

INDIA leaders likely to meet on June 1 to assess poll performance



'MODI GOVT' RESHAPED BUDGET IN 10 YEARS REFORMS TO CONTINUE TO MAKE INDIA DEVELOPED NATION'



'Being called Radhika just makes MY DAY'



QUOTE OF THE DAY
 Phone tapping is more dangerous than Emergency. KCR should be banned from contesting elections for violating the oath of office. The Telangana government should order a CBI probe into the phone tapping case. Why is Chief Minister Revanth Reddy not arresting KCR? Why is the CM protecting Uttam Kumar Reddy in the paddy scam and KCR in the phone tapping case?
 — Bandi Sanjay Kumar, BJP MP

DON'T MISS... CEO happy with steps for counting...

Andhra Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Mukesh Kumar Meena, expressed satisfaction with the preparations made by the NTR district administration for the forthcoming vote counting in the Vijayawada Lok Sabha and seven other assembly constituencies scheduled for June 4. The vote tallying will be conducted at the Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges in Jupudi of Ibrahimpatnam district, meeting all the guidelines set forth by the Election Commission of India (ECI). CEO Mukesh Kumar Meena, accompanied by...

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Fire deaths up by 30% as...

Fire has taken 55 lives and injured more than 300 people in the national capital so far this year, according to the official data revealed on Monday. According to the data by Delhi Fire Services (DFS), 16 people were killed in fire in January, another 16 in February, 12 in March, four in April, and seven till May 26. Fire incidents led to 51 injuries in January, 42 in February, 62 in March, 78 in April, and 71 till May 26. From January 1 to May 26, the DFS received 8,912 fire-related calls. According to the data, 36 people...

—PAGE: 5

'ONGC's high investments to...

A step-up in investments at Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) will slow down its deleveraging over the next 12-24 months, eroding headroom for the state-owned firm's 'bbb+' standalone credit profile, S&P Global Ratings said on Monday. Stating that ONGC's financial results for the fiscal year ended on March 31, 2024, were in line with expectations, S&P said despite a decline of 2-3 per cent in the company's domestic oil and gas production volumes and lower realizations in fiscal 2024, EBITDA grew to Rs 1.1 lakh...

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From setbacks to success: Shreyas...

When Shreyas Iyer recreated Lionel Messi's famous World Cup celebration after lifting the IPL Trophy as Kolkata Knight Riders captain in Chennai, it was nothing short of an Argentine moment for the embattled Indian cricketer at an individual level. His central contract torn up a few weeks before the IPL besides a recurring back injury threatening to derail him, Iyer faced numerous challenges at the start of the year. He finally found a deep sense of triumph and vindication in this victory, much like...

—SPORTS

'Gear up for counting'

CEC commends officials for successful conduct of polls nationwide



Rajeev Kumar, CEC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajeev Kumar has emphasised the need for meticulous planning to ensure a smooth and accurate declaration of election results. Ahead of the counting scheduled for June 4, Kumar has instructed officials to stick to the Election Commission of India's (ECI) guidelines and expedite preparations to minimise any delays in announcing the outcome.

During a comprehensive review session, Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, along with CEOs and ROs from various constituencies, discussed arrangements for the vote-counting process.

Kumar commended the collective efforts that have led to the successful execution of the general

CEO MK Meena took part in video conference addressed by CEC Rajeev Kumar on Monday

- EVM handling to be systematic with minimal movement.
- Special provisions for Electronic Transfer Postal Ballot Management System (ETPBMS) in place.
- Timely and accurate results to be displayed via boards.
- State CEOs participate in video conference to discuss preparations.
- Uninterrupted power supply and contingency measures essential.
- Comprehensive training for election personnel planned.
- IT equipment to be prepared in advance.
- CEC Rajeev Kumar stresses prompt and accurate result declaration.
- Adherence to EC guidelines underscored.
- Crowd control at EVM storage sites emphasised.

elections nationwide and urged officials to uphold the same level of dedication for the impending vote counting.

Key directives include maintaining strict crowd control at the designated strong rooms where Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are stored, ensuring uninterrupted power supply, and having contingency measures such as power backup, fire safety equipment, and ambulances on standby.

Election personnel will receive thorough training on EVM vote counting procedures, and necessary IT equipment like computers, printers, and scanners will be set up well in advance at counting centres.

On the day of the counting, EVMs will be handled methodically, and once the vote tally is completed, they will be promptly sealed and stored securely.

Movement of EVMs will be minimized to avoid unnecessary disruptions. Additionally, special provisions will be made for the Electronic Transfer Postal Ballot Management System (ETPBMS), with dedicated tables and scanners for counting.

Security beefed up in AP: CEO

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Elaborate security arrangements have been made to ensure that vote counting is peaceful across Andhra Pradesh on June 4, state Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena said on Monday.

In the wake of poll-related violence reported at some places in the southern state, the top election official said, "Twenty companies of security forces (central armed police forces) have been allocated for the state and pickets are being set up."

Besides identifying sensitive centres, he noted that people suspected of creating trouble are being zeroed in on. Declaring the election results day as a 'dry day' (alcohol will be unavailable), Meena said that prohibitory orders will be imposed for as long as required.

Andhra Pradesh went to simultaneous polls for 25 Lok Sabha and 175 Assembly seats on May 13.

Surge in postal ballots raises validity concerns

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh witnessed a remarkable surge in the number of postal ballots in the recently concluded assembly and Lok Sabha election. This year, the number of postal ballots received has doubled compared to the previous election, prompting questions about their validity under current rules. Election officials have reported receiving 540,000 postal ballots, a significant increase from the 295,003 postal ballots recorded in the 2019 elections. The district of Srikakulam leads with the highest number of postal ballots at 38,865, followed by Nandyala with 25,283 and Kadapa with 24,918.

This surge is attributed to those on election duty and the new inclusion of 13,700 senior citizens above 85 years of age and 12,700 disabled persons, who used the home voting system introduced for the first time. The unprecedented volume of postal ballots has raised concerns about potential delays in the polling process. Officials are preparing for a meticulous counting process, which involves presenting each postal ballot to the candidate agents and validating them based on strict criteria. A postal ballot will be invalidated if the voter declaration form is separate from postal ballot cover A, if the ballot lacks a gazetted officer's signature, or if it is not signed by the Returning Officer (RO) on the back.



Officials are preparing for a meticulous counting process, which involves presenting each postal ballot to the candidate agents and validating them based on strict criteria. A postal ballot will be invalidated if the voter declaration form is separate from postal ballot cover A, if the ballot lacks a gazetted officer's signature, or if it is not signed by the Returning Officer (RO) on the back.

In light of these stringent rules, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has requested the Election Commission (EC) to provide exemptions, citing verbal assurances from Mukesh Kumar Meena, although no formal orders have been issued.

Continued on Page 2

'Follow Kerala's example in tackling 'communal' forces'

South India is going to give 100 seats to INDIA: TG CM Revanth Reddy

PNS ■ KOZHIKODE

People from other states in India should follow the 'responsibility' shown by the people of Kerala in keeping 'communal' forces at bay, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said here on Monday.

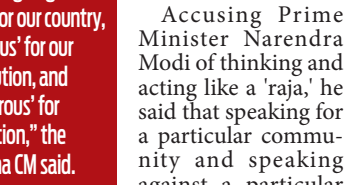
He said that whenever he visited Kerala, he felt inspired and learnt a lesson on how to prevent 'communal' forces from entering his state.

Speaking at the annual meeting of Snehasadas, organised by the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a Congress ally, Revanth congratulated the party led by Panakkad Syed Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal for organising such an event when some people are trying to 'divide' the country by opening shops of 'hatred' in the 'market of love'.

Snehasadas is about various communities coming together in harmony to show their regard for each

other. The Telangana CM said that 'communal' forces, who wanted to divide this country and change its Constitution, have been trying hard to enter Kerala, but the people of Kerala have not allowed them to do so. "Kerala is a role model for India," Revanth said, adding that the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala, in which IUML is a partner, is a role model for INDIA.

Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of thinking and acting like a 'raja', he said that speaking for a particular community and speaking against a particular community, just to win an election, is not compatible with the post of the Prime Minister. "If 'communal' forces win this time, it is going to be 'dangerous' for our country, 'dangerous' for our Constitution, and 'dangerous' for reservation," the Telangana CM said.



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Continued on Page 2

Judgment in stone attack case today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Arguments were heard in the bail petition filed by the accused Satish in the stone attack on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy by the Judge of 8th Additional District Court, Vijayawada on Monday. Advocate Saleem on behalf of the accused presented his argument before the court stating that his client Satish was illegally arrested by the police in the case without proper evidence.

He said that during the 2019 elections also the same trick was played by Jagan Mohan Reddy to gain sympathy and target poor people. The opponent's counsel denied the charges levelled by the advocate Saleem and said that an opposition party leader had offered a huge amount to Satish to resort to attack. After hearing the arguments from both sides, the judge reserved the judgment for Tuesday.

Steps for Jagan's coronation ahead of counting sparks debate

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the world of politics, it's not uncommon for parties to exude confidence in their electoral prospects. However, the Yuva Jana Samika Rythu Congress Party's (YSRCP) recent actions have left many observers in the State puzzled. With election results still eight days away, YSRCP's preparations for the swearing-in ceremony have sparked considerable discussion and criticism among the public and political analysts alike.

With the decision of who will hold power in Andhra Pradesh in 2024 stored securely in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the early arrangements for the oath-taking



ceremony have been perceived as premature by many. The election results are scheduled to be released on June 4, and by noon on that day, the new Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh will be known. Planning for the oath-taking ceremony can surely wait until then.

According to sources, the Andhra University ground has been chosen as the venue for the swearing-in ceremony. However, due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) under implementation, YSRCP leaders are tight-lipped about the arrangements.

Despite this, YSRCP has been aggressively promoting the notion that YS Jagan will be sworn in as Chief Minister on June 8 or 9.

Continued on Page 2

MLC Raghu Raju skips hearing over defection

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With MLC Indukuri Raghu Raju skipping the hearing in connection with his defection to TDP, Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council Chairman Koye Moshenu Raju on Monday posted the matter for next hearing on May 31.

The MLC has defected from YSRCP to TDP. Following this, the ruling party had filed a complaint

with the Council Chairman, who issued summons to Raghu Raju and asked him to appear before the Legislative Council in person.

The show-cause notice had asked him to explain as to why the Council should not take action against him under the anti-defection law. As Raghu Raju did not appear on Monday, the Council Chairman deferred the hearing till Friday.

Raghu Raju started his political career during 2001-06 as a member of Srungavarapukota ZPTC. Criticism is strong against him and he shows a domineering tendency no matter which party he is in. Being close to the Botsa Satyanarayana family, Raghu Raju was selected as MLC from YSRCP. But amid the most dramatic developments, he defected from the ruling YSRCP to TDP before the elections.

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the Chairman of the Council are taking stringent action against the MLAs and MLCs who have defected from their party. MLC Janga Krishnamurthy, and former MLCs Vamsi Krishna Yadav and C Ramachandraiah were disqualified. These two were elected as MLCs from YSRCP; Vamsi Krishna joined Jana Sena and C Ramachandraiah to TDP.

Man mauled to death by pack of stray dogs

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

In a disturbing incident at Bittarapadu village under GM Valasa mandal on Monday, a pack of stray dogs mauled a man to death.

According to official sources, the victim, who is identified as Neerasa Satyam, had ventured to the outskirts of the village to answer nature's call.

Soon, he was surrounded by a pack of strays, which viciously attacked and inflicted multiple bite wounds upon him. Locals tried to rescue him and made best efforts to rush him to the hospital.



However Satyam succumbed to his injuries on the way to hospital.

Guarantees in poll manifestos not 'corrupt practice': SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said that commitments made by political parties in their election manifestos will not amount to "corrupt practice" under the election laws.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan made the observation while dismissing a plea by a voter hailing from the Chamrajpet Assembly Constituency challenging the election of a candidate belonging to the Congress.

The plea alleged that commitments by the Congress in its election manifesto for the 2023 Karnataka assembly polls were direct and indirect financial help to the public which amounted to corrupt electoral practice. The contention of the learned counsel that the commitments by a political party in its manifesto,

The plea alleged that commitments by the Congress in its election manifesto for the 2023 Karnataka assembly polls were direct and indirect financial help to the public which amounted to corrupt electoral practice. "It is for the other parties to show as to how implementation of the

said schemes amounts to bankruptcy of the State Treasury and it can only lead to mal governance of the State. It is possible that they can be termed as wrong policies under the given facts and circumstances of the case, but cannot be termed as corrupt practices," the high court had said.

The Karnataka High Court had held that a party's announcement about the policies they plan to put into place cannot be regarded as corrupt behaviour under Section 123 of the Representation of Peoples Act. "The five guarantees of the Indian National Congress have to be considered as social welfare policies. Whether they are financially viable or not is altogether a different aspect. It is for the other parties to show as to how implementation of the said schemes amounts to bankruptcy of the State Treasury and it can only lead to mal governance of the State. It is possible that they can be termed as wrong policies under the given facts and circumstances of the case, but cannot be termed as corrupt practices," the high court had said.

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Cordon & search ops conducted at 502 places

1 country-made gun, 307 litres of liquor, 93,000 litres of jaggery wash seized

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Police, acting on the directives of DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, conducted extensive cordon & search operations at approximately 502 locations across the State in anticipation of the vote counting scheduled for June 4.

The operations yielded notable results, including the seizure of a country-made gun, 46 litres of NPDL liquor, and the apprehension of 23 individuals. Furthermore, 2,602 vehicles lacking proper documentation were impounded during the operation, and an additional 307 litres of liquor and 93,000 litres of fermented jaggery wash were seized. From May 24 to 27 noon, seven individuals were served 41 A CrPC notices.

These ongoing cordon and search operations, supervised by district SPs, are aimed at upholding law and order, curbing criminal activities, and deterring unruly behaviour



Emphasising the importance of public cooperation, the DGP highlighted that these operations are crucial measures undertaken by the police department to combat crime and address antisocial behaviour effectively. Citizens are urged to actively participate by reporting any suspicious activities or individuals to the local authorities via emergency hotlines 112 or 100, thus contributing to the collective effort to maintain public safety and security.

across the state. The meticulous inspections span various locations, including key intersections, village peripheries, residences of suspected individuals or known offenders, commercial establishments, storage facilities, and other areas prone to illicit activities. The focus is on uncovering contraband such as illegal liquor, weapons, explosives,

drugs, unregistered merchandise, and unauthorized vehicles. Furthermore, diligent efforts by new recruits in the districts have led to the identification and apprehension of suspicious individuals.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST FOREIGN STUDENTS

250 students from Srikakulam district trapped in Kyrgyzstan

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

The safety of Indian medical students pursuing education abroad is once more imperilled, echoing past international crises. Presently, approximately 250 students from Srikakulam district find themselves trapped in Kyrgyzstan amid escalating violence directed at international students. The capital city, Bishkek, has witnessed riots over the past week, with international students, particularly Indians, being targeted in the attacks. Reports of violence against Indian students have sparked widespread concern among their families back home.

Faced with mounting fear and uncertainty, these families are desperately pleading with the Indian government to intervene and ensure the safe return of their children. While the students have assured their families of their current safety, the rising number of attacks has left everyone on edge. This situation highlights the recurring issue



where rioters targeted foreign students, confining them to their hostels for days under a climate of fear. The attacks, specifically targeting Indian students, resulted in injuries and widespread anxiety. Relief came only after the Indian government intervened and facilitated their return home. The current crisis underscores a recurring issue - the vulnerability of Indian medical students seeking education abroad. Parents of affected students are urging the government to address the root cause: limited access to medical education within India.

Mahanti Ananya, a medical student from Ranasthalam, recounted a previous incident

critical need for an expansion of government medical colleges, ideally with one established in every district. Additionally, she advocates for a significant increase in the number of available seats. This, she believes, would provide more Indian students with the opportunity to pursue their medical aspirations within the country. Venku Naidu, another parent, highlights the existing disparity between the number of doctors and the population in India. He urges the government to prioritize the medical sector by allocating increased resources and establishing more government medical colleges across the nation.

As concerns for student safety mount, calls for collaboration between central and state governments are growing louder. Only through combined efforts can meaningful solutions be found to ensure the safety and aspirations of Indian students pursuing medical education abroad are not jeopardised.

14 hurt as auto plunges into valley

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM MANYAM

Fourteen tribal people sustained serious injuries when an auto-rickshaw they were travelling in plunged into a valley on Monday. The incident occurred as around 18 locals from Pambarelli village, located in Seethampeta mandal, were returning from the weekly market.



The autorickshaw, overloaded with passengers, lost control and veered off the road, falling into a deep valley. The accident resulted in severe injuries to 14 passengers, who were promptly transported to RIMS hospital in Srikakulam for emergency medical treatment. Additional injured passengers

were taken to KGH Hospital in Visakhapatnam. Hospital authorities report that two individuals are currently in critical condition.

Dr. DVG Shankara Rao, Chairman of the State Scheduled Tribes Commission, responded swiftly to the accident. He

contacted relevant officials and medical personnel to ensure the injured received the best possible care. The Police authorities are investigating the cause of the accident, with initial reports suggesting that overloading and poor road conditions may have contributed to the mishap.

VMRDA unveils ambitious ₹250 cr convention centre project

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the development of a world-class convention centre integrated with a minimum 5-star hotel/resort and waterfront entertainment facilities. This prestigious project, valued at approximately Rs 250 crore, will be undertaken through a public-private partnership model. It is poised to significantly enhance Visakhapatnam's standing as a prominent business and tourism destination.



Strategically situated within VMRDA Park on Beach Road, the project capitalizes on the city's vibrant beachfront. Encompassing 7.97 acres, the

site offers ample space for comprehensive development. The cornerstone of this development is a state-of-the-art multi-purpose convention hall designed to accommodate at least 2,500 attendees in a flexible, partitionable theatre-style layout. This versatile space will cater to a wide range of events, conferences, and exhibitions of national and international significance. Additionally, the project includes a luxurious 5-star

hotel/resort boasting a minimum of 200 rooms, providing exceptional accommodation for discerning guests. Complementing these facilities will be high-quality waterfront entertainment amenities, the specific details of which will be outlined in the proposals submitted.

This development aligns perfectly with VMRDA's Master Plan 2041, which was approved in 2021, adhering to the designated recreation land-

use zone. The project is expected to yield a multitude of benefits, including attracting prestigious national and international meetings, events, and exhibitions. It will also stimulate the growth of Visakhapatnam's tourism sector and generate significant employment opportunities within the region.

The Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority anticipates this project to be a transformative force, establishing the city's beachfront as a premier hub for business and leisure travellers.

With its comprehensive approach to development and strategic location, the project promises to elevate Visakhapatnam's profile on both the national and international stage.

'Gear up for counting'...

Continued from Page 1

The EC stressed the importance of timely and accurate result announcements, facilitated through display boards. State Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena, alongside Additional CEO P Koteswara Rao and MN Harendhira Prasad from the Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission office, participated in a video conference addressing these preparations.

Similarly, Chief Electoral Officers from Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim, representing areas where elections were conducted in five phases, joined the conference from their respective states.

322 pilgrims leave for Haj from Gannavaram

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The first flight took off for Jeddah from the Gannavaram Airport on Monday for the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. As many as 322 pilgrims went to the Haj Pilgrimage on the first flight.



Minority Welfare Department Secretary and Haj Operations Chairman Harsha Vardhan flagged off the bus which transported pilgrims from the Haj camp on the premises of the Eidgah Jama Masjid at Gannavaram in the wee hours on Monday. Earlier, Harsha Vardhan explained the instructions for all pilgrims.

Minority Welfare Department Secretary and Haj Operations Committee Chairman Harsha Vardhan flagging off the Haj pilgrims' bus at the Haj camp on Monday

He said that as many as 692 pilgrims are going to Haj pilgrimage from the State this year. The second flight will take another 322 pilgrims from the

Gannavaram airport on Tuesday. On Wednesday (May 29), the third flight with 48 pilgrims will leave for Jeddah at 7.10 am.

Andhra Pradesh Wakf Board Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Hajj Committee

EO Abdul Khadir, committee members, CRDA Additional Commissioner Alim Bhasha, Dudekula Corporation MD Gouse Peer, Urdu Academy Director Mastan Vali and others were present.

'Follow Kerala's...'

Continued from Page 1

He said the BJP was speaking about 400 plus seats only to change the Constitution and 'scrap' SC and OBC reservations. "People gave Modi two chances, but he 'failed' to do anything. So this time the people will defeat him," Revanth said.

The BJP is going to get only half the seats in states where they won during the 2019 Parliament elections and if they want more seats, they will have to go and contest in Pakistan, he said. "South India is going to give 100 seats to INDIA. The NDA will not get a single seat in Kerala and Tamil Nadu," he added.

Steps for Jagan's coronation...

Continued from Page 1

This has been heavily publicised in Visakhapatnam, with YSRCP main leaders even informing the media about the specific dates and timings of the ceremony.

According to sources, the Andhra University ground has been chosen as the venue for the swearing-in ceremony. However, due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) under implementation, YSRCP leaders are tight-lipped about the arrangements. On the other hand, enquiries with hotels revealed that bulk reservations of rooms have been done around the dates of the possible swearing-in ceremony, but did not confirm that the exercise was done for the YSRCP's event.

Observers suggest that the party should consider exercising more restraint. It would be prudent for YSRCP to wait until the election results are officially announced on June 4 before making any formal arrangements for the swearing-in ceremony. This approach would not only demonstrate respect for the electoral process but also avoid unnecessary criticism and maintain public trust.

Critics within the party are questioning the necessity of these early preparations. "Why the rush?" they ask. After all, once victory is confirmed, all proclamations and actions gain legitimacy.

Until then, announcing an oath-taking ceremony appears presumptuous and has led to criticism from both within the party and from opposition parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

The YSRCP's premature announcements have sparked debate about the appropriateness of such actions before the official results are declared.

As the countdown to the election results continues, all eyes will be on the EVMs and the outcome, which will decisively determine who will lead Andhra Pradesh. Until then, prudence and patience are advised for all parties involved.

Surge in...

Continued from Page 1

During the 2019 elections, over 56,000 postal ballots, more than 20 per cent, were declared invalid. With the current surge, there is widespread concern about how many votes will face the same fate this time. Counting of electronic voting machine (EVM) votes will commence only after the postal ballot count is completed, underscoring the significance of ensuring the validity of each postal ballot.

The electoral officials are taking extensive measures to handle the increased volume and ensure a fair and transparent counting process.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Panchami: May 27 04:53 PM to May 28 03:24 PM
Shashthi: May 28 03:24 PM to May 29 01:39 PM
Nakshatram: Uttarashadha: May 27 10:13 AM to May 28 09:33 AM
Shravana: May 28 09:33 AM to May 29 08:38 AM
Rahukalam: 3:27 PM to 5:04 PM
Yamagandam: 8:59 AM to 10:36 AM
Varjyam: 01:24 PM to 02:56 PM
Gulika: 12:13 PM to 1:50 PM
Amritakalam: 10:38 PM to 12:10 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:47 AM to 12:39 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 42°C
Humidity: 42%
Sunrise: 5:34 AM
Sunset: 6:35 PM
Updated: May 27, 2024 5:00 PM

Nandigama TDP leader held for sexual harassment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam party leader and former Nandigama town president Srinivas Rao (42) was arrested by the Nandigama police on Monday for clicking pictures and shooting videos of a girl and harassing her to fulfil his sexual desires. The victim, a 19-year-old girl, unable to bear the harassment, complained with police.

Nandigama town CI Haneesh said that the accused person was identified as Srinivas Rao, a small-time businessman who runs a chicken shop and a biryani centre in Nandigama town. The victim's mother is a sweeper at the ATM

The accused person was identified as Srinivas Rao, a small-time businessman who runs a chicken shop and a biryani centre in Nandigama town. The victim's mother is a sweeper at the ATM centre adjacent to the biryani centre. The victim cleans the ATM centre when her mother is unwell. In the recent past, when the girl went to clean the ATM centre in the morning, the accused shot pictures and videos of her and blackmailed her. He also threatened her with dire consequences.

complaint with police. A case has been registered under 354 IPC and the accused was arrested on Monday. It is reported that Srinivas is known for getting phone numbers from customers at the chicken centre and Biryani Point. He then blackmails them by taking photos and videos. However, the police said that it is yet unclear whether there were other victims.

Sanjay asks CM to order CBI probe into phone-tapping case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging that former Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu engaged in cyber-attacks on opposition parties during the last 10 years, BJP General Secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar demanded that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to order a CBI probe into the phone-tapping case.



Speaking to the media on Monday, Sanjay said that the phone-tapping incident was more shocking than the 1975 emergency. KCR violated the basic principles of the Constitution and Radhakrishnan Rao's statement is proof for it. KCR is not eligible to take up any post including the MLA post, he said.

He asked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy why the govern-

ment is not arresting KCR. "Who is protecting Uttam Kumar Reddy in the paddy scam and KCR in the phone tapping case," he said. He demanded that Revanth Reddy should prosecute both KCR and KTR if he is sincere and that the government should order a CBI probe into the phone-tapping case.

Sanjay said that what he said regarding phone tapping has become true now. KCR tapped phones to attack opposition parties, particularly the BJP, and it is proved through Radhakrishnan Rao's confession, he said.

He said that Radhakrishnan Rao's statement has proved that KCR used the MLAs purchasing issue to protect his daughter from the Delhi liquor scam case. KCR used to destroy families by

tapping the phones of wives and husbands, he said. He demanded that the government should impose a ban on KCR so that he would not contest any election again. He said the government should think of cancelling the recognition of the BRS as BRS leaders including KTR engaged in phone tapping.

Sanjay asked the government to explain why it is not arresting

KCR in connection with the phone tapping case although there is proof that KCR had a hand in phone tapping.

"Why is the government failing to bring the main accused Prabhakar Rao to India from the US? More facts will come out if Prabhakar is arrested, he said. He also demanded that the government should arrest KCR immediately and prosecute him.

BJP asks EC to check CM's flight before it leaves for Delhi

Pointing out that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has been flying to New Delhi once every week, Telangana BJP Vice-President NVSS Prabhakar asked the Election Commission (EC) to check the CM's flight before it goes to New Delhi. Addressing the media at the State BJP office here on Monday, Prabhakar said that the assets of Congress Ministers are increasing but the assets of Telangana are decreasing. He said the BRS government looted the people while procuring paddy and the Congress government too is following in the footsteps of the BRS government. Prabhakar asked the Chief Minister to respond to allegations against the Ministries of Telangana. He demanded that the CM should order a probe into the corruption allegations against Ministers.

School bags to be delivered as per schedule: Praveen Prakash

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In light of the upcoming general elections, Principal Secretary of the School Education Department, Praveen Prakash, has affirmed the commitment to timely delivery of school bags to mandal centres across Andhra Pradesh. Prakash acknowledged the challenges posed by restrictions on inter-state travel during this electoral period, emphasising the importance of adhering to election rules while ensuring the smooth transportation of school bags from production facilities to mandal centres via trucks.

A comprehensive plan has been devised to facilitate the movement of school bags using 250 trucks, navigating inter-state borders seamlessly.

Prakash highlighted the significance of each truck driver's role, as they traverse multiple states and districts to reach their designated mandal centers. To address potential hurdles at various checkpoints, drivers have been equipped with necessary documentation affirming the ownership of the stock by the Andhra Pradesh state government.



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hurdles at various checkpoints, drivers have been equipped with necessary documentation affirming the ownership of the stock by the Andhra Pradesh state government.

Praveen Prakash reiterated the commitment to maintaining stringent quality control measures throughout the delivery process. He underscored the directive issued to the quality control team and all staff members, emphasizing that there will be no compromise on the quality of the delivered school bags.

With a firm focus on adherence to election guidelines and ensuring timely delivery, the School Education Department remains dedicated to fulfilling its obligations to students across the state.

10 killed in 3 accidents

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ten lives were lost in a series of road accidents across Andhra Pradesh early Monday morning. Among the victims were four members of a single family and a retired judge.

The first accident occurred at Kodurupadu village in Bapulapadu mandal, Krishna district, where a car en route from Kovvur to Chennai collided with a lorry travelling from Eluru to Vijayawada. The impact was catastrophic, instantly claiming the lives of Swamyathan (40), Rakesh (12), Radhapiya (14), and Gopi (23). Swamyathan's wife, Satya, sustained critical injuries and was rushed to GGH in Vijayawada. All victims hailed from Tamil Nadu. The vehicle's excessive speed contributed to the collision, according to Hanuman Junction Circle Inspector Allu Lakshminarasimha Murthy.

In the second incident on the Puthalapattu-Naidupeta National Highway

in Chandragiri mandal, Tirupati district, a car carrying six individuals crashed into a culvert, resulting in the death of four and injuring two others. The identities of the deceased remain to be confirmed by authorities. They were returning from a visit to the Tirumala hill shrine in Nellore.

Lastly, tragedy struck again in Ramavaram village, Jaggampeta mandal, Kakinada district, when a collision between a car travelling from Visakhapatnam to Vijayawada and a mini-truck claimed the lives of retired Judge V Mohan Kumar (65) and car driver Srinivas (35).

Expressing deep sorrow and concern, the Telugu Desam Party chief and former chief minister appealed to the government to extend all necessary assistance to the injured.

The accidents have not only caused immense loss to the victims' families but have also disrupted traffic on key routes, emphasising the urgent need for enhanced road safety measures across the State.



Massive BH series vehicle registration scam unearthed

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A massive scam involving BH series vehicle registrations has been uncovered in Visakhapatnam, leading to significant financial losses for the State government. This fraud, orchestrated by several car dealers, has prompted the Transport Department to take stringent actions against the culprits, causing a stir among both dealers and consumers. The scam involves vehicle dealers diverting the 17 per cent life tax payable by ordinary consumers. By exploiting exemptions meant only for a select few, including central government employees, these dealers have registered vehicles under the BH series by paying only 4 per cent tax. This fraudulent activity has led to a substantial loss of revenue for the government.

Transport department officials, upon discovering the scam, launched an investigation that resulted in immediate action. Transport department authorities have suspended the authorization of several dealers found guilty of this scam. Speaking to the media people here on Monday, Visakhapatnam Deputy Transport Commissioner GC Rajaratnam announced that Three Star Motors, Varun Motors, and Shiva Shankara Motors had their authoriza-

tions suspended. Additionally, notices have been issued to 16 other dealers.

Rajaratnam explained that the registration of vehicles illegally registered under the BH series has been cancelled, and the standard 17 per cent life tax has been imposed. The scam involved falsifying residence documents and certificates, pretending that individuals residing in Visakhapatnam were living in states like Arunachal Pradesh to take advantage of lower tax rates. This deceptive practice aimed at boosting sales has now been exposed.

In response to this fraud, Rajaratnam said transport department officials are seizing the vehicles involved and suspending the temporary registration authorization of the dealers. The department has issued a stern warning that action will be taken against both the dealers and the vehicle owners who used fake address proof for BH series registrations. Consumers who purchased these cars to save on costs are now facing confusion and uncertainty due to the crackdown by authorities. This scam has not only disrupted the market but also highlighted the need for stricter regulations and oversight in vehicle registration processes.

Varla writes to DGP for action against YSRCP's 'false' info

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP senior leader Varla Ramaiah on Monday wrote to Director General of Police Harish Kumar Gupta to register an FIR and arrest Varra Raveendra Reddy and also Sajjala Bhargav Reddy for criminal conspiracy to malign the image of TDP leaders. The TDP leader complained to the state DGP against the YSRCP henchmen for spreading false information on social media to mislead the public and damaging the reputation of the Telugu Desam Party chief promoting enmity and hatred between groups.

In his letter, he mentioned that YSRCP henchmen at the behest of Sajjala Bhargav Reddy are spreading false information among the public



intending to mislead them. Varra Raveendra Reddy with user name @varra1987 on X (formerly Twitter) tweeted saying Nara Chandrababu Naidu is suffering from cancer, which is in the third stage and hence, without any information he went to America to get treatment. Such deliberate spreading of false information to become

a habit to the YSRCP social media team headed by Sajjala Bhargav Reddy.

The said tweet has been posted with malicious intentions to malign the image of Nara Chandrababu Naidu and deliberately mislead the public with false information. Further, the said post on X is aimed at creating confusion among TDP supporters and with a malicious intention to promote enmity and hatred among groups. He appealed to the DGP to register FIR and arrest Varra Raveendra Reddy and also Sajjala Bhargav Reddy for criminal conspiracy to malign the image of TDP leaders, promoting enmity and hatred among groups and for deliberately spreading false information to mislead the public.

Port City on tenterhooks as poll outcome is due soon

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Amidst the extended period between polling and counting, palpable anticipation pervades the entire port city. Political leaders are in a state of high tension as the nail-biting wait for the results of the general elections draws near. Actions and discussions are rampant, not only among contesting candidates but also resonating deeply among party leaders, activists, and the general people alike. Conversations reverberate across every nook and cranny, with an overarching query dominating interactions: "What

is the condition of your constituency?"

While it's customary for candidates and leaders to unwind post-polling, engaging in familial respites or vacations, the pulse in many constituencies of the district remains entrenched in the election fervour. While a handful may have ventured beyond local confines, the majority remain entrenched, tirelessly dissecting the polling patterns, voter turnout, and booth-level dynamics. Key leaders continue to huddle, meticulously analysing every facet of the electoral landscape. The heightened turnout and expen-



Calculations weigh heavily, particularly on candidates from the ruling party facing mounting pressure. The spectre of overspending looms large, juxtaposed against the uncertain

promise of the voting patterns.

With the countdown to the vote count underway, speculations abound. Discussions on the likely outcomes proliferate among the population, fueled further by rampant betting activities. The anticipated fate of prominent constituencies, including Kadapa MP, Gudivada, Gannavaram, Cheepurupalli, and Pithapuram, captivates public discourse, transcending from street-side tea shops to bustling shopping malls.

However, amidst the anticipation, stress mounts with conflicting survey results inundat-

ing social media platforms. Polling companies clamour for attention, each touting varying predictions, aggravating the tension among candidates and their supporters. Frantic attempts to gauge the mood through IVRS calls and post-poll surveys ensue, underscoring the relentless undercurrent of uncertainty that pervades until the definitive declaration of results. As the district collectively holds its breath, the pulse of anticipation remains palpable, underscoring the gravity of the impending electoral verdict and its far-reaching ramifications.

Krishna district is all set for counting of votes on June 4

Amidst tight security, postal ballot boxes were shifted from the Treasury to strong rooms



Postal ballot boxes from Machilipatnam Lok Sabha constituency being shifted from the Treasury to the strong rooms on Monday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has revealed that the district administration is all set for the counting of votes at Krishna University in Machilipatnam on June 4. Elaborate arrangements have been made for the smooth and transparent counting, he said.

In the presence of political party leaders and representatives of the candidates, the district officials shifted the postal ballot boxes from the District Treasury office to strong rooms at the Krishna University in a specially arranged vehicle amidst tight security on Monday. Collector Balaji personally supervised the process.

During the event, Balaji men-

tioned that as many as 21,139 postal ballots were polled in Machilipatnam Lok Sabha constituency. They had been stored in 33 trunk boxes at the Treasury on the collectorate premises. All postal ballot boxes were moved to the strong rooms at Krishna University for the vote counting on June 4.

He added that the initial randomisation staff were assigned to oversee the tabulation of polled votes. These staff members were split into four groups and they underwent training sessions at the Zilla Parishad Convention Hall in Machilipatnam for two days. The Collector said that there would be a second randomisation programme for these staff in the presence of Returning Officers.

The vote counting will start with postal ballots at 8 am and the counting of polled votes in EVMs will begin at 8.30 am, he added.

A three-tier security system has been provided for the strong rooms on the premises of Krishna University. Central Reserve Police Forces, State Armed Police Forces and Civil Police have been deployed for security at the strong rooms. A special control room has been arranged for the candidates and their agents to verify the strong rooms.

Krishna District Revenue Officer (DRO) K Chandrasekhar Rao, Postal Ballot Nodal Officer Shahid Babu, several candidates and political party representatives were present.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Krishna District Milk Producers Mutually Aided Cooperative Union Limited (Vijaya Dairy) Director Yerneni Sita Devi passed away following a cardiac arrest on Monday. She was residing at her elder son's house at Vasantha City Layout at Hafeezpet in Hyderabad. Sita Devi was the wife of Yerneni Nagendranath, former Drainage Board member, who died last year. Sita Devi's family had strong political connections. She was elected as MLA twice from the erstwhile Mudinepalli Assembly constituency in Krishna district. Also, she was Minister for Education in the Dr NTR cabinet in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. She was elected as MLA for the first time in 1985 and again in 1994 on the TDP ticket. Later, she joined BJP and with the support of TDP, she

Former Vijaya Dairy director Yerneni Sita Devi dead



Ex-MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao and Gudivada candidate Venigandla Ramu paying tributes to Yerneni Sita Devi

was made Director of the Vijaya Dairy. Recently, she maintained a distance from politics. She has two sons and a daughter.

The body was brought to her native village Konduru of

Kalidindi mandal in Eluru district on Monday evening. The funeral will be conducted on Tuesday.

Naidu, other leaders condole death TDP national president and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed grief over the demise of Sita Devi. He recalled her services as a minister and an MLA. He conveyed his condolences to Sita Devi's family.

Vijaya Dairy Chairman Chalasanani Anjaneyulu, CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao and other political party leaders also condole Sita Devi's death. Former MLA Raavi Venkateswara Rao and Gudivada TDP candidate Venigandla Ramu paid tributes to her.

Why is EC not taking action against CS? TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP leader GV Anjaneyulu questioned why the Election Commission is acting soft towards the state Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy. He said that why the EC is still continuing a person involved in controversies is being continued as CS of the state. He said that the CS should have been removed when

there are deaths during the distribution of pensions. Why CS should be continued in the post when he feels that whatever he does will be taken as granted.

He said that though the CS is retiring from service in a month, he is making all efforts to be in the good books of CM Jagan. Although the election code is in force in the state, many violations have been committed by this CS.

Many controversial decisions have been taken in a manner that is ready for anything for the CM. EC should take immediate action on the land scam allegations against CS. It is very dangerous to have machinery in the hands of such a person on the day of counting. There is a threat to protect the ruling party from the allegations, said Anjaneyulu.



'GM's Man of the Month' safety awards presented

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager, South Central Railway, presented the General Manager's 'Man of the Month' Safety Awards to four employees of Vijayawada Division for showing alertness in duty and taking timely action to prevent unsafe conditions on Monday. The programme was held at Rail Nilayam, Secunderabad.

Narendra A Patil, DRM, Vijayawada Division, attended the virtual safety meeting along with Principal Heads of Departments from Rail Nilayam, Secunderabad, and DRMs of Guntakal, Guntur, Secunderabad, Hyderabad, Nanded Divisions from their respective offices.

The General Manager reviewed the safety preparedness of the Zone. He instructed the officials to conduct regular safety drives, and night inspections in the sections to notice the deficiencies in the system and to

ensure alertness and avoid untoward incidents. Narendra A Patil congratulated the staff for their alertness and prompt action on duty. Award winner KB Subrahmanyam, Technician-II, Gudur, of Mechanical Department, while attending rolling in examination noticed a secondary vertical damper bottom mounting bracket broken and the damper in hanging condition in the seventh coach from trailing side on Train No. 13352 on April 16. The vertical damper hanging was removed immediately and the train was escorted with staff till Vijayawada with speed restriction.

Y Venu Gopal, Points Man, Krishna Canal Junction of Engineering Department, while performing shunting, noticed smoke coming out from the wagon of coal loaded goods train on April 5. Immediately, the fire brigade was called up and they put off the fire by taking power block.

Modi's agenda is to render social justice

Is there any substance in allegations being levelled by Rahul Gandhi and his aides that social justice is being denied to the people of the nation? To what extent the people pay attention to these allegations? Answers to the questions will be out on June 4.

The unsubstantiated allegations over denial of social justice to the people being levelled by Rahul and his team will fell flat with the people, especially at a time when millions of SCs, STs, BCs and Adivasis derive benefit from welfare schemes of the Union government.

The schemes benefit the poorest of the poor to join the national mainstream and achieve economic equality. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi got the opportunity, he first elevated Ramnath Kovind and subsequently Draupadi Murmu to the office of the President of India, the highest office in the country.

When Mrs Gandhi imposed the draconian Emergency in the country and which saw hundreds shot dead, all parties united behind Jayaprakash Narayan to unleash social revolution. In the opposition struggle, Jan Sangh also played a pivotal role. This development became the main reason for the downfall of the Congress. Such conditions do not prevail in the country now.

Modi did not unleash repression on the people like Mrs Gandhi. He did not postpone elections by one year and did not enforce Emergency. Government agencies have been taking action against the corruption of the political parties under the BJP regime, but they did not do anything with ordinary people. Millions of voters, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, have been exercising their right to franchise, demonstrating a democratic spirit. Where is the evidence for the

Modi did not unleash repression on the people like Mrs Gandhi. He did not postpone elections by one year and did not enforce Emergency. Government agencies have been taking action against the corruption of the political parties under the BJP regime, but they did not do anything with ordinary people

allegation that democracy is being eroded in the nation? How can taking action against the corrupt, anti-social forces, those who are keen to foment trouble in society and those who join hands with foreign powers be described as undemocratic?

Why did the Opposition parties remember social justice and Muslim welfare only at the time of elections? The terminology was the creation of the outdated Left parties.

The Left parties, which are wiped out all over the globe, have joined hands with the Congress and imposing their ideology on the Congress. Because of this ideology, Left parties were wiped out from West Bengal and Tripura. In Telangana, the Left parties contested from 17 Assembly seats and received severe drubbing in all seats.

On the other hand, the Congress imbibed Muslim League ideology and has been



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

leveling allegations as if Modi regime did injustice to the Muslims. People from all religions derive benefit under schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojna, power connections, free LPG cylinder supply, Ayushman Bharat and other schemes. Modi is the first leader to notice that Pasmanda, the community that is regarded as the untouchable among the Muslims, were benefited. He implemented several mea-

asures to benefit Ansaris (weaver community), Khureshis, Kunjda (vegetable sellers), tailors, Mansuris (cotton growers) and so on to render them social and economic justice. After the BJP came to power in UP, it appointed a Pasmanda community person as minority welfare minister. In the local body elections held in the nation's capital, the BJP gave tickets to six Muslims, including four Pasmanda Muslims. The Congress has sided with the Muslims who occupied higher echelons of society, but Modi government has been trying to render justice to Pasmanda Muslims, who are not known to many. That is why Shia Muslims and a large number of Pasmanda Muslims have been supporting the BJP. Narendra Modi is the first leader to take measures to render justice to Muslim women, who were discriminated against. Today,

a large number of Muslim women patronise the BJP because of Modi's initiative against triple talaq. Either PM Modi or the BJP never tried to convert the Muslims into a vote bank. In fact, no other regime saw communal riots that occurred during the Congress regime. Did anyone come across communal riots in the 10-year rule of Modi? Modi sent the message across the nation that every citizen of the nation would be safe as long as they feel they are Indians first. The BJP corrected historic wrongs, but it did not affect the interests of any section of society. Everyone knows if Congress-led grand alliance INDIA is voted to power, the minority and vote bank politics will come into play and majority Hindus would be in a defensive position.

The Constitution approved caste-based reservations but not religion-based quota. However, successive Congress regimes raked up the quota for the Muslims. Justice Ranganath Misra Commission proposed 15% quota for the Muslims. The UPA regime proposed 4.5% quota for the backward Muslims. Kerala, Karnataka and Telangana governments took measures to provide quota for the Muslims. That is why if the grand alliance of INDIA were to come to power it would change the statute and provide legality to reservations, Modi cautioned people. As long as he is alive, he declared, he would not agree to quota on religious grounds.



Counting of votes must be carried out efficiently: DC



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

District Collector K Madhavi Latha has directed the officials to count votes efficiently and without flaws.

A training programme was held here on Monday for the Counting Supervisors, Assistants Supervisors and Micro Observers on the campus of Nannaya University. They were imparted training on counting votes. In a PowerPoint presentation, the counting staff was explained about the counting process.

Addressing them, Collector Madhavi Latha directed the officials, who are taking part in the counting duties of General Elections-2024, to

conduct the counting of votes efficiently without any mistakes and carry out the counting of votes in a transparent manner without committing even a small mistake.

She reminded them that mobile phones would not be allowed in the counting hall. The Collector told them to strictly follow the guidelines laid down by the Election Commission in the counting centres. She said that there would be supervision of the counting process to ensure that the counting is carried out flawlessly. The counting process begins at 8:00 am and technical experts would be made available to attend if EVMs give trouble during

the counting.

She said that 14 tables are being set up in each hall for the counting of votes in all segments as per the instructions of the Election Commission and the counting will be done round-wise, stating that each table has a micro observer, counting supervisor and counting assistant. The role of micro-observers is very crucial in making the counting transparent in the vote counting process. The micro observers have to give each round-wise report to the election observers appointed by the Central Election Commission, she told them.

"Any problem in the count-

ing process should be reported to the ARO. The counting staff should have full understanding of all the matters related to the counting process and they should perform their duties with complete transparency and commitment while following the rules," the Collector told them.

The Collector clarified doubts about EVMs to the counting staff on the counting process. She also explained about the counting of VVPATs. As many as 1100 officials and employees from various government departments from seven constituencies participated in the training session.



Training held for counting staff

PNS ■ ELURU

Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh has made it clear that the counting of votes would be done for 16 to 21 rounds in each Assembly constituency at 14 tables. A training programme was conducted on the Ramachandra Engineering College campus for the counting officials and staff on Monday.

Addressing the counting staff on the occasion, the

Collector said that the election officials conducted the polling peacefully and in the same spirit, they should conduct the counting of votes in a peaceful environment without committing mistakes.

After randomization, the counting staff should go to the counting centre and report to the Returning Officer regarding the constituency allotted to them. The rules and regulations issued by the Election Commission regarding the

counting process must be followed, he told them.

"During the training, the counting staff should have a thorough understanding of all aspects of the counting process. They should bring any problem to the notice of the Returning Officer. The Election Commission has issued clear instructions on the counting of postal ballot votes. They have not only been communicated to the staff in training but a demo is

also being conducted for practical training at the training site," the Collector said.

A postal ballot vote should not be rejected without appropriate reason, he said and asked the staff to improve their knowledge. The staff should ask the Training Officer to clear their doubts, he told them. Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, ITDA Project Officer Surya Teja, DRO F Pushpamani and other officials were present.

CEO happy with steps for counting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Mukesh Kumar Meena, expressed satisfaction with the preparations made by the NTR district administration for the forthcoming vote counting in the Vijayawada Lok Sabha and seven other assembly constituencies scheduled for June 4. The vote tallying will be conducted at the Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges in Jupudi of Ibrahimpatnam district, meeting all guidelines set forth by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

CEO Mukhesh Kumar Meena, accompanied by NTR District Collector Dr S Dilli Rao, Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna, Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, and other officials, inspected the counting arrangements at the Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges in Jupudi on Monday. He scrutinized the three-tier security measures implemented at the EVMs' secure storage facilities, signing the security checkpoint register before commencing the inspection.

During the visit, NTR District Collector Dilli Rao



Chief Electoral Officer Mukhesh Kumar Meena and NTR District Collector Dilli Rao inspecting the counting arrangements at the Nova College in Jupudi on Monday.

briefed CEO Meena on the vote counting arrangements, emphasizing the precautionary steps taken to ensure a smooth and transparent process on the counting day. More than 1,000 supervisors, assistants, micro observers, and an additional 500 staff have been appointed for the June 4 counting. Stringent security measures, including CCTV surveillance in the counting

halls, have been arranged to prevent any untoward incidents.

Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna outlined the security protocols established at the counting centres, highlighting the collaborative efforts of various departments in successfully conducting polling on May 13.

CEO Meena provided suggestions for the upcoming vote counting, elucidating

the roles and responsibilities of officials, staff, contesting candidates, and counting agents.

Accompanied by Assembly constituencies Returning Officers (ROs) K Madhavi, A Ravindra Rao, G Venkateswarlu, Bh Bhavani Sankar, E Kiranmayi, and others, CEO Meena ensured a comprehensive review of the preparations for the crucial vote counting process.



Two poachers arrested, gun seized

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police arrested two poachers in the forest area and seized a gun from them in the Madanapalle division Annamayya district.

Madanapalle CI Sadgurudu told the media that on a tip-off a police team arrested them when the two were hunting animals in the fields.

The police arrested Garivi Venkatesh and S Giri and seized a country-made gun from them.

Cases under various sections are registered against them. The two poachers would be produced before the court, the CI said.

Rowdy sheets opened against 159 persons: SP



PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The police opened a rowdy sheet against 159 persons in the district who were involved in the violent incidents during the polling day on May 13.

The SP Gowtham Shali said that as part of oppressing anti-socials with an iron hand, a rowdy sheet opened against 106 persons in Tadipatri alone.

The police have taken the violent incidents, which took place on the polling day May 13, very seriously and are

oppressing the anti-socials with iron hand.

The police are taking firm measures to ensure that such violent incidents will not recur in the district in the future. The SP said that a rowdy sheet is being opened against those who were involved in the violent incidents which took place on polling day May 13.

The police in Yadiki arrested those who were involved in violent incidents on polling day and the arrested belonged to both the YSRCP and TDP, she said.

Constable falls to death from bike



PNS ■ GUNTUR

A police constable was killed when he fell from his motorcycle accident on the Inner Ring Road opposite Uday Hospital here on Monday.

Police said that police constable Pilli Sunil Babu, attached to the East Traffic Police station, was going on his motorcycle. He did not notice the speed-breaker on the road, resulting in him losing control of the bike and falling. He suffered a critical head injury and died instantly. Pedakani ASI Anthony Raj registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH for postmortem. The police personnel expressed grief and shock over the death of their colleague in a road accident.

Tanguturi's grandson passes away



PNS ■ ONGOLE

The grandson of combined Andhra Pradesh first chief minister Tanguturi Prakasam passed away on Monday.

Family members said that Tanguturi Prakasam's grandson Tanguturi Gopala Krishna died at a private hospital in Hyderabad while undergoing treatment on the morning of Monday. He had been ill for the last few months.

Tanguturi Gopal Krishna worked in the Commercial Tax office as a record assistant and took voluntary retirement on December 31, 2016. He is survived by his wife Vijaya Lalita and two sons Saikranth and Prakash. Family members said that Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu had two sons. The deceased Gopala Krishna was the son of Prakasam Pantulu's younger son Hanumantha Rao.

Webcasting prevented rigging: Pulivarthi Nani

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Chandragiri candidate Pulivarthi Venkata Mani Prasad, known as Nani, has claimed that the Webcasting prevented the YSRCP from indulging in rigging on the polling day on May 13.

Talking to the newsmen in his residence here on Monday,

he displayed the videos of attacks and violence incidents, committed by the YSRCP activists.

"Bhanu, the close associate of Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy, hammered me with a hammer. I suffered an injury in the attack. The YSRCP activists came not to destroy my car but to kill me. The attack on me was orchestrated by Chevireddy



Bhaskar Reddy. They hid the swords, which they used in the attack on the SPWU premises. The swords came to light during the SIT investigation," Pulivarthi Nani said, adding that people of the constituency know who are enacting dramas.

The TDP leader recalled that he embarked fast unto death in protest against the death of a student by the Chevireddy

Bhaskar Reddy's land mafia. However, the police foiled his fast, he stated. Pulivarthi Nani alleged that Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy had won elections since 2014 by carrying out large-scale rigging during polling. Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy tried to get his son to win from the Chandragiri constituency in the election by resorting to rigging.

INDIA CORNER

Coal scam: Court convicts Maharashtra-based company, directors

A Delhi court on Monday convicted a Maharashtra-based company and two of its directors for cheating and criminal conspiracy in a case related to irregularities in the allocation of a coal block in the state. This was the 16th case related to the alleged coal scam in which the court pronounced its judgment. Special Judge Sanjay Bansal held the accused -- B S Ispat Ltd, Mohan Agrawal and Rakesh Agrawal -- guilty under sections 420 (cheating) and 120-B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC, noting that the prosecution had proved the case beyond any reasonable doubt. The case pertains to irregularities in the allocation of 'Marki Mangli-I' coal block situated in Maharashtra in favour of the company. The court is likely to hear the arguments on the sentence tomorrow. The convicts face a maximum punishment of a seven-year jail term, while the court is likely to impose a fine on the company.



Missing for 22 years, man rejoins family with help of police

An eight-month long investigation by a team of Haryana police has helped reunite a 29-year-old man with his family in Uttar Pradesh, over two decades years after he went missing, an official said on Monday. Separated from his family at the age of seven after he was allegedly abducted by someone and later abandoned, Amit grew up in different children's homes in Delhi. Rajesh Kumar, Assistant Sub-Inspector, Haryana Police's Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU), who led the investigation, on Monday said Amit was recently reunited with his family after 22 years. Amit's relentless search for his family finally bore fruit after he came in contact with ASI Kumar came a few months ago when the officer had gone to Delhi in connection with a missing child's case. With only fragmented memories of an oil mill in his village and a place named 'Bala Chowk' shared by Amit, ASI Kumar embarked on a meticulous investigation to trace his family.



Primary school teacher suspended for making indecent remarks against PM

A teacher posted in a government primary school in Kaushambi district was suspended on Monday after a case was registered against her for making indecent remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on social media. Basic education officer Kamleendra Kushwaha issued the suspension order against the teacher named Varsha. Kushwaha said that taking cognizance of the social media post of Varsha, the principal of a government primary school posted in a village in Sirathu tehsil, an official lodged a complaint at the Kokhraj police station based on which a case was registered against her on Sunday night under sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), 505(2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) and 295A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) of the IPC and the IT Act.



INDIA leaders likely to meet on June 1 to assess poll performance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The top leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc are likely to meet in the national capital on June 1 to assess their performance in the Lok Sabha elections and chalk out their strategy ahead of the results.

The sources said the proposed meeting will be convened in the afternoon of June 1 when the last phase of polling will be underway.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, who is one of the senior-most leaders of the opposition bloc, has convened the meeting, they said.

The sources in the Trinamool Congress (TMC) said party supremo Mamata Banerjee, general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and other



The sources said the proposed meeting will be convened in the afternoon of June 1 when the last phase of polling will be underway. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, who is one of the senior-most leaders of the opposition bloc, has convened the meeting, they said

top leaders will be voting on the day and hence, will be unable to attend the meeting and pointed out that the party has so far attended all

meetings of the opposition bloc.

The TMC has conveyed this to the organisers, the sources added.

Voting will take place on nine seats in West Bengal on June 1, including two seats in Kolkata - Kolkata Dakshin and Kolkata Uttar. The other constituencies that go to polls in the state include Jadavpur, Dum Dum, Barasat, Basirhat, Jayanagar, Mathurapur and Diamond Harbour.

During the meeting, the opposition leaders will discuss their strategy ahead of the June 4 results and assess their performance in the seven-phase elections, they said.

The opposition alliance has been claiming that it will be able to stop the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from returning to power at the Centre and cobble together a government of its own.

'Religion-based reservation will not be allowed'

PNS ■ VARANASI

Reservation based on religion will not be allowed to be implemented till Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP are in power, party president JP Nadda said on Monday.

Accusing the opposition of planning to give reservation based on religion, he said, "It is clearly written in the Constitution that there will be no religion-based reservation."

"As long as PM Modi and BJP are in power, there will be no such reservation," the BJP president said.

"We will not allow anyone to encroach on the reservation of our Dalit, tribal, backward and extremely backward classes. You will see what will happen to the opposition on June 4 (the counting day)," Nadda said.

GAME ZONE FIRE

Gujarat HC raps Rajkot civic body, says it doesn't have faith in state machinery

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat High Court on Monday said it does not have faith in the state machinery "which gets into action only after innocent lives are lost", as it pulled up the Rajkot civic body over the purported lapses in functioning of the game zone facility where a massive fire killed 27 persons.

A special bench of Justices Biren Vaishnav and Devan Desai asked whether the civic body sat over the fire safety orders passed earlier on a PIL for 18 months.

The HC was hearing a suo motu PIL on the TRP game zone fire tragedy which occurred on May 25. A day earlier, the HC termed the inci-

dent a prima facie "man-made disaster".

The bench asked whether the civic body had turned a blind eye to such a big structure coming up in its vicinity

after its lawyer submitted that the TRP Game Zone had not asked for requisite permissions.

The bench noted that all commissioners of the Rajkot municipal corporation from

the time the TRP game zone was set up in 2021 till the time of this incident (on May 25) "should be held accountable for the tragedy that occurred," and directed them to furnish separate affidavits.

On Monday, a counsel pointed out the state government will have to come forward to hold a person accountable, and this calls for drastic steps.

"Who will take such drastic steps? Honestly speaking, we do not have faith in the state machinery now. Four years after orders of this court, directing them, after their assurance, this is the sixth incident that has happened. They only want lives to be lost and then trigger the machinery," the bench said.



Modi made all-out efforts to topple Himachal's Congress govt: Priyanka

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made all-out efforts to topple Himachal Pradesh's democratically-elected government by using money power, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged on Monday.

The only purpose of BJP leaders, starting from Prime Minister Modi, is to grab power at any cost and they indulge in corrupt practices, bribe legislators and mislead people in the name of God to achieve their purpose, she claimed.

"Modi made all-out efforts to topple the democratically-elected Congress government in the state by indulging in corrupt practices and using money power," the Congress general secretary said while



addressing a poll rally in Chamba for party's Kangra Lok Sabha seat candidate Anand Sharma.

Priyanka Gandhi also asked the public if they would prefer such a leader.

Addressing another rally in Kangra district, she spoke about the Himachal's political turmoil that took place in February-March and alleged that legislators were given Rs 100 crore each by the BJP.

Two doctors, staffer of Sassoon hospital remanded in police custody

PNS ■ PUNE

A court here on Monday remanded two doctors and an employee of Sassoon General Hospital arrested in connection with the Porsche crash in police custody till May 30.

The police produced the three in the court of Judicial Magistrate First Class (Small Causes) A A Pande and sought their custody for 10 days.

Earlier in the day, the police arrested Dr Ajay Taware, head of the state-run hospital's Forensic Medicine department and Dr Shrihari Halnor, the chief medical officer for alleged manipulation of blood samples and destruction of evidence in the case, an official had said.

The third arrested person, Atul Ghatkamble, works under Dr Taware.

The police told the court that

PUNE CAR CRASH



some financial transactions had taken place to change the blood samples and they needed to search the houses of the accused in connection with it. The court then remanded the three in police custody till May 30.

Two IT professionals died

Teenage boy drives BMW car without license with man on bonnet in Kalyan; case registered

PNS ■ THANE

Close on the heels of the Pune Porsche car crash in which two IT professionals were killed, a 17-year-old boy allegedly drove a BMW car without a license on busy streets in Kalyan with a man lying on its bonnet, prompting the police



to register a case after videos of the stunt went viral. Police arrested the man

after their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porsche allegedly driven by a 17-year-old minor, son of realtor Vishal Agarwal, in the early hours of May 19. The police claim the teenager was drunk at the time.

lying on the car bonnet, identified as Subham Mithila, and booked the 17-year-old who was at the wheel and his father, a retired government official who owns the car, an official said on Monday. The teenager drove the car on Saturday in the busy Shivaji Chowk area in Kalyan city in Thane district.

Black money's impact on elections to rise: Amit Shah

Says alternative to electoral bond scheme should be found

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah believes the influence of black money will increase during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections following the Supreme Court's decision to scrap the electoral bond scheme, and suggested all stakeholders will have to deliberate and decide on an alternative.

If the impact of black money rises, then an alternative should be found, he said, adding that it is for Parliament to debate and decide on any other mechanism for funding to political parties.

He said in an interview on Saturday that the electoral bond scheme, which allowed donors to fund political parties anonymously by purchasing bonds from the SBI, was



scrapped at a crucial time. The Supreme Court had struck down the scheme in February, a month before the Lok Sabha elections were announced.

Replying to a question on the issue, he said, "I believe and this is my guess that it will increase the influence of black money in elections and politics."

Modi should not be referred to as PM in BJP poll campaign: Mamata

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said that Narendra Modi should be referred to as a BJP leader and not as the prime minister in the saffron party's campaign as he is a "caretaker PM".

Addressing an election rally in Burrabazar area in Kolkata Uttar seat for party candidate Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Banerjee said, "Modiji has every right to campaign. He has every right to come here



and participate in election programmes. But I am surprised to see him being referred to as the PM in his party's campaign advertisements."

"Can he do this? I am being

referred to as TMC chairperson by my campaign managers and by my party here even though it is not assembly polls. Still, I am adhering to the model code of conduct," she said.

Modi is scheduled to take part in a roadshow in Kolkata on May 28.

Referring to Modi as the "caretaker PM", Banerjee asserted that the BJP will not return to power for a third term and the INDIA bloc will form the government at the Centre.

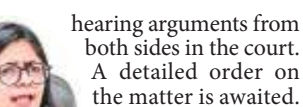
SWATI MALI WAL ASSAULT CASE

Court rejects Bibhav Kumar's bail plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Monday dismissed the bail plea of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's close aide Bibhav Kumar who is accused of assaulting AAP MP Swati Maliwal at the CM's residence.

Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal rejected the bail plea of Kumar, a personal assistant of the CM, after



hearing arguments from both sides in the court. A detailed order on the matter is awaited. During the proceedings, Rajya Sabh MP Maliwal told the court that there was a threat to her life and "grave danger" to her family if Kumar was released. She claimed that a "one-sided video" about the incident "was made by a YouTuber", following which she started receiving the threats.

'Every time you criticise Modi govt, you are termed anti-national'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Monday said whenever people criticise the Narendra Modi government, they are accused of being anti-national and claimed there is an effort to "delegitimise dissent".

The Congress leader drew a parallel between the regimes led by India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the present dispensation led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said Nehru, whose death anniversary is being observed today, was somebody who said



democracy has to be instilled and encouraged in the people of India.

Referring to Modi, Tharoor said a 'chaiwala' could become the country's prime minister because of the democratic institutions and values laid down by

Nehru more than 17 years ago. "In a democracy, we have the right to challenge and criticise the government. But every time you criticise the government you are accused of being an anti-national," Tharoor, who was accompanied by former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, said.

"That means your criticism is no longer legitimate. You are dubbed anti-Hindu and anti-national, what kind of talk is this," Tharoor, who reached here after campaigning in Punjab for his party candidates, told a news conference.

Fire deaths up by 30% as compared to 2023

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fire has taken 55 lives and injured more than 300 people in the national capital so far this year, according to the official data revealed on Monday.

According to the data by Delhi Fire Services (DFS), 16 people were killed in fire in January, another 16 in February, 12 in March, four in April, and seven till May 26.

Fire incidents led to 51 injuries in January, 42 in February, 62 in March, 78 in

April, and 71 till May 26.

From January 1 to May 26, the DFS received 8,912 fire-related calls. According to the data, 36 people had lost their lives during the same period in 2023.

"The number of fire calls increased to 32.26 per cent this year. According to the data, a total 6,436 calls related to the fire were received from January 1 to May 26, last year, but this year the number has gone up by more than 32 per cent with 8,912 fire related calls during the same period," an official of



the Delhi Fire Services said. "Last year 36 people had lost their lives, this year total 55 people have so far lost their lives," the official added.

On Sunday, six newborn

died after a massive fire broke out at a private children's hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar.

The blaze broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital at around 11.30 pm on Saturday and soon spread to two other adjacent buildings.

Sixteen fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze and a massive rescue operation was launched. Of the 13 children taken out from the hospital, six were declared dead.

Police had said that one child had already died before

the fire broke out. DFS chief Atul Garg told PTI Videos, "The neonatal hospital has no fire NOC and has not even proper fire combat arrangements. Besides that, oxygen cylinders were also kept there which had exploded."

"Be it NOC required or not, everyone must ensure proper fire safety arrangements in all types of buildings. Installing sprinklers is one of the best ways to combat fire initially and to inform firefighters," he said.

BSP, BJP have joined hands covertly: Akhilesh

Says 'Bahujan Samaj' should support INDIA bloc

PNS ■ GHAZIPUR

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Monday claimed that the BJP and BSP have joined hands covertly and urged the voters from SC, ST and OBC communities that have been supporting Mayawati's party to choose the INDIA bloc this time "to save the Constitution".

Addressing an election rally here, Yadav said only Uttar



Pradesh "can save the country" by voting out the BJP.

"This election is about saving our future. At the same time, this election is also about

saving the Constitution, which gives us respect, which protects our rights.

"It is being seen that BJP and BSP have joined hands covertly. Hence, we want to appeal to the people of 'Bahujan Samaj' that this election is also to save the Constitution of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar and they should support the INDIA bloc," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Up in flames

Ten fatalities in overnight Delhi fires reflect poorly on CM Kejriwal, who is busy campaigning

A tragedy of the highest order and an act of unpardonable negligence by civic authorities: Two blazes in Delhi have claimed 10 lives in separate incidents. A fire broke out late on Saturday at a children's hospital in East Delhi, resulting in the death of seven babies. The other incident, in the same district, occurred in the early hours of Sunday when three persons were killed in a fire that engulfed a residential building. The hospital fire which burnt seven infants alive is a horrible incident. The Capital, grappling with these tragedies, finds itself in grief and introspection. The Delhi incidents come on the heels of another inferno in Gujarat, where 27 children were charred to death in a gaming arcade. It is summer when, understandably, Delhi is more prone to fire incidents. Before the blame game starts and accountability fixed, someone in the Delhi Government must own moral responsibility and strict action should be taken against those who played with human lives. Prima facie it is a case of utter negligence as oxygen cylinders stored on the ground floor burst open, though the fire may have been triggered by a short circuit incident. Safety protocols exist only on paper and the authorities concerned look the other way when it comes to complying with the norms. Often, fire protocols that mandate safety measures are flouted at will, including fire drills which never happen. In a particularly devastating case, an entire family perished due to a fire caused by an electrical short circuit. Firefighters, despite their best efforts, face significant challenges due to narrow approach lanes and inadequate water supply in certain areas.



These tragic incidents have sparked a public outcry for improved fire safety regulations and more robust enforcement of existing laws. Amidst this sorrow and anger, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's absence has not gone unnoticed. Currently out on interim bail and engrossed in election campaigns in Punjab, his stance that he can manage Delhi's affairs from within jail has become a contentious issue. This claim, though technically plausible with today's technology, seems detached from ground realities that demand immediate and hands-on governance. The Chief Minister's current focus on electioneering in another State raises legitimate concerns about where his priorities lie and whether he can adequately address the urgent needs of Delhi while physically away from home and office. Indeed, the responsibility for these tragic incidents is multifaceted. On the one hand, the immediate causes point to systemic issues; on the other, the wider accountability lies with the city's administration and leadership. But whether it is the Ghatkopar tragedy, the gaming arcade fire or the Delhi blaze, we learn nothing from these incidents. After the initial hue and cry, everything is normalised and life goes on. It is time we at least ensure proper fire audits of at least hospitals and schools and do not put children's lives at risk. Hope our activist Chief Minister will take action and things will improve in the Capital before it is too late.

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PICTALK



A man feeds pigeons and crows on a hot summer day, in New Delhi

Buddhist influence on Tagore's work



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Gurudev drew heavily from Buddha's teachings on non-violence and respect for all life, which resonate deeply in a world starved for peace, offering tranquillity

The relevance of Buddha's teachings in the contemporary world is profound. His principles of non-violence and compassion offer a path toward greater harmony in a world often plagued by conflict. The Buddha's teachings also emphasise respect for all forms of life and interdependence, principles crucial for addressing today's environmental challenges. Embracing these values fosters sustainable practices and a deeper connection with nature. Ethical living, as outlined in the Buddha's Eightfold Path, remains pertinent in personal, professional and societal contexts, promoting integrity and cooperation.

Practitioners of this philosophy such as the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, alias Thay have advanced the principles of non-violence, compassion and mindfulness to promote global peace. Their "Engaged Buddhism" encourages integrating mindfulness into everyday life and social activism, advocating for peaceful conflict resolution and environmental care. His teachings on deep listening and loving speech, help bridge divides and heal communities. Similarly, the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama promotes interfaith dialogue, compassion and ethical responsibility, inspiring global movements for human rights and sustainability. These leaders illustrate how ancient Buddhist principles can address modern challenges, fostering a culture of peace and understanding worldwide.

Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore drew inspiration from Buddhism, which can be seen in his work. His vision of universal humanism aligns with the Buddha's teachings of compassion and loving-kindness. Tagore's works often reflect themes of inner peace and self-realization, akin to Buddhist concepts. His holistic approach to education also emphasised the development of the whole person and mirrored the Buddhist focus on the cultivation of wisdom. Buddha's teachings emphasise inclusivity, compassion and the inherent potential for enlightenment in everyone, regardless of



social status. He rejected the caste system, asserting the importance of ethical behaviour over birthright. British Historian and author Karen Armstrong notes that Buddha challenged the social and religious norms of his time by not endorsing the caste system. Even Buddha's monastic community, the 'Sangha', welcomed individuals from all backgrounds, promoting spiritual equality and inclusiveness.

In one of his plays "Chandalika", Tagore articulates the notion of oneness through the character of Prakriti, a woman from the untouchable caste and Ananda, a revered Buddhist monk. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist scriptures, Tagore reimagines the narrative to explore the enduring struggle against societal divides, particularly the historical plight of untouchables in ancient India. Ananda's humble acceptance of water from Prakriti poignantly rejects caste prejudice and acknowledges her intrinsic dignity. Despite Prakriti's attempt to ensnare Ananda with a spell in a desperate bid for affection, his unwavering faith in Buddha's teachings serves as a beacon of purity. Divine intervention ultimately frees Ananda from the enchantment, symbolising the triumph of spiritual integrity over worldly desires - which is one of the characteristics of



BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS EMPHASISE INCLUSIVITY, COMPASSION AND THE INHERENT POTENTIAL FOR ENLIGHTENMENT IN EVERYONE. HE REJECTED THE CASTE SYSTEM, ASSERTING THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OVER BIRTHRIGHT

meditation in Buddhism. Through Tagore's lyrical prose, the story transcends its narrative framework, evolving into a profound meditation on the enduring power of love, redemption and the unity that connects all souls. This legacy, left by Buddha, urges his followers to break free from societal constraints, form a 'Sangha', and become messengers of peace.

Further, Tagore uses Prakriti's character elevating her to question societal norms restricting the freedom of women and thereby restoring her own identity. In his bid, Ananda's compassionate attitude - a specific characteristic of the Buddhist philosophy - rekindles Prakriti's sense of self-worth, asserting that all humans are fundamentally equal. The water she pours on Ananda's hands symbolises her purity and love, as well as his boundless benevolence and humanity. Tagore explores the themes of spirituality and untouchability through the symbolic union (read elevation) of Prakriti through the medium of Ananda. This (union) represents the harmony between man and woman, purity and impurity and spirituality and passion. Tagore uses this synthesis to depict a balanced and civilised society. Similarly, the Buddha emphasised the importance of compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) towards all

beings, advocating for empathy and support within the community, especially towards those who are suffering or marginalised. His First Noble Truth, addressing 'dukkha' (suffering), underscored the universal human experience of suffering, fostering a shared commitment to alleviating it for everyone. To this, Thich Nhat Hanh reflects, "Understanding suffering gives rise to compassion and from compassion, understanding deepens" (The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching). Buddha's teachings on right livelihood and ethical behaviour promoted social justice and fairness, contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate society. In Buddhist philosophy, the 'Middle Way' focuses on avoiding extremes and finding balance, a principle reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's works. For example, in his play "The King of the Dark Chamber," ('Raja' in Bengali), Tagore explores the themes of light and darkness and ignorance and enlightenment, mirroring the Buddhist search for harmony. The main character's journey to understand and accept both the light and dark aspects of life represents the Middle Way's emphasis on balance.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GUIDELINES FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Key takeaways from ICMR's new dietary guidelines," published on May 27, this is my response. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) have released new dietary guidelines to address the significant burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in India. With 56.4 per cent of diseases linked to poor dietary habits, these guidelines aim to promote healthier eating and lifestyle choices. The recommendations emphasise a balanced diet incorporating a variety of food groups, with a focus on whole grains, millets and natural protein sources. Limiting fat intake to 30 per cent of daily calories and including fresh vegetables and fruits in every meal are also crucial.

In addition to dietary changes, the guidelines highlight the importance of regular physical activity—at least 30-45 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children. Special advice for pregnant and lactating women includes exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. For cooking and storage, using air fryers, granite-coated utensils and earthen pots is recommended to maintain nutritional quality and safety.

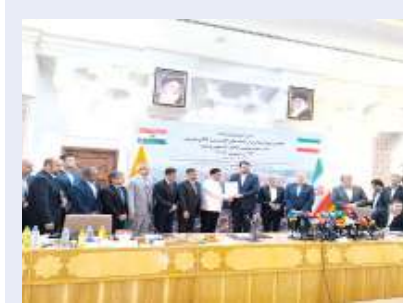
Aman Kumar | Dhanbad

LIVE HAPPILY ANONYMOUSLY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Embracing silence in the age of social media," published on May 27, this is my response. Recently, I came across a famous quote by Khalil Gibran: "Travel and tell no one; live a true love story and tell no one; live happily and tell no one; people ruin beautiful things." This reminded me of the cautionary advice from our elders to avoid flaunting good fortune to ward off the evil eye. Back then, we cherished and shared our joys within close circles.

The times have changed. The shift from letters to emails marked a significant transition in communication, though Government and corporate sectors still

Chabahar's strategic masterstroke



Apropos the news story "India-Iran revitalise Chabahar Port," published on May 27, this is my response. The recent 10-year, \$370 million agreement between India and Iran to develop the Chabahar Port marks a significant milestone in regional connectivity and economic collaboration. As an avid newspaper reader, I see this project as a testament to

India's strategic foresight. Chabahar not only offers India a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia but also provides an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan, mitigating geopolitical roadblocks. The port's strategic location on Iran's southeastern coast enhances India's regional influence, countering China's dominance with its Belt and Road Initiative. Moreover, Chabahar offers Afghanistan a viable alternative to the Karachi Port, potentially fostering greater economic stability in the region. Despite the hurdles posed by US sanctions and regional instability, India's commitment to Chabahar underscores its readiness to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes. This port symbolises India's assertive global stance, promoting regional stability and economic growth through enhanced connectivity.

Roshan Daa | Rourkela

cling to physical signatures for validation. Despite technological advances, the reluctance to embrace complete digital transformation persists, often due to the sender's unfamiliarity with digital tools. Reflecting on the past, I recall the anticipation of waiting for responses to my manuscript submissions. Today, a quick rejection email highlights the impersonal nature of modern communication. Social media's omnipresence underscores this shift, contrasting starkly with Gibran's timeless wisdom. In an age where oversharing is the norm, his advice feels both radical and refreshing, challenging our constant urge to broadcast every aspect of our lives.

Riya Aggarwal | Jind

INNER STRENGTH HELPS ENJOY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Strategies for Inner Peace and Empowerment," published on May 27, this is my response. Are we pursuing an illusion, like the golden deer of the Ramayana? This chase often feels like a self-destructive mission, driven by a mind over-

whelmed with 70,000 thoughts a day. Our lack of focus and the influence of negative environments and unhealthy habits cloud our judgment. I understand this deeply, having battled alcoholism myself. Recovery through Sudarshan Kriya and Pranayama showed me the importance of a strong mind and healthy surroundings. Effective time management is crucial. Techniques like the POSEC method help us prioritise, while a SWOT analysis and delegation aid efficiency. Tackling tough tasks first and maintaining flexibility prevent burnout. Developing hobbies and practicing gratitude can transform our outlook. To quiet our minds, we should embrace activities like walking, talking through problems and pursuing passions. Exercise and cold baths can invigorate our spirits. Ultimately, we must accept our inner strength, declutter our minds and cultivate positivity to truly celebrate life.

Priyanka Singh | Lucknow

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Science archives preserve our scientific legacy

Establishing a National Science Archives Centre in India is crucial to safeguarding our scientific heritage for future generations

As an ever-evolving discipline, science continually shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. Each discovery, innovation and technological advancement contributes to the present and builds the foundation for future generations. Most scientific activity in our laboratories may become part of tomorrow's history. People who have seen and overcome the COVID-19 pandemic may understand the hardships people faced during the pandemic. The innovations and discoveries developed to combat the global pandemic are now part of scientific history. Similar is the case with most of our scientific discoveries and inventions.

Scientific knowledge is inherently cumulative. Each generation of scientists builds upon the work of their predecessors, advancing our understanding of complex phenomena. For instance, the development of quantum mechanics in the early 20th century paved the way for modern advancements in quantum computing. Scientific developments also



highlight the pain the researchers undertook during that time. It can act as an inspiration for future researchers to move forward. Unfortunately, we dig into the past of a scientist only when their work gets global recognition. By this time, we might have lost all resources related to the discovery except for the research publications available on the public database. Science archives are essential for preserving human knowledge's vast and intricate tapestry. They store various materials, including research notes, correspondence between scientists, experimental data, publications and even artefacts such as laboratory equipment and specimens. This preservation is critical because it ensures that valuable scientific information is not lost over time. For example, the archives of the Royal Society in London contain records dating back to the 17th century, chronicling the early days of modern science. These documents provide insights into the time's experimental techniques and intellectual debates, allowing historians and scientists to trace the evolution of scientific

thought and practice. In India, the Archives at NCBS (https://archives.ncbs.res.in/) serve as a novel initiative to preserve the scientific history of modern India. The centre has over 250,000 processed objects across 30+ collections in various forms, ranging from paper-based manuscripts to negatives to photographs, books, fine art, audio recordings, scientific equipment, letters and field and lab notes. The documents stored in volatile electronic or digital storage are susceptible to being permanently erased by a single button press or the malfunction of a hard drive. If these artefacts are not systematically conserved, they will be permanently lost, leading to what has been referred to as the Digital Dark Age. The Government should also make it mandatory for every researcher to periodically submit the documents to archives so that age and memory don't fade the significance of their research work.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN MITIGATING THE E-WASTE CRISIS

It can be tackled with innovations, regulations and corporate responsibility



SHAINY SHARMA

Today with the advancements in the field of science and technology, computers and other mobile devices have become such an integral part of everyone's work and personal lives that it is hard to imagine life without them. Not only that, but along with that the problem of e-waste continues to grow every year as consumers frequently upgrade their gadgets leading to the high turnover of electronic devices. E-waste or electronic waste refers to discarded electronic devices and appliances that have reached the end of their useful life or are no longer wanted by their owners. It is one of the significant problems due to its complex composition, rapid generation and the challenges it poses to human health and the environment. Due to the presence of various toxic substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium present in batteries and semiconductors can cause of neurological damage and can even damage the kidneys and bones. Not only this the toxic chemicals released from such wastes can leach into soil, making it infertile and unsafe for agriculture.

Not only will the soil get contaminated but the other sources of the environment that is water and air will also be affected badly as improper disposal of e-wastes can contaminate the waterbodies thereby affecting the water supplies and aquatic life and; toxic fumes released for extracting valuable metals will contribute to respiratory problems. It is believed that airborne toxins can travel long distances, affecting air quality and human health. Quite often in many developing countries, informal e-waste recycling activity is a significant source of income. Such activities are often unregulated and the workers are exposed to high levels of toxic substances without adequate protection.



This exposure can lead to respiratory problems, skin disorders and other severe health issues. The improper disposal and recycling of e-waste contribute to greenhouse gas emissions thereby contributing to environmental degradation and increased carbon footprints. According to the Global E-waste Monitor 2020, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste in 2019 and this figure is expected to grow to 74.7 million metric tons by 2030. Only a fraction of this waste is properly recycled, with much ending up in landfills posing significant environmental and health risks.

Proper recycling of such wastes is the only solution that can help recover valuable materials and reduce the need for new resource extraction and the same is possible only and only when the Government enacts and enforces stringent regulations for e-waste management, including proper collection, recycling and disposal practices such as e-waste collection drives and recycling centres to facilitate proper disposal. Manufacturers should also be held responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including take-back programs and recycling initiatives. Investing in advanced recycling technologies can help improve the efficiency and safety of extracting valuable materials from e-waste. Encouraging the manufacturers to design such products that are easier to recycle, repair and upgrade can reduce e-waste generation. Educating consumers at the same time about the importance of proper e-waste disposal and the available recycling options can reduce improper disposal practices. Establishing international standards for e-waste management can help ensure safe and efficient recycling practices worldwide. Strengthening international regulations to prevent the illegal export of e-waste to developing countries where it is often processed unsafely. Remember, from gadgets to green initiatives, every individual living on this planet should recycle their e-waste and pave the way for a cleaner greener tomorrow.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Raisi's legacy endures in Iran, despite West



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Over three million mourners gather in Mashhad to honour the late President Raisi. The hold of hardliners in the country is much stronger than the West might think

Over three million Iranians have gathered in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city, to honour the late President Raisi, who tragically perished in a helicopter crash along with eight others. The massive turnout, which filled the streets to capacity, reflects the deep respect and admiration many citizens held for Raisi, contradicting assertions by Washington that he was widely despised. Raisi's interment at the holy shrine of Imam Reza, a significant and unprecedented honour for a political leader, accentuates his esteemed status in the country. This unprecedented event defies the distorted and often misunderstood sentiments of the Iranian populace towards their leaders. Often, those who are demarcating the enemies, forcing others to accept their version of the story as gospel truth, are met with a ground reality that tells us the exact opposite.

The circumstances of the incident, however, have fuelled a wave of conspiracy theories. Moments after the crash, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer declared there was no evidence of foul play, citing intelligence officials, despite Iran's rescue teams not yet having reached the crash site. Subsequently, some blame the secret organisation of Iran's arch-enemy State, Israel's Mossad. Others speculate that the death was the result of an inside job. However, this tragedy marked a significant event not only in Iranian politics but in the constantly growing West versus Rest dynamic, which is now more strongly questioning the partiality of international organisations while strengthening the established strong alternatives such as BRICS and the New Development Bank. Iran is playing a pivotal role in this.

Meanwhile, a segment of Western media recently published a series of stories about the helicopter crash suggesting that American sanctions have severely hindered Iran's ability to maintain its fleet of American-manufactured helicopters. It was suggested that a technical failure caused the crash, but so far there's no evidence to support this. The helicopter was one of three Bell 214 models; the other two returned safely, but President Raisi's did not. An Iranian defence firm, under the Iranian Aviation Industries Organisation (IAIO), specialises in maintaining and reverse-engineering US-model helicopters for Iran's military and the IRGC. Added to the US Department of the Treasury's SDN list in January 2018, its assets under US jurisdiction are frozen and transactions with US parties are prohibited under Executive Order 13382, targeting WMD proliferators. However, contrary to suggestions that Raisi's helicopter was overloaded and that this put undue strain on its engines, the aircraft was not operating beyond its capacity. The helicopter was carrying nine passengers and crew combined, well within its maximum capacity of 15 persons. The notion that the helicopter's age contributed significantly to the crash is also questionable. While the media has painted the Bell 214 as ancient, in reality, it was built in 1994 by Bell Helicopter Textron in Canada. With a global average age for commercial helicopters at around 23 years, Raisi's helicopter, though slightly older, was not exceptionally outdated. Moreover, helicopters used for presidential transport typically receive meticulous maintenance.

As Stephen D. Bryen, a leading expert on technology security who led the Pentagon's technology policy efforts during the Reagan



PRESIDENT RAISI WAS FOCUSED ON COOLING DOWN BORDER TENSIONS AND EXTENDING HIS DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH TO NEIGHBOURING ARAB COUNTRIES. HIS CHOSEN FOREIGN MINISTER, AMIR ABDOLLAHIAN, WHO ALSO PASSED AWAY WITH HIM, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN REENGINEERING IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

administration, pointed out, the engines of Raisi's helicopter, Pratt and Whitney PT6Ts, are also Canadian-made and widely regarded for their reliability. The implication that the helicopter's maintenance was compromised due to sanctions lacks substantiation, especially considering the high-profile nature of the passengers. The critical question of whether Canada currently supplies spare parts to Iran remains unclear, adding another layer of complexity to the narrative. Nonetheless, the assertions of technical failure due to sanctions remain speculative without concrete evidence and the focus should be on a thorough and unbiased investigation into the actual causes of the crash.

President Raisi was focused on cooling down border tensions and extending his diplomatic outreach to neighbouring Arab countries. His chosen Foreign Minister, Amir Abdollahian, who also passed away with him, was instrumental in reengineering Iranian foreign policy. A notable example of this effort was the steps taken to normalise Iran-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations. This Chinese-backed diplomatic initiative is crucial for reshaping the West Asian diplomatic terrain. Similarly, the recent irrigation project constructed across the Aras River, which Raisi jointly inaugurated with his counterpart in Baku, is a demonstration of this new diplomatic approach.

The Aras River, spanning 1,072 km, originates in Eastern Turkey and flows along several borders: Turkey and Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Iran and Azerbaijan and through Azerbaijan into the Kura River. This region, a small riverine area in the Caucasus between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, has witnessed numerous tragedies, including the often-overlooked Armenian Genocide, which claimed around 1.5 million lives. The 689 km Iran-Azerbaijan border, demarcated by the Aras River, highlights the geopolitical sensitivity and strategic importance of this area. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Azerbaijan gained independence and assumed control of part of the Iran-Soviet border, leading to

escalating disputes. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War saw Azerbaijan seize full control of the western border with Iran, heightening tensions. Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan slightly improved under President Hassan Rouhani, but Baku never hesitated to provide Israel with a strategic opportunity. Israel strengthened its alliance with Azerbaijan, turning it into a significant market for advanced weaponry. The 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in approximately 5,700 deaths, with Israel supplying a significant portion of Azerbaijan's arms, highlighting the deepening strategic ties between the two nations. As a result, Azerbaijan was able to absorb the Artsakh Republic, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-proclaimed republic dissolved in January this year.

In exchange for Israeli weapons, Azerbaijan provided oil. Ilham Aliyev, president since 2003, was re-elected for a fifth term on February 7 with over 92 per cent of the vote. Aliyev, who succeeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, a former Soviet KGB officer, has strengthened Azerbaijan's ties with Israel. Aliyev amended the constitution in 2009 to permit unlimited presidential terms and, in 2016, extended the presidential term from five to seven years. Azerbaijan can be seen as a family-run State prioritising clan interests, yet Aliyev has skillfully navigated relations with Eastern and Western powers to serve his political aims. It is not hyperbole to say Aliyev is a skilled Machiavellian politician in contemporary politics. An investigation by Israeli media outlet Haaretz published recently detailed the strategic relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan, through which Tel Aviv has supplied Baku with billions of dollars worth of weapons in exchange for "oil and access to Iran."

This extensive military cooperation underscores the depth of the strategic alliance between the two nations. Azerbaijan has reportedly permitted Israel's Mossad intelligence agency to establish a presence in the country to monitor Iran, its southern neighbour. Additionally,

Azerbaijan has facilitated the setup of an airfield for Israel to potentially strike Iranian nuclear facilities from its territory. In exchange, Azerbaijan receives the most advanced weapons, including ballistic missiles, air defence systems and kamikaze drones. However, as Yossi Melman, a noted Israeli writer and journalist who is an expert on intelligence and strategic affairs, affirmed, it is unlikely for Israel, particularly Mossad, to be involved in such an assassination as it never targets such individuals. But one should not forget that it was under President Raisi that Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel, the single largest drone attack ever carried out by any country. President Raisi and his top diplomat left a legacy far greater than what they achieved while in power. Their deaths are more impactful than the assassination of President Mohammad Ali Rajaei and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, who were cut short in an explosion set by the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation, in August 1981. Despite expectations of seclusion and controversy, Raisi navigated international relations adeptly, maintaining uranium enrichment and escalating tensions with the West, but also restoring ties with Saudi Arabia, which advanced peace talks in Yemen and prevented military escalation.

This diplomatic success, seen as strategic pragmatism, opened dialogue with other regional powers and reduced tensions. Raisi revived the Chabahar port deal with India, defying US sanctions and facilitated a major prisoner exchange with the US, demonstrating diplomatic flexibility. Though Iran was blamed for supporting Hamas in the October 2023 attacks on Israel, no concrete evidence linked Iran directly, yet its backing of such groups has increased its regional influence and garnered support for Palestinians from other Arab countries. Iran lost two great politicians, but it is hard to assume it will change the Iranian political structure rather it will be strengthened.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and author. Views are personal)

The crisis in Kerala's State-run hospitals runs deep

The alarming frequency of medical mishaps in Kerala's Government hospitals paints a dire picture of the State's healthcare system

The day is not far off when all the Government-run hospitals in Kerala will spot the hoarding "Patients, enter at your own risk". This is not an exaggerated Statement as botched-up surgeries and wrong diagnoses have become the hallmarks of State-run hospitals.

Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger. However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospital authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter. Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! The police have filed a FIR against Bejohn Johnson, the doctor who performed the surgery and has slapped charges on him under IPC Sections 336 (endangering the life or personal safety of others) and 337 (causing hurt by an act endangering the life or personal safety of others). In all probability, the general public

would forget this incident as more and more cases like this come up daily from the Government hospitals.

Controversies are not new to the GMCH Kozhikode. In 2023 July, it was reported that a woman who underwent a caesarian in the hospital in 2017 developed severe pain in her abdomen. It was found that a pair of forceps was accidentally left in her stomach after the 2017 surgery and she was living with the same till acute pain made her approach the hospital in 2023. The hospital authorities found to their surprise that Harshinia, the patient, had a pair of mosquito to artery forceps in her stomach post the caesarian which was caused by medical negligence. The police as well as the investigating doctors con-

firmed the finding and sent their reports to the minister for health Veena George. The minister, a former newsreader in a private TV channel who made a lateral entry into the CPI(M) is yet to take any action on the incident while Harshinia is staging a sit-in in front of the medical college hospital demanding solatium. The standard reply given by the Department of Health is that it was an isolated incident that is being blown out of proportion by vested interests.

In yet another shocking incident, a patient admitted to the ICU post-surgery was raped and molested by a hospital employee who is a trade union leader affiliated with the CPI(M). The nursing officer who reported the matter to the

higher authorities was shunted out to a far-off hospital while the rapist is walking free in search of his next victim. Even doctors and nurses are not free from attacks by patients and their relations. In May 2023, Vandana Das, a 22-year-old doctor working as an internee in Kottarakkara Government Hospital was stabbed to death by a drug addict suffering from withdrawal paranoia while the police and her colleagues remained mute spectators. Even as this article is written, here comes a report from GMCH Kozhikode about a complaint from a patient. The implant meant for another patient was wrongly inserted into the complainant's hand. These events are sufficient to prove the CPI(M)'s claim that

Kerala is the State with the best healthcare facilities is a blatant lie. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan exhorts people from other States and countries to visit Kerala for world-class health care. The authenticity of the Kerala Model of Development and Health Care has come down like a pack of cards. According to senior doctors who have been in Government service for more than three decades, the ruling CPI(M) itself is behind the collapse of Kerala's health sector. "The CPI(M) owns super speciality hospitals across the State named after its late leaders. Since the State-run hospitals have collapsed, the party can make a giant kill by forcing the patients to these party-run hospitals which are no different from corporate

hospitals. The CPI(M) is the leader of the hospital mafia in Kerala," said a veteran doctor. There are not enough specialist doctors to meet the requirements of patients. The trust deficit between doctors and the Government has reached a point of no return. Kerala is one of the States that saw maximum casualties during the COVID-19 pandemic though the Government managed to cover up the details with its carrot-and-stick policy. The claims by both the ministers K K Shylaja (2016-2021) and Veena George (2021-till date) were found to be stranger than fiction as nearly one lakh deaths have been reported from the State since the pandemic was detected for the first time in 2020. Though the Kerala

Government declared time and again that the State would develop its vaccine, K-Vaccine, the announcement remains on paper. The State of health in Kerala is such that whenever he is afflicted with a common cold, Pinarayi Vijayan takes the first available flight to the USA where Mayo Clinic is his favourite destination. The same is the case with ministers as well as CPI(M) leaders who have an inherent weakness for anything associated with the imperialists. While the chief minister himself asks people from other countries to come to Kerala for medical treatment, he is not sure about the quality of treatment in the State-run hospitals.

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer, views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 83.14 against US dollar

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, mirroring the benchmark indices that erased their gains and ended the day off their record-high levels. Forex traders said the rupee settled in a narrow range as the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market supported the rupee, while elevated crude oil prices in the international market restricted the upmove. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.08, then touched an intra-day high of 83.05 but soon pared the gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the American currency. On Friday, the rupee rallied for the fourth consecutive trading session and settled with a sharp gain of 19 paise at 83.10 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.67, lower by 0.05 per cent.



Ashok Leyland shares rally nearly 8% after Q4 earnings

Shares of Ashok Leyland on Monday rallied nearly 8 per cent after the company reported a 16.73 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 933.69 crore in the March quarter. The stock jumped 7.69 per cent and ended at Rs 226.75 on the BSE. During the day, it climbed 8.59 per cent to the 52-week high of Rs 228.65. At the NSE, it zoomed 7.78 per cent to Rs 227.10. The company added Rs 4,756.85 crore taking its market valuation to Rs 66,581.22 crore. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 799.87 crore in the same period of the previous fiscal, Ashok Leyland said in a regulatory filing on Friday. Consolidated revenue from operations in the quarter under review stood at Rs 13,577.58 crore as compared to Rs 13,202.55 crore in the year-ago period, it added. Total expenses in the fourth quarter were marginally lower at Rs 12,037.16 crore as compared to Rs 12,085.5 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.



Awfis Space Solutions IPO subscribed 108.17 times

The initial public offer of co-working space operator Awfis Space Solutions got subscribed a whopping 108.17 times on the closing day of subscription on Monday, amid heavy participation from institutional investors. The Rs 599 crore initial share sale received bids for 93,34,36,374 shares against 86,29,670 shares on offer, according to data available with the NSE. The portion for non-institutional investors fetched 129.27 times subscription while the category for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) got subscribed 116.95 times. The quota for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) attracted 53.23 times subscription. The initial public offer (IPO) of fresh issue of up to Rs 128 crore and offer for sale of up to 1,22,95,699 equity shares began for bidding on Wednesday. The price range for the IPO is Rs 364-383 per share. The IPO of Awfis Space Solutions was fully subscribed on the first day of bidding on Wednesday.



MODI GOVT RESHAPED BUDGET IN 10 YEARS

Reforms to continue to make India developed nation: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the Modi government has reshaped the Union budget in the last 10 years from a mere record of expenditure to a strategic blueprint for equitable distribution, and stressed that the pace of reforms will continue to make India a developed nation. Sitharaman said the government will continue to maximise the value and impact of hard-earned taxpayer money, ensuring it is put to the best possible use for the benefit of all. The minister said the Modi government has prioritised transparency in its budgeting practices and numbers. Countries with transparent budgets are often viewed favourably by international bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank. This can lead to improved global trust. "This starkly contrasts the @INCIndia-led UPA government's repetitive practice of



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hiding the deficits through off-budget borrowings and issuance of 'Oil Bonds', which somewhat covertly shifted the fiscal burden to future generations. Under UPA, standard fiscal practices were routinely changed to make Budget numbers look favourable,"

Sitharaman said in a post on X. She said the last decade has witnessed a substantial improvement in the sanctity and credibility of the Union Budget, leaving past constraints and archaic practices behind. "Our government has reshaped the budget from a

mere record of expenditures into a strategic blueprint for equitable development. We make judicious & efficient use of every rupee collected from our taxpayers and give them a transparent picture of public finances," Sitharaman said. The minister said the government has taken various reforms to strengthen and bring transparency to the budgetary process and practices. Since FY 2017-18, the budget presentation has been shifted to 1st February instead of the last working day in February. It effectively advanced the expenditure cycle by two months, she said. Sitharaman further said reform in government expenditure by bringing in Treasury Single Account (TSA) for the 'just-in-time' release of funds to autonomous bodies has lowered the borrowing costs for the Centre. "TSA has resulted in savings of more than Rs 15,000 crores to date," she said.

Gold, silver prices rebound on strong global cues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices rebounded sharply on Monday after falling for three straight sessions, with the precious metal jumping Rs 220 to Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the national capital, tracking a strong trend in the overseas market due to escalating tensions in the Middle East. Gold had closed at Rs 72,600 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver prices also bounced Rs 1,050 to Rs 92,850 per kg. In the previous session, it had finished at Rs 91,800 per kg. Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,820 per 10 grams, up by Rs 220 against the previous close.

Record RBI dividend at 0.6% of GDP may not be sustained: Fitch

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Monday said the record-high dividend transfer by the RBI to the government is equivalent to 0.6 per cent of GDP, and such high level of dividends as a percentage of GDP is unlikely to be maintained. The board of India's central bank last week decided to transfer a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government out of the profits earned in fiscal 2023-24. This is more than double of Rs 1.02 lakh crore that was budgeted by the government. Fitch said an important driver of higher RBI profits appears to be higher interest revenue on foreign assets, though the central bank has not yet provided a detailed breakdown. "The RBI recently

announced a record-high dividend transfer to the government equivalent to 0.6 per cent of GDP (Rs 2.1 trillion) from its operations in FY24. This is above the 0.3 per cent of GDP expected in the FY25 budget from February, so will aid the performance but depend on various factors, including the size and performance of assets held on the central bank's balance sheet and India's exchange rate. Transfers may also be influenced by the RBI's views on what level of a buffer is appropriate to be maintained in balance sheet, it said. "The potential volatility of transfers means there is significant uncertainty about their medium-term path, and we do not anticipate that dividends as a share of GDP will be sustained at such a high level," Fitch said. However, such windfall dividend transfer should help to ensure the 5.1 per cent of GDP deficit target for the fiscal year ending March 2025 (FY25) will be met and could be used to lower the deficit beyond the current target.

authorities in meeting near-term deficit reduction goals," the rating agency said in a statement. Fitch said transfers from the Reserve Bank of India to the government can be significant at the margin for fiscal



Samsung launches made-in-India Galaxy F55 5G smartphone

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Samsung on Monday said its all-new Galaxy F55 5G smartphone has been made in India as the consumer electronics major outlined its growth strategy pivoting on product differentiation and rapid adoption of 5G. Raju Pullan, Senior Vice President, MX Division, Samsung India, said that Q1 2024 "has taken off well" and "created a strong momentum for Samsung". Speaking at the launch of Galaxy F55 5G -- which is being billed as the most premium Galaxy F series smartphone -- Pullan said that Rs 20,000-30,000 segment is the fastest-growing segment in the smartphone category. The Galaxy F55 5G will be available in three storage variants (starting from Rs 26,999), on Flipkart, Samsung.com, and at select retail stores. The Galaxy F55 5G smartphone is made in India and made for India, he said.

Sensex scales 76,000 peak, Nifty hits new high before closing lower

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sensex scaled the 76,000 level for the first time while Nifty hit a new lifetime peak before closing marginally down on Monday as investors booked profits at record levels amid high volatility ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 19.89 points or 0.03 per cent lower at 75,390.50. Intra-day, the barometer climbed 599.29 points or 0.79 per cent to an all-time peak of 76,009.68 following gains in select banking, financial and IT shares. However, investors preferred to book profits at record levels and the index declined around 835 points from the day's high to hit a low of 75,175.27. Broader Nifty of the NSE declined by 24.65 points or 0.11 per cent, to end at 22,932.45. The 50-issue barometer rose by 153.7 points or 0.66 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 23,110.80 during the day. However, it tanked

around 240 points at the fag-end due to selling in oil, energy and FMCG shares. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries declined nearly 1 per cent, dragging the benchmark indices into the negative. Selling in FMCG giant ITC also eroded gains. Equity benchmarks were



benchmark to climb 1,000 points to reach the 76,000-mark on Monday. The BSE benchmark took 21 trading sessions to reach 75,000-mark on April 9 after hitting the 74,000-level on March 6. From the Sensex pack, Wipro, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards. IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were among the major gainers. "The bulls are facing stiff resistance at 23,000 levels as investors start booking profit at higher levels to avoid any knee-jerk reaction in the market ahead of the election result. Better earnings growth, the expectation of a revival in private capex, and a moderation in FII's selling intensity are the key positive triggers in the market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Adani Ports shares end over 1% higher; hit 52-week high weeks before Sensex entry from June 24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Monday ended over 1 per cent higher and hit the 52-week high level during the day. This comes less than a month before the company's entry into the 30-share BSE Sensex from June 24 replacing IT major Wipro. The stock went up 2.93 per cent to hit the 52-week high of Rs 1,457.25 during the day on the BSE. It ended at Rs 1,431.75, up 1.13 per cent. Shares of Wipro, however, declined 2.36 per cent to Rs

452.55. During the day, it dropped 2.57 per cent to Rs 451.55. The stock of Wipro was the biggest laggard among the 30-share BSE Sensex firms. This would mark the first inclusion of any Adani Group firm in Sensex. The group has 10 listed firms. The changes will be effective from June 24, 2024, Asia Index, a joint venture between S&P Dow Jones Indices and BSE, said in a statement on Friday, adding that the replacement is a part of a periodic review. Both APSEZ and Wipro are constituents of NSE's Nifty index.



HCLTech, Arm collaborate to work on custom silicon chips for AI-led biz

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT company HCLTech on Monday said it has partnered with British semiconductor and software design company Arm to work on custom silicon chips that support AI-driven business operations. A semiconductor designed for a specific task is referred as custom silicon chip. The partnership will enable semiconductor manufacturers, system OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) and cloud services providers to enhance the computing efficiency of their data centre environments, HCLTech said in a statement. "HCLTech's collaboration with Arm will contribute to the development of industry-leading cus-



tom AI silicon solutions that will revolutionize the way AI workloads are addressed in data centre environments," said Ameer Saithu, Executive Vice President, Engineering and R&D Services, HCLTech. HCLTech said it will utilise Arm Neoverse Compute Subsystems (CSS) to help clients minimise development risks and deliver innovative, market-customized solutions geared towards improved performance and scalability for AI workloads.

Ghana ties up with Reliance Jio arm for building 4G, 5G telecom infra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Ghana has signed deals with a Reliance Jio subsidiary, Tech Mahindra and other vendors to build 4G and 5G infrastructure as the African country aims to enhance its telecom capabilities. Ghana's state-backed Next-Gen Infrastructure Company (NGIC) has partnered with Jio's arm Radisys, Tech Mahindra and Nokia to build



the necessary infrastructure for delivering affordable 5G mobile broadband services. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, the West African country's minis-

ter for communication and digitalisation, told reporters here that India was a "strategic choice" due to its similar demographics and Ghana wants to replicate the Indian story on telecom penetration. "Your (India's) demographics are just like us, the Jio model was rolled out just a few years ago, so the learnings are still fresh," she added. NGIC has been allocated 5G

spectrum and local telcos will be utilising the shared infrastructure to roll out the services in the next six months. As per reports, the overall contract is over US\$ 200 million. Ekuful said Ghana is a part of the 33-nation Smart Africa alliance, and other countries in the continent will be closely watching the rollout to see whether they can also emulate the same locally.

'ONGC's high investments to delay deleveraging'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A step-up in investments at Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) will slow down its deleveraging over the next 12-24 months, eroding headroom for the state-owned firm's 'bbb+' standalone credit profile, S&P Global Ratings said on Monday. Stating that ONGC's financial results for the fiscal year ended on March 31, 2024, were in line with expectations, S&P said despite a decline of 2-3 per cent in the company's domestic oil and gas production volumes and lower realizations in fiscal 2024, EBITDA grew to Rs 1.1 lakh crore from Rs 93,600 crore in fiscal 2023. "We attribute the higher EBITDA to the strong performance of downstream subsidiaries - Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corp



Ltd (HPCL), which together accounted for about 30 per cent of the group's EBITDA during the year. We forecast ONGC's EBITDA will remain at about Rs 1 lakh crore over fiscal years 2025 and 2026," it said. ONGC's integrated operations will support earnings resilience. The firm's production volumes should rise gradually

over fiscal years 2025 (April 2024 to March 2025) and FY2026 as the company scales up oil and gas production from its block in the Krishna Godavari (KG) basin in India. "We expect output from the group's international assets, held through ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), to grow by 2-5 per cent during this period," S&P said.

The higher output should mitigate the impact of moderating oil prices based on S&P Global Ratings' Brent crude oil price assumption of US\$ 85 per barrel for the rest of 2024 and US\$ 80 per barrel for 2025 and 2026. "Our base case also assumes the average realization on the company's domestic gas production will be US\$ 9.5 per metric million British thermal unit (mmBtu) for the next two years. This is given the mix of output from nomination fields and difficult acreages, and India's administered gas price formula," the rating agency said. It forecast ONGC's annual capital expenditure will increase to Rs 57,000-58,000 crore annually over the next 12-24 months, from about Rs 52,000 crore in fiscal 2024 (April 2023 to March 2024). Of this, the company is like-

ly to spend Rs 33,000-35,000 crore annually to primarily arrest declining output from its matured fields in India. The balance will be spent at its downstream subsidiaries, MRPL and HPCL, to enhance refining and petrochemical capacities. "ONGC's planned capital investments are likely to consume about 60 per cent of the company's operating cash flow. This, and ONGC's stated financial policy on shareholder distributions, will leave limited headroom for the company to undertake sizable additional investments, in our view. "We expect ONGC's ratio of funds from operations (FFO)-to-debt to remain at 45-55 per cent in fiscals 2025 and 2026, compared with about 55 per cent in fiscal 2024, assuming the acquisition of ONGC Petro additions Ltd (OPAL) will be completed in fiscal 2025.

GST to be paid by telcos along with instalments towards spectrum charges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom companies will have to pay GST along with the instalments paid towards spectrum charges, a senior official said. The Department of Telecom (DoT) will hold the next round of spectrum auction on June 6 for eight spectrum bands meant for mobile phone services. The base price for the auction has been set at Rs 96,317 crore. The spectrum will be assigned for 20 years and successful bidders will be allowed to make payments in 20 equal annual instalments in the coming mega auction. The official said Goods and Services Tax (GST) will have to

be paid at 18 per cent by telecom companies along with each instalment. "The GST Council in its next meeting is likely to clarify the procedure for payment of GST by companies winning the bids during the spectrum auction," the official told PTI. The clarification will end

confusion among field formations regarding the method for collection of GST in the auction process. All the available spectrum in the 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz, 2,500 MHz, 3,300 MHz, and 26 GHz bands are part of the auction. The total frequencies being put under the hammer are valued at Rs 96,317 crore on base price. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said under the new GST law, spectrum payment is covered under licensing services for the right to use other natural resources on which tax is levied at 18 per cent.



what's brewing?

KARAN PRESENTS DHADAK 2, STARRING TRIPTII & SIDDHANTH

Karan Johar has announced his new film, *Dhadak 2*. Produced by Johar, the film will star Siddhant Chaturvedi and Triptii Dimri and will be directed by Shazia Iqbal. Sharing the announcement video, Karan Johar wrote in Hindi, "Once upon a time, there was a king and there was a queen. They were from different castes, and that's the end of the story."

The caption also read, "Presenting *Dhadak 2* starring Siddhant Chaturvedi & Triptii Dimri. Directed by Shazia Iqbal. #Dhadak2 in cinemas 22nd November 2024 (sic)." The movie will explore barriers of class and status stitched in the minds of societies, underscoring a narrative of love that can never be fulfilled.



Munawar Faruqi gets married to make-up artist Mehzabeen Coatwala

Munawar Faruqi, the winner of *Bigg Boss 17*, is said to have got married for the second time. He married Mehzabeen Coatwala earlier this month, according to the reports. A source said, "Yes, Munawar is now married. *Usne shaadi kar li hai. Woh yeh sab under wraps rakhna chahita hai tabhi koi khass pictures bhi nahi milega apko* (He got married. He wants to keep it under wraps; hence, you would not find any pictures of the two)."

"Only the couple's near and dear ones were present for the ceremony. It was an extremely close-knit function," added the source. Citing a social media page, the report said that Munawar Faruqi performed *nikah* with makeup artist Mehzabeen Coatwala. Munawar and his new bride reportedly held their wedding reception at Mumbai's ITC Grand Maratha on Sunday!

It was reportedly an intimate function. As per the report, Munawar's friend-actor Hina Khan was among those invited to the celebrations. On her Instagram Stories, Hina had shared her picture. She added the song *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai* as the background music.



Kate Beckinsale gives back to her critics over body-shaming comments



Kate Beckinsale responded to those who made disparaging remarks about her appearance and figure. The *Underworld* actress talked up health problems she had encountered in the previous year and criticised trolls who deemed her "too thin" in a lengthy Instagram comment on Sunday, May 26.

It all began when Kate Beckinsale posted an Instagram video of herself sporting various retro outfits and hairstyles for her upcoming film, *Stolen Girl*, which is set in the 1990s. The post was flooded with a volley of comments remark-

ing on her appearance. "Walking skeleton", a comment read. Another chimed in, writing, "Sorry to say this, Kate, but you do look a bit thin." Kate Beckinsale stood up to her critics by setting the record straight about people's unsolicited comments about her body and appearance.

Responding to a critic, Kate Beckinsale revealed she went through a harrowing year where her mother went through some health issues and even "nursed" her stepdad "to his death early this year." The *Serendipity* actress also shared that she lost her pet cat last year. Kate Beckinsale also revealed that she spent "six weeks" in the hospital recovering from a Mallory-Weiss tear, engendered by "violent coughing or vomiting." According to Johns Hopkins, "the less common causes are a hiatal

hernia or childbirth, which can increase pressure in your abdomen." Kate Beckinsale added that her initial health scare was augmented by "the severe flair of my mast cell disease, also mitigated by stress, shock, and grief," which has contributed to her weight loss. She remarked, "That's what I am prepared to disclose, which has contributed to some weight loss. What you think of my appearance and how I should look, independently of any circumstances in my life and my family's, is not important."

Kate Beckinsale then slammed the body shamers, noting, "I don't care what your taste in women is. I care that you think any of us need to be appraised of it." She concluded her statement by asking her followers to "do better."



Massiel Taveras is now demanding respect & reiterating Rowland's remarks!

The star-studded occasion, the Cannes red carpet this year, remained a visual extravaganza, despite some discomfort suffered by a few actors. Actress Massiel Taveras of the Dominican Republic got into a similar confrontation with a security guard a few days after a video of singer Kelly Rowland getting into a heated altercation with her went viral. The guard appeared to be rushing her through pictures. A few other videos of the incident surfaced later, one of which included K-pop star YoonA in a similar circumstance. She didn't voice her displeasure with the treatment, but she did show signs of irritation like the other two did. Taveras is now speaking up, demanding respect, and reiterating Rowland's remarks.

As she attempted to unfold the long train of her dress, which showcased Christ's inventiveness, the star of *The Other Penelope* was seen pushing a security guard on the red carpet who was trying to push her inside the building. It was observed that Massiel became irritated with the security guy who had been involved in Kelly Rowland's incident and took his frustrations out on him. Although Taveras did not directly relate her own experience, Kelly Rowland's criticism of the security guard has now made its way onto Massiel Taveras' Instagram story.

"Queen," Taveras wrote on her Instagram story, sharing an article about Kelly Rowland. "[We need] respect." She added it in another post. "The woman knows what happened; I know what happened." Rowland earlier told addressing what went wrong on the red carpet. "I have a boundary, and I stand by those boundaries and that is it. And there were other women who attended that carpet, who did not look quite like me," she added.



A special train was built for Chandu Champion's Satyanaas: Source

Jointly produced by Sajid Nadiadwala and Kabir Khan, *Chandu Champion*, featuring Kartik Aaryan, is indeed one of the most anticipated films of the year that everyone is eagerly looking forward to. While the stunning trailer gave a glimpse of its enthralling world, the makers recently released the first song, *Satyanaas*, kickstarting the musical journey of the film. The energetic dance number set the stage on fire, with Kartik Aaryan and his group of young cadet friends celebrating the dawn of a new chapter in their lives, all compiled in just 4 days in a train that was specially made for the song.

The first song, *Satyanaas*, from *Chandu Champion* has indeed drenched the audience in its fervour with its groovy beats and Kartik's resilient energy! What makes it even more special is the fact that the train in the song was specially made for the song.

As per a source close to the production, "The *Satyanaas* song was shot over a period of 4 days, and the train was made especially for shooting the song to ensure the theme of the film, which is set in the 1960s, was kept intact and exuded the same vibes." This indeed speaks volumes about the scale of the film and the fact that the makers are not leaving any stone unturned to make it special in every aspect.

As *Chandu Champion* gears up for its June 14, 2024, release, the buzz around the film continues to grow. With its compelling storyline, entertaining performances, and now an electrifying first song, *Chandu Champion* is poised to make a lasting impact on audiences worldwide.



Bhuvan's 'Titu Mama' has a unique identity; here's how

India's biggest content creator turned actor, Bhuvan Bam, has achieved another milestone in his illustrious career. Known for playing multiple characters in his sketch videos under the title *BB Ki Vines*, Bhuvan has now officially trademarked one of his most popular characters, Titu Mama.

Titu Mama, a character beloved by millions, is known for his savage humour and distinctive style. Often featured in *BB Ki Vines* episodes, Titu Mama has become a cultural icon with a unique personality that resonates deeply with audiences.

Reflecting on this achievement, Bhuvan Bam said, "The journey of Titu Mama has been incredible. When I first introduced him in my sketches, I had no idea he would gain such immense popularity. Titu Mama's distinct qualities and style have struck a chord with viewers, and it's truly heartwarming to see the love and appreciation for him." He further added, "In 2018, we took Titu Mama to a new level with *Titu Talks*, where I had the privilege of hosting

Shah Rukh Khan as my first guest, followed by international stars Johnny Sins, Ramcharan, Junior NTR, and SS Rajamouli. The overwhelming response to *Titu Talks* reinforced the character's popularity and potential. To protect and preserve this intellectual identity, we decided to officially register Titu Mama with Intellectual Property India. This step ensures that Titu Mama remains a unique and cherished part of our creative universe."

Bhuvan Bam's decision to trademark Titu Mama underscores the character's significant impact and the importance of protecting creative content in the digital age. This move not only solidifies Titu Mama's status as a trademarked entity but also highlights Bhuvan's commitment to maintaining the integrity and originality of his work.

With this achievement, Bhuvan Bam continues to set new benchmarks in the entertainment industry, proving that creativity, when combined with strategic foresight, can lead to lasting success.

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

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NANCY

SUDOKU

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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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.

GINGER MEGGS

A pioneer of East-West fusion, L Shankar, who in the latest times mesmerised the audience with the Aditya Birla Masters of Music concert, takes *The Pioneer* had the enchanting experience of inventing his double violin and collaborating with the legendary Vikku Vinayakram and Zakir Hussain.

Celebrating L Shankar's famous quartet

SHIKHA DUGGAL

The Aditya Birla Masters of Music, a unique concert, gathered together great music titans, one of which was L Shankar, whose works enveloped the listeners and combined the traditional beats of classical percussion with strings!

Shankar Lakshminarayana, the violinist, vocalist, and composer, is widely considered a pioneer of East-West fusion, combining the rich traditions of classical music with Western genres such as jazz, rock, and electronic music. In an exclusive interview with us, the person credited with creating the stereophonic double violin states, "Necessity is the mother of inventions. When I was in London recording my debut, which Frank Zappa produced, I overdubbed violin, viola, cello, and bass. Because of my numerous musical interests, I used to have different violins for classical, *Shakti*, and other rock projects and collaborations. It was tough to transport so much equipment. I wanted to create a single instrument that could be played in all genres. Hence, I designed the LSD (L Shankar's Double Violin). I worked on the prototype for two years to ensure the proper angle and distance between the two necks. The instrument has a full orchestral range and can mimic the sounds of flute,

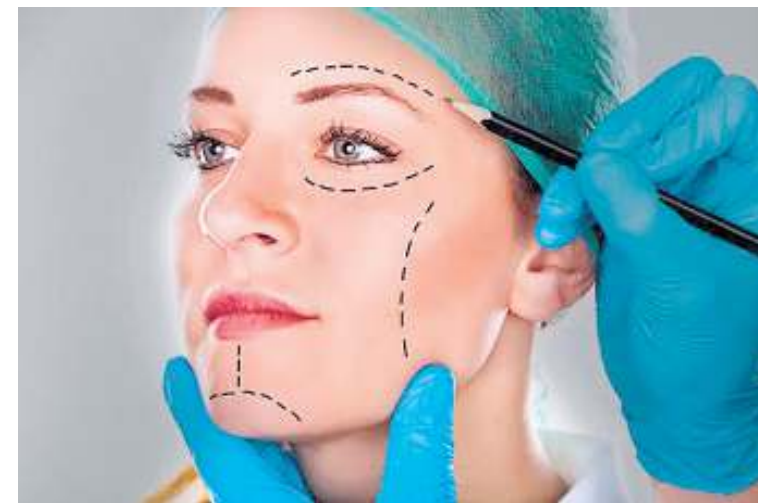
guitar, and synthesizers. I can play on one neck while the other produces sympathetic sounds. For decades, this instrument has proven to be exceptional. I currently have the fourth edition. People have attempted to reproduce it." The event provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to commemorate this famous artist's quartet! Furthermore, he adds, "You must keep an open mind. Growing up in a musical family, I've always felt at ease with diverse musical genres. I studied international music. Artists vary in their style and adaptability, making it enjoyable to collaborate with them. This leads to unrestricted creativity and enjoyment."

An exuberant musician discusses the impact of music and the success of his album *Pancha Nadai Pallavi*, as well. "I collaborated extensively

with artists Vikku Vinayakram Ji on *ghatam* and Zakir Hussain Ji on *tabla*. The *Pancha Nadai Pallavi* was a complicated work with a unique rhythmic cycle, *Mahalakshmi tala* (9 1/2 beats), named after the mother of the famous Mahaperiyava saint. We rehearsed the *Pallavi* extensively before recording." Because, on a general note, he was keen to tell us, "Music is a common thread that connects all of us around the world. I participated in performances with the Prince's Trust in London, UN Peace Day, Nelson Mandela's charity shows, and numerous Amnesty International shows, where many musicians volunteered to promote peace. I learned a lot from these encounters."

The L. Shankar on the double violin continues, "My family has a great musical legacy that spans generations. Our musical family includes Vikku Vinayakram Ji and '3G' with Selvaganesh Ji and Swaminathan Selvaganesh from South India, as well as Ustad Fazal Qureshi from the renowned Ustad Alla Rakha's family from the North. This elite group comes from a well-known family with a long history. So, the sky was the limit for these exceptional artists. We covered the difficult *Ragam Tanam Pallavis* and *Shakti* classics from the first three albums. We offered a large selection of songs to choose from."

Finally, the Madras-born singer advises budding musicians to be completely passionate about what they do, committed, unconcerned about criticism, and concentrated. "It's a long road, but if you enjoy it, it's a pleasure because we are fortunate to do what we do. One must not accept no for an answer! If you serve Saraswati, she will look after you. If you serve the music, it will serve you forever. I am solely a music student and will remain so. Here are my feelings. I only compete with myself, not with others." You know what? His world music records with the band *Shakti* during the mid-70s became the 'standard to assess the playing and composition ability of any world musician following in *Shakti's* vast wake. As a result, his enormous body of work covers a wide range of genres, including vocal and instrumental works! It was a joy to know Shankar, who was born in Madras as the sixth child in a musical family. Considered a child prodigy, he began vocal training with his father at the age of two. Within a year, he was able to hum complicated lines from traditional Indian music. Since, look at him now, when their house was attacked and burned down during the ethnic riots in 1958—Shankar and his two older brothers created the *Violin Trio*, which made history in the 20th century Carnatic music scene after fleeing Sri Lanka. That's how it's done!



Interesting facts about plastic surgery that you should be aware of

There is an increase in the number of patients seeking cosmetic procedures over the years. While plastic surgery has always been a topic of interest, there are still many misconceptions surrounding it. In this article, Dr. Anmol Chugh, consultant, Plastics & Aesthetics Centre, CK Birla Hospital shares 10 interesting facts about plastic surgery that the general public should be aware of!

appearance, it can positively impact their mental and emotional well-being.

1. Plastic surgery is not just about vanity

Contrary to popular belief, plastic surgery is not just about enhancing one's appearance for purely aesthetic reasons. It also includes reconstructive surgery to improve function and correct defects caused by burns, trauma, or birth defects.

6. Technology has advanced significantly

Thanks to technological advancements in the medical field, plastic surgery procedures are now safer, more precise, and have a shorter recovery time. Innovative techniques and tools have greatly improved the results of cosmetic and reconstructive surgeries.

2. It has a long history

Plastic surgery dates back to ancient civilisations such as India, Egypt, and Greece. The first documented plastic surgery procedure or nose job was performed in India over 3000 years ago.

7. It is on the rise

The demand for plastic surgery has been steadily increasing over the years.

3. It involves extensive training

Contrary to what some may believe, becoming a plastic surgeon is not an easy feat. It requires almost 15 years of training starting from MBBS to becoming a full-fledged plastic surgeon.

8. Men are also seeking plastic surgery

While traditionally seen as a procedure for women, men are now seeking plastic surgery as well.

4. There are many types of plastic surgery

Plastic surgery is not limited to procedures like breast augmentation or rhinoplasty. It also includes reconstructive procedures such as cleft lip repair, scar revision, and hand surgery.

9. It is not just for the wealthy

Contrary to popular belief, plastic surgery is not just for the wealthy. With advancements in technology and more options for payment and financing, it has become more accessible to people from all walks of life.

5. It can boost self-confidence

While plastic surgery should not be seen as a solution to low self-esteem, it can definitely boost one's self-confidence. When a patient is happy with their

10. There are risks involved

As with any surgical procedure, there are risks involved with plastic surgery. It is essential for patients to have realistic expectations and to choose a qualified and experienced plastic surgeon to minimise these risks.

In conclusion, plastic surgery is a complex and multifaceted field that goes beyond the surface level of vanity. It has a rich history, requires extensive training, and offers a range of procedures to improve both function and appearance. As with any surgical procedure, it is essential to do thorough research and consult with a qualified professional before making any decisions.

'Sanjay Leela Bhansali wanted casting to feel like 'tawaifs' of Lahore'

TEJAL SINHA

It's been almost a month since its release, and *Heeramandi* has still been creating the same buzz and providing one and all with more insights about the period drama, helmed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Now, be it with some BTS insights, adoring Bibojan's *Gajagamini* walk, or Alamzeb being trolled, the series has been all over the news! If truth be told, the casting, right from Manisha Koirala as 'Mallikajaan' to Taha Shah Badusha as 'Nawab Tajdar Baloch', Farida Jalal as 'Qudisha Begum' to Fardeen Khan as 'Wali Bin Zayed-Al Mohammed', has undeniably been a bonus point.

So why not gain more insights behind the casting from the casting director Shruti Mahajan, whose notable works in her repertoire include iconic titles like *Bajirao Mastani*, *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, *The Big Bull*, *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, *Padman*, *Mary Kom*, *Satyagraha*, *Ghoomer*, and *Lust Stories 2*, to name a few.

"The casting for *Heeramandi* was similar to that of the other projects I have cast for," begins the casting director in this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*. So basically, she got a script from the directing team almost more than a year before the project went on the floor. "For this series, I didn't get a script. I got a Bible (she laughs). In the script, after reading the character presented by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and knowing that it was going to be streamed on OTT, expectations were very high. I knew the antagonist and protagonist had to be faces in the search for the right actor for the right role! Just like *Heeramandi*, the casting also had to be larger-than-life. We kept on doing multiple rounds of presentations, and after the main cast was done, we got into the secondary casting."

A revelation she brings to us: "There were auditions hap-

pening for Alamzeb and Tajdar's characters, and for the rest of the characters, it was just a look test."

Speaking of Alamzeb's character, the discussions around Sharmin Sehgal's performance don't seem to stop anytime soon. People have, in fact, also criticised Sanjay Leela Bhansali's niece for having no expression! As we discuss the same thing with Shruti, she shares, "You cannot please everyone. Furthermore, given the nature of our work, we receive a wide range of feedback. One has to take everything with a pinch of salt and move on. You must continue to improve your craft and give it your all. It's a packaged deal. We are aware of what we have accomplished and the effort we have expended, and we must be respected for it. Regarding criticism, I believe that we learn to accept it in the same way that we accept love. As a casting director, I always tell actors to focus on their skills. I feel

that a lot of people have liked Sharmin's work. There is a lot of praise for her voice and for her innocence, so I feel she's done a fine job; she has given her best."

She recalls that she has come a long way working with Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Her first project with him was *Ramleela*, and she says she's got to learn a lot while working with him. "Now we share a beautiful working relationship. Yes, the expectations are very high with each film that I work on with him because

he always thinks it's going to get better and better. Every time that I cast for him, I know that it has to be out-of-the-box casting. It is not easy to please him," she shares with sheer excitement and further speaks of casting veteran actors like Manisha Koirala and Farida Jalal. "He wants to push the envelope, and that is when, when it came to the casting of Mallikajaan, we thought of Manisha because the character had to be larger than life and had to belong to an era and to that part that was beautiful, had to be aesthetic, and we know Manisha is a great actor. We've always seen Manisha doing these pretty soft beauty roles, but Bhansali had worked with her in the past and was definitely aware of her skills, so when her name popped up, he was very excited. And I was like, this is something nobody has ever seen Manisha do. Back then, she was in Nepal, and when we called her, she was also very excited to be a part of it. And with Fareeda Ji, it just happened that the role required a graceful, classy grandmother, with a lot of love and affection, and then an age group, which was also supposed to be right. The first name that came as a reference was her! And during that, we heard rumours that she wasn't keeping well. So we first had to check on her health."

In the context of *Heeramandi*, she shares that the biggest challenge was the expectations from Netflix. "They knew that somebody like SLB was known for his casting and his craft. Casting for a series doubles the work. He wanted that the casting should feel like they belonged to the world of Lahore, Pakistan, and that it was also an era that was more real. The challenge for the character was to understand every part, and all these characters had their own tracks. The core was the same during casting but had their own uniqueness, and the guys had to give a royal vibe to men who could be dominated by these courtesans, and they could drive these men into the story."

As we head towards the end of this chat with her, Shruti, who is going to work on a film with Akshay Kumar *Sarfira*, one series with Rajkumar Gupta, and Bhansali's *Love and War*, to name a few, says, "The only best decision is to follow what I've liked. It's a dream come true. Every film on which I have worked is special, as is working with such filmmakers. I only have gratitude if you follow your passion; the sky is the limit."

The *Heeramandi* cast has certainly been the talk of the town ever since its announcement. What better can it be than gaining more insights on the selection from the casting director, Shruti Mahajan, herself in this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*.

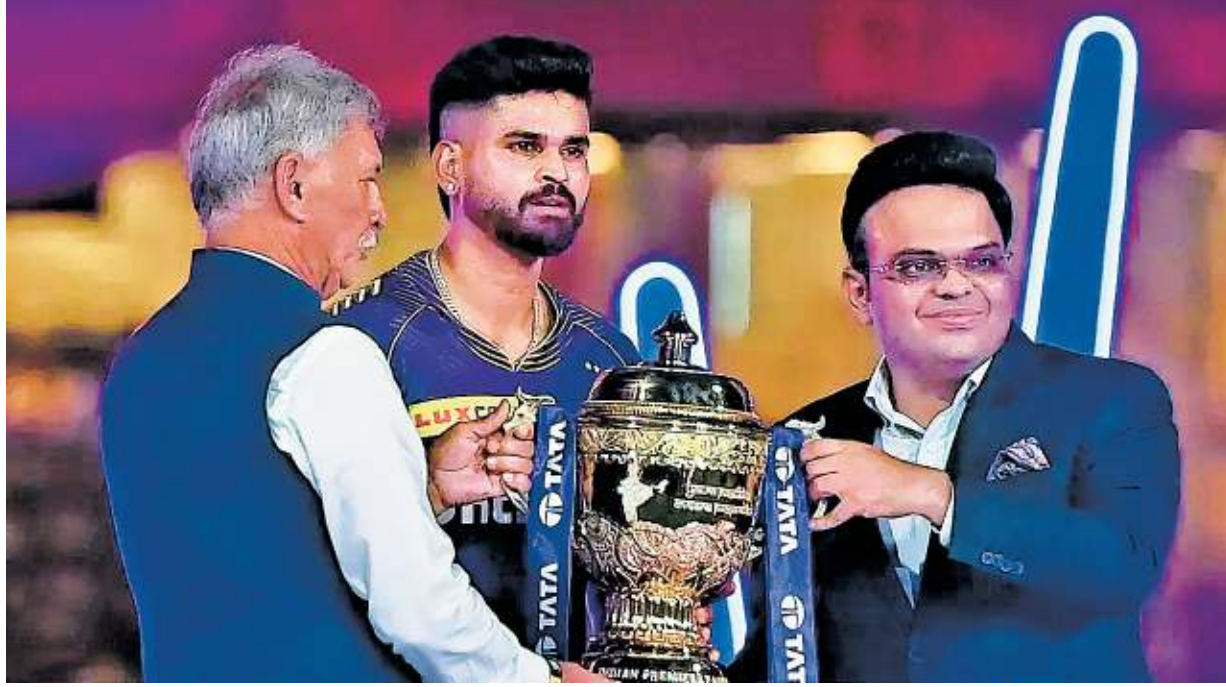


FROM SETBACKS TO SUCCESS: SHREYAS IYER'S JOURNEY TO IPL VICTORY

PTI ■ KOLKATA

When Shreyas Iyer recreated Lionel Messi's famous World Cup celebration after lifting the IPL Trophy as Kolkata Knight Riders captain in Chennai, it was nothing short of an Argentina moment for the embattled Indian cricketer at an individual level. His central contract torn up a few weeks before the IPL besides a recurring back injury threatening to derail him, Iyer faced numerous challenges at the start of the year. He finally found a deep sense of triumph and vindication in this victory, much like Messi did after exorcising the ghosts of losing the 2014 final and winning the trophy for his country after a 36-year wait. For the two-time IPL champions, the wait lasted 10 years as Iyer sang a redemption song following a topsy-turvy start to the year. Little wonder then that he chose to imitate the man who knows all about rising from setbacks. So, Iyer, with the trophy in his hands, took a playful walk towards his teammates, quite

similar to what Messi did after the final against France in Doha, and handed the big prize to them. "I am hearing a lot about Gautam Gambhir, who has created a magnificent culture in the KKR team. But this guy (Iyer), I don't think he is getting enough credit," said the legendary Ian Bishop on Sunday as KKR defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets in a completely one-sided final to win their third IPL title. KKR may have got most of their runs from openers Sunil Narine and Phil Salt, but they played as a team and managed to come out winners in a dominant season, topping the table with two rounds to spare, and enduring just three losses in between. "It is hard to express how we are feeling right now. The wait was so long. We played like invincibles throughout the season. There is so much to cherish right now," said Iyer. It was a special feeling for his childhood and Mumbai coach Pravin Amre, who first tested his character by promoting Iyer to No.3 from No.7 in his



maiden Ranji season in 2014-15. Iyer returned with 153, his maiden first-class hundred in their match against Bengal at Eden Gardens in December 2014. "I challenged him in his entire

career (in Mumbai)...I knew how strong-willed he's and it was my job as a coach to challenge him. He always liked to take the challenge in a good stride. He is a good team man. In the last world cup, he scored 530 runs," Amre said.

"I always told him you just do whatever is in your hands, let the other people do their job, you just remain focus on what's in your hands," added Amre who first took him under his wings at the Shivaji Park Gymkhana.

By leading KKR into final, Iyer achieved the rare feat of playing the summit clash as captain of two different franchises in the IPL. The KKR skipper missed the last season because of a back injury that required a surgery

in London last year. He made a comeback in the Asia Cup and went on to become India's third leading run-getter after Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the last year's ODI World Cup. The year didn't start well for him though as he had a difficult outing in the home Test series against England and looked patchy scoring 140 runs in the first two matches before being left out for the final three Tests. It was learnt that he developed the recurring back problem, even though he was cleared by the Board medical staff. Iyer then became the centre of a controversy when he missed the Ranji Trophy for his home state Mumbai and went on to attend KKR's pre-season camp. Iyer, however, returned to play for Mumbai in the semifinal and final against Vidarbha where he scored a resolute 95 in the second innings of their 42nd Ranji triumph. The Board omitted him from the Grade B contract and BCCI secretary Jay Shah issued a stern warning asking players not to prioritise IPL over domestic cricket.

Under intense scrutiny, Iyer looked rusty at the start of the IPL and got out for a two-ball duck in their opener against SRH. He had some significant contributions later on but his efforts were all overshadowed by Narine and Salt's explosive batting. **CAPTAIN COOL:** However, Iyer personified "Captain Cool" and held the team's cause ahead of his individual milestones. He went on to become the fourth leading run-getter for KKR this season with 351 runs and two fifties. His best came against the crucial first qualifier against SRH when he anchored their tricky chase of 160 with an unbeaten 58. "The way he handled the team as a player is commendable. More than that, he is improving as a leader and the experts in the game are also appreciating his leadership qualities," Amre said. "I personally believe success is not an accident he has worked hard for this, handling the team. Yes, he had a good team under him but bringing the best out of everyone is important," he added.

Starc produced ball of the IPL, Narine best player for KKR: Hayden

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former Australia batter Matthew Hayden has termed Mitchell Starc's outstanding away-swing to Abhishek Sharma in the IPL final as the "ball of the IPL" while describing Sunil Narine as the "best player" for triumphant Kolkata Knight Riders. Shreyas Iyer's rampant KKR, who were unstoppable throughout the 17th edition of the IPL, crushed Sunrisers Hyderabad in the summit clash by eight wickets to add a third trophy to their cabinet on Sunday. "The moment that ball bowled to Abhishek Sharma came out of Mitchell Starc's hands, it was game over. It was destined to be the best ball of the IPL - an absolute peach at a time when it was so important," Hayden told Star Sports Cricket Live. Former England batter Kevin Pietersen said Starc's ability to get his wrist position right towards the end of IPL and cranking up extra pace along with Narine's all-round ability bolstered KKR. "Mitchell Starc was averaging around 136-137 kph during the majority of the season. But in the last two weeks he has gone above 140 kph and that is his average. He is bowling fast," Pietersen said. "We never saw him swing the ball for the first seven, (or) maybe even eight weeks of this tournament. (But) in the last few weeks, he has got his wrist in a good place and started to swing the ball back," he added. Pietersen was lavish in praise of Narine, saying that the KKR veteran gave his critics a perfect reply. "I was one of the most vocal



critics at the start of the tournament saying I didn't like Sunil Narine at the top of the order, due to his inconsistency. He would typically hit a six and then get out, disrupting the momentum," Pietersen said. "However, this season he has been consistent. He has thought like a batter, batted like a batter and got the runs of a batter. He has averaged more than many batters and his strike rate has been phenomenal. He has played both sides of the wicket exceptionally well." "We don't need to say much about his bowling - he is an out-and-out superstar. His ability to change his action and still produce such impressive numbers is quite something. He is the heart and soul of this outfit," Pietersen said. Former India batter Ambati

Rayudu, meanwhile, credited KKR captain Iyer, coaching staff as well as the team's domestic talent for coming together. "Shreyas Iyer has been tremendous in terms of leading KKR, and we should give him a lot of credit. He was not in the best of forms with the bat, but still, the way he has led the team, the way he has used his resources, is commendable," Rayudu said. Rayudu said a huge tally of runs from an individual is not as crucial as the others contributing collectively. "That is exactly how teams win the IPL. We have seen this over the years; it is not the orange cap that wins you the IPL, but it is the contributions from 4-5 batters with 300-400 runs each - that is what gets you to the finals," he added.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

After resisting the lure of lucrative private leagues for almost a decade because of his commitment towards the "Baggy Green," Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has hinted that he might quit one format to make room for more franchise cricket in his schedule. While the 34-year-old didn't specify the format he intends to give up, it is likely to be ODIs considering that the next 50-over World Cup is in 2027. Starc, who was bought for a record 24.75 crore by Kolkata Knight Riders, was magnificent in the business end of the tournament. He ended up with 17 wickets, including five in the two knock-out games, to engineer a dominant title triumph for the Shah Rukh Khan-owned team. To a query from PTI as to how he would take it up from here after his best year in franchise cricket, Starc hinted that T20s could gain prominence in his roster. "For the last nine years, I

Starc hints at quitting one format to open doors for more franchise cricket

certainly prioritised Australian cricket. I have pulled out often to have a chance to give my body a break and spend some time away from cricket with my wife as well, so that's certainly been where my head has been for last nine years," Starc said after his match-winning 2/14 in the IPL final against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "Moving forward, I am certainly close to the end of my career than the start. One format may be dropped off as there is long time till next World Cup and whether that format drops off or not, that will open doors for a lot of franchise cricket," the "King of Swing" said. He mentioned that this year's IPL will help him in preparing for the T20 World Cup in West Indies starting June 1. "...That's the other side of



benefit of being here, some amazing players in an amazing tournament and great lead up to WT20 and success has been fantastic. It is great that a lot of players are in good position heading into the World Cup," he said. He is hopeful of turning up for KKR even next year. "I don't know the schedule exactly but I have thoroughly

out tracks. "T20 is not as physically demanding as Test cricket and it's been warm, humid, so that plays a part but that's fine. It would be cooler here in the West Indies than here," he said when asked how his body is holding up after two months of IPL. "There's the Impact Player Rule here and that's not the case in the World Cup and after that you have to put a team that's more balanced and you rely more on all-rounders. You can't have your batting all-rounder coming in at No. 9, like they do in IPL. "I don't think the runs would be that much, I don't think 270 can be scored... Wickets may play a part as we have seen high-scoring matches here and wickets won't be same in West Indies.

Australia facing player shortage for T20 World Cup Warm up games: Marsh

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia is facing shortage of players and might be forced to use support staff as substitute fielders in the warm-up games of next month's T20 World Cup due to the low turnaround time between the IPL and the global showpiece. Australia are set to play two warm-up games against Namibia on Wednesday and the West Indies on Friday in Trinidad but they might have as few as eight players available for the two matches since most of them will take a break following their stint in the IPL playoffs. "We're going to be undermanned. But it

is a practice game. The guys who need to play will play as much as they can and we'll figure it out from there," captain Mitchell Marsh, who himself is not certain to play against Namibia as he is recovering from a hamstring injury, told cricket.com.au. The IPL finals between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad concluded on Sunday night and three players - Travis Head, Pat Cummins and player of the match Mitchell Starc - were part of the two teams. Besides the trio, Cameron Green and Glenn Maxwell, who were part of the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, will only link up with the World Cup squad by the end of the week in Barbados, while



Marcus Stoinis, who played for Lucknow Super Giants, is expected to arrive in Trinidad only after the Namibia practice match. Travelling reserves Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short too are set to join after

Australia's first match of the tournament proper which is against Oman on June 5. "It's important to be flexible. Guys who have been at the IPL have been playing a lot of cricket. We prioritised giving them a couple of days at home to see their families, refresh, and play the long game for this tournament," Marsh said. "We will get our 15 (all together) eventually, but really important that we give them a break, even if it's just a couple of days at home, that's really important." According to ICC rules, players taking to the field in the warm-up games must be from the country they are representing.

Can cricket make inroads in baseball loving America?

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cricket, a popular pastime in the United States in the mid 1800s, makes a big-ticket return to North American shores through the T20 World Cup but will it be able to leave an impression on the local audience that knows little to nothing about the gentleman's game? Cricket globally is driven by India but the International Cricket Council sees huge potential in the American market and claims there are already 30 million fans that follow the game in the massive country. The T20 showpiece is also seen as a major stepping stone to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where cricket will make a comeback after 128 years when the big event kicks off on June 1. A total of 16 games will be played across three venues - New York, Dallas and Lauderdale - with a majority of 55 matches scheduled in the Caribbean including the knock-outs. Day three of the competition will have South Africa and Sri Lanka battling it out in New York, where the first ever international cricket game was held between USA and Canada back in 1844. It was a phase when the sport was played widely across America

before a much faster alternative in Baseball gained prominence during the Civil War in the 1860s. "...(T20) it's entertainment and that's what people look for. That's what Americans look for, you know, they want entertainment," says legendary West Indian Brian Lara, one of the most recognisable cricketers in the world but someone who admits that he could walk around Miami without getting a second look. "You know, you speak to an American and I've done that many times and they'd say 'you play a game for five days and then you end up in a draw? What's that all about?' So it's, it is difficult," he explains the challenge of selling Test cricket to an American, who might just warm up to the shortest format though. A couple of weeks of international cricket in an alien land will not be enough to evoke long-lasting interest from the local audience and to ensure the game grows beyond the South Asian and Caribbean expat community, the stakeholders will need more time. For a beginner, cricket can be rather complex to understand especially when one is introduced to "third man", "fine leg" or "deep mid-wicket", some of the terms used for the many field placements in the game.



The ICC is pulling out all stops to engage with the American audience, whether it is getting eight-time Olympic gold-winning sprinter Usain Bolt on board as

the World Cup ambassador or promoting the event at the recent Formula 1 race in Miami. To distract the average American household from the world of

baseball, NFL and NBA, cricket will need to grow at the grassroots level. "I surely think the game can grow in the USA. When you have

presence in a country people start gravitating towards it and want to know more about," Bolt, who belongs to the cricket-loving Caribbean, told PTI in a recent interview. The Americans have surely one reason to follow the event. Their team, mainly made up of players from South Asian and Caribbean heritage, will be making its World Cup debut. Venu Pisike, head of USA Cricket, reckons the ICC event will bring much-needed awareness around the game but eventually, it is the lure of taking part in the 2028 Olympics that will draw masses to the sport. "So far, cricket is predominantly an expats' game, but with the marketing and promotion activities during the World Cup, there is some momentum and the World Cup will definitely boost the opportunities to expand the game in the USA," said Pisike. "Definitely, the World Cup is bringing a lot of awareness and then the opportunity for cricket to be in the Olympics, that will definitely attract the community because the US is a huge sports country. "Olympics is the prime area where all the sports bodies are focusing on since cricket is going to Olympics, that will actually

give more opportunities to expand the sport between the World Cup and the Olympics," added Pisike. The USA squad picked for the tournament makes up for a bunch of semi-professionals who rely on full-time jobs to run their families. That will have to change if the sport is to appeal to a broader audience in America, believes India-born USA squad member Nisarg Patel. "Ultimately what needs to change in the USA is that an American kid in a high school needs to see a future in the game. There are so many sports in America, the country is built on Olympic medals. "For cricket to succeed, we need to show them there is a career out of playing cricket," said the spinner, who works full-time with a medical research company in Los Angeles. The start of Major League Cricket last year, the sport's first professional league in the country, was a big step in that direction. However, to capture the imagination of people in a country with an already crowded and developed sporting landscape, would be a gargantuan challenge for the ICC and other stakeholders.

'BEING CALLED RADHIKA JUST MAKES MY DAY'

Ahead of the release of the film *Gangs of Godavari*, actress Neha Sshetty interacted with us about her journey, from childhood aspirations to her admiration for Sridevi's iconic rain dances.

K. RAMYA SREE

In Indian cinema, the legacy of mesmerising rain sequences once belonged to the iconic Sridevi. Today, that mantle is being carried forward by none other than Neha Sshetty, whose consecutive chart-topping rain songs have captivated audiences nationwide. As Neha gears up for the much-anticipated release of her upcoming film *Gangs of Godavari*, starring alongside Vishwak Sen, excitement is very high. Sharing the screen with acclaimed actress Anjali, Neha reflects on the camaraderie and positive energy fostered on set, enhancing the overall filming experience. Bankrolled by Sithara Entertainments and helmed by director Krishna Chaitanya, *Gangs of Godavari* promises to be a cinematic extravaganza spanning multiple genres, with a release date set for May 31st. Ahead of the film's debut, Neha sat down with us to discuss her journey, from childhood aspirations to her admiration for Sridevi's iconic rain dances. Beginning with her character in the film, she shared, "I play Bujji in *Gangs of Godavari*. She is a beautiful, elegant, and vulnerable girl, yet surprisingly strong. Set against the backdrop of the 1990s, the film explores Bujji's transformation into a resilient woman amidst village life. Our director drew inspiration from veteran actress Sobhana, ensuring authenticity in every aspect of the character." Reflecting on the misconceptions surrounding the film's premise, Neha



clarifies, "Despite what the trailer may suggest, *Gangs of Godavari* offers a balanced blend of romance, thriller, comedy, and emotion. Our director, Krishna Chaitanya, drew from personal experiences, infusing authenticity into every frame." Filmed primarily in Rajahmundry, Neha fondly recalls the warmth and hospitality extended by the locals, creating cherished memories both on and off-screen. She shared, "People in Rajahmundry were very welcoming. We had great food. Everyday we had different types of food coming from different households." Embracing her newfound moniker as "Radhika," inspired by Shah Rukh Khan's iconic character, Neha humbly acknowledges the audience's adoration for her on-screen persona. In her words, she shared, "Like how Shah Rukh Khan has 'Badshah', I got Radhika very early in my career. Being called Radhika just makes my day. The audience liked the character so much, that's why they call me that." She added, "I was 5 years old when I decided I would become an actress. I love dancing. I've always wanted to be an actress since I was a child." Asked about being called the new rain dance queen of Tollywood, the *DJ Tillu* star expressed, "When it comes to rain songs, Sridevi remains unparalleled. Now people are giving me compliments for my rain songs, and I am very happy about it. I have been lucky with songs. I am thankful to my directors that I am getting such songs." Furthermore, about her roles in all her films where she is seen mostly in sarees, Neha expressed, "Scripts are coming in which I have to wear a saree. When I came to the industry, I was much younger, and I wasn't even sure if I liked wearing a saree, but today I am very comfortable wearing a saree." With a discerning eye for future projects, Neha remains committed to delivering engaging narratives, mindful of the shifting dynamics in post-pandemic cinema. "I have one upcoming film with Bellamkonda Srinivas that is yet to start, directed by Saagar Chandra. I am being selective with my movies now. I feel that after COVID, audiences are not coming to theatres much, and I want to give them something interesting for my films," concluded Neha on a fun-filled note.



Rajinikanth, Sathyaraj reunite for *Coolie* after 38 years

The revelation of the title of Rajinikanth's upcoming film has set his fans into a frenzy. Directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj, *Coolie* signifies a significant milestone in the actor's illustrious career, and audiences are eagerly awaiting updates on this highly anticipated project. Adding to the excitement is the reunion of two actors after a staggering 38 years. In a noteworthy development, veteran actor Sathyaraj has been confirmed to star in the film, marking a special reunion with Rajinikanth. Sathyaraj's character in *Coolie* is poised to play a pivotal role as Rajinikanth's friend, promising to add depth and intrigue to the storyline. The news of the reunion between these two iconic actors has ignited anticipation among fans, who are eager to witness the on-screen chemistry



between the duo. With both Rajinikanth and Sathyaraj bringing their immense talent and charisma to the table, the inclusion of Sathyaraj in the cast promises to elevate *Coolie* to new heights. As anticipation for *Coolie* continues to soar, fans are eagerly awaiting further updates and insights into this highly anticipated project. Stay tuned for more exclusive updates on *Coolie* as the film gears up for production, promising an unforgettable cinematic experience for audiences worldwide.

Vijay Thalapaty turns singer for *GOAT*

Actor Vijay is gearing up for the much-anticipated release of *The Greatest Of All Time (GOAT)*, marking a significant moment in his career. While the buzz about this movie is already very high, a recent revelation about the film by music composer Yuvan Shankar Raja has added more fuel to the ongoing buzz. In a recent media interaction in Dubai, Yuvan Shankar Raja shared insights about *GOAT*. Initially hesitant, Raja finally disclosed that Vijay had lent his melodious voice to two songs in the film. "For the first time ever, Thalapaty Vijay has sung two songs for his film," Raja announced, unveiling the exciting news.

The revelation quickly went viral on social media platforms, with fans expressing their excitement and anticipation. The first song from *GOAT*, titled *Whistle Podu*, sung by Vijay himself, was released on April 14 to widespread acclaim. However, details about the release of the second song are yet to be revealed. This isn't the first time that Vijay has lent his voice to movies. He became a singer for some of his previous movies, however, he lent his voice to a song after a very long time.

Since the announcement of *GOAT* by Venkat Prabhu, the makers have been actively sharing updates and behind-the-scenes glimpses from the film's set on social media. In the movie, Vijay will portray dual roles, essaying both the younger and older versions of his character. Produced by AGS Entertainment, the ensemble cast includes Prashanth, Prabhudeva, Ajmal Ameer, Meenakshi Chaudhary, Mohan, and Jayaram in pivotal roles. The highly anticipated film is slated for release on September 5, promising audiences an unforgettable cinematic experience.



SECOND SINGLE FROM *INDIAN 2* SET TO DROP ON MAY 29

The much-awaited sequel, *Indian 2 (Bharateeyudu 2)*, starring Kamal Haasan, has been creating waves among movie buffs. Directed by the visionary Shankar, this film has been in the making for quite some time and is finally gearing up for release in July.

While snippets of information about the film have been surfacing on social media, fans are eagerly awaiting more updates. The latest buzz is all about the release of the second single from *Indian 2*, which is scheduled to hit the airwaves on May 29.

"Let the magic of music sweep you away. The mesmerising love song from *#Bharateeyudu2* is set to release on May 29th. *Bharateeyudu-2's* second single on May 29th," wrote the makers on their official social



media handles. The announcement has sparked a frenzy on social media platforms, with fans eagerly anticipating what the musical maestro Anirudh Ravichander has in store for them. With a stellar cast that includes Kamal Haasan, Siddharth, Kajal, and Rakul Preet, among others, and backed by the powerhouse production house Lyca Productions, *Indian 2* promises to be a cinematic extravaganza. Scheduled for release on July 12, the film is poised to deliver a gripping blend of action, drama, and social commentary. As the excitement continues to soar, fans are eagerly counting down the days until the release of the second single, hoping for another musical masterpiece to add to the film's allure.

Gam Gam Ganesha boasts of impressive comedy: PRODUCER VAMSI KARUMANCHI

Producer Vamsi Karumanchi, who is making his Tollywood debut with *Gam Gam Ganesha*, shares insights into the film's journey and his experiences in the industry.

K. RAMYA SREE

As the much-anticipated action crime comedy *Gam Gam Ganesha* gears up for its grand theatrical release on May 31, producer Vamsi Karumanchi, making his Tollywood debut, shares insights into the film's journey and his experiences in the industry. "Our roots are in Guntur. We moved to the US for work and business but returned to India during the lockdown. Due to travel restrictions, we couldn't go back to the US," reveals Vamsi, adding, "Since childhood, I've been a movie enthusiast and a fan of Balakrishna. Even in the US, we watched all Telugu movies, often surprising others with our enthusiasm in theaters."

Discussing the genesis of *Gam Gam Ganesha*, Vamsi explained, "When director Uday Shetty narrated the story, Anand liked it. Anand plays a funky character that's somewhat brash and daring. *Gam Gam Ganesha* revolves around a Ganesh statue and money, blending action and comedy."

Elaborating on the film's journey to the big screen, Vamsi shares, "We initially aimed to release it during Vinayaka Chavithi but postponed it due to industry strikes and Anand's involvement in *Baby*. We then planned a release for the 25th of this month but shifted to the 31st to avoid clashing with *Dil Raju's Love Me*." "Gearing up for a substantial release, *Gam Gam Ganesha* is being distributed by Mythri Movie Distributors in Nizam and Dheeraj Mogilineni Entertainments in AP and Karnataka, with over 400 theaters secured. We also have an OTT deal with Amazon Prime," he adds.

Reflecting on the film's unique charm, Vamsi emphasizes, "Anand's role in *Gam Gam Ganesha* is unique and should not be compared to his role in *Baby*. The film boasts impressive comedy, with Jabardast Emmanuel delivering humour. Heroines Nayan Sarika and Pragathi Srivastava shine with significant roles."

Commending director Uday Shetty's vision, Vamsi remarks, "Directors often struggle to bring crime comedy genres to life as well as they narrate them, but Uday has executed *Gam Gam Ganesha* excellently. The budget was significant, but the quality is evident."

Looking ahead, Vamsi expresses excitement about future projects and the possibility of working with his favourite actor, Balakrishna. As *Gam Gam Ganesha* prepares to hit theaters amidst healthy competition, Vamsi Karumanchi exudes confidence in the film's potential to captivate audiences and make a mark in Tollywood.



Payal Rajput's *Rakshana* all set for a powerful strike on June 7

Mark your calendars as *Rakshana* is all set to hit theatres on June 7, offering a fresh perspective on Payal Rajput's versatility as an actor. Her portrayal of a police officer in this thrilling crime investigation adds a special appeal to the film. The audience can anticipate an engaging cinematic experience as the story unfolds on the big screen.

Crime investigative movies always manage to captivate audiences due to their intriguing twists and turns, keeping viewers on the edge of their seats. *Rakshana* is no exception, as it draws inspiration from a real-life incident, providing an added layer of authenticity and intrigue to the narrative. The teaser for the film has already received a positive response from movie enthusiasts, adding to the excitement surrounding its release.

Apart from Payal Rajput, the film features an exceptional cast, including Roshan, Maanas, Rajeev Kanakala, Vinod Bala, Sivanarayana, and others. *Rakshana* is being crafted under the banner of Haripriya Creations, boasting stellar contributions from Anil Bandari as the cinematographer, Mahati Swara Sagar as the music composer, J.R. Ethiraj as the sound designer, Gary B.H. as the editor, Venkat Master as the stunt choreographer, Rajeev Nair as the production designer, Tayanidhi Sivakumar as the writer, and Alagarsamy and Mayan-Pradeep Pudi handling the VFX.

With Payal Rajput leading the way and a talented team behind the scenes, *Rakshana* promises a thrilling and immersive cinematic experience. Be ready to witness the story unfold on June 7 and brace yourself for an unforgettable crime investigative journey.



TRAILER RELEASE GALA



Tamil director Vikraman's son Vijay Kanishka starred in *Samudrakhani*, with Sarath Kumar and Gautham Vasudeva Menon in the lead roles of the film *Hit List*. Directed by SooryaKathir Kakkallar and K. Karthikeyan under R. K. Celluloids, filmmaker K. S. Ravi Kumar is producing the film. In the past, the first-look posters for this movie raised expectations for the movie. The teaser for this movie was launched by versatile hero Surya. Coming in the action, suspense, and crime genres, the trailer for this film was recently released and is impressing the audience. The trailer launch and pre-release event for this movie were held grandly, and the makers revealed that the film will be released on May 31. Actor Murali Mohan and Telangana Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad were the chief guests of the event. Along with them, producer-director K.S. Ravikumar, hero Vijay Kanishka, directors SooryaKathir Kakkallar and K. Karthikeyan, and Telugu release producers Srinivas Goud and Bekkam Ravindra participated in this event.