gannavaram airport under suspicion of planning a protest against Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. The Chief Minister and his family were departing for a tour of the United Kingdom on Friday night when Dr Lokesh, a US citizen, was found in the airport under suspicious circumstances.

Lacking a proper ticket and failing to provide satisfac-

tory answers, he was detained and questioned by the police. Subsequently, he was served with a 41A notice and released.

On Sunday, Dr. Lokesh returned to Gannavaram airport to travel to Delhi. During the security check, airport officials discovered a satellite phone in his possession. Using a satellite phone without proper permission from the central government is illegal.

The airport officials promptly informed the Gannavaram police, leading to Dr Lokesh's detention.

Dr Lokesh, who hails from Venkatayapalem in Tulluru mandal, had retired from his practice as a doctor in the United States.

He is currently being interrogated by the Gannavaram police.

AP students safe in Kyrgyzstan

APNRTS continuously monitoring situation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In light of the current situation in a region of Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, issued an advisory on Saturday urging Indian citizens and students in the area to remain vigilant and to contact the local Embassy of India at 0555710041 in case of emergencies.

The MEA reassured that the Government of India is closely monitoring the situation in cooperation with the local authorities and further advised Indian students to stay indoors and maintain regular communication with the Indian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan.

Chief Executive Officer of APNRTS, an entity of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, shared the MEA advisory on its official website and social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, on Saturday.

Under the instructions of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who is currently on a foreign tour, APNRTS is continuously assessing the situation in Kyrgyzstan, in coordination with the MEA. On May 18, four students from Andhra Pradesh contacted the APNRTS 24/7 helpline and reported that students from Andhra Pradesh and other states in

Kyrgyzstan were in safe locations. Kyrgyzstan is a popular destination for Indian students, particularly those from Andhra Pradesh, pursuing medical degrees. Fortunately, reports confirm that no Indian or Andhra Pradesh students have been attacked thus far.

Citizens of Andhra Pradesh and students in Kyrgyzstan can reach out to the APNRTS 24/7 helpline at +91 863 2340678, +91 85000 27678 (WhatsApp), or via email at info@apnrtsc.com, helpline@apnrtsc.com.

The Embassy of India helpline in Kyrgyzstan can be reached at 0555710041 for any assistance.

Fake exit polls flood social media, confuse AP voters

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Despite the Election Commission of India's ban on exit polls until June 1, fake surveys inundate social media platforms, creating confusion among voters in Andhra Pradesh. As the election results draw near, the proliferation of these false polls escalates, with punters intensifying their wagers on candidate and party outcomes.

Numerous fictitious exit polls have surfaced on social media, adding complexity to the electoral landscape.

Citizens express concern over the dissemination of misinformation, urging authorities to take action against those responsible for fabricating such surveys. Reports indicate that political activists may exploit these fraudulent polls to sway public opinion, potentially at the behest of betting syndicates.

One counterfeit 'exit poll' purportedly forecasts the NDA alliance, comprising TDP-BJP-Jana Sena, securing 120 assembly seats and 15 MP seats in the state. Another deceptive 'survey' projects YSRCP to claim 125

Political analysts highlight the high-stakes betting surrounding key candidates such as Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan in Pithapuram and Nara Lokesh of TDP in Mangalagiri. Such speculative betting underscores the urgency for regulatory intervention to curb the proliferation of fake exit polls and their detrimental impact on the electoral process.

assembly seats and 18 MP seats. These misleading narratives not only misinform voters but also fuel illegal betting activities, especially in regions like Godavari and Krishna, known for their robust betting markets

encompassing diverse events from IPL matches to elections.

Political analysts highlight the high-stakes betting surrounding key candidates such as Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan in Pithapuram and Nara

Lokesh of TDP in Mangalagiri. Such speculative betting underscores the urgency for regulatory intervention to curb the proliferation of fake exit polls and their detrimental impact on the electoral process. As the spectre of fake exit polls looms large over Andhra Pradesh, stakeholders stress the imperative for stringent enforcement measures to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and ensure that voters are not misled by misinformation propagated through social media channels.

SIT may submit...

Continued from Page 1

The officials assured the EC that the situation would be brought under control. DGP Harish Kumar Gupta subsequently established the SIT under senior IPS officer Vineet Brijlal to investigate the statewide arson.

The 13-member team is collaborating with clues networks and checking the FIRs from the affected areas, with additional FIRs being filed as needed. Brijlal expressed confidence that significant progress would be made by Sunday.

The SIT, headed by IG Vineet Brijlal, has been investigating since Friday night, deploying teams to Palnadu, Anantapur, and Tirupati districts. They are focusing on incidents in Tadipatri, Macherla, Gurazala, Narasaraopet, Sattenapalli, and Tirupati.

Police officers implicated in the violence are also under investigation. FIRs related to the violence are being processed promptly. Suspended SP Bindu Madhav is currently being questioned and has met with SIT chief Vineet Brijlal. The investigation includes the actions of TDP leaders in the Palnadu district and incidents in Gurazala, Macherla, Narasaraopet, and Sattenapalli.

Criticism mounts over CM's foreign tour amid post-poll violence

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the wake of escalating tensions following the recent elections in Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's overseas trip has sparked widespread criticism. Jai Bharat National Party President JD Lakshminarayana has emerged as a vocal critic, voicing concerns over the timing and implications of the Chief Minister's visit to the United Kingdom just two days ago. Speaking to the media in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Lakshminarayana condemned the spate of violent incidents and clashes unfolding across the state in the aftermath of the elections. He vehemently protested the absence of Chief Minister Jagan during such critical moments, asserting that it is incumbent upon the



state's leadership to be present amidst such turmoil to ensure peace and security.

Lakshminarayana expressed dismay over the apparent absence of cabinet ministers during the crisis, lamenting the lack of visible leadership in quelling the escalating tensions between rival factions. He pointed out the failure of

authorities to effectively enforce Section 144 during polling, citing televised footage of brazen acts of violence. The Jai Bharat National Party President criticized the inability of party leaders to rein in their supporters and demanded swift action against those involved in perpetrating violence.

He decried the influence of money in elections, accusing political parties of reckless spending and emphasizing the need for strict enforcement of the law.

As the state braces for the election counting scheduled for June 4th, Lakshminarayana urged authorities to take necessary precautions to maintain law and order. He called for a thorough investigation by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the incidents of riots, urging prompt submission of a report to the Election Commission. Amidst mounting concerns over the deteriorating situation in Andhra Pradesh, Lakshminarayana's remarks underscore the urgent need for effective governance and swift action to restore peace and stability in the region.

Iran President's chopper...

Continued from Page 1

Later, state TV put it farther east near the village of Uzi, but details remained contradictory.

Traveling with Raisi were Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, the governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province and other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. One local government official used the word "crash" to describe the incident, but he acknowledged to an Iranian newspaper that he had yet to reach the site himself.

Neither IRNA nor state TV offered any information on Raisi's condition in the hours afterward. However, hard-liners urged the public to pray for him. State TV later aired images of the faithful praying at Imam Reza Shrine in the city of Mashhad, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, as well as in Qom and other locations across the country.

"The esteemed president and company were on their way back aboard some helicopters and one of the helicopters was forced to make a hard landing due to the bad weather and fog," Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in comments aired on state TV. "Various rescue teams are on their way to the region but because of the poor weather and fog, it might take time for them to reach the helicopter."

He added: "The region is a bit (rugged) and it's difficult to make contact. We are waiting for rescue teams to reach the land-

ing site and give us more information." Rescuers were attempting to reach the site, state TV said, but had been hampered by poor weather conditions. There had been heavy rain and fog reported with some wind. IRNA called the area a "forest" and the region is known to be mountainous as well. State TV aired images of SUVs racing through a wooded area.

A rescue helicopter tried to reach the area where authorities believe Raisi's helicopter was, but it couldn't land due to the heavy mist, emergency services spokesman Babak Yektaparast told IRNA.

Raisi had been on the border with Azerbaijan early Sunday to inaugurate a dam with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

The dam is the third one that the two nations built on the Aras River. The visit came despite chilly relations between the two nations, including over a gun attack on Azerbaijan's Embassy in Tehran in 2023, and Azerbaijan's diplomatic relations with Israel, which Iran's Shiite theocracy views as its main enemy in the region.

Iran flies a variety of helicopters in the country, but international sanctions make it difficult to obtain parts for them. Its military air fleet also largely dates back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Raisi, 63, is a hard-liner who formerly led the country's judiciary. He is viewed as a protégé of Khamenei and some analysts have suggested he could replace the 85-year-old leader after his death or res-

ignation from the role. Raisi won Iran's 2021 presidential election, a vote that saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Raisi is sanctioned by the U.S. in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

Under Raisi, Iran now enriches uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and hampers international inspections. Iran has armed Russia in its war on Ukraine, as well as launched a massive drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It also has continued arming proxy groups in the Middle East, like Yemen's Houthis rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, mass protests in the country have raged for years. The most recent involved the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been earlier detained over allegedly not wearing a hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities. The months-long security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained.

In March, a United Nations investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

The U.S. State Department said it was "closely following reports of a possible hard landing of a helicopter in Iran carrying the Iranian president and foreign minister."

It added: "We have no further comment at this time."

Meritorious tribal students struggle to secure Inter seats

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

Tribal students in Manyam districts are facing formidable hurdles in accessing intermediate education despite achieving commendable scores in their Class X examinations. The scarcity of seats in Gurukulam Residential Junior Colleges under Parvathipuram and Seethampet ITDAs compounds the issue, disproportionately affecting tribal students.

This academic year, more than 3,000 tribal students showcased outstanding performance in their 10th standard exams within the two ITDAs, with many surpassing the 550-mark threshold. Regrettably, there are merely eight Gurukula Residential Junior Colleges in the district, with an anticipated intake capacity of 2,060 students.

Consequently, only half of the eligible students, totaling 1,030, secured seats this year.

The predicament exacerbates as these colleges offer limited seats, particularly in the coveted MPC and BPC departments, amounting to only 640 students. Consequently, many students are compelled to opt for the CEC group due to seat shortages. Moreover, the allocation of a mere 40 seats in Peddamadi Junior College under Seethampet ITDA and an additional 40 in Bhadrigrari and P Konavalasa College under Parvathipuram ITDA exacerbates the issue, necessitating arduous commutes for tribal students.

Amidst this backdrop, the notification for admissions to Inter this year has been released by Gurukula Residential Junior

Colleges, with counseling scheduled for May 22. However, with over 3,000 tribal students potentially vying for seats and limited options available, the specter of many being left without a placement looms large. Addressing this pressing concern, Nagabhushanam, former convener principal of Gurukul Residential Junior Colleges in Seethampet, stressed the imperative for immediate action, advocating not only for an increase in existing seats but also for the establishment of new gurukuls.

Responding to the issue, D Manjulaveena, Director of Intermediate Education, acknowledged the seat shortage and assured that project officers are actively investigating solutions, reiterating their commitment to serving tribal students to the fullest extent

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha

Tithi: Dwadashi: May 19 01:50 PM to May 20 03:59 PM

Trayodashi: May 20 03:59 PM to May 21 05:39 PM

Nakshatram:

Chitra: May 20 03:16 AM to May 21 05:46 AM

Rahukalam: 7:23 AM to 8:59 AM

Yamagandam: 10:36 AM to 12:12 PM

Variyam: 12:06 PM to 01:52 PM

Gulika: 1:49 PM to 3:25 PM

Amritakalam: 10:42 PM to 12:28 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:46 AM to 12:38 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 36°

Humidity: 67%

Sunrise: 5:35 AM

Sunset: 6:33 PM

Updated: May 19, 2024 5:00 PM

Lengthy code...

Continued from Page 1

During the election code the government cannot take any decisions and for everything it has to take the permission from the Election Commission. Not giving nod by the Election Commission for holding the Cabinet meeting for the Telangana government after polling was over attracted the criticism and led to debate on the lengthy election code. Moreover, during the election code, the Election Commission is making the transfers of bureaucrats from DGP to sub-inspector and the Chief Secretary to MRO. The people and the political parties are feeling that the President's rule is better than the Election Commission 'rule'.

In Andhra Pradesh the actions of the Election Commission has become 'over action', according to political circles. The lengthy election code is hampering the administration and the interests of the people, the bureaucrats feel.

They are questioning as to where is the need for code of conduct after the polling is over. There was a 20 days gap between the poll and the announcement of the results. In these 20 days also the State government cannot take any decision and the Election Commission rule will continue. The purpose of the election code is not to get undue advantage by the ruling party in the elections, and not to influence the people by the ruling parties in the elections. When the election is over how the government decisions will harm the interests of the opposition parties, the political circles question.

Naidu...

Continued from Page 1

A special court for CBI cases granted Jagan Mohan Reddy permission for his foreign tour. He is expected to return to Andhra Pradesh on June 1, three days before the vote counting on June 4.

N Chandrababu Naidu left for the US late on Sunday. He was accompanied by his wife Bhuvaneshwari, son Nara Lokesh, daughter-in-law Brahmani, and grandson Devansh. This six-day visit will see Naidu returning well before the vote counting on June 4.

Huge bettings on poll outcomes in combined Krishna district

DASARI SRINIVASA RAO
■ VIJAYAWADA

Post-election betting is brisk in the erstwhile Krishna district, focusing on winning candidates, total seats, and government formation.

Leaders and cadres of the ruling YSRCP, opposition TDP, and its alliance parties Jana Sena Party (JSP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are showing interest in these bets, which range from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1 crore.

The Assembly constituencies of Gannavaram and Gudivada, crucial and prestigious segments, are drawing most of the betting interest. Incumbent MLA Dr Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan is aiming for a third consecutive win from Gannavaram. Previously a TDP stronghold, Vamsi secured his earlier wins on a TDP ticket but contested this time on a YSRCP ticket. His main rival, Yarlagadda Venkata Rao, who previously ran for YSRCP, is now contesting on a TDP ticket, making this constituency a focal point of statewide debate.

Similarly, former minister and



Punters indicate that the majority of bets focus on government formation. Both YSRCP and TDP leaders are optimistic about winning more than 135 to 150 MLA seats and are betting on these numbers, including district-wise winning MLA seats.

sitting MLA Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao, alias Nani, is confident of securing his fifth consecutive win in Gudivada. Contesting since 2004, Nani won twice on a TDP ticket and twice on a YSRCP ticket. This time, he faces NRI Venigandla Ramu, contesting on a TDP ticket.

Bettors are heavily focusing on these two assembly segments, wagering lakhs of rupees. High betting activity is also reported in Vijayawada Central, East, and West constituencies, as well as in Penamaluru, Machilipatnam, and other constituencies.

An intriguing betting scenario is unfolding in Vijayawada, where brothers Kesineni Srinivas, alias Nani (YSRCP), and Kesineni Sivanath, alias Chinni (TDP), are contesting for the Vijayawada Lok Sabha seat. Supporters of both candidates are actively placing bets, confident of their candidate's victory.

Punters indicate that the majority of bets focus on government formation. Both YSRCP and TDP leaders are optimistic about winning more than 135 to 150 MLA seats and are betting on these numbers, including district-wise winning MLA seats.

Moreover, betting is prevalent on numerous candidates, down to the village level. Interestingly, major political party leaders are acting as betting agents, with others also placing significant amounts of money.

There are allegations against the police for not addressing the betting activities adequately. Some leaders reportedly collected around Rs 1 crore for bets. Despite these reports, police claim they have not received sufficient evidence to take action.

Elaborate steps for counting of votes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR and Krishna district authorities have started making elaborate arrangements for the counting of votes. As part of the ongoing general elections, the polling was held for 25 Lok Sabha and 175 Assembly constituencies in Andhra Pradesh on May 13.

The erstwhile Krishna district comprises two Lok Sabha segments -- Vijayawada and Machilipatnam. Tiruvuru (SC), Mylavaram, Nandigama (SC), Jaggayyapet, Vijayawada East, West and Central Assembly constituencies come under Vijayawada Lok Sabha segment. Penamaluru, Pamarru (SC), Gudivada, Machilipatnam, Pedana, Gannavaram, and Avaniigadda Assembly segments come under Machilipatnam.

The EVMs from Vijayawada Lok Sabha segment and all seven Assembly constituencies are stored at the Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges at Jupudi of Ibrahimpatnam near Vijayawada. Those from Machilipatnam Lok Sabha and seven Assembly constituencies are stored at Krishna University in Machilipatnam.

Under the supervision of NTR District Election Officer (DEO) Dr S Dilli Rao and Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna, Returning



NTR District Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna and Joint Collector Dr Sampath Kumar inspecting the security arrangements at Nova Engineering College at Jupudi

Officers are making necessary arrangements for the counting of votes. The NTR district administration is making security arrangements. A three-tier security system has been arranged in the strong rooms. Every day, one Returning Officer and an ACP-level police officer are deployed to supervise the security and other arrangements.

The authorities have constructed temporary walls around the counting centres at

All required materials have reached counting centres; tables will be arranged within three days

Nimra and Nova colleges. No one will be allowed without proper identity cards. A check-post has been set up for the purpose at a half-kilometre distance from the colleges. According to the sources, 14 counting tables will be arranged for each Assembly constituency and the Parliament constituency. The counting tables have been sent to the Nova and Nimra colleges, and after three days tables will be formed as per the

guidelines of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Meanwhile, Krishna District Collector DK Balaji conducted a crucial meeting in view of the vote counting. Under his supervision, the authorities shifted all necessary materials such as computers, printers, Xerox machines, writing pads, pens, pencils, calculators etc. to the strong room as well as the counting centre at Krishna University.

Also, he convened a meeting with all ROs and gave several instructions to them. After completing every round, the results will be displayed in the counting hall, communication and media rooms.



NTR Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna paying homage to ASI Ramana Rao at Patamata in Vijayawada on Sunday

ASI succumbs to injuries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police (ASI-898) NVV Ramana Rao, who was severely injured in a road accident on Saturday night, died while undergoing treatment at a hospital here on Sunday. He was injured while on duty at the EVM strong rooms at Jupudi of Ibrahimpatnam mandal in NTR district. The road accident occurred near the strong room.

Ramana Rao's body was brought to his house at Patamata in the city. NTR Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna and other police officials paid tributes to the officer. The

Commissioner met the family members and conveyed condolences.

He said that the department would support ASI Ramana Rao's family and assist them in getting all benefits from the State government. The last rites were performed with police honours.

Deputy Police Commissioner S Harikrishna, Special Branch ADCT P Kanaka Raju, CCS ACP Sravanthi Roy, AR ACP D Prasad, Inspectors M Satyanarayana, Mohan Reddy, Prasad Kumar, Lakshmi Narayana, NTR District Police Officers Association president M Somaiah and others were present.

Vizag paediatric super specialty hospital project hits admin roadblock

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The State government's initiative to establish a specialized paediatric super specialty hospital in Visakhapatnam has encountered roadblocks, sparking concerns about the project's timeline. Initial plans involved elevating the existing Rani Chandramani Devi Hospital (RCD Hospital) to a comprehensive paediatric facility. This proposal met with initial optimism, aimed to provide advanced medical care to children in the district. However, progress on this front has stalled since its introduction four years ago.

The lack of advancement has raised questions regarding the government's commitment to bolstering healthcare infrastructure. Currently, the Ranichandramani Devi



Hospital in Pedawaltair caters to a portion of paediatric cases, prompting officials to advocate for its evolution into a fully equipped paediatric hospital. The proposal, which requires a substantial budget of Rs 197 crores, received a directive from the Chief Minister himself to establish such facilities. However, despite undergoing multiple reviews, progress remains sluggish, and the inertia persists.

complemented by expert medical personnel.

Nevertheless, bureaucratic reshuffles and administrative impediments have cast a shadow over the fate of these proposals. Speculations are rife regarding the impact of the departure of a key official crucial to the hospital's upgrade and the absence of tangible progress, potentially dooming the paediatric hospital project to obscurity.

As citizens eagerly anticipate concrete actions from the authorities, lingering questions persist regarding the government's prioritization of public health and its efficacy in materializing promises into tangible outcomes, particularly in vital sectors like paediatric healthcare. Stay tuned for further developments on this evolving narrative.

Devotees throng Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Devotees thronged Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam at Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Sunday to have darshan of the goddess.

Temple authorities had made elaborate arrangements and the priests organised 'Suryopasana Seva' on the premises of the temple. Special Archana and pujas

were performed. Nitya Arjitha Sevas, Sri Ammavari Khadga Malarchana, Laksha Kumkuma Archana, Sri Chakra Navaavarararchana, Chandri Homam, Shanti Kalyanam and other sevas continued.

Meanwhile, Endowment Department Commissioner S Satyanarayana visited the temple and had darshan. The temple authorities welcomed the Commissioner.



Devotees waiting in queue at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, Indrakeeladri, in Vijayawada on Sunday



Harshavardhan Raju takes charge as Tirupati SP

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Harshavardhan Raju took charge as district Superintendent of Tirupati on Sunday.

Talking to the media on the occasion, he said that he was posted as SP of Tirupati district in the wake of violence incidents after the polling. He said that he would take the assignment as a challenge and strive hard to maintain the law and order efficiently in the district.

The SP said that he would review with the senior officials the prevailing law and order situation. After discussing with the officials, he would try to grasp the law and order situation prevailing in the district, he added. "All needed steps will be taken to ensure that no untoward incident takes place across the district during the counting of votes day, June 4. I will lay special focus on the vulnerable areas and augment security there. I will not yield to the pressure of any political leaders," the SP made it clear and warned of stringent action if anybody was involved in creating a law and order problem.

COMMENDABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Andhra bags 13 medals in National Skill Competitions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh clinched 13 medals, including one gold and one bronze, alongside 11 medals of excellence at the India Skill Competitions held in Delhi from May 15 to 19, marking a commendable achievement on the road to the World Skill Competitions slated for Lyon, France in 2024.

Engaging in a total of 37 skill trades, Andhra Pradesh fielded 42 members who showcased their prowess, resulting in a remarkable haul of 13 medals. The World Skills Competition, held biennially, stands as the pinnacle of the global skills movement, striving to enhance the world through the mastery of skills. In a spirited contest featuring

approximately 900 candidates across 60 trades, Andhra Pradesh shone with 42 candidates competing in 37 trades. Thanks to the rigorous training provided by APSSDC, our participants secured the top spot in Cosmetic Design with a gold, while also bagging a bronze in Mechanical CAD, alongside 11 other trades where they earned medallions of excellence.



Mango farmers in Vizianagaram hit by adverse weather, pests

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

The prevailing adverse weather conditions have hit mango farmers hard in Vizianagaram district, with expectations of significant losses this season. The yield of mangoes, already affected by heavy fog in January, February, and March and subsequent pest attacks, has now been further damaged by untimely rains.

Mango, one of the top five cultivated crops in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, is grown on nearly 30,000 hectares in Vizianagaram district. Popular varieties such as Suvarna Rekha, Banginapalli, Cherukurasalu, Paria, and Panukulu are among those cultivated here. Vizianagaram is also known for exporting mangoes to New Delhi, West Bengal, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh via rail and road networks.

For the past three years, mango cultivation in Vizianagaram has suffered due



to adverse weather conditions. This year, heavy fog and dew in the early months damaged crops at flowering and pod stages. Recently, hundreds of hectares in Bondapalli, Gajapathinagaram, Mentada, Gurla, Garividi, Cheepurupalli, and Nellimarla have been further affected by untimely rains.

"We are spending at least Rs 50,000 to Rs 60,000 per hectare on watering, gardening, and pesticides," said Sriramulu, a

mango farmer from Bondapalli Mandal. "Under normal conditions, the yield is between 20 to 25 tonnes per hectare. However, over 30 per cent of the yield was damaged by fog, dew, and pest attacks. Now the untimely rains have caused even more damage to the crop." The situation has not only made the "king of fruits" a bitter experience for the farmers but has also driven up prices, making mangoes dearer for consumers this season.

Negligence jeopardises port city's water supply

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Meghadri Gedda Reservoir, a critical source of potable water for Visakhapatnam, faces a severe challenge due to insufficient maintenance funding over several years. This neglect has resulted in a concerning decline in the reservoir's storage capacity, potentially jeopardizing the city's water supply.

Initially constructed for agricultural and industrial purposes, the Meghadri Gedda Reservoir currently plays a vital role in fulfilling Visakhapatnam's drinking water needs, contributing

approximately 12 million gallons daily. With a maximum storage capacity of 61 feet and a minimum operational level of 44 feet, the current water level of 44.6 feet underscores the urgency of the situation.

The primary cause of this predicament is the lack of regular desilting, a process that removes sediment accumulation. During the monsoon season, the reservoir fills rapidly, necessitating the premature release of water to prevent flooding in downstream areas. This practice, typically initiated when the level reaches 57 feet, has significantly reduced the reservoir's effective storage



capacity over the years.

Despite being operational for over five decades, the reservoir has not undergone any major desilting work. A survey conducted nearly a decade ago estimated the cost to be around Rs. 50 crores. The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal

Corporation (GVMC), responsible for allocating the necessary funds, has consistently failed to do so, leading to a steady decrease in water levels each year. While the Irrigation Department holds primary responsibility for the reservoir's maintenance, the

GVMC's failure to allocate even basic funding has caused significant deterioration. Essential projects such as embankment reinforcement, stone refilling, and spillway gate repairs have been stalled for months due to the GVMC's inaction. This neglect not only results in water wastage but also threatens the city's long-term water security.

Officials from the Water Drainage Department attribute this neglect to the lack of prioritization by GVMC officials and policymakers regarding the city's water needs. They warn that unrepaired spillway gates could necessitate uncon-

trolled water releases during heavy rains, further compromising the reservoir's structural integrity. Immediate and decisive action is required from the GVMC and relevant authorities to address this crisis.

Allocating the necessary funds for desilting and repairing the spillway gates is paramount to restoring the Meghadri Gedda Reservoir's capacity and guaranteeing a reliable water supply for Visakhapatnam. Delaying action could lead to a severe water shortage in the city, jeopardizing the sustainability of its water resources.

Retired defence officer duped of Rs 14.42 L in a trading fraud

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 60-year-old Jeedimetla retired Defence Officer (IAF) was cheated into a trading fraud of Rs 14,42,970, resulting in the loss of his lifetime investments, including the loan he had taken from various sources.

After seeing an advertisement on the Facebook, the victim joined on Feb 26, 2024, in a WhatsApp group named 'V2-Avinash bulls united'. This group was led by Avinash Agrawal and he was introduced to Anjana Kapoor to contact.

Anjana claimed to be an analyst assistant to Avinash Agrawal, helping individuals invest in the Indian stock market using a Goldman Sachs primary institutional account. She explained that she could assist in making money through trading activities such as block trading, upper circuit stocks, and IPO allotments.

The instructed him to download a trading app called 'ZOOSLI' and on March 20, 2024, he initially added a total of Rs 30,000 to the trading app. She guided him through the trading process within the group, claiming substantial profits with no commission charges and the ability to withdraw funds daily.

The victim withdrew Rs 43,000 as per Anjana's guidance. He continued to engage in similar transactions as guided by Anjana on various dates, with all transactions occurring from his bank account to different accounts provided by them, but later, withdrawal requests were denied.

He was encouraged to raise more funds to fully subscribe to the IPO for better profits. Believing in this advice, he continued adding funds to the app.

Peddireddy flays TDP's campaign against Jagan's foreign tour

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Minister for Energy, Forests and Environment Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy came down heavily on the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) for its misleading posts on social media on Jagan Mohan Reddy's foreign tour.

The Minister also took strong exception to the posts of TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh alleging that Peddireddy was shifting money to a foreign country.

"If Jagan Mohan Reddy goes on a foreign visit, it is depicted as him fleeing the country. Now Chandrababu Naidu is also going to a foreign country but the TDP is claiming that he is going for medical tests," he ridiculed.

Talking to the media here on Sunday, Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy condemned the TDP fallacious campaign that Jagan Mohan Reddy had fled to foreign countries. The Minister warned the TDP leaders to restrain themselves from making such comments against Jagan Mohan Reddy and cautioned that they would come to the streets to oppose such malicious comments unless they stop it.

"Nara Lokesh is making



"Nara Lokesh is making absurd comments against me, describing me as 'Papala Peddireddy'. Your (Lokesh) father is 'Papala Chandrababu' as he was responsible for the deaths of Vangaveeti Ranga and Pingali Dasaratharam," the Minister lashed out.

absurd comments against me, describing me as 'Papala Peddireddy'. Your (Lokesh) father is 'Papala Chandrababu' as he was responsible for the deaths of Vangaveeti Ranga and Pingali Dasaratharam," the Minister lashed out.

People of the state know

whether Peddireddy is a 'Papala Peddireddy' or 'Manchireddy'. "If you (Lokesh) continue posting misleading posts, we will respond in the same manner," he warned.

Nara Lokesh tweeted that Peddireddy is shifting proper-

ties including money and diamonds to foreign countries. "We have taken up projects in South Africa. We send vehicles to that country. The customs in both countries thoroughly check the material and vehicles before approving for shipment. Cash can not be shifted to foreign countries by placing it in vehicles as alleged by Lokesh. Only stupid persons like Lokesh, send money to foreign countries concealing in vehicles," Peddireddy slammed.

The Minister alleged that the TDP leaders shifted money in chartered flights to Singapore and Dubai. Peddireddy also attacked former Minister Deiveneni Umamaheswara Rao accusing him of plundering money when he was the irrigation minister. He also questioned Deiveneni about why he was denied a ticket to contest in the elections by Naidu, even though he was the Minister for five years.

Peddireddy made it clear that they have Ferro Silica and Ferro Manganese projects in South Africa. They recently established the Swarna Metla project in South Africa and for the project, they were dispatching vehicles from Mumbai port as vehicles are scarce in the country.

All steps will be taken to maintain L & O on counting day: SP

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR



Superintendent of Police Gowthami Shali has made it clear that all required steps will be taken to maintain law and order on the counting day, June 4. Talking to the media here on Sunday, she said that she gives top priority to maintaining law and order in the district. "Elaborate security will be provided to ensure that no untoward incident will take place on the counting day. I will discuss deploying police personnel to the vulnerable areas with the officials," she said.

Gowthami Shali took charge as SP of the district a few days ago. She said that required security was provided at various places to check violence incidents. The problematic areas were identified and extra precautions would be taken at the places, she added.

The SP said that appropriate action would be taken against rowdy sheeters and a strict vigil would be laid on their movements. Special focus is being laid on the vulnerable villages, she said. The SP warned of taking stringent action against those who resort to violent incidents during the counting of votes.

Complete arrangements for counting of votes, officials told

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM



As the day for counting of votes is fast approaching, the official machinery is making massive arrangements for counting votes.

The counting of votes will be taken up in the counting centres on June 4. The counting will be held on the campuses of Vishnu Engineering College and SRKR Engineering College. The Collector and SP visited the EVM strong rooms and the security. "The counting of votes will begin at 8 am on June 4. The results of each round will be displayed on the board," West Godavari Collector Sumit Kumar made it clear.

In a statement here on Sunday, Collector Sumit Kumar directed the officials to complete the barricading at the counting centres and install the CCTVs. "Elaborate security arrangements should be made within 100 metres of the counting centres. Rainproof tents should be erected," the Collector told the officials.

A large number of activists of political parties may throng to the counting centres on the counting day and the police should make arrangements to regulate the influx of activists to the counting centres, the Collector ordered the officials. He also asked the officials not

to allow heavy vehicles near the counting centres.

"The persons who have authorized identity cards should only be allowed to enter the counting halls. No one should be allowed without identity cards. The permission into counting halls is strictly prohibited," the Collector stated.

Stating that the counting process will be taken up as per the ECI guidelines, the Collector said the counting process would be taken up in the counting halls which are set up near the EVM strong rooms. Initially, the counting of postal ballots would be taken up at specially arranged tables, he added.

The Collector further said that 14 tables would be set up for each constituency in the counting centre and staff would be randomly allocated to each table, stating that the counter supervisors, micro observers and counter assistants would be appointed for each counting centre.

Identity cards will be issued to all officials as well as the agents of the respective political parties to supervise the counting process, the Collector said, adding that those who enter the counting centre will not be allowed to take mobile phones into the counting centre and they should deposit the mobile phones and take a receipt for the same.

'Whitathon Run' to raise funds for Retinoblastoma treatment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The sixth edition of 'Whitathon Run' was held on Sunday, to raise awareness on the early detection of Retinoblastoma (eye cancer) in children and also funds for its treatment by LV Prasad Eye Institute on Sunday.

Dr Anusua Ganguly, Campus head, flagged off the run at the Kode Venkatadri Chowdary

Campus in two categories -- 5K and a 3K. Governor Abdul Nazeer unveiled the T-shirt for the third edition of the Whitathon Walk.

The funds raised from the Whitathon Run are utilised to treat underprivileged children suffering from Retinoblastoma at no cost, and to support future research. This year, over 300 participants joined the cause. Retinoblastoma is a rare

eye cancer that primarily affects children under three years of age. Over the past decade, LVPEI has treated more than 2,500 patients, about 60-65 per cent of them free of cost. Annually, the institute treats 150 to 200 new cases of Retinoblastoma, with 40 per cent of them in the later stages and 10 per cent in the very late stage, Dr Anusua Ganguly said.



Uncertainty looms over Amaravati realty boom

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The real estate market in Amaravati and its surrounding areas remains stagnant, with minimal land transactions occurring before or after the elections. Capital farmers are holding off on buying or selling land, awaiting the outcome of the general elections. Despite some landowners sensing an increase in land prices over time, actual registrations are scarce. The anticipated economic resurgence witnessed during 2015-16 is nowhere in sight, even in the event of a change in government.

The opposition alliance comprising TDP, BJP, and JSP has made the capital issue a focal point of their campaign, promising to address the concerns of Amaravati's residents if elected. However, scepticism prevails among landowners



There are doubts regarding the alliance's ability to prioritise capital construction amid competing demands. The TDP alliance has pledged numerous welfare schemes, placing a substantial financial burden on the government from Day One. Moreover, the projected cost of capital construction has escalated significantly since 2015, making it seemingly unattainable at present.

who participated in the land pooling initiative and regional investors. They are uncertain about the alliance's ability to form a government and fulfil its promises, preferring to await the election results on June 4. Some residents of the capital region believe that even if the

alliance comes to power, reviving capital construction will be a formidable challenge. Neglect over the past five years has led to poor maintenance, necessitating significant expenditure to clear vegetation and prepare the site for construction.

There are doubts regarding

the alliance's ability to prioritise capital construction amid competing demands. The TDP alliance has pledged numerous welfare schemes, placing a substantial financial burden on the government from Day One. Moreover, the projected cost of capital construction has escalat-

ed significantly since 2015, making it seemingly unattainable at present.

Ramakrishna, a real estate businessman from Guntur, expressed confidence that a return to power by Chandrababu Naidu would lead to the construction of a world-class capital. However, residents of Amaravati and Guntur question whether the alliance, lacking support from the BJP at the Centre, can deliver on ambitious promises like the 'Super 6' without federal backing.

Former NAREDCO general secretary, Mallikarjun, suggests that while land transactions are currently sluggish, they are expected to rebound once the alliance forms a government. Many investors are adopting a wait-and-watch approach, as their funds remain tied up, and the previous economic boom remains elusive for now.

CRIME BEAT

Two persons killed as RTC bus rams stationary lorry

PNS ■ NELLORE

Two persons were killed and two others were injured when an APSRTC bus rammed a stationary lorry at Damaramadugu village in Buchireddypalem mandal on Sunday.

Police said that the RTC bus was going to Nellore from Kanigiri. It rammed a lorry killing Mariyamma (46) and Vemavarapu David (50). Police said that the tyre of



the lorry got punctured and the lorry was stopped on the roadside to carry out required

repairs. The speeding RTC bus rammed the stationary lorry resulting in the left-side

front portion of the RTC bus being badly damaged.

The two deceased were travelling in the bus and sitting in the front row. As many as 47 passengers were travelling in the ill-fated bus when the mishap took place. The two injured persons were admitted to the GGH in Nellore where the condition of them is said to be critical. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

35 RTC bus passengers have a miraculous escape

PNS ■ GUNTUR

As many as 35 bus passengers had a miraculous escape as the APSRTC bus rammed a culvert and came to a halt precariously at Chinakakani on Sunday.

The Vijayawada bound RTC bus mounted the road divider and later rammed the culvert and then came to a halt. All the 35 passengers travelling in the bus and also the bus driver had a miraculous escape.

If the bus had gone a few meters forward, it would have fallen into the drain. The RTC officials began an inquiry into the accident.



Bodies of 3 women found floating in lake

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Three bodies of women were found floating on a lake at Nagara Vanam near here on Sunday.

The three bodies of women were fished out from the lake. Two bodies were found a few meters away from the shore and another body was found near to the shore. Kurnool range DIG CH Vijay Rao, SP Krishnakanth and other police officials visited the lake.

Talking to the media, SP

Krishnakanth said that three bodies of women were retrieved from the lake. The identity of the three women is yet to be established. Inquiry is being carried out in the surrounding villages about the missing women, the SP said.

The police began an investigation to ascertain whether the three women were murdered and their bodies were dumped in the lake or it was a case of suicide. The bodies were shifted to the Government Hospital for post-mortem.



Govindaraja Swamy takes out celestial ride

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

On the fourth morning of the Brahmotsavam, deity Sri Govindaraja Swamy, along with Sridevi and Bhudevi, were taken out on a celestial ride on the elegant 'Kalpavriksha Vahanam'.

It is believed that the deities who glided along the Mada streets on the celestial vehicle would bless the devotees.

On Monday evening, 'Garuda Vahanam' will be observed.

Both the Tirumala seers, Agama advisors, DyEO Shanti and others were present on the occasion.



Patient suffering from Follicular Lymphoma successfully treated

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Follicular Lymphoma Stage IV in a 62-year-old male patient was successfully treated by the doctors of the American Oncology Institute (AOI) located in Kanuru, Vijayawada.

The patient's journey began with complaints of weight loss and debilitating backache persisting over six months. Initially evaluated in other hospitals, he was diagnosed with multiple large abdominal lymph nodes and underwent treatment under tuberculosis protocols. However, due to persistent symptoms, the patient sought re-evaluation at AOI, Vijayawada, under the care of Dr Sai Krishna Kolluru.

Dr Kolluru's thorough examination and biopsy confirmed the diagnosis of fourth stage Follicular Lymphoma with bulky lymph nodes and bone involvement. It's a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma in a relatively advanced stage that has spread not just in one area anymore but has moved to other parts like the bone marrow or organs such as the liver, spleen, or lungs.

With AOI's multidisciplinary approach and advanced treatment modalities, the patient underwent six cycles of chemotherapy over six months. Mahendra Reddy, Regional Chief Operating Officer (RCOO) of AOI, said: "The successful management of this complex case highlights AOI's steadfast commitment to delivering top-notch cancer care. With cutting-edge technology and a patient-centered approach, AOI strives to redefine the standards of oncological care, offering hope and healing to those battling cancer."

Eatala accuses govt of collecting 'RR tax'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP senior leader and Malkajgiri Lok Sabha constituency BJP candidate Eatala Rajender on Sunday alleged that the Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is charging Rs 75 per sq ft for building permission.

Rajender alleged that the assurances given by the Chief Minister are unimplementable. He warned that the people would teach a lesson if the Congress government fulfilled promises given to people ahead of the Assembly elections. He expressed the opinion that the idea of revision of land value was not right.

While addressing the media at Nalgonda on Sunday as part of Graduate MLC by-poll on behalf of BJP candidate G Premender Reddy, Rajender alleged that there is growing disenchantment with the government within a short time.

He alleged that the Congress leaders were thinking as to how to accumulate more wealth instead of focusing on boosting the government's revenue.

Rajender said, "It has been fixed to charge Rs 75 per sq ft for building permission in Hyderabad. It is like Right Royal Tax...It seems that the decision was made to pay money to three people. KCR also did the same and lost



BJP leader Eatala Rajender speaking to the media in Nalgonda on Sunday

power. Revanth Reddy is what you do. The time will be like this for the losers. Revanth Reddy has collected most of the money in the shortest period of time".

Rajender said that the Prime Minister and the Home Minister came here and said that RR tax is being collected in Telangana. "PM and HM have already warned them to be careful that they are looking at it in 360 degrees", he said.

Rajender alleged that the Congress party has been showing its true colours. There is no mention of promise of Rs 2,500 monthly aid for women. There is no mention of Rs.4000 pension. He said Revanth Reddy is swearing by gods as he thinks that people may not believe him. Bills are not being paid for the works done by the sarpanches and those who have done the contract work. There is a situation where bills would

not be sanctioned unless 10% bribes are paid. There is no work without money. It has been decided to charge everyone constructing buildings in Hyderabad Rs 75 per sq. ft. It is like the Right Royal Tax. It seems that the decision was made to pay three people. KCR also did the same and he lost power. The time will be like this for losers. Revanth has collected the most money in the shortest period. They seem to be competing to fill ten years of drought at once.

He alleged that the crops withered away, motors and transformers are burning out, but they are not paying attention to them. Bonus at the rate of Rs 500 for paddy was not paid. There is confidence that the youth and educated people would fully support the BJP candidate the MLC elections, he added.

INDIA CORNER

Newlywed couple dies by jumping in front of train

A newly married couple died here allegedly by jumping in front of a train as their families objected to their marriage, police said on Sunday. Laldhar Prasad, in-charge of Government Railway Police (GRP) post at the Bhadohi Railway Station said information was received this morning that the bodies of a young man and woman were found on the tracks. The deceased were identified by their family members as Jitendra Kumar Gautam (25) and Lalita Gautam (22), Prasad said. The couple's family members told the police that Jitendra and Lalita were neighbours in the Dalit Colony of the city's Jalalpur area. The duo were in a relationship for a year before they eloped from their homes about two months ago and got married in Delhi, the officer said. About fifteen days ago, Jitendra had returned home with Lalita and they started living with his family. However, both their families were not ready to accept the marriage.



Three terror associates detained under PSA in J-K

Three men alleged to be overground workers (OGWs) of terrorists were detained under the Public Safety Act (PSA) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. Terming the action necessary to maintain public order, police said the three men were assessed to be posing a significant threat to the safety and security of the state. Poonch and adjoining Rajouri district have witnessed some deadly terror attacks over the past two years, resulting in the killing of a number of security personnel and civilians. Poonch and Rajouri are part of the Anantnag parliamentary constituency which is going to polls in the sixth phase on May 25. The detainees were identified as Iftar Ahmed alias "Kaka", Khurshid Ahmed and Ghulam Abass, all residents of Gursai village of Mendhar, a police spokesperson said. "All three notorious criminals have demonstrated a pattern of behaviour, characterised by the adoption of various tactics, to spread terror and fear within the peace loving community."



Over 1,000 Mizoram policemen could not vote in LS polls

More than 1,000 policemen in Mizoram were unable to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha polls held on April 19, officials of the state election department said. These personnel were deployed in other states for poll duty several days before April 19, the day when the northeastern state voted, they added. Although arrangements were supposed to be made for the police personnel to vote at facilitation centres, no such provision was made as they had to leave the state before candidates could be finalised, officials said. Despite requests made to the Election Commission on two occasions to allow the police personnel to cast their votes, the appeals were allegedly rejected by the central poll panel, officials added. In response to this, the People's Conference (PC) party wrote to Election Commission principal secretary SB Joshi urging the poll panel to permit 1,047 policemen from Mizoram to exercise their franchise before the counting of votes.



BJP sees AAP as challenge, launched 'Operation Jhadoo' to crush us: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed the BJP has launched a campaign to crush AAP as the saffron party sees it as a challenge.

He also urged party workers and leaders to be braced for even bigger challenges.

AAP's march towards the BJP headquarters in the national capital was stopped midway as party leaders and workers raised slogans against the saffron party and hailed Kejriwal.

Kejriwal had on Saturday said that he and other AAP leaders would march to the BJP headquarters "so that the prime minister can send anyone he wishes to jail".

The BJP is saying it will send AAP MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj to jail, he had claimed, hours after his aide Bibhav Kumar was arrested in connection with the "assault" on party MP Swati Maliwal.

AAP later said in a statement, "We waited for half an hour on the road for the police to come and arrest us. But the BJP accepted its defeat."

Addressing party workers and leaders ahead of the march, Kejriwal said there will be bigger challenges ahead and asked the cadre to be prepared.

"The prime minister has made up his mind to completely destroy and crush the Aam Aadmi Party, for which he has



"The prime minister has made up his mind to completely destroy and crush the Aam Aadmi Party, for which he has started an operation called 'Operation Jhadoo', " Kejriwal said.

Kejriwal should stop theatrics, break silence on Maliwal assault case: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday said Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal should not indulge in theatrics and instead break his "silence" on the alleged assault on AAP MP Swati Maliwal by his aide Bibhav Kumar.

The reaction came after Kejriwal and his party workers and leaders held a massive protest near the BJP headquarters against Kumar's arrest in connection with the case. "Kejriwal should break his

silence instead of his 'dramebazi (theatrics)' and answer specific questions," Shehzad Poonawalla, the BJP's national spokesperson, said in a post on X.

The BJP leader asked Kejriwal if he had ordered the "attack" on Maliwal at the chief minister's residence and gave patronage to Kumar because he knows his "dark secrets".

"Why is the CCTV (camera) footage missing? Did Kejriwal help Bibhav to destroy/tamper evidence, including CCTV

(camera) footage from Shoshan Mahal (Kejriwal's residence)? Why release small clips and not full CCTV (camera) footage?" he said in the post.

"Why U turn from what Sanjay Singh said 96 hours ago and why victim-shaming now by AAP?" the BJP leader asked.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, party MP Manoj Tiwari, who is seeking reelection from North East Delhi, alleged that Kejriwal held the protest to save Kumar.

challenge for the BJP in the future. Aam Aadmi Party should be crushed here itself. Under this operation, big leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party will be arrested, they are being arrested," the Delhi chief minister claimed.

He also claimed that AAP's bank accounts would be frozen in the coming days. The Enforcement Directorate's (ED) lawyer has already given a statement in the court that AAP's bank accounts will be frozen immediately after the elections, he charged.

Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail in the excise policy case, claimed that AAP will be brought "to the road" by getting it to vacate its office.

The Delhi chief minister, however, asserted that AAP is "not a party of a few people, it is a party of the dreams of 140-crore people". People of this country have never seen such work in 75 years, he said while highlighting AAP governments' work in Delhi and Punjab.

"This ideology, a government of this kind that works, can also run with such honesty. This ideology is spreading very fast in the country.

And the dreams that the common man used to have about the government in this country, those dreams are now being realised," he said.

Kejriwal said AAP is now an idea and asked, "You can arrest its leaders but how will you arrest this idea?"

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Launching a blistering attack on the Congress, Union Home minister Amit Shah accused the opposition party on Sunday of "preserving" Article 370 of the Constitution, due to which terrorism increased in the country.

He also asserted that the BJP will never allow another division of the country.

Addressing a Lok Sabha poll rally in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh, Shah said, "The Congress and the Samajwadi Party preserved (sambhal ke rakha) Article 370 for 70 years, due to which terrorism increased across the country."

"You made Modi the prime minister for the second time and he abrogated Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019. In Kashmir, where the Army had to be taken along for hoisting the tricolour, at that same Lal Chowk (in Srinagar) now, the 'shobhayatra' of Lord Krishna is taken out."



accused the Congress of spreading the lie that if Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes to power for a third time, he will abolish reservation.

"Modiji has the majority for the last 10 years and he did not use it to abolish reservation. As long as the BJP has even one MP, no one can touch reservation," he said. Posing a question to the SP and Congress, Shah said, "I want to ask (SP chief) Akhilesh Yadav and (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi that your government was in power for 10 years, what did Uttar Pradesh get in that period? They gave Rs 4.9 lakh crore to Uttar Pradesh in 10 years, whereas Narendra Modi gave Rs 19.11 lakh crore."

Machhlishahr will go to polls in the sixth phase of the seven-phase Lok Sabha election on May 25.

Twelve candidates are in the fray from constituency and the main contest is between the BJP's B P Saroj and the SP's Priya Saroj.

Cong gov't will complete its term: HP CM Sukhu

PNS ■ BILASPUR/HAMIRPUR

The Congress government would complete its five-year term and Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur should stop "day-dreaming" about toppling the Himachal Pradesh government, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Sunday. "Jai Ram Thakur's new black coat that he gave for stitching following the BJP's attempts to topple the democratically-elected Congress government in the state would remain with the tailor," Sukhu said while addressing a public rally in Bilaspur district.

He asserted that the state's interests would not be compromised as he sought support for Congress candidate from Hamirpur Lok Sabha seat Satpal Raizada. Earlier, addressing a rally at Hamirpur, Sukhu had alleged that three legislators from the district -- two Congress rebels and an independent MLA -- "sold themselves".

He was referring to the MLAs who voted for the BJP's candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls held earlier this year.

The chief minister said that these legislators have "played with the sentiments of the people" of the district and the BJP will get a befitting reply on June 4, the day the results of the polls are announced.

Nation will become colony of foreign forces if INDIA bloc comes to power: Anurag Thakur

PNS ■ HAMIRPUR

The nation will be doomed and become a "colony of foreign forces" if Congress-led INDIA bloc is allowed to rule, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said on Sunday.

He addressed several election meetings in the Hamirpur parliamentary constituency.

"The nation will be doomed and become a colony of foreign forces who are busy destabilising the integrity and unity of India if Congress-led INDIA bloc is allowed to rule," he said.

He gave a clarion call to the people to join hands with the BJP, remain united under the party banner and vote for it on June 1.

He alleged the Congress

and INDIA bloc leaders are advocating the cause of terrorists and pro-Pakistani elements but their "nefarious desires" will not materialise as people know their "evil designs".

Accusing the Congress of adopting the policy of appeasement towards minority communities,

he alleged that nepotism and terrorism prevailed during the tenure of the UPA government.

Terming the ten-year term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "historic and unforgettable", he said that his work and name have left an "indelible mark" on the hearts and minds of people, adding that 'My Choice Modi' is echoing across the country.



Bihar govt school teacher jailed for saying 'nobody should vote for Modi' inside classroom

PNS ■ MUZAFFARPUR

A government school teacher in Bihar has been arrested and sent to jail for allegedly telling children in his class "nobody should vote for Modi", an official said on Sunday.

According to Muzaffarpur SSP Rakesh Kumar, the teacher has been booked for violating the election model code of conduct, after an FIR lodged by the district education officer.

DEO Ajay Kumar Singh said teacher Harendra Rajak's conduct was brought to his notice by family members of a number of students of the government secondary school at Amrakh in Kurhani block.

"A written complaint was submitted by the family members that children were being told by the teacher that nobody should vote for Modi since foodgrains unfit for



human consumption were being distributed under the free ration scheme", the DEO said.

He added, "a number of boys and girls from the class also confirmed that Rajak had been saying such things inside the classroom. Prima facie it was a violation of model code of conduct which forbids any government employee from trying to influence poll outcome by speaking for or against any political party. Hence, the FIR was lodged against the teacher for needful action".

EC asks city dwellers to turnout in higher numbers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On the eve of phase five of Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission on Sunday pointed out that Mumbai, Thane and Lucknow have shown apathy towards voting in the past and asked these city dwellers to turnout in higher numbers.

The poll authority noted that in the past these cities have "suffered" from urban apathy in voting.

"The Commission specially calls upon these city dwellers to erase the stigma by turning out in higher numbers," it said.

On May 3 too, while referring to voter turnout in phase two, the Commission had said it was "disappointed" with the turnout level in some metropolitan cities. The EC had last month

PHASE FIVE LS POLLS



assembled many metro Commissioners here to work out a strategy to fight urban apathy.

Urban and youth apathy is described as a phenomenon when young voters and those living in metros fail to turn up at polling stations on election day.

So far, the last four phases have registered a voter turnout of 66.95 per cent.

Around 45.1 crore electors have exercised their franchise in the last four phases. As in

February this year, the total number of voters stood at around 97 crore.

Polling for 23 states and union territories, and 379 seats has been completed so far.

The EC said 49 seats in eight states and union territories, including Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal will go for polls in phase five on Monday.

Besides Lok Sabha, 35 assembly constituencies in Odisha will also go to polls on Monday.

Around 9.47 lakh polling officials have been deployed across 94,732 polling stations.

Over 8.95 crore people, include 4.69 crore male; 4.26 crore female and 5409 third gender electors are eligible to vote

INDIA bloc govt will herald stable, predictable policymaking

Congress on stock market volatility

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid stock market volatility, the Congress on Sunday accused Home Minister Amit Shah of inciting "fear-mongering" and said an INDIA coalition government shall herald a new age of stable, predictable policymaking and overall prosperity.

The opposition party's assertion came after Home Minister Shah in an interview with a TV channel said the stock market shouldn't be linked with elections, but a stable government does help it

perform better.

He also suggested that the market will shoot up after June 4 as a result of the BJP and its allies sweeping the Lok Sabha elections. In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said there is no basis to the "fear-mongering" incited by the outgoing Home Minister, about the INDIA government in financial markets. The record of the Congress party in providing strong and inclusive economic growth speaks for itself, he said.



Audio books can stimulate a child's interest in reading: Ruskin Bond

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Audio books can inculcate story listening habits in children and gradually attract them to reading books, says legendary author Ruskin Bond who turned 90 Sunday.

To commemorate the day, audiobook platform Audible has brought out a keepsake edition with 25 of his popular stories. Titled "All Time Favourites for Children", the stories have been curated and selected by the author himself. The narration is by Anuj Datta.

Bond said audiobooks can be like oral storytelling and stimulate a child's interest in reading. "Sometimes a child is reluc-

tant to make the effort to start reading a book. If it's being read to them, either the book is on audio or somebody is reading from one, it helps to create interest. Once that interest develops, the young reader very often will go on to reading books on his or her own," Bond told PTI.

"I would call it a stimulus, a catalyst for the whole art of reading," he added.

Talking about his childhood, Bond said he began to read at a pretty young age.

"My father used to tell me stories mostly about history. I was an early reader but some kids are not. They come a bit late to books. So, audiobooks fit in very well there in their early



years," he said.

The stories in the new audiobook include "Goldfish Don't Bark", "Boy Scouts Forever", "The Black Cat", "Grandfather Fights an Ostrich", "A Bicycle Ride with Uncle Ken", "The Woman on Platform 8" and

"The Parrot Who Wouldn't Talk".

Bond had previously narrated many of his stories.

"A few years ago, Puffin Books brought out a whole series of my chapter books and these are short stories of mine that we split into chapters for easier reading. I went to Delhi and lent my voice for about 10 stories. Each one turned into an audiobook and I believe they're doing fairly well," he said.

On his latest venture, the Mussoorie-based author said, "I hope children would listen to it during their summer break. It excites me to know that many of my books and stories are accessible on Audible.in."

Muslims in Ayodhya say 'mandir-masjid' a non-issue, want development

PNS ■ AYODHYA

As Ayodhya gears up to vote for the first time after the Ram temple consecration, Muslim voters in the pilgrim town say "mandir-masjid" (temple-mosque) is not an issue for them and employment and development are their primary concerns.

Some, including Iqbal Ansari, who was a litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, give the BJP "due credit" for the development of Ayodhya while others feel much needs to be done to ensure that the gains percolate to all parts of the temple town.

"When elections come, political leaders start remembering God, irrespective of their party. But people want health and education facilities and security," Ansari told PTI.

"The BJP has done good work in Ayodhya and hence it should get the due credit. The BJP has an edge here. Though I do not have much interest in elections, I will definitely cast my vote on polling day," he said.

Ansari said workers of political parties have been coming to his house to seek his vote and



the BJP was the first to approach him.

Ansari had earlier said that the BJP brought an end to the Ram temple issue.

The 55-year-old found a mention in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at a poll rally in Haryana's Gohana on Saturday.

Hitting out at the Congress for giving the January 22 Ram temple consecration ceremony a miss, Modi had said, "They have so much hatred towards Lord Ram that they rejected the invitation (for consecration ceremony)."

Whereas Ansari, who fought against the Ram Mandir in court, attended the ceremony, the prime minister had said.

Ashfaq Hussain, a builder and government contractor associated with the BJP, asserted that Muslim women are with the party.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

An intricate puzzle

Kejriwal aide's arrest sparks AAP-BJP war of words amid Maliwal's assault allegations

The alleged assault case involving former Delhi Commission for Women chief and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal, in which she has named Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's PA Bibhav Kumar, keeps getting murky. The development came within days of Kejriwal's return to campaigning from Tihar Jail, where he had been incarcerated for his alleged role in the Delhi excise policy case. Now the arrest of Bibhav Kumar for the alleged assault has sparked a series of protests and political manoeuvres. The case centres around Maliwal who, interestingly, herself has been under scrutiny by the Anti-Corruption Bureau for alleged appointment irregularities in DCW. After first admitting to the assault, AAP now alleges that Maliwal was blackmailed with the fear of arrest in the case. Bibhav's arrest is linked to this ongoing investigation, adding fuel to an already volatile situation. In response to his aide's arrest, Kejriwal — accompanied by AAP MPs, MLAs and supporters — led a protest march to the BJP headquarters to show solidarity with Bibhav and "expose" the BJP's political vendetta. In a video message to the Prime Minister, Kejriwal asked the latter to arrest all top AAP leaders at once instead of doing that one by one. Kejriwal also emphasised that the action against Bibhav and Maliwal were attempts to stifle AAP's efforts to combat corruption and improve governance. On the other hand, the BJP has asserted that the law against corruption is being followed diligently. Its leaders argue that investigation is a necessary step in ensuring transparency and accountability in public offices. Interestingly, the Congress has chosen to remain silent on this issue. This non-committal stance could be seen as a strategic decision to avoid getting embroiled in the confrontation between AAP and BJP, both of whom are its political rivals in Delhi.



Timing is everything in politics; the cauldron is coming to a boil with less than a week to go for voting in Delhi on May 25. Meanwhile, the ongoing tussle between AAP and BJP is emblematic of the larger power struggle between the parties. This incident is likely to have ramifications beyond immediate political dynamics, potentially influencing voter perception and future elections. It would not be wise to assign motives to Maliwal at this point; besides, the case is now sub judice but one can safely say from experience that several of her past statements have been rather awkward. Once she tweeted she was a "proud daughter" and, on another occasion, said she was sexually abused by him when she was a child. The situation also brings to the fore issues of misuse of investigative agencies and the limits of political accountability. As both parties continue to trade barbs, the people of Delhi watch closely, hoping for resolutions that prioritise effective governance and justice over political expediency. As Buddha once said, three things cannot be hidden for long — sun, moon and the truth! We would know soon whether it was a political conspiracy or really a assault by her own party members!

PICTALK



Women carry staltice flowers in bamboo baskets, in Senapati district of Manipur

India tactfully manages US-Iran tensions



BHOPINDER SINGH

As India forges a vital partnership with Iran through the Chabahar port agreement, it must adeptly balance its regional interests against the backdrop of American concerns

Iran has had an unwarranted grip on the sensibilities of the US administrations, irrespective of their partisan divide. The moment for the bilateral fracture in American imagination starts from the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the subsequent US Embassy hostage drama. The wounded memory for the Iranians is deeper and traced to the CIA-aided coup against the popular Prime Minister, Mosaddegh, in 1953. Undoubtedly, the religious puritanism of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime after the revolution pitted it ideologically against the 'West', but the public memory of the US support to Saddam Hussein (later ousting him) in the decade-long Iran-Iraq war, is now conveniently forgotten by the duplicitous American regimes. Later, Americans linked Iran to 9/11 and the birthing of Al Qaeda/ISIL, even though Iran didn't have anything to do with either. If anything, Iran and its proxies fought ISIL in Syrian-Iraqi swathes and were instrumental in decimating the same, though later the Americans killed the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. Because sectarian undercurrents and the chessboard of American 'allies' (Israel and Arab Sheikdoms) have a checkmate from Iran and its proxies in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen - the unjustified demonizing of Iran continues. While countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have contributed far more towards religious extremism and terror, they continue to receive American support, while the Iranians face crippling sanctions. Americans had unilaterally reneged on the Iran Nuclear Deal even when all other signatories i.e., P+1 countries and the UN watchdog agency IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) had confirmed that Iran had complied with all provisions. Pressure from Israel and Sheikdoms ensured that Iran continued getting conflated with everything going wrong in the Middle East, even if Iran did, or did not have any role in the same. While the Hamas group was supported by Iran (as indeed by Saudia Arabia and others, till recently), there is no credible evi-



dence to link Iran with the planning or execution of the 7th Oct 2023 attack, but the phantom of Iran linkages persisted. Pushed to a corner to retaliate to salvage its sovereignty pride the Iranians did retaliate, albeit, after getting forced to do so after its senior military officers were killed in Syria, by Israelis. The must-needed justification to 'prove' Iran's purported machinations and belligerence was offered and the Americans lapped it up with both hands - that it is the election year and flexing Iran's muscles against the 'enemy' i.e., Iran, brings its electoral benefits, vitiates the situation even further. Now Joe Biden who had earlier come to power with the promise to restore the Iran Nuclear Deal torn by the unhinged Donald Trump, is all but a forgotten memory. Today, Biden is trying to outdo Donald Trump in 'taking on' the Iranians, with even more sanctions. The White House issued a Statement, "Less than a week ago, Iran launched one of the largest missile and drone attacks the world has ever seen against Israel. Together with our allies and partners, the United States defended Israel. We helped defeat this attack. And today, we are holding Iran accountable-imposing new sanctions and export



WHILE INDIA NEEDS TO MAINTAIN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE US TO COUNTENANCE THE CHINESE THREATS, IT ALSO HAS ITS REGIONAL CONCERNS WHICH REQUIRE DE-HYPHENATION FROM US CONCERNS WITH IRAN

controls on Iran". The import of the same goes beyond the USA as it now seeks to potentially sanction any country dealing with Iran e.g., India, which has recently signed a 10-year contract to manage the strategic Chabahar port in Iran. This gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics bypasses Pakistani China-developed, Gwadar Port, in Pakistan) and strengthens Indian ties with the civilisational land of Iran. With the Taliban in Afghanistan tiring of Pakistan and the Iranians signing this deal, Delhi is justifiably excited about the evolved prospects of countering the Sino-Pakistani assertions in the theatre. While India needs to maintain its relations with the US to countenance the Chinese threats, it also has its regional concerns which require de-hyphenation from US concerns with Iran. India cannot be a blind minion of the US as it has its own bilateral and regional imperatives that warrant 'strategic independence' in decision-making, as was done by buying Russian oil and maintaining cordial relations with Moscow, whilst nuancing concerns for

Ukraine. To be fair, the Americans have recognised the Indian positions and compulsions which are not aimed at diminishing the US interest, but only towards protecting its own, hence the restraint in actuality, even as the war of words persists. In any case, the Biden administration will be at its voluble worst and indulge in sabre-rattling (especially on matters about Iran) and therefore important to understand their compulsion of tonality. It is with this backdrop that the Statement of the US official must be understood, when pressed about the Indian agreement with Iran, "You've heard us say this in several instances, that any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk that they are opening themselves up to and the potential risk of sanctions". The Americans will say what they have to and the Indians will do what they have to, as it is a well-understood position on both sides. India's strategic equation with Iran is not designed to diminish the US interest. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

Promise and challenges of drones in agriculture



HIMANSHU VERMA

Drone technology shows promise in agriculture, offering efficiency and cost savings. Yet apprehensions galore hinder its adoption

Drone technology has gained popularity in the agriculture industry in recent years. Drones provide farmers with several advantages, such as higher yields, lower costs, and enhanced efficiency. However, there are worries that farmers would be hesitant to use drone technology because they don't know enough about it or are afraid of losing their jobs. We may examine the advantages of drone technology for the agricultural industry as well as any obstacles that might be preventing farmers from implementing it. Drones' advantages in the agriculture industry



In the agricultural industry, drones may be utilised for a variety of purposes, such as insect control, crop mapping, soil analysis, and irrigation. The following are the main advantages of drone use

- 1. Increased efficiency:** Farmers can collect data and monitor crops more successfully because of drones' ability to cover huge expanses of land swiftly and efficiently. Early problem detection can result in quicker and more efficient responses.

ers from using this tool. These are a few of the main obstacles:

- 1. Fear of losing one's job:** Since fewer people will be required to undertake physical labour on farms as a result of the adoption of drone technology, many farmers are worried about losing their jobs.
- 2. Lack of expertise:** Farmers may lack the expertise or training required to use drones safely. They might not be confident in their abilities to utilize it, which might make it difficult for them to accept this technology.
- 3. Cost:** Since drones may be pricey, many farmers might not be able to afford to invest in this technology.
- 4. Regulatory obstacles:** Farmers may find it challenging to use this technology if there are regulatory obstacles to the usage of drones in agriculture. Drone technology usage in rural India's agriculture industry is still in its infancy. This technology is attracting curiosity, but there are also worries about job loss and a lack of education and training. Nonetheless, initiatives are being made to overcome these obstacles and

promote the use of drone technology. The Digital India programme is a major endeavour that seeks to furnish rural regions with digital infrastructure. The initiative's emphasis on education and training may aid in addressing farmers' deficiencies in knowledge and experience. Furthermore, several efforts and organisations are working to further the application of drone technology in agriculture. To promote precision agricultural technology, such as drones, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) developed the Centre for Precision and Farming Technology. Farmers may be reluctant to accept this technology, though, due to worries about job loss and a lack of education and training. Farmers must have the support and training; they need to use this technology efficiently, as well as an understanding of its potential advantages. (The writer is an assistant professor of agronomy, college of Agriculture & environmental technology, Surajmal University, Uttarakhnad; view are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FOLLOW THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Madam — Apropos the news article "Mamata Promises to back INDIA in Power," published on May 16. The Chief Minister of Bengal, Mamta Banerjee, had earlier decided to go solo in the elections. Even the ruling party Trinamool Congress's (TMC) leader's atrocities against women of the Sandeshkhali haven't lowered the spirit of Didi (Mamta Banerjee). Annoyed with the saffron party at the centre and blaming it for hatching a conspiracy in the Sandeshkhali incident, the chief minister has decided to support the INDIA bloc from outside if it comes to power in the centre. Accusing Narendra Modi of not fulfilling any of the promises to the nation, Didi said Publicity and lies are his two weapons. According to the chief minister, the PM is a prachar Babu who does only 'prachar' and nothing else. Using such terms against the PM of the nation is a violation of the code of conduct. All political leaders should maintain the sanctity of the Constitution and follow a code of conduct while speaking publicly.

Abhilasha Gupta | Mohali

CHABAHAR PORT PACT

Madam — It refers to the news article "India And Iran Sign Chabahar Port Pact," this is my response. The Chabahar Port is a cornerstone of India's regional strategy, offering several critical advantages. It serves as a vital gateway for expanding trade with Central Asia, providing a direct, cost-effective route to the region's abundant resources. Additionally, Chabahar acts as a strategic counterbalance to China's influence, particularly in light of China's control of Gwadar Port in Pakistan. The port also offers a reliable alternative trade route to Afghanistan, bypassing the often volatile land routes through Pakistan and ensuring uninterrupted trade and aid flows. This collaboration with Iran further strengthens India's diplomatic ties and bolsters its position in the Asian geopolitical landscape. India's commitment to the Chabahar

Chhetri retires



Apropos the news article, "Stalwart Chhetri announces retirement," published on May 17, this is my response. The news of Sunil Chhetri's retirement has hit the Indian football community hard. As the much-admired and treasured Indian captain announced his decision to step away from international football after the FIFA World Cup qualification match

against Kuwait on June 6, emotions ran high across the country. Chhetri was the face of Indian football in a remarkable career spanning over 20 years. With a legacy that has left an indelible mark on Indian football, the 39-year-old maestro's journey has been an inspiration to millions, reshaping perceptions of this beautiful game in the nation along the way. Since his debut in 2005, Chhetri has amassed a multitude of accolades, including setting records for the highest number of appearances and goals scored for India. With 94 goals in 150 matches, Sunil Chhetri holds the third position on the list of most international goals, trailing behind only the two superstars, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. "A simple ball unites us all", the saying goes. Needless to say, Sunil Chhetri was a perfect example of this soccer quote. Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

project, despite the potential risk of US sanctions, underscores its strategic autonomy. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar defended the Chabahar Port deal with Iran despite US sanctions warning, emphasising its regional benefits. India views the port as crucial for accessing Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan. Despite US pressure, India asserts its strategic independence through the deal to counter China's influence in the region. Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

CRUELTY AGAINST ANIMALS

Madam — Apropos the feature article, "Assault most foul for kindness to animals," by Hiranmay Karlekar, published on May 18, this is my response. Compassion for all living creatures has been the philosophy of India. In most Indian households, rural and urban, when people cook, they reserve a portion of the food for cows, dogs and birds. However, human beings, born as a superior species, consider themselves the sole claimant to this planet and its related div-

idents. Dog lovers aiding animals face assaults by impostors posing as human saviors, reflecting a concerning trend of violence. Animals may be mute but we as a society have to speak on their behalf as animals breathe like us and have emotions. Even though India, with its population of over 1.42 billion, still faces significant challenges in addressing animal cruelty. Every minute, an animal in India faces abuse, despite existing laws like Sections 428 and 429 in Animal Laws. The State Government does not take animal abuse cases too seriously, making it difficult to calculate just how common they are. India was given a "C" under the Animal Protection Index (API) and is also a moderate performer under the Sanctioning Cruelty category. Unfortunately, these animal abuse statistics have shown, that animal cruelty is a real issue in India that takes millions of victims every year. Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN CONNECTING THE MIND AND BODY

Harnessing the potential of mind is the key to true happiness



RAVI VALLURI

What is the difference between PK and PIKU? Two letters, 'I' and 'U.' I is us and U are them (an extra-terrestrial Aamir Khan). Their CPU is cerebral and our CPU is at the level of the abdomen. Or say for vast multitudes the focus is on the abdomen. It would be quite captivating to watch the main protagonists PK (of the eponymous movie) and Bhaskor (of Piku fame) sharing their thoughts and respective metabolisms in a spaceship. Food has a tremendous impact on our system, which we do not quite comprehend. Improper diet first takes a toll on the metabolism and then attacks other organs of the body. Simply put, the intake of toxic foods generates repugnant thoughts and results in a weak mind and body.

The human mind is an enigma and a reservoir of potential. But the moot question is how do we tap this potential? The mind is a movie theatre where we script and enact innumerable movies and soap operas. Technology alone cannot be a substitute for the enormous potential of the mind. It needs to be cultured, harnessed and harmonized with needs and wants.

We need to distinguish the brain from the mind. The brain is an organ that serves as the centre of the nervous system in all vertebrate and most invertebrate animals. Only a few invertebrates such as sponges, do not have a brain, diffuse or localized nerve nets are present instead. Mind on the other hand, is the faculty of consciousness and thoughts. It is an individual's intellect or memory of his attention span or will. Sri Ravi Shankar has captured it very succinctly. He says the mind is like the sky and thoughts are like clouds. Your thoughts make or mar the progress and development of the mind.



To be happy in life humans need to calm the obdurate and recalcitrant mind. Further keep reminding ourselves that we are blessed, grateful and have abundance in our lives. Life is full of valleys and peaks. It can never be a rising curve or a straight line permanently.

The human mind vacillates between the past and the future. In the past, the mind is regretful and if it is in the future, it is anxious. In either situation, the mind is not at peace or in the present moment and thus remains unhappy.

Incidentally, there is a deep connection between the stomach and the mind. That is why it is called the gut feeling or the sixth sense. Our solar plexus keeps sending us signals. It depends as to whether we are conscious and wakeful enough to grasp those signals.

Humans can truly celebrate only if we can silence our minds. There are techniques to do it and develop a relaxation room or space in our minds and harness the energy so that it does not get enervated. By practising Suryanamaskars and Padmasadhana as crafted by Gurudev we can enhance our Prana, (chi) or energy levels substantially.

This energy can be channelled in innumerable ways. There may be some who may practice meditation, breathing techniques or simply observe silence to quieten the mind. The path is chosen based on our personality type. Several others through unflinching prayers and reading inspirational literature can silence the mind. But the aim is to be in the present and lead a happy life. Let our minds not be judgmental and complain and cling to negativities. Willy-nilly we provide the hook to hang the coat of negativity.

"Life gives you plenty of time to do whatever you want to do if you stay in the present moment," writes Deepak Chopra.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Economic crisis takes a backseat in elections



SHIVAJI SARKAR

As India's election fever rises, the spotlight shifts from core economic issues to religious controversies and symbolic debates



In this dance of democracy, scarce resources are seemingly rambling over the election tempo. The religious slant on employment and siller issues like the mangal sutra raised are for diverting from the core issue that has as yet to be answered by the pre-poll slogan of "we are the fifth largest economy". Aren't we that large? Some stats say that but the country has tougher stats to counter like the difficult balance of payments and still grim, Manipur the embattled State, for the failure of the provincial Government has over 67000 people displaced during the last year because of the ethnic conflict. There are also reports that farmers plough into the Punjab BJP poll campaign and express similar wrath in Haryana as well. They tell a political party to be people-friendly as also kisans are not born for doles. And Agniveers on their death are not being given a salute is a national cry.

Jobs not being there is the reality. Urban joblessness has risen to 6.7 per cent from 6.5 per cent in March 2024. The men's unemployment has jumped to 6.3 per cent from 5.8 per cent. Periodic labour survey data is a pointer to difficult job scenarios. This is reflected in the elections by the Bihar caste survey that indicates more difficult situations for marginal castes, a detested reality. Caste denotes empowerment as well as deprivation.

Would a Congress manifesto professing over 50 per cent reservation serve the issue? The BJP contests it. It is accused of wanting to rob reservations. It is repeatedly denied by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. No party has answered if jobs are not there, how would a reservation help? National Commission for Backward Classes has warned West Bengal and Punjab Governments for not "fully using the space available under the 50 percent ceiling for reservations for scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes and OBCs". It asked Bengal to increase it by 5 per cent and Punjab by 13 per cent. It finds that



THE MAHANAVRATNA AND NAVRATNA INDUSTRIES WERE DOING WELL WHEN MOST OF THESE WERE AXED OR SABOTAGED, LIKE AIR INDIA AND HMT, TO FACILITATE THE GROWTH OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHICH EARNED HUGE PROFITS BUT DID NOT CREATE JOBS

Bengal filled up 45 per cent of the quota and Punjab only 37 per cent. The worst may be Arunachal Pradesh. Yet another sex racket is busted with eight Government officials among 21 arrested.

The International Labour Organisation finds 28 million men women and children are in forced labour due to a cycle of poverty. Of these 63 per cent are in the private sector. Forced labour generates \$ 236 billion in illegal profits globally every year.

"We now know that the situation has only got worse. The international community must urgently come together to take action to end this injustice," said the ILO Director General.

The report, titled 'Profits and poverty: The economics of forced labour', also estimates that traffickers and criminals are generating close to \$10,000 per victim, up from \$8,269 (adjusted for inflation) a decade ago. The survey also said that forced commercial sexual exploitation contributes to more than two-thirds (73 per cent) of overall illicit profits, despite accounting for only 27 per cent of all victims in privately imposed work. "Total annual illegal profits from forced labour are highest in Europe and Central Asia (\$84 billion), followed by Asia, including India and the Pacific (\$62 billion), the Americas (\$52 billion), Africa (\$20 billion) and the Arab States (\$18 billion)," the report said.

The ILO cautions India. It also worked on conditions of Indian labour in the Arab countries.

In a scenario, where people compromise with their dignity, the ILO doubts the figures on India's galloping progress. The supposed \$ 3 trillion economy, highly burdened

with debt, has an annual repayment of over Rs 10.4 lakh crore.

Economic issues remain at the forefront of the voters. Globally shrinking jobs, particularly in IT, has rattled many Indians. Political parties offering sops of reservations or apprenticeships of Rs 1 lakh a year (approx. Rs 8000 plus a month) sells well among the burgeoning numbers of jobless, who are already hit by one of the highest inflation of 55 per cent in ten years. It is not easy for them to manage it amid farmers' distress and the trade deficit widening to a four-month high at \$ 19.1 billion. Exports rise by one per cent to \$35 billion and imports by over 10 per cent to \$ 54.1 billion. This upsets the Government's calculations on the impending forex reserves.

How would the country improve the job scenario? The age-old move to wean the workers away from the farms has failed. Still, agriculture employs over 54 per cent of the Indian workers. The Nehruvian economy created robust public sector organisations. In 1994-2000, PSUs employed 19.4 million (about 2 crores) people or 69 per cent of the total employed. The other 31 per cent were employed in the central and State Governments. Some 3.4 million jobs were added to non-farm payrolls and unemployment at 5.6 per cent had fallen from 6.6 per cent.

In sharp contrast, in 2021-22, PSU employment reduced to 8.61 lakh. And it is gradually reducing. According to official statistics, employment in the organized sector is now a mere 8.34 per cent, of which the public sector accounts for 5.77 per cent and the private sector only 2.58 per cent in the total employment generated.

The Government's massive infra investment of Rs 11 lakh crore this fiscal may have added some jobs in the construction sector but these short-term jobs are not considered quality work. Apart from infra investments are subject to erosion in many ways, right from excess cost estimation to longer gestation.

So the promise of reservation is a dream. According to CMIE, employment in India increased by a mere 5.8 million till March 2023. An additional 119 million people were not added to the potential labour force during the same. The estimates show that self-employment has been the chief driver of the Indian job market, which was hit hard by demonetisation crushing a parallel self-sustained economy.

Poll promises apart, the country is in the grip of a severe economic crisis. Ideally, more PSUs are required to stop labour exploitation in the private sector as well as their disinclination to create jobs. The Mahanavrata and Navratna industries were doing well when most of these were axed or sabotaged like Air India and HMT to facilitate the growth of the private sector, which earned huge profits but did not create jobs.

Reversing it would require revival and reforming the Planning Commission and reshaping the economy in the public sector where the private sector would have to compete on equal terms. Reservations to benefit the deprived castes then only would yield results. Would a revamp be possible?

(The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Complex challenges necessitate consciousness and policy shift

India's pressing issues demand pragmatic action and a collective mindfulness shift for lasting, transformative change

India faces multitudes of challenges arising from different quarters. It is tempting to think of these problems as belonging to society, polity, economics etc. But essentially all problems have their roots in the mind of the human being and arise from a lack of adequate understanding of the self. The solutions therefore have to be both in the external and the internal domain. Let us look at the five major conflicts and challenges plaguing India. A vision for the future would involve constructively responding to these problems.

1. Climate Change
It is well-established that climate change is an anthropogenic phenomenon. Ladakh is already agitating about the palpable changes that climate change is inflicting on the



ACHARYA PRASHANT

region's ecology. Five years is too long a time if India does not immediately take corrective steps. There is a terrifying lack of public awareness on this issue leading to political inaction. How are we planning to deal with swathes of terrible heat waves that are going to engulf the country? What will diminishing crop yields and extreme weather events do to the poor? Do we not know the origins of the toxic air that we

are consuming or the water distress we are facing? We continue to wreck the Himalayas with deforestation and the construction of massive carbon-emitting infrastructure, despite knowing that this is causing erratic rain patterns, melting of the glaciers and eventual destruction of life as we know it.

Blind lust for consumption comes from the blind belief that consumption is an indicator of the fulfilment or success of one's life. The sheer size of our population coupled with this notion of consumerism is a recipe for self-destruction. In the next 5 years, we need education and mass-awareness programs on this biggest threat that mankind faces and also genuine efforts towards correcting the consumption-

based flawed philosophy of life, through programs on self-awareness.

2. Animal Rights
The same lust that threatens to destroy the planet also co-opts the rights of all living creatures on Earth. The problems of animal rights violations, ecology loss and biodiversity extinction - all arise from the same source. When we talk of animal rights, it is today unfortunately a struggle for the basic right to survive. Close to 50% of all living species on the planet have gone extinct in the last 50 years. Most of it is because of violent human action. 100-1000 species go extinct every day. Also, this is 100 to 1000 times faster than the natural extinction rate.

As Indians and as humans, we can survive either physically or

spiritually with the kind of carpet 'speciecide' we have launched against the entire planet. In its scale and brutality, it exceeds any act of violence the Earth has ever seen. It is especially lamentable to see that India, with its Ahimsa, is among the worst perpetrators of atrocities towards life-forms. Be it meat exports, the expansion of the dairy industry, or the organised destruction of animal habitats through so-called developmental activities, it only augurs doom for all.

In the next 5 years, I wish to see direct and strong action on this front, which can only result from an arousal of public consciousness.

3. Education
Public statistics on the State of India's education portray the

deep waters that the country is in. There are startling revelations on the basic quantitative and linguistic abilities of school students, not to mention the unemployability of college pass-outs. Compared to the developed world and the mass of developing countries, this highlights the utter lack of importance that Indian society places on education.

The problems of today can have only spiritual solutions and we have kept the young population oblivious of spirituality. Our education has become very dangerously anti-life. A human being is alive only if he can reflect and understand. There is a need to urgently ramp up the basic education infrastructure of the country and also to prioritize the integration of life

education into the modern education system.

In the next 5 years, we need to see an education system that places deep emphasis on both Vidya (knowledge of the self) and Avidya (knowledge of the world).

4. Protection of rights of the marginalised communities
More than half of the world's wealth resides in the hands of less than 1% of individuals. The situation in India is no different. When national resources are commanded by just a few individuals, the outcome is that much of the world is plagued by poverty, even starvation. The glamorization of wealth and the promise of pleasure has made the middle classes disconnected and indifferent to the stark realities of the world.

In the next few years, the rights of the vulnerable sections must be defended in all ways - through education, legal frameworks and socio-religious reform.

5. Creative and dignified employment for the youth
Work is not something that you can choose as per the prevailing norms in your academic institution family or community. I would want to see, in the next 5 years, the creation of an academic, social and economic environment that brings creative vocation to the youth, not just as a means of livelihood but as the fulfilment of life itself.

(The author is a Vedanta teacher, author and the founder of Prashant Advait Foundation; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Zinc demand in India likely to double in next 5-10 years

The demand of zinc is expected to double in India in the next five to 10 years on the back of huge investments in infrastructure sector, including steel, International Zinc Association said on Sunday. The demand for zinc in India depends largely on the growth of the steel market as zinc is mainly used to galvanise steel to protect it from corrosion. "I see a doubling of the demand (for zinc) in the next five to 10 years. The market for primary and refined zinc in India is currently close to 800 to 1,000 tonnes (per annum) and has a great opportunity to increase with all the developments that we are witnessing in India. We see huge investments in additional steel capacity and...steel still needs to be protected by galvanized coatings. We see a lot of plans and investments going on for new galvanizing lines. So I expect a strong role for zinc in India," International Zinc Association Global Director Martin Van Leeuwen said in an interaction.



Egyptair looks to operate daily services connecting Delhi, Cairo

Encouraged by rising traffic between Egypt and India, Egyptair is looking to operate daily flights connecting Delhi and Cairo, according to a senior executive. Currently, the Egyptian carrier, which started operations in India more than four decades ago, has nine weekly flights to Cairo. Out of them, five flights are from Mumbai and the remaining four are from the national capital. "We hope to operate daily flights from Delhi to Cairo," the airline's Country Manager Amr Aly said on Sunday. He said that air traffic between the two countries has improved and there is also transit traffic to other places. The carrier started Delhi-Cairo flights last August. The services on this route are operated with A320 neo aircraft and Boeing 737-8 plane is used for flights connecting Mumbai and Cairo. Egyptair, part of the Star Alliance, has a codeshare partnership with Air India.



Dr Reddy's, Sun Pharma, Aurobindo recall products in US

Drug makers Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharma and Aurobindo Pharma are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, as per the latest Enforcement Report of the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA). Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling close to 20,000 cartons of a medication used to control blood phenylalanine levels in adults and children. Princeton (New Jersey) based Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Inc. is recalling Javygtor (sapropterin dihydrochloride) Powder for Oral Solution (100mg) due to it being a "Sub-potent Drug", USFDA stated. The company is also recalling another lot of sapropterin dihydrochloride for the same reason, it added. The USFDA said the drug maker initiated the Class I recall in the US on April 8 this year. As per the US health regulator, a Class I recall pertains to defective products that can cause serious health problems.



3 jailed in Patanjali Soanpapadi case

A court here has sentenced three people to six months' imprisonment for violating food safety standards in making Patanjali Elaichi Soanpapadi. Assistant Prosecution Officer Ritesh Verma said that Pithoragarh Chief Judicial Magistrate Sanjay Singh on Saturday also imposed fines of Rs 5,000 to Rs 25,000 on them, besides the jail sentence. Verma said that the court sentenced Leeladhar Pathak, a shopkeeper from the Bering town of Pithoragarh, to six months' imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 5,000 for selling the product.

GDP growth likely to be 6.7% in Q4; 7% in FY24: Ind-RA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Ratings and Research expects the country's GDP growth rate for the March quarter at 6.7 per cent and around 6.9-7 per cent for the 2023-24 fiscal, its principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said. The GDP numbers for the fourth quarter (January-March 2024) and the provisional estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal are scheduled to be released by the government on May 31. The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the June quarter, 8.1 per cent in the September quarter and 8.4 per cent in the December quarter of 2023-24. "We are expecting the fourth quarter growth to be 6.7 per cent and the overall GDP growth for FY24 to be around 6.9-7 per cent," Sinha told PTI Videos in an interview. He said the growth rate in



the first two quarters benefited from a low base, though the 8.4 per cent growth rate in the third (October-December 2023) quarter was surprising. "When we analyse the data, then what is visible is the wedge between the GVA and GDP. A large impetus to Q3 GDP has come from higher tax collection, but this phenomenon is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter. The

ter, the GVA was 7.7 per cent and GDP 8.1 per cent. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a given period. GVA is GDP minus net taxes (gross tax collection minus subsidy). The Reserve Bank, in its monetary policy review in April, projected GDP growth for 2023-24 at 7 per cent. As regards the economic growth in the current fiscal, Sinha said the GDP is expected to expand at 7.1 per cent. "Even if we set aside the tax component, the momentum witnessed in the first and second quarters has continued in the subsequent quarters, and the likelihood is that momentum will continue in FY25," he added. The services sector, he said, will continue the momentum, led by construction and electricity, while mining and industrial output will be laggard.

NEGOTIATION ON FTAS

Comm Min holds discussions on formulating SOPs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has held detailed discussions with senior officials of different departments and trade experts on formulating standard operating procedures (SOP) for negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs), an official said. To discuss the various aspects of these agreements, the commerce ministry has organised a two-day 'Chintan Shivir' on FTA strategy and SOPs for trade negotiations on May 16-17. Suggestions that came up during the discussions included comprehensive consultations with public and private sector players and sharing details of the proposed FTAs with the line ministries, the official said. "Consultations should be held at every stage of FTA negotiations. Representatives of certain ministries suggested

the commerce ministry to share FTA details with them in a timely manner so that they can prepare their views on those agreements," the official added. The exercise assumes significance as India is engaging with several trade partners to negotiate free trade pacts. Former commerce secretaries, trade experts and government officials from ministries, including finance, IT and electronics, and mines, participated in the deliberation. In the Chintan Shivir, various issues were discussed,

including India's trade strategy and vision 2047; economic assessment and modelling of FTAs; inclusion of new disciplines into FTAs such as labour, environment, gender, and indigenous people; services and digital trade; and SOPs for FTA negotiations. A separate session was also organised on leveraging India's FTAs to address new forms/kinds of measures like CBAM (carbon border adjustment mechanism), supply chain disruptions, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence. India is negotiating trade pacts with the UK, the EU (European Union), Peru, and a comprehensive trade deal with Australia. It is also in talks with the Eurasian Economic Union for a trade agreement. India's goods and services exports in 2023-24 reached an all-time high of US\$ 778.2 billion, up 0.23 per cent from US\$ 776.4 billion in 2022-23.



Mutual Funds invest Rs 1.3 L cr in equities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mutual funds (MFs) showed strong confidence in Indian equities this year, injecting around Rs 1.3 lakh crore, driven mainly by significant retail investor interest and the robust performance of the stock market. Mutual funds, which manage long-term wealth for domestic investors, prioritise the Indian market's underlying growth potential and are less rattled by short-term events like elections, which allows them to keep investing in equities, Tradejini COO Trivesh D said. Additionally, the growing interest in systematic invest-

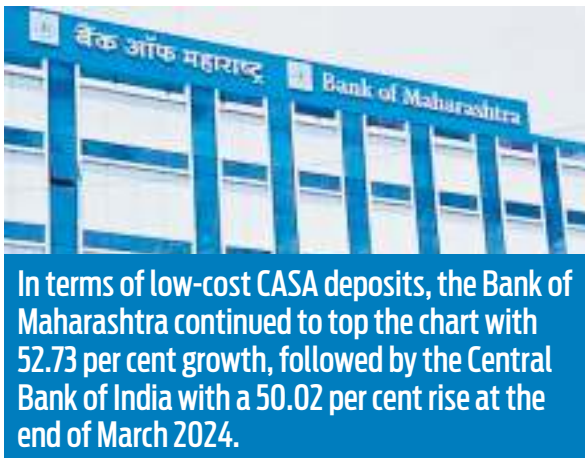
ment plans (SIPs) on the back of astonishing compounding stories by influencers and industry veterans has perked investors, who otherwise wish to stay away from the markets, to start participating through these mutual funds, he added. According to the data from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), MFs invested Rs 26,038 crore in the first fortnight of the ongoing month and Rs 20,155 crore in April. Moreover, the highest MF buying for 2024 was experienced in March, as they put in a net of Rs 44,233 crore. Also, they invested Rs 14,295 crore in February and Rs 23,010 crore in January.



Bank of Maharashtra tops among PSU banks in business growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra recorded the highest growth rate last fiscal in terms of total business and deposit mobilisation among public sector lenders at a time when most banks are facing difficulty in achieving double-digit growth. The Pune-headquartered lender has registered a 15.94 per cent rise in the total business (domestic) in FY24, followed by the country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) with 13.12 per cent growth, according to published financial numbers of the public sector banks (PSBs). However, SBI's total business (deposit and advances) was about 16.7 times higher at Rs 79,52,784



crore compared to Rs 4,74,411 crore of Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) in absolute terms. Similarly, BoM continued to maintain its top spot in

terms of growth in deposit mobilisation, with a 15.66 per cent rise in FY24. It was followed by SBI (11.07 per cent), Bank of India (11.05 per cent) and Canara Bank (10.98 per cent). Out of 12 public sector banks, only these four lenders could log a double-digit growth in deposits in the financial year 2023-24. In terms of low-cost CASA deposits, the Bank of Maharashtra continued to top the chart with 52.73 per cent growth, followed by the Central Bank of India with a 50.02 per cent rise at the end of March 2024. A higher level of current account and savings accounts helps banks to keep their cost of funds low. With regard to loan growth, the Kolkata-based UCO Bank was a tad higher at 16.38 per cent, followed by BoM at 16.30 per cent. SBI also reported 16.26% growth in advances in FY24.

Reliance seeks access to ATF pipelines, storages of PSU oil firms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Industries Ltd has sought access to pipelines and storages that public sector oil companies have built over the years for supplying jet fuel (ATF) from depots and oil refineries to airports, as it looks for a larger pie of fuel trade at some of Asia's busiest airports. Reliance, which produces a fourth of India's aviation turbine fuel (ATF), wants access to storage depots outside the Delhi airport as well as to pipelines leading to Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad airports. It currently supplies small volumes of ATF when compared with supplies made

by state-owned firms. The firm made the suggestion in its comments to oil regulator PNGRB's draft regulation calling for supply of ATF in all existing and future airports through pipelines that can be accessed by any supplier so as to bring in competition and cut fuel cost. While the fuel market is open, airplanes at the country's busiest airports are fed by pipelines that were built by state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) over decades.



Tea major B&A Ltd ventures into retail segment

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

For the first time in its over-100-year history, B&A Ltd has forayed into the retail segment through its 'Gatoonga' brand of black tea, a top company official said. The brand was launched in Assam on Saturday, with the company looking to tap the market in the home state before entering other parts of the country, B&A Ltd Managing Director Somnath



Chatterjee said. "The company's retail foray has begun with 'Gatoonga' brand by tapping the Assam

market and it will gradually expand across India based on a demand-driven growth strategy," he said. B&A Ltd Deputy Managing Director Dhruva Jyoti Dowerah said the company's parent group had four verticals previously, and the retail branding being the fifth one. The existing verticals are tea manufacturing and processing, packaging, tea tourism and broking.

Trade ties with India suspended due to 'heavy duties': Pak Foreign Minister

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has said that trade ties between Islamabad and New Delhi have remained suspended since 2019 due to the imposition of "heavy duties" by India on imports from Pakistan after the Pulwama attack. In a written reply submitted to the National Assembly on Saturday, Dar, who also holds the deputy prime minister's slot, said: "India decided to



impose 200 per cent duty on imports from Pakistan, suspended the Kashmir bus service and trade across the Line of Control after the Pulwama attack." According to the Dawn newspaper, Dar was responding to a question by Pakistan Peoples Party lawmaker Sharmila Faruqi seeking details about trade challenges faced by Pakistan in its relations with neighbouring countries, especially India.

FPIs withdraw Rs 28,200 cr from Indian equities on poll jitters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have pulled out a massive Rs 28,200 crore from Indian equities so far this month, owing to uncertainties about the outcome of the general elections and attractive valuations of Chinese markets. The withdrawal was way higher than a net pullout of over Rs 8,700 crore in April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with



Mauritius and a sustained rise in US bond yields.

Before that, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 35,098 crore in March and Rs 1,539 crore in February. Going forward, there is likely to be a dramatic change in foreign portfolio investors' (FPIs) equity flows in response to election results. Political stability will attract huge inflows in the Indian market, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Govt recovers Rs 852 cr under amnesty scheme for exporters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has recovered about Rs 852 crore under the amnesty scheme for exporters for one-time settlement of default in export obligation by the holders of advance and EPCG authorisations, an official said. The figures are likely to increase further as the exercise is on for the compilation of the data, the official added. The government has fixed March 31 as the last date for

payment of customs duty plus interest. Under the scheme, 6,705 applications were filed and as per the provisional figures, an amount of about Rs 852 crore has been recovered. This figure is further expected to increase," the official said. Meanwhile, several small exporters have requested the government to continue the scheme for a one-time settlement of default in export obligation till September. Ludhiana-based Hand Tools



Association President SC Ralhan has said several small exporters have not been able to

avail of the benefits of the scheme due to fulfilling their obligations to make payments to MSMEs within 45 days. In the new foreign trade policy (FTP), the scheme was announced for exporters for one-time settlement of default in export obligation by the holders of advance and EPCG (export promotion for capital goods) authorisations. Under the scheme, all pending cases of the default in meeting export obligation (EO) of certain authorisations can be regularised by the authorisation holder on payment of all customs duties that were exempt-

ed in proportion to unfulfilled EO and interest at 100 per cent of such duties exempted. India's merchandise exports rose by 1 per cent to US\$ 34.99 billion in April, even as the trade deficit widened to a four-month high of US\$ 19.1 billion during the month, according to government data. Imports also increased by 10.25 per cent to US\$ 54.09 billion in the month under review from US\$ 49.06 billion in April 2023 due to a significant jump in gold imports.

ITC's Sanjiv Puri assumes charge as CII president

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sanjiv Puri, Chairman and Managing Director of ITC, has assumed office as the president of the Confederation of Indian Industry for 2024-25, the chamber said on Sunday. He takes over from R Dinesh, Chairman of TVS Supply Chain Solutions. Puri heads ITC Ltd, a conglomerate with businesses in FMCG, hotels, paperboards & packaging, agribusiness, and IT.

He is also the Chairman of ITC Infotech India Ltd, its subsidiaries in the UK and US, and Surya Nepal Private Ltd. Rajiv Memani takes over as President-Designate of CII for 2024-25. He is Chairman of the India region of EY (Ernst & Young), a leading global professional services organisation. He is also a member of EY's global management body as the Chair of its Global Emerging Markets Committee.

JOLLIEST DUO AKSHAY KUMAR & ARSHAD WARSI WRAP UP THEIR FIRST SCHEDULE



The iconic duo of Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi has officially wrapped up the first shooting schedule for the much-anticipated film *Jolly LLB 3*. The actors took to Instagram to share the exciting news with fans, posting a video of themselves riding a motorcycle through the picturesque landscapes of Rajasthan with the caption, "And that's a schedule wrap! As you can see both the Jollies had a jolly good time in Rajasthan."

Fans are eagerly awaiting the on-screen chemistry of Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi, as this marks the first time the two will share the screen together in the beloved *Jolly LLB* franchise. Arshad Warsi, who played the role of Jagdish

Tyagi, aka Jolly, in the 2013 original *Jolly LLB*, and Akshay Kumar, who starred as Jagdishwar Mishra in the 2017 sequel *Jolly LLB 2*, are bringing their combined talent and charm to the third installment.

Jolly LLB 3 continues the legacy of the beloved legal drama series, following the misadventures and courtroom battles of its titular character, Jolly. This third installment brings together the talents of Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi, promising fans a unique and entertaining experience.

Meanwhile, adding to the excitement surrounding the film, a local artist who worked on the set took to social media to share a humbling and heartwarming experience of working alongside Akshay Kumar. The artist shared a picture from

the set and wrote: "I greeted Akshay Sir with Jai Shri Ram, so he bowed and greeted me back by saying Jai Shri Ram. I was with @akshaykumar on the shoot the whole day recently. I was curious as to what it was about him that people get so happy seeing him. Few people even started crying after meeting him; a few got overwhelmed. Observing Akshay Kumar, I realised that someone who lives by positive values exudes positivity. He sleeps at 9 p.m., wakes up at 4 a.m., works out, and doesn't have any bad habits. He believes in God and goes about his work with all earnestness. I salute this man."

'The pressure to deliver after 12th Fail is unnerving,' says Vikrant Massey

Man of the Year, Vikrant Massey is currently basking in the success of his blockbuster film *12th Fail*, a milestone that has firmly established him as one of the most sought-after and bankable actors in Bollywood. Professionally and personally, Vikrant is in a happy space, particularly as he embraces the joys of fatherhood alongside his flourishing career.

In a recent interview, Vikrant opened up about the significant changes in his life following *12th Fail*. "The last six months have been quite eventful, and actually, quite a lot of things have happened. The success of *12th Fail*, wrapping up *The Sabarmati Report* and it being touted as the much-anticipated release, and then fatherhood as well. I can easily say that I'm going through an incredible purple patch in my life," he shared.

Reflecting on his current phase, Vikrant admitted that the newfound success brings its own set of challenges. "So, in a way, this is all very unnerving. The pressure to go out there and meet people's expectations again with equal success is very tough. At the back of your head, you know that you cannot replicate *12th Fail* or any success as a matter of fact. You have to start afresh, so I am starting afresh with my next slate

of films," he said, acknowledging the jitters he feels for his upcoming projects.

Despite the pressure, Vikrant remains optimistic and confident about his future endeavours. "Having said that, I think I am confident about what we have achieved with the film so far. Overall, personally and professionally, it was a happy time, and I'm really grateful. I couldn't have asked for anything more," he concluded. Looking ahead, Vikrant has an exciting lineup of films that promise to keep his momentum going. Apart from *The Sabarmati Report*, which has already garnered significant buzz, fans can also look forward to seeing him in *Phir Aayi Haseen Dilruba* and *Blackout*.



Sharon Stone desires to have her 'acting life' back

Actress Sharon Stone said that her health negatively impacted her career, but she would love to get back to doing what she loves. "I still don't have my acting career back. I would really like to work again as an actor so much, not just as a weak, supporting part," the actress told *The Times* newspaper.

Stone wants to get back to her career in acting, following a 2001 stroke. "I'd like to really have the parts that I have earned and can do. I would really like to have my own real career back. I would really like to have my life back."

The actress said that she went through hell after the stroke, which impacted every area of her life, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

Stone said, "Because it took seven years to really recover, and I did lose custody of my child. And I did lose my career, and I did lose \$15 million—every cent I had—in child support and court fees. So I didn't really bounce back and have a rebirth."

"I would really like to have my life back. I didn't rebound, and it isn't some kind of wonderful story. It'd be great if it was, but it isn't. I survived," she added.

Stone shared that doctors only gave her a 100 percent chance of survival. "I pretty much knew it was serious when I came to the floor and I couldn't get up, and I kept calling for help, and I couldn't get it. I thought: 'I'm having a stroke!'" she said. The actress was going through "psychological chaos."

"I couldn't talk. I couldn't read. I couldn't write my own name. I was stuttering. When I reached for something, I had no depth perception. It was complete psychological chaos."



'I flaunted my vitiligo at the Cannes Red Carpet,' says Aastha Shah

Aastha Shah, a pioneering voice for the beauty industry, proudly flaunted her vitiligo at the Cannes Film Festival, donning a stunning gown by renowned designer Fouad Sarkis. Her bold move not only redefines beauty standards in India but also opens doors for countless individuals facing skin conditions to embrace their unique beauty.

"I flaunted my vitiligo at the Cannes Red Carpet," she expresses, radiating confidence and grace. Her presence on the red carpet was a powerful statement, challenging conventional beauty norms and celebrating individuality. The intricate design and flowing silhouette highlighted her natural beauty, drawing attention to her

vitiligo in a way that was both empowering and inspiring.

"For years, I struggled with feeling beautiful because of my vitiligo," Aastha shared. "Today, I walked the red carpet at Cannes, not in spite of my vitiligo, but because of it. I want to show everyone that beauty comes in all shades and patterns." Her impact extends beyond the red carpet. She actively advocates for skin positivity and works with various organisations to promote acceptance and self-esteem among individuals with vitiligo and other skin conditions.

As she continues to break barriers and redefine beauty norms, her presence at Cannes serves as an enduring symbol of courage and inspiration. Her message is clear: true beauty lies in embracing who you are, flaws and all.



STANDALONE

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan graced the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival 2024 as the global spokesperson for L'Oréal Paris. Her appearance at Cannes marked a special milestone as she walked the red carpet to mark L'Oréal Paris' 27th year of association with the Cannes Film Festival!

Hamare Baarah teaser starts new buzz on social media

Ever since the teaser of Kamal Chandra's directorial *Hamare Baarah* headlined by Annu Kapoor, Manoj Joshi, and Paritosh Tripathi has been dropped, it has generated serious chatter at every corner. While the teaser shocked everyone with its bold narrative and the reality of women's sufferings, it has also set social media buzzing about it. In recent years, for the first time, it has been seen that right from the teaser, a film is grabbing the eyeballs.

The posters released by the makers prior to the teaser have kept the audiences piqued to know more about the film, and the teaser has successfully multiplied the buzz to an unprecedented level. The netizens are highly praising the teaser on social media, as it surprises with a never-before-said narrative. The film *Hamare Baarah* is jointly produced by Birender Bhagat, Ravi S. Gupta, Sanjay Nagpal, and Sheo Balak Singh. Triloki Nath Prasad is serving as co-producer, and Kamal Chandra is directing the film. The story of the film is penned by Rajan Agarwal, while

Ajendra Ajay is serving as a creative director. The film, set in Uttar Pradesh, highlights the sensitive issue of the rise in population in the nation. The film is arriving in cinemas on June 7th, 2024, and recently premiered at the 77th Cannes Film Festival. The film will be released by Viacom 18 Studios in India while Rising Star Entertainment UK is at the helm for the global release.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



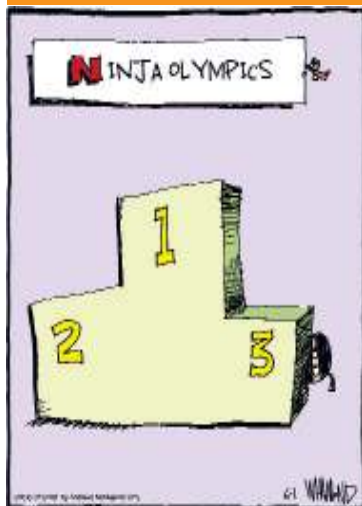
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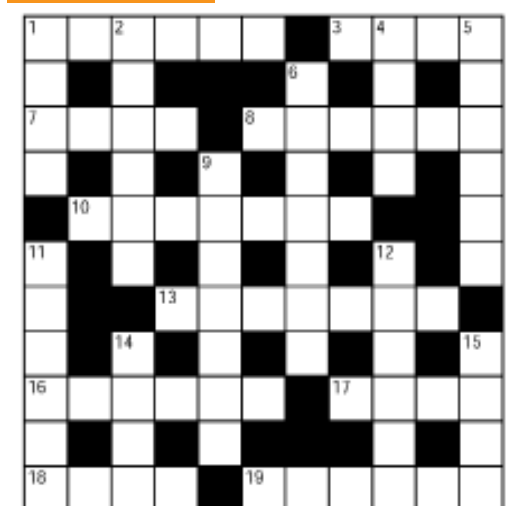
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



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Yesterday's solution

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3	5	4	7	9	1	8	6	2

Rules

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

ACROSS

- The one who comes first in a race
- Twirl around
- Very impolite
- A fire-breathing monster
- A repairer of teeth
- The head of an empire
- Look very carefully for something
- Jealousy
- Moist
- Centre

DOWN

- A wriggly creature living in soil
- Said "yes" with the head
- These hold clothes on a line
- Two times forty-five
- A painter uses these
- A body organ
- Touched lips with someone
- Connected together
- Peaceful and still
- A rubber cover for a wheel



'I would have been somewhere else if I'd catered to *Log Kya Kahenge* in real life'

TEJAL SINHA

Peer pressure—something that we've all been aware of and, on the other hand, something that is very well portrayed in the Prime Video series *Dil Dosti Dilemma*.

The series shows how a smart and young girl, Asmara, comes from a wealthy family in Bengaluru and is eager to spend her summer vacation in Canada. However, her plans take an unexpected turn when she arrives at Tibbri Road, her maternal grandparents' middle-class neighbourhood. What she originally perceives as a punishment evolves into a journey of new experiences and realisations. Through mishaps, new friendships, a growing relationship, and many beautiful moments, Asmara realises that there is more to life than financial possessions and luxurious trips. *The Pioneer* quickly connects with the national-award-winning actress Tanvi Azmi, who plays the character of Asmara's Naani, discussing this important theme.

"See, it's coming-of-age for this girl, and she has been exposed to these readily available roads and hi-fi places," begins the much-celebrated actress. She feels that, unfortunately, these are the value systems that these youngsters are growing up with.

Going ahead, she shares, "I feel why this went right was the incredible choice of her mother to take that responsibility of cancelling her trip to Canada and sending her to the godforsaken lower middle-class locality, which is a completely unfamiliar territory for her. I think what is commendable about this is that the parents are stepping in and deciding that this is enough and that this is not how you are going to behave. I don't know, as a mother, if I would have the guts to do this. She (Asmara) realises how flippant, friv-



olous, and false her life is and how she's keeping up with it." The peer pressure is certainly something that many youngsters these days have put themselves under. And in fact, as we discuss much in detail about the same, the *Bajirao Mastani* actress shares, "If you ask me, parents are just throwing money on their children, so the value of money and relationships have just disappeared, which is very tragic."

She also speaks of how important it is for conversations between elders and youngsters to happen like dialogue and not about imposing authority. Youngsters these days,

she says, are no doubt anti-authoritative, and there's a need to keep it as give-and-take in the conversations. "In *Dil Dosti Dilemma*, Asmara gives some valuable lessons to her grandmother, and her grandmother gives her value lessons, sharing each other's point of view. Somehow, I don't know how people have been blown away by this story. For me, it was a normal thing because I grew up in a joint family. So I felt this was an important show in that sense for older people to get perspective and also for the younger people."

Be it in *Akele Hum Akele Tum*, *Dushman*, *Mela*, *Raja Ko Rani Se Pyar Ho Gaya*, *Delhi-6*, *Thappad*, *Tribhanga*, and *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*, to name a few, screen space never defined her presence. But with *Bajirao Mastani*, we got to see a whole different Tanvi Azmi altogether. In fact, she shares, "I am always approached for characters that require me to be warm, strong, loving, and everything at the same time, but never like that of a character in

Bajirao Mastani. When I went to meet Sanjay for *Bajirao Mastani*, he said you've only played these strong, warm, and loving characters. How would you be able to play this? I was like, You need to have faith in yourself for choosing me as an actor, and you need to see if I'm capable or not. One needs to understand that, as actors, that's what you are supposed to do, and that's your job. Just because you are good at being warm, sensitive, and affectionate, you can just not keep playing the same. There has to be something else on your platter. Now I'm being approached for a lot of antagonistic roles also, which is great."

Log kya kahenge (What will people say!) This phrase is something that many people, not just previous generations, but also younger generations, are concerned about. And as we see, that's something that her character too thinks of in the *Dil Dosti Dilemma*. Certainly not someone who believes in this in real life, she says, "Interesting question, yaa. Actually, this is who I am. I am completely mad, vibrant, and sarcastic. I know I can be fun, so I am all of that, but I will still bring those bits to Naani as and when required. You know, sometimes it's just the look, but the point is that you have to touch the core of the character, which is what I feel, and once you do that, everything flows and things come automatically. Log kya kahenge toh woh generation ka toh hai hi (What will people say? It is definitely of that generation); in fact, not just that generation but also a lot of us are holding on to ourselves. Even today, kids are like, they will judge me. It's only as you grow older that you realise that nobody really has time for you and nobody's judging you. They will say one sentence and move on in their lives. You have to see what you need to do. Frankly, I've never been one to cater to *Log Kya Kahenge*. Maine toh itna sab kuch kiya hai, agar maine socha hota toh kahin aur hi hoti. Hindu Maharashtrian Brahmin girl marrying a Muslim at the age of 21 ab uske aage aap kya karenge (What will Longe say? I have done a lot of things, and if I had given it a thought, I would have been somewhere else. Hindu Maharashtrian Brahmin girl marrying a Muslim at the age of 21 (what will you do next)? So after that sab kuch maaf (everything is forgiven), you need to stop worrying about the world. The world is not worrying about you."

National-award-winning actress Tanvi Azmi, who was recently seen in the Prime Video series *Dil Dosti Dilemma*, discusses with *The Pioneer* the central theme of the series and enunciates the thought process of her character with her real-life experiences.



TRANSFORMING HIS CIVIL SERVICE DREAMS INTO A THRIVING START-UP

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Surajit Kalita takes us through his journey from being a civil servant and working with the Assam government to creating his own AI special interest group in Hyderabad.

RASHMI BHUMIREDDY

Life is all about surprises that come to your plate, consisting of unexpected twists and turns. Well, similar is the story of this young man from Assam. Well, many dream of cracking the civil service examination, don't they? But Surajit Kalita, on the other hand, not only cracked the state civil services examination, but in order to pursue his desire of getting into managing consultancy, he quit his civil servant job.

Hailing from Guwahati, he comes from a family where his late father, K.N. Kalita, worked as the proprietor of a civil construction firm. Having been brought up by his mother, who was a homemaker, who managed to handle the finances, along with the education of his and his other two sisters and other expenses through the properties.

"Since childhood, I always aspired to become a civil servant so that I could contribute to the socio-economic development of Assam," begins Surajit on a brighter note in this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*.

Fortunately, he achieved his dream by passing the state civil service exam on his first attempt in 2018. "I have many fond memories from my time as a civil servant. It provided me with ample opportunities to serve in various leadership roles across different capacities. While working as a civil servant, I joined as an executive magistrate for the government of Assam. I served in three rural districts, taking care of economic development, administration, law and order, revenue collection, disaster management, and the conduct of elections under the ambit of the ECI. I was responsible for managing the state's response to saving and rehabilitating people during natural disasters."

He found himself doing the service in the highly flood-prone districts of Morigaon and Kamrup. Additionally, he led the Health Department during the fight against COVID-19. Furthermore, he was also responsible for managing law and order and also led from the front to manage and contain violent mass protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Surajit, who was also involved in many developmental projects aimed at uplifting

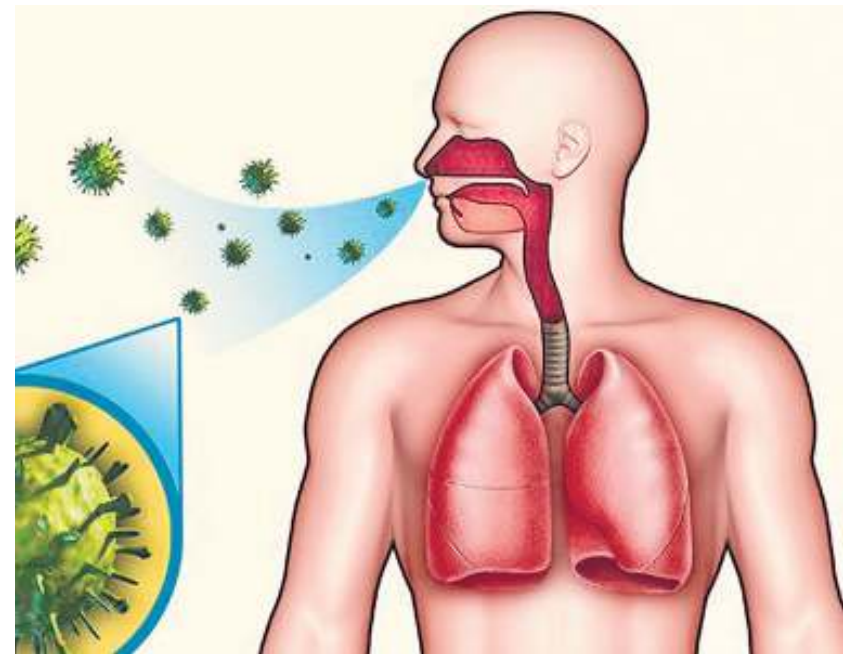
women and children in rural Assam, somehow shifted his career from a stable government job to a management consultancy. In regards to this, he goes on further and shares, "While a government job undoubtedly offers many opportunities and a secure career, it also comes with limitations in terms of geography and jurisdiction. When I joined, I aimed to serve the people of my state with full dedication and capability. I am proud to say that during my time as a civil servant, I achieved all the goals I had set for myself. However, I realised the need to upskill and prepare myself for the rapid innovation and progress the world is experiencing. Management consulting offers the opportunity to stay updated with these transformations and solve problems for both businesses and people."

Thus, he went on to pursue a Post Graduate Program (PGP) in Strategy and Information Technology at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

His learning experience at ISB, he says, was truly enriching and transformative. He further shares, "The program provided me with a holistic understanding of business management, honed my analytical skills, and equipped me with the tools necessary to tackle complex problems in various domains. One of the most valuable aspects of ISB was its faculty and leadership conclaves. The professors and experts in the conclaves brought real-world experience to us, which made the learning more practical and relevant. Their insights into industry trends, case studies, and best practices were invaluable. Moreover, its diverse student cohort enhanced my learning experience since interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds and industries broadened my perspective and allowed me to learn from their experiences. Collaborating with them on projects and assignments not only improved my teamwork and communication skills but also exposed me to different approaches to problem solving."

During his tenure at ISB, he and other co-

founders launched an AI special interest group (SIG). This platform allows students who are interested in AI to share knowledge, resources, and insights. Members discuss the latest developments, research papers, and case studies in the field, enhancing their understanding of AI concepts and applications. It also facilitates networking among students, faculty, and industry professionals interested in AI. Through events like guest lectures, panel discussions, and networking sessions, members connect with experts and potential mentors, expanding their professional network and gaining valuable insights into career opportunities in AI. While the SIG membership is currently limited to the ISB ecosystem, we have organised numerous sessions in collaboration with other prominent institutions, including MIT Sloan and several IITs, that helped build a wider and more accessible community.



Valley fever demystified!

Valley Fever is an infection caused by the fungus *coccidioidomycosis* scientifically known as *coccidioidomycosis*. It attaches to an individual's lungs leading to severe coughing and difficulty in breathing. It poses a greater risk to children, elderly people, or persons with weak immune systems due to their vulnerability levels where they cannot fight it effectively as compared to others who are healthy against it.

Causes and Transmission

Valley fever is a disease that occurs when fungal spores are inhaled from the soil. These spores are usually present in arid environments characterized by dust. They become airborne when the soil is disturbed or during processes such as land cultivation, building, or wind. When inhaled, these molds can attach themselves to the lungs, and this causes infection.

Symptoms

Valley Fever's effects are different in different people, they may be mild on the one hand but severe in others.

- A slight fatigue, a cough, fever, shortness of breath, hurried headache, and night sweats may often be used to describe the symptoms associated with this disease and others with valley fever hence causing confusion for doctors trying to diagnose the right case among these cases.

- It can be more dangerous for people with weak immune systems e.g. in cases of such diseases or conditions as HIV/AIDS, organ transplant, or corticosteroid intake.

- In its extreme forms, this sickness may spread from one part of the body (generally the lungs) to another like the brain, spinal cord, bones, and joints leading to likely fatal complications.

Diagnosis

Valley fever is difficult to diagnose because it has symptoms similar to other respiratory diseases. The disease is diagnosed by healthcare practitioners through clinical approach and tests. Therefore,

they may have to perform blood tests, take chest X-rays, or even use CT scan images. They may also do blood cultures for fungus detection.

Prevention

It is unfortunate that as of now, there is no vaccine against Valley Fever. Yet, there's something people could do to decrease their chances of catching it. One could avoid going to areas where it is common when there is too much wind or dust around, putting on safety garments whenever they are doing their job in dirty places, and also remaining indoors prior and amid dust storm.

Treatment

The type of treatment for Valley Fever depends on how serious the disease is.

- For mild cases, those which are not too much, some people may take some antifungal drugs so that this fungal infection gets cleared.

- However, other forms of therapy are required in instances where the sickness is severe involving lung infections or meningitis so that the fungus is gotten rid of. These include having patients under anti-fungal medication from an indefinite future point alongside being admitted into the hospital at times.

Valley Fever is a very serious respiratory disease due to breathing in fungi spores found in soil. Typically, it shows mild symptoms however, people who have weak immunity are more likely to suffer from these symptoms heavily if they contract it.

The infection must be diagnosed early and managed through effective treatment to prevent dangerous complications that could prove life-threatening. By learning how to spot the signs of Valley Fever, detecting it early could protect anyone affected by this hidden danger of the desert.

(The author, Dr. Gera Smitha Raj, is a Consultant Dermatologist, at Apollo Clinic in Chandanagar.)



RCB'S TURNAROUND WILL INSPIRE OTHER TEAMS, SAYS DINESH KARTHIK

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's remarkable turnaround to win six games on the trot and barge into the Indian Premier League playoffs this year will inspire other teams in future, believes wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik. RCB, who lost seven of their first eight games including six defeats in a row, came back roaring from the brink of elimination in the 17th edition of IPL to make the final four. The Faf du Plessis-led side on Friday got the better of defending champions Chennai Super Kings by 27 runs to seal the fourth spot in the points table. "People will always remember certain journeys. The way we have come back after eight games, we needed to win six, people will remember this team," Karthik was quoted as saying in a RCB release. "Every year in this tournament, when you hit the seven-game mark, there will be one or two teams which would have probably won one



or two and they will look to us and say, 'RCB did it. That was special. We are going to try and repeat what RCB did.' "That is what we all play cricket for, sport for, where people follow us and believe us that they can do something

special. It is hard. It is not going to be easy, I can tell any team that. What we have achieved today is very, very special," Karthik said. RCB will now face the team which finishes third, one among Sunrisers Hyderabad

and Rajasthan Royals, in the Eliminator to be played at Ahmedabad on Wednesday. "We have it within our grasp to do something that people will remember us for many decades. It will be a journey where people will say, 'wow,

that RCB team was special. We are on that journey," Karthik said. Karthik said RCB's confidence was the differentiating factor between them and CSK, a team which has a better bilateral record. "Coming into this game, there was a sense of quiet confidence about us, playing the defending champions, and the way we played we should be really proud," Karthik said. The senior wicketkeeper pointed out RCB's fielding and aggressive batting, despite rain intervention, as the factors which worked for them. "We can proudly say we are the best fielding team in this tournament without a doubt," he said. "Even though it turned, we had a rain break, we had to go, start again, just the way Virat (Kohli) and Faf played the next three overs made it feel like 140-150 could be a decent total. "Most teams would have thought about that and we would have thought about that for a second as well," he said.

Rayudu does not feel Dhoni has played his last match, puts ball in BCCI court

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India batter Ambati Rayudu doesn't feel MS Dhoni has played his last match in the IPL and wants the BCCI to continue with the contentious impact player rule as it could help the long-serving legend to keep going in top-flight cricket. Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings bowed out of this edition of the Indian Premier League following a 27-run defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a much-anticipated southern derby in Bengaluru on Saturday. The five-time defending champions needed 17 in the final over to qualify for the playoffs on better net run rate, but bowler Yash Dayal, after being hit for monstrous six by Dhoni, held his nerves to help RCB prevail. Later, speaking on Star Sports Cricket Live, Rayudu said, "I don't think this is his last game. I just don't see him wanting to end on this note." Even as the RCB players broke into wild celebrations, Dhoni shook hands with the opposition's reserves and support staff before quietly disappearing into the dressing room. Rayudu said, "He looked a little frustrated, even when he got out. That's very unlike MS



Dhoni, he just wanted to qualify and finish on a high. But you never know with MS Dhoni, he might come back next year." Rayudu, who played under Dhoni at CSK, brought the BCCI into the picture. "... With the impact player role as well, it gives him the opportunity to be able to come in those last few overs and truly make that impact. "BCCI better not remove the impact player role because we still want to see MS Dhoni play. So, it's up to BCCI now. Do we want to see MS Dhoni play or not?" While the match ended in agony for Dhoni and Co, RCB continued their revival with a sixth straight win in a row, a remarkable feat that saw them rise from the bottom of the table to make the playoffs. Speaking of Dhoni, former Australian opener Matthew

Hayden said, "Yeah, I suppose the thing is when you come to the end of your career, whether it is the last part of his career or not, what you don't want to see is diminishing returns as an athlete. "Firstly, as a leader, he is The Thala of the Chennai Super Kings. This is telling me that nothing here is about becoming anything else other than first place. He's desperately using his brains, all of that cricket knowledge. "And of course, the power is there and that's always been MS Dhoni. He's always hit balls at this stage of an innings. At the front, you can understand how players can hit it. But at the back, it's really hard to hit balls." Dhoni made 25 off 13 balls with the help of three fours and a huge six, showing that he can still send the ball a long, long way.

God's plan: Year after Rinku's rapidfire, Yash Dayal redeems himself

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Yash Dayal couldn't shake the haunting memory of Rinku Singh's five consecutive sixes last year as MS Dhoni lofted his full-toss over the Chinnaswamy roof, before regaining his composure to complete the 20th over and clinch RCB's berth in the 2024 IPL playoffs. Dayal, who cut a forlorn figure after being hammered for five sixes in a row by his Uttar Pradesh mate Rinku last season, redeemed himself on Saturday night by defending 17 in the final over against the likes of Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja. "God's plan baby," that was how Rinku summed the reversal of fortunes for Dayal.

The 26-year-old from Prayagraj was released by Gujarat Titans after the 2023 season but he found a new IPL home in RCB, who showed faith in him by paying a handsome Rs 5 crore at the auction. Dayal not only repaid the faith but also erased the scars of last season. "When I got hit the first ball (by Dhoni), subconsciously you reach that place (Rinku's five sixes off him). But I did well this whole season and I kept telling myself that I just had to bowl a good ball. "I didn't have to look at the scoreboard. I just had to bowl well. I used that confidence in execution," said Dayal who kept RCB's remarkable comeback story alive in this

IPL. The last over also indicated the coming of age for Dayal, who learned from the mistakes he made against Rinku's onslaught. After the full toss that Dhoni duly dispatched out of the ground, Dayal returned to bowling slower balls into the pitch that resulted in the former India captain's wicket and just one run off the following four balls. "The last time what happened with me, it made me a little nervous. But since I have come in the RCB setup, I have worked very hard on practice and I have delivered in matches. I just wanted to focus on bowling two balls well. "Even if when plans were not



executed well, the seniors were standing, they did not scold me or anything. That was a positive thing and it helped me a lot on the ground." In what arguably has been the toughest season for bowlers, Dayal has managed 15 wickets in 13 games at a decent economy rate of 8.94. Dayal was supposed to bowl the penultimate over but a last-minute change of plan saw him bowling one of the most important overs of his life. "Actually, I was going to bowl the second last over. But suddenly DK bhैया and Faf spoke. I don't know what they talked about. They said that Lockie will bowl and then I'll bowl the main over. I was fine

with both." Dayal feels the constant support that he has received from RCB has led to desirable results. "I have got proper backing from RCB. When I came at the start, the management told me that I am an important player. I will be backed from the starting to the end, which is a very good thing. "All the youngsters who were picked, they were told the same thing. That is now visible in the results also." The home crowd was RCB's 12th man as usual and with a play-off berth on the line, the atmosphere fired up the team even more. It is difficult to keep emotions in check at such a juncture but

Dayal tried to calm himself down. "There are so many people around you, there is a whole crowd. So, somewhere or the other, the mind gets diverted. But as a player, we are built for this." He also gave due credit to the army of RCB loyalists. "I had never felt like this since childhood. Whenever I used to watch a RCB match on TV, I never thought that I would be part of this team. Today I am here and I was feeling unreal on the ground. It is an unbelievable crowd and very supportive," added Dayal. What was the turning point of the game? "I think Dhoni bhैया's wicket was the turning point, as the first ball went for six."

OTHERS SPORTS

Satwik, Chirag win Thailand Open title

PTI ■ BANGKOK

In a confidence-boosting performance ahead of Paris Olympics, star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Sunday won the Thailand Open Super 500 badminton tournament with a straight-game win over Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi of China, here. Satwik and Chirag, the world number three pair, prevailed 21-15 21-15 over Liu and Chen, ranked 29th, for their ninth BWF world tour title in men's doubles. It was also the second title of the season for the Asian Games

champions following their triumph at the French Open Super 750 in March. They had also finished runners-up at Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750. "It has been a lucky tournament for us. The journey started from here. We lifted this title in 2019 and again we are lifting it here now. After 2019, we went on to win many tournaments and, hopefully, it will give more boost to us in the upcoming important tournaments," Satwik said after the win. "They keep on playing fast and we knew we couldn't relax. Overall, I think it's the best match we played throughout the tournament. We kept



everything calm and under control. So really happy that we played well." Asked about Paris Games, Chirag said: "Not just us but all athletes want to go out there in the Olympics and win that medal and we too want that

and hopefully we will play well there." For Satwik and Chirag, the title comes at a crucial juncture of their careers as they had some low returns in the last couple of tournaments. The Indian pair lost in the second round at All England Championships and then missed the Asia Championships due to an injury to Satwik. The Thomas Cup campaign was also not too fruitful as they lost a couple of narrow matches to top pairs. Satwik and Chirag had come into the Thailand Open final without dropping a game and were favourites to claim the title, while Liu and Chen also produced some stunning wins in the run-up to the summit clash and

had the reputation of never losing a final. However, it was always going to be a tough task to tame the top-seeded Indians, who didn't allow the Chinese to get into long rallies or sustain any pressure. Satwik and Chirag made a superb start by quickly opening up a 5-1 lead. Chen and Liu clawed back with a four-point burst. At 7-7, the Chinese pair won a 39-shot rally and surged ahead to 10-7 before spraying one long. Liu and Chen played a few intense rallies but Chirag unleashed a bullet return to draw level at 10-10 but Liu ensured they had a slender edge at the break.

Messi held scoreless but Inter Miami extends unbeaten string



AP ■ FORT LAUDERDALE

Lionel Messi was kept off the scoresheet for the second consecutive match, but Inter Miami secured its second straight shutout. "We were not as fluid offensively and they formed a solid defense," Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said. "Defensively we worked very well." The win improved Eastern Conference-leading Miami to 9-2-4 with 31 points. DC United dropped to 4-5-5 and 17 points. Messi returned to the lineup after missing Wednesday's match at Orlando because of knee soreness. The Argentine star forward had at least one goal and assist in five consecutive matches until a 3-2 win at Montreal on May 11. Messi began Saturday with a league-leading 12 assists. Tightly marked for most of the match, Messi found a slight opening in the 71st minute, but his shot from 22 yards sailed high above the crossbar. Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender preserved the shutout when he stopped a shot from United's Jacob

score the goal." For a team known for its high-powered offense that has produced a league-high 36 goals, Miami secured its second straight shutout. "We were not as fluid offensively and they formed a solid defense," Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said. "Defensively we worked very well." The win improved Eastern Conference-leading Miami to 9-2-4 with 31 points. DC United dropped to 4-5-5 and 17 points. Messi returned to the lineup after missing Wednesday's match at Orlando because of knee soreness. The Argentine star forward had at least one goal and assist in five consecutive matches until a 3-2 win at Montreal on May 11. Messi began Saturday with a league-leading 12 assists. Tightly marked for most of the match, Messi found a slight opening in the 71st minute, but his shot from 22 yards sailed high above the crossbar. Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender preserved the shutout when he stopped a shot from United's Jacob

Aravindh Chithmabaram beats Salem to claim sole lead in Sharjah

PTI ■ SHARJAH

Indian Grandmaster Aravindh Chithmabaram defeated local star A R Saleh Salem to emerge as the sole leader on 4.5 points after the end of the fifth round of Sharjah Masters chess tournament here. Chithmabaram is now followed by four players, the Iranian duo of Amin Tabatabaei and Bardiya Daneshvar and Americans Hans Moke Niemann and Sam Shankland who all have four points apiece. Top seed Arjun Erigaisi is in the next pack of eight players having 3.5 points each and giving him company here is another Indian in Sankalp Gupta.

With four rounds still to be played in the USD 52000 prize money tournament, as many as 16 players have an identical three points each. The list includes Indians Abhimanyu Puranik, Leon Luke Mendonca, P Iniyan and V Pranav. It turned out to be a tough day at the office for many but Chithmabaram was in his element as he simply crushed Salem in all departments of the game. It was a King's Indian defense by Salem who played black and the middle game saw Chithmabaram exerting pressure on the queen side. It was on the 17th move that the Chennai-based GM unleashed a brilliant tactical sequence, giving up two



minor pieces for a rook. As things turned out, white's position remained better for the rest of the game and Salem was outdone eventually in the endgame wherein white's rook proved superior. The game lasted 48 moves.

Erigaisi was in a spot of bother at some point against Volodar Murzin, the upcoming talent from Russia who has to play under FIDE flag here. After attaining an optically better position in the middle game out of a Queen pawn game,

Erigaisi was on the defensive as Murzin made some steady recovery. He had to liquidate to a rook and pawns endgame where the draw was a just result. Sankalp continued with his impressive run, holding highly regarded Teimour Radjabov of Azerbaijan to a draw while Abhimanyu Puranik could not keep up with his form and lost to Amin Tabatabaei of Iran. Important and Indian results Round 5 (Indians unless specified): Aravindh Chithmabaram (4.5) beat A.R. Saleh Salem (Uae, 3.5); Hans Moke Niemann (Usa, 4) drew with Alexey Sarana (Srb, 3.5); Erigaisi Arjun (3.5) drew with Volodar Murzin (Fid, 3.5); Abhimanyu Puranik (3) lost to Amin Tabatabaei (Iri, 4);

Sankalp Gupta (3.5) drew with Samuel Sevian (Usa, 3); Shreyas Royal (Eng, 3) drew with Nihal Sarin (3); Leon Luke Mendonca (3) drew with Nikolas Theodorou (Gre, 3); P Iniyan (3) drew with Teimour Radjabov (Aze, 3); V Pranav (3) beat Nodirbek Yakubov (Uzb, 2); Abhimanyu Mishra (2.5) drew with Bharath Subramaniam (2.5); Benjamin Gledura (Hun, 2.5) drew with Pranav Anand (2.5); Aditya Mittal (2.5) drew with Siddharth Jagadeesh (Sgp, 2.5); B Adhian (3) beat Pouya Idani (Iri, 2); Abhijeet Gupta (2.5) drew with Mahdi Gholami Orimi (Iri, 2.5); D Harika (1.5) lost to Emre Can (Tur, 2.5); Yilmaz Mustafa (Tur, 1.5) drew with Raja Ritvik (1.5); S P Sethuraman (1) lost to Yazig

Actress Tanvi Akaansha Koppineedi, who is all set to make her theatrical debut with Vijaya Bhaskar's *Usha Parinayam*, gets candid with *The Pioneer* over an exclusive call, sharing interesting insights about her breakthrough in the industry.

'MY CHARACTER IN USHA PARINAYAM HAS DIFFERENT SHADES & EMOTIONS'



TEJAL SINHA

Tanvi Akaansha Koppineedi, is all set to make her theatrical debut with the upcoming Vijaya Bhaskar-helmed *Usha Parinayam*. What makes this project even more special is that Tanvi will be seen playing the lead protagonist opposite Sree Kamal.

Well, this is not going to be the first time that she's going to show us her acting prowess, because it was in 2021 when she starred in the Zee5-streamed *Alanti Sitrulu*. The OTT project was undeniably a film she's always going to be grateful for. Not only was it her first-ever project, but it was through *Alanti Sitrulu* that she got to learn anything and everything about the shooting process. However, it didn't seem easy for her to post that after going to multiple auditions. But again, getting to the auditions was also not a cakewalk because she had to constantly look through Instagram and make casting calls.

"Since I was four years old, I have always dreamt of being an actress," recalls the budding star in this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*. And so, watching her film on the big screens is definitely going to be a surreal and dream-come-true moment. "Ever since I was a kid, I was trying to get that one project, and finally it happened with *Alanti Sitrulu*, which in a way helped me a lot." In fact, when she was a four-year-old, she auditioned for a kid's role in *Jai Chiranjeeva*, alongside megastar Chiranjeevi. However, I couldn't make it through.

Breakthrough projects also bring different emotions and challenges. However, with *Usha Parinayam*, she shares,

"Everybody on set made it very easy for me, especially sir, my director (Vijaya Bhaskar). He took very good care of me. So, once I got the project, it just felt like I was working with a family; it didn't feel like an outsider for me as such. I consider it a 100% God's blessing that I got to debut with such a talented director who makes such classic films. It's an absolute honour to be under his guidance, to learn from him, and to know him as a director. He is a very kind-hearted person and a beautiful human being. I really hope to work with him again and again."

We wondered how she bagged the project. Well, she goes on to reveal, "My dad is an executive producer in the industry, and through one of his friends (Hari uncle), who is a casting director, he happened to show my profile to sir. I went and met sir, and actually, you know, our interaction was just for five minutes. He just saw me and spoke to me a little bit. I thought I didn't make it because I didn't audition for it, but he told me that when he saw me, he knew I was his Usha." Well, that's so overwhelming!

Further, she also brings in some exclusive revelations: "There were over 200

girls who had auditioned for the role, and a few were, in fact, also finalised. However, it didn't happen with them for some reason, and I got the role."

A special moment from the sets of *Usha Parinayam*: "After I had just done my scene, everyone on the set started clapping for me. I think that is something I will cherish forever after my first shot. We were shooting in Kashmir, and every day was so fun; Kamal would make me laugh and everybody would take care of me," she shares, adding her camaraderie with Kamal: "He is a very humble and down-to-earth person, very sweet, and made me feel extremely comfortable. Not only me; he takes care of everybody on set and is sweet to everybody. He is very talented. It is a privilege to make a debut with such a talented person as him."

The national-award-winning filmmaker Vijaya Bhaskar is known for his romantic comedies. So what can we expect from *Usha Parinayam*? The lead actress shares, "You can expect a romantic comedy. It's a full package; there are commercial aspects to it and a lot of entertainment. At the end of the day, I feel like everybody will feel like I have watched a good movie and family entertainer, and all age groups can watch it." Further shar-

ing some exclusive insights about her character without revealing much detail, she shares, "This role has all kinds of emotions, and she is a strong character. I get to play so many shades in the story, so it's like a beautifully written character, and it's like any heroine would love to debut with. I could really showcase how she is."

Undeniably being a little nervous, and just as her bio reads 'faith over fear', even this time she says, at the end of the day, this was something that she has always dreamt about. "I just had to calm myself. I talked to myself and just kept reading the script. But after my first shot, I got a lot of confidence, and sir was very sweet about it. He was like, 'Don't be nervous, and you can do it'. Kamal was also a very encouraging person. The set had around 70 to 80 people, while *Alanti Sitrulu* had not more than 10 people. So it was very intimidating as everyone was watching me."

Usha Parinayam also has a special mass song that has Seerat Kapoor dazzling the screen with her beauty and moves. Recalling her interaction with the actress, she shares, "I met her, and she is extremely sweet. I went on the last day of the shoot of the song, and I was behind the sets. I feel it is definitely going to be a blast in the theater, and everybody will have fun watching it."

She also discloses that a song was also shot in Dubai. Well, on a concluding note, the budding actress, who is looking forward to working with all of the actors and directors in the Telugu film industry, shares, "I just love Telugu films and hope that the audience will love me and Kamal on-screen. And moving forward, I would love to work with everybody here."



Who is Bujji from Kalki 2898 AD?

The anticipation surrounding the magnum opus, *Kalki 2898 AD*, is high among movie enthusiasts worldwide. With the announcement of the revelation of the fifth superstar and Bhairava's best friend, Bujji, on May 22, 2024, excitement knows no bounds. In a fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpse titled 'From Scratch EP4: Building A Superstar', the creators take us on an enthralling journey, starting from director Nag Ashwin's visionary inception back in June 2020. Described as a "superhero," "Bhairava's best friend," and "Best Companion," Bujji's buildup has left netizens guessing and eager to know more about this much-talked-about 5th Superstar of the film. The 2-minute, 22-second video even offers teasing glimpses, including a mysterious encounter

with Prabhas in what appears to be a garage setting, heightening the eagerness for Bujji's grand debut on May 22nd. Moreover, a recent revelation into the realm of *Kalki 2898 AD* through Amitabh Bachchan's portrayal of Ashwatthama has left fans spellbound. The character reveal, celebrated as a true pan-Indian teaser, seamlessly weaves together languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and English. Directed by the visionary Nag Ashwin, *Kalki 2898 AD* stands tall as the cinematic event of the year. With an ensemble cast featuring luminaries like Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan, Prabhas, Deepika Padukone, and Disha Patani, and supported by the esteemed Vyjayanthi Movies banner, the stage is set for a monumental release on 27th June, 2024.



Niharika NM set to debut in Tamil cinema

Niharika NM is set to debut in a Tamil movie with LYCA Productions, successfully setting foot into the world of movies after conquering the digital landscape. While it is her third time at the Cannes Film Festival, she will be attending the festival this year as a debutant actor.

Niharika's debut in Tamil cinema is a testament to her talent and relentless hard work. Niharika has always been quick at picking up languages and accents. She speaks five languages: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, and English. Owing to this, she has her eyes set on working across the film industry. Earlier this year, she made her Hollywood debut with the widely popular global show *Big Mouth* alongside Megan Thee Stallion, Jordan Peele, Padma Lakshmi, and Maitreyi Ramakrishnan.

Expressing her exhilaration, Niharika NM says, "I am really excited and really nervous at the same time. I'm nervous only because I care a lot. I just hope that when the movie comes out, everybody enjoys watching me on the big screen as much as they do on the small ones. And to be launched by LYCA, the biggest production house in South India, is truly an honour for me. I hope I make everybody who's ever supported me proud."

The movie, slated to be released early in 2025, features Atharva Murali, with director Aakash Baskaran making his debut. It is a wholesome film filled with romance, comedy, friendship, and heartbreak. As Niharika NM prepares to embark on this fresh journey, she remains grounded in her roots and committed to her craft. With humility and determination, she sets her sights on making a meaningful impact in the world of cinema and inspiring others to pursue their passion for storytelling fearlessly.

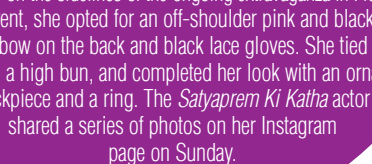


Real gold used for Yash's outfits in Ramayana

Actor Yash, who will be playing the role of Ravana in Nitesh Tiwari's upcoming film *Ramayana*, will be seen sporting garments made out of "actual gold". A source close to IANS shared details about costumes: "The clothes that are being made for Yash are made of real gold." The demon king's kingdom was known as the 'Golden City of Lanka' according to mythology. The source further shares, "Actual gold is being used because Ravana was the king of Sri Lanka and it was a golden province at that time. So, all his clothes, whatever is being used, are being made in real gold." The upcoming magnum opus also stars Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Rama and Sai Pallavi as Sita. It also has actress Lara Dutta playing Kaikeyi and Arun Govil as Raja Dashrath. Designer duo Rimple and Harpreet, who have made costumes for films like *Padmaavat*, *Housefull 4*, and the series *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*, have come aboard to make ensembles for *Ramayana*.

KIARA ADVANI STUNS AT CANNES

It was "a night to remember," said actor Kiara Advani, who was honoured at the Women In Cinema Gala, which was held alongside the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. Advani was one of the six women to be felicitated at the dinner, hosted by the Red Sea International Film Festival and Vanity Fair Europe on Saturday on the sidelines of the ongoing extravaganza in France. For the event, she opted for an off-shoulder pink and black gown with a bow on the back and black lace gloves. She tied her hair in a high bun, and completed her look with an ornate neckpiece and a ring. The *Satyamev Ki Katha* actor shared a series of photos on her Instagram page on Sunday.



Universal Hero Kamal Haasan and directed by visionary filmmaker Shankar, is finally nearing its grand release. With post-production nearing completion, the makers are gearing up for a promotional blitzkrieg to reignite the excitement surrounding this cinematic event. The *Indian 2* team has already descended upon Mumbai, kicking off a series of promotions with a stylish appearance

The highly anticipated sequel to the 1996 blockbuster *Indian*, *Indian 2*, starring Universal Hero Kamal Haasan and directed by visionary filmmaker Shankar, is finally nearing its grand release. With post-production nearing completion, the makers are gearing up for a promotional blitzkrieg to reignite the excitement surrounding this cinematic event. The *Indian 2* team has already descended upon Mumbai, kicking off a series of promotions with a stylish appearance

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