

**EC wrong in directing Cong not to politicise Agnipath: Chidambaram**  
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**MALDIVES TO LAUNCH INDIA'S RUPAY SERVICE**  
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**Shruti Haasan confesses BREAK-UP**  
 P12

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
 Uttam made someone file a police case against me when I asked about public issues as an opposition leader. Is this the people's government? (Praja Palana). The Revanth government should order a probe into irregularities in the Civil Supplies Department. The government set up a committee, framed guidelines and issued a statement regarding inviting tenders for procuring paddy. How is all this possible on a single day?  
 - Alleti Maheshwar Reddy, BJLP leader P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**SSC student raped in classroom by minor...**

In a shocking incident, a 15-year-old girl who recently completed her 10th Class (SSC) was raped in her school classroom by a minor boy. The heinous act was recorded on video by four others in Mandavalli village. Although the incident occurred on May 15, it only came to light on Thursday when the girl's parents complained to the police. According to the police, the victim went to her school to collect her marks list. At the same time, five of her schoolmates, including the minor boy, were also present at the school. As the girl...

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**'Early brain network differences in...**

Six-week old infants with high chances of developing autism showed distinct patterns in brain connections, which researchers said likely emerge much earlier than autism-related behaviours can be noticed. The researchers focussed on the brain's salience network, a group of regions crucial to identifying information in the environment that is worthy of one's attention and enabling appropriate responses to them. In babies with high chances of developing autism -- a disorder marked by repetitive...

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**Leather exporters seek national...**

Apex body for leather and footwear exporters CLE has asked the government to formulate a national policy for the sector with a view to attract investments, boost India's shipments and create jobs. In a letter to Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam, Council for Leather Exports (CLE) said that though there are schemes and support measures at central and state levels, there is a need for holistic development of the entire sector through a national policy. The elements of the proposed policy, it said, can...

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**SRH big hitters up against RR's spin...**

IPL's best power-hitters Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma will face a very different challenge in wily spin twins Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin when Sunrisers Hyderabad take on Rajasthan Royals in a high-octane second Qualifier here on Friday. 'Travishek' as the duo is affectionately called by the fans have taken power-hitting to a new level. Head (533 runs at 199.62) and Abhishek (470 at 207.04) have hit 72 sixes apart from 96 boundaries between them. If that's not enough, they have...

-SPORTS

**EC did not release controversial video: CEO**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena has disclosed that eight police teams, comprising Superintendents of Police (SP) and Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP), are actively pursuing the arrest of YSRCP Macherla MLA candidate and incumbent MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy. This development comes in the wake of a video surfacing depicting Reddy purportedly vandalising an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) at the Palvai Gate polling station. Meena clarified that while the video footage did not officially leave the custody of the Election Commission (EC), it may have been leaked during the investigative process. Furthermore, the Presiding Officer (PO) and Assistant Presiding Officer (APO) on duty were suspended for failing to furnish accurate information regarding the EVM damage incident.

Speaking at a press briefing on Thursday, Meena underscored the EC's commitment to expeditiously apprehending Ramakrishna Reddy. He cautioned leaders of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) against visiting injured activists in the Macherla constituency, urging them to refrain from exacerbating tensions as the situation gradually stabilises. Meena also announced plans for a state visit on May 25 to personally inspect the strong rooms where EVMs are securely stored. Meena assured the public of a robust three-tier security arrangement, involving both Central and State

**Meena stresses stepping up of security at strongrooms**

- TDP leaders advised against visiting Macherla constituency to prevent escalating tensions
- Meena scheduled a State visit tomorrow to inspect strongrooms where EVMs are stored.
- Enhanced security measures, including three-tier security, are in place in strongrooms with continuous CCTV monitoring.
- Review meeting with District Election Officers focused on ensuring stringent measures for June 4 vote counting.
- Separate media centres established at counting sites; clear communication with candidates and agents emphasised.
- Strict protocols outlined for EVM movement, counting procedures, and access control at counting centres.
- Additional CEOs and election officers participated in a video conference to coordinate efforts across districts.

**Pleas of Ambati, Mohit for re-polling dismissed**

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has dismissed two petitions separately filed by Minister Ambati Rambabu and Chandragiri YSRCP candidate Mohit Reddy, both seeking re-polling. Minister Ambati Rambabu had petitioned the High Court to conduct re-polling in

four polling centres in Sattenapalli following violence on polling day. The petition was rejected by the trial court. Similarly, the High Court also dismissed Mohit Reddy's plea for re-polling in Chandragiri, Tirupati district. The polling day and subsequent days witnessed widespread violence in Palnadu and Tirupati districts.

Officers on Thursday, Meena instructed them to enforce stringent measures for the vote-counting process scheduled for June 4.

Continued on Page 2

**HC grants interim bail to Pinnelli till June 5**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a temporary relief to YSRCP MLA from Macherla, Ramakrishna Reddy, the AP High Court granted him interim bail. The court stipulated conditions for the bail, ensuring that no legal action could be taken against Pinnelli until June 5, 10 am. The case is adjourned to June 6.

On Thursday, Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy approached the AP High Court seeking anticipatory bail. A motion petition was swiftly filed by the MLA, leading to the court's decision to grant bail. The hearing on the anticipatory bail petition of Macherla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy was conducted by the AP High Court. Advocate Niranjan Reddy, representing MLA Pinnelli, argued that if the alleged incident indeed occurred on May 13, an FIR would have been lodged by May 15.

Reddy contested the Election Commission's actions triggered by a video released by opposition leader Nara Lokesh on Twitter, pointing out that the FIR mentioned unidentified individuals. Questioning the authenticity of the Twitter video, Reddy suggested it might have been doctored. Emphasizing the severity of the charges, Reddy cited guidelines from the Supreme Court's Anesh Kumar case, noting that in cases carrying sentences of up to seven years, 41A notices should be served. The Election Commission's counsel requested time to prepare a counter. Justice Jyotirmayi, presiding over the single bench, temporarily postponed proceedings due to an ongoing inquiry in another court. Subsequently, arguments were presented on behalf of the police, leading to Justice Jyotirmayi granting conditional bail to MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy until June 5th.



Continued on Page 2



**Kodali indisposed**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Gudivada sitting MLA Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) fell ill during a meeting with YSRCP leaders of Nandivada mandal at his residence in Gudivada on Thursday. While discussing the recently concluded general election polling with party leaders and cadres, Nani suddenly collapsed onto the sofa.

Immediately following the incident, Nani's security personnel cleared the party leaders and cadres from his house and notified doctors. A team of doctors promptly arrived at Nani's residence and began treatment. According to the doctors, Nani's condition is currently stable and there is no cause for concern.

Nani had been actively participating in the election campaign for 75 days without rest, which contributed to his exhaustion. During the meeting, he collapsed due to fatigue, stress, and high temperatures, according to party leaders. Supporters of Kodali Nani have condemned the spread of false news regarding his health. They affirmed that there are no major health issues concerning Nani and criticised the misinformation being circulated.

**Bengaluru rave party: 86 people including Telugu actress test positive for narcotics**

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The blood samples collected from those who attended the rave party at a farmhouse here recently have revealed that 86 people, including a Telugu film actress, tested positive for narcotics, police sources said on Thursday.

According to sources, a total of 103 people had participated in the party, which was organised under the pretext of a birthday party. The participants included 73 men and 30 women.

Police seized MDMA (Ecstasy) pills, MDMA crystals,

hydro cannabis, cocaine, high end cars, DJ equipment, including sound and lighting worth Rs 1.5 crore during the raid at the farmhouse near Electronic City in the wee hours of May 19.

After the raid, police collected the blood samples of the participants in a private hospital, which revealed that 59 men and 27 women tested positive for narcotics.

"Most of the people who attended the party were consuming drugs. The Central Crime Branch will issue notices to those who tested positive," a police source said.



According to sources, a total of 103 people had participated in the party, which was organised under the pretext of a birthday party.

**Disclosure of station-wise voter turnout on website will cause chaos: EC to SC**



P5

**7 Naxals killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh**

PNS ■ NARAYANPUR

Seven Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in a forest along Narayanpur-Bijapur inter-district border in Chhattisgarh on Thursday, police said.

The gunfight broke out around 11 am when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation and the intermittent firing was still underway. Narayanpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Prabhat Kumar said. Seven Naxalites in "Maoist uni-



form" have been gunned down in the exchange of fire so far, said the SP. The operation, involving personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard from Dantewada,

Narayanpur and Bastar districts, Bastar Fighters and Special Task Force -- all units of state police -- was launched based on inputs about the presence of cadres from Maoists' Indravati Area Committee and Platoon No. 16, he said.

Altogether seven firearms have been recovered from the encounter site, he said.

The operation is still underway and further details were awaited, he added.

2

**EVM VANDALISATION**



**2 polling officers suspended**

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Following the incident of EVM vandalism at Palvai polling station in the Rentachintala mandal of Macherla constituency, the Election Commission has taken action by suspending two polling officers involved.

The Election Commission suspended Presiding Officer Subba Rao, a lecturer at the Government Junior College in Sattenapalli, and polling officer Shabanaj Begum, an Assistant at ZP High School, Venkatapuram. They have been suspended for violating ECI guidelines and regulations.

It's worth noting that during the ongoing polling, Macherla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy of YSRCP reportedly visited the Palvai polling station and allegedly vandalised an EVM by striking it against the floor. The ECI has responded seriously to this incident and issued a lookout notice for MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, who is currently evading authorities.

**APNRTS reaches out to Telugu students**

**2 direct flights to Delhi from Bishkek from today**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CEO of Andhra Pradesh Non-Resident Telugu Society (APNRTS), Venkat Medapati, has assessed the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, affirming that conditions are currently stable. Charanjeet Singh, Additional Secretary of Eurasia at the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, announced that starting May 23, there will be two direct flights daily from Bishkek to New Delhi.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Medapati assured that APNRTS Society is actively monitoring the situation in Kyrgyzstan and maintaining communication with Telugu students, providing necessary



counselling and support. The society ensures that students are promptly informed about advisories from the Ministry of External Affairs.

Continuing their efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of students from Andhra Pradesh in Kyrgyzstan, the APNRTS has raised concerns with the office of Charanjeet Singh, highlighting the challenges faced by students and the requests for repatriation. In response, the Office of the Additional Secretary-Eurasia at the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, confirmed that the situation in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is normal. Medical stu-

dents from India in Kyrgyzstan are advised to adhere to the guidelines provided by the National Medical Commission of India before considering returning to India.

Furthermore, it was conveyed that two direct flights will operate daily from Bishkek to New Delhi starting May 23. Indian students requiring assistance can contact the Embassy of India in Bishkek through their helpline at 0555710041.

APNRTS urges students and parents not to panic but to remain vigilant. They emphasise their commitment to closely monitoring the situation and encourage students in Kyrgyzstan to reach out to their 24/7 helpline for assistance. The helpline numbers are +91 863 2340678 and +91 85000 27678 (W), and students can also email at info@apnrts.com or helpline@apnrts.com.

**Thunderstorms forecast in AP**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday forecast thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and gusty winds in parts of Andhra Pradesh for five days between May 23 and 27.

Rainfall is likely in parts of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh (NCAP), Yanam, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh (SCAP) and Rayalaseema, while heavy rains are predicted in some places in NCAP on Friday.

Gusty winds with speeds reaching up to 50 km per hour (kmph) are expected, said the weather department in a press release.

"Conditions are favourable for the advance of southwest monsoon over some more parts of south Bay of Bengal, remaining parts of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andaman Sea and some parts of east-central Bay of Bengal during the next two days."



during the next two days," it said.

According to the Met department, Wednesday's low pressure over the west-central and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal moved northeastward and transformed into a well-marked low-pressure area over

west-central and adjoining south Bay of Bengal by 8:30 am on Thursday.

It is likely to move northeastward and intensify into a cyclonic storm over the east-central Bay of Bengal by May 25 morning, the Met department added.



# YSRCP demands swift action on poll day violence

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leaders of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) met with Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena at the Secretariat on Thursday and submitted a letter urging immediate and decisive measures in response to incidents of violence during and after polling. MLAs Kasu Mahesh Reddy, Malladi Vishnu, MLC Lella Appi Reddy, and other party members were also present.

Post the May 13 polling, YSRCP has raised concerns over alleged booth capturing, rigging, and voter intimidation by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). These grievances necessitate urgent action, including re-polling in 60 booths across 16 constituencies, alongside enhanced police oversight. Despite repeated appeals, no action has been taken.

In their efforts to address these issues, party members have requested a thorough review of live webcasting footage from contested polling stations, with the intention of substantiating their call for re-polling based on evidence captured therein. Additionally, they have formally petitioned for the filing of cases and legal proceedings against individuals implicated in unlawful activities.

Addressing the media following the meeting, Gurazala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy warned that if the Election Commission fails to adequately



**Gurazala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy warned that if the Election Commission fails to adequately address instances of election-related violence linked to the Telugu Desam Party, they are prepared to take the matter to higher judicial authorities, including the High Court and the Supreme Court. He accused Chandrababu Naidu of orchestrating disturbances on polling day, particularly targeting marginalised communities.**

ly address instances of election-related violence linked to the Telugu Desam Party, they are prepared to take the matter to higher judicial authorities, including the High Court and the Supreme Court. He accused Chandrababu Naidu of orchestrating disturbances on polling day, particularly targeting marginalised communities. Complaints regarding TDP-instigated violence have been consistently lodged with the Election Commission

since polling day. The MLA emphasized TDP's involvement in booth rigging and reiterated the demand for re-polling in over 60 stations.

MLA Mahesh stressed the importance of conducting thorough investigations based on available footage and advocated for re-polling in areas marred by violence and TDP-induced irregularities, where substantial evidence has been provided to the Chief Electoral Officer. He questioned the

Election Commission's inaction despite widespread reports of TDP members attempting to influence YSRCP voters and criticized instances where law enforcement failed to intervene despite knowledge of TDP's intimidation tactics.

YSRCP MLA Malladi Vishnu disclosed prior notifications to the Election Commission regarding problematic polling centres, urging enhanced security measures to safeguard voter integrity in those areas.

"However," he remarked, "under pressure from BJP state president Purandheshwari, the Election Commission made decisions without conducting comprehensive investigations."

This lapse contributed to outbreaks of violence in various regions of the state.

# Forest officials release Olive Ridley hatchlings into the sea

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Forest Department officials released 95,696 Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings into the Bay of Bengal across several coastal villages in the district on Thursday marking a pivotal moment in the ongoing efforts to protect this endangered marine species. The initiative, in collaboration with the TREE Foundation, saw the collection of nearly 1.59 lakh eggs, a testament to the dedicated efforts of the forest officials and the community. The conservation project began in January and continued through May, with over 1,59,275 eggs meticulously gathered from various coastal regions.

To ensure the safety and successful hatching of these eggs, they were transferred to specially set up hatcheries in 16 different locations throughout the district. Key sites included Vajrapukotturu, Santhabommali, Kaviti, and Sompeta, where optimal conditions were maintained to facilitate the development



the hatchlings. Murali Krishnam Naidu, the Forest Range Officer (FRO) for the Palasa Kasibugga range, highlighted the ongoing nature of this crucial activity. Speaking to 'The Pioneer', Naidu stated, "The activity of collecting eggs, hatching them, and releasing

the young turtles is continuing. We have collected 1,12,647 eggs from the coastal belt of Palasa Kasibugga range and released 68,306 turtles into the sea."

This year's efforts have not only helped in bolstering the Olive Ridley turtle population

but also in raising awareness about marine conservation. The Olive Ridley turtles, known for their synchronized nesting in large numbers, are classified as vulnerable due to threats like habitat loss, fishing nets, and climate change. The collaborative effort between the Srikakulam Forest Department and TREE Foundation showcases the impact of community and organizational partnerships in environmental conservation. It also underscores the importance of protecting marine biodiversity for the health of our oceans.

As these hatchlings make their way into the Bay of Bengal, the hope is that many will survive to adulthood and return to these shores to nest, continuing the cycle of life and reinforcing the success of these conservation efforts.

The dedication and hard work of the Srikakulam Forest officials and their partners serve as an inspiring model for similar initiatives worldwide.

# CLAP workers face hardship due to unpaid wages

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

For the past three months, workers tasked with collecting garbage using Clean Andhra Pradesh (CLAP) vehicles have faced severe financial hardship due to unpaid wages. Despite numerous complaints, neither the contractor nor the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) officials have taken steps to address the issue.

The GVMC allocated a total of 650 CLAP vehicles, one for each secretariat, to handle household garbage collection. Each vehicle, complete with a driver, is provided by a contractor at a monthly cost of Rs 65,000. Additionally, the public health department officials of GVMC hired outsourced sanitation workers to accompany these vehicles and collect garbage door-to-door. Initially, two loaders were assigned per vehicle, but due to a shortage of sanitation personnel, these loaders were reassigned, and 650 daily wage workers were recruited to fill the gap.

A tender was issued for supplying these workers at a rate of Rs 450 per day, and the contractor who won the tender provided the workers to GVMC less than three months ago. These workers diligently go door-to-door collecting garbage. However, they have



not been paid for their work since they started. The workers, when inquiring with GVMC officials, were informed that the contractor had not yet submitted a bill. Despite the GVMC billing the contractor, the contractor is responsible for paying the workers at the end of each month and then claiming reimbursement from GVMC. However, the contractor has refused to pay the wages until the GVMC processes the bill, leaving the workers in financial distress and unable to support their families.

It has come to light that workers performing these daily wage jobs had to pay up to Rs. 50,000 to the contractors and middlemen. The workers were promised that their positions would eventually become permanent, prompting them to

take out loans to pay these fees. They now face the dilemma of losing both their three months' unpaid salary and the money they initially paid if they quit.

When questioned, GVMC officials reiterated that the contractor has not yet submitted the bill. They explained that the GVMC would release funds once the contractor pays the workers and submits the bill, with a margin provided to the contractor for this purpose. However, the contractor appears to be delaying payment until the GVMC bill is settled. The workers' plight underscores a significant issue in the management of sanitation services in Visakhapatnam, with calls for immediate action to resolve the wage delays and prevent further exploitation of daily wage workers.



# 'BJP believes women should be treated as second-class citizens'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed the BJP believes women should be treated as "second-class citizens" and that its ideological parent RSS does not allow women to enter its 'shakhas'.

Addressing an all-women poll meeting in Mangolpuri in support of the Congress North West Delhi Lok Sabha seat candidate Udit Raj, Gandhi said though the BJP passed the women's reservation bill in Parliament with much pomp and show, later it said that it will be implemented after 10 years.

On the last day of campaigning for the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 25, Gandhi also took a metro ride and interacted with people.

"Met fellow passengers and enquired about their well-being -- I am happy to see that our initiative of building metro in Delhi has proved so convenient for public transportation," the former Congress president said in a post on X in Hindi.

He also shared pictures of him interacting and clicking pictures with passengers in the metro.

# 'No tension over going back to Tihar'

AAP will not be finished even if you hang me: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, whose interim bail ends on June 1, said he felt no "tension or anxiety" over going back to Tihar Jail and considered incarceration as part of his "struggle" to save the country.

Kejriwal, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court on May 10 to campaign for the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

In an interview to PTI Videos, the Delhi chief minister said he read the 'Gita' twice in Tihar jail during his nearly one-month stay there before getting the interim bail, and claimed it changed his outlook.

He said what gave him the strength to tolerate his stay

at Tihar was the tales of freedom fighters who spent years of incarceration without any hope, while he consoled himself thinking he would get out of jail in a few months.

"I have no tension or anxiety. I will go back if I have to. I consider it as part of my struggle to save the country," he said when asked about being sent back to Tihar. Recalling his previous stay in jail, Kejriwal said he read three-four books, including the 'Gita', the 'Ramayana' and on the political history of the country.

He also alleged that in Tihar, he was under round-the-clock surveillance through CCTV cameras installed in his cell that were monitored by 13 jail officials as well as by the PMO.

"Just imagine being watched for every movement of yours for 24 hours. It will make life difficult.

There was no moment for me to be relaxed," he said. He further claimed that the prison guards told him that officials questioned whether or not he was weeping or depressed.

On the issue of electoral bonds, the AAP convener said that if INDIA bloc comes to power, a probe will be ordered into the "biggest scam" of the independent India.

"It's a bundle of thousands of scams. Almost each donation that the BJP has received is in return of some favour. It's quid pro quo - the donors got some tender or work. It's also alleged that donors got bail," he charged.

The AAP chief, whose party has faced flak from the BJP which accused it of not being able to check the Khalistani elements in Punjab and receiving foreign funds, said the charges were "laughable".

# EC did not release...

Continued from Page 1

He stressed the imperative of meticulous preparations to ensure swift and accurate result declarations. A video conference with election officials across all districts focused on counting arrangements, emphasizing the need for fortified security at counting centres and transparent communication regarding the allocation of counting tables and rounds.

Meena underscored the establishment of dedicated media centres at counting sites and the importance of disseminating counting-related information to candidates and agents well in advance.

He also outlined the significance of organizing separate routes for EVM movement from strong rooms, as well as distinct pathways for candidates and agents, complete with

barricades and signage. With regard to the vote counting procedure, Meena specified the requirement for separate tables designated for Assembly and Parliament votes based on the number of polling stations. He directed that the counting of postal ballots commence concurrently with EVM counting, with results promptly uploaded to the EC's Encore web application. Unauthorized individuals and those lacking identity cards will be strictly prohibited from entering the counting centres. Meena affirmed that the three-tier security protocol will remain in effect in the strongrooms until the conclusion of the counting process.

Additional CEOs P Koteswara Rao and MN Harendhira Prasad, along with election officers from all districts, participated in the video conference from their respective locales.

# HC grants interim bail..

Continued from Page 1

The backdrop to this legal saga involves Macherla MLA's involvement in a case related to the destruction of EVMs, prompting the Chief Election Officer's condemnation of the violence and damage during polling. Multiple cases have been registered against the local MLA under various sections.

Police teams were mobilized to apprehend MLA Pinnelli, issuing lookout notices against him as the prime suspect in the EVM damage case. Despite the formation of eight special teams and an extensive search, Pinnelli's whereabouts remained elusive.

A recent tip-off led the police to Hyderabad, where they attempted to arrest the

MLA. However, Pinnelli managed to evade capture, with only his driver detained after the police seized his car. Pinnelli, who had been evading authorities, subsequently filed an anticipatory bail petition in the High Court, sparking anticipation within party circles and among YSRCP members regarding the court's decision.

## CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

# RINL donates battery-run vehicles to KGH

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As part of its Corporate Environment Responsibility (CER) initiative, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, presented five battery-powered vehicles to King George Hospital (KGH) in Visakhapatnam. The handover ceremony took place today at the KGH premises. Dr A Mallikarjuna, District Collector along with Mr. AK Bagchi, Director (Projects) and Additional Charge Director (Operations) of RINL officially launched the eco-friendly vehicles. The total cost of these five vehicles is approximately Rs. 40 lakhs.

Collector Mallikarjuna praised RINL for its generosity and unwavering commitment to social welfare, emphasising the positive impact these vehicles will have on patient care at KGH. He expressed heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the community. Dr. P Ashok Kumar, Superintendent of KGH, echoed these sentiments, acknowledging the critical support these vehicles will provide to patients in need. Bagchi highlighted RINL's long-standing dedication to societal welfare, expressing



pride in contributing to such a noble cause. Following the formal proceedings, both dignitaries took a symbolic drive in the new battery-powered vehicles around the KGH premises.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Department of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant coordinated the program, which saw the donation of two wheelchair-accessible vehicles and three six-seater vehicles to KGH. These vehicles will facilitate the transportation of patients, including the elderly, disabled, injured, pregnant women, and other needy individuals, across the hospital's expansive 27-acre campus.

With KGH serving approximately 2,000 patients daily from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, and neighbouring states

like Odisha and Chhattisgarh, the new vehicles are set to significantly enhance the hospital's logistical capabilities. Around 1,475 patients visit various wards and speciality facilities at KGH each day, making the addition of these vehicles a vital asset for efficient patient transport.

The event was attended by notable figures including Praveen Kumar, CGM (Services) at RINL, Dr G Buchi Raju, Principal of Andhra Medical College, CH Srinivasa Rao, Assistant Director at KGH, Dr. EVR Raju, Expert Advisory Committee Member of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), along with senior officers from Visakha Steel Plant, RINL, and several senior doctors from KGH.

# 7 Naxals...

Continued from Page 1

With this incident, 112 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in the state.

Ten Naxalites, including three women, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in a forest along the border of Narayanpur and Kanker districts on April 30.

On April 16, security forces had gunned down 29 Naxalites during an exchange of fire in Kanker district, according to police.

On May 10, they said, 12 Naxalites were eliminated in a gunbattle with security personnel near Pidia village in Bijapur district.

However, local villagers and activists had claimed that those killed near Pidia were not Naxalites and that the encounter was staged.





### Krishna boy bags 74<sup>th</sup> rank in IFS exam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tummala Krishna Chaitanya, a young engineer who hails from Rangannagudem of Bapulapadu mandal in Krishna district, has secured 74<sup>th</sup> rank in the Indian Forest Service (IFS) Examination (Main) 2023 conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Currently, Krishna Chaitanya is working as Assistant Section Officer (ASO) at the Andhra Pradesh State Secretariat in Velagapudi.

## 'Chalo Macherla' march foiled by Vijayawada, Guntur police

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move to curb the TDP's planned rally to Macherla following post-election incidents in the Guntur district, police confined TDP leaders to their homes on Thursday. Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao, TDP's State general secretary and former minister, found himself under house arrest at his residence in Gollapudi, NTR district. Additionally, police imposed house arrest on TDP Politburo Member Nakka Anand Babu and senior leader Kanaparathi Srinivasa Rao.

The call for 'Chalo Macherla' issued by the TDP was met with police intervention, with officers stationed at the residences of TDP leaders to prevent their departure. Notably, TDP leader Julakanti Brahmaiah Reddy was also subjected to house arrest following the conclusion



**TDP leaders Devineni Uma, Nakka Anand Babu, and Kanaparathi Srinivasa Rao were among those kept under house arrest**

of polling. At Uma's residence in Gollapudi, NTR District Police maintained a presence and restricted his movement, sealing off the main gate.

Expressing his concerns, Devineni Uma alleged that despite the election being monitored entirely through webcasting, Macherla MLA Pennelli Ramakrishna Reddy purported-

ly tampered with EVMs on May 13. He criticized the absence of Pennelli's name in the police complaint filed by the Village Revenue Officer on May 15.

Uma further raised doubts regarding the vote counting scheduled for June 4, citing objections from YSRC MLAs and Ministers to Chief Electoral Officer Mukhesh Kumar

Meena's statements. He also questioned the effectiveness of Chief Secretary Dr. KS Jawahar Reddy in safeguarding Returning Officers, alleging threats from YSRC leaders.

Additionally, Uma demanded investigations into allegations involving Sakshi Channel and accusations of aiding Ramakrishna Reddy's escape from police arrest in Telangana.

## Krishna and NTR districts gear up for counting process

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District collectors DK Balaji and S Dilli Rao of Krishna and NTR districts respectively have assured Chief Electoral Officer Mukhesh Kumar Meena of their readiness to oversee the counting of polled votes on June 4th, to be conducted at Machilipatnam and Vijayawada. CEO Mukhesh Kumar Meena chaired a video conference from his office at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday, connecting with all district collectors and joint collectors to discuss the upcoming vote-counting procedures.

Krishna district collector Balaji updated CEO Mukhesh Kumar on the arrangements made for counting at Krishna University in Machilipatnam. He detailed plans to allocate 14 counting tables per assembly segment, each supervised by two counting supervisors and one micro observer. Randomization of duties for these officials will occur on May



Collectors S Dilli Rao and DK Balaji of Krishna and NTR districts respectively took part in a video-conference addressed by AP CEO Mukhesh Kumar Meena on Thursday.

26th and June 3rd. Balaji estimated that election results could be expected after completing 15 to 22 rounds of counting, based on the polled votes.

In parallel, NTR district collector Dilli Rao confirmed that vote counting for Vijayawada Lok Sabha and seven assembly constituencies would take place at Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges in Jupudi, Ibrahimpatnam Mandal. He emphasized the provision of three-tier police security at

these colleges' strong rooms, comprising personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force, Special Armed Police Force, and civil police.

Rao reassured that comprehensive arrangements have been swiftly put in place for smooth and transparent counting. These include the setup of counting tables, the appointment of supervisors, staffing requirements, and the establishment of a media and communication centre.

## Vengamamba pioneered women's empowerment: Swarupananda

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Matrusri Tarigonda Vengamamba, the saint-poetess of the 18th Century brought about women empowerment in her times fighting against social evil and pioneered Annaprashadam in Tirumala, said Visakha Sarada Peetham pontiff Swarupananda Saraswathi Swamy on Thursday.

While addressing senior officers of TTD in SVETA during the 294th Vengamamba Jayanti fete organised by the Vengamamba Project of TTD this evening, he advocated that the essence of Hindu Sanatana Dharma



should be propagated on various social media platforms in a big way like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc., so that it will reach a wide range of public.

"The ancient temples of India are centres of knowledge, ethics, social service and also income generating centres. Every individual should take up the responsibility of propagating Hindu Dharma in a widespread manner in this fast-growing world and sustain our Vedic Dharma for future generations," he said.

He said TTD, besides making the best use of its Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel and publishing dharmic books, should also take up Hindu Dharma Prachara through social media platforms as today the majority of people irrespective of age have Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook accounts.

## AP EAPCET – 2024 exams conclude

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The AP EAPCET -2024 online exams conducted for eight days have concluded all over the state and at two centres in Hyderabad successfully on Thursday.

Vice-chancellor and EAPCET Chairman Prof GVR Prasadaraju told media persons that the entrance online exams were conducted successfully all eight days without any lapses.

He thanked the AP State Council for Higher Education Chairman Prof K Hemachandra Reddy for entrusting the job of conducting the AP EAPCET-2024 to the JNTUK.

EAPCET Convener Prof K Venkataraju said the number of students appearing for the



AP EAPCET was growing gradually as more and more were showing interest in pursuing higher education because of the reforms brought out by

the state council for higher education.

He said there was a considerable increase in the number of students who applied and

appeared for the test. "The preliminary key for the agriculture and pharmacy wing was released on Thursday morning and the response sheets were furnished on the website. Students can intimate their objections on the key if any, up to 10 AM on May 25."

Similarly, the preliminary key for the Engineering exam will be released at 10 AM on Friday and objections if any could be intimated up to 10 AM on May 26," he added.

Since the 25 per cent weightage marks for the AP EAPCET would be given based on the intermediate marks, AP regular intermediate students and also 10 plus 2 students of other Boards have to upload their marks through the EAPCET website for allotment of ranks to them.

## Chit fraud: Two organisers sentenced to 3 years in jail

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Second Additional Judicial First Class Magistrate M Prasanna Lakshmi on Thursday, convicted and sentenced two chit fund organisers-Pyla Nageswara Rao and Pyla Pavan Kumar to three years Rigorous Imprisonment and a fine of Rs.10,000 each for cheating a woman to the tune of Rs.10 lakhs.

The prosecution case was that both the accused owners of Durga Radhika Chits Private Limited had collected Rs.10 lakhs from Kale Satya Varalakshmi in 2016 in installments in the name of Chit and on completion failed to pay back the amount to her.

## Biodiversity conservation for food security stressed

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSR Horticultural University Vice-Chancellor (VC) Prof. T Janakiram emphasised the critical link between biodiversity conservation and global food security during his keynote address at a national seminar held at Andhra University (AU) on Thursday. The one-day conference, titled "Biodiversity: Climate Change and Ecotourism," was organized by the Department of Botany to commemorate the International Day for Biological Diversity. Dr. Janakiram addressed the audience,

expressing concern about the alarming decline in forest resources and rising greenhouse gas emissions, which seriously threaten the planet's ecological balance. He urged for immediate, coordinated, and strategic efforts towards environmental protection.

AU VC Prof. PVGD Prasad Reddy echoed these concerns, highlighting the importance of preserving the delicate balance of life on Earth. He encouraged individuals to develop a deeper appreciation for nature, stating that protecting all living beings is a form of serving a higher purpose. Additionally,



he raised concerns regarding the damaging impact of carbon emissions on marine ecosystems. Prof. Hanchilal, a member of the National Biodiversity

Board, warned about the significant consequences of even slight temperature increases, particularly for the agriculture sector. He explained the far-

reaching effects of temperature fluctuations on polar regions, emphasizing the global importance of taking climate action.

BVA Krishnamurthy, Member Secretary of the AP Biodiversity Board, drew attention to the economic consequences of climate change. He stressed the critical need to safeguard biodiversity, especially from the encroachment of tourism. Krishnamurthy emphasised that preserving biodiversity is not just an environmental concern but a fundamental necessity for human well-being. The event featured contributions from various dig-

nitaries, including Science College Principal Prof. K Srinivasa Rao and Department Head Prof. K Sandhya Deepika. They highlighted the importance of collaboration between different disciplines to address environmental challenges effectively.

The conference saw active participation from department professors, officials of the AP Biodiversity Board, and representatives from various sectors. It also provided a platform for researchers and students from diverse backgrounds to engage in discussions and share insights.



Minister Uttam kumar conducting a review with L&T officials on Thursday

## TG CM, Uttam to visit Medigadda

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy will visit the Medigadda Barrage next week.

Uttam held a review meeting with senior officials of the L&T and Irrigation Department and said that the recommendations of the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) regarding interim repairs of the Medigadda Barrage should be executed on a war footing. "The CM and I will be visiting Medigadda Barrage next week," he told the officials.

The CWPRS (Central Water Power Research Station) team visited Parvathi Barrage in the Siripuram Gram Panchayat of Peddapalli District on Thursday. The team from Pune (CWPRS) inspected the

Barrage along with local engineering officials.

The barrage's downstream and the 60th gate of the barrage's pier were thoroughly inspected for around an hour. During the field visit of the CWPRS team local engineering officials were asked about project details.

The CWPRS team's members, JN Edlabadkar, Dr Prakash K. Pale and Dr DG Naidu, were present along with local engineering officials during the visit to the Parvathi Barrage. On Wednesday, they inspected the Medigadda and Annaram barrages of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) in Jayashankar Bhupalpally district. The NDSA had suggested certain steps before the rainy season to maintain the status quo at the distressed barrages.

## Tribal development scheme faces setback due to official negligence

PNS ■ PADERU

A central government scheme aimed at promoting tribal economic development has hit a roadblock in Visakhapatnam due to alleged official negligence. The Vana Bandhu Kalyana Yojana, launched to provide infrastructure and support self-employment in tribal areas, saw a project in G. Madugula mandal failing to take off.

A floriculture unit built in Kullupadu village for Rs 43 lakh lies defunct, raising concerns about the utilization of funds allocated for tribal development. The central government had earmarked special funds under the Vana Bandhu Kalyana Yojana for Visakhapatnam's G. Madugula mandal, known for its low literacy rates. In 2016, Rs 10 crores was released to establish a floriculture unit aimed at empowering tribal women with self-employment opportunities. The project involved con-

structing four poly houses, an office for the unit, and a storage building. Plants were procured from Bangalore, and tribal women from Vanjanga Panchayat in Kullupadu village received training in flower cultivation. However, despite the initial investment and infrastructure setup, the project failed due to a lack of follow-through from the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) officials. The officials, entrusted with ensuring the project's success and the women's self-sufficiency, allegedly abandoned the initiative after the initial setup.

The negligence resulted in a complete loss of the Rs. 43 lakh investment. The plants have withered, the poly houses have deteriorated, and the constructed buildings stand unused. Local tribal communities are disheartened by the squandered resources and blame the ITDA officials for their apathy and mismanagement.

## Tibetan Buddhists celebrate Buddha Jayanthi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tibetan Buddhist monks celebrated the 2568th Buddhajayanthi at Nagarjunakonda known as Sriparvata-Vijayapuri, the capital city of the Andhras during the Ikshwaku rule (third century CE), says Dr E. Sivanagi Reddy, Buddhist expert and CEO, Pleach India Foundation.

Dr Reddy escorted Ven Gheshe Ngawang Jungney and Ven Jampa Kunga from Sera Tibetan Monastery, Bailukuppe, near Mysuru to Anupu at Nagarjunakonda and briefed on the history of Buddhism in Nagarjunakonda valley with special reference to the Buddhist structures namely, Stupas, Chaityas, Viharas,



Silamandapas, Stadium and Hariiri temple. The monks expressed happiness over visiting a world-famous Buddhist site where Buddhism flour-

ished with more than 30 establishments and an international university where students from 14 countries had their education in all branches of

knowledge.

Dr Reddy explained the features of the Buddhist architecture and the mature phase of the Amaravati school of art seen on the sculptural panels depicted with the life events of Siddhartha Gautam - the Buddha, Nataka stories, contemporary lifestyle and creative art designs and patterns. The monks felt the need of an interpretation centre and a preview theatre to present the story of Nagarjuna and the history of Nagarjunakonda for the benefit of the visitors and appreciated Kamal Hasan of ASI for the well upkeep of the monuments.

Local Buddhists Grandhi Ramakrishna, Nagarjuna and ASI personnel Venkateswarlu participated in the programme.

## Ensure every student has mid-day meal in school: Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Principal Secretary of the School Education Department, Praveen Prakash, has issued directives to all District Educational Officers (DEOs) to ensure that every student in the government schools partakes in the mid-day meal programme during the upcoming academic year of 2024-25.

Praveen Prakash highlighted the collaboration with culinary experts from the Taj Hotel, Tirupati, in producing instructional videos showcasing various dishes under the mid-day meal scheme menu.

In a press release issued on Thursday, Praveen Prakash

emphasised the importance of every government school student benefiting from the mid-day meal programme. He stressed the necessity of instructional videos demonstrating the preparation of delicious and nutritious dishes, focusing on their health benefits. Additionally, he urged all DEOs to ensure full student participation in the mid-day meals, with the overarching aim of enhancing the quality and taste of food across the state's 44,190 schools.

"As part of the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme in government schools statewide, we have created specialized videos showcasing the



preparation of appetising and healthful dishes, accompanied by explanations of their nutritional value," Prakash elaborated. "With a rotating menu, we have developed a series of six

videos, each corresponding to a day of the week, all available on our YouTube channel, @gurumuddaandhra (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzo5nshpou)."

Praveen Prakash directed DEOs to ensure that all 85,000 cooks across the 44,190 schools download these instructional videos. For those without smartphones, arrangements are to be made for the videos to be displayed after school hours, utilizing interactive flat panels in high school classrooms and smart TVs in primary schools. He reiterated the commitment to maintaining high standards of food quality and taste in all schools as

part of an ongoing effort to improve the mid-day meal (MDM) programme statewide.

Recognising that not all cooks may possess smartphones, Prakash emphasised the utilization of available technology to ensure widespread access to instructional materials. "Our primary objective remains the assurance of food quality and taste in all 44,190 schools across the state," he emphasized, underlining the collective effort needed to achieve this goal.

Prakash also addressed concerns regarding the existing practice where some students bring tiffin boxes from home instead of participating in the

MDM program. He highlighted the potential adverse effects on the school environment and students' emotional intelligence (EQ). "Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in student success," Prakash emphasized. "We have to foster these qualities among students, and the MDM programme serves as an excellent platform for such endeavours."

Furthermore, he warned against the negative impact of tiffin boxes on students' EQ, explaining, "Bringing tiffin boxes can create a sense of distance between students and hinder their emotional intelligence development."





**160 kg ganja seized, 2 arrested**

PNS ■ ELURU

The police seized 160 kg of cannabis at Kalaparru toll plaza in Pedapadu mandal on Thursday. Police here on Thursday said that on a tip-off, a SEB police team led by CI K Vidya Sagar conducted a checking of vehicles at Kalaparru toll plaza. They found 80 packets in an SUV which contained 160 Kgs of ganja. The police seized ganja, the SUV and a smartphone, altogether worth Rs 10.55 lakh. The police arrested Jumeer Pinjari and Atiqi Ahmad who belonged to Maharashtra state. The arrested persons were produced before the district court which sent them to judicial remand.

**SSC student raped in classroom by minor boy, arrested**

PNS ■ ELURU

In a shocking incident, a 15-year-old girl who recently completed her 10th Class (SSC) was raped in her school classroom by a minor boy. The heinous act was recorded on video by four others in Mandavalli village. Although the incident occurred on May 15, it only came to light on Thursday when the girl's parents complained to the police. According to the police, the victim went to her school to collect her marks list. At the same time, five of her schoolmates, including the minor boy, were also present at the school. As the girl was leaving, the accused dragged her into a classroom where a 15-year-old boy allegedly raped her. The other four recorded the assault on their mobile phones. The gang then began blackmailing the girl's parents for money. Despite the parents' offer of Rs 2 lakh, the gang demanded a larger sum. Eventually, they posted the footage on WhatsApp groups.

This led the parents to file a complaint with the Mandavalli police. Kaikalur Rural Circle Inspector Krishna Kumar and Mandavalli SI Ramachandra Rao registered the case and apprehended the minor boy, who was subsequently sent to a juvenile home by the Juvenile Court. The police also arrested the four persons accused of recording the rape. They were produced in court and remanded to judicial custody for 14 days. In response to the incident, Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission Chairperson Gajjala Venkata Lakshmi directed Eluru district officials to ensure the victim's safety. She spoke with the victim's mother over the phone, assuring her of all possible support. The Women's Commission chairperson expressed deep concern over the rising incidents of violence against women and girls. Despite stringent punishments, these crimes continue to occur, she lamented.

**Arrangements being made for counting of votes: DC**

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY



District Collector K Madhavilatha has made it clear that all arrangements are being made for the counting of votes for the seven Assembly segments and one Parliamentary constituency in the district. Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena held a video conference with the Collectors on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, she explained to the CEO all required equipment and facilities are being provided for the counting of votes, she stated. She said that polling was held on May 13 in 1577 polling stations peacefully in which 13,13,630 voters exercised their right to vote. She said that for the counting votes, 14 tables are being set up separately for the Assembly segments and Parliament constituency. Under the supervision of a supervisor, assistant supervisor, and micro observers at each table, the counting of votes would be taken up transparently in the presence of the candidates or their nominated agents as per the guidelines

**She said that for the counting votes, 14 tables are being set up separately for the Assembly segments and Parliament constituency.**

to examine the vote-counting process in the state. Madhavilatha said that the EVMs would be shifted from the strong room to the counting centres by the village revenue assistants amid police protection and strict security arrangements and after the counting is completed they would be preserved in the strong room. Madhavilatha stated that the Postal Ballot vote counting would be taken up in the counting centres of the respective assembly constituencies, adding that the postal ballot for the candidates of the Parliament/Assembly Constituency would be scrutinized at various stages. Collector Madhavilatha said that the Central Election Commission has assigned four election observers to the state

**2 girls killed as private travels bus overturns**

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Two girls were killed and 10 others were injured when the private bus in which they were travelling overturned at Kodumur village in Kurnool district on Thursday. Police said that the private travel bus was going to Adoni from Hyderabad. When the bus was going at high speed it overturned on the highway killing

Lakshmi (13) and Govardhini (8) instantaneously. Both the deceased belonged to Hyderabad city. The injured passenger was admitted to the GGH in Adoni where the condition of one of the passengers is said to be very critical. The accident took place when the driver of a bus was overtaking a lorry. As many as 40 passengers were travelling in the bus when the mishap occurred. The driver of the bus fled after the accident.



**Woman killed, 6 injured as two cars collide**

PNS ■ BAPATLA

A young woman was killed and six others were injured when a car collided with another car at Pandillapalli bypass road in Vetapale mandal on Thursday. Sub-inspector G Suresh told the media that the car which



was going to Kanigiri from Bapatla collided with another car which was going to Chirala from Pandillapalli. One woman, Shirisha (29) was killed instantaneously while her husband Tendulkar was injured in the accident. As many as five people were injured who were travelling in another car. They were admitted to the GGH in Chirala.

**No permission for victory rallies on counting day: SP**

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Palnadu District Collector Srikanth Srikesh and Superintendent of Police Malika Garg here on Thursday inspected the JNTU College campus where EVMs are preserved and arrangements are being made for the counting of votes. Speaking on the occasion SP Malika Garg said that strong security has been provided to the strong rooms located on the campus of JNTU College. Security is being beefed up in the surrounding areas because of the counting of votes. The SP made it clear that processions or victory rallies would not be allowed in the district on the counting day and legal action would be taken against those who disturb peace and tranquility. The SP said that since the Election Code, Section 144 CrPC and Section 30 Police Act are in force, no gathering



of more than four people at one place, open meetings, meetings and rallies are allowed in any area. As per the instructions of the Election Commission, the petrol filling stations should fill petrol and diesel vehicles only and petrol and diesel should not be sold in separate bottles. She warned of stringent action if anybody was found violating the rule and selling petrol and

diesel in bottles. She asked the people's representatives to behave responsibly during the counting of votes in the counting centres and cooperate with the police in maintaining the law and order situation. Joint Collector Shyam Prasad and Additional SP (Admin) Raghavendra Rao and DSP Sudhakar Rao were among those who accompanied the SP.

**YSRCP shielding Pinnelli: Julakanti**

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) senior leader Julakanti Brahma Reddy has alleged that YSRCP leaders are helping Macherla Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, who is at large in a vandalising EVM. Talking to the media here on Thursday, he slammed that YSRCP leaders including S a j j a l a Ramakrishna Reddy were extending all support to Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy. The TDP leader also charged that some of the police officers colluded with Pinnelli and helped him to escape. Expressing anger over the indifference of police and officials in handling the



attack on the polling station case, Julakanti Brahma Reddy lashed out that the police filed cases under ordinary sections on the attack on polling stations at Palvaigate, JP Gudem and Macherla. The YSRCP activists attacked and thrashed some tribal youths, who were the TDP agents at a polling station at KP Gudem, he alleged. The police prevented the TDP leaders when they were going to KP Gudem to visit the injured tribal youths, he lamented. Meanwhile, the police foiled the TDP's chalo Macherla call on Thursday by arresting Julakanti Brahma Reddy and Nakka Ananda Babu when he was trying to go to Macherla.

**Sedentary lifestyle leading to diabetes in mega cities: Doc**

MOHAMMED BALEEGH ■ HYDERABAD

In all, 75% of people in nation's mega cities today suffer from diabetes due to sedentary lifestyle, said Doctor Viswanathan Mohan, a diabetes specialist. Speaking of the trends in diabetes and the reason for the high number of diabetic patients in India despite advancements in science, Dr Mohan said, "It (Diabetes) is increasing rapidly. In the 1970s only 2% of urban Indians and 1% of rural Indians suffered from diabetes. Till India opened its economy in 1991 there was a single digit rise in diabetic patients. The moment the economy opened up, prosperity and affluence began. Before this, malnutrition was prevalent in pockets of India. Then the economy started booming due to the IT industry's gradual rise. As people started affording better, diabetes rates shot up due to mechanisation, greater income and the rise in obesity due to reduced physical activity," he added. According to an ICMR study in 2023, in some states, the whole state recorded 26% of adults suffering from diabetes, which is 1 in 4 people above 20 years. 40% of people above 50



years in cities like Hyderabad, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru have diabetes. Another 35% of people in these cities suffer from traces of diabetes. Moreover, 3 out of 4 persons irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds suffer from diabetes and 101 million people in India have confirmed diabetes while 136 million are at the pre-diabetes stage. Speaking of symptoms and precautions against diabetes, Dr Mohan said, "Diabetes is largely an asymptomatic disorder; if 100 million in India are diabetic, 50 million of them may not even be aware that they have diabetes. If people wait for symptoms to get tested, they are not acute in chronic diseases

like diabetes. Hence, they are at high risk. The symptoms include excessive thirst, urination, feeling tired, loss of weight itching in the genital region in both men and women, numbness in the feet, blurring of vision and wounds that don't heal. These symptoms are detected very late. The only way is to keep screening people regularly. A free blood test camp will be conducted in Hyderabad on Saturday." With regards to children being vulnerable to diabetes, the doctor said, "Now, youngsters below 20 years are also affected by diabetes. Modification of lifestyle can help postpone the disease. However, most people aren't aware of this."

**SFA worker Kishan suspended for sexual abuse in Hyd**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

SFA worker Kishan, in the Gajularamaram Circle of Kukattally was suspended by the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner for allegedly harassing a female worker under his supervision for the past few days. A complaint was filed against him a week ago, prompting BC Malla Reddy to suspend him and investigate the matter. The videos of Kishan forcibly assaulting a female worker have

gone viral in all social media platforms. The workers in the department demanded the permanent suspension of the accused. Similar incidents like this have previously emerged. It is stated that the accused forced female workers and assaulted them. He also threatened them not to tell anyone about his heinous act. GHMC Commissioner Ronald Rose has expressed outrage over reports of sexual harassment of a woman sanitation worker in Gajularamaram circle of Kukattally zone.

**BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE A ROBUST TRADE RELATIONSHIP 40% of Indian students in US are Telugus, says envoy**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Jennifer Larson, United States Consul General in Hyderabad, said that the number of Indian students studying in the US is increasing every year and that 40% of Indian students in America are Telugu. Telugu is the fastest-growing language in the USA, she said, during a panel discussion on "Global Alliances: Strengthening Economic Bridges" organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) Ladies Organisation (FLO) at the Park Hyatt on Thursday. The discussion also featured Gareth Owen, British Deputy High Commissioner of Telangana and AP and Denise Eaton, Trade and Investment Commissioner for Austrade in South Asia. In all, 150 FLO members attended the session. The session began with Priya

Gazdar, Chairperson of FLO saying, "We are now living in a global village. Trade between nations has become much simpler than in the past. International trade allows companies in general and our members in particular to expand their markets and access goods and services. No country has as robust a relationship as India and the US have. The trade has grown nearly 10 times since 2001, to about \$200 billion in 2023." Each of the speakers gave a list of three priority sectors for stronger trade relationships. Jennifer looked at education as a top priority area as it is worth \$9 billion annually contributing to the American economy by Indian students. She also stated that the bilateral trade between both nations might touch \$500 billion in the next five years. Also, Green Technology, Solar Panels, Yoga and Ayurveda have been

emerging markets in the USA. Denise said the trade delegation led by Australian Premier Anthony Albanese last year to India was very significant. It demonstrates our mutually beneficial relationship and the bond. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Albanese met thrice in the year 2023 itself speaks volumes. "Indian market means so much to us. You are the largest market", she added. Gareth said the educational and cultural exchanges between the countries contribute to strengthening the trade relations. "Our cultural and people-to-people relations are very strong. The UK is an educational destination for many Indian students. We have 1.3 lakh Indian students studying in our country. In regards to entrepreneurship, especially women, he agreed that access to funds for women entrepreneurs is always challenging.



Jennifer Larson, Priya Gazdar, Gareth Owen and Denise Eaton as panelists in the discussion on "Global Alliances: Strengthening Economic Bridges"

**'Ready for a debate on graft in civil supplies dept'**

Civil Supplies officials threatened contractors from Punjab & Haryana: Maheshwar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Civil Supplies Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy could not answer when asked about the corruption and irregularities in his department, BJP leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy said. He said that Uttam made some people file a complaint against him and also made the police to file a case against him (Maheshwar) when he asked about public issues as the opposition leader. "Is this the people's government?" he asked and added that he is ready for a debate on corruption in the Civil Supplies Department. Maheshwar said the Revanth Reddy government should order a probe into the irregularities in the Civil Supplies Department like the probe by a retired judge into the corruption that took place in the execution of the Kaleshwaram Project. He said that Uttam has no

answer to his questions and so he has been making officials issue statements. He demanded that Uttam should tell him how to correct the mistakes he had pointed out. "Instead of correcting mistakes, Uttam hit back by filing cases," he said. Asking as to what Jagga Reddy knew about the Civil Supplies Department, Maheshwar said that he had exposed the corruption in the Civil Supplies Department as a public representative. "The government appointed a committee on January 25 after framing guidelines. On the same day, the government issued a statement on global tenders. How can all these, that is, setting up of a committee, meetings, framing of guidelines and the issue of a statement regarding tenders be possible on a single day? The government prepared another set of guidelines for paddy procurement. Contractors from Punjab and Haryana came forward to take part in the tenders. However, some officials threatened them from taking part in the tender process. The government entered into agreements on April 18 with rice millers although the Model Election Code was in force," Maheshwar said. Declaring that he has no intention to corner anyone personally but is just questioning the government on



public issues as an opposition leader, Maheshwar asked whether collecting an additional Rs 216 crore from millers was correct. "How can the millers bear it if the government gives them more paddy exceeding limits? The government asked the millers to give money although the millers said that they would give rice. Is it right for the Minister to threaten millers," he asked. "Should I make the excesses committed by the Minister at the Jala Soudha public? I am not afraid of harassment. I entered politics by selling my assets to serve the public. It is atrocious on the part of the Minister to file cases against me instead of answering me. I am ready to face any number of cases for the public's sake," Maheshwar said. He said that the government asked contractors to buy the entire paddy before May 23 and warned them that the government will blacklist them if

they do not buy the entire paddy. "Corruption of around Rs 800 crore took place in paddy procurement. The deadline given to contractors ended on May 23, but there is no action against them. Why is the government giving extension to bidders who did not buy the entire paddy," he asked. Maheshwar said the government sold 1.59 lakh tons of rice for Rs 2,259 per quintal and the same government has now purchased 22 lakh quintals of rice from the millers at the rate of Rs 5,700 per quintal for mid-day meals and hostel students. "In the open market, one can buy rice with 10 per cent split rice for Rs 38 a kg. Why did the government sell and purchase rice at this huge price difference," he asked. "I have evidence of corruption in the Civil Supplies Department. I am ready to prove my charges if the Minister agrees to a debate," Maheshwar said.



INDIA CORNER

### Two kids, elderly man killed as car overturns in MP's Rajgarh district

Two children and an elderly man were killed and three others injured after the car they were travelling in overturned in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district on Thursday, a police official said. The car going towards Indore flipped near a petrol pump in Sarangpur of the district around 11 am, killing a child on the spot. Another child succumbed to his injuries while being taken to the hospital from the scene, he said. The third person died during treatment in a hospital in Indore. The deceased were identified as Ishant Sharma (4), Nishi Sharma (02) and Dinesh Sharma (65), Sarangpur police station in-charge Santosh Singh Waghela said. The victims were on their way to Indore from Biora for shopping at the time of the incident. The three injured persons were referred to Indore after initial treatment at Sarangpur, he added.



### Cannes: Meerut girl gives UK film school cause for cheer

Meerut-born Mansi Maheshwari, representing the United Kingdom as a graduate of the National Film and Television School (NFTS), is in contention for a La Cinef prize at the 77th Cannes Film Festival. Maheshwari's 'Bunnyhood', a nine-minute-long animated film, premiered here on Thursday, a day on which all eyes were on the world premiere of Payal Kapadia's highly anticipated 'All We Imagine As Light', the first Indian title in Cannes Competition in 30 years. 'Bunnyhood' is, in the filmmaker's words, "a horror comedy in which I tell a coming-of-age story about me and my mother". She says: "The title refers to the stage of transition that separates childhood and adulthood. The film seeks to understand why people feel the need to lie." 'Bunnyhood' is the 25-year-old's graduation film. Maheshwari passed out of NFTS this year after completing a course in Directing Animation.



### Four labourers buried alive while digging well in Jharkhand

At least four labourers, including a woman, were buried alive while digging a well in Jharkhand's Lohardaga district on Thursday, police said. The incident took place around 11 am in Chitri Ambatoli village in Senha police station area, around 80 km from state capital Ranchi, when the workers were digging a well under an MGNREGA project, a senior officer said. The police conducted a rescue operation but all the four labourers were found dead, he said. "A portion of the earth caved in when the four labourers were digging the well. Excavators and other equipment were deployed but the four persons were found dead," Senha police station in-charge Vedant Shankar said. The deceased were identified as Abu Rehan Ansari (35), Shabnam Khatun (21), Ramjan Ansari (35) and Bhagat, he said, adding the bodies were retrieved and sent for post-mortem examination.



# Disclosure of station-wise voter turnout on website will cause chaos: EC to SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that "indiscriminate disclosure" of polling station-wise voter turnout data and posting it on website will cause chaos in the election machinery which is already in motion for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The poll panel said that public posting of Form 17C - which gives the number of votes polled in a polling station - is not provided in the statutory framework and could lead to mischief and vitiation of the entire electoral space as it increases the possibility of the images being morphed. The EC also dismissed as false and misleading the allegation that the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections saw an increase of "5-6 per cent" in the voter turnout data



released on the day of polling and in the subsequent press releases for each of the two phases. The Election Commission stated this in an affidavit filed in response to a plea of an NGO seeking a direction to the poll panel to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of the conclusion of polling for each phase of the Lok Sabha elections. "It is submitted that if the reliefs sought by the petitioner is allowed, it will not only be

in teeth of the aforesaid legal position but will also cause chaos in the election machinery which is already in motion for the ongoing General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2024," the poll panel said in its 225-page affidavit. It said the petitioner NGO 'Association of Democratic Reforms' has failed to mention a single instance where candidates or voters had filed an election petition on the basis of the allegations raised by the petitioner with respect to the Lok Sabha election in 2019.

### Phase 5 turnout now at 62.2%; women outnumber men in casting vote

The voter turnout in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls held on May 20 has now climbed to 62.2 per cent, the Election Commission said on Thursday with women outnumbering men. According to an EC statement, 61.48 per cent of the registered male voters turned up at the polling stations as compared to 63 per cent of female electors. In phase 5, 49 seats across six states and two union territories went for polling where over 8.95 crore people, including 4.69 crore men, 4.26 crore women and 5409 third gender were eligible to vote. The participation of women in voting was higher as compared to men in Bihar, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

The male-female turnout gap was wide in Bihar and Jharkhand. While in Bihar, the male turnout was 52.42 per cent, the female turnout was 61.58 per cent. Similarly, in Jharkhand, the male turnout was registered at 58.08 per cent, while the female turnout was 68.65 per cent. A maximum of 38.22 per cent of voters registered in the third gender category turned out to vote in West Bengal. EC noted that repolls at two polling stations in the Kandhamal in Odisha will be concluded on Thursday and the figures "may" change accordingly, once the data is updated for post-repoll. In the corresponding phase in the 2019 polls, the turnout was registered at 64.16 per cent.

# EC wrong in directing Cong not to politicise Agnipath: Chidambaram

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Thursday said the Election Commission was "egregiously wrong" in directing his party not to 'politicise' the Agnipath scheme, asserting that it is the right of an Opposition party to criticise a policy of the government. The Election Commission Wednesday came down heavily on the ruling BJP and opposition Congress, asking them to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language, and religious lines. The EC also asked the Congress not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive statements regarding the socio-economic composition of the armed forces. The Commission was referring to remarks made by top Congress leaders on the Agnipath scheme. In a post on X, Chidambaram said the ECI is wrong in



Agniveer is a scheme, a product of the policy of the government. It is the right of an Opposition political party to criticise a policy of the government

directing the Congress party not to 'politicise' the Agnipath scheme. "What does 'politicize' mean? Does the ECI mean 'criticise'? Agniveer is a scheme, a product of the policy of the government. It is the right of an Opposition political party to criticise a policy of the government and declare that, if voted to power, the scheme will be scrapped," the former Union minister said. "Agniveer" creates two categories of soldiers who fight together, and that is wrong, Chidambaram said.

'Agniveer' employs a young man for four years and throws him out without a job and without a pension, and that is wrong, he said. "Agniveer was opposed by the Army, yet the government thrust the scheme upon the Army, and that is wrong. Hence, the Agniveer scheme must be scrapped," he said. "ECI was egregiously wrong in giving direction to the Congress party and, as a citizen, it is my right to say that ECI was egregiously wrong," Chidambaram said.

# IF 'DOUBLE ENGINE' GOVT FORMED IN ODISHA Bulldozers to be used against mafia, says Adityanath

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said if the 'double engine' government is formed in Odisha, bulldozers will be used against the mafia. During the last 20-25 years, the "officer raj" has "pushed Odisha to 50 years back", he claimed, alleging that the ruling BJD is playing politics with the future of youths in the state. Addressing an election rally in the Chilika assembly constituency under the Puri Lok Sabha seat, Yogi said, "Give us strength to form a double engine government in Odisha so that we can clear the path by running bulldozers on 'land, sand, forest and cattle' mafia in the state, as we did in Uttar Pradesh." The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state. "The BJD government is surrounded by bureaucracy and when the bureaucracy surrounds any government, it gives birth to dictatorship. Then corruption rises, the poor are exploited and the administration collapses," he alleged. In an apparent reference to Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's aide and bureaucrat-turned-BJD leader V K Pandian, Adityanath said, "An officer should not be given so much freedom that he starts controlling the government. Only elected public representatives should govern the state, which is the basis of a healthy democracy." He claimed that the BJD's "misrule" is because "Naveen babu has been surrounded by bureaucracy and he has been misled by bureaucrats".



"Power generated from Odisha is being provided at a cheaper price to other states. What kind of misrule is this?" he asked. The BJP leader also accused the BJD government of "destroying" the Odia culture and said the Narendra Modi government has brought Ram Lalla to his birthplace in Ayodhya after 500 years. Alleging that the Congress and TMC have been playing politics with religions, Adityanath claimed, "Policies of INDIA bloc parties promote terrorism, naxalism and corruption." "Religion-based reservation is against the spirit of our Constitution. Only India-origin SC, ST and backward communities should get the benefit of reservation," he said, referring to a Calcutta High Court order against the TMC government's move to include Muslims under the OBC category. The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, sparking a political debate in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections. The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list of backward categories was to "treat them as a vote bank". Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "India earned respect in the world and its territories are secure", Adityanath said, adding that "terrorism and naxalism have been eliminated". "Now, when a firecracker goes off in India, Pakistan comes up with a clarification that it has no role in the blast. Because, Pakistan knows that this is new India, Modi's India, which will not tolerate when one creates any mischief," the BJP leader said.

# 'PM Modi started equitable service delivery, minorities equally benefited'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had introduced a culture of equitable service delivery in the country wherein minorities were equally benefited, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. He said the prime minister has successfully raised the standards of public service delivery above vote consideration, based on the principle of justice for all. "Modi will always be credited for having introduced a new work culture in India wherein each of the pro-poor and public welfare schemes were designed in such a man-



ner so as to reach the most needy or the last man in the last queue, regardless of caste, creed, religion or vote consideration," said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel. He said, purely objective parameters were followed to

meet the requirement, "wherever the requirement was not met in the past and to deliver justice wherever justice had been denied in the past". This, the minister said, was quite a departure from the practice followed by the Congress and its allied governments earlier wherein vote bank politics pre-determined the selective rolling out of the state benefits. "In contrast to the appeasement-driven practice followed during the Congress or UPA rule, Prime Minister Modi has introduced a culture of equitable delivery wherein minorities were equally benefited," he said here.

# Five dead, as blast rips through chemical factory

PNS ■ THANE

At least five persons were killed and 56 injured following an explosion at a chemical factory in Maharashtra's Thane district on Thursday afternoon, officials said.



As a boiler exploded at Amudan Chemicals located in Phase 2 of Dombivli MIDC area around 1.40 pm, its impact and the resultant blaze affected adjacent factories. As per the preliminary information, those killed were working in neighbouring plants, said Maharashtra industries minister Uday Samant. The plant where the explosion took place was not in operation for the last few

months and had restarted only a few days ago, he said. Samant, local MP Shrikant Shinde and MLA Raju Patil visited the site inside the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) area, some 40 km from Mumbai. The blast was so loud that it was heard a kilometre away, an eyewitness said. Glass windows of adjoining buildings

cracked while many houses in the vicinity were damaged, officials said. Thick clouds of smoke could be seen hovering over the factory. Speaking to reporters at Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said a massive rescue and relief operation is underway at the site and he had directed the district collector to conduct a detailed inquiry into the incident.

# Elephant census begins at Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in TN

PNS ■ ERODE (TAMIL NADU)

The Tamil Nadu forest department on Thursday commenced a three-day-long elephant census at Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve as part of the state-wide initiative, officials said. Around 300 forest officials are deputed to conduct the census in ten forest ranges at STR. All precautionary measures are being taken, like providing firearms for enumerators to safeguard them from animal attack, drinking water and food, officials said. The forest officials will conduct the census from 6 am to 6 pm daily till Saturday. This second synchronised Elephant Population Estimation 2024 which began today will cover 26 forest divisions in 697 blocks, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment Climate Change and Forests, Supriya Sahu said. The estimation will be done

simultaneously in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, she said in a post on the social media platform X. "The first synchronised estimation done in 2023 in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala had estimated a population of 2,961 elephants in TN. A total of 1,836 forest staff and 342 volunteers are participating in this exercise Video - @supriyasahuia #TNForest #Elephantestimation," Sahu said posting a video. Five tiger reserves spread across the state have been included in the elephant census covering the forest areas from Hosur to Kanyakumari. The Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) has also been included in the census. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden Srinivas R Reddy, and Chief Conservator of Forests and field director of MTR, D Venkatesh, were among the officials involved in the annual exercise.

# NORTH BLOCK BOMB HOAX Delhi Police writes to Google, seeks IP address details

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the North Block received a hoax bomb threat email, the Delhi Police on Thursday wrote to Google seeking details of its IP address, an official source said. The Internet Protocol (IP) address is a unique identifying number assigned to every device connected to the internet. A bomb threat on Wednesday sent alarm bells ringing in the North Block, which houses the office of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), but was declared a

hoax after nothing suspicious was found. A letter has been sent to Google to provide the IP address of the email which was sent to the MHA office, an official source said. The Delhi Police Special Cell and the local police are investigating the case. A case may be registered at Kartavya Path police station for further investigation, an officer said. A senior officer posted at MHA received the threat through an email around 3:30 pm on Wednesday. The email stated that the "building will explode as a bomb is planted".

# 'Early brain network differences in infants with autism-risk'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Six-week old infants with high chances of developing autism showed distinct patterns in brain connections, which researchers said likely emerge much earlier than autism-related behaviours can be noticed. The researchers focussed on the brain's salience network, a group of regions crucial to identifying information in the environment that is worthy of one's attention and enabling appropriate responses to them. In babies with high chances of developing autism -- a disorder marked by repetitive behaviour and impaired social interaction -- the researchers found stronger connections

between the salience network and brain regions processing sensory information and movement, or the sensorimotor regions. The team, co-led by the researchers at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), US, further found that infants with stronger connections to sensorimotor regions in the brain had weaker connections with prefrontal ones, which are important for social interactions. This suggested that paying more attention to basic sensory information comes at the cost of paying attention to socially relevant cues, thereby possibly playing a role in people with autism displaying an impaired social behaviour, the



researchers said. "An emerging theory in autism research is that differences in sensory processing may precede the more classic social and communication symptoms of autism, and this data supports that theory in showing that very early brain differences related to how attention is allocated may pre-

dict both sensory and social behaviours in toddlers," Shulamite Green, an assistant professor at UCLA, said. "In other words, more attention to extraneous sensory stimuli in the environment could make it difficult to attend to social cues, and this difference in attention could really affect how the brain develops

across the first year of life and beyond," Green, corresponding author of the study published in the journal Communications Biology, said. The researchers also found that the brain patterns observed in six-week-old babies could predict their behaviour at age one. Infants with stronger connections with sensory regions were found to show "over-responsivity" when they were a year old, a trait known to be characteristic of autism in which individuals show extreme responses to typical environmental sounds or sensations. In contrast, the researchers found that babies having stronger connections with pre-

frontal regions in the brain showed a better ability to share attention with others at age one, an important stage preceding the development of social and communication skills that are often impaired in autism. The observed patterns could help explain the reduced social attention and unusual sensory processing commonly seen in people with autism, the authors said. For the study, the researchers analysed 53 infants, 24 of whom had a higher likelihood of developing autism because at least one older sibling had a diagnosis -- a factor known to enhance the risk of autism. The remaining 29 had no family history of autism or any other developmental disorder.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## EC stirs a bit

The poll panel's latest directive to parties for a honest fight is a classic case of too little, too late

With the Lok Sabha elections approaching the final phases, the Election Commission (EC) has issued a stern directive to the Congress and the BJP against creating false narratives and making communal utterances. Interestingly, this directive comes after five of the seven poll phases are over. Also, the timing and impact of this intervention raise critical questions: Is the EC's directive aimed more at ensuring a free and fair election or at salvaging its image which has taken a dip? Though it is an independent, autonomous constitutional body, several events have raised doubts about its impartiality and functioning. There have been accusations of Government interference, from influencing the timing of elections to being lenient towards the BJP while being overly strict with the Opposition. Savour this: Since 2019, three Opposition parties registered 27 complaints against PM Modi but the EC took no action. A scrutiny of these complaints and the EC's response shows the poll body's 'reluctance' to act against the Prime Minister. The Congress has accused the panel of being "super, super cautious" regarding complaints against Modi, following the EC's request to the BJP to respond to the allegations of Modi's divisive speech in Rajasthan. The EC also asked the Congress to address the BJP's complaints against Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi. The EC's letters mark the first such action against a Prime Minister. But will any real action ever be taken?



According to the poll panel, approximately 425 major complaints, excluding those related to canvassing or requiring clarification, have been filed by various parties and candidates. Action has been taken or the matter resolved in 400 of these cases. Interestingly, in most cases, the punishment was so mild that it did not matter much; like abstaining from campaigning for two days, and so on. Now, with only two phases of polling left, the directive is not likely to achieve much since the electoral narrative has already been set, with party rhetoric having saturated media channels and influenced public opinion. The late issuance of this warning suggests only an attempt to curb last-minute escalations in divisive rhetoric. By waiting until the tail end of the election cycle, the EC has allowed political parties ample time to embed their narratives into the electorate's psyche, with an extra long rope for the ruling party. Besides, for such a warning to be effective, it needs to be backed by the possibility of tangible consequences. While the directive emphasises the need for a respectful and fact-based campaign, it lacks clear punitive measures for violations. Political parties might calculate that the benefits of inflammatory and polarising rhetoric outweigh the potential repercussions. To ensure future elections are fairer and more respectful of democratic principles, the EC should adopt a more proactive stance involving faster interventions and stricter penalties for violations. It can draw inspiration from its own history when TN Seshan first empowered the institution.

## PICTALK



Devotees at Har Ki Pauri on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, in Haridwar

PTI

## Summer can be fun and learning for students

By engaging in innovative and educational activities, children can make the most of their summer break, ensuring both physical and intellectual growth

School students look forward to the arrival of summer vacations with a great deal of excitement. That period is also one of the happiest phases of a student's life. It also becomes imperative that parents recognise the worth of their children's time at this point. They start to worry about how they will ever let their child utilise his time wisely during those days. On the contrary, children are full of energy and anticipation in those months. However, it becomes troublesome for working parents if their kids are younger and highly energetic. Their daily scheduled activities go wild, making it harder for parents to engage their children in meaningful activities.



Though summer vacation means different to everyone, the significance of summer learning should not be ignored. It is a vital component of children's physical as well as academic health. With just 60 days of summer vacation, every day a child does not participate in summer training represents a setback. Nevertheless, parents can engage their children in a variety of new and entertain-

ing activities. Summer Vacation Courses The hot Indian summer can be the toughest time to endure for some people, especially kids. They can suffer severely if they stay unprepared to beat the heat. Parents should be cautious about the meals their children eat during these hot days so that no additional stress is placed on their digestive systems. In order to avoid digestive and dehydration issues, parents can add watermelon, curd, cucumber, coconut water and seasonal vegetables to their children's meal plans. Children must begin learning about the contemporary technological environment in which they live. Therefore, parents can engage their kids with engaging and innovative learning products. Trends are as follows: AI and ML course for kids: There are various courses online to introduce children

with futuristic skillset like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. Any career option kids would choose, this skillset will be must. Students should opt for courses which consist of Python Coding, Generative-AI prompt writing and Industry Projects like Website & App Building. Kids and parents should not get afraid of new technologies rather take these as an opportunity to outsmart in the future job market. Learning AI tools will upgrade the performance quality of culturally active students also. Learning AI-ML will prepare the students for upcoming innovation and robotics related competitions too. The best outcome will be grabbing an online internship. It will help the kids become more confident for the future. Summer specialised Innovation Based Online Experiments: Students and Parents should look for online innovation based experiments or projects which will not only provide a project kit but also consist of live sessions to understand the science and technology of the project. Students should be able to represent the projects in



AJITH KUMAR NS

schools too. Some attractive projects could be Laser Home Security System, Rain Water Detection and automatic cloth retrieval machine, Automatic Smart Roof, Parking Occupancy Indicator, Smart Blind Stick etc. Apart from the ones mentioned above, there are many other innovative activities which can be explored by the parents to increase their children's confidence and interest during summer holidays. Moreover, learning is an endless process. School kids need to gain knowledge about new things every day that are useful for their career and educational growth. Some of the most important knowledge for kids during the vacation will be sustainability, space technology, Electric Vehicle technology, Autonomous Car technology, Flying Taxi system and drone technology etc. Thus, during the next summer vacation, students may simply PLAY. LEARN. EAT. REPEAT by contemplating these mentioned methods of utilising perfect and productive holidays.

(The writer is advisor innovates and director at YuviPeP; views are personal)

## Child development as a fundamental right

In the pursuit of a more equitable society, the universalisation of early childhood development should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a gratuitous freebie



APARAJITA SHARMA

That early childhood development (ECD) should be treated as a fundamental right rather than a gratuitous freebie is paramount for fostering an equitable society. The 2024 general elections offer a significant opportunity to advocate for the universalisation of ECD from birth to 18 years. Ensuring access to quality early education and care is crucial for the holistic development of children and the broader advancement of society.

**ECD as a Fundamental Right** India's commitment to social welfare is enshrined in its Constitution. The Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the Government to secure adequate means of livelihood, equitable distribution of resources and special protection for children and vulnerable sections. Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, emotional and social development. The National ECCE Policy 2013 underscores the importance of providing quality health, nutrition, early learning and protection for children under six. Recognising ECCE as a justiciable entitlement under the RTE Act would ensure that all children receive the foundational support necessary for their development.

**Challenges in Providing ECD** After 13 years of implementation of the RTE Act 2009, only 25.5 per cent of schools across the country are RTE compliant. 8.4 lakh teacher positions are vacant and there is a constant shift towards contractual teachers. 19 per cent of schools in India are estimated to have teacher vacancies and one school in seven is run by a single teacher. While the quality of education cannot be ensured without professionally qualified and motivated teachers, 44 per cent of all teachers across the country work without job contracts, many fail to receive social security benefits and all are pressured with non-academic work which is estimated to account for 20-25 per cent of teachers' working hours. The average expenditure is 8,997 per annum for pre-primary, 9,913 for secondary and 13,845 for higher secondary. Costs are significantly higher in



urban areas and private unaided educational institutions. Despite the recognised importance of ECD, significant challenges remain. As of recent surveys, only 38 per cent of children aged 3-6 years are enrolled in preschool education in Government Anganwadi centres. Additionally, the issues regarding 0-3-year-old children remain at the bottom of the pyramid of rights and entitlements in the country. Issues such as being underweight, stunting and anaemia among children highlight the need for comprehensive early childhood programs that address both educational and nutritional needs.

As of 2018-19, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) had 30.1 per cent of Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) positions and 27.7 per cent of Supervisor positions vacant across the country. About 6.9 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi workers (AWWs) and 7.6 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi helpers (AWHs) were also vacant. This is a grave concern for achieving universalisation of childcare services in the country as well as improved governance at the project level. Despite the mention of establishing creches for promoting women workers and childcare services for their children vide several legislations,<sup>[6]</sup> the



THE DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY MANDATE THE GOVERNMENT TO SECURE ADEQUATE MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD, EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND SPECIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE SECTIONS

number of creches came down to a drastic 3400 creches with only 84000 beneficiaries by 2023. The promise of creche for promoting women workers is a welcome in political parties' agendas, however without universalisation and adequate public provisioning of childcare services they may again leave behind the most marginalised children and serve only a selected few.

A public manifesto collated by four national-level networks working for children's rights spotlights the need for reiterating the constitutional provision to ensure rights, entitlements and the overall well-being of children. The manifesto calls for extending the Right to Education (RTE) Act to cover children from birth to 18 years, aligning with the internationally recognised definition of childhood.

The manifesto further calls for drafting, implementing and enforcing a national regulatory framework for private schools and ECCE centres to combat the increasing commercialisation and privatisation of education. This framework should regulate fees, ensure compliance with quality norms and address social segregation. The Government must take immediate steps to ensure that all private schools adhere to the conditions under which recognition is granted and that no unrecognised schools are allowed to operate.

The State must be held accountable for its enforcement to guarantee that all children receive quality education. Strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) and community participation in education is vital for the successful execution of educational policies. Additionally, it is critical to strengthen the Anganwadi system. Critical positions such as AWWs and AWHs must never be left vacant. The capacities of Anganwadi centres and workers should also be enhanced.

**Way Ahead** Investing in ECD has significant long-term benefits. Studies indicate that quality early childhood programs yield a high return on investment, contributing to better health, education and economic outcomes. Children who receive adequate early care and education are more likely to succeed in school, secure better jobs and contribute positively to society. Therefore, ECD should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a discretionary freebie. Its universalisation must be backed by adequate funding and robust policies, to ensure equitable access to marginalised children. There is a clear roadmap for achieving this goal.

(The writer is a member of Alliance for Right to ECD; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## BUDGET CLIMBDOWN CONCERN

Madam — Apropos the news story "Do not withdraw capital support for oil PSUs," published on 23 May, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, the Government's recent decision to halve the equity infusion for three major public sector oil companies—Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)—is concerning. Initially, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a substantial Rs 30,000 crore for these companies to aid their transition to green energy and achieve net-zero emissions. However, this amount was slashed to Rs 15,000 crore, with no clear explanation provided.

Despite impressive profit margins, companies in the capital-intensive energy sector require substantial investments to transition to green energy. Past Government directives led to financial losses and predictable policy support is crucial to offset these losses and ensure their contribution to India's green energy transition and economic stability.

Khiraabdi Tanya | Noida

## ELECTION BATTLE IN THE LAST LAP

Madam — Apropos the news story "Epic election battle enters decisive phase," published on 23 May, this is my response. With only ten days left in India's intense two-month election season, the focus sharpens on Uttar Pradesh, a critical battleground for the ruling BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have been tirelessly campaigning, emphasising law and order and cultural nationalism. Meanwhile, opposition leaders, notably Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, strive to break the BJP's dominance. Despite Modi's polarising campaign, Yogi's steadfast leadership and achievements, including the Ram temple at Ayodhya, galvanise the BJP's base. The outcome in Uttar Pradesh, with its pivotal 80 seats, will significantly influence the national result. Both

## Israel honours Indian caregivers



Apropos the news story "Israel honours Kerala caregivers," published on 22 May, this is my response. The celebration of Israel's National Day in India underscored the deep bonds between the two nations, especially in light of recent tragic events. Naor Gilon, Israel's Ambassador to India, expressed profound gratitude for India's unwavering support since the Hamas attacks on October 7. This solidarity reflects

the extraordinary relationship between Indians and Jews. Gilon honoured two brave Keralaites, Meera and Sabitha, who risked their lives to save an elderly couple during the attack and paid tribute to Romi, a young Israeli child of Indian descent, for her bravery amidst the tragedy.

The event, graced by Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, highlighted the resilience and resolve of the Israeli people despite the pain inflicted by terrorism. Kwatra emphasised India's zero-tolerance stance on terrorism, aligning with Israel's fight against such threats. The national anthems of both countries played, symbolising unity, while a special message from President Isaac Herzog of Israel reinforced the call for the release of the 128 hostages. The Christian Alliance and Action for Social Action in Kerala also voiced strong support for Israel, praying for the hostages' safe return.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Modi and Yogi's efforts will be crucial in determining the BJP's success, potentially solidifying their path to victory on June 4.

Preeti Bajaj | Chandigarh

## RAISI'S OPPRESSIVE REGIME

Madam — Apropos the editorial "Iran at Crossroads," published on May 22, this is my response. The late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner, has long been regarded as a prospective successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He frequently criticised America and Israel and was on Washington's tight blacklist for serious human rights breaches. He was very vocal about growing Iran's nuclear power, despite US sanctions. Raisi held various key posts before becoming President of Iran in 2021 and many scandals have surrounded him. Specifically, he was accused of forcefully suppressing movements and opponents. Raisi was one of the Iranian politicians at whose behest two of the harshest acts of repression took place. Iran enacted regulations regulating women's dress and behaviour after Raisi

was elected president. Iran's hijab law has tightened. In September 2022, Iran witnessed significant protests after Mahsa Amini's death in custody for violating dress laws, marking the largest unrest since the 1979 Revolution. The demonstrations resulted in numerous casualties. Ebrahim Raisi, known for his harsh stance on exiled opposition and human rights groups, was linked to the mass killings of Marxists and leftists in 1988 while serving as Tehran's Revolutionary Court deputy prosecutor. Amnesty International reported the existence of 'Death Committees' in Iran, comprising religious judges, prosecutors and intelligence officers. These committees arbitrarily sentenced thousands of inmates to death. Amnesty reports that these committees have sentenced over 5,000 people to death. It was only after the mass hanging of 1988 that Raisi was called 'The Butcher of Tehran.'

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





### FIRST COLUMN NEW CHALLENGES FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The global geopolitical landscape grows more complex with Russia-China ties



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The gruelling Indian elections, one of the largest democratic exercises in the world will be over in a week or so. A hectic flurry of pending policy decisions is likely to start immediately. If the current party comes back, a hundred days action-packed agenda would be rolled out by most major Government departments, going by PM Modi's Stated objective of not wasting a minute after polls are over. However, the geo-political space, which existed when the elections were declared, has become far more complex refusing to wind down any time soon.

To be fair some of the changes are driven by elections happening all across the globe during 2024, including in key European Union and US. This will ensure that almost all multilateral forums, where these key constituents and India are major contributors, would be subject to pressures of domestic politics and issues. Meanwhile, India's long-standing partner Russia, finished their election nearly a month back and upon reelection President Putin undertook his first State visit to China last week. Russia and China have emerged as the key UN Security Council permanent members, whose interests and policies are not likely to align with the US-led block any time soon.

The joint Statement released after President Putin's visit to China highlighted the importance of his visit to China. It was a message to the wider Western block of countries opposed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, coming at a time when the Chinese president had just come back after meeting every senior leader from the European Union, the French President and reaffirmed firm support from a couple of East European countries. The European Union and recently the US have expressed grave concerns



and taken some tariff measures regarding China's non-competitive trade practices, especially regarding State-subsidised cheap Electric vehicles flooding their markets. Apprehensions have been raised by Indian trade associations that the loss of the lucrative US market for Chinese Electric vehicles could lead to, these automotive products being dumped in India leading to a situation similar to Europe and the US. In this context Russia seems to have come out in full support of the Chinese automotive sector, perhaps also sending a strong message to Europe and the US. In the media Statement released during Mr Putin's State visit to China, he mentioned "Regarding bilateral industrial cooperation, we are pleased to witness the proactive expansion of Chinese automakers and household appliance manufacturers in the Russian market. As discussed during our talks and as the President said, we acknowledge the detrimental effect of any unlawful actions, sanctions, or restrictions. We wholeheartedly embrace collaboration with our Chinese counterparts."

China has refrained from overtly criticising Russia over its war in Ukraine and has in the past been accused of supplying military equipment stealthily. Even though Ukraine found mention in both Statements by President Putin and President Xi Jinping, it was velvet-gloved, under larger international foreign policy issues and overall commentary on geo-political matters. On foreign policy matters Russian president's Statement read "We are working together to create a fairer and more democratic multipolar world order based on the central role of the UN and its Security Council, international law, cultural and civilizational diversity, as well as a calibrated balance of interests of all members of the international community. We believe that the creation of such alliances is extremely harmful and counterproductive." Reforming multilateral institutions, especially the UN and a permanent membership has been a long-term foreign policy goal for PM Modi. In the wake of geopolitics, the new Government will have its task cut out on foreign policy.

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

# Elder abuse is far more rampant than assumed



GURDEEP KAOUR

Despite respect for the elderly, many seniors face abuse from family members. This hidden crisis demands urgent action to protect their dignity and wellbeing



The culture in India over the past few decades has significantly transformed. As the 21st century unfolded with developments and advancements in science, technology, communication etc. the values upon which cohesion and amicable environment at family to global level can be built have been hit hard. The world has never been wealthier or possessed greater knowledge and technological prowess than it does today but sadly, inequality, poverty, food insecurity, violence, exploitation and discrimination continue to escalate unchecked. Among the victims of exploitation are the elderly population across the globe. And this issue becomes more worrisome for India where the culture of respect and care for the elderly has always existed and was deeply rooted. Given the cultural norms, the value system of filial piety and residence with the children, more often than not the elders in the family seem protected but on closer and deeper investigation, it is not so. The prevalence of elder abuse and neglect is evolving as a pressing and distressing hidden reality. As the person ages, his or her ability to engage in productive/ remunerative work gradually decreases, further their physical ailments, diseases etc demand care and specific needs to be looked after, this worsens and complicates the problem. As dependency grows and contribution declines, the elders in the family become subject to abuse, isolation, neglect, humiliation and harassment. The increased rate of urbanisation, transborder migration, inflation, technological advancement and the scale and extent of dependency add to the vulnerability of the elderly being exploited and neglected. In most cases, the perpetrators of abuse- physical, psychological, financial and verbal are their children whom they have raised by sacrificing their comforts and basic needs. According to the United Nations policy brief titled 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons' (2020), the cases of elder abuse have grown worldwide during and after the pandemic, making it a worrisome issue.

Life expectancy and life longevity have enormously improved, given the advancements in diagnostic, medical and therapeutic science but for the ageing population support



THE PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT IS EVOLVING AS A PRESSING AND DISTRESSING HIDDEN REALITY IN INDIA, DESPITE THE COUNTRY'S CULTURAL NORMS OF RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

services from family, community and the Government are also crucially needed for dignified life and death. In the present-day neo-liberal world order, access to State-of-the-art health and care facilities burns a big hole in the pocket of those wanting to access them. In addition, inflation, job crunch, financial crisis and the burgeoning household budget for education, basic needs, recreational, health care services etc are largely responsible for the elders and their needs being pushed to the periphery. Lack of timely care and preventive measures compounds their problem and vulnerability to the extent of extreme dependency. The State of complete/ partial dependency makes them subject to neglect, harassment and humiliation, abrogating their human rights. With intra and transborder migration of young and productive age groups, the threat to survival, safety and well-being of the ageing population is rising across the globe including India. In the past few decades, the migration from rural to urban areas and from urban to distant lands has been considerably growing, the dearth of resources, harsh living conditions and tough competition faced by the young population a reason although indirect, for elder abuse and in absence of dear ones (son/grandchildren), adjustment to new settings also drains the elder population mentally, financially and emotionally and risks their wellbeing and safety.

Further, as senior citizens are seen as a liability, apart from the conflict over their care and responsibility, the conflict over inheritance and property share also traumatises them. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of elder abuse cases emerge from property-related matters. Thus physical, verbal, sexual, mental and emotional abuse can occur within these dynamics, causing immense suffering to the elderly. The sudden-

part about elder abuse is that the perpetrators of violence and hardship against them are their family members, it could be their son/ daughter-in-law/ daughter/ son-in-law/niece/nephew/ grandchildren among other close relatives as a result of the instances of violence either don't come in the public domain or if at all it comes, it isn't given attention stating that it is a personal/family matter. Due to a lack of intervention, the concerns of the elderly being abused and harassed most often go unattended and cared for.

In most cases the abuse is subtle and persistent, so is perceived as normalised by victims and is difficult to label as abuse, however, badly harms the victims and their wellbeing. In some cases, senior citizens suffering from dementia or other cognitive impairments are unable to understand that they are being ill-treated and abused or at times may find it difficult to effectively communicate the reality and seek intervention. The absence of timely and appropriate intervention discourages the victims from reporting their abuse. It is also out of fear of offending the family members/ agonising them that the victims are reluctant to report or discuss the instances of violence and humiliation meted out by them. There is also a stigma around abuse and the concern that society may perceive them to be weak/ incapable and also that it might bring the family in a bad light is a reason that discourages senior citizens from speaking about their vulnerability and abuse. Moreover, the elderly either don't have awareness about the legal mechanism that they can take recourse to or do not have trust in the system and the law designed to protect them.

As most cases remain unreported, the exact figures associated with violence against elder persons cannot be provided. This however can-

not be taken as a reason to escape and deny the grim reality. The issue indeed is important and the laws enacted in the recent past to save the elders from abuse and violence, the growing number of old age homes and the increase in property-related disputes where the elders in the family are either as plaintiff or the defendant are a testimony. Globally, a very good proportion of the population is growing older, India mirrors this trend too. According to the United Nations Population Fund's India Ageing Report 2023, the population above 60 years will double from 10.5 per cent or 14.9 crore (as of July 2022) to 20.8 per cent or 34.7 crore by 2050. There is a dire need to understand that this population is neither small nor are their issues insignificant that can be ignored. It is important to understand that the elderly population which isn't engaged in productive work were once the ones who shouldered responsibilities and looked after the needs of the children. They had been once a very potential workforce in nation-building. They are a reservoir of knowledge and experience and should be valued for their sacrifices, pains and contributions made during their lifetime. As reasons are multiple behind elder abuse so are the ramifications, it is therefore important to have solutions at different levels ranging from sensitising the society at large to spreading awareness among elders, formulating policies, emboldening social security measures to robust monitoring and judicial mechanism to deal with the perpetrators of violence. Concrete measures need to be taken so that elder abuse, albeit hidden, is not perceived as normalised.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Political Science, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

# Political turncoats being turned down by voters

There is a concerning pattern of political leaders forsaking their party affiliations in pursuit of personal gain, but voters are giving them a run for their money

India, once a beacon of guidance in global affairs encompassing Statecraft, religion and politics, now confronts a disheartening reality. Presently, its political landscape appears adrift and devoid of purpose. Those in positions of authority seem driven solely by personal gratification. The completion of the fifth phase of the 2024 general elections has stirred heightened activity among political factions. Both ruling and opposition parties fervently urge the public to cast their votes in their favour. As the electoral process unfolds, leaders assess their prospects of triumph or defeat, often shifting allegiances between parties. Moreover, other political entities not only welcome



VINOD TAKIAWALA

defectors into their ranks but also offer them electoral tickets, even at the expense of their loyalists. The phenomenon of leaders defecting from one party to another is not new. Reflecting on historical trends, in the 1960s, approximately 30 per cent of parties witnessed leadership changes. However, public sentiment, termed 'Janata Janardan,' proved decisive,

thwarting 31 per cent of defectors in 1977 and 85 per cent in 2019. Examining the success rates of party-switching leaders, in the 1960s, around 30 per cent of parties with new leadership secured victories. Contrastingly, in the 2019 elections, the success rate plummeted to less than 15 per cent. A recent example is Seema Soren from Jharkhand, a three-time MLA and sister-in-law of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who departed from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on March 19. Similarly, Congress MP Geeta Koda from Jharkhand also crossed over to the BJP and secured a ticket for the

Singhbhum constituency. The trend continues with leaders like Brijendra Singh and Rahul Kaswa, former BJP MPs now contesting under the Congress banner and Ritesh Pandey, previously a BSP MP, a BJP candidate. Afzal Ansari, once aligned with the BSP, is now a candidate for the Samajwadi Party, while Bibi Patil and Sangita Azad, both former BSP MPs, are now BJP candidates. Analysts attribute these defections to various factors such as the denial of tickets or perceived better prospects in another party. However, the prognosis for such defectors appears bleak as data analysis from the Trivedi Center for Political Data at Ashoka University indicates a dwin-



dling success rate, dropping below 15 per cent in the 2019 elections from around 30 per cent in the 1960s. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, out of over 8,000 can-

didates, 195 were party-switchers, constituting 2.4 per cent of the total candidates. However, only 29 emerged victorious, marking a success rate of 14.9 per

cent, significantly lower than previous years. The peak year for party-switching was 1977, post-Emergency, when disparate political forces united against Indira Gandhi, resulting in a success rate of 68.9 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the subsequent election saw this rate decline sharply. The question of which party, BJP or Congress, better accommodates defectors remains a subject of debate.

In 1984, following Indira Gandhi's assassination, sympathy propelled the Congress, leading to a remarkable success rate of 81.3 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the BJP, contesting its inaugural Lok Sabha elections in 1984, saw no success among its 62

defector candidates. However, subsequent years witnessed shifts in these figures. In 2019, 5.3 per cent of BJP candidates were defectors, with a success rate of 56.5 per cent, whereas the Congress, with 9.5 per cent defectors, saw only 5 per cent success.

The future of defector leaders in the ongoing 2024 Lok Sabha elections remains uncertain until June 4th, when the Indian electorate bestows its verdict, symbolised by the "Vijayshree" crown. Until then, further speculation would be premature, necessitating patience from all stakeholders.

(The writer is a columnist and a freelance journalist; views are personal)



MONEY MATTERS

## MahaRERA suspends registration of 20,000 real estate brokers

Maharashtra's realty regulator on Thursday said it has suspended the registration of 20,000 real estate brokers, leaving only 13,000 such registered agents in the state. There were a total of 47,000 agents registered with the regulator, which began the registration of the middlemen for property transactions in 2017. Earlier this year, it cancelled the registration of 13,785 agents for not renewing their licenses. The registrations of an additional 20,000 agents have been suspended for one year for not obtaining MahaRERA's real estate agent certificate of competency or not uploading the certificate on the watchdog's website, an official statement said. Licenses of these 20,000 agents can be renewed if they complete training, obtain the certificate of competency, and upload the same on the portal within a year, it added. According to an official, about 5,500 new candidates are likely to appear for the examination to get registered as agents next month.



## IndiGo to introduce business class in flights this year

After flying for nearly 18 years, the country's largest airline IndiGo on Thursday announced it will introduce business class in flights this year, as the carrier seeks to provide more options for passengers amid rising economic growth. The airline will launch a "tailor-made business product", the details of which will be unveiled around August that will also mark the 18th anniversary of the carrier. The latest announcement also comes less than a month after the profitable carrier said it would buy 30 wide-body aircraft. "In a groundbreaking move to redefine business travel in India, IndiGo, India's most preferred airline, announces the plan to launch a tailor-made business product for India's busiest and business routes," IndiGo said in a statement. Currently, the airline only has economy class. It has a fleet of more than 360 aircraft and operates around 2,000 flights daily.



## 'Pre-owned car market expected to touch 1.09 cr units by FY28'

India's pre-owned cars sales market is expected to reach 1.09 crore units with value more than doubling to USD 73 billion by FY28, according to the latest Indian Blue Book (IBB) report. In FY23, the pre-owned cars sales in India stood at about 51 lakh units. The domestic used car industry was valued at USD 32.44 billion in FY23, as per IBB report by 'car&bike' and 'Das WeltAuto by Volkswagen'. "Apart from an increasing preference for personal mobility, other key factors such as rising disposable incomes and shorter vehicle replacement cycles are encouraging as well. All these factors will only invigorate the demand for pre-owned cars," the report said. Post COVID-19, the demand for used cars among new-age buyers remains high globally. In India, the story is no different. The Indian market for used cars will rise exponentially, as social taboos in relation to used cars are fast fading, it added.



# Maldives to launch India's RuPay service

PNS ■ MALE

Notwithstanding the turbulence in their bilateral ties, the Maldives will soon launch India's RuPay service, which a senior minister has said "will bolster the Maldivian Rufiyaa." RuPay, a product of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is the first of its global card payment network in India, with wide acceptance at ATMs, POS devices, and e-commerce websites across India. Minister of Economic Development and Trade Mohamed Saeed while announcing how both India and China have agreed to use local currency in bilateral trade, spoke about the upcoming launch of India's RuPay. "The upcoming launch of India's RuPay service is anticipated to further bolster the Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR)," Saeed told state-run PSM News on Wednesday. He also emphasised that "addressing the dollar issue and reinforcing the MVR is a top priority for the current administration. However, there



has been no announcement of any date for the launch. Last week, a news portal, CorporateMaldives.com, reported that Saeed conveyed that the card will be "formally utilised for transactions denominated in rupees within Maldivian territory." "We are currently engaged in discussions with India to explore avenues for facilitating payments in rupees," the minister said. An India-Maldives joint statement during the official visit of the then President of Maldives Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to India in August 2022 said: "The two leaders welcomed the ongoing work to operationalize the usage of RuPay Cards in Maldives and agreed to consider further measures to boost bilateral travel and

tourism and economic inter-linkages." Over the last few years, multiple banks and payment companies from across various countries have partnered with NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL), the international arm of NPCI, to accept UPI and RuPay in one form or the other. Ever since the pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu assumed power last November, the relations between the Maldives and India have soured. The repatriation of 80 plus Indian military personnel manning three aviation platforms earlier this month from the archipelago nation at his insistence has left a bitter note on bilateral ties.

## NSE listed companies' market capitalisation surpasses US\$ 5 trillion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The market capitalisation of listed companies on the NSE surpassed US\$ 5 trillion (Rs 416.57 trillion) on Thursday on a day when the Nifty 50 index touched an all-time high of 22,993.60. The Nifty 50 index also touched an all-time high of 21,505.25 on Thursday indicating that growth in the equity market is not restricted to only the large capitalised stocks, a statement by NSE said. The journey of market capitalisation of listed companies from US\$ 2 trillion (July 2017) to US\$ 3 trillion (May 2021) took about 46 months, US\$ 3 trillion to US\$ 4 trillion (December 2023) took about 30 months and the latest US\$ 5 trillion addition took only about 6 months, the exchange said. The top five companies by market capitalisation on the exchange are Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Bharti Airtel. Growth in market capitalisation is not restricted to the top companies but is observed across stocks, it added. The resource

mobilisation by corporates, including the small and medium enterprises in the primary market, has been encouraging and provided an effective alternative mechanism in addition to the traditional methods of fundraising, the statement said. Liquidity in the secondary market has also improved significantly in the capital market segment. The equity segment's daily average turnover has increased by over 4.5 times from Rs 17,818 crore in FY15 to Rs 81,721 crore in FY24. The achievement of this milestone is a testament to the vision outlined for the Amrit Kaal which includes a technology-driven and knowledge-based economy with strong public finances, and a robust financial sector, it said. "I would like to thank the government of India, Securities Exchange of Board of India, and Reserve Bank of India for supporting the capital market ecosystem with progressive regulatory frameworks," Sriram Krishnan, Chief Business Development Officer of NSE, said.

## 'India to get rating support if it uses RBI dividend to reduce fiscal deficit'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India can get 'rating support' over time if it utilises the highest-ever dividend of over Rs 2 lakh crore received from the Reserve Bank to reduce fiscal deficit, said an S&P Global Rating analyst on Thursday. The RBI board has decided to pay a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 2024, more than double of what was budgeted expectation of Rs 1.02 lakh crore. "The additional dividends from the RBI are around 0.35 per cent of GDP. Whether it would support the narrowing of the fiscal deficit in fiscal 2024-25 would really depend on the final budget that would be passed after the June election results," S&P Global Ratings Analyst YeeFarn Phua said. The interim budget presented in Parliament earlier in the year targets a fiscal deficit of 5.1 per cent of the GDP. The additional dividend from the RBI may not necessarily lead to a full decrease in the deficit due to potential revenue



shortfalls in areas like investment receipts or additional allocation to expenditures in the final budget, Phua said in an email interview from Singapore. However, "if it does lead to a full decrease of the deficit, we believe it will lead to a faster path of fiscal consolidation that, in turn, will provide rating support over time", Phua added. The government expects to bring down the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal, down from 5.8 per cent in 2023-24. As per the fiscal consolidators roadmap, the deficit -- the difference between government expendi-

ture and revenue -- would be brought down to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. In May last year, S&P Global Ratings affirmed India's sovereign rating at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook on growth but flagged weak fiscal performance and low GDP per capita as risks. 'BBB-' is the lowest investment grade rating. All three global rating agencies -- Fitch, S&P and Moody's -- have the lowest investment grade rating on India with a stable outlook. The ratings are looked at by investors as a barometer of the country's creditworthiness and impact on borrowing costs.



## For fleet operators, revenue growth to double

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Revenue growth of road transport fleet operators is expected to double to 9-11 per cent this fiscal, riding on better domestic demand amid tepid exports, CRISIL Ratings said on Thursday. It further said operating margin is seen improving 75-100 basis points on better fleet utilisation and steady fuel costs. According to the rating agency, the credit profile of operators should remain strong as well, as they may look to moderate capital expenditure (capex) towards fleet expansion, following strong additions in the past three fiscal years, as new guidelines for air-conditioned driver cabins kick in the next fiscal year. Fleet operators expanded their fleet size by 60 per cent in the three fiscal years through 2024, as demand recovered sharply post the Covid-19 pandemic and returns from fleet additions were immediate.

## Ind-Ra expects stable operating performance for most infra projects

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) expects stable operating performance for most infrastructure projects in the current financial year. The rating agency on Thursday maintained its stable outlook on the infrastructure sector, including the transport segment -- which signifies low chances of rating changes for the sector in the near to medium term. The rating agency assigned a positive outlook on the airport segment which means there are high chances of rating upgrades in the near to medium term. Ind-Ra stated that the stable outlook on the infrastructure sector factors in the likelihood of a stable operating performance for most projects, long-term revenue visibility under concession agreements and power purchase pacts and expected improved cargo and traffic volumes. On the power sector, the rating agency said it expects total capacity installed to reach about 476 GW in FY25 against 440 GW as of March 2024. In a virtual press meet,



Bharat Kumar Reddy, Associate Director at India Ratings and Research, said, "On the energy front, we have seen peak demand growing by almost 13 per cent during the last fiscal. However, the deficit has reduced to 1.5 per cent compared to 4 per cent which we have seen in FY23 that is largely because of better coal supply." The overall peak demand was 243 GW in FY24 and the total capacity installed was about 440 GW as of March 2024. "This is incremental of about 26 GW largely driven by solar of about 15 GW," Reddy said. Maintaining its stable outlook on toll roads, the rating agency said it expects a moderation in toll collection growth in the range of 6-7 per cent in the current fiscal compared to double-digit growth seen in FY23 and last fiscal.

## NHAI's road assets monetisation can fetch up to Rs 60,000 cr for govt : Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rating agency ICRA on Thursday said state-owned NHAI's targeted asset monetisation of road assets could fetch the government up to Rs 60,000 crore in the current fiscal year. In April 2024, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had released an indicative list of 33 road assets it plans to monetise in FY2025, through a mix of toll-operate-transfer (TOT) and sale to the NHAI's Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT). These assets are spread across 12 states, cumulatively spanning nearly 2,750 km and with an annual toll collection of Rs 4,931 crore.

## Peak power demand hits season's high of 235 GW

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's peak power demand hit the season's high of 235.06 GW on Wednesday mainly due to excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and coolers amid severe heat waves in most parts of the country. According to the power ministry data, the peak power demand met or the highest supply in the day is recorded at 235.06 GW on Wednesday, which is the maximum so far in the summer season this year. The all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023. The record is expected to be broken during this summer season. Earlier this month, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during daytime and 225 GW during



The power ministry data, the peak power demand met or the highest supply in the day is recorded at 235.06 GW on Wednesday, which is the maximum so far in the summer season this year. The all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023.

evening hours for May and 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW during evening hours for June 2024. Besides the power ministry has also projected that peak power demand can hit the 260GW mark during this summer season. The data shows peak power demand was 224.18GW in April 2024, when the country wit-

nessed the onset of the summer season in various parts of the country. It was 221.82GW in March, 222.16GW in February and 223.51GW in January. During May, peak supply hit 233 GW on May 6 and 233.80 GW on May 21. It was 221.42 GW recorded in May 2023. Last week, the peak power supply touched 229.57 GW on

May 18, while it was around 226 GW on May 15, 16 and 17. The peak supply was 229.77 GW on May 4 and 228.71GW on May 20. The industry experts are of the view that power demand could soar further and can easily breach the all time high of 243.27 GW recorded in September 2023.

## Gold plunges Rs 1,050 to Rs 73,550/10 g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Extending the downside for the second straight session, gold prices sharply tumbled by Rs 1,050 to Rs 73,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a decline in precious metal rates globally. Gold slid sharply following the release of the Federal Reserve's hawkish meeting minutes, which indicated that the US Fed officials are in no rush to cut rates, with "many" questioning



whether a higher-for-longer policy is restrictive enough, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 74,600 per 10 grams. In addition, silver prices also plummeted by Rs 2,500 to Rs 92,600 per kg. It had

closed at Rs 95,100 per kg in the previous session. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,550 per 10 grams, down by Rs 1,050, taking bearish cues from the overseas markets," Saunil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at US\$ 2,375 per ounce, down US\$ 42 from the previous close.



## Investors become richer by Rs 4.28 lakh cr; market cap of BSE-listed firms hits new peak

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth on Thursday went up by Rs 4.28 lakh crore amid the ongoing optimistic trend in equities where the benchmark Sensex hit its lifetime peak. The 30-share BSE Sensex regained the 75,000 level in intra-day trade on Thursday. It climbed 1,196.98 points or 1.61 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 75,418.04. During the day, the Sensex zoomed 1,278.85 points or 1.72 per cent to reach the intra-day high of 75,499.91. The NSE Nifty went up by 369.85 points or 1.64 per cent to settle at 22,967.65. It jumped 395.8 points or 1.75 per cent to 22,993.60 -- the barometer's record intra-day high. Investors' wealth went up by Rs 4,28,602.18 crore with the

market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies reaching an all-time high of Rs 4,20,22,635.90 crore (USD 5.05 trillion). "Markets ended at fresh all-time high amid short-covering, improving investors' sentiment towards the election outcome and healthy macros highlighted by the record dividend payout by RBI," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd. Market-cap of BSE-listed companies too crossed USD 5 trillion making India the 5th country to reach this milestone, he added. The combined market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the historic USD 5 trillion-mark for the first time at the close of trade on Wednesday.

# Leather exporters seek national policy to attract investments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Apex body for leather and footwear exporters CLE has asked the government to formulate a national policy for the sector with a view to attract investments, boost India's shipments and create jobs. In a letter to Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam, Council for Leather Exports (CLE) said that though there are schemes and support measures at central and state levels, there is a need for holistic development of the entire sector through a national policy. The elements of the proposed policy, it said, can include incentives for setting up of manufacturing units, training of workers, support measures for adoption of sustainable technologies and inno-



There is a need to fine-tune special economic zone (SEZ) policy with a focus on increasing productivity through flexible labour laws, lowering the tax burden for the sale of goods in the domestic market.

vative products. "This policy should cover the entire supply chain of the sector, starting from raw materials to finished products, including processing, product development, marketing, supply chain management, and backward integration," the council

said. Explaining the importance of the policy, CLE Executive Director R Selvam said that the sector needs a national policy as it is a labour-intensive sector, which employs about 4.4 million, with over 85 per cent women. "The sector has a huge socio-

economic benefit. The policy would help the industry in boosting exports and creating huge number of jobs," Selvam said. The council asked the government to implement the production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the entire supply chain of the footwear

and leather industry and also the machinery segment. It added that there is a need to fine-tune special economic zone (SEZ) policy with a focus on increasing productivity through flexible labour laws, lowering the tax burden for the sale of goods in the domestic market. Further, the CLE suggested that the policy should include a blueprint for infrastructure development in all leather and footwear clusters to make them smart clusters; measures for logistics management; and monetary policy; credit facilities; and insurance coverage. "I would request to frame the policy to facilitate growth and development and provide additional employment opportunities to at least two million youth in the next seven years," CLE Chairman R K Jalan said.

He also called for organising a meeting of global CEOs of major leather products and footwear brands with industry secretaries of states. "Such a meeting will be helpful in attracting more investments from brands," he said adding that there is a demand for setting up plug-and-paly models of factories wherein ready-to-use factory sheds with all required infrastructure and support services are provided by the government. The industry is projected to grow at a CAGR of 18-20 per cent in the next 6 years. Its turnover is projected to reach USD 47 billion by 2030 from USD 16.7 billion in 2023-24. The sector's exports dipped by about 10 per cent to USD 4.3 billion in 2023-24.



# Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia takes on a thriller drama for her big-screen debut!

Rising star Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia embarks on an exciting new chapter in her career as she signs her next project, a gripping thriller drama, with production house Jar Pictures.

Following her memorable stint on *Big Boss Season 16*, Ahluwalia is poised to captivate audiences on the big screen with her debut role in this yet-to-be-titled project.

Ahluwalia's transition to the silver screen marks a significant milestone in her career, as she steps into the lead role in this highly anticipated thriller drama.

Expressing her excitement about the project, Ahluwalia shared her thoughts, stating:

"I am thrilled to be collaborating with Jar Pictures for my big-screen debut in this thrilling drama. After my journey on *Big Boss Season 16*, I am excited to explore new avenues in my acting career, and this project presents the perfect opportunity. Working alongside such a talented team and under the guidance of a renowned director is truly a dream come true."

Nimrit further adds, "After being introduced to Ajay Sir by my agent, he saw potential in me for the role. Following several rounds of auditions, he was convinced that I was the right fit for my big-screen debut in his film. Securing



the role for my first film was a surreal experience."

The untitled thriller drama, helmed by a seasoned director, promises to deliver an immersive cinematic experience, with Ahluwalia at the forefront of the narrative. Joining the cast alongside Ahluwalia will be prominent names from the industry, further elevating the anticipation surrounding the project.

Meanwhile, *Choti Sardarni* actress Nimrit has travelled to Romania to join the 14th season of *Khatron Ke Khiladi* with other contestants. The filming will last for over a month, and the show is slated to air on Colors TV in July.

# Angelina Jolie must produce years' worth of NDAs in Brad Pitt's lawsuit

All NDAs signed by Angelina Jolie in the last eight years would be presented as evidence in the current civil case between her and Brad Pitt over their Château, fine wine, and vineyard in France.

A Los Angeles Superior Court judge ordered Jolie to turn up "all non-privileged documents in her possession, custody, or control that are responsive to" Pitt's legal team's request.

This includes any non-disclosure agreements the *Maleficent* star has signed. The judge has granted Jolie one month to comply with the ruling.

A source from Pitt's camp has described the ruling as a "crushing blow" to Jolie, who had previously contended that fulfilling such a request would be "expensive," "wasteful," "unreasonable," and



"abusive."

Jolie's lawyers had continued to indicate that the unveiling of the NDAs infringes on the privacy of other individuals involved.

These data are most likely comprised of important contracts with various Hollywood entities, such as employers, brands, and employees; the contracts may contain "contracts that include Jolie's compensation or compensation she paid to third parties."

Now, Jolie's team is scheduled to produce a list of documents they believe are private, allowing Pitt's attorneys to "evaluate the merits of Jolie's assertions of privilege."

Earlier this year, the *Bullet Train* star's lawyers inquired about the number of NDAs Jolie had staff members sign. This came after Jolie claimed that Pitt was seeking to assert control over her through an "overreaching" arrangement.

# Richard Jenkins joins the cast of Amazon Prime Video's adaptation of Criminal

Richard Jenkins, a renowned actor, has been named as the first cast member for Amazon Prime Video's planned series adaptation of the iconic comic novel *Criminal*. According to reports, the news offers a hopeful insight into the highly anticipated movie.

Jenkins will play the character Ivan in the series, who is described as "Leo's dad's best friend and has always been an uncle figure to him. He used to be a robber and criminal, but he is now suffering from dementia. Leo is trying to care for him but realises he's doing more work than he can



handle." This nuanced role promises an engaging exploration of relationships and life's complexities. Richard Jenkins' career spans decades, and he brings extensive expertise and talent to the screen. Jenkins, noted for his extraordinary ability to switch between comedy and drama, has left an everlasting influence on film and television. Notable performances in famous films such as *The Shape of Water* and *The Visitor* won him Oscar nods, demonstrating his versatility as an actor.

# First look of Love In Vietnam unveiled at Cannes

In an unprecedented and historic move, the entertainment industries of India and Vietnam have joined forces for the first time to produce a feature film, marking the dawn of a new era in cinematic collaboration.

This landmark venture is led by acclaimed director-turned-producer Omung Kumar, joined by director-producer Rahhat Shah Kazmi, internationally acclaimed festival curator Captain Rahul Bali, and Abhishek Ankur. The movie features a stellar cast, including the charming Shantanu Maheshwari and the stunning Aneet Kaur, along with popular Vietnamese actress Kha Ngan. The film, titled *Love In Vietnam*, is directed by the visionary Rahhat Shah Kazmi. The movie is based on the bestseller *Madonna In A Fur Coat*.

The excitement reached a crescendo as the first-look poster for *Love In Vietnam* was unveiled at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. The film is



supported by the Consulate General of India in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the Consulate General of Vietnam in Mumbai, and Vietnam Airlines.

# Shraddha Kapoor is reading scripts to make sure she chooses the right one: Source

Bollywood's most popular actress, Shraddha Kapoor, is in no rush to jump onto her next project, despite a flood of offers.

With a staggering 89.2 million followers on Instagram, Kapoor's decisions are keenly watched by her fans and industry insiders alike. Her latest hits, including the genre-defining horror-comedy *Stree* and the box office triumph *Tu Jhooti Main Makkar*, which grossed an impressive 220 crores, have cemented her status as one of Bollywood's most bankable stars.

Amidst this streak of success, Shraddha Kapoor remains committed to a meticulous selection process for her upcoming roles. Known for her versatility and dedication to her craft, she is currently engrossed in reading several scripts to find the perfect fit.

"Shraddha has been offered a few projects, but she is taking her time to read them all and choose," revealed a source. This careful consideration underscores her desire to maintain a high standard of entertainment value and to take on roles that offer variety and depth, ensuring she continues to resonate with her vast audience.



## FUN

### ARCHIE

### CALVIN AND HOBBS

### GARFIELD

### REALITY CHECK

### SPEED BUMP

### CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	
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17				16	
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19					

### GINGER MEGGS

### SUDOKU

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	3							6
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Yesterday's solution

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

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.



## 'Chatting with lively vendors has enriched my travel experience'

A passionate globetrotter, Ekta Mohanani Kamra, who has travelled to different mesmerising locations, gets candid with *The Pioneer* as she shares her travel experiences this week for our *Travelogue* segment.

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Ekta Mohanani Kamra is a passionate globetrotter who has strolled through the beautiful alleys of Paris, danced the night away in Ibiza, discovered the historic charm of the United Kingdom, and soaked up the tropical beauty of Bali, among many other captivating destinations.

For her, travelling is more than just visiting new locations. It allows her to immerse herself in different cultures, meet interesting people, and get new ideas on life. "It's also a moment for self-reflection and determining what is actually important to me. Ultimately, travel enhances my life with amazing experiences and beloved memories," she says in an interview with *The Pioneer*.

As an Indian, she is used to delicious, spicy food, so savouring basic foods like tomato bread or boiled potatoes with Sriracha sauce was a thrill. She adds, "Each cuisine has its own distinct charm, making every meal a brand new adventure." She had an amazing time in Dubai and Abu Dhabi! In Dubai, she went on a desert safari and explored the breathtaking Dubai Miracle Garden. Meanwhile, in Abu Dhabi, "I had the opportunity to visit the breathtaking Qasr Al Watan palace and go kayaking in the enchanting mangroves. Both sites provided an ideal blend of adventure and culture, resulting in an amazing experience."

Aside from that, her journey to Udaipur included an exciting off-the-beaten-path excursion. She proceeded to the calm Chuda Shikar Oudi, which is around 37 kilometers from the city. "There, I took an incredible safari ride and immersed myself in the thrilling animal experience. Later, I enjoyed a delicious meal with my companions under the beautiful stars. The afternoon was packed with the thrill of a Polo

match, and I finished the day with a fun night of dancing."

Las Palmas, the vibrant capital of Gran Canaria in Spain's Canary Islands, is one such city that always surprises tourists with its culture and traditions. She says, "The Carnival of Las Palmas was a highlight, with extravagant parades, vibrant costumes, and energetic music that filled the streets for a week. I really enjoyed immersing myself in the local celebrations, where traditional Canarian music, with its own folk songs and instruments, created an unforgettable ambience."

She has not encountered any terrible situations, but one such occasion was caused by heavy traffic. She relates, "When I travelled to Bali during peak travel periods, the traffic congestion in South Kuta, Legian, Seminyak, and Ubud was absolutely insane!"

Interaction with locals frequently provides the tourist with information about the location. "Interacting with locals on my excursions has been quite enlightening. Whether it's chatting with colourful merchants at a crowded market or seeking advice from kind strangers, the genuine warmth and hospitality I've encountered have definitely enhanced all of my travels, making them unforgettable."

The most important thing to have while visiting new areas is a book travel guide, which may sound traditional, but she believes it comes in handy while travelling. "I enjoy reading short travel guides that provide unique insights into local culture and history, as well as practical recommendations and detailed maps. These guides are ideal for anyone planning a quick city getaway or a longer vacation," she says in conclusion.

### Travelogue



## Tobacco-free tomorrow



We live in an era where there is a strong emphasis on global health awareness campaigns, and Anti-Tobacco Day serves as a timely reminder of the ongoing issues faced by rising tobacco smoking among individuals. While the dangers to respiratory health are well-known, the impact on vital organs like the kidneys remains less discussed yet is equally concerning.

### UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF TOBACCO ON KIDNEY HEALTH

Tobacco is a significant risk factor for chronic kidney disease (CKD). The World Health Organisation (WHO) helps to point out the direct link between smoking and an increased risk of CKD and end-stage renal disease (ESRD). A report by the National Kidney Foundation further reveals that smokers are more susceptible to proteinuria, a sign of potential kidney damage. The relative risk of proteinuria and CKD-ESRD with smoking ranges from 2.0 to 3.2, which is alarming. Further, smoking is not only an independent risk factor but also a risk amplifier for CKD in patients with diabetes and hypertension. Interestingly, cessation of smoking reduces the risk of progression to end stage kidney failure. Thus, raising awareness about this issue is crucial.

### INDIA'S TOBACCO PRODUCTION AND DIVERSIFICATION EFFORTS

In addition to being a major consumer of tobacco, India stands as the second-largest producer globally, manufacturing 761,335 tons. The majority of this production is concentrated in three states, employing nearly 25 million people across the production value chain.

Recognising the health and economic implications, the Indian Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperation, and Farmers Welfare introduced a crop diversification scheme under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana program. The government reported a diversion of 67,512 hectares, or 8.7% of designated tobacco-growing land, since 2015-2016. In 2022, India's unmanufactured tobacco production stood at approximately 2 thousand tons, representing 13.4% of the global production of 5.78 million tons. This marks an 11.9% increase from the 690.0 thousand tons produced in 2010. Moreover, India utilised an estimated 3 thousand hectares for tobacco cultivation in 2022, a 4.3% decrease.

### THE NEED FOR ANTI-TOBACCO INITIATIVES

Despite increasing awareness, tobacco-related illnesses, including kidney diseases, continue to rise. A WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic in 2023 exposed the tobacco industry's tactics to undermine smoke-free regulations. From discrediting evidence on

second-hand smoke to promoting Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) as "clean" alternatives, these tactics demand vigilance from policymakers and the public alike. The industry also influences policy-making through lobbying, aiming to weaken tobacco control measures and undermine existing laws by promoting ENDS (Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems) through traditional and social media. Regulators must remain vigilant against these tactics to protect public health.

### DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

In the last 15 years, there has been significant progress in implementing smoke-free measures globally. In 2007, only 15 countries were believed to have 100% smoke-free cafés, pubs, and bars, a number that rose to 88. Despite this, these venues remain the least protected under national laws. Meanwhile, 81 countries had smoke-free healthcare facilities, and 78 had smoke-free educational facilities. These numbers increased to 142 and 149 countries, respectively. This significant increase underscores the growing global commitment to creating healthier environments by reducing exposure to second-hand smoke in crucial public spaces.

Sensitisation about the ill effects of smoking in schools and colleges is pivotal. Manufacturers of cigarettes and tobacco products need to be more explicit in displaying the hazards of smoking.

### EMBRACING A SMOKE-FREE FUTURE

There's a growing trend to extend smoke-free laws across various public venues and outdoor spaces globally. We must empower people with information on the ill effects of smoking and the benefits of quitting. Hence, by providing accessible and effective smoking cessation support services such as counselling, medications, and hotlines, one can ensure that these materials are widely available and cheap to all those who want to quit smoking.

Therefore, it is essential to create a smoke-free world that demands collaborative efforts and robust policies. As we mark Anti-Tobacco Day this year, we can renew our commitment to safeguarding public health and fostering a tobacco-free environment for future generations.

(The author, Dr. Manjunath Doshetty, is a nephrologist at NephroPlus.)

## 'When a woman runs a show, there's a different perspective'

Actress Sai Tamhankar, who has created her niche in the Hindi and Marathi film industries, speaks with *The Pioneer* as she speaks of her much-anticipated *Dabba Cartel* and more insights on her working style.

TEJAL SINHA

Sai Tamhankar has been in the film industry for 16 years, yet she is still relatively new to Bollywood. How, you wonder? Well, every time that she's on screen, she certainly brings a new face and new life to every character that she plays. For instance, her upcoming project, *Dabba Cartel*, has been creating quite a buzz ever since its announcement. Her character brings us a never-seen-before avatar of the talented actress.

With the immense anticipation for the series *Dabba Cartel*, Sai herself has also been very excited. Basically, it was the story that inspired her. And then, of course, she says, "Shibani Dandekar is the showrunner of the show. I think when a woman runs a show, it brings a different perspective, and also, this entire thing is led by

women. I really like when women drive something; it becomes multi-dimensional." *Dabba Cartel* is a riveting tale that propels five ordinary women from their routine existence in a quiet colony of Thane into the murky, unpredictable life of the underworld. A woman-led crime drama is not something that we generally get to see, and that was something that intrigued her pretty much. Sai had also gained much traction for her role as Shama, Kriti Sanon's friend, in the award-winning film *Mimi*, which was about a surrogate mother. While in the film she played her friend, it was in *Anubandh* that she herself played the character of a surrogate mother. She feels that it has certainly changed her perspective on motherhood and children over the years. "Earlier, I would love only children who would smile and be happy children, but after doing *Anubandh*, I started admiring and

appreciating seeing children in a different light. If there is a human unconditional love, it is motherhood. There is nothing else in the world. *Mujhe aisa lagta hai ki Maa apne bacche ko pyar karti hai woh unconditional hota hai* (I feel that a mother's love for her child is unconditional), and we don't see such unconditional love in human form. I think the human race is very selfish, and we think about ourselves and never think of how challenging it is for the person who is the mother. At some point, they just lose their self-identity and only look after their family. It isn't something forced; it happens naturally. That's something magical."

She's always been someone who says 'what's next' and does not delve into the glory of time. "I am always curious and want to work; I cannot sit still. If I am sitting at home for more than four days, I get really restless. I love my work from the bottom of my heart, and I am the happiest person when I am on the set. So, sometimes my friends and my loved ones have to make me realise that, Listen, girl, slow down, take a deep breath, let it sink in, appreciate a little how far you have reached."

In fact, she's someone who is rarely pleased with herself! "These are rare moments, but there are. These moments come once in a blue moon, and I like the fact that it is hard to please myself. It's only about me. *Dusro ko appreciate karne ki bari tho fatt se hota hai khud ko appreciate karne mein bahut time lagta hai* (Appreciating others happens quickly, but it takes a lot of time to appreciate

yourself), and when that moment comes, it is really satisfying, it is reassuring, and it is self-motivation does not come every day, but when it comes, it's really nice."

She even recalls a time when she literally thought of giving up and leaving everything to pursue her MBA degree. However, her destiny had different plans. And she says it's very important for one to accept their sadness, just as one accepts happiness and explores the different colours of life.

Going ahead, she recalls a time when she was extremely frightened of being typecast. "I was extremely scared after *Hunter* because I was being offered similar kinds of roles. Thankfully, I waited until I got something different than that role, and that was *Love Sonia*. So yes, it's a natural fear, and you should be able to maneuver these things or carve your own paths among these difficulties." As an actor, she's someone who has no fixed process for choosing a project. It could be due to its story, set-up, director being your friend, or a script that is challenging and brings you a different part than the ones played in the past. However, over the years, Sai, who has *Agni*, *Ground Zero*, an untitled web series on Hotstar, *Dabba Cartel*, and a few Marathi projects, says on a concluding note, "Over the years, what I have realised over time is that it is very important to what phase you are in in your life. Sometimes you choose projects as per your mental space, and what you are going through in life can also sometimes determine the choices."







# SRH big hitters up against RR's spin stars in battle of nerves for place in IPL final

PTI ■ CHENNAI

IPL's best power-hitters Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma will face a very different challenge in wily spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin when Sunrisers Hyderabad take on Rajasthan Royals in a high-octane second Qualifier here on Friday.

"Travis' as the duo is affectionately called by the fans have taken power-hitting to a new level. Head (533 runs at 199.62) and Abhishek (470 at 207.04) have hit 72 sixes apart from 96 boundaries between them. If that's not enough, they have a swashbuckler in Heinrich Klaasen (413 runs at 180), who also has 34 maximums to his credit.

But playing on an Uppal shirtfront that resembled a

national highway or at the Kotla or Wankhede is completely from playing at the Chepauk where the strip will be sticky in nature.

The ball stops and stroke-makers do have a tough time when it comes to hitting through the line.

Ashwin, who has played all his cricket at this ground, knows the strip like the back of his hand and his form has improved towards the back-end of the tournament.

With the country's best leg-spinner Chahal for company, Royals would be hoping that Head, Abhishek and Klaasen can be disposed off quickly to gain control of the proceedings.

As for their bowling, the onus would once again be on T Natarajan, who has been SRH's top wicket-taker this season,

and playing on his home turf here, he would love to exploit the conditions.

Also, the experienced duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Cummins have a lot to deal with as the former has been wicket-less in his last two games.

SRH's problems lie in not having two quality spinners. Mayank Markande is mediocre at best and Shahbaz Ahmed's primary skill is willow-wielding, not bowling slow left-arm orthodox tweakers.

As for RR, the side finally ended its five-game winless streak, thanks to its all-round show against RCB.

In batting, the top-order displayed some positive signs, especially Yashasvi Jaiswal, and he would love to continue the form ahead of the T20 World Cup in the Americas next



month. However, skipper Sanju Samson will have to do better, given that he hasn't crossed the 20-run mark in the last three contests.

In the middle order, Dhruv Jurel will be under pressure, having failed to enter the double digits in his last two outings.

The side would also be relying on its Caribbean game-changers Shimron Hetmyer and West Indies T20 skipper Rovman Powell for some power-hitting that they displayed against RCB.

Riyann Parag, who has displayed some serious form this term, is also one of their bankable batters.

**SQUADS:**  
**SRH:** Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz

Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Uppendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth, Viyakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh and Mayank Agarwal.

**RR:** Sanju Samson (c & wk), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Kuldeep Sen, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dube, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Tanush Kotian.



## We need bowlers with specific skill set of bowling at Chinnaswamy: RCB head coach Flower

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Raw pace alone will never be enough to win T20 games consistently at Chinnaswamy where bowlers with different skill-sets, executing a specific plan will be required in RCB set-up, head coach Andy Flower said after his team's exit from IPL Eliminator.

While RCB had a brilliant run at the back-end with six straight wins and qualified for the 'Eliminator', the team lost most of its games at the Chinnaswamy with none of the pacers — Mohammed Siraj (ER 9.18), Lockie Ferguson (ER 10.62), Yash Dayal (ER 9.14), Reece Topley (ER 11.200), Karn Sharma (ER 10.58) haven't exactly set the stage on fire.

"You certainly need highly skillful bowlers at (M) Chinnaswamy (Stadium). Simply pace is not going to be the answer there. You need skilful, intelligent bowlers and people that can bowl to really specific plans at Chinnaswamy," Flower said.

With the mega auction scheduled to take place before next IPL, Flower wants RCB to pick specific kind of players.

"I don't really want to talk about that stuff yet - I'm still digesting what's happened in this game. (But) I do think though as part answer to your question the Chinnaswamy has some particular qualities that we need to be able to exploit," Flower said when asked what the franchise's approach will be for the next year.

**P O W E R - H I T T E R S**

**NEEDED:** On batting front, Flower wants players with better power game, who can keep up the tempo.

"We have all seen how the power game has affected T20 cricket recently. On the batting front, you certainly need to recruit batsmen with that sort of power that can keep up that sort of tempo," he added.

**COACH SUPPORTS 'IMPACT PLAYER' RULE:** Flower batted for the 'Impact Player' rule saying that it allows two Indian players to participate in a game.

"It has got a few positives about it absolutely. Now there's an extra Indian playing and that's a good thing for Indian cricket. It has catalysed the batsmen," Flower said.

"It has given them a little bit of a safety net and they've taken off and attacked the game a little more this year."

The left-hander believes that even if the rule is done away with, batters won't back away from the ultra-aggressive approach seen this year.

"Even if you took the impact player rule away, I believe batsmen will still retain that very aggressive game that they're playing at the moment because they've proved to themselves that they can play that aggressively and stay in," Flower said.

**DON'T SEE REASON THAT MAXWELL CAN'T TURN THINGS AROUND:** Flower backed the struggling Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell to turn things around after he was dismissed for a duck and finished with a mere 52 runs in 10 matches.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dinesh Karthik's international career was a classic case of what could have been after the arrival of Mahendra Singh Dhoni but on Wednesday, when he said goodbye to the game at the end of his team's IPL campaign, it was from a stage he made his own over the past 17 years.

The Eliminator between his Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals ended up being Karthik's swansong, bringing down curtains on a 20-year-old career marked by a series of comebacks across formats.

Twenty six Tests, 94 ODIs and 60 T20s over two decades don't make for eye-popping numbers but the forever fidgety 38-year-old managed to stay relevant till the very end despite spending more time in the commentary box than on the field over the past couple of years.

Ahead of the T20 World Cup squad announcement, Karthik forced himself into the selection debate for the wicket-keeper batter's role with head-turning performances for RCB but that one final comeback wasn't meant to be as selectors rightly went for younger talent.

While he was commenting on the India-England Test series in February-March, Karthik had made up his mind on retirement but the world only got to know when Michael Atherton let it slip in a podcast with the Tamil Nadu stumper.

Having played for as many as six

## Dinesh Karthik: Man of comebacks and Dhoni's understudy calls time on IPL and international career

teams in the IPL since the tournament's inception in 2008, Karthik can be proud of his record in the world's premier T20 league.

He finished as an IPL winner with close to 5000 runs over 17 seasons besides taking 145 catches and effecting 37 stumpings.

He batted at various positions all these years but his days at the RCB as a finisher over the past three seasons stood out.

In a format increasingly ruled by power-hitters, Karthik relied on his experience, game awareness and touch to find the boundaries at will.

His 330 runs at a strike rate of 183 in 2022 earned him a recall to the Indian team for the T20 World Cup but that happened to be his last time in national colours.

He scored at an even higher clip this season but despite making himself available for the upcoming World Cup, he deep down knew his comeback saga with Indian cricket had come to an end.

**KARTHIK HAD HIS MOMENTS IN STOP-START INDIA CAREER:** The Chennai-born cricketer was only 19 when he made his India debut in an ODI against England at Lord's in September 2004.



He announced his arrival on the big stage with a spectacular stumping of opposition skipper Michael Vaughan.

Three months later, he made his Test debut against Australia but his international career could never really take off due to middling performances and rise of Dhoni.

With Dhoni a certainty in the playing eleven, Karthik was asked to open the batting on the tour of England in 2007 and he made a standout contribution in the team's rare Test series win away from home.

Between 2010 and 2017, Karthik remained sought after in the world of

IPL but his stock fell sharply in the national team.

He got back in the scheme of things following India's loss to Pakistan in the 2017 Champions Trophy final.

Between 2017 and 2019, Karthik regularly played for India in the white-ball formats. His memorable knocks included the iconic last ball six that helped India seal the 2018 Nidahas T20 Trophy in Colombo.

Couple of months later, he made a Test comeback after eight years but that was short-lived.

Karthik was seen as a certainty for the 2019 ODI World Cup but by his own

admission, he was shocked to know about his exclusion from the home series against Australia, ahead of the ICC event in England.

The selectors surprisingly brought him back for the World Cup where he only got three games, including the ill-fated semifinal against New Zealand.

The final chapter of his comeback story unfolded after a stellar IPL in 2022 but like on previous instances, Karthik could not seize the opportunity and could only manage only 14 runs in three innings at the T20 World Cup in Australia.

By his own admission, his India career could have been so much more but there was no shame in being overshadowed by someone like Dhoni.

The consistency that he lacked in international cricket was his friend in the IPL and his significant contribution was duly recognised by his RCB teammates on Wednesday night including the great Virat Kohli who was the first one to acknowledge his long career.

Karthik will be back in the commentary box soon and could be seen playing the T20 leagues outside the IPL.

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Ravichandran Ashwin does not want to single out impact player rule as the only contributing factor in high scores being recorded several times this IPL, as the premier India spinner attributes it to the evolution of batters.

Ashwin also has urged bowlers to start working on their batting skills in order to meet the demands of the game.

The season has witnessed some astonishing batting records -- teams crossed the 200-run mark for a staggering 41 times whereas the 250-mark was breached on eight instances in the league round.

IPL's record highest team total of 287 was also registered in the ongoing edition.

"Even if the impact player rule wasn't there, scores would be this high," Ashwin said on JioCinema Match Centre Live after their four-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the

## High scores in IPL due to batters skills, not impact player rule: Ravichandran Ashwin

IPL Eliminator, here on Wednesday.

"In my opinion, batters have more confidence and pitches everywhere have been standardised."

"In the future, all bowlers will need to be hitters because we know that no matter how well we bowl, we also need to be able to bat. The game is headed in that direction," he said.

While Indian captain Rohit Sharma has criticised the rule, arguing that it hampers the development of all-rounders in the country, star batter Virat Kohli has opined that it disrupts the balance of the game.

The rule was formally adopted in the 2023 edition of the IPL after a trial in the Syed



Mushtaq Ali Trophy domestic T20s.

The BCCI secretary Jay Shah recently said the impact player rule was implemented on a 'test case' basis and is not

a permanent one. Shah has also said the board authorities will talk to the stakeholders before taking a final call on the debatable rule.

Coming off a gruelling five-

match home Test series against England where he was the leading wicket-taker in India's 4-1 win, Ashwin said he had to overcome an abdominal injury and started bowling in his elements only in the business end of the competition.

"My tournament has gone in two halves. The first half was coming off the Test series, so my body didn't feel fresh. My arm speed wasn't there and I also had an injury, an abdomen tear. I played through the injury but didn't get much bowling time or repetitions.

Ashwin was adjudged man-of-the-match for his miserly 2/19 that restricted Royal Challengers Bengaluru to 172/8.

"I am someone who depends on bowling repetitions. Over the last 6-7 games, I feel like my rhythm came back. I was able to bowl off spin. I changed my action slightly. My plan was simple. I came with a single-minded focus on changing the line and length of my deliveries and it was executed well," added Ashwin.

Ashwin has also hailed Riyan Parag's maturity and said the Assam batter has come a long way since making his debut as an 18-year-old in IPL 2019.

"It's important to give batters, especially junior batters, role clarity. Riyan came into the team as a 17-year-old child and he's matured over the years, getting role clarity for the first time this season.

"I never doubted his ability. The shot he hit over the covers tonight, not many batters can hit that. Based on his talent and how his season has gone, I think he can reach wherever he wants to," he said.

# Avesh Khan Way: Sleep well, eat well and bowl well

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Eat, sleep. Bowl and repeat. Avesh Khan has simplified the mantra of success and it is paying dividends as one saw his performances during key games for Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL.

With 16 wickets from 15 matches, mostly played on flat decks, an economy rate of 9.81 is praiseworthy and his control at the death has made him look a different bowler this time around.

"I have simplified my cricket - I have to sleep (well), I have to eat (well) and I have to bowl (well) and there is nothing else to it," said Avesh, who took a three-for to help Rajasthan Royals reach Qualifier 2 in IPL here on Wednesday.

"The more you would think... cricket is like a circle, the smaller you keep it, the better it will be. You expand this circle more and you will

find (more and more) gaps," he added.

"This has changed my life too and also impacted my cricket," he said.

The 27-year-old, who is among India's reserve players for next month's T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and the USA, on Wednesday revealed that analysing his strengths and weaknesses after a heavy domestic season followed by IPL last year helped him find the better version of himself.

"Last year when I played for LSG, I had played 10 matches of Ranji Trophy wherein I bowled about 320 overs. The body was not responding to the efforts I was putting in," he said.

He also needed to be aware that playing too much can cause wear and tear.

"It happens, sometimes as a bowler you just end up playing so much. Even in the IPL, you may think that it's a four-over game or a 20-over



game but still, there is a lot of effort that goes in. The body starts giving up and there are mental and physical fatigues too," he added.

"Your execution could go off the mark, but if you are mentally and physically fresh you will be able to execute better. I was not fresh last year so I did not have a successful IPL. I (also) realised later that there is no good in taking so much tension," he added.

Avesh said going back to the drawing board and working with his coach in order to work on his bowling action and setting up right routines for training and recovery have helped him immensely.

"I could not find the answers back then, but after the IPL last year, I analysed that there were some technical changes in my bowling. I worked with my coach Anand Rajan and I did well with him," he said.

"I played in the Deodhar Trophy and Duleep Trophy

which was followed by my comeback into the Indian team."

Avesh said leaving LSG for Rajasthan Royals also had specific benefits for him as a bowler.

"I understood my body and when the trade was made this year, I was also happy because anything can happen to you at any time in IPL," said Avesh.

"The trade was not in my hands, but I took it positively, and Rajasthan's (home) ground is also quite big, the team is also good... as a bowler you need such margins," he said.

While acknowledging that various methods help player develop mental toughness, Avesh said there is no better teacher than going through the grind regularly.

"I get up only at 2:00pm on match days so there is no time to think that much," Avesh replied when asked what he does to develop mental

toughness.

"You can do whatever you can to build mental toughness but until you are not in a position to have faced the challenges repeatedly, you cannot overcome them. I acknowledge all that, but when (as a batter) you need 10-12 runs in an over, you forget everything and focus on execution," he added.

The pacer acknowledged RR's dugout was tense during a close finish against RCB in the Eliminator here but he said the team perhaps remembered head coach Kumar Sangakkara's message before the game.

"The talk was simple — either we would win or go back home. We had to give it our all," he said.

"We were top two till the last game of the (league stage) and we finished third. (Kumar) Sangakkara said whether we win or lose, there should be no regrets," Avesh added.





## Dhanush set to collaborate with Manjummel Boys director

In a confirmation that has set tongues wagging in the film industry, it's been informed to us by the sources that acclaimed director Chidambaram, best known for his work on the hit film *Manjummel Boys*, is all set to helm a new project starring none other than the multi-talented Dhanush.

This exciting venture is being produced under the banner of Gopuram Films, adding further anticipation to what promises to be a cinematic delight.

While fans eagerly await this collaboration, Dhanush is currently immersed in his filming commitments. Presently, he's busy shooting for *#Kubera*, and once this project wraps up, he's slated to dive into the next phases of *NEEK* and *Raayan*.

The busy schedule doesn't end there for Dhanush, as he's already charted out his future

plans with precision. Following the completion of *NEEK* and *Raayan*, the versatile actor has his sights set on two highly anticipated projects: the much-talked-about Ilayaraja biopic and a film by the acclaimed director Rajkumar Periyasamy.

With a lineup of such diverse and intriguing projects, Dhanush's fans have every reason to be excited. Whether it's his remarkable performances or his knack for choosing captivating roles, Dhanush continues to captivate audiences with each new venture.

Indeed, the confirmation of his collaboration with director Chidambaram only adds to the anticipation surrounding Dhanush's upcoming projects.

As the actor gears up for a series of big releases, including *#AO2*, the anticipation among fans is palpable.

# Prabhas: In my younger days, I fashioned myself on Kamal sir

Prabhas says Nag Ashwin's Kalki 2898 AD has turned out to be a lucky project for him as the film gave him the opportunity to collaborate with two stalwarts of Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan and Kamal Haasan.

Bachchan and Haasan play pivotal roles in the multilingual magnum opus that was greenlit as Project K in 2020.

The movie, which promises to transport audiences to a time never seen before in Indian cinema, is produced by Aswini Dutt, the founder of Vjayanthi Movies.

"I'm thankful to Amitabh sir and Kamal sir; as they agreed to be part of Kalki 2898 AD, they both have inspired the whole of India. I'm very lucky to act with these two legends.

I think Amitabh sir, who hails from

North India, has earned a huge fan base in the South, and we all should be proud of him. Kamal Sir is also a big star. They both have fans all over India," Prabhas said at a promotional event for Kalki 2898 AD here on Wednesday night.

The 44-year-old actor recalled that as a child, he used to dress up like Haasan's characters from his movies.

"In my younger days, I fashioned myself on Kamal sir and also tried to get my clothes stitched, like the ones he wore in the 1983 film *Sagara Sangamam*," he said. At the event, the makers introduced 'Bujji', a life-size futuristic car, which is driven by Prabhas in Kalki 2898 AD. The actor arrived at the event, which was attended by over 15,000 fans, in the customised car. Kalki 2898 AD also stars Deepika

Padukone and Disha Patani, and Prabhas expressed gratitude to both actors for being part of the movie.

"Deepika is the most gorgeous and beautiful superstar; she is doing international films and ads, and we are lucky to have her in the film," Prabhas said.

The Baahubali star said he admires his producer Dutt's passion and courage for making one of the costliest films in India with Kalki 2898 AD.

"He (Dutt) is the only producer who has been in the industry for the last 50 years, and imagine his second movie being with NTR. His two daughters also have the same passion, and we all should be inspired by them," he said.

Kalki 2898 AD will be released in theatres on June 27.



## Kajal's *Satyabhama* releasing on June 7

Queen of Masses' Kajal Aggarwal, in the lead role of the movie *Satyabhama*, is getting ready for a grand theatrical release worldwide on June 7. Kajal is portraying a powerful police officer, and this movie is attracting interest from all sections of the audience, especially among the female audience. Kajal's words during the promotions highlight that this is a movie women should watch. The female audience is eagerly waiting for *Satyabhama*.

Naveen Chandra plays the pivotal role of Amarender in *Satyabhama*. This film is produced by Bobby Tikka and Srinivasa Rao Takkalapalli under the banner of Aurum Arts. Major film director Sashikiran Tikka served as the presenter and provided the screenplay. This crime thriller is directed by Suman Chikkala. The trailer and lyrical songs released so far from *Satyabhama* are receiving a positive response. The trailer for this film will be released today by Natasimham Nandamuri Balakrishna.

## Shruti Haasan confesses break-up speculations

The ever-charming Shruti Haasan not long ago engaged in a candid and interactive Q&A session with her Instagram followers, providing a glimpse into her personal life while addressing a myriad of queries. Amidst the various questions that flooded in during the session held today, May 23, one topic stood out: her relationship status.

Addressing the curiosity surrounding her personal life, Shruti Haasan took a candid approach to responding to fans' inquiries. In a moment of openness and honesty, the *Salaar* actress acknowledged the ongoing speculations about her breakup with ex-boyfriend Santanu Hazarika. Without hesitation, she revealed her current relationship status, stating, "I don't like answering these questions, but I am entirely single. I am willing to mingle, only working and enjoying my life. Bye, Enough."

The revelation comes amidst heightened speculation and gossip circulating in the media and among fans regarding her romantic life. Shruti's willingness to address the topic head-on during the Instagram Q&A session showcases her candid nature and openness with her fans. While the actress continues to enchant audiences with her on-screen performances and versatile talent, her candid interactions with fans on social media add a personal touch, allowing them to connect with her on a deeper level. As Shruti Haasan navigates through both her personal and professional endeavors, her fans eagerly await her upcoming projects and continue to shower her with love and support.



## Manchu Lakshmi plays Jwala in *Yakshini*

Another intriguing web series, *Yakshini*, is coming from the collaboration of Arka Media Works and Disney plus Hotstar. This web series is produced by Shobu Yarlagadda and Prasad Devineni. Vedhika, Manchu Lakshmi, Rahul Vijay, and Ajay are playing the lead roles. Director Teja Marni is helming the *Yakshini* series.

The character Jwala, played by Manchu Lakshmi in the *Yakshini* web series, was intro-

duced today through a special poster titled 'Mysterious Jwala'. Featuring elements of fantasy, romance, and comedy, *Yakshini* promises to offer a new experience to the audience.

Arka Media Works has produced this series with significant production values, realising director Teja Marni's vision. The *Yakshini* web series is set to stream in Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi, and Telugu in June.



## Pushpa 2 duet song to release on May 29

Mythri Movie Makers, in collaboration with Sukumar Writings, has once again set ablaze the entertainment landscape with the innovative release of the announcement video for the second single from *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, titled *Sooseki (Couple Song)*. In this creatively crafted video, Rashmika Mandanna is seen on the movie set, preparing for a shot. Keshava asks her character, Srivalli, about the second single from *Pushpa*, prompting Srivalli to sing the song's lyrics. The video then dramatically reveals the iconic *Pushpa* brand logo, announcing that the song will be released on May 29th at 11:07 a.m.

Following the teaser, the release of the first song from *Pushpa 2* further amplified the excitement. This song became a massive hit across all languages, dominating music charts and garnering immense appreciation from fans and critics alike. The success of the song underscores the soaring anticipation for the film and the widespread appeal of its music.



The promotional teaser for *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, aptly titled *#Pushpa2TheRule* teaser, has stormed its way to the zenith of YouTube trends, seizing the coveted #1 spot for an unprecedented 138 hours. Garnering a staggering 110 million+ views and an astonishing 15.5 million+ likes, the teaser

stands as a testament to the electrifying anticipation for this cinematic masterpiece.

*Pushpa 2: The Rule* boasts an exceptionally talented crew. Directed by the visionary Sukumar, whose previous works have set new benchmarks in the industry, the film promises a compelling narrative and stunning visuals. The music, composed by the maestro Devi Sri Prasad, is expected to deliver unforgettable melodies and powerful scores that resonate deeply with audiences. Starring the charismatic Allu Arjun in the titular role and the talented Rashmika Mandanna, the film is set to offer stellar performances and captivating chemistry. Their combined star power, along with Sukumar's direction and Devi Sri Prasad's music, ensures that *Pushpa 2: The Rule* will be a cinematic extravaganza that enthralles audiences worldwide. Mark your calendars for August 15th, as *Pushpa 2: The Rule* is set to hit theaters on this date, promising an unforgettable cinematic experience.

## Seerat Kapoor, Sharwanand reunite after a decade in *Oh Manamey*

Actress Seerat Kapoor is set to star alongside actor Sharwanand in an upcoming film directed by Sriram Aditya and produced by People Media Factory. This film marks a significant reunion for the two actors, who last worked together almost a decade ago in the hit movie *Run Raja Run*.

The movie has now been officially named *Oh Manamey*, generating significant buzz and excitement among fans. This rom-com promises a delightful and heartwarming experience.

The release of the teaser for *Oh Manamey* has further amplified the anticipation surrounding the film. Audiences, already thrilled by the announcement of Seerat and Sharwanand's reunion, have seen their excitement skyrocket with the teaser's debut. Also, the songs are choreographed by none other than Raju Sundaram, who is also the mastermind of the *Run Raja Run* songs. He is

one of the top choreographers in the industry.

The trailer offers a tantalising glimpse into the film's charming narrative and the palpable chemistry between the lead actors, setting high expectations for its upcoming release.

*Oh Manamey* is shaping up to be one of the most eagerly awaited movies in recent times. The official naming of the film has added a new layer of interest, giving fans a concrete title to rally around. Sriram Aditya's direction, combined with the proven on-screen synergy between Seerat and Sharwanand, suggests that the film will be a standout in the rom-com genre.

As excitement continues to build, Seerat's fan following is eagerly waiting to see her first glimpse with regards to the movie, anticipating a charming and heartwarming story that showcases the undeniable chemistry of its lead actors.



## Anup Rubens has his hands full



Music plays a crucial role in the outcome of movies. Films that are musically successful have high chances of doing well at the box office as well. In fact, chartbuster songs help create buzz. Anup Rubens has given many classic hits such as *Jai, Ishq, Gunde Jaari Gallanthayyinde, Manam, Heart Attack, Temper, Soggade Chinni Nayana, Bangaraju, Gopala Gopala, Nene Raju Nene Mantri, and 30 Rojullo Preminchadam Ela*. His love, emotional, and melodic songs will always be catchy and indelible to us. Now, the sensational composer

who is enjoying top form is busy with multiple projects and is set to offer back-to-back musical treats with his upcoming bunch of films.

Meanwhile, the evergreen movie *Manam*, for which Anup Rubens provided a blockbuster album, completes 10 years after its release today. The makers are holding special screens across the Telugu states on the occasion. Anup Rubens shared a video of him playing the *Manam* tune on the keyboard, which takes us into a trance. The video is going viral on social media with a humongous response.

Currently, Anup Rubens is working on action king Arjun Sarja's Pan India movie. He is scoring music for Gowri Ronanki's project. He is also working on a project being produced by AK Entertainment, and is also part of Sumanth's next film, directed by Santhosh. He reunited with Aadi Saikumar, for whom he provided many chartbuster albums. The film *Krishna from Brindavanam* is directed by Veerabhadram Chowdary. Anup Rubens also signed Akash Puri's new movie with Vijay Konda.

The music director, who is also in talks for some other projects, will reveal them once everything is finalised.